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THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION IN AMÉRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
FEDERAL IMMIGRATION POLICY AND LOCAL IMPACTS IN THE UNITED STATES  
AND ECUADOR

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By Claudia Hayden Williamson

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies  
Croft Institute for International Studies  
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses the hemispheric politics of migration through the cases of the United States and Ecuador. It first reviews the scholarly literature regarding globalization and the politics of migration in the United States and Ecuador. Next, it analyzes the politics of migration of the Trump and Biden administrations in the United States and their local impacts. The subsequent chapter analyzes the impacts of the Moreno and Lasso administrations in Ecuador. The central argument of this thesis is based on criminalization rhetoric, arguing that criminal securitization discourses have become vital to how center and peripheral countries in the Americas are responding to migrant flows. Administrations use fear, resentment, and hatred of migrants for political gain and to more closely regulate migrants' lives or removal from the country.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2019, seven food processing plants in the state of Mississippi were the targets of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, resulting in the arrest of 680 undocumented immigrants (Gallagher et al. 2019). These raids were justified in press releases from the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the guise of identity fraud, the use of identities of legal United States workers (ICE 2019). While direct action against immigrant communities is not new to the United States, these raids were the largest conducted in a single day in United States history, a fact championed by the Trump administration (Tamborrino 2019). This administration brought anti-immigrant rhetoric to the forefront, to build its popularity among right and far-right constituencies, emphasizing border policy as a primary facet of its platform (Corasaniti 2016). This ideology has shaped conservative culture, specifically in the South. Latino communities in Morton and Forrest, Mississippi were directly harmed. Students arrived home from the first day of school with parents nowhere to be found, facing immense legal fees and ensuing deportations.

A differing lens of criminalization can be seen in Ecuador. Following the political-economic crisis of Venezuela in late 2019 and early 2020, Ecuador experienced an influx of Venezuelan political and economic refugees. From this influx, there was an emergence of reactionary anti-immigrant sentiment specifically regarding Venezuelan populations entering the country, at the same time, contrasting the recent constitutional protections and a public culture that celebrated the rights of migrants. While the Moreno administration sought to rhetorically maintain the pro-migrant position of its predecessor, the policies of the administration reflect a

nuanced form of criminalization framed in humanitarian rhetoric while Venezuelan migrants living in Ecuador face economic exploitation and anti-immigrant sentiment.

### **Research Question**

This study examines hemispheric migration politics within the Americas. In particular, the investigation focuses on two very different national cases of migration politics and policies that target vulnerable populations. First, it analyzes the federal policies of the Trump and Biden administrations in the United States with respect to Latino populations. Second, it analyzes the federal policies of the Moreno and Lasso administrations in Ecuador with regard to the Venezuelan population. The time frame it covers is from 2017 to 2021, a crucial transition period between administrations in both countries. The analysis attends to federal policies as well as their implementation and impacts on local populations.

There are different targeted migrant groups in these two cases. The United States case involves Latinos in Mississippi who have sought socioeconomic advancement. Though Mexican and Central American nationals are the primary migrants subjected to the ICE raids, the category of “Latinos” or “Hispanics” is a regional pan-ethnic category that encompasses any nationals south of the United States-Mexico border. This pan-ethnic category implicitly references the United States as a geopolitical power within the Americas. The United States attracts migrants from across Latin America but also asserts its geopolitical power and prerogative over the hemisphere. The Ecuador case involves Venezuelans fleeing an ongoing political-economic crisis. As opposed to “Latino”, the category of reference for the Ecuadorian case will focus on a nationality, presenting an opposing case to the United States. While the United States is a

hemispheric geopolitical power that has experienced widespread immigration over its history, Ecuador is not a geopolitical power and has experienced substantial emigration. It is important to note that these are not equivalent cases and instead will be compared to highlight the variable networks of migration and migration politics within the hemisphere.

### **Research Argument**

Migration politics in the United States and Ecuador are embedded within the center-periphery relations of neoliberal globalization pertaining to the Americas. In the Americas, there is a regional system of exchange of resources, capital, people, ideas, and policies between the United States, Canada, and Latin American countries. There are also patterns of exploitation upon which immigration systems hinge. Different legal regimes are created to selectively open and close borders to migrant flows or to problematize their existence inside countries and call for their expulsion. I argue that criminal securitization discourses have become vital to how center and peripheral countries in the Americas are responding to migrant flows. Administrations use fear, resentment, and hatred of migrants for political gain and to more closely regulate migrants' lives or removal from the country.

These criminal securitization discourses arise within the political and economic relations of the Americas in which the United States is a “center” attempting to halt the inflow of migrants and Ecuador is a Latin American “periphery” attempting to attract migrants. In the case of the Mississippi ICE raids, the Trump administration intensified the push to criminalize all Latino undocumented migrant populations and expel them from the country. This is part of a long history of conservative backlash and xenophobia against the inflow of migrants associated with

globalization. In the situation of Ecuador, the Moreno administration has tried to take a middle position on criminalizing Venezuelans. This is reflective of a history of pro-migrant legislation and culture such as the adoption of the principle of universal citizenship in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution in response to the hemispheric patterns of increased emigration from Ecuador. Nevertheless, this culture of celebrating migrants has shifted with the influx of Venezuelan migrants and a rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Criminal securitization has involved punitive measures taken within countries toward vulnerable populations that advance the political goals of presidential administrations. In the United States, the Trump administration has galvanized a right-wing populist movement in which controlling migration figures centrally as part of a broader “American First” agenda (Müller 2021). This authoritarian populist movement rhetorically frames itself as anti-globalization (Bonikowski 2019). This has involved critiques of free trade and engaging in trade wars with countries like China. Halting the flow of “brown people” into white America has become a key part of fighting globalization. To understand migration politics in the US, scholars cannot just look at national political spheres. They must position their studies within the regional political economy of neoliberalism. In Ecuador, the Correa administration (2007-2017) took an anti-neoliberal position and developed a Christian socialist platform (Schwartz et al. 2017). Correa also sought to build alliances with New Left administrations in countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina. Presenting himself as anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist, Correa also embraced strong human rights language surrounding migration that framed Ecuador as a welcoming country for migrants and refugees. Though from the same political party, the Moreno

administration (2017-2021) shifted to a pro-neoliberal position that was more welcoming to United States interests, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and free trade. However, Moreno shied away from embracing a Trumpian xenophobic position on all refugees. The Lasso administration has expanded upon Moreno's neoliberal interests while nearly abandoning the human-rights-centered language of the Moreno administration.

## **Methodology**

This is a comparative study of federal migration and policy within the Americas. Taking a world systems theoretical framework, I understand hemispheric migration through the lens of center-periphery relations of unequal exchange and flows of capital, goods, migrants, ideas, and policies. Case selection had to reflect different structural positions within the hemisphere. I chose the United States to understand the core position. I chose Ecuador to represent a peripheral position. These two cases reflect very different political-economic relationships to the system of neoliberal globalization in the Americas. In both cases, I focus primarily on data directly from the administrations themselves and the news media covering the administrations. In my first empirical chapter, I utilize press releases and public statements from the Trump and Biden administrations, executive orders, and news media. I also analyze statements and websites from local immigrants' rights organizations in Mississippi to understand the local response to the actions of these administrations and use local news sources to better understand the impacts on Mississippi communities. In my second empirical chapter, I use press releases, speeches, executive orders, and immigration policies from the Moreno and Lasso administrations. To better understand how these administrations have impacted local communities, I also utilized data from

local newspapers, specifically *La Hora*, to better understand the stories of Venezuelan migrants living in Ecuador. In both empirical cases, I use open coding in reference to policy, speeches, and press releases. In each of these sources, I code for terms regarding humanitarianism and criminalization regarding migrant communities. All of the translations included here are my own.

## **Study Overview**

This thesis consists of a literature review regarding globalization in the Americas, the politics of migration in the 20th century United States, and the politics of migration in 20th century Ecuador. This literature is the basis of my analysis and understanding of the hemispheric politics of migration based on the cases of the United States and Ecuador. The first empirical chapter follows the development of the politics of migration in the United States from 2017 through 2021, specifically focusing on the Trump and Biden administrations, their policies, and their local impacts. Within this chapter, I specifically shed light on the local case of the Mississippi ICE raids in 2019 and focus on how this case represents the exchange from the center to the periphery recreated in the United States through the exploitation of Latino populations in the United States South. The second empirical chapter follows the shifts in the politics of migration in Ecuador from the Moreno administration to the beginning stages of the Lasso administration, specifically in regards to the policy surrounding and impacting Venezuelan immigrants as a result of the political-economic crisis in Venezuela.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This study examines hemispheric migration politics with respect to the United States and Ecuador. There are three bodies of research that provide the scholarly basis of this study. First, I focus on globalization in the Americas. Second, I analyze immigration law and politics in the United States. Finally, I refer to scholarship regarding immigration law and politics in Ecuador. After reviewing this body of research, I discuss the academic contributions made by this project.

### **Globalization in the Americas**

Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) theory of the world system provides an important way to understand the political-economic history of the Americas. The modern capitalist economy originated during the "long 16th century" (1450-1640) within Europe and engaged in early colonial projects in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Within this region, northwest Europe emerged as the "core" through various geographic, historical, and economic processes (Wallerstein 1974). The most important factors in northwestern Europe's dominance of the economic-geographic hierarchy were its specialization in higher-skilled agricultural production, which in turn favored tenancy and higher wages, impacting modes of labor control (Wallerstein 401). Northwestern Europe's ascent as the dominant core took place with respect to Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean which became, respectively, periphery and semi-periphery positions in the regional system. Wallerstein argues that "the key fact is that, given slightly different starting-points, the interests of various local groups converged in Northwest Europe,

leading to the development of strong state mechanisms, and diverged sharply in peripheral areas, leading to very weak ones” (Wallerstein 1974, 403). This European economic system—with core, semi-periphery, and peripheral structural positions organized into a hierarchical system of power and resource exploitation—is based on “unequal exchange” (Wallerstein 1974). The world-systems theory argues that the basis of capitalism involves unequal exchanges of surplus value between regions that reinforce the dominant position of the core at the expense of semi-peripheral and periphery regions. European imperialism in the Americas helped to establish the world economic system in which the “New World” countries were integrated as peripheries (Wallerstein 1974). Independence movements in the 1700s and 1800s restructured the world economy within North, Central, and South America (Hoffman 2000). During the 1800s, the United States became a core country in the Americas while imposing systems of unequal exchange on Latin American countries like Ecuador (Wallerstein 1974). The United States’ core position was consolidated through settler colonialism, conquest, and territorial dispossession of Native American societies and Mexico.

David Harvey (2007) argues that “neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2007, 22). The ideals of neoliberalism are rooted in the limitation of state intervention to preserve democracy and create the market conditions to expand development in ways that benefit all people, regardless of class. In practice, this meant the privatization of public industries, the deregulation of the

economy, and the lowering of tariffs on foreign trade and investment (Harvey 2007). It also meant the shrinking of state welfare protections for the lower classes (Harvey 2007). The first experiment in neoliberalism was conducted in Chile with the US-backed deposing of President Salvador Allende by the military dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet in 1973 (Barder 2013). This case allowed for the legitimization of neoliberalism, deregulating state power, financialization, and increasing privatization, a model that essentially “[reasserted] a form of class power over a society riveted by social stratification and the loss of governmental authority” (Barder 2013, 112). Though it’s important to understand the core-periphery relations in the Americas under neoliberal globalization, we should not lose sight of the experiences of migrants themselves. Meléndez-Badillo argues for a more holistic approach that also incorporates “migrants’ historical experiences, their structural conditions, and their relation to hegemonic ideologies in home and host societies” (Meléndez-Badillo 2015, 117).

William Robinson (2008) restructures Wallerstein’s argument regarding the world economy and argues that globalization exists as a new stage in the history of world capitalism (Robinson 2008). Globalism brings forward a new era of a singular global civilization– “one in which humanity is bound together as never before, yet divided into the haves and the have-nots across national and regional borders in a way unprecedented in human history” (Robinson 2008, 2). He expands upon Wallerstein’s notion of the singular, unified labor force exploited at the core. This framework exists as a way to understand the influence of 19th and 20th-century neoliberalism in Latin America, specifically the way it came into being and its long-term effects, especially on the hemispheric politics of migration.

## **Politics and Law of Migration in the United States**

The history of migration policy in the United States is marked by reactionism. By 1914, transatlantic migration had risen “to ever greater heights” with a shift toward new sending countries (Abramitzky and Boustan 2017). This was met with political pressure to restrict the influx of immigrants. In 1907 Congress convened the Dillingham Commission to study the effects of immigration (Abramitzky and Boustan 2017). The commission resulted in a report advocating for additional immigration regulations, “including limits on the number of immigrant arrivals, quotas by country-of-origin, and restrictions against immigrants who were illiterate or penurious” (Abramitzky and Boustan 2017, 1317). This led to the end of the era of open borders in the United States. A literacy test was imposed in 1917 and, passing President Wilson’s veto, country-specific immigration quotas were imposed. This capped arrivals at 150,000 by 1924 with quota allocations based upon the size of migrant stocks from each country of origin in 1890 (Abramitzky and Boustan 2017). Ferrie and Hatton approach these policy changes with the questions, “who gains and who loses from immigration?” and “who is in a position to do something about it?”. The framework they set to analyze U.S. policy decisions specifically focuses on political-economic costs and benefits of immigration, relating demand for immigration to supply (Ferrie and Hatton 2013).

Another landmark in the modern politics of immigration in the United States is the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. At this time, two major philosophies emerged surrounding immigration policy and specifically this legislation. The first philosophy emphasizes “humanitarian values” while the second emphasizes the “maintenance of American culture”

(Keely 1971). Those who subscribed to the philosophy of “humanitarian values” pushed for the repeal of quotas and for an immigration policy that reunited families (Keely 1971). Members of Congress who subscribed to this set of ideals “favored an increase in the number and proportion of immigrants from countries other than those of Northern Europe. Included among these organizations were religious and non-sectarian immigrant aid groups, ethnic societies and labor groups” (Keely 1971, 158). The opposing position continued to favor the national origins quota (Keely 1971). They also promoted an “end to the exemption for Western Hemisphere immigrants from numerical restriction,” arguing that if they were not made subject to national quotas, “at least a ceiling should be placed on immigration from this hemisphere” (Keely 1971, 158). The perspective was centered around the protection of the American economy and workers, which were ostensibly threatened by increased immigration. This position was primarily backed by Southern legislators (Keely 1971).

The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 “eliminated the national-origins quotas and relied on a preference system focused on immigrants’ family relationships with United States citizens or legal permanent residents, or their skills” (FitzGerald and Cook-Martin 2015). This legislation banned immigrant visa discrimination on the basis of “race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence” and “established an annual cap of 170,000 visas for immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere, with no country in the hemisphere allowed more than 20,000 visas” (FitzGerald and Cook-Martin 2015). This legislation resulted in a shift in the ethnic makeup of the United States with the European and Canadian share of legal immigrants falling from 60 percent in the 1950s to 22 percent in the 1970s while the Asian share of legal

immigration rose from 6 percent in the 1950s to 35 percent by the 1980s and 40 percent in 2013 (FitzGerald and Cook-Martin 2015). The proportion of European to overall immigrants diminished (Hirschman 2014). The major regions of origin of immigrants in the post-1965 wave were Latin America and Asia (Hirschman 2014). The new wave of immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s was predominantly characterized by influxes to the West and East coasts with other selected states also attracting high populations of immigrants, specifically Texas, Florida, and Illinois (Hirschman 2014). Hirschman notes that the educational background of immigrants is bimodal, stating “The largest group of immigrants, particularly those from Mexico and Central America, has less education, on average, than the native-born American population. Less education, however, is not equivalent to unskilled labour. Many immigrants without a high school degree are able to work in the skilled construction industry, nursing homes caring for the elderly, and in the service sectors in restaurants, hotels, and gardening” (Hirschman 2014, 4).

Immigration policy took a different turn in the late twentieth century. With the rise of neoliberal globalization, there were growing numbers of migrants traveling to the United States to seek socioeconomic opportunities and to flee violence and insecurity (Massey 2020). The Republican Party especially sought to stoke fears of brown immigrants and to win elections through strong border policies, restrictions, and criminalization of undocumented migrants (Hajnal 2021). The Trump presidency went even further in its demonization of Latin American migrants with its “America First” nativist ideology. The Trump administration attempted to criminalize all types of migrant populations, whether those seeking economic opportunity or

refugees fleeing the violence caused by the United States-led war on drugs (Beutel and Karčić 2022).

### **Politics and Law of Migration in Ecuador**

Ecuador has been marked by waves of emigration during the 20th century, especially since the 1960s. The migrant-sending zones—such as Azuay, Cañar, and Cuenca—involved communities that practiced subsistence agriculture and craft production, such as weaving Panama hats for export to New York (Jokisch 2014). Jokisch argues that while the Panama hat trade declined in the 1950s and 1960s, this export trading connection enabled emigration to New York.

Throughout the 1970s, Ecuador experienced economic growth due to the oil industry, but in the 1980s oil prices collapsed. This was intertwined with increased debt and inflation as well as lower wages for workers (Cueva and Diaz 2019). This confluence of factors drastically impacted Ecuadorian farmers, leading many to emigrate (Jokisch 2014).

Though Ecuador was a sending country for migrants, it also was a receiving country that reflected the instability of surrounding countries in South America. Indeed, Colombian farmers began settling in Ecuador. The number of Colombian immigrants doubled in the 1960s, continued to grow throughout the 1970s, and remained constant in the 1980s (Orcés 2009). Conflict in Colombia dating back to La Violencia—a civil war fought between the Liberal and Conservative Parties—and subsequent insurgencies aligned with leftist revolutionary movements led to a significant humanitarian crisis (Pugh et al. 2020). This violence led to the displacement of large numbers of Colombians, with many migrating to neighboring countries such as Ecuador (Orcés 2009). According to the 2001 census, “there are approximately 51,556 Colombians in

Ecuador” in “provinces that belong variously to the regions of the highlands, the Amazon, and the coast” (Orcés 2009, 137). These statistics challenge us to reconcile Ecuador’s modern history of increased protections for migrants with its public sentiment toward migrant communities which was often negative and associated with crime and poverty (Orcés 2009).

In the late 20th century, Ecuador experienced twelve administration changes between 1980 and 2006 while also suffering a “30 percent reduction in its GDP and a considerable increase in poverty from 41 to 75 percent as a result of the political and financial crises from 1998-99” (Orcés 2009, 131). This resulted in a large number of Ecuadorians emigrating to Spain and a considerable number emigrating to Italy, with roughly 1.5 million leaving the country (Orcés 2009). Mass emigration coincided with the introduction of neoliberal policies that were heavily contested by indigenous organizations around the country (Korovkin 2001). Governments embraced neoliberal policies as a result of financial problems, global ideological factors, a perceived lack of alternatives, and assumed weakness of popular opposition (Hey and Klak 1999). This shift to neoliberalism created economically vulnerable populations and resulted in increased emigration.

Neoliberal globalization was contested by the newly elected Correa administration in 2006. The Correa administration oversaw the rewriting of the Ecuadorian constitution. One of the major planks within the constitution was a “pro-migrant” framework that celebrated the universal human rights to mobility and sought to attract more people to the country, such as citizens living abroad (Pugh 2017). The principle of “universal citizenship” was associated with the “free mobility of all inhabitants of the planet and the gradual end to the condition of

foreigners as transforming elements of unequal relations amongst countries, especially North-South” (Ortiz 2010). Unlike the United States political context in the 2000s, Ecuador was moving in an opposite direction in migration policy and politics that was proudly anti-criminal securitization. Its structural position in the Americas as a periphery meant that it took a different approach to neoliberal globalization—and its migration flows—than the United States did as a core country, which was trying to diminish migratory flows as the global War on Terror was escalating in the Middle East and Central Asia. Both countries would shift toward more aggressive criminal securitization discourses and policies following the Great Recession (2008-2009) as countries began to recognize the systemic weakness of the neoliberal world system.

### **Scholarly Contribution**

This study goes beyond country-level scholarship on migration politics and policy in the United States and Ecuador. Instead, I use the world system framework to understand neoliberal globalization as fundamentally structuring migration politics in the United States and Ecuador. This study contributes to understanding migration politics as embedded in the center-periphery relations of neoliberal globalization of the Americas. Specifically, I argue that criminal securitization discourses are crucial to how center and periphery countries are responding to migrant flows in the aftermath of the Great Recession. In Ecuador, the Moreno and Lasso administrations have embraced more moderate positions on criminal securitization that target Venezuelan refugees. In the United States, the Trump administration stoked fear, resentment, and hatred of migrants to justify criminalization and removal from the country. The Biden

administration has toned down the anti-migrant rhetoric but has quietly kept some Trump-era policies in place.

## **CHAPTER III: MIGRATION POLICY AND RHETORIC IN THE UNITED STATES**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the evolution of migration politics in the United States from 2017 to 2021, from the Trump administration through the first year of the Biden administration. I focus on changing federal policies and rhetoric targeting Latino migrant populations. I call attention to the local impacts of these policies during the Mississippi ICE raids in 2019. In this chapter, I utilize public websites, press releases, social media communications, and secondary sources to better understand the policies enacted by both the Trump and Biden administrations. The United States government has framed itself as a humanitarian country but has a different constitutional framework than Ecuador regarding migration. I argue that the Trump and Biden administrations have created a regime of criminal securitization, but adopted different discourses of migration.

The Trump administration has taken an overtly anti-migrant position that intersects with white nationalist values. Conversely, the Biden administration has taken a more pro-migration position but one that obscures practices of criminal securitization. The Biden presidency has pushed back against the rhetoric of the Trump administration, but little has changed to restructure the orientation of migration policy. This chapter does not provide a comprehensive overview of federal immigration policy nor the entirety of the rhetoric surrounding immigration from either administration. Rather, it utilizes rhetoric and policies to understand the major trends of migration politics in the United States and their impacts on a localized scale.

## **Trump Administration**

Anti-migrant rhetoric does not begin or end with the presidency of Donald Trump. The Trump administration is a symptom of decades of neoliberalism and generations of white supremacist ideologies, but his statements and actions empowered open hostility against immigrant populations. Trumpian policy justified and normalized hostility through a criminalizing and dehumanizing language toward migrants before, during, and after his presidency.

The Trump administration used dehumanizing language toward migrants, publicly and privately. His language oftentimes revealed a central focus of creating a border that specifically endangered and harmed those who attempted to cross. As Scott (2019) notes, “the president had often talked about fortifying a border wall with a water-filled trench, stocked with snakes or alligators, prompting aides to seek a cost estimate.” His aides also recounted that “he suggested that they shoot migrants in the legs to slow them down” (Scott 2019). These statements reveal an inclination toward violent policies against migrants, later revealed in his enacted policies.

Publicly, in the earliest parts of his campaign, he openly called Mexican immigrants criminals and rapists, accusing them of bringing drugs over the border (Washington Post Staff, 2015). He also has openly encouraged violence against immigrant communities, specifically from police, stating, “When you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon, you just see them thrown in, rough. I said, ‘Please don’t be too nice’” (Scott 2019). The use of the word “thugs” and his evident and explicit desire for the maltreatment of immigrants

communicates at least a level of acceptance, if not encouragement, for violence against immigrant communities. During his acceptance speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention, he emphasized the separation between “illegal immigrants” and “Americans,” stating that “[illegal immigrants] are being released into our communities by the tens of thousands in our communities with no regard for the impact on public safety or resources” (PBS NewsHour 2016). During this same speech, he also brings up the case of an undocumented immigrant living in Nebraska who “ended the life of an innocent young girl,” emphasizing that the girl had recently graduated valedictorian of her class and that she was “one more child to sacrifice on the altar of open borders” (PBS NewsHour 2016). The explicit focus on singular cases of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants stokes the terror and criminalization that legitimize harsh immigration policies and treatment of migrants, perpetuating migrants as a threat to “national identity,” constituted in whiteness.

The Trump administration enacted 472 administrative changes to the United States’ immigration system over four years (Bolter et al. 2022). The direction of immigration policy under Donald Trump was framed under the rhetoric used in his campaign and marked by the executive orders enacted within his first month of office. On January 23rd, 2017, Trump enacted the executive order “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements,” signaling that his time in office would unsurprisingly focus upon increased security as opposed to providing migratory access for immigrants. The main contents of this executive order were expanded use of detention, limits on access to asylum, enhanced enforcement along the United

States-Mexico border, and the construction of a 2,000-mile border wall (Center for Migration Studies 2017).

Remaining true to his campaign rhetoric, “Section 4 of the border security executive order directs DHS to take steps to obtain operational control of the United States-Mexico border by planning, designing and constructing a wall along the length of the border. It also directs DHS to allocate unused funding to construct a wall and to undertake a comprehensive study on the security of the southern border within 180 days. Section 8 directs DHS to hire an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents ‘as soon as practicable’” (Center for Migration Studies 2017). The executive order also emphasizes the construction of detention facilities to detain individuals “apprehended on suspicion of violating Federal or State law,” as well as expedite determinations of eligibility to remain in the United States and remove those whose requests have been rejected, and form partnerships to enforce these policies (Executive Order 13767 2017). This executive order expands the enforcement of the goals of Homeland Security to state police forces, advocating for localized criminalization of migrants, as well as promoting expediting processes of removal. Another important facet of this executive order is its attempts to limit access to asylum, “to apply humanitarian parole authority only on a ‘case by case’ basis” (Center for Migration Studies 2017). These actions exist to explicitly limit and criminalize migrants seeking humanitarian aid.

The “securitization” of the Trump administration, protecting those *inside* the country from the people *outside*, is manifested in the early days of the Trump administration. An executive order from January 2017 titled “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United

States,” forbade sanctuary jurisdictions from receiving federal grants, permitted state and local law enforcement to act as immigration agents, and ended the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) of the Obama administration and re-instituting the Secure Communities program, a relic of the George w Bush administration, requiring the detainment of undocumented immigrants in municipal custody (Center for Migration Studies 2017). This executive order also sought to hire 10,000 additional ICE agents (Executive Order 13768 2017). These expansionary and securitizing measures not only seek to criminalize undocumented migrants, but also punish jurisdictions that attempt to provide aid to undocumented persons, starking a division that positions the Trump administration as explicitly anti-immigrant.

During this month, the Trump administration also released the Executive Order titled “Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals” which “suspends the issuance of visas to nationals from Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen; shuts down the U.S. refugee program for 120 days; reduces the number of refugees to be admitted to the United States in FY 2017 from 110,000 to 50,000; halts the resettlement of Syrian refugees indefinitely; launches a screening mechanism for the entry of foreign nationals; and requires DHS to expedite completion of an entry-exit tracking system” (Center for Migration Studies 2017). These explicit measures against immigrants from the Middle East again center an idea of the preservation of United States “identity” constituted in whiteness, stoking fear of immigrant communities and framed under the notion of protection from terrorism and disorder.

It is important to note that in 2019, during the third year of the Trump presidency, the United States “witnessed the highest number of migrant apprehensions at the southwest border

since 2007” (Bolter et al. 2022, 3). In line with Trump campaign rhetoric, while limiting asylum at the border the Trump administration also implemented “a regulation making migrants ineligible for asylum if they failed to apply for it elsewhere en route to the United States, Asylum Cooperative Agreements with Central American countries allowing the United States to send asylum seekers abroad, and a ramping up of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as Remain in Mexico), requiring migrants, mainly asylum seekers, to wait in Mexico for their U.S. immigration court adjudications” (Bolter et al. 2022, 3). Such asylum limitations again cast criminalization over migrant communities, limiting secondary asylum applications and pushing immigrants to “remain in Mexico.” These policies legislate the notion of “us” versus “them” mentality exemplified in Trump rhetoric. Nevertheless, Trump-era policies were also characterized by their focus on the border: “interior immigration arrests and removals ultimately decreased in comparison to the prior four years under the Obama administration. ICE made 549,000 arrests from FY 2017 through FY 2020, compared to 640,000 from FY 2013 through FY 2016. Similarly, it removed 935,000 noncitizens from the country during Trump’s term in office, compared to 1,160,000 in the prior four years” (Bolter et al. 2022, 3).

### **Biden Administration**

In contrast to the Trump administration, the Biden administration has embraced a humanitarian framework through its immigration discourse, but in practice, has shifted only slightly from the immigration tactics of the Trump administration. Nevertheless, the language surrounding immigration has shifted significantly between administrations. The Biden administration has

embraced a humanitarian framework, similar to that of the Moreno administration noted in chapter IV.

Biden has emphatically stated that he intends to reform the modern immigration system of the United States. According to a press release by his administration in July 2021, the main issues of the Biden administration are remaining a “nation of borders,” utilizing similar wording to the Trump administration, while “ensuring a secure, humane and well-managed border” (Biden Administration 2021). Within this statement, the Biden administration boasts of what it considers its successes, stating, “We successfully processed over 12,500 people who had been returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols. We expanded lawful pathways for protection and opportunity, including the Central American Minors (CAM) program to reunite children with their parents in the United States. We strengthened collaborative migration management with regional partners, including through a new Human Smuggling and Trafficking Task Force to disrupt and prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking operations. And we continue to deter irregular migration at our Southern border,” (Biden 2021). While still focused on securitization through programs focused on targeting human trafficking and pushing back against “irregular migration,” the Biden administration also attempted to distance itself from the previous administration, emphasizing that the current administration’s approach to border policy is vastly different from that of the Trump presidency, stating “The Biden-Harris Administration has accomplished this and more while reckoning with the prior Administration’s cruel and reckless immigration policies, which exacerbated long-standing challenges and failed to securely manage our border. Case in point: the total number of unique encounters at the Southern border

to date this fiscal year remains below the total number of unique encounters to date during fiscal year 2019 under the Trump Administration” (Biden 2021).

The Biden administration, while challenging a minimal amount of Trump policy, seeks to juxtapose itself to the Trump administration, providing direct comparisons statistically and promoting itself as the alternative to Trump, an administration that will “reform” the immigration system while attempting to balance the more conservative wing of the Democratic party’s desire to be “tough on immigration.” Nevertheless, as Biden seeks to differentiate his administration from that of the previous president, he still maintains Trump-era policies, even battling to defend them in court. As of early 2022, the Biden administration fought to uphold Title 42, a Trump policy used to bar entry to migrants due under the justification of precautions against Covid-19, although at the time of its enactment, New York City was the global epicenter of the pandemic. In his first year of presidency, Biden has used Title 42 to expel more than one million migrants at the border (Narea 2022). In addition, the Department of Justice under the Biden administration has urged federal courts in California and Pennsylvania to dismiss cases of migrant families separated during the Trump administration (Narea 2022).

### **Local Impacts**

The impacts of the United States’ immigration policy are not monolithic, nor are they equally applied across the United States. In this section, I specifically focus on the case of Mississippi to better understand the local impacts of Trump-era immigration policy and the specific change in policy in relation to the Mississippi ICE raids under the Biden administration. I utilize this case to better explain how the exploitation of Latino migrants based in the core-periphery relationship

of the United States and Latin America is reproduced within the United States. Under the Trump administration, the Mississippi ICE raids of 2019 were highly calculated and specifically designed to arrest undocumented workers in Mississippi, with a history that dates back more than a decade. Since the early 2000s, “hundreds of undocumented workers across the country told federal officials they worked at food processing plants in Mississippi” (Gates and Zhu 2019). Upon release from detention, immigrants were often fitted with ankle monitors while awaiting deportation proceedings, allowing authorities to follow the comings and goings of dozens of Mississippi migrants, tracking them to food processing plants (Gates and Zhu 2019). On August 7th, 2019, “hundreds of immigration officials descended on seven Mississippi plants owned by four companies- Peco Foods, Koch Foods, Pearl River Foods and A&B Inc., associated with the MP Food and PH Food plants” (Gates and Zhu 2019). These raids occurred in the towns of Morton and Forrest, Mississippi, home to large migrant communities, on the first day of school, leaving children coming home to empty houses. 680 undocumented workers were arrested, 300 of which were released the same day while the other 380 were held in an ICE detention facility in Louisiana (Gates and Zhu 2019). These raids occurred after years of planning what was “the largest single-state workplace enforcement action in the country, ever” (Gates and Zhu 2019). Affidavits in the case revealed that federal officials had data “dating back 17 years, from Nov. 18, 2002, to June 13, 2019,” that “showed that approximately 222 undocumented workers” had “indicated they worked at Peco Foods and presented agents with Peco Foods personnel identification cards with their photographs and assumed identities” (Gates and Zhu 2019).

While the unsealed search warrants against the food processing plants state that they were suspected of “willfully and unlawfully employing” undocumented immigrants, few prosecutions against the plants have taken place. I situate this in the political context of the Trump administration. During his presidency, ICE raids increased while the number of corporate prosecutions for employing undocumented workers diminished. While in this case, federal law says that “the maximum penalty for intentionally hiring undocumented workers is six months in jail and/or a \$3,000 fine for each undocumented worker” as of 2021, there is no documentation of fines or arrests for the employers. This occurs against the backdrop of the history of a country that rarely prosecutes companies with the number of corporate prosecutions decreasing even more as the number of undocumented immigrants arrested has increased (Merle 2019).

Upon analysis of ICE press releases and statements from federal officials, the major emergent theme is reinstating a “nation of laws.” In response to the ICE raids, US Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi Mike Hurst said, “Today, through the hard work of these men and women, we are once again becoming a nation of laws” (Gallagher et al. 2019). We must recognize that this notion of “lawlessness” is not placed upon the employers, but the employees, again pushing the notion of the criminalization of migrants as opposed to the employers. The major justification for the raid was that undocumented workers were committing identity theft, working under the social security numbers of legal citizens. ICE director Matt Albence pushed away from the notion that this was directly tied to the Trump presidency, stating “These are not new laws, nor is the enforcement of them new” (Shoichet 2019). Acknowledging the length of the investigation and the long-term planning involved, he stated “The arrests today were the

result of a year-long criminal investigation. And the arrests and warrants that were executed today are just another step in that investigation.”

In a political context, the Mississippi ICE raids generated a national outcry and drew attention to the anti-immigrant policies and practices of the Trump administration, the effects of which can be seen on a local scale. Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee and Mississippi Representative Bennie Thompson held a hearing entitled “Immigration Raids: Impacts and Aftermath on Mississippi Communities” allowing for those impacted by the ICE raids and the major actors to voice their opinions and experiences on a federal level. Three months following the ICE Raids, Bennie Thompson also wrote a guest column in the Jackson-based newspaper the Clarion Ledger, deeply criticizing the Trump administration’s “excessive show of force that upended communities across Mississippi and took parents away from their children” (Thompson 2019). He specifically called attention to the context in which they occurred- “just days before when a white supremacist domestic terrorist entered an El Paso Walmart” (Thompson 2019). Thompson focused on the long-term negative impact that the ICE raids will leave on vulnerable Mississippi communities, stating “we deserve answers on how the administration is — or is not — following the law” (Thompson 2019).

Under the Biden administration, on October 12th, 2021, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas “directed enforcement agencies to stop all workplace raids and, instead, to shift their focus to employers who are hiring and victimizing undocumented workers. ‘By adopting policies that focus on the most unscrupulous employers, we will protect workers as well as legitimate American businesses,’ Mayorkas said in a public statement”

(Aguilera 2021). This policy change presents a direct contrast to the Trump administration policy which focused on immigrant detention from workplace raids and was characterized by a lack of prosecution for employers.

The largest ICE raids conducted in a decade happened in Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation, under the presidency of Donald Trump. We must acknowledge the converging factors that allowed this to be possible, the conservative position of Mississippi amplified by the Trump Presidency. This occurred under the governorship of Phil Bryant, a politician with deep ties to the Republican Party and who openly supported the political decisions of the Trump administration and campaigned upon its promises (Harrison 2018). While the reasons that Mississippi is governed by conservatives may be linked to voter suppression, we also must acknowledge the context in which much of the nation views Mississippi. The occurrence of the ICE raids was not only reflective of the notion of the exploitation and criminalization of Latino workers in vulnerable areas as a result of harmful rhetoric and policies, but is also reflective of the minimization of the voices of oppressed communities, especially in places like Mississippi. Mississippi similarly reflects the economic exchanges witnessed on a global scale, as Latino populations participating in the global economic exchange dominated by the United States are targeted and exploited.

## **Conclusion**

Under the Trump administration, ICE raids increased while employer prosecutions decreased. The Mississippi ICE raids were met with a lack of prosecution for corporations employing undocumented immigrants. Within Mississippi, the administration overtly targeted workers over

employers. The notion of prosecuting and targeting undocumented workers in the raids exists as a reflection of the value exchange between Latin America and the United States. Latin America has been shaped and exploited by US forces, creating environments in which many Latino workers must look for jobs elsewhere, creating the supply to the United States' economic demand for cheap labor to uphold systems of increased profits for owners. If the supply of workers is large, it allows corporations to treat undocumented workers as expendable. With a federal government and an administration that explicitly refuses to hold corporations accountable, compounded by decades of neoliberalism, Trump does not exist as the issue himself but instead brings to light the systemic issues of valuing profits over people and viewing workers as resources to be used for economic resources as opposed to human beings. Coupled with the criminalizing and dehumanizing rhetoric of the Trump administration and the political background of Mississippi, a state that is rarely valued by the nation as a whole, this creates a storm for horrible atrocities to occur with the assumption of little pushback or accountability. Under the Biden administration, little has changed in terms of migration policy. A key facet of the Biden administration is its attempts to separate itself from the Trump presidency, maintaining that the administration is committed to reforming the modern immigration system of the United States. Nevertheless, the Biden administration continues to uphold Trump-era policies and has yet to make any substantial change to the immigration system, continuing to exploit migrant workers and limit immigration. From this stance, I maintain that under the neoliberal framework of the United States, Biden attempts to both be "tough on immigration" while also rhetorically

distancing himself from the Trump administration. Nevertheless, the policies in place still reflect the global system of exploitation of the “periphery” by the United States.

## **CHAPTER IV: MIGRATION POLICY AND RHETORIC IN ECUADOR**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore migration politics in Ecuador from 2017 to 2021, from the Lenín Moreno administration to the newly-elected administration of Guillermo Lasso. I focus on the changing federal migration policy and the rhetoric as Venezuelan refugees are targeted. I also seek to understand the local responses to those policies in Quito and Guayaquil. Unlike the United States, the Ecuadorian state has legally framed itself as a humanitarian state that seeks to promote the human right to mobility (Pugh 2017). I argue that both the Moreno and Lasso administrations have created a discourse of criminal securitization that is framed within human rights-centered language.

Initially following the approach of predecessor Rafael Correa, President Moreno embraced a pro-migrant ideology. Following the worsening of the Venezuelan migrant crisis, Moreno reframed humanitarianism as consistent with increased national securitization and migrant criminalization. Under the Lasso administration, we see a shift toward the efforts of securitization intertwined with free-market policies and neoliberal ideology. As anti-migrant rhetoric has escalated, migrants' rights organizations have created a culture of response-based organizing to overcome the barriers placed by the "humanitarian" policies of Moreno and Lasso.

### **Historical Background**

As discussed in the literature review, the political migratory context of Ecuador is historically centered around emigration. In the last five years, however, roughly 1.7 million Venezuelans

have entered Ecuador, and around 377,000 have settled in the country (UNHCR 2019). In 2019, there was a peak of roughly 2,000 Venezuelan migrants entering Ecuador per day (UNHCR 2019). These immigrants are legally entitled to a humanitarian embrace based on the human rights-centered, pro-migrant statutes woven into Ecuador's constitution. Title VIII of the 2008 Constitution "advocates the principle of universal citizenship, the free movement of all inhabitants of the planet, and the progressive extinction of the status of alien or foreigner as an element to transform the unequal relations between countries, especially those between North and South" (Constitution 2008). Since the end of the 20th century, the politics of migration in Ecuador have been centered around the embrace of migrant communities, urging and celebrating migration to Ecuador. However, the influx of Venezuelan refugees challenged the Moreno and Lasso administrations, leading to major shifts in migration politics and rhetoric.

### **Moreno Administration**

To understand the ideological shifts that occurred under Lenín Moreno, we must first understand the migration politics of his predecessor, Rafael Correa. Correa was president from 2007 to 2017 and was perceived as a champion for the rights of migrants. He pushed for open borders and an open visa policy, which he later retracted due to pushbacks within his party, specifically regarding security concerns and the perception of increased crime linked to immigration, resulting in the selective reintroduction of visa policies for South-South migration (predominantly African, Asian, and South American migrants) (Freier 2013). Under the Correa administration, the principle of universal citizenship was adopted into the 2008 Constitution. Nevertheless, "only six months later, visas were reintroduced for Chinese citizens. Two years

after their initial annulment, visa requirements were reinstated for citizens of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia” (Freier 2013, 1). Lenín Moreno served as vice president under Correa from 2007 to 2013. Rather than embracing the humanitarian and pro-migrant framework of his predecessor, Moreno began to adopt the language of criminal securitization but couched it within humanitarian rhetoric that responded to Venezuelan refugee populations.

Moreno’s policy stance shifted rightward in comparison to Correa. Moreno entered office representing the Correa-dominated leftist party, the PAIS Alliance. Moreno’s policies began to evolve regarding migration, as the increase of Venezuelan migrants concerned citizens across the party spectrum (Malo 2021). The Moreno administration backed the Ley Orgánica de Movilidad Humana. The Ley orgánica de movilidad humana<sup>1</sup> was framed as positive for vulnerable migrants, but created easier deportation procedures to target Venezuelan migrants (Malo 2021). On July 29th, 2019, the Presidential Assembly of Ecuador published Memorandum PAN-CLC-2019 to discuss the “Ley orgánica reformatoria a la ley orgánica de movilidad humana,”<sup>2</sup> a project reforming the Ley orgánica de movilidad (Memorándum PAN-CLC-2019). In this memorandum, the Moreno administration discusses its specific motivations, knowledge, and approval of the project, using words like “migración riesgosa”, “reciprocidad internacional”, “flujos masivos provocados por crisis”, “ser considerado una amenaza o riesgo para la seguridad

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<sup>1</sup> Organic Law of Human Mobility

<sup>2</sup> Organic Reformatory Law to the Organic Law of Human Mobility

interna”<sup>3</sup> (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Santi Pereyra 202, 75). From this standpoint, we see the Moreno administration's increase in the use of securitizing language.

These policy decisions explicitly undermined Ecuador’s human-rights migration policies to respond to the challenges of Venezuelan refugees. The Moreno administration’s approach coincided with the hardline anti-migrant and border securitization policies coming from the United States. The migration politics of the hemispheric core provided cover for Moreno to implement stricter migration policies in Ecuador. The Moreno administration took advice and technology from the United States regarding immigration (United States Embassy and Consulate in Ecuador 2019). This alignment marked a shift toward more explicit forms of securitization, regularization, and criminalization of migrant communities. The press release from the United States Consulate in Ecuador states, “The United States government will work with the government of Ecuador in the coming months to acquire and install the hardware and software for the PISCES system, which will be owned and operated by the government of Ecuador. The United States will train Ecuadorian personnel to operate and maintain the system”<sup>4</sup> (United States Embassy and Consulate in Ecuador 2019). The embrace of United States-backed technology for immigration control exemplifies a deepening alignment with the United States, contrasting past Ecuadorian migration politics and pushing toward United States’ migration

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<sup>3</sup> “risky migration”, “international reciprocity”, “massive flows caused by crises”, “being considered a threat or risk to internal security”

<sup>4</sup> El gobierno de los Estados Unidos trabajará con el gobierno de Ecuador en los próximos meses para adquirir e instalar el hardware y el software para el sistema PISCES, que será propiedad y operado por el gobierno de Ecuador. Estados Unidos capacitará al personal ecuatoriano para manejar y mantener el sistema.

politics, both in the enactment and implementation of policy, but also the rhetorical aspects of United States' politics of migration.

Moreno employed a migrant criminalization discourse to address social issues concerning Venezuelan migrants, such as the Todos Somos Diana<sup>5</sup> campaign. This was a campaign against femicide, specifically referring to a case in which a woman was murdered by her boyfriend, a Venezuelan migrant. In President Moreno's statements on the campaign via Twitter, he expresses concern for the wellbeing of women in Ecuador, "a country of peace."<sup>6</sup> He added: "We have opened our doors, but we will not sacrifice anyone's security"<sup>7</sup> (Moreno 2019). Moreno references the need for security and noted his contacts with officials and police regarding the integrity of the border. Moreno has associated issues of safety and security with Venezuelan migrants – a position that provides an opening for passing stricter migration policies.

Moreno's "Informe a la nación"<sup>8</sup> also demonstrates concern about the Venezuelan migrant crisis, stating that the goal is to find a solution to "a source of instability for several countries in the region"<sup>9</sup> (Informe a la Nación 2019). Nevertheless, he affirms that Ecuador is a "country of migrants"<sup>10</sup> and a "generous people,"<sup>11</sup> but acknowledges that they cannot disregard

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<sup>5</sup> We are all Diana

<sup>6</sup> Un país de paz

<sup>7</sup> Les hemos abierto las puertas, pero no sacrificaremos la seguridad de nadie.

<sup>8</sup> Report to the nation

<sup>9</sup> una fuente de inestabilidad para varios países de la región

<sup>10</sup> un país de migrantes

<sup>11</sup> un pueblo generoso

the crisis: “the regime denies us information, and we cannot verify the background of Venezuelan citizens, who enter our territory. As a result of a precautionary measure, suspending the requirement of the judicial past for Venezuelan citizens, we went from 500 to 2,500 daily admissions and those who traveled to Peru, today remain, because our neighbor to the south, now requires the Visa”<sup>12</sup> (Informe a la nación 2019). He discussed his plans to update the Ley orgánica de movilidad humana and establish a humanitarian visa, resulting in the Visa de Excepción por Razones Humanitaria (VERHU).<sup>13</sup>

The VERHU was one of the most significant acts of the Moreno administration that was directly related to its interactions with Venezuelan migrants. Decreto 826 established the VERHU in July 2019, a humanitarian visa explicitly for Venezuelan migrants. According to Decreto 826, the main purpose of this visa was to regularize migrants and to “grant an immigration amnesty for all Venezuelan citizens who have not violated the laws of Ecuador and who: 1) Have entered the territory of Ecuador regularly through the immigration control points until the effective date of this Executive Decree. 2) Having entered Ecuador regularly through the immigration control points, they are in irregular migratory status because they have exceeded

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<sup>12</sup> el régimen nos niega información, y no podemos verificar los antecedentes de los ciudadanos venezolanos, que ingresan a nuestro territorio. A raíz de que una medida cautelar, suspendió el requisito del pasado judicial para los ciudadanos venezolanos, pasamos de 500, a 2.500 ingresos diarios y quienes transitaban hacia Perú, hoy se quedan, porque nuestro vecino del sur, ahora les exige visa.

<sup>13</sup> Exception Visa for Humanitarian Reasons

the time of permanence granted on the date of entry into force of this Executive Decree”<sup>14</sup> (El Comercio 2019). The VERHU visa allows a path for temporary regularization of migrant status, specifically from the standing that the visa is free, application costs are low, passports can be five years expired, forgiveness is provided for previous fines, and allowance is made for migrants to work legally (Cook 2021). This allows migrants to achieve regularized status for two years. Nevertheless, the VERHU provides new barriers for Venezuelan migrants as it requires interviews to occur in Caracas, Bogotá, or Lima, as well as increased background checks. Moreover, migrants must have never broken any Ecuadorian law, no matter how minor (Cook 2021). While the VERHU provides some relief through regulatory status and the ability to work, it makes it far more difficult for Venezuelans to enter the country, allowing the Moreno administration to frame its decrease in migratory access under the guise of humanitarian efforts. The Minister of the Department of Human Mobility conducted an interview to discuss the VERHU visa for Venezuelans in which he continuously draws attention to the number of Venezuelan migrants living in Ecuador and the need for regularization of their migratory statuses, specifically discussing the actions needed by the United Nations to continue these proceedings (Espinosa 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> Otorgar una amnistía migratoria para todas las ciudadanas y ciudadanos venezolanos que no hayan violado las leyes del Ecuador y que: 1) Hayan ingresado regularmente a través de los puntos de control migratorio al territorio del Ecuador hasta la fecha de entrada en vigencia del presente Decreto Ejecutivo. 2) Habiendo ingresado regularmente al Ecuador a través de los puntos de control migratorio, se encuentren en condición migratoria irregular por haber excedido el tiempo de permanencia otorgado a la fecha de entrada en vigencia del presente Decreto Ejecutivo

## **Lasso Administration**

Guillermo Lasso entered office amid the global pandemic and an economic downturn in Ecuador. In his early days in office, Lasso demonstrated a similar commitment to neoliberal free-market policies as the Moreno administration. Before assuming office, Lasso touted his push toward free-market policies and his goal of lowering the deficit stating, “We are not going to raise taxes, we will not raise VAT [...] We must be ambitious and achieve a zero deficit in four years of government. We will not depend on debt” (NBC 2021). He also emphasized the importance of boosting crude oil production, proposing risk-sharing contracts with private companies (NBC 2021). Though the Venezuelan migrant crisis continues to affect migratory politics in Ecuador, Ecuador is facing an emigration crisis that has affected its political standing with Mexico and other countries in Latin America. As of July 2021, “as reported by the Vice Minister of Human Mobility, Carlos Velástegui, seven out of ten Ecuadorians who enter Mexico are detained when trying to pass irregularly to the US and between January and July 2021, according to local media citing government sources, 88,696 Ecuadorians have traveled to Mexico, of which 34,771 returned” (MRT 2021).

President Lasso’s public statements on migration have been limited since assuming office on May 24, 2021. During his address to the United Nations, Lasso emphasized the importance of trade integration as a creator of economic opportunity, specifically regarding migrants. During this speech, he acknowledged the “tragedy of forced migration,” and applauded the welcoming nature of Ecuador to embrace Venezuelan migrants, calling their response “brotherly”—this is similar to Moreno's past statements and reflects the humanitarian framework within which

criminal securitization discourses have operated. Lasso has also championed the regularization of migrants in their ability to access social security and labor benefits. He later implied that migrants are looking for trade integration that “their authorities” do not provide for them, looking for “global job markets,” indicating his anti-protectionist stance in relation to global trade, tying it to the issue of migration. He stated, “it’s better for us to be connected by free trade than forced migration” (United Nations 2021). When approached with questions regarding migration policy in an interview, Lasso stated: “Migration policies have two tracks: defend Ecuadorians in countries like the United States, Europe, Spain, Italy, but at the same time also act humanely with Venezuelans who have arrived in Ecuador”<sup>15</sup> (Infobae 2021). From this stance, Lasso is framing migration as an issue with two sides, stating, “We cannot be so incoherent in asking for good treatment for Ecuadorians living abroad and mistreating foreigners living in Ecuador. We have to be coherent and consistent, this is a two-way street and in the case of Venezuelans we will work closely with the United Nations”<sup>16</sup> (Infobae 2021). Lasso also took the opportunity to criticize Venezuela: “Venezuela does not live in a democracy today, it is a reality that 50 countries are unaware of the Maduro government and recognize Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela. But beyond declarations we must arrive at a real practice, that whoever governs Venezuela really has power and there is a pending issue<sup>17</sup>” (Infobae 2021).

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<sup>15</sup> Las políticas migratorias tienen doble vía: defender a los ecuatorianos en países como EE.UU., en Europa, España, Italia, pero a la vez también actuar humanitariamente con los venezolanos que han llegado a Ecuador.

<sup>16</sup>No podemos ser tan incoherentes de pedir un buen trato para los ecuatorianos que viven en el exterior y maltratar a los extranjeros que viven en Ecuador. Tenemos que ser coherentes y consecuentes, esto es doble vía y en el caso de venezolanos trabajaremos de cerca con las Naciones Unidas.

<sup>17</sup>Venezuela no vive en una democracia hoy, es una realidad que 50 países desconocen al Gobierno de Maduro y reconocen a Juan Guaidó como legítimo presidente de Venezuela. Pero más allá de declaraciones debemos llegar a una práctica real, de que quien gobierne Venezuela tenga realmente el poder y ahí hay un tema pendiente

Lasso's migration policy has remained largely hidden so far. The administration has embraced the human rights language of humanitarian migration policy within the constitution, as well as the merits of free trade and globalization to help impoverished people. However, his rhetoric on the campaign trail suggests animus against migrants. More scrutiny is needed to determine where Lasso's policy approach will settle.

### **Local Impacts**

The migration policies of the Moreno and Lasso administrations have had impacts on Venezuelan refugee populations, municipalities where they reside, and immigrant rights groups. In this section, I examine some of the impacts of migration policy on the lives of Venezuelan migrants. *La Hora*, a news source based out of Quito, documented the lives and struggles of Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador.

Two major factors for migrant communities are the ability to work and legal status. According to the World Bank, "Less than 15% of the population in conditions of mobility from Venezuela have a regular immigration status that allows them to work in the formal sector yet 65% of Ecuadorian Venezuelans of working age have some form of employment compared to less than half of their Ecuadorian counterparts at 42%. Venezuelans work 5 hours more per week than Ecuadorians on average but their monetary salary is 42% lower" (World Bank 2020). According to a World Bank Study, "the majority of the Venezuelans interviewed had completed secondary school and many have some higher education, especially the women" (World Bank 2020). The study also highlighted that "four in ten Venezuelans in Ecuador were victims of discrimination – mainly due to their nationality – during the report data collection and

preparation period” (World Bank 2021). In addition, “over 50 percent of school-aged migrants and refugees do not attend school, mainly because of the costs involved, such as for materials or transportation, and because of the lack of identification documents” (World Bank 2021).

Nevertheless, the resident representative for the World Bank in Ecuador stated that “the World Bank recognizes the efforts of the Government of Ecuador to address the economic challenges and at the same time the difficulties involved in the sustained flow of a large number of immigrants” (World Bank 2021).

The national securitization discourse has shaped local public sentiments. The struggling economy is oftentimes attributed at least in part to Venezuelan migrants. According to a World Bank report, the “majority of Ecuadorians consider the Venezuelan population to have a negative impact on the economy, [and] they overload state services and increase crime” (World Bank 2020). While public sentiment believes that Venezuelan migrants are the source of economic struggles, local anecdotes reflect that Venezuelan migrants are receiving limited economic opportunities or no legal benefits from work. A woman in Esmeraldas stated, “The truth is that a lot of work happens here. I have asked for help from different organizations but I only have the food card that would last me six months and today I am here asking for [shelter]. Now I am with other Venezuelans in a roofless hut sleeping on the floor, without money and with my sick children”<sup>18</sup> (La Hora 2021). This statement reflects the theme of the lack of regularization of migrants’ statuses and its impacts on the ability to work legally as a Venezuelan migrant in

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<sup>18</sup> La verdad es que acá se pasa mucho trabajo, he pedido ayuda a las diferentes organizaciones pero solo tengo la tarjeta alimentaria que me duraría seis meses y hoy me encuentro aquí pidiendo ayuda para estar bajo un techo. Ahora estoy junto a otros venezolanos en una choza sin techo durmiendo en el piso, sin dinero y con mis hijos enfermos

Ecuador. Other instances of the lack of work for Venezuelan migrants are conveyed by similar anecdotes in *La Hora*. Julieta, a 26-year old Venezuelan migrant living and working in Ambato, stated “Anything is better than doing nothing”<sup>19</sup> (La Hora 2021). According to the report, approximately 70% of migrants in Ambato work informally in the streets.

In Guayaquil, “after a meeting with security authorities, Mayor Cynthia Viteri confirmed that a census of Venezuelans living in the city will be carried out”<sup>20</sup> (Redacción Primicias 2020). She stated, “We ratify our collaboration with the Police to carry out a census and thus learn about the reality of foreigners in Guayaquil,”<sup>21</sup> after a meeting at the Corporation for Citizen Security<sup>22</sup> (Redacción Primicias 2020). The use of language such as “foreigners” against the backdrop of discussions regarding a new census and increased policing demonstrates the divisions and criminalization of migrants that are recreated on the local level, tying migrant lives to a sense of danger and disorder. We can see that the securitization discourse influences and is influenced by both public sentiment and local politics.

Migrants’ rights groups have responded to the influx of Venezuelan refugees amidst changing political conditions in Ecuador. Some organizations have tried to help migrants to understand the policies and regulations of the Moreno and Lasso administrations. Organizations

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<sup>19</sup> Cualquier cosa es mejor que no hacer nada

<sup>20</sup> Luego de una reunión con autoridades de seguridad, la alcaldesa Cynthia Viteri confirmó que se efectuará un censo a venezolanos radicados en la ciudad

<sup>21</sup> Ratificamos nuestra colaboración con la Policía para realizar un censo y así conocer la realidad de los extranjeros en Guayaquil

<sup>22</sup> Corporación para la Seguridad Ciudadana

like Migrante Universal have focused on the legalization and regularization of migrants, providing information on their websites to differentiate the types of visas, their requirements, and how to access legal help (Migrante Universal 2021). They specifically provide information on how to navigate Decreto 826 and the VERHU visa. The group Chamos Venezolanos primarily focuses on issues concerning the family, education, and providing necessities for Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador. In addition to formal organizations, there are also social media sites that attempt to provide information to migrants to allow them to communicate and connect. On Facebook there are groups called: “Venezolanos en todo el Ecuador” and “Inmigrantes venezolanos en Ecuador.” These sites provide discussions about visa regularization, entry into the country, and recommendations for places to find jobs. Migrants post on these platforms to help one another find resources or provide relevant information.

## **Conclusion**

Ecuador experienced mass emigration in the late 20th century. As a sending country, Ecuador embraced humanitarian mobility ideals in the 2008 Constitution. The influx of Venezuelan refugees has challenged the universal citizenship platform inscribed into the constitution. The chapter has argued that the Moreno and Lasso administrations have embraced a criminal securitization discourse pertaining to Venezuelan refugees, but one that is couched in humanitarian mobility language. Though its structural position as a periphery and historical experience with mass emigration would indicate a likelihood of having pro-immigration policies, Between 2017 and 2021 Ecuador experienced massive inflows of refugees. To reduce inflows and discipline migrant populations, the administrations have taken more punitive measures.

However, the Moreno and Lasso administrations have sought to reconcile more punitive policies with the embrace of neoliberalism and its legal commitment to humanitarian ideals.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the hemispheric politics of migration from the basis of the United States and Ecuador. While it may seem unusual to compare the local impacts of federal policy in Ecuador to that of Mississippi and the United States, the two primary cases that I focus on shed light on very different discourses and policies of migration in the Western hemisphere. In chapter III, I examined the rhetorical tactics of the Trump administration as tools to legitimize his politics, constructing the basis for the Mississippi ICE raids. Conversely, the Biden administration attempts to discursively distance himself from the Trump administration while quietly defending his policies. In chapter IV, I analyze the cases of Moreno and Lasso, specifically focusing on the shifts in language and policy in response to the increase in Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador.

Based on my analysis, I have argued that Trumpian rhetoric and policies embodied the extreme exploitation and criminalization discourse regarding migration, resulting in cases such as Mississippi in which Latin American migrants are targeted, working low wage jobs in rural, vulnerable communities. This case exemplifies how neoliberalism serves to promote the interests of corporations, exploiting immigrants arriving from peripheries in the Global South. In the Ecuadorian case, I have argued that under the Moreno and Lasso administrations we have seen a deepening of the ties between free-market capitalism and the exploitation of migrant communities under the guise of humanitarianism. While the humanitarian framework of Correa still practiced ethnic limitations on visa policies, both Moreno and Lasso continued and strengthened these limitations in the wake of the Venezuelan migrant crisis. Nevertheless, as

exhibited by policies under Moreno and Lasso, like the VERHU visa, the emphasis on securitization and criminalization of Venezuelan migrant communities exists under the guise of humanitarianism. Under Lasso, we see not an entire abandonment of humanitarianism, similarly to the Biden administration, but an increase in neo-liberalization with the centralization of deepening ties with the United States and emphasizing United States interests. In both cases, I argue that on the local level criminalization results in a hazy and difficult situation for migrants on the ground, allowing them to be paid unfair wages and subjected to increased fear within their communities. While the two cases depict different versions of migratory politics, we see that in each case the closer ties to neoliberalism and the emphasis on corporate and United States interests parallels an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment and criminalization discourse that is backed by an emphasis on legality and lawfulness.

This work describes a larger pattern of the hemispheric politics of migration. In both cases, with neo-liberalization comes increased criminalization of migrants. While the Trump administration presents explicit criminalization and white supremacist ideologies, his main focus was the protection of corporate interests at the expense of Latino communities while simultaneously presenting an intensive border policy based on exclusion, criminalization, and xenophobia. While the Biden administration has attempted to distance itself from the xenophobic rhetoric of the Trump administration, it continues to maintain Trump-era policies while rhetorically pushing for a more humane, “reformed” immigration system.

The case of Ecuador expands upon the usage of humanitarian language to mask limiting and harmful policy for immigrants. The Moreno administration formed as an extension of the

Correa administration, but as Ecuador received an influx of migrants, Moreno began to adopt more securitizing policies and use more criminalizing language toward specifically Venezuelan migrants, coinciding with increased neoliberal policies. Lasso presents an even stronger shift toward neoliberalism, attempting to align Ecuador with the policies of the United States while simultaneously embracing an anti-immigrant sentiment and specifically trying to distance Ecuador from Venezuela and its people. The two cases present the embrace of corporatism and neoliberal policies that coincide with shifts toward the criminalization of migrant communities, rooted in the hemispheric politics of migration. With the United States being the driving economic power, the embrace of neoliberal policies results in further exploitation of migrants from the periphery region.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship regarding comparative immigration policy, while highlighting some of the social impacts of these policies. Additionally, my comparison of the United States and Ecuador centers on global inequality from the perspective of the core-periphery relationship between the United States and Latin America, resulting in the United States' economic control over the hemisphere and the exploitation of Latino migrant workers within and outside of the United States. I hope this thesis sheds light on a small piece of the larger narrative of injustices committed against migrant communities in the name of corporate power.

In terms of future research, it is crucial to continue the focus on the impacts of the Venezuelan migrant crisis in Ecuador and continue following the decisions of both the Moreno and Lasso administrations. I hope to continue following the Biden administration's policies in

conjunction with his rhetoric and am specifically interested in whether the notion of “restructuring” the United States’ immigration system will ever come to fruition. In the future, I hope to expand this research to cover more in-depth the impacts of the Mississippi ICE raids on a personal level and better understand the specific impacts of community members there, situated in the global context of the economic exchange between the United States and Latin America.

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