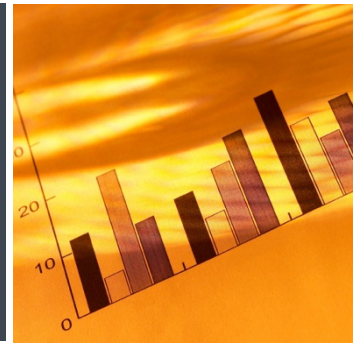


Deportation, Circular Migration and Organized Crime: Honduras



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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Deportees from Canada face a variety of economic and security challenges upon their return to Honduras, one of the five most violent countries in the world.

BACKGROUND

Canadian immigration policy requires that non-citizens who have committed serious crimes be removed from Canada and returned to their country of origin. In other countries, similar patterns of circular migration—immigration followed by deportation—have facilitated the development of transnational organized crime links. Most notably, deportation and circular migration played a central role in the development of the *maras* in Central America, whose origins as Los Angeles street gangs facilitated their re-entry into the drug-trafficking market in the United States (U.S.). The report examines the impacts of forced criminal deportation on crime and community security in Canada and in the case study country, Honduras.

Nearly half of Hondurans live in extreme deprivation, defined as lacking the most basic means to feed themselves (Casas-Zamora, 2015:2). Unsurprisingly, deportees from Canada face a variety of economic and security challenges upon their return to Honduras. As a group, criminal deportees are particularly stigmatized and find it extraordinarily challenging to secure adequate housing, healthcare, education and livelihoods.

Honduras hosts two distinct forms of transnational criminality that could affect public security in Canada: the youth gangs known as the *maras*, and the more sophisticated transnational organized crime groups that oversee the hemisphere's drug trade (while also participating in other forms of transnational organized crime, including human smuggling and arms trafficking).

The report considers a number of interconnected sets of issues concerning the relationship between deportation, circular migration and organized crime in

Canada and Honduras, including the prospective threats these deportees may pose to Canada and the impact of deportations on development in Honduras which has been identified as a priority aid recipient for Canada. The report concludes with a set of potential policy options to help mitigate the negative impacts of criminal deportation on public safety in Canada and Honduras.

METHOD

The foundational basis for the report's findings was an exhaustive review of the existing literature on transnational organized crime in Canada and Honduras, as well as the challenges facing deportees and the availability of reintegration programs in Honduras. This literature review was augmented by data provided by the Canada Border Services Agency on the scale of deportation from Canada to Honduras, the reasons for removal and the number of deportations involving organized crime. The authors also conducted 14 interviews with researchers, academics, reintegration program staff, policymakers and law enforcement officials in Canada and Honduras.

FINDINGS

There is to date no evidence of a direct connection between Honduran deportees from Canada and gang activity in Canada. Such ties remain possible, in the present and in the future, because the (*Mara Salvatrucha*) MS-13 and the Barrio 18 gangs are both known to operate in Canada, but are highly improbable given the diffuse and localized structure of the *maras*.

Similarly, there is no evidence of direct ties to Canada from Honduran organized crime groups. The majority of cocaine entering Canada crosses the U.S. border under the control of Mexican, Colombian, and Dominican organizations. Honduran criminal groups



operate much further down the supply chain. As one expert interviewed for this report noted, “there are many degrees of separation between people smuggling drugs into Canada and those transshipping it through Honduras. The relationship is really indirect.”

In Honduras, however, the impact of deportation is more clearly evident, as deportations continue to feed Central America’s gang problem. Garzón (2013:5) noted that, “evidence shows that criminals returning from the U.S. to Mexico and countries in Central America have been a major catalyst for violence and crime in the region.” Although there are some (grossly insufficient and under-resourced) reintegration programs for returned migrants deported for violation of visa conditions and the like, there are no programs tailored to criminal deportees. It is important to acknowledge, however, that deportations from Canada in recent years have never constituted more than 0.5 percent of those from the U.S. and Mexico combined. Thus, the impact of deportation from Canada on organized crime in Canada and Honduras should not be overstated.

Nevertheless, as a country of focus for the Government of Canada’s international development efforts, the state of public security in Honduras is cause for serious concern. Fuelled by its crisis of gang violence and prominent position in the hemispheric drug trade, Honduras has suffered some of the highest murder rates “on record in modern times,” reaching a staggering 92 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011 (UNODC, 2012:15). The escalation of violence and criminality afflicting Honduras has readily overwhelmed its already fragile state institutions, which have proved unable—and in many cases unwilling—to ensure the public safety of citizens (including deportees) and address the country’s role in transnational organized crime (see Meyer, 2015).

While the Honduran security and justice sectors are overwhelmed by the challenge of violent crime, significantly undermanned and under-resourced, and plagued by corruption and dysfunction, reforms are underway, including the September 2015 approval of an international Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH).

IMPLICATIONS

The report suggests several potential policy options for the Canadian government to consider, including:

- supporting reintegration programs in Honduras;
- expanding information sharing with Honduran authorities;
- reviewing deportation to Honduras; and
- continuing to support security sector reforms.

SOURCE

Burt, Geoff, Michael Lawrence, Mark Sedra, James Bosworth, Philippe Couton, Robert Muggah and Hannah Stone. (2016). “Deportation, Circular Migration and Organized Crime: Honduras Case Study.” Public Safety Canada.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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Meyer, Peter J. “Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations.” Congressional Research Service, May 20, 2015.

UNODC. *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment*, 2012.

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