

Transnational Gangs: Globalization and Central America

The Maras
and the
Dark Side of Globalization



The Global Origins of the Maras



Immigration from Central America 1970s-1980s

- **The Wars in Central America and the Displaced Population- Heavily into Los Angeles, California**
 - Impoverished areas
 - Lack of social network
 - Conflicting ethnicities

Gangs as Defensive Organizations

- **Small group of Salvadoran Refugees that banded together as protection against Mexican and Salvador Street Gangs**
 - Small Salvadoran Group initially
 - Later spread to other Central Americans

Ernesto Miranda,
Founding Member



Mandalit del Barco, NPR

Deportations

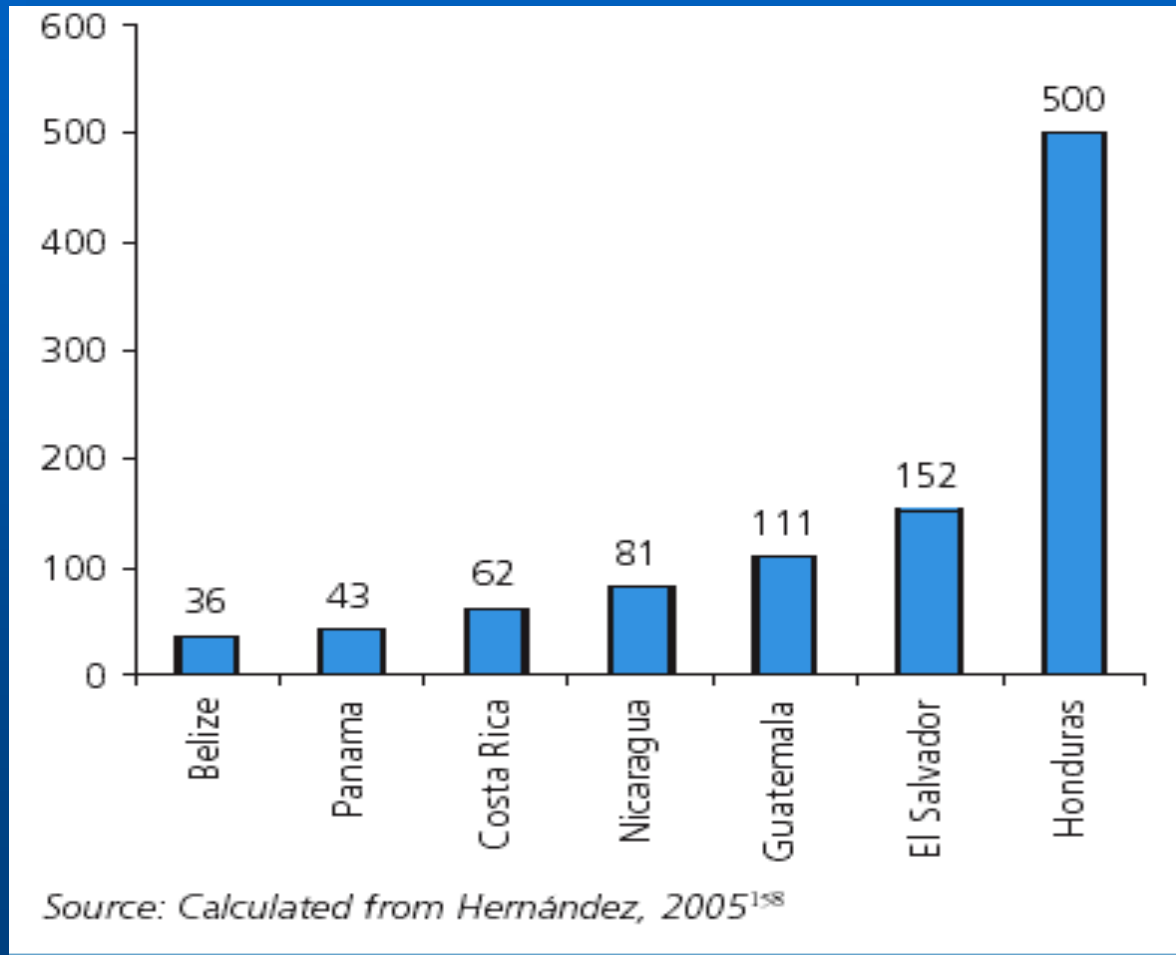
- During Fiscal Year 2006, the number of criminal deportees to El Salvador was 3,679; Guatemala was 3,589; and Honduras was a staggering 5,559. Each of these was nearly doubled from Fiscal Year 2005 according to Claire Ribando, in “Gangs of Central America,”

Estimates of Gang Members in Central America

Country	Number of gangs	Total membership	Average number of members per gang
Panama	94	1385	15
Nicaragua	268	4500	17
Guatemala	434	14,000	32
Belize	2	100	50
Honduras	112	36,000 ¹⁵⁶	321
Costa Rica	6	2660	443
El Salvador	4	10,500	2625
TOTAL		69,145	

8 Hernández, S, 'The phenomenon of criminal youth gangs in Central America and the importance of regional cooperation'. Paper given at the OAS meeting on Transnational Criminal Youth Gangs: Characteristics, Importance and Public Policies, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico June 16 and 17, 2005.

Gang Members per 100,000 Population



Local Crime

- **Protection Rackets**
 - Legitimate Businesses
 - War Taxes
 - Illegal Businesses
 - Prostitution
 - Small Time Criminals
 - War Taxes
- **Drug Distribution**
- **Petty Theft**

From Central America and Back

- Estimates of MS-13 or M-18 gang members in the United States range from as few as 15,000 to 30,000
- It is claimed that they are now in anywhere from 33 to 41 US States

Transnational Crime

- **Some Arms Trafficking**
- **People Smuggling and Trafficking**
 - Small Number from Mexico to US
 - More from Guatemala to Mexico
- **Stolen Automobiles and Parts**
 - US and Mexico to Central America
- **Credit Card Fraud**
 - Relatively new

New Global Outreach of the Maras- Information Technology

- **New Technology**
 - Global Communications
- **Cyber Crime**
 - Salami Slice
 - Phishing
 - ID Theft



Why are the Maras Successful?

Social Factors

- **Poverty**
- **Sense of belonging**
- **Migration of families**
- **Long histories of violence in the region**

Other Factors

- Pre-existing Gangs
- Increased residual drugs from trafficking
- A Glut of illegal arms left from civil wars. Over 1 million unregistered illegal fire arms left from conflicts.



Adaptability

- No longer are tattoos mandatory
- Sending Members for Education
- Finding New Avenues
- Continued Growth- now found in Canada and continuing growth in the US