



VOICES FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

Economic Challenges, Migration
Pressures, and Regional Security in 2025



GeoPoll Interim Report



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Introduction

New Insights on Central America’s Migration and Economic Landscape

GeoPoll’s latest research—conducted via its Panama-based call center—provides fresh insights into the economic concerns, migration trends, and security perceptions shaping Central America. Recent developments, including Secretary Marco Rubio’s visit to multiple Central American countries, highlight the focus of U.S. relations in the region, particularly regarding economic cooperation, security efforts and migration management.

This study covers Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, offering a comprehensive view of the region’s ongoing challenges, particularly economic instability, food insecurity, and migration uncertainty.

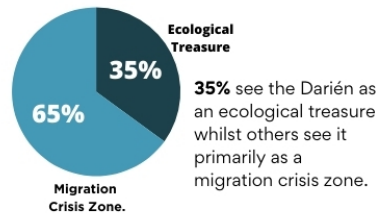
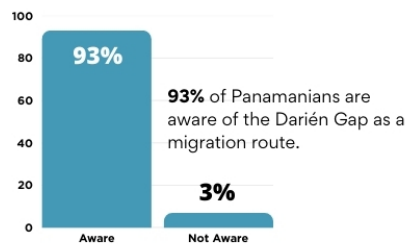
Read the interim findings below and [share your email](#) if you would like to receive the full report!

Our **full report** will further explore regional migration trends, economic instability, and security concerns shaping the future of **Central America**.

Key Findings at a Glance across Central America (Interim Results)

Panama – Balancing Growth, the Darién Dilemma & the Recent Canal Crisis:

- 93% of Panamanians are aware of the Darién Gap as a migration route.
- Nearly 1 in 3 (29%) believe lack of infrastructure in the Darién is fueling migration issues.
- 35% see the Darién as an ecological treasure whilst others see it primarily as a migration crisis zone.
- The recent Panama Canal crisis continues to raise economic anxieties.
- Despite challenges, Panama remains a regional economic leader, with strong connectivity and investment appeal.



1 in 3 (29%)

Believe lack of infrastructure in the Darién is fueling migration issues.

El Salvador – Security Success

- El Salvador is now the safest country surveyed—with 78% saying they feel "very safe", compared to much lower levels in neighboring countries.
- Only 6% of Salvadorans are considering migration, significantly lower than regional averages.
- But 22.5% of the population still struggles with food insecurity, highlighting room for further economic improvement

78%-Very Safe

El Salvador is now the safest country surveyed—with 78% saying they feel "very safe", compared to much lower levels in neighboring countries.

6%- Migration

Only 6% of Salvadorans are considering migration, significantly lower than regional averages.



22.5%

Of the population still struggles with food insecurity, highlighting room for further economic improvement

Guatemala - A Nation on Edge

- 58% of Guatemalans feel "very safe", making it less secure than El Salvador and Nicaragua.
- 81% worry about job stability, showing deep economic anxieties.
- 14% are unsure about their migration future, the highest rate of uncertainty in the region.



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81%— Worry about job stability, showing deep economic anxieties.

14%— Are unsure about their migration future, the highest rate of uncertainty in the region.

Honduras – Voice Security Concerns Amidst Economic Challenges

- Honduras ranks as the least safe in the interim data: Only 52% feel "very safe", and 9% say they feel "very unsafe"—the worst in the region.
- 27% experience food insecurity, the highest rate of hunger among surveyed countries.

52% – Very Safe
9% – Very Unsafe

Honduras ranks as the least safe in the interim data: Only 52% feel "very safe", and 9% say they feel "very unsafe"—the worst in the region.



Food Insecurity

27% –

Experience food insecurity, the highest rate of hunger among surveyed countries.

Nicaragua – The Hidden Hardship

- 79% of Nicaraguans are worried about job stability, the highest economic anxiety in the region.
- 21% face food insecurity, showing rising economic stress despite relative safety.

Job Stability

79% –

Of Nicaraguans are worried about job stability, the highest economic anxiety in the region.

Food Insecurity

21% –

Face food insecurity, showing rising economic stress despite relative safety. ility, the highest economic anxiety in the region.



Across the region, **economic struggles, migration considerations, and security concerns** are influencing public sentiment. While **safety perceptions differ by country, financial instability and job insecurity** remain the most pressing challenges, driving uncertainty about the future.

Interim Results

The Panama Canal and Economic Uncertainty

The [Panama Canal](#) is the most frequently mentioned issue in the study, with respondents expressing concerns over its economic importance, potential foreign intervention, and national security risks.

[Recent diplomatic engagements](#) have reinforced Panama's commitment to strengthening trade relations with the U.S., with discussions on modernization efforts and investment opportunities.

Key considerations:

- **Economic Stability:** The canal generates significant revenue, but potential shifts in global trade and foreign investment and influence remain concerns.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Public sentiment reflects a continued desire for improvements to ensure long-term operational efficiency.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Maintaining strong U.S.-Panama ties is viewed as beneficial for economic security and political stability.

💡 *"The Panama Canal is crucial for our economy."*

💡 *"If we lose control of the Canal, it will be a big problem."*

💡 *"Decisions about the Canal affect the entire country."*

💡 *"President Trump's statements about the Panama Canal are very risky for us and the economic situation."*

Key Concerns Expressed by Panamanians about the Canal:

- **Fear of foreign control over the canal** and its potential economic and political ramifications.
- **Uncertainty over trade and business stability**, with concerns about declining revenue and global trade disruptions.
- **Rising tensions between the U.S. and Panama**, with worries about diplomatic conflicts and their economic fallout.
- **Potential job losses** due to instability in canal operations and its impact on employment given majority of employees are Panamanian.

- **Concerns over infrastructure and investment**, particularly regarding foreign involvement in modernization efforts.

Many of these concerns were addressed during Senator Rubio's visit to Panama on February 2. He emphasized that as long as Panama renegotiates contracts related to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the canal will remain under Panamanian authority. The visit resulted in positive outcomes, reinforcing U.S. support for Panama. Additionally, Senator Rubio expressed backing for President-elect Mulino, particularly in humanitarian initiatives, strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between the two nations.

The Darién Gap and Migration Perceptions in Panama

The Darién Gap is the geographic region that connects the American continents, stretching across southern Panama and northern Colombia. As a key transit route for migrants, the [Darién Gap plays a central role in regional migration discussions](#).

Panamanians' express concerns about resource strain and security risks associated with high migration flows. Recent data indicates that Panama has made [a recent reduction](#) in the number of migrants making the journey.

Public Opinion on the Darién Gap:

- **93% of Panamanians recognize the Darién Gap's role in migration.**
- **35% consider it a vital natural resource that must be protected.**
- **29% express concern over government intervention in managing the area.**
- **20% view migration through the Darién as a humanitarian and security threat.**

💡 *"The lack of infrastructure and response in the Darién is making it harder for us to manage migration."*

💡 *"Panama has to take stronger actions; migration is overwhelming our resources."*

Given these concerns, it is crucial to sustain investment in infrastructure and security within the Darién while enhancing regional cooperation on migration policies. This remains a [key priority for the Panamanian government](#) as it seeks to balance humanitarian responsibilities with national security and resource management.

Panama's Economic Relationship with the U.S. and Path to Growth

Panama maintains a strong economic partnership with the U.S., benefiting from trade, investment, and diplomatic ties. While this relationship provides stability, it also exposes

Panama to external economic shifts. Interim survey results reflect diverse perspectives on Panama's economic strategy, governance, and long-term financial trajectory.

Despite relative economic stability compared to its regional neighbors, some Panamanians express concerns about governance, transparency, and the need to diversify economic drivers. However, Panama continues to take steps toward strengthening its domestic economy and international partnerships, reflecting a commitment to sustainable growth and economic resilience.

Respondents emphasized:

- **Governance and Transparency:** Whilst Panama has made strides in improving [governance](#) some respondents voiced concerns about corruption and economic management.
- **Cost of Living Pressures:** Inflation remains a challenge, with rising household expenses and [global supply chain disruptions](#) affecting food prices and purchasing power.
- **Job Market & Employment Opportunities:** While the government is working to attract investment and create jobs, many young Panamanians still seek stable employment, particularly outside the [informal sector](#).
- **Workforce Challenges:** Some respondents noted sector-specific constraints and legal barriers that impact job availability, emphasizing the need for continued labor market reforms.

💡 "The government is not doing enough to improve the economy."

💡 "Corruption remains a major problem in the country."

💡 "I do not trust politicians to solve our problems."

Panama's ongoing efforts to strengthen governance, enhance economic diversification, and invest in workforce development reflect a commitment to addressing these concerns while maintaining its strategic economic position in the region.

Personal Impact and Future Uncertainty

While many Panamanians report that their daily lives have not been directly affected by recent political events, concerns about future economic changes persist. According to the survey:

- **44.8%** state they can afford food but struggle with non-essential expenses.
- **19.9%** can afford occasional major purchases (e.g., appliances, electronics).
- **17.4%** feel financially secure, able to buy whatever they need.
- **15.4%** report struggling to afford basic necessities like food.

Respondents expressed a mix of cautious optimism and apprehension:

💡 "They don't affect me in any way; my concern is that there should be more jobs, as it is difficult to find one with the experience I have."

💡 "Many threats, specifically regarding the canal."

💡 "I am worried about the future of the children."

Broader Regional Context: Migration and Economic Challenges Across Central America

While this interim report focuses on Panama, GeoPoll's interim research highlights **perceived economic instability, migration pressures, and security concerns** across Central America, particularly in **El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua**.

📌 Economic Concerns and Impact

- Financial instability is one of the most pressing concerns, with rising costs of living and widespread food insecurity.
- In **Honduras**, **27%** of respondents struggle to afford food, the highest rate in the region. **Guatemala and Nicaragua** follow closely, with **22%** facing food insecurity. **El Salvador reports 22.5%**, while Panama sees lower levels of extreme food insecurity.
- Many respondents feel economic policies are **failing to address unemployment and inflation**, deepening uncertainty about the future. **Job instability** is a major concern, with **over 51% of Hondurans** and **41% of Nicaraguans** struggling to find stable work.

📌 Political and Social Concerns

- Governance and political instability remain key concerns, with **fears over corruption, ineffective leadership, and foreign influence** shaping public perception.
- Diplomatic relations with major economic partners, particularly the U.S., are seen as both **an opportunity and a potential risk** to regional stability. Economic dependency on **foreign trade and investment** raises concerns about long-term sovereignty.


📌 Employment and Future Outlook

- Employment insecurity remains one of the biggest challenges, with **job markets failing to keep pace with population needs**.

- While younger respondents show more optimism, they express **frustration over limited job opportunities and economic stagnation**.
- Many see **starting a business as a viable alternative**, with **over 35% of respondents in El Salvador considering entrepreneurship**, followed by **29% in Honduras**.

Perceptions of Foreign Relations

- Central Americans have mixed views on foreign influence—some believe it brings investment and stability, while others see it as deepening economic inequality.
- Trade and diplomatic agreements impact daily life, but many feel their countries lack leverage in negotiations, leading to economic dependency on larger nations.

 **Migration Intentions:** The interim data suggests that respondents across the region plan to migrate in the next three months due to economic hardship, lack of job opportunities, violence, and family reunification.

- **El Salvador:** 82% plan to stay, while 6% are considering moving abroad.
- **Guatemala:** 73% intend to stay, but 7% plan to migrate internationally. 14% remain unsure about their future.
- **Honduras & Nicaragua:** Around 75% plan to stay, while 11% are considering migration.
- **Panama:** 72.6% plan to stay, 13.4% are unsure, and 7% intend to migrate internationally.

Economic Hardship & Employment Barriers:

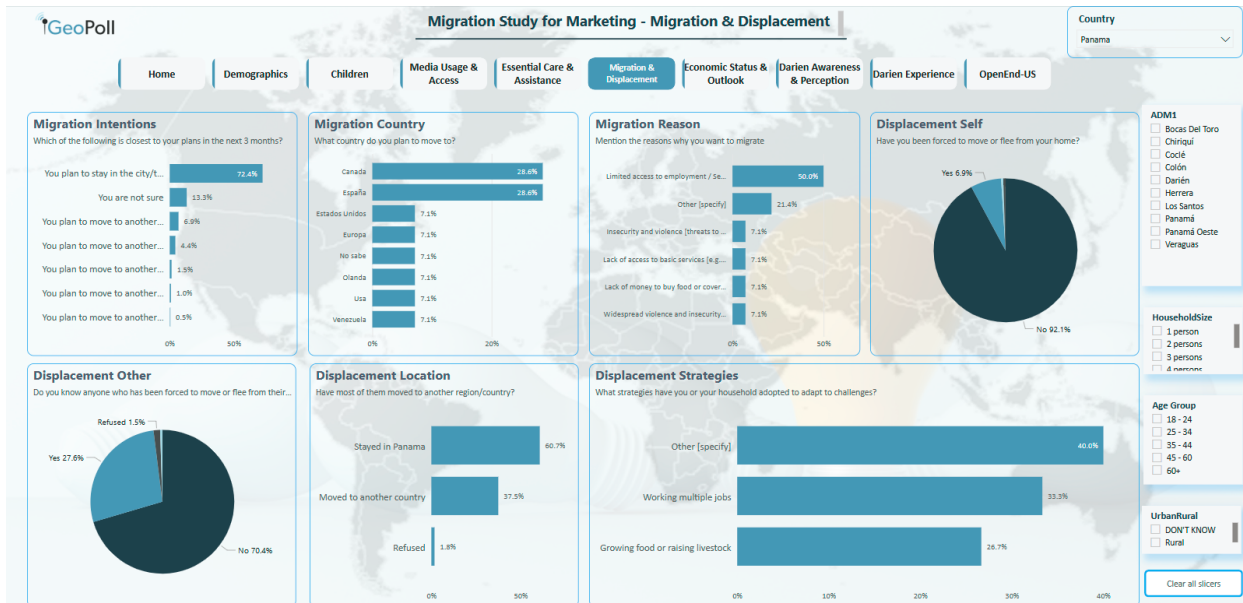
- **Honduras** has the highest rate of food insecurity (27%), followed by **Guatemala** (22.3%) and **Nicaragua** (20.7%).
- **El Salvador** and **Panama** show better conditions, but many still face slight economic struggles.
- In **Panama**, legal documentation barriers and job discrimination remain key challenges, particularly for those seeking employment in the formal sector.

Safety Concerns:

- **El Salvador** is the safest country surveyed, with 78% feeling safe.
- **Guatemala & Nicaragua:** Around 60% feel secure, though crime remains an issue.
- **Honduras** is the least safe, with only 52% expressing a sense of security—9% say they feel "very unsafe".
- **Panama** reports better safety perceptions than most Central American countries but remains concerned about migration-related security risks.

Looking Ahead: These regional insights will be explored further in GeoPoll’s full report & dashboard once data collection is complete, which will provide deeper analysis on migration drivers, economic instability, and security challenges across Central America.

Here is a sneak peak of the dashboard:



Study Details

The interim survey was conducted using **CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing)** across **five Central American countries: Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama on 13-23 January 2025**. The total number of responses collected in the interim data was **904**, distributed as follows:

- **Panama: 200** responses
- **Other Central American countries (Total: 704):**
 - **El Salvador: 73** responses
 - **Guatemala: 81** responses
 - **Honduras: 77** responses
 - **Nicaragua: 76** responses

The results and data collection will be completed mid-February.

Stay tuned for the **full final report** and **dashboard** coming soon from **GeoPoll**.



About GeoPoll

GeoPoll is a full-service market and social research agency that conducts surveys via computer- assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), short message service (SMS), WhatsApp, and mobile web/mobile application communications. We also conduct online and offline qualitative research.

The GeoPoll study on migration in Central America is being implemented by GeoPoll using our own mobile research platform and extensive respondent database. The questionnaire was designed by GeoPoll researchers and conducted via GeoPoll's Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) application. Data collection is ongoing. The live call survey is being offered in Spanish and English, and being conducted from the [GeoPoll call center](#) in Panama City, Panama.

For more information on the sample and methodology for this study or to conduct a research study of your own using the GeoPoll CATI application and our call centers around the world, [contact us](#) today.

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