



Machismo in the Northern Triangle

RAIO Research Unit

April 2020

The Northern Triangle



Questions to Consider

- ▶ In what ways does machismo manifest within the family/household?
- ▶ How do women integrate their experiences of machismo into their identity formation and choices?
- ▶ What role does government play?
- ▶ How do women's beliefs about how they should behave impact their response to machismo?

Theories about the origins of machismo

- ▶ Machismo is a cultural construct affecting all parts of society
 - ▶ “Sociologists offer up a historical cultural explanation for both the region’s gender violence problem and the impunity with which cases of femicide are often met... There has been a social and cultural expectation in Latin America since the Spanish conquest, that men are entitled to women, and it’s how they express their sense of masculinity“ Wall Street Journal, May 4, 2019.
 - ▶ “It’s about machismo-the culture of which goes back to colonial times, when conquering Spaniards came without wives and treated the indigenous like slaves. Today...it’s about engendering maximum terror in your enemies, and you do that by showing how macabre you can be in the way you torture or kill. Honduras is locked in a war of grisly one-upmanship, and women’s bodies are the battlefield.” New York Times, April 5, 2019.

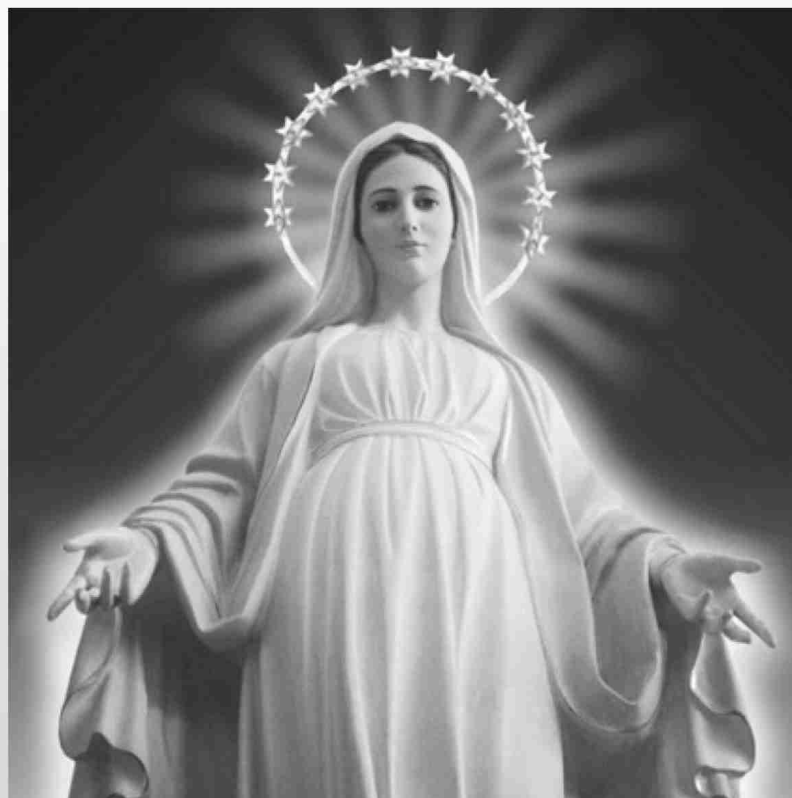
Defining machismo

- ▶ “Exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships.” Evelyn P. Stevens, 1973.
- ▶ “[A] manifestation of the patriarchal culture where men assume that they are superior and can exert power over women...In this context, women are ashamed to admit that they are suffering violence because society will tend to blame them as being responsible for inducing violence,” USAID, Nov. 2015.
- ▶ “Machismo is about men believing a woman is their property and possession.” Reuters, October 2015.

Defining machismo

- ▶ “Machismo posits that men are the strong sex and that men don’t/should not express their emotions.” Creative Associates International
- ▶ “Machismo refers to a set of beliefs about how Latino males should act. Positive traits typically associated with Machismo include: honor, pride, courage, responsibility, and obligation to family, while negative traits associated with machismo include: sexual prowess, high alcohol consumption, and aggressiveness.” Journal of Family Violence, 2007.

Marianismo



Marianismo (cont.)

- ▶ “Marianismo is about sacred duty, self-sacrifice, and chastity. About dispensing care and pleasure, not receiving them. About living in the shadows, literally and figuratively, of your men-father, boyfriend, husband, son-your kids, and your family.”
- ▶ Women should be selfless and able to withstand extreme sacrifices for the sake of the family
- ▶ Women are either saints or whores

Marianismo (cont.)

- ▶ Marianismo = Norms for how women should behave
 - ▶ “Ten Commandments of Marianismo”
 1. Do not forget your place
 2. Do not forsake tradition
 3. Do not be single, self-supporting, or independent-minded
 4. Do not put your own needs first
 5. Do not wish for more in life than being a housewife
 6. Do not forget that sex is for reproduction, not for pleasure
 7. Do not be unhappy with or criticize your man
 8. Do not ask for help
 9. Do not discuss personal problems outside the home
 10. Do not change those things which make you unhappy

Traditional Roles

- ▶ Men
 - ▶ Providers
 - ▶ Decision makers
 - ▶ Head of family
- ▶ Women maintain the home:
 - ▶ Cooking
 - ▶ Cleaning
 - ▶ Laundry
 - ▶ Raising children
 - ▶ Grocery shopping (but male partner decides budget)

Cohabitation vs. Formal Marriage

- Cohabitation is very common throughout Central America
- Cohabitation has been commonplace in all of Latin America for centuries
 - Began as a way for Spanish colonizers to have relationships with indigenous women without formal marriage
- Broad social recognition, but no inheritance rights
- Concepts: unión libre, concubinato, amancebamiento, abarraganarse
- Guatemala and Honduras both recognize “unión de hecho”
- El Salvador’s constitution has language indicating that marriage is not a requirement for enjoyment of the rights established in favor of the family (articles 32-36)

Machismo's impact

- ▶ UN: “power imbalances and structural inequality between men and women are among the root causes of violence against women” and “this makes violence against women a matter of inter-gender inequality between women and men” ... [D]iscrimination is understood as having multiple forms that combine to heighten the vulnerability of some women and girls to violence. This reflects the understanding that discrimination and violence against women is also a matter of intra-gender inequality among women.” IACHR, December 31, 2015

Machismo's Impact (cont.)

- ▶ “The problem is not easily erased by legislation or enforcement, [Judge Eduardo Alfonso Campos Paz] said, because of a mind-set ingrained in boys early on and reinforced throughout their lives. ‘When I was born, my mom or sister brought me food and drink,’ the judge said. ‘My sister cleaned up after me and washed my clothes. If I wanted water, she would get up from wherever she was and get it for me. We are molded to be served, and when that isn’t accomplished, the violence begins.’” *New York Times*, 2019.
- ▶ Machismo and marianismo deny both men and women their humanity

Machismo's Impact (cont.)

- ▶ “Men are raised to understand their role in society as providers and protectors, and when that role is challenged, many react with violence.” Wall Street Journal, 2019.
- ▶ “Crimes against women are simply seen as less important because women are not as important in society.” Pamela Neumann, Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies, Bucknell University
- ▶ Guatemala: “80% of men believe that women need permission to leave the house, and 70% of women surveyed agreed.” U.N. Women Guatemala, as reported by CNN, 2015

Intersections Causing Further Marginalization

- ▶ Machismo + corruption: “Combination of ‘machismo and patriarchal culture’ as well as the lack of institutions capable of investigating these killings.” EFE (Honduras), Nov. 17, 2015
- ▶ Machismo + racism: especially in Guatemala, where approx. 40% of the population is indigenous (Maya, Garifuna, Xinca)
 - ▶ Afro-Hondurans (Garifuna and Bay Island Creoles)

Intersections Causing Further Marginalization (cont.)

- ▶ Machismo + poverty
 - ▶ Guatemala: 48.8% of population lives in poverty, 8.7% in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 USD per day. (World Bank, 2014)
 - ▶ “In essence there are ‘two Guatemalas’, one well-off, and one poor, one urban and one rural, one Ladino and one Indigenous with large gaps in both social and economic outcomes.” (World Bank Guatemala Overview)
 - ▶ El Salvador: 29% of the population lives in poverty (less than \$5.50 USD per person per day); 8.5% in extreme poverty (less than \$3.20 USD per day) (World Bank, 2017)
 - ▶ Honduras: 52.6% of population lives in poverty; 17.2% in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 USD per day) (second only to Haiti in all of Latin America and the Caribbean) (World Bank, 2017)

Intersections Causing Further Marginalization (cont.)

- ▶ "Politicians don't think women are important," says former Secretary General of the Presidential Secretariat for Women [Guatemala] Elizabeth Quiroa. "Political parties use women for elections. They give them a bag of food and people sell their dignity for this because they are poor." CNN, 2015.
- ▶ Machismo + Poverty + Racism + Corruption

Domestic Violence



Why is domestic violence so prevalent in the Northern Triangle countries?

- ▶ El Salvador: 67% of Salvadoran women have suffered some form of violence in their lifetime, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and abuse by family members. Only 6% of victims had reported abuse to authorities
- ▶ “El Salvador is a country with so much gang violence, so much brutality so many murders, that nobody pays attention to violence against women...it’s invisible in this huge ocean of violence.”
- ▶ “Gang members see women as sexual objects”
- ▶ El Salvador is the only country with a law against “femicide suicide”: driving a woman to suicide by abusing them.

Why is domestic violence so prevalent in the Northern Triangle countries? (cont.)

- ▶ Honduras
 - ▶ Widespread gang violence; violence is normalized
 - ▶ Lack of family role models, drug and alcohol abuse, patriarchal culture. Creative Associates International
 - ▶ Lack of interest in stopping the behavior. Some men believe they have a right to treat women as they please and are not interested in being educated otherwise. Project Hope

Why is domestic violence so prevalent in the Northern Triangle countries? (cont.)

► Guatemala

- “[D]aily practices of machismo, racism, and discrimination are still major barriers—deeply entrenched in history—to the political participation of women, and especially young or indigenous women.”
- “The main cause of femicide that Amnesty International has identified is government inaction and the resulting impunity—human rights abusers can literally get away with murder in Guatemala, especially when their victims are women. Amnesty found that less than 4 percent of homicide cases result in the conviction of those responsible. This low rate, in turn, is largely the result of insufficient and ineffective investigations.”

Why is domestic violence so prevalent in the Northern Triangle countries? (cont.)

- ▶ Underreporting

- ▶ “Domestic violence is underreported because women are afraid to speak [due to] fear and social stigma.” USAID, Honduras, 2015.

- ▶ “I heard that you were screaming, but didn’t go to help you because I assumed your husband was beating you.” USAID

- ▶ Victim Blaming:

- ▶ “[W]omen have been blamed in courtrooms for the violence inflicted on them because they went out at night or their husbands were angry that ‘lunch wasn’t prepared on time.’”
Glenda Baires, judge appointed to hear cases in El Salvador’s Women’s Courts

Historical Context

- ▶ Honduras
 - ▶ Military rule uninterrupted for almost 17 years from 1960s until 1981
 - ▶ Civilian government began in 1981, but U.S. presence in the 1980s due to regional conflicts (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala) meant continued militarization through the early 1980s
 - ▶ Economic and financial decline in early 1990s
 - ▶ Hurricane Mitch hit in 1998, killed thousands of Hondurans

Historical Context

- ▶ Guatemala
 - ▶ 36 years of civil war: “During the conflict, an army of around 40,000 men and a civilian defence force of approximately one million were trained to commit acts of violence against women. When the war ended and these men returned home, they got no help in readjusting.” BBC, 2015.
 - ▶ “This prevailing culture of machismo and an institutionalized acceptance of brutality against women leads to high rates of violence.” CNN

Historical Context

- ▶ El Salvador
 - ▶ 12 years of civil war, 1980-1992
 - ▶ Policía Nacional Civil created as part of 1992 peace accords. PNC incorporated those who had participated in the civil war
 - ▶ Salvadorans fled to the U.S. in droves. Some joined gangs. MS-13 founded in Los Angeles.
 - ▶ Civil war ends, 4,000 gang members with criminal records deported back to El Salvador
 - ▶ El Salvador's infrastructure and economy were destroyed by the civil war; no institutions capable of controlling gang activity.
 - ▶ As of 2018, MS-13 is active in 94% of El Salvador's 262 municipalities.

Domestic Violence: Young Girls and Adolescents

- ▶ Guatemala: Council on Hemispheric Affairs, June 17, 2015.
 - ▶ Half of all women are married by age 20
 - ▶ 44% become mothers by age 20
 - ▶ Among indigenous women: 54% become mothers by age 20
 - ▶ In 2009 and 2011, there were 135,808 pregnancies in girls aged 10 to 19
 - ▶ In 2012, there 61,000 pregnancies in this age group; 35 of which were 10 year old girls

Domestic Violence: Young Girls and Adolescents (cont.)

► Guatemala

- “In the majority of cases of sexual violence against girls, some as young as 10, most are committed by family members, mainly by the girl’s father or stepfather,” said Mirna Montenegro, the head of Guatemala’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Observatory (OSAR).
- “In 2012, nearly 90 percent of all pregnancies among Guatemalan girls under 14 involved relatives, including cousins and uncles, of which 30 percent were the result of rape by fathers, according to Guatemala’s human rights ombudsman.”
- “Machismo is about men believing a woman is their property and possession. We’ve heard fathers say ‘She’s my daughter and my property so I will do what I want with her,’” said Montenegro.

Domestic Violence: Young Girls and Adolescents (cont.)

- ▶ Guatemala: 80+ births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 (UNFPA, 2017)
- ▶ Honduras: 60+ births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 (UNFPA, 2017)
- ▶ El Salvador: 60+ births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 (World Bank, 2017)
- ▶ These numbers do not account for pregnancies in girls between the ages of 10-14
- ▶ For comparison, the U.S. had a rate of 18.8 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 in 2017

Domestic Violence: Young Girls and Adolescents (cont.)

- ▶ Catholic and Evangelical churches are politically influential and stifle discussion about sexuality
- ▶ Poverty increases pressure on families to find “economically stable husbands” (COHA.org, 2015)
 - ▶ “It’s like a relief when someone else becomes responsible for the girl. Sometimes parents will give the girl to someone with a lot of resources-it’s a bit like trafficking.” Lizani Lopez, Observatorio en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva (OSAR Guatemala)

Domestic Violence: Young Girls and Adolescents (cont.)

► Child Marriage

- Guatemala: Illegal for children under 18 to marry. Practice persists in indigenous communities. Also, sometimes people simply live together and do not attempt to legally marry, bypassing the law
- El Salvador: Illegal for children under 18 to marry. Loophole allowing child marriage in certain circumstances was closed by parliament in 2017. Still, reports indicate underage girls are involved in informal relationships prior to 18, often against their will
- Honduras: Illegal for children under 18 to marry. Loophole allowing child marriage with parental consent was closed in 2017. In 2016, 34% of girls married before the age of 18

Femicide: Definition and History

- ▶ “Femicide is generally defined as the murder of women because they are women, though some definitions include any murders of women or girls.
- ▶ Femicide has been used to describe killings of women by intimate partners and family members; it has also been used to describe gender-related killings in the community. The term femicide was introduced in the last century to describe killings of women that were gender related in order to recognize the impact of inequality and discrimination, identified internationally as a root cause of violence against women.
- ▶ Femicide has been identified globally as a leading a cause of premature death for women...The Global Study on Homicide in 2011 indicated that while there has been a decrease in homicides worldwide there has been an increase in the number of femicides.”

Femicide Statistics

- ▶ El Salvador: one of the highest femicide rates in the world
 - ▶ Over 3,500 killed (2010-2017)
 - ▶ One femicide every 24 hours (2018)
 - ▶ Femicide rate is 6 times the global average
- ▶ Honduras: 5,600 femicides in the last 15 years (as of 2018);
 - ▶ One femicide every 16 hours
 - ▶ Femicide rate is 12 times the global average
- ▶ Guatemala: two women violently killed each day
 - ▶ Femicide rate is more than 3 times the global average
 - ▶ “In 2008, more than 700 women were murdered in Guatemala; many of these murders were preceded by brutal sexual abuse and torture. A 2009 human rights campaign reported that there had been more than 500 femicides per year in Guatemala since 2001.” WHO, 2012

Femicide: The Murders of María José Alvarado and Sofía Trinidad Alvarado



Femicide: The Murders of María José Alvarado and Sofía Trinidad Alvarado

- ▶ María José was shot 16 times and Sofía was shot 8 times
- ▶ They went missing after Sofía's boyfriend's birthday party
- ▶ Sofía's boyfriend shot them both after allegedly seeing Sofía dance with another man
- ▶ María José was a television personality and Miss Honduras at the time of her death; she was only 19 years old
- ▶ Sofía's boyfriend was charged with femicide for Sofía's murder; penalty of up to 40 years in jail. María José's murder was not charged as a femicide
- ▶ Defendant sentenced to 45 years: 40 years for Sofía's murder, 5 for María José's
- ▶ Case received international attention given the status of one of the victims; one of the few cases that was investigated, prosecuted, and resulted in a conviction

Victimization by gangs and other criminal groups

- ▶ El Salvador:
 - ▶ Systematic use of sexual violence - dominance, status & revenge
 - ▶ Viewed as “property” of gangs
 - ▶ *novias de las pandillas*:
 - ▶ May be “chosen” as girlfriends despite no actual relationship: “When she was 12, a gang member forced her to become his girlfriend. Three years later, having had two of his children and faced constant abuse and death threats, Maria attempted suicide.” Time, May 2019.
 - ▶ *niñeras*

Victimization by gangs and other criminal groups (cont.)

- ▶ Honduras: “The strongly macho ethos of the Honduran gangs expresses itself through their reported virulent hatred and ill-treatment of persons of (perceived) diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities and in the reported widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls living in many gang territories, including forcing girls into prostitution and killing those who resist.” UNHCR, 2016.

Victimization by gangs and other criminal groups (cont.)

- ▶ Guatemala: “[W]omen face a heightened situation of risk: the maras tend to be criminal structures dominated by males with a machista hierarchy, who engage in practices of extreme violence. It is difficult for women to rise above men to hold high positions in the hierarchy and, true to the stereotype, many women (mothers, sisters, female partners) are regarded as “property” of men and their gang. Overpowering and harassing women is part of the control and confrontation strategy among gangs, which leaves women particularly vulnerable to acts of extortion, threats, sexual violence, torture and murder.” IACHR, 2017.

Impunity

- ▶ Honduras: 463 women murdered in 2016
 - ▶ 15 investigations
 - ▶ 2 convictions
- ▶ Authorities unable or unwilling to help: One Salvadoran woman recalled that she was “standing in front of the police, bleeding, and the police said, ‘Well, he’s your husband.’” Another Salvadoran woman stated: ‘One time the police came to our home, but they said that because this was a case of domestic violence, we could resolve it between ourselves. I do not have confidence in the police.’” UNHCR, *Women on the Run*, 2015.

Impunity (cont.)

- ▶ Honduras: “In the rare cases where police arrested the perpetrators of abuse, the perpetrators were generally released within a few days. ‘I reported my husband to the police once,’ explained a woman from Honduras. ‘They detained him, but only for 24 hours, and then he was released and was even more angry.’ Another Honduran woman, whose mother had been abused by the woman’s father and later her stepfather, sometimes made official complaints on her mother’s behalf. But it was useless, she says. ‘They put them in jail for 24 hours and then they are out.’” UNHCR, *Women on the Run*, 2015.

Impunity (cont.)

- ▶ El Salvador: “Laws against domestic violence remained poorly enforced, and violence against women, including domestic violence, remained a widespread and serious problem... [T]he Salvadoran Organization of Women for Peace (ORMUSA) reported that in 2016 and 2017, **only 5 percent of the 6,326** reported crimes against women went to trial. On July 4, police arrested a **police commissioner** for violating the terms of a restraining order protecting his spouse.” U.S. Department of State

Impunity (cont.)

- ▶ El Salvador: Few perpetrators face justice. “Between 2013 and November 2016, the Salvadoran government opened 662 femicide cases, but only 5 percent reached a conviction. With pervasive gender inequality and widespread impunity, part of the reason for the epidemic of violence against women may simply be that assailants believe that they can get away with it.”

Implementation of Legislation for the Protection of Women

► Guatemala

- Guatemala is the least advanced country in Latin America in terms of gender equality. It is number 113 out of 153 countries catalogued in the Global Gender Gap Report for 2020.
- Guatemala is the only country in the region with no legal incentive to incorporate women in political life.
- “The femicide law required every region in the nation to install a specialized court focused on violence against women. But more than a decade later, only 13 of 22 are in operation.” New York Times, Aug. 18, 2019.

Implementation of Legislation for the Protection of Women

► Honduras

- Creation of *Ciudad Mujer* services project, Inter-Institutional Commission on Femicide, but funds are not adequately allocated. OHCHR.org, Nov 2018.
- Decrease in proportion of women in national political leadership, despite rules on equal representation of women in men in politics. Distortion in interpretation of those rules to allow for election of more men
- “Government restructuring in 2014 downgraded the status of the National Institute for Women, cut funding for women’s rights groups, and abolished the police emergency telephone line for female victims of violence.” Irish Times, 2015
- Oficina Municipal de la Mujer: handles interactions between local governments and organized women’s groups as well as individuals

Implementation of Legislation for the Protection of Women (cont.)

- El Salvador
 - Ley contra La Violencia Intrafamiliar (1996, amended in 2013)
 - Ley Especial Integral para una Vida Libre de Violencia para las Mujeres (2011)
 - Some judges have refused to implement it because they claim it “unequally protects women with respect to men” (IRBC, 2016)
 - Ley de Igualdad, Equidad, y Erradicación de la Discriminación contra las Mujeres (March 2011)
 - Evidence indicates increase in girls’ educational levels since passage of the law
 - El Salvador is the only country with a law against “femicide suicide”: driving a woman to suicide by abusing them (2012)

Implementation of Legislation for the Protection of Women (cont.)

- ▶ Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer: created by legislative decree in 1996; charged with implementing laws passed for improvement of women's legal standing. Board of directors is lead by Social Inclusion Secretary, several other ministry secretaries are members
- ▶ UNIMUJER ODAC: Unidad Institucional de Atención Especializada a las Mujeres en Situación de Violencia de la Oficina de Denuncia y Atención Ciudadana (as of Dec 2018, 31 units in the country, El Salvador has 14 departments. Small offices, not a lot of staff, but staff does receive training)
- ▶ Ciudad Mujer: government program through Social Inclusion Secretary. Offers reproductive health services, counseling for victims of domestic violence, economic autonomy assistance (job training), childcare for kids up to the age of 12, and development of participants' understanding of their rights so that they can fully participate as citizens

Implementation of Legislation for the Protection of Women (cont.)

- ▶ El Salvador: “Although these represent positive steps, the underlying problems are endemic. The judicial system is overworked and poorly funded. Only 3 percent of court cases involving violence against women ended in guilty verdicts between 2016 and 2017. Impunity is rife.” Foreign Policy, March 2019.

Public Response

- ▶ NGOs: Project Hope, Creative Associates International, Alianza Joven (Honduras), Honduras Center for Women's Rights, La Alianza (Guatemala), Mercy Corps, Red de la No Violencia Contra las Mujeres (Guatemala), Supérate (El Salvador), Glasswing (El Salvador)
- ▶ Art: Dolls Clan (Honduras)
- ▶ USAID investment in education and community-based crime and violence prevention: "Programs focus on education and workforce development to increase economic productivity in high crime areas, identified under El Salvador's national security plan."

Public response (cont.)

- Risk in speaking out: Female human rights defenders “are more at risk of certain forms of violence and other violations, such as prejudice, exclusion and repudiation, than their male counterparts due to the fact that they are seen as challenging accepted sociocultural norms, traditions, perceptions and stereotypes about femininity, sexual orientation and the role and status of women in society, which often serve to normalize and perpetuate forms of violence and oppression. Furthermore, their complaints are often dismissed and they are subjected to repeated threats and intimidation by the authorities.” Special Rapporteur, UN Human Rights Council, Honduras, 2015.

Recommended Sources

- ▶ [BBC News: Latin America](#)
- ▶ [InSight Crime](#): excellent source of reporting, analysis and investigation on organized crime in the Americas.
- ▶ [Inter Press Service News Agency: Americas](#)
- ▶ [Los Angeles Times: Mexico & the Americas](#)
- ▶ [Miami Herald: Americas](#)
- ▶ [NACLA](#): information and analysis of the Americas region, and its relationship with the United States.
- ▶ [The Associated Press: Latin America](#)
- ▶ [The Guardian: Americas](#)
- ▶ [The New Humanitarian: Americas](#)
- ▶ [The New York Times: Americas](#)
- ▶ [The Washington Post: Americas](#)

Contact Info

RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov