

The Truth Behind U.S. Immigration Policy: Human Development as an Alternative to Border Security

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***Abstract:** In the current American political climate, immigration is a highly contentious issue. As immigration from Central America's Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) increases, the Trump Administration has enacted harsher immigration laws and revamped border security in an attempt to discourage migrants from journeying to the U.S. Historically, U.S. military and economic interventions helped create environments in the region that foster violence and encourage migration. Moreover, the policies adopted by the U.S. following its involvement in Central America have done little to decrease the number of immigrants arriving at the border. Based on historical precedent, increased border security and harsher immigration policies will not successfully decrease the number of immigrants attempting to cross into the U.S. today. Utilizing various case studies concerning U.S.-Latin American relations, this analysis will illustrate the influence that the U.S. had in creating unstable environments in Central America, as well as highlight how socio-economic factors play a much larger role in influencing one's decision to migrate rather than the threat of apprehension at the border. The U.S., therefore, must invest in sustainable development programs that expand human capital if it hopes to reduce the number of immigrants arriving at the southern border.*

I. Introduction

Throughout U.S. history, immigration has been an important element of the development of the U.S. as a diverse and powerful state. Despite these early beginnings, immigrants in the U.S. today face overwhelming amounts of discrimination, particularly those from Mexico and Central America. Hispanic immigration to the U.S. is not a new trend; it began with the Gold Rush in 1848, and has continued ever since. However, political dialogue today frames Hispanic immigrants as new threats who cause violence, commit crimes, and take jobs from American workers. While this mindset is quick to place the blame for hardships on immigrants, the causes for immigration are rooted in the long history of U.S.-Latin American relations in both Mexico and Central America.

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In the early 1900s, the U.S. created the first foreign worker program, calling on Mexican “Braceros” when the country was in economic need and casting them out when work was scarce, thus setting a precedent for immigrating to the U.S. in search of economic prosperity.¹ In Central America, the U.S. maintained a political, military, and economic presence for decades, contributing to environments of instability in several Central American countries that are still prevalent today. These factors combined have left a severe impact on the region, and continue to influence the growing number of immigrants that are arriving at the U.S. Southern Border each year.

Despite its controversial history in Mexico and Central America, the U.S. has taken a rather hard-lined approach to curbing immigration by increasing border security and inflicting harsher punishments on those who cross the border illegally. This approach is counterproductive, as research shows that border security plays a minimal role in the decision to immigrate, while socio-economic conditions that immigrants face in their home countries are much larger determining factors.² For this reason, U.S. immigration policy has done little to stop the flow of migrants from Mexico and Central America into the country. On the other hand, through various policies and strategies, the U.S. has helped create poor socio-economic conditions in Mexico and Central America, while simultaneously encouraging immigration for undocumented workers. As long as poor conditions exist in immigrants’ home countries and there is hope for economic prosperity in the U.S., immigrants will not stop attempting to cross the border. The best approach for the U.S. to limit immigration from these regions is not to increase border security, but to acknowledge the role it played in creating unstable conditions in Latin America and invest in sustainable development programs in Mexico and Central America that encourage human development. By investing in programs that promote inclusive economic growth, the U.S. can improve socioeconomic conditions and reduce the need for migrants to seek work in the United States.

II. The Controversial History of U.S. - Central American Relations

Before examining the current immigration crisis, it is crucial to understand the controversial history of U.S. intervention in Central America. For decades, U.S. intervention helped destabilize political systems and disrupted economies, creating instability that lingers today, which cultivates environments that are ripe for corruption and violence. Following World War II, Central America’s location made the region extremely important for U.S. interests. For this reason, the U.S. felt it necessary to protect and preserve relations at all costs. During the Cold War, Latin America became a battleground for outside actors to influence development. In an effort to spread communism across the globe, the Soviet Union expanded influence and supported revolutionary movements in the developing world, including in Latin America.³ In response, Washington enacted the economic program Alliance for Progress, which gave large sums of economic assistance to the region, and deployed covert and direct military action to

¹Gilbert Carrasco, “Latinos in the United States: Invitation and Exile.” in *The Latino Condition, Second Edition*. ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. (New York: New York University Press, 2011):79-80

²Wayne A. Cornelius and Idean Salehyan, “Does Border Enforcement Deter Unauthorized Immigration? The Case of Mexican Migration to the United States of America” *Regulation & Governance* 1, no. 2 (June 2007): 145

³Hal Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 37

counter Soviet efforts.⁴ While U.S. intervention led to the failure of revolutions in Central America, it did not necessarily bring victories to the region for the countries impacted. U.S.-backed leaders led to violent military regimes and unstable democracies that prevented social and economic recovery. Consequently, the end of the Cold War prompted an increase in violence in Central America, and new conflicts emerged such as the illegal drug trade.⁵ Today, this lingering violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras forces millions of migrants to immigrate to the U.S. Southern Border each year.

El Salvador

El Salvador is the smallest mainland country in Central America, yet it has one of the highest numbers of immigrants fleeing to the United States each year. During the 2014 immigration crisis, nearly 10,000 Salvadoran children were apprehended alone at the U.S. Border.⁶ The country is ripe with violence and has one of the highest murder rates in the world. In 2015, El Salvador experienced 105 homicides per 100,000 people.⁷ This violence is a result of the country's bloody civil war, in which the U.S. had a heavy military presence.

Between 1961 and 1965, the U.S. initiative Alliance for Progress gave more aid to El Salvador than any other country in the region, with the goal of supporting military governments to avoid Communist threats and political reforms.⁸ However, the Alliance did little to help peasant populations, and El Salvador soon ranked in the top five countries in the world for most malnourished people.⁹ In 1970, following a failed promise of agrarian reform, armed rebels began to operate in El Salvador. By this time, there was a strong U.S. military presence in the country; Salvadoran officers were trained at the U.S.-run School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone, and U.S. military advisors were placed in El Salvador in 1968.¹⁰ Another failed coup in 1979 arguably sparked the Salvadoran Civil War, in which the Salvadoran army, backed by the U.S., attempted to curtail the efforts of the leftist insurgency group, Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN).¹¹ The civil war was marked by right wing death squads of the Salvadoran army, which committed atrocious acts of violence against civilians. From the start of the war in 1980 until its end in 1992, nearly 75,000 Salvadoran civilians were killed,¹²

⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

⁶ Jens Manuel Krogstad and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Number of Latino Children Trying to Enter U.S. Nearly Doubles in Less Than a Year," *Pew Research Center*. June 10, 2014. Accessed September 30, 2018 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/10/number-of-latino-children-caught-trying-to-enter-u-s-nearly-doubles-in-less-than-a-year/>

⁷ The World Bank, "Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 People)," 2015. Accessed September 1, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>

⁸ David W. Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine: A Reference Guide to U.S. Involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999): 173.

⁹ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993): 176.

¹⁰ Ibid, 177.

¹¹ Mike Allison. "El Salvador's Brutal Civil War: What We Still Don't Know," *Al Jazeera*. March 1, 2012. Accessed September 15, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/2012228123122975116.html>

¹² Allison, "El Salvador's Brutal Civil War".

and nearly 1 million were displaced as refugees in neighboring Honduras, Mexico, and in the United States.¹³

Instability in El Salvador today can be traced back to the civil war. Following the war, a truth commission in El Salvador found that 85 percent of human rights violations had been committed by government forces backed by the U.S. military.¹⁴ In 1993, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly enacted the Amnesty Law, which granted amnesty to all of those accused of human rights violations during the civil war.¹⁵ Consequently many people in El Salvador who made a living from violence as members of death squads and other military-related activities were suddenly pardoned and left without a source of income, as the military budget was reduced significantly and the U.S. no longer provided large sums of military aid. Many of these people turned to new illicit activities for income, such as joining gangs or the international drug trade between South America and the United States. Further, many Salvadoran refugee youth who fled to the United States during the war were deported back to El Salvador and continued the spread of gang violence that they had been exposed to in Los Angeles.¹⁶ Today, El Salvador is one of the most violent peacetime countries in the world, primarily due to fighting between powerful street gangs. Government corruption and a lack of police resources allow violence in the country to continue, which pushes more and more Salvadoran citizens to flee to the United States.

Guatemala

The United States has had arguably the most direct involvement in Guatemala than any other Central American state. Guatemala was the primary location for the Boston-based company, the United Fruit Company (UFC), which first began banana production in Guatemala in 1908. By 1950, it controlled close to 40,000 jobs in the country and cultivated 85 percent of the tropical lowlands suitable for banana production, leaving little room for other local farmers or producers.¹⁷ Further, the UFC subsidiary, International Railways of Central America, owned nearly all of the railways in Guatemala. During this time, UFC was known to enlist the help of dictators who provided large sums of land, ensured limited government regulation, and installed low taxes.

The interests of U.S. business in Guatemala were a large determining factor as to why the U.S. intervened in the country's government. In 1951, Jacobo Arbenz was elected to the presidency. Arbenz's policies pushed Guatemala's politics to the left, seizing 1.5 million acres of plantations from large corporations, including UFC, and dispersing them to rural farmers.¹⁸ Further, Arbenz legalized the communist party, sending more alarms to the U.S. State Department of possible communist insurgencies in Guatemala.¹⁹ For officials in Washington,

¹³ Joaquín M. Chávez, "How Did the Civil War in El Salvador End?" *American Historical Review* 120, no.5 (December 2015): 1784

¹⁴ Chavéz, "How Did the Salvadoran Civil War End?" 1792-1793.

¹⁵ Geoff Thale, "Amnesty Under Fire in El Salvador: Legal Challenges and Political Implications," *Washington Office on Latin America*. October 21, 2013. Accessed September 5, 2018 <https://www.wola.org/analysis/amnesty-under-fire-in-el-salvador-legal-challenges-and-political-implications/>

¹⁶ Michael Wilkerson, "Security and Democracy in El Salvador: An Undeniable Connection," *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 1 (2008): 39

¹⁷ Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine*, 197.

¹⁸ Moye, "The United States Intervention in Guatemala", 45.

¹⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 116.

these factors were enough to justify CIA intervention in Guatemala.²⁰ Citing the protection of U.S. security interests against communism, the Eisenhower administration made the decision to overthrow democratically-elected Arbenz in an effort dubbed “Operation Success.” The CIA staged Operation Success through Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, a former military leader who was exiled for a coup-attempt against Arbenz. The U.S. provided Castillo Armas with bomber planes, weapons, and financial and logistical aid.²¹ In 1954, he led 200 troops from the Honduran border and deployed bomber planes from Nicaragua to overthrow Arbenz. The U.S. then helped secure Castillo Armas as the new leader of Guatemala, who quickly overturned reforms of Arbenz and returned the state to a military regime marked by corruption and oppression.²² Castillo Armas was succeeded by a string of dictators, which marked the start of a 36-year civil war in 1960. In the late 1960s and early 70s, the Pentagon spent 12 million USD annually to support the Guatemalan army.²³ Between 1954 and 1990, military governments were responsible for the deaths of over 100,000 Guatemalans and the disappearance of 50,000.²⁴

Poor socio-economic conditions in Guatemala today can be attributed to the decades-long violence brought on by the civil war. Because of the length of the war, many families were left with an inferior education and lack of opportunities, which resulted in generations of deep-rooted poverty.²⁵ Many male youth were recruited into armed groups, thus suffering from a lack of education. These children were then less likely to have skilled jobs and more likely to earn lower wages. The war also had a strong negative impact for Mayan children, whose villages were frequent targets of death squads. Many schools were destroyed, as well as families’ homes and sources of livelihood. For rural Mayan children, education during the war decreased by up to 30 percent.²⁶ Because of these conditions, many adults who were children during the war lost the opportunity to gain an education. These populations are still facing extreme poverty today.

Today, nearly 60 percent of the population in Guatemala lives in poverty.²⁷ For this reason, thousands of Guatemalan citizens each year immigrate to the U.S. border in search of better socio-economic conditions to improve their standard of living. In January of 2018 alone, 1,000 Guatemalans were deported from the U.S. and sent back to their home country. However, most Guatemalan citizens are unable to find a job without a formal education. Each year, 140,000 young people enter the labor force in the country, yet only 2 of 10 will find a job in the formal sector.²⁸ Seeing no other options, immigrants will continue to migrate from Guatemala until these conditions are improved.

²⁰ Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine*, 200.

²¹ Moye, “The United States Intervention in Guatemala,” 48.

²² *Ibid*, 49.

²³ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 170.

²⁴ Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine*, 204

²⁵ Rubiana Chamarbagwala and Hilcías C. Morán, “The Human Capital Consequences of Civil War: Evidence from Guatemala,” *Journal of Development Economics*, 94, no.1 (January 2011): 44

²⁶ *Ibid*, 43.

²⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, “Guatemala,” *World Factbook*, October 17, 2018. Accessed October 22, 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html>

²⁸ María Martín, “Nothing for us Here: Deported Guatemalans Plan to Return to U.S.,” *NBC News*. March 29, 2018. Accessed July 10, 2018 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/nothing-us-here-deported-guatemalans-plan-return-u-s-n858231>

Honduras

Like El Salvador, Honduras today faces one of the highest homicide rates in the international community. From 2012-2016, the capital, San Pedro Sula, was one of the top three most dangerous cities in the world. In 2011, the country of Honduras had an overall homicide rate of 85 per 100 thousand people. The rate has since fallen to 56.5 per 100,000, yet it remains significantly higher than the global average of 5.3.²⁹ These high murder rates cause thousands of Honduran citizens to flee to the U.S. border each year. During the 2014 immigration crisis, from October 1, 2013 until May 31, 2014, 13,282 unaccompanied minors from Honduras arrived at the U.S. southern border.³⁰ The conditions in Honduras that influence high homicide rates are a result of a century-long battle to gain financial independence that left the Honduran economy in an unstable condition. Today, a lack of economic development creates an environment suitable for violence.

Honduras is often considered the original “banana republic”; throughout the twentieth century, U.S. fruit companies took full advantage of the country’s low economic development. Banana companies meddled in Honduran politics by bribing government officials in favor of lenient labor laws that catered to company demands, and gave permission to build ports and railroads.³¹ By 1914, banana companies held nearly a million acres of fertile land in Honduras.³² In 1954, the United States began to equip the Honduran military with the means to transform into a professional military. Washington later provided financial and technical assistance, including modern equipment and advanced training at the U.S. Army School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone.

U.S. efforts to transform the military were successful; following a military coup in 1956, the armed forces became independent of the elected government in Honduras, which allowed it to control Honduran politics for the next 30 years with the support of the United States.³³ Under the administrations of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, the U.S. took advantage of Honduras’ dependence on U.S. economic investments and utilized the country and its central location as an anti-communist tool. By the mid-1980s, the U.S. provided more than 3.5 million USD in military aid, which gave the military the capacity to patrol the border regions and confront the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and assist the Salvadoran military regime.³⁴

Following the end of the Cold War and communist threats in neighboring countries, the U.S. no longer saw a need to continue providing military aid to Honduras. However, since the end of the Cold War, Honduras has still faced political unrest. Today, gang violence remains one of the largest barriers to development for Honduras and the cause for the country's high levels of violence. While Honduras did not have its own civil war, it served as a base for U.S intervention in several military invasions. As a result, Honduras felt the impacts of instability in other nearby states, and was unable to recover its economy from the impacts of banana companies. This history has created an environment in Honduras suitable for poverty and violence. Honduran citizens each year face the threat of death by gangs and are forced to pay extortion payments for

²⁹ The World Bank, “Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 People).”

³⁰ Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera, “Number of Latino Children Trying to Enter U.S. Nearly Doubles in Less Than a Year.”

³¹ Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine*, 236.

³² LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 46

³³ *Ibid*, 239.

³⁴ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 264.

themselves or their loved ones, totaling \$200 million USD each year.³⁵ Under these conditions, many Hondurans see no other option but to flee to the U.S. border for protection.

III. History and Flaws of U.S. Immigration Policy

In addition to U.S. military involvement in Central America, it is also critical to understand the trends in U.S. immigration policies and how they relate to the current immigration crisis. While its military and political interventions in Latin America have contributed to increased immigration from the region, the U.S. has a controversial history regarding immigration policy toward Hispanics. Throughout its history, the U.S. has frequently called upon Hispanic immigrants, particularly from Mexico, to fill labor shortages in times of economic prosperity, thus setting a precedent for migrants to come to the U.S. in search of work. Nonetheless, current and former U.S. border control policies do not reflect this economic dependence on immigrants for cheap labor.

Hispanic immigrants have been arriving to the United States for the past century and a half due to labor shortages and surpluses in the U.S. economy. Mexican laborers have often acted as a “disposable labor force” to fill jobs in the United States when needed.³⁶ When WWI presented the need for increased labor in the United States, Congress allowed entry into the U.S. for Mexican laborers under a temporary work program. The program extended until 1922, and was then re-visited when the U.S. entered into WWII. In 1942, the U.S. government implemented the Mexican Labor Program, also known as the Bracero Program, allowing Mexican workers to once again gain temporary legal status to fill labor shortages in the U.S.³⁷ Temporary workers on the Bracero programs not only filled necessary labor gaps, but also contributed significantly to the U.S. economy. However, as soon as jobs were no longer available to them, Mexican migrants were treated with cruelty and intolerance. During the Great Depression, immigrants were blamed for economic hardships. Many were threatened out of their homes and jobs, and eventually were driven out of the country. Following WWII, even Mexican Americans who served in the armed forces were met with discrimination. Fallen soldiers were refused burials and veterans were often denied service in restaurants.³⁸

In 1952, the H-2 program under the McCarran-Walter Act was enacted as a follow-up to the Bracero Program, which allowed the Department of Labor to fill temporary jobs with foreign labor. Nonetheless, “Operation Wetback” in 1954 simultaneously created border control policies to prevent illegal immigration and deport immigrants already in the U.S. From 1954 to 1959, the operation deported 3.7 million Hispanics, including U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent, with only 63,500 deported through formal proceedings.³⁹ In 1986, under President Ronald Reagan, the U.S. passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which gave legal status to immigrants who had been in the country since January of 1982. However, the policy also tried to

³⁵ Rocio Cara Labrador and Danielle Renwick, “Central America’s Violent Northern Triangle,” *Council on Foreign Relations*. June 26, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2018 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>

³⁶ Carasco, “Latinos in the United States: Invitation and Exile,” 78.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 80-81.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 82.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 84-85.

discourage immigration by prohibiting employers from hiring undocumented immigrants without proof of residency.⁴⁰

In more recent history, immigration policies have been no less unforgiving. Policies in the 1990s were created specifically to deter migrants from crossing the U.S. border by placing them directly in harm's way. This border control strategy, known as "Prevention through Deterrence," began by placing increased border security near popular border crossings, thus forcing migrants to look toward other routes.⁴¹ Many were forced to cross through the Sonoran Desert, one of the most remote and desolate places in the country. The idea behind this policy was that, faced with the dangers of the desert, migrants would be deterred from attempting a border crossing. However, the policy forced migrants to cross through dangerous conditions, often resulting in severe dehydration, injuries, and death. Many migrants also faced rape, assault, and theft from thugs and coyotes. The policy was successful in pushing migration from El Paso, though it did not decrease the number of attempts at crossing the border. The number of migrants caught by border patrol in the Tucson sector of Arizona increased from 92,639 people in 1993 to 616,346 people in 2000. Further, from 2000 to 2014, nearly 3,000 bodies of immigrants were recovered in Southern Arizona, 800 of which were unidentified.⁴²

Contemporary Policies

The varying policies throughout the twentieth century show how U.S. opinion toward immigration has constantly changed; some policies have encouraged immigration, while others have tried to deter it. Today, the Trump administration has taken a number of anti-immigration initiatives in response to immigration from Central America. Early in his presidential term, Trump ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for certain Central American countries, and attempted to eliminate Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which both provide legal protection to immigrants in the United States. In May of 2018, Trump enacted the Zero Tolerance Policy, which separated migrant children from their parents when they arrived at the border, in an effort to deter immigrants from attempting the cross. In the near future, nearly 350,000 immigrants in the United States may lose legal status due to the termination of TPS, and as of June 2018, over 2,000 migrant children had been separated from their parents while attempting to cross the border.⁴³

President Trump has also begun to enhance border security. The U.S. border currently is home to a partial border fence, security cameras, thermal sensors, x-rays, and over 20,000 border control agents.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, President Trump has strained U.S.-Mexican relations by expressing his desire to construct a border wall for the sole purpose of keeping migrants out of the United States. The proposed border wall would cover approximately 1,000 miles of the U.S. Southern Border. Trump initially estimated the cost of the wall at 10-12 billion USD. The Department of Homeland Security later estimated approximately 22 billion USD.⁴⁵ Trump has insisted Mexico will cover expenses for the wall, but the requests have gone unmet. Nonetheless,

⁴⁰ Karen Tumulty, "Why Immigration Reform Fell Short," *The Washington Post*. February 3, 2013. Accessed October 19, 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/why-immigration-reform-fell-short/2013/02/03/fbb643aa-6be7-11e2-8740-9b58f43c191a_story.html?utm_term=.ec04b1f7cd40

⁴¹ Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. (Oakland, University of California Press, 2015): 31

⁴² Ibid, 35.

⁴³ Labrador and Renwick, "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle."

⁴⁴ Aj Jazeera, "Trump's Border Wall Explained," March 30 2017. Accessed December 2018.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/mexico-border-wall-stake-170327135349790.html>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Trump has continued to advocate for harsher action against immigration, called on Mexico to stop Central Americans before they reach the U.S., and utilized the U.S. military for immigration-related issues. In October 2018, nearly 4,000 Hondurans left their country in a migrant “caravan” heading to the U.S. border. As the group traveled north, immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala joined as well.⁴⁶ In response, Trump ordered 5,000 U.S. troops to the Mexican border,⁴⁷ who utilized tear gas against the first wave of the caravan that arrived in Tijuana Mexico. The caravan included children and migrants who had begun the process of applying for asylum in the United States.⁴⁸

Do Policies Work?

Despite Trump’s increased attention to border security and immigration policies, many migrant families claim that they will not be deterred from attempting to make the journey across the border. It is a common belief that if the U.S. increases border control, creates harsher policies, and makes it more difficult and dangerous to cross the border, immigrants will be deterred from making the journey. However, this argument fails to consider conditions that exist in immigrants' home countries. Decades of economic dominance and political unrest have created environments suitable for poverty and violence relating to gangs and drug cartels. Gangs such as MS-13 and the 18th Street gang rule the streets of large cities like San Salvador and San Pedro Sula. Gang members abduct citizens and force them to pay taxes, ransom, or extortion payments to gang leaders. In total, extortion payments demanded by gang members in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are equivalent to nearly 700,000 USD annually. El Salvador pays the highest amount, at roughly 400,000 USD per year.⁴⁹ Those who cannot pay face death threats, or are forced to join the gangs themselves. The death of children in these countries is also not unusual, as authorities in San Pedro Sula claim they regularly receive bodies of children under 10 years-old.⁵⁰ Citizens of the Northern Triangle, especially those living in poverty, may face three options: join a gang, be killed, or flee the country. For many families who cannot afford to pay ransom or extortion payments to gangs, the risk of staying is too great. Parents instead choose to send their children alone to the U.S. border, or they flee the country with their children in tow, regardless of any dangers that await them on the migrant trail, or threats at the U.S. border⁵¹

⁴⁶ Kevin Sieff and Joshua Partlow, “How the Migrant Caravan Became so Big and why it Continues to Grow,” *The Washington Post*. October 23, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-americas/how-the-migrant-caravan-became-so-big-and-why-its-continuing-to-grow/2018/10/23/88abf1a6-d631-11e8-8384-bcc5492fef49_story.html?utm_term=.4790a8f7f336

⁴⁷ The Associated Press, “US to Cut Troops Along Mexico Border but Extend Deployment,” *The New York Times*. November 20, 2018. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/aonline/2018/11/30/us/politics/ap-us-border-troops.html>

⁴⁸ Megan Specia and Rick Gladstone, “Border Agents Shot Tear Gas Into Mexico. Was It Legal?” *The New York Times*. November 28, 2018. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/world/americas/tear-gas-border.html>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Frances Robles, “Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border,” *New York Times*. July 9, 2014. Accessed October 19, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/world/americas/fleeing-gangs-children-head-to-us-border.html>

⁵¹ Susan Gamboa, Mariana Atencio and Gabe Gutierrez, “Why are so Many Migrants Crossing the U.S. Border? It Starts with an Escape from Violence in Central America,” *NBC News*. June 20, 2018. Accessed October 19, 2018

Poor conditions that encourage migration from Central America are nothing new; immigrants have consistently chosen to migrate to the U.S. Border regardless of circumstances in the U.S. or U.S. immigration policies. A 1994 study in response to IRCA found little support that enforcement strategies are an effective deterrent to immigrants and that there was no association between the perceived threat of apprehension at the border and the decision to migrate.⁵² The study also found that while IRCA may have had an impact on the number of border crossing attempts in its first year of implementation, by year two the effects had worn off entirely.⁵³ A 2007 study analyzing border enforcement strategies since 1993 found similar results in response to Prevention through Deterrence measures. Researchers interviewed 603 returned or new migrants from Mexico and found that while 80 percent felt it was very dangerous to cross the border, and 72 percent were aware of increased border security, 51 percent claimed they were still planning an attempt to immigrate to the U.S.⁵⁴ Therefore, the border control policies did not deter immigrants, but instead led them to utilize different, and often more dangerous, strategies to cross the border.

Migrants frequently cross in hazardous areas of the border region, and are more likely to utilize coyotes, or illegal smugglers who charge thousands of dollars per migrant. Migrants have also had a high success rate; in the era of Prevention through Deterrence, 97 percent of migrants apprehended were eventually able to gain entry to the U.S.⁵⁵ Current proposed border security strategies will likely yield very similar results, particularly President Trump's wall. Currently, there is fencing covering 548 miles of the U.S. southern border. The fence was created through the Secure Fence Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2006. The initial construction of the fence cost 2.3 billion USD.⁵⁶ Despite the high cost, the fence did little to reduce immigration from Mexico and Central America; the act decreased the number of Mexican citizens living in the U.S. by .06 percent, while simultaneously decreasing U.S. GDP by 2.5 billion USD due to losses of labor.⁵⁷ At the same time, while the U.S. did see a decrease in immigrants from Mexico following the Secure Fence Act, immigration numbers from all other regions did not change, except in Central America, where the number of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S from the region increased from 1.5 million in 2007 to 1.9 million in 2016.⁵⁸

While the U.S. continues to invest in high-tech border security and enact harsher immigration policies, the rate at which immigrants travel to the U.S. has continued to increase. Policies have failed to address the root causes of immigration, which include the demand for immigrant labor, the hope of economic security in the United States, and the desire to flee unsafe and poor socio-economic conditions. Because these problems are rooted in the history of

https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/immigration-border-crisis/central-america-s-violence-turmoil-keeps-driving-families-u-s-n884956?cid=sm_npd_nn_tw_nw

⁵² Thomas J Espenshade, "Does the Threat of Border Apprehension Deter Undocumented Immigration?" *Population and Development Review* 20, no.4 (1994): 886

⁵³ Ibid, 880,

⁵⁴ Cornelius and Salehyan, "Does Border Enforcement Deter Unauthorized Immigration?" 145.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 150.

⁵⁶ The Economist, "The Big, Beautiful Border Wall America Built Ten Years Ago," November 22, 2018. Accessed December 5, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2018/11/24/the-big-beautiful-border-wall-america-built-ten-years-ago?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/ed/thebigbeautifulborderwallamericabuilttenyearsagoconstruction>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, "5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*. November 28, 2018. Accessed December 5, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/28/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

violence and civil wars in Central America and foreign labor practices with Mexico, they cannot be solved by increasing spending on technology and walls to secure the border, or creating policies that endanger the lives of migrants. President Trump's current immigration and border control policies will most likely show a repeat in the trends of policies enacted prior to his administration, in that they will do little to prevent immigration, and will be waste of U.S efforts and resources. Instead, to decrease the number of immigrants attempting to cross the border, the U.S. should increase investment in development programs in Central America that focus on human development and the growth of human capital, such as education and job growth.

IV. Human Development as a Response to Immigration

Several recent administrations have responded to the violence in Central America with economic policies. President George W. Bush established the Millennium Challenge Corporation and increased trade and free-market reforms. President Obama provided aid through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), which aimed to help the region's law enforcement, counter-narcotic groups, and justice systems. CARSI also aligned with the Inter-American Development Bank initiative, Alliance for Prosperity (A4P), which promoted commerce and security in the region.⁵⁹ However, these policies all focused primarily on strengthening macro-economic relations and security rather than improving conditions for citizens that face violence daily on a micro level. A history of civil war and structural violence has a large negative impact on human capital in any state; countries that have experienced a recent civil war are much more likely to have populations living in extreme poverty below one dollar per day.⁶⁰

While many development programs have historically aimed to improve physical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges etc., this cannot be the initial approach in regions like Central America's Northern Triangle, where decades of violence created entire generations of citizens lacking the skills needed to pull themselves from extreme poverty. Instead of children going to school, or adults working formal sector jobs, citizens in these countries who cannot secure income flee their homes in search of better opportunities, or turn to other forms of security, such as gangs and cartels, which further exacerbates structural violence.⁶¹ Globally, crimes are committed disproportionately by young males with low access to education. This is especially true in the Northern Triangle region where male youth are frequently recruited into gangs, such as MS-13. Therefore, programs focused on human development, including education, health and job skills, are much more effective for creating social change, as they help to lower the opportunity cost of committing crimes.⁶² Each additional year spent in school increases income by ten percent, while healthy children are much more productive in school and therefore more likely to see increased wages and opportunities.⁶³ These increased opportunities thus help to reduce crime long-term, and increase economic and political stability.

⁵⁹ Labrador and Renwick, "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle."

⁶⁰ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About it*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2007. p. 17

⁶¹ Ibid, 21.

⁶² Mauricio Rivera and Barbara Zarate-Tenorio, "Beyond Sticks and Stones: Human Capital Enhancement Efforts in Response to Violent Crimes in Latin America," *European Journal of Political Research* 94. (August 2016): 535

⁶³ Jim Yong Kim, "The Human Capital Gap: Getting Governments to Invest in People," *Council on Foreign Relations* 97, no. 4 (July/August 2018): 93-94

Human capital programs have helped to reduce poverty across the globe. Throughout the 1990s, Ghana doubled its federal spending on education, which led to large improvements in primary school enrollment rates. By 2012, Ghana's literacy rates had improved 64 percent, and poverty fell from 61 percent to 13 percent.⁶⁴ Similarly, in Kenya, a 2015 study found that providing children with deworming medicine improved school attendance and raised wages in adulthood by up to 20 percent.⁶⁵ Development programs prioritizing human capital have also been successful in other Latin American countries. Created in 1997, PROGRESA was a conditional cash transfer (CCT) program in Mexico that offered monetary compensation to families living in poverty in exchange for sending their children to school and seeking preventative care. Families were given more money for children in secondary school. During a pilot project for the program, secondary school enrollment increased by nearly ten percent for females and five percent for males.⁶⁶

In Brazil, similar emphasis on social programs has helped to decrease extreme poverty levels. President Fernando Enrique Cardoso, who held office in Brazil from 1995 until 2003, was known for his programs for human development. During his presidency, he created the income transfer program "Bolsa-Escola" which provided monetary subsidies to families for enrolling their children in school and bringing them to health clinics. In total, the program reached 5 million families across Brazil.⁶⁷ He also improved the quality of education by enacting a program that increased salaries for teachers by half in the state of Alagoas, and hiring more teachers that were college graduates.⁶⁸ His successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, continued Cardoso's focus on social policies, and emphasized social deterioration as the cause of violence.⁶⁹ By the end of Lula's presidency in 2010, 20 million Brazilians had been lifted out of extreme poverty.⁷⁰

Investment in human development does have certain disadvantages. Firstly, some human capital programs, such as those dedicated to education, may take years, or decades to show results. Therefore, politicians may lack incentives to support these policies. Further, governments attempting to transfer funds from tangible infrastructure programs to programs that cannot be easily measured may cause unease in populations that already have low rates of government trust. However, as more populations feel the need for social change, the more likely citizens are to demand these changes in their communities. In Peru, for example, in 2006, civil society groups that saw a need for improvements successfully led campaigns that pushed politicians to place health issues for children on policy agendas.⁷¹

In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, where unrest grows and citizens' needs are continuously unmet, it is likely that human development programs will be met with optimism. As previously mentioned, nearly 4,000 Hondurans joined in a migrant caravan heading to the U.S.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁶ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, (New York: Public Affairs), 2011. p. 79

⁶⁷ The Economist, "Targeting the Poor," August 14, 2003. December 5, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/the-america/2003/08/14/targeting-the-poor>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Rivera and Zarate-Tenorio, "Beyond Sticks and Stones," 537.

⁷⁰ Tom Phillips, "Lula Era Comes to an End in Brazil," *The Guardian*. December 31, 2010. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/31/brazil-lula-era-ends>

⁷¹ Kim, "The Human Capital Gap," 96-97.

border in the final months of 2018.⁷² Immigrants in the caravan cited various reasons for migrating. Some fled threats from MS-13 gang members, while others left in search of jobs that can help them fulfill basic needs of their children, such as food and clothing.⁷³ Migrants who had reached the U.S. border in Tijuana were quoted saying that despite the troops at the border and tear gas attacks, they could not return to their home countries, as they were fleeing gang recruitment.⁷⁴ Nearly all fled due to issues resulting from a lack of human development in their home countries. While President Trump threatened to militarize the southern border with Mexico in response to the caravan, the migrants continued their journey north, showcasing how their need for better opportunities outweighs any threat of border security.⁷⁵

V. Conclusion

There are several arguments as to why immigration is beneficial for the United States, which include both cultural and economic reasons. In today's globalized world, it is highly unlikely that any administration will be able to stop immigration from Central America entirely. Regardless, the current measures pursued by the Trump administration, the Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies, as shown throughout history, are not successful methods to limit or reduce immigration. The military and economic role the United States played in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras throughout the mid to late 1990s, combined with policies that encouraged foreign workers to immigrate to the U.S., have contributed to unstable environments of poverty and violence. For citizens living in these countries, the threat of border security and immigration policies is not enough to quell their desires to seek a better life across the southern border. To reduce the number of migrants arriving at the border, the U.S. should refocus efforts from border security and invest in programs that, in conjunction with local governments and international organizations, can improve the conditions for citizens of the Northern Triangle, thus reducing the need for migrants to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

⁷² Kevin Sieff and Joshua Partlow, "How the Migrant Caravan Became so Big and why it Continues to Grow."

⁷³ Danielle Volpe and Kirk Semple, "Voices from the Caravan: Why These Honduran Migrants are Heading North," *The New York Times*. October 18, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/18/world/americas/honduras-migrant-caravan-voices.html?smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur>

⁷⁴ Maya Averbuch, and Elisabeth Malkin, "Migrants in Tijuana Run to U.S. Border, but Fall Back in Face of Tear Gas," *The New York Times*. November 25, 2018. Accessed December 4, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/25/world/americas/tijuana-mexico-border.html>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

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