



Reinforcing Push Factors in the Northern Triangle: An Investigation of Trump's Attempts to Deter Immigration through Humanitarian Aid Reduction

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Introduction

- April 2019: Trump Administration announced its intentions to freeze U.S. foreign aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, amounting to \$450 million
- Trump asserted that the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) needs to be punished “because they haven't done a thing for us”

Research Questions

- What are the impacts of ending or reducing U.S. humanitarian aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras?
- Do punitive deterrence strategies, like aid reduction, strongly influence migrants' decisions to seek refuge in the U.S.?



Background Information

- Root causes of the Central American refugee crisis
 - Pervasion of gang activity and violence
 - Maltreatment of women and children
 - Poverty and lack of job opportunities
- Push Factor = flaw or distress that drives a person away from a certain place
- Pull Factor = benefit that attracts people to a certain place

Methods

Power of stories to humanize statistics and combat psychic numbing that accompanies tragedies of great magnitude

- Personal Narratives
 - Migrants
 - Aid Program Beneficiaries
 - Aid Workers and Organizations
 - U.S. Government Officials and Politicians
- Media Analysis
 - Central American Newspapers and Journalists



Results

- Migrants: Four out of eight asserted that if they had access to aid programs, “they would not have made the journey to the US”
- Aid Beneficiaries: USAID funding is the “community's only lifeline”
- Aid Organizations: 70 organizations issued a statement in April 2019 condemning the actions of the United States
- US Officials: “Mr. Trump's decision to end the aid to the Central American countries is likely to anger members of Congress from both parties”
- NTCA Newspapers: “It is clearly unethical to allow the weakest allies, who have remained in the line of fire for the interests of the United States, to be left alone in the face of adversity, making the help they need conditional on results that cannot be delivered” urgently

Conclusions

- While opportunities in the U.S. serve as a strong pull factor, the troubles of the Northern Triangle function as stronger push factors
- The Trump Administration failed to recognize the power of push factors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, instead reinforcing their prominence by creating a void of financial and programming support
- Not only are these policies ineffective by leveraging financial factors made irrelevant by the push factors in the NTCA, the abrupt removal of aid and resources is unnecessarily punitive
- Deterrence strategies of U.S. immigration policy are fundamentally flawed due to misunderstanding how push factors motivate migrants



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