



U.S. STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America

Cover Message from Vice President Kamala Harris

In Central America, the root causes of migration run deep—and migration from the region has a direct impact on the United States. For that reason, our nation must consistently engage with the region to address the hardships that cause people to leave Central America and come to our border.

For decades, our nation has engaged in Central America. Often well intentioned, the engagement has often not been consistent. And over the last few years, the United States significantly pulled back from work in the region.

Under our Administration, President Joe Biden and I have restarted our nation’s engagement in Central America and diplomatic efforts with Central American governments. Our Root Causes Strategy is comprehensive and draws from decades of experience—and is based on four core pieces of evidence.

First, addressing the root causes of migration is critical to our overall immigration effort.

Just after we took office, President Joe Biden outlined our Administration’s vision to reform our immigration system by creating a pathway to citizenship for the nearly 11 million undocumented migrants in our country, modernizing our immigration process, and effectively managing our border.

Shortly after that, the President asked me to lead our nation’s efforts to address the root causes of that migration. That is because migration to our border is also a symptom of much larger issues in the region.

Second, providing relief is not sufficient to stem migration from the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather conditions have indeed exacerbated the root causes of migration—which include corruption, violence, trafficking, and poverty. While our Administration is proud that we have sent millions of vaccine doses and hurricane relief, we know that it is not enough to alleviate suffering in the long term.

The root causes must be addressed both in addition to relief efforts—and apart from these efforts. In everything we do, we must target our efforts in those areas of highest out-migration—and ensure that these programs meet the highest standards of accountability and effectiveness.

Third, unless we address all of the root causes, problems will persist.

Recently, I travelled to Guatemala, where one of the largest challenges is corruption. Our Administration knows that, where corruption goes unchecked, people suffer. And so, on that trip, the United States announced that we will launch an Anticorruption Task Force which will include U.S. prosecutors and law enforcement experts who will investigate corruption cases. It is our goal that, in dealing directly with corruption, we will also mitigate the lack of economic and educational opportunities on the ground.



Fourth, and most importantly, the United States cannot do this work alone.

Our Strategy is far-reaching—and focuses on our partnerships with other governments, international institutions, businesses, foundations, and civil society. At this writing, we have already received commitments from the governments of Mexico, Japan, and Korea, and the United Nations, to join the United States in providing relief to the region. Our Administration is also working hand-in-hand with foundations and non-profits to accelerate efforts in Central America.

While, in the past, the private sector has been an underutilized partner, our Administration is calling on U.S. and international businesses to invest in the region – and thus far, 12 have done so. Private sector investment not only boosts economic opportunity, but it also incentivizes regional governments to create the conditions on the ground to attract such investment.

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Ultimately, our Administration will consistently engage in the region to address the root causes of migration. We will build on what works, and we will pivot away from what does not work. It will not be easy, and progress will not be instantaneous, but we are committed to getting it right. Because we know: The strength and security of the United States depends on the implementation of strategies like this one



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Introduction

It is in the national security interest of the United States to promote a democratic, prosperous, and secure Central America, a region closely connected to the United States by culture, geography, and trade. COVID-19, extreme weather, and severe economic decline are compounding longstanding challenges in the region, forcing far too many Central Americans to conclude the future they desire for themselves and their children cannot be found at home. They have lost hope and are fleeing in record numbers.

Persistent instability and insecurity in Central America have gone on for too long. Poverty and economic inequality, pervasive crime and corruption, and political leaders' drift toward authoritarian rule have stunted economic growth and diverted critical resources from healthcare and education, robbing citizens of hope and spurring migration. The worsening impacts of climate change, manifesting as prolonged periods of drought and devastating storms, have exacerbated these conditions and undermine U.S. and international interests. All of these factors contribute to irregular migration, and none of them can ultimately be addressed without honest and inclusive democratic governance that is responsive to the needs of citizens in the region.

The Root Causes Strategy, directed by the President in Executive Order 14010, focuses on a coordinated, place-based approach to improve the underlying causes that push Central Americans to migrate, and that “take(s) into account, as appropriate, the views of bilateral, multilateral,

and private sector partners, as well as civil society.” This Strategy lays out a framework to use the policy, resources, and diplomacy of the United States, and to leverage the expertise and resources of a broad group of public and private stakeholders, to build hope for citizens in the region that the life they desire can be found at home.

The U.S. government consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to inform this Strategy, including governments in the region, Members of Congress and their staff, international organizations, civil society organizations, labor unions, and the private sector. Consultations will continue throughout implementation.

“ This Strategy lays out a framework to use the policy, resources, and diplomacy of the United States, and to leverage the expertise and resources of a broad group of public and private stakeholders, **to build hope for citizens in the region that the life they desire can be found at home.** ”



Strategic Environment

Weak investment in infrastructure and education and poor rule of law leaves Central America at a competitive disadvantage for external investments, economic growth, and talent retention. Weather shocks due to climate change contribute to growing poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity. Corruption and other government actions to undermine transparency and democratic governance limit confidence of the public in their governments and discourage domestic and foreign investment. Threats

such as gang violence, criminal activity, and illicit drug flows challenge the security environment in Central America.

Nevertheless, opportunities for change exist. A growing number of stakeholders, including from civil society and the private sector, are interested in pushing governments toward reforms that foster greater transparency and address climate change. Likeminded government actors, as well as multilateral banks, private companies, foundations, civil society organizations, and international organizations, are interested in partnering on efforts to address the root causes of migration. Sustainable technology can help increase access to government services and economic opportunities. We will take advantage of these opportunities to address the reasons individuals choose to leave their home.



Desired End State

A democratic, prosperous, and safe Central America, where people advance economically, live, work, and learn in safety and dignity, contribute to and benefit from the democratic process, have confidence in public institutions, and enjoy opportunities to create futures for themselves and their families at home.



Strategic Framework

The Strategy focuses on the most commonly cited factors limiting progress in Central America, particularly those related to economic opportunity, governance and transparency, and crime and insecurity. It is often a combination of multiple factors, resulting in a lack of hope that their country will improve, that marginalizes large populations within the region and pushes some people to migrate. As such, we must work across all pillars to create economic opportunities, empower women and youth, support responsive and transparent governments, and build communities where people feel safe. As individuals observe and experience improvements in these areas, we anticipate more people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras will have a reason to believe they can build successful lives at home rather than abroad.

“ Effecting systemic change and achieving the desired end state of a democratic, prosperous, and safe region will require the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to govern in a transparent, professional and inclusive manner **that favors the public interest over narrow private interests.**”

Effecting systemic change and achieving the desired end state of a democratic, prosperous, and safe region will require the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to govern in a transparent, professional and inclusive manner that favors the public interest over narrow private interests.

U.S. foreign assistance cannot substitute for political will in these countries. Used strategically, however,

U.S. development, diplomatic, and related tools can generate political leverage, empower champions of change, combat impunity and state capture, and catalyze improvements in governance, private investment, and human capital.

Execution of the Strategy will draw on the breadth of the U.S. government and a diverse group of public and private stakeholders. It will draw on technological advances and leverage existing technology to offer dynamic, creative, efficient, and transparent solutions. Throughout, it will focus on ensuring opportunities are available to all citizens regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

The strategy is organized under five pillars:

- Pillar I: Addressing economic insecurity and inequality
- Pillar II: Combating corruption, strengthening democratic governance, and advancing the rule of law
- Pillar III: Promoting respect for human rights, labor rights, and a free press
- Pillar IV: Countering and preventing violence, extortion, and other crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs, trafficking networks, and other organized criminal organizations
- Pillar V: Combating sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence

Each Pillar is supported by various lines of effort, many of which advance progress in multiple pillars. While implementation of the lines of effort will be similar in each country, the specifics will differ. To build political will among leaders in Central America, the United States will utilize diplomacy, public diplomacy, sanctions and visa revocations, and targeted foreign assistance programs.

“ Even with a strong, sustained commitment, the type of systemic change envisioned in the Strategy will take time to achieve, and progress will not be linear. ”

The United States will combine our efforts with those of other governments, including in Central America and beyond, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, and multilateral banks and institutions, to leverage investments and speak with a similar voice as we advocate for partner government actions to affect sustainable change. This holistic approach utilizes all U.S. government tools and a broad array of partnerships to leverage expertise, creative ideas, and the power of multiple voices to generate necessary change to provide citizens in the region with hope. Even with a strong, sustained commitment, the type of systemic change envisioned in the Strategy will take time to achieve, and progress will not be linear. Implementing the Strategy demands a disciplined approach that relies on innovation and evidence, but also clear accomplishments along the way to maintain momentum.

Across all pillars of our work, we will:

- ***Consult and Coordinate:*** To further develop our path forward, the administration will continue to consult with Congress, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, like-minded partners, and governments. We will listen, learn the lessons of past efforts, create an approach, which draws on input from across sectors, and develop a broad base of support that advances efforts across the Strategy.

- **Communicate:** We will create a robust communications plan, leveraging independent and social media, to convey our efforts to improve conditions in the region, build support for our approach, and instill hope in the region. We will also seek to discourage irregular migration and dispel misinformation.
- **Assess:** We will move forward deliberately with clear goals, measurable objectives, and strong safeguards to guide our efforts. Throughout implementation, we will build in assessment points to ensure our efforts are producing the results we seek, strengthening where needed, adjusting course where warranted, and discontinuing as required.



Pillar I: Addressing Economic Insecurity and Inequality

Despite reductions in poverty rates and increases in GDP per capita prior to the double impacts of the pandemic and hurricanes Eta and Iota, the economies of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras remain largely informal and highly unequal. Key to growth will be structural reforms to address impediments to investment, economic diversification, increased judicial transparency, improved governance and transparency, expanded access to financial capital for businesses, streamlining of government procedures to start businesses and pay taxes, investment in workers, and formalization of the economy. Inclusive growth, that reaches women and marginalized populations, and includes decent work, will be critical to creating hope among citizens in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weakness in national health care systems, led to severe economic downturns, and devastated tourism. The consequences of climate change are only projected to get worse, further disrupting growing cycles, upending farmer livelihoods, and exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition. Securing commitments from regional governments while working with the private sector, international donors, foundations, international financial institutions (IFIs), and multilateral development banks (MDBs) will be critical to fostering the reforms necessary for businesses to thrive, mobilizing investment, and promoting economic development in the region. Across these efforts, we will focus on empowering women, youth, and marginalized communities.

Strategic Objectives:

1. **Foster a Business Enabling Environment for Inclusive Economic Growth:** Governments build an enabling environment for business by implementing reforms to address structural impediments to growth, streamlining and digitalizing business registration and operations processes, offering legal certainty, reducing opportunities for corruption, enforcing labor and environmental rules, combating insecurity and extortion, and leveling the playing field for international businesses. Governments promote and facilitate economic growth in a manner that is available to all sectors of society, including women, minorities, and other marginalized populations.
2. **Increase and Diversify Trade:** Customs and border systems are more efficient and less subject to malfeasance, there is increased alignment and reduced redundancy of regulations across the

region, and infrastructure projects better facilitate trade. Enhance and diversify trade to include new export sectors, including those that reinforce U.S. supply chain needs.

3. ***Enhance Workforce Development, Health, Education, and Protection:*** Governments are able to effectively manage the COVID-19 response and prepare for the potential of future pandemics, and all citizens, including women and girls, have improved access to quality education, health care and clean water access, and social safety nets.
4. ***Build Resilience to Address Climate Change and Food Insecurity:*** Governments target investments so they are better able to mitigate the impact of severe weather events, including flooding and drought. Agriculture, including fisheries and aquaculture, is developed toward higher levels of climate resilience, leading to affordable and available food that can be utilized for a healthy diet, contributing to greater food security.

Lines of Effort:

1. **Foster a business-enabling environment for inclusive economic growth.** The United States will work with governments to streamline regulatory processes and services, including via digitalization of government services such as records, databases, permitting, and tax collection. This will include efforts to address structural impediments to investment; support business incubation and acceleration to strengthen value chains by helping businesses produce higher-value goods in the agricultural and emerging sectors, and ensure all populations are incorporated into economic development policies.
 - **Promote legal certainty.** Weak rule of law is often cited as the top factor limiting new investment in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We will work with the private sector, governments, and civil society to strengthen transparency, promote business ethics, and foster predictable legal and regulatory business environments.
 - **Promote investment-enabling reforms.** The United States will partner with regional governments, multilateral development banks, and the private sector to promote reforms to address structural impediments to investment and facilitate greater private sector participation in these economies, leveraging U.S. government partnerships with these entities to support business development and create jobs.
 - **Embrace technological solutions.** The United States will leverage rights-respecting technology to facilitate economic growth, increase opportunities for excluded populations, promote financial inclusion, and strengthen education and workforce development in coordination with the private sector. This will include extending existing technological solutions to our areas of focus, and guarding against unintended consequences of technological expansion.
 - **Expand opportunity for women, youth, and minorities.** The United States will work to ensure government programs and financial capital reach underserved groups, including small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), youth, women- and indigenous-owned businesses, businesses serving rural areas, and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
2. **Enhance and diversify trade.** The United States will work with a variety of stakeholders to increase trade, diversify industry, and create decent work for citizens in the region, while working with governments to promote reforms needed to facilitate this growth.

- **Facilitate trade.** The United States will work with governments to expand and diversify trade by reducing malfeasance and corruption in customs regimes; promoting prioritization of lending and technical support for infrastructure projects that facilitate trade; aligning and integrating regional customs systems; harmonizing regulatory certification requirements; and supporting business compliance with internationally recognized labor rights, environmental protections, and complex international trade rules.
 - **Partner with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).** The United States will partner with IFIs and MDBs to diversify donors and provide a wide range of financing options to governments and private sectors in the region. We will leverage the IFIs and MDBs to prioritize support for infrastructure development that facilitates trade and investment while incorporating transparency and good governance priorities in their financing and technical assistance initiatives.
 - **Partner with the Private sector.** The United States will partner with private sector companies to sustainably grow economies by attracting greater private investment while encouraging governance, economic, and other reforms to support business-enabling environments that create decent work. We will conduct outreach to U.S. and vetted multinational businesses that already operate in the region, as well as business chambers of commerce in Central America.
 - **Promote cross-border energy infrastructure.** The United States will support cleaner and more efficient cross-border energy systems including new energy delivery infrastructure to facilitate increased reliability and cross border power integration and trade.
3. **Enhance workforce development, health, and education.** The United States will support workforce training and vocational education programs, including improving the quality of existing education and increasing children enrolled in education and food programs that ensure children’s basic nutritional needs are met; expand access to clean and potable water; and support a stronger COVID-19 response.
- **Increase access to quality education.** The United States will support governments in providing youth with appropriate, safe, and accessible educational opportunities; and ensuring educational and vocational offerings reflect labor market needs so youth are able to access decent work upon completion of their studies.
 - **Improve health.** The United States will support water and sanitation programs to expand access to clean water. The United States will support programs to strengthen health systems to address current and future public health challenges.
4. **Build resilience to address climate change and food insecurity.** The United States will partner with governments, MDBs, IFIs, and the private sector to facilitate the development of agricultural practices to ensure farmers can better respond to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, which have contributed to food insecurity.
- **Increase resilience.** The United States will support improved agriculture production and income generation to reduce food insecurity while supporting sustainable food systems. We will support efforts to improve crop resilience, adopt environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural practices, and improve land and water

management; improve the resilience of residential, commercial, and public buildings and core public infrastructure; and mitigate the impacts of and support a more rapid recovery from hurricanes and other severe weather events.

- **Enhance renewable energy.** The United States will support new electricity generation projects, including in renewable energy and power grid improvement; a more efficient regulatory framework, especially for distributed generation, increased reliability, grid sustainability, and cross-border power integration and trade. We will focus on investment categories including power generation with a focus on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and storage; residential, commercial, and public buildings; and water efficient agriculture.



Pillar II: Combating corruption, strengthening democratic governance, and advancing the rule of law

Governance challenges, including widespread corruption, undercut progress on economic opportunity, protection of human rights, and civilian security. Private companies cite corruption as an impediment to investment. Weak democratic institutions, coupled with rampant impunity, have lowered citizens' trust in their governments and the independence of judicial systems. Contested elections and opaque government decision-making have led to violence.

As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments all too often fail to provide needed services to their citizens and lack of government investment in infrastructure, education, health, and civilian security has hobbled advancement. We will partner with civil society and independent media so they can maintain their critical oversight role and will work with civil society, the private sector, governments, and international institutions to advocate for sustainable progress in these areas.

Strategic Objectives:

1. ***Strengthen Democratic Institutions to Improve Governance and Rule of Law:*** Governments enact and implement legislative reforms towards transparent and participatory policy making and electoral processes, including broad civic engagement. Oversight is instituted at all levels of government.
2. ***Combat Corruption:*** Governments are freed from entrenched networks of corruption and impunity. They develop and strengthen independent and transparent systems to eliminate conflicts of interest, including in selection of judges and other government personnel.
3. ***Improve Government Service Delivery:*** Governments improve capacity to raise and manage public resources, initiate reforms to improve fiscal and operational transparency, and provide services to all citizens.

Lines of Effort:

1. **Strengthen democratic institutions to improve governance and rule of law.** The United States will work with countries to promote reform agendas across all branches of government so government better serves all citizens. This will include a focus on adequately resourcing judicial and oversight institutions, ensuring their independence, and promoting reform of personnel selection and retention processes.
 - **Strengthen the independence of the justice sector.** The United States will promote a merit-based, independent process for nomination and selection of justice and oversight officials, and establish anti-corruption norms limiting immunity of officials from prosecution and banning candidates for office with disqualifying criminal records. We will promote adequate funding of justice institutions so they have the resources to serve the country.
 - **Promote transparency.** The United States will work with partners to promote transparency in electoral systems through reform and enforcement of electoral campaign finance rules and open list systems to allow for direct representation. We will empower independent audit and oversight institutions to monitor use of public funds, and promote transparency in government processes, including open government mechanisms and the promotion of open data. We will explore how to leverage the concept of “vetted units” to bring trusted actors into key roles in oversight bodies, including in legislative committees.
 - **Improve efficacy of legislative branches.** The United States will work with partners to root out corruption in legislative branches and improve the transparent and efficient functioning of those bodies.
 - **Empower public and private sector actors.** The United States will partner with civil society and independent media so they have the tools, knowledge, and networks needed to safely identify government neglect and abuse, raise awareness, and demand accountability. We will partner with the private sector to advocate for necessary reforms and regulations to promote transparency.
2. **Prioritize an anticorruption agenda.** The United States will work regionally, bilaterally, and, if we must, unilaterally to root out corruption and enhance transparency across the region.
 - **Support civil society and media organizations.** Across Central America, citizens, nongovernmental organizations, and media organizations have led efforts to promote transparency and demand improved governance. The United States will expand support for NGOs and other entities in the region focused on governance promotion to encourage local leadership of such efforts and foster resiliency and sustainability.
 - **Prevent, detect, investigate, and prosecute corruption.** The United States will work with partners to develop and implement a variety of anti-corruption tools aimed at preventing, detecting, investigating, and ultimately punishing corruption at all levels and in all branches of the government, and throughout society. We will identify, support, and

partner with prosecutorial teams that demonstrate a commitment to holding corrupt actors to account.

- **Sanction corrupt actors.** The United States will use various tools, including financial sanctions and visa restrictions, to signal we will not tolerate corruption and antidemocratic behavior. We will press governments to strengthen transparency, accountability, and the rule of law with decisive and meaningful reforms.
3. **Improve administration of public resources.** The United States will work with governments to establish proper budgeting, management, and use of public resources at the local and national levels to enhance service delivery for all citizens, including in underserved areas and vulnerable populations.
- **Improve government finances.** The United States will work with governments to review fiscal policy to identify gaps and incongruences in taxation, and opportunities to progressively expand the tax base, incentivizing individuals and businesses to move into the formal economy and to transition public procurement to a competitive, transparent, and merit-based system to curb political influence and diminish the opportunities for corruption.
 - **Target key populations.** The United States will work with governments to establish strategies to provide services in marginalized communities, including IDPs, high-threat crime areas, and regions with highest outbound migration.



Pillar III: Promoting respect for human rights, labor rights, and a free press

Respect for human rights, labor rights, and press freedom are essential elements to democratic and social development in the region. Marginalized populations, including women and girls, indigenous, Afro-descendent, and LGBTQI+ populations often suffer discrimination and may be victims of hate crimes. Victims of violence at the hand of the state or criminal organizations suffer from systemic violations of their rights under the law (including redress, protection, and recognition), and IDPs are particularly at risk. Labor rights activists, human rights and environmental defenders, and independent journalists face violence and intimidation. Authorities often do not hold perpetrators of these crimes accountable and labor law enforcement is weak. We will work with partners in the region, including civil society, to promote respect for human rights for all citizens.

Strategic Objectives:

1. **Enhance Respect for Human Rights:** Governments prevent, reduce, and mitigate risk factors and reduce human rights violations. Civil society organizations and a robust free press hold government actors accountable. At-risk populations have national and international recourse, including U.S. government support and advocacy.

2. ***Enhance Respect for Labor Rights:*** Governments ensure labor laws are enforced as required by CAFTA-DR, with a particular emphasis on freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively, addressing child labor and forced labor, and promoting decent work in safe, healthy, and inclusive workplaces free from discrimination.
3. ***Promote a Free Press:*** Governments respect the independence of all forms of media so citizens can access information necessary to make informed decisions and hold governments accountable.

Lines of Effort:

1. **Strengthen respect for human rights.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to strengthen legal frameworks, promote the enforcement of laws that protect citizens' rights, support regional and domestic early warning systems to track risks for violations, and build institutional capacity to protect citizens' rights.
 - **Protect human rights defenders and at-risk populations.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to protect marginalized individuals and groups, including human rights and environmental defenders, youth activists, LGBTQI+ people, indigenous people, IDPs forcibly displaced by violence, labor rights activists, and other individuals who are at risk of persecution or abuse.
 - **Respond promptly and decisively to ensure accountability.** The United States will work with governments so they decisively respond when human rights violations occur, extending access to justice for all citizens, and reducing impunity by ensuring justice and security actors hold perpetrators accountable.
 - **Curb extrajudicial killings.** The United States will support efforts to curb abuses by security personnel, including the police, and hold perpetrators accountable.
 - **Strengthen civil society protections.** The United States will work with governments and civil society organizations to ensure that civil society and media groups are able to hold governments accountable without legal restriction and free from intimidation.
2. **Strengthen respect for labor rights.** The United States will work with governments to strengthen legal frameworks and the enforcement of labor laws, promote decent work, and support workers in exercising their freedom of association and collective bargaining rights.
 - **Protect trade unionists and the right to organize.** The United States will work with governments to ensure laws that protect the rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively are in place and are effectively enforced. The United States will work with governments to empower workers to claim their rights, protect labor rights activists, and build the capacity of democratic, worker-led organizations.
 - **Improve legal frameworks, enforcement, and awareness.** The United States will work with governments to ensure laws that protect fundamental labor rights are in place and enforced, with appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms and proactive outreach to communities, unions, civil society, and employers. The United States will promote labor rights compliance among employers, including accountability in the supply chains of priority sectors. The United States will work with governments, employers, and worker organizations to promote constructive dialogue on labor issues to improve legal

frameworks, inform enforcement strategies, and strengthen worker voices related to labor and employment issues.

3. **Promote a free press.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to ensure citizens have access to information from independent sources to inform their choices.
 - **Strengthen independent media.** The United States will support a regulatory environment that ensures independent media can operate without fear of reprisal or intimidation, and will support development of media that can serve as an effective oversight tool to those in power.



Pillar IV: Countering and preventing violence, extortion, and other crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs, trafficking networks, and other organized criminal organizations

U.S. assistance contributed to important advances in the professionalism and capability of law enforcement and security services throughout Central America, in particular with the capacity of vetted units, community policing, and violence prevention initiatives. Homicide rates have decreased and capacity to seize illicit drugs has increased in recent years, though violence against women and children has increased. Gangs and extortion remain a threat, and transnational crime is on the rise. Challenges remain with uneven capabilities among law enforcement and security services, inadequate resourcing of security needs, the impact of the pandemic on law enforcement, and the military's role in policing.

Obtaining clear and meaningful commitments from our partners to tackle corruption and support transparency is a foundational element for sustainable progress across the criminal justice systems of Central America. Increasing security within communities is key to generating hope for citizens in the region so they can move safely to school and work, but also to attract investment. We will work with partner governments and community organizations to build professional security forces and focus on violence prevention and intervention to build a more secure region.

Strategic Objectives:

1. ***Professionalize Security Forces:*** Governments support the development of accountable security forces that earn the respect of the citizens they serve. This includes adopting budgets for security forces that enable them to be sufficiently staffed, trained, equipped, and compensated, and have internal oversight to strengthen accountability. Governments establish legal limitations on the use of militaries in civilian policing and implement plans for the removal of militaries from civilian policing.

2. ***Counter Organized Crime:*** Security forces counter organized crime and using place-based strategies, disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations and other criminal actors in key corridors to improve citizen security.
3. ***Build Safe Communities through Violence Prevention and Intervention:*** Governments make legal and policy reforms in violence prevention, support rehabilitation and re-insertion into society of former gang members and individuals previously incarcerated, and provide protection to at-risk youth and victims of violence, and other marginalized populations, including prevention of human trafficking.

Lines of Effort:

1. **Professionalize security forces.** The United States will support the development of well-trained civilian law enforcement and other security forces that can provide effective, accountable services with respect for the rule of law and human rights. We will work with governments so civilian law enforcement has the resources and capacity to assume full responsibility for civilian security, enabling the drawdown of military from policing roles.
 - **Improve civilian policing.** The United States will work with governments to target resources at the most pressing security challenges, while ensuring intelligence-led and community policing concepts are introduced and implemented nationwide, designed to increase dialogue and trust with populations, and establish community-based solutions to crime that respect human rights.
 - **Enhance accountability.** The United States will work with governments to build accountability into security forces through initiatives to support audit and oversight functions to root out and address misconduct and poor performance.
2. **Counter organized crime.** The United States will work with governments to increase capacity of law enforcement and other security forces to address the unique transnational and national threats to the region, such as drug trafficking, gangs, extortion, smuggling, corruption, and money laundering, including through vetted and specialized units, regional cooperation, and legislative reform to increase penalties for organized crime.
 - **Build trusted partners.** The United States will work with and expand vetted and specialized units to build capacity to address complex crimes, including human and drug trafficking, and ensure trusted partners that can work with the United States and others in the region.
 - **Promote regional cooperation.** The United States will promote coordination and information sharing among countries in the region to address transnational crime, including to combat narcotics and other illicit trafficking.
3. **Build safe communities.** The United States will work with governments, law enforcement, community organizations, and others to build trust between the community and government, prevent crime, and provide alternatives to youth considering a life of crime.
 - **Create safe spaces.** The United States will work with municipalities and community organizations to increase the availability of safe spaces, such as parks and youth centers,

and improve the safety of public transportation, so that citizens can engage in economic and social life without fear

- **Create meaningful alternative for at-risk youth.** The United States will work with a diverse range of stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector to prevent youth from joining gangs, including through opportunities to play, learn, work, and feel connected with their families and communities.
- **Reintegrate offenders.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to support offenders' efforts to disengage from gangs and reintegrate into communities by addressing trauma, community resiliency, education and economic opportunity, and case management services.



Pillar V: Combating sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence

Across the region, gender-based violence (GBV)--including, but not limited to, intimate partner violence, rape, gender-based murder of women and girls (femicide)--and other crimes, including sex and labor trafficking, significantly hinder the ability of women and girls to participate fully in society and contribute to their families and communities. Women and youth from historically marginalized communities often face even higher levels of GBV. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, women and youth subjected to violence or human trafficking lack sufficient access to justice and protection services. The ability of law enforcement to combat sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence remains a challenge, and domestic violence has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will work with partner governments, civil society organizations, and others to combat violence in the region.

Strategic Objectives:

1. **Combat sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence:** Governments and civil society take steps to prevent sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence; hold perpetrators accountable; and protect and provide services for victims.

Lines of Effort:

1. **Combat sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to prevent, address, and support victims of sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence.
 - **Prevent and prosecute sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence.** The United States will work with governments in the region to implement existing legislation relating to sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence, and ensure law enforcement and the justice sector is equipped to investigate and prosecute these crimes, reducing impunity for

these crimes. We will work with community-based organizations to change the culture around gender-based violence and empower women.

- **Support victims.** The United States will work with governments and civil society to increase support and protection for survivors of these crimes, and break down stereotypes and cultural norms that permit these crimes to continue.



Implementation Sequencing Highlights

Short-Term:

Build Partnerships: We will build a coalition of people, organizations, and businesses committed to creating economic opportunity and fostering political will for structural reforms in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Mobilize Investment: We will work with the private sector to mobilize investment in the region to create economic opportunity.

Address Acute Causes: We will address humanitarian needs from the fall 2020 hurricanes, provide training and finance to jump start the economies after COVID-19 and hurricane devastation, and provide critical support to those in need of food assistance. We will focus on education and training for youth.

Communicate: We will ensure people in the region know about the United States' commitment to supporting good governance, economic opportunities, and security so they understand help is on the way to build hope for a better future at home. We will communicate clearly to governments in the region that the United States wants to be a partner in their success, but that this partnership requires a shared commitment to inclusive and transparent democratic governance.

Medium Term:

Promote Reforms: We will focus our efforts on deepening implementation of initiatives that promote reforms fundamental to addressing root causes of migration, employing the full range of U.S. government tools to combat corruption and promote political will where necessary.

Create Economic Opportunity: We will expand our partnership with foundations, civil society, and the private sector to deliver new economic opportunities to citizens in the region, and mobilize appropriate technological solutions.

Fight Corruption: We will launch a regional anti-corruption initiative and work closely with partners to prosecute corruption and transnational criminal operations, including illicit political finance, migrant smuggling and trafficking cases, that will help improve governance in Central America.

Combat Insecurity: We will target security assistance on the most common security-related drivers of migration, including extortion and gender-based violence.

Address Climate Change and Improve Disaster Preparedness: We will work with partners to reinforce national and regional preparedness and disaster response capabilities and implement programs to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Communicate: We will continue to communicate progress and actions to build hope across society.

Long-Term:

Deepen Partnerships: We will solidify and expand implementation across the pillars, informed by constant feedback and consultation from stakeholders in Congress, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and partner governments.

Institutionalize Programs: We will aim for institutionalization of longer-term structural changes in governance to ensure strong democratic institutions and governments that invest in the well-being of their societies. We will assess our progress and increase the sustainability of our efforts by transferring increased ownership to partners in the region.

Integrate Regionally: We will seek deeper economic and political integration across Central America, and with North America, to safely and humanely manage migration and to help realize a vision of a more prosperous and stable region.

