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Dr. Dinius

INST 421

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Why Families Flee: A Study of Northern Triangle Migration Patterns

Explanation of Research Question:

For my senior thesis, I am addressing the motivations for and patterns of the massive influx of families emigrating from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) of Central America. Since 2012, the number of family units apprehended at the United States border has increased five-fold with most families coming from Central America as opposed to Mexico.[1] I define family units according to the definition provided by United States Customs and Border Patrol as follows: " the number of individuals (either a child under 18 years of age, parent or legal guardian) apprehended with a family member."[2] Given that the United States implements a strict definition of family when documenting immigrants, the increase in family units is likely an underestimate since extended family members do not qualify. This data also does not include family units who present themselves to authorities in Mexico in order to claim asylum or fail to complete the journey out of the Northern Triangle.

	FY 13	FY 14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
Family Units	14,885	68,445	39,838	77,674	75,662	107,212

The number of family units apprehended at the United States-Mexico border from fiscal year 2013 to fiscal year 2018 according to United States Customs and Border Patrol. [3]

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[1] "Recent Migration to the United States from Central America: Frequently Asked Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, January 29, 2019. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45489.pdf.

[2] "U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Family Unit and UAC Apprehensions (FY 2014 - FY 2016)." Washington DC: *US Customs and Border Patrol*, 2016. https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2016-Oct/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Family%20Units%20and%20UAC%20Apps%20-%20FY16.pdf.

[3] "Southwest Border Migration FY2017." United States Customs and Border Patrol, December 15, 2017. https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration-fy2017; "United States Border Patrol Southwest Family

Commented [OD1]: How much is massive. Give us a scale.

Commented [OD2]: All good analysis is nuanced!

Commented [OD3]: Do you have specific numbers? Or at least rough numbers? It is always nice to make these scales concrete.

Commented [OD4]: Meaning?

Through my research, I want to analyze the demographic shift in migration patterns from single adults to family units when emigrating from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Essentially, I hope to document trends in family migration over time using quantitative data and analyze the influence of US immigration policy using qualitative data. The demographic information on migration is less complete due to the lack of consistent and organized polling and statistics in the Northern Triangle so I will employ data which predominantly comes from the United States Customs and Border Patrol. I plan to conduct a tri-country analysis of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, but I am prepared to adjust the scope in light of limited data or methodological constraints.

Characteristics of the Northern Triangle

Northern Triangle countries have replaced Mexico as the largest sources of family units migrating to the United States. The region has a complex history of interaction with foreign actors, specifically the United States which contributed to the adverse conditions that encourage Central Americans to emigrate to the United States today. The United States sponsored a coup in 1954 to overthrow the democratically elected Jacobo Árbenz, and installed a military government. The post-Arbenz era ushered in decades of instability, military rule by Carlos Castillo Armas, and strife which culminated in the deaths of over 200,000 indigenous people.[4] In El Salvador in the 1980's, the United States trained and funded death squads and facilitated the creation of a militarized society. This triggered mass migration from El Salvador to the United

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Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016." Washington DC: Customs and Border Patrol, June 17, 2019. https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016.
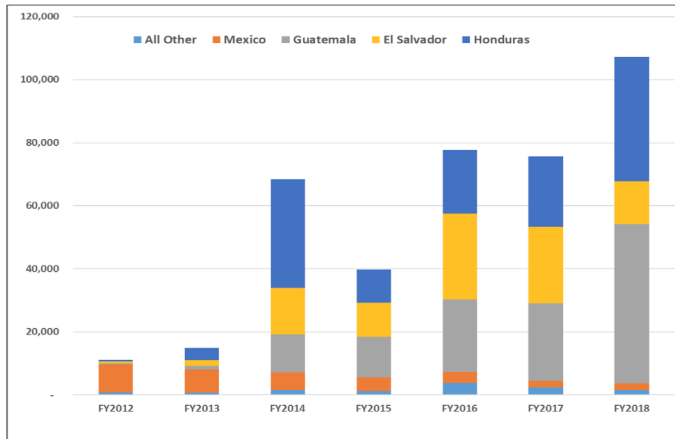
[4] Borger, Julian. "Fleeing a Hell the US Helped Create: Why Central Americans Journey North." *The Guardian*, December 19, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/central-america-migrants-us-foreign-policy.

Commented [OD5]: Good. Clear.

Commented [OD6]: Moy entirely clear what that refers to.

Commented [OD7]: At some point, you will need to include a map of the Northern Triangle – at the latest for the thesis writers conference.
It helps the geographical understanding of the migration pressure.

Commented [OD8]: Be more specific in terms of the time-frame of the impact. Guatemala had massive killing until the 1980s, under the government of Rios Montt – who was recently on trial.

States where marginalized immigrant groups formed the gang which evolved into the modern Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13. Under Reagan, MS-13 members were deported back to El Salvador where the gang further organized and became a prominent force within the region. Finally, in Honduras, the United States stationed troops there to combat the Sandinistas in Nicaragua resulting in the construction of US military bases. The militarization of Honduras created a culture of repression with widespread poverty and human rights abuses that helped provoke widespread migration to the United States beginning in the 1990's. Historical drivers of migration in the region include "weak institutions and corrupt government officials, economic growth that does not significantly reduce chronic poverty, rising levels of crime, and demand for illicit drugs result in insecurity and citizens' low levels of confidence in government institutions."[5] While Central Americans continue to flee for those reasons, these countries are

> **Commented [OD9]:** This may be a little too abstract for the level of analysis.
> You can probably make that more concrete.
>
> What you cite here applies to Central America for much of the last 100 years… in a sense.

Recent Migration to the United States from Central America: Frequently Asked Questions

Figure 2. Total Family Unit Apprehensions at the Southwest Border by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, FY2012-FY2018

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Border Patrol, "Stats and Summaries," https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/media-resources/stats.

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[5] "Recent Migration from Central America to the United States," 4.

particularly affected by "high homicide rates gang activity, extortion, and corrupt public institutions"[6]. Many of the aforementioned factors are a direct product of US involvement in the Northern Triangle. The region also is extremely vulnerable to changes in climate. Given that large numbers of workers in the Northern Triangle pertain to the agricultural sector, climate fluctuations prove extremely important in migration decisions. Central American immigrants in the United States are not a new phenomenon but rather a steadily growing one since the 1980's. However, a pattern has emerged in recent years in the Northern Triangle involving a dramatic increase in family unit's migrating together as well as unaccompanied minors (see Figure 2 above). This paper will specifically analyze the role of family units in that increase. In that context, the data on unaccompanied minors may serve as a helpful framework and point of reference.

See Figure 1 below for basic data on the Northern Triangle countries:

	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Population Size	6.42 million	17.25 million	9.59 million
Population Density	310 people/square km	161 people/square km	86 people/square km
Population Age 0-14	27%	34%	31%
Population Age 15-65	64%	61%	64%
GDP/capita PPP (2011 Constant International $)	7,393	7,509	4,560

Figure 1: World Bank Indicators for Population Size, Population Density, Population Age (%), and GDP/capita PPP in 2011 Constant International Dollars for the year 2018[7]

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[6] O'Connor, Allison, Jeanne Battalova, and Jessica Bolter. "Central American Immigrants in the United States," August 15, 2019. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states.

[7] World Development Indicators 2018, *The World Bank,* 2018. https://data.worldbank.org

Commented [OD10]: You will need to figure out what your level of specificity will be. Are you interested decades, or rather a shorter time frame.

These institutional and broader causal factors matter, but how prominent you make them depends on the angle to pursue.

Commented [OD11]: Here, you are shifting to a shorter time frame which will probably be your focus.

Commented [OD12]: You will probably expand that framework and add data more closely related to your migration analysis.

Do numbers of migrants correspond to population density? Do they correspond to gang presence? Just possibilities for you to develop the analysis… Those could be additional variables in your quantitative analysis, for example, if you have the data for the equivalent years.

Data and Methods

My methodology will involve two sections, one quantitative and one qualitative. For

qualitative data, I will examine local newspaper sources from the Northern Triangle, American

think tank reports, and secondary sources which conducted interviews with migrant families and

children, gathered data regarding the migration process, or address the concept of migration

patterns from the Northern Triangle. Using keywords such as "family migration," "United States

immigration policy," and "Northern Triangle migration," I will use qualitative sources to

systematically determine how the patterns of migration to the United States are impacted by

United States foreign policy and immigration laws. I potentially will pick a series of relevant

time frames and analyze the newspaper coverage in the Northern Triangle for that time frame to

gauge US policy and patterns of migration. Based on this analysis, I will analyze how United

States immigration policies historically influences family decisions to migrate and particularly

relates to the recent increase in family units in the past decade.

For quantitative data, I will conduct regression analysis using survey data. The potential

data source options include the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) which allows

for the exportation of Stata data for a wide variety of variables particularly with regards to crime

victimization, political preferences, intentions to migrate and opinion data regarding the

country's largest problems[8]. The annual Latinobarometro survey data available in SPSS, Stata,

and R format is a Latin America wide survey that asks questions to respondents regarding how

they and their family view particular issues.[9] While this survey does not exactly interview family

units directly, the responses are designed to represent the perspectives of family units though

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[8]The Latin American Public Opinion Project: America's Barometer, *Vanderbilt University*, 2016.
http://datasets.americasbarometer.org/database/index.php?freeUser=true#
[9] "Informe 2018." Santiago, Chile: Latinobarómetro, 2018. http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp.

answered by a single person. The Latinobarometro survey is a good tool for comparative study however it also does not include drivers of migration like migration history and existence of family members in the United States. The Latin American Migration Project is the most migration specific of the three databases however it only contains data regarding Guatemala and El Salvador[10]. This data is available through Stata, SPSS, and SAS download and contains specific demographic information on families migrating however the most updated version is 2007. I will compare the conclusions obtained to US border patrol data regarding the amount of family units arriving at the United States border. I hope to use quantitative data to arrive at conclusions with regards to family migration patterns. However, if the available data does not represent the migration decisions of families

I have considered possible frameworks for the analysis. First, the *International Migration Review*'s "Crime Victimization in Latin America and Intentions to Migrate to the United States" employs a Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model to test the statistical significance of crime victimization in family migration decisions.[11] The researchers chose crime victimization as their variable of choice because it is regarded as a significant driver of migration. While the HGLM model may prove too complex for an undergraduate thesis, I hope to restructure the methodology given I plan to only complete a three-country study. I will use the intention to migrate as the dependent variable of my study and select other facts such as being a parent, favorable views of the United States, I will run regression analysis of each country and compare the results based on the database deemed most relevant and appropriate for this study. The hierarchical model

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[10]Latin American Migration Project, *Princeton University* and *University of Guadalajara*, 2019. https://opr.princeton.edu/archive/lamp/

[11] Wood, Charles H., Chris L. Gibson, Ludmila Ribeiro, and Paula Hamsho-Diaz. "Crime Victimization in Latin America and Intentions to Migrate to the United States." *International Migration Review*44, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 3–24. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.11111). 1747-7379.2009.00796.

Commented [OD16]: You'll need to figure out how you can make the different data sources/sets compatible in terms of their software, if that is an issue.

Dr. Guo will be able to advise.

Commented [OD17]: Is that still on the table, and can it be combined with the data from LAPOP and LatinoBarometro?

We discussed it, but I am not entirely sure now.

used by the Woods study is used to do a continent-wide analysis but given the three Northern

Triangle countries are relatively similar, I should be able to omit this section which makes the

model simpler.

The *Children and Youth Services Review*'s article entitled "El Salvadoran Youth

Migration: A Formative Assessment Focused on Salvadoran Repatriation Facilities."[12] uses a

multimethod approach based on a combination of small-scale qualitative interviews and

quantitative analysis using LAPOP surveys. The researchers interviewed deported youth upon

repatriation regarding their primary reasons for emigrating and compared the results to large

national surveys. While repatriation is not directly connected to family migration, the manner in

which the researchers incorporated LAPOP data is relevant to my study. They used the LAPOP

AmericasBarometer, a survey conducted every two-years, from 2004-2012 to calculate annual

means and percentages of issues impacting Salvadoran residents during the time period. I could

potentially conduct a similar analysis over a given period of time to analyze patterns in family

migration using the Latinoberometro, LAPOP, or US Customs and Border Patrol data or a

combination of the three.

Commented [OD18]: Interesting. I do not remember that we discussed that specifically, and I look forward to hearing your ideas about that combination of different sources (which I mentioned above).

Chapter Outline

The introductory chapter of my senior thesis will introduce a brief overview of family

migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America to the United States. It will include the

research question and the sub-questions imbedded within it which will prove as the subject of my

analysis. Throughout this section, I will briefly outline the historical relationship of the United

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[12] Anastario, Michael, Kelle Barrick, Deborah Gibbs, Wayne Pitts, Rose Werth, and Pamela Lattimore. "Factors Driving Salvadoran Youth Migration: A Formative Assessment Focused on Salvadoran Repatriation Facilities." *Children and Youth Services Review*59 (October 31, 2015): 97–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.10.019.

States in facilitating events in the Northern Triangle thus provoking some of the mass migration observed today. I will identify key pieces of literature which reinforce the research question and provide valuable context to study of family migration. This section will include a series of graphs and tables which provide the necessary context for the analysis and an outline of the thesis structure.

Chapter two will shift the focus to quantitative data analysis using either or both the Latinoberometro and LAPOP public opinion data. While these surveys are not designed to exclusively study migration, they both address migration decisions and have the potential to analyze family migration patterns. I will conduct logistical regression analysis between questions over a series of four to five years in order to track patterns of family migration. This chapter will include one subsection on data and methodology, one subsection on the results and analysis, and a final sections on key limitations of the findings. I hope to do a tri-country analysis using survey data within each country however I am willing to adjust if the available data does not permit.

The third chapter will describe qualitative data surrounding the research question. Perhaps the most important piece of qualitative data that cannot be captured numerically is how US policy or events correspond with family migration decisions. I plan to select certain events or significant time periods and analyze the newspaper coverage in central America during that time period. One potential approach could include researching the number of "family migration" mentions at the time that President Trump enacted the zero tolerance policy. Lastly, in this section I hope to do an analysis of US foreign policy's role in the process of family migration. This section will also include any relevant narratives or studies regarding migration patterns from the Northern Triangle.

The fourth and final chapter will include the overarching conclusions of the research based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis. It will interpret the results from the quantitative and qualitative sections in comparison with the proposed hypotheses. If space permits, I will speak to the contribution of this work and the results' overall implications for migration in the region. Lastly, I will discuss the overall limitations of the study and propose suggestions for further research.

Writing Plan

October 14-18: Read and annotate 2+ sources per day, produce a final draft of prospectus and chapter outline, create a concrete plan for quantitative data implementation, learn to use SPSS
      October 14: meet with Celia Parks, Dr. Guo

October 21-25: Read and annotate 1+ sources per day, consider concrete plan for systematic qualitative data implementation, prepare for thesis writer's conference: provide preliminary data (qualitative and quantitative) for one country (⅓), develop preliminary hypotheses
      Meeting with Dr. Jackson

October 28-November 1: Thesis Writer's Conference, read and annotate 1+ source/day

November 4-8: Produce quantitative data for country 2/3

November 11-15: Produce quantitative data for country 3/3

November 18-22: Refine questions and hypotheses for quantitative data

November 25-29: Thanksgiving/potentially analyze qualitative data for country 2/3

December 2-6: Finish Preliminary Research Project by Friday

December 9-13: Finals

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United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016." Washington DC: Customs and Border Patrol, June 17, 2019. https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016.

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