

# Urban Migration Comparison in Honduras and Costa Rica <sup>\*1</sup>

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## Resumén

Este estudio compara la migración interna reciente en Honduras y Costa Rica. Ambos países son similares tanto en su geografía como en su historia; sin embargo, son sustancialmente diferentes en niveles de desarrollo económico y estabilidad política.

En cuanto al aspecto geográfico, estos dos países registran un nivel bajo de urbanización. Mientras que el 75% de la población en América Latina vivió en áreas urbanas en 2000, las cifras para Costa Rica y Honduras son: 48% y 53%, respectivamente (U.N. 2000). Este modelo de urbanización inspira esta investigación sobre el curso de las migraciones internas, las cuales usualmente son dominadas por movimientos de las áreas rurales a las áreas urbanas. Este estudio investiga si la migración interna en estos dos países es parecida al resto de América Latina, la cual revela nuevas tendencias de migración a las ciudades intermedias.

Empleando los datos censales para el año 2000, examino las 10 ciudades más grandes de cada país. Las áreas urbanas en Honduras son dominadas por el Distrito Central y San Pedro Sula con 850,227 y 515,458 habitantes respectivamente, mientras que la ciudad más grande de Costa Rica, San Jose, tiene solamente 309,672 habitantes. Las otras ciudades examinadas tienen aproximadamente de 100,000 a 200,000 habitantes. Además, las ciudades en esta investigación en Costa Rica están más agrupadas geográficamente.

El análisis revela que entre 1995 y 2000 las ciudades más grandes en Honduras, Tegucigalpa y San Pedro Sula recibieron la mayoría de los migrantes, y aunque las ciudades intermedias crecieron rápidamente recibieron una fracción pequeña de migrantes. En Costa Rica la distribución de los migrantes recientes varía mucho entre las ciudades del mismo tamaño. En general, las tendencias de la migración interna en estos dos países revelan diferencias sustanciales; sin embargo, se pueden observar algunas similitudes para el caso de las ciudades intermedias.

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### Overview:

This study compares contemporary patterns of internal migration in Honduras and Costa Rica, countries with geographic and historical similarities, yet differences in contemporary levels of economic development and political stability.

These countries share low levels of urbanization. While 75% of the population in Latin America resided in urban areas in 2000, the numbers for Costa Rica and Honduras were only 48% and 53%, respectively (U.N. 2000). The low urbanization levels within these countries inspires this investigation on internal migration patterns, which tend to be dominated by rural-to-urban movement. This study investigates both the similarities and differences of the migration patterns within these two countries and also considers the role of intermediate cities as migrant destinations, which recent literature indicates have played a large role in recent urbanization patterns throughout Latin America.

Using the latest Census data for each country - 2000 for Costa Rica and 2001 for Honduras, I examine the largest cities in both countries. The data reveal differences in populations sizes, density and geographic spacing of cities in these two countries. Due to these differences, the following analysis uses country-specific definitions of urban areas.

In Honduras, the evidence suggests that the largest cities in fact received the vast majority of migrants, yet the most startling changes occurred in the intermediate cities (e.g. Coloma) that appeared to be undergoing industrial changes. In Costa Rica, the migrant patterns are comparatively static across the high density cantons, with a relatively consistent amount of internal migration. The patterns reveal a greater degree of disparity in internal migration in Honduras than in Costa Rica as evidenced by both the standard deviation and the coefficient of variation of the percent of migrants across the regions. In general, while there are a number of similarities in the internal migration patterns of these two countries, the differences outweigh them. Presumably, Costa Rica's economic and political stability allowed for the development of a comparatively stable urban system while recent industrial changes in Honduras have created a higher level of internal migration.

### Background:

The process of urbanization results from economic and demographic shifts. On the economic side, shifts from agricultural to industrial bases necessitate rural-to-urban movement. Historically, agricultural changes have led to population movement in Costa Rica with the introduction of coffee and changes in Banana plantations. More recent changes include Honduras' 1992 *Ley para la Modernización y Desarrollo del Sector*

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*Agricola (LMDSA)*, which marked the official decline of the cooperative (ejidal) lands. This law expanded land market liberalization and increased the share of privately owned land that employed modern farming techniques in order to compete in international markets (Thorpe 2000). Trade policy reform and international business also stimulated agricultural development by promoting crop switching and other crop-augmenting behaviors. Such changes lead both to a disrupted rural environment, and to increases in agricultural productivity.

Both trade policy and agricultural change facilitate the process of rural-to-urban migration, as modern agriculture requires a smaller labor force to sustain the entire population. Between 1983 and 2003, the percentage of Honduras' population employed in agriculture declined from 43% to 34%<sup>2</sup>. Such economic transitions have formed the basis of rural-to-urban movements since the dawn of the industrial revolution.

What begins as a rural disruption quickly infects the urban environment through the onset of migration flows, and ultimately the management of a rapidly growing urban population becomes the larger concern of such transitions. Both academic understanding and effective policy planning must consider both the past history of similar regions, and the factors of time and place that shape individual transitions. These factors include geography, natural resources, current infrastructure and the intervening momentum of demographic change that determines the magnitude of present and future growth.

### **Historical Population Growth:**

The importance of population growth in the midst of urban transition cannot be understated. Honduras' population has doubled more than seven times since its first census count of 93,505 inhabitants in 1791, and the population continues to grow steadily into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Census data from Costa Rica suggest that the population more than doubled between 1864 and 1892 from 120,499 to 243,205 with much of the growth in San Jose and Alajuela. The population currently stands at 3.8 million.

While the population growth rate has slowed in recent years due to declining fertility, the consequences of population growth have increased due to the large starting base and to the fact that the majority of this growth is occurring in already dense urban areas. In 1961, approximately 440,000 Hondurans lived in urban areas; by 2001 this number had risen to over 3 million, at a notably faster growth rate than the overall population. Table 1 provides population totals for Honduras and its two largest cities of the Distrito Central (DC) and San Pedro Sula (SPS).

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<sup>2</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE): Programa de Encuesta de Hogares Vigésima Séptima Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, Tegucigalpa, M.D.C, Mayo 2003, Naciones Unidas Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía (CELADE): Encuesta Demográfica Nacional de Honduras: EDENH II 1983, San Jose, 1985: Abril.

**Table 2. Population Totals, Honduras and Mayor Cities: 1961-2001**

	<u>April 1961</u>	<u>March 1974</u>	<u>May 1988</u>	<u>March 2001</u>
<b>Honduras</b>	1,107,859	2,653,857	4,248,561	6,535,344
<b>DC</b>	164,941*	302,483	595,931	850,227
<b>SPS</b>	95,464	161,700	319,740	515,458

Source: National Government Census: 1961, 1974, 1988 and 2001

\* Note: The 1961 census included Tegucigalpa, but not the entire Distrito Central.

Table 2 shows the intercensal growth rates and reveals that while there was a large decline in population growth rates from 1961-1974 and 1974-1988, from 6.76 to 3.30, yet Honduras' population growth in the next period, 1988-2001, went up slightly to 3.38. Additionally, urban growth rates exceeded overall population growth rates from 1974-1988, and were fairly comparable with overall growth rates in the later period. Thus, in spite of some initial decline in population growth rates, the rates indicate that steady growth will continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Table 2. Annual Growth Rates, Honduras and Mayor Cities: 1961-2001**

	<u>1961-1974</u>	<u>1974-1988</u>	<u>1988-2001</u>
<b>Honduras</b>	6.76	3.30	3.38
<b>DC</b>	4.69	4.76	2.79
<b>SPS</b>	4.08	4.78	3.75

Note: The above are exponential growth rates according to the formula:  $[\ln(\text{population end}/\text{population beginning})]/\text{time in years}$ . The base figures are those shown in Table 1.

The population figures in Table 2 also hint at differences between San Pedro Sula and the Distrito Central. While the rate of growth was higher in SPS in the most recent period, the numeric growth was still higher in the Distrito Central. The numeric population increase between 1988 and 2001 was 334,769 in DC, and only 276,191 persons in San Pedro Sula. Declining growth rates can mask substantial population flows or numeric increases in already large populations.

### **Definition of Urban Areas:**

To investigate the role of industrial changes and migration patterns, a definition of the urban areas under investigation is essential. The municipal districts encompass fairly large and distinct geographic areas irrespective of the population size. Urban areas in Honduras are clearly dominated by two large cities, the Distrito Central (DC) 850,227, and San Pedro Sula (SPS), 515,458; the other 8 cities examined in Honduras range from 90,000 to 150,000 people. These cities are generally spread throughout the country, with a cluster in relatively close proximity to the city of San Pedro Sula in the northern state of Cortes. This area has experienced rapid growth and industrial change since the 1988 census, and is a prime location for international trade with a large port situated on the Caribbean Sea.

A definition of distinct cities in Costa Rica is more difficult. At first glance, the census numbers suggest that Costa Rica's capital and largest city, San Jose, is substantially smaller than Honduras' largest cities at only 309,672 inhabitants. Additionally, the Costa Rican cities appear to be quite geographically clustered, which poses difficulties for defining distinct urban areas. For instance, the district of San Jose

includes a total area of only 44 kilometers<sup>2</sup> as opposed to Tegucigalpa's 460 kilometers<sup>2</sup>, and the province of San Jose contains a number of adjoining and highly dense areas. In Costa Rica, therefore, rather than looking at distinct areas with large populations, I look at the density within each Canton and find that a cutoff of 1000 persons per square kilometer, which leaves 14 total Cantons that encompass 30% of the population and less than 1% of Costa Rica's total area. These Cantons that surround San Jose have a total population of close to 1 million people. The other highly dense urban cluster occurs in the province of Heredia.

Table 1A. Overview of Selected Cities in Honduras

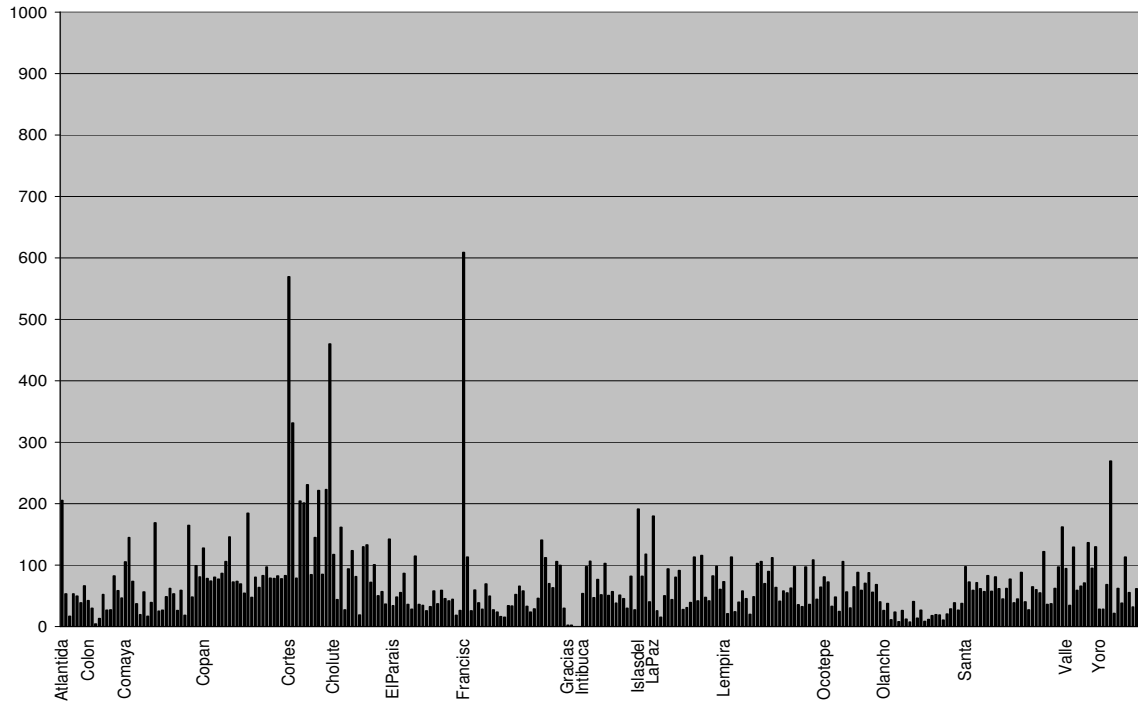
		Population	Area (KM <sup>2</sup> )	Density hab/KM <sup>2</sup>
<b>HONDURAS</b>		6,535,344	112,492	58.1
LA CEIBA	1.01	127,590	621.8	205.2
TELA	1.07	77,031	1163.3	66.2
COMAYAGUA	3.01	87,474	831.9	105.6
SAN PEDRO SULA	5.01	515,458	905.5	569.3
CHOLOMA	5.02	151,999	458.6	331.4
PUERTO CORTÉS	5.06	90,161	391.2	230.5
SANTA CRUZ DE YOJOA	5.10	61,461	96.8	634.9
CHOLUTECA	6.01	120,791	1032.6	117.0
DANLÍ	7.03	135,136	2446.3	55.2
DISTRITO CENTRAL	8.01	850,227	1396.5	608.8

Table 1B. Overview of Selected Cities in Costa Rica

		Total Population	Area (KM 2)	Density
<b>COSTA RICA</b>		3,810,179	51084.1	74.6 per/KM <sup>2</sup>
SAN JOSE	101	309,672	44.6	6940.2
ESCAZU	102	52,372	34.5	1518.5
DESAMPARADOS	103	193,478	118.3	1636.1
GOICOECHEA	108	117,532	31.5	3731.2
ALAJUELITA	110	70,297	21.2	3320.6
TIBAS	113	72,074	8.1	8843.5
MORAVIA	114	50,419	28.6	1761.7
MONTES DE OCA	115	50,433	15.2	3326.7
CURRIDABAT	118	60,889	16.0	3817.5
LA UNION	303	80,279	44.8	1790.7
SANTO DOMINGO	403	34,748	24.8	1398.9
BELEN	407	19,834	12.1	1632.5
FLORES	408	15,038	7.0	2160.6
SAN PABLO	409	20,813	7.5	2764.1

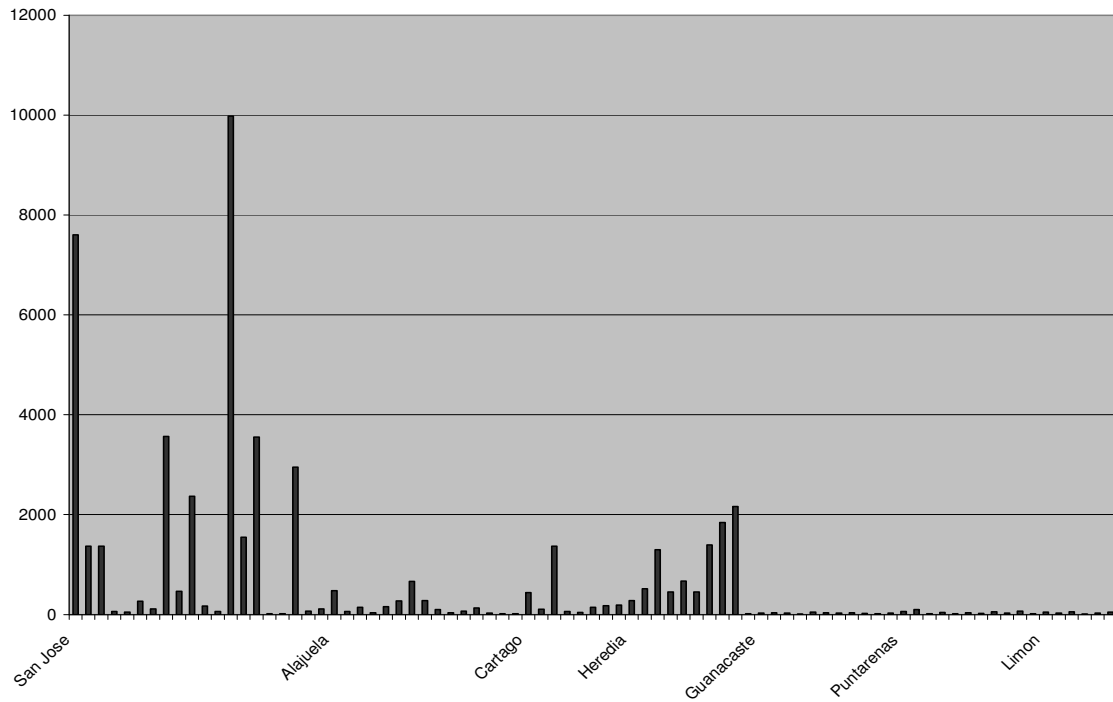
A municipal-level examination reveals dramatic distinctions in the density patterns within each country. Figures 1A and 1B chart the density square kilometer in Honduras' 298 Municipalities and Costa Rica's 81 Cantons. The highest density in Costa Rica was approximately 10,000 inhabitants per square mile (in the Canton of Tibas) while the capital city, San Jose, topped 6,000 persons per square mile. In stark contrast, Honduras' capital Tegucigalpa, only slightly exceeded 600 persons per square mile. The census data reveal that Costa Rica has two dense population centers – in and around San Jose, and in the province of Heredia. Part of these differences are due to the fact that Costa Rica's highest density cantons have small geographic areas, yet these Costa Rica has urban centers geographic that are far more dense than the population hubs in Honduras, in spite of aggregate-level similarity in urban measures.

Figure 1A: Density of Honduras' Municipalities: 2001 (Persons per 1000 KM<sup>2</sup>)



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Censo de Población y Vivienda 2001, 1988

Figure 1B: Density of Costa Rica's Cantons: 1998 (Persons per 1000 KM<sup>2</sup>)

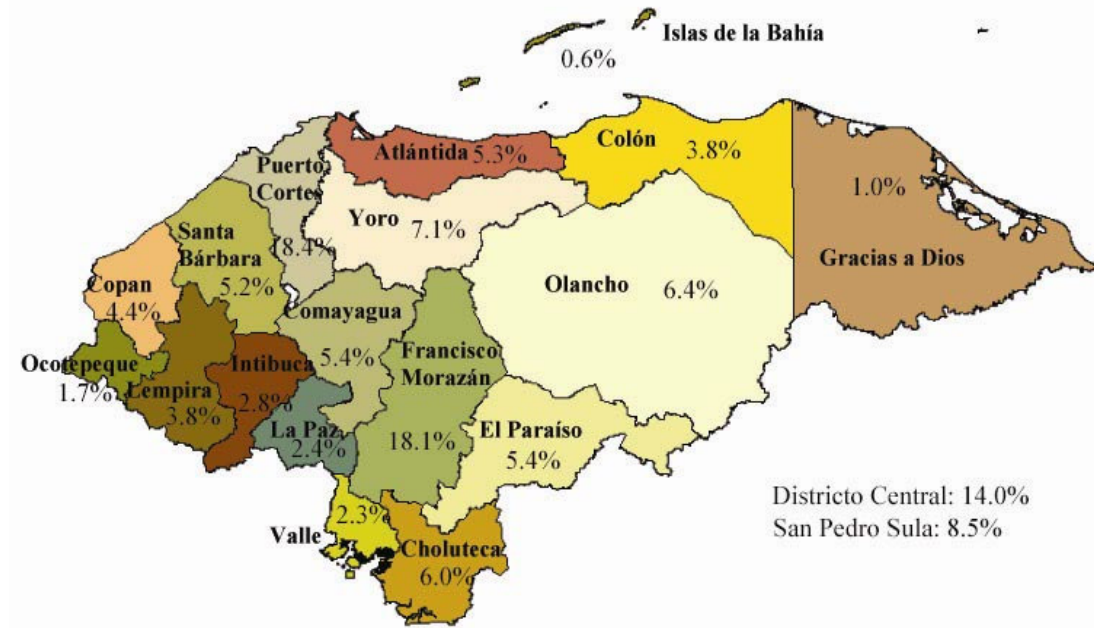


Source: (INEC) Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos Costa Rica, Anuario Estadística 1995-1998

### Population Distribution:

The presence of urban areas in Honduras can be seen from the distribution of Honduras' population in figure 1 below.

**Figure 2A. Honduras' Population Distribution, by Department: 2001**



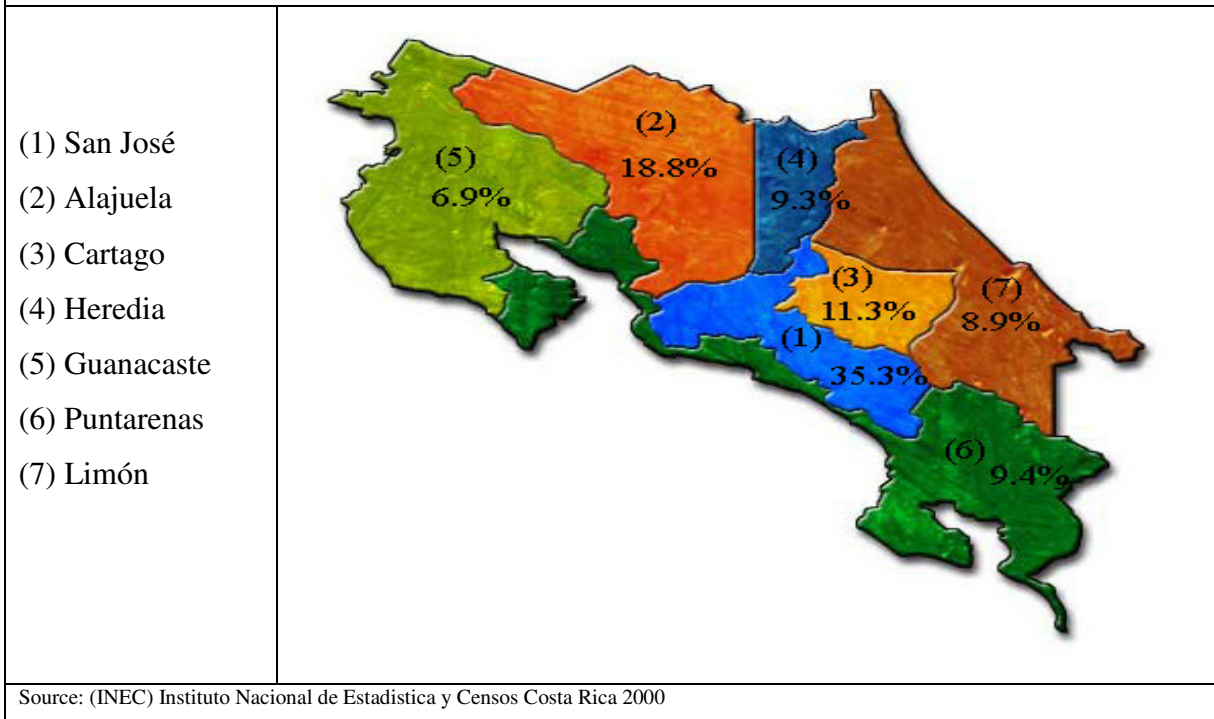
Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Censo de Población y Vivienda 2001

In 2001, 18.4% of Honduras' population resided in Puerto Cortes, which contains San Pedro Sula, and 18.1% of the population lived in Francisco Morazán, which includes the Distrito Central (DC). While both departments have comparable shares of the overall population, municipal level examination reveals a number of distinctions. In Cortes, 12 of 12 municipalities are considered urban, whereas only 16 of 26 of Francisco Morazán's municipalities are urban. While the Distrito Central contains the vast majority of the population living in the Department of Francisco Morazán, San Pedro Sula contains less than half of Cortes' population. In spite of the rapid urban growth in Cortes, especially from 1988 to 2001, much of this growth occurred outside of SPS, whereas almost all the urban growth of Francisco Morazán has occurred in the Distrito Central. In 1974, 7.6% of Honduras' population lived in San Pedro Sula, by 2001 this figure was 8.5%; the comparable figures for the Distrito Central are 11.5% and 14.0%. Thus the Distrito Central maintains a larger share of Honduras' population and experienced a larger proportionate population increase over a period in which Honduras' population more than doubled. Yet, the entire Department of Cortes received twice the number of internal migrants between 1996-2001, as the Department of Francisco Morazón. This fact is surely related to the topological differences between the regions. The physical growth of



the Distrito Central is constrained by mountains on all sides, while the industrial factories of San Pedro Sula are free to settle in any direction.

**Figure 2B. Costa Rica's Population Distribution, by Province: 2000**



The above graph illustrates a high level of urban concentration in a relatively small geographic area, the province of San José. If we consider the province of San José and its neighboring cities to largely consist of a single metropolitan area, then one-third of the Costa Rican population resided in the capital city in the year 2000. In contrast, only 14% of Hondurans resided Tegucigalpa and 18% resided in the entire province of Francisco Morazán. Honduras appears to have two main cities and several regional hubs, while Costa Rica has one large metropolis that spans much of the country, with a few population concentrations in nearby areas. Yet the data suggest that there are fewer actual cities, presumably because the country is smaller and possibly also better connected to the regional center.

**Internal Migration into Urban Areas:**

The following tables compare internal migration into the selected Cantons in Costa Rica and into the largest cities in Honduras. The Honduran cities have a higher percentage of internal migrants, on average. Unfortunately, the data below do not capture the whole picture of migration flows in that they do not consider the rate at which individuals migrate from the rural areas, but they do consider the proportion of the population that has migrated within the past 5 years. If a higher percentage of the population was living in Costa Rica's metropolitan area of San José in 1996 than in either of Honduras' largest cities, then the population at risk of migrating to San José is proportionately smaller. The most striking finding in the comparison of the tables below is the difference in the

standard deviation and coefficient of variation across the regions. The Hondurans cities reveal a greater variation. The cities in the Department of Cortes reveal a particularly high proportion of internal migrants. This finding suggests that these cities are growing and newly developing. Of course, larger cities must also have larger the migration stream to influence the distribution of the population. In other words, a small flow may register in a small city, but would not be recognizable in a larger one. Yet, overall the patterns suggest a new flow of migration into the Department of Cortes in Honduras, yet comparatively static flows in Costa Rica.

**Table 2A: Costa Rica - Percent of Internal Migrants to Selected Cantons**

Internal Migrants: Mean 4.36, Standard Deviation: 1.9, Coefficient of Variation: .44		
Geo. Code	Canton	% Internal Migrants
1.01	SAN JOSE	5.99
1.02	ESCAZU	8.30
1.03	DESAMPARADOS	2.91
1.08	GOICOECHEA	2.98
1.10	ALAJUELITA	4.20
1.13	TIBAS	4.07
1.14	MORAVIA	3.09
1.15	MONTES DE OCA	6.46
1.18	CURRIDABAT	6.97
3.03	LA UNION	2.77
4.03	SANTO DOMINGO	2.83
4.07	BELEN	5.56
4.08	FLORES	2.63
4.09	SAN PABLO	2.28

Definition: Internal Migrants are those who migrated from inside the country, but outside the province between 1995-2000

Source: (INEC) Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos Costa Rica 2000

**Table 2B: Honduras - Percent of Internal Migrants to the Selected Cities**

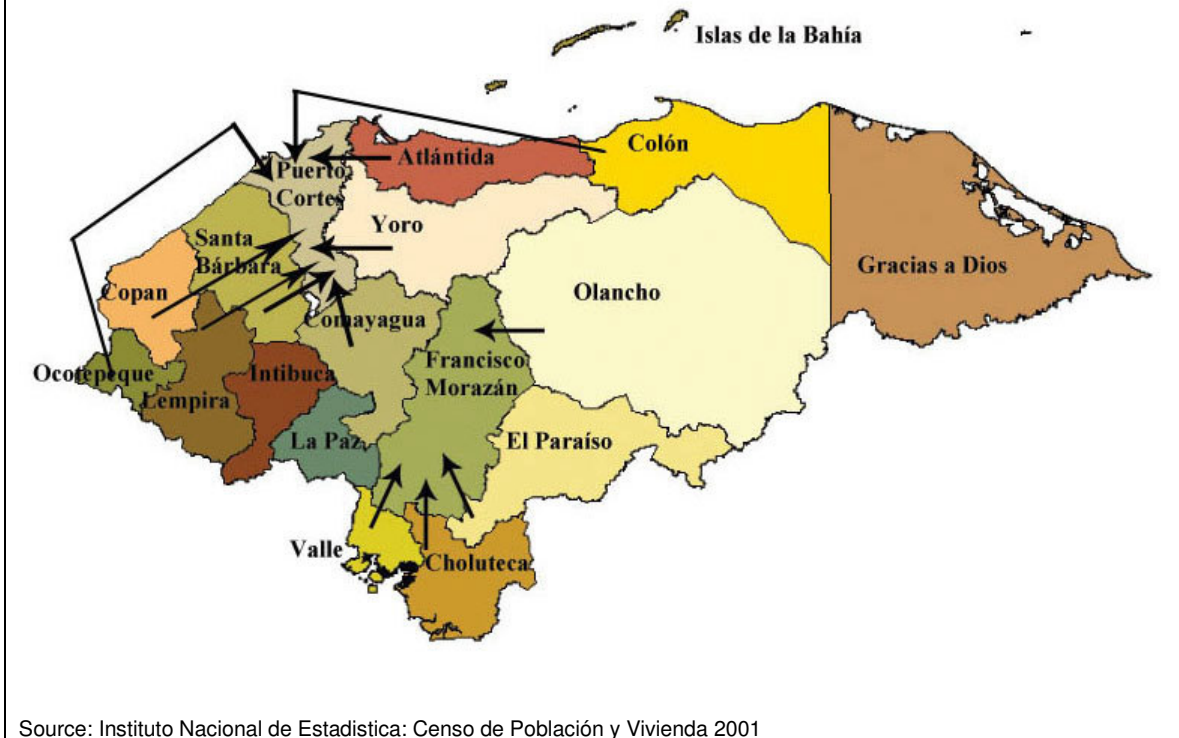
Internal Migrants: Mean 5.86, Standard Deviation: 3.5, Coefficient of Variation: .60		
Geo. Code	City	% Internal Migrants
1.01	LA CEIBA	7.43
1.07	TELA	4.92
3.01	COMAYAGUA	3.95
5.01	SAN PEDRO SULA	7.83
5.02	CHOLOMA	14.17
5.06	PUERTO CORTES	4.22
5.10	SANTA CRUZ DE YOJOA	7.04
6.01	CHOLUTECA	2.23
7.03	DANLI	2.50
8.01	DISTRICTO CENTRAL	4.30

Definition: Internal Migrants are those who migrated from inside the country, but outside the department between 1996-2001

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Censo de Población y Vivienda 2001

The map below illustrates several of these findings in a graphical format and demonstrates the differences between the Distrito Central and San Pedro Sula and its suburbs.

**Figure 3. Internal Migration Flows to Cortes and Francisco Morazán: 1996-2001 (Sending department rates of over 15 per 1000)**



The 2001 census reports that between 1996 and 2001 the Distrito Central received 32,179 in-migrants, or 88% of the migrants to Francisco Morazán, whereas San Pedro Sula received 34,513, or 44% of the migrants to Cortes. These figures are indicative of the fact that much urban growth in Cortes occurred on the periphery of the main city of San Pedro Sula, a possibility that the topography of the Distrito Central prevents.

The chart below looks at the direction of internal migration into the cantons examined in Costa Rica. They are sorted by density. These figures are relatively crude, and further steps would add some controls for the population size of the sending region, yet some trends are apparent. The following chart considers internal migrants to be those who did not live within the canton 5 years before. Clearly the majority of the cantons in San José came from other cantons in San José, while the cantons in Cartago and Heredia do not reveal as dramatic a trend. Alajuela also appears to have spent a fair number of migrants to several of these regions, and Puntarenas is also consistently represented.

Table 3: Costa Rica Percent of Internal Migrants to 10 Most Dense Cantons, by Province: 2000

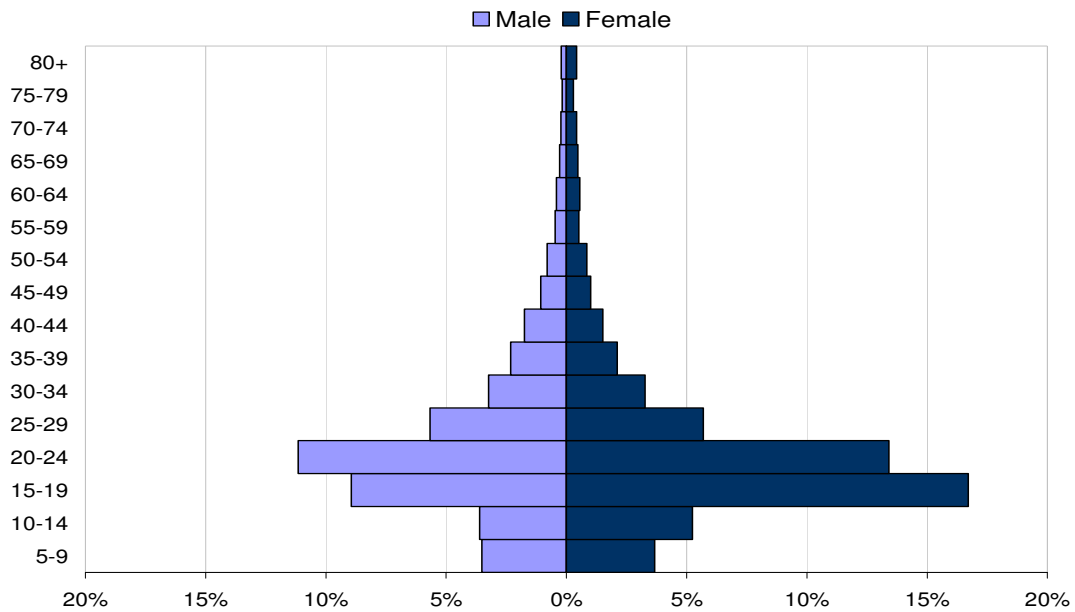
	SAN JOSE	ALAJUELA	CARTAGO	HEREDIA	GUANACASTE	PUNTARENAS	LIMON
Tibas	62.7	5.0	4.0	9.8	4.5	8.9	5.1
San Jose	53.0	10.1	5.5	8.1	5.2	11.5	6.7
Goicoechea	68.1	4.9	5.3	4.9	3.6	7.7	5.5
Montes De Oca	61.6	10.2	8.8	4.3	4.1	7.3	3.8
Curridabat	68.2	4.8	9.4	3.2	3.1	7.9	3.4
Alajuelita	68.7	4.9	3.9	4.6	3.2	9.0	5.7
San Pablo	30.4	4.9	2.1	50.7	2.6	5.3	3.9
Flores	23.7	14.1	1.9	48.2	3.1	7.0	2.1
Moravia	76.1	3.9	3.7	6.5	2.2	5.0	2.7
Belen	42.3	21.1	2.7	18.2	3.8	8.5	3.3
Desamparados	68.4	4.8	6.2	3.8	3.6	8.6	4.7
Escazu	71.6	6.7	3.0	5.0	3.5	7.1	3.1
La Union	69.4	4.4	9.0	4.4	2.4	6.3	4.1
Santo Domingo	59.7	6.6	3.3	19.6	2.4	5.8	2.6

Source: (INEC) Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos Costa Rica 2000

#### Migrant Characteristics:

Beyond the sheer numbers, the characteristics of the migrant population influence the direction and pace of urban growth. Figure 3 below illustrates the age and sex distribution of the migrant population that entered the Distrito Central between 1996 and 2001, as recorded by the 2001 census. These figures report that 56% of all migrants to the Distrito Central were female. Additionally, the migrant population is predominantly young, with few migrants over age 30. This trend is particularly notable for females who migrate primarily between ages 15 to 19 with some spillover into the 20 to 24 year-old category. While more males migrate between ages 20 to 24 than in any other category, the decline is not as steep over the older age categories as it is for females. These age patterns are presumably a reflection either of employment differences or differences in marriage patterns between males and females.

**Figure 4: Age Structure of Migrants to the Distrito Central: 1996-2001**



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Censo de Población y Vivienda 2001

**Conclusion:**

This study serves as a preliminary examination of the similarities and differences of urban migration patterns between 1995-2001 in Costa Rica and Honduras. The descriptive results suggest that Costa Rica’s urban migration flow is more stagnant than the that in Honduras. Costa Rica’s economic and political stability may have allowed for the development of a comparatively stable urban system while recent industrial changes in Honduras appear to have led to a higher level of internal migration. Thus the comparative stability and prosperity in Costa Rica could have fostered a historical growth and stability of urban system, while Honduras is currently experiencing a more dynamic transition from an agricultural to an industrial base. As these types of transitions engender rural-to-urban migration, these migration patterns are more predominant in Honduras than in Costa Rica. The first figures (1A and 1B) suggest differences in the patterns of urban density between the countries that are not captured in the relatively similar percent considered urban levels of 48% and 53%, which appear to be unrepresentative of the true differences in urban patterns within these two countries.

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