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## Central American Migration Patterns: How the actions of the United States have impacted emigration from the Northern Triangle of Central America

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Central American Migration Patterns:  
How the actions of the United States have impacted emigration from the Northern Triangle of  
Central America

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HONORS PROJECT

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**Abstract:**

This paper is based on the fact that there is a growing number of Americans who feel negatively about immigrants, especially from Latin America. However, these people do not consider what role their own country plays in these migration patterns. There has been an increase in migration from Central America, specifically the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and there has been research by experts on what has caused this migration surge. Some of these reasons include political and economic instability. However, a lesser explored reason in the field and a reason that is likely not considered by the average person is the involvement the United States has had in these countries. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the United States involved themselves in the politics of Central America which has consequently damaged these countries. The research question this paper will strive to answer is “To what extent has the United States’ past involvement in the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras impacted the emigration patterns of these countries today?”

This paper will use the events of the Guatemalan Revolution, the Salvadoran Civil War, and the Honduran coup d’état to demonstrate the involvement of the United States. All three of these events were orchestrated at the hands of the United States and had a large impact on their respected countries. These three events, and therefore the United States, continues to impact these three countries today, and also can be traced to many of the reasons why people choose to migrate. The United States has a responsibility for the migration surge out of Central America due to reasons such as instigating violence and by destroying governments which has left a lasting political instability.

**Introduction:**

More than 1 million immigrants enter the United States every year (Budiman). In recent years, the United States has seen a large number of these immigrants coming from Latin America, specifically the countries known as the “Northern Triangle of Central America” which consists of the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Border Control at the United States’ Southern Border is also seeing an increase of apprehensions of people emigrating from the Northern Triangle. In 2021, 41% of all encounters United States Border Control had at the Southern Border were with people attempting to enter the United States from the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America, compared to only 37% of encounters being with people from Mexico attempting to cross the border (“Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy”). The large number of immigrants seen entering the United States from these three countries has people questioning why these people are packing up everything and leaving their countries. While there are answers such as violence, poverty, and the increase of natural disasters

these countries have seen due to climate change, this paper will examine the idea that the actions of the United States are somewhat responsible for this emigration wave. Through looking at the United States involvement in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras this paper will examine how the United States has been involved in these countries in the past and how this involvement continues to impact the countries today. While the involvement covered in this paper focuses on the 20th and 21st centuries, US involvement in Latin America in general can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Monroe Doctrine, showing that this has been an ongoing issue.

Throughout the 20th and early 21st century the United States involved themselves in the politics of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. These past actions of the United States negatively impacted these countries and have continued to have a negative impact today, thus influencing migration patterns out of these countries.

### **Literature Review:**

Due to the large number of immigrants from Central America's Northern Triangle entering the United States, it has become a widely studied topic. With this increase of scientific interest has come many different views on why people are choosing to emigrate out of Central America, specifically the countries that make up the Northern Triangle of Central America. Some of the major reasons explored through the current literature on why people emigrate from the Northern Triangle of Central America are political instability and violence, poverty and unemployment, and climate change (Ruiz Soto 9-27). These three topics are what a majority of the literature in the area of study of Central American immigration revolves around.

### **Political Instability**

One common school of thought as to why people emigrate from Central America is that people emigrate due to political instability which is driven by violence in the Northern Triangle

of Central America. These two issues, political instability and violence, also lead to other issues which are reasons people choose to migrate, such as drug trafficking, gangs, and human trafficking. Decreased living standards, caused by political and economic instability in itself is a form of violence and also contributes to other forms of violence, such as revolutions, civil wars, or gangs (Rios 310). Some popular ideas among the literature in this school of thought are that many people currently immigrating to the United States from the countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America are families or unaccompanied children. When families or children migrate, many scholars point to the causes of violence and thus political instability as drivers of migration. For example, in 2012 all three of the countries that make up the Northern Triangle of Central America were in the top five of what are considered the most murderous countries in the world, with Honduras coming in first, El Salvador fourth, and Guatemala fifth. (Stinchcomb 18). Many scholars in the field, such as Stinchomb and Hershberg, point to this violence, mainly led by gangs, combined with the corruption of the police, caused by political instability, as a reason why people migrate from these countries. Other sources, such as the Congressional Research Center point to the widespread drug trafficking and human trafficking, led by gangs and continues to be allowed due to the political instability, as reasons why people migrate (“Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy”). Overall, one reason for emigration out of Central America that has been widely explored through literature is political instability which consequently leads to violence, gangs, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

### Economic Instability

Another explanation for migration out of Central America that has been studied in the current literature on the topic is poverty and unemployment. The countries of Central America’s Northern Triangle have high unemployment rates and therefore high poverty rates. These two

factors are things that many experts in the field point to when considering why people are migrating out of Central America. In a similar way, scholars who think that people are migrating due to violence and political instability point to the fact that there are many minors and families migrating, scholars who look more at economic reasons for migration use that there are also many single adults migrating as evidence. For example, Clark says, “the fact that these immigrants tended to be adults (and probably young adults) suggests that they were responding primarily to labor market forces, rather than to political instability or violence at home” (Clark). Furthermore, surveys conducted by the Migration Policy Institute found that recent migrants from the Northern Triangle move primarily for economic reasons such as unemployment, as shown in Appendix A Figure 1 (Ruiz Soto 27). From these high rates of poverty and unemployment also comes a high rate of food insecurity. This has become a hot topic for research on why people are migrating, reaching all the way to the United Nations. In 2021 the United Nation’s World Food Programme released a report stating that those in Central America who experience food insecurity are three times more likely to make plans to migrate than those who do not experience food insecurity (UN World Food Programme). Overall, high rates of unemployment which thus causes high rates of poverty and food insecurity is a reason for migration that currently has been widely explored by experts in the field.

### Climate Change

Lastly, a reason as for why people are migrating out of Central America is climate change and the subsequent natural disasters that have resulted. Many of these scholars point to the fact that many immigrants are coming from what is known as “Central America’s Dry Corridor”. This region stretches from Mexico to Panama and includes a group of countries that have experienced extreme droughts in recent years as a result of climate change, with Guatemala and

Honduras having the worst droughts (Tower). Since many of those who live in Central America are farmers or rely on the land, these droughts then also lead to many people having economic instability or food insecurity. Also, according to the World Meteorological Organization, Central America is one of the regions of the world that is most impacted by climate change. (América Latina) Therefore since it is one of the most affected regions in the world in terms of climate change, it would make sense why people are emigrating from here.

In conclusion, due to the fact that emigration out of Central America has risen one hundred and thirty two percent from 1990 to 2020 it has become a widely studied topic (“Migration Data in Central America”). There are many different theories on reasons why people are emigrating out of Central America including political reasons, economic reasons, and climate reasons. There is also literature on how shifting US foreign policy has impacted migration. In particular in the same time period as this paper covers, the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 was passed which ended immigration quotas a resulted in an influx of immigration from Latin America (Dominguez 278). However, there is a limited amount of literature examining the foreign relations of Central America particularly with the United States and the United States involvement in Central America has impacted emigration patterns This paper will strive to fill this gap by analyzing how the actions of the United States in relation to certain events of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Northern Triangle of Central America impacted these countries then and continue to today, specifically looking at how the common reasons for emigration have been impacted.

### **Methods:**

The central question this paper strives to answer is “To what extent has the United States’ past involvement in the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras impacted the

emigration patterns of these countries today?” In order to answer the question, this paper will examine three countries that have high emigration rates today and look at specific instances in which the United States had been involved in these countries. From here it will be examined how these past actions of the United States impacted those countries at the time of the events and continues to impact these countries today. Lastly, common reasons for emigration from these countries will be examined in relation to how these reasons connect with the actions of the United States. From the findings of this examination, a conclusion will be drawn based on the overlap of how the United States past actions continue to impact the countries today and lead to reasons for emigration from these countries. It is here that it will be determined how much of a role the past actions of the United States play in current emigration patterns of Latin America.

The three countries that will be used throughout the course of this paper are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, each with a different instance of United States involvement in their history. For the case of Guatemala, this paper will examine the United States’ involvement in the Guatemalan Revolution that took place from 1944 to 1954. For El Salvador, this paper will examine the United States’ involvement in the Salvadoran Civil War which took place from 1979 to 1991. Lastly, for Honduras the Honduran coup d’état of 2009 will be examined. All three of these events will allow a conclusion to be drawn about the United States’ involvement in Latin America and how it continues to impact these countries today.

### **Case Study- Guatemala**

The first case study that this paper will focus on in order to come to a conclusion about how much of an impact the actions of the United States have had on migration patterns from Central America is the Guatemalan Revolution. The Guatemalan Revolution took place from 1944 to 1954. Prior to 1944, the Guatemalan government kept strict divisions between the upper

class and lower class, which ultimately led to two percent of the population owning sixty percent of the land. Also, during this time period, a majority of businesses in Guatemala were foreign owned businesses, mainly from the United States, making Guatemala a country that was very dependent on exports and other countries, especially the US (Moye 44). In 1944, at the beginning of the period known as the Guatemalan Revolution, there was the overthrow of Guatemalan dictator Jorge Ubico Castañeda. Ubico, who was a wealthy landowner, took control of the country in 1931. Ubico was elected because of his endorsement by the United States and his history of being a strict ruler and his promise to end labor uprisings. Once Ubico gained power he immediately destroyed the power of the growing labor movement and consequently the Communist Party in Guatemala. This helped to protect both foreign companies and his own wealth and land (Glejises 9).

Throughout Ubico's rule workers had a very limited number of rights. They were not able to be paid more than twenty-five cents per day, and Ubico stepped in when the United States military attempted to pay Guatemalans more than this. However, despite paying the working-class pennies, he did raise his own salary, bought much more land, and harshly punish anyone who opposed this (Glejises 12-19). Despite thirteen years marked by these issues, major unrest and consequently revolution did not take place until 1944. This revolution, the Guatemalan Revolution, was mainly led by students and inspired by the fact that throughout World War II they saw propaganda from the Allies that listed the Four Freedoms- freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear- and realized that they were not awarded these freedoms. In 1944 peasants and affluent Guatemalans began to protest Ubico due to him taking away constitutional guarantees. The widespread disapproval for Ubico led to the American backed leader's resignation on June 30, 1944. While this moved Guatemala towards

democratic elections, it angered the United States because they were no longer able to control Guatemala as easily (Gleijeses 23-26).

After the overthrow of Ubico in 1944, a free election was held in which Juan José Arévalo Bermejo became the first democratically elected president. Arévalo based his campaign on being a reformer and did much of this throughout his time in office. He built the country's social security system and built and staffed new schools. While the communist party supported Arévalo, Arévalo did not support them. He banned the Communist Party and had their leaders deported (Moye 44). Arévalo served as president of Guatemala from 1945 to 1951 where he was then succeeded by Jacobo Árbenz Guzman, who was elected president of Guatemala in March of 1951. The election of Árbenz was the climax of the second part of the Guatemalan Revolution, in which the United States had a heavy involvement.

Many of the actions that Árbenz took and the policies he put into place went against the values of the United States and they therefore felt the need to intervene. The United States' two major issues with Árbenz were the policies he implemented against US owned businesses and the stance he took on communism. For businesses, much of it has to do with the United Fruit Company (UFCO), a major US owned business that had a budget "larger than those of the Central American countries in which it operated" (Gleijeses 89). Under the previous president, Arévalo, there was a new labor code implemented, directly forcing UFCO to change many of their policies. Under Árbenz he continued to take power away from foreign companies, such as UFCO, since he wanted to give more power to the Guatemalan people. The largest land reform put into place was Decree 900 which was approved in June 1952. This was a way to center the land around "the needs and aspirations of individual peasant families" (Gleijeses 150). However, in order to do so land had to be taken away from large companies, such as UFCO. While it did

anger the elite, Decree 900 benefited Guatemala as a whole (Glejeses 159-162). Other actions implemented by Árbenz angered the elite as well as the United States were income tax increases for the wealthy, rent control, and an overall betterment of life for those in poverty (Glejeses 168-170).

In terms of communism, due to the wealthy businessman working for US companies informants they had living in the country, the United States viewed Guatemala in the late 1940s as “a nightmarish world infested not only by communists, but also by ill-defined yet dangerous species such as pro-Communists, fellow travelers, extreme leftists, and radical leftists” (Glejeses 101). This became worse once Árbenz took office in 1951 due to his radical land reforms and his association with communist leaders; the United States soon started to suspect that he was a communist. Many experts stated that Árbenz was obviously separate from the Communist Party, but he was still too close for comfort from the view of the United States in the Cold War era. Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence at the time, made comments about how Árbenz aspired to turn Guatemala into a communist state (Moye 47). Due to these concerns combined with concerns that the Soviet Union was going to make attempts to move into the west, President Eisenhower ordered the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to form “Operation PBSuccess” in order to overthrow Árbenz in 1953 (Moye 48).

All of these factors came together on June 18, 1954, when former Guatemalan military leader, Castillo, and his troops who had been given weapons and resources from the United States invaded Guatemala. Árbenz did not view Castillo’s army as a threat as there were only around two hundred men involved, however he did view the United States as a threat and was scared as to what their next step would be in case of Castillo’s defeat. Castillo’s army was in Guatemala for two days before they fought their first battle on June 20. Guatemala brought this

conflict with the United States to the attention of the Security Council of the United Nations but due to the involvement and persuasion of the United States, the council refused to consider the case. After this, fear of the United States and the actions they may take took over the Guatemalan army and they refused to fight (Gleijeses 334-342). The people of Guatemala began to turn against Árbenz, not because they did not agree with his ideals but because of their fear of the United States and what they would do if Árbenz was not removed from office. Due to these factors, Árbenz resigned on June 27, 1954 (Gleijeses 345-347). After the resignation of Árbenz the United States and UFCO helped to put Castillo into office where he then began a long dictatorship, followed by the Guatemalan Civil War, and took actions such as arresting 9,000 people and revoking previous land reforms to thus benefit the foreign businesses (Moye 49).

In conclusion, throughout the ten-year period known as the Guatemalan Revolution the United States was a key player who displayed primary concern for its own geostrategic goals. The United States during this Cold War era was promoting democracy. However, when the democratically elected president, Árbenz, implemented policies they did not agree with, they overthrew him and also supported the dictatorship of Ubico, as opposed to a democratic election, because his policies benefited them. The era following the overthrow of Árbenz led to a military dictatorship and therefore led to the Guatemalan Civil War, just ending in 1996. These factors, at the hands of the United States, can be related to migration from Guatemala. 61% of Guatemalans migrate because they feel there is widespread corruption within their government (“Guatemala: Irregular Migration”). This can be traced back to the involvement of the United States in their government and that government officials were forced to follow the wants of the United States, thus corrupting the government. Similarly, 59% of Guatemalans live below the poverty line and 77% of Guatemalans who migrate do so in search of economic endeavors (“Guatemala: Irregular

Migration”). This can be traced back to the United States not supporting and eventually overturning the land reforms of Árbenz that benefited those in poverty. This can still be impacting people today, as those living in poverty never got the chance to get the land Árbenz was attempting to give them. Economists say that wealth goes back three generations and the wealth, or lack thereof, people have today begun three generations ago. Therefore, these families continue to live in poverty and experience generational poverty, due to the actions of the United States in 1954. However, the United States is not completely responsible due to the fact that many years have passed since their involvement and other factors have played into Guatemala not being able to recover. Overall, the United States was very involved in the Guatemalan Revolution and some of their actions can be traced to factors that continue to impact Guatemalan people today.

### **Case Study- El Salvador:**

The second case study that this paper will consider is the Salvadoran Civil War which took place from 1979 to 1992. Prior to war breaking out in 1979, there had been tension developing in the country for many years due to the wealth gap and inequality in the country. El Salvador had been ruled by a wealthy group of families, known as the “Fourteen Families”, which resulted in eight percent of the population controlling half of the nation's income while the rest of the population lived in poverty and was pushed off of their land in order to make room for cash crops (Garcia 20). There had been peasant uprisings for many years but eventually came to a breaking point on October 15, 1979, when protestors overthrew the dictator Carlos Humberto Romero thus formally starting the Salvadoran Civil War. These protestors were made up of various groups that had developed in the years prior, including the Popular Liberation Forces, the

People's Liberation Block, and the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (Garcia 21). Many of these protestors were inspired by the Catholic Church and the pivot the Church took towards theology of liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. This includes the ideas that everyone is God's child and God's children have a responsibility to challenge oppression and condemn injustice (Garcia 21). All of these forces combined led to the Salvadoran Civil War.

After the overthrow of the past leader in October of 1979 a civilian-military junta took over control of the country. A junta is defined as a group that takes power after a country by force, often after a coup. They made promises of social reforms and for the first time in a long time, the people of El Salvador, a country long ruled by military dictators, felt hope. However, they soon came to realize that while the civilian junta had the ceremonial power of the land, the Fourteen Families still held the real power in the country and as a result the civilian junta resigned. With this resignation the two distinct groups of the country worsened. There was the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), also known as the Guerilla Army, made up of a variety of left-wing groups, who wanted to move towards justice and unity, and there was the Salvadoran Military and those who had traditionally held power and wanted to get rid of any resistance. It was soon clear that a Civil War between the two groups was beginning (Ram 3-4). Due to the Cold War mentality plaguing the United States at this time and their commitment to ending all kinds of socialism and communism as well as the large coffee industry in El Salvador and the presence of US businesses, the United States supported the Salvadoran Military throughout this Civil War. They offered a wide variety of aid to the Military, including increasing aid money, training of their soldiers, and various forms of weapons.

The Salvadoran Civil War was an extremely bloody and deadly war. Throughout the course of the twelve-year war 75,000 people were killed, many of these being at the hands of the

Salvadoran Military. The first two years of the War are known as the bloodiest period with 8,000 deaths taking place in 1980 alone and throughout this period two of the most notable events took place, the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the El Motze Massacre (Garcia 22-23).

Archbishop Oscar Romero was killed from a single shot from what was later determined to be a US assault rifle. on March 24, 1980, while standing at an altar saying mass. Archbishop Romero was a big proponent and preached theology of liberation, which ultimately led to his death.

Theology of liberation is something that was disliked by the Salvadoran Military because it was encouraging the FMLN and their ideas of equality. It has been confirmed by the United Nations that Archbishop Romero was murdered by the Salvadoran military. At his public funeral procession, the Salvadoran military opened fire into the crowd. Forty-four people were killed and two hundred were wounded (Anderson). From this point forward, Archbishop Romero became a figure and an inspiration for FMLN throughout the Civil War, furthered by the role of the Salvadoran Army and thus the United States played in his death.

The other major event, often referred to as the deadliest part of the Civil War, is the El Mozote Massacre. This took place between December 11 and December 13, 1981. According to witness accounts of people in the town at the time, there was no battle happening and the Salvadoran Army came into the town, rounded people up, and began shooting them. There were even more who were beaten and raped. In total, this massacre resulted in 533 children, 220 men, and 200 women being killed (Brigida). Despite firsthand accounts saying that it was the Salvadoran Army, the official government as well as the United States has kept the narrative that this massacre was at the hands of the Guerilla Army and the FMLN. However, firsthand accounts state that it was the Salvadoran Army and many survivors escaped to Guerilla Camps where they were kept safe (Brigida). Overall, the El Mozote Massacre was an extremely violent

and deadly event in the Salvadoran Civil War, taking place due to the weapons and training the United States provided with the United States providing \$25 million more in military aid just eight months before in March 1981.

After the extremely violent beginning to the Civil War, violence continued but slowed down. Throughout the following nine years of Civil War many were killed by the Salvadoran Army including American nuns, off duty US Marines, and the head of the El Salvador Human Rights Commission, and hospital patients when the Military targeted a hospital and raped and killed patients, but despite all of this the Salvadoran Military continued to receive US aid (“Timeline El Salvador”). In 1982 the elected government of El Salvador began again, after the overthrow in 1979. In the election of 1984 Jose Napoleon Duarte was elected as a member of the Christian Democratic party. However, this election is viewed as fraudulent and corrupt due to involvement of the United States to make sure their candidate was elected. Throughout the time of the war, Duarte had strongly opposed the FMLN and was seen as a symbol against communism throughout North America. The Civil War was beginning to end in 1990 when Duarte died from cancer and the United States Congress voted to decrease aid to El Salvador by fifty percent. The war officially ended in late 1991 when the United Nations helped to make a peace agreement between the Salvadoran Government and elites and the FMLN (“Timeline El Salvador”).

The Salvadoran Civil War was extremely violent and destroyed the state of El Salvador for many years and can be largely to blame for the violence and destruction. Throughout the time of the war itself over one million Salvadorans were displaced and forced to migrate. Due to the United States’ large role in the war, they can be partially responsible for the migration surge during the Salvadoran Civil War. However, after the end of the Civil War the United States

ended the Temporary Protective Status of those who migrated to the United States and sent them back to El Salvador (Menjívar). This was in part due to there no longer being the direct threat of war in El Salvador and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 so the United States no longer felt as worried about the direct threat of communism. These people being sent back, combined with the state of the country at the time, made it easy for gangs to form. This gang culture still exists today and the violence they cause is still a large reason as to why people emigrate from El Salvador. This, again, can be traced back to the actions of the United States (Menjívar). During and after the civil war, the country's structure did not change much, leaving the wealth gap between rich and poor pretty much unchanged. Socioeconomic inequality has only gotten worse in the past thirty years since the war (Menjívar). This can also be somewhat traced back to the actions of the United States, due to their failure to support the party that was supporting economic equality during the El Salvador Civil War. Therefore, those who were in poverty then and fighting for equality still are in poverty today and are being forced to migrate for economic opportunities, thus resulting in the migration surge being seen today. As a whole, this shows that the United States did contribute to the violence and economic instability and migration in El Salvador but is not the sole cause. There are also many causes that have led to this instability continuing to today, thirty years after the Salvadoran Civil War.

### **Case Study- Honduras:**

Lastly, this paper will consider the coup d'état of Honduras that took place in 2009. This event does differ a bit from the two previous case studies in that it is just a single event and not an ongoing conflict, such as the ten-year Guatemalan Revolution and the twelve-year Salvadoran Civil War. However, it is still an important event in Central American history especially when

considering the involvement of the United States. Prior to this, Honduras had already felt effects from the actions of the United States due to their geographic proximity to Guatemala and El Salvador and the turmoil in these countries at the hands of the United States. Furthermore, the United States played a pivotal role in the overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya on June 28, 2009.

On the morning of June 28, 2009, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was met with military troops at his house where he was forced out at gunpoint and put on a plane to Costa Rica. As this was happening, other military members were blocking the media, so they were not able to cover the current events. The military overthrew Zelaya due to his attempt to reform the constitution. Government leaders thought that Zelaya was planning to use constitutional reforms to get rid of term limits, so he was able to transition the country towards a dictatorship, and they called upon the military to put a stop to it. This is the narrative that was told to the public and that the United States upheld. However, this is not what Zelaya was attempting to do. He was attempting to put a nonbinding referendum on the ballot for the next election on whether the public wanted to reform the Constitution. Prior to this, the United States had already expressed dislike for Zelaya due to his social reforms and taking power away from the rich and elite business owners who had ties with the United States (Johnston).

The United States claimed at the time, and still continue to do so, that they had no prior knowledge of the coup. However, Pentagon documents that have been released show that the United States was preparing for a military overthrow of Zelaya as early as two days before it took place (Johnston). However, the biggest role of the US happened after Zelaya was already forced out of office. Following the removal of the office of Zelaya, the United States and specifically the Secretary of State at the time Hillary Clinton stated that Honduras should move

back to their constitutional order but not restore the presidency of Zelaya, despite the United Nations and many Latin American nations calling for the restoration of Zelaya (Zunes).

Throughout this time in the days after Zelaya was removed from office there were many protests in opposition. These protestors were met with a lot of violence. These protests were followed with the temporary president suspending constitutional freedoms, all while being supported by the United States (“Honduras: Constitutional Crisis”). The United States’ policy is that when a democratically elected leader is removed from a country, aid stops being given to that country. However, the United States continued to give aid to Honduras after Zelaya was overthrown. Instead of calling for Zelaya to be returned to office, like many other countries, the United States instead assisted in holding new elections in Honduras. Many countries stated they would not honor the results of these elections if Zelaya was not returned to power, but the United States was not one of them (Zunes). In this election, a United States backed candidate won and human rights violations increased greatly. Furthermore, in the 2013 election, another United States backed candidate was elected. Since he has been in office, he has made constitutional reforms to end term limits- the same thing Zelaya was removed from office for allegedly attempting to do- but has yet to suffer any consequences (Johnston).

Overall, the United States played a very important role in the Honduran coup of 2009 which did impact migration patterns and continues to do so even today. The Honduran Coup began a period of political instability and violence in Honduras, and the United States supported it and allowed it to happen. In the time following the coup, human rights violations in Honduras rose by 4,000 percent. This includes sexual violence, mass arrests, torture, among others (“Honduras: Constitutional Crisis). The violence and the contingency of the United States that was evident thirteen years ago still continues today. In 2016, there were more than a dozen

activists killed. Fifty percent of US aid to Honduras is contingent on the absence human rights violations. However, despite events like this the United States continues to turn a blind eye and give them full aid. This continues to uphold the violent atmosphere that the United States aided in creating in 2009 (Johnston). In regard to migration, “Honduran emigration intentions appear more closely tied to problems of personal security rather than economic considerations” (Hiskey 437). Therefore, since the United States has contributed to this violent state, they can be held somewhat responsible for these emigrations from Honduras.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, I conclude that US foreign policy had a negative effect on the politics of the Northern Triangle of Central America causing political and economic instability leading to an increase in immigration out of the countries. While the events covered in this paper may have happened decades ago, they still continue to impact the condition of these countries today, and thus the migration patterns of these countries. For example, Appendix A Fig. 2 shows that the number of Salvadorans in the United States, the most common country for them to emigrate to, began to rise during the Civil War in the 1980s partially as a result of the actions of the United States throughout the Civil War and have continued to rise since then, due to the ongoing effects of the actions of the United States. However, due to the fact that this did happen decades ago and still continues to impact the country today is a reason as to why the actions of the United States is not the only factor contributing to immigration. There are many factors working as to why these countries have not been able to recover in the years that have passed. Also, there are different parts of the US government that are involved more than others, such as the CIA, and responsibility cannot solely be put on the entirety of the US government.

Furthermore, while the United States does have a role to play in the migration patterns from Central America, there are other factors to consider, such as the other factor previously mentioned in this paper, climate change. The United States does have some responsibility in climate change due to their carbon emissions and other environmental impacts, this blame is more so shared by many countries and is more of a universal fault as opposed to the direct fault of the United States, as seen with other issues. Overall, this paper primarily focused on three reasons for migration: political instability, economic instability, and climate change as well as focusing on three countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. To further explore this issue in future research other reasons for migration can be considered, other events in the three countries used can be considered, or other countries in Central America can be considered. Another country that could be considered in further research is Panama. Panama has had large involvement from the US in their history, due to the Panama Canal, but does not have the large emigration rates that other countries have today.

In conclusion, while the US may not have a direct political role in causing the emigration out of the Northern Triangle, the ethical implications are clear. The US has played an integral part in the dissolution of the governments of the Northern Triangle and has the moral responsibility to acknowledge it. As a US citizen it is disappointing to see the government ignore the problems that have been caused, and also punish the immigrants that have come to the US as a result of these problems. The United States should take responsibility for the problems they have caused in the Northern Triangle of Central America and the impact these problems have had on the countries, including emigration.

### Appendix A: Graphs

Figure 1- Migration Policy Institute findings on the motivation of people to migrate

**Factors Reported to Have Motivated Members of Surveyed Households to Migrate Recently, by Country of Origin, 2021**

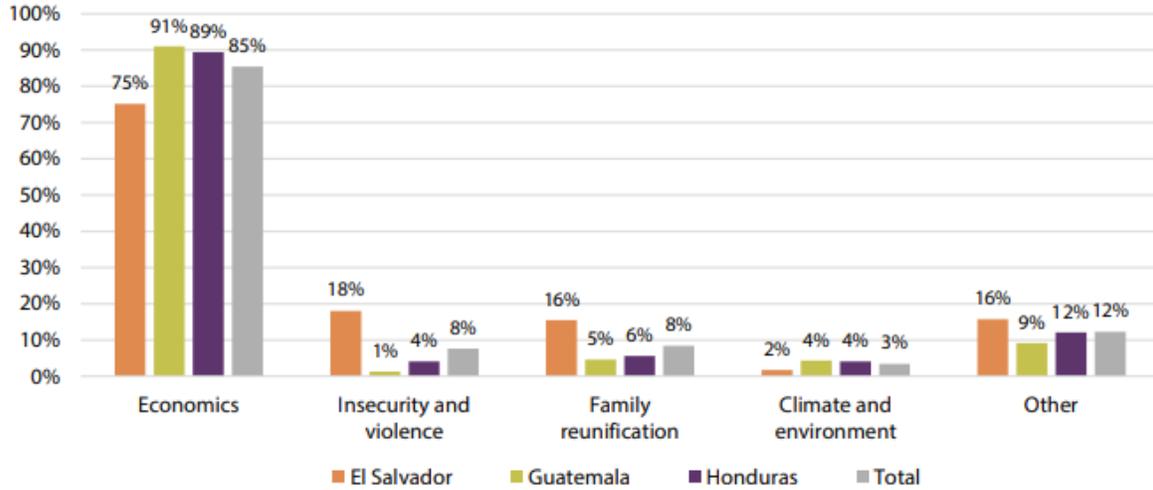
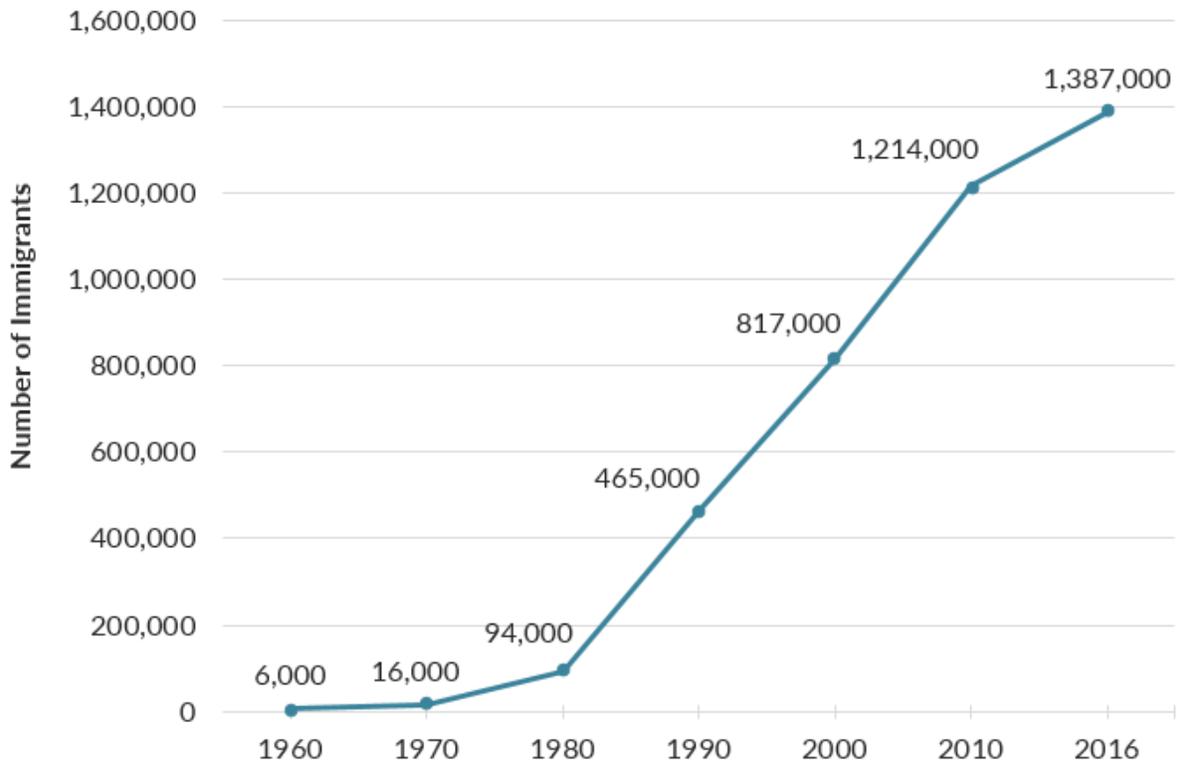


Figure 2- Migration Policy Institute findings on population of Salvadorans in the United States



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