



# CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA'S NORTHERN TRIANGLE

How U.S. Policy Responses are Helping,  
Hurting, and Can be Improved

Authors:

Cristina Eguizábal, Matthew C. Ingram,  
Karise M. Curtis, Aaron Korthuis,  
Eric L. Olson, Nicholas Phillips

Editor:

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*Latin American Program*



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*Eric L. Olson*  
December 2014



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## CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Executive Summary</b>   | <b>1</b>   |
| <i>Eric L. Olson with Katheryn Moffat</i>  |            |
| <b>PART ONE: EVALUATING CARSI</b>  | <b>18</b>  |
| <b>The Central America Regional Security Initiative—<br/>Losing the Good Fight: When Good Intentions<br/>are Not Enough</b>          | <b>19</b>  |
| <i>Eric L. Olson with Christine Zaino</i>  |            |
| <b>The Central America Security Initiative:<br/>A Key Piece of U.S. Security Assistance to<br/>El Salvador, But Not the Only One</b> | <b>55</b>  |
| <i>Cristina Eguizábal</i>  |            |
| <b>CARSI in Guatemala: Progress, Failure,<br/>and Uncertainty</b>  | <b>101</b> |
| <i>Nicholas Phillips</i>   |            |
| <b>CARSI in Honduras:<br/>Isolated Successes and Limited Impact</b>  | <b>165</b> |
| <i>Aaron Korthuis</i>  |            |
| <b>PART TWO: NEW DIRECTIONS<br/>IN POLICY</b>  | <b>244</b> |
| <b>Violence in Central America: A Spatial View<br/>of Homicide in the Region, Northern Triangle,<br/>and El Salvador</b>             | <b>245</b> |
| <i>Matthew C. Ingram and Karise M. Curtis</i>  |            |
| <b>Policy Options for Future United States Security<br/>Assistance in Central America</b>  | <b>285</b> |
| <i>Eric L. Olson</i>   |            |
| <b>About the Authors</b>   | <b>295</b> |



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ERIC L. OLSON WITH KATHRYN MOFFAT\*

Throughout the spring and summer of 2014, a wave of unaccompanied minors and families from Central America began arriving at the U.S.-Mexican border in record numbers. During June and July over 10,000 a month were arriving. The unexpected influx triggered a national debate about immigration and border policy, as well as an examination of the factors compelling thousands of children to undertake such a treacherous journey. Approximately two-thirds of these children are from Central America's Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. According to interviews with the children their motives for migrating ranged from fleeing some of the world's highest homicide rates, rampant extortion, communities controlled by youth gangs, domestic violence, impunity for most crimes, as well as economic despair and lack of opportunity. Many hoped to reunite with family members, especially parents, who are already in the United States.

The wave of migrants has underscored chronic problems in the region that stem back decades. It is often assumed that international drug trafficking explains the surge in violence since 2009, but other important factors are also at play. Drug trafficking is certainly a factor, especially in areas where criminal control of territory and trafficking routes is contested, but drugs do not explain the entirety of the complex phenomenon. Other factors have also contributed.

While there are important differences among the three countries, there are also common factors behind the violence. Strong gang presence in communities often results in competition for territorial and economic control through extortion, kidnapping and the retail sale of illegal drugs. Threats of violence and sexual assault are often tools of neighborhood

*\*Kathryn Moffat, M.A., served as a Wilson Center Latin American Program research intern throughout the CARSI project and made enormous contributions to research, editing, and keeping this project on track. She wrote the first draft of this executive summary and contributed to its final version.*

control, and gang rivalries and revenge killings are commonplace. Elevated rates of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and weak family and household structures also contribute as children are forced to fend for themselves and often chose (or are coerced into) the relative “safety” of the gang or criminal group. Likewise, important external factors such as a weak capacity among law enforcement institutions, elevated levels of corruption, and penetration of the state by criminal groups means impunity for crime is extraordinarily high (95 percent or more), and disincentives to criminal activity are almost non-existent. Public confidence in law enforcement is low and crime often goes unreported.

U.S. policy and practice are also a major contributing factor to the violence. U.S. consumption of illegal drug remains among the highest in the world, and U.S. and Mexican efforts to interdict drug trafficking in the Caribbean and Mexico has contributed to the trade’s relocation to Central America. Furthermore, the policy of deporting large numbers of young Central Americans in the 1990s and 2000s, many of them already gang members in the United States, helped transfer the problem of violent street gangs from the United States to Central America’s northern triangle. El Salvador now has the largest number of gang members in Central America followed close behind by Honduras and Guatemala. Finally, the trafficking of firearms, especially from the United States, has also contributed to the lethality and morbidity of crime. Efforts to slow firearms trafficking from the United States have encountered many domestic and political barriers and continue largely unchecked.

Over the past year, the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Latin American Program has undertaken an extensive review of the principal United States security assistance program for the region—the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). This review has focused on the major security challenges in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and how CARSI seeks to address these. This publication includes country reports on each country including a review of the current in-country security context, as well as assessing CARSI’s effectiveness for addressing these challenges. The report also includes a chapter providing an in-depth analysis of the geographic distribution of homicides and an examination of how such an analysis can help policy makers design more effective targeted strategies to lower violence. A final chapter outlining policy options for the future completes the report.

## The United States Response

The humanitarian crisis at the border has prompted an important discussion about U.S. policy in Central America and whether more assistance is needed; and, if so, for what. In July, 2014, President Obama sent to Congress a requested for \$295 million in aid for Central America as part of a \$3.7 billion emergency supplemental request intended to reinforce border security, expand detention facilities, and expedite immigration processing in an attempt to dissuade further migration.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the region’s three Presidents have called for a substantial aid package focused on energy and transportation assistance for Central America.<sup>2</sup>

CARSI began with the Bush Administration’s request in 2007 for \$500 million for Mexico and \$50 million for Central America, as the initial phase of a three-year, \$1.4 billion security packaged known as the Mérida Initiative.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, Congress provided \$400 million for Mexico and \$65 million for Central America, authorizing funding to “be made available for assistance for seven Central America countries, as well as Haiti and the Dominican Republic.” The assistance was designated to help combat drug trafficking and related violence and organized crime, and for judicial reform, institution building, anti-corruption, rule of law activities, and maritime security.<sup>4</sup> The Mérida Initiative–Central America component was eventually spun off to become the Central America specific CARSI program in FY 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: Emergency Supplemental Request to Address the Increase in Child and Adult Migration from Central America in the Rio Grande Valley Areas of the Southwest Border,” Press Release, July 8, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/08/fact-sheet-emergency-supplemental-request-address-increase-child-and-adu>.

<sup>2</sup> “Factbox: Central America plan highlights energy, transport projects,” Reuters, September 24, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/24/us-usa-immigration-plan-factbox-idUSKCN0HJ2H320140924>.

<sup>3</sup> House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations for 2009, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., March 6, 2008, page 664.

<sup>4</sup> House of Representatives, *Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010: Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3288*, 111th Congress, 1st sess., December 8, 2009, page 343.

## PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

**CARSI does not represent a security strategy but rather a number of programmatic initiatives with laudable goals that operate largely independently of each other.** At times, United States supported programs contradict or undermine these goals.

**The problems of crime and violence in society are often conflated with the threats of international drug trafficking.** Counter-narcotics operations often take precedence when broader institutional reform goals, such as professionalizing the police or justice sector, are unsuccessful or do not enjoy the strong backing of the host government.

**By focusing too narrowly on counter-narcotics, the United States and host countries become bogged down in a traditional approach to drug law enforcement that prioritizes arrests over community based approaches to reducing crime and violence.**

**U.S.-supported specialized law enforcement units, known as vetted units, succeed in creating competent and elite units capable of carrying out sensitive operations but fail to contribute to broader law enforcement reform and professionalization.** Vetted units tend to become isolated within the broader institutional framework, can create resentment and unnecessary competition within their institution, and, because of their sensitive nature, have been accused of undertaking operations that contradict or undermine other law enforcement priorities.

**The long term sustainability of CARSI programs and, thus, its ability to reach its stated goals is in doubt where U.S. priorities are not shared by host countries.** Countries are generally enthusiastic recipients of traditional security assistance including equipment, specialized law enforcement training, and participation in coordinated law enforcement operations; but much less so when it comes to implementing broader institutional reforms, undertaking anti-corruption measures, expanding violence prevention programs, and making significant financial contributions of their own.

**As violence increases, countries tend to fall back on a more traditional anti-narcotics anti-gang strategy for dealing with crime and violence by relying heavily on increased security force presence and patrols in violent neighborhoods, and focusing primarily on arrests, especially leaders of criminal organizations.**

**Prisons and criminal justice systems are unable to process and adequately dispose of the elevated volume of arrests leading to high rates of impunity (around 95 percent).** Serious prison overcrowding ensues due to extensive pre-trial and long-term detention. Criminal justice systems throughout the Northern Triangle are overburdened and breaking down, allowing prisons to become an active part of the criminal enterprise by supplying new recruits for gangs and criminal networks, with criminal organizations operating out of the relative safety of prisons.

**CARSI programs have, with a few exceptions, lacked adequate evaluations. Current evaluations tend to focus on measuring inputs—how many police were trained, or how much cocaine was seized—and not on the impact and outcome of the project.**

**USAID's crime and violence prevention programs are one bright spot for U.S. efforts. USAID has carried out extensive impact evaluations that show a significant improvement in perceptions of crime and violence in neighborhoods where programs are implemented.** The evaluations were carried out over three years by the well-respected Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University and included base-line surveys of randomly selected high-violence communities, as well as extensive quantitative and qualitative field work over a three year period.

**A primary challenge for USAID, and U.S. policy overall, is how to expand programs where there is clear evidence of success but where host government commitment is not strong.** Additionally, current prevention programs are unnecessarily limited to a focus on at-risk youth (primary prevention) and need to include more direct work with criminally active youth (secondary prevention).



According to a U.S. Department of State “Fact Sheet” from August 2010, CARSI’s five goals are to:

1. Create safe streets for the citizens in the region
2. Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband within and between the nations of Central America
3. Support the development of strong, capable and accountable Central American governments
4. Re-establish effective state presence and security in communities at risk
5. Foster enhanced levels of security and rule of law coordination and cooperation between the nations of the region<sup>5</sup>

To accomplish these goals, the United States, particularly through the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), works with host countries to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement institutions, including police and prosecutors, to fight crime; to engage in community-level crime and violence prevention efforts focused on at-risk youth; and to support drug interdiction efforts.

### The CARSI Assessment

The authors of the overview chapter and the three country studies, found in Part One, conclude that despite several notable successes, many CARSI-funded programs suffer from significant weaknesses. Among the successes are the demonstrable impact USAID supported community-based crime and violence prevention programs have on perceptions of security in target high-crime neighborhoods; improved confidence in local police in target areas; and, most importantly, a decrease in reported crime. This is the only program area where a robust and comprehensive impact evaluation has been conducted with baselines established before program implementation. Nevertheless, there are questions about the level of host country commitment to broaden and deepen these programs using their own resources, so the sustainability of these initiatives is uncertain.

A central conclusion of this report is that CARSI does not reflect a

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Central America Regional Security Initiative,” n.d., <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/carsi/>.

comprehensive strategy to address the critical public security threats that have shaken the region, and thus its impact on the problems of crime and violence driving Central American migration to the United States is quite limited. Absent a strategic focus policy choices have, at times, contradicted each other and undermined CARSI’s laudable goals. Some agencies favor a more traditional counter-narcotics law-and-order focus, while others prioritize the reduction of community-based violence, and these distinct approaches periodically end up working at cross-purposes.

Other common criticisms from the three country studies include the absence of rigorous impact evaluations of CARSI funded programs, over-reliance on vetted units and training programs to reform law enforcement institutions and build their capacity to function more effectively. The exceptional impact evaluation work commissioned by USAID and noted above notwithstanding, CARSI programs do not undergo comprehensive impact evaluations as a general rule especially in the areas of institutional strengthening and drug interdiction. Drug seizures, arrests, and number of people trained continue to be used as indicators of success even though these offer little evidence of long term impact on violence or crime rates, or institutional capacity.

Likewise, CARSI-supported vetted units and special vetted task forces have had mixed results. Vetted units have two primary objectives: (1) to conduct professional investigations and carry-out sensitive operations; and (2) to strengthen the capacity of the rest of the police force by providing a positive example and repopulating the force with well trained personnel.<sup>6</sup> In general, vetted units and task forces have succeeded in the first part of their mission—specialized training and sensitive operations. However, both Honduran and Salvadoran police officers interviewed for this report have questioned whether the vetting procedures are effective, and that corruption continues to be a problem in the units, albeit less so.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the broader impact of vetted units on the institutional capacity of their broader law enforcement agency has never been evaluated or measured. In many cases members of vetted units are not cycled out so their ability to act as a “feeder system” to repopulate the agency with

<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted by Eric Olson with U.S. officials, March 28, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Interview by the author with a former PNC investigator who requested anonymity, San Salvador, May 13, 2014.

skilled and trustworthy personnel is not occurring. Furthermore, the fact that vetted units are in a position of privilege creates resentment and animosity with the broader agency.

Some highlights from individual chapters follow:

### **CARSI – El Salvador has achieved modest success, but lacks a coherent strategy and has room for improvement.**

In the report's first chapter, Cristina Eguizábal examines CARSI-funded programming in El Salvador. With a homicide rate of 41.2 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012 (already a steep decline from 70 the previous year), El Salvador nevertheless continued to have the fourth highest homicide rate in the world, after only Honduras, Venezuela, and Belize, while the criminal conviction rate was just five percent.<sup>8</sup>

The United States has provided law enforcement and institution building assistance to El Salvador for decades, with a history of limited success. According to Eguizábal, current U.S. assistance has continued to focus primarily on operational changes within the institutions of government rather than taking on the root causes of violence, including the fundamental issue of generalized corruption and impunity within the justice system. As a result, after decades of security assistance, El Salvador continues to have an elevated homicide rate, a criminal conviction rate of only five percent, and its prisons are the most overcrowded in the entire hemisphere suggesting a judicial system that is broken.

Another challenge resides in USAID's traditional reliance on U.S.-based, and usually for-profit, "implementing partners" to carry out its programs in-country. Critics have suggested this private-contractor model erects an unnecessary barrier between project designers and aid recipients, impeding the flow of money toward target communities, and the bottom-up flow of information from community to policymakers. To its credit, USAID has attempted to respond to these criticisms in several ways. Rather than contracting solely with U.S.-based for profit implementing companies, USAID has partnered with a group of five Salvadoran non-profit organizations that have formed SolucionES to become a rare local

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of State, "El Salvador Travel Warning," April 25, 2014, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/el-salvador-travel-warning.html>.

implementing partner for USAID projects. While this does not resolve many of the concerns about excessive and costly administrative criteria for managing U.S. assistance, it does bring local organizations into a more direct leadership and management role that can potentially strengthen civil society capacities in country and shorten the distance between donor and beneficiaries.

Eguizábal also examines two INL-supported efforts intended to address crime and violence in communities with elevated gang presence. One such program, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program is intended to prevent elementary and junior high school-aged children from becoming involved with gangs. Taught by police officers in schools, GREAT lessons attempt to give students skills that will help them solve problems without resorting to violence and criminal behavior. Eguizábal concludes that in a context where youth may be coerced into joining gangs, accepting the protection of gangs, GREAT's lessons alone are unlikely to help young people in a violent community avoid gangs affiliation. Nevertheless, the author believes the program has value because it can build confidence between various stakeholders in the community by fostering a partnership between teachers, police officers, and students that can contribute to local social cohesion in important ways.

Model police precincts and associated U.S.-sponsored training programs for midlevel police officers are another example of U.S. efforts to strengthen law enforcement capacity by modeling good practices. The programs appear to be well-run and participants say they are satisfied with their interactions with USAID and INL, but violence remains extremely high in these neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> El Salvador's homicide rate declined significantly in 2012 and 2013, but this is generally attributed to a gang truce that the U.S. strongly opposed and no particular U.S. supported intervention or strategies including the model precincts and law enforcement training programs have demonstrated significant impact on homicide and violence

<sup>9</sup> Interviews by the author with Javier Castro de León, Director of Legal Studies from FUSADES who has worked with the U.S. Embassy in the process of drafting and commenting the access to public information (USAID non CARSI) and asset forfeiture (INL CARSI) laws, San Salvador, May 14, 2014 and with Uwaldo Peña Information Officer at the Ministry of Public Works, who participates in the Public Transportation Security Interagency Task Force sponsored by INL, San Salvador, May 30, 2014.

rates beyond the limited areas of the target neighborhood.

Additionally, as a foreign assistance program, CARSI is unable to address two of the principle factors contributing to insecurity in El Salvador—U.S. migration policy (including the large scale deportation of criminal youth); and the widespread availability of trafficked firearms. Both migration and firearms are extremely contentious domestic political issues in the United States and not addressed by CARSI or the PFG—which can make U.S. security strategy seem ineffective in the eyes of Central American public opinion.

Ultimately, Eguizábal concludes that U.S. security assistance has made a difference, but is reluctant to label CARSI a success in El Salvador because of the country's intractable security problems. The transnational nature of the violence is a fundamental issue, and she argues that the two regional powers (the United States and Mexico) must share in the responsibility to solve the country's security challenges. Eguizábal also recognizes that Salvadoran society cannot expect others to solve their county's security problems and must also commit to solving these problems by making significant sacrifices such as increasing state revenues a passing a security tax and by adopting less regressive taxation policies; and eradicating corruption. Eguizábal observes that El Salvador's current tax rates, the lowest in Latin America, means that elites make a limited contribution to the well-being of society as a whole, and that elites are often willing to turn a blind eye to corruption where it reinforces their lack of accountability.

### **CARSI in Guatemala: Progress, Failure, and Uncertainty**

In Guatemala, Nicholas Phillips examines the case of the country which has received by far the most CARSI funds to date, and has experienced mixed results in attaining CARSI goals. Possibly Guatemala's greatest advance is the progress made in combatting impunity during the tenure of Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz from late 2010 to May 2014. Unfortunately, her removal from office in May leaves doubts about the government's political will for continued efforts to tackle organized crime. Furthermore, Guatemala's extremely low tax rate and legislators' apparent unwillingness to generate new revenue imperils future security investments and Phillips suggests conditioning future U.S. aid packages on the national legislature's commitment to increase tax revenue collection, specifically

for security purposes.

A major focus for CARSI in Guatemala has been to strengthen the country's counternarcotics efforts. Through CARSI the U.S. has supported both maritime and aerial interdiction efforts with limited success. One noteworthy effort is focused in the Western Highlands where poppy plantations are believed to be part of the heroine trade. While there is not agreement among experts on the size of the cultivated area, Guatemala has moved aggressively to eradicate the plants. Nevertheless, efforts have been met with strong local opposition by farmers who are very poor and find the illicit crop provides a viable economic alternative in an area of the country they feel has long been abandoned by the central government. The outcomes from the government's eradication efforts have not been measured and questions remain about its viability over time.

While counternarcotics efforts are important to CARSI in Guatemala, Phillips also notes U.S. support for other significant initiatives such as crime prevention programs and efforts to respond effectively to domestic and gender-based violence through the justice system. The United States has funded several widely-praised projects (including 24-hour courts and a national anti-gang unit known as PANDA), which have enjoyed substantial buy-in from Guatemalan leadership. In the case of the 24-hour courts in Guatemala City, the initial project significantly reduced the number of cases dismissed on technicalities leading to the formation of four new courts in other cities, with a fifth one currently being developed.

Another special 24-hour court was added in 2012 to hear cases of violence against women, including sexual violence, human trafficking, and exploitation. While the United States provided initial funding, Guatemala has assumed full responsibility for maintaining and sustaining the court. USAID also funded the construction of specialized court facilities designed to handle sensitive and potentially dangerous cases, as well as providing legal assistance for writing laws designed to protect victims' identities in these cases. These courts have higher conviction rates than the national rate, but safety remains a concern, with witnesses, judges, and victims continuing to face intimidation and the risk of violence. Yet despite these new legal protections, defense attorneys have the capacity to slow down the judicial process through legal maneuvering.

Whether or not it is the byproduct of CARSI assistance, Guatemala has enjoyed some success in reducing homicide rates over the last few

years, likely due to improvements in law enforcement capacities beginning around 2010.<sup>10</sup> The creation of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2007 also helped weaken organized crime by bringing international expertise and political support to bear on a series of politically sensitive cases. Even though critics contend CICIG has failed to coordinate with local prosecutors on sensitive cases, and thus failed to build local capacity, there is evidence the CICIG has played an essential role in supporting the country's Attorney General.<sup>11</sup>

### **CARSI in Honduras: Isolated Successes and Limited Impact**

In his chapter on Honduras, Aaron Korthuis highlights CARSI-related programming in a country with the highest homicide rate in the world according to the United Nations—roughly 90 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Despite numerous reform efforts, Honduras continues to struggle with weak law enforcement capacity and persistent corruption, making CARSI's stated goals particularly relevant to the country's current context. U.S. security assistance (including both CARSI and non-CARSI funding streams) focus primarily on problems of illegal drug trafficking and associated crimes including money laundering, a top concern for U.S. policy, as well as CARSI-funded vetted units, a major component of U.S. drug interdiction efforts. Anti-gang programs and community programs intended to prevent the growth of crime and violence are a significant additional element of the program.

Korthuis argues that to achieve lasting change, CARSI must seek avenues to transform law enforcement agencies weakened by corruption and criminal penetration through institutional reform and greater transparency. Instead, much of the focus in Honduras has been on building the capacity of individuals to transform the institutions from within. The Honduran Criminal Investigation School, sustained in part with CARSI funds, has produced a number of police officers with knowledge of community policing principles and techniques, but has resulted in little reform of the

police as a whole. Korthuis points out that CIS is based in the capital city of Tegucigalpa so access to its training programs is limited for personnel located around the country because distance and time away from regular duties required for participation is costly. Furthermore, there is anecdotal information and subjective assessments by supervisors of the impacts the school's trainees have on institutional capacity, but no systematic impact evaluation of how the trainings may or may not have influenced the behavior, culture, and practice of the police force.

Korthuis also takes a closer look at youth outreach centers established with the help of CARSI funds to provide alternatives to at-risk youth in high crime, high violence neighborhoods. The centers aim to offer a refuge to at-risk youth with services that include gyms, Internet access, and classes to improve employability. Depending on the community, up to 90 percent of those served may be from fragile families. According to Korthuis the outreach centers do engage thousands of children and teenagers, but are not necessarily reaching those at highest risk or those on the margins of gang activity. Questions are also raised about the sustainability of these centers once USAID and CARSI funding dries up. To date, the Government of Honduras has provided onetime assistance to the outreach centers but has not included these programs in the regular government budget. Some centers have tried to become self-sustaining by selling memberships to use the centers' gym, but so far these efforts have not generated sufficient funds to put the centers on solid financial footing.

Finally, Korthuis points to what may be the most serious concern about CARSI in Honduras, namely divergent views between both countries on how to respond to the issues of crime and violence. While the U.S. has mapped out a series of priorities for building the capacity the country's police and justice institutions, and supported efforts to prevent crime and violence, the Honduran government appears to be headed in a different direction. In part, this discrepancy may be the result of new Honduran government taking office since the original CARSI framework was established, but it leaves open some important questions. The current government of Honduras led by Juan Orlando Hernández has focused instead on building the capacity of the new military police (PMOP) and less so on building the capacities of the civilian police or the federal prosecutor's office that have been the central priorities of U.S. policy.

Such differences in priorities raise concerns about the ultimate success

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Mendoza, "Paz y Paz versus la Casta Guerrera," BLOG de Carlos Mendoza, April 29, 2014, <http://carlosantoniomendoza.blogspot.com/2014/04/paz-y-paz-versus-la-casta-guerrera.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Edgar Gutiérrez, political analyst, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 13, 2014.

of either strategy.

Part Two takes a closer look at some of the policy options that policy makers might consider to address the public security challenges faced by the Northern Triangle Countries. The first chapter uses innovative methodologies to examine the geographic distribution and spatial analysis of homicides to develop a much more specific understanding of crime and violence at the local level. With this analysis, Ingram and Curtis suggest ways to strategically target policy responses and particular strategies for building community resilience to help protect communities from threats posed by local criminal organizations. In a second chapter, Eric L. Olson identifies a series of assumptions U.S. policy makers should put aside when promoting security in the region, and a number of priority areas that can contribute to reducing violence, and explores policy options for the future.

### **Innovative Approaches and Policy Options for Addressing the Northern Triangles Crime and Violence Future Policies can Benefit from New Ways of Targeting Resources**

In the report's fifth chapter, "Violence in Central America: A Spatial View of Homicide in the Region, Northern Triangle, and El Salvador," Matthew C. Ingram and Karise M. Curtis use exploratory spatial analysis to identify patterns in the region's homicide data. Their examination of available data leads to three important conclusions.

First, the authors conclude that homicides are not distributed in a geographically random manner but tend to cluster in areas of high violence ("hot spots") and low violence ("cold spots"). By narrowing the analysis to the municipal level, the authors are able to identify clusters that would otherwise be missed by a national- or departmental-level analysis. Furthermore, different types of homicides tend to follow different clustering patterns so, in the case of El Salvador, for example, the authors isolate distinct clusters of elevated homicides among youth, women, and men. They also point out that homicide clusters often involve multiple municipalities that, at times, include communities in more than one department (state), or transcend national boundaries as in the case of the Honduran-Guatemalan border.

Second, Ingram and Curtis identify an important "neighborhood effect"

among these clusters where violence in one municipality influences violence in neighboring municipalities. For example, they report that in some clusters a 1 percent increase in homicide rates in one contiguous municipality is positively associated with a 1.26 percent increase in the homicide rate of a focal municipality.

Finally, spatial regression reveals some explanatory factors with potential policy implications. Ingram and Curtis suggest policy makers use spatial regression tools to better target assistance on clusters rather than on departments, where assistance may be directed to less violent areas, or on isolated communities that miss the relationship between neighborhoods and municipalities. Additionally, the authors find that population pressures, especially rapid urbanization and population growth, have a positive effect on homicide rates (that is, increases them), while education has a negative effect (decreases). In fact, the authors find that the "protective effects" of education are so strong that they are more significant than increasing the size of police presence in violent neighborhoods. Surprisingly, Ingram and Curtis reported that extreme poverty has a negative effect, which does not align with expectations based on the existing literature, and which suggests that more research is needed to confirm this finding.

In the final chapter, Eric L. Olson addresses possible new directions for policymakers to consider as they weigh further aid for Central America. Olson argues that the United States should adopt a new framework for security assistance in Central America that prioritizes reducing community level violence by focusing on the principal factors driving this violence. He suggests seven suggestions for improving the impact of U.S. security assistance for Central America

**Reduce violence, build community resilience.** United States efforts must focus on reducing the kinds of community level violence that is driving migration. This means pursuing community oriented programs in policing, crime and violence prevention, and promoting educational and economic opportunities that are attuned to the specific needs of the community. Focusing on local gangs and efforts to end extortions is central to this strategy.

**Tie new United States resources to progress in meeting specific mutually agreed upon targets for reducing violence.** The Northern Triangle's security challenges are enormous so additional resources are urgently needed. But existing and future new U.S. security assistance should

be repackaged within a negotiated strategic framework that sets specific targets and actions designed to reduce violence. These actions should include both targeted law enforcement efforts and prevention programs in the most violent communities. A robust and comprehensive impact evaluation process should be part of the endeavor with new resources made available when there is evidence of progress in meeting target outcomes. The agreed upon outcomes, actions taken, and results of impact evaluations should be made public to increase accountability and forge a partnership with civil society.

**Name a high-level coordinator or special envoy for U.S. security programs** to ensure that a strategy is fully articulated and, more importantly, successfully carried out. This person should have the capacity to alter course and redirect resources (in consultation with Congress) when impact evaluations suggest programs are not being successful. At times the U.S. lacks the partners in the region to accomplish its goals. Political and economic elite often lack the political will to carry out difficult reforms, so the high-level coordinator should be senior enough to press for reforms and should have the authority to hold back assistance when the political commitment to implement needed and previously agreed to program is not there.

**Increase and expand prevention programs in targeted high crime areas.** The evidence is mounting that crime and violence prevention programs can reduce crime and improve community resilience. These programs should be expanded geographically to include more neighborhoods, and the focus expanded beyond at-risk youth to include interventions with criminally active youth. Many experiences and studies in the United States have demonstrated that it is possible to work with gang members and move them toward less criminal, less violent activity.

**Fight corruption.** Building effective and professional police, prosecutors, and courts in the region is essential if Central American countries are to successfully resist crime on their own with minimal U.S. assistance. But the U.S. has been engaged in efforts to reform and strengthen these institutions in Central America for years, even decades. These efforts have failed for a variety of reasons including insufficient commitment from the economic and political elites in partner nations to tackle the problems of corruption and accountability. Instead, U.S. programs have focused too narrowly on training, equipment, and infrastructure, not on fighting

corruption.

The United States should prioritize anti-corruption efforts by strengthening mechanisms of transparency and accountability, supporting efforts to investigate and hold government officials accountable, and encourage not only vetting of law enforcement forces, but purging and prosecuting those engaged in corruption and criminal activities. Improved crime statistics and analysis, information on prison overcrowding and pre-trial detentions, prosecutions, and disposition of cases are essential to determining if security efforts are being successful. Failure to do so will undermine the public's already low confidence in state institutions and weaken other well-intentioned and well-designed programs.

**Empower Civil Society:** When corruption is elevated and governments are unwilling to make the tough decisions to hold people accountable, the U.S. should encourage civil society organizations to play that role and open spaces for policy debate with civil society. Civil society organizations can monitor government programs and report on progress. The U.S. should also do more to encourage and nurture independent investigative journalism. Freedoms of expression and access to information are the essential building blocks of democracy so must be a priority in the U.S. strategy.

**Make social investments and economic opportunity part of the security strategy.** With the exception of El Salvador, which participates in the Partnership for Growth (PFG) program, the CARSI program does not include a social investment and economic development component. There is ample evidence that investments in education (Ingram and Curtis) and job training can have a protective effect on communities and enable them to better resist crime. Additionally, rapid population growth – often the result of rural-urban migration – can destabilize communities and increase the chances of community level violence. The United States should consider increasing the kinds of targeted social investments and economic development programs to both rural and urban communities that will help stabilize those communities and offer new hope for to roughly 2 million Central American young people who don't work and don't study.

There are no easy solutions or shortcuts for dealing with these issues. It will require a long-term bipartisan commitment to the region, discipline to stay focused on the framework, and adequate, not unlimited, resources.



## PART ONE: EVALUATING CARSI

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# THE CENTRAL AMERICA REGIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

## LOSING THE GOOD FIGHT: WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

ERIC L. OLSON WITH CHRISTINE ZAINO\*

The news and images of thousands of unaccompanied Central American minors arriving at the United States border with Mexico over the summer of 2014 was shocking and heart-rending. Children as young as five and many thousands barely in their teens were turning themselves in to U.S. border officials believing they would be allowed into the country to be reunited with family. While much of the political debate in Washington about this humanitarian crisis centered on perceived border and immigration policy failures by the Obama Administration, the reality is that most children were fleeing a region experiencing dramatic increases in violence and low government capacity to guarantee their safety and provide basic services. Widespread rural poverty, failing schools, weak health care systems, and poor job growth made the situation even more desperate.

Ironically, addressing the problems of poverty and insecurity in Central America have been central to U.S. policy for decades and especially important since 2008 when the Bush Administration first put forward a security assistance package for Mexico that included a small portion for Central America. Eventually the Obama Administration adopted and expanded this approach becoming what is known today as the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).

As the Administration and Congress debate the best ways to respond to the current humanitarian crisis at the border and address the longer term drivers of migration, the question is whether CARSI is an adequate

\* Christine Zaino, Program Associate for the Wilson Center Latin American Program, contributed to researching and editing this chapter.

framework for dealing with the problems plaguing Central America, and especially the Northern Triangle Countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The purpose of this chapter, and the case studies in this volume, is to examine both the security context in these three countries, which are also the countries of origin for the vast majority of children fleeing to the United States, as well as the elements of the U.S. response to these challenges to determine whether these are sufficient, should be expanded, or, in some cases, discarded altogether.

## The Context

Whether by geographic accident or misfortune; the by-product of decades of civil conflict; ineffective governments; weakened security forces; grinding poverty and growing inequality; or an aggressive U.S. deportation policy, the fact is that Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are experiencing not only serious violence and security threats but also major economic and governance challenges that are destabilizing their democracies and causing major regional dislocation. The flood of migrants fleeing the region starting in 2011 has placed enormous pressure on both Mexican and U.S. migration and border control authorities and has taxed the budgets of cities, states, and federal agencies charged with responding to the influx.

Central America as a region—and its Northern Triangle countries in particular—have suffered from extreme violence and shifting drug trafficking patterns between South America and the United States for nearly a decade. Several complex and often inter-related problems have coincided to make the countries of the Northern Triangle among the most violent in the world, with one city (San Pedro Sula, Honduras) recording the world’s highest homicide rate for a non-war setting in 2013.

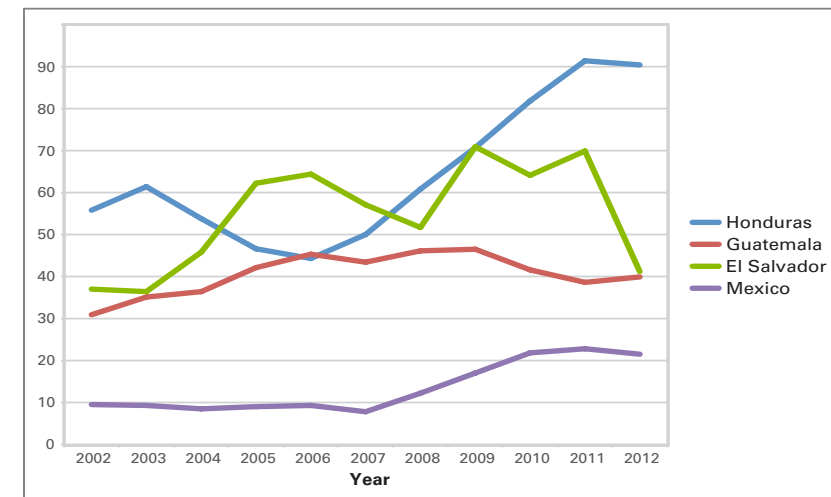
According to the recent “UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2013,”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The largest global study and most common reference point for homicide data is conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The most recent report (published in 2014), “Global Study on Homicides 2013,” is cited here and can be found at <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/>. The UNODC homicide data is based on statistics from various sources, including criminal justice systems, public health systems, and international organizations. The UNODC attempts to select data that conforms to the definition of intentional homicide which it uses for statistical purposes: “unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person.” (UNODC, “Methodological Appendix,” 2014, p.109, <http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/Methodology.pdf>) It should be noted that the most recent data from UNODC is only provided through 2012 or the latest year possible.

Central America has experienced a marked increase in homicides since 2007; much of it attributed to skyrocketing homicide rates in the Northern Triangle. Honduras leads the way with a rate of 90.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants followed by El Salvador at 41.2 per 100,000, and Guatemala at a rate of 39.9 per 100,000. By way of comparison, Mexico’s homicide rate in 2012 was 21.5 per 100,000. (See Figure 1)

Furthermore, Honduras has seen a steady increase in its homicide rate since 2006, experiencing a small decrease between 2011 and 2012 when it dropped from 91.4 to 90.4 per 100,000. Guatemala, after seeing a decrease in rates from 2009–2011, saw a slight increase in its homicide rate in 2012. El Salvador has seen the most progress within the Northern Triangle, as its homicide rate has decreased about 40 percent following a gang truce announced in March 2012, although the rate has begun to creep back up as the truce has unraveled.

**Figure 1:** Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population in Mexico and the Northern Triangle (2002-2012)



Source: Graph created using data from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Intentional Homicide Count and Rate per 100,000 population, by country/territory (2000–2012),” <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html>.

Unfortunately, reliable homicide data is notoriously difficult to obtain. Even the UN data has been called into question, sometimes by the very states that provide the raw data used in the UN’s report. Methodologies for

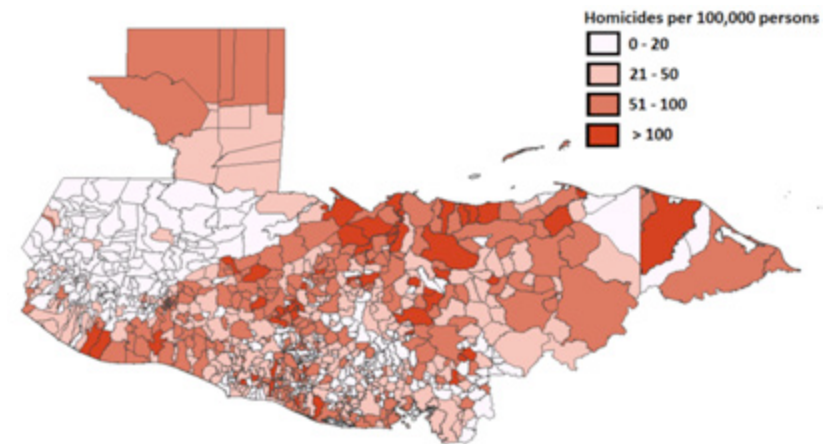


gathering the data vary between countries, making country-to-country comparisons difficult. At times countries change how they report data from year-to-year. This is the case in Guatemala, where the government began using homicide data reported by the national forensics lab, INACIF, instead of the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), which they had used previously. In Honduras, the government decided to by-pass the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) Violence Observatory, which had served as an aggregator of official homicide data until recently. The government has now created its own string of some 40 local observatories to report official data. Consistency between the data developed by the UNAH's Observatory and the more official government network has not been determined.

More important than the aggregate number of homicides is their intensity level by local jurisdiction. Figure 2 below is a map of homicides in the Northern Triangle countries reflecting homicide intensity by municipality. We have preferred to use this map for this study because it was created by a group of researchers led by Carlos Mendoza of Guatemala, a former Wilson Center Fellow and currently a security analyst for Central American Business Intelligence. The data and methodology behind the map tends to be more consistent.<sup>2</sup> By highlighting levels of intensity, researchers are able to isolate specific factors in that jurisdiction that are contributing to violence, propose policy approaches to deal with the violence. See chapter in this volume by Matt Ingram and Karise Curtis on the value of special analysis of homicide rates.

<sup>2</sup> Data for this map is drawn from the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), Guatemala; the Policía Nacional, Honduras; and Fiscalía General de la Republica (FGR) and Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), El Salvador.

**Figure 2:** Homicide Rates in Northern Triangle Countries (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), 2013



Source: Created by Carlos Mendoza and team, with data from Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), Guatemala; Policía Nacional, Honduras; and Fiscalía General de la Republica (FGR) and Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), El Salvador.

### The Problem: What is Driving the Violence in the Northern Triangle?

If successful treatment presumes an accurate diagnosis, then a successful U.S. policy depends on an accurate understanding of the dynamics behind the region's current security challenges. The answers to these questions are critical to formulating appropriate policy responses. Is violence the principal challenge to be addressed in Central America or simply a symptom of deeper problems? Is that deeper problem one of drug trafficking that has rediscovered the region, pushed there by Mexico's crack down on criminal networks? Are youth gangs to blame? Have weak and corrupt institutions of government penetrated by organized crime rendered the state incapable of a coherent response becoming, instead, an incubator of crime? Do long-standing issues of poverty and inequality at the heart of internal armed conflicts in the 70s, 80s, and 90s—never fully addressed in subsequent peace processes—linger on today resulting in less ideological and more criminal conflicts? In all likelihood, there an element of truth in

each of these hypotheses that together form a perfect storm exploited by criminal actors to mold the state and democratic institutions to its purposes?

Both the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations have highlighted the need to address the region’s growing security challenges, both for its destructive impact in the region and for its potential impact on the United States. When a U.S. security assistance initiative was first proposed to Congress in 2007, then-Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, Ambassador Thomas A. Shannon, noted that the urgency of the region’s security situation justified the Bush Administration’s emergency spending request to Congress noting that, “...we have seen a rapid escalation in the activity of organized crime and narcotics traffickers in the region that is evidenced...by spiraling violence and the movement of additional drugs and resources through Central America...”<sup>3</sup>

As Ambassador Shannon’s statement suggests, the problems of drug trafficking and violence are often linked as a rationale for the policy. According to U.S. government reports, Central America has steadily become an important link in the drug trafficking routes from the Andes to the United States. The Department of State’s 2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report states, “The United States estimated that more than 80 percent of the primary flow of the cocaine trafficked to the United States first transited through the Central American corridor in 2012. The United States also estimated that as much as 87 percent of all cocaine smuggling flights departing South America first land in Honduras.”<sup>4</sup>

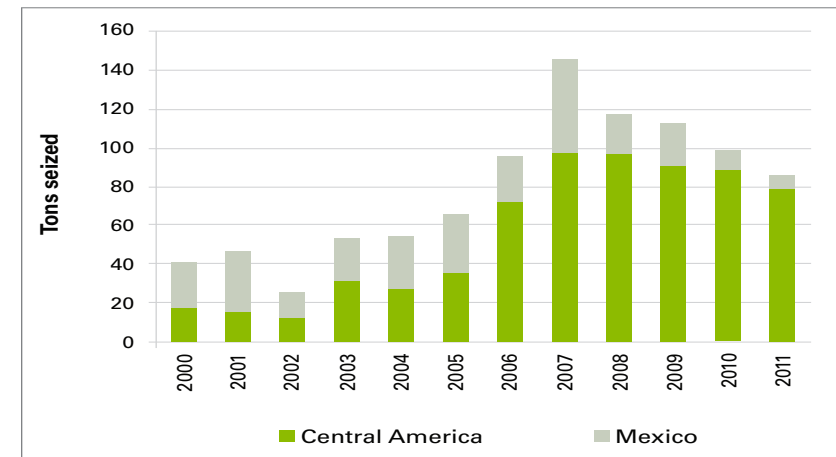
And according to a 2012 UNODC assessment, “Between 2000–2005 the amount of cocaine seized in Central America was about equal to the amount seized in Mexico. By 2011 the volume of cocaine seizures in Central America was more than 13 times than amounts seized in Mexico.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mérida Initiative: Assessing Plans to Step Up Our Security Cooperation with Mexico and Central America*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 14, 2007:p.17, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg38938/pdf/CHRG-110hhrg38938.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2013 International Narcotics Strategy Report*. “Country Reports: Honduras through Mexico,” March 5, 2013: p.189, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2013/vol1/204050.htm>.

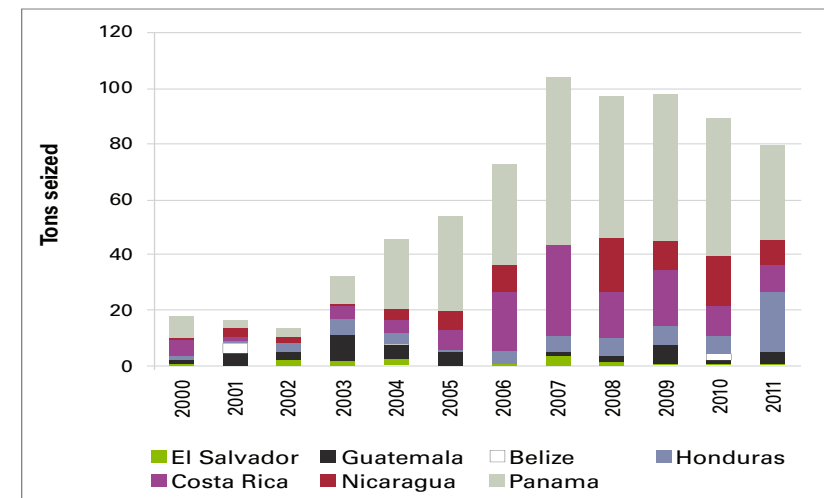
<sup>5</sup> “Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Vienna, September 2012: p.19.

**Figure 3:** Cocaine Seizures in Central America and Mexico, 2000-2011



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment*, Vienna, 2012: p.19.

**Figure 4:** Distribution of Cocaine Seizures in Central America, 2000-2011



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment*, Vienna, 2012: p.24.

Furthermore, a review of the congressional record at the time security assistance to Mexico and Central America was debated in 2008 suggests that the primary concern among Administration and Congressional leaders was to control drug trafficking through the Meso American corridor. For example, then Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Tom Lantos (D-CA) said in his opening statement at a hearing on U.S. security assistance, “The appalling violence associated with the drug trade and with the vicious criminal gangs that run it cries out for vigorous, joined action by the governments of the region.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, an official Department of State description states, “[CARSI] is designed to stop the flow of narcotics, arms, weapons, and bulk cash generated by illicit drug sales, and to confront gangs and criminal organizations.”<sup>7</sup>

But, while the links between international drug trafficking and violence are real, they are often more complex than commonly understood. The congressional debate at the time and subsequent statements by the Administration seemed to conflate the two—drug trafficking and violence—implying that international drug trafficking was the sole, or primary, explanation for the rising violence and homicide rates in the Northern Triangle. No other explanation was offered.

Yet, drugs and homicides are not inter-changeable and a policy designed primarily to stop international drug trafficking risks missing many other causes of violence and homicide in Central America. For example, the violence contributing to the influx of unaccompanied child migrants over the summer of 2014 cannot be explained as the direct result of actions by Mexican criminal networks like the Sinaloa Federation or the Zetas. These criminal networks may have taken advantage of the increased flow of migrants for their human smuggling businesses but other factors rooted in the communities of origin are important drivers as well. Children fleeing Northern Triangle countries reported to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that societal and domestic violence, as well as economic desperation, and the opportunity to join family in the United

<sup>6</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “The Mérida Initiative: Assessing Plans to Step Up Our Security Cooperation with Mexico and Central America,” p.1.

<sup>7</sup> “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership,” Bureau of Public Affairs Factsheet, U.S. Department of State, August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

States where the primary motivation for their journey north.<sup>8</sup>

These findings are confirmed by broader surveys of Central Americans by the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. Analysis of their survey data from 2004–2012 revealed that actual crime victimization as well as general feelings of insecurity contribute to migration intentions, particularly in certain countries: “El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala seem to support the central finding that crime and insecurity lead individuals to consider emigration.”<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, while crime and violence in general are reported to encourage migration, a 2012 report by Corporación Latinobarómetro, another organization that publishes public opinion surveys in Latin America, reminds us that the crime and violence most commonly victimizing Latin Americans involves common crime (such as assault, theft, and extortion, is reported as a greater menace than organized crime and drug trafficking. For Latin America in aggregate, “unorganized crime” was reported most often—by 42 percent of respondents—as the most pervasive crime, far above “drug trafficking” at 13 percent of respondents. Looking specifically at the countries of the Northern Triangle, particularly few respondents rated drug trafficking as the most frequently experienced crime: 8 percent of Honduran respondents, 7 percent of Guatemalans, and 5 percent of Salvadorans, compared to Brazil, where 35 percent of respondents ranked drug trafficking as the most frequent crime.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, there is very little official data that establishes a motive for most homicides thus linking illegal drugs to homicides is more conjecture and assumption than a conclusion based on empirical evidence or criminal investigation. The investigative capacity of police and prosecutors are stretched thin and their ability to gather physical and testimonial evidence

<sup>8</sup> *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Office for the United States and the Caribbean, Washington, D.C., July 2014, pp.9–10.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Hiskey, Mary Malone, and Diana Orcés, “Violence and Migration in Central America,” *LAPOP Americas Barometer Insights 2014*, #101, p.7, <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO901en.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Marta Lagos and Lucía Dammert, “La Seguridad Ciudadana: El Problema Principal del América Latina,” Corporación Latinobarómetro, report presented in Lima, Peru, May 9, 2012, p.51, [http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD\\_La\\_seguridad\\_ciudadana.pdf](http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD_La_seguridad_ciudadana.pdf).

in high crime areas is minimal. In Guatemala, “unknown” is listed as the motive in roughly 40 percent of homicide cases, and “illegal drugs” is the official cause in only 8 percent. According to Carlos Mendoza, all homicides occurring in Guatemalan municipalities categorized as “narco territories” are attributed to illegal drugs without further examination.

Failure to determine a motive makes prosecution nearly impossible and contributes to elevated rates of impunity. Instead of prosecutions, all countries rely, to varying degrees, on extended pretrial detention of “suspects” leading to dramatic overcrowding of prisons—some 300 percent in El Salvador. See statistics on pre-trial detention (Table 1) and overcrowding (Table 2) below. Lack of investigative capacity and lack of accountability for crime may be a major factor contributing to the explosion in violence in Central America. The state’s inability to protect leads many individuals to either flee, fight back any way they know how, or join the criminal organizations as a matter of self-preservation.

**Table 1: Pre-Trial Detentions in Northern Triangle Countries, by percentage (2000-2013)**

| Country     | Year |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|             | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| El Salvador | 50   | 50   | 50   | 49   | 39   | 28   | 31   | 39   | 36   | 35   | 34   | 29   | 29   | 24   |
| Guatemala   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 47   | n/a  | 41   | 41   | n/a  | 42   | n/a  | 56   | 54   | 54   | 54   |
| Honduras    | 87   | 85   | 78   | 70   | 62   | 63   | 50   | 62   | 51   | 49   | 45   | 48   | 48   | 50   |

Source: Data from OAS Hemispheric Security Observatory ([alertamerica.org](http://alertamerica.org)), “Indicators, 13. Prison Systems, 11. Untried Prisoners Held (Percentage),” OAS Observatory on Citizen Security—Data Repository, <http://www.oas.org/dsp/Observatorio/database/indicadorsdetails.aspx?lang=en&indicador=56>.

**Table 2: Prison Overcrowding in Northern Triangle Countries, 2005-07 and 2011**

| Country     | 2005-07         |                   | 2011            |                   |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|             | System Capacity | System Population | System Capacity | System Population |
| El Salvador | 7,770           | 12,581            | 8,187           | 24,399            |
| Guatemala   | 6,454           | 8,243             | 6,492           | 12,303            |
| Honduras    | 8,280           | 11,691            | 8,190           | 11,985            |

Source: Data from Elías Carranza, 2012, “Situación penitenciaria en América Latina y el Caribe ¿Qué hacer?” *Anuario de Derechos Humanos 2012*, Table 1a, <http://www.anuariocdh.uchile.cl/index.php/ADH/article/viewFile/20551/21723>.

In addition, distinguishing between types of criminal networks and organized crime is important. Major trafficking organizations, of the kind using rural landing strips and remote river “highways” in Honduras and Guatemala, are primarily interested in transporting cocaine to lucrative markets in New York, Washington, Chicago, and Los Angeles as quickly as possible. Their principle market and source of income is not in Honduras, the region’s fourth poorest country. Violence is used strategically in areas of competition with rival criminal networks but homicides are distributed more broadly in Central America and are not limited to international trafficking routes.

The relationship between drugs and homicides often reflect local criminal dynamics and the lack of an effective state presence more than the direct result of international drug trafficking. For example, violence can be related to retail distribution of small amounts of illegal drugs in urban neighborhoods. Some of these illegal drugs enter the Central American retail market as in-kind payments to locals for providing services to the traffickers such as transportation and security services for drug shipments. But violence concentrated in urban areas can also be related to other forms of crime including assaults, kidnapping and extortion—all of which are chronically under-reported. For example, a recent survey of small and medium sized enterprises in El Salvador found that 79 percent of these are victims of extortion but only 16 percent bother to report the crime.<sup>11</sup>

The number of kidnappings is especially difficult to ascertain because victims and their families are often reluctant to report the crime for fear that involving law enforcement may put their loved one at greater risk. The table below makes this very clear with the number of kidnaps in Honduras is virtually unreported. But there is evidence that fear of kidnapping and extortion are major drivers for migrants fleeing violent communities.

<sup>11</sup> FUSADES, DEL – Estudios Legales, “Informe de Conyuntura Legale e Institucionial,” First Semester, 2014. [http://www.fusades.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&task=download&id=692\\_8d9340207240d38f5b-83219c3b1c2392&Itemid=297&lang=es](http://www.fusades.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&task=download&id=692_8d9340207240d38f5b-83219c3b1c2392&Itemid=297&lang=es)

**Table 3: Northern Triangle Kidnapping Rate per 100,000 Inhabitants, by country (2000-2012)**

| Country     | Year |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|             | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| El Salvador | n/a  | n/a  | 0.32 | n/a  | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.35 | 0.16 | 0.36 | 0.47 | 0.47 | 0.24 | 0.22 |
| Guatemala   | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.38 | 0.31 | 0.41 | 0.41 | 0.44 | 0.73 | 1.56 | 1.16 | 0.93 | n/a  | n/a  |
| Honduras    | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | 0.48 | 0.95 |

Source: Organization of American States, “OAS Observatory on Citizen Security – Data Repository,” <http://www.oas.org/dsp/Observatorio/database/indicadoresdetails.aspx?lang=en&indicator=28>.

Numerous field studies and assessment have concluded that gangs engage in violent turf battles and a variety of crimes such violent auto theft, home invasions and extortions, but the link between Central American gangs and international drug trafficking are limited. As Rodgers, Muggah, and Stevenson wrote: “In contrast to the numerous sensationalist accounts linking Central American gangs to migrant trafficking, kidnapping, and international organized crime, it is clear from the various qualitative studies of Central American gangs that both *pandillas* and *maras* are mainly involved in small-scale, localized crime and delinquency such as petty theft and muggings (although these can often result in murder).”<sup>12</sup>

A second congressional concern linking illicit drugs to elevated homicides in Central America was the fear that a U.S. security policy focused heavily on Mexico might have devastating consequences for Central America. Referring to the “balloon effect”—when pressure on one link in the drug trafficking chain pushes the trade to another more vulnerable area—Congress expressed its concern that Central America would suffer the consequences of an all-out assault on drug trafficking in Mexico.

Indeed, the Bush Administration’s first request to Congress for security assistance was primarily focused on Mexico. It resulted from extensive consultations between the United States and Mexican governments about how to confront together the criminal networks that were increasingly emboldened and violent in their competition to supply illegal drugs to the lucrative U.S. consumer market. Of the original \$1.4 billion three-year security package for Mexico, commonly referred to as the Mérida Initiative, a small portion (approximately \$50 million) was to be directed to Central

<sup>12</sup> Rodgers, Dennis, Robert Muggah, and Chris Stevenson, “Gangs of Central America: Causes, Costs, and Interventions,” *Small Arms Survey*, Geneva, 2009: p. 9.

America and the Dominican Republic.

But while the policies of then-Mexican President Felipe Calderón to aggressively confront transnational criminal networks in Mexico enjoyed widespread bipartisan support in Washington, there were also numerous congressional voices expressing concern about the Mérida Initiative’s potential impact on Central America. For example, Congressman Albio Sires (D–New Jersey) emphasized the regional nature of the security threats stating, “I have a problem when we concentrate on one country, and we do not concentrate on the region. I feel that the efforts that we are going to make in Mexico, all it is going to do is put more pressures on those other Central American countries as we eradicate, as we did in Colombia, some of these cartels or some of these drug dealers...it would have been wise to take a regional approach...if we push these drug dealers into those other countries, all we are doing is destabilizing those countries.”<sup>13</sup> Senator Richard Lugar (R–Indiana) argued that “Central American officials feel that they will not be able to confront threats effectively without more assistance. They fear the gang members and drug traffickers will flee Mexico for Central America, where it will be easier to operate.”<sup>14</sup> Such an unbalanced approach, they suggested, did not take into account the potential risks in Central America.

Indeed, it is often argued that the flow of drugs and homicides increased dramatically in Guatemala and Honduras as a result of President Calderón’s aggressive campaign against major trafficking organizations like the Zetas and Sinaloa Federation. While there is evidence to support this thesis, it is also true that drug trafficking through the region was well established prior

<sup>13</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “The Mérida Initiative: Assessing Plans to Step Up Our Security Cooperation with Mexico and Central America,” 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 14, 2007, p.45.

<sup>14</sup> Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “The Antidrug Package for Mexico and Central America: An Evaluation,” 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 15, 2007, p.4. Senator Menendez: “These cartels are very strategic, so we move the problem out of Mexico and we move it, maybe, to the Caribbean,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “The Antidrug Package for Mexico and Central America: An Evaluation,” 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 15, 2007, p.16. Senator Joseph Biden also questioned whether the funding for Central America was adequate to prevent a balloon effect in funding, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “The Antidrug Package for Mexico and Central America: An Evaluation,” 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 15, 2007, p. 54.

to 2007 when the Calderón offensive got underway. Mexican trafficking organizations had already struck deals with Central American trafficking networks as far back as the 1980s including with the Honduran trafficker Juan Ramón Matta Ballesteros.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, James Bosworth has argued that the 2009 coup in Honduras shifted the attention of the country's security forces to protecting the new regime from external political threats from the deposed president and thus created an internal security vacuum that was eagerly filled by international trafficking organizations.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the lack of clarity about the sources and kinds of violence driving homicides in Central America has led to a confused, sometimes contradictory, policy response from the Central American governments and the international community, including the United States. We will examine some of these issues in the following sections.

### The Response from the United States

Given that the Northern Triangle's multiple security challenges extend back a decade and more, considerable pressure has been exerted in Washington, amongst Central American governments, and in the media, calling on the United States to "do something" to address these problems before they become unmanageable. But how, exactly?

Against this troubling backdrop, the United States has variously been accused of either ignoring the warning signs in Central America, pursuing policies that exacerbated the region's security crisis, or, according to some, simply doing too little too late to make a difference. Some in Congress pointed to the U.S. experience in Colombia as a model for engagement and asked why the United States did not make a larger financial commitment in Central America—one that more closely matched the average \$665 million in annual assistance the United States has provided via Plan

Colombia since Fiscal Year 2000.<sup>17</sup> Others have noted that while the Bush Administration initially requested \$1.4 billion over three years to fund the Mérida Initiative, the \$50 million in the package for Central America during the first year stood in stark contrast to the \$500 million Mexico was to receive the first year.

In response, the Bush Administration maintained that it shared the concerns about potential impacts in Central America but did not want to delay the extensive security cooperation package it had developed with Mexico while it was in dialogue with the Central American countries.<sup>18</sup> According to then-Assistant Secretary Thomas A. Shannon, Jr.'s testimony before Congress, the Bush administration envisioned the Central American component of Mérida as "a new partnership, built off a dialogue that the United States and the Central American republics had in 2007 under the auspices of the Joint U.S.-SICA [Central American Integration System] Dialogue."<sup>19</sup> In effect, the Administration argued that assistance for Central America was necessarily more complex because it involved seven countries (ultimately nine when the Dominican Republic and Haiti were added by the House).<sup>20</sup>

While originally part of the Mérida Initiative, security assistance for Central America was formally separated to become the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) in the FY 2010 appropriations bill. The Obama Administration sought to build collaborative security

<sup>17</sup> Average calculated based on data in June S. Beittel, "Colombia: Background, U.S. Relations, and Congressional Interest," Congressional Research Service, November 28, 2012, p.38.

<sup>18</sup> Congress added funding for Haiti and the Dominican Republic out of concern that these countries would also suffer the so-called "balloon effect" of shifting drug trafficking routes as cartels were squeezed in Mexico and Central America.

<sup>19</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, "Central America and the Mérida Initiative," 110th Cong., 2nd sess., May 8, 2008, p.9.

<sup>20</sup> In the same legislative package, Congress also authorized \$65 million in funding for Haiti and the Dominican Republic, to "be made available for assistance for the countries of Central America, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic only to combat drug trafficking and related violence and organized crime, and for judicial reform, institution building, anti-corruption, rule of law activities, and maritime security" (House of Representatives, "Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010: Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3288," 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., December 8, 2009, p. 343.)

<sup>15</sup> Steven Dudley and Michael Lohmuller. "Docs Reveal CIA-Guadalajara Link, Not Conspiracy" *InSight Crime*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-death-of-camarena-and-the-real-cia-guadalajara-cartel-link>.

<sup>16</sup> James Bosworth, "Honduras: Organized Crime Gained Amid Political Crisis," in *Organized Crime in Central America: The Northern Triangle*, Cynthia J. Arnson and Eric L. Olson (eds.), Woodrow Wilson Center Report on the Americas, #29, November 2011.

partnerships with several countries in the hemisphere. As part of this effort, the administration re-launched the Central America part of the Mérida Initiative as CARSI in 2010.<sup>21</sup> In its Committee Report, the House appropriators specified that “The Committee believes that funding and cooperation within the region is a long-term proposal and therefore is transitioning the three-year Mérida Initiative–Central America to a longer-term Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).” While the Senate bill intended to keep funding for Central America within the Mérida framework, the separation ultimately took place.

### What is CARSI?

Given the complexity of Central America’s security challenges, and the urgency to “do something” in response to the increasing violence and instability in the region, it is not surprising that the CARSI program emerged as a broad framework of objectives and priorities. A Department of State produced “Fact Sheet” on CARSI lays it out succinctly: “The desired objective of CARSI is to produce a safer and more secure region where criminal organizations no longer wield the power to destabilize governments or threaten national and regional security and public safety, as well as to prevent the entry and spread of illicit drugs, violence, and transnational threats to countries throughout the region and to the United States”<sup>22</sup>

The stated goals of the CARSI program are themselves laudable. U.S. Department of State documents and testimony refer to the following five:

1. Create safe streets for the citizens in the region
2. Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband within and between the nations of Central America
3. Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments
4. Re-establish effective state presence and security in communities at risk

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<sup>21</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, May 6, 2014, p.2.

<sup>22</sup> “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership.” Fact Sheet Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

5. Foster enhanced levels of security and rule of law coordination and cooperation between the nations of the region

“The U.S. is committed to citizen safety in Central America...We are doing everything we can in the fight against corruption and impunity, in providing the equipment and the support that law enforcement and the military require, and helping to build civil society to stand against the scourge of drug trafficking.”

– Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, 2010

Two noteworthy observations emerge. First, to its credit the U.S. Department of State formally defined the region’s security challenges, at least initially, in terms of public security and not strictly as a drug trafficking problem. While a positive declaratory shift, counternarcotics nevertheless continue to be a centerpiece of U.S. policy either by default or design. For example, former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said: “The U.S. is committed to citizen safety in Central America...We are doing everything we can in the fight against corruption and impunity, in providing the equipment and the support that law enforcement and the military require, and helping to build civil society to stand against the scourge of drug trafficking.”<sup>23</sup> As documented in the chapters on Honduras and Guatemala in this volume, counternarcotics often becomes the primary focus of partner nations, limiting the effectiveness of U.S. programs intended to prevent violence, strengthen law enforcement and judicial institutions broadly, and thus increase public security.

Conflating citizen security and counternarcotics can pose policy dilemmas because, while similar, the strategy for dealing with each one differs and can, at times, undermine one another. Many sources of violence and causes of homicide are overlooked or receive inadequate attention when counternarcotics efforts take precedence. As we have seen, extortion and other forms of violent common crime significantly impact communities and contribute to homicides; but, as argued in the chapter by Ingram and Curtis, one must also consider various other factors such as geography, economic

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<sup>23</sup> “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership,” Bureau of Public Affairs Factsheet, U.S. Department of State, August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

distress, rapid urbanization, and lack of adequate schooling as factors undermining community resilience and thus contributing to elevated homicide rates. Additionally, numerous studies have pointed to the important links between domestic violence and broader societal violence. According to Joy D. Osofsky, for example, “What children learn from witnessing domestic violence: Violence is an appropriate way to resolve conflicts. Violence is a part of family relationships. The perpetrator of violence in intimate relationships often goes unpunished. Violence is a way to control other people.”<sup>24</sup>

In this context, the violence cited by the majority of unaccompanied minors as a primary factor for fleeing to the United States are more likely related to specific community factors rather than the transnational drug trafficking most often cited. And according to LAPOP analysis, “Personal victimization is also strongly correlated with intentions to migrate, suggesting again that both of these crime-related factors may be at work in pushing at least some percentage of Central Americans to consider leaving their native country.”<sup>25</sup> So a policy focused primarily on drug interdiction is unlikely to have a major impact on the factors driving the violence and subsequent migration of children from Central America.

To its credit, the CARSİ program also reflected the Obama Administration’s desire to design, and congressional willingness to support, an approach less focused on the traditional “war on drugs”—military-focused, equipment-heavy assistance programs utilized in Colombia and in the initial formulation of the Mérida Initiative, when eradication of illegal crops, such as marijuana and opium poppy plants, and interdiction of trafficking routes took precedence.<sup>26</sup>

In this broader context, CARSİ can be understood as having three

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<sup>24</sup> Joy D. Osofsky, “Children Who Witness Domestic Violence: the Invisible Victims,” *Social Policy Report*, Society for Research in Child Development. Vol. IX, no. 3, 1995: p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Hiskey, Malone, and Orcés, *LAPOP Americas Barometer Insights* 2014, #101: p.4.

<sup>26</sup> While the initial Mérida Initiative proposal embodied more traditional anti-drug program, later iterations of the strategy added initiatives to support “building resilient communities” including more targeted local efforts to support violence prevention programs and expand educational and employment opportunities. See Olson and Wilson for a full discussion. Eric Olson and Christopher Wilson. “Beyond Mérida: The Evolving Approach to Security Cooperation.” *Working Paper Series on U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*. Wilson Center Mexico Institute and University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute. May 2010.

priority areas and one central organizational principal. Simply put, the stated priorities are crime prevention, institutional reform and strengthening, and counternarcotics efforts. Building partnerships, strengthening the capacity of partner nations, and responding to the needs identified by the host government are the principal operational principals.

Even the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), traditionally focused exclusively on counternarcotics efforts, appears to have expanded its approach and broadened its horizons beyond the narrow counternarcotics focus of its past, having transformed its field offices in United States embassies from Narcotic Affairs Sections (NAS) to include strengthening law enforcement capacity in country. This transition is summarized in a speech by the current Assistant Secretary of State for international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, Ambassador see William Brownfield’s on March 27, 2014 at the University of Texas–Austin.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, INL remains primarily a counternarcotics focused bureau within the Department of State bringing to bare law enforcement tools and diplomacy to combat the illicit flow of drugs into the United States. The fact that the majority of U.S. security assistance for Mexico and Central America flows first through INL means that its approach to the problem of crime and violence in the region predominates within policy circles.

## A Missing Strategy

Despite its broad and ambitious goals and objectives, CARSİ leaves unresolved whether its primary focus is citizen security or counternarcotics and often seeks to address both simultaneously. This may well reflect the divergent viewpoints in Congress and across the Executive branch, a debate that includes not only INL but the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Justice Department, and to a lesser extent the U.S. military through its Southern Command, that tend to favor a more traditional law enforcement focus. Conversely, agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of State’s Bureau for Western Hemisphere Affairs—charged with coordinating CARSİ policy—tend to focus more on

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<sup>27</sup> William R. Brownfield. “Drugs, Security, and Latin America: The New Normal?” Remarks at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas. Austin, Texas. March 27, 2014, <http://m.state.gov/md224531.htm>.



the broader public security agenda of violence prevention and strengthening institutions as a vehicle for establishing greater public security.

As a result, the CARSI program lacks a unified strategy—a road map setting out priorities and allowing for an objective evaluation of whether progress is being made. The oft asked question, “Is CARSI working?” is difficult to answer because no agreed upon criteria exists for a proper evaluation. By some measures, CARSI is a success. Money is being spent in targeted areas: people are being trained in security operations, and thousands of at-risk children are receiving anti-drug and anti-gang courses and participating in enrichment classes such as computer skills and athletic competitions. All are examples of success.

By other measures, over time CARSI has failed or been wholly inadequate because homicides remain historically high, and while each country of the Northern Triangle has seen both increases and decreases in their homicide rates, nothing suggests there is a secular decline. The recent influx of unaccompanied minors fleeing north to Mexico and the United States may be a tragic indication that violence generally, beyond homicides, may be as bad as ever and that five years of CARSI has had little impact. Even if combating drug trafficking were to be the measure of success, drugs continue to flow across the region in significant quantities as reported by the UNODC and Department of State. (As noted earlier, roughly 80 percent of cocaine heading to the United States from the Andes passes through Central America on its way north.)

Based on numerous interviews and an extensive review of publically available documents, we have reached the conclusion that the Central America Regional Security Initiative represents a number of high priority and urgently needed programs but does not reflect an overall strategy. A senior U.S. Department of State official with direct responsibility for CARSI implementation put it succinctly: “CARSI is not a strategy.” Instead, CARSI is a funding stream created by Congress (at the request of the Bush and Obama Administrations) that seeks to address very real security challenges but fails to set strategic priorities and articulate a coherent plan for advancing these priorities among the diverse set of challenges in Central America. Without the prioritization implied in a strategy, each component part would appear to be of equal value, and in some cases U.S. supported efforts advance one objective while undermining another.

There is an understandable tension between responding to the immediate

challenges posed by transnational trafficking organizations while also addressing longer-term needs such as reforming failing state institutions, establishing violence prevention programs, and developing alternative livelihoods for at-risk youth. All are objectively important to addressing Central America’s challenges but failure to prioritize and design a coordinated strategy can mean these initiatives become increasingly stove-piped. In the specific case of CARSI it often means that individual projects share a common goal but may not work together in any coherent way to achieve the stated goal. They exist in large part as individual and separate side-by-side initiatives that may not add up to a common purpose and in some cases undermine one another.

This dilemma is most visible in the case of the anti-gang work. In October 2012 and again in June 2013, the United States Department of the Treasury designated the Salvadoran Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and their supporters a “transnational criminal organization (TCO),” pursuant Executive Order 13581. The designation targets the finances of the criminal group and puts at risk anyone who engages with the designated criminal group and individuals. The impact on the designation was made clear in the Department of the Treasury’s October 11, 2012 press announcement, “as a result of today’s action, any property or property interests in the United States, or in the possession or control of U.S. persons in which MS-13 has an interest, are blocked, **and U.S. persons are prohibited from engaging in transactions with MS-13.**”<sup>28</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The intention of such a designation is to create, in part, a “pariah effect,” or a disincentive for anyone to engage with the designated TCO. While an important and effective law enforcement tool in other instances, in the specific case of El Salvador, and to a lesser extent in Honduras and Guatemala, it has had the practical effect of freezing gang intervention programs that could be carried out by USAID and its implementing partners. As a result, USAID goals and objects regarding violence prevention have been limited to primary prevention programs such as community centers, after school programs, and sports and cultural activities. While these are valuable activities, and third-party impact evaluations have shown positive results, these programs are not dealing with youth who are already part of MS-13, and who might be open to leaving the gang if there were acceptable exit programs and alternative

<sup>28</sup> “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Center, October 11, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.

education and employment programs available. Furthermore, sorting out which kids in a community are affiliating or associated with the gang, and thus ineligible for services, can be an impossible and possibly dangerous task.

The Treasury designation effectively puts the United States on the sidelines when it comes to reaching out to criminally active youth where the possibility of a more immediate impact on violence in a community is not possible. Programs in the United States that have engaged with active gang members and enjoyed success are effectively off limits in the Northern Triangle countries as a result. In this case the anti-drug goal may be furthered but can adversely affect efforts to reduce crime and violence in a community.

### **Lack of Government Buy-In**

While the lack of a clear strategy for CARSI is a significant impediment to the enterprise, equally important is the issue of host government buy-in. What is the host government's commitment to a particular initiative and how are they implementing these efforts?

A formal system of agreements and understandings exist that make possible a U.S. presence and activities in country. Both INL and USAID follow similar procedures signing agreements with host countries to carry-out specific programs; but these formal arrangements do not measure the level of commitment of the host country to the project and its goals.

For example, despite progress in rewriting laws and passing institutional reform packages for the police and judiciary in several countries the results are quite limited. Reforms of criminal procedures like adoption of an oral adversarial legal system can represent a welcome advance, but these same reforms can be quickly undermined if the government itself does not demonstrate the courage to fully implement the reforms and ensure an evenhanded application of the law including accountability for corrupt public servants. Identifying and purging corrupt officials, such as police officers, is a first step but must be followed by full prosecution, something rarely pursued.

Another problem can be found in the chapter on Honduras by Aaron Korthius where priorities emphasized by the government of Honduras contradict the priorities established by the United States with the previous Honduran government. The current Hernandez government is focused primarily on building up its military police (PMOP) and other specialized security units as the main instrument for confronting organized crime and drug

trafficking rather than addressing overall institutional weaknesses within the civilian police and Public Ministry. On the other hand, the United States has decided that it will not support the PMOP because of human rights concerns and accountability questions. Its stated commitment is to strengthen the civilian police and justice system. In this case, one must ask whether much needed efforts to reform the police and justice system stand any chance of success when the central government has placed its priorities elsewhere.

Furthermore, with divergent priorities it's not surprising that some in the U.S. Embassy would like to refocus on a more traditional counternarcotics strategy. The absence of political commitment to reform may doom the effort from the beginning so pursuing a narrower (and traditional) law enforcement strategy focused on drug trafficking becomes more attractive since bilateral interests tend to converge more directly in this area, especially in Honduras.

### **The Limits of Judicial Reform/Institution Strengthening**

Lack of host government commitment to full implementation of judicial reform and rule of law implementation is another major factor undermining good intentions on the part of the United States. Judicial reform and strengthening the capacity of prosecutors and justices has been an important element of U.S. assistance programs for Central America since the 1980s. While never a large percentage of the foreign aid budget for the region, supporting rule of law programming, reform, and modernization has been a constant for the past three decades.

Yet today, there is general agreement across the U.S. political spectrum that reforming and strengthening law enforcement and rule of law institutions is still urgently needed in Central America. After decades devoted to rule of law reform and judicial strengthening, there has been precious little improvement. Use of pre-trial detention remain stubbornly high, successful prosecutions stand a roughly five percent across the region (Guatemala has done better), and prisons are grossly overcrowded and have become key links in the criminal enterprise. The recent "re-arrest" of Byron Lima Oliva, already in jail for his role in the murder of Guatemalan Bishop Gerardi, is emblematic. Lima is alleged to have run a criminal empire, including money laundering and providing special benefits to inmates, from within the prison

while serving a twenty-year sentence.<sup>29</sup> (Also, see Tables 1 and 2 above for pre-trial detention and prison overcrowding data.)

Corruption is rampant throughout police and justice institutions in the Northern Triangle, and inefficient, poorly trained, and unprofessional forces are a common and constant challenge in any attempt to combat crime and drug trafficking. In Honduras, for example, the militarization of the police force and the use of informal security enforcement have decreased public trust in governmental citizen security measures and has allowed organized crime groups to infiltrate the public sector.<sup>30</sup>

The situation is not uniform across the three countries, however, with Guatemala showing some concrete and specific improvements in clearance rates and better coordination between prosecutors and police. Additionally, Guatemala has enjoyed more success in adapting a strategic approach to crime fighting focusing on criminal networks rather than taking an individual case approach. And it has benefited from the presence of a United Nations office (the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG) that has assisted with complicated and sensitive investigations of criminal networks and corrupt officials.<sup>31</sup> At present, it is not clear if these advances will be preserved and expanded with the forced departure of Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz, who is credited with having resisted many political pressures and effectively carrying out many prosecutions against criminal organizations.

Guatemala's improvements notwithstanding, there remain many challenges in terms of institutional reform and capacity building in all three countries. So after decades of U.S. support for rule of law and institutional reform programs for the police and judiciary, why are corruption, ineffective police work and prosecutions still the hallmark of most law enforcement agencies in the Northern Triangle? Two scholars have studied the field extensively and have arrived at some important conclusions that have both informed and helped guide the researchers in this project. Thomas Carothers observes that judicial reform demands "something far deeper and

more-complex than the kinds of technocratic activities a judicial reform project was likely to entail."<sup>32</sup> More than technical and financial deficiencies, rule of all initiatives are hindered by political and human obstacles—corrupt elites and "leaders who refuse to be ruled by the law...the will for reform... must come from within."<sup>33</sup> Another researcher, Rachel Kleinfeld, reached a similar conclusion suggesting that, "Rather than reforming laws to make them more 'modern' or tweaking institutional arrangements to make them appear similar to those in the West, reformers looking at power structures and cultural norms have clear goals that transparently serve rule-of-law ends." Current reforms often fail to "confront the enormous challenges of creating meaningful limitations on political power holders, changing how governments relate to citizens, and altering fundamental norms that govern how citizens interact with each other."<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the broader political challenges reform efforts encounter, there are also a number of policy choices that undermine these efforts including: an over reliance on training as a vehicle for institutional reform; a "vetted unit" strategy that fails to impact broader institutional capacities; inadequate evaluations of U.S. supported programs; lack of transparency and inadequate policy dialogue with civil society organizations in country.

### Over Reliance on Training

Within the framework of institutional reform and strengthening, training is often a central element of the strategy, and with good reason. As noted, police and justice sector personnel often have only basic formal training, and lack many of the professional skills needed to effectively conduct modern law enforcement operations.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, low educational levels and poor training contribute to ineffectiveness that, in turn, contribute to public distrust of the institutions and can lead to poor force morale. Together, these factors exacerbate the institution's existing vulnerabilities and, ultimately, its susceptibility to further penetration and capture by criminals.

<sup>29</sup> Sonia Perez, "Guatemala bishop's killer ran alleged jail empire," *Associated Press*, September 3, 2014, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/guatemala-bishops-killer-built-empire-prison>.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Ungar, "The Rot Within: Security and Corruption in Latin America," *Social Research* 80.4, Winter 2013: pp.1189 and 1203.

<sup>31</sup> See chapter on Guatemala, "CARSI IN GUATEMALA: Progress, Failure, and Uncertainty," by Nicholas Phillips in this volume for further discussion of CICIG.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Carothers, ed., *Promoting the Rule of Law Abroad: In Search of Knowledge*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006: preface.

<sup>33</sup> Carothers (2006), p.4.

<sup>34</sup> Rachel Kleinfeld, *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad: Next Generation Reform*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012: pp.21 and 8.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Ungar, "Community Policing in Honduras: Local Impacts of a National Programme." *Policing and Society* 22.1, March 2012.

Such a view must also be counterbalanced with several additional factors. No matter how important training is to the modernization of institutions, it is not a panacea but, rather, one tool among several needed to bring about institutional transformation. Training is important but so is establishing specific selection criteria and properly vetting recruits; establishing a professional career path with merit based promotions and adequate compensation; and, creating internal and external control mechanisms to promote accountability to professional standards, legal obligations, and ultimately to the public. A focus on training and capacity building is important, but too narrow a focus on training while overlooking other elements for building a strong and effective institution can be detrimental to its overall health and strength.

Yet CARSJ programs, and United States policy in general, tend to rely heavily on training, and to an important but lesser extent, vetting, to build capacity in institutions and, by implication, attempt to overcome the “corruption” factor in police and justice institutions. Training and vetting are the common recipe applied almost everywhere, not just Central America. While training may present logistical, administrative, and technical challenges it does not usually require significant political commitment on the part of a law enforcement agency or national government to implement. Prosecuting corrupt or abusive officers, including leaders, does.

The biggest challenge may come with the results of vetting and decisions about what to do with those recruits and current law enforcement personnel that fail vetting and background checks. This became particularly problematic in Honduras, where much of the government’s effort to clean up the police was centered on the vetting and purging of officers unfit to serve. The country’s Policia Nacional identified and purged nearly 1500 officers, who are now awaiting trial, not only leaving the country’s police force greatly reduced, but also straining the capacity of Honduras’s justice system.<sup>36</sup> In general, these actions require far less political and legal risk than creating a strong independent internal affairs mechanism or establishing a special prosecutor’s unit with the authority to proactively investigate and hold accountable police, prosecutors, or government official accused of corruption and abuse.

<sup>36</sup> “Reacciones sobre la depuración policial en Honduras,” *El Heraldo* (Honduras), September 23, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/alfrente/750835-331/reacciones-sobre-la-depuración-policial-en-honduras>.

**Table 4: Training as Part of the Overall Strategy for Institutional Reform and Strengthening**

| Country     | Civilian Police   | Fiscalia/MP   | CN Units  | Judiciary   |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| El Salvador | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Regional) security sector reform (2012)</li> </ul>  |   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist courts and judges through trainings (ex. In support of the implementation of the new asset forfeiture law) (2014?)</li> </ul> |
| Guatemala   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data gathering and analysis (2009-10)</li> <li>• Port security (2009-11)</li> <li>• Coordination and accountability (2009-10)</li> <li>• Police academy (2014?)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data gathering and analysis (2009-10)</li> <li>• Coordination and accountability (2009-10)</li> <li>• Prosecutor Assistance (2009-10)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aviation support training (2010-2013)</li> <li>• Narcotics interdiction (2009-10)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data gathering and analysis (2009-10)</li> </ul>   |
| Honduras    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Regional) security sector reform (2012)</li> <li>• Port security (2011)</li> <li>• Honduran Criminal Investigative School courses in basic, intermediate, and advanced investigations, including Human Rights curriculum (2014?)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training prosecutors to lead prosecutor/police collaborative teams (2014?)</li> </ul>  |   |   |
| Regional    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community policing (2013)</li> <li>• Management-level (2013)</li> <li>• International Law Enforcement Academy (2008-9, 2011)</li> <li>• Anti-Gang Units (2008)</li> </ul>  |   |   |   |

### Vetted Units

Vetted units are an essential part of the law enforcement capacity building and institutional reform strategy used by the United States around the world and especially in Central America. There are two broad categories of vetted units—those that conform to the U.S. Department of State’s guidelines<sup>37</sup> and those that form a “task force.” Vetted units are generally established within an individual law enforcement agency or security force and carry out sensitive operations under the supervision and direction of U.S. law enforcement personnel. A task force is also vetted but usually combines personnel from multiple agencies and security forces, and U.S. personnel play a significant role but in an advisory capacity instead of directly overseeing operations. In both cases, successful background checks are an essential part of the vetted units and task forces.

**Table 5: Vetted Units Supported by CARSII Program**

| Country     | Police/FBI  | DEA  | DHS/ICE  |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| El Salvador | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FBI vetted units (2009, 2012, 2014,)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEA vetted unit (2008-9, 2012, 2014)</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vetted units (2008-9, 2012, 2014?)</li> </ul> |
| Guatemala   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Port police (2009-10)</li> <li>FBI vetted unit (2012, 2014)</li> <li>Guatemalan Anti-Gang Unit (PANDA) (2014)</li> <li>Guatemalan Intel and Analysis Centers (CRADIC) (2014)</li> <li>PNC polygraph unit (2014)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEA vetted unit (2008-9, 2012, 2014)</li> <li>DEA-SIU vetted unit (2014)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vetted units (2009-2014)</li> </ul>           |
| Honduras    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FBI vetted units (2012, 2014)</li> <li>Honduran Anti-Gang Unit (2014)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEA vetted unit (2008-9, 2012)</li> <li>DEA-SIU vetted unit (2014)</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vetted Units (2008-9, 2012, 2014)</li> </ul>  |
| Regional    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transnational Anti-Gang Units (2008-9, 2011, 2014)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEA vetted unit (2010-11, 2013)</li> </ul>  |  |

<sup>37</sup> Department of State guidelines are not publicly available but interviews with officials suggest these include extensive vetting for possible links to criminal activity and past human rights violations, as well as establishing a rough ratio of one U.S. officer for every 15 foreign officers.

The purpose of the vetted unit is twofold. First, to create a specialized and highly professional unit that will enable the unit to focus on specific types of crimes (extortion, kidnapping, or gang activity, for example) and to carry out highly sensitive operations against high impact criminals. Second, the vetted unit is supposed to contribute to the overall capacity and professionalization of the entire force as members of the vetted unit are trained, gain experience, and cycle back into their home institution where they can have a positive multiplying effect on the entire agency.

In theory, enabling vetted units to carry out sensitive law enforcement operations should create a modeling effect that would encourage the entire police force to improve its capacities and thus enjoy similar success and rewards of the vetted unit. The vetted unit demonstrates what is possible and is said to create incentives for others to follow suit. Furthermore, as members of vetted units cycle out they might also become agents of change within their own institutions pushing for reform and better practices.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support these contentions. Members of vetted units resist transfers preferring to stay where pay, benefits, prestige, and access to equipment and resources are much better than with the broader institution. Furthermore, significant resentments emerge within police agencies when a few are given additional resources, training, and support while others struggle to fulfill their jobs.

Specialized units dealing with particular crimes such as kidnapping, extortion, or money laundering can be an effective way to deal with these matters, but the ability of these same units to impact broader institutional capacities and elevate the professionalism within the institution appear to be extremely limited. Ultimately, the vetted units often result again in a more traditional counternarcotics strategy rather than building the capacity of Central American law enforcement agencies to implement a crime fighting and violence reduction strategy on its own.

### Coordination

For a strategy to be effective, policy coordination is a must. To this end, CARSII teams at each embassy and inter-agency teams in Washington meet regularly to discuss CARSII implementation and report progress made by each agency in meeting targets and objectives.

Nevertheless, there is reason to be concerned that current coordination

efforts tend to be an ineffective coordination mechanism. Since CARSI does not represent an integrated strategy, the meetings appear to primarily serve as a reporting mechanism without the capacity or will to set priorities or ensure coherence across agencies.

Furthermore, agencies have a propensity to focus on their own program priorities which become increasing stove-piped. In one U.S. Embassy we learned that INL and USAID were promoting two different models of community policing. Tough decisions about what model to pursue and which agency takes the lead are often not taken.

Moreover, it is not at all clear that some of the initiatives supported by short-term infusions of emergency funding from the U.S. (either through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives or the Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilizations Operations) will be sustainable once these sources dry up. Other agencies of the U.S. government with a longer term presence do not always share the commitment to these initiatives. Short-term funding can help jump-start innovative projects and support new approaches to solving problem, but without a broader commitment within the U.S. government to continue and expand on these innovative interventions the benefits can be quickly lost.

Furthermore, as already noted, with agencies pursuing different priorities the risk of policies and programs contradicting and undermining one another is clear. The notion that stopping illegal drugs and crime and violence prevention are on equal footing means that decisions about priorities are not made when these come into conflict with one another, or when a host country seems less committed to one priority.

Lastly, the absence of a process to set strategic priorities also reflects the absence of strategic leadership for CARSI. High level leadership that goes beyond overseeing country plans and program implementation is urgently needed to ensure that priorities such as anti-corruption measures, greater transparency and accountability in government, and sustainable policy implementation are maintained by U.S. agencies as well as host countries. Maintaining a strategic focus in the midst of competing priorities, contradictory demands from Congress, and host countries that have not fully committed to a plan requires high level leadership that is often missing. As a result, host countries can find it easy to avoid taking the difficult but necessary decisions to ensure government agencies function to their fullest capacity free of political favoritism or criminal manipulation.

## Evaluating Inputs rather than Outcomes

As noted elsewhere, lack of appropriate indicators of success and adequate impact evaluations continue to plague U.S. security programs. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) pointed out this problem in a 2013 study. Country-level reports from embassies as well as annual reviews from USAID missions were inconsistent, often simply offering general descriptions of ongoing projects and failing to provide information on performance relative to established CARSI goals. Even where metrics have been established, "U.S. agencies have not assessed and reported on their results using the performance metrics identified in the February 2012 interagency citizen security strategy for Central America."<sup>38</sup> The GAO notes that the lack of assessment on the proven effectiveness and impact of activities hurts future decision making. Missions are not necessarily to blame, however, as "it is challenging to assess progress using some of the metrics, such as a metric addressing reductions in impunity rates in selected communities, because the necessary data may not be readily available."<sup>39</sup>

As already noted, U.S. policy tends to rely too narrowly on training to increase the institutional capacity of public security and law enforcement agencies. Systems to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of training are rarely in place. Instead of measuring training's impact on such things as morale, professionalism, and reducing corrupt practices a measurement of the number of trainees and workshops organized are often provided in an attempt to demonstrate the impact of the strategy.

The authors of the three country studies in this volume found similar problems in their research. In general, program goals are well explained and seem appropriate for dealing with the multiple challenges in each country but there is little evidence, with a significant exception involving USAID crime and violence prevention programs, those programs are being evaluated effectively. The most common problem is that evaluations tend to measure the wrong thing—inputs instead of outcomes.

For example, as is noted in the chapter on Honduras, significant emphasis

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<sup>38</sup> "Central America: U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objective," Government Accountability Office, Report to the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate, September 2013 (GAO-13-771): p.29, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/658145.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Government Accountability Office, 2013, pp. 30-31.

has been placed on training police through the Criminal Investigation School. This program has received solid support from the Honduran government and is increasingly popular among law enforcement agencies. The government has even discussed the possibility of converting it into a regional center for law enforcement training. Nevertheless, there have been no evaluations of the impact of this training on the institutions as a whole. The record of achievement thus far has been measured in terms of the number of participants in training courses and supplemented with anecdotal evidence of improvement in individual cases but not an assessment of the overall performance of the force or agency.

It is also alarming that the U.S.-originated D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program designed to discourage youth from taking drugs, joining gangs, and engage in violent activity is being promoted in the Northern Triangle when evaluations in the United States have shown the program has very limited impact. No comparable evaluation of this program's impact has been carried out in Central America.

On the other hand, as noted, extensive impact evaluations of USAID funded crime and violence prevention programs have been conducted by Vanderbilt University's Latin America Public Opinion Program (LAPOP) using extensive community surveys and qualitative interviews. Among the findings from LAPOP's work is that USAID funded crime and preventions contributed to improved perceptions of security in high crime neighborhoods, and reductions in crime. Additionally, communities benefiting from the programs reported improved relations with local police, important improvements in handling conflicts and violence at local schools.<sup>40</sup>

## Transparency

In general, U.S. Department of State, USAID, and embassy personnel were forthcoming and provided great insight into their work on CARSI related programs and patiently answered our multitude of questions. They

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<sup>40</sup> Susan Berk-Seligson, Diana Orces, Georgina Pizzolitto, Mitchell A. Seligson, and Carole J. Wilson, "Impact Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Prevention Approach in Central America: Regional Report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama," Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University, October 2014: pp.1-10.

were accessible and graciously arranged for meetings and visits to CARSI supported programs. They also provided us with helpful comments, suggestions and corrections on earlier versions of the country studies.

When it came to documentation, however, it was difficult to get by the traditional barriers of most bureaucracies. For instance, there has been no breakdown of CARSI related expenditures by country and no information about where these budgets stand regarding obligations and disbursements. What is available is the general CARSI budget by broad program area (ESF, INCLE, etc.) but not by specific country breakdown. How much is spent on training police in Honduras or Guatemala is not publically available. It is impossible to know how much is spent on prevention by INL versus USAID, or how much is spent on drug interdiction versus crime and violence prevention programs in each country.

Furthermore, beyond the publically available facts sheets about CARSI, most of which are one page in length, there is almost no other documentation that would explain in greater detail what strategies are being pursued in each priority area. We have been able to piece some of this together based on information gathered from Congress and in personal interviews with Embassy and Department of State staff, most of which was conducted on a non-attribution basis.

In the end, the lack of transparency and documentation lends additional credence to the notion that CARSI does not represent an overall strategy but simply a compilation of individual programs with little coordination, and strategic coherence.

## Role of Civil Society

As part of this project, we have conducted three public meetings—one in each of the Northern Triangle countries—to present our initial finding and solicit public input and corrections. These meetings were organized by local organizations and included a broad cross-section of civil society including universities and think tanks, service organizations, press, and non-governmental organizations with specialized expertise in security matters where invited to participate. Over 100 individuals and organizations participated in these meetings

In each case we asked participants about their familiarity with the CARSI program, its goals, and objectives in their country. With very few

exceptions, participants expressed no knowledge about CARSI. In many instances they were unsure about the purpose or focus—whether it was a counternarcotics program, a prevention program, or something else. Many expressed the belief that CARSI was a continuation of the “war on drugs” and was pursuing a militarized approach to security.

The lack of basic knowledge about CARSI among well informed Central American policy and security analysts is worrisome and alarming. In a setting of elevated corruption and weekend state institutions, civil society organizations can and should play an important role in holding government’s accountable and providing policy options for improving programs and results. These potential benefits are by-passed or undermined by the lack of transparency already noted, and the lack of a clear engagement strategy between the state and civil society. Some of this is due to political polarization and suspicions about the intentions of the government or civil society organizations, but it should not be seen as an excuse.

The United States could and should play a proactive role of modeling healthy civil society engagement on these issues, but in most instances U.S. engagement is limited to work with the government or implementing partners. Broader civil society discussions about policy design, strategy design, and implementation are generally non-existent. The one exception we witnessed was in Honduras where both the government and the U.S. Embassy have been open to more direct discussions with civil society.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, CARSI is a well-intentioned initiative designed to address the serious security threats that are unsettling and weakening a long-suffering region. But a number of internal challenges like the absence of a unified strategic plan for success and insufficient action at home to combat firearms trafficking and reduce demand for drugs; as well as external factors like strategic differences with host countries and their lack of commitment to address corruption, criminal penetration of state institutions, and the diverse causes of violence in their societies have served to undermine CARSI’s best intentions. Defining the region’s security threats in terms of elevated rates of crime and violence caused by multiple factors, not just international drug trafficking, and focusing on the multiple sources of and strategies for addressing these challenges including expanded crime and

violence prevention programs and targeted and professional law enforcement strategies is a first step toward defining a coherent new approach to the region. Critically evaluating U.S. funded programs and strategies are also essential to avoid reflexively supporting initiatives that have no demonstrable impact on the violence. Impact evaluations are also necessary to reduce the justifiable skepticism that comes when money is spent, at times for decades, with now apparent impact or improvement in conditions or governance. Finally, constructing political will at home and in Central America to prioritize transparency and accountability and do away with the privileges of economic and political elites that undermine the rule of law are enormous but essential challenges to be overcome if we expect to see success in a reasonable timeframe.





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## THE CENTRAL AMERICA REGIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

A KEY PIECE OF U.S. SECURITY  
ASSISTANCE TO EL SALVADOR, BUT  
NOT THE ONLY ONE

CRISTINA EGUIZÁBAL

### Introduction

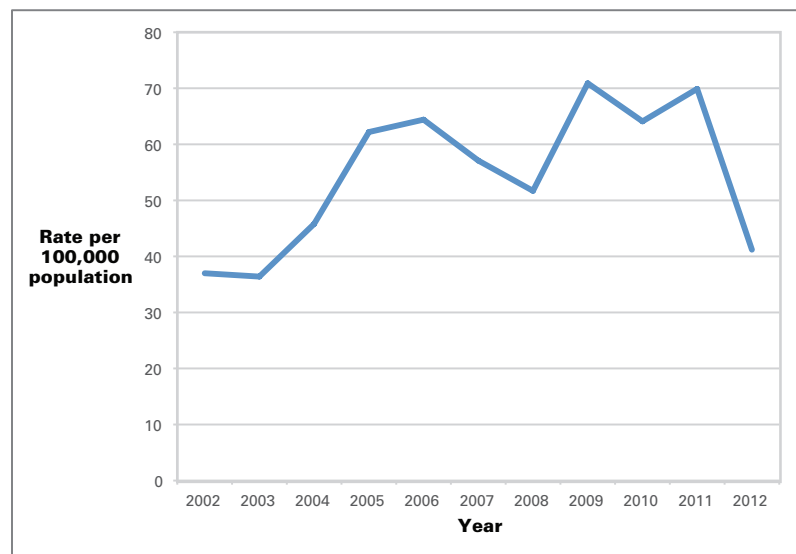
The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that in 2011 the annual homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in El Salvador was ten times higher than the global average. Although El Salvador's annual homicide rate in 2012 was 41.2 homicides per 100,000 (down from 70 per 100,000 the previous year), it still had the fourth highest homicide rate in the world after Honduras, Venezuela, and Belize. Seventy percent of those crimes were committed with firearms. Only twenty-four percent of murders went to trial.<sup>1</sup> According to the United States Department of State, El Salvador's criminal conviction rate is five percent.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported that in 2011, El Salvador was the Latin American country with the highest levels of prison overcrowding, with prisons at 300 percent of their capacity. Sixty percent of inmates felt less secure in the prisons than outside.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014), 45-46, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of State, "El Salvador Travel Warning," April 25, 2014, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/el-salvador-travel-warning.html>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014: Seguridad Ciudadana con rostro humano: Diagnóstico y propuestas para América Latina* (New York: United Nations Development Program, November 2013), 124, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/img/IDH/IDH-AL%20Informe%20completo.pdf>.

**Figure 1: Homicide Rates in El Salvador, 2002-2012**

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Intentional Homicide Count and Rate per 100,000 population, by country/territory (2000-2012),” <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html>.

El Salvador’s public security crisis is often equated with violence, in particular with the staggering number of homicides. Attempts to confront it have been unsuccessful to put it mildly. Implementation of an extremely repressive “iron fist” (*mano dura*) public security strategy during 2003 and 2004 did not lead to a decline in homicides; in fact, the annual homicide rate grew 22.8 percent to reach 51.1 per 100,000 by the end of the second year. This policy was followed by an even more repressive policy—“super iron fist” strategy (*súper mano dura*)—that ended in 2009. That year was El Salvador’s most violent with an annual homicide rate of 70.4 per 100,000.<sup>4</sup> At 80 per 100,000, the annual homicide rate among men between 18 and 30 years of age was considerably higher.<sup>5</sup>

However, as we know, not all homicides are related to other crimes. In El Salvador interpersonal homicides, in particular of women, and hate

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Salgado, “Factores Clave para entender la violencia en El Salvador” in *El Prisma de las seguridades en América Latina: escenarios regionales y locales*, ed. Alejo Vargas Velásquez (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2012), 92.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP, *Informe Regional*, 53.

crimes against sexual minorities are also plentiful. Organized crime is always accompanied by lawlessness, but is not inherently violent and most transnational organized crime activities are not only nonviolent but often conducted through legal channels—money laundering would be a case in point. Hence, violence reduction and crime reduction are two different things. The solution to the insecurity is to reduce violence, granted, but also to confront crime head on in general, particularly its two main drivers: impunity and corruption.

How did we get here? Three assumptions sustain the following analysis:

El Salvador’s public security crisis is systemic: for more than a century, the state’s inability to fulfill its obligations has created a very insecure environment for most of its population;

The commitment to the rule of law and to protecting all sectors of society has to come first from the country’s political and economic elites and only second from the international community. Foreign aid is necessary but not sufficient by any means; and

Strengthening the institutions responsible for upholding the law and protecting the people are *sine qua non* conditions for other development activities to occur.

## A Country Plagued by a History of Violence and Injustice

Violence and extreme personal insecurity, particularly for the less well-off, are not new to El Salvador. Historically, Salvadoran society has been afflicted by high levels of violence even by Latin American standards. The causes of violence have changed and so have some of its manifestations, but unfortunately violence has been a constant.

The repression that followed the 1932 indigenous/communist revolt indelibly marked Salvadorans’ definition of personal safety. On the losing side, indigenous communities from the Western Highlands stopped using their native languages and adopted western style dress. On the winning side, deep anticommunism, and ethnic hatred informed public policy as much as public modernization theories promoted by the U.S. government and the multilateral institutions and favored by the young technocrats that were little by little occupying decision-making positions in the state bureaucracy.

Over a historical canvas already marked by deep social and economic

inequality, the thirteen year civil war (1979–1992) left scars in all sectors of society and widespread resentment. From the 1970s on, massive human rights violations and political extremism led to a generalized civil war that lasted until 1992, when a peace settlement brokered by the United Nations was reached. Once the war concluded, it was assumed that increased social justice would automatically result from a reasonably well-functioning democracy. It did not.

The former warring parties signed the Chapultepec Accords: the economic establishment on the right, regrouped under the ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance party) banner and, on the left, the different Marxist guerrilla organizations allied in the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Liberation Front). The peace accords set the basis for a new political regime that has functioned satisfactorily—albeit imperfectly—within the parameters of representative democracy: free and fair elections, division of power among the branches of government, checks and balances, and civilian democratic control over the military. However, democratic consolidation is still a work in progress and the rule of law is far from firmly established. This is particularly true within the security and justice sectors.

Following the reigning orthodoxy at the time, the Salvadoran economy was thoroughly restructured: trade was liberalized, the public sector was largely privatized, and the state was left bare-boned. This new economic strategy, commonly known as the “Washington Consensus,” seemed to work during the years immediately following the peace accords—the economy grew at rates that had not been achieved in two decades. After Chile, El Salvador was considered the “freest” economy in Latin America. However, despite its early dynamism, the economy was not able to absorb the growing workforce. There was not enough work for the demobilized soldiers, let alone for those looking for their first job.

The only options left to the unemployed were either to migrate “North” and try to join a relative already in the United States, or join the bulging ranks of the informally employed, who constantly had to bridge legal and illegal, lawful and unlawful—even criminal—activities.

Despite the international peacekeepers’ efforts to disarm both sides after the cease fire, many former combatants were able to keep their weapons. In addition, arms caches were plentiful and many knew how to access them. So former combatants were not only unemployed, they were also armed and trained to fight.

This phenomenon of skilled former combatants entering the criminal world partly explains why sophisticated armed structures appeared seemingly overnight in the mid to late 1990s, particularly in El Salvador, and more broadly in much of Central America. Rather than spending years developing the capacity to form highly structured criminal enterprises, they simply adapted wartime structures and tactics to criminal activities.<sup>6</sup>

By the time the peace accords were signed, what had begun ten years before as a stream of migrants fleeing the war had become a flood of men, women and children seeking to join family members, find better job opportunities to better provide for the children left behind, or just pursuing the American Dream. One downside of this trend was fractured families, including teenagers left without parental supervision growing up in a context of lingering violence.

As the importance of remittances grew for the Salvadoran economy, private investment gradually abandoned traditional and nontraditional export sectors in favor of nostalgic exports and service sectors catering to migrants: banking, telecommunications, transportation, and import and distribution of consumer goods. The negative impact of these changes in the economic matrix was an increased dependence of the economy on dollars generated abroad, actually delinking the country’s prosperity (and therefore that of the economic elites) from domestic production. Both trends were accelerated by the adoption of the U.S. dollar as the country’s legal tender in 2000.

Since the end of the war, the formerly paternalistic and often brutal Salvadoran elites have become increasingly globalized.<sup>7</sup> With huge investments in other Central American countries and even in the United States, often carrying double citizenship, they may be model citizens abroad, but “at home” are extremely comfortable with their privileges and lack of accountability, more often than not turning a blind eye on corruption. Their contribution to the general well-being is minimal, El Salvador’s taxes are among the lowest in Latin America; furthermore, state revenue

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<sup>6</sup> See Douglas Farah and Pamela Phillips Lum, *Central American Gangs and Transnational Criminal Organizations: The Changing Relationship in a Time of Turmoil*, February 2013, [http://www.ibiconsultants.net/\\_pdf/central-american-gangs-and-transnational-criminal-organizations-update-for-publication.pdf](http://www.ibiconsultants.net/_pdf/central-american-gangs-and-transnational-criminal-organizations-update-for-publication.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Benedicte Bull, “Diversified Business Groups and the Transnationalization of the Salvadoran Economy,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 45 (May 2013): 265–295.

comes basically from taxes on consumer goods that mostly penalize the less well off.<sup>8</sup>

### No Reliable Information and Lack of Transparency Regarding Security

The origins of the infamous Salvadoran street gangs are often traced, with good reason, to the United States' policy, implemented beginning in 1996, of deporting criminals with links to powerful Hispanic gangs in Los Angeles. What is less widely known is that the U.S. immigration rules banned U.S. officials from disclosing the deportees' criminal backgrounds, so the local authorities had no idea who these newcomers really were.<sup>9</sup> As a recent story published by the online journal *El Faro*, the country's most important and well respected digital news outlet shows through the life story of a former gang member in a witness protection program, what the U.S. deportees did was upgrade the skills of local youth gangs that formed at the end of the war.<sup>10</sup>

Easily available arms, combined with plenty of young men with no other jobs who knew how to use them, and criminal know-how coming from the United States via deportees, provided the ingredients for a powerful cocktail for insecurity. By the mid-2000s, when South American cocaine traffickers replaced their increasingly monitored traditional maritime smuggling routes through the Pacific and the Caribbean with the Central American corridor, the mix became explosive and lethal.

Organized crime did not begin operating in the region over a *tabula rasa*; it established alliances with local groups. Contraband operations

<sup>8</sup> Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales, "Reflexiones sobre la tributación en América Central. Boletín de Estudios Fiscales No.3, Noviembre 2005, <http://www.estimacionestributarias.com/archivos/tributacion%20en%20America%20Central%20ICEFI%20I.pdf>, and "Política fiscal salvadoreña, 2007-2013: diagnóstico y condicionantes financieros para la transición política de 2014," <http://icefi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Diagn%C3%B3stico-fiscal-ESV.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America," *Foreign Affairs*, 84:3 (May 1, 2005): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60803/ana-arana/how-the-street-gangs-took-central-america>.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Martínez, "El Estado contra Chepe Furia," *Sala Negra*, March 11, 2013, <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201303/cronicas/11342/> and Oscar Martínez and Juan Martínez, "La espina de la Mara Salvatrucha," *Sala Negra*, March 3, 2014, [http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201403/cronicas/14879/?st-full\\_text=3](http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201403/cronicas/14879/?st-full_text=3).

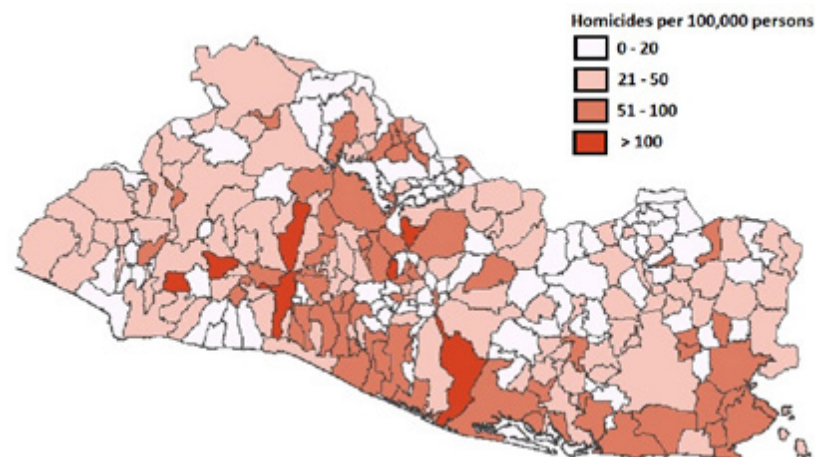
throughout the Isthmus, traditionally dealing with luxury goods such as cars, archeological artifacts or precious woods and more down to earth merchandise such as cattle or cheese, had already converted to arms smuggling during the war on behalf of all sides: the U.S.-supported *contras* as well as the Cuban-trained Marxist guerrillas. In the last ten years they have morphed into drug movers and people smugglers in alliance with the powerful Mexican cartels which are now hegemonic in the region.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike its Northern Triangle neighbors Guatemala and Honduras, El Salvador does not have large ungoverned spaces where drug trafficking is the main activity and order is guaranteed by the drug lords. The pattern in El Salvador is that of local enclaves along the trafficking routes fueled by drug money where mafia bosses have political connections to all parties, for example the case of Metapán near the Guatemalan border.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Alejandra S. Inzunza and José Luís Pardo, "El Salvador busca su redención," *Domingo El Universal*, December 7, 2012, <http://www.domingoeluniversal.mx/historias/detalle/El-Salvador+busca+su+redenci%C3%B3n-971>.

<sup>12</sup> From its base in Metapán, a small town in the Santa Ana department located near the Guatemalan border, a group of traffickers, known as the Taxis Cartel, controls a vital cocaine transit route that cuts across the north of El Salvador, from the border with Honduras to the border with Guatemala. With a network of collaborators that allegedly includes policemen, soldiers, judges and members of the national legislature, the Taxis Cartel is believed to be a key player in the Northern Triangle's drug smuggling business. According to *El Faro* the story began with Jose Adan Salazar Umaña, a prominent hotelier and Salvadoran football personality. *El Faro* has also reported that authorities have identified him as a big figure in the drug trade since at least 2000. Joining him in the organization's leadership are Juan Umaña Samayoa, the mayor of Metapán, and Roberto Herrera, a local businessman. Other alleged key allies include prominent politicians such as Armando Portillo Portillo, the mayor of Texistepeque, and Reynaldo Cardoza, a Legislative Assembly member. See Patrick Corcoran, "Taxis Cartel Controls El Salvador Cocaine Route," *InSight Crime*, May 18, 2011, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/taxis-cartel-controls-el-salvador-cocaine-route>. See also "Empresarios de Metapán exonerados al pagar al fisco," *La Prensa Gráfica*, April 26, 2014, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/04/26/empresarios-de-metapan-exonerados-al-pagar-al-fisco>. On May 30, 2014, the White House designated Salazar Umaña for sanctions under the Kingpin Act (Office of the White House Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act," May 30, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/30/letter-president-foreign-narcotics-kingpin-designation-act>).

**Figure 2:** Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population in each Municipio in El Salvador



Source: Created by Carlos A. Mendoza, using rates calculated by Mendoza based on data from the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (DIGESTYC), the Instituto de Medicina Legal, la Fiscalía General de la República (FGR) and the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC).

There is widespread agreement that the main sources of violence are: organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, youth gangs popularly known as *maras*, domestic violence, and hate crimes. The little evidence-based information available is used for political purposes so that nobody really knows who is responsible for what. Who is responsible for the astonishing number of homicides? In January 2012, according to the Ministry of Public Security, gang members were responsible for 90 percent of homicides. According to the Civilian National Police (PNC) the figure was only 29.85 percent. The Institute for Legal Medicine (Instituto de Medicina Legal-IML, roughly equivalent to a coroner or medical examiner's office) reported that only 10 percent of homicides were committed by gang members (while also signaling that the causes of 67.8 percent of homicides remained unknown).<sup>13</sup> In 2014, according to the PNC, gang members were

<sup>13</sup> Suchit Chávez and Jessel Santos, “IML quiere omitir causa de homicidios en informes,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, January 13, 2012, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/el-salvador/judicial/242809-impl-quiere-omitir-causa-de-homicidios-en-informes.html>.

responsible for 64 percent of homicides twice its 2012 estimate.<sup>14</sup>

In March 2012, *El Faro* revealed that the two main gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 had declared a truce facilitated by the Salvadoran government. The truce<sup>15</sup> had been mediated by the Salvadoran Armed Forces Catholic chaplain, Monsignor Fabio Colindres and a former FMLN commander, Raúl Mijango. The jailed gang leaders had agreed to issue an order to stop the killing in exchange for better prison conditions. It is unclear how the “negotiation” actually occurred. What is clear, at least analytically, is that in addition to the two mediators, there were three parties to the negotiation: Mara Salvatrucha, Barrio 18, and the Salvadoran government or at least individuals speaking for institutions of the Salvadoran government.

Two different “mediations” were conducted: one at the level of the gang leaders with the objective of reducing violence; and another one that would lead to the prison transfer of the gang leaders from high security facilities to more lenient ones, between them and the government representatives. The government of then-president Mauricio Funes was very opaque regarding its role in the negotiations. At first it denied any knowledge; as the truce seemed to bear fruits, it portrayed its role as that of a facilitator. But in the end, General David Munguía Payés, Defense minister and former Security minister, reclaimed ownership of the idea.<sup>16</sup>

Despite a dramatic decrease in the number of homicides from 14 daily homicides before the truce to 4.5 per day at its lowest level, public opinion surveys in 2012 and 2013 showed that just over 50 percent of the population felt that the truce had helped to reduce crime.<sup>17</sup> The number of extortions

<sup>14</sup> “Intensifican reuniones por alza de homicidios,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, April 30, 2014, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/04/30/intensifican-reuniones-por-alza-de-homicidios>.

<sup>15</sup> Following Salvadoran journalists and academics we use the term truce to refer to the reduction in the number of homicides agreed in February 2012 by the major gang leaders in jail. The agreement was to order their followers to reduce violence against rival gangs in exchange of more lenient prison conditions for them.

<sup>16</sup> Carlos Martínez and José Luis Sanz, “La nueva verdad sobre la tregua entre pandillas,” *Sala Negra*, September 11, 2012, <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201209/cronicas/9612/>.

<sup>17</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013*, 46.

remained very high.<sup>18</sup>

The truce was endorsed and supported by the Organization of American States (OAS) General Secretariat. Ambassador Blackwell, responsible for multidimensional security, proposed the creation of a Technical Committee to which President Funes was asked to nominate General Munguía as the government's point person. The truce also received public support from a "Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador" convened by the OAS to accompany the process and formed by individuals in their private capacity but with experience of gang peace efforts in different places including the United States.

In September 2012, the Papal Nuncio invited some fifty prominent individuals to join a vaguely conceived "Humanitarian Commission" that went nowhere. A new support initiative came along in early 2013, after the Technical Committee announced a second phase of the truce baptized "process of reduction of crime and violence" to be implemented in four pilot municipalities—Santa Tecla, Ilopango, Sonsonate, and Quezaltepeque—while promising the rollout of a total of 18 peace zones. The Salvadoran Foundation for Social Development (FUSADES) hosted the launch of the Humanitarian Foundation, a second iteration of the Humanitarian Commission, this time under the leadership of Antonio Cabrales, a respected business leader.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the opposition to the truce within El Salvador was fierce. The Attorney General, the director of the IML, and the new Security and Justice Minister, Ricardo Perdomo, were very critical. ARENA, sectors of the business community, and the U.S. Embassy were also against it. The Catholic Church's Bishops Conference seemed to support Monsignor Colindres and endorsed the truce at the start, but distanced itself very soon as did most civil society organizations, the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), and other private universities. While applauding

the reduction in the number of homicides and deploring the continued number of extortions, many civil society organizations argued that the truce was not only illegal but, more disquietingly, it had allowed the gangs to strengthen their links to organized crime.<sup>20</sup>

Luis Martínez, the current Attorney General, launched a criminal investigation regarding the truce and has already cited for questioning both mediators, the former vice minister of security and the former director of prisons. He has also announced that General Munguía is next on his list. Their crimes would include smuggling computers and mobile devices into the prisons and violating the 2010 anti-gang law (*Ley de Proscripción de Pandillas*).<sup>21</sup>

In any event, before El Salvador's new government, led by President Salvador Sánchez Cerén announced its intention to abandon the truce, the gang cease-fire began giving signs of exhaustion and the number of homicides has risen steadily throughout the year: 1035 murders in the first 117 days of 2014.<sup>22</sup> This increase in violence seems to be caused, at least in part, by increasing animosity between two rival groups of the M18 (formerly Barrio 18): Revolutionaries and Southerners. Additionally, and more frighteningly, in a show of force gang members have been ambushing and attacking policemen in different parts of the country, urban and rural areas. Private security guards have been attacked in downtown San Salvador near the Central Market, disrupting activity in the capital city's retail nerve center.

Security analysts have reported that the MS-13, the region's most powerful gang, is significantly enhancing its weapons capabilities, acquiring automatic rifles such as AK-47s, along with grenades, rocket propelled grenade launchers, and Light Anti-Tank Weapons. The gangs seem to have taken advantage of government gun-buy-back programs to turn in old and worthless weapons, using the income to buy higher quality weapons

<sup>18</sup> "Iglesia católica mantiene preocupación por casos de extorsión en El Salvador," *La Página*, March 24, 2014, <http://www.lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/79447/2013/03/24/Iglesia-catolica-mantiene-preocupacion-por-casos-de-extorsion-en-El-Salvador>.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Whitfield, "Mediating Criminal Violence: Lessons from the Gang Truce in El Salvador," *Oslo Forum Paper*, No.001 (Geneva: Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, June 2013), [http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx\\_news/Mediating-Criminal-Violence\\_01.pdf](http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx_news/Mediating-Criminal-Violence_01.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Martínez and José Luis Sanz, "La nueva verdad sobre la tregua entre pandillas."

<sup>21</sup> José Luis Sanz, "La tregua entre pandillas o el Estado en conflicto con la ley," *El Faro*, March 4, 2013, <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201303/noticias/11225/>.

<sup>22</sup> Jorge Beltrán Luna, "PNC: 1035 homicidios en 117 días de 2014," *El Diario de Hoy*, April 28, 2014, [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idCat=47859&idArt=8739570](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idCat=47859&idArt=8739570).

in smaller quantities from existing arsenals in Nicaragua. However, a big share of the weaponry seems to be stolen or purchased from the military.<sup>23</sup>

In response to the spike in violence, during its last days in office the Funes government seemed to reverse course and established a crisis task force between the ministry of security, the Attorney General's office, locally known as FGR (Fiscalía General de la República) and the PNC, the sectors most critical of the truce. Civil society groups critical to the truce launched a new "dialogue" initiative, this time clearly under the leadership of the Security Minister. Participants included diverse representatives of Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church, several national NGOs, and the UNDP.

The idea to create "zones of peace" as a second phase for the truce did not really materialize due, among other things, to a lack of funds to support reinsertion programs for young people attempting to leave the gangs. Nevertheless, dialogue initiatives have proliferated particularly at the local level and several attempts to "negotiate" with local gang members are considered to have been a relative success.<sup>24</sup>

However, as a response to the launching of the second phase of the truce, the U.S. government designated the MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization for its involvement in "serious transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, human smuggling, sex trafficking, murder, assassinations, racketeering, blackmail, extortion and immigration offenses," thus empowering officials to more aggressively target the group.<sup>25</sup> Regarding dialogue with gang leaders, the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador has been understandably critical of the truce but has adopted a more cautious

approach towards the more discreet local efforts of some municipalities.<sup>26</sup>

### U.S. Security Assistance: Then and Now

U.S. security assistance to El Salvador, in its two facets, law enforcement and institution building, has a long history.<sup>27</sup> During the 1972-1992 civil war, the U.S. government was heavily involved in both. While supporting the armed forces, Washington was also working with the political elites creating the basis for the civilian regime that ended up negotiating the peace. To the armed forces it provided equipment, training, intelligence, and overall strategic guidance in the counterinsurgency effort. To the political elites it provided democracy know-how. Chief among democracy assistance programs was the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administration of Justice program (AOJ), which was the largest democracy assistance program in Latin America during the 1980s and involved, in addition to USAID, the Departments of State and Justice and the United States Information Agency.

However, the program did not yield the expected results. Regardless of the program's virtues, it did not address the core causes of violence at the time: the political hegemony of the economic elites and the traditional means of exerting power. As Thomas Carothers has noted, "Creating a judicial assistance program to get at the problem of right-wing death squads was a way of addressing the problem without confronting the fundamental issue of the configuration of power in El Salvador." Regarding the Judiciary more specifically, he added "the Salvadoran justice system did not break down as a result of the civil war and thereby cause the torrent of political

<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of the Salvadoran gangs weaponry see Herard Von Santos, "El armamento de las pandillas salvadoreñas: análisis de su letalidad, poder de fuego e implicancias de seguridad pública," *Revista Policía y Seguridad Pública* 1(4), November 2013-June 2014, 209-239, <http://cinc.ansp.gob.sv/revista/index.php/rpsp/article/view/93/93>.

<sup>24</sup> Ana Glenda Tager and Isabel Aguilar Umaña, "La tregua entre pandillas salvadoreñas. Hacia un proceso de construcción de paz social," Interpeace, 2013, <http://new.pensamientopenal.com.ar/sites/default/files/2014/03/latinoamerica03.pdf> and Carlos Martínez, "Ilopango contra su sombra," *El Faro*, March 18, 2014, [http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201303/cronicas/11434/?st-full\\_text=0](http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201303/cronicas/11434/?st-full_text=0).

<sup>25</sup> United States Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organizations," October 11, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.

<sup>26</sup> Jessel Santos, "EUA lanza en Nejapa proyecto de prevención," *La Prensa Gráfica*, April 24, 2013, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/eua-lanza-en-nejapa-proyecto-de-prevencion->. Carlos Martínez and José Luis Sanz, "Tiembra la tregua en Ilopango," *El Faro* September 7, 2013, <http://www.elfaro.net/es/201309/noticias/13231/>.

<sup>27</sup> The U.S. government defines security assistance as providing training, equipment, and supplies to foreign security forces and the government agencies responsible for those security forces. Security assistance also includes assistance to the justice sector (including law enforcement and prisons), rule of law programs, and stabilization efforts. See U.S. Department of State, "The Global Contingency Fund," <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/sa/gscf/index.htm>.

violence of the late 1970's and 1980's."<sup>28</sup> Carothers' assertion is important because it underscores: a) the long term character of violence in El Salvador, and b) the mistaken assumptions that have historically undermined U.S. security and democracy assistance.

Violence today is not caused by death squad activity as was the case in the 1980s, but by a combination of factors fueled by organized crime and gang perpetrated street violence. However, as in the past, the United States has trouble addressing the root causes and tends to focus on operational aspects without really looking at the bigger picture, which today is a canvas of generalized corruption and impunity. In addition, as in the past, "the closeness of U.S. officials to their Salvadoran counterparts may have led to a loss of objectivity."<sup>29</sup> These words, written to describe the AOJ program of the 1980's, perfectly describe U.S. security assistance today.

Widespread corruption in the PNC has been amply documented. The presence of officers linked to well-known drug traffickers within the highest ranks, including the police chief, has been publicized as well.<sup>30</sup> In 2001, a thorough police investigation identified officers who had submitted fake diplomas to obtain promotions; today, fifteen of the officers identified by that investigation occupy key posts in the police command structure, and some even command vetted units.<sup>31</sup>

Until the end of the internal conflict, police assistance had been a secondary component of overall U.S. security assistance to El Salvador focused on the counterinsurgency effort. In 1974, Congress prohibited

the use of foreign assistance funds for training police, building prisons or supporting internal intelligence and surveillance programs. However, shortly thereafter a number of temporary exemptions were made to allow U.S.-supported police assistance programs in foreign countries. For example, the International Security and Development Assistance Authorizations Act of 1983 permitted "antiterrorism" training for foreign police in the United States. In 1992, through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, the Justice Department was allocated \$20 million to begin training and support the newly created National Civilian police.<sup>32</sup> However, a U.S. General Accounting Office report released in September that same year found slow progress and faulted among other things El Salvador's lack of support for the academy or the police force.<sup>33</sup>

In 1995, Gino Costa from the United Nations Peace Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), drawing lessons learned from the creation of the new civilian police said: "The strengthening of the Criminal Investigation Division needs to be awarded special attention as it lacks sufficient personnel for its operations. This failure partially explains the failure of the PNC in combatting organized crime, which is increasing nationwide every day."<sup>34</sup> That was almost 20 years ago!<sup>35</sup>

Currently El Salvador receives U.S. assistance from several budget sources, through different channels and wrapped in different "packages"—CARSII being one of them. Programmatically, the overall guidelines of the bilateral cooperation efforts are set by the Partnership for Growth

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 224.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Popkin, *Peace without Justice: Obstacles to Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>30</sup> Héctor Silva Ávalos, *Infiltrados. Crónica de la corrupción en la PNC (1992-2013)* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> "Informe señala nueve comisionados y cinco inspectores jefe con títulos irregulares," *El Mundo*, November 4, 2013, <http://elmundo.com.sv/informe-senala-nueve-comisionados-y-cinco-inspectores-jefes-con-titulos-irregulares> and Carlos Martínez and Roberto Valencia, "Hay pandilleros que hasta dan tumbes de droga en altamar a narcotraficantes locales," *El Faro*, June 27, 2011, <http://www.salanegra.elfaro.net/es/201106/entrevistas/4576/>. A former investigator of the PNC, who asked to remain anonymous, expressed doubts about the reliability of polygraph tests. Interview with the author in San Salvador on May 13, 2014.

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Johnson, Johanna Mendelsohn Forman, and Katherine Bliss, *Police Reform in Latin America: Implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2012), 17, [https://csis.org/files/publication/120228\\_Johnson\\_PoliceReform\\_web.pdf](https://csis.org/files/publication/120228_Johnson_PoliceReform_web.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> United States General Accounting Office, "Aid to El Salvador: Slow Progress in Developing a National Civilian Police," 1992, <http://www.gao.gov/products/NSIAD-92-338>.

<sup>34</sup> Gino Costa, "The United Nations Reform of the Police in El Salvador," in Institute of Policy Studies of Singapore and United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), *The Role and Functions of Civilian Police in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations: Debriefing and Lessons* (London: Kluwer Law International, 1996), 79.

<sup>35</sup> Edgardo A. Amaya Cobar, "Quince años de reforma policial en El Salvador: Avances y desafíos," *Urvio. Revista Latinoamericana de Seguridad Ciudadana* 2 (September 2007):127-144, [http://www.flacsoandes.org/urvio/img/INV\\_SV\\_URV2.pdf](http://www.flacsoandes.org/urvio/img/INV_SV_URV2.pdf).



(PFG), an innovative Obama Administration foreign assistance program that emphasizes bilateral collaboration to overcome obstacles to economic growth, as well as ownership by the recipient country. To date PFG is only being implemented in four countries worldwide: the Philippines, Ghana, Tanzania, and El Salvador.

Following President Obama's visit to El Salvador in March 2011, a team made up of U.S. and Salvadoran officials carried out an analysis of the factors constraining the country's economic development and identified crime and insecurity, as well as low productivity, as the most important obstacles to growth. In November 2011, the countries signed a four year Joint Country Action Plan (JCAP) to conjointly fight these barriers to growth. Fourteen of the nineteen PFG goals for El Salvador pertain to crime and security and initiatives designed to reach those goals are funded through CARSI.

PFG is a new way of conducting assistance programs and does not involve the commitment of new funds. Through its implementation the U.S. government is using the new international cooperation methodology that closely follows the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) guidelines: increased interagency—and intergovernmental—cooperation among donors and increased say from the host government.<sup>36</sup> PFG's aims are also narrower than traditional cooperation programs, focusing on the effects of violence and chaos on human development. The emphasis is on the transfer of expertise rather than funds. In the Salvadoran case, the strategy is two-pronged: institution building and violence and crime prevention.

Another innovation is the emphasis put on evaluation. The JCAP negotiated between the two governments includes a very rigorous evaluation and monitoring process: semi-annual performance reporting that is public

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<sup>36</sup> "It is now the norm for aid recipients to forge their own national development strategies with their parliaments and electorates (ownership); for donors to support these strategies (alignment) and work to streamline their efforts in-country (harmonization); for development policies to be directed to achieving clear goals and for progress towards these goals to be monitored (results); and for donors and recipients alike to be jointly responsible for achieving these goals (mutual accountability)." See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action," <http://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/paris-declarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>.

and based on chosen indicators and benchmarks, an annual high-level bilateral review that is accompanied by a public forum, and mid-term and final evaluation conducted by a third party.

The binational negotiators identified fourteen variables for the evaluation of the security-related work:

1. Strengthen Justice Sector Institutions
2. Improve Criminal Justice Procedures
3. Reduce Impact of Crime on Businesses
4. Reduce Impact of Crime on Commuters/Public Transportation
5. Remove Assets from Criminal Organizations
6. Strengthen El Salvador's Civil Service
7. Promote a National Dialogue to Improve Security
8. Assist At-Risk Youth through Economic Opportunities
9. Strengthen the PNC
10. Improve Education Opportunities for Youth in High-Risk Municipalities
11. Prevent Crime and Violence in Key Municipalities and Support Reforms
12. Reduce Overcrowding in Prisons
13. Enhance the Security of the Prisons
14. Promote use of Extradition to Combat Crime

In the second 2012 report card, all benchmarks were on track except two (6 and 14); in August 2013, items 4, 5 and 6 were lagging.<sup>37</sup>

Concomitantly, USAID has launched a request for proposals (RFP) for a Monitoring and Evaluation Program of its programs in El Salvador. The RFP is requesting technical advice for evaluation activities at the operating unit level. These efforts will facilitate informed program management decisions, shape the longer-term strategic direction of programs and decision-making within the Mission, and enable USAID/El Salvador to comply with USAID's Evaluation Policy. The evaluation will include PFG programs.

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<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Asocio para el Crecimiento. El Salvador-Estados Unidos de América. Tercer Informe Semestral. Noviembre 2012-Mayo 2013," August 2013, [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/elsalvador/92891/SEP\\_2013/PFG%20Scorecard%20III%20SPANISH.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/elsalvador/92891/SEP_2013/PFG%20Scorecard%20III%20SPANISH.pdf).

However, the more often mentioned foreign security assistance program that benefits El Salvador is CARSI, the “implementation and funding structure” for the Central American Citizen Security Partnership.<sup>38</sup> Despite all U.S. efforts, homicide rates in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have remained largely unchanged (or in the case of El Salvador have diminished as a consequence of the controversial political maneuver known as the truce, which was opposed by the U.S. government).<sup>39</sup>

The five stated CARSI goals are:

1. Create safe streets for the citizens of the region;
2. Disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband to, within, and between the nations of Central America;
3. Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments;
4. Re-establish effective state presence, services and security in communities at risk; and
5. Foster enhanced levels of coordination and cooperation between the nations of the region, other international partners, and donors to combat regional security threats.<sup>40</sup>

On the U.S. Department of State’s website, CARSI’s goals are identified as improving border protection, law enforcement, security and justice sector modernization, and the promotion of community policing.<sup>41</sup> There is no formal mention of drugs or drug trafficking.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “The Central American Citizen Security Partnership,” March 29, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/187331.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, “Report to the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate. Central America. U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objectives,” GAO-13-771, September 2013, 9, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/658145.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership,” August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/145956.pdf> and U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Shared Partnership—Fact Sheet,” August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2010/145747.htm>.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Central America Regional Security Initiative,” (accessed May 6, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/carsi/>.

The five original CARSI goals have been incorporated into PFG. However, unlike PFG, which implies a new way of doing business in international cooperation, CARSI has been described by U.S. Department of State officials and USAID experts in Washington and in San Salvador as a funding stream that has allowed the different U.S. government agencies to upgrade the work that they were already doing.

**Table 1: CARSI Institutional Reform and Institutional Strengthening Projects in El Salvador**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Police</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand community-based policing model</li> <li>• Strengthen anti-corruption capacity</li> <li>• Model Police Precinct Program</li> <li>• Police professionalization (establish a career path, international standard certification of quality management systems)</li> <li>• Promotion of civil society oversight</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Fiscalia/PM</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic Monitoring Center (Attorney General’s office)</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Judiciary</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the criminal procedures code</li> <li>• Improve practices for processing criminal cases</li> <li>• Effectiveness and accountability of judges and private attorneys</li> <li>• Support task forces to combat extortion of businesses and transportation systems</li> <li>• Implementation of new asset forfeiture law</li> <li>• Improve transparency and accountability for judges, officials, and private attorneys; more effectively evaluate judges</li> </ul> |
| <b>Prisons</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management support: case management and classification systems/procedures</li> <li>• Efforts to reduce pre-trial detention</li> <li>• Prisoner rehabilitation programs (<i>Yo Cambio</i>, etc.)</li> <li>• Cell improvements</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Other Law Enforcement-Based Prevention</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime pattern identification</li> <li>• Deploy COMPSTAT (or equivalent) analysis system</li> <li>• SolucionES GDA–Alliance Project (supports research to inform crime prevention decisions)</li> </ul>   |

Sources: U.S. Department of State, “FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2009 Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2010 Appropriations Spending Plan: Central America—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “Congressional Notification Transmittal Sheet,” August 11, 2011; U.S. Department of State, “Fiscal Year 2012 Congressional Spending Plan: Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI),” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2013 Spend Plan—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” September 10, 2013; and U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline,” April 16, 2014.]

For example, the projects identified in the first Letter of Agreement signed by the two governments under the Mérida Initiative (a precursor to CARSÍ) framework have been extended several times, with CARSÍ funding. These are: (1) vetted units and Sensitive Investigative Units to work with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) on drug interdiction; (2) a Transnational Anti-Gang Initiative that also supports the deployment of U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents to the region; (3) police equipment upgrades (for example: protective equipment, basic communications, improved transportation, computers, and narcotics and explosives detection equipment); (4) improved prison management; and (5) the establishment of an International Law Enforcement Academy.<sup>42</sup> These counternarcotics initiatives are now considered to be part of PFG.

In addition to the assumption regarding the lack of commitment of the Salvadoran authorities to strengthening the rule of law, it is not difficult to grasp that CARSÍ's effectiveness has been undermined by at least three basic tensions present from the beginning (when it was only a secondary component of the Mexico-focused Mérida Initiative). First, although CARSÍ was conceived of as a regional initiative aid negotiations were done bilaterally which undermined the regional nature of the initiative since individual Central American countries had divergent and even contradictory priorities. Additionally, it has two different sets of objectives (drug war objectives versus institution-building objectives) that might be complementary in the abstract, but at odds in the current implementation stage. Finally, in many instances, projects were conceived and first implemented by the different U.S. agencies before CARSÍ and PFG were created and were subsequently retrofitted to conform to CARSÍ's strategy and more recently PFG's.

Since the first stages of the implementation of the Mérida Initiative, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) programs in El Salvador have sought to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement to combat drug trafficking, gangs, and money laundering; to encourage justice sector reform, such as improving investigations and prosecutions; and to address prison overcrowding and deficiencies in the correctional sectors. USAID has focused

<sup>42</sup> U. S. Department of State, "Project Descriptions in El Salvador," <http://sansalvador.usembassy.gov/news/2009/special/merida/project.html>.

largely on economic development and crime and violence prevention programs, while the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) concentrates on providing equipment, training, and vetting. SOUTHCOM helped establish a joint Salvadoran interagency task force, the Cuscatlán Joint Group (GCC) to better integrate the PNC, the Attorney General's office, the armed forces, customs, and port authorities. The GCC was also supposed to work more effectively with the counterdrug Forward Operating Location based in Comalapa. It has done so consistently since its inception.

It is intriguing, to say the least, that Commissioner Godofredo Miranda Martínez, a former director of El Salvador's Antinarcotics Division, investigated for links with Salvadoran drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and for suppression of evidence serves as GCC's commander. Moreover, it is even more puzzling when it is public knowledge that the internal affairs investigation was prompted by a complaint coming from U.S. congressman Jim McGovern.<sup>43</sup> A 2013 article in *Dialogo*, a digital newsletter published by the Southern Command highlighted GCC's successes at drug interdiction and quoted Commissioner Miranda extensively.<sup>44</sup>

U.S. assistance to the GCC is based on a January 2009 Letter of Agreement under CARSÍ which also facilitates the GCC's coordination with the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South). Based in Key West, JIATF South conducts interagency and international monitoring and detection operations, for the interdiction of illicit trafficking. It constitutes one of the pillars of the war on drugs in the Americas. The GCC has also been actively involved in Operation Martillo, an effort led by the JIATF South to neutralize transnational criminal organizations in Central America.

CARSÍ has not changed the traditional bureaucratic division of labor. However, CARSÍ's original goals have inevitably become diluted through the natural erosion of objectives that takes place as international

<sup>43</sup> "Ascienden a Godofredo Miranda," *Diario Digital Contra Punto*, April 15, 2012, <http://www.archivocp.contrapunto.com.sv/politica-gobierno/ascienden-a-godofredo-miranda>. See also Hector Silva, "Purging El Salvador's National Police: Mission Impossible," *InSight Crime*, November 15, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/purging-el-salvadors-national-police-mission-impossible>.

<sup>44</sup> Daisy Carolina Danker, "A Common Front Against Drug Traffickers," *Dialogo*, April 1, 2013, [http://dialogo-americas.com/en\\_GB/articles/rmisa/features/viewpoint/2013/04/01/feature-pr-6](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/viewpoint/2013/04/01/feature-pr-6).

cooperation programs go through different phases from political to administrative and finally to operational. In the case of ongoing U.S. security assistance to El Salvador, the first stage was the broad initiative announced at the Presidential level: the Mérida Initiative (by President George W. Bush) and PFG (by President Barack Obama). Broad goals have also been announced at the Secretary of State level, such as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's statement that "strengthening the rule of law, attacking criminal organizations head-on, rehabilitating those who do fall into criminality while preventing young people from doing that in the first place, rooting out corruption, and ensuring accountable and effective institutions are essential."<sup>45</sup>

This first formulation of the proposed CARSI policy reflected objectives still unadulterated by coming negotiations and compromises. The second formulation resulted from a negotiation that has little to do with what goes on in Central America and more to do with U.S. domestic political dynamics including interagency rivalries (Defense, Homeland Security, and State for example) and negotiations between the Department of State and Congress for concrete budget allocations. The third phase of the program is usually shaped in the agreement between the Governments of United States and El Salvador and codified in a "Letter of Agreement," in the case of INL or a "Strategic Objectives Agreement" for USAID. It is at this level that the different governmental agencies stamp their bureaucratic imprint and the Salvadoran government negotiates its broader political priorities. A fourth stage would result from how specific projects are understood by the host country's national or local implementing institutions. For example, the PNC's understanding of and commitment to community policing, the Attorney General prioritizing training for specialized prosecutors to implement the newly adopted asset confiscation and forfeiture law, and political parties' willingness to vote for a money laundering law in accordance with international standards could all affect a project's feasibility. At the local level, for example, the municipal government's actual commitment to youth programs will be crucial to the success of international cooperation projects to support vocational training programs.

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<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Capable Governments," February 6, 2012, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/02/20120208163306su0.9403301.html#ixzz39RkkSM8i>.

Finally, we reach the actual implementation phase where technical teams are charged with putting the plans into action and working on the ground with local or U.S.-based development or security specialists. At this stage USAID tends to diversify its partners which often leads to duplication of efforts and unhealthy competition among the local agencies.

In addition to the structural limitations described above, another very important cause for concern is more clearly political: the fact that two of the most important drivers of insecurity in Central America remain outside the foreign policy realm. Moreover, they constitute two very controversial issue areas of the U.S. domestic political agenda, namely migration policy and firearms. For Central American public opinion it is very difficult to understand why the U.S. government seems unable to do anything about deportations and arms trafficking.

Regarding deportations, after the 1992 Los Angeles riots city police blamed most of the looting and violence on local gangs, including the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13).<sup>46</sup> In response, California toughened its anti-gang legislation, thereafter charging young gang members as adults instead of minors, resulting in hundreds of young Latinos being sent to jail. In 1994 California passed its own version of a "tough on crime," "iron-fisted" policy with the "three strikes and you're out" legislation, dramatically increasing jail time for offenders convicted of three or more felonies.

In 1996, as a response to steeply rising illegal migration Congress enacted new restrictive legislation by passing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Noncitizens sentenced to a year or more in prison would, from that date on, be repatriated to their countries of origin once they served their prison terms. Even foreign-born U.S. citizens could be stripped of their citizenship and expelled if convicted of a felony. As a result, between 2000 and 2004, an estimated 20,000 young Central American criminals were deported to their countries of origin.<sup>47</sup>

In 2008, the Bush administration launched a new deportation program "Secure Communities," a collaboration between local police and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that identifies non-citizens in the U.S. criminal justice system. For decades, local jurisdictions had shared the fingerprints of individuals who were arrested or booked into

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<sup>46</sup> Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

custody with the FBI to see if they had a criminal record. Under Secure Communities, the FBI was required to send the fingerprints on to the Department of Homeland Security to check against its immigration databases. The program has expanded from being deployed in 88 jurisdictions in 2009 to all 3,181 enforcement jurisdictions in the United States in 2013. Around 400,000 deportations per year are carried out by DHS, and 95 percent of those deported are Latin Americans: Mexican, Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran.<sup>48</sup>

Five days a week, two airplanes carrying 250 individuals each land at El Salvador's Comalapa airport, and this figure does not include minors.<sup>49</sup> Many of those deported return to the United States, and among those who cannot return many stay in the country and join the gangs.<sup>50</sup>

For the past several years, Central American officials have asked the U.S. government to consider providing a complete criminal history for each deportee who has been removed on criminal grounds, including whether he or she is a member of a gang. While ICE does not provide a complete criminal record for deportees, it can provide some information regarding an individual's criminal history when specifying why the individual was removed from the United States. ICE does not indicate gang affiliation

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<sup>48</sup> Marc R. Rosenblum and Doris Meissner with Claire Bergeron and Faye Hipsman, *The Deportation Dilemma: Reconciling Tough and Humane Enforcement*, (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, April 2014), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/deportation-dilemma-reconciling-tough-humane-enforcement>.

<sup>49</sup> Ana Irma Rodas de Mendoza (El Salvador's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vice Ministry of Salvadorans Abroad) in discussion with the author, February 7, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with Ana Irma Rodas de Mendoza from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Larissa Brioso, a researcher for the Central American University José Simeón Cañas, February 4, 2014, and an informal conversation with the members of the Citizen Observatory on Violence of Ciudad Arce (La Libertad), March 26, 2014. For a psychological analysis of the decision to migrate and to return, see Mauricio Gaborit et al., "La esperanza viaja sin visa. Jóvenes y migración indocumentada de El Salvador," (San Salvador: UNFPA, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, and Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, 2012), 195, [http://www.unfpa.org/sv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=545:la-esperanza-viaja-sin-visa&catid=37:nacionales](http://www.unfpa.org/sv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=545:la-esperanza-viaja-sin-visa&catid=37:nacionales). For an analysis of the root causes of gang violence, see José Miguel Cruz, "Los factores asociados a las pandillas juveniles en Centroamérica," *Estudios Centroamericanos (ECA)* 685-686:1155-1182, [http://www.uca.edu.sv/publica/ued/eca-proceso/ecas\\_anter/eca/2005/685-686/art5-eca-685-686.pdf](http://www.uca.edu.sv/publica/ued/eca-proceso/ecas_anter/eca/2005/685-686/art5-eca-685-686.pdf).

unless it is the primary reason for the deportation, but law enforcement officials in receiving countries are able to contact the FBI to request a criminal history check on particular criminal deportees after they have arrived in that country. With support from CARSI funds, ICE and the FBI have developed a pilot program called the Criminal History Information Program to provide more information to officials in El Salvador about deportees with criminal convictions. The U.S. government does not currently fund any deportee reintegration programs for adults in Central America, although it has done so in the past.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, the most recent crisis involving migrant children fleeing to the United States will add an additional layer of complexity to the problem. If the youngsters are deported in significant numbers, as appears to be the case, they will return with the added stigma of deportation, and the presumption of gang affiliation since this has been the experience in the past. For many in El Salvador deported young man = gang member. Why then not join them?

The existence of a large illegal market in firearms makes this situation even more explosive. Guns in El Salvador are plentiful and easy to access. Not all come from the United States. However, Mexican DTOs' increasing incursions in Central America have augmented the availability of U.S. arms in El Salvador.<sup>52</sup> El Salvador has an important arms black market where potential buyers can find all kinds of firearms and explosives from the most varied sources. According to data collected by the ATF, nearly half of the guns seized from criminals in El Salvador and submitted for tracing in the ATF's online system last year originated in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Many of those guns were imported through legal channels, either

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<sup>51</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, May 2014, 22, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41731.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Harry Peñate, responsible for Central America at the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Agency (ATF), cited by Eva Saiz, "El 60 por ciento de las armas de fuego rastreadas en El Salvador proviene de EEUU," *El País*, January 6, 2014, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/12/29/actualidad/1388337229\\_853927.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/12/29/actualidad/1388337229_853927.html).

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information, *ATF Central America*, March 10, 2013, PowerPoint Presentation, [https://www.atf.gov/sites/default/files/assets/statistics/TraceData/TraceData\\_Intl/2013/central\\_america\\_-\\_cy\\_2013.pdf](https://www.atf.gov/sites/default/files/assets/statistics/TraceData/TraceData_Intl/2013/central_america_-_cy_2013.pdf).

to government or law enforcement agencies, but a not-insignificant number of the weapons were traced to retail sales in the United States. That is, they were sold by gun dealers in the United States, often near the border, and then brought south, typically hidden in vehicles, though sometimes also stowed in checked airline luggage, air cargo, or even boat shipments.<sup>54</sup> The stream of gun trafficking from the United States to Central America has become strong enough that the ATF expanded to Central America its e-Trace system and installed a “regional firearms advisor,” plus a deputy attaché, at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador.

Recent arms seizures have shown that many of the weapons circulating illegally have been stolen from Salvadoran military or police arsenals or sold to criminal gangs by army or law enforcement personnel.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, important buyers of illegal weapons are El Salvador’s numerous security firms that protect private and government interests. Though they are legal entities, security firms often prefer to purchase arms in the black market to avoid government scrutiny. Not surprisingly, these security firms also serve as a large source of weapons for thieves.

The illicit arms trade is also tied to drug trafficking. Traffickers buy weapons and use the same smuggling routes. More worrisome, guns are a very common method of payment for drugs and end up in the hands of criminal gangs.

<sup>54</sup> Alec MacGillis, “America’s Wild West Gun Laws Are Helping Fuel the Border Crisis: The Unwanted Traffic Between the U.S. and Central America Goes Both Ways,” *The New Republic*, July 20, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118759/nra-and-gun-trafficking-are-adding-fuel-border-migrant-crisis>.

<sup>55</sup> Seth Robins, “El Salvador’s Military: Arms Dealer to the Maras?,” *InSight Crime*, June 16, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/el-salvadors-military-arms-dealer-to-the-maras>.

## From a “Spaghetti Bowl”<sup>56</sup> of Streams of Funding and Implementing Agencies to a More Integrated Strategy?

Well aware of the multiplicity of bureaucratic actors involved, the U.S. Embassy has created two working groups in an effort to coordinate better among the many U.S. government agencies. These are a multi-agency economic, commercial, and development working group which handles more traditional issues of trade and investment, and a PFG working group with a strong mandate to address security issues. The working groups bring together participants to share information, discuss division of labor and assess progress on meeting mission goals and objectives.<sup>57</sup> For example, the Department of State will use diplomatic leverage to advance PFG’s overall objectives. INL will provide technical assistance to establish vetted units and task forces to combat crimes against business. The Department of the Treasury will provide technical support to the Salvadoran finance ministry, the Attorney General’s office, and the Financial Intelligence Unit to

<sup>56</sup> In his book *Termites in the Trading System: How Preferential Agreements Undermine Free Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), the leading trade scholar Jagdish Bhagwati coined the term “spaghetti bowl” to depict the overlapping provisions of the proliferating bilateral and regional trade pacts. I apply this metaphor to international cooperation to Central America in general, but it also applies to U.S. government assistance. In order to be effective more has to be done to better manage the interface between national objectives, regional initiatives, and the overall security environment and synchronize domestic developmental requirements and objectives with external commitments in all different layers of decision making.

<sup>57</sup> The U.S. Embassy in San Salvador has grown 38 percent since 2000. The departments of State, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Health and Human Services, Justice (DEA, ATF, and FBI), Homeland Security (ICE), and Treasury, the Peace Corps, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and USAID have people on the ground. Out of a total of 492 employees, 134 are U.S.-hired and 358 locally hired. U.S. agencies involved in CARSII include the Departments of State, Defense, and Treasury; Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Customs and Border Protection (CBP); the U.S. Coast Guard; the FBI; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT); and USAID. U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, “Inspection of Embassy San Salvador, El Salvador,” March 2014, <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/224059.pdf>. The report is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

assist with financial crimes investigations. The Department of Justice will provide technical assistance to draft legislation and recommend strategies to establish a viable extradition process for example.<sup>58</sup>

The embassy manages substantial bilateral foreign assistance programs funded from three main sources: the Department of State's regular foreign assistance appropriation from Congress; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and other, smaller funding streams, mainly from the Department of Defense and Department of Labor. Department of State funds are used mainly by USAID and INL.

From FY2008 to FY2014, Congress appropriated approximately \$803.6 million for the countries of Central America under what was formerly known as the Mérida Initiative–Central America and is now known as CARSİ. El Salvador received 16.3 percent of CARSİ funds. The Obama Administration has requested \$130 million in CARSİ funding for the eight CARSİ countries in FY2015.<sup>59</sup>

Of the total amount for the region, nearly 64 percent of the funds were appropriated under the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) foreign aid account (managed by the Department of State), 32 percent of the funds were appropriated under the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account, most of which are managed by USAID even though ESF is a Department of State account. A small portion (four percent) of the funding appropriated from FY2008 to FY2014 was provided through the Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-mining and Related programs (NADR) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) accounts.<sup>60</sup>

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is the second biggest funding source on security-related matters in El Salvador. Although not security focused per se, the MCC program in El Salvador is linked to continuing implementation of the PFG objectives and thus indirectly includes a security component. El Salvador has received \$460.9 million in funds from MCC over the last five years and is preparing to sign a \$277 million follow-on compact. The second disbursement is contingent on the approval

<sup>58</sup> USAID/El Salvador, "Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2013–2017," 15, <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/CDCS%203-3-14%20Public%20Version%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

of two laws: one on public-private partnerships, a second one on money laundering (both PFG success indicators).

Despite the embassy's best efforts, coordination between the different funding streams remains a challenge and Washington's bureaucratic inertias are acutely felt at the local level as they undermine coordination efforts. According to the already cited 2014 report by the U.S. Department of State Office of the Inspector General (OIG report), the 2014–2016 Integrated Country Strategy was largely drafted by individual sections, with limited reference to mission colleagues. The OIG report also mentions several instances of the officials at the embassy in San Salvador being blindsided by their Washington counterparts. For example, the OIG cites specific cases of the embassy being unaware of a grant offered by bureaus within the State Department such as the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs, for all practical purposes sabotaging painstakingly established local coordination mechanisms.<sup>61</sup>

### **Bureau for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) Funds**

The International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement section (often referred to as the INL section) at the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador is new, it only opened in 2012. However, since 2008, INL has allotted \$47.1 million, primarily but not exclusively through CARSİ, to support law enforcement programs in the country. The OIG report mentions that INL has had trouble disbursing its allocated funds for assistance purposes ("pipeline funds"). Embassies typically receive funding for INL programs in the last weeks of the fiscal year and sign a letter of agreement with host countries to obligate funding. Funds are then available in the next fiscal

<sup>61</sup> The referred to grants were for \$717,000 and \$250,000 respectively. Similarly, in August 2013 a Washington-based Department of Labor employee traveled to El Salvador to review a \$14 million Department of Labor grant to help eliminate child labor, but embassy personnel did not receive a report or feedback from the visit. According to the Inspector General's report the embassy has monitored another problematic \$1 million grant from the Department of Labor that may require more oversight from the funder. Office of the Inspector General, "Inspection of Embassy San Salvador."

year for sub-obligation.<sup>62</sup> Delays in committing funds can result from problems in procurement, grants, or project development processes. They can also reflect delays in negotiating specific project parameters with the host government. As of September 30, 2013, the INL section in El Salvador reported \$20.26 million in funds that had not been allocated.<sup>63</sup> As a matter of fact, one of the reasons for opening a full INL section at the embassy was to accelerate the disbursements of funds.<sup>64</sup>

### Vetted Units

U.S. assistance provided through CARSI supports specialized law enforcement units that are vetted by, and work with, U.S. personnel to combat transnational gangs and trafficking networks. FBI-led Transnational Anti-Gang units, which were first created in El Salvador in 2007, have now expanded into Guatemala and Honduras with CARSI support.

**Table 2: Vetted Units Supported by CARSI in El Salvador**

| Police/FBI            | DEA             | DHS/ICE         |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Anti-gang vetted unit | DEA vetted unit | DHS vetted unit |

Source: Created based on information from U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “CARSI INL Supported Projects,” April 16, 2014.]

The Drug Enforcement Agency, ICE, and INL also have established vetted unit programs in El Salvador: DEA’s Special Antinarcotics Group (Grupo Especial Anti Narcóticos—GEAN), a counter narcotics unit within El Salvador’s Anti-Narcotics Division; ICE’s Transnational Investigative Unit that focuses on identifying organizations engaged in transnational

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Subobligation refers to the commitment of U.S. Government foreign assistance funds, usually under the terms of a bilateral letter of agreement.

<sup>63</sup> Embassies are required to sub-obligate funding within one fiscal year of the letter of agreement’s signature. “The bureau has approved Embassy San Salvador’s request to extend sub-obligation dates for its pipeline funds. Embassy San Salvador has an internal plan that appears viable for committing CARSI and Regional Gang Initiative pipeline funds within an acceptable timeframe. Some delays can be attributed to the opening of the office and associated building of administrative capacity.”(Ibid.)

<sup>64</sup> Email from the INL security expert in the U.S. Embassy, August 25, 2014.

organized crime. Among other activities, these units and task forces conduct complex investigations into money laundering; bulk cash smuggling; and the trafficking of narcotics, firearms, and persons. Funding traditionally provides for operating costs, investigative equipment, and training for investigative and enforcement activities.

INL oversees several task forces. The best known among them is Grupo Cuscatlán.<sup>65</sup> The Grupo Cuscatlán was established in 1999 as a joint PNC-Armed Forces operational unit to intercept sea and air drug shipments passing through Salvadoran territory detected by the Southern Command Anti-Drug Monitoring Center in Comalapa. In 2009 the collaboration was widened to include all institutions responsible for national security and the administration of justice. PNC, FGR, and military personnel remain 24 hours a day in their own facilities at the Comalapa Air Base working directly with U.S. personnel.

Although these units have conducted successful operations they are difficult to maintain given the broader context of corruption. In El Salvador for example, the DEA vetted unit was reduced from 22 officers to 8 after polygraph tests suggested that nearly two thirds of the personnel were no longer suitable to serve.<sup>66</sup>

There are two different types of vetted corps: vetted units and task forces. A vetted unit must, among other criteria, meet specific vetting standards, be made up of personnel from one agency, and generally conform to an established ratio of U.S to host country personnel. In El Salvador the ratio is one U.S. official for every fifteen Salvadorans. Vetted units are operationally focused and U.S. participation in these operations is more direct. Vetted Task Forces are different in so far as they often bring together staff from several agencies, and U.S. law enforcement personnel do not participate directly in operations although they may serve as liaisons or advisors to the task force.

<sup>65</sup> In addition the INL oversees the Public Transportation Protection and the Business Crimes Task Forces while the DEA operates a Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) Program. SIUs are top secret groups of elite agents, nearly always police, equipped, trained, and vetted by the United States. Their members undergo background checks and regular polygraph and drug testing. The SIU have access to DEA’s intelligence database.

<sup>66</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative.”



Vetted units and task forces have two main objectives: to conduct professional investigations and operations; and, to be a role model that will influence the overall institution for the better.<sup>67</sup> In general, vetted units and task forces have been successful conducting delicate and complex operations, however, their usefulness as role models have been tempered by Salvadoran police officers' doubts about the efficacy of polygraphs and their suspicion that some of the Salvadoran participants in the vetted corps are not as clean as they look.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the vetted units and task forces whose members are polygraphed, trained, equipped, and guided by U.S.—or Colombian<sup>69</sup>—personnel, the unit must comply with the Leahy law<sup>70</sup> vetting process conducted by an embassy first-tour office management specialist who handles all vetting related to human rights abuses for all the agencies. The Leahy law prohibits the use of U.S. security assistance to assist foreign security units where there is credible evidence tying the units to gross human rights violations. Leahy vetting determines whether there is such evidence prior to providing assistance, and is an important part of the embassy's work. In El Salvador, U.S. agencies and embassy sections submitted 2,500 names for Leahy vetting in 2013 about 10 percent of whom were deemed ineligible for training.<sup>71</sup>

### The Gang Resistance, Education, and Training Program

Another INL signature program is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program. In 2010, INL formed a partnership with the National Policy Board of the U.S.-based Gang Resistance Education and Training Foundation to implement a GREAT program in El Salvador. GREAT is a school-based, police-taught gang and violence prevention program for elementary and junior high school aged children. The program is intended to immunize youngsters against delinquency, violence,

and gang membership. GREAT lessons focus on providing students with life skills to help them avoid using criminal behavior and violence to solve problems.

First developed by the Phoenix police department in 1991, it was rolled out across the United States in 1992. In an effort to encourage positive relationships in the community between parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers, in the United States GREAT has developed partnerships with nationally recognized organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the National Association of Police Athletic Leagues.

In El Salvador, there are 18 PNC officers certified as full-time GREAT instructors and approximately 114 officers have been trained to use the methodology. More than 25,000 students have graduated from the program since 2010. The El Salvador-based training program has certified over 300 regional officers and trained more than 30,000 at-risk youth in Central America.<sup>72</sup> INL has now formed a partnership with Fundación Patria Unida, a Salvadoran private foundation led by Guillermo Borja Ferguson, a well-known coffee baron. Patria Unida will sponsor the future costs of expanding GREAT to more schools and communities.

GREAT's usefulness is not because it helps youngsters in the community avoid being recruited by gangs. When the trade-off is either to join the gang or be killed, loyalty and exit are the only options (voice is not a possibility).<sup>73</sup> The program's value lies in its confidence building among stake holders aspect. The partnership between students, teachers, and police officers is not a panacea but it is an important contribution to social cohesion at the local level.

INL has also used CARSI funding to help support Salvadoran efforts to adopt an asset's forfeiture law and adopted implementation measures and procedures. In November 2013, the government of El Salvador approved

<sup>67</sup> Interview conducted by Eric Olson with U.S. officials, March 28, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Interview by the author with a former PNC investigator who requested anonymity, San Salvador, May 13, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview by the author with INL security expert at the U.S. Embassy, San Salvador, May 28, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Named after Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Chair of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee and the law's chief proponent.

<sup>71</sup> Office of the Inspector General, "Inspection of Embassy San Salvador."

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, "INL and Community Policing in Central America, Fact Sheet," handed to the author (no date).

<sup>73</sup> These concepts are a reference to Albert O. Hirschman's seminal essay *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). The author argues that there are three types of responses to unsatisfactory situations in one firm, organization, or country. The first is exit: leaving without trying to change things (migrating); the second is "voice," that is, speaking up and trying to change things (a GREAT tool); and the third one is "loyalty," or to accept the status quo (joining the gang). For an excerpt of the argument see <http://www.thesocialcontract.com/pdf/four-four/hirschma.pdf>.

an asset forfeiture law. With generous funding from INL, an experienced Colombian judge helped with the drafting of the law and will collaborate in its implementation and the training of the special courts that will constitute the new jurisdiction. The U.S. Department of the Treasury will coordinate with the Salvadoran government to promote the expansion of asset forfeiture operations in the future. Likewise, an anti-money laundering bill has been under consideration by El Salvador's Legislative Assembly for almost a year now and is still waiting for presidential signature.

### Economic Support Funds (ESF) Funds

USAID has expanded the reach of its programs by using CARSIFunds to complement its regular bilateral assistance funding. For example while USAID spent \$41 million in El Salvador in FY2014 and has requested \$27 million for FY2015 for its regular bilateral assistance programs in El Salvador, CARSIFunds were \$10 million in FY2014 and the Obama administration has requested \$5 million for FY2015.<sup>74</sup>

For the period 2013–2017, USAID plans to align all activities and resource requests with PFG goals. USAID/El Salvador proposes as a general goal to expand broad-based economic growth in a more secure El Salvador, and believes it can accomplish this goal through strategic investments under two complementary development objectives: improved citizen security and rule of law in targeted areas; and economic growth opportunities based in an expansion of exports (*tradables* in PFG parlance). USAID/El Salvador's goal statement directly aligns with PFG's overall goal—and CARSIFunds—to steer El Salvador towards a new era of a secure environment for higher investment.

During the next four years USAID will support the PFG Joint Country Action Plan goals to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice procedures and practices and strengthen justice/security sector institutions. Projects are designed to provide technical assistance to promote increased coordination between justice sector agents and institutions, and to improve the management and investigative capacity of the Attorney General, the Public Defender, the National Civilian Police, forensic services, judges, and court personnel. Interventions are intended to professionalize El Salvador's civil service, and in general enhance public confidence in the government.

<sup>74</sup> Foreignassistance.gov, "El Salvador," <http://www.foreignassistance.gov/web/OU.aspx?OUID=218&FY=2013&AgencyID=0>.

In recent years, as the country's increasing insecurity has become a major development challenge, USAID has expanded crime prevention activities to high-risk communities with the participation of local authorities, community and youth leaders, NGOs, and the private sector and will continue to do so.

USAID El Salvador is implementing five CARSIFunded initiatives: Rule of Law; Violence Prevention at the Local Level; Adopt a School; Improving the Justice System; and SolucionES, a Global Development Alliance, the agency's largest ever alliance with local organizations.<sup>75</sup>

Through its management of CARSIFunds appropriated through the ESF account, USAID supports municipal level efforts designed to address the underlying conditions of crime and violence, targeting young people in particular. As a result of the social and economic exclusion that stems from dysfunctional families, high levels of unemployment, minimal access to basic services, ineffective government institutions, and insufficient access to educational and economic opportunities, many Salvadoran youth do not have viable alternatives to gangs and other criminal organizations. USAID-funded programs seek to provide education and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth as well as recreational spaces.

Among the non CARSIFunds complementing CARSIFunds's objectives, it is important to mention the Department of Defense (DOD)'s support for counter narcotics efforts in the region.

Operation Martillo, an interdiction effort designed to prevent trafficking in the coastal waters of Central America is a good example of DOD's support for CARSIFunds's objectives. Launched in January 2012, Operation Martillo is a complex military exercise involving the deployment of U.S. military, Coast Guard, law enforcement and partner nation vessels, aircraft, soldiers, sailors, and police along the region's Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Its purpose is to interdict drug flows heading north from South America. The Southern Command's components most involved are in addition to JIATF South, the Honduras-based U.S. Joint Task Force Bravo, Naval Forces South (also known as the 4th Fleet), and Marine Forces South. Agencies from the Homeland Security Department include the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection. The Department of Justice's DEA plays a role on

<sup>75</sup> USAID, "USAID's Lopes on Crime in Latin America, Caribbean," June 19, 2013, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/06/20130620277078.html#axzz34jHvRdy7>.

the ground, as does INL, which supports local forces with CARSI funds. The seven Central American countries are part of the exercise. Canada, Colombia, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom have participated, as well. The cost of the program is not public, though it is likely well into the hundreds of millions of dollars given the number of assets employed.<sup>76</sup>

USAID has often been criticized by the donor community for its lack of collaborative spirit, its reliance on U.S.-based contractors and the Agency's disconnect from local realities. Following the findings and recommendations of the 2010 First Quadrennial Diplomacy Review "Leading Through Civilian Power," USAID embarked on a series of reforms to "transform its model of doing business" in line with OECD's international cooperation guidelines. These reforms, labeled *USAID Forward*, are still largely untested but are being thoroughly implemented in El Salvador.

Three are worth citing: greater reliance on host nations' systems and local organizations; an emphasis on accountability and transparency, among others, in programming by implementing multi-year plans for foreign assistance; and improved coordination with other bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs, and the private sector.



A SolucionES leadership workshop for young people in San Martin.

<sup>76</sup> Adam Isacson et al, "Time to Listen: Trends in U.S. Security Assistance to Latin American and the Caribbean," Washington Office on Latin America, 12, <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Regional%20Security/Time%20to%20Listen/Time%20to%20Listen.pdf>.

SolucionES constitutes an interesting test case of the new PFG approach that USAID has been implementing since 2010 in its reform agenda, commonly referred to as "USAID Forward." From the recipient's point of view, the innovation is the agency's goal of expanding its use of host nation systems and local implementing partners instead of the U.S.-based firms that have traditionally dominated the USAID program implementation field. U.S. funds provided to partner country governments, local organizations, and local business have been increased from less than 10 percent to 20 percent. USAID has announced its intention to more than double direct grants to local NGOs and to increase the number of direct contracts with local private business.<sup>77</sup>

USAID has traditionally relied on U.S.-based private development firms to implement its programs. These firms can be contractors (for goods and services), grantees, or can enter into a cooperative agreement with the agency. In El Salvador, USAID's main partners are Checchi and Company Consulting, Research Triangle International, Casals and Associates, and Creative Associates through its SICA anti-gang programs. All are for-profit firms.

Critics argue that the USAID private-contractor model creates an unnecessary barrier between the people designing the projects and the actual recipients of aid. This barrier decreases both the top-down flow of money and the bottom-up flow of information between the U.S. government and the aid recipients. As a result, projects are less effective and less efficient because of this sizable gap between donors and recipients. At the most basic level, the use of for-profit private contractors significantly reduces the amount of money actually reaching the grassroots level. USAID pays many of its contractors an overhead (up to 10 percent of total costs). Development experts estimate that the average percentage of obligated funds that actually flows

<sup>77</sup> United States Department of State and United States Agency for International Development, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State and United States Agency for International Development), 112, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDACQ604.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACQ604.pdf).

to local partners is around 20 percent.<sup>78</sup>

USAID's own limited staff forces it to rely on contractors and has shifted an increasingly greater proportion of the bureaucratic burden—which is considerable—onto the contractors themselves. As a result, the current system rewards mainly size and familiarity with U.S. government funding competitions. Within the cumbersome request for proposals process, applicants must invest a great deal of time and money into the initial application, both of which go to waste if the contractor is not selected. It will be very difficult for USAID to abandon this practice altogether.

For example, Checchi implemented a five-year program to help strengthen the criminal justice system in El Salvador, one of USAID's identified areas of work under PFG. As part of the five-year contract with USAID, the company provided technical assistance in the implementation of a new criminal procedure code. The program is also designed to liaise with USAID's community policing program. Among other activities, the Checchi team worked to promote better coordination between the National Civilian Police and the Attorney General's Office (FGR) in the investigation and prosecution of criminal cases. The team worked to strengthen the FGR's forensic investigation capacity and increase its use of scientific evidence as a basis for conviction. In addition, Checchi provided assistance to the FGR to reengineer its organizational structure and internal processes. Finally, Checchi assisted with the development and implementation of a Domestic Violence Initiative and a Rape Crisis Center. Checchi will continue assisting USAID in its effort to strengthen the country's justice sector having won a second five-year contract that is now in its first year of implementation.

Progress, although real regarding programmatic and operational, has been slower than expected at the political level. During the Funes administration, several Supreme Court decisions were questioned by the FMLN (most

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<sup>78</sup> "Citizen Security in El Salvador: Improving the Effectiveness of International Aid," University of Washington Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies Citizen Security in El Salvador: Improving the Effectiveness of International Aid Task Force 2012 Task Force Members Ashley Davis, Dan Fiedler, Janey Greenstein, Sherrie Hsu, Mina Manuchehri, Katherine McKeon, Emily Phillips, and Alyssa Virtue. Coordinators/Editors Kate Fenimore and Katherine Walton. Faculty Advisor Angelina Godoy. Special Advisor Jorge Sapoznikow. Evaluator Mauricio Vivero. <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/19667/F%20Godoy%20Task%20Force%20Final%20Report.pdf.txt?sequence=2>.

importantly the destitution of the Court's President by the Constitutional Chamber for lack of political impartiality) setting the stage for a long institutional impasse.<sup>79</sup> Things seem to have calmed down, but there are no guarantees that setbacks will not occur again in the future.

RTI and a Canadian partner, the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation, were USAID contractors in one of the Crime and Violence Prevention Programs from 2008 to 2012. The program worked to strengthen the capacities of local governments, civil society organizations, community leaders, and youth to address the problems of insecurity at the municipal level. Twelve sites were selected as the project launching pads: San Martín, Toncatepeque and the Districts of La Chacra and Altavista in San Salvador, Armenia; Nahuizalco and Izalco in Sonsonate; Ahuachapán in Ahuachapán; and Santa Tecla, Ciudad Arce, San Juan Opico, and Zaragoza in La Libertad. The goal was to establish Prevention Councils in specific municipalities to analyze problems within the community and develop Prevention Plans to address those problems through a variety of activities ranging from vocational training to social entrepreneurship. A second version of the Crime Prevention program was launched in April 2014 to be led by Creative Voices in Development.<sup>80</sup>

With the idea of achieving long-term sustainable development, USAID Forward has begun consistently supporting local institutions, private sector and civil society organizations that serve as engines of growth and progress in their own nations. In 2012, USAID Forward established SolucionES, as a parallel effort in local crime prevention based on similar assumptions and promoting a similar strategy.

It is too early to tell if these reforms will have a positive impact on the overall efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. assistance. One aspect to monitor

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<sup>79</sup> Geoff Thale, "Tensions Rise between El Salvador's National Assembly and the Supreme Court: Understanding (and Misunderstanding) the Salvadoran Constitutional Crisis," Washington Office on Latin America, July 18, 2012, [http://www.wola.org/commentary/tensions\\_rise\\_between\\_el\\_salvador\\_s\\_national\\_assembly\\_and\\_the\\_supreme\\_court\\_understanding](http://www.wola.org/commentary/tensions_rise_between_el_salvador_s_national_assembly_and_the_supreme_court_understanding).

<sup>80</sup> El Salvador is divided into 262 municipalities. Municipalities selected for the program are: Acajutla and San Antonio del Monte in the Department of Sonsonate; Nejapa, Panchimalco, and Soyapango in San Salvador; Cojutepeque and Ilobasco in Cabañas; San Vicente and Tecoluca in San Vicente; Usulután in Usulután; Conchagua in La Unión and Quezaltepeque in La Libertad. Jessel Santos, "Trece Municipios dentro de planes de prevención," *La Prensa Gráfica*, April 9, 2014.

will be how the huge asymmetry between the funder and the local implementing organizations will play out when local actors do not have the leverage and political connections to effectively compete with the U.S. private development contractors.

### Community Policing: Where Funding Streams Converge

INL and USAID both contribute to expanding community policing in El Salvador. USAID provides assistance and support to the National Civilian Police (PNC) in its effort to become a more community-oriented police force adopting community-oriented models of operation. Activities focus on management policies and practices, professional development in conflict resolution, strategic decision-making, problem solving, and awareness training. For the roll out of the community policing program in high crime municipalities, USAID identifies and supports leaders in the institution that are working towards a cooperative and productive relationship with citizens. USAID also promotes collaboration between the PNC, municipal officials, and community organizations to draft security action plans to tackle crime problems.

For its part, INL focuses more directly on training in community-police relations (community police) at the local level; as well as, intelligence-led policing, an approach that is complementary to community-oriented policing but more concerned with traditional police priorities such as the detection of crime and the apprehension of serious offenders through the identification and elimination or mitigation of community conditions that create opportunities for criminal activity.<sup>81</sup> As part of its strategy, INL has helped establish “model precincts” throughout the Northern Triangle countries where these techniques and strategies can be showcased. The strategy has been to identify receptive police and civilian leadership in high risk communities, encourage them to implement known best practices in crime prevention and then encourage replication of those best practices nationwide.

In collaboration with the Transnational Regional Gang Program, INL has established two model precincts: Lourdes Colon, on the Eastern outskirts

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<sup>81</sup> For further reading on different policing approaches see Nick Tilley, “Modern Approaches to Policing: Community, Problem-Oriented and Intelligence-Led,” in Tim Newburn, ed., *Handbook of Policing*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (London and New York: Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 373–403.

of the greater San Salvador metropolitan area, and Santa Ana, El Salvador’s third largest urban conglomerate. Usulután and San Martín have received a majority of the basic training curricula. Future plans are to establish model precincts in small rural towns such as San Luis Herradura de la Paz, a small coastal community near El Salvador’s international airport in Comalapa where the Cooperative Security Location is located; San José Villanueva, between San Salvador and the Port of La Libertad; Caluco in Sonsonate; and Concepción Batres in Usulután.<sup>82</sup>

INL has equipped Model Precincts with information technology that gives them the tools to implement CompStat strategies, the highly successful problem solving model developed by the New York City Police Department that is now implemented around the world. Most model precinct police officers have been trained in community policing by USAID-funded programs. In addition to providing modern equipment, model precincts offer the services of basic youth community outreach centers where young people from community schools can play, work or study in air-conditioned computer rooms, and train in a soccer field under the supervision of an adult coach. Computer instructors and soccer coaches are either active police or civilian PNC employees. The coaches in the athletic programs are GREAT-certified instructors. Finally, local jails (pre-trial detention facilities called *bartolinas*) in model precincts are being remodeled and provided with basic services (running water, toilets, showers, etc.). Model precincts’ jails are extremely overcrowded like the rest of Salvadoran prisons and improving the infrastructure will not solve the problem of overcrowding which results from an extremely dysfunctional justice system. However the request to help improve living conditions in pretrial detention centers was a direct request from the PNC.

INL has also sponsored training by U.S. experts. Instructors from the Florida Regional Community Policing Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida trained over 600 officers in Santa Ana in investigative techniques, collection and analysis of evidence, and community policing as part of model precinct initiatives. The Criminal Justice Department at Temple University has also provided support and U.S. experts will develop Central American focused community policing and intelligence-led policing curricula that will be

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<sup>82</sup> E-mail message from the Regional Gang Advisor based at the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, July 14, 2014, 5:25 p.m.

administered to mid-level police officers on a regional platform.

Despite the suspicions of and resistance to change that were reportedly common during the program's early phases, the benefits of the program have attracted attention and generated requests from other community leaders and police commanders for help in implementing similar strategies. Model precinct procedures are being implemented in San Miguel, Ahuachapán, and Sonsonate.<sup>83</sup>



The PNC Ahuachapán precinct near the Guatemalan border.

U.S.-funded programs at the local level are evidently well-run and those involved in the projects declare themselves satisfied with their interactions with USAID and INL.<sup>84</sup> However, violence indicators remain stubbornly high. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine whether the clear reduction

<sup>83</sup> Interview by the author with INL security expert James Rose, San Salvador, May 28, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Interviews by the author with Javier Castro de León, Director of Legal Studies from FUSADES who has worked with the U.S. Embassy in the process of drafting and commenting the access to public information (USAID non CARSI) and asset forfeiture (INL CARSI) laws, San Salvador, May 14, 2014 and with Uwaldo Peña Information Officer at the Ministry of Public Works, who participates in the Public Transportation Security Interagency Task Force sponsored by INL, San Salvador, May 30, 2014.

in the homicide rate between 2012 and 2013 was a product of the so-called gang truce or the community oriented security policies implemented by the government with U.S. support during this period.

A very good sign is that the new administration has declared that it is building its citizen security strategy with community policing as the cornerstone program and community policing precincts have been established in several San Salvador neighborhoods.

## Conclusion

U.S. Security Assistance has changed over the years. Under the Mérida Initiative Framework its most important components were military and oriented to the hard security side—very much influenced by the “war on drugs” paradigm. Three key changes introduced by the Obama administration moved the focus of the assistance towards institution building and violence prevention: the changes introduced in the overall foreign assistance *modus operandi* bring it closer to the OECD guidelines, including more contact and coordination with the donor community, more input from the host government and increased transparency; the Partnership for Growth strategy as a White House initiative providing a framework for the all U.S. cooperation, and the efforts at the local level to get everyone on the same boat.

Has U.S. security assistance made a difference? Yes. Why then is there such skepticism in labeling it a success? Allow me to advance three hypotheses: the intractability of the problem of insecurity, the transnational aspects of violence, and the inflated expectations of what limited approaches can do.

The problems of violence and insecurity have permeated Salvadoran history. It used to be a domestic problem very much rooted in extreme inequality, ethnic and social discrimination, authoritarianism, and arbitrariness of the justice system. Those problems have remained, albeit tempered by the new, generally-accepted political rules based on the principles of representative democracy and equality before the law.

Salvadoran society became globalized before it had the time to consolidate its political institutions. Free trade and migration have brought new challenges, but so has transnational organized crime in all its manifestations.

It is clear that the problem of insecurity in El Salvador, and Central

America's Northern Triangle in general, is not only local or sub-regional, it concerns the whole region with important global spill-over effects. Moreover, the drug trade—one of the most important drivers of insecurity, also directly implicates the regional powers: the United States (where the drugs are headed and where many of the weapons originate); Mexico (where the big cartels dominating the drug trade reign) and Colombia (where the drug is produced). The Obama administration has been increasingly talking about co-responsibility and that is a good first step. However, it is not enough for Washington to accept part of the blame in creating the problem; it must also accept the obligation to contribute to its solution beyond providing foreign assistance.

The solution of the public security crisis in the region must be multi-level, multi sectorial, involve multiple actors, multinational, transnational, long term and require a significant financial commitment.

1. Multilevel: it must be coordinated at the national and local levels within the boundaries of the nation states and also at the sub-regional, regional and international levels.
2. Multi sectorial: it must be addressed by the security sector institutions in the first place, but it must also involve education (to create a better educated workforce), health policies (to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, substance and drug abuse, etc); youth policies (to help promote young people's social insertion); economic policies (to promote formal employment and reduce the informal sector); and fiscal policies (to improve tax collection).
3. Multiple actors: civil society and the private sector must be actively involved in the effort; international governmental and non-governmental organizations as well.
4. Multinational: in addition to providing assistance to the small Central American countries it will require the international community to drastically change the international drug regime and adopt a more pragmatic and scientific approach to drug consumption; it will also require better regulation of small arms beginning with signing and ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly on April 2, 2013.

5. Transnational: It will need increased exchange of information and enhanced cooperation between governments in matters of intelligence (smart borders are also part of the solution).
6. Expanding funding: there is a need to create new funding mechanisms beyond taxes and aid.

International cooperation and foreign assistance can help, but cannot be held accountable for the continued insecurity. There is a need to revise the success criteria and set them on a more realistic plane. U.S. security assistance by itself will not solve El Salvador's insecurity problem but definitely contributes to Salvadoran institutions combat crime.



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## CARSI IN GUATEMALA

### PROGRESS, FAILURE, AND UNCERTAINTY

NICHOLAS PHILLIPS

#### Introduction

To the extent that the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) is a coherent policy, Guatemala is its centerpiece. This land of sultry jungles, volcanic highlands, and buzzing cities boasts a population of nearly 16 million—the largest on the isthmus, with roughly 39 percent self-identifying as indigenous.<sup>1</sup> During the first five years of CARSI, no country in Central America received more of the initiative’s funds, or was allocated more non-CARSI security aid.<sup>2</sup> Thus it would appear that the U.S. Congress is aware of Guatemala’s problems: its weak institutions, drug smuggling, gangs, violence, poverty, inequality, impunity, corruption, and malnutrition. We may now add to this list the recent swell of Guatemalan youth who abandoned their homeland and got caught crossing illegally and unaccompanied onto American soil.<sup>3</sup>

But is CARSI a catalyst for adequate solutions? In some ways, yes. In others, no. And in some areas, it is hard to say for lack of performance

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<sup>1</sup> “Proyecciones de población por departamento,” Temas/Indicadores, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.ine.gob.gt/index.php/estadisticas/tema-indicadores>; and “Censos Nacionales XI de Población y VI de Habitación 2002,” Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 32, <http://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/20/jZqeGe1H9WdUDngYXkWt3GIhUUQCukcg.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objectives,” GAO-13-771, September 2013, 11 and 17.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Turkewitz, “Fear Is Driving Young Men Across the U.S. Border,” *The Atlantic*, June 20, 2014.



evaluations. CARSI funds have bolstered the criminal courts and the police's anti-gang unit, for example, but have failed to produce an exemplary police precinct or eradicate poppy farms. Furthermore, some crime prevention efforts bankrolled by CARSI have never been audited, so their effectiveness is not clear. This chapter will shed some light on CARSI's successes, challenges, and unknowns in Guatemala.

## Security Overview

For much of the last half century, the biggest security threat to Guatemalans was their own civil war. Between 1960 and 1996, leftist guerrillas took up arms against a series of militarized conservative regimes in one of Latin America's "hottest" Cold War conflicts. The Guatemalan state, backed by wealthy elites and fueled by anti-communist fervor, countered the rebellion with such ferocity that a United Nations truth commission later declared certain state tactics as "genocide" against the indigenous population, some of whom had sided with the guerrillas. In sum, the commission estimated that the 36-year struggle claimed up to 200,000 lives and pushed as many as 1.5 million from their homes.<sup>4</sup>

The vortex of war had sucked in all of Guatemalan society, not just the combatants: rich and poor, young and old, *ladino*<sup>5</sup> and indigenous, Catholics and Protestants, bureaucrats and businessmen, politicians, the police, the courts, the press, universities, and labor unions. The armed forces had seized control of the interior and the borders, but certain military structures displayed "a climate of permissiveness or corruption," that allowed organized crime to gain a firmer foothold in Guatemala.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, the

<sup>4</sup> *Guatemala: Memory of Silence, Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations*, February 1999, 17 and 30, [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf). These figures have been repeated countless times since their publication; for a dissenting view, see Carlos Sabino, *Guatemala, La Historia Silenciada (1944-1989) Tomo II*, Capítulo XXV (Guatemala: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> In the Guatemalan context the word *Ladino* is primarily used to denote a mixed-raced person between Spanish and Indigenous. *Ladinos* are primarily Spanish speakers.

<sup>6</sup> Julie López, "Guatemala's Crossroads: The Democratization of Violence and Second Chances," in *Organized Crime in Central America: The Northern Triangle*, eds. Cynthia J. Arnson and Eric L. Olson, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), 154, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/node/19779>.

signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 did not immediately usher in a new, peaceful era. For example, according to a 2003 report by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a Washington D.C.-based think tank, a shadowy network of active and retired government officials, military men, private citizens, and clandestine armed groups continued to collude with each other after the conflict. They allegedly embezzled state resources, avoided prosecution for wartime atrocities, and hounded left-leaning civil society with threats, harassment and murder.<sup>7</sup>

Regular citizens, adapted to years of chronic political violence, found themselves poorly equipped to handle a rising tide of street crime. Tani Adams, a U.S.-Guatemalan anthropologist, wrote in a 2012 study that in the first decade after the Peace Accords, "a new kind of violence progressively overran daily life" and Guatemalans displayed

*contradictory impulses: adaptation and combat, fear, denial and indignation, heightened aggression...many of the survival strategies that people had learned during the war—silence, avoidance, self-victimization and scapegoating—had clearly gained new life and functionality as ways to cope with violence in peacetime.*<sup>8</sup>

The havoc wrought by internal armed conflict thus rendered Guatemalan territory more fertile than ever for the expansion of global criminal markets—namely, the drug trade.

## Drug Trafficking and Violence

As the Mexican state clashed with drug cartels beginning in 2006, its neighbor to the south became more attractive than ever as an alternate hub for moving narcotics. Guatemala was facing serious problems of its own. Borders were porous. The military, tasked with securing them, was significantly reduced in manpower and resources as required by the peace accords.

<sup>7</sup> Susan C. Peacock and Adriana Beltrán, *Hidden Powers in Post-Conflict Guatemala: Illegal Armed Groups and the Forces Behind Them*, (Washington, D.C.: Washington Office on Latin America, 2003), <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Citizen%20Security/past/Hidden%20Powers%20Long%20Version.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Tani Marilena Adams, "Chronic Violence and its Reproduction: Perverse Trends in Social Relations, Citizenship, and Democracy in Latin America," Woodrow Wilson Center Update on the Americas, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, March 2012, 5, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Chronic%20Violence%20and%20its%20Reproduction\\_1.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Chronic%20Violence%20and%20its%20Reproduction_1.pdf).

This left many informal crossings totally unguarded. The country's police, the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), was corrupt and inept, which lowered the cost of getting caught. Finally, strong smuggling networks already existed in Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> A handful of well-connected Guatemalan criminal families—the Mendozas, the Lorenzanas, and the Ortiz clan, for example—had expertise in smuggling contraband and drugs across the country. They were well positioned to profit from the cocaine bonanza that surged in after 2007 and 2008.<sup>10</sup>

In some cases, the local populace favored the trafficking clans over the state. As Guatemalan journalist Julie López has observed, “organized crime has filled the voids of power and authority in several regions of the country.” All over Guatemala, “organized crime pays for the electrification of urban areas, paves streets, and employs locals in its businesses enterprises.”<sup>11</sup>

The families did not operate in a vacuum. Each had ties to larger outside groups. The Mendozas worked with the Gulf Cartel. Juan Ortiz López (nicknamed *Chamalé*) partnered with the potent Sinaloa Federation, considered by some to be the largest drug trafficking organization on the planet. The Lorenzanas at one time cooperated with the ruthless Zetas, a cartel composed of former Mexican and Guatemalan military operatives.<sup>12</sup> But the Lorenzanas and Jairo “*El Pelón*” Orellana, an independent trafficker connected to the family, managed to do business with both the Zetas and Sinaloa. The families bribed PNC officials to look the other way or actively help out, but they couldn't buy off everyone: dirty policemen known as *tumbadores* sometimes seized the drugs for their own nefarious purposes.<sup>13</sup>

Claudia Paz y Paz, Guatemala's soft-spoken attorney general from late 2010 to May 2014, surprised many with an unprecedented crusade against the drug lords. During her first year, she oversaw the arrest of

long-time traffickers Waldemar “*El Patriarca*” Lorenzana Lima and his son, Eliú Elixander—theretofore known as “untouchables” for their deep connections in the state. Ortiz, the reverend-turned-kingpin of the western highlands, was also arrested on her watch. During her second year, Paz y Paz's team won the conviction of 60 Zetas and their Guatemalan ally, Horst Walther “*El Tigre*” Overdick.<sup>14</sup> Right before her departure from office in May 2014, she helped coordinate the capture of Orellana in Zacapa.

High-profile arrests do not necessarily shut down a cartel. Ortiz was extradited to the United States in May 2014 and his brother Rony remains a fugitive, yet their trafficking ring continues to operate in Guatemala's western highlands.<sup>15</sup> According to Steven Dudley of *InSight Crime*, the Zetas have weakened and assumed a lower profile, but still operate along a corridor through the center of the country along with remnants of the Lorenzana network. Meanwhile, the Mendozas still hold sway in the east and the northern jungles of Petén, the Saraceño clan on the Pacific coast is fighting off challenges by smaller groups, and the Caraduras band continues to move product through Guatemala City.<sup>16</sup>

As for the Sinaloa Federation, its leader, Joaquín “*El Chapo*” Guzmán Loera, was captured by Mexican marines in February 2014. However, high-ranking sources in the PNC and Ministerio Público (Public Ministry) said in interviews that the arrest has not disrupted the supply chain in any noticeable way.<sup>17</sup> Sinaloa's relationships in Guatemala are extensive and “horizontal,” allowing it to adapt nimbly to any kind of threat.<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. Department of State still lists Guatemala as a “major” country in terms of drug transit and precursor chemicals. Smugglers, it says, can

<sup>9</sup> López, “Guatemala's Crossroads,” 140.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment*, (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), 25, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC\\_Central\\_America\\_and\\_the\\_Caribbean\\_english.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_Central_America_and_the_Caribbean_english.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> López, “Guatemala's Crossroads,” 176.

<sup>12</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> “Radiografía del Cartel de La Charola,” *El Periódico*, October 14, 2014. <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20141014/pais/3307/Radiograf%C3%ADa-del-Cartel-de-La-Charola.htm>

<sup>14</sup> “Ministerio Público Presentación de Resultados 2012,” November 30, 2012, slide 35, <http://www.mp.gob.gt/informes-públicos-fiscal-general/>.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with high-ranking official in the Public Ministry, Guatemala City, May 19, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Dudley, “Guatemala's New Narco-map: Less Zetas, Same Chaos,” *InSight Crime*, September 16, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/guatemalas-new-narco-map-less-zetas-same-chaos>.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with high-ranking official in the PNC, Guatemala City, May 21, 2014; also interview with high-ranking official in the Public Ministry, Guatemala City, May 19, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Julie López, “9 apuntes sobre el panorama del narcotráfico sin ‘El Chapo,’” *Plaza Pública*, February 24, 2014, <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/9-apuntes-sobre-el-panorama-del-narcotrafico-sin-el-chapo>.

move bulk cash, drugs and precursors through the country “with little difficulty.” The Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) recently asserted that in the first half of 2013, over two-thirds of all cocaine arriving in the United States first passed through Guatemala. The country continues to be a source of poppy, the flower used to make heroin. It is also a production base for methamphetamine. Security forces have seized huge amounts of precursor chemicals and are only now in the process of organizing them.<sup>19</sup>

Drug trade logistics are constantly evolving. High-ranking sources in the Guatemalan government agreed that the fleet of helicopters donated to Guatemala by the United States has allowed the Central American nation to better patrol its own airspace over the last several years. This has drastically reduced the number of cocaine flights into the country. The majority of drugs now enter Guatemala via boats on the Pacific coast, the officials said, with plenty of “weight” still rolling in across the Honduran border on its way north to Mexico.<sup>20</sup>

It is precisely these two areas—the Pacific coast (Escuintla and Santa Rosa departments) and the Guatemala-Honduras border (Zacapa and Chiquimula departments)—that are plagued by the highest murder rates in the country. Yet how much is Guatemala’s overall homicide rate—34 per 100,000 inhabitants<sup>21</sup>—driven by the drug trade?

Many assume that *narcoactividad* is the engine driving most of the bloodshed in Guatemala, and indeed the whole isthmus. “Intensified competition in cocaine has increased the level of violence in the region,” reported the International Narcotics Control Board of the United Nations in March 2014, with “both sides of the Guatemalan-Honduran border, and in Guatemala along the borders with Belize and Mexico” among the

“areas of highest concern.”<sup>22</sup> It seems logical, even obvious: Guatemala is sandwiched between the world’s largest cocaine source (the Andes) and largest market (the United States); the drug traffickers running in between show a penchant for guns and violence.

But the link is not so clear-cut, according to Carlos Mendoza, a Guatemalan economist, political analyst and member of President Otto Pérez Molina’s Comisión Nacional Para la Reforma Política de Droga (National Commission for Drug Policy Reform). In the online news site *Plaza Pública* last May, Mendoza cited a statistic provided to the commission by the government (he did not divulge which agency) linking 45 percent of all murders to drug trafficking. However, he found the methodology flawed: if a murder occurs in a municipality deemed to be a hot-bed of narco-activity, then under this analysis, it is automatically considered a result of drug trafficking.<sup>23</sup>

The police also collect data on this topic, but those data point away from drugs. For instance, the PNC keeps a tally of purported motives for each homicide, following a preliminary crime scene investigation. The figures from January to November 2013 show that the most frequently ascribed motive was “*ignorado*” (or “unknown”). The second most frequent was “*venganza*” (or “revenge”). Only seven of 4,881 homicides were deemed related to drug trafficking.<sup>24</sup> A figure that low is probably distorted; the police likely have plenty of incentives to avoid pointing a finger at the drug traffickers. But even if the PNC data is only partly accurate, factors besides drugs must be adding to the body count.

Mendoza has proposed an alternative theory about the high rate of homicides at the Guatemalan-Honduran border. In that region, where livestock ranchers often carry guns, a macho “culture of honor” compels

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” Vol. 1, March 2014, 176, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222881.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, Guatemala City, May 19, 2014 and interview with PNC official, May 21, 2014; see also Geovanni Contreras, “Identificadas 10 rutas del narcotráfico,” *Prensa Libre*, October 22, 2014. [http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/Nacionales-identificadas-10-rutas-del-narcotrafico-autoridades\\_0\\_1234076593.html](http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/Nacionales-identificadas-10-rutas-del-narcotrafico-autoridades_0_1234076593.html)

<sup>21</sup> Rodrigo Baires, “Diez años de muertes violentas en Guatemala,” *Plaza Pública*, February 11, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations International Narcotics Control Board, “Report 2013,” March 4, 2014, 45, [http://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2013/English/AR\\_2013\\_E\\_Chapter\\_III\\_Americas.pdf](http://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2013/English/AR_2013_E_Chapter_III_Americas.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Mendoza, “¿Cuál es la relación entre violencia homicida y narcoactividad en Guatemala? Parte I,” *Plaza Pública*, May 19, 2014, <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/cual-es-la-relacion-entre-violencia-homicida-y-narcoactividad-en-guatemala-parte-i>.

<sup>24</sup> Policía Nacional Civil, “Estadística de Homicidios Registradas a Nivel República de Enero a Noviembre 2013, Desglosado por Posible Móvil del Crimen y Departamento,” <http://ca-bi.com/blackbox/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Movil-del-Homicidio-al-30nov-2013.png>.

men to respond disproportionately to aggressions and slights in order to avoid seeming vulnerable. After all, Mendoza argues, illicit drugs move across both the southern and northern borders of Guatemala, but the murder rate in the south is much higher. Therefore, culture might explain the difference.<sup>25</sup>

The proliferation of firearms is another factor in the violence. By the end of the armed conflict, Guatemala was already awash in guns, but since then, even more have poured in. In 2007, for example, the country had nearly 148,000 guns registered and owned by civilians; in 2013, that figure had grown to 500,000,<sup>26</sup> with thousands reported stolen over the last five years.<sup>27</sup> Illegal firearms are impossible to count with precision, but they loom large in Guatemalan crime. Import data from the government's gun registry (La Dirección General de Control de Armas y Municiones, or Directorate General of Gun and Mmunition Control, known as DIGECAM) show that only 15 percent of guns are registered, implying the existence of 2.5 million illegal guns by the end of 2012.<sup>28</sup> According to a 2014 study by Research Triangle Institute (RTI), an international non-profit that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) subcontracts to conduct research and implement its programs,

- 8 out of 10 firearms seized in Guatemala are illegal;
- 9 out of 10 crimes are committed with illegal firearms;
- The most prevalent handgun used to commit crimes is the 9mm;
- The amount of legally imported ammunition is about half of all that actually enters the country.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Carlos Mendoza, an economist, political scientist, and founding partner of the Central American Business Intelligence, Guatemala City, May 8, 2014.

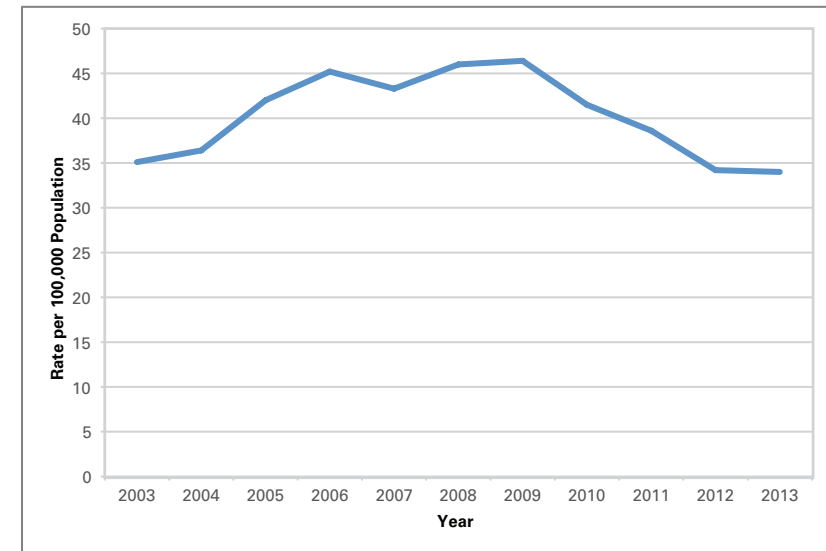
<sup>26</sup> Andrea Orozco, "Más de 4 mil 200 heridos de bala en 2013," *Prensa Libre*, February 17, 2014, [http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/mil-heridos-bala\\_0\\_1086491431.html](http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/justicia/mil-heridos-bala_0_1086491431.html).

<sup>27</sup> Wayne J. Pitts, et al., "Factors Affecting Homicide Rates in Guatemala 2000-2013: A Study of the Municipalities of Guatemala, Mixco, and Villa Nueva," prepared for Democracy and Governance Office, USAID/Guatemala, Final Report, 94.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

Figure 1: Homicide Rate in Guatemala, 2003-2013



Source: Created using statistics compiled by Carlos A. Mendoza based on Data from the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC). See Carlos A. Mendoza, "Tendencia Trimestral de Homicidios por Distintas Causas de Muerta (arma utilizada), 2004-2013," *The Black Box* (blog), February 17, 2014, [http://ca-bi.com/blackbox/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/tendencias-trimestrales-por-causa-de-homicidios-PNC-2004\\_13-tasas-2000\\_13.pdf](http://ca-bi.com/blackbox/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/tendencias-trimestrales-por-causa-de-homicidios-PNC-2004_13-tasas-2000_13.pdf).

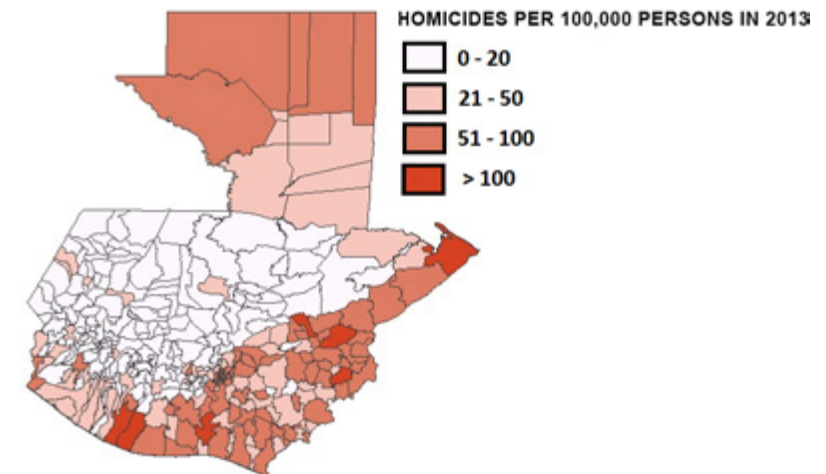
These data do not necessarily suggest that Guatemala has a gun problem, but rather, an *illegal* gun problem—a distinction that policymakers may consider taking into account, should they wish to attack the problem from this angle.

Curiously, the homicide rate has been falling in Guatemala for several

years.<sup>30</sup> President Pérez Molina has tried to take credit for this, but journalist Rodrigo Baires of *Plaza Pública* has shown using police data that the downward trend actually started in 2010, two years before the president took office. Baires argued that several factors kicked in around that time: prosecutors began dealing with murders and extortion as group phenomenon, instead of isolated cases; the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses, or national forensics lab, was given more resources to work on evidence; and investigators started using wiretaps.<sup>31</sup> In sum, law enforcement started working better: the government prosecutors' conviction rate rose from 2.9 percent in 2010 to 8.2 percent in 2013.<sup>32</sup>

Homicides dropped most dramatically in Guatemala City, from 40.7 per 100,000 residents in 2009 to 32.1 by the end of 2013.<sup>33</sup> USAID commissioned a study to determine why. Researchers found that a number of factors likely contributed, including improvements in local governance, better emergency response and trauma care and a safe new system of public transport (the *Transmetro*), among other factors.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 2:** Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population in each Municipio in Guatemala



Source: Created by Carlos A. Mendoza, using rates calculated by Mendoza based on data from the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC) and the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).

<sup>30</sup> Statistics published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) show that Guatemala's homicide rate climbed from 2011 to 2012. See UNODC, "Intentional homicide count and rate per 100,000 population, by country/territory (2000-2012)," [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/data/GSH2013\\_Homicide\\_count\\_and\\_rate.xlsx](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/data/GSH2013_Homicide_count_and_rate.xlsx). However, what really happened is that the UNODC changed methodologies for gathering data and in 2012 started using data from the national forensics lab, INACIF, instead of the PNC data used previously. Homicide totals kept by INACIF are always higher, because they include people wounded at crime scenes who later die in the hospital. This switch of sources explains the appearance of a "jump" in the murder rate. Guatemalan officials and journalists who analyze the issue tend to rely on PNC data. For more discussion on this topic, see Carlos Mendoza, "Error de ONUDC en cifras de violencia homicida de Guatemala," *The Black Box* (blog), July 14, 2014, <http://ca-bi.com/blackbox/?p=9231>.

<sup>31</sup> Baires, "Diez años de muertes violentas en Guatemala."

<sup>32</sup> Carlos Mendoza, "Paz y Paz versus la Casta Guerrera," BLOG de Carlos Mendoza, April 29, 2014, <http://carlosantoniomendoza.blogspot.com/2014/04/paz-y-paz-versus-la-casta-guerrera.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pitts, et al., "Factors Affecting Homicide Rates in Guatemala 2000-2013," Final Report.

### Gangs and Extortion

Gangs have roamed Guatemala City since at least the 1970s. Known as *pandillas*, these small groups of young male friends would band together in poor neighborhoods to dance, scrap with rivals and commit petty crimes. But in the decades following, the *pandillas* morphed into better-organized structures now known as *maras*.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1990s, the United States deported tens of thousands of Central Americans with criminal records back to the isthmus, and along with them, the rivalry between two Hispanic street gangs from Los Angeles: the Mara Salvatrucha (a.k.a., MS) and Barrio 18 (a.k.a. Dieciocho).<sup>36</sup> The deportees helped convert the local Guatemalan *pandillas* into local franchises (or

<sup>35</sup> Lourdes Hum, Leslie Ramos, and Iván Monzón, "Respuestas de la sociedad civil al fenómeno de las maras y pandillas juveniles en Guatemala," in ed. José Miguel Cruz, *Maras y Pandillas en Centroamérica*, Vol. IV (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2006), 162.

<sup>36</sup> Ana Arana, "How the Street Gangs Took Central America," *Foreign Affairs*, 84:3 (May 1, 2005): 98.

*clicas*<sup>37</sup>) of the larger *mara*. The gang members began extorting businesses on their turf and took advantage of legal and illegal small firearms flowing into the country. Drug traffickers moving through the region contracted certain gangs for security services and paid them in product, thus encouraging the gang members to set up local markets for street drugs.<sup>38</sup>

To combat the gangs, the PNC launched Plan Escoba (which loosely translates as “Operation Clean Sweep”) in August 2003. Thousands of tattooed young men suspected of being gang members were thrown into jail, mainly on the pretext of minor drug possession charges that were ultimately dismissed.<sup>39</sup> Then the situation grew darker: a United Nations official who visited Guatemala in 2006 reported “highly credible” allegations that the PNC’s investigative unit was secretly hunting down gang members and executing them—a social cleansing that harked back to the armed conflict.<sup>40</sup>

The gangs continued to grow until a 2011 United Nations report estimated Guatemala’s gang population at 22,000 strong. Edwin Ortega, director of the PNC’s anti-gang unit (called PANDA), believes it is much smaller than that, around 5,000. He said PANDA is currently conducting a national gang census to get a clearer picture.<sup>41</sup> It will not be easy: the gangs conceal their tattoos, tie their shoes in secret ways to show their allegiance, speak backwards on the phone to foil wiretaps, and smuggle notes written in coded handwriting in and out of prisons.<sup>42</sup> The government reported

in May 2014 that Guatemala was home to 40 *clicas* of Dieciocho and 30 of MS, with hundreds of their members already in prison.<sup>43</sup> The MS is more selective in its recruitment, Ortega said, but press reports suggest that both *maras* recruit children as young as six years old to do their dirty work.<sup>44</sup>

However large their numbers, the *maras* are making their presence felt in the *zonas rojas* (or crime-plagued “red zones”) of the capital as well as in the nearby municipalities of Villa Nueva and Mixco. Citizens in these areas live in a situation of “perpetual threat [of] extortion, intimidation, and violence” at the hands of gangs, according to a 2014 study commissioned by USAID. Residents in these communities are “afraid to go outside after certain hours” and are “captives in their own homes.”<sup>45</sup> The neighborhoods of Limón, Asunción, and Colonia Maya in Zona 18 of Guatemala City, for example, “are under almost total control of gang members.”<sup>46</sup> The *maras* extort small businesses in their territories all the way down to the trash collectors and prostitutes.<sup>47</sup> They also prey on public-transit operators. In 2013, 87 bus drivers, 49 taxi drivers, 68 mototaxi drivers, and 53 *ayudantes* (or drivers’ assistants) were murdered, according to the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Mutual Aid Group).<sup>48</sup> Authorities estimate that some 40 percent of these kinds of deaths are related to extortion.<sup>49</sup>

Ortega observed that while both *maras* make most of their income through extortion, a.k.a. *la renta*, the MS has ventured further into drug

<sup>37</sup> *Clicas* are small subgroupings within gangs, not separate organizations.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Brenneman, “Review of *Adiós Niño*,” *Homies and Hermanos* (blog), July 1, 2013, <http://homiesandhermanosbook.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/review-of-adios-nino/>.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Berlin et al., “Between the Border and the Street: A Comparative Look at Gang Reduction Policies and Migration in the United States and Guatemala,” Human Rights Institute, Georgetown University Law Center, 2007, 9–10, [http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/hri\\_papers/2/](http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/hri_papers/2/).

<sup>40</sup> “Civil and Political Rights, Including the Questions of Disappearances and Summary Executions, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston,” Addendum, August 21–25, 2006, 9, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/461f844d2.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Inspector Edwin Ortega of PANDA, interview with the author, Guatemala City, March 3, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Inspector Edwin Ortega of PANDA, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 8, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Mariela Castañón, “70 clicas de pandillas asedian las zonas más inseguras,” *La Hora*, May 27, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Evelyn De León, “Las pandillas reclutan a niños a partir de los 6 años,” *Siglo21*, October 2, 2013, <http://m.s21.com.gt/node/314291>.

<sup>45</sup> Wayne J. Pitts et al., “Factors Affecting Homicide Rates in Guatemala 2000–2013: A Study of the Municipalities of Guatemala, Mixco, and Villa Nueva,” Executive Summary, Prepared for Democracy and Governance Office, USAID/Guatemala, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Pitts et al., “Factors Affecting Homicide Rates in Guatemala 2000–2013,” Final Report, 100.

<sup>47</sup> “Recolectores de basura y prostitutas, nuevas víctimas extorsión en Guatemala,” *EFE*, July 29, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Grupo Apoyo Mutuo, “Informe anual sobre hechos violentos y situación de DDHH en Guatemala. Año 2013,” Cuadro 11, Área de transparencia (blog), January 15, 2014, <http://areadetransparencia.blogspot.com/2014/01/informe-anual-sobre-hechos-violentos-y.html>.

<sup>49</sup> José M. Patzán, “Transporte en pugna debido a extorsiones,” *Prensa Libre*, January 10, 2014.

dealing than its rival. MS is now taking over markets where Dieciocho members used to sell but were arrested and thus ceased operations. Ortega said that the gangs do interact with drug traffickers in order to supply those local markets, but outside of that, PANDA has found little hard evidence of a *mara*-drug trafficker relationship.

All of these gangs extort, but not all extortionists are gangsters. In fact, Ortega says that some 70 percent of extortionists are civilians who only pretend to be members of MS or Dieciocho in order to frighten victims into forking over cash. In some cases, these civilians have no connection to the *maras* and are making idle threats. But last January, a judge convicted ten people who had been extorting bus drivers while also paying quotas to three different gangs, suggesting that the gangs may have been charging for use of their “brand” in a sort of franchise arrangement.<sup>50</sup>

Many extortionate phone calls originate from behind prison walls, noted Ortega. He explains that when an offender first arrives at a correctional facility, the inmates demand that he provide personal information about his neighbors and acquaintances—cell numbers, addresses, family members, daily habits, etc.—which the inmates then use to terrify an extortion victim over the phone. Ortega said that most of the time, victims extorted over the phone are instructed to deposit money in a bank account, usually in Banco Azteca, which he said does not ask new customers a lot of questions.<sup>51</sup> (The new inmate can avoid the obligation to identify targets for extortion by paying Q1,500 per month, but if he refuses that option too, the inmates may force him to clean the bathroom with his hands or may deny him a place to sleep.)<sup>52</sup>

According to Ortega, PANDA breaks up about 15 extortion rings per year. Some are *clicas* of MS and Dieciocho, others are small, unaffiliated criminal bands. In 2013, PANDA made 646 arrests, and the unit’s case-work led to 166 convictions. Ortega, who escaped unhurt from a highway assassination attempt in 2011, said it is dangerous work: two PANDA officers were killed and another two wounded in shootouts with gangsters in 2013. Between January and May 2014, PANDA had three gun battles

<sup>50</sup> Hugo Alvarado, “Tribunal condena a 10 extorsionistas,” *Prensa Libre*, January 31, 2014. Inspector Ortega said that this kind of arrangement is the exception, not the rule.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Inspector Edwin Ortega of PANDA, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 8, 2014.

with the gangs.<sup>53</sup> The *maras* used to brandish homemade weapons (or *armas hechizas*) but since 2008 have largely graduated to .38 caliber pistols, 9mm handguns and AK-47s, all of which they can buy on the black market.<sup>54</sup> A police raid on a Dieciocho *clica* in Mixco last April, for example, turned up a grenade, eight pistols, an M-16 rifle, and an Uzi sub machine gun.<sup>55</sup>

### Other Crimes

Reports of kidnapping for ransom have become relatively rare in Guatemala. In 2012, there were 85 reported victims, most of them male. Last year, the total number of reported victims fell to only 50—possibly due to the efforts of the PNC’s anti-kidnapping task force, which dramatically increased the seizure of vehicles, cell phones, guns, and cash belonging to kidnapers in 2013.<sup>56</sup> The true number of cases may be higher, though, as some victims’ families negotiate in private for fear that involving the authorities will endanger their loved one.

In an interview, “Marcos,” the unit’s coordinator, described the task force’s operations. (In 2011, he explained, he exited a grocery store and assassins fired two bullets through his chest, puncturing both lungs and sending him into a coma for five days; he miraculously survived, and now prefers to use a nickname.)<sup>57</sup>

According to Marcos, the task force guides a victim’s family through negotiation with the perpetrators in order to resolve cases. About 97 percent of victims are released unharmed. At the same time, Marcos says, families make only “minimum payments” to the kidnapers, who as a group receive roughly two percent of the ransom money they demand.<sup>58</sup> The coordinator declined to offer specifics on how the unit manages to both preserve the

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Jody García, “Pandillas adquieren armas en mercado negro,” *La Hora*, March 15, 2014, <http://www.lahora.com.gt/index.php/nacional/guatemala/actualidad/192848-pandillas-adquieren-armas-en-mercado-negro>.

<sup>55</sup> Ministerio Público, “Previene ataque de pandillas en colonia El Milagro,” April 2014, <http://www.mp.gob.gt/2014/04/previene-ataque-de-pandillas-en-colonia-el-milagro/>.

<sup>56</sup> “Fuerza de Tarea (FT - MG)—Comando Antisecuestros (DEIC) Policía Nacional Civil Resultados 2014,” Power Point Presentation, May 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with “Marcos,” anti-kidnapping task force coordinator, Guatemala City, May 14, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

life of the victims and prevent this kind of crime from becoming profitable; he revealed only that the unit instills in the kidnappers the “certainty” that they will be captured and go to prison if the case unfolds any other way.

Typical kidnappers, Marcos observed, have a criminal history and operate in small, independent groups without ties to larger organized crime structures. As for the victims, a “high percentage” come from the lower middle economic stratum; only some are wealthy elites.<sup>59</sup> In 2012 and 2013 combined, the anti-kidnapping task force made 384 arrests and broke up a total of 49 kidnapping rings.<sup>60</sup> Over the last several years, they have tightened their relationship with prosecutors and now rely heavily on forensic evidence (such as wiretaps), as opposed to informants and *colaboradores eficaces* (former associates turned witnesses as part of a plea bargain). The task force members have not received training from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Law Enforcement and Narcotics Affairs (INL), but like other special units in the PNC they do undergo vetting and integrity tests.<sup>61</sup>

The most common crime in Guatemala, when lumped together in one category, is robbery/theft. This is why the exterior walls of countless buildings are fitted with razor wire, barbed wire, and broken-glass spikes (and sometimes all three). It is also why heavily armed security guards watch over even low-end businesses such as fried chicken joints and Pepsi delivery trucks.

According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), the government’s central data processing office, 17,840 Guatemalans fell victim to property crimes in 2012. A hefty majority of them—about two-thirds—had their cars or motorcycles stolen. Less than seven percent had their residences broken into.<sup>62</sup>

There is no publicly available data that tracks property crime cases through to completion; for this reason, it is difficult to measure impunity

for this kind of crime. But official statistics seem to indicate that the judicial system cannot keep up with the cascade of cases. For example, the Public Ministry filed 18,966 charges of robbery in 2012. However, the court system recorded only 1,092 convictions for robbery and fewer than 200 acquittals that same year, suggesting that the vast majority of robberies go unpunished.<sup>63</sup>

The second most common crime in Guatemala is violence against women. This category accounted for over a quarter of all charges filed by the Public Ministry in 2012.<sup>64</sup> Violence against women became part of the penal code after Guatemalan feminists convinced Congress to pass the legislation in 2009.<sup>65</sup> The law created the offense of “femicide,” defined as the murder of a woman for motives that relate to her gender (for example, if she is murdered out of misogyny, or as part of a gang ritual, or by a jilted lover).<sup>66</sup> According to Ruby Monzón, the head prosecutor of crimes against women, a “femicide” charge carries a higher burden of proof than ordinary homicide, so many murders of females are charged as simple homicides. Femicides are handled by the prosecutor of crimes against life; all other crimes against women are handled by the *Fiscalía de la Mujer*, a special prosecutor for crimes against women. And these cases abound.

In 2012, the Public Ministry fielded a total of 45,786 complaints of violence against women. In 2013, the number exceeded 51,786.<sup>67</sup> This does not necessarily indicate that the problem is worsening; it could mean that more women are becoming aware of the law, which is only five years old. Victims can specify the type of violence as economic, physical, psychological, or sexual. The vast majority of complaints, though, have been entered under the general category of “violence against women,” which is defined as harming, threatening, or arbitrarily detaining a woman, whether

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23 and 33.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>65</sup> Ruby Monzón, *agente fiscal* in the *Fiscalía de la Mujer*, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 8, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Centro Nacional de Análisis y Documentación Judicial (CENADOJ), “Ley contra el Femicidio y otras Formas de Violencia Contra la Mujer,” accessed on May 21, 2014, 4, [http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Ley\\_contra\\_el\\_Femicidio\\_y\\_otras\\_Formas\\_de\\_Violencia\\_Contra\\_la\\_Mujer\\_Guatemala.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Ley_contra_el_Femicidio_y_otras_Formas_de_Violencia_Contra_la_Mujer_Guatemala.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Statistical report provided to author by the Public Ministry, May 19, 2014. This figure does not include data from most of December 2013.



in public or in private.<sup>68</sup>

During her tenure as Attorney General, Claudia Paz y Paz established a dozen new special prosecutors' offices for crimes against women and also oversaw the launch of a 24-hour women's court in the capital.<sup>69</sup> Convictions in these jurisdictions climbed from 215 in the first ten months of 2012 to 322 in the first ten months of 2013.<sup>70</sup> While that hints at improvement, it is still only a fraction of the total complaints filed.

On the plus side, female victims can now seek social, psychological, and legal assistance (called Modelo de Atención Integral) at five different locations outside of the capital: Escuintla, Mixco, Huehuetenango, Cobán, and Coatepeque. Filing criminal charges against perpetrators, which used to take 24 hours or more, can now be done within two hours.<sup>71</sup>

### Institutional Evolution

On February 19, 2007, three Salvadoran diplomats driving toward Guatemala City for a meeting of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) were pulled over by crooked police.<sup>72</sup> The officers believed the vehicle would contain drugs or cash they could steal, but upon finding neither, they killed the diplomats and their driver. Within a week, four policemen—including the chief of the PNC's organized crime division—were accused of the crime, arrested, then mysteriously murdered while in custody. It was later revealed that one of them had agreed to cooperate with investigators and was presumably killed by the intellectual authors of the assassinations.<sup>73</sup> Within days, Anders Kompas, representative of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, said publicly that Guatemala's security situation was deteriorating at an accelerated rate, to

the point that it had become “a collapsed and failed state.”<sup>74</sup>

But the PARLACEN case, as it became known, may have been the event that kept Guatemala from tumbling into the abyss. Six months after the crime, legislators finally did what civil society had long suggested: they overwhelmingly approved the creation of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (commonly known by its Spanish acronym, CICIG).<sup>75</sup> This unprecedented body of investigators and lawyers, selected from abroad, was granted special jurisdiction inside Guatemala to root out state corruption and go after organized crime.

The CICIG has indeed managed some impressive feats. It unraveled the strange and politically destabilizing homicide of attorney Rodrigo Rosenberg.<sup>76</sup> It built the case against former president Alfonso Portillo Cabrera for embezzlement of state funds.<sup>77</sup> And in September 2014, a joint CICIG–Public Ministry investigation exposed a money-laundering and bribery ring inside Guatemala's prisons, which has resulted in the arrest of the penal system's director and of other public officials.<sup>78</sup> The CICIG has also prevented corrupt individuals from holding public office and has successfully pushed for legislative reform, such as a law allowing the Guatemalan state to seize organized crime assets for its own use.<sup>79</sup>

However, CICIG has its critics. Edgar Gutiérrez, the ex-foreign minister and current director of IPNUSAC (Instituto de Problemas Nacionales

<sup>68</sup> Centro Nacional de Análisis y Documentación Judicial (CENADOJ), 3.

<sup>69</sup> “Informe de Gestión, Ministerio Público, 2011–2014,” 15, <http://www.slide-share.net/mpguate/informe-de-gestin-ministerio-pblico-20112014>.

<sup>70</sup> Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, “Informe tercer año de gestión,” slide show, December 12, 2013, 59, <http://www.slideshare.net/mpguate/fiscal-general-present-informe-de-tercer-ao-de-gestin>.

<sup>71</sup> Ruby Monzón, *agente fiscal in the Fiscalía de la Mujer*, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 8, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Héctor Silva Ávalos, “EUA dudó de la investigación en caso PARLACEN,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, March 17, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Sonia Pérez, “Impunidad afecta funciones del Estado,” *Prensa Libre*, March 3, 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Hector Silva Ávalos, “The United States and Central America's Northern Tier: The Ongoing Disconnect,” Working Paper, Inter-American Dialogue, March 2014, 20.

<sup>76</sup> David Grann, “A Murder Foretold,” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> “Caso Alfonso Portillo (Causa No. 7102-2001),” CICIG website, <http://www.cicig.org/index.php?page=7102-2001>

<sup>78</sup> “Desarticulan red que involucra a Edgar Camargo y Byron Lima Oliva,” Comunicado de Prensa 031, CICIG website, September 3, 2014.) <http://www.cicig.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=559&cntnt01returnid=67>. The mastermind of this criminal network was none other than Byron Lima Oliva, a former Army captain who is already serving a twenty-year sentence for the murder of Archbishop Juan Gerardi -- the clergyman who was bludgeoned to death just days after publishing a report on the military's human rights abuses during the armed conflict. For background, see Francisco Goldman, *The Art of Political Murder*, New York: Grove Press, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, May 6, 2014, 16.

de la Universidad de San Carlos, the University of San Carlos's National Problems Institute), said that the CICIG is hobbled by a superficial knowledge of Guatemala's inner workings, a diplomatic reluctance to dig too deep, and lack of coordination with local prosecutors.<sup>80</sup> The entity's mandate is set to expire in September 2015.

The PARLACEN case of 2007 did not only lead to the approval of the CICIG; it also pulled back the curtain on institutional rot inside the national civilian police. That same year, a team of state security officials and members of civil society came together to diagnose the problem. They concluded that PNC services were neither "timely," "appropriate," "trustworthy," nor "sufficient," for which reasons Guatemalans viewed them as "corrupt" and "incapable of confronting rising criminal violence."<sup>81</sup>

The police, they continued, were disorganized, lacked a clear mission, and had a limited capacity for criminal or internal affairs investigation.<sup>82</sup> In terms of human resources, the force was understaffed and deployed inefficiently. The rotation policy prevented officers from developing professionally and from identifying with the citizens they served. The police academy was weak, in-service training was scant and unsystematic, ranking officers displayed little administrative savvy, and the police career path was ill-defined. "Officers," the group lamented, "are unmotivated for various reasons, among them: low salaries, poor work conditions (lack of equipment, infrastructure and supplies), growing institutional stigma, rising risk level, etc."<sup>83</sup> The consequences, according to the memorandum, were distrust, insecurity, impunity, high crime rate, abuse of authority, and the rise of parallel justice, i.e., vigilante groups.<sup>84</sup>

To remedy this situation, then-President Álvaro Colom created the Comisión Nacional para la Reforma Policial, or Presidential Police Reform Commission, in 2011. First helmed by civil society leader Helen Mack of the Fundación Myrna Mack, and currently led by one-time interim

interior minister Adela Torrebiarte, this body seeks to improve the force's capacities in several areas: criminal investigation, crime prevention, institutional organization, professional training, human resources, technology, logistics, and internal affairs.<sup>85</sup> It strongly influences the U.S. Embassy's role in security matters. As one adviser from INL put it, "Every single program we do, we have to run it by the Commission."<sup>86</sup>

The commission claimed several victories after its first two years. As part of a project to instill pride among officers (a project called "*Dignificación*"), it finished remodeling 26 police stations and began work on 39 more.<sup>87</sup> It furnished the force with more than 1,500 computers, brought the number of stations with internet access to over 650, and set up digital registries for arrest warrants and stolen vehicles.<sup>88</sup> It hired, trained and equipped officers for an internal affairs investigation unit,<sup>89</sup> which brought charges against nearly 200 officers in 2013.<sup>90</sup>

The Commission also launched a pilot project in *Comisaría 14* (station or precinct 14). It remodeled the entrance, lighting, and parking lots. It built a technology center inside the station and equipped patrol pickups with tablets and cameras. It also trained the officers in several areas. Finally, the Commission designed and launched a new police education model. It set up a school for high-ranking officers and a continuing education school. The Commission emphasizes its training volume: according to the most recent annual report, 48,635 police employees have been trained in areas ranging from human rights and public service to digital systems and firearms law. While these are certainly steps in the right direction, indicators such as "number of new computers" or "number of trainees" really only measure *outputs*, not *outcomes*. Computers are an output of reform. Reduced crime is the ultimate desired outcome. And there is a dearth of evidence that, in Guatemala, reduced crime necessarily follows from simply training police or giving them new equipment.

<sup>80</sup> Edgar Gutiérrez, political analyst, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 13, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Verónica Godoy et al., "Propuesta Metodológica para las autoridades del Ministerio de Gobernación encaminadas a la continuidad de acciones inmediatas," memorandum prepared for the Ministerio de Gobernación, May 18, 2007, 2 and 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>85</sup> "Preguntas Frecuentes," Reforma Policial, <http://www.cnrp.gob.gt/content/preguntas-frecuentes>.

<sup>86</sup> Telephone interview with INL advisers, April 14, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Comisión Nacional para la Reforma Policial, "Informe 2013," May 2014, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>90</sup> Adela Camacho de Torrebiarte, police reform commissioner, interview with the author, Guatemala City, March 5, 2014.

The Commissioner recognizes this. “You have to train them, but you have to demand results, too,” she said. “And you have to *measure* the results, because that’s going to tell you if we’re on the right track.”<sup>91</sup> But the Commissioner’s accurate observation only serves to highlight that there are no publicly available, current and comprehensive audits of PNC performance, nor any in-depth study on the effects of police reform. Therefore, it is too early to call it an overall success or failure.

As for the Public Ministry, perhaps the biggest story in Guatemalan security over the past four years has been the mild-mannered but demonstrably effective attorney general, Claudia Paz y Paz, whose term ended in May 2014. A common refrain during interviews for this report was that Paz y Paz was an incorruptible public servant. She redirected considerable attention to crime victims, and not only women. By her own reckoning in public reports, she presided over the recruitment of dozens of new indigenous language interpreters<sup>92</sup> and a drastic increase in the number of telephone surveys asking victims to evaluate the attention they received. Of more than 15,800 victims surveyed on her watch, 91 percent reportedly gave a positive response.<sup>93</sup>

A recent audit by CEJA (Centro de Estudios de Justicia de las Américas, the Justice Studies Center of the Americas) lauded the MP for an “exponential” increase in cases resolved without having to go to trial, from 5,800 in 2008 to 27,950 in 2013.<sup>94</sup> The auditors also praised the rise in convictions from 3,280 in 2009 to 7,122 in 2013.<sup>95</sup> In all, they concluded, the reforms of the last few years “have noticeably improved criminal prosecution, reduced impunity for the most serious crimes and raised the level of transparency and accountability.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the CICIG stated in its most recent annual report that Guatemala’s impunity rate for crimes against life in 2009 was

95 percent, but fell to 72 percent in 2012.<sup>97</sup>

As mentioned above, Paz y Paz helped bring down several underworld leaders who have since been extradited to the United States, including Waldemar “*El Patriarca*” Lorenzana, Eliu Elixander Lorenzana, Juan “*Chamalé*” Ortiz and Horst Walther “*El Tigre*” Overdick. The U.S. Department of State recently reported that during the first ten months of 2013, the Guatemalan state locked up “a number of high-profile drug traffickers” and extradited four others “with minimal difficulties.”<sup>98</sup>

Paz y Paz’s anti-drug trafficker crusade may have endeared her to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), but she ruffled many feathers among conservatives at home for prosecuting civil-war-era military atrocities. She helped convict perpetrators of two of the state’s worst massacres—*Dos Erres* and *Plan de Sánchez*—as well as the former police chief Pedro García Arredondo, found guilty of disappearing a college student suspected of being a guerrilla.<sup>99</sup> Most notably, she opened a case against former general and *de facto* president José Efraín Ríos Montt, along with his military intelligence director, General José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, accusing both of genocide and crimes against humanity committed in the Ixil triangle in 1982. A tribunal of judges found Ríos Montt guilty on both counts in May 2013, but a constitutional court later annulled it. The case now sits in legal limbo, pending appeals. Though it received less press, Paz y Paz also targeted an ex-commander from the leftist guerrilla side as well. Fermín Felipe Solano Barillas was charged with the summary execution of 22 civilians in 1998 to prevent them from betraying the rebel position to the army. In July 2014, he was convicted and sentenced to 90 years in prison.<sup>100</sup>

Paz y Paz was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013, and many in the international community called for her reappointment as attorney

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Paz y Paz Bailey, “Informe tercer año de gestión,” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Germán Garavano et al., “Evaluación del impacto del nuevo Modelo de Gestión Fiscal del Ministerio Público de Guatemala,” CEJA, 56, [http://www.cejamericas.org/Documentos/librosvirtuales/libro\\_modelogestionfiscal\\_MPGuatemala/index.html](http://www.cejamericas.org/Documentos/librosvirtuales/libro_modelogestionfiscal_MPGuatemala/index.html).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>97</sup> “Sexto informe de labores de la Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG),” 6, <http://www.cicig.org/uploads/documents/2013/COM-045-20130822-DOC01-ES.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” 185.

<sup>99</sup> He has since been charged additionally with the burning of the Spanish Embassy in 1980, when indigenous peasants and others occupied the building, police stormed it and a fire left 36 people dead.

<sup>100</sup> Claudia Palma y José Rosales, “Condenan a exguerrillero por matanza de El Aguacate,” *Prensa Libre*, July 4, 2014.

general. She also scored second-highest in the application exams given to candidates. However, her competitors criticized her case management. For example, during her tenure, state lawyers worked in a sort of relay system whereby one group of prosecutors would investigate a case, then hand it off to a second group to argue it at trial. Her detractors considered this inefficient.<sup>101</sup>

In the end, Paz y Paz did not even make the list of the final six candidates. In the view of Gutiérrez, who served as foreign minister under President Alfonso Portillo, the Pérez Molina administration engaged in unprecedented lobbying behind the scenes to shut down her candidacy early, and business groups joined in, viewing her as hostile to private, large-scale exploitation of natural resources.<sup>102</sup> After she left her post, a judge issued an order freezing Paz y Paz's assets and prohibiting her from leaving the country (she had already left) as part of a civil suit brought by a private company against the Public Ministry; some viewed this as retribution for her prosecutorial zeal while in office.<sup>103</sup>

The human rights community both in Guatemala and abroad remains skeptical that the new Attorney General, former Supreme Court president Thelma Aldana, will push forward on any transitional justice cases. However, the U.S. Embassy struck a note of optimism. "There are areas we can work with her on," said one USAID official. "We're particularly excited about working with her on violence against women."<sup>104</sup>

### CARSI Strategy in Guatemala

Each year, the U.S. Congress sends CARSI money southward with the understanding that the Department of State will use it, up and down the isthmus, to (1) make the streets safer, (2) disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband, (3) fortify governments, (4) establish state presence in

<sup>101</sup> Claudia Palma, "Claudia Paz y Paz se defiende ante postuladora," *Prensa Libre*, April 24, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Edgar Gutiérrez, political analyst, interview with the author, Guatemala City, May 13, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Jody García, "Los 14 días de arraigo de Claudia Paz que ningún medio contó," *Nómada*, August 7, 2014. <http://nomada.gt/los-14-dias-de-arraigo-de-claudia-paz-que-ningun-medio-conto/>

<sup>104</sup> Telephone interview with USAID official, May 22, 2014.

rough areas, and (5) foster cooperation with neighbors and outside actors.<sup>105</sup>

The U.S. mission in Guatemala has already crafted its own goals, tailored specifically to its host country. When these Guatemala-specific goals fit inside CARSI's general goals, the embassy can dip into the CARSI fund to pursue them. "CARSI, for us, is a budget line item," said one USAID official in Guatemala City. "We see it as part of a portfolio of funds that we use depending on what programs need funding and when." In other words, she added: "We don't go out and say, 'These are CARSI programs.' We say, 'These are USAID programs.'"<sup>106</sup> INL operates the same way.



Acción Joven, situated in Centra Sur and funded by CARSI, is now offering nearby youths vocational training in areas like electronics, cooking, and construction, in addition to artistic and sports activities.

For this reason, CARSI has a bit of a branding problem in Guatemala. The USAID official observed that "There's no CARSI branding or marketing plan, so even if we wanted to brand something as 'CARSI,' we wouldn't have the tools to do so."<sup>107</sup> As a result, Guatemalan civil society seems confused about it. "Everyone talks about CARSI funds," said Helen Mack of the *Fundación Myrna Mack*. "But nobody has a full picture of how

<sup>105</sup> Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors," ii.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with USAID Official, Guatemala City, February 10, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Telephone interview with USAID official, May 22, 2014.

it's divided up.”<sup>108</sup>

When asked about CARSI, Carmen Rosa de Leon Escribano, director of IEPADES, said, “It’s never really been focused on prevention or comprehensive programs,” but rather guided by “a whole repressive military concept” of beefing up counternarcotics units. Interestingly, a few weeks before our interview, Rosa had actually attended a USAID presentation of exactly the type of programming she favors: crime prevention projects. She had not realized they were CARSI-funded, she said (and indeed, CARSI did not appear anywhere in the slideshow). Moreover, just hours before our interview, she attended a meeting at which USAID asked Guatemalan civil society groups to apply for grants that would fund programs to prevent violence. That slideshow did indeed emphasize CARSI and explain its priorities.<sup>109</sup> But Rosa remained skeptical. “They say it’s about prevention,” she said of CARSI, “but there’s not much prevention in it.”

Yet the CARSI budget mix suggests that Washington is shifting away from “hard” programming toward “soft” programming. For example, the money set aside for USAID to encourage “Governing Justly and Democratically” more than doubled from 2010 to 2013, from \$5 million to \$10.5 million. In the same period, the amount earmarked for INL’s “Aviation Support” dropped dramatically because the Guatemalan state finally took possession and control of six UH-1H II helicopters that were formerly owned and maintained by the United States.<sup>110</sup> According to a USAID official, this shift in priorities “has not been articulated to us, but we can feel it in our budgets.”<sup>111</sup>

If Guatemalan civil society members had a clearer picture of how CARSI actually works and what it aims to do, they could steer funding toward areas they care about, which would increase ownership, accountability, and maybe the likelihood of success. That is what the fifth goal of CARSI calls for, anyway, according to its explanation on the Department of State’s website: an “integrated, collaborative” effort that is “coordinated

with” various parties, including “civil society.”<sup>112</sup>

Thankfully, USAID has grasped this. Under the auspices of USAID Forward, an agency-wide effort to bypass middlemen and contract directly with host-country actors,<sup>113</sup> USAID/Guatemala solicited proposals last February from any Guatemalan civil society groups interested in grant funding for security and justice projects. Grants will range from \$50,000 – \$500,000 and add up to \$1.5 million.<sup>114</sup> The agency held an information meeting on March 6. One USAID official said that 150 Guatemalans from 118 organizations attended.<sup>115</sup>

These grants alone will drive home the point that CARSI is not simply a counternarcotics program. As we will see in later sections, many CARSI-funded projects have little or nothing to do with drugs *per se*. For instance, INL is helping the police academy update its basic curriculum in victimology, interviewing, and report-writing. Meanwhile, USAID is giving scholarships to children in at-risk areas to learn web design. The first is institution-building; the second, prevention. Neither is overt counternarcotics. But both are CARSI.

True, some CARSI projects directly target drug traffickers, such as Team Omega, a mobile checkpoint/interdiction unit that patrols Guatemala’s borders. But even a project like that could produce positive externalities. For example, Team Omega may end up apprehending human traffickers or wild animal smugglers while searching a truck for cocaine.

Both in theory and on the ground, then, counternarcotics is a central part of CARSI in Guatemala but not its totality. CARSI has five goals, broadly defined. The risk of broad goals is that they will result in an incoherent hodge-podge of minimal progress in dispersed micro-areas. But one could counter-argue that broad goals render the U.S. mission more nimble in responding to the host country’s desires to improve security. After all, in the final analysis it is the sovereign nation of Guatemala, not the embassy, which decides where, when, and how progress is made.

<sup>108</sup> Helen Mack, founder of Fundación Myrna Mack, interview with the author, Guatemala City, February 10, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> USAID/Guatemala, “Reunión informativa, APS 520-14-000001,” PowerPoint Presentation provided to the author, March 6, 2014.

<sup>110</sup> U.S. Department of State, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” 186.

<sup>111</sup> Telephone interview with USAID official, May 22, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: Enhanced Levels of Cooperation and Coordination,” February 6, 2012, Fact Sheet, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2012/183562.htm>.

<sup>113</sup> USAID, “USAID Forward At a Glance,” <http://www.usaid.gov/usaidforward>.

<sup>114</sup> USAID, “APS 520-14-000001, Guatemalan Citizen Security Partnership Program Agency for International Development,” <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=251622>.

<sup>115</sup> Telephone interview with USAID official, May 5, 2014.

**Table 1: CARSI Institutional Reform and Institutional Strengthening Projects in Guatemala**

| Police  | Fiscalia/PM  | Judiciary  | Prisons  | Other Law Enforcement-Based Prevention   |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based policing</li> <li>• Support the Police Reform Commission</li> <li>• Model Police Precincts</li> <li>• Support the National Civil Police Internal Affairs unit and the Office of Professional Responsibility (including polygraph unit)</li> <li>• Police professionalization (establishing a career path, acquiring international standard certification of quality management systems)</li> <li>• Promotion of civil society oversight</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support transition of CICIG functions to Attorney General's Office</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen prosecution and adjudication of criminal cases</li> <li>• Provide more secure environment for pre-trial hearings</li> <li>• Support implementation of the criminal procedure code</li> <li>• Support for 24-hour and High Impact courts</li> <li>• Support asset seizure and money laundering cases</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime information statistics system</li> <li>• Support identification, safe handling, and destruction of precursor chemicals</li> </ul> |

Sources: U.S. Department of State, “FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2009 Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2010 Appropriations Spending Plan: Central America—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “Congressional Notification Transmittal Sheet,” August 11, 2011; U.S. Department of State, “Fiscal Year 2012 Congressional Spending Plan: Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI),” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2013 Spend Plan—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” September 10, 2013; and U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline,” April 16, 2014.

Guatemala has displayed a certain degree of “buy-in,” or commitment to reform. For example, the justice system solicited USAID’s help in the design and construction of 24-hour courts and high-impact courts, all of which now operate independently of U.S. assistance. On the INL side, Guatemala has nationalized the UH-1H II helicopters (mentioned above) and scaled up a police precinct’s anti-gang unit to operate nationally.

In fact, one USAID official suggested that Guatemala’s enthusiasm for U.S.-supported reform has outrun its budget on occasion. For example, the government requested more 24-hour courts, but USAID balked because Guatemala did not yet possess the funds to absorb and sustain them.<sup>116</sup>

Buy-in has not been 100 percent. One INL official pointed out that corruption, political intrigue, and shuffles in hierarchy can cause national institutions such as the police to change course, which drags INL programming along with it. Another hindrance to long-term buy-in is a lack of institutional memory and continuity. According to a long-time participant in U.S. programming in Latin America, the Guatemalan government is staffed on the basis of personal relationships. Ministry leaders often have little experience either in government or in the functional area that they lead. A new president every four years implies a “wholesale replacement of personnel down below office director level—there is no civil service or permanent bureaucracy to speak of. Every four years it is back to square one.”<sup>117</sup>

Still, one INL adviser said that in the last year or so, his team made a special effort to get buy-in from both high- and low-ranking security officials. “We work with our Guatemalan counterparts as equal partners and do not attempt to sell or push products on them,” he said. “We attempt to ascertain their needs and if appropriate, within our guidelines, assist in the training and/or the procurement of materials.”<sup>118</sup>

### USAID

The embassy’s two main managers of CARSI dollars, USAID and INL, have related but quite distinct strategies for reaching CARSI goals. In 2012, USAID outlined a “Country Development Cooperation Strategy”

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Long-time participant in U.S. programming in Latin America, correspondence with the author, June 26, 2014.

<sup>118</sup> INL adviser, e-mail correspondence with the author, May 13, 2014.

for Guatemala.<sup>119</sup> The overarching framework consists of three goals—to create “A more secure Guatemala that fosters greater socio-economic development in the Western Highlands and sustainably manages its natural resources.”<sup>120</sup>

It is no accident that the first of the three prongs is “a more secure Guatemala.” USAID suggests that security is a “prerequisite” and “fundamental” to development. (Most urban Guatemalans would probably agree; according to a poll by the daily newspaper *Prensa Libre* published in January 2014, a majority of them said insecurity was their number one concern.)<sup>121</sup> So how does USAID believe it can bolster security? It hypothesizes that it can help reduce crime by:

- “increasing the demand for police and justice reform;
- “strengthening national level government capacities to include administrative, financial and strategic planning;
- “institutionalizing crime prevention strategies;
- “targeting pilot projects in key areas with high homicide rates;
- “strengthening local governments; and
- “improving transparency and accountability of key institutions.”<sup>122</sup>

USAID further identifies two intermediate results for its CARSI program: better security-and-justice-sector institutions (SJSIs), and less violence.<sup>123</sup>

Initiatives by Guatemalans to improve their own SJSIs are in no short supply. A revision to the Code of Criminal Procedure in 1994 transformed the criminal courts from an inquisitorial system (in which the judge investigates crime) to an adversarial system (in which the judge is only a referee). The Peace Accords of 1996, which formally ended the country’s decades of armed struggle, called for further reform, as did two separate national agreements pushed by former President Colom and his successor,

<sup>119</sup> “Guatemala Country Development Strategy 2012–2016,” USAID/Guatemala, March 16, 2012, <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/GuatemalaCDCS.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Geovanni Contreras, “Encuesta: Inseguridad es el gran problema,” *Prensa Libre*, January 14, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> USAID/Guatemala, “Guatemala Country Development Cooperation Strategy,” 2012–2016,” 1.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

President Pérez Molina.

But reform in Guatemala often exists only on paper: laws get passed, but not necessarily implemented for lack of money. As a U.S. Department of State report notes, “Guatemala suffers from severe budget constraints, which are exacerbated by endemic corruption and low rates of tax-collection.”<sup>124</sup>

As a result, USAID is now seeking to help Guatemala with the implementation phase of legal reform. And in that area, says the USAID official, “there is a lot of low-hanging fruit.” For example, the national constitution ratified in 1995 mandated that an arrested person be arraigned in front of a judge within six hours. However, for many years, courts were only open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Monday through Friday. Therefore, if a suspected criminal was arrested on a Friday afternoon, for example, he would sit behind bars for at least two days. When he was finally brought before a judge, the policeman who arrested him might no longer be available, and police testimony is critical to establishing a criminal charge in Guatemala. So as many as 77 percent of cases were dismissed for lack of merit.

In 2006, USAID proposed a 24-hour court that would operate around-the-clock with judges, police, prosecutors, and defenders all “co-located,” or assigned space, in the building. USAID furnished the design and monitored operations for two years. The difference was stark: inmates saw a judge much quicker, and in Guatemala City, the rate of dismissals fell from 77 percent to 12 percent. The 24-hour courts were so successful that between 2007 and 2009, four new ones were opened in Villa Nueva, Mixco, Escuintla, and Sacatepequez. (A fifth is now in the works for Xela, Guatemala’s second-largest city; USAID is currently monitoring these courts to see if adjustments are necessary.)<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> U.S. Department of State, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” 183.

<sup>125</sup> Shannon Shissler and Casey Wheeler, “Rule of Law Activities in Guatemala,” PowerPoint Presentation, USAID/Guatemala; also interview with USAID adviser, April 14, 2014.



Here in the Public Ministry's headquarters in Zona 1 of Guatemala City, female crime victims can get legal, psychological, and medical assistance 24 hours a day. This facility was built with CARSI funds.

In addition, a special 24-hour court was assembled in 2012 to hear cases of violence against women, exploitation, sexual violence, and human trafficking. The Guatemalan congress approved the Law Against Femicide and Violence Against Women in 2008, but implementation was slow to follow. So at the request of attorney general Paz y Paz and the Supreme Court president, USAID helped design and equip the court, which is installed on the first floor of the Public Ministry building in Guatemala City. Once a victim walks into the court, she can file a complaint in a private office, and also seek any necessary medical attention (including a rape kit). Psychologists and social workers are on hand to help. Judges can authorize a protection injunction and issue an arrest warrant if the aggressor's identity is known.



In this secure antechamber, crime victims and witnesses can give testimony on camera without being intimidated by the accused. This too was constructed with CARSI money.

This specialized court also features an antechamber where psychologists, prompted by judges, can interview children and victims. These interactions can be video-conferenced onto a large screen in the courtroom during a trial, or recorded beforehand and submitted into evidence. The witness's identity may or may not be concealed from the accused, depending on the case, but the idea is to avoid exposing a vulnerable victim to a hostile courtroom environment. The United States no longer funds any of these 24-hour courts; Guatemala has assumed that responsibility.





Judges in the 24-hour women's court can quickly issue an injunction or an arrest warrant (if the aggressor's identity is known).

The second half of USAID's strategy centers on violence prevention. To prevent violence, USAID seeks to encourage

- “stronger employment capacity for at-risk youth to compete in the job market by providing educational, vocational and recreational opportunities;
- “community-oriented policing activities that promote trust in the police;
- “better public infrastructure and support for crime prevention in target communities;
- “targeted support for at-risk populations, especially those vulnerable to human trafficking;
- “civic responsibility.”<sup>126</sup>

In plain English, USAID is saying that it aims to steer high-risk youth away from delinquency by providing them with job skills and fun things to do. For example, in the high-risk municipality of Villa Nueva southwest of Guatemala City, USAID has funded a beautician's school for young women and a soccer program for boys and girls.

<sup>126</sup> USAID/Guatemala, “Guatemala Country Development Strategy 2012–2016,” 27.

As for civic responsibility, USAID recognizes that “the majority of the population does not believe that participating in a public process will result in change and many people are not respectful of the rule of law.”<sup>127</sup> Therefore, it seeks to change their attitude. It has encouraged stakeholders (such as teachers, police, and parents) to meet in a room as a *comité comunitario de prevención* (or community prevention committee). There, they agree on steps for tamping down the violence where they live. Such collaboration would, in theory, build up trust between them. This project will be discussed more fully in the next section.

### International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL)

It is important to keep in mind that INL is not the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The DEA's job is to thwart drug flows; INL's job is to make Guatemala better at thwarting drug flows. But even if the narcos all left tomorrow, that still wouldn't solve Guatemala's violence problem, according to one INL official: “Narcotics is a symptom. The cause is that [Guatemalans] don't have functioning institutions. If you're going to solve narcotics, you've got to get those functioning. So we've taken that on.”<sup>128</sup>

In March 2014, INL released its annual “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report.” It reads more like a progress update than a forward-looking roadmap. But between that document and interviews with embassy staff, certain strategic elements and guiding principles come into focus. Within the past two years, INL-Guatemala experienced a deep turnover and now appears guided by three lodestars: community policing, sustainability, and measurability.

Community policing, to be explored in a later section, refers to a law enforcement *modus operandi* based on building mutual trust, information-sharing, and face-to-face familiarity between police and residents. Guatemala will struggle to bridge that chasm, as only 34.9 percent of

<sup>127</sup> USAID/Guatemala, “Reunion informativa,” 28.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with INL official, February 11, 2014.

Guatemalans voiced confidence in the PNC in a 2012 poll.<sup>129</sup> INL is promoting community policing, but also desires that any advances be sustainable by the Guatemalans themselves, and not depend on perpetual U.S. scaffolding. As one INL adviser put it, “The idea is to work ourselves out of a job.” Lastly, INL officials say they are taking steps to actually measure success and demand certain results.

A recent police program demonstrates all three principles. In March 2014, INL paid for 21 PNC officers to travel to Miami-Dade in Florida to be trained in the Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment (SARA) method<sup>130</sup> of community policing and other programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).<sup>131</sup> After earning certification as community policing coordinators, they will return to Guatemala and themselves become trainers for more than 400 of the PNC’s prevention officers. (INL calls this the “train-the-trainer” principle.) INL will then check the results and send a second group to Miami-Dade in September *if and only if* the first group succeeds in training their peers. INL has also secured memorandums of understanding with the PNC ensuring that those community policing coordinators will stay in their positions for four years. They insisted on the non-transfer provisions when in 2013 two INL-trained officers were reassigned as government chauffeurs.<sup>132</sup>

Training appears to be INL’s primary strategy for strengthening the police. One INL official estimates that, factoring in the salaries of advisers whose main job is to coordinate training, roughly half of the institution’s annual budget goes toward the training of Guatemalan security forces.<sup>133</sup> In addition to the Miami-Dade trips mentioned above, INL has sent officers to the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in

San Salvador for several years running to become certified in the GREAT program (Gang Resistance Education and Training). INL also brings training to Guatemala. The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) recently gave a course on ballistics. In March, experts from Temple University gave a weeklong course to over 100 officers in “Intelligence-Led Policing,” which according to Professor Jerry Ratcliffe means dropping “whack-a-mole policing that arrests offenders with no overarching strategy” and replacing it with policing “that places significant emphasis on data and intelligence analysis as the central component of police strategic thinking.”<sup>134</sup> Classes such as these are very much in demand among PNC officers in Guatemala. “Everybody wants to go to training,” said one senior INL adviser, who explained that officers see it as a way of advancing their careers. “We have no problem filling the rosters.”

A second INL strategy is vetting. Any officer enrolling in INL-sponsored training must submit to “Leahy vetting,” named after U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) who spearheaded legislation to prohibit the United States from supporting security forces with outstanding human rights violations. INL also assists with vetting at the PNC basic academy, where it supports background verification of cadets.

A third INL strategy is material and logistics support. When the PNC executes a week-long poppy eradication campaign in San Marcos, INL provides food and portable toilets. When officers give DARE or GREAT courses, INL gives them projectors, laptops, and manuals. INL helped set up the Sistema de Información Policial (SIPOL, or Police Information System), which is a computerized crime analysis system that helps pinpoint criminal hot spots.<sup>135</sup> Since 2003, INL has provided the model precinct in Villa Nueva with computers, wiretapping/surveillance equipment and telephones.

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<sup>129</sup> Dinorah Azpuru with Juan Pablo Pira and Mitchell A. Seligson, “Political Culture of Democracy in Guatemala and the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity, Tenth Study of Democratic Culture of Guatemalans,” LAPOP/Vanderbilt University, December 2012, 148, [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/guatemala/Guatemala\\_Country\\_Report\\_2012\\_English\\_W.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/guatemala/Guatemala_Country_Report_2012_English_W.pdf).

<sup>130</sup> Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, “The SARA Model,” accessed on May 16, 2014, <http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara>.

<sup>131</sup> National Institute of Justice, “Program Profile: Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE),” accessed on May 16, 2014, <http://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=99>.

<sup>132</sup> Telephone interview with INL/Guatemala advisers, April 14, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> Telephone interview with INL/Guatemala official, May 13, 2014.

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<sup>134</sup> Jerry Ratcliffe, “What is Intelligence-Led Policing?” Introduction, *Intelligence-Led Policing* (Portland, Oregon: Willan, 2008).

<sup>135</sup> E-mail correspondence with INL adviser, May 13, 2014. See also Ministerio de Gobernación, “Sistema de Información Policial SIPOL,” January 8, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tz\\_jkGYBShU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tz_jkGYBShU).



Children march in a school parade in Zona 1 of the capital on June 29, 2014.

The national anti-gang unit, PANDA, is an example of a successful unit that was trained, vetted, and equipped by INL. It began as a specialized wing of the model precinct in Villa Nueva (to be discussed in a later section) and was scaled up to the national level in 2009. It is now staffed with 135 investigators who undergo vetting twice a year. INL has furnished PANDA with computers, cameras, voice recorders, and bullet-proof vests. INL has trained PANDA officers in human rights standards, hostage negotiation, and techniques for investigating crimes against women, homicide, and kidnapping. It sends PANDA officials annually to a regional international anti-gang training conference (the latest was in Mexico City last March).

Table 2: Vetted Units Supported by CARSI in Guatemala

| Police/FBI   | DEA  | DHS/ICE   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Port police</li> <li>• Guatemalan Anti-Gang Unit (PANDA) (FBI vetted unit)</li> <li>• Guatemalan Intel and Analysis Centers (CRADIC)</li> <li>• PNC polygraph unit</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DEA vetted unit</li> <li>• DEA-SIU vetted unit</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DHS vetted unit</li> </ul> |

Source: Created based on information from U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “CARSI INL Supported Projects,” April 16, 2014.

As opposed to investigating individual cases of gang membership, PANDA investigates an entire gang for months, and sometimes years, to ensure that the whole criminal network is rounded up and to ensure that witnesses do not suffer reprisals. In 2013, PANDA broke up about 15 gangs that were committing extortion. It made 649 arrests and works closely with the Public Ministry to strengthen its cases. Nearly every person interviewed for this report, in and outside the government, praised PANDA for its progress.

According to the March 2014 strategy report, INL collaborated with the Guatemalan government to train and equip a mobile land interdiction unit called “Team Omega.” It is composed of 38 men and moves along the country’s borders, halting traffic and conducting checkpoints.<sup>136</sup> It uses scanners and fiber optic cameras to search for drugs inside a vehicle’s gas tank.<sup>137</sup>

INL does what it calls “Rule of Law” programming in the justice sector, too. It is similar to what USAID does in that sector but centers on INL’s particular purview of crimes: drug trafficking, corruption, and money laundering. The main effort here is to train judges and prosecutors so they know the law’s fine print and what evidence should lead to a successful conviction. In some cases INL helps draft a new law (such as the seized asset law) by presenting legislators with research on the experiences of other countries and potential loopholes.<sup>138</sup>

INL also engages in crime prevention. GREAT and DARE fall under this rubric. INL also supports the Ministry of Health’s efforts in the western department of San Marcos to educate people about the dangers and consequences of growing poppy. In Salcajá, Quetzaltenango, and Petén, INL has teamed up with the Ministry of Education to try to shrink local demand for drugs. INL also recently finished mapping and auditing Guatemala’s drug treatment centers, and in 2014 is conducting the first national drug-use survey since 1998.<sup>139</sup>

Are INL’s prevention programs succeeding? Officials said that GREAT has offered to send two evaluators to Guatemala, but the PNC has yet to

<sup>136</sup> U.S. Department of State, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” 179.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with high-ranking PNC official, Guatemala City, May 21, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Telephone interview with INL staff, June 26, 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

coordinate the visit. One INL adviser said that since his arrival a year ago, no attempt has been made to see if DARE is working.

This is needed, because at least two studies published in the *American Journal of Public Health* suggest that DARE does *not* work, at least in the United States. One of them concluded in 2004 that

*Our study supports previous findings indicating that D.A.R.E. is ineffective.... Given the tremendous expenditures in time and money involved with D.A.R.E., it would appear that continued efforts should focus on other techniques and programs that might produce more substantial effects.*<sup>140</sup>

DARE may be a smashing success specifically in Guatemala, but without any testing, it is impossible to say for sure.

Prevention aside, INL officials have voiced a desire to measure the effectiveness of all their training and material support programs in general. To that end, they are now creating crime incidence “baselines” in areas where they are assisting certain Guatemalan police units. Thus, they will not directly evaluate a unit’s performance, but rather, gauge the impact of that unit on its jurisdiction.<sup>141</sup> “I think anecdotally we know training is effective,” said one INL official. “We’re historically bad at measures of effectiveness. We don’t do that real well in INL—feedback and surveys and things.”<sup>142</sup>

## USAID Projects

### Security and Justice Reform

On June 25, 2012, an illustrious crowd gathered on the fourteenth floor of the Courts Tower in Zona 4 of Guatemala City. After months of construction and \$400,000 in assistance from USAID, four new courtrooms were ready for use.<sup>143</sup> The U.S. Embassy sent out no press release about this. The local media covered it only with blurbs. But considering who showed up—the Supreme Court president and magistrates, then-U.S. Ambassador

Arnold Chacón and CICIG director Francisco Dall’Anese—it was a big day for Guatemalan criminal justice.

The occasion was the unveiling of a new home for the Tribunales de Mayor Riesgo, or high-impact courts (HICs). These rooms were designed to handle the most sensitive and potentially dangerous prosecutions. Some attributes of the new rooms are subtle ones that we take for granted in the United States. The judges, prosecutors, and defenders can enter and exit through independent doorways. Judicial clerks toil at desks closed off from the public. A communications jamming system prevents cell phone calls inside the courtroom. And a prominent screen allows for video conferencing, which reduces the risk, expense, and inconvenience of transferring imprisoned defendants.

But perhaps the most crucial features of the rooms are the most obvious: in the front left corner, a secure holding cell with bullet-proof glass has seating for the accused. In this way the accused cannot verbally intimidate victims, witnesses, and forensic experts. But testimony need not necessarily come from the witness chair: in the back of the room are three highly polarized windows from which witnesses can watch the proceedings without being seen by anyone in the courtroom. Through microphones and speakers, they can interact with the court and testify anonymously.

According to one USAID adviser, this new system is actually the second attempt at HICs. In the nineties and early aughts, three such courts opened up in Quetzaltenango and Chiquimula and the capital. However, they were underfunded and overloaded with cases, and were eventually dissolved.

But courtroom safety remained a concern. In 2006, for example, 23 gang members went on trial for the jailhouse murder of eight rivals. During a pretrial hearing on April 4, 2006—on that same fourteenth floor of the Court Tower, in fact—a vicious knife fight broke out. Somehow, members of MS had managed to sneak in weapons. As the melee erupted, security guards and soldiers failed to intervene, though one guard did protect the judge from a knife-wielding gangster who had gotten near him. The next day, the judges convened for a meeting, after which they demanded better security, evacuation plans, and emergency exits.

When it came time to draft plans for a second round of HICs, the CICIG did a study determining the necessary courtroom security features and USAID provided the money to install them. USAID also provided legal assistance in writing the new law. To ensure that only a manageable number

<sup>140</sup> Steven L. West and Keri K. O’Neal, “Project D.A.R.E. Outcome Effectiveness Revisited,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94:6 (2004): 1027–1029, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448384/pdf/0941027.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> E-mail correspondence with INL/Guatemala adviser, May 19, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with INL/Guatemala official, February 27, 2014.

<sup>143</sup> Hugo Alvarado, “Juzgados y Tribunales de Mayor Riesgo tienen sede,” *Prensa Libre*, June 25, 2012.

of matters would reach the court, the law established certain “filters,” such as the requirement that the attorney general recommend the case.<sup>144</sup>

From 2009 through 2013, the HICs heard some 240 cases.<sup>145</sup> The conviction rate has been relatively high. HIC Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez estimates that 70–75 percent of prosecutions are successful. According to data supplied by RTI, the government won 40 out of 66 cases in 2013 for a conviction rate of over 60 percent.

But a remodeled courtroom does not protect everyone involved in the justice system. Prosecutors are not superheroes, points out the USAID adviser. “They still live in their house with their families, drive their own cars,” she said. “If I were a Zeta, I’d go after the prosecutor.”<sup>146</sup>

Asked what challenges still remain in the HICs, Judge Yassmin Barrios responded that “intimidation is still occurring against the witnesses and judges and victims. We’re in a crisis moment, and it really worries me that there could be a regression in the justice system.”

Judge Barrios presided over the most famous HIC case so far, the genocide trial against former general and *de facto* president José Efraín Ríos Montt—a case that, ironically, was so “high-impact,” proceedings had to be moved next door to the Supreme Court building to accommodate the audience and the press. (Even there, the United States had a presence: a sticker on the back of Ríos Montt’s chair showed that some furniture had been provided by the embassy).<sup>147</sup> In a sense, the Ríos Montt trial and other transitional justice cases are not directly relevant to Guatemalan security today. The atrocities occurred decades ago, and the alleged perpetrators are elderly men. But as attorney general Claudia Paz y Paz told the *New York Times*, the prosecution is “sending the most important message of the rule of law—that nobody is above the law.”<sup>148</sup>

Yet that message has grown ambiguous. On May 10, after a six-week trial in which nearly 100 Maya-Ixil people testified to the army’s murder, rape, and torture of their loved ones in 1982 and 1983, the panel of judges found the former general guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity.

<sup>144</sup> Telephone interview with USAID/Guatemala adviser, May 7, 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Shissler and Wheeler.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with USAID/Guatemala adviser, Guatemala City, February 26, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, “In Effort to Try Dictator, Guatemala Shows New Judicial Might,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2013.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

They sentenced him to a combined 80 years in prison without possibility of parole. Days later, the press photographed Judge Barrios walking into work wearing a colorful skirt and a bullet-proof vest as insurance against the “hundreds” of death threats she had received.<sup>149</sup>

But on May 20, ten days after the verdict, the nation’s highest court—the Constitutional Court—ruled that Judge Barrios had violated Ríos Montt’s due-process rights early in the trial when she expelled his attorney from the courtroom, leaving the accused without legal representation for a brief period on April 19. The high court’s decision annulled everything that happened after that infraction, including the final verdict. Judge Barrios and her colleagues had to recuse themselves, and the matter moved to a different tribunal, where its status is uncertain.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, despite USAID’s support for high-profile prosecutions, defendants such as Ríos Montt can still deflect a guilty verdict not through intimidation, *per se*, but by using a perfectly legal device: the *amparo*, for which no exact translation exists in English.<sup>151</sup> The *amparo* is an appeal a criminal defendant can make to the Constitutional Court whenever he thinks his constitutional rights have been violated. In practice, defense lawyers use them like crowbars to jam into the spokes of justice and slow everything down. And when their *amparo* petitions are deemed “frivolous and notoriously inadmissible,” they are only fined paltry sums of up to \$130, which they do not always even bother paying.<sup>152</sup>

Still, HIC convictions continue to roll in, with direct consequences for ordinary Guatemalan citizens. In late February 2014, Judge Barrios convicted 22 members of MS for illegal association, conspiracy, extortion, and murder. This particular *clica* of MS, the “Pewee Locos” of la Aldea Canalitos in Guatemala City’s Zona 24, had been extorting some

<sup>149</sup> “Jazmin Barrios, la jueza que no temió a los militares,” *EFE*, May 18, 2013.

Judge Barrios is no stranger to intimidation, by the way: in March 2001, just days before sentencing two ex-military men for the murder of human rights defender Archbishop Juan Gerardi, someone tossed two grenades into the patio of the judge’s house. They exploded, but no one was injured.

<sup>150</sup> International Crisis Group, “Justice on Trial in Guatemala: The Ríos Montt Case,” *Latin America Report No. 50*, September 23, 2013, 2 and 12.

<sup>151</sup> Other examples: Notorious drug trafficker Waldemar Lorenzana was arrested in 2011, but was not extradited to the United States until March 2014; Juan ‘Chamalé’ Ortiz was also arrested in 2011 but has so far staved off extradition.

<sup>152</sup> International Crisis Group, 14–15.

95 percent of the businesses in their territory. These businesses included motorcycle-taxis (*mototaxis*), *tiendas* (or small shops), trash collectors, cable providers, hardware stores, a laundry service, a taco restaurant, a car wash, and a bakery, among others. Thanks to extensive wiretapping, investigators were able to convict the group for the killings of four mototaxi drivers and for the planning of 16 other murders. Sentences ranged from eight to 291 years of prison.<sup>153</sup>

USAID's role in the courts is currently limited to the coordination of training for judges. For example, it recently set up a *conversario* (or information session) for the HIC judges on Guatemala's money laundering law. A magistrate gave a presentation and fielded their questions.

The courts, of course, constitute only one half of the criminal justice system. USAID has also been working to shore up the PNC as an institution by advising the Ministerio de Gobernación, or Interior Ministry, and the Police Reform Commission on how to rework the "human resources" aspect of the force. As one USAID adviser put it, the PNC suffers from a "patchwork" of regulations on eligibility-for-hire, assignment, ranks, promotion, benefits, and retirement that are not internally consistent. The Guatemalan lawyers drawing up a new, comprehensive law looked to USAID for research on how police "HR" looks in other countries. The resulting legislative proposal, which is still waiting approval from the president, would clearly define an officer's career from hiring to retirement (or firing). It would also provide for a police registry to keep track of officers' service history and performance.

### Violence Prevention

On a recent morning in March, the TITA Beauty and Cosmetology school in Villa Nueva was a beehive of activity. Young women—all in beige shirts and burgundy slacks—chatted as they groomed each other's hair and rushed around for supplies in the ground-level shop. Every student had a scholarship. And every scholarship came from CARSI.

The beauty school is just one small part of USAID's five-year, \$26 million dollar Violence Prevention Program (VPP). Launched in 2010, the VPP was designed for high-risk neighborhoods such as Villa Nueva. The

<sup>153</sup> Copy of Sentencia C-010181-2011-00698; also Tulio Juárez and José Miguel Lam, "Fijan de 8 a 291 años de cárcel a 22 peweos locos por extorsión y asesinatos," *El Periódico*, February 25, 2014.

municipality of Villa Nueva, just to the southwest of the capital, contains some of the roughest spots in Guatemala. A USAID-commissioned study found in 2013 that in the Villa Nueva enclaves of El Mezquital and El Búcaro, "the crime situation has already passed a critical threshold because of pervasive extortion and homicides at the hands of hired killers... military detachments are now permanently assigned in efforts to curb the violence."<sup>154</sup>

From January 2013 to January 2014, USAID spent roughly \$877,750 in CARSI funds (and claimed to have leveraged \$42,550 from private enterprise) on violence prevention in Villa Nueva.<sup>155</sup> USAID contracted RTI to implement the program, which sub-contracted various organizations to implement the actual projects. For example, RTI sub-contracted Fundación EcuMénica Guatemalteca Esperanza y Fraternidad (ESFRA, or Guatemalan Ecumenical Foundation for Hope and Fraternity) to run the scholarship project at the TITA beauty school. According to Judith Santos, the ESFRA coordinator, TITA had 24 scholarship students in its six-month project that varied in age from 17 to 24 years old. Four of them were pregnant. Some were 17-year-old mothers who already had two children.

Santos said that at home, the students face problems ranging from family violence (including sexual abuse) to mistreatment from boyfriends to problems with gangs. For these reasons, ESFRA had a psychological counselor on hand. Sometimes, the neighborhood's problems followed the students to school. Four days earlier, an armed robber had entered the school and demanded all the students' cell phones.

One student, 19-year-old Maria Ajanel, said that after 7 p.m. she does not go outside of her house, adding that a few days ago, two boys were killed in a personal dispute near her house. She said that once she has learned all the skills in the course—how to cut men's and women's hair, do highlights and dyes, give manicures and pedicures—she wants to open

<sup>154</sup> Wayne J. Pitts et al., "Executive Summary," 3. During a car ride through the Villa Nueva neighborhood of El Mezquital in March 2014, the driver suggested I remove my sunglasses to avoid drawing unwanted attention to the car (because people in El Mezquital do not wear sunglasses).

<sup>155</sup> "Inversión Aproximada Realizada por el Proyecto USAID Prevención de la Violencia en el Municipio de Villa Nueva Hasta Enero del 2,014," unpublished memorandum by USAID, 1–2.

her own business. In fact, neighbors and friends are already coming over to employ her services, and she is already charging some of them. Another student, 22-year-old Miriam Ixim, said that if she had not won the scholarship, she would probably still be sitting at home, watching her nephew.

In addition to the beauty school, ESFRA supervised other CARSI-funded programs such as an Automotive Mechanics class and a Restaurant Service class. In all, ESFRA reported, scholarships had benefited 56 young women and 29 young men as of the beginning of 2014.<sup>156</sup>

Another VPP project in Villa Nueva is Casa Barrilete. “I like Casa Barrilete,” said Mayor Edwin Escobar in an interview. “When you go in, you always see a lot of kids.” Casa Barrilete operates at a mall called CentraSur, inside commercial space donated by the municipality of Guatemala City. (Originally it was to be located in El Búcaro, but that proved unfeasible because gang conflicts prohibited many children from walking through that territory.) The programming is diverse: computer science, hip-hop dancing, guitar, marimba, drawing, painting, sculpture, football, and basketball are all on offer (among other things). Nearly 600 children from Villa Nueva have received scholarships to take classes here.

Student Jeimmy Jamileth Ampérez Rodríguez said she was nervous to take the computer course at first because, as an 18-year-old, she had no idea how to use a computer. Her instructor later said she learned the Microsoft Office suite incredibly fast, and was working on a PowerPoint Presentation (complete with animated graphics) on the history and meaning of International Women’s Day. There were 60 students in that class.

Probably the biggest draw at Casa Barrilete actually takes place off-campus: the soccer program. Coach Jairo Vides (who used to play professionally for the Deportivo Petapa squad) said that gang threats on the first day of the program prompted Vides to switch venues to a dirt field. Combining the morning and afternoon groups, about 53 children show up on a regular basis. They range in age from 7 to 18 years old. About five percent of the children are actively in gangs, he said; some do not even have shoes to play in. In between drills, he talks to them about violence, values, and discipline. “The kids sometimes see me as a father figure,” he said. “They tell me their problems.”

<sup>156</sup> “Reduciendo condiciones de vulnerabilidad económica en niños, niñas, hombres y mujeres jóvenes en situación de riesgo social en el municipio de Villa Nueva, Guatemala,” ESFRA, PowerPoint Presentation, last modified January 25, 2014, 2.



At Casa Barrilete near the boundary between Guatemala City and Villa Nueva, hundreds of students got scholarships from USAID to study computing, guitar, marimba, painting, sculpture, hip hop dancing, and more.

Lastly, the VPP provided scholarships for the iTEC UVG Programa Tecnológico. There, at a technological park, the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG) offers training in information technology. In March 2014, 105 students graduated from a fifteen-month web software design program, in which they became proficient in a wide variety of program languages and applications.<sup>157</sup>

When USAID/Guatemala launched the VPP back in March 2010, the agency decided to set aside some funds for self-analysis. The idea was to not only set up projects to steer kids away from violence, but also subject some of those efforts to a rigorous scientific analysis to see if the projects actually worked. USAID contracted the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University to help out. LAPOP was chosen

<sup>157</sup> “iTEC UVG Programa Tecnológico Cuatro Grados Norte,” PowerPoint Presentation, January 2014, 2–4; an employee of RTI in Guatemala City explained to the author that UVG and USAID both chipped in to fund the 105 scholarships, which helped pay for student tuition, materials, transportation, and uniforms.

for its 20 years of experience in conducting “policy-relevant” surveys in the region.<sup>158</sup>

First, USAID picked three municipalities to concentrate on: Guatemala City, Esquipulas (in the southeastern state of Chiquimula), and Tactic (in the highland state of Alta Verapaz). Next, LAPOP identified 40 separate neighborhoods within those three cities that had a similar “high-risk” profile. LAPOP discarded locales already overrun by gangs and organized crime, to avoid putting researchers in danger. Instead, they picked places that were “vulnerable to becoming crime hot-spots” based on levels of poverty, infrastructure, and other “standard demographic characteristics” (such as urban setting, proportion of youth, and population density).<sup>159</sup> LAPOP then randomly chose 21 neighborhoods to receive CARSI-funded interventions and assigned the 19 others to a “control” group where no interventions would happen.<sup>160</sup>

The interventions were always two-fold: USAID would help create a *comité comunitario de prevención* (or community prevention committee) composed of stakeholders. These committees would map out the crime problems themselves, and come up with a plan that consisted of USAID-funded programs. Each neighborhood thus had a unique set of problems and solutions, but the basic two-step process of requiring the community to work together was the same. “Our development hypothesis is that one problem in these communities is lack of social cohesion and participation,” one USAID adviser said in an interview. The prevention committees, he said, were designed to turn this around.<sup>161</sup>

In the first quarter of 2013, once the CARSI-funded program had been in operation for about a year, LAPOP returned to the 40 neighborhoods to conduct a second round of interviews and thereby make a “mid-point” evaluation. Compared to trends in the control neighborhoods (where USAID did nothing), the treatment neighborhoods showed fewer

reported crimes—specifically:

- 18 percent fewer reported occurrences of robberies;
- 50 percent fewer reported cases of illegal drug sales;
- 50 percent fewer reported cases of extortion and blackmail.

Furthermore, residents were less likely to avoid certain corners of the neighborhood because of fear of crime, and less likely to see gang fights as a problem in their community. The interventions also corresponded with greater satisfaction with democracy, and greater satisfaction with (and trust in) the police.

Two clarifications are in order. First, LAPOP only measured the *overall* effectiveness of the CARSI strategy. Because many of the interventions overlap, the study’s authors say it is “difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle and evaluate the effect of each individual program, let alone the components of each program.”<sup>162</sup> On one hand that is unfortunate, because it hinders the ability to replicate success. On the other hand, every community has a unique set of problems which may call for unique solutions. If the common denominator of *comités comunitarios de prevención* happens to work across communities, that should trump the philosophical tidiness of one-size-fits-all programming.

Secondly, LAPOP evaluated USAID’s interventions by relying heavily on people’s perceptions of crime, rather than actual crime data. “Some people would argue that perception is everything,” explained one USAID adviser, adding that victimization rates in Guatemala are actually quite low even in the so-called *zonas rojas*. “But *feeling* unsafe affects people’s well-being. If you feel unsafe you’re going to behave in a different manner and support policies that may not help build social cohesion.”

Citizen perception is only one among many possible indicators of success. Agency officials in Guatemala City are now inventing brand new indicators—and not a moment too soon, according to a critical audit released last May by USAID’s Office of the Inspector General. The auditors, based in San Salvador, traveled to Guatemala in late October 2013 to monitor the progress of the VPP—specifically some of the same projects already under LAPOP’s microscope. The auditors faulted both USAID/Guatemala and its implementing partner, RTI, for using poor indicators.

<sup>158</sup> Susan Berk-Seligson et al., “Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) Mid-Term Impact Evaluation Guatemala” LAPOP/Vanderbilt University, December 2013, 16.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Assignment was actually not totally random: LAPOP avoided having a treatment neighborhood right next to a control neighborhood so that the former would not affect (or “contaminate”) the latter. See Susan Berk-Seligson, et al., 25.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with USAID adviser, Guatemala City, February 27, 2014.

<sup>162</sup> Susan Berk-Seligson et al., 19.



For one thing, the auditors wrote, USAID designed four indicators to measure *outputs* rather than *outcomes*. A major VPP goal was to increase civic responsibility, for instance, so the project kept data on how many people attended civic training classes. Yet according to the auditors, such an indicator is “tracking outputs (participation) and not outcomes (actual increase in civic responsibilities).”<sup>163</sup>

That indicator was also ill-defined: among the 71,852 people who reportedly participated in civic awareness and responsibility training, 4,000 were simply attendees of the Mother’s Day or Child’s Day parades, “even though those activities did not promote understanding of civic rights and obligations.”<sup>164</sup>

Furthermore, some scholarship data inflated reality. For example, of the 26,761 scholarships that were reportedly given to youths, 430 scholarships were actually provided to the same 43 students. Each of these 43 students received a scholarship every month for ten months, and each time the student was re-entered into the system as though they were a new recipient.<sup>165</sup> Students were counted whether or not they even completed the training, which could have been a twelve-month course or a two-hour class; all were lumped together.<sup>166</sup>

The auditors concluded that many of these problems occurred because USAID/Guatemala failed to monitor RTI and make sure it fulfilled the VPP implementation contract. They attributed this failure to “high turnover in the project’s monitoring and evaluation team.”<sup>167</sup> USAID responded to this criticism by arguing that RTI was hired mainly to implement, while LAPOP was hired to monitor, and LAPOP’s appraisal was positive.<sup>168</sup>

In a sense, the debate is moot. USAID has created some new indicators in their next large-scale prevention program, a five-year \$30–40 million dollar endeavor slated to begin in late 2014. One is a comprehensive hybrid indicator, the “citizen security index,” which will take into account not only perceptions of insecurity, but also real victimization levels and

behavioral changes as well.<sup>169</sup>

Without solid indicators, it is impossible to offer anything other than anecdotal impressions of current USAID prevention projects in Guatemala. But one thing is certain: they are extremely limited in scope. Adding up all the scholarship students from all the Villa Nueva programs described above gives a total of about 800 youths (that is, if those numbers are reliable). However, according to a USAID memorandum, there are an estimated 4,117 young people between 5 and 24 living in Villa Nueva.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, even in the best-case scenario, the VPP would not have reached even a fifth of Villa Nueva’s youth. That is not a criticism of USAID; the agency has a budget, and can only spend what it has. But even the best programming for a fifth of an at-risk area’s population will have limited benefits.

## INL Projects

### Model Police Precinct in Villa Nueva

On May 13, 2005, PNC officers invaded Ciudad del Sol, a notorious gang haven in Villa Nueva, armed with colors. Painting over a mural crowded with Mara Salvatrucha symbolism, the officers brushed the words, “*Velando por tu seguridad: Policía Nacional Civil*” (or “The National Police: Watching out for Your Security”).<sup>171</sup>

Up until that time, Ciudad del Sol had been “abandoned,” said Inspector Edwin Ortega, who recalled the operation. “The gang members would walk the streets with guns, robbing neighbors, selling drugs. All the houses and buildings had graffiti.”<sup>172</sup> The delinquents were also getting smarter: while making their rounds extorting businesses, they would dress nicely in ties to avoid standing out. But Ortega says the police spent months collecting intelligence from neighbors, rounded up several gang members, painted over their murals with the help of high school students, and “took back” Ciudad del Sol—at least temporarily.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Office of the Inspector General, “Audit of USAID/Guatemala’s Violence Prevention Project, Audit Report No. 1-520-14-009-P,” May 15, 2014, 4.

<sup>164</sup> Office of the Inspector General, 5.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>168</sup> USAID official, e-mail correspondence with the author, June 13, 2014.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with USAID adviser, Guatemala City, February 27, 2014.

<sup>170</sup> “Resumen de la Implementación del Proyecto USAID Prevención de la Violencia en el Municipio de Villa Nueva,” USAID internal memorandum, last modified March 10, 2014, 1.

<sup>171</sup> “Policía “invade” zonas de maras en Guatemala,” *El Diario de Hoy*, May 14, 2005.

<sup>172</sup> Inspector Edwin Ortega, interview with the author, Guatemala City, March 3, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

It was one of the first campaigns by Villa Nueva's *comisaría modelo*, or model precinct. A model police precinct (MPP), according to a Department of State-commissioned report, is "a comprehensive and ambitious form of community-oriented policing" that emphasizes "prevention, information collection and processing, and community relationships."<sup>174</sup> Creating a model precinct requires several actions, enumerated in the report:

- "Modernization of infrastructure, communications, mobility, security cameras, and other equipment;
- "Creation of a victim-support office, with particular attention to the needs of women;
- "Community-oriented patrols that use saturation and other effective deployment practices;
- "Creation of an internal control office inside the precinct;
- "Specialized training for all personnel; and
- "Full initial vetting and continuous, random vetting of all rank-and-file officers."<sup>175</sup>

INL began recruiting for Villa Nueva's MPP in 2003, but immediately encountered a problem. According to Interior Ministry adviser, Juan Pablo Ríos, for every officer who passed the polygraph and other vetting exams, about ten failed. There simply were not enough clean officers to wholly replace *Comisaría 15*, which then had jurisdiction over Villa Nueva and four nearby municipalities. Yet scaling down the MPP to just one station would not have worked either, because stations have a limited working area. So it was decided to conceive of the *comisaría modelo* as a sort of smaller, parallel version of *Comisaría 15*.<sup>176</sup>

Once they had successfully vetted enough personnel to get started, the MPP started the mandatory training. Each officer had a minimum number of hours of continuing training each year, and many instructors (from Puerto Rico, for example) came to give courses. But at first, the PNC

kept rotating officers in and out of the MPP.<sup>177</sup> "If you trained them in Villa Nueva," said one INL adviser, "two months later, after spending all that money, they'd move them out."<sup>178</sup> The frequent rotation of personnel was undermining the goals of the program. Still, the MPP made several strides. Ríos said that at that time, in 2004, very little was known about the structure and operation of the gangs, so a unit was created to investigate gangs like those terrorizing Ciudad del Sol.<sup>179</sup>

Another major goal of the MPP was to build links to the community. To that end, the MPP launched a citizen services office in May 2005 and opened an anonymous tip-line "Tell it to Waldemar" ("*Cuéntaselo a Waldemar*") the same year.<sup>180</sup> A central digital system for analyzing criminal information, called CRADIC, was created in 2006. At schools, the gangs had been charging students one Quetzal (\$0.13) per day to be allowed safe passage into the buildings, so a fleet of MPP officers began patrolling all 120 schools and shut the racket down, while staying in touch with principals, teachers, and parents to stay abreast of any problems.<sup>181</sup> Officers also started giving courses in DARE and GREAT.

In August 2007, researchers from the Human Rights Institute of Georgetown University Law Center visited Villa Nueva. They found that "various individuals we met in Guatemala, including prosecutors, public defenders, and staff members at several nonprofits, signaled that the precinct's accomplishments were impressive." Residents had reportedly "reclaimed" the town square, and the MPP put on a festival celebrating the reduction in crime that some 2,500 residents attended.<sup>182</sup>

The "*de facto* chief" behind all the progress, the researchers found, was Samuel "Sammy" Rivera, a Puerto Rico native and INL adviser. "Although officially only a consultant to the *Comisaría* and outside its chain of command," the researchers wrote, "Rivera is the primary driving force behind all of the precinct's innovations and is intricately involved with its day-to-day operations." Rivera told them that the general crime

<sup>174</sup> Gerard Martin, "Section I. Introduction" and "The INL/NAS Model Precinct (MP) Approach to Community-Oriented Policing" in Chemonics International, "Community Policing in Central America: The Way Forward," prepared for USAID, June 2005).

<sup>175</sup> Gerard Martin, "The INL/NAS Model Precinct (MP) Approach to Community-Oriented Policing."

<sup>176</sup> Juan Pablo Ríos, *Ministerio de Gobernación* adviser, interview with the author, March 13, 2014.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Telephone interview with INL adviser, April 1, 2014.

<sup>179</sup> Juan Pablo Ríos, interview with the author, March 13, 2014.

<sup>180</sup> Berlin et al., 12 and Martin, "The INL/NAS Model Precinct (MP) Approach to Community-Oriented Policing" 14.

<sup>181</sup> Martin, 14.

<sup>182</sup> Berlin et al., 13.

rate remained high, but extortions had fallen and the conviction rate was 45–50 percent.

Ríos credited Rivera for being a pioneer in targeting extortionists in Guatemala, but said the conviction rate was misleading: Rivera and his allies in the Public Ministry only pursued cases against low-level criminals collecting the extortion money, known colloquially as *renta*, because those people were easier to convict. Meanwhile, “the criminal structure kept getting stronger and stronger.”<sup>183</sup> The Guatemalan government and the PNC, he said, never really embraced Rivera. “The truth is that people [in the PNC] didn’t like him,” said Ríos. Those outside the MPP resented that he had effectively assumed command in part of *Comisaría 15*, instead of just “shadowing” the Guatemalan brass. Inside the MPP, Ríos said, some subordinates complained that Rivera treated them as useless and inept. He concludes: “I think the problems were not with the design. The problems were with the implementation, above at the political level.”<sup>184</sup>

The Guatemalan authorities also still had not embraced the model by 2007, according to the Georgetown researchers:

*The Guatemalan government does not oppose the Embassy’s efforts in Villa Nueva nor the range of other programs that the Embassy and USAID support in Guatemala. Rather, the government appears to be disengaged from these efforts. Guatemalan leaders rarely articulate requests for specific assistance from the United States. Instead, they simply accept whatever aid is provided to them. One likely reason they cited for this trend is the high level of turnover in the Guatemalan government.*<sup>185</sup>

The hard data available from the PNC was inconclusive. From 2004 through 2009, injuries due to violence increased and homicides grew from 329 to 568 in the five municipalities under the jurisdiction of *Comisaría 15*. Assaults went down from 193 to 61, but it was impossible to attribute any of those trends to the MPP, because nobody was breaking out statistics by municipality.<sup>186</sup>

Still, the Guatemalan government was sufficiently pleased in 2009 to green-light the installment of another model precinct in Mixco, a different

large suburb near the capital with high crime rates. That year and the next, Washington set aside a total of \$2.16 million in CARSI funds explicitly to support the model precinct programs. Funds were to be used for

*vetting, training, technical assistance, and police equipment such as computers and office equipment, phones for the tip line, materials for community outreach such as municipal events, and crime mapping to guide patrolling. Equipment and operational support for the [Guatemalan government’s] crime information system (CRADIC) will improve patrolling coverage, improve the quality of investigations, and provide more reliable statistical data for deployment of police personnel and strategic planning. Funds will pay for maintenance and upgrades for equipment, computer hardware and software and training for police who will use the system.*<sup>187</sup>

Certain components of Villa Nueva’s MPP were then “scaled-up” to the national level. The “Cuéntaselo a Waldemar” anonymous tip hotline was one of these. In addition, the anti-gang unit that began in Villa Nueva was re-christened PANDA and given national jurisdiction. By 2011, it had 100 vetted agents skilled in wiretapping and long-term investigations, and was handling a national caseload.<sup>188</sup>

At that time, a report commissioned by the U.S. Department of State found that nine out of ten veteran police officers were still failing the MPP’s vetting process. Rookie officers fresh out of the academy fared better, with a 50 percent passing rate. A “significant majority” of the officers already in the MPP, though, were passing the semi-annual tests. Yet they still faced challenges, the report found, including “constant informal institutional resistance, including threats from other units or former police officers.”<sup>189</sup>

On a brighter note, technology improved in these years. In January 2012, a surveillance center was installed in Villa Nueva’s city hall building where the cafeteria used to be. The center now has nine large-screen computer monitors, each of which displays about a dozen live feeds from the 212 security cameras dotting the municipality. Personnel from the PNC, the *Policía Municipal de Tránsito (PMT)*, and army all watch the screens 24 hours a day in three eight-hour shifts. INL provided many of

<sup>183</sup> Juan Pablo Ríos, interview with the author, March 13, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Berlin et al, 14.

<sup>186</sup> Martin, “Community Policing in Central America: The Way Forward,” annex.

<sup>187</sup> U.S. Department of State, “FY 2010 Appropriations Spending Plan: Central America—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” 18.

<sup>188</sup> Martin, 13.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 12.

the computers and desks in the center. Mayor Edwin Escobar said in an interview that since the center began running, homicides have dropped 23 percent in Villa Nueva.<sup>190</sup>

But a quick search in the archives of *Prensa Libre*, Guatemala's largest daily paper (and one that is not known for sensationalizing violence), reveals that Villa Nueva is still plagued by murder and mayhem on a weekly basis, and that the peace brought to Ciudad del Sol has long since ended. There, in August 2013, police officers conducted 15 raids and rounded up nine members of MS who had been robbing neighbors. Grenades, pistols, and bullet-proof vests were seized.<sup>191</sup> Two days earlier, also in Ciudad del Sol, a stray bullet hit a child in his left arm as he lay in bed. He was four years old.<sup>192</sup>

Reflecting on the MPP project overall, a current INL official said that Villa Nueva "started with good intentions" and today has "elements" of an MPP, including a branch of the anti-gang PANDA unit and the new surveillance center, but it "never really gelled into what our [current] advisers believe is a full model police precinct."<sup>193</sup> A different INL adviser said that "the major impediment" to a fully-functioning MPP in Villa Nueva up until the arrival of INL's new team was "a lack of buy-in" from the PNC, the Ministerio de Gobernación (Ministry of Government), and the Police Reform Commission. "Since we've arrived here," he said, "we've been on a mission to get their buy-in."

The adviser said that INL's new vision for an MPP is having "all necessary services that we deem should exist under one roof." The idea is to have beat cops, investigators, analysts and managers all swapping information and helping each other, alongside prevention programs. And INL plans to work on this in *Comisarías 14, 15, 16 and 51*.<sup>194</sup> Already in *Comisaría 14*, INL has helped create and launch a new system of police management

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<sup>190</sup> Edwin Escobar, mayor of Villa Nueva, interview with author, March 3, 2014. According to an aide to the mayor, this statistic is based on data from both the surveillance center and the PNC.

<sup>191</sup> "Detienen a nueve personas durante operativos en Villa Nueva," *Prensa Libre*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>192</sup> Fredy Sarceño, "Bala perdida hiere a niño en Ciudad del Sol, Villa Nueva," *Emisoras Unidas*, August 27, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with INL/Guatemala officials, Guatemala City, February 27, 2014.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

based on statistical analysis and tighter links to citizens. It is very similar to New York City's CompStat, but is tailor-made for Guatemala and is called MOPSIC (the data analysis tool is SIPOL, mentioned above).<sup>195</sup>

Interior Ministry adviser Juan Pablo Ríos agrees that a true model precinct will have it all: not only strong investigative, internal affairs and SWAT units, but also elements of prevention, along with strong links to civil society and the community. "The specialized police services, they're useful, but that's not really what citizen security is all about," said Ríos. "Rather, it's about the most basic part, the regular uniformed officer who's walking around in his uniform. And for us Guatemalans, that person is still nobody."

### Poppy Eradication in San Marcos

On the morning of January 27, 2014, a multi-vehicle convoy of PNC officers, soldiers, and U.S. advisers rumbled out of the city of San Marcos in Guatemala's western highlands. Their destination: Ixchiguán, a municipality crouched between the steep slopes of the Sierra Madre mountains. Backpackers know this area for the Tajumulco volcano, which at 13,485 feet is the highest in Central America. The authorities, however, know it as Guatemala's heartland of opium poppy cultivation. Latex from a mature poppy plant can be converted into heroin so cultivation of the plant is illegal in Guatemala. That morning officers were on their way to cut them down yet again.

But as they approached the village of Tuninchum, a mob of farmers who opposed eradication blocked the road, launching "rocks, sticks and incendiary bombs" at the vehicles. Several policemen were injured. One suffered burns to his face.<sup>196</sup> The mission was only temporarily diverted; later that week, the PNC boasted of having ruined 65 hectares of poppy valued at \$94.2 million.<sup>197</sup> But the mob attack of last January may be only a taste of what is to come if Guatemalan authorities, supported by CARSI funds, stick with a policy that has failed for many years to solve San Marcos' poppy problem.

True, eradication numbers are up, but that is only one metric. President

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<sup>195</sup> Telephone interview with INL staff, June 26, 2014.

<sup>196</sup> "Guatemalan peasants attack cops targeting drug crops," *EFE*, January 27, 2014.

<sup>197</sup> "PNC erradica cultivos de amapola por más de US\$94 millones," *ACAN-EFE*, January 31, 2014.

Pérez Molina's administration reports that eradication climbed from 1,509 hectares (estimated by the Guatemalan government to be worth \$2.4 billion) in 2011 to 2,430 hectares (worth \$3.1 billion) in 2013.<sup>198</sup> Yet how much *amapola* (the Spanish word for poppy) is actually sprouting out of the soil? And is that acreage growing?

"We don't know how much there is," said one Interior Ministry adviser, adding that apparently "every month there's more and more." An INL adviser said that aerial surveillance alone cannot paint an accurate picture of total poppy growth; rather, you need someone using GPS instruments on the ground. But that is a dangerous task, as farmers do not take kindly to a state agent calculating their crop coverage in order to destroy it.<sup>199</sup>

The conflict started about four decades ago, when Mexicans arrived from across the nearby border with their "pretty flower that could be grown all year," according to a Tajumulco resident familiar with the situation. The outsiders told the villagers that the poppy can be converted to medicines. "People back then barely left the pueblo," the resident said. "Some had not even traveled to San Marcos." But by 1988, anyone who still doubted whether poppy was an illicit drug precursor needed only look to the sky. The Guatemalan government, using U.S. aircraft and helicopter escorts, was spraying herbicide on *amapola* fields on a daily basis (and drawing gunfire while doing so).<sup>200</sup> A quarter century later, the *campesinos*—mainly of indigenous Maya-Mam descent—are still planting poppy, despite state attempts to stop it. The reason is plain—incentives drastically favor it.

First, these farmers are very poor. According to a 2009 government report, the percentage of those living in "general poverty" in Ixchiguán, Tajumulco, and Sinibal—the three municipalities that form the "poppy triangle"—were 88.5, 93.3, and 90, respectively. The percentages of those living in "extreme poverty" rates were 38.1, 38.9, and 43.9, respectively.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>198</sup> "Estrategia de Erradicación de Cultivos Ilícitos 2013," memorandum by Quinto Viceministro de Antinarcoicos, 4.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with INL adviser, Guatemala City, March 28, 2014.

<sup>200</sup> Nathaniel Sheppard, Jr., "Guatemalan climate: Good for Poppy Fields, Drug Traffickers," *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1990.

<sup>201</sup> "Índice de pobreza general y extrema por municipios," Descargas de Segeplan 2.0, [http://www.segeplan.gob.gt/downloads/IndicePobrezaGeneral\\_extremaX-Municipio.pdf](http://www.segeplan.gob.gt/downloads/IndicePobrezaGeneral_extremaX-Municipio.pdf).

Said one INL adviser: "They don't see this as a drug problem; they see it as money for their kids."<sup>202</sup>

Secondly, the revenue and logistics of growing poppy are laughably more lucrative than traditional crops. In the mountainous climate of San Marcos, a farmer could plant a *cuerda* (or 440 square meters) of maize and get a harvest that will fetch about Q450 (\$58). He can do this once a year, and must haul it to market himself. In contrast, a farmer could plant a *cuerda* of poppy and get a harvest that will fetch Q4,000 (\$516), and possibly more. And he can do this about five times a year, because poppy has a much shorter life cycle. In addition, a *coyote*—or drug trafficker—will come pick it up.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, in gross-revenue terms, poppy is roughly 50 times as lucrative as maize and requires less transportation.

According to a Guatemalan government document, the drug traffickers equip the farmers with good fertilizer and improved seeds that will sprout ten buds per seed.<sup>204</sup> An INL adviser said that harvest is labor-intensive, and some families pull their children out of school to help. They must cut the ball and let the gum drip out for 24–36 hours. Then they scrape off the gum. That is what the coyotes come to collect.

One Tajumulco resident said that a coyote can earn as much as Q10,000 just for transporting a kilo of poppy gum to the border. They are the ones who are getting wealthier. The farmers have gotten together to buy some land, he concedes, but they are still poor. "We grow potatoes and corn, but that's just to eat," explained a shy farmer with gold front teeth and a baseball cap. "You can't buy oil or meat or shoes with that. You can, though, with poppy. The government says we're buying cars, two-story houses. Those are lies."

Asked if he was aware of heroin's destructive properties, he said, "We don't consume it. We know it's a drug, but where else are we going to get money?<sup>205</sup>...If the government wants us to stop cultivating poppy, they

<sup>202</sup> Interview with INL adviser, Guatemala City, March 28, 2014.

<sup>203</sup> Interviews with poppy farmers in Tajumulco, March 19, 2012.

<sup>204</sup> Quinto Viceministro de Antinarcoicos, 2.

<sup>205</sup> This provokes the question: if growing poppy is so essential to survival, how did villagers survive *before* the introduction of poppy? A couple of farmers said that back in those days, the *canasta básica*—or cost of basic essentials—was cheaper. An adviser from the *Ministerio de Gobernación* offered a different take on why they persist in growing poppy: "The problem is, the farmers like to go the easiest way."

should give us help to work legally, or work with the U.S. to help us get visas.” Instead, he said, “they just come in and cut everything down and give us nothing in exchange.”

The government used to swoop in two or three times annually, but they plan on five operations in 2014, according to an INL adviser, and are considering a permanent presence in San Marcos. They come with 250–300 police, plus army soldiers and elements of the Public Ministry and human rights community. Over four or five days, the PNC officers wield machetes and sticks to whack the base of the plant, which then perishes within 24 hours. The army is present for protection, and helicopters are on hand to evacuate injured people in the case of violence. “Sometimes we can hear AK-47 shots in the distance to intimidate us” said the INL adviser, who said that INL’s role is strictly logistical, involving provisions of food and portable toilets (for hundreds of men over several days).<sup>206</sup>

Sources in and outside officialdom confirm that the Guatemalan state has verbally agreed to not throw any farmer in jail for growing *amapola*; rather, it reserves the right to destroy the crop. Thus, a farmer must calculate: will I get away with the next harvest? Given how lucrative poppy is, and its proliferation in San Marcos, some apparently view a police raid here and there as the cost of doing business. But government officials now also claim that Mexican drug traffickers are actually forcing some peasants to grow and sell poppy.<sup>207</sup> When the state targets that poppy instead of the Mexican thugs, the biggest loser is the poor farmer who has been robbed by both sides of his time, labor and land.

President Pérez Molina said in April 2014 that he is open to the possibility of legalizing poppy cultivation for pharmaceutical purposes. If the National Commission for Drug Policy Reform makes such a recommendation in its upcoming report in October, he said, he will introduce a bill to that effect.<sup>208</sup> Meanwhile, on April 7, 2014, Guatemala’s Ministry of Agriculture announced it had invested Q30 million (\$3.9 million) in

a program to help the farmers grow potatoes and fruit trees.<sup>209</sup> It bears mentioning that the government has not totally abandoned the area: the state offers Tajumulco Q150 million (or \$1.3 million) in infrastructure subsidies every year, for example.<sup>210</sup>

On a global level, Guatemalan poppy is not a large market. The scale of production is nowhere near Afghanistan or neighboring Mexico. Even in terms of CARSI assistance to Guatemala, it is a small budget line item: in 2012, a total of \$500,000 was explicitly intended for poppy eradication. But given that the U.S. government is helping punish impoverished farmers for the crime of responding to U.S. market demand, one could argue that it owes a bit more to the *campesinos* of San Marcos.

INL has teamed up with Guatemala’s Ministry of Health to teach area community leaders and schoolchildren about “the negative effects and health risks associated with the cultivation of poppy.”<sup>211</sup> But even if the farmers knew all about heroin’s depredations in foreign countries, they would still have hungry mouths to feed and school supplies to buy.

“We’re not attacking the problem at its roots,” said the Tajumulco resident familiar with the situation. “We’re only getting solutions for a few days. The best solution is for the state to start accompanying farmers on a process of production and commercialization of products that can grow here.” He ticks off a list of possibilities: chicken, vegetables, beans, rice, and farmed fish. Exportation would require vastly improved roads, which in rural San Marcos are sparse and pocked with holes. He envisions better tourist infrastructure to help travelers visit the volcano, the many archeological sites, or artisans who could open wood- or metal-working shops.

In 2012, USAID redirected its economic development strategy to focus on the Western Highlands. It has helped construct a better farm-to-market infrastructure so that farmers can export snow peas and broccoli, for

<sup>206</sup> Interview with INL adviser, Guatemala City, March 28, 2014.

<sup>207</sup> “PNC erradica cultivos de amapola por más de US\$94 millones,” *ACAN-EFE*, January 31, 2014.

<sup>208</sup> Geovanni Contreras, “Otto Pérez apoya legalizar marihuana y amapola,” *Prensa Libre*, April 3, 2014.

<sup>209</sup> Santiago Castro, “Buscan sustituir cultivos de amapola y marihuana por papa y frutas,” *Prensa Libre*, April 7, 2014.

<sup>210</sup> Telephone interview with Tajumulco resident familiar with the poppy situation, May 28, 2014.

<sup>211</sup> U.S. Department of State, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” 178.

instance.<sup>212</sup> However, the Western Highlands is a big area, and the USAID budget is limited. In Tajumulco, the program has only reached only 13 of 152 communities.<sup>213</sup> Interviews with INL and USAID officials revealed no evidence of any coordinated, whole-of-government effort by the U.S. Embassy to go onto poppy farms and help *campesinos* grow alternative crops. As long as this remains the case, it appears that the *campesinos* will plant ever more poppy, and the United States will pay for policemen to go cut it down, with no end in sight.

## Conclusion

The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala has made much progress in meeting CARSI goals, but challenges remain.

USAID's high-impact courts have enabled big blows to organized crime, but remain hampered by legal obstacles thrown up by defense lawyers. Its violence prevention program in Villa Nueva clearly helps the children who get involved, but since four-fifths of the children in the area are not involved, its scope remains limited. Yet there is no question that USAID is making serious and sustained efforts to monitor and evaluate all of its programs and tweak them if necessary.

INL has had mixed results, too: PANDA is widely viewed as a success, while the model precinct in Villa Nueva—after nearly a decade in operation—still does not meet INL's own standards. It spends much time and money on DARE and GREAT training, but has not conducted any study to see if those programs are effective. It continues to support a policy of poppy eradication in San Marcos that has failed *for decades* to turn the situation around. INL's new team has talked about creating “baselines” to measure success, but admits that so far, it has been “bad at measures of effectiveness.” It should get better at this, for the sake of U.S. taxpayers and the Guatemalan people.

As mentioned before, Guatemala is not a star in the American flag.

The embassy cannot unilaterally impose its will there. It can only fortify security to the extent that Guatemalan leaders genuinely desire it—and even then, only to the extent they can pay to keep it going once INL or USAID steps aside.

But do Guatemalan leaders *want* to pay to keep it going? This country imposes the second lowest tax burden relative to gross domestic product (GDP) in all of Latin America—and one of the lowest in the whole world, for that matter.<sup>214</sup> The director of Guatemala's central bank said in June 2014 that to maintain economic stability and enable the state to keep its promises in the areas of health, education, security and employment, legislators would have to raise the tax burden from 11 percent to 14 percent.<sup>215</sup> At the time of this writing, they have not done so.

As the U.S. Congress contemplates an additional aid package to Central America as a response to the child immigrant crisis, it may do well to offer a generous amount over time but also attach strict conditions, such as the Guatemalan legislature's raising of tax revenue earmarked specifically for security investments. That would incentivize bold and sustained reforms, and ideally equip Guatemala with both the money *and* the will to move forward.

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<sup>212</sup> Elizabeth Dunn, “FIELD Report No. 18 Smallholders and Inclusive Growth in Agricultural Value Chains,” prepared for USAID by Impact LLC, January 2014, 5–6, <http://agrilinks.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/FIELD%20Report%20No%2018%20Smallholders%20in%20Value%20Chains.pdf>.

<sup>213</sup> Telephone interview with Tajumulco resident familiar with the poppy situation, May 28, 2014.

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<sup>214</sup> The CIA World Factbook, “Country Comparisons: Taxes and Other Revenues,” accessed July 15, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2221rank.html>.

<sup>215</sup> Manuel Rodríguez, “Banguat: Estabilidad requiere elevar carga tributaria a 14%,” *La Hora*, June 5, 2014, <http://www.lahora.com.gt/index.php/nacional/guatemala/actualidad/196829-banguat-estabilidad-requiere-elevar-carga-tributaria-a-14->.



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## CARSI IN HONDURAS

### ISOLATED SUCCESSES AND LIMITED IMPACT

AARON KORTHUIS

#### The Public Security Situation in Honduras

In November 2013, Hondurans headed to the election polls for a second time since the 2009 coup d'état that destabilized the country and left unchecked a problem that the country has long failed to address: violence and organized crime. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) latest homicide report, Honduras continues to struggle with the highest homicide rate in the world.<sup>1</sup> The seriousness of the security situation has provoked travel warnings from the U.S. Department of State and infamy in the international press tied to the violence experienced in Honduran cities and the abuses perpetuated by state security forces.<sup>2</sup> Over the past decade, drug trafficking through the country has surged, making it the "favoured northbound route for cocaine from South America."<sup>3</sup> Given the country's historically weak law

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014), [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, "Honduras Travel Warning," December 24, 2013, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/honduras-travel-warning.html>. See also Alberto Arce, "Effort to Clean Up Honduran Police Force Stalls," *The Associated Press*, June 11, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/honduras-police-cleanup-efforts-stall>.

<sup>3</sup> "Full circle," *The Economist*, May 24, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21602680-old-route-regains-popularity-drugs-gangs-full-circle>.



enforcement institutions, persistent problems with corruption, and poverty, as well as a continued U.S. appetite for cocaine, these problems are hardly a novelty—and present grave problems for the country’s leaders.

Unsurprisingly then, this problem was consistently featured in the leading presidential candidates’ discourse and public debate, and was undoubtedly a major factor in the final outcome. National Party candidate and eventual victor, Juan Orlando Hernández, called for a heavy-handed approach to security that relied on a newly created military police, while LIBRE<sup>4</sup> candidate Xiomara Castro’s voice resounded on public airwaves calling for Honduran soldiers to return to their barracks.

These starkly divergent views stem from a Honduran population tired of years of violence, organized criminal activity, declining security, and increasingly accustomed to the military’s involvement in traditional policing.<sup>5</sup> Alarming, only 27 percent of Hondurans expressed any confidence in the civilian police in August 2013, while 73 percent disagreed with the idea that the military should remain in the barracks (and by extension, presumably refrain from involvement in policing efforts).<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to address burgeoning organized crime and violence and instigate reform of Honduras’ security and justice institutions have consumed the country over the past few years and feature prominently in President Hernández’s plans. Yet, at best, these efforts have produced mixed results, and at worst have resulted in a depressing setback to assuring Honduras’ long term security.

The United States, through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), seeks to strengthen and improve Honduran initiatives through law enforcement cooperation, capacity building, and prevention programs. These programs persist amidst Honduras’ difficult political

environment and staggering problems, and success remains isolated, although hope remains that reform may finally gain momentum.

This chapter will seek to further explore these difficulties and United States efforts to engage them by first examining the Honduran security situation. Second, it will explore U.S. law enforcement strengthening efforts by looking in detail at vetted units. Third, it will address U.S. police capacity-building efforts through the Criminal Investigation School. Finally, it will discuss the crime and violence prevention efforts undertaken by USAID through youth outreach centers in poor Honduran communities.

## Organized Crime and Violence

### *Homicides*

The fitful pace of Honduran reform stems in part from the complexity of the security situation. Several international and domestic studies suggest that the country’s homicide rate is among the world’s highest, although consensus does not exist regarding the exact number. According to the latest UNODC report the rate per 100,000 inhabitants stood at 90.4 in 2012, the most recent year available. Other Honduran reports using official police, prosecutor, and autopsy data found 79 homicides per 100,000 in 2013, declining slightly from a high of 86 in 2011.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Libertad and Refundación (LIBRE) party is made up of the followers of ousted President Manuel “Mel” Zelaya. A large portion of its membership came from Zelaya’s former party, the Liberal Party, which split after the President was removed from office in the 2009 coup. LIBRE also includes a number of grassroots organizations and labor movements that rallied around Zelaya after his ouster.

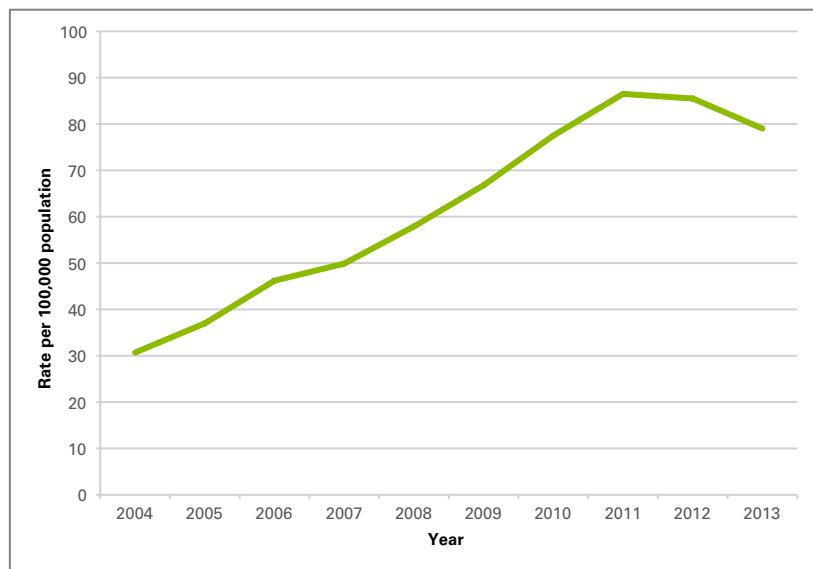
<sup>5</sup> Such involvement is also a legacy of the 1970’s and 1980’s, when the military was heavily involved in maintaining the country’s internal security.

<sup>6</sup> “Encuesta Nacional de Opinión Pública Agosto 2013.” This survey was undertaken by the Honduran polling company Le Vote for the Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa.

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<sup>7</sup> Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, “Boletín del Observatorio de Violencia, Edición 32,” February 2014, 2, <http://iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Nacional/NEd32EneDic2013.pdf>.

**Figure 1:** Homicide Rate in Honduras, 2004-2013



Source: Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, “Boletín del Observatorio de Violencia, Edición 32,” February 2014, 4, <http://iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Nacional/NEd32EneDic2013.pdf>.

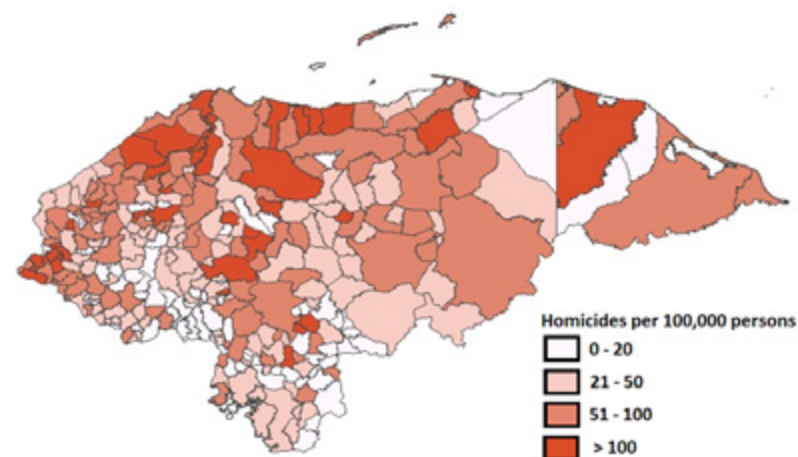
A number of indicators suggest that this violence stems in large part from drug-trafficking activities and urban-based criminal groups such as gangs. First, homicides remain heavily concentrated in Honduras’ largest cities and across its northern corridor leading to the Guatemalan border, where drug trafficking routes and groups are ubiquitous. In the provinces of Cortes and Atlántida, 2013 homicide rates reached 133 and 115 per 100,000 citizens, significantly above the national average.<sup>8</sup> Other statistics—such as the fact that 83.3 percent of homicides are committed with firearms, and at least 13 percent of homicides appear to be *sicariato*, or assassin-style, murder for hire killings—point to gang and organized criminal activity.<sup>9</sup> The violence is also heavily concentrated among the population group

<sup>8</sup> Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, “Boletín del Observatorio de Violencia,” 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 3. Seventy percent of homicides have no known possible motive, according to the Violence Observatory, suggesting that the 13 percent figure could be much higher in reality.

most commonly involved in gangs or drug-trafficking activities: young adult males. Shockingly, in 2013 the homicide rate for males ages 20-24 was 318.3 per 100,000, revealing how crime and violence affect certain parts of the population particularly hard.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2:** Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population in each Municipio in Honduras



Source: Created by Carlos A. Mendoza, using data from the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH)’s Violence Observatory and the University Institute on Democracy, Peace, and Security (IUDPAS - Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad).

### Drug Trafficking

Mexican cartels and local *transportista* groups contracted by cartels operate with seeming impunity in the country’s northern region, bringing drugs into the country via sea, land, and air routes.<sup>11</sup> The operations of such groups exploded in recent years, especially in the wake of the country’s 2009 coup, producing a “cocaine gold-rush” according to the UNODC, and exacerbating an already challenging situation in which the

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Essentially, this means a 20-24 year-old male has a 0.32 percent of dying due to violence every year, roughly equivalent to one in every 300 males this age.

<sup>11</sup> James Bosworth, “Honduras: Organized Crime Gained Amid Political Crisis,” in *Organized Crime in Central America: The Northern Triangle*, eds. Cynthia J. Arnson and Eric L. Olson (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), 62-103, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/node/19779>.

government's ability and willingness to ensure the rule of law was declining.<sup>12</sup> As Honduras became a focal point for drug trafficking over the last decade, competition between these trafficking groups and the virtual lack of state presence in some of their operation areas provided an environment ripe for skyrocketing violence and all sorts of other organized criminal activity, such as human trafficking and illegal firearms transfers.<sup>13</sup>

Today, the situation remains acute.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. Department of State estimated in 2013 that 87 percent of drug-laden flights originating in Colombia and Venezuela first make landfall in Honduras.<sup>15</sup> Recent statements by the Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, William Brownfield, suggest that this phenomenon may be changing; in February 2014 he reported that drug flights to Honduras were down 80 percent during 2013.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Honduran media reports point to a shift in trafficking patterns—flights from South America first land in remote Nicaragua, and then conduct short, low altitude flights over the Honduran border so as to avoid radar detection.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis in the Honduran media and counter-trafficking strategy on these flights may be misplaced though. A U.S. Embassy official recently indicated that the United States places a priority on intercepting the “80 to 90 percent of illegal drugs that enter Honduras via maritime routes,” meaning that only 10–20 percent of drugs enter Honduras via the

air or land.<sup>18</sup> According to statements made by General John Kelly of U.S. Southern Command, drug traffickers use “go-fast” boats to move cocaine from Venezuela and then assimilate by using local boats once they arrive on the northern Honduran coast, where they eventually unload their expensive cargo.<sup>19</sup>

Once in Honduras, drugs normally transit the northern corridor, a region long marked by its widespread impunity. Traffickers have traditionally enjoyed ease of movement in this region, given that some parts of Western Honduras “are completely under the control of complex networks of mayors, businessmen and land owners” rather than the central government.<sup>20</sup> The December 2012 murder of a mayor in Western Honduras, allegedly by soldiers, highlights the extent to which authorities in the region are also involved in illicit trafficking and are victims of its violence.<sup>21</sup> This is further underscored by frequent allegations that politicians and elections are tainted by drug money and receive it to finance their campaigns in a decidedly opaque electoral financing environment.<sup>22</sup>

Despite this reality, over the past year, the Honduran government has taken actions that point towards a genuine willingness to combat drug-trafficking and the state of impunity, although in many cases the results leave much to be desired. A number of examples highlight this contrast between will and results. For example, following the placing of infamous individuals and groups like “Chepe” Handal (a former political candidate) and the Cachiros on the U.S. Drug “Kingpin” list in 2013, Honduran authorities took significant legal action. In April 2013, authorities seized

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Transnational Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), 19, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC\\_Central\\_America\\_and\\_the\\_Caribbean\\_english.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_Central_America_and_the_Caribbean_english.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Bosworth, “Honduras: Organized Crime Gained Amid Political Crisis,” 62–103.

<sup>14</sup> In an interview, Minister of Security Arturo Corrales asserted that drug-trafficking remains the country's primary security problem, especially because of its strategic location. Interview with Minister of Security Arturo Corrales, April 29, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “Honduras,” *2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2013/vol1/204050.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Lohmuller, “Are Honduran Drug Flights Down 80% as Officials Claim?,” *Insight Crime*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/are-honduras-drug-flights-down-80-as-officials-claim>.

<sup>17</sup> “Descubren artimañas de narcos para evadir radar móvil en Honduras,” *El Heraldo*, April 1, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Descubren-artimanas-de-narcos-para-evadir-radar-movil-en-Honduras>.

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<sup>18</sup> Dan Lamothe, “Shady Honduran Military Won't Get Help from the U.S. to Shoot Down Drug Planes,” *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2014, [http://complex.foreign-policy.com/posts/2014/03/31/shady\\_honduran\\_military\\_won\\_t\\_get\\_help\\_from\\_us\\_to\\_shoot\\_down\\_drug\\_planes](http://complex.foreign-policy.com/posts/2014/03/31/shady_honduran_military_won_t_get_help_from_us_to_shoot_down_drug_planes).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Ramsey, “Honduran Mayor Killed by Gunmen ‘in Military Uniforms,’” *Insight Crime*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduran-mayor-killed-gunmen-false-military-uniforms>.

<sup>22</sup> “Narcos ofrecen dinero a candidatos en Honduras,” *La Prensa*, February 9, 2012, <http://www.laprensa.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/LaPrensa/Honduras/Apertura/story.csp?cid=329017&sid=267&fid=98>.

a number of Handal's properties.<sup>23</sup> Later, in September, a major operation took place against the Cachiros, allegedly seizing \$800 million in assets.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, both these operations were ultimately marred by the targets' evident anticipation of such actions: in the case of Handal, many possessions had already been removed from his houses, while in the Cachiros case, some of the bank accounts turned out to be empty.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in late March 2014, Honduran officials captured "El Negro" Lobo, a drug-trafficker at the top of the list for extradition to the United States.<sup>26</sup> "El Negro" was extradited to the United States in May, and was the first Honduran citizen to be handed to U.S. authorities since Honduras changed its laws in recent years to allow the practice of extradition.<sup>27</sup> U.S. Ambassador Lisa Kubiske applauded the government's action, saying on her Twitter account that it sends a clear signal to organized crime syndicates that Honduras does not belong to them.<sup>28</sup>

#### Gangs

Drug trafficking and organized crime—which President Juan Orlando

Hernández has identified as the country's main security problem—exist amid a web of other worrying criminal phenomena that contribute to the country's violence and instability. Honduras' estimated 12,000 gang members continue to pose a threat in major urban areas, extorting businesses and running local drug networks.<sup>29</sup> Cities like the capital, Tegucigalpa, remain stricken with gang-related violence. Extortion practices utilized by gangs regularly paralyze the cities' transportation system, as terrified bus and taxi drivers protest the violence they suffer by refusing to drive. In 2012 alone, 84 taxi drivers were murdered.<sup>30</sup> Preliminary talks exploring the possibility of a gang truce similar to that announced in El Salvador appear to have had little effect in taming Honduras' violence—and certainly has not produced the dramatic decline in homicide rates seen early on in El Salvador's gang truce.<sup>31</sup> In part, this may be due to the more disparate and disperse nature of Honduras' gangs, which are more numerous and less centralized than El Salvador's.<sup>32</sup>

Honduran violence has reached such unbearable levels that the United Nations has specifically identified it as a growing cause of emigration,

<sup>23</sup> "Fiscalía incauta tienda y hacienda de Chepe Handal," *La Prensa*, April 18, 2013, <http://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/policiales/365695-98/fiscal%C3%ADa-incauta-tienda-y-hacienda-de-chepe-handal>.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Parkinson, "\$800 Mn Cachiros Seizure 'End of Phase One': Honduras Police," *Insight Crime*, September 26, 2013, [http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/\\$800m-cachiros-seizure-end-of-phase-one-honduras-police](http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/$800m-cachiros-seizure-end-of-phase-one-honduras-police).

<sup>25</sup> "Allan casas de 'Chepe' Handal en SPS," *El Heraldo*, April 18, 2013, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Allanan-casas-de-Chepe-Handal-en-SPS>. See also "OABI no encontró dinero en 70 cuentas," *El Heraldo*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Pais/story.csp?cid=583577&sid=299&fid=214>. This article reports that the group's bank accounts were empty and many assets removed from those sites targeted by the operation. A U.S. official with knowledge on the matter asserted that not all of the frozen accounts were empty. Email correspondence with U.S. official, July 1, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Marguerite Cawley, "Honduras Arrests Drug Trafficker 1st in Line for Extradition," *Insight Crime*, March 28, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-arrests-drug-trafficker-1st-in-line-for-extradition>.

<sup>27</sup> "Honduran accused drug trafficker extradited to U.S.," *Reuters*, May 9, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/09/us-honduras-drugs-usa-idUSBREA480C620140509>.

<sup>28</sup> "Crimen organizado está avisado: Honduras no les pertenece," *El Heraldo*, May 9, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/707596-331/kubiske-al-crimen-organizado-honduras-no-les-pertenece>.

<sup>29</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Red de Seguridad y Defensa en América Latina, *Índice de Seguridad Pública: Centroamérica: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá*, (Buenos Aires: RESDAL, 2013), 93, <http://www.resdal.org/libro-seg-2013/honduras-indice-2013-esp.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> James Bargent, "Murders in Honduras Rising Despite Gang Truce," *Insight Crime*, August 5, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/murders-in-honduras-rising-despite-gang-truce>. The gang "peace process," which was announced in May 2013 from a prison in San Pedro Sula, was led by a Catholic priest, with support from the Organization of American States. It is important to note that a truce was not officially reached, but rather the announcement in Honduras allegedly marked the beginning of a "peace process" that would address the country's (and even the region's) unbearable violence, according to the *Washington Post*. Unfortunately, since the May 2013 announcement, little visible progress has occurred, and the government's commitment to such efforts appears to be notably lower than that (previously) expressed by the El Salvadoran government. See Nick Miroff, "Honduran gangs offer peace from prison," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/honduran-gangs-offer-peace-from-prison/2013/07/24/6fb3b8e6-dd1c-11e2-a484-7b7f79cd66a1\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/honduran-gangs-offer-peace-from-prison/2013/07/24/6fb3b8e6-dd1c-11e2-a484-7b7f79cd66a1_story.html).

<sup>32</sup> James Bosworth, an analyst in the region, correctly notes this in his article "Can Honduras Mirror El Salvador's Successful Gang Truce?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 29, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2013/0529/Can-Honduras-mirror-El-Salvador-s-successful-gang-truce>.

asserting that many recent emigrants from Honduras have been motivated by threats related to gangs (and other organized criminal activities).<sup>33</sup> The recent child immigrant crisis in the United States further highlights the role this violence plays in displacing Hondurans and disrupting society.<sup>34</sup> Alarmingly, while many Hondurans leave due to violence, deportations from the United States feed the ranks of gangs and other organized criminal groups. In 2012 alone, 43.7 percent of the 32,500 Hondurans deported from the United States had criminal records.<sup>35</sup> Fragile social conditions—from unemployment to vast inequality—underlie this precarious situation, putting youth and returning emigrants (especially those with criminal records) alike at risk of joining Honduras’ violent gangs.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Violence Perpetrated by State Security Forces*

In addition, violence perpetrated by members of state security forces continues to pose a serious problem, and corruption remains endemic among the security and justice apparatus, especially among members of the National Police. According to the National University’s (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras—UNAH) Violence Observatory, 149 people were killed by Honduran police officers during 2011 and 2012, although some have challenged these numbers as being inflated or incorrectly calculated.<sup>37</sup> In early 2014, *El Heraldo*, one of Honduras’ main daily newspapers, published a series of articles highlighting the relentless

corruption that typifies the Honduran police. Internal police documents obtained by the newspaper include the names of nearly 200 active police officers (many of them senior-level) involved in drug-trafficking and robbery, among other activities.<sup>38</sup> Civil society and human rights groups have also denounced the corruption that characterizes the police, noting that purges of police officials have focused on lower level officers and neglected to investigate more senior officers and their assets.<sup>39</sup>

### **Security and Justice Institutions: New Reforms, Old Problems**

#### *Reform Efforts with Few Results*

Despite the problems with state security forces, the Honduran government has yet to take the problem of reform and the need for thorough vetting seriously. In mid-December 2013, Minister of Security Arturo Corrales announced the purging of 161 police officers from the National Directorate for Criminal Investigation (DNIC, for its Spanish initials), lauding the action as an important step forward in strengthening the country’s corrupt and battered police force. Yet in subsequent days, the Minister’s action became the focus of fierce criticism.<sup>40</sup> Among those purged were individuals vetted by the U.S. Embassy and recognized as clean, dedicated members of the police, officers who had received extensive foreign training, and others recognized by their peers as exceptionally

<sup>33</sup> Centro Internacional para los Derechos Humanos de los Migrantes, “Desplazamiento Forzado y Necesidades de Protección, generados por nuevas formas de Violencia y Criminalidad en Centroamérica,” (unpublished paper drafted at the request of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees, May 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Frances Robles, “Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/world/americas/fleeing-gangs-children-head-to-us-border.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/world/americas/fleeing-gangs-children-head-to-us-border.html?_r=0).

<sup>35</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, “Gangs in Central America,” *Congressional Research Service*, February 20, 2014, 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>37</sup> Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, “Boletín Especial Edición No. 5: Criminalidad Policial,” December 2012, [http://iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Especiales/BEP\\_Ed5.pdf](http://iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Especiales/BEP_Ed5.pdf). Some suggest that the numbers may be inflated because they rely heavily on questionable police statistics and media reports. Further, they may fail to differentiate between legitimate uses of force and unsubstantiated killings by the police. While such concerns are legitimate, it is important to acknowledge that the report may also fail to account for unreported instances of police violence, a factor also crucial to assessing this number’s veracity and reliability.

<sup>38</sup> “Honduras: La lista de policías vinculados a delitos es escalofriante,” *El Heraldo*, February 5, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Al-Frente/Honduras-La-lista-de-policias-vinculados-a-delitos-es-escalofriante>. See also “Honduras: Redes de narcotráfico penetraron a altos oficiales,” *El Heraldo*, February 5, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Al-Frente/Honduras-Redes-del-narcotrafico-penetraron-a-altos-oficiales>.

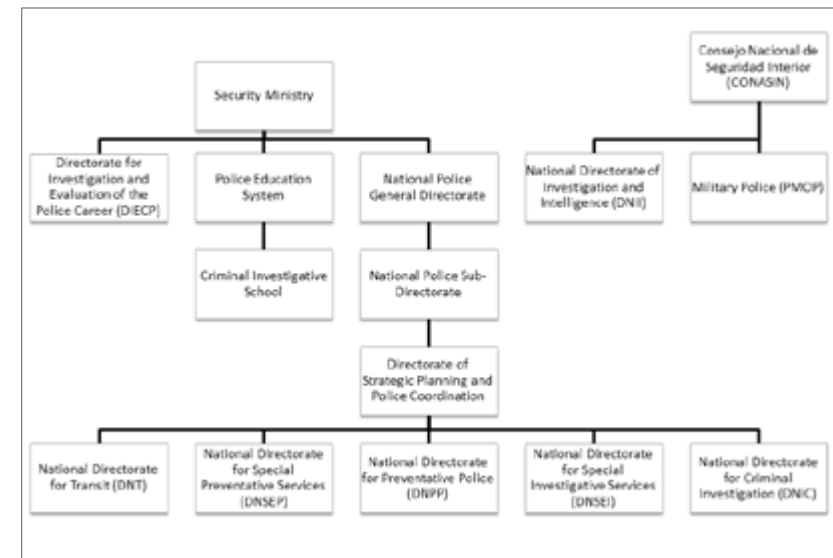
<sup>39</sup> Dagoberto Rodríguez, “Más de L57 millones van gastados en la fracasada depuración policial,” *La Prensa*, January 14, 2014, <http://www.laprensa.hn/lasultimas24/442674-97/mas-de-l57-millones-van-gastados-en-la-fracasada-depuracion-policial>.

<sup>40</sup> “Honduras: Polígrafo deja fuera a 161 de la DNIC,” *El Heraldo*, January 16, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Poligrafo-deja-fuera-a-161-agentes-de-la-DNIC>.

dedicated to their work.<sup>41</sup> Despite their training and reputation, the officers were fired without access to the labor protections police officers are entitled to as public servants. The handling of their dismissal was so questionable that even Ramón Sabillón, Director General of the National Police, admitted in an interview that good officers had been purged, and that it was affecting the police's investigative work.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, a month after this purge, 35 high-ranking police officers were “honorably discharged,” despite the widespread suspicion among civil society groups, the media, and others that many of these officers were closely tied to criminal bands known to be operating in the police.<sup>43</sup>

Such is the nature of Honduras' nascent and hesitant security sector reform. Institutional weakness is rife and corruption remains rampant and without consequence. And yet, security sector reform has remained a central public issue in Honduras since late 2011 when the death of the son of Julieta Castellanos (Rector of Honduras' National Autonomous University—UNAH in Spanish) at the hands of police officers, and the assassination of Alfredo Landaverde, a high-ranking public official working on security issues, shocked the country. Despite the outrage these tragedies provoked, efforts to enact change since then remain uncoordinated and often isolated from one another, marked by limited successes and misplaced priorities.

**Figure 3:** Organigram of Honduran Ministry of Security



Source: Created based on Honduran Ministry of Security, “Republica de Honduras. Organigrama de Secretaria de Seguridad,” n.d., <http://www.seguridad.gob.hn/images/organigrama.jpg>, with additional information provided by Honduran officials in conversation with the author and Honduran Embassy officials in conversation with Eric Olson, July 2014.

Media and public clamor has resulted in little meaningful action to address corruption. In April 2013, hearings in the National Congress and civil society pressure revealed that the use of polygraph tests, drug tests, and financial background investigations by the Directorate for the Investigation and Evaluation of the Police Career (DIECP) had led to the firing of only seven officers since the Directorate's creation in late 2011—and of these seven, some were allowed to once again join the police after being fired.<sup>44</sup> The U.S. Department of State noted a similar lack of progress, stating that 407 of 687 abuse or corruption reports received by the Directorate in 2012 remained “in investigation” as of July 30, 2013.<sup>45</sup> As noted above, various sectors have questioned recent efforts to purge Honduras' police, arguing

<sup>41</sup> German H. Reyes, “Oficiales de policía aseguran que las autoridades quieren desaparecer la DNIC,” *Revistazo*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.revistazo.biz/web2/index.php/nacional/item/844-oficiales-de-polic%C3%ADa-aseguran-que-las-autoridades-quieren-desaparecer-la-dnic>.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Director General (Honduras' national police chief) Ramón Sabillón, May 5, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> See January 29, 2014 press release from the Alianza por la Paz y la Justicia: <http://alianzapazyjusticia.com/index.php/descargas-de-documentos-categorias/category/4-comunicados#>.

<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2014: Honduras,” <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/honduras?page=1>.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013: Honduras,” 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220453>.

that the Ministry of Security's efforts lack transparency and fail to punish police officers genuinely involved in crime.<sup>46</sup>

The toxic mix of violence, corruption, impunity, and organized crime suggests that Honduran authorities continue to face grave internal and external challenges. Unfortunately, Honduras' ability to respond to these challenges remains weak and fragmented, despite isolated instances of improvement in all three security and justice sector institutions: the police, the public prosecutor's office, and the judiciary.

#### *The Police (and Military)*

Following congressional hearings in April 2013, Minister of Security Pompeyo Bonilla was fired in what was widely understood to be a response to his poor performance and inability to promote reform and address corruption. He was replaced by Arturo Corrales, the Foreign Minister at the time.<sup>47</sup> Corrales launched a series of new initiatives, taking an unprecedented census that confirmed the police force was comprised of about 13,000 officers (the exact number was previously unknown even to the force's leadership). The Ministry of Security also supplied patrol cars with new GPS units, created a new Operations Center to monitor and coordinate police movements, and opened an emergency call center using the 911 number. Further, it launched a crime database center, known as the Online Police Statistic System (Sistema de Estadística Policial en Línea, or SEPOL) that publicizes Honduran crime data down to the *barrio* (neighborhood) level, and has launched some 30 municipal-level violence observatories to monitor homicide statistics.<sup>48</sup> Such reforms suggest possible progress towards creating a more professional and responsive police force. Other isolated initiatives, such as local community policing projects and a joint civil society and police/prosecutor project that has aided in dramatically

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<sup>46</sup> Press release from the Alianza por la Paz y la Justicia, January 29, 2014, <http://alianzapazyjusticia.com/index.php/descargas-de-documentos-categorias/category/4-comunicados#>.

<sup>47</sup> "Informe de la Comisión Especial de Seguridad del Congreso Nacional," (unpublished government document, April 15, 2013). See also "En 30 días estarán creados nuevos observatorios," *La Tribuna*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.latribuna.hn/movil/2014/04/23/en-30-dias-estaran-creados-nuevos-observatorios/>.

<sup>48</sup> Arturo Corrales, "Primer 100 días," presentation to government officials, civil society members, and international representatives, August 12, 2013. For information about SEPOL, see <https://www.sepol.hn>.

lowering homicide rate in its target neighborhood also demonstrate the possibility of transforming a weak and corrupt Honduran police, and provide an important possible template for reform at the national level.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these programs, Honduras' police force arguably remains the worst in the region. Corruption among high-level officers and police violence against civilians comes as little surprise given the institution's lack of staff, training, and the resources it needs to undertake its work. At 142 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants, the per capita police ratio is the region's lowest (despite the highest rates of violence), and far below the regional average of 268 per 100,000.<sup>50</sup> Most police officers make less than \$500 a month, working often grueling shifts with uniforms and bullets purchased out of their own salary, making the allure of bribes or other money-making schemes tantalizing.<sup>51</sup> In interviews done for this paper, one U.S. official repeatedly lamented the Honduran government's tendency to fund new security forces such as the Military Police rather than invest in the underfunded existing police force.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, under-investment in civilian police reform cannot be explained away simply as a result of the Honduran state's dire financial situation, or the President Hernandez's commitment to trimming the central government's size and budget. The state spends heavily on security and has large sources of funding available through multilateral organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank. Instead, the government has channeled many resources towards its new National Directorate for Intelligence and Investigation (Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia e

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<sup>49</sup> Mark Ungar, "Community Policing in Honduras: Local Impacts of a National Programme," *Policing and Society* 22.1 (2012): 31-34. See also Nicholas Phillips, "In Honduras, Going From Door to Door to Prosecutors," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2014, sec. A9.

<sup>50</sup> Average calculated by the author based on statistics provided by the OAS Security Observatory for Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama, using data from the "Organization of American States Hemispheric Security Observatory," available at <http://www.oas.org/dsp/observatorio/database/countries.aspx?lang=en>.

<sup>51</sup> Red de Seguridad y Defensa en América Latina, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Interviews with U.S. official, February 14 and 26, 2014. The official made clear the United States provides no support to this military police unit. Director General Ramón Sabillón also made clear in a May 5, 2014 interview that a primary difficulty for the police was the lack of resources needed to undertake its work.

Investigación, DNII) and the Military Police (Policía Militar del Orden Público, PMOP).<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the Hernández government introduced a plan to civil society working groups that includes many police reform elements and commitments to continue initiatives designed to strengthen the institution, such as the purchase of technological tools, extensive purging, and reforms to the Ministry of Security's structure, among others.<sup>54</sup> It remains to be seen whether the government will comprehensively implement this plan. For the most part, it appears that the new security entities created by the government continue to receive exceptional attention, even while they may confuse the roles of the police and military, redirect resources away from a police force that requires serious reform, and in the worst of cases, represent a misguided approach to combating crime that threatens to violate human rights and replace long-term stability with short-term gain.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the DNII, the PMOP, and a new investigative unit within the Public Ministry (or Public Prosecutor's Office) all have a mandate to conduct criminal investigation, further splintering a process already

characterized by poor coordination and chronic weakness.<sup>56</sup> Notably, Honduran and U.S. officials alike cited this proliferation of parallel investigative and inter-institutional units as a major problem that divides and disperses law enforcement efforts.<sup>57</sup>

Further, large chunks of the state's discretionary security budget, which comes from a new tax that is derived primarily from financial transactions and for which there is no reliable oversight mechanism, has been designated for equipment purchases for the new military police. It has also been used to expand Honduras' military by an additional 1,000 soldiers, despite the fact that the police force lacks the basic equipment and personnel it needs.<sup>58</sup> Additional purchases from this discretionary security fund include expensive military-grade radars obtained, for around \$30 million, to detect incoming drug flights from Colombia and Venezuela, despite the fact that the U.S. Southern Command has offered assistance in this area for years.<sup>59</sup>

Soon after the acquisition of these radars, the Honduran Congress adopted a new law in early 2014, essentially allowing the Honduran military to bring down unknown planes in Honduran airspace using whatever means necessary, including shooting down unresponsive planes.<sup>60</sup> This,

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<sup>53</sup> These investment practices have led some to argue that the Hernández government wants to dismantle the current investigative police body (and perhaps even the entire civilian police force) and replace it with alternative bodies, like the new military police. See German H. Reyes, "Oficiales de policía aseguran que las autoridades quieren desaparecer la DNIC."

<sup>54</sup> "El Plan de Todos para una Vida Mejor: Pacto por Honduras," Mesa #1: Recuperar la Paz y la Seguridad de las Familias Hondureñas (unpublished government document, February 2014.)

<sup>55</sup> Ample evidence exists that the government has not yet taken seriously the need for reform of the civilian police force. The creation of parallel (often military) entities has diverted resources from fixing a broken and under resourced institution. For example, while new vehicles transport the country's Military Police, a recent report published by the Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa described the situation in the province of Comayagua, where six investigators have one vehicle between them to cover a province in which 400 homicides occurred between 2010 and 2012. Unsurprisingly, the investigators completed only nine percent of investigations during these years. A second example comes from the way police reforms proposed by the Public Security Reform Commission, which sought to improve the institution's focus on the local community, were completely ignored. Finally, the purging example described above, in which good police officers were fired while corrupt ones walked free with benefits, sends completely the wrong message to the civilian police about what is expected from police officers.

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<sup>56</sup> See "Decreto No. 168-201: Ley de Policía Militar del Orden Público." See also "Decreto 211-2012: Ley de Inteligencia Nacional." See also "Con más de 50 agentes iniciará la Agencia de Investigación del MP," *El Heraldo*, January 21, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/702386-214/con-más-de-50-agentes-iniciará-la-agencia-de-investigación-del-mp>.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 14, 2014 and interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> "Nuevos operadores de seguridad absorben 138 millones de lempiras," *El Heraldo*, September 20, 2013, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Economia/Nuevos-operadores-de-seguridad-absorben-138-millones-de-lempiras>.

<sup>59</sup> "Radares estarán listos en primer semestre de 2014," *El Heraldo*, January 2, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Radares-estaran-listos-en-primer-trimestre-de-2014>. U.S. aid in this area was suspended for a time in 2012 following an incident involving U.S. anti-drug agents, Honduran security forces, and civilians in the Mosquitia in May of 2012 and an additional incident involving the shooting down of a suspected drug flight, perhaps prompting the government to pursue its own source to detect incoming flights.

<sup>60</sup> The passage of this law prompted the United States to stop providing radar information to Honduras regarding suspicious planes. "Honduras instala radar y EEUU deja de dar datos sobre trazas de aviones," *El Heraldo*, March 31, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Pais/story.csp?cid=703246>.



along with the 28 remote landing strips destroyed by the Honduran military in 2013, signals that the Honduran government is placing an exceptional, and perhaps misplaced emphasis, on detaining drug flows using aviation routes.<sup>61</sup> For example, recent shifts in drug trafficking methods emphasize shorter low altitude flights from Nicaragua across the border into Honduras, meaning that the radar equipment may neither detect nor deter flights from landing in the country's ungoverned wilderness.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, the increased use of the military to perform police functions threatens the long-term transformation of Honduras' police, as well as its present ability to combat crime. Worryingly, the original 1,000 members of the PMOP in August 2013 received only one month of specialized training beyond their basic military training before being deployed. While an additional 1,000 members added in May 2014 received up to four months of training, questions remain about the adequacy of the curriculum and whether the time spent in training is adequate.<sup>63</sup> This cursory training leaves PMOP members ill-prepared to undertake the criminal investigations that already present serious problems for the country's police, and by dividing investigative functions across organizations the introduction of the PMOP has further weakened the police's capacity to effectively undertake and collaborate on investigations.<sup>64</sup> To date, the PMOP's primary task has

<sup>61</sup> "Informe de Logros- Año 2013," Secretaría de Defensa Nacional. Minister of Security Arturo Corrales explained these efforts as part of a larger push to create a "shield" against drugs entering by air, land, and sea, but the evidence suggests that the government is placing exceptional emphasis on stopping drug flights. Interview with Minister of Security Arturo Corrales, April 29, 2014. The questionable nature of this emphasis is best understood by remembering that U.S. officials estimate that 80-90 percent of drugs enter via the sea (not to mention land routes via Nicaragua).

<sup>62</sup> "El narcotráfico cambia su ruta para introducir drogas a Honduras." *El Heraldo*, 7 April 2013, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Al-Frente/El-narcotrafico-cambia-su-ruta-para-introducir-drogas-a-Honduras>.

<sup>63</sup> =See "1,000 agentes más a la Policía Militar," *El Heraldo*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/706847-214/1000-agentes-más-a-la-polic%C3%ADa-militar>. By the end of 2014, the Honduran government hopes to have 5,000 military police members. See also Charles Parkinson, "Honduras duplicará la presencia de la Policía Militar en San Pedro Sula," *Insight Crime*, March 27, 2014, <http://es.insight-crime.org/noticias-del-dia/honduras-duplicara-policia-militar-en-san-pedro-sula>.

<sup>64</sup> "Honduras: Selecto grupo de soldados ya se entrena como policías," *El Heraldo*, September 6, 2013, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Honduras-Selecto-grupo-de-soldados-ya-se-entrena-como-policias>.

been supporting "Operation Francisco Morazán," an effort announced by President Hernández during his January 2014 inauguration. The operation has focused on entering dangerous neighborhoods of the country's largest cities in the hopes of dismantling criminal bands.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, despite isolated instances of progress, the evidence continues to suggest that Honduras' civilian police remain chronically weak. Although the Honduran government has not abandoned its police force outright, it does not appear to be investing the resources needed to ensure the force's transformation, preferring instead to strengthen new institutions that are publicly popular, like the Military Police, or to invest in technology that a poorly trained and under-educated police force may struggle to effectively utilize.

#### *The Public Ministry*

Honduras' Public Ministry faces institutional challenges similar to those at of its crime fighting partner, the National Police. The institution suffers from weakness in both resources and capacity, and has not undergone the profound reform needed to create a more professional, capable institution with the ability to address Honduras' overwhelming violence and organized crime. This crisis came to a head in mid-2013 when the Public Minister (roughly equivalent to an attorney general) resigned following immense pressure from civil society groups and others in response to a lengthy expert evaluation revealing the institution's weaknesses.<sup>66</sup> The National Congress installed an Intervention Commission (Comisión Interventora) in the Public Ministry to oversee the institution, and in late August 2013 Congress elected a new Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General. The National Human Rights Commissioner Ramón Custodio, UNAH Rector Julieta Castellanos, and civil society groups heavily criticized the election process for its lack of transparency after political interests, rather than merit, appeared to play a determinative role in the election process. Despite this rough beginning, the arrival of new leaders at the helm of the Public Ministry has led to a number of important

<sup>65</sup> See Karla Zabudovsky, "Who's Fighting your Drug Wars," *Newsweek*, February 28, 2014, 7-22.

<sup>66</sup> "Evaluación del Ministerio Público de la Republica de Honduras," (unpublished document, January 2013). Three experts contracted by the U.S. Embassy—a Mexican, an El Salvadoran, and a Costa Rican—undertook this institutional evaluation to identify weaknesses and offer recommendations to improve the Public Ministry.

initial gestures and actions that appear to steer the institution in the right direction, while other problems continue to go unaddressed.

In particular, recent actions by the Ministry's new leaders to hire additional prosecutors, to create a special unit for investigating and prosecuting crimes in the Bajo Aguan region, and to prosecute emblematic cases stand out as important initiatives.<sup>67</sup> Honduras' low prosecutor-to-inhabitant rate of 6.4 per 100,000 (neighboring El Salvador has 13.4 and Costa Rica has 10.2) poses similar personnel problems to those faced by overburdened police in responding to the country's elevated levels of violence and organized crime.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the recent addition of 21 prosecutors (due to a considerable budget increase) and the intention to hire more represents an important basic step in strengthening the Public Ministry.<sup>69</sup> The creation of a Bajo Aguan unit—that has at least a two-year mandate—also represents a positive step towards resolving Honduras' most divisive social conflict and one that stands for the seriousness of Honduras' human rights situation.<sup>70</sup> Finally, the recent convictions of Alfredo Landaverde's assassin and the police officers who murdered Julieta Castellanos' son demonstrate that the institution can successfully prosecute crimes—even in sensitive cases

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<sup>67</sup> The Bajo Aguan region is home to some of Honduras' most serious human rights abuses and social conflict, due to a dispute between a large corporation and local residents. A report from Human Rights Watch underscored the government's failure to address this situation, demonstrating that extremely few cases have been investigated, much less prosecuted. According to an April 23, 2014 interview with a senior Public Ministry official, the U.S. government offered to provide financial support to this new Bajo Aguan unit, but due to the Public Ministry's desire to quickly launch the unit, it was not able to do so.

<sup>68</sup> Asociación Interamericana de Defensoría Públicas, "Diagnóstico de la Defensoría Pública en América," 2012. Rates were calculated by the author based on the population and prosecutor numbers provided in the report.

<sup>69</sup> "Ministerio Público cuenta con 21 nuevos fiscales," *El Heraldo*, January 21, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Ministerio-Publico-cuenta-con-21-nuevos-fiscales>.

<sup>70</sup> "Equipo investigará crímenes en el Aguán," *El Heraldo*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Equipo-investigara-crimenes-en-el-Aguan>.

of symbolic importance.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, Honduras' government and the Public Ministry's leadership must deal with an institution plagued by many longstanding problems. Chief among these is the weakness in criminal investigation capacity. An analysis conducted by regional experts in early 2013 revealed that the Public Ministry's role in directing and overseeing criminal investigations requires serious strengthening. The fact that the police only complete around 20 percent of investigations in cases where the Public Ministry requests an investigative report underscores the depth of the problem.<sup>72</sup> Security for prosecutors represents another major challenge for those working on sensitive cases, as demonstrated by numerous murders over last year of prosecutors.<sup>73</sup> Other problems include the lack of witness protection, training for prosecutors, a shortage of material resources (such as vehicles), and weakness in attorney supervision and discipline for inappropriate or criminal behavior.<sup>74</sup> Finally, excessive caseloads represent another debilitating burden; for example, in 2012, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights was responsible for 7,000 cases, while the office was only

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<sup>71</sup> See "Sentencia de 66 años de reclusión para asesinos de hijo de la rectora," *La Tribuna*, December 9, 2013, <http://www.latribuna.hn/2013/12/09/sentencia-de-66-anos-de-reclusion-para-asesinos-de-hijo-de-la-rectora/>. See also "Condenado a 22 años, asesino de Alfredo Landaverde," *La Tribuna*, January 10, 2014, <http://www.latribuna.hn/2014/01/10/condenado-a-22-anos-asesino-de-alfredo-landaverde/>.

<sup>72</sup> Case statistics from "Evaluación del Ministerio Público de la Republica de Honduras," 9. The Public Ministry requests investigations from the police in nearly 77 percent of cases that are reported to it, according to statistics provided in the report from 2008-2012.

<sup>73</sup> Marguerite Cawley, "Honduras' Top Anti-Money Laundering Prosecutor Murdered," *Insight Crime*, April 19, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-top-anti-money-laundering-prosecutor-murdered>. See also, Elyssa Pachico, "Honduran Prosecutors 'Killed by Barrio 18 Gang,'" *Insight Crime*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-prosecutors-reportedly-killed-by-barrio-18>. The seriousness of this situation is underscored by the fact the Attorney General at the time, Luis Rubi, had assigned armored vehicles to his "protocol chief," while high-level prosecutors working on sensitive such as the organized crime prosecutor mentioned here used personal vehicles for transport.

<sup>74</sup> "Evaluación del Ministerio Público de la Republica de Honduras." The Public Ministry sends reports of crime to the police, which are then charged with returning it with an investigation that the prosecutors can use to pursue the case.

assigned 16 prosecutors: this works out to be 437 cases per prosecutor.<sup>75</sup> Simply put, much work awaits Honduras' Public Ministry if it hopes to address the country's staggering security problems.

### *The Judiciary*

In December 2012, four members of the Constitutional Chamber of the Honduran Supreme Court of Justice were dismissed by the National Congress following a controversial decision related to the use of polygraph tests for police vetting.<sup>76</sup> Judged unconstitutional by many legal scholars, some have expressed concern that the dismissals were an attempt by National Party leaders to "exert control over the Supreme Court," raising serious concerns about the possible political manipulations of the judiciary, its polarization, and its independence as a branch of government.<sup>77</sup>

More recently, the Honduran judiciary launched an expansive effort to remove members and personnel accused of releasing drug-traffickers and other criminals from jail.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, the effort has been characterized by a lack of transparency, bringing into question its motives and veracity.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kaitlin Owen, *Honduras: Journalism in the Shadow of Impunity*, eds. Carmen Cheung et al., (Toronto: Pen International, 2014), 37.

<sup>76</sup> James Bosworth, "Honduran lawmakers fire four Supreme Court judges," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 12, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2012/1212/Honduran-lawmakers-fire-four-Supreme-Court-judges>.

<sup>77</sup> Peter J. Meyer, "Honduras-U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, February 5, 2013. Additionally, it should be noted that President Hernández was President of Honduras' unicameral legislature when the Justices were dismissed.

<sup>78</sup> "Consejo suspende a dos jueces más," *El Heraldo*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Consejo-suspende-a-dos-jueces-mas>.

<sup>79</sup> In a series of meetings to which the author was privy for reasons unrelated to this paper, actual and former judges complained that the current process of firing judges was based on shaky legal reasoning, that the motives for many firings were unclear, and that the labor rights of judges were not being respected. This is underscored by the manner in which the body leading this purge has acted: press conferences or interviews with the press are given announcing the number of judges fired, but the justifications for the firings are rarely made public. Finally, the independence of this body authorizing and overseeing these firings is seriously questioned, due to the manner in which its members were elected. For example, see "Consejo de la Judicatura aún no informa suspensión a jueces," *El Tiempo*, December 11, 2013, <http://www.ella.hn/portada/noticias/consejo-de-la-judicatura-aun-no-informa-suspension-a-jueces>.

As with the police and Public Ministry, the institution requires serious reform that will allow Hondurans to more easily access judicial services and help improve the discharge of justice. These needs were noted in recent justice and security sector policy plans created with help from the United Nations Development Program and the European Union.<sup>80</sup>

### *Other Institutions*

In early 2012, the National Congress created a promising Public Security Reform Commission to diagnose, define, and lead the security sector reform process and certify the vetting process for civilian police. Nevertheless, the same Congress that created the Commission also dissolved it in January 2014 after the government failed to consider the legal reforms the Commission proposed and drafted.<sup>81</sup> The Commission's failure led to widespread criticism of the Commission's work and suggests that security and justice reform in Honduras is politically divisive, conflictive, unorganized, and ultimately extraordinarily difficult. It is not yet clear that the Hernández government will be able to move beyond these difficulties to address the country's chronic problems.

## **Conclusion**

Honduras' justice and security institutions show some nascent signs of progress due to actions pushed by their leaders and successful, isolated projects that appear to have lowered levels of crime and changed the way individuals, such as the police, do their work. Despite this, serious problems persist. Homicide levels remain alarmingly high, even if lower than in the past, and organized crime continues to operate with seeming impunity across the country's northern corridor. Gangs terrorize urban populations, and the state's own security forces have yet to rid themselves of corruption

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<sup>80</sup> Honduras' *Política de Seguridad Ciudadana y de Convivencia Social*, written in conjunction with experts from the United Nation Development Program, is a good example of one such document.

<sup>81</sup> "Desaparece Comisión de Reforma a la Seguridad Pública," *El Heraldo*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Desaparece-Comision-de-Reforma-a-la-Seguridad-Publica>. It is important to note that the Commission's mandate included not only police reform, but also the ability to draft reforms for the Public Ministry and the Judiciary. Civil society groups also criticized the Commission for failing to mount an effective campaign to press the Congress to consider its proposed reforms.

and abuse. Further, the advent of the Military Police confuses the roles of the police and the military in a dangerous way, while criminal investigation has become increasingly dispersed between different agencies. Institutions remain weak, and once again, poor criminal investigation suggests that coordination is a chronic problem. Finally, despite the existence of policies and plans drafted with the help of international donors, reform efforts lack the necessary investment by the Honduran government, thus further worsening coordination. President Hernández seeks to improve this via his “Pact for Honduras,” a master plan drafted with the input of civil society, the private sector, and others, but its adoption and long-term effects remain to be seen.

### U.S. CARSI Strategy in Honduras

The extreme violence in Honduras and government actions targeting crime and drug trafficking fill, if not dominate, the country’s daily newspapers and televised news cycles. Inevitably, these dynamics have also commanded the attention of foreign governments and institutions—especially the United States. As a result, U.S. aid to Honduras, including CARSI funding, is in large part oriented towards dealing with the security challenges outlined above.

The last five-year Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Honduras was launched in 2009, and outlined planned U.S. activities through 2013.<sup>82</sup> Much of these centered on security-related matters, and they appear to have remained generally consistent despite the country’s 2009 coup. At the time of this writing, the next five-year strategy is still being drafted and had not yet been publicly released.<sup>83</sup>

#### The U.S. and the Public Security Context

Interviews with U.S. officials and a review of the 2009–2013 CAS

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<sup>82</sup> CAS documents are created by USAID in coordination with other relevant agencies, and include all U.S. government foreign assistance programs and resources provided to the country in question, with the goal of creating a longer-term plan against which annual operations can be compared. Honduras was a pilot country for the CAS project. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), “Country-Specific Foreign Assistance Strategies,” [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pcaab761.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pcaab761.pdf).

<sup>83</sup> Author requests to view the draft were denied.

provide a complex picture of the problems that U.S. CARSI assistance seeks to address in Honduras.<sup>84</sup> Broadly speaking, they identify three primary problems whose solutions include a wide variety of CARSI-backed programs: drug trafficking/organized crime, weak institutions—especially in terms of low capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes—and finally, social ills that exacerbate and undergird Honduran crime and violence.

Drug trafficking represents one of the most serious problems identified by the United States, and is an overriding and primary concern for the CARSI aid received in Honduras. The 2009–2013 CAS cites Honduras’ location at the heart of Central America as a reason for its abundant drug trafficking and other associated crimes, such as money laundering. The strategy document makes clear that these illegal activities in turn help to produce the country’s high levels of violence. Complicating this situation is the fact that resource shortages, a porous border, and a lack of control over the country’s remote northeastern region further encourage the use of Honduras as a landing point for South American cocaine shipments.<sup>85</sup> According to the CAS, the violence from these criminal activities “fuels illegal immigration and threatens regional stability and U.S. national security interests.”<sup>86</sup> This emphasis on drug trafficking and its effects as a major problem remains a guiding feature of U.S. CARSI policy in Honduras five years later. One U.S. official noted that the top U.S. priorities in the country were drug-related investigations, cocaine interdiction, and the investigation of homicides, highlighting the important focus drugs continue to play in determining U.S. policy.<sup>87</sup>

Weak institutions and limited capacity to address crime stand out as a second major problem area identified by both strategy documents and U.S. officials. Chief among the causes of weak institutions is corruption. A recent paper by the Inter-American Dialogue noted that the problem of

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<sup>84</sup> USAID, “Honduras Country Assistance Strategy: Fiscal Years 2009–2013.” The strategy document refers to the “Mérida Initiative” in relation to security issues, given that it was drafted while the CARSI program was still known by this name.

<sup>85</sup> These problems are also reiterated in Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issue for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, May 7, 2013.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 14, 2014.

widespread corruption increasingly concerns U.S. officials.<sup>88</sup> Interviews in Honduras suggested a slightly more favorable view of the Honduran Police Force: some U.S. officials stationed in the country acknowledged the need for purging corrupt officers, but did not emphasize corruption as a primary cause of weakness.<sup>89</sup> Despite this, the fact that many, if not all, U.S.-vetted police units in Honduras remain isolated from the rest of the police suggests that U.S. officials may fear the leaking of information compiled in criminal investigations due to corruption.<sup>90</sup>

Beyond the risks of criminal infiltration, the 2009–2013 CAS and the author’s interviews with U.S. officials did identify a variety of other institutional and capacity-related weaknesses that undermine Honduras’ ability to address crime and violence. The CAS addresses institutional weakness in broad terms, pointing to poor training and a lack of equipment as serious problems.<sup>91</sup> Interviews suggested additional problems, such as confusion caused by overlapping mandates for criminal investigations in at least four different law enforcement institutions, low education levels among police, a lack of basic equipment (such as police uniforms), minimal long-term institutional planning capacity, and a simple (but drastic) shortage of personnel in the police force.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Hector Silva Avalos, “The United States and Central America’s Northern Tier: The Ongoing Disconnect,” Inter-American Dialogue Central America Security Working Paper, March 2014, 14.

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, February–March 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Vetted units and their role in CARSI’s strategy in Honduras are discussed in more detail below.

<sup>91</sup> USAID, “Honduras Country Assistance Strategy,” 7.

<sup>92</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, February–April 2014.

**Table 1: CARSI Institutional Reform and Institutional Strengthening Projects in Honduras**

| Police   | Fiscalia/PM   | Judiciary   | Prisons  | Other Law Enforcement-Based Prevention   |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for Honduran National Police Financial Crimes Task Force and the Violent Crimes Task Force</li> <li>• Courses on Human Rights and on basic and advanced investigation at the Honduran Criminal Investigative School</li> <li>• Support police-reform laws</li> <li>• Improve Honduran National Police internal affairs and support establishment of Administrative Division as well as Intelligence, Computer Forensics, Fugitive Recovery, and Monitoring and Evaluation Units</li> <li>• Model Police Precinct</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional legal adviser to enhance prosecutorial capacity of Trafficking in Persons investigations</li> <li>• Assist with justice reform strategy</li> <li>• Advance professional responsibility policies and procedures</li> <li>• Support cross-organization collaboration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-gang-focused capacity building</li> <li>• Increase collaboration with the police and the Public Ministry</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen local and national violence observatories</li> </ul> |

Sources: U.S. Department of State, “FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2009 Appropriations Spending Plan: Mexico, Central America, Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2010 Appropriations Spending Plan: Central America—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” n.d.;

U.S. Department of State, “Congressional Notification Transmittal Sheet,” August 11, 2011; U.S. Department of State, “Fiscal Year 2012 Congressional Spending Plan: Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI),” n.d.; U.S. Department of State, “FY 2013 Spend Plan—Central America Regional Security Initiative,” September 10, 2013; and U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline,” April 16, 2014.

Finally, the Country Assistance Strategy (which is not limited to security issues) and U.S. officials noted a number of other basic problems that guide U.S. policy in Honduras. Low trust in public security institutions and a lack of accountability and rule of law feature prominently among those problems acknowledged in relation to security and justice sector institutions.<sup>93</sup>

Gangs also present a significant challenge for the country’s security, controlling many urban areas and serving as the “foot soldiers of the drug trade.”<sup>94</sup> Their control of neighborhoods leaves youth in many *barrios* with the choice of staying indoors or joining the gangs right outside their doors (a problem cited by officials).<sup>95</sup> Gangs, in addition to other organized criminal activities, represent a major component of the country’s violence problems, and thus efforts to target their existence and operations feature prominently in the strategy.

The complex problems identified by the 2009–2013 CAS lead to the important conclusion at the document’s end that “Peace and Security and the need for the GOH...to address problems such as drug and weapons trafficking, decreasing gang activities, and improving the Honduran police is the number one priority.”<sup>96</sup> Five years later, this “number one” priority continues to define and guide U.S. identification of problems and policy in Honduras, given the ongoing gravity of the country’s problems.

### **The Three Pillars of CARSI-Honduras: Law Enforcement, Capacity-building, and Prevention**

In order to combat crime and violence, reduce drug trafficking, and strengthen institutions, the United States employs a strategy with three main pillars that seeks to address these problems at various levels. While

<sup>93</sup> USAID, “Honduras Country Assistance Strategy,” 4–5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, March–April 2014.

<sup>96</sup> USAID, “Honduras Country Assistance Strategy,” 38.

this three-pronged approach is not explicitly stated in the 2009–2013 CAS, at least one document summarizing Honduran CARSI aid and one U.S. official defined the strategy in this way, and it accurately reflects the various aspects of CARSI implementation in Honduras.<sup>97</sup>

The law enforcement pillar of U.S. CARSI strategy in Honduras contains two components that often overlap, yet represent distinct elements of the strategy: drug interdiction and vetted law enforcement units.<sup>98</sup> Although the aggregation of CARSI budget reporting makes it difficult to determine the specific funding amounts for these items, it is reasonable to assume they are at the core of CARSI’s Honduras strategy, given the weight placed on these issues in the CAS and in interviews with U.S. officials. Such attention is also expected given the perception among some that CARSI is merely “the sum of already existing bilateral programs... masterminded mainly from the law enforcement perspective and focused heavily on drug interdiction, repression of youth gangs, counter-narcotics intelligence sharing, and the strengthening of military, naval, and air force equipment.”<sup>99</sup>

This reality seems to hold especially true in Honduras, where not only federal agencies such as the FBI, DEA, and the Department of Homeland Security have vetted units (not unlike in other high-crime, high-violence countries), but where the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) section of the embassy also oversees a number of task forces (similar to, but distinct from vetted units) to investigate and prosecute crimes.<sup>100</sup> These units primarily respond to the problems of violence and drugs by investigating and prosecuting crimes and thereby contribute to lower levels of crime and the reduction of impunity. They are generally comprised of prosecutors and vetted police officers, as well as U.S. and

<sup>97</sup> Author interview with U.S. official, February 14, 2014. *See also* U.S. Department of State, “The Future of CARSI in Honduras,” March 12, 2012, [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/honduras/23248/pol/carsifuturehn\\_eng.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/honduras/23248/pol/carsifuturehn_eng.pdf). These three areas are also identified in Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issue for Congress,” May 7, 2013.

<sup>98</sup> A vetted unit is a law enforcement body whose members have been investigated by U.S. authorities for ties to corruption or human rights abuses, have been the recipient of a U.S.-applied polygraph task, and work with the aid of U.S. law enforcement advisers.

<sup>99</sup> Hector Silva Avalos, “The United States and Central America’s Northern Tier,” 12.

<sup>100</sup> According to a U.S. official, this is a mandate that is unique to INL in Honduras.

other foreign advisers (mainly Colombians) who help to guide the process of investigation and prosecution. Vetted units also receive material support to ensure their capacity to resolve cases. In Honduras, a number of different vetted units and/or task forces are currently in operation under the supervision of the following agencies:

- FBI
- Drug Enforcement Agency
- Department of Homeland Security/ICE
- Customs and Border Protection
- State Department Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Violent Crimes Task Force (formerly Special Victims Task Force)
  - Financial Crimes Task Force (with support from the Office of Technical Assistance of the U.S. Treasury Department)
  - National Anti-Gang Unit<sup>101</sup>

These units respond to various criminal activities in Honduras, though the emphasis tends to be on high impact crimes or organized criminal activity. Although the long-term goal is a “feeder-system” in which vetted units in turn build institutional capacity, personnel turnover in these vetted units is very low.<sup>102</sup>

Another major aspect of law enforcement activities in Honduras is the specific focus on drug interdiction. While some of this aid comes through non-CARSI sources such as support given through U.S. Southern Command, vetted units and equipment are important CARSI contributions.<sup>103</sup> A 2012 document detailing some of CARSI’s initiatives in

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<sup>101</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline,” April 16, 2014, (unpublished document obtained from INL for this paper). Also confirmed in interviews with a U.S. official, February 14 and 26, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Interviews with U.S. official and Honduran police officials, February-March 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Among other things, U.S. Southern Command has provided support in interdicting drugs via the U.S. airbase at Soto Cano, in outlining drug-flight patterns for the Honduran government, and in strengthening maritime interdiction efforts through the presence of destroyers in the region. For more, see Thom Shanker, “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](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/world/americas/us-turns-its-focus-on-drug-smuggling-in-honduras.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). See also “Con buques de guerra de EEUU combatirán a narcos en Honduras,” *El Herald*, March 13, 2014, 10.

Honduras refers to a Joint Maritime Vetted Unit that was the recipient of 20 refurbished go-fast boats, as well as other equipment, as a part of narcotics interdiction efforts. It also points to the training of 100 border agents as an important step in improving the ability to intercept drugs in Honduras.<sup>104</sup> Other operations, such as the aforementioned operations against Chepe Handal, the Cachiros, and the “Negro” Lobo (operations supported by U.S. vetted units) also reveal the preeminent role drug-related issues play in CARSI-Honduras strategy.<sup>105</sup>

Capacity building of Honduran law enforcement institutions is the second major pillar of CARSI strategy in Honduras. One important element of this strategy is the use of vetted units. In theory these units serve to professionalize a select group of Honduran officers who receive specialized training and thereby can demonstrate their ability to undertake sensitive operations effectively. Additionally, it is believed that the carefully selected and specially trained members of the vetted unit will have a positive influence on their institutions when they leave they return to their normal duties. But some question whether vetted units contribute to institutional strengthening as a whole.<sup>106</sup> There is no documented empirical evidence that would support the contention that Honduran members of U.S. vetted units have returned to their original law enforcement agencies to have an impact on the institutions’ professionalism and functioning.<sup>107</sup> Further, beyond this “positive influence” ideal, it is not clear what the actual strategy is to use vetted units as a means to larger institutional reform. Neither U.S. nor Honduran officials appeared to be clear on what this “institutional reform” strategy aspect of vetted units is or how it is to be brought about, further bringing into question whether such impact actually exists.

Beyond the vetted units, training programs and the presence of Colombian and other foreign security advisers are additional elements intended to address the problems of institutional weakness and low capacity

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<sup>104</sup> U.S. Department of State, “The Future of CARSI in Honduras.”

<sup>105</sup> Parkinson, “\$800 Mn Cachiros Seizure ‘End of Phase One’: Honduras Police.”

<sup>106</sup> Interviews with former Honduran police officials, February 20 and March 27, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Specifically, no studies or reviews were made available to show the impact officers have upon the institution after leaving their unit. Most likely, such studies simply do not exist because police officers rarely leave the vetted units they are in, suggesting that a broader impact upon the institution is highly unlikely.

identified by the Country Assistance Strategy and U.S. officials.<sup>108</sup> For example, in the area of training, the United States started a Criminal Investigation School with Colombian instructors that provide basic and specialized classes to not only police and prosecutors, but also to judges, border officials, and firefighters.<sup>109</sup> The United States also provided support for Colombian experts to advise and strengthen the new Directorate for Investigation and Evaluation of the Police Career (DIECP), an independent unit created to investigate and vet police officers. This support was later suspended due to frustrations over the pace of efforts to improve police vetting.<sup>110</sup>

Further, U.S. and Colombian advisers help to strengthen both the police and Public Ministry by drawing on their own experience and training, and imparting it to the Hondurans with whom they work. Interviews and documents obtained by the author reveal 75–80 Colombians are on site in Honduras serving with various agencies, as well as to help the Ministry of Security and police directors draft a new law and regulations for the police force.<sup>111</sup> Other examples of Colombian support will be discussed in further detail throughout this chapter, including training and advising special units.

The final pillar of CARSI strategy in Honduras consists of a wide

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<sup>108</sup> Interviews with U.S. official, February 14 and 26, 2014. For a more in-depth look and understanding of the use of Colombian advisers in Honduras and other CARSI beneficiaries, see Arlene B. Tickner, “Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy,” Washington Office on Latin America, May 2014, <http://www.wola.org/files/140318ti.pdf>.

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Department of State, “The Future of CARSI in Honduras” and interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014. Since its inception in May 2011, the school has trained “2924 police, prosecutors, judges and other security actors in over 27 different skill areas.” U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “Criminal Investigation School Fact Sheet,” n.d. (unpublished document obtained by author).

<sup>110</sup> Russell Sheptak, “US suspends aid to Honduras police cleanup,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 6, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2013/0606/US-suspends-aid-to-Honduras-police-cleanup>.

<sup>111</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials February–March 2014 and documents obtained by author, listing Colombian police advisers and their assignments within the country’s police force from May 2013. Over the course of the Colombian support program in Honduras, nearly 200 Colombian National Police officers have provided assistance to Honduras. Email correspondence with U.S. official, July 1, 2014.

range of prevention programs overseen by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (and in some instances supported by INL). According to both an internal USAID paper and a U.S. official providing a general overview of CARSI projects managed by USAID in Honduras, a number of “levels” of prevention exist that help conceptualize the institution’s prevention work.<sup>112</sup> The first level of prevention is that of “primary prevention,” or “universal, population- and location-based programs for youth and families in high-risk areas.”<sup>113</sup> In Honduras, this form of prevention comes through youth outreach centers that operate in many of the nation’s highest-risk neighborhoods. The centers are the first point of entry for USAID into the violent communities they target, and offer a number of programs and services to the community’s youth, such as internet cafes, soccer fields, and gyms as a means to keep youth off the streets, and hopefully, out of gangs. Other CARSI programs which fit under this “primary prevention scheme” include the GREAT program (The Gang Resistance Education and Training Program is a drug-prevention program akin to DARE in the United States, and is administered by INL, not USAID) and alternative education programs and teen pregnancy programs, which seek to address the lack of opportunities for youth to find work, as well as the alarmingly high teen pregnancy rates that creates a youthful, but volatile, population.<sup>114</sup>

“Secondary prevention” more selectively identifies and seeks to address the risks associated with individuals who are very likely to become engaged in criminal activity. The YSET (Youth Services Eligibility Tool), currently a small pilot project in Honduras, provides a good example of such prevention. Essentially, it helps to identify whether youth are in danger of joining gangs or other criminal bands, and outlines a family intervention plan for those whose situation is judged precarious.<sup>115</sup> The tool, originally deployed with success in Los Angeles, is just being launched in Honduras; consequently, its results and success remain to be seen. An implementing organization in Honduras noted that few secondary programs

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<sup>112</sup> USAID, “Non-paper on Crime Prevention,” (unpublished document, n.d.). Interview with U.S. official, March 2014.

<sup>113</sup> USAID, “Non-paper on Crime Prevention,” 1.

<sup>114</sup> USAID, “Honduras Country Assistance Strategy,” 3.

<sup>115</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials and representatives of implementing partner organizations, April 2014.



are currently being employed in Honduras, revealing a definite area for future strengthening.<sup>116</sup>

A third level of prevention, known as “tertiary prevention” seeks to address issues of juvenile justice and recidivism among offenders. USAID has sought to improve prevention at this level through reforms to the juvenile penal code and a restorative justice program for juveniles that provides alternatives to prison (which, according to many Hondurans, are prime gang-recruiting grounds). Another program seeks to prevent adults from reoffending by providing both group counseling and job opportunities or loans to open small businesses.<sup>117</sup>

Finally, “situational prevention” is built on the premise that a “built environment can not only deter crime but also effectively increase public perception of security.”<sup>118</sup> USAID possesses a small program in this area. It seeks to strengthen municipal governance and community participation as a means to encourage use of public spaces, rather than turning them over to gangs, a problem noted in the Country Assistance Strategy.<sup>119</sup>

USAID’s Honduras strategy also includes additional programs that do not fit immediately within this prevention framework, but may be more properly labeled what the internal paper calls “Rule of Law and Citizen Security Policies.” In this respect, the Office of Transitional Initiatives within USAID and INL have launched a neighborhood community-policing program in Tegucigalpa along with Japan’s development agency that is to function as a “model precinct.” A U.S. official noted that this program was important given the distrust Hondurans have in the police (a problem also noted in the CAS), and that it seeks to “build a bridge” between the police and community to help resolve this.<sup>120</sup> Through a three to four day training course that touches on issues from how to treat citizens to the use of statistics and planning, the program looks to both improve policing and citizen trust at the local level.<sup>121</sup>

USAID officials noted that some of these programs, such as YSET, have been or remain pilot projects (for example, YSET began in October 2013),

<sup>116</sup> Interview with an implementing organization director, April 2, 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> USAID, “Non-paper on Crime Prevention,” 2.

<sup>119</sup> USAID, “Country Assistance Strategy,” 7.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. Also based on interview with U.S. official, February 14, 2014.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

but are likely to form a more integral part of the new consolidated strategy the agency is developing. Of similar importance is the fact that these programs employ a coordinated geographical focus, a fact that U.S. officials sought to make clear. According to these officials, outreach centers serve as a gateway into violent communities, and open the door to coordinate the provision of other services, such as teen pregnancy programs or alternative education.<sup>122</sup> Implementing partners interviewed by the author noted that they worked in specific “CARSI” communities, and sought to coordinate their efforts and services with the other organizations working with CARSI by inviting them to events or using outreach center facilities.<sup>123</sup>

### What are CARSI’s Expected Results in Honduras?

The 2009–2013 CAS lists a number of expected results that are directly related to many of the projects described above. The stated goals include increased transparency and better rule of law, as well as helping to form a more “accepted and respected [police] force.”<sup>124</sup> Other CAS goals focus on improving law enforcement capacities and results, such as better police investigation and intelligence, improved police communications, better-trained police officers, and the interception of illicit drugs.<sup>125</sup> Through USAID’s prevention efforts, CARSI seeks to build “strong and resilient communities that can withstand the pressures of crime and violence.”<sup>126</sup> Specifically, U.S. officials added a number of desired and complementary results, including the lowering of crime rates in the short term, helping to prevent high-risk youth from entering gangs, lowering recidivism among offenders, building capacity for community organizing and project management in target neighborhoods, providing skills that youths can use to find employment, and building partnerships with the private sector and government so as to promote long-term sustainability.<sup>127</sup> These desired results, as well as the above programs, are also to be understood within

<sup>122</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Interviews with implementing partner organizations, April 2014.

<sup>124</sup> USAID, “Country Assistance Strategy,” 8.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 6–8.

<sup>126</sup> “Honduras/CARSI Performance Management Plan,” (an unpublished USAID document provided to the author by the USAID mission in Honduras).

<sup>127</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, February–March 2014. See also “Honduras/CARSI Performance Management Plan.”

the larger five-goal CARSI framework.

### **CARSI in Honduras: A Strategy in the Making?**

The United States' CARSI strategy in Honduras clearly includes a wide variety of activities centered on the core idea of improving citizen security. Encouragingly, these efforts respond to many levels of needs: law enforcement, institutional reform, prevention, and community building, among others. \$16.5 million was designated for USAID-run projects in both fiscal years 2012 and 2013, suggesting that prevention is not mere rhetoric in Honduras—it represents an important and significant aspect of U.S. policy in the country.<sup>128</sup> USAID's projects showed evidence of coordination between organizations and along geographical lines, although this certainly can be improved. This effort to approach problems of violence in a holistic way should be noted and commended—while recognizing that much room for improvement remains.

Yet this framework and holistic approach belies a reality that was made evident both in interviews and in looking at CARSI's implementation in Honduras. This reality is what Hector Silva identifies as CARSI's "piece-meal approach:" the crafting together of various existing programs into one overall funding stream called CARSI, but without a rigorous strategy to make it especially effective.<sup>129</sup> In interviews, U.S. officials suggested a similar understanding of CARSI's beginning back in 2008 as the Mexico-focused Mérida Initiative: a funding stream for existing projects and new projects with a general focus on citizen security, but without an integral strategy.<sup>130</sup>

This lack of overall strategy presents a major problem not only for CARSI in Honduras, but also for the overall initiative. Five years in, common goals and programs are well-established, but an overarching and comprehensive strategy oriented towards the reduction of crime and violence and improvement in citizen security appears to be lacking. A disconnect seems to exist between the law enforcement and capacity building

aspects discussed above, given that those serving in vetted units rarely leave to form a regular part of the institution that employs them. Further, despite the assertion that weekly meetings are held to coordinate efforts between INL, USAID, and others, it remained unclear how the offices coordinate on strategy in order to make CARSI more effective (beyond trying to build a "model precinct"). How such meetings and reporting on individual projects foster cooperation and produce a set of joint priorities based on shared analysis of Honduras' circumstances and capacities is even less clear, suggesting that integrated coordination and cooperation across projects is limited.

U.S. strategy in Honduras, beyond these internal difficulties, also faces marked challenges regarding compatibility with the Honduran government's strategy and priorities for citizen security. Consensus between the U.S. government and the Honduran government and agreement on priorities appears to diverge in some areas and coincide in others (an understandable reality), presenting difficulties for certain aspects of U.S. CARSI programming.<sup>131</sup> The recent public disagreement over Honduras' new law authorizing the shoot-down of suspected drug flights and the subsequent U.S. suspension of facilitating radar data highlight this departure from the "close cooperation" that has often characterized relations.<sup>132</sup> One U.S. official also expressed concern that the Honduran government does not place sufficient emphasis on improving and reforming its police, leading to a lack of clarity over where U.S. CARSI funding will best have an impact.<sup>133</sup> In other areas though, the Honduran government appears to be adopting, if not wholeheartedly embracing, programs first pushed by USAID. The Government of Honduras recently promised \$1 million of its own money to open ten new community outreach centers, while local governments and organizations have taken it upon themselves to help

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<sup>128</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Fiscal Year 2012 Congressional Spending Plan: Central America Regional Security Initiative," September 9, 2012; U.S. Department of State, "FY 2013 Spend Plan—Central America Regional Security Initiative," September 10, 2013.

<sup>129</sup> Hector Silva Avalos, "The United States and Central America's Northern Tier," 22.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 26, 2014.

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<sup>131</sup> In an interview, Minister of Security Arturo Corrales openly noted this fact, saying that because they work and come from different contexts, the U.S. and Honduras at times understand things differently. As an example, the Minister pointed to the controversy over the shoot-down of airplanes and U.S. support of airborne helicopter operations to capture drugs landing in Honduras from illegal drug flights. Interview with Minister of Security Arturo Corrales, April 29, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issue for Congress," 28.

<sup>133</sup> Interviews with U.S. official, February–March 2014.

sustain others, thus pointing to an instance of government willingness to expand a prevention program it views as successful.<sup>134</sup> Even so, the government's long-term commitment to sustaining prevention projects is unclear. The \$1 million designated for outreach centers comes from a discretionary fund, rather than Congressionally-established long-term funding, and the many other projects funded by USAID do not necessarily have potential sponsors to continue funding their work.

This suggests a deeper problem that the CARSI strategy does not address but may which ultimately determine the effectiveness of CARSI in Honduras: political will. Rachel Kleinfeld convincingly argues that the successful rule-of-law assistance in developing nations depends, in part, on the country's broader political context and the willingness of authorities to elevate respect for the rule-of-law above the narrow privileges of economic and political elites. In the context of Honduras, then, technical assistance programs such as support for security and justice sector reform and professionalization must be placed within the broader political context, especially given the apparent unwillingness of authorities to address basic problems.<sup>135</sup>

In particular, reliance on vetted units to tackle sensitive cases, an unwillingness to vet the police, and limited Honduran government commitment to prevention programs suggests that the political conditions do not yet exist to create a lasting and sustainable rule of law through U.S. aid. For example, internal and external mechanisms to combat corruption and abuse by the police are weak and have not received the political commitment necessary to force a genuine purge of the institution. Further, regular and reliable support from the Honduran Congress for prevention programs or legal and structural reforms has not materialized. Failing to address these issues means that CARSI's efforts are both isolated in time (they occur while funding exists) and unsustainable over the long term, due to both funding limitations and a lack of attention to corruption. As CARSI moves past its first five years and drafts another five year strategy plan, U.S. officials must prioritize the difficult task of encouraging Honduras to demonstrate the political will to undertake fundamental reforms that will increase accountability, root out corruption, and elevate the importance of the rule of law.

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Rachel Kleinfeld, *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad: Next Generation Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 30.

In the next section, we will look more closely at one program from each of the CARSI's pillars: law enforcement, capacity-building, and prevention, pointing to both success and challenges for these programs in improving Honduran public security.

## **“Task Forces” and Vetted Units in Honduras: Investigation in Isolation?**

### **The Importance of Vetted Units and Task Forces in Honduras**

The “task force” plays a central role in Honduras' CARSI funding, and represents an innovation on a much older and commonly used way of supporting law enforcement efforts in Latin America: the vetted unit. Both types of units seek to improve the operational capacity of Honduran law enforcement agencies by building specialized units to carry out sensitive operations, while also improving the institution's overall capacity overtime by rotating personnel in and out of the special units. In Honduras, the *fuerza de tarea* (task force) has emerged as a defining feature of such efforts, with at least two such units created in 2011 and 2012 with CARSI support (via INL). Their unique attributes and visible role in Honduras make them an important area of focus for understanding CARSI's impact in Honduras.

Before proceeding, it is important to understand the structure and definition of vetted units and task forces. Both types of units possess two defining characteristics: 1) they are “vetted and polygraphed units,” and 2) they receive the assistance and support of U.S. advisers to conduct their operations.<sup>136</sup> Generally speaking, these units operate under specific mandates to investigate and resolve certain types of crime, and receive support from individual U.S. government agencies on the basis of the type of crime the unit investigates.<sup>137</sup> To better understand the specific differences between vetted units and a task force in definition and in practice, see Text Box 1.

As was highlighted in the section on strategy, a number of vetted units and task forces exist in Honduras to target various but sometimes overlapping areas of high impact crime. Of particular importance are the Violent Crimes Task Force and the Financial Crimes Task Force, given their focus on major problems in Honduras as well as their recent formation.

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<sup>136</sup> See U.S. Department of State, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline.”

<sup>137</sup> Interview conducted by Eric Olson with U.S. officials, March 28, 2014.

### Text Box 1: Vetted Units and Task Forces

U.S. support to Honduran law enforcement units generally takes two forms: the “vetted unit” and the “unit that is vetted,” also known as the “task force.” While they share some similarities, there are also significant differences:

- Level of U.S. involvement:
  - Vetted units can be “defined as vetted and polygraphed units that conduct[s] police operations with a U.S. law enforcement advisor.”<sup>138</sup>
  - A “unit that is vetted” (a category that includes task forces) can be “defined as vetted and polygraphed units that receive[s] the assistance of a U.S. advisor and/or training, but do not conduct police operations.”<sup>139</sup>
  - The subtle difference in wording here marks an important difference: task force advisers participate in field activities less directly and frequently than their vetted unit adviser counterparts.<sup>140</sup>
- Ratio of local law enforcement personnel to U.S. advisers:
  - Department of State guidelines specify an “ideal” ratio of 1 U.S. law enforcement adviser to 15 officers in a vetted unit.<sup>141</sup>
  - There is no established ratio for a task force, which may be larger and made up of representatives from several Honduran agencies. Task forces may include one or more U.S. advisers who do not participate directly in operations.
- Agencies involved:
  - Vetted units include only police investigators and members of the prosecutor’s office.
  - Task forces tend to involve multiple law enforcement agencies.
    - For example, in Honduras, the Financial Crimes Task Force includes members of the police, the National Banks and Insurance Commission, and the Public Ministry. It also works closely with members of the Office of Administration of Seized Goods and Honduras’ financial crimes judge.<sup>142</sup>

Despite these differences, in both cases, the units pursue similar goals centered on ensuring results in criminal investigations and prosecutions, in theory helping to provide an example that stimulates reform and better performance in the institution as a whole.<sup>143</sup>

The Violent Crimes Task Force was created in 2011 to focus on crimes affecting the historically vulnerable LGBT population, which in the wake of Honduras’ 2009 coup had experienced a noticeable increase in homicides.<sup>144</sup> The task force began with three police investigators and help from one member of the Public Ministry, with the support of two U.S. advisers: a Chicago homicide detective and a former state and federal prosecutor.<sup>145</sup> Over the next few years the unit expanded, adding additional detectives and prosecutors from the Public Ministry, as well as both Colombian and U.S. advisers. The expansion of membership (now up to at least 42 individuals) led to an expanding mandate. By January 2014, the task force officially became the “Violent Crimes Task Force,” and now investigates the murders of LGBT persons, journalists, foreigners, and other “high-profile” murders where help is requested by the Honduran government.<sup>146</sup>

The formation and growth of the Financial Crimes Task Force reflects a similar trajectory. Following the passage of a new asset forfeiture law in 2010, INL sought ways to improve the Honduran government’s ability to prosecute such cases and manage seized assets. The first major initiative in this regard concerned the Office of Administration of Seized Goods (Oficina Administradora de Bienes Incautados, or OABI in Spanish), an office that U.S. officials now assert is a regional example due to its excellent

<sup>138</sup> U.S. Department of State, “CARSI INL Supported Projects Outline.”

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> This was also noted in an interview conducted by Eric Olson with U.S. officials, March 28, 2014.

<sup>141</sup> This advised ratio can be found in a U.S. State Department cable entitled “INL Vetted Unit Support Policy.” This information was facilitated by a State Department official, May 29, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 19, 2014.

<sup>143</sup> Interview conducted by Eric Olson with U.S. officials, March 28, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Jordan Baber, “LGBT community in Honduras, invisible no more,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 11, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2013/0311/LGBT-community-in-Honduras-invisible-no-more>.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. Also verified in an interview with Public Ministry prosecutor, May 6, 2014.

performance.<sup>147</sup> The Financial Crimes Task Force was launched soon thereafter in order to train personnel and improve Honduran capacity to enforce the country’s new asset forfeiture law. Thus, at the outset, the work of the task force focused on work in the Asset Forfeiture Division of the Organized Crime Office in the Public Ministry, but when the office was merged to form a larger financial crimes unit within the Organized Crime Office, this mandate grew to include money laundering and tax crimes.<sup>148</sup> The task force appears to be more diversified than other vetted units, with a focus on work in the Public Ministry, but it also includes at least 12 police officers and some members of the Financial Investigation Unit of the National Banks and Insurance Commission (Comisión Nacional de Bancos y Seguros).<sup>149</sup> The unit also benefits from the help of 16 different foreign advisers—one from the United States and a number of Colombians and Costa Ricans.<sup>150</sup>

**Table 2: Vetted Units Supported by CARSI in Honduras**

| Police/FBI                                | DEA                 | DHS/ICE         |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| Honduran Anti-Gang Unit (FBI vetted unit) | DEA-SIU vetted unit | DHS vetted unit |

Source: Created based on information from U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “CARSI INL Supported Projects,” April 16, 2014.

In general, the CARSI-supported task forces operate with similar structures and work practices. Advisers—U.S., Colombian, and otherwise—aid the work of the task forces at various levels. First, embedded advisers work day to day alongside the police officers and prosecutors investigating the

cases taken by these special units. Interviewed officials made clear that these foreign advisers do not participate directly in investigations or operations. Nevertheless, U.S. advisers can accompany the police in the field, observing their activities and strengthening their investigative work. On the basis of these observations, they can provide advice to Honduran members of the task force and help to walk the unit through cases. But U.S. officials interviewed for this report asserted that neither the advisers nor their U.S. superiors choose which cases the task forces investigate.<sup>151</sup> Honduran officials supported this claim, although one noted that the United States obviously has an interest in what cases are being investigated (as does the Honduran government).<sup>152</sup> Above the embedded advisers are higher-ranking U.S. INL officials who also provide support and advice to the units, and coordinate the CARSI support provided to them via the INL section of the U.S. Embassy. On the Honduran side of things, a police officer with the rank of *Comisario*, roughly equivalent to a captain or precinct commander, acts as a liaison between the vetted units and the Director General of the Police, and the units are under this officer’s supervision.<sup>153</sup>

Select members of the Honduran civilian police or Public Ministry investigators (and at times, new recruits) form the ranks of these task forces.<sup>154</sup> Depending on the unit, prosecutors may or may not receive full-time assignments to task forces: in the Financial Crimes Task Force, prosecutors are not assigned to the unit full-time, while in the Violent Crimes Task Force prosecutors receive permanent, exclusive assignments to the unit.<sup>155</sup> In order to become part of a task force, all personnel must undergo thorough vetting and background investigation, although only those carrying

<sup>147</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 19, 2014. According to the official, this office has greatly improved its management of assets, in large part by taking and maintaining a full inventory of what it has seized (and continues to seized). Its 27 members are vetted, and work with the aid of a full-time U.S. adviser. Asset management has also improved when it concerns cash: money that may have disappeared immediately into the hands of government officials before is now put on deposit with the bank to earn interest until court cases are decided, after which the money is used to strengthen law enforcement and prevention efforts in the country. Finally, the office is completely self-sustainable—likely the only office of seized goods in Latin America to be so, according to the same U.S. official.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 26, 2014. In large part, this was corroborated in interviews with Honduran officials.

<sup>152</sup> Interviews with Public Ministry officials, April 23, April 25, and May 7, 2014. As a further example to support this point, a prosecutor working with the Violent Crimes Task Force asserted that that the task force’s mandate was clear, and that “high impact” cases that were assigned to the unit were decided by the Public Ministry, and not by interference from U.S. officials.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Director General of the National Police of Honduras, Ramón Sabillón, May 6, 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014. The official explained doing so would not be justified, given that those prosecutors would have a significantly lower caseload than their counterparts.

a weapon (generally, the police) must complete the more rigorous Leahy vetting requirements (see Text Box 2 for more information regarding the vetting process).<sup>156</sup>

### Text Box 2: Vetting in Honduras and the Leahy Law

As is the case with all countries receiving U.S. security assistance, stringent vetting requirements, commonly known as the Leahy Law provisions, are in place for aid to the Honduran security sector.<sup>157</sup> In the specific case of Honduras, the government conducts its own vetting process for potential recipients of U.S. security assistance. This may include testing (such as polygraph or drug tests) and a background check for possible abuses or human rights violations. The U.S. Embassy conducts a second review, checking for reports or intelligence information linking the candidate to possible involvement in criminal activity or violations of human rights. Finally, the Department of State in Washington, using databases and information collected there, runs a final check before allowing the officer to become a recipient of U.S. aid—in this case, CARSI aid.<sup>158</sup> Once vetted, officers are deemed eligible to receive various forms of U.S. assistance, such as material support, participating in a vetted unit, or receiving training such as attending the Criminal Investigation School.

Once the vetting process reaches completion, approved officers benefit from a wide variety of U.S. support offered to the Violent Crimes and Financial Crimes Task Forces. CARSI funds provide logistical equipment, such as vehicles, computers, phones, cameras, and other items for the task forces (including money to cover travel expenses for investigations), a means of aid that one U.S. official described as an “untraditional” role for

<sup>156</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>157</sup> For a detailed review and understanding of the Leahy vetting process, see Nina M. Serafino et. al, “‘Leahy Law’ Human Rights Provisions and Security Assistance: Issue Overview,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 29, 2014, 7-12. For more detailed information on the specific human rights conditions placed on U.S. aid to Honduras, see Peter J. Meyer, “Honduras-U.S. Relations,” May 30, 2014, 20-22.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

INL.<sup>159</sup> These resources meet important needs for the units given that the Honduran government rarely provides the logistical material police investigators need to perform their work.<sup>160</sup> As a result, and in contrast to their counterparts assigned to National Directorate for Criminal Investigation (Dirección Nacional de Investigación Criminal—DNIC), the investigative arm of the police, task force members have at their disposal all the equipment they need to conduct an investigation.<sup>161</sup> This equipment belongs exclusively to the task force, and the presence of U.S. advisers helps to ensure that it does not leave the task force or fall into the hands of non-vetted police officers.<sup>162</sup> A former Honduran police official who worked closely with the Violent Crimes Task Force underscored this fact, saying that control and use of the U.S.-funded equipment was strictly enforced and respected.<sup>163</sup> Despite this—and as is discussed in more detail below—the allocation of resources and benefits to vetted officers often generates resentment among police officers not receiving such aid, suggesting that isolated, rather than comprehensive, reform of the Honduran police institution is all that is occurring through such aid.

U.S. support also extends to formal trainings, beyond the logistical and advisory support detailed thus far. Once vetted, task force members can receive trainings via the Criminal Investigation School (discussed in the next section). The Financial Crimes Task Force has also received joint training with the various members of the task force—the Police, the Public Ministry, and the National Banks and Insurance Commission—as a means

<sup>159</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 26, 2014 and interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014. For examples of this type of support, see U.S. Department of State, “The Future of CARSI in Honduras” from March 2012, describing some of the logistical equipment offered to Honduran law enforcement bodies. According to the U.S. official, this type of INL assistance is in large part unique to Honduras.

<sup>160</sup> Such support was identified as important in interviews with Police Director General Ramón Sabillón and Public Ministry officials, April 23 and 25, May 6 and 7, 2014.

<sup>161</sup> Director General Ramón Sabillón noted repeatedly in his interview with the author that a lack of resources was a fundamental and central problem of the police’s weakness in Honduras, especially in the area of investigation. Interview with Director General Ramón Sabillón, May 6, 2014.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>163</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, March 27, 2014.

to strengthen coordination and cooperation between members.<sup>164</sup> A senior Public Ministry Official, police officials, and a former member of a vetted unit (not from a task force) who had attended trainings in Honduras and internationally affirmed that the trainings were high quality and beneficial.<sup>165</sup> Another Public Ministry official with close ties to the vetted units and task forces noted that training and advice provided by the embassy did not always respond to the Honduran context and Honduran procedures, especially if those imparting the trainings or assessment had spent little time in Honduras. The official affirmed that longer-term advisers provide much better assistance, given their continuous presence and understanding of the situation.<sup>166</sup>

Task force members and their work remain noticeably separate from the rest of police operations.<sup>167</sup> The aforementioned member of a vetted unit asserted that the U.S. Embassy in Honduras greatly distrusts the Honduran Police, which may contribute to the isolation characteristic of both vetted units and task forces in Honduras.<sup>168</sup> Task force members and advisers keep nearly all information regarding investigations internal, without disseminating information to outside members of the police. For example, a police officer working alongside the Violent Crimes Task Force noted that he usually did not know what cases the unit was working on (despite his position of authority), nor did he have control over the investigators that were theoretically under his command. Frequently, he found out about the status of investigations after the task force submitted an investigative report to the Public Ministry.<sup>169</sup>

In part, this separation and guarded approach appears to be due to legitimate fears of corruption that are pervasive within the police—the

same police officer from the vetted unit cited above again noted that he knew many fellow officers (outside the vetted unit) involved in organized crime, and that he treated all his personal and investigative information with special care, telling no one outside the vetted unit.<sup>170</sup> The separation, or quarantine of vetted units, also stems from the need for the units to focus on the delicate cases assigned to them, thus improving their ability to thoroughly investigate the criminal bands or groups selected for investigation.<sup>171</sup> Police members of task forces and vetted units apparently operate out of separately rented houses, where they remain isolated from the rest of the institution's work.<sup>172</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that turnover of task force personnel seldom occurs.<sup>173</sup> One U.S. official spoke of the vetted units and task forces as creating a “feeder-system” in which officers would be provided two years of training to strengthen their law enforcement skills and would then be returned to their non-vetted units where they would have a positive professional influence on their particular law enforcement agency. But the evidence of this appears to be far different.<sup>174</sup>

For example, a former vetted unit member noted that during his 19 months with the unit, not a single individual was rotated in or out except for himself.<sup>175</sup> Task force members receive an extra stipend in addition to their salary, and the added benefits of prestige and sufficient equipment make working for a vetted unit a desired post and difficult to give up.

Additionally the financial and professional benefits enjoyed by special unit members can also provoke jealousy among those within the broader law enforcement agency that do not receive similar benefits.<sup>176</sup> These factors, combined with the investment required to train and prepare police officers capable of undertaking the delicate investigations, create an incentive for little personnel turnover, and they bring into question the narrative that such units impact the larger transformation of the institutions in which they operate.

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 19, 2014.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, February 20, 2014, interview with Public Ministry official, April 23, 2014, and interview with Director General Ramón Sabillón, May 5, 2014.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014.

<sup>167</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, March 18 and 19, 2014. This information was further verified through author email correspondence with U.S. officials on April 21, 2014. Public Ministry operations are not separate—they remain in the offices of the Public Ministry.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official from vetted unit, February 20, 2014.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, March 27, 2014.

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official from vetted unit, February 20, 2014.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, March 27, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with U.S. official, February 26, 2014.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official from vetted unit, February 20, 2014.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, March 27, 2014.

### Task Force Impacts and Institutional Transformation: Success and Challenges for CARSI

Vetted units and task forces have a mixed record in Honduras. While on the one hand they produce important and comparatively better results in criminal investigation, their impact on the larger institution—a stated goal of CARSI—is not evident. These realities are manifest both in publicly available statistics regarding cases falling under the mandate of the task forces studied here, and in the numerous interviews conducted with those working closely with the task forces.

To begin, it is undoubtedly true that the lack of personnel turnover, as well as the training and equipment characteristic of the task forces, ensures their increased capacity to investigate crimes relative to their non-vetted unit counterparts within the police. Public Ministry officials noted that the U.S.-supported task forces and vetted units produced better investigations, although this is in part due to the fact that they simply have more time and people to dedicate to a smaller number of cases than their counterparts (see more on this below).<sup>177</sup> In this sense, task forces make an important contribution to building capacity, albeit in a manner isolated from the rest of the institution.

According to senior Honduran officials, the result has been increased criminal convictions, investigations into high-level organized criminal activities, and a reduction in impunity in high-stakes cases.<sup>178</sup> Since its inception, the Financial Crimes Task Force has won 41 out of 45 cases, addressing a long backlog of cases that were never investigated while also taking on a number of new cases.<sup>179</sup> These successes further enhanced the unit's capacity to carry out investigations because of the public's growing confidence and willingness to confide in and aid units backed by the U.S. Embassy. U.S. officials also pointed to a massive September 2013 operation against the Cachiros, a Honduran drug-trafficking organization, as

an example of the success of task force units.<sup>180</sup> This operation, which was led by the Financial Crimes Task Force, produced the purported seizure of \$800 million in assets, and represents an important step towards addressing Honduran organized crime.<sup>181</sup> Public Ministry and police officials stated that without U.S. support, the investigation of recent sensitive cases such as those involving the Cachiros criminal network and the arrest of drug-trafficker “Negro Lobo” would simply not be possible, demonstrating that U.S.-supported units produce important results in the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking.<sup>182</sup>

Finally, as was mentioned above, trainings help to build capacity and, in theory, promote institutional reform by spreading skills throughout the police and Public Ministry. Yet because personnel rarely leave vetted units, the goal of using vetted units as a “feeder system” to transform the institution remains distant.<sup>183</sup>

On the other hand, the claimed results and impacts do not entirely coincide with external analysis and statistics. As discussed above, the isolation, the lack of information sharing, and the very low turnover in personnel make it difficult to understand how these units might have much effect beyond the cases they investigate and prosecute, reaffirming the narrative expressed by various Honduran police officers.<sup>184</sup> Further, intelligence and information produced in the course of task force investigations are not disseminated to other investigators, possibly impeding their work, or at the

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Public Ministry officials, April 25 and May 6, 2014.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Director General Ramón Sabillón, May 5, 2014. The former Honduran police official who served in a vetted unit asserted that his unit's work was definitely disrupting organized criminal activity within Honduras.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 19, 2014.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. A Public Ministry official also pointed to the case as an example of successful coordination between the U.S.-backed task forces and vetted units. Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014.

<sup>181</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “Country Report, Honduras,” *2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2014/vol1>.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014 and interview with Director General Ramón Sabillón, May 5, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> Interviews with former Honduran police officials and with Public Ministry official, February 20, March 27, and April 25, 2014.



very least, slowing their progress.<sup>185</sup> Given regulations and requirements about who can benefit from U.S. aid, as well as legitimate concerns about leaking information to organized crime, the isolation and information sharing practices are understandable, and perhaps in many cases required by U.S. law. Yet, paradoxically, they may be inhibiting the police's ability to investigate cases in some instances, worsening a cycle of impunity.

Further, these practices suggest a greater, more fundamental challenge to the hope that vetted units and task forces can contribute to institutional transformation: they operate in a vacuum, isolated from an institution plagued by both petty and high-level corruption. Reintegrating vetted officers into this corrupt environment presents a problem (to the point that it can endanger their lives). It may also be unrealistic to expect that reintegration will not affect their performance, and more significantly, their morals and relations with the public. This suggests the need for internal and external control mechanisms. Unfortunately, the United States has already tried to provide such support in Honduras, only to suspend it in May 2013 following disappointment with the results, due in large part to the lack of political will to address police corruption.<sup>186</sup>

Beyond this, the data pertaining to the cases overseen by the Violent Crimes and Financial Crimes Task Forces suggests that success in investigating and prosecuting actual cases is limited (although admittedly better than in non-vetted units). A report by Cattrachas, Honduras' leading LGBT organization, paints a nuanced picture. Of the 120 homicides of LGBT people that have occurred since the 2009 coup, at least 33 cases have entered judicial proceedings, and nine cases have resulted in sentencing.<sup>187</sup> The organization concludes that "the results are undeniable, the investiga-

tions are having an effect, and impunity is lowering," but it also notes that much remains to be done.<sup>188</sup> While these results reflect better performance than other parts of the Honduran justice and security system, they also show that the Violent Crimes Task Force is far from resolving all the cases that fall under its mandate, despite the fact that U.S. officials stated they now have the capacity to handle all LGBT cases.<sup>189</sup>

Cases of violence against journalists represent an even greater concern. The rate of impunity in homicide cases of journalists in Honduras remains high, despite the Violent Crimes Task Force's expanded authority to investigate such cases. For example, the International Human Rights Program at Toronto University noted in an extensive report that since 2003 only nine arrests and two convictions have occurred for the 38 homicide cases in which Honduran journalists were victims.<sup>190</sup> Even accounting for convictions in two more cases since the report's publication, the 95 percent impunity rate in such cases documented by the authors is alarming, and highlights the limited nature of the task force's successes.<sup>191</sup>

In relation to the Financial Crimes Task Force, one particular case calls into question the success of the unit. In mid-September 2013, the Honduran government, in conjunction with the U.S. Embassy, announced a major operation against the drug-trafficking group Los Cachiros, which had been designated a significant narcotics trafficking group in accordance with the U.S. Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act earlier that year. The operation, led by the Financial Crimes Task Force, deployed hundreds of police officers, prosecutors, and other government officers in a multi-agency effort to seize the Cachiros' assets.

Notably, however, the operation fell short in one important area. Some of the Cachiros' 71 bank accounts frozen in the operation were later found to be completely empty, while other assets were removed from seized properties before the operation was conducted. According to the Director of OABI, these disappointing results likely resulted from a leak from within

<sup>185</sup> Interview with former Honduran police official, March 27, 2014. For example, the police officer detailed an instance in which the FBI-led anti-gang unit came to help with an investigation, and simply showed up, took pictures, and left, without sharing any of the information with those charged with investigating the homicide that had taken place.

<sup>186</sup> Adriana Beltran and Geoff Thale, "Police Reform in Honduras: Stalled Efforts and the Need to Weed out Corruption," Washington Office on Latin America, August 26, 2013, [http://www.wola.org/commentary/police\\_reform\\_in\\_honduras\\_stalled\\_efforts\\_and\\_the\\_need\\_to\\_weed\\_out\\_corruption](http://www.wola.org/commentary/police_reform_in_honduras_stalled_efforts_and_the_need_to_weed_out_corruption).

<sup>187</sup> Indyra Mendoza and Gabriel Mass, "Informe Casos Judicializados por Muertes violentas a personas LGBTTI en Honduras (2009-2013)," Cattrachas, January 20, 2014, 3-5.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 5 (author's translation).

<sup>189</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Kaitlin Owen, *Honduras: Journalism in the Shadow of Impunity*, 24. Thirty-two of these homicides have occurred since the 2009 coup.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 24.

the police.<sup>192</sup> But as a U.S. official pointed out, the Cachiros operation deployed at least 200 individuals, providing ample opportunity for the powerful drug trafficking group to be tipped off.<sup>193</sup> Even so, the original results claimed by the U.S.-supported task force certainly turned out to be far less, calling into question the success—and perhaps the unquestioned reliability—of task force units.

On a separate note, other practices employed by task force and vetted unit advisers help to explain their improved performance when compared with other non-vetted units, and according to a Honduran police official, generate resentment among fellow officers. This is the result of a number of factors: the fact that only the best investigators are chosen for the task force (which in turn further dilutes the pool of investigators remaining with the police force), their low caseload volume when compared to the regular police's workload, and the number of investigators employed in the task force. For example, one complaint registered by a police official reflected some of these concerns with the Violent Crimes Task Force. Out of 56 investigators assigned to the homicide unit in Tegucigalpa, at least eight of them—nearly 15 percent—were assigned to the task force.<sup>194</sup> Considering that about 86 homicides occur in the city every month, this represents a significant drain on investigative resources.<sup>195</sup> Further, while from the beginning the task force utilized new recruits to fill its ranks, it quickly began to draw away some of the Tegucigalpa homicide unit's best investigators, a scarce and important resource in a unit overwhelmed by violent crime.<sup>196</sup> Finally, investigators belonging to the task force fall outside of quota requirements established for most police investigators that demand a certain number of investigations each month. While this encourages quality work that will produce convictions (certainly a better long-term practice for the police), it generates resentment among other police officers

who must conduct more investigations with fewer resources.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, vetted unit and task force proliferation, and by extension, related problems with coordination and information sharing pose a serious challenge.<sup>198</sup> In an interview, a Public Ministry official noted with worry the growing number of special units like those financed by the U.S. Embassy. The official asserted that the sheer number of new units disperses limited resources across more agencies, which may weaken units or task forces with a longer history of successful work.<sup>199</sup> Task forces and vetted units, like their North American counterparts and advisers, often fail to share information and end up investigating the same cases and groups, suggesting a worrying lack of coordination.<sup>200</sup> As noted by the Public Ministry official, the United States—and the Honduran government—would likely benefit from a consolidation and strengthening of already existing units, so as to help improve coordination and build upon the successes of these units.<sup>201</sup>

These considerations seriously call into question the narrative of institutional reform through vetted units and task forces in Honduras. While vetted units and task forces produce important results for groups that traditionally suffer extreme impunity, both the claims of widespread success and the stated goal of promoting institutional reform provoke doubt upon close inspection.<sup>202</sup> This, in turn, produces questions of sustainability: if vetted units and task forces, a crucial aspect of CARSI programming, are not transforming the Honduran police, will their improved performance in addressing crime continue in the absence of U.S. funding? CARSI's reliance on such operational activities in Honduras must take these considerations

<sup>192</sup> Charles Parkinson, "Cachiros Knew About Honduras Police Operation: Official," *Insight Crime*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/cachiros-knew-about-honduras-police-operation>.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 19, 2014.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> IUDPAS, "Boletín Enero-Diciembre 2013," 5.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* The interviewed officer noted that a joke among police officers is to call those investigators working for the task forces "dolls" (*muñecas*) because of their lighter workload.

<sup>198</sup> The United States is not the only one creating such units. The Honduran government has recently created a number of new units (FUSINA and TIGRES, to name a few), thus exacerbating the problem.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Public Ministry official, April 25, 2014.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> It is important to emphasize the INL Section's attention to groups that are disproportionately victims of violence in Honduras, and who have been unduly affected by the worsened state of impunity following the 2009 coup. It is commendable and noteworthy that INL has sought to respond to these needs directly, responding to outcries by groups in both the United States and Honduras.

into account, and look for constructive ways to utilize such units as a catalyst for stimulating institution-wide change, so that once funding is no longer available, improved performance persists and impunity continues to fall. Further, and closely related to this, is the fact that CARSI *must* recognize that these law enforcement successes, as well as achieving the goal of institutional reform cannot be separated from the government's political will to overhaul the police and transform the institution. Contributing to the formation of this political will presents a key challenge for the sustainability of Honduran vetted units and task forces, but without it, the institutional reform CARSI seeks to promote will not occur.

### Training as Capacity Building: Honduras' Criminal Investigation School

While task forces and vetted units also enhance capacity building in so far as they build the skills of police officers, prosecutors, and others connected to the special unit, trainings offered through the U.S.-backed Criminal Investigation School provide an example of broader CARSI-backed initiatives to build capacity within Honduran law enforcement agencies. The school, which began in 2011, now serves as Honduras' primary center for the ongoing training of police and continues to expand its work and scope, often incorporating other members of the justice system.

The school emerged following a 2011 needs and capacity assessment by INL that identified serious shortcomings in continuing training opportunities for police, and concluded that efforts to reinforce and enhance police preparedness needed to start from scratch.<sup>203</sup> A Honduran police official articulated a similar understanding of the school's origins: it started due to the need to improve the police's skills and provide ongoing training to its members.<sup>204</sup>

At the outset, four U.S. instructors staffed and led the newly formed Criminal Investigation School.<sup>205</sup> Course offerings initially focused on improving basic investigation skills and enhancing specialized skills to tackle crimes related to criminal gang activity, homicides, and other high

<sup>203</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía (Police Commissioner and Rector of the Police Education System), April 17, 2014.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

impact crimes.<sup>206</sup> With the passage of time though, the school's instructors and course offerings quickly diversified. With U.S. (CARSI) funding, Colombian police officers began to take over the teaching of many courses, while other specialized courses became part of the school's regular schedule. Eventually, select Honduran police officers began to shadow the Colombian instructors, and now all seven of the school's instructors are Honduran.<sup>207</sup>

Today, courses range from community policing and policing in rural areas, to investigation of drug trafficking, money laundering, and kidnappings, to broader topics, such as transit procedures, interview techniques, and securing crime scenes.<sup>208</sup> The Rector of the Police Education System hopes the school will eventually become a regional resource for continued police training and learning, providing courses to police officers all over the region.<sup>209</sup>



The Criminal Investigation School, located in Tegucigalpa, opened in 2011 using CARSI funding, with the goal of improving police officers' skills and allowing for continuing education within the police force.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía, April 17, 2014.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014. According to the U.S. Department of State document "The Future of CARSI in Honduras" (March 12, 2012), the Criminal Investigation School was slated to transfer entirely to Honduran instructors by October 2012.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía, April 17, 2014.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

Choosing the police officers to be trained at the school involves a lengthy process that requires the application of Leahy vetting (see Text Box 2). At the beginning of an education cycle, the Police Education System announces course offerings to regional police chiefs, specifying that all prospective students must be nominated five weeks before classes begin in order to complete the required vetting procedures. Once the names are received, a vetting process is undertaken to determine eligibility for the courses (see Text Box 2).<sup>210</sup> Officers taking courses at the school must complete the vetting process on an annual basis in order to take additional classes in later years as is always the case with vetted individuals that continue to benefit from U.S. aid.<sup>211</sup>

A senior Honduran official identified this vetting process as a crucial aspect of strengthening Honduras' police over the long term, and as a means to root out the corruption and neglect that characterized the police for many years. According to him, an "A List" and "B List" of Honduran police officers serves as the basis of a process designed to remove corrupt or tainted elements of the police, and strengthen those vetted and identified as meeting the institution's standards. The "A List" of vetted and committed officers can freely proceed to take classes at the school, while the "B List" (essentially, those that do not meet the vetting requirements) cannot receive trainings and will eventually be forced out of the police force.<sup>212</sup>

CIS courses average two to four weeks, although some can last for a couple of months. Training includes the use of mock crime scenes in order to simulate real life pressures, as well as a focus on team building and cooperation, which seeks to address the chronic weakness of poor coordination in the justice and security sector.<sup>213</sup> Outside instructors, such as judges and prosecutors, also cycle through the school in an effort to improve inter-institutional coordination, and in some cases members of the justice system as well as firefighters also receive classes at the school.<sup>214</sup>

Beneficiaries of the school's training become a part of the school's

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía, April 17, 2014.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. U.S. officials noted that training for firefighters is crucial due to the fact that they often arrive first to a crime scene, and need to know how to protect the crime scene and secure evidence.

extensive database that records the kinds of training each participant receives as well as the grades they received. U.S. officials noted that this database helps to identify possible candidates who would benefit from and meet the prerequisites for advanced classes. Nevertheless, the practice of assigning police to specific units on the basis of their preparedness and training (i.e. taking advanced courses from the school) remains limited, despite the existence of the database.<sup>215</sup> A Honduran official suggested that some unit assignments were made on the basis of trainings given, but this may just be the case insofar as those attending the CIS already work in the specialty areas in which they receive additional training.<sup>216</sup>



Criminal Investigation School students work in a mock crime scene as part of their training.

Officials identified a number of successes resulting from the school's work. Since its opening, the school has imparted training to nearly 3,000 separate members of the police, Public Ministry, and others in over 27 subjects.<sup>217</sup> The school's most essential course, "Basic Criminal Investigation,"

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía, April 17, 2014.

<sup>217</sup> INL, "Criminal Investigation School Fact Sheet," n.d.

provided training to over 700 police officers between 2012 and 2013.<sup>218</sup> U.S. officials assert that the school now commands respect and considerable interest among the Honduran police, to the point that the various directorates of the police now request the school add many specialized courses to its curriculum that span the spectrum of police work. The school is also reportedly seeking international certification and Honduras hopes it can become a regional center for police training.<sup>219</sup>



The Criminal Investigation School uses mock crime scenes to simulate the pressures officers face in real-life investigations and to promote a focus on team building and cooperation among the students.

Yet beyond mere evidence of demand for its training, it remains difficult to determine the Criminal Investigation School's impact on building the capacity of the Honduran police, and more generally, security and justice institutions. Most evidence appears to be anecdotal: for example, Director General of the National Police, Ramón Sabillón, stated the school

<sup>218</sup> INL, "Country Report, Honduras." *2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*. See also INL, "Honduras," *2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*. To put this in context, Honduras has about 13,000 police officers, meaning a little over 5% of Honduran police officers have received this basic introductory course.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

is providing quality investigators. In addition, the Rector of the Police Education System cites as evidence of the School's success a higher numbers of captures, an improved rate of bringing cases to trial, enhanced response and activity against certain crimes like drug-trafficking, and more emphasis within the police on community-based policing.<sup>220</sup> U.S. officials also pointed to other anecdotal evidence of the impact and effect the CIS can have upon its graduates.<sup>221</sup>

While these stories and assertions of accomplishments and improvements are encouraging, they also highlight a similar impact assessment problem identified in other areas of CARSI programming. Anecdotes may hint at limited success, but CARSI lacks a systematic measurement of the courses' impact beyond the number of beneficiaries. U.S. officials said that they hoped to begin to remedy this situation with the launching of a special website that would provide former students with the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss how their training translates to in-the-field successes.<sup>222</sup> Even so, more thorough tracking of graduate performance and periodic review of where the school's graduates end up (whether in leadership, outside the police force, or even engaged in criminal activity including corruption) should be an important priority for INL's CARSI program. Furthermore, assessing the impact of training on law enforcement institutions as a whole is a more difficult but equally important task. Evidence that demonstrates whether training is making the agency more effective and less corrupt seems important if further training assistance is to be justified.

While today the Criminal Investigation School in Honduras appears to be experiencing an uptick in interest among law enforcement leaders and institutional growth, it has faced a number of challenges along the way. Chief among them appears to be the vetting requirements. While all agree on the importance of vetting and the need for thorough background checks of the school's students, U.S. officials noted that the CIS often must rely on

<sup>220</sup> Interview with Hector Ivan Mejía, April 17, 2014. Because police performance statistics are not widely disseminated, it is impossible to verify this information. Further, determining causation—whether the Criminal Investigation School has caused these assumed improvements in police performance—would present additional difficulties.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

the small cadre of Leahy-vetted officers to provide trainings.

Additionally, the five weeks required to vet a potential student often results in many being turned away because their superiors failed to provide sufficient lead-time for them to be properly vetted in order to enroll in a training course.<sup>223</sup> Another difficulty emerged during the school's first months of operation, when it lacked the reputation it possesses today. In these early days, students were hard to find, suggesting that at the outset, the school did not command the police's buy-in and ownership as it does today. Finally, the suggestion from Honduran authorities that they might relocate the school presents a constant threat, and with good reason: in recent months, the Ministry of Security completely changed the location of Honduras' traditional headquarters, generating serious resentment among police officers and officials.<sup>224</sup>

### Training and Police Reform

The Criminal Investigation School in Honduras boasts some clear successes. Its reputation and use by the police, as well as ownership of and investment in the school by Honduran authorities suggests that the police see it as an important tool for improving their own institution. Many students have now received classes through the school's programs, and it is one reason for claims of improvement in police performance.

Nevertheless, a few questions remain for the school. First and foremost, as a "capacity building" initiative providing training for the Honduran police, the program's impact on genuine reform of the larger institution is limited. The police certainly do need training, but in an institution that suffers from widespread and high-level corruption and a lack of resources and public mistrust, the police require considerably more than training-based capacity enhancement. In order to better understand the impact that the school produces and to ensure its positive effect upon the

institution as a whole, more rigorous tracking of graduates' careers and performance is necessary, rather than simply relying on promising anecdotes or the observations of Honduran police superiors overseeing the school.

Further, the Honduran experience underscores the need for CARSI programs to adapt to environments marked by exceptional corruption, looking for ways to build capacity without having to rely on isolated units or training programs that may benefit individuals but do not transform the institution as a whole. INL in Honduras has sought ways to do this (mentioned in the U.S.-CARSI Strategy section of this chapter) by supporting legal and structural reforms and the involvement of Colombian advisers, but these efforts are undermined by the lack of political will among Honduran authorities to prioritize institutional reform and promote greater accountability.

Second, the Criminal Investigation School's limited geographic scope presents difficulties in reaching police officers at the national level. Up until 2014, classes only took place in Tegucigalpa, limiting the participation of potential candidates based in other regions, including the violent northern corridor. The two-to-four week length of most courses has made it difficult for already over-extended local police offices to spare officers, especially for investigators who are absent from duty to attend courses at the school in the capital. Given that Tegucigalpa, the site of the school, already boasts the best allocation of resources and personnel, local police officers' easier access to the learning provided at the school may reinforce the unfortunate disparity that characterizes police, human, and material resource deployment.<sup>225</sup> The launching of classes outside the capital in 2014 marks an important step towards correcting this imbalance, and provides the opportunity for officers in other regions to benefit from the school's expanding offerings and presence. U.S. officials ought to continue to pursue methods to offer classes in other regions, perhaps developing satellite campuses in violent hotspots like San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba in order to better equip police officers and improve the police's performance at the national level.

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> U.S. officials noted that the Ministry of Security has threatened to relocate the school multiple times (interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014). *See also* "Empleados y docentes de la Universidad de Policía protestan ante orden de desalojo," *El Tiempo*, November 20, 2013, <http://tiempo.hn/portada/noticias/empleados-y-docentes-de-la-universidad-de-policia-protestan-ante-orden-de-desalojo>. The resentment stemmed from the lack of warning provided to the affected police officers and the need to fund their move to the new site.

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<sup>225</sup> For example, statistics acquired by the author from a police slide presentation show that Tegucigalpa possesses 60 investigators and 20 cars to investigate homicides, while San Pedro Sula has a mere 30 investigators and six cars for such cases. This disparity becomes dramatic when one considers that San Pedro Sula suffers from nearly twice as many homicides per month as Tegucigalpa.

Finally, disconnecting training from police assignment practices and patterns poses a serious weakness for the current Criminal Investigation School training scheme. While it is important to acknowledge and applaud the existence of a database tracking officers' educational records, this information is most useful if it can be harnessed to make decisions about where and how police officers should be deployed. The institutional impact and impact on crime would likely be significant if a mechanism could be created to allow Honduran police leaders to more effectively assign personnel on the basis of their preparedness. While officials assert this is the long-term goal, addressing it in the short term should be a priority for capacity building efforts in Honduras.<sup>226</sup>

### Strengthening Training, and Looking Beyond

As with the other programs discussed in this chapter, the Criminal Investigation School provides many benefits to the Honduran police, and by their own account, helps to increase and improve the police's capacity and performance. Emphasis on matters such as community policing suggest that it also contributes to reform and transformation within the police.

Even so, CARSI support for the police needs to go beyond a training center in the country's capital. Other reform-oriented CARSI projects do exist in the country—such as support for reforming laws pertaining to the police and improving the police's structure, the placement of Colombian advisers in select areas, and aid in developing new units such as police intelligence—but the Criminal Investigation School remains a primary feature of Honduran INL programs.<sup>227</sup> Expanding the school's reach, as well as integrating its database into a larger police assignment scheme, will complement and further strengthen these larger reform efforts, and provide more long-lasting capacity building for the Honduran police.

### Outreach Centers: The Poster Child for Prevention in Honduras

CARSI's Honduras strategy, discussed above, makes clear that prevention in Honduras encompasses a variety of programs. USAID's outreach centers are emblematic of the prevention efforts employed in Honduras.

<sup>226</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, March 18, 2014.

<sup>227</sup> "CARSI INL Supported Projects, April 16, 2014."

The three or more years of their existence, and their prominence both in Honduras' violent communities and in the discourse of U.S. officials made them the obvious choice for further inspection and reflection in this chapter. While USAID must face the challenges of ensuring sustainability and measuring program impact, it appears that outreach centers are somewhat helpful outposts for public services that at a minimum provide recreational and vocational training opportunities for at-risk youth.

The outreach center program began in earnest in 2011 through funds provided to Alianza Joven Regional-SICA (Regional Youth Alliance), which later formed a Honduran chapter called Alianza Joven Honduras (Honduras Youth Alliance, or AJH for its Spanish initials). In that year and ensuing years, the Regional Youth Alliance/AJH began 40 different outreach centers throughout the country using CARSI funds from USAID.<sup>228</sup> The criteria for identifying the sites focused on two primary issues: high risk/violence and high need. Such factors were assessed via statistics provided by official sources, such as the UNAH Violence Observatory, the country's most respected source of violence data.<sup>229</sup>

In order to enter a community, USAID and its implementing partner must be invited to work in the local community by those living there.<sup>230</sup> A focus on community ownership and presence represents a crucial aspect of the outreach center model: previous efforts to create something similar with *casas juvenes* (youth houses) in Guatemala had failed because they were located outside the community and so were not practical for the poor, at-risk youth they sought to serve.<sup>231</sup>

Individuals running one outreach center in Tegucigalpa who were interviewed for this report reinforced the importance of community ownership as vital to a center's performance. In their opinion, the success of an

<sup>228</sup> Luis Mazariegos et. al, "Sistematización: Centros de Alcance "Por Mi Barrio" Honduras," Alianza Joven Honduras, January 2014, 5.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. While U.S. officials made clear that that invitation by the community is the outreach center program model, it is not clear whether the existence of the outreach center program creates the self-perceived need within the community for the center, thus prompting the invitation. This possibility is quite likely and should not be ignored, given that the program and funding for outreach centers exists and is promoted by USAID/AJH.

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Salvador Stadthagen (Director for Alianza Joven Honduras, a project of Creative Associates, based in Washington D.C.), April 2014.

outreach center depended fundamentally on its presence in the community and commitment to that same community.<sup>232</sup> Most often, a local church will request the creation of an outreach center in a community. Churches possess special inroads into violent communities, and their members often have a special ability to move around violent communities in ways that others may not. Further, churches provide one of the very few socially acceptable means by which former gang members can leave behind their dangerous cohorts.<sup>233</sup> Other examples of the local organizations that run outreach centers include local community councils and the U.S. faith-based relief and development agency, World Vision.<sup>234</sup>

Once the invitation is extended, those involved in launching the new center work to identify a site. Sometimes, the community chooses to utilize an otherwise derelict building and reclaim it for community use. For example, in Nueva Capital, a poor community on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa and a site visited by the author, the outreach center building was once built by the city then abandoned and marred by gang graffiti, but later reclaimed by the community and USAID in order to create the center.<sup>235</sup> According to one U.S. official, each new center costs around \$22,000.<sup>236</sup> Others though, have suggested that the actual cost is much higher, and that USAID programming only provides minimal help in supplying and furnishing the center.<sup>237</sup> Supplies that support the Center's programs can represent a significant financial burden that USAID generally does not cover.

Once in operation, a full-time paid coordinator runs each outreach center, while volunteers meet the center's other needs. This is where the need for a strong organization, church, or community council becomes especially

important, given that a volunteer network is often required to keep the center running.<sup>238</sup> Once again, USAID's support for these coordinators appears to be limited: initially, the salaries are covered, but once the outreach center has been in operation for a year or two, funding for these positions is eliminated, undermining the model's sustainability unless other sources for these funds are located.<sup>239</sup> This declining funding was a notable critique offered by various parties: aid is significantly reduced in the years following the more generous funding of the outreach's center's first year of operation, even while the demands for performance and impact remain the same.<sup>240</sup>



Outreach centers are intended to offer a refuge to at-risk youth by providing various community services. The centers receive initial funding from USAID but must rapidly become self-sufficient.

An outreach center provides a number of services to the local community, in theory acting as a refuge for vulnerable youth in poor and at-risk communities. When asked about the profile of youth in the community,

<sup>232</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Interview with U.S. official, April 9, 2014.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with Nueva Capital outreach center coordinator and volunteer, April 9, 2014.

<sup>236</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>237</sup> Interview with the director of an organization that started and continues to operate an outreach center, May 27, 2014. (Hereinafter "interview with outreach center implementing organization director.") The individual interviewed further noted that much of the equipment provided—foosball and pool tables, for example—broke within weeks of its provision to the outreach center.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. In theory, outside sources such as municipal governments or other organizations would pick up the funding for these positions.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with outreach center implementing organization director, May 27, 2014, and interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.



Nueva Capital's outreach center coordinator responded that 90 percent of the children passing through its doors come from fragile or disintegrated families (for example, from families where there was not a father figure present).<sup>241</sup> In contrast, individuals working with an outreach center in another community suggested that many of the children from more stable families frequented the outreach center alongside their more vulnerable and at-risk counterparts.<sup>242</sup>

To keep the youth occupied, services provided in the centers include gyms, Internet service, soccer fields, and a variety of classes designed to improve youths' skills and ability to find a job.<sup>243</sup> Some services perform dual functions: for example, internet access, game consoles such as Wii's, or a soccer field act as ways to attract youth into the center and introduce them to its other services, like capacity-building classes.<sup>244</sup> Others, like the gym or a soccer field, where usage fees are charged, serve as a mechanism to generate revenue for the outreach center, and therefore, a means to contribute to the goal of long-term sustainability.<sup>245</sup>

The Nueva Capital outreach center offered a number of different classes designed to both build youth capacity and address physical and emotional needs. Volunteers teach six computing classes a day, which are the center's most popular service. Other services included a number of classes for personal beauty, electricity and small electric appliance repair, and gym. Classes also included the teaching of virtues and morals through a small lesson at the outset of class or through the viewing of movies. The Center also has an after-school "learning reinforcement" program for problematic children at the local school. Finally, alternative online secondary education programs will soon form a part of the Center's services, providing an opportunity for older youth to finish their secondary education.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Interview with Nueva Capital outreach center coordinator, April 9, 2014. This statistic should be not be seen as authoritative—it was simply a rough estimate provided by the coordinator.

<sup>242</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, Salvador Stadthagen, and outreach center coordinator and volunteer, April 2 and 9, 2014.

<sup>244</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials and Nueva Capital outreach center coordinator and volunteer, April 2 and 9, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Interview with Nueva Capital outreach center coordinator, April 9, 2014. Some similar programs and workshops were also mentioned in the interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.



Students participate in an after-school class, one of many services offered to youth at an outreach center.

Other actors questioned the sustainability of these services and programs noting that funding for them is not permanent and is drastically reduced after the outreach center's first year of operation.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, they also questioned the actual impact of the programs and classes, instead suggesting that these programs must orient their focus on mentoring and providing services and opportunities to high-risk youth in special danger of joining criminal bands.<sup>248</sup> The outreach center's focus on recreational programs, they assert, has a doubtful impact upon violence because it does not properly and thoroughly engage this more vulnerable population.<sup>249</sup>

In addition, outside organizations that also receive CARSI funding from USAID will at times offer their services through outreach centers. For example, the Youth Against Violence Movement (Jovenes Contra la Violencia) implements an anti-bullying program at the Nueva Capital outreach center, and both the teen pregnancy program and alternative

<sup>247</sup> Interview with outreach center implementing organization director, May 27, 2014.

<sup>248</sup> In USAID terminology, this would be "secondary prevention." According to the interviewed persons, these programs have a much more proven and effective track record.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

education program METAS (both funded by USAID CARSI funds) have implemented their programs there.<sup>250</sup> USAID funds given to the Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social (FHIS—Honduran Social Investment Fund), a government agency, are also brought to bear on communities in which CARSI works in support of outreach centers.<sup>251</sup> While this demonstrates an encouraging amount of coordination between various programs that seek to target the “primary prevention” level, another outreach center coordinator who was interviewed noted that only the teen pregnancy program ever arrived at the center he coordinated during his extensive time there.<sup>252</sup> Finally, a pilot “secondary prevention” program seeking to target especially at-risk youth also attempts to integrate outreach centers, churches, and schools into efforts to identify youth at risk of sliding into violence and crime.<sup>253</sup>

To keep these programs and services running, officials noted repeatedly the importance of sustainability in funding and management. The centers operate a number of schemes to help generate funding for their programs such as selling gym passes/memberships, setting up a bakery to make and sell baked goods, candle-making, vegetable canning, and clothes sales.<sup>254</sup> Yet despite this plethora of microenterprises, AJH admits that using this model to sustain the centers is problematic because it fails to sustain them as originally envisioned. In its study of the outreach center program, AJH noted that instilling the importance of the entrepreneurial values in outreach center coordinators remains an important objective in order to make these microenterprises more effective. According to the document, AJH’s new strategy focuses simply on using gyms as means to generate revenue for the centers, although it is unclear how successful this attempted refocus will be.<sup>255</sup>

Even with gyms, outreach centers are unlikely to become “sustainable” in the sense of being self-financing, putting in doubt the longevity of the

entire outreach center project.<sup>256</sup> Outside funding remains a constant need. USAID and its partners are looking to make the programs sustainable by identifying other sources of funding so as to ensure their long-term existence once USAID can no longer provide funding for them. This comes in various forms: volunteer work (thus minimizing salary expenses), donations from the local community and partners (e.g. the church), municipal governments, the national government, and private sector partnerships.<sup>257</sup> Potential private-sector partnerships merit special attention given the priority placed on these partnerships in interviews and across the spectrum of all USAID CARSI programs. Examples of such support include the provision of free Internet to the outreach centers through Tigo, one of Honduras’ largest cell-phone service providers, and a *maquila* (factory) in San Pedro Sula that built and maintains an outreach center in a poor community where many of its workers live.<sup>258</sup>

U.S. officials also maintain that the Honduran government has demonstrated commitment to the outreach center methodology. Using funds from the aforementioned “Security Tax,” President Hernández’s administration committed \$1 million to strengthen the outreach center program by opening a number of new centers.<sup>259</sup> Municipal governments have also found the program beneficial, and in some places now pay the coordinator’s annual salary, although AJH’s review of the program notes that local government support has not materialized as hoped.<sup>260</sup> Other donors have also adopted the outreach center model: the European Union’s mission in Honduras now provides funding for a few centers.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, in San Pedro Sula and Choloma, a regional NGO will soon take over the financing and oversight of all outreach centers in the region, without USAID support,

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Nueva Capital outreach center coordinator, April 9, 2014.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Honduran government official from FHIS, April 9, 2014.

<sup>252</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Salvador Stadthagen, April 2, 2014.

<sup>254</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>255</sup> Luis Mazariegos et. al, “Sistematización: Centros de Alcance “Por Mi Barrio” Honduras,” 42.

<sup>256</sup> In the interview with Salvador Stadthagen on April 2, 2014, he noted that the center were never likely to be self-financing.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>259</sup> “L 20 millones para centros de alcance,” *El Heraldo*, February 13, 2014, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/L-20-millones-para-centros-de-alcance>.

<sup>260</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014 and Luis Mazariegos et. al, “Sistematización: Centros de Alcance “Por Mi Barrio” Honduras,” 6.

<sup>261</sup> Email correspondence with Salvador Stadthagen, June 2, 2014.

possibly ensuring longer term viability.<sup>262</sup>

While efforts to provide outside funding to outreach centers are visible, ensuring sustainability should be a preeminent concern and a top-priority for USAID, and represents a serious challenge. Gym memberships might cover miscellaneous expenses such as the utilities and water bill, but it is doubtful whether it will cover the capital investments all outreach centers need or even the coordinator's salary. Further, while the private sector (and for that matter, municipal governments) might be willing to give their support freely to the outreach centers while USAID is involved, this willingness might diminish without its leadership and image once the organization pulls its support. In the end, sustainability will depend upon the Honduran government—a questionable partner when it comes to sustaining prevention projects. While a hopeful sign, the \$1 million the government dedicated to new outreach centers does not guarantee the sustainability of already existing centers, and the source of the money—a discretionary fund—means that long term funding is not ensured.

In terms of results and impact, it is noteworthy that both U.S. officials and their implementing partners consider the outreach center program a success, a fact evidenced by the numerous examples of positive impacts that were cited throughout interviews conducted by the author. Chief among them were the number of beneficiaries served via the centers: officials asserted that between 15,000 and 17,000 separate children and youths have benefited with the help of over 700 volunteers since the program's inception.<sup>263</sup> The individuals receiving these resources often come from communities with high demand for services that are otherwise unavailable. For example, in Nueva Capital, 536 youth signed up to receive classes or participate at the center the day after its inauguration, highlighting the

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<sup>262</sup> This viability is not guaranteed. Should the NGO fail to find the funds necessary to keep the outreach centers going, they will simply close, providing a poignant example of the worries expressed regarding sustainability in this section.

<sup>263</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, February 26, 2014 and April 2, 2014. In order to qualify as a beneficiary, a youth must have spent at least 10 hours in the outreach center. It is important to note that 10 hours in an outreach center over the period of weeks, months, or even years suggests very little about whether outreach centers are preventing youth from engaging in violence, or joining a gang, and much less about their ability to return at-risk youth to school or to create employment opportunities.

need for such centers and the success they can have.<sup>264</sup>

Beyond this, USAID officials, implementing partners, and coordinators and volunteers provided a number of anecdotes highlighting success stories of individual youths that had been transformed by the outreach center and its programs.<sup>265</sup> They talked about previously quiet or problematic youth who were transformed over the course of a class, or how young people were able to find a job as a result of the training and classes they received via the outreach center. Other vocational program facilitators from the Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS), which also provides job training in the community (through the outreach center), similarly cited anecdotes of trainees who had work lined up after receiving FHIS certification at an outreach center.<sup>266</sup> Unfortunately though, no reliable and readily accessible data (beyond number of beneficiaries) is available to systematically determine the program's effect on employment, representing another serious challenge for the outreach center program.<sup>267</sup> USAID officials noted that when the outreach center programs originally began, they employed indicators such as homicide rates in the community, but that these were quickly discarded once it was recognized that outreach centers could not have an impact on such problems without a simultaneous improvement in law enforcement efforts.<sup>268</sup>

### **USAID Prevention in Honduras: Challenges amidst Violence**

This leads to one of the difficulties and weaknesses of CARSI's

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<sup>264</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014. This success must be qualified though. An interview conducted with the outreach center coordinator in Nueva Capital revealed that the center had at most the capacity to serve a total of 200 youths even though 400 were currently signed up. Thus far, some 500 kids have been served. While it shows the center is certainly being used, it appears that those launching the center probably did not anticipate the demand that would exist. Further, given the large size of the Nueva Capital neighborhood, the appearance of 500 kids to sign up for services should not be overly surprising, and tempers the assertions of success by U.S. officials.

<sup>265</sup> USAID, "JuvenClubs: Rescuing youth from violence by promoting their interests and talents."

<sup>266</sup> Interview with FIHS vocation program facilitators, April 9, 2014.

<sup>267</sup> This must be viewed in light of the Honduran economic situation: Few formal sector jobs are available, especially for youth attending public schools in poor urban neighborhoods.

<sup>268</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials and Salvador Stadthagen, April 2, 2014.

prevention efforts in Honduras. Measurements of the success and impact of outreach centers in constructing “strong and resilient communities that can withstand the pressures of crime and violence,” are evidently lacking, calling into question the program’s overall impact, despite evidence that it is possible to provide such monitoring and assessment.<sup>269</sup> This is not to say that the output and work of the centers is not monitored: officials and implementing partners outlined a number of ways this is done. First, basic indicators like youth served and services provided are regularly recorded and provided through quarterly reports from the implementing partner, AJH. Youth arriving regularly at the outreach centers for classes or other activities receive a survey in which they are asked to indicate basic information about themselves, including whether they go to school or whether they work.<sup>270</sup> Beneficiaries of the center are also asked to sign in and out in order to keep track of attendance. Second, USAID officials also conduct both announced and unannounced visits to the outreach centers to check-in on their work. Officials fill out a form detailing their observations, and also seek to talk to the youth regarding their perceptions and experience at the center. Success indicators now also include sustainability measures, such as private sector and NGO partnerships.<sup>271</sup>

Even so, impact monitoring that goes beyond immediate project indicators, such as the number of beneficiaries, is undoubtedly lacking. This is worrying, given that some of those interviewed for this chapter question the model’s impact in the communities they serve.<sup>272</sup> In part, this lack of monitoring may not be the fault of USAID or of those implementing the project; such indicators present measurement challenges. For example,

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<sup>269</sup> For an example of how to measure community resilience and to understand factors that contribute to building it, see Matthew C. Ingram, “Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico’s Municipalities,” in *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, eds. David A. Shirk, Duncan Wood, and Eric L. Olson (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the University of San Diego Justice in Mexico Project, March 2014), [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Resilient\\_Communities\\_Mexico.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Resilient_Communities_Mexico.pdf), 25–62.

<sup>270</sup> Survey obtained by author at outreach center site entitled “Centros de Alcance ‘Por Mi Barrio’: Ficha de Datos del Beneficiario.”

<sup>271</sup> Interview with U.S. officials, April 2, 2014.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

following up with young people who participated in a vocational program a month or two after its completion might be difficult in marginalized and violent neighborhoods (but that does not mean it cannot be tried). More likely, measuring more holistic results will reveal an unimpressive and disappointing reality regarding program impact, perhaps providing a disincentive to pursue such data. This reality stems from the fact that few formal employment opportunities are available and that the youth living in dangerous communities have few alternatives to the reality in which they live. Admittedly, anecdotes suggest methods that might prevent youth from becoming engaged in criminal activity and ways to shape youth to become a positive force in the community, but they remain just that—anecdotes. To better target a community’s needs and ensure CARSI’s positive impact, systematic monitoring and follow-up with beneficiaries from the outreach centers through surveys should be undertaken.<sup>273</sup> In this way, the survey results can be used to strengthen the prevention programs and the community’s continuing and evolving needs identified.

And while this monitoring and impact assessment could be improved, it is noteworthy and laudable that USAID has sought to lead the way in assessing the long-term impact of its programs through a scientifically rigorous survey with target and control neighborhoods in Central America and Mexico. With the help of Vanderbilt University (which has a long history of providing polling data in the Latin American region), USAID seeks to use victimization and perception surveys to determine what impact USAID CARSI prevention has had, which will in turn inform the future of the outreach center program and others discussed in the CARSI strategy section of this chapter. Thus, while the evidence above suggests there is room for improvement, USAID’s assessment efforts represent a significant step in the right direction, and serves as a model for other CARSI programs that do not benefit from such impact analysis.<sup>274</sup>

Coordination and cohesion between USAID’s numerous CARSI programs—of which the outreach center is the focal point—merits special attention as well. On the whole, when questioned about coordination,

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<sup>273</sup> For example, interviews with the beneficiaries a few months after receiving after a class or attending the outreach center regularly could help to determine if they found a job or have begun attending school or even church. Without such information, the impact of the outreach center program remains in question.

<sup>274</sup> Author requests to view the draft of this assessment were denied.

implementing partner employees revealed genuine efforts to guarantee that USAID-funded services arrived at local outreach centers and the communities in which USAID focuses its efforts.<sup>275</sup> This is encouraging and commendable. Yet the sheer number of projects that USAID is implementing and the apparent duplication in some of these programs remain a cause for concern.

For example, multiple projects from different organizations receiving funding from USAID focused on “community-organizing”-like efforts, and at least two have alternative education programs that appear to provide degrees with similar functions. While it is difficult to determine whether program duplication has also resulted in redundancy at the community level, consolidation of the most effective programs would seem to be a prudent course of action. This is especially true when one considers that USAID is a single (major) donor working alongside many others that may also be duplicating functions. Thus program proliferation suggests the need for better coordination—with the appropriate focus given by USAID in coordinating services through a place like the outreach center.

Another potential area for USAID programming improvement concerns the “secondary prevention” scheme that forms part of USAID’s overall strategy. Outreach centers, with their classes, programs, and additional services offered by other USAID programs (teen pregnancy, alternative education, etc.) provide a myriad of primary prevention opportunities for the community. But it is the “higher risk kids from higher risk areas” who need more attention, a strategy that produces better results according those working in an outreach center that seeks to provide this type of focus in its work.<sup>276</sup> The YSET pilot program, which trains outreach center coordinators and volunteers, as well as others (e.g. teachers) to identify high-risk youth and recommend them for counseling, represents a step in the right direction in this respect. If consolidation takes place in the numerous primary prevention programs already in place, this would certainly leave resources to strengthen programs on other prevention levels.

Similarly, tertiary prevention—or namely, prevention that seeks to prevent recidivism—would also benefit from additional focus and resources.

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<sup>275</sup> Interviews with numerous implementing partner organizations, April 2014.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014.

Prisons in Honduras are commonly known as gang recruiting centers that merely produce criminals, and so prevention efforts targeting former offenders presents a special challenge, and requires more opportunities and counseling for those exiting prison. While USAID has launched some limited programs to help former offenders and to provide avenues to restorative justice for youth, they appear, like the YSET program, to be quite limited in scope.<sup>277</sup> In part, this may be due to the politically sensitive nature of such funding, as well as legal restrictions due to the designation of MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization by the Obama administration.<sup>278</sup>

Finally, all the stakeholders interviewed identified elevated violence in outreach center communities as an additional challenge for the program. This is not a program weakness—the outreach centers seek to address this very problem. But it has affected program operations. In one community, stolen equipment prompted the permanent shutdown of the outreach center, while in another it has affected the success of the microenterprise used to support the center.<sup>279</sup> Other outreach centers have closed temporarily due to violence in the community stemming from inter-gang warfare. Rather than being a weakness, this confirms that the outreach centers truly are placed in Honduras’ most violence-stricken communities; similarly, it also suggests that violence remains a challenge worth noting in order to understand the outreach center program.

### **Conclusion: CARSI and Prevention in Honduras**

USAID’s outreach center program addresses a long neglected need in

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<sup>277</sup> In an interview with a U.S. official, the author was told about a program in Tegucigalpa designed to help find jobs for former inmates or provide money for small businesses. About 50–60 individuals had received money to fund a small business at the time of the interview. USAID has also supported juvenile justice reform, supporting efforts to change the penal code and offer youth alternative to incarceration in order to pay their dues. Interview with U.S. official, February 26, 2014.

<sup>278</sup> U.S Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization,” press release, October 11, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.

<sup>279</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials and Salvador Stadthagen, April 2, 2014 and interview with outreach center supervisor and former outreach center coordinator, June 4, 2014. Officials also noted that the local partner in the community where the outreach center was closed was not fully committed to the project, in part motivating the decision to close the center.

poor and violent Honduran communities: programs that provide alternatives for youth who often must choose between staying indoors or joining the violent criminal bands that rule the streets. The centers offer opportunities in neighborhoods where schools are faced with problems of over-capacity, giving youth a chance to explore possible alternative educational programs in manual labor or in learning basic computer skills. Some basic impacts are evident: the enthusiasm with which other organizations and the private sector have supported the program suggests it touches a nerve within Honduran society.

Yet the outreach center program, as well as USAID's CARSI programs in general, suffers from two serious weaknesses that require immediate attention: impact measurement and sustainability. By improving success indicators that measure outcomes and community resilience, and by following up with more youth, the program's true impact can be more fully determined. This is a crucial need, given the vast investment inserted into the program and its undetermined subsequent impact. Further, special attention must be paid to the sustainability of these programs in order to ensure community strengthening over the long term. As it stands, the program's long-term viability without USAID support is questionable. Given these concerns, USAID needs to learn from the past five years of CARSI implementation to strengthen and consolidate those programs with *measured and proven* results while guaranteeing their long-term sustainability.

### **CARSI in Honduras: Five Years Later**

More than five years after CARSI's inception and the associated rise in justice and security sector funding, Honduras faces even more pronounced difficulties in addressing problems of violence and crime. Drug-trafficking remains rampant, corruption taints not only the police, but also the Public Ministry and the Judiciary, and urban violence continues unabated. Despite this, some encouraging trends have emerged. Limited reforms are taking place within the police and Public Ministry, and law enforcement efforts have produced actions against leading drug-traffickers in the country.

U.S. assistance and support, in large part suspended following the 2009 coup, increased in earnest in 2011 and following years, and resulted in the launch of task forces, a new criminal investigation school, and community outreach centers, among a myriad of other programs. Today, the legacy of

these efforts is mixed: a number of successes certainly are evident, while difficulties in the models employed suggest the need for adaptation and revision.

In particular, a few challenges stand out for CARSI's future in Honduras. First, coordination between the numerous programs funded by INL and USAID can and should be improved. This applies at many levels: coordination and information between task forces is noticeably absent, but seeking to improve coordination between law enforcement and prevention efforts is also needed, and would likely produce more dramatic results in the areas that it targets.

Coordination would also improve if CARSI were to address another problematic area: program proliferation. A large number of vetted units and task forces operate within Honduras, in addition to numerous new special entities created by the Honduran government, producing confusion and duplication of efforts. In prevention, USAID boasts a plethora of programs, but a number clearly overlap and provide similar services, suggesting the need to consolidate some programs, while expanding secondary prevention programs.

Third, CARSI strategy and goals need to be reassessed based on their impact on rule of law institutions. Despite the stated goal of supporting and promoting broader institutional reform, the formation of vetted units and specialized task forces has produced questionable results within the larger institution, and, at times, has been counter-productive even while their impact on specific investigations and crime fighting efforts may be positive. The emphasis on law enforcement training provided by the Criminal Investigation School, which is designed to improve performance, is also unverifiable and its contribution to broader institutional reform is questionable. Consequently, U.S. efforts to aid legal reform of the police and support entire offices (like police intelligence) should be sustained, and perhaps expanded, as a means to slowly reform the larger institution.

But beyond that, the U.S. government must seek to ensure the political will required to produce comprehensive institutional transformation and sustain prevention efforts. As Kleinfeld notes, improving the rule of law—including security and justice sector reform—requires that the United States, and in this case Honduras, recognize that long established interests and privileges may be affected by reform and, thus, make the process of

reform very difficult.<sup>280</sup> Treating reform as a technical or legal manner without recognizing the political dimensions will continue the cycle that has characterized CARSI in Honduras to date: inaction and stalemate on much needed long-term comprehensive institutional transformation. The failure of the current and former governments to vet Honduras' police, pass meaningful legal reforms or provide a long-term budget for prevention efforts, as well as their reliance on military police forces for public security functions suggests that political will continues to present serious challenges for CARSI in Honduras. This is a matter that U.S. officials cannot ignore.

Finally, the United States needs to improve indicators and measurement of success in order to better determine the impact of CARSI. This applies to all the areas explored in this chapter. Reporting on task force performance should be more transparent, so that Honduran and U.S. taxpayers alike better understand the sensitive support the United States is providing. The Criminal Investigation School should seek ways to follow up with students, learning from their experiences and determining whether the skills taught are appropriate to their needs in the field. And USAID needs to move beyond basic indicators like the number of beneficiaries served towards more integral measurements, such as job placement, to better assess the success of prevention efforts. On top of all this, accounting of public resources used for security purposes *must* be more transparent and readily available so that the measured results can be compared with the investment by the United States.

As many interviewees made clear, U.S. security assistance in Honduras provides important and indispensable contributions to law enforcement and prevention efforts. Results are evident, and should be recognized. But revisions to the country strategy, as well as an acknowledgement of the program's limitations and impacts, should be made, with the hope of further improving a situation of crime and violence that continues to severely debilitate Honduras.

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<sup>280</sup> Kleinfeld, *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad*, 10.



## PART TWO: NEW DIRECTIONS IN POLICY

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# VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

## A SPATIAL VIEW OF HOMICIDE IN THE REGION, NORTHERN TRIANGLE, AND EL SALVADOR

MATTHEW C. INGRAM AND KARISE M. CURTIS\*

### Introduction

Violence directly affects individual and community wellbeing, and is also increasingly understood to undercut democracy and development. For public health scholars, violence presents a direct harm to health and wellbeing. In the worst cases, violence is lethal. Violence also generates serious costs to democracy. Fear and insecurity erode public trust and interpersonal confidence, hindering civic engagement and participation in public life. Further, low public trust undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, and persistent insecurity can generate support for heavy-handed or authoritarian policies.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in some new democracies in the region, including El Salvador, frustration with criminal violence has led majorities to support a return to authoritarian government.<sup>2</sup> Across the region, polls identify crime and citizen security as top policy

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Sarles, "USAID's Support of Justice Reform in Latin America," in *Rule of Law in Latin America: The International Promotion of Judicial Reform*, ed. Pilar Domingo and Rachel Seider (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> José Miguel Cruz, "The Impact of Violent Crime on the Political Culture of Latin America: The Special Case of Central America," in *Challenges to Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from the Americas Barometer 2006-2007*, ed. Mitchell A. Seligson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2008), 241, noting similar survey results in Guatemala and Honduras.

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priorities.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the prevention and reduction of violence is crucial to democratic stability. Lastly, violence generates heavy economic costs, dampening development. In the United States, Ted R. Miller and Mark A. Cohen estimated the annual financial costs of gunshots alone at \$126 billion.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found that the health care costs of violence constituted 1.9 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Brazil, 5.0 percent in Colombia, 4.3 percent in El Salvador, 1.3 percent in Mexico, 1.5 percent in Peru and 0.3 percent in Venezuela.<sup>5</sup> Along with law enforcement costs, costs to the court system, economic losses due to violence, and the cost of private security, violent crime has been estimated to cost Brazil 10.5 percent of GDP, Venezuela 11.3 percent, Mexico 12.3 percent, and El Salvador and Colombia more than 24 percent of GDP.<sup>6</sup> Restating, violence costs several countries, including El Salvador, 10–20 percent of GDP. Given that GDP growth rates of three to four percent would be considered healthy, a substantial reduction of violence in these countries would have dramatic benefits for development. In sum, concerns about public health, democracy, and development motivate the need for a better understanding of the patterns and causes of violence, and of the need to translate this understanding into improved violence-reduction policies.

The intensity of violence in Latin America, particularly in Central America, also motivates this study. The United Nations Office on Drugs

<sup>3</sup> Marta Lagos and Lucía Dammert, “La Seguridad Ciudadana: El problema principal de América Latina,” *Corporación Latinobarómetro*, May 9, 2012, [http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD\\_La\\_seguridad\\_ciudadana.pdf](http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD_La_seguridad_ciudadana.pdf).

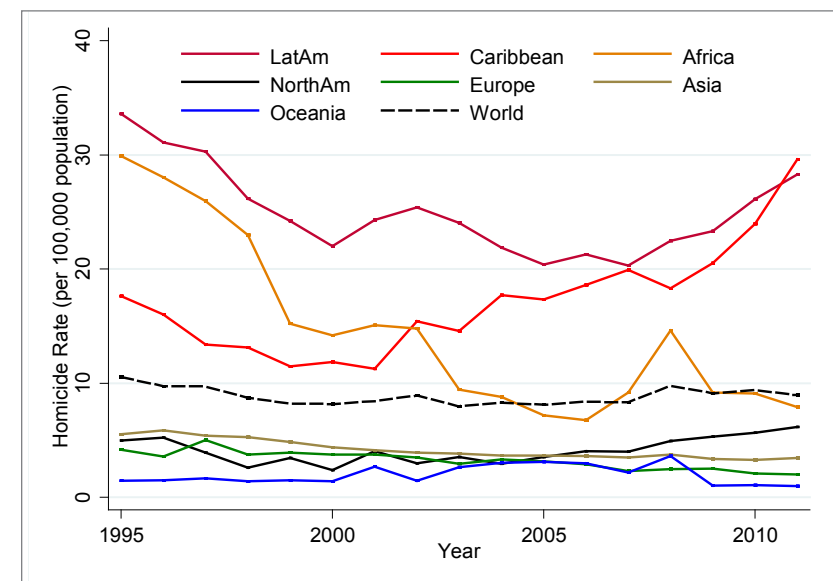
<sup>4</sup> Ted R. Miller and Mark A. Cohen, “Costs of Gunshot and Cut/Stab Wounds in the United States, with Some Canadian Comparisons,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 29, no. 3 (1997): 329–341.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Luis Londoño and Rodrigo Guerrero, “Violencia en América Latina: Epidemiología y Costos,” Documento de Trabajo R-375, (Washington, D.C.: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1999); Mayra Buvinic and Andrew Morrison, “Technical Note 4: Economic and Social Consequences of Violence: Violence as an Obstacle to Development” (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, 1999):1–8, cited in *World Report on Violence and Health*, eds. Etienne G. Krug et al., (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2002): 12.

<sup>6</sup> Londoño and Guerrero, “Violencia en América Latina: Epidemiología y Costos,” 26; Robert L. Ayres, “Crime and Violence as Development Issues in Latin America and the Caribbean,” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998), cited in Paulo de Mesquita Neto, “Public-Private Partnerships for Police Reform in Brazil,” in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas*, eds. John Bailey and Lucía Dammert (Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 2006), 49.

and Crime (UNODC) reports homicide rates for the major regions of the world for the 17 years from 1995 to 2011.<sup>7</sup> UNODC data reveal two patterns that set Latin America apart. First, homicide rates in this region are much higher than in other regions, and much higher than the global average. Specifically, homicide rates in Latin America have been four to six times higher than those in North America. For instance, while the U.S. homicide rate was 5 per 100,000 in 2010, the rate for Latin America was approaching 30. Figure 1 graphs these regional trends, showing the high and increasing homicide rates in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Figure 1:** Homicide Rates Across World Regions, 1995-2011



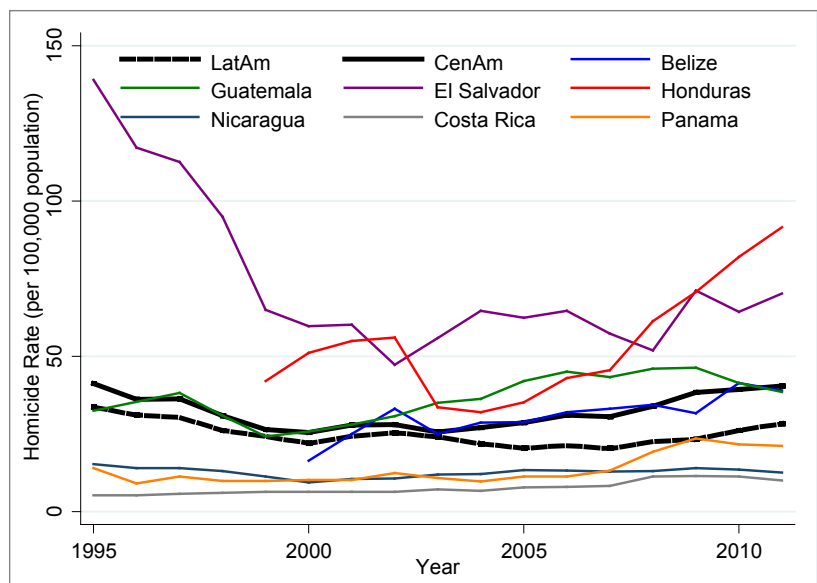
Source: UNODC

Focusing on Central America, Figure 2 graphs homicide rates for the Central American nations from 1995 to 2011 in reference to the already high and increasing rate for Latin America (black dotted line). The figure also includes the sub-regional average for Central American countries only (solid black line). Notably, El Salvador and Honduras reported the two

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014), <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/>.

highest homicide rates in the world for the three years from 2009 to 2011, and either El Salvador or Honduras has generated the highest homicide rate in the world since 2005.<sup>8</sup> Comparing all Central American countries to the Latin American average, the lines representing El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are always above the broader, regional average. Even though the sub-regional average (solid black) is higher than the regional average for all of Latin America, these three countries are also consistently above the sub-regional average, with Honduras and El Salvador far above this average. Again, two features of the lines representing these countries are (a) the high rate of violence compared to their regional counterparts, and (b) the increasing rate of violence compared to level or decreasing rates in other countries. Another worrying trend is that while Belize's homicide rate was below the regional average in 2000, since that time it has also joined the other three countries as the only Central American nations with homicide rates consistently higher than the Latin American average. Thus, even in a region beset by high and increasing rates of violence, these Central American nations stand out as having high and increasing rates of violence.

**Figure 2:** Homicide Rates Across Central American Countries, 1995-2011



Source: UNODC

<sup>8</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013*.

Focusing on El Salvador and comparing the scales of the vertical y-axes from both Figure 1 and Figure 2 reveals that homicide rates in El Salvador have been persistently above even the maximum value on the y-axis of Figure 1. National homicide rates only recently dropped below 100 in El Salvador, and while the national rate dropped below 50 in 2012, there was a disturbingly sharp upturn in homicides in the first half of 2014.<sup>9</sup> Subnationally there are multiple municipalities with rates over 100, and these communities co-exist with other communities that do not experience any homicides (see below). As disturbing as the situation may be in El Salvador, the red line representing Honduras shows that violence in Honduras has increased at an alarming rate since 2007. Updating these two countries beyond the data included in Figure 2 and Table 1, Guatemala's homicide rate increased slightly from 2011 to 2012, from 38.6 to 39.9, according to UNODC data, but then decreased in 2013 to 34.3 according to national police statistics.<sup>10</sup> Honduras held steady at a very high rate, from 91.4 (2011) to 90.4 (2012), per UNODC data,<sup>11</sup> but then dropped substantially in 2013. However, the extent of the drop is debated openly in Honduras. The official statistics report a drop a homicide rate for 2013 to 75.1. Compared against the UNODC figure for 2012, this would mean a one-year drop of 17 percent. In contrast, data reported by non-governmental organizations, led by the Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), initially showed a homicide rate for 2013 of 83, which was later adjusted to 79; these figures suggest a more conservative drop of between 8 percent and 13 percent.<sup>12</sup> Even using the official, government data, the homicide rate in Honduras remains extremely high in 2013, nearly 40 percent higher than the second-highest

<sup>9</sup> There were 1,147 homicides reported in the first seven months of 2013, while 2,000 had already been reported by July 15, 2014, an increase over the same seven-month period of more than 70 percent. Gloria Flores and Ernesto Pérez, "Asesinatos en El Salvador superan las 2,000 víctimas," *La Prensa Grafica*, July 15, 2014, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/07/15/asesinatos-en-el-salvador-superan-las-2000-victimas>.

<sup>10</sup> Rodrigo Baires Quezada, "Diez años de muertes violentas" *Plaza Pública*, February 2, 2014, <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/diez-anos-de-muertes-violentas-en-guatemala>.

<sup>11</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013*.

<sup>12</sup> "Autoridades discrepan por tasa de homicidios en Honduras," *La Prensa*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.laprensa.hn/inicio/440816-98/autoridades-discrepan-por-tasa-de-homicidios-en-honduras>. See also Observatorio de la Violencia, "Boletín Ene-Dic 2013: Mortalidad y Otros," Edición No. 32, February 2014, <http://iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Nacional/NEd32EneDic2013.pdf>.

homicide rate reported in 2012 (Venezuela, at 53.7).

Emphasizing these points, the most recent UNODC data place four Central American countries at the top of the list of most violent countries in the world for the last several years. In 2012, Honduras held the top spot with a homicide rate of 90.4, followed by a South American country (Venezuela with 53.7), but then followed by three Central American neighbors: Belize (44.7), El Salvador (41.2), and Guatemala (39.9). In 2011, Honduras again held the top spot (91.4), El Salvador came in second (69.9), followed by three Caribbean or South American countries, and Belize and Guatemala were next, at 39.2 and 38.6, respectively. Table 1 extends the discussion of this data, showing the rank and homicide rate of each of these countries from 2005 to 2012. Summing up the data in the table, these four Central American countries have been experiencing persistently high and increasing levels of violence for a decade.

**Table 1: Rank and Homicide Rate for Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (2005-2012)**

|      | El Salvador | Guatemala | Honduras | Belize    |
|------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 2005 | 2 (62.2)    | 4 (42.1)  | 3 (46.6) | 10 (29.8) |
| 2006 | 1 (64.4)    | 3 (45.3)  | 5 (44.3) | 10 (33.0) |
| 2007 | 2 (57.1)    | 6 (43.4)  | 3 (50.0) | 10 (33.9) |
| 2008 | 4 (51.7)    | 5 (46.1)  | 1 (60.8) | 11 (35.1) |
| 2009 | 1 (70.9)    | 7 (46.5)  | 2 (70.7) | 12 (32.2) |
| 2010 | 2 (64.1)    | 7 (41.6)  | 1 (81.8) | 6 (41.8)  |
| 2011 | 2 (69.9)    | 7 (38.6)  | 1 (91.4) | 6 (39.2)  |
| 2012 | 4 (41.2)    | 5 (39.9)  | 1 (90.4) | 3 (44.7)  |

With these cross-national patterns in mind, this paper examines the spatial distribution of violence in Central America in four steps. First, we examine homicide rates at the first subnational level (e.g., departments, provinces) across the entire Central American region. Second, highlighting the countries that consistently have the highest homicide rates in recent years, we narrow the focus to three countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—and again examine violence at the first subnational level. Third, we narrow the focus even further to examine only El Salvador, though this time we drill down further to a municipal level of analysis. Fourth, drawing on a more complete, municipal-level data set for El

Salvador, a more in-depth explanatory analysis of subnational (departmental and municipal) variation in homicide rates within El Salvador tests the relationship between some common social, economic, and institutional correlates of violence. This more thorough analysis complements the earlier regional and three-country analyses, aiming to identify patterns that can help improve violence-reduction policies in El Salvador, the three countries, and across the region.

In contrast to a whole-nation perspective that draws on aggregate homicide rates at the national level, the subnational perspective and tools of spatial analysis facilitate the identification of clusters of violence that are compelling for policymakers for two reasons: (1) these clusters may be situated in restricted pockets within single countries, facilitating the targeting of violence reduction or violence prevention policies to communities or groups of communities, rather than spreading resources around the entire country; and (2) these clusters may straddle international boundaries, identifying key locations of trans-border violence and facilitating the targeting of violence prevention or reduction policies that require international, cross-jurisdictional collaboration.

In greater detail, the paper proceeds as follows. First, Section 1 examines patterns of homicide across all Central American countries and then focuses more closely on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The section visualizes data on all homicides for 2010, the last year for which subnational data across all countries were obtained. Section 2 then zooms in to El Salvador and more closely examines subnational patterns of variation in homicide, highlighting the benefits of a municipal-level analysis over national or departmental perspectives that obscure substantial information at the lower, municipal level. Aside from “zooming in” below the departmental level, this section visualizes data on different measures of homicide, including aggregate homicides for 2012 and 2013, female victims (“femicides”) for 2013, and youth homicides for 2012, presenting these data in maps.

Section 3 introduces the theoretical background for an explanatory analysis of homicide, identifying specific working hypotheses regarding social, economic, and institutional factors anticipated to have a causal relationship with homicide. Section 3 clarifies sources and methods. Section 4.1 undertakes an exploratory spatial analysis of the data mapped in Sections 1 and 2, testing whether the homicides are distributed in a spatially random manner across Central America and then across El Salvador’s 261 municipalities.

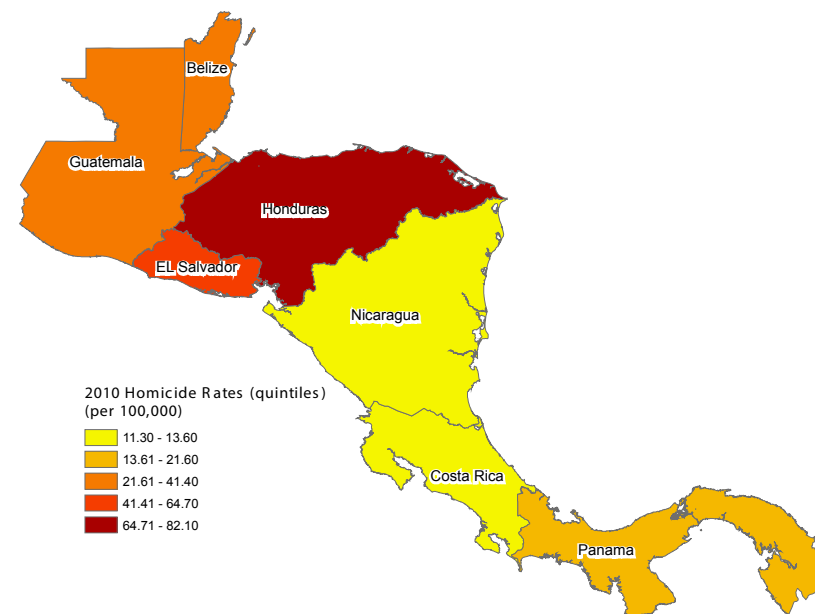
Again, the benefits of a municipal level analysis are emphasized, and the section identifies specific municipalities that constitute cores of statistically significant clusters of violence. Section 4.2 adds a brief explanatory analysis based on a spatial regression model.

Looking ahead, the findings suggest that violence clusters geographically in non-random ways, violence in one municipality spills over into homicide in neighboring municipalities, population pressures exert an expected upward pressure on homicide rates, poverty exerts an unexpected downward pressure on homicide rates, and education exerts an expected downward pressure on homicide rates. Finally, the conclusion revisits the main findings and discusses policy implications. While the population finding does not translate into a clear policy program, and the poverty finding requires additional research to understand the causal process underlying the result, the other findings yield clear policy implications. Specifically, violence-reduction policies should be targeted regionally rather than at isolated communities, policies aimed at femicides and youth homicides should be targeted at different geographic regions than policies aimed at homicide more generally, and policies need to emphasize long-term investment in education.

### Section 1: Homicide in Central America: From National to Subnational Views

Figure 3 reports a conventional, nation-level view of homicide rates across Central America. In this figure, the high national homicide rate in Honduras creates a large, dark area, and overall homicides appear to be concentrated in the four northernmost countries: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

**Figure 3:** National Homicide Rates in Central America, 2010

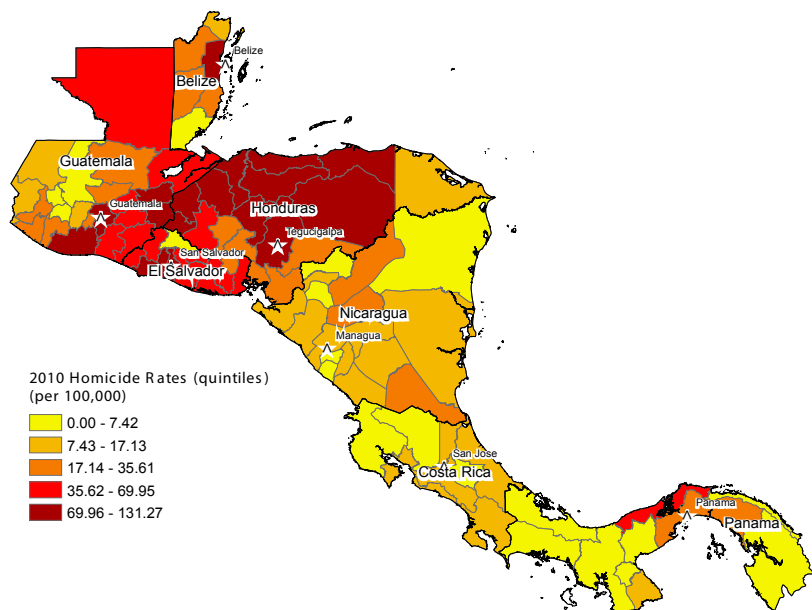


Source: Authors' creation

However, a national view obscures substantial subnational variation, variation that can be very instructive for targeting violence-prevention and violence reduction policies.<sup>13</sup> Figure 4 reports the same geographic coverage of Central America, but this time at the first subnational level of analysis (e.g., departments, provinces).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Adam Storeygard, et al., "The Global Distribution of Infant Mortality: a Subnational Spatial View," *Population, Space and Place* 14, no. 3 (2008): 209-229.

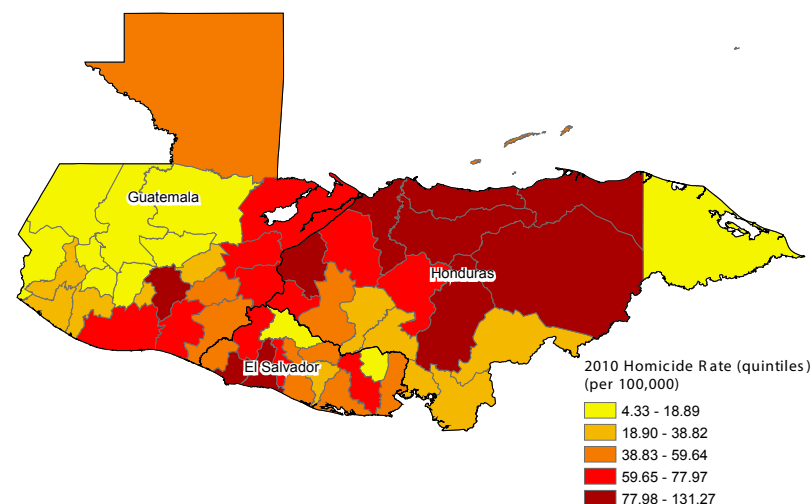
**Figure 4:** Homicide Rates, First Subnational Administrative Division, 2010



Source: Authors' creation

Even a cursory glance at the kind of map in Figure 4 reveals patterns invisible at the national level. For instance, several subnational units in Nicaragua and Panama—countries that appear to be relatively free of violence based on national data—experience homicide rates akin to those of multiple places in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Further, the high violence that is generally attributed to the entire country in places like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is not geographically uniform. That is, within these countries, violence is unevenly distributed, being more concentrated in some places than in others. Indeed, in some subnational units in both Guatemala and El Salvador—as well as multiple other units in other countries—there are very few or no homicides in 2010.

**Figure 5:** Homicide Rates in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (by departments), 2010



Source: Authors' creation

Figure 5 focuses on three countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—reporting quintiles for the departments in these countries. In contrast to the subnational map of violence across all of Central America, there are no departments in these three countries in which homicide was absent in 2010. Restating, in every single department across all three countries, there was at least one homicide in 2010. Further, at least at first glance, homicide appears to be concentrated along the southern border of Guatemala, especially along the Guatemala–Honduras border, and among the north–central departments of Honduras.

## Section 2: Homicide in El Salvador: A Closer Look

This section unpacks homicide data in El Salvador in three ways. First, the analysis shifts to municipal-level data, using updated data from 2012 and 2013. Second, 2013 data are compared with 2012 data to gauge the temporal stability of patterns in the most recent, 2013 data. Finally, aggregate homicide data are disaggregated into femicides, male victims, and youth victims. Data differentiated by sex was available only for 2013, and

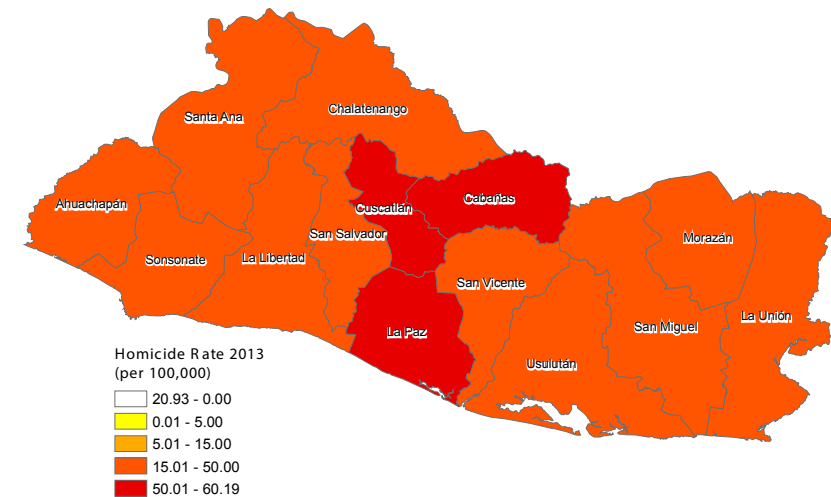
data differentiated by age was available only for 2012. Throughout, the goal of disaggregating data in these ways is to identify strategies to improve the targeting of violence-reduction policies.

The national-level data in Figure 2 spanned 1995–2011. At the end of that time span, 2011, the national homicide rate in El Salvador stood at 70.19. The rate dropped in 2012 and 2013 to 41.91 and 40.98, respectively.<sup>14</sup> By these national figures, El Salvador still has a high rate—eight times the U.S. rate and about 30 percent higher than Mexico, where the homicide rate has tripled since 2007<sup>15</sup>—but it has dropped significantly over the last 10–15 years, especially if we consider the extraordinarily high homicide rates in the mid-1990s, soon after the end of the civil war. As noted earlier, there appears to be a worrying uptick in violence in the first half of 2014, increasing by 70 percent over the same time period in 2013 (see note 9).

However, as was the case with the regional data reported earlier, this national level of analysis obscures meaningful variation among different administrative units within El Salvador. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate how a department-level analysis obscures rich information at the municipal level. Figure 6 maps 2013 homicide rates (per 100,000 people) across El Salvador's 14 departments. Figure 7 then maps the same data across the country's 261 municipalities (see Data and Methods for data sources).<sup>16</sup> In these maps, darker colors identify areas with higher homicide rates and lighter colors

identify areas with lower homicide rates.

**Figure 6:** Homicide Rates at Department Level in El Salvador, 2013



Source: Authors' creation

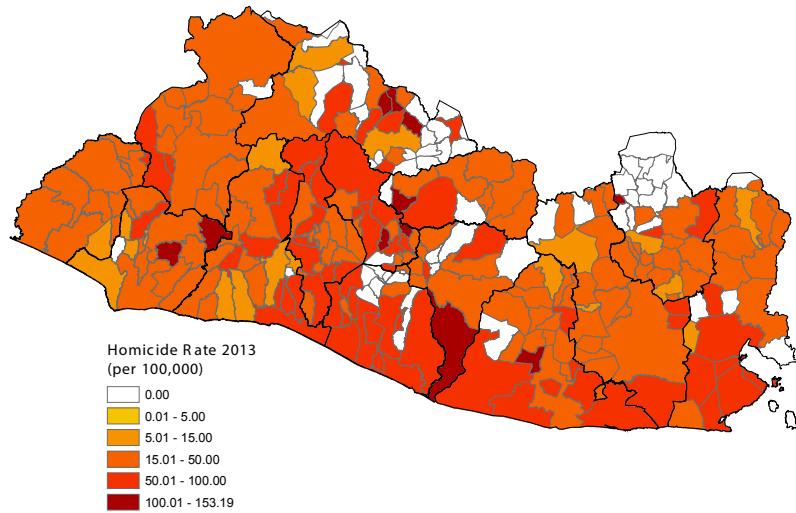
The map in Figure 6 suggests that the main administrative areas with high levels of violence are the three central departments of Cabañas, Cuscatlán, and La Paz, and that otherwise violence is fairly uniform at rates between 15 and 50. Notably, Figure 6 suggests that the areas with the highest homicide rate do not exceed 60.19, and conversely that there are no violence-free areas in the country.

<sup>14</sup> This rate was calculated using 2007 population as the denominator, which was the last census year. Instituto de Medicina Legal (IML), "Homicidios del año 2012, total país según reconocimientos de medicos forenses y base consensada entre FGR, IML y PNC," 2013, <http://www.transparencia.oj.gob.sv/portal/transparencia.php?opcion=13>.

<sup>15</sup> Alejandro Hope, "Not Quite at War, not Yet at Peace," presentation at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, January 16, 2014, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/security-mexico-pena-nieto-administration-re-view>; Matthew C. Ingram, "Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico's Municipalities," in *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, ed. David A. Shirk, Duncan Wood, and Eric L. Olson (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Justice in Mexico Project, 2014), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/resilient-communities-mexico-2014>.

<sup>16</sup> El Salvador generally reports 262 municipalities. However, one of these municipalities, Meanguera del Golfo, is an island in the Gulf of Fonseca near the border with Honduras and Nicaragua, and little data is available for this unit. Thus, it is excluded from the analysis. See Data and Methods.

**Figure 7:** Homicide Rates at Municipal Level in El Salvador, 2013



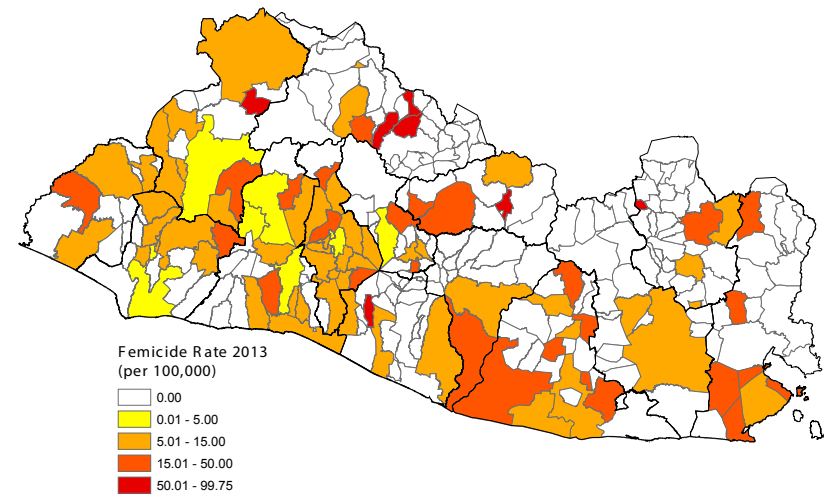
Source: Authors' creation

Figure 7, however, reveals the much wider variation at the municipal level that was obscured in Figure 6. Indeed, some municipalities exhibit homicide rates well above 100, while at the same time substantial portions of the country are free of homicides. Also, while some of the units with the highest homicide rates (dark red) appear to be in the central departments identified earlier, there are several others that are in other parts of the country. Further, even a cursory examination of this map suggests that communities bordering the Pacific coast experience high levels of violence (bright red), especially the eastern two-thirds of the coastal communities.

The much richer variation that is evident with a municipal level of analysis can be leveraged to target violence-reduction policies in a way that is not possible with the departmental data alone. For instance, a policy based on the department-level data might suggest that resources should be directed at the three centrally-located departments with the highest homicide rates. However, the municipal-level map shows that there are several municipalities within these departments that have no homicides, and conversely that there are several municipalities outside these departments with much worse problems of violence. Thus, a policy based on

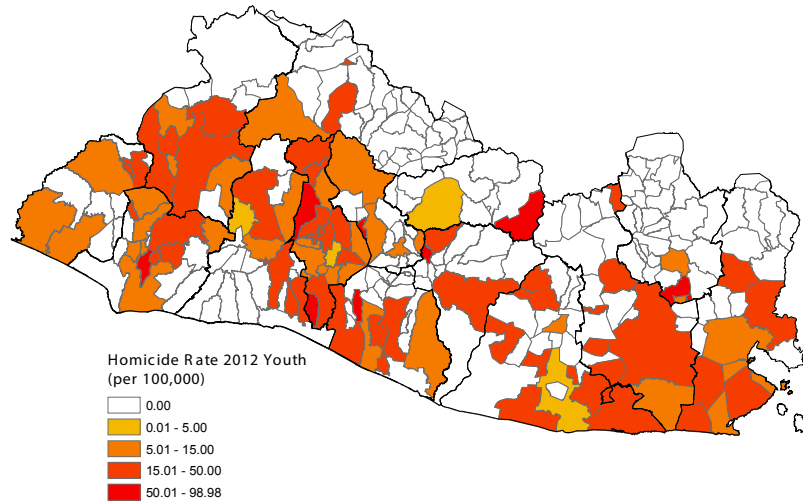
the departmental data would be inefficient in that it would direct resources where they are not needed and divert resources from where they are needed. That is, just as national-level data obscure meaningful variation and policy-relevant information among departments, department-level data obscure this variation and information among municipalities. For these reasons, the rest of this paper adopts a municipal-level perspective, aiming to identify ways to improve the targeting of violence-reduction policies.

**Figure 8:** Femicide Rate in El Salvador, 2013



Source: Authors' Creation

Available data also allow an examination of homicides of women (i.e., femicide) and homicides of youths (ages 0-17). Figure 8 reports femicide rates and Figure 9 reports homicides of youths. The patterns for femicides and youths are quite different from the overall pattern, offering additional evidence to inform the targeting of violence-prevention policies for these particular kinds of homicides. At first glance, femicide appears to be concentrated in smaller pockets of the country, primarily in the northern department of Chalatenango, along the border with Honduras. Youth homicides appear to be more heavily concentrated around the nation's capital—in and around the department of San Salvador—and also in the southeastern part of the country, near the Gulf of Fonseca.

**Figure 9:** Youth Homicide Rate in El Salvador, 2012

Source: Authors' creation

The remainder of this paper undertakes a spatial analysis of the data presented thus far, including exploratory analyses of spatial clusters and a spatial regression model of the aggregate homicide measure for 2013.<sup>17</sup> First, we outline our theoretical expectations that motivate the explanatory analysis and then describe our data and methods.

### Section 3: Explaining Violence: Theoretical Framework and Working Hypotheses

Sociologists and criminologists have found an association between a large array of structural features of communities—macro-level and slow-moving demographic, economic, and social conditions—and the rate of crime in those communities. While these pressures help understand root causes of violence and therefore can guide governments' proactive policy

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed discussion of methods, see Matthew C. Ingram and Karise M. Curtis, "Homicide in El Salvador's Municipalities: Spatial Clusters and the Causal Role of Neighborhood Effects, Population Pressures, Poverty, and Education," Working Paper (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, July 14, 2014), [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/Homicides\\_ElSalvador](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/Homicides_ElSalvador).

responses in each of these areas in order to prevent criminality in the first place, governments can also influence violence via more reactive public safety efforts once patterns of criminality emerge, primarily through investment in the size and quality of its public safety and security forces, or state capacity. We draw on these theories to help to explain variation in homicide rates across El Salvador's municipalities.

**Social Disorganization.** Research in sociology and criminology on the role of community context,<sup>18</sup> "collective efficacy,"<sup>19</sup> and social context<sup>20</sup> in explaining crime and violence provide a central theoretical framework for explaining variation in homicide rates. According to Robert J. Sampson and W. Byron Groves—and following earlier research by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay—violence is a consequence, in part, of social disorganization, and social disorganization can be measured by its external sources, including resource deprivation or socioeconomic status (SES), residential mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity.<sup>21</sup> With regards to the presence or absence of material resources, William Alex Pridemore, in his review of the cross-national literature, found that higher rates of poverty have consistently been linked to higher rates of homicide in the United States and abroad.<sup>22</sup> Other contributing factors include family disruption,

<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Sampson and W. Byron Groves, "Community Structure And Crime: Testing Social-Disorganization Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 4 (1989): 774-802; Robert Bursik and Harold G. Grasmick, *Neighborhoods and Crime: the Dimensions of Effective Community Control* (New York: Lexington Books, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Robert J. Sampson, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science* 277, no. 5328 (1997): 918-924.

<sup>20</sup> Sara K. Thompson and Rosemary Gartner, "The Spatial Distribution and Social Context of Homicide in Toronto's Neighborhoods," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 51, no. 1 (2014): 88-118.

<sup>21</sup> See Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942) and Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*, revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> William Alex Pridemore, "Poverty Matters: A Reassessment of the Inequality-Homicide Relationship in Cross-National Studies," *British Journal of Criminology* 51, no. 5 (2011): 739-772.



which “may decrease informal social control at the community level,”<sup>23</sup> and urbanization, which “weaken[s] local kinship and friendship networks and impede[s] social participation.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, for Sampson and Groves, community capacity to remain organized, i.e., to resist disorganization and therefore reduce crime, is shaped by macro-social and macro-economic factors like resource deprivation, residential instability, ethnic heterogeneity, family disruption, and urbanization.<sup>25</sup>

Complementing the above discussion, Bursik and Grasmick theorized that the more disorganized a community (here: municipality) is, the more crime—both violent and acquisitive—will occur as a response to and product of the social disorganization.<sup>26</sup> Communities can become more disorganized as demographic pressures shift, either through population growth, population concentration, mobility or migration, the breakdown of family structures, and increased ethnic heterogeneity. Bursik and Grasmick discovered that ethnically diverse communities experience tension between different ethnic groups for many reasons.<sup>27</sup> Ethnic groups typically have different primary languages, practices, and networks from one another and from the majority group in the area, which can hinder the organization of the entire community. Additionally, any tension present between ethnic groups may lead to violence (especially that of racially based gangs).

Along similar lines, Kenneth C. Land, Patricia L. McCall, and Lawrence E. Cohen established three principal components from the primary predictors of interest.<sup>28</sup> These three composite measures captured (1) population

pressures, (2) resource deprivation/affluence, and (3) family disruption.<sup>29</sup> Population pressures include total population and population density or concentration, but can also extend to other demographic pressures like age structure and, since most crime is committed by young males, the proportion of the population that is young and male. Indicators of resource deprivation or affluence include income, inequality, and poverty rates. Lastly, family disruption has been measured using divorce rates,<sup>30</sup> but could also be captured by indicators of single-parent households, especially those headed by women.

In short, all else being equal, we anticipate that population pressures, urbanization, family structure, and ethnic heterogeneity contribute to social disorganization. Thus, key indicators of social disorganization include population growth, population density, degree of urbanization, percentage of households headed by single women, and percentage of the population that is indigenous. Further, we anticipate that each of these indicators will have a positive relationship with homicide rates. To be sure, urban centers may be home to many risk factors for violence, but urban areas can also be sources of factors that are protective against violence, including increased law enforcement presence.<sup>31</sup> We return to the issue of law enforcement presence below, but for now we anticipate that the indicators of social disorganization identified above will have a positive relationship with violence, while we also remain cognizant that some of these indicators may be capturing some of the protective effects associated with urban areas.

**Education.** Education is widely regarded as having a protective effect

<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Sampson and W. Byron Groves, “Community Structure And Crime: Testing Social-Disorganization Theory,” 781, citing Robert J. Sampson, “Effects of Socioeconomic Context on Official Reaction to Juvenile Delinquency,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 6 (1986): 876–85.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 782.

<sup>25</sup> According to these authors, these structural factors are also mediated by informal social features of communities, including the ability to supervise teenage groups, the size and density of friendship networks, and participation or engagement in civic life.

<sup>26</sup> Bursik and Grasmick, *Neighborhoods and Crime: the Dimensions of Effective Community Control*.

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

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth C. Land, Patricia L. McCall, and Lawrence E. Cohen, “Structural Covariates Of Homicide Rates: Are There Any Invariances Across Time And Social Space?,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 4 (1990): 922–63.

<sup>29</sup> See also Robert D. Baller et al., “Structural Covariates of U.S. County Homicide Rates: Incorporating Spatial Effects,” *Criminology* 39, no. 3 (2001): 562 and 568.

<sup>30</sup> Land, McCall, and Cohen, “Structural Covariates Of Homicide Rates: Are There Any Invariances Across Time And Social Space?,” 922; Baller et al., “Structural Covariates Of U.S. County Homicide Rates: Incorporating Spatial Effects,” 561–588.

<sup>31</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2013*, 7.

against violence,<sup>32</sup> especially against homicide.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Mexico's former top anti-drug prosecutor identified the harmful consequences of the lack of education, noting the low education of many organized crime "foot soldiers."<sup>34</sup> Education exerts this protective effect in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, as more individuals, especially young men, are in school, they are not elsewhere, e.g., spending time on the street, so they are less likely to be either victim or perpetrator. That is, higher levels of educational enrollment and attainment suggest that children stay in school longer and in a safe, productive, socially controlled environment away from crime. Thus, school enrollment rates, attendance rates, time spent in school, and other measures of educational attainment should have a negative relationship with violence.

Indirect effects play out over longer term. A population that is more educated is generally able to obtain better employment, stay employed, and both maximize available opportunities and overcome adversity. Thus, a better-educated population is more likely to find rewarding activity in the legal, formal economy. Further, if opportunities for crime arise, a better-educated individual is more likely and better able to assess the material costs of engaging in criminal behavior, including the potential costs of losing one's job or being incarcerated. Since violent crime, especially homicide, incurs high costs of this type, education should be a particularly important protective barrier to engaging in violent crime.

Additionally, since past criminal activity is a predictor of future criminal activity, individuals who have spent more time in school—and therefore away from crime—are less likely to engage in future crime, and potentially have a cultural, ideational, and ethical aversion to crime that is more reinforced than in people who did not spend time in school and perhaps

engaged in other, even petty types of crime at an earlier age. Lastly, education allows citizens to communicate more effectively with each other, learn each other's language, and strengthen community ties to improve their social interactions. In many ways, education can help counter the negative effects of social disorganization outlined previously. Literacy rates and other measures of educational attainment, therefore, should have a negative relationship with violence.

**Economic Activity.** Beyond the structural conditions of income, inequality, and poverty rates discussed earlier, the level of economic activity in a community can have an effect on crime and violence. The general expectation is that weak economies or economic downturns push people out of work or out of full employment, and this unemployment or under-employment creates financial stress and, therefore, incentives for illegal activity. Citizens may become frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities and seek illegitimate means to overcome this economic strain. One route may be to turn to acquisitive crimes and black markets for income. The risk of violence increases during the commission of property crimes (e.g., a burglar may encounter an occupant in a home), and interactions with black markets also raise the risk of violence, given that participants cannot rely on lawful measures (i.e., police) when wronged by others in these settings. Thus, Richard Rosenfeld argues the anomic strain created by unemployment and a poorer economic system, along with poverty, increases homicide indirectly through property crime.<sup>35</sup>

In the United States, existing research finds a firm relationship between economic downturns and an increase in property crime, but the relationship appears to reverse for economic downturns and homicide.<sup>36</sup> This counterintuitive relationship has also been found in Mexico.<sup>37</sup> An alternative expectation, therefore, is that economic downturns reduce the circulation of goods and people, reducing interactions among people, and

<sup>32</sup> Denise C. Gottfredson, "Youth Employment, Crime, and Schooling: A Longitudinal Study of a National Sample," *Developmental Psychology* 21, no. 3 (1985): 419-432; David Farrington et al., "Unemployment, School Leaving and Crime," *British Journal of Criminology* 26, no. 4 (1986): 335-356; Christopher J. Ruhm, "Are Recessions Good For Your Health?," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115, no. 2 (2000): 624.

<sup>33</sup> Lance Lochner and Enrico Moretti, "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports," *American Economic Review* 94, no. 1 (2004): 175-177.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Gonzalez, quoted in E. Eduardo Castillo and Mark Stevenson, "Mexican Capo Tried To Escape While Being Captured," *Associated Press*, July 17, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/mexican-capo-tried-escape-when-he-was-captured>.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Rosenfeld, "Crime Is The Problem: Homicide, Acquisitive Crime, And Economic Conditions," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 25 (2009): 287-306.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Raphael and Rudolf Winter-Ebmer, "Identifying The Effect Of Unemployment On Crime," *The Journal of Law and Economics* 44, no. 1 (2001): 271-277.

<sup>37</sup> Ingram, "Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico's Municipalities."

therefore decreasing opportunities for crime and violence.<sup>38</sup>

**State Capacity.** Drawing on both the armed conflict literature and research in criminology, state capacity is expected to have a negative effect on homicide rates. Weak states are those that lack the institutional capacity to support and maintain control over its citizenry effectively.<sup>39</sup> Weak governments typically have higher rates of violence (be it political or criminal) for multiple reasons, including those mentioned earlier (i.e. social disorganization, institutional anomie, etc.), but also because they are unable to respond to waves of crime when these occur. Weak states either have fewer police and security forces or forces that are more loyal to the government in charge than the well-being of local citizens. A community with fewer police per capita does not have as much external pressure to conform to the laws of society and may have more crime as a result.<sup>40</sup> We define state capacity here specifically as security capacity, or the available public safety infrastructure, and anticipate that communities with weak security infrastructure will have higher homicide rates than communities with strong security infrastructure.

### Results 1: Exploratory Spatial Analysis

Exploratory spatial analysis is “a critical first step for visualizing patterns in the data, identifying spatial clusters and spatial outliers, and diagnosing possible misspecification in analytic models.”<sup>41</sup> Maps are not a necessary step, but “[g]raphical displays provide an auxiliary method [to data tables] that may allow patterns to be discovered visually, quickly.”<sup>42</sup>

First, global and local tests of spatial autocorrelation capture the degree of overall structural dependence among units. Specifically, the global and local tests of spatial autocorrelation posit a null hypothesis of no spatial dependence among observations, i.e., spatial randomness, and then test whether this null

hypothesis is supported. The global test is the global Moran’s  $I$ , and examines whether there are any regular patterns among geographically connected units.<sup>43</sup> If there are no regular patterns of spatial association, the statistic is not significant. If there are significant spatial associations, the statistic can be positive or negative. A positive global Moran’s  $I$  indicates that similar values of the outcome of interest, here homicide, are clustering together; a negative result indicates divergent or dissimilar values are clustering together. Thus, if violence is distributed haphazardly around a country, the value of Moran’s  $I$  will be near zero and not statistically significant; however, if violence tends to cluster in pockets of high and low levels of violence, then the value of Moran’s  $I$  will move away from zero and toward one.

Drawing on the discussion of global spatial autocorrelation, a local test for spatial dependence is the local Moran’s  $I$ , or local indicator of spatial autocorrelation (LISA).<sup>44</sup> Whereas the global measure of spatial clustering (Moran’s  $I$ ) provides information about whether there is an overall grouping of homicide into pockets of high and low homicide rates, a LISA statistic provides information on the correlation on an outcome of interest among a focal unit and its neighbors, whether the association is positive (i.e., similar values) or negative (i.e., dissimilar values), and whether the association is statistically significant. For instance, if unit  $A$  has a high homicide rate and all of unit  $A$ ’s neighbors have a similarly high homicide rate, the LISA value will be positive. Similarly, if unit  $A$  has a low homicide rate and all of unit  $A$ ’s neighbors also have a low homicide rate, the LISA value will be positive. Thus, LISA statistics serve to identify local clusters of an outcome of interest. Stated differently, there may be very little clustering overall—across an entire country – but there may be a particular city with a very high homicide rate that is surrounded by other municipalities with similarly high homicide rates. This would be a local cluster of violence that would otherwise be missed by the aggregate, global measure of geographic association, but which would be identified by the LISA value. To be clear, while the global Moran’s  $I$  may

<sup>38</sup> Raphael and Winter-Ebmer, “Identifying The Effect Of Unemployment On Crime,” 276–277.

<sup>39</sup> Stewart Patrick, *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Steven D. Levitt, “Understanding Why Crime Fell In The 1990s: Four Factors That Explain The Decline And Six That Do Not,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 163–190.

<sup>41</sup> Baller et al., “Structural Covariates Of U.S. County Homicide Rates: Incorporating Spatial Effects,” 563.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Don Ward and Kristian Skrede Glenditsch, *Spatial Regression Models* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2008), 11.

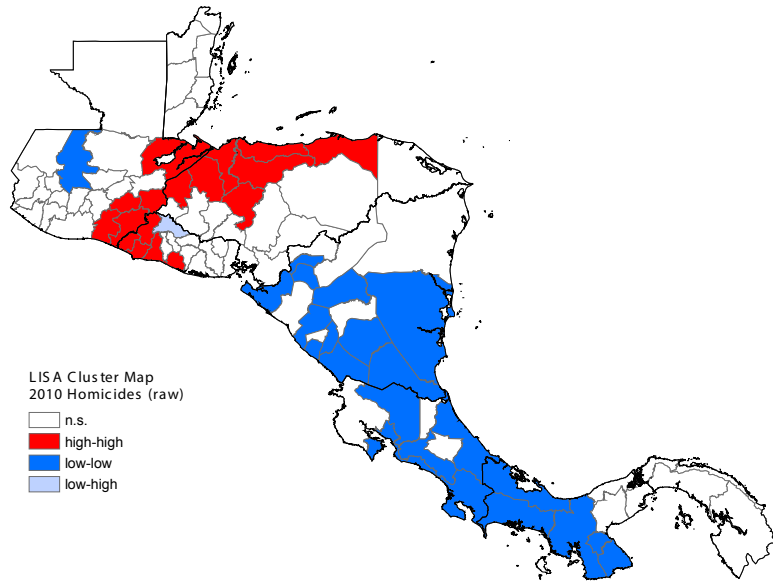
<sup>43</sup> P. A. P. Moran, “The interpretation of statistical maps,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 10, no. 2 (1948): 243–251; P. A. P. Moran, “A test for the serial independence of residuals,” *Biometrika* 37, no. 1–2 (1950): 178–181; P. A. P. Moran, “Notes On Continuous Stochastic Phenomena,” *Biometrika* 37, no. 1–2 (1950): 17–23; A. D. Cliff and J. K. Ord, *Spatial Processes: Models & Applications* (London: Pion, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Luc Anselin, “Local Indicators Of Spatial Association-LISA,” *Geographical Analysis* 27, no. 2 (1995): 93–115.

suggest that overall there is little spatial autocorrelation in the data, LISA values can identify smaller geographic areas where positive or negative clustering occurs. LISA values can also be mapped in a LISA cluster map. According to Luc Anselin, this kind of map is “[a]rguably the most useful graph” in spatial analysis.<sup>45</sup>

Building on the exploratory spatial techniques outlined above, fuller explanatory techniques include spatial regression models. While a full explanatory analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, we report a single spatial lag regression here, examining whether homicide rates in a municipality are influenced by homicide rates in surrounding municipalities.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 10:** LISA Cluster Map for 2010 Homicide Rates in Central America



Source: Authors' creation

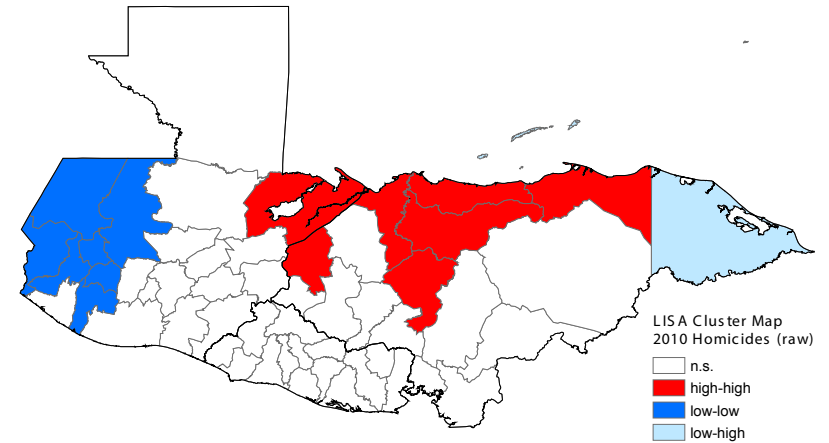
First, Figure 10 maps LISA clusters for raw homicide rates in 2010 at the

<sup>45</sup> Luc Anselin, “Exploring Spatial Data with GeoDa: A Workbook,” GeoDa Center for Geospatial Analysis and Computation, Arizona State University, 2005, 140, <https://geodacenter.asu.edu/system/files/geodaworkbook.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> For details on methods, see Ingram and Curtis, “Homicide in El Salvador’s Municipalities, Spatial Clusters and the Causal Role of Neighborhood Effects, Population Pressures, Poverty, and Education.”

first subnational administrative level for all Central American countries.<sup>47</sup> Overall, there is a strong positive relationship in the homicide rate among all units in the map (Moran’s  $I = 0.54$ ;  $p < .001$ ), suggesting homicide is not distributed randomly among geographic units.

**Figure 11:** LISA Cluster Map for 2010 Homicide Rates in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras



Source: Authors' creation

Zooming in to the municipal level in El Salvador, Table 2 reports global Moran’s  $I$  values for each of the five measures of homicide rates. The table also reports significance values. The statistical significance allows us to confidently reject the null hypothesis of spatial randomness in the data with regards to all of the measures of homicide with the exception of femicides.

<sup>47</sup> LISA clusters calculated using GeoDa with 9,999 randomizations. Note: the shapefile for this map included two duplicate units in Panama: Colón and Panama. These could not be merged, so they were retained as separate units rather than breaking Panama up in some unusual manner, and also instead of ignoring Panama altogether. There is nothing in the overall pattern that suggests the results would be meaningfully different if these two units were merged. Also, the weights used to capture which units are connected to each other included Islas de la Bahía in Honduras. Specifically, these islands have two neighbors in the analysis: Atlántida and Colón.

**Table 2: Global Spatial Autocorrelation (Moran's I) in El Salvador**

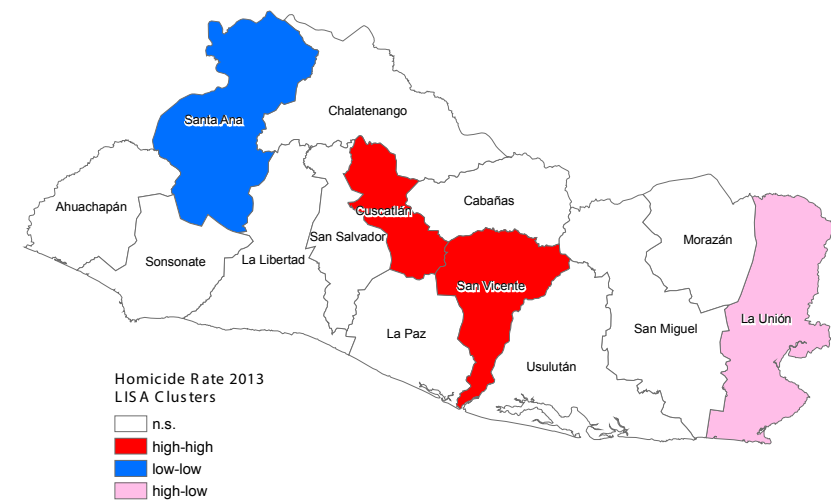
| Measure                     | Moran's I | p     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Homicides 2012              | 0.19      | 0.000 |
| Homicides 2013              | 0.20      | 0.000 |
| Homicides 2013 (men only)   | 0.19      | 0.000 |
| Homicides 2013 (women only) | 0.03      | 0.437 |
| Homicides 2012 (youth only) | 0.09      | 0.001 |

Beyond these indications of global spatial clustering, Figures 10–17 report LISA cluster maps showing the distribution of statistically significant clusters (see Data and Methods for discussion of local indicators of spatial autocorrelation). White areas are regions of spatial randomness in the distribution of violence, while colored areas are units that form the core of non-random spatial clusters. All cluster associations are significant at least at the .05 level. Note also that the municipalities colored for significance constitute the cores of spatial clusters. That is, the colored municipalities have a statistically significant relationship with the municipalities that border them, including those that are clear. Thus, the outer boundary of the cluster extends into the blank municipalities bordering the colored ones, and the true size of the spatial cluster is larger than the colored cores.<sup>48</sup>

### Key Findings of Exploratory Spatial Analysis

- Homicides are not distributed in a geographically random manner.
  - Homicides tend to cluster in areas of high violence (“hot spots”) and low violence (“cold spots.”)
  - Different types of homicide follow different clustering patterns.
- Analysis at the municipal level highlights areas that deserve attention that would otherwise be missed at higher levels of analysis.
- Although there may be more than one cluster of violent municipalities within a department, there are also multiple areas that are not experiencing high levels of violence.
  - Therefore, examining clusters of violence at the municipal level provides useful information on how to target responses to violence and violence prevention efforts more efficiently.

The LISA cluster map also identifies the substantive content of those clusters. Red identifies those municipalities with high levels of homicide that are surrounded by municipalities with similarly high levels of homicide (high-high). Blue identifies units with low homicide levels surrounded by units with similarly low levels (low-low). Light blue identifies those units with low levels of violence surrounded by units with high levels (low-high), while pink identifies those with high levels of homicides surround by units with low levels (high-low).

**Figure 12: LISA Map of 2013 Homicide Rates (Departments)**

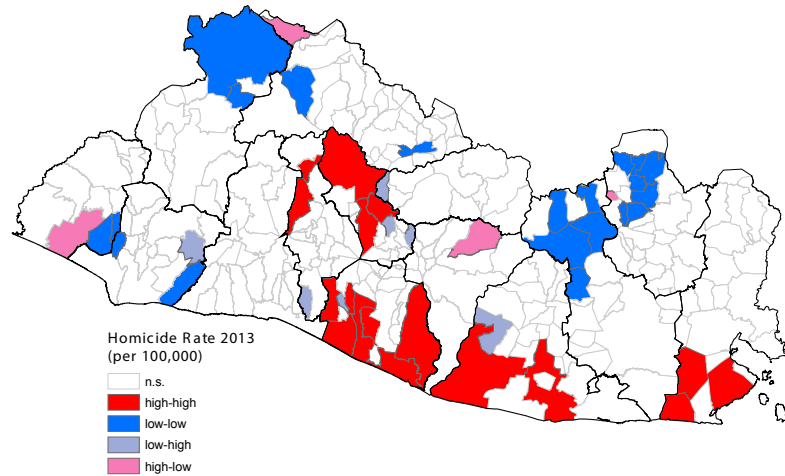
Source: Authors' creation

Figure 12 begins with a departmental view of LISA clusters for the aggregate 2013 data. At this level of analysis, the evidence suggests that there is a large cluster of high violence centered around the departments of Cuscatlán and San Vicente, and a cluster of low violence in the northwest, around the department of Santa Ana. As was the case with the choropleth maps in Figures 1–8, however, this department-level perspective obscures rich information at the municipal level of analysis, starting with Figure 13. Figure 13 shows that, unlike the concentration of violence in the center of the country as suggested by Figure 12, there are clusters of violence in the central region, but more extended clusters along the coast, especially

<sup>48</sup> Anselin, “Exploring Spatial Data with GeoDa: A Workbook,” 146.

the eastern two-thirds of the coast. Also, there are multiple areas within departments that are not experiencing high levels of violence even though there may be municipal clusters of violence within the same department. Thus, the municipal level LISA clusters provide valuable information for targeting policies to prevent or respond to violence.

**Figure 13:** LISA Map of 2013 Homicide Rates (Municipalities)



Source: Authors' creation

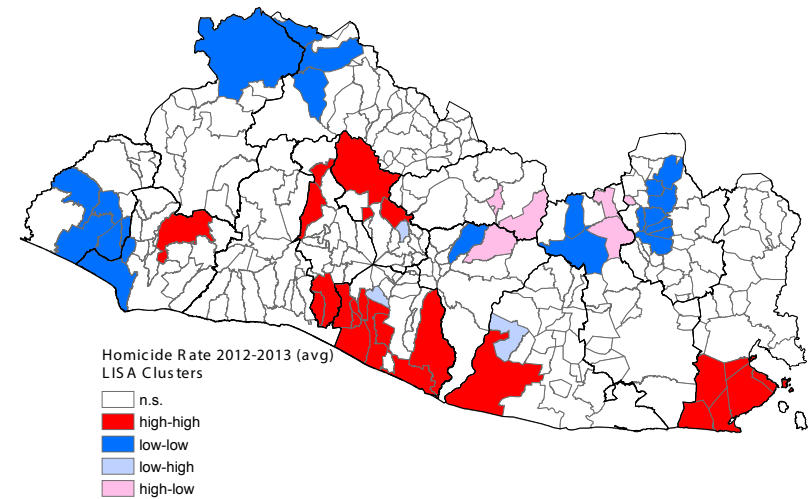
Table 3 reports the municipalities with the highest LISA values that are also statistically significant. Thus, from among all the red, high-high clusters in Figure 13, the table identifies the municipalities that most merit attention. The municipal code in the first column also helps identify the relevant department. For three-digit codes, the first digit is the department code; for four-digit codes, the first two digits are the department code.

| Table 3: Municipalities with Top 5 Significant LISA Values for 2013 Homicide Rates |                       |      |        |
|--|-----------------------|------|--------|
| Code   | Municipality          | LISA | Sig    |
| 822  | San Luis La Herradura | 4.54 | 0.0002 |
| 802  | El Rosario            | 2.71 | 0.0014 |
| 1404   | Conchagua             | 2.42 | 0.0290 |
| 815  | San Pedro Masahuat    | 2.38 | 0.0056 |
| 1408   | La Union              | 2.08 | 0.0496 |

Taken together, Figure 13 and Table 3 help identify the municipalities that constitute cores of clusters of violence, and also the departments that most deserve attention. From Table 3, the departments that stand out are La Paz (code = 8) and La Union (code = 14). Note that these are not the same departments identified in Figure 12 using a departmental-level of analysis.

Figure 14 and Table 4 do the same for the average homicide rates from 2012 to 13. The same general pattern remains for violence clusters in the LISA map, and the Table again identifies the same five municipalities in the same two departments.

**Figure 14:** LISA Map of 2012-2013 Homicide Rates



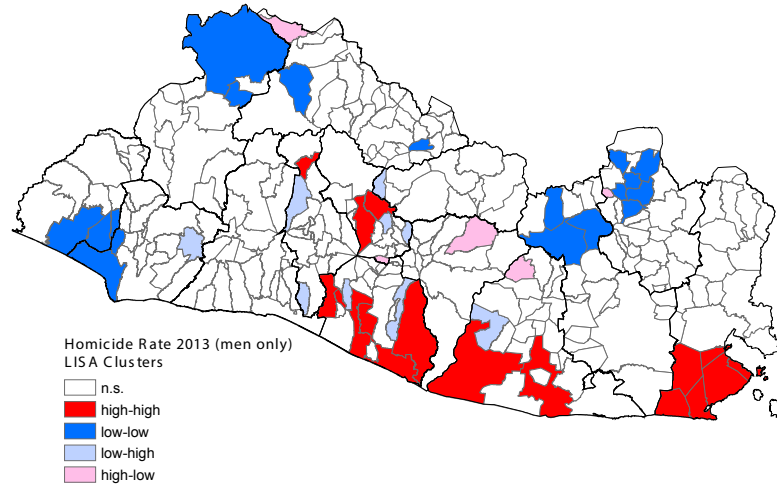
Source: Authors' Creation

| Table 4: Municipalities with Top 5 Significant LISA Values for 2012-2013 Homicide Rates |                       |      |        |
|---|-----------------------|------|--------|
| Code  | Municipality          | LISA | Sig    |
| 822   | San Luis La Herradura | 4.22 | 0.0002 |
| 1408  | La Union              | 3.68 | 0.0192 |
| 815   | San Pedro Masahuat    | 3.39 | 0.0058 |
| 1404  | Conchagua             | 3.23 | 0.0026 |
| 802   | El Rosario            | 2.56 | 0.0006 |

Disaggregating the overall homicide rates, Figure 15 and Table 5 do the same analysis for homicide rates in 2013 of men only. With some minor

differences, the overall pattern appears to be the same and the information conveyed in Table 5 is also the same, suggesting that overall homicide rates are driven primarily by the homicides of men, i.e., male victims.

**Figure 15:** LISA Map of 2013 Homicide Rates, Men Only

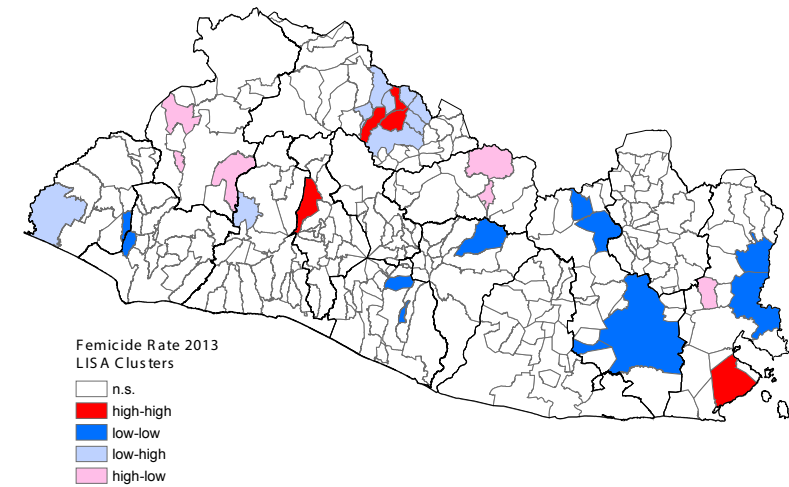


Source: Authors' creation

| Table 5: Municipalities with Top 5 Significant LISA Values for 2013 Homicide Rates (men) |                       |      |        |
|--|-----------------------|------|--------|
| Code   | Municipality          | LISA | Sig    |
| 822  | San Luis La Herradura | 5.14 | 0.0002 |
| 802  | El Rosario            | 3.42 | 0.0004 |
| 815  | San Pedro Masahuat    | 2.58 | 0.0064 |
| 1404   | Conchagua             | 2.16 | 0.0368 |
| 1408   | La Union              | 2.06 | 0.0408 |

Disaggregating further, Figure 16 and Table 6 report the same LISA map and top five municipalities, respectively, for femicides in 2013. Here the pattern is dramatically different. There is a set of three contiguous municipalities that constitute a high-violence cluster in the northern department of Chalatenango (code = 4), along the border with Honduras. There is another cluster core in the department of San Salvador, just north of the nation's capital, and a final cluster core in the southeastern department of La Union.

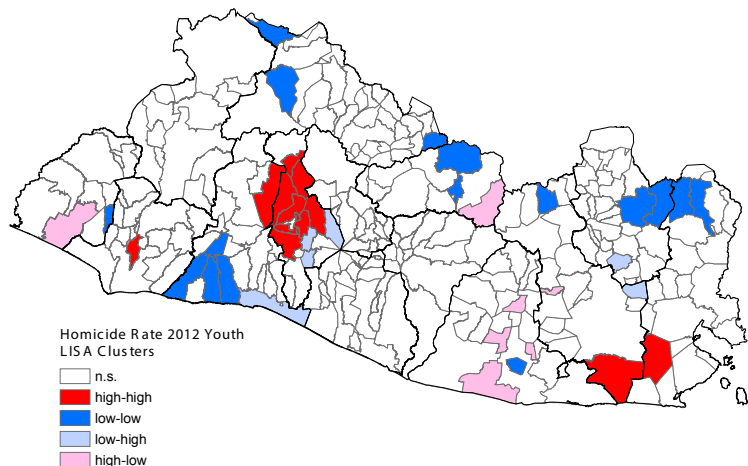
**Figure 16:** LISA Map of 2013 Homicide Rates, Women Only



Source: Authors' creation

| Table 6: Municipalities with Top 5 significant LISA values for 2013 Homicide Rates (women) |                         |      |        |
|--|-------------------------|------|--------|
| Code   | Municipality            | LISA | Sig    |
| 411  | La Laguna               | 6.75 | 0.0046 |
| 406  | Concepcion Quzaltepeque | 5.48 | 0.0116 |
| 432  | Santa Rita              | 4.20 | 0.0050 |
| 1404   | Conchagua               | 0.88 | 0.0440 |
| 609  | Nejapa                  | 0.62 | 0.0350 |

**Figure 17:** LISA Map of 2012 Homicide Rates, Youth Only



Source: Authors' Creation

| Table 7: Municipalities with top 5 significant LISA values for 2012 homicide rates (youth) |               |      |        |
|--|---------------|------|--------|
| Code   | Municipality  | LISA | Sig    |
| 309  | Nahulingo     | 7.52 | 0.0426 |
| 609  | Nejapa        | 2.32 | 0.0434 |
| 602  | Apopa         | 2.14 | 0.0038 |
| 618  | Tonacatepeque | 1.54 | 0.0282 |
| 601  | Aguilares     | 0.93 | 0.0438 |

Lastly, Figure 17 and Table 7 repeat the previous LISA cluster analysis for youth homicides in 2012. As was the case with femicides, the pattern is very different from the aggregate homicide rate or the rate for homicides of only men. The dominant result for youth homicides is that these homicides are heavily concentrated in and around the nation’s capital, covering much of the department of San Salvador, and extending into the neighboring departments of La Libertad to the west and Cuscatlán to the east. The municipality with the highest LISA value is in a different department Sonsonate (the single red municipality in the western part of the country; code = 3). However, all remaining municipalities in the top

five are in the department of San Salvador. The nation’s capital city, San Salvador, is not listed here but it is the eleventh highest LISA value, and is statistically significant (LISA value of 0.35, p-value of 0.0168).

**Results 2: Spatial Regression**

While a full explanatory analysis of the varieties of homicide in El Salvador is beyond the scope of this paper, we offer a summary of the results of one explanatory model of the aggregate measure of all homicides for 2013. Here, we leverage the theoretical discussion of explanatory factors outlined in a previous section, as well as the variables described in the Appendix.<sup>49</sup>

Four main results emerge from the analysis: (1) population size has the expected positive effect on homicide rates, (2) extreme poverty has an unexpected negative effect, (3) education has the expected negative effect, and (4) the spatial lag of homicide rates (i.e., the average homicide rate in any one unit’s neighbors) is positive and statistically significant, indicating that an increase in homicide in neighboring communities has the effect of increasing homicide in one’s home community. Specifically, a one percent increase in homicide rates in nearby communities causes a 1.26 percent increase in homicide in a focal community.

Notably, several variables that controlled for other explanations were not significant. Perhaps of most interest among these variables is a measure of police capacity, which captured elements of both personnel and expenditures per capita.<sup>50</sup> This variable was not statistically significant.

**Conclusions and Policy Implications**

This chapter has mapped homicide rates at the subnational level across all Central American countries, and then conducted exploratory and explanatory analyses of homicide rates using the tools of spatial analysis in three, increasingly focused geographical areas: Central America, the three countries of the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), and El Salvador. Taken together, the cluster analyses and spatial

<sup>49</sup> For more details on methods, see Ingram and Curtis, “Homicide in El Salvador’s Municipalities: Spatial Clusters and the Causal Role of Neighborhood Effects, Population Pressures, Poverty, and Education.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



regression generate the following conclusions.

**Level of analysis.** Analysts should consider differences in data at national, departmental, and municipal levels of analysis, along with the ways in which analysis of data at lower administrative levels can lead to richer interpretations and improved targeting of violence-reduction policies.

**Spatial clustering.** Various forms of homicide—aggregate, women only, men only, or youth only—cluster in non-random ways, i.e., these phenomena are not distributed randomly across Central America’s departments and provinces, or across El Salvador’s municipalities. Moreover, within El Salvador, each type of homicide follows a different pattern of geographic distribution. Aggregate homicide rates and homicides of men show similar patterns, with clusters of violence along coastal communities and in central communities north of the capital. Femicides are clustered primarily in a set of municipalities in the northern department of Chalatenango. Youth homicides cluster dramatically in and around the nation’s capital, especially to the north of the city, and extending into the northeastern part of the department of La Libertad and to the northwestern part of the department of Cuscatlán. These clustering patterns can also help target violence-reduction and violence-prevention policies.

**Explaining homicide rates: population pressures, poverty, education, and neighborhood effects.** Four main findings emerge from the explanatory analysis of homicide rates in El Salvador’s municipalities.

Population pressures, primarily in the form of population size, have an expected positive effect on homicide rates. As population increases, homicide rates increase.

Poverty has an unexpected, counterintuitive, negative relationship with homicide rates. That is, as poverty rates increase, homicide decreases. This finding cuts against a wide range of existing research supporting strain and anomic theories. One possible explanation follows the logic of alternative hypotheses regarding economic activity. Specifically, while economic activity is generally expected to have a negative relationship with homicide, some research has found a positive relationship, suggesting that as economic activity increases, people interact more frequently, and there are more opportunities or targets for crime and violence. Following this logic, as poverty deepens, there may be fewer opportunities or targets for crime and violence, resulting in the finding reported here.

The education finding reinforces much of the findings about the

protective effect of education found elsewhere in the literature, including in other countries in Latin America.<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, violence has a neighborhood effect. That is, violence in one municipality influences violence in neighboring municipalities. Specifically, a 1 percent increase in the homicide rates of nearby municipalities is associated with a 1.26 percent increase in the homicide rate of a focal municipality.

Notably, while the exploratory cluster analysis covered the entire region, and then supplemented the full regional analysis with other analysis of increasingly narrow geographic scope, the explanatory analysis was restricted to El Salvador. Still, the findings in El Salvador mirror similar findings elsewhere, especially regarding the protective effect of education.<sup>52</sup> Thus, though a full explanatory analysis awaits the construction of a more complete data set, the findings regarding clusters, education, and neighborhood effects are supported by similar findings elsewhere in Latin America.

Several policy implications derive from these conclusions. These are ordered to correspond with the conclusions above.

Policymakers should target violence prevention policies in a regional fashion, rather than targeting isolated communities. For instance, recalling the patterns from Figures 13 and 14, it is unlikely that a policy directed at isolated departments along the Guatemalan and Honduran border would succeed. Rather, violence-reduction and violence-prevention policies must target groups of departments in this area, even groups of departments across international borders. Similarly, combining the findings from the LISA map in Figure 17 with the findings from the spatial regression, it appears a policy aimed at reducing youth violence in the city of San Salvador is unlikely to succeed if this policy is aimed only at that one city, ignoring the violence in adjoining municipalities.

There is a high return on investments in education, even in comparison to short-term cost savings of hiring additional police.<sup>53</sup> This is perhaps

<sup>51</sup> For example, Ingram, “Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico’s Municipalities.”

<sup>52</sup> For an examination of homicide rates across Mexico’s municipalities, see Ingram, “Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico’s Municipalities.”

<sup>53</sup> Lochner and Moretti, “The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports,” 182–183.

particularly true given the results in El Salvador presented here, since there is strong evidence regarding the protective effect of education but no evidence of any beneficial effect of additional police personnel or additional police expenditures.

Policymakers should also take a longer-term view. Educational investment pays off in the short term by keeping youths in safe, productive, supervised environments, but it also pays off in manifold ways over the longer term as individuals with more education obtain better jobs and are less likely to risk the punitive sanctions of criminal behavior.

### Appendix: Data Notes

Violence is the outcome of interest and we measure this outcome several ways. First, for the analysis of all Central American countries, as well as the department-level analysis of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, homicide rates were measured in 2010 using data from a 2011 report by *La Prensa Grafica*, a Salvadoran newspaper.<sup>54</sup> This report consolidated information from police, non-governmental, and medical examiner sources for all Central American countries. Though the data are from different sources, such data have been shown to converge in other studies.<sup>55</sup> For the municipal-level analysis in El Salvador, five variables captured the outcome of interest: (1) aggregate homicide rates for 2013; (2) average homicide rates for 2012–13; (3) homicides in 2013, men only; (4) homicide rate in 2013, women only (femicides); and (5) homicides in 2012, youth only. All Salvadoran, municipal-level data are from El Salvador's Institute

of Forensic Medicine, or Instituto de Medicina Legal (IML).<sup>56</sup> Data reporting is uneven over time. The 2012 data was reported by municipality, but only disaggregated youth homicides, not the sex of the victim. The 2013 data reports homicides by municipality, but this time ignores youth homicides, and breaks down sex of victim. Taken together, the two years yield measures of overall homicide rates in 2012 and 2013, femicide rates in 2013, and youth homicide rates in 2012.<sup>57</sup>

To be sure, homicide rates provide an admittedly imperfect measure of violence in societies. However, more complete, comparative data on different types of violence are not available, and recent subnational data on homicide rates are difficult to obtain in many countries. Homicide rates have several methodological strengths, providing a metric that is generally available over time and across several subnational levels of government (e.g., departments and municipalities). Existing research also finds that other types of crimes track homicide rates.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, all else being equal, homicide is more comparable across countries, especially within a single region, as reported here, due to cross-national similarities in its legal definition, i.e., the intentional killing of one person by another. This comparability is harder to establish for other types of violent crime, which can have varying legal definitions across national and even subnational jurisdictions.

<sup>54</sup> *La Prensa Grafica Datos* (LPG Datos), “Homicidios en Centroamerica,” March 2011, <http://multimedia.laprensagrafica.com/pdf/2011/03/20110322-PDF-Informe-0311-Homicidios-en-Centroamerica.pdf>. This report consolidated statistics for 2010 from official statistics offices in all Central American countries.

<sup>55</sup> Marcelo F. Aebi, and Antonia Linde, “Is There a Crime Drop in Western Europe?,” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 16, no. 4 (2010): 251–277 (discussing a convergence between victimization surveys and police data for most crime types except rape); Gordon C. Barclay, “The Comparability of Data on Convictions and Sanctions: Are International Comparisons Possible?,” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 8, no. 1 (2000): 13–26 (showing a convergence between national police data and the European Sourcebook for homicide and other crime).

<sup>56</sup> Instituto de Medicina Legal (IML), “Homicidios consolidado año 2013 según base de datos del Instituto de Medicina Legal, cotejada y consensuada con la F.G.R. y la P.N.C.,” 2014, <http://www.transparencia.oj.gob.sv/portal/transparencia.php?opcion=13>; IML, “Homicidios del año 2012 total país según reconocimientos de médicos forenses y base consensuada entre FGR, IML y PNC,” 2013, <http://www.transparencia.oj.gob.sv/portal/transparencia.php?opcion=13>.

<sup>57</sup> Several duplicate municipalities appeared in the data. We deleted the duplicates, and in all cases kept the data for the municipality with the highest number of homicides in order to avoid underreporting. Duplicate municipalities included San Bartolome Perula (duplicate reported 1 homicide; kept the one reporting 4); San Francisco Menend. (2; kept one with 10); San Sebastian Salitr. (1; kept one with 11); and Santa Tecla (4; kept Nueva San Salvador, with 13).

<sup>58</sup> Scott Mainwaring, Timothy Scully, and Jorge Vargas Cullell, “Measuring Success in Democratic Governance,” in ed. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, *Democratic Governance in Latin America* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 31; John Bailey and Lucía Dammert, “Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas,” in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 7.

Independent variables in El Salvador include population size (logged), population density (population divided by the area of the municipality in square kilometers, logged), median age, percentage of the population that is male and between the ages of 15 and 30, percent of the population that is indigenous (logged), percent of the population that is rural (logged), percent of households headed by single women, per capita income (logged), general and extreme poverty rates, four measures of education level (adult literacy rate, adult illiteracy rate, percent of children ages 7-14 attending school, and percent of school-age children who were matriculated/enrolled in school), unemployment rate (logged), percent of the population age 15 and up that is economically active, and measures of police personnel and expenditures.

With the exception of data on population, poverty, and police, all independent variables are taken from the last official census in 2007 from El Salvador's national statistics office, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (DIGESTYC), and are measured at the municipal level. Population figures are from 2010 based off population projections from the 2007 Census. Poverty rates were obtained in DIGESTYC's series of nationally-representative household surveys in 2004 (*Las Encuestas de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples*; EPHM), which were the most recent. Data on police personnel and expenditures were obtained from the National Civil Police and covered the years 2004-08.<sup>59</sup> Following the armed conflict literature on state capacity, where military quality is measured as military expenditures divided by military personnel,<sup>60</sup> we measured police quality as police expenditures divided by the number of police personnel, and complemented this with a measure of expenditures per capita. Thus, using this data, we generated five individual measures of state security capacity: (1) average number of police officers per capita (logged); (2) average police expenditures per police officer (logged); (3) average police expenditures per capita (logged); (4) expenditures per police officer in the most recent year,

2008 (untransformed); and (5) expenditures per capita in 2008 (logged).<sup>61</sup> Lastly, we generated two composite measures from available data—one for education and one for security capacity. For education, the principal component was based on all four measures (eigenvalue = 3.29, explaining 82 percent of the variation of all four individual measures; one of the individual measures (percent attendance) loaded above 82 percent, and the rest of the individual measures had factor loadings above 92 percent). For security capacity, the principal component was based on all five measures of police personnel and expenditures (eigenvalue = 4.17, with 83 percent of variation explained; all variables had factor loadings above 0.88).

Shapefiles for the Central American region are from ESRI.<sup>62</sup> Two shapefiles for El Salvador facilitate the municipal-level analysis and mapping of data. Both were obtained from the national registry center, Centro Nacional de Registros.<sup>63</sup> The municipal shapefile used the Lambert NAD 27 projection, and the departmental shapefile used the WGS 1984 projection. The Lambert shapefile had no unidentified border zones (*zonas limitrofes*), but these zones were present in the WGS file. Thus, maps with both municipal and departmental units do not coincide exactly, though the unmatched areas have no data and are generally along the border with Honduras. Further, the Lambert shapefile contained 261 municipal units, while some data sets reported 262 units. The unit missing from the shapefile is Meanguera del Golfo (code 1410), an island in the Gulf of Fonseca off the southeastern coast of El Salvador, bordering Nicaragua and Honduras. Since there was also only sparse data for this unit, it was deleted and omitted from the analysis.

<sup>59</sup> Wilfredo José Díaz Gallegos, David Alexander Duque Machado, Aldo José Martínez Gómez, and Edwin Geovany Manguía Ayala, *Territorialización de las expresiones de violencia y del gasto público destinado a seguridad ciudadana: Policía Nacional Civil 2006-2008*, 2009, [http://www.uca.edu.sv/deptos/economia/media/archivo/849b10\\_territorializaciondelasexpresionesdeviolenciaydelgasto.pdf](http://www.uca.edu.sv/deptos/economia/media/archivo/849b10_territorializaciondelasexpresionesdeviolenciaydelgasto.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam III, "The Duration of Interstate Wars, 1816-1985," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 239-257.

<sup>61</sup> Nearly 34 municipalities had an average of zero expenditures budgeted to them and no officers assigned to them between 2004-2008. As such, the average expenditures per capita and per police officer, as well as police officers per capita, were also highly skewed. Additionally, 38 municipalities had zero expenditures budgeted from the National Civil Police. For these reasons, the logged transformation of these variables was used in the analysis.

<sup>62</sup> ArcGIS v10.1, ESRI Data and Maps, World Administrative Divisions.

<sup>63</sup> Available at <http://www.cnr.gob.sv> (last accessed July 7, 2014).



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## POLICY OPTIONS FOR FUTURE UNITED STATES SECURITY ASSISTANCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

ERIC L. OLSON

Faced with record levels of violence due, in large part, to elevated homicides rates, kidnapping, extortions, sexual and domestic violence the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras face the urgent need to adopt policies that will effectively reduce crime and violence, and enable them to develop into the thriving democracies of their aspirations. While each of these nations must lead the way to confronting the multiple causes of the violence afflicting their country, the United States also has both a strategic and humanitarian interest in addressing these problems. Failure to help address these challenges has already resulted in a regional crisis, significant pressures on Mexico, and a significant humanitarian crisis at the United States-Mexico border. Ignoring the security challenges in the Northern Triangle will simply exacerbate an already dramatic situation which could easily turn into a far greater crisis of un-governability and regime collapse that would pale in comparison with the current situation.

The fundamental question is whether the Northern Triangle countries are able to deal with these problems on their own or whether it will require significant and sustained support—financial, technical, and strategic—from the international community and especially the United States.

The security crises all three countries are facing are the result of both external and internal threat. The external threats posed by trafficking organizations have become more serious in recent years as the international drug trade has shifted. Nevertheless, the drug trade alone does not explain the kinds of problems the serious threats the region is experiencing. Historically weak institutions such as police and justice systems, and weak

regulatory capacity have been exploited by criminal groups—both domestic and international—to further cripple the state and, at times, render it complicit in the crime and violence afflicting their people. A policy of aggressive deportation of criminal by the United States further complicated the security landscape because receiving countries were poorly prepared to deal with the sudden return of thousands of young people with no real roots in their society and with a history of gang activity. It was easy for them to duplicate these criminal relationships in unfamiliar countries poorly equipped to respond.

Furthermore, the easy access to firearms from stockpiles left over from 1980s civil conflicts, and the abundance of firearms imported or smuggled into the Northern Triangle from the United States, Mexico, and Europe greatly exacerbates the level of violence and rates of mortality.

Finally, the steady and strong demand for illegal products—not just drugs, but exotic woods, precious metals and gems, petroleum products, and human labor (whether smuggled or trafficked) places the security crisis in the Northern Triangle in the broader context of illegal economies driven more by supply and demand than simply criminal individuals that need to be arrested and prosecuted. Together these factors provide convincing evidence that a multinational and multidimensional approach is needed to address Central America's security crisis, one that requires determined engagement by the nations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras themselves but cannot be successfully waged alone and in isolation.

But agreeing to work together, either multilaterally or bilaterally, using various approaches and entry points to address the challenges outlined above does not guarantee success. The United States and its Central American partners have been working on many of these same problems for years—in some instances since the mid-1980s, spending hundreds of millions with little to show for it. There are some glimmers of hope, of course, but these are mostly isolated, often fading quickly when a new government is elected and the commitment to a sustainable state policy is non-existent.

As we've tried to demonstrate in this report, the explanations for the lack of progress are multiple. Key factors highlighted include a misguided analysis of the factors contributing to the countries violence—focusing too narrowly on international drug trafficking and traditional eradication and interdiction programs that miss the broader context of crime and

violence in the region; the absence of an overall strategy to address this broader violence landscape; failure to prioritize among policy options; lack of a strong U.S. and host country commitment to governance reform and implementing the rule of a law even-handedly that could adversely affect the privileges of economic and political elites; and the lack of adequate transparency, dialogue with civil society, and, most importantly, the lack of adequate impact evaluations that would help modify—or reaffirm—the strategy based on empirical evidence.

Sadly, the human face of the multiple security challenges and policy shortcomings turns out to be the thousands of young children that have fled the Northern Triangle. The influx of nearly 70,000 unaccompanied alien children (UACs) and the U.S.-Mexico border since January 2014 is the latest tragic manifestation that current strategies and policies are not working. These children are fleeing primarily because of conditions in their neighborhoods and communities and the inability of their governments to guarantee their safety. While drugs—especially the retail market—is a factor, in is one among many and their flight can hardly be reduced to a discussion about international drug trafficking groups in Colombia and/or Mexico.

In this context, it is appropriate to ask what policy approaches are needed to avoid simply repeating the well-intentioned but largely ineffective policies of the past. The following include a number of steps and proposals the U.S. government should seek to advance and a number it should seek to avoid as its wrestles with these issues.

### **Lessons from the Past for U.S. Security Policy in Central America**

Given the opportunities, challenges and risks of the current security landscape in Central America's Northern Triangle, the United States could benefit from an honest review of past experiences in security assistance to avoid past mistakes and expand on the positives. The following are a series of “dos and don'ts” the United States might consider as they move forward.

**Counternarcotics efforts should not be the centerpiece of United States security policy in Central America.** Past experience in Latin America has shown that a narrow approach on drug eradication and interdiction

has enjoyed some short term success while spawning other longer-term problems. Colombia has experienced success in reducing the intensity of the internal armed struggle but limited success in reducing drug trafficking, and where success is evident drug production and trafficking has moved to neighboring countries. In Central America, trans-national drug trafficking is a factor in the region's increased violence but it is one of many historic and contemporary factors, and its relationship to the kinds of community level violence driving the migration of children is indirect and much more complex than often assumed.

International drug traffickers represent a serious challenge in some areas of the Northern Triangle and a focused law enforcement strategy for dealing with them must be developed, but drug policy in Central America—like in the United States—should not be limited eradication, interdiction and incarceration policies. The problems of growing consumption of illegal substances in Central America should be dealt with differently than trafficking networks. As U.S. Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Ambassador William Brownfield said at a press briefing in New York, “. . .whatever our approach and policy may be on legalization, decriminalization, de-penalization (of illegal substances), we all agree to combat and resist the criminal organizations – not those who buy, consume, but those who market and traffic the product for economic gain.<sup>1</sup>

The violence in Central America is predominately related to local criminal markets especially extortion, kidnapping, and local drug markets. Children and families are fleeing because conditions in their local neighborhoods have become so desperate.

**The United States should not spend more money without a clear strategy.**

The United States has a framework for addressing security concerns in Central America called the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). It includes many well intentioned projects, some better than others. But it lacks an overall strategic framework that sets priorities and ensures that programs are complementary rather than working at cross purposes. At present, CARSI is simply a series of initiatives and programs with funding

<sup>1</sup> “Trends in Global Drug Policy,” William R. Brownfield, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Statement at New York Foreign Press Center, October 9, 2014. <http://fpc.state.gov/232813.htm#VD1Vud9x8L0.twitter>

but not an effective strategy. While more resources are needed these should be tied to the articulation of an effective strategy that includes effective coordination and impact evaluations.

**Require impact evaluations for all U.S. security assistance programs.**

While evaluations are often part of U.S. assistance programs these evaluations often measure the wrong thing. They measure inputs – like how many police or prosecutors have been trained—rather than measuring outcomes—like whether an initiative has resulted in some tangible change. Training alone is insufficient to turn the tide against corruption and criminal networks operating within government institutions. Aggressive anti-corruption and prosecution strategies are more immediately important. Traditional counter-narcotics measurements such as drug seizures and arrests are ineffective indicators of success when it comes to reducing crime and violence. Seizures are helpful indicators of where drugs are flowing but they do not provide an indicator of success for overall supply or demand for illegal drugs. Large numbers of arrests do not mean crime and violence will decrease since prisons are often incubator for criminal activity and many youth caught up in mass arrests are introduced to criminal activity while in severely overcrowded and inhuman prisons. Furthermore, mass arrests, severe prisons overcrowding, elevated rates of pre-trial detention are indicators of a dysfunctional justice system incapable of holding criminals accountable.

**Security does not depend solely on law enforcement activities.**

Police and prosecutors have an important role to play but it should be targeted and specific, not broad and generalized. Increasing the size of security forces and better equipping them can be important but building trust between police and community should be a priority. Furthermore, increasing police presence and patrols can be reassuring but will not have a lasting impact on crime. Additionally, putting more people in already overcrowded jails is not the answer. A well-coordinated and balanced program that includes both crime suppression and prevention is essential. Neither the United States nor Central America can arrest their way out of this problem.

## **The Agenda Going Forward: Reduce Violence, Fight Corruption, Build Capacity, and Integrate Economic Opportunity.**

The United States already has a program—the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)—to address many of the same issues driving today’s migration. The United States has been funding some of these same programs—rule of law promotion, police professionalization, and poverty reduction—in Central America for decades. Why, then, are we still experiencing the kinds of migration and dysfunctional state institutions that existed in the 1980s?

The answer is one of focus and prioritization. There are many good ideas and programs but the focus has been misdirected. To be successful the United States must prioritize its interventions in Central America, focusing like a laser on the following:

**Reduce violence, build community resilience.** United States efforts must focus on reducing the kinds of community level violence that is driving migration. This means pursuing community oriented programs in policing, crime and violence prevention, and promoting educational and economic opportunities that are attuned to the specific needs of the community. Focusing on local gangs and efforts to end extortions is central to this strategy.

**Tie new United States resources to progress in meeting specific mutually agreed upon targets for reducing violence.** The Northern Triangle’s security challenges are enormous so additional resources are urgently needed. But existing and future new U.S. security assistance should be repackaged within a negotiated strategic framework that sets specific targets and actions designed to reduce violence. These actions should include both targeted law enforcement efforts and prevention programs in the most violent communities. A robust and comprehensive impact evaluation process should be part of the endeavor with new resources made available when there is evidence of progress in meeting target outcomes. The agreed upon outcomes, actions taken, and results of impact evaluations should be made public to increase accountability and forge a partnership with civil society.

**Name a high-level coordinator or special envoy for U.S. security programs** to ensure that a strategy is fully articulated and, more importantly, successfully carried out. This person should have the capacity to alter course and redirect resources (in consultation with Congress) when impact evaluations suggest programs are not being successful. At times the United States lacks the partners in the region to accomplish its goals. Political and economic elite often lack the political will to carry out difficult reforms, so the high-level coordinator should be senior enough to press for reforms and should have the authority to hold back assistance when the political commitment to implement needed and previously agreed to program is not there.

**Increase and expand prevention programs in targeted high crime areas.** The evidence is mounting that crime and violence prevention programs can reduce crime and improve community resilience. These programs should be expanded geographically to include more neighborhoods, and the focus expanded beyond at-risk youth to include interventions with criminally active youth. Many experiences and studies in the United States have demonstrated that it is possible to work with gang members and move them toward less criminal, less violent activity.

**Fight corruption.** Building effective and professional police, prosecutors, and courts in the region is essential if Central American countries are to successfully resist crime on their own with minimal U.S. assistance. But the United States has been engaged in efforts to reform and strengthen these institutions in Central America for years, even decades. These efforts have failed for a variety of reasons including insufficient commitment from the economic and political elites in partner nations to tackle the problems of corruption and accountability. Instead, U.S. programs have focused too narrowly on training, equipment, and infrastructure, not on fighting corruption.

**Prioritize anti-corruption efforts by strengthening mechanisms of transparency and accountability,** supporting efforts to investigate and hold government officials accountable, and encourage not only vetting of law enforcement forces, but purging and prosecuting those engaged in corruption and criminal activities. Improved crime statistics and analysis,

information on prison overcrowding and pre-trial detentions, prosecutions, and disposition of cases are essential to determining if security efforts are being successful. Failure to do so will undermine the public's already low confidence in state institutions and weaken other well-intentioned and well-designed programs.

**Empower Civil Society.** When corruption is elevated and governments are unwilling to make the tough decisions to hold people accountable, the United States should encourage civil society organizations to play that role and open spaces for policy debate with civil society. Civil society organizations can monitor government programs and report on progress. The United States should also do more to encourage and nurture independent investigative journalism. Freedoms of expression and access to information are the essential building blocks of democracy so must be a priority in the U.S. strategy.

**Make social investments and economic opportunity part of the security strategy.** With the exception of El Salvador, which participates in the Partnership for Growth (PFG) program, the CARSI program does not include a social investment and economic development component. There is ample evidence that investments in education (Ingram and Curtis) and job training can have a protective effect on communities and enable them to better resist crime. Additionally, rapid population—often the result of rural-urban migration—can destabilize communities and increase the chances of community level violence. The United States should consider increasing the kinds of targeted social investments and economic development programs to both rural and urban communities that will help stabilize those communities and offer new hope for to roughly 2 million Central American young people who don't work and don't study.



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