Crossing the "Vertical Frontier"

David FitzGerald
University of California, San Diego

@FitzGeraldUCSD
Why leave Central America?

- World homicide ranking (2016):
  - El Salvador - 2\textsuperscript{nd}
  - Honduras - 4\textsuperscript{th}
  - Guatemala - 17\textsuperscript{th}

- Extensive gang control of territories / corruption / impunity

- UN “human development index” ranking of 189 countries (2018):
  - El Salvador - 121st
  - Guatemala - 127th
  - Honduras - 133th
Why go to the U.S.?

- 100+ years of U.S. military interventions and total economic domination tie Central America to U.S.

- Central American community in the U.S. established in 1980s by people fleeing wars in which U.S. deeply involved
Central American immigrants in the U.S., 1960-2016

El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras
Why travel in a caravan?

- MIGRANTS ARE TARGETS: Gangs and corrupt police assault, extort, & kill people in transit
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- IMPUNITY - 99% of crimes reported against migrants in 2014-2016 did not result in a sentence – WOLA 2017
Mothers from Central America cross into Mexico demanding information about missing loved ones. Image by Julysa Sosa. 2016.
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- VISIBILITY - trying to reduce risk of crime and detention/deportation
Requests for asylum in Mexico, 2013-2018

Source: Boletín Estadístico de Solicitaciones de Refugio en Mexico, COMAR.
Note: 2018 is partial data (Jan-August).
Percent of Central American applicants granted refugee or complementary protection status in Mexico, 2013-2017

Source: Boletín Estadístico de Solicitaciones de Refugio en México, COMAR
Why not ask for asylum in Mexico?

- Central Americans often targets in Mexico.
- Family ties & greater economic opportunity in U.S.
- Misinformation about asylum in U.S.

**U.S. asylum denial rates, FY2012-2017**

- Guatemala: 75%
- Honduras: 78%
- El Salvador: 79%
What’s new about Mexico as a buffer to keep people from Central America out of the U.S?
A long history continues...

1980s:
- U.S. pays for refugee camps in southern Mexico
- Mexico imposes travel restrictions on Central Americans in northern Mexico
- Mexico imposes visa requirements on Central Americans

1990s:
- U.S. finances repatriations

2000s-2010s:
- U.S. equips / trains Mexican immigration and border control agents
“The Guatemalan border with Chiapas is now our southern border.”

– Alan Bersin, DHS Assistant Secretary for Policy, 2012
Rafts openly take unauthorized migrants across Suchiate river to Mexico
“The vertical frontier”

Sources: Boletines Estadísticos 2001-2017, SEGOB; Casillas 2008: 159; INS and DHS Yearbooks and Enforcement Reports, 1992-2017
Comments welcomed

David FitzGerald
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dfitzgerald@ucsd.edu
@FitzGeraldUCSD