

The police force itself is involved in crime and cannot be relied on for help. Many of the bandits are current or former police officers, says Grupo Beta Sur supervisor Mario Campos Gutiérrez. If these bandits are arrested, they pay bribes to police headquarters and are quickly released without any consequences. Witness statements against them mysteriously "disappear."

For migrants, going to police authorities would be dangerous anyway because they could be deported. Because migrants are on the run, they cannot wait around for months until a trial to testify against the bandits. This makes them ideal victims for robbers to attack.

Migrants have asked members of Grupo Beta Sur why the authorities don't clamp down on the gangsters. Grupo Beta Sur agents told them they needed witnesses. They urged the migrants to step forward and report abuses. One teenager who did was brutally beaten by Mara Salvatrucha gangsters later that day.

And bandits long ago intimidated any La Arrocera residents who considered testifying.

"If you say anything, they kill you. Better to keep your mouth shut," says a local elderly man, who is afraid to give his full name. An ice cream vendor near La Arrocera adds, "If you turn them in, they get out, and they come after you. They operate by light of day. There is no law here."

The last time Enrique sneaked past La Arrocera, he was lucky because he was careful. He stuck with a band of street gangsters. Bandits try to avoid gangsters, who are likely to