DECLARATION OF NESTOR RODRIGUEZ

I, Nestor Rodriguez, hereby declare that the following statements are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, and belief.

1. My name is Nestor Rodriguez. I am currently a Professor in the Department of Sociology at The University of Texas at Austin in Austin, Texas. I have held this position since September 2008. My current office address is the following: The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Sociology, 305 E. 23rd Street, A1700, Austin, Texas, 78712-1086. I have a B.A. in Sociology and Political Science, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology. See Nestor Rodriguez faculty profile: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/sociology/faculty/npr62


3. Over three decades of research, I have amassed a large amount of data, insights and observations about the causes of Central American migration to the United States. Based on my years of research in Central America and studying Central American migration to the United States, it is my conclusion that increased violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras is the primary cause for the recent migration to the United States of large numbers of women and children from Central America. A substantially related factor causing the migration is the failure of local and national governments in Central America to offer sufficient protection to citizens. The region's population has experienced a fundamental loss of social trust in their governments' ability to protect them from violence or offer remedies to address the violence. As a result, many families have determined that flight from the region is necessary to seek safety.

4. These conclusions are based on my research and my experiences interviewing Central American immigrants in the United States as well as individuals in Central America. I began interviewing Central American immigrants in the United States regarding their migration experiences in 1984 and made my first research trip to Guatemala in July 1988. I traveled to Guatemala for research almost annually between 1988 and 1998. In Guatemala, I interviewed residents regarding the conditions that caused town residents and nearby villagers to migrate to the United States, and regarding the ways migrants organized their migration.
5. In 1997, I began new research on Central Americans who had migrated to Texas. In 1998, this research was expanded to El Salvador when we hired Salvadoran interviewers to interview 159 deported migrants or their families in different regions of El Salvador. In 2002, I traveled to San Salvador, El Salvador to organize a random social survey of 300 deported Salvadoran migrants.

6. In the summers of 2010 and 2011, I returned to Guatemala to conduct research among 60 migrant families in the highland township of San Cristóbal Totonicapán. I studied changing social conditions in the highlands that affected Guatemalan migration to the United States. Also in 2010, I undertook new Central American migration research with another sociologist at The University of Texas, sending graduate students to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, in addition to Mexico, to investigate the conditions faced by returning migrants, mostly deportees, to these countries.

7. Of particular relevance are my observations and conclusions based on my research conducted between 2002 and the present. My research shows dramatically increasing levels of gang violence and insecurity in Central America over this period. This violence is motivating forced migration to the United States because of its severity.

8. My research in El Salvador since 2002 has shown ever-increasing levels of youth gang violence in that country reported by community residents. Similarly, in my research trips to Guatemala in the summers of 2010 and 2011, I learned that criminal violence had emerged as a major danger.

9. Because of the rise in violence, the conditions that I encountered in the Guatemalan highlands in 2010 and 2011 were different from the conditions I had seen in my late 1980s and 1990s travel to the region. The forms of violence reported by residents in my research site of San Cristóbal Totonicapán included home invasions of domiciles owned by migrant families, threatening phone calls made by gang members to extort payments from migrant families that were thought to be receiving monthly remittances from the United States, kidnapping and killing of the daughter of a local hotel owner, a vicious attack and rape of a young women by transient youth in the nearby town of Momostenango, attacks of residents by assailants with knives demanding money, and the shooting of bus drivers, with at least one killed, for refusing to give a portion of their passenger fares to gangs. Also, in the highlands I learned of the killing of a political candidate by political rivals and the killing of a human rights worker by unknown assailants. It was clear to me that the changing social environment made residents extremely fearful for their safety.

10. The study I initiated with a colleague and graduate students in 2010, surveying migrants returning to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, has not yet been completed. However, preliminary conversations with the field researcher in El Salvador indicate that violence is a principal driving factor in migration to the United States. When asked if high levels of violence against Central Americans on the Mexican passage would discourage the migration north, one Salvadoran respondent answered no, that violence was already an everyday lived reality in El Salvador. This response suggests that the dangers of remaining in the home country are motivating migration and that, in these circumstances,
the risks relating to travel and reception in the United States become less significant considerations in making the migration decision.

11. My decades of research on Central American migration further allow me to conclude that rumors regarding lenient immigration detention policies in the United States are not a significant factor motivating current Central American immigration to the United States. A very small percentage of Central Americans may be prompted to undertake migration as a result of information suggesting that they will be released from detention promptly after arrival in the United States. However, this small minority of migrants would be made up of individuals who are predisposed to migrate without authorization under any circumstances. These individuals would very likely undertake the journey at some point regardless of any policies on immigration detention in the United States.

12. My research observations in Central America indicate that the large majority of populations in Central America are not predisposed to emigrate. The 1,560,000 unauthorized migrants in the United States from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, estimated by the Department of Homeland Security, represent only 5.1 percent of the total populations of those countries. See http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_iil_pe_2011; http://www.prb.org/pdf14/2014-world-population-data-sheet_eng.pdf. Central Americans, like populations everywhere, except in closed totalitarian societies, have strong, inter-generational family and institutional attachments in their settings and are not predisposed to migrate en masse simply because they hear that someone bonded out, or was released, from detention. Given the predisposition of most Central Americans to remain in their home countries, the central factor that compels and motivates those residents is the danger of imminent violence, not the prospect of release from detention once in the United States.

13. Relatedly, based on what I have learned about the social organization of Central American migration in my research, it is very unlikely that the prompt release on bond, or without the requirement of bond, would stimulate a pattern of mass unauthorized migration of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans to the United States. Since its inception in the 1970s, Central American migration to the United States has demonstrated regularities of social organization based on transnational circulation of information among migrant families of what to expect during and after the migration process. As a result, potential migrants in Central America are very aware of the dangers involved in travelling to the United States as well as the economic and social costs. They do not risk unauthorized migration, unless forced to do so by factors such as extreme violence, and certainly would not emigrate simply because they heard that someone was detained and then released.

14. My research on Latin American, and especially Central American, migration—and my doctoral dissertation study of a 499-page analysis of global migration patterns since the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century—indicates that detention is not the best approach to instances of mass migration. Detention does not deter migration. Migration is a basic natural feature of humankind and has been a basis for its development and sophistication. Instead, border and national security is endangered when migrants are detained and deported en masse because, in the absence of reasonable administrative methods of reception by governments, migrants are compelled to repeatedly attempt
extra-legal means of entry. Simply detaining broad categories of migrants, moreover, causes great stress for population categories including U.S.-born citizens, as research by the Pew Research Center has consistently found in their national surveys of how immigration enforcement measures are affecting the national populace; see http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/12/19/on-immigration-policy-deportation-relief-seen-as-more-important-than-citizenship/.

15. Push factors greatly outweigh pull factors in Central American migration to the United States. Thus, en masse detention followed by mass deportation only serves to reproduce the migrant stream that leads to heightened enforcement reactions in the first place. My co-published research (“U.S. Deportation Policy, Family Separation, and Circular Migration,” International Migration Review, volume 42, 2008), based on 300 interviews of deported Salvadorans in El Salvador, indicates that 38 percent of deported migrants planned to re-migrate to the United States, often because the conditions in El Salvador that propelled them to migrate in the first place had not changed. Categorical or widespread detention of Central American migrants fleeing violence in their home countries creates a vicious cycle that has continued negative impacts on the border in the absence of an alternative response to the inevitable migrations.

I declare, under penalty of perjury under 28 U.S.C. § 1746, that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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