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# How Immigration Policy Affects Migratory Flows and Immigrant Experiences: A Comparative Analysis of Policy Impacts on Northern Triangle and Venezuelan Immigrants in the United States

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HOW IMMIGRATION POLICY AFFECTS MIGRATORY FLOWS AND IMMIGRANT  
EXPERIENCES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLICY IMPACTS ON NORTHERN  
TRIANGLE AND VENEZUELAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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by

Audrey McDonough

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, MS  
December 2021

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the past two decades, the US has experienced a large influx of immigrants from Venezuela and the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Due to these unprecedented increases, there has been numerous notable shifts in Immigration control policy between the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Generally, policies under Obama were favorable and reflected pro-immigrant rhetoric. Meanwhile, Trump took a drastic turn toward restrictionist, unfavorable policies. This study aims to examine the impact of immigration policy on migratory flows and the immigrant experience in the US. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I examine data that demonstrates the migratory inflows and outflows of these groups as well as oral history interviews and newspaper discourse to determine the effects of immigration policy on migratory flows and the socioeconomic integration of these immigrant groups in the US. The results indicate that favorable policies generally coincided with increases in migratory flows while unfavorable policies coincided with decreases. With regard to the immigrant experience, favorable policies positively impacted the socioeconomic integration process and unfavorable policies negatively impacted the process. This study may provide valuable insight for decision makers of immigration control policy and allow for a deeper understanding of the effects of immigration policies.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE AND VENEZUELAN MIGRATION CRISIS**

The United States has experienced a massive inflow of refugees and migrants from the Northern Triangle – Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador – and Venezuela in the last decade. Between 2010 and 2019, the Guatemalan population rose 61% from 1,044,209 to 1,683,093, the Honduran population rose 71% from 633,401 to 1,083,547, the Salvadoran population rose 40% from 1,648,968 to 2,311,547, and the Venezuelan population rose 155% from 215,023 to 549,256 (US Census Bureau 2010; American Community Survey 2019). These significant increases sparked political debate on immigration control policies and resulted in a rise in anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric in the US.

### **Push and Pull Factors Driving Migration to the US**

There are various push and pull factors responsible for the influx of immigrants toward the United States. Push factors, the factors that encourage migratory outflows, often include limited economic opportunities, war, violence, political corruption and natural disasters. Pull factors that encourage inflows of migrants from the Northern Triangle and Venezuela include greater economic opportunities, favorable policies, and social networks, are common to Northern Triangle and Venezuelan immigrants in the United States (Rosenblum and Brick 2011).

### **Push Factors**

The Northern Triangle and Venezuela are experiencing extreme poverty and economic collapse, resulting in low wages, unemployment, food insecurity, and inaccessibility to basic goods. (Restrepo, Sutton, and Martinez 2019; Restrepo 2018). The widespread poverty has forced many citizens to flee. The citizens also face high crime rates due to gang violence, narcotrafficking, and impunity, leaving many with no option but to seek asylum. As of 2018, Latin America has accounted for nearly 40 percent of the global homicides, with Venezuela, Honduras, and El Salvador fluctuating at the top of the world's highest murder rates and Guatemala following closely behind (Restrepo, Sutton, and Martinez 2019). Political corruption exacerbates economic inequality and violence, weakening democratic institutions and causing the populace to lose faith in the capabilities of elected officials to improve the political, economic, and security situations in the countries. Climate change also largely impacts economic security in the Northern Triangle. For a region heavily reliant on agricultural land for sustaining economic growth, climate change related issues such as rising sea levels, hurricanes, draughts, and crop disease are resulting in an inability for those in the agricultural community to reap profit or grow enough food to sustain the population (Hallet 2019). These factors are driving migrants to the US in search of stability and economic opportunity.

### **Pull Factors**

Economic opportunity is one of the greatest pull factors involved in the decision to migrate to the United States. Migrants view the United States as an opportunity for greater economic success as there are often higher wages and more employment opportunities. Social networks, which connect migrants to jobs and communities in the host country, are also a significant pull factor as they provide economic and social assistance that allow for easier

integration into the new communities (Rosenblum and Brick 2011). Lastly, favorable policies that provide protections to immigrants, opportunity to obtain legal status and residency, and defer deportation encourage immigrants to come to the US.

### **Research Question**

With the population of Northern Triangle and Venezuelan immigrants continuing to rise, and with many questions on how to handle this growth remaining unanswered, it is crucial to understand the implications of national immigration control policy on the migratory flows and experiences of immigrants. This project aims to examine differences in how shifts in US immigration policy between the Obama and Trump Administrations have impacted migratory flows and immigrant experiences. I also examine if historical and contemporary US relations impact national policy decisions and migratory flows. For example, does regime type and political ideological leanings – specifically with regard to left vs. right wing governments – impact the leniency of immigration policy? Are immigrants from Latin American countries that threaten US political or economic interests favored over immigrants from other countries in the region? With regard to the immigrant experience, I seek to examine how policy shifts between the Obama and Trump Administrations have impacted the socioeconomic integration and documentation process of the immigrants.

### **Hypotheses**

I hypothesize that immigrants from left-wing regimes that pose a threat to the democratic and economic stability of the hemisphere, Venezuela in this study, encounter more favorable immigration policies than those from the right-wing regimes of the Northern Triangle. I



hypothesize that favorable policies increase the migratory flows while unfavorable, restrictionist policies dissuade migration.

I also hypothesize that the Venezuelan immigrant experience is positively affected by the presence of favorable policies, while those same experiences for Northern Triangle immigrants are either unaffected or negatively affected due to the lack of such favorable policies. In general, I hypothesize that the demographic makeup of Venezuelan immigrants being mostly middle to upper class, skilled professionals will yield more positive experiences, while the mostly non-white, indigenous, unskilled, and lower-class immigrants from the Northern Triangle will encounter more hardships in the integration and documentation process.

## **Methodology**

I employ a mixed methods approach in my comparative analysis on the impacts of US immigration policy on migratory flows and immigrant experience. My quantitative analysis examines how shifts in US immigration policy between the Obama and Trump administrations have impacted the migratory flows, using data from the Department of Homeland Security's Yearbook of Immigration Statistics to analyze the differences between the admittance of legal refugees as affirmative asylum cases and the deportation of undocumented immigrants between 2009 and 2018. The quantitative data on migratory flows is analyzed in conjunction with shifts in policy. I examine the coded favorable and unfavorable policies and determine whether these policies increased or decreased migratory flows by looking at percentage increases and decreases in admissions following policy shifts.

My qualitative analysis compares the experiences of the immigrants from the two cases by focusing on socioeconomic integration and the documentation process. I will code the oral

history interviews and the media discourse data using the following variables: educational opportunity, economic mobility, language proficiency, social integration, discrimination, and documentation. I examine the qualitative findings in comparison to the Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends quantitative data that covers educational attainment, income, language proficiency, and documentation to determine whether the data from the oral history interviews and media is consistent with the nationwide trends.

## **CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **History of US Immigration Policy**

Immigration policy involves restrictions against illegal immigration and the admission and selection of lawful immigrants, temporary workers and refugees. From US independence in 1776, immigration was relatively unrestricted. The Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed all white men to gain citizenship in the newly independent nation (J. Jagers, Gabbard, and S. Jagers 2014). However, the admittance of only white men arguably introduced racist and xenophobic undertones to the US immigration policy system that have continued throughout history and modern times (Reimers 2012).

By 1882, the policies shifted toward strict regulation due to the large migratory inflows from Europe and China. Prejudicial immigration policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Naturalization Act of 1906, which prohibited entry based on ethnicity and language, were developed. The adoption of the Immigration Act of 1917, continued to prolong the prejudicial policies and prevented immigrants from arriving based on ethnicity and literacy. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 continued this prejudicial system as it placed limits on how many immigrants could arrive based on nationality (J. Jagers, Gabbard, and S. Jagers 2014).

However, with the onset of World War II and the subsequent labor shortage, US immigration policy shifted to favor immigration. The Bracero Program brought in Mexican labor to solve these shortages. With the need for global allies, Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952 which eliminated racial prejudices and created three categories of immigrants that could legally enter the United States — skilled or related to a US citizen, unskilled, and the

refugee (J. Jagers, Gabbard, and S. Jagers 2014). However, the Great Depression increased hostility toward immigrants and many were deported (Reimers 2012). The economic collapse during this time led to communities drawing back their economic and political support of immigrants, who were seen as an economic burden to the nation, a view still prominent today.

The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the quota system and led to a shift in the demographic makeup of immigrants arriving in the US. Those arriving from Latin America and the Caribbean swiftly became a large portion of the immigrant population (J. Jagers, Gabbard, and S. Jagers 2014). The adoption of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mandate in the 1980 Refugee Act provided provisions to allow those subject to persecution, war, and violence to be reviewed to permit entrance into the US.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States saw a rise in restrictionist attitudes, especially toward Muslim and Latino immigrants who have been portrayed as a threat to national security and individual safety (Rosenblum 2011). The demonization of Latino immigrants by politicians served to garner support from working-class citizens whose economic security was threatened. The arrival of Latino immigrants has also resulted in fear stemming from cultural differences, and their inability to assimilate into US society.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Immigration Policy Decision Making**

In order to understand how shifts in immigration policy have impacted migratory flows, it is crucial to understand the theoretical approaches to immigration policy development. The political science and international relations approaches which best guide my hypotheses on the policy decision making process include realism and the security and stability framework.

Realism is a prominent approach which views international relations as a constant struggle for power among states (Meyers 2000). The realist approach accounts for the impacts of foreign policy relations on the development of immigration policy, as well as how certain policies may affect diplomatic relations and supports the importance of state relations and regime type in the development of immigration policy. Policy shifts aligned with the realist camp are seen with the US admitting and favoring refugees from communist or socialist regimes during the Cold War.

Weiner (1995) advocates for a security and stability framework. This approach focuses on how political changes between states are responsible for migratory flows. Weiner claims that migration is either a method of promoting international peace or a threat to nations. Refugees can be tools of foreign policy, used to express opposition to their home country. Granting refugee status to a group from a certain country typically creates an adversarial relationship by implying criticism of the government (Weiner 1995). States often favor admitting refugees from nations they have bad relationships with. Cuban refugees, for example, were embraced and awarded numerous opportunities to settle in the US due to the foreign policy implications of accepting migrants from a communist state during the Cold War. I expect policies toward Venezuelan immigrants to be in line with the cold war era Cuba policies due to the similarities in political ideology.

### **Northern Triangle**

The Northern Triangle countries have long experienced political and economic instability, with the United States historically intervening to quell left-wing political uprisings and supporting military coups that installed right-wing military governments, even if it came at

the expense of rural, indigenous populations and the economic prosperity of the populace. Guatemala experienced a long civil war involving a US backed coup against Jacobo Árbenz and the installation of a military dictatorship which resulted in the death of over 200,000 Guatemalans between 1960 and 1996 (Chasteen 2016). Since the 1954 coup, the country remained under military rule. During this time, the armed forces carried out a dirty war against rural guerrilla activists, with many of the victims being rural peasants specifically from the Maya population. Honduras experienced an extensive US military presence since the 1890s that aimed to protect US political and economic interests. The US backed 2009 coup against Manuel Zelaya resulted in further militarization in the country and increased organized crime, resulting in Honduras being one of the most violent countries in the world (Borger 2018). El Salvador was also plagued by a 12-year US backed civil war in the 1980s. The US government funded death squads to defeat the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). This war resulted in the deaths of more than 75,000 Salvadorans (Allison 2012). Many members involved with the conflict were granted amnesty, which further exacerbated impunity rates of crime throughout the Salvadoran society. The effects of US intervention remain to be seen today, as poverty and violence rooted from militarization drive many Northern Triangle citizens to migrate.

Since the mass influx of migration from the Northern Triangle, the United States has focused its foreign policy on deterring migration. The US government developed the Alliance for Prosperity Plan under the Obama administration. This plan allocated \$750 million dollars to the region in an attempt to combat issues such as violence, poverty, and widespread impunity that are significant push factors driving migration to the US. The plan has four main objectives: stimulate the economy, create growth opportunities, enhance public safety and the legal system,

and strengthen institutions within the state (Garcia 2016). However, under President Trump, relations became tense. In 2019, the Trump administration attempted to cut aid to the region due to the thousands of asylum seekers arriving in the US. Later in the year, the aid was restored to the three countries with the signing of the Asylum Cooperation Agreements (Trotta 2019). This agreement slows the influx of migrants from the region by facilitating cooperation among the four countries in order to expand their abilities to offer asylum, allowing the US to send asylum seekers back to their countries of origin (DHS 2020).

### **Venezuela**

Unlike the Northern Triangle countries, Venezuela experienced more economic and political prosperity during the Cold War era and was deemed one of the most prosperous countries in Latin America. When Hugo Chávez became president in 1999 under a socialist platform, many of the democratic institutions in the country eroded and his economic decisions resulted in a massive economic decline. After his death in 2013, his successor Nicolás Maduro was elected under the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Under Maduro, the economy and general security in the country rapidly deteriorated and coincided with a rise in human rights abuses (Seelke 2020).

US relations with Venezuela began to decline when Chávez took power, and worsened under Maduro. In January 2019, the National Assembly elected Juan Guaidó, a popular opposition leader as president. The US officially recognized Guaidó as interim president, but the military continued to remain loyal to Maduro, who managed to stay in power. Throughout the turbulent regimes of Chávez and Maduro and as the threat of socialist influence in the region grew, the US has remained committed to restoring democracy in the country by providing

humanitarian aid and imposing sanctions to restrict Venezuelan access to US financial markets and the state oil company (Seelke 2020).

### **US Immigration Policy Today**

President Obama has a mixed legacy on immigration. While harshly enforcing existing enforcement policies and deporting the most illegal immigrants of any previous administration, about 3 million, he also granted deportation protections to hundreds of thousands of people (Nowrasteh 2017). Due to the public's fear from the 9/11 terrorist attacks and economic recession in 2008, Obama had to adopt hardline enforcement policies. In 2014, President Obama issued a number of executive orders aimed toward reforming the US immigration system, much of this due to the 2014 immigration crisis from the Northern Triangle. Despite the rise in enforcement, President Obama adopted favorable policies which provided protections from deportation to hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

Since the advent of his campaign for the US presidency, Donald Trump made immigration from Latin America a top policy priority, promising to develop stricter policies and to curb the supposed economic and cultural security threat Americans face with the arrival of Latino immigrants. During his initial days in office, enforcement became a top priority at both the border and the interior. The Trump administration focused its immigration reform policies on building a wall on the Southern border, decreasing the quantity of immigrants who could enter the country legally, and deporting countless unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States. It also expanded those who could qualify to be deported, reduced refugee admissions, and made the asylum process more difficult (Peirce, Bolter, and Seele 2018). Unlike President Obama, who focused interior enforcement on criminals, the Trump administration broadened the



criteria for those who could be deported to include non-criminals. Although President Obama deported more undocumented immigrants, President Trump created more anti-immigrant policies through executive orders, especially for those who were seeking asylum at the Southern border.

Overall, the imposition of strict enforcement policies and the overwhelming anti-immigrant rhetoric, especially toward those arriving from the Northern Triangle may have dissuaded migratory flows and hindered the experiences of the immigrants residing in the US. The impacts of Obama and Trump era policies on migratory flows and experiences are tested and discussed in the following chapters.

## **CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF MIGRATORY FLOWS**

This chapter compares the impacts of US immigration policy on migratory flows, with the unit of analyses being refugee and asylum admissions and the deportation of immigrants. The analysis will range from 2009-2018 for individuals granted affirmative asylum as well as those deported to capture the effects of the policy shifts between the Obama and Trump administrations.

### **Studying Fluctuations in Migratory Flows**

To conduct my analysis, I used data from the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) which provides the quantity of asylum seekers granted affirmative asylum and the number of aliens removed in conjunction with policy shifts between the two administrations. To examine whether foreign policy implications have an impact on the development of favorable or unfavorable policies, I coded each policy shift as favorable or unfavorable based on whether they allow for protections to relocate to the US or whether they imply a strict-enforcement of the groups. I examined the percentage increase and percentage decrease of refugee and asylum admissions into the US and of deportations in the years following shifts in policy to determine whether favorable and unfavorable policies impact flows.

### **Dependent Variables**

For the analysis of the impacts of US immigration policy on the migratory flows, the dependent variable is migratory flows, understood as inflows of those granted affirmative asylum and outflows of those deported. For the analysis of whether foreign policy impacts the decision-making process of immigration policy, the dependent variable is policy type, coded as favorable or unfavorable.

*Favorable Policy:* A policy is favorable if it encourages migration to the US, allows migrants to remain in the US, or defers enforcement of deportation.

*Unfavorable Policy:* An unfavorable policy is considered as any policy that deters migratory inflows to the US, enhances the enforcement and deportation process, or makes the process of obtaining asylum more difficult.

### **Independent Variables**

The independent variable for the migratory flows analysis is shifts in immigration policy between favorable or unfavorable policies. The independent variables for the implications of foreign policy are regime type. As regime type impacts foreign relations, this will serve to examine if regime type is an important factor in immigration policy decision making.

*Left-Wing Government:* A country's government is left-wing if it has a far left-leaning liberal, socialist, or communist government.

*Right-Wing Government:* A country's government is right-wing if its ruling party is conservative.

### **Policy Shifts**

There have been numerous notable shifts in immigration control policy between the Obama and Trump administrations. I provide a list of the different policies enacted under the two administrations through congressional or executive action with a description of their impacts and code the policies as favorable, unfavorable, or mixed.

*Obama Administration: January 2009 - January 2017*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Policy Type</b>
2010	Border Security Act	Funded the hiring of 3,000 Border Patrol agents; increased ICE's budget by \$244 million	Unfavorable
2012	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	Allowed undocumented immigrants that arrived as minors to avoid deportation and be eligible for work permits	Favorable
2014	Immigration Accountability Executive Action	Cracked down on illegal immigration at the border; revised the priority to deport felons rather than families; and expanded the Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver Program to include immediate family members of Legal Permanent Residents	Mixed
2014	Central American Minors (CAM) refugee and parole program	Allowed lawfully present parents to request a refugee resettlement hearing for their children who remained in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador	Favorable
2009-2017	Annual Asylum Ceiling	Remained high between 70,000 and 85,000 throughout both terms	Favorable

Table 1: Obama presidency policies. Sources: Data from Lee (2010); Mayorkas (2012); Rush (2020)

*Trump Administration: January 2017 - January 2021*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Policy Type</b>
January 25, 2017	Executive Order	Announced the building of the border wall, expansion of the expedited removal process, and the detention of asylum seekers	Unfavorable
January 27, 2017	Executive Order	Suspended refugee admissions for at least 120 days; instituted extreme vetting	Unfavorable
September 27, 2017	Asylum Ceiling	Set at historic low of 45,000	Unfavorable
November 9, 2017	Termination of CAM	Ended Obama-era policy that allowed minors to obtain refugee status	Unfavorable
April 6, 2018	Zero Tolerance Policy	Allowed for the criminal prosecution of all foreign nationals attempting unauthorized entry	Unfavorable

May 2018	Child Separation	Marked the start of child separation and prosecution of parents crossing the border with children	Unfavorable
November 9, 2018	Presidential Proclamation	Restricted the ability to file asylum claims to only those who enter through ports of entry	Unfavorable
January 2019	Migrant Protection Protocols/"Remain in Mexico" rule	Prohibited asylum seekers from entering the US	Unfavorable
2019	Third-Country Asylum Rule	Allowed the US to send asylum seekers back to the Northern Triangle; permitted the refusal of entry to asylum seekers who came through Mexico	Unfavorable
January 2021	Deferred Enforcement Departure	Provided Venezuelans deportation protections for 18 months	Favorable

Table 2: Trump presidency policies. Source: Wasem (2020)

**Analysis: Foreign Policy Impacts**

For the analysis of foreign policy impacts on the development of immigration policy, I compare the presence of favorable and unfavorable policies for the Northern Triangle and Venezuela with regard to the countries relations with the US. The dependent variable is policy type and the independent variables are regime type.

*Hypothesis*

*Immigrants from left-wing regimes that pose a threat to US political and economic interests encounter favorable immigration policies while immigrants from right-wing governments do not encounter as many favorable policies.*

I hypothesize that Venezuela, whose government is a socialist left-wing regime, would encounter more favorable policies than the immigrants from the right-wing governments of the Northern Triangle. Following realism's idea that the US previously favored refugees from adversarial states I expect the policies to favor the admittance of Venezuelans.

## *Methods and Results*

I examined the quantity of favorable and unfavorable policies in relation to the regime type. I found there to only be one favorable policy toward Venezuelan immigrants, the Deferred Enforcement Departure policy enacted by Trump in his final days in office. Overall, between the two administrations, more protections were given to the Northern Triangle immigrants. This goes against my initial assumptions that immigrants from the left-wing regime of Venezuela would encounter more favorable policies than those from the right-wing regimes of the Northern Triangle countries. The overall lack of protections and favorable policies targeted toward Venezuelan immigrants and the number of policies aimed at providing protections for those from the Northern Triangle does not support my hypotheses, and there is no notable impact on regime type and immigration policy decision making with regard to these cases. The realist and security and stability theoretical framework that guided my initial assumptions toward these cases is not supported by the findings. Perhaps domestic politics, republican or democratic regimes, and economic factors are more important contributors to the development of immigration policy toward these cases, or perhaps the case selection is too small to consider a globalized framework based on foreign policy and international relations.

### **Analysis: Individuals Granted Affirmative Asylum**

I analyze the impacts of favorable and unfavorable policy shifts on the quantity of individuals granted affirmative asylum in the US. I examine the effects of the favorable policies to test whether these policies increased inflows of those granted asylum affirmatively. To test whether Trump's policies decreased asylee inflows, I examine the period following 2017.

## *Hypothesis*

*The existence of favorable immigration policies will positively affect migratory inflows of asylum seekers while unfavorable policies will negatively affect migratory inflows of asylum seekers.*

I hypothesize that in general, more individuals are admitted and granted affirmative asylum during periods in which a favorable policy is in effect and that fewer are admitted during periods in which an unfavorable policy is in effect. I also hypothesize that in relation to the comparisons between the admittance of asylum seekers, Venezuelans are admitted more than those from the Northern Triangle.

## *Methods and Results*

To test the impacts of favorable and unfavorable immigration policies, I examined the percentage change in individuals granted asylum following policy shifts. I did a separate analysis for the Obama administration from 2009-2016 and the Trump administration from 2017-2018 due to Obama having more favorable admissions policies and Trump having unfavorable policies.

Since there have been no policies specifically targeting Venezuelan refugees between 2009 and 2018, I examined the total change in admissions for each administration. Under the Obama administration, from 2009 to 2016, there had been a 20% total decrease in those granted asylum affirmatively. Between 2017 and 2018, during the Trump administration, there had been a 1,138% increase from 482 to 5,966 individual Venezuelans granted affirmative asylum. However, between 2015 and 2017, Venezuelan immigrants were admitted at a much lower rate than the Northern Triangle asylum seekers.

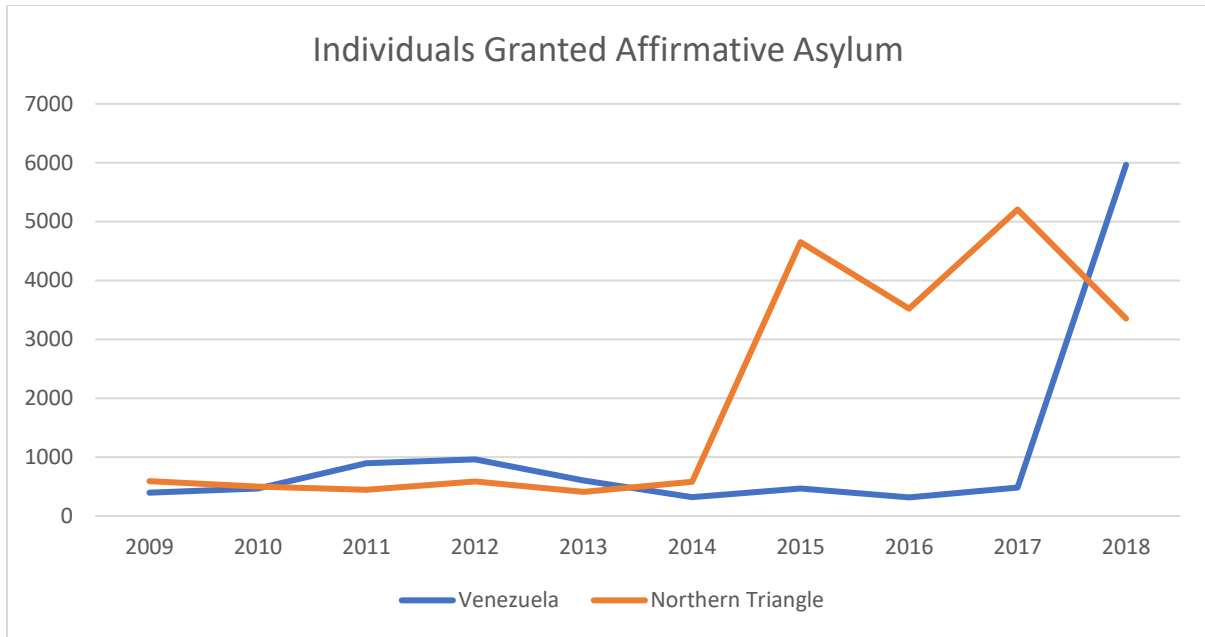


Figure 1: Venezuelan and Northern Triangle individuals granted affirmative asylum. Source: United States. *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2018.

Under President Obama, there were significant increases in individuals granted affirmative asylum from the Northern Triangle. Guatemalans saw a 269% total increase from 348 to 1,285 individuals, Hondurans saw a 2095% total increase from 39 to 856 individuals, and Salvadorans saw a 580% increase from 203 to 1,380 individuals. Between 2014 and 2015 after the imposition of many of Obama's executive actions, Guatemala saw a 444% increase, Honduras saw a 1133% increase, and El Salvador saw a 920% increase. Once President Trump came into office in 2017, Guatemalans experienced a 33% decrease, Hondurans experienced a 23% decrease, and Salvadorans experienced a 45% decrease in individuals granted affirmative asylum.

The results support my hypothesis. As there were more favorable policies during the Obama administration, the overall trends demonstrated increases for the Northern Triangle refugee flows. Additionally, as many of these policies were overturned and replaced by



unfavorable policies during the Trump administration, the data reflects that these policies resulted in a decrease in individuals from the Northern Triangle granted affirmative asylum. However, when considering the lack of direct policies targeting Venezuelan populations as well as the fluctuations, there are significant limitations involved with the analysis. Venezuelans continued to remain consistent and saw a large jump in 2018 despite the lack of favorable policies. It came before the imposition of the one favorable policy under Trump. Perhaps there exist more pertinent factors such as quantities of individuals applying and push factors that better determine refugee flows. I expected the Venezuelan immigrants to fare better than the data depicts.

### **Analysis: Aliens Removed**

In this section, I examine policies that theoretically should have had a direct impact on deportation rates, such as the favorable policies of protections covered by DACA and the unfavorable policies of increased interior enforcement under President Trump.

#### *Hypothesis*

*Strict enforcement-based policies will result in more migratory outflows through deportation than policies that protect against deportation.*

I hypothesize that immigrants from the Northern Triangle countries experienced increases in deportation rates under the Trump administration due to the restrictionist policies. I also expect that Northern Triangle immigrants will experience more outflows in terms of deportations than Venezuelans in general. With regard to shifts in policy, I hypothesize that unfavorable strict enforcement-based policies will yield more deportation outflows than favorable deportation policies that offer protections.

## Methods and Results

To test the above hypotheses, I examined the raw data of the annual number of deportations of immigrants from each of the four countries.

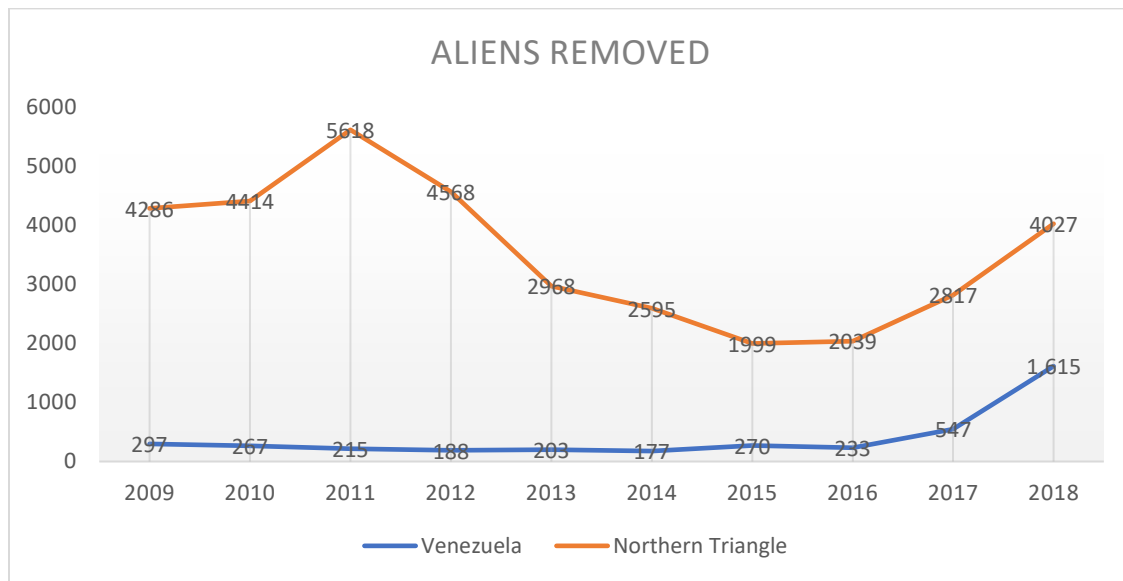


Figure 2: Venezuelan and Northern Triangle immigrants deportations. Source: United States. *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2018.

Under the Obama administration between 2009 and 2016, I found that there was a 52% total decrease in Guatemalans deported, a 51% decrease in Hondurans deported and a 56% decrease in Salvadorans deported. Although over the two terms, Obama deported more immigrants from the Northern Triangle than Trump, the trend reflected an overall decrease in deportations during his second term. Trump, on the other hand, significantly increased deportations within a year of the start of his term. Between 2017 and 2018, the deportations of Guatemalans rose 61%, Hondurans rose 29%, and Salvadorans rose 32%.

The data does not fully support my hypothesis. The raw numbers demonstrate that more Northern Triangle immigrants were deported annually under Obama than Trump. However,

under the Obama administration, the ultimate trend was decreasing while under Trump it increased. The data seems to support my assumption that fewer Venezuelans in general were deported than immigrants from the Northern Triangle. From 2009 to 2017, fewer Venezuelans were deported than immigrants from either three of the Northern Triangle countries. In 2018, the number of Venezuelan immigrants deported surpassed the numbers of those deported from Honduras and El Salvador. However, the overall trend could be due to the raw number of Venezuelan immigrants being rather small compared to those from the Northern Triangle rather than foreign policy implications. Following favorable policy shifts, there were consistent decreases in the deportation of each immigrant group. However, once Trump came into office, the deportations rose drastically.

## CHAPTER 4: IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN THE US

This chapter analyzes the differences between the immigrant experiences of migrants from the Northern Triangle and Venezuela. Through oral history interviews, I identify the allegorical data that captures the immigrant experience for both groups. The socioeconomic integration experience is documented in relation to shifts in immigration policy through a discourse analysis of the media.

### **Studying the Immigrant Experience**

To conduct my comparative analysis of the socioeconomic integration experience in the US, I coded oral history interviews from immigrants, many using pseudonyms, from the three Northern Triangle countries and Venezuela. I analyzed interviews from the *New Roots: Voices from Carolina del Norte!* archive and the Southern Foodways Alliance archive to examine the Northern Triangle immigrant experience. To analyze the experiences of Venezuelan immigrants in the US, I used interviews found online from the University of Maryland's Archive of Immigrant Voices, the Dartmouth Latino Oral History Project, letters written by Venezuelan detainees from the Detainee Allies, the Southern Foodways Alliance archive and interviews from the *New Roots: Voices from Carolina del Norte!* archive. I coded numerous newspaper articles from various sources within the ProQuest database that discuss the immigrant experience in relation to the variables discussed below and shifts in immigration policy. I compare the findings from the analysis of the oral history interviews and the newspaper discourse analysis with Pew Research Center's facts on Hispanic trends data.

## **Hypotheses**

I hypothesize that Venezuelan immigrants have more ease in the socioeconomic integration process and face less discrimination than immigrants from the Northern Triangle. I hypothesize that Venezuelans will have an advantage with regard to better access to education, more access to jobs that promote upward economic mobility, English language proficiency, and facing less discrimination. On the other hand, I expect the Northern Triangle immigrants to have an advantage when it comes to social integration due to the large existing population base.

## **Variables**

The following dependent variables of socioeconomic integration are coded and examined throughout the analysis in relation to the independent variable, immigration policies:

*Educational Attainment:* This includes any educational opportunity that allows for the immigrant to acquire knowledge or skills necessary to find employment.

*Economic Mobility:* The ability of an individual to change their economic status. I will consider both upward economic mobility and the downward economic mobility experienced by low paid low skilled jobs of many immigrants.

*Language Proficiency:* The ability of the immigrant to speak English fluently.

*Social Integration:* The process in which immigrants are incorporated into the social and cultural structure of the host society. This variable will cover social networks — migrant community connections, friends in the community, and association with other immigrant communities.

*Discrimination:* The mistreatment of someone based on race or ethnicity.

*Documentation:* The documentation variable will cover all bases of legal or illegal immigration. It will include the experiences surrounding the processes of getting visas, green cards, asylum or other legal status, becoming naturalized citizens, or being detained/deported.

## **Nuances of Venezuelan and Northern Triangle Immigrant Identity**

In order to understand the differences in the socioeconomic integration immigrant experiences between the Northern Triangle and Venezuelan immigrants living in the US, it is crucial to understand the potential reasons behind these differences, with considerations ranging from ethnicity and race to one's economic status prior to migration. Each of these socioeconomic considerations play a role in the immigrant experience and socioeconomic integration.

The first wave of Venezuelan migration to the US after the rise of Chávez consisted mostly of wealthy middle and upper class, skilled workers who arrived in the country by air. Many of whom fled to Weston, Florida, a suburb in the greater Miami area (Semple 2008). One family, the Dunaevschis, is a prime example of this first wave of Venezuelan migration. The father was a business owner, forced to leave everything. However, the family was able to travel back to Venezuela every few months to transfer their wealth and belongings. They eventually opened a furniture company in South Florida, an opportunity only those with financial security would be able to endeavor (Semple 2008). This experience is characteristic of the first wave of wealthy Venezuelan immigrants to arrive in the US, especially in South Florida. Although many had to experience a change in the standard of living due to leaving much behind, they still had the economic capabilities to integrate into society.

However, the second wave of Venezuelan migration that occurred in the mid 2010s saw a wider range of demographics. While many of these immigrants arrived with college degrees, many are forced to work for companies like Uber, resulting in big lifestyle changes (Scott 2019). Within this wave, many also feel isolated compared to other immigrant communities. One immigrant claimed this isolation is due to their limited options in obtaining legal status, “From my experience as a Venezuelan immigrant in the USA, it is a duty to express the migratory option that we have to apply for a status of refuge or asylum,” (Scott 2019). Many can't apply for

TPS or DACA, leaving them only to apply for refugee or asylum status and are given less options than other Latino immigrant groups.

Despite the different makeup of the second wave of migration, the Venezuelan immigrants stand out in terms of education and income. They are the most highly educated Hispanic group in the US, with nearly 58% having a college degree and 64% of recent arrivals from 2014 to 2019 having a bachelor's degree. This education tends to lend them English proficiency. They are more likely to be employed in well-paying industries than other Hispanic immigrant groups in the US (DiMartino 2021). While there are certainly anomalies, this is characteristic of the majority of the Venezuelan population in the US, and the high education and economic levels may ease the socioeconomic integration experience.

Immigrants from the Northern Triangle, on the other hand, tend to be working-class who come to the US seeking economic opportunity. The education levels for Northern Triangle immigrants are relatively low, with the majority having not completed high school and having low proficiency levels in English (Cohn, Passel, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2017). These factors diverge from the common demographics of Venezuelan immigrants and undoubtedly have a negative impact on socioeconomic integration. Another common characteristic of immigrants from the Northern Triangle is belonging to one of the many indigenous groups, who disproportionately experience violence and economic hardship in the region. These immigrants are typically poor, uneducated, and unable to speak English. According to a 2015 review addressing indigenous immigration, "42 percent of Guatemalan families entering Arizona in 2015 spoke an indigenous dialect as their primary language. 77 percent of those who spoke a Mayan dialect reported speaking English "less than very well" (Bixby 2018). A Guatemalan Mayan language, Mam, is now the ninth-most frequent spoken language in immigration courts,

but the lack of reliable translators has negatively affected the documentation process (Bixby 2018). Navigating integration into the US with regard to social, economic, and legal status proves to be difficult for indigenous immigrants from the Northern Triangle who face ethnic-based discrimination at almost all aspects of the immigration experience.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Immigrant Experience**

#### *Educational Attainment*

The anecdotes within the oral history interviews support my hypothesis that the Venezuelans have an educational advantage. The majority of the interviewees discussed being educated prior to migrating or obtaining advanced degrees while in the US. Isabel Hernández, a 19-year-old Venezuelan immigrant enrolled at UNC Chapel Hill, reflected on her educational opportunities saying “Most of the Latinos were in the lower classes and I was in the IB program”, discussing the academic advantages she held compared to other Latino immigrants in her community (Interview with Isabel 2011).

Those interviewed from the Northern Triangle described education as a major pull factor. Miguel, a Guatemalan immigrant in North Carolina, emphasized that Hispanics were not in difficult classes and in order to keep up with his education, he had to begin communicating with the non-Hispanic students (Interview with Miguel 2011). Overall, the data from the interviews supports the idea that Venezuelans have higher levels of educational attainment due to being placed in higher level classes and from prior educational experiences.

The newspaper discourse analysis also supports my hypothesis. The Venezuelan immigrants are depicted more highly in the media than the Northern Triangle immigrants in



terms of education. They are described as the most educated Latin American group in the US, with over half of the adults having college degrees while those with college degrees from the Northern Triangle are only about ten percent of the immigrant population (Henderson 2018). One source which discussed the negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants as a burden to the US economy aptly defended the Venezuelan immigrant population in relation to their education and employment:

"Highly-educated" and "well-paid" aren't descriptors you'd use for a human tsunami of cheap labor or welfare-users. Indeed, while their earnings are slightly below average, Hispanics of Venezuelan origin who speak English very well or as their first language out-earn Americans by nearly \$5,000 annually. And as 21% of Americans were insured by Medicaid in 2019, that was true for only 14% of Venezuelan-Americans (DiMartino 2021).

Arguing that the Venezuelan immigrant population is not a threat to the economic prosperity of the nation, DiMartino emphasized that Venezuelan immigrants may be less of a burden than the US population as he cites that nearly 58% have college degrees compared to 33% of Americans.

In terms of the effects of immigration policy on the education of these immigrant groups, the media allows for more insight than the oral history interviews. For immigration policy under Obama, some of his policies such as immigration raids were claimed to hinder education as they created fear, instability, and deterred children from attending school (Sens. Durbin 2016).

However, the media also portrays Obama in a positive light with regard to DACA, the program that gave many Northern Triangle undocumented youth populations legal status and deportation protections. "El 44% completó la secundaria pero no fue a la universidad, mientras que el 20% sigue cursando la secundaria. Sólo el 18% se ha inscrito en la universidad, un 15% no completó los estudios de enseñanza superior, y un 4% obtuvo al menos una licenciatura" (Peña 2018).

Those who were protected by DACA enjoyed access to schooling without fear of being deported, and the above statistics show relatively impressive completion rates.

Under the Trump administration, the media continued to highlight the negative effects of policy shifts on immigrant educational opportunity. Previous recipients of DACA suffered blows to their educational opportunities with various appellate court decisions which were harmful to immigrant education and future success with socioeconomic integration. In 2019, an appeals court validated the decision of Georgia Universities to deny admissions on the basis that the applicants were DACA recipients (NA-TN 2019). Judicial decisions like this common under the Trump administration diminished the higher-level education opportunities for many DACA recipients.

The quantitative data provided by PEW supports the portrayals of the lack of educational opportunities for the Northern Triangle immigrants compared to the Venezuelan immigrants found in the oral history and newspaper analysis. According to PEW, about 16% of US Hispanics ages 25 and older have obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Compared to the US Hispanic average educational attainment, only 10% of Guatemalans, 11% of Hondurans, and 10% of Salvadorans have completed a degree at the bachelor's level. 55% of Venezuelans, on the other hand, have obtained at least a bachelor's degree (Noe-Bustamante 2019). This is notably higher than the average Hispanic and Northern Triangle educational attainment. This largely supports my hypothesis that Venezuelan immigrants have an educational advantage.

### *Economic Mobility*

Within the oral history interviews, the Venezuelan immigrants discussed a wide variety of economic opportunities they encountered while in the US. Allen Ampueda, a restaurant owner in Memphis, Tennessee described how he was paid only \$5.25 per hour for day laborer jobs when he first arrived in the US, “sabia que el pago, o lo que me estaban dando, no era el pago

real”. He then later was able to open up his restaurant, which he claims he would never have had the opportunity to do if still in Venezuela. However, the process of opening his restaurant was more difficult than he presumed: “Cuando venimos a EEUU vimos que la situación no es tan fácil para crear un negocio aquí” (Allen Ampueda 2017). The experience of Allen Ampueda reflects the experience of many, especially in relation to the initial struggles he faced when arriving in the US and attempting to start a business. Despite these struggles, he was able to eventually experience upward economic mobility like the other Venezuelan immigrant interviewees who obtained work easily.

Of the six Northern Triangle immigrant oral histories, five of them discussed starting out in low paying jobs such as construction or housekeeping, and some of them continue to work in these fields as they have no other options, especially with regard to documentation. Rodrigo Lopez, a Guatemalan immigrant, works in construction. He highlights the difficulties for the immigrant community to get jobs, especially in relation to documentation:

Yo tengo profesión. Muchos tenemos las profesiones, en cuanto de trabajo. Pero los requisitos que nos piden; tienes que tener los ocho números. Y los ocho números son los que te van a – te van a registrar. Si tienes los ocho números, te dan tu trabajo. Y si no, pues, no hay. Entonces esto es un problema que ha venido afectando a la comunidad desde – bueno yo creo que ya desde hasta un rato. Bueno, mayormente, hasta en este año ves, se le han reproducido más con respecto al problema sobre el E-Verify, el chequeo de documentos de las compañías (Interview with Rodrigo 2012).

Two Honduran women, Xiomara Osoto and Sara Avila, and one Salvadoran, Maria del Carmen Flores demonstrated their entrepreneurial spirit after arriving to the US to create small businesses at local food stands and farmers markets (Xiomara Osoto 2017; Sara Avila 2017; Maria del Carmen 2013). They took on any job they were offered to save up to start their own food stands in New Orleans and San Francisco. Xiomara Osoto, from Honduras, discusses the

obstacles she faced in starting her food stand which reflect the obstacles faced by other immigrants in similar situations:

Bueno, la verdad para poner un restaurante, uno tienen que buscarse un lugar más o menos. Y no se encuentra un lugar más o menos. Yo renté una vez un restaurante y la señora me sacó mucho dinero. Me sacó casi cinco mil dólares. Perdí cinco mil dólares porque ella quería la renta. Que le pagara los billetes adelantados. Billetes que tenía retrasados. Ella no tenía clientela. Ella no vendía nada, pues. En el día se vendía un pollo con tajadas. No podía trabajar. Yo le pagué a una muchacha quinientos dólares a la semana y no hicimos nada. Le limpiamos el restaurante. Limpiamos todo el restaurante. Cuando uno empieza, uno va acomodando y limpiando y viendo que está mal y todo eso y vean, no es lo mismo. Y como iba ser mío yo lo iba a agarrar. Pero no, no sirvió de nada. Se me fue todo mi dinero allí. Perdí todo mi dinero (Xiomara Osoto 2017).

Overall, the Venezuelan immigrants depicted encountering easier experiences surrounding economic mobility than the Northern Triangle immigrants. Both groups demonstrated entrepreneurial spirit and many started out with low wage jobs, but the Venezuelans did not discuss the issues involved in finding jobs or starting a business on the same scale as the Northern Triangle immigrants.

The newspaper analysis does not support my hypothesis as strongly as the oral history interviews, notably in relation to Venezuelan employment. The media heavily discussed the obstacles many Venezuelan professionals faced when arriving in the US. With regard to the recent wave of the Venezuelan immigrant population, many of the highly educated migrants are forced to take low wage jobs as they are unable to find jobs in their profession. Those who were doctors or lawyers or any other high paying job now work for companies like Uber or work in low wage professions such as housekeeping or construction. Many have described it as "starting from zero" in terms of having to leave their professions behind for jobs that provide low or declining economic mobility (Capozzi 2018). Many of these former professionals now must seek economic assistance to merely survive (Salomon 2017).

Despite the different portrayal of Venezuelan immigrants in the media, the portrayal of Northern Triangle immigrants was consistent with the above analysis. The job makeup of those who received DACA is similar to much of what was described in the oral history interviews:

De los que están en la fuerza laboral, la mayoría trabaja en preparación de comida, ventas al menudeo, hospitalidad, trabajo administrativo, y construcción, aunque también están representados en trabajos de limpieza, transporte, gerencia, cuidado personal, mantenimiento, educación, y cuidado de salud. (Peña 2018)

The situation is different for undocumented immigrants, however. The media reiterates the notion that many immigrants from the Northern Triangle are confined to a small sector of the labor force, "a black market of employers willing to exploit the vulnerability of the undocumented by hiring them for less than the minimum wage" (Jopson 2018). The lack of documentation of immigrant groups proves to be detrimental for economic mobility as many have no opportunity to move upward without obtaining documentation, demonstrating the strong ties between immigration policy and the immigrant experience with relation to economic integration.

The effects of immigration policies on socioeconomic integration and employment are also better discussed within the media. Obama's CAM policy received much backlash from the Republican Party, with senator Jeff Sessions highlighting the toll refugee's put on the US economy:

Recent statistics from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement indicate that 75 percent of refugees receive food stamps, more than half receive medical assistance, approximately half receive cash assistance, and 25 percent receive public housing assistance. Additionally, refugee status provides a pathway to citizenship. (Sen. Jeff Sessions 2015).

However, this evidence proves that refugees admitted under the CAM program would be awarded many federal benefits that would be helpful for their economic mobility in the US. The media also portrayed the potential economic harms associated with Trump's anti-immigrant

policies in relation to the economic stability of immigrant populations and the country as a whole. According to the Center for American Progress, President Trump's attempts to eliminate DACA could have caused an economic loss of over 400 billion dollars and remove over 685,000 people from the workforce (Peña 2018).

The PEW data reflects the newspaper analysis with regard to the depiction of Venezuelan professions struggling when integrating into the US economy. For US Hispanics, the median annual income for ages 16 and older is \$25,000. For Guatemalans and Hondurans, this number was \$23,000. Salvadorans' median income fell on the US Hispanic average at \$25,000. Out of the four countries, Venezuelans earned the highest at an annual \$27,000 (Noe-Bustamante 2019). Although Venezuelan immigrants in the US earned more than the Northern Triangle and US Hispanic population as a whole, the difference is minimal. The collected data for Venezuelan immigrants as a whole demonstrates that they are not truly much better off economically than the Northern Triangle population, and the overall analysis does not support my initial hypothesis.

### *Language Proficiency*

After analyzing the oral history interviews, I found my hypothesis to be correct. The majority of the Venezuelan interviewees were fluent in English. They had either received instruction while in Venezuela, like Roberto Colmenares and Orlando Salazar, and had to work on their speaking fluency while in the US (Rafael Arreaza 2021; Orlando Salazar 2021). Allen Ampueda discussed how many of the recent Venezuelan arrivals in the Memphis community came well prepared, and how they learned English relatively quickly if they had not already known it. "Casi todos aprenden inglés rápido, si ya no lo saben" (2017).

The Northern Triangle immigrants expressed more difficulties with regard to reaching English fluency and socioeconomic integration, and some continue to speak English poorly. Miguel described his difficulties in adjusting to living in the US at first due to the language barrier saying, “También el idioma fue muy difícil porque no sabíamos inglés, entonces era muy difícil comunicarnos con otras personas.” (Interview with Miguel 2011). Others echoed this idea, demonstrating how important English fluency is to the integration experience in terms of education and job prospects.

The large number of indigenous immigrant groups from the region experienced more difficulty in the integration process as they were isolated from both English and Spanish speaking communities. Rodrigo Lopez speaks el Mam, a language native to Guatemala. He describes that many members of the Guatemalan community in North Carolina speak native languages, and how this has made their integration more difficult (Interview with Rodrigo 2012). As the importance of learning English was evident in the above anecdotes, the Northern Triangle immigrants understood the necessity, but encountered more challenges due to lack of prior education or strong resources for indigenous speakers.

The newspaper analysis yielded different results. As mentioned in the economic mobility section, many of the Venezuelan immigrants viewed coming to the US as "starting from zero" as they had to learn a new language to find work (Capozzi 2018). For the Northern Triangle immigrants, the results were consistent as many faced further challenges due to speaking an indigenous language rather than Spanish:

Indigenous families, mentioned fear of the new government, language barriers, anxiety of participating in public spaces and anguish over social institutions, including law enforcement and education, as threats to their abilities for their families to successfully integrate into U.S. society. (Diepenbrock 2017)

The quantitative data from PEW yielded unexpected results as I initially expected more Venezuelans to be proficient in English and to be well above the US Hispanic national average. However, 48% of Guatemalans and Hondurans, 53% of Salvadorans, and 57% of Venezuelans speak English at home or at least "very well". This is well below the national average of 70% of US Hispanics who fit these criteria. In terms of proficiency levels, 64% of Hispanic adults are English proficient. Only 38% of Guatemalans, 40% of Hondurans, 44% of Salvadorans, and 54% of Venezuelans are proficient in English (Noe-Bustamante 2019).

### *Social Integration.*

The Venezuelan interviewees discussed experiencing smaller social networks than the Northern Triangle immigrants. For the Venezuelans, these small communities allowed for them to further their socioeconomic integration. Isabel Hernandez discusses how she has felt a sense of belonging within the Latino community as a whole: "We've met a lot of Latinos and, I can't say that many Venezuelans, but even just among the Latino community, I feel like with friends that we've made, we've kind of formed that community, almost like a sense of family, a sense of belonging" (Interview with Isabel 2011). The social networks and community networks are stronger among the Venezuelans and Latino community than I expected.

The Northern Triangle interviewees share the notion that they found a community while in the US. Miguel found his place on the university soccer team, Rodrigo Lopez found a community within his church – La Inmaculada Concepción where he says, "Me ha relacionado con más gente de otros países como El Salvador, Honduras, incluso del mismo país de Guatemala" (Interview with Miguel 2011). Xiomara Osoto discusses the support her business received from the Latino community that is characteristic of many immigrant experiences:



No, ellos conocen aquí y todo. El barrio, aquí, hay mucho hispano. Mucho hondureño, mexicano y mucha gente nos conoce y vienen aquí. Una vez lo anunciamos por el radio y vino mucha gente. Pues, ya no lo anunciamos porque se paga bastantito y la señora nos pagó un tiempo y vino mucha gente. Hicimos mucha clientela. Pero anunciándose por el radio, aquí, viene mucha gente (Xiomara Osoto 2017).

In general, the interviews demonstrate how the Latino community as a whole aids in the socioeconomic integration of both groups. It is likely that there exists a more heterogeneous Latino community than I had initially thought. Rather than solely relying on individuals from their origin countries, both groups found support within the Latino community.

The media, on the other hand, largely portrayed a strong community of Venezuelan immigrant populations, especially in Florida. There are various enclaves where Venezuelan immigrants relocate, building strong and cohesive communities, finding jobs, and fostering strong societal connections with one another (Lemongello 2019). Many Venezuelans found a community among other Venezuelan immigrants in their areas. Patricia Juarez, for example, reflected on how the Venezuelan community helped her in her time of a medical and economic crisis, "I counted on the emotional, social and economic support of many Venezuelans I did not even know" (Scott 2019). Northern Triangle immigrants also have strong connections to the community before arriving in the US. Many of these immigrants also find communities beyond the immigrant groups from their country of origin.

The media also discussed how policies directly impacted socioeconomic integration. Obama's CAM policy was portrayed positively as a source to reunite immigrant children with their parents. A Salvadoran immigrant, Nuriel Montiel, discussed how she planned to apply for CAM for her daughter, who she left behind to find work in the US after being granted TPS due to earthquake destruction (Sacchetti 2015). Many others used this policy to reunite with their children.

Trump-era immigration policies, particularly the zero-tolerance policy, were largely critiqued due to the separation of thousands of children from their families at the border. The cruelty and irreversible harms of this policy were condemned:

Imagine, if you can, the suffering visited upon those children, including many still in diapers and requiring afternoon naps, by the administration's cavalier brutality and incompetence — the anguish of little girls and boys removed from their parents for weeks or months because of a president lacking a conscience and a government whose data systems were not suited to the task of reunification. Those wounds won't heal easily, or ever (Opinion 2019).

The detrimental effects of family separation undoubtedly created obstacles within the social integration process. Without access to immediate family, immigrant children and their families were subject to anxiety and isolation from their loved ones. Familial connections play a vital role in the social integration of immigrant populations. The lack of such connections and the trauma due to strict, enforcement-based policies hinders the ability for immigrants to foster the necessary connections to integrate into society.

### *Discrimination*

The majority of the Venezuelans did not discuss any experiences with discrimination that had a lasting impact on their integration. This could be attributed to the fact that many Venezuelan immigrants tend to have lighter skin and to be more educated. Isabel Hernandez's explains why she believes she has not encountered much discrimination, “I think that because my skin is so light, I haven't gotten it that bad really. Because I don't have an accent, I also haven't gotten it that bad”. However, she recalls that her father has experienced racism, especially after the 9/11 attacks. Because he is darker than her and had a full beard and mustache, he was mistaken for Muslim. Her father's experience reflects the colorism that many of the Northern Triangle immigrants experience.

The Northern Triangle immigrants talked more about discrimination they encountered Miguel experienced difficulties integrating into US society due to discrimination, representing the overall picture derived from the interviews:

Fue muy difícil porque la gente a veces — porque todavía existe mucho el racismo. Entonces cuando lo miran a uno que es hispano, te quedan viendo con mala cara, deciden irse mejor por otro lado o le dicen a uno cosas como tratando de hacerlo menos a uno; Entonces era como que uno es la minoría y puede existir todavía ese racismo, que solo por el hecho ser hispano a uno lo miren con mala cara o lo miren inferior a los demás; Se nos nota un acento cuando lo hablamos. Tal vez no era el inglés al que ellos estaban acostumbrados a oír o ellas pensaban ... entonces siento que si les provocaba un poco de rencor, a que ellos decían que teníamos una ventaja sobre ellos porque hablábamos dos idiomas (Interview with Miguel 2011).

Discrimination of Northern Triangle immigrants was highly covered in the media during the Trump presidency. Numerous sources describe how ICE agents have been accused of racially and ethnically profiling asylum seekers at the Southern border especially with the "Remain in Mexico" rule. One source shared that the rule increased the risk of discrimination and extortion and claimed "U.S. officials choose who crosses based on nationality and other characteristics" (Hennessy-Fiske 2018). The indigenous immigrants are disproportionately impacted by this discrimination:

Given today's immigration enforcement increasingly rooted on racial profiling as a tactic to apprehend undocumented immigrants, indigenous-Latino immigrants, particularly those who have darker skin tones and shorter statures, are more easily targeted," Gomez Cervantes said. "To add another dimension, many indigenous- Latino migrants do not speak Spanish or English fluently, leading to difficulty in gaining access to important information and resources." (Diepenbrok 2017)

*Documentation*

The majority of the Venezuelan immigrants who discussed the documentation process in their oral history interviews had different individual experiences. Isabel Hernandez and her family's green cards were sponsored by her father's church. She claims, "It was a long and tedious process, but we did everything by the book" (Interview with Isabel 2011). Roberto Colmenares was able to get documentation through marriage, as many immigrants do (Rafael Arreaza 2021). Another Venezuelan immigrant, Allen Ampueda, reflected on how professional class immigrants have more access to the necessary means for obtaining documentation, and how they have an easier time integrating into society and the economy due to their documentation status:

En mi comunidad venezolana está creciendo porque más gente está pudiendo escapar de Venezuela. Pero esta gente ya viene más preparada. Son profesionales, aunque no pueden trabajar con su profesión pero si pueden ocupara posiciones mejores porque ya viene con legal, con permiso, mientras su asilo político, sale, le dan un permiso de trabajo. (Allen Ampueda 2017)

However, under the Trump administration, Venezuelan immigrants discussed being held in detention centers while seeking asylum. Four Venezuelans who were detained during the Trump administration addressed anonymous letters to the Venezuelan Detainees Allies organization under various pseudonyms to protect their identity. They describe being detained while waiting for their asylum case to progress. One immigrant, EL, was granted conditional release by ICE, but does not have the ten thousand dollars necessary to get bail. Another, MR, discussed the abuses they faced while being detained after their asylum request was denied and how the injuries have yet to be addressed by ICE (Venezuela Detainees 2019). When considering my hypothesis, it again seems to be more complex than the assumption that Venezuelan immigrants have an easier time obtaining documentation.

Northern Triangle interviewees discussed the various methods they obtained documentation as well as the challenges of not having documentation. Miguel, from Guatemala, arrived by plane with temporary visas and remained in the country. The interview took place during the DREAM Act/DACA legislation, and he hoped it would pass so he could stay in the US. The idea of having to return makes him sad as he is already accustomed to living in the US (Interview with Miguel 2011). Rodrigo Lopez explained how he did not have any legal status in the US, "No tengo nada de documentos legales" (Interview with Rodrigo 2012). This has made his life in the US more difficult.

The newspaper analysis better reflects the general experience immigrants face with relation to documentation and policy shifts between Obama and Trump. While Obama was in office, the media expressed CAM and DACA positively in a pro-immigrant light for providing protections, legal status, and employment opportunities. While Trump was in office, he received criticism for his stance on Venezuelan immigrants. The media highlighted the contrast between Trump's hardline rhetoric against the Venezuelan government and his inflexibility in allowing Venezuelan refugees to enter the country. Under Trump, Attorney General Jeff Sessions overturned a ruling that allowed immigrants to seek asylum on the basis of fear from violent non-state actors, impacting both Venezuelan and Northern Triangle migrant's ability to seek asylum. One Venezuelan immigrant was denied asylum even though she has been targeted by the leftist, Maduro supporting militant colectivos group who kidnap, torture, and murder those who do not support the regime (Madrid 2019). By restricting the criteria required for obtaining asylum, many immigrants had little legal recourse to establish their cases, making the documentation process more difficult.

Many Venezuelans arrive with tourist visas and apply for asylum, but changes in immigration law have made the asylum process much more difficult, resulting in over half of the asylum applications being rejected (Collins 2019). One policy under Trump required the most recent asylum applications to be reviewed first in order to deter the applications of invalid claims. (Vizcaino 2018). This change made it more difficult as asylum seekers have fewer financial means and time to go through the process and many Venezuelans landed in detention facilities for future deportation. However, the wealthier class of Venezuelan immigrants are unlikely to encounter problems with such changes, as they have the financial means to obtain representation and are less likely to be deported.

The media largely portrayed Trump's overturn of Obama era policies negatively. The overturning of the CAM program would require those who arrived under the program to reapply for parole. However, it proved to be difficult as they must provide "an urgent humanitarian or a significant public benefit reason" to stay (Rosenburg 2017). The media also provided anecdotes from immigrants whose lives were upended by policy shifts under the Trump administrations highlighting the anxiety created by the fear of losing documentation status, "We feel that at any given moment, someone can knock at the door and say, 'You are leaving,' said Lupe, a 24-year-old Salvadoran who arrived in New York in July to reunite with her father after seven years of waiting. "There is a lot of anxiety that comes with that." (Salomon and Torrens 2020).

There were also portrayals of the anxiety immigrants felt toward applying for DACA under Trump: "López says the family agonised for two years over applying for Daca in the first place, as it meant admitting to the government that Rolando was in the US illegally. Now all the personal information they handed over is at the disposal of the Trump administration. 'I don't

know why they want to terrify children,' López says. 'It's like they're playing with them.'"  
(Jopson 2018).

The quantitative data from PEW mainly supports the results from the newspaper analysis. For the total US Hispanic population, 33% are foreign born. The percentage of the foreign-born populations in the US is notably higher than the Hispanic average. 60% of US Guatemalans, 62% of US Hondurans, 57% of US Salvadorans, and 74% of US Venezuelans are foreign born. The portion of those who are considered as US citizens is notably lower too. Only 27% of foreign-born Guatemalans, 24% of foreign-born Hondurans, 33% of foreign-born Salvadorans, and 34% of foreign-born Venezuelans are US citizens (Noe-Bustamante 2019).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Interpretations**

This thesis analyzes the impacts of US immigration policies on migratory flows from Venezuela and the Northern Triangle, and documents the socioeconomic integration experiences of these immigrants under the last two presidential administrations. The number of refugee seekers from these countries has risen dramatically in the past two decades, and migratory flows will likely continue to increase so long as instability remains in the host countries. Understanding whether US immigration policy truly has an impact on migratory flows and immigrant experience will be crucial for policy makers who are charged with tackling the crisis. The second chapter focusing on migratory flows demonstrates whether shifts in immigration policy line up with shifts in migratory refugee inflows and deportation outflows. The qualitative chapter on the immigrant experience reflects how shifts in immigration policy impact socioeconomic integration and how nuances of immigrant identity play a role in their experiences.

### **Conclusions**

US immigration policy has historically shifted from periods of liberalization to heavy restriction and enforcement, with the latter being of utmost priority under Obama and Trump. Both presidents instituted unfavorable, restrictionist and enforcement-based policies, but unlike Trump who eroded much of the established framework for legal migration, Obama offered more opportunities for legal immigration through DACA and refugee programs such as CAM.

### *Foreign Policy Implications*



The guiding theoretical frameworks behind my hypotheses were realism and the security and stability framework, which focus on state relations as the driving force behind immigration policy decision making. I sought to analyze whether foreign policy implications, state relations, and regime type were the guiding factors contributing to immigration policies directed toward Venezuelan and Northern Triangle migrants. However, while I expected for there to be favorable policies for Venezuelan immigrants due to the socialist regime in their host country, I found there were few, if any, policies directly impacting the population. Under Obama, more favorable policies were awarded to immigrants from the Northern Triangle and the Trump administration was characterized by widespread unfavorable policies that impacted both Venezuela and the Northern Triangle.

With regard to my framework, the data on policy type as favorable or unfavorable does not reflect the idea that foreign policy implications played a role in the policy decision making process for these cases. It does, however, line up with the notion that strict, enforcement-based policies arise during periods where immigrants are viewed as an economic or cultural threat reflected with Obama's large quantities of deportations and enforcement policies following the 2008 economic crisis and Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric. Perhaps this framework is consistent on a global scale or when considering historical cases, but when examining the cases involved in this study, the reality does not support the theories guiding my assumptions. It is probable that there are other, more important factors besides the regime type considerations of foreign policy implications such as domestic politics and economic concerns that guide immigration policy decision making.

### *Policy Impact on Migratory Flows*

The data supports my hypothesis that policy type has an impact on flows. During periods of favorable policies, the numbers of Northern Triangle individuals granted affirmative asylum increased while they decreased during times of unfavorable policies. Decreases in deportations also coincided with periods of favorable policies. However, there may be other factors that contribute to the migratory flows such as the various aforementioned push factors driving hundreds of thousands to flee. Although the data supports that the Northern Triangle refugee flows increased while the favorable policies of Obama were in place and decreased while the unfavorable policies of Trump existed, there also may be more significant external factors that align with the push factors and domestic politics that could contribute to these results. Under Trump, the number of Venezuelan individuals granted asylum rose, and this could be due to his condemnation of the Maduro regime, but they were generally admitted at lower rates than those from the Northern Triangle. It is more probable that, due to a lack of favorable policies for Venezuelans, the increases were due to the sheer quantity of Venezuelans migrating to the US.

### *Policy Impact of Immigrant Experience*

For most of the variables of socioeconomic integration I analyzed, my hypotheses were supported by the data from the oral history interviews, the newspaper analysis, and the PEW data. With regard to portrayals of educational attainment, economic mobility, language proficiency, and discrimination in the oral history interviews, Venezuelan immigrants tended to describe their integration as easier than the Northern Triangle immigrants. Although I expected the Northern Triangle immigrants to portray an advantage with social integration due to the already large existing population in the US, I found the Venezuelans to describe similar experiences in which they found themselves connected to the Latino community as a whole. The

oral history interviews from both cases described their varying documentation processes as being difficult, but many of the Venezuelan immigrants had an easier time. The newspaper analysis yielded different results, especially in relation to the Venezuelan immigrants. They were depicted as also struggling in relation to economic mobility, language proficiency, and the documentation process.

The newspaper analysis also provided more insight into the impacts of immigration policies on socioeconomic integration and the experiences of migrants from Venezuela and the Northern Triangle. Unfavorable enforcement policies were depicted as negatively impacting educational attainment as many students were deterred from attending or applying to schools in fear of being deported. The effects on social integration were depicted as positive when favorable policies allowed for family reunification and harmful when unfavorable policies promoted family separation. Lastly, policies that made the documentation process easier, such as DACA, were depicted as beneficial to the immigrant experience while those that slashed the number of available opportunities were seen as detrimental to immigrant success on all aspects of the socioeconomic integration experience.

### **Limitations**

This study provides important insight into the effects of immigration policy on migratory flows and immigrant experiences. However, the data examined for the impacts of policy on migratory flows, individuals granted affirmative asylum, and aliens removed is rather narrow. As there was little data that demonstrated concrete inflows and outflows, I had to choose data that was aligned with the policy shifts that occurred under the two administrations and many of these policy shifts had implications on refugee flows.

Also, relying on oral history interviews and newspaper analyses has its limitations. Individual anecdotes may not reflect the immigrant experience as a whole and newspaper data may contain bias. With the oral history interviews, there are also limitations regarding the interview questions. Without interviewing immigrants directly, I had to rely on the questions of others. I would have ideally incorporated more questions to discuss the impact of policy on their experience, but the newspaper analysis proved to be a sufficient supplementary source to this data.

Another limitation I encountered was in relation to my theoretical framework. As the assumptions that guided my hypotheses were ultimately not reflected in the data from the cases, it is probable that it may be too outdated or international to consider the foreign policy implications of the small, regional selection of cases. Domestic political implications seemed to be more pertinent in the decision-making process under these two administrations, and I would likely incorporate that into future research rather than relying too heavily on state relations.

### **Implications**

As it is unlikely for the Venezuelan and Northern Triangle crisis to come to an end, it is crucial to understand whether domestic immigration policies can dissuade migration. However, it is likely that factors other than immigration policy contribute to these flows such as economic, political, environmental, and social instability in the host countries that leave no other option than to migrate and seek asylum. Overall, it is unlikely that refugee policy, as defined under UNHCR convention, will change to expand to those coming due to push factors like climate and economic instability, so domestic politics in the US must develop immigration control policies well equipped to handle the massive increases in flows on both the documentation and

socioeconomic integration spheres. Foreign policy must also move toward developing plans to boost the stability of the origin countries to dissuade migration.

First, the priorities surrounding immigration must change. Policies should be focused on deterring migration through aid programs in the origin countries that aim to fix the economic, political, and societal structural issues that are at the forefront of the push factors resulting in migratory inflows. Although developing international aid programs would be an arduous process, there is hope that such programs can increase stability in the Northern Triangle and Venezuela with the ultimate outcome being a decrease in the need and desire to migrate.

However, immigration policy must continue to be improved for those who have already made the journey to the US. It is evident that immigration policies, especially in relation to documentation, make the socioeconomic integration process difficult for these immigrant populations. The indigenous immigrants from the Northern Triangle have an especially difficult time due to the language barrier. They are often subject to more racial discrimination from immigration officials, and lack of translators available within the legal system have resulted in family separation, detention, or deportation. It is crucial for the US to develop means to facilitate the documentation process for these immigrants, whether through the hiring or training of employees proficient in the languages or through English teaching assimilation programs.

The mixed methods nature of my project emphasizes that these immigrants are not just numbers. Their lives and experiences in the US are undoubtedly impacted by immigration policy. Fear, anxiety, and hopelessness were emotions echoed within the immigrant stories along with the restrictionist policies under Trump. In the presence of favorable policies, immigrants felt a sense of hope, community, and gratitude. With immigrant lives in the US either being upended or solidified by shifts in policy, it is important to note that the impacts of policy changes

are much more than numbers. They impact the livelihood of human beings. Perhaps this research will provide guidance to policymakers on ways in which to expand their mindset beyond the numbers to focus on the truly important effects of immigration policy on the immigrant experience.

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## APPENDIX

### Percentage Change in Individuals Granted Affirmative Asylum

Year	Venezuelans Granted Asylum	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	394	-	-
2010	467	19%	19%
2011	898	92%	128%
2012	960	7%	144%
2013	601	-37%	53%
2014	318	-47%	-19%
2015	466	47%	18%
2016	316	-32%	-20%
2017	482	53%	22%
2018	5,966	1138%	1414%

Year	Guatemalans Granted Asylum	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	348	-	-
2010	292	-16%	-16%
2011	288	-1%	-17%
2012	313	9%	-10%
2013	232	-26%	-33%
2014	312	34%	-10%
2015	1,698	444%	388%
2016	1,285	-24%	269%
2017	1,996	55%	474%
2018	1,337	-33%	284%

Year	Hondurans Granted Asylum	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	39	-	-
2010	50	28%	28%
2011	59	18%	51%
2012	138	134%	254%
2013	107	-22%	174%
2014	89	-17%	128%
2015	1,097	1133%	2713%
2016	856	-22%	2095%
2017	1,089	27%	2692%

2018	841	-23%	2056%
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Year	Salvadorans Granted Asylum	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	203	-	-
2010	158	-22%	-22%
2011	97	-39%	-52%
2012	135	39%	-33%
2013	71	-47%	-65%
2014	182	156%	-10%
2015	1,856	920%	814%
2016	1,380	-26%	580%
2017	2,121	54%	945%
2018	1,177	-45%	480%

**Percentage Change in Aliens Removed**

Year	Venezuelans Deported	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	297	-	-
2010	267	-10%	-10%
2011	215	-19%	-28%
2012	188	-13%	-37%
2013	203	8%	-32%
2014	177	-13%	-40%
2015	270	53%	-9%
2016	233	-14%	-22%
2017	547	135%	84%
2018	1,615	195%	444%

Year	Guatemalans Deported	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	1,860	-	-
2010	2,236	20%	20%
2011	3,010	35%	62%
2012	2,346	-22%	26%
2013	1,390	-41%	-25%
2014	1,141	-18%	-39%



2015	813	-29%	-56%
2016	899	11%	-52%
2017	1,338	49%	-28%
2018	2,151	61%	16%

Year	Hondurans Deported	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	1,354	-	-
2010	1,324	-2%	-2%
2011	1,563	18%	15%
2012	1,285	-18%	-5%
2013	931	-28%	-31%
2014	949	2%	-30%
2015	751	-21%	-45%
2016	669	-11%	-51%
2017	884	32%	-35%
2018	1,136	29%	-16%

country of origin	Salvadorans Deported	Yearly Change	Total Change
2009	1,072	-	-
2010	854	-20%	-20%
2011	1,045	22%	-3%
2012	937	-10%	-13%
2013	647	-31%	-40%
2014	505	-22%	-53%
2015	435	-14%	-59%
2016	471	8%	-56%
2017	595	26%	-44%
2018	785	32%	-27%