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# 2024-2025 Team Policy Debate Resolution Introduction

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Resolution wording may undergo minor amendment if deemed necessary prior to the start of the 2024-2025 competition season.

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***Resolved: The United States Federal Government should significantly reform its foreign policy toward one or more of the following Central American countries: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.***

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## Background

Central America is an oft-overlooked region of the world that has geopolitical importance to the United States as its close neighbor. Policymakers and researchers have long debated the ethics, efficacy, and necessity of U.S. engagement in the region. Debaters will learn why the United States is involved in Central America by exploring how issues of poverty, instability, violence, and climate crises in other nations interlace with U.S. interests.

## Resolution Definitions

**United States Federal Government:** “The Federal Government is composed of three distinct branches: legislative, executive, and judicial, whose powers are vested by the U.S. Constitution in the Congress, the President, and the Federal courts, respectively. There are hundreds of Federal agencies and commissions charged with handling responsibilities as varied as managing America’s space program, protecting its forests, gathering intelligence, and advancing the general welfare of the American people.”

[Our Government | The White House](#)

**Foreign Policy:** “the policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states” [Foreign policy Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)

**Toward:** “in relation to” [Toward Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)

## Resolutonal Analysis

**Actor.** The actor in this resolution is the United States Federal Government which includes all three branches as defined above. Many federal government departments and agencies are involved in Central American foreign policy including the Department of State, Department of Agriculture, Department of Treasury, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration

Services (USCIS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) just to name a few.

**Policy.** Although the definition of *foreign policy* is straightforward and the list of Central American countries is concrete, the meaning of the term *toward* will be more debatable. Debaters will need to think about the direction of the policies they are debating. Is it a policy “toward” one or more of the listed Central American countries?

**Limiters.** The main limiter in the resolution is the list of Central American countries which debaters may consider. Although most definitions of Central America include Panama along with the other six countries named in the resolution, the debate committee decided to eliminate Panama from the list in an effort to narrow the resolution to a more manageable list of issues and possible cases. Panama is quite different from the other Central American countries in several respects including its stronger economy, the geographical and political importance of the Panama Canal, and the fact that its culture is more associated with South America rather than Central America.

**Central American Countries.** Most of the countries in the resolution descend from the Mayan empire that was invaded by Spain. Most have an elite minority and a large, poor mass of workers, many of whom are indigenous peoples. Most of the countries have challenging terrain--from treacherous mountains to barren land to coastland.



[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Central\\_America](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Central_America)

The six countries can be thought of in three groups:

- **Northern Triangle:** Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have serious challenges. Many cases could increase aid, democracy assistance, or military assistance, but many cases could decrease those things.
- **Nicaragua:** We have a fraught relationship with Nicaragua for many reasons. Cases could increase or decrease sanctions, increase or decrease incentives to turn to us instead of China or Russia, etc.
- **Costa Rica and Belize:** Typically these two countries fare better than the others and have excellent relationships with the United States. Costa Rica has a (relatively) robust economy but may be faltering democratically.

Many of these countries have a long history of all kinds of woes: poverty, civil war, crime, resource extractivism, natural disasters, corruption, and everything in between. Particularly, the Northern Triangle is one of the poorest regions in the Western Hemisphere ([The Borgen Project](#)).

**United States' Interests.** United States' interests in Central America are threefold: (1) Preserve freedom of action near our borders because geography matters; (2) Reduce negative spillover, such as migration and illegal drugs; and (3) Promote U.S. values, such as democracy and free markets. These interests drive our foreign policy toward the region generally and the countries in particular.

**Current United States Policy.** United States' foreign policy has wavered between interventionist and hands-off since the birth of our nation. Many experts differ in their opinions about whether we should increase or decrease U.S. engagement in Central America and whether our involvement helps or hurts. Many issues seem intractable and are complex chicken-and-egg problems. For example, how do we encourage a sustainable democracy when corruption exists, and how do we fight corruption without a stable democracy?

Key background concepts to study include the Monroe Doctrine and policy during the Cold War. Current policy focuses around limiting migration, countering China and Russia, encouraging democracy, and using trade to develop their economies.

## Affirmative Topics

- Cut/Establish/Increase aid. This includes funding and/or programs of various types in multiple realms like education, health, infrastructure, democracy and governance (e.g., elections training), agriculture, disaster response, and more.
- Target respect for human rights/democracy in the region, whether that be through making aid conditional (or more conditional than it already is) or through specific training programs
- Combat gangs/organized crime in the area
- Implement climate change offset programs
- Change immigration policy targeted at Central American countries specifically
- Develop overall, or partial, strategy of withdrawal due to past lack of success for US policy toward Central America

## Negative Topics

- For Affirmative plans looking to increase involvement:
  - United States' involvement has historically failed
  - It's too late to right the wrongs caused by U.S. engagement
  - It's too late to fix such deeply-rooted issues
  - United States' interests not important enough to justify continuation of throwing aid at these struggling nations
  - United States' current policy is already accomplishing the Affirmative's goals--no need for change
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- For Affirmative plans looking to decrease involvement:
  - United States must right its own wrongs from past meddling in the area
  - United States' historic deep involvement in the region through its numerous aid programs and more is an investment that must be seen to the end
  - Appeal to the specific given reasons by the U.S. government for why a policy the Affirmative wants to scale back is in place (even better: offer proof that the given policy is actually working)
  - United States' interests in the region are too important

- If the United States decreases involvement in the region, China and/or Russia will step in to help, jeopardizing U.S. interests and security

## Resources

- [Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy](#)
- [U.S. STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA](#)
- [Getting Migration in the Americas Right - Center for American Progress](#)
- [Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle | Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [Central America Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR](#)
- [Generating Hope: USAID in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras | Latin America and the Caribbean | U.S. Agency for International Development](#)
- [Migration Policy Institute: Central America & the Caribbean](#)
- [USAID in Central America: Less Is Better](#)
- [U.S. Assistance to Central America Promotes Security, Economic Development, and Rule of Law – USGLC](#)
- [USAID: Latin America and the Caribbean Countries](#)
- [How Should the U.S. Respond to China's Influence in Latin America? | United States Institute of Peace](#)
- [U.S. Policy Toward Central America Continues Legacy of Displacement \(disponible en español\) | NACLA](#)
- [Central America Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR](#)
- [Generating Hope: USAID in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras | Latin America and the Caribbean | U.S. Agency for International Development](#)
- [Northern Triangle: terrifying to live in, dangerous to leave](#)
- [Economic Opportunity in the Northern Triangle](#)