

THE REGIONAL MIGRATION STUDY GROUP

MIGRANTS DEPORTED FROM THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO TO THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE

A STATISTICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

By Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas and Victoria Rietig



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September 2015

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Marc R. Rosenblum and Doris Meissner, respectively Deputy Director and Director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), for their thoughtful review and comments on earlier versions of the report. The authors also extend special gratitude to Elsa Augustine who provided substantial data analysis and research assistance. Thanks also go to MPI Director of Communications Michelle Mittelstadt for skillful edits, and to her and MPI's Communications team for invaluable assistance with publication.

This research has been made possible through the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), and the Central America and Mexico Migration Alliance (CAMMINA).

A draft version of this report was presented at the MPI roundtable "Regional Solutions for Unaccompanied Children: Practical Strategies for Governments and Civil Society in North and Central America" held in Washington DC, April 30 and May 1, 2015.

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Cover Design: Burke Speaker, MPI
Typesetting: Liz Heimann, MPI

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Suggested citation: Dominguez Villegas, Rodrigo and Victoria Rietig. 2015. *Migrants Deported from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle: A Statistical and Socioeconomic Profile*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.



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Executive Summary

Together, the United States and Mexico have apprehended almost 1 million people who originated from the Northern Triangle of Central America in the past five years, and have deported more than 800,000 of them. Many of these were children. Between 2010 and 2014, around 130,000 minors were apprehended, and more than 40,000 deported back to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the three countries that constitute the Northern Triangle. While the surge of unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2014 generated intense media interest, little debate has focused on Mexico's increasing enforcement role, the effect of combined U.S. and Mexican enforcement on Central American migration patterns, and the characteristics of the population deported to the Northern Triangle. This report examines trends in apprehensions and deportations of both children and adults in the United States and Mexico, and it provides a demographic, socioeconomic, and criminal profile of child and adult deportees.

Together, the United States and Mexico have apprehended almost 1 million people who originated from the Northern Triangle of Central America in the past five years.

This report finds two striking trends in immigration enforcement in North and Central America since 2010:

1. ***Mexico's increased enforcement capacity and efforts appear to be changing long-lasting trends in apprehensions.*** Up until 2014, apprehensions in the United States grew at a much faster pace than apprehensions in Mexico. U.S. apprehensions of Central Americans at the U.S.-Mexico border quintupled, while Mexican apprehensions grew by just 61 percent in 2010-14. U.S. apprehensions of unaccompanied minors grew even faster, increasing thirteenfold during this period, compared to a fivefold increase in Mexican apprehensions of child migrants. This pattern is on pace for a reversal in 2015, as Mexico's apprehensions were projected to increase by about 70 percent, eclipsing U.S. apprehensions, which have dropped by more than half compared with the previous year. The pattern also holds true for minors. Apprehensions of minors are up significantly in Mexico, while such U.S. apprehensions were projected to fall by half.
2. ***Mexico over the past five years has deported the vast majority of unaccompanied minors arriving back in Central America.*** While the United States and Mexico each deport a large number of Central American adults, Mexico was responsible for four out of five child deportations to the region (79 percent) in 2010-14. Mexico apprehended one-third (32 percent) of the region's child migrants during this period, but deports significantly higher shares of those it apprehends. For every 100 minors apprehended in 2014, Mexico deported 77 of them, compared to three out of 100 for the United States.

These findings have emerged from a backdrop of two broader trends:

- The number of people from the Northern Triangle apprehended by Mexico and the United States increased rapidly in recent years. Total apprehensions from the three Northern Triangle countries more than tripled, from 110,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2010 to more than 340,000 in 2014. Apprehensions of unaccompanied and accompanied minors rose even faster, from almost 9,000 in 2010 to more than 72,000 in 2014—a nearly ninefold increase.
- Deportations from the United States and Mexico also increased, though not as rapidly as apprehensions. In contrast to the threefold increase in apprehensions, total deportations by the



United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle increased by 50 percent, from 142,000 in 2010 to more than 213,000 in 2014. Even though the number of child apprehensions tripled in the years 2010-14, minors made up a relatively small share of deportations to the Northern Triangle—less than 18,000, or around 8 percent of all deportations in 2014.

Taken together, these findings show how Mexico’s growing enforcement efforts increasingly shape Central America’s migration picture, shifting longstanding regional dynamics. Overall migration flows may have lessened, but the main force at play in the region today is the “squeezing of the balloon:” migrants who in the past would have made it to the U.S. border and appeared in U.S. apprehensions data are now intercepted and counted in Mexican statistics. Successful responses to regional migration dynamics must include ways not just to shift the flows, but to deflate the pressures that cause them.

While falling apprehensions at the U.S. border are seen as a success linked to the implementation of Mexico’s 2014 Southern Border Program, both the U.S. and Mexican enforcement systems raise concerns about the protection of vulnerable children. In the United States, the very low number of deportations relative to apprehensions reflects limited adjudication capacity and long backlogs; conversely, the very high ratio of deportations to apprehensions in Mexico indicates limited humanitarian screening and inadequate due-process protections.

Successful responses to regional migration dynamics must include ways not just to shift the flows, but to deflate the pressures that cause them.

The report also provides a sociodemographic profile of recent deportees. Among adults and children over the age of 15, the majority are young males with low educational attainment levels and experience in low-skilled jobs. More than 60 percent of deportees are younger than 29, more than 80 percent are male, and more than 53 percent have an elementary-level education or less (only 2 percent have university-level education). About four out of ten (39 percent) of those deported in 2013 were unemployed for at least 30 days before leaving home, and only 4 percent worked in high-skilled fields. Among youth younger than 18, the majority are boys between 12 and 17 years old. However, the surge in overall child inflows since 2013 has also been marked by a sharp increase in the number and proportion of migrants coming from the most vulnerable groups: children under the age of 12 and girls.

The majority of deportees do not have a criminal background. Contrary to the stereotype of the young Central American gang member, 61 percent of adult deportees and 95 percent of child deportees from the United States did not have a criminal conviction prior to deportation. Among those with a criminal record, 63 percent (25 percent of all deportees) had been convicted of immigration offenses, traffic crimes, or other nonviolent crimes, versus 29 percent (11 percent of all deportees) convicted of violent offenses and 9 percent (3 percent of all deportees) of drug offenses.

The findings in this report raise important policy questions: How can the United States and Mexico design regionwide policies that effectively balance enforcement and protection? What can the countries of origin do to stem the flow of migrants? How should the United States and Mexico support the Northern Triangle in the reintegration of deportees to avert the revolving door of migration, deportation, and remigration?

These questions are not new, but as political leaders in the United States, Mexico, and the region focus on Central America amid plans for major financial investments in the Northern Triangle, there is a new sense of urgency to address regional migration strategically. Answering these questions would require

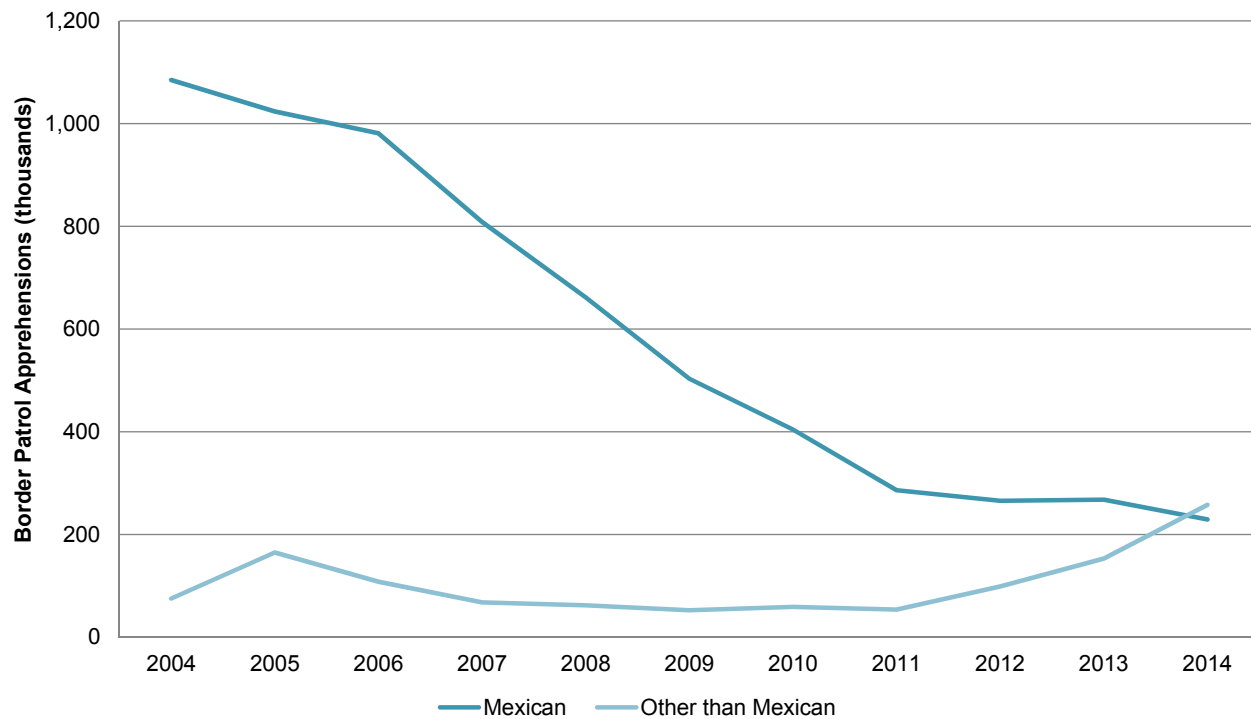


all five countries in the region—the United States, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—to collaborate and design a regional migration policy that strikes a workable balance between enforcement and protection, addresses the root causes of migration, and facilitates successful reintegration of deportees.

I. Introduction

Migration patterns in North and Central America have changed substantially in the past decade. While migration from Mexico has decreased to historic lows, migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) has surged. In fiscal year (FY) 2014, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) apprehended more than 239,000 migrants from the Northern Triangle, a fivefold increase over FY 2010.¹ For the first time, non-Mexicans—overwhelmingly Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Hondurans—accounted for a majority of unauthorized immigrants apprehended by CBP (see Figure 1).² These statistics are particularly striking given that the combined population of these three countries is about one-fourth of Mexico’s (29 million versus 120 million).

Figure 1. U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions of Mexicans and Other than Mexicans, FY 2004-14



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), “Total Illegal Alien Apprehensions by Fiscal Year,” accessed June 17, 2015, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Total%20Apps%2C%20Mexico%2C%20OTM%20FY2000-FY2014_0.pdf.

- 1 Note that all data presented in this report are arranged by U.S. fiscal year, with the exception of the socioeconomic data of adults presented in subsection III.A, “Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Deportees 15 Years and Older.” See U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), “U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions from Mexico and Other Than Mexico (FY 2000-FY 2014),” accessed June 4, 2015, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Total%20Apps%2C%20Mexico%2C%20OTM%20FY2000-FY2014_0.pdf.
- 2 While CBP formally calls them “apprehensions,” the majority of the 52,000 children and 68,000 family units that arrived at the Mexico-U.S. border in fiscal year (FY) 2014 presented themselves to the CBP.



These numbers have been driven, in part, by a dramatic increase in unaccompanied Central American children migrating through Mexico to reach the United States. Child migration from the Northern Triangle to the United States is not new. Between 2009 and 2011, an average of 3,900 children arrived in the United States. However, in 2011, steady increases in child migration from the Northern Triangle began. A combination of push and pull factors, including endemic poverty, unemployment, growing violence and deteriorating citizen security, long-established family networks in the United States without legal pathways to migrate, and special procedures that prevent the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from deporting Central American children immediately, caused a surge in this migration flow.³ The surge of child migration sparked a wave of media coverage beginning in spring 2014, prompting significant attention from politicians, the public, and policymakers to what was described as a “crisis.”

Apprehensions of Central American children at the U.S.-Mexico border reached 52,000 in 2014; that year, 20,000 children arrived in the United States in May and June alone. As apprehensions by Mexico also rose sharply in 2014, Mexico and the United States together apprehended eight times as many children in 2014 as they did in 2010.

Along with growing apprehensions of children and adults, the number of deportations from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle has also increased substantially, from fewer than 145,000 in 2010 to more than 200,000 in 2014. Deportations of unaccompanied children almost tripled during this period, exceeding 9,000 in 2014.

Mexico is deploying an aggressive enforcement strategy that includes increased border surveillance, internal checkpoints, and immigration raids.

This report aims to inform the current policy debate around Central American migration through Mexico to the United States by providing a broad overview of regional immigration enforcement trends. How many Central American adults and children have been apprehended and deported, both within Mexico and in the United States, and how have enforcement patterns changed in recent years? What are the demographic characteristics of deportees? What education and skills do deportees have that might help them find employment after their deportation and anchor them again in their home countries? And how many of them carry a criminal record?

To answer these questions, the report describes recent trends in the apprehension and deportation of citizens from the Northern Triangle, and gives a snapshot of the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of recent deportees. It is divided into three sections: the first presents apprehensions and deportations of adults and minors from the United States and Mexico; the second describes the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of returned migrants; and the final section provides information on the criminal background of adults and children deported from the United States to the Northern Triangle.

II. Apprehensions and Deportations to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador

Both Mexico and the United States have stepped up their enforcement efforts in response to the recent

³ Marc R. Rosenblum, *Unaccompanied Child Migration to the United States: The Tension between Protection and Prevention* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/unaccompanied-child-migration-united-states-tension-between-protection-and-prevention.

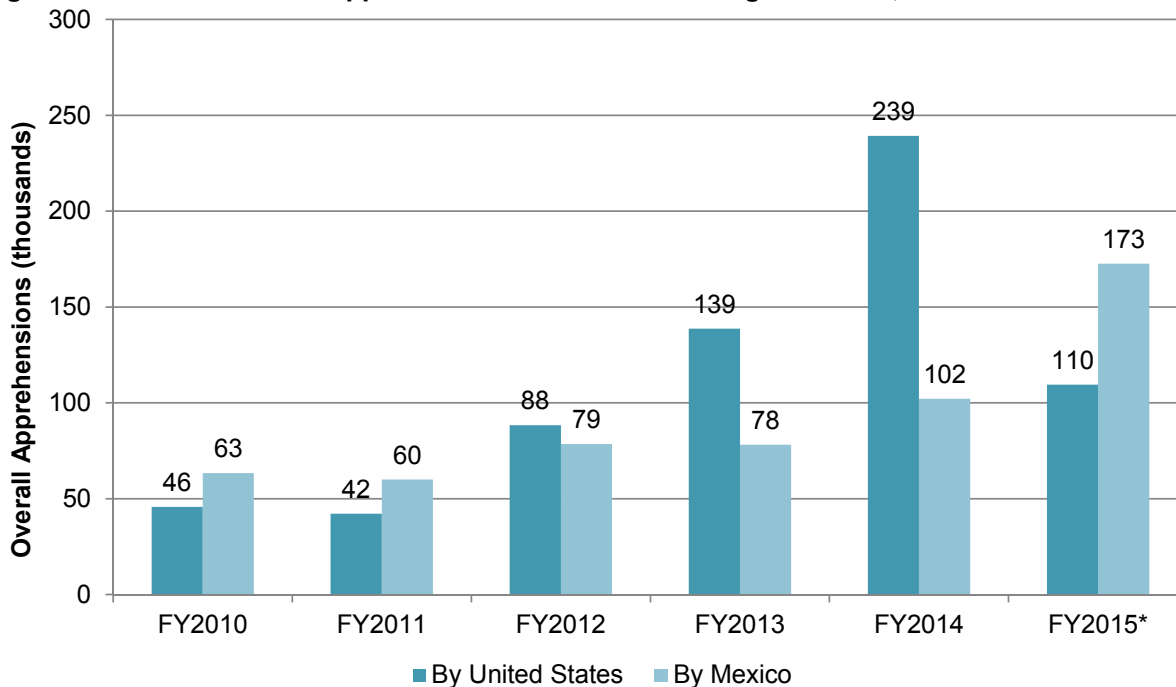


increase in Central American migration. The Obama administration has continued and deepened a trend of tougher border enforcement that began during the 1990s.⁴ Mexico is deploying an aggressive enforcement strategy that includes increased border surveillance, internal checkpoints, and immigration raids in places known to be frequented by Central American migrants, such as bus stations, hotels, and restaurants.⁵ These efforts have led to sustained increases in the number of Central American children and adults apprehended and deported in the past five years.

A. Overall Apprehensions and Deportations

Apprehensions of Central Americans from the Northern Triangle in the United States and Mexico more than tripled, from around 100,000 in 2010 to more than 340,000 in 2014. As Figure 2 illustrates, apprehensions in the United States increased fivefold in these years. Apprehensions in Mexico grew at a much slower rate over the same period, increasing by 62 percent. Thus, while Mexico apprehended slightly more Central Americans than did the United States in 2010 and 2011, by 2014 it apprehended less than half the U.S. number.

Figure 2. U.S. and Mexican Apprehensions of Northern Triangle Citizens, FY 2010-15



Notes: Mexico's deportation data are reported by calendar year but have been rearranged to represent the U.S. fiscal year (FY). FY 2015 data represent a Migration Policy Institute (MPI) projection based on the average proportion of annual apprehensions observed during the first seven months of the fiscal year in the United States (from October to April), and the first six months of the fiscal year in Mexico (from October to March) in FY 2010-14. From FY 2010 to FY 2014, the first seven months accounted, on average, for 59 percent of total apprehensions by CBP in the United States. From FY 2010 to FY 2014, the first six months accounted, on average, for 42 percent of apprehensions from the Northern Triangle in Mexico. *Sources:* MPI calculations of U.S. data for FY 2015 from CBP, "Total Illegal Alien Apprehensions by Month—FY2010-14," accessed June 4, 2015, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Total%20Monthly%20Apps%20by%20Sector%20and%20Area.%20FY2000-FY2014_0.pdf. For FY 2010-14 and FY 2015, unpublished data from CBP, "U.S. Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions by Citizenship FY 2004-FY 2015TD through April;" MPI calculations of data for FY 2015 and FY 2010-14 for Mexico from Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," arranged by FY 2009-15, accessed May 28, 2015.

- ⁴ Marc R. Rosenblum and Kristen McCabe, *Deportation and Discretion: Reviewing the Record and Options for Change* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), 9, 26, www.migrationpolicy.org/research/deportation-and-discretion-reviewing-record-and-options-change.
- ⁵ Victoria Rietig and Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas, "Changing Landscape Prompts Mexico's Emergence as a Migration Manager," *Migration Information Source*, December 10, 2014, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/top-10-2014-issue-8-changing-landscape-prompts-mexicos-emergence-migration-manager.



As Figure 2 also illustrates, however, trends in apprehensions appear to be shifting in important ways in 2015. Apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border are on pace to drop by half, while Mexican apprehensions are projected to grow by 70 percent—and, by the end of 2015, likely to substantially exceed those in the United States.

Figure 3 provides a more detailed view of the changes in apprehensions in Mexico and the United States from 2013 to 2015. Disaggregating apprehensions by country of origin, the figure shows that apprehensions of Guatemalans in Mexico are projected to grow the fastest, doubling between 2014 and 2015, while apprehensions of Salvadorans and Hondurans are projected to increase by just 65 percent and 39 percent, respectively. This pattern is mirrored in the United States: Guatemalan apprehensions are on pace for the smallest decrease in 2015, of 37 percent, compared with projected drops in Honduran and Salvadoran apprehensions of 71 percent and 51 percent, respectively.

*Trends in apprehensions appear to be shifting in
important ways in 2015.*

Rising apprehensions in Mexico alongside falling apprehensions in the United States suggest that a larger share of Central Americans is being apprehended in Mexico, before reaching the U.S. border. This growth in Mexican apprehensions is likely a result of Mexico's implementation, partly under pressure from the United States, of the Southern Border Program (Programa Frontera Sur).

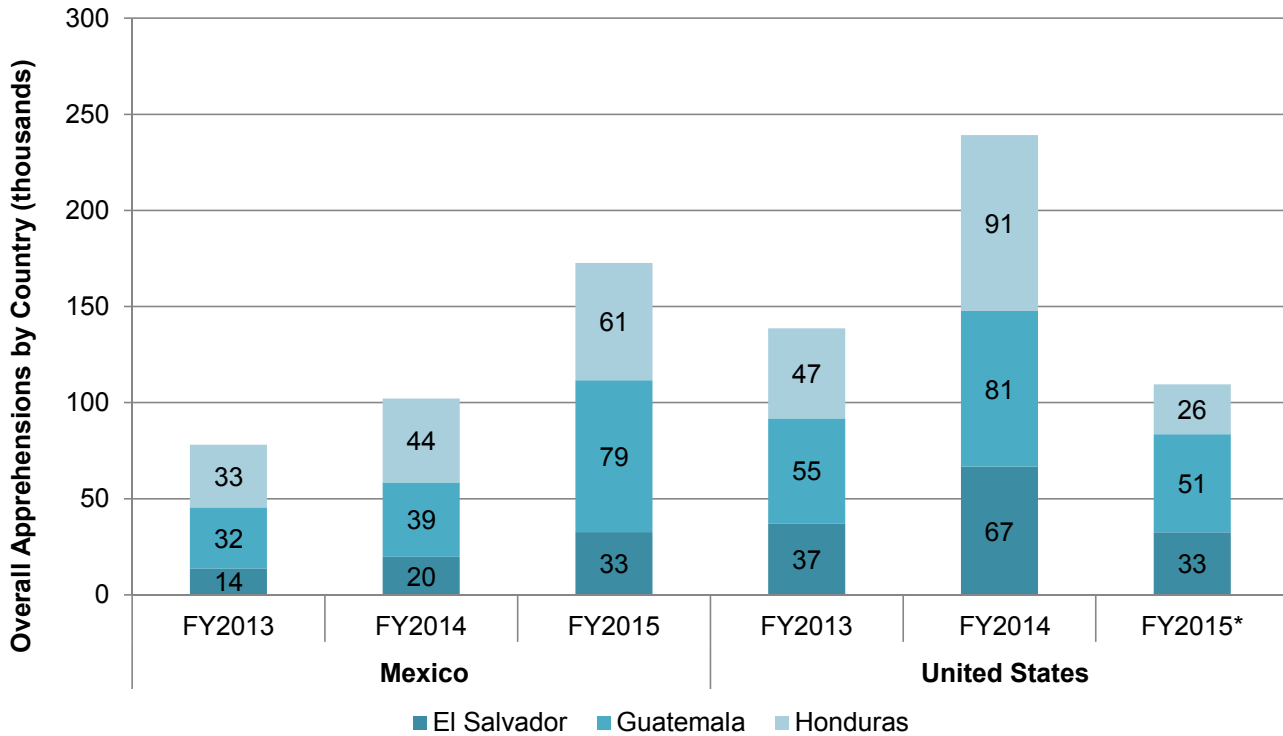
However, the decrease in apprehensions of Hondurans and Salvadorans in the United States is considerably higher than the respective increase in apprehensions in Mexico. For instance, the United States is projected to apprehend 65,000 fewer Hondurans in 2015 than in 2014, yet Mexico is likely going to apprehend only 17,000 more Hondurans. This suggests that overall flows from Honduras are dwindling. The pattern is similar for El Salvador, but different for Guatemala.⁶

These two trends together—a sharp decrease in apprehensions by the United States and a relatively smaller increase in apprehensions in Mexico due to tougher enforcement—suggest that Honduran and Salvadoran migration has slowed down, while Guatemalan migration appears little changed in 2015.

⁶ For details on apprehensions data disaggregated by country of origin, see Appendix.



Figure 3. Apprehensions in the United States and Mexico, by Country of Origin, FY 2013-15



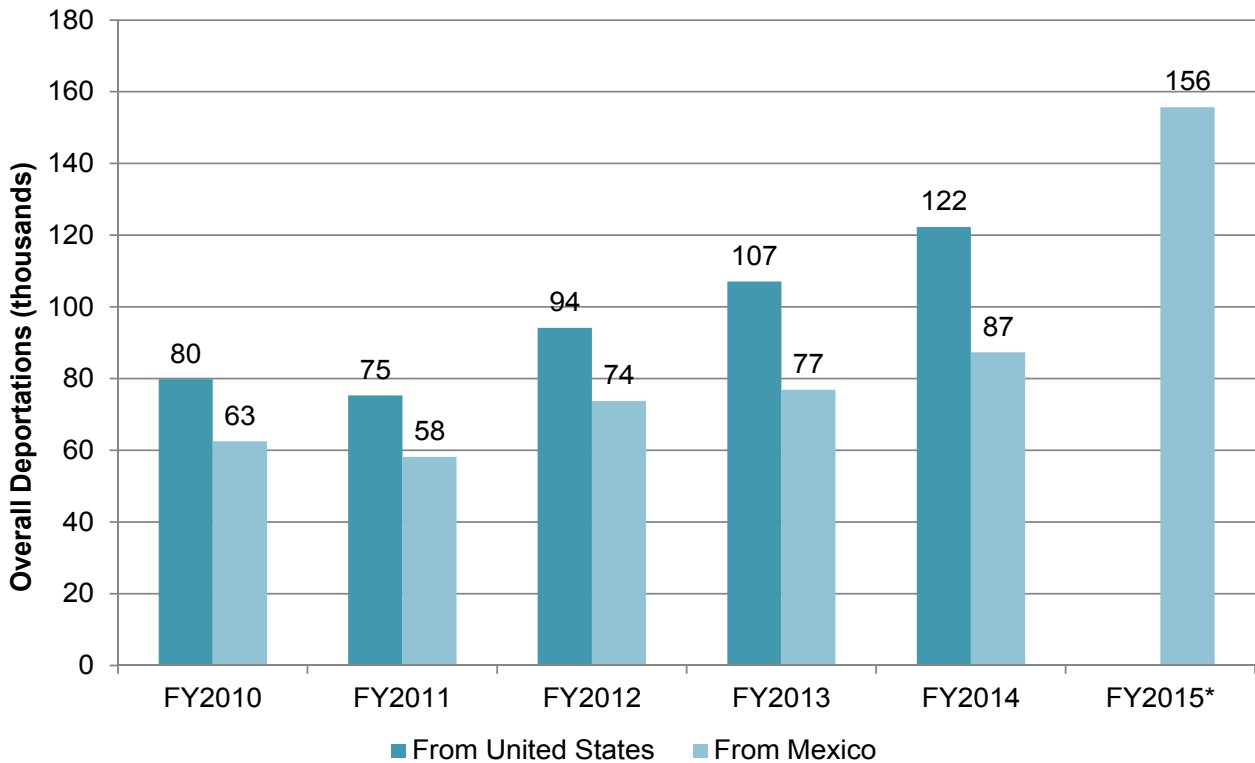
Notes: FY 2015 data represent a MPI projection based on the average proportion of annual apprehensions observed during the first seven months of the fiscal year in the United States (from October to April), and the first six months of the fiscal year in Mexico (from October to March) in FY 2010-14. From FY 2010 to FY 2014, the first seven months accounted, on average, for 59 percent of the total apprehensions by CBP in the United States. From FY 2010 to FY 2014, the first six months accounted, on average, for 42 percent of apprehensions of citizens of the Northern Triangle in Mexico.

Sources: MPI calculations of U.S. data for FY 2015 from CBP, "Total Illegal Alien Apprehensions by Month—FY2010-14." For FY 2010-14 and also FY 2015, unpublished data from CBP, "U.S. Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions by Citizenship FY 2004-FY 2015TD through April." MPI calculations of data for FY 2015 and FY 2010-14 for Mexico from INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," FY 2009-15.

Deportations to the Northern Triangle have grown at a slower pace than apprehensions. While total apprehensions more than tripled in this period, total deportations from the United States and Mexico increased by only 50 percent, from approximately 142,000 in 2010 to 213,000 in 2014. As Figure 4 illustrates, trends were broadly similar in deportations from the United States (with a 53 percent increase in deportations, from 80,000 to 122,000) and from Mexico (40 percent growth, from 62,000 to 87,000). Backlogs in U.S. federal immigration courts, which exceeded 445,000 cases as of April 2015, have been a key factor in the slower growth in deportations as many of those apprehended may wait years to appear before an immigration judge and have their cases decided.⁷

*Deportations to the Northern Triangle have grown at a slower
pace than apprehensions.*

⁷ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Immigration: 445,000 Awaiting a Court Date, Which Might Not Come for 4 Years," *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 2015, www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-immigration-court-delay-20150515-story.html.

**Figure 4. Total Deportations from United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle, FY 2010- 15**

Notes: Data on deportations from the United States in 2014 include only removals. Data for FY 2015 are not yet available to estimate projections. FY 2015 data for Mexico represent an MPI projection based on the proportion of annual deportations to countries in the Northern Triangle observed during the first six months of the fiscal year. Historically, these months have accounted for 44 percent of annual deportations, and INM reported 68,777 deportations in the first six months of FY 2015. Sources: U.S. Data for the United States for FY 2014 from Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), “FY 2014 ICE Immigration Removals,” accessed April 23, 2015, www.ice.gov/removal-statistics; for FY 2010-13 from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2013* (Washington, DC: DHS, 2013), www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics-2013-enforcement-actions. MPI calculations for FY 2015 and FY 2010-14 for Mexico from INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” FY 2009-15.

Overall, more than 840,000 migrants were deported to the Northern Triangle between 2010 and 2014: about 480,000 from the United States and about 360,000 from Mexico. El Salvador has consistently received the fewest deportations, with a total of 171,000 in 2010-14. Conversely, Guatemala—about twice as populous as its Northern Triangle neighbors—has consistently received the largest number of deportations with a total of 368,000 since 2010. Honduras ranks in between, with 301,000 deportations, but has seen the greatest growth in deportations, with an overall increase of 55 percent.⁸

B. Apprehensions and Deportations of Minors

Apprehensions of children in the United States and Mexico grew exponentially between 2010 and 2014, from around 8,000 to more than 72,000. As Figure 5 illustrates, most of this growth stems from increased apprehensions of unaccompanied children in the United States, which doubled every year between 2011 and 2014. Between 2012 and 2014, more than twice as many children were apprehended in the United States as in Mexico. This difference is even larger when taking into account that the data on child apprehensions in the United States include only unaccompanied minors, while Mexican apprehension data include both accompanied and unaccompanied children.⁹

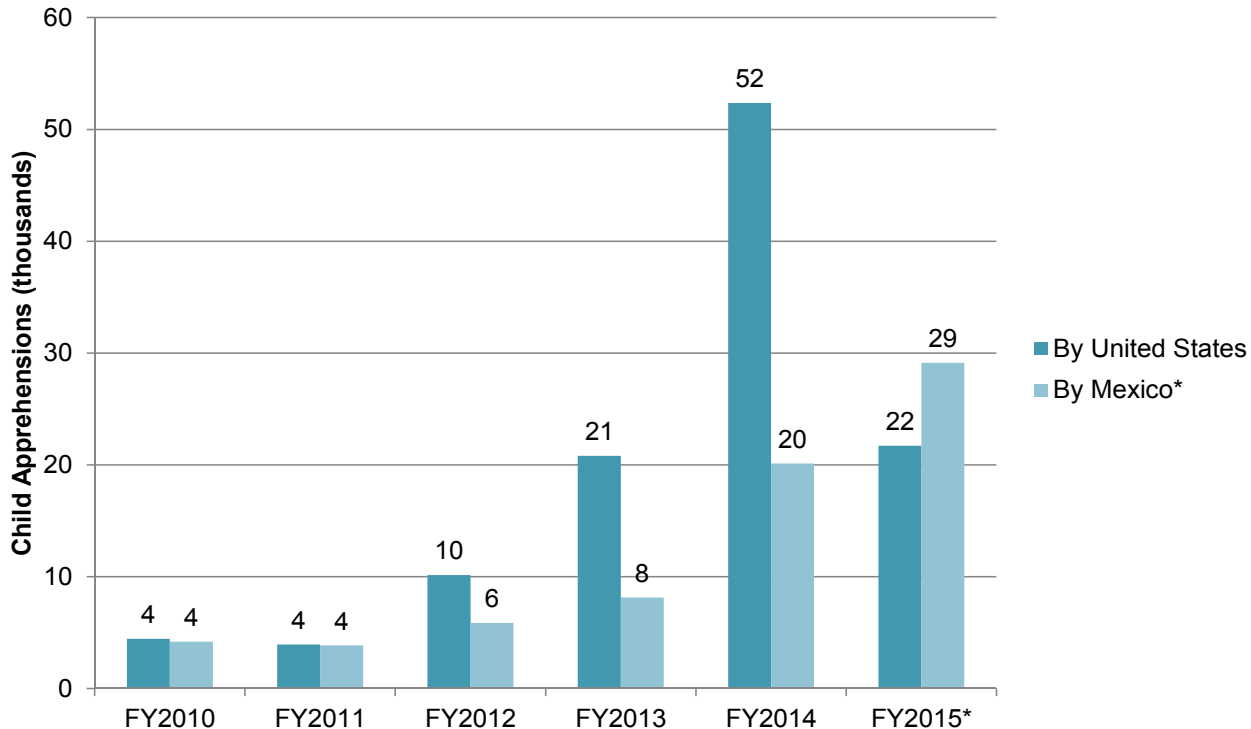
⁸ For details on deportations data disaggregated by country of origin, see Appendix.

⁹ Data on apprehensions of accompanied children in the United States are not publicly available. CBP provides only total apprehensions of people within family units and does not separate out apprehensions of children from these numbers. For data on family unit apprehensions, see CBP, “Family Unit and Unaccompanied Alien Children (0-17) Apprehensions FY 14 compared to FY 13,” accessed June 18, 2015, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Fam-



This pattern will likely shift in 2015, however, as apprehensions of children are projected to halve in the United States but grow further in Mexico, possibly surpassing those in the United States. An increase in resources for accelerated apprehension, processing, and adjudication of child and family arrivals in the United States together with aggressive media campaigns to discourage migration in the countries of origin might have deterred many from migrating in 2015. However, it appears that Mexico's increased enforcement capacity and efforts—partly under pressure of the United States—are the main drivers of the decrease in child arrivals at the U.S.-Mexico border. Many of the children who would have otherwise presented themselves to the U.S. Border Patrol are now apprehended by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM).¹⁰

Figure 5. Total Apprehensions of Children from the Northern Triangle by the United States and Mexico, FY 2010-15



Notes: U.S. data cover apprehensions of only unaccompanied children, while data from Mexico cover both accompanied and unaccompanied children. FY 2015 data for the United States represent an MPI projection based on the average proportion of annual apprehensions of unaccompanied children observed during the first seven months of each year in the range FY 2010-14. FY 2015 data for Mexico represent an MPI projection based on the average proportion of annual deportations of accompanied and unaccompanied minors to each of the countries in the Northern Triangle observed during the first six months of each year in the range FY 2010-14.

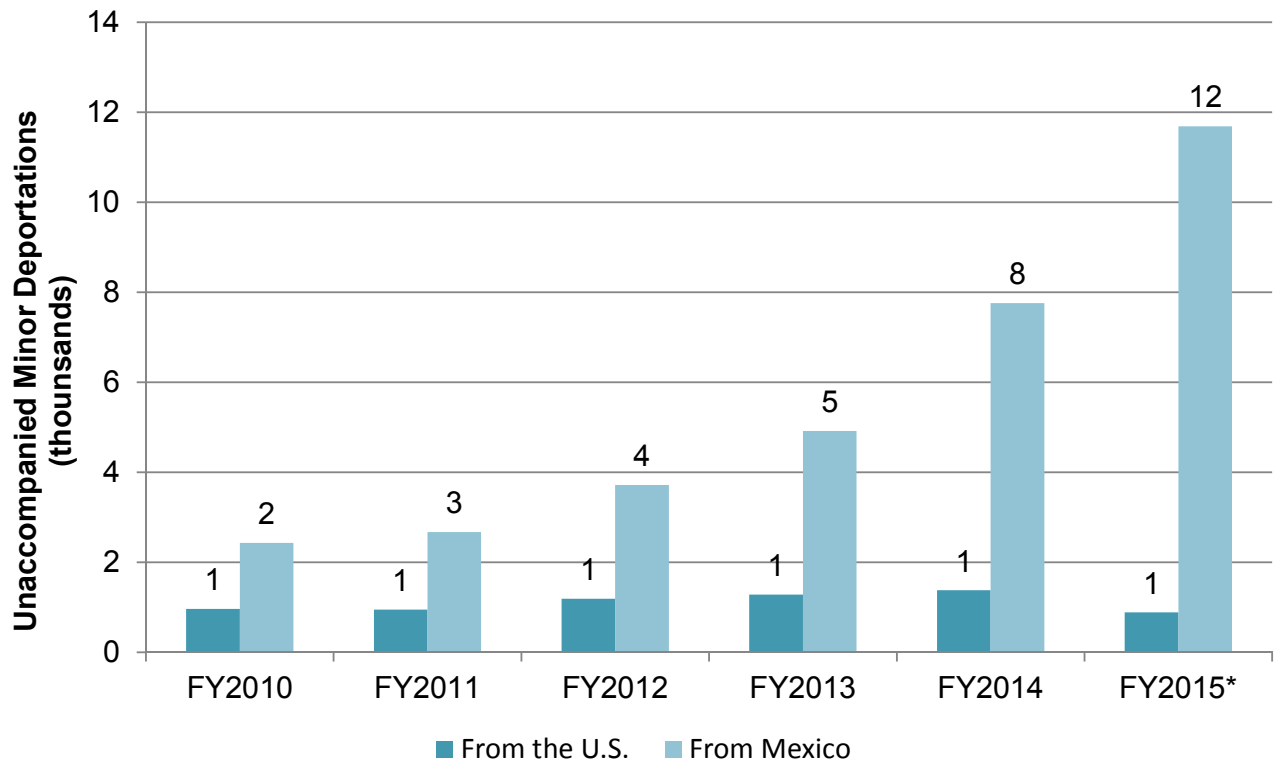
Sources: MPI calculations of U.S. data for FY 2015 from CBP, "Total Unaccompanied Alien Children (0-17 Years Old) Apprehensions by Month", accessed June 4, 2015, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Total%20Monthly%20UACs%20by%20Sector%2C%20FY10.-FY14.pdf. U.S. data for FY 2010-14 and also FY 2015 from CBP, "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children," accessed June 4, 2015, www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children. MPI calculations of data for FY 2015 and FY 2010-14 for Mexico from INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," FY 2009-15.

Mexico deported most of the unaccompanied children returned to the Northern Triangle between 2010 and 2014. As Figure 6 illustrates, Mexico deported almost six times more unaccompanied minors than the United States in 2014 (1,300 from the United States, compared with 7,800 from Mexico), and is projected to deport 12 times as many in 2015.¹¹

[ily%20Units%20and%20UAC%20Apps%20FY13%20-%20FY14_0.pdf](#).

10 For details on apprehensions of children disaggregated by country of origin, see Appendix.

11 For details on deportations of unaccompanied minors disaggregated by country of origin, see Appendix.

**Figure 6. Deportations of Unaccompanied Minors from the United States and Mexico to Northern Triangle, FY 2010-15**

Notes: FY 2015 data for the United States represent an MPI projection using data for the first five months of FY 2015 and assuming that deportations will happen at the same monthly rate. FY 2015 data for Mexico represent an MPI projection based on the average proportion of annual deportations of accompanied and unaccompanied minors to each of the countries in the Northern Triangle observed during the first six months of each year in the period FY 2010-14.

Sources: U.S. data in FY 2015 and FY 2014 from unpublished U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) data obtained by MPI; U.S. data in FY 2010-13 from data provided to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) from ICE Legislative Affairs on October 20, 2014, www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/?id=dd88040a-b1e6-405f-a71b-1a86c6ba2599. Mexico data for FY 2010-15 from INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," FY 2009-15.

In addition to the more than 9,000 unaccompanied minors that both the United States and Mexico deported in 2014, Mexico deported an additional 8,000 accompanied children, bringing the total number of deported children to more than 17,000.¹² Overall, 43,000 child migrants were deported to the Northern Triangle between 2010 and 2014. Of these, about 18,000 were returned to Honduras, 17,000 to Guatemala, and 8,000 to El Salvador. In this period, deportations of minors to Guatemala doubled; they tripled to El Salvador and quadrupled to Honduras.¹³

Based on preliminary data for the first six months of FY 2015, child deportations from Mexico to Guatemala are projected to double between 2014 and 2015, to grow approximately 40 percent in the case of El Salvador, and to remain stable for Honduras.¹⁴

The United States deported just three unaccompanied children for every 100 it apprehended in 2014,

12 Data on accompanied children deported by the United States are unavailable.

13 See Appendix for detailed numbers of apprehensions and deportations of children.

14 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) projections for 2015 are based on the average proportion of annual deportations of accompanied and unaccompanied minors from Mexico to each of the countries in the Northern Triangle, as observed during the first six months of each fiscal year from FY 2010 to FY2014. Between FY 2010 and FY 2014, the first six months of each fiscal year accounted for an average of 38 percent, 48 percent, and 37 percent of the total deportations of children from Mexico to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, respectively. In the first six months of 2015, Mexico deported 1,833 children to El Salvador, 4,974 to Guatemala, and 2,864 to Honduras. For detailed monthly deportation data from Mexico, see Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," 2009-15.



while Mexico deported 77 of every 100 unaccompanied children it apprehended. This difference reflects the vastly different legal procedures Mexico and the United States use to adjudicate children’s migration cases. In the United States, a combination of mandatory hearings, family placements, and long wait times for hearings has resulted in a sizeable time lag between when children are apprehended and when their cases are adjudicated.¹⁵ In contrast, though Mexico’s immigration law stipulates similar procedures, civil-society organizations (CSOs) have long pointed to a disconnect between theory and practice that contributes to the almost immediate deportation of most children apprehended by Mexican authorities.¹⁶ The difference in the ratios of deportations to apprehensions in both countries thus indicates differences in the countries’ enforcement systems—both of which come with a separate set of challenges: Slow adjudication in the United States and limited humanitarian screening in Mexico.

The United States deported just three unaccompanied children for every 100 it apprehended in 2014, while Mexico deported 77 of every 100 unaccompanied children it apprehended.

III. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Deportees to the Northern Triangle

Hundreds of thousands of deported Central Americans have arrived back in their countries of origin in the past five years. Policies to receive and reintegrate them hinge on a clear understanding of who these people are and what skills and characteristics they bring. This section presents statistical profiles of the origin, age, gender, education, and employment experience of deportees over 15 years of age, and the demographic characteristics of deported minors.

A. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Deportees 15 Years and Older

Detailed data on the characteristics of deportees who are at least 15 years of age are available from the Mexican Migration Southern Border Survey (EMIF Sur, by its Spanish acronym).¹⁷ The data presented here were collected from a representative sample of deported migrants from the United States and

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the adjudication process for unaccompanied children and family units in the United States, see Rosenblum, *Unaccompanied Child Migration to the United States*.

¹⁶ Another important factor influencing high deportation rates may be the low rates of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Mexico; these children are more likely to seek asylum in the United States, where many have relatives. The list of frequent criticisms of Mexico’s enforcement system by civil-society organizations (CSOs) includes lack of transfers from detention centers to child-care centers as mandated by law, insufficient screening for humanitarian protection needs, a lack of information sharing about how to claim asylum, children being detained for extended periods of time, as well as (thoroughly documented cases of) corruption, abuse, and neglect at the hands of Mexican officials. For more on the protection of migrant children detained in Mexico, see the Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute Fact-Finding Project, *The Cost of Stemming the Tide: How Immigration Enforcement Practices in Southern Mexico Limit Migrant Children’s Access to International Protection* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute, 2015), 25, www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/centers-institutes/human-rights-institute/fact-finding/upload/HRI-Fact-Finding-Report-Stemming-the-Tide-Web-PDF-English.pdf; Aldo Ledón Pereyra et al., “Mexico: Southern Border,” in *Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices, and Challenges*, eds. Karen Musalo and Pablo Ceriani Cernadas (San Francisco: Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, 2015), 248, http://cgrrs.uchastings.edu/sites/default/files/Childhood_Migration_HumanRights_FullBook_English.pdf; Abbdel Camargo, *Arrancados de Raíz: Causas que originan el desplazamiento transfronterizo de niños, niñas y adolescentes no acompañados y/o separados de Centroamérica y su necesidad de protección internacional* (Mexico City: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014), www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Publicaciones/2014/9828.

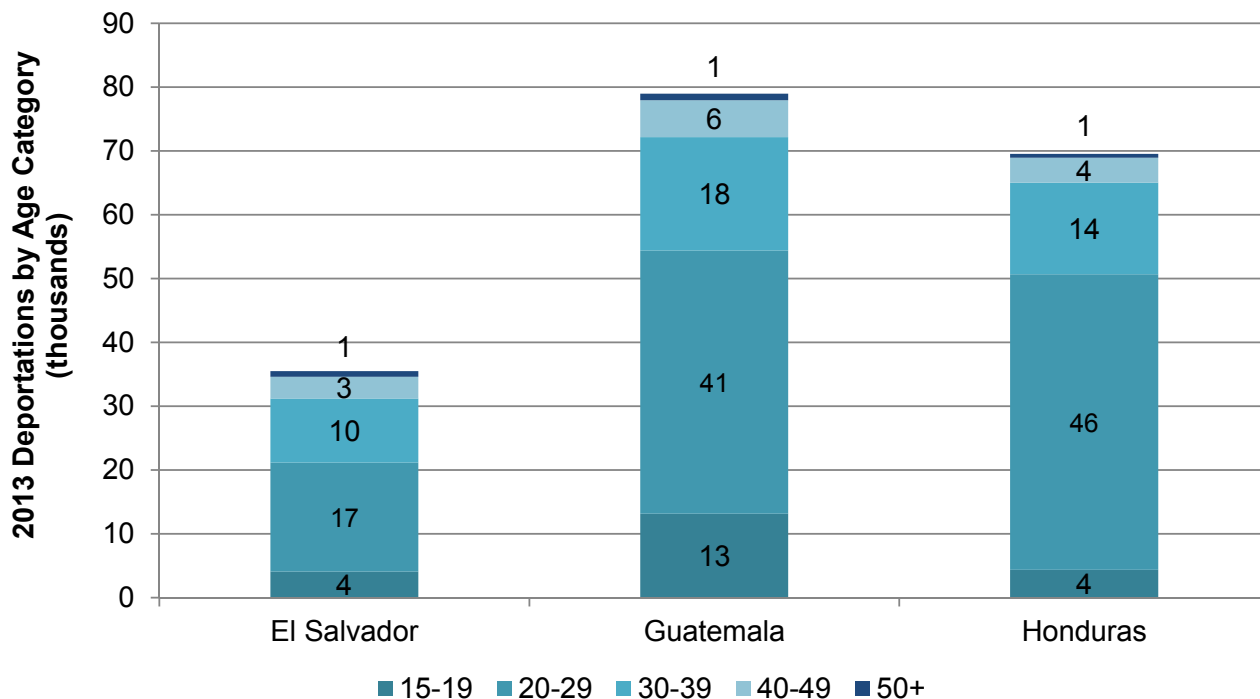
¹⁷ The Mexican Migration Southern Border Survey (known as EMIF Sur) included only people who were 15 or older at the time of the survey. The following section of this report includes a detailed profile of child deportees, based on other data sources.



Mexico surveyed at various border crossings and airports in the three Northern Triangle countries in 2013.¹⁸

As Figure 7 illustrates, the majority of deportees are young adults between ages 20 and 29. This is especially true in Honduras, where 67 percent of surveyed deportees fall into this age range. Deportees to El Salvador are relatively older than deportees to Honduras and Guatemala. Around 40 percent of deportees to El Salvador are 30 and older, an age range that makes up less than 30 percent of deportees to Guatemala and Honduras. Fewer than 10 percent of deportees to all three countries are ages 40 and older.

Figure 7. Adult Deportees from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle, by Age Group, 2013



Sources: MPI calculations from Colegio de la Frontera Norte, “Encuesta sobre migración en la frontera sur de México (EMIF SUR),” 2013, www.colef.mx/emif/bases.php; INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2012-14, arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

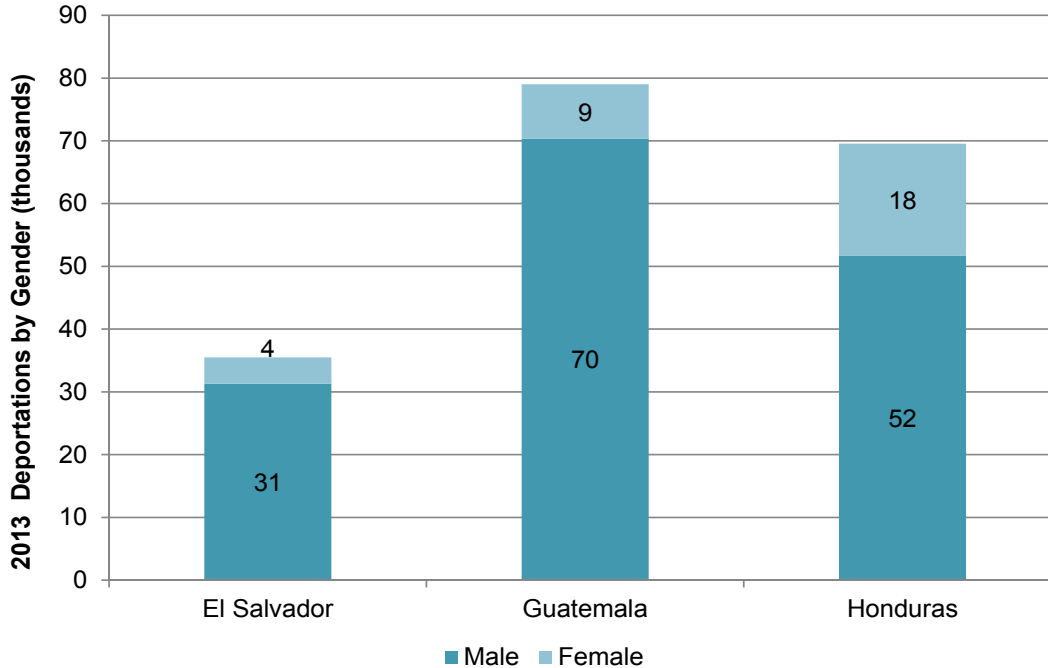
As Figure 8 illustrates, the deportee population is predominantly (83 percent) male in all three countries. Honduras has the largest proportion of female deportees (26 percent), and Guatemala the smallest (11 percent).

The majority of deportees are young adults between ages 20 and 29.

¹⁸ EMIF Sur is run by Mexico’s Colegio de la Frontera Norte, with support from Mexico’s National Institute of Migration, Labor and Social Welfare Ministry, Foreign Ministry, and National Population Council. For more information on the survey and its methodology, see Colegio de la Frontera Norte, “Metodología de las Encuestas sobre Migración en las Fronteras Norte y Sur de México,” accessed April 23, 2015, www.colef.mx/emif/metodologia/docsmetodologicos/Metodologia%20Emif%20Norte%20y%20Sur.pdf.



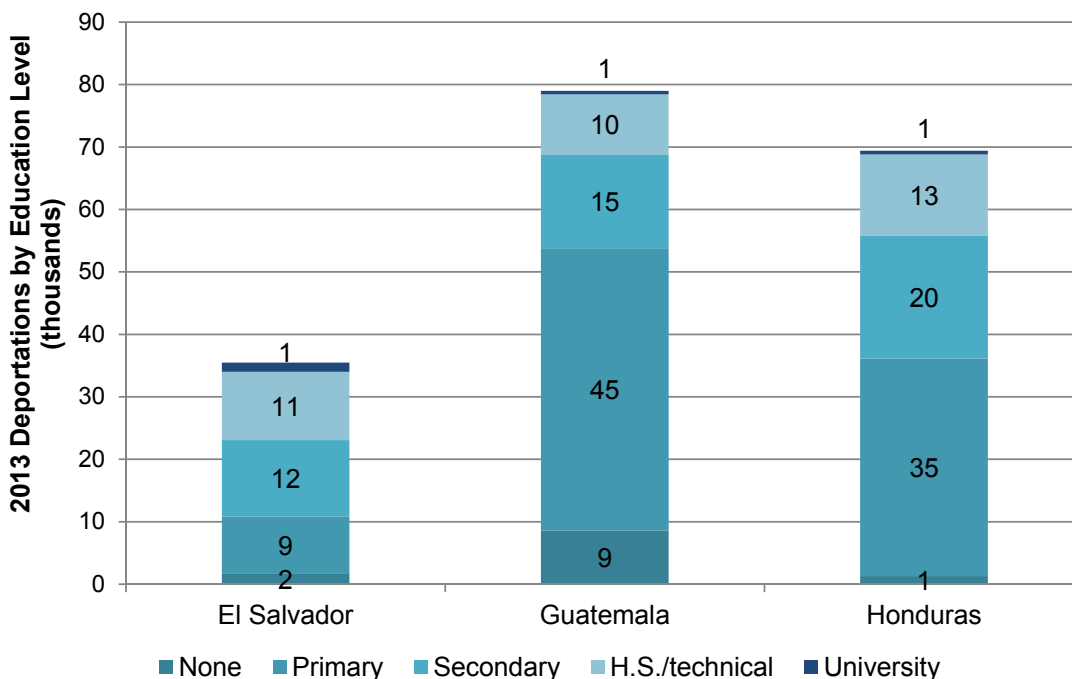
Figure 8. Adult Deportees from the United States and Mexico to Northern Triangle, by Gender, 2013



Sources: MPI calculations from Colegio de la Frontera Norte, “Encuesta sobre migración en la frontera sur de México (EMIF SUR);” INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2012-14 arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

Figure 9 describes the educational achievement of deportees to the Northern Triangle. Most deportees, including more than 80 percent of those to Guatemala and Honduras, have a secondary education or less. Deportees to El Salvador have a somewhat higher educational achievement level: 35 percent finished high school or more, and the majority completed secondary school.

Figure 9. Adult Deportees from the United States and Mexico to Northern Triangle, by Highest Level of Educational Achievement, 2013

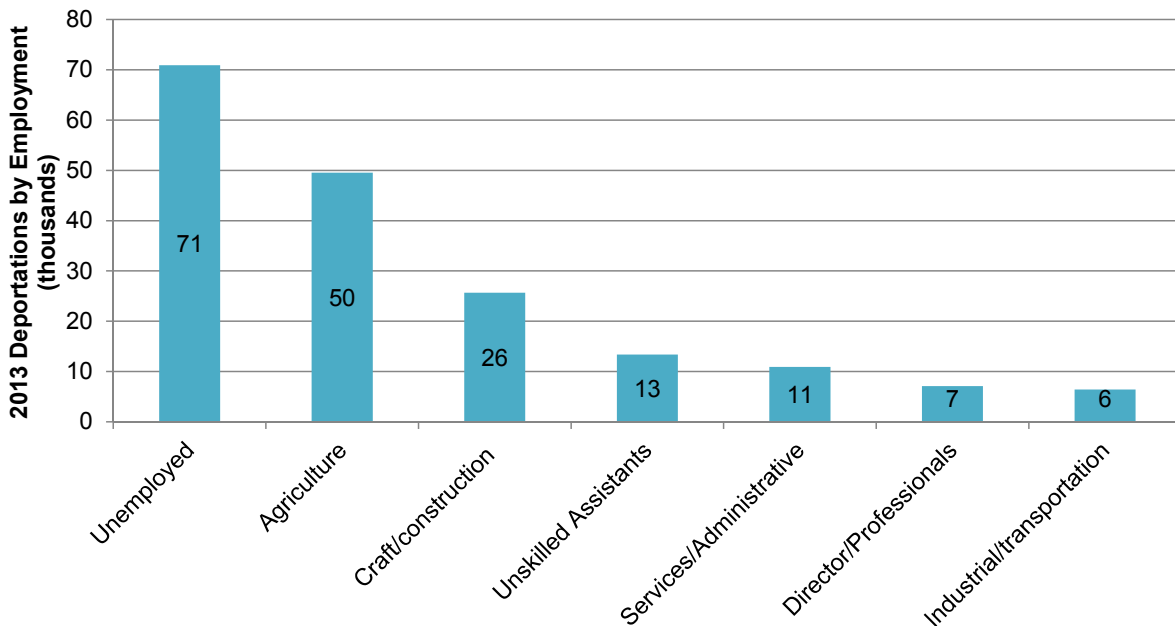


Source: MPI calculations from Colegio de la Frontera Norte, “Encuesta sobre migración en la frontera sur de México (EMIF SUR);” and INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2012-14 arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.



Figure 10 describes deportees' employment experience. A large number of deportees (almost four out of ten) were unemployed in the 30-day period before they left home. Of those who were employed, many worked in low-skilled jobs. A little more than one in four reported having worked in agriculture. An additional 14 percent had worked in construction or crafts, and about 8 percent worked as unskilled assistants. This means that only a small minority of deportees (14 percent) had worked in jobs that likely required medium or high skill levels. The employment profile of deportees is similar across the three countries of the Northern Triangle with the exception of Guatemala, where nearly half (45 percent) of deportees were unemployed in the 30 days before leaving home, compared to roughly one-third of deportees to both Honduras and El Salvador.

Figure 10. Work Experience of Adult Deportees from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle in the 30 Days Before Leaving Home, by Trade or Profession, 2013



Sources: MPI estimations from Colegio de la Frontera Norte, "Encuesta sobre migración en la frontera sur de México (EMIF SUR);" INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," 2012-14, arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

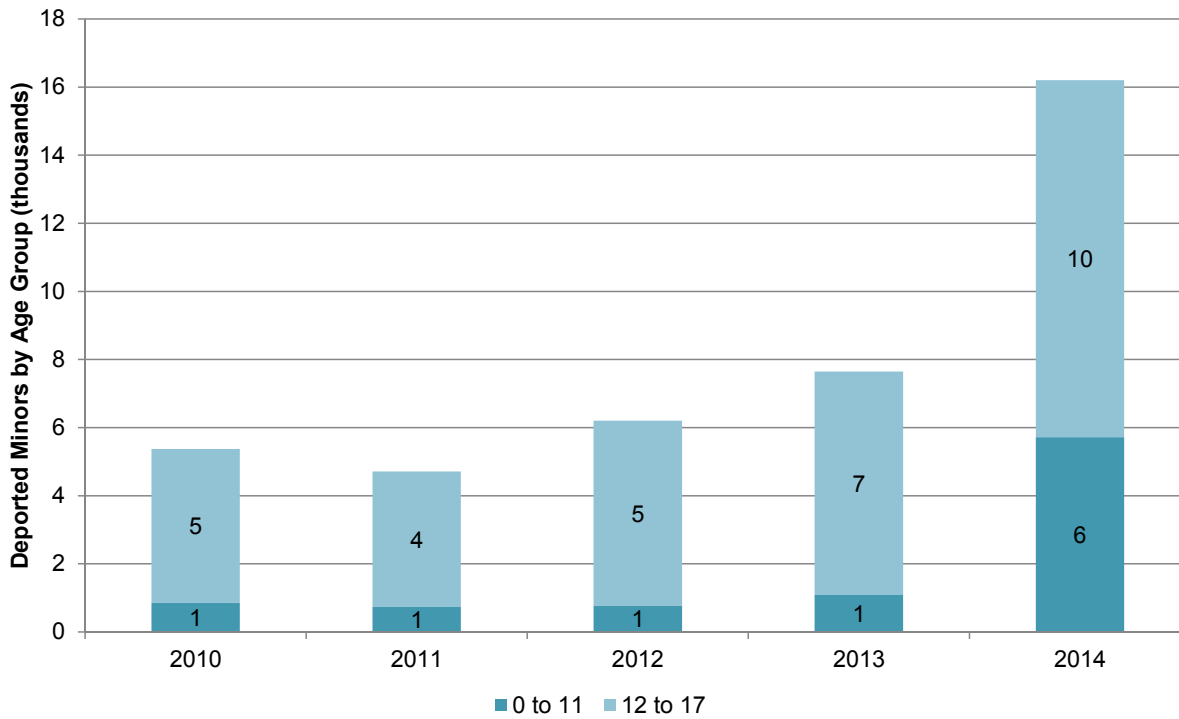
B. Demographic Characteristics of Deported Minors

Data on the characteristics of deported minors are more limited than on adults. While the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) was not able to obtain demographic data on minors deported from the United States, data are available for minors deported from Mexico from 2010 to 2014. (As explained above, deportations of minors from Mexico account for the majority of all such deportations during this period.)

Until 2013, the vast majority of minors deported to the Northern Triangle from Mexico—more than 85 percent—were adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17. More than 75 percent were male. As Figures 11 and 12 indicate, the age and gender distribution of deported minors changed significantly between 2013 and 2014. Total numbers increased sharply, and the share of younger children and girls also increased. The number of younger children deported increased fivefold (from 1,100 in 2013 to 5,700 in 2014), and the number of girls deported tripled (from 1,800 in 2013 to 5,500 in 2014).

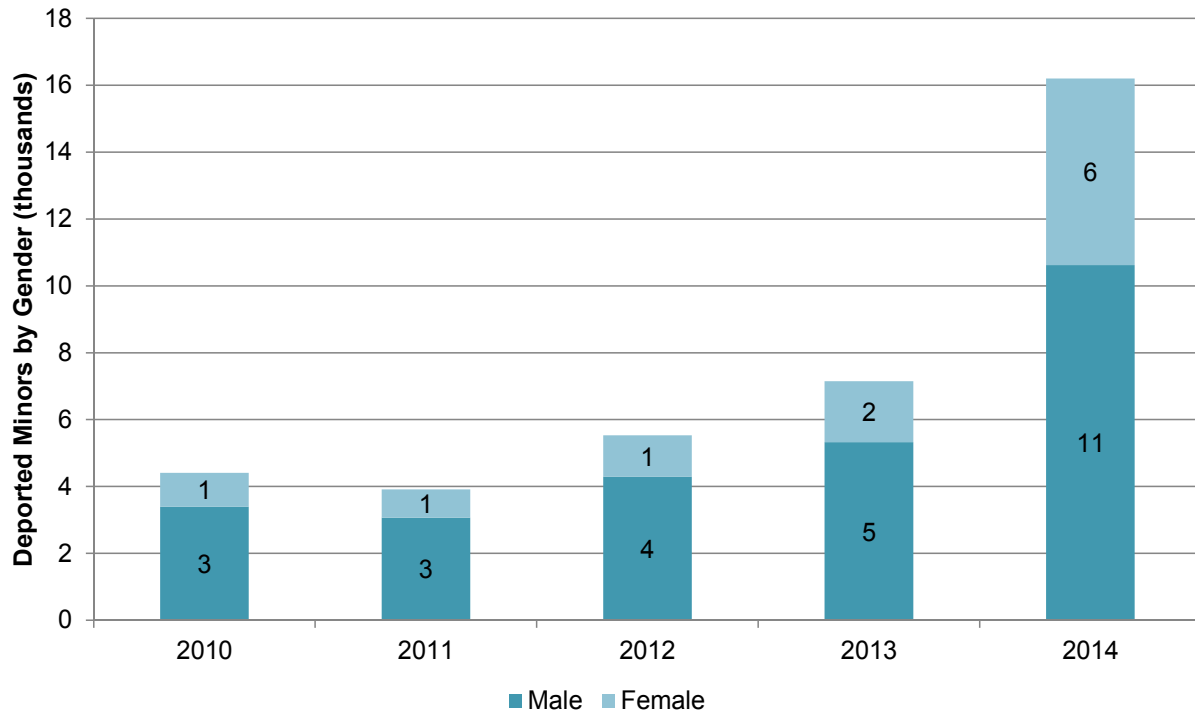


Figure 11. Deported Minors from Mexico to the Northern Triangle, by Age Group, FY 2010-14



Source: INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," 2009-14, arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

Figure 12. Deported Minors from Mexico to the Northern Triangle, by Gender, FY 2010-14

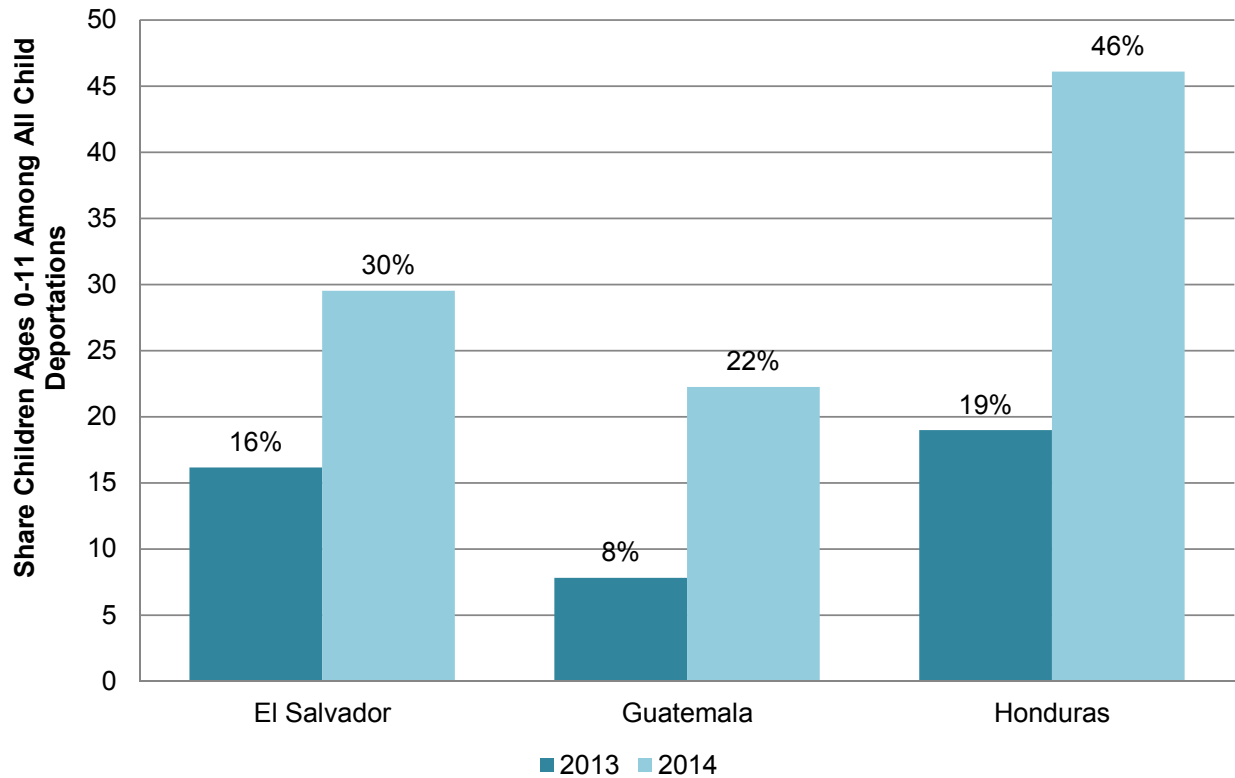


Source: INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," 2009-14, arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.



Figure 13 shows that the increase in the percentage of deported young children under the age of 12 was particularly steep in Honduras, rising from one in five in 2013 to nearly half in 2014. In El Salvador, the share doubled from 16 to 30 percent, and nearly tripled from 8 to 22 percent in Guatemala.

Figure 13. Share of Young Children (ages 0-11) among All Deported Minors from Mexico to the Northern Triangle, FY 2013-14



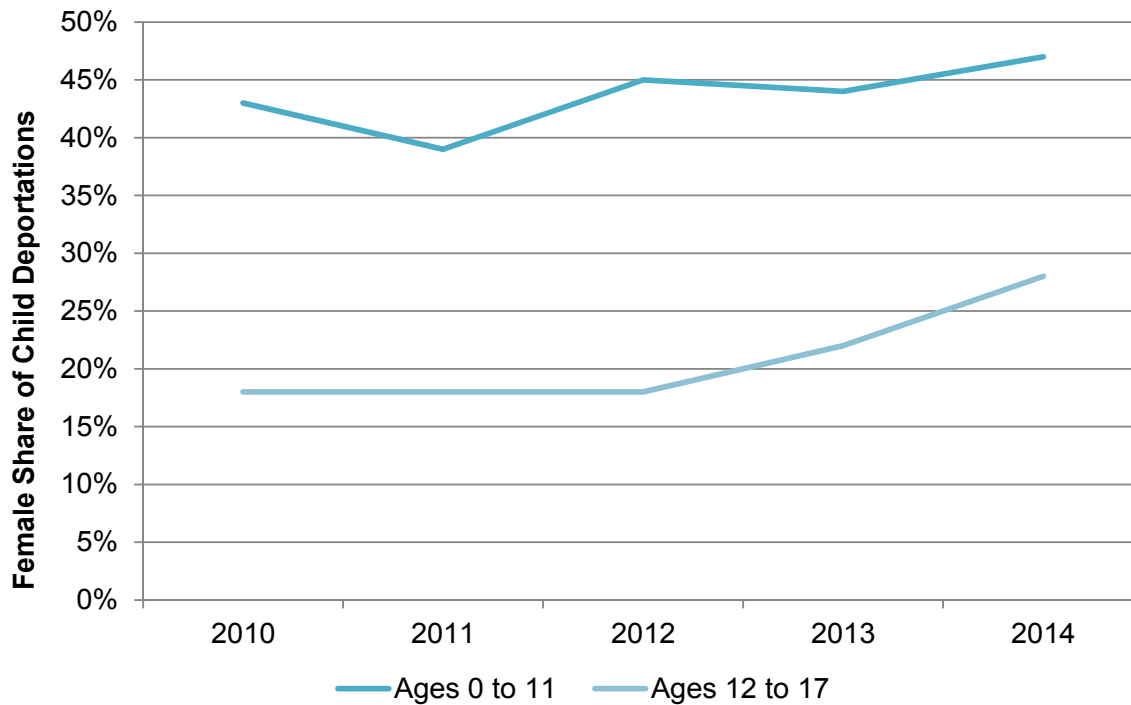
Source: INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2012-14 arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

As Figure 14 illustrates, the share of girls is notably higher among deportees ages 0-11 than among those ages 12-17. In 2014, a little less than half, or 47 percent, of the younger age group was female, compared with only 28 percent of the older group. The share of females increased in both groups after 2010, but the increase in the share of teenage girls between 2013 and 2014 stands out.

The increase in the percentage of deported young children under the age of 12 was particularly steep in Honduras.



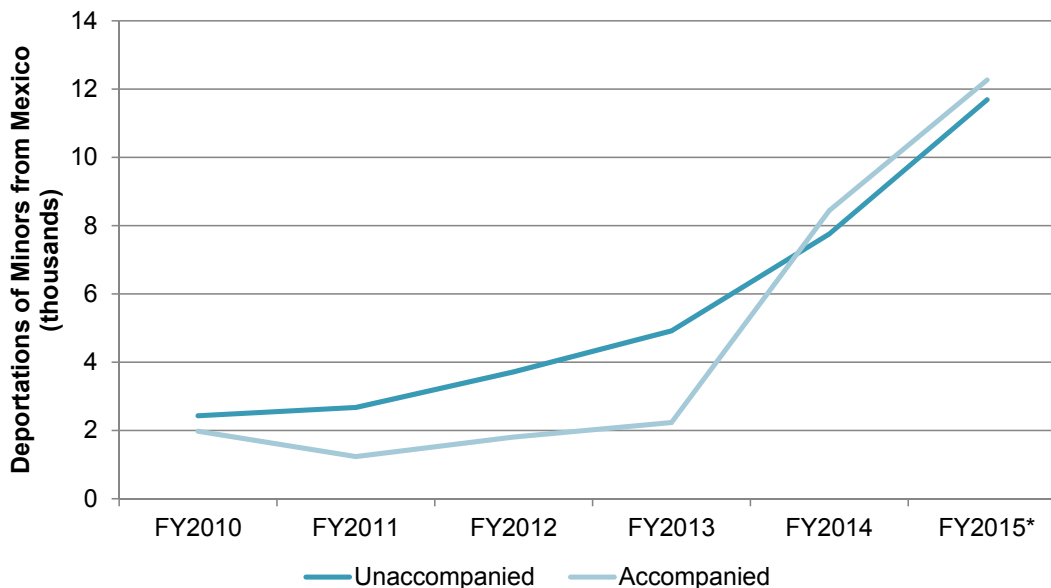
Figure 14. Share of Females among Total Deported Minors from Mexico to the Northern Triangle, by Age Group, FY 2010-14



Source: INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2009-14, arranged to match U.S. fiscal year calendar.

The majority of child deportees were unaccompanied until 2014, when the trend changed and most child deportees migrated with an adult family member. As Figure 15 illustrates, the number of both accompanied and unaccompanied children deported from Mexico grew sharply between 2013 and 2014; the surge in accompanied children is particularly notable.

Figure 15. Accompanied and Unaccompanied Minors Deported from Mexico to the Northern Triangle, FY 2010-14



Source: INM, “Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias,” 2009-14, arranged to match U.S. FY calendar.



The demographic profile of deported minors from Mexico reveals an increase in two especially vulnerable groups over the study period: children younger than 12. The rise in the numbers of these vulnerable groups is an immediate result of a rise in the number of families fleeing the countries of the Northern Triangle. Family migration, mostly comprised of women and children, also explains the sharp increase in accompanied children deported from Mexico and the quadrupling of U.S. apprehensions of family units—which reached more than 68,000 in 2014, up from just 15,000 in 2013.¹⁹ These trends are likely driven by a combination of deteriorating security conditions—women and children are particularly vulnerable to domestic and gang violence—and the growth in door-to-door services offered by smuggling networks that promise to reduce the risks of crossing Mexico.

The demographic profile of deported minors from Mexico reveals an increase in two especially vulnerable groups over the study period: children younger than 12.

IV. Criminal Profiles of Deportees from the United States

Since 2003, about 95 percent of deportees from the United States fell into at least one of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) enforcement priority categories outlined in 2010: recent illegal entrants, noncitizens who disobey immigration court orders, and noncitizens convicted of a crime.²⁰ The U.S. focus on the deportation of criminals has led to a large number of deportees with a criminal background, including a relatively small number of violent criminals who may present important public safety concerns to the countries of Central America. Most deportees with criminal records, however, have been convicted of exclusively nonviolent crimes, and most often immigration-related offenses, such as entry without inspection. This section profiles the criminal histories of adult and child deportees from the United States.

A. Criminal Profiles of Adult Deportees from the United States

Table 1 outlines the types of crimes committed by people deported from the United States to the three countries of the Northern Triangle from 2009 to 2013, listing each person's most serious criminal conviction.²¹

¹⁹ CBP, "Family Unit and Unaccompanied Alien Children (0-17)."

²⁰ Rosenblum and McCabe, *Deportation and Discretion*, 9, 26. The criminal profile of deportees includes only returns and removal cases from the United States. Data on the criminal background of people deported from Mexico are not available.

²¹ For more information on the data, see Rosenblum and McCabe, *Deportation and Discretion*; and Ginger Thompson and Sarah Cohen, "More Deportations Follow Minor Crimes, Records Show," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/04/07/us/more-deportations-follow-minor-crimes-data-shows.html.



Table 1. Adult Deportees from the United States to the Northern Triangle, by Most Serious Criminal Conviction, FY 2009-13

	El Salvador		Guatemala		Honduras		Northern Triangle	
Noncriminal	58,007	57%	121,135	66%	82,864	57%	262,006	61%
Violent crimes	14,918	15%	17,136	9%	16,602	11%	48,656	11%
Immigration crimes	7,028	7%	14,984	8%	19,924	14%	41,936	10%
Traffic crimes	7,694	8%	15,972	9%	9,955	7%	33,621	8%
Other nonviolent crimes	9,932	10%	11,554	6%	9,942	7%	31,428	7%
Drug crimes	4,340	4%	3,106	2%	7,176	5%	14,622	3%
Total	101,919	100%	183,887	100%	146,463	100%	432,269	100%

Notes: Numbers include both ICE returns and removals. Traffic crimes include driving under the influence (DUI) and other traffic offenses; drug crimes include possession, sale, distribution, and transportation offenses; nonviolent crimes include FBI Part 2 crimes identified as nonviolent offenses and nuisance crimes; violent crimes include FBI Part 1 crimes and FBI Part 2 crimes identified as violent offenses and domestic violence crimes. Data are based on removal events, not individuals, and the characteristics of individuals who are removed repeatedly may differ from those removed only once, thereby biasing these data slightly toward the characteristics of individuals with multiple removals.

Source: MPI analysis of ICE Enforcement Integrated Data (EID) obtained by *The New York Times* through a *Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) request.

As Table 1 indicates, the majority of deportations to the region (61 percent) involved people without a criminal conviction, and another 18 percent were of people convicted exclusively of immigration or traffic offenses. Only 11 percent of deportations involved people with a violent criminal background.

While the percentage of deportees with criminal backgrounds other than traffic or immigration crimes is relatively low (21 percent), it represents almost 95,000 deportations. Given the weak judicial institutions of the Northern Triangle, the reception of large numbers of people with criminal backgrounds presents a significant strain on the region's judicial systems and societies.

The reception of large numbers of people with criminal backgrounds presents a significant strain on the region's judicial systems and societies.

B. Criminal Profiles of Deportations of Minors from the United States²²

Though some of the attention on unaccompanied children in 2014 focused on teenage members of dangerous gangs, fewer than 5 percent of child deportees to Central America have been convicted of any criminal offense, and just 2 percent of a violent crime or drug offense (see Table 2). Of deportation cases involving children with criminal convictions, the majority (62 percent) involved children convicted exclusively of immigration violations, traffic crimes, or other nonviolent offenses.

²² The criminal profile for minors deported from the United States is based on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Enforcement Integrated Data (EID) dataset, which contains information on deportees' criminal background. Please note that the count of child deportations presented in Table 2 differs slightly from the deportation count presented in Table A-4 in the Appendix, which comes from recently updated unpublished ICE data obtained by MPI.

**Table 2. Minors Deported from the United States to the Northern Triangle, by Criminal Status and Most Serious Criminal Conviction, 2009-13**

	El Salvador		Guatemala		Honduras		Northern Triangle	
Noncriminal	637	97%	2,321	96%	1,397	92%	4,355	95%
Immigration	6	1%	56	2%	32	2%	94	2%
Violent	12	2%	20	1%	27	2%	59	1%
Drug crimes	1	0%	2	0%	36	2%	39	1%
Other nonviolent	4	1%	13	1%	19	1%	36	1%
Traffic crimes	0	0%	10	0%	7	0%	17	0%
Total	660	100%	2,419	100%	1,513	100%	4,592	100%

Notes: Numbers include both ICE returns and removals. Traffic crimes include DUI and other traffic offenses; drug crimes include possession, sale, distribution, and transportation offenses; nonviolent crimes include FBI Part 2 crimes identified as nonviolent offenses and nuisance crimes; violent crimes include FBI Part 1 crimes and FBI Part 2 crimes identified as violent offenses and domestic crimes.

Source: MPI analysis of ICE data obtained by *The New York Times* through a FOIA request.

V. Conclusion

Overall, approximately 800,000 adults and 40,000 children were returned to the Northern Triangle in the past five years, as Mexico and the United States apprehended and deported increasing numbers of migrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Projections for 2015 show a decline in total apprehensions and deportations in the United States, and a sharp increase in Mexico—a change likely driven by the increasingly aggressive enforcement measures implemented by the Mexican government since 2014.

Child migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras increased dramatically in 2014. Apprehensions of children rose particularly quickly in the United States, where the number of unaccompanied children almost doubled between 2013 and 2014. In contrast to apprehensions, deportations of children grew sharply in Mexico but stayed constant in the United States, generating a growing gap between the number of children deported by Mexico and the United States. Mexico deported about six times as many unaccompanied children as the United States in 2014, and this is projected to double (to 12 times) in 2015. While public attention has focused on unaccompanied children, the number of children traveling with family members (so-called “family units”) that were apprehended in the United States also grew, more than fourfold, between 2013 and 2014. Mexican statistics show a similar fourfold increase in deportations of accompanied children in these years, and a further 50 percent increase is projected for 2015.

Mexico deported about six times as many unaccompanied children as the United States in 2014, and this is projected to double...in 2015.

Most adults deported to the Northern Triangle are young males with low educational attainment levels and experience in low-skilled jobs. Most minors are males between the ages of 12 and 17; however, the share of children under the age of 12 and the share of girls increased substantially after 2013, along with the growth in family migration. This may be an indicator of overall deteriorating conditions (generalized violence and endemic poverty) in Central America, a hypothesis that is supported by reports of gangs increasingly targeting young children and perpetrating violence against women and girls, as well as the



high share of apprehended children from impoverished indigenous backgrounds.

The growth in migration from and in deportations to the Northern Triangle is a regional phenomenon that poses policy challenges to countries in North and Central America. So far, the policy responses of both Mexico and the United States have focused primarily on enforcement. The United States (as the primary destination) and Mexico (most often used for transit but increasingly a destination) have increased their enforcement efforts to reduce the flows of Central American migrants. The decrease in U.S. apprehensions so far in 2015 is a sign of the results of this strategy. Yet the strategy brings with it persistent reports from local and international civil-society actors and other experts about humanitarian deficiencies in Mexico's increasingly aggressive enforcement processes and procedures.

Meanwhile, the underlying drivers of emigration from Central America—heightened violence, endemic poverty, weak governance, lack of economic opportunity, and family ties in the United States with minimal pathways for legal immigration—remain in place. Even though U.S. apprehensions have dropped, overall regional apprehensions are on pace for a much smaller decline in 2015 than the U.S. data alone suggest.

The dominant regional dynamic at play is displacement of flows—the so-called “squeezing of the balloon”: migrants who would have made it to the U.S. border in past years and appeared in U.S. apprehensions data are now intercepted in Mexico, swelling Mexican statistics. Balanced approaches to regional migration dynamics must include ways not just to shift the flows, but to deflate the pressures that cause them.

The dominant regional dynamic at play is displacement of flows—the so-called “squeezing of the balloon”.

For a more comprehensive policy response, the United States and Mexico—together with the countries of the Northern Triangle—need not only to design migration policies that establish workable enforcement and humanitarian protection, but also development policies that address poor standards of living, improve citizen security in the primary sending countries, and facilitate the reintegration of deportees.²³

²³ For a full discussion of reception and reintegration services for Central American deportees, see Victoria Rietig and Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas, *Stopping the Revolving Door: Reintegration Services for Deported Migrants in Central America* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2015 forthcoming).

Appendices

Appendix I. Apprehensions and Deportations from the United States and Mexico, by Country of Origin

Table A-1. Apprehensions by the United States and Mexico of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans, FY 2010-14

	El Salvador			Guatemala			Honduras			Northern Triangle		
	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total
FY 2010	13,723	11,036	24,759	18,406	27,328	45,734	13,580	24,992	38,572	45,709	63,356	109,065
FY 2011	10,874	8,992	19,866	19,061	32,851	51,912	12,197	18,229	30,426	42,132	60,072	102,204
FY 2012	22,158	11,946	34,104	35,204	38,994	74,198	30,953	27,567	58,520	88,315	78,507	166,822
FY 2013	37,149	13,708	50,857	54,692	31,835	86,527	46,865	32,608	79,473	138,706	78,151	216,857
FY 2014	66,638	19,773	86,411	81,116	38,657	119,773	91,475	43,726	135,201	239,229	102,156	341,385
Total	150,542	65,455	215,997	208,479	169,665	378,144	195,070	147,122	342,192	554,091	382,242	936,333

Note: Mexico's deportation data were originally reported in calendar years but have been rearranged to represent U.S. fiscal years (FY).

Sources: U.S. data in FY 2010-14: unpublished data from CBP, "U.S. Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions by Citizenship FY2004-FY2015TD through April." Mexico data in FY 2010-14: INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," FY 2009-14.

Table A-2. Deportations from the United States and Mexico to Northern Triangle, FY 2010-14

	El Salvador			Guatemala			Honduras			Northern Triangle		
	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total	United States	Mexico	Total
FY 2010	21,296	10,926	32,222	32,023	26,871	58,894	26,503	24,713	51,216	79,822	62,510	142,332
FY 2011	18,402	8,837	27,239	33,369	31,523	64,892	23,580	17,848	41,428	75,351	58,208	133,559
FY 2012	19,914	11,991	31,905	41,232	34,377	75,609	33,022	27,372	60,394	94,168	73,740	167,908
FY 2013	21,481	14,016	35,497	48,213	30,806	79,019	37,438	32,114	69,552	107,132	76,936	184,068
FY 2014	27,180	17,054	44,234	54,423	35,100	89,523	40,695	38,913	79,608	122,298	91,067	213,365
Total	108,273	62,824	171,097	209,260	158,677	367,937	161,238	140,960	302,198	478,771	362,461	841,232

Note: Data on deportations from the United States in 2014 only includes removals.

Sources: U.S. FY 2014 data, ICE, "FY 2014 ICE Immigration Removals," for FY 2010-13: DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2013* (Washington, DC: DHS, 2013). For Mexico FY 2010-14, INM, "Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias," FY 2009-14.



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