
Honduras versus El Salvador Migration to the United States

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for

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Background

"Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador were not able to do the job of stopping people from leaving their country and coming illegally to the U.S. ..." tweets the President of the United States on October 22, 2018 (Reuters, 2018). He was referring to a caravan of some 5,000 to 10,000 men, women, and children crossing through Mexico seeking admittance to the United States. According to the United Nations, these three countries have experienced the following net migration per 1,000 people - ranked highest to lowest - over the last 10 years ending 2015 (United Nations, 2017):

Net migration rate (per 1,000 population)		
Country	2005 - 2010	2010 - 2015
El Salvador	(9.4)	(7.7)
Guatemala	(1.6)	(0.6)
Honduras	(0.6)	(0.4)

Source: UN, Dept of Economic and Social Affairs

All these countries are geographically similarly located as shown on the map below:



Of the three countries Guatemala has the largest population at 17.2 million people. Honduras and El Salvador have more comparable population levels at 9.4 million and 6.4 million, respectively (United Nations, 2017). In addition to population,

Honduras and El Salvador appear to be very similar countries in most respects. As summarized in the table below, both countries have similar ethnic diversity, have the same official language, and have similar religious affiliations. Both countries have constitutional representative forms of government. And, while El Salvador's GDP per capita is about 35% less than that of Honduras', the other significant economic stressors (i.e. unemployment rate, poverty level, taxes, and inflation) appear comparable. (The World Factbook, 2018).

Country	Honduras	El Salvador
Ethnic Groups	Mestizo 86.3%, white 12.7%, Amerindian 0.2% (includes Lenca, Kakawira, Nahuatl)	Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European) 90%, Amerindian 7%, black
Languages	Spanish (official), Nawat (among some Amerindians)	Spanish (official), Amerindian dialects
Religion	Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 36%,	Roman Catholic 46%, Protestant 41%,
Government	Constitutional Presidential Republic (Separate Executive, Legislative, & Judicial branches)	Constitutional Presidential Republic (Separate Executive, Legislative, & Judicial branches)
Suffrage	Universal	Universal and compulsory
GDP per capita	\$8,900 (2017 est.)	\$5,600 (2017 est.)
Unemployment Rate	7% (2017 est.)	5.9% (2017 est.)
Below poverty line	32.7% (2016 est.)	29.6% (2014)
Taxes	21% of GDP (2017 est.)	19.3% of GDP (2017 est.)
Inflation Rate	1% (2017 est.)	3.9% (2017 est.)

Source: CIA The World Fact Book

Therefore, it is curious why El Salvador should have an emigration level to the United States that is about 18 times higher than that of Honduras.

Research Question

Why is El Salvador's rate of emigration to the United States significantly higher than that of Honduras?

Potential Explanations

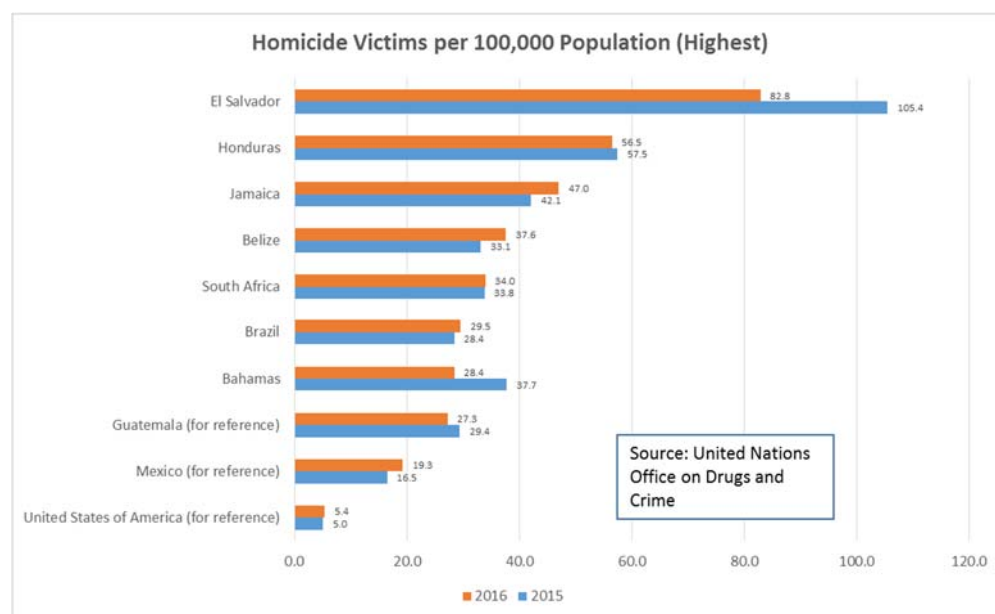
To explain the differences between the emigration levels to the United States observed between El Salvador and Honduras, the following three hypotheses are proposed: 1) Level of Violence, 2) Host Country Family Affiliations, and 3) Level of Economic Volatility.

Hypothesis #1 – Home Country Violence Drives Emigration

Hypothesis: In comparing two countries, those having a greater internal level of violence will be more likely to emigrate when compared those countries with a lower level of violence.

According to the United Nations, armed conflict is an important driver of migration (United Nations, 2017). Both Honduras and El Salvador have had a history of armed conflict. The fighting is over as of this writing but much of the military hardware remains. It is noteworthy that some, if not most, of the counterrevolutionary military equipment was purchased with funds provided by the United States. Criminals now have access to that hardware. Violent crime may not be armed conflict but that may be of little practical difference to ordinary citizens. Both Honduras and El Salvador have

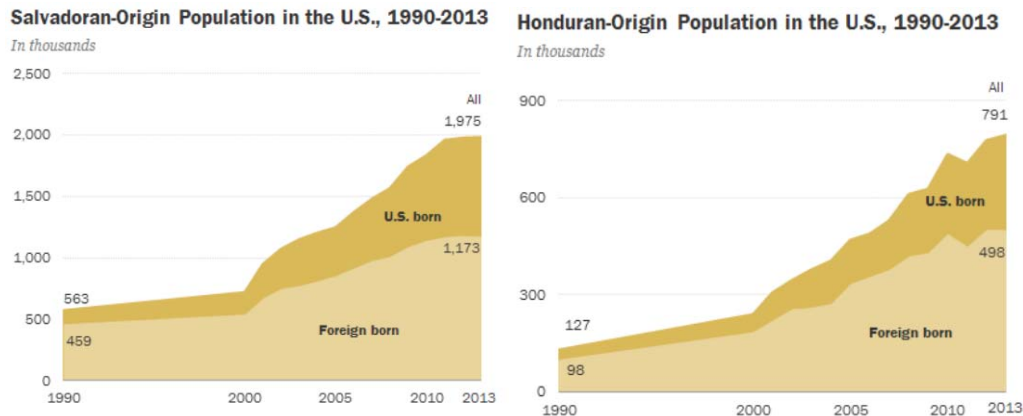
high crime rates, high levels of gang activity, and a weak judicial system. (Insight Crime, Honduras Profile, 2018) (Insight Crime, El Salvador Profile, 2018). The crime rate in these countries is exacerbated by the United States' demand for illegal drugs and, relatedly, the failure of United States to reduce that illegal demand. Honduras and El Salvador are major criminal corridors for the flow of these drugs to the United States which leads to violent conflicts between rival drug gangs within these countries. (Insight Crime, Honduras Profile, 2018) (Insight Crime, El Salvador Profile, 2018). Both countries have extremely high murder rates. However, violent crime appears higher in El Salvador. In 2016, the Los Angeles Times reported that San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, was officially the murder capital of the world (Los Angeles Times, 2016). According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, there were 82.8 homicides per 100,000 people in El Salvador compared to 56.5 per 100,000 in Honduras in 2016 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016) or about 30% higher. The homicide rate was even more pronounced in the previous year. See chart below.



Violence is higher in El Salvador, but it might also be unique when compared to Honduras. Margaret Popkin spent time in El Salvador with the guerrilla fighters after the peace agreement was signed. She noted that many citizens believed that the only way to obtain justice in the country was through self-help (Popkin, 2000). This culture of self-help may be contributing “to a *death squad phenomenon*, with instances surfacing of citizens and possibly police conducting ‘social cleansing’ of criminals and others deemed undesirable.” (Emphasis added) (Insight Crime, El Salvador Profile, 2018). Such a culture may have redefined how the citizens of El Salvador see their relationships with their fellow citizens and that perception of violence as the social norm may also be leading to greater citizen despair in El Salvador than Honduras prompting El Salvador’s greater emigration.

Hypothesis #2 – Host Country Family Affiliations Drives Home Country Emigration

Hypothesis: In comparing two countries, those having more immigrants in the host country from the home country will have more emigrants in following years than countries with few immigrants in the host country.



Source: Pew Research Center

The number of immigrants within the United States from El Salvador has grown significantly faster than that of Honduras. (López, 2015). As of 2013, there were nearly 2.5 times as many Salvadorans living in the United States than there were Hondurans. Since 1990, the Salvadoran-origin population has more than tripled, growing from 563,000 to 2 million in 2013 (See graphs above) (López, 2015). The causes of this increasing Salvadoran population on the immigration from El Salvador to the United States is likely fourfold. First, remittances (i.e. US Dollars sent to those in the home country) are providing a greater savings base that allows home country citizens to afford the travel to the United States. Second, immigrants from the home country residing in the host country provide a support base which emigrants can use to more easily establish and integrate themselves into the host country. Third, the ease at which modern communication travels globally allows host country immigrants to communicate the benefits of living in the host country to home country citizens' thereby encouraging greater emigration. Finally, better global communication allows for greater coordination and planning of that emigration. In simple terms, the more citizens from the home country in the host country the greater the "snow ball" migration effect. That is, it is

possible that the greater migration level from El Salvador than from Honduras to the United States is simply the result of a greater level of migration previously occurring from El Salvador than has occurred from Honduras.

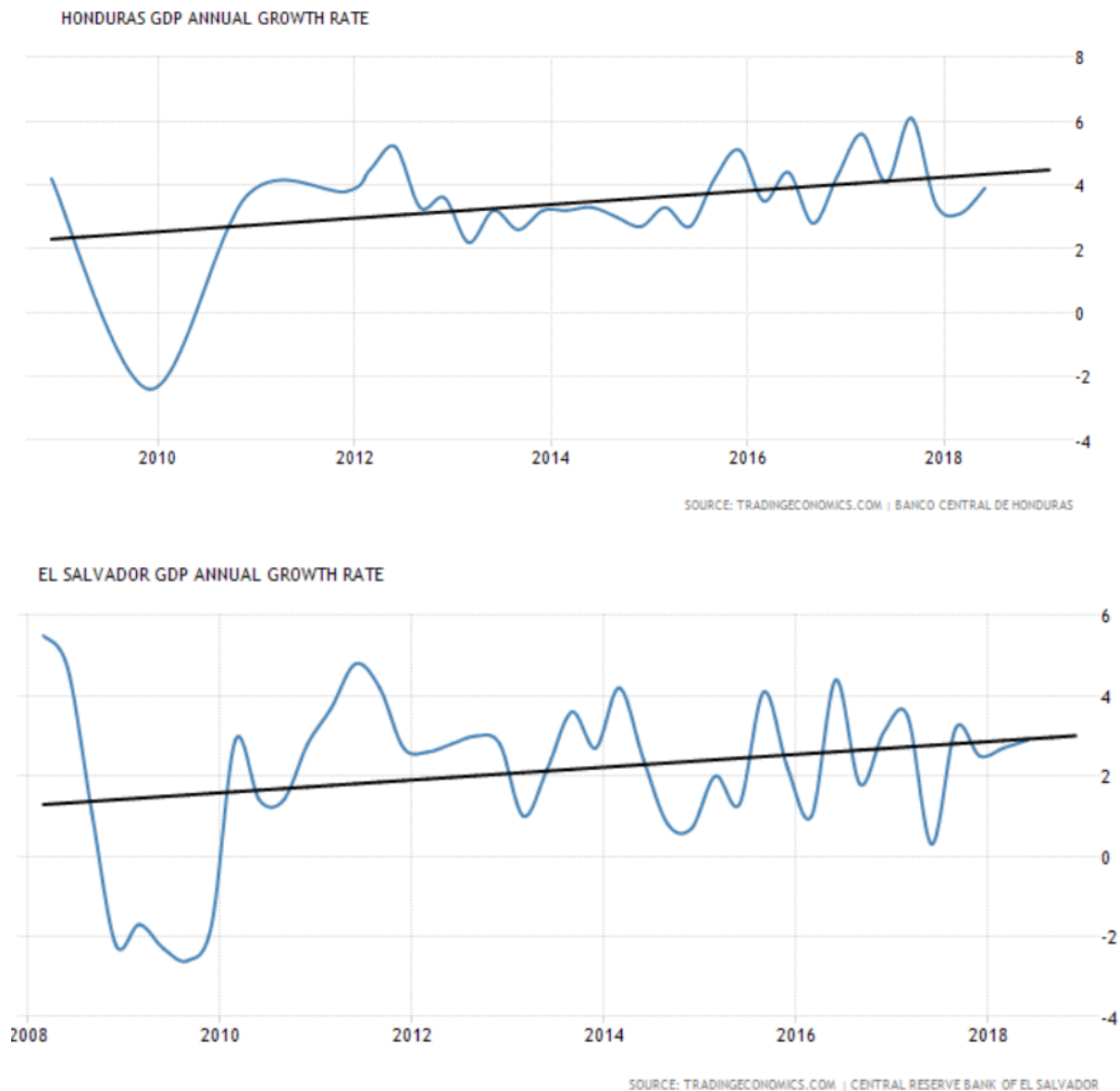
Hypothesis #3 –Level of Home Country Economic Volatility

Hypothesis: In comparing two countries, those having greater economic volatility are more likely to emigrate than will those having a lower level of volatility.

According to the United Nations, economic crisis is an important driver of migration (United Nations, 2017). However, both Honduras and El Salvador do not appear to be in economic crisis. In fact, both countries are economically similarly sound and progressing at a comparable measured rate. Most recently, the GDP annual growth rate for Honduras was 3.9 percent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2018, up from a 3.1 percent in the previous period; while the growth rate for El Salvador was 2.9 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, up from a 2.7 percent in the previous period (IEconomics Inc, 2018). According to a 2016 Pew Research Center survey of recently deported migrants in their home countries work was a top motivator for their journey. Among Hondurans deported from the U.S., 96% cited work as a main reason for coming, as did 97% of deported Salvadorans. Surveys of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras migrants who were apprehended in Mexico while on the way to the U.S., then deported, also found that nearly all said they were moving to find work. (Cohn & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2018). If work is a major driver for emigration and both Honduras and El Salvador appear to be economically similar it may be that the volatility of their

respective economies that are producing different emigration rates. When reviewing the quarter GDP growth rates, El Salvador appears much more volatile than Honduras.

See graphs below (TradingEconomics.com, 2018):



This volatility may be resulting in Salvadorans perceiving more consistent work prospects through emigration when compared to Hondurans and thus driving the higher rates of Salvadoran emigration.

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