



Understanding and addressing youth in “gangs” in Mexico

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Brief Project Description

This Working Paper is the product of a joint project on civic engagement and public security in Mexico coordinated by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Justice in Mexico Project at the University of San Diego. As part of the project, a number of research papers have been commissioned that analyze the range of civic engagement experiences taking place in Mexico to strengthen the rule of law and increase security in the face of organized crime violence. Together the commissioned papers will form the basis of a future edited volume. All papers, along with other background information and analysis, can be accessed online at the Mexico Institute's webpage and are copyrighted to the author.

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Introduction

Academic and policy analysts have identified Mexican street gangs as a potential looming security threat as Mexico continues its struggle against large drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).¹ However, interviews for this project indicated that a security-centric lens on “gangs” only exacerbates youth involvement in gangs, while “social integration” and/or human rights approaches are more effective and less costly.²

There is a surprising dearth of scholarly literature on youth gangs in Mexico, particularly in the English language.³ The Mexican government has released few reports on the issue and has little in the way of descriptive statistics on the gang phenomenon in Mexico because it fails to gather systematic information.⁴ Like the early iterations of the Merida Initiative, the Mexican government’s response to gangs has been security-centric. However, research in Mexico for this report indicated that the gang phenomenon in Mexico is incredibly diverse, not easily categorized and would be more cost-effectively addressed through a “social policy” approach.⁵ Indeed, even the word gang or “*pandilla*” brings with it connotations that lead to false understandings and

¹ Eduardo Guerrero Gutierrez, “Nexos - Pandillas y Cárteles: La Gran Alianza,” Nexos, January 6, 2010, <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?P=leerarticulo&Article=73224>; Patrick Corcoran, “Street Gangs to Replace Cartels as Drivers of Mexico’s Violence,” Insight Crime, January 18, 2012, <http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2097-street-gangs-to-replace-cartels-as-drivers-of-mexicos-violence>; Patrick Corcoran, “Mexico Report Tackles Kidnapping-Drug Trafficking Nexus,” July 30, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2962-mexico-report-tackles-kidnapping-drug-trafficking-nexus>.

² Gerardo Sauri, Interview with Gerardo Sauri of the Mexico City Commission on Human Rights, interview by Nathan Jones, in-person, October 16, 2012; Hector Castillo Berthier, Interview of Professor Hector Castillo Berthier General Director of the Circo Volador Program., In person Mexico City, October 17, 2012; Manuel Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas, interview by Nathan Jones, face to face, October 17, 2012.

³ Some Mexican scholars have addressed the issue. A.N. José Manuel Valenzuela Arce and R.R.C. Domínguez, “Las Maras. Identidades Juveniles Al Límite.” Colección Estudios (2007).

⁴ A notable exception to this dearth of information on gangs in Mexico was published during the writing phase of this report. See Emilio Daniel Cunjama Lopez, Alma Eunice Rendon Cardenas, and Martin Iniguez Ramos, *Pandillas En El Siglo XXI: El Reto de Su Inclusion En El Desarrollo Nacional*, ed. Balcazar Villareal (Mexico: Secretaria de Seguridad Publica Federal, 2012).

⁵ Sauri, Interview with Gerardo Sauri of the Mexico City Commission on Human Rights.

counterproductive policies.⁶ This lack of information about this diverse youth gang phenomenon makes further analysis on this issue all the more necessary.

This report seeks to (1) understand and define the gang issue in Mexico, (2) establish the regional histories and sociologies of what is known about these gangs, (3) understand the causes of youth gang involvement, (4) briefly describe U.S.-Mexico bilateral efforts on youth gang prevention via the Merida Initiative, (5) identify a sampling of existing civil society groups and programs geared specifically toward addressing youth gangs in Mexico and Central America, and (6) provide policy recommendations for the U.S. and Mexican governments on how to best support civil society and strengthen relevant state institutions.

There are numerous programs and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in Mexico that are addressing youth gang involvement. This report profiles three government supported NGOs operating in Mexico with strong indications of success, *Youth Work: Mexico* (International Youth Foundation), *Circo Volador* and *Cauce Ciudadano*. To manage youth gang involvement, the Mexican government's primary goal should be to "scale up" these types of programs and address areas of weak governance that allow gangs to flourish.

Methods:

For this project the author conducted in-depth interviews with scholars such as Hector Castillo Berthier, government officials such as Gerardo Sauri of the Commission on Human Rights in Mexico City, civil society representatives who work with at risk-youth in Mexico such as the head of the *Circo Volador* program, and graduate students such as Manuel Balcazar who conducted fieldwork on *maras* in Chiapas. Their insights provided an invaluable context for archival research

⁶ Ibid.; Director Circo Volador Program Mexico City, Interview with Director Circo Volador Program, interview by Nathan Jones, October 17, 2012.

that included Mexican government and NGO reports, presentations from the Mexican Attorney General's office, news reports and scholarly books and articles. The project drew upon the author's previous academic research and fieldwork on Mexican drug trafficking networks in Mexico City, Tijuana, Guadalajara, and elsewhere.

I. Youth in Street Gangs in Mexico

There is significant regional variation in street gangs in Mexico. Categorizing them is difficult, but given the context of sophisticated organized crime violence in Mexico, it is important to make distinctions between organized crime and largely youth based street gangs and understand the history of gangs in the region, including the United States and Central America. Before we can delve into the histories and sociologies of youth gangs in Mexico we must establish a working definition of this highly "fluid" concept.⁷

Gang Definitions

In a recent report, the Organization of American States "eclectically" defines youth gangs as:

...a spontaneous effort by children and young people to create, where it does not exist, an urban space in society that is adapted to their needs, where they can exercise the rights that their families, government, and communities do not offer them. Arising out of extreme poverty, exclusion, and a lack of opportunities, gangs try to gain their rights and meet their needs by organizing themselves without supervision and developing their own rules, and by securing for themselves a territory and a set of symbols that gives meaning to their membership in the group. This endeavor to exercise their citizenship is, in many cases, a violation of their own and others' rights, and frequently generates violence and crime in a vicious circle that perpetuates their original exclusion. This is why they cannot

⁷ James C. Howell, "Youth Gangs: An Overview" (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, August 1998); Phelan Wyrick, "Gang Prevention: How to Make the 'Front End' of Your Anti-Gang Effort Work," United States Attorney's Bulletin 54, no. 3 (May 2006), <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Front-End.pdf>.

reverse the situation that they were born into. Since it is primarily a male phenomenon, female gang members suffer more intensively from gender discrimination and the inequalities inherent in the dominant culture.⁸

This definition is useful for its subtlety and its view of youth in street gangs through a human rights lens instead of a purely security centric lens. Security centric views of gangs can increase social stigmatization and thereby serve to exacerbate social marginalization. The academic literature on gangs identifies social and cultural marginalization as a primary cause of gang inception and individual gang involvement.⁹

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice programs, provides another useful definition youth gangs, which helps to exclude other criminal actors.

A group must be involved in a pattern of criminal acts to be considered a youth gang. These groups are typically composed only of juveniles, but may include young adults in their membership. Prison gangs, ideological gangs, hate groups, and motorcycle gangs are not included. Likewise, gangs whose membership is restricted to adults and that do not have the characteristics of youth gangs are excluded.¹⁰

Spanish media often refers to gangs as “*pandillas*” or “*maras*” interchangeably. Those that distinguish between the two terms usually point to the transnational and more recent character of Central American *Maras* versus the local character of *pandillas*.¹¹ This term along with *pandillero*, or gang member, have stigmatizing negative social connotations. Thus, human rights advocates

⁸ DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF GANGS: Executive Summary (Department of Public Security, Organization of American States; 1889 F Street 8th F, Washington D.C. 20006, USA: Department of Public Security of the Organization of American States, June 2007), <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2010/CP24469E-4.pdf>.

⁹ James C. Howell and Moore, “History of Street Gangs in the United States” (National Gang Center Bulletin, May 2010), <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/History-of-Street-Gangs.pdf>; J.M.V. Arce, A.N. Domínguez, and R.R. Cruz, *Las Maras: Identidades Juveniles Al Límite* (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2007).

¹⁰ Howell, “Youth Gangs: An Overview.”

¹¹ Clare Ribaldo, “Gangs in Central America” (Congressional Research Service, 2009), 3–4.

tend to prefer the term “youth groups” or “*grupos juveniles*.”¹²

Within youth gangs are smaller cliques or “*clicas*,” which are loosely affiliated with larger gangs and help to account for their “horizontal” and “leaderless” character.¹³ A 2007 Organization of American States (OAS) report on gangs provides a useful distinction between youth gangs and youth groups: “gangs differ from other juvenile relational models in that they have clearly defined fixed and drastic internal rules whose breach can entail punishments that may even result in death.”¹⁴ The report goes on to describe how gangs are “basically [an] urban” phenomenon, and thrive on conflict with state institutions, civil society and other gangs. This increased rivalry and sense of being different from the rest of society helps to consolidate gang identity; distinguishing them from other youth groups.¹⁵

The OAS report provides a useful typology of gangs that includes 5 gang categories: (1) “scavenger (short-lived) gangs,” (2) “transgressor” or “youth gangs,” (3) “violent gangs,” (4) “criminal gangs” and (5) “female gangs,” which it identifies as severely understudied.¹⁶ An example of scavenger gangs are school gangs, which are “small to medium sized (15-40 members)” and engage in minor criminal acts “within and around their neighborhood and school.” “Transgressor or youth gangs” tend to be larger with “40-80 members” and are engaged in constant protection of their neighborhood from rival gangs. They tend to be more hierarchical and have “ranking standards” and “initiation rites.” “Violent gangs” tend to be large having “100-500 members” and are considered the second stage of gang evolution. They control broader territory dominating neighborhoods through cliques. Criminal gangs, which have between 50 and 200

¹² José Manuel Valenzuela Arce and Domínguez, “Las Maras. Identidades Juveniles Al Límite.”; Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas; Castillo Berthier, Interview of Professor Hector Castillo Berthier General Director of the Circo Volador Program.

¹³ Clare Ribaldo Seelke, “Gangs in Central America” (Congressional Research Service, 2009).

¹⁴ DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF GANGS: Executive Summary, 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF GANGS: Executive Summary.

members, are considered a third stage of gang evolution because they engage in more complex criminal activities. Transnational *maras* with a presence in southern Mexico are an example of this gang type.¹⁷

Gangs not “Cartels”

Given the context of drug related organized crime violence in Mexico, it is important to distinguish between youth gangs and “cartels” more appropriately referred to as drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) or organized crime groups (OCGs) given their inability to control prices.¹⁸ Youth gangs sometimes referred to as street gangs typically control local turf for extortion and drug distribution. They engage in less profitable criminal activities than larger more sophisticated organized crime groups that focus on drug and arms trafficking and are more geographically dispersed.¹⁹ The youth gang literature also identifies lower levels of hierarchy in youth gangs than in drug trafficking organizations as a distinguishing factor.²⁰

Much has been made about the potential alliance between cartels and street gangs. While gangs and organized crime often share common members, most Mexican gangs do not have extensive transnational connections or connections to large Mexican DTOs. One 2009 report on gangs in Monterrey estimated that there were more than 1,600 youth gangs in the metropolitan area and only 20 of those were involved in retail drug sales.²¹ In Monterrey, for example, it is argued that

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Colleen W. Cook, C.R.S Report For Congress: Mexico’s Drug Cartels (Congress: Congressional Research Services, December 10, 2007), www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34215.pdf.

¹⁹ Steven Dudley, Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: Its Evolution and Role in International Migration, The Regional Migration Study Group (Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute and the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, November 2012), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/RMSG-TransnationalCrime.pdf>.

²⁰ Ribaldo, “Gangs in Central America,” 3.

²¹ Salvador Frausto Crotte, “Pandillas de Nuevo León - El Universal - Sociedad,” March 2, 2009, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/sociedad/2138.html>.

the *Zetas* control local street gangs, but the degree and extent of that control is unknown.²² Also, the presence of the *Zetas* appears to be weakening in the city according to a new report from Southern Pulse that suggests that the Gulf Cartel now controls three-quarters of Monterrey.²³ This may help to delink the gangs and organized crime in the city because the Gulf Cartel is known more for trafficking rather than extortion and kidnapping emphasis of the *Zetas*.²⁴

Loose “Alliances?”

It should be noted that some youth gangs like *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) have been reported to form alliances with DTOs such as Los *Zetas*. Central American *maras* also have established relations with prison gangs, e.g. *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) has a historic affiliation with the Mexican Mafia or *La Eme* prison gang. The nature and extent of these alliances is hotly debated. Most analysts believe that the relations are ad-hoc and operate on an as-needed basis motivated by profit. Recent reports also indicate that *Mara Salvatrucha* and other gangs prey upon Central American migrants on their way to the U.S. through Mexico through kidnapping, extortion or by providing information on the migrants to larger criminal organizations.²⁵ There are also reports that Los *Zetas* are heavily involved in human trafficking along these routes,²⁶ providing circumstantial evidence of ad hoc cooperation on these shared profit schemes.

II. Regional Gang Variation

Gang structures and sociologies *generally* vary by region in Mexico. Southern Mexican states such as Chiapas and Oaxaca have a significant Central American *mara* presence, while Northern

²² SGF, “‘Zetas’ Usan a Pandillas Para Extender Su Control - El Universal - México,” May 8, 2010, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/678889.html>.

²³ Steven Dudley, “Two Mexico Cartel Rivals, Once Reeling, Now Resurging - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Américas,” February 3, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/2-mexico-cartels-once-reeling-now-resurging>.

²⁴ Nathan Jones, “The State Reaction: A Theory of Illicit Network Resilience” (Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2011).

²⁵ Dudley, *Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: Its Evolution and Role in International Migration*, 13.

²⁶ Dudley, *Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: Its Evolution and Role in International Migration*.

Mexican gangs are heavily influenced and in some cases cross-fertilized by U.S. gangs. Central Mexican gangs tend to be characterized as “youth groups” often times with minimal criminal activity. It should be noted that these are generalizations based on region and the various gang types may be found beyond these generalized descriptions, e.g. Mexican government reports mention the presence of MS-13, a Central American *maras*, in 20 of 32 Mexican states.²⁷

Southern Mexico and the *Maras*

Some scholars such as Max Manwaring²⁸ and policy makers now argue that transnational street-gangs known as *Maras* threaten the sovereignty of Central American nations.²⁹ Many Central Americans migrated to the United States during the civil wars of the 1980s and 1990s. In some cases they went as children without family structures. When these new immigrants arrived in the United States existing Mexican street gangs rejected them.³⁰ Some of these immigrants banded together to form street gangs for protection. The most famous of these gangs is *Mara Salvatrucha*, also known as MS-13. Many of the members of these gangs were eventually deported back to Central America. Once in their home countries the deportees reformed gangs, which would become the first “super-gangs,” or transnational street gangs. These gangs are now highly dispersed and victimize society through crimes like kidnapping, extortion and gang-related homicides.³¹

According to a Mexican Attorney General’s Office (PGR) presentation to the Organization

²⁷ PGR, “MEDIDAS DE ACCIÓN Y PREVENCIÓN CONTRA EL FENÓMENO DE LAS PANDILLAS EN MÉXICO,” March 2010, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCoQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fscm.oas.org%2Fpdfs%2F2010%2FCP23852-9.ppt&ei=RFaJUKaUF6TC2wXe3ICYCg&usg=AFQjCNEOpXkIds3kRjQAZ_eNa9-eTcqj6g&sig2=_qaH-W9WWhhsjktFSCXKdA.

²⁸ Max G. Manwaring, “A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Trafficking Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica and Brazil,” Strategic Studies Institute December 2007 (2007): 59.

²⁹ A. Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” Foreign Aff. 84 (2005): 98; Manwaring, “A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Trafficking Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica and Brazil.”

³⁰ Howell and Moore, “History of Street Gangs in the United States.”

³¹ Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” 2005.

of American States (OAS) in January 2010, Central American *maras* such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 are present in 20 of 32 Mexican states primarily along the southern border with Guatemala.³² The degree of the presence varies by locale. Interviews indicated that *mara* presence is heaviest in the southern state of Chiapas where Central American *mara* members are likely to flee to avoid the *mano dura* or “strong hand” policies of Central American governments.³³ *Maras* in southern Mexico are largely urban phenomenon with a “symbolic presence” in rural areas having to do with the fact that they are pushed out of urban centers. This makes targeting urban centers for youth programs all the more advantageous.³⁴

Central American governments beginning in 2003 implemented *mano dura* or “iron fist” policy responses.³⁵ The strategies involved “zero-tolerance” practices of arresting tattooed or suspected *mara* members without due process of law and holding them for up to twelve years at a time on the suspicion of gang membership. The strategy was “incarceration heavy” and may also have included extrajudicial killings. While they initially appeared to improve security, the strategies resulted in overflowing prisons leading to riots and the release of many gang members for lack of evidence.³⁶ The policies also led to retaliatory violence from *maras* and increased social marginalization, which prevented their “reform and ultimately meaningful reintegration into society.”³⁷ It became clear to Central American governments that arrest and imprisonment alone

³² PGR, “MEDIDAS DE ACCIÓN Y PREVENCIÓN CONTRA EL FENÓMENO DE LAS PANDILLAS EN MÉXICO.”

³³ *Mano Dura* or “Iron Fist” policies were established in El Salvador (2003) and other Central American countries. These policies were characterized by “zero tolerance” of gangs and gang members. Gang members could be arrested for tattoos or “flashing signs” and specialized anti-gang police units were established. The policies typically stigmatized the gang members and the specialized units were accused of human rights violations.

Balcazar, Interview on *Maras* in Chiapas; M. Hume, “Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs,” *Development in Practice* 17, no. 6 (2007): 1.

³⁴ Balcazar, Interview on *Maras* in Chiapas.

³⁵ Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” 2005; Ana Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 2005, sec. International, http://www.nytimes.com/cfr/international/20050501faessay84310_arana.html.

³⁶ Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” June 7, 2005.

³⁷ A. Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” *Foreign Aff.* 84 (2005): 98; Oliver Jütersonke, Robert

could not solve the problem and alternative social programs were necessary to divert youth from *maras*.³⁸ Due to these criticisms Central American governments shifted to *Mano Extendida* (extended hand) and *Mano Amiga* (friendly hand) policies, which tend to focus on alternatives and incentives instead of purely punitive measures.³⁹ Evidence of the effectiveness of these programs is difficult to find, as is evidence of their ineffectiveness.⁴⁰ This stems from the piecemeal nature of their implementation and rising regional violence as a confounding variable. Indeed, the northern triangle countries of Central America (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala) now have some of the highest homicide rates in the world.⁴¹

U.S. and Central American gangs tend to draw a large portion of attention in Mexican media and government reports. This may have to do with their established structures, reputations for violence, ease of identification and the tendency of media and government to focus on potential national and transnational security threats. Indeed, some are establishing relationships with large sophisticated Mexican “cartels,” further blurring distinctions between youth gangs and sophisticated transnational drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).⁴² In contrast, there are thousands of small youth gangs and youth groups in Mexico that are not so easily characterized and have no connection to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). Treating these groups with the same security-centric focus could be counterproductive, serving to disenfranchise young people through police

Muggah, and Dennis Rodgers, “Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security Interventions in Central America,” *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 4–5 (2009): 373–397.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Oliver Jütersonke, Robert Muggah, and Dennis Rodgers, “Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security Interventions in Central America,” *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 4–5 (2009): 373–397.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Angela Me, Enrico Bisignos, and Steven Malby, 2011 Global Study on Homicide: Trends, Contexts, Data. (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

⁴² Diana Washington Valdez, “Zetas Cartel -Mara Salvatruchas Alliance in Mexico Unites Brutal Gangs - El Paso Times,” April 15, 2012, http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_20399497/alliance-unites-brutal-gangs.

repression.⁴³

Gangs in Northern Mexico

Northern Mexican gangs are heavily influenced and structurally modeled on U.S. street gangs. These include gangs that formed in the United States border region and are present in Mexico such as, *Barrio Azteca*, which formed in El Paso and has a strong presence in Ciudad Juarez. Also included are prison gangs like the Mexican Mafia, also known as *La Eme*. The Mexican Mafia is a highly sophisticated U.S.-based prison gang, which taxes and exerts authority over the majority of southern California Latino street gangs.⁴⁴ The Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR) has identified it as having a presence in Mexico. Given its business-oriented nature and connections to highly profitable drug trafficking organizations, this "presence" likely consists of intermediaries between prison gangs and Mexican DTOs designed to facilitate the flow of drugs into the highly profitable U.S. consumer market.⁴⁵ In reality *La Eme* is not a youth gang, but a sophisticated organized crime group.

Numerous U.S. street gangs have a significant presence in Mexico, particularly in the northern border region. Examples include collaboration between the Barrio Logan gang (San Diego) and the Arellano Felix Organization (Tijuana Cartel) and the alliance of the Carillo Fuentes Organization (CFO) and the El Paso-based *Barrio Azteca*.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sauri, Interview with Garardo Sauri of the Mexico City Commission on Human Rights; Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas.

⁴⁴ D. Skarbek, "Governance and Prison Gangs," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 4 (2011): 1–15; D. Skarbek, "Prison Gangs, Norms, and Organizations," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 82, no. 1 (2012): 96–109.

⁴⁵ Andrea, FBI Informant Details Mexican Mafia's Control Over Prisons - San Diego News Story - KGTV San Diego, February 9, 2010, <http://www.10news.com/news/22516591/detail.html>.

⁴⁶ William Booth, "U.S. to Embed Agents in Mexican Law Enforcement Units Battling Cartels in Juarez," *Washington Post*, February 24, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/23/AR2010022305560_pf.html; William Booth, "Mexican Azteca Gang Leader Arrested in Killings of 3 Tied to U.S. Consulate" *Washington Post*, March 29, 2010, accessed May 2, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/29/AR2010032903373.html>; Washington Valdez,

When the Arellano Felix brothers (Tijuana Cartel) found themselves in conflict with Chapo Guzman of the Sinaloa cartel they relied on David Barron Corona, one of their bodyguards, to recruit from his San Diego based Barrio Logan street gang and *La Eme* (Mexican Mafia) prison gang to build their enforcer squads.⁴⁷ Over time the enforcers for the Tijuana cartel who were also members of *La Eme* and Barrio Logan grew in number; thus institutionalizing the relationship.⁴⁸

Barrio Azteca began as a street gang in El Paso Texas and expanded into its sister city Ciudad Juarez. It also became an important prison gang. During the conflict between the Juarez Cartel (CFO) and the Sinaloa cartel beginning in 2008, *Barrio Azteca* played an important role fighting with the Juarez cartel. Likewise, the Sinaloa cartel utilized the *Artistas Asesinos* and the *Mexicles* to counter the Juarez cartel and *Barrio Azteca*.⁴⁹ Gangs such as *Barrio Azteca* are known for their sophistication in terms of the type of weapons they sometimes utilize and their use of the Nahuatl language to encrypt communications to avoid law enforcement detection.⁵⁰

Not every gang in northern Mexico has a strong connection to U.S. gangs nor are they as dangerous. Indeed a 2010 report by Mexico's Secretary of Public Security argued that most gangs in Baja California were not as dangerous as their U.S. counterparts and were principally dedicated to

"Zetas Cartel -Mara Salvatruchas Alliance in Mexico Unites Brutal Gangs " El Paso Times, April 15, 2012; Robert Caldwell, "Cartel Secrets," San Diego Union Tribune, 2007,

http://www.uniontrib.com/uniontrib/20070701/news_lz1e1cartel.html; Solomon Moore, "War Without Borders: How U.S. Became Stage for Mexican Drug Feud," NY Times, 2009,

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/09/us/09border.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print; Doug Farah, "Cartel Hires Mercenaries To Train Security Forces," Washington Post, 1997,

http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T8020454561&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T8020454564&cisb=22_T8020454563&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8075&docNo=1; Sandra Dibble, "Split Within Arellano Félix Cartel Leads to More Violence," San Diego Union Tribune, January 4, 2009, accessed September 7, 2009,

<http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/jan/04/n52766113653-arellano-f233lix-drug-cartel-split-sm/>; Jones, "The State Reaction: A Theory of Illicit Network Resilience."

⁴⁷ DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION LECTURE SERIES: HARROD, SCHARF AND ZIEGLAR (Justice, Department of: DEA, 2008), http://www.deamuseum.org/transcripts/Harrod_Scharf.pdf.

⁴⁸ Jones, "The State Reaction: A Theory of Illicit Network Resilience."

⁴⁹ Washington Valdez, "Zetas Cartel -Mara Salvatruchas Alliance in Mexico Unites Brutal Gangs - El Paso Times."

⁵⁰ Alexander Meneghini, "Barrio Azteca, Más Poderosos Que Zetas - Grupo Milenio," March 17, 2010, <http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/562a77fdb11ec7137554a9298b48a835>; Veronica Sanchez, "Liga PGR a Narco Con 214 Pandillas," abril 2010, <http://www.reforma.com/nacional/articulo/550/1099846/?grcidorigen=2>.

graffiti.⁵¹

Gangs in Central Mexico

Mexico has low-level youth gangs with minimal criminal activities. Indeed, these low criminality groups may be the largest part of the so-called “gang” problem, a term that may do more harm than good. Central Mexican Gang sociology differs greatly from that of U.S. gangs. Due to the drug consumption market in the United States, gang membership is often an occupation that entails working in drug sales and protecting “turf” for the purposes of drug sales.⁵² In Mexico drug consumption has not been high—though this appears to be changing—thus Mexican youth gang members often have had to seek legitimate employment or engage in other petty crimes to sustain themselves and their families.⁵³ Expert interviews in Mexico indicated that the number of gang members presently involved in retail drug sales and enforcement was a very small proportion of the overall membership (3-4%), even in *colonias* or neighborhoods where both gangs and drug sales are present.⁵⁴

“Youth groups” with common identifiers, but very loose connections are particularly relevant in Central Mexico. For example, *Reggaetoneros* in Mexico City are sometimes referred to as “gangs.” In reality their only connections are their love of *reggaeton* music, associated dance, fashion, occasional vandalism and confrontations with police they view as repressive to their ostensibly legal activities.⁵⁵ This category is not limited to *reggaetoneros*, but includes *Los*

⁵¹ Pandillas: Análisis de Su Presencia En Territorio Nacional (SSP, Agosto 2010), <http://www.ssp.gob.mx/portalWebApp/ShowBinary?nodeId=/BEA%20Repository/1214175//archivo>.

⁵² Jose Manuel Valenzuela Arce, Interview on the sociology of gangs in Tijuana versus the United States, February 2011.

⁵³ “Growing Drug Abuse in Mexico Adds to Crime and Violence -- Frontera Norte Sur,” Mexidata.info, February 1, 2010, <http://mexidata.info/id2541.html>; Sylvia Longmire, “Mexico’s Rising Drug Use and Addiction - Who Is to Blame?,” October 12, 2009, <http://mexidata.info/id2430.html>.

⁵⁴ Director Circo Volador Program Mexico City, Interview with Director Circo Volador Program.

⁵⁵ Gabriel Stargardter, “Mexico Shudders at Rise of Rebellious Reggaetoneros,” Reuters, August 20, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/20/entertainment-us-mexico-reggaetoneros-idUSBRE87J0JH20120820>.

darketos or “goths,” *Los Emos*, *Los Punketos*, etc.⁵⁶ These groups are included here because they are the social groupings that may be most prone to gang involvement or conflated with gangs. These groups are also the most easily prevented from joining gangs through cost-effective preventive action by the state and civil society. Further, the same development programs that are likely to reduce *mara* and northern Mexican street gang involvement are likely to benefit these groups as well.

The term “*Banda*” was used to describe these youth groups in Mexico City in the 1980’s. Many members of so called *bandas* were excluded from work and school—essentially giving them what is now described as *nini* status (the so called *ninis* are those who neither work nor attend school: “*ni trabajan, ni estudian*”)—and were subject to extortion from local police. Often times the term *pandilla* or “gang,” with its concomitant negative connotations, is used to describe them. Today the term *Tribu Urbano* or “urban tribe” is used describe these youth groups. Human rights workers and academics interviewed for this project prefer the term “*grupos juveniles*” or youth groups, because it is not a stigmatized term.⁵⁷

Gangs in central Mexico tend to be low on the criminality scale. For example, a 2009 study of Guadalajara found 144 gangs comprising 3,710 members across 65 neighborhoods. Of those 86 gangs were dedicated to public disorder and graffiti, 12 to car and auto-part theft, 10 to consumption of drugs and alcohol, 10 to selling/consuming drugs/alcohol and auto-theft and 6 to robbing passersby and businesses.⁵⁸ Similarly a study produced in Mexico City found 351 youth “*bandas*” and gangs in 2007. The delegation of Iztapalapa had about 30 criminal gangs with an average age

⁵⁶ Castillo Berthier, Interview of Professor Hector Castillo Berthier General Director of the Circo Volador Program.

⁵⁷ Director Circo Volador Program Mexico City, Interview with Director Circo Volador Program.

⁵⁸ Pandillas: Análisis de Su Presencia En Territorio Nacional, 13.

of 25 that were more frequently linked to organized crime than other regions of the city.⁵⁹

III. Causes of youth gang involvement in Mexico

The existing literature on youth gang involvement in Mexico identifies many important socio-economic and psychological factors that contribute to youth gang involvement including unemployment, a poor educational system, lack of parental involvement, lack of afterschool activities, poverty, etc.

Profile of a gang member

There is an extensive literature profiling gang members and their social characteristics.⁶⁰ Among those characteristics identified by the literature and interviews are: aged 12-24,⁶¹ unemployment, lack of education, a family member who is a gang member, “aggressive or violent... experience multiple caretaker transitions... associate with other gang-involved youth,”⁶² come from single parent homes, suffer abuse in homes, drug consumption, traumas and living in poor urban environs with a lack of public services and utilities especially when a large proportion of the population is in poverty.⁶³ For example, in some cases, Mexican citizens in rural areas do not have birth certificates due to the cost of traveling to attain one or other barriers created by weak state capacity and poverty; making it impossible for some to enter the formal economy.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰ J. P. Sullivan and R. J. Bunker, “Drug Cartels, Street Gangs, and Warlords,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 40–53; S Skaperdas and C Syropoulos, “Gangs as Primitive States,” *Papers* (1993); A. Valdez, “Gangs: A Guide to Understanding Street Gangs,” No.: ISBN 0-915905-62-0 (1997): 394; A. Valdez, A. Cepeda, and C. Kaplan, “Homicidal Events Among Mexican American Street Gangs,” *Homicide Studies* 13, no. 3 (2009): 288; Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” 2005; J.P. Sullivan, “Maras Morphing: Revisiting Third Generation Gangs,” *Global Crime* 7, no. 3–4 (2006): 487–504; Skarbek, “Prison Gangs, Norms, and Organizations”; José Manuel Valenzuela Arce and Domínguez, “Las Maras. Identidades Juveniles Al Límite.”; Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment (USAID, 2006).

⁶¹ Howell, “Youth Gangs: An Overview,” 2.

⁶² James C. Howell, “Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs” (OJJDP, December 2010), OJJDP.com.

⁶³ Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment.

⁶⁴ Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas.

Economic contributors to youth gang activity

Mexico's economy has shown impressive macroeconomic stability. Following the "unholy trinity" of the 2008 financial crisis, the so-called swine flu epidemic and tourist fears due to drug violence, Mexico's economy contracted by 6%.⁶⁵ However, Mexico has since had modest but consistent growth and has become a 1.6 trillion dollar economy. In 2011, GDP growth was over 3.9%, outpacing Brazil's 2.7%.⁶⁶ Mexico's economic ministers have suggested that drug violence costs the Mexican economy 1.2% of total GDP which makes Mexico's economic resilience all the more impressive.⁶⁷ While Mexico has made impressive economic strides, poverty remains a problem; "comparing incomes alongside access to health care, education, social security, housing, and food, finds that just over 45 percent of Mexicans are considered poor..."⁶⁸ Because poverty contributes to many of the underlying social conditions that lead to gang involvement, Mexico has a long road and a great deal of social investment needed to mitigate the gang issue.

Despite positive economic growth unemployment in Mexico especially youth unemployment, remains a serious problem contributing to gang involvement. In 2012 the Mexican unemployment rate has ranged from 5.4% to 4.7%, while youth unemployment for young males aged 15-24 was nearly double at 9.4% and 9.2% in the first and second quarters of 2012, respectively. For young females age 15-24 the unemployment rates for the first quarter of 2012 were higher at 10.8% and 10.6% in the first and second quarters.⁶⁹ It should also be noted that the

⁶⁵ "Country Statistical Profile: Mexico - Country Statistical Profiles: Key Tables from OECD - OECD iLibrary," October 25, 2012, http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/country-statistical-profile-mexico_20752288-table-mex.

⁶⁶ Elisabeth Malkin and Simon Romero, "Group of 20 Meets in a Mexico Outperforming Brazil," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2012, sec. World / Americas, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/world/americas/group-of-20-meets-in-a-mexico-outperforming-brazil.html>.

⁶⁷ "Mexico Says Drug Violence Cuts 1.2 Pct Pts Off GDP," Reuters, September 1, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/01/mexico-drugs-idUSN0119285420100901>.

⁶⁸ Shannon O'Neil, "Mexico Makes It," *Foreign Affairs* (April 2013): 52-63.

⁶⁹ "Short-Term Labour Market Statistics," OECD, October 25, 2012, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=STLABOUR>.

underemployment rate is likely close to 25%.⁷⁰

Los Ninis

The so-called *ninis*, have been identified as a potential contributing factor to insecurity and a drag on the Mexican economy. Unemployed and uneducated youth are also an obvious potential contributor to gang membership, as youth seek alternative sources of “belonging” during idle time and engage in petty crimes to sustain themselves and their families. However the reality of *ninis* is complex and being a *nini* is not a permanent state.⁷¹

Luis Miguel Gonzalez of *El Economista* identifies a youth unemployment rate of 12.3% in Mexico in 2011, indicating that 1.6 million young people between the ages of 16-29 neither work nor study. Gonzalez also notes that unemployed youth are more likely to be pulled into criminal activity, suffer from mental health issues and be vulnerable to illness.⁷² The OECD Mexico country profile indicates that the suicide rate for unemployed youth not in school aged 20-24 years and 15-19 years is 18.4 and 27.6 per 100,000.⁷³

IV. U.S.-Mexico bilateral efforts on youth gang prevention: The Merida Initiative

The Merida Initiative is a U.S.-Mexico partnership that has been an important framework for bilateral cooperation since 2007. It was initiated as counter-organized crime partnership that was security-centric, focusing on military equipment. The United States initially provided \$1.4 billion over three years to Mexico and lesser amounts to Central America.⁷⁴ The Initiative has four pillars:

⁷⁰ “CIA - The World Factbook,” accessed November 5, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>.

⁷¹ Rodolfo Tuiran and Jose Luis Avila, “Jóvenes Que No Estudian Ni Trabajan: ¿Cuántos Son?, ¿quiénes Son?, ¿qué Hacer?” «Revista Este País», March 1, 2012, <http://estepais.com/site/?p=37606>.

⁷² Luis Miguel Gonzalez, “¿Cuánto Cuestan Los Ninis? | El Economista,” February 10, 2012, <http://eleconomista.com.mx/caja-fuerte/2012/02/10/cuanto-cuestan-ninis>.

⁷³ “Country Statistical Profile: Mexico - Country Statistical Profiles: Key Tables from OECD - OECD iLibrary.”

⁷⁴ Colleen Cook, Rebecca G. Rush, and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Merida Initiative: Proposed U.S. Anticrime and Counterdrug Assistance for Mexico and Central America,” accessed November 29, 2008,

(1) “disrupt capacity of organized crime to operate,” 2) “institutionalize capacity to sustain rule of law,” (3) “create a 21st century border structure” and (4) “build strong and resilient communities.”⁷⁵ Pillar IV, “building resilient communities,” was added in the Merida 2.0 phase and is particularly important in addressing youth gang involvement.

The initial military equipment was slow to be delivered and U.S. and Mexican government officials have since acknowledged that local and national capacity-building and development efforts characterized by pillars II and IV are where resources now need to be allocated in order to address Mexico’s long term security issues.⁷⁶ This has led to a reevaluation of the Merida Initiative, which is sometimes referred to as “Beyond Merida” or “Merida 2.0.”⁷⁷

The government of Mexico acknowledges it must fund its own social and development programs to expand state capacity in a sustainable fashion. Pillar IV of the Merida Initiative is primarily funded by the Mexican government and through programs such as the *Todos Somos Juárez* (We are all Juárez) program. It has devoted \$3.38 billion pesos in Ciudad Juárez, making the city a testing ground for Merida Initiative funded concepts and programs.⁷⁸

Most Merida funds for development on the U.S. side are administered through the United

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/news/docs/06.03.08%20CRS%20Report.pdf>; “The Four Pillars of Merida” (U.S. Embassy Mexico City), accessed October 25, 2012,

<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/mexico/310329/7abril/The%20Four%20Pillars%20of%20Cooperation%20Final.pdf>; “AL DÍA: Merida Initiative & Pillar IV – Addressing the Causes of Mexican Criminal Violence: What Role for the USAID? « Mexico Institute,” December 15, 2010, <http://mexicoinstitute.wordpress.com/2010/12/15/al-dia-merida-initiative-pillar-iv-%e2%80%93-addressing-the-causes-of-mexican-criminal-violence-what-role-for-the-usaid/>.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that Pillar IV was added later in the Beyond Merida or Merida 2.0 phase. “The Four Pillars of Merida.”

⁷⁶ It is now estimated that funding is closer to \$1.8 billion.

Cook, Rush, and Seelke, “Merida Initiative: Proposed U.S. Anticrime and Counterdrug Assistance for Mexico and Central America”; Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin Finklea, U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond (Congressional Research Service, August 16, 2010), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a528272.pdf>; Randal C. Archibold and Damien Cave, “U.S. Braces for Mexican Shift in Drug War Focus,” The New York Times, June 10, 2012, sec. World / Americas, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/world/americas/us-braces-for-mexican-shift-in-drug-war-focus.html>.

⁷⁷ Ribando Seelke and Finklea, U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond, 12.

⁷⁸ “Cd. Juárez Action Plan ‘Todos Somos Juárez: Reconstruyamos La Ciudad’,” May 2010, http://www.embassyofmexico.org/files/Todos_Somos_english_may10_v1100.pdf.

States Agency for International Development (USAID) and help to fund important initial projects. The Mexican government has been particularly interested in “proof of concept” from USAID funded programs.⁷⁹ Proof of concept is understood to mean that the Mexican government is interested in seeing effective program concepts tested and measured for success so that these programs can be scaled up and expanded throughout the country. Measuring success of small-scale development programs is particularly difficult, leading some to question the effectiveness of development programs to combat or prevent youth gang activity; though as Jütersonke et al. point out, “absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence.”⁸⁰ The work of USAID, NGOs, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) have been valuable in so far as they have demonstrated the efficacy of various programs and provide the technical know-how in establishing pilot programs. Beyond the government of Mexico, the private sector in Mexico, particularly in Monterrey, has demonstrated a willingness to fund and operate programs that would benefit youth prone to gang activity. Awareness that these are pilot programs, which will have funding and support from domestic actors, bodes well for their long-term sustainability and effectiveness.⁸¹

V. Existing youth gang prevention programs in Mexico

Given the nature of youth gang involvement, programs and groups which may not be specifically geared toward preventing youth gang participation, have important salubrious effects. Effective schools and sports programs often divert students away from gang involvement. Job training programs, drug rehabilitation, counseling and family counseling are all examples of programs and services that can address the root causes of gang involvement. Programs and groups run by former gang members like *Homeboys United* and *Cauce Ciudadano* may provide gang

⁷⁹ USAID Official and Nathan Jones, Interview of USAID official, Phone, October 2012, <http://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/usaid-history>.

⁸⁰ Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers, “Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security Interventions in Central America,” 14.

⁸¹ USAID Official and Nathan Jones, Interview of USAID official.

members with a psychological means by which to exit gang life.⁸²

Programs that address gang involvement can be divided into three general types: prevention, intervention and suppression. Prevention is generally far cheaper and safer than intervention and suppression because the latter two can result in retaliation from gang members.⁸³ Intervention on the other hand focuses on attempting to remove gang members from gang life and reintegrate them into society. Groups such as Homeboy Industries provide valuable job training and social services to gang members attempting to exit gang life.⁸⁴ The group serves as an example of a successful intervention program that can be more broadly applied. Suppression focuses on law enforcement activities designed to capture and punish gang members. Suppression is the least cost effective type, but often gets the lion's share of funding given the tendency to view these problems through the security lens. It should be noted that a comprehensive gang strategy should include varying degrees of all three types with "hardcore" gang members being targeted for suppression and intervention and potential youth initiates being targeted for prevention.

Drug rehabilitation programs

Drug rehabilitation centers help would-be and former gang members end drug use. From 2002-2008 drug abuse in Mexico rose especially in the northern region among males 18-24, but has since stabilized.

Drug rehabilitation centers have proliferated in the last decade in Mexico. Drug rehabilitation center financing from the Merida Initiative was funded through the State Department's Bureau of Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and supported the training of six hundred new

⁸² "Cauce Ciudadano - ¿Quiénes Somos?," accessed October 30, 2012, http://www.cauceciudadano.org.mx/quienes_somos.html.

⁸³ USAID Official and Nathan Jones, Interview of USAID official.

⁸⁴ "Homeboy Industries," accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.homeboyindustries.org/>.

counselors trained in a “standardized curriculum developed with support from the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission and Merida assistance.” According to INL, plans to train 5,000 new counselors are underway. “Mexico’s 2012 budget for addiction-related activities (including alcohol and tobacco) is approximately \$84 million.”⁸⁵

Drug rehabilitation centers in Mexico have been criticized for various shortcomings including: 1) A lack of professionally trained staff, 2) at risk of high profile *narco* and gang attacks as a result of being perceived as recruitment centers for rival gangs, 3) overcrowding 4) insufficient in the number of locations required to meet the rising needs of Mexican society.⁸⁶ It is clear, based on INL and Mexican government statements, the lack of drug rehabilitation centers with trained personnel has been identified and plans to address it are underway.⁸⁷ The success of those plans will depend upon the effectiveness of implementation.

Violence in *Ciudad Juarez*

No city has been harder-hit by drug violence in Mexico than *Ciudad Juarez*. In 2007 the Sinaloa cartel was fighting the combined forces of the Gulf Cartel and its armed wing *Los Zetas* for control of the lucrative point of entry in Nuevo Laredo.⁸⁸ Seeing no end in sight, the Sinaloa cartel shifted its aggression from Nuevo Laredo to Ciudad Juarez and began a bloody struggle with the Carillo Fuentes Organization (Juarez Cartel) to control the city. The struggle exploded with high

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, “Country Reports - Honduras through Mexico,” Report, U.S. Department of State, March 5, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2013/vol1/204050.htm>.

⁸⁶ Marc Lacey, “Gunmen Kill 19 at Drug Rehab Center in Northern Mexico,” The New York Times, June 11, 2010, sec. World / Americas, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/12/world/americas/12mexico.html>; Anne-Marie O’Connor and William Booth, “Mexican Drug Cartels Targeting and Killing Children,” The Washington Post, April 9, 2011, sec. World, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/mexican-drug-cartels-targeting-and-killing-children/2011/04/07/AFwkFb9C_story.html; “Attack at Tijuana Rehab Center Kills 13” KPBS July 4, 2011, accessed November 5, 2012, <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2010/oct/25/witness-attack-tijuana-rehab-center-kills-13/>.

⁸⁷ Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, “Country Reports - Honduras through Mexico.”

⁸⁸ John Burnett, “Nuevo Laredo Returns To Normal As Violence Slows,” January 23, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99742620>.

homicide rates in 2008. Homicide rates in Juarez remained high until early 2012 when according to the Chihuahua state prosecutor's office there was a 59.8% drop in murders over the same six-month period in 2011.⁸⁹ The cartels involved in the struggle for the city utilized local gangs like the *Artistas Asesinos* and the *Barrio Azteca*. The use of violent low-level enforcers exacerbated rates of crime and violence. Juarez became the "murder capital" of Latin America, a distinction it has only recently lost to San Pedro Sula of Honduras.⁹⁰ There was a silver lining in Juarez's high levels of violence. It attracted government and NGO resources and made Juarez the center for finding solutions for Mexico's drug related violence.

Todos Somos Juarez

In response to rising violence in Juarez, many NGOs entered the city. The federal government of Mexico initiated a program known as *Todos Somos Juarez* or "We are all Juarez." *Todos Somos Juarez* was announced after a birthday party massacre of 10 teenagers, 2 children and 3 adults.⁹¹ In Villas de Salvacar Juarez on January 30, 2010, drug traffickers claimed to believe rivals were in attendance at the party.⁹² The program was in many ways intentionally modeled upon the city of Medellin, Colombia's response to organized crime-related violence in the 2000's that emphasized large infrastructural projects to increase the number of safe spaces for youth in the city.⁹³

⁸⁹ Alejandro Martinez-Cabrera, "Juárez Slayings Decreased 59.8% First Half 2012 - El Paso Times," July 14, 2012, http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_21074666/juarez-slayings-decreased-59-8-first; Geoffrey Ramsey, "Despite Shake Ups to Mexico's Underworld, Juarez's Uneasy Peace Will Stand - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas," October 25, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/juarez-uneasy-peace>.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Ramsey, "Honduras: Home to the New Ciudad Juarez? - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas," January 17, 2012, www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/honduras-home-to-the-new-ciudad-juarez.

⁹¹ Lorena Figueroa, "Juárez Families, Neighborhood Scarred by 2010 Massacre - El Paso Times," January 29, 2013, http://www.elpasotimes.com/juarez/ci_22470601/i-am-stillin-disbelief?source=pkg.

⁹² Jorge Ramos, "Todos Somos Juárez Ha Sido Un Éxito: Calderón - El Universal - Nación," February 18, 2012, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/831056.html>.

⁹³ Ana Lagner, "Esperanza Para Juárez, Estrategia Medellín | El Economista," June 10, 2011, <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2011/06/10/esperanza-juarez-estrategia-medellin>.

Todos Somos Juarez is an example of an overarching government and civil society partnership in Mexico that can bring together societal support for youth gang prevention programs. While it was a federal program, it included state and local government representatives and invited the public to participate in fifteen open workshops on a range of topics.⁹⁴ It also institutionalized “tables” where local citizens could participate, provide feedback, and identify issues of contention. Human rights activists have criticized these tables because the government generally controls them, steering funding toward high-profile infrastructure projects; thus limiting the real impact citizen participation could have. Despite this, institutionalizing citizen participation in governance appears to have had a real impact in galvanizing the city’s response to violence. *Todos Somos Juarez* was beneficial to overall gang prevention and employment programs because it provided an overarching framework for government and civil society cooperation.⁹⁵

Juarez has seen a significant reduction in violence. There has been an extensive debate on whether this can be attributed to *Todos Somos Juarez* or other factors such as the dominance of the Sinaloa cartel in its conflict with the Juarez Cartel.⁹⁶ Some have also credited the “get-tough” policies of Julian Leyzaola the Juarez police chief who previously presided over a similar reduction of violence in Tijuana, but who in both cities was accused of human rights abuses.⁹⁷ Most analysts believe the reduction of violence in Juarez can be explained by all factors to greater or lesser degrees coalescing, although many point to the potential negative long-term consequences of zero-tolerance policies.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ “‘Todos Somos Juárez’ Program, Explained,” Justice in Mexico, March 2010, <http://justiceinmexico.org/2010/03/18/%e2%80%9ctodos-somos-juarez%e2%80%9d-program-explained/>.

⁹⁵ “IYF | IYF,” accessed October 29, 2012, <http://www.iyfnet.org/youth-work-mexico>.

⁹⁶ Ramsey, “Honduras: Home to the New Ciudad Juarez? - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas”; Martinez-Cabrera, “Juárez Slayings Decreased 59.8% First Half 2012 - El Paso Times.”

⁹⁷ William Finnegan, “In the Name of the Law: A Colonel Cracks Down on Corruption,” *The New Yorker*, October 18, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/18/101018fa_fact_finnegan#ixzz12ONN9dAn.

⁹⁸ Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas.

Youth Work: Mexico and *Entra21*

One of the specific programs implemented in the backdrop of *Todos Somos Juarez* was *Entra21*, which was developed in Latin America and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to train young people with relevant skills for the job market.⁹⁹ *Entra21*'s Juarez iteration began with an assessment of local employers and the work skills they needed from young people. Relationships with local employers were developed and employers committed to offering program participants internships. If these internship reviews were positive, the understanding was that participants would be offered jobs with the employer.¹⁰⁰

Youth Work: Mexico also identified significant dropout rates as students moved from primary to secondary school (the equivalent of moving from elementary to middle school). More than 3,000 students dropped out at this critical juncture.¹⁰¹ By meeting with parents and conducting focus groups, *Youth Work: Mexico* identified numerous reasons for this dropout rate.¹⁰² For example, each *colonia* has a primary school but not necessarily a secondary school. This meant that parents had to send their children out of their local neighborhoods on public transportation in an insecure city. Many parents and students were afraid to do this. Further, public schools require a tuition payment, which while small and symbolic, posed a barrier for some parents.¹⁰³

Youth Work: Mexico implemented by the International Youth Foundation through a USAID grant, began immediately instituting summer camp programs in Ciudad Juarez in 2010, designed to target these students who were not registered for school. The goal was to convince parents to register their children and overcome the barriers that prevented them from doing so. They

⁹⁹ "IYF | IYF."

¹⁰⁰ Carlo Arze, Interview Phone Carlo Arze Head of Youth Work Mexico in Ciudad Juarez, Phone, October 9, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

negotiated with local schools to extend registration deadlines and were successful in registering a significant proportion of these students; preventing them from becoming “*ninis*.” Of the summer program participants in 2010, 2011 and 2012 that had just completed primary school and not enrolled in secondary schools, 87% were able to register late and were placed in secondary school the next year.¹⁰⁴

Youth Work: Mexico, as “a youth to youth initiative,” serves as an example of best practices for youth gang prevention in Mexico and beyond. First, it allied with and incorporated existing youth groups in Juarez. Second, it incorporated existing youth gangs and turned them into positive social forces, which promoted their program and engaged in outreach work. Third, it was culturally sensitive. When recruiting in potentially violent neighborhoods it was careful to ask permission from local gang leaders to avoid unnecessary violence.¹⁰⁵

Circo Volador

Another program that helps to prevent gang involvement by addressing root social causes, is the *Circo Volador* program. This program began in the 1980’s as an outgrowth of the youth research of Hector Castillo Berthier, Professor of Sociology at the *Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico* (UNAM). Due to his previous research on youth in Mexico City, the Mexican government tapped Professor Castillo to understand and work to eliminate violence among gangs in Mexico City. In his initial research, he identified music as a common denominator among youth in the city. In an attempt to establish youth outreach, Professor Castillo established a radio show for young people to express themselves in Mexico City. The show was cancelled due to a young person cursing the Mexican president, but the networks of youth contacts created by the radio show

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

participation allowed further research.¹⁰⁶

Later Professor Castillo found an abandoned space and asked his network of contacts what it should be used for. The youth contacts suggested a physical space for theater and art, which they renovated themselves. The program goal became to take an illicit skillset and turn it into a productive, employable skill. For example, youth engaging in graffiti could be converted to artists and graphic designers. Radio shows produced histories of neighborhoods. The production of the shows required interviews by young people of neighborhood residents. According to *Circo Volador* program leaders, this had the salubrious effect of connecting the neighborhood youth to older residents and the resulting dialogue brought the two groups closer together.¹⁰⁷

Today the *Circo Volador* program has expanded beyond Mexico City to ten cities. The *Secretaria de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL) of the Mexican government provides funding for organizer salaries. The program begins with a diagnostic stage that takes two to three months and includes an initial intervention. The communities selected have generally high levels of violence, high poverty and are located in highly marginalized areas without basic services like water and electricity.¹⁰⁸

The initial intervention by *Circo Volador* uses cultural activities to build trust in the community such as: movies, Internet radio shows from local youth, and art and music exhibitions. Organizers ask questions like: what skills do local youth have that can be professionalized? How do youth view violence? As victims or as aggressors? How does the community view youth? Oftentimes the answers indicate that there is segregation between youth and adults that allows

¹⁰⁶ HISTÓRICO SEDESOL 2010 | Comunicados (Tijuana, Baja California: SEDESOL, November 13, 2010), http://www.sedesol2010.sedesol.gob.mx/index/index.php?sec=10&clave_articulo=386; Director Circo Volador Program Mexico City, Interview with Director Circo Volador Program; “Circo Volador, Centro de Arte y Cultura,” accessed October 29, 2012, <http://circovolador.org/index.php/circo-volador/historia/46-cvhistoria>.

¹⁰⁷ Director Circo Volador Program Mexico City, Interview with Director Circo Volador Program.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

young people to become a scapegoat for the social ills of the larger community.¹⁰⁹

A one-year intervention process follows the diagnostic and initial intervention. This includes workshops to professionalize existing skills. The skillsets are used to discuss themes of violence and to unite the community. Radio shows create histories of the neighborhood, uniting neighborhood generations and changing “perceptions on both sides of the age spectrum.”¹¹⁰ Participants have also created comic books that explore issues of violence in relationships. These types of projects generate self-reflection for youths that in turn changes their self-image and relationship with the community.¹¹¹

Cities and neighborhoods are identified using SEDESOL’s Levels of Social Violence Index and are typically high in homicides, assaults and arms in addition to lacking infrastructure like pavement, water, electricity, etc. There are a total of 70 employees nationwide. A four-person permanent team is based in each of the following cities: Tijuana, Juarez, Tapachula, Playa del Carmen, Distrito Federal and San Luis Potosi. *Circo Volador* aspires to self-sufficiency in funding by soliciting donations from local businesses and institutions using the logic that the program reduces crime and creates a safer neighborhood. However, the program is still heavily dependent upon SEDESOL funding.¹¹²

The program emphasizes safety when working in violent locales. First, all employees are trained to avoid “being a hero” and to remove themselves from danger. Second, because local drug dealers observe the program by planting spies in workshops, program organizers make it clear that they are not interested in eliminating drug dealing; rather they only want to address youth issues. Program organizers consistently find that in a neighborhood with over 100 youth, typically only

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

three to four are involved in local dealing; corroborating the notion that less than 3-4% of the population stigmatizes the vast majority of youth uninvolved in the drug trade.¹¹³

Cauce Ciudadano

Cauce Ciudadano is another example of a Mexican NGO successfully working with at risk-youth in Mexico City. Led by ex-gang member-turned-activist Carlos Cruz, its mission is to “prevent, reduce and eliminate violence generated by young people, as well as playing the same role in various development circles including: family school and neighborhood.”¹¹⁴ The organization provides life skills training to young people and adults that aim to “strengthen the protective factors and eliminate risk factors by promoting healthy lifestyles and the full exercise of rights.”¹¹⁵ These life skills include: “health promotion,” “resilience,” “the prevention of psychological and health problems” and the promotion of “social responsibility by linking personal responsibility” to broader responsibilities to “family, school and society.”¹¹⁶

Cauce Ciudadano provides important training to “civil society organizations” and “members of government agencies working with young people.” One example of *Cauce Ciudadano*’s collaboration with another NGO and private sector entity is its work with the Ashoka NGO which collaborated with *Danone* to provide life skills training to the door-to-door and street sales staff of *Danone* products in Mexico City.¹¹⁷ This project focused on women working in the informal sector,

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ “Cauce Ciudadano - ¿Quiénes Somos?”.

¹¹⁵ Translation provided by google translate. From the Cauce Ciudadano website.

¹¹⁶ “Cauce Ciudadano - ¿Quiénes Somos?”; “Cauce Ciudadano - Trabajo de Calle,” accessed October 30, 2012, http://www.cauceciudadano.org.mx/trabajo_calle.html.

¹¹⁷ “Cauce Ciudadano - ¿Quiénes Somos?”; Carlos Cruz - Cauce Ciudadano Partner with Danone Semilla.mov, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bzwuTeo_Jw&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Carlos Cruz and “Cauce Ciudadano” Presentation, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okfnIsfS2ak&feature=youtube_gdata_player; “La Secretaría de Educación Pública y Cauce Ciudadano A.C. Convoca n a Organizaciones de La Sociedad Civil a Participar En La Implementación Del Proyecto ‘Equidad: El Respeto Es La Ruta ’ 4ª Etapa” (Secretaria de Educacion Publica y Cauce Ciudadano A.C.), accessed October 30, 2012, <http://mujeroaxaca.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ConvocatoriaOSC.pdf>.

aiming to incorporate them in the formal sector with jobs that provided “full social benefits.” Employment and life skills training of women resulted in improved family structures and likely reduced the probability of gang involvement within these families. *Cauce Ciudadano* also conducts career training, provides conflict mediation directly with local gangs and youth groups to convert gangs and youth groups into positive social forces within their communities.¹¹⁸

Gang Prevention and Intervention Programs in Central America

The Washington Office of Latin American Affairs (WOLA) has profiled youth gang prevention programs in Central America that can serve as examples for Mexico. In Guatemala “Ceiba Group” is a NGO that provides mentors and after-school programs for at risk-youth. The group also provided training to local youth to become mentors in addition to opening centers, which provide safe public spaces for library and Internet services.

Paz y Justicia in Honduras is run by the Mennonite Church and works with homeless youth to “cultivate” leadership in an effort to prevent gang initiation. The NGO also provides tattoo removal funding in conjunction with the Catholic Church.¹¹⁹ The NGO has served roughly 320 youth and has limited police involvement in intervention programs to raise youth trust levels.¹²⁰ These programs, like the Mexican programs profiled in this report, emphasize human rights, life skills, and youth to youth strategies in their gang prevention efforts.

¹¹⁸ “Cauce Ciudadano - Capacitación Para El Empleo,” accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.cauceciudadano.org.mx/empleo.html>; “Cauce Ciudadano - Trabajo de Calle.”

¹¹⁹ A fundamental weakness of this report is a lack of information on the significant role of the Catholic Church in gang prevention in the region. This lack is attributable to the time and resource constraints of the report and the fact that many Catholic Relief service programs, while very effective in gang prevention activities, have a very limited media profile, are highly localized and are difficult to contact. This should not be construed as a failure to recognize the critical role these groups play in gang prevention throughout the hemisphere.

Atreviéndose a Querer: Respuestas Comunitarias a La Violencia Pandillera Juvenil En América Central y Comunidades de Inmigrantes Centroamericanos En Estados Unidos (Washington, D.C.: Washington Office of Latin American Affairs, August 27, 2009), 39,

http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Citizen%20Security/past/Atreviendose_a_querer.pdf.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37–40.

Measuring success of these programs in the context of reduced violence is impossible given the small scale of the implementation of these programs and the weak state capacity of Central American governments. Rather policy makers should seek to achieve a “tipping point” or “critical mass” of these type of development programs, while strengthening critical institutions such as the judicial, law enforcement, penal and educational systems.¹²¹

VI. Policy Recommendations

The framework of the Merida Initiative should be continued and built upon with an increased emphasis on development capacity building in Mexico and Central America. In many ways, this is occurring and should be deepened. It must also be recognized that Merida funding is a small fraction of what the Mexican government is spending on these types of programs and reforms.

Through Merida Initiative funding, USAID has supported NGO’s and local civil society groups that have on a small scale successfully engaged in youth employment training programs. These programs like *Youth Work: Mexico*, *Circo Volador* and *Cauce Ciudadano* should be “scaled up,” and expanded to more cities throughout Mexico. Initial statements and plans from the new Peña Nieto administration indicate it plans to do just this by expanding the *Todos Somos Juarez* model to 251 cities with over \$9 billion in funding from the Mexican federal government.¹²²

Circo Volador and *Youth Work: Mexico* currently function in Ciudad Juarez and are expanding to other cities such as Tijuana where they recently graduated 112 youth.¹²³ Though *Youth Work: Mexico* is still in the implementation phase and is yet to be formally evaluated, it has successfully applied best practices in the Mexican context as evidenced by similar procedures used

¹²¹ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights : from Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0654/2005048867-t.html>.

¹²² “Mexico Unveils New Strategy in War on Drugs and for Preventing Crime” *The Guardian*, February, 2013, accessed February 14, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/13/mexico-strategy-drug-war>.

¹²³ U. S. Embassy, “Latest Consulate News: 112 Graduates from Youth Employability Program in Tijuana-USAID,” Http://usembassy.state.gov/grad_usaid.html, January 14, 2013, http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/grad_usaid.html.

by *Circo Volador* and *Cauce Ciudadano*. These programs should be applied in large cities throughout Mexico, especially those hardest hit by drug violence like Monterrey, where private sector funding is available and likely to be supportive.¹²⁴ Where private sector funding may be lacking, federal government funding for projects is critical.

Below is a list of recommended policies for the Peña Nieto administration to address youth in street gangs in Mexico.

- 1) **Emphasize development funding.** Current funding to address drug-related violence in Mexico is heavily weighted toward the security apparatus including the military, the police, the penal system and the judiciary. While these are critically important governance sectors, development funding to prevent Mexican youth from entering the judicial and penal system is also a cost effective use of resources. Localized programs such as *Todos Somos Juarez* can serve as models for the wider emphasis on development funding and as previously mentioned, initial indications from the Peña Nieto administration indicate that an expansion of this program is forthcoming.¹²⁵
- 2) **Employment training programs with life skills components.** *Youth Work: Mexico*, *Circo Volador* and *Cauce Ciudadano* all incorporate methods that train youth in valuable skills, but also address underlying psychological and social issues, like traumas and self-esteem, that make young people susceptible to gang involvement. Likewise addressing these issues makes young people valuable to employers, further reducing their propensity to become involved in gangs. Increased program funding for these and similar programs can be administered via grant programs through SEDESOL or other government agencies. To expand these types of programs they must be “scaled up” and adopted by government

¹²⁴ “Lorenzo Zambrano, Cemex, y La Lucha Contra La Violencia Del Narcotráfico” The WallStreet Journal, accessed May 23, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB128708875386747251.html>.

¹²⁵ “Mexico Unveils New Strategy in War on Drugs and for Preventing Crime” The Guardian.

agencies. This will first require long-term funding of institutions and programs. Second, leaders of these NGOs must be utilized to “train the trainers.” Third, the Mexican government must have a willingness to accept localized failures and to adjust these programs and the metrics by which they are assessed to local and institutional conditions.

3) **Institutionalized police-youth dialogue forums.** Interviews with officials of the Mexico City Commission for Human Rights indicated that there were moments in Mexico City where dialogue between youth and police was encouraged and resulted in salubrious policy proposals. One such time followed the News Divine nightclub tragedy where police arrived to arrest underage drinkers at an overcrowded club and the ensuing stampede resulted in the death of nine youth and three police officers.¹²⁶ Unfortunately these moments of dialogue required tragedies and were not institutionalized into regular local forums to increase dialogue between police and youth in the city. Regularized forums for dialogue would improve the relationship between youth and local police by eliminating the mutually held negative perceptions and providing a forum for youth civic participation that will yield valuable policy prescriptions. Mexico City’s Secretary of Security recently announced the creation of a new unit to address youth crime and gangs. This unit could provide an institution to lead and organize youth, civil society and police dialogue and serve as a model for Mexico.¹²⁷

4) **Education.** *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) should establish an anti-gang curriculum to provide children with the necessary tools to make appropriate decisions about gang membership; particularly in Mexico’s south where *mara* presence is strongest. Further,

¹²⁶ “Criticism Surrounds Prison Sentencing in ‘News Divine’ Case,” Justice in Mexico, August 19, 2012, <http://justiceinmexico.org/2012/08/19/criticism-surrounds-prison-sentencing-in-news-divine-case/>.

¹²⁷ Gerardo Jimenez, “SSPDF Anuncia Ante Embajada de EU Grupo Para Combatir Pandillas | Excélsior,” October 6, 2013, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/comunidad/2013/06/10/903396>.

extending the hours of the school day and number of days of school could help occupy more youth time.¹²⁸

5) National surveys on youth gang involvement in Mexico. According to an OAS report on youth gangs:

In Colombia and Mexico, there is very little legislation on gangs and, therefore, a paucity of specialized institutions for tackling the problem. In addition care delivery mechanisms are insufficient, isolated, and poorly coordinated. This situation requires enactment of new legislation consistent with a rights-based approach.¹²⁹

Thus, the country's national statistics agency, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI), should be funded to begin gathering systematic nation-wide data on gangs and youth group involvement. Because this data is likely to be tightly correlated with statistics on development, INEGI should work closely with SEDESOL to develop the type of data to be gathered and implement these surveys.

6) Increased funding for the study of youth gangs in Mexico. Through grants to academic institutions the Mexican government should offer graduate and postgraduate funding for academics studying the youth gang and youth group phenomena in Mexico. Anthropological, sociological, and political science fieldwork-based research will be particularly valuable to supplement quantitative data produced by INEGI.

7) Safe public spaces. Invest in the construction of safe social spaces for young people including after school programs, recreational centers, and spaces for music concerts and art. Merida Initiative funding has been utilized in Juarez to build “prep schools” that also serve

¹²⁸ Cunjama Lopez, Rendon Cardenas, and Iniguez Ramos, *Pandillas En El Siglo XXI: El Reto de Su Inclusion En El Desarrollo Nacional*, 187.

¹²⁹ DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF GANGS: Executive Summary, 12.

as after school and sports recreational centers in poor *colonias*. These infrastructural development projects expand state educational capacity and provide adolescents with after school options, giving them alternatives to criminal activities and or victimization.

- 8) **Drug rehabilitation programs.** Increasing funding for drug rehabilitation programs to address gang intervention is necessary. These programs and centers must professionalize treatment providers and institute accountability and transparency mechanisms, while protecting the privacy of patients.
- 9) **Create a Mexican National Gang Alliance.** Mexican government funding could support conferences and information sharing between civil society, relevant law enforcement institutions and government officials. In the United States the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations (NAGIA) brings together “22 state and regional gang investigator associations.”¹³⁰ Gang expert interviews in Mexico indicated that Mexico currently suffers from an “atomization” of agencies with knowledge of the gang phenomenon.¹³¹ Unlike the law enforcement focus of the U.S. NAGIA, the Mexican version should emphasize civil society participation.
- 10) **Gang Truces and Peace Zones** – The recent and apparently successful gang truces in Central America suggest these strategies might be effective in addressing Mexico’s *Mara* and gang problems. El Salvador has created peace zones in which local gangs agree to cease all gang and criminal activity in designated municipalities. This is the second phase of the gang truce in El Salvador between the largest *Maras*, MS-13 and Barrio 18, that appears to

¹³⁰ “National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Associations - N.A.G.I.A. -,” accessed November 1, 2012, <http://www.nagia.org/>.

¹³¹ Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas.

have successfully reduced homicides.¹³² Due to the apparent success, other Central American nations such as Honduras are attempting to replicate them. While tentative and experimental at best, the peace zone concept might be applicable to Mexico, especially in southern states such as Oaxaca and Chiapas that have the strongest *maras* presence.¹³³ Civil society groups, in particular the Catholic Church and other religious groups, have played a critical role in the negotiations of these truces in Honduras and El Salvador and could play an important role in the establishment of truces with *Maras* in Mexico. There has been significant internal debate in both the El Salvadoran government and Catholic Church on whether or not the gang truce is a good idea.¹³⁴ Some fear legitimizing the gangs as political actors, while others fear the government is admitting that it is powerless to stop the gangs.¹³⁵

Because of the role of higher-level organized crime groups such as cartels in Mexico being responsible for a higher percentage of homicides, a gang truce might not have the same impact on homicides in Mexico as it did in El Salvador. This does not mean that it might not be an effective strategy for reducing localized violence and diverting gang members into job training programs and the legitimate economy. There are localized examples of non-aggression pacts between street gangs throughout Mexico, e.g. eight gangs signed a non-aggression pact before local authorities in Leon, Guanajuato. A program called, “Leon is with the Young” that included sports, recreational activities, and self-employment workshops designed to steer the young away from vandalism and drugs, complimented the pact. While this may seem small in the context of Leon’s 991 gangs, this

¹³² Geoffrey Ramsey, “Guatemala, Honduras May Replicate El Salvador Gang Truce - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas,” May 24, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/guatemala-honduras-may-replicate-el-salvador-gang-truce>.

¹³³ Tom Boerman, Central America Researcher, interview by Nathan Jones, January 30, 2013; Elyssa Pachico, “El Salvador Gangs Accept Proposal to Create ‘Peace Zones’ - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas,” December 5, 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-gangs-accept-peace-zones>.

¹³⁴ Steven Dudley, “5 Things the El Salvador Gang Truce Has Taught Us - InSight Crime | Organized Crime in the Americas,” March 12, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/5-things-el-salvador-gang-truce-taught-us>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

is an example of programs that can and should be scaled up to include more gangs and services over time.¹³⁶ Similar gang peace pacts have been made in Guadalajara and Monterrey.¹³⁷

Conclusions

While Mexico's gang problem appears significant, there are examples of government, private sector and civil society efforts to address it that appear, at least qualitatively, effective. There are examples of successful gang programs and best practices at the local level in Mexico, but they are slow to be expanded nationally. Interviews indicated Mexico suffers from an "atomization" of efforts addressing the gang phenomenon.¹³⁸ The dizzying complexity of gangs in Mexico also makes formulating policy difficult. While media may portray youth as violent "*pandilleros*," "*mareros*" and "*narcos*," many so-called gang members are in reality youth group members of "urban tribes" linked only by music and fashion. Addressing these youths through security-centric and "zero-tolerance" policies only serves to disenfranchise them and exacerbate the problem of social marginalization. The complexity of this issue means that addressing youth gang involvement will be tied to other issues such as education reform, after-school and employment programs.

Todos Somos Juarez has succeeded in providing a successful framework for civil society, private sector and government cooperation on efforts relating to the gang phenomenon. As it stands now, it is simply too small and localized to have an impact on the broader issues of drug related violence and gang involvement in Mexico. *Todos Somos Juarez* and the successful programs like *Youth Work: Mexico*, *Cauce Ciudadano* and *Circo Volador* should be funded for more rapid

¹³⁶ "Pandillas Firman Un Pacto En León," February 10, 2013, <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/pandillasfirmanunpactoenleon-1480299.html>.

¹³⁷ Mendoza Navarro, "Pacto de Paz Entre Pandillas," March 13, 2013, <http://www.oem.com.mx/eloccidental/notas/n2913493.htm>; "Rayados Apoyan Pacto de Paz de Pandillas - Futbol - México - Mediotiempo.com," November 17, 2011, <http://www.mediotiempo.com/futbol/mexico/noticias/2011/11/17/rayados-apoyan-pacto-de-paz-de-pandillas>.

¹³⁸ Balcazar, Interview on Maras in Chiapas.

expansion throughout Mexico. One city is insufficient; *Todos Somos Juarez* should be expanded to more cities in Mexico with appropriate accountability and transparency mechanisms. Under the framework of programs like *Todos Somos Juarez* the policy recommendations suggested here can be implemented. Indeed, the new administration in Mexico appears intent upon ongoing implementation of this strategy.¹³⁹ Continued support for the deepening and sufficient funding of these policies must continue to ensure their successful implementation.

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¹³⁹ Shannon K. O’Neil, “Refocusing U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation. Before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere and Global Narcotics Affairs United States Senate 1st Session, 113 Th Congress Hearing on Security Cooperation in Me Xico: Examining the Next Steps in the U.S.-Mexico Security Relationship” (Council on Foreign Relations, June 18, 2013), 4, http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ONeil_Testimony.pdf.

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Nathan P. Jones, Ph.D., is the Alfred C. Glassell III Postdoctoral Fellow in Drug Policy at the Baker Institute. His research focuses on drug violence in Mexico. Jones has published with numerous think tanks, including the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and InSight Crime. While teaching at the University of San Diego (USD) in 2011-2012, Jones worked closely with the school's Trans-Border Institute on grant proposals and research projects. He has been a trusted source on issues of violence in Mexico with media outlets such as the Houston Chronicle, Texas Public Radio, the Los Angeles Times, the San Diego Union-Tribune, and KPBS San Diego radio and television.

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