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Rise in U.S. Immigrants From El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth From Elsewhere

Lawful and unauthorized immigrants increase since recession

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Terminology

Central America includes Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. The **Northern Triangle** includes El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Origin refers to the heritage, nationality, lineage or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. U.S.-born residents reporting origins in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Central America or Mexico are considered to be of Hispanic origin; almost all immigrants born in those countries say they are of Hispanic origin.

Foreign born refers to an individual who is not a U.S. citizen at birth — who, in other words, is born outside the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose parents are not U.S. citizens. The terms “foreign born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably. Immigrants are identified by birth country, not origin, so “Salvadoran immigrants” refer only to those born in El Salvador.

U.S. born refers to an individual who is a U.S. citizen at birth, including people born in the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories, as well as those born elsewhere to at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen.

The **lawful immigrant** population is defined as naturalized U.S. citizens; people granted lawful permanent residence (previously known as legal permanent residence); those granted asylum; people admitted as refugees; and people admitted under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work.

Unauthorized immigrants are all foreign-born noncitizens residing in the U.S. who are not lawful immigrants, as defined above. These definitions reflect standard and customary usage by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and academic researchers. The vast majority of unauthorized immigrants entered the country without valid documents or arrived with valid visas but stayed past their visa expiration date or otherwise violated the terms of their admission. Some who entered as unauthorized immigrants or violated terms of admission have obtained work authorization by applying for adjustment to lawful permanent status, obtaining Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and/or receiving Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. This “quasi-lawful” group could account for as much as about 10% of the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population. Many could also revert to unauthorized status.

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Rise in U.S. Immigrants From El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth From Elsewhere

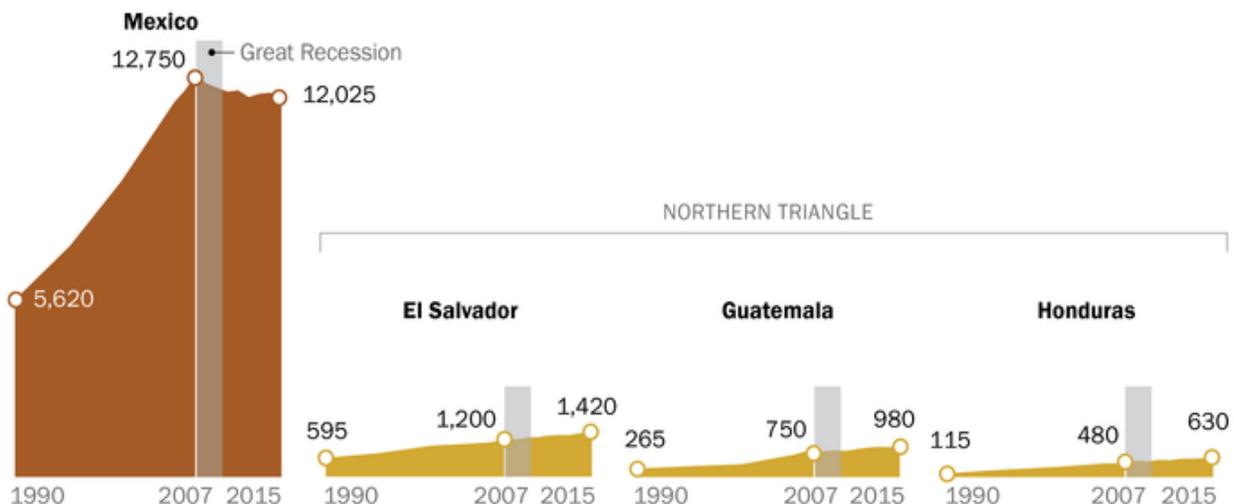
Lawful and unauthorized immigrants increase since recession

The number of immigrants in the United States from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras rose by 25% from 2007 to 2015, in contrast to more modest growth of the country's overall foreign-born population and a decline from neighboring Mexico.

During these same years, the total U.S. immigrant population increased by 10%, while the number of U.S. Mexican immigrants decreased by 6%, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Since recession, U.S. immigrant populations from Northern Triangle rise as number from Mexico declines

In thousands



Note: All numbers rounded independently are not adjusted to sum to the U.S. total. See methodology for details. The Great Recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on adjusted 1990 census, augmented 1995 and 2000 Current Population Survey and augmented 2005-2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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One metric – the number of new immigrants arriving in the U.S. each year – illustrates dramatically how immigration trends from Mexico and the three Central American nations, known collectively as the “Northern Triangle,” have diverged in recent years. According to U.S. Census

Bureau data analyzed by Pew Research Center, about 115,000 new immigrants arrived from the Northern Triangle in 2014, double the 60,000 who entered the U.S. three years earlier. Meanwhile, the number of new arrivals from Mexico declined slightly from 175,000 in 2011 to 165,000 in 2014.

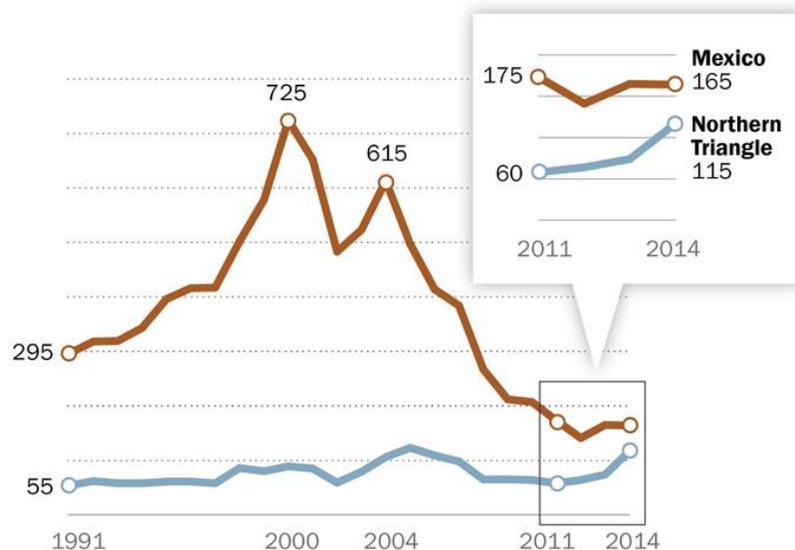
Growing numbers of lawful as well as unauthorized immigrants from the Northern Triangle have made their way to the U.S. during the American economy's slow recovery from the Great Recession (the recession began in December 2007 and officially ended in June 2009). Of the 3 million Northern Triangle immigrants living in the U.S. as of 2015, 55% were unauthorized, according to Pew Research Center estimates. By comparison, 24% of all U.S. immigrants were unauthorized immigrants.

Among the possible explanations for the recent rise in Northern Triangle immigration are high homicide rates, gang activity and other violence at home,

[according to a survey of migrants from the region](#). Other survey data indicate that Northern Triangle migrants are attracted to the U.S. for the same reasons as other migrants: [economic opportunity and a chance to join relatives](#) already in the country. The flow of money from the U.S. to the Northern Triangle is substantial: In 2015, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras were among the top 10 estimated remittance-receiving nations from the U.S., according to a [Pew Research Center analysis](#).

New immigrant arrivals to U.S. from Northern Triangle grow between 2011 and 2014, while flow from Mexico dwindles

Estimated annual inflow of immigrants, in thousands



Note: Northern Triangle includes El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Data rounded to nearest 5,000.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2000 census (5% sample); 2000-2004 American Community Survey; augmented 2005-2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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More than a quarter million unauthorized immigrants from the Northern Triangle (roughly a fifth of unauthorized immigrants from the three countries) have temporary protection from deportation under two federal programs that the White House may phase out – [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) and [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\)](#). The three Central American nations are also the starting points for many of the [thousands of unaccompanied children](#) apprehended along the U.S.-Mexico border since 2013.

The Northern Triangle’s recent rise in U.S. immigration diverges from the pattern for Mexico, the [largest source of U.S. immigrants](#). The immigrant populations from both Mexico and the Northern Triangle had been increasing since the 1970s. But overall growth in the Mexican-born population in the United States [declined or stalled](#) since 2007, fed by a decline in unauthorized immigrants and a rise in the lawful immigrant population.

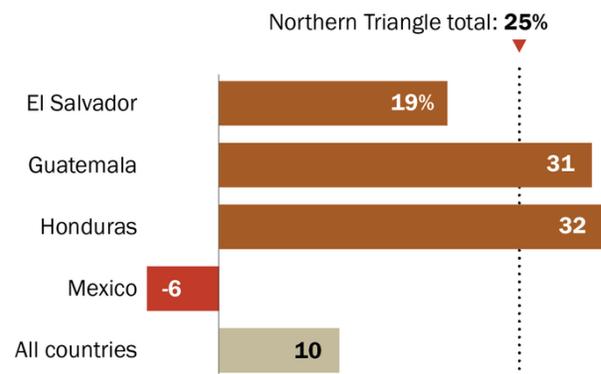
Heavily influenced by the decline from Mexico, the [U.S. unauthorized immigrant population](#) peaked in 2007 and fell over the next two years. It leveled off after 2009, because increases from the Northern Triangle and other regions balanced the continuing decline from Mexico. The [U.S. lawful immigrant population](#) overall grew over the decade, but not as sharply as it did from the Northern Triangle.

The 12 million Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. in 2015 far outnumbered those from the Northern Triangle, but the three Central American nations have grown in significance as a source of U.S. immigrants. In both 2007 and 2015, El Salvador ranked fifth among source countries, with 1.4 million immigrants in the U.S. in 2015. In those same years, Guatemala moved from 11th to 10th, with 980,000 U.S. immigrants in 2015. Honduras moved from 17th to 15th, with 630,000 immigrants in the U.S. in 2015.

Immigrants account for most of the 4.6 million U.S. residents with origins in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and are the main driver of the group’s growth. By contrast, two-thirds of

Northern Triangle immigrant populations in U.S. grew more sharply than the overall foreign-born population from 2007 to 2015

% change in U.S. immigrant population from ...



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2007 and 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Mexican Americans were born in the U.S., and [births to U.S. residents](#) are the main contributor to the group's population growth.

The recent surge in arrivals notwithstanding, most Northern Triangle immigrants have lived in the U.S. for at least a decade. Their households are more likely than those of immigrants overall to include minor children. And, as a group, their education levels and English proficiency are lower than those of U.S. immigrants overall.

Migrant motivations include economic opportunity

As for their reasons for moving, some limited survey data indicate that Northern Triangle migrants are attracted to the U.S. for the same reasons as other migrants: economic

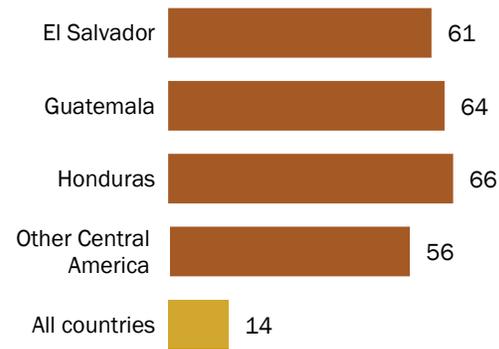
opportunity and reunification with family members. Other evidence, discussed below, suggests that some are being pushed out of their countries by widespread violence, which also was an important driver of Central American migration to the U.S. in the 1980s.

According to a [2011 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. Hispanic adults](#), Central American migrants – 83% of whom were born in the Northern Triangle – were less likely than other Latino migrants (46% vs. 58%) to cite economic opportunities as the main reason for relocating to the U.S. In addition, a smaller share of Central American immigrants cited family reasons for migrating (18% vs. 24% among other Hispanic immigrants).

Surveys of recently deported Northern Triangle migrants in their home countries¹ also found that work was a top motivator for their journey, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of 2016 data. Among Guatemalans deported from the U.S., 91% cited work as a main reason for coming, as did 96% of Hondurans deported from the U.S. and 97% of deported Salvadorans. Surveys of

Majority of U.S. residents with Northern Triangle origins are immigrants

% of foreign born among U.S. residents in 2015, by origin



Note: Based on Hispanic origin population.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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¹ These findings about deported immigrants come from Encuesta de Migración en la Frontera Sur (EMIF-Sur), conducted since 2004 by a coalition of Mexican government and non-government agencies. The surveys interviewed a representative sample of deportees in their home countries. The deported Northern Triangle migrants who were interviewed were overwhelmingly male and had a median age in the mid-20s. When asked whether they would try again someday to return to the U.S. for the same reason, 64% of Salvadorans deported by the U.S. said yes, compared with 47% of Hondurans and 32% of Guatemalans.

Northern Triangle 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.

Violence may also play a role in immigrants' motivations to migrate north

However, the same 2011 Pew Research Center survey that found economic opportunity was the top reason for Central American immigrants to come to the U.S. indicated that violence in Central America is a factor as well. Central Americans were more likely than other Latino migrants to cite conflict or persecution as a reason they left – 13% said that was the main reason they came to the U.S., compared with 4% of other Hispanic migrants, according to the [National Survey of Latinos](#).

A 2014 U.S. Department of Homeland Security document cited [poverty and violence in Northern Triangle nations](#) as forces that motivated [unaccompanied children who were being apprehended](#) at the border in large numbers. The document, which was obtained by Pew Research Center, cited rural poverty in Guatemala and “extremely violent” conditions in El Salvador and Honduras. At a conference on Northern Triangle issues this year, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence spoke of “vicious gangs and vast criminal organizations that [drive illegal immigration](#) and carry illegal drugs northward on their journey to the United States.”

At the time of the 2014 DHS report, Honduras had the [world's highest murder rate](#) – 74.6 homicides per 100,000 residents that year. El Salvador ranked second, with 64.2. Guatemala was ninth, at 31.2. [In 2016](#), El Salvador had an even higher homicide rate than Honduras, 91.2 per 100,000 people. The Honduras rate was 59.1 and Guatemala's was 23.7.

Northern Triangle nations also are among the poorest in Latin America. In 2014, some had relatively [high shares of people living on less than \\$2 a day](#) – 17% of Hondurans, 10% of Guatemalans and 3% of Salvadorans, according to World Bank data.

A [2013 Pew Research Center survey in El Salvador](#) found that high shares of people living there – 90% or more – said crime, illegal drugs and gang violence were very big problems in their country. Half (51%) said they were afraid to walk alone at night within a kilometer of their home.

The same survey also found that most Salvadorans not only knew someone already living in the U.S., but also wanted to move to the U.S. themselves. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) said they would move there if they could, including 28% who would move without authorization. Two-thirds of Salvadorans (67%) said they had friends or relatives who lived in the U.S. Most said people who move to the U.S. have a better life (64%) than those in their country.

Remittances and the Northern Triangle

The Pew Research Center survey of Salvadorans in 2013 found that 84% said it is good for El Salvador that many of its citizens live in the U.S.

One reason for that might be the money they send home: According to a [Pew Research Center analysis of World Bank data](#), Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras were among the top 10 estimated remittance-receiving nations from immigrants in the U.S. in 2015.

The money that immigrants send home to Northern Triangle nations has grown substantially in recent years, except for a one-year dip in 2009, the final year of the U.S. recession. In 2016, according to [World Bank estimates](#), remittances to the three nations totaled \$15.9 billion, of which most came from the U.S. Those remittances were the equivalent of about 17% of the total economic output (as measured by gross domestic product) in El Salvador, 11% in Guatemala and 18% in Honduras in 2016.

Guatemalan immigrants around the world sent home \$7.5 billion in remittances in 2016, while Salvadorans sent \$4.6 billion and Hondurans \$3.9 billion, according to World Bank data. The vast majority of the money came from immigrants in the U.S.

The rise in remittances to Northern Triangle nations diverged from a decline in overall remittances to developing nations in 2016. A [World Bank brief about global remittance trends](#), published in October, noted that money sent home by Northern Triangle and Mexican migrants went up despite an increase in deportations from the U.S. The increase in remittances “is in part due to possible changes in migration policies. Migrants are sending their savings back home in case they must return.”

The World Bank brief also stated that remittances may continue to rise because the tighter U.S. labor market could be driving employment, especially in the construction industry. Immigrants

Northern Triangle migrants sent nearly \$16 billion in remittances home in 2016

In billions of dollars



Source: World Bank Remittances Inflow, 2016.
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are [overrepresented in the U.S. construction industry](#): They were 17% of the total workforce in 2014, but 24% of the construction workforce.

As these immigrant populations have gone up, Northern Triangle governments have expanded their outreach to their nationals in the U.S. The [Guatemalan government, for example](#), opened two new consulates this year, in Raleigh, North Carolina, and in Oklahoma City. El Salvador opened a consulate in [McAllen, Texas](#), in 2014 and another one in [Aurora, Colorado](#), earlier this year.

This report is based largely on Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Figures have been adjusted for undercount, so findings differ from official published numbers, but the trends and patterns are similar for both.

1. Recent trends in Northern Triangle immigration

Migration from Central America to the U.S. **began rising notably in the 1980s**, and continued to increase in subsequent decades. More recently, the number of immigrants – lawful and unauthorized – from the three Northern Triangle nations rose by 25% between 2007 and 2015. During that same period, the immigrant population from Mexico, the largest birth country for U.S. immigrants, declined 6%. The overall U.S. immigrant population rose 10% during the same period. Altogether, the 3 million immigrants from the Northern Triangle were 7% of the U.S. foreign-born population of 44.7 million in 2015.

This Northern Triangle growth included increases in the number of both lawful and unauthorized immigrants. From 2007 to 2015, the lawful immigrant population from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras grew 24% and the unauthorized immigrant population grew 26%. By comparison, the national lawful immigrant population increased by 19% from 2007 to 2015, and the unauthorized immigrant population declined by 10%.

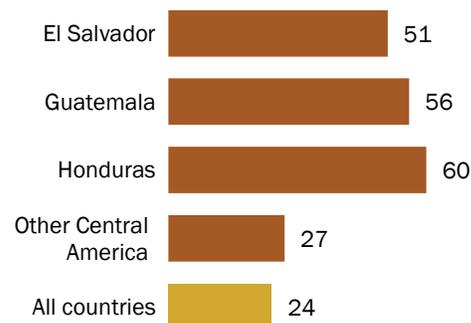
Immigration from the Northern Triangle has helped to expand the origin populations from these three countries. Including both immigrants and the U.S. born, the number of U.S. Hispanic residents with origins in the three Northern Triangle countries rose even more sharply (46%) from 2007 to 2015. This total includes 1.2 million U.S.-born children with family origins in these three countries.

Although the U.S.-born components of these populations are growing rapidly, at least six-in-ten U.S. residents of Salvadoran, Guatemalan or Honduran origin were immigrants in 2015, compared with 53% of those with other Central American origins (Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama). A third of Mexican Americans (33%) are foreign born. By comparison, 14% of all U.S. residents were foreign born in 2015.

A majority of Northern Triangle immigrants are unauthorized immigrants

Majority of foreign born from Northern Triangle are unauthorized immigrants

% of U.S. immigrants from ____ who are unauthorized immigrants, 2015



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).
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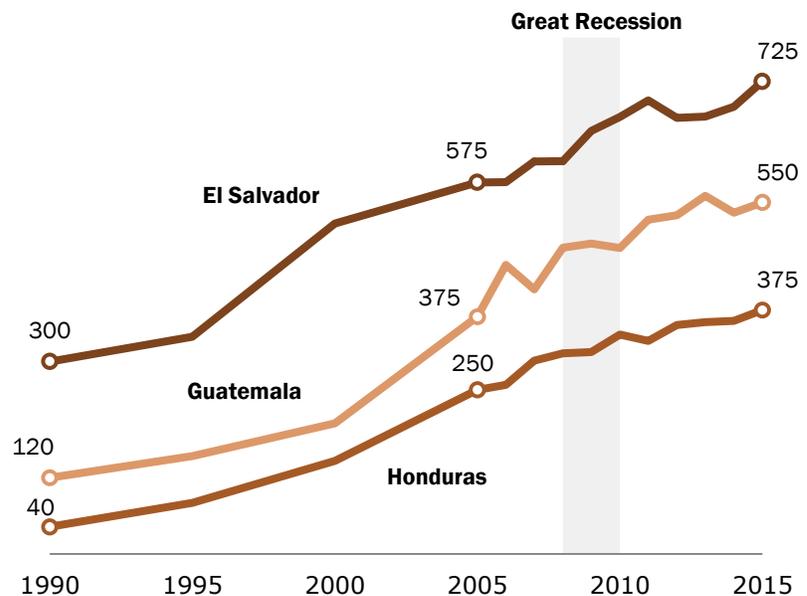
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Among all U.S. immigrants, one-in-four (24%) were unauthorized immigrants in 2015, according to Pew Research Center estimates. Among those from the Northern Triangle nations, a majority were unauthorized immigrants – 51% from El Salvador, 56% from Guatemala and 60% from Honduras. The share of unauthorized immigrants from other Central American nations (27% in 2015) was closer to the overall U.S. share.

The number of U.S. unauthorized immigrants from Northern Triangle nations has risen since the 2007-2009 Great Recession, and the three Northern Triangle nations rank among the [top countries](#) for the size of their unauthorized immigrant populations. In 2015, there were about 725,000 unauthorized immigrants from El Salvador, 550,000 from Guatemala and 375,000 from Honduras. By contrast, the total number of U.S. unauthorized immigrants, 11 million in 2015, is 10% less than in 2007 and has ticked down since 2009. The [number from Mexico](#), the largest birth country for unauthorized immigrants, has declined notably from 6.4 million in 2009, to 5.6 million in 2015.

U.S. unauthorized immigrant population from Northern Triangle countries more than tripled since 1990

In thousands



Note: Data labels are for 1990, 2005 and 2015. See methodology for rounding rules. The Great Recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on adjusted 1990 census, augmented 1995 and 2000 Current Population Survey and augmented 2005-2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Temporary Protected Status and DACA

Several hundred thousand unauthorized immigrants from the Northern Triangle have received temporary permission to live and work in the U.S. under two federal programs with uncertain futures.

About [195,000 Salvadorans and 57,000 Hondurans](#) are estimated to be protected from deportation under [Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS), a program that allows relief based on natural disasters or other catastrophes in their home countries. In order to qualify, they must meet residency and criminal-record requirements. The U.S. government's current designation of immigrants from El Salvador as eligible for Temporary Protected Status began in 2001, based on a series of earthquakes in that country that inflicted widespread damage and killed more than a thousand people. For Honduras, TPS eligibility began in 1999 based on Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which killed more than 5,600 people and displaced more than a million.

The Temporary Protected Status permits are set to expire [July 5 for people from Honduras](#), and [March 9 for people from El Salvador](#). The [presidents of both countries](#) have asked the U.S. government to extend the temporary program. The administration is required to state [60 days in advance](#) whether it intends to extend or terminate the protected status, and protection automatically extends for six months if such a notice is not published. In advance of the government's decision, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reportedly submitted a [required assessment](#) in which he said that home-country conditions no longer necessitate protected status for immigrants from Central America.

Although some TPS recipients may be in the U.S. on valid temporary visas, Pew Research Center assumes that nearly all immigrants with TPS are in the country without authorization.

[Nearly 60,000 young unauthorized immigrants](#) from the three countries have received work permits and relief from deportation under the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, according to the [most recent Department of Homeland Security statistics](#), released Sept. 4. They include about 25,900 from El Salvador, 17,700 from Guatemala and 16,100 from Honduras. (There may be some recipients of DACA status who also have Temporary Protected Status.)

The program, created by President Barack Obama with an executive action signed in August 2012, provides a two-year renewable work permit and protection from deportation to unauthorized immigrants who came to the U.S. before age 16 and meet [certain other conditions](#). President

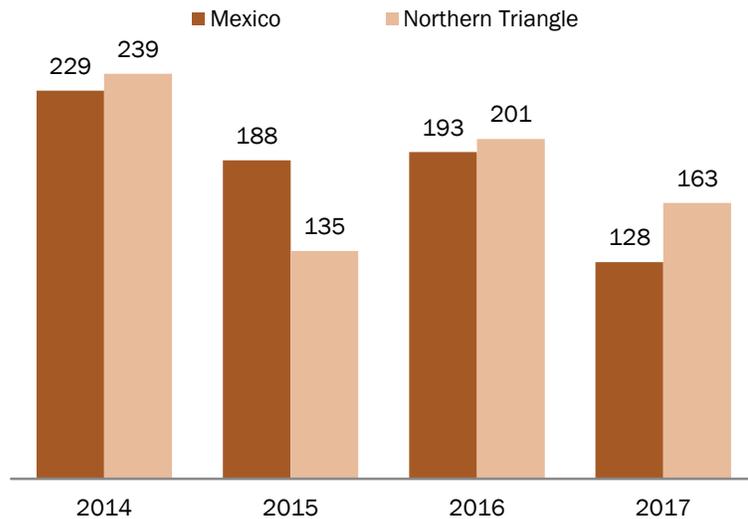
Donald Trump has ordered that the [program be phased out](#), unless Congress passes legislation to extend it past March 5, 2018.

Apprehensions and deportations

In addition to the rise in the number of Northern Triangle immigrants living in the U.S., government statistics also show a recent increase in migrants from the three nations apprehended at the border. In fact, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection statistics, apprehensions of Northern Triangle immigrants outnumbered those of Mexicans at the U.S. Southwest border in fiscal 2014, 2016 and 2017. The law enforcement agency says [fiscal 2014 was the first time that apprehensions of Central Americans outnumbered those from Mexico](#). About 99% of Central American [apprehensions that year](#) were of immigrants from the Northern Triangle.

Apprehensions of Northern Triangle immigrants exceed those of Mexicans in most recent fiscal years

Apprehensions at U.S.-Mexico border, in thousands



Note: Northern Triangle includes El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Data refer to number of reported apprehensions, not the number of unique individuals apprehended.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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Mexicans continue to be the majority of those deported by U.S. border authorities, but the three Northern Triangle nations ranked second, third and fourth for deportations in fiscal 2016. In fiscal 2016, about 34,000 Guatemalans, 22,000 Hondurans and 20,000 Salvadorans were removed. Together they accounted for about a fifth (22%) of deportations by U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials. About 245,000 Mexicans were deported, or 72% of removals.

People turned back at the border or held in immigrant detention centers are not included in U.S. Census Bureau immigrant statistics. However, the census data analyzed in this report could include migrants who are detained and then released in the U.S. while their cases are adjudicated, though it is not possible to differentiate them from other migrants in the data.

Beginning in fiscal 2013, [a rising number of unaccompanied children](#) were apprehended at the U.S. border with Mexico, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data from the Department of Homeland Security. The number from the Northern Triangle peaked at 51,705 in fiscal 2014. In the 2017 fiscal year, there were [31,754 apprehensions of children](#) from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras also drove a [surge in apprehensions of family groups](#) – children and their parents or guardians – in 2016 and 2017. According to Customs and Border Protection data, there were 71,145 family apprehensions of Northern Triangle migrants in fiscal 2017, compared with 2016’s total of 70,407.

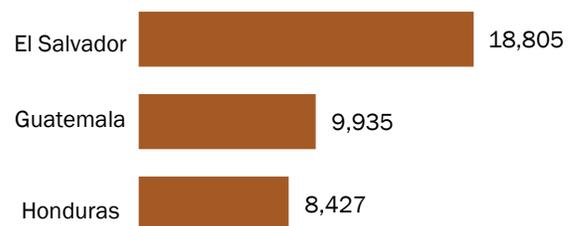
El Salvador among the top countries for green cards to lawful immigrants

Some Northern Triangle nations rank among the top birth countries for new U.S. lawful permanent residents, according to U.S. Department of Homeland Security statistics. In 2015, El Salvador ranked ninth among countries for the number of green cards issued to people born there, and has ranked in the top 14 since 2006. Guatemala ranked 22nd in 2015, and has been in the top 28 since 2006. Honduras ranked 28th in 2015 and has been in the top 40 since 2006.

More than [37,000 immigrants from the three Northern Triangle nations](#) were granted green cards, giving them lawful permanent resident status, in the first three quarters of the 2017 fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2016, through June 30). A total of 18,805 green cards were granted to immigrants from El Salvador, most of them (11,620) new arrivals rather than people already in the U.S. adjusting their immigration status. A total of 9,935 green cards went to Guatemalans, about

More than 37,000 people from Northern Triangle nations granted green cards in first nine months of fiscal 2017

Number granted lawful permanent residence, Oct. 1, 2016-June 30, 2017



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Rise in U.S. Immigrants From El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth From Elsewhere"

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half of whom (5,003) were new arrivals. For Hondurans, 8,427 green cards were granted, but less than half (3,853) went to new arrivals.

Among all 845,951 immigrants who obtained lawful permanent residence in the first three quarters of fiscal 2017, about half were new arrivals and half were people already living in the U.S. who adjusted their status.

Most Northern Triangle immigrants are admitted because they have relatives already living in the U.S., as is true of immigrants overall.

Only a small number of lawful immigrants from Northern Triangle nations arrive as refugees – 974 from El Salvador, 50 from Guatemala and 93 from Honduras from Oct. 1, 2016, to June 30, according to [Department of Homeland Security statistics](#). A total of 49,232 refugees arrived during that time.

Asylum applications from Northern Triangle nations rise since 2013

Asylum applications from people born in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have [risen sharply](#) in recent years, according to U.S. government data. There were more applications in fiscal 2013-2015 from the three nations than in the previous 15 years combined, according to data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The three Central American nations accounted for 37% of all asylum applications filed with [two U.S. government agencies](#) in fiscal 2015 and 2016. That amounted to 112,151 applications. In fiscal 2014, 24% of asylum seekers came from the three Northern Triangle nations.

Partial data for fiscal 2017 also show that 37% of applicants – 79,571 of 215,213 – came from the Northern Triangle. Numbers are available for the full fiscal year (October 2016-September 2017) from the Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Services, which handles "affirmative" applications from those in the U.S. Numbers are available through May 2017 from the Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review, which handles "defensive" applications from those in removal proceedings.

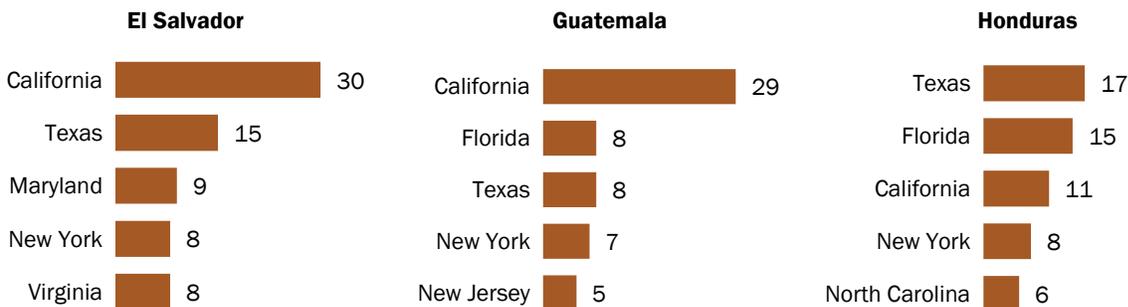
2. Geography and characteristics of Northern Triangle immigrants

Worldwide, more than eight-in-ten migrants born in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras live in the United States, according to [United Nations estimates](#). That included 89% of Salvadoran migrants, 86% of Guatemalans and 82% of Hondurans in 2015.

Among all those born in El Salvador worldwide – those who live in El Salvador and those who live elsewhere – 23% reside in the U.S., according to United Nations figures for 2015. For Guatemalans and Hondurans, the shares in the U.S. are smaller – 6% and 8%, respectively – but still consequential.

California, New York, Texas are among top states of residence for Northern Triangle immigrants

% of immigrants from _____ living in each state



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).
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Most Northern Triangle immigrants live in states that also are popular with other immigrants, especially those from Latin America. In all, 84% of Salvadoran immigrants lived in the 10 most popular states for immigrants from their country in 2015, as did 72% of Guatemalan and 79% of Honduran immigrants. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of immigrants overall lived in the most popular states for the foreign-born population.

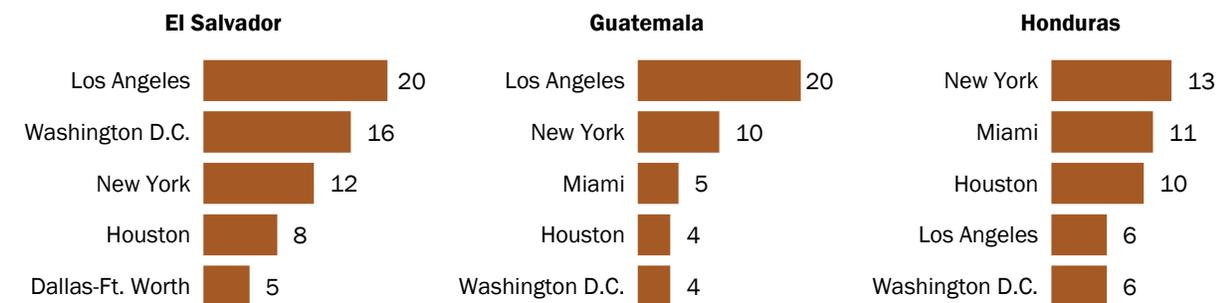
More than any other state, California has the largest share of Salvadoran immigrants (30% lived there in 2015) and Guatemalan immigrants (29%). It’s also the top state for U.S. immigrants overall – one-in-four live there. For Hondurans, though, Texas (17% in 2015) and Florida (15%)

are at least as popular as California (11%). Texas has the second largest population of U.S. immigrants; 11% lived there in 2015.

However, several states that are not among the top 10 destinations for immigrants are popular with those from Northern Triangle countries. They include Maryland for immigrants from all three countries, North Carolina for Guatemalans and Hondurans, Nevada for Salvadorans and Louisiana for Hondurans.

Top metro areas are similar for Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Honduran immigrants

% of immigrants from ___ living in each U.S. metro area



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).
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Immigrants from the three countries also are most likely to live in metro areas that are popular destinations for other immigrants, according to 2015 census data.

The top five for each group include Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and Houston, as well as Dallas (for Salvadorans) and Miami (for Guatemalans and Hondurans). A higher share of Salvadorans live in their top 20 metro areas (81%) compared with Guatemalans (67%) and Hondurans (70%). Among all immigrants, 65% live in the top 20 metros.

Among the nation’s 50 largest metropolitan areas, a Northern Triangle nation is the largest birth country in only two. Salvadorans are the largest immigrant group in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, and Hondurans are the largest in New Orleans, according to 2015 Census Bureau data.

Most Northern Triangle immigrants have lived in the U.S. a decade or more

Despite the large number of immigrants who arrived in the past decade, most immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more, as is true for the majority of all U.S. immigrants.

Among immigrants in 2015, 78% from El Salvador, 71% from Guatemala and 68% from Honduras had lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more. Immigrants from other Central American nations are even more likely to be longer-term U.S. residents: 85% have lived in the U.S. for at least a decade as of 2015. Among all U.S. immigrants in 2015, 76% lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more. The share of immigrants in the U.S. for 10 years or more has risen for all these groups since 2007.

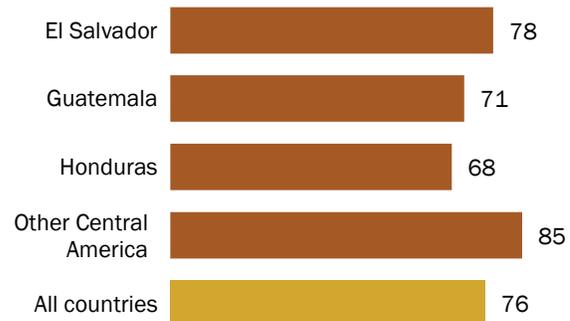
Most unauthorized immigrants also have lived in the U.S. for at least 10 years. The share residing in the U.S. a decade or more has risen since 2007 for all unauthorized immigrants, for Northern Triangle unauthorized immigrants and for other Central American unauthorized immigrants. For unauthorized immigrants overall, as well as for those from Guatemala and Honduras, the share in the U.S. for 10 years or more has been a majority since 2007.

For comparison purposes, immigrants from Mexico are at least as likely as those from Northern Triangle nations to have lived in the U.S. for a decade or more. Among all Mexican immigrants in 2015, 85% had; among unauthorized immigrants from Mexico, 80% had.

U.S. immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are especially likely to be of working age – 18 to 64. Among all immigrants, 80% were in this age group in 2015, but that share is nearly nine-in-ten among Salvadorans (88%), Guatemalans (86%) and Hondurans (87%). By contrast, among all people born in the U.S., 60% were of this age in 2015.

Eight-in-ten immigrants from El Salvador have lived in U.S. for at least a decade

% of immigrants from _____ who have lived in U.S. for 10 years or more, 2015



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).
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Guatemala is the only Northern Triangle country from which there are substantially more men (59% in 2015) than women (41%) among U.S. immigrants. The shares are nearly equal for Salvadorans and Hondurans, as they are for U.S. immigrants overall. However, there is gender imbalance in the other direction among other Central American immigrants; this group is 56% female. Among all U.S. immigrants, 50% are female.

The labor force status of Northern Triangle immigrants varies by gender. Men from the Northern Triangle are more likely to be working or looking for work than immigrants overall or people born in the U.S. Among those ages 18 to 64, 91% of Northern Triangle male immigrants were in the labor force in 2015, compared with 86% of all male immigrants and 79% of U.S.-born men.

Among women ages 18 to 64, labor force participation varies by birth country, but it is lower than for all U.S.-born women. Linked to their lower labor force participation is their greater likelihood to have young children at home. Northern Triangle immigrants are at least twice as likely as U.S.-born women to have young children at home.

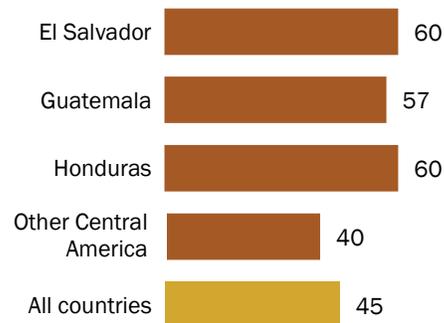
Most Northern Triangle immigrant homes include children

Households headed by immigrants from Northern Triangle nations are more likely to include children younger than 18 than immigrant households overall in the U.S. While 45% of immigrant households included minor children in 2015, the share was 60% for those headed by a Salvadoran immigrant, 57% for those headed by a Guatemalan immigrant and 60% for those headed by a Honduran immigrant. Among households headed by other Central American immigrants, 40% included minor children. (By contrast, only 29% of households headed by a U.S.-born adult included children in 2015.)

The share of households with children is higher for homes headed by unauthorized immigrants than by lawful ones. Among all Northern Triangle unauthorized immigrant households, 63% had minor children in 2015,

Northern Triangle immigrant households are likely to include children

% of U.S. households headed by immigrants from ____ with children younger than 18, 2015



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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compared with 55% for households headed by a lawful Northern Triangle immigrant.

A single-person household – someone living alone – is relatively uncommon for Central American immigrants, especially those from the Northern Triangle. Among Salvadoran immigrants, 9% lived alone in 2015, compared with 12% for Guatemalan immigrants and 14% for Honduran immigrants. Among all immigrants, 19% did. Among all the U.S. born, 30% did.

According to other census data for individuals (not households), about four-in-ten immigrant adults from the three Northern Triangle nations live with minor children. The vast majority of those immigrant adults – about nine-in-ten – live with U.S.-born children, who are U.S. citizens at birth.

Education levels relatively low for Northern Triangle immigrants

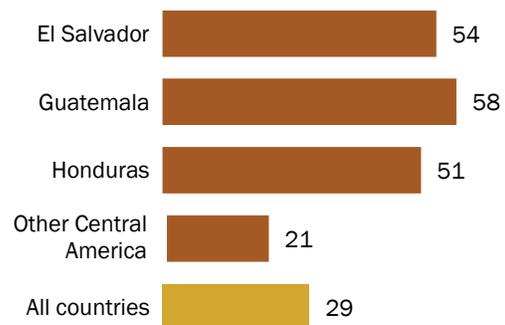
The educational attainment of the immigrant population from Northern Triangle nations is below that of all U.S. immigrants. Among those ages 25 and older, half or more from each country have not completed high school, compared with 29% of all immigrants, according to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data. Most of those who have not finished high school have less than a ninth grade education; fully 39% of Northern Triangle immigrants had this level of schooling in 2015.

Among Northern Triangle immigrants in 2015, 27% had a high school diploma or GED equivalent and no further education, 11% had some college education or a two-year degree and 7% had a bachelor's degree or more. The comparable shares for the foreign-born population overall in 2015 were 26%, 15% and 30%.

In looking at educational attainment, legal status matters: Most Northern Triangle unauthorized immigrants have not completed high school (60%), compared with 48% of lawful immigrants from the region.

A majority of Northern Triangle immigrants have not finished high school

% of U.S. immigrants ages 25 and older without a high school diploma in 2015 from ...



Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Educational attainment is notably higher among U.S.-born residents with roots in the three Central American nations. In that group, the vast majority has a college degree (24% in 2015), some college (30%) or a high school education (30%). Only 16% did not complete high school.

Most Northern Triangle immigrants are not proficient in English

Immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are less likely than other foreign-born residents of the U.S. to be proficient in English. English proficiency is defined as either speaking only English at home or, if someone speaks another language at home, that person speaks English very well.

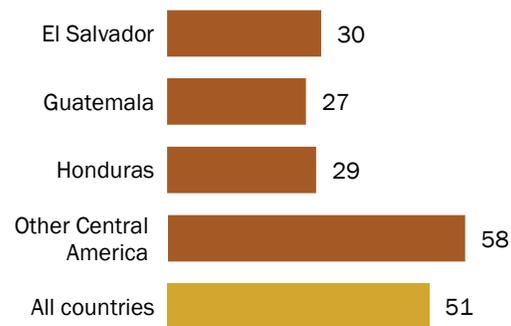
In 2015, half of U.S. immigrants ages 5 and older (51%) were proficient in English, compared with almost a third of those from the Northern Triangle.

Most households of immigrants from Central America speak a language other than English at home. Among immigrants ages 5 and older, only 4% from El Salvador, 7% from Guatemala and 4% from Honduras spoke English and no other language at home in 2015. Nearly all who do not speak only English at home said they spoke Spanish. By comparison, among all immigrants, 16% spoke only English at home, according to 2015 census data.

English proficiency tends to be higher for immigrants with college degrees and lawful status. As with education levels, immigration status is relevant: Unauthorized immigrants from each of the three countries are less likely to be proficient than lawful immigrants. The relatively high share of Northern Triangle immigrants who do not have high school diplomas or lawful status helps explain their relatively low levels of English proficiency.

Northern Triangle immigrants less likely to be English proficient than U.S. immigrants overall

% of U.S. immigrants ages 5 and older who speak English proficiently in 2015, from ...



Note: Those who speak English proficiently are those who speak only English at home or, if they speak a non-English language at home, indicate they speak English “very well.”

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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This report was written by D’Vera Cohn, senior writer/editor; Jeffrey S. Passel, senior demographer; and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, senior researcher. Editorial guidance was provided by Mark Hugo Lopez, director of Global Migration and Demography research; James Bell, vice president for global strategy; and Phillip Connor, senior researcher. Charts and tables were created by Abby Budiman, intern; Michael Keegan, information graphics designer; Gustavo López, research analyst; and Cohn. López and Antonio Flores, research assistant, number-checked the report and its graphics. David Kent copy edited the report. Ariana Rodriguez-Gitler was the digital producer.

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Methodology

Data sources for this report include the 1990 census, the 1995 and 2000 Current Population Survey, and the 2005-2015 American Community Survey, all from the U.S. Census Bureau. Data are adjusted and augmented for undercount. For details, see methodology of the Pew Research Center report “[Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009.](#)”

Data for the immigrant population from all countries and from Central American countries, as well as immigrant inflows to the U.S., are rounded to the nearest 5,000 for populations under 1 million, the nearest 10,000 for populations between one and 10 million, and to the nearest 25,000 for populations over 10 million. Estimates for unauthorized immigrant populations are rounded differently, according to the rounding rules in the Pew Research Center report “[Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009.](#)”

The [2011 National Survey of Latinos](#) was conducted from Nov. 9 through Dec. 7, 2011. Results are based on telephone interviews conducted by Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS), an independent research company, among a nationally representative sample of 1,220 Latino respondents ages 18 and older. Of these, 492 respondents were U.S. born (including Puerto Rico) and 728 were foreign born (excluding Puerto Rico). Of the foreign born, 299 were U.S. citizens, 261 were legal residents and 140 were not citizens and not legal residents.

The Encuesta de Migración en la Frontera Sur ([EMIF-Sur](#)) has been conducted since 2004, although only 2016 data were included in this report. The surveys of deportees are conducted among a representative sample of people deported from the United States and Mexico in four cities and in the main airports of the three Northern Triangle nations (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras).

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Appendix B: Additional tables and chart

Labor force participation varies by gender

% of immigrants ages 18-64 who are working or looking for work

	Men	Women
El Salvador	90	70
Guatemala	92	60
Honduras	89	62

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).
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Educational attainment of Northern Triangle immigrants

% of immigrants ages 25 and older from ___ with designated education level, 2015

	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Less than 9 th grade	35%	44	38
9 th – 12 th grade	18	14	14
High school graduate	28	26	28
Two year degree/ Some college	11	10	12
Bachelor's degree or more	7	6	9

Note: Shares may not add to 100% due to rounding. "High school graduate" includes persons who have attained a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as a GED.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Foreign-born population for selected countries of birth, 1990-2015

In thousands

Years	All countries	Mexico	Total Central America	Total Northern Triangle	Northern Triangle		
					El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
2015	44,750	12,025	3,540	3,030	1,420	980	630
2014	43,650	12,175	3,420	2,920	1,370	945	595
2013	43,375	12,150	3,350	2,850	1,320	955	580
2012	42,550	12,050	3,330	2,830	1,320	930	580
2011	41,900	12,250	3,210	2,720	1,300	890	530
2010	41,125	12,225	3,100	2,630	1,250	830	545
2009	40,675	12,350	3,100	2,570	1,230	840	500
2008	40,550	12,475	3,010	2,520	1,180	825	515
2007	40,550	12,750	2,940	2,430	1,200	750	480
2006	39,250	12,250	2,840	2,350	1,110	800	435
2005	38,100	11,875	2,710	2,200	1,070	705	430
2000	32,650	9,380	2,250	1,700	980	405	310
1995	26,875	7,310	1,730	1,310	740	340	225
1990	20,950	5,620	1,360	980	595	265	115

Note: All numbers are rounded independently and are not adjusted to sum to the U.S. total or other totals. See Methodology for rounding rules. Central America includes Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates for 2005-2015 based on augmented American Community Survey (IPUMS); for 1995 and 2000 based on augmented March Supplements to the Current Population Survey. Estimates for 1990 are from augmented 1990 census tabulations.

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