Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants in the United States: The Long-term Implications of Civil War and Violence on Successful Integration

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by
Courtney Maurer

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Most importantly, I would like to thank the brave immigrants that chose to risk everything to give their family a better life. I recognize their sacrifices and they are the reason I am passionate about immigration reform. I will continue educating others about immigrant injustices in their honor.
ABSTRACT

Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants in the United States: The Long-term Implications of Civil War and Violence on Successful Integration

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Global Studies

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Courtney Maurer

From 1960-1990, El Salvador’s and Guatemala’s civil wars caused great harm and suffering for their populations, exposing them to oppression, dictatorship, and severe human rights violations. The long term effect of these civil wars is still experienced today in the forms of violence, corruption, unstable economies, and poverty, which block their attainment of the basic necessities of life, including safety, education, jobs, and food. Many Salvadoran and Guatemalan families make the dangerous and costly choice to flee their homeland in search of security and a better way of life. However, once they arrive in the U.S., their relatively low levels of education, job skills, and English language attainment in comparison to other Central and Latin Americans make it extremely challenging for these two immigrant groups to integrate into the socio-economic fabric of the U.S. Thus, many Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants in American communities are failing into the cycle of poverty. This thesis argues that Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants exhibit analogous vulnerabilities to refugees who have similarly fled violence and threats to life. However, because the American military supported Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil war efforts, it has not been politically expedient for the U.S. Government to award these populations with refugee or asylee status. Arriving without documentation, skills, or economic support, Guatemalans and Salvadorans quickly fall into the cycle of poverty. For
two primary reasons, it is in the U.S. Government’s best interests to help them gain self-
sufficiency and better integrate into American life. First, the U.S. must face some level of
accountability for its role in Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars, which prompted the
dislocation of both populations. Second, this thesis argues that lacking intervention, Salvadoran
and Guatemalan communities in the U.S. will create pockets of poverty that depress local
communities and increase the likelihood of the same types of violence they once fled in their
homelands.
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Introduction

Research Problem and Rationale

Since the 1960s, Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants have arrived in the U.S. in record numbers. Fleeing post-civil-war conditions, including rampant gang violence, these migrants have much in common with refugees, asylees, and other forced migrants. Those who have settled in the U.S. have fallen far behind other Central American immigrants as measured by English language attainment, education level, socioeconomic mobility, spatial dispersal, all markers of successful integration. The sharp socioeconomic gap and low rate of integration among Salvadorans and Guatemalans can be linked to the countries’ civil wars and the consequences of the wars that are still impacting residents to this day. Facing violence, poverty, and low education rates, Salvadorans and Guatemalans migrate to the U.S. with little resources in order to give their families a better life.

This paper argues that the post-civil war conditions prompting Salvadoran and Guatemalan migration assert a negative influence on this population long after they have migrated. Interpersonal and gang violence in El Salvador and Guatemala impact many areas of the economy and individuals’ lives. The high rates of violence hinder children and adolescents from receiving the education they need to be competitive in the future workforce. Many times parents are afraid to send their children to school due to gang activity on school grounds. This leaves parents to make the difficult decision to either send their children to school potentially putting them into harm's way or to keep them at home essentially stopping them from receiving a
formal education. Migrating to the U.S. with little education creates enormous integration barriers for adult and youth Salvadorans and Guatemalans compared to other Central Americans who migrate with higher levels of education.

Violence also hinders El Salvador’s and Guatemala's economic and personal growth. For decades, violence has been driving investors and businesses away due to the high risk of corruption and extortion. This leaves Salvadorans and Guatemalans with little job opportunities and without job options many residents are unable to acquire various skills that would be useful when or if they migrate to the U.S. Without education and job skills many Salvadorans and Guatemalans that migrate to the U.S. take manual labor jobs that do not require specialized skills or education. Often times these positions require immigrants to work in hazardous environments for subpar pay. Many times parental low education levels and low job skills is the start of an intergenerational poverty cycle in the U.S. that negatively impact Salvadoran and Guatemalan families and their ability to become self-sufficient.

Without new businesses, investors, or job opportunities many Salvadorans and Guatemalans fall into poverty in their homelands. With low GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth and rampant inequality between socioeconomic classes, Salvadoran and Guatemalan residents continue to migrate to the U.S. for work. In 2017 it was found that El Salvador had the lowest GDP growth and Guatemala had the highest GDP growth over the last five years; however, Guatemalans experience the highest inequality in Central America despite high GDP growth. The most recent data from 2016 shows that poverty rates have been decreasing in El Salvador and is currently at 31%. Guatemala on the other hand is not so transparent about its poverty rate. The latest data from 2014 shows 49% if Guatemalans were living in poverty an
increase from 43% in 2006.\textsuperscript{1} It is speculated that the poverty rate in El Salvador will continue to drop as more Salvadorans send remittances to their families in the homeland. Although the GDP continues to modestly grow in each country, many residents are still living in poverty and are dependent on remittances.

Finally, this paper confronts the frequently heard question: Why should we care? These are undocumented migrants who are relatively unskilled with little education. When these immigrants arrive to the U.S. with few resources and have American born children, the children grow up with the lack of resources to succeed academically perpetuating the intergenerational poverty cycle. If the U.S. continues to ignore these populations, American born Salvadoran and Guatemalan children will become dependent on social programs and will have a much harder time reaching their full potential academically and in the workforce. These populations are extremely capable of being self-sufficient if they receive the correct resources and assistance when Salvadoran and Guatemalan adults arrive in the U.S. or if resources are offered to Salvadoran and Guatemalan children at an early age. The lack of resources and opportunities for advancement in El Salvador and Guatemala is making it difficult for these populations to integrate once they arrive in the U.S. Since the U.S. played a role in their civil wars, ultimately contributing to the post-civil war environments that plague El Salvador and Guatemala, the U.S. government should assist these populations in the integration process. Some Americans and politicians say that these populations should not be seen as a concern for the U.S.; however, this study opposes this view and explains why it is unsustainable and inhumane to keep ignoring these populations.

Salvadoran and Guatemalan integration is an important topic to study because as much as politicians rally against undocumented immigrants, they are arriving and settling, and having children who are now American. The U.S. has a tendency to focus more on deportation than integration of undocumented immigrants. This is not to say that there should be open borders and no immigration laws. Laws are in place to keep systems organized and running efficiently; however, the U.S. is lacking fair and effective immigration laws. The current U.S. immigration system is outdated and cannot handle the current immigration influxes caused by debilitating post-civil war conditions. Immigrants will continue to enter the U.S. to flee the conditions in their homeland and the U.S. needs to shift its focus on to providing resources to immigrant families. This way immigrant children and American born children of immigrant parents can break the poverty cycle and reach their full potential. As the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations continue to rise in the U.S. so will the urgency to acknowledge the needs of these populations.

**Methodology and Parameters**

This paper studies the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations in their homelands and the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations living in the U.S. These two Central American populations experienced U.S. backed civil wars at similar times and face similar post-civil war conditions. Although Honduras is frequently grouped with El Salvador and Guatemala when discussing poverty, homicide rates, corruption, and gang activity within area known as the Northern Triangle, the pre-migration context for Hondurans and the country’s civil war is much more different than that of Salvadorans and Guatemalans and deserves an independent study. To fully understand the Honduran civil war and the country’s unique post-civil war environment,
one would have to study the infamous Battalion 316, an elite Honduran military squad which was trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to carry out torture, mass abductions, and murders.²

This study also does not include immigrants from other Central American countries (Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, or Panama) considering immigrants from these countries migrate to America with significantly more education, English language attainment, and they integrate economically better in the U.S. compared to Salvadorans and Guatemalans migrants. This paper focuses solely on the integration rates of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants due to their low integration rates among Central American immigrants, continuously high rates of violence, poverty, and corruption in their homelands.

In addition, this study does not include immigrants from other Latin American countries such as Mexico, South America, or the Caribbean because the current immigration tension in the U.S. is mainly focused on Northern Triangle immigrants and the U.S. government's response to the influx of these groups and unaccompanied minors from this area. The U.S. government's response is causing a major division among Americans and politicians that will have long term effects. There are a few new policies that the Trump Administration has enacted during a time of great influx of Northern Triangle immigrants that have not been publicly announced in the past such as the following: limiting Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants’ ability to claim asylum, separating parents and children at the port of entry long term, the attempt to end DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the attempt to end TPS (Temporary Protected Status), and an increase of demagoguery in order to pass restrictive immigration laws.

In order to study the history of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigration, their civil wars, the push factor causing the influx of these populations, and their integration rates in the U.S., this paper draws information from national databases, scholarly sources, and journalistic resources. This paper applies scholarly research in a way that connects post-civil war conditions to the low integration rates among Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the U.S.

This paper is not perfect and has its own limitations, as do all studies. Data on Central Americans is often clustered and it is difficult to know what applies specifically to Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Also there are many instances where Salvadorans and Guatemalans are clustered with all Hispanic/Latino immigrants. There are certain parameters within this study that are unable to specifically separate Salvadorans and Guatemalans from all Central American and all Hispanic/Latino immigrants. Also, the most recent data for some parameters is a few years old and only a few data sets reflect integration or migration rates for 2018 or 2019. However, even this collective data still gives an insight into how Central American and Latino families integrate once they arrive in the U.S.

In addition, much of the data in this study comes from national surveys or the U.S. Census. The shortcoming of gathering data from surveys is that the response rate is not 100%. Therefore, the surveys cannot capture every individual with the Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Central America, or the Hispanic/Latino population.

**Literature review**

Immigrant integration and assimilation has been studied for the last century and now as the immigrant population in the U.S. continues to increase it is important to know where the terms came from and how they have changed to capture immigrants’ experience in the U.S. Integration and assimilation are not the same process and should not be used interchangeably.
Integration is the process when immigrants are incorporated into the host society and are equal to the natives without having to shed their own culture to fit in. Assimilation on the other hand is defined as the process of fully adopting the host culture and seamlessly becoming part of the host society. Usually the assimilation process requires immigrants to shed their home culture in order to fully adopt the host culture. The following theories use the term assimilation partly because when these theories were founded, researchers thought that assimilation should be the goal for immigrants in order for them to succeed. However, as we become a more global society and individuals become more exposed to other cultures, this study stresses the acceptance of others without the need to strip them of their home culture. Therefore, this paper will use the term integration.

There are many indicators of integration and the indicators can vary from state to state or among researchers. The general rule is that integration success is determined by measuring the differences between immigrants and native born individuals in education rates, the employment sector, ability to speak the host country's language, and socioeconomic status. At first, immigrant integration was thought to be a linear straightforward process; however researchers’ understanding of integration changed and therefore new theories were established over time.

**Straight-line assimilation theory.**

In 1920 Robert E. Park, who was a Chicago University sociologist, wrote many research papers about integration into the American culture that would soon become known as the

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4 Ibid.

Straight-line Assimilation Theory (also known as the Classical Assimilation Theory). Park believed that an immigrant’s assimilation into the American culture was inevitable and that each generation would experience higher rates of upward mobility than their predecessors, ultimately becoming assimilated into the American culture while becoming less accustomed with their home culture.⁶

After revisions over the years, researchers have given this theory its name and crafted a new definition for it. Immigration researchers Brian Gratton and Emily Skop along with historical demographer Myron Gutmann defined the Straight-line Assimilation Theory by stating it “predicts a steady, generational transition in which immigrant-origin groups take on the demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of natives. In family forms, distinct ethnocultural characteristics fade in strength over time and ethnic families become indistinguishable from native ones”.⁷ The Straight-line Theory predicts that the first generation, usually parents, do not integrate as well due to lack of resources and skills and the third generation children are the most integrated, but at the cost of shedding their home culture.

Researchers began to notice that not all immigrants integrate the same way and certainly not in a simple way that Park had envisioned. Many critics of the Straight-line Assimilation Theory thought that this theory was too narrow minded and had an “Anglo-conformity” perspective since immigrants at the time were conforming to the White Protestant culture, which was the America’s culture. The American culture was stagnant for a long time since a majority

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of Americans and immigrants were White Europeans. This theory was not able to explain the explaining the assimilation process, or lack thereof, for immigrants of other races and ethnicities. Sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou noticed this flaw and contributed to the Segmented Assimilation Theory in an attempt to explain why non-white and post 1960s immigrants were not assimilating as easily as others.

**Segmented assimilation theory.**

The Segmented Assimilation Theory was created in response to the shortcomings of the Straight Line Assimilation Theory. The Segmented Integration Theory was founded in 1993 by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, sociology professors at Princeton and University of California Los Angeles. The theory attempts to explain the vastly different assimilation experiences among immigrants. Their goal was to show that institutional barriers such as underfunded schools, laws and policies, and the lack social acceptance hinder disadvantaged immigrants from fully assimilating. Portes and Zhou explain that the segmented assimilation attempts to answer “…into what sector of American society a particular immigrant group assimilates. Instead of a relatively uniform mainstream whose mores and prejudices dictate a common path of integration, we observe today several distinct forms of adaptation”. These “segments” that Portes and Zhou mention are segments of the population that are grouped together based on their occupations, socioeconomic status, education level, and various skills they possess that help them survive in the United States.

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Researchers found that many immigrants were not assimilating in a “straight line” or not assimilating at all. The more this phenomenon was studied the more researchers found that immigrants from certain areas assimilate better in the U.S. due to the resources available to them in their homelands before migration. The prediction of the Segmented Integration Theory is that there are two outcomes for immigrants and their children based on their individual’s skills, occupation, and socioeconomic status. Sociologists Alejandro Porte, Patricia Fernández-Kelly, and William Haller state that an immigrant’s integration outcome is either “ascending into the ranks of a prosperous middle class or join in large numbers the ranks of a racialized, permanently impoverished population at the bottom of society”.\(^{10}\) Pre-migration resources and the degree of reception in the host country can determine how second generation immigrants integrate in one of three ways: upward mobility, downward mobility, or selective acculturation.

Upward mobility is the trajectory when immigrants migrate to the U.S. with enough education, economic resources, and English language attainment to be successful themselves; thus these first generation immigrants are able to be active participants in their children’s lives and offer them the necessary resources needed to succeed. This trajectory signals full integration into the American culture for second generation immigrants.\(^{11}\) First and second generation immigrants in this category have full access to quality services within their community that can range from education, healthcare, job opportunities, or opportunities for youth involvement.

Downward mobility is the trajectory when immigrants do not migrate with enough resources, education or language attainment to ensure that their children experience upward mobility. This trajectory signals little to no integration and it is usually the precursor for an

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Intergenerational poverty cycle. First and second generation immigrants on this category do not have access to the quality services mentioned before. Once in this category, it is extremely hard for immigrant families to gain access to quality services due to their lack of resources and society's unwillingness to assist them. Therefore, many second generation children are stuck in this mobility trajectory.

Selective acculturation is another trajectory signaling upward mobility, but the difference is that immigrants and their children do not abandon their home culture. Immigrant parents keep their home culture a part of their children’s life by teaching them their home language, traditions, and customs. This trajectory is often associated with biculturalism, bilingualism, and upward economic mobility.

Although the Segmented Integration Theory highlights the institutional barriers that immigrants face and offers an alternative explanation for low integration rates, there are some researchers that are not convinced this theory is accurate. Critics argue that this theory falsely blames racialization and other institutional barriers for immigrants’ poor economic mobility when their slow integration rates could be due to financial obligations or little job growth in their communities. Another flaw that critics point out is that the Segmented Integration theory has not been tested beyond second generation immigrants, who are generally at a young age, and that the theory is not considering the common teenage defiant attitude as the cause of low integration rates; it only focuses on institutional racism and other barriers.

12 Ibid. 1169.
13 Ibid. 1170.
15 Ibid.
There are different ways immigrants integrate and without the necessary resources, immigrants and their children can experience downward mobility for generations. This not only impacts the family themselves, but downward mobility impacts the community as a whole. With the correct resources, immigrants can contribute economically and culturally to their communities. Although second generation mobility heavily depends on their parent’s pre-migration resources, all hope is not lost and the U.S. has the ability to help immigrant families out of the downward mobility trajectory. There is much more work to be done in order to understand social and institutional barriers that keep immigrants from integration. However, there is already a plethora of data available that outline the consequences if immigrants and their children are left in poverty.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter one will focus on the history of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigration. This chapter will provide a historical overview of Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars and their outcomes. It will also give details on how the U.S. was involved in the civil wars, how the Salvadoran and Guatemalan population changed in the U.S. during this time period, and how the U.S. reacted to the influx of these two groups at the time. Chapter two will give insight into the push factors causing the current influx of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants. Chapter two also describes the legal and illegal pathways Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants take in order to get to the U.S. such as family sponsorships, refugee and asylum, work visas, coyotes, and presenting themselves at the port of entry. Also it will discuss the context of reception for Salvadorans and Guatemalans and details about the politics, hostile public attitudes, immigration laws and apparatus over the past three presidential administrations. Chapter three will provide an
overview of Salvadoran and Guatemalan integration in the U.S. This chapter will discuss how they are faring in terms of English language attainment, education, employment and economic status, spatial dispersal and ethnic enclaves, and individual factors such as race and religion which also impact their ability to survive. Finally, the conclusion will give an explanation on why the U.S. should start assisting Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the integration process. The U.S. should have a great interest in breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle for Salvadoran and Guatemalan families because the second generation and beyond are American born citizens and these populations are continually ignored resulting in low education rates, low job skills, and causing these populations to be more dependent on social programs. Salvadorans and Guatemalans are strong and determined individuals who make sacrifices to give their family a better life and due to the role the U.S. played in their civil wars, the U.S. government should take some responsibility in stabilizing their lives.
Historical Overview of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan Civil Wars

From 1960-1996 Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants entered the U.S. in record numbers. Fleeing civil wars in El Salvador (1980-1992) and Guatemala (1960-1996), almost half a million Salvadorans and Guatemalans sought refuge outside of their homelands. During the civil wars, Salvadorans and Guatemalans lived in poverty, oppression, and mass violence. The civil wars devastated both countries, causing violence, government corruption, and very little infrastructure improvement.

El Salvador’s poverty and oppression dates back to the 1880s when the coffee industry became the country’s main source of economy and grew the inequality gap between social-economic classes. During this time coffee accounted for 95% of El Salvador's income, but only 2% of the population benefited from the industry’s wealth by being owners or investors for coffee companies.16 This inequality gap existed for over 100 years and in 1980 it was found that only 60 families owned 100% of the coffee industry in El Salvador with a population of 4.577 million at the time.17 The rest of the population lived in or near poverty levels and never enjoyed the wealth of the coffee industry despite working for coffee companies and on plantations. Poor living conditions and lack of government help led to an uprising among those living in poverty. However, this group was soon met with oppression and the Salvadoran military, with the government’s support, started targeting anyone who was leading or supporting social and

17 Ibid.
economic reform. During the civil war there were attempts to end the conflict, but both sides did not trust each other so the war continued. Guerrilla groups did not participate in elections due to corruption and the groups believed that elections would be altered to favor the right-wing candidates. On the other hand, the Salvadoran government refused to attend peace talks led by the guerrilla groups. The refusal to negotiate led to the destruction of El Salvador's economy, infrastructure, and deaths and missing people which prompted many Salvadorans to flee their homeland in search for a better life.

Guatemala's oppressive and poor living conditions date back hundreds of years as well. Nearly 500 years ago when the Spanish conquered Guatemala, a new socio-economic hierarchy was put into practice and many indigenous Mayans were deemed as slaves and were forced to work on plantations. Even after gaining independence in 1821 Guatemala was ran by military dictators and land oligarchies. This continued until 1944 when democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz came into power and promised major land reforms to give the power back to the people. Ten years later in 1954, the United States became involved to protect its fruit companies in Guatemala. Arbenz’ progressive platform and reforms did not sit well with Guatemalan elites and the U.S. In 1954 the U.S. helped right winged elites overthrow Arbenz and gave power to right wing dictators that would keep the elite rich and the poor in poverty. Mayans originally supported the guerrilla groups that started a full scale war with the Guatemalan government and the Mayans were hopeful that the guerrilla groups would address

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
the economic and political marginalization against them. Unknowingly, their support of the guerrilla groups was used by the Guatemalan government to label all Mayans as an enemy and in response to the Mayans’ support, the government targeted civilians in order to cut off any ties or support for the guerrilla groups. Similar to El Salvador, greed, oppression, and poverty destroyed Guatemala's economy, infrastructure, and justice system and are still plagued with corruption and injustice to this day. Guatemalans are still unable to live in their homeland safely and comfortably due to little job opportunities, poverty, and corruption within their government.

The U.S. immigration mechanism is a broken and a complex institution. It is extremely expensive to become a U.S. citizen and the process can take years. Individuals who are fleeing violence and warfare feel a sense of urgency about finding secure living conditions. Legal pathways, such as asylum, refugee, and temporary protected status, were created to provide dislocated populations the proper documentation status to seek refuge in the U.S. However, because this process is politicized, acceptance is not guaranteed for those who apply under duress, and criteria often changes under each presidential administration. With asylum or refugee status, Salvadorans and Guatemalans would receive government assistance and deportation protection which would aid them in starting a productive new life in the U.S. and be self-sufficient.

Similar to many refugees or displaced people who flee the conditions of war or disaster, Guatemalans and Salvadoran migrants carry with them with few resources and limited human capital. Arriving with lower levels of education and job skills, Guatemalans and Salvadoran immigrants have not integrated into the social and economic fabric of the United States as well

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
as those coming from more developed nations.\textsuperscript{27} Many Central American immigrants entered the United States without documentation, eager to escape violence, famine, or persecution in their homeland, and according to the Pew Research Center, only 31\% of foreign-born Salvadorans and 24\% of foreign born Guatemalans living in the United States had obtained citizenship by 2013.\textsuperscript{28} Without citizenship it is nearly impossible for these individuals to receive assistance from social programs, secure high paying jobs, or be part of their children’s academic life in order to provide guidance. The lack of pre-migration resources such as education, job skills, and English language attainment is detrimental and causes low integration rates for Salvadorans and Guatemalans. The impact of the civil wars has had an international impact on Salvadorans and Guatemalans keeping them from gaining the resources they need to reach their full potential in their homelands and the U.S.

**Salvadoran Civil War**

During the 1980-1990 Salvadoran civil war, the number of Salvadoran immigrants seeking refuge in the U.S. skyrocketed. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that within ten years of the outbreak of civil war, the Salvadoran immigrant population in the United States quintupled from 94,000 to 465,000.\textsuperscript{29} In a nation defined by the coffee industry, the gap between the rich and poor was growing. In the 19th century, the coffee industry was the country’s main source of income and at one point only 60 families controlled 100\% of the coffee industry.\textsuperscript{30}


These elite families had control over the government, causing officials to be biased in their favor when it came to coffee regulations. To keep earning economic and political advantages offered by the economic elites, the military and government made false promises to the peasant families to keep them under control as they waited for equitable land distribution aid from the government. The peasants grew tired of waiting for government aid and formed guerrilla groups to overthrow the ruling elite. Maureen Kane, a history professor at Northern Virginia College, explains that “discontent with the government provoked the five main guerrilla groups [in El Salvador] to unite in the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN).” When the civil war started, the United States sent military and financial aid to support El Salvador’s government to combat the guerrilla groups, which they considered to be communist radicals. During this era of Cold War tension between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., American politicians feared a Soviet foothold in Latin America would compromise its security and felt increasing pressure to take control of the situation. To help keep “communism” out of its sphere of influence, the U.S. government sent El Salvador’s military and police force $4.5 billion dollars’ worth of military and financial aid. The U.S finally ceased its financial and military support of Salvadoran government forces in 1990 after the United Nations became involved to help mediate an end to the war. At this point, Congressman Joe Moakley confirmed reports of human rights violations caused by the Salvadoran government and police forces that led to the deaths of approximately 75,000 Salvadorans and an unknown number of missing people during this time period. At

31 Ibid.
32 Kane, M., Op. Cit.
34 Kane, M., Op. Cit.
long last, the FMLN and Salvadoran Government met in Mexico City in 1992 to sign the Chapultepec Peace Accords, which marked the end of the civil war.35

As the civil war displaced countless Salvadorans from their homes, U.S. journalists, social workers, and clergy began to notice the arrival of many Salvadoran immigrants into the states. This made front page news and many Americans were afraid of communist behavior exhibited by Salvadoran immigrants seeking refuge in America. Former president Ronald Reagan used demagoguery to gain support for U.S. intervention in El Salvador by stating

“...if Congress offers too little support, it will be worse than doing nothing at all. This excessive communism in Central America poses the threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border on our south could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes. We could face a massive exodus of refugees to the United States.” 36

Many Salvadorans fleeing violence and persecution met the qualification of “asylum seeker,”37 however the U.S. Government didn’t recognize them as such during the Salvadoran civil war. Both Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants were rarely granted asylum during their civil wars because former president Ronald Reagan denied humanitarian crisis reports concerning Salvadorans and Guatemalans and Reagan chose to classify these groups of immigrants as “economic migrants”.38 This classification took away their ability to claim “well rounded fear of persecution”, the fundamental principle of asylum claims. Regardless of their ability to gain asylum, Salvadorans continued to pour into the U.S. By 2015, almost twenty-five years after the civil war ended, 2.1 million Salvadorans were reportedly living in the United States.39 Even

37 The United Nations defines refugees as “persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution…. people for whom denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences”.
though the Salvadoran population had grown substantially during this era, the U.S. government failed to provide displaced Salvadorans with relief, resources or legal documentation that might help them integrate socially and economically after their arrival.

**Guatemalan Civil War**

Similar to El Salvador’s civil war, the United States played a role by funding Guatemalan military coups to overthrow democratically elected presidents that aimed to change the economy and political parties in Guatemala. U.S. intervention in Guatemala politics began in 1954 and this effort would eventually help precipitate the civil war six years later. In the end the United Nations confirmed 200,000 deaths, 83% of those being indigenous Mayans.\(^{40}\) The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency supported a military coup targeting then elected president, Jacobo Arbenz, who legalized the communist party and attempted to nationalize plantations owned by the U.S. based United Fruit Company.\(^{41}\) The U.S. backed the coup in self-interest due to the threat of nationalizing the United Fruit Company. If Jacobo Arbenz was successful, the U.S. company would have lost all of the company’s assets and millions of dollars. The United Fruit Company’s executives saw this as a threat and pressured the U.S. government into sending resources to help overthrow Jocobo Arbenz.\(^{42}\) With the help of U.S. intervention the coup leader, Colonel Carlos Castillo, became president by force and reversed land reform laws that benefited poor farmers along with voiding voting rights for illiterate Guatemalans; Castillo remained president until 1958 when he was murdered.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{40}\) The Center for Justice and Accountability., *Opt. Cit.*, Guatemala “Silent Holocaust”: The Mayan Genocide
After Castillo was murdered for his oppressive ruling style, Guatemala came under an autocratic ruler named General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes. During his time as the ruler from 1958-1966, the civil war began in 1960 when guerrilla groups started resisting military forces.\textsuperscript{44} In 1966 there was an attempt to restore civilian rule and democracy which lead to Cesar Mendez being elected as Guatemala’s president; however, Mendez’s presidency did not last long and the civil war intensified due to military counterinsurgency campaigns.\textsuperscript{45} The second phase of Guatemala’s civil war started in 1970 when Carlos Arana was elected president\textsuperscript{46} and immediately gave the Guatemalan military more control over the public resulting in ten years of violence against guerrilla groups and indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{47} The U.S. became even more involved in Guatemala’s civil war when it was decided that our government would send military and public safety support to Carlos Arana to defeat the leftist insurgency, but soon after received criticism since Arana was considered a counter-terrorist. \textsuperscript{48}

From 1982-1994 Guatemala experienced more uncertainty. Presidents were forced to resign or ousted by coups, constitutions and political parties were nulled, and civil rights were restricted.\textsuperscript{49} Finally in 1994 Guatemala's National Congress voted for Ramiro De Leon Carpio to become the president of Guatemala and he did not waste any time trying to restore liberalism for his people.\textsuperscript{50} Carpio initiated peace talks between the rebels and the government and in 1996

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} The Guatemalan military backed Carlos Arana so it is possible he was elected through intimidation and force.
\textsuperscript{47} Public Broadcasting Station, \textit{Op. Cit.} Timeline: Guatemala’s Brutal Civil War.

\textsuperscript{49} Public Broadcasting Station, \textit{Op. Cit.} Timeline: Guatemala’s Brutal Civil War.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
under a new president, Alvaro Arzu, the peace negotiations were finalized and a peace treaty was signed\textsuperscript{51}.

First, counterinsurgencies in the Eastern Ladino\textsuperscript{52} region broke out from 1960-1968, then came conflicts in the western Mayan highlands.\textsuperscript{53} The first phase of the civil war did not force many Guatemalans to migrate because the counterinsurgencies were primarily focused on opposition leaders, not so much the public\textsuperscript{54}. In fact, the only a small number of Guatemalans migrated to the United States at this time, while others moved “...primarily to Mexico, joining a pre-existing diaspora of largely professional, middle-class Guatemalan political exiles in Mexico City.”\textsuperscript{55} Thereafter, during the second phase of the civil war, worsening conditions and attacks on the general public forced a large number of Guatemalans to migrate to Mexico and the U.S.\textsuperscript{56}

Guatemala's civil war started in 1960 and lasted until 1996, consequently causing another great influx of Central Americans into the United States. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (now known as Department of Homeland Security) estimated that between 1977 and 1989, 59,702 Guatemalans (documented and undocumented) migrated to the U.S. from Guatemala, accounting for 43,915 (42\%) out of the 104,559 asylum applications in 1992.\textsuperscript{57} Other Guatemalans were internally displaced or migrated to neighboring countries.

However, the corruption has not stopped and the current president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, has received harsh criticism for wasting money and resources. In 2017 Morales spent

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[51] Ibid.
\item[52] “Landino” refers to individuals who are non-indigenous Guatemalans. Landios do not practice indigenous culture.
\item[54] Ibid.
\item[55] Ibid.
\item[56] Ibid.
\item[57] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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approximately $40,000 USD\textsuperscript{58} on designer sunglasses, whiskey, dry cleaning services, among other things using Guatemalan government funds. In addition to this accusation, the Guatemalan attorney general and the United Nations international commission found Morales and his advisors funneled $800,000 USD worth of hidden and unexplained funds into his 2015 presidential campaign.\textsuperscript{59} This gross consumption using government and private resources has angered Guatemalans, who face stark economic inequalities and among the worst rates of poverty, malnutrition, and maternal and child mortality rates in Central America.\textsuperscript{60} Since the end of the civil war, the Guatemalan government is notorious for its oppression of citizens and its corruption. Most Guatemalans who have migrated to the U.S. post-war are seeking jobs and a stable place to live since the Guatemalan government does not put in effort and/or lack the resources to rebuild Guatemala's infrastructure and restore order among civilians.\textsuperscript{61} 

In 2018 the Guatemalan government estimated that 150,000 to 170,000 Guatemalans enter the workforce each year; however, only 35,000 to 40,000 jobs are created every year.\textsuperscript{62} With well over 100,000 Guatemalans unemployed year after year, the need to migrate for work becomes a priority and a push factor. Consequently, Guatemala has a high rate of inequality and without jobs many Guatemalans face poverty in their homeland which is an important pre-immigration factor that hinders their ability to integrate when and if they migrate to the U.S.


\textsuperscript{60} British Broadcasting Corporation News, \textit{Opt. Cit.}

\textsuperscript{61} Jonas, S., \textit{Op. Cit.}

In addition to forcing labor migration for adults, poverty and lack of jobs also impacts the ability for Guatemalan children to attend school. Many children living in rural parts of Guatemala and many indigenous children do not attend school due to the costs of transportation, the cost of supplies, or because they must work in order to help support their family.\(^{63}\) Even if all Guatemalan could attend school, the school systems would not be able to educate all children sufficiently due to subpar teaching material and the inability to find quality teachers in rural areas.\(^{64}\) Without education, Guatemalan children do not attain the skills needed to become competitive individuals in the Guatemalan and possibly the U.S. workforce causing them to be the start of an intergenerational poverty cycle.

Along with poverty, lack of jobs, and declining education among youth, corruption and violence continues to plague the Guatemala as well. Over the past few decades Guatemala has attempted to completely shift their government from an autocratic rule to a democracy. Democratically elected individuals have presided in Guatemala for the past 30 years; however, many of the democratically elected offices still tangled in high levels of corruption such as impunity, drug trafficking, and inequitable distribution of resources.\(^{65}\) Guatemala is a major transit country for illegal drug trafficking specifically cocaine and heroin.\(^{66}\) Guatemala's open borders, lack of law enforcement, and collusion between corrupt officials and organized crime allow many items to be smuggled or trafficked like drugs, weapons, dangerous chemicals, and people.\(^{67}\) It is very difficult for Guatemalans to rid their country of corruption since many

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64 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 19
67 Ibid.
powerful individuals in the government and community and militaristic organized crime groups benefit from corruption and continue to fight any anti-corruption laws or policies.68

There have been progress made in Guatemala in fighting corruption and impunity, but not enough to make a significant difference. Maureen Taft-Morales, a Latin American Affairs Specialist for the Congressional Research Service, states that “[a]lthough state institutions have investigated and arrested high-level officials, including a sitting president, for corruption, high levels of impunity in many cases continue due to intimidation of judicial officials, deliberate delays in judicial proceedings, and widespread corruption.”69 With the continuous high level of corruption and lack of public services, many Guatemalans decide to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. for the chance to give their family the resources needed to survive. Without strong governmental effort corruption will continue and consequently forcing Guatemalans to migrate in large numbers.

Analysis and Impact of the Civil Wars

Although both civil wars came to an end more than twenty-five years ago, El Salvador and Guatemala have not yet recovered economically or politically. Due in part to civil conflict, El Salvador and Guatemala differ from other Central America nations (excluding Honduras) in various ways. Due to the deep rooted corruption and high impunity rates, El Salvador and Guatemala currently claim the highest homicide rates in the region. Homicides, extortion, and other forms of violence are rarely prosecuted due to intimidation of judges and lawyers. This gives power to organized crime rings and corrupted officials and they use this power to control

68 Ibid., 3
69 Ibid., 2
civilians. Due to the current political state in each country, the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) has been deemed just as dangerous as war zones due to current rates of homicide, corruption, and gang violence.\textsuperscript{70} According to a Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) survey, a nonprofit organization offering free medical services in unstable countries, 467 Central American migrants receiving medical care from the organization were surveyed and the results show how bad the political and social environment is in the Northern Triangle region.

“39.2 percent mentioned direct attacks or threats to themselves or their families, extortion, or gang-forced recruitment as the main reason for fleeing their countries”, “43.5 percent had a relative who died due to violence in the last two years. More than half of Salvadorans surveyed (56.2 percent) had a relative who died due to violence in this same time span.” and “54.8 percent of Salvadorans had been the victim of blackmail or extortion, significantly higher than respondents from Honduras or Guatemala.”\textsuperscript{71}

The violence and corruption that Salvadorans and Guatemalans experience on a daily basis is inhibiting them and their families from living a normal life. Families are fleeing their homelands for safety and security more and more each year.

Recently there have been more Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants migrating to the U.S. than to any other Central American country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the requests for asylum for immigrants fleeing El Salvador and Guatemala rose from 59,343 to 84,777 applications (30\%) from 2016 to 2017.\textsuperscript{72} However, only a small percentage are granted asylum or refugee status and this is most likely due to former president Reagan's decision to label them as “economic migrants” decades ago. It seems that

\textsuperscript{70} Cone, J., & Bosch Bonacasa, M., \textit{Op. Cit.}
categorizing these populations set a precedent for them making it almost impossible for them to claim asylum and refugee status. This is only a partial number of immigrants from these areas because there are some that are forced to enter the US undocumented due to the lack of financial resources. Doctors Without Borders, has completed extensive medical work in Central America and both the Executive Director, Jason Cone, and the Head of Operations for Latin America, Marc Bosch Bonacasa, stated that

“[although] the Northern Triangle is not a war zone, the attacks that people have suffered in the region and along their migration route through Mexico are comparable to the situations MSF has encountered in over 40 years of working in conflict areas around the world. Murders, kidnappings, threats, recruitment by non-state armed actors, extortion, sexual violence, and forced disappearances are daily threats facing people in the region.”73

The U.S. government has taken little action to try and help those fleeing El Salvador or Guatemala, these populations are receiving help from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rather than the U.S. federal government. In 1985 Central American immigrant organizations and various Catholic and Baptists churches helped Salvadorans and Guatemalans sue the U.S. government for wrongly denying their asylum applications.74 The lawsuit which is known as *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh* (ABC) settlement, accused the US government of denying Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum applications without a just cause.75 Organizations started to notice the rejection trend among the asylum applicants and it was found that out of an estimated 500,000 applicants only 2% (10,000) were granted asylum the rest being rejected.76

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75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
Churches and other organizations helped Salvadorans and Guatemalans sue the government and applicants were given the chance to reapply and have a fair hearing, but they were not automatically granted asylum.\textsuperscript{77} In the end, almost 200,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans (in addition to some individuals from former soviet who were also wrongly denied asylum) were awarded green cards.\textsuperscript{78}

Other forms of legal status were initiated, but were ineffective. In the past Salvadorans have been granted temporary protected status (TPS) twice from 1991-1992 and 2001-2019. President Donald Trump has decided not to renew TPS for Salvadorans and their protection will end on September 9, 2019 despite advice to not end the program.\textsuperscript{79} According to the Migration Policy Institute, TPS was first created in 1990 (in response to the ABC settlement) and in the following year Salvadorans were the first people to receive TPS due to the civil war, but this protection only lasted one year and expired a year later in 1992.\textsuperscript{80} Giving Salvadorans only a year of TPS was ineffective because it does not give immigrants a path to citizenship; it only makes them non-deportable for a certain period of time. Once the TPS expired in 1992, the Salvadorans that were granted TPS living in the U.S. suddenly became undocumented and deportable. Also, the TPS protection came way too late for Salvadorans. By 1991 the civil war was over and hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans were already living in America undocumented for a considerable amount of time.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Almost ten years later in 2001, former president George W. Bush granted TPS to Salvadorans due to a 7.6 magnitude earthquake and the aftershocks that came after. It was estimated that the earthquake misplaced 1.3 million Salvadorans, 2.8 billion is infrastructure damages, and massive food and water insecurity. Citing similar reasons, former president Barack Obama extended TPS for Salvadorans specifically due to subsequent natural disaster that have caused draughts, famine, lack of electricity mosquito borne illnesses, and gang related insecurity.

Contrary to Salvadorans, Guatemalans have never received TPS despite experiencing a civil war similar to El Salvador and requesting the protection numerous times in 2005, 2008, 2010, 2013, and in 2018 for natural disaster relief. This is a pivotal moment in realizing that Salvadorans and Guatemalans have been trying for decades to enter the United States legally, but the U.S. government has always found a way to reject them. After being turned away time after time, Salvadorans and Guatemalans sometimes have to make the decision to enter undocumented and risk deportation or return to their unstable countries. In turn, forcing Salvadorans and Guatemalans to immigrate illegally and denying them other forms of aid has further intensified the already delicate rhetoric of immigration in the United States.

Salvadorans and Guatemalans fall into the categories of asylees and refugees and the United States should have recognized El Salvador and Guatemala's population as such. After contributing to both civil wars and considering the lasting effect they continue to have on the population, it is fair to argue that the U.S. has a moral obligation to offer refugee or asylum

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
status to those who are fleeing violence and persecution that is still happening to this day.
Although, the U.S. did not start the civil wars, our government should not have gotten involved.
No one knows how long the wars would gone on or how they would have ended if the U.S. did not get involved, but the fact is the U.S. government was a part of many individual’s death and displacement. Therefore, the U.S. should be held responsible for the role it willingly took and assist Salvadorans and Guatemalans in obtaining U.S. Citizenship, asylum status, or refugee status not make it more difficult like President Trump’s administration is currently doing.

The past and present attempts by the U.S. government to drive out Latinos and their families shows a lack of systematic and moral understanding on why Latino immigrants should be incorporated into the American society and be assisted in becoming citizens. These individuals do not come for free government assistance and as far as historical documents can show, these are individuals migrated to the U.S. in the 1800s to find work, shelter, and other opportunities to for their families. History is repeating itself and this time Salvadorans and Guatemalans are migrating to the U.S. for the same exact reasons: unstable governments, poverty, and violence. Once again the U.S. government is failing them. Many Americans and government officials see Salvadorans and Guatemalans as “criminals” that should be prosecuted for entering the U.S. undocumented, but these same individuals are missing the point and turning a blind eye to the fact that the U.S. was involved in both civil wars and our government likely prolonged the wars and consequently many people died or were displaced.

Furthermore, the U.S. government should have great interests in providing relief and necessary resources to help Salvadorans and Guatemalans integrate or restructure the asylum application process so Central Americans, especially unaccompanied minors, are not recruited by MS-13 members. The spread and continuation of the MS-13 is partly fueled by the gang
targeting unaccompanied Central American youth who travel alone to the U.S. fleeing the violence and poverty in the Northern Triangle.\textsuperscript{85} The MS-13 see these minors as easy recruits since these individuals are in a foreign land needing assistance learning the language, culture, and creating networks.\textsuperscript{86} There have been many questions raised about the effectiveness and tracking capabilities of the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement where many of these minors are screened and then settle in communities across the nation; the other minors bypass immigration authorities.\textsuperscript{87} Although, a small percentage of unaccompanied minors become MS-13 gang members this number could continue rising of the U.S. government stand idly by and taking little action to rectify the problem. Denying Central American immigrants asylum is not going to rectify the growing immigration problem either. Immigrants will continue fleeing from the dangers in their home countries because they have the responsibility and a powerful instinct to protect their families. The U.S. must restructure and increase assistance for these families; if not, the cycle of violence and poverty will continue for Salvadorans and Guatemalans.


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
El Salvador and Guatemala Push Factors

The causes of immigration, known as push factors, vary from country to country, while each destination country has various pull factors or characteristics that draw individuals to migrate there. Push factors can include poverty, violence, religious persecution, famine, war, lack of public services. Examples of pull factors can include quality of education, healthcare, personal safety, job opportunities, and family reunification. With regard to push factors in El Salvador and Guatemala, both countries are combating high rates of violence, gang activity, government corruption, and poverty, which are causing a negative net migration in both countries. Net migration is found by calculating the difference between populations immigrating and emigrating within a given area; therefore, countries have a negative net migration when the number of people migrating from the country is higher than the number of people emigrating to the country.

Violence against men and women occurs at high rates in El Salvador and Guatemala, but women in particular are targeted more for specific types violence, such as interpersonal and domestic violence or abuse. They are also often victims of collective violence, defined by the World Health Organization as violence between gangs, rape used as a weapon, state or group terrorism, and the act of being displaced from their homes.  

The high rate of violence is impacting Salvadorans and Guatemalans in other ways as well. Violence disrupts the economic system and causes poverty and the lack of job opportunities. Violence in these countries is

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hindering business and economic prosperity. Investing in Salvadoran and Guatemalan business is a substantial risk because of the violence and corruption endemic in these nations. Many startup or established businesses do want to take the risk. Thus, few jobs are established and individuals make the choice to migrate, primarily to the U.S., in order to find work. However, violence in these countries continually occurs at high rates due to government corruption. Many times, criminals are not prosecuted for violent crimes, thus allowing individuals to commit crimes without consequences.

Lack of educational opportunities can be seen as a consequence of the violence and poverty in El Salvador and Guatemala. The number of out of school children in each country has been steadily increasing over the past ten years. Many parents fear that sending their children to school will put them at risk of gang activity and gang violence on school grounds. In addition, many children may work to help their parents pay bills and run the household. The impact of low education levels among Salvadoran and Guatemalan children is perpetuating the cycle of poverty in their home countries. When they migrate to the U.S., their low human capital puts them at a disadvantage for furthering their education or finding high paying job opportunities. However, even for those Salvadorans and Guatemalans who do finish high school in their home countries, there are few jobs that match their education level, thus their skills are not being put to use. Violence, lack of job opportunities, and low education levels are interrelated issues that feed into one another, causing high levels of migration to the U.S.

**Poverty, Violence, and Corruption**

Although El Salvador and Guatemala are close in proximity to other Central American countries, the push factors that cause Salvadorans and Guatemalans to migrate also cross contiguous borders into neighboring countries, they are likely to experience the same problems
they face at home: high homicide rates, government corruption, broken economies, and weak educational systems. These push factors are causing a negative net migration in El Salvador and Guatemala. In 2017, the United Nations Population Division found that between the years 2010 and 2015 both El Salvador and Guatemala had a negative net migration of -240,000 and -50,000 respectively which may have risen since this data was collected. Migration trends show that less developed and lower income countries experience a negative net migration while developed and high-income countries experience a positive net migration. Immigrants often choose leave their homes to find more resources and opportunities in more developed nations. Without more government stability in El Salvador and Guatemala, immigrants and their children will continue migrating to the U.S.; escaping poverty and violence while in search of educational and job opportunities.

The United Nations Population Division also found that among all immigrants migrating from El Salvador (1,559,924 people) and Guatemala (1,117,355 people) in 2017, Salvadoran women (784,190) made up 50.27% of the total Salvadoran immigrants and 50.27% (561,688) of Guatemalan immigrants were women, a majority of whom headed to the U.S.

Male and female migration from El Salvador and Guatemala are even; however, the reasons for migration are not the same. Females in the Northern Triangle region are more prone to experience interpersonal and community violence compare to men. The World Health Organization defines interpersonal violence as “violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The former category [family and intimate partner violence] includes

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90 Ibid.
93 The World Health Organization defines interpersonal violence as “violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The former category [family and intimate partner violence] includes
on Latin America found that women in the Northern Triangle region are much more likely to experience gang threats, rape, assault, extortion, and domestic abuse for reasons that include: witnessing a crime, attempting to leave a gang or relationship, or failing to pay an extortion fee or war tax.\textsuperscript{94} Although homicide rates are high for both men and women, with homicide rates of 81.2 per 100,000 people in El Salvador and 27.3 per 100,000 people in Guatemala, interpersonal violence and collective violence disproportionately impacts women more than men.\textsuperscript{95} Violence and homicides continue to occur at high rates and are made worse by underfunded institutions, weak judicial systems, corruption, and a distrust between government officials and residents. The impunity rate is as high as 95\% in some areas of the North Triangle region.\textsuperscript{96} Many criminals are not convicted due to bribing or extorting judges and local police officers. Corruption occurs at much higher rates in El Salvador and Guatemala compared to the United States. For example, in 2017, Transparency International found that El Salvador’s corruption perception index was at 112/180 and Guatemala's was 143/180, with a score of 180 being the highest corruption score. With a lower homicide rate of 5.4 per 100,000 people in the U.S.\textsuperscript{97} and a corruption score of 16/180\textsuperscript{98}, safety is a pull factor that entices Salvadorans and Guatemalans to migrate to the U.S.


Poverty is also an important factor in an individual’s decision to migrate to the United States. According to the World Bank, from 2010-2016, El Salvador experienced the lowest GDP growth within the Central America region averaging only 2.6%, and the country recently experienced an even lower GDP growth rate of 2.3% for FY 2017.\textsuperscript{99} The lack of GDP growth signals a weak economy that impacts Salvadorans’ ability to make a living. Although El Salvador's GDP growth rate is the lowest in the region, it should be noted that poverty rates have actually fallen from 39\% to 31\% in 2007-2016, based on a $5.50 per day poverty line.\textsuperscript{100} Both external and internal factors contributed to the poverty reduction. First, salary increases for low skilled workers benefited individuals who fall in the bottom 20\% of the impoverished population and secondly remittances sent home from family abroad helped bring many individuals out of poverty.\textsuperscript{101} As more Salvadorans migrate to find work in the United States, remittances sent to families in El Salvador have increased. In this case, the reduction of poverty brings about a mixed outlook on El Salvador’s economy. On one hand, the Salvadoran government has made positive steps to increase wages for workers, but on the other hand, Salvadorans are still dependent on remittances. This means that high numbers of Salvadorans are still migrating in search of work. With high levels of crime and violence still occurring, the economy will not grow exponentially due to the risk of investing and the expenses related to opening businesses in El Salvador.

Guatemala on the other hand has shown high GDP growth over the last few years, but has the highest inequality rate between the rich and poor in the region.\textsuperscript{102}

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100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

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has averaged 3.0% since 2012, then increased to 4.1% in 2014 when the government implemented macroeconomic management reforms. However, GDP growth leveled out to 2.8% in 2017.\textsuperscript{103} Even with high GDP growth, Guatemalans continue to experience high rates of poverty, malnutrition, maternal and child mortality rates. The Salvadoran and Guatemalan government collect very little public revenue such as local and nationwide taxes, land taxes, and corporate taxes and therefore each country lack the funds to increase public services that would help combat inequality.\textsuperscript{104} One reason why the Guatemalan government may not be able to collect public revenue is because of the high poverty rate. The most recent data from the World Bank shows that in 2014, 48.8% of Guatemalans lived in poverty based on a $5.50 per day poverty line.\textsuperscript{105}

Combating violence is expensive, but also offers some citizens advancement opportunities as well. In 2017, the Institute for Economics and Peace found that El Salvador spends 13.8% and Guatemala spends 8.2% of its GDP on services such as private security, internal security, military expenditure, and costs related to investigating homicides.\textsuperscript{106} In fact, it’s been argued that violence and investment risks are the main reasons why companies choose not to establish business in El Salvador and Guatemala.\textsuperscript{107} As companies choose to do business in countries with lower violence and corruption rates, Salvadorans and Guatemalans will continue migrating for work.

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\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item The World Bank, \textit{Op. Cit.}, Poverty headcount ratio at $5.50 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population)
\end{enumerate}
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With high levels of emigration, remittances continue to be one of the main contributors to the Salvadoran and Guatemalan economies. The World Bank found that the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala are highly dependent on remittances. During fiscal year 2017 remittances made up 20.4% of El Salvador’s and 11.2% of Guatemala’s GDP. If remittance flows suddenly ceased, it would be disastrous for these countries’ already underfunded and weak social services sectors. El Salvador and Guatemala spend more on violence containment than on social welfare; however, not all hope is lost. If El Salvador and Guatemala can continue to grow economically, even in modest amounts, more funding can be put into social services sector, including schools, youth programs, and unemployment services.

Declining Education Rates among Youth in El Salvador and Guatemala

Education rates among youth in El Salvador and Guatemala have been decreasing since 2010, as personal safety on school grounds and gang violence threaten school attendance. High unemployment rates add another layer to the problem when students leave school to help support their families. The number of out-of-school youth in both countries has increased by 317%, witnessing 31,499 to 131,351 school dropouts in El Salvador between 2010 and 2017. Similarly, out of school youth in Guatemala has skyrocketed by 548%, from 46,051 youth to 298,432 between 2009 and 2016. Families decide to stop sending children to school as MS-13 gang members launch recruitment campaigns on school territories. In 2012, MS-13 members in El Salvador made a “ceasefire” truce with other local gangs and agreed to stop infiltrating

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schools in order to increase school attendance rates. However, the government retracted its acknowledgment of the truce in January 2014 and the gangs quickly recovered full control of school territories before re-launching recruitment efforts once again. Even with the 2012 truce, parents were still fearful to send their children to school. Since then, the environment has not improved as education enrollment rates continue to steadily decline. However, once Salvadoran and Guatemalan children enroll in the U.S. education system there are different hardships they must overcome.

One factor that may attract Salvadorans and Guatemalans to migrate to the U.S. with their children is that all children, documented or undocumented, have the right to education. In 1982 during the *Plyer v. Doe* case, the U.S. Supreme court used the fourteenth amendment to argue that an education cannot be denied based on an individual’s legal status. Even though Salvadoran and Guatemalan children have the right to education when they arrive to the U.S., this does not mean their educational experiences are similar to their native-born American peers and other immigrant children due.

Certain resilience factors have been found among Latino immigrants as a broader group that help them navigate their childhood. Nevertheless, Latino children tend to fall behind in school as a consequence of living in linguistic isolation, living in poverty, or low parental education attainment. As a whole, adult Latino immigrants are known to pass on cultural characteristics that assist their children in building relationships with those around them. For example, strong family ties, friendliness, and reciprocity (*familismo*) and strong connections with

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112 Ibid.

others outside of the family (*personalismo*) help Latino children build a support system that can impact their psychological and physical well-being in a positive way; potentially protecting them from the more severe impacts of poverty and family immigration stressors.\footnote{Sibley, E., & Brabeck, K. (2017). Latino Immigrant Students’ School Experiences in the United States: The Importance of Family–School–Community Collaborations. School Community Journal, 27(1), 137–157. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1146470.pdf, p. 138-139} Latino children often learn strength and resiliency from their immigrant parents who have shown on a daily basis their determination to survive psychological and physical changes that occur when starting a new life in a foreign country.\footnote{Ibid., 139}

Although Latino families have great strength and determination to succeed, immigrant Latino children often perform poorly in school. There are a number of obstacles that Latino children must overcome when they arrive in a new community. They are more likely to live in linguistically isolated households, to live in poverty compared to native-born Americans, to have at least one parent that has not completed high school, or to attend under-resourced schools that are segregated from native-born whites.\footnote{Ibid.} Consequently, these factors inhibit Latino children from receiving the necessary resources and parental involvement such as the ability to communicate with teachers, provide tutoring, and assist with homework that help children academically succeed. Therefore, many Latino children are less proficient in mathematics and reading and are less likely to complete high school compared to their native-born American peers.\footnote{Ibid.}

As the number of immigrant children in the U.S. school systems continues to rise, many states either accommodate or block immigrant children when they try to access U.S. public schools. For example, in 2011 the state of Alabama attempted to pass legislation that required

\footnote{Ibid., 139}
proof of legal status from parents and students. Similarly, a city in California attempted to require parents’ fingerprints and social security numbers before they stepped foot on school grounds. A city in the state of New Jersey attempted to require state issued identification that is only acquired when an individual is documented. These are only a few examples of how states have tried to discourage undocumented children from attending their public schools. Although these three laws never took effect because they were either blocked by federal courts or were dropped while facing multiple lawsuits, it shows that there is an anti-immigrant sentiment in different areas of the country.

However, there are states that are willing to accommodate undocumented children. Colorado has gone above and beyond the basic federal requirement of offering English-language learners with supplemental English as a second language (ESL) classes. The Colorado Department of Education has created a Migrant Education Program that sets goals so that migrant children have the same opportunities and resources to succeed as their native-born peers. The Colorado Department of Education offers migrant children educational programs and services all year long that address their unique educational needs and the department advocates for fair educational reforms that will help migrant children.

Some taxpayers and government officials are against accommodating undocumented students in public schools that are underfunded and subpar compared to other developed countries school systems. Although the financial burden of educating undocumented children is a

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120 Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). Migrant Education Program. Retrieved from https://www.cde.state.co.us/migrant
121 Ibid.
legitimate concern, by law documented and undocumented Latino children have the right to attend public schools. However, not all states offer supplementary resources for immigrants and their families like Colorado. The lack of resources often increases the number of high school dropouts and continues the poverty cycle for generations. With a quality education, these children can invest and be active in their communities in the future. Although not all schools in the U.S. are perfectly safe or inclusive, some Salvadoran and Guatemalan families see the U.S. school system as a better environment for their children to obtain a formal education compared to schools in their home countries.

**Migrant Pathways to the United States**

Many undocumented Central Americans immigrants hire smugglers (also known as coyotes) to guide them North through Mexico in an attempt to reach the Southern border of the United States. It is difficult to measure the number of Northern Triangle immigrants that enter the U.S. through human trafficking operations. Considering the low rates of citizenship, TPS, refugee or asylum status among Salvadorans and Guatemalans it is likely that many Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants hire coyotes to enter the U.S. The journey to the U.S. is extremely dangerous and expensive, but when faced with the hardships in their home countries, Central American immigrants make the grueling choice to risk their lives in search of safety for their family. In 2018 the United Nations found that Central American families pay an average of $7,000 USD per person for smuggling fees from Central America to the United States.\(^{122}\) The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found that “[t]he fees are largely determined by the distance of the smuggling trajectory, number of border crossings, geographic conditions, means

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of transport, the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents, risk of detection and others. The fees are not fixed, and may change according to the migrants’ profiles and their perceived wealth.123 Since many immigrants are detained at the border by either Mexico or U.S. officials, some smugglers offer “smuggling packages” that include multiple border crossing attempts for a much higher price.124

Smuggling has become a multibillion-dollar industry that is built upon the misfortunes of others. Central American smugglers generate around $2 billion annually as migrants leave their homes at increasing rates due to violence, persecution, or economic reasons.125 The choice to hire smugglers is not an easy one. Migrants pay a substantial amount of money in hopes of getting themselves and their family to safety only to be detained, be physically or sexually assaulted, or murdered in route to the United States. Migrants have reported crimes such as the following: violence, rape, theft, kidnapping, extortion, or human trafficking.126 In addition to these crimes, smugglers also neglect the needs of migrants when traveling. For example, many smugglers do not pack enough food, water, or medicine that is needed and this leaves migrants to fend for themselves resulting in many deaths.127

Recently, migrants from the Northern Triangle have been traveling in caravans of as many as 15,000 people, presenting themselves to U.S. Border Control officials and officially seeking asylum instead of crossing the border illegally. However, this does not imply that a migrant’s stay at U.S. immigration detention centers leaves them better off. Migrants have reported experiencing physical and sexual abuse in the hands of U.S. government officials. From

123 *Ibid.*, 5
125 *Ibid.*, 58
126 *Ibid.*, 9
2003 to 2017, among the 85 detention centers in the U.S., 185 migrants have died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers. Seventeen facilities in the U.S. reported three or more deaths, one facility in Houston reported eight deaths, while one facility in Arizona reported up to fifteen deaths.\textsuperscript{128} The number of sexual abuse claims is also extremely concerning. In a five year span from 2013-2017, there were 1,310 sexual abuse reports made by immigrants in ICE detention centers, which represents only those cases of abuse that were reported and filed.\textsuperscript{129} Lacking legal representation, language skills, and fearing deportation, many migrants are unable to report abuse in U.S. detention facilities.\textsuperscript{130} Many Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants find themselves in a double-bind. If they decide to hire smugglers, they risk abuse and death along the route to the U.S.; if they present themselves legally to the U.S. Border Control they risk abuse, death, or deportation back to their home country.

**Family based migration, Asylum status, and TPS**

For Salvadorans and Guatemalans, family networks are commonly used to enter the U.S. lawfully. During fiscal year 2017, 20,872 Salvadorans and 8,994 Guatemalans obtained Lawful Permanent Resident (LRP) status through immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or family sponsored preferences (reference). As few as 1,000-1,500 immigrants from each country obtained LPR status through employment-based preferences, asylum or refugee status.\textsuperscript{131} The

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
lack of skills and employment experience in El Salvador and Guatemala may explain why the number of employment-based LPRs is low.

Few refugees and asylees arrive from this region because the U.S. does not recognize their conditions as worthy of refugee status. The U.S. government defines a refugee as someone who is outside of the U.S. and is “...unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”. 132 Asylees are individuals who meet the definition of refugees and are already in the U.S. or are presenting themselves as asylum seekers at the U.S. port of entry. 133

The total number of refugees that the U.S. government is willing to take in from around the world has declined over the past four years. The Obama administration set the refugee admission ceiling to 85,000 for fiscal year 2016 and before he left office, Obama set the ceiling at 110,000 for fiscal year 2017. 134 However, after Trump was inaugurated on January 20, 2017 he used an executive order to decrease the fiscal year 2017 ceiling from 110,000 to 50,000. 135 Currently for fiscal year 2018, President Trump has set the ceiling to 45,000 136 with the intention of setting the ceiling even lower for fiscal year 2019 to 30,000. 137 Every year fewer and fewer

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135 Ibid.
migrants are able to receive refugee status that would give them a legal status and resources from the government and non-governmental organizations that would help them integrate.

Specifically regarding El Salvador and Guatemala, the number of Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylees and refugees admitted to the U.S. in 2017 was extremely low. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2017 a total of 1,513 Guatemalan migrants were admitted into the U.S. as refugees or asylees out of the total 146,003 asylees and refugees admitted that year.\textsuperscript{138} DHS did not publicly disclose how many Salvadoran immigrants were admitted as refugees or asylees in 2017; however, the 2016 statistical yearbook shows that only 897 Salvadorans were admitted as refugees or asylees out of the total 157,452 migrants admitted as refugees or asylees in 2016.\textsuperscript{139}

It is becoming very difficult for Salvadorans and Guatemalans to receive refugee or asylee status. Not only is the refugee cap decreasing each year, in June 2018, the U.S. government attempted to narrow the requirements to obtain asylee status which would have drastically decreased the already small number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans that receive asylum status. Specifically, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions attempted to eliminate the fear of domestic and gang violence as a basis for asylum and it is clear that domestic and gang violence are driving factors of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigration; however, this attempt was struck down by federal judges.\textsuperscript{140} This negatively impacts asylum seekers’ ability to integrate because being awarded asylum status is an official designation that provides resources and citizenship status.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.}
In addition to U.S. government attempts to narrow asylum status pathways, the government is also attempting to eliminate Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for Salvadorans along with immigrants from three other nationalities living in the U.S. Instead of renewing TPS for almost 350,000 immigrants from El Salvador and Honduras, President Trump has decided to end the protection for these groups and they must leave or find a legal pathway to stay in the U.S. by September 2019 and January 2020 respectively.\textsuperscript{141} TPS for Salvadorans has continuously renewed by former presidents Bush and Obama since 2001 due to natural disasters. El Salvador now faces high rates of violence instead of natural disasters. By ending TPS for Salvadorans, the Trump administration is sending these individuals back to an unsafe environment with little resources.

The Secretary of Homeland Security has the ability to designate countries for TPS if the residents are experiencing: ongoing armed conflict (such as civil war), an environmental disaster (such as earthquake or hurricane), or an epidemic, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions.\textsuperscript{142} TPS does not lead to a permanent legal status and is only a deferral of deportation. TPS recipients are not removed from the U.S. for a specific duration set by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), can obtain an employment authorization document, and may be granted travel authorization.\textsuperscript{143} Many times DHS will designate TPS to countries for two to four years and then the TPS status must be renewed for that country.

As of January 2018 the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) found that 262,526 Salvadorans are TPS recipients\textsuperscript{144} and more than half have lived in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Felter, Claire, & Shendruk, Amanda, Op. Cit.
\end{itemize}
the U.S. for 20 years or more.\textsuperscript{145} Guatemalans are not eligible to apply for TPS; therefore, this is one less legal pathway option for people fleeing violence in Guatemala. The Guatemalan government has requested TPS for its residents five different times since 2005 due to natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The Department of Homeland Security has denied Guatemala’s TPS requests for unknown reasons.\textsuperscript{146} Dan Cadman, a Center for Immigration Studies researcher and retired Immigration Naturalization Service official, speculates that Guatemala was denied TPS because, although tragic, the low number of deaths and missing persons related to the natural disasters in a nation of almost 16 million does not hinder the country’s ability to cope and rebuild.\textsuperscript{147} In addition, he says that receiving TPS for displaced Guatemalans is a way for the Guatemalan government to take pressure off of themselves to provide resources for the families.\textsuperscript{148}

In January 2018 President Trump and his administration announced it would be ending TPS for El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, and Sudan, a move that will negatively impact over 300,000 immigrants.\textsuperscript{149} However, in October 2018 a lawsuit was filed against the administration's decision and a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction keeping TPS in place while the lawsuit is proceeding through the court system.\textsuperscript{150} The Department of Homeland Security justified ending TPS for Salvadorans by stating that roads and essential infrastructure in El Salvador, such as hospitals, schools, and public services, have been repaired following an

\textsuperscript{146} Luna, Op. Cit.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
earthquake in 2001. Therefore, the Trump administration argues, TPS in no longer necessary for Salvadorans, who can safely return home.\textsuperscript{151} Although infrastructure may have been repaired, El Salvador is not a safe environment for individuals to return to due to the high homicide rates and gang violence. In addition, most Salvadoran TPs recipients have lived in the U.S. for such a long time that El Salvador may be unrecognizable to some and their livelihoods are invested in the U.S. Ending TPS will not only have a negative impact on the families and children of Salvadoran TPS recipients, but on the U.S. economy as well thus impacting all individuals in the U.S.

Salvadoran TPS recipients in the U.S. are active in the workforce and contribute to the well-being of the economy. In 2017 the Center for Migration Studies found that the labor force participation rate among Salvadoran, Honduran, and Haitian TPS recipients ranged between 81-88 percent and is much higher than the overall U.S. population participation rate at 63 percent.\textsuperscript{152} About forty percent of these TPS beneficiaries work in crucial job fields that impact the U.S. economy such as the following: construction, restaurants/food service, landscaping services, child care, and grocery stores.\textsuperscript{153} TPS not only allows individuals to be self-sufficient by obtaining jobs and attending school, but it also benefits business owners and helps fill positions that would otherwise be vacant. At the very least TPS recipients should be given a pathway to legal permanent resident status and then eventually citizenship. Salvadoran TPS recipients have invested so many resources into their lives in the U.S. that ending TPS would negatively impact their communities.


\textsuperscript{152} Warren, R., & Kerwin, D., \textit{Opt. Cit.}, 577

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
Context of Reception

U.S. laws and politics surrounding immigration usually change when new presidential administrations come into power or when international crises occur that cause mass immigration. Each administration has its own objectives in “fixing” the broken immigration system and the political decisions made have lasting impacts on many populations. Generally, the Democrats and Republicans have different views about how to manage immigration, and this friction causes many problems and stalemates within congress. For example, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 enacted by former president Regan was the last major immigration law passed in the United States. The law gave unauthorized immigrants and temporary laborers working in the agricultural sector a pathway to legal permanent residency (LPR) status; however, it also increased border patrol staffing by 50% and initiated the employment authorization process that is still used to this day. It is important to note that this law did not do give immigrants citizenship immediately. This law simply allowed undocumented immigrants to apply for LPR and if they wanted to apply for permanent citizenship status they were able to do so at a later time.

Through IRCA, 1.6 million undocumented immigrants became legal permanent residents and an additional 1.1 million become legal permanent residents through the special agricultural workers provisions. Congress truly thought the “wiping the slate clean” and starting over with employer sanctions, increased border patrol, and “amnesty” for almost 3 million undocumented immigrants would deter illegal immigration into the U.S. Despite the intentions of the IRCA, illegal immigration continued and did not decrease. In 1986 there were an estimated 3.2 million

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undocumented immigrants living in the U.S and as of March 2017 that number has grown to 11 million.\textsuperscript{156} The IRCA failed for three reasons: the law excluded a significant number of immigrants who arrived after the cutoff date of January 1, 1982, the new border enforcement did not truly start until the 1990s, and the enforcement of the employer sanctions were weak and employees were able to submit falsified documents.\textsuperscript{157} The immigrant population that was excluded from applying for LPR stayed in the U.S. and became the core of the new undocumented population in the U.S. Also, the weak enforcement of the work verification process made it easy for labor immigrants to migrate and still find jobs in the U.S. Overall the IRCA did not address the driving factors of illegal immigration and did not put a system in place to foresee temporary and permanent immigration influxes. It is apparent that U.S. immigration laws need to be upgraded and amended to fit the new demands of immigration. The world and the causes of immigration have changed since 1986 and the U.S. is not equipped to handle major influx of Northern Triangle immigrants since outdated protocols that were constructed in 1986 are still being used in 2019.

The most recent U.S. presidential administrations have tried to assist El Salvador and Guatemala in combating the high rates of violence and poverty that hinder residents’ prosperity. For example, former president George W. Bush focused on business initiatives such as increasing trade, starting free-market reforms, and specifically the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). Announced by Bush in March 2002, the MCA was a program that promised developing countries grants if they consistently showed declining corruption, investments in


education and health care, and promoting economic freedom.\textsuperscript{158} As a result, this program awarded millions of dollars to Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.\textsuperscript{159} However, in 2003 and 2004, violence began to increase again due to the Northern Triangle region adopting a “heavy hand” (mano dura) approach\textsuperscript{160} that gave police officers more power, deployed the military, and sought harsher punishments for gang members in order to combat the high rates of crime and violence.\textsuperscript{161} This approach did not lead to a decrease in homicides, homicide rates actually increased and the region then responded with a “super heavy hand” approach (súper mano dura).\textsuperscript{162} This renewed violence caused an outflow of Central American immigrants from the Northern Triangle region, many of whom headed to the U.S.\textsuperscript{163} The influx of undocumented Guatemalans and Salvadorans put a strain on border security and the influx of unaccompanied minors strained the judicial system. Detention centers were being filled fast and as a result the number of beds in detention centers has increased 85% since 2005 and the number of border patrol agents has also increased 85% since 2005.\textsuperscript{164} Instead of following the “catch and release” practice that released immigrants from detention centers as they waited for their immigration court hearings, the Bush administration started holding immigrants in the detention centers as more bed spaces became available.\textsuperscript{165} As a result of the influx of immigrants and unaccompanied

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{160} Eguizábal, C., Ingram, M. C., Curtis, K. M., Korthuis, A., Olson, E. L., & Phillips, N., \textit{Op. Cit.}, 56
\item \textsuperscript{161} Cara Labrador, R., & Renwick, D., \textit{Op. Cit.}
\item \textsuperscript{162} Eguizábal, C., Ingram, M. C., Curtis, K. M., Korthuis, A., Olson, E. L., & Phillips, N. \textit{Op. Cit.}, 56
\item \textsuperscript{163} Cara Labrador, R., & Renwick, D., \textit{Op. Cit.}
\item \textsuperscript{165} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
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minors, in 2005 the Bush administration adopted a “zero-tolerance policy” that automatically criminally prosecuted and deported undocumented migrants.\footnote{166 Cara Labrador, R., & Renwick, D., \textit{Op. Cit.}}

Under President Barack Obama, the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARS\textsuperscript{I}) was developed to provide Central American countries more than $1 billion to counter the narcotics industry, stop corruption in the judicial system, and restore control to law enforcement agencies in these nations.\footnote{167 Ibid.} Halfway through his second term, Obama reshaped the U.S. approach to Central American security by involving multiple agencies within the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America initiative.\footnote{168 Cara Labrador, R., & Renwick, D., \textit{Op. Cit.}} Similar to past attempts to bring stability the region, this initiative had three goals: to promote prosperity, to strengthen the government, and to increase security by implementing better trade deals, improve quality education, depoliticizing institutions, and professionalizing police forces.\footnote{169 Congressional Research Service. (2019, January 8). U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress. Retrieved from https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44812.pdf, p.5} Obama created this partnership across U.S. agencies in response to the influx of unaccompanied minors at the U.S. southern border in 2014. However, the Obama administration abandoned the holistic strategy and started prosecuting and deporting migrants who did not qualify for asylum status.\footnote{170 Cara Labrador, R., & Renwick, D., \textit{Op. Cit.}} A few years earlier in 2012 Obama attempted to rectify the number of undocumented children in the U.S and signed executive orders, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), that gave qualifying undocumented individuals that were brought to the U.S. as minors work authorization and deferred deportation up to two years with eligibility to renew. This program does not give DACA recipients a pathway to citizenship and the legitimacy of the program as a
whole has been severely undermined by the Trump administration since and lack of congressional approval.

The DACA program has not been popular among Republican lawmakers from the beginning. In 2014 many lawmakers made their opposition known and said that policies like DACA have encouraged waves of unaccompanied minors to enter U.S. borders. Representative Michael McCaul stated this shows the world that the U.S. does not enforce its immigration policies strictly.\textsuperscript{171} Despite opposition from lawmakers and members of congress, the DACA program has continued; however, its future has hung in the balance since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. Since his inauguration, Trump has repeatedly attempted to end the DACA program, although his efforts are continually met with resistance. President Trump has continued a few Central American support programs that his predecessors began, but has adopted a much stricter “zero-policy” stance on immigration than was seen during past administrations.

In addition, President Trump built his presidency campaign and following on the promise to build a physical wall along the southern U.S. border to keep undocumented immigrants from crossing into the U.S. So far a wall has not been built due to the lack of support from both the congressional house and senate bodies; however, Trump is currently floating the idea of declaring a national emergency in order to receive the funds without congress’ approval. While his promise has yet to be fulfilled, Trump has taken to extreme measures in order to deter migrants from crossing the border illegally or seeking lawful asylum.

In order to deter migrants, the Trump administration has been prosecuting all undocumented migrants and deporting them immediately sometimes without court hearing or

access to lawyers; essentially immigrants are being denied their constitutional right of due process and do not have the right to legal counsel. Children sometimes as young as three years old are forced to represent themselves in immigration hearings in front of judges. In addition to expedited deportation, the Trump administration practiced an extreme measure to deter immigrants that started an outcry of opposition amongst many Americans and government officials. In the spring of 2018 the administration formally announced it would start separating children and parents when they are intercepted at the southern border. While parents the parents were being prosecuted for entering the U.S. illegally they were given no contact with their children and the children were taken away and put in detention centers or foster care. With a plethora of lawsuits challenging this practice, the Trump administration was ordered to keep track of how many children were separated from their parents and that they had to be reunified by June 2018. The administration claimed there were nearly 3,000 children that were separated, but new reports found that this practice started in 2017 before it was formally announced; therefore, there are greater number of children that were separated than the administration estimated in spring 2018 and not all have been reunified with family to this day. The exact number of children that have not been reunified is unknown since there is no tracking system between Department of Homeland Security, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and Health and Human Services which are the three agencies who were involved in placing children in homes, foster care, and detention centers.

174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
While former presidents Bush and Obama adopted a zero-policy stance on immigration during their presidencies, they also created aid through monetary programs and various initiatives that attempted to rebuild various Central American institutions. To date, President Trump has not pledged any additional assistance or new programs that would help fix the push factors causing Central Americans to migrate to the U.S. In fact, President Trump has threatened numerous times to cut off aid to the Northern Triangle region and completely close the U.S. southern border. There are many unforeseen factors that can cause international aid to fail in a foreign country; however many times it simply comes down to the lack of goal requirements set by the donor country. International Relations researchers Benjamin Buch, Buntaine, and Bradley Parks found that “in the absence of requirements about what types of targets should be pursued, countries that are dependent on aid select easy targets that have limited value for strengthening public sector institutions”. Essentially, without specific goals that target and strengthen the fundamental function of the target public institutions, recipient countries will instead focus on easier goals such as how the institutions are organized in terms of personnel and management. It is unknown if the requirements that were placed on the Northern Triangle region through previous aid programs were not specific enough or if the goals were set to a low standard. Foreign aid has the potential to produce beneficial results in recipient countries; however President Trump is not actively seeking new ways to produce change in the Northern Triangle region. Salvadorans and Guatemalans will continue to migrate to the U.S due to the quality of life in their home countries.; therefore it would be worthwhile to analyze and amend the U.S. foreign aid requirements to Central America so that fundamental changes are made or use the


177 Ibid.
foreign aid money to help build social programs and provide resources for immigrants so they can successfully integrate in the U.S.

The push factors in El Salvador and Guatemala have been occurring for decades and foreign aid attempts from the U.S. have proven to be unsuccessful for the most part. There continues to be high rates of violence, corruption, poverty, and a decline in education. Businesses and investors continue to flee from the Northern Triangle region and consequently this stops the new formation of jobs; creating labor migrants. This not only impacts poverty and El Salvador and Guatemala's economy, it also impacts the migrants’ ability to receive employment based visas due to the lack of job skills. Not only do Salvadorans and Guatemalans face great uncertainty in their home countries, they also face uncertainty when they arrive to the U.S. due to changing laws and attitudes towards immigration.

Due to the political climate from the Trump administration, lawmakers and senators have not been able to devote the necessary resources and time needed to negotiate a permanent immigration solution. Instead of using presidential powers to push for a viable solution, Trump appears to be focusing only on the U.S. southern border in an attempt to stop immigrants from crossing into the U.S., even through legal pathways. Focusing solely on the southern border is not getting to the root of the problem because it doesn’t address the real issues promoting Central American migration. Central Americans will continue to migrate to the U.S. in order to flee violence, find jobs, and care for their families. Northern Triangle immigrants face such harsh living conditions that they are willing to risk life endangerment or physical abuse by submitting to human traffickers.

It would be of great benefit if the U.S. government analyzed and restructured the U.S. foreign aid system to the Northern Triangle region or focused on integration success among
immigrants when they arrive in the U.S. If the push factors of immigration are not fully addressed, Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants will need assistance in order to reach the same level of integration success as other Central American immigrants. Currently, since immigrant integration is not the primary focus for the U.S. government, the 2.4 million authorized and unauthorized Salvadorans and Guatemalans living in the U.S.\textsuperscript{178} have a strong workforce potential, but is underemployed due to barriers that are blocking them from reaching their full potential.

\textsuperscript{178} Cohn, D’Vera, Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Passel, J. S., \textit{Op. Cit.}
Salvadoran and Guatemalan Integration in the United States

This chapter will explore six integration indicators to assess whether or not Salvadorans and Guatemalans are integrating at a successful rate into their new communities in the U.S. Integration indicators measured in this study include: English language attainment, education, employment and economic integration, spatial concentration, race, and religion. It is important to study integration rates among Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants because they represent 3.8% and 2.45% of the Latino population in the U.S. respectively and little data is available that looks specifically at these two group’s integration success in the U.S. in comparison to other Central American immigrants. Additionally, it should be noted that both groups share similar histories of civil war, ongoing violence, and broken school systems that serve as “push” factors that create similar integration barriers on arrival to the United States.

On average, Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants do not integrate at the same rate as other Central American immigrants. This is particularly true for English language attainment and education indicators. Generally, people from other Central American countries speak English at a more proficient level than do Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants. People from other Central American nations, such as Belize, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, and who are five years or older have higher rates of English proficiency compared to Salvadorans and Guatemalans the

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179 For this chapter, if Salvadorans and Guatemalan integration variables will be compared to other Central American immigrants and native born Whites to see how they compare. According to the International Organization for Migration, successful integration rates are generally considered by researchers to be when “migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community.” To successfully integrate migrants should have the same access to healthcare, education, labour market, and financial services. https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf

same age. In addition, individuals from the same Central American countries have higher shares of high school graduates among people twenty-five years and older compared to Salvadorans and Guatemalans the same age.

A number of factors hinder Salvadorans and Guatemalans from receiving formal education in their home countries, which in turn impacts their ability to learn when they arrive in the United States. The political instability in El Salvador and Guatemala and lack of governmental resources likely play a role in the low education rates. Consequently, high levels of gang recruitment occur on school grounds and often territory disputes between gangs brings violence in the vicinity of schools. Thus many Salvadoran and Guatemalan children do not attend school in fear of being a victim of gang violence. In addition, documentation status and limited financial resources are often contribute to lower integration outcomes among these two groups.

Immigration research suggests that, along with education levels, an individual’s job experience impacts their ability to gain employment that pays a living wage in the U.S. Those without formal education gravitate toward the service sector. The argument that Latinos are more likely to hold physical jobs that the rest of America does not want has some truth to it. For example, the top five jobs that are most likely to be filled by an immigrants both documented and undocumented are: miscellaneous personal appearance workers (i.e. manicurist, skin care jobs, and makeup artists), graders and sorters of agricultural products, construction (specifically plasterers and stucco masons), sewing machine operators, and miscellaneous agriculture workers (i.e. maintaining crops and livestock or animal breeders).\(^{181}\) The main reasons Latinos hold service sector jobs is because they their lack of English language skills and education leave them

without other options. Service sector jobs often relate to dangerous working conditions. These types of jobs do not pay as well as white-collar jobs. The average household income for Latinos is $14,000 less than Whites’ and their net worth is $115,500 lower than that of native born Whites.

In terms of Spatial Concentration, Salvadorans and Guatemalans reside in similar states such as California and Texas and a majority of both groups live in Los Angeles and the surrounding metropolitan area. Spatial concentration in urban centers and ethnic enclaves is a phenomenon that is not caused by only one factor; it is due to many social and political barriers. How a society receives certain ethnic and racial groups along with jobs opportunities and state laws will influence an immigrant’s decision to live in a certain location. Many times you do not see many Latino and White families in the same neighborhood. In addition to home value differences, areas where Latinos concentrate may lack political, cultural, and scholastic services that help the population succeed. Sometimes these areas are not a concern for local and federal government to pour resources into because many government officials and their constituents believe deporting or limiting resources for immigrants and their families is more important than providing relief and resources that would help them integrate into their communities.

As for race, research studies on Salvadorans and Guatemalans do not separate these two groups. Therefore, data in the next two sections address Latinos as a whole. Research suggests that racism does occur in Latin America toward individuals of and in similar to that of African Americans and other dark skinned immigrants. Darker skinned Salvadorans and Guatemalans of

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182. White-collar jobs are administrative and office positions either in a staff or managerial role.
Afro- or mixed race who face regular discrimination in their home countries due to their indigenous or African heritage. The preference for lighter skin creates a type of social ranking in many of Latin American countries.  

Pew Research found that 77% of Latinos living in the U.S. identify with Christianity, and gravitate to Spanish-speaking churches where they are less likely to meet native-born Whites. There are trends that show that second-and third-generation U.S.-born Latinos are likely to attend English speaking churches and identify as less religious than their parents. Therefore, first-generation Latinos are more likely to attend a Spanish-speaking church than native-born Whites or second-generation (native-born Latinos).

**English Language Attainment**

Many studies show how important learning the English Language is for immigrants and their children. Specifically, Geoffrey Carliner, an American economist, states that “immigrants who speak little to no English have greater difficulty finding jobs, especially well paid jobs outside immigrant enclaves. Jobs that involve contact with native-born customers or co-workers usually require the ability to speak English well.” The lack of English language attainment creates significant barriers for Salvadoran and Guatemalan to gain upward mobility in the U.S. According to family and immigration sociologists Mary Waters and Marisa Pineau, the ability to speak English is the highest value skill that immigrants can obtain because it helps immigrants

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186 http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/latino/


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communicate, gain necessary resources, succeed in school, and navigate the U.S. job sector.\textsuperscript{189} Learning the English language provides great benefits to immigrants, such as better paying jobs, higher socioeconomic status, better school outcomes, and the ability to be active in American politics.\textsuperscript{190} There are many incentives to learn English before arriving to the U.S.; however, many immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala are not able to gain access to language training because of the negative political and social environment in each country.

In 2015 a Pew Research Center study found that immigrants from the northern triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) are the least likely to speak English “very well” compared to all other immigrants living in the U.S.\textsuperscript{191} This study also found that only 27% of Guatemalan and 30% of Salvadoran immigrants ages five years or older speak English proficiently compared to all other Central America immigrants, 58% of whom demonstrate English language proficiency.\textsuperscript{192} The ability to speak English opens up more job and housing opportunities for immigrants who might otherwise find their options limited to life in ethnic enclaves where upward mobility is more difficult to achieve.

Obtaining formal education also improves Salvadoran and Guatemalans’ English language attainment. Educational settings are often the first place where young Salvadorans learn English, particularly when a majority of their school peers are native English speakers and schools offer English as Second Language (ESL) classes. Carlos Cordova, a specialist in Latino Cultural Studies, states that “individuals who hold professional degrees or some formal

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
education demonstrate higher level language acquisition over those who are unskilled laborers; this facilitates labor market opportunities.”

In addition, Pew Research demographers D’vera Cohn, Jeffrey Passel, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera found that

“English proficiency tends to be higher for immigrants with college degrees and lawful status. As with education levels, immigration status is relevant: Unauthorized immigrants from each of the three countries are less likely to be proficient than lawful immigrants. The relatively high share of Northern Triangle immigrants who do not have high school diplomas or lawful status helps explain their relatively low levels of English proficiency.”

Maintaining Spanish as a first language while acquiring English is not considered to be a negative characteristic of Salvadoran households. In fact, according to sociologist Tanya Golash-Boza there are numerous studies that “find a positive relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability” and that “bilingualism promotes academic achievement and leads to higher academic expectations”.

One reason why Spanish speaking families have been able to sustain themselves linguistically is due to the tremendous growth in both the number and share of Spanish speaking immigrants since the 1970s due to cohort replenishment and a slight birth rate increase among Latino immigrants living in the U.S. In this case cohort replenishment in the U.S. is mainly fueled by asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented immigrants from the Northern Triangle. In 2017 to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that 294,000

Northern Triangle immigrants were registered globally as asylum seekers and refugees and most settle in the U.S., Mexico, and Belize; this figure is a 58% increase from 2016.\textsuperscript{197}

This is only a partial number of immigrants migrating to the U.S. because there are some that enter undocumented due to the lack of financial resources for the asylum application. The continuous inflow of Spanish speaking immigrants may be the reason why Salvadoran immigrants integrate linguistically far less readily than other Latino groups. However, second and third generation Salvadorans speak English better than the first generation due to education in the American system and occupational integration. However, second and third generation immigrants eventually lose the ability to speak Spanish by the third or fourth generation. Losing the ability to speak Spanish can be problematic for intergenerational communication and cultural identity between family members who solely speak Spanish and younger family members who speak primarily English. Cohort replenishment would increase significantly if Spanish speaking Latino parents raise their children with Spanish as their first language. This would allow the Spanish language to be passed on to later generations and an increase in the bilingual Latino population.

\textbf{Education Rates}

An immigrant’s education level on entry is an important measurement of his or her future integration success because it directly affects what jobs the individual will qualify for. Many factors determine if immigrants will receive a quality education\textsuperscript{198} in the receiving nation. A few of these factors range from a stable source of income, English language attainment, and their


\textsuperscript{198} Quality education is defined as an education that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual well-being.
parents’ education level. Regarding first and 1.5 generation immigrants\textsuperscript{199}, the possibility of obtaining a higher education after migrating is low. The challenges that first generation immigrants must overcome, including financial hardship, low English language skills, undocumented status, often take priority over furthering their education. Sandy Baum and Stella Flores explain that immigrants who enter the United States before the age of thirteen perform academically at the same level as their native born peers; however, immigrants that enter the United States after the age of thirteen have a more difficult time learning English and usually have lower levels of education compared to those who arrive before the age of thirteen.\textsuperscript{200} The lack of education among first generation immigrants directly impacts their children's academic success. Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo found that

“[p]arents with more education are better equipped to teach their children how to study, access data and information, develop arguments, and structure essays, and can provide necessary resources. In contrast, youngsters whose parents have little or no formal educational experience are often unable to manage these academic tasks.”\textsuperscript{201}

When these finding are applied to first generation Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants, the outlook is grim; however, there tends to be an increase of education levels for second generation for Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants.

Augmenting data from the 2015 American Community Survey, the Pew Research Center estimates that 54\% of Salvadoran and 58\% of Guatemalan immigrants twenty-five years and older living in the U.S. have not completed high school in their homeland and are without a

\textsuperscript{199} First generation immigrants are those who migrated to the U.S. first and 1.5 generation immigrant are those who are born in another county, but migrate to the U.S. at an early age.


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diploma.\textsuperscript{202} This compares to 21\% of immigrants from other Central American countries who have fewer than 12 years of formal education (excluding Hondurans who are at 51\%).\textsuperscript{203} The unstable political and economic sectors in their home countries, along with gang violence, have created obstacles for many Salvadorans and Guatemalans who are trying to obtain formal education or job security. The high rates of homicide and gang recruitment activity on school grounds affects the educational sector in their home country because parents are fearful to send their children to school. Gangs often visit schools to recruit new members of all age groups. MS-13 gang recruitment of school aged children also occurs in the United States and is becoming an increasing problem. Not only do Salvadoran and Guatemalan parents worry about their children going to school in their home countries, they also have to worry about their children’s well-being if or when they migrate to the U.S. MS-13 gang members in the U.S. tend to target immigrant youth from Central America who are traveling alone and are in need of the basic necessities such as shelter, income, food, and general guidance as they try and start their new life.\textsuperscript{204} Although the U.S. is not perfect in stopping gangs from recruiting youth, the chances of successfully graduating from high school and attending college seems to be higher in the U.S. than in El Salvador and Guatemala.

According to the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) regarding school attendance among youth in El Salvador, “[a]lthough primary school enrollment and completion rates have steadily increased in the last decades, only about 50 percent of Salvadoran youth attend early secondary school (7-9th grades), and only half of these go on to complete high

\textsuperscript{202} Cohn, D’Vera, Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Passel, J. S., \textit{Op. Cit.}
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Jouvenal, J., Morse, D., & Miller, M. E, \textit{Op. Cit.}
school”. 205 It is a similar situation for youth in Guatemala. The USAID found that only three-fourths of Guatemalans enrolled in primary school graduate from the sixth grade and only 40% of eligible youth are enrolled in early secondary school (7th-9th grade). 206 The lack of adequate education mixed with violence and poor job opportunities often push families to leave El Salvador and Guatemala for safer and more economically stable locations.

Scholastic success is also dependent on the ability to speak English. According to Mary Waters and Marisa Pineau, living in linguistically isolated households hinders children of all ages from integrating because “it limits immigrants’ social capital and their access to various resources; it also contributes to anxiety” and they “face higher barriers to educational attainment due to their parents’ limited ability to communicate with school staff and monitor their children’s educational progress”. 207

A theory of positive selection may offer insights into the reasons certain immigrants integrate better than others into the American school systems and other areas of life. The “immigrant optimism” theory estimates that when an immigration journey is more difficult, immigrants will have higher expectations for themselves or other members of their family. 208 This pressure to do well may motivate immigrants and their family members, including children, to be as successful as they can; however, the pressure may also cause anxiety or hopelessness if they are not given the resources to reach their full potential when it is expected. 209

Specifically looking at the education levels of U.S. born Salvadoran sand Guatemalans, there is an increase in education levels compared to their parents. According to the Pew Research

208 Baum & Flores, Op. Cit., 178
Center’s augmented data on second generation Northern Triangle immigrants, 24% of this group have a college degree, 30% reported to have some college, 30% have a high school education only, and 16% did not complete high school.\textsuperscript{210} Although there is an increase in education levels over generations, their lower education levels compared to other Central American immigrants restrict the type of occupations Salvadorans and Guatemalans obtain.

**Employment and Economic Integration**

Due to low job opportunities in their home countries and lack of skills, some first generation Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants travel to the U.S. to find work in low-status and sometimes dangerous occupations (i.e. janitorial, housekeeping, agricultural positions, and construction) with low earning pay due to job availability and/or legal status. Working in dangerous and low wage positions is not a choice that many immigrants make willingly. Pia Arrhenius and Madeline Zavodny, both labor and immigration economists, argue that “lower levels of education, social capital, and English ability may lead to immigrants' having less information about job risks” and that “employers may understate workplace risks to workers; this understatement may occur more among employers who hire immigrants, either intentionally or because of communication difficulties with immigrants who speak a different language.”\textsuperscript{211} The types of jobs immigrants obtain is often dependent on their legal status.

More often than not, first generation Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants do not obtain U.S. citizenship. Between the years 2007-2015 the share of undocumented immigrants from the Northern Triangle region grew, 26%.\textsuperscript{212} Without permanent citizenship or high wage

\textsuperscript{210} Cohn, D’Vera, Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Passel, J. S., Op. Cit.
\textsuperscript{212} Cohn, D’Vera, Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Passel, J. S., Op. Cit.
skills, first generation immigrants find themselves in low paying labor positions as stated before. Even though the second generation never reaches occupational equality with non-immigrant families, about one third of second-generation Central American men have risen to professional or managerial positions with even a bigger increase of second generation women in these types of positions. 213

Immigrants generally work in hazardous jobs for less than minimum wage to provide for their families and this complicates the notion of economic integration. According to sociologists Yu Xie and Margaret Gough, economic integration refers to the expectation that immigrants arrive in the United States earning relatively low incomes but eventually will earn the same income as native workers within ten to fifteen years.214 Economic levels are thought to be an indicator of successful integration, but it takes for granted that the immigrant in question has similar or identical, skills, education levels, and resources to allow them to compete with native born Americans. Not all immigrants reach this socioeconomic expectation due to integration barriers.

After examining the average household incomes and poverty rates in 2015, it was found that Central American immigrants have lower incomes and higher poverty rates compared to all other immigrants and the native born population in the United States. The median income for Central American origin households was $42,000, $51,000 for all other immigrant households, and $56,000 for native born Americans.215 More Central Americans live in poverty versus all other immigrants, other Central American immigrants, and native born Americans. It was found

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that 22% of Central Americans in the United States live in poverty compared to 16% of other immigrants and 9% of native born families.\textsuperscript{216} Furthermore, the number of Central Americans living in poverty is disproportionate to families from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador with 28% of Honduran and Guatemalan families, 19% of Salvadoran families living in poverty versus 12-13% of Costa Rican, Panamanian, and Nicaraguan families living in poverty.\textsuperscript{217} An individual's socioeconomic status is determined by many factors, it seems that Latinos across all generations cannot break through systematic barriers (i.e. lack or scholastic resources, lack of parental involvement, language barriers, and insufficient financial resources) as well as other immigrants from Central America. Although all Central American families live in poverty to an extent, Salvadoran and Guatemalan families experience inequality the most.

\textbf{Spatial Dispersal}

Spatial dispersal is an important factor for measuring integration and the idea is that the longer immigrants have lived in the United States, the more dispersed they become and do not reside in certain concentrated cities leading to spatial integration. This is not always the case due to numerous cultural, political, and social discriminations. Waters and Pineau argue that

\begin{quote}
“These communities lack the most basic economic, cultural, and political ingredients needed to ensure immigrant success—for themselves and their children. Moving to new destinations is no economic panacea. Emerging empirical evidence indicates that some native whites and affluent populations are “fleeing” diversifying neighborhoods for predominantly white suburbs, gated communities in exurban developments, or returning to the city as part of the gentrification process (in Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere), leaving behind the poorest and most vulnerable populations to fend for themselves in economically declining communities.”\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Panel on the Integration of Immigrants into American Society., \textit{Op. Cit.}, 210
\end{footnotesize}
The media acts as a catalyst of anti-immigrant and discriminatory practices between wealthy homogeneous neighborhoods and mainly low-income Latino immigrants because these neighborhoods are most likely coming in contact with Latinos on a large scale for the first time. The images that the media portrays is the first exposure that many white suburban families have of Latinos.

Ethnic enclaves can only exist if they attain two characteristics. The first is that the ethnic enclave must have a large population where there are different socioeconomic levels. This means that there must be individuals at a high socioeconomic status that have the resources to open a business and others that are at a low socioeconomic status that need a job or do not have many job opportunities. The second characteristic is that the ethnic enclave must exist segregated from the main economy so that ethnic business owners can count on the availability of ethnic laborers and vice versa. In an increasing trend, many immigrants and minorities are forced to live in spatially concentrated areas due to the lack of political, financial, and educational resources.

In 2015 the Pew Research Center, found that the top three states with the highest Salvadoran population are California, Texas, and Maryland and the three states with the highest Guatemalan population are similar: California, Texas, and Florida. Coinciding with this data, the survey also found that most Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants live in Los Angeles metropolitan area than any other urban area and its surrounding cities.

Yu Xie and Margaret Gough also explain that people in ethnic enclaves are able to create a cohesive community because “certain human capital skills, such as ethnic language, cultural knowledge, and social network ties to the place of origin, are important and marketable only in the internal labor market defined by an ethnic enclave”. Characteristics of the Salvadoran and

Guatemalan culture and large cities with ample space are what keep ethnic enclaves together. Although cultural commonality among the groups help them feel secure, it hinders them from learning a very valuable skill that will help them integrate. It is true that Salvadorans and Guatemalans interact with others outside of ethnic enclaves such as at work or at the local supermarket; however, many Salvadorans and Guatemalans do not have interactions with other groups outside of their neighborhood institutions such as school and church.

Race

The concept of “race” entered American history during the seventeenth century when colonists began distinguishing themselves from Native Americans and African slaves. The white European population adopted a sense of entitlement and began to see themselves as superior. Continuing to believe they are deserving of certain privileges, by 1790 the division between the groups was established and “othering” darker skinned individuals became a common practice; so much so that Blacks and Native Americans were banned from receiving citizenship whether they were enslaved or not.220 Although race is a social construction that is ever changing, the way an individual is located within the race spectrum determines how they are viewed and treated in their home countries. In short, race is a socially and culturally constructed concept that categorizes individuals as “superior” or “inferior”.221

Race has and continues to dominate the political environment and social interactions for those living in the US as well as those living in Central America. Even though this concept is

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baseless in biology and genetics, it has become part of the American culture and has social consequences especially if you are dark skinned or black. Latinos are continuously categorized in the “dark” or “brown” side of the dichromatic scale, but the Latino ethnic group is diverse and comprised of white Latinos with European ancestry in addition to Latinos who have darker skin with African ancestry. The US census does not include Hispanic/Latino as a race option, only as an ethnic category; therefore, Latino/Hispanic is not officially considered to be a race. However, since the US government tends to group Black and Latinos together in anti-discriminatory laws and initiatives, Latinos are categorized and thought of as a minority race.

Latinos living in the US are aware of the discrimination against Blacks and other dark skin individuals, so some try to distance themselves from the Black racial category by identifying as “some other race” on the census. They are also known to segregate themselves spatially from the Black community in the U.S. Many times Latinos in the US experience occupational, housing, and educational discrimination just as blacks do. For example, many times realtors only show housing to Latinos that are segregated away from white neighborhoods and in turn segregating them from better community programs such as schools, health centers, and recreational services.

The Latino population is found in many different areas within Central America and the Caribbean; therefore, not all Latinos are darker skinned and many Latinos do not fit on the dichotomy race spectrum that exists in Central America. Thus there is a racial divide and, similarly to the systematic discrimination in United States, black Latino individuals are poorer

222 Ibid., 24
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid., 26
than white Latinos. Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson state “...Latino groups have greatly differing socioeconomic profiles. The contrast between predominantly white and middle-class Cubans and poor people of black, Indian, or mixed race from parts of Central America and the Caribbean suggest the limits of pan-Latino solidarity”. 226 Along with variable skin color, there are also different cultures within the Latino population that differentiate each ethnic group within the Latino population. What factors create bonds between Latinos then? Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson say that it is not the Spanish language, since many second and third generation Latinos do not speak Spanish, it is simply just the Spanish heritage individuals share. 227 The Spanish heritage bond could be described as frail or distant which may make it psychologically easier for Latinos to “other” each other leading to racism within their own race/ethnic group.

Interestingly, race was not important in Latin America until scientists in Europe and the U.S. started developing theories about race thus giving it importance in societies. During the late nineteenth century, these hierarchical theories became popular in Latin America; consequently, blacks and Indians were seen as inferior and race mixture (i.e. interracial marriages and interracial children 228) were seen as decay of the white Latino superiority. 229 The belief that blacks and Indians were inferior was kept alive and it spread via new visual technology and mass printing that circulated widely both in Latin America and Europe. Images of Latin American and South American Indians were created by Europeans and Peruvians which focused on physical appearance and giving more importance to the individual’s race; therefore, creating fear and

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227 Ibid.
228 People that are European and Indian descent are known as “mestizos”
229 Wade, Op. Cit., 180
prompting restriction of black immigration while increasing the support of European immigration in many countries.230 Essentially, the white population in Latin American and the white population in the U.S. are deemed more superior on the dichotomous race scale.

**Religion**

One integration measurement that Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants share is religion. Religion was and remains a tool of cohesion among people that helps strengthen relationships. One religion in particular has gained a majority of Americans as followers and that is Christianity. Out of 35,000 United States adults surveyed in 2014, 70.6% identified as Christian.231 The relationship between Central American immigrants and Christianity in the United States is unique and both groups benefit greatly from each other. Christianity is a method of integration that allows immigrants to fit into the dominant Christian culture. Meanwhile, those same immigrants help keep Christian institutions alive in the U.S. Religious institutions have a long history of assisting newly arrived immigrants, asylees, and refugees in finding resources such as housing, jobs, and local non-governmental organizations that assist with integration.232 It is important to understand that religion in the U.S. is declining and all religions are losing followers every year; however, Latinos are helping to ease the decline and without them the decrease would be sharper. In fact, in 2012, 61% of 1 million documented immigrants identified as Christian and out of eleven million undocumented immigrants, 83% identified as Christian.233 In El Salvador and Guatemala, nearly half the population identifies as Catholic and 40%

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identifies as Protestant.\textsuperscript{234} By sharing the same religion and beliefs, Christianity has helped Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants integrate into communities within the U.S. Christianity, specifically Catholicism and Protestant denominations, is the most popular religion in Latin American countries and many Latinos are active in the Christian community by praying and attending services. When Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants arrive in the United States, they usually remain active within the religion in order to remain connected to their home countries while establishing connections in their new communities. The sense of belonging that churches offer immigrants is beneficial to an individual's mental, physical, and emotional well-being and has shown to provide resilience against discrimination.\textsuperscript{235}

Before, during, and after the civil war that crippled their country, Catholic and Protestant churches offered more than a place to worship, explains Sociologist Cecilia Menjívar. She also states that:

“In the United States, the Catholic Church - along with mainline Protestant denominations - has filled the vacuum of government assistance for these de facto refugees and has been actively involved in improving their lives. These churches have offered Salvadoran immigrants the assistance and protection that the U.S. government has refused to extend them. They created sanctuaries throughout the country to protect them from deportation to life-threatening conditions in their homeland, have provided settlement assistance, championed the legal struggle that eventually granted Temporary Protected Status to Salvadorans and an opportunity to resubmit asylum applications.”\textsuperscript{236}

Although Menjívar specifically studied Salvadoran immigrants, Guatemalan immigrants also experienced a violent civil war just a decade earlier; therefore, it would be correct to assume that


\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 24
Guatemalans viewed churches as a resource to promote their well-being and a place of shelter from the U.S. government just as Salvadorans did.

Many areas that are considered ethnic enclaves will have multiple churches that cater to different cultures and languages. If a population of immigrants cannot find a church that fits its needs, it is common for newly arrived immigrants to establish their own place of worship and welcome other immigrants in need.\textsuperscript{237} For example, Central American immigrants often establish Latino churches and hold services in Spanish for the first generation so that Latinos in the area can attend services in their native language. Interestingly enough, at the same time more Latino churches are being formed, well-established Latino churches are starting to offer their services in English for the second generation. By providing English translations, Latino churches aim to keep younger, Americanized Latinos from breaking away from Latino churches.\textsuperscript{238} Although American-Latino youth attend church more often than non-Latino Americans, they are increasingly less religious than their parents, just like their non-Latino peers.\textsuperscript{239}

The growth of non-affiliated individuals is a fairly new trend in the U.S that is gaining momentum. In the U.S. 20\% of the general population identify as religiously unaffiliated and the growth of unaffiliated Latinos (U.S. born and foreign born) has risen to 18\%.\textsuperscript{240} This number has been slowly increasing over the years and to be religiously unaffiliated was unheard of a generations ago. The transition from Catholicism and Protestantism to an unaffiliated status is another sign that Latinos are integrating into the American culture. Among the 25\% of the Latinos in the U.S. that have left Catholicism, almost half say they are atheist, agnostic, or

\begin{footnotes}
\item 237 Ibid.
\item 238 Lazo, Op. Cit.
\item 240 Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
religiously unaffiliated; 55% of this population born in the United States\textsuperscript{241}. Studies have shown that the decline in religious affiliation is increasing among races and they also show that this phenomenon is popular only within the millennial generation (age 18 to 33 years old). The 2014 Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center shows that 36% of Millennials between the ages of 18 and 24 and 34% of older Millennials between the ages of 25 and 33 say they are religiously unaffiliated.\textsuperscript{242} This is compared to more than 70% of older generations identifying with a religion, mainly Christianity\textsuperscript{243}. Even though the rate of unaffiliated individuals is on the rise the belief in God is stable. The Pew Research Center found that most unaffiliated individuals still believe in God and observe less than religiously affiliated Americans\textsuperscript{244}. The best way to describe this group is those who believe, but do not belong. This phrase is not used in a way to say this group is an outcast and are not welcomed, it is used to convey the idea that they believe in a higher power, but do not belong to a religion or church.

Generally religion in the U.S. is seen as a form of connection among members of a community. However, in this case Latinos and whites do not generally share the same space to practice the same religion. That is slowly changing, but it seems that religion is only a path to integration for U.S. born Latino youth who attend church with their white peers. Since most of the older Latino generations tend to segregate themselves and do not attend predominantly white English-speaking churches, they do not always share a special religious bond with Christians outside of their ethnic group. It is not guaranteed that Latinos and whites would form a special bond if they attended the same churches, but it is extremely possible that the two groups would

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{242} Pew Research Center., \textit{Op. Cit.} Religion in Latin America Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region  
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Ibid.}
start to realize they have this deep personal characteristic in common which could help intergroup relations.

Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants and their families continue to show great strength during the migration journey and when they enter the U.S. Families from El Salvador and Guatemala migrate knowing they will face extremely unfavorable, even deadly, conditions, but their determination to build a better life is greater than their fear. Not only do these individuals experience unfavorable conditions during migration, they also face a hostile climate when they enter the U.S. through laws and public attitudes toward immigrants. Salvadorans and Guatemalans do what they have to do in order to survive and give their children a better future, but the consequences are sobering.

Instead of assisting immigrants, especially those from Central America, the U.S. government has the tendency to alienate immigrants rather than offer resources that help them integrate. Therefore, the low education rates that Salvadorans and Guatemalans enter the U.S. with puts them in low-wage jobs that are dangerous and also hinders them from giving their children the necessary resources they need to succeed. Their native-born American children are part of the large next generation, but will not start with the same resources that other children have. To break the poverty cycle, America should focus on integrating immigrants and switch from an inattentive attitude to a more proactive one. Thus, giving Salvadoran and Guatemalan families the chance to fully integrate and succeed within the job and school sectors which would increase their English language skills and economic integration.
Conclusion

Pre-migration context is an important determinant regarding immigrant integration in a foreign country. Salvadorans and Guatemalans are strong people that strive to be successful in the U.S. Unfortunately, the consequences of their civil wars continue to damage generations with broken infrastructure and violence. The most damaging consequence for Salvadorans and Guatemalans is that their low education rates, low socio-economic levels, lack of job skills and the lack of English language attainment, make it very difficult to come to the U.S. and be as successful as other Central Americans.

When immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala enter the U.S., they face a hostile political environment that focuses on deportation rather than integration, lack of access to public funds to help them become self-sufficient, and lack skills to obtain high wage jobs. These personal and environmental factors not only negatively impact first generation immigrants but they also perpetuate the cycle of poverty for their American-born children. Salvadoran and Guatemalan parents are unable to give their children the necessary resources to succeed economically or academically. Salvadorans and Guatemalans face higher poverty rates than other Central Americans. In 2015 the poverty rate among Northern Triangle immigrants from Honduras (28%), Guatemala (28%), and El Salvador (19%) was higher than the poverty rates among immigrants from Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua with their poverty rates between 12-13%.245 In March 2018 the Trump administration publicly introduced a plan to add a

citizenship question on the 2020 census potentially decreasing the number of respondents and federal funding for immigrant and minority communities. The proposed question will ask respondents if they are a citizen of the U.S. Advocate groups that are suing the Trump administration claim that the question would cause a decrease in responses especially in households with unauthorized immigrants resulting in a low population count. This is problematic because the population count determines how many Electoral College votes and congressional seats a state receives and if the population is undercounted immigrant communities will lose political power. In addition, immigrant communities will become even more underfunded if there is an undercount. The population count also determines where and how almost $880 billion dollars are distributed among American communities for schools, health services, and other public services. A decrease in respondents would decrease the amount of federal funding the community receives since the population count would show there are less individuals to serve. In reality there will not be a population decrease, the citizenship question will just create more underserved communities. It is critical that Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants receive assistance so that they can become self-sufficient and provide their children the necessary resources to succeed.

In many ways Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants can be compared to refugees or asylum seekers because of their perceived threat in their homeland and broken infrastructure. However, there are few that are actually given refugee or asylum status. Therefore, many come to the U.S. undocumented and parents try their hardest to give their family a better life. With

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247 Ibid.

248 Ibid.
51% of Salvadorans and 56% of Guatemalans without documentation, this is a population the U.S. needs to pay attention to because the cycle of poverty reoccurs when they have American born children.\textsuperscript{249} In 2015 the Pew Research Center found that 63% of Northern Triangle households headed by an unauthorized immigrant had children and 55% of Northern Triangle households headed by a lawful immigrant had children.\textsuperscript{250} The U.S. has a “pick yourself up by your own bootstraps” mindset, but it is a nation with no social support mechanism for aspiring undocumented migrants. It is difficult for Salvadorans and Guatemalans to succeed under this mindset when they arrive in the U.S. with little job skills or education causing many families fall into poverty causing second generation Salvadorans and Guatemalans to grow up without the necessary resources and guidance that is needed to navigate their lives successfully.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that high teen birth rates are linked to low education and income levels of the parents, neighborhood-level income inequality, lack of opportunity for positive youth involvement.\textsuperscript{251} Without positive guidance, the lack of parental resources, and little funding for community level resources or positive activities for its members, Salvadoran and Guatemalan youth are left to navigate their world unattended and the consequences are sometimes life altering. A 2016 study completed by the CDC found that only 35.9% of Hispanic mothers that gave birth at age 20 or younger completed high school diploma or received a General Educational Development certificate (GED) compared to 43.8% of White mothers and 41.5% of African American mothers the same age.\textsuperscript{252} Although the number of teen births among Hispanic adolescents are declining each year (a decreased from

\textsuperscript{249} Cohn, D’Vera, Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Passel, J. S., Op. Cit.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
31.9 to 28.9 between 2016-2017.\textsuperscript{253} the number of high school dropouts are still high and impacts future generations and perpetuates the poverty cycle even further.

By receiving a high school diploma, men have the ability to make an average of $797 a week equivalent to $41,444 a year compared to $583 a week equivalent to $30,316 a year without a high school diploma.\textsuperscript{254} Women make less than men despite the holding the same amount of education. Without a high school diploma woman make an average of $444 a week equivalent to $23,088 a year and with a diploma woman will only make $620 a week on average which is equivalent to $32,240 a year.\textsuperscript{255} These figures are an average earning for all men and women before taxes, but when you break down earnings by race Latino men and women make less than their White counterparts. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that Hispanic males only make 71.9\% of the amount White men earn and Latina women only make 74.8\% of what White women earn.\textsuperscript{256} Not only do women in general make less than men, Latina women make the least and when this is accompanied by a teenage birth and no high school degree, it is extremely difficult to provide the necessary resources themselves and their family.

The consequences of letting Salvadorans and Guatemalans fall into poverty without intervention is not only costing the U.S. a significant amount of money, this inaction is also marginalizing millions of individuals who have fled broken and dangerous homelands. These marginalized populations are here in the U.S. having children that are American citizens. Due to

\begin{footnotesize}
\bibitem{255} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{footnotesize}
the low integration rates and lack or resources the lower income class will continue to grow, leading second generation Salvadoran and Guatemalan children into the growing poverty cycle.

Unattended second generation Salvadorans and Guatemalans will rely heavily on social services if the U.S. does not engage and provide resources that enables them to succeed academically and master the English language. Not only will these youth rely on social services for basic needs, there is a possibility they will turn to street gangs to fulfill their economic and social needs. Sonja Wolf, a Drug Policy Programme researcher at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) Región Centro in Mexico, states that “street gangs are spawned by "multiple marginality," or exclusion leading to socioeconomic disadvantage, dysfunctional families, and psychological and emotional barriers that leave people with few resources to better their lives”. Allowing Salvadoran and Guatemalan families to live with little resources has a negative intergenerational impact that could be prevented by giving families access to basic resources on arrival to the U.S. Marginality is the primary cause of gang emergence and frequently affects immigrants; however, this is not to say they are the only population that is impacted. The number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans migrating to the U.S. continue to rise and without proper resources marginality may continue increase the number of gang affiliated individuals.

After examining the potential consequences of inaction, there are far more compelling reasons to offer Salvadorans and Guatemalans integration resources than to not. By attaining integration resources, families will be able to rely less on social programs, receive better education, and future generations will be self-sustaining. Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants

258 Ibid.
have an indestructible determination to give their families a better life. Many times pro-immigrant arguments revolve around the argument that immigrants contribute a significant amount of money to the U.S. economy. The reality is that immigrants contribute far more than money to the American culture and communities and their contribution is truly invaluable. Many aspects of the American culture such as music, sports, education institutions, businesses, literature, technology, and even U.S. politics have been shaped by native born Americans and all immigrants. Immigrants use their multicultural background and multiple frames of reference to recognize new choices and possibilities, interpret events and objects differently than others, and innovate the American culture259. No matter how small or big of a role the U.S played in the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars, these populations deserve a better life in the U.S.

By taking a proactive stance against immigrant poverty and helping families integrate, the high school dropout and teen pregnancy rate among second generation immigrant youth will decrease; therefore, increasing the number of high school graduates and increasing their ability to make a living salary. Furthermore, the U.S. could save money as a nation by shifting the emphasis on the prevention of poverty for Salvadoran and Guatemalan parents through education and acquiring job specific skills rather than supporting their American born children through public assistance funds. Preventing poverty would not only help these families economically long term, the second generation would also have access to all the necessary resources to be at the same level of their peers academically and thus securing safer and better paying jobs in the future.

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