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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Units</th>
<th>FY 13</th>
<th>FY 14</th>
<th>FY 15</th>
<th>FY 16</th>
<th>FY 17</th>
<th>FY 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14,885</td>
<td>68,445</td>
<td>39,838</td>
<td>77,674</td>
<td>75,662</td>
<td>107,212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/central-america-migrants-us-foreign-policy). 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 States.

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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." While Central Americans continue to flee for those reasons, these countries are

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5 "Recent Migration from Central America to the United States," 4.
Williams 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 is also 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:

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

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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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. 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. While this survey does not exactly interview family units directly, the responses are designed to represent the perspectives of family units though

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.\footnote{Latin American Migration Project, \textit{Princeton University} and \textit{University of Guadalajara}, 2019. \url{https://opr.princeton.edu/archive/lamp/}}. 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 \textit{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.\footnote{Wood, Charles H., Chris L. Gibson, Ludmila Ribeiro, and Paula Hansho-Diaz. “Crime Victimization in Latin America and Intentions to Migrate to the United States.” \textit{International Migration Review} 44, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 3–24. \url{https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111}.1747-7379.2009.00796.} 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

\begin{thebibliography}{11}
\bibitem{10}Latin American Migration Project, \textit{Princeton University} and \textit{University of Guadalajara}, 2019. \url{https://opr.princeton.edu/archive/lamp/}
\end{thebibliography}
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.” 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.

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

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

Bibliography


Borger, Julian. “Fleeing a Hell the US Helped Create: Why Central Americans Journey


Latin American Migration Project (LAMP), Princeton University and University of Guadalajara, 2019. https://opr.princeton.edu/archive/lamp/


