

Victims of crime, corruption more likely to emigrate from Central America

by Jim Patterson (<http://news.vanderbilt.edu/author/patterjm/>) | Posted on Thursday, Feb. 27, 2014 — 1:20 PM



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People who have been asked to pay a bribe or been the victim of a crime are more likely to leave their Central America homeland seeking a new life, according to a data collected by Vanderbilt University's [Latin American Public Opinion Project](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>).

Only age and sex mattered more as factors influencing the decision to emigrate. Young men are by far the most likely to move to another country.



<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/bio/jonathan-hiskey>

Jonathan Hiskey (Vanderbilt University)

“These findings indicate that in addition to its other tragic consequences, the crime wave currently affecting much of Central America seems also to be contributing to a larger pool of people looking to exit the country,” write Jonathan Hiskey, associate professor of political science at Vanderbilt University; Mary Malone, assistant professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire; and Diana Orcés, a Ph.D. student at Vanderbilt. The trio co-authored *Violence and Migration in Central America* (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO901en.pdf>), an *Insights* report from LAPOP.

Homicide rates in Honduras and El Salvador have skyrocketed since 2000, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The percentages of citizens who wish to leave those countries have grown along with the homicide rates, in El Salvador to 23.6 percent and 11.4 percent in Honduras. Other countries with significant percentages of the public wishing to emigrate include Nicaragua (20.1 percent) and Guatemala (14.4 percent). Homicide rates in Nicaragua and Guatemala have been mostly flat during the 2000s, but instances of crime victimization are high in those nations.

The study also tracked citizens’ “perception of insecurity,” meaning how vulnerable they felt to crime regardless of its actual presence. Surprisingly, not only did it not factor much in anyone’s plans to leave their homeland, but even in high-crime countries the perception seemed to die down after a while even if the crime didn’t.

“Central Americans may have become increasingly desensitized to high levels of crime, or made behavioral adjustments in their daily lives to avoid victimization, and thus are less likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods,” Hiskey, Malone and Orcés write.

Other factors tracked and found less influential in the decision to emigrate include years of education, wealth and the perception of government corruption.

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