

Immigration and National Security: An Empirical Assessment of Central American Immigration and Violent Crime in the United States

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About this Publication:

This paper forms part of the Justice in Mexico working paper series, which includes recent works in progress on topics related to crime and security, rule of law, and human rights in Mexico. All working papers can be found on the Justice in Mexico website: www.justiceinmexico.org. This research seeks to understand the extent to which Central American immigration has an impact on violent crime in the United States. Through the compilation of qualitative information and quantitative statistics, this paper examines the flow of immigrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), their concentration of settlement in U.S. cities, and the violent crime rates of these cities. Debates over national security and human rights cause tension as Central Americans seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexican border. In addition, increasing polarization of views on the topic inhibits progress on a comprehensive immigration reform. Not only does this research add to the understanding of the potential threat of these particular migrants and the criminal gang, Mara Salvatruchas (MS-13), to American communities; its findings can be generalized to the overall debate of the nature of immigration and national security.

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Daphne N. Blanchard earned her master's degree in International Relations at the University of San Diego (USD) in 2018 with an emphasis in economic development and diplomacy in Latin America. During her time at USD, Ms. Blanchard authored articles for the Justice in Mexico News Monitor and the Tico Times, a leading news outlet in Costa Rica. Over the last ten years, she has led several humanitarian and small-scale development projects in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Costa Rica. She currently serves on the advisory board for a workforce development program in a production facility in Tijuana, Mexico. Her interests include engagement and collaboration between state and non-state actors to find innovative solutions to complex global issues, such as immigration.

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Immigration and National Security: An Empirical Assessment of Central American Immigration and Violent Crime in the United States

By **Daphne N. Blanchard**, Masters in International Relations, University of San Diego

Executive Summary

- **The arrival of the October 2018 Central American caravan became a flashpoint in the immigration debate between human rights and national security.**

Thousands of migrants traveled in a caravan from Central America's Northern Triangle to the United States in October of 2018. President Trump called on Mexico to stop the influx, sent troops to the U.S.-Mexican border, and threatened to cut aid to the Central American country. While several hundred returned on Honduran-sponsored busses and roughly 2,000 people applied for asylum in southern Mexico, the group totaled 6,500 migrants when they arrived at the wall lining the San Ysidro-Tijuana border. Conflicts between the migrants, Mexican police, citizens of Tijuana and U.S. protesters made national headlines. Meanwhile, international aid groups offered makeshift housing, basic necessities, and legal representation for the asylum seekers. Immigration was central to the November mid-term election debates.

- **Central American immigration has risen significantly over the last few decades.** Presently 3.4 million people born in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are living in the United States, more than double the estimated 1.5 million people in 2000, with half of them undocumented. In the time period between 2011 and 2017, the number of Northern Triangle immigrants rose approximately 400,000 which indicated a growth of 0.1 percent of the foreign-born population. The number of Northern Triangle migrant arrivals nearly quadrupled in 2014, with the arrival of approximately 131,000 migrants. El Salvador is the largest sending country from the region, with 1.4 million immigrants in the United States, a 112-fold increase since 1970. Guatemala is second with 815,000, followed by Honduras with 623,000.

- **The number of unaccompanied minors (also known as UACs) crossing the U.S.-Mexico border has dramatically increased since 2008.**

Between 2008 and the first eight months of 2014, the number of unaccompanied minors that crossed the U.S. southern border each year jumped from about 8,000 to 52,000, prompting the U.S. Congress to request further research and a hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations. The year 2014 was dubbed the Central America migration crisis due to the 90 percent increase in UACs between 2013 and 2014. The composition of the recent caravans that arrived in April and October of 2018 suggest that child and family migration from the Northern Triangle is an enduring phenomenon.

- **The root causes of the flows are pervasive violence and systematic persecution in the Northern Triangle region.**

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are consistently ranked among the world's most violent countries not at war due to their exceptionally high rates of homicide, extortion, gang proliferation, narcotics trafficking, weak rule of law, and official corruption. Many migrants reported fleeing systematic persecution from authorities, pervasive violence from organized criminal organizations, and forced gang recruitment.

- **Northern Triangle migrants make up less than one percent of the U.S. population.**

To put the increases in immigrant population in perspective and understand the scope of Central American migration, it is important to note that in 2017 the Northern Triangle subset of immigrants constitute 0.9% of the share of overall population, of which by far the largest percentage is attributed to those with El Salvadoran origins. Asian foreign-born are the most prevalent with 4.3 percent of the share, which consists of Eastern, South Central, and South Eastern Asian immigrants. Those born in Mexico are second with 3.4 percent; while European and African foreign-born make up 1.2 and 0.7 percent respectively.

- **Public anxiety over Central American migrants stalls immigration reform.**

The tension at the U.S.-Mexico border due to Central American asylum seekers has reached a fever pitch, polarizing views on how to deal with ever increasing immigration. Although seven percent of Northern Triangle refugees were granted asylum the year after the 2014 surge in migration, compared to 24 percent of refugees from China, the continual flow of Central American migrants to the United States' southern border elicits anxiety, protests, and much public debate. As rhetoric from high-level politicians and news media make connections between violent crime and immigration, political parties' stances on immigration become more divergent -- leading to the inability to agree on comprehensive immigration reform. The difference in opinion between Democrats and Republicans has grown over time with 42 percent of Republicans, compared to 84 percent of Democrats,

saying that immigrants strengthen the country, the largest partisan gap on openness to immigrants since 1994. Democrats triple the share of Republicans with the opinion that the nation has a responsibility to care for refugees.

- **The internet and social media have heightened the risk of mass manipulation and emotional decision-making in immigration policy.**

Although the Trump administration and news outlets of today are not the first to make a public connection between crime and immigration – the debate has been ongoing for decades – changes in media technology have exacerbated the issue. The internet and social media platforms have significantly increased the scope and reach of consumers at hyper speed without third-party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgement to add context to complex issues. This is evident in a Republican-sponsored political commercial that connected an undocumented Mexican cop-killer with the tagline: “Stop the caravan. Vote Republican.” Although widely rejected by major television and news outlets on both sides of the aisle for being misleading, the ad was seen approximately 6.5 million times while featured atop Trump’s Twitter page. Studies have shown how elite discourse shapes mass opinion and action on immigration policy without necessarily tying the rhetoric to empirical data of the actual threat posed by the group.

- **Studies show that as immigration levels have risen in the United States, overall violent crime rates have reduced.**

The relationship between immigration and crime in the United States has been studied at length by scholars whose findings convey a similar conclusion: that immigration does *not* increase crime and violence, in fact, in the first generation it seems to reduce it. Since 1970 to today, the share and number of immigrants in the United States have increased rapidly while violent crime has been trending in the opposite direction to a level below what it was in 1980. Even as the U.S. undocumented population doubled to 12 million between 1994 and 2005, the violent crime rate in the United States declined 34.2 percent. In addition, cities with large immigrant populations such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Miami also experienced declining crime rates during that period.

- **Evidence does not support the notion that increases in Central American immigrant populations lead to increases in violent crime rates.**

Although Northern Triangle immigration has surged over the past several years, the evidence does not support the claim that they are posing a U.S. national security threat. Not only did overall U.S. violent crime rates descend as Central American migration share rose; but the influx of these foreigners in 27 metro areas showed no correlation when compared to the violent crime rate changes of each one during 2012 to 2017. When compared to homicide rate changes, there is no correlation between the changes in the immigrant population from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; in fact, the vast majority of cases demonstrate a reduction in crime.

Not one of the 27 metros with high concentration of immigrants from that region is within the top ten of the most violent metros in the United States. The violence that Northern Triangle migrants are fleeing is not translating into more violence in American communities, as the public discourse seems to suggest. The Central American migration threat has been hyperinflated in scope and potential for insecurity.

- **The scope of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang is narrow by comparison.**
According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), approximately ten thousand MS-13 members inhabit the United States, amounting to 0.3 percent of the overall U.S. population. By comparison, there are approximately 1.4 million gang members living in the United States that make up more than 33,000 gangs. Of the 45,400 UACs apprehended at the border in the five-year period of 2012 and 2017, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) apprehended 159 UACs with confirmed or suspected gang affiliations, 56 of which were suspected or confirmed to be affiliated with MS-13. The Cato Institute reports that 0.1 percent of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol arrests were MS-13 gang members at the border mid-year in 2018, similar to the statistics from prior years.
- **The brutality of MS-13 has the potential to disrupt neighborhoods, but not the United States as a whole.**
The threat of the MS-13 gang is far smaller in scope and reach than high-profile dialogue suggests, and it is given disproportionate attention in the public discourse considering the levels of crime. Of the 1.2 million violent crime offenses committed in the United States between 2012 and 2017, 345 were committed by members of the MS-13 gang. Although spread throughout cities in the United States and a legitimate concern for the communities which they inhabit, the members of this murderous gang do not demonstrate an ability to disrupt the stability and security of the entire nation and show no sign of expansion. Containing the threat of this violent criminal organization is best left to local authorities with local solutions. This research does not advocate ceasing to address the root causes of MS-13 criminal activity, only to keep the risk in perspective to reduce the negative consequences of fear-based decision-making.
- **The conflating of MS-13 with all immigrants in public discourse is unfounded and problematic.**
Connecting all immigrants with the violent acts of the few stalls progress on immigration reform, influences public opinion and immigration policy decisions without data to support the level of threat, creates an atmosphere of conflict surrounding those requesting asylum and settling in American neighborhoods, and is counterproductive to keeping Americans safe. Anxiety-inducing messaging from elite levels slows productive, compromise-driven dialogue that is necessary for immigration reform and effective allocation of finite resources.

1. Introduction

In October of 2018, a caravan of several thousand people from Honduras crowded wall-to-wall on a bridge spanning the Suchiate River that connects Tecun Uman, Guatemala and Tapachula, Mexico. As chanting migrants pushed through the steel gate, hundreds of Mexican Federal Police attempted to push them back, returning tear gas for thrown rocks in an effort to regain control. Several of the desperate travelers circumvented the official port of entry and crossed the river into Mexico illegally on handmade rafts.

Fleeing extreme violence and poor economic conditions in the Northern Triangle of Central America, formed by El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, the migrants left their homes behind for security and opportunity in the United States. President Trump called on Mexico to stop the influx of migrants, sent troops to the U.S.-Mexican border, and threatened to cut aid to the Central American country. While several hundred gave up the quest and returned on Honduran-sponsored busses and roughly 2,000 people applied for asylum in southern Mexico, the caravan's ranks continued to grow as several thousand migrants continued the journey northward until 6,500 migrants arrived at the wall lining the San Ysidro-Tijuana border. A group of migrants rushed the wall—some were successful, most were arrested—and the tear gas used to quell the chaos made national headlines. Meanwhile, international aid groups offered makeshift housing, basic necessities, and legal representation for the exhausted asylum seekers.¹

Is the northern migration of thousands of people from a region with one of the highest murder rates per capita in the world an issue of human rights or U.S. national security? Are Central American asylum seekers escaping violence or bringing it with them? Should the American people be sympathetic or terrified? To understand the extent of the potential threat, we must look to previous Central American migrations flows and the impact they have had on American communities.

¹ BBC News. 2018. "Trump Vows to Cut Aid over Migrant Caravan." October 22, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45933845>.

IMAGE 1: Caravan arrives at the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana



Image by: Elizabeth Rivas

2. Background of the Issue

2.1 The Recent Central American Migration Surge

Central American northbound migration is not a new phenomenon; however, the dramatic increase in scope and composition since 2011 has caused this migrant population to gain public attention. In 2015 alone, 110,000 people left the Northern Triangle of Central America -- a fivefold increase from 2012.² Skyrocketing violence from the region is the root cause of the mass migration, particularly from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These nations are consistently ranked among the world's most violent countries not at war due to their exceptionally high rates of homicide, extortion, gang proliferation, narcotics trafficking, weak rule of law, and official corruption. Many migrants reported fleeing systematic persecution from authorities, pervasive violence from organized criminal organizations, and forced gang recruitment.³

² Cara Labrador, Rocio, and Danielle Renwick. 2018. "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle." *Backgrounder edition*. Council on Foreign Relations. Last updated on June 26, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>.

³ Medecins Sans Frontieres. 2017. "Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A neglected humanitarian crisis." May 2017. Retrieved from https://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf_forced-to-flee-central-americas-northern-triangle_e.pdf.

In this paper, I will evaluate the extent to which immigration has had an impact on violent crime in the United States, with a particular focus on the recent surge of migrants from Central America from 2012 to today. Since 85 percent of Central American migrants are from the Northern Triangle region, I focus my analysis on immigration from those countries.⁴ Although in previous decades Mexican immigration to the United States was on the rise with a peak of 1.6 million apprehensions in 2000, over the last decade and a half it declined to 192,969 in fiscal 2016.⁵ Pew Research Center reports a net loss of Mexican immigration to the United States from 2009 to 2014 and a sharp decline in unauthorized Mexican immigrants since 2007.⁶

Meanwhile, Central American immigration has continued to rise. Presently 3.4 million people born in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are living in the United States, more than double the estimated 1.5 million people in 2000, with half of them undocumented.⁷ The Center for Immigration Studies reported a 28-fold increase in the number of immigrants from Central America (documented and undocumented) since 1970 — six times faster than the overall immigrant population.⁸ El Salvador is the largest sending country from the region, with 1.4 million immigrants in the United States, a 112-fold increase since 1970. Guatemala is second with 815,000, followed by Honduras with 623,000. Approximately half of the Salvadoran and two-thirds of Guatemalan and Honduran immigrants are undocumented.⁹

Between 2008 and the first eight months of 2014, the number of unaccompanied minors that crossed the U.S. southern border each year jumped from about 8,000 to 52,000, prompting the U.S. Congress to request further research and a hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations.¹⁰ The intense migration continued. In its 2017 annual

⁴ Lesser, Gabriel, and Jeanne Batalova. 2017. "Central American Immigrants in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, April 5, 2017. Retrieved from, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>.

⁵ Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, and Jens M. Grogstad. "What We Know about Illegal Immigration from Mexico." Pew Research Center, March 2, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

⁶ Gonzalez-Barrera, A. "More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.: Net Loss of 140,000 from 2009 to 2014; Family Reunification Top Reason for Return." Pew Research Center, November 19, 2015. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/11/19/more-mexicans-leaving-than-coming-to-the-u-s/>; Gonzalez-Barrera, A, and Jens M. Grogstad. "What We Know about Illegal Immigration from Mexico." Pew Research Center, March 2, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

⁷ Lesser, Gabriel, and Jeanne Batalova. 2017. "Central American Immigrants in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, April 5, 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>; Cohn, D'Vera, Jeffrey Passel, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. 2017 "Recent Trends in Northern Triangle Immigration." Pew Research Center. December 7, 2017. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/recent-trends-in-northern-triangle-immigration/>.

⁸ The term "immigrants" refers to people residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent immigrants, refugees and asylees, legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), and persons residing in the United States without authorization.

⁹ Camarota, Steven, and Karen Zeigler. 2018. "Central American Immigrant Population Increased Nearly 28-Fold since 1970," November 1, 2018. <https://cis.org/Report/Central-American-Immigrant-Population-Increased-Nearly-28Fold-1970>.

¹⁰ U.S.Cong., Congressional Research Service. 2014. "Unaccompanied alien children: Potential factors contributing to recent immigration." (W. Kandel, A. Bruno, P. Meyer, C. R. Seelke, M. T. Morales, & R. E. Wasem, Authors) [Cong.]; United States Senate. 2015. "Dangerous Passage: Central America in Crisis and the Exodus of Unaccompanied Minors: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations." United States Senate, 113th Cong. 2 (2015). Retrieved from <https://heinonline-org.sandiego.idm.oclc.org/HOL/P?h=hein.cbhear/fdsysabw10001&i=1>.

report, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reported a 50 percent increase in apprehensions of what it called *aliens* from the Northern Triangle of Central America by U.S. Border Patrol.¹¹

2.2 Central American Migration in the Spotlight

The sharp rise of immigrants fleeing violent crime and extreme poverty in the Northern Triangle has been the focal point of recent significant media and public policy attention. News outlets broadcasted asylum-seeking parents being separated from their children in U.S. detention centers in response to the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" policy. Reports of an MS-13 gang member arrested while traveling with a caravan followed President Trump's tweet: "Getting more dangerous. 'Caravans' coming."¹² The president has repeatedly blamed the murder of two girls in New York on "crippling loopholes in our laws" that have enabled the MS-13 gang, an international criminal organization which originated in Los Angeles and consists of members of Salvadoran origins, "to infiltrate" U.S. communities.¹³ Attorney General at the time, Jeff Sessions, called the group which arrived in April "a deliberate attempt to undermine our laws and overwhelm our system;" while the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), an advocacy group for human rights in the Americas, contends that traveling in caravans is "rational" to reduce the risk of assault, robbery, kidnapping, rape, or even murder when traveling without a highly paid smuggler.¹⁴ Although sympathetic to the dangers that befall caravan travelers, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, expressed concern over "the violence provoked by some members of the group, as well as the apparent political motivation of some organizers of the caravan."¹⁵

Although the Trump administration and news outlets of today are not the first to make a public connection between crime and immigration—the debate has been ongoing for decades as evidenced in the amount of scholarly research on the subject—changes in media technology have exacerbated the issue. The internet and social media platforms have significantly increased the scope and reach of consumers at hyper speed without third-party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgement to add context to complex issues.

¹¹ Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics (2017). "Annual Report: Immigration Enforcement Actions: 2016." December 2017. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Enforcement_Actions_2016.pdf.

¹² Maza, Cristina. 2018. "MS-13 Gang Member Arrested Traveling with Migrant Caravan from Central America to U.S." *Newsweek*, April 12, 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/ms13-member-arrested-traveling-migrant-caravan-central-america-us-884193>.

¹³ Rose, Joel, Carrie Kahn, and Kelsey Snell. "Trump's Tweets On 'Caravans' Crossing the Border, Annotated." *NPR*, April 2, 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/ms13-member-arrested-traveling-migrant-caravan-central-america-us-884193>.

¹⁴ Sessions, Jeff. "Attorney General Jeff Sessions Statement on Central American 'Caravan.'" 2018. The United States Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-statement-central-american-caravan>; Washington Office on Latin America. 2018. "9 Questions and Answers About the Central American Migrant Caravan." Washington, DC: WOLA. Accessed December 17, 2018. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/9-questions-answers-central-american-migrant-caravan/>.

¹⁵ Pompeo, Michael. 2018. "Migrant Caravan." U.S. Department of State. October 21, 2018. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/10/286805.html>.

The caravans with Honduran and Salvadoran origins became a flashpoint in the immigration debate during the November 2018 midterm elections. President Trump described the migrants' northward journey as an "invasion of our country" and his supporters produced a controversial political commercial on the topic featuring footage of a Mexican undocumented immigrant, Luis Bracamontes, bragging about his murder of police officers in 2014, followed by images of Central American asylum seekers and the tagline: "Stop the caravan. Vote Republican."¹⁶ Although widely rejected by major television and news outlets on both sides of the aisle for being "racist" and misleading, and by Facebook for its "sensational" content, the ad was seen approximately 6.5 million times while featured atop Trump's Twitter page.¹⁷ Mr. Bracamontes has no known ties to the 2018 caravans and was deported during the respective Democratic and Republican administrations of Clinton and Bush.

While President Trump tweets about dangerous criminals permeating the caravans and news outlets report the infiltration of an MS-13 gang member under the guise of being an unaccompanied minor, humanitarian organizations such as Amnesty International, Medecins Sans Frontieres, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees argue that the United States has a legal obligation under international law to hear asylum claims.

In 2015, one year after the time period dubbed the Central American Migrant Crisis, due to the increased scope and changed composition of Northern Triangle migrants, the United Nations refugee agency conducted a study documenting asylum-seekers through first-hand anecdotal evidence by surveying over 160 women who were traveling alone or with children through Mexico to the United States. The purpose of the study was to draw attention to the complexity of this wave of refugee migration in the Americas and to suggest recommendations on how to deal with the influx. The UN study found the migrants to be vulnerable families fleeing violence, including victims of rape, assault, extortion, and threats by members of heavily-armed, transnational criminal groups.¹⁸

On the other hand, the anti-immigration group known as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) claims that mass migration is attributable to immigration policies, such as those advocated for by the Obama administration's "comprehensive immigration reform." The 2009 comprehensive immigration reform advocated by Obama and a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators called for amnesty for millions of undocumented migrants but failed to win approval. FAIR claims that such proposals "encourage future illegal immigration, inviting increased crime to our country

¹⁶ Grynbaum, Michael M., and Niraj Chokshi. 2018. "Even Fox News Stops Running Trump Caravan Ad Criticized as Racist." *The New York Times*, November 6, 2018, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/05/us/politics/nbc-caravan-advertisement.html>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2015. "Women on the Run: First-hand accounts of refugees fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico." Retrieved September 22, 2018, from <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/operations/5630f24c6/women-run.html>.

and hindering the safety of Americans.”¹⁹ In a brief to Congress on how to address the border crisis, FAIR calls on legislatures to elevate the threshold standard of proof in credible fear interviews and to “impose and enforce penalties for the filing of frivolous, baseless, or fraudulent asylum applications.”²⁰ The Trump administration has made major changes toward this end.

Yet, there are substantive grounds for asylum in many cases. Ample research has been conducted and reported on the push and pull factors of the surge in migration from the Northern Triangle region. Several NGOs and scholars have attempted to debunk the sentiment that migrants leave home due to the pull of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy or strictly for improved economic opportunities.²¹ U.S. Congressional discussions and scholarly works document coordinated efforts of state and nonstate actors in the Northern Triangle countries, Mexico, and the United States to combat the violent situation and reduce push factors. There is overwhelming evidence that the root cause of this recent wave (2012 to today) is due to first, extreme violence, and second, lack of economic opportunities due to the systematic violence and lawlessness in the region.²²

The surge of thousands of asylum seekers since 2012, the dramatic increase in unaccompanied children, and the multiple caravans of Central American migrants traveling northward, expose the complex struggle between national security and human rights, especially in the absence of U.S. immigration reforms to regularize the flows of immigrants into the country.

2.3 A History of Violence in the Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle region countries are consistently ranked the most violent countries in the world with the highest murder rates for countries not at war. The perpetual violence can be traced back to the civil wars of El Salvador and Guatemala of the 1980s and the spill over into the neighboring country, Honduras, which left in their wake weak institutions and a large pool of heavily armed, unemployed men. Organized criminal groups proliferated and with them drug trafficking, extortion, corruption, and

¹⁹ Federation for American Immigration Reform. “Immigration and National Border Security.” Washington, DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform. n.d. Accessed November 7, 2018. <http://fairus.org/issue/national-security/immigration-and-national-border-security>.

²⁰ Federation for American Immigration Reform. 2018. “How Can Congress Address the Current Border Crisis?” Policy Analysis. Washington, DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform. <https://fairus.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/FAIR%20Issue%20Brief%20Border%20Crisis.pdf>

²¹ Wong, Tom. “Statistical Analysis Shows That Violence, Not Deferred Action, Is Behind the Surge of Unaccompanied Children Crossing the Border.” Center for American Progress, July 8, 2014. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2014/07/08/93370/statistical-analysis-shows-that-violence-not-deferred-action-is-behind-the-surge-of-unaccompanied-children-crossing-the-border/>.

²² Orozco, Manuel. & Yansura, Julia. 2014. “Understanding Central American migration: the crisis of Central American child migrant in context.” *Inter-American Dialogue*. August 2014. Retrieved from https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FinalDraft_ChildMigrants_81314.pdf

rampant gang violence. Despite police and judicial reforms, and the accompanying one billion dollars in U.S. aid, 93 percent of crimes go unpunished in some areas and 90 percent of documented cocaine flows pass through this region.²³

The most notable criminal organization to come from this region is the Mara Salvatrucha criminal gang (MS-13). The gang was formed in Los Angeles in the 1980s by Salvadorans who fled civil war in their country. Following large-scale deportations from the United States of undocumented immigrants with criminal records in the early 2000s, the gang's presence grew in Central America. Coupled with members of the region's other largest gang, MS-18, there are approximately 85 thousand members in total. According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, approximately ten thousand MS-13 members inhabit the United States.²⁴ Due to accusations of human rights abuses by police and military during the region's civil wars, the inability of law enforcement to contain the violence in the region, and the perpetual poor economic conditions that have resulted, thousands of Central Americans have chosen to leave. The growing conflict in Nicaragua to the south and the possibility of security and opportunity in the United States drives the asylum seekers on their dangerous journey north.

3. Elite Discourse on Immigration Policy

3.1 Public Anxiety Stalls Reform

The way in which migrants are portrayed in public dialogue not only has significant impact on how they are received at borders and in their communities, but shapes U.S. immigration policy as a whole. In recent years, the tension at the U.S.-Mexico border due to Central American asylum seekers has reached a fever pitch, polarizing political parties and public perception about how to deal with ever increasing immigration. Highly charged social media posts or news reports have resulted in U.S. public responses that vacillate between outrage over human rights violations, due to images of children sleeping on the floor behind chain-linked fences, and fear of being overrun by potentially dangerous foreigners, after the president sends warnings through twitter of "MS-13 run[ning] wild in our communities."²⁵

²³ The Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) was designed to mesh with the Alliance for Prosperity (A4P) strategy of Northern Triangle governments and the Inter-American Development Bank. "Central America Regional Security Initiative." 2017. U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/2017/260869.htm>; Cara Labrador, Rocio, and Danielle Renwick. 2018. "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle." *Backgrounder edition*. Council on Foreign Relations. Last updated on June 26, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>.

²⁴ Cara Labrador, Rocio, and Danielle Renwick. 2018. "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle." *Backgrounder edition*. Council on Foreign Relations. Last updated on June 26, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>.

²⁵ "Trump Tweet: Warns about Stakes in Upcoming Election: MS-13 Running Wild in Communities, Drugs & More." n.d. Accessed October 29, 2018. <https://dmlnews.com/dml-tv-warns-stakes-upcoming-election-ms-13-running-wild-communities-drugs/>.

A Gallup poll (2017) revealed that nearly half of U.S. citizens surveyed believe that immigrants are making the crime situation in the United States worse.²⁶ In addition, a poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports (2018) found that 51 percent of likely U.S. voters believe the caravans of migrants crossing Mexico to enter the United States illegally are a threat to public health and national security and that the United States should stop all the Hondurans who were en route to the United States from entering the country.²⁷

Although the United States is a nation of immigrants with a history of openness and a fiercely-held value of “equality for all,” anxiety is rising amongst some groups as the immigrant share of U.S. population is nearing a historic high with increasing density in twenty of its metropolitan areas.²⁸ Pew Research reported in October 2018, that although most Americans view openness to foreigners as “essential” to the identity of the nation (68 percent), 44 percent of Republicans polled said they fear the loss of the nation’s identity.²⁹ Furthermore, Pew reported (2017) that positive views of immigrant contributions to society have increased over the last two and a half decades, with about two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) saying that their hard work and talents strengthen the country. However, the difference in opinion between Democrats and Republicans has grown over time with 42 percent of Republicans, compared to 84 percent of Democrats, saying that immigrants strengthen the country, the largest partisan gap on openness to immigrants since 1994.³⁰

The polarization is further demonstrated in attitudes about whether the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees, as Democrats triple the share of Republicans with the opinion that the nation has a responsibility to do so. The share of Republicans who feel this way (26 percent) is down from 35 percent in February 2017, a few weeks after President Trump took office; and among conservative Republicans the share dropped even lower to 19 percent.³¹ As rhetoric from high-level politicians and reports from news media make connections between violent crime and immigration, race and ethnicity tensions increase and political parties’ stances on immigration become more divergent -- leading to the inability to agree on comprehensive immigration reform.

²⁶ Gallup. 2018. “Immigration.” Washington, DC: Gallup Inc. Accessed November 6, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/Immigration.aspx>.

²⁷ Rasmussen Reports. 2018. “Voters See Migrant Caravans as Threat, Favor Asylum Pause.” *Rasmussen Reports*. November 26, 2018. http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/immigration/november_2018/voters_see_migrant_caravans_as_threat_favor_asylum_pause; Rasmussen Reports. 2018. “Voters Say Government Should Stop Hondurans at the Border .” *Rasmussen Reports*. October 23, 2018. http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/immigration/october_2018/voters_say_government_should_stop_hondurans_at_the_border.

²⁸ Lopez, Gustavo, Kristen Bialik, and Jynnah Radford. “Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants.” Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

²⁹ Pew Research Center. 2018. “Openness to Foreigners Essential to U.S. Identity, Say Most Americans.” Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/09/most-americans-view-openness-to-foreigners-as-essential-to-who-we-are-as-a-nation/>.

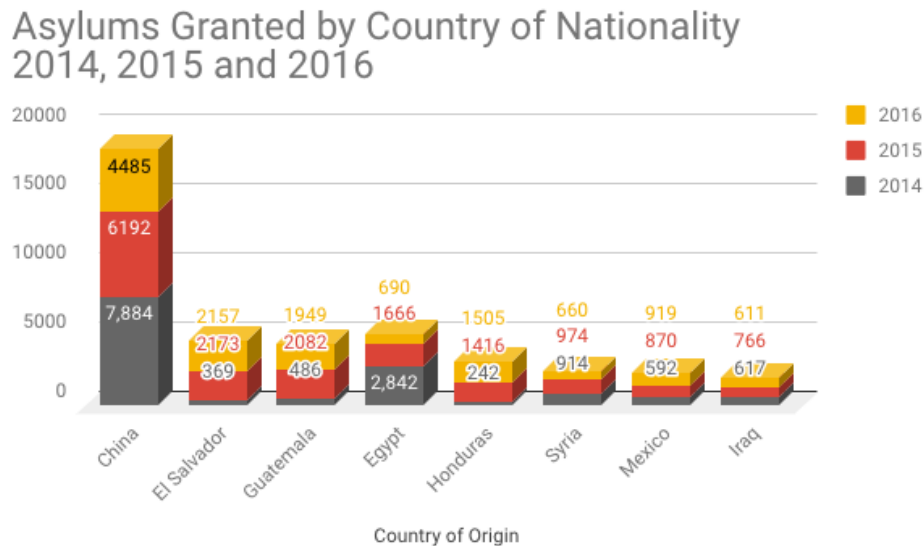
³⁰ Pew Research Center. 2017. “The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider.” October 5, 2017. Pew Research Center. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/>.

³¹ Pew Research Center. 2018. “GOP Views of Accepting Refugees to US Turn More Negative as Admissions Plummet.” *Pew Research Center*. Accessed December 18, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/24/republicans-turn-more-negative-toward-refugees-as-number-admitted-to-u-s-plummets/>.

The Council on Foreign Relations notes that reform alluded Congress for years due to the controversial nature of the competing security and humanitarian concerns. Congress has debated several plans, comprehensive and piecemeal, over the past two decades but has been unable to come to a consensus; and as a result, some major policy decisions have been moved into the executive and judicial branches of government.³²

Although seven percent of Northern Triangle refugees were granted asylum the year after the 2014 surge in migration, compared to 24 percent of refugees from China, the continual flow of Central American migrants to the United States' southern border elicits anxiety, protests, and much public debate (see Figure 1).³³ This subset of migrants has symbolic implications with the potential to greatly influence immigration policies such as visa allotments and immigrant-selection mechanisms, border controls, immigrant integration programs, and paths to citizenship. The influx of Northern Triangle migrants set the stage for immigration to be a key issue in the November 2018 midterm elections as Republican and Democrats fought for control of both chambers in Congress.

FIGURE 1: Asylums Granted by Country of Nationality (Affirmatively and Defensively)



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security

³² Felter, Claire, and Danielle Renwick. 2018. "The U.S. Immigration Debate." *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0>.

³³ Zong, Jie, and Jeanne Batalova. 2017. "Refugees and Asylees in the United States." Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>

The struggle between human rights and national security is aggravated by anxiety-inducing messaging from elite levels, which slows productive, compromise-driven dialogue that is necessary for immigration reform. Meanwhile, asylum-seekers wait for years to receive a decision on their case, Temporary Protection Status for Hondurans and Salvadorans is terminated, the DACA policy is rescinded, the refugee ceiling is reduced, and the legal pathway to citizenship becomes more restrictive by the year.

3.2 Decisions Without Data

Studies have shown how elite discourse shapes mass opinion and action on immigration policy without necessarily tying the rhetoric to empirical data of the actual threat posed by the group. Brader et al. find that group cues influence opinion and political action by triggering emotions - in particular anxiety - not by changing beliefs about the severity of the immigration problem. Their findings suggest that the public is susceptible to error and manipulation.³⁴

Indeed, despite the attempts of scholars to challenge the link between violent crime and immigration with empirical evidence, anti-immigrant rhetoric connecting immigrants to criminal violence continues from the highest level. Sociologists Hagan and Palloni assert that concerns about crime ultimately helped to justify restrictive immigration policies in the past. They also warn that recurring political pressures threaten to bring the simpler, more sweeping stereotype - that immigration causes crime - back into prominence.³⁵

Immigration scholars Massey and Pren assert that “openness and restrictiveness in immigration policy are more strongly influenced by domestic economic circumstances and political ideologies than statistical evidence of what is governing international migration.”³⁶ The objective of this paper is to confront this trend by bringing current and statistical-based evidence to inform the debate of whether or not higher concentrations of Central American immigrants lead to increased crime rates in the United States.

³⁴ Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. “What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 959-978. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00353.x.

³⁵ Hagan, John, and Alberto Palloni. 1999. “Sociological Criminology and the Mythology of Hispanic Immigration and Crime.” *Social Problems*, 46(4), 617-632. doi:10.2307/3097078

³⁶ Massey, Douglas S., and Karen A. Pren. 2012. Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America. *Population and Development Review*, 38(1), 1-29. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2012.00470.x.

4. Immigration and the Crime Relationship

4.1 Does Immigration Cause Crime?

The relationship between immigration and crime in the United States has been studied at length by scholars whose findings convey a similar conclusion: that immigration does *not* increase crime and violence, in fact, in the first generation it seems to reduce it. This work attempts to upend the common perception among criminologists, sociologists, policy-makers, and the general public that these groups have a propensity to settle in poor neighborhoods and commit crimes, often called the “social disorganization” theory. A trend that emerged, however, is that second and third generation immigrants *do* show an increase in incarceration rates beyond that of their parents and grandparents, although not to the extent of native-born citizens.³⁷ There are studies of potential causal factors, the correlation to immigrant concentration (or lack of), and how to address this phenomenon; however, that is beyond the scope of this paper.

One such study was conducted by Robert J. Sampson (2008), a Harvard scholar who studies the possible immigration-crime link, to assess the potential dangers of immigration by drawing comparisons between the increased level of immigration and the crime rate in the United States. Data from this study demonstrates a reduction in homicides as immigration increased during the time period of 1990 and 2004. He contrasts the 2007 controversial U.S. public debate by several prominent figures who connected immigrants to crime with what he calls the “fact-based scenario” of immigrants reducing crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods.³⁸

Rumbaut and Ewing (2007) reported similar findings, citing that between 1994 and 2005 U.S. crime rates declined as immigration increased. Even as the undocumented population doubled to 12 million during that time period, the violent crime rate in the United States declined 34.2 percent. In addition, cities with large immigrant populations such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Miami also experienced declining crime rates during that period.³⁹ Sampson concludes that correlation does not equal causation; but these figures do suggest that the trends are opposite of what is commonly assumed.⁴⁰

One of the most comprehensive and recent studies on this topic compiled data from 1980 to 2016. In this study, the Marshall Project (2018) collaborated with a decades long, large-scale collaborative study between four universities and led by Robert Abelman from the State University of New York at Buffalo.⁴¹ Researchers compared immigration rates with crime rates over several decades in 200 metro areas, which are a mixture of

³⁷ Sampson, Robert J. 2008. “Rethinking Crime and Immigration.” *Contexts*,7(1), 28-33. doi:10.1525/ctx.2008.7.1.28

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Rumbaut, Rubén. G., and Walter Ewing. 2007. “The Myth of Immigrant Criminality and the Paradox of Assimilation: incarceration rates among native and foreign-born men.” Immigration Policy Center: Washington D.C. February 21, 2007. Retrieved September 22, 2018, from <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/myth-immigrant-criminality-and-paradox-assimilation>

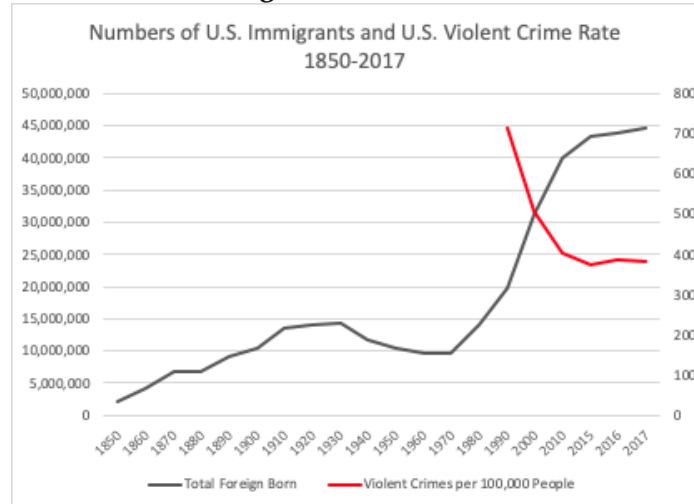
⁴⁰ Sampson, Robert J. 2008. “Rethinking Crime and Immigration.” *Contexts*,7(1), 28-33. doi:10.1525/ctx.2008.7.1.28.

⁴¹ Flagg, Anna. 2018. “The Myth of the Criminal Immigrant.” *The Marshall Project*, March 30, 2018. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/03/30/the-myth-of-the-criminal-immigrant>.

urban hubs and smaller manufacturing centers, geographically dispersed across the country.

The data from the study shows immigration growing for decades and crime trending in the opposite direction to a level below what it was in 1980. In 136 of the 200 metro areas, (almost 70 percent), the immigrant population rose while crime stayed the same or decreased. In 27 percent of the areas (54 metro areas), both immigration and crime increased. The ten places with the largest increases in immigrants all had lower levels of crime in 2016 than in 1980. The study claimed there is no causal relationship between the rise of immigration and violent crime of the 54 areas that increased in crime rates. The Marshall Project came to the conclusion that the data suggests that either immigration has a reducing effect on violent crime or it has no relationship between the two variables.⁴² It is important to note, however, that the study did not include Los Angeles, the city in the United States with the highest concentration of Central Americans and the birthplace of the criminal gang with El Salvadoran origins, MS-13. This paper looks more closely at this key metro area in the analysis section.

FIGURE 2: Numbers of U.S. Immigrants and U.S. Violent Crime Rates, 1850-2017



Data source: Migration Policy Institute, FBI Uniform Crime Report

4.2 Counter-arguments

Even with the publication of statistics through scholarly journals, the argument that immigration leads to more crime in American neighborhoods is still prominent in public discourse and has driven immigration policy decisions and proposals by the Trump administration.

⁴² Ibid.

The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) takes issue with the findings of such studies, pointing out that the lack of correlation between the immigrant share of population and levels of crime is only addressing the overall crime rate, not crimes specifically committed by immigrants. As contradictory evidence, the CIS refers to a 2009 analysis by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics which found that crime rates were higher in metropolitan areas that received large numbers of legal immigrants; however, no link to data sets was provided.⁴³

FAIR continues to draw a link between immigrants and criminality, claiming that a reduction of overall immigration to what it calls "a more normal level" would lessen the negative impact of immigration on national security. FAIR gives anecdotal evidence of the threat of what it calls "uncontrolled immigration" through a series of 18 examples of serious crimes committed on U.S. citizens by immigrants in 2017. One such example was the killing of a woman by an undocumented immigrant from Honduras who was street racing. FAIR addresses its lack of official metrics to measure its claim, stating that these cases are not representative of the illegal alien population in general, but "demonstrate that better prevention of illegal immigration is a public safety issue."⁴⁴ As evidence, FAIR highlights the failed effort by an immigrant to detonate a massive car bomb in New York City's Times Square in May of 2018, claiming that it demonstrates that a determined terrorist can exploit weaknesses in the system.⁴⁵

In response to FAIR's concern, yes, there are anecdotal cases; but statistically speaking such cases are the exception and not the norm. If the United States redirected scarce resources to prioritize exceptional cases, much needed attention would be directed away from other, greater threats to public safety.

President Trump's claim that dangerous people are traveling with the caravan is backed to some extent by the Center for Immigration Studies, which claims that within the caravan or not, Special Interest Aliens from Middle Eastern regions and countries are entering the United States illegally through Latin America. The DHS asserts that these groups pose a "higher risk of committing terrorist acts because of the presence of Islamist terrorist organizations."⁴⁶ Special Interest Aliens (SIAs) are said to utilize well-established Latin American smuggling routes from countries of the Middle East, and also from South Asia and North Africa, according to a memo released by President Obama's Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Jeh Johnson, in 2016. There was enough of a

⁴³ Camarota, Steven, and Jessica Vaughan. 2009. "Immigration and Crime: Assessing a Conflicted Issue." *Center for Immigration Studies*, November 18, 2009. <https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-and-Crime>.

⁴⁴ Federation for American Immigration Reform. "Serious Crimes Committed by Illegal Aliens" n.d. Accessed November 7, 2018. <http://fairus.org/issue/illegal-immigration/examples-serious-crimes-illegal-aliens>.

⁴⁵ Federation for American Immigration Reform. 2010. "Immigration and National Security: 2010 Update." Washington, DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform. February 2010. <http://fairus.org/issue/national-security/immigration-and-national-security-2010-update>.

⁴⁶ Bensman, Todd. 2018. "Political Crossfire over the Migrant Caravan Produces New Information on a Real Homeland Security Problem." *Center for Immigration Studies*, October 23, 2018. <https://cis.org/Bensman/Political-Crossfire-over-Migrant-Caravan-Produces-New-Information-Real-Homeland-Security>.

potential threat to form a SIA Joint Action Group to dismantle groups that specialize in human smuggling into the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁷ To what extent SIAs have infiltrated Central American caravans or used their same route is challenging to verify as the documentation of this group's actions is often classified and found only in the DHS's sensitive compartmented information facilities, or SCIFs, according to the Center for Immigration Studies.⁴⁸

5. Research Question & Methodology: Evaluating the Impact of NTCA Migration on U.S. Crime Trends

This paper seeks to understand the extent to which northbound Central American immigration has an impact on violent crime in the United States. Specifically, I test the relationship between immigration and crime through the use of qualitative information and quantitative statistics with the goal to aggregate current data pertaining to this subgroup to facilitate an evidence-based discussion on the topic.

To better analyze this question and inform recent public discussion on this topic, this evaluation narrows the focus to the immigration and violent crime trends of Northern Triangle immigrants in the United States. Previous scholars compiled all Latinos together in their collection and analysis of statistics with a particular focus on Mexican immigrants. Since these studies, Northern Triangle migrants have increased substantially while Mexican immigration has sharply declined. This research examines the effect that this subgroup of migrants has had on security in American neighborhoods today.

I begin my analysis by comparing the overall immigration share of population in the United States and U.S. violent crime rates of 302 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) to determine if increased immigration in the United States has led to an overall increase in violent crime. To evaluate the current situation, I gathered the most current statistics available from the Migration Policy Institute, which indicated the total U.S. population, the total number of immigrants, and the immigrant share of U.S. population in 2017.⁴⁹ I collected violent crime statistics for the same year and an identical MSA set from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report 2017, honing in on violent crime rates as defined in the report as murder, rape, assault, and robbery.

To get a better understanding of the scope of the Central American immigrant population in the United States since the 2014 Central American migrant crisis, I used the data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey on the place of birth for the foreign-born population in the United States to assess the growth of the Central American immigrant population in the United States year-by-year and how it

⁴⁷ Johnson, Jeh. 2016. Memorandum. Department of Homeland Security. <https://cis.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Jeh-Johnson-Cross-Border-Movement-of-Special-Interest-Alie...%20%284%29.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Bensman, Todd. 2018. "Political Crossfire over the Migrant Caravan Produces New Information on a Real Homeland Security Problem." *Center for Immigration Studies*, October 23, 2018. <https://cis.org/Bensman/Political-Crossfire-over-Migrant-Caravan-Produces-New-Information-Real-Homeland-Security>.

⁴⁹ Migration Policy Institute. 2012. "U.S. Immigrant Population by Metropolitan Area." Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-immigrant-population-metropolitan-area>.

compares to the overall U.S. population and the total foreign-born U.S population. I paid particular attention to the years 2005 to 2017 to understand before and after the 2014 surge of migrants. The Department of Homeland Security's Yearbook of Immigration Statistics provides a compendium of tables that provide data on foreign nationals who are granted permanent residence and their country of last residence. I included statistics from fiscal years 1970 to 2010 and 2013 to 2017 to determine the magnitude of this new wave of migrants compared to past decades.⁵⁰ Looking at the data throughout the decades helps to gain perspective, as significant Central American northern migration began in the 1980s with the region's civil wars and spiked in 2014 with an especially high rate of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC), the official term for unaccompanied, undocumented migrants under the age of 18.

Next, I examine whether this subset of the immigrant population poses a threat to national security, paying particular attention to the scope of the migrant group's connection to the ruthless gang, MS-13. After assessing where the highest concentrations of Central American migrants have settled, I analyze the change in Northern Triangle immigration and Crime Rates from 2005 to 2017 to see what trends emerge. Due to the gravity of the crime, homicides are more likely to be reported even in immigrant communities which typically have lower reporting rates. I compare findings of the net change of violent crime rates and immigration with those of homicide rates and immigration for the time period to see if a stronger correlation presents itself.

Through the compilation of statistics from the Center for Immigration Studies and the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol for the time period of 2012 to 2017, I evaluate the reach of the Mara Salvatrucha criminal organization and to what extent it is representative of the overall Central American immigrant population. I examine the claims of high-profile U.S. leaders who assert that MS-13 gang members are arriving with the recent surge of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) and that they are "running wild" in American neighborhoods.⁵¹ Using current data, I assess the extent of the threat of this gang with El Salvadoran origins.

This paper adds value to previous work done on this issue by compiling and analyzing data of immigration of the Northern Triangle countries of Central America separate from Mexico. By comparing the previous flows and outcomes with the current Northern Triangle migration and U.S. violent crime statistics, we can better understand if the violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras has translated into increased violence in the communities in which they have settled.

⁵⁰ Office of Immigration Statistics. 2011. "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2010." Department of Homeland Security. https://www.fosterglobal.com/policy_papers/ois_yb_2010.pdf; Office of Immigration Statistics. 2018. "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2017." U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2017>.

⁵¹ Trump, Donald J. 2018. "A Vote for Democrats in November Is a Vote to Let MS-13 Run Wild in Our Communities, to Let Drugs Pour into Our Cities, and to Take Jobs and Benefits Away from Hardworking Americans. Democrats Want Anarchy, Amnesty and Chaos - Republicans Want LAW, ORDER and JUSTICE!" Tweet. @realDonaldTrump. July 5, 2018. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1015033658548207616>.

6. Analysis

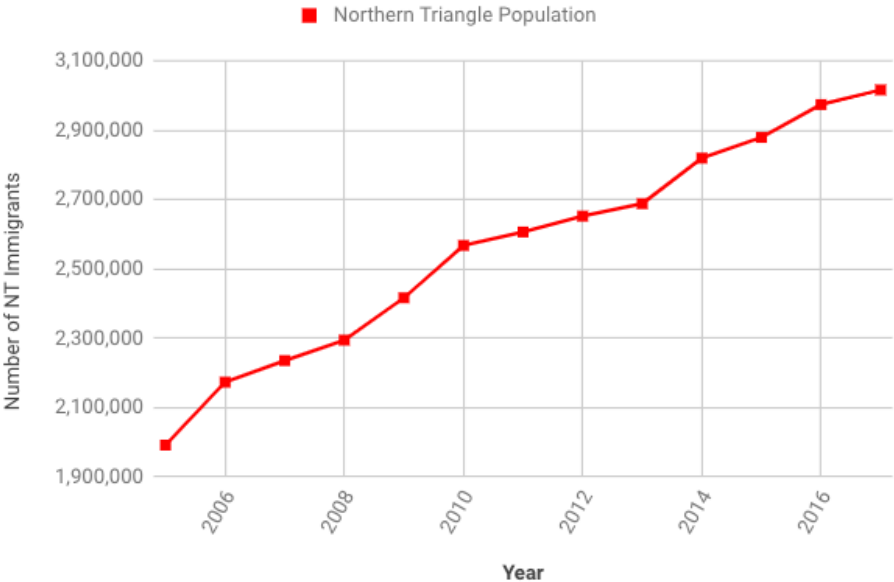
6.1 Findings in Immigration Trends

Since 1970, the share and number of immigrants in the United States has increased rapidly. The immigrant share of the population is nearing a historic high, but it is still lower than prior to the Great Depression and World War II.

The data retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau demonstrates a steady climb of immigrants from the Northern Triangle region that have settled in the United States. In 2005, immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras living in the United States equaled nearly 2 million and increased to slightly above 3 million over the next 12 years. In the time period between 2011 and 2017, a time which spans before and after the migrant crisis, the number of Northern Triangle immigrants rose approximately 400,000 which indicated a growth of 0.1 percent of the foreign-born population (see Figure 3). The number of Northern Triangle migrant arrivals nearly quadrupled in 2014, with the arrival of approximately 131,000 migrants. This surge included a dramatic increase in Unaccompanied Alien Children whose numbers spiked from approximately 8,000 a year previous to 2012 to nearly 60,000 in 2014.

FIGURE 3: Northern Triangle Population in the United States

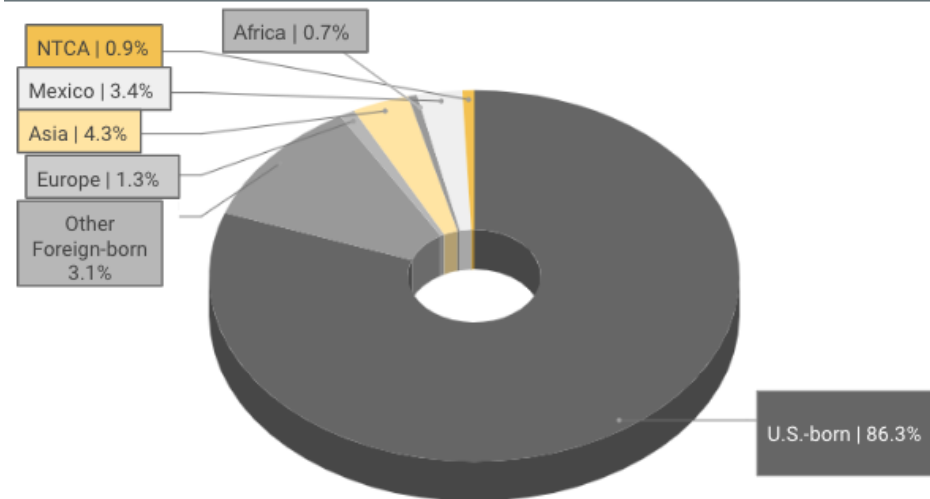
Northern Triangle Population in the United States
2005-2017



Data Source: American Community Survey Selected Population Tables, U.S. Census Bureau

To put the increases in immigrant population in perspective and understand the scope of Central American migration, it is important to note that in 2017 the overall U.S. population consisted of over 326 million people, of which approximately 45 million were foreign-born. Of the foreign-born, the Northern Triangle subset of immigrants constitute 0.9% of the share of overall population, of which by far the largest percentage is attributed to those with El Salvadoran origins.⁵² Asian foreign-born are the most prevalent with 4.3 percent of the share, which consists of Eastern, South Central, and South Eastern Asian immigrants. Those born in Mexico are second with 3.4 percent; while European and African foreign-born make up 1.2 and 0.7 percent respectively (see Figure 4).⁵³

FIGURE 4: Foreign-born Populations in the U.S., 2017



Foreign-born Populations in the U.S. | 2017

Source: US Census Bureau

6.2 Northern Triangle Immigrants and Crime

The findings of my research contradict the common perception that the concentration of Central American immigrants drives up crime rates, in fact, the results show a pattern that upends popular stereotypes and pokes holes in the immigrant-crime connection. In 2017, the overall rate of violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants in the United States fell 0.9 percent when compared to the previous year. That percentage is 16.5 percent lower than the estimated rate of 2008, previous the Central American migrant crisis.

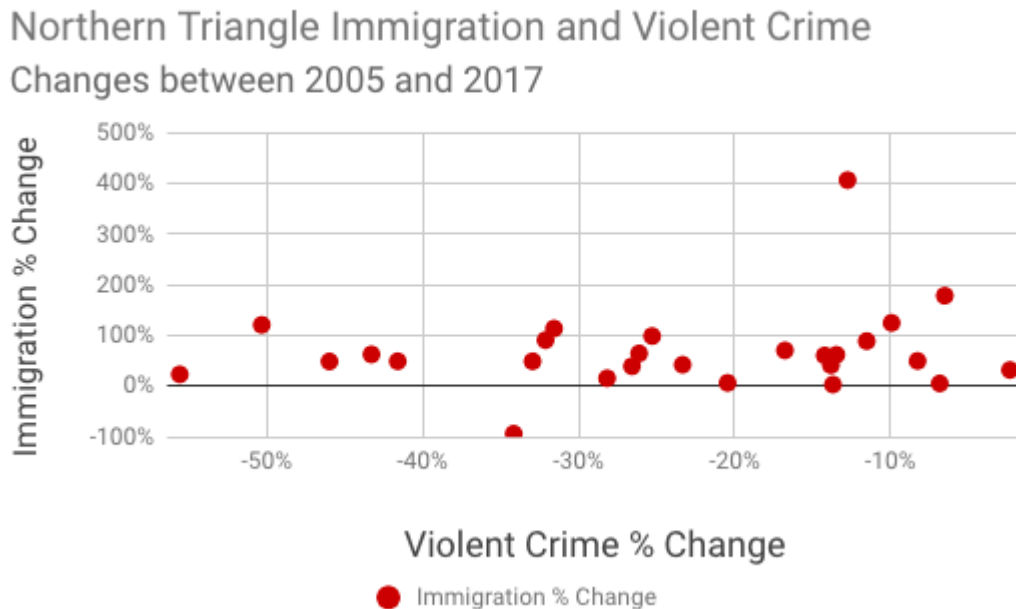
⁵² "American Community Survey, FactFinder." 2017. U.S. Census Bureau. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

⁵³ Bureau, U. S. Census. n.d. "American FactFinder: Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth: Latin America." Accessed October 26, 2018. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?ft=table>.

Upon initial observation of the Central American connection to crime, no patterns emerged between the most violent metro areas in the United States and the areas with the highest concentration of Northern Triangle migrants. In fact, not one of the 27 metros with high concentration of immigrants from that region is within the top ten of the most violent metros in the United States. According to U.S. Census data, the metro area with the highest concentration of foreign-born from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras is Los Angeles, California. With a rate of 497, it is ranked 78 out of the 326 metro areas on the FBI's 2017 Uniform Crime Report for violent crime rates. While this rate is above the U.S. average of 388, it is nowhere near the rate of the most violent communities in the United States, such as Kansas City, Missouri, which holds the highest ranking at a rate of 1718. With the spotlight on the San-Diego-Tijuana border as the caravan participants arrive by the thousands, it is interesting to note that as San Diego and its surrounding areas experienced an increase of Northern Triangle immigration by 16 percent, it reported a violent crime and homicide rate decrease of 28 percent and 27 percent respectively.

In evaluating the changes between Northern Triangle foreign-born immigrants and changes of violent crime and homicide rates in the metro areas in which they settled between the years of 2005 and 2017, no significant trends emerge. That is, upon analysis of the linear relationship between the two variables of immigration and violent crime, no clear correlation emerged. In fact, crime went down across the board, as indicated by the correlation coefficient of 0.033 and as depicted in the figure below (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: Northern Triangle Immigration and Violent Crime, 2005-2017



Data Source: US. Census, FBI Uniform Crime Report

One consideration that could affect the results is that immigrants (especially undocumented immigrants) are less likely to report crimes.⁵⁴ The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) points out the potential for a share of these underreported crime to have been committed by undocumented immigrants.⁵⁵ To address this concern, I gathered homicide rates for the 27 metro areas to see if a different pattern or level of correlation occurred. Due to the seriousness of the offense, studies have shown that these crimes have a higher likelihood of being reported regardless of the associated risks.⁵⁶

When comparing NTCA immigration and homicide rates, the weak correlation is even more evident. In the vast majority of cases, homicide rates declined as immigration climbed significantly. With the influx of Central American foreigners ranging from 4 percent to 407 percent increases, only five metro areas showed a rise in homicide rates, and one community showed no change at all. Los Angeles, the metro most representative of Central American immigrants, reported a growth of 4 percent of foreigners from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and a 45 percent decrease of homicides.

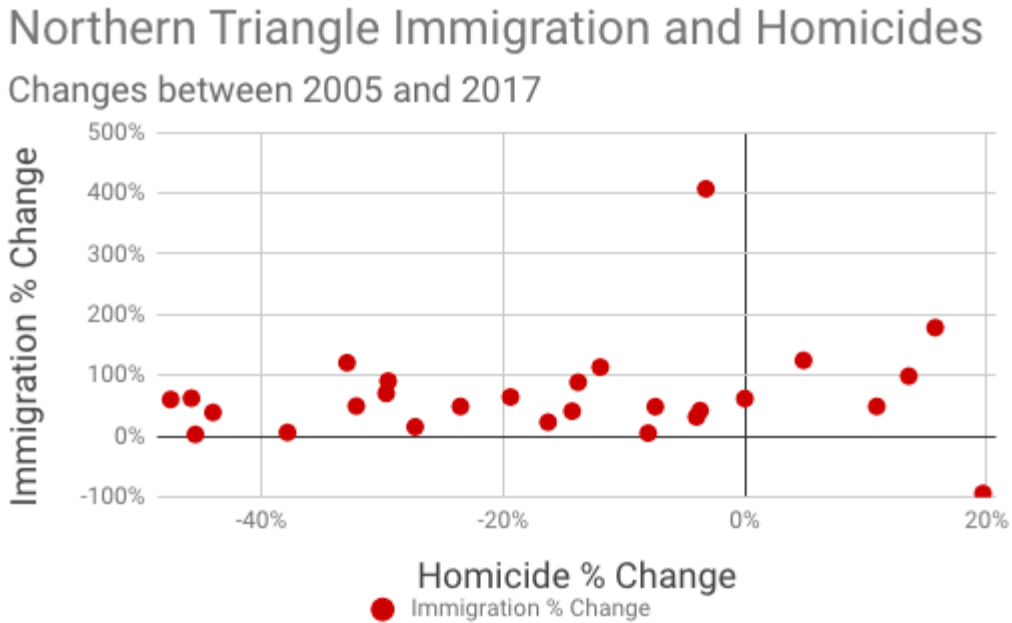
Seattle metro area had the highest spike in immigration, rising by 407 percent, whereas homicides dropped by three percent. The only metro area to experience a reduction in Northern Triangle concentration was Columbus, Ohio, which also experienced a 20 percent rise in homicide rates. The next most significant jump in immigration was Baltimore, which experienced immigration growth by 179 percent and, opposite of the majority of cases, an increase of homicides by 16 percent. The increase could be attributed to the riots that ensued after the death of Freddie Gray who died April 19, 2015 while in the custody of the Baltimore Police Department. The homicide rate spiked in 2015 from 9.6 to 13.1 and continues to increase as tensions continue. Beyond these observations, the figure below demonstrates this weak correlation between Central American immigration and homicides (see Figure 6). These results are statistically significant as evidenced by the P-Value of .001, a strong indicator that these results did not occur by mere chance.

⁵⁴ Stephen M. Schnebly found that as the immigrant concentration of an area increases, victims of crime are less likely to report their victimization. Schnebly, Stephen M. 2008. "The Influence of Community-Oriented Policing on Crime Reporting Behavior." *Justice Quarterly* 25 (2): 223–51.

⁵⁵ Camarota, Steven, and Jessica Vaughan. 2009. "Immigration and Crime: Assessing a Conflicted Issue." *Center for Immigration Studies*, November 18, 2009. <https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-and-Crime>.

⁵⁶ Kubrin, Charis E., and Graham C. Ousey. 2009. "Immigration and homicide in urban America: what's the connection?" In McDonald, W. F. (Ed.) *Immigration, crime and justice/Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance*, 13, 17-32. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

FIGURE 6: Northern Triangle Immigration and Homicides, 2005-2017



Data Source: US. Census, FBI Uniform Crime Report

7. A Closer Look at the MS-13 Threat

The threat of MS-13 infiltrating American communities has received high level attention in social and news media. President Donald Trump has shined a spotlight on the notoriously brutal gang based in El Salvador through his use of social media and speeches. His commentary repeatedly connects U.S. immigrants and immigration policy with the international crime gang. For example, in his January 2018 State of the Union address, President Trump linked the arrival of Central American unaccompanied minors to the 2016 Long Island murders by members of the MS-13 gang and blamed loopholes in U.S. immigration law. In a tweet in April 2018, Trump revived the argument that the U.S. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy was to blame for the caravan of migrants heading from Central America to the U.S.-Mexican border. In another tweet, he contended that “Honduras, Mexico [and others]...send many of their people to our country through our weak immigration policies,” then connected “open borders” to “drugs and crime.” With the families of two girls murdered by MS-13 present, Trump opened a roundtable on immigration by conflating the gang to all immigrants by asserting, “We’re here today to discuss the menace of MS-13. It’s a menace, a ruthless gang that has violated our borders and transformed once-peaceful neighborhoods into bloodstained killing fields.”

To what extent is the MS-13 criminal gang representative of the overall immigrant population? Philip Bump takes issue with what he calls Trump’s “narrow spotlight” on MS-13 in a Washington Post article. He condemns his conflating of the gang to all immigrants and his focus on a “subset of a subset of the immigrant population.”⁵⁷

Politifact, a fact-checking website, attempted to determine if the gang members who killed the Long Island teenagers had in fact been given entrance to the United States as Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) by inquiring with the U.S. Justice Department, Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. No agency provided information to support his claim. Furthermore, experts have shown that MS-13’s growth predates the last two administrations’ immigration policies as the gang was formed in Los Angeles in the 1980s by marginalized Salvadoran youth who fled civil war in their country.

7.1 The Narrow Scope of the MS-13 Problem

Since the early 2000s, the size of the criminal organization grew following the large-scale deportations to Central America from the United States of undocumented immigrants with criminal records. Coupled with members of the Northern Triangle region’s other largest gang, MS-18, there are approximately 85 thousand members in total. According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), approximately ten thousand MS-13 members inhabit the United States, amounting to 0.3 percent of the overall U.S. population.⁵⁸ By comparison, there are approximately 1.4 million gang members living in the United States that make up more than 33,000 gangs.⁵⁹

With respect to the claim that a horde of MS-13 members are crossing the border as unaccompanied minors, of the 45,400 UACs apprehended at the border in the five-year period of 2012 and 2017, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) apprehended 159 UACs with confirmed or suspected gang affiliations, 56 of which were suspected or confirmed to be affiliated with MS-13.⁶⁰ Newsweek reported that 90 percent of the 60 migrants in the April 2018 caravan apprehended in Arizona were families, a third were less than 18 years of age and one gang member was found among them.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Bump puts Trump’s use of the term “killing fields” into perspective by pointing out that the term is often connected to the 1970s Cambodian genocide by the Khmer Rouge during which 1.4 million people were killed in five years. In contrast, 37 homicides took place in the Long Island counties in 2016, which is home to 2.8 million people. Bump, Philip. 2018. “Trump Again Smears a Large Immigrant Community with the Violent Actions of a Few People.” *The Washington Post*, May 23, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/05/23/trump-again-smears-a-large-immigrant-community-with-the-violent-actions-of-a-few-people/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.06f7927477c0.

⁵⁸ Cara Labrador, Rocio, and Danielle Renwick. 2018. “Central America’s Violent Northern Triangle.” *Backgrounder edition*. Council on Foreign Relations. Last updated on June 26, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>.

⁵⁹ U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2011. “2011 National Gang Threat Assessment.” Washington, DC: US Federal Bureau of Investigation. Accessed November 16, 2018. <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-assessment>.

⁶⁰ Valverde, Miriam. “Immigration, MS-13 and Crime: The Facts behind Donald Trump’s Exaggerations.” *Politifact*, February 7, 2018. <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/feb/07/donald-trump/immigration-ms-13-and-crime-facts-behind-donald-tr/>.

⁶¹ Maza, Cristina. 2018. “MS-13 Gang Member Arrested Traveling with Migrant Caravan from Central America to U.S.” *Newsweek*, April 12, 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/ms13-member-arrested-traveling-migrant-caravan-central-america-us-884193>.

7.2 What is the reach of MS-13 criminality?

To assess the threat to public safety, we must understand the reach of the MS-13 criminal organization, known for its brutality and subcultural moral code based on merciless retribution. To do so, I use data compiled by the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) through a study of MS-13 criminal charges and arrests of 2012 to 2017. CIS gathered this information from U.S. federal institutions such as the Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the local agencies in which the offenses occurred.

The study gathered a total of 500 cases which occurred in 22 states between the five-year period. Data indicates that 93 percent of the crimes occurred in ten highly populated states. The states affected are not geographically isolated, as they range from East to West and show no correlation to a specific region. Some may argue the far-reaching ability of this gang; however, MS-13 crimes are small in number compared to the 1.2 million overall violent offenses committed. At its most violent in 2016, the gang committed 163 offenses nationwide, and the average yearly number of offenses in the most incident-concentrated state, California, is 17. Of the 500 cases, 345 were related to violence with a high concentration on murder, sex trafficking, drug trafficking and extortion. When compared to the overall violent crime statistics which indicate that assault accounts for 65 percent of overall U.S. violent crimes, the violent nature of this group could be one reason why they are receiving disproportionate public attention.⁶²

CIS claims that MS-13 crime in the United States has rebounded, however, when the data is examined closely, it becomes apparent that the incidents were a relatively small number when compared to the overall numbers of offenses and total U.S. criminal gang population. With regards to MS-13 gang members arriving in the United States as unaccompanied minors, the study found that 120 of the 506 MS-13 suspects in the case set arrived as UACs, including 48 of the murder suspects. The Cato Institute puts these numbers in perspective as it reports that 0.1 percent of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol arrests at the border mid-year in 2018 were MS-13 gang members—that is 0.11 percent of the 252,187 apprehensions in this year. That number is similar to the statistics from prior years and does not suggest a resurgence as the CIS study claims. Furthermore, apprehensions of individuals in any gang made up 0.2 percent of all Border Patrol arrests in 2018, meaning that 99.8 percent of all arrests were not gang members.⁶³

Empirical data reveals that the scope of MS-13 danger is much narrower than indicated by the amount of discussion it receives in the public spotlight and that the threat does not show signs of rapid expansion. The pockets of terror of this criminal gang that elicits fear in the hearts of Americans have the potential to disrupt neighborhoods, but not the United States as a whole. The violence of this subgroup of a subgroup should be addressed at a local level and separated from the immigration dialogue.

⁶² Vaughan, Jessica. 2018. "MS-13 Resurgence: Immigration Enforcement Needed to Take Back Our Streets." Center for Immigration Studies. February 21, 2018. <https://cis.org/Report/MS13-Resurgence-Immigration-Enforcement-Needed-Take-Back-Our-Streets>.

⁶³ Bier, David. 2018. "0.1% of Border Patrol Arrests Are MS-13." *Cato at Liberty*. Cato Institute. <https://www.cato.org/blog/01-border-patrol-arrests-are-ms-13>.

8. Policy Recommendations

To address the surge in Central American migration, to reduce the burden on host countries, and to facilitate balanced immigration dialogue, there are several things we can do. By engaging and collaborating with regional governmental partners, development actors, civil society, and private corporations, innovative options can be employed to encourage progress on immigration reform policy and to reduce the northward migration of masses of people in search for security and better economic opportunities. Immigration is a complex, multi-faceted issue that impacts both the sending and receiving nations; therefore, I offer the following recommendations for all involved parties to consider, both state and non-state actors, to achieve effective and lasting progress.

- **Reduce the threat narrative surrounding immigrants and Central American migrants to encourage fact-based immigration policy-making and to aid in their assimilation.** Rather than try to change the mind of the Trump administration, it may be more impactful to target the hearts and minds of the American people through campaigns to show the human side of the Northern Triangle immigrants. When so much of the public discourse is centered around the threat of their arrival and connections to violent crime, it is imperative to engage media, community, and non-governmental organizations in an effort to balance the dialogue surrounding the migrants and inform the American public of the extent of the threat. Scholars have done extensive research and found that immigration and criminality are not linked in the first generation, but they struggle to share their message on platforms that reach the majority of citizens. Infographics, social media, and ad campaigns are just a few of the tools that can be used to undo the de-humanizing of the public rhetoric surrounding those fleeing violence in their home countries. These efforts should include a plan to help change perceptions of refugees so that they are seen as rights-holders, contributors, and partners in the development of communities.⁶⁴ Not perceiving the Central Americans who are granted asylum as hostile or threatening will aid them in assimilating into their new communities as productive, engaged citizens, thus reducing the negative effects of second and third generation immigrants.
- **Highlight the positive results occurring in the Northern Triangle region and spread the message both in the NTCA and the United States.** If media, community, and international organizations highlighted the extensive efforts and positive results occurring in the Northern Triangle region and among its neighbors, the hopelessness that drives migrants from their homes could be replaced with increased confidence in local governance and civic action to support the ongoing efforts towards stability and economic opportunities. This could be done through social media and public awareness campaigns targeting citizens of the Northern

⁶⁴ Ridge, Tom, and Gayle Smith. 2018. *Confronting the Global Forced Migration Crisis: A Report of the CSIS Task Force on the Global Forced Migration Crisis*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Triangle region and those of the United States where high concentrations of Central Americans reside. Moreover, news of security improvements and anti-corruption efforts could lead to increased foreign investment and business opportunities, triggering much needed industry and infrastructure in the NTCA region. Some examples of incremental successes are the high level of arrests by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and El Salvador's 30 percent reduction in homicide rates in ten target municipalities since 2015. A coordinated effort between the Honduran government and the U.S. Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), which includes enforcement training, youth employment, and investment in community leadership, has resulted in a cut in homicides by half in some of the most dangerous neighborhoods in San Pedro Sula.⁶⁵

- **Offer sustained and increasing support to sending communities to reduce the push factors of migration.**

The United States should offer sustained and increasing support to sending communities to reduce the push factors that are driving flows of migration northward. To echo Christina Perkins et al. (2016) in "Achieving Growth and Security in the Northern Triangle," supporting the Northern Triangle must be a priority. The United States needs to offer unwavering support of the Alliance for Prosperity plan—a comprehensive strategy to counter the underlying causes of violence, economic stagnation, and weak governance—and increase its efforts on the U.S. Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) which engages the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), other nations, financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society in economic and social programs for high risk communities in the Northern Triangle region.⁶⁶ U.S. funding can be better spent making sure Central Americans never leave home. In FY2016, Congress allocated \$750 million to Central America, a 34 percent increase from \$506 million in FY2015—just a fraction of the \$49 billion the United States spent on foreign assistance that year. The aid is conditional upon the governments adopting policies that discourage migration to the United States and assist in reintegration of deportees, accountability, anti-corruption, and tax and business reforms.⁶⁷ Cutting aid to the Northern Triangle region, as President Trump has threatened, would likely increase northward migration as efforts to tackle the root causes would be weakened and it would unravel the positive strides that have taken place.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Perkins, Christina, Daniel F. Runde, and Erin Nealer. 2016. *Achieving Growth and Security in the Northern Triangle of Central America*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <http://lib.myilibrary.com?id=979326>.

⁶⁶ "Central America Regional Security Initiative." 2017. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/2017/260869.htm>.

⁶⁷ Perkins, Christina, Daniel F. Runde, and Erin Nealer. 2016. *Achieving Growth and Security in the Northern Triangle of Central America*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <http://lib.myilibrary.com?id=979326>.

⁶⁸ Burmeo, Sarah. 2018. "Is the Migrant Caravan a National Security Crisis?" *Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy*. Podcast audio. November 3, 2018. <https://sanford.duke.edu/articles/migrant-caravan-national-security-crisis-podcast>.

- **Support other host countries to create additional safe havens in the region.** Helping the host countries of the region, specifically Mexico, through funding and support of development, rule of law, education, and industry-growing initiatives could provide an alternative to the United States when migrants are in search of a safe haven. The new administration in Mexico wants migrants to integrate into Mexican society and is offering work permits. Although a potential solution to the backlog in U.S. asylum courts, it will not hold without addressing some challenges.

First, Mexico has experienced a worsening of its security condition over the past three years. Intentional homicides have increased in all but six states with Baja California ranking among the top five. The highest concentration of increased homicides in the Baja region has taken place in the city of Tijuana where the majority of caravan participants are currently residing and applying for asylum.⁶⁹ Mexico's struggle with organized crime and weak rule of law puts the newcomers at risk to many of the challenges from which they fled. Continued U.S.-Mexico security cooperation is in the United States' interest. If unable to find safe haven in Mexico, the United States is obligated by international law to grant protection within its borders to those with a credible claim to asylum.

Furthermore, the sheltering, feeding, and medical treatment of thousands of migrants in Tijuana has put a strain on the border city's public resources prompting its mayor, Juan Manuel Gastelum, to declare a humanitarian crisis. To ensure Mexico's ability to house the newcomers, the United States should offset the costs of assimilating the migrants into the city's strapped educational systems and public services by allocating funds to President López Obrador's migrant "Marshall Plan," geared toward border enforcement and job creation in Central American and Mexico.⁷⁰ Supporting Mexico's efforts through public and private investment could reduce the burden on Mexico and expand its economic stability, thus increasing its ability to assimilate migrants for the long term.

- **Give priority to bilateral workforce development initiatives that have the potential to reduce the need to migrate northward.** Workforce development initiatives involving the U.S. and Mexican governments, academic institutions, and the private sectors boost productivity and quality of life in Mexico, thus reducing the need to migrate northward in search of increased educational and economic opportunities. U.S. and Mexican officials need to give priority to the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation, and Research, launched in 2014, to expand opportunities for educational exchanges,

⁶⁹ Calderón, Laura, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk. 2018. "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2017." *Justice in Mexico*, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of San Diego.

⁷⁰ Martin, Rachel. 2018. "Mexico Is Looking to The U.S. To Fund Their Migrant Marshall Plan." Interviewed by Carrie Kahn. *Morning Edition*. NPR.Org. December 14, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/14/676652909/mexico-is-looking-to-the-u-s-to-fund-their-migrant-marshall-plan>.

scientific research partnerships, and cross-border innovation that could lead to mutual economic prosperity and sustainable social development.

In addition, the governments of the United States, Mexico, and the private sectors of both nations should implement, incentivize and regulate a replicable workforce development system to be executed at the corporate level, one which invests in employees by offering pathways to skill building, leadership training, and career development within the workplace. Workforce development through the aegis of large transnational corporations can help in sharing knowledge and best practices in both directions creating a symbiotic relationship in which all parties benefit. For example, when businesses invest in the development of their workforce, they increase the number of skilled laborers in their facility, decrease attrition by giving employees a clear line of sight for upward mobility, reduce the need to look outward for leadership roles, reduce conflict within the organization, and reduce costs in the process.

Alpha Guardian, a U.S.-based corporation, has been working to this end in their Tijuana, Mexico manufacturing facility.⁷¹ Through their in-house education system, employees have access to free and low-cost professional and personal courses, trainings, and accredited degrees during working hours. By prioritizing the development of their people, this transnational corporation has experienced a decrease in attrition, an increase in skilled labor and leadership within their teams, and a marked loyalty from their employees that is often missing from the *maquiladora* industry. Although the corporation shoulders the expense of the educational program, the cost savings of reduced attrition balances that figure. In addition, skilled labor imported from the United States would cost the company far more in increased salary than the cost of in-house courses and trainings within the Mexican facility.

Mexico also stands to benefit in a number of ways, in addition to the benefit of a reduced unskilled labor exodus to the United States and the training of skilled laborers who will join the Mexican labor force. Loyalty and confidence in the state, alternate, legal means of wealth accumulation to combat drug trafficking, and eventual reduced violence are possible outcomes. Of course, workforce development is not a panacea for all the problems in Mexico; however, it does provide a more accessible path for citizens to access legitimate, meaningful employment within the borders of Mexico. Better opportunities will lead to greater trust in the Mexican government and its ability and desire to take care of its people. It is in Mexico's interest to offer increased investment incentives and subsidies, including those aimed to lure Foreign Direct Investment, to corporations who invest in their employees' development.

⁷¹ "Alpha Guardian – People First." n.d. Accessed January 23, 2019. <https://www.alphaguardian.com/>.

- **Promote the transformation of the international refugee system from a resettlement-based to a development-based refugee policy.**

A development-based, as opposed to the current resettlement-based, refugee policy is an idea that is gaining traction. The idea is promoted by Collier and Botts from Oxford University and endorsed by the Center for Immigration Studies as an alternative to how we have been addressing refugee concerns for 50 years.⁷² The overarching principle is to transform refugees from a burden to a benefit for the host country. Development-based initiatives empower refugees and their host communities with policies that are sustainable and scalable and that allow displaced people to learn, work, and flourish until they are able to return to their homes. By setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs), the host country is incentivized to onboard refugees by receiving funding for infrastructure and industry-growing projects from the international community and shifts the discussion from burden-sharing to profit-sharing.

The host country in turn incentivizes local investment and the hiring of new arrivals through tax exemptions, labor scholarships, subsidies, and other devices already in place to elicit foreign investment. Instead of using a portion of its national budget to fulfil its humanitarian duty, the nation is able to capitalize on low-cost labor and financing of jumbo projects that will in turn result in industrial development advancement. Not only will this strategy promote self-sufficiency of refugees, it will enable them to stay close to home and return to rebuild their country after the conflict with their newly acquired skills and economic freedom.⁷³ A shift from resettlement to development refugee policies reduces the draw of resources from other underserved populations and citizens within a country through increased industry and job creation. With better support, serving new arrivals and serving host communities is not mutually exclusive.⁷⁴

9. Conclusion

There are several challenges to measuring immigration and criminality, some of which I attempted to remedy and others which call for further research. In order to assess the immigrant-crime relationship, the data that was most available for measuring was collected by Metropolitan Statistical Areas. One benefit of this unit is that it avoids selection bias as it includes 302 metro areas that are spread out nationwide and control for population of over 100,000 people - a useful sample size since crime rates are reported per 100,000 inhabitants. The downside, however, is that these metro areas include surrounding counties with lower crime rates than their larger city centers. One

⁷² Betts, Alexander, & Paul Collier. 2016. "Jordan's Refugee Experiment: A New Model for Helping the Displaced." April 28, 2016.

⁷³ Rush, Nayla. 2016. "Refugee Resettlement Is Not the Answer." Center for Immigration Studies. <https://cis.org/Rush/Refugee-Resettlement-Not-Answer>.

⁷⁴ Ridge, Tom, and Gayle Smith. 2018. *Confronting the Global Forced Migration Crisis: A Report of the CSIS Task Force on the Global Forced Migration Crisis*. Rowman & Littlefield.

example of how this can skew results is in the case of Detroit where the crime rate of the city center is 1030 and the Metropolitan Statistical Area is 554. When ranking and comparing the most violent cities and then comparing it to immigration changes, highly affected cities may not be considered due to the extremely low crime rates of their surrounding counties. In addition, some high crime areas have a population below 100,000 and were left out of the analysis.

Compiling an accurate headcount of immigrant populations in the United States is complicated by undocumented immigrants' hesitation to fill out citizenship and last country of residence questions on U.S. Census surveys for fear of being deported. However, community funding of education and social programs often depend on the survey reporting which encourages participation. Also, there is potential for violent crimes of MS-13 members to be underreported due to their use of extortion and other violent measures to influence their victims. To minimize this, I used homicides for my analysis since there is a higher likelihood of this grievous offense to be reported regardless of the risks.

Overall, although Northern Triangle immigration has surged over the past several years, the evidence does not support the claim that they are posing a U.S. national security threat. Not only did overall U.S. violent crime rates descend as Central American migration share rose; but the influx of these foreigners in 27 metro areas showed no correlation when compared to the violent crime rate changes of each one during 2005 to 2017. When compared to homicide rate changes, there is no correlation between the changes in the immigrant population from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; in fact, the vast majority of cases demonstrate a reduction in crime. The violence that Northern Triangle migrants are fleeing is not translating into more violence in American communities, as the public discourse seems to suggest. The Central American migration threat has been hyperinflated in scope and potential for insecurity.

Likewise, the threat of the MS-13 gang is far smaller in scope and reach than high-profile dialogue suggests, and it is given disproportionate attention in the public discourse considering the levels of crime. Although spread throughout cities in the United States and a legitimate concern for the communities which they inhabit, the members of this murderous gang do not demonstrate an ability to disrupt the stability and security of the entire nation and show no sign of expansion. Containing the threat of this violent criminal organization is best left to local authorities with local options. This research does not advocate ceasing to address the root causes of MS-13 criminal activity, only to keep the risk in perspective to reduce the negative consequences of fear-based decision-making.

The conflating of all immigrants with the MS-13 gang, as has been done repeatedly through President Trump's tweets and speeches, is unfounded and problematic. Connecting all immigrants with the violent acts of the few stalls progress on immigration reform, influences public opinion and immigration policy decisions without data to support the level of threat, creates an atmosphere of conflict surrounding those requesting asylum and settling in American neighborhoods, and is counterproductive to keeping Americans safe.

The surge in migration from the Northern Triangle to the United States has not been accompanied by increases in violent crime that would warrant sounding the national security threat alarm and allocating resources to protect and preserve the state. To address the concerns of citizens and humanitarian needs of the migrants, it is vital to accurately and critically assess the real impact of the incoming flows through the recent caravans and utilize level-headed and data-driven dialogue to agree on immigration reform. Solutions will need to be more comprehensive and nuanced than the simple taglines suggest of “refugees go home” and “welcome asylum seekers.”

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