



BEST PRACTICES IN REDUCING VIOLENT HOMICIDE RATES

**HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
MEXICO**

John Bumpus. John Speed Meyers. Pierina Sanchez.

Emily Alinikoff. Kennji Kizuka. Soyeon Yu.

Jaime Archundia. Anh Hua. Katherine Johnson. Christopher Lau.

Project Advisor: Dr. Hillard Pouncy



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	5
Case One: Honduras.....	7
Case Two: El Salvador.....	19
Case Three: Mexico.....	31
Conclusion.....	43
Acknowledgments	45

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2011 World Development Report aptly points out that the nature of violent conflict has changed, warning that the 20th century tools developed to prevent, mitigate, and manage traditional forms of violence may no longer be up to the task. The report's evidence shows that while interstate and civil wars are on the decline, 1.5 billion people worldwide continue to live in areas severely affected—and even debilitated—by persistent gang violence and organized crime.

In Central America alone, homicides related to organized crime have increased every year since 1999. This worrying trend is evident even in states that have simultaneously made progress addressing traditional forms of political violence.¹ This disconnect raises the question: what new policy tools are needed to prevent, mitigate, and manage contemporary forms of violence?

One way that victims and states are grappling with this dilemma is by leveraging the power of local actors to forge local solutions. Some sub-national authorities have taken on the responsibility of reducing gang violence in their own communities. Experiments led by innovative coalitions of mayors, private sector leaders and associations, churches, and other community groups seem to have had some positive effects in Latin American countries. Also of note, some of the best police practices and judicial approaches have occurred at the municipal level.

This study identifies and assesses some of these local and innovative efforts in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. Despite differences in the composition of violent actors and the nature of violence across these three countries, researchers set out to identify how local communities and non-traditional actors are addressing gang violence in their particular contexts. Findings indicate that non-traditional approaches must carefully consider the specific realities of their contexts, thus having implications for external donors and influential state actors like the United States. Summaries of

country assessments, findings, and recommendations follow. Full treatment of these topics is available in each country report.

Case One: Honduras

Assessment

Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world outside of an active war zone. The 2011 Honduran homicide rate exceeded 90 homicides per 100,000 persons, and over 250 per 100,000 in some regions.² This staggeringly high homicide rate is intrinsically linked to a confluence of factors including international narcotics trafficking, the growth of organized gangs, migration and deportation patterns, inequality, and near impunity. To reduce impunity, one nongovernmental organization, the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ), pioneered an investigation program that now operates in three neighborhoods: Nueva Suyapa, Flor del Campo, and Villa Nueva. A better understanding of how ASJ operates in these neighborhoods can help researchers understand if other innovative strategies, like the widely acclaimed Operation Ceasefire, could take root in Honduras.

Findings

Differences in number and structure of groups:

Nueva Suyapa has several weak groups associated with homicides, while Flor del Campo has one highly organized group, 18th Street, associated with homicides.

Differences in motives: While the groups in Nueva Suyapa have many different motives such as drugs, issues of respect, and extortion connected to homicides, Flor del Campo's homicides are highly associated with 18th Street and their extortion racket.

Location of violence in Tegucigalpa: Hotspot analysis at the neighborhood level of

Tegucigalpa showed a stronger likelihood for violence in neighborhoods furthest from the downtown area.

¹ The World Bank, World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, Development, *Overview*, pp. 2-4. Full text available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WD R2011_Overview.pdf

² "UNODC Homicide Statistics," UN Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed December 18, 2013, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>; 2012. Shared with research team by ASJ.

Operation Ceasefire: The team concludes that ASJ and local police have an opportunity to implement an Operation Ceasefire-like program in Nueva Suyapa, but face greater challenges in Flor del Campo because of the 18th Street gang, which is highly organized, and has the potential to resist a credible threat by ASJ and the local police.

Recommendations

1. To the United States Government:

Advocate a pilot program for the coupling of work by the U.S. Embassy's vetted units and ASJ's Peace and Justice Program personnel.

Support a formal evaluation of ASJ's operations in Flor del Campo, Nueva Suyapa, and Villa Nueva.

Encourage the evaluation of existing local youth programs to identify successful programs that could be scaled and to hone in on effective poverty and inequality alleviation strategies.

Encourage the publication of homicide data in its raw form at the highest level of detail possible. As it currently stands, there are great discrepancies between crime and homicide data sources.

Encourage the sharing and increased use of cross-departmental crime intelligence in guiding investigations and allocating financial resources.

Continue to encourage the Honduran government to increase resource provision in the HNP and public ministry.

Support the continuing Honduran efforts at systemic police reform and encourage increased prison security.

2. To ASJ:

Buttress the Peace and Justice Program with the Ceasefire model.

Work to secure partnerships with U.S. Embassy vetted units in new neighborhoods to increase both ASJ's investigative and prosecutorial efficacy.

Case Two: El Salvador

Assessment

Years of top-down strategies failed to reduce violent crime and homicides in El Salvador. Successive presidents from 2000 through 2009 tried to thwart violence with severe punishment and incarceration, resulting in no progress at home and criticism from the international community. It was not until the famous March 2012 gang truce between the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang and rival Barrio 18 that homicide rates noticeably decreased. This agreement, though largely celebrated in the international community, has proven fragile and its future is uncertain. As of 2013, homicide rates have even begun again to increase. Despite the policy's short-term reduction in homicide rates, it is too politically unpopular to be sustainable in the long run and questions loom large as to whether or not it has actually strengthened gangs.

Findings

Homicide Reduction: The most significant benefit of the truce has been the reduction in the homicide rate since March 2012.

Direct Engagement with Gangs: Negotiating with gangs has drawn gang members into ordinary societal activities while giving municipal and non-governmental actors latitude to conduct outreach.

Lack of Strategy: Neither the government of El Salvador nor the primary non-governmental architects of the truce appeared to have a strategy to combat gang violence while the truce was under negotiation.

Public distrust of the government's gang interventions: The lack of transparency around the truce undermined public trust and allowed for politically-driven bashing of the policy.

Constraints on NGOs operating with funding from USAID: After discovering that some municipalities reserved funding and programs for active gang members, USAID had to suspend its funding, highlighting the difficulty for rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former gang members.

Insufficient Attention to Non-Homicides: The truce demonstrates that homicide reduction alone

was insufficient to achieve security. Extortion, intimidation, and other non-violent crimes need to be addressed.

Increasing Uncertainty about Gangs: The truce has raised questions about the power and legitimacy of gangs. This is particularly salient since gangs were not forced to fully demobilize as part of the truce.

Recommendations

1. To the Next Government of El Salvador:

Develop a comprehensive anti-gang strategy: The truce alone is not an anti-gang strategy. Similarly as *Mano Dura* has shown, repression alone is not a strategy. The right balance of carrots and sticks is needed to combat gang violence. A comprehensive policy must include: *improved police capacity, prison reform, targeted arrests, integrated opportunities for former gang members and newly arrived deportees, and preventative programming for at-risk youth.*

Increase and improve police: As part of a comprehensive strategy, the government should increase national and community police forces.

Strategize economic inclusion: A comprehensive anti-gang strategy should aim at inclusive growth, economic development, and employment creation.

Consult and recruit private sector help: Given the severity of the gang problem, the government should recruit the private sector in creating employment opportunities.

Do not abruptly roll back the truce: The new government should not reverse the truce. For better or worse, the truce is in place and the gangs have shown the capacity to dial the homicide rate up or down.

Steer Conversation about the Government Role: The new government should capitalize on their opportunity as newly-elected officials to steer the conversation away from the previous administration's role in the truce to forward-thinking strategies about combatting gang violence.

Rename the “violence free municipalities” and detach them from the truce: The so-called violence free municipalities have much potential but are hindered by their connection to the

politically toxic truce. Renaming these “anti-violence zones,” or *zonas contra violencia* and incrementally separating them from the truce will give them a greater chance to succeed.

Reform anti-gang legislation: The current anti-gang law outlaws engagement with gang members. This is a challenge for mayors and local leaders who want to dialogue with and create rehabilitation programs for gang members and former prisoners.

Improve assistance to newly arrived deportees: The government should direct resources toward the integration of deportees.

2. To the United States Government:

Continue monitoring the development and evolution of gangs: It remains unclear how the truce has affected the composition and functioning of gangs. To anticipate changes and plan policies, the U.S. should closely monitor how gangs are becoming integrated economically and politically at the local level, the gang leadership's commentary on politics and national elections, and possible links between gangs and drug trafficking organizations.

Tailor funding and program support to combat gang violence comprehensively: The U.S. should calibrate its support for programs that have worked and those that have potential, including: continuing to fund locally-driven policies, considering funding programs that include gang participation, collaborating with international organization, providing targeted training programs to complement Salvadoran government efforts, and supporting the Salvadoran government's efforts to reintegrate deportees.

Case Three: Mexico

Assessment

Like many other countries in Latin America, Mexico has long dealt with the problem of DTOs and drug violence. After a lull in violence beginning in the mid-nineties, Mexico experienced an explosion of violence beginning in 2007. Drug interdiction efforts in Central America, particularly in Colombia, increased the economic opportunity for the drug trade in Mexico. This new opportunity brought intense competition among the major DTOs in Mexico, and at the peak of violence, Mexico was engulfed in a drug war that pitted the

DTOs against each other as well as against the Mexican government. The *mano dura* policies under the Calderón administration exacerbated the violence. It was only when the Calderón administration began to selectively target DTOs, that the tide began to turn. The Peña Nieto administration has taken a different tact, aiming to address the underlying social issues that lead to violence. This change in policy presents an opportunity for the U.S. to support the programs that can effectively mitigate and prevent violence in Mexico.

Findings

Mano Dura Policies Exacerbated Violence: The *Mano Dura* policies under the Calderón administration increased violence in Mexico by creating power vacuums both among DTOs for regional control of drug routes, and within DTOs for positions of power within the respective organizations.

Different Violent Actors Have Different Motivations: Three levels of actors threaten safety and security in Mexico: (1) DTOs, (2) *superpandillas* and vigilante groups, and (3) street gangs. Because these actors have different motivations, and operate at different levels, the Mexican and U.S. governments must tailor their policies to different actors to reduce violence.

Civil Society Involvement is Essential for Violence Reduction: Civil society played a major role in reducing violence in key cities throughout Mexico. The Mexican Government's newly established National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime (NPSVPC) represents an acknowledgment that violence reduction requires addressing the underlying social issues that lead to violence.

Recommendations

1. To the United States Government

Increase bilateral cooperation to improve the detection and reduction of weapons, arms, and human trafficking at the U.S.-Mexican border. Additionally, following the Mérida Initiative, the U.S. should continue to share technology with its Mexican counterparts so the Mexican authorities can better track migrants coming into Mexico.

Support local NGOs by helping them build capacity and by creating a space for them to work with local government and local technology companies.

2. To the Mexican Government

Continue Judicial Reform: More than 80% of homicides go unpunished. It is critical for the government to prioritize cases of serious violence so that citizens do not perceive that homicides and other crimes are going unpunished.

Improve Border Security: Border security needs to be bolstered at both the Northern and Southern borders. At the Northern border, the Mexican government should increase coordination with the U.S. to increase its detection of drugs entering the U.S. and weapons entering Mexico. At the Southern border, the government must improve its technology and more closely track the movement of migrants and traffickers into the country.

Improve Federal-Regional-Municipal Cooperation: Violence affects every level of government, but for too long, anti-violence strategies were prescribed top-down from the federal government. It is critical to obtain the input of regional and municipal governments to allow for policy buy-in as well as to include the expertise they have in combatting local violent actors.

Continue Targeted Enforcement: To avoid exacerbating homicides, the government should avoid indiscriminately using violence, and instead should focus police and military enforcement on the upper and middle-tiers of DTOs.

Allocate Resources More Efficiently: The National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime should allocate more resources to cities with higher homicide rates in order to more efficiently combat violence.

Integrate Civil Society: Civil society can play a key role in reducing, and ultimately, preventing violence at the municipal level. At both the national and local level, the government should solicit the input of the local NGOs, and should design policies that leverage the capabilities of civil society to address the social issues that lead to violence.

INTRODUCTION

Objective of the Report

Central and Latin America are home to some of the highest homicide rates in the world. Despite years of top-down efforts to punish and incarcerate alleged perpetrators of gang violence, crime and homicide persist. In recent years, local governments and non-traditional actors have begun to initiate innovative strategies to combat violence where national governments have failed. For instance, Santa Tecla, El Salvador and Puerto Cortes, Honduras are early examples of community-based initiatives with reputations for successful implementation.¹ These local efforts and campaigns—those that work with, without, or against state institutions—have been able to spur and even influence national-level action.

In part, the growth of local efforts is a response to the failure of national-level approaches: El Salvador and Honduras both underwent “mano dura” policies, which seemed to complicate and exacerbate violence, rather than diminish it. In El Salvador, it was not until the March 2012 gang truce between Barrio 18 and MS-13 that homicide rates decreased for the first time in years. This non-traditional approach—shepherded by church leaders, prominent nongovernmental leaders, and the Organization of American States (OAS)—remains highly controversial. Unpopular with the public, the truce’s origins are opaque and the precise role of the government is still largely unknown. The dynamics, consequences, and prospects of the truce approach have critical implications for problem solving in other locations like Honduras and Mexico.

Like El Salvador, Honduras is dominated by a violent rivalry between maras. In addition, transnational drug-trafficking syndicates are responsible for a significant portion of intentional homicides. In the face of this violence, one NGO, the Association for a More Just Society (Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa, “ASJ”) developed its own neighborhood level solution: a witness protection program and

legal services for communities bedeviled by impunity and high homicide rates. This local solution provides insight both into potential remedies for violent conflict in Honduras and policy prescriptions for contexts with similar dilemmas.

The Mexican case is distinct. Mexico experienced an upsurge in violent crime in the last decade. From 2007 to 2010, the number of homicides increased more than 30% every year as a consequence of the fierce battle between drug trade organizations (DTOs) vying to gain control over smuggling routes into the United States. Understanding why DTOs engaged in extreme violence, what variables fuel this violence, and how this violence has been effectively reduced have major implications for contemporary violent conflict in the region and beyond. In Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana, it is well documented that precursors to extreme violence like the presence of youth gangs, transnational gangs, poor governance indicators, lack of employment or educational opportunities, and high levels of immigration from Central America combined to make these cities some of the most dangerous places on the planet. In Chiapas, however, these variables are similarly present but the state has remained relatively peaceful. Understanding why Chiapas has remained relatively immune to this violence and how this peace can be protected have received inadequate attention from policymakers and researchers alike.

Researchers set out to investigate the unique dynamics and implications in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico with the intent of applying lessons learned elsewhere in the region and beyond. Four overarching questions about gang violence guided researchers. First, researchers aimed to understand the policy elements and policy levers that influence homicide rates. Second, the group tried to develop frameworks that yield metrics for guiding the prevention, management, and/or mediation of gang-related violence. Third, and specifically in Honduras, researchers studied contemporary gang conflict dynamics and prevention methods in Latin American countries while drawing potential lessons learned via innovative strategies in the U.S. like Operation Ceasefire. Finally, researchers set out to understand

¹ See, e.g. Enrique Desmond Arias and Mark Ungar, “Community Policing and Latin America’s Citizen Security Crisis,” 41 *Comparative Politics* (July 2009) pp. 409-429.

if the innovative policies attempted in these three countries are exportable elsewhere in the region and beyond.

Research Methods

This report is based on research undertaken by the ten authors over the course of five months. In addition to secondary resources related to each case study, the bulk of the analysis is based on interviews in three countries. Between October 25 and November 1, 2013, researchers held nearly 100 interviews with government officials, civil society organizations, law enforcement representatives, political officials, and journalists in Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras. In Mexico, researchers focused their work in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Tapachula, and Mexico City. In El Salvador, researchers conducted meetings in San Salvador, Santa Tecla, Santa Ana, and Ilopango. In Honduras, researchers focused their work on Tegucigalpa.

Structure of the Report

The report is divided into three case studies and a conclusion that identifies some crosscutting themes and lessons. Each case study consists of an overview of the country's current situation including its composition of violent actors, its recent anti-gang violence policies, the methodology for each country report, findings gleaned from research and on-the-ground interviews, and recommendations tailored for relevant audiences.

The conclusion highlights broad lessons that may apply in other contexts. It calls for careful application of the lessons learned given the importance of context-specific factors. It also evaluates the policies that have been successful in reducing violence, and their potential exportability.

CASE ONE - HONDURAS

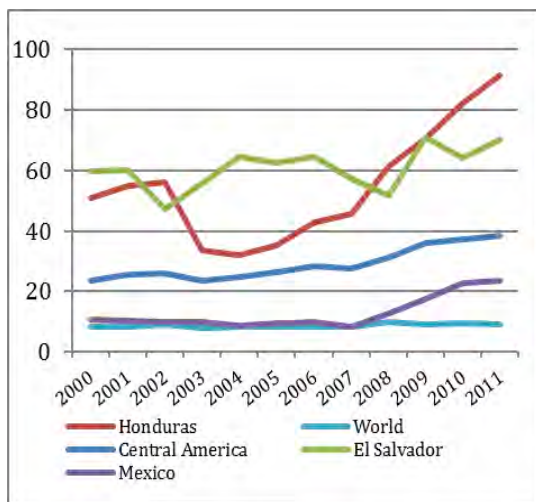
I. INTRODUCTION

Because CSO maintains a significant presence in Honduras, tasked with, among other objectives, reducing the homicide rate, the workshop dispatched a team to Tegucigalpa to study the patterns of local violence and the U.S.-funded anti-homicide efforts.

1. The Murder Capital of the World

Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world outside of an active war zone. The 2011 Honduran homicide rate exceeded 90 homicides per 100,000 persons, and over 250 in some regions.^{1,2} By comparison, the 2011 worldwide homicide rate was 6.9 homicides per 100,000 and the homicide rate in broader Central America, a region experiencing relatively high levels of violence, hovers at 25 homicides per 100,000. The Honduran homicide rate even outpaces that of El Salvador and Mexico (see Figure 1), countries that have received the greatest share of negative publicity.³

Figure 1. Annual Homicide Rate per 100,000 Persons – Comparing Honduras to Central America and the World



Data Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime

Honduras owes its staggeringly high homicide rate to a confluence of factors including international narcotics trafficking, the growth of organized gangs, migration and deportation patterns, inequality, and near impunity.

Honduras resides in the geographic core of Central America, claiming 400 miles of coast along the Caribbean Sea, a geographic fact that explains its attractiveness to tourists and drug trafficking organizations alike. United States drug interdiction efforts in the early 2000s focused on Venezuela and Colombia, with the unfortunate consequence of turning Honduras into the drug pathway of least resistance.⁴

Traffickers increasingly use Honduras' coast to transport drugs from South America to Mexico and the United States; an estimated 90 percent of all cocaine from South America passes Honduras en route to North America.⁵ These organizations capitalize on the Honduran government's weakness, particularly in the country's periphery, even building their own runways in the wilderness of northern Honduras, out of view of the Honduran police and military.⁶ The use of northern Honduras as a lily pad for drug trafficking potentially accounts for the high homicide rates seen in coastal municipalities, as seen in Figure 2 and Appendix 2.

Marked by high inequality, Honduras has experienced rapid urbanization and outward migration during the second half of the 20th century, which has only served to further destabilize the already strained society and government of Honduras.⁷ Some credit high rates of emigration with the dissolution of the family unit.⁸

U.S. immigration policies fueled gang activity beginning in the mid-nineties, as 46,000 Hondurans, many gang-affiliated, were deported back to

¹ "UNODC Homicide Statistics," UN Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed December 18, 2013, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>.

² 2012. Shared with research team by ASJ.

³ "UNODC Homicide Statistics," accessed December 18, 2013, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>. Authors' own calculations.

⁴ Bruce Bagley, "The evolution of drug trafficking and organized crime in Latin America," *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas* 71 (2013): 102-4.

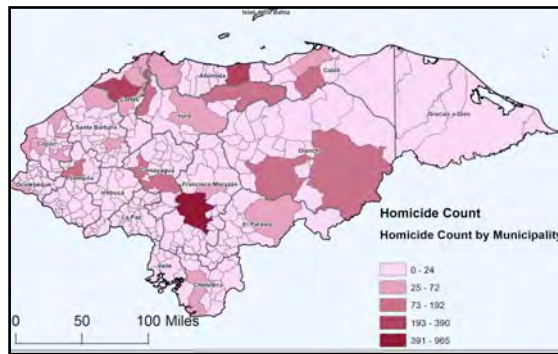
⁵ Steven S. Dudley, "Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras," Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, (May 2010): 9-10.

⁶ Interview with U.S. government official. November 2, 2013.

⁷ Shlomo Angel et al., "Rapid Urbanization in Tegucigalpa, Honduras," Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs Workshop Report, 2004.

⁸ Interview with Honduran government official. November 28.

Figure 2. Homicide Count by Honduran Municipality



Data: Association for a More Just Society (ASJ),
Authors' Own Calculations

Honduras.⁹ This led to the growth of Honduran gangs and violence.¹⁰ The two largest Honduran gangs, Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (18th Street) have joined the drug trade, further stoking violence.¹¹ Gangs also engage in the collection of a 'war tax' (extortion charged to local businesses and even individual households), murder for hire, and robbery.

Most troublingly, criminals carry on with impunity as an under-paid and overwhelmed police force and criminal justice system struggle to prosecute crimes.

2. Association for a More Just Society

To reduce impunity, one nongovernmental organization, the Association for a More Just Society, pioneered the Peace and Justice Program. This effort dedicates ASJ's own lawyers and investigators (in collaboration with the National Directorate for Criminal Investigations (DNIC) lawyers and investigators already working in the neighborhood) to end impunity in violence-ravaged communities. ASJ then advertises the results to encourage the belief that a safer Honduras is possible. ASJ has operated for almost a decade in one neighborhood, Nueva Suyapa, and

has recently expanded the Peace and Justice Program to Flor Del Campo and Villa Nueva. The State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) has financially supported this local organization. Several other efforts have attempted to stem the high homicide rate, including security apparatus reforms, Mano Dura policies, community-oriented policing, military policing, and civil society outreach.

3. Learning from the American Context: Boston-Ceasefire

This section also considers the applicability of Operation Ceasefire, a prominent U.S. anti-homicide program, to Honduras' capital, Tegucigalpa. The Ceasefire model first implemented in Boston in the mid-1990s has been remarkably successful throughout the United States.¹² This paper examines whether the neighborhoods where ASJ intervened could be amenable to Operation Ceasefire.

Ceasefire works through the pre-intervention identification of violent groups and the individual members of those groups in city neighborhoods. Representatives from these violent groups are then convened and given a simple message: stop shooting or all members of an offending gang will be targeted. Law enforcement officials then wait for a violent incident, and target all members of any gang whose member violates the ceasefire, using the intelligence gathered before the intervention began. In this way, the intervention rests on pressure exerted by gang members on one another to uphold the ceasefire and to avoid group punishment.

The efficacy of the Ceasefire method hinges on several factors. First, because Ceasefire targets group-based violence, the homicides must involve groups whose members are able to exert social influence on each other. Second, the model assumes that local police forces can gather sufficient intelligence to identify group members and to deter gun violence once the ceasefire begins. Third, the law enforcement team should be able to deliver a swift blow if and when a gang member

⁹ "Situación de Maras y Pandillas en Honduras." Programa Nacional de Prevención, Rehabilitación y Reinserción Social. Study funded by UNICEF. (2012): 24 http://www.unicef.org/honduras/Informe_situacion_maras_pandillas_honduras.pdf

¹⁰ Clare Ribando Seelke, "Gangs in Central America," Congressional Research Service, 2009: 4.

¹¹ Colindres, Felix. (Sub-Commissioner of the Honduras DNIC.) Interview by authors. Tape recording. Tegucigalpa, Honduras, October 28, 2013.

¹² Anthony A. Braga, David M. Kennedy, Elin J. Waring, and Anne Morrison Piehl, "Problem-Oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Operation Ceasefire," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38, no. 3 (2001); and George Tita et al. "Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles," RAND, Public Safety and Justice, (2003).

violates the ceasefire, punishing all members of the offending group.¹³ This last element requires an enforcement team capable of delivering a credible threat.

4. Road Map

The next section details the research group's methods: semi-structured interviews in Tegucigalpa with criminal justice personnel, neighborhood homicide and group audits, and collection and analysis of existing quantitative data.

The paper then presents the results including an overview of homicides in Flor Del Campo and Nueva Suyapa, two neighborhoods where ASJ works, and figures on group-involvement and motives. The results section also presents available evidence on the violent groups present in these two neighborhoods, or colonias.

The analysis section uses the findings from the results section to examine the potential effectiveness of Operation Ceasefire. The analysis specifically examines the groups in Tegucigalpa and the Honduran criminal justice system, in order to determine if conditions are similar enough to inner city America to consider Operation Ceasefire transferrable.

The paper concludes with recommendations to CSO, ASJ, and the Honduran government on how to reduce the homicide rate in Tegucigalpa. The top recommendations include: a call for Embassy Tegucigalpa and ASJ to partner together to implement a pilot version of Operation Ceasefire, potentially employing the U.S.-trained vetted units; publishing the full and detailed raw homicide data by a credible organization like the Violence Observatory; and the evaluation of ASJ's Peace and Justice Program.

II. METHODS

The research team conducted a week of interviews with Tegucigalpa-based officials, including a homicide review and group audit, obtained quantitative datasets relevant to the research, and performed desktop research on violence, violent groups, and policing in Honduras and on the experience of American cities with Operation Ceasefire.

1. Interviews

Between October 26 and November 1, 2013, the research team partnered with ASJ and a student-professor team from the Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) to conduct interviews and primary research.¹⁴

The research team interviewed individuals in various branches of the Honduran National Police (HNP) including the DNIC, a senior representative of the Violence Observatory at the UNAH, officials of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development; and conducted primary research with investigators from ASJ and the DNIC.

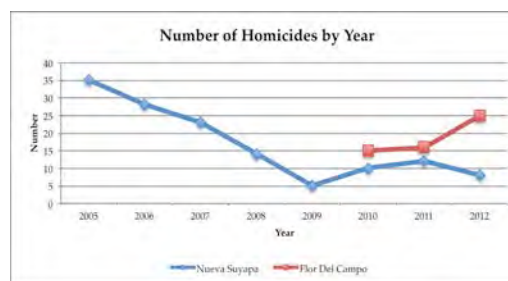
Figure 3. List of Interviewee Positions

Interview Position
Coordinator of Security, UNAH, IUDPAS
CSO Field Team Director, Embassy Tegucigalpa
Deputy Director, Narcotics Affairs Section, Embassy Tegucigalpa
Deputy Country Representative, USAID OTI
Coordinator, USAID CARS in Honduras Program Office
Project Management Specialist, Democracy and Governance Office, USAID
Cultural Affairs Officer, Embassy Tegucigalpa

2. Homicide Review and Group Audit

In order to gain a clearer understanding of violence at the neighborhood level in Tegucigalpa, the research team performed primary research in the

Figure 4. Homicide Trends in Nueva Suyapa and Flor del Campo



Data: ASJ, Authors' Own Calculations

¹³ George Tita et al. "Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles," RAND, Public Safety and Justice, (2003): 18.

¹⁴ Lillian, Castro Jose Wilfredo Serrano, and Professor Alexis Cerrato. Universidad Autonoma de Honduras.

form of incident reviews similar to those employed by practitioners of Operation Ceasefire.¹⁵ Interviews centered on two Tegucigalpa neighborhoods, Nueva Suyapa and Flor del Campo. The team interviewed ASJ and DNIC investigators and lawyers who had deep local knowledge about the homicide cases in these neighborhoods. The team sought to determine the proportion of total homicides that could be attributed to street groups in 2012 and the motivation of the violent actors. Questions included incident narrative, location, weapon used, victim group involvement, offender group involvement, age, gender, and motive. (See Appendices 3 and 4 for questionnaires used.) Investigators and lawyers non-randomly reviewed 26 homicides in Nueva Suyapa and 11 homicides in Flor del Campo; these investigators and lawyers were aware of the research team's objectives.

The team also gathered the information necessary for a group audit, an assessment of the violent groups present in Nueva Suyapa and Flor del Campo. Through both interviews and documents provided by ASJ, the team researched the membership, activities, hierarchy and criminal histories of violent groups present in these neighborhoods.

III. RESULTS

1. Neighborhood Homicide Review and Group Audit

The incident review and gang audit showed that the majority of homicides examined were group-involved, in both neighborhoods, but that the groups, and their motives, differ dramatically between the two neighborhoods.

The results lead to the tentative conclusion that Nueva Suyapa has characteristics that make it amenable to an Operation Ceasefire-like intervention. Flor del Campo, on the other hand, has characteristics that will make Operation Ceasefire more difficult to implement.

i. Homicide Overview

Nueva Suyapa, once one of Tegucigalpa's deadliest neighborhoods, has become increasingly less violent, as seen in the steady downward decrease in the annual homicide count. Flor del Campo's

homicide rate has taken the opposite path, jumping up twenty-five homicides in 2012.

ii. Group-Involvement

Though homicides in both neighborhoods share a link to groups, the groups differ between the two neighborhoods. In Nueva Suyapa a range of groups are associated with homicides. Small groups – Gia, Puchos, Rodas and a motorcycle-stealing gang – share the homicide count with larger organizations like MS-13.

iii. Motives

The difference between the number of groups and structure of the groups between the two neighborhoods likely explains an equally large difference in the motives associated with homicides.

In Nueva Suyapa, many different motives are connected to homicides. Perpetrators kill over the drug business, respect issues, extortion, and a host of other issues. In Flor del Campo, on the other hand, 18th Street uses its dominant position to run an extortion racket, which turns lethal when anyone, from a business-owner to a taxi driver, refuses to pay the 'war tax.' Consequently, Flor del Campo has a relatively higher percentage of homicides associated with extortion and robbery. For the reader's reference, the codes used in the below tabulation are not exclusive; a homicide can have multiple motives and the team coded appropriately.

iv. Groups in Nueva Suyapa vs. Flor del Campo

As mentioned above, the two neighborhoods host dramatically different groups.

Small, relatively weak gangs reside in the hilly colonia of Nueva Suyapa. The groups are ever changing, but in the last year a small list of between seven and nine groups have controlled the violence: the Puchos, Gia, the Rodas, and others. The Rodas are the area's drug wholesaler, dealing to Nueva Suyapa's scattered groups and also engaging in narcomenudeo or retail drug trafficking. Groups range in size, but are mostly small bands of up to fifteen males with a loose hierarchy. MS-13 and 18th Street have sporadically operated in Nueva Suyapa but have struggled to gain a foothold, possibly because ASJ's Peace and Justice Program keeps these violent groups at bay.

In contrast to Nueva Suyapa, Flor del Campo is entirely run by a single, hierarchical group. 18th Street, specifically the Lirusaicos ("Little Psychos")

¹⁵ Crandall, Vaughn; Wong, Sue-Lin. "Practice Brief: Call-In Preparation and Execution." Center for Crime Prevention and Control, John Jay College of Criminal Justice. 2012.

clique, controls the entire area of Flor del Campo. This clique is the Flor del Campo franchise of a larger group that has ties to other colonias in Tegucigalpa, other cities in Honduras, and possibly other 18th Street groups in the United States. 18th Street runs an extortion racket in Flor del Campo, charging businesses and residents an aptly named “war tax” while killing those who do not pay.

2. Statistical and Geographic Analyses

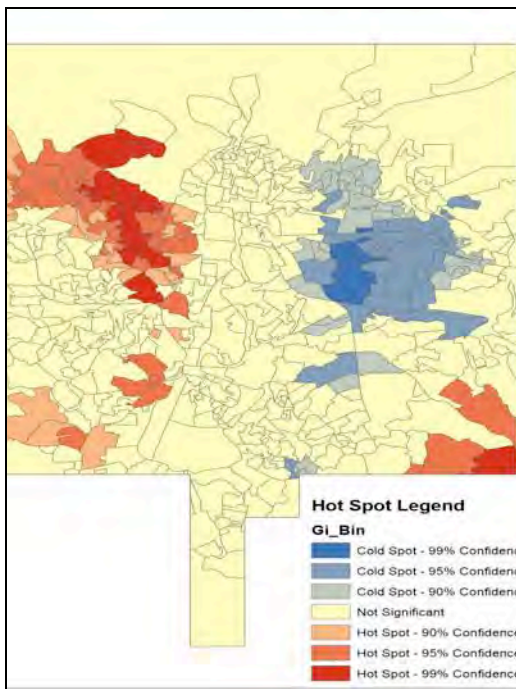
i. Victim Demographic Comparisons

The team found no statistically significant differences between neighborhoods with respect to the age and sex of victims.¹⁶

ii. Geographic Information System Analysis

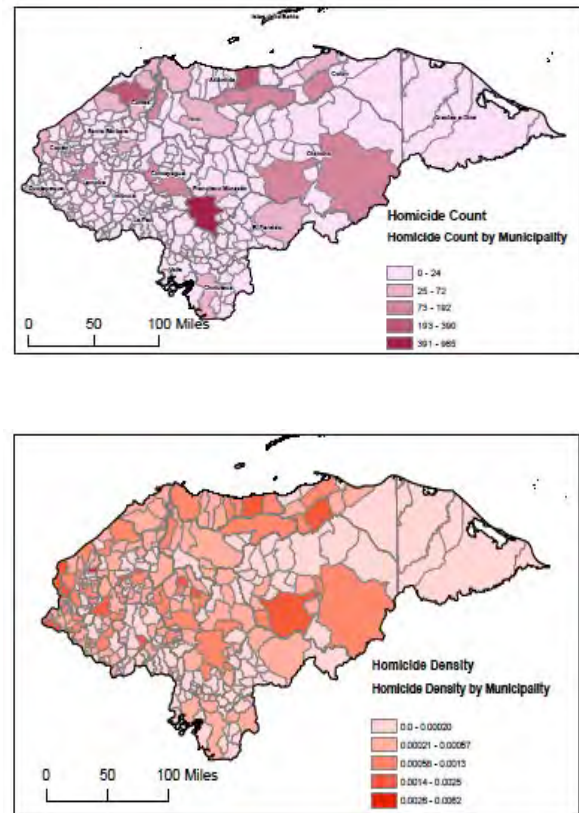
Hotspot analyses at the neighborhood level of Tegucigalpa showed a stronger likelihood for violence in regions furthest from the downtown area near the U.S. Embassy and other government buildings (see Figure 5 which shows hotspots (red) and cold-spots (blue) in Tegucigalpa).

Figure 5. Hotspot Analysis of Homicides in Tegucigalpa



Data: ASJ, Authors' Own Calculations

Figure 6. Homicide Count and Density in Honduras



Data: ASJ, Authors' Own Calculations

Hotspot analyses at the municipal level found a stronger likelihood for violence in the parts of Honduras bordering El Salvador (see Figure 6).

3. Interview Insights

Interviewees cited explanations similar to those found in the introduction section discussing the causes and nature of high homicide rates in contemporary Honduras.

When asked about which interventions they thought would be most effective, many mentioned a need for reduced impunity, youth programs, and creation of economic opportunities. Measures to decrease impunity would need to address the weak investigative capacity of the DNIC, its lack of

¹⁶ Origin of data omitted for the protection of informants.

funding, the poor training of DNIC investigators, and corruption within the HNP.¹⁷

Multiple interviewees mentioned the problem of gang power concentrated in prisons and exhibited skepticism about the efficacy of military policing.

IV. Analysis

1. Transferability of Operation Ceasefire from inner city America to Tegucigalpa.

The efficacy of the Ceasefire method, as discussed earlier, hinges on several factors.

First, the model assumes that local police forces can gather sufficient intelligence to identify group members and to collect intelligence on them to deter violence once the ceasefire begins. ASJ already performs this work in the neighborhoods where it operates. Interviewees presented us with detailed organization charts of violent groups, demonstrating that ASJ can track the members and activities of violent groups. While questions remain about the ability of the local police to conduct this type of intelligence gathering, a coordinated partnership between the police, investigators, and ASJ seems possible for this intelligence effort.

Second, and most important, the law enforcement team has to be able to deliver a swift blow if and when a gang member violates the ceasefire, punishing all members of the offending group.¹⁸ This last element requires an enforcement team capable of delivering a credible threat to the violent group. The research team suspects that law enforcement and ASJ already provide and can continue to provide such a credible threat in Nueva Suyapa. Law enforcement officials can exploit the weakness and disorganization of the violent groups there.

In Flor Del Campo, with the presence of the highly organized 18th Street, delivering a credible threat will be much more difficult. Whether law enforcement and ASJ can demonstrate a credible threat in Flor Del Campo against 18th Street remains to be seen, but the vast difference in strength between 18th Street and Nueva Suyapa's groups suggests that ASJ's success in Nueva Suyapa does not guarantee success in Flor Del Campo. 18th

Street might be too strong, too large, and too organized for Operation Ceasefire to succeed.

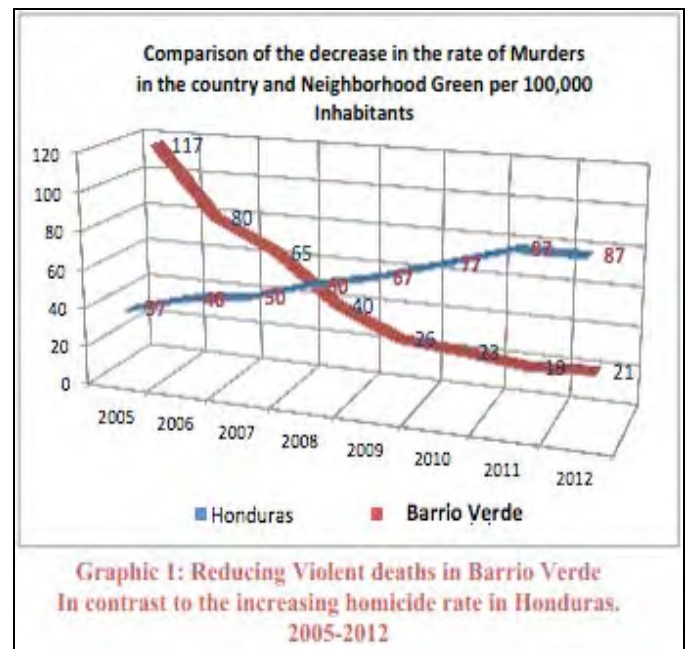
2. A Method to Evaluate the Effectiveness of ASJ's Peace and Justice Program

The research team also reviewed how the State Department currently evaluates ASJ's Peace and Justice Program, a partner of CSO in the fight against homicide. While we find the current method does not deliver a reliable estimate, an updated method coupled with expanded data would, enabling CSO to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of funding ASJ.

i. Current Evaluation of ASJ

CSO currently employs a straightforward approach to track ASJ's performance: the in-country CSO team, with the help of ASJ, tracks the monthly homicide count in the three neighborhoods in which ASJ operates its Peace and Justice Program.¹⁹ A downward trend in homicides presumably demonstrates ASJ's success and the success of CSO funding.

ASJ also self-evaluates its work. In public documents ASJ has argued that the decline in the homicide rate in Nueva Suyapa concurrent with the rise in the national homicide rate demonstrates a track record of success. The graph below is ASJ's visual representation of this argument.¹



¹⁷ Interview with Honduran government official. November 28, 2013.

¹⁸ George Tita et al. "Reducing Gun Violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles," RAND, Public Safety and Justice, (2003): 18.

¹⁹ Internal CSO Document. "Metrics Tracker." Rows 58-63.

ii. Improving Evaluation Methods

Both CSO's and ASJ's evaluation of the Peace and Justice Program may be skewed because their methods do not consider the homicide rates in relation to the aggregate rate in Tegucigalpa, or in the rest of the nation. This may overlook the relative strength of the Peace and Justice Program, where, for example, the homicide rate in ASJ's neighborhoods increases, but does so at a much lower rate than in the rest of the city. Similarly, without a complete picture, ASJ may also overestimate the effects of its programs where the homicide rate decreases in its neighborhoods, but also decreases substantially in areas that do not have the Peace and Justice program.

iii. Improved Data and Methods

An evaluation method that delivers reliable estimates has become all the more important for ASJ (and CSO) because ASJ has recently expanded its efforts from Nueva Suyapa to Flor Del Campo and Villa Nueva. Tracking ASJ's recent efforts, where the results might not be as dramatic as in Nueva Suyapa, will be crucial.

First, a more rigorous data collection method would provide data on all neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, including neighborhoods where ASJ has not intervened. Having such a wide array of data allows researchers to compare trends in Nueva Suyapa, Flor Del Campo, and Villa Nueva with trends in other neighborhoods. Ideally the homicide data would begin before ASJ's Peace and Justice Program, which started in 2005. The Violence Observatory at UNAH potentially collects this data, though the research team was unable to access it. Given that the Violence Observatory receives U.S. government funding, CSO may be able to access this data.

With this updated data an illuminating, though not statistically rigorous, method would be to compare homicide trends in Tegucigalpa neighborhoods where ASJ has intervened with trends in other Tegucigalpa neighborhoods, particularly with neighborhoods originally experiencing similar levels of homicide.

ASJ and CSO could also adopt more rigorous methods such as difference-in-differences or propensity score matching. The first method compares the homicide trends across different neighborhoods to isolate the effect of ASJ. The other compares the homicide trends in Nueva

Suyapa and Flor Del Campo to trends in neighborhoods with similar levels of violence.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are divided into two sections: those for the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and those for ASJ.

1. Recommendations to CSO

Since CSO has limited time remaining in Honduras, and because Honduras is shepherding in a new presidential administration that campaigned on reform, the research team recommends that CSO (1) continue to support the ASJ Peace and Justice program in the manner described below; (2) identify and support youth programs run by other civil society groups; and (3) focus on the government reorientation efforts listed below.

Please note that while the recommendations below are addressed to CSO, in some cases other Department of State bureaus and even other government agencies might be better equipped to enact these changes.

i. With respect to ASJ

a. Expansion of Peace and Justice Program into a Ceasefire Pilot

CSO should advocate a pilot program for the coupling of work by the U.S. Embassy's vetted units and ASJ's Peace and Justice Program personnel. ASJ's investigators would continue to do their investigative work, with vetted units targeting neighborhoods rather than issue areas. The Ceasefire message would be delivered together by DNIC investigators (who are backed by ASJ), by the vetted units, and by established community organizations such as neighborhood patronatos and religious institutions.

b. Evaluation of existing work

CSO should support a formal evaluation of ASJ's operations in Flor del Campo, Nueva Suyapa, and Villa Nueva. A formal evaluation would contribute to a better understanding of ASJ's effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and the potential for ASJ's intervention to work in neighborhoods dominated by a single strong pandilla.

ii. With respect to Civil Society

a. Evaluation of existing work

Poverty and inequality are important contributing factors to the social instability in Honduras. In

order to hone in on effective poverty alleviation strategies, **CSO should encourage the evaluation of existing local youth programs, in order to identify successful programs that could be scaled.** Interviewees almost unanimously expressed strong preference for the expansion of youth programs that keep youth off the street, teach them life skills, and help them to secure future economic opportunities.

USAID funds a significant number of local organizations and initiatives related to citizen security, democracy and governance, economic growth, education and health promotion.²⁰ **CSO and USAID can work together to evaluate these programs.**

iii. With respect to the Honduran Government

a. Improve Data Collection and Intelligence.

The HNP collects detailed crime data at crime scenes. UNAH also collects crime data from the HNP and aggregates it with data from the medical school (Hospital Escuela), news agencies, international development agencies, and local NGOs. However, after mere tabulation, it appears not much else is done with the data. CSO can encourage the improvement of this situation in at least two ways.

First, discrepancies between crime and homicide data sources should be addressed. The DNIC, HNP and UNAH publish vastly different crime statistics, and ASJ has done comparisons that show discrepancies even within the HNP; for instance, local police posts have different numbers than the DNIC statistics division.²¹

Instead, **CSO should encourage the publication of the data in its raw form at the highest level of detail possible.** UNAH Violence Observatory should spearhead this effort because it is the least politically vulnerable of Honduran institutions.

Second, **CSO should encourage the sharing and increased use of cross-departmental crime intelligence in guiding investigations and allocating financial resources.** At the national level, DNIC's anti-gang unit has intelligence on the breakdown of core activities by gang (including divisions of crimes by separate gangs), expansion

patterns, and more.²² At the municipal and colonia level, DNIC investigators are capable of identifying gang members by name or nickname.²³ This information does not presently appear to be shared between different components of the security apparatus; the DNIC and the Preventative Police are not in direct dialogue, and DNIC investigators who collaborated with the authors of this report on the neighborhood audits did not appear to know much about broader crime patterns. If shared, this intelligence could be used to target efforts and stymie gang growth.

For instance, in Tegucigalpa, the team learned of two gangs called "Los Chirisos" and "Los Que No Se Dejan" who are expanding through the peripheral areas of the city and whom senior officials in the DNIC suspect will begin to clash with MS13 and B-18 factions in the north within the next months.

By supporting efforts to improve the public availability of crime data, CSO can have a lasting impact on Honduras in the form of reform efforts being magnified by other nongovernmental organizations and foreign aid agencies motivated by the data CSO makes available. By encouraging the sharing of intelligence among the different departments of the police force, Honduras might be inspired to draft a well-informed comprehensive anti-gang strategy.

b. Support the allocation of more resources to policing and investigations to decrease impunity, while continuing to support systemic police reform efforts and restore public trust. While both the U.S. Embassy's vetted-units and ASJ's Peace and Justice program provide resources to HNP and public ministry units they partner with, **CSO should continue to encourage the Honduran government to increase resources to the HNP and public ministry.** The authors of this report were told that as many as 95 to 98 percent of crimes committed go without punishment throughout the country. Such staggering figures surely threaten the rule of law.

While the HNP and public ministry are in need of resources to increase efficacy, they are also known to be plagued with corruption. **CSO should thus simultaneously support the continuing efforts at systemic police reform ('depuration**

²⁰ Interview with U.S. Agency for International Development official. October 10, 2013; USAID. "Our Work." accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.usaid.gov/honduras/our-work>.

²¹ Interview with member of ASJ. November 1, 2013.

²² Interview with Honduran government official. October 28, 2013.

²³ The researchers observed this repeatedly during interviews.

policial’), especially as General Juan Carlos Bonilla steps down from his role as police chief, and president-elect Juan Orlando Hernandez selects a new chief who will draft a new citizen security agenda.

c. Support increased prison security.

CSO should encourage increased prison security. If prisons are to serve the purpose of deterrence, then the link between inmates and the outside world must be severed. Gang-leaders are known to take control of prisons and command extortions, hits, and other crimes from within the prisons, causing imprisonment of dangerous criminals to have the paradoxical effect of causing increases in violence instead of decreases.²⁴ Conversations with ASJ and DNIC neighborhood investigators corroborated this story. For instance, when the leader of the Puchos of Nueva Suyapa was imprisoned, followers engaged in seemingly random acts of violence motivated by individual attempts to gain the gang-leader’s approval for gang-leadership; followers also collected “war tax” payments to send back to the leader.

d. Comprehensive national security policy

Given the increasing importance of DTOs in Honduras and democracies across Central America, as well as the contentious history between Honduran citizens and the police and military forces, **CSO should support Honduras in working toward the long-term adoption of a three-pronged citizen security model.** Honduras should adopt a community-policing model that eventually includes Ceasefire and strengthened policing and investigative capacity to combat local crime at the neighborhood level, a national military to protect its borders and sovereign interests, and a regional Central American hybrid force specially trained in counterinsurgency.²⁵

Whether the deployment of military police in Tegucigalpa’s colonias reduces violence or homicides is an open question. Improved crime data collection and utilization could help answer this question, and a three-pronged citizen security model would guarantee that citizen security is

prioritized.

2. Recommendations to ASJ

ASJ’s Peace and Justice program has made a powerful difference in Nueva Suyapa as demonstrated by Nueva Suyapa’s crime trends, especially in contrast to the violence in Flor Del Campo. Despite the great success in Nueva Suyapa, the authors believe that ASJ’s Peace and Justice Program will face challenges in other neighborhoods precisely because of the differences in the structures of groups between these neighborhoods.

Because of that acknowledgement, the authors recommend ASJ buttress its Peace and Justice Program with the Ceasefire model. Specifically, ASJ should work to secure partnerships with U.S. Embassy vetted units in its new neighborhoods. Such partnerships would serve to increase both ASJ’s investigative and prosecutorial efficacy. In a neighborhood such as Flor del Campo, ASJ’s other focus should be to build the capacity to assert a credible threat to gang members that they will come after all members if the ceasefire is violated.

As mentioned above, ASJ’s investigators would continue to do their investigative work; vetted units would target neighborhoods rather than issue areas; the Ceasefire message would be delivered together by DNIC investigators (backed by ASJ), by the vetted units, and by established community organizations such as neighborhood patronatos and churches.

²⁴ Interview with Honduran government official. October 28, 2013.

²⁵ Shanker, Thom. “Lessons of Iraq Help U.S. Fight a Drug War in Honduras.” The New York Times, May 5, 2012.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/world/americas/us-turns-its-focus-on-drug-smuggling-in-honduras.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

APPENDIX 1: INCIDENT REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

INCIDENT REVIEW

Reference Number:

Incident type:

Date and location of Incident:

What weapon was used?

Does the review group know about this incident?

Gun Vehicle Knife

Yes No

Object Other:

What happened here? What is the story of this incident?

Victim

Victim name:

Was the victim involved in a street group?

Victim gender:

Yes No Unknown

If yes, which group?

Victim age:

Victim race:

Did the review group know the victim before the incident?

Offender

Offender name:

Was the offender involved in a street group?

Offender gender:

Yes No Unknown

If yes, which group?

Offender age:

Offender race:

Did the review group know the offender before the incident?

Was the incident *preceded* by a violence incident? Yes No Unknown

Was the incident *followed* by a violent incident? Yes No Unknown

What was the relationship of the victim and offender?

Which of the following apply to this incident? Use all that apply.

Drug Business

Other Business

Beef (running dispute)

Respect (Personal Vendetta)

Between groups

Between individuals

Between group/individual

Domestic (Romantic)

Domestic (against child)

Romantic (non-domestic)

Gender Based

Drug Robbery

Other Robbery

Burglary

Street hold-up

Murders related to extortion

Social Cleansing (by police)

Social Cleansing (by military)

Social Cleansing (by para-security)

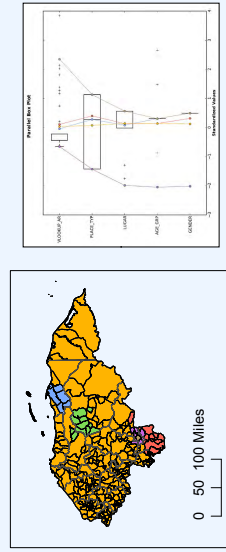
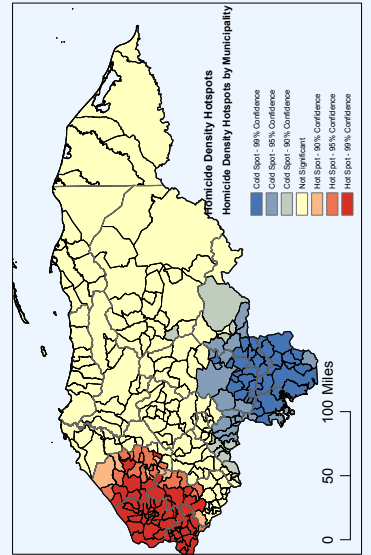
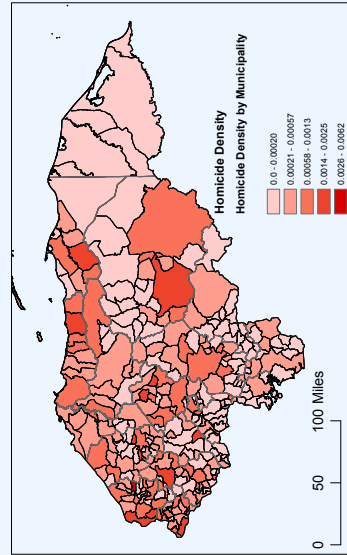
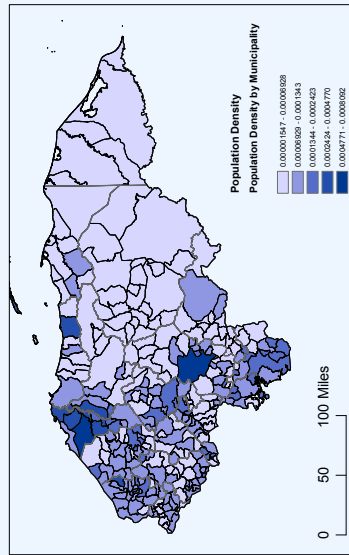
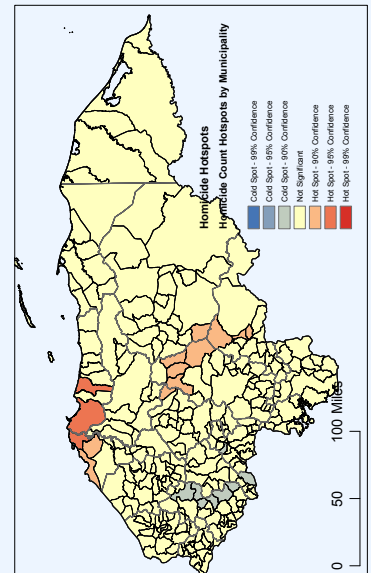
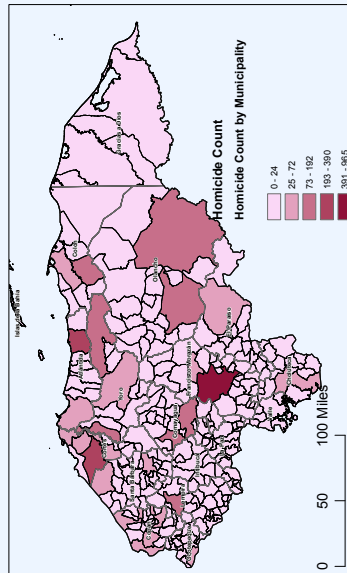
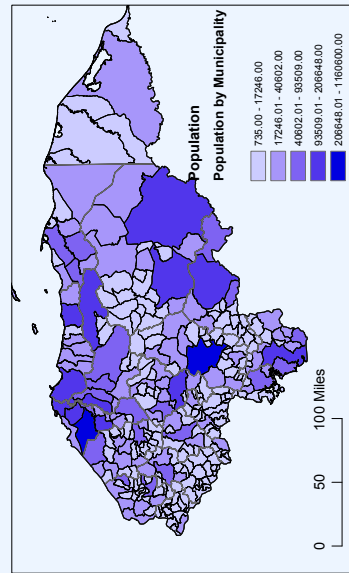
Social Cleansing (by citizen – criminal)

Social Cleansing (by citizen – otherwise non-criminal)

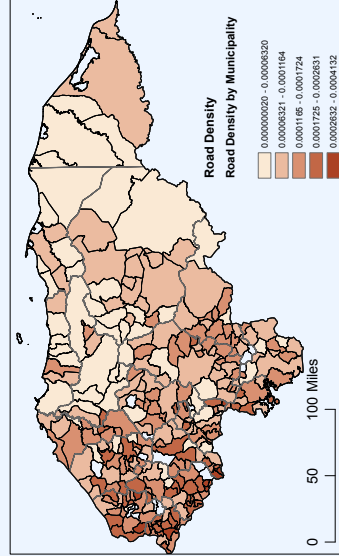
Other (describe)

Unknown

APPENDIX 2: GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS ANALYSIS- ROADS, POPULATION, & HOMICIDE



Grouping by gender, weapon, rural/urban, and type of location (public way vs. a home) shows no clear grouping pattern.



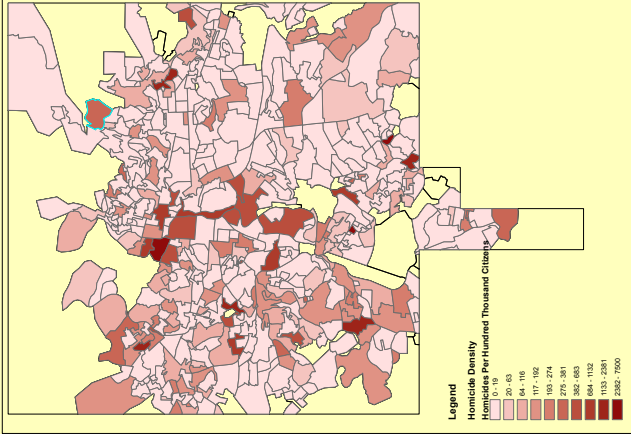
This analysis illustrates how population density, homicide count and density, and road infrastructure density vary by municipality in Honduras. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the municipalities in which the greatest incidence of homicides is occurring, and to display relationships between homicide count and density to population count and density, and road density.

Homicide counts are visibly related to population counts at the level of municipalities; however, when homicide counts are normalized by population, the relationship between homicide and population seems to weaken suggesting population density is not a one to one predictor of homicide counts.

Road density is greatest in the west of the country, near the border with Guatemala and El Salvador. Road density does not appear to be strongly related to homicide count, but does appear to be related to homicide density.

Hot spot analysis by homicide count shows high homicide rates in the northwest of the country, north of the second city, San Pedro Sula; and to the west of Francisco Morazan, the department that hosts the capital. Hot spot analysis by homicide density shows a cluster of municipalities with relatively high homicide densities in the west of the country near the border with El Salvador. Hot spot analysis by road density shows a cluster of municipalities with high road densities near the border with Nicaragua. These results should be explored further.

Grouping by gender, weapon, rural/urban, and type of location (public way vs. a home) shows no clear grouping pattern.



CASE TWO – EL SALVADOR

I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This section examines the effectiveness of anti-gang policies in El Salvador, particularly the 2012 truce between the country's largest gangs (MS-13 and Barrio 18). The case study (1) describes the truce; (2) assesses its opportunities and challenges; (3) highlights municipal anti-violence initiatives; and finally (4) proposes solutions to the new government of El Salvador for addressing gang-related crime.

Since the early 1990s, El Salvador has confronted increasingly violent and organized gangs. With homicide rates rising through 2012, national policies largely failed to quell, and often exacerbated, the problem. The truce that began in March 2012 diverges from previous strong-arm tactics both in semantic approach and in results, as an impressive (but potentially short-lived) drop in homicides followed the truce. However, the truce's unintended consequences, like those of previous repressive policies, threaten to empower gangs.

With presidential elections in February 2014 and persistent concern among the Salvadoran public about security policy, any proposed change in anti-gang policy confronts political polarization and scrutiny.

1. Methodology

Interviews conducted between October and November 2013 in Washington, DC and El Salvador inform the findings. The research team interviewed members of Salvadoran government ministries, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia, law enforcement, and municipal governments, as well as representatives from the U.S. State Department and USAID.

Additionally, the research team visited the municipalities of Ilopango and Santa Tecla, two of the earliest adopters of the *municipios libres de violencia* (municipalities free of violence) initiative. These municipalities implemented different strategies to address gang violence. These sites also offered perspectives from the two major political parties. Ilopango's mayor comes from the opposition ARENA party, and Santa Tecla is led by the ruling FMLN party.

2. Historical Overview

Since the end of the civil war in 1992, El Salvador has experienced high levels of crime, including one of the highest national homicide rates in the world. In 2011, the annual homicide rate was nearly 70 per 100,000 residents.¹ Observers have attributed much of this violence to gangs.

Figure 1:
Intentional Homicides in El Salvador

Year	Homicides	Rate per 100,000
2012	2576	32.0
2011	4308	70.2
2010	4005	64.7
2009	4349	70.6
2008	3179	51.9
2007	3497	57.3
2006	3928	64.7
2005	3778	62.4
2004	3897	64.6
2003	3356	55.9
2002	2835	47.3
2001	3590	60.2
2000	3551	59.8
1999	3845	65.0
1998	5584	95.0
1997	6573	112.6
1996	6792	117.3
1995	7977	139.1

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics 2013 (based on data from the Policía Nacional Civil)

After the civil war, already weak institutions and low capacity to ensure public security were undermined by the proliferation of small arms, family disintegration, and forced migration, as well as high poverty and unemployment. In 1996, changes in U.S. immigration law led to the deportation of thousands of Salvadorans, including members of the MS-13 and M-18 street gangs. Between 1998 and 2011, over 150,000 Salvadorans were deported. Just over a third had a criminal record, although most had no gang affiliation.² Deportee integration represented a challenge for the Salvadoran government because of the number of individuals involved and lack of information sharing with the U.S. about criminal histories.

¹ UNODC Homicide Statistics 2013, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html.

² DHS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2011 & 2007.

Though youth gangs were already active in El Salvador, deported gang members contributed to the development of organized gang activity. Continued deportations have strengthened gangs in size and, some allege, in transnational connections.³ Today, what were small local gangs in the 1990s have consolidated into well-organized entities. With tens of thousands of members, including those in prison, and hundreds of thousands of family members, associates, and dependents, MS-13 and M-18 have developed complex vertical command structures. In MS-13, local level *clickas* (cliques)—ranging from a dozen to a hundred members—maintain territorial control within their *colonias*. Membership in the *clicka* is specialized, with *soladados* (soldiers) patrolling territory and *gatilleros* (triggersmen) carrying out killings. *Clickas* are under regional leadership with the top echelon of control exercised by *ranfleros* both inside and outside jail. Some observers noted that MS-13 has become increasingly sophisticated in its organizational structure, operations, and hierarchical control, and is more akin to an organized criminal syndicate than a street gang.⁴ M-18 similarly evolved from loosely structured street gangs to a more organized group, though less markedly than MS-13 has.⁵

The failure of the government to invest in social services for marginalized communities has also fueled gang predominance. The government's export-oriented policies increased rural-urban displacement, exacerbating existing inequalities. Limited expenditure on social services restricted opportunities for poor youth, some of whom find economic opportunity and social belonging in a gang. As a result, gang activity has proliferated.

Additionally, there was a lack of investment in the public security sector. The *Policía Nacional Civil* (national police, or PNC), formed after the civil war, was unprepared for the gang problem. With underdeveloped preventive and investigative capacity, the government's strategy on crime was largely reactive. For example, in the early 2000s, as

gang membership and organization grew, the PNC concentrated resources on a rash of high publicity kidnappings⁶ and on achieving numerical arrest goals rather than on preventing crime. As a result, the PNC failed to curb gang activity as gangs became more sophisticated and violent.⁷

Similarly, public perception of crime, which diverged from actual victimization rates, cemented security policy as a hot button political issue.⁸

II. HISTORY OF NATIONAL POLICIES

The government responded to gang violence with various anti-gang policies—from suppressive to rehabilitative measures. With mixed short-term results, these efforts failed to create lasting security.

1. *Mano Dura*

In 2003, President Francisco Flores of ARENA launched *Plan Mano Dura* (Iron Fist). *Mano Dura* made gang membership illegal regardless of the commission of a crime. Police relied on “gang-style” tattoos, clothing, or previous gang activity as proof of membership, leading to mass arrests. The next ARENA administration under Antonio Saca instituted *Plan Súper Mano Dura* (Super Iron Fist) in July 2004. This was supposed to incorporate prevention and rehabilitation efforts. In practice, however, *Súper Mano Dura* remained a strategy based on largely suppressive measures, continued to penalize gang membership and raised maximum sentences for juvenile offenders.⁹

These policies had damaging consequences. Chief among them were prison overcrowding and increased gang capacity. Between 2004 and 2008, mass arrests doubled the number of jailed gang members from 4,000 to 8,000.¹⁰ Gang leaders capitalized on the increased concentration in prison to consolidate their power and organization. This

³ James Bargent, “U.S. Surveillance Tracks Central America Gangs,” *Insight Crime*, July 9, 2013. www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/u.s.-surveillance-tracks-central-america-gangs

⁴ In October 2012, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated MS-13 as a significant transnational criminal organization. See, U.S. Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization,” October 11, 2012, www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx.

⁵ Clare Ribando Seelke, “Gangs in Central America,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 28, 2013, RL34112, p. 4

⁶ Interview with Pedro Gonzalez, Anti-Gang Unit, PNC.

⁷ Interview with Rodrigo Avila, former PNC chief

⁸ Edgardo Alberto Amaya, “Security Policies in El Salvador, 1992-2002” in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas*, John Bailey and Lucía Dammert (eds.), University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006, p. 135-136

⁹ Sarah Elizabeth Garland, “El Salvador: Law Brands Gang Members Irredeemable” by Sarah Elizabeth Garland, *IPS News*, August 3, 2004. www.ipsnews.net/2004/08/el-salvador-law-brands-gang-members-irredeemable/

¹⁰ Steven Dudley, “How ‘Mano Dura’ is Strengthening Gangs,” *InSight Crime*, November 21, 2010 www.insightcrime.org/investigations/how-mano-dura-is-strengthening-gangs

was exacerbated when prisons were segregated by gang membership in 2004 following prison riots.¹¹ Now more hierarchical and exerting greater control over members outside prison, jailed gang leadership directed criminal activity, primarily extortion and kidnappings. Extortions increased with arrests because gangs needed money to pay lawyers and support their families.¹² Outside prison, *Mano Dura* and *Súper Mano Dura* shifted gang tactics as members learned to operate in secret.¹³ For example, members stopped tattooing their faces and changed their dress to evade detection.¹⁴

2. *Mano Amiga*

As gang violence continued under *Mano Dura*, repression alone proved insufficient. The PNC had advocated for prevention, reintegration, and rehabilitation measures as early as 2003,¹⁵ but it was not until 2005 that the government introduced *Mano Amiga* (Friendly Hand), which offered prevention activities for at-risk youth. *Mano Extendida* (Extended Hand) followed and focused on gang rehabilitation and reinsertion.¹⁶ However, both policies ultimately failed to stem gang violence. First, the policies lacked the reach and popular support that *Mano Dura* had. Second, funding was lacking. Third, the programs did not change the social stigma of gangs. The public remained wary of former gang members and the police targeted businesses employing former gang members, making earnest reintegration difficult.¹⁷ Without funding or political support, *Mano Amiga* policies were gradually withdrawn.¹⁸

Both *Mano Dura* and *Mano Amiga* policies failed to address the economic and social dynamics that

The Politics of Gang Intervention

In El Salvador, two major parties compete for power each election cycle: the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party and left-leaning Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). ARENA and FMLN representatives interviewed broadly agree that gangs are a social phenomenon fueled by societal marginalization. However, they disagree on how to best combat the problem. ARENA—generally seen as opposed to the truce—accuses the FMLN of capitulating to gangs and providing criminals with undeserved privileges by facilitating the truce. The FMLN attack ARENA for overseeing years of failed *Mano Dura* policies that saturated prisons and failed to address prevention or reinsertion.

However, debate about the truce, which has intensified as presidential elections approach in February 2014, does not cut neatly along party lines. ARENA candidate, Norman Quijano, explicitly opposes the truce. However, some ARENA mayors, like those in Ilopango, Apopa and Mejicanos, support the policy. The ruling FMLN is divided. President Funes and Defense Minister Munguía Payés remain in favor of the truce. Public Security and Justice Minister Ricardo Perdomo is opposed, as are the Chief of Police, Rigoberto Pleites, and the Attorney General, Luis Martínez. FMLN presidential candidate, Sanchez Ceren, has remained ambivalent while his running mate, Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz, enthusiastically oversees a *violence-free municipality*, an effort that has been linked to the truce.

made it difficult for members to leave and made it attractive for socially marginalized youth to join gangs. Financially, gang activity was more profitable than the opportunities offered by the state. Socially, gangs provided members with a sense of belonging. Additionally, choosing to leave could make members vulnerable to reprisal. For example, a farm cooperative was established in 2005 to teach prisoners farming techniques and agricultural sciences in preparation for future employment. This closed after gang members opened fire on the farm, as it constituted a threat to the gang's power and hold over its members.¹⁹

¹¹ Mary Jordan, "Gangs Rampant in El Salvador Prison," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2004, seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2002039675_gangssalvador19.html; Interview with Rodrigo Avila, former PNC chief

¹² Interview with Raul Mijango, truce mediator

¹³ Interview with Carlos Ponce

¹⁴ Steven Dudley, "How 'Mano Dura' is Strengthening Gangs," *InSight Crime*, November 21, 2010 www.insightcrime.org/investigations/how-mano-dura-is-strengthening-gangs

¹⁵ Interview with Pedro Gonzalez, PNC Anti-Gang Commissioner

¹⁶ Sonja Wolf, "Creating Folk Devils: Street Gang Representations in El Salvador's Print Media," *Journal of Human Security* 8.2 (2012): 36-63

¹⁷ Sarah Elizabeth Garland, "El Salvador: Law Brands Gang Members Irredeemable" by Sarah Elizabeth Garland, *IPS News*, August 3, 2004. www.ipsnews.net/2004/08/el-salvador-law-brands-gang-members-irredeemable/

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with Rodrigo Avila, former PNC chief

3. Anti-Gang Law of 2010

In September 2010, under the presidency of the left-leaning FMLN, the National Assembly approved a new anti-gang law that made gang membership punishable by four to six years in prison and gave authorities permission to freeze bank accounts and seize assets.²⁰ The law also made any engagement with gangs illegal, and granted more powers to the police, including the power to make mass arrests of suspected gang members. Critics argue the law is largely ineffective at curbing gang violence and only exacerbates prison overcrowding. MS-13 and M-18 leaders, mediators of the 2012 gang truce, and several mayors seeking to advance rehabilitation programs have called for the repeal of the Anti-Gang law.²¹

4. Community-Oriented Policies

Some of El Salvador's 262 municipalities started their own efforts to address gang violence. Since at least 1996,²² various local-level truces have even been negotiated between the gangs, although most have proved short-lived.²³ The most widely touted and apparently successful of these local initiatives has been in Santa Tecla, a satellite city of the capital San Salvador. In the early 2000s, Santa Tecla was among the 20 most violent municipalities in the country. In 2005, Santa Tecla's homicide rate was above the national average. Yet from 2006 onward, its homicide rates steadily declined. By 2010, the rate dropped to 20 per 100,000. At the same time, the national rate was more than three times higher. After a spike in 2011, Santa Tecla's homicide rate dropped back down to 18 per 100,000 in 2012 and is projected to be in the single digits in 2013.

It is not clear what drove Santa Tecla's homicide reduction. One explanation is that higher levels of economic development, as measured in human development indices (based on health, education and per-capita income), drove the decrease. In 2009, Santa Tecla had the second highest municipal human development index and a per-capita gross domestic product more than twice that of the

national average.²⁴ By this point, Santa Tecla saw its homicide rate drop to levels close to those of Antiguo Cuscatlán, the Salvadran city with the highest human development index, and a per-capita income level more than three times the national average.

The Santa Tecla Model

Santa Tecla attributes its success to its community-oriented policies. In 2002, the municipality implemented a "Participative Strategic Plan" to address concerns of citizen security and services for the sizeable underemployed youth population, including:

- scholarships to promote school completion;
- rehabilitation of dilapidated public infrastructure;
- prohibition of weapons in public spaces;
- Municipal Policy for Prevention and Citizen Security focused on homicide reduction;
- a local Observatory for the Prevention of Crime to monitor crime rates and inform policy interventions;
- community policing with joint patrols between the PNC and local police;
- a closed circuit camera network to monitor high-crime spots;
- Inter-institutional Council for Violence Prevention, which incorporates local and national governmental agencies as well as citizen participation;
- Council for Coexistence and Citizen Security to oversee municipal government implementation of these plans; and
- local citizen economic development committees as a pillar of the prevention and security policy.

Source: "Experiencias exitosas implementadas por el Gobierno Local de Santa Tecla" and Observatorio Municipal Para la Prevencion de Violencia, "Incidencias Delictivas en Santa Tecla," August 2013

²⁰ "El Salvador Implements New Gang Law," *InSight Crime*, September 22, 2010. www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/el-salvador-implements-new-gang-law

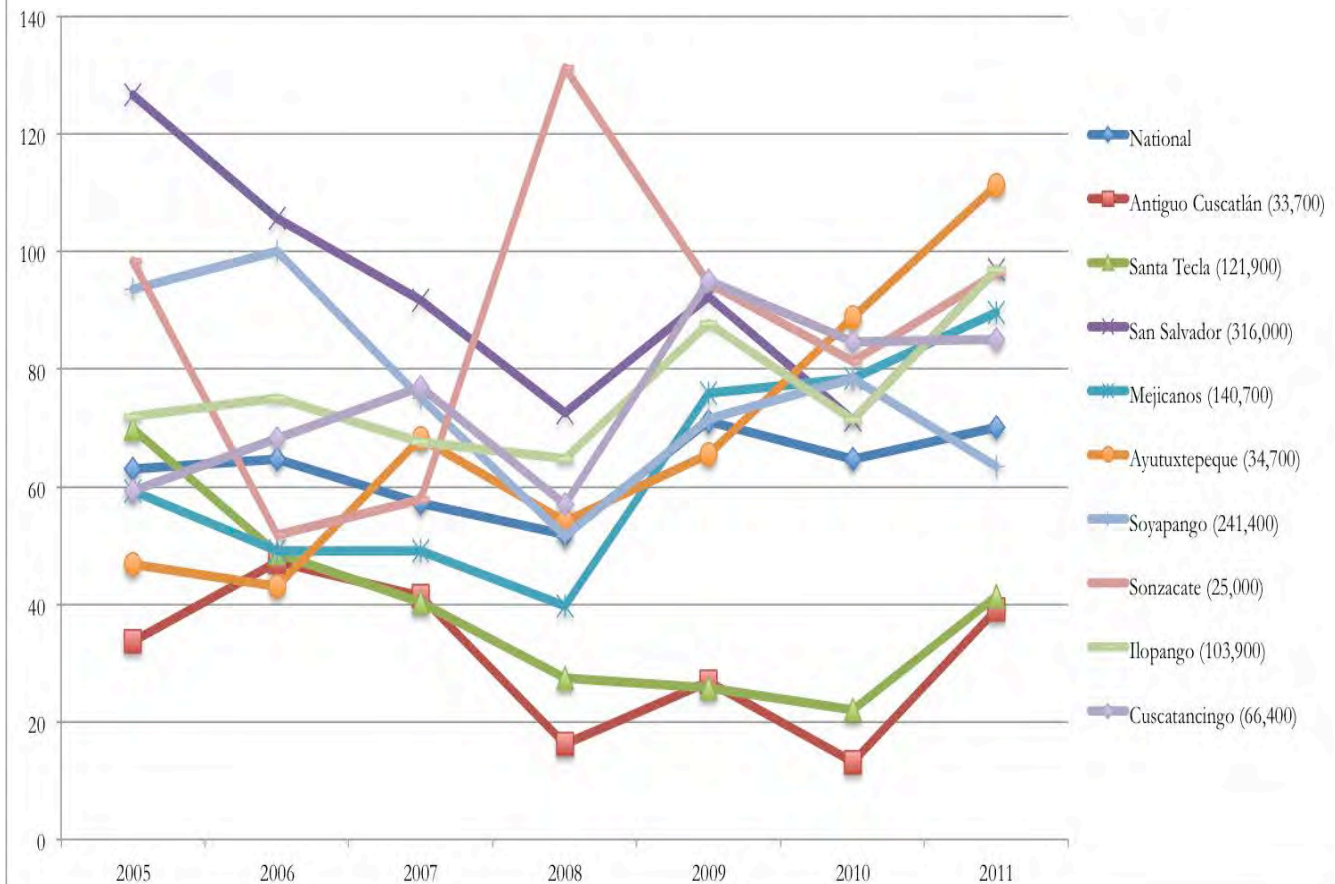
²¹ James Bargent, "El Salvador Truce Mediators Call for Repeal of Anti-Gang Law," *InSight Crime*, November 28, 2012. www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-gang-truce-mediators-repeal-anti-gang-law

²² Juanita Darling, "Gang Truce Gets Boost From Salvadoran City," *LA Times*, April 12, 1996.

²³ Interview with Roberto Rubio, FUNDE.

²⁴ Experiencias exitosas implementadas por el Gobierno Local de Santa Tecla," powerpoint presentation.

Figure 2: Pre-Truce Homicide Rate per 100,000 by Municipality (population size), top 9 in index



However, in comparing Santa Tecla and Antigua Cuscatlán with seven other municipalities that ranked highest in human development indices for El Salvador in 2005 and 2009 (Figure 2),²⁵ higher development did not necessarily result in less violence. These other municipalities did not experience the same drop in homicides as Santa Tecla. In fact, some of these municipalities had homicide rates above the national average.

A more likely explanation is Antigua Cuscatlán and Santa Tecla had motivated and efficient local governments that made smart public safety investments. Like Santa Tecla, Antigua Cuscatlán began community policing around 2006 and more recently installed cameras and inaugurated a violence observatory in 2013.

Santa Tecla 2010 Anti-Gang Investments

In 2010, Santa Tecla invested one million USD in violence prevention and citizen security:

- \$300,000 from UNDP to support their Coexistence and Citizen Security Policy;
- \$320,000 from the EU through Projovenes II to upgrade public spaces;
- \$50,000 from the government of Andalusia for a good neighbor program;
- \$250,000 for communication technology for violence mapping from Qualcomm and RTI;
- \$20,000 for the crime observatory from the German development agency.

Source: Consultores para el desarrollo integral, "Informe de Avance: Experiencias exitosas implementados por el Gobierno Local de Santa Tecla"

²⁵ UNDP, "Informe 262: Indicadores Municipales sobre desarrollo humano y Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio. El Salvador 2005", January 2006, cuadro 1, p. 20; UNDP, Fundación Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (FUNDAUNGO), "Almanaque 262: Estado del desarrollo humano en los municipios de El Salvador 2009," p 13.

Outside of homicide, however, theft, extortion, and robbery levels have not declined.²⁶ Santa Tecla's crime observatory reported a 13% increase in theft in the first eight months of 2013 compared to the same period in 2012.²⁷

Still, Santa Tecla offers hope that locally-driven efforts can be effective and that a national policy could be forged from this model.

III. TRUCE

1. Early Results

In March 2012, news outlet *El Faro* broke the story of a negotiated gang truce with an article titled "Government Negotiates Reduction in Homicides with Gangs." *El Faro* reported that the gangs and the government forged an agreement, wherein the government transferred prominent gang leaders to low security prisons and had even given large sums of cash to their families in exchange for the gangs' promise to stop killing each other.²⁸

Initially, the government denied involvement, insisting that religious and nongovernmental

leaders brokered the truce. Yet with time—and the obvious implausibility of this narrative—the government's official position evolved. Currently, the government acknowledges that it facilitated the truce through mediators Fabio Colindres, a Catholic Church leader, and Raul Mijango, former guerilla leader. However, it denies directly negotiating with gangs.²⁹ The gangs confirmed this account in a public communiqué.³⁰

In reality, the government likely arranged the truce and asked the mediators to serve as interlocutors because direct negotiation was neither politically sustainable nor desirable for the government. The protagonists of the truce were the MS-13 and M-18 leaders from prison; then Minister of Public Security and Justice Munguía; and his deputy, Douglas Moreno. Moreno maneuvered the dialogue via mediators Colindres and Mijango, who remain the figureheads of this process.

At the outset, the gangs announced that they had committed to stop killing each other and to stop killing security forces.³¹ Two months later, the

Figure 3: Number of Homicides per Month, 2011-2013



Sources: Instituto de Medicina Legal and Policía Nacional Civil

²⁶ Luisa Arévalo Herrera, "Gestión Municipal de la Seguridad Ciudadana en Centroamérica y República Dominicana, Capítulo El Salvador," (FLACSO, 2010).

²⁷ Observatorio Municipal Para la Prevención de Violencia, "Incidencias Delictivas en Santa Tecla," August 2013

²⁸ Óscar Martínez, Carlos Martínez, Sergio Arauz and Efren Lemus, "Government Negotiates Reduction in Homicides with Gangs," *E/Faro*, March 14, 2012. www.elfaro.net/es/201203/noticias/8061/

²⁹ "Insulza niega beligerancia de pandillas," *Contra Punto*, July 13, 2012. www.contrapunto.com.sv/politica/insulza-niega-beligerancia-de-pandillas. Interview with Munguía Payés.

³⁰ *Los Voceros Nacionales De La Mara Salvatrucha MSX3 y Pandilla 18* (Public Communiqué from MS13 and Barrio 18 Leadership), par. 6, March 19, 2012, www.elfaro.net/attachment/395/comaras.pdf?g_download=1

³¹ *Los Voceros Nacionales De La Mara Salvatrucha MSX3 y Pandilla 18* (Public Communiqué from MS13 and Barrio 18 Leadership), par. 6, March 19, 2012.

gangs announced that they would stop recruiting in schools.³² In an interview with mediator Raul Mijango, he identified five specific commitments made by gang leaders: stop killing each other; stop killing security forces; stop recruiting in schools; allow reinsertion of gang members who forfeit their affiliation; and reduce non-gang casualties.³³

The lack of transparency surrounding the truce undermined the policy. Though April 2012 homicide rates had dropped by more than 50% since the beginning of the year (Figure 3), media reports focused on the precise role of the government and terms of the agreement rather than the decline in homicides.³⁴ The government's distance from the agreement was largely explained by public disapproval of the government's engagement with the gangs and the privileges granted them. Shortly after the truce was announced, only 16% of Salvadorans thought the policy benefited the general population and 68% believed the truce had political ends.³⁵

The government insists it never negotiated directly with gangs despite contrary reports.³⁶ Regardless, the truce remains problematic because it has not adequately mandated gang demobilization. Similarly, unlike municipal-level efforts, the national truce provided no space for public input.³⁷

2. Operationalizing the Truce

In September 2012, the Organization of American States (OAS) announced its participation and leadership in a Technical Steering Committee to formalize the dialogue surrounding the truce. The

Committee, composed of truce mediators and representatives from the private sector, civil society, and the government, would implement the truce at the local level.³⁸ The OAS' role highlighted the government's willingness to accept international support while Munguía's appointment as governmental interlocutor showed its commitment to the process.

In May 2013, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled that Munguía's appointment as Minister of Public Security and Justice was unconstitutional under the 1992 Peace Accords, given his previous service as a general. In July 2013, President Funes re-appointed Munguía as Minister of Defense, and Munguía was able to continue his engagement with the truce during this transition through his role with the Technical Committee. This helped allay fears among gang leaders that the shift in leadership could erode the truce. Concern that the truce's implementation depended on the commitment of one government official may not be ill-conceived: from May to July 2013—amidst Munguía's transition—homicides increased from 150 to 250 per month, where they have hovered ever since.

At the end of 2012, the government formed a Humanitarian Commission, comprised of OAS officials, civil society, and business leaders, to administer prevention and reinsertion programs. The mandate acknowledged that prevention and reinsertion are necessary components of an anti-violence strategy. The Commission, sustained by private donations from anonymous Salvadoran and international contributors, is one component of the larger Technical Committee.³⁹

Mijango and Colindres then announced "phase two" of the truce in November 2012. Select municipalities were declared "violence free zones" or *Municipios Libres de Violencia* (MLVs). Gangs would carry out non-aggression pacts facilitated by

³² Roberto Valencia y Óscar Luna, "Las pandillas dan un paso más: todos los centros escolares son ahora 'zonas de paz,'" May 2, 2012, www.elfaro.net/es/201204/noticias/8485/

³³ Interview with Raul Mijango, truce mediator

³⁴ James Bosworth, "El Salvador's first 'murder free' day in three years: The first of many?" *Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 2012, www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2012/0420/El-Salvador-s-first-murder-free-day-in-three-years-The-first-of-many

³⁵ Marguerite Cawley, "Gangs Gain Most from El Salvador Truce: Opinion Poll," *Insight Crime* August 28, 2013, www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/maras-gaining-most-from-truce-say-el-salvador-survey-respondents

³⁶ José Luis Sanz y Carlos Martínez, "Exviceministro de Seguridad negoció en persona con líderes pandilleros," *El Faro*, July 27, 2013, www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201307/cronicas/12785/

³⁷ The debate about the need to consult the public is largely philosophical. Critics claim that the truce process was opaque and conclude that this was an agreement for peace among gangs and not for society. For others, however, this is just the difficult reality of negotiating conflict, some of which—they opine—must happen behind closed doors.

³⁸ OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, "The OAS, Civil Society, the Church and a Negotiated violence reduction in El Salvador and Honduras," Power Point Presentation, unspecified date, 2013.

³⁹ Linda Garrett, "The First Year: A Chronology of the Gang Truce and Peace Process in El Salvador," *Center for Democracy in the Americas*, March 2013, p. 30, www.democracyinamericas.org/around-the-region-blog/the-first-year-a-chronology-of-the-gang-truce-and-peace-process-in-el-salvador/. This point was also clarified during a confidential interview with OAS officials on October 10, 2013.

local committees, composed of social, church, business, gang leaders, and government representatives.⁴⁰ Truce facilitators declared that gangs in MLVs would turn in weapons and commit to “eradicating homicides, extortions, theft, robberies, and kidnapping,” so that “citizens will be able to transit freely through the streets [of these zones], along with gang members.”⁴¹ In return, the government and private industry would provide reintegration opportunities for those who left the gang.

While the U.S. has not explicitly criticized the truce, it has distanced itself from any association with it. Since the truce became public, the U.S. designated MS-13 a transnational criminal organization, added six gang leaders to an economic sanctions list, issued a travel warning for El Salvador, refused requests by Salvadoran officials to fund truce-related activity, and halted aid to six municipalities where gang members were permitted to participate in a U.S.-funded income support program for unemployed youth. The U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, Mari Carmen Aponte, has repeatedly stated that the U.S. has no link to the truce and will not fund the truce. The U.S. position is consequential because it influences U.S. funding decisions and impacts the Salvadoran government’s decision-making process.

3. Unfinished Business

“Phase two” is underway with uneven progress across 18 participating municipalities. Some rely on previous programs, others created policies, and some have yet to develop into more than an announcement.

In January 2013, then Vice Minister of Justice and Public Security Moreno announced that the government was seeking \$74 million to implement the MLVs, 50% of which they had already acquired through international loans.⁴² The government promised funding to participant municipalities,

creating a financial incentive for municipalities to publicly attach themselves to this policy. To date, little money has been dispersed. However, some municipalities have used their own funds to offer business opportunities to gangs. In Ilopango, the mayor secured a bakery for one gang and a chicken farm for another.⁴³

It is important to highlight that in some municipalities, prevention and reinsertion programs portrayed as “phase two” of the truce were already underway. For these municipalities, local-oriented programs were nothing new. The promise of central government funding provided further motivation. This prior experience with locally driven mediation and reinsertion programs is key. First, it provides lessons on what has worked at the local level. Second, since “phase two” is an iteration of already operating programs, it need not be tied to the truce. This is vital considering the political unsustainability of the truce.

Although the U.S. refused to fund truce activities, it has committed significant funds for public security. Through the Partnership for Growth initiative, the U.S. pledged \$91.2 million towards judicial system reinforcement, community crime prevention, educational opportunities, and the SolucionES program, which will raise \$22 million in matching funds to keep at-risk youth out of gangs.

Due to a lack of data and transparency about Salvadoran government spending, it is unclear how much money specifically goes toward anti-gang policies.⁴⁴ A leader in El Salvador’s industrial sector suggested that mismanagement of taxpayer and donor funds explained the funding shortage.⁴⁵ Others suggest that resource constraints are real. According to one official, the government was seeking a small grant from Italy to support MLVs.⁴⁶

This saga and accompanying analysis are changing in real time. In late 2013, homicide rates rose and Minister of Public Security and Justice Perdomo distanced himself from the truce. Mediator Mijango and gang leaders released a communiqué insisting that gangs were not involved in the spike in

⁴⁰ Carmen Rodríguez and Israel Serrano, *Municipios santuarios definirán segunda fase de tregua entre pandillas*, La Pagina, November 23, 2012.

www.lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/74210/2012/11/22/Segunda-fase-de-tregua-entre-pandillas-creara-municipios-santuarios

⁴¹ Carmen Rodríguez and Israel Serrano, *Municipios santuarios definirán segunda fase de tregua entre pandillas*, La Pagina, November 23, 2012.

⁴² Sunchit Chavez and Fernando Romero, *Gobierno necesita \$74 mill para “santuarios”* La Prensa Grafica, January 26, 2013. www.laprensagrafica.com/gobierno-necesita-74-mill-para-santuarios

⁴³ Interview with Salvador Ruano, Ilopango

⁴⁴ Interview with Roberto Rubio, FUNDE

⁴⁵ Interview with Javier Siman, ASI

⁴⁶ Interview with Javier Martínez, Ministry of Public Security and Justice. The research team found this anecdote particularly telling as the amount sought (approximately \$5 million all together) was relatively small.

homicides.⁴⁷ Journalists declared the truce all but dead. In the meantime, opportunities and challenges can be gleaned from experiences to date.

IV. FINDINGS ON THE TRUCE: NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND RENEWED CHALLENGES

1. New Opportunities

Though maligned in the Salvadoran press, the truce created opportunities for combatting the country's high homicide rate.

Homicide Reduction: The most significant benefit of the truce has been the reduction in the homicide rate since March 2012. Had 2011 homicide rates persisted in the absence of the truce, thousands of Salvadorans would have lost their lives in the past 20 months. This decrease in violence could have provided a space to implement comprehensive anti-gang violence strategies.

Direct Engagement with Gangs: Negotiating with gangs, especially at the municipal level, has not only drawn gang members into ordinary societal activities—a prospect that raises concerns about the legitimization and entrenchment of gang membership—but has also given municipal and non-governmental actors latitude to conduct outreach. Santa Tecla's local government has folded gang outreach and reintegration activities into its menu of anti-violence services. Prior to the truce, the municipality would not have openly advertised or sought donor support for such programs.⁴⁸ In some instances, direct negotiation with gangs has improved access to services and programs for citizens who reside in or must pass through gang-held territory.⁴⁹ However, some indicated that the anti-gang law makes this engagement legally tenuous.⁵⁰ One NGO representative noted that even though they inquire about participants' gang affiliation in order to avoid legal and funding repercussions, gang-involved youth likely already participate in their programs.⁵¹

⁴⁷ James Bargent, "El Salvador gangs at war as truce hits the rocks," *Insight Crime*, November 21, 2013. www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-gangs-at-war-as-truce-hits-the-rocks

⁴⁸ Interview with Stanley Rodriguez, et al., Santa Tecla.

⁴⁹ Interview with Santa Tecla, INJUVE and FEPADE. However, some service providers noted that access to their program spaces had not improved or had worsened. Confidential interview with international agency.

⁵⁰ Interview with Salvador Ruano, Ilopango.

⁵¹ Confidential interview with international agency.

Highlight Municipal Initiatives: "Phase two" of the truce brought new prominence to municipal anti-gang programs. First, the co-option of municipal efforts as a "phase" of the truce reinforced the need for comprehensive, local anti-violence efforts. Second, the promise of funding made clear that with appropriate support, local governments across the political spectrum were willing to engage gangs in reintegration and other programming.⁵² While the financial support has not materialized to the extent anticipated, several municipalities, Santa Tecla and Ilopango among them, have implemented their own programs. Regardless of whether this truce is deemed a success, it has catalyzed *local* governments to consider how they can engage with the gangs.

2. Renewed Challenges

In addition to the new opportunities, the truce has also created new and possibly lasting challenges for El Salvador.

Lack of Strategy: Neither the government of El Salvador nor the primary architects of the truce appeared to have a strategy to combat gang violence while the truce was under negotiation. Nor do they appear to have formulated one since. Though there are general visions of anti-gang policies, there are few details about planned actions or an implementation timeline.⁵³ The lack of a comprehensive, national anti-gang strategy will continue to undermine any individual effort.

Public distrust of the government's gang interventions: The lack of transparency around the truce undermined public trust and created a space for politically-driven bashing of the policy and other anti-gang policies. Public distrust and political discord undermine the viability of future anti-gang initiatives supported by the government. But the February 2014 election creates an opportunity for the government to change and control the narrative and direction of future policy.

Constraints on NGOs operating with funding from USAID: In September 2013, USAID suspended funding for PATI (*Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso*)—an income support program

⁵² Of the 11 municipalities that have implemented "violence free" zones, ARENA holds the municipalities of Ilopango, Quezaltepeque, Sonsonate, Apopa y San Vicente. The FMLN holds Santa Tecla, Ciudad Delgado, Zacatecoluca, Puerto La Libertad y Nueva Concepción and a coalition government holds Puerto El Triunfo.

⁵³ Interview with Raul Mijango, truce mediator

for unemployed youth—in six municipalities after the Salvadoran press revealed that program slots had been reserved for active gang members. With the U.S. Treasury’s designation of MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization, USAID cannot fund rehabilitation and reinsertion efforts of active gang members. While USAID funding can still be used for prevention, rehabilitation and reinsertion programs must seek alternative funding.⁵⁴

Insufficient Attention to Non-Homicide Crimes: The truce demonstrated that homicide reduction alone was insufficient to achieve security. Extortion, intimidation, and other non-violent crimes need to be addressed.

Increasing Uncertainty About Gangs: The truce has raised questions about the power and legitimacy of gangs. In part, this is due to the fact that gangs were never required to fully demobilize as part of the truce. Additionally, gangs improved their organization, communication, and modus operandi in the period of relative security created by the reduction in homicides.

- **Presence in legitimate economy:** Gangs have increased their presence in legitimate economic activities by operating microenterprises.⁵⁵ This can be problematic as gangs were never required to renounce criminal activity to operate these businesses. It also creates new avenues for gangs to intimidate citizens and competitors in an open market. Should this continue, street gangs may evolve into mafia-style organizations.
- **Expanded illicit economic activities:** Gangs have become more sophisticated in their illicit economic activities as their organization has improved. Intimidation, extortions, and rent-seeking continue, and may have increased. In particular, distribution networks—namely trucks that transport goods—are targets of gang extortion and rent-seeking as businesses need permission to cross various gang territories.⁵⁶
- **Political influence at the municipal level:** As gangs operate more openly, they enjoy increased

political power at the municipal level. In the MLVs, gang members sit at committee meetings and some gangs have taken over community watch organizations.⁵⁷ Gangs may exploit their new political power to increase territorial control and ratchet up illicit and violent activity.

- **Intimidation at higher levels:** With improved intelligence gathering, gangs have begun to intimidate higher-level government officials. According to prosecutors from the Attorney General’s office, intimidation was previously limited to local level officials, such as police officers and investigators. However, since the truce, gangs have identified and threatened national level officials involved in anti-gang investigations, including public prosecutors.⁵⁸
- **“Stickiness” of the truce:** There is now reduced room for the government—and the next administration—to negotiate in relation to the truce. An attempt to scale back or remove the truce will likely lead to an uptick in violence and homicide by the gangs.
- **Uncertainties about gang structure:** It is unclear how gang structure and hierarchy have changed since the truce. Additionally, new economic gains may lead to intra-gang divisions as members vie for control of new economic opportunities. Pedro Gonzalez, director of the PNC’s anti-gang unit, suggested that Barrio 18 has already begun to fracture from infighting between *clickas*. He projected that MS-13, despite its higher levels of internal organization, will also soon fracture.⁵⁹ If gang structures and dynamics shift drastically, future policies may be ineffective if they are rooted in an outdated understanding of gang organization.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To the Next Government of El Salvador:

The election of a new government in 2014 represents a propitious opportunity to revamp and rebrand the truce and anti-gang policies. These officials will not only have a fresh

⁵⁴ Interview with USAID

⁵⁵ “In El Salvador, feared gangsters take up baking and chicken farming,” *Global Post*, July 22, 2013.
www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/130722/el-salvador-maras-gangs-truce-bakery-farm

⁵⁶ Interview with Javier Siman, ASI

⁵⁷ Interview with Stanley Rodriguez, Santa Tecla. Interview with Salvador Ruano, Ilopango

⁵⁸ Interview with Oscar Torres, Head of the Anti-gang and Homicide Unit, and Julio Adalberto Arriaz, Director for the Defense of Societal Interests, Fiscalía General, October 29, 2013.

⁵⁹ Interview with Pedro Gonzalez, Sub-director of Anti-Gang Unit, and Inspector Ronald Segura, Head of CAT, Policía Nacional Civil, October 31, 2013.

start but will also be motivated to achieve success to maintain political support.

Develop a comprehensive anti-gang strategy: The truce alone is not an anti-gang strategy. As *Mano Dura* has shown, repression alone is not a strategy. The right balance of carrots and sticks is needed to combat gang violence. A comprehensive policy must include: **improved police capacity, prison reform, targeted arrests, integration opportunities for former gang members and newly arrived deportees, and preventative programming for at-risk youth.** The truce should be portrayed as a complement to these larger efforts. Additionally, the public relations campaign around new policies should be transparent and their formulation should include public input.

Increase and improve police: As part of a comprehensive strategy, the government should increase national and community police forces.

Strategize economic inclusion: As government officials from both parties recognize, gang violence is part of a much larger dilemma of economic and social marginalization. Comprehensive anti-gang strategy should aim at inclusive growth, economic development, and job creation.

Consult and recruit private sector help: Given the severity of the gang problem, the government should recruit the private sector in creating employment opportunities. Specifically, private companies ought to be incentivized to hire and train at-risk youth, former prisoners, and gang members seeking rehabilitation. Moreover, private sector leaders ought to be consulted on prisoner training programs and broader prison reform efforts. Though prison reform is not the responsibility of the private sector, given its breadth of resources, it should be involved.

Focus on interagency cooperation: A comprehensive strategy requires collaboration across government agencies. The National Youth Institute (INJUVE) has admirably coordinated several ministries to execute prevention policies. Similarly, the Ministries of Justice and Public Security, Health, and Labor, and the Office of the Attorney General must work together to devise and execute a comprehensive strategy. Current coordination is underdeveloped.

Do not abruptly roll back the truce: The new government should not reverse the truce. For better or worse, the truce is in place and the gangs have shown the capacity to dial up or dial down the homicide rate. The short-term impact of rupturing the truce would likely be an increase in homicides to rates similar to pre-truce figures. The new government must remain committed to this process while developing more comprehensive policies.

Steer Conversation about the Government Role: The new government should capitalize on their opportunity as newly-elected officials to steer the conversation away from the previous administration's role in the truce to forward-thinking strategies about combatting gang violence.

Rename the “violence free municipalities” and detach them from the truce: The so-called violence free municipalities have much potential but are hindered in two ways: their title sets expectations too high and they are connected to the politically toxic truce. Renaming these “anti-violence zones,” or *zonas contra violencia*, and incrementally separating them from the truce will give them a greater chance to succeed. No local effort, however, can succeed without resources. The government should provide needed funds for these local efforts.

Reform anti-gang legislation: The current anti-gang law outlaws engagement with gang members. This is a challenge for mayors and local leaders who want to dialogue with and create rehabilitation programs for gang members and former prisoners. Under current legislation, such activities are prohibited. Reforming the anti-gang law would grant these leaders the space to establish programs without fear of prosecution.

Improve assistance to newly arrived deportees: The government should direct resources toward the integration of deportees. The time of their arrival is an optimal moment for the government to assist these at-risk and marginalized individuals, thereby reducing their likelihood of turning to gang membership to find a sense of community.

2. To the United States Government:

Continue monitoring the development and evolution of gangs: It remains unclear how the

truce has affected the composition and functioning of gangs. To anticipate changes and plan policies, the U.S. should closely monitor the following:

- *If and how gangs are becoming integrated economically and politically at the local level:* In particular, the U.S. should pay close attention to whether or not gangs are taking control of local community development organization (ADESCOs) and/or local businesses.
- *The gang leadership's commentary on politics and national elections:* This will help officials glean whether or not gangs are trying to insert themselves into the political process or to influence elections.
- *Possible links between gangs and drug trafficking organizations:* This is an unlikely scenario given the size and insignificance of El Salvador in the illicit drug market. However, this development would be significant given the resources implied and deserves continued attention.

Tailor funding and program support to comprehensively combat gang violence: The U.S. should calibrate its support for programs that have worked and those that have potential:

- *Continue to fund what works:* Locally-driven policies have shown success and should continue to receive U.S. support. Funding for municipal-level prevention programs is worth the investment.
- *Consider funding programs that include gang participation:* Some local prevention and rehabilitation programs may involve gang participation. This is desirable in some cases and unavoidable in others, given the power and reach of gangs. The U.S. should not deny funding to these types of efforts on principle alone. The U.S. should consider funding efforts where local authorities can justify the participation of gangs.
- *Collaborate with international organizations:* To assist programs that may be controversial, including those that may include gang participants, the U.S. could provide support

via international institutions like the OAS. The OAS is in the process of establishing a field office to further its work as guarantor of the truce and has expressed its support for MLVs. However, a lack of resources has hindered its work. Increasing support for OAS efforts in El Salvador offers an opportunity to support local-level efforts that may be too controversial for direct U.S. support.

- *Provide targeted training programs:* The U.S. should prioritize training opportunities that further Salvadoran efforts to combat gang violence, specifically in the areas of **prison reform, police training, and interagency cooperation.**
- *Support El Salvador's capacity to integrate deportees:* To date, the U.S. has deported thousands of Salvadoran nationals, including gang members, to El Salvador. By providing information on criminal histories and funding in-country integration efforts, the U.S. can help the Salvadoran government cope with the challenge at hand. Lack of capacity to integrate these deportees hinders anti-gang efforts.

CASE THREE – MEXICO

I. INTRODUCTION

This section examines the causes of violent homicide in Mexico over the last decade and the programs and policies undertaken by the government and civil society to combat them.

Beginning in 2006, Mexico experienced a precipitous rise in homicides as several national-level Drug Trade Organizations (DTOs) battled each other, and eventually the Mexican military and police, over control of strategic transportation corridors between Central America and the United States. By 2012, Mexico had several of the deadliest cities in the world.

Since then homicide rates have dropped off, but several cities still experience extremely high homicide rates. Furthermore, there are concerns that the atomization of DTOs into more than a dozen regional mafias is changing the criminal balance of power, sparking another round of intense violence as these cliques battle for regional control of drug routes, and commit violent crimes against the population to compensate for their economic losses due to increased competition in the illicit drug market.

This case study analyzes the effectiveness of the government and civil society in addressing lethal violence. The aim is to shed light on the variables that make the implementation of violence reduction interventions successful.

First, the case provides background on the violent actors in Mexico and recent trends in violence. Second, the case analyzes some of the key policies that have worked to reduce violence in Mexico. Finally, the case provides recommendations for the U.S. and Mexican governments to reduce and prevent violence in Mexico.

II. VIOLENT ACTORS

Violent actors in Mexico can broadly be categorized into three classes: (1) major drug trafficking organizations; (2) smaller regional drug trafficking organizations; and (3) local street gangs. These three types of actors have fluid relationships within and between their classes. Many national-

level DTOs began as smaller regional organizations or subgroups within other DTOs. Vertically, many of the national DTOs employ local gangs or have created paramilitary wings for enforcement.

The different types of actors have different respective motivations for violence. Those motivations have important implications for the policies necessary to reduce and prevent violence. Below is a description of the relevant actors, their motivations, and their geographic bases.

1. National-Level Drug Trade Organizations (DTOs)

Mexico's national-level DTOs are predominantly trafficking businesses motivated by economic gain. Their violent battles over terrain can be viewed as a means of protecting or expanding their delivery routes for drugs, migrants, and weapons. Although often extremely violent, DTOs have neither espoused coherent political goals, nor advocated for political independence. Their concerns largely remain territorial and business-oriented.

2. Regional mafias or *superpandillas*.

The second tier of violent actors is composed of smaller, regional mafias and super-powered street gangs or *superpandillas*. These organizations function as sub-contractors under the national DTOs. Often these organizations work as the local enforcement wing for the larger DTOs, performing a range of functions as informants, extortionists and hitmen. Because of their influence within urban areas, they are extremely effective in their operations in cities, but generally have weaker influence in rural areas.

Due to their fluid cooperation with the national-level DTOs, identifying all the *superpandillas* has proven difficult. The Attorney General of Mexico's office has identified approximately 80 of these second tier criminal organizations. It is often difficult to distinguish a *superpandilla* from the larger DTO with which it works. For example, the Zetas often work with these second tier organizations to carry out hits, or to demand payment from an extortion target within a city.

While *superpandillas* generally operate on a contractual basis with national-level DTOs, some, like the Azteca Asesinos and La Linea, which both

work with the Juárez Cartel, pledge their allegiance to specific cartels. More often, these regional organizations pay a tax or *derecho de piso* to the DTOs who control the region. In exchange, the *superpandillas* are able to gain information, weaponry, and training from the DTOs. For example, in the case of the Zetas, the national level DTO often trains local gangs in violent military tactics. It is through this diffusion of tactical and logistical support that local gangs are able to evolve into *superpandillas* able to challenge for power at the municipal or regional level.

In addition, in regions beset by violence, the Mexican government has recently had to deal with the rising regional power of vigilante groups in Western Mexico.¹ Armed initially to provide protection from the *superpandillas*, there is fear that many of the vigilante groups, if not disarmed or integrated with the government forces, will themselves act as regional gangs by extorting residents and trafficking drugs.

3. Local Street Gangs

Small criminal gangs comprise the third tier of violent actors in Mexico. This classification contains organizations that are very diverse in their natures and in their relationships with lethal violence. On the one hand there are gangs that use violence to commit assaults, car thefts or local drug dealing. On the other hand, there are social groupings of teenagers—with huge membership in disadvantaged urban areas—where members are searching for a common identity; which usually comes from drug and alcohol abuse, affinity for reggaeton music, punk or goth subcultures.

Local street gangs, unlike the *superpandillas*, are not generally involved with the national-level DTOs. In fact in cities with strong DTO presence, youth gangs are often targets of major criminal organizations. Their members are recruited by force, initiated into illicit drugs to develop a market for addicts or otherwise murdered. Though these street gangs are not currently a major driver of violence and thousands have no links with DTOs or *superpandillas*, they constitute a recruiting pool for cartels looking for young men on the verge of

criminal activity. Consequently, as confrontation between DTOs spreads, the existence of youth gangs in Mexico's cities threatens to exacerbate the epidemic of lethal violence.

III. THE SURGE OF EXTREME VIOLENCE

From 1992 to 2007, the rate of intentional homicides in Mexico decreased from 19 per 100,000 people to eight per 100,000. However, over the last seven years, Mexico has experienced a surge in lethal violence. Between 2007 and 2012, by different estimates, Mexico suffered between 100,000 and 130,000 homicides.² Some 60% were attributed to drug violence. Over that same period, an additional 25,000 people disappeared.³

Although Mexico has lower homicide rates than many other Latin American countries, at 22 homicides per 100,000 people its homicide rate is still nearly quadruple that of the U.S.⁴ Especially concerning in the Mexican case was the growth rate in homicides. Between 2007 and 2010, homicides in Mexico increased at an average rate of 30% a year—the highest in the world over that period.⁵

In 2012, Mexico had nine of the fifty deadliest cities in the world: Torreón (95 homicides per 100,000 people), Nuevo Laredo (73), Culiacán (62), Cuernavaca (56), Ciudad Juárez (60), Chihuahua (43), Ciudad Victoria (38) and Monterrey (31).

While Mexico has long had to deal with DTOs and narcotrafficking, the last seven years have seen a fundamental shift in the volume and brutality of violence associated with DTOs. A number of factors contributed to this shift.

² Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública; <http://www.incidenciadelictiva.secretariadodejecutivo.gob.mx>; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) deaths by homicide, http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/olap/proyectos/bd/continuas/mortalidad/defuncioneshom.asp?s=est&c=28820&proy=mort_dh.

³ Alfredo Corchado, "Violence Levels off in Some Parts of Mexico, but Spreads to Others," *Dallas Morning News*, February 4, 2012.

⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, deaths by homicide; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Intentional Homicide Rate*, 2012.

⁵ Indicadores de Víctimas Visibles e Invisibles de Homicidio, México Evalúa.

¹ Randal Archibold, and Paulina Villegas, "Vigilantes, Once Welcome, Frighten Many in Mexico," *New York Times*, February 24, 2014.

First, the implementation of Plan Colombia in the Andean Region debilitated Colombian DTOs and left a vacuum in the drug trafficking market. Mexican DTOs took advantage of this opportunity and gained control over cocaine smuggling operations from Colombia into the U.S. where the cocaine drug market generates \$38 billion in yearly revenue.⁶ Consequently, drug-related violence moved into Mexico as Mexican DTOs fought over control and access to the lucrative U.S. market.

Second, increased competition among Mexican DTOs triggered homicides in states and cities located in strategic areas for illicit crop production and narcotrafficking. Violence was pervasive in cities along the northern border, such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, as well as in important ports of entry for drugs coming from South America, such as Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán. In response, the GoM under the Calderón administration waged a widespread war against all of Mexico's major DTOs—an approach similar to the *Mano Dura* (iron fist) policies in Central America, which focused on knocking out the leaders of the drug cartels. As a measure of success, the GoM showed how many DTO members were killed or arrested. However, the government's efforts caused the violence to spiral quickly upward.⁷ Attacking the DTOs not only caused them to lead reprisals against the government and the military, but also led to power vacuums, both among and within DTOs.⁸ The result was a vicious increase in gang-related homicides and violence, as DTO members competed for leadership positions, and DTOs competed with each other to take over territories of weakened DTOs.

Third, the justice system was unable to deter violence. With courts and law enforcement agencies underfunded, disorganized, and outdated, the government was ill-equipped to deal with the surge in homicides. Homicides were rarely punished and DTOs were free to act with impunity. The Mexican Courts only pronounced a sentence for 3,614 cases out of the 21,046 intentional homicides perpetrated in 2010, meaning that by

2012, 81% of the homicide cases remained unsolved.⁹

Finally, confrontations between DTOs had a major impact on the upsurge of violent homicides because of the availability of high-caliber weapons trafficked from the U.S. According to the GoM, more than 90% of the weapons used in drug-related homicides came from the U.S.. Another important driver was the availability of human resources. Thousands of young males, usually from street gangs, were prone to join these criminal organizations in search of economic opportunity.

Trends of Violence

Examining the trends in homicides between 2008 and 2013, there are four periods of increasing violence that support the argument that competition among DTOs was a large driver of the spike in homicides.

Figure 1 shows four periods of increased violence between: (1) May - June 2008; (2) October - November 2008; (3) May - October 2010; and (4) May 2012. Each of the spikes in violence can be associated with divisions within DTOs, or with a high-target capture by the government. The May 2008 spike in violence can be attributed to the break off of the Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO), the former armed wing of the Sinaloa Cartel.¹⁰

Much of the violence between 2008 and 2010 followed the same logic of competition. For example, the violence in Ciudad Juárez resulted from the Sinaloa Cartel's efforts to expand into the border territory historically controlled by the Juárez Cartel.

⁶ Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2006.

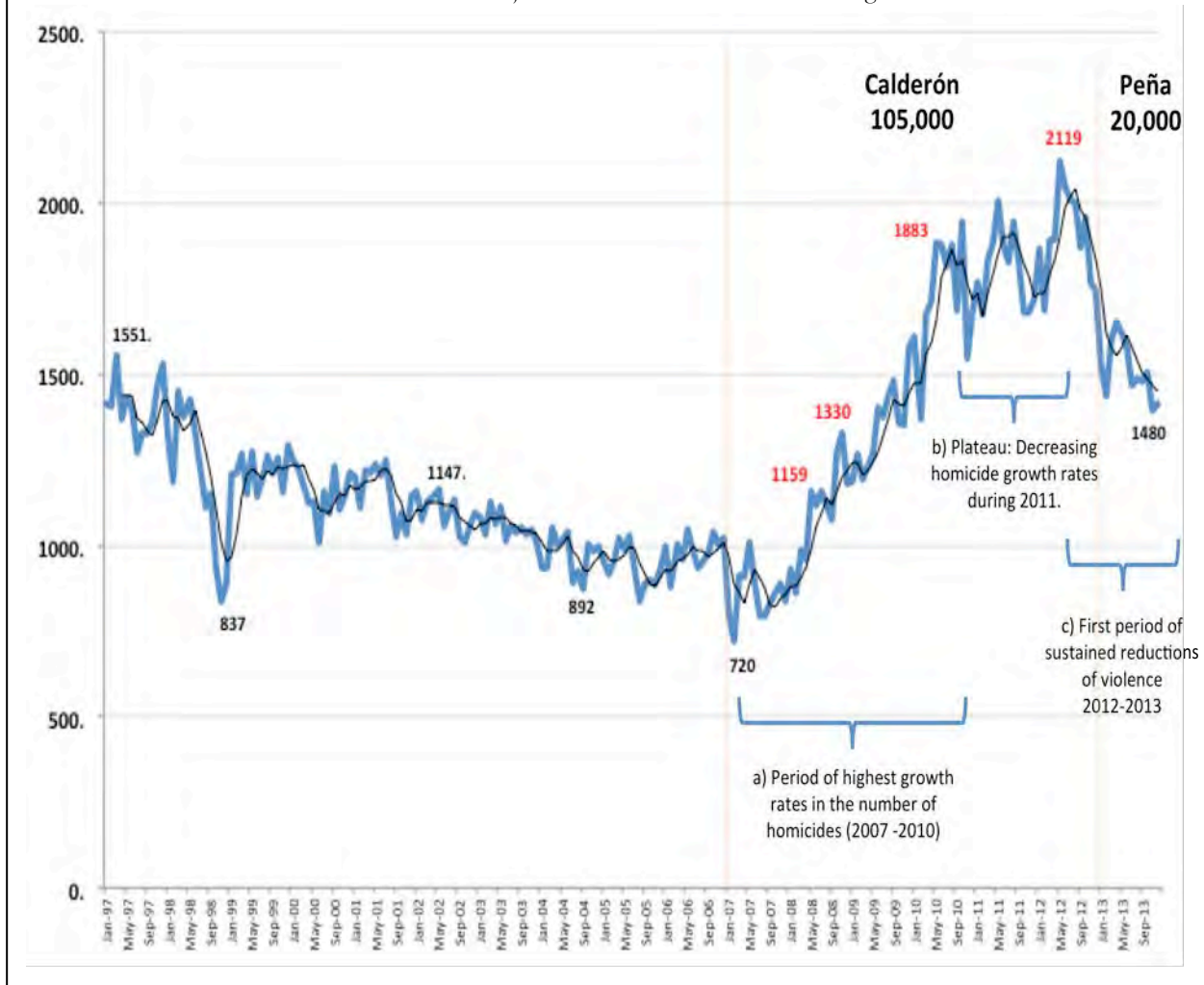
⁷ Salazar & Olson, p. 2.

⁸ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Lessons from Colombia for Mexico? Caveat Emptor," *Brookings Institute*, February 24, 2012.

⁹ Zepeda, Seguridad y Justicia Penal en los estados: 25 indicadores de debilidad institucional", México Evalúa, 2012.

¹⁰ Stephen Dudley, "Chapo' Guzman Capture Provides Glimpse of Mexico's Past, Future," *InSight Crime*, February 25, 2014.

Figure 1. Intentional Homicides in Mexico by month (1997-2013).
Source: Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Publica



Later on, from May to October 2010, the Zetas—who were working as the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel— became independent and declared a war against their former bosses to control the territories of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. This event, and the continuing war over Ciudad Juárez between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels, can be matched with the spike of violence during the second half of 2010. The final spike of violence in mid-2012 may be related to an internal division within Los Zetas between the organization’s major leaders: Heriberto Lazcano (aka “Lazca”) and Miguel Angel Treviño Morales (aka “Z40”).

As Figure 1 shows, the policies under the Calderón administration exacerbated the violence and competition among the DTOs; during his administration the homicide toll reached more than 100,000 homicides, which is fifteen times higher than the number of US casualties in the

Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and almost double the casualties in combat during the Vietnam War.¹¹

Calderón’s policy against crime was based on militarizing the state’s efforts against DTOs, in order to recover territory controlled by the DTOS. The main strategy consisted of capturing the DTOs’ leadership.¹² When the military launched its first operation against DTOs in Michoacán, Calderón, dressed in full military uniform, announced that he was waging “a war that together we will win against delinquency.”¹³ In the speech he warned that the operations would cost the country resources and lives. Unfortunately, Calderón was largely correct in that claim: the war against DTOs took the lives of

¹¹ www.icasualties.org

¹² Inauguration Speech at the Hispanic Mexican Forum for Investment and Entrepreneurial Cooperation, December 6, 2006.

¹³ Speech at the launch of the *Operativo Conjunto Michoacán*, December 2006.

thousands of Mexicans but did nothing to resolve the problem of criminal violence.

In contrast to President Calderón, current President Enrique Peña Nieto ran on a platform of crime prevention and violence reduction. The Peña Nieto administration is in the process of designing and implementing its flagship national program for this purpose. The GoM is moving from an approach of war against criminality to a citizen-security approach, where homicide reduction and preventing violent crimes are the top priorities.

Figure 1 also shows that Mexico experienced a decrease in homicides over the last year (May 2012–October 2013). The cities and municipalities that experienced some of the worst violence have similarly seen a decline in homicides (Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Acapulco, Veracruz). Although homicide rates are still higher than in 2007, at the national level drug-related violence has stopped growing for the first time since 2006.

Even with a recent decrease of 8% in homicides (from 16,500 between December 2011 and August 2012, to roughly 15,200 over the same period in 2012), citizen perception of insecurity remains unchanged.¹⁴ For this reason, it is necessary for the Peña Nieto administration to understand the causes of the recent decline in violence.

Third, before the Salvárcar massacre in Ciudad Juárez in January 2010, the security strategy lacked mechanisms for citizen participation and for civil society to demand adjustments. The consequence was a government that insisted that most of the killings were gang-affiliated and that remained insensitive to the reality of the daily trauma experienced by communities exposed to violence.

IV. LESSONS IN VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Six policy-related factors have contributed to the reduction in homicides since May 2012:¹⁵

¹⁴ Encuesta Nacional de de Victimización y Percepción de la Seguridad Pública, INEGI (2012–2013)

¹⁵ A recent study published by Brookings Institution arrives to similar conclusions. See Eduardo Guerrero, “Security Policy and the Crisis of Violence in Mexico,” in Diana Villiers Negroponte (Ed.), *The End of Nostalgia: Mexico Confronts the Challenges of Global Competition*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013; Alejandro Hope, “Peace Now? Mexican Security Policy after

1. A change from a non-selective enforcement approach to a selective enforcement approach, in which the most violent organizations are targeted.

2. A long-term commitment from Mexico’s Federal Government to invest public resources in improving the institutional capacity of law enforcement and judicial agencies.

3. An improvement in the coordination, information sharing, and intelligence capabilities of law enforcement agencies from the three levels of government.

4. The active involvement of civil society in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public safety policies.

5. The implementation of “municipal integrated programs,” which have jointly addressed the security, economic, and social drivers of violence.

6. The implementation of social programs, usually by NGOs at the local level, to disengage youth from street gangs and prevent them from joining criminal organizations.

However, two independent factors have also contributed to the reduction in violence. First is the emergence of national and regional winners from the DTOs’ war over corridors and territories – for instance, the dominance of the Sinaloa cartel over other major DTOs in northern border cities like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. Second is the reduction in the availability of new recruits for DTOs and *superpandillas*, due to the attrition rate of gunmen in disadvantaged areas of Mexico. This problem has been addressed by kidnapping and coercing migrants to join the DTOs’ militias.

Key policy-related factors that helped reduce violence

Selective enforcement

During the last year of the Calderón Administration, the Federal Government shifted from a strategy of blanket engagement of all the DTOs to a selective enforcement strategy focused almost exclusively on capturing or neutralizing

Felipe Calderón”, Latin American Group Working Paper, January 2013.

high-value targets within the Zetas, the most violent DTO at the time.

As a result, the GoM was able to capture Miguel Treviño (aka “Z40”), one of the main leaders of the Zetas. A few months later, members of the Navy killed Heriberto Lazcano in a confrontation. Since Lazcano was the last high-level leader within the Zetas, the temporary shock against the most violent DTO was harnessed by the Sinaloa cartel to expand over territories controlled by Zetas cells. After a temporary spike in violence (from January to May 2012, as Figure 2 shows), the battle between the Zetas and Sinaloa was temporarily won by the Zetas. Violence started to decrease as the Sinaloa, which is a more business-oriented cartel, established alliances with other DTOs to secure the drug traffic in their territories.¹⁶

Furthermore, this shift in strategy sends a dissuasive message to DTOs: extreme violence will not be tolerated, and thus any DTO acting as the Zetas did will be systematically targeted until it is eliminated. This selective enforcement approach might have provided an incentive for other DTOs to reduce their dependency on extreme violence as a method to solve their disputes.¹⁷

Investment in institutional capacity

In the last seven years, the GoM has doubled its investment in the modernization and professionalization of law enforcement institutions. These efforts have started to yield positive results: cities that have invested in better-prepared and equipped law enforcement agencies have been able to reduce the levels of violent crime.

¹⁶ Numerous journals have reported alliances between the Sinaloa and Tijuana cartel to secure the transit of drugs over the Tijuana-San Diego border, as an alternative to violence. Similarly, law enforcement specialists have pointed out that the recent rise of the Sinaloa cartel as the predominant force in the illegal drug market has helped to stabilize the levels of violence in the country. See Carrasco, “El Chapo, eventual aliado de Peña Nieto”, *Proceso*, December 2012, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=327663>, and the analysis of the Sinaloa cartel by Insight Crime in: <http://es.insightcrime.org/grupos-mexico/sinaloa-cartel>

¹⁷ Guerrero; Hope; Eric L. Olson, “Considering New Strategies for Confronting Organized Crime in Mexico”, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute, March 2012; Vanda Felbab-Brown “Peña Nieto’s Piñata: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexico’s New Security Policy against Organized Crime”, Brookings, February 2013; Rios and Aguilera, Keys to Reducing Violence in Mexico”, *ReVista*, Winter 2012.

The lessons from Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez—cities with epidemic bouts of violence in 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2011-2012, respectively—show the importance of weeding out corruption in the police force and of establishing policing methods that account for community input. Tijuana, for example, managed to significantly reduce the number of intentional homicides by purging corrupt officers from the municipal police and encouraging anonymous tips by members of the public. The community helped to identify hot spots for criminal activities and violence, and the police were able to focus their efforts in these areas.¹⁸

The objectives aimed at strengthening and professionalizing law enforcement institutions, as well as the reform of the criminal justice system, must be continued and enhanced during the current administration. President Peña Nieto should continue these efforts and take advantage of his negotiating power and political leadership (as a president from PRI, the same party of 21 out of 32 state governors in Mexico) to accelerate the implementation of police and criminal justice reforms.

Municipally integrated approaches

The implementation of *Todos Somos Juárez*, aimed to reduce homicides in Ciudad Juárez—the most violent site of drug-related violence in 2010—marked a shift from addressing violence with traditional security measures to adopting strategies that help alleviate the economic and social problems that trigger it.¹⁹

Todos Somos Juárez pledged \$270 million (U.S.) to cover some 160 programs that included not just security, but also economic assistance, educational programs, health, and social development.

Analysts point out that homicides in Juárez declined since their peak in 2010 due to the temporary peace that accompanies the ascension of one cartel.²⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown argues that it was a “narcopeace” that led to the decline in

¹⁸ Interviews with U.S. Consulate Staff Jason G. Voderstrasse and José María Noriega, Tijuana, Mexico, November, 2013.

¹⁹ In 2010, for example, Juárez accounted for 20% of the gang-related homicides in Mexico. Morse, Isaacson, & Meyer, “Tackling Urban Violence in Latin America,” p. 10.

²⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Focused Deterrence, selective targeting, drug trafficking and organized crime: Concepts and practicalities,” *International Drug Policy Consortium*, February 2013, p. 11.

homicides, and not the *Todos Somos Juárez* program—which has been criticized as being scattershot and incomplete. Despite these assessments, TSJ helped to deter youth from joining the local *superpandillas* (Los Artistas Asesinos and La Línea), which slowly led to the weakening of the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels in the region and the establishment of a “narcopeace”.

There is similar evidence that the Sinaloa Cartel’s dominance in certain regions stabilized violence as the Sinaloa were adept at forging local business partnerships.²¹ However, with the recent arrest of Joaquín (El Chapo) Guzmán Loera, the Sinaloa Cartel’s longtime leader, there is some fear that violence may break out as different individuals or factions battle for control of the Sinaloa Cartel’s drug business.

The Active Involvement of Civil Society

Experiences from Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana and Monterrey depict the importance of involving civil society in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies aimed to reduce and prevent violence.

In northern border cities with the U.S. such as Juárez and Tijuana, civil society involvement following sustained increases in homicide after 2008 focused on government accountability and directly supporting law enforcement efforts.

In Juárez, after the murder of 28 teenagers in January 2010, it was civil society’s public condemnation and outcry that helped spark the creation of *Todos Somos Juárez (TSJ)*. Following the creation of TSJ, small groups coalesced around specific social issues in “Mesas,” or working groups (eventually collectively called “The Mesa”). The nature of civil society involvement was entrepreneurial: most of the Mesa’s leadership came from businesspeople and the white-collar sector, who felt their interests were threatened by growing violence. The Mesa aided coordination among government forces and supported the resolution of kidnapping and extortion cases through the exchange of information.

²¹ Ginger Thompson and Randal Archibold, “El Chapo’s Arrest Unlikely to Break Mexican Cartel,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2014.

In Tijuana, business groups assisted with marketing a government tip line, which encouraged greater use of the line and ultimately assisted the resolution of criminal cases as the public gained trust in the system. It is difficult to judge the effectiveness of other civil society efforts in Tijuana because they have tended to affect homicide rates through other factors, such as fostering trust between law enforcement and the general public. Business groups in Tijuana served as intermediaries between government and law enforcement entities and the general public, conducting public trust: “...this increased connection between civil society and the armed forces provided Tijuana citizens a filter through which they could determine which security force structure was trustworthy.”²² This likely led to higher cooperation with law enforcement, which likely impacted homicide reduction efforts – but this has not been quantified.

A final northern example is Monterrey, a key industrial city. Until recently, Monterrey was considered safe, especially for wealthier Mexicans and expats from the United States. The Gulf Cartel and the Zetas began contesting Monterrey in 2009, leading to spikes in violence that peaked in 2011, when the Zetas killed over 50 people in a grenade-ignited gasoline fire at the Casino Royale.²³ This uptick in violence terrified wealthy Mexicans and expats and damaged Monterrey’s reputation as one of Mexico’s safest cities.²⁴

Citizens in Support of Human Rights formed to help law enforcement solve disappearance and kidnapping cases. In parallel, the Council of Civic Institutions of Nuevo Leon (CCINLAC) convened to hold the government accountable through regular review of government commitments. Monterrey presents the case in which civil society involvement has least obviously led to concrete results. Despite considerable efforts by CADHAC and CCINLAC to further government accountability, both groups have had trouble

²² Dudley, Steven and Sandra Rodríguez. *Civil Society, the Government and the Development of Citizen Security*. Working Paper Series on Civic Engagement and Public Security in Mexico, University of San Diego. August 2013.

²³ David A., “Drug Violence and State Responses in Mexico,” Department of Political Science, University of San Diego (2011): 4.

²⁴ David Luhnnow, “Expats Flee Drug War in Mexico’s No. 3 City,” *Wall Street Journal* (2010).

getting genuine traction with officials. CCINLAC, for example, published a set of indicators to evaluate government efforts around crime, human rights, and corruption. When the government realized measures were not limited to economic achievements, they backed out of the partnership.²⁵

These cases suggest a few factors that predict successful civil society intervention. First, trust and a good working relationship between civil society groups and local law enforcement are necessary for such efforts to succeed. The most direct civil society impact is traceable in Juárez, where the federal government's support of the Mesa increased credibility with law enforcement. The groups that prove most effective also tend to have a personal connection they are able to leverage to gain government support.

Successful civil society groups tend to have a clear sense of mission rather than a shifting strategy for different audiences. In Monterrey, CCINLAC had to navigate a politically untenable situation when it attempted to ally with the government while simultaneously aiming to hold it accountable; damaging the government alliance when accountability indicators were fully revealed. Each civil society group will be more successful by focusing on a single goal.

In addition, the absence of basic security may seriously hinder civil society's ability to impact local homicide rates. In Nuevo Laredo, another border town, civil society has faced barriers to reducing homicides because it is simply too dangerous for journalists, non-profits, or business groups to speak out.²⁶ For example, in May 2012 a major paper declared directly that it would no longer cover violence because of the risks involved. In line with this statement, a day after 23 people were killed, the paper made no mention of violence and instead highlighted presidential elections. Civil society may only be a useful lever once the very worst violence has stabilized.

²⁵ Miguel Treviño, former director of CCINLAC, in an interview with Steven Dudley and Sandra Rodriguez.

²⁶ Much of the escalating violence and dynamics between drug cartels in Nuevo Laredo is detailed in Freddy Mariñez Navarro and Leonardo Vivas' *Violence, Governance, and Economic Development at the US-Mexico Border: The Case of Nuevo Laredo and Its Lessons*.

In the southern state of Chiapas, civil society involvement looks quite different. Major DTOs cause significantly fewer homicides in Southern Mexico than in the northern cities, but the region faces other serious social challenges, particularly regarding migrants from bordering Guatemala.

In Chiapas, as a result, several civil society groups, many religious, focus on providing social services to vulnerable groups. Though rigorous research on civil society efforts against violence in Chiapas is limited, examples of organizations that provide economic and physical support are easy to find in the stories of migrants. In Tapachula, Casa del Migrante provides basic services to recent migrants, who arrive there at the advice of family members or contacts who have come before.²⁷

In addition to managing challenges with migrant groups, civil society involvement in supporting at-risk populations has the potential to keep smaller street gangs less vulnerable to influence by DTOs. Civil society programs that give more economic or political space to local gangs might also be able to dissuade them from allying with the DTOs.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations for the GoM and the U.S. government based on the lessons learned from the Calderón administration. The section starts by analyzing the GoM's current baseline policy for violence reduction, the National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime (NPSPVC), presented by the Peña Nieto administration in February 2013. The objective of this section is to frame the recommendations to the GoM within this program, and to maximize its impact on violence reduction. Similarly, the recommendations for CSO and the U.S. government will be framed in terms of the bilateral agreements, knowledge exchange, and cooperation that can help Mexico and other countries in Central America to curb violence.

What is the current baseline policy for violence reduction?

The NPSPVC is the flagship violence reduction program of the Peña Nieto administration. It will

²⁷ Cynthia Gorney, "Mexico's Other Border," National Geographic (2008).

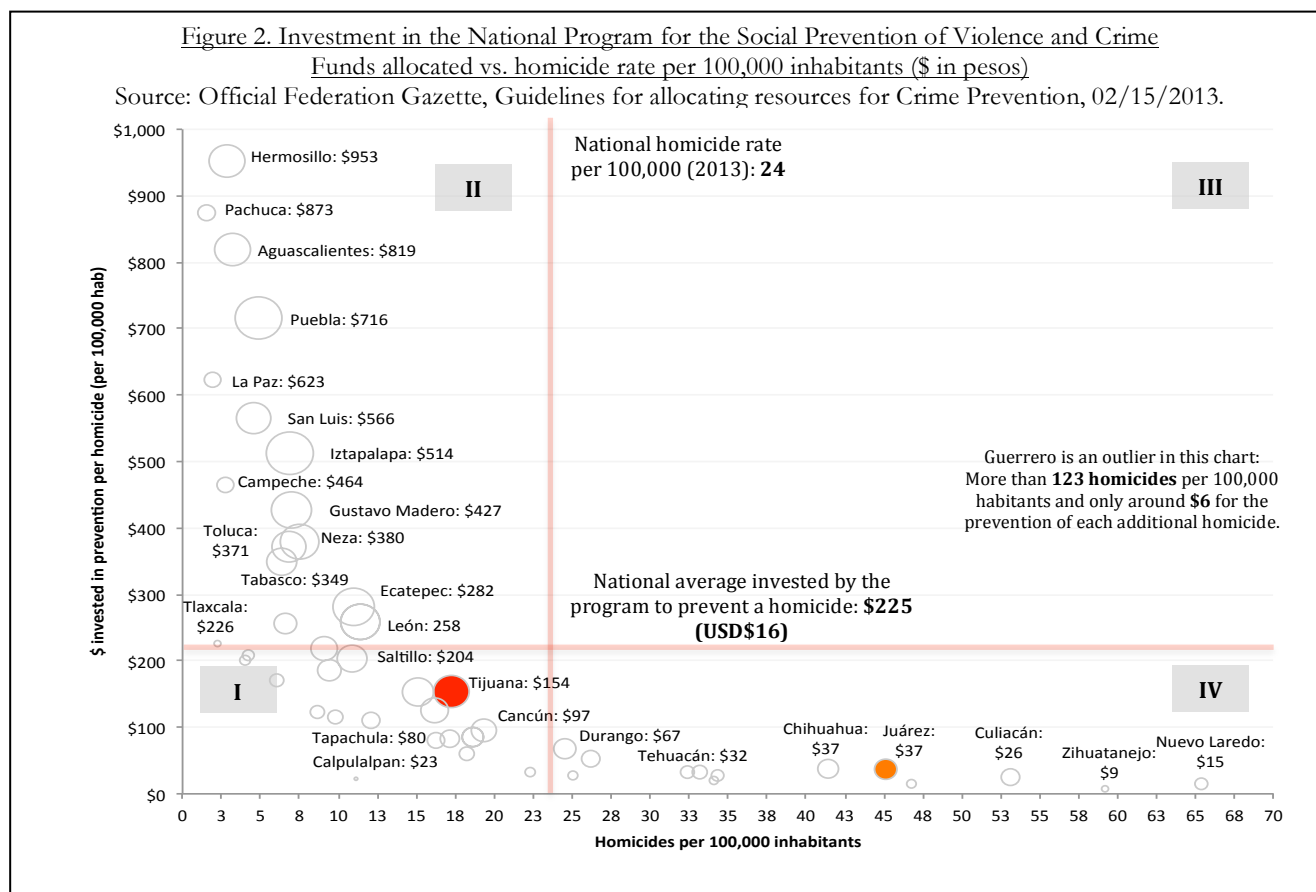
be implemented in 57 cities and 7 metropolitan areas (La Laguna, Guadalajara, Cuernavaca, Monterrey, Queretaro, Veracruz and Zacatecas), which have different rates of violence.

The program allocates \$166 million dollars (\$2,250 million pesos) to finance social infrastructure and community intervention projects to prevent violence and criminal involvement of at-risk youth.²⁸ However, the program's guidelines do not establish a clear objective in terms of violence reduction or concrete strategies to accomplish a decrease in violent crimes (such as extortions or kidnappings), or specific mechanisms for the federal and local governments to work along with the affected communities.

The NPSPVC's objective is to reverse the "naturalization of violence," or to "make people

understand violence is not natural," in municipalities across the country.²⁹ The NPSPVC does not officially acknowledge that its main target is homicide; however, the Mexican public will likely judge its success by its ability to reduce homicides, kidnappings, and extortions.

Figure 2 shows that the program could more efficiently make use of its limited resources to have the greatest impact on violence reduction. The cities that are currently hotspots for violence are not being prioritized. Figure 2 contrasts the number of intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the cities selected for the program with the amount of resources invested to prevent an additional homicide (in pesos), and shows that the NPSPVC is not designed to apply a differentiated approach, in which the most violent cities receive prioritized attention.



²⁸ "Acuerdo por el que se establecen los Lineamientos para el otorgamiento de Apoyos a las Entidades Federativas en el marco del Programa Nacional de Prevención del Delito", *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, February 15, 2013, http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5288039&fecha=15/02/2013

²⁹ Interview, Office of Social Prevention and Delinquency, October 28, 2013.

In conclusion, the NPSPVC does not allocate enough resources to the cities that need the most assistance. As Figure 2 shows, the program invests, on average, \$210 pesos to prevent an additional homicide. However cities with very high levels of violence (quadrant IV) such as Acapulco, Nuevo Laredo, Culiacan and Juárez receive on average \$25 pesos to prevent an additional homicide; while cities with very low levels of violence (quadrant II) such as Mérida, Hermosillo, Pachuca receive more than \$873 pesos.

The program could more efficiently allocate funds to maximize the reduction of violence in Mexico. Cities in quadrant IV should receive more resources to implement active community intervention projects to reduce ongoing violence, while cities in quadrant II should receive fewer resources to develop long-term prevention policies.

According to the Ministry of the Interior's Office for Social Prevention and Crime, a primary challenge will be to translate this federally designed program to the local level. The NPSPVC describes the role of the Federal Government as one of funding, data measurement, and provision of general guidelines, while the state governments and municipalities are responsible for building up a program that fits these guidelines. Consequently, creating the incentives for cooperation among the three levels of government in the implementation of this program is a necessary condition for its success.

Moreover, Mexican analysts have criticized the NPSPVC for its lack of structure and for providing local governments free reign to finance projects only tenuously related to violence reduction.³⁰ As such, there are concerns that the program may be too broad to be an effective strategy for homicide reduction in Mexico.

1. Recommendations for the GoM:

These recommendations aim to optimize the NPSPVC and maximize its impact for the reduction of homicides and other manifestations of violence.

The best practices to reduce homicides in Mexico should include a selective policy strategy that at least considers the following factors:

1. **Selective Enforcement:** Instead of indiscriminately engaging all the DTOs at the same time, the GoM should continue the Calderón Administration's eventual practice of targeting the most violent criminal organization.
2. **Regional Considerations:** Rather than enforce top-down policies, policies should be catered to prevent homicides by whichever violent actors are ascendant in a particular region.
3. **Targeted Incentives:** DTOs promote the use of extreme violence in their disputes because the costs are acceptable and there are no direct consequences for their business. However DTOs have alternatives, such as truces and negotiation among them. Without an external guarantee for their safety, *superpandillas* do not have an alternative for violence; it is "kill or be killed." Consequently, homicides related to DTOs should be addressed differently than violence among *superpandillas*. Vigilante groups pose yet another challenge. Ultimately, to incentivize them to disband, they must be integrated into Mexican security forces, and the government must effectively establish the rule of law in the regions where these groups wield power. Effective violence reduction programs deal with the whole range of incentives that induce people to use lethal violence as a method of conflict resolution.

Implementing the selective strategy

Figure 3 shows that violent drug-related homicides have been concentrated in five regions: 1) the cities of the Mexican northern border, which are major points of entry to the United States; 2) the "Golden Triangle", a predominantly rural poor area—formed by the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Durango—used by DTOs to grow marijuana and opium poppy; 3) the strategic ports on the Pacific coast, where loads of cocaine arrive from Colombia, such as Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán and other ports along Guerrero; 4) the drug-trafficking corridors along the coasts of the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico; and 5) major domestic markets for illicit drugs, such as Acapulco in Guerrero and Monterrey in Nuevo León.

³⁰ For a summary of the main critics see Alejandro Hope's opinion at <http://www.animalpolitico.com/blogueros-plata-o-plomo/2013/02/19/prevencion-al-aventon/#axzz2tQz8R0RA>

Within these regions, DTOs have different motivations to use and promote violence. Selective enforcement against the most violent DTO should take advantage of intelligence, and try to understand the main economic interests of the criminal organizations within each region. Consequently, instead of targeting only the DTO's leadership, law enforcement agencies should obstruct criminal operations in the area to link the costs associated with violence with direct costs to the DTO's business in each region.

For instance, this approach should be used to reduce drug-related homicides in the Michoacán coast region, which are currently largely perpetrated by the Caballeros Templarios DTO (Knights Templar) and their associated *superpandillas*. The GoM should develop enough intelligence about the ports controlled by the Knights Templar and how the distribution network of this DTO is organized. With this information, the GoM can selectively target its resources against the business assets, networks and infrastructure only of this DTO.

The targeted approach must be reinforced with a communications strategy, in which the GoM sends the message that this DTO has been targeted because of its extremely violent behavior and the same will happen to any other criminal organization that uses extreme violence.

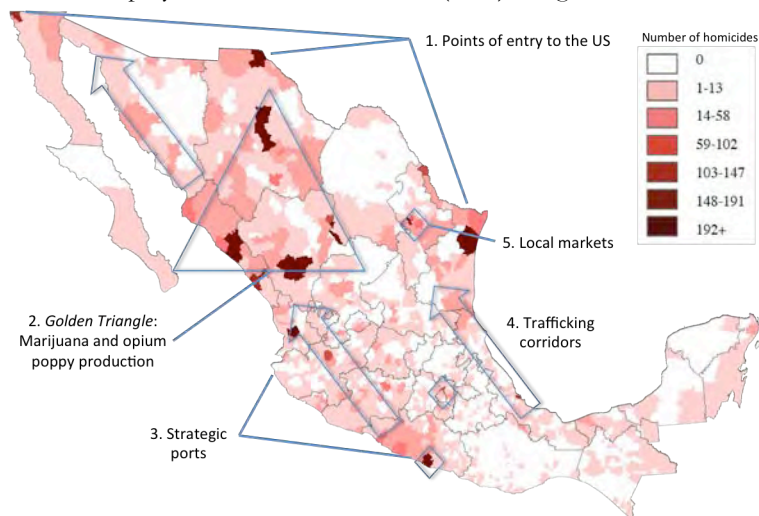
The objective of the selective enforcement strategy is twofold: 1) to enforce prohibition of production, trafficking, and distribution of illegal drugs; and more importantly, 2) to change the incentives of DTOs to use and promote homicides as a method of conflict resolution. With this dissuasive strategy the GoM would raise the costs for DTOs to kill.

Once the incentives that induce DTOs to use extreme violence are changed through targeted enforcement, DTOs might help to enforce the less-violent equilibrium among their contractors, the *superpandillas*. It would not be in the interest of DTOs to be associated with violent *superpandillas*, because this would alert the GoM, and ultimately hurt their business.

The GoM strategy to reduce violence between *superpandillas* must consider that these groups resort to violence as a method of survival.

Consequently, a policy for addressing violence among *superpandillas* should establish a mediation mechanism or institution that the actors in conflict can trust. In other settings, this mediator has been the Catholic Church, a powerful and trusted actor in Latin America and especially in Mexico. However, to avoid the problems of gang truces harboring criminal activities, as in El Salvador, the

Figure 3. Hot spots for violent homicides in 2011 by municipality
Source: Map by Molzhan, Rios and Shirk (2012), *Drug Violence in Mexico*



mediation should only be restricted to the church and civil society during the initial phase, then transferred to the GoM's law enforcement and justice institutions. The GoM must establish a public set of objectives for the mediation process: the disarmament of the *superpandillas* and mafias, an offer for protection to members who decide to opt out and incentives for their demobilization, such as reduced sentences and the possibility of entering into rehabilitation programs. The objective of this policy is to offer an alternative to *superpandillas* members other than to kill or be killed.

The GoM policies to dissuade street gangs from violence should be based on developing community intervention projects that provide job and education alternatives for at-risk youth in the cities ridden by crime. Currently, the GoM lacks a policy for the demobilization of youth from gangs. In fact, gangs are not systematically studied by law enforcement and intelligence agencies, which are mainly concentrated in DTOs and regional mafias.

Consequently, the NPSPVC should incorporate the lessons from Ciudad Juárez, as well as Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Medellín, Colombia, on how to demobilize youth from gangs and maintain peace in regions struck by severe drug-related violence.

In Ciudad Juárez, *Todos Somos Juárez* tweaked the strategy of direct confrontation against DTOs, with social and economic-oriented programs to alleviate the structural drivers of violence. In Rio, *favelas* were recovered from the control of drug lords through a model that combined a military strategy to oust the DTOs from urban slums, and the creation of Pacifying Police Units (*Unidade de Policia Pacificadora*), which forged close-knit relationships with the community to reduce the incidence of homicides. In Medellín, after the demise of the Medellín Cartel and as extreme violence decreased, social interventions invested in the most disadvantaged regions of the city, in order to demobilize youth from gangs and avoid the reemergence of strong criminal organizations.

The NPSPVC should prioritize the implementation of the selective enforcement strategy, the mediation with *superpandillas*, as well as social development programs to demobilize street gangs, in the municipalities within the five regions in Figure 3.

2. Recommendations for the U.S.

The implementation of selective enforcement and homicide reduction policies by the GoM will require three intensive inputs: 1) intelligence; 2) cooperation and coordination between local enforcement agencies—which have different levels of institutional capacity; and 3) the active participation of NGOs in the design, implementation and evaluation of citizen security policies and social development programs.

Consequently, the U.S. government role should be to help the GoM in developing the capacity required to implement the strategy described in this case. The U.S., with CSO leadership, could establish an agreement with the GoM to adapt the Mérida Initiative to help implement the selective enforcement and violence reduction strategy, as well as the recommendations described above.

Programs under pillars II, III and IV of the Mérida Initiative—Institutionalizing the Rule of Law, Building a 21st Century Border, and Building Strong and Resilient Communities—should be reviewed and assessed. The objective will be to align them to help the GoM develop 1) the necessary intelligence for the implementation of a selective enforcement strategy, 2) better capacity of local governments for coordination in citizen security issues, and 3) a critical mass of NGOs that can help design and implement local violence reduction programs.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED

The experiences of El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico provide insight into how and when different homicide reduction strategies should be implemented as CSO and its partners work to address destabilizing levels of gang violence in Central America. The following section provides an overview of lessons learned, including an assessment of the exportability of these different strategies.

Operation Ceasefire/Association for a More Just Society

The success of the Association for a more Just Society's Peace and Justice program in Nueva Suyapa illustrates that swift enforcement can be effective at curbing homicides and reducing crime. Though not identical to the Boston Ceasefire intervention, ASJ's Peace and Justice program is similar in that it aims to deter future criminal activity and to reinforce the idea that a safer Honduras is possible. It is important to note that in Nueva Suyapa, small, loosely defined, violent groups are responsible for a large segment of the violence. As ASJ is aware, other neighborhoods are not like Nueva Suyapa. Violent groups are likely to be much more highly organized and intricately structured. Thus, replicating ASJ's model in other locations may not lead to the reduction in violence seen in Nueva Suyapa.

If an ASJ model is adopted elsewhere, there are several complementary measures that should be employed. An ASJ type program can be more successful if it develops secure partnerships, particularly with units that have been vetted by the U.S. embassy or government elements. Increasing investigative and prosecutorial efficacy, as well as building a credible threat to gang members, will increase the likelihood of success for an ASJ type program. As part of this effort, governments replicating ASJ should work through established community organizations such as neighborhood *patronatos* and churches to deliver the Ceasefire message.

Alliance-Based Interventions

The experience in Honduras also provides lessons on the efficacy of municipal alliances that work to reform security and reduce crime. The Security

Tax, administered by the Citizen Security Commission in Puerto Cortes, was effective in reducing violence levels in a small city of 140,000 people. Cross-sector alliances within municipalities that lobby to create local citizen security taxes—which would be used to fund logistical and technological supports for policing and investigation at the local level—have proved to be an effective way to combat violence at the local level. As seen in Puerto Cortes, the success of such cross-sector municipal alliances requires deep local knowledge at the neighborhood level. Without this knowledge, such alliance-based interventions may prove ineffective at combating gang violence.

Truce-Based Interventions

The gang truce in El Salvador demonstrates that such a policy can succeed in dramatically reducing overall homicide figures. However, the El Salvador context is one wherein gangs are hierarchically structured and centralized, and recognized leaders direct the actions of lower level cliques. In states or cities where the gang structure is decentralized and each group operates only under the command of their local leader, a national-level truce may be an ineffective method to address gang-related homicides. This is particularly important to consider as gangs operating in places like Honduras lack this organizational and leadership structure.

The El Salvador experience also provides lessons on how a truce-type intervention should be implemented in order to increase its chances of success. Specifically, a truce does not negate the need for continued investment in public security, prevention, and rehabilitation. Nor does a truce address any of the underlying systemic social, economic, and political conditions that are the root cause of gang activity. Rather, it creates a space for public security investments and institutional reforms to take hold. Countries and cities considering a truce should simultaneously pursue a strategy for improving police investigative and intelligence capabilities, decreasing impunity, and providing alternative opportunities for at-risk youth and gang members. Otherwise, a truce becomes a wasted opportunity. Additionally, it is necessary to foster political and popular support and to establish realistic expectations. As seen in El Salvador, failure to gain popular support for the truce

undermined anti-gang efforts.

Municipalities Free of Violence/Local Level Engagement with Gangs

As seen in the case of El Salvador's Santa Tecla municipality, local level engagement with gangs—through gang participation in municipal meetings and economic enterprises—can be associated with a reduction in local homicide rates. However, it is important to note that Santa Tecla had invested in public security and economic development for approximately ten years prior to the March 2012 truce. Homicide rates were experiencing a downward trend before the announcement of a truce. As such, local level engagement with gangs may not be successful at reducing homicide rates if the municipality has not already invested in improving security or creating economic opportunities.

The experience of Santa Tecla also shows that local level engagement with gangs will have a higher chance of reducing homicide rates if (1) such engagement complements existing municipal strategy and (2) sufficient resources exist for executing these policies. Santa Tecla represents a municipality with a relatively high development index that has received substantial donor aid for its security and anti-gang programs. Other municipalities that publicly supported direct engagement with local gangs but lacked these resources did not experience the same success. Efforts to replicate engagement with gangs at the local level will increase their chances of success if such economic and institutional resources are present.

Heavy-Handed National Interventions

In Mexico, a hardline “mano dura” policy from 2007 – 2011 exacerbated homicide rates, but a successful modified strategy after 2011 demonstrates that an effective national response to reduce homicide is possible. During its last year, the Calderón administration shifted from a blanket “mano dura” approach to strategies targeting specific types of violent actors, causing homicide rates to decline. A nationally coordinated strategy makes sense in a context like Mexico's, where many different actors are responsible for local violence and where violent actors have a

cross-regional presence with multiple points of local impact.

The Mexican case demonstrates that certain factors make such a national homicide reduction strategy more likely to succeed. First, a national homicide reduction strategy will have a higher chance of success if it employs a comprehensive strategy that targets specific violent actors. In Mexico, very different approaches to address violence by Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs), “superpandillas,” and street gangs, as well as selective targeting of the most violent DTOs, yielded significant homicide reductions after 2011. Second, local examples like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez show the importance of national support to strengthen and professionalize local law enforcement institutions. Finally, national support and even leadership of municipal integrated approaches may neutralize the economic and social causes of local violence. Through *Todos Somos Juárez* (TSJ), the national government pledged considerable financial assistance and oversight for local economic, education, health and social development programs in Juárez. Though other factors affected the steady decline in homicides that occurred in Juárez after TSJ's implementation, TSJ played an important role deterring youth from joining local superpandillas, weakening regional cartels and helping to hold the “narcopeace.”

There are several ways in which CSO and the U.S. Government might support an effective national security strategy in Mexico and in other national contexts where regional DTOs and other violent actors are present. These include (1) support with data collection to better understand the causes and actors involved in particular regions; (2) adaptation of bilateral aid programs such as the Mérida Initiative to target selective enforcement; and (3) assistance with intelligence and training of local NGOs to implement integrated municipal approaches more effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the guidance of Charles Call from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at the U.S. Department of State. We benefited invaluable from several other members of that team, especially Ambassador Rick Barton; Tim Roorda; David Paine; Gail Morgado; Cindy Huang; Daniel Friedman; and Daniel Fennell. We are grateful for the wisdom of Clare Ribando Seelke, Specialist in Latin American Affairs at the Congressional Research Service.

We learned a tremendous amount from David Kennedy and Amy Crawford of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and many local U.S. teams kindly shared insights into their work. In Chicago, we thank Chris Mallette and Thomas Hurley. In Philadelphia, we learned much from Bryan Lentz, William Inden, and Caroline Keating McGlynn.

Each of our teams must thank Professor Hillard Pouncy. Without his encouragement and guidance, this work would not have been possible.

Finally, we are deeply indebted to those who helped us at the country level.

El Salvador

The El Salvador research team would like to thank several individuals for sharing their knowledge and providing guidance, without which the final product would have been impossible. First and foremost, we were fortunate to work with Andrea Onate, Ph. D. candidate in Modern Latin American History at Princeton University, who offered indispensable intellectual advice from start to finish. Her knowledge of Salvadoran history and current politics made our research possible and her editing prowess helped us shape the final product. In addition we would like to thank Ambassador Ruben Zamora, Deputy Chief of Mission Oscar Chavez, and Luis Aparicio and Claudia Beltran of the Salvadoran embassy in Washington, DC for their time and counsel. We also extend special gratitude to Angel Cartagena, Director of International Cooperation in San Martin, El Salvador for his assistance and counsel. There are many others who deserve our thanks for making this research possible and we are

grateful to all of those who spared time and energy to discuss such a critical topic with us.

Honduras

Chief among the friends who made the Honduras team's research possible is the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) and the people there who are making Honduras safer. We thank Dr. Kurt ver Beek and Abram Huyser Honig for their help and time. We also must thank Trent Strum. His dedication to arranging meetings and preparing for our research visit was invaluable. We are in David Kennedy's debt for connecting us with ASJ. We must also thank Wangyal Shawa and Bill Guthe for their help while we made our GIS maps. This difficult process was made easier with help from these GIS experts.

Finally, we thank all those who agreed to speak with us during our research trip to Tegucigalpa, including Tony Brand from USAID, Arabeska Sanchez from UNAH, Felix Colindres from the Honduran National Police, and Luis Saul Buesos Mazariegos.

Mexico

Our team received generous guidance and logistical support from many in Mexico City. In particular, we are grateful to Monte Alejandro Rubido, Secretary of the National Security Council and his team: Luis Esteban Islas, Francisco Gatica, Ricardo Marquez, Elías Rafful, and Eunice Rendón. Special thanks to Miguel Rios for his invaluable help setting up key meetings in Chiapas. From the National Security Commission, we are indebted to Jessica Duque, Mario Arroyo Juárez, Bernardo Almaraz, José Antonio Velázquez and Krhisto González. Finally, thank you to Edgar Ramirez, Department of Homeland Security Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City.

In Chiapas it was a special honor to meet with Raciél López Salazar, Attorney General, and his energetic team. In Tapachula, our appreciation goes to Carlos Rosales Amaya and Moises Grajales of the Public Security Secretary and to José Antonio Sánchez, Director of the Municipal Planning Institute. Finally, we are grateful to the many others who took the time to speak with us, and whose support and wisdom made this report possible.

