



JESUITS



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**Myth 1:** President Obama has been lax on Border Security and enforcement of immigration laws, which is driving increases in Central American youth and families migration to the United States

**Fact: Border enforcement has never been tougher or more robustly funded.**

- Prosecutions for “illegal entry” have risen by 130% since 2007.
- The administration is spending \$18 billion on border enforcement.
- There are now more than 21,000 Border Patrol agents. The number of Border Patrol agents has doubled since 2005 and quintupled since 1993.
- We now have drones and Blackhawk helicopters on the border, 700 miles of fencing and this administration has deported approximately 400,000 people a year.

**Fact: Crime and violence is driving increased migration from Central America.**

- Migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence increases and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold.
- Honduras has the highest homicide rate in world. From 2005 to 2012, murders of women and girls increased 346%. Murders of men and boys increased by 292% over the same time period.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 2006, the total number of murders in Honduras has more than doubled, rising from 3,118 to 7,172 in 2012. Over that same period the number of Hondurans migrating illegally to the U.S. has increased by 73%.
- Child advocates, especially from Honduras and El Salvador, report accounts of children being forcibly recruited to participate in gang activities.
- Governments in the region have been unable to prevent violence and ensure citizen safety. Beginning in 2003, governments in Central America implemented “iron fist” (*mano dura*) policing strategies; but homicide rates rose as those policies were implemented. Many young people in poor neighborhoods where gangs are active have no other option but to flee home.
- Organized criminal networks have become more involved in the drug trade, and in some cases have penetrated the political sector. Conflicts between trafficking groups, and corruption that

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<sup>1</sup> This statistic is from the Observatory of Citizen Security’s [2012 report](#) on violence against women in Central America. It bears mentioning that the murder rate according to uncorroborated government statistic dropped in 2013, so a recent analysis found the murder rate for women and girls rose [263% between 2005 and 2013](#). This perceived drop in the murder rate however should be analyzed in light of the dramatic increase [in forced disappearances](#) of women and girls in Honduras in 2013.

weakens the ability of the police and other officials to respond to crime, have led to violence along smuggling routes.

**Fact: Lack of opportunity leads many young people to migrate.**

- The decision to leave your home and community involves many factors. Extreme criminality may be driving the recent surge of youth migration, but the high levels violence and insecurity stem from and are compounded by deeply entrenched poverty. Improving policing can stem violence, but creating opportunity for youth employment is essential to sustaining lower levels of violence.
- According to a 2012 World Bank study younger workers confront serious barriers to legal employment. The study found that 30% of urban youth in Central America are neither working nor in school. Allocating a fraction of border security funds to sustainable economic and human development for Central America would be a wise investment.

**Myth 2:** The Obama administration's policy of "paroling" unaccompanied children apprehended by Border Patrol to family members has led parents to traffic their children to the United States.

**Fact:** The number of unaccompanied children crossing the border has doubled every year since 2011, largely due to the extreme levels of violence facing young people who live in impoverished communities in Central America.

- Children and youth in Central America are particularly vulnerable to violence both by gangs attempting to forcibly recruit children as young as five into their ranks, and from vigilante death squads who enter neighborhoods known for gang activity and indiscriminately execute young people.

**Fact:** Increases in youth migration to the United States from Honduras is driven by a high level of victimization.

- Honduran boys and men ages 15 to 30 have a 1 in 300 chance of being murdered.
- Each month for the last 3 years about 70 children and youth in Honduras have been murdered. From January to March of this year, the number of murders of children and youth 23 and under rose to 90 a month on average.
- The tortured bodies of children ranging in ages between 2 and 13 have appeared in certain gang controlled neighborhoods in the cities of San Pedro Sula and Limon in Honduras, apparently victims of forced recruitment campaigns.
- The children arriving on our border suffer serious hardship during extremely dangerous journeys to escape targeted violence from which regional governments have failed to protect them.

**Myth 3:** The increase in asylum applications from Central Americans is a sign of fraud in the asylum system. Illegal migrants are taking advantage of American generosity to get into the U.S.

**Fact:** People fleeing the violence in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are claiming asylum in many other countries.

- Asylum claims are increasing all over the region, indicating that the cause of the increase is not unique to the U.S.
- Since 2009, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize jointly documented a 712% increase in the number of asylum applications from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

**Fact: The increase in asylum claims is being driven by an increase in violence, criminality, impunity and corruption in the precarious states of the Northern Triangle.**

- We can't ask countries like Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon to keep their borders open in the face of surging numbers of people seeking protection from violence in Syria if we're unwilling to objectively screen the asylum claims of desperate people who arrive at our own border. As a global humanitarian leader, the U.S. has an obligation to objectively assess applications for refugee status. The current increase in asylum claims may be an indication of an increase in people seeking protection from violence, not of people trying to "game" the system.

(This document was updated on June 17, 2014, to reflect 2013 numbers of asylum applications in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize. The previously cited statistic was from UNHCR's "Children on the Run Report," published in 2013, measuring the percentage increase in asylum claims from base year 2009 to 2012. UNHCR has once again documented another collective increase in asylum claims from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala in 2013, a 712 percent increase in asylum claims filed in Central American states from nationals of the Northern Triangle when compared to claims filed in

2009. The current version also corrects a previous error regarding the percent increase in the number of Hondurans migrating illegally to the United States. The post originally referred to a 100 percent increase since 2005; it has been corrected to cite a 73 percent increase since 2006).