

REINFORCING PUSH FACTORS IN THE NORTHERN
TRIANGLE: AN INVESTIGATION OF TRUMP'S ATTEMPTS
TO DETER IMMIGRATION THROUGH HUMANITARIAN
AID REDUCTION

by

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The Northern Triangle of Central America has long been a major source of immigration to the United States. In April of 2019, the Trump Administration announced its intentions to freeze U.S. foreign aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in an overall strategy to punish the Central American nations and encourage them to employ their own immigration deterrence methods. However, concerns persisted regarding whether ending funding for humanitarian aid projects would effectively mitigate migration, when oftentimes these programs serve to lessen prominent push factors in the Northern Triangle and encourage reinvestment in local communities. After a thorough literature review of the related academic field and an examination of the root causes and historical context influencing the intense push factors in the NTCA, diverse stories from stakeholders are compiled in order to present an overarching view of the impacts of President Trump's aid policies. Interviews with migrants and aid beneficiaries, excerpts from Central American newspapers, conversations with aid workers, and statements from U.S. politicians point to the

negative repercussions of aid reduction. Human perspectives of individuals closest to the situation overwhelming describe the intensification of push factors without the support of USAID funding.

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Chapter 1: Project Origins and Personal Reflections

Although this could be considered an unconventional way to begin a formal thesis, I strongly believe in the importance of including the origin of this project and the sources behind my personal investment in the topic. Due to the spread of COVID-19 and the respective impacts this virus has caused across the world, this thesis process has been altered and adapted for the safety of all involved. While I find these precautions both critical and inevitable, I now find it especially important to reflect on my personal journey as I will not have the platform of an in-person thesis defense to explain the origins of my thesis. This research has been many years in the making and while much has changed globally during this extended timeframe, my passion and concern for the Northern Triangle has not. While one of my largest regrets has been my inability to travel to the region and conduct my own interviews, I have attempted to make up for this short-coming by doing thorough research as well as being open and willing to accept whatever conclusions might be revealed. Furthermore, I have had opportunities to attend prestigious conferences and take meaningful courses that prioritized international issues and allowed for independently directed study. These experiences have both introduced and expanded upon my knowledge of the impacts of President Trump's aid policies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, thus allowing this thesis to grow and flourish. While these specific events are challenging to formally cite within this paper, this education both inside and outside the classroom has been too valuable to exclude from the narrative of this project. In order to contextualize the importance of this extended interest turned thesis, I intend to describe some of the experiences and thoughts that have been the most impactful for this thesis project.

My connection with the topic of Central American migrants specifically began in the Fall of 2015 during my senior year at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon. I attended the Ignatian Family Teach-in for Justice, a Catholic social justice conference specifically rooted in honoring Jesuit priests and their companions who were martyred in El Salvador in 1989 (“Ignatian”). This gathering takes place yearly in Washington, D.C., joining representatives from Jesuit institutions across the country to engage in learning and advocacy. For multiple days, attendees listen to expert and peer speakers discuss various social justice concerns through a Catholic lens. Then, different school groups advocate on Capitol Hill about specific social justice concerns to their respective senators’ offices.

At first, I was not selected to participate in the Ignatian Family Teach-in for Justice. Acceptance was extremely competitive at my school and after the application process, I was told that I had been placed on a waitlist. However, a few weeks into the group’s preparation meetings, someone could no longer continue with the time commitment. I received a call and was thrown into the process. Advocacy groups had been formed based on three different topics: Humane immigration reform, environmental justice, and human rights in Central America. Students were already busy researching, developing their arguments to present to our senators and representatives, and creating leave behind documents. Although overwhelmed, I felt extremely grateful to again have an opportunity to participate, and willingly stepped into whatever role I was offered. This just so happened to be with the group arguing in support of human rights in Central America. I had no previous experience with the topic; however, I dove into catching up on research, slowly but surely educating myself

on the complex human rights abuses taking place in the region and the role the United States government plays in their perpetuation. Ultimately, my group members and I wrote our leave behind document for Senator Jeff Merkley, beginning with the following statement of purpose: “Our request is to end harmful interventions that further militarize Central American societies, while meaningfully addressing violence, impunity, and rights violations that compel displacement and migration” (Cartasegna). The presentation to Senator Merkley’s staff itself actually proved to be fairly anticlimactic; unlike some students from schools in more conservative regions that dealt with disagreement and challenges from their representatives, our staffer essentially told us that Senator Merkley already agreed with these views and remained willing to support Central American human rights. However, being able to articulate this stance and present it in a government office in our national capitol, truly jumpstarted my interest in this topic that went on to morph and develop further over the past several years.

My formal classes in high school and college have also allowed me the opportunity to discover my passions and independently focus on the Northern Triangle topic. During my senior year of high school at Jesuit, I took an International Studies elective. Mr. Flamoe became one of my favorite teachers, due to his passion for teaching what many just considered a fun, easy class to pad their senior year schedule. We covered everything from the conflict in Syria to the Paris climate change agreement to the oil crisis in Venezuela, sampling a new world issue every week. I looked forward to that class every day, anticipating the materials that had never been made a priority in my traditional core courses. My love of this class specifically inspired me to enter the

University of Oregon as a Pre-International Studies major. I felt increasingly confident in this choice when I took INTL 101 fall of my first year on campus with Dr. Galen Martin, as the format very much mirrored my treasured high school introductory course. Not only did this course introduce me to my future primary thesis advisor, but our final research assignment allowed me to delve further into the conflicts rampant in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Our class was specifically tasked with looking at a variety of sources, including popular press, web sources, academic journals, and books, and determining their usefulness in order to investigate an international issue of our choosing. I fell back upon an issue that I already knew I had passion and curiosity for; I decided to specifically look into root causes of Central American migration to the United States.

I went on to cover variations of this topic in two other independent projects for International Studies classes while working on completing my International Studies major. In a final research paper for Dr. Derrick Hindery's INTL 420, I first became interested in push factors stemming from the Northern Triangle and set out to discover more. I ultimately argued that gang activity and the related dangers such as homicide, violence against women and children, and extortion, as strengthened by U.S. foreign policy and perpetuated by weak and corrupt government and law enforcement, merited the most attention in this complicated crisis. In Prof. Nick Macdonald's INTL 424, I shared my interests with a group for a collaborative paper, where this time we provided policy proposals for combatting the refugee situation from the Northern Triangle. Discussing previously attempted interventions and collaborating with my partners to

propose our own unique solutions allowed me to explore a new perspective and continue to widen my horizons in relation to this field.

Around this time, I began to seriously think about my thesis and consider what topic I should pursue. The Northern Triangle and its accompanying refugee issues stood out automatically due to the time and research I had already invested. Through my thesis orientation with Dr. Mark Carey, thesis prospectus with Dr. Roxann Prazniak, and colloquia regarding writing literature reviews with Dr. Trond Jacobsen, I narrowed down my topic to specifically investigate the effects of President Trump's aid policies in the region. Overall, I am thankful to have been able to take so much time to learn and think about this topic. While I believe this adds some extra pressure, given that I am so invested and feel obligated to do justice to what has become a large part of my life, I could not have come this far without the support of my instructors and their thoughtful classes. With this in mind, I want to specifically provide an extended thank you to every teacher aforementioned in this section, as well as those who have not been included but still made a powerful impact on my studies, for their contributions to my learning.

Most recently, I received a fellowship to attend the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights ("OCHR"), a week long conference in Oxford, England during summer 2019. I was selected as one of four undergraduate students to accompany seven other graduate and law students from the University of Oregon; we joined with representatives from other universities across the United States and ultimately became certified as Oxford Human Rights Fellows. OCHR specifically hosts "seminars on human rights, global conflict, humanitarian aid, peace building, and related subjects" in an effort to understand and develop solutions for the modern problems plaguing our

globalized world (“Oxford”). This particular program focused on issues of international movement and migration, specifically covering situations like human trafficking, Syrian refugee relocation efforts in France, and Central American migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border. This last lecture specifically helped me focus on the aspects of my thesis that delve into the intended versus actual impacts of President Trump’s policies in the region. It included details on the effects of family separation, the efforts of nonprofit organizations offering health and legal services, and the public demands to suspend entities like U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). After learning through discussions led by experts and peers, each group of school representatives was tasked with presenting about the immigration context surrounding their own school; in our case, we focused on immigration in Eugene, Oregon and some key actors making a difference in that work.

Similarly to the Ignatian Family Teach-in for Justice, I found myself on a winding road to my final destination. I applied for the fellowship during my freshman year, when I was denied. I applied again my sophomore year, when I was placed on a waitlist. A spot opened up a few weeks before departure, but I was unable to financially swing obtaining airfare with the last-minute notice. I applied for my final opportunity last spring during my senior year; I was overjoyed to learn that my persistence had paid off and the topic this summer so perfectly aligned with my interests. During my time in Oxford I was able to connect and befriend like-minded people, gaining a sense of the scope for my thesis and, by extension, my future career path. Even when challenged, I have not wavered from my interests in human movement, but instead made the most of

various opportunities to build upon my existing knowledge and learn more that I could apply towards my thesis.

Overall, I feel extremely privileged to be able to have experienced these diverse and influential opportunities. The aforementioned life-changing conferences and rigorous academic classes have greatly influenced the direction of my thesis project, for which I am grateful. However, I am also acutely aware that not many people have access to these same resources, much less the opportunity to attend college and write a thesis. This disparity becomes increasingly apparent when I focus on the population at the heart of my thesis project. Often, the most disadvantaged populations in our world comprise of refugees and other migrants. Whether facing violence, economic hardship, or sheer instability, refugees are forced to exist without the support of a nation and tasked with navigating a world that sees them as more burden than human being. With this dichotomy in mind, I have found myself wondering over the course of this process what makes me qualified to be doing this research and telling these stories, when I can never truly understand the impacts of President Trump's aid policies in the Northern Triangle on a personal level. Over and over again I wonder why I was born in the United States with its global power and status, why I have white skin and the advantages as well as relative safety that provides, and why I have the financial resources to invest in pursuing higher education.

I certainly cannot answer those questions, but I believe it extremely important that they be included in this project for transparency and authenticity. I may not have known how to ask these critical questions and dispute my own authority without my education, and specifically my International Studies, Spanish, and Honors College

courses; therefore, I am thankful for every opportunity to learn and grow my own perspectives. Additionally, while my initial curiosity began my senior year of high school, my understandings of the world have grown exponentially since then and I intend to use my current findings as a foundation that I hope to continue to build upon in the future given more developments in character and information. Ultimately, with these considerations in mind, I aim to respectfully provide the best research possible through the inspiration of my valuable previous experiences as well as the acknowledgment of my privilege and the individuals who have helped me achieve all that I have been able to in regards to this project.

Chapter 2: Terminology and Justification

The following vocabulary terms include those I believe important to properly and fully understanding this research. Some words and their accompanying definitions are fairly self-explanatory; they are being included to encourage uniformity, seeing as even common definitions often vary vastly across people, perspectives, and experiences. I have compiled these definitions based on years of research as well as specific sources when cited.

Other terms, specifically the differentiations between migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, are hotly contested and politicized. For this specific terminology, I am adapting the definitions provided by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an international nongovernmental organization that responds to humanitarian crises by providing “clean water, shelter, health care, education and empowerment support to refugees and displaced people” (“IRC’s Impact”). There exists heated debate in the United States about how to properly categorize people coming from the Northern Triangle to settle in the United States. I have chosen to use the terms migrant, immigrant, asylum seeker, and refugee interchangeably. Although there are nuanced, technical distinctions outlined in the following definitions, I have not been able to find accurate statistics that clearly allocate people from the Northern Triangle into these distinct groups. While many would obviously appreciate simple and clear categorizations, and thus the use of one precise definition throughout this thesis, this conflict is much too nuanced to solely concern itself with using precise academic terminology.

I am not seeking to make a statement on the quality of refugee protections or the process behind obtaining this protected status in the United States or around the world with this thesis; while these are important issues, that I am equally interested in, they remain beyond the scope of this project. Rather, I believe it is important to highlight that all people regardless of race, origin, language, and more are deserving of a fulfilling and safe life. I aim to accomplish this by delving into the impacts of President Trump's aid decisions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and how that can increase instead of decrease surges in movement out of these aforementioned nations, ultimately not providing access to a safe life in either their countries of origin or the United States.

In reality, the population leaving the NTCA is mixed; there is documentation of people moving due to fear of persecution and violence as well as people who want access to better economic opportunities. These two seemingly distinct groups often even overlap in their stated reasoning for wanting to leave El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, citing a mixture of fear as well as a desire to provide their families with better options. Both overlapping populations are in need of financial assistance in their countries of origin and both contribute to the migration flow towards the United States. While I believe the definitions are important context for understanding the complex nature of this issue, my approach remains that investing time in trying to distinguish between the specific categories of people leaving the Northern Triangle is not worth the effort when both "types" of people are in need of aid from the United States to influence their decisions to remain in their country of origin. Indeed, including these definitions even paints a picture of how politicians can use such terminology to defend the

withholding or termination of aid in accordance with which population is purportedly being served. Overall, I am choosing to prioritize people and their unique stories over prescribing narrow technical definitions that create a hierarchy of who deserves assistance.

Related to valuing humanity through vocabulary choices, I am choosing to not include terms like “illegal” or “alien” in reference to people leaving the Northern Triangle to enter the United States without immigration documentation. While President Trump uses these terms freely, and they may appear in quotes from his statements surrounding the ongoing issue, I support the theoretical framework that no human being can be illegal or alien. Instead, words such as “undocumented” will be employed to encompass this particular scenario. While this choice can also be controversial, I strongly support the idea that the words we use matter. Making a conscious effort to affirm the humanity of individuals facing difficult life choices that are often influenced by factors outside of their control is simply the right and kind action.

With these explanations complete, I present the following vocabulary for optimally understanding the context of the Northern Triangle region and President Trump’s recent aid policies:

Asylum seeker: Someone seeking international protection from danger in their home country, but with a claim for refugee status that has not been determined legally. Asylum seekers must arrive at or cross a border in order to apply for asylum. They must then prove to authorities that they meet the criteria to be covered by refugee protections.

Emigration: The act of leaving or exiting one's country with the intention of settling permanently in another.

Femicide: The intentional murder of women because they are women or, more generally, any killings of women or girls. Femicide explicitly differs from male homicide in that "most cases of femicide are committed by partners or ex-partners, and involve ongoing abuse in the home, threats or intimidation, sexual violence or situations where women have less power or fewer resources" (Garcia-Moreno).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): The total value of everything produced in a country, regardless of its citizens or non-citizens produced the product in question.

Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDPPC): A measure of a country's economic output that accounts for its population size; it divides the GDP of a country by the number of people in the country in order to attempt to quantify a nation's standard of living.

Homicide: Deliberately and unlawfully killing another person, otherwise known as murder.

Immigrant: Someone who makes a conscious decision to leave their home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there. Many immigrants go through a lengthy vetting process in order to relocate; some arrive in their destination country without documentation.

Immigration: International movement of people entering or coming in to settle, usually permanently, in a foreign country.

International Non-governmental Organization (INGO): A non-governmental organization on an international scope, providing advocacy and/or services worldwide.

Mara Salvatrucha: International criminal gang that originated in Los Angeles during the 1970's and 1980's, although many members were deported to Central America after arrest and/or the end of the Salvadoran Civil War. The group participates primarily in extortion as well as trafficking of drugs, arms, and people. They are also commonly referred to as MS-13 ("MS13").

Migrant: Someone moving from place to place, either within their country or across borders, usually for economic reasons. These people "were not forced to leave their native countries because of persecution or violence, but rather are seeking better opportunities" ("Migrants").

Non-governmental Organization (NGO): An organization that is independent from both the governmental and private sectors. Also referred to as a nonprofit organization, their mission is to advocate for a cause or point of view.

Northern Triangle: See Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA).

Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA): Refers to the three Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; referred to jointly due to their economic integration as well as shared challenges (including poverty, violence, and corruption).

Push-pull Factors: Influences that drive people away from one place and towards a new location; combinations of push-pull elements help determine migrations of particular population from one place to another.

Refugee: Someone who has been forced to flee their home because of war, violence, or persecution. An official entity determines “whether a person seeking international protection meets the definition of a refugee, based on well-founded fear” (“Migrants”). Those with refugee status have special protections under international law.

18th Street: Also known as Barrio 18, Calle 18 or M-18, this transnational criminal organization began in Los Angeles and focuses on kidnapping and extortion. Their rivalry with the Mara Salvatrucha gang has exacerbated the violence in the Northern Triangle (“Barrio 18”).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This literature review will explore sources that contextualize the intentions and impacts behind the Trump Administration's aid policies as related to the flow of asylum seekers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, in order to form a better background of understanding for the ensuing thesis. While the Trump Administration feels strongly that these actions will incentivize the three governments to take action, other experts in the field have expressed concern about the countries' abilities to reduce migration without funding to implement programs that provide practical education and employment opportunities within their own territory. Additionally, this work will critically examine the perspectives taken when making funding decisions and immigration policies in general, questioning whether ending funding and therefore programming in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras will allow the countries to better focus on deterring migration themselves or serve as a greater push factor from the region. Too often politics narrowly focus on the United States as a pull factor; while this remains a valid consideration, the Northern Triangle possesses its fair share of powerful push factors. These influences include the prevalent violence, gang activity, and economic weaknesses characteristic of the region that will be elaborated on in the following chapters. This work will investigate whether punitive deterrence strategies like aid reduction by the United States maintain a strong influence on migrants' decisions to seek refuge or whether these actions simply make the lives of Central Americans, who would choose to migrate anyway due to the strength of the aforementioned push factors, more difficult.

This literature review will focus on sources that cover core issues ranging from current accounts of the Trump Administration's Central American aid policies to President Trump's general interaction with the Northern Triangle region. General push factors and root causes will be referenced for background and included in the historical context chapter, but the most relevant literature will offer commentary on a combination of the Trump Administration immigration policies, decisions regarding U.S. humanitarian aid, and refugees or migrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Information on this topic was obtained through a variety of sources, one type being current news articles, which have the benefit of providing the most up-to-date information possible regarding oft fluctuating government budget decisions. Additionally, quantitative as well as qualitative investigations are referenced, providing a variety of new research about both U.S. and Northern Triangle perspectives about the refugee crisis. Furthermore, synthesis articles contribute essential background information about Central American refugees as well as Trump's relationship with Latin America. Finally, government documents supply a wealth of information including official publications regarding immigration policies, interviews with President Trump, and analysis of federal budget allocations.

News articles form the first category of literature being included, specifically focusing on the Trump Administration's recent and ongoing aid decisions in the Northern Triangle. While showcased in this literature review, this source type additionally proved essential for the body of this thesis and drawing conclusions about the impacts of Trump's aid decisions. Although not technically peer-reviewed academic articles, and therefore not usually included in reviews of literature, this case proves an

exception as the changes to aid distribution have been so recent that no peer-reviewed journal has yet fully covered this information. Including an overview of these news articles proves essential to understanding the most recent events as part of the broader research landscape, while acknowledging this information gap as a weakness within the field that this thesis seeks to remedy. Work like that of Boyd, “Trump: No More Aid for Three Central American Countries,” contributes helpfully to the research field by explaining the basic facts and circumstances of the recent aid decisions, including dates and timing, financial figures, and quotes from President Trump’s official statements on the issue. Without these simple factual explanations, further analysis would be impossible and one could not comprehensively articulate recent events critical to this thesis. Similarly, an article from NPR by McDonnell features direct interviews with and quotations from Northern Triangle citizens previously benefitting from U.S. aid programs as well as the INGO partners newly suffering from the lack of funding. News articles like these valuably provide access to fresh perspectives directly influenced by recent humanitarian aid decisions from the United States’ government, introducing real world experiences to the field that have not yet been accessed by peer-reviewed research. Additionally, authors Tegel and Grunstein, respectively writing “Aid Cuts Won't Slow Central America's Exodus” and “The Failed Assumptions Behind Central America's Refugee Crisis,” both critique Trump’s aid decisions by elaborating on how the funds are intended to allow potential immigrants to remain at home by improving living conditions, reducing violence, and encouraging economic development. Not only do these sources explain recent political proceedings, but they offer valuable preliminary arguments against the effectiveness of Trump’s strategies, contributing to

the overall research inquiry into whether methods of deterrence prove compelling.

Overall, news articles critically provide the most recent information specifically about Trump's aid decisions, updating the research field faster than peer-reviewed sources.

Additionally, quantitative peer-reviewed articles prove essential to understanding the research landscape surrounding the Central American refugee crisis, especially in relation to perspectives within the United States. Detailing the methods and results of primary research relating to the topic of Central American migrants and their journey to the United States, these sources valuably supply a range of results from experiments that would be impossible for this thesis to produce given various constraints. While the benefits of these sources have restrictions in that the limitations of the original researchers still apply, as well as an unavoidable lack of familiarity with the original projects on the part of this thesis, they still allow an overall greater comprehension beneficial to orienting this work within the larger research field. Additionally, although this thesis primarily functions from an international perspective, these articles provide an analysis of the U.S. citizenry's perspectives and what influences those thought processes that critically contextualize the U.S. government's decisions. For example, "Assessing the Relationship Between Neoliberal Ideology and Reactions to Central American Asylum Seekers in the United States" by Dutt and Kohfeldt discovers that neoliberal ideology "strongly correlated with moral exclusion, lower levels of willingness to engage in efforts to support the rights of asylum seekers, and greater ethnocentrism." Recognizing this dominant policy of neoliberalism in the Republican party and investigating the subsequent trend in human sentiments, this article contextualizes Trump's actions regarding aid within the attitudes of the

population. While not directly related to aid allocation, this study provides information about how willing U.S. citizens might be to support the revocation of aid to Central America, thus influencing the circumstances surrounding subsequent U.S. fiscal decisions. Relatedly, “‘You are Not Welcome Here!’ Understanding News Coverage of Central American Migrant Families in Trump’s America” by Chattopadhyay examines how the New York Times discusses the migrant crisis and therefore influences its large readership base. While some of the articles analyzed may include discussion of Trump’s aid policies in the region, Chattopadhyay does not pursue this as a main focus; however, exploring media and the influence it exerts over U.S. citizens similarly contextualizes Trump’s decisions within the current political climate of the United States. Quantitative peer-reviewed articles prove particularly useful in this thesis’ research landscape for understanding attitudes in the United States regarding Central American refugees, which could in turn influence policies of humanitarian aid enacted by the government.

Furthermore, qualitative sources also influence the research landscape surrounding the Central American refugee crisis, specifically contributing primary research about the push factors influencing migrants. While not providing statistical analyses like the aforementioned quantitative investigations, these peer-reviewed articles prove arguably more influential to this particular thesis as they provide individual interview responses and quotes from Central Americans choosing to leave their countries of origin, also employed within the body of the thesis as direct evidence of the consequences of Trump’s aid decisions. These direct interactions humanize the experiences of people seeking asylum, an essential part of this thesis, and provide real stories to support more statistical understandings of the root causes of migration. While

similarly experiencing limitations according to the parameters of the original research and the less intimate understanding of the process as a whole, these results can still be helpfully used to appropriate analyses based in primary research not available to this thesis. For instance, Spohn's work in her article "Emigrants' Stories of Foreign Aid and their Reasons for Emigration: Guatemalans on the Move" directly asks emigrants about the challenges and opportunities within their origin country that motivate their movement, even going so far as to explicitly ask about the effectiveness of aid programs. While constrained by only focusing on Guatemala and having a small sample size of interview participants, this style of research generates results that directly help answer research questions regarding the impact of deterrence immigration policies. Similarly, "Why are You Seeking Refuge?: Conducting Evaluations of Central American Asylum Seekers" by Rosenberg features case studies that supply more real world stories that humanize migrants and the trauma they face individually. Helpfully giving individual migrants a voice and discouraging the apathy that can accompany large statistics, the article also points out the increasingly antagonistic rhetoric and policies of the Trump Administration. While providing a more niche perspective within the field by focusing on mental health and the role of mental health professionals throughout the refugee crisis, the overall takeaways that look at whether push factors overwhelmingly influence decisions to migrate still apply clearly to this thesis. Mainly, this area of the research field produces evidence to back claims regarding the strength of push factors versus pull factors influencing migration from the Northern Triangle.

Next, synthesis articles covering the root causes as well as legalistic definitions regarding the movement of people from the Northern Triangle have proven invaluable

to understanding larger issues behind Trump's relationship with aid in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. While not necessarily presenting new research findings, understanding the recombination and rethinking of other sources to create powerful new arguments related the Central American refugee crisis essentially assists in comprehending the literature around the topic as a whole. Indeed, because these sources tend to combine previous thinking from other authors, the articles provide an even better understanding of the overall scope of the field of research. One source specifically, "Securing Protection for De Facto Refugees: The Case of Central America's Northern Triangle" by Medrano, explains the trauma often suffered due to gang and state sanctioned violence as well as the inability of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans to secure protective status because of definitions originating in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. This explanation of current legal limitations helps contextualize the current struggle between the reasons humanitarian aid could greatly help the region and the reasons the Trump Administration can shirk a sense of obligation to provide assistance. Furthermore, a similar article, "Tearing Down the Wall between Refuge and Gang-based Asylum Seekers: Why the United States Should Reconsider its Stance on Central American Gang Based Asylum Claims," again takes a legalistic approach by asserting that the U.S. government inconsistently applies social group characteristics when choosing to give protections to refugees of domestic violence and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) but not gang violence. Providing more insight to the legal end of the research landscape, this piece overall supports the need for more protection and support denied these migrants by Trump's aid policies. A related work titled "Invisible War: Central

America's Forgotten Humanitarian Crisis” specifically compiles information regarding the violence, extortion, gang recruitment, and disappearances plaguing the region. Written by Cone and Bosch Bonacasa, the article showcases perspectives obtained from working within a shelter along the Northern Triangle migratory route, offering new perspectives alongside a valuable synthesis of the root causes pushing migration. Synthesis articles generally covering the struggles and rights of Northern Triangle refugees help supply critical background information for understanding the whole of the conflict before exploring the finer details of humanitarian aid policy. While much of this information remains outside the scope of this particular project, this research also specifically plays into the aforementioned chapter that will summarize the root causes known to influence migration from the Northern Triangle.

Synthesis articles within the field additionally provide a great deal of information generally regarding the Trump Administration and U.S. relations with Central America. While this thesis will specifically focus on Trump’s decisions regarding international aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, this work would be meaningless without an understanding of both Trump’s relationship with Latin America and U.S. relations with the region as a whole. While these articles cover a wide range of information, including the effectiveness of U.S. deterrence strategies, the morality of U.S. immigration policies, U.S. citizens’ reactions to Trump’s actions in Central America, and suggestions for Trump’s engagement in Latin America, they generally provide information about U.S. relations with Northern Triangle within which one can situate specific conversations about aid. For instance, “Leaving the Devil You Know: Crime Victimization, US Deterrence Policy, and the Emigration Decision in

Central America” directly connects to research inquiries posed by this thesis about the effectiveness of stricter deterrence efforts. Previous successful work like that of Hiskey, Córdova, Malone, and Orcés will guide deeper quests for information in a productive direction. Additionally, in “The Asymmetric Border: The United States' Place in the World and the Refugee Panic of 2018,” Agnew asserts that the U.S. government faces a crisis of morality following problematic immigration enforcement decisions. This article discusses Trump’s policies more broadly, including child separation decisions, situating humanitarian aid issues within the larger context of harmful practices towards Northern Triangle refugees. Fernando Torres-Gil and Demko take a slightly different approach to the overall same subtopic, writing “The 2018 Mid-term Elections: Backlash to the Backlash on Immigrants, Diversity, and Divisiveness” to elaborate on apparent backlash against Republican rhetoric as evidenced through mid-term elections. Documenting a growing resistance to Trump’s scapegoating of refugees, capturing these instances of change helps provide a more comprehensive and realistic view of the topic, alerting the literary field to important emerging trends. Finally, “Beyond the Headlines: A Strategy for US Engagement with Latin America in the Trump Era” and “The Trump Administration in Latin America: Continuity and Change” both provide analyses of and suggestions for President Trump’s relations with Latin America as a whole. While the sections about the Northern Triangle countries directly impact the thesis topic, obtaining a general sense of the United States’ engagement with the continent as a whole contextualizes the Northern Triangle refugee problem within the broader research landscape. Altogether, these synthesis articles, while covering a wide

range of information, serve to broadly communicate the political environment surrounding Trump's revoking of aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Lastly, various government documents provide a unique channel of information about the Central American refugee crisis and its relation to the cessation of aid from the United States to the Northern Triangle. Including a frequently asked questions document about Central American migration, interview exchanges between President Trump and journalists, and an analysis of the U.S. foreign assistance budget, these documents examine direct information from the government. While not peer-reviewed journals, and therefore not traditionally included in a literature review, these documents allow a greater understanding of U.S. policy by supplying information directly from the source of the humanitarian aid allocation decisions. For example, "Recent Migration to the United States from Central America: Frequently Asked Questions" provides a current overview of migration, including both statistics as well as push and pull factors. While covering a much wider topical scope than this thesis, taking into account the interpretations of migration the United States chooses to portray within this document offers an excellent opportunity to understand the issue from the perspective of the U.S. government. "Remarks in an Exchange with Reporters Prior to Departure for Houston, Texas," another government document that features valuably in surrounding literature, provides direct quotations between President Trump and various journalists at a press conference. These exchanges provide direct insight into the logic and reasoning Trump uses to support decisions regarding the Central American refugee crisis, valuably contributing to understanding the removal of aid from Northern Triangle nations. In addition, Meyer produces an analysis titled "U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America

and the Caribbean: FY2018 Appropriations” which includes Trump’s specific foreign assistance request that would cut funding for nearly every type of assistance and every nation in the region. Providing the concrete numbers behind the rhetoric, these statistics work together with an understanding of the policy implications for Central America to paint a comprehensive picture of the impacts of aid reductions. These government documents form a critical portion of the literature available in the field, directly connecting to the specific questions posed by this thesis.

In summary, a wide range of academic literature encompasses the Central American refugee crisis. While not every aspect can be directly applicable to specific projects, in this case the investigation of the Trump Administration’s reduction of aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, understanding the larger field of literature and thinking remains important to having a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of the scope of the issue as a whole. Without this contextualization, especially insights including the perspectives of major players such as the U.S. government, the Northern Triangle nations, and the migrants themselves, this thesis’ discussion of the anticipated consequences and complications from Trump’s aid policies would lack the necessary weight to demonstrate the importance of this discussion. Pulling from a wide variety of sources including news articles, quantitative and qualitative research reports, peer-reviewed synthesis articles about various subtopics, and government documents allows for a better understanding of where this new investigation regarding humanitarian aid and deterrence policies will fit into the research landscape.

Chapter 4: Research Question and Methods

As President Trump's aid decisions have taken place relatively recently and author travel to the Northern Triangle for in-person investigation was not feasible, this thesis necessitated a creative methodology which evolved over the course of the project. Traditional academic research methods were employed to inform both the literature review as well as the historical context and push factors of Northern Triangle. Dr. Trond Jacobsen and Dr. Derrick Hindery's courses proved essential for teaching both the best ways to research such topics in addition to providing the space to develop these distinct portions of the thesis. Specifically, techniques like faceting, aliasing, developing Boolean search strings, and selecting well-matched academic databases proved exceedingly helpful for generating high quality search results, thus forming the basis of a thorough investigation.

In terms of gathering information specifically regarding Trump's aid decisions in the Northern Triangle, this thesis prioritized the stories of citizens from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, specifically including beneficiaries of aid programs, migrants, and journalists, statements from aid organization workers, and perspectives from government officials to gauge the impact of U.S. government policy. Interviews with migrants and aid recipients primarily came from the academic journal articles previously discovered for the literature review. However, news articles from reputable sources, such as NPR and The New York Times, also proved invaluable for obtaining direct quotes and extrapolating ideas. In order to find Central American newspaper articles, and therefore a perspective not defined by its geographic relation to the United States, the author consecutively changed the internet TLD to El Salvador, Guatemala,

and Honduras. By conducting google searches with each country's different internet domain code, authentic, Spanish-language sources about the issue became available. Including pieces in Spanish became an important feature of this thesis, as that is the first language of many impacted by the reduction in aid resources, and therefore a critical component to fully comprehending the impacts of Trump's decisions. Similar manipulation of google and popular U.S. news sources proved essential for obtaining interviews with aid workers and statements from U.S. politicians regarding their views of Trump's revocation of humanitarian aid.

These methods for the main body of the paper can be summarized as using media analysis and personal narratives. Media analysis, applicable to the newspaper sources, involved taking into account American as well as Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran media's portrayal of Trump's aid choices as well as the narratives included. Through these methods, the author had intimate insight into the sentiments of all involved nations, specifically through opinion writings and additional interviews. Furthermore, personal narrative analysis was employed for interviews and articles that prominently featured quotes from interviews. Capturing the personal experiences behind the more frequently disseminated statistics became a key goal of this thesis, as it allows for the humanization of individuals and their stories.

Despite the strength of these convictions regarding the power of storytelling, the issue of quantitative bias must be addressed. Certain types of research are often favored and prioritized; for example, reports that heavily rely on data, statistics, and numerical figures are frequently accepted more readily than qualitative data. While this thesis makes use of quantitative data when beneficial to accurately conveying information, it

primarily relies on the individual stories and experiences. This choice was partially made because the aid decisions of the Trump Administration have all taken place over the past two years, and there has not been sufficient time to generate many quantitative studies and observe the subsequent results. However, and more importantly, this thesis consciously prioritizes the powerful conveyance of mutual concern and individual stories. Despite understanding the risks of quantitative bias, projecting diverse yet also interconnected narratives took priority in discussing the impacts of President Trump's aid reduction.

Overall, this thesis will ask the question "What are the impacts of ending or reducing U.S. humanitarian aid to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador?" Specifically, this work will investigate whether punitive deterrence strategies like aid reduction by the United States possess a strong influence on migrants' decisions to seek refuge or whether these actions simply make the lives of Central Americans, who would chose to migrate anyway due to the strength of the aforementioned push factors, more difficult.

Chapter 5: Introduction

Human movement and migration have become pressing topics of conversation and debate in the modern era, increasing in prevalence with improvement of technology and growth of globalization. Indeed, migration with the intention of seeking refugee or asylum status has particularly been on the rise, as the “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that the number of requests for international refugee or asylum protection increased fivefold from 2010 to 2015” (Medrano 129). Yet despite media portrayals that emphatically focus on the Syrian refugee crisis and its impacts on the global North, issues of mass movement occur all over the world, notably including the current refugee crisis from the Northern Triangle. Sometimes considered failed states, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras face high levels of gang and drug related violence, femicide and violence against women, and extortion and corruption amongst law enforcement and the government. With longstanding U.S. travel warnings in place for all three nations, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras boast “sky-high annual homicide rates, of 83, 27, and 57 per 100,000 residents in 2016” (Tegel). Additionally these countries struggle economically, demonstrated by the fact that “El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras had annual per capita incomes in 2017 of just \$3,889, \$4,471, and \$2,480 respectively, far below the Latin American and Caribbean average of \$9,275” (Tegel). Economic issues showcase deeper seeded problems like the absolute control gang activity exerts over these societies and the overall lack of education and employment opportunities outside of joining the Mara Salvatrucha or the 18th Street gangs.

In response to these extensive issues, which will be elaborated on later, large numbers of migrants stem from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, passing through Mexico in order to seek refugee status and a better life in the United States. The general number of refugees and asylum seekers “from the three countries of the Northern Triangle has seen nearly a tenfold increase since 2011 [...]. Asylum applications from NTCA nationals were 45 percent higher between January and June of 2017 as compared to the same period from 2016” (Cone and Bosch Bonacasa 226). Moreover, this problem is not limited to the United States border, as nations surrounding the Northern Triangle also experience an increasing amount of applications for asylum: “Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran children and families are also seeking refuge closer to home in the neighboring countries of Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize” with a massive “432 percent increase in the number of asylum requests” in these five countries from 2009 to 2012 (Restrepo 2). Elevated numbers of people from the Northern Triangle have also become internally displaced (Restrepo 3).

However, the actual statistics regarding the number of migrants have fallen as of 2019, especially following unprecedented surges of unaccompanied migrant children. This crisis garnered intense media attention during the summer of 2014 when “more than 57,000 children [...] arrived in the United States, double the number who made it to the U.S. southern border in FY 2013” (Restrepo 1). In spite of this incident, strictly measuring according to numbers, it could be argued as of 2018 that there “was no immigration crisis at the border [...] The irregular movement of people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is currently small by historical standards” (Agnew 507). However, a rigid assessment of solely numbers does not provide a comprehensive

understanding of the situation. Instead, one could understand United States immigration policies as currently suffering from a crisis of human rights, as evidenced by recent Trump Administration policies like denial of a proper pathway to asylum status, parent-child separation policies, and termination of aid to the region (Agnew 507). These political actions showcase the overall attitude of the current administration and its disregard for the humanity of Central American migrants, escalating an already tense situation and further endangering already vulnerable people. The extreme politicization of immigration issues accompanying President Trump's election has specifically played into the current administration's debates about humanitarian assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Agnew).

In April of 2019, the Trump Administration announced its intentions to freeze U.S. foreign aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Amounting to \$450 million, President Trump asserted that these nations have failed to stem the outflow of migrants heading towards the United States and need to be punished “‘because they haven't done a thing for us’” (Tegel). However, many experts have called into question the logic behind this position, identifying its contradiction of previous U.S. approaches to foreign relations as the aid allocation exists solely because the U.S. government sought to resolve problems within El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras “by channeling hundreds of millions of dollars through dozens of local and international nongovernmental organizations that carry out development and humanitarian programs on its behalf” (McDonnell). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated aid money to programs that promote a variety of education and employment opportunities in an effort to stabilize the region and therefore discourage migration:

The projects in jeopardy include a series of discount agricultural supply markets in the highlands; rural health clinics; community savings and loans funds; after-school tutoring for kids in violent urban neighborhoods; shelters for victims of domestic abuse and human trafficking; re-integration services for returned migrants; trainings aimed at improving the transparency and effectiveness of local governments; and support for conserving ecologically sensitive landscapes. (McDonnell, 2019)

Without this financial support on the ground, many analysts predict that migratory outflows will grow stronger, as abruptly removing this aid will undermine any sense of opportunity and increase vulnerability in the region. While budget negotiations are ongoing and unresolved as of December 2019, this decision aligns with overall trends and priorities of the Trump Administration, as fiscal year 2016 and 2019 witnessed the aid budget for the region drop from \$750 million to \$530 million (McDonnell).

As of October 2019, President Trump claimed to have reneged his plans to revoke U.S. aid to the Northern Triangle. Through various tweets, Trump praised the three nations for their renewed efforts to combat migration and specifically for signing “new accords with the United States that will potentially allow the Department of Homeland Security to send asylum seekers from the U.S. border back to Central America” (Miroff). While President Trump did not specify the financial amount to be returned, sources close to the decision have widely reported \$143 million (Miroff). While obviously still a considerable figure, these numbers are significantly reduced from the original \$450 million allocated for the aforementioned aid programs. Additionally, reports point to the intentions of the United States government to restrict this funding to limited issues including “counternarcotics operations, military aid, assistance with the resettlement of deportees and programs to prevent young people from joining gangs” (Miroff). While these are important concerns that deserve financial

assistance, programs like those described in McDonnell's article still face increasing uncertainty. Furthermore, the time gap in the release of aid will negatively impact existing programs although the extent of the damage is not yet fully known; many had to suspend services which created complications, inconsistencies, and ultimately regressions in focus communities. Finally, there is overall concern about the deal El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were pressured to make and their ability to quickly implement asylum systems capable of protecting vulnerable groups. Polls in the three nations show minimal public support for "a deal that would require their governments to resettle foreigners seeking refuge," despite promises of accompanying additional aid (Miroff).

As already evidenced, issues relating to migration in the Northern Triangle can be quite broad in scope, therefore this introduction also takes necessary time to define what information and topics will be limited throughout this thesis project. For example, the United States claims a long history of political and militaristic intervention in this region of the world. This problematic fact and the impacts of these interventions on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras form the subjects of other thoroughly done research projects and articles. While these factors are briefly touched upon in the following historical context section, these brief paragraphs cannot do justice to the lengthy investments of time and research undertaken by other authors. Including some of this context is necessary, in order to display the responsibility of the United States to play a role in creating solutions; because the United States has promoted policies that prioritized intervention and involvement, often at the expense of Central American interests, the nation has a duty to assist in the current crises that have been exacerbated

by past actions. However, the overall approach remains to focus on the relationship between aid and migration in the context of the currently occurring refugee crisis.

The Northern Triangle has also historically been the site for a number of surges in migration, related to the extended involvement of the United States. However, this research will only be focusing on the most recent cases of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to the United States. While the history of movement from this region could provide interesting insights into the state of immigration now as well as point to overall patterns, it connects too deeply to the historical events and patterns that extend beyond the scope of this research.

Additionally, when prioritizing a human-oriented approach to comprehending the situation, it can be assumed that migrants themselves do not peruse history texts or the causes of current issues as rationale for leaving. Instead, these migrants focus on the tangible realities of their everyday lives that serve as the impetus for their departure. Relatedly, while push factors feature prominently into this analysis of the impacts of revoking U.S. aid, they will serve as a peripheral focus. The main concerns surround the lack of U.S. aid and support failing as an intended deterrence strategy, and instead becoming its own powerful push factor. While critical to understanding the context of and establishing motivations for migration, no revolutionarily new understandings of other push factors will be introduced. Expert researchers and authors have already spent time examining the root problems of the region, and this information will be featured in the subsequent chapter regarding the historical context and root causes.

Chapter 6: Historical Context and Root Causes

Many authors have taken the time to create quality synthesis pieces about the history of the Northern Triangle's struggles and the root causes that have led to persistent migration out of the region in this modern era, as mentioned throughout the literature review. In order to properly contextualize the more recent issue of Trump's aid decisions and its impacts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, this chapter will summarize some of those previous findings, specifically focusing on the influence of gang activity and derivative problems as well as previous, problematic interventions in the NTCA.

The increased violence followed and sustained by gang activity in the Northern Triangle has historical roots in U.S. foreign policy. In general, violence initially became more commonplace following the United States' "support of wars against popular movements seeking social change in Northern Triangle countries in the 1970s and 1980s" (Carlson 132). The political histories of these nations have been deeply intertwined for decades, as the United States specifically staged multiple interventions in the region ranging from the CIA's operation to overthrow Guatemala's democratically elected president in the 1950's and the U.S. intervention in El Salvador's civil war during the 1980's (Shesgreen). These critical events have led to a lasting impact on migration patterns and safety levels in the Northern Triangle.

Additionally, when gangs began to develop and strengthen in Central American immigrant communities, the U.S. government failed to acknowledge or remedy the causations of this gang development, such as poverty, racism, and a lack of social control (Carlson 132). Instead, the U.S. government attempted to eradicate the gang

problem by passing laws in the 1990s and 2000s that involved the deportation of undocumented immigrants with criminal records to their heritage countries, already fragile and recovering from the aforementioned long term conflict and civil war (Labrador). Arguably even more problematic, many deportees had never actually lived in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras for significant periods of time; instead, these individuals were primarily raised in the United States. Ultimately, these deportations resulted in “strengthening the transnational link between the Central American and U.S. gangs, without curtailing the level of gang violence” in either nation (Carlson 132). Additionally, this meddling changed the dynamics of gangs in the Northern Triangle, creating “maras” or vast networks of “young people associated with the franchises of [...] the Mara Salvatrucha Thirteen (MS-13) and the Eighteenth Street gang (Barrio 18)” (Cruz 46). Both major gangs “formed in Los Angeles: M-18 in the 1960s by Mexican youth, and MS-13 in the 1980s by Salvadorans who had fled the civil war” (Labrador). U.S. policy provided these organizations the opportunity to expand internationally as well as build an estimated base of “85,000 gang members” in the Northern Triangle countries combined (Restrepo 6). Moreover, these two organizations consider each other “enemies to the death” and violently engage in disputes over territory (Cantor 86). This nurtures an unsafe environment that diminishes the ability of the people of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to confidently build their lives in Central America.

This expansion of gang activity directly relates to the extremely high levels of homicide in the Northern Triangle. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime reports that “Honduras had the world’s highest per-capita homicide rate in 2012, at 90.4 homicides

per 100,000 people. El Salvador was fourth in the world, with a rate of 41.2 homicides per 100,000 people, and Guatemala was fifth, with a rate of 39.9 homicides per 100,000 people” (Restrepo 4). Gang presence concentrated in the Northern Triangle produces these grotesquely high figures. In Latin America, gang members committed around two-thirds of registered 2015 homicides (Cantor 84). These figures prove even more concerning when juxtaposed with gang-based homicide levels in other areas of the world: “In Latin America, fully 30 percent of homicides in 2013 were organized-crime or gang-related compared to just 1 percent in Asia, Europe, and Oceania” (Restrepo 5). This numerical discrepancy quantifies the vast differences in safety around the world. The high occurrence of gang instigated homicide sheds light on migration due to fear for life and safety.

Furthermore, gang violence presents a heightened risk to women and young people, impacting levels of migration. Competing gangs consistently target and recruit young men, threatening to kill these teenagers and following through on that threat if they continue to resist membership (Valdés 84). This validates the reasoning behind people leaving El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as regular recruitment directly threatens the lives of citizens. Additionally, gang members frequently rape young women and gang leaders have the power to turn women into sex slaves (Medrano 131). While gang members unfortunately often execute these violent, abusive acts, even the threat of these violations can be psychologically torturous enough to prompt women to abandon their country of origin. In a video from The Guardian, partially filmed in a Mexican migrant shelter, one woman recounted her terrifyingly life altering experiences with gangs in El Salvador: “They beat me. I was in the hospital for eight days. But I

never imagined that I was pregnant. Because during that time they raped me. After all that, they said, be grateful that we didn't kill you" ("If You Come Back"). This horrific account first-handedly recounts the terror imposed on women by Northern Triangle gangs. Women in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras face economic, physical, sexual, and psychological violence, which all influence decisions to seek refuge abroad. Furthermore, Northern Triangle countries do not only have the highest rates of homicide, but specifically report "the world's highest rates of 'femicides'" (Cantor 83). Harming young people and women in particular, violence of all kinds has become a prominent push factor.

Extortion also largely impacts security in the Northern Triangle, thus influencing the need to leave in search of more stable opportunities. Experts estimate that a gang member in the Northern Triangle region "is able to collect approximately \$1,000 every week in 'protection taxes'" (Cruz 46). Gang members coerce protection taxes; they force community members to pay fees to prevent the gang from using physical intimidation or other destructive tactics. Many people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras cannot afford these fees and yet also cannot bear to face the consequential threats. In 2015, a Honduran newspaper discovered that Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans "pay an estimated \$390 million, \$200 million, and \$61 million, respectively, in annual extortion fees to organized crime groups" (Labrador). This exorbitant amount of coerced money discourages people from the Northern Triangle from attempting to grow roots in the region, instead pushing these people to find more stable locations to raise families and run businesses. In the same interview with the woman from the migrant shelter, she describes how she maintained a

successful business in El Salvador until gangs began to threaten her, asserting that, “They took my business, they took my house” (“If You Come Back”). With her source of livelihood and stability for her family destroyed, not to mention the ensuing physical trauma, gang activity forced this woman as well as many others in similar situations to prioritize the preservation of familial safety and wellbeing.

The damaging practice of extortion resonates even more deeply given the low socioeconomic status of the Northern Triangle, connected to a lack of access to education as well as job opportunities. This creates a relentless cycle that both pushes young people into gang life and subsequently allows gang life to continue, additionally fueling migration. For instance, 45.0 percent Salvadorans, 54.8 percent Guatemalans, and 67.4 percent Hondurans live in poverty, enforced by the blatant economic inequality in the nations (Restrepo 6). This widespread poverty disillusioned young people, as many believe that they have no option other than gang life to secure a future in their home country. In order to escape this poverty and subsequent dependency on gang life, many chose to seek educational and economic opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, this poverty and its connection to gangs continues to exist as the government struggles to facilitate alternative education and employment opportunities: “Lack of access to well-paid jobs, training programs, and quality education disproportionately exposed many Central American youngsters to a life of crime and violence” (Cruz 47). Not only do Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan young people find it challenging to trust the public sector, the governments continue to underperform in job creation, training, and educational programs, causing migration to places with increased access to these services.

Not only do these governments have difficulties creating economic change, the Northern Triangle countries additionally struggle with implementing societal change. This inability to protect their own citizens from gang violence and create solutions in the region partially stems from reliance on the aforementioned dubious political interventions of the United States; nevertheless, these challenges increase people's desire to leave and seek safety elsewhere. For example, Cruz maintains that old Central American regimes thwarted political reforms in the 1990s during the installation of democracies, perpetuating problems of the past and undermining efforts to enact change. New governmental actors allowed former government personnel with histories of human rights abuses to continue in their positions, weakening new institutions by maintaining old, flawed practices and overlooking the importance of accountability (Cruz 47). When these governments received opportunities to enact changes and step into power voids occupied by gang organizations during times of civil war, they failed to do so and instead allowed corrupt individuals to maintain previous practices. This greatly decreased confidence in the government's effectiveness; the inability of governments to provide adequate responses to victims of gang violence pushed citizens towards migration (Cantor 90). Presently, the Northern Triangle governments continue to lack control in their own territories due to the influence of gangs: "Real power, then, increasingly rests with a host of autonomous TOC [transnational organized crime] groups, their allied political actors, and private armies equipped with their own resource base that makes the reimposition of state control as a positive influence difficult if not impossible" (Farah 94).

Furthermore, people from the Northern Triangle not only disapprove of a general lack of government control, but also encounter government corruption and its influence on the perpetuation of gang culture. These challenges have been heavily influenced by the interventions of the United States. However, corruption and the prevalence of gang activity remain key factors impacting migration and aid decisions. Corruption scandals in the region surface regularly and have even gone so far as to implicate “former presidents such as Francisco Flores of El Salvador and Alfonso Portillo and Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala” (Colburn 83). The highest office holders being caught in corruption scandals demonstrates the prevalent exploitation of governmental power and makes ordinary citizens doubt their own government’s desire to protect them from gangs. Farah comments on the interconnectedness of government and illegal crime, claiming that the “Northern Triangle is emerging as a region where the state is often no longer the main power center or has become so entwined with a complex and inter-related web of illicit activities and actors that the state itself at times becomes a part of the criminal enterprise” (Farah 90). This politicization of gang activity increases fears regarding the persistence of violence and extortion. Without confidence that the government will stop gang activity, many feel forced to leave to seek safety and stability elsewhere. While issues like corruption often call into question whether aid money would even be used effectively, it arguably creates an incentive for more financial resources as well as logistical support to be implemented in order to help the region manage funds properly and achieve maximum impact.

Along with a lack of confidence in the strength of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran governments, potential refugees do not find local police capable of

combating gang problems, fueling desire to find protection across borders. These three governments host more gang members than police force members (Restrepo 6). This fact complicates law enforcement's ability to hold gang members accountable, showcasing strength in numbers and subsequently overall power in the Northern Triangle region. In recognition of the intense violence, weak policing, and sheer size of gang networks, Northern Triangle governments often turn to military power; however, this cannot be a long term solution. An increased emphasis on regular policing will not be effective while local officers both become consistently overshadowed by military personnel as well as continue to lack job security, training, community trust, and accountability (Malinowski 29). Lack of community trust, especially fueled by police participation in a corrupt and extortive system, prompts citizens to seek refugee status somewhere with competent policing and the accompanying lessened gang presence.

Just as with the government, people doubt the effectiveness of the police as well as often fear police officers' potential corruption due to connections to gang life. For example, Cruz reports one study which asserted that "66 percent of Guatemalans, 49 percent of Salvadorans, and 47 percent of Hondurans believed that their police were implicated in criminal activities" (Cruz 47). Therefore, gang culture persists partially because citizens often do not trust that police workers will support them over gang members. Furthermore, without this basis of trust, gang-inflicted violence and threats often go unreported, increasing the power of crime organizations. All of this compounds to prompt people to leave El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras for greater trust and less gang-intertwined corruption in law enforcement services.

Overall, the Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran national governments have tried a variety of different strategies over the years to minimize the destruction of gangs and migration. For example, Northern Triangle governments adopted policies of *mano dura* or ‘heavy hand’ that “expanded police powers and enacted harsher punishments for gang members” (Labrador). This ultimately failed, as subsequent mass incarceration made prisons ideal recruiting locations for gangs. In 2012, the Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes facilitated peace negotiations between MS-13 and M-18. However, this effort too fell short of success: “Despite the reduction in violence between the gangs, crimes against civilians, such as extortion, continued unabated, and when the peace deal unraveled in 2014, killings more than doubled” (Labrador). Strategies from the Northern Triangle national governments have done little to permanently resolve the conflicts in the region; this can be additionally connected to the previously mentioned struggles of the Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran governments to provide alternative educational and employment opportunities, disengage from corruption, and maintain an effective law enforcement network. Therefore, the United States government has continued to intervene in Northern Triangle gang violence into the present day.

In terms of current efforts, different presidential administrations of the United States government have implemented strategies in reaction to gang activity and subsequent refugee influxes, ultimately continuing the trend of less than successful interventions. As far as individual administrations, President George W. Bush pursued policies including the Millennium Challenge Corporation and Operation Streamline which increased trade and free market reforms in the region as well as criminal

prosecution and deportation for migrants crossing illegally respectively (Labrador). President Barack Obama's Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) focused on providing money to be used for improvements to law enforcement, counternarcotics, and justice systems (Labrador). Obama then amended his approach to introduce the Alliance for Prosperity (A4P), which created a "multiyear, multi-billion dollar effort by Northern Triangle governments and the Inter-American Development Bank to promote commerce and security in response to the 2014 influx of unaccompanied minors" (Labrador). Obama additionally followed up this action with mass deportations of migrants whose asylum claims had been denied in attempts to deter other refugee seekers. Although this summary only includes the most recent presidential administrations, this history of explicit intervention obviously extends back much further, as evidenced by the aforementioned CIA and US historical presence in the region as early as the 1950's. Overall, the United States government has clearly struggled to formulate effective solutions to gang violence and related movement, allowing President Trump the freedom to implement new strategies, including the complete revocation of aid.

The Northern Triangle refugee crisis, as spurred by a complicated political history and persistent gang presence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, continues to impact many individuals and their decisions to migrate. Continued ignorance surrounding the Northern Triangle refugee crisis and a lack of acknowledgment of the very real threats these people attempt to escape has the potential to kill people. For example, one study has shown a "documented eighty-three cases since 2014 where someone deported from the United States was killed within a few

months of their return to Central America. Of these, forty-five cases were in El Salvador, three in Guatemala, and thirty-five in Honduras” (Medrano 134). The underlying push factors of gang activity including homicide, violence against women and children, and extortion, as strengthened by U.S. foreign policy as well as perpetuated by weak and corrupt government and law enforcement, should not be trivialized but instead acknowledged. With these deep-seeded problems in mind, this thesis now turns its attention specifically to President Trump and his administration’s relationship with Central America. Knowing and understanding the root issues dominating the NTCA is essential when considering the potential impacts and implications of revoking the very aid funding that was previously intended to relieve effected citizens and generate solutions to these dilemmas.

Chapter 7: Impacts of Trump's Aid Decisions

Introduction

President Trump's frequently shifting decisions regarding supplying aid to the Northern Triangle of Central America have wreaked havoc on people from the region as well as their institutional counterparts. Countless individuals have stories and opinions related to the withdrawal and reduction of aid that provide valuable, human-oriented understandings of the negative impacts caused by Trump's policy. Disparate actors possess justified opinions about the unfavorable effects of the removal of aid to the Northern Triangle. As discussed in the methods chapter, this thesis will draw from the stories of citizens from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, specifically including beneficiaries of aid programs, migrants, and journalists, statements from aid organization workers, and thoughts from government officials. Previous research and case studies that prominently feature interviews with migrants, excerpts from Central American newspapers, interviews with aid workers, and statements from U.S. politicians clearly point to the negative repercussions of aid reduction from the perspectives of individuals closest to the situation. With this documented support from various contributors, this thesis claims that financial aid suspension has been an ineffective migration deterrence strategy of the United States government. Opportunities in the United States serve as a strong pull factor while the troubles of the Northern Triangle, detailed in the historical context and root causes section, continue to function as strong push factors; although Trump intended for the removal of aid to deter travel through igniting action from the NTCA national governments, the policy has instead created a void of support and reinforced powerful push factors.

Undeniably, there are many overlapping considerations and, in a situation as complicated as this, its nearly impossible to prove causality. Especially due to the relative recentness of these decisions, there is a lack of quantitative data to assert whether changes in aid and funding have a direct correlation with migration numbers increasing. However, the main goal of this thesis remains sharing the experiences of those changed by the loss of aid money and conglomerating opinions to present an overarching look at the overwhelmingly negative impacts, instead of definitively proving a numerical correspondence. Even without strict statistical backing, it seems reasonable to assert that making life more challenging by diminishing aid programs and therefore decreasing alternative options could push already struggling people over the edge and ultimately towards migration. Spohn, whose study will be covered with more depth later in the chapter, valuably asserts that Guatemalans, and by extension Salvadorans and Hondurans, would prefer “to stay with their families and in their native country if they have a standard of living that provides for their needs such as food, education, and providing for children” (Spohn). This underlying assumption, adopted by this thesis project, speaks to the widespread desperation of individuals from the Northern Triangle to generate such intense migratory flows. If conditions were improving in the Northern Triangle due to the financial investment of the United States, it stands to reason that people would prefer to not make the dangerous and uncertain trek across borders. With this presupposition in mind as well as the qualitative, story based approach of this research, this thesis will turn to some background information underlying considerations of aid revocation in the Northern Triangle.

For brief context, it remains important to clarify what exactly is meant when discussing U.S. foreign aid to the Northern Triangle countries; there have been frequent disparities between its function and how it has been characterized, especially by President Trump himself. As briefly conveyed in the introduction section, Trump framed the withdrawal and reduction of aid as punishment for the three national governments, when in reality the vast majority of aid instead goes towards “nongovernmental organizations, churches, charities and private contractors that carry out projects for the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development” (Malkin). The largest portion of these funds goes towards improving justice systems and preventing violence (Malkin). This logistical information fundamentally casts doubt upon the soundness of Trump’s strategies to deter migrants. The relationship between U.S. aid and the national governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras lacks directness and therefore already seems to be a questionable option for creating political pressure. Instead, the humanitarian organizations listed above suffer the direct consequences. A concise look at specific programs from each nation follows in order to provide an even deeper understanding of the primary uses of humanitarian aid and highlight the types of programs being adversely impacted by reductions in funding.

Although the three Northern Triangle countries have similar problems and connected needs, the nations have distinct, unique programs through the assistance of USAID to target specific community concerns. For example, Guatemala receives the most U.S. aid, specifically focusing on economic growth, food security, and rural development. One organization, Feed the Future Guatemala, which focuses on farmer

incomes and nutrition, anticipated receiving “\$36 million over a five-year period from 2017 to 2022” through the U.S. government to achieve projected goals (Specia). This funding is now in jeopardy due to Trump’s reduction in resources; organizers cannot be sure of their long term prospects to implement this important work. Avanzado con Libros is another union based in Honduras that was set to receive “\$9.9 million from 2017 to 2020” in order to provide needed books for teachers, students, and schools (Specia). Because Trump has expressed that reinstated aid will focus on issues of security and migration prevention, programs like Avanzado con Libros are highly likely to continue to face financial uncertainty. USAID has even claimed that previous investments throughout Honduras positively “contributed to an increase in average income for tens of thousands of families, a reduction in homicides and an increased capacity to prosecute criminals” (Specia). This previous success makes the aid cuts seem even more puzzling by illogically risking regressions in progress by abruptly cutting off long-term assistance. Furthermore, the diminishment of mechanisms to maintain these previous investments of time and money compromises the sustainability of these accomplishments and the value of the taxpayer’s investments. Finally, in El Salvador, USAID funding has made a difference in programs like Government Integrity, which explicitly supports local governments in promoting accountability and transparency (Specia). If programs that reduce corruption lose significant funding in favor of focusing resources on issues like security, misuse of funds could more feasibly occur, ultimately nullifying the reinvestment of lesser amounts of aid.

Migrant Interviews and Case Studies

With these specific examples in mind, case studies that feature interviews and research about the impact of aid programs on residents of the Northern Triangle offer important stories and perspectives from migrants and would-be migrants themselves. While it would obviously have been ideal to directly conduct interviews, these articles offer an equally valuable alternative. Interviews and related data from beneficiaries of USAID funded programs and migrants regarding their motives behind relocating, especially as connected to push factors and stronger U.S. deterrence immigration policies, provide authentic accounts of what influences a person's decision to emigrate.

Tim McDonnell produced an article for NPR that covers some reactions of Guatemalan residents to the Trump Administration's aid freeze through in depth interviews. For example, interviewee Carlos Marroquín explained that his family began to receive around \$60 per month from a program implemented by the INGO Save the Children and financed by USAID in November 2018 in order to purchase supplemental grocery staples unable to be grown on their corn farm (McDonnell). However, in August of 2019, he learned that the program would end a year earlier than than hoped due to Trump's aid freeze, stranding Marroquín and others who relied on these funds to remain in Guatemala and avoid extreme poverty. Leslie Karina Azañón González, another beneficiary of the cash transfer program, went so far as to refer to the USAID funding as the "community's only lifeline" (McDonnell). This extreme statement speaks to the isolation felt by community members who had humanitarian assistance abruptly taken away. This program specifically gave participants a reason remain in Guatemala, supplementing their limited incomes as well as providing a method to survive without

more drastic measures like migration. Indeed, Mercy Corps conducted a survey of “400 people who had participated in a two-year agricultural support program in Guatemala [and] found a 30% drop in ‘youth who reported seriously considering migrating ‘all the time’ or ‘frequently’ after participating in the program” (McDonnell). While these programs are not solutions to root problems in and of themselves, the impacts should not be ignored or minimized. In an already vulnerable region, stability like that provided by nutrition and agricultural support programs make a difference in influencing migration. Mercy Corps additionally utilized USAID money to clean up streets and create new urban parks in Guatemala City, which interviewee Elvis Flores asserted led to increased investment in the community and helped “‘people feel like they can stay here.’” (McDonnell). Although such improvement projects do not fundamentally reduce gang life or increase safety levels, confidence in the potential for improvement and investment in bettering the area greatly influences would-be migrants to stay instead. However, the slashing of aid allocation has meant that although the NGO originally planned to complete 80 park projects, only 12 will be possible (McDonnell). The drastic reduction in the number of parks that will be created implies an equally drastic reduction in the number of Guatemalans that will be positively impacted by the additions to their communities. This in turn could increase migratory flows out of communities deemed inhospitable. Moreover, the termination of aid projects means the firing of employees who rely on a stable income from nonprofit partners: “The Save the Children office in Santa Cruz del Quiché [...] will close. Before the cuts, it employed more than 200 people, all Guatemalans” (McDonnell). The

impacts of aid reduction reach farther than the automatic loss of funds; whole programs must be ended, effecting employment chains like that of the Save the Children office.

Monica Spohn's research investigates Guatemalan emigrants' motivations for emigrating, including a specific discussion regarding the impact of USAID investments. There are some undeniable limitations to the application of this case study: Spohn only interviews eight people and only contacts individuals who chose to emigrate instead of decided against emigration. Although limited, this line of investigation remains compelling by asking direct questions about the influence of U.S. foreign policy and specifically USAID. Drawing from the personal stories of eight adult emigrants, Spohn determined that participants did not have much experience with aid programs; however, four out of eight asserted that if they had access to such programs "they would not have made the journey to the U.S. and would have stayed in Guatemala with their families" (Spohn). These interviewees actually assert that even prior to Trump's withholding of aid, USAID was not effectively addressing their needs of educational opportunities and jobs. This implies the need to increase the reach and content of aid programs to effectively discourage emigration, essentially the exact opposite from action advocated by President Trump. While 50% of the sample may not sound promising, one must remember that only eight individuals partook in the study. Furthermore, the individuals interviewed all actually emigrated, which could have ultimately influenced the answers they provided, as it can be hard to imagine a life without such an impactful event after it has already taken place. Although aid programs were not available to the Guatemalans included in this sample, interviewees "indicated that they would help slow emigration if they reach more people in need" (Spohn). Emigrating Guatemalans, the main target of

the United States government, explicitly described how increased or sustained USAID projects would encourage individuals to remain in their communities of origin. These individuals also specifically requested the expansion of development programs that target adults and address education as well as economic needs, aspects of humanitarian assistance largely ignored by President Trump's restrictions surrounding the reinstatement of financial aid.

Hiskey et. al. similarly researched the underlying reasons for Honduran emigrants to move away from their country, explicitly exploring the extent to which knowledge of heightened U.S. immigration deterrence efforts influenced respondents' emigration decision. While this study does not specifically consider President Trump's revocation of aid as a deterrence strategy, extrapolating the findings of Hiskey et. al. to the foreign aid situation produces valuable findings about the general ineffectiveness of such methods. For instance, through survey evidence from select municipalities in Honduras, it can be concluded that "these individuals persist in their migration plans even if they are fully aware of the dangers they are likely to encounter along the way and the high probability of deportation if they make it to the United States" (Hiskey 430). Again, while not specifically referencing the impact of U.S. aid decisions, these findings speak to the overall ineffectiveness of deterrence strategies in mitigating migration. Push factors in the Northern Triangle are so potent that even being actively discouraged by U.S. government policies does not stop attempts to immigrate to the United States. Indeed, Hiskey et. al. offers an in-depth explanation of the attraction of deterrence strategy as well as its limitations:

That appeal rests on the idea that if individuals living in these contexts can just be convinced that emigration is a riskier alternative than staying

home then they will decide to stay. Unfortunately, however, understanding why policymakers in the United States are likely to opt for a strategy of deterrence based on detention and deportation does not make it an effective strategy. What our results point to is the inability of this approach to dissuade that subset of individuals who have directly experienced the cruelties of life in a high-crime context from taking a life-threatening chance to escape that reality. (Hiskey 442)

Again relating to the oft disregarded importance of push factors, deterrence strategies have repeatedly proved to be ineffective in the face of the concerns in the Northern Triangle region, which will remain entrenched without financial investment and support. Furthermore, it is not a just solution to simply convince potential emigrants that movement will be more dangerous than remaining in the often detrimental communities they currently reside in without addressing the root sources of that danger. This research also investigates the role knowledge surrounding the increasement and intensification of deterrence strategies plays into the decision to emigrate; Hiskey et. al. concluded that although the vast majority of respondents “were aware of the stricter US immigration policy regime, this awareness had no effect on their consideration of emigration as a viable strategy” (Hiskey 429). These findings can be projected on President Trump’s usage of aid reduction as faulty tool to reduce migration. Although would-be migrants will likely have an awareness of the United States’ opposition to their movement, this will not necessarily change their decision to be pushed towards the United States by conditions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. With this logic, increasing aid allocation would be even more ideal as a method to reduce push factors and thus the desire to emigrate.

Northern Triangle Newspapers

Newspapers from journalists in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras allow an opportunity to view the aid dilemma from outside the lens of the United States. While one must be aware that journalists are singular people that cannot speak for whole nations or regions, their inclusion allows more global perspectives to be included. Furthermore, their thoughts often reflect the attitudes of their audiences or help guide their audiences towards certain conclusions. Additionally, while journalists are trained to be objective, opinion pieces and articles featuring interviews of other Central American citizens have been especially included to gain a better understanding of the repercussions from the aid decisions to those directly impacted.

The first article, an opinion piece for a Salvadoran newspaper, Alberto Valiente Thoresen discusses the nature of U.S. aid to his country of origin: “Sin embargo, sería erróneo caracterizar la ayuda estadounidense a estos países como mera caridad. Esta se ha justificado principalmente como una inversión para los Estados Unidos. Por ello, debe ser tratada como tal. También debe considerarse como una obligación moral” (Valiente Thoresen). Rejecting the idea that USAID constitutes mere charity that the United States is not obligated to sustain, Valiente Thoresen instead asserts that government aid is not only an investment but a moral obligation due to the country’s previous interference in El Salvador. Speaking as a Salvadoran citizen, Valiente Thoresen demonstrates the frustration felt due to the United States conversely meddling and withdrawing without personal consequence while detrimentally effecting El Salvador. Valiente Thoresen goes on to discuss the power the United States commands over the poorer and smaller nation, writing, “Es claramente poco ético dejar que los

aliados más débiles, quienes se han mantenido en la línea de fuego por los intereses de los Estados Unidos, se queden solos ante la adversidad, haciendo que la ayuda que ellos necesitan con urgencia sea condicional a resultados que no se pueden entregar” (Valiente Thoresen). Again referring to the United States as owing the Central American nation for its involvement during the Salvadoran civil war, the author contends that El Salvador should not be held to such rigid standards of ending migration while in need of assistance when the United States has been equally unable to achieve those same desired results. While not directly referencing the influence of aid reduction on migration decisions, Valiente Thoresen speaks more broadly to the longterm turmoil and therefore negative effects such financial choices will have on El Salvador as a country, a sentiment likely shared by readers.

Next, Christopher Sherman writes for a Guatemalan newspaper about the migration attempts of one Salvadoran woman. Although Sherman originates from the United States, he is currently a correspondent in Mexico City for The Associated Press possessing copious experience covering stories about migration and good relations with Spanish-language news sources. More importantly, he includes interview material with Central American natives that speaks to the role of Trump’s aid reduction in influencing migration. Sherman specifically recounts the story of an attempted migrant woman who had not heard about the most recent developments with U.S. government aid and connected negotiations to minimize the travel of asylum-seekers towards the United States: “El gobierno de Trump selló varios acuerdos con El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras para frenar la llegada de migrantes a Estados Unidos. Ella nunca se había enterado de eso” (Sherman). The Salvadoran woman, unnamed for security, still tried to

emigrate twice with her three and nine-year old sons to reunite with her husband in the United States (Sherman). In this particular situation, Trump's aid policies doubly failed, as this woman remained determined to migrate both during the suspension of aid and when the Northern Triangle countries made asylum limiting deals to regain some funding.

In another article from Guatemala, Grecia Ortíz reports on recent statements by U.S. Congressman Elliot L. Engel regarding the impacts of Trump's alterations to Northern Triangle aid. While this information could easily be instead included in the section about reactions from government officials, who is reporting this information and who the author is reporting it to ultimately matters more. Ortíz elaborates on the recent developments regarding the partial reinstatement of aid through the commentary of Engel, the president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, who newly asserted, “Al finalizar los programas y luego reiniciarlos, es probable que este enfoque también termine costando mucho más al contribuyente estadounidense a largo plazo con muchos menos resultados” (Ortíz). Taking a very logical approach, Engel laments the financial ineffectiveness of the stopping and starting behind Trump's aid decisions. Specifically, Engel claims that the United States “perdió más de un año y \$400 millones en esfuerzo a largo plazo para abordar las causas profundas de la migración infantil y familiar” in favor of what he refers to as Trump's “radical y antiinmigrante” agenda (Ortíz). While these arguments are similar to those expressed by other U.S. government officials, Ortíz writes for a Guatemalan newspaper, specifically about “temas de interés para la comunidad migrante en Estados Unidos” (Ortíz). The author has determined that Engel's perspectives are of special concern to Guatemalans

and the connected community of Guatemalan migrants, thus indicating a sustained concern about the topic. Furthermore, by highlighting commentary that discusses the negative impacts of Trump's policies on previous time and financial investments, the author indicates and addresses her readership's preexisting interests regarding the failures behind the removal of aid.

In a article predating the official withdrawal of aid, a Honduran newspaper article quotes Trump claiming that the Northern Triangle countries can easily stop migration caravans from forming and simply choose not to because ““quieren librarse de gente de su país, de ciertas personas”” (“Trump acusa”). This news source focused on the most ludicrous of Trump's assertions, that the NTCA actively encourages individuals to migrate in order to get rid of certain citizens. Revealing projected, racist understandings of Central American migrants as criminals that their own government does not want, this article discredits Trump and his threats to remove aid in the eyes of its Honduran audience by pointing out the ridiculous beliefs the American President holds towards Central American migrants. While a direct relationship cannot be established, these sentiments expressed in the media undoubtedly influence Honduran citizens and potential migrants, ultimately creating a negative perception of deterrence strategies employed by the United States.

Aid Workers and Organizations

While migrants and Central American citizens are obviously the first populations impacted by Trump's decisions to alter aid allocation to the Northern Triangle, aid workers and operations in the region have also been deeply shaped. Not only have they had to deal with the uncertainty of funding and the ability to continue

performing their deeply needed services, but these individuals have extensive experience with the needs of their beneficiaries and therefore a strong sense of the potential negative effects of limiting aid. Their realities and accompanying stories have been included to reveal yet another perspective on the negative impacts caused by Trump's aid policies.

In April of 2019, more than “70 organizations issued a statement in response to announcements by the Trump Administration” regarding the end of foreign assistance programs in the Northern Triangle through InterAction, an group that fosters the formal alliances of international NGOs and partners in the United States (“Community Reactions”). The contributors condemned the shortsighted approach and voiced concerns that this choice would ultimately undermine the nation’s own policy goals as well as make life more challenging for vulnerable people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Even before the effects of the aid limitations had fully set in, multitudes of field experts could ascertain the inevitable negative impacts on the communities they have worked with for extended periods of time and the ineffectiveness of such policies at ultimately deterring migration. Organizations including Mercy Corps, Project Concern International, Catholic Relief Services, and CARE International have all reported the need to curtail or terminate programs, leaving program recipients in uncertain standing (McDonnell). Traditional staples in these Central American communities, NGO’s and INGO’s have been forced into such an unexpectedly desperate position that they no longer possess the same influence in encouraging potential migrants to remain in their nation of origin. They cannot offer resources or even words of assurance, having been forced into an equally vulnerable position by the

U.S. government. Rick Jones, a youth and migration advisor for the INGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS), voices his concern about the revocation of aid from the United States government, asserting, ““If there is no US support for these people, there’s a boomerang effect where people are going to get desperate and say I have no other opportunity but to migrate”” (White). Supplying the perspective of an individual deeply familiar with both the push factors and pull factors facing would-be migrants, Jones candidly remarks on the significant responsibility the United States government has recently shirked in an effort to promote deterrence policies. Indeed, aid organizations are quick to point out that foreign humanitarian assistance already “accounts for less than one percent of the nation’s overall budget,” begging the question of the minimal impact on the U.S. budget versus the potential positive impacts of continuing assistance (White). Aid organizations want to help Northern Triangle citizens improve their lives and give individuals reasons to remain integrated in their Central American communities; however, many aid workers and organizations remain unable to assist without USAID funding, increasing the probability of immigration to the United States.

U.S. Government Officials

Finally, government officials located in the United States have expressed concern over President Trump’s humanitarian aid plans in the Northern Triangle. While unlike the aforementioned actors these individuals are not on the ground experiencing the impacts of funding losses, many are well versed in the potential political as well as human ramifications of reducing aid to those in need. Their stories of concern about the anticipated negative impacts on migratory flows equally describe the ineffectiveness of Trump’s intended deterrence strategy.

The organization InterAction additionally compiled excerpts of statements about President Trump’s Northern Triangle aid decision from various U.S. senators and representatives, all of which overwhelmingly commented on the counter-productivity of ending investments that ultimately strive to prevent the outbreak of conflict (“Community Reactions”). Bipartisan condemnation of this aid reduction showcases the great support for creating hope and reasons to stay through foreign assistance funding which, as many government leaders pointed out, has demonstrated successful results. Indeed, although Trump and his allies have often been vocal supporters of aid reduction and confident in its ability to create the desired impact of encouraging the Northern Triangle to reduce migration, many others doubt the chosen methods: “Mr. Trump’s decision to end the aid to the Central American countries is likely to anger members of Congress from both parties, who have supported spending money to try to address the root causes of the violence that has caused migrants to flee those countries to come to the United States” (Rogers). Rarely in the present day United States government is there bipartisan support regarding an aspect of immigration; however, aid for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras fit that description. Countless senators and representatives acknowledged the importance of recognizing root causes forcing migration in order to effectively persuade individuals to remain in the Northern Triangle, instead of applying blindly damaging deterrence methods. Contrary to Trump’s stated goals, some government officials even expressed concern that “the Administration’s proposed foreign assistance cuts, combined with other policy shifts, could contribute to a relative decline in U.S. influence” in Central America (Meyer 19). This observation describes the irony of expecting a diminishment in financial influence to exert more control than

an active financial presence and support. Overall, government officials, theoretically the contributors closest to Trump, still express doubts over utilizing aid suspension as an effective deterrence strategy, commenting on the inevitable negative repercussions for migratory flows.

Conclusion

Numerous actors deeply familiar with conditions in the Northern Triangle of Central America have expressed concern about the impacts of Trump revoking aid to the region. Indeed, many have claimed that the reduction in aid will cause the exact opposite effect from what Trump intends; experts personally familiar with the situation assert that migratory outflows could increase due to the strengthening of pre-existing push factors without the mitigating support of USAID funding and associated humanitarian programs. While President Trump claims that reducing aid serves as an effective threat to the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to deter migration, interviews and commentaries from migrants, aid program beneficiaries, Central American journalists, aid organization workers, and U.S. politicians showcase a contrasting understanding of the situation. Personal narratives and perspectives from those deeply invested in the situation affirm the negative consequences from Trump's decisions to retract and partially reinstate U.S. government aid to the Northern Triangle.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis project aimed to investigate the impacts of President Trump's removal and later reduction of humanitarian financial assistance to the Northern Triangle countries in Central America. By specifically exploring the personal, human-oriented stories of citizens from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, including beneficiaries of aid programs, migrants, and journalists, statements from aid organization workers, and thoughts from government officials, this thesis concludes that Trump's decisions can be expected to negatively effect the lives of those connected to the aid and subsequently fail to stem migratory flows. Indeed, some interviews and commentaries have asserted that negative ramifications have already begun to be felt. Although the Trump administration intended to reduce migration towards the United States by punishing NTCA governments and theoretically encouraging these nations to more effectively deter movement themselves, countless experts have instead insisted that eradicating support for aid programs diminishes supportive foundations within origin communities, thus prompting extreme actions like migration. While President Trump attempted to capitalize on deterrence immigration policies to stem migration, the Administration failed to acknowledge the power of longterm push factors in the region and the role of USAID funding in locally managing those challenges and encouraging community investment over relocation.

Overall, there are copious opportunities to further this beneficial research. Firstly, more in-depth interviews in the Northern Triangle focusing on the opinions and experiences of the target groups featured throughout this analysis would prove especially valuable. While the primary information obtained clearly demonstrated the

risks of Trump's aid policies, generating more data specifically regarding the impacts of aid programs on decisions to proceed with emigration could be particularly important. Additionally, Trump's policies towards aid allocation to the Northern Triangle remain frequently changing; documenting and analyzing the impacts of continued alterations could prove interesting. Relatedly, because of the recent nature of these events, many long-term effects have not yet been felt by both Central Americans citizens and aid workers. Allowing time to pass before investigating further could allow for larger trends to be documented and included in analysis.

Supporting this research and future variations remains critically necessary seeing as this work could have implications for various important political decisions in the United States as well as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Overall, the dilemma of migration from the Northern Triangle will not resolve itself, implying a need for immediate and, more importantly, effective interventions to be considered. While Trump's problematic strategy of complete removal of aid is relatively new, the United States government has been involved in the region for decades with limited success. This project could serve as a jumping off point for unearthing potential courses of action that will make a difference in U.S. policy success in the region as well as curbing the overall suffering of asylum-seekers. However, creating such an impact is likely to take time, increasing the justification for discovering the most impactful action in order to make a difference as soon as possible. Furthermore, this financial aid debate connects to a much wider set of immigration concerns. President Trump has made immigration a signature issue for his Administration, often generating polarizing debates between political parties. Trump has taken executive action on diverse aspects

of immigration including parent-child separation at the Mexican border, travel bans from Muslim-majority countries, building an expanded wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, and the remain in Mexico program, related to the asylum limitation agreements signed by the Northern Triangle countries (“Candidate Tracker”). These varied, yet deeply connected contemporary social issues have a huge role in modern discourse regarding immigration. With the 2020 U.S. presidential election rapidly approaching, and incumbent President Donald Trump running for reelection, thorough examination of all of his immigration policies appears more important than ever. After affirming the general ineffectiveness and harm of his choices regarding aid to the Northern triangle, it stands to reason that President Trump’s other immigration decisions should be carefully considered for validity as well as level of harm towards migrants and other stakeholders, especially before a potential reelection.

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