

## Forum: Security Council (SC)

**Issue: The situation in Central America: progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development**

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## INTRODUCTION



"Map of Central America." map. *wikitravel*, 31 Oct. 2010, [wikitravel.org/shared/File:Map\\_of\\_Central\\_America.png](https://wikitravel.org/shared/File:Map_of_Central_America.png). Accessed 12 July 2019.

The region of Central America has suffered under a lot of criminal activity throughout their history. Starting from the revolutions and civil wars in the late 70s it evolved into becoming one of the most pressing crises in the last few decades. Central America is composed of the following states: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. The region has been facing major security issues such as an excessive crime rate, poverty issues, an unstable government or oppression against the lower classed citizens. With the continuously growing influence of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and gangs and their ruthlessness towards the population of Central America, the situation has only aggravated in the last few years. Violence and insecurity have left the population, which is constantly plagued by social inequality and unemployment, in a state of despair and hopelessness, which is further explainable due to the understaffed and unprofessional

police forces in these areas but also the lack of a competent and incorruptible government. Having a homicide rate of more than 50 homicides per 100.000 residents, the governments of the region strive for solutions on their crisis. Since the countries in Central America lack the resources though to provide their citizens with the appropriate protection and guarantee their safety, they have to rely on the aid of other nations such as the United States or the UN.

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle of Central America consists of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. It is most known for its world-wide highest homicide rate and its high rate of violence, insecurity and other criminal activity. From their independence until today the three states in the NTCA remain the worst components in the Central America crisis.

### DTOs

Drug Trafficking Organizations are mostly found in Mexico although they have expanded their branches into the Central American region and spread fear and terror amongst the civilians. This is mostly executed with their organized drug transportations through the whole of Central America and the occasional drug turfs which leave thousands of innocent people dead. Their job is to produce, transport and distribute large amounts of different kinds of drugs.

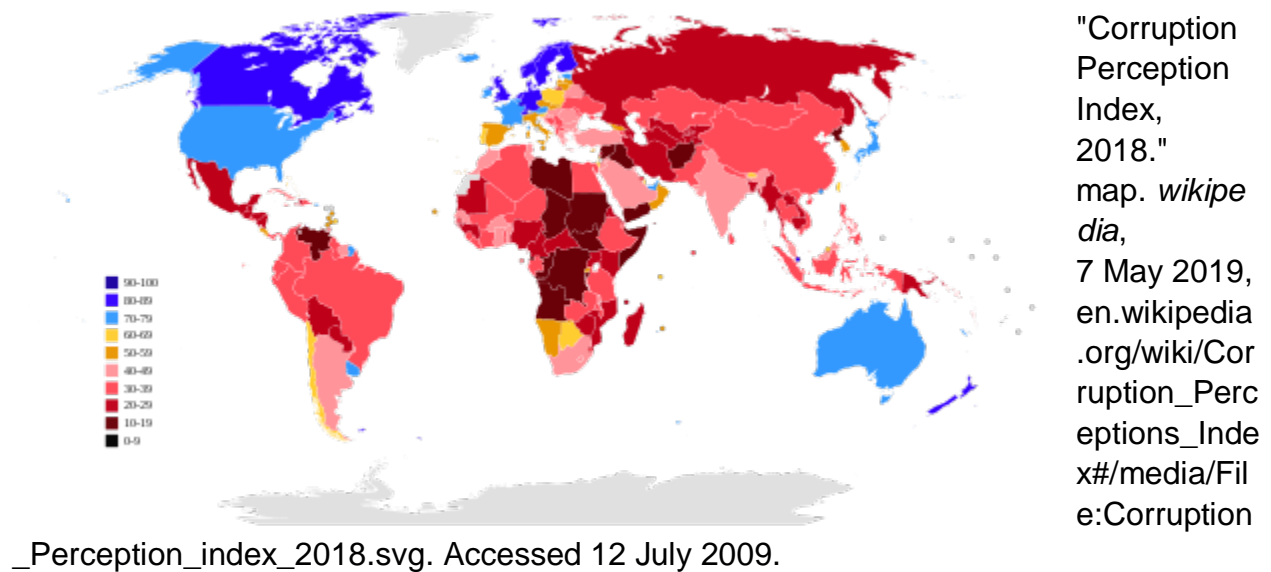
### Gangs

Gangs are organized groups of criminals who usually consist of close related friends or family with the aim of spreading violence and the participation in all kinds of criminal activity.

### Maras

The Gangs in Central America are referred to as: Maras. They started out in the 1970s in the United States and developed into a very influential criminal network especially in the 1990s.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION



### Structural Weaknesses in the Government

Ever since the first creation of a government in one of these countries there have been incidents of corruption and fraud. Every country in the Central American region is perceived as a corrupted state since their scores all surpass 50 (apart from Belize which is not listed on the Index). The public sector of Nicaragua is believed to be one of the most corrupt in the world with a score of 25 out of 100 in the transparency level. The judicial system is commonly being manipulated by politicians and criminal gangs, making judicial decisions favorable for the bribers. Even though anti-corruption laws have been implemented in all the Central American countries, there is no recollection of the successful enforcement of that law, leading to instability in the economic sector and the inability to increase the state's income. This furthermore results in an immense raise of tax rates which normally means that less citizens are able to afford these taxes and thus disrupting the own economy. This has been the case for most of the countries in this area. Although Costa Rica has not been dealing with such a large amount of corruption accusations it is also prone to having many venal politicians, police officers or lawyers. Corruption and manipulation are mostly carried out by drug cartels or politicians, but there have been claims of corruption by socialistic parties. One example is the democratic socialist political party: Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The socialist party which came to power between 1979 and 1990 received massive criticism from the Nicaraguan population for abusing human rights during their 11-year spell.

Another major issue with which the governments have to keep up with is the lack of territorial control. The borders, especially in the Northern Triangle, are susceptible of lacking security as well as the means to establish order in case of any border crossing. People have lost trust in public security forces, which consequently leads to them hiring private security personnel, outnumbering the already poorly armed police officers. All these components mean that a possible development and economic growth is out of the question, which explains the lack of confidence of Central America's population in its own government and the high rate of migrants and asylum seekers in the northern countries.

### Central American migrant caravan



Map of the caravan route. map. 26 Nov. 2018, [www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45951782](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45951782).

The above-mentioned atmosphere that has been created in the past few decades has led to an enormous wave of immigrants seeking for international protection in the hope that their children will not fall prey to the DTOs and that they have a better chance of a wealthy future for their families. Another aspect are the everlasting droughts

and crop failures in the dry regions of Honduras which have impacted the agricultural sector massively and forced people out of their homes. It is more than usual for people from Central America to leave their country in such hopes. The idea of thousands of immigrants forming a caravan and travelling together is however relatively new. The idea behind it is that they do not want to be kidnapped, robbed or raped by local gangs who target migrant. One of the biggest and most well-known caravans took place in the Holy Week of 2017 and 2018 and were set up by Pueblo Sin Fronteras (Village Without Borders). These caravans usually start with a small group of 100-200 people and develops into masses of more than 1000 immigrants. Some of them come from the southern regions of Central America. The majority though comes from the NTCA, mainly Honduras. The desperate citizens who are being terrorized in their home country make their way from San Pedro Sula, Honduras and arrive more than 4000 km north in Tijuana, Mexico, where they try to cross the borders to the United States to seek asylum. It is estimated that around 500.000 migrants cross the Mexican border every year, from which 164.000 (according to the UNHCR) originate from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Once those immigrants reach their targeted destination it is stated in the US law that it is their right to ask for an asylum and they cannot be deported without being heard out. The law states that as long as you are a refugee you deserve to be listened to and to be provided with food and shelter. Consequently, everyone who emigrates from Central America states that they are threatened by local gangs or drug cartels thus making life in their home nation impossible. The evidence to back those facts up is however seldomly provided which results in hundreds of thousands of deportations each year. In 2016 alone 216.000 deportations took place in the United States. The current president of the USA, Donald Trump stated multiple times during the mid-term elections in November of 2018 that all illegal immigrants are not welcome and will either be sent back or face prison sentences. The migrant's options remain limited as they are forced to stay in Mexico where the drug cartels and gangs are stronger than anywhere else or make their way to the USA where they are expected to meet military forces and fences at the border.

### DTOs

Around 70-80% of the produced cocaine in South America goes through Central America. The drug traffickers exploit the already vulnerable Central American countries and use the inability of these states to keep the DTOs at bay, due to the many other challenges they are facing such as the high rate of gang activity. They use them as a transshipment point for the actual destination which would be the USA-Mexico borders. The drug transport through these countries make the already unstable region spike in homicides and criminality. It creates smaller drug wars which puts the citizens at risk and further promotes the unfaithfulness in the government. The civil wars throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century laid the foundations for an easy access on weapons which created the Weapon-Trafficking-Empire we see today, coupled with the money

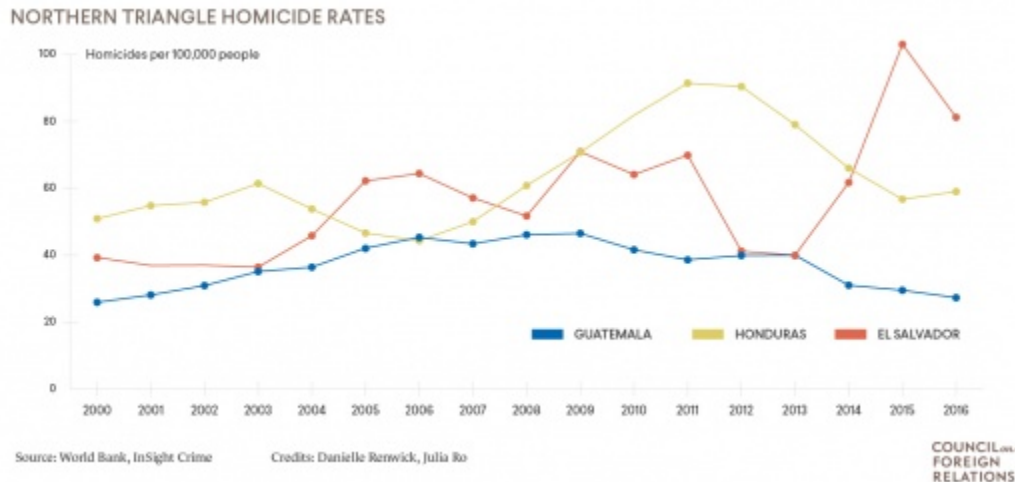
laundering and the rising rates of violence and crime. Additionally, the public sector is susceptible to bribery which only facilitates the constant move of drugs through the countries. Notwithstanding the significance of this problem, the government has achieved little to nothing when trying to fix it. The frustration in the minds of the locals is understandable since the engagement levels of the politicians and institutions have been minute and international cooperation in order to find concrete solutions such as a centralized drug database to gather all the necessary information has failed miserably.

## Gangs

Gangs (also referred to as Maras) have contributed massively over the past few decades, to the destruction and destabilization of the Central American region.

The civil war in Guatemala which lasted for more than 30 years (1960-1996) and the fight between the Salvadorian military-led government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a leftist umbrella organization (1979-1992), left more than 250.000 civilians dead. The aftermath of these wars is distinct until the present day since the easy access to weapons in the late 90's made it particularly easy for anyone to push through their own laws with the help of guns. Extortions and manipulation rose as the homicide rate began to grow as well. The unemployed and desperate citizens formed organized groups which are today known as gangs. The effects of the wars were not only palpable in El Salvador and Guatemala though, as the neighboring countries such as Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua felt the wave of criminal activity reaching their border in quick succession.

These criminal groups can be identified as Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs), organized crime groups whose targets are mostly immigrants or smaller vulnerable families. The most important though are the Maras. Some of the biggest Maras in Central America are the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Eighteenth Street Gang (M-18). Less known but equally as influential are the street gangs (pandillas). The M-18 was formed and founded in Los Angeles in the 1960s by young Hispanics who were left out by the already existing groups in the region. The MS-13 consisted of Salvadorans who emigrated from their country during the civil war in the 1980s and settled in Los Angeles. Their presence became more and more eminent in the following decades only to be disrupted by a wave of deportations from the US government which forced nearly all the members of these gangs to immigrate back to their home nations. It is estimated that the members of these gangs exceed 50.000 and could measure up to 80.000. There are estimated to be more 10.000 gang members in the United States. In addition to the extortion, human trafficking, smuggling and corruption, comes the drug trade which is often performed by Gangs which cooperate with DTOs, which in turn creates small drug wars and adds to the violence, especially in the Northern Triangle.



"Northern Triangle Homicide Rates." graph. 26 June 2018,  
[www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle](http://www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle).

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### United States of America

The United States of America is one of the main countries which offers their constant support to the Central American region. The most memorable and recent act of help from the US took place in 2014 when the United States in cooperation with the Central American governments launched the project "Alliance for Prosperity". This project promised many essential factors such as but not limited to economic development, fighting against poverty, corruption and other forms of crime and the improvement of local and international security. Though these plans may seem like the government of the US was always open to help the countries in need, this is not exactly the case. In order to solve their differences with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, president Ronald Reagan launched the Reagan Doctrine which allowed USA to invade different parts of Central America, mainly Nicaragua, to fight against their main enemy. Despite those past issues, Central America keeps close relations with the US since they promote peace and democracy in their area. The ever-rising immigrant waves from the southern borders create an extra motive for the US to help the countries in the Central American region.

### Mexico

As mentioned before Mexico plays a decisive role in the development of the Central American crisis. It sits between Central America itself and the United States

which means it is the only way for immigrants to get to their destination which is America. As the Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has expressed several times his country is open to any kind of immigration and willing to provide jobs to anyone crossing the southern borders as long as they respect the local laws.

The biggest effect that Mexico has on Central America though are the Drug Trafficking Organizations which are operating on their grounds. Many DTOs such as Los Zetas have been most active in the Northern Triangle, explaining the current situation in this region. The frequent drug transshipment activities have forced drug use, especially in the NTCA, to rise exponentially and smaller drug wars to erupt all over the region due to local gangs wanting to claim the drug routes and other territory for them.

#### United Nations High Commissioner On Refugees (UNHCR)

Even though the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees has been kept busy by the migration crisis in Europe, recent sparks in immigration waves in Central America have forced the UN to oversee the situation in this region. According to their official website there are approximately 170.000 refugees and asylum-seekers coming from the Northern Triangle, trying to cross the Mexican borders. That is why the UNHCR is trying to improve regional cooperation with the goal to enhance the security and the protection of the locals, to improve the reception standards for asylum-seekers and to establish possible protection networks. In cooperation with many other UN Organizations, the Central American governments, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the World Bank they signed the San Jose Action Statement in order to address the issue and come up with solutions to improve protection for all violently displaced refugees.

#### United Nations Observer Group In Central America (ONUCA)

The ONUCA was founded in November 1989 after an agreement of the five Central American leaders to cease the ongoing wars. Its goal was the demobilization of the Nicaraguan Resistance in order to establish peace and democracy in a country which had been plagued by war for years. The main aim though was to demobilize any irregular forces and to destroy their arsenal. The organization accelerated the process of disarmament and played an essential role in any kinds of peacekeeping operations that took place during this time. The pacification of the area took many steps forward with the help of ONUCA while they encouraged the local parties to resolve any conflicts in the region.



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1821	Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama declare independence
1823	Guatemala declares independence
1823	Creation of the Federal Republic of Central America; A republican democracy which was littered by civil wars
1838-1841	Disintegration of the Union; Separation of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Costa Rica
1907	Creation of a Central American Court of Justice
13.12.1960	Establishment of the Central American Common Market with the goals of political unification and the implementation of the Import Substitution Industrialization policies
1962	The start of the civil war in Guatemala between the leftist Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and the Guatemalan government which had US backup
15.10.1979	Beginning of the Salvadoran civil war between Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), a leftist rebel group and the government which had military assistance
June 1979	After 17 years of revolution in Nicaragua, the FSLN now controlled most of the country excluding the capital
17.7.1979	President Somoza is forced to resign and pass control of the state over to the revolutionary movement FSLN
1981-1990	Contra War between an anti-Sandinista movement and the government consisting of the FSLN; this ended when the Tela Accord was signed in 1989 which promised the demobilization of the Contra armies and the FSLN

16.01.1992	The Chapultepec Peace Accords are signed in Mexico City, ensuring peace for El Salvador and marking the end of the civil war
December 1996	URNG, a once guerrilla umbrella organization, becomes a legal party and ends the civil war in Guatemala which lasted for more than 35 years with peace treaties, while also being overviewed by the United Nations Security Council

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/50/132)

It recognized the essentiality of international support and the creation of an international framework with the goal of promoting peace, democracy and sustainable development. Implemented on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 1995.

### United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/50/226)

Establishment of the United Nations Mission for Verification of Human Rights in order to restore peace and try to preserve Human Rights in the Central American region. Implemented on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1996.

### United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/58/117)

With the cooperation of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America and further international assistance the Central American governments try to solve the instability in their states. Implemented on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003.

### United Nations Security Council Resolution (A/RES/63/19)

Trying to resolve the ongoing crisis in the Central American region by fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development. Implemented on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Ever since the civil wars struck half of the Central American countries, they had to deal with some of the highest homicide rates, rising rates of violence and drug trafficking. In response to these issues many of their governments proposed radical measures to combat these problems. Military forces assisting the poorly armed and trained police officers became a daily routine. The adoption of strict and aggressive laws against gangs and DTOs, especially in the Northern triangle, led to thousands of arrests, resulting in an overcrowding in prisons. Although the implementation of such laws resulted in a short-term decrease of violence it created even more mistrust in the government and has not helped in resolving the immensely high crime rates in a long-term scheme.

The United Nations have contributed massively to the improvement of the standards of living for the locals. Although the homicide, violence and crime rate in general has risen extremely in the last decade it is not due to the interference of the UN. Their donations to the local governments and the establishment of refugee camps all over Central America and the US with the cooperation of the UNHCR is without the shadow of a doubt one of the few glimmers of hope for Central American population.

### Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

The 5 Goals of CARSI: <sup>1</sup>

1. Create safe streets for the citizens of the region
2. Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband to, within, and between the nations of Central America
3. Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments
4. Re-establish effective state presence, services and security in communities at risk
5. Foster cooperation between the nations of the region, international partners, and donors to combat regional security threats

The Central American Regional Security Initiative was created by the United States Department of State with the goals that were just listed above. With nearly 1 billion dollars spent from the US government in order to achieve those goals it is clear that the Central American governments have moved on from the brutal laws of the past which

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<sup>1</sup> "Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)." *InSight Crime*, 18 Oct. 2011, [www.insightcrime.org/uncategorized/central-america-regional-security-initiative/](http://www.insightcrime.org/uncategorized/central-america-regional-security-initiative/).

have only met criticism, and are working on fixing their situation with more peaceful measures.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The mission of granting peace and democracy in a region where homicides are more prevalent than a stable Wi-Fi connection has come out to be quite hard. However, the assumption that the locals have not tried their best would be unfair. The lack of resources and the fact that there are many factors to be considered when looking at this issue create a very complex situation which is not to be dealt with naively.

The creation of organizations like the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have proven to be some of the most successful solutions to this topic. Although they not even close into restoring normality to the region they have indeed provided the citizens and the governments of Central America with enough resources to combat a fraction of the problem. With the continuation of this process this would pledge some kind of hope to the people of these countries.

One of the main issues in Central America is the lack of transparency within their borders. Their low status on the Corruption Perception Index shows the high corruption rates of these countries. The UN could create an advisory or monitoring body to monitor and discuss with other countries on how to protect the democracy from venality and corruption. This could be an effective measure against corrupt politicians and could provide the population, which normally does not trust the government, with politicians who put the states interest first.

Another corrupt and very underqualified public sector of Central America are the government officials. Lack of resources, training and thorough monitoring create the ineffective and sometimes also corrupt police officers who do not really care to carry out their duties, either because they are scared or simply not qualified enough. The creation of national institutions and international cooperation with the likes of the United States of America or NGOs could be instrumental to resolving the Central American Crisis.

The last main focus of all the parties should be the immense refugee waves that are hitting Mexico's borders every day. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has already taken big steps in order to resolve the issue. The government just need to follow their lead. As mentioned before the creation of a legal framework would help develop an exact program for the management and distribution of any resources. Data collection is paramount for a better understanding of the issue and a more effective identification of immigrants. Last but not least the creation of refugee camps all over the region, which is already been implemented has to continue to meet the enormous amount of displaced people in Central America.

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