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Honduras: Factors Underlying Immigration to the United States

Annika Meurs

Abstract:

This thesis examines the relationship between out-migration from Honduras, US policy, and conditions in Honduras. More particularly, it examines the violent and repressive conditions in Honduras along with US Military Assistance from 1980 to 2017. I look at the impact of US immigration policy on migration flows into the United States. Using data from World Bank databank, the US Foreign Aid Greenbook, the World Development Report, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), and the Political Terror Scale (PTS), I argue that violent conditions in Honduras, US military aid, and US immigration policy have significantly contributed to the ongoing exodus from Honduras to the United States between 1980 and 2017.

Introduction

In 1980, around 40,000 Honduran migrants were living in the United States. This marks the beginning of significant Honduran out-migration to the US. Over the following two decades, the estimated number of Honduran migrants in the United States increased more than sevenfold. By 2017, the US population of Honduran origin totaled more than 650,000 (MPI 2017). This exponential increase begs the question, why are so many Hondurans leaving their country and immigrating to the United States?

As out-migration flows from Honduras to the United States increased in the recent decades, anti-immigrant rhetoric within the United States was quick to follow. Popular discourse in the US demonizes Central American migrants, characterizing them as uneducated, criminals, and free-loaders who migrate to the US with predatory intent (Massey and Pren 2012). This notion, however, does not take into account the conditions that drive individuals and families to migrate. Previous migration literature finds violence and economic conditions in a country of origin to be the primary determinants of migration (Czaika and Kis-katos 2009) (Parkins 2010) (Massey et al. 2014) (Miguel Cruz 2015) (Rogers and Jones 2007) (Nevins 2016) (Sladkova 2007).

In this thesis I examine factors underlying migration flows from Honduras to the US since 1980. My research finds three factors that may have contributed to increased out-migration from Honduras between 1980 and 2017: 1. the political and economic conditions in Honduras, 2. US Military Assistance in Honduras, 3. gang violence in Honduras, and 4. US immigration policy. The first section of this thesis reviews previous literature on the topic. The subsequent section examines the socio-political and economic history of Honduras, analyzing the impact on Honduran citizens. The third chapter addresses the history and the influence of street gangs in

Honduras. The following chapter outlines the history of immigration policy in the United States, arguing that the increasingly restrictionist policies have largely failed to prevent in-migration flows. The final chapter presents data on conditions in Honduras that may have acted as push factors influencing out-migration. The data suggests that violence, measured by intentional homicides, is the primary determinant of migration from Honduras to the United States. While migration scholars find economic conditions in the country of origin to drive out-migration (Czaika and Kis-katos 2009) (Parkins 2010) (Massey et al. 2014) (Miguel Cruz 2015) (Rogers and Jones 2007) (Nevins 2016) (Sladkova 2007), the data on GDP per capita indicates that it has little correlation with migration in the Honduran case.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

The decision to migrate is not an isolated action but rather a response to multiple factors including civil conflict, insecurity, and a lack of economic opportunities in search of economic prosperity and security. In 2019, data from the UN Population Division estimates there are 272 million international migrants worldwide. The global number of migrants has tripled since 1970. Migrants, making up 3.5 percent of the global population, primarily reside in the developed regions of Europe and North America (United Nations Population Division, 2019). Some politicians and social movements in developed destination countries have responded to this trend in migration by demonizing immigrants and militarizing borders to mitigate immigration. Despite these efforts, migration policy has predominantly failed to limit immigration. In the following section I will discuss the factors that influence an individual's decision to migrate and how immigration policies and the greater political and economic system play a role in this decision.

Work developing general theoretical frameworks to understand the causes of migration is quite limited in peer reviewed journals since the 1970's. In the field of political science, the number of peer reviewed articles is extremely small. In the area of sociology, economics, and geography there is more literature on the topic. In the following section I first define push and pull factors, along with social networks as the primary determinants of immigration. I will then discuss in more detail previous economic and political theories on migration and immigration policy. Finally, I will review the extent to which the empirical evidence is consistent with these theories.

Migration scholars divide the factors that impact an individual or family's decision to migrate into two categories: push and pull factors. Push factors are conditions within a country of

origin that encourage outflow. These factors manifest as a number of different economic, political, and societal conditions that have generated economic instability, civil conflict, violence, insecurity, displacement, and crime. Pull factors are conditions in the destination country that encourage inflows, such as the prospect of security, employment opportunities, familial attachments and social networks (Rosenblum and Brick 2011) (Parkins, 2010).

Migration theorists within economics disagree on whether push or pull factors are a more important influence an individual's decision to migrate. Early economic theories such as Piore's (1979) "dual labor market theory" and Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory suggest that conditions in the global capitalist economy may encourage immigration. Piore's (1979) dual labor market theory suggests that international immigration is a response to the constant demand for immigrant labor that is inherent in the capitalist structure of developed nations. Developed capitalist economies demand low-skill labor to maintain low wages and high profits. Thus, international labor migration is provoked by the "pull" of employment opportunities in developed economies. Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory similarly asserts that migration is a consequence of the capitalist system. Developed capitalist regions benefit most from migration as it is a means of mobilizing cheap labor for capital which perpetuates inequality. According to Wallerstein, inequality is a consequence of capitalism and migration is the response. As capitalist development causes dislocation and poverty in peripheral countries, the victims migrate to developed countries in search of economic opportunities. Unlike, Piore's (1979) "dual labor market theory", Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory argues that conditions in the global capitalist economy "push" migrants out of fiscally unstable economies and into developed capitalist countries.

In contrast to Piore's (1979) "dual labor market theory" and Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory, that focuses on system-level factors, microeconomic theories of migration developed in the 1990s focus on individual-level explanations. These theories suggest that individuals are rational actors who decide to migrate based on a cost-benefit analysis when there is an expected net positive return, often monetary, from migrating (Castles, Haas, and Miller 2014). Migration Systems Theory evaluates the decision to migrate on a more systemic level. This theory, originally developed by Kritiz, Lim, and Zlotnik (1992) and expanded upon by others such as Castles, Haas, and Miller (2014) brings together the role of political, economic, social, and demographic contexts in addition to other "linkages" on the decision to migrate (Parkins, 2010). Kritiz, Lim, and Zlotnik (1992) define "linkages" as historical, cultural, colonial, and technological factors. Jennissen (2007) further specifies the causal effects of social, economic, and political factors on international immigration flows. According to Jennissen (2007), societal factors such as crime and violence have a direct influence on international migration flows and also an indirect influence on migration via the lack of economic prosperity and opportunities within a country.

Although economic theories do not discuss social networks, current migration scholars in the field of sociology and political science cite networks and linkages between origin and destination countries, in addition to push and pull factors, as primary influences in an individual's decision to migrate. Many scholars, including Rosenblum and Brick (2011), Parkins (2010), Massey, Durand, and Pren (2014), and Massey and Pren (2012), contend that social networks facilitate migration as they connect migrants to their destination country. Migrant networks additionally provide funds and information to newcomers and assist with integration.

Empirical evidence from studies on immigration flows from Indonesia, the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and to Germany suggest that the primary push factors that stimulate migration are violence and insecurity and the predominant pull factors are economic opportunities, labor demands, family unification and social networks. Of these factors, Czaika and Kis-Katos (2009), Parkins (2010) and Massey, Durand, and Pren (2014) identify violence and economic opportunities to be the principle drivers of migration trends. High levels of violence significantly affect everyday activities such as work, study, and social activities and effectively eliminate the prospect of economic prosperity (Swanson and Torres 2016). In looking at the causes of displacement during a period of civil conflict in Aceh, Indonesia, Czaika and Kis-katos (2009: 404) determine that “insecurity creates additional costs that modify the expected outcome and diminish the relevance of other socio-economic migration determinants.” The conflict in Aceh, Indonesia between rebel fighters and the state was a strongly politically motivated and ultimately left more than 500,000 people displaced. Engel and Ibáñez (2007), find that even in a conflict environment such as the political conflict in Indonesia, economic incentives play an important role in household migration decisions (Czaika and Kis-Katos 2009).

Parkins (2010) similarly identifies four primary factors influencing out-migration in the Caribbean; the primary determinant of immigration being violence and crime, followed by unemployment and skill mismatch, the absence of economic opportunities, and finally, the lack of social opportunities. Many respondents in a survey emphasized that if crime and violence did not decrease, social and economic opportunities would be dramatically undermined. In Central America, widespread gang violence, civil conflict, high rates of domestic violence, and extreme poverty, drive the decision to migrate (Miguel Cruz 2015) (Rodgers and Jones 2007) (Nevins 2016) (Sladkova 2007). In a study of migration drivers Massey et al. (2014) find that rising

levels of violence in Central America have a strong effect on an individual's decision to migrate, whereas US labor demands have no effect at all. Contrastingly, in Mexico, Massey et al. (2014) determines that the US labor market is a very strong contextual indicator of migration, however the rising levels of violence have not played a significant role in driving the decision to migrate. Massey et al. (2014) explains that in Central America migrants fleeing violence and economic disorder are not selective demographically but instead, can be characterized by predominantly high human and social capital, occupational skill and business ownership. Thus, when compared to Mexican migrants, migrants from Central America are less incentivized by the economic opportunity pull factor in the United States.

Empirical evidence finds social networks to also play an important role in influencing the decision to migrate. For a migrant, established networks or communities in a destination country significantly diminish the cost of immigration by providing housing, and job opportunities (Castles 2004). Complex networks linking Mexico to the United States have prompted a long history of out-migration. In the late 1950's the United States established a temporary worker program where Mexican laborers could enter the United States legally. This program, called the Bracero Program, established a culture of migration to the United States and generated transnational networks linking Mexican residents to the United States. After legal entry was limited for the first time in 1965, Mexican out-migration did not subside. Instead, labor demands within the United States continued to provide a means of filling economic needs in Mexico and established migrant networks continued to draw Mexican laborers to the United States (Massey et al. 2014).

Mass immigration to Germany was affected by networks in a similar manner to the United States. Between 1955 and 1973 Germany recruited migrant workers as guest workers

who would were expected to leave after a few years. These workers were not supposed to bring dependents or settle permanently. When labor recruitment stopped in 1973, however, the guest workers settles permanently and formed communities within Germany. Already having established networks, understanding the culture and the labor market, migrants in Germany were inclined to become permanent residents, despite policies discouraging it (Castles 2004).

Migration policy is important to understanding immigration patterns. Policy affects the scope of immigration as it regulates what conditions are provided to resident immigrants such as work and housing, welfare provisions and educational opportunities. When provided, such provisions and opportunities act as pull primary factors for potential migrants. Furthermore, migration policy influences the admission and selection of permanent residents, temporary migrant workers, and refugees in addition to the efforts to control illegal migration (Myers 2000). In their research, Myers draws upon the Marxist approach, the national identity approach, and the role of domestic politics to further theorize migration policy. The Marxist approach suggests that immigration is a structural part of capitalism that benefits the ruling class, similar to the approaches of Wallerstein (1974) and Piore (1979). Capitalists encourage labor migration to keep wages down and increase profits. The national identity approach which Myers coined argues that immigration policies are shaped by conceptions of citizenship and nationality within the destination country. With this understanding Myers contends that the anti-immigration sentiments in the United States originate from a historically strong cultural attachment to nationalism. Similarly in Germany, immigration was viewed as nationalistic competition between the Germans and the Poles in Prussia which subsequently promoted increased violence against migrants and increased restrictions on immigration. On the other hand, the domestic politics approach to migration policy theory attributes changes in immigration policy to

situational socioeconomic factors rather than historical and cultural influences. The domestic politics approach postulates that changes in the domestic socio-political economy, such as a recession or influx of migrants from a different ethnic or racial background, promote changes in immigration policy. Myers (2000) explains that political parties play off of these economic failures and socio-political changes using xenophobia and nationalism to gain voters, which ultimately contributes to national pressures for more restrictive policies.

Migration policy, often focused on domestic issues, does not entirely address the complex causes of migration. Castles (2004) explains that migrants are not isolated individuals who react to bureaucratic policies, “but rather social beings who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities by actively shaping the migratory process” (860). Furthermore, there is a structural dependence on cheap labor in developed countries. Migrant workers from undeveloped countries, or the global South, occupy jobs in the labor market in developed countries that are not desired by locals. The agricultural sector in the United States, for example, depends on undocumented workers to maintain low production costs (Castles 2004). Castles (2004) adds that this economic divide between the North and the South persists despite increasing links through the global economy. Disparities in social conditions, human rights, and security continued to increase. Migrants respond to these worsening economic, political and social conditions by migrating to North states where there is security and job opportunities (Castles 2004).

There is not one underlying theory that comprehensively explains the determinants of all international migration flows. Rather, it is important to note, that the specific causal mechanisms driving immigration varies with social, economic, and political factors in addition to other “indicators” such as geographic location, culture, gender, age, and the media. This diversity of

migration motives are demonstrated through an analysis of the varied empirical findings from studies on immigration flows from Indonesia, the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and Germany. Evidence from these studies indicates that while crime, violence, and economic opportunities are often the primary indicators of migration trends, they do not affect every population equally. An individual's migration responses to specific conditions may vary across genders, and levels of education attainment play an important role in influencing an individual's decision to migrate. In general, young, educated, and economically successful, predominantly male individuals have a stronger incentive to migrate as their net benefits in the destination country are likely to be greater. However, when crime, violence and economic opportunities come into play these factors, which affect all members of the population, take precedence (Czaika and Kis-katos 2009) (Parkins 2010).

There has been limited research on the determinants of migration in Central America and particularly in Honduras. One exception is Miguel Cruz (2015) who attributes the insecurity and mass migration from Honduras to institutional failures. This argument by Miguel Cruz (2015) can be understood by drawing on Jennissen's (2007) causality chain approach which argues that political, economic, and political factors have a causal effect on international immigration flows. Using the causality chain approach one can understand that institutional failures both influence migration flows directly and indirectly affect the economy and security of Honduras. Within Honduras, insecurity both drives out-migration itself and also has a negative impact on economic conditions, further influencing a migrant's cost-benefit analysis on their decision to migrate.

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Chapter 2: Historical Background- Honduras

Honduras, along with the rest of Central America and Mexico, was colonized in the 1500's by the Spanish Crown. Without many valuable natural resources, Honduras was free of any major political and economic interference during colonialism. In the immediate post-independence period however, major foreign investors such as the United States saw potential in the fruit industry in Central America. Soon, a large portion of the Honduran GDP was earned by Western-owned plantations. This trend of US economic interference continued into the 1980's when civil conflict in the neighboring countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador prompted the US to fund military training and assistance in Honduras. The period of strong military presence in the 1980's resulted in heightened level of violence, torture, and disappearances which spurred continuous migration flows to the United States. When US-funded military aid drastically decreased in the 1990's the Honduran economy collapsed. This, followed by continued impunity for the violence of the 80's, neoliberal policies, and Hurricane Mitch pushed an increasing number of individuals to migrate. In 2000, insecurity in Honduras increased. The rise in crime rates was met with *mano dura* or zero tolerance policies and political repression which served to further heighten crime and insecurity. In recent years, the homicide rate in Honduras has been among the highest in the world. Such high levels of violence have contributed to a loss in educational and economic opportunities and a subsequent rise in out-migration to the United States. The surge in crime and homicide rates in the last decade can be attributed to a rise in political repression since the coup in 2009. Yet, the political and economic conditions with Honduras have been further exacerbated by factors outside of country such as the movement of drug trafficking from Colombia to Central America in the 1990's resulting in heightened gang involvement in Honduras.

Honduras: The Colonial and Immediate Post-Independence Period

Historically, Honduras could be differentiated from the neighboring Central American regions of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua by the notably low levels of class conflict. During the colonial period, that began in the 1500's when the Spanish colonized Central America and Mexico, Honduras was largely uninhabited. The majority of the indigenous population was quickly eradicated by European colonists or wiped out by disease and thus Honduras could be identified by its more ethnically homogenous mestizo culture than neighboring Spanish colonies. Furthermore, Honduras lacked significant levels of mineral deposits or other exploitable resources for wealth that often produce social tension and high inequality. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of the landed minority occurred much later in Honduras than in other countries in Central America, around the beginning of the 20th century, when foreign investors began to invest millions of dollars in primary resources such as bananas and coffee. With no resources to develop industries separate from agriculture, the economy of Honduras inevitably became tied to the desires of foreign investors (Merrill et al., 1995).

By the 19th century, Central America had gained independence from the Spanish crown. Spanish power in Central America began to decline in the early 1800's after Spain raised taxes which set off a series of uprisings throughout the region. Specifically in Honduras, insurgency erupted in 1812 in the capital city of Tegucigalpa which ultimately resulted in the demise of Spanish rule in the region by 1821 (Merrill et al., 1995).

Following the collapse of Spanish rule, a two-part elite emerged as the controlling social factions across Central America. Spanish-born bureaucrats dominated one faction and the landed elite controlled the other. The lower class was comprised of the labor force. This included indigenous peoples, African slaves and *ladinos* who come from a mixed racial background.

Ladinos worked as wage laborers, small farmers, artisans, merchants, and peddlers (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019).

During the immediate post-independence period, two important socio-political factions emerged, the Liberals and Conservatives. The Liberals fought for the abolition of slavery, and economic modernization. Liberal support came from emerging professionals, the white and *ladino* population, and from the upper middle class excluded from the landed aristocracy. Conservatives, on the other hand, were led by landowners who promoted the ideals of order, moderation and stability, in opposition of progressive reform (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019). The Liberal and Conservative factions were represented by two dominant parties; the conservative party, the Partido Nacional (PN), and the liberal party, the Partido Liberal (PL). These parties formed in the 160's and continue to maintain popular support today. Initially, the Partido Nacional allied with the military to gain support. In opposition, the Partido Liberal took an anti-militarist stance (Merrill et al., 1995).

Since independence, economic growth in Honduras, and across Central America, has remained closely tied to agricultural development. In the 20th century foreign investors began to exploit the vast economic potential of primary products and by 1929, agricultural exports from Honduras had risen to US \$25 million, US \$21 million being from predominantly US-owned banana plantations (Merrill et al., 1995). The magnitude of agricultural production in 20th Century Honduras generated a reliance on plantation societies and foreign investors for economic growth. Subsequently, landowners and foreign investors became the social, political and economic authorities in Honduras. Thus, Honduras evolved as a highly unequal society where the empowered few participated in cash crop production instead of industrialization (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019) (Merrill et al., 1995).

1980's: The Rise of Military Power in Honduras

At the end of the 20th century the Honduran military emerged as an autonomous institution vested with vast political and economic power. Due to the extreme wealth inequality, those who were not members of the landed elite were left with few other opportunities for economic advancement with land concentrated in the hands of the elite, universities restricted to the upper class and limited industrial development. Thus, ambitious adolescents were encouraged to join the military as it was one of the few institutions within Honduras that offered upward mobility for the lower class (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019). Military indoctrination ensured that they identified with the institution and its leaders.

The election of President Roberto Suazo Córdova in 1981 marked the beginning of an era of important US-funded military influence in Honduras. This alignment led to a period of political and economic destabilization. Suazo promoted ideals of military empowerment and anti-communism, as insurgency spread throughout the neighboring countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador. During this era, President Suazo worked closely with the United States on domestic and foreign policy to defeat leftist insurgents-- the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. The alignment with the United States produced massive financial support for Honduras while pursuing a staunchly anti-communist agenda. During this period, US military aid in Honduras increased by more than twentyfold, and Honduras became the tenth largest recipient of US assistance aid (Merrill et al., 1995). Through this alliance, Honduras was converted into a platform for US military intervention. The rapid expansion of military resources in Honduras enabled the military to maintain a position of dominance over civilian political sectors and independently pursue an

anticommunist agenda (Looney and Markwick 2020) (Berryman 1985, 92 and 63) (Booth, Wade, and Walker 2018: 209-219). In line with these ideals, in the 1980's Congress passed a constitutional amendment that transferred the power of Commander-in-Chief from the President to the head of the armed forces (Looney and Markwick 2020). The new constitution gave the military veto power over presidential candidates in addition to power over national security (Hill, 2017).

By 1985, the total economic and military aid from United States rose to more than US\$100 million from around US\$20 million in 1980 (USAID 2018). Assistance aid in Honduras remained at more than US\$100 million until the end of the 1980's. The exorbitant military and economic aid granted to Honduras greatly improved the economy. Within the 80's, GDP per capita rose from around US\$1,079 as the beginning of the decade to US\$1,362 by 1987 (World Bank 2019). This resulted in an increasing economic dependence on foreign aid which was further exacerbated by a severe economic collapse during the 1980's due to insurgency in the region (Merrill et al., 1995).

A portion of the military resources went towards funding Battalion 316 in Honduras. Battalion 316, an elite death squad within the Honduran military, had the explicit sanction from the United States and was in charge of independently preventing and suppressing domestic insurgency. The elite death squad used public terror tactics to control the Honduran population. Suspected radicals including students, journalists, and activists were captured by Battalion 316 and taken to unmarked jails where they were interrogated and tortured. The majority of the individuals captured by the Battalion 316 disappeared. During this period, newspapers were encouraged to report on the disappearances and relatives of those missing were given full-page advertisements. This was a tactic employed by the commander and chief of the armed forces and

the creator of Battalion 316, Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, to incite fear across Honduras and prevent insurgency. In 1983 the Reagan administration awarded Álvarez the Legion of Merit medal for achieving democratic progress in Honduras (Berryman 1985: 50-51). The impacts of this rampant political repression can be seen in the Political Terror Scale (PTS) developed with data from Amnesty International. From 1980 to 1990 PTS publishes that the conditions in Honduras vary between a 4 and a 3 out of 5. 5 being complete political terror. PTS defines level 4 as an environment where civil and political rights violations are rampant. In this level, murders, disappearances, and torture are common. In level 3, political murders and brutality are still common along with extensive imprisonment without a trial (Gibney et al., 2019).

The political interest of the United States in funding an anti-communist agenda in Honduras continued into the late 1980's and thus so did the trend of repression, torture, killings and disappearances within Honduras. In 1987 alone, there were 263 extrajudicial executions, 16 forced disappearances, 356 illegal arrests and 83 cases of torture according to the Committee for Defense of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH Annual Report 1987). In August of 1987, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua signed the Esquipulas II Peace Accord, an agreement that promised to establish peace in the Central American region (UN Peacemaker, 1987). After the Peace Accord was signed the United States lost interest in the region and a large portion of military funding was revoked and US military officials were sent home. In 1987 after the Esquipulas II Peace Accord, CODEH, a Honduran human rights organization, reports that the number of civil rights abuses drastically improved. The number of homicides by a suspected abuse of authority was reduced from 93 the year prior to signing the Peace Accord to 47 the year after signing it. Furthermore, the number of illegal arrests diminished from 229 to 127 (CODEH Annual Report 1987).

Still, significant repercussions remained. The overall increase in military influence and violence combined with death squad activity and the resulting collapse of the economy perpetuated displacement, crime, insecurity across the population, especially concentrated in low income communities. Between 1987 and 1991, the national GDP fell by nearly a third from around US\$6 billion to US\$4.6 billion (World Bank 2019).

The political and economic shift that began in the 1980's drove many individuals to migrate from Honduras to the United States in search of security, in addition to employment, and educational opportunities. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of Honduran immigrants living in the US grew exponentially in response to the hostile environment in Honduras from 39,154 in 1980 to 108,923 in 1990 (MPI Data Hub 2018a). There is limited data on migration flows within the 1980's however, it is clear that a number of factors culminated to increase the possibility of migration and to provide further incentive for migration. The causal factors suggest that when large scale migration began from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in the 1980's in response to the violent civil war and political repression social networks were created linking Central America to the United States. These networks incentivized migration to the United States as they reduced the cost of migration. Furthermore, the heightened inflow of military aid in Honduras in the 1980's contributed to heightened oppression and violence within the country that pushed individuals out despite the improved economy.

1990's: A period of Neoliberalism and Diminished Military Control

In the 1990's the armed forces no longer controlled Honduras. During this period, two presidents from the Partido Liberal rose to power emphasizing the end of military corruption and the rise of human rights in Honduras. Applying neoliberal policies and progressive reforms, both

presidents aspired towards modernization. However, military defiance, economic collapse, and Hurricane Mitch presented several challenges.

Since the 1980's US military aid had plummeted from its peak at around US\$131 million in 1985 to a mere US\$532,000 in 1994. In 1993 the National Committee for the Protection of Human Rights released a report detailing the human rights violations generated by the military in the 1980's. Subsequently, the Honduran government finally acknowledged responsibility for the violent campaign against its own citizens and began prosecuting military officers for their involvement in the torture and execution of innocent peoples (Pine 2008: 54).

The unresolved human rights abuses of the 1980's, rampant government corruption, disputes over land rights, and overall civil grievances led to the election of Carlos Roberto Reina Idiáquez (PL) in 1993 and Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé (PL) in 1997. Both presidents campaigned on a human rights platform that resolved to reform the judicial system, dismantle the power of the military, and undermine corruption. Under the leadership of President Reina, human rights reform gained momentum and various efforts were made to investigate the human rights violations of the 1980's including replacing the *Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones* (DNI), which was controlled by the military and implicated in several cases of torture and killings, with the a new *Departamento de Investigación Criminal* (DIC) now in charge of investigating criminal activity. In May of 1995, a constitutional reform passed abolishing forced conscription in the armed forces and restored civilian control over the military (Amnesty International 1995). While President Reina was somewhat successful in undermining military control over society, there were several challenges.

The armed forces responded with violence to the numerous attempts to diminish military influence during Reina's presidency. In 1995, Luis Alonso Discua Elvir, the former leader of

Battalion 316, was accused by the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared (COFADEH), of reactivating the paramilitary group and using it to threaten the Reina administration.

Furthermore, while Reina was president, there were a total of 21 documented “terrorist” attacks on Reina in addition to attacks on civilians all which were understood to be a threat from the military (Pine 2008). Extrajudicial killings and torture by the military continued irrespective of Reina’s human rights efforts. In 1995 alone, several indigenous peoples and peasants were executed by the Honduran military (Amnesty International Report 1995). While conditions had somewhat improved since the substantial drop in military aid in 1990, rates of violence only diminished for a short period, rising again in the late 1990’s as the military fought to maintain control.

Facing numerous obstacles, President Reina was ultimately unsuccessful in holding the armed forces accountable for their massive human rights violations in the 1980’s (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019). In 1998 the First Criminal Court in Tegucigalpa ultimately ruled in favor of applying amnesty laws to the military officers involved in the torture and execution of hundreds of peoples in the decade prior (Pine 2008: 54-55). The conclusion of the trial in favor of the military officers set a precedent of impunity for violent acts that have continued into present day.

Flores Facussé continued Reina’s human rights efforts and additionally enacted several policies to modernize and reform the economy. While in office, Flores Facussé further strengthened civilian control of the armed forces by creating a functional defense ministry and returning the police force to civilian control. This act seemingly had little effect on the number of rights violations. In the late 1990’s crime rates began to rise again as former military officers and landowners joined paramilitary groups, frustrated about losing political power to the law into

their own hands (Freedom House 1999). Human rights advocates continued to be threatened and attacked and allegations of such events were largely ignored and not thoroughly investigated. Flores' efforts were again undermined by the authority of the military (Freedom House 1999).

The adoption of neoliberal economic reforms in the 1990s worsened the economic conditions faced by the same underprivileged populations that were targeted by military and police forces. The neoliberal economic policies were intended to promote economic development. Spending cuts in education, healthcare and other social services further undermined the economic situation of marginalized people. In Honduras specifically, between 1991 and 1999 social expenditures were reduced as a percentage of GDP (Miguel Cruz 2015). By the late 1990's the public expenditure on education had dropped significantly to 3.6% of the GNP down from 4.1 in 1990. Public spending on health similarly dropped, although less significantly, from 2.9% of the GNP in 1990 to 2.7 by the end of the decade (World Bank 2001). The results of the neoliberal political and economic policies directly affected the lives of many Central American citizens leaving them searching for opportunities outside of Central America and tapping into existing networks in the United States and Mexico.

Hurricane Mitch ravaged Honduras in 1998 and further exacerbated economic disparity. The hurricane had devastating human and economic impacts on Honduras leaving nearly 6,000 people dead and more than 1.5 million displaced out of a total population of 6 million. Additionally, almost the entirety of all banana and tobacco crops were destroyed, leaving 17,000 unemployed. And those whose crops or merchandise had not been destroyed found it nearly impossible to transport their goods for sale as the roads across the country were effectively impassable. Across Honduras, more than 60% of the national infrastructure was destroyed (Skidmore, Smith, and Green 2019). Hurricane Mitch left Honduras with a nearly 3 million US

dollar deficit. Hurricane Mitch left a large portion of the country unemployed, homeless, and stripped of their form of income (Reichman 2011). These direct impacts heightened economic hardship and thus increased levels of violence as people became desperate for their livelihood and that of their family (Looney and Markwick 2020). Between the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch, neoliberal policies which reduced the social safety net, and the failed political reforms in the 1990's, Honduras experienced an exponential rise in out-migration between 1990 and 2000. During this period the number of Hondurans living in the United States nearly tripled from around 109,000 in 1990 to 283,000 in 2000 (Miguel Cruz 2015). Miguel Cruz (2015) and Reichman (2011) primarily attribute the mass upsurge in migration during this period to Hurricane Mitch. Following the natural disaster, migration became a routine part of social life, a way to leave behind the social and economic devastation that affected a large portion of the population (Reichman 2011: 47).

The political and economic reforms introduced in the 1990's by both Presidents Flores and Reina were insufficient and even counterproductive in diminishing military power and improving the economy. Although Reina and Flores Facusse focused on strengthening civilian rule, both Presidents continued to rely on the military to resolve internal security conflicts such as controlling labor unrest, street protests, and crime. Continued reliance on the military along with the inability of the government to maintain political dominance over the armed forces allowed for arbitrary detention and torture by the police and military to continue (Freedom House 1999). Civil society responded with an uproar in protests demanding justice for an increasing number of deaths of indigenous peoples, impoverished individuals, and children since the beginning of the decade. The protests, however, only provoked more violence by the military (Looney and Markwick 2020) (Miguel Cruz 2015). In 1998, CODEH, a human rights

organization, reported that paramilitary activity had once again been revived and killings of civilians by police and military personnel was more common than in the 1980's. The report notes that since 1990, 701 people had been killed, many of whom were recovered in fields with signs of torture (Pine 2008). The military and police violence in Honduras in the 1990's were the legacy of the oppressive institutions developed with US military aid the decade prior.

In 1999, there was continued impunity for the ongoing human rights violations. There were further cases of violent repression against indigenous people with no evidence of investigation. Human rights defenders were threatened and attacked, journalists reporting on military and police actions were intimidated, and more than 50 children were reported to be killed in 1999. Many youth killings were reported to be related to gang violence however, little evidence was provided and a limited number of cases were investigated (Amnesty International 2000). Changes in the overall democratic progress during this period are unclear. Between 1999 and 2000 the Freedom House rating for Honduras declined from Free to Partially Free (Freedom House 1999). The Polity IV measure of democracy, however, indicates that the democracy rating increases from a 6 to a 7 on a scale of 10 (Polity IV). The one conclusion we can draw from this period is that political terror decreases. Following a decade of military power where Honduras received between 3 and 4 on the Political Terror Scale, the PTS rating in the 1990's dropped to between 2 and 3. According to PTS, in level 2 political murder is rare, and torture and beatings are uncommon (Gibney et al., 2019).

2000s: The Return to Political Repression

In the 2000's, rampant economic inequality in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch along with continued paramilitary activity and civilian unrest, along with the expansion of street gang

which will be discussed in the following chapter, contributed to heightened crime rates, a loss of school enrollment, and increased out migration. The Honduran government responded to the rise in insecurity by enacting *mano dura* policies and increasing political repression. These policies contributed to continued violence and poverty.

In 2001 Ricardo Maduro Joest (PN) campaigned for president on a platform of zero tolerance for crime. Similarly other Central American countries including El Salvador and Guatemala, the *mano dura* or “War on Crime” policies applied predominantly targeted low income individuals. In line with these policies, in August of 2003 the Honduran Congress approved Article 322, an amendment to the country’s penal code which authorized sentences of up to twenty years for “illicit association”, regardless of whether any violent or illegal acts had been committed (Pine 2008). This led to the arrest of an estimated 1,500 alleged gang members, often for simply having tattoos (Amnesty International 2005). The new policy additionally reduced the age at which a suspected gang member could be tried as an adult to sixteen. The emphasis on the protection of society through “War on Crime” rhetoric justified the return to militarized policing of the streets to monitor the poor. Consequently, Article 322 and similar “War on Crime” policies greatly expanded incarceration rates and violence against the poor and underprivileged populations in Honduras, as they are most likely to be presumed to be associated with gang involvement (Pine 2008). The resulting prison overcrowding cited in Pine (2008) and steadily increasing homicide rates since the early 2000’s largely failed to diminish gang and criminal activity. Instead, *mano dura* policies drastically increased the level of organization, international links and technological sophistication within criminal networks. Mass incarceration created conditions that facilitated criminal organization and increased the likelihood of future involvement in criminal activity. In 2002 alone, 556 children and youth under the age of 22 were

murdered according to *Casa Alianza*, a non-governmental Honduran organization dedicated to the protection of children living on the street (Pine 2008; 57). In September of 2002 the Ministry of Security declared it would investigate and resolve, within 90 days, the deaths of 15 minors that had been documented by *Casa Alianza*. By the end of the year, however, none of the killings had been investigated much less resolved (Amnesty International 2003). The Maduro Administration implemented militarization and repression in an effort to diminish crime. In addition to creating more violence, these efforts were unsuccessful as they were not met with competent investigations or fair judicial processes. In 2003, for the first time since the 1980's, the Political Terror Scale rating for Honduras reached level 4. This rating indicates that in addition to heightening political and civil rights violations, Maduro's *mano dura* policies entirely disregarded judicial processes.

The *mano dura* policies implemented by Maduro in the early 2000's largely failed to address the widespread social and economic devastation across Honduras. In 2003, the UN Human Development Report concluded that over half of the population in Honduras was living in "abject poverty" (Schmalzbauer 2013). During this era, Maduro further embraced neoliberalism by privatizing public goods and services, and creating a sales tax on a wide range of essential goods. Under these neoliberal policies, few social programs addressing healthcare, education, or economic development were created. Instead, the large majority of economic resources were devoted to victimizing the very communities affected by economic degradation (Miguel Cruz 2015). Thus, the very individuals targeted by the military and police personnel appointed by Maduro were also affected by various forms of structural violence such as a lack of employment opportunities, poor class mobility and changes in family structure due to the countless loss of family members to state-led violence. This portion of the population also has a

strong incentive to migrate to the United States, not only do they have the most economic need but also experience the most violence (Pine 2008).

The rapidly escalating homicide rate and the devastating economic growth produced an environment adverse to upward mobility. The desperate condition of the economy and society prompted unrest to spread throughout Honduran civil society and in August of 2003, thousands of anti-neoliberal protests blocked all major road into the capital city of Tegucigalpa. This protest marked the rise of the National Coordinating Committee of Popular Resistance (CNRP) a popular organization that represented unions, indigenous peoples and *campesino* movements. Maduro's reduced public spending again prompted protests and strikes among teacher and healthcare workers in 2005 (Main 2014). As Maduro's economic initiatives continued to fail, public opinion increasingly demonstrated a lack of confidence in the political elite to act in the interest of the lower working class (Looney and Markwick 2020). It is possible that the increasing protests is attributable to the rise in political openness reflected in the PolityIV democracy score remaining at 7 after 1999.

José Manuel Zelaya Rosales (PL), rose to power in 2006, at a time when the people of Honduras were desperate for change. Zelaya campaigned as a president for the people. He promised to reduce corruption, improve security, create jobs, and combat drug trafficking. A year after taking office Zelaya showed progress towards complying with his promises. He significantly raised the minimum wage, established negotiations with teachers unions and initiated a review of property titles in the fertile region of Bajo Aguán where there had historically been land conflict between *campesinos* and corporations. Zelaya additionally established an agreement with the CNRP and other social movements to support their revolutionary projects including one that would generate a new charter to replace the constitution

that was drafted during the last military dictatorship. These unprecedented policies enacted by Zelaya were a clear move to reduce the influence of the Honduran business elite (Main 2014).

While Zelaya made efforts to reduce the institutionalized violence in Honduras, human rights violations continued but were insufficiently investigated. In 2007, after two years in office, youths, indigenous people, women, and members of the LGBTQ community continued to be intimidated, tortured and killed without retribution. In 2007 alone, local human rights organizations reported that more than 400 youths were killed by unknown assailants. The vast majority of these cases went uninvestigated, increasing the atmosphere of terror (Amnesty International 2007).

In an effort to replace the constitution that was drafted during the last military dictatorship Zelaya attempted to introduce a referendum in the 2009 national elections that would allow voters to decide whether to support it. The referendum, however, was blocked by the Honduran Congress. Zelaya responded by organizing a non-binding national poll that would measure the popular opinion on the charter. Zelaya's opposition publicly rejected the poll and claimed his goal was instead to extend his presidential term. However, Zelaya was not on the list of candidates for the upcoming presidential election. Early in the morning on June 28th, 2009, the day the poll was set to occur, Zelaya was kidnapped at gunpoint and put on a plane to Costa Rica (Main 2014).

The Obama administration issued a delayed response to the coup. On June 28th, the US government released a vague statement that failed to acknowledge the coup and the following day released another statement articulating that there may have been an illegal coup and military assistance was partially suspended. Ultimately, the US government refused to address Zelaya's

kidnapping and suspension from office as a military coup as this statement would have triggered the suspension of all aid except for humanitarian aid.

In November of 2009 the US announced it recognized the legitimacy of the Honduran presidential elections whether or not democracy had been restored. On November 29, 2009 presidential elections went ahead as scheduled and Porfirio Lobo Sosa (PN) was elected into office. With his election, Lobo pledged to lead the country towards national unity (Amnesty International 2007). At the same time, military assistance from the US increased across Central America in the name of the “war on drugs”. In Honduras, military assistance grew exponentially in the 2000’s (Main 2014). At the beginning of the century US military aid in Honduras totaled around US\$1 million. By 2011, military aid has risen to around US\$11 million, peaking in 2015 at US\$22 million (USAID 2018). After the coup in 2009, homicide rates began to rise consistently. Immediately following the rise in military funding in 2011, homicide rates per 100,000 jumped to 85.1, up 9 from the year prior (World Bank 2019). Since 2011, the homicide rate in Honduras has remained among the highest in the world (UNODC 2019).

When Roberto Micheletti was appointed as interim-president following the 2009 coup, opposition protests erupted across Honduras. Violent repression was carried out against peaceful protesters and in many cases assaults on protesters led to death, injury and torture. On September 26, 2009, Micheletti revoked constitutional freedoms such as the right to personal liberty and the right not be held for more than 24 hours without evidence. The Center for the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (CPTRT) reports that in the four months following the coup the number of human rights violations increased by more than 4,000 percent (Physicians for Human Rights n.d.).

After the coup in 2009, the negotiations for land reform in Bajo Aguán that Zelaya had initiated faltered and violent land disputes became increasingly frequent. Much of the violent land reform conflict stems across Honduras from the passage of an agrarian “modernization” law in 1992 that concentrated land in the hands of agricultural corporations and displaced thousands of *campesinos* (Main 2014) (Human Rights Watch 2014). Since 2009, many land disputes have triggered intimidation, threats and violence including beatings and killings. Often, the disputes are made worse by the presence of government security forces intended to restore order and instead engage in human rights violations such as arbitrary detentions, forced evictions and torture. Between 2009 and 2012, 92 people were killed in land disputes in the Bajo Aguán region (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Political violence and repression escalated after the 2009 coup. Since the 1980’s state led violence, torture, and disappearances have been met with impunity setting a precedent for a system that undermined accountability within the government and created space for escalating rates of violence. In 2011, the homicide rates in Honduras surged higher than the world average at 85.1 per 100,000 according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC 2011). Around the same time, gross secondary school enrollment dropped by more than 10% to 49% in 2014 (World Bank 2019). The substantial insecurity in Honduras following the 2009 coup and the subsequent loss in educational attainment in addition to the high levels of poverty forced led to an increasing number of migrants to seek economic, educational, and social opportunities within the US. In 2011, the number of Honduran migrants living in the United States continued to rise although less sharply than in previous period from around 490,600 in 2011 to 655,300 in 2017 (MPI Data Hub 2018b).

The alarming levels of violence and repression did not cease when Lobo Sosa was elected president in 2011. That year, a US-sponsored “Truth Commission” identified several murders committed by police and military personnel targeted at *campesinos*, opposition leaders, journalists, and LGBT activists. During this period, reports on paramilitary activity again resurfaced (Main 2014). In 2010 alone at least 10 journalists were killed between January and December and according to the Public Attorney’s Office, 282 women were murdered between January and October (Amnesty International 2011). Irrespective of these persuasive reports, the US continued to support Honduras with military aid.

In April of 2012, thousands of peasant farmers provoked by the continuous land disparity and human rights violations occupied around 12,000 hectares of land across six provinces. The occupations promptly escalated to violence between landless farmers and landowners. Many landowners responded by hiring armed security guards. This, coupled with allegations of drug trafficking and the US sponsored “war on drugs” resulted in the further militarization of the Bajo Aguán region (Looney and Markwick 2020) (Amnesty International 2011). Such circumstances prompted government agencies to relate killings in the Bajo Aguán region to illegal armed conflict and organized crime such as drug trafficking organizations thus resulting in a lack of substantial investigations into violence in the region. In February 2013, the Honduran government recorded 73 killings associated with land conflicts. However, only seven of these cases were brought to trial and not a single case was convicted (Human Rights Watch 2014).

The clear repression of civil society along with the unprecedented levels of violence prompted an unparalleled number of Honduran voters to show up to the presidential election polls in November of 2013. The election results were however, not indicative of the massive civil movement to the polls. Subsequent to the election, several reports demonstrated

irregularities in vote counting. Many voters were listed as dead and denied access to the polls in addition to several reports that the National Party (PN) engaged in massive vote buying outside of the polling areas. Despite the irregularities and the requests from the LIBRE and Anti-Corruption Party (PAC) to recount the votes, the *Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, the highest electoral authority in Honduras, announced that Hernandez of the National Party had won the popular vote. That same night the US ambassador to Honduras declared that she “recognized and respected” the election results (Main 2014).

As president, Hernandez upheld a two-pronged plan for militarization and neoliberalism. The plan included regressive 15% tax increase on consumer items, freezing public sector wages, privatization of the telecommunications company, and the reduction of the electricity subsidies. Furthermore, military police were enshrined in the constitution and thousands of soldiers were again put on the street under the guise of reducing gang violence. Instead, military police and soldiers raided the homes of opposition candidates and human rights defenders (Main 2014).

Journalists, women, children, and activists continue to be threatened, attacked and even tortured without investigations from the state. Again in 2017, there were reports from both national actors and international observers on irregularities in national elections. Subsequent civil protests resulted in violent responses from the state, and authorities decreed a state of emergency. The protests in 2017 resulted in the deaths of at least 22 civilians and more than 1,300 detentions (Human Rights Watch 2019). Such violence and repression has persisted in Honduras since mid 20th Century. In the 1980’s state-led violence was highly exacerbated by US military aid to Honduras in support of an anti-communist agenda. The subsequent impunity for the violent acts caused by military officers in the 1980’s sets a precedent that still continues in Honduras today.

The persisting repression, increasing homicide rates, and rising economic inequality combined with the absence of educational and economic opportunities has resulted in ever increasing out-migration from Honduras to the United States. The escalating homicide rates and reports of state-sponsored repression has however, not diminished the military aid and support provided by the United States. In the United States, border control policies have been entirely unsuccessful in diminishing these high rates of immigration. In the following chapter I will discuss how policies applied within the United States, specifically immigration policies from the 1960's until present have affected immigration flows from Central America specifically and on the Mexico/US border in general.

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Chapter 3: A Deeper Look Into the Violence in Honduras

When the civil wars ended and repression diminished in the Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala) at the end of the 1980's, levels of violence spiked in an unprecedented manner. A correlation can be drawn between the rise in violence in the 1990s and the growing presence of street gangs in the Northern Triangle. The current gangs in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala can be traced back to Los Angeles in the 1970s and 1980s when migrants from the Northern Triangle began fleeing civil conflict for the United States, predominantly settling in Los Angeles, California. When Central American refugees arrived in the US they were largely ignored by US authorities. Many refugees were crowded into low-income communities, facing substandard living conditions, unable to access proper education, employment, or social services. Such conditions led to the marginalization and alienization of Central American youths in Los Angeles. In search of a sense of community, many joined gangs which provided youth with friendship and familial bonding in addition to status and respect which previously seemed unattainable (Wolf 2012: 70) (Grillo 2016: 197-198). In 1992 when the civil war in El Salvador ended, US authorities began targeting undocumented refugees, ultimately deporting tens of thousands, mostly gang members, to their countries of origin. These deportees, identifiable by their tattoos, brought their gang affiliations, alliances, and rivalries with them to their countries of origin (Wolf 2012: 71).

In Central America, repatriated gang members arrived in countries destroyed by civil war and political repression. Without proper infrastructure, institutions, or economic stability, Central American states lacked the resources and the motivation to support the recent arrivals and many were left on the street to fend for themselves. Deportees instead protected themselves by recruiting others just as they had in LA. Soon, the thousands of repatriated gang members had

grown in size and power (Farrah 2012). As organized crime and homicide rates skyrocketed, Central American police forces were overwhelmed, lacking the resources and institutional support to slow the spread of violence.

In Honduras, and across Central America, governments launched *mano dura* campaigns to address increasing gang violence. As discussed in Chapter 2, *mano dura* policies targeted low income communities where gangs were prevalent, jailing thousands of youths for “illicit association” with gangs, regardless of whether any crime had been committed. These policies however, were widely unsuccessful and even counterproductive. Consolidating gang members into prisons across Central America served to increase criminal organization and consolidate networks within gangs. Additionally, several gangs responded to *mano dura* policies by toughening their initiation requirements to protect themselves from infiltration. Often, recruits were required to commit acts of violence to be initiated. Gang members also adopted strategies to diminish police detection. No longer were tattoos compulsory, public flashing of hand signs stopped and dress codes became more conventional (Wolf 2012: 72-73). Instead of reducing violence, *mano dura* policies only served to formalize gang structures.

Gangs across Central America were further strengthened by drug trafficking. As drugs moved from Colombia to the US through Central America gangs were recruited for transportation purposes. Trafficking of drugs, specifically cocaine, provided gangs with the money necessary to bribe police and military, increasing their influence in society. Gangs additionally invested their economic resources to in public works, often providing public services the state was unable to provide (Kolb 2012). Drug trafficking created an environment where Central American gangs were able to transform from street gangs to “organized crime syndicates” (Grillo 2016: 212).

In Honduras in particular, weak institutions maximized the influence of gangs. As discussed in the previous chapter, corruption within state institutions resulted in impunity for crimes, which in turn increased violence and generated further corruption. The rising presence of gangs beginning in the 1990s only served to maximize this effect. Due to the vast corruption in Honduras, gangs were able to infiltrate local and municipal governments making them useless as an element of state control. Furthermore, the fragility of the judicial system in Honduras made it difficult to carry out laws and enforcement against gang related criminal activity (Gutierrez Rivera 2011).

The neoliberal policies applied in Honduras additionally contributed to the expansion of gangs within the country. In Honduras, neoliberal policies significantly reduced social spending on education and healthcare focusing instead on the servicing of foreign-debts. The few resources that remained were devoted to funding police and military development. Such policies severely diminished opportunities for economic mobility among the poor and working class. Thus, many youth in Honduras joined gangs, seeing them as an opportunity for economic advancement (Wolseth 2004). Not only did gangs in Honduras offer an opportunity for economic mobility, they additionally provided youth with status, respect, familial bonds which would have been otherwise unobtainable due to the deterioration of the state.

Conditions in Honduras have created an environment susceptible to the growth of organized crime. Among Central American countries where poverty and political repression are common-place, Honduras has had the highest gang membership (Kolb 2012) and levels of violence (Miller and Trinkunas 2015). In an effort to reduce gang involvement across Honduras, the United States has increased funding for militarization efforts. However, by further militarizing Honduras, the US aid instead contributed to a dramatic surge in violence (Beeton

and Watts 2016) both because military efforts likely had the unwanted effect of killing innocent bystanders and because weapons issued to the military and police likely land in the hands of gang members (Kolb 2012).

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Chapter 4: US Background

1965 is the year many scholars refer to as a turning point in US immigration policy. The *Immigration and Nationality Act* (INA), passed that year, established a basic outline for Immigration Law that remains in place today. The INA placed restrictions for the first time on immigration flows from the Western Hemisphere. The reforms replaced the national origin quotas that were applied in the 1920's to limit immigration from Eastern Europe and effectively ban immigration from Asia and Africa. Instead, the 1965 reforms to the INA placed country caps on immigration, permitting up to 20,000 visas per country (Rosenblum and Brick 2011) (Massey and Pren 2012). Following the INA the population of undocumented immigrants from Latin America rose from around zero in 1965 to 9.6 million in 2008 (Massey and Pren 2012).

Prior to the amendments to the INA, Mexican workers followed freely across the border. At the time, the majority of Mexican workers were contracted through the Bracero Program, a temporary worker program established in 1942 to promote immigration due to US labor shortages during WWII. The Bracero Program guaranteed a minimum wage, transportation, housing, and health benefits (Rosenblum and Brick 2011), attracting thousands of Mexican immigrants per year. By 1955-59, half a million Mexican migrants were entering the US each year, around 450,000 temporary Bracero immigrants, and 50,000 permanent residents (Massey and Pren 2012). The Bracero Program established a culture of migration from Mexico to the United States. Migrants became embedded in employer practices and entire communities in Mexico grew to depend on migration as a source of income. Thus, when legal entry was restricted for the first time in 1965, Mexican migration did not cease.

The sudden elimination of the Bracero Program in 1964 and the subsequent amendments to the INA in 1965 had dramatic consequences on the future of immigration policy in the United

States. These reforms failed to provide sufficient mechanisms for foreign workers to enter to the US legally, thus forcing employers and workers to resort to illegal means to maintain a profit. US policymakers additionally failed to account for the vast economic, political, and social changes in Mexico and Central America that would greatly contribute to increased migration (Rosenblum and Brick 2011). In the 1980's civil wars broke out in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, killing and displacing millions, and entirely disrupting the Central American economic system. Instead of sponsoring the millions of asylum seekers escaping civil conflict and entering the United States illegally, the Reagan Administration funded the governments in El Salvador and Guatemala and the contras in Nicaragua further contributing to violence and poverty. Although the Reagan Administration failed to grant the Central American refugees asylum, millions of migrants continued to enter the US illegally in search of security. By 1990 Congress had reversed the policies set by the Reagan Administration and passed legislation that allowed the president to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to migrants from countries that have been particularly damaged by natural disasters or violent conflict (Gzesh 2006). Individuals granted TPS do not receive permanent residence, rather they are permitted to reside in the US without the fear of being detained (USCIS 2020). TPS encourages those from particularly affected countries to migrate to the United States however, very few asylum seekers receive TPS and instead when they arrive at the border they are met with Border Patrol and enforcement measures designed to keep undocumented migrants out of the United States.

The surge in illegal immigration from Central America during the 1970's and 80's prompted new restrictionist policies. In 1986 Congress passed *Immigration Reform and Control Act* (IRCA) which offered legal status to millions of undocumented migrants and authorized increased funding for Border Patrol and expanded enforcement measures. The subsequent

Immigration Act of 1990 and Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility of 1996 (IIRIRA) further increase funding for enforcement efforts. By 2000, the number of Border Patrol Officers had nearly tripled and the enforcement budget had increased seven fold since 1986. This created a “caging effect” that kept migrants in the United States (Massey et al., 2014). While, during the Bracero Program workers circulated back and forth across the border, the heightened security on the border drastically increased the cost of migrating and incentivized migrants to remain in the US permanently. The subsequent rise in in-migration and the loss of out-migration resulted in an exponential increase in the undocumented population between 1970 and 2000 (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2014) (Massey and Pren 2012) (Rosenblum and Brick 2011).

The dramatic rise in the undocumented population during this period allowed political activists and lobbyists to frame Latino immigration as a grave threat to US national security. Politicians and the media took advantage of this narrative, demonizing Latino immigrants, illegal immigration and depicting the southern border as under attack. This rhetoric surrounding immigration transformed a cyclical practice that went unnoticed for decades during the Bracero Program into a political issue that came to be at the forefront of policy discussions (Massey and Pren 2012). This widespread anti-immigrant sentiment created a feed-back loop as further restrictionist policies and strict enforcement policies generated a massive growth in border apprehensions which fueled increasingly negative attitudes towards immigration.

Annual number of apprehensions and estimated illegal entries, 1955-1995

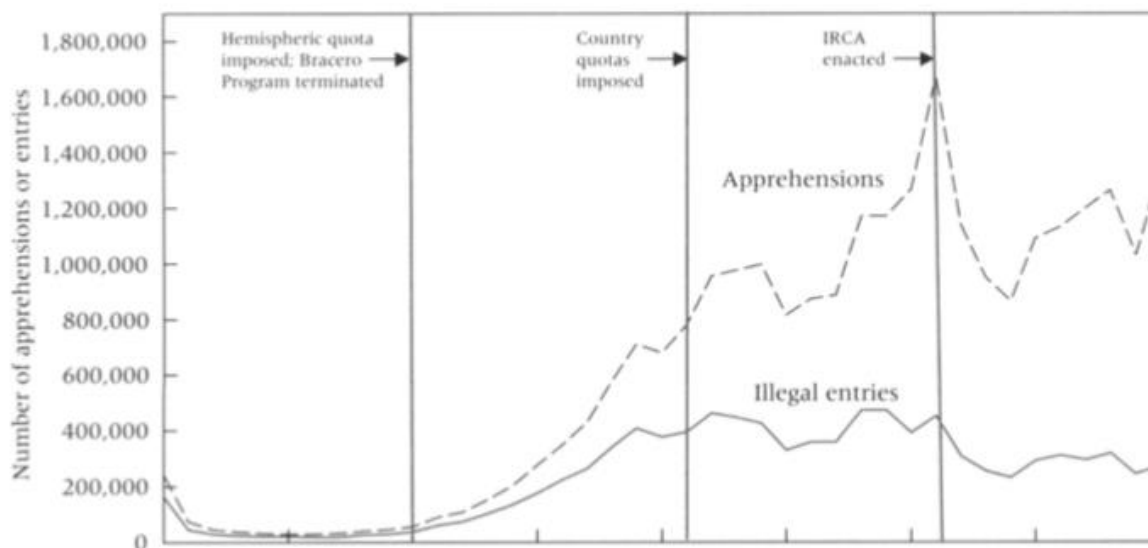


Figure 1: Massey and Pren (2012)

Figure 1 demonstrates the direct effects from the elimination of the Bracero Program. Prior to 1965, illegal entries and apprehensions remained around zero. However, directly following the termination of the Bracero Program, both illegal and apprehensions began to rise. While illegal entries have essentially remained constant since 1975, and actually fell dramatically around 1990, border apprehensions have continued to increase. The steadily increasing border apprehensions have served to fuel an anti-immigration narrative which then prompted the enactment of the IRCA in 1986, the *Immigration Act of 1990*, and the IIRIRA. These restrictionist policies however, have done little to combat net illegal entries into the US.

In 2001, immigration policy appeared to be changing as President George W. Bush and then Mexican President, Vicente Fox had reached an agreement on bilateral immigration reform. However, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 interrupted the negotiations and in response between 2001 and 2006, the US passed six additional immigration laws that focused on tougher enforcement. The immigration reforms passed in the early 2000's by the Bush

administration contributed to a growth in border patrol personnel, new worksite enforcement laws, and a radical expansion of enforcement across the US (Rosenblum and Brick 2011). By 2009 the number of deportations had drastically increased to nearly 400,000 from 200,000 annually in 1996 (Massey and Pren 2012).

The Obama administration particularly targeted rising migration flows by gaining increased funding for detention facilities, surveillance, border patrol, in addition to hiring more judges and immigration officials. In 2012, the administration developed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program to protect migrants who had arrived to the US as children. DACA allowed individuals who had arrived in the US before their 16th birthday, were under the age of 31, and had been living in the US since 2007 to apply for deferred action, which could indefinitely defer deportation. This program was intended to create an opportunity for immigrants who had grown up in the US to continue to live and succeed in the US without fear of deportation (DHS 2019). DACA marked an important policy change that may have influenced migration flows. Following the passage of DACA, poorly informed parents may be incentivized to migrate to the US to receive deferred action for their children, unaware that DACA would not protect those who were not already living in the US. While the Obama administration strove to protect migrants who had arrived as children, deportations of undocumented immigrants, particularly those with criminal records and recent arrivals increased exponentially (Shifter and Binetti 2020).

The Obama administration, from 2008 to 2016, and now the Trump administration adopted a similar policy approach based on the theory that Central American migrants are driven by economic opportunity in the US rather than crime and violence in their country of origin (Córdova et al. 2018). Such policies manifested with the intention to deter future migration by

increasing detention and deportation. By focusing on the economic opportunity pull factor, recent US policies have failed to address the predominant factor of insecurity.

Following the “economic migrant” narrative, in 2019 the Trump administration suspended TPS for several countries including Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras under the impression that migrants from these respective countries were entering the United States in search of economic opportunity instead of insecurity. TPS was granted to Honduran migrants in 1999 following Hurricane Mitch and by 2018, TPS protected around 57,000 Honduran migrants. The decision to revoke TPS for several countries has forced around 428,000 individuals, many of whom have lived the US for decades, to return to a country they no longer call home. Many of those granted TPS have jobs, homes, and US-born children and are forced to make the tough decision to abandon this life or lived in the US undocumented with the fear of being detained (The Guardian 2018).

Over the last 35 years increasing immigration enforcement on the border and across the US has failed to produce effective results. Instead, the undocumented population has more than tripled since 1990 when it was 3.5 million. In 2015, the unauthorized population in the United States totaled around 11.9 million with 55% that population from Mexico and 15% from Central America (Bryan 2015) (USINS 2000).

US immigration policy has historically been grounded in economic and political circumstances rather than a significant understanding of migration trends. When the Bracero Program ended suddenly in 1965, migration flows did not cease. Instead, the long-established practice of migration continued informally. As illegal immigration rose, so did the Latino threat narrative that framed immigration as a threat to national security and took little account of the fluctuating immigration rates due to changes in economic trends and insecurity within Mexico

and Central America. The widespread anti-immigration sentiment in the US fueled further restrictionist policies and a massive expansion of border enforcement which served to “cage” immigrants in the United States, effectively eliminating the practice of cyclical migration as the cost of migration increased.

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Chapter 5: Methodology and Data Analysis

Migration scholars theorize that individuals leave their home and migrate to an unknown country for reasons related to civil conflict, violence, insecurity, economic opportunity, and familial attachments. Of these push and pull factors, Czaika and Kis-Katos (2009), Parkins (2010), Massey et al. (2014), Miguel Cruz (2015), Rodgers and Jones (2007), Nevins (2016), and Sladkova (2007) identify high levels of violence and crime and the absence of economic opportunity in a country of origin to be the primary determinants of migration. They additionally highlight economic potential in the destination country as a dominant pull factor. Scholars Rosenblum and Brick (2011), and Castles (2004) further cite social networks as a pull factor that play an important role in influencing the decision to migrate, as established communities in a destination country significantly diminish the cost of living and the emotional stress for a migrant.

Violence, crime, economic conditions, and social networks are critical in determining migration flows. Instead of targeting the primary drivers of migration, however, US immigration policy has focused on increasing immigration enforcement efforts within the United States. Consequently, these policies have done little to mitigate in-migration to the United States. In Central America, continuous economic crises, political insecurity, and heightened homicide rates have further encouraged individuals to migrate to the US. As discussed in Chapter 2, in Honduras specifically, military and state-induced violence in the 1980's initiated a period of significant Honduran migration. In the 90's, efforts towards modernization and prioritizing human rights were drastically undermined by economic collapse, continued impunity for state-led violence, and Hurricane Mitch. Since 1999, the number of Honduran migrants living in the United States has grown dramatically.

In this thesis I draw on data from the World Bank databank, the US Foreign Aid Greenbook, the World Development Report, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), and the Political Terror Scale (PTS) to examine the role of economic insecurity and high rates of violence and crime on migration flows from Honduras to the United States. I look at immigration flows in three phases. This method of analysis reflects the five periods in Honduran history since the 1980's outlined in chapter two: 1. 1980-1991, a period of military power; 2. 1991-1998, neoliberal policies and political reform; 3. 1998-2005, economic shock and the following *mano dura* policies; 4. 2006-2009 Zelaya's presidency and the subsequent; and 5. 2009-present, political repression, violence and military aid. In the early periods, I rely heavily on data from the World Bank Databank on GDP per capita in constant LCU¹ and the Political Terror Scale (PTS) as measurements of poverty and violence, important push factors. Up until the 1990's there is no data on intentional homicides and limited data on migration flows. During this period very few institutions were collecting data. The absence of data is also likely due to a government effort to conceal the devastating effects of state-led violence in addition to the lack of interest in providing accurate data to the public.

In the 1990's, elected presidents defied military power and enacted neoliberal and human rights reforms. Undermined by an economic collapse and a devastating natural disaster, the reforms of the 1990s proved ineffective in improving livelihoods in Honduras and thus limiting out-migration. For the first time, in 1990 there is data on intentional homicides within Honduras which provide measures of a potential push factor during this period in Honduras. I additionally continue to rely on GDP per capita in constant LCU and the Political Terror Scale (PTS) in addition to data from the US Foreign Aid Greenbook demonstrating US military aid to

¹ Constant LCU is a measurement of GDP in constant local currency (in this case Honduran pesos)

demonstrate potential push factors. Furthermore, I will discuss issues related to US immigration enforcement and border patrol as potential pull factors that influence migration flows into the US.

Between 1990 and 2000 the number of Honduran immigrants living in the United States more than doubled, and by 2013 the number doubled again. During these decades not only did intentional homicide rates rise and fall, policies within the United States encouraged migration flows to continue, effectively pulling migrants (from Honduras and all Central America) into the United States. I will outline potential push factors by analyzing data on intentional homicide rates, the Political Terror Scale, US military aid, the Migration Policy Institute Estimated Immigrant Population, and US Border Patrol Apprehensions in addition to potential pull factors by examining US immigration enforcement and border patrol policies. I hypothesize that greater GDP per capita and a rise in democracy in Honduras will result in lower out-migration. Conversely, higher homicide rates will lead to greater migration flows.

Results

Table 1

Year	Political Terror Scale (PTS)	Total Military Assistance (Constant US Dollars)	Homicides per 100,000	MPI Estimated Immigrant Population	Estimated Yearly Migration ²	US Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions per 1,000
1980	4	\$10,135,964	..	39,154	..	..
1981	4	\$20,797,476	..	..	..	..
1982	4	\$44,691,885	..	..	..	..
1983	4	\$20,405,028	..	..	..	..
1984	4	\$1,833,530	..	..	..	..
1985	3	\$131,393,842	..	..	..	..
1986	3	\$113,661,575	..	..	..	..
1987	3	\$6,883,919	..	..	..	..
1988	4	\$74,255,836	..	..	..	..
1989	3	\$1,968,401	..	..	..	..
1990	3	\$35,413,526	10	108,923	..	..
1991	3	\$54,039,427	13.8	..	..	..
1992	3	\$9,803,218	18.2	..	..	..
1993	3	\$2,611,034	23.2	..	..	..
1994	2	\$31,861	30.3	..	..	..
1995	2	\$480,879	26.9	..	..	..
1996	3	\$726,274	..	..	..	..
1997	2	\$606,628	..	..	..	..
1998	2	\$2,734,507	..	..	..	..
1999	3	\$2,846,458	40.3	..	..	..
2000	3	\$1,238,456	48.8	282,852	..	..
2001	2	\$1,653,080	52.1	..	..	..
2002	3	\$2,175,215	52.8	..	..	..
2003	4	\$2,466,147	57.9	..	..	..
2004	3	\$5,964,556	50.5	..	..	..
2005	3	\$4,147,376	43.6	..	..	..
2006	3	\$3,234,125	41.3	405,258	20401	22,907
2007	3	\$4,195,113	46.5	430,504	25,246	19,346
2008	2	\$6,309,727	56.6	460,197	29,693	14,626
2009	4	\$4,598,146	65.7	467,943	7,746	13,580

² (Year to year difference in estimated immigrant population)

2010	3	\$4,648,000	76.1	522,581	54,638	12,197
2011	2	\$11,306,626	85.1	490,636	-31,945	30,953
2012	2	\$10,733,555	84.3	521,682	31,046	46,865
2013	..	\$8,633,928	74.3	533,598	11,916	91,475
2014	3	\$11,630,809	66.9	588,301	54,703	33,848
2015	2	\$22,521,259	57.5	599,030	10,729	53,402
2016	3	\$17,801,567	56.5	651,059	52,029	47,900
2017	4	..	41.7	655,362	4,303	77,128

Source: World Bank (2019), Gibney et al. (2019), USAID (2018), (MPI Data Hub (2018a; 2018b), U.S. Border Patrol (2019)

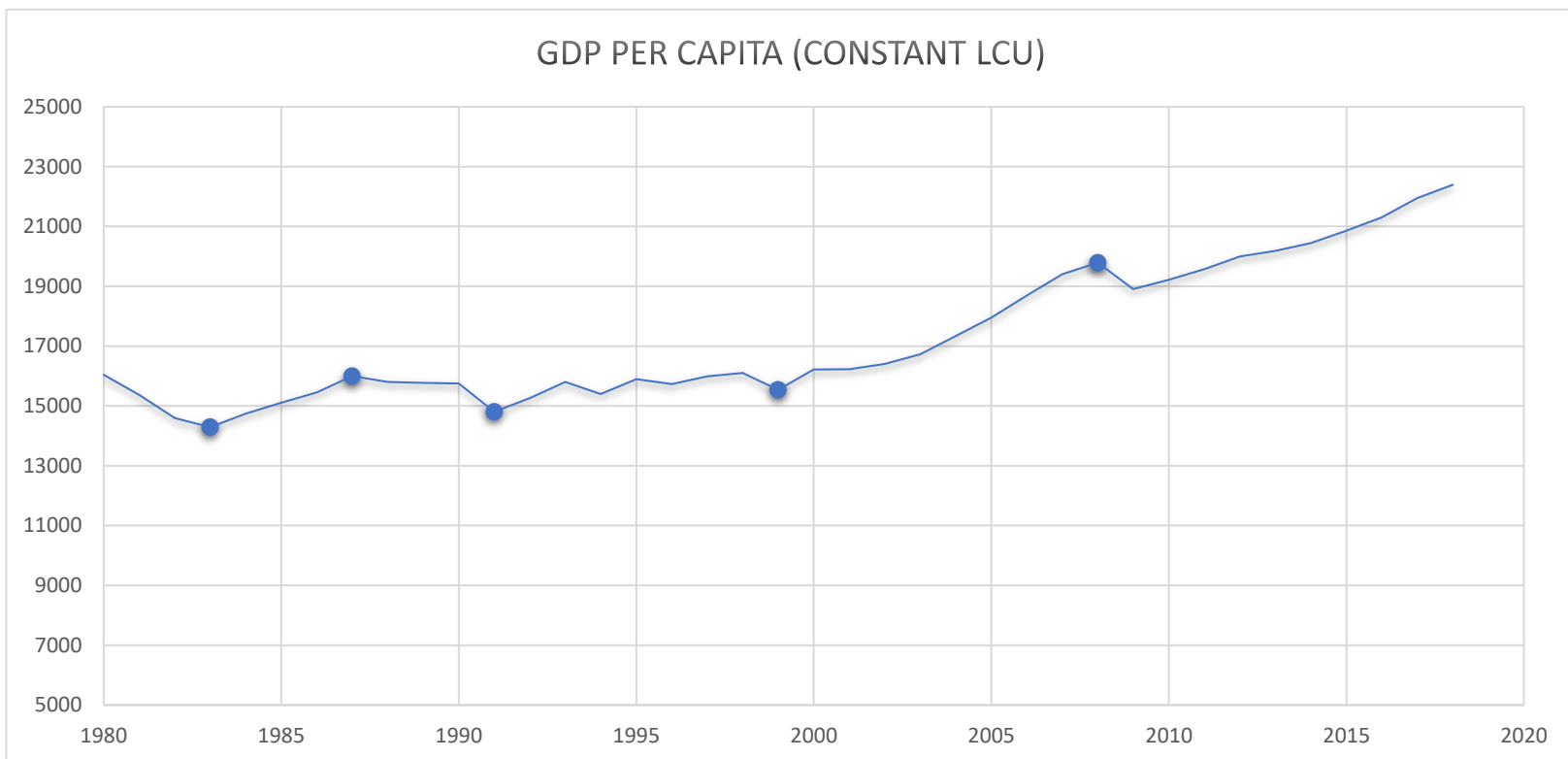
1980-1991: A Period of Military Power

This decade marks the beginning of significant Central American migration to the US. Within Central America, the 80's are defined by the violent and devastating civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua and US military intervention. As discussed in Chapter 2, this period converted the country into a platform for US military intervention into the neighboring countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Thus, from 1980 until 1991, Honduras experienced a period of substantial military aid from the US. Throughout the decade the US invested a total of more than US\$300 million in military education, training, and foreign military direct loans (Table 1). While there are extensive reports of heightened state-led violence, including forced disappearances, torture, and killings, following the substantial increase in US military funding during this period there is no consistent data documenting levels of violence or homicide rates (Pine 2008).

Economic data show that following a period of economic growth until 1980, Honduras experienced an economic downturn between 1980 and 1983. Subsequent to 1984 Honduras experienced a period of economic recovery (Figure 1). Although economic conditions in Honduras during this period were recovering, the Honduran migrant population within the United States continued to rise. Between 1980 and 1990 the estimated Honduran immigrant population living in the United States more than doubled from the relatively low 39,154 in 1980

to 108,923 in 1990 (Table 1). Data from this period is very limited however, theory and history discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 suggest that violence, insecurity, and limited economic opportunity in Honduras along with social networks recently established in the US may have contributed to the increase in migration flows.

Figure 1

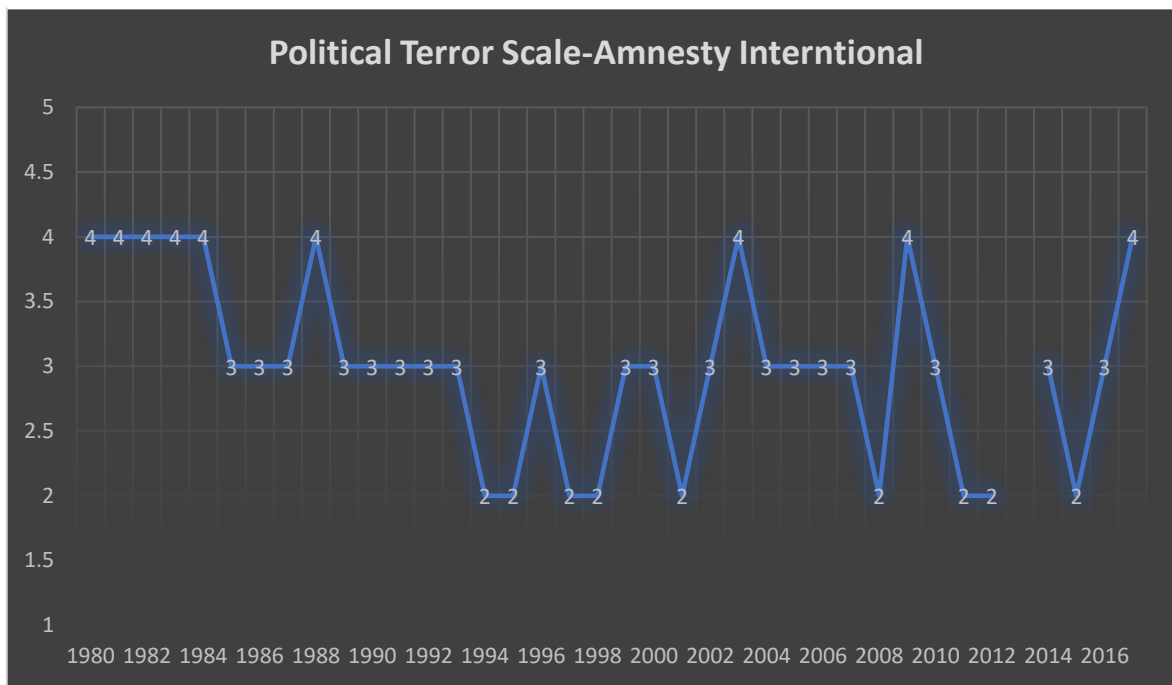


Source: World Bank (2019)

The Political Terror Scale (PTS) using data from Amnesty International supports the theory that violence and insecurity drives out-migration. Between 1980 and 1991 the PTS rating for Honduras varies between 3 and 4, on a 5 point scale. On this scale 5 signifies complete political terror and 4 is defined as rampant civil and political rights violations where murder, disappearances and torture are common. On the PTS 3 represents an environment where political murders continue to be common along with detention without trial. The PTS scale clearly

illustrates the social and political environment in Honduras in the 1980's was insecure. Such environment likely contributed to increased out-migration during this period (Figure 2).

Figure 1



Source: Gibney et al. (2019)

1991-1998: Neoliberal Policies and Political Reform

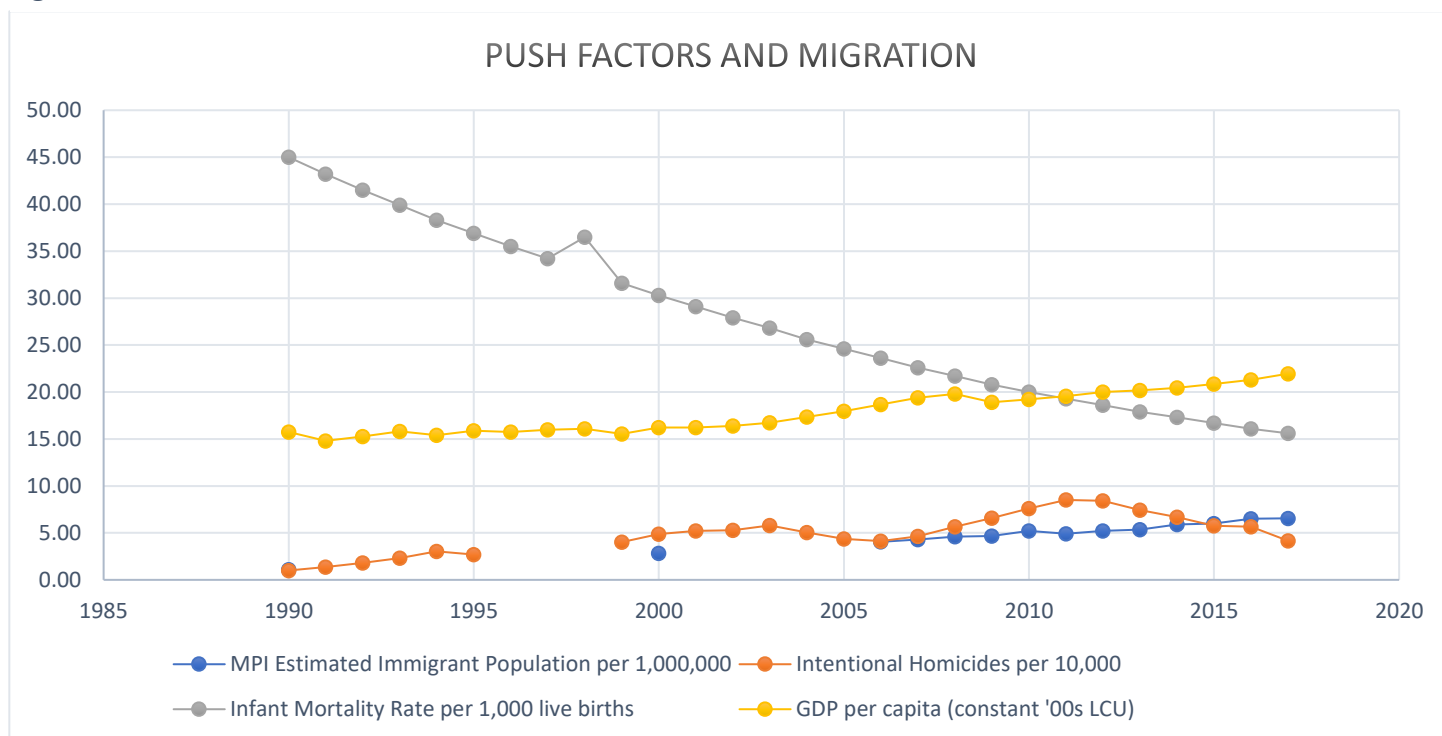
The 1990's saw the introduction of neoliberal policies which cut spending on healthcare, education, and other social services. The introduction of neoliberal policies contributed to the economic collapse in the early 90's (Miguel Cruz 2015) (World Bank 2001), exacerbating the downturn likely caused by the decrease in military aid. From 1991 to 1999 average GDP per capita remained below the average level of 1987 to 1990. These conditions created an economic incentive for individuals and families to migrate to the United States.

In addition to the decline in GDP per capita, intentional homicide rates rose throughout the 1990's. The rise in violence is likely the result of the growing presence of street gangs. As discussed in Chapter 3, tens of thousands of gang members were repatriated across Northern Triangle in the early 1990's. Without institutional support or economic resources, Honduras was

largely unable to mitigate the expansion of gang violence. Thus, Honduran street gangs grew in size and power and by 1999, the number of intentional homicides had reached 40 per 100,000. While not all of these deaths can be attributed to gang violence, it is an important contributor. The combination of these economic and violence-related push factors over the 1990s were important forces underlying the increasing Honduran population in the United States which more than doubled in the 1990's from 108,923 in 1990 to 282,852 in 2000.

The limited data on the Honduran immigrant population in the US between 1980 and 2000, prevents drawing conclusions on the primary factors that have influenced migration flows during this period. However, the doubling of migration every decade between 1980 and 2000 (Figure 3 and Table 1) is likely due to a variety of factors discussed above such as homicide rates, and GDP per capita. The substantial increases in number of Honduran immigrants in the US could also be associated with US border patrol policies. As discussed in Chapter 3, beginning in the 1970's and the 1980's and dramatically increasing in the 1990's the US expanded

Figure 2



Source: World Bank (2019), (MPI Data Hub (2018a; 2018b), U.S. Border Patrol (2019)

enforcement measures on immigration and increased funding for the Border Patrol. These policies created a “caging effect,” effectively encouraging migrants to remain in the US as the heightened border security drastically increased the cost of migrating (Massey et al., 2014) (Massey and Pren 2012) (Rosenburg and Brick 2011).

1998-2005: Economic Shock and the Following Mano Dura Policies

During the 1990s, Honduras endured the economic shock of neoliberalism, only to be confronted with another economic crisis at the end of the decade. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch destroyed infrastructure, export crops, left a large portion of the country unemployed, and displaced more than 1.5 million people (Reichman 2011). Hurricane Mitch likely brought on the decline in GDP per capita in 1999 show in Figure 1.

As discussed in Chapter 2, at the turn of the century, continued economic inequality, paramilitary activity and gang violence gave rise to increases in crime and civilian unrest, which resulted in a dramatic rise in political repression and homicides rates. In the decade prior, intentional homicide rates averaged 23.2 per 100,000, excluding 1996 through 1998 for which there is no data. From 2000 to 2005 this average jumped to 50.95 intentional homicides per 100,000. This dramatic rise in homicides rates can be attributed to the *mano dura* policies enacted by Maduro in 2003. As seen in Chapter 2 and 3, these *mano dura* policies were intended to limit gang and criminal activity however, the policies, which specifically targeted low income individuals, resulted in increased criminal involvement and subsequent widespread social and economic devastation as the rise in criminal activity and homicide rates resulted in lower educational enrollment and fewer employment opportunities (Miguel Cruz 2015) (Pine 2008). Table 1 indicates that intentional homicide rates rise dramatically in 2003 when *mano dura* policies are applied. In the following years homicide rates level out, although still remaining

higher than the decade prior where intentional homicide rates averaged a relatively low 23.2 per 100,000. This trend drives increased out-migration, reflected in the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) data on estimated population of native Hondurans living in the US, which escalates to more than 400,000 in 2006, up from around 282,000 in 2000 (Table 1).

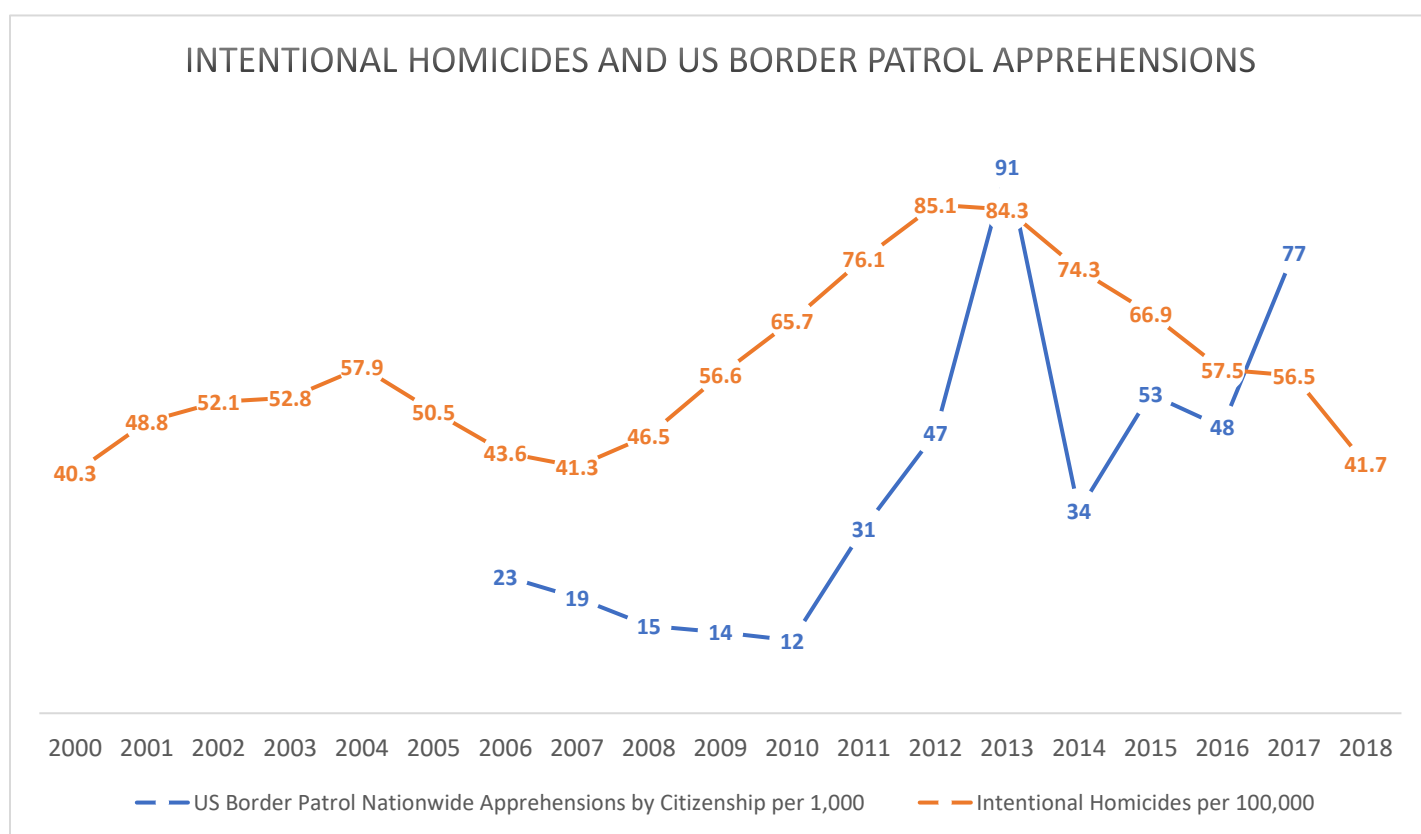
In the late 1990's the US military introduced a new form of aid to combat rising gang violence in Honduras which the US understood to be associated with drug trafficking. This aid, classified as "Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities, Defense", totaled 6,091,276 between 1998-2005, around 28% of the total US Military Assistance within those years (USAID). These counter-drug initiatives, served to militarize the conflict, likely further perpetuating intentional homicide rates throughout Honduras both directly and indirectly. Directly, US military aid increased funding for the Honduran military, which as discussed in Chapter 2, had historically been an institution defined by corruption and violence. By funding the Honduran military, the US likely contributed to an increase in weaponization which indirectly can be correlated to perpetuated political repression and crime. Furthermore, it is likely that weapons sent by the United States, to combat gang violence, ended up in the hands of those very gangs, since the military and police forces were under their influence.

2006-2009: Military Coup and Political Repression

In 2006 Manuel Zelaya was elected president of Honduras. While in power Zelaya strove to reduce corruption, improve security, create jobs, and combat drug trafficking. These initiatives benefitted Honduras as investments in security and employment improved the economy (Figure 1) and reduced violence (Figure 4). From 2006 to 2008 intentional homicide rates slightly dropped to an average of 48.1 per 100,000 from the average of 50.95 per 100,000 taken between

2000 and 2005. This average, however, omits 2009 the year Zelaya's coup occurred where intentional homicide rates increase significantly, a consequence at least partly attributable to the coup. Following the drop in intentional homicides in Honduras, US Border Patrol Apprehensions of Honduran migrants declines, as seen in Figure 4. Beginning in 2006, US Border Patrol Apprehensions decrease significantly from 22,907 to 12,197 in 2010. US Border Patrol Apprehensions only begin to rise again after Zelaya is ousted from power in 2009.

Figure 4



Source: (MPI Data Hub (2018a; 2018b), U.S. Border Patrol (2019))

2009-present: Increasing Crime and Violence

Zelaya's challenge to the military and the traditional elite led to a military coup in 2009. Following the coup, intentional homicide rates reached unprecedented levels. In 2009, the intentional homicide rate reached 65.7 per 100,000, while prior to the coup homicide rates had

only risen to 57.9 per 100,000. Subsequent to 2009, intentional homicide rates further escalated, averaging 78.6 per 100,000 between 2009 and 2011 (Table 1). This dramatic rise in homicide rates after the coup can be attributed to the political repression that followed. During this period peaceful protesters were often assaulted by military and police personnel (Physicians for Human Rights n.d.).

The increase in political repression immediately following the coup is reflected in the Political Terror Scale (Figure 2). In 2009, the PTS rating for Honduras jumps to level 4. However, following 2009, PTS declines again suggesting that the increase in intentional homicide rates between 2010 and 2013 may be attributable to a high level of crime or gang violence rather than state induced violence (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Political repression and the unprecedented level of homicide rates likely encouraged many Honduran natives to flee insecurity and find refuge in the United States. In 2010 alone, around 55,000 Honduran migrants arrived in the US. This was an unprecedented rise in migration flows from Honduras to the United States. In years prior, net migrant inflows had merely reached around 29,000 per year. As the number of intentional homicide rates increased in Honduras so did the number of US Border Patrol Apprehensions of Honduran migrants. Figure 4 demonstrates that in 2010, US Border Patrol Apprehensions of Honduran migrants began to rise. Following 2010 these Border Patrol Apprehensions increase exponentially eventually peaking in 2013, one year after intentional homicides rates peak in Honduras. Figure 4 indicates a one year lag between intentional homicides and US Border Patrol Apprehensions. This lag is typical for factors influencing migration flows as it may take time for individuals to feel the effects of push or pull factors (Appendix A shows the relationship adjusted for the lag).

The spike in the Honduran migrant population living in the US can be attributed to three factors. The first, as mentioned above, is the rise in homicide rates after the 2009 coup. The second, is a the expansion of Honduran street gangs and the subsequent rise in US Counter-Drug enforcement efforts. Following the 2009 coup, the Honduran government struggled to maintain political order, creating space for street gang to flourish. In response, the United States increased drug enforcement efforts. Between 2009-2016 US military aid for “Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities” totaled 66,265,832, approximately 75% of US military aid during this period (USAID). This demonstrates a huge jump in US counter-drug initiatives as compared to the previous period, between 1998-2005, where drug enforcement aid merely reached 28% of total US military aid to Honduras. Increased gang involvement and US military aid for drug-enforcement efforts likely contributed to a rise in out-migration from Honduras as both can be correlated with heightened levels of violence.

The third factor potentially influencing a rise in the Honduran migrant population in 2011 and 2013 is the implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012 which as discussed in Chapter 3 permitted immigrants who arrived in the US as children to apply for deferred action which could indefinitely defer deportation. While DACA specifically required applicants to have arrived prior to 2007, the news of a revolutionary act such as DACA may have traveled incorrectly by word of mouth leading people to believe that the US was accepting applications from all children arriving in the United States. While DACA could account for the spike in border apprehensions at the border in 2013, the effect seems to have been short-lived since border apprehensions decline significantly in 2014.

Discussion

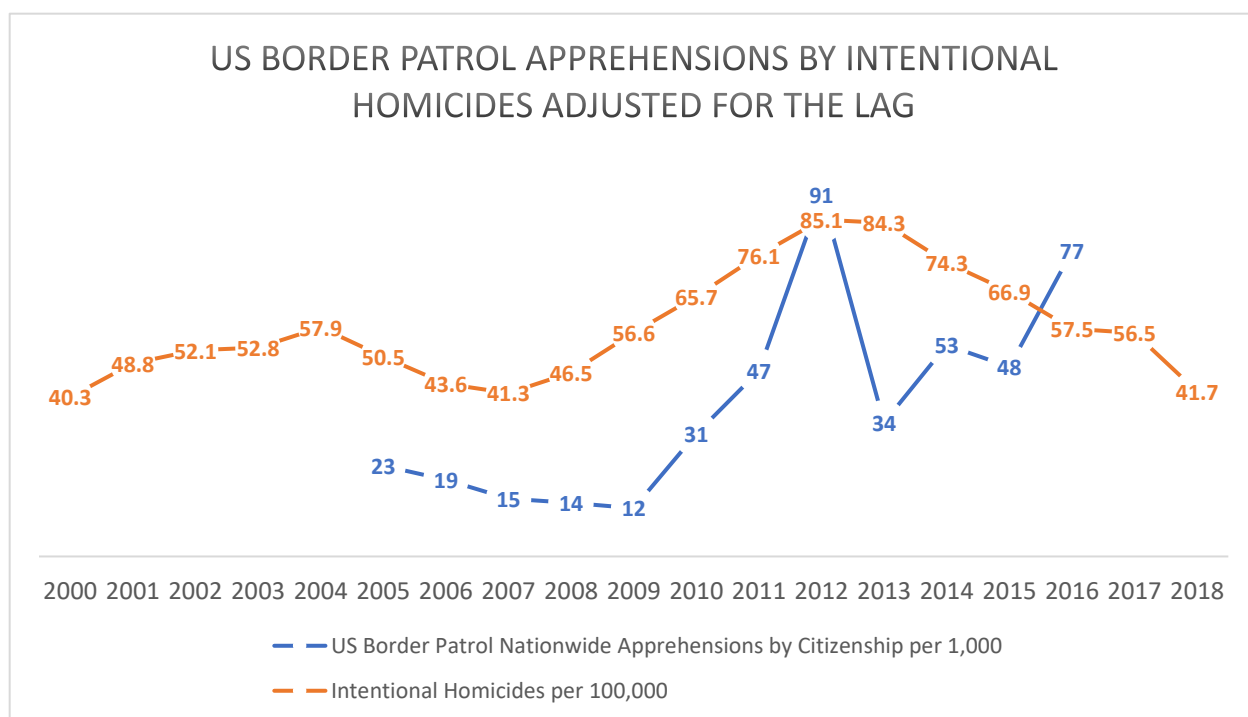
1980 marks the beginning of significant migration from Honduras to the United States. Since then, the number of Honduran migrants living in the United States has increased substantially from around 40,000 in 1980 to 650,000 in 2016 (Table 1). This level of migration can be attributed to a number of push and pull factors including homicide rates, economic security, social networks, and US immigration policies. However, data on Honduras from the 1980's is extremely limited. In 1980, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) publishes a single year of data on the Honduran immigration population in the United States. However, it is possible to look at the dynamics in factors known to affect migration based on previous work. Among these I consider: GDP per capita and the Political Terror Scale, factors which are thought to encourage individuals to leave their country of origin. During this period GDP per capita and the Political Terror Scale rating rise. Since migration data during this period is limited, these conclusions on factors underlying migration flows can only be very tentative.

Similarly to the 1980's, analysis of the 1990's also suffers from a lack of migration data. Throughout this period, MPI solely publishes migration data for two years, 1990 and 2000. These data indicate that the Honduran migrant population in the United States consistently doubled every decade from 1980 to 2000. While the lack of data makes it difficult to explain migration flows, data on known push factors suggests that the consistent economic crises in the 1990's was a factor.

Following 2006, MPI data on the Honduran migrant population in the United States in addition to US Border Patrol Apprehensions of Honduran nationals is consistently published. To test my hypothesis I compare migration data with data on intentional homicide rates, the Political Terror Scale, and GDP per capita. My findings show that intentional homicides are

highly correlated with migration flows from Honduras to the United States following 2006. As discussed, gang violence and US counter-drug initiatives may have contributed heightened violence in Honduras. Figure 4 illustrates that as intentional homicides fall, so do US Border Patrol Apprehensions and when intentional homicide rates rise, US Border Apprehensions follow. This suggests that violence and insecurity are the driving push factors influencing migration flows from Honduras to the US during this period. My findings support the common theory proposed by migration scholars: Massey et al. (2014), Miguel Cruz (2015), Rogers and Jones (2007) Nevins (2016), and Sladkova (2007). However, contrary to popular migration theories, I find that GDP per capita is not an influential push factor. While Czaika and Kis-katos (2009), Parkins (2010), Massey et al. (2014), Miguel Cruz (2015), Rogers and Jones (2007) Nevins (2016), and Sladkova (2007) suggest economic conditions to be a primary determinant of migration flows, this does not seem to be the case in Honduras. Between 1980 and 2016 I find little correlation between migration patterns and GDP per capita as seen in Figure 3.

Appendix A

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- Conclusion

Over the previous three decades, migration from Honduras to the United States has increased exponentially, albeit with fluctuations. This thesis strives to examine the conditions that may have influenced the extent of out-migration from Honduras to the United States since 1980. After analyzing data on common push and pull factors proposed by migration scholars, I find that violence, as measured by intentional homicides, to be a primary determinant of migration flows from Honduras to the US. While migration scholars suggest that economic conditions have a comparable effect to violence on migration flows (Czaika and Kis-katos 2009) (Parkins 2010) (Massey et al. 2014) (Miguel Cruz 2015) (Rogers and Jones 2007) (Nevins 2016) (Sladkova 2007), the data on GDP per capita from Honduras shows little correlation with migration patterns.

Unlike El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras was not a victim of civil war in the 1980's. However, the US sponsored militarization of Honduras and the subsequent human rights violations in the 1980's created a legacy of corruption and impunity for violent crimes that continues today. Such conditions in Honduras allowed for the rapid expansion of street gangs, which have greatly contributed to the rising levels of violence in the country. Recently, the United States has promoted further militarization of the region, in an effort to mitigate gang violence, by placing weapons in the hands of corrupt military and police officers who are often controlled by the gangs themselves. While Honduras never experienced a civil war, vast US Military Assistance in a country where institutions are weak and economic resources are scarce has contributed to an environment of rampant violence which has consequently pushed an increasing number of migrants to seek refuge in the United States.

The weak influence of economic conditions on Honduran migration patterns is likely due to the relative distance between Honduras and the United States. Massey et al. (2014) find that

Mexican migrants are highly influenced by economic opportunities in the US whereas, in Central America, rising levels of violence have a strong impact on an individual's decision to migrate and US labor demands have no effect at all. My results support Massey et al. (2014) in showing that Central American migrants are more influenced by push factors than pull factors.

Migration scholars additionally cite social networks and linkages between origin and destination countries to be primary influences on an individual's decision to migrate. While there is limited data suitable for measuring the impact of social networks on migration, it seems likely that following the significant migration from Honduras and Central America in the 1980's an increasing number of social networks were created connecting Central America to the US, thus producing a chain reaction as networks facilitated further migration by providing funds and information to potential migrants (Rosenblum and Brick 2011) (Gallup 1997) (Parkins 2010), (Massey et al. 2014) (Massey and Pren 2012).

I further suggest that US immigration policies may have had the unintended effect of encouraging in-migration. Historically, US immigration policy has been grounded in intimidation and restriction. Increased funding for Border Patrol and enforcement efforts, however, only served to encourage migrants to remain in the US permanently as the cost of migration increased (Massey et al., 2014) (Massey and Pren 2012) (Rosenburg and Brick 2011). Furthermore, I suggest that DACA, which was enacted in 2012 to protect migrants who had arrived to the US as children may have encouraged greater migration, as many migrants were likely misinformed on the parameters of the act. While I was unable to collect data to support these theories, the former is a likely an explanation for the consistent rise in migration flows as immigration policies have become more restrictionist. And the later likely explains the spike in migration from Honduras in 2013, directly following DACA.

As migration to the US from Honduras specifically, and Central America in general, has increased in the recent decades, US immigration policy has consistently responded by funding enforcement and deterrent efforts. However, such policies have largely failed to mitigate or even reduce migration flows, as US immigration policy directors remain ignorant of the primary factors driving out-migration from Central American countries. US immigration policy continues to be influenced by the premise that Central American migrants leave their home and their loved ones to embark on the challenging and sometimes impossible journey to the United States only to enrich themselves at the expense of US citizens. This notion however, is flawed and fails to take into account the violent and repressive conditions, often generated by US policy, in a country of origin that push individuals to make the difficult decision to migrate. It is my hope that work such as this sheds light on the conditions in a country such as Honduras and will encourage an increasing number of people to advocate for change in immigration policy.

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