

NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION

To be cited only in accordance with FED. R. APP. P. 32.1

United States Court of Appeals
For the Seventh Circuit
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Argued December 16, 2025

Decided December 29, 2025

BeforeMICHAEL B. BRENNAN, *Chief Judge*DIANE S. SYKES, *Circuit Judge*REBECCA TAIBLESON, *Circuit Judge*

No. 25-1643

CINIA QUIROZ-BARDALES, et al.,
Petitioners,

v.

PAMELA J. BONDI,
Attorney General of the United States,
Respondent.

Petition for Review of an Order of the
Board of Immigration Appeals.

Nos. A215-765-200, A215-765-201,
A215-765-202

ORDER

Cinia Quiroz-Bardales, a Honduran citizen, petitions for review of the Board of Immigration Appeals' dismissal of her appeal from an immigration judge's denial of asylum and withholding of removal for herself and two of her minor children. Quiroz asserts that the Board incorrectly ruled that she had not established a nexus between her family membership and an attack against her in Honduras. Because substantial evidence supports the Board's conclusion, we deny the petition.

In 2018 the Department of Homeland Security initiated removal proceedings against Quiroz and her two foreign-born daughters, charging each as inadmissible under 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(6)(A)(i) as noncitizens present without being admitted or paroled. Through counsel, Quiroz and her daughters conceded the charges of removability and filed applications for asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under the regulations implementing the Convention Against Torture. *See* 8 U.S.C. §§ 1158(b)(1)(A), 1231(b)(3)(A); 8 C.F.R. § 1208.16–1208.18. With respect to asylum and withholding of removal, she asserted a fear of persecution on account of her membership in the family of her domestic partner, Luis Barahona, because of a “debt” that men who robbed her in Honduras said her family owes them.

The IJ made the following findings of fact: Quiroz and Barahona share three daughters, two born in Honduras and one born in the United States. In 2015 while living in Muchilena, Honduras, two men attacked Barahona with a machete and robbed him. Although he recognized one of the men, Barahona does not know why they targeted him, but he suspects that they knew that he had picked up his biweekly wages that day. Soon after the attack, Barahona and Quiroz moved their family to Chivana, Honduras, where her parents live, and which is about an hour away from Muchilena by bus. Barahona fled to the United States a few months later, but Quiroz and their children remained in Honduras.

Three years later in 2018, men wearing black clothes and hoods confronted Quiroz in Chivana. They asked her where Barahona was and told her that they wanted to “get even” with him. When Quiroz yelled for help, the men told her that they would come for her family, knocked her unconscious with a gun, and stole money from her. Quiroz wrote in her asylum application that after the attack, she saw the men three times near her home. When later testifying in immigration court, she increased this number to between five and ten times. Fearing for their safety, Quiroz and her children fled Honduras to join Barahona in the United States, entering without inspection and admission near Hidalgo, Texas. Quiroz’s mother continued to see the men around the house in Chivana after Quiroz left.

The IJ denied petitioners’ applications, concluding that Quiroz had not established a nexus between the attack on her in 2018 and her relationship with Barahona or, alternatively, that her relationship was at most a tangential or incidental motive for the attack. Although the IJ relied on Quiroz’s testimony, which he found credible, the IJ found that it was not clear that the men had any vendetta against Barahona despite making a reference to him. The IJ also concluded that Quiroz had not

established past persecution, a well-founded fear of future persecution, an inability to relocate within Honduras to avoid future harm, or that the Honduran government was unable or unwilling to protect her and her family.

The Board of Immigration Appeals agreed with the IJ's decision and dismissed the appeal. The Board concluded that Quiroz failed to establish that she was targeted on account of her family membership and, as a result, that she had not established a nexus between the attack and her family membership. It also ruled that the IJ did not clearly err in his finding that the men's motive was to further their criminal enterprise rather than animus against Quiroz's family.

On petition for review, Quiroz argues that the Board and the IJ erred in denying her and her children's applications for asylum and withholding of removal.¹ She first contends that we should review the IJ's decision as supplemented by the Board's because the Board adopted the IJ's findings with little additional analysis. But the Board did not expressly adopt the IJ's decision when it dismissed the appeal. Where, as here, the Board issues its own opinion rather than adopting or merely supplementing the IJ's opinion, we review only the Board's opinion. *Gamero v. Barr*, 929 F.3d 464, 468 (7th Cir. 2019); *Vahora v. Holder*, 626 F.3d 907, 912 (7th Cir. 2010). Because the Board's opinion does not address the IJ's conclusions regarding past persecution, fear of future persecution, internal relocation, or protection from the Honduran government, those arguments are beyond the scope of our review.

The only agency determination properly before us is the Board's conclusion that Quiroz failed to establish a nexus between the 2018 attack and her membership in Barahona's family. Quiroz argues that this conclusion is not supported by substantial evidence because she credibly testified that the men asked her where Barahona was and told her they wanted to "get even" with him.

We review the Board's nexus determination for substantial evidence. *Granados Arias v. Garland*, 69 F.4th 454, 464 (7th Cir. 2023). Under this deferential standard, the agency's "findings of fact are conclusive unless any reasonable adjudicator would be compelled to conclude to the contrary." *Meraz-Saucedo v. Rosen*, 986 F.3d 676, 684 (7th Cir. 2021) (quoting *Nasrallah v. Barr*, 590 U.S. 573, 584 (2020)).

¹ The petitioners have expressly waived any challenge to the denial of their claims under the Convention Against Torture.

To qualify for asylum, an applicant must establish that she was persecuted “on account of” a statutorily protected ground. 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101(a)(42)(A), 1158(b)(1)(A). The government does not contest that Barahona’s family is cognizable as a particular social group. But the protected ground must also be “one central reason” for the harm (or feared harm), meaning that it need not be the only reason, but it cannot be a minor one. *Id.* § 1158(b)(1)(B); *W.G.A. v. Sessions*, 900 F.3d 957, 965 (7th Cir. 2018); *In re J-B-N- & S-M-*, 24 I. & N. Dec. 208, 213 (BIA 2007). The same nexus showing is required to qualify for withholding of removal. *Granados Arias*, 69 F.4th at 465.

Substantial evidence supports the Board’s decision to dismiss the appeal based on a failure of proof. The Board saw no clear error in the IJ’s finding that the primary motivation behind the attack was to further the assailants’ criminal enterprise. To be sure, that conclusion does not preclude family membership from also constituting “one central reason” for the attack. *W.G.A.*, 900 F.3d at 965. But given the three-year gap between the attacks, Quiroz failed to establish that a continuing vendetta against Barahona was one central reason the men targeted her. *Cf. id.* at 966 (timing of a gang targeting the petitioner two days after a brother defected from the gang supported a finding of nexus). Indeed, she testified that she was unaware of any motive the men had beyond just getting money.

Although the record includes Quiroz’s credible testimony that the men asked her about Barahona and said that they had something to “get even” with him, those words alone do not compel a finding of nexus. When we have decided that the evidence compels a finding of nexus with family membership, the evidence of motive has been more substantial, often involving a pattern of attacks on family members and several clear statements of intent by the persecutors. *See, e.g., Mejia v. Bondi*, 144 F.4th 965, 975 (7th Cir. 2025); *Gonzalez Ruano v. Barr*, 922 F.3d 346, 355 (7th Cir. 2019); *W.G.A.*, 900 F.3d at 966. The two ambiguous statements the men made about Barahona do not rise to the same level of proof. Quiroz has not presented sufficient evidence to establish that “no reasonable adjudicator” could disagree with her claim that family membership was “one central reason” for the attack. *Munoz-Rivera v. Garland*, 81 F.4th 681, 690 (7th Cir. 2023) (applying the substantial evidence standard).

We therefore DENY the petition for review.