

University of  
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Public Policy

## CARSEY RESEARCH

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## Why Do the Children Flee?

### Public Security and Policing Practices in Central America

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#### “Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border”

*New York Times July 9, 2014*

In summer of 2014, headlines throughout the hemisphere called attention to an unfolding tragedy: the plight of Central Americans fleeing north to escape the violence engulfing their communities. The staggering number of migrants seeking refuge sparked a great deal of debate within the United States, particularly due to the large numbers of children. In 2014, approximately 57,000 unaccompanied minors traveled from Central America to Mexico, continuing north to cross the U.S. border illegally. Once in the United States, most children turned themselves over to U.S. Border Control agents and faced swift deportation proceedings. Others have been temporarily reunited with family members throughout the United States, waiting for the courts to decide their fate. Thus far in 2015, the number of unaccompanied child apprehensions on the southwest border has declined compared to 2014.

The large numbers of people fleeing Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras testify not only to the violence of illicit markets but also to the failure of these countries' governments to fulfill their most important task—protecting the lives of their citizens.

However, some border crossing zones (particularly the Big Bend and Yuma sectors) report sharp increases in apprehension rates, indicating that migrants and traffickers may be adjusting their tactics to try to elude U.S. border agents.<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, apprehension and deportation rates of Central American migrants have almost doubled this year, as Mexican officials have ramped up enforcement

#### KEY FINDINGS



Central Americans' experiences and perceptions of crime are linked to an increased likelihood of migration.



Nicaragua and Panama have successfully created civilian police forces, while the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) rely on militarized policing strategies.



Trust in police is significantly higher in Nicaragua and Panama than other countries in the region.



In Nicaragua and Panama, people have more trust that the justice system will convict perpetrators of crime.

efforts at the behest of U.S. officials. Central Americans are still fleeing, but many are detained in Mexico before they reach the U.S. border.

The large numbers of children fleeing Central America has led politicians, pundits, and average people to question U.S. immigration policy, deportation proceedings, and criteria for refugee status. The United States plays a critical role in this crisis. U.S. demand for drugs drives much of the violence in Central America today, and traffickers are able to capitalize on easy access to guns and ammunition in the United States to improve the armed might of gangs and drug cartels. Despite the electoral commitments of both Democrats and Republicans, serious efforts to reform U.S. immigration policy have languished.

The migration emergency, however, is not just a product of U.S. policies on drugs, guns, and immigration. Some Central American governments have exacerbated the

**FIGURE 1: HOMICIDE RATES IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO (UNODC 2014)**

security crisis that created the exodus in the first place. Throughout Central America, organized crime and corresponding violence thrive in areas with weak and unresponsive governments. The large numbers of people fleeing Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras testify not only to the violence of illicit markets but also to the failure of these countries' governments to fulfill their most important task—protecting the lives of their citizens.

In contrast, some Central American countries have been able to contain the crime crisis and provide a minimum level of safety for their people. Nicaragua and Panama face some of the same challenges as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, yet their response to the security crisis is markedly different. Nicaragua and Panama

have invested in the creation of civilian police forces that aim to respond to the needs of citizens, and they have developed public security policies that favor prevention and rehabilitation over repression. Rather than relying on militarized tactics to subdue suspected criminals, Nicaragua and Panama have sought to invest in community policing models and address the socio-economic conditions that allow crime to thrive in the first place. The experiences of these two countries offer important insights. They demonstrate that new democracies can overcome the challenges posed by poverty, inequality, and authoritarian rule, and invest in institutions that uphold the rights and safety of their citizens. To understand how

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Central American governments can respond to crime in ways that will not prompt their citizens to flee, we can learn from the evolution of policing practices in Nicaragua and Panama, and how police have interacted with the communities they serve.

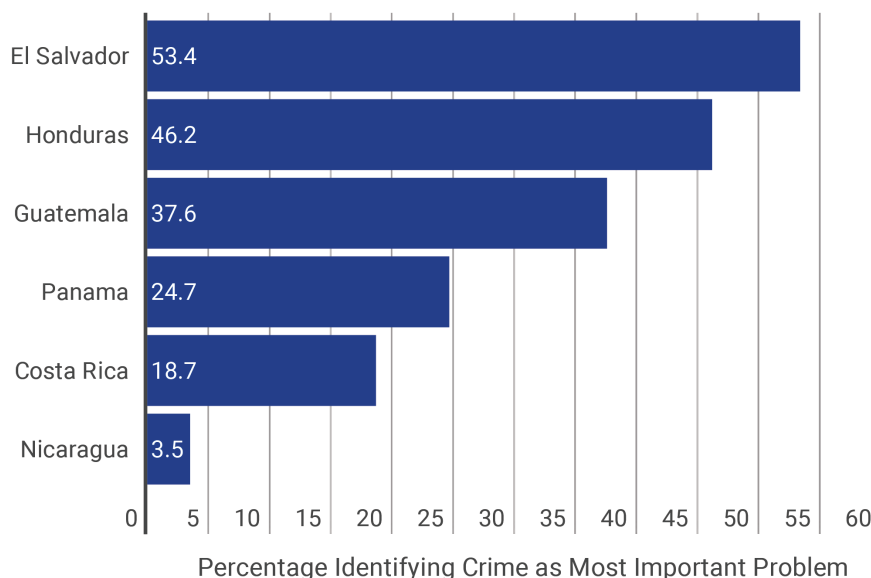
## The Security Crisis in Central America

In 2013, more than a third of all global homicides occurred in the Americas, home to only 14 percent of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> Central America tied with sub-Saharan Africa as the most violent region in the world. In the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras), average homicide rates in 2013 were more than 12 times higher than the U.S. rate of 4.7 per 100,000. At 90.4 per 100,000, homicide rates in Honduras are the highest in the world.

Citizens in the region have observed these rising rates of violent crime with alarm. In a 2014 poll, respondents in five out of six Central American countries identified crime as the gravest problem in their country.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 reports the percentage of respondents in each country who indicated crime was the most pressing national problem. In every country except Nicaragua, crime eclipsed concerns over economic issues like unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Furthermore, recent research links Central Americans' experiences and perceptions of crime to an increased likelihood of migration.<sup>4</sup> Given these circumstances, it isn't surprising that the countries with the most serious crime—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—are generating such high numbers of emigrants, particularly to the United States.

Costa Rica and Panama have very low levels of emigration in general. Rates of violent crime in Costa Rica are almost double those of the United States, but still far lower than the regional average. Crime is of concern, but it has not motivated a large wave of emigration, in part

FIGURE 2: PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME IN CENTRAL AMERICA (2014)



Source: 2014 AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project

because of the economic benefits provided to citizens through Costa Rica's social welfare system. Similar to Costa Rica, rates of violent crime in Panama are quite high compared to the United States but still lower than the regional average. The violent crime rate is triple that of the United States, and above the threshold that international organizations consider detrimental to a country's stability.<sup>5</sup> Still, as this brief will show later, citizens have greater confidence that their police can provide public safety, reducing the hopelessness that often motivates emigration. Panama's recent economic boom creates further incentives for citizens to stay.

Nicaragua has a higher level of emigration, but migrants predominantly head south to Costa Rica instead of north to the United States. Following a 1998 guest worker agreement between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, large numbers of Nicaraguans have migrated for seasonal and long-term

employment opportunities. In Nicaragua, public fear of crime is very low. At 11.3 per 100,000, homicide rates are low for the region (though still high by international standards), and for the past two decades, citizens have expressed far more confidence that their justice institutions can handle increases in violent crime compared to citizens in the other Central American countries.<sup>6</sup> Nicaraguan migration is not tied to security concerns, but to economic ones.

## Origins of the Crisis

How did the security crisis, and its subsequent refugee crisis, begin? Much of the answer lies in the political and economic changes that swept the region in the 1990s. During this time, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua signed peace treaties to end decades of civil war and adopted democratic forms of governance. These nascent democracies had to create new domestic police forces

while simultaneously disarming combatants and rebuilding infrastructure. Honduras also faced formidable challenges during the 1990s, as its geographic proximity to the civil wars of its neighbors rendered it a destination for tens of thousands of refugees, as well as insurgents launching incursions across the borders.<sup>7</sup> As in the post-conflict countries, democracy replaced authoritarian rule in Honduras in the 1990s, and the new democratic government faced the daunting challenge of disarming former combatants, creating new civil institutions, and addressing the needs of citizens.

U.S. policy exacerbated post-war problems in El Salvador and Honduras, as the United States deported record numbers of Salvadoran gang members (particularly from Los Angeles) back to postwar El Salvador, and most deportees could not find work in the legal economy.<sup>8</sup> During this time of transition, the gangs solidified their criminal networks, cultivated ties with corrupt officials, and extended their presence to neighboring countries like Honduras.

Nicaragua had to disarm combatants and rebuild after decades of war, but it did not experience the same influx of gang activity during its transition to democracy. Nicaragua's success at blocking gangs is partially due to its wartime experiences in the 1980s, as the Sandinistas prioritized border security to thwart Contra attacks launched from Honduras. This emphasis on border security made it difficult for transnational gangs to enter Nicaragua even after the war. The Sandinistas also created neighborhood-level defense organizations, which evolved into community associations that helped police neighborhoods and keep more

dangerous foreign gangs out.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, the police of Nicaragua evolved quite differently from the other post-conflict countries of Central America, making a complete break from their authoritarian and repressive past following the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty in 1979. Nicaragua's new constitution created an apolitical, professional, and civilian police force, and stipulated that police must respect citizen rights and the rule of law. This foundation has led Nicaraguan police to emphasize prevention and intervention over repression when fighting crime. Nicaragua's emphasis on crime prevention makes it harder for gangs to recruit disaffected youth and use prisons as training grounds for new members. Some youth join smaller-scale neighborhood pandillas, but large, sophisticated gangs have not established a stronghold in the country.<sup>10</sup> Nicaragua is not completely immune to the influence of organized crime, however, as officials from the Nicaraguan National Police have faced charges of complicity in money laundering and drug trafficking operations.<sup>11</sup> Still, cartels and gangs do not have the same grip on the country's government and economy as they do in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Panama has followed a very different political trajectory, but faced similar problems under democratic rule. Given its geographic location, Panama has long served as a hub facilitating the transfer of legal and illegal goods and services, and its role in illicit drug trade intensified in the 1980s under General Manuel Noriega. The U.S. Department of Justice interrupted Noriega's lucrative yet illicit career when it issued a warrant for his arrest on drug trafficking charges. In 1989, the United States

invaded Panama to enforce this warrant, subsequently destroying the Panamanian army and capturing Noriega. In the aftermath of the invasion, Panama overhauled its security forces and created a civilian national police force. Democratic reforms transformed Panamanian institutions throughout the 1990s, but the illicit sector proved resilient, particularly as Panama's strong international banking center and adoption of the U.S. dollar made it an appealing site for money laundering.<sup>12</sup>

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Despite their different political histories, the Central American countries all experienced economic transformations in the 1980s and 1990s. These economic transitions led market forces, even illegal market forces like drug trafficking, to become far more powerful than many states.

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With its long history of democratic rule, Costa Rica did not experience the tumultuous political transitions of its neighbors in the 1990s. Indeed, Costa Rica's stability has made it a destination for many migrants, particularly from Nicaragua. As noted above, following a 1998 agreement between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, large numbers of Nicaraguans have migrated south for economic reasons, and according to rough estimates 8 percent of the population in Costa Rica is from Nicaragua.<sup>13</sup>

Despite their different political histories, the Central American countries all experienced economic transformations in the 1980s and 1990s. These economic transitions led market forces, even illegal market forces like drug trafficking,

to become far more powerful than many states.<sup>14</sup> Economic reforms reduced government regulations of markets and trade while simultaneously trimming state budgets. Borders became more porous and created new opportunities for illicit actors to hide their profits among legal flows. In sum, the political and economic transitions of the 1990s weakened the power of the state, and created opportunities for non-state actors (such as organized crime syndicates) to exert their influence. Today's violence and criminal activity are also linked to developments elsewhere in the hemisphere. Joint U.S.-Colombian anti-drug operations reduced the power of Colombian cartels, and Mexican cartels moved in to fill the gap. When Mexico unleashed its war on drugs in 2006, the illicit drug market shifted its operations south into Central America. In 2006, 23 percent of cocaine shipments moving north passed through Central America. By 2011, this amount had jumped to 84 percent, as the Mexican offensive pressed cartel activity south.<sup>15</sup> The shift in drug trafficking corridors corresponded to increases in violence in the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras).

### **Confronting the Crime Crisis: Successful Policing Strategies**

With the exception of Costa Rica, the Central American governments of today have inherited daunting problems. There are clear differences in how these governments have confronted these challenges, however. In the Northern Triangle countries, governments have by and large responded to high rates of

violence and organized crime with militarized (and often repressive) policing strategies. In Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, “mano dura” (loosely translated as “iron fist”) policies rule the day, as politicians tend to respond to spiraling rates of public insecurity with increasingly harsher policing practices.<sup>16</sup> Mano dura measures may help win votes during elections, but after almost two decades, they have failed to stymie rising rates of violent crime and have weakened state protections of civil liberties and human rights.

In contrast, Nicaragua and Panama have employed different policing strategies. As noted above, Nicaragua embarked on police reform much earlier in its history, creating an entirely new civilian police force shortly after the 1979 revolution. The Contra War of the 1980s interrupted the operations of this new police force, but with the return of democracy in the 1990s, attention turned once again to policing practices, and a series of reforms resulted in a community-oriented police force that emphasizes prevention over repression. In contrast to Honduras, where the military occasionally patrols alongside civilian police officers to conduct mass arrests, police officers in Nicaragua tend to be embedded in communities. Police officers are assigned to specific neighborhoods, and instructed to conduct regular patrols on foot and/or in vehicle. Police officers are also instructed to liaison with civil society groups, and in some areas police officials are encouraged to pursue university degrees in public administration.

Reformers link these community-oriented policing practices to a number of successful outcomes. Despite Nicaragua's history of inequality and political violence, for the past two decades it has registered crime rates far lower than the rest of the region. At \$4,500 per capita, Nicaragua's gross domestic product (GDP) is less than a quarter of Costa Rica's, yet its homicide rate is roughly the same. Nicaragua's rate of violent crime is 75 percent lower than the other post-conflict countries in the region (Guatemala and El Salvador), despite registering slightly lower levels of GDP per capita than these countries. Furthermore, both state and societal forces tend to shun militarized policing practices, favoring preventive and community-based initiatives that do not run the same risk of jeopardizing human rights and civil liberties as their mano dura counterparts. In a 2014 survey, Nicaraguans registered some of the highest levels of support in the region for preventive crime-fighting practices, with 42 percent endorsing preventive measures (such as afterschool programs for youth, street lights, job training for first-time offenders) over punitive ones (for example, longer prison sentences for juvenile offenders, the death penalty, and detention without due process).<sup>17</sup>

Promising police reforms in Panama have more recent origins. Homicide rates rose an alarming 90 percent in Panama from 2000 through 2010, but a series of police reforms introduced in 2010 corresponded with reduced rates of violent crime and more professional police forces. Reformers have prioritized a civilian, community policing model in Panamanian cities, and have aimed to integrate police officers more cohesively into the communities they serve.

To increase the street presence of police, reformers strived to replicate the Chilean model of dividing the national territory into zones (“cuadrantes”) and assigning a police station to each zone, along with the necessary vehicle and personnel resources. Police are responsible for personalizing themselves with the communities in their zone and working with residents and civic organizations to identify security concerns and solve community problems. Police salaries and professional training have improved substantially, and civil society groups tie such reforms to improved professionalism on the streets.<sup>18</sup>

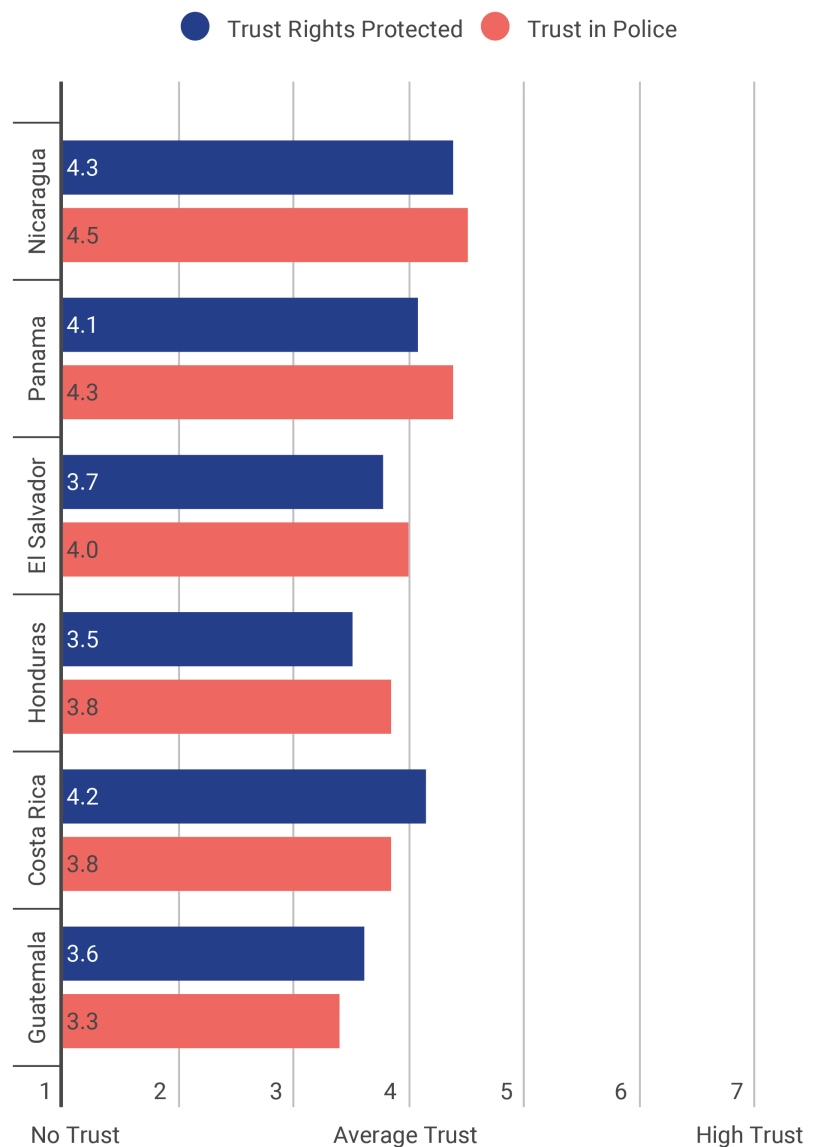
## Public Evaluations of Police Performance

Survey data can help gauge empirically how well police reforms in Nicaragua and Panama have improved both police performance and police-community relationships. The Latin American Public Opinion Project’s (LAPOP) 2014 AmericasBarometer includes several survey questions that tap into public perceptions and evaluations of police forces throughout Central America. When we compare public perceptions of policing in Nicaragua and Panama to the countries of the Northern Triangle, we find that citizens register more positive evaluations in the countries that have introduced community-oriented policing practices.

### Trust in Police and Respect for Citizens’ Rights

Figure 3 reports national levels of trust in the police, and trust that citizens’ basic rights are protected in the country. Respondents in Nicaragua and Panama registered

FIGURE 3: TRUST IN POLICE AND RESPECT FOR CITIZENS’ RIGHTS (2014)



Source: 2014 AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project

significantly higher levels of trust in police than respondents from other countries in the region.<sup>19</sup> When asked whether they trusted the political system to respect citizens’ rights, respondents in Nicaragua and Panama also reported significantly higher levels of trust than respondents in the Northern Triangle countries. As Figure 3 indicates, perceptions that citizen rights

are protected were significantly higher in Nicaragua and Panama compared to the other countries that transitioned to democracy in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the survey data indicate that the two democratizing countries that have employed community-friendly policing reforms also report significantly higher levels of trust in police and perceptions that basic rights are protected.

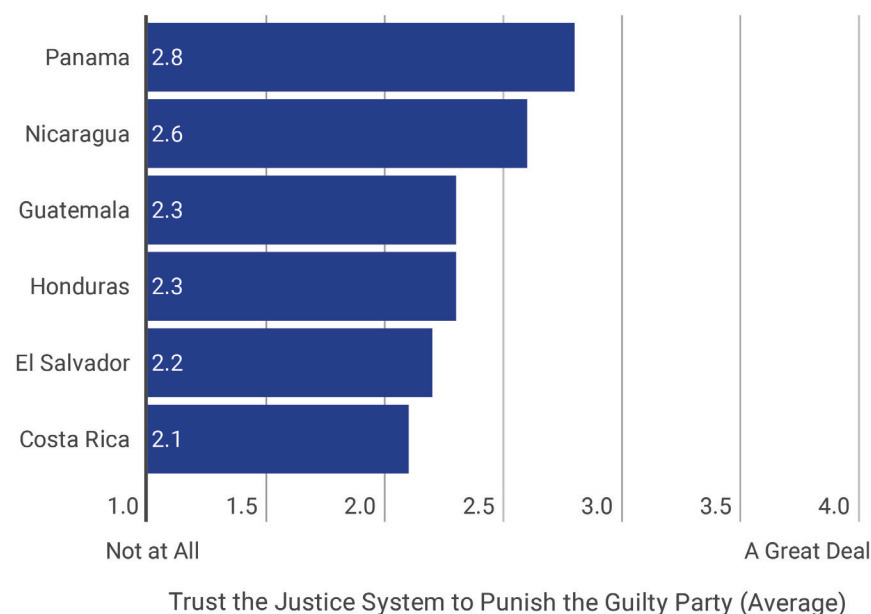
Given the legacy of human rights abuses in Nicaragua and Panama, this finding is promising. Under authoritarian rule, one of the major grievances was that police and military forces frequently abused the human rights of the citizenry. The survey results here indicate that Nicaragua and Panama have made progress on this crucial front.

### Efficacy of the Justice System

To measure citizen evaluations of the efficacy of the justice system, commonly understood as comprising both the police and the courts, LAPOP asked respondents in Central America whether they would trust the justice system to punish the guilty party if they were victimized by a crime.<sup>21</sup> As Figure 4 illustrates, once again respondents in Nicaragua and Panama report significantly higher levels of trust that the justice system is capable of convicting perpetrators of crime. Perhaps surprisingly, Costa Rica scores low on this measure. Interviews with Costa Rican justice officials, police officers, and victims' advocates suggest that these low scores are most likely due to public frustration with a sharp and sudden increase in violent crime in the 2000s, and the perceived inability of the police to address criminality decisively. Traditionally accustomed to high levels of public safety and professional police forces, Costa Ricans have reacted swiftly and negatively to abrupt deteriorations in the status quo.

Other survey items indicate that there is still room for improvement in police performance. In 2014, LAPOP included a new survey item to measure respondents' evaluations of police response times: "Suppose that someone robbed your house

**FIGURE 4: TRUST THE JUSTICE SYSTEM WILL PUNISH THE GUILTY PARTY**



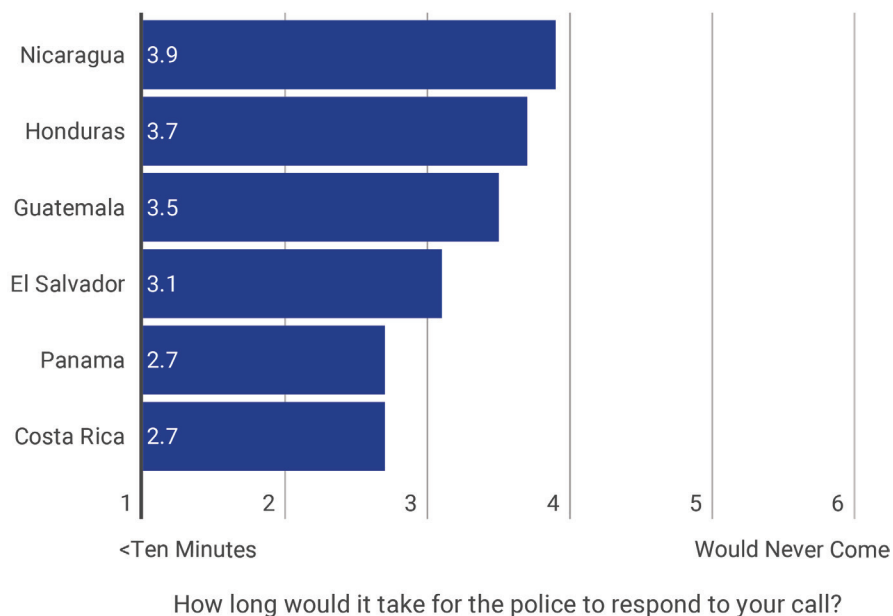
Source: 2014 AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project

and you called the police. How much time do you think the police would take to get to your house on a typical day around noon?" Respondents could select among five options: (1) less than 10 minutes, (2) between ten to 30 minutes, (3) more than 30 minutes but less than an hour, (4) more than an hour but less than three hours, (5) more than three hours. If respondents replied on their own that the police would never arrive, they were coded as (6). Figure 5 reports average estimates of response time in each Central American country. While Panama joins Costa Rica with the shortest response times of the region, Nicaraguans report the longest estimated response times. Still, there are some positive results from the Nicaraguan survey. In Nicaragua, there were no significant linkages between anticipated police response time and the race, ethnicity, wealth, education, income, and gender of respondents.

In all of the other Central American countries, respondents with darker skin reported significantly longer anticipated police response times. In Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala, wealthier respondents also reported significantly shorter anticipated police response times. So while Nicaraguans perceive police as slow to respond to their calls, we do not find the same socioeconomic and racial differences in police responsiveness as we observe in other Central American countries.

### Discussion

Given the severity of the Central American crime crisis, coupled with long historical legacies of inequality, poverty, and repression, the governments of the Northern Triangle countries face a difficult task ahead. To address the crime wave and subsequent migration crisis, these Central American

**FIGURE 5: PERCEIVED LENGTH OF POLICE RESPONSE TIME**

Source: 2014 AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project

leaders can exert little control over U.S. laws on drugs, guns, and immigration. However, they can invest in police institutions that respond to the needs of their citizens, and ensure that crime-fighting tactics respect citizens' rights. The case of Nicaragua in particular illustrates that even countries with few resources can choose to channel those resources wisely. In Nicaragua and Panama, national surveys indicate that the public registers more trust in police and more positive evaluations of respect for citizen rights. Respondents in these countries also are more likely to think that the justice system can sanction criminals effectively. In Panama, respondents also estimate that police response times will be reasonable—between 10 minutes to less than an hour. However, there

are significant socio-economic and wealth disparities in people's evaluations of police responsiveness. People with lower levels of education and income estimate that police will be slower to respond than their wealthier, more educated counterparts. Likewise, women and people of color also anticipate slower police response times.

The United States has a vested interest in promoting community-oriented policing strategies in the region. Traditionally, the United States has prioritized militarized public security strategies over preventive ones in its foreign aid allocations. American police consultants such as William Bratton and Rudolph Giuliani have reinforced this message as they have successfully lobbied many Latin American governments to import their model of zero tolerance policing,

which has coincided with a spike in human rights violations in some urban areas. Given the inability of these militarized policing strategies to curb violent crime in Central America, the United States has shifted its focus slightly. In 2008, the United States launched the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), investing \$642 million to date to fight crime by investing in "community policing, gang prevention, and economic and social programming for at-risk youth and communities."<sup>22</sup> Neighborhoods participating in the program report lower levels of violent and non-violent crime, increased trust in police, and lower levels of gang activity.<sup>23</sup> While these reports are promising, CARSI's funding is trivial given the scope and severity of the security crisis. Latin American presidents have called upon the United States to increase funding for CARSI, with little success. To address the Central American migrant crisis, President Obama requested \$1 billion to target the root causes of poverty and crime that lead so many people, particularly children, to embark on the perilous journey north. In June of 2015, the U.S. Congress reserved less than \$300 million for this effort. If the United States aims to reduce the number of people fleeing north, it must invest more seriously in policing and public security practices that have a track record of success. After almost two decades, it is clear that iron fist, repressive policing strategies do not work. As the cases of Nicaragua and Panama demonstrate, community-oriented policing strategies are effective in building citizens' trust in their police and fostering a culture of respect for human rights.



## Data

This brief relies upon public opinion data from the 2004–2014 AmericasBarometer datasets, conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>). The author would like to thank LAPOP and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available. Homicide data are available through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Global Study on Homicide (<http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html>).

## Endnotes

1. For data on unaccompanied minor apprehensions, see the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol statistics, available at: <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children>.
2. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2014. Global Study on Homicide, available at: [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).
3. Data are from the 2014 AmericasBarometer, conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University.
4. Jonathan Hiskey, Mary Fran Malone, and Diana Orcés, "Violence and Migration in Central America," *AmericasBarometer Insights* no. 101 (2014), available at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO901en.pdf>.
5. Many international organizations regard eleven homicides per 100,000 as the tipping point at which violence jeopardizes the stability and quality of governmental and non-governmental institutions.
6. Mary Fran Malone, *The Rule of Law in Central America: Citizens' Reactions to Crime and Punishment* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).
7. Richard L. Millet, "Crime and Citizen Security: Democracy's Achilles Heel," in R. L. Millet, J. S. Holmes, and O. J. Pérez, eds., *Latin American Democracy: Emerging Reality of Endangered Species* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 252–64.
8. Sonya Wolf, "Mano Dura: Gang Suppression in El Salvador" (2011) available at: [www.sustainablesecurity.org/article/mano-dura-gang-suppression-el-salvador](http://www.sustainablesecurity.org/article/mano-dura-gang-suppression-el-salvador).
9. Harold Sibaja et al., "Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, Annex 5: Nicaragua Profile" (Washington DC: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2006), available at: [www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/democracy/nicaragua\\_profile.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/democracy/nicaragua_profile.pdf).
10. There are three main categories of criminal organizations in Central America: cartels, maras, and pandillas. At the apex are cartels—large-scale, multi-national enterprises whose access to lucrative illegal trade endows them with military and economic resources that rival those of the governments they undermine. Ranking lower than cartels in terms of resources and geographic scope are maras, or gangs. Maras do not have the resources of cartels, but they do control much of the transportation and prison systems, particularly in the Northern Triangle countries. Governments in the Northern Triangle have found the maras to be formidable opponents, and have even entered into negotiations with them to broker cease fire agreements. Pandillas represent the lowest level of organization of criminal groups, and are concentrated primarily in Nicaragua. Pandillas are local groups of youth engaged in lower levels of criminal activity, such as theft. While pandillas can be violent, they do not have the organization or resources to challenge the government's monopoly of force seriously, as do maras and cartels.
11. Javier Meléndez and Roberto Orozco, "The Unsuspected Dimensions of Drug Trafficking in Nicaragua," *InSightCrime: Organized Crime in the Americas* (2013), available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/unsuspected-dimensions-drug-trafficking-nicaragua>.
12. Orlando Pérez, "Drugs and post-intervention political economy in Haiti and Panama," in I. L. Griffith, ed., *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 138–61; Mark P. Sullivan. "Panama-U.S. Relations: Continuing Policy Concerns," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, 1997), available at: [www.fas.org/man/crs/92-088.htm](http://www.fas.org/man/crs/92-088.htm).
13. Nicaraguans have migrated to Costa Rica for seasonal as well as long-term work. This migration is motivated almost exclusively by economic considerations, rather than those of security.
14. Moisés Naím, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).
15. Randal Archibold and Damien Cave, "Drug Wars Push Deeper Into Central America," *New York Times*, March 23, 2011.
16. For a more thorough overview of mano dura policing practices, see chapter 4 in Malone, *The Rule of Law in Central America: Citizens' Reactions to Crime and Punishment*.
17. Data are from the 2014 AmericasBarometer.
18. While Panama's police reforms have registered some success recently in urban areas, policing practices remain highly problematic in many rural areas. In particular, the Servicio Nacional de Fronteras (SENAFRONT), a police force tasked with reinforcing borders against drug traffickers, has come under harsh criticism amid charges of corruption and abuse of human rights in the rural areas of drug trafficking corridors.

19. Significance was determined through independent samples t tests. More robust statistical analyses, relying upon binomial and ordinal logistic regression, are available by request to the author via email: [Mary.Malone@unh.edu](mailto:Mary.Malone@unh.edu). For exact text of survey items, please see the English translation of the country questionnaire: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2014/LAPOP2014-v15.2-Eng-131218\\_W.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2014/LAPOP2014-v15.2-Eng-131218_W.pdf).

20. In Costa Rica, the region's oldest democracy, average trust that citizens' rights were protected was also significantly higher than in the Northern Triangle countries.

21. In prior surveys LAPOP included separate survey questions to measure the efficacy of the police and the courts. Due to the high level of correlation between these survey questions (Pearson's  $r > .8$ ), in 2014 LAPOP included one survey question to gauge evaluations of the justice system as a whole.

22. Central American Regional Security Initiative Fact Sheet, available at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/carsi/index.htm>.

23. Susan Berk-Seligson et al., "Impact of Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America: Regional Report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama" (2014), available at: <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/USAID-LAPOP%20Crime%20Prevention%20Impact%20Evaluation%20-%20Regional%20Report%20-%20Final%20-%202014-10-29.pdf>.

### About the Author

Mary Fran T. Malone is an associate professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire and the coordinator of the Latin American Studies Program. She received a Carsey School Summer Fellowship in 2014.

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