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El Salvador's Migration Success Story Doesn't Add Up

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The number of migrants arriving at the United States' southern border has increased dramatically over the past six years, and immigration consistently ranks among Americans' top concerns, including in the run-up to this year's general election.

For decades, American politicians have been looking for ways to address the root causes of migration, especially from countries in the "Northern Triangle" — a term commonly used to refer to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. A growing group of American politicians and pundits believe they have finally found an answer in Nayib Bukele, the young, hip president of El Salvador.

Bukele and his administration claim that migration from El Salvador to the United States has declined precipitously on his watch. The reason? He says it's because of his government's exceptionally forceful crackdown on crime and gangs — making El Salvador safer and its citizens less likely to leave. However, our recent analysis of US immigration data shows that Bukele's purported success may be vastly overstated.