A Historical and Demographic Outlook of Migration from Central America’s Northern Triangle

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Carla Pederzini, Universidad Iberoamericana Mexico City,
Fernando Riosmena, University of Colorado at Boulder,
Claudia Masferrer, INRS and El Colegio de México and
Noemy Molina, Fundación Iris de Centromerica Partners-El Salvador
Persistent growth of the NTCA-born population in the U.S., despite:

- Economic crisis and slow recovery in the U.S.
- Rising number of deportations from U.S. interior
- Steady/growing number of NTCA nationals apprehended at the border or “removed” from U.S. interior
- Increasing risks and costs of transit through Mexico
  - Tougher immigration controls and higher apprehensions
  - Increased violence and insecurity throughout the journey
- Decreased emigration from Mexico to the U.S.
Unauthorized NTCA immigrant stocks grow while Mexican stocks diminish

Note: Mexican amounts are divided by ten.
Outline

1. Historical context and international migration dynamics from the NTCA
2. Mexico as a destination and place of transit
3. U.S. as destination country
4. Demographic profile of NTCA migrants in Mexico and U.S.
5. Discussion and policy recommendations
Historical Context

Figure 3.

- **1950's**: Lack of land and work, Outmigration to other CA Countries (Mainly Honduras)
- **1960's**: Emigration of Banana Workers to New Orleans
- **1970's**: War with El Salvador
- **1980's**: Immigration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua
- **1990's**: Civil War, migration to US intensifies
- **2000's**: Outmigration
- **2010's**: Persistent growth of the NTCA-Born population in the U.S. and Mexico
Intra-regional migration responses

“Export-oriented” political economy based on basic agricultural commodities favored:

– Large domestic producers at El Salvador and Guatemala
– Foreign investment

Guatemala: Historical migration flows to SE Mexico

El Salvador: Dislocated peasants to Honduras

Honduras: Large flow of immigrants during 1980s and 1990s
From Intra-regional to International Migration

Guatemala:
Refugee camps ran by UNHCR in Mexico
Migration flows to US

• El Salvador:
During the conflict: Onset of migration flow to US
After pacification: Emigration rekindled due to:
  – Longstanding economic problems and political confrontation
  – Hurricane Mitch (1998) and earthquake (2001)
  – Increasing gang violence since beg. of 21st Century

Honduras:
Highest rate of recent migration to the US refueled by drug and gang related violence
Destination: Mexico

- Mexican asylum “policy” challenged at end of 1970s
  - Commission for Aid to Refugees (COMAR)
  - Limited to attention to Guatemalans due to budget constraints
- Creation of the Instituto Nacional de Migración (1993)
  - Changes Control and migration management
- Increased violence toward migrants and human rights violations lead to the adoption of a new Migration Law (2011).
  - facilitates immigrant regularization and the granting of permanent residence for high-skilled immigrants,
  - limited options for Central Americans.
Population born in the NTCA living in Mexico by year

Thousands

Guatemala  El Salvador  Honduras

Source: Estimates for 1970 and 1980 are taken from CEPAL (1999); 2010 and 2010 from Mexican censuses.
Transit through Mexico

• Increasing trend since the mid-1990s to 2005
  Highest point in 2005 = Between 390,000 and 430,000 migrants.
    – Slowdown 2006-2009
    – Stabilization 2010-2011
    – Since 2012 increase again (Honduras at the top)

• After 2009 increased proportion of unaccompanied minors detained by Mexico and the U.S.
Destination: United States

- Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)
  - 136,000 Salvadorans and 50,000 Guatemalans legalized through IRCA (around $1/5^{th}$ of the population in 1990)
- Limited legal refuge and asylum options
  - TPS a mechanism for temporary but renewable relief from deportation
- Increase in irregular inflows
  - U.S. labor demand
  - Family reunification
  - Immigration policy towards low-skilled
Steady growth of Immigrant stocks in the US

Note: Mexican amounts are divided by ten.
Source: Authors’ calculation from data from 1960-2000 based on decennial census data long forms; data from 2006-2008 through 2012-2014 based on three-year averages from the 2006-2014 American Community Surveys.
Greater feminization in Mexico

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<th>Honduras</th>
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Mexico

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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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USA
Older Salvadorans

- El Salvador (in U.S.)
- Guatemala (in U.S.)
- Honduras (in U.S.)
- El Salvador (in Mexico)
- Guatemala (in Mexico)
- Honduras (in Mexico)
Years of Schooling in Mexico and U.S.

- El Salvador (in U.S.)
- Guatemala (in U.S.)
- Honduras (in U.S.)
- El Salvador (in Mexico)
- Guatemala (in Mexico)
- Honduras (in Mexico)
Summary

• Persistence of emigration from the NTCA, rooted in a historical and geo-political context defined by violence, insecurity and hard economic conditions
  – Civil wars in the past
  – Gang and drug-related violence today

• Consequences of immigration enforcement from the U.S. and Mexico
  – Challenges for re-integration
  – Vicious cycle: emigration – return – violence/insecurity
Policy recommendations

• Formal recognition of the shared responsibilities between NAFTA and NTCA countries

• To countries of destination
  – Formal recognition of violence, insecurity, and persecution as motivations for migration
    • Revise/create processes for refugees and asylum seekers
    • Respect the application of non-refoulement
    • Revise provisions for Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

• To countries of transit
  – Provisions of legal status and documentation for transit
    • Legal framework, budget, and creation of bureaucratic channels
Policy recommendations (cont.)

• To sending countries
  – Reduce “push factors”
  – Ease reintegration upon return
  – Improve data collection on migration that captures the complexity of the phenomenon
    • Year of arrival, date of first emigration
    • Place of residence 1 and 5 years prior
    • Cause of migration
  – Share existing and future data and create repositories of regional comparative data