

## **Appendix 2: Country Commitment Metrics Analysis**

The Department of State and USAID have committed to using context data to monitor and assess progress towards achieving the strategic objectives of the U.S. Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Irregular Migration in Central America (Root Causes Strategy). Often gathered by independent third-parties, context indicator data help policymakers monitor regional and national operating environments, including country commitment to reform. This report compares country-specific values to regional and historical averages (i.e., benchmarks) as appropriate. (See Appendix 3 for analysis of performance metrics.)

The cross-cutting question of migration intentions represents a prime example of a country commitment metric. Data from Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) 2021 AmericasBarometer surveys reveals that the percentage of citizens intending to leave Guatemala and Honduras registered the largest increase in the history of the AmericasBarometer. El Salvador registered a more modest increase (see Figure 1). Not all who express an intention to leave will actually embark on the journey, however. Of those who expressed an intention to leave their countries, less than a quarter had taken concrete steps to do so. Nevertheless, increased intentions may portend elevated migration levels and those who intend to emigrate predominantly show interest in the United States as their destination. LAPOP also reported the lack of economic opportunities, food insecurity, and crime and violence as the main motivations for migrating in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Lupu, Noam, Mariana Rodríguez, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister (Eds.) 2021. *Pulse of Democracy*. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, available at [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2021/2021\\_LAPOP\\_AmericasBarometer\\_2021\\_Pulse\\_of\\_Democracy.pdf](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2021/2021_LAPOP_AmericasBarometer_2021_Pulse_of_Democracy.pdf)

### Do you have any intention of going to live or work in another country in the next three years? Yes/No

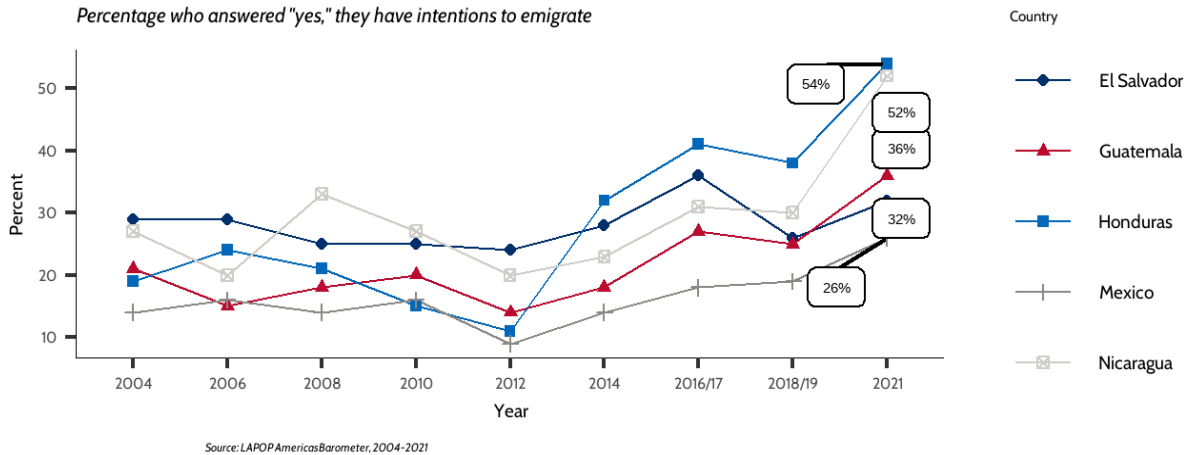


Figure 1. *Migration Intentions, 2004-2021*

## Pillar 1: Addressing Economic Insecurity and Inequality

**Business enabling environment:** In 2020 the economies of northern Central America precipitously declined because of both the COVID-19 pandemic and tropical storms Eta and Iota: Honduras and El Salvador experienced declines in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth rates approaching 10 percent, while Guatemala had a more modest decline of three percent (see Figure 2). Unemployment also sharply rose across the region, with the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimating that the total unemployment rate nearly doubled in each northern Central American country from 2019 to 2020 (see Figure 3). Moreover, unemployment among youth, a key demographic for the Root Causes Strategy, likely has risen more sharply. According to the ILO, the drop in the employment rates of young workers globally has been 2.5 times greater than that incurred by the general population during the pandemic, and a larger share of young workers have become inactive.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021, International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO, 2021, available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/WCMS\\_795453/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/WCMS_795453/lang--en/index.htm)

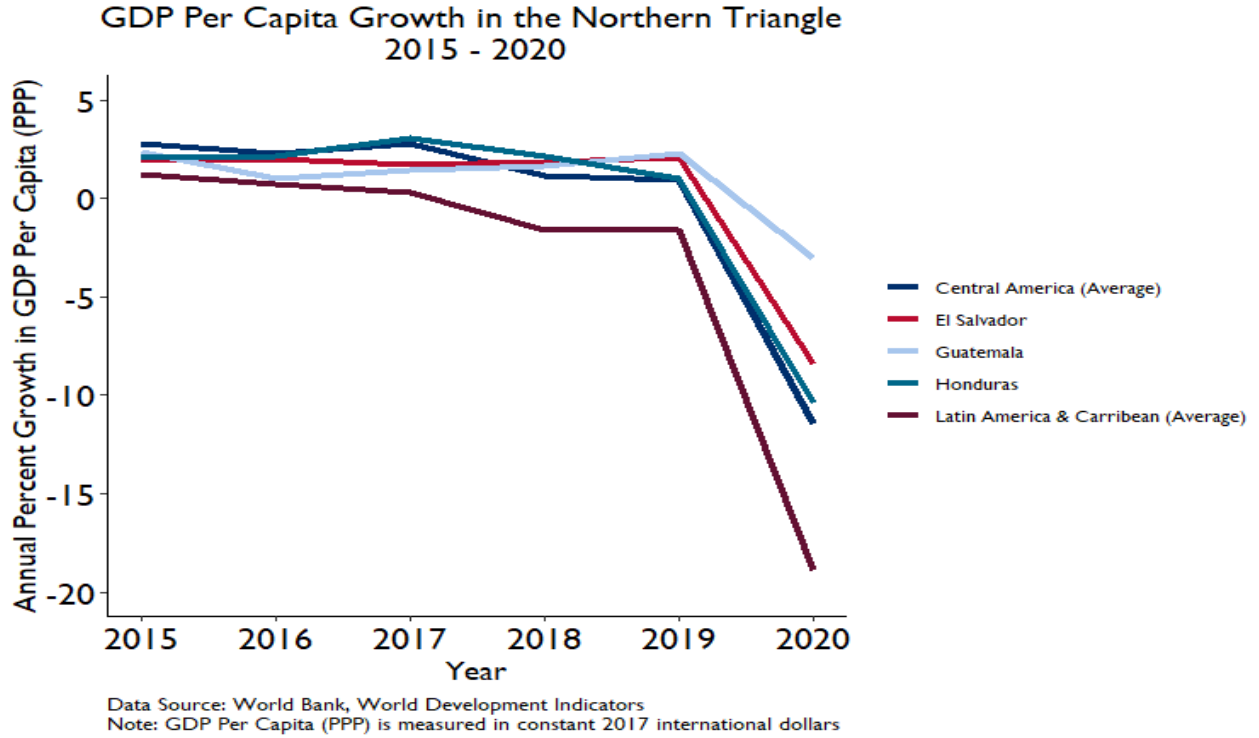


Figure 2. *GDP Per Capita Growth Rate*

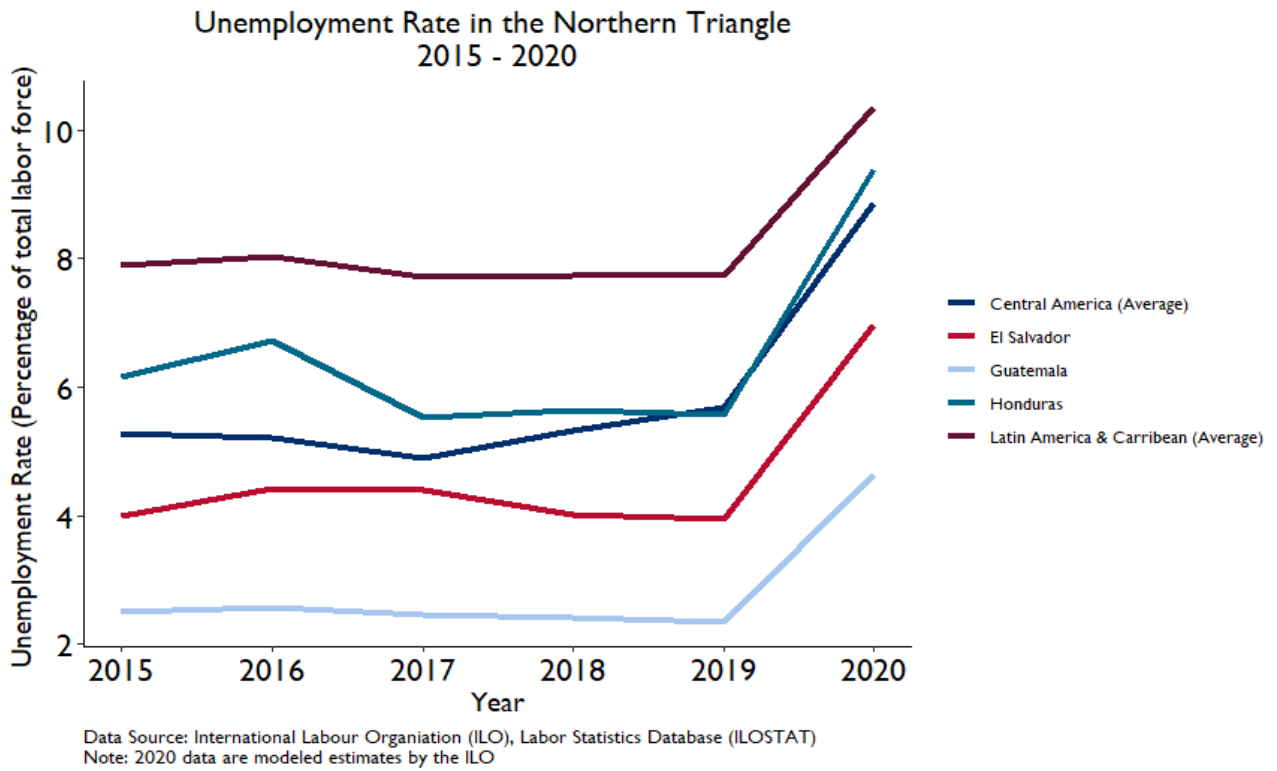


Figure 3. *Unemployment Rate*

A lack of proper regulatory enforcement, as measured by the World Justice Project, is impeding private sector development in the economies of northern Central America. El Salvador scores on par with the Latin America and Caribbean regional average for regulatory enforcement,<sup>3</sup> while Guatemala and Honduras perform far below this average.<sup>4</sup> Further, the weak regulatory environments in these economies also drive informality, and shadow economies adversely affect formal businesses. Firm-level surveys conducted across the three northern Central America countries in recent years show competition from informal firms as a major constraint for a sizable share of registered businesses.<sup>5</sup> On average across the three countries, 45.4 percent of formal firms surveyed cite this as a significant hurdle to doing business,<sup>6</sup> and all three countries in northern Central America lag behind the regional average for Latin America and the Caribbean of 39.6 percent.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in all three economies, firms listed the practices of informal businesses as one of their top three biggest obstacles.<sup>8</sup>

**Trade:** While El Salvador outperforms regional averages and its neighboring countries on export sophistication, all three northern Central America countries have room to improve and expand their economies through trade diversification (see Figure 4) while also exploiting the advantages of integration through the Central American Common Market. As a group, Central American countries showed a much smaller decline in exports than the rest of the region in the first half of 2020 (i.e., exports fell by less than half that of other subregions in Latin America), partly due to the importance of trade within Central America. Nevertheless, the region remains vulnerable to volatility, since a large share of export-sector employment in Central America consists of low-tech manufacturing industries (e.g., food, beverages, and tobacco; textiles, clothing, and footwear; and others such as the maquila assembly of electronics and medical equipment, and plastics, wood, and paper).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> World Justice Project. (2020). WJP Rule of Law Index 2020. World Bank, available at <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>

<sup>4</sup> World Justice Project. (2020). WJP Rule of Law Index 2020. World Bank, available at <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/> Guatemala and Honduras rank 25 and 30, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank Enterprise Surveys, available at <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys>

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Enterprise Surveys, available at <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys>

<sup>7</sup> World Bank Enterprise Surveys, available at <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys>

<sup>8</sup> World Bank Enterprise Surveys, available at <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/enterprisesurveys>

<sup>9</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).(2020). International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, available at [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46614/1/S2000804\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46614/1/S2000804_en.pdf)

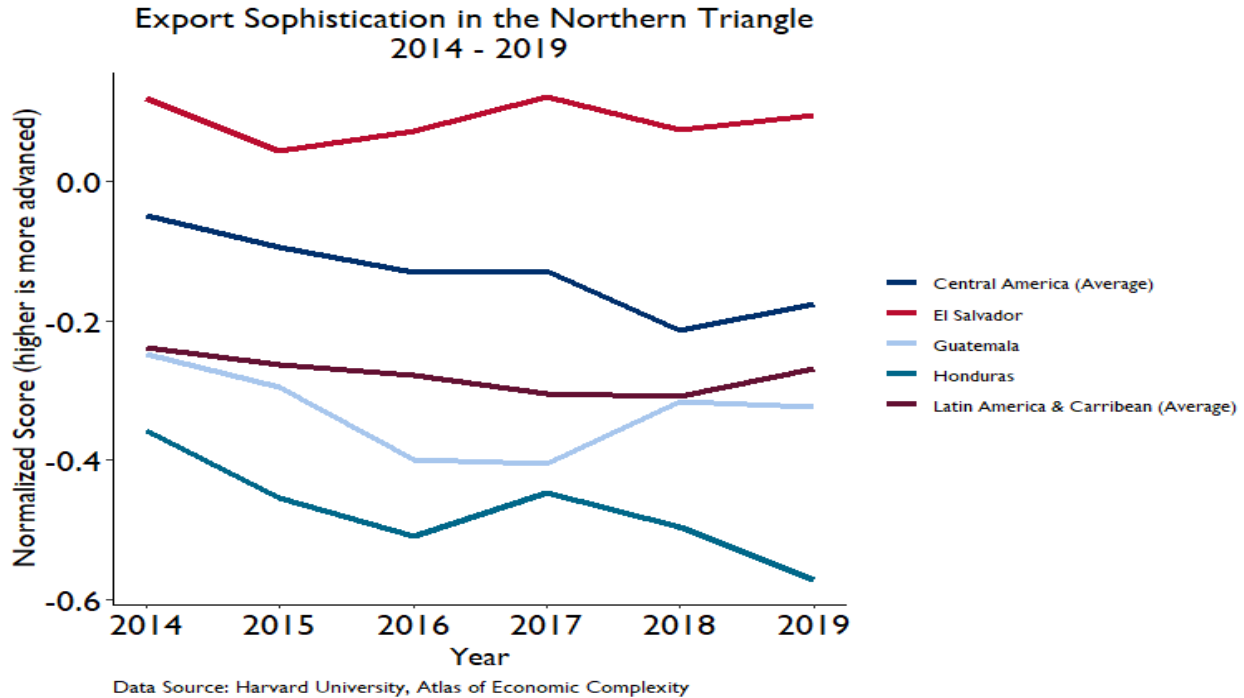


Figure 4. *Export Sophistication*

**Education, Workforce Development, Health, and Social Protection:** On two key metrics of education, lower secondary school completion rate and learning-adjusted years of school (which factors in education quality)<sup>10</sup>, El Salvador performs better than the Central American average, while all three northern Central American countries lag behind averages for all of Latin America and the Caribbean (see Figures 5 and 6). The suspension or closure of face-to-face learning in schools and other settings due to the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated gaps in educational access, quality, and learning outcomes.<sup>11</sup> This, in turn, has negative implications for preparing youth to enter the workforce. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted education and training and has negatively affected the transition of many individuals from school, vocational training, or university to the labor market. This has negative implications for the

<sup>10</sup> Lower-secondary completion rates in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have seen modest improvements since 2015, but still remain below averages for Latin America (all three countries) and Central America (Guatemala and Honduras). This indicator reflects an upper estimate of the actual lower secondary completion rate; the numerator may include late entrants and overage children who have repeated one or more grades of lower secondary education as well as children who entered school early.

<sup>11</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2020). *Education in the time of COVID-19*, available at [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45905/1/S2000509\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45905/1/S2000509_en.pdf)

longer-term employment probabilities, wages, and skills development of a substantial cohort within the workforce.<sup>12</sup>

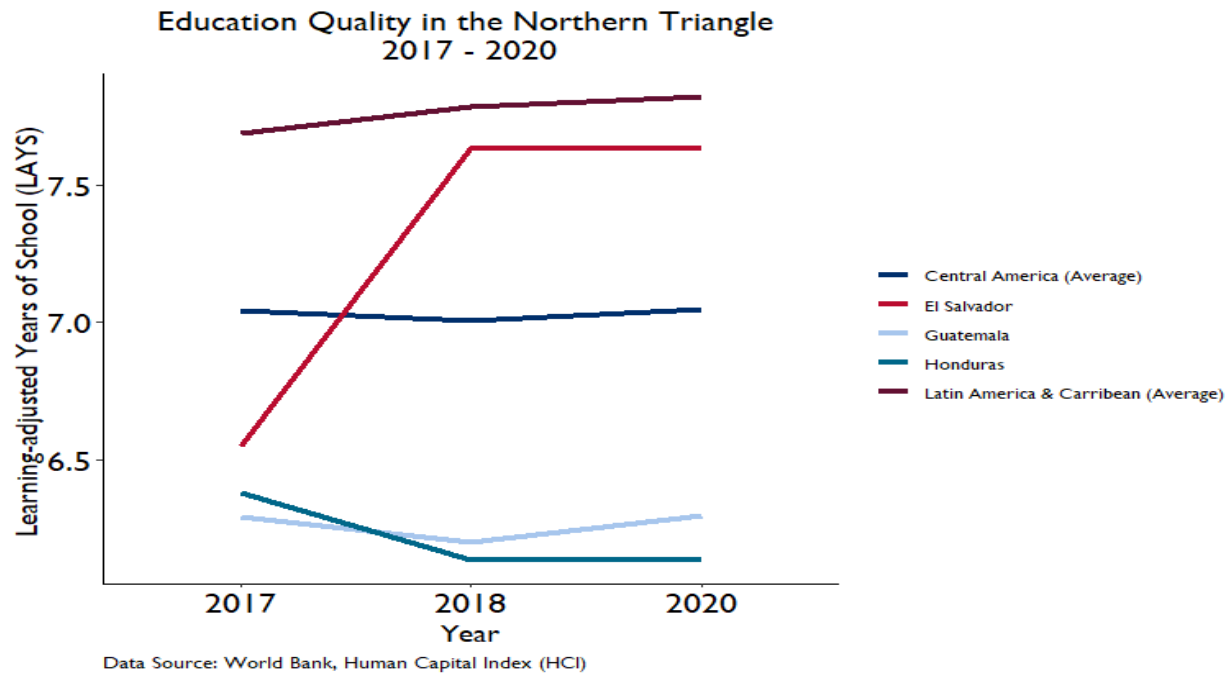
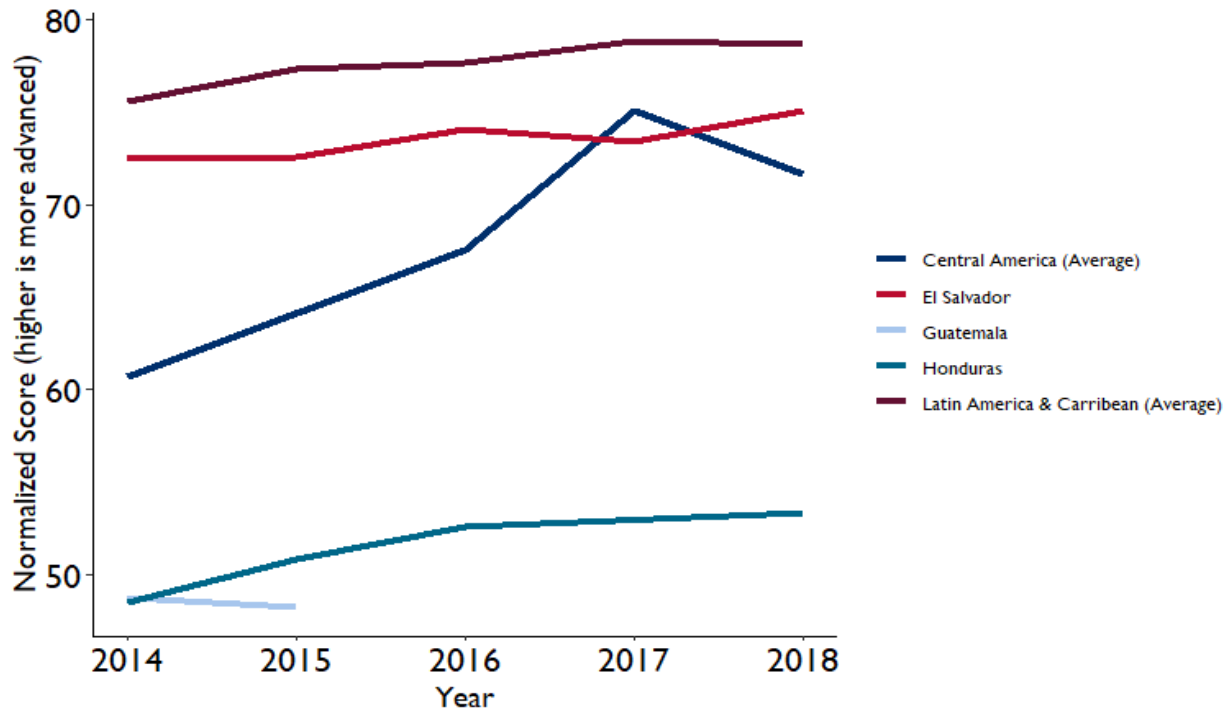


Figure 5. *Education Quality*

<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization. (2021). *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021*, available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/WCMS\\_795453/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/WCMS_795453/lang--en/index.htm)

### Lower Secondary Completion Rates in the Northern Triangle 2014 - 2018



Data Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics (UIS) Database

Figure 6. *Lower Secondary Education Completion Rate*

El Salvador's child health score<sup>13</sup> for 2020 nearly matches the Latin America and the Caribbean average, and the score for Honduras registers slightly below average for Central America; Guatemala's score consistently ranks far below all regional averages (see Figure 7). Nevertheless, in 2020, vaccination coverage rates—a key determinant of child health—declined region-wide due to funding shortfalls, vaccine misinformation, instability, COVID-19 restrictions on movement, and reluctance to access health facilities for fear of COVID-19 transmission.<sup>14</sup> As of November 2021, the percentages of eligible population with full COVID-19 vaccination register near 61 percent in El Salvador, 21 percent in Guatemala, and 37 percent in Honduras. Further, social protection coverage rates—the percentage of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit (e.g., unemployment, family leave, retirement) for all three countries remain lower than

<sup>13</sup> The Child Health Indicator comprises three underlying indicators: access to at least basic sanitation; access to at least basic water; and child mortality (ages 1–5). For more information, see <https://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/nrpi-chi-2020/>

<sup>14</sup> Pan-American Health Organization. (July 2021). COVID-19 pandemic leads to major backsliding on childhood vaccinations, new WHO, UNICEF data shows. For more information, see <https://www.paho.org/en/news/15-7-2021-covid-19-pandemic-leads-major-backsliding-childhood-vaccinations-new-who-unicef-data>

averages both for Central America and for Latin America and the Caribbean (see Figure 8).

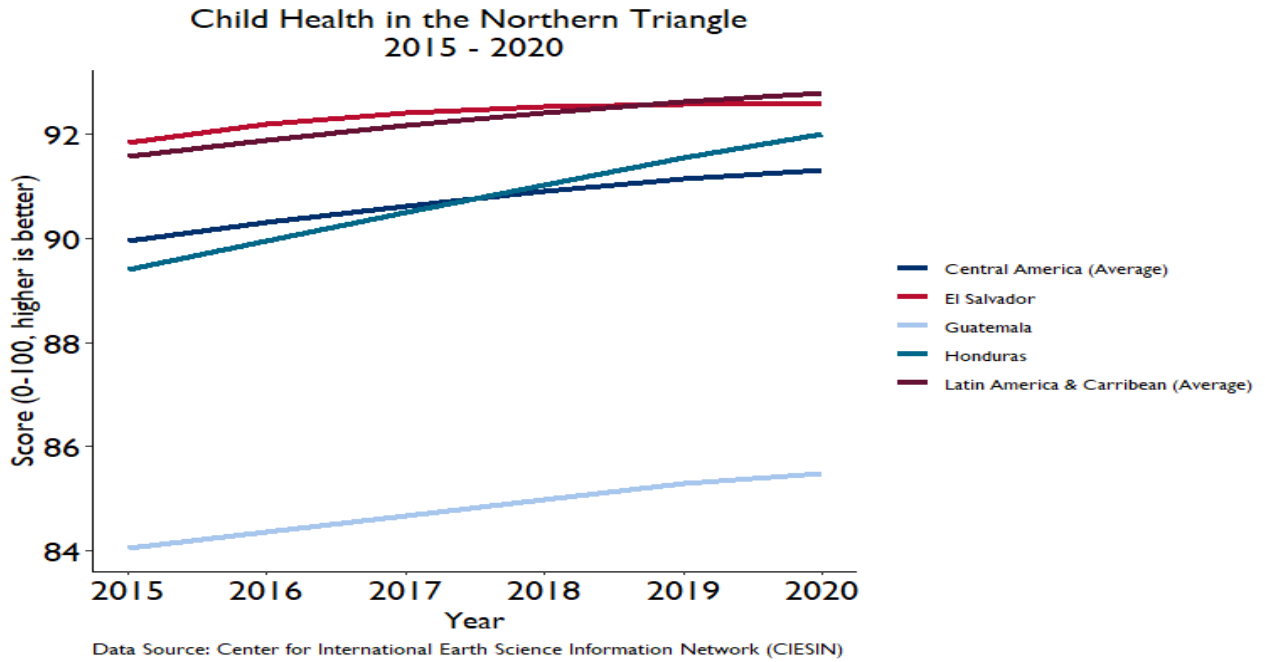
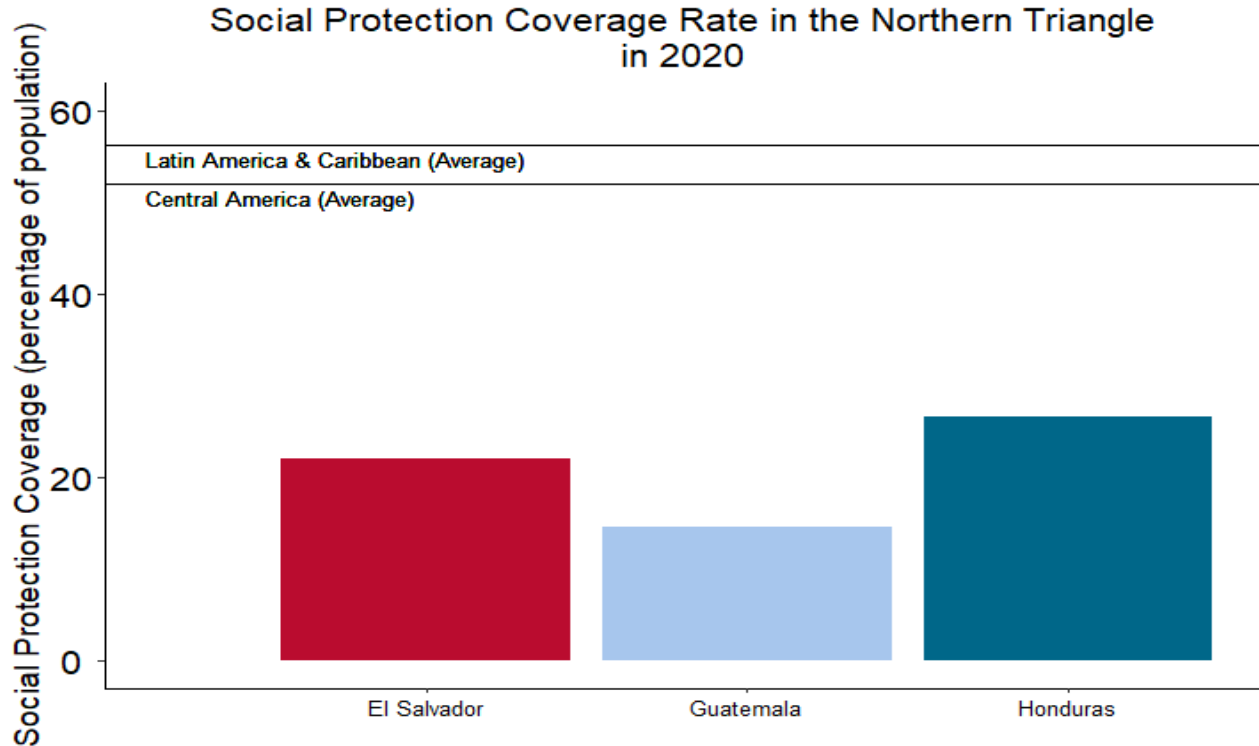


Figure 7. *Child Health*





Data Source: International Labour Organisation (ILO), Labor Statistics Database (ILOSTAT)

Figure 8. *Social Protection Coverage*

**Global Climate Change and Food Insecurity:** Despite vulnerability to climate change,<sup>15</sup> all three countries of northern Central America score poorly, compared to regional averages, on the quality of environmental policy, as measured by the Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (see Figure 9).<sup>16</sup> The populations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras remain more food insecure compared to averages for Central America and Latin America and the Caribbean, with food insecurity rising region-wide in 2020 (see Figure 10). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 report shows that the average prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the populations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras has increased from the 2014-2016 triennia to the most recent 2018-

<sup>15</sup> Germanwatch (2021). *Global Climate Risk Index, 2021*, available at <https://germanwatch.org/en/19777> Guatemala and Honduras are more vulnerable to global climate change than average for Central America, while these countries and El Salvador are more vulnerable than the average for all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>16</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung (2020). *Transformation Index (BTI)*, available at <https://bti-project.org/>. The BTI Environmental Policy indicator scores countries' environmental policies on a one to ten scale, with higher scores representing more advanced environmental policy regimes. This indicator measures the soundness of environmental stewardship and natural resource management, factoring a wide array of macroeconomic policies with environmental consequences, such as energy and tax policies, national climate plans, and incentives at the firm and household levels. The indicator also considers whether legislation and regulations are effectively executed, as well as the influence of societal stakeholders beyond the government, including the private sector and civil society

2020 triennia from 42.4 to 47.1, 42.7 to 49.7, and 41.6 to 45.6 respectively.<sup>17</sup> As a comparison, Central America as a whole shifted from 27.9 to 34.8 in the same time period, an increase largely driven by the aforementioned countries.<sup>18</sup> Further, perception surveys conducted by Vanderbilt University's Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 2021 also revealed increasing levels of self-reported food insecurity, a key motivating factor for migration, in Guatemala and Honduras, with a slight decline in El Salvador.<sup>19</sup>

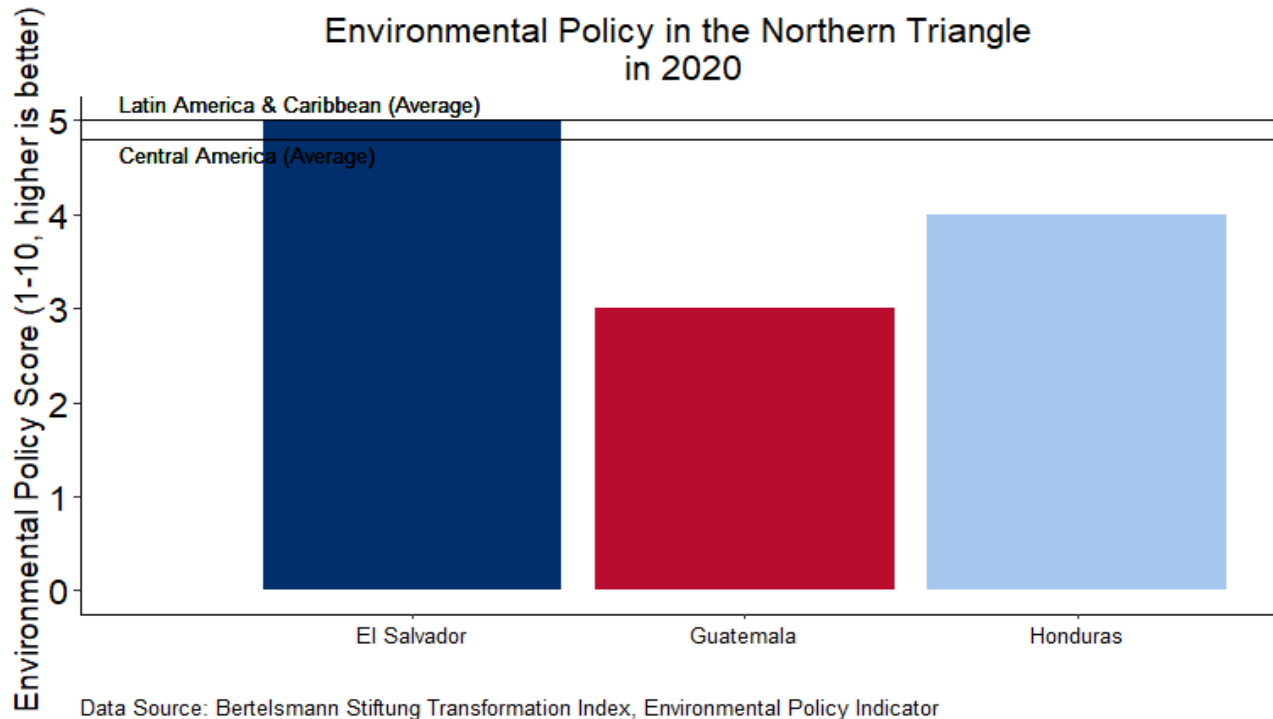


Figure 9. *Environmental Policy*

<sup>17</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. (2021). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all*, available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4474en> Individual country estimates are presented as triennia to mitigate for sampling variability.

<sup>18</sup> Mexico and Costa Rica make up the other two countries included to calculate the prevalence of food insecurity for the Central American region.

<sup>19</sup> Vanderbilt University. *Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)*, available at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/> LAPOP surveys for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras include two questions related to food security: (1) In the past three months, because of a lack of money or other resources, did your household ever run out of food? and (2) In the past three months, because of lack of money or other resources, did you or some other adult in the household ever eat only once a day or go without eating all day?

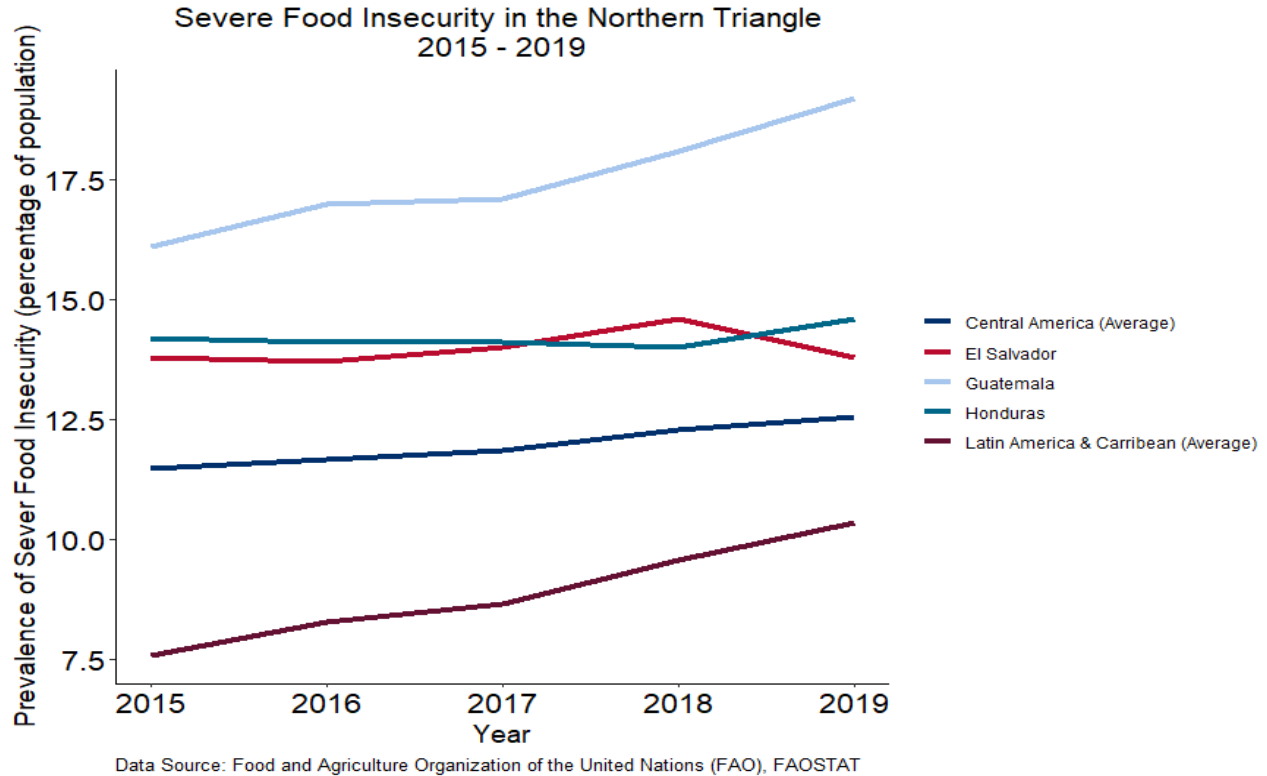


Figure 10. *Severe Food Insecurity*

## **Pillar 2: Combating Corruption, Strengthening Democratic Governance, and Advancing the Rule of Law**

**Democratic Governance and Rule of Law:** Honduras and Guatemala historically have performed worse than regional averages on the Varieties of Democracy liberal democracy index,<sup>20</sup> and liberal democracy scores for all three northern Central America countries have declined since 2015.<sup>21</sup> El Salvador, in particular, experienced democratic backsliding in 2020. Likewise, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras consistently score lower than regional averages on the World Justice Project's overall rule of law index, with scores for all three countries falling since 2015. In Guatemala and Honduras, survey data further reflects this in citizens' declining trust in their countries' judicial systems (see Figure 11).

<sup>20</sup> The Varieties of Democracy liberal democracy index measures the quality of democracy defined as constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. The index, which ranges from zero to one (higher is better), also takes into account the level of electoral democracy. For more information, see <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/reference-material-v11/>

<sup>21</sup> The World Justice Project uses national household surveys and the opinions of legal experts to measure rule of law experience and perception in countries worldwide. The scale runs from zero to one (higher is better). For more information, see <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2020>

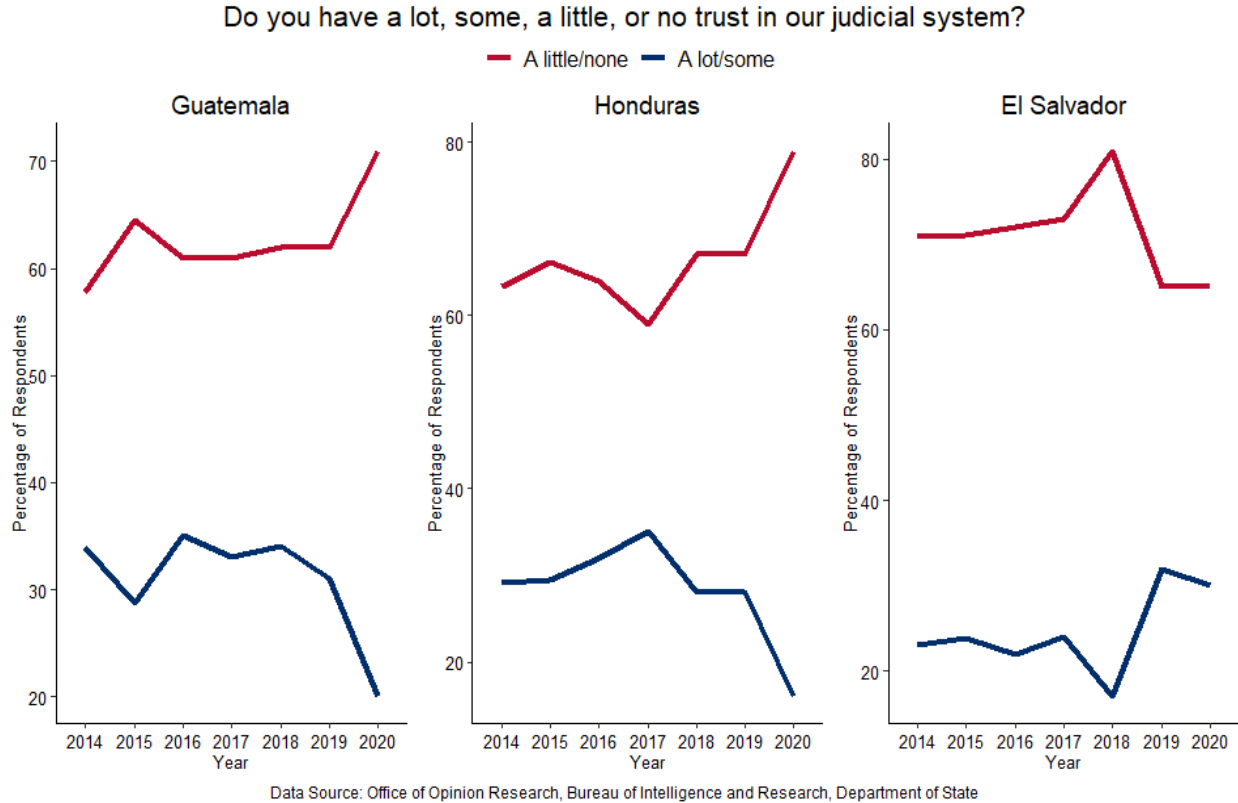


Figure 11. *Trust in the Judicial System*

**Combat Corruption:** On nearly all well-known measures of public corruption, all three northern Central America countries continue to score lower than regional averages for Central America and Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup>

Transparency International surveys indicate respondents perceive Honduras and Guatemala as significantly more corrupt than Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole. For both countries, the perceived degree of public sector corruption has increased over the 2015 to 2020 period. Government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the space for opportunism and malpractice from public officials, especially in the realm of public health-related acquisitions and procurement of PPE, ventilators, and other necessary supplies.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Measures of public corruption include Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and Global Corruption Barometer, Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) corruption indicators (control, executive, judicial, political, public sector, and regime), World Justice Project's absence of corruption index, Vanderbilt University's Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) perceptions of political corruption, and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicator on control of corruption.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the Honduras-based National Anti-corruption Council has identified approximately \$68 million in alleged acts of corruption in its Corruption in the Times of COVID-19 report. For more information, see <https://www.cna.hn/investigaciones/investigaciones-2021/>

**Government Service Delivery:** The World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators show government effectiveness in northern Central America as substantially lower than average for Latin America and the Caribbean overall; scores have remained poor in Guatemala and Honduras, in particular, over the last five years.<sup>24</sup> Relatedly, tax revenue as a percentage of GDP decreased in Honduras (19.2 percent) and slightly increased in El Salvador (21.9 percent) in 2020; Guatemala (12.4 percent) remained far below the regional average, with the lowest ratio of all countries in the region.

### **Pillar 3: Promoting Respect for Human Rights, Labor Rights, and a Free Press**

Freedom House downgraded El Salvador’s status from “free” to “partly free” in 2020, reflecting a worsening of political rights and civil liberties in the country, and Freedom House has categorized Guatemala and Honduras as “partly free” for the last 20 years.<sup>25</sup> Northern Central America countries rate at or near regional averages on Varieties of Democracy’s diagonal accountability index, which measures oversight by civil society organizations and media activity (see Figure 12).<sup>26</sup> However, El Salvador’s civil society and media effectiveness score has dropped substantially from 2017 to 2020. This coincides with a gradual decline in press freedom in El Salvador and Honduras, as measured by the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, and small improvements in Guatemala. Guatemala and Honduras perform poorly compared to the Latin America average score, with Honduras also below the Central America average and Guatemala slightly above in 2020 (see Figure 13).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The World Bank. World Governance Indicators. <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi> World Governance Indicator on government effectiveness captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.

<sup>25</sup> Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2020: The Annual Survey of Political Rights & Civil Liberties, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/FIW2020\\_book\\_JUMBO\\_PDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/FIW2020_book_JUMBO_PDF.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> See Varieties of Democracy. The V-Dem Dataset, <https://www.v-dem.net/vdemds.html>

<sup>27</sup> See Reporters Without Borders. World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/index>

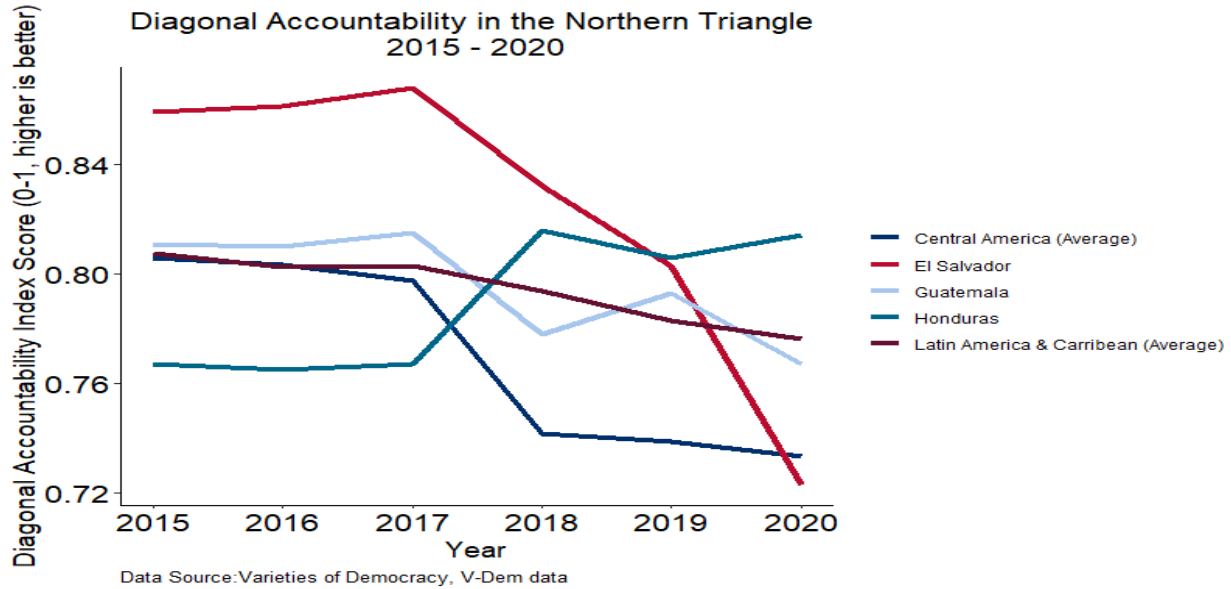


Figure 12. *Diagonal Accountability*

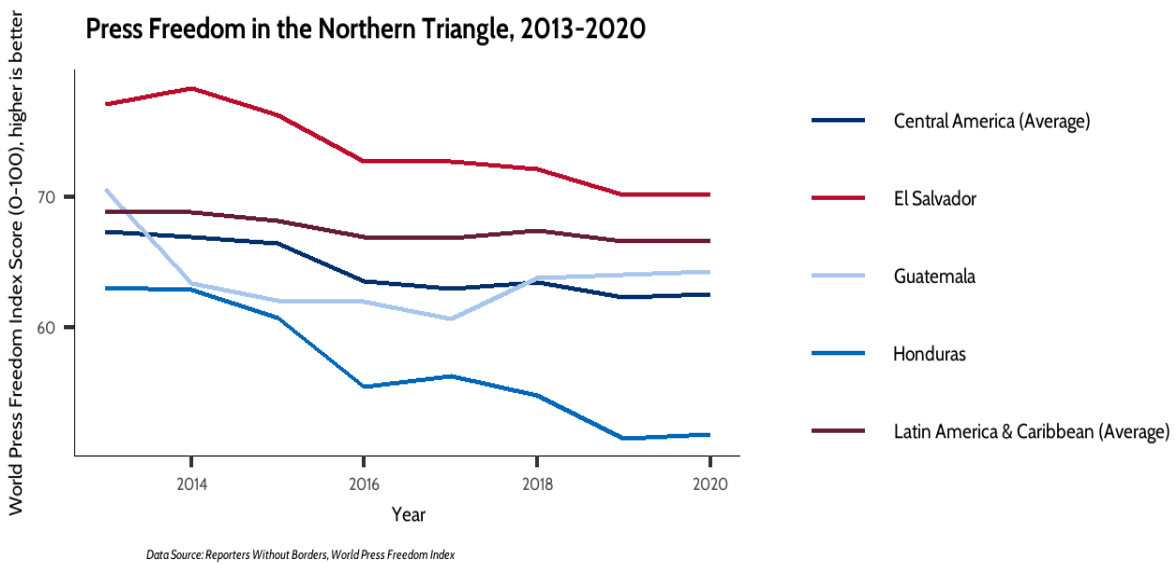


Figure 13. *Press Freedom*

**Pillar 4: Countering and Preventing Violence, Extortion, and other Crimes Perpetrated by Criminal Gangs, Trafficking Networks, and other Unlawful Organizations**

**Professionalize Security Forces:** Perception survey data from the Department of State’s Office of Opinion Research shows a majority of citizens in Guatemala and Honduras have little or no trust in their national police, with the percentage growing larger in 2020. El Salvador reported similar results up until 2019, when

the majority switched to reporting a lot or some trust in national police (see Figure 14).

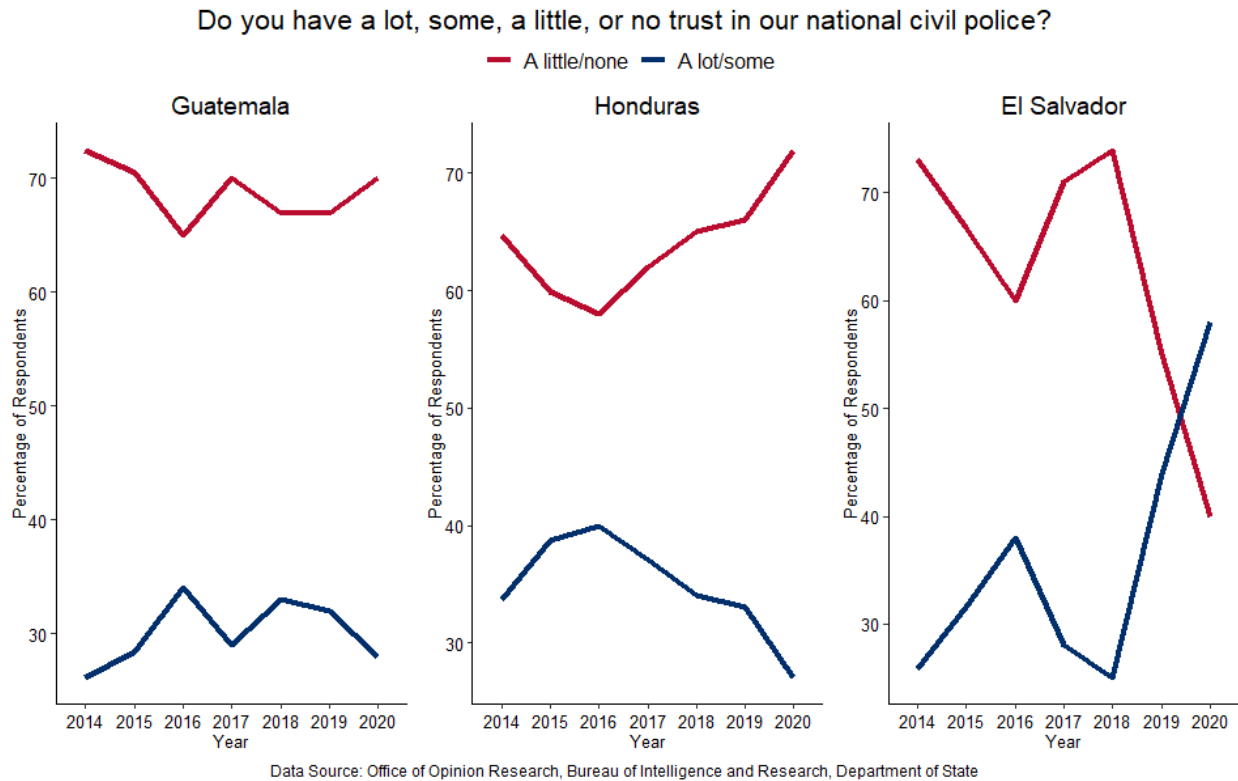


Figure 14. *Trust in Police*

**Organized Crime:** According to the 2021 Global Organized Crime Index, northern Central America countries have higher criminality scores than the average for Latin America and the Caribbean; scores for Guatemala and Honduras register higher than the Central America average.<sup>28</sup> According to the Global Initiative for Transnational Organized Crime, which produces the index, the presence of sophisticated criminal organizations like Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 and the association of large human trafficking and drug markets play major contributing factors to these scores.

<sup>28</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. (2021). *Global Organized Crime Index*.

<https://ocindex.net> In the 2021 Global Organized Crime Index (the first year the index was produced), the Central America average criminality score was 6.17; El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras scored 6.94, 6.48, and 6.98. The index scores countries from one to ten, where a higher score indicates more severe criminality. The criminality scores consist of the average of ten criminal markets and four criminal actor types. While encompassing a range of activities, criminal markets consist of the political, social, and economic systems surrounding all stages of the illicit trade and/or exploitation of commodities or people. Criminal actor scores come from assessments of the structure, control and influence of groups engaged in organized criminal activities. For more information, see <https://ocindex.net/>

**Violence Prevention and Intervention:** High homicide rates have declined over recent years, with a particularly pronounced reduction in El Salvador following a sharp spike in 2015 (see Figure 15). More recent data on homicides over the course of the pandemic indicate that all three countries saw a downward trend in homicide rates in 2020, but these declines did not continue into 2021. Overall, homicide rates remain higher than regional averages, especially in El Salvador and Honduras, and in all three countries, higher than the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of endemic violence (a rate of 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants or higher). Beyond homicide rates, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras citizens' perceptions of safety continue to fluctuate, with feelings of insecurity increasing in Guatemala and Honduras in 2020 and dropping substantially in El Salvador (see Figure 16) despite an uptick in disappearances.

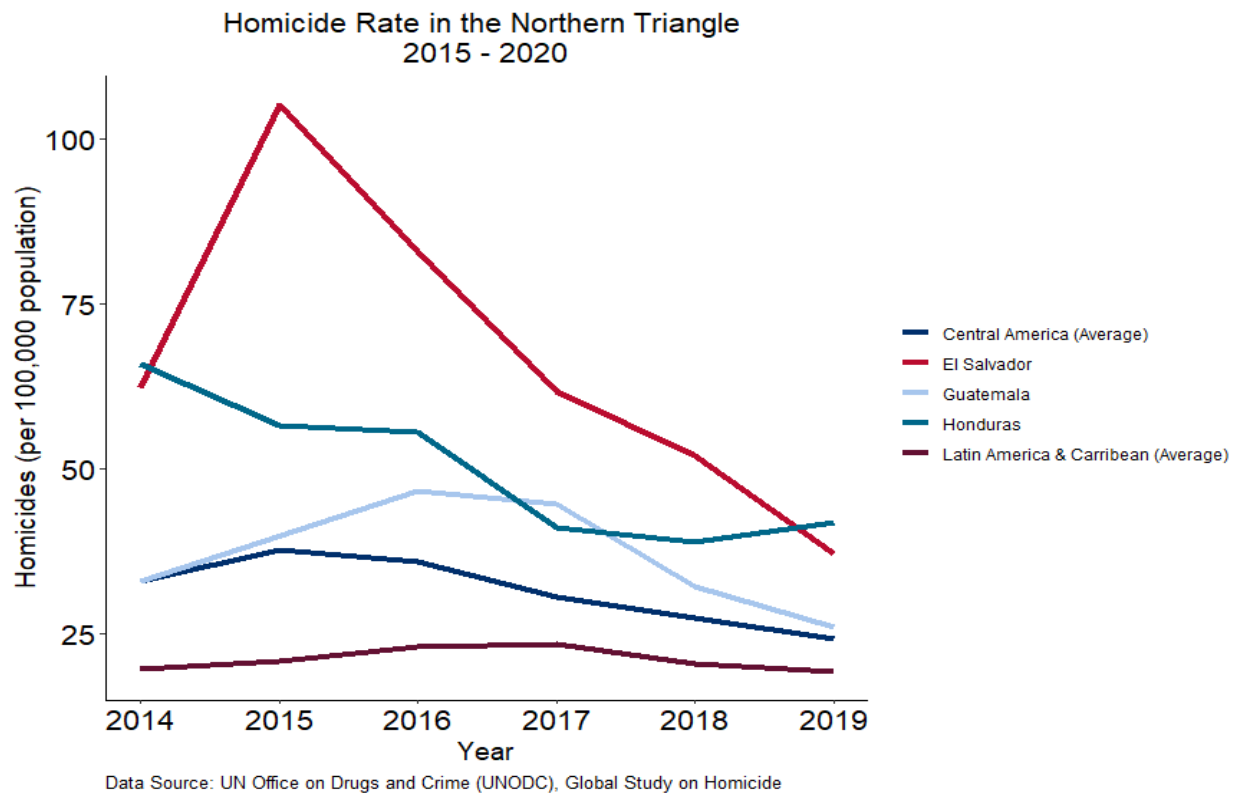


Figure 15. *Homicide Rate*



Do you generally feel safe or unsafe when you walk in your community during the night?

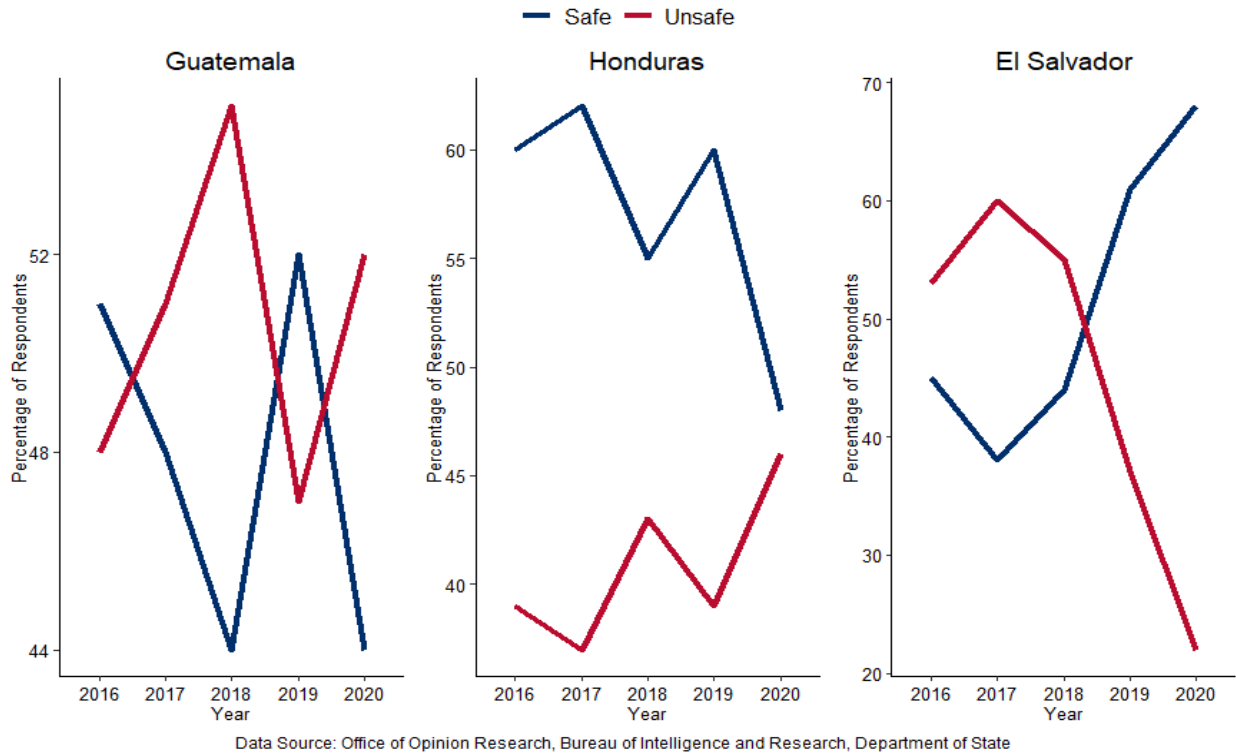


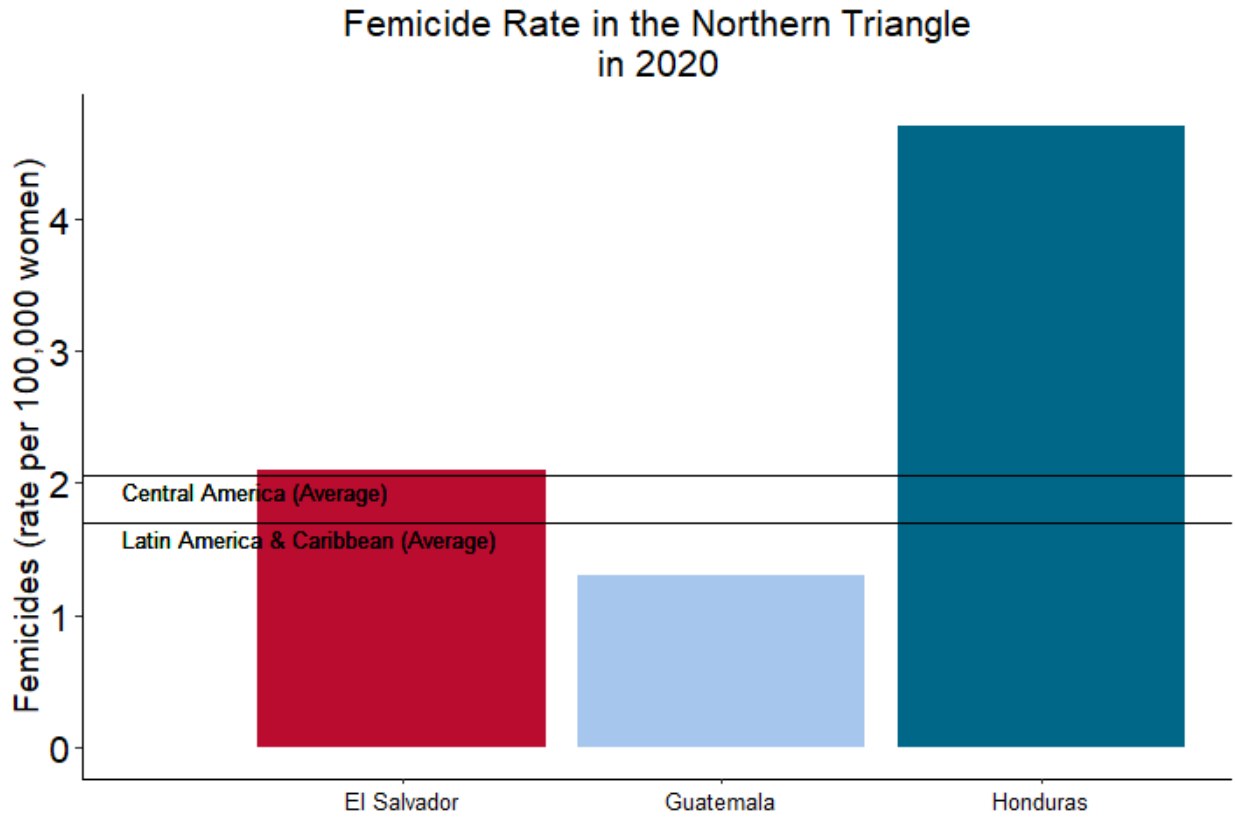
Figure 16. *Safety at Night*

## Pillar 5: Combating Sexual, Gender-Based, and Domestic Violence

Despite the progress on general violence reduction, gender-based violence remains highly prevalent in northern Central America. According to the most recent available data (from 2020) on rates of femicide, defined as the number of women killed by gender violence per 100,000 women, Honduras had the highest rate in all of Latin America by a wide margin at 4.7, followed by El Salvador in fourth at 2.1, and Guatemala in ninth at 1.3 (see Figure 17). This prevalence extends to other types of gender-based violence as well. In 2018 the World Health Organization reported that the percentage of women who had experienced intimate-partner violence at some point in their lifetime (defined as physical or sexual violence from a male partner) stood at 21 percent in El Salvador and Guatemala, and 17 percent in Honduras.<sup>29</sup> Although we lack more recent data, the World Health

<sup>29</sup> World Health Organization. (2021). *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women*, available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>

Organization expects gender-based violence to have increased globally during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>30</sup>



Data Source: United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, CEPALSTAT Database

Figure 17. *Femicide Rates*

<sup>30</sup> World Health Organization. (2021). *COVID-19 and violence against women: What the health sector/system can do*, available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-SRH-20.04>