

NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION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 July 7, 2026

Decided July 17, 2026

Before

MICHAEL B. BRENNAN, *Chief Judge*

MICHAEL Y. SCUDDER, *Circuit Judge*

THOMAS L. KIRSCH II, *Circuit Judge*

Nos. 24-2224 & 25-1278

GLADIS YOLANDA CHAVEZ-
PINEDA,

Petitioner,

v.

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

No. A208-276-014

TODD W. BLANCHE,
Acting Attorney General of the United
States,

Respondent.

ORDER

Gladis Yolanda Chavez-Pineda, a Honduran citizen, entered the United States without an entry document and applied for asylum. The immigration judge denied her application, and the Board of Immigration Appeals dismissed her appeal. She now petitions for review. She argues that the Board incorrectly ruled that she had established neither a cognizable particular social group nor a nexus between her membership in that group and any past harm or feared future harm. Because

substantial evidence supports the Board's conclusion that Chavez-Pineda did not establish the requisite nexus, we deny the petition.

Chavez-Pineda and her juvenile daughter, A.G.C., entered the United States on June 15, 2015, and were apprehended by a Customs and Border Protection officer the same day. A month later, the Department of Homeland Security charged them as inadmissible under 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(7)(A)(i)(I) for not being in possession of a visa or other entry document. Through counsel, the petitioners admitted to the factual allegations contained in the Notice to Appear, and the immigration judge found, based on those admissions, that the petitioners were removable.

Chavez-Pineda then applied for asylum, withholding of removal, and protection under the regulations implementing the Convention Against Torture, with A.G.C. as a derivative beneficiary with respect to asylum. *See* 8 U.S.C. §§ 1158(b)(1)(A), 1231(b)(3)(A); 8 C.F.R. §§ 1208.16–1208.18. Chavez-Pineda asserted that she had been the victim of robbery and extortion at the hands of a Honduran gang, including threats to mutilate her daughter, and she feared similar harm would befall her or her daughter upon their return. She attributed the harm she had experienced to her membership in an asserted particular social group defined as: "Honduran single mothers who do not comply with [gang] demands."

The IJ made the following findings of fact, which Chavez-Pineda does not challenge in her petition. Chavez-Pineda was born in Honduras. In 2014, her husband, who had operated a mechanic shop, died in an accident. Chavez-Pineda then took over operation of that shop. In January 2015, Chavez-Pineda was robbed by a man whom she recognized. That February, she began receiving extortion threats from a gang, Mara 18. The next month, she received daily threats, including threats to harm A.G.C., and she decided to pay the extortion demand. After a brief pause, the gang once again began threatening Chavez-Pineda, and when she refused to pay, the gang stole tools from the shop. The threats then intensified, and in May 2015, Chavez-Pineda closed her shop and fled Honduras for the United States with A.G.C.

During her individual hearing, Chavez-Pineda speculated that the gang may have targeted her because the mechanic shop was known in her town, and because the gang was aware that her husband had died and believed that she received his life insurance benefits. She did not know if the gang had threatened her husband before his death.

The IJ denied the applications, concluding that Chavez-Pineda's proposed particular social group was not cognizable because it was circularly defined by the persecution she feared. The IJ also concluded that even assuming her claimed particular

social group was cognizable, she had not demonstrated that the harm she suffered was on account of her membership in that group. The IJ therefore denied her asylum application and, for the same reasons, concluded that she had not established eligibility for withholding of removal. The IJ separately denied her application for CAT protection. In the absence of eligibility for any relief, the IJ ordered Chavez-Pineda and A.G.C. removed to Honduras.

Chavez-Pineda appealed to the Board, arguing that the IJ incorrectly determined that she had not proffered a cognizable social group or established the necessary nexus. The Board agreed with the IJ that her proposed social group was not cognizable and that she had not demonstrated that she was targeted based on her membership in her proposed social group. The Board further reasoned that the gang members were motivated by money—particularly because she believed that the gang targeted her for her life insurance benefits—as opposed to animus toward members of her proposed particular social group. The Board therefore dismissed the appeal.¹

In June 2023, while Chavez-Pineda's appeal before the Board was pending, A.G.C. received special immigrant juvenile status, deferring her removal for four years, at which point she would become eligible for adjustment of status. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.11. After the Board dismissed the appeal, Chavez-Pineda and A.G.C. moved to reopen their cases, arguing that the evidence of A.G.C.'s status was not available when Chavez-Pineda had her hearing, and that A.G.C. would experience greater hardship by having to choose between remaining in the United States without her mother or returning to Honduras and losing her special immigrant juvenile status. They argued, in the alternative, that A.G.C.'s case should be severed from her mother's and that A.G.C.'s removal proceedings should be terminated. The Board denied the motion to reopen Chavez-Pineda's case because there was no evidence that her immigration status had changed or that there was any other basis to terminate her proceedings. The Board did, however, sever A.G.C.'s case from her mother's and the same day entered a separate order terminating her proceedings. Chavez-Pineda has since been removed to Honduras.²

¹ Chavez-Pineda did not challenge the IJ's denial of relief under the Convention Against Torture. The Board deemed the challenge waived, (Chavez-Pineda Br. Short App. at A3 n.3), and she does not challenge that conclusion in this petition.

² Chavez-Pineda's removal does not render her petition moot. If she were to succeed, she would no longer be barred under 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(9) from readmission,

Chavez-Pineda maintains that the Board and the IJ erred in denying her applications for asylum and withholding of removal. She argues first that “Honduran single mothers who do not comply with [gang] demands” is a cognizable particular social group. She disputes the Board’s determination that this group is circularly defined by persecution, contending that it is also defined by reference to immutable characteristics shared with others, i.e., gender, parenthood, and past actions. Because, as discussed below, Chavez-Pineda cannot establish the required nexus, we can assume, without deciding, that this is a cognizable particular social group. *See Orellana-Arias v. Sessions*, 865 F.3d 476, 484 (7th Cir. 2017).

Chavez-Pineda next argues that the Board erred in concluding that she failed to establish a nexus between the harm she experienced and her asserted particular social group. We review the Board’s nexus determination for substantial evidence, *de Paz-Peraza v. Bondi*, 140 F.4th 390, 394 (7th Cir. 2025), and the agency’s finding of fact is 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)). The parties dispute whether the Board applied the proper standard for assessing a persecutor’s mixed motives, but we need not decide. It is sufficient to say that Chavez-Pineda needed to prove that her membership in her social group was “one central reason” for the harm. 8 U.S.C. § 1158(b)(1)(B)(i); *Ferreira v. Barr*, 962 F.3d 331, 337–38 (7th Cir. 2020).

Chavez-Pineda’s argument hinges on two lines of evidence: her testimony that the gang targeted her because she was vulnerable as a single mother; and the timing of the threats, particularly because they escalated after she refused to pay. But her testimony that the gang was motivated by her marital status was conclusory, and however suspicious the timing may have been, her evidence would, at best, support an inference that her membership in that group played some role in the harm she suffered. The evidence would not compel a reasonable fact finder to conclude that a central reason she was persecuted was because of her membership in the group. *See de Paz-Peraza*, 140 F.4th at 395 (internal quotation removed) (quoting *Bueso-Avila v. Holder*, 663 F.3d 934, 938 (7th Cir. 2011)). The Board’s contrary conclusion—that she was targeted because of her ability to pay—was supported by substantial evidence, particularly her testimony that the gang believed she had recently received life-insurance benefits.

so there remains a live case or controversy. *See Singh v. Holder*, 720 F.3d 635, 638 (7th Cir. 2013).

Chavez-Pineda also contends that the Board did not adequately explain its reasoning for denying her motion to reopen and ignored her argument that removing her would cause undue hardship to A.G.C. This court reviews “the Board’s denial of reopening for abuse of discretion,” and the Board may deny a motion to reopen if it fails to demonstrate the applicant’s eligibility for relief. *Perez-Perez v. Wilkinson*, 988 F.3d 371, 374 (7th Cir. 2021). The Board may not, however, ignore the evidence presented in the motion. *Arej v. Sessions*, 852 F.3d 665, 667 (7th Cir. 2017). Here, the Board did not ignore the fact that A.G.C. had received special immigrant juvenile status: it severed and terminated A.G.C.’s proceedings for that very reason. The only argument that Chavez-Pineda presented to the Board for why she herself would be eligible for any additional relief was an undeveloped contention that her removal “would raise due process concerns.” But she did not identify any authorities establishing that she had a due process right to remain in the United States, nor are we aware of any. At oral argument, Chavez-Pineda suggested that the Board could have closed or terminated her proceedings. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 1003.18(c), (d). But she did not explain in her motion to reopen why she would be eligible for either form of relief. Because Chavez-Pineda did not provide the Board any basis to grant her relief, the Board was within its discretion to deny the motion.

We close by observing that, although Chavez-Pineda did not prevail in her petition, she received excellent representation before this court.

For the reasons stated, we DENY the petition.