

HOW TO MOST EFFECTIVELY ACCOMMODATE CLIMATE CHANGE MIGRATION  
A Report on Latin American Migration to the United States in Relation to Climate Change and  
How to Aid the Most Vulnerable

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## Abstract

The relationship between the United States and its Latin American neighbors has always been complicated, especially when it comes to migration between the two, especially as of the past few decades. However, a new problem presents itself in an obstacle humanity has not yet had to face on such a scale: climate change. Amongst divided political directions on what to do with climate change within itself, the United States also must prepare for a blending of two of its growing problems, in the new term of “climate migration”. This paper explores the exact definition of climate migration, the reason behind it in Latin America, world context for the term, predictions for how it will affect the United States, and finally how to best navigate it as the United States.



## **Introduction**

An existential problem looms over the horizon, and it has no intentions of being fair: climate change. Despite being caused by the faults of a few states, it is a threat to the stability of the world as it is known today. If not handled correctly, death, poverty, disease, mass migration, and general upheaval will occur in many parts of the world. Particularly, the global south is most vulnerable to the disasters climate change is to bring. Whereas the wealthy have the ability to pay for things such as relocation, air conditioning, or simply have the ability to compete with rising prices for necessities like water or food, the rest of the world will struggle when those resources become harder to find due to the changes in climate. When people lose their ability to survive in their home, the natural reaction is to move elsewhere, and in a political climate where immigration is a highly debated issue, the incoming groups of climate migrants will place new pressures on world governments not seen before. This paper will explore the effects climate change will have on migration, as well as how to best ensure the wellbeing of those migrants looking at the issue through humanitarian and security lenses.

## **Important Terms and Ideas When Speaking About Climate Migration**

Some of the big ideas in this paper could be foreign concepts to some, so it is crucial in this conversation to have a baseline understanding of some terms. To begin, climate change, as referenced in this paper, will mean the shift in worldwide climate patterns. Climate change is different than global warming, because according to NASA, “Global warming is the long-term heating of Earth’s climate system observed since the pre-industrial period (between 1850 and 1900) due to human activities, primarily fossil fuel burning, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth’s atmosphere” (Overview: Weather, Global Warming and Climate Change 2019). However, it defines climate change as “a long-term change in the average

weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional and global climates. These changes have a broad range of observed effects that are synonymous with the term" (Overview: Weather, Global Warming and Climate Change 2019). This paper will be using the term "climate change" because it is a more inclusive term, opening the argument to a wider variety of analyses.

Now, this is related to climate migration directly, and because it is one of the main focuses of this paper it is crucial that it is properly understood. Climate migration in this paper will be defined simply as migration driven by climate change and its effects. The reasons why this paper will use the term 'climate migration' instead of 'climate refugees' are as stated in a United Nations Sustainable Development article: the status of refugee may drive certain states to reject the rights and humanity of climate migrants, especially the poorer climate migrants who may not be able to prove climate as a claim to refugee status, the inclusion of a somewhat new refugee term may weaken the title of refugee to certain states that may not recognize climate as a sufficient reason, and migration status allows for previous migration steps to provide a clearer framework for how to provide for people that is more structured than that of a refugee status. It could provide easier access to things like humanitarian visas, temporary protection, authorization to stay, regional and bilateral free movements agreements, and more (Ionesco 2019).

Unprecedented numbers of people will be arriving in new countries in the next several decades, but "Despite predictions of such startling magnitude, there is no legal framework for climate refugees. Not in international law, not in the laws of specific countries" (Miller 2017). Thus, using frameworks and language around climate migrants instead would be more helpful.

Migration is a much more established and solidified idea. Especially with rising global xenophobia and extreme policy debate towards refugees, using the term 'climate migration' can

help those forced out of their homes by climate change more than ‘climate refugee’ status by softening the increasingly negative association worldwide.

### **Climate Change: What Is It Exactly?**

Climate change is based on established science, and is a globally recognized problem. To start explaining, it is important to address climate forcings. Climate forcings are “The factors that influence the global climate system” (Richardson 2014). A variety of climate forcings have been observed to be changing within the past few decades as a result of human intervention. A big factor is emissions, emitted largely by industrialization and the use of fossil fuels. What happens when emissions are released is “A part of the sun’s energy reaching the Earth is radiated back into the atmosphere in the form of infrared (IR) radiation (heat). Greenhouse gases absorb this radiation and the process results in heat retention in the atmosphere” (Richardson 2014). This is called the “greenhouse effect”, and is commonly used in climate change discussion. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas often blamed for the heating of the Earth, and “carbon dioxide from human activity is increasing more than 250 times faster than it did from natural sources after the last Ice Age”(Climate Change Evidence: How Do We Know? 2020). This is a clear indicator of human causation, because industrialization and increased human activity started not too long ago. This heating is important because “most of it is extremely likely (greater than 95% probability) to be the result of human activity since the mid-20th century and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented over decades to millennia”(Climate Change Evidence: How Do We Know? 2020). Along with greenhouse effect discussion comes the idea of a limit in terms of what the Earth can or can not support. Ideas of limiting emissions and production in favor of lessening strain on the planet are consistently debated, and the idea of carrying capacity was introduced. Carrying capacity is commonly used in studying ecosystems and is a maximum number of

organisms an ecosystem can support before organisms start dying off due to resource strain. With carrying capacity in relation to the Earth, “If there are no limits, then we can populate, grow, and consume at will. For several centuries it had seemed that unconstrained economic growth was the natural order of things, and so social survival in finite systems was simply not conceptualized” (Dryzek 1997). So, the idea of finite resources in regards to human survival on Earth is a fairly new concept. Even the idea of climate change is still new, and because of this credibility for climate migration may be hard to solidify everywhere. In some areas of the world, climate change is still a barely formed idea, so accountability is hard to form. There is no overarching centralized authority to hold states accountable, because “Decentralized systems have no cohesive leadership directing them: examples include markets, liberal democratic political systems, and the international system. In such systems there is no incentive to care about collective goods like environmental quality or long-term human wellbeing” (Dryzek 1997). This falls in line with the idea of the tragedy of the commons, which is an idea that private interest will always trump the collective good, so anything collective does not really last. This lines up with the greenhouse effect, because states will continue to produce emissions and ruin the collective good of a functional planet, unless there is an incentive to not do so. Incentive to make eco friendly changes must be provided by a larger figure, because “individual adaptation actions are not autonomous: they are constrained by institutional processes such as regulatory structures, property rights and social norms associated with rules in use” (Adger, Arnell, and Tompkins 2004). In order to avoid tragedy of the commons, a larger role must be given to an overarching entity. Such actions will be further discussed farther down along this paper.

Climate change brings a host of problems, most notably and well known being the general heating of the earth. For example, “By 2070, the kind of extremely hot zones, like in the Sahara, that now cover less than 1 percent of the earth’s land surface could cover nearly a fifth of the land, potentially placing one of every three people alive outside the climate niche where humans have thrived for thousands of years” (Lustgarten 2019a). This kind of giant shift in climate will warrant a migration of people just as drastic. Old homes and customs will be uprooted in the name of survival. Additionally, “Ecosystems are likely to be pushed increasingly into alternate states with the possible breakdown/ of traditional species relationships, such as pollinator/plant and predator/prey interactions, adding additional stresses and potential for system failures.” (Backlund, Janetos, and Schimel 2009). The breakdown of existing ecosystems will require humans and animals to quickly think of new methods to live in them, and if that takes too long it may result in both human and animal suffering. If animals do not adapt to new ecosystems and relationships quick enough, they will go extinct and the ecosystem will never go back to what it once was. Another big issue that has risen along with climate change are natural disasters and floods, and “From 1990 to 2016, the number of natural disasters worldwide has more than doubled the total from the previous 89 years” (Schramek and Harmeling). The suffering caused by these increasingly common disasters can be seen in Hurricane Katrina and Harvey and the California fires in the United States, and Hurricane Maria and Dorian and the Haiti earthquakes in the Caribbean. As hurricanes and floods become more common, they present incredible danger to the human population because eleven of the fifteen largest cities in the world are on a coast (Emanuel 2012). If humanity is not careful, it may drown itself in both water and disease, because particularly in warmer climates water based disasters provide an ideal habitat for disease. In specific, “Heat stress, malaria, dengue, cholera, and other water-borne

diseases are areas of grave concern” (Edwards and Roberts 2015). In areas that will already be struggling with barrages of natural disasters, battles with multiple serious diseases may be the hidden danger amongst an era of unprecedented turmoil.

### **What Does Climate Change Have To Do With Migration in Latin America?**

Ties between an unbalanced climate and migrants can already be seen on the United States and Mexico border, because “Mexican migration to the United States pulsed upward during periods of drought and...by 2080, climate change there could drive 6.7 million more people toward the Southern U.S. border” (Lustgarten 2019a). Inevitably, the rich will be able to adapt with things like air conditioning or easily moving from one location to another, however people with no access to those things will be left with a hard choice: leave for somewhere else, or put themselves and their families in danger in an increasingly uninhabitable climate.

Climate change is an issue that could greatly shape the future of Latin America. Certain countries are making steps to be ecologically forward such as Costa Rica, but others lag behind, along with the rest of the world. Looking specifically at Central and South America, the already giant numbers of migrants heading North will increase as the earth warms and already hot locations become unbearable. People will begin to move up North in search of milder climate, and “The projected number of migrants arriving from Central America and Mexico rises to 1.5 million a year by 2050, from about 700,000 a year in 2025” (Lustgarten 2019a). This means that the border will be consistently seeing new prospective Americans, assuming that the United States is prepared to take in millions more people in thirty years time.

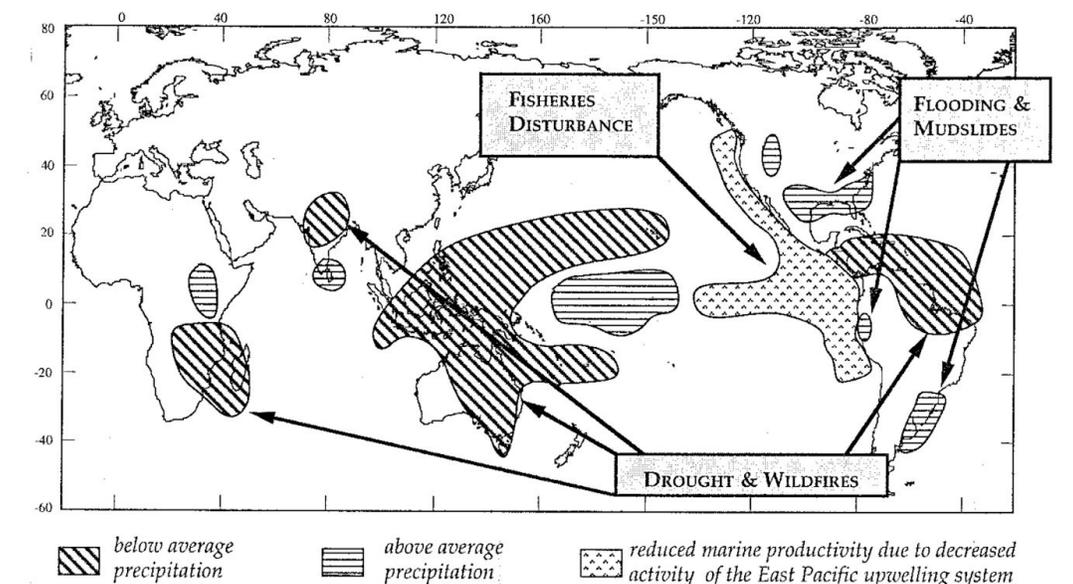
Another concerning thought about a movement of people that large is the drain of citizens from Latin American countries, leaving some behind to attempt to take over vacant positions. This can be troublesome if a country’s best and most educated people leave, which is called

brain drain. Former Guatemalan President Álvaro Colom called for help, saying “How many deaths do we have to report? How many bridges have to be destroyed ... and how many kilometers of roads ruined need to be reported before some parts of the [UN] Convention recognize that Guatemala is a developing country and highly vulnerable to the changes and variability of the climate?” (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Guatemala is similar to many other Latin American countries in that they will be more vulnerable to climate change, and may need the assistance of foreign governments. Governments that lack the ability to easily adapt will suffer more, and “According to the book *Power in a Warming World*, people who live in the 48 “least-developed countries” are five times more likely to die in a climate-related disaster than the rest of the world” (Miller 2017). While this is problematic for the obvious reason of unnecessary death, it will make other matters worse as well. More specifically, “Climate change can be a “threat multiplier,” says Christina Chan, the director of the World Resources Institute’s climate resilience practice”(Law 2019). This is true for any country, but in the Caribbean, islands are very vulnerable. On top of the risk of being swallowed by the ocean, “Haiti will also struggle because the population is dependent on agriculture, and rising sea levels mean that salt water may contaminate freshwater” (Law 2019). Without freshwater sources, communities in Haiti, or

any place for that matter, will crumble. As seen on the graph below, the Americas face grave changes ahead. Before analyzing the map, it is important to know that “First, fish and other aquatic products provide at least 20% of protein intake for a third of the world’s population. This dependence is generally highest in developing countries. Second, small-scale fisheries are by far the most important for food security...Third, fisheries and aquaculture directly employ over 36 million people worldwide, 98% of them in

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## Climate, Environment, and Human Action

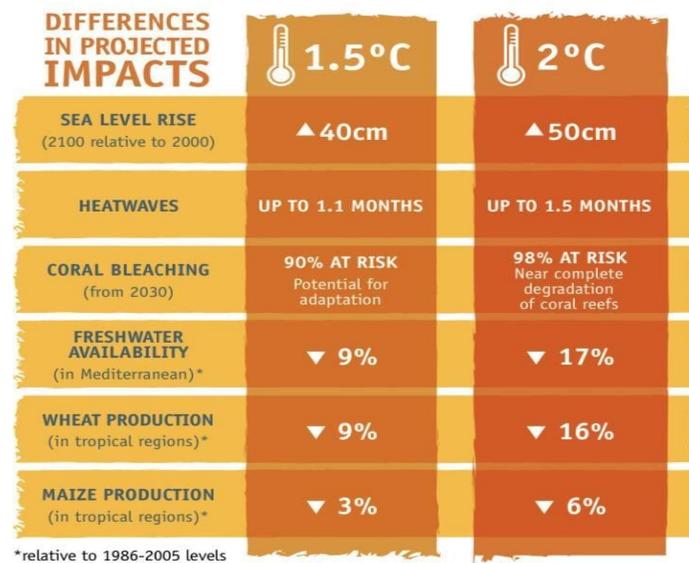


“Global and regional scale precipitation patterns associated with the El Niño/Southern Oscillation weather system.

Disturbance boundaries of fisheries are approximate” (McIntosh, Keesh, and Tainter 2000).

developing countries” (Richardson 2014). Not only is fishing essential for food, but the industry employs and supports millions of people. The graph warns of fishery disturbances, meaning those ways of life are about to be flipped around, perhaps irreparably. It also warns of droughts, wildfires, mudslides, and flooding all in Latin America as well as the United States. It is based off of the El Niño drought, which was “made worse by climate change, is exacerbating food insecurity, a strong indication of the severe climate adaptation and disaster preparedness gap.

Globally, the number of people who are displaced from their homes, many of them due to extreme weather events, is unprecedented. This situation is regarded as the biggest humanitarian crisis since the 2nd world war” (Schramek and Harmeling). Bridging the climate adaptation and disaster preparedness gap will be crucial in ensuring the safety of these areas, and if not done well enough people will suffer and migrate to survive.



(CARE Climate, Schramek and Harmeling)

In the graph above, more food insecurity is indicated for Latin America. Both wheat and maize production in tropical regions is predicted to take major damage, and paired with the fishery disruptions mentioned above, that is a severe change to the Latin American way of life and food chain. However, it is not just about having enough food to eat; “Agriculture and animal husbandry are also tuned to the present climate, so that comparatively small shifts in precipitation and temperature can exert considerable pressure on government and social systems whose failures to respond could lead to famine, disease, mass emigrations, and political instability” (Emanuel 2012). Food shortages not only kill people from starvation, but trigger a list of other irritants that could lead to even more death and suffering because of the pressures

they place on political and social institutions. In the Caribbean, the coral biome may collapse and sea levels will threaten islands, and in Central and South America the Andean ecosystems will warm, exposing the area to tropical diseases, and the Amazon will go through diebacks (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Not only does nature look bleak in that scenario, but the exposure of new diseases can lead to major problems as new disease needs new research, new immunities, and new treatments; and the process of getting there more often than not includes casualties.

To be more specific about the Andean glaciers, they “have shrunk by 30 to 50 percent since the 1970s. The glaciers are retreating at their fastest rate in the past three hundred years...Colombia expects to lose all its glaciers this century, and Peru projects that glaciers lower than five thousand meters above sea level may disappear between 2015 and 2020” (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Losing glaciers thousands of years old would be a huge loss for the planet, and would offset an entire ecosystem, as well as hurt the Andean region’s power supply. Hydro power in the Andes “accounts for roughly 60 percent of the region’s installed capacity and 70 percent of power generation” (Edwards and Roberts 2015). This source of power taken out would devastate the region and likely force it to search for alternative sources, and there is a chance the alternative source may not be as eco friendly. A shut down of the Andean hydropower system has happened before, when “In 2009, during Ecuador’s worst drought in decades, water levels at the Paute River Dam, the Andean nation’s largest, were extremely low. The government was forced to declare a state of electrical emergency nationwide and implement daily rationing of electricity, which led to blackouts for hours at a time” (Edwards and Roberts 2015). Not only will the region suffer ecologically, but it will suffer economically as well should those glaciers melt. The Americas will be overrun with climate issues if things continue, and it is only a matter of adaptation and avoidance for many.

Discussion of climate change affecting Latin America would not be complete without addressing the hundreds of indigenous groups that live there. Latin America has a total of 644 indigenous groups, with 62% of Bolivia's population being indigenous and 60% of Guatemala's population being indigenous (Kronik and Verner 2010). Their ability to adapt to climate change is very different, because they often live a very different style of life. Sadly,

“Indigenous peoples' capacity to adapt to climate change events has often already been stretched to the limit.

Because environmental changes are happening so fast, indigenous communities find it difficult to adapt in a culturally sustainable manner. Not only is their livelihood threatened, but so is their cultural integrity. Social and cultural cohesion is vital to their survival as indigenous people, and rising concerns about food insecurity and poor health prompt the younger generation and even whole families to pursue new adaptation measures such as temporary and permanent migration, adoption of modern agricultural methods, and income generation from new sources such as tourism” (Kronik and Verner 2010).

The loss of faith in indigenous ways of living contribute to the already dwindling numbers of native communities and customs, and these cultures may be lost and in danger if climate change is not taken care of. Many indigenous groups are threatened by the idea of climate change and have harsher feelings towards their neighbors, as well as vice versa. Along the Mexico-United States border, “the indigenous Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, wrote that “Borders are no longer just lines drawn on maps and customs checkpoints, but walls of armies and police, of cement and brick, of laws and persecution. In the world above, the hunting of human beings increases and is celebrated with clandestine competitions: whoever expels, incarcerates, confines, and murders the most win””(Miller 2017). Tension with indigenous groups should matter because their identities deserve to be preserved, and they make up such a large part of Latin America's population and culture. Not only that, but “Climate change affects them in different ways, and it is important to consider these differences. For rural indigenous people across the LAC region,...findings show that increased water scarcity, rising mean temperatures, and disturbances in seasonal rhythms are affecting the viability of crop and livestock production and the availability of food foraged from the wild. Often the effects of climate change result in food

insecurity and poor health, as well as erosion of confidence in the solutions provided by traditional cultural institutions and authorities” (Kronik and Verner 2010). Climate change has an increased effect on indigenous communities, who place extraordinary value on the natural world and depend on it heavily to survive; both physically and culturally.

### **What About the Rest of the World?**

Climate migration is a complicated topic, and to get a beginner’s grasp on the topic before going into detail about how it relates to world politics it helps to look at the issue from a specific, familiar lens. In the United States, climate migration is already well on its way. In California, sea levels threaten coastlines and fires rip through homes, driving many to relocate. In the future, it will only get worse, as “At least 28 million Americans are likely to face megafires like the ones we are now seeing in California, in places like Texas and Florida and Georgia”(Lustgarten 2019b). In other regions of the United States, “The West and Southwest are likely to become drier, while the eastern United States is likely to experience increased rainfall. Heat waves are very likely to be hotter, longer, and more frequent, and heavy rain is more likely to become more frequent” (Backlund, Janetos, and Schimel 2009). In addition to changes in normal, every day weather and climate, the United States will also fall victim to rising sea levels. So much so, that “According to the United States Geological Survey, Louisiana lost 1,900 square miles of land between 1932 and 2000- the equivalent, as journalist Brett Anderson describes it, “of the entire state of Delaware dropping into the Gulf of Mexico.” If trends continue, by 2064 rising water will take from Louisiana another landmass larger than Rhode Island.” (Miller 2017). Just like the rest of the world, the United States faces losses in coastal communities unlike anything seen before. This upset in the usual climate will very likely make certain areas close to unlivable, or at least unpleasant enough for people to leave. However, the role of the United

States in the global issue of climate change will likely be offensive as well as defensive: “In a 2003 report commissioned by the Pentagon called *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security*, authors Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall assess what they call the “unthinkable.” In a world afflicted with climate cataclysms:

“The United States and Australia are likely to build defensive fortresses around their countries because they have the resources and reserves to achieve self-sufficiency. With diverse growing climates, wealth, technology, and abundant resources, the United States could likely survive shortened growing cycles and harsh weather conditions without catastrophic losses” (Miller 2017).

This statement has been accurate thus far for the United States, where militarization of the border has quickly found its place in the mind of the average American voter and fear mongering is a common political tactic as the unknown effects of large groups of foreigners is consistently dangled in front of their faces.

Additionally, other areas of the world like Southeast Asia have been struggling with climate change. This area has already been hit hard, triggering deadly tropical storms, drought and flooding in some areas. The World Bank claims eight million people have migrated from there to the Middle East, Europe, and North America (Lustgarten 2019a). With immigration already being a highly contested subject in American politics today, climate migrants in those numbers will inevitably stir more dangerous anti-immigrant sentiment and pose a security risk, as well as the humanitarian risk of how to properly take care of climate migrants and ensure their safety. Much of the world is susceptible to climate change driving people out of their homes, because “According to a United Nations report, most contemporary famines result from armed conflict and are worsened by natural disasters” (Law 2019). Such areas are spread out throughout the world, including Yemen. There, “civil war broke out in Yemen in 2015...hundreds of thousands of people have been killed directly as a result of the conflict, but also due to the subsequent famine, poor sanitation and a lack of clean water, according to the United Nations”

(Law 2019). Climate migration will hit every area of the world, triggering global responses from each state bound to be touched by mass movement of people. Especially in coastal areas, sea level rise threatens many. Staggeringly, “One-third of the world’s population lives near a coast. Looking specifically at low-elevation areas most vulnerable to rising seas, that means close to 700 million people are at risk” (Miller 2017). Climate change will leave no region unscathed with numbers like that, and with those predictions it is necessary for countries with large migrant populations to prepare for more. This will be no easy task, as many world powers are turning their backs on migrants.

### **Why Migrate?**

In reality, large numbers of people are migrating to other countries for good reason. It is a simple idea that if an area is no longer sustainable that people will move, “And while many displaced people will try to stay close to home, approximately 244 million people currently live outside their country of birth, up from 80 million in the 1980s (and a 41 percent increase from the year 2000). Since so many people are undocumented, and therefore uncounted, the actual number is likely much higher. People are traveling across borders in unprecedented numbers, and expectations-including those of people who live in vulnerable areas-are that this will continue” (Miller 2017). Migration is not a new concept, and adapting to it is key in the stability of any state, especially in an increasingly globalized world. There are plenty of indicators of movement as well, such as “stepwise migration”. This concept is that people often migrate internally first, often to a new city within their home country, before taking the even riskier chance of international migration (Lustgarten 2019a). Tracking such things could be helpful in predicting movements. If the United States is to survive the mass global movement that is to come with climate change, it must acknowledge and prepare for migrants. Even if they are not

necessarily “climate migrants”, climate change will drastically make previous push factors worse. “Catastrophic convergence”, or the idea that the economic, political, and ecological push factors of migration are not separate; rather, they compound each other to create increasingly untenable situations, is an important idea (Miller 2017). So, when environmental pressures worsen, as do many other stressors. The total number of people pressured to migrate by environmental change goes up significantly when the idea of catastrophic convergence is introduced, and the idea gets much more serious.

Climate migration in the United States, however, would look significantly different than climate migration in Latin America, generally speaking. In the United States, “Agriculture, for example, represents only 3% of the United States economy, thus by economic reasoning the total loss of our agriculture would amount to a modest recession” (McIntosh, Keech, and Tainter 2000). Whereas climate migrants from Latin America would more likely be migrating to escape unsustainability and inability to continue with normal agriculture and thus normal economy, people in the United States would be likely to be moving due to natural disasters like fires or hurricanes.

### **Climate Attitudes in the United States Vs. Latin America**

That being said, it is important to note the cultural differences between the United States and Latin America in regards to climate change. As stated before, wealthier countries and wealthier people will have an easier ability to adapt and easily move, and will have different reasons for doing so as the economic damage will be significantly less in the United States. This is not to say that Americans do not see climate change as a large problem, as “Half of Americans now rank climate as a top political priority, up from roughly one-third in 2016, and three out of four now describe climate change as either “a crisis” or “a major problem””(Lustgarten 2019b).

Climate is a slightly controversial topic, however, with a large chunk saying it is very important but a smaller one also denying climate change even exists. In the United States, “The number of Americans who deny the science behind climate change and oppose action is relatively small, but their beliefs are relatively hardened in that they are resistant to unlearning their misconceptions on the subject” (Mast 2019). Climate change’s hit-or-miss nature in the United States may be because the threat of climate change remains a far idea from the average American, as the United States has a diverse and mild climate as compared to much of Latin America. This can cause trouble to climate migrants, because if certain Americans do not see climate change as a legitimate threat they will likely not support the idea of a “climate migrant.”

Not only is public opinion about climate change heavily mixed, border security is a lucrative aspect of the American economy. The future does not look to change for the better, because “According to economic reports, the national security industry will mushroom into a \$546 billion market by 2022.” In just two short years, national security will grow into a sprawling enterprise, preparing to meet the predicted rise in migration. Anti-immigrant sentiment is a dangerous movement sweeping many state governments, seeing rises paired with nationalist sentiments in the United States and Europe. According to the research report *Climate Migration Security: Making the Most of a Contested Relationship*, rises in nationalism means the security implications of migration are seen in the recent break up of politics with a rise of nationalist sentiment after fears of a loss of culture, prompting the EU and many national governments to place migration at the top of the political agenda, prompting things like Brexit (Van Schaik and Bakker 2017). There is a similar movement in the United States, with nationalism rising with the unprecedented era of Donald Trump and his new wave of his own brand of conservatism, riddled with xenophobic, American exceptionalist views.

## **Donald Trump and American Nationalism**

In the United States, the rise of Donald Trump has signified the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, and climate change denial. Not one to care much for anybody not American, “One element of Trump’s populist politics has been an intense nationalism, symbolized by his motto “America First” and manifest in his condemnation of trade treaties and international governmental organizations, such as the United Nations and NATO, as infringements on national sovereignty” (Mast 2019). “America First” has been solidified in Trump’s push for an extensive border wall as well as prosecution of illegal immigrants, with both being big pushing points in his campaign. These ideas can be dangerous when paired with incoming groups of climate migrants, and the United States has already seen an example of how their President handles large groups of migrants during the Latin American migrant caravans, when he denied asylum to people that walked thousands of miles to arrive in the United States, as well as telling the American public that the caravans were full of “gang members” and “bad people”(Migrant Caravan: What Is It and Why Does It Matter? 2018). He is not only saying things to provoke American citizens, but following through with other threats. Under Donald Trump’s administration, “there is more spending on border reinforcement than ever before in the history of humankind” (Miller 2017). That number is only bound to go up if attitudes towards migration does not change. The path the United States is currently on looks grim, as the Department of Homeland Security becomes more and more powerful by the day, gradually growing into a massive entity with “240,000 employees and \$61 billion annual budget” (Miller 2017). With the militarization of the border becoming a stand alone industry, it will be harder to dismantle without significant change. Unfortunately, that will require widespread awareness and education about climate migration, as well as emphasis on empathy and global citizenship, because as of

2018 “The United States refused to join 164 other countries in signing a global migration treaty ...the first such agreement to recognize climate as a cause of future displacement” (Lustgarten 2019a). If the American government does not formally recognize climate as a valid push factor for migration, it makes it difficult to discern how it will handle the predicted clash between migrants escaping unlivable conditions and the supposed illegitimacy of their struggle.

### **What Now? Is Hope Lost?**

However, there are plenty of good things to consider when thinking about migration into the United States. The United States was built brick by brick from migrants, and it will continue to do so. A point to consider is “As the United States and other parts of the global North face a demographic decline, for instance, an injection of new people into an aging work force could be to everyone’s benefit”(Lustgarten 2019a). Influxes of people ready to work is valuable to a system built off of production, and the United States produces a wide variety of things and services, and its capitalistic nature encourages business growth. Migrants will keep the United States growing and they will continue to add to the great melting pot the United States claims to be.

### **What Does the United States Do Next?**

Before the groups of migrants from Central and South America make their way up North, possibly to the United States, steps must be taken to alleviate some of the pain of moving one’s life by addressing some changes that need to be made. In the past, “Societies, organisations and individuals have adjusted their behaviour in response to past climatic changes, and many are now contemplating adapting to altered future climatic conditions. Much of this adaptation is reactive, in the sense that it is triggered by past or current events, but it is also anticipatory in the sense that it is based on some assessment of conditions in the future” (Adger, Arnell, and Tompkins

2004). The United States has the research and the means to take adaptation seriously, and it is owed to the rest of the world to do so, as it stands as a beacon for migrants due to its world status and mild climate. The United States can be proactive instead of reactive, and make space for the future migrants before they arrive and can take steps to prevent the further degradation of the environment and Latin American homes. First and foremost, reducing the impact the United States has on climate change will help the people living in vulnerable areas adapt and thrive in their homes, thus eliminating the need to migrate. Second, lessons must be taken from abroad: the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner released a document named the “Seven Key Elements”, which highlight things a state can do to help migrants with their adjustment. It includes changes to business models to encourage inclusivity of migrants and positive migrant imaging, sociopolitical messages (including changing the narratives around migrants: they bring a larger workforce to an aging state and enrich communities, and focusing on the human aspects of migration instead of the security ones could emphasize the connections people make with migrants), fighting the narrative of “us vs them”, emphasizing local participation in expressive work such as art, music, sports, or food, and ensuring the wellbeing of migrants with access to healthcare, spiritual assistance, and knowledge of legal rights.

Even small things such as language used when describing migration are addressed, and admittedly changes had to be made to this very presentation. For example, using words like “waves”, “flows”, “tides” or other water-related words to describe patterns of immigration is common phrasing used around the topic today, however it is dehumanizing, and close attention must be paid to verbage (Seven Key Elements). These are small things that the American government can watch over and encourage, that will likely go a long way. Reprimanding authority figures that use divisive language could be a great start, because change starts small.

Funding public education and arts centers also is a small thing to do, but by doing so these centers remain open and functional to help migrants feel comfortable and to give them a space to mingle and express themselves, as well as open more places to work.

In short, things to take from the Seven Key Elements that should be implemented in the United States to encourage migrant-friendly attitudes are allocating more resources to expanding public services, cracking down on hate speech and pushing inclusivity in schools, giving monetary incentive to businesses whose models encourage migrant-friendly behavior (this is vague on purpose, because leaving it open allows businesses to be creative and innovative on how to prove inclusivity), and funding state-run informational centers specifically for informing migrants of their basic legal rights and providing information on local jobs and how to enroll in health plans.

Also, the 3S Initiative, a plan for security, stability, and sustainability, was endorsed at the 1st African Action Summit. According to the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification, African countries who join this mission are “set to receive help to create green jobs and to promote investment opportunities by migrants themselves. The 3S initiative is also expected to promote programs at country-level to adopt drought early warning systems; strengthen land tenure; identify hotspots of land degradation, population movement and migration; track new pastoralist routes to prevent the emergence of tensions over natural resources and to integrate natural resource management into national security strategies and migration policy” (Van Schaik and Bakker 2017). Taking inspiration from these ideas can do much to help vulnerable areas, and support to implement these ideas in Central and South America can prevent ecosystem degradation and make those areas sustainable, taking away some of the need to migrate in the first place. Providing monetary support to Latin America to implement such policies would be a

good move by the United States, as well as cooperating with governments and intergovernmental organizations, like the United Nations, to properly oversee and implement them. It is important to recognize that these countries and its people are entirely capable of taking care of themselves and they are in no means damsels in distress, however it is a global responsibility to help adapt wherever possible, especially when dealing with displaced people. Since the United States will be dealing with lots of vulnerable people, it is important to bear in mind that “Human rights-based approaches are key for addressing climate migration: states of origin bear the primary responsibility for their citizens’ protection even if indeed their countries have not been the main contributors to global warming; they should therefore apply human rights-based approaches for their citizens moving because of environmental or climatic drivers”(Ionesco 2019). That being said, the United States must hold accountable the governments of its Latin American neighbors to treat its people to the best of their ability, particularly in the case of environmental upheaval. Human rights issues are bound to arise in the midst of continental change and movement, but it is the United States job to not only make sure that it is not the state causing these issues, but that it is also keeping a watchful eye on the rest of Latin America. Overall, it is important to build an attitude based on empathy and compassion rather than pity or charity.

For more concrete ideas of policy recommendations, it is important to look into migration theory to form ideas. Migration and its relation to a governmental body can, in theoretical terms, be split into three perspectives. The first relies on the role of the national state in a globalizing world. More specifically, this theory states that migration can be largely determined by citizenship customs in relation to the topic of migration. In the United States, migration has an extensive history and until recently, America has loved its migrants. That world image of the

“land of opportunity” still stands, and still attracts plenty of migrants. The second relies more on the determinants of policy change, or the role of internal economic or political changes in changing views of migration. If an economy is doing well, a country may be more receptive to accepting migrants. If there is political animosity towards a specific ethnic group in a country, they will be more closed off towards migrants. As mentioned before, the Donald Trump administration is regularly regarded as anti-migrant, even racist. Unfortunately, this theory proves to be true, as within Trump’s presidency he has cracked down on migration and has scaled up deportations. The third theory focuses on the role of collective interests in migration policy, but political parties individually have little to do with this theory. Party ideologies have little effect, however this theory points to something called a “hidden consensus” between parties that dictate how a country acts towards migration. This theory also stresses the importance of judiciary courts and their attitudes towards migrants, for example anti-discriminatory rulings (Giugni and Passy, 2006). In the United States, judicial courts have historically dealt with so many discrimination cases that there are multiple different tests for addressing each case, so the courts are well versed in the matter. All together, these theories all still point to the United States having a complicated and long history with migration, and point to it continuing on with or without the support of the White House administration.

To encourage that the United States can take on millions more people and still remain relatively environmentally safe, early adaptation must be pushed by the government. It “can be motivated by many factors, including the protection of economic well-being or improvement of safety...It can be undertaken by an individual for their own benefit or it can be made up of actions by governments and public bodies to protect their citizens” (Adger, Arnell, and Tompkins 2004). Ways to implement these ideas are to give government incentives for

businesses to produce environmentally friendly products and to stop trying to revitalize or keep alive fossil fuel industries. President Trump ran on that very thing, “In fact, he made numerous promises on the campaign trail that horrified climate scientists, including one to cut environmental regulations and to revitalize the coal industry, a position widely panned by economists and other experts in energy and natural resources” (Mast 2019). This is absolutely not the right path the United States should go down, as it only worsens the problem of climate change and subsequently worsens the problem of climate migration. More concrete ideas to follow would be CARE’s Five Key Demands for Climate Justice, which are as follows: “1. Governments must take concrete steps to put the 1.5°C limit into practice and shift to 100% pro-poor renewable energies in an equitable manner. 2. Governments must scale-up support for gender-equitable, pro-poor adaptation to climate change impacts in developing countries to build resilience. 3. Governments need to address the growing loss and damage from climate change impacts and scale-up finance for loss and damage. 4. Countries must promote sustainable, productive, equitable and resilient agriculture through domestic action and international cooperation on sustainable agriculture and food and nutrition security. 5. Governments need to promote and respect gender equality and human rights in all climate action” (Schramek and Harmeling). These rules are simple and straightforward, and it should be easy enough for the United States to implement most of those rules. The government needs to fund green energy harder and wean itself off of the temptation of fossil fuel industries, continue to actively support women in STEM and green fields and support gender equity in its foreign policy, continue to research and prepare for unavoidable losses and damages caused by climate change, and inform the nation’s farmers of which crops are good for which area and how that may change in the coming decades and continue to incentivize them to plant the right things.

Lastly, it is crucial that the United States holds on to a humanitarian standard. As has become apparent at the U.S.-Mexico border during the last four years, “it is increasingly clear that a lack of human rights-based migration governance at the global, regional and national levels is leading to the routine violation of migrants’ rights in transit, at international borders, and in the countries they migrate to” (UN Human Rights Office of High Commissioner). The United States needs to redeem itself and reclaim its humanity. It has a chance to once again show the world its leadership, and lead an increasingly mobile world in the right moral direction. An intergovernmental, impartial organization must be created to oversee climate migration around the world, because “Migrants in an irregular situation tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and marginalization, often living and working in the shadows, afraid to complain, and denied their human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN Human Rights Office of High Commissioner). It is no secret that in the United States undocumented migrants often have their labor exploited, and in order to truly handle this migration event correctly that must end. Implementing an organization to regularly check that migrants are not being exploited in any way will ensure that nothing gets swept under the rug.

### **Conclusion**

Climate change remains as one of humanity’s biggest challenges. It threatens to wipe out all that mankind knows as normal as of the year 2020, and unless drastic action is taken by every major country, the best man can do is prepare to change along with the world. The United States, a significant world power, can expect to receive millions of migrants while at the same time dealing with its own climate issues. However, the United States has within it the power to become, as John Winthrop once put it, “as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us”. The United States has the economic power and wealth, technology, and will to prepare

appropriately for both climate change and climate migration from its Latin American neighbors, and should it choose to take the wheel of green leadership, it may foster a smooth transition for millions of people amongst a new and chaotic world, but only should it make the conscious choice to do so.

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