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TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS

**Advancing Immigrant Integration
Despite Its Uncertainty**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Temporary Protected Status has benefitted over 400,000 immigrants living in the United States by providing them with a renewable work permit and relative protection from deportation. Salvadoran and Honduran immigrants make up the overwhelming majority of TPS holders. This report examines key indicators of immigrant integration among these TPS holders based on a multi-region survey of 2,098 respondents in the five regions with the largest concentrations of these immigrants. Findings show that TPS holders have resided in the United States for at least 20 years and two-thirds have a U.S.-born child. About half of TPS beneficiaries have enrolled in educational opportunities after arriving to the U.S., such as finishing high school, obtaining a GED, or taking English language courses. TPS holders have the highest labor force participation rate and a higher rate of entrepreneurial activities than other immigrant groups: Over 88% of all TPS holders are in the labor force. About one-third own their homes and are active in their communities and organizations. All this indicates that these immigrants are rooted in the United States and socially integrated in communities across the country. Thus, TPS represents a step in the right direction but a more secure status is evidently needed.

INTRODUCTION

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) has allowed over 400,000 immigrants to live in the U.S. with a lower fear of deportation and access to work and educational opportunities unavailable to undocumented immigrants. TPS provides a work permit and temporary protection from deportation to immigrants from countries experiencing a natural disaster, war, or other major emergencies that prevent their safe return. The Immigration Act of 1990 allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to designate a country for TPS for periods of 6 to 18 months and can extend that designation if the country's conditions remain unsafe for the return of their citizens. Currently, nationals of 10 countries have TPS.²

But despite providing immigrants with temporary relief from deportation and a work permit, TPS does not grant its beneficiaries a pathway to citizenship or the ability to sponsor their family members. Some states may deem TPS beneficiaries ineligible for public assistance.³ This has left TPS beneficiaries in a situation where, despite being able to establish deep roots to the United States and their communities, they experience systemic exclusion from many benefits and opportunities afforded to U.S. citizens. This situation undermines TPS holders' process of integration as well as their families'.

Furthermore, because their status is temporary, the lives of TPS beneficiaries are vulnerable to the sudden termination of their country's TPS designation. The Trump administration has decided to terminate TPS for nationals of El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan. The termination of TPS would make over 400 thousand people vulnerable to have their lives completely upended by deportation.⁴

As the 9th circuit court of appeals deliberates whether the cancellation of TPS is lawful, this report presents statistics on the demographic profile, educational background, economic activities and social contributions, and community involvement, of Salvadoran and Honduran TPS recipients to show the advantages and limitations of having TPS in the United States.

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METHODOLOGY

The data on TPS recipients is based on a multi-regional telephone survey of 2,098 respondents in the five U.S. regions with the largest concentration of Salvadoran and Honduran immigrants collected by UCLA professor of Sociology Cecilia Menjivar, the Center for Migration Research at the University of Kansas, and multiple community-based organizations (CBOs) in 2016. Survey respondents were randomly selected from lists of TPS recipients provided by the partner CBOs⁵. The survey had a total of 2,098 respondents from El Salvador (92.3%), Honduras (7.5%), and Nicaragua (0.2%). Salvadorans and Hondurans represent almost 74% of all TPS recipients, so these two nationalities are used as a proxy for the experience of TPS holders.⁶

To provide context on the experience of TPS recipients, this brief compares TPS recipients with unauthorized immigrants who have many limitations due to their immigration status, and naturalized immigrants who theoretically have access to all opportunities granted to U.S. citizens. The data for unauthorized immigrants come from the Migration Policy Institute's estimates of the unauthorized population obtained from the pooled 2012-16 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).⁷ The data on naturalized immigrants come from the 1 year and 5 year samples of the 2016 ACS.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics

The majority of TPS recipients (53.7%) are men, similar to the population of unauthorized immigrants, but different from the naturalized immigrant population, among whom the majority (54.1%) are women. The median age for TPS recipients is 43 years, which is 7 years younger than the naturalized foreign-born population (see **Table 1**). TPS recipients have spent over 20 years in the United States on average, which is almost 6 years longer than unauthorized immigrants but almost 10 years shorter than the average for naturalized immigrants. Honduran and Salvadoran immigrants who currently hold TPS were granted this status in 1998 and 2001 respectively, and they have been renewing this permit every 18 months with a \$485 fee per renewal. No additional registrants were permitted after those cutoff years. Thus, TPS holders' length of stay in the United States is related to the original date of TPS designation.⁸

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of TPS Recipients, Unauthorized Immigrants, and Naturalized Immigrants, 2016

	TPS RECIPIENTS	UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS	NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS
PERCENT MEN	53.7%	53%	45.9%
MEDIAN AGE	43	N/A	51.4
YEARS IN THE U.S.	20.3	14.8	30

Notes: Median age for all unauthorized immigrants is not available.

Sources: Data on TPS Holders: Cecilia Menjivar, "Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants", Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#). Data for Unauthorized Immigrants: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States", Migration Policy Institute, 2016, [Available Online](#). Data for percent women and median age for naturalized immigrants: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Accessed August 3, 2020, [Available Online](#).

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Most TPS recipients (54%) reported being married or cohabiting, which is higher than the 40% of undocumented immigrants but lower than the 62.4% of naturalized immigrants with the same marital status. TPS recipients are also less likely to be divorced, separated, or widowed than unauthorized immigrants and naturalized immigrants (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Marital Status and Number of Children of TPS Recipients, Unauthorized Immigrants, and Naturalized Immigrants, 2016

MARITAL STATUS	TPS HOLDERS	UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS	NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS
MARRIED/COHABITING	54%	40%	62.4%
NEVER MARRIED/SINGLE	36%	40%	17.5%
DIVORCED, SEPARATED, WIDOWED	9.8%	20%	20%

Sources: Data on TPS Holders: Cecilia Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants”, Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#). Data for Unauthorized Immigrants: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States”, Migration Policy Institute, 2016, [Available Online](#). Data for naturalized immigrants: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Accessed August 3, 2020, [Available Online](#).

The length of time spent living in the United States (an average of 20 years) and the formation of new families, with almost two thirds of TPS holders having a U.S.-born child, indicates that these immigrants are rooted and settled in the United States and socially integrated in communities across the country. Most TPS survey participants (86.3%) had at least one child, and on average they had between two and three children. Of those with children, 61% have at least one U.S.-born child which means that many TPS beneficiaries live in mixed-status families.

Despite many of them having families in the United States, the precarity of TPS as an immigration status and the inability to sponsor their family members still residing in their countries of origin for a visa forces TPS beneficiaries to live separated from their families. Almost 25% of survey respondents had either some or all their children living outside of the United States.

Education, Employment, Health Insurance, and Homeownership

TPS allows beneficiaries to access education and economic opportunities not afforded to undocumented immigrants. Despite having an average educational attainment of fewer than 8 years of education before migrating to the United States, TPS beneficiaries enroll in educational opportunities to increase their socioeconomic status and adapt to life in the United States. Out of the adults in the survey able to advance their education after arriving to the U.S., almost 3 out of 4 enrolled in at least one educational opportunity. Over 19% of them finished high-school or obtained their GED, more than 3% enrolled in some college courses, 2% got a bachelor’s degree, 10% obtained a training or education certificate, and 74% enrolled in English classes (see [Table 3](#)).

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Table 3. Educational Experience in the United States of TPS Holders

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	TPS HOLDERS
FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL OR HAS A GED	19.5%
SOME COLLEGE COURSES WITHOUT GRADUATING	3.3%
CERTIFICATE	10%
UNIVERSITY DEGREE	2%
ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES	74%

Note: Percentages are estimated out of those who enrolled in any educational opportunity in the U.S.

Sources: Data on TPS Beneficiaries: Cecilia Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants”, Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#)

TPS holders have a much higher labor force participation rate than unauthorized and naturalized immigrants. Over 88% of all TPS holders are in the labor force compared to 72% of undocumented immigrants and a little over 65% of naturalized immigrants (see Table 4). TPS holders are more entrepreneurial than naturalized immigrants. As **Table 4** illustrates, almost 11% of TPS holders are self-employed compared to only 7.2% of naturalized immigrants.

Table 4. Employment Characteristics of TPS Holders, Unauthorized Immigrants and Naturalized Immigrants

	TPS HOLDERS	UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS	NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS
IN LABOR FORCE	88.5%	72%	65.1%
SELF EMPLOYED	10.8%	NA	7.2%

Notes: Self-employment data for unauthorized immigrants is not available.

Sources: Data on TPS Holders: Cecilia Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants”, Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#). Data for Unauthorized Immigrants: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States”, Migration Policy Institute, 2016, [Available Online](#). Data for naturalized immigrants: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Accessed August 3, 2020, [Available Online](#).

Although TPS status opens up employment opportunities, TPS holders are also victims of labor exploitation. Around 7% of TPS holders mentioned that their boss did not pay them on time in the 12 months prior to the survey, and almost 11% indicated that their boss paid them less than what they were supposed to be paid. About 6.4% described having an injury at work, and fewer than 3% had to leave their job due to an injury in the 12 months prior to the survey. Finally, about 2.8% of respondents said that their boss owed them wages.

A clear benefit of TPS is that its beneficiaries are much more likely to have health insurance than unauthorized immigrants. As seen in **Table 5**, only 22.3% of TPS holders are uninsured, compared to 53% of undocumented immigrants who do not have health insurance. However, TPS holders are more likely to be uninsured than naturalized immigrants. The majority (38.3%) obtained insurance through their job, others acquired coverage through their partners (5%) or through their parents (.2%), the Affordable Care Act (7.7%), or other sources (24.7%).

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Table 5. Percent Without Health Insurance for TPS Holders, Unauthorized Immigrants, and Naturalized Immigrants

	TPS HOLDERS	UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS	NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS
UNINSURED	22.3%	53%	11.7%

Sources: Data on TPS Beneficiaries: Cecilia Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants”, Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#). Data for Unauthorized Immigrants: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States”, Migration Policy Institute, 2016, [Available Online](#). Data for insurance rates naturalized immigrants: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Accessed August 3, 2020, [Available Online](#).

Even with more access to jobs, home ownership is comparatively lower among TPS holders. Even though approximately 32% of TPS holders in the survey owned their own home (as seen in Table 6), this is a slightly lower percentage than unauthorized immigrants (34%) and significantly lower than foreign-born citizens (64.7%)

Table 6. Homeownership Rate for TPS Holders, Unauthorized Immigrants, and Naturalized Immigrants

	TPS HOLDERS	UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS	NATURALIZED IMMIGRANTS
HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE	31.9%	34%	64.7%

Sources: Data on TPS Beneficiaries: Cecilia Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants”, Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas May 2017, [Available online](#). Data for Unauthorized Immigrants: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States”, Migration Policy Institute, 2016, [Available Online](#). Data for naturalized immigrants: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Accessed August 3, 2020, [Available Online](#).

Community Engagement and Contributions to Taxes and Social Security

TPS holders are actively involved in their communities, through neighborhood organizations (3.7%), their children’s schools (9.8%), church (17.4%), work organizations or events (2.6%), sports teams (3.5%), or other activities (2.4%). Additionally, about 20% of TPS holders participate in community service, such as volunteering in nonprofit organizations or in other service activities like children’s hospitals. Their community involvement also includes civic activities that support immigrants’ rights, such as rallies, informative forums, or petitions (26%).

TPS Holders also contribute to government revenue. 90% of TPS holders reported having filed income taxes every year in the three years prior to the survey, and TPS holders have contributed to social security for an average of 15.4 years.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

TPS has been critical and significantly beneficial for those who hold this status. TPS holders can hold jobs formally, have access to health insurance benefits, participate in their communities, and some can purchase homes. The positive effects of TPS reach these immigrants’ family members, co-workers, neighbors, and communities.

TPS holders generally do better than undocumented immigrants on the various indicators discussed in this report but not as well as those immigrants who hold lawful permanent residence or are naturalized. Thus, TPS represents a step in the right direction but a more secure status is evidently needed.

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Legality, even temporary, brings many benefits, including the right to work legally; however, moving these immigrants to permanent legal residence would be even more beneficial for the immigrants, their families, and for U.S. society in general. Long-term uncertainty undermines plans for the future, and, because this status is temporary, TPS holders are unable to live completely fulfilled lives or sponsor family members who are still in their home countries. Additionally, the temporality of TPS makes its beneficiaries vulnerable to the political winds of the time. As highlighted by the actions of the Trump administration, hundreds of thousands of lives, even for people who have lived in the U.S. for over 20 years, can be dramatically changed by terminating a country's TPS status. To increase protection and reduce vulnerability, the following policies should be enacted.

Policy Recommendations

1. Renew Temporary Protected Status designations for currently designated countries beyond the January 2021 deadline.
2. Grant permanent residence status to all TPS recipients.

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ENDNOTES

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² Jill Wilson, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020), Page 5, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/RS20844.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For a detailed description of the methodology see Cecilia Menjívar, *Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants*, (The University of Kansas : Center for Migration Research, 2017), Page 6, http://ipsr.ku.edu/migration/pdf/TPS_Report.pdf

⁶ For numbers of current TPS beneficiaries by country see Jill Wilson, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020), Page 5, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/RS20844.pdf>

⁷ For a detailed description of the Migration Policy Institute's imputation of unauthorized status see Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States", Migration Policy Institute, 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>

⁸ For details on the requirements to be eligible for TPS see: For Honduras: U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, "Temporary Protected Status Designated Country: Honduras", accessed August 3, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-honduras> ; For El Salvador: U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, "Temporary Protected Status Designated Country: El Salvador", accessed August 3, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-el-salvador>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cecilia Menjivar holds the Dorothy L. Meier Chair in Social Equities and is Professor of Sociology at UCLA. She has published extensively on Central American migration to the United States, with a focus on how immigration laws and legal status affect the lives of immigrants in their families, work, and other spheres of life. She has received multiple awards for her scholarship, including two career awards from the American Sociological Association, and a John S. Guggenheim and Andrew Carnegie Fellowships. She has served as Vice President of the American Sociological Association, and recently was elected President.

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