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For decades, the U.S. policy on immigration from Latin America has focused exclusively on preventing illegal immigration. Such a one-sided approach has exasperated the U.S. immigration situation rather than helped those in power understand and address the underlying reasons why so many are willing to take the associated risks. The inability to assess Latin American countries' needs demonstrates the disconnect between policy and implementation of U.S. departments and agencies programs to increase capacity and stability. Adopting the "push-pull" theory as a framework for understanding why people risk their lives to immigrate to the U.S. illegally will help policymakers understand the strategic environment and enable strategists to design approaches that help the U.S., its allies and partners to mitigate the underlying problems. The study provides background on U.S. interests in Latin America due to geography, economy, and security with historical references of immigration policy across five administrations as the context and consequence of U.S. presidents over time. The Biden Administration is at an inflection point with immigration and a global health crisis. The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability provides the approach to assist leaders on immigration.

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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**  
**JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE**  
**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**ARE WE THERE YET? USING THE PUSH-PULL THEORY  
TO ADDRESS LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO THE U.S. DURING  
COVID-19**

By:

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**ARE WE THERE YET? USING THE PUSH-PULL THEORY  
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COVID-19**

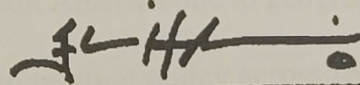
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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.**

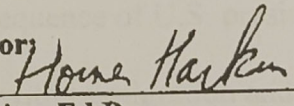
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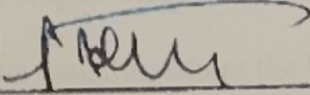
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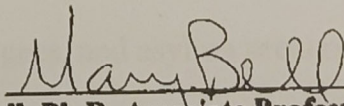
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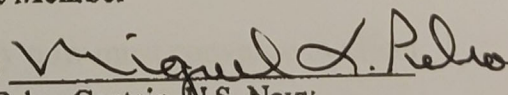
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## Abstract

For decades, the U.S. policy on immigration from Latin America has focused exclusively on preventing illegal immigration. Such a one-sided approach has exasperated the U.S. immigration situation rather than helped those in power understand and address the underlying reasons why so many are willing to take the associated risks. The inability to assess Latin American countries' needs demonstrates the disconnect between policy and implementation of U.S. departments and agencies programs to increase capacity and stability. Adopting the "push-pull" theory as a framework for understanding why people risk their lives to immigrate to the U.S. illegally will help policymakers understand the strategic environment and enable strategists to design approaches that help the U.S., its allies and partners to mitigate the underlying problems. The study provides background on U.S. interests in Latin America due to geography, economy, and security with historical references of immigration policy across five administrations from 1986-2020 as the context and consequence of U.S. presidents over time. The Biden Administration is at an inflection point with immigration and a global health crisis. The human security situation exacerbated by fragile democracies, authoritarian regimes, and economic indebtedness creates a situation where the U.S. involvement is necessary to shape the environment post-pandemic to minimize any increase in migration, internally displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers. The *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* provides the approach to assist leaders as these challenges on immigration. Policy and strategy now must converge to affect change. An understanding of whole-of-government activities is inherent in the success of these activities and their sustainability.

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## **Dedication**

I want to thank my wife, Jennifer, and our sons, Iraán and Jalil, for their encouragement, confidence, and patience throughout this process.

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## Table of Contents

Table of Figures.....	<i>xi</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	<b>1</b>
Chapter 2: Migration Theory .....	<b>5</b>
Chapter 3: Immigration Policy by Presidential Administration (1986-2020).....	<b>13</b>
President George H.W. Bush .....	<b>13</b>
President William Clinton.....	<b>15</b>
President George H. Bush.....	<b>18</b>
President Barack Obama.....	<b>20</b>
President Donald Trump .....	<b>22</b>
President Joseph Biden .....	<b>24</b>
Chapter 4: The COVID-19 Effect .....	<b>28</b>
U.S. Government Response .....	<b>29</b>
USSOUTHCOM Response.....	<b>30</b>
Significance of Response.....	<b>31</b>
Chapter 5: Recommendation and Conclusion.....	<b>34</b>
Policy .....	<b>36</b>
Strategy .....	<b>37</b>
Criteria-Factors .....	<b>38</b>
Bibliography.....	<b>49</b>
Vita.....	<b>59</b>

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**Table of Figures**

Figure 1 - Origin and Destination Factors and Intervening Obstacles in Migration. .... 7

Figure 2 - Pew Research Center Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. .... 26

Figure 3 - U.S. Southern Command COVID-19 Humanitarian Assistance Program  
projects..... 31

Figure 4 - COVID-19: A Top Cause of Death in The Americas. .... 32

Figure 5 - Department and Agency Roles and Responsibilities. .... 44

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Democratic states connected by shared values and economic interests will reduce the violence, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration that threaten our shared security and limit opportunities for adversaries to operate from areas of proximity to us”.*<sup>1</sup>

—Donald Trump, 45th President of the United States

Are we there yet? This is the question migrants ask themselves when they leave their point of origin for a new destination in the U.S., searching for a better life for themselves and their families. The U.S. government asks itself the same type of question when developing or adjusting immigration policy and country-specific engagement strategies to invest time, funds, and resources to maintain U.S. prosperity and security. There is no silver bullet to crafting a perfect immigration policy or a country engagement plan because of the complexity of foreign policy and interaction between sovereign nations. The U.S. and Latin America have a long and storied history of strong partnerships designed to advance the Western Hemisphere. Throughout the long history, interests associated with democracy, free trade, illicit drugs, and immigration have been part of the discourse because of the security, economic, and social impacts on the Western Hemisphere.

For decades, the U.S. policy on immigration from Latin America has focused almost exclusively on preventing illegal immigration. Such a one-sided approach has exasperated versus helped the U.S. understand and resolve why so many are willing to take enormous risks to enter the country. Despite identifying immigration as a matter of vital national interest, it has been primarily peripheral, with neither side of the political

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<sup>1</sup> Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy*. (Washington, DC, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 51.

spectrum in the U.S. able to gain consensus leading to a comprehensive approach to the challenge of illegal migration.

Policy under the former presidential administration may have slowed immigrants' flow across the border. However, the conditions that drive immigration— legal and illegal alike—have not improved south of the border. In fact, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has worsened conditions in several countries and threatens to create more momentum for people to migrate to the U.S. in the future. On July 1, 2020, Deputy Administrator from the Bureau of Latin American and the Caribbean, Joshua Hodges, testified to the sentiment before the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. He stated,

“the COVID-19 pandemic is unique in that it is causing widespread health and economic devastation across the world, in developed and developing countries alike. The challenges that COVID-19 brings forward have the ability, if unchecked, to magnify underlying and ongoing development challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean, which potentially undermines the significant investments made through the American people's generosity.”<sup>2</sup>

The inability to assess Latin American countries' needs as it pertains to COVID-19 demonstrates the disconnect between policy and identified requirements to increase capacity and stability. One way to address these disconnects is by studying the issues through the push-pull framework.

Adopting the "push-pull" theory as a framework for understanding why people risk their lives in the effort to immigrate illegally to the United States will help policymakers understand the strategic environment in Latin America, enabling strategists

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<sup>2</sup> “Prepared Testimony of Joshua Hodges, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean, before the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | July 1, 2020 | U.S. Agency for International Development,” July 1, 2020. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/congressional-testimony/jul-1-2020-joshua-hodges-sdaa-lac-response-covid-19-latin-america>.

to design strategic approaches that help U.S. allies and partners with strained relations to mitigate the underlying problem leading to illegal immigration. Without understanding the drivers and factors of immigration across the southern U.S. border, the lack of action by the Department of State on the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Latin America* or action that does not comport with the realities of immigration factors could jeopardize the current administration's plan for immigration reform.

Chapter 2 introduces the push-pull theory as it relates to international migration to provide a basic understanding of the factors that cause a migrant to leave their origin in the hope of a better life in a new destination. It then focuses on the specific push-pull factors evident in Latin American that cause migrants to enter the U.S. by traversing unknown and dangerous paths. The chapter culminates by proposing Latin American immigration is a vital national interest, and the U.S. needs to act now with a different approach to achieve different results.

Chapter 3 provides the background on U.S. interests in Latin America due to geography, economy, and security and the level of national interest and historical references of immigration policy across administrations from 1986-2020 as the context and consequence of U.S. presidents over time. Each presidential administration's election campaign included immigration policy reform. In each case, implementation or lack thereof was shaped by partisan politics, interest groups, or the executive branch's will. While the Biden Administration's will and strategic guidance signal a shift from previous administrations, other detractors persist.

Chapter 4 provides COVID-19 pandemic highlights as a global health crisis that directly affects migration flow to the U.S. and indirectly in the region due to human

security. The human security situation exacerbated by fragile democracies, authoritarian regimes, and economic indebtedness creates a situation where U.S. involvement is necessary to shape the environment post-pandemic to minimize any increase in migration, internally displaced people, refugees, or asylum seekers.

Chapter 5 recommends implementing the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* in Latin America as a regional concept in conjunction with the Biden Administration's immigration policy reforms as a tool to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on migration to improve U.S.-Latin American relations. The chapter concludes that immigration policy reform is of central importance to the U.S. vital national interests, and the stabilization strategy is the nexus between executive will and achieving national objectives.

Ultimately, the decision to make Latin America a priority region is based on national interests and the current environment. The approach is the stabilization framework that can help leaders address the immigration challenge to counter regional and external actors that threaten stability and security.

## Chapter 2: Migration Theory

*“Integrating, aligning, and unifying our efforts with partners is critical to our collective success. Close relationships, built on trust, facilitate our efforts to increase institutional capacity, counter threats, and respond rapidly and effectively to crises.”<sup>1</sup>*

-Admiral T. Faller, Commander, U.S. Southern Command

Migration is a natural phenomenon where human beings move from one place to another, whether temporarily or permanently, for a wide variety of factors. There are extensive theories on why people migrate, and one study breaks those reasons down into four main categories: labor migration, return migration, chain migration, and asylum migration. Labor migration is when people cross national borders for employment. When a migrant works in another country then return to their home country for at least a year, they are considered return migrants. When a migrant moves from one country to another to unite their family, that is called chain migration. Migrants who flee their home country for fear of violence or reprisal are considered asylum seekers.<sup>2</sup>

There are many ways to categorize migration theories. Examples of different categorizations are level-based and discipline-based.<sup>3</sup> The first categorization focuses on varying levels of migration, including micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level.<sup>4</sup> The micro-level considers migration decisions based on the individual’s perspective. Macro-level looks at migration decisions based on an aggregate point of view. For example, people migrate based on the economics of a country. The meso-level considers migration decisions based on a mix of both micro and macro level. Examples are family bonds or isolated minority communities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Southern Command. Strengthen Partnerships <https://www.southcom.mil/Lines-of-Effort/Strengthen-Partnerships/> (accessed March 2, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> A.A.I.N. Wickramasinghe and Wijitapure Wimalaratana, “International Migration And Migration Theories,” *Social Affairs: A Journal for the Social Sciences*, Vol 1, No. 5, Fall 2016, pp. 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

The discipline-based migration theories are divided into various disciplines such as economics, sociology, geography, and demography.<sup>6</sup> This study focuses on sociological migration theory at the micro or individual level.

In 1966, E.S. Lee proposed a comprehensive migration theory that refers to the factors that lead to migration as positive and negative, more commonly referred to as push-pull.<sup>7</sup> Push factors are undesirable conditions in the migrant's place of origin that push them away, and pull factors attract the migrant to the desired destination due to their desirable qualities. The migrant, as Lee describes it, also encounters intervening obstacles, but the migrant rarely takes such obstacles into account in their decision-making. Lee states the factors that drive the decision to migrate and the process of migration may be summarized under the following four types:

1. Factors associated with the area of origin.
2. Factors associated with the area of destination.
3. Intervening obstacles.
4. Personal factors.<sup>8</sup>

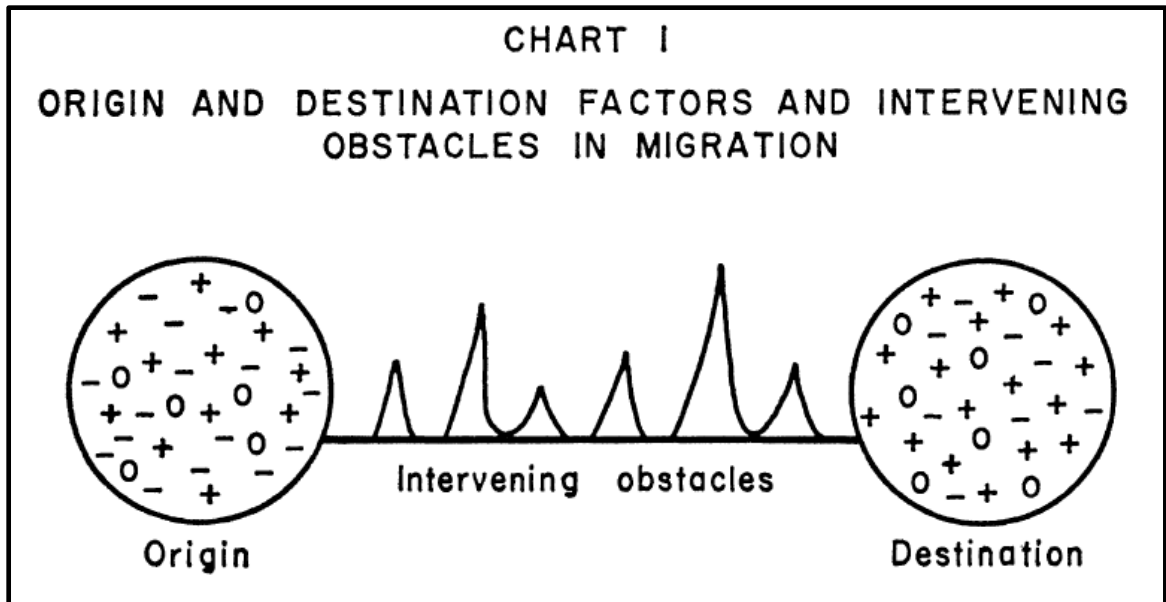
Personal factors, such as language barriers, cultural differences, safety, and shelter, also play a role in a migrant's decision to leave their place of origin. For instance, if a migrant decides to move to a new country where they cannot speak some of the language, they will find it hard to express themselves. Figure 1, shows these personal factors that may become intervening obstacles and affect a person's decision to migrate.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Everett S. Lee. A Theory on Migration. Athens Center of Ekistics. 1967, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43614502>, (accessed September 12, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 213.



*Figure 1 - Origin and Destination Factors and Intervening Obstacles in Migration.*  
 Source: Ekistics, "A Theory of Migration," April 1967, Accessed on November 10, 2020,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43614502>.

The push-pull theory is essential to explaining the causes of continued migration from Latin America to the U.S. because it provides a current understanding of the environment. Many factors influence why Latin Americans are being pushed to the U.S. to include violence, political corruption, poverty, and human security, which includes a lack of adequate food and healthcare, especially during COVID-19. In response, the U.S. pull factors include safety, security, work opportunities, access to food, and a robust healthcare system. Illegal immigration is less about the U.S. and more about the push factors of violence, political corruption, poverty, and human security in Latin America.

### **Violence**

Violence is the use of physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy someone.<sup>9</sup> The impact of violence is visible through physical battery and invisible

<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "corruption," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence> (accessed January 21, 2021).

through psychological and emotional stress. The World Health Organization report on violence states that it is impossible to calculate the human cost in grief and pain. In fact, much of it is almost invisible.<sup>10</sup> When a person is regularly exposed to violence and does not receive support or find a haven, it increases the likelihood that they will flee without a plan or a planned destination.

Violence is one of the most common push factors Latin America faces today, and it has been increasing over the last several decades in Latin American countries.<sup>11</sup> Four countries in Latin America, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela, account for a quarter of all murders each year globally. Of the twenty countries in the world with the highest murder rates, seventeen are in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> The most common acts of violence are perpetrated by gangs, cartels, and militia groups against the government or the general population, often resulting in significant trauma and death. Local law enforcement cannot provide protection or are part of the problem, pushing migrants to choose between their home's dangers and the uncertainty of migrating north.

### **Corruption**

Corruption is dishonest or illegal behavior, especially by influential people such as government officials or police officers.<sup>13</sup> Excessive corruption leads to weak governance, minimal development opportunity, or disbelief or trust in the judicial system

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<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization. Violence: a global public health problem. [https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/chap1.pdf](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/chap1.pdf) (accessed March 11, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Immigration Forum. Push or Pull Factors: What Drives Central American Migrants to the U.S.? <https://immigrationforum.org/article/push-or-pull-factors-what-drives-central-american-migrants-to-the-u-s/> (accessed February 25, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Erickson. **Latin America is the world's most violent region. A new report investigates why.** Washington Post, April 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/25/latin-america-is-the-worlds-most-violent-region-a-new-report-investigates-why/> (accessed February 2, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "corruption," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corruption> (accessed January 21, 2021)

and law enforcement. Corruption can also be an obstacle to foreign investment or support from international economic institutions. If a country's government can increase its financial transparency and show consistency in its justice system, which leads to a reduction in corruption, it increases trust and decreases a citizen's desire to leave.

Corruption is another intense push factor in many Latin American countries. Accordingly, the Organization of the Americas and the World Bank held a symposium called *The Fight Against Corruption in Latin America and The Caribbean* to identify the causal factors to create a strategy to stem the tide of corruption.<sup>14</sup> The report highlighted how the repercussions of political corruption directly affect a country's domestic economy, international investments, and private direct investments.<sup>15</sup> A lack of or misdirection of funds impedes institutional development and job creation, pushing citizens to search for employment outside the country. A 2014 Congressional research report on Latin America emphasized that public-sector corruption can contribute to migration since corruption fosters criminality, such as violence, and erodes the rule of law, which is likely a contributing factor to Central Americans migrating to the U.S.<sup>16</sup> If the political sphere in Latin America is not addressed adequately by reducing the corruption that undermines the economy and security, any further investments will be superficial. The extreme poverty in many countries is associated with corruption and the lack of political will to provide economic vitality.

## **Poverty**

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<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Sheppard. *The Fight Against Corruption In Latin America And The Caribbean: A World Bank View*. Chile 1998. <https://www.oas.org/JURIDICO/spanish/RepoBM.htm> (accessed February 24, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Services. *Combating Corruption in Latin America: Congressional Considerations*. Washington DC. May 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45733.pdf>, 16. (accessed February 24, 2021)

A person who lives in poverty is defined as one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.<sup>17</sup> An acceptable amount of money provides the economic viability to obtain and sustain life's basic amenities: shelter, food, and clothing. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has described economic growth as a crucial means for expanding the substantive freedoms that people value. These freedoms are strongly associated with improvements in general living standards, such as greater opportunities for people to become healthier, eat better and live longer.<sup>18</sup> Recent estimates for global poverty by the World Bank are that 9.2% of the world's population, or 689 million people, live in extreme poverty on \$1.90 or less a day.<sup>19</sup> Poverty can lead to poor health, prolonged economic disparity, social exclusion, and susceptibility to crime and other illicit activities.

In Latin America, 76% of the population is in the low-income or lower-middle-income range, with the latter experiencing significant social and labor inclusion deficits and a high degree of vulnerability to falling back into poverty.<sup>20</sup> The dire situations affect adults, children, and families and creates cycles of poverty. While the U.S. is not immune to poverty, U.S. citizens have better employment opportunities and a vast institutional support structure to provide basic amenities. The ability to decrease the poverty and wealth inequality gaps minimizes the want or need to migrate. Increased wealth equates

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<sup>17</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "corruption," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poverty> (accessed January 21, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Department of International Development. GROWTH: Building Jobs and Prosperity in Developing Countries. <https://www.oecd.org/derec/unitedkingdom/40700982.pdf>, 7. (accessed March 11, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> World Vision. Global Poverty: Facts, FAQs, and how to help. <https://www.worldvision.org/sponsorship-news-stories/global-poverty-facts#facts>. (accessed March 11, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-region-has-underestimated-inequality>

to greater access to food and healthcare, also known as human security. A recent report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean highlights that poverty reduction programs with a universal supply of quality health and education services are needed to eradicate poverty.<sup>21</sup>

### **Human Security**

Human Security is the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair.<sup>22</sup> Food and medical insecurity are often categorized under human security. Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.<sup>23</sup> Many times the inability to obtain adequate amounts of nutritious foods lead to health issues that require medical attention to correct. Unfortunately, individuals suffering from poverty are uncertain, anxious, and vulnerable due to their ability to access or sustain adequate health care services. In the current pandemic environment, food and medical insecurity have increasingly become driving factors of migration since governments do not have adequate resources for either due to preexistent fragile economies that were underwritten by international economic institutions.

According to the World Food Program, “the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean could potentially leave around

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<sup>21</sup> Simone Cecchini. “Reducing Poverty amidst High Levels of Inequality: Lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean,” 8. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2017/04/Simone-Cecchini-Reducing-poverty-amidst-high-levels-of-inequality.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Human Security Unit. Human Security & Food Security. <http://www.fao.org/3/i5522e/i5522e.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

14 million vulnerable people in severe food insecurity this year.”<sup>24</sup> The vulnerability of fragile governments and declining economic viability deny the country to shift resources to subsidize the entire population forcing a migration to another destination.

Unfortunately, the same holds for medical support. Migrants’ socio-economic status also negatively affects their ability to take all precautionary measures against COVID-19 and receive medical care if contaminated due to lack of or inappropriate health insurance and insufficient financial resources.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, this can lead to prolonged exposure to other sicknesses that are compounded and lead to death. As Latin American countries continue to grapple with human security, exacerbated by COVID-19, an inefficient and ineffective healthcare system and lack of a medical-industrial base are highlighted, and people are crossing porous borders for survival.

To summarize, push-pull factors are those conditions that drive people away from their place of origin and draws them to an unknown destination. A combination of the factors drives migration. Many factors such as violence, political corruption, poverty, and human security, push Latin Americans to migrate north. Simultaneously, U.S. pull factors of less violence, political corruption, greater economic viability, access to food, and a robust healthcare system attract migrants. The determinant between successful and unsuccessful national policies regarding migration depends on understanding the environmental conditions that drive migration and the causal relationships between the factors to ensure policies holistically and accurately address migration-related issues.

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<sup>24</sup> Mathias Roed. COVID-19: Millions at risk of severe food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. World Food Programme. March 2020, <https://www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-millions-risk-severe-food-insecurity-latin-america-and-caribbean> (accessed March 1, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Chamie. International Migration amid a World in Crisis, *Journal on Migration and Human Security*. 2020, 236.

### **Chapter 3: Immigration Policy by Presidential Administration (1986-2020)**

*“Everyone agrees that our immigration system is broken and that it has been broken for decades.”<sup>26</sup>*

-House Committee on the Judiciary

Migration continues to be a subject of political debate. Over the past decade, concerns have been raised regarding the huge influx of migrants from Latin America, which includes staggering numbers of Central Americans arriving via Mexico. To apply Lee’s push-pull migration theory to the current environment under the Biden Administration, it is important to first understand the recent presidential administrations' history. Understanding that history is critical to know where there is room for improvement in national policy. This chapter studies the last five presidential administrations ranging from President George H.W. Bush to President Donald Trump.

#### **President George H.W. Bush**

President George H.W. Bush’s election came on the heels of significant policy advancement to address the Reagan Administration's immigration issue. Although immigration had been a low priority for Reagan earlier in his political career, increasing public and congressional concern and the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) report's arrival forced him to establish an immigration task force.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, the immigration task force presented the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA led to the legalization of approximately 2.7 million

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<sup>26</sup> House Committee on the Judiciary, *Immigration*, Washington DC.

<https://judiciary.house.gov/issues/issue/?IssueID=14897>. (Accessed February 17, 2021).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

illegal immigrants, but lawmakers underestimated the remaining illegal immigrant population.<sup>28</sup>

President Bush continued with immigration reform. He signed into law the broadest revision of U.S. immigration laws in more than a half-century. The act provided for the admission of 700,000 immigrants into the U.S. in fiscal years 1992 through 1994 at roughly 675,000 immigrants a year.<sup>29</sup> Simultaneously, President Bush continued to invest in the War on Drugs begun by previous presidents and linked illegal immigration to combating drugs. He stated, “the legislation meets several objectives of my Administration's war on drugs and violent crime. Specifically, it provides for the expeditious deportation of aliens who, by their violent criminal acts, forfeit their right to remain in this country. These offenders, comprising nearly a quarter of our federal prison population, jeopardize every American resident's safety and well-being.<sup>30</sup>” Unfortunately, the statement and implementation of the enhanced law enforcement measures at the southern border made immigration issues a subset of the strategy to fight transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). The drug problem in the U.S. was the primary focus to reduce the supply sources in Latin America, and immigration became associated with that fight. The association led to drastic changes regarding foreign policy with Latin America and increased U.S. investments to eradicate the source of both drugs and immigration, barricading the border without consideration for the consequences.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Maddox. Ronald Reagan and the Task Force on Immigration. University of California: Pacific Historical Review, Vol 74, No 2, May 2005, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2005.74.2.195>. (accessed February 18, 2021), 227.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Glass. Bush signs immigration reform statute into law, Nov. 29, 1990, Politico, November 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/11/29/bush-immigration-reform-1990-1014141> (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Glass. Bush signs immigration reform statute into law, Nov. 29, 1990, Politico, November 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/11/29/bush-immigration-reform-1990-1014141> (accessed February 19, 2021).

The Bush administration spent approximately \$562 million on border security and immigration enforcement.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the federal drug control budget increased from \$5 billion to \$12 billion. Specifically in Latin America, President Bush launched the “Andean Initiative” to bolster counter-narcotics support to Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Under the initiative, Congress provided the Department of Defense (DOD) with its first major counter-narcotics authority, identifying DOD as the lead federal agency to detect and monitor aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs from abroad into the United States.<sup>32</sup> Initiatives like the Andean Initiative complimented ongoing engagements in the region, emphasizing preventing violence, the rule of law, and other social factors that ate away at society. The funding change marked the sharpest escalation in the history of the drug war, and it locked the country into a strategy of punishment, deterrence, and intolerance but did little to alleviate addiction or halt the flow of drugs.<sup>33</sup>

### **President William Clinton**

President William Clinton came into office at the end of the Cold War, and the U.S. economy was in recession. His policies were based on increasing U.S. presence and creating an environment for open markets and free trade agreements to increase middle-class Americans' equity. President Clinton believed the more that democracy, political, and economic liberalization took hold in the world, particularly in countries of geostrategic importance to the U.S., the safer the U.S. would be, and the more U.S.

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<sup>31</sup> The Cost of Border Security & Immigration Enforcement in the U.S. July 2019. <https://howmuch.net/articles/the-cost-of-border-security-and-immigration-enforcement-in-the-us> (accessed February 24, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Clare Ribaldo Seelke. Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs, Congressional Research Services, May 2011, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41215.pdf> (accessed Marc 1, 2021), 11.)

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Pembleton. George H.W. Bush’s biggest failure? The war on drugs. Washington DC. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/12/06/george-hw-bushs-biggest-failure-war-drugs/> (accessed February 24, 2021).

citizens would prosper.<sup>34</sup> Latin America is of geostrategic importance to the U.S.; however, the Clinton Administration's immigration policy towards Latin American countries was also overshadowed by the ongoing War on Drugs. The 1994 *National Security Strategy* articulated very clearly that a way to cooperate with Mexico and other Latin American countries to curb illegal immigration and narcotics trafficking was by advancing the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).<sup>35</sup> NAFTA was purported as a win-win for the U.S., Canada, and Mexico because it was supposed to improve the economy and create jobs. The implementation of NAFTA would not come without a cost.

As the U.S. embarked on the implementation of NAFTA, it was juxtaposed with the reality of dealing with illegal immigration. The desired effects of increased free trade under NAFTA on the economy were going to take time; therefore the U.S. continued with security measures at the southern border to control the migration flow. In the 1996 budget, President Clinton called for a \$1 billion increase to combat illegal immigration through border control, worksite enforcement, removal of criminal aliens, assistance to states, other key initiatives, and his administration was the first to develop a National Detention and Removal Program.<sup>36</sup> The national initiatives and the program were designed to work in tandem with the Mexican government's efforts to create a stable environment for economic prosperity.

President Clinton anticipated migration from Mexico and the rest of Latin America would decrease with the implementation of the trade agreement and increased

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<sup>34</sup> White House. A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, Washington DC, 1994. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>36</sup> William Clinton. Rebuilding America For A New Era. Washington DC, 1995. [https://clintonwhitehouse1.archives.gov/White\\_House/Publications/html/briefs/iii-7.html](https://clintonwhitehouse1.archives.gov/White_House/Publications/html/briefs/iii-7.html) (accessed February 19, 2021).

border investments. In terms of social and economic factors, part of the trade agreement directed Mexico to enforce its laws in worker health and safety, child labor, and the minimum wage.<sup>37</sup> The Clinton Administration believed that focusing on the three areas would directly address poverty and human security and indirectly decrease violence and gender inequality, and migration push factors. Simultaneously, the benefits of a growing economy would create more self-sustainment opportunities and reduce Mexican citizens' desire to migrate north. President Clinton emphasized that when Mexicans have more disposable income to buy more U.S. products, there will be less illegal immigration because more Mexicans will support their children by staying home.<sup>38</sup> The Clinton Administration believed the benefits would directly decrease the migration pull factor to the U.S. for work opportunities and indirectly for access to education and healthcare.

President Clinton's agenda for his eight years in office worked to address issues from economic recession recovery to international conflicts. Inside of these parameters, Clinton's Administration primarily utilized NAFTA as the vehicle to counter the push-pull factors on why Mexicans and Latin Americans migrate north. However, NAFTA devastated Mexico's rural economy and destroyed many small- and medium-sized businesses in Mexico. With millions of Mexicans displaced from rural communities competing for the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs that relocated from the

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<sup>37</sup> The White House. Remarks By President Clinton, President Bush, President Carter, President Ford, And Vice President Gore In Signing Of NAFTA Side Agreements, <https://clintonwhitehouse6.archives.gov/1993/09/1993-09-14-remarks-by-clinton-and-former-presidents-on-nafta.html>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

U.S. under NAFTA, many found no work.<sup>39</sup> Although the free trade agreement benefited the U.S. economy, border security spending did not deter migration.

### **President George W. Bush**

President George W. Bush knew that the U.S. had an illegal immigration problem entering office based on previous administrations and personal experience as the Governor of Texas. His campaign platform included his immigration approach, which included establishing a six-month standard for processing immigration applications, encouraging family reunification, and splitting the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).<sup>40</sup> His immigration platform was similar to previous administrations. President Bush took the initiative early on in his administration to visit Mexican President Vicente Fox to address bilateral migration issues.<sup>41</sup> This direct engagement was an attempt to gain commitment to attack the push-pull factors comprehensively. Unfortunately, the presidents could not agree, and the immigration issue was overtaken by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11). It would not be until President Bush's second term that he reaffirmed his commitment to immigration reform.

In his second term, President Bush's decision calculus was shaped by the events of 9/11, forcing him to link terrorism with immigration as an issue to address to defend the homeland. This linkage moved the law enforcement function of immigration to the newly established Department of Homeland Security. These

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<sup>39</sup> Public Citizen Foundation, Fact Sheet: NAFTA's Legacy: Failed Trade Policy That Drove Millions From Their Homes, September 2019, [https://mkus3lurbh3lbztg254fzode-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/NAFTA-Factsheet\\_Immigration\\_Oct-2019-1.pdf](https://mkus3lurbh3lbztg254fzode-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/NAFTA-Factsheet_Immigration_Oct-2019-1.pdf) (accessed March 1, 2021), 2.

<sup>40</sup>George W. Bush for President, George W. Bush 2000 On The Issues, 2000.

**Immigration** <http://www.4president.org/issues/bush2000/bush2000immigration.htm> (accessed February 27, 2021).

<sup>41</sup>Jeb Bush and Thomas F. McLarty III, U.S. Immigration Policy: Independent Task Force Report No. 63. Council for Foreign Relations, [https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/Immigration\\_TFR63.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Immigration_TFR63.pdf) (accessed February 26, 2021)

are actions, albeit well-intended, that divided the immigration process's roles and responsibilities with the Department of State, increasing the complexity of obtaining a cohesive immigration policy or plan. The Bush Administration's budget included border security investments of \$10.4 billion for employer enforcement for illegals, tamper-proof identification, temporary worker program, with one difference being no amnesty.<sup>42</sup> Although it had been six years since 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were still ongoing as part of the "War on Terrorism." The political and economic crisis in 2007-2008 prevented a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants attainable with U.S. citizens losing their homes and savings.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, President Bush focused his efforts on stabilizing the economy before leaving office in 2008.

President Bush's 2001 and 2007 immigration reform plans aimed to fix the physical and electronic immigration process. His investment to secure the border was considered an obstacle for migrants flowing in from the southern border. Additionally, the administration's wanted to hold employers accountable by fining them for hiring illegal immigrants, in hopes that this would decrease the migration flow. However, President Bush's creation of a temporary worker program seemed counter to any gains from employer accountability since temporary workers often led to overstays once work visas expired. The issue already existed in the immigration process and made it difficult to track workers once they left their initial place of employment.

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<sup>42</sup>White House. State of the Union: President Bush's Plan For Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Washington DC: 2007, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/stateoftheunion/2007/initiatives/immigration.html> (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. The U.S. Financial Crisis. CFR. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-financial-crisis> (accessed February 27, 2021).

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan dominated President Bush's terms in office. The shift to the war on terrorism changed the focus on immigration alone to immigration as a sub-set to the government's efforts to counter violent extremist organization threat. Increased U.S. border enforcement efforts, though necessary, have had the unintended effect of increasing the population at the entry points for the U.S. to house, process, and transport to their place of origin or another agreed-upon country.

### **President Barack Obama**

President Barack Obama inherited two long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and an immediate need to rebuild the economy. In his second term, he attempted to deliver on his other campaign promise in fixing the sorely flawed and broken immigration system. The plan focused on three actions: provide additional resources for law enforcement personnel at the border, improve the path for high-skilled immigrants, graduates, and entrepreneurs to stay and contribute to the U.S. economy, and take steps to deal with the millions of undocumented immigrants.<sup>44</sup> The complete plan passed in the Senate but not in the House of Representatives, lacking a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants residing in the U.S.

Although not directly related to immigration reform, the Obama Administration made a significant investment to reinvigorate the economy. The most notable bill was the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which authorized government investments of about \$833 billion in infrastructure, education, health, clean energy, and helping states

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<sup>44</sup> White House. President Obama Announces New Steps to Fix Our Broken Immigration System, Washington DC, November 2014. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/immigration/immigration-action#> (accessed February 19, 2021).

balance their budgets.<sup>45</sup> According to pull migration theory, these are all factors that immigrants evaluate when deciding to migrate. In 2015 President Obama's budget proposal included nearly \$374 million for border security, an increase of \$90 million from current funding levels for the Department of Homeland Security. The funding, among other things, paid for new technology on the border and 2,300 additional customs officers.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the proposal included \$142 million to support Mexico law enforcement and improve conditions in Mexico.<sup>47</sup> These budget proposals and signing legislation like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which offered two-year immigration deferrals and work permits, and the DREAM Act, to protect young immigrants who are vulnerable to deportation, were the last efforts of President Obama to affect the U.S. immigration problem.<sup>48</sup>

The Obama Administration's enforcement practices drew criticism from the left and the right. Some immigrant advocacy groups criticized his administration for overseeing the deportation of more than three million people during his eight-year tenure, exceeding those of the Clinton and George W. Bush Administrations.<sup>49</sup> Many Republicans said the Obama administration, by narrowing its deportation efforts to undocumented immigrants who had committed serious crimes, was soft on enforcement.

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<sup>45</sup> Josh Hicks. Obama's failed promise of a first-year immigration overhaul, September 2012. . [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/obamas-failed-promise-of-a-first-year-immigration-overhaul/2012/09/25/06997958-0721-11e2-a10c-fa5a255a9258\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/obamas-failed-promise-of-a-first-year-immigration-overhaul/2012/09/25/06997958-0721-11e2-a10c-fa5a255a9258_blog.html) (accessed February 27, 2021)

<sup>46</sup> Rebecca Ballhaus. Obama Immigration Budget Underscores Deep Division with GOP. Wall Street Journal, February 2015. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-immigration-budget-underscores-deep-division-with-gop-1422916192>. (accessed February 26, 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Claire Felter. The U.S. Immigration Debate. Council of Foreign Relations, June 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0> (accessed February 26, 2021)

<sup>49</sup> American Immigration Council Staff. **President Obama's Legacy on Immigration.** Immigration Impact, January 2017. (accessed February 26, 2021).

## **President Donald Trump**

President Donald Trump ran his campaign on a controversial immigration platform that bordered on isolationism with little regard for the effects on U.S. influence in the world. His plan included building a wall at the southern border, deporting approximately eleven million illegal immigrants, creating a deportation force, visa tracking, E-verification for employer accountability, and a temporary ban on Muslim immigrants.<sup>50</sup> As with previous presidents, President Trump had a plan for his first 100 days, and Executive Orders related to immigration were part of his agenda to deliver on his promise. His administration took a sweeping set of immigration actions, ranging from imposing a travel ban to cutting refugee admissions, "extreme" vetting, and fortifying immigration enforcement at the border and in the U.S. interior.<sup>51</sup> Although President Trump would retract or make adjustments to some of his Executive Orders, sourcing the \$4.5 billion border wall dominated his presidency.<sup>52</sup>

Over the four years of the Trump administration, the budget for Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Border Patrol Agents, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was approximately \$52.3 billion annually.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, funding for border protection or deportation was requested through supplementals

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<sup>50</sup> Nick Corasaniti. A Look at Trump's Immigration Plan, Then and Now. New York Times: 2016. , <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/31/us/politics/donald-trump-immigration-changes.html>. (accessed February 18, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> Sela Cowger. The First 100 Days: Summary of Major Immigration Actions Taken by the Trump Administration, Fact Sheet, Migration Policy Institute, April 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/first-100-days-summary-major-immigration-actions-taken-trump-administration> (accessed February 27, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> William L. Painter. DHS Border Barrier Funding, Congressional Research Services, January 2020. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45888> (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> American Immigration Council. The Cost of Immigration Enforcement and Border Patrol. Fact Sheet, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/the-cost-of-immigration-enforcement-and-border-security> (accessed February 25, 2021).

or shifting money from other places such as the DOD. For example, in response to multiple Trump Administration requests totaling more than \$8.3 billion through FY2019 for border barrier construction, Congress appropriated almost \$3.1 billion. The Trump Administration redirected an additional \$6.7 billion, mostly from FY2019 defense funds, toward border barrier construction.<sup>54</sup>

The consistent investments in border security and President Trump's rhetoric seemed to deter most migrants. Although the Obama Administration was the first to use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, President Trump was the first to use the medium to push his agenda, introduce executive orders, and inform the world about his policies. In his second month in office, President Trump tweeted, "Mexico was just ranked the second deadliest country in the world, after only Syria. The drug trade is largely the cause. We will BUILD THE WALL!"<sup>55</sup> A year later, he continued creating policies designed to decrease the U.S.'s migration pull factor. On May 7, 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the Department of Justice (DOJ) implemented a "Zero Tolerance" policy toward illegal border crossing to discourage illegal migration into the U.S and reduce the burden of processing asylum claims that officials contended were fraudulent.<sup>56</sup>

Besides the "Zero Tolerance" policy, President Trump also reversed DACA and took actions to keep out immigrants who would require taxpayer-funded

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<sup>54</sup> Jill Wilson. Immigration. Congressional Research Services, February 2020. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10520>. (accessed

<sup>55</sup> Pete Grieve. Trump tweets 'We will BUILD THE WALL', CNN Politics, June 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/22/politics/donald-trump-build-wall-mexico-second-deadliest/index.html> (accessed March 1, 2021).

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Attorney General Sessions Delivers Remarks Discussing the Immigration Enforcement Actions of the Trump Administration," May 7, 2018.

services, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits.<sup>57</sup> The denial of food and healthcare, are two of the push factors that forced these migrants to the U.S. from Latin America due to limited resources and stressed political institutions.

President Trump implemented his immigration reform policies, even though the sole intent seemed to be, close the border and deport any illegal immigrants without considering their current circumstances. Although the administration implemented a multitude of Executive Orders to decrease the number of legal and illegal immigrants, the pandemic actually was the cause of decline. As the pandemic affected migration globally, permanent and temporary immigration to the United States reached a record low in fiscal year (FY) 2020, a trend that could continue into FY 2021. The number of immigrant visas issued abroad in FY 2020 dipped 45 percent from a year earlier, and the number of temporary (nonimmigrant) visas issued decreased 54 percent.<sup>58</sup> The effects of COVID-19 in conjunction with the executive orders signed by the Trump administration are the starting points for the next administration to implement a coherent and collective immigration policy that accounts for the lasting push-pull factors identified in Chapter 2.

### **President Joseph Biden**

With President Biden's election, many of President Trump's Executive Orders have been reversed - including those focused on immigration. President

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<sup>57</sup> Claire Felter. The U.S. Immigration Debate. Council of Foreign Relations, June 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/us-immigration-debate-0> (accessed February 26, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Muzaffar Chishti. The “Trump Effect” on Legal Immigration Levels: More Perception than Reality?, Migration Policy Institution, November 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-effect-immigration-reality> (accessed March 22, 2021).

Biden stated, "It is essential to ensure that our laws and policies encourage full participation by immigrants, including refugees, in our civic life; that immigration processes and other benefits are delivered effectively and efficiently; and that the Federal Government eliminates sources of fear and other barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing government services available to them."<sup>59</sup> In the current COVID-19 environment, the U.S. must align policy with a strategy that includes Latin America to reaffirm the region's importance.

Public opinion toward illegal migration to the U.S. varies considerably across the population, especially with the recent migrant caravans from Central America that made it to the southern border and the current COVID-19 environment. The previous administration's rhetoric and actions associated with illegal immigration raised the situation to a vital interest; however the intent was to deport anyone captured and found to be in the U.S. unlawfully. On the surface, this seemed simple, but the implementation phase proved to be difficult because of the layers of coordination and collaboration required between policymakers, state government, federal law enforcement, and the countries of origin of each immigrant. The illegal immigration issue is centuries old and will not be solved during one administration, therefore a strategy is required to address the issue over time methodically. The portrayal of the increasing illegal immigrant population in the media is accurate until about 2005; however contrary to a recent analysis completed by WOLA, IOM, and PEW Research Center. Statistics illustrate that

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<sup>59</sup> White House. Executive Order on Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans. Presidential Actions.

before COVID-19, unauthorized immigration was decreasing (see Figure 2). The majority of the decrease was associated with Mexican migrants returning. According to Mexican government survey data, most returnees said they left the U.S. of their own accord, and the majority cited family reunification as the main reason for going to Mexico.<sup>60</sup> This downward trend indicator demonstrates the push-pull factors are continuously evaluated by the migrant and can be reversed.

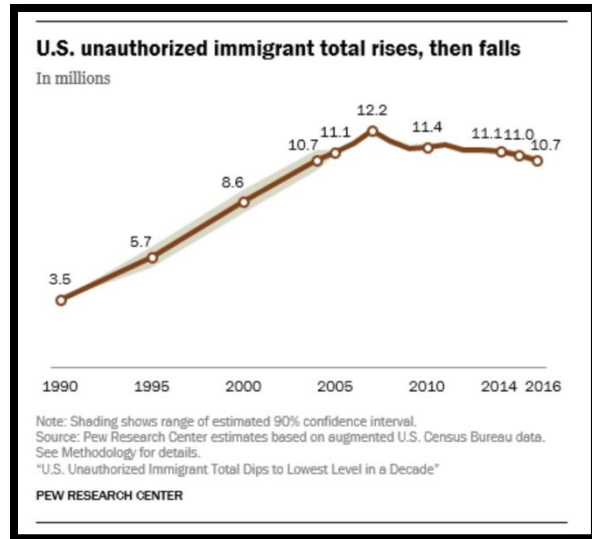


Figure 2 - Pew Research Center trends in the unauthorized immigrant population for U.S. states.

Source: Pew Research Center: "U.S. unauthorized immigrant total rises, then falls" Online, June 12, 2019, Accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/interactive-s/unauthorized-trends/>

The past and present Presidential Administrations' immigration policy and strategic goals display the expansive authority and influence the executive branch wields to achieve national security. The policy of the president directly impacts the push-pull factors on migration flow upon implementation. Some presidents utilized the office of influence as the lever of power, in the spirit of mutual respect-cooperation, multilateralism, economic interdependence in the region and others, as a hammer of isolationism and division. The current COVID-19 environment

<sup>60</sup> Jeff Passel. **Unauthorized immigrants became a smaller share of U.S. foreign-born population.** Pew Research Center, 2018. Washington DC. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2018/11/27/unauthorized-immigrants-became-a-smaller-share-of-u-s-foreign-born-population/> (accessed February 20, 2021).

warrants the former lever of influence to cooperate, rebuild capacity and capability,  
and strong partnerships.

#### Chapter 4: The COVID-19 Effect

*“Reviewing the past, assessing the present, and anticipating the likely future of international migration also offer a solid foundation for governments to formulate relevant policies and develop appropriate programs.”<sup>61</sup>*

-Mr. Joseph Chamie, Journal on Migration and Human Security

Before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, recent presidential administrations handled immigration policy and strategy as legal and illegal border rights issues and for a more diverse labor market. The U.S. hosts more immigrants than any other country, with more than one million people arriving every year as permanent legal residents, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other immigration categories. The total across these categories, coupled with the United States' openness to people of all races, ethnicities, and religions, makes the U.S. the world's most desirable country for immigration.<sup>62</sup> However, the pandemic has changed the face of migration.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created disproportional and widespread economic, social, and political effects on Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>63</sup> The virus knows no geopolitical boundaries, does not discriminate and does not account for cultural boundaries posed and or superimposed by governments or international institutions. COVID-19 is a real-world viral contagion that threatens the way of life across the globe. Specific to the Western Hemisphere, there are important lessons learned from its confluence on migration/immigration patterns, policy, and strategy. In the midst of the

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Chamie. “International Migration amid a World in Crisis.” Journal on Migration & Human Security 8, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 231.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of State. International Migration: Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. (Washington D.C.). <https://www.state.gov/other-policy-issues/international-migration/>. (accessed October 25, 2020).

<sup>63</sup> Mark Sullivan. Latin America and the Caribbean: Impact of COVID-19. Congressional Research Service, February 2021. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF11581.pdf>, 1. (accessed February 28, 2021).

pandemic, there is an opportunity to improve cooperation on migration/immigration, policy, and stabilization between the U.S. and Latin American.

### **U.S. Government Response**

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the U.S. Government has committed more than \$900 million in State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) emergency health, humanitarian assistance, economic, and development assistance specifically aimed at helping governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fight the pandemic.<sup>64</sup> This humanitarian aid is supplemental to the amounts programmed in the U.S. foreign aid budget for the fiscal year 2019-2020. Of the \$900 million, \$79 million was earmarked for Latin America and the Caribbean to address areas from health assistance to response efforts for asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants, and host communities in Mexico, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, and others.<sup>65</sup> The Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration will be responsible for monitoring these humanitarian funds' effectiveness in minimizing the impact of COVID-19 and updating policy and diplomatic agreements accordingly. As part of the whole-of-government approach, the DOD, particularly U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), is working with the U.S. country teams in each Embassy and directly with the host country military to assess the situation and identify options for addressing the health crisis.

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<sup>64</sup> Department of State. UPDATE: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19. Factsheet. May 19, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/update-the-united-states-continues-to-lead-the-global-response-to-covid-19/> (accessed November 10, 2020)

<sup>65</sup> Department of Defense. SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility. <https://www.southcom.mil/About/Area-of-Responsibility/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

### **USSOUTHCOM Response**

USSOUTHCOM is responsible for providing contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>66</sup> The focused mission of USSOUTHCOM and the daily monitoring of the region through its Operations Center postures the command for any arising situation to respond with applicable resources, funding, or authorities. USSOUTHCOM is accustomed to providing humanitarian assistance. The response is primarily associated with hurricanes, tropical storms, or earthquakes. However, the command has experience with planning from the 2014 Ebola health crisis. These lessons directly apply to the COVID-19 response and direct support through USAID was provided through USSOUTHCOMs' Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP). The program funds infrastructure, equipment, and training helping nations prepare before disasters and crises and supports countries who request assistance from the U.S. government when they experience health and weather-related emergencies.<sup>67</sup> To date, USSOUTHCOM has provided support of \$17.4 million for 320 projects to 28 countries on top of donations purchased from local vendors supporting the economy through reduced purchasing power as a result of COVID-19 protocols.<sup>68</sup> Figure 3 highlights USSOUTHCOM COVID-19 Humanitarian Assistance Program projects as of February 5, 2021.

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<sup>66</sup> Department of Defense. SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility. <https://www.southcom.mil/About/Area-of-Responsibility/> (accessed October 9, 2020).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Department of Defense. SOUTHCOM COVID-19 Humanitarian Assistance Projects. <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/SOUTHCOM-COVID-19-Humanitarian-Assistance-Projects/>. (accessed October 9, 2020).



Figure 3 - U.S. Southern Command COVID-19 Humanitarian Assistance Program projects.

Source @USSOUTHCOM "U.S. Southern Command COVID-19 Humanitarian Assistance Program projects" Online, February 9, 2021, Accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/SOUTHCOM-COVID-19-Humanitarian-Assistance>

The response to COVID-19 is a catalyst for the U.S. administration to reassess Latin American foreign policy to address capacity and capability gaps and chart a post-pandemic path.

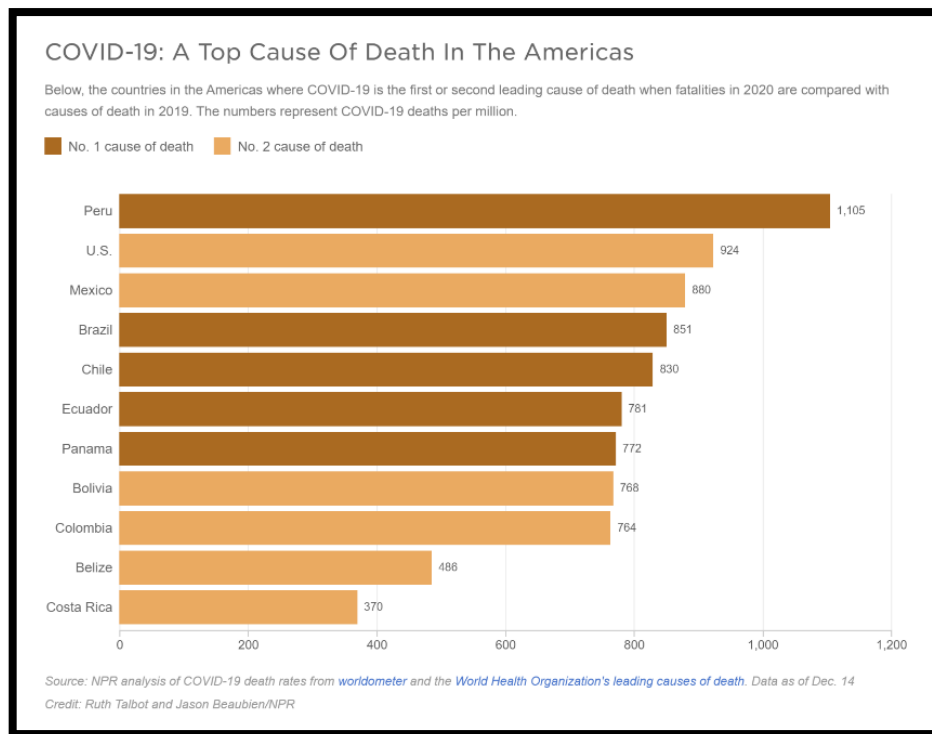
### Significance of Response

In 2017, the White House released the *National Security Strategy* that clearly articulates the U.S. stance on combating pandemics. The priority, President Trump states, “We will encourage other countries to invest in basic health care systems and to strengthen global health security across the intersection of human and animal health to prevent infectious disease outbreaks.”<sup>69</sup> At this moment, we are in the middle of an infectious disease outbreak that requires a holistic approach between the U.S. whole of government and partners in the region. At the strategic-operational level, USSOUTHCOM recognizes that future generations' success and security depend on how

<sup>69</sup> White House. *National Security Strategy*, 2017, 9.

effectively the U.S. builds trust with allies and partners in the hemisphere today, working with and through interagency partners.<sup>70</sup>

Within the Western Hemisphere, the North American Continent, inclusive of the United States and Canada (370 million population), and Latin America (646 million population) includes approximately one billion people impacted directed and indirectly by the COVID-19.<sup>71</sup> As of February 28, 2021, the U.S. has lost over 500,000 people to COVID deaths, and Latin American countries have succumbed to equal or greater devastation. Figure 4 shows the impact of COVID-19 on the Americas.



*Figure 4 - COVID-19: A Top Cause of Death in The Americas.*  
*Source - NPR "COVID-19: A Top Cause of Death in The Americas", Online, December 8, 2020, Accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/12/18/947792819/chart-covid-19-is-now-leading-killer>.*

<sup>70</sup> United States Southern Command. Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander United States Southern Command before the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, February 2019, 1.

<sup>71</sup> World Bank. Data. World Bank Group. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/united-states>. (accessed February 26, 2021).

COVID-19, with its demonstrative nature to impact the human race, it immediately changed migrant patterns and movement of people, teaching the world its innate push-pull capacity. The world's best thinkers, leaders, institutionalists, and corporate institutions can utilize this moment to adapt the approach to immigration. This thought process is in line with the Migration Policy Institute launch of a major new initiative—Rethinking U.S. Immigration Policy—that aims to generate a big-picture, evidence-driven vision of the role immigration can and should play in America's future.<sup>72</sup> COVID is the change agent impacting world geopolitics and migration, national security, and vital interest for the U.S. and Latin American countries. The link between strategic guidance and the ability to affect change at the ground level is regional integration through a stabilization strategy and approach that includes prioritization, funding, resources directed at the most vulnerable nation-states to achieve immediate effects.

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<sup>72</sup> Migration Policy Institute. Rethinking U.S. Immigration Policy: Building a Responsive, Effective Immigration System, Event: August 2019. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/rethinking-us-immigration> (accessed February 28, 2021).

## Chapter 5: Recommendation and Conclusion

*“Advancing the United States’ top foreign policy priorities requires a revitalized approach to how we work to stabilize conflict-affected areas. We cannot continue to take the same approach and expect different results.”<sup>1</sup>*

- 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review

The U.S. immigration debate is dominated by illegal immigration and rarely about the importance of legal immigration. The U.S. population understands that the strength of the U.S. is founded on diversity and opportunity due to early policy on immigration. Immigration is one of the fundamental building blocks that help make the U.S. unique. Based on the current situation at the border, some people believe President Biden’s Administration has not found a solution to resolve the immigration issue. A recent article states Biden is not yet 100 days into his presidency, and his Administration appears to have already lost the thread. Once again, thousands of unaccompanied minors are at the border, entangling Biden administration in a familiar debate over the nation’s broken immigration system. It is cast in the old, familiar terms of “surge,” “crisis,” and “national security,” instead of framed around providing aid to asylum seekers, refugees, or migrant children.<sup>2</sup> The article identifies the pandemic and hurricanes as push factors. Hurricanes Eta and Iota displaced hundreds of thousands of people, creating a new class of refugees with more reason than ever to migrate north and setting up an early test for the incoming Biden administration.<sup>3</sup> It explains the actions the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Stabilization Assistance Review. A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas 2018.pdf, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Jasmine Ulloa. **Once again, thousands of children have come to the border. So much for a new day on immigration, Boston Globe: March 2021. Online** <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/03/25/nation/so-much-new-day-immigration-president-biden-grapples-with-children-border/> (accessed March 24, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Natalie Kitroeff. **2 Hurricanes Devasted Central America. Will Ruin Spur a Migration Wave?** New York Times. December 2020.

should take to address the border issue but does not consider the underlying push factors of violence, corruption, poverty, and human security that Central American countries and the region as a whole must address to reduce the willingness of migrants to risk their lives on a path to the north. The article perpetuates the age-old story of a broken immigration system without allowing the Biden Administration time to methodically introduce measures to implement a strategy that has, thus far, eluded previous administrations. Additionally, any migration solution will require Latin American and the U.S. to strengthen partnerships, and the solutions will have to be different from the traditional approaches they have been adopting.

Chapters 1 and 2 discuss how adopting the "push-pull" theory as a framework for understanding why people immigrate illegally to the U.S. will help policymakers understand the strategic environment in Latin America. This framework will enable leaders to design strategic approaches to help U.S. allies and partners mitigate the underlying problem leading to illegal immigration. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a historical perspective on immigration policy by recent presidential administrations and then introduces the current administration's policy. The two chapters also highlight how the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has exacerbated immigration. The Biden Administration has an opportunity to implement a strategy based on policy to achieve a collective approach using a whole-of-government approach in coordination with Latin American governments. Without understanding the drivers and factors of immigration across the southern

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/world/americas/guatemala-hurricanes-mudslide-migration.html> (accessed April 18, 2021).

U.S. border, the actions by the Department of State on *the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* in Latin America does not comport with the realities of immigration factors. This lack of understanding could jeopardize the Biden Administration's plan for immigration reform.

The next steps to address migration impacts from Latin America to the U.S. are: understanding the policy, must include utilizing the *Conflict and Stability Strategy* criteria to validate the region as a priority. Then it must outline the roles and responsibilities of the whole-of-government partners to develop a comprehensive policy for Senior Level Steering Committee approval. With a coherent policy, the U.S. government will have the opportunity to execute a cohesive plan that includes measures of effectiveness and measures of performance to assess progress.

### **Policy**

President Biden ran his campaign with an immigration platform that, if implemented, will bring the U.S. into negotiations with Latin American countries to find solutions. His proposed plan includes an eight-year path to citizenship for virtually all unauthorized immigrants currently residing in the U.S. This plan includes three million people known as DREAMers, more than 300,000 people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and hundreds of thousands of farmworkers.<sup>4</sup> President George W. Bush attempted to find a path to citizenship for approximately three million undocumented immigrants in 1986, without a strategy to address the remaining illegal citizens. Those who were not part of his plan did

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Jenna. Joe Biden fights skepticism with a simple immigration message: I'm not Trump or Obama. Washington Post, May 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed March 5, 2021).

not meet the citizenship criteria even though the weighting of push-pull factors initially drove them to the U.S.

The Biden Administration identified the absence of a strategy when drafting the Presidential Release for immigration highlighted by executive action to *Develop a Strategy to Address Irregular Migration Across the Southern Border and Create a Humane Asylum System*.<sup>5</sup> The executive action highlights explicitly violence as a destabilizing factor to the Western Hemisphere. However, other push factors include political corruption, poverty, and lack of human security. Policymakers, migration/immigration professionals, regional organizations, and independent think tanks who provide a wealth of historical knowledge and foresight to presidential administrations for planning have analyzed these remaining push factors. Implementing a strategy with essential tasks that can be measured is warranted to achieve a different outcome from past administrations.

### **Strategy**

The *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* as an implementation tool should be promoted in conjunction with the immigration/migration policy and adapted as a matter of immediate prioritization for the U.S. and Latin America. The acknowledgment of the strategy's necessity is a positive guiding force for both prevailing and countervailing influence(s), but is often disconnected by geographical-geopolitical areas of influence. The nexus of policy and strategy could prove invaluable in the time and space required for implementation. The time needed to develop and execute a strategy would allow the push-pull factors affecting the region will continue to be exacerbated by

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

COVID-19, making a dire situation worse and requiring the U.S., Latin America, and international partners and institutions to invest more time and money for recovery. This study asserts that the Latin American region meets the prioritization criteria outlined in the *Conflict and Stability Strategy* in order to take immediate actions to bring social, economic, and political stability to the region within one to five years. Department of State, USAID, the Department of Defense, specifically USSOUTHCOM, and other agencies and departments should expedite a combined regional assessment to the Senior-level Steering Committee for approval. The Biden Administration must show Latin America it is a priority and meets the criteria, thereby making them a main effort for resourcing, funds, and personnel.

#### **Criteria-Factors**

The strategy states the U.S. will prioritize countries and or regions over a ten-year time horizon, starting with no less than five countries and regions. Through the senior-level Steering Committee, these countries or regions will be assessed based on objective criteria consistent with the factors identified in Section 505 of the Global Fragility Act (GFA).<sup>6</sup> These factors include U.S. national security and economic interests, violent conflict and associated national resilience, assessed levels and risks of fragility, political will and capacity for partnerships, the opportunity for U.S. impact, and other international commitments and resources.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State. U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. Washington D.C. December 2020. Online <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/us-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability.pdf> , 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### ***United States National Security and Economic Interests***

The U.S. draws its strength from strong partnerships with countries with similar ideals and principles. The majority of Latin American governments exercise democratic principles and share in the region's security and economic prosperity, making them a vital U.S. interest. In the 2020 *Interim National Security Guidance*, President Biden writes, “Because the vital national interests of the United States are inextricably bound to the fortunes of our closest neighbors in the Americas, we will expand our engagement and partnerships throughout the Western Hemisphere—and especially with Canada and Mexico—based on principles of mutual respect and equality and a commitment to economic prosperity, security, human rights, and dignity.”<sup>8</sup> The principles mentioned earlier are similar to the push-pull factors identified in Chapter 2 that have affected immigration and migration between the U.S. and Latin America and inside the region, creating varying instability levels. There is an opportunity to collaboratively address these factors and comprehensively balance push-pull factors, effectively decreasing conflict and increasing stability.

### ***Violent Conflict and Associated National Resilience***

Violence is one of the most common push factors Latin America faces today, and it has been increasing over the last several decades in Latin American countries.<sup>9</sup> This level of violence stems from governments and law enforcement's inability to provide a safe environment for its citizens. Unfortunately, the situation

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<sup>8</sup> The White House. *Interim National Security Guidance*, Washington D.C., March 2021, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Immigration Forum. *Push or Pull Factors: What Drives Central American Migrants to the U.S.?* Online <https://immigrationforum.org/article/push-or-pull-factors-what-drives-central-american-migrants-to-the-u-s/> (accessed February 25, 2021).

is exacerbated by COVID-19, and law enforcement is perpetrating violence during protests on behalf of the government, thus increasing distrust and desperation. In El Salvador, Honduras, and Argentina, security forces have engaged in serious abuses while enforcing measures against the spread of COVID-19 and in response to demonstrations.<sup>10</sup> These type of actions are pushing citizens to migrate to seek asylum in the U.S. or other countries in the region. Before Congress, Admiral Faller stated, “The threats in the Western Hemisphere are persistent, they’re real, and they represent a formidable risk to our national security. Perhaps most urgently, this region has been one of the hardest hit by COVID-19; the health, economic, and social impacts of which will alter the hemisphere for years to come.”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Assessed Levels and Risks of Fragility***

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Latin American region saw a rise in democratic governments after years of authoritarian regimes and military coups. Participatory government, access to basic services, and economic viability initially decreased the push factor and made the pull factor less appealing. Latin America's democracies are displaying levels of fragility because of their inability to deliver consistent basic services discrediting the initial claims of democratic governance. According to the Global Fragility Index, 25 of the 178 countries assessed are in Latin America highlighting the inability to provide basic services, erosion of legitimate

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<sup>10</sup> Cesar, Munoz. Latin America, It’s Time to End Police Abuse, November 2020, Online <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/18/latin-america-its-time-end-police-abuse#> (accessed March 5, 2021)

<sup>11</sup> United States Southern Command. Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander United States Southern Command before the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 16, 2021, 2.

governance, loss of territorial control, and unable to fully participate in the international community.<sup>12</sup> Political corruption, poverty, and access to adequate food and healthcare, the push factors identified in Chapter 2, contribute to fragility. To curtail backsliding or support weak democracies, bold action with policy and strategy are required to bolster the rule of law, personal development programs, and investments in infrastructure and healthcare systems in the region.

### ***Political Will and Capacity for Partnerships***

The region has sought to establish and strengthen democratic institutions, including free and fair elections, separation of powers, and the rule of law. Latin American leaders are again turning to the White House for help. They hope the Biden administration will increase U.S. support to countries hosting Venezuelan migrants and help them solicit greater European aid, speed up access to coronavirus vaccines, and expand emergency lending through the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>13</sup> In addition to unilateral engagements with Latin American countries, the U.S. can leverage the Organization of the American States (OAS) to drive the discourse on common topics to prevent conflict and mitigate stability issues. The OAS is the Americas' premier political forum where the independent countries of North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean come together to advance their shared goals and work out their differences.<sup>14</sup> OAS, bilateral and multilateral burden-sharing arrangements, military to military engagements, along with

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<sup>12</sup> Fund for Peace. Fragile States Index, The Fund for Peace, 2020, Online <https://fragilestatesindex.org/data/> (accessed March 5, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Gedan. In Latin America, U.S. Popularity is Already Bouncing Back. Foreign Policy: February 2021. Online <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/19/latin-america-united-states-diplomacy-regional-cooperation/>. (accessed March 25, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Organization of American States. Political Dialogue. 2021, Online [http://www.oas.org/en/about/political\\_dialogue.asp](http://www.oas.org/en/about/political_dialogue.asp) (accessed October 23, 2020).

Embassy and Consulate personnel interaction provide an avenue for consistent dialogue to build strong partnerships.

***Opportunity for U.S. impact***

In 2020, Admiral Faller stated, “The U.S. derives immense benefit from a stable, peaceful hemisphere, and keeping our partnerships in the Western Hemisphere strong and vibrant will allow us to achieve the NDS objective of maintaining a favorable regional balance of power that reduces security threats to the homeland.”<sup>15</sup> The U.S. has a window of opportunity with COVID-19 to make an immediate impact by finding regional solutions to expedite recovery with follow-on actions to update crisis action plans, create or build up the medical-industrial base, and increase information sharing to solidify response to future crises. The *Interim National Security Guidance* states, “We will join with others to address the grave challenges stemming from or aggravated by the pandemic, including growing debt, rising poverty, deteriorating food security, and worsening gender-based violence.”<sup>16</sup> This statement is a commitment to combat the push factors causing internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers.

***Other International Commitments and Resources***

On March 4, 2021, the White House released the *Interim National Security Guidance* that articulates a distinct shift in the nation’s engagement around the world going forward. The central theme is, “We will double down on building partnerships throughout the world because our strength is multiplied when we combine efforts to address common challenges, share costs, and widen the circle of

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<sup>15</sup> United States Southern Command. Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander United States Southern Command before the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, January 30, 2020, 1.

<sup>16</sup> The White House. *Interim National Security Guidance*, Washington D.C., March 2021, 12.

cooperation.”<sup>17</sup> This theme highlights the U.S. will be fully engaged in the international community based on national interests with the required resources to deter or defeat threats to allies and partners, especially when it relates to near-peer competitors like China. By bolstering and defending the U.S.’ unparalleled network of allies and partners and making smart defense investments, they will also deter Chinese aggression and counter threats to our collective security, prosperity, and democratic way of life.<sup>18</sup> Again, it is an opportune time to leverage partnerships and not ‘every man for himself’ tactics to common threats in the region.

### **Roles and Responsibility**

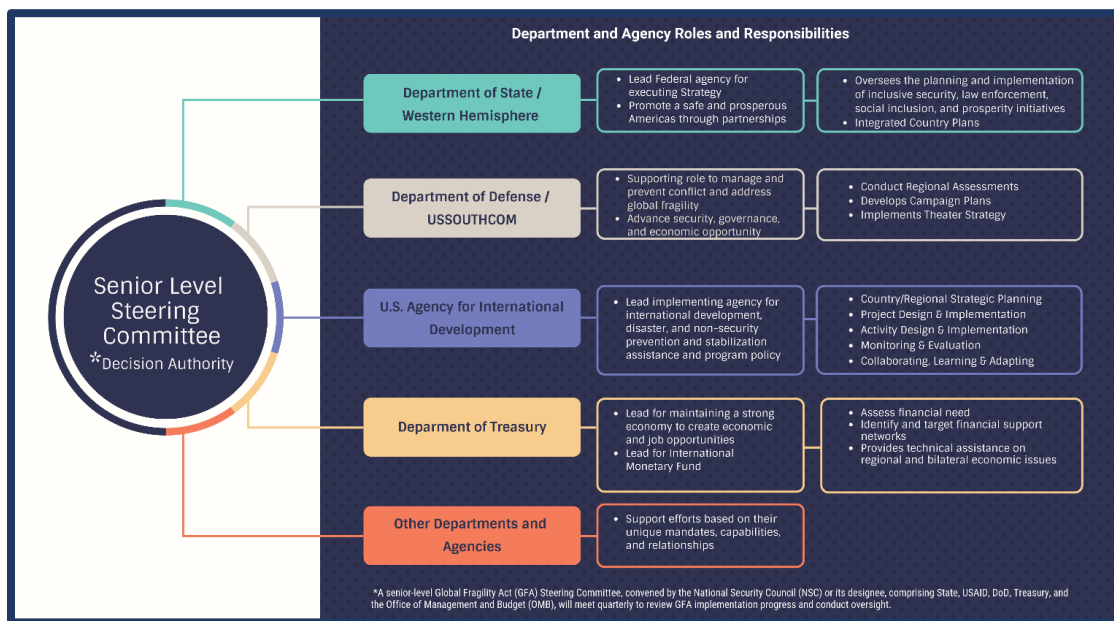
The U.S. government has established clear roles and responsibilities to ensure effective GFA implementation. Figure 5 identifies the primary Departments and Agencies, their role and responsibilities, and the initial products required to

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<sup>17</sup> The White House. Interim National Security Guidance, Washington D.C., March 2021, 10.

<sup>18</sup> The White House. Interim National Security Guidance, Washington D.C., March 2021, 20.

justify a country or region for approval by the Senior Level Steering Committee as a priority.



*Figure 5 - Department and Agency Roles and Responsibilities.*

*Source: Created from information obtained from U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stabilization and United States Southern Command and Department of Treasury websites.*

### **Department of State**

The Department of State is the lead federal agency for executing the Strategy and overseeing and implementing U.S. foreign policy under the U.S. president's direction to advance diplomatic and political efforts with local partners, relevant bilateral parties, and multilateral bodies. Specifically, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere is charged with advancing fair and reciprocal trade, sustainable economic development, and poverty reduction; combat drug trafficking, transnational crime, and illegal immigration, among other aspects to strengthen U.S. national security.<sup>19</sup> The aforementioned areas are part of the push-

<sup>19</sup> Department of State. Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs: Mission. Online: <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-political-affairs/bureau-of-western-hemisphere-affairs/> (accessed March 30, 2021).

pull factors that cause migration when a country is not, or cannot, provide for their people.

U.S. Embassies, or as Admiral Faller calls them, “maneuver forces,” are the closest touchpoints the U.S. has to execution of a cohesive policy as the U.S. looks to strengthen relationships with partner nations.<sup>20</sup> U.S. Embassies provide the current picture of the environment in each country to develop and implement their Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) to address issues to support presidential priorities and objectives identified in the National Security Strategy. Immigration policy and illegal immigration have been constants topics for each U.S. administration, therefore making the ICS a critical component to building the package to submit to the Senior Level Steering Committee.

### **Department of Defense**

The Department of Defense serves a supporting role to manage and prevent conflict and address global fragility through specialized activities. The U.S. will prioritize countries or regions to implement the strategy over a ten-year time horizon, starting with no less than five countries and regions. The criteria mentioned above and the priorities set by the U.S. president and Department of State influence the U.S. Southern Command’s (USSOUTHCOM) Campaign Plan and implementation of their Theater Strategy. USSOUTHCOM is currently grappling with a surge in migration at the southern border as the Biden Administration attempts to implement policy. The immigration issue affects U.S.

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Southern Command. United States Southern Command Strategy: "Enduring Promise for the Americas," [https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/SOUTHCOM\\_Strategy\\_2019.pdf?ver=2019-05-15-131647-353](https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/SOUTHCOM_Strategy_2019.pdf?ver=2019-05-15-131647-353), 7.

Northern Command as well, which has the responsibility for homeland security. This direct link to another Combatant Command should drive immigration to be included in a Global Command Plan, in addition to having its own Line of Effort in the USSOUTHCOM Combatant Commander's Campaign Plan and regional assessments. By making immigration a priority, the USSOUTHCOM increases accountability through assessments, sends updates to Congress, and enables alignment with President Biden's immigration policy.

### **U.S. Agency for International Development**

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) serves as the lead implementing agency for international development, disaster, and non-security prevention and stabilization assistance and program policy to support U.S. objectives under this strategy. Similar to the U.S. Embassy personnel, USAID personnel, are located in each country and are critical to meeting U.S. goals. USAID helps address the security, governance, and economic drivers of irregular migration. USAID's primary goal is to foster an environment where families can envision their futures in their home countries and communities.<sup>21</sup> The country/regional planning, project and activity planning, and implementation informed by monitoring and evaluations provide another aspect of the criteria that underpin the package to the Senior Level Steering Committee.

### **Other Departments and Agencies**

Other Federal departments and agencies, including the Department of the Treasury (Treasury), Department of Justice, Department of Commerce (DOC), Department of Energy, and the U.S. International Development Finance

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development. "Central America Strategy", January 2021. Online <https://www.usaid.gov/central-america> (accessed March 30, 2021)

Corporation (DFC), support United States efforts to prevent violence and fragility globally and stabilize conflict-affected areas, as appropriate and authorized, based on their unique mandates, capabilities, and relationships.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There will never be a perfect solution to addressing immigration. However, if the administration continues to utilize policy as strategy the U.S. will continue to demonstrate immigration is a peripheral versus a vital national interest. Policy is not strategy. Policy provides organizations the ability to make logical decisions, while strategy is the plan of action to accomplish specific goals. The adoption of the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* provides the approach to assist leaders as they address migration challenges and illegal immigration in the twenty-first-century security environment, converging with policy to achieve immediate and sustainable results with Latin America.

Understanding the push-pull factors, the effects of previous immigration policy decisions, and information on COVID-19 is critical to providing the current environment's context. This understanding enables strategists to design approaches to achieve the desired future conditions that strengthen partnerships with U.S. allies and partners in the region. The priority should be the ongoing surge of immigrants from Central America and the top five countries where the COVID-19 is the leading cause of death identified in Figure 4. It is imperative to use a whole-of-government approach, thereby reinforcing the importance of leveraging national security tools. President Biden states explicitly, “the vital national interests of the U.S. are inextricably bound to the

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<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of State. Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 504(c) of the Global Fragility Act. Washington D.C., 3.

fortunes of our closest neighbors in the Americas.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the USSOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility should be identified as a priority region by the Senior-Level Steering Committee and approved by Congress to obtain the required authorities, resources, and budget as a supported command to meet the goals and objectives of the Biden Administration's immigration policy.

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<sup>23</sup> The White House. Interim National Security Guidance, Washington D.C., March 2021, 10.

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### **Vita**

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