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Labor migration and social struggle in the Trump Era
The case of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras

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In the past four decades, the immigrant population from Central America, mainly from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, has grown from being a small part of the migrant population in the United States to a significant presence, and one with its own characteristics and challenges. Currently, 7% of immigrants in the United States come from Central America. In Washington DC, one out of every seven immigrants is Salvadoran.

Nearly half of the Central American immigrant population in the United States does not have legal documented status. Through November 2017, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) offered protection from deportation and provided work permits to 204,000 Salvadorans and 61,000 Hondurans, although it was not provided for immigrants from Guatemala.

Migrant workers from Central America mainly hold low-paying jobs in the service sector. The presence of Central Americans in the U.S. labor movement is growing by the day. Some of the union leaders are Central Americans, especially in the service-sector and construction unions. As a result, several labor unions such as the SEIU (services), UFCW (food and commercial workers), and IUPAT (painters and allied trades) are implementing legal support programs for immigrant workers.

Nonetheless, the challenges during the Trump administration are immense. As a first order of business, immigrant workers and their allies seek to defend sanctuary cities from budget attacks from the federal government and protect themselves from immigration raids. The United States labor movement must continue to be a bastion to defend the rights of all workers, including immigrants.

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Introduction

Migration of Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran nationals to the United States has been an ongoing phenomenon over the past four decades. Nonetheless, studies of this trend have been limited due to two central factors: On one hand, the study of the migration from these three Central American countries has been eclipsed - among academics and public policy designers - by the greater migratory flows from Mexico. In absolute numbers, Mexicans have a much larger migration flow, leading the unique characteristics of Central American migration to be diluted among the general profile of the Mexican migrant population. On the other hand, Central American migration tends to be viewed through the lens of extraordinary events, such as the flow of refugees from the civil wars in the 1980s, or the current crisis of unaccompanied minors. This lens tends to hide the ongoing nature of Central American migration and its long-term characteristics.

The objective of this study is to present a general profile of migration from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to the United States, highlighting available data on occupational profiles, income levels, and the challenges that Central American immigrant communities face under the Trump administration. In the first case, the data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and research institutions such as the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) offer a more detailed panorama of the migration flows from these three Central American countries to the United States, including the main destinations of the migrant population.

In the latter case, data on employment, salaries, occupation, and labor union representation available through the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the American Community Survey (ACS) generally do not disaggregate information by country of origin; when they do so, they tend to group all of the Central American population in a single section. Given these data trends, the occupational profiles and information on union participation among the migrant population from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are not especially detailed. We have attempted to compensate for this lack of detailed information by describing emblematic cases of Central American union leadership and sharing information on the programs and services that diverse organizations offer for the Central American migrant population.

I. Migration to the United States from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras

Background

Prior to the 1980s, migration from Central America to the United States was mainly limited to individuals with high educational attainment, from the middle or upper-middle class. Accounts from this period are mostly anecdotal, from writers such as Francisco Goldman and David Unger, both of whom are children of wealthy Guatemalans. The integration of these migrants and their descendants was facilitated thanks to their identification with middle or upper-class recipient communities, their fluency in English, and access to well-paid employment or business ownership.

In the mid-seventies, wars in the three countries of Northern Central America and Nicaragua generated migratory flows of rural inhabitants with little or no formal education and low income, especially in the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador. Despite the very difficult conditions that the rural populations of Guatemala and El Salvador faced in the civil wars in their home countries, U.S. authorities turned down the great majority of asylum requests, issuing favorable decisions in only 3% of the cases[1]. As a result of these decisions, most of the Central American migrant population that arrived in the United States during these years remained with undocumented status.

In the early 1990s as the armed conflicts in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua drew to a close (the latter indirectly affecting Honduras, due to the Nicaraguan "Contra" operations in their territory[2]), Central American migration was driven mainly by economic causes, until the end of the

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1 Zong, Jie y Jeanne Batalova, "Central American Immigrants in the US", Migration Policy Institute, September 2, 2015, retrieved from http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united- states, January 6, 2017. MPI data are based on ACS results from the U.S. Census (see Introduction)
2 After the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the military opposition to the Sandinista government was organized into a group known generically as "*la Contra*" or "the Contras", supported by the United States.

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first decade of this century, in which insecurity and violence became the primary drivers of migration.

From 1970 to 2015, the migrant population grew from 52,000 people from the three countries (El Salvador - 16,000; Guatemala - 17,000; Honduras - 19,000) to approximately 2.9 million (El Salvador - 1.35 million[3]; Guatemala - 930,000; Honduras - 600,000). Graph 1 shows the increase in absolute numbers among the total Central American migrant population, in which migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala account for 85% of the total. The chart clearly reveals an exponential increase starting in 1980; in the case of El Salvador alone, the migrant population from that country grew by approximately 500% from 1980 to 1990, and 200% from 1990 to 2000 (MPI, 2015)[4].

Graph 1: Central American Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2015
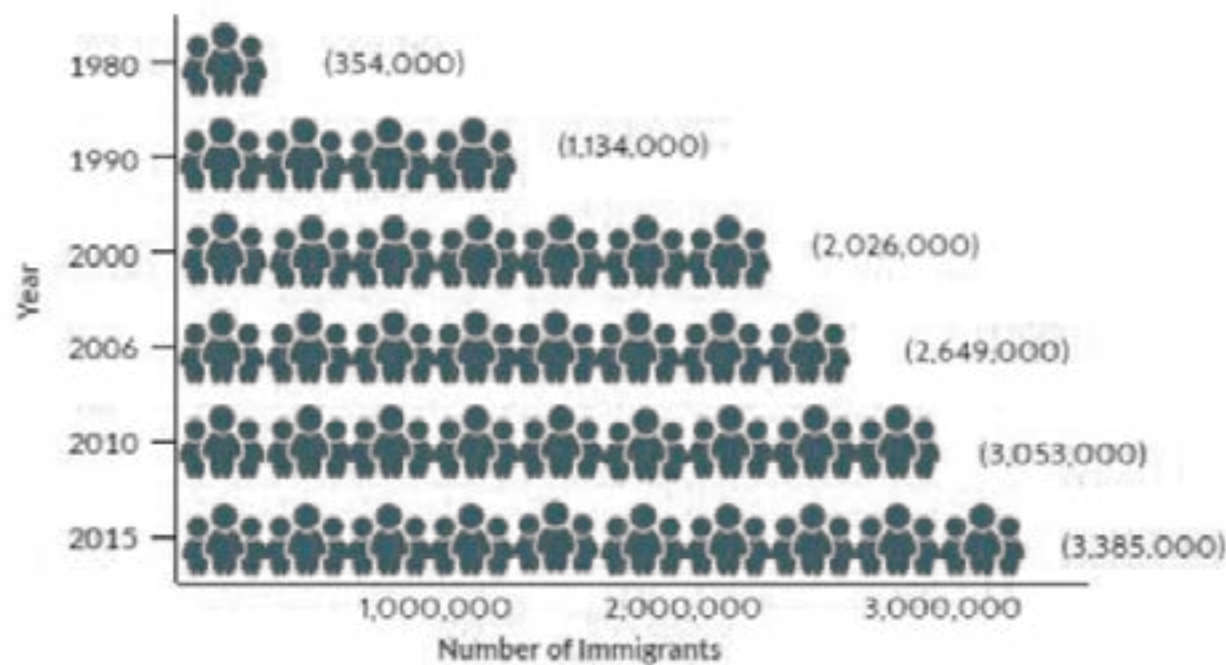
Source: U.S. Census Data for 2006, 2010, and ACS 2015, from Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" (Working Paper no. 81, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2006).

Another aspect to note in this increase in the Central American migrant population in the United States is that, starting in 1980, Central American migrants began to make up a more visible part of the migrant population overall. In 1970, Central American migrants did not even account for 1% of the total migrant population in the United States; by 2013, Central America represented 7% of the total. Currently, one out of every seven migrants in the District of Columbia is Salvadoran, the country with the greatest proportion of migrants out of the three (MPI, 2015).

Geographic distribution

The immigrant population from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras is concentrated mainly along the East coast, Southern California, Florida, and in the metropolitan areas of Houston and Dallas, Texas. The three metropolitan areas with the greatest number of immigrants from these three countries are Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim; New York-Newark-Jersey City, and the metropolis made up of Washington, DC and the adjacent suburbs of Maryland and Virginia, known as DMV (see Table 1). Less significant numerically, but relevant in terms of impact in the local labor force, is the Guatemalan population settled in rural areas in the Southern United States, where they make up a significant number of the workers in the poultry and pork processing plants.

Table 1. Metropolitan Areas in the United States with the Greatest Number of Central American Migrants

Metropolitan Area	Inmigrant Population from Central America	% of Metro Area Population
Los Ángeles Long Beach- Anaheim, CA	561,000	4.3
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	365,000	1.9
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD.WV	264,000	4.6
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	240,000	4.2
Houston- The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	201,000	3.3
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	107,000	2.4
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	86,000	1.3
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	68,000	1.6
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	64,000	1.4
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	59,000	1.1

Source: MPI, 2015.

Note: While it was not possible to disaggregate the data in this chart to reflect the number of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans separately, the combined immigrant population from these three countries accounts for 85% of the Central American migrants in the United States. In this sense, the geographic distribution in this chart may be considered as representative for the population from the three countries in this study.

Migratory status

The migrant population from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras is among the group with the lowest naturalization rates in the United States: only 22% to 31% of all of the migrants from these countries have obtained U.S. citizenship. This low rate is due to the fact that the majority of these migrants are not eligible for citizenship as a result of their undocumented status (1.4 million in all from the three countries), or they have been beneficiaries from Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which covered 204,000 Salvadorans and 61,000 Honduras. Guatemala does not have TPS. Approximately 60,000 young people from these three countries received protection under Deferred

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3 The Government of El Salvador, through its Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad, estimates that the number is more than double this figure, at 2.8 million Salvadorans in the United States. See: http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2017/03/07/no-se-confien-eviten-todo-tipo-de-problemas-cancilleria-a-salvadorenos-en-eua#sthash.eFUXJIGN.dpuf

4 For relative growth rate, see: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrants-countries-birth-over-time?width=1000&height=850iframe=true. The graph is interactive and allows for comparisons between the migration rates from each country in each decade, starting in the 1960s, and among multiple countries of origin. The graphs were produced by the MPI, based on ACS data from the U.S. Census.

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Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (MPI, 2015), prior to the cancellation of this program by Executive Order from President Trump in September, 2017.

Organizations and support programs for the immigrant population in the United States

A brief list of organizations offering support for the immigrant population, especially or including immigrants from Latin America, is provided below[5].

Table 2: Organizations and programs in support of the migrant population in the United States

Organization	Specialty	Geographic coverage
American Civil Liberties Union—Immigrants' Rights Freedom Network	Civil Liberties Due Process	Countrywide
American Friends Service Committee	Quaker organization that participates in different training initiatives on immigrants' rights and defense	Especially in Arizona, Texas, New Jersey, and Iowa
American Immigration Lawyers Association	Legal representation	Countrywide
Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law	Human rights protection for immigrants	Countrywide
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc	Under the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; provides legal support on immigration.	Countrywide
Equal Rights Advocates	Supporting immigrants through a gender lens	California
Farmworker Justice Fund	Agency of *Consejo Nacional de La Raza*, the largest and most influential Mexican-American organization in the United States. Support for temporary migrant farmworkers.	Countrywide
Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees	Provides grants to other organizations working to defend migrants' rights.	Countrywide
Immigrant Legal Resource Center	Offers legal education and defense of the rights of migrants	Countrywide
National Coalition for Dignity and Amnesty of Undocumented Immigrants	Mobilization in favor of comprehensive immigration reform.	Headquarters in New York, but active through networks and coalitions across the country
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights	Mobilization in favor of comprehensive immigration reform.	Headquarters in California, but with operations across the country through its nearly 200 member organizations
Working Families United	Union coalition in defense of TPS and DACA for youth and workers	Countrywide, especially in areas with for member union presence, such as California, New York, and the Washington DC metropolitan area.

5 The full list can be found at: http://www.publiceye.org/research/directories/immig_grp_defend.html

II. Profile of the migrant labor force from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in the U.S. economy

Distribution by economic sector

Half of the migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras do not have a high-school degree or equivalent, and only 7% hold a university or higher degree (MPI, 2015). As a result, these workers often can access only low-skilled and low-wage jobs. Another salient point is the high participation by Central American migrants in the labor force: 75% of these migrants over the age of 16, compared to 37% of all other foreign nationals, and 63% of native-born U.S. citizens. The sectors in which the Economically Active Population from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador works are services (34%), construction and maintenance (22%), production and transportation (18%), sales and office work (14%), and management, business, science, and the arts (11%). Disaggregated by gender, one of the most notable data points is that 44.6% of women immigrants from Central America (including the 6 countries of the region) work in the service and care sectors (MPI, 2013)[6].

The following graph compares the main sectors in which the Central American immigrant population works.

Graph 2: Sector distribution of the Central American immigrant population working in the United States
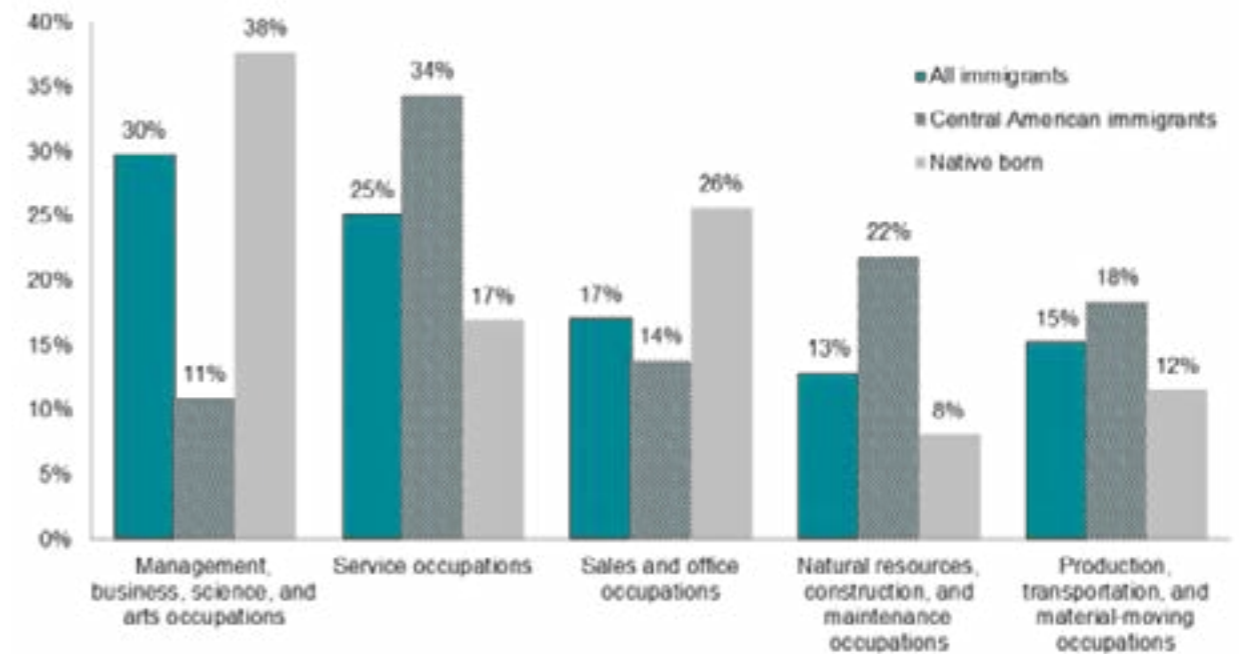
Source: MPI, 2015, with data from the U.S. Census and ACS, 2015.

6 Author's note: The occupational categories are not consistent among the different versions of the profile studies on Central American migration (2013 and 2015) published by the Migration Policy Institute, despite the fact that both studies cite the same source (the American Community Survey from the U.S. Census). The main difference is that the more recent version of the MPI study groups production and transportation into a single category, while they are disaggregated in the previous version.

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Income level

The average annual income for a migrant family from Central America is $41,000 (USD). By way of comparison, the average for all other migrant families is an annual income of $51,000, and $56,000 for native families.

In 2017, the U.S. Government established a Federal Poverty Level (which serves as a baseline to calculate eligibility for medical insurance under Obamacare) at $23,000 for a family of 4.[7] That is, a family of four members with a household income under this level would be considered as living in poverty. While it is true that the average income for Central American migrant families is above the U.S. federal poverty line, 22% of these families live below the poverty line, compared to 16% of the rest of the immigrant population, and 9% of the native population.

III. Union participation and experience among migrant workers from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala in the United States

The total number of unionized workers in the United States through 2016 was 14.6 million, or 10.7% of the total salaried workers in the country.[8] To illustrate the decline in unionization and the structural power of labor unions in the United States, consider that from 1983 to 2016, the unionization rate in the country fell by half, from 20.1% to 10.7% of the workforce.

While union density in the public sector remains relatively high, with a rate of 34.4%, the situation in the private sector is extremely precarious, where unionization reaches only 6.4%. This is relevant considering that public sector employment is difficult for immigrant workers to access, especially for workers without legal documented status or individuals with low English language fluency. This is one of the reasons why unionization among the

working immigrant population is slightly lower than that of native workers in the United States (9% and 12%, respectively in 2010, the last year for which disaggregated data between immigrant and native workers are available).[9]

Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) do not disaggregate by country of origin. The unions themselves do not compile detailed information on the country of origin of their immigrant members, either. It is difficult to estimate the number of immigrant workers from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala who are members of a union. There are, however, some numbers that can shed light on the role of Central American workers in recent unionization trends.

An important percentage of the unionized immigrant population in certain areas of the service sector (hotels, healthcare, and others) is greater than its proportion in the workforce, as is described in Graph 3, with data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

7 Data from Obamacare.net, one of the main providers of advice and accompaniment to access benefits under Obamacare. https://obamacare.net/2017-federal-poverty-level/ Retrieved April 19, 2017. A family is considered as living in poverty if it does not earn enough to ensure adequate access to food, healthcare, housing, and education.

8 Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.html. February 13, 2016.

9 Batalova, Jeanne. "Foreign-Born Wage and Salary Workers in the U.S. Labor Force and Unions", Migration Policy Institute, September 29, 2011. Online at http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/foreign-born-wage-and-salary-workers-us-labor-force-and-unions#3. Retrieved February 13, 2016.

Graph 3: Percentages of Foreign-Born Among All Workers and Among Union-Represented Workers Age 16 and Older in Industry, 2009*
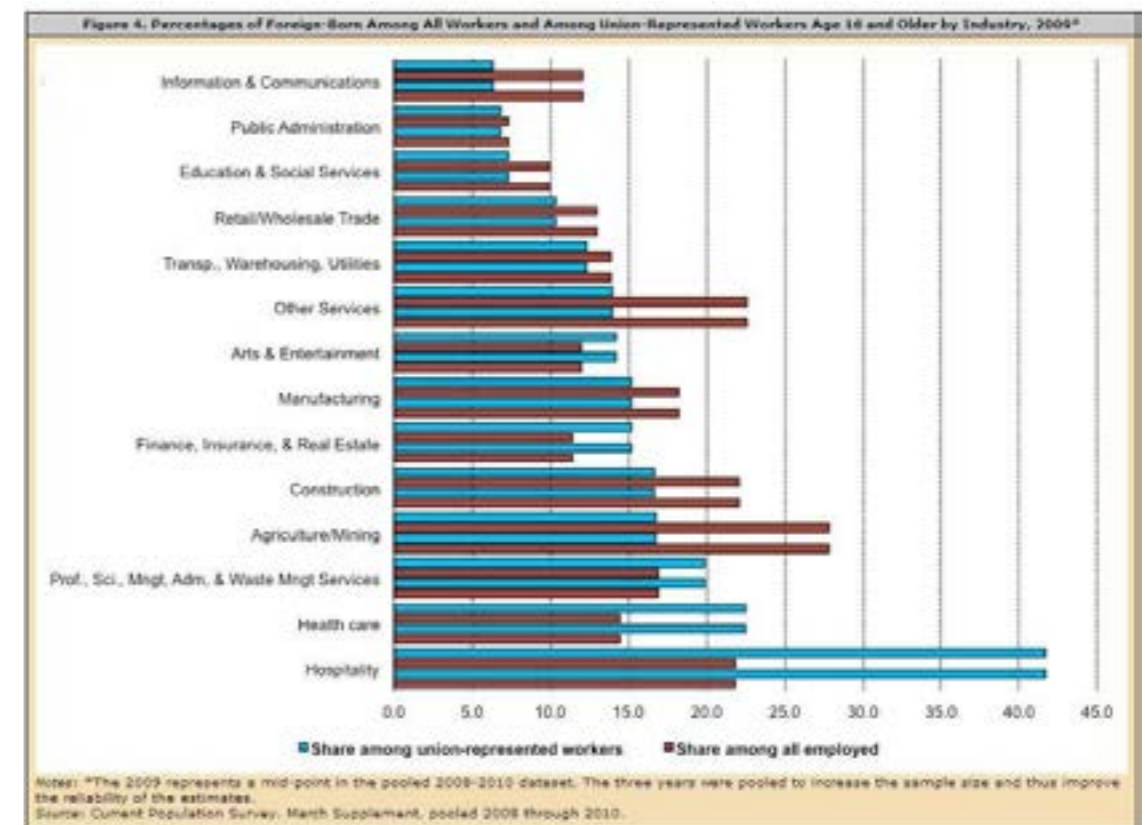
In the bottom two categories, note how immigrant workers double their representation in labor unions (41.7%) in the hospitality sector, compared to their share of the total workforce in the sector (29.9%). A similar trend can be observed in the healthcare sector (penultimate, from top to bottom). While it is true that the service sector in general has lower unionization rates than other sectors such as education or construction, the over-representation of immigrant workers among unionized laborers speaks to the protagonist role that these workers have played, as we will see below.

Two emblematic cases of Central American union activism

Little more than three decades ago, coinciding with increased outsourcing in the economy and a decline in manufacturing, the center of gravity for union activity in the United States began to move toward the service sector, food production, retail sales, and other similar branches of the economy.

In the first half of the 1990s, a group of indigenous Guatemalan workers organized to protest low wages

and dangerous working conditions in a chicken plant run by Case Farms, in Morganton, North Carolina. Migration of rural farmers from the Cuchumatanes region of Huehuetenango, Guatemala, had begun in the 1980s as a result of the forced displacement and violent repression of local indigenous communities during the Guatemalan civil war. This migration flow reached North Carolina in the early 90s. Once at the plant in Morganton, the workers organized through ethnic and linguistic affinity groups (*kanjobales, aguacatecos,* and *chalchitecos*), and began a pressure campaign that included work stoppages and strikes until their union membership and rights to collective bargaining were recognized.[10]

To date, the poultry and pork processing plants in the Southern and Midwestern United States continue to employ a large number of Guatemalan immigrant workers, who also make up a significant portion of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW).

Around this same time, on the other side of the country in Los Angeles, Salvadoran janitorial workers

10 Fink, Leon. The Maya of Morganton. UNC Press, 2003.

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were among the most active contingents in the "Justice for Janitors" campaign, which revolutionized the way union campaigns are undertaken in the United States. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) used the innovative tactic of direct action to highlight working conditions for janitors and cleaning staff in office buildings, as well as their determination to unionize and have their worker rights enforced.

Alongside this effort, the union mobilized support from allies in the community: churches, civic organizations, migrants' associations, etc., to pressure the companies from all sides. Many Salvadoran participants in these actions had community organizing experience in their home country, which they brought to bear in this new context. After the convincing union victory in the Los Angeles campaign, several Central American leaders began to hold important positions within the union, and then lead civic participation initiatives. One such case is that of Benjamín Monterroso, of Guatemalan origin, who is now the director of Mi Familia Vota, an organization founded by the SEIU to register Latino/a voters and promote civic participation among migrant workers.[11]

Union programs to serve immigrant members

UFCW and SEIU are among the unions with the highest immigrant membership in general, and of Central American migrants in particular. It should thus be of no surprise that both unions are some of the most active labor organizations in campaigns for comprehensive immigration reform to legalize the migratory status of millions of undocumented workers in the United States.

SEIU has funded the creation of several organizations that address immigration issues, including:

- iAmerica (http://iamerica.org/) This organization distributes information on the fundamental rights of all people in the United States, regardless of their migratory status, and offers legal aid for specific cases. The organization also provides advice and support for permanent residents eligible to become U.S. citizens.

- MIA (Movement of Immigrants in America www.facebook.com/movementofimmigrantsinamerica/). MIA organizes immigrant workers who cannot join a union through civic participation campaigns, providing access to benefits similar to union membership.
- Mi Familia Vota (http://www.mifamiliavota.org/). This organization specializes in voter registration and the promotion of civic and electoral participation by new citizens.

UFCW has undertaken a large-scale campaign to encourage and support permanent residents who are eligible to become U.S. citizens. Through its union structure, UFCW trains union delegates to advise members in filling out the naturalization forms, gathering the necessary documentation, and preparing for the Civics and English citizenship exams. Several UFCW locals regularly hold screening events to determine the eligibility of people interested in obtaining U.S. citizenship, and are studying how to extend this benefit to friends and family members of their immigrant members.

Other similar initiatives include Working America We Rise (http://www.workingamericawerise.org/), which operates much like MIA, as a gateway to civic participation and access to benefits similar to those offered by unions for immigrant workers.

The AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) has a specific department that provides the same services as the SEIU and UFCW (http://adelantewerise.org/), focusing on access to truthful information on the current situation and perspectives for immigration reform, political defense, channeling legal aid for immigrant workers at risk due to their migratory status, training for civic participation, and especially engagement among unions and workers' organizations. (While the latter are grassroots organizations that do not directly represent workers through collective bargaining, they do provide legal support and are a form of mobilization to defend workers' rights.)

IV. Perspectives on the situation in the Trump Era

Donald Trump rose to the presidency of the United States based on discourse that dehumanizes and criminalizes undocumented immigrants. During his campaign, it was clear that Trump was able to mobilize some of the most radical anti-immigrant sectors, some of whom have been classified as "hate organizations" by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that monitors these extremist groups.

In the first few months of his administration, Trump has taken concrete steps to implement his anti-immigrant campaign promises. Some of these steps include:

1. In September 2017, Trump suspended the DACA program that offered protection from deportation and work permits to nearly 800,000 young immigrants. Although the President established a grace period until March 15, 2018, to renew DACA permits that would expire prior to this date, the decision to end the program has generated great distress among the youth affected. Thus far (February 2018), negotiation continues between the Congress and White House to decide the future of DACA and its beneficiaries.

2. The policy of this administration has been to cancel Temporary Protected Status (TPS) nearly every time it has come up for renewal for a specific country. From November 2017 to January 2018, Trump canceled TPS benefits for Haiti, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and extended TPS for Honduras for only six months, now set to expire on July 5, 2018. With this decision, if no changes are made, nearly 200,000 Salvadoran citizens will lose their migratory status in the United States in September 2019.

3. As part of his campaign to build a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico, Trump has insisted that any agreement on a program to provide regular legal status for young DACA beneficiaries must be linked to approval of funds, up to 25 billion dollars, for wall construction, as well as a limitation of the categories under which family members

of U.S. citizens and permanent residents may emigrate to the United States.

4. In addition to the aforementioned actions, Trump has continued in his efforts to block the entry of visitors and refugees from Muslim-majority countries, increase raids of undocumented immigrants for deportation, and reverse the policy of sanctuary cities.

In each of these initiatives, the Trump administration has met with fierce resistance, in many cases led by the affected people themselves. As an illustrative case, it is worth exploring further the example of sanctuary cities.

In broad strokes, a sanctuary city is characterized by limited collaboration by local law enforcement and public officials in the application of federal immigration laws. This can take the form of refusal to share information on people arrested with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), refusal to involve local policing forces in immigrant raids, and an explicit affirmation of the city's intention to accept and integrate immigrants who chose to live there, regardless of their migratory status.

The Trump administration has threatened to suspend the transfer of federal funds to sanctuary cities that refuse to renounce this stance or that refuse to collaborate with immigration authorities. In January 2018, the Department of Justice threatened to bring criminal charges against city officials who refuse to provide information on their enforcement of the new federal directives on immigration.[12]

Provided below is a list of the large cities that have made declarations to be considered as sanctuary cities, and their reactions to the Trump administration. It is worth noting that nearly all of the sanctuary cities have majority Democratic mayors or city councils.

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11 Interview with Benjamín Monterroso, February 7, 2017.

12 Published in USA Today, January 24, 2018. Retrieved: February 20, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/01/24/justice-department-threatens-sanctuary-cities-subpoenas-escalating-trumps-immigration-enforcement-ca/1061225001/

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Table 3: Sanctuary Cities for Immigrants in the United States

City, State	Visible pro-immigrant policy	Recent reactions to Trump
Birmingham, Alabama	Declaration as a "welcoming city"	Reaffirmed status in January 2017
Berkeley, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and the State of California in general	Police are prohibited from approaching an individual for the sole purpose of inquiring about his or her migratory status	Reaffirmed status in January 2017
Middletown, Connecticut		Declaration as a sanctuary city in February 2017, to reject Trump's threats against sanctuary cities
Miami, Florida	Had a policy of refusal to pay for detention of individuals held by ICE.	Rescinded its status as a sanctuary city after Trump's threats to cancel the transfer of federal resources. This measure was roundly rejected by the population in the city.
Saint Petersburg, Florida		Adopted the designation of sanctuary city in February 2017
Atlanta, Georgia	Declared itself to be a "welcoming city" in January 2017	
Chicago, Illinois	Has been a sanctuary city since 2012, and reaffirmed this stance in 2016	
Nueva Orleans. Luisiana	The police have not cooperated with ICE since January 2016.	
Boston y área metropolitana, Massachussets	Ensures that all people detained in the city have equal access to bail, which is important given that undocumented detainees without access to bail can be more easily remanded to ICE.	
Nueva York, NY	Perhaps at the vanguard of the movement. New York has multiple programs to integrate the immigrant population, and it does not collaborate with ICE.	The city has continually defied the Trump government and reaffirmed its status as a sanctuary city.
Newark y otras localidades de la zona metropolitana de Nueva York, Nueva Jersey	Follows the example of New York City	
Cincinnati, Ohio		Declared as a sanctuary city in response to threats from Trump.
Portland, Oregon y Seattle, Washington	Resolutions to refrain from enforcing immigration law in their jurisdictions.	

Source: Table produced with journalistic sources.

Sanctuary cities have become part of a movement that seeks not only to create safe places for immigrants, but also to design public policies for the integration and civic participation of the immigrant community. As a result, this movement has become a true incubator for immigrant civic leadership.

Working Families United

This is a labor coalition made up of painters and allied trade workers (IUPAT), bricklayers, ironworkers, hospitality workers (UNITE HERE), and food and commercial workers (UFCW). The construction sector continues to employ many immigrant and Central American workers. As a result of this makeup, this coalition has led several of the more visible actions demanding reinstatement of TPS for all of the countries for which this status has been suspended, permanent status for TPS-holders and DACA recipients, and comprehensive immigration reform.

The coalition estimates that TPS cancellation will have an enormous cost for the U.S. economy. For example, the financial burden of replacing the displaced labor force would represent 967 million dollars for employers. Over the course of a decade, lost contributions to Social Security and Medicare programs (medical insurance for people over the age of 65, administered by the federal government) would come to over 7 billion dollars, and the negative impact for the U.S. Gross Domestic Product could come to 164 billion dollars.[13]

Reactions from the business sector

The economic cost of the Donald Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies has not gone unnoticed by the business sector. A study by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (HCC) estimated that in the city of Houston alone, the annual economic cost for the local economy due to the loss of work permits following TPS cancellation could reach 2 billion dollars and affect reconstruction work after Hurricane Harvey. Over 20,000 Salvadorans live in Houston, 20% of whom work in the construction sector.[14]

For this reason, the HCC has insisted on the need for a definitive solution to protect DACA beneficiaries, workers covered by TPS, and immigrants with irregular status.

Conclusions and recommendations

This outlook is only a broad overview of Central American labor migration in the United States currently, and a brief discussion of the participation of these workers in the labor movement. Over the last three decades, Central American migration to the United States has shifted from being a footnote to Mexican migration (in academic, activist, and public policy circles at least), to becoming a distinct phenomenon with its own unique characteristics and dynamics.

The educational profile and undocumented migratory status of many immigrant workers limits their options to only low-paid work. As a result, immigrant workers from Central America have had to organize to improve their working conditions. The immigrant workers from Central America have applied their own traditions of organizing and struggle, developed in their home countries, to enrich the repertoire of tactics and labor organizing action in the United States, and Central Americans have taken leadership roles within the union movement.

The current context is one of serious challenges, but also opportunities to strengthen and expand Central American leadership in the movement for the defense of immigrants' rights and dignity. Donald Trump has begun to make good on some of his threats, empowering Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to conduct raids against immigrants at their homes and workplaces. Given the fear among the immigrant community, some economic sectors have begun to feel the impacts of lack of labor, especially for agriculture and construction.[15] It is difficult to anticipate to what extent the continuity of these measures could lead to an economic slow-down, given the essential role that Central American and Mexican immigrants play in these economic sectors. Nonetheless, the President and his allies appear to

13 See http://www.workingfamiliesunited.org/. Retrieved: February 20, 2018.
14 See: http://www.houstonhispanicchamber.com/in-the-news/2018/01/21/loss-of-tps-is-expected-to-cost-the-region-$1.8b/. January 21, 2018.
15 See the US News Article: https://www.usnews.com/news/business/articles/2017-04-24/fearing-a-worker-shortage-farmers-push-back-on-immigration. Published on April 24, 2017.

be uninterested in the economic consequences of their anti-immigrant policy.

Facing the anti-immigrant onslaught from Donald Trump, union organizations now have the challenge of closing ranks to help their most vulnerable members. To do so, it is first necessary to get to know this membership better: who they are, where they are from, what specific problems they face at the workplace and in their unions, etc. Second, unions have the duty to preserve and expand their infrastructure for legal defense for immigrant workers, support the process of obtaining citizenship, and encourage civic and electoral participation. Many labor unions are rising to this challenge, as we have seen in the case of the members of the Working Families United coalition. Nonetheless, many more are falling behind. It is imperative for the national leadership of the labor movement to promote participation by all of their member organizations in this process. Central American immigrant workers have led many of the iconic labor battles in recent decades; it is fundamentally important that the unions do not fail them now in this adverse context.

Other recommendations to better serve the immigrant population from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras include:

1. Foster collaboration among immigrant and union organizations to document and combat abuses by unscrupulous bosses who take advantage of the anti-immigrant climate to threaten to deport workers who protest labor rights violations.

2. Establish collaboration agreements among the consular network from these three countries, social organizations, and labor unions to identify the population and individuals most vulnerable to ICE raids and formulate emergency action plans.

3. Promote large-scale naturalization of individuals eligible to become U.S. citizens.

4. Establish trans-national support networks for deported migrants to ensure the preservation and transfer of their assets from the United States to Central America, and to protect their families.

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