

Weak State as a Security Threat: Study Case of El Salvador (2014-2019)

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ABSTRACT

The World Trade Center Attack remembered as the 9/11 tragedy has awakened the international community, particularly the United States (US) to sharpen its foreign policy in facing security threats coming from 'weak states'. One of the most prominent weak states examples posing a grave threat is the Northern Triangle Countries of Central America (NTCA) which are referred to as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Hence, this paper will discuss the rationale behind US initiatives in dealing with security threats in El Salvador as one of the NTCA using the weak state concept and national interest concept. It is found that El Salvador corresponds to the elements of a weak state and poses security threats by giving rise to transnational criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and migrant problems. Overcoming those security threats has become a vital US national interest. However, despite decreasing security threats coming from El Salvador and strengthening El Salvador's government capacity is highly correlated, strengthening El Salvador's governance through the providence of aid and assistance is classified as US important national interest.

Keywords: Security threats; Northern Triangle; weak state; El Salvador; national interest

ABSTRAK

Serangan World Trade Center yang dikenang sebagai tragedi 9/11 telah menyadarkan masyarakat internasional, khususnya Amerika Serikat (AS) untuk mempertajam kebijakan luar negerinya dalam menghadapi ancaman keamanan yang datang dari 'negara-negara lemah'. Salah satu contoh negara lemah yang menimbulkan ancaman serius adalah Negara Segitiga Utara Amerika Tengah (NTCA) yang merujuk ke Guatemala, Honduras, dan El Salvador. Oleh karena itu, tulisan ini akan membahas alasan di balik inisiatif AS dalam menghadapi ancaman keamanan di El Salvador sebagai salah satu NTCA dengan menggunakan konsep negara lemah dan konsep kepentingan nasional. Ditemukan bahwa El Salvador sesuai dengan unsur-unsur negara lemah dan ternyata menimbulkan ancaman keamanan dengan mendorong kemunculan organisasi kriminal transnasional, perdagangan narkoba, dan masalah imigran. Mengatasi ancaman keamanan tersebut telah menjadi kepentingan nasional AS yang vital. Namun, meskipun mengurangi ancaman keamanan yang datang dari El Salvador dan penguatan kapasitas pemerintahan El Salvador sangat berkorelasi, penguatan tata kelola El Salvador melalui pemberian bantuan dan pertolongan sebenarnya tergolong kepentingan nasional penting AS.

Kata kunci: Ancaman keamanan; Segitiga Utara; negara lemah; El Salvador; kepentingan nasional

Introduction

The 9/11 tragedy has raised the awareness of the international community, especially the United States (US) that security threats could arise in the form of transnational security threats from the world's most poorly governed countries. The threat spectrum has expanded by involving the role of non-state actors. The emergence of non-state actors who carry out transnational activities has brought a new color to the world foreign policy formulation in which states should realize that threats to stability and peace can arise from the often underestimated weak states. With that in mind, the US refocused its foreign policy attention on three countries in the Central American region which are known as the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA).

The term Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) highlights the three Central American turbulent and most violent countries consisting of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The NTCA has long suffered from rampant corruption, poverty, food insecurity, a stagnant economy, organized crime networks, high homicide rates, drug trafficking and human trafficking, undeniably one of the poorest regions in the Western Hemisphere. This situation prompts people in these countries to migrate to seek for better economic opportunities and security providence. The domestic chaos gave birth to transnational criminal organizations like MS-13 who were often caught carrying out various illegal actions, not only within the NTCA administrative area but spreading to countries in the Americas and Europe.¹

Poverty is undoubtedly one of the main problems as well as the biggest challenge for Honduras with more than 66% of the population living below the poverty line as of 2016. The rate of economic growth was only above the average for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) countries reaching 4.9% in 2017 which then dived back to 2.7% in 2019. Half of the population lives on less than US\$5.50 per day. Violence also remains an icon of the country despite a drop in the homicide rate from 83 to 38 murders per 100,000 population between 2011 and 2018.² Inequality within the country is also extreme due to Honduras's political system that tends to serve the elite before the people, a corrupt government, weak policies, underemployment, and economic policies that focus on natural resource exploitation rather than land reform. Consequently, these factors drive a large number of migrants from Honduras every year.

In the case of Guatemala, even though the economy has traditionally been fairly stable, the poverty rate is severe. Based on the World Bank, Guatemala is ranked as the fifth poorest country in Latin America as measured by GDP in 2019 with 3 in 4 Guatemalans living in poverty. Furthermore, the level of chronic malnutrition is also high in Guatemala, ranking first in the LAC region and fourth in the world. Instability can also be seen from a political perspective where in mid-2015, tens of thousands of Guatemalans took to the streets to protest against multi-million dollar corruption schemes at the highest levels of government and demand reform.³ The violence that has become an icon of the NTCA forced more than 432,000 families to migrate from Guatemala and cross the US southern border in 2019 alone. In the following year, there was a fivefold increase in migrant arrivals.

¹ Steven Dudley and Silva Avalos, MS13 In the Americas: How the World's Most Notorious Gang Defies Logic, Resists Destruction (National Institute of Justice, 2018).

² "Honduras," World Bank, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras>.

³ Steven Ambrus, "Guatemala: The Crisis of Rule of Law and a Weak Party System," Ideas Matter, January 28, 2019, <https://blogs.iadb.org/ideas-matter/en/guatemala-the-crisis-of-rule-of-law-and-a-weak-party-system/>.

On the other hand, El Salvador, as the country with the smallest geographical area in Central America, continues to experience low economic growth with an average annual GDP of only 2.3%.⁴ El Salvador has been named as one of the countries with the highest murder rate. In 2015, the level of violence that occurred was said to match the level of violence during the civil war era. Natural factors such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, tropical storms, and drought due to their geographical location make the people of El Salvador increasingly cornered and try to find a better life in other countries.⁵ As this paper will show, the government of El Salvador has failed to fulfill the fundamentally important functions such as security, provision of basic services, and protection of civil liberties to build a strong and stable nation.

The US itself has a long history of intervention in the three NTCA countries. Particularly in the last two decades, the US has channeled a lot of assistance to strengthen and encourage the development of the NTCA. The US provided \$2.6 billion in foreign aid to the NTCA in the 2015-2018 period and co-funded the government's NTCA initiative called Alliance for Prosperity (A4P) by embracing Islamic Development Bank (IDB).⁶ The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is also channeled to promote NTCA government accountability, tackle rampant corruption and violence, and other aspects that are driving irregular migration from the NTCA. All of these are done even though the US is located in a different region.

Positive side aside, the US also contributed to the protracted civil wars in El Salvador (1979-1992) and Guatemala (1960-1996) by providing military assistance and funds of \$1 million per day to fight communist insurgencies and ideology in the Cold War situation.⁷ This war is one of the roots of multidimensional problems in NTCA. This war, in which many countries intervened, destroyed the NTCA country's economy, eased access to firearms, increased extreme unemployment, killed civilians, and increased migrants. In other words, the US has a stake in shaping NTCA then and today which makes this case interesting and worth further analysis.

Literature Review

Discussing US relations with the NTCA will not be separated from the history of a protracted civil war full of US intervention and struggle to support El Salvador to uphold democracy and not degenerate into authoritarianism. However, in the last two decades, researchers and policymakers have paid particular attention to security threats that emerge as what Stewart Patrick illustrates as a cross-border 'spillover' from weak states such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, organized crime, regional instability, global pandemics, and energy insecurity. In examining the big goals behind US assistance to the NTCA, there are several pieces of literature worth to be scrutinized to enrich this paper's analysis.

⁴“Overview,” World Bank, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Death Threats and Gang Violence Forcing More Families to FLEE Northern Central America – UNHCR and Unicef Survey,” UNHCR, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/12/5fdb14ff4/death-threats-gang-violence-forcing-families-flee-northern-central-america.html>.

⁶ Mark Schneider, “Where Are the Northern Triangle Countries Headed? And What Is U.S. Policy?,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), July 9, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/where-are-northern-triangle-countries-headed-and-what-us-policy>.

⁷ United States General Accounting Office, “EL SALVADOR Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but Not Overcome the Insurgency,” <https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-91-166.pdf> (accessed July 8, 2021).

Michael Shifter through his writings *Countering Criminal Violence in Central America* agreed that despite the nuances of the history and the sense of moral obligation, the current situation in Central America particularly in the NTCA is a critical concern of the US for its national security. Given that the security problems of this region are increasing, especially organized crime which is inherently a transnational problem, enhancing the capacity of the NTCA state to fight against the criminality of non-state actors is important.⁸ Thomas Riney in his research paper entitled *How is MS-13 a Threat to US National Security?* stated that the presence of MS-13 as a rapidly growing TOC from NTCA is indeed a direct threat to the US. He added that the Central American government's ability to maintain control over its country is a major source of threats to US national security that fosters the growth of transnational street gangs such as MS-13.⁹ Riney believes that aid to Central America should be focused on the goal of increasing military strength in Central America in quantity and quality.

Complementing the view put by Shifter, Ieva Giedraityte through *Empire, Leadership or Hegemony: US Strategies towards the Northern Triangle Countries in the 21st Century* argued that there are two trends were shaping the US and NTCA relations which is based on security challenges and migration flows; and US diminishing role in the region. She later adds that the strategy implemented by Obama during his presidency was corresponding to intermediate hegemonic strategy. Giedraityte saw that emphasis on cooperation and joint problem solving is a typical soft hegemonic strategy.¹⁰ Talking about the sphere of influence, the US has always put more effort into preventing countries from falling into the hole of authoritarianism that leaves little to no place for democracy to grow. In international relations, democracy is one form of soft power. Joseph Nye believes that liberal democratic politics is the foundation of US soft power, in addition to the free market economy and fundamental values such as human rights. As will be shown in the final section of the analysis, all three forms of soft power are especially prominent in the amount of aid the US provides to the NTCA.

In the case of El Salvador itself, the US has placed its intervention since the civil war to prevent the growing counter-insurgency movement supported by countries with communist ideology. Lyndsey Deep in her thesis *Variations of U.S. Public Diplomacy in Central America's Northern Triangle* concluded that during the 2009-2016 period, strengthening democracy was a US policy objective for Central America, especially in the NTCA. During its efforts, the US aimed to strengthen its relationship with the executive branch of El Salvador, rebuild democracy after the coup in Honduras, and fight corruption at Guatemala's highest levels of government.¹¹ Remains of the same page of Deep's argument, Gary Bland through his writings *Supporting Post-conflict Democratic Development? External Promotion of Participatory Budgeting in El Salvador*, introduced the term participatory budgeting (PB) that refers to US endorsement of democracy in El Salvador in the form of financial assistance. One of the examples is USAID as a manifestation of the spread of PB in El

⁸ Michael Shifter, "Countering Criminal Violence in Central America" (New York, US: The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), 2012), pp. 1-43, https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2012/03/Criminal_Violence_CSR64.pdf.

⁹ Thomas J Riney, "How Is MS-13 a Threat to US National Security?," *AIR WAR COLLEGE AIR UNIVERSITY*, February 12, 2009. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA540139.pdf>

¹⁰ Ieva Giedraityte, "Empire, Leadership OR Hegemony: US Strategies towards the Northern Triangle Countries in the 21st Century," *Latin American Yearbook – Political Science and International Relations* 7 (2019): p. 175, <https://doi.org/10.17951/al.2019.7.181-192>

¹¹ Lyndsey Horn (Calhoun, 2021), pp. 1-87, 63.

Salvador. Within USAID itself is an institution called the Democratic Local Governance Activity (DLGA) which functions to spread democracy in El Salvador.

By studying previous literature relevant to the topic of US assistance to El Salvador as NTCA countries, this paper aims to fill the gap of classifying the US level of national interest in providing assistance to El Salvador. As this paper will show, national security has become the main reason and priority behind US continuous assistance to El Salvador. This article will begin with the analysis of El Salvador as a weak state and how consequences that arise become US national interest with a high level of importance. This paper will be divided into five sections, namely background, problem formulation, theoretical framework, analysis, and conclusions.

Problem Identification

To make this research more specific and sharp, the authors choose to analyze El Salvador in the 2014-2019 timeframe under the government of President Salvador Sánchez Cerén. This timeframe is determined as this timeframe represents one of the most problematic eras of El Salvador in which the state experienced a significant rise in homicides rate, corruption, and even the world's most violent countries, according to a United Nations report.¹² As the reign of Cerén had just ended around a year before this paper was written, thus his governance performance is considered intact and relevant enough to illustrate contemporary El Salvador. El Salvador was chosen considering that our discussion will analyze a lot of weak state characteristics in terms of institutional capacity and legitimacy of power to enforce the law and its consequences such as the development of Trans Organized Crime (TOC) and waves of migrants that can be seen as a problem to an extent of the this group potential to be involved in a criminal activity. By the time this paper was written, the largest number of immigrants living in the US were from El Salvador Among the three NTCAs.¹³ MS-13 as a phenomenal TOC is also rooted in El Salvador.¹⁴

Our research aims to answer the question of why does the US continue to channel its aid and assistance in supporting El Salvador's capacity-building and development? The hypothesis is that as a weak state El Salvador raises security threats by giving rise to transnational criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and migrant issues in which addressing these security threats is considered as US vital national interest.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, the authors describe the concept of a weak state proposed by Francis Fukuyama, and Shaoguang Wang, and the implications that arise from the existence of a weak state according to Phil Williams. This concept is crucial to see whether El Salvador can represent the elements that comprised a weak state as well as the proof of how it raises security threats to neighboring countries, especially the US and the stability of the Central American region. The author will also use the concept of national interest described by Robert Jeffrey Art to look at aspects of

¹² "El Salvador Homicides Jump 56 Percent as Gang Truce Unravels," Reuters, December 30, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-el-salvador-violence-idUSKBN0K81HR20141230>.

¹³ Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "U.S. Relations With El Salvador - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, April 14, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-el-salvador/>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

¹⁴ BBC News Indonesia "Kisah Di Balik MS-13, Salah Satu Geng Jalanan Paling Brutal Di Dunia." BBC News Indonesia (BBC, April 21, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-39663817>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

national interest that are believed to be driving the various aids provided by the US to El Salvador as the chosen country.

a. Weak State Concept

Francis Fukuyama in his book *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* argues that the need for state-building becomes vital to international security because weak states are the source of many of the world's most serious problems, ranging from poverty, human rights violations, massive waves of migration, AIDS, drugs, to terrorism. To be able to understand the concept of a weak state, we need a picture of an ideal country. Fukuyama refers to Max Weber's definition of the state which is a human community that successfully claims a legitimate monopoly on the use of physical force in a given territory.¹⁵

According to Fukuyama, the state has a monopoly function of legitimacy of power which gives each state coercive power to protect property rights and provide public security. This function allows individuals to escape from what Hobbes describes as *bellum omnium contra omnes* or the war of all against all. Although the condition develops and occurs within the country, it is the basis for conflict and war at the international level. The essence of statehood to Fukuyama lies in law enforcement, shown by the ultimate ability to send someone with uniforms and weapons to force people to obey the laws of the land. As the opposition to the ideal state, a weak state can be interpreted as a country with weak institutional capacity in applying the legitimacy of power to uphold state law in a clearly and transparent manner.¹⁶

Weber's definition was also re-emphasized by Shaoguang Wang in his writing *The Problem of State Weakness*. According to Wang, to be able to govern effectively, the state must be able to carry out six essential functions. The six functions include:¹⁷

- a. Monopoly on the legitimacy of the use of force. This function is carried out by the government by developing police and military that are professional, knowledgeable, dedicated, disciplined and uniformed and regulated by law so that the government can monopolize legitimate power under its jurisdiction and dispel threats from outside and maintain internal order.
- b. Resource extraction, and resource availability allow the state to carry out other tasks. An effective government must be able to extract sufficient resources from society, collect them, and use them for national purposes. An effective country is a country that is fiscally able to generate profits from the management of existing resources.
- c. Shaping national identity and mobilizing consent in which it requires shared identities and values that unite society as a whole because the use of coercion is costly and excessive use is not effective in the long term. He brings to the table the history of Rwanda, the Balkans and

¹⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 93 - 120.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Shaoguang Wang, "The Problem of State Weakness," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): pp. 36-42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0022>, 37-38.

Indonesia to remind us that the absence of an overarching national identity can be a frightening centrifugal force.

- d. Regulating society and the economy. The state needs to establish regulations in various aspects of economic and social life. A well-governed country is a well-governed country, regardless of whether the country is democratic or not.
- e. Maintaining the internal coherence of state institutions. This function is manifested in the form of an effective bureaucracy in which a large and complex government must move with 'gears linked together'. Corruption or incompetence of individual officials must not be allowed to reach the point of weakening the internal coherence of the state administration itself.
- f. Redistribution of resources, that is relocation of authoritative scarce resources among different social groups to provide economic security for the most disadvantaged. This function is important to prevent wealth disparities or opportunities for social mobility which can lead to political instability. By establishing moderate redistributive policies, the state can maintain order and increase its legitimacy.

If the state cannot fulfill these six basic functions, the people will not benefit from the existence of the state, no matter how democratic the government of the country is. Furthermore, Phil Williams argues that weak states can be easily characterized by the country's failure to fulfill various functions and roles ('capacity gaps') which will leave a void ('functional hole'). The functional hole has the potential to be charged and exploited by criminal enterprises, including TOC. Facilitated by globalization, TOC can be defined as networks pursuing monetary (commercial) gains through illegal means that cross national boundaries. By the same logic, state-building becomes important to prevent this from happening.¹⁸

Supporting Fukuyama's concept of a weak state, Stewart Patrick describes the relationship between weak states with TOCs. According to him, criminal networks naturally thrive in an environment where the rule of law is imperfectly enforced, public services are unreliable, corruption is rampant, and prone to internal disputes. Countries with strong criminal networks can also be seen from weak law enforcement, border control, and regulatory systems. Patrick emphasized that the enormity of transnational organized crime in Latin America was triggered by poor governance and law enforcement capacity.¹⁹

b. National Interest Concept

National interest is the most important basis for determining the strategy needed by a country to make foreign policy and military strategy. The national interest is the basic guide for the state in determining the deployment of resources and attitudes needed for the welfare of a country. Robert Art argues that national interests need to be sorted based on their importance due to limited resources, time and attention. Without a priority scale, decision-makers in the country will continue to experience conflict between one interest and another.²⁰

¹⁸ Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Assessing Evidence of Spillovers," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2006, pp. 1-31, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.984057>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Century Foundation/Cornell UP, 2004), 45.

National interests are divided into three namely 'vital', 'highly important', and 'important' which are ranked based on the involvement of military support for these interests, benefits, convenience to be achieved and costs if these interests are not protected. The 'vital' national interest is notably regarded as the most important because it relates to national security. Failure to achieve this will result in enormous costs, for example, a direct threat to the country's internal defense. National interest that is 'highly important' will bring enormous profits if it is achieved and incur substantial costs if it fails to achieve it, although the loss will not be as critical as the loss of 'vital' interest if it fails to be protected. An example of a 'highly important' interest is ensuring access to oil in the Persian Gulf.²¹ Finally, the 'important' national interest is to fulfill the country's economy and security to create a better international environment, and the loss if not achieved is not too big.²² For example, suppressing climate change, spreading human rights values, consolidating democracy, and international economic openness.

Analysis

a. El Salvador as a Weak State

Measuring the six indicators of an effective state function, El Salvador can be classified as a weak state. The first indicator is the legitimate monopoly of power by the government to be able to enforce the law. Weak law enforcement can be seen from violations of the law (lawlessness) that hit this country. Although the state monopoly on the lawful use of force is claimed to cover the entire territory, there are certain loopholes indicated by persistently high crime rates, indicating that the state has lost significant control over population and territory and its ability to guarantee civil rights. and human rights.

The government needs legitimacy in the form of recognition from the people to be able to implement a legitimate monopoly of power. This kind of legitimacy is crucial so that law enforcement, which Fukuyama refers to as the essence of statehood, can be implemented. This recognition is grown from the government's presence in protecting the basic rights and freedoms of its people, upholding the rule of law, and enabling broad participation in the political process. However,

a survey in 2017 showed that 42% of 1000 Salvadoran respondents agreed that gangs (Delinquency/Maras) are the ones who run the country, whereas only 6% admit that President Sanchez holds the power. Weak governance was also cited by prosecutors in El Salvador who pointed out that a politician had to ask gangs for permission to hold rallies or rallies in many neighborhoods.²³ El Salvador seems to be a country in captivity of splinter actors with the highest homicide rate in the world, especially femicide.²⁴ In 2014, the homicide rate in El Salvador increased from five to around nine lives per day. This very unsafe situation became one of the factors that caused many Salvadorans to migrate to other countries.

Fukuyama emphasizes the role of law enforcement officers ('send someone with a uniform

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 46.

²³ Robbie Whelan, "Why Are People Fleeing Central America? A New Breed of Gangs Is Taking Over.." The Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones & Company, November 2, 2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pay-or-die-extortion-economy-drives-latin-americas-murder-crisis-1541167619>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

²⁴ Indexmundi "Countries Ranked by Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 People)." Countries ranked by Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people), n.d., <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5/rankings>. Retrieved July 11, 2021.

and a gun’) to ‘force’ people to comply with the law. Wang also argued that the government's ability to claim a legitimate monopoly of power as a basic test of statehood originates from the quality of the police and military apparatus. However, what happened in El Salvador was far from the ideal. It was so dangerous for the police in El Salvador that some of them fled the country. Confrontations between police officers and gang members involving firearms and resulting in death are quite common. In 2017 alone, around 45 policemen died as a result of violence, 21 officers were on patrol, some of whom were not even on duty when they were killed.²⁵ In early 2018, the UNHRC in its report underlined the increasingly serious problem of extrajudicial killings in this country, accompanied by a lack of investigation and strict punishment by the authorities.²⁶ In other words, El Salvador is an example of a state where the non-state actors hold more power against the legitimate government and law enforcer.

The second function emphasizes resource extraction. An effective government in terms of resource extraction can be seen from the country's fiscal condition. A healthy fiscal condition is illustrated by the government's efforts to maintain spending, manage fiscal deficits prudently, and reduce the level of state debt. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the fiscal deficit is the main cause of the high debt government of El Salvador which has increased significantly.²⁷ Apart from debt levels and fiscal deficits, government revenues and spending are also an important part of the government's fiscal policy.

The state cannot operate without income from taxes and non-taxes. Wang compares the income of the country from resource extraction to human blood. This revenue is used for government spending in fulfilling various national interests, one of which is infrastructure development and improving the quality of life of its citizens. Central government revenue of El Salvador itself is very low when compared to other countries.²⁸ According to reports from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2014 the government of El Salvador collected only about 18% share of GDP on income, placing it third lowest in the LAC region.²⁹ Moreover, only 9.5% of the total budget is spent on social benefits while the average country in the region spends up to 24.6%.

Wang claims the importance of the function of national identity to mobilize citizen approval. In El Salvador, the protracted civil war which was heavily intervened by the US resulted in relatively high political polarization. This polarization divides Salvadorans into two main parties (FMLN and ARENA) with marked ideological differences. According to a study by the University of Salamanca, El Salvador is the most polarized country in Latin America.³⁰ The polarization is prominent when presidential elections are held where each party often echoes civil war-era rivalries in campaigning.

Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) itself is a Marxist-Leninist rebel group

²⁵ Parker Asmann, “El Salvador Citizens Say Gangs, Not Government 'Rule' the Country.” InSight Crime, August 19, 2020, <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-citizens-say-gangs-not-government-rules-country/>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

²⁶ Robbie Whelan, “Why Are People Fleeing Central America? A New Breed of Gangs Is Taking Over..” The Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones & Company, November 2, 2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pay-or-die-extortion-economy-drives-latin-americas-murder-crisis-1541167619>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

²⁷ International Monetary Fund, “El Salvador: Selected Issues,” *IMF Staff Country Reports* 16, no. 209 (2016): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781498342346.002>.

²⁸ “Government Revenues,” Government Revenues - Countries - List, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/government-revenues>.

²⁹ International Monetary Fund, “El Salvador: Selected Issues,” *IMF Staff Country Reports* 16, no. 209 (2016): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781498342346.002>.

³⁰ International Monetary Fund, “El Salvador: Selected Issues,” *IMF Staff Country Reports* 16, no. 209 (2016): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781498342346.002>.

that was legalized as a political party after the civil war. President Salvador Sánchez Cerén and his predecessor Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena were the first two FMLN cadres to serve as president in El Salvador. During the civil war, the FMLN received support from Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union against the US-backed country's military. If the polarization between the supported Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and the FMLN is not properly mitigated, the division that claimed many victims like the civil war two decades ago could be repeated.

Based on the fourth function, it is said that a well-organized state is a state that can manage well with various economic and social regulations.³¹ El Salvador itself has made various economic policies that were made to maintain macroeconomic stability and meet the targets of the law *Fiscal Responsibility Act*.³² But the existing policies are felt to be insufficient to fulfill the fourth function, this can be proven by the level of crime and violence in El Salvador. Within the country of El Salvador itself, there are rampant acts of crime and violence by a group of gangs known as *None*.³³ This unsafe situation will make El Salvador a less friendly country for foreign investors to invest their capital in. El Salvador is listed as a country that has difficulty getting *Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)* compared to other Central American countries.³⁴ As of 2019, El Salvador was ranked 91st for ease of doing business among 190 economies measured. Inconsistency in enforcing commercial law, corruption, and security issues are considered to be the main contributors to the lack of FDI.

The gang works by extorting residents and if residents do not want to pay, then they will make death threats against residents. In the period 2014-2017 alone, 20,000 people became victims of murder and most of the killings were carried out by members of the *None*.³⁵ There is a great fear among citizens in El Salvador, especially those who are marginalized, to be able to live their daily lives. Activities as simple as looking for a supply of clean water or going to school can kill them at any time. This disrupted the fabric of the country as well as made El Salvador fertile ground for gangs and violent factions to continue to grow and gain power.³⁶ Jeanne Ridders, a violence prevention expert from the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Cristosal agrees that this cycle of violence begins and continues to repeat itself when the state "abandons" its people by not fulfilling basic human rights such as water, education, health and employment. Without clear and strong economic and social regulations, these needs will never be adequately met and easily accessed by citizens.

The fifth function is the ability to maintain the internal coherence of state institutions. All forms of corruption or incompetence of officials are prevented so that they occur to a minimum.³⁷ Corruption itself has been one of the major challenges in El Salvador for many years after the civil

³¹ Shaoguang Wang, "The Problem of State Weakness," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): pp. 36-42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0022>, 37-38.

³² "El Salvador," *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2019, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44675/158/EEI2019_ElSalvador_en.pdf.

³³ Clare Ribando Seelke, "CRS Report for Congress," *El Salvador: Political, Economic, and Social Conditions and U.S. Relations*, November 18, 2008, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4951ec75e.pdf>.

³⁴ US Official Website of the International Trade Administration El Salvador. (2020). El Salvador - Market Challenges/ <https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/el-salvador-market-challenges>.

³⁵ "Life under Gang Rule in El Salvador," Crisis Group, December 10, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/el-salvador/life-under-gang-rule-el-salvador>.

³⁶ International Monetary Fund, "El Salvador: Selected Issues," *IMF Staff Country Reports* 16, no. 209 (2016): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781498342346.002>.

³⁷ Shaoguang Wang, "The Problem of State Weakness," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): pp. 36-42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0022>, 37-38.

war.³⁸ Even though El Salvador is a democracy where citizens should have the right to demand accountability from their authorities, in El Salvador transparency is still not the norm. Lack of transparency, impunity and corruption are serious problems that can hinder the growth of a country's democracy. Many of El Salvador's domestic officials committed acts of corruption by misusing public assets to gain huge profits for themselves.³⁹ In recent years, El Salvador has attempted to take important steps to combat corruption and impunity, including by indicting three former presidents for corruption, one of them being Antonio Saca.⁴⁰ However, there have been no significant developments indicating that El Salvador is fulfilling the effective functions of the five states according to Shaoguang Wang.

Then the last function, it is said that a country can maintain order and increase its legitimacy by establishing moderate redistributive policies.⁴¹ However, again, it was felt that this function could not work properly in El Salvador. In 2019, 45.6% of state revenue is controlled by the richest 20% of El Salvador. This gap has started to increase since 2017 when El Salvador's income percentage was at 44.7%. Furthermore, to measure gaps, data on the Gini Coefficient is needed. The Gini coefficient is the deviation to measure the distribution of income in a country evenly to every household in a country. In 2017, the Gini Coefficient in El Salvador reached 38 which indicates that the gap in wealth or income in El Salvador is quite high.⁴²

Departing from the six essential functions of the state according to Shaoguang Wang, it can be proven that El Salvador in the 2014-2019 period can be categorized as a weak state. However, under President Sanchez, El Salvador made a lot of efforts to improve its governmental capacity, especially in terms of the legitimate monopoly of power. In this regard, the US has stated its commitment to cooperate. In President Obama's remarks on July 25, 2014, he stated that countries must do more to address the root causes of the problem by explicitly addressing poverty and violence in Central America.⁴³

b. The Impact of El Salvador as a Weak State

Located in Central America, El Salvador is the country with the smallest geographical area.⁴⁴ With an area slightly smaller than Belize, which is 21,041 km², its population is 18 times the population of Belize (6.4 million Salvadorans) placing it as one of the most densely-populated countries in the world.⁴⁵ El Salvador is a strategic location for organized crime groups looking to link

³⁸ "El Salvador," Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44675/158/EEI2019_ElSalvador_en.pdf.

³⁹ Laura Andrade, *Transparency In El Salvador*, 1st ed. (El Salvador: University Institute for Public Opinion, 2019)

⁴⁰ Julett Pineda Sleinan, "Salvadoran Court: Ex-President and Wife Guilty of Illicit Enrichment," OCCRP, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/13586-salvadoran-court-ex-president-and-wife-guilty-of-illicit-enrichment>.

⁴¹ Shaoguang Wang, "The Problem of State Weakness," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): pp. 36-42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0022>, 37-38.

⁴² Published by Teresa Romero and Jul 5, "Income Held by Top 20 Percent in El Salvador," Statista, July 5, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1075313/el-salvador-income-inequality/>.

⁴³ "Remarks by President Obama after Meeting with Central American Presidents," National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration), accessed August 8, 2021, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/25/remarks-president-obama-after-meeting-central-american-presidents>.

⁴⁴ World Bank, "Overview." World Bank, October 09, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/elsalvador/overview>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁴⁵ "Central Intelligence Agency." Central Intelligence Agency (Central Intelligence Agency, July 06, 2021), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/el-salvador/>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

drug producers in South America with drug consumers in North America taking advantage of its land, air and sea routes. Interpol stated that their presence in El Salvador is very important to maintain national and regional security given that the TOC in this country operates at a global level.⁴⁶ Corruption and gang crime along with money laundering, drug trafficking, firearms, humans, and counterfeit goods are still the main challenges for law enforcement in this country.

According to Patrick, weak states tend to experience low growth rates compared to other developing countries.⁴⁷ The World Bank recorded very slow growth in El Salvador where the average economic growth in recent years has only reached 2.3%.⁴⁸ High gang activity contributes to making it one of the bottom economies in Central America by increasing dropout rates (recruited into gangs) and eliminating potential investors. Young people in El Salvador are recruited and involved in gangs with an average age of 15 years.⁴⁹ The risk factors for youth involvement also eventually became a concern of the US in initiating various aids and movements.

Even though in the period 2014-2019, the poverty rate decreased (35.5% to 26.2%) and the unemployment rate fell (4.15 to 3.96), poverty is still a challenge in El Salvador, especially in urban areas. Apart from gang activity and overcrowding, El Salvador's economy tends to stagnate due to environmental factors. With about 70% of the land used for agriculture, El Salvador still often experiences extreme water shortages even though the Central American region is rich in water resources. This is due to weak regulation, poor service,⁵⁰ and uncontrolled commercial exploitation.⁵¹

By the time this paper is written, El Salvador is one of the countries in the region with severe levels of environmental degradation due to high population density and unsustainable agricultural practices. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of El Salvador stated that 90% of surface water sources have been contaminated due to poor waste management, especially agricultural and industrial waste. With water as the most basic need for the population to live clean and decent, this clean water crisis has caused the death of around 500 children per year.⁵² Access to water is also complicated by gang activity in various water sources.

A bad economy does not necessarily make a country classified as a weak state. However, according to Stuart Eizenstat, John Edward Porter, and Jeremy Weinstein in their work *Rebuilding Weak States*, more than 50 out of 70 low-income countries in the world are classified as weak states that threaten US security and the security of the international community.⁵³ The historical journey of how El Salvador became a security threat is quite long and complex. US intervention against El

⁴⁶ INTERPOL, "El Salvador." El Salvador, n.d., <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Member-countries/Americas/EL-SALVADOR>. Retrieved July 11, 2021.

⁴⁷ Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Assessing Evidence of Spillovers," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2006, pp. 1-31, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.984057>, 9.

⁴⁸ World Bank, "El Salvador Overview." World Bank, October 09, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/elsalvador/overview>. Retrieved July 11, 2021.

⁴⁹ "Key Issues AFFECTING Youth in El Salvador - OCDE," Key Issues affecting Youth in El Salvador - OCDE, accessed August 8, 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/fr/pays/elsalvador/youth-issues-in-el-salvador.htm>.

⁵⁰ Heather Gies, "Once Lush, El Salvador Is Dangerously Close to Running out of Water." Environment (National Geographic), May 4, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/el-salvador-water-crisis-drought-climate-change>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁵¹ Eddie Galdamez, "Water Pollution in El Salvador. Getting Worse Every Year.." El Salvador INFO, June 30, 2021, <https://elsalvadorinfo.net/water-pollution-in-el-salvador/>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁵² Oxford Analytica (2016), "El Salvador water emergency will offer short-term fix", Expert Briefings. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB210639>

⁵³ Stuart E. Eizenstat, John Edward Porter, and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Rebuilding Weak States," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 1 (2005): p. 134, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20034213>, 136.

Salvador has been carried out since the early 20th century.⁵⁴ Until the outbreak of 9/11, *the War on Terror* initiated by the US dominated the foreign policy agenda where the definition of terror is very complex, especially when drawn into the context of the NTCA. The Pentagon has finally defined organized crime, drug trafficking and gangs as the "anti-social combination" that destabilizes society and therefore poses a serious threat to security, especially in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁵

However, it turns out that such a broad concept has attracted the US to one root of the problem, namely the wave of migrants. Migrants not only bring overcrowding problems but also bring serious security threats. 2014 was underlined as the year that called upon the US to act immediately after 68,500 unaccompanied underage immigrants were arrested at the US border, of which 16,400 of these immigrants were from El Salvador. The main reason these immigrants are desperate to cross the border is the extreme poverty and violence in El Salvador.⁵⁶ In the same year, 43% of Salvadorans wanted to leave the country, with insecurity (30%) and economic hardship (24%) being the most common reasons.⁵⁷

Talking about gangs, MS-13 or Mara Salvatrucha was originally a street gang born in Los Angeles in the 1980s consisting of immigrants who had fled from the El Salvador civil war. *Mara* means gang, meanwhile, *Salva* is short for Salvador, and *trucha* stands for smart or street-skilled. In 1994, a special FBI task force was formed to deal with MS-13.⁵⁸ In 2012, the US Treasury designated MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization (TOC), the first gang to receive this label and is on a par with other international cartels such as Zeta (Mexico), Yakuza (Japan). and Camorra (Italy).

In the US, 60-70% of MS-13 members are immigrants, mostly illegal, originating from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. In El Salvador itself, MS-13 has been designated a terrorist organization, which oddly enough employs most Salvadorans in the country.⁵⁹ Until this paper was written, MS-13 moved independently with financial motivation and not ideologically. From massive drug trafficking, prostitution, smuggling, and especially extortion, the income of this gang is claimed to be US\$ 31.2 million. Here it becomes clear that TOC can be strong because of the gap in the government's function to provide jobs and facilities to improve human resources through education, for example. The dropout rate in El Salvador is so high due to poverty and the country's insecure conditions that they are recruited from a very young age. The safety concern when going to school comes from the presence of various gangs in almost every corner of the neighborhood, not just

⁵⁴ Peter S. Michaels, "Lawless Intervention: United States Foreign Policy in El Salvador and Nicaragua," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 7, no. 2 (January 5, 1987), <https://doi.org/https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71463263.pdf>, 225.

⁵⁵ "Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs," Taylor & Francis, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09614520701628121?journalCode=cdip20>, 74.

⁵⁶ Cecilia Menjivar and Andrea Gómez Cervates, "El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration." *migrationpolicy.org*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration>. Retrieved July 11, 2021.

⁵⁷ Nina Lakhani, "Gang Violence in El Salvador Fuelling Country's Child Migration Crisis." *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, November 18, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/18/el-salvador-gang-violence-child-migration-crisis>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁵⁸ BBC News Indonesia "Kisah Di Balik MS-13, Salah Satu Geng Jalanan Paling Brutal Di Dunia." *BBC News Indonesia* (BBC, April 21, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-39663817>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁵⁹ FOXBusiness, "How MS-13, One of America's Most Dangerous Gangs, Is Funded." *Fox Business* (Fox Business, April 19, 2017), <https://www.foxbusiness.com/features/how-ms-13-one-of-americas-most-dangerous-gangs-is-funded>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁶⁰ Robert Valencia, "MS-13 and Barrio 18 Gangs Allegedly Employ More People in El Salvador than the Country's Largest Employers." *Newsweek* (Newsweek, November 2, 2018), <https://www.newsweek.com/ms-13-barrio-18-gangs-employ-more-people-el-salvador-largest-employers-1200029>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

the notorious MS-13 or Barrio-18.

According to US Census Bureau estimates, approximately 1,387,000 Salvadorans lived in the US as of 2016, the largest group of immigrants from among countries in Central America.⁶¹ Following the massive influx of immigrants from El Salvador since 2014, there has been a dramatic increase in criminal acts by MS-13 in 2016-2017.⁶² In 2017, the US declared that MS-13 was officially a priority for the Organized Drug Enforcement Task Force, that MS-13 poses a clear and immediate danger to the security of the US homeland and its communities, endangering the safety and security of the US public and the NTCA.⁶³

It can be concluded in this section that El Salvador as a weak state has given rise to various implications. The government's vacuum in providing security through law enforcement, employment, and people's access to necessities of life has fueled waves of migrants and TOCs like MS-13 that seem to fill these voids. MS-13's strong and transnational membership has succeeded in making the Central American region, especially the North Triangle, a dangerous, violent, and deadly place even in the absence of war. MS-13 can be a TOC and a security threat to other countries caused by El Salvador being a weak state.

c. The US and Efforts to Address El Salvador's Security Threats

The US has deployed several efforts to overcome the problem of threats coming from El Salvador, such as the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) Which *was* created to strengthen law enforcement and reduce criminal organizations in Central American countries, one of which is El Salvador. CARSI is fully supported by the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs or The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). In the 2008-2015 period, The US allocated \$1,150.2 billion to various CARSI programs.⁶⁴

One of the programs in question is Narcotics Interdiction and Law Enforcement Support for countering narcotics and law enforcement in Central America.⁶⁵ CARSI is also designed to assist with security equipment in the form of weapons, computers, radios, and various technologies for identifying narcotics which are expected to increase the security and strength of law enforcement officers. CARSI is also providing funds devoted to building long-term capacity and identifying deficiencies of law enforcement sectors and agencies in Central America in the Institutional Capacity Building program.⁶⁶

With the support of Salvadoran police and prosecutors, INL helped facilitate interagency US law enforcement efforts to dismantle MS-13 cells across the NTCA and the US. As a result, the US

⁶¹ Cecilia Menjivar and Andrea Gómez Cervates, "El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration." migrationpolicy.org, May 11, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration>. Accessed July 11, 2021.

⁶² The United States Department of Justice. "MS-13's Highest-Ranking Leaders Charged with Terrorism Offenses in the United States." <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/ms-13-s-highest-ranking-leaders-charged-terrorism-offenses-united-states>. Retrieved July 9, 2021.

⁶³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement "Combating Gangs.", January 27, 2021, <https://www.ice.gov/features/gangs>. Accessed 8 July 2021.

⁶⁴ Peter J. Meyer and Ribando Clare Seelke, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2014), 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 19-20.

⁶⁶ Peter J. Meyer and Ribando Clare Seelke, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2014), 18.

succeeded in dismantling the MS-13 cell, arresting more than 1,800 gang members in El Salvador alone. Through *Youth Gang Prevention Programs*, INL managed to reach 19,495 youth in El Salvador. In terms of border security, INL helped identify 2,195 subjects with criminal histories of which 628 were gang members trying to enter US jurisdiction areas.⁶⁷ In addition, El Salvador's own country shows that the homicide rate per 100,000 population in El Salvador decreased from 105 in 2015 to 36 in 2019. In Honduras, the rate decreased from 85 in 2011 to 41 in 2019. In Guatemala, it fell from 42 in 2009 to 22 in 2019.⁶⁸

In 2014, the Alliance for Prosperity (A4P) was initiated as an alliance between the US and the NTCA government to address the immigrant crisis. The US contributed by channeling \$750 million. Although A4P had reduced migration rates in the US-Mexico border by 171%, in 2016, there was still an increase in the migration of unaccompanied children from the NTCA. A4P budget is considered less profitable for Central American countries because it is assessed as 75% of the funds A4P should be used for community development such as opening new jobs and strengthening social order.⁶⁹

Security threats arising from TOC that originate from the migrant problem are declared to be a vital US national interest.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the assistance provided by the US (A4P, CARSI, USAID), even though it was successful at several points such as reducing the murder rate and increasing the role of the security forces in El Salvador, still poses a security threat to the US. Migration and transnational crime rates are still increasing and various institutions have been initiated to deal with MS-13.⁷¹ Even in 2019, Trump had stopped all assistance to the three NTCA countries because they were deemed ineffective even though in October of the same year these aid programs were resumed.⁷²

Therefore, we can also conclude that even though efforts to overcome the security threats that arise as a consequence of El Salvador as a weak state classified as a US 'vital' national interest, increasing the governmental capacity of El Salvador is a national interest of the US that is 'important'. This statement stands for two reasons. First, it is important in the sense that the success of this aid will lead to improvements in the US economy and security through a more stable and secure NTCA. However, the provision of this assistance is not as critical as the US and its national and international partnerships' direct handling of MS-13 and the handling of migrant issues at the US-Mexico border. Direct handling at the border or the establishment of a special task force for MS-13 within the US, on the other hand, can cause huge losses if not fulfilled.

Second, the objectives of these aids are more inclined to meet US national interests in the 'important' classification. For example, CARSI's objectives focus on protecting human rights,

⁶⁷ "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law ENFORCEMENT Affairs: El Salvador Summary - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, February 3, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-international-narcotics-and-law-enforcement-affairs-work-by-country/el-salvador-summary/>

⁶⁸ Kin Ma (Harvard Library Office for Scholarly Communication, 2021), pp. 1-101, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37367666>, 86.

⁶⁹ Laura Iesue, "The Alliance for Prosperity Plan: A Failed Effort for Stemming Migration," COHA, November 21, 2019, <https://www.coha.org/the-alliance-for-prosperity-plan-a-failed-effort-for-stemming-migration/>. Accessed July 11, 2021

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Combating Gangs," <https://www.ice.gov/features/gangs>. Retrieved July 9, 2021.

⁷¹ OSAC, "El Salvador 2020 Crime & Safety Report," <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b4884604-977e-49c7-9e4a-1855725d032e>. Retrieved July 9, 2021.

⁷² Teresa Welsh, "US to Resume Northern Triangle Aid, Pompeo Says," devex, 2019, <https://www.devex.com/news/us-to-resume-northern-triangle-aid-pompeo-says-95846>.

strengthening the economy, increasing trade, creating jobs, and preserving the environment.⁷³ A4P's focus on mitigating the migrant crisis supports more transparent governance of the NTCA, increased institutional and production sector capacity, and human resource development. It is true that indirectly the success of these aids will stem criminality and waves of migrants which pose a security threat to the US. However, the first things this aid achieved included consolidation of democracy, El Salvador being more integrated into international markets, mitigating climate change, and spreading human rights values. These matters are classified by Robert Art as US national interests of a nature 'important'.

Conclusion

Our analysis proves that the US continues to provide aid to El Salvador whereas as a weak state, El Salvador poses a security threat to the US through the presence of transnational criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and the large influx of immigrant problems. Addressing this security threat is in the US national interest because it has implications for US internal security. El Salvador is categorized as a weak state through our analysis of the six indicators of state function put forward by Shaoguang Wang for the state of El Salvador up to 2019. Our findings include two things. First, there is a functional hole in El Salvador that makes TOC like MS-13 grow and seems to fill the country's void (*capacity gaps*) El Salvador to carry out the functions of government and guarantees access to basic needs for its inhabitants. Second, we also find that aid is in the US national interest in development efforts (capacity-building) El Salvador and address security threats to the US correlated but have different levels of importance.

We strongly recommend that US aid and various development initiatives for El Salvador get out of the category of weak state next. The US can be a catalyst that drives other countries as well as influential institutions such as the United Nations, not only in terms of improving domestic security but also actively participating in 'safeguarding' weak state countries. A challenge that is full of threats and difficult but very necessary in relations between countries that have been affected by globalization. In addition, we emphasize the importance of this assistance to intensively prioritize the security sector, followed by the economy through job creation, investment and international trade. Through increased security, economy and government capacity, it is hoped that the influx of migrants and the proliferation of criminal organizations can be contained.

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⁷³ "U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America Results Architecture – Overall Summary," State.gov, accessed August 8, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/U.S.-Central-America-Strategy-Objectives.pdf>.

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