Triggers to Central American Migration: A Contemporary Study
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Introduction
In November of 2018, a caravan of approximately 7,000 Central Americans trekked more than 2,500 miles across hostile territory to reach the U.S. Southern Border and file a claim for asylum (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). Virtually all caravan members came from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—a region characterized by grinding poverty, widespread violence, and governmental instability. Attracting heavy media coverage, this emerging phenomenon of transnational migration drew attention to the growing humanitarian crisis in Central America and at the southern border. Yet despite its recent coverage, Central American migration to the U.S. has been a persistent occurrence since the end of the Cold War. In fact, Department of Homeland Security records illustrate explosive surges occurring much sooner than the appearance of the caravans. Between 2011-2014 alone, the Northern Triangle experienced a 250 percent increase in apprehensions (Department of Homeland Security, 2020). Accordingly, these varying migratory trends put forth a puzzling inquiry leading up the humanitarian crisis of today. Motivated by the current question of migrant caravans, my research will survey the historical motivations of Central American migration patterns while attempting to understand the contemporary developments of the issue. Placing all these components together, my research question will be as follows:

What are the main forces driving contemporary Central American migration patterns?

Methods
My research design consists of a qualitative approach in which I conduct a case study of Honduras to create an in-depth examination of the independent variables driving migration. The study employs border apprehensions as the main measure of migration with data drawn from the Department of Homeland Security’s Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Furthermore, the period of observation takes place from 1992-2015. As for the methodological approach, I rely on process tracing as a deductive means to decipher which of potential triggers have contributed to the surges and to what degree. While this method does not denote causation, it allows for a unique blend of qualitative analysis matched with quantitative data that, together, has put forth a comprehensive and detailed account of the factors conducive to Honduran migration. Critical components of this approach include the uncovering of causal linkages and closely examining the trajectory of change over time.

Results
The results of the case study are each layered, contributing to a more complete explanation of the puzzle. Though not hypothesized, I first begin with the role of poverty. Dedicating a chapter to this topic, I conclude that poverty—due to its historical presence in Honduras and lack of variability throughout the period observation—is not a driving force of migration. Still, it does serve as a base condition for the surges. Similarly, the developmental aid hypotheses do not show a sufficient correlation with apprehension trends. Upon examining its base condition for the surges. Similarly, the developmental aid hypotheses do not show a sufficient correlation with apprehension trends. Upon examining its

Discussion
Each of the results derived from the case study are highly applicable to the rest of the Northern Triangle region. Not only does each country receive a similar amount of developmental aid but they are also subject to the same pool of criminal organizations and are affected regionally by climate change. Thus, the conclusions derived from my study of Honduras may directly correspond to El Salvador and Guatemala with only few discrepancies. In application to post-2015 trends, these findings will serve as a strong basis to approach future research. As we continue to experience the emergence of new patterns—such as the migrants caravans that have motivated this study—it may be worth noting the potential waxes and wanes between each impetus over time. One example is the immense cut-off in Northern Triangle aid of approximately 78 percent proposed by the Trump administration (USAID, 2020). Additionally, the chances of prolonged drought and extreme weather events will become more likely as temperatures continue to gradually increase while rainfall decreases (USAID, 2017). Such developments may imply changes in the potency and role of each trigger. Accordingly, their continual observation will inform us a great deal about future migratory trends.

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References