



**CENTRAL AMERICA
SECURITY CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Spring 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TERMS OF REFERENCE.....1-2

KEY JUDGMENTS.....3-5

RECOMMENDATIONS.....6-28

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

- Reforming the Public Sector to Reduce Low-Level Corruption
- Regulation of NGOs and the Sustainability of Projects

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

- Novel and Cost-Effective Ways to Deliver Infrastructure to Rural Areas
- E-Governance

CRIME PREVENTION

- Engaging Youth to Prevent Crime
- Gender-Based Violence Incites Overall Violence
- Improving the Effectiveness and Sustainability of Violence Prevention Programs
- Addressing True Drivers to Properly Implement Justice Reform

DEPORTEES

- Protecting Northern Triangle Countries from Criminal Deportees
- Integrating Returning Nationals into the Economy
- Protections for Women and Unaccompanied Minor Deportees

TEAM BIOS.....29-31



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SECURITY CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Central America Security Challenges and Opportunities Practicum will identify, analyze and prioritize the available options for solving Central America's urgent security issues, which have profound implications for regional governments - particularly those of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras - and their partners.



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KEY QUESTIONS

What are the necessary conditions for addressing Central American security challenges?

- What public sector reforms can Central American governments implement to reduce low-level corruption?
- How can governments effectively regulate and vet non-governmental organizations (NGOs)?
- How can civil society coordinate with existing NGOs, working on a bottom-up model, in order to effectively address the concerns of the people and make long-term impacts?

Are there ways to improve government control over areas in which it is absent?

- What are some novel and cost-effective ways to deliver infrastructure development to rural areas?
- What are some low-cost means of improving connections between rural populations and their central governments?

What works and does not work in crime prevention?

- What programs and strategies are best suited to reinforce positive youth development and prevent a pattern of violence?
- How can communities in the Northern Triangle best prevent and combat gender-based violence in an effort to reduce overall crime?
- How can these countries ensure program results are sustainable?
- How can Central American countries more effectively implement strategies to improve the criminal justice system?

What types of programs and policies can Central American governments establish to address the different challenges posed by an influx of deportees from the following categories: those with criminal records, non-criminals, and members of vulnerable groups?

- What programs can Central American countries implement to deter deportees with criminal convictions from resuming criminal activities upon returning to their country of origin?
- How can returning nationals be reintegrated into local and regional economies?
- How can the unique challenges faced by deportees from vulnerable groups (such as women and youth) be addressed?

GOALS

The Practicum team's goal is to produce actionable recommendations and useful research memoranda to assist the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in their 2017 policy priority of addressing Central America's urgent security challenges.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In addition to researching published material, the Practicum team will consult with a broad range of government and non-government experts on crime prevention, infrastructure development initiatives, deportee reintegration, and the necessary conditions for solving these security challenges. The experts in question will include members of U.S. and Central American government agencies, non-governmental entities, and other academic and regional NGOs in Washington D.C., as well as those in Tegucigalpa, Guatemala City, and San Salvador.

PRODUCTS

The Practicum team, divided into four sub teams, will develop and deliver products reflecting the expressed needs and interests of the IDB, including brief memos, background papers, oral briefings, and, if the IDB wishes, PowerPoint presentations.

OTHER CLIENTS

The IDB is our principal client. While recognizing the sensitive nature of conversations surrounding development projects, we would like to offer briefings on our key findings to other entities and we welcome suggestions on individuals or organizations that should receive them as well.

KEY JUDGMENTS: DRIVERS OF INSECURITY



**CENTRAL AMERICA
SECURITY CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The widespread violence in the Northern Triangle is symptomatic of deeper structural challenges that lead to a devastating cycle of human insecurity. These challenges are rooted in two key areas: institutional failures and an eroding social fabric. Structural and institutional failures include lack of governmental resources, weakened institutional capacity, corruption and in some cases a nonexistent government presence. Social conditions include threats of public and domestic violence, an erosion of community institutions, and lack of educational and economic opportunities—all of which contribute to a culture of impunity and a cycle of human insecurity. The following is a detailed description of these drivers:

The current state of public sectors in the Northern Triangle creates ample opportunities for rent-seeking behavior at the lower levels of government. A thriving patronage system, meager pay for civil servants, bloated and redundant bureaucracies, and a lack of transparency in government-issued licensing applications contribute to systemic low-level corruption. This ingrained culture encourages civil servants, bureaucrats, and local politicians to operate with impunity both in the formal and informal economies.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) seek to fill in gaps in government capacity, but there is a lack of vetting, coordination, and local civil society input. Government capacity in the Northern Triangle is too weak to react to the growing concerns and needs of the people, especially in terms of vulnerable populations and the large incoming flux of deportees from Mexico and the United States. NGOs have helped fill the weak areas, promising service delivery and assistance to people in need. However, the region is a hotbed of false and/or inefficient NGOs due to lax regulations on vetting and the inability to monitor purported projects. Furthermore, many NGOs that receive heavy funding in the area work on a top-down model, fulfilling donor wishes before considering the bottom-up needs of the communities, thereby contributing to short term fixes, not long-term, sustainable results.

Lack of infrastructure development contributes to insecurity and stagnates development in rural areas. The factors that drive this issue are: a shortage of trained technical personnel around rural infrastructure developments, the absence of a truly effective grid system with uniform

policies in the Northern Triangle countries, and the perception that micro-grid development is substantially more expensive than a macro-grid extension.

Northern Triangle countries lack the financial resources needed to effectively govern their entire territory and government services often fail to reach dispersed rural populations.

Insecurity also presents a challenge in providing civil services outside of major cities. Language and cultural barriers between largely rural indigenous populations and urban, non-indigenous populations also contribute to this divide. New and innovative means of governing are needed in order to fully engage with, and deliver services to, rural populations.

A lack of educational opportunities drives criminal activity; a weakened early education system due to disproportionate spending on higher education by elites affects youth most at risk of delinquency. A public education system in need of effective resources and meaningful reform drives impunity and inhibits crime prevention.

Gender-based violence (GBV) fuels the epidemic of violent crime. Drivers include gender inequality, a machismo culture that has normalized aggressive male behavior, the shock value of graphic GBV crimes, weak institutions that do not recognize and prioritize GBV, a judiciary system that does not prosecute GBV crimes, and a lack of economic opportunities for women. Community-based efforts lack sufficient capacity to alert the public to the gravity of GBV. Low priority or willful ignorance by law enforcement perpetuates crimes related to GBV.

Limited donor coordination and the use of a short-term approach to projects and programs affect the sustainability of crime prevention initiatives. This challenges the strengthening of institutional capacity at the national level, and development of necessary policy frameworks that contribute to sustainability. Governments do not have effective aid coordination mechanisms that allow them to improve ownership, alignment and harmonization, in order to obtain better results for the region.

The inability of Northern Triangle countries to correctly identify and address the underlying causes of crime has limited the government's effectiveness in implementing and executing criminal justice reform. Addressing crime in the Northern Triangle as solely a criminal issue has prompted these governments to ineffectively prioritize hardline criminal justice strategies rather than more comprehensive measures. Properly addressing the true drivers of crime offers governments a clearer idea of the crime situation.

Returning deportees who are convicted felons pose a significant threat to the security of the Northern Triangle. The protection of citizens within the Northern Triangle from criminal felons is dependent on law enforcement having the best tools. Law enforcement lacks the access to the most up-to-date and accurate records to identify and track felons.

A lack of job opportunities at competitive wages and insufficient reintegration services are hindering the economic reintegration of the over 679,175 individuals who have been forcibly returned to the Northern Triangle in the past three years. These issues are driven by each country's economic dependence on low value-added industries and inadequate coordination between reintegration programs and the private sector. The lack of growth in high value-added industries is further exacerbated by the high costs of electricity and a lower-skilled human capital base that fails to attract knowledge-intensive services.

Human trafficking, gang violence, and domestic abuse contribute to an unsafe environment for women and unaccompanied minor deportees arriving back in their country of origin. Lack of educational and economic opportunities, coupled with desperation to escape domestic violence leaves these groups vulnerable to human trafficking and gang recruitment. Programs focused on providing social and educational services for these groups can provide protection in the short term and opportunity in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

- Reforming the Public Sector to Reduce Low-Level Corruption
- Regulation of NGOs and the Sustainability of Projects

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

- Novel and Cost-Effective Ways to Deliver Infrastructure to Rural Areas
- E-Governance

CRIME PREVENTION

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Necessary Conditions

Reforming the Public Sector to Reduce Low-Level Corruption

Challenges: Corruption is endemic within Northern Triangle governments. In 2016, all three countries received low scores from Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with El Salvador ranking as 95th in the world, Honduras coming in at 123rd, and Guatemala at 136th. In these governments, low-level corruption predominantly manifests as instances of patronage, nepotism, and bribe-taking. These rent-seeking activities inhibit economic development, investment, and GDP growth in the formal economy, in addition to hampering bureaucratic efficiency and undermining public trust in governmental institutions.

Key Judgments: thriving patronage system; inadequate pay for civil servants; bloated and redundant bureaucracies; lack of transparency in licensing processing

Recommendations:

- Based partly upon lessons gleaned from a successful case study in the country of Georgia, Northern Triangle governments should implement the following public sector reforms:
 - Increase the use of formal, competitive civil service examinations for entry-level recruitment in the public sector.
 - Enlist the financial support of international, private donors (such as the Open Society Foundations) to institute salary-supplement programs for civil servants.
 - Establish an Office for Reform Coordination to streamline the ongoing process of modernizing, reorganizing, and consolidating public sector agencies and departments.
 - Build upon existing eRegulation websites to create a digital public access registry that documents the status of government-issued personal- and business-related licensing applications.

Comments:

- Increasing the use of formal, competitive entry-level recruitment processes in the public sector will be less efficient than embracing equivalent private sector-style practices. Although recruitment in the private sector is inherently a faster and more flexible process, ingrained corruption in Northern Triangle countries makes this alternative a non-starter. Trading efficiency for reduced corruption is an unfortunate but necessary exchange. Wage premiums do exist between Northern Triangle private and public sectors (including wage disparities *within* the public sector in the Salvadoran case) and this cannot be discounted when considering salary-supplement programs. The tradeoff between increasing civil servant wages and expanding the wage disparity at the same time must be considered.
- Where local communities lack the infrastructure to access eRegulation websites, print versions of the registry should be publicly posted at regular intervals in locations open to the community.
- A long-term but politically sensitive solution may be reforming/simplifying the tax code to decrease corruption within tax collection agencies and fund government

programs and civil servant salaries. Instituting tax reform will require tremendous amounts of political capital, a legislative mandate, and the political will to see the task to completion.

Outcomes: Successfully implementing these public sector reforms will reduce – but cannot eradicate – low-level corruption in Northern Triangle countries. If implemented, the effectiveness of these reforms could be measured by studying public perceptions of corruption over time through such indicators as the Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators. However, even if public perceptions of corruption in the Northern Triangle diminish in the near future, it would be difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between these particular public sector reforms and reduced corruption. Failing to institute these reforms will perpetuate the status quo, preventing Northern Triangle governments from adequately addressing their pressing security challenges, and strengthening the ingrained culture of corruption and impunity.

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Necessary Conditions

Regulation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the Sustainability of Projects

Challenges: Northern Triangle governments have a weak capacity to deliver services that benefit the public. NGOs are needed to fill these gaps in state capacity, especially in such crucial sectors as healthcare, deportee reintegration, education and youth development, and protection of vulnerable populations. The challenge is two-pronged: NGOs are not properly vetted and are therefore ripe for corruption and criminal activities. However, the NGOs that do deliver necessary services must comply with donor wishes, often leading to short-term fixes instead of sustainable results. Furthermore, when donor funds are disbursed by the government, they may not reach the NGO in their entirety.

Key Judgments: lack of NGO vetting; corruption; instability; lack of sustainability; lack of citizen input; distrust of government; inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability

Recommendations:

- A committee consisting of appropriate government personnel, researchers, and community representatives should develop a transparency and accountability website that effectively tracks NGOs, their activities, projects, deliverables, sources of funding, and financial information. This website should be updated frequently and be available in both Spanish and the regional language of use, when appropriate.
- Communities served by NGOs should be equipped with “customer” report cards that track their satisfaction with services delivered. Data from these report cards should be included on the transparency and accountability website.
- NGOs that are utilizing their full budgets satisfactorily, demonstrating high rates of community/civil society support, and participating in transparency initiatives should be given priority for funds distributed to the government by development banks and donors. Donors and banks should make all loans to be utilized by NGOs contingent on these parameters. A similar ranking system has been established by GiveWell.org, which informs donors about NGOs, charities, and nonprofit organizations.
- It is recommended that, when appropriate, local or municipal governments determine which NGOs should receive priority for funding, as mentioned above. This strategy would serve to facilitate a more bottom-up approach. If government involvement *could* be avoided in the disbursement process, it may lead to improved grassroots project support. Donors should strive to make continued funding contingent upon grassroots initiatives first receiving a certain percentage set-aside of the funds provided.

Comments: The website initiative, which will be long-term and permanent, will require at least a one to two year period to be set up, and, as such, its capabilities may not be fully realized for at least two years. This potential timeline is based off a similar website initiative being carried out in Mexico. Some concerns with a transparency and accountability website include avoiding corruption within the system, political or elite capture, and/or citizen silencing. Mitigation efforts in these areas will need to be thoroughly considered, and could include website control at the local government level (to serve as an accountability check on both local and federal inputs) or media/journalism initiatives.

Relegation of donor funds to local grassroots initiatives *first* should only be done once communities have identified and presented to the root causes of the problems they seek to solve to donor organizations. The donor should always seek to be responsive to community needs instead of being strategically involved in projects.

Outcomes: Mitigating corruption in the government will lead to more robust state capacity and better service delivery, reducing strain on overextended NGO budgets. Transparency and accountability initiatives such as a website for NGOs, if fully implemented, will reduce corruption and fewer false NGOs, improve allocation of donor funds, and enhance delivery of services from NGOs receiving funds. Furthermore, it will put more power into the hands of the citizens who are the supposed recipients of NGO services. Making donor funds and bank loans contingent upon bottom-up public interest projects will result in more sustainable outcomes. Utilizing tools such as “customer” report cards in communities serviced by NGO projects will enable government personnel and donors to accurately rate the efficacy of ongoing and completed projects. These outcomes, when applied to NGOs working on topics of interest in our Terms of Reference will promote reductions in crime, a stronger civil society, higher rates of successful reintegration into society by deportees, and a wider area of service delivery.

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Government Control

Novel and Cost-Effective Ways to Deliver Infrastructure to Rural Areas

Challenges: A 2016 report from the IDB's Multilateral Investment Fund shows that 16% of people do not have access to electricity in El Salvador, while 11% still lack access in Honduras, and 15% in Guatemala. Electrification levels are especially low in rural areas. Development organizations and banks such as the IDB understand the utility of micro-grids in providing electrification to "off-grid" communities. However, the perception that these types of projects are cost prohibitive and require a great deal of policy reform has served as a barrier to their development in Northern Triangle countries.

Key Judgments: shortage of trained technical personnel around rural infrastructure developments; absence of effective grid system with uniform policies in Northern Triangle countries; perception that micro-grid development is substantially more expensive than a macro-grid extension

Recommendations:

- Wind turbines and solar panels can be used as off-grid generation sources for micro-grids and are able to bring electricity to communities far from infrastructure. Moreover, they can facilitate the improvement of government control in the area. Micro-grids that make use of both solar and wind generation should be considered for their ability to maximize generation potential.

For all Northern Triangle Countries

- o It is imperative that the public, government, and utility companies are consulted on micro-grid development. Tariffs that are imposed on small, off-grid systems must be made known and, if possible, eliminated. Because macro-grid extension is cost-prohibitive in many of these areas, it makes little sense to tax and impose heavy regulations and costs on the development of micro-grid technologies.
- o Communities should capitalize on micro-grid development and exchange energy. For villages located far away from macro-grid infrastructure, separate micro-grids or hybrid microgrids that make use of different generation sources could be placed in each village or locality to increase generation capacity. Each community would also be equipped with a low-cost version of a backup generation source such as an anaerobic digester. Excess energy can be traded between these communities via the usage of this interconnected system. Primary generation should come from renewable sources such as solar and wind.
- o If desired, energy can be sold between villages using a peer-to-peer electricity sharing system. This system, based on a study by Inam et al., allows separate households and villages to sell electricity to one another using a Power Management Unit. This unit uses computer software to facilitate trade between users when energy is in short supply in one village and in excess in another. Sale can be controlled by individual village heads or councils, but options may vary depending on the community in question. If villages *are not* selling energy to each other, end users in villages being electrified should receive remittances to pay for

their electrical usage until they can afford to pay for the service on their own. These remittances should be provided by the government or NGOs.

For Guatemala and El Salvador

- o Because electricity generation is concentrated in the hands of a few players in both countries, the major entities in the electricity market must be included. However, because private companies can participate in the market, it is logical for the major players to partner up with private outside companies to increase capital available to build micro-grid projects.

For Honduras

- o Use the recently passed Law of Electrical Industry (Decree-Law 404-2013) to make contract awards for micro-grid projects via auction. Set the minimum quota for renewable energy development by considering the maximum cost of micro-grid development and upkeep in the villages and municipalities in question. Development and integration should be simplified since Honduran electricity is still primarily handled by one major player (ENEE).
- o Though it offers feed-in tariffs for clean energy investment, ENEE does not have the resources to build the necessary projects. The government should partner with clean energy investment firms to recruit Honduran academics to build the needed micro-grids and encourage the formation of startups that specialize in renewable energy development. This is possible, as Honduras has begun to open its electricity market to private companies following the passage of the Law of Electrical Industry. A similar program could also be instituted in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Comments:

- Maximum generation capacity should be determined before the project begins, and a contingency plan must be created to account for increased generation needs that develop over time. It should be noted that a lead acid battery would possibly need to be used in the context of the PMU-based system for energy trading. Remittances would also be unneeded in the case of a PMU-based system.
- Micro-grid setup and resource potential should be modeled before the project begins. Mapping technology should be utilized to determine the best areas for placement to optimize the project's effectiveness in delivering electricity. There are a variety of companies and software programs that offer this service (e.g. Spire Global and HOMER, respectively).

Outcomes:

- Electrification percentages increase to above 90% in all Northern Triangle countries, with rural communities able to take electrification into their own hands and model it on their own preferences.
- Effective facilitation of the project builds trust between rural communities and the central government.

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Government Control

E-Governance Initiatives

Challenges: Exerting control over areas in which the government does not have a presence is a major challenge for Northern Triangle countries. These governments often do not have a strong presence outside of urban centers, and in some more isolated areas, have no presence at all. The weakness of government institutions contributes to the overall security problem in the Northern Triangle.

Key Judgments: lacking government financial resources; cost of governance over a dispersed area; insecurity; urban-to-rural language and cultural divide

Recommendations:

- Northern Triangle countries should use e-governance as a means to improve nationwide government quality and service coverage, without adding excessive costs. Opportunities for e-governance include transparency, civic engagement, and low-cost service delivery initiatives. In these areas it is recommended that Northern Triangle countries:

Transparency and Civic Engagement Initiatives

- Continue existing open-data programs and expand where possible. Use data visualization tools, info graphics, and public awareness campaigns to make data more approachable for the average citizen.
- Use e-governance tools to gather information and ideas from local populations about preferred government programs, projects, and resource allocation.
- Create mobile and web-based systems that allow citizens to report government service issues, waste, fraud, and abuse. Use automated ticketing systems to prioritize reported problems waiting to be addressed, and track actions taken to resolve them.

Low-Cost Service Delivery Initiatives

- Pilot distance service delivery initiatives, like telemedicine, as a means of expanding services when placing personnel in new areas is difficult for reasons of cost or scarcity. Consider ways to pair highly educated technical experts in cities (e.g. doctors, medical specialists) with lower- educated technical specialists in the field (e.g. nurses, medical assistants).
 - Offer automated, internet application processes for licenses, identification, and other government certifications.
 - Partner with private organizations to develop language-learning and translation applications in local ethnic languages and Spanish.
- There are several challenges to standing up e-governance programs in rural areas, including lacking infrastructure, limited access to technology, illiteracy, limited ability

to speak Spanish and general technological illiteracy. To address these challenges it is recommended that Northern Triangle countries and their partners:

- o Improve key infrastructure (electricity, internet access, and telephone service) in rural areas to the extent possible.
- o Design e-governance applications and websites to use minimal amounts of data to minimize the cost of using these systems for users on pay-by-the-megabyte internet plans and to improve accessibility in areas with limited, or slow internet connections.
- o Design e-governance programs for access via popular, accessible, lower-tech devices whenever possible (e.g. devices like the Nokia 1100 series).
- o Expand access to technology by encouraging local governments, community organizations, schools, and small businesses to develop low-fee or free internet cafes and computer labs that allow for shared use of more expensive equipment.
- o Offer e-governance applications and web pages in as many local languages as is practicable to ensure that they are accessible to rural populations with limited Spanish-language skills.
- o Encourage peer-to-peer education through “train-the-trainer” type workshops focusing on equipping teachers, community leaders, and others that have frequent contact with large networks of people in rural areas with tools to improve technological literacy in their communities.

Comments: It is difficult for a government to control an area in which it has no physical presence and can neither enforce its laws by force (forced compliance), nor offer the services and civic engagement that help convince citizens to follow the rules of their own accord (voluntary compliance). E-governance tools will promote government control by offering a means to improve voluntary compliance. These tools can be deployed at different levels of government to achieve different aims. Some tools work better at the local level (e.g. applications allowing reporting on service delivery), while others can be used across all levels of government (e.g. open data initiatives). E-governance tools should be seen as an addition to, rather than a replacement for, traditional modes of governing, as access to technology is not universal. Additionally, while this paper is focused on improving governance of rural areas, it should be noted that e-governance initiatives will also improve governance in urban areas; possibly even to a greater extent due to better access to technology and infrastructure.

Outcomes: The intent of the above recommendations is that the use of e-governance tools will allow governments and citizens to engage with each other even in areas in which geographic challenges have traditionally limited communication. Additionally that, governments will be able to operate more efficiently due to the automation offered by these tools. Through the increased transparency, efficiency, and civic engagement created by these applications, the aim is that trust in government will improve. As a result, citizens may be more likely to follow government rules and laws of their own accord, and government control will increase even in areas that traditionally have had little to no government presence.

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Crime Prevention

Engaging Youth to Prevent Crime

Challenges: Schools in Northern Triangle countries do not have adequate resources to provide a competitive education, especially in rural areas. Gang members often target schoolchildren for forced recruitment, especially on the way to and from school. The average public school day in Northern Triangle countries is only four to five hours, inhibiting learning and leaving ample opportunity for delinquency. Furthermore, little or non-existent communication between schools and households hampers early detection of delinquent activities. Even with a formal education, many students cannot find jobs once they complete their education. According to USAID, more than two million youth (ages 15 to 24) in the region neither study nor work. International aid organizations and NGOs have tried to address this issue by offering after school programs. However, crime prevention programs lack sufficient longevity, financial support, and scale to make a wide impact. In Honduras, education is highly politicized and meaningful reform faces strong opposition and lack of political will. Finally, funding is primarily provided for the secondary and university levels, diminishing what is available for early and primary education. This system creates a knowledge gap amongst at-risk students that only increases as they get older.

Key Judgments: lack of educational opportunities drives criminal activity; weak early education system due to disproportionate spending on secondary and higher education by elites affects youth most at risk of delinquency; lacking public education system in need of effective resources and meaningful reform drives impunity and inhibits crime prevention

Recommendations:

- In the absence of meaningful reform by Northern Triangle governments, a unique intergenerational mentor program integrated into the school curricula, where older students are paraeducators to younger students, should be established. This program includes:
 - A course for credit where secondary students are trained in paraeducator practices including behavior management and instructional strategies. Post training, students will engage in tutoring younger students in basic education for 75 percent of their class time. The other 25 percent will be spent learning leadership and entrepreneurial skills, planning and executing community service projects and fundraisers, engaging in identity and cultural enrichment projects, and organizing *familia* nights where guardians are invited to the school to learn about topics important to their students and the school community. The fundraisers will contribute to a scholarship fund that will be matched by public-private partnerships.
 - As part of the program, secondary student tutors will be assigned two mentors – one from the community and one from diaspora –who will provide guidance through in person and e-mentoring platforms, respectively.
 - A parent-teacher organization where teachers conduct home visits and one-on-one meetings with students in an effort to gain a more holistic picture of students’

circumstances. Parents in this organization can plan and execute fundraisers to benefit the school or scholarship funds.

- o The community and private sector will also be incorporated as part of a “Padrinos” component, where small and large businesses can sponsor a student’s education by donating to the program. In return, they will receive a collective progress report and a sticker logo showing their support. Families will be encouraged to shop at establishments that display these stickers.

Comments: The strongest solutions will combine non-partisan integrated policy reform, program development, and long-term public engagement. The recommended program will fortify each student’s education by supplementing instruction and empowering students. Its implementation is particularly important in the absence of much needed increases in public school funding that would make possible the lengthening of school days, implementation of policies lowering teacher-student ratio, reformatting of teacher trainings, and salary increases. This program will be more sustainable than others because it is built into the existing framework of the school system. It will not waste available funds establishing a parallel system or focusing its efforts on afterschool programs, in which research shows the most at-risk students will not participate. The goal should not be simply limiting violence and preventing crime, but instead striving to create spaces where students can thrive and reach their highest potential.

Outcomes: Results from this program can drive meaningful education policy reform in the near future. Over time these solutions will lower criminality, increase education, and likely increase earning potential.

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Crime Prevention

Gender-Based Violence Incites Overall Violence

Challenges: Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, often occurring as acts that result in the physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering of women or girls. GBV includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether it occurs in public or in private life. A 2015 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that women face a “startling” degree of violence in the Northern Triangle, including rape, assault, extortion, and threats by armed criminal groups. In fact, “sixty-four percent of the women described being the targets of direct threats and attacks by members of criminal armed groups as at least one of the primary reasons for their flight” from the region. GBV is pervasive throughout Latin America, and is exceptionally serious in the Northern Triangle countries.

Key Judgments: GBV fuels overall violent crime rate; inability to correctly identify and address the underlying causes of crime; lack of vetting, coordination, and civil society input in NGOs; lack of educational opportunities and weakened early education system; limited donor coordination and use of a short-term approach to projects

Recommendations: GBV is omnipresent in the Northern Triangle but also localized in specific settings; therefore it is imperative that local governments, NGOs, and community organizations work together to develop and implement long-term, evidence-informed programmatic interventions in communities where GBV is prevalent. A proactive approach to changing law enforcement’s institutionalized view of GBV can facilitate police training to spot and combat GBV. Several possible interventions or programs are outlined below:

- Local governments should support low cost solutions that capitalize on existing institutional and societal frameworks, such as expanding pre-school opportunities and increasing day care vouchers for poor families. “Fatherhood initiatives” that encourage paternal participation in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and childcare duties should be piloted and evaluated for effectiveness at reducing domestic violence. If a significant difference is made, they should be replicated and expanded.
- Large-scale domestic violence public awareness campaigns should be developed to prevent further GBV. These campaigns could be based on U.S. television and radio programs in which celebrities and athletes deliver anti-GBV messages. The popular *No More/No Más* campaign has already been replicated in Spanish to reach Latinas in the U.S., and should be expanded to the Northern Triangle as soon as possible. Popular telenovela and athletic stars should be approached as spokespersons for these campaigns.
- Communities should strengthen existing family planning efforts because they elevate the well-being and autonomy of women in society. There are NGOs that already collaborate with USAID in other countries and that may be willing to help introduce, develop, and facilitate these programs in the Northern Triangle. The NGOs should prioritize expanding family planning programs and conducting rigorous evaluations to test their effectiveness.

- The most important measure that governments can take in preventing future GBV is to reduce impunity and prosecute current crimes against women to the full extent of the law. This will reduce gang violence towards women and the LGBT community, as gang members currently see GBV as an easy means of intimidation with few, if any, consequences. As long as law enforcement officers turn their heads, GBV will have a medium to flourish. Women who report domestic violence should be protected by law enforcement and their cases should be taken seriously by the judiciary.

Comments: Global factors such as drug and human trafficking contribute to GBV, but combating these crimes is beyond the scope of this paper. Discrepancies between media/local NGO reports and USAID's reporting numbers on GBV also raise serious concerns. Most sources say that there is very little follow-through from the judicial system, whereas USAID's website reports that in a region of El Salvador where they have a presence, 97 out of 99 domestic violence cases were reported, went to court, and resulted in convictions. However, even a modest decrease in GBV would be a step in the right direction.

Outcomes: If these recommendations are implemented successfully, public awareness of GBV will increase, putting pressure on the judicial system to take domestic violence cases more seriously, and resulting in increased prosecution of these crimes. Lack of impunity will serve as a deterrent for gangs and disgruntled partners. A decrease in gender inequality is also highly desired. The IDB has invested in similar programs, such as the Peace in Machay program in Peru and Ciudad de las Mujeres in Mexico. Money invested in similar GBV prevention programs in the Northern Triangle will have a positive impact on local communities and a ripple effect on society. Conversely, the programs outlined above may have little to no effect on crime prevention measures. Should this be the case, the campaigns would be a failure.

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Crime Prevention

Improving the Effectiveness and Sustainability of Violence Prevention Programs

Challenges: Traditional strategies for aid allocation have failed to strengthen the institutional capacity of national institutions in the Northern Triangle, diminishing their ability to promote sustainable and effective violence prevention programs.

Key Judgment: quick-fixes in projects and programs; weak institutional capacity; strategic frameworks and policies; over-reliance on third party actors; donor coordination; ownership, alignment, and harmonization of aid

Recommendations:

- Develop a donor coordination committee consisting of representatives from Northern Triangle countries and the donor community. This committee would enhance Northern Triangle countries' ownership over violence prevention programs, facilitate the alignment and harmonization of aid, and promote the following objectives:
 - *Increased government participation in key project decisions:* to ensure that all initiatives contribute to and improve the capacities of their institutions, while addressing the most pressing challenges that they currently face.
 - *Earmarked budget support from donors to national and local governments:* this financial instrument would allow international partners to continue influencing the allocation of their contributions, but, at the same time, it would guarantee the strengthening of national institutions and their role in the sustainability of violence prevention initiatives.
 - *Focus on state rather than national government plans and strategies:* this continues to be an important issue for the region, as all actions should be geared towards securing long-lasting impact and continuity across governments within each Northern Triangle country.
 - *Mutual accountability:* for both donors and recipient governments to be responsible for adequate management of resources with a results-oriented approach.
 - *South-South cooperation:* identifying successful approaches to violence prevention within the Northern Triangle that may be suitable to be replicated in other countries.
 - *Diversification of funding sources:* to minimize the effect of a potential reduction in aid from the U.S. government, these countries should look for other partners who can provide both technical and financial cooperation.
 - *Decentralization:* allowing local governments to play a more active role in project development and implementation, considering their capacity to influence change at the territorial level.
- Provide additional support for Northern Triangle countries to promote fiscal policy reform in order to reduce aid dependency. International organizations will play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue between relevant actors and guaranteeing that reforms take into account the different perspectives of these three countries.

Comments:

- The committee proposed in this paper requires leadership from an external actor with the necessary political leverage to influence donor relations, balance government interests, and guarantee the involvement of key actors. Additionally, it is important to ensure that decisions made at the highest political levels translate into specific actions at the operational level within each country.
- An initiative based on the “Group of Friends of the Central American Security Strategy” could be developed, ensuring that Northern Triangle governments play a leading role in reaching out to traditional and non-traditional partners to gain political support, technical expertise, and resources to finance programs.

Outcomes: In the short-term, the successful implementation of this proposal will allow Northern Triangle governments to guarantee that all violence prevention projects and programs align with their needs and priorities, while gradually improving the capacities of national and local institutions. This committee will also allow the international donor community to contribute to the development of necessary policy frameworks at the national level, which will improve effectiveness and, eventually, reduce the Northern Triangle’s dependency on aid for program implementation.

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Crime Prevention

Addressing True Drivers to Properly Implement Justice Reform

Challenges: Decades of various anti-crime policies and criminal justice reform attempts by Northern Triangle countries have not successfully reduced crime in the region; unfortunately, crime has risen recently in spite of these efforts.

Key Judgments: incorrectly addressing drivers of crime; fragile judiciary; overemphasis on strong-armed law enforcement; prison system backlogged with pretrial detainees; impunity; misuse of resources; corrupt institutions

Recommendations:

- Northern Triangle governments should act in concert with NGOs and international organizations to expand efforts to protect the rights of the accused and incarcerated.
 - Northern Triangle governments should partner with the United Nations to create the Comisión Internacional por los Derechos de los Encarcelados y Acusados (CIDEA), adhering strictly to the United Nations Standards and Norms.
 - Included in this are measures to improve quality of prison guards and zero tolerance policies for human rights violations.
 - Using reforms implemented in the Dominican Republic as a model, Begin to implement strong education-focused reforms aimed at reducing recidivism in smaller prisons. Suggested programs include:
 - High school and college degree programs as part of early release incentives
 - Literacy requirements as conditions for early release
 - Job training and skill-building activities
 - Implement limits on the types of offenses requiring pre-trial detention, as well as on the duration of this detention. These reforms will reduce the number of prisoners held at prisons, and lower the risks of violence, disease, and socio-economic tension within these institutions.
 - To relieve prison overcrowding, more community service diversionary sentences should be created.
 - Smaller detention centers should be built to separate suspects based on the severity of their offenses, reducing the risk of cohabitation between violent and nonviolent offenders.
- Expand Community-Based Violence Prevention programs to strengthen resilience, and identify and address the various environmental risk factors that lead to crime.
 - USAID's "Place Based" program found that community-level prevention methods resulted in lower perceptions and expectations of crime, in contrast to *mano dura* programs used by national governments.
 - Work with community organizations and leaders to develop locally based and anonymous mechanisms to report corruption.
- Implement programs that borrow components from Guatemala's CICIG and Honduras' MACCIH throughout Northern Triangle countries. These initiatives can

begin to strengthen the capacity of judicial powers to adequately promote better and more comprehensive institution building.

- o Each country should promote legislation that creates a homegrown parallel judicial body that will empower Northern Triangle governments to adequately and forcefully investigate high-profile corruption cases.
 - In the case of Guatemala, increase funding for CICIG and expand its mandate.
 - In the case of Honduras, increase the power of MACCIH's mandate.
- o Broadening the mandates for these bodies will expand their reach beyond a solely case-oriented focus and allow them to tackle systemic reformation of judicial institutions, beginning with degrading corruption.
 - System-oriented commissions, such as the MACCIH in Honduras, are structured to prevent future corruption cases from occurring, rather than solely addressing those in existence.

Comments: Additional funding for various programs could be provided by seized assets from narcotics, bribery, and criminal cases. The Office of Seized Asset Management (OABI) in Honduras has proven an effective mechanism in asset forfeiture and its mission can be exported to the other Northern Triangle countries, recycling around \$9 million a year in assets back into the government.

Outcomes: These reforms, if successfully implemented, could drastically decrease the number of pretrial detainees, increase education and job-preparedness among incarcerated individuals, and reduce corruption within Northern Triangle government institutions. Even if these recommendations are met with limited success, these countries would not be any worse off than they are now, aside from the loss of time and resources funneled into program implementation. It should be noted that region-wide success will not occur overnight and thus patience is necessary, as growing pains are to be expected. Should these reforms succeed, however, Northern Triangle countries will reap economic, security, and social benefits that far outweigh the initial costs, leaving the region much more stable and prosperous.

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Deportee Sub-Team

Protecting Northern Triangle Countries from Criminal Deportees

Challenge: In 2014, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) made it a priority to deport undocumented criminals who pose a serious threat to public safety or national security. That year, 167,740 undocumented immigrants were removed for criminal violations – 36% of which were classified as felonies. Criminal felons deported back to Northern Triangle countries pose a significant threat to security in the region.

Key Judgments: convicted criminal felons; identification; unique threat to regional security; lack of criminal record sharing; information sharing; security gaps; biometric technology; tracking system

Recommendations:

- Before deportation from the U.S., convicted criminal felons should be identified, and their country of origin notified.
 - Authorities from the state where incarceration occurred would be responsible for sharing information on convicted criminal felons with DHS.
 - The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency within DHS, would compile the criminal records of all deportees and notify the receiving country of any convicted criminal felons scheduled to arrive.
- The U.S., Mexico, and Northern Triangle countries should improve criminal record sharing in order to ensure that Northern Triangle countries know when a convicted felon is returning to the region.
 - An increase in information sharing between law enforcement agencies and across borders is necessary to improve security in the Northern Triangle.
 - DHS should provide training and technical assistance to Northern Triangle countries in order to enhance their border screening procedures.
 - The U.S. Department of Justice should provide training and technical assistance to Northern Triangle countries to integrate and improve the Interpol infrastructure and national law enforcement frameworks.
- DHS should implement a plan to increase the availability of biometric technologies for use by law enforcement and government agencies within the Northern Triangle.
 - This would deter deportees from attempting to falsify their identity.
 - Such a plan would facilitate tracking the movements of convicted felon deportees.
 - DHS would provide training on the best and most efficient use of Interpol technology on hand in order to track convicted criminal felons.
 - The use of cloud technology should be considered to reduce the cost burden of procuring new equipment.
 - Biometric technologies use unique physical characteristics such as photos, iris scans, and two index fingerprints to prevent illegal entry. They represent a potential solution to close the security gaps that currently exist in Northern Triangle immigration and border management systems.
 - This plan could ultimately drive job creation, as administrative personnel will be needed to manage the system.

Comments: The potential for deported convicted felons to continue committing crimes in the Northern Triangle could be mitigated by enhanced information sharing, increased border controls, and increases in the use of biometric tools by Northern Triangle law enforcement. The above recommendations would enable law enforcement to be aware of convicted felons returning to their area of responsibility, and could reduce the security threat posed by these individuals.

Outcome: If these issues are properly addressed, it would improve the security situation within the Northern Triangle and consequently create more secure communities, improving the economic landscape and preventing instances of migration.

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Deportee Sub-Team

Integrating Returning Nationals into the Economy

Challenges: Since 2014, 679,175 individuals from the Northern Triangle were involuntarily removed from the U.S. and Mexico and returned to their countries of origin. Upon their return, these individuals often experience substantial difficulties reintegrating into local and regional economies. These hardships are due to shortcomings in current reintegration programs and systemic economic issues, most notably the lack of job opportunities at competitive wages. Successful reintegration is further hindered by the fact that approximately one-third of deported individuals are not reunited with their belongings that were confiscated in the U.S.

Key Judgments: dominance of low value-added sectors; insufficient coordination between job placement services and private industry; lower-skilled human capital base fails to attract knowledge-intensive industries; high cost of electricity

Recommendations:

- Establish more effective coordination between deportee reintegration services and private industry by creating partnerships that allow companies to coordinate their labor force needs with reintegration services that offer job placement and vocational training.
 - These partnerships would consist of each Northern Triangle country's government-operated reintegration programs, pre-existing vocational training agencies, and private companies.
 - They would be modeled on the Guatemalan Bienvenido a Casa program's partnership with the Center for Corporate Social Responsibility in Guatemala (Centro para la Acción de la Responsabilidad Social Empresarial en Guatemala, CENTRARSE), but would include the participation of vocational training agencies.
 - In Honduras and El Salvador, such partnerships would require the creation of an organization similar to CENTRARSE that has extensive membership and emphasizes corporate social responsibility. Alternatively, to avoid creating a new organization, the participation of chambers of commerce could be secured.
- Facilitate the return of deportees' belongings that were confiscated in the U.S. by:
 - Expanding government-run reception services' capacity to include resources for obtaining confiscated possessions.
 - Creating partnerships between government-run reception services in the Northern Triangle and current U.S.-based NGOs that specialize in returning confiscated belongings to deportees.
 - Standardizing procedures for confiscated belongings in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Justice, and increasing cooperation regarding this issue between these two agencies.
- Encourage foreign investment in high value-added industries that create more jobs at higher wages.
 - Northern Triangle governments should create tax incentives for high-technology manufacturing and businesses specializing in knowledge-intensive service exports such as finance, communications, and research and development.

Comments: The economic reintegration of returning nationals is contingent on a two-pronged approach that focuses on both short- and long-term solutions. Short-term solutions include partnerships between reintegration programs and private companies, as well as efforts to reunite deportees with their belongings. However, these proposals are limited by deeper economic constraints that require long-term solutions, such as the lack of high-wage jobs. Job creation can only occur if development is encouraged in high value-added industries, such as high-technology manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services. Investment in these industries is, in turn, dependent on an educated human capital base and highly-developed infrastructure with affordable access to energy.

Outcomes: Enacting these recommendations will increase the economic reintegration of returning nationals by:

- Connecting them immediately upon their return with companies that have job openings and organizations that provide vocational training required for such jobs, if necessary.
- More easily reuniting them with their confiscated belongings, which are often necessary to obtain a job and include items such as identification documents, cell phones, or cash.
- Promoting industries that will provide increased job opportunities at competitive wages over the long-term. These industries will have the capacity to employ large numbers of returning nationals in the future.

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Deportee Sub-Team

Protections for Women and Unaccompanied Minor Deportees

Challenges: Women and unaccompanied minors deported back to Northern Triangle countries face a unique set of struggles upon re-entry to their countries of origin. Many migrated due to lack of educational and economic opportunity, as well as domestic violence, gang violence, or fear of sexual violence. Oftentimes, however, these vulnerable groups face additional trauma during their migration. For example, Amnesty International reports that approximately 60% of women who cross into the United States through Mexico are raped on their journey, and thousands of women and children in tenuous positions are exploited by human trafficking networks every year.

Key Judgments: domestic violence; gender inequality; need for better deportee in-processing system for women and unaccompanied minors; human trafficking threatens women and unaccompanied minors; corruption facilitates human trafficking

Recommendations:

Deportee In-Processing

- Develop specialized in-processing procedures to determine whether additional protections are needed for women and unaccompanied minors returning to their country of origin.
 - Ensure that female immigration officials are present to handle the in-processing of women and unaccompanied minors. Train these officials to recognize signs of abuse and human trafficking, so they can discreetly refer deportees for secondary processing if abuse is suspected.
 - Immigration officials should verify that unaccompanied minors are being released to family members, and schedule in-home follow-up visits by social workers. Those who cannot return to family should be taken to shelters.

Long-Term Reintegration Support

Women

- Expand provision of mental health resources for women who have been victims of sexual assault/trafficking during their migration. To defray the cost of such services, the state should consider leveraging assistance from NGOs and religious organizations.
- Develop a Peer Support Provider training program and give women deportees the option to enroll in and complete the program after in-processing. This program would provide participants with trauma management skills, and would serve two purposes – women who complete the training would receive a small monthly stipend to set up a Peer Support Group in their hometown, and the group would expand the state's ability to provide mental health services in geographically dispersed areas.
- Establish a scholarship fund for women deportees interested in beginning a career in social work to give them the means to support themselves while completing requisite training and certification processes. This would enable these women to

leverage their experiences as migrants to help other women and children deportees during the reintegration process. Partnerships with prominent businesses may be a way for such a scholarship fund to be financed.

Unaccompanied Minors

- Establish and enforce standards of care (physical and mental health services, education, safety, etc.) for shelters housing children.
- Expand the network of shelters for unaccompanied minors. This can be done by the state directly, or through partnerships with religious organizations and NGOs. All shelters should be regularly inspected to ensure compliance with standards of care..
- Provide financial resources to bolster/expand existing foster care systems or pilot programs, such as the 2013 USAID-backed Buckner International project in Guatemala.

Anti-Human Trafficking Measures

- Facilitate the reporting and prosecution of human traffickers, with a particular focus on the corrupt immigration officials assisting them. Broadcast the reporting process through a public media campaign so the general population is familiar with it.
- Establish a rating system (similar to that of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program) to evaluate private companies on their level of compliance with standards designed to reduce human trafficking. The initial focus of this program should be on companies that cater to the tourist industry in popular resort/travel destinations.

Comments: Lack of public funding for the expansion of social services puts serious limitations on the scope of the suggested programs. For this reason, Northern Triangle countries should look to leverage loans and grants from multilateral institutions, as well as the support of NGOs and religious organizations. Additionally, corruption among immigration officials and the backlog of court cases poses an obstacle to the reduction of human trafficking.

Outcomes: The recommended initiatives will provide a social safety net for women and unaccompanied minors, groups that are particularly vulnerable upon return to Northern Triangle countries. The recommendations aimed at reducing the prevalence of human trafficking may also have the positive spillover effect of reducing corruption overall – an overarching issue in the region. Failure to implement these programs will ensure that the most vulnerable members of society continue to suffer from lack of basic security, with catastrophic implications for both human capital potential and the economic development of the region.

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ABOUT OUR TEAM



**CENTRAL AMERICA
SECURITY CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Necessary Conditions Sub-Team

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Meredith Robinson is a Masters of International Affairs Candidate at American University focusing on Global Governance Politics and Security. Before graduate school, she served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kenya where she taught 180 students at a rural high school and worked with community partners on grant-funded water and sanitation infrastructure projects. She graduated from Western Washington University with a B.S. in Biology and Anthropology and minors in Chemistry and Spanish. Languages: English, Spanish, and Swahili.

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