

Perceptions of Immigration



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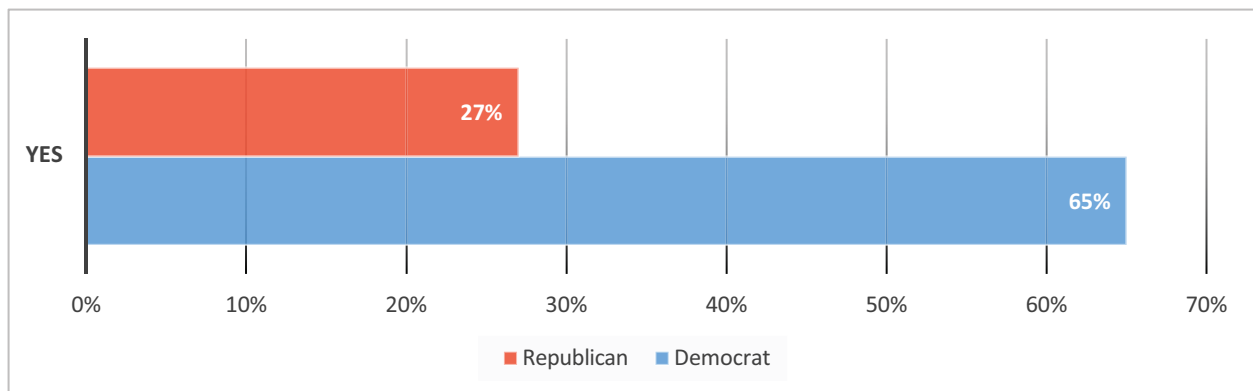


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Perceptions of Persecution by Political Party

Sixty-five percent of Arizonans who are Democrats believe that Central American migrants have a credible fear of persecution when they apply for asylum in the U.S., compared to 27% of Arizonans who are Republicans (Figure 1), according to Morrison Institute's 2019 statewide poll.

Figure 1. Percent of poll respondents who agree most migrants from Central America arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border have a credible fear of persecution.



Source: Morrison Institute's Arizonans Speak 2019 poll

The spread, or difference in opinion by political party, is 38 percentage points. This is not an anomaly. All four of the poll's immigration questions had spreads between Democrats and Republicans of 35 percentage points or greater.

This brief will highlight research about Central American migration and examine recent asylum seeker trends and policy changes to better understand asylum seekers in Arizona.

Life in Central America

Central America is comprised of seven countries: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. However, the focus of recent immigration debate stems from the migration patterns of three countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which collectively are referred to as the Northern Triangle.

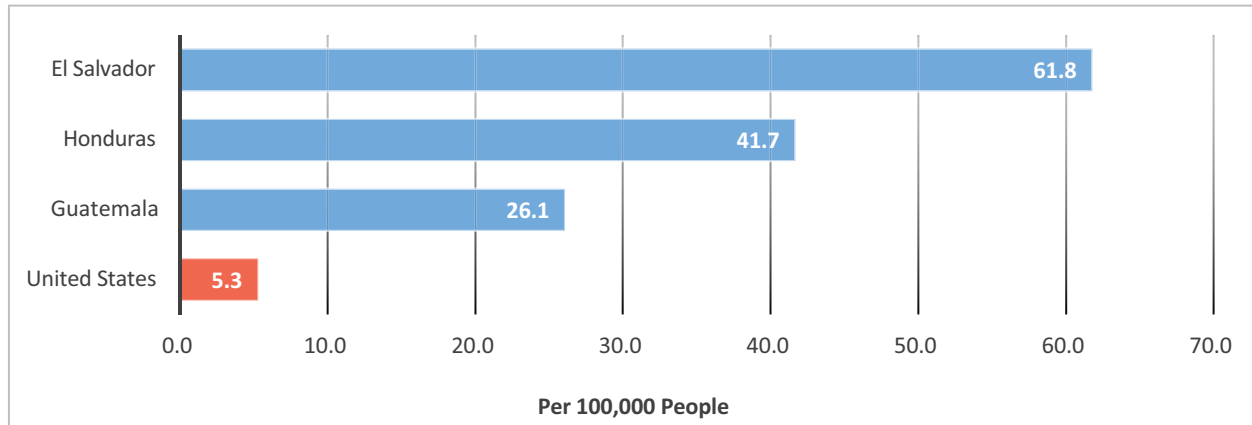
Many interrelated factors contribute to an individual's decision to migrate from their country of origin: crime, violence, corruption, mass poverty and direct persecution from governments and organized crime organizations.

Central America has a [long history of autocratic rule](#), government corruption, extortion and violence against women. Plus, according to the Centers for Disease Control, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are all suffering from significant healthcare worker shortages, which means that many Central Americans have [limited- to- no access](#) to health professionals for basic healthcare needs.

In addition, many young people living in Central American countries grapple with vulnerabilities associated with [high rates of crime and gang violence](#), including poor education completion rates, early pregnancy and limited employment opportunities. In 2017, only [47.2% of adolescents in Guatemala](#) were enrolled in secondary school. [Dropout rates in El Salvador](#) have risen significantly, with only 33% of youth completing high school. And in 2018, [Honduras estimated around 900,000](#) children were out of school.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime conducted a Global Homicide Study (Figure 2) and determined [El Salvador had the highest murder rate in the world in 2017](#).

Figure 2. Central American homicide rates in 2017 compared to the U.S.



Source: UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2017

In El Salvador, the main source of income for gangs is extortion (not drugs), with [93% of small businesses](#) reported having to pay in 2016. According to reports from the National Anti-Extortion Force, there is an estimated [\\$390 million lost to gang extortion](#) in El Salvador each year. Those who refuse to pay are threatened with violence or killed, while others who cannot keep up with payments become forced to move. In fact, [96.2% of internally displaced people](#) in El Salvador cited gangs as the reason for abandoning their homes.

Officials in both Guatemala and Honduras struggle to regain public trust after widespread corruption. Investigations in 2015 by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala exposed [more than 60 corruption schemes](#), implicating officials in all three branches of government and prompting the resignation and arrest of then-President [Otto Perez Molina](#). Meanwhile, in Honduras, the Special Commission for Police Reform suspended or [removed more than 5,000 police officers](#) for corruption. However, the commission later came under public scrutiny when an officer, promoted by the commission, was arrested for [illicit association and money laundering](#).

What does it mean to apply for asylum in the United States?

Asylum seekers are people who have fled persecution in their home country and are seeking safe haven in a different nation. To be eligible for asylum in the U.S., applicants must be seeking protection because they have a [well-founded fear of persecution](#) based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

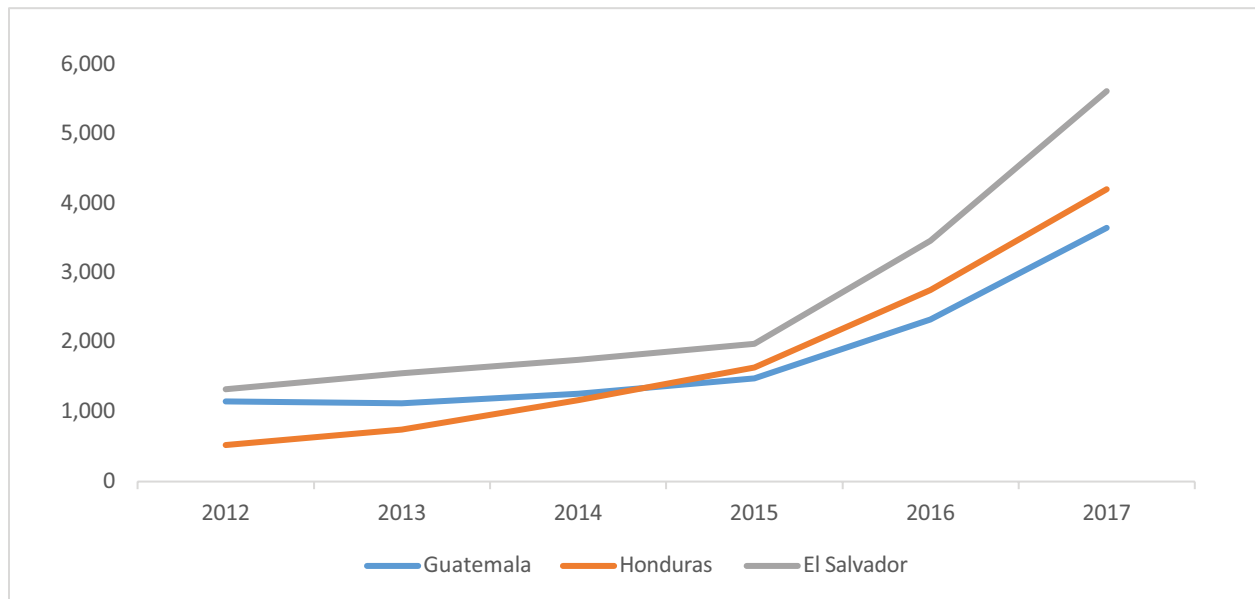
The majority of asylum seekers come from regions of the world that are suffering from conflict, disaster, or weak rule of law. Seeking asylum in the U.S. is a legal process that does not require a travel visa or prior authorization. It can be initiated at a U.S. border port of entry or from within the U.S.

Asylum seekers must present [credible evidence](#) supporting their claims of persecution before they are granted asylum. Migrating solely for economic opportunity is not a valid reason to claim asylum.

Trends in Asylum Claims and Approvals

According to statistics from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University, [asylum applications](#) from Central American countries have increased from 3,000 applications in 2012 to 13,461 applications in 2017 (Figure 3).

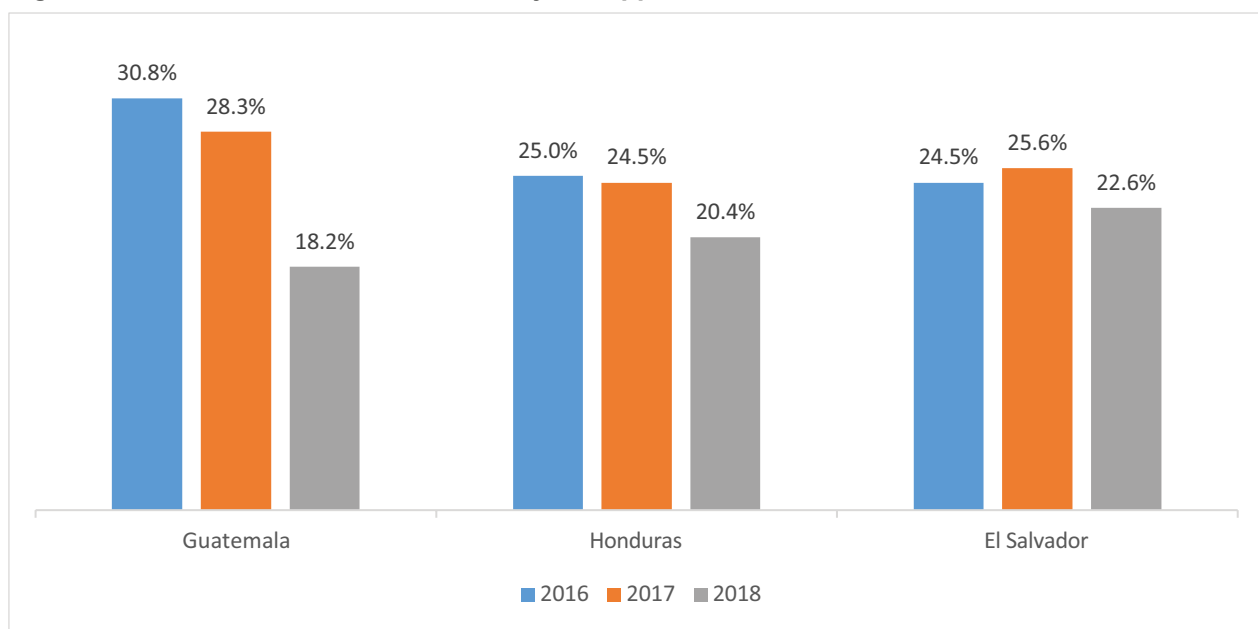
Figure 3. Number of Central Americans filing asylum cases in the U.S.



Source: Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University

While there has been a significant increase in the number of asylum cases filed from Northern Triangle countries, the percentages of [approved applications has decreased](#) in recent years. People from Guatemala have seen the largest decrease in asylum approvals – from 30.8% in 2016 to 18.2% in 2018. Honduras experienced a decrease from 25% in 2016 to 20.4% in 2018, and El Salvador experienced a slight decrease from 24.5% in 2016 to 22.6% in 2018 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percent of Central American Asylum Approvals in the U.S.

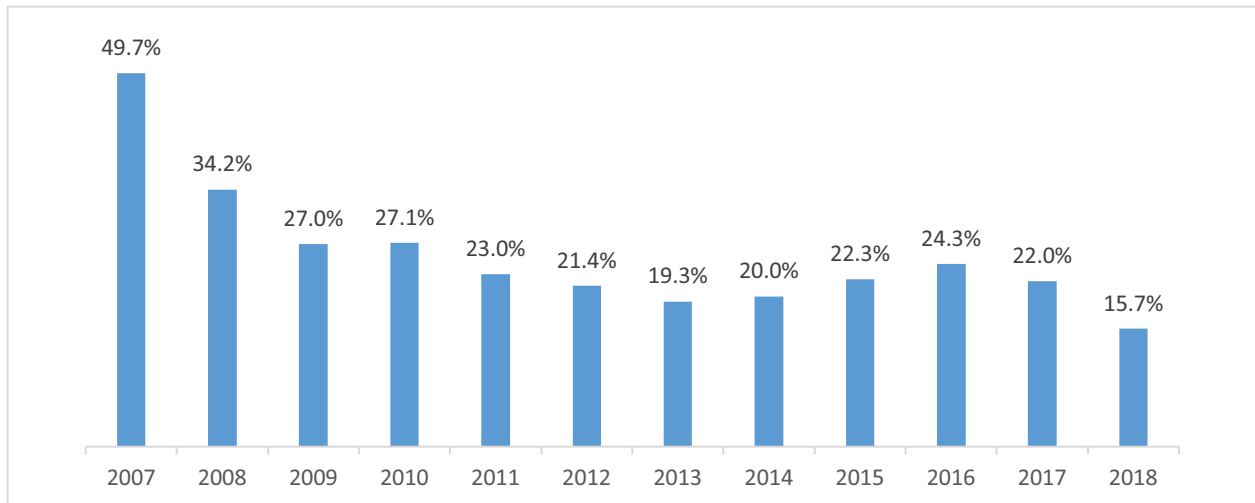


Source: Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University

Trends in Asylum Claims and Approvals

Immigration courts in Arizona processed a record number of [asylum cases](#) in Fiscal Year 2019. Despite the spike in asylum applications, the percent of approved asylum cases processed in Arizona has actually decreased over the past decade (Figure 5). Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have a lower asylum approval rate than the rate for all asylum applicants.

Figure 5. Arizona Immigration Court, Percent of Asylum Approvals



Source: Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University