NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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MOLLY C. DWYER, CLERK
U.S. COURT OF APPEALS

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT

VILMA MIRANDA-BARRIENTOS; DARWIN ESTIVEN HENRIQUEZ-MIRANDA, Petitioners, v. TODD BLANCHE, Attorney General, Respondent.	No. 25-2038 Agency Nos. A209-988-910 A209-988-911 MEMORANDUM*

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

Submitted October 26, 2026**
Seattle, Washington

Before: M. SMITH, CHRISTEN, and MILLER, Circuit Judges.

Petitioners Vilma Miranda-Barrientos (Miranda) and Darwin Estiven Henriquez-Miranda, both natives and citizens of El Salvador, petition for review of a decision of the Board of Immigration Appeals upholding an immigration judge's

* This disposition is not appropriate for publication and is not precedent except as provided by Ninth Circuit Rule 36-3.

** The panel unanimously concludes this case is suitable for decision without oral argument. *See* Fed. R. App. P. 34(a)(2).

denial of their applications for asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). We have jurisdiction under 8 U.S.C. § 1252, and we deny the petition.

We review the agency's legal conclusions de novo. *Macedo Templos v. Wilkinson*, 987 F.3d 877, 879 (9th Cir. 2021). We review the agency's findings of fact for substantial evidence. *Flores Molina v. Garland*, 37 F.4th 626, 632 (9th Cir. 2022). Under that standard, "findings are 'conclusive unless any reasonable adjudicator would be compelled to conclude to the contrary.'" *Id.* (quoting 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(4)(B)).

1. Both asylum and withholding of removal require an applicant to show that her past persecution, or feared future persecution, bears a nexus to a protected ground. *Garcia v. Wilkinson*, 988 F.3d 1136, 1143, 1146–47 (9th Cir. 2021). For asylum, a protected ground must be "one central reason," and for withholding of removal, "a reason," for the persecution. *Barajas-Romero v. Lynch*, 846 F.3d 351, 358 (9th Cir. 2017) (emphasis omitted) (quoting 8 U.S.C. §§ 1158(b)(1)(B)(i), 1231(b)(3)(C)).

Substantial evidence supports the agency's finding that the gang members who threatened petitioners were motivated purely by criminality, not by Miranda's membership in either of her proposed particular social groups. Miranda testified that she was "not sure as to why" the gang members started extorting her, but that

gang members often target business owners, and that they threaten "pretty much everybody in El Salvador for money." Nothing in the record compels the conclusion that the gang members had any other motive. The failure to establish nexus is dispositive of petitioners' claims for asylum and withholding of removal, so we need not address whether the harm they suffered in El Salvador rose to the level of persecution. *See Zetino v. Holder*, 622 F.3d 1007, 1016 (9th Cir. 2010); *INS v. Bagamasbad*, 429 U.S. 24, 25–26 (1976) (per curiam).

2. Petitioners did not address CAT relief in their opening brief and have therefore forfeited any challenge to the agency's determination that they are not eligible for such relief. *See Hernandez v. Garland*, 47 F.4th 908, 916 (9th Cir. 2022).

PETITION DENIED.