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CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO GANG ASSESSMENT

USAID Bureau for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs
Office of Regional Sustainable Development

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USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Executive Summary

Rising crime is threatening democratic development and slowing economic growth across Central America and Mexico. Gang activity has transcended the borders of Central America, Mexico, and the United States and evolved into a transnational concern that demands a coordinated, multi-national response to effectively combat increasingly sophisticated criminal gang networks. Whereas gang activity used to be territorially confined to local neighborhoods, globalization, sophisticated communications technologies, and travel patterns have facilitated the expansion of gang activity across neighborhoods, cities, and countries. The monikers of notorious gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street gang (Barrio 18) now appear in communities throughout the United States, Central America, and Mexico. Members of these international gangs move fluidly in and out of these neighboring countries. The U.S. Congress has recognized that some gangs in Latin America and the United States are international criminal organizations whose criminal activities in the Americas have damaging effects on national security by increasing domestic crime levels and facilitating drug trafficking. To combat these gangs which continue to expand their cross-border networks and illegal activities, the United States should act quickly and seize the opportunity to work with Central America and Mexico to develop a coordinated, effective response.

Recognizing that gang activity is a complex, multi-faceted, and transnational phenomenon that is clearly in the national interest to address, the USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Office of Regional Sustainable Development (LAC/RSD) initiated the Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment in 2005 to study the phenomenon and propose solutions in five countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. LAC/RSD received assistance from the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation.

The objectives of the Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment are to: (1) analyze the nature of gangs, their root causes, and other factors driving the phenomenon; (2) examine the transnational and regional aspects of gangs in Central America and Mexico, including the impact of deportation and immigration trends; (3) evaluate policies and programs and identify best practices in the assessment countries and the United States; and (4) provide strategic and programmatic recommendations to USAID about addressing the gang problem in the assessment countries[1]. Highlights follow.

Gang members and gang networks are heterogeneous. Gang members in Central America and Mexico are not homogenous. There is no typology applicable to every gang or gang member, and not all gangs have the same objectives or engage in the same type

[1] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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of activities or with the same level of violence. Although each country has its own brand of gang problem, the factors driving gang activity throughout the region include a lack of educational and economic opportunities, marginalized urban areas, intra-familial violence and family disintegration, easy access to drugs and firearms, overwhelmed and ineffective justice systems, and the "revolving door" along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Gangs represent a *regional* problem. Though data on gang activity is limited and often unreliable, the number of gang members in the five assessment countries range from a conservative estimate of 50,000 to approximately 305,000. Crime and gang violence is threatening economic and democratic development across the region. Estimates of the direct and indirect costs of violence suggest that the costs of crime are roughly 12 to 14 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), although only a portion of this cost can be attributed to gangs.[2] Gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street conduct business internationally, engaging in kidnapping, robbery, extortion, assassinations, and the trafficking of people and contraband across borders. Some Central American governments claim that a primary source of the gang problem is the U.S. policy of deporting gang members without sharing information about these deportees with government officials on the receiving end. They point to the fact that the majority of U.S. annual criminal deportations go to the five countries in this assessment. Gang members who commit crimes in their own countries often flee to the United States to hide, engage in criminal activity, and earn income until they are caught and deported, a cycle that often repeats itself again and again.

Current policies and programs to address gangs across Central America and Mexico are disjointed; an integrated, coordinated approach is needed. Research on gangs in the United States, interviews with experts on gangs, and reviews of anti-gang efforts in eight U.S. cities reveal that gang and youth violence problems are complex and an integrated and coordinated response that incorporates prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches is needed to achieve sustainable results. Current efforts to address gangs in the five assessment countries are fragmented, disjointed and further underscore the need for coordinated action and leadership. The results of the country investigations showed:

- **El Salvador** has a serious problem with international gangs, a harsh anti-gang law, and an emphasis on a law enforcement approach. It has modestly applied NGO and government prevention and intervention approaches.

- **Honduras** has a serious problem with international gangs, harsh anti-gang legislation, and also emphasizes law enforcement approaches. Honduras has a limited application of prevention and intervention approaches.

- **Mexico** has a largely unacknowledged problem with international and local gangs, no anti-gang laws, a law enforcement emphasis, and has applied some NGO and government prevention and intervention approaches.

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[2] UNDP. *Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*. 2005. pages 9 and 37.

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- **Guatemala** has a serious, localized gang problem but a limited international gang presence, an anti-gang law under consideration, and a primarily law enforcement emphasis with some application of prevention and intervention approaches**.**

- **Nicaragua** has a minor, largely localized gang problem with no international gangs. An anti-gang law was considered but not adopted. Nicaragua emphasizes prevention and intervention approaches integrated with law enforcement.

Gangs are a serious problem requiring U.S. Government (USG) involvement and interagency and international cooperation. The gang problem in the region cannot be adequately addressed by each country acting alone. A variety of USG agencies must work in cooperation with the assessment countries. There are several strategic and programmatic areas in which the USG can effectively address the gang issue.

Law enforcement must be balanced with prevention/intervention efforts, and both must receive adequate emphasis and funding. Prevention and intervention initiatives coupled with law enforcement approaches are more effective than law enforcement or prevention and/or intervention alone. Only an integrated approach offers a long-term solution to the gang problem.

The direct engagement of law enforcement agents is critical to effectively combating gang violence. Since gang activities tend to be concentrated in a limited number of "hot spots" in each country with unique contexts and needs, the USG should support interventions that demonstrate the efficacy of community policing models that provide integrated prevention, intervention, and law enforcement activities tailored to the particular needs of the local community.

Law enforcement, judicial, and criminal justice systems need to be strengthened throughout Central America and Mexico. Structural weaknesses in the Central American and Mexican judicial, law enforcement, criminal justice, and penitentiary systems contribute to the gang problem in each country. USAID, along with other USG and international donors, should continue efforts to strengthen these institutions.

Transnational initiatives that promote informational exchanges among gang-affected countries are important. Actors in gang-affected countries cannot act independently to implement effective, sustainable anti-gang strategies and programs. As gangs are transnational in nature, information must flow freely between all countries involved to provide the most impact.

Intervention activities should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness, creatively constructed, and take into account local factors. Intervention, and more specifically rehabilitation, programs exist in each country but are largely under funded, have a number of inherent risks, and are not easily able to provide the multitude of services needed for gang members to engage in alternative lifestyles.

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Policy initiatives and reform at both the national and regional levels are urgently required. Each Central American government is in the process of reviewing its policies towards gangs. While some countries have adopted largely hard-line policies focused on strengthening law enforcement's ability to remove gang members and suspected gang members from the streets, other gang-affected countries have yet to fully define, legislate, and/or implement balanced prevention and enforcement policies.

Accurate information on gangs and gang violence is unavailable. While anecdotal information abounds, there is little solid research being conducted on gang activities in Central America. Data on gangs across the region is unreliable and inconsistent.

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Introduction

Rising crime is threatening democratic development and slowing economic growth across Central America and Mexico. When Central Americans are polled about their primary fears, personal security and neighborhood safety are the most common concerns and gangs are often cited as the reason for high rates of crime and violence in their communities. USAID-funded public opinion surveys in Latin America revealed that victims of crime have less confidence in democratic institutions[3]. In addition, in many countries, high levels of crime provide the strongest justification in people's minds for a military coup.[4]

Gang activity in Central America and Mexico is a sophisticated form of violence and an increasing threat to security in the region. Since the end of the 1980s period of armed conflict, gang violence has evolved from a localized, purely neighborhood-based security concern into a transnational problem that pervades urban enclaves in every country in the region. The two predominant Central American gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street gang (Barrio 18), while originating in the Los Angeles region of the United States, have capitalized on globalization trends and communications technologies to acquire arms, power, and influence across the United States, Mexico, and Central America. Gang activity has developed into a complex, multi-faceted, and transnational problem that cannot be solved by individual countries acting alone. New approaches are needed to curb the social and material devastation wrought by these extremely violent networks.

The five countries studied in this assessment – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua – have each responded differently to the gang problem. El Salvador and Honduras, for example, have largely committed to the *mano dura* (firm hand) approach, which emphasizes zero-tolerance law enforcement for tackling gang violence issues. The remaining countries are pursuing different approaches or are still debating *mano dura's* merits and shortcomings. Nicaragua has adopted an anti-gang approach that is weighted more towards prevention and intervention than heavy-handed law enforcement. Guatemala continues to debate *mano dura* while it struggles to operationalize prevention and intervention activities amid accusations of social cleansing tactics used on gang members. Mexicans, in general, do not feel they have a gang problem, although news of gang and drug cartel activity is reported daily. While each country struggles with its internal response, to date there have been few initiatives that address the transnational nature of gang activity in the region.

Figure 1 is a simplified representation of the cause-and-effect nature of gang activity. This cycle is further supported by sophisticated international communication networks, deportation and immigration trends, and a tendency by the press to sensationalize gang activity, thereby increasing the allure of gangs to youth.

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[3] Democratic Monitoring Indicators Survey. Latin American Public Opinion Project. http://www.lapopsurveys.org
[4] Report: *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens' Democracy*. United Nations Development Programme. 2004.

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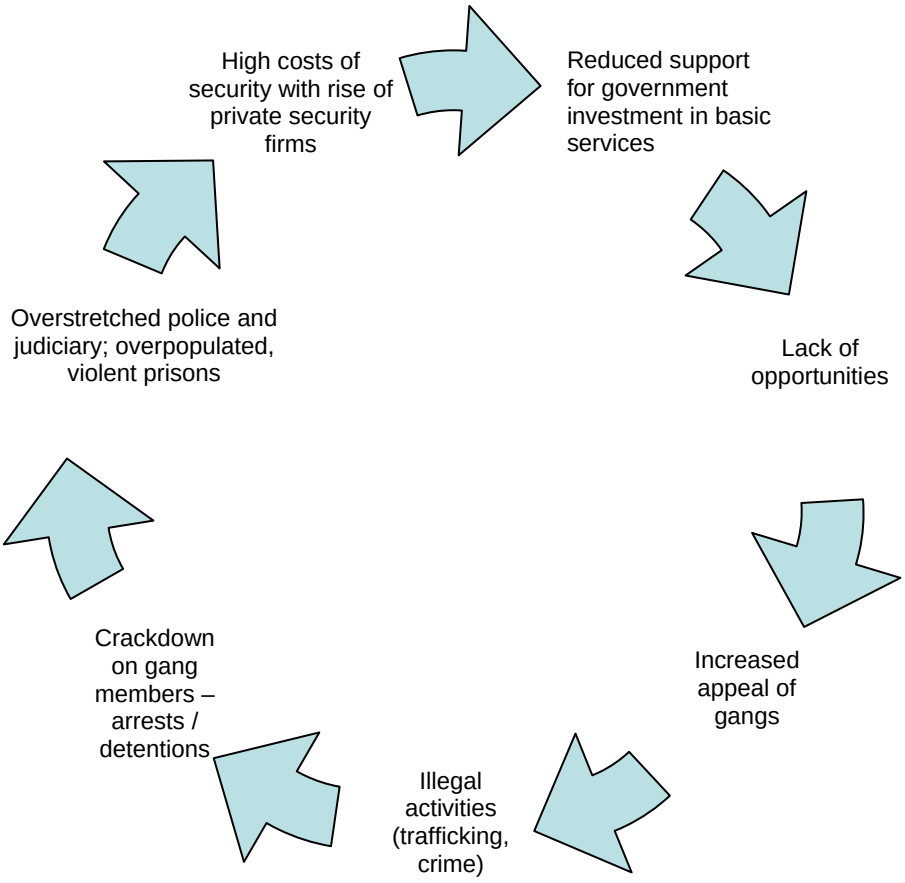
Figure 1: The Vicious Cycle of Central American and Mexican Gangs



U.S. Congressional Interest in Gang Issues

The U.S. Congress has expressed interest in understanding why Latin America has been identified as one of "the most violent regions on the planet."[5] In April 2005, representatives from USAID, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (DHS/ICE), Howard County Police Department, the Heritage Foundation, and the Inter-American Dialogue were called before the House of Representatives International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere to testify. The purpose of the hearing was "to examine the current threat level to economic and political stability in the Western Hemisphere, the implicit implications for U.S. security, and current remedies being pursued by the U.S. and other world organizations."[6] The U.S. Department of

[5] Chairman Dan Burton. U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. Hearing: Gangs and Crime in Latin America. April 20, 2005.

[6] House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. Hearing: "Gangs and Crime in Latin America," April 20, 2005.

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Justice estimates that there are some 30,000 gangs with about 800,000 members operating in the United States. Chairman Burton's statement cited "strong evidence that our porous borders are providing easy passage for gang members and illegal immigrants, [and] the children of illegal immigrants are prime targets for gang recruitment." The agencies that testified at the hearing were challenged to find "new and innovative ways to strengthen international cooperation to fight gangs and crime."[7]

USAID Involvement in Addressing Gangs

While USAID has experience implementing crime prevention activities in Central and South America, its experience directly addressing the gang issue is limited. USAID undertook this gang assessment in 2005 to study the transnational nature of gangs, review the United States' experience over the last two decades tackling this issue domestically, analyze the current situation along the southern and northern borders of Mexico and in four Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), and make recommendations for future actions by the United States Government. The decision to undertake this assessment coincided with a greater recognition of the seriousness of the gang problem across the United States, in part a function of increased media coverage of violent gang-related acts in cities throughout the United States. During the hearing, Adolfo A. Franco, USAID Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, remarked on the impacts of gang activity in the region: "Rising crime and gang violence in Latin America pose a direct threat to security, economic growth, democratic consolidation, and public health in Latin America. USAID is prepared to continue working with other U.S. agencies to develop multi-sectoral responses to address both the law enforcement and social prevention aspects of crime mitigation."[8]

Assessment Objectives

The Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment has four main objectives:

- To analyze the nature of gangs and identify root causes and other factors driving the phenomenon
- To examine the transnational and regional nature of gangs in Central America and Mexico, including the impact of deportation and immigration trends
- To identify and evaluate policies and programs that address gang issues in the five assessment countries and in the United States
- To provide strategic and programmatic recommendations to the LAC Bureau and LAC Missions in the five assessment countries

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Excerpt from the testimony of Adolfo A. Franco, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, USAID on April 20, 2005, before the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere.

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Methodology

This assessment intends to provide an overview of the transnational nature of gang members and their networks spanning Mexico, Central America, and the United States; a review of current policies being implemented; and recommendations for further action. There were several constraints worth noting in undertaking the assessment. Accurate research and analysis regarding this topic is scarce. In fact, this is the first in-depth assessment of transnational gang linkages and activity. Moreover, quantitative data on gangs at the local and state levels is either unavailable or unreliable. However, anecdotal information from media outlets, citizens, NGOs, and some local and state government officials is plentiful.

To account for these constraints and utilize the wealth of qualitative data available in-country, USAID contracted Creative Associates International, Inc. to conduct fieldwork in Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, and El Salvador, while USAID staff conducted fieldwork in Guatemala. Field teams consisted of 4-5 individuals, including USAID representatives and local researchers in each country. The team employed a fieldwork methodology based upon a research tool developed by the Creative Associates team and refined with the input of USAID. Creative Associates developed a list of interview questions for various stakeholders, e.g. USG representatives, mayors, police, judges, correctional officers, other government officials, private sector stakeholders, church clergy, NGO officials, vulnerable youth, gang and former gang members. The questions covered nine key areas – effective programs, root causes, gang recruitment, government/donor/organizational policies, current responses to gang issues, status of security, border issues, deportation issues, role of the media, and gangs in prison. In addition, a team based in Washington, D.C. researched gang initiatives in eight areas in the United States and conducted a series of half-day consultations in Washington, D.C. with a representative sampling from various offices within USAID and other USG agencies, international donors, academics, private sector, police, local government officials, NGOs, and former gang members. These meetings provided a testing ground for preliminary recommendations and conclusions and created relevant linkages between domestic and international agendas related to gang activity.

Five Country Profile Annexes follow this report. Each profile includes a country-specific analysis of gangs, a review of responses to the gang issues, and policy and programmatic recommendations[9].

[9] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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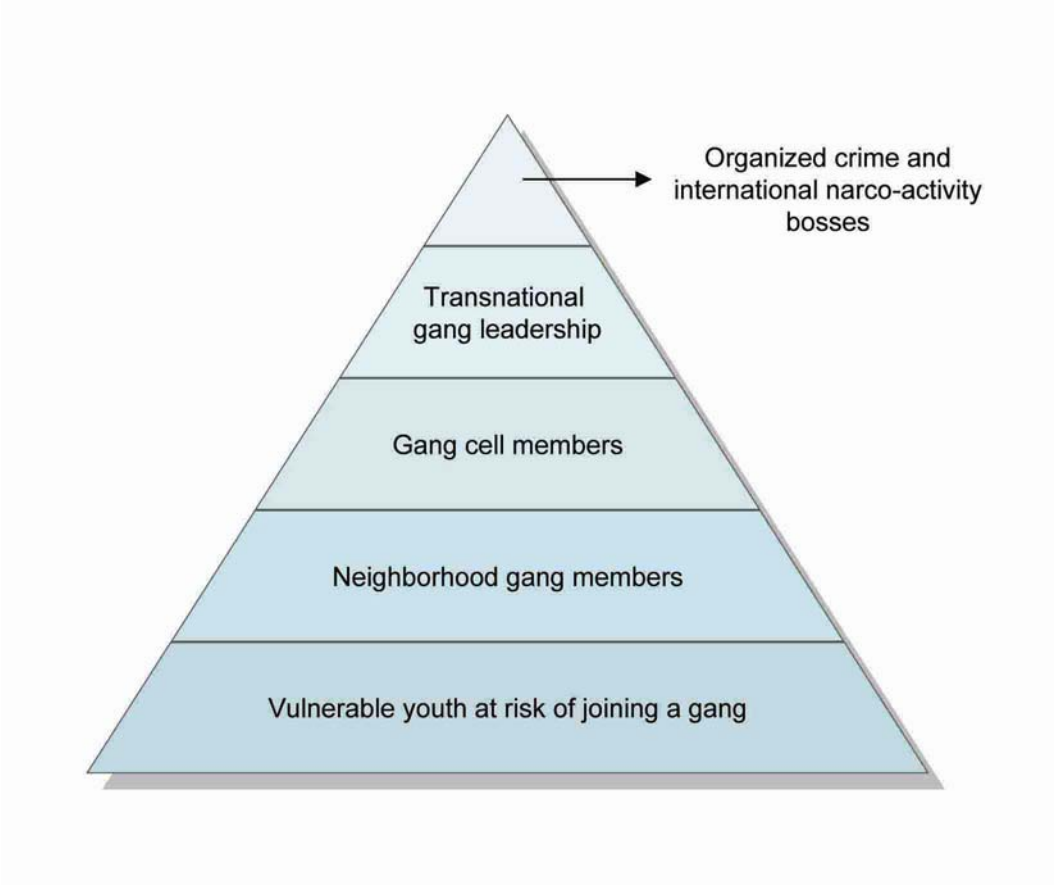
The Typology of Gangs[10] in Central America and Mexico

Gang members in Central America and Mexico are not homogenous. There is no typology applicable to every gang or gang member. Not all gangs have the same objectives, engage in the same type of activities, or exhibit the same level of violence.

Figure 2 below shows a hierarchy of organizations and networks in Central America and Mexico that most commonly fall under the definition of gangs. While the pyramid does not do complete justice to the level of complexity within each strata, it does provide a general understanding of the various groupings of gangs and their relation to organized crime networks and the broader at-risk youth population.

Figure 2: Gang Structures



[10] For the purposes of this report, the use of the word "gang" refers to any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its identity (Professor Malcolm Klein, "Voices from the Field Conference", February 2005). However, this definition is not used consistently in the region, and a wide range of organized groups and networks are referred to as gangs.

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Box 1- Profile of a Boss: "El Chapo"

Max Aregon a.k.a. Joaquin Guzman-Loera, a.k.a. "*El Chapo*" Guzman, 51 years old, of the notorious Mexican drug cartel is an example of an organized crime boss who has contracted out work to gang members. It is speculated that El Chapo has hired MS-13 gangsters to combat rival cartels. In addition, other lower level cartels use gang members to distribute drugs.

Organized Crime and International Narco-Activity Bosses (international): The top block of the pyramid represents the highest levels—the leadership—of organized crime and narco-activity networks. Most analysts do not believe that there is a direct ascension from street or neighborhood gangs to organized crime, yet it is believed that some narco-bosses work closely with the leadership of the most sophisticated transnational gangs. In general, these bosses do not have communication with members below the regional and national levels. But, other lower levels maintain close relations to ensure drug distribution in specific regions or neighborhoods.

Transnational Gang Leadership (regional): This block represents the leaders of 18th Street, MS-13, or other gangs with international presence. These individuals oversee well-connected cells with extensive communication networks that are engaged in extortion and support drug and arms trafficking through territorial control of specific *barrios* (neighborhoods), or of other places such as nightclubs. When detained, a few of them have lawyers who are able to help them avoid prison sentences.

Box 2- Profile of a Transnational Gang Leader

Bernardo Bonilla, 24 years old, a.k.a. the *Loco*, is an ambitious gang member who has evolved from involvement in local neighborhood operations to more sophisticated, transnational organized crime activity. He has built strong networks with gang members in prisons and in other countries. He understands the potential of the gang organization and is trying to become more involved in lucrative organized crime. As the majority of his clique currently lacks the necessary skills to engage in the more sophisticated business of organized crime, its involvement is limited. However, Bonilla has begun to groom some members for future involvement.

Box 3- Profile of a Gang Cell Member

Eduardo Perez, a.k.a. the Joker, is a member of MS-13, and the leader of his clicka. He and his gang regularly distribute drugs in the neighborhood. He has moved his way up in the gang through his progressively brutal acts. His gang extorts buses, local businesses, and families in residential areas. The money collected is used to satisfy various needs of the clicka, finance parties, and support the families of those who have been killed or those who are in prison. Despite these financial gains through extortion, Perez still lives in relative poverty.

Gang Cell Members (national): At this level, 18th Street or MS-13 *clickas* (cells) are involved in lower-level trafficking and have lesser territorial control over *barrios*. These gang members may be involved in extortion, such as the collection of *impuestos de guerra* (war taxes) from bus and taxi drivers and small businesses owners, and they sometimes carry out orders from regional leaders. They often receive special privileges in prison from other gang members when detained. These members communicate up to the drug traffickers and down to the lower level members.

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Neighborhood Gang Members (local): *Maras de Barrio* (neighborhood gangs) are not necessarily members of the 18th Street or MS-13 gangs, but they may imitate these two gangs. They fight for territorial control over *barrios* and carry homemade arms or arms that are often acquired through the robbery of private security guards. These gangs typically comprise youths from marginal urban neighborhoods. They do not receive special privileges from other gang members while in prison and are often viewed as illegitimate by gang members who consider themselves true members of specific gang *clickas*. Youth gangs in Mexico are normally referred to as "*pandillas*," not "*maras*," and exhibit these same characteristics.

Box 4 – Profile of a Neighborhood Gang Member

Roberto Lopez, 16 years old, says that he joined the gang because he wanted love and respect. He dropped out from school, consumes crack, and carries a homemade arm. He is protective of his territory, and regularly fights with the rival gang to safeguard it, which often gets him in trouble with the police. He knows about the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs and may one day become a member of one of them.

Box 5- Profile of a Youth at Risk of Joining a Gang

Alberto Mendez is 10 years old and does not like school. His family lets him hang out on the street with friends even though his mother knows that his cousin joined a gang sometime ago. He admires his cousin. Last week his cousin's picture was in the newspaper. He was detained by the police but back in the neighborhood three days later. If his father continues to get drunk at night, and beat his mother and his little brother, he will ask his cousin to let him join the gang.

Vulnerable Youths at Risk of Joining a Gang: This group represents the largest segment of the population: youths ages 8-18 whose lives are characterized by several risk factors, making them susceptible to joining a gang.[11] The majority of youths in this group are poor, live in marginalized urban areas, have limited to no educational or job opportunities, and represent the lowest level of the gang supply chain. This group can be further broken into three subsets. The first group of at-risk youth is often referred to as "*simpatizantes*," or sympathizers. This group includes at-risk youth who are exposed to gang activity, may have a relative who is in a gang, are somewhat familiar with certain aspects of gang culture (e.g., gang symbols, graffiti), and often display allegiance to one gang over another; that is, they are sympathetic to one particular gang, but have not been officially inducted, or "jumped into" a gang. This group is perceived to be the group of youth *most* at risk of making the decision to join a gang. The second group of at-risk youth, often referred to as "*aspirantes*," or aspirants, includes often the youngest youth who have some exposure to gang activity but have not yet become very familiar with specifics of gang culture. With continued exposure, this group of youth will become well-versed and more sympathetic to gang life. Lastly, the third and largest subset includes the broader at-risk youth population that includes youth living predominantly in poor, marginalized, urban areas without access to education, employment, and other opportunities. While this group has not yet been exposed to any significant level of gang activity, the likelihood does exist that they will be drawn to gang life especially if their basic needs such as income and fulfilling social ties are not satisfied in other ways. Subsets can help policy makers identify and target appropriate policies and programs.

[11] Causes and risk factors for gang activity in the five assessment countries are explained in greater detail in the Country Profile Annexes.

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Responses to Gang Activity: The Prevention—Intervention—Law Enforcement Continuum

This assessment distinguishes between three responses to gang violence: prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. **Prevention** refers to efforts to prevent, reduce, or minimize the incidence of gang activity and its negative consequences by dissuading at-risk youths from joining gangs. Specific prevention activities include, but are not limited to, expanded educational opportunities, implementation of school-based violence prevention curricula, provision of safe recreational opportunities for youths, alternative income generation activities, and targeted community and parental awareness initiatives and training. **Intervention** refers to efforts to support, encourage, and positively address the needs of individuals attempting to leave or who have left a gang, and may include efforts to persuade individuals to leave the gang. Specific intervention activities include, but are not limited to, the provision of skills training, counseling, access to employment opportunities, drug and alcohol abuse programs, alternative sentencing, and prison rehabilitation programs. Prevention and intervention activities can be implemented by both government and non-government actors. **Law enforcement** approaches focus on the arrest, detention, prosecution, and incarceration of criminals. Most countries, including the United States, rely heavily on law enforcement as the primary response to gang activities, while prevention and intervention services receive less attention and budgetary support. However, experience gained in the United States and elsewhere indicates that successful anti-gang programs implement a balanced and unified prevention–intervention–law enforcement approach.

The Gang Phenomenon in Central America and Mexico

Many transnational gangs originated in Los Angeles, formed by Latin American immigrants who came to the United States to escape Central American conflicts in the 1980s. Once in the United States, many young Mexican and Central American immigrants were exposed to gangs. When they returned or were deported back to their native countries, they brought the U.S. gang culture with them. Gangs now exist across Central America, Mexico and the United States, and their international connections feed a thriving gang culture.

While gangs in each country have singular characteristics, gang members and their activities are intricately linked across borders. International borders in Central America and Mexico offer minimal obstacles to illegal crossings. Gang members can easily relocate to another country if they feel that the threat level against them in their home country has become too great. There are an estimated 62,700 gang members in the four Central American countries (see Box 1). Additionally, conservative estimates are that about 19,000 members of MS-13 and 18th Street gangs combined operate along the Mexican borders. MS-13 and 18th Street also have thousands of members living in the United States. They are rival gangs, and generally where one is found the other is operating nearby. They conduct international business including the trafficking of illegal substances and people, kidnapping, robbery, extortion, assassinations, and other illicit profit-generating activities.

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Box 1. Estimated numbers of gang members

Country	Gang membership (predominantly MS-13 and 18th Street)
United States	38,000[12]
El Salvador	10,500[13]
Honduras	36,000
Nicaragua	2,200[14]
Guatemala	14,000
Southern Mexico border	3,000[15]
Northern Mexico border	17,000[16]
Totals	120,700

The root causes of gang activity in the five countries are similar—marginalized urban areas with minimal access to basic services, high levels of youth unemployment compounded by insufficient access to educational opportunities, overwhelmed and ineffective justice systems, easy access to arms and an illicit economy, dysfunctional families, and high levels of intra-familial violence. A demographic youth bulge has created a cohort of youth without jobs, decent education, or realistic expectations of employment. The four Central American countries have a combined total population of nearly 30 million people and approximately 60 percent are under 25 years old.[17] The Mexican states assessed (Chiapas, Baja California, Chihuahua, and Tamulipas) have an estimated population of 9.6 million people and nearly 50 percent are under 25 years old.[18] Underemployment and unemployment ranges from less than 20 percent in Guatemala, to about 25 percent in Mexico, to over 50 percent in the remaining three countries.[19] Although many of these youth represent untapped economic potential for their countries, they face a much bleaker future than their parents did at the same age.

While countries may suppress gangs by stepping up law enforcement actions in areas with high levels of gang activity, few have developed long-term plans for a balanced prevention-intervention-law enforcement approach. However, governments and regional institutions have begun to recognize the importance of working together on this issue. In early April 2005, Central American leaders met in Honduras to consider regional approaches to coordinate security and information-sharing initiatives to combat gangs. In addition, later that year the Organization for American States hosted a two-day meeting in Tapachula, Mexico where member states considered regional responses to the transnational phenomenon of youth gangs in Central America and Mexico. In April

[12] These figures are the conservative estimates of MS-13 and 18th Street gang membership in the U.S., used by the FBI and the National Drug Intelligence Center.
[13] These figures were collected by the FBI from national counterparts in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.
[14] This figure is an approximate number used by the National Police in Nicaragua.
[15] This figure is an approximate number used by the border authorities in the Tapachula, Mexico area.
[16] This figure is an estimate of the number of gang members in Ciudad Juarez based on an interview held in the Direccion de Prevencion Municipal office. October 2005. Numbers of gang members were difficult to obtain and substantiate in the other northern border towns visited by the Assessment Team.
[17] www.paho.org 1996 and 2000 combined statistical estimates.
[18] Population information . GeoHive. http://www.geohive.com. and www.dallasfed.org. Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. El Paso Branch.Issue 2. 2001. Page 2.
[19] Multiple sources: Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos. http://www.nph.org/; The World Factbook. http://www.cia.gov/cia/; Industry Canada. http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/.

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2006, government officials from across Central America and Mexico and from various USG agencies, along with experts in prevention, intervention, and law enforcement, will come together in El Salvador to discuss the state of the gang problem across the region, share information about what different countries are doing to address gangs, and brainstorm solutions.

The Transnational Nature of Gang Activity in Central America and Mexico

The transnational nature of gangs is the result of a confluence of factors including a lack of services and opportunities within countries, deportation trends, and migration between countries. These factors can make relocation to other countries and gang activity more alluring. Contradictory to many claims, U.S. deportation practices are not the single, overriding factor fueling the growth of gangs. The emergence of gangs in Central America and Mexico pre-dated the 1990s, the decade when the U.S. deported large numbers of convicted gang members to their home countries. However, deportation is one of several factors contributing to the expansion of gangs. Deportation is of particular relevance as it has directly resulted in the exporting of the U.S. brand of gang culture to Central America and Mexico. This resulted in Central American and Mexican gangs adopting more sophisticated gang techniques – which originated on the streets of urban America. In addition, these gangs became increasingly connected to their gang affiliates in the U.S., which has continued to facilitate cross-border communication, organization, and growth among gang members in the U.S., Central America, and Mexico.

In general, neither criminal nor administrative deportees to Central America and Mexico receive any social or remedial services upon their return to their home countries. This increases the likelihood that deportees will either attempt to illegally re-enter the United States or, with particular respect to criminal deportees, continue criminal activity in their countries of origin. During FY 2004, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sent 72,173 criminal and 64,520 administrative deportees[20] back to the five countries studied in this assessment (See Box 2). These numbers represented 85 percent of all deportations that fiscal year. While initial efforts have been undertaken by the U.S. Government to share background information on deportees with host key country officials, this is not yet standard practice.

[17] An administrative deportee is a person, who has not been charged with committing any crimes, expelled from a country by recognized authorities and in accordance with legal jurisdictions of that country.

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Box 2. FY 2004 Criminal Deportations from the U.S. to Five Assessment Countries

Country	U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement FY 2004 Criminal Deportations
El Salvador	2,667
Honduras	2,345
Nicaragua	388
Guatemala	1,831
Mexico	64,942
Totals	72,173

Migration is another factor that has resulted in the transnationalization of gang activity. Gang members often relocate from one Central American country to another. For example, Central American gang members consider southern Mexico to be a lucrative business environment where one can profit from the cross-border trafficking of drugs, weapons, and humans. On Mexico's northern border, gangs are reportedly hired by international drug cartels for various services such as drug distribution and assassinations. To respond to the fluidity of gang migration in this region, government officials have an incentive to ensure that their internal policies and procedures are strict enough to discourage gang members from neighboring countries from migrating to their country.

In June 2005, the DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) confirmed the transnational nature of gang activity. The FBI MS-13 National Task Force traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, on a fact-finding mission. On that trip, the FBI obtained 180 fingerprint records of gang members. These records were later shared with ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The interagency partners determined that 46 of those same individuals had already been identified in the United States. Although it was not clear from the June fact-finding mission in which direction—north or south—the gang members were heading, it was evident that there is frequent transnational movement by gang members throughout the region.

The Revolving Door

Transnational gang activity is fueled by the relative ease in which gang members can cross borders, which creates a self-perpetuating "revolving door" phenomenon. The revolving door refers to the ongoing and circular flow of gang members from the north to the south and also from the south to the north. The reasons behind this continual movement are complex and varied. One contributing factor is the tendency for gang members to flee areas where they are either wanted by authorities, have committed a crime, or have recently been released from jail. For example, when gang members in Central America commit crimes in their own countries, they often flee the crime scene

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and hide out in the United States with acquaintances or family members – thus the door swings from the south to the north.[21] Once in the U.S., deportation proceedings may eventually result in gang members being returned to their home countries (door swings from the north to the south). Further complicating the panorama, it is not uncommon for a gang member to stage an intentional minor arrest by U.S. authorities in order to get a free trip back to their home country. Regardless of the intentionality of arrest and deportation, anecdotal information indicates that gang members often travel back to the United States in a matter of weeks.

Deportation is a frightening prospect for many known gang members, as reprisals in their home countries can be deadly. For example, some Salvadoran gang leaders who have been deported from the U.S. claim to fear El Salvador's *Sombra Negra* (Black Shadow), a purported assemblage of rogue police and military personnel who deal out vigilante justice to criminals and gang members. They say that they would prefer to take their chances with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security than with groups like the *Sombra Negra,*[22] and therefore try to enter and remain in the U.S. illegally. Gang members living illegally in the U.S. may then proceed to extort and threaten Central Americans in the United States with claims that they will retaliate against family members in home countries if pledges of silence are broken, or if knowledge of a gang member's actions are revealed to U.S. authorities.

The Cost of Violence

The cost of gang violence will be a key determinant in how much countries should choose to invest in addressing the problem. Regrettably, data required to calculate this cost is vague and inconsistent. The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have made significant strides in developing an understanding of violence more broadly and its costs. The IDB measures the costs of violence by considering direct and indirect costs and economic and social multipliers. Using this approach, they estimate the cost of violence in Latin America to be 14.2 percent of GDP.[23] In industrialized nations, the costs are estimated to be around 5 percent of GDP. Similarly, the World Bank has identified a strong correlation between crime and income inequality. Business associations in the region rank crime as the number one issue negatively affecting trade and investment. A cost assessment focused specifically on gang violence to assess the range of costs posed by gang violence, including additional security measures, law enforcement, medical attention, foregone investment, and losses in productivity, would reveal potentially large investments that could be redirected for more productive uses.

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[21] Interview with gang members. Washington, D.C. December 2005.

[20] Daniel Borunda, "Central American Gang May Have Presence in EP," *El Paso Times*, January 3, 2005.

[21] Londono, J. and Guerrero, R. (1999), "Violencia en America Latina: epidemiologia y costos," IADB Working Paper, No. R-375. Page 22.

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Box 3. Costs of Violence in El Salvador
In 2005, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) financed a study "*Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*" ("How Much Does Violence Cost El Salvador?"), in which the costs of violence were estimated to be approximately 11.5 percent of the GDP, or about US$1.7 billion annually. The proportion of this which can be specifically attributed to gang violence can only be estimated. The Government of El Salvador claims that 60 percent of the homicides are related to gang violence. Using this figure, it can be estimated that gang violence costs the country about US$1 billion per year.

The U.S. Experience Addressing Gang Activity

Central American gangs are a growing concern in the United States, and the federal government is becoming increasingly involved with state, local, and community actors to develop solutions to the gang problem. While by no means solved, the gang problem in certain areas of the United States has abated, and multiple gang programs have been implemented that provide important lessons and experiences that should be drawn upon in addressing gangs in the Central American and Mexican context.

In preparing this report, researchers began by reviewing available data on gangs and related violence in the U.S. Statistics revealed that over the past decade there has been an overall decrease in youth and gang related violence in the United States. The U.S. law enforcement community contends that these overall violence reductions among youth and gangs coincided with the introduction of new community policing tactics and practices by police. However, the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment reports that Hispanic gang membership is increasing and in communities where the more notorious gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street operate, there is increasing violence and crime. This is not surprising, as MS-13 and other gangs have begun to cross national boundaries, and Latin America now has the second highest violent crime rate in the world (second only to sub-Saharan Africa).

Detailed case studies of anti-gang programs in several areas of the United States are found in Annex 6. Case studies cover Boston, Massachusetts; Newark, New Jersey; Indianapolis, Indiana; Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; Mountlake Terrace, Washington; and the Greater Washington, DC region. Research reveals that the success of any anti-gang initiative hinges on its ability to integrate a number of approaches. Both the law enforcement-only and prevention-only approaches failed or at best provided mixed results in the U.S. experiences. Gang and youth violence problems are complex and, as the following two case studies demonstrate, a coordinated response that incorporates prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches is needed in order to achieve sustainable results.

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CASE STUDY 1. BOSTON

After years of anti-gang initiatives led by the Anti-Gang Violence Unit of the Boston Police Department (BPD), a new program emerged in the late 1990s that became known as "Operation Cease Fire." First, instead of localized and episodic crackdowns, Cease Fire was a systematic, citywide operation with the clear purpose of continuing until the gang violence stopped. Police and others communicated directly with gang members and "pulled every lever" to ensure severely unpleasant consequences for those who perpetuated the violence. Cease Fire also included a focused law enforcement attack on illegal gun trafficking. The Operation maintained continuous and coordinated communications with gang members, relaying its message that violence would not be tolerated and would be met with an unprecedented law enforcement response. Second, Operation Cease Fire offered an array of prevention and intervention programs that supported gang members interested in making positive choices for their future. Third, Operation Cease Fire institutionalized the BPD training program and shifted the way police and probation officers worked on gang issues.

Operation Cease Fire had a dramatic impact on Boston's youth homicide rate. In the twelve months following the introduction of Operation Cease Fire, the number of youth homicides fell by two-thirds and remained low until 2001.

Lessons Learned from the Boston Experience:

- Monitor and adapt. The Boston strategy developed over time as law enforcement and community leaders gradually gained confidence in each other and recognized the need to work as a cohesive unit. In addition, the developing program was molded through trial and error.
- Use a multi-sector approach. Forming a working group consisting of representatives from all agencies that deal with violence as well as community-based entities was paramount to the success of the Operation.
- Hold groups accountable. The Boston program was successfully predicated on using the social structure inherent in gangs to enforce collective accountability for individual violent actions.
- Assess first. Conducting a community-wide assessment of the gang problem is an important first step in reaching consensus among stakeholders.
- Communicate. A direct communications strategy aimed at chronic offenders and backed by the community may have the potential to generate at least short-term declines in criminal activity.

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CASE STUDY 2. LOS ANGELES

In 1998, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded the RAND Corporation to develop and test strategies for reducing gun violence among youths in Los Angeles. After forming a working group with community and law enforcement representatives, the Hollenbeck area of Los Angeles was targeted. Approximately 75 percent of all homicides in the area were gang motivated or gang-related, and about half involved drugs. A spatial analysis identified hot spots where much of the violence took place.

The working group team designed an intervention that incorporated both carrots and sticks. The sticks used included (1) targeting all members of the given gang, regardless of who committed the act, with strict law enforcement; (2) increased police patrols in the offender's and victim's area; and (3) stricter enforcement of public housing requirements. The carrot side of the intervention focused on community-based violence prevention programming through a consortium that included local churches, job referral agencies, gang workers, and others. Some support services offered to gang members included job training and placement, tattoo removal, and substance abuse treatment.

The overall results of the initiative were mixed. Although violent gun-related crimes involving gang members dropped by one-third in the Hollenbeck area during the intervention, the effects decreased over time.

Lessons Learned from the Los Angeles Experience:

- Start small. In a large geographic area like Los Angeles, with a wide range of ethnic, political, and socioeconomic differences, researchers thought it doubtful that a citywide intervention would have succeeded.
- Form working groups. The working group provided a regular forum for exchanging ideas and focusing attention on a discrete and manageable problem.
- Use neutral facilitators and analysts. Nongovernmental organizations can play an important role in cutting through the bureaucratic channels to reach key people, provide unbiased analysis, and maintaining program momentum.
- Increase funding for carrots. Once law enforcement decided to implement the intervention, they had significant resources to carry out the action and well-developed procedures and command structure to produce outcomes. The community partners, on the other hand, had fewer resources, less flexibility, and less experience mounting a coordinated effort with other agencies. Community-based organizations may need additional resources and training to become more effective partners.

The U.S. case studies highlight the difficulties that the United States confronted when attempting to address issues related to violence, crime, easy access to small arms and gang activity. Several U.S.cities continue to struggle with these issues today. While any attempts to obtain similar results in Central America and Mexico should draw upon lessons learned from the U.S. experience, it is important to acknowledge that the infrastructure and level of sophistication to address these U.S.-based problems does not generally exist in the five assessed countries.

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U.S. Government Efforts to Address Gang Violence in Central America and Mexico

The USG is implementing some activities in the region that fall within the broad parameters of the anti-gang response continuum—prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. USAID is implementing a few programs to directly address gang activity utilizing these three approaches. In addition, the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement is assisting local police to more effectively address the gang problem and the Department of Justice is providing assistance to strengthen law enforcement.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has increased its efforts to address domestic gang violence as it is connected to Central American and Mexican gangs. In September 2005, during a one-day operation, the FBI MS-13 National Gang Task Force coordinated an international effort involving 6,400 police officers, federal agents, and other officials in twelve U.S. states, as well as in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and southern Mexico, to target MS-13 and other violent gangs. This operation resulted in a series of arrests, searches, detentions, and other law enforcement actions against over 650 gang members. The DOJ has also convened an International Anti-Gang Task Force comprised of three operational working groups (Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance, Law Enforcement Cooperation and Information Sharing, and Repatriation) to focus and coordinate international anti-gang enforcement efforts of the various U.S. federal law enforcement agencies with efforts of their counterparts in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In addition to the law enforcement components of the DOJ and the Department of Homeland Security (including the FBI; Drug Enforcement Administration; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Bureau of Prisons; U.S. Marshals Service; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and U.S. Customs and Border Protection), other interested U.S. departments and agencies such as the Department of State and USAID are participating in this task force.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has also increased efforts to address the gang problem. To combat gangs, DHS stepped up deportations in general during 2005, along with collections of gang-related information on persons picked up and interviewed by the DHS Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE started formal information collection on gangs under "Operation Community Shield[24]" in February 2005. Since then, there have been over 1,500 gang member entries included in the operation's database.[25] Over 10 percent of those identified as gang members were charged by ICE with illegal re-entry after deportation, and over 60 percent were charged with entry without inspection.[26] (See Figure 3: The Revolving Door of Transnational Gang Flow).

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[24] Operation Community Shield, started in February 2005, is a national law enforcement effort that links all of ICE's law enforcement authorities to combat violent gang activity.

[25] The ICE Operation Community Shield database for each person processed includes photographs, fingerprints, distinguishing markings such as tattoos and reference to criminal records, citizenship, immigration status and gang affiliation.

[26] Information obtained from DHS ICE Human Rights Violators and Public Safety Unit. Washington, D.C. "Entry without inspection" indicates that a person has crossed an international border and entered the US without being subjected to routine DHS border and customs procedures.

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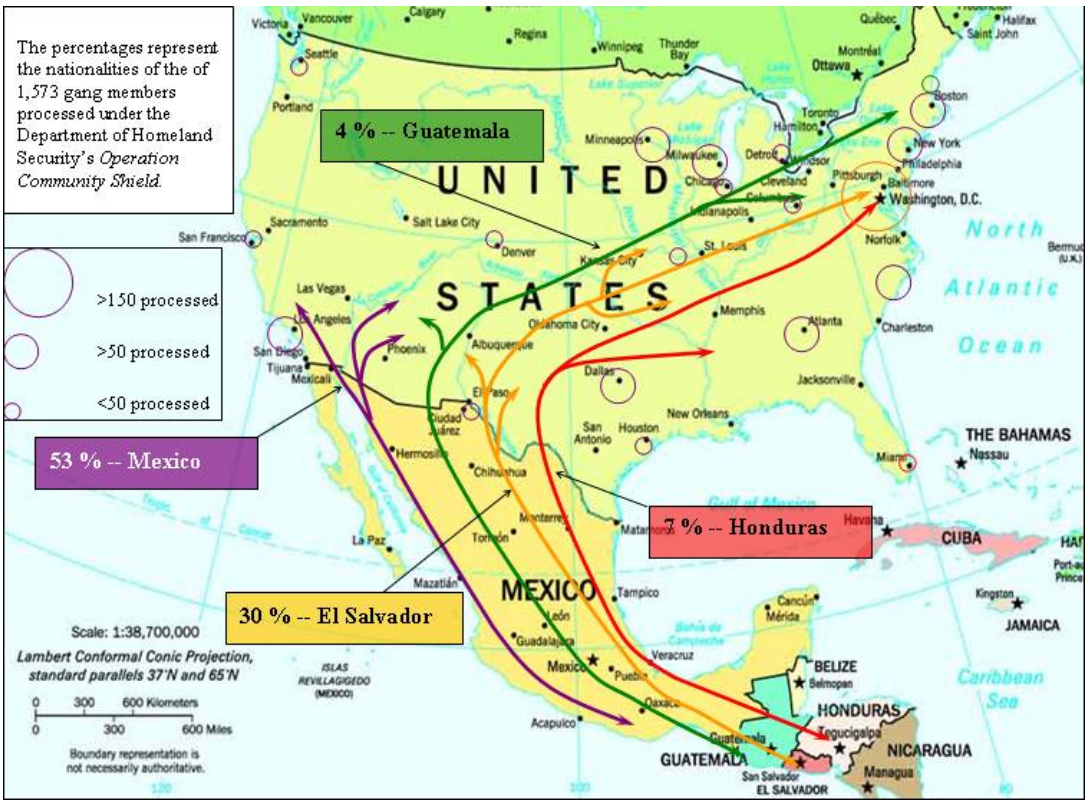
Figure 3: The Revolving Door of Transnational Gang Flow



The Revolving Door of Transnational Gang Flow

The map depicts approximate migration trends of Central American and Mexican gang members to the U.S. who were identified and processed by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Operation Community Shield initiative. Operation Community Shield is ICE's first broad effort to collect information on gang members as it relates to: deportation, removal and prosecution proceedings; identification of violent gangs; deterring and dismantling gang operations; increasing public awareness on violent gangs; and partnering with other law enforcement organizations for these objectives.

These migration trends indicate a movement of gang members to many points in the interior sections of the U.S. as well as to the primary coastal, urban and suburban areas. The arrows indicate tendencies or patterns of gang member migration. The circles are representative of areas where larger numbers of gang members were processed. Every state has a Latino immigrant population and all U.S. cities with a population over 250,000 have a gang presence.

During Operation Community Shield's first nine months of operation, from February through November 2005, ICE processed 1,573 persons who identified themselves, or were identified based on records or other intelligence, as gang members. Of the 1,573 processed, 1,346 (85%) were charged with re-entry after deportation, illegal re-entry and entry without inspection. Of those 1,346 individuals, 95% of them were from four countries – Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – and 372 (27%) had criminal charges against them.

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The United States did not statistically identify deported gang members until recently. The Department of Homeland Security and the FBI are beginning to work more closely with authorities in Central America and Mexico, but there are still large gaps in procedures and coverage that push the implementation of a cogent, cooperative regional approach years into the future.

The U.S. has made important advances in battling gang violence at home and abroad, particularly over the last two years targeting Hispanic gang members. However, much like its counterparts in Central America, the United States has yet to implement a broad policy initiative that fully takes into account prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches. Further coordination among agencies is necessary, to recognize the comparative strengths and limitations of each organization and strike the appropriate balance necessary to effect a lasting reduction in gang violence over time.

The Gang Problem at the Country Level and Country Responses[27]

Despite their proximity, each country's gang problem exhibits unique characteristics. Political events, country contexts, legislation, and other factors influenced how gangs established themselves within a particular area. The governments of all five countries have expressed concern with gang activity in their countries. For example, the governments of Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico recently signed an agreeement committing themselves to combating international terrorism and cracking down on arms and drug trafficking, and criminal gangs. The five countries studied have taken various steps along the prevention-intervention-law enforcement spectrum to address gangs within their national boundaries. The specific gang conditions in the five assessment countries, as well as current responses, are covered in detail in the individual country profiles that follow this chapter. A summary is provided in Table 1.

[27] For a detailed analysis of the gang situation in each of the five assessment countries, refer to the five Country Profile Annexes of this report.

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Table 1: Overview of Gangs in Central America and the Mexican Borders

Country	Gang Situation	Gang Legislation	Government Focus
El Salvador	Gang problem severe and international. Despite heavy-handed anti-gang laws, homicides still on the rise.	Anti-gang law (see country section for details).	Law enforcement emphasis, with active government and NGO prevention and some intervention.
Honduras	Gang problem severe with international aspects that warrant concern. Homicides increasing notwithstanding anti-gang legislation.	Anti-gang law (see country section for details).	Law enforcement emphasis with limited resource support; limited prevention and intervention.
Nicaragua	Gang problem is relatively minor and localized. Gang activity continues due to drug trafficking, poverty and lack of opportunities.	Anti-gang law debated and not accepted by Congress.	Approach more weighted towards prevention and intervention, with law enforcement involvement.
Guatemala	Gang problem severe but localized. Increasing reports of social cleansing of gangs appeared in international news.	Anti-gang law under consideration.	Law enforcement emphasis, with some prevention and intervention.
Mexico (Southern and Northern Borders)	Gang problem along the borders considered both local and international, but not widely recognized. Southern border offers drugs/arms/human trafficking opportunties for gangs. Northern border gangs cooperating with drug cartels.	No anti-gang law.	Law enforcement emphasis, with some NGO and government prevention and intervention.

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Working Towards the Solution: Donor Responses

Many donors support programs that indirectly address the gang problem by focusing on major causes and risk factors. Examples include primary education, youth leadership, community development, alternative dispute resolution, micro-enterprise development, and vocational and skills training. Participation in these more traditional development programs tend to be based on beneficiaries' past performance and few truly target the hardened gang members or potential gang members. In many cases, donors and local service providers are absent in neighborhoods that are considered to pose high security risks. As a result, there are huge gaps in service provision in these areas and marginalized youth in these areas often perceive their only alternatives to be gang life or illegal immigration.

Table 2 below provides a non-exhaustive list of current donor activities that address the gang issue, or crime and violence more broadly.

Table 2: US and other International Donor Assistance

Country	Donor	Description
El Salvador	USAID	Aid to Artisans has developed inroads to dialogue with gang leaders and involves their members in artisan development activities in the Ilobosco region. Proyecto MOJE (Movement of Young Discoverers) works toward eliminating violent gang rivalries and provides technical job training to local gang members with skills in pottery-making, welding, carpentry, and screen-printing. Targeting gangs in Ilobosco, MOJE also provides workshops on self-esteem and personal development for participating gang members. The program, in which MS-13 and 18th Street gangs work together, has succeeded in reintegrating some 300 gang members back into society.
El Salvador	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)	The IDB is executing a $45 million violence reduction loan which, after some delay, is now in the process of reactivation.
El Salvador	European Union	The European Union has provided $10 million assistance to the Government of El Salvador's National Council on Public Security (CNSP) for prevention activities launched in 10 municipalities of San Salvador and to be expanded to 25 municipalities.
Guatemala	Department of State and USAID	The US Government Rule of Law Strategy in Guatemala identifies "creating a new vision of policing" as a key objective. The US Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) and USAID are working together to implement a pilot project in Villa Nueva, a satellite city of Guatemala with high levels of gang activity. The activity's objective is to combine law enforcement approaches with community-based policing methods to reduce gang violence. Specific elements of the program include the creation of a specialized "Gang Unit" to use improved criminal investigative methods to identify gang members involved in drugs/arms trafficking, homicides, and extortions and process them through the formal justice system.

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Country	**Donor**	**Description**
Guatemala	USAID	APREDE (Association for Crime Prevention) operates three youth centers (*Casas Jovenes*) in Guatemala. The USAID Youth Alliance Program is helping APREDE develop a replicable model to respond to youth issues and tap into public and private sector support for APREDE, the Villa Nueva Crime Prevention Council and several Outreach Centers. The Youth Alliance Program has trained more than 700 youth, reached more than 7,000 youth with prevention initiatives and found employment for nearly 100 vulnerable youth. The Project recently launched a five-episode reality show, called "Challenge 10: Peace for the Ex," which features ex-gang members working together to develop small businesses.
Guatemala	USAID	The Rule of Law program is working to strengthen the justice sector and, through the creation of and support to Justice Centers, is improving coordination between different justice sector actors. In addition, the Rule of Law program is working in several departments in Guatemala to conduct community-based crime mapping to develop community-driven solutions to local crime problems. The Rule of Law program has also begun production of a radionovela program entitled "Amor Entre Rejas", about a Guatemalan family struggling with crime and gangs, and examining the different approaches to dealing with crime.
Guatemala	IDB	The IDB recently approved a $30 million, 2.5-year loan to Guatemala focused on citizen security projects. The emphasis will be on working with Ministries that already have resources and policies in place, to implement those policies. Specifically, the IDB will focus on working with COPREDEH to elaborate the new youth violence prevention policy; strengthening the police, especially community-based policing; developing a citizen security "observatory;" job training and youth employment; improving communication and social awareness on crime issues; preventing domestic violence; and supporting community crime prevention projects.
Guatemala	United Nations	Several UN offices (UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF) are joining forces to work with the GoG Ministry of Government to strengthen the police, protect human rights, and work with NGOs to implemented youth violence prevention activities. In addition, UNDP is working with Ceiba, a Guatemalan NGO, to strengthen police capabilities to analyze the gang phenomenon in Guatemala. UNDP is also supporting a pilot social/laboral insertion program in Antigua, with private sector support. Lastly, UNICEF is working with APREDE to provide rehabilitation services through Casa Joven – Edy Gomez, or the Edy Gomez Youth House, as well as analyzing the potential for an increased use of alternative sentencing for youth.

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Country	**Donor**	**Description**
Honduras	USAID	USAID/Honduras, while having no specific experience in working with gangs, supports youth through its Strengthened Rule of Law Program, which uses Alternative Dispute Resolution to resolve conflicts at the community level before turning to violence. The Advisory Center for Human Resources Development annually enrolls 5,000 low-income young people who are considered high-risk youth and could potentially be recruited by gangs. The Education for All project uses distance learning to train 100,000 out-of-school youths and young adults.
Honduras	IDB	The IDB has provided a $32 million loan to Honduras for a violence reduction program. This program will develop infrastructure, provide training to gang members in micro-entrepreneurship, and help gang members reintegrate back into society (San Pedro Sula area only)
Nicaragua	USAID	The Enhancing Vulnerable Children's Support in Nicaragua project, which is being implemented with the Fabretto's Children's Foundation, indirectly supports anti-gang responses. The project has three objectives: to improve school attendance and enrollment so children advance from primary to secondary school; raise the level of education achievement in primary schools; and improve health and hygiene in the participating schools.
Nicaragua	United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	UNDP has supported the development of a database on gangs and at-risk youth and made efforts to help ensure that information collected by the various NGOs was shared.
Regional	WB	The World Bank has developed a tool entitled "A Resource Guide for Municipalities: Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention in Urban Latin America," which it uses as the foundation of training it conducts for municipalities in the region. The document is based on the "Manual for Community-Based Crime Prevention," developed by the Government of South Africa, but was adapted to the Latin American urban context. The guide includes specific municipal approaches for addressing crime, best practice principles in crime prevention, and numerous examples of international municipal crime and violence prevention and reduction strategies.
Regional	Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)	The objectives of the recently established Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CCPVJ), which PAHO is supporting, include: promoting programs and policies for the prevention of juvenile violence; coordinating the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations to support a common agenda and achieve optimal impact; developing and advocating for public policy; and promoting respect for human rights. PAHO's support includes technical and financial assistance for ongoing activities in the region to halt the proliferation of gangs and diminish youth violence.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Gangs are a serious problem requiring USG involvement and interagency and international cooperation. The gang problem in the region cannot be optimally addressed by each country acting independently. USG agencies must work in cooperation with the gang-affected countries and include a broad spectrum of stakeholders including community groups, NGOs, and government institutions in these efforts.

Law enforcement must be balanced with prevention efforts, and both must receive adequate emphasis and funding. Empirical evidence from research on U.S. domestic anti-gang efforts indicates that prevention efforts coupled with law enforcement approaches are more effective than law enforcement or prevention alone. This tandem, integrated approach is the only true long-term solution to the gang problem. By working with youth, parents, churches, schools, and communities, the next generation of gang members can be dissuaded from joining gang life. Specific recommendations include:

- Support community-based initiatives that bring together a broad range of actors, including government (health, education, law enforcement, justice and economy), NGOs, the private sector, and community groups.
- Improve media coverage of the gang issue to minimize bias, increase public awareness, and promote social responsibility.

Law enforcement agents should be directly involved with the community to combat gang violence. Based on experiences in the United States and Central America, community-based policing models in many cases have proven effective at increasing the effectiveness of the police, improving community-police relations, and building support for the justice sector. Community-based policing, if supportive conditions exist, can be a powerful element of any effective program to combat gangs. Specific recommendations include:

- Introduce and expand community-based policing in gang-affected countries, where appropriate conditions exist, focusing on high priority urban neighborhoods where gang activity is most problematic.
- Establish independent police oversight committees and citizen oversight/watchdog mechanisms.

Law enforcement, judicial and criminal justice systems should be strengthened throughout Central America and Mexico. Structural weaknesses in the Central American and Mexican judicial, law enforcement, and criminal justice systems are fueling the gang problem in each country. USAID, along with other USG agencies and international donors, should continue to support institutional strengthening. Specific recommendations include:

- Analyze police record keeping and procedures to improve record sharing and encourage the development and maintenance of an electronic database on gang intelligence.

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- Provide regional opportunities for police to receive anti-gang response training in enforcement, prevention, and rehabilitation to improve understanding of gang resistance dynamics.
- Analyze and discuss human rights and public defender issues related to gangs with local authorities.
- Share gang-related information in accordance with international protocols.
- Work with governments to analyze and address weaknesses in the prison system that are driving the gang phenomenon.

Transnational initiatives that promote informational exchanges among gang-affected countries are essential. The research collected during this assessment confirms the necessity of developing a regional approach to addressing gang problems. USAID and the State Department should encourage dialogue with the five countries and multilateral insitutions such as the United Nations and Organization of American States to develop a focus, agenda, and tentative timeline for transnational initiatives to address gangs. Specific recommendations include:

- Provide fora for regional leaders from all sectors (governmental and nongovernmental) to discuss gang issues.
- Calculate the costs of gang violence to individual countries and to the region, using methodologies that are consistent across countries.
- Extract lessons learned from anti-gang efforts in the United States and apply them in the Central American and Mexican context.
- Convene discussions with other donors on their regional and country-specific plans to coordinate and leverage donor resources for anti-gang responses.
- Establish regional standards for anti-gang approaches and practices.

Intervention activities should be creatively constructed, evaluated to determine their effectiveness, and take local contexts into account. Intervention and rehabilitation programs exist in each country but are largely underfunded, have a number of inherent risks, and are not easily able to provide the multitude of services gang members need to reintegrate into society. In some of the more violent neighborhoods, security risks are an ongoing challenge for organizations and individuals alike. Outreach workers, which are often rehabilitated ex-gang members, run additional risks in the streets as they can be easily confused with current gang members. Furthermore, there are few organizations that can provide the holistic breadth of services required to help rehabilitate gang members that include, at a minimum, psychological counseling, medical treatment for addictions and other health issues, skills training, and educational opportunities. Specific recommendations include:

- Evaluate existing rehabilitation programs to determine their effectiveness.
- Design and implement programs and provide training to organizations that target newly arrived deportees and provide alternatives to continued gang membership and facilitate re-entry.

Policy initiatives and reform at both the national and regional levels are urgently required. Each Central American government is in the process of reviewing its policies

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towards gangs. While both Honduras and El Salvador have adopted relatively hard-line policies, the other countries have yet to fully define and legislate policy initiatives. Specific recommendations include:

- Provide high-level technical advisory services to help Central American governments design effective gang policies, budgets for interventions, and safeguards for human rights.
- Support multi-sectoral policy reform dialogues to develop broad-based solutions to gang activity.

Accurate information on gang violence is largely unavailable. While anecdotal information abounds, there is relatively little solid research available on gang activities in Central America. Data on gangs across the region is unreliable and inconsistent. Specific recommendations include:

- Support reliable research on gang issues.
- Collect regional statistics on gangs and design and improve databases on vulnerable youth populations.
- Undertake a mapping exercise to identify "hot spots," and target activities accordingly.
- Develop case studies and databases on anti-gang best practices to be shared among gang-affected countries.

A Summary of the Gang Problem in the Five Assessment Countries

A detailed analysis of gangs in each of the five assessment countries, country-level responses, and country-specific policy and programmatic recommendations can be found in the five attached Country Profile Annexes[28].

The following are brief summaries of the gang phenomenon in the five assessment countries.

[28] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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El Salvador

El Salvador is captive to the growing influence and violence of gangs. MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, the two most notorious and active of the Central American gangs, are rooted in El Salvador and demonstrate transnational characteristics. If programs are to be strengthened and approaches diversified to address the gang scourge in El Salvador, it is critical to be able to understand and respond to the adaptive nature of gangs in the region. Countries neighboring El Salvador must also receive assistance to deal with El Salvadoran gangs that might relocate elsewhere due to crackdowns, among other reasons. The gang problem in El Salvador has escalated faster than in any other country assessed in this study. This phenomenon is partially fueled by the deportation of gang members from the United States to El Salvador.

Crowded living conditions, lack of public space for recreation and sport, high unemployment rates, intra-familial violence, proliferation of guns, and the easy access to drugs and alcohol are factors that encourage youths to join gangs. This combination of factors, together with the arrival of gang members deported from the United States who are highly skilled in street gang life, contributed to the consolidation of MS-13 and 18th Street gangs.

The Government of El Salvador instituted a hard-line law enforcement strategy, *Super Mano Dura* ("super firm hand"), which was motivated by a desire for safer streets and communities but has resulted in severely overcrowded prisons. In addition, the heavy-handed policy catalyzed a highly charged debate on the constitutionality of the law that allows individuals to be arrested based on inference or assumed association and held for up to 72 hours without charges. As a consequence of ongoing criticism, the Salvadoran government initiated two umbrella strategies designed to address the problem at its source: a prevention strategy for youths at risk, and a strategy that provides assistance to former gang members who want to be rehabilitated. However, these two strategies receive only a small percentage of the overall funding being allocated to address gangs. In sum, while arrests of alleged gang members have certainly increased, there is no clear indication that the gang problem has abated as a result of these policies.

Guatemala

According to the Government of Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, homicides in the country have risen 40 percent from 2001 to 2004. The homicide rate in Guatemala was 35 per 100,000 people, compared to 5.7 per 100,000 in the United States. The year 2005 did not see an abatement of crime, with the number of homicides through September 2005 at 3,154, already approximately eight percent higher than in all of 2004. Guatemalans cite crime, along with corruption, as one of their top concerns and high levels of crime is cited as the top justification for a military coup.[29]

[29] Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura politica de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

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The majority of gang members in Guatemala are under 24 years of age. The average age of gang recruits appears to be on the decline, with youth as young as eight years old now joining gangs and serving low-level functions such as serving as *banderas*, or "look-outs," and drug distributors in their *barrios*. While the FBI estimates that there are approximately 14,000 gang members in Guatemala, similar to other countries in the region, estimates of the number of gang members in Guatemala vary widely, ranging from 14,000 to 165,000. This reflects the weaknesses and limitations of data collection systems in the country, where data varies by source and where police and judicial data systems are plagued by consistent underreporting. According to the National Civilian Police, there are 340 *maras* in Guatemala and the localities with the greatest gang presence are Zones 6, 7, 12, 18, and 21 in Guatemala City, along with Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan on the periphery. The two largest youth gangs in Guatemala are the *Mara Salvatrucha* 13 (MS-13) gang, with members comprising approximately 80 percent of the total number of gang members in the country, and 18th Street (*Barrio 18*), whose members comprise about 15 percent, and the remaining five percent making up other smaller, copycat gangs.[30]

The costs and impacts of gang activity on Guatemala's development can be categorized into three general areas – impacts on economic, social, and democratic/political development, many of which are interrelated and overlap. The primary impacts on economic development include deterred trade and investment and the privatization of security. The economic costs of crime (not just gang violence) in Guatemala in 1999 were estimated to be 565.4 million dollars. It is estimated that firms in Guatemala individually suffer average losses of about $5,500 annually due to crime in 1999; the total budget for private spending on security was at least 20 percent greater than the public security budget and amounts annually to approximately $3.5 million.[31] Social development impacts include stigmatization and victimization of youth and the further weakening of social capital. In addition, an increase in sexual and physical violence against women and violent murder of women, or "femicide" instills fear in citizens and increases public insecurity, thus hindering social development. Impacts on democratic/political development include reduced public faith in democracy; a diversion of resources from critical development sectors; media sensationalism; the deterioration of the state-citizen relationship in poor, urban areas; and increasingly enabling environment for institutional and extra-judicial violence.

Like its neighbors, the Government of Guatemala has not yet developed a comprehensive national plan to address the various dimensions of the gang problem including prevention, rehabilitation, and law enforcement. Currently, government investments to address the gang problem overwhelmingly favor short-term law enforcement, to the neglect of long term prevention-oriented programs that address the root causes of the problem.

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[30] Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

[31] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Arriagada and Godoy, 2000. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

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Despite not having enacted specific anti-gang legislation, the Government of Guatemala has nonetheless stepped up efforts to control gang violence in selected neighborhoods with high crime levels. As organized crime, particularly drug-related crime, establishes a firm foothold in the poor urban areas of Guatemala and other countries in the region, the standard government response has been to increase efforts to control the violence through increases in arrests and/or police presence. In Guatemala, this response has been representative of the state response to gangs. The state has stepped up efforts to control violence by increasing law enforcement and criminal justice actions in areas such as Villa Nueva. In addition the Government, and in response to an increase in reports of state-sponsored violence and "social cleansing," has begun to send observers from the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office along with police patrols to monitor potential abuses of power.[32]

In addition to the stepped up law enforcement efforts to directly confront gang violence in targeted communities, the Government of Guatemala has developed certain policies and strategies whose implementation could significantly impact the problem of gang violence by tackling key socioeconomic and contextual factors that are fueling the gang phenomenon. The first policy that could have a significant impact on the problem of gang violence is the National Policy on the Prevention of Youth Violence, a product of the Presidential Commission of Human Rights. The plan focuses on addressing the socioeconomic risk factors such as unemployment, weak social capital, and insufficient education. A second strategy would reform the National Civilian Police (PNC), another positive step. While there are some non-governmental organizations implementing activities aimed at preventing at-risk from joining gangs and working towards rehabilitating and reinserting former gang members into society, such efforts are relatively small scale.

Honduras

Honduras is considered one of the most violent countries in Latin America. In 1999, the homicide rate, which reached 154 per 100,000 inhabitants, was attributed largely to juvenile gangs, organized crime, drug trafficking, and social violence. More recent levels are lower—46 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants—but it is still higher than other countries in the region.[33] In addition to the high homicide rate, there is a high rate of physical violence. There are claims that groups of citizens and state workers have committed violence against youths and gang members. During the last five years, extra-judicial killings of street children have raised concerns about social cleansing and the possible involvement of police in some of these murders.

Honduras is a relatively poor country, with two major urban centers—Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula—that account for much of the country's 7 million inhabitants. The majority of the population (41 percent) is under the age of 15. With precarious economic

[32] Reployle, Jill. Christian Science Monitor. *In Guatemala, a Rise in Vigilante Justice*. csmonitor.com. October 6, 2005
[33] Clare Ribando. CRS Report for Congress. Gangs in Central America. Order Code RS22141. September 21, 2005.

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conditions and the social fabric weakened by the lack of education and job opportunities, many at-risk youths are extremely susceptible to entering the gang lifestyle.

For the most part, Honduras faces many challenges similar to its neighbors in dealing with criminal violence and delinquency. Many Hondurans have a sense of insecurity, which is further exacerbated by the overwhelming attention given to gang violence by the media and government. In Honduras there is evidence that media coverage of gang violence facilitates and enhances the reputation of gangs portrayed. Rival gangs compete over who can demonstrate the most brutality or audacious delinquent behavior. Daily news in Honduras often shows gang members displaying their tattoos and using hand signs to show their gang affiliation.

Honduras has adopted a hard-line law enforcement approach to deal with gangs. The costs of law enforcement and subsequent health care expenses (which are related to violence) results in Honduras losing a significant portion of its GDP that could be invested elsewhere. When combined with the already rampant corruption, the loss of resources is significant. Despite the *anti-mara* (anti-gang) legislation and the fact that the majority of government resources goes towards law enforcement, police officers believe their efforts are under-funded. The need for prevention and rehabilitation programs has been recognized as an integral component to any law enforcement effort, yet very little is allocated for prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Southern and Northern Mexico

The perception of the gang problem in Mexico has not reached the level of hysteria seen in some Central American countries, though a growing fear of the *maras* is brewing. While there are gangs, their sphere of influence seems linked to the numerous operational drug cartels and other organized crime organizations. Mexico, in addition, has two cause-phenomena that are not found in the other countries: (1) Central American gang members view Mexico's southern border as an opportunity to become involved in the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and humans as they flow north and south; and (2) gangs on the northern border are intergenerational. Gang activity on the northern border is related to drug cartels; narco-trafficking; trafficking of people, weapons, and other illegal substances; the *maquiladora* (assembly plant) industry; lack of sufficient educational opportunities for many children of *maquiladora* employees; substance abuse among youths; dysfunctional families; and minimal parental supervision. Another factor that contributes to the growth of youth gang members in the northern border area is the movement of individual youths attempting to join relatives in the United States. The United States deports more people to Mexico than to any other country in the world. In FY 2004 the U.S. sent 64,942 criminal and 49,454 non-criminal deportees to Mexico.

Reliable data on the extent of the gang activity in Mexico is non-existent. Mexico's decentralized system makes national statistic gathering difficult. A corrupt police and national security force coupled with an inefficient and ineffective judicial system compounds the gang problem and the public perception of the gang problem in Mexico.

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The Government of Mexico has had long-standing approaches to law enforcement. However, its approach to gang problems does not balance prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. To date, Mexico has not adopted national *anti-mara* legislation as has El Salvador and Honduras. The national police do not have an anti-gang strategy, and the emphasis continues to be on incarceration and deportation. While the federal, state, and municipal police do not coordinate on this issue, there is limited government assistance targeting youths who are in gangs or at risk of joining gangs. Mexicans, in general, do not perceive that their country has a gang problem.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua's gang problems are much different from those of its neighbors to the north. While Nicaragua is transitioning to a democratic system, the level of violence reported in El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala is not found in the country. Nicaragua's approach to the problem of youth gangs differs from that of other countries in the region. Where El Salvador and Honduras have taken a hard-line law enforcement approach, Nicaragua has focused much of its efforts on prevention and rehabilitation, which have had important results in reducing criminality and youth violence.

MS-13 and 18th Street gangs have not made their presence felt in the Nicaragua. The combination of lingering socialist structures such as the neighborhood watch, the crime prevention role the police have carved out for themselves during the last few years, and Nicaraguans' interest in deterring the proliferation of "outside" gangs may have prevented these two transnational gangs from establishing a foothold in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan homegrown gangs are resistant to foreign gangs attempting to set up shop in their *barrios*.

Nevertheless, Nicaragua's fragile economic situation is fertile ground for increased youth gang activity. Some political parties hire youths to cause disturbances at rival political or social events. Others are mainly involved in petty crime to feed crack and glue drug habits. Many of these youths end up on the street with no future and find themselves joining a street or neighborhood gang, which becomes the basis for delinquent activities.

It appears that although Nicaragua may have a serious problem with high levels of common violence; it does not currently have a major gang problem. Moreover, its prevention and rehabilitation approach appears to be working well and may be a model for other countries in Central America and Mexico.

A Summary of Country-Level Recommendations

The Assessment Team concluded that all of the five countries could benefit from utilizing a three-step process for developing anti-gang responses: (1) change public perception; (2) mobilize people and organizations who are advocates and will support the development of effective solutions; and (3) create allies with donors, governments, and civil society stakeholders to leverage resources and support, and to develop and implement coordinated anti-gang policies and programs.

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Prerequisites to success include: (1) the marketing of anti-gang response concepts to educate and win over stakeholders not currently engaged in the issue; (2) the availability of arenas through which to foster the development of necessary synergies and alliances; and (3) the building of public awareness about various aspects of the gang issue through exchanges of information and communication through such channels as the print and television media and community-based town hall meetings.

Specific policy and programmatic recommendations for all five countries include:

- Work collaboratively with other gang-affected countries to develop a comprehensive regional strategy that balances prevention, intervention, and law enforcement, and is accompanied by country-specific action plans.
- Pursue linkages with the American private sector; local, regional, and international business communities; and donors to leverage support and funding for, and improve coordination of, anti-gang activities.

- Support the development of municipal information systems to build local capacity to collect data and use crime-mapping to identify hot-spots and more effectively target anti-gang interventions.

- Support targeted prevention programs that provide youth at risk of joining a gang in hot-spot communities with productive alternatives to gang life. Youth should be provided with such opportunities as educational scholarships, skills training, job placement, recreation, mentoring, and drug counseling/rehabilitation.

- Develop programs to address domestic violence. Intra-familial violence is one of the predominant risk factors drawing youths into gangs as a replacement for dysfunctional family structures.

- Assess weaknesses within the judicial, law enforcement, and criminal justice systems that are fueling gang activity, and develop solutions. These sectors are not working together effectively to produce a functioning rule of law system that can effectively deter and combat violent gang activity.

- Train judges, police, prosecutors, and public defenders on issues related to organized crime investigations, gang activity, incarceration, and human rights.

- Provide alternative dispute resolution training for police, local officials, community leaders, youth at risk of joining a gang, and gang members.

- Develop gang resistance school curricula for incorporation into standard teaching requirements, and measure the effectiveness of such efforts.

- Working with partner governments and other local and national actors, assist in the development of a plan to reintegrate deportees arriving from the United States to minimize the prospects of deportees choosing to engage in criminal gang activities.

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- Work with the media to encourage more accurate public perceptions of gang activity and more responsible and investigative journalism.

- All anti-gang programs should incorporate a gender-sensitive approach. While an in-depth assessment of female involvement in gangs and as victims of gang activities was beyond the scope of our research, additional studies documenting this important and increasing trend are necessary.

- Support community-based policing efforts to improve the citizen-police relationship and increase the effectiveness of law enforcement.

The five Country Profile Annexes for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua follow.

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Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 1: El Salvador Profile[34]

April 2006

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Historical Context

After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, El Salvador has made significant strides in its post-conflict transition to a stable democracy. During the last ten years, however, violence in general has emerged as a potential threat to lasting stability and peace, and gang violence in particular has had serious impacts. In a survey conducted by Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica (IUDOP), 91 percent of those interviewed stated that *maras* (gangs) were a big problem. Many academics and political analysts conclude that the problem of gangs is the second most important sociological phenomenon of violence, after the civil war.

The high number of homicides—approximately 40 per 100 thousand inhabitants—gives El Salvador the unenviable ranking as one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America. In addition to homicides, there are other violent crimes, including intra-familiar violence, robbery, extortion, and kidnapping. Central American experts suggest that 40 percent of all homicides that occur today in El Salvador involve a gang member as the victim or the perpetrator.[35] Not surprisingly, both delinquency and citizen security have become predominant concerns for most Salvadorans.

The most violent departments in the country are San Salvador, Sonsonate, Santa Ana, La Paz, and La Libertad. The gang phenomenon is also most prevalent in these same departments. Interestingly, these departments with the highest homicides rates (per Instituto de Medecina Legal (IML) statistics) were those relatively less affected during the civil war conflict of the 1980s.

While violence is on the upswing, reported human rights violations have decreased. During 2004, the PDDH (public defender's office) accepted 634 complaints of human rights violations, compared with 2,479 in 2003. The rights most frequently alleged to have been violated included personal integrity, due process, and labor laws. According to the U.S. State Department, many complaints are also filed against the police for mistreatment.[36]

The challenges facing youths in El Salvador are numerous and further exacerbated by a high level of income inequality. In 1961, some the poorest quintile earned six percent of the total income, while the wealthiest quintile earned 61 percent of the national income, and conditions have not significantly changed since then. The poorest 20 percent earned only 2.4 percent of the total income, while the richest quintile maintained their hold of national income at 58.3 percent. With this degree of inequality, the majority of youths aged 14-25 years old face social exclusion characterized by the lack of basic services (e.g., water, energy, electricity, and education) that could improve their lives.[37]

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[35] Discussions in August and September 2005, with founding members of the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence.

[36] El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S, State Department, February 28, 2005.

[37] UNDP, *Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*, pg. 33.

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El Salvador's population is fairly young: 37 percent are under 15, and 23 percent are 15-24 years old. Of these youths, 48 percent are in secondary school, and 17 percent have reached the university level. Approximately 11 percent of the youth population (15-24) is illiterate. Forty percent of children drop out of school before grade 5.[38]

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon

The origins of El Salvador's violent gangs can be traced to the Salvadorans and their children who fled their country during the brutal civil war of the 1980s. By 1990, over 700,000 Salvadorans had settled mainly in Los Angeles, California, and also in Washington D.C., suburbs of New York City, and in parts of Maryland, where they had formed their own gangs or joined existing gangs.[39]

In 1992, the Peace Accord between the government and the Marti Faribundo National Liberation Front (FMLN) marked an end of the twelve-year war and the beginning of the flow of Salvadorans back to their country. In 1996, the number of returnees increased, as immigration policies changed and the United States deported thousands of people to El Salvador and other Central American countries. Although these deported immigrants were not identified as criminals or gang members at the time of deportation, some had been incarcerated in the California prison system. Some of these deportees were gang members, including members of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and 18th Street (Barrio 18) gangs, and took many aspects of U.S. gang culture back to El Salvador, including hand signals, insider language, styles of dress, and propensity for rebellion and violence. MS-13 and 18th Street members learned much of their craft from the established Mafia Mexicana, then the most influential gang in Southern California.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of gang members in El Salvador, rough estimates exist. The National Civilian Police, for example, estimate there are approximately 10,500 members, whereas the government's National Council on Public Security (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública or CNSP in Spanish) calculates upwards of 39,000 members (22,000 in MS-13; 12,000 in 18th Street; and another 5,000 in other gangs). The variance depends perhaps on whether one is counting full-fledged members and sympathizers.

Gang structure in El Salvador is difficult to determine. As explained in the overview of this report, the two main gangs—MS-13 and 18th Street—have a series of decentralized *clickas,* or smaller units, that cover specific neighborhoods. Gang infiltrators report that some *clickas* convene periodically with national-level gang leadership who determine the criminal and delinquent actions for the entire gang.[40] Most gang experts acknowledge that it is difficult to identify gang leaders. People interviewed by the field team indicated that there is a national-level leader for MS-13 who calls the shots from prison, but the field team could not confirm this information.

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[38] UNESCO statistics. www.uis.unesco.org
[39] Hayden, T. *Street Wars Gangs and the Future of Violence*. The New Press. 2004. Page 202.
[40] Interview with National Civilian Police. El Salvador. September 2005.

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However, there are some in the Government of El Salvador who claim that they have been able to infiltrate these gangs and decipher their language and codes. According to information provided by the CNSP, in response to hard-line Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura law enforcement initiatives (discussed later in this profile), 18th Street has established the following new rules and goals:

- Take over drug trade
- Purchase more weapons
- Eliminate members who are traitors
- Prohibit new tattoos
- Do not recruit women as new gang recruits
- Execute members consuming crack and cocaine (using marijuana, including marijuana laced with coke, is allowed)
- Take over drug trafficking corridors in two to three years
- Take over small cartels

The hard-line law enforcement approach has not had the desired effect of curbing gang violence or reducing recruitment. Gang membership seems to be rising, despite frequent roundups of gang members. Additionally, media obsession with gang violence in effect helps gangs to publicize their criminal acts and build the status of gang members portrayed in the media. The constant showcasing of gangs on the front pages of Salvadoran newspapers serves as a recruiting tool for gangs to increase their rank and file.

The high profiling of gang violence also has served to link gang members with narco-trafficking activities. There are many reports that MS-13 and 18th Street gangs are trying to establish their own drug corridors through Central America and Mexico and in some cases have made contact with Colombian narco-traffickers. This speculation has been fueled by reports that MS-13 members in Tapachula, Mexico, are working with the Mexican drug cartel run by Chapo Guzman.[41]

Some of the people interviewed by the field team believe that gang problems in El Salvador are growing faster than gang problems in other countries in the region. Ricardo Meneses, former Director of Police, observed that some *clickas* and some gang members are becoming more sophisticated.[42] The increased sophistication of El Salvadoran gangs is exemplified by the following characteristics:[43]

- Use of minors to commit crimes, since they cannot be convicted as adults.
- Family support of gangs, as some gang members support their families financially through gang activities.

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[41] Joaquin Guzman-Loera, a.k.a. "Chapo" Guzman, heads a notorious Mexican drug cartel and is wanted in California on conspiracy, drug, money laundering and criminal forfeiture charges.
[42] Interview with Miguel Cruz, IUDOP.
[43] Interviews with CNSP, Rodrigo Ayala, Vice Minister of Public Security (at the time) and Pepe Morataya, Polígono.

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- Widespread, national visibility, with incarcerated gang members expanding their networks through jails.
- "Fees" demanded (extortion) from bus drivers and business owners.
- Stronger links with organized crime.
- Competition for drug trafficking replacing competition for territories.
- Some members are to pay for costly defense attorneys indicating substantial profits through criminal activity.
- Fluid communication between gangs in El Salvador and in the United States. Members have a sophisticated communication networks between prisons and the street, using coded language and paper messages folded in a precise manner, which is also coded. Gangs may also communicate through Web sites.
- Autonomy and organization. It is believed that in El Salvador, 18th Street has a structure made up of *ranfla* (national leaders), *runers* (leaders with no tattoos, strong discipline, and the responsibility for committing homicides, and trafficking drugs and weapons), and *missionaries* (*clickas* gang members).
- Gang members displacing "*coyotes*"[44] and narcotraffickers.

However, most gang members in-country do not appear to have a high level of sophistication.

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

Rampant gang activity in El Salvador obstructs economic progress and democratic social development. The deterioration of security, state-citizen relationships, and the health and livelihood of citizens is increasingly at risk. This next section will delve into the numerous detrimental impacts of gang activity in this country.

Impacts on Economic and Social Development

A recent study done by the UNDP calculates that violence costs El Salvador approximately US$1.7 billion annually, which is roughly 11.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). These costs are attributed to health-related issues (e.g., lost lives, emotional distress, and medical attention); institutional costs (e.g., public security and administration of justice); private security costs for protection of businesses and private residences; negative impacts on financial investment, and loss of work opportunities; and material losses. In addition, intangible costs also have higher negative impacts. For 2003, the total amount of resources lost as a result of violence was more than double that of the budgets for both education and health, which amounted to approximately US$720 million.[45] For most industrialized countries, the total GDP lost to violence-related costs amounts to about 5 percent. However, in less developed countries it amounts to approximately 14 percent.[46]

[44] A person who arranges illegal passages for people from Central America to the United States.
[45] UNDP, *Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*, San Salvador, 2005, pg 8.
[46] IBID, pg. 37.

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Gang activity also contributes to deterred trade and investment. Almost 41 percent of the Salvadoran firms interviewed reported having been victims of crime, while nearly 50 percent reported that crime and violence are major constraints to business. The World Bank report "El Salvador's Investment Climate" (July 2005) states that micro- and small firms are more likely to be affected by gang-related crime than are larger firms. On average, the statistics from firms surveyed show that gangs were responsible for 27 percent of the crimes committed, while micro- and small firms reported that gangs were responsible for 46 percent and 37 percent, respectively, of the crimes committed against them.

Gang activity has encouraged the expansion of some services, however. Private security companies, for example, have grown exponentially in the last several years. As of September 2004, there were 158 private security companies with 18,244 active guards. The National Police, in contrast, has a total of 16,800 officers, with approximately 5,000 on active duty at any given time.

As a result of a sense of insecurity and the proliferation of weapons, many people want to leave the country. The images of gang violence create a sensation of chaos, leaving many to doubt that they can prosper in the country. Indirectly, the gang phenomenon has actually encouraged people to leave El Salvador in search of a more stable environment, taking their economic potential with them. On the other hand, deportations from the United States have increased over the last several years. Many of those deportees are gang members who reinforce the gang lifestyle when they return to El Salvador. In FY 2004, of the nearly 6,000 Salvadoran deportees, over 2,600 were criminal deportees.[47] Thus, while many youths leave El Salvador looking for a better life, many are forced to return, and have been or become involved in criminal activity.[48]

The majority of those in gangs are youths. The stigmatization of poor urban youths as potential or actual gang members has negative social consequences for the country. These youths are often discriminated against for their appearance or simply avoided, as they are considered dangerous.[49]

The media has tended to over-exaggerate the problem of the gangs while not focusing on other important social issues. While the media bombards the public with news accounts of gangs involved in criminal activity, there is little analysis of the origins and proliferation of the gang phenomenon. Instead, gangs are often the scapegoat for all social ills, which limits the public's deeper understanding of gangs and other issues affecting the country.

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[47] DHS, ICE. Removal By Nationality – Deportations.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Interviews conducted in El Salvador during September 2005.

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Impacts on Democratic and Political Development

Gang activity may affect democratic stability. A 2004 study "The Political Culture of Democracy in El Salvador" prepared by Mitch Seligson documents that when a high degree of victimization exists within a country, its political culture is negatively affected.

Gang activity may also influence policy decisions. Many analysts suggest that the hard-line approach taken by the government is politically motivated. It is much easier to crack down on gang members than to deal with more complicated social issues that support gang activity, such as income inequality and poverty. When deciding how resources are to be spent, politicians may make tough decisions about diverting resources to fight gang activity from other development areas.
Gang activity often contributes to weakened state-citizen relationships in poor, urban areas. Many youths in El Salvador seem to lack of respect for authority and rule of law. In 2000 and 2001, 50 percent of crimes were committed by youths 15-24 years old.[50] The poor state-citizen relations may be linked to a more general rejection of democratic legal processes. According to Fishel and Grizzard, gang members may be under close scrutiny by law enforcement officials or may have been unjustly booked, incarcerated, or deported from the United States merely because of their identity with a gang.[51] One potential danger is that the resulting feelings of exclusion and resentment could lead gang members to reject U.S. democratic values.

Finally, the presence of gangs may contribute to an enabling environment for institutional and extra-judicial violence against certain groups of people. Most gangs in El Salvador are involved in economic, social, and institutional violence. These categories explain the type of street violence that is common to gangs, which include street theft, robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, small arms dealing, and car theft.[52] These interrelated categories fall along a continuum in which institutional violence begins to involve social cleansing and extra-judicial killings—two phenomenon that El Salvador has experienced recently in reaction to the gang problem. The specter of death squads from the 1980s has raised concern that the country could be heading down this dangerous path, as overzealous civilians and state agents respond with deadly force toward gang members.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

The varied causes and risk factors that lead at-risk youths in El Salvador to join gangs are described below.

Marginal urban enclaves. Gangs often dominate the most marginalized urban areas. In some cases, poverty levels in these areas contribute to the ongoing activity of gangs.

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[50] Discussions in August and September 2005, with founding members of the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence.
[51] Fishel and Grizzard, "Countering Ideological Support to Terrorism in the Circum-Caribbean," C/SRC Discussion Paper 05/52. September 2005
[52] IBD Report on Violence in Latin America, chapter five, pg 2.

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Other factors that contribute to gang domination are breakdown of the family, social and community structures, lack of basic services, and lack of opportunities for jobs or recreational activities. Gangs are able to control these territories, which are mostly isolated areas, with relatively little challenge from law enforcement.

Large numbers of unemployed youths. In many areas with gang activity, the majority of youths are unemployed. Gangs offer an alternative means to acquire goods, and they offer social acceptance to these otherwise marginalized youths. Forced recruitment is unnecessary.

Education system unable to retain youths. Various studies conducted throughout Central America indicate a direct correlation between dropout rates and gang activity. In many cases, youths have poor attendance records and dismal grades, which make their retention even harder. Forty percent of Salvadoran children drop out of school before grade 5. Interviewees reported that some gang members completed at least the ninth grade.

Reactive state government. Most gangs did not start out as criminal organizations, but tended to move in that direction over time. The state has responded to gang activity with hard-line law enforcement tactics. In the worst cases, there are arbitrary detentions, torture, and extra-judicial executions.[53] For the most part, these repressive tactics have not deterred gangs from forming and operating, but rather have spurred gangs to consolidate, sometimes coming into direct confrontation with the state.

Access to the illicit economy. In most cases, the gangs finance themselves through criminal activities and drug trafficking.[54] Without access to the illegal economy, these groups would have little or no other sources if income.

Parents living and working in the United States. With parents working elsewhere, there are numerous cases of children raised by relatives who abuse and/or neglect them, do not fully accept them as family members, and treat them as outsiders. This can cause fear or rebellion, which may drive some children to the streets to seek relief.

Legacy of conflict and violence. El Salvador's civil war (1980-1992), one of the most devastating armed conflicts in Latin America, resulted in the deaths of more than 75,000 people. Following the war, there was an increase in violence and crime. This increase was partially attributed to the fact that nearly all crime that occurred during the conflict was considered war-related.

Approximately 30,000 El Salvador Armed Forces soldiers, over 6,400 National Police and other security forces, and over 8,500 FMLN combatants were demobilized as a result of the terms of the Peace Accords. Thousands of trained fighters were without jobs and struggling to exist, and thousands of firearms were available. Violence had become

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[53] El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S, State Department, February 28, 2005.

[54] Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005.

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socialized, and populations often used violence as the first line of response to settle conflicts.

Weak, ineffective, corrupt police, criminal, and judicial systems. Areas lacking in social services and security, gangs become bolder, and may take on roles normally reserved for the state. This might include extorting "taxes" from businesses, bus drivers, and others who want to do business in the neighborhood. In extreme cases, the gangs begin to exercise their own justice, demanding certain behavior from the citizens and sanctioning those who do not obey.[55]

Gangs are able to access weapons, conduct illegal activities, and dominate territories in part because some state functionaries are corrupt.[56] There are unsupported claims that the police are directly involved in illegal activities with gang members.

Access to small arms. Small-caliber arms are the weapon of choice for controlling territories—including local inhabitants—and trafficking of goods and drugs. In most cases, gangs have easy access to all kinds of weaponry, even those meant for use in war. Weapons proliferation is made easier by little or no controls on weapons by the state, easy access to trafficking routes, and the availability of weapons cached from the civil conflicts of the 1980s.

Narco-Activity. The international drug trade is connected to the gang problem in El Salvador on several levels. El Salvador serves as a critical point of trans-shipment of drugs originating in Colombia and destined for United States markets, which has created thriving narco-trafficking and organized crime networks in the country. The resulting flow of drugs into El Salvador also may contribute to higher levels of drug consumption and addiction in the country, which in turn may lead to more gang violence.

Media Coverage. As previously mentioned, the media's tendency to regularly highlight gang violence has served in some ways to glamorize this lifestyle to many disenfranchised youths who feel abandoned on many fronts.

Current Responses to Gangs

The problem of gangs is a societal problem. Yet, public fear and stereotyping, exacerbated by the media and government, enable the government to use suppression and enforcement approaches without addressing the root causes of youth violence. Unfortunately, the hard-line approach sends the message to the public that law enforcement is the only way to deal with the gang problem, and prevention and intervention programs have received much less attention and fewer resources. More recent efforts have reflected a move towards a more holistic approach.

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[55] Interview with the *Jefe del Comite de Politica Militar, Estado Mayor Conjunto*. He reported a market vendor woman was recently killed in San Salvador by a gang member for refusing to pay a gang tax of about US $1. January 2006.

[56] Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005.

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Government Response:

One of the main government strategies for dealing with gangs has been hard-line law enforcement. Mano Dura (firm hand) and Super Mano Dura (super firm hand) are law-enforcement approaches aimed at incarcerating gang members involved in criminal activity.[57] Mano Dura was made law in 2003 under the Flores administration. Its sequel, Super Mano Dura, launched on August 30, 2004, was defined as an integral plan to deal aggressively with delinquents through law enforcement, as well as to provide for prevention and intervention initiatives. Super Mano Dura resulted in the arrest of 11,000 gang members in just one year.

The emphasis on law enforcement has produced unexpected results. The existing legislation allows officers to randomly apprehend and book gang members, a procedure that has flooded the system. There is a lack of national coordination among the country's enforcement institutions in El Salvador (Attorney General's Office, Judges, and National Civilian Police). The judiciary and police systems are saturated, and there are not enough personnel in these systems to manage the problem of gangs.

In addition, the hard-line law enforcement approach has put a particular strain on the prison system in El Salvador. In 2002, even before the *anti-mara* laws, the prisons in El Salvador were considered the most overcrowded in the region. This made rehabilitation and surveillance programs much more difficult to achieve and implement in order to attain successful results. From 2003 to 2005, the situation deteriorated significantly, with some 4,000 gang members in various prisons throughout the country. According to the International Centre for Prison Studies, the total prison population in 2004 was 12,117. This is a small prison population, but heavily weighted with gang members. Furthermore, Salvadoran officials indicate that about 60 percent of the gang members in prison are U.S. deportees or are facing criminal charges in the United States. About 1,800 MS-13 members are inmates in Salvadoran prisons.[58] As in neighboring Honduras and Guatemala, there have been massacres in the Salvadoran prison system. For example, on August 18, 2004, some 31 prisoners were killed in the Centro Penal La Esperanza known as "Mariona").

Some have opposed the enforcement activities stemming from these anti-*mara* laws. Aida Luz Santos de Escobar, Judge for the *Juzgado Primero de Ejecucion de Medidas al Menor Infractor* **(**First Court of Execution of Measures of Minor Infraction) of San Salvador, stated that after Mano Dura took effect, the number of homicides increased. She said that the anti-*mara* laws violated constitutional norms and international treaties in several ways: (1) youths were tried as adults; (2) homicide cases not committed by gang members had advantages over those committed by gang members; (3) the law violated

[57] The Ministry of Governance–Public Security has an annual budget of 134.5 million dollars to maintain the police force, and an additional 7.5 million for strengthening the policing infrastructure. The criminal system has an annual budget of 18.5 million to improve the prison system, especially regarding its ability to deal with incarcerated gang members. An additional 7.3 million has been designated for improving prison infrastructure.

[58] Lopez, Connell and Kraul. "MS-13: International Franchise." *Los Angeles Times*. October 30, 2005.

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the equity principle, (4) the law violated the presumption of innocence until the contrary is proved; and (5) the law was enforced retroactively.

Former President Flores asked the Supreme Court to pressure judges to support this law, but the judges continued to oppose it. They did not agree with the arrest of gang members simply for illicit association and felt this was unconstitutional, as anyone could be rounded up for illicit association or for being tattooed.[59] The judges also did not agree with the practice of sentencing youths as adults. To date, no one has been convicted for illicit association. The Fiscalia (Attorney General's office) cannot prove illicit association unless it infiltrates the gang, and this has not been done. On the other hand, Miguel Cruz from IUDOP states that Mano Dura, which ended in 2005, resulted in gangs creating more national networks because many ended up in jail, where they coordinated activities and established contacts.

Some claim that Super Mano Dura has been successful in reducing gang recruitment. In fact, recruitment has declined among gangs, although activities have become more violent, moving towards homicide and trafficking in drugs and arms. Many express concern both about the negative impact on the rule of law if due process concerns are not respected and about the weakening of the long-term legitimacy of the police if they are increasingly pressured to improve public security in a suppressive fashion. There also exists a healthy amount of cynicism in El Salvador and in the region about these law enforcement approaches, which some cite as simply a means to win votes in upcoming elections.

Despite disagreements about anti-*mara* laws, most persons consulted during interviews agree that U.S. deportation policies, together with the perceived lack of sharing information among countries about deportees with criminal records, have exacerbated the problem.[60] In FY 2004, the DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported 2,667 criminal and 3,310 administrative deportees to El Salvador. As stated by Rodrigo Ayala while Vice Minister of Public Security and now the new Director of the National Civilian Police (PNC), "The problem is those gang members coming from the United States. They arrive with no paper work, so their criminal status is supposedly unknown. These are the gang members that are often admired, as they are more sophisticated, speak English, and have links to gangs in the U.S."

The average Salvadoran is anxious to see these "menaces to society" rounded up and thrown in jail. With 91 percent surveyed by IUDOP stating that the *maras* are a big problem, it is not a surprise that the law-and-order approach is popular. Interestingly, in this same survey, only 20.8 percent considered the *maras* a problem in their own neighborhoods. Nevertheless, sympathy towards these youths is generally lacking. This is further exacerbated by the media's tendency to sensationalize the phenomenon of gang violence. Ironically, the Mano Dura approaches seem to have actually strengthened the gangs as they band together to resist policing efforts.

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[59] Illicit association is a group of three or more gang members meeting, which can also be described as "loitering". It serves as the justification for police to apprehend and detain gang members. To date, no one has been convicted of illicit association.

[60] Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005

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Some have countered with efforts to preserve some basic rights for Salvadoran youth. Currently, the Ley Penal Juvenil (Juvenile Offender Law) requires that minors between the ages 12-17 be tried only in juvenile courts and limits sentences for minors to a maximum of seven years. Alternatives to incarceration are required. In July 2004, the Legislative Assembly modified the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Juvenile's Offender Law, and Penitentiary Law in response to an April Supreme Court decision that the October 2003 Anti-Mara law was unconstitutional. The maximum period allowed to investigate a crime when the defendant is a minor was reduced to 60 days. Also, when a child is arrested, police must inform their parents or guardians, the solicitor's office, the Attorney General, and the PDDH (Procuraduria para La Defensa de Los Derechos Humanos – Public Defenders Office for Human Rights).[61]

In recent months, and as a consequence of ongoing criticism, the Salvadoran government has initiated two umbrella-type strategies designed to address the problem at its source: Plan *Mano Amiga* (Friendly Hand); and *Mano Extendida* (Extended Hand). Mano Amiga is defined as a prevention strategy for youths at risk. Its programs aim to keep them from joining gangs, participating in delinquent activities, leaving school, or becoming drug abusers. Mano Amiga has two main policies: the "Plan Nacional de Juventud" (National Plan for Youth) and the Politica de Seguridad Ciudadana (Policy on Citizen Security), with participation from the Ministerio de Gobernación which focuses on prevention at the primary level.[62] Mano Extendida provides assistance to former gang members who want to be rehabilitated.

These programs are coordinated by the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública (CNSP), a government agency established in 1996 to provide support to the presidency in the area of public security, with roles later expanded to include project implementation as well. The CNSP also developed a conceptual framework for social prevention of violence and delinquency with an emphasis on citizen participation. CNSP receives about $731,000 annually to work on violence and crime prevention activities. Currently, CNSP is the government agency responsible for managing prevention and intervention programs for youths at risk with numerous government ministries and NGOs.

The prevention and intervention policies of Mano Extendida and Mano Amiga are fairly new, and the impact is difficult to measure to date. However, the percentage allocated to prevention and intervention approaches to gangs makes up only 20 percent of the available government funding, while a larger percentage goes towards law enforcement (Super Mano Dura). The reality is that it is politically expedient—and less expensive—to incarcerate a gang member than to implement intervention efforts that have limited success and require a long-term commitment and resources.

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[61] El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S, State Department, February 28, 2005.

[62] The plan presented in January 2005 was formulated by the Saca government. As part of the design, the Secretaría Nacional de la Juventud consulted extensively with youth and adults nationwide, including the various public and private institutions, to better inform that programmatic content of the plan. The final Plan Nacional de Juventud has three main objectives: improve the quality of life for youth; promote youth development at all levels; and attend to at-risk and excluded youth.

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However, as experience has demonstrated, incarceration alone is not working. Gangs continue to exercise influence within the prisons and judicial system, and they reportedly continued to run criminal activities from their cells. In May, the Director of Prisons found that members of MS-13 supervised criminal activity while incarcerated. Additionally, the Director discovered that gangs encouraged criminal activity by children. Moreover, gang violence, especially in the country's three largest and oldest penitentiaries and its juvenile holding facilities, continue to plague the prison system, despite government efforts to separate different gangs. At year's end, a total of 12,073 prisoners were held in 24 prison facilities with a combined design capacity of 7,312, and there were 31 men and 9 women in 2 secure hospital wards with a combined capacity of 75 people.[63] Alternative programming may need to be further explored.

Donor Response:

The largest donor working in El Salvador is the United States, with an FY 2004 program of $74.3 million. Other major donors in El Salvador include international donors such as UNDP, the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, as well as Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain, and Sweden. Further investigation is needed to identify synergies between these programs and potential anti-gang work considered by USAID. Highlights are provided below.

USAID supports an Aid to Artisans program Proyecto MOJE **(**Movement of Young Discoverers), which works on eliminating violent gang rivalries and provides technical job training to local gang members with skills in pottery-making, welding, carpentry, and screen-printing. Targeting gangs in the community of Ilobosco, MOJE also provides workshops on self-esteem and personal development for the participating gang members. Proyecto MOJE is expecting to receive a grant from the IDB for $300,000 for commercialization; and will receive another $300,000 from the EU/AECI. To date, over 300 gang members have been reintegrated into society to date and it is estimated that there are less than 100 active gang members in Ilobosco at the time of this report. The program has been successful in bringing both the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs members together. MOJE issues participants an identity card to help police know that they are in a structured rehabilitation program.

The U.S. Embassy supports a program implemented by the educational NGO Culture of Lawfulness, which demonstrates to 8th and 9th grade students how the rule of law helps people be better citizens and respect the law. In Culture of Lawfulness education, the goal is to reach the next generation of students and, through them, their parents and communities. Project staff and consultants help teachers develop a lawfulness education program, integrate it into the curriculum, and involve parents and the community in complementary activities.

[63] El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S, State Department, February 28, 2005.

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Civil Society Response:

Although UNDP has not worked directly with youth-at-risk since 1993, they have been implementing a Society Without Violence Program since 1998. The program, which expects to reduce violence and insecurity in the country through advocacy and other programs, involves three elements: (1) research on violence; (2) implementation of local initiatives; and (3) communication. They look for prevention initiatives, since causes of violence are complex and multi-faceted. Also, UNDP worked with UNICEF, PAHO, and the World Bank on a policy paper that was later given to the government to develop a comprehensive security policy.

The Canadian PVO CECI (Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation) had a prevention program in the Zaragoza and El Puerto municipalities. The field team visited the program with the mayor and other community leaders to see several recreation opportunities, such as a school for karate and a soccer field. Police officers also talked with youth about avoiding drugs and staying out of trouble. The community, led by the mayor, created the Network of Citizen Security. CECI funding was used to strengthen this network and initiate several community activities to get youths off the street and out of gangs. The municipality of Zaragoza is now continuing activities without CECI support. The program demonstrates how minimal funding, used effectively, can foster community activities preventing violence and how collaboration between sectors (i.e. police, civil society and local authorities) is key in prevention programs.

The EU provides some of the approximately $US10 million of funding for CNSP's violence and crime prevention and gang rehabilitation activities. (Other funds are provided by the El Salvador government.) Launched in 10 municipalities of San Salvador, the activities will eventually expand to 25 locations. The EU-supported activities focus on youths ages 10-25.

Even though some donors are supporting prevention and intervention activities, Artur Guth of the *Secretaria de la Juventud* (Youth Secretariat) explains that in general, donors are not interested in intervention. The funding for this purpose is minimal. The Granja. A state-owned residential rehabilitation center, is one of the few intervention projects funded by the government. Nevertheless, he is not discouraged. According to Guth, "a youth with options will not choose the gang lifestyle."

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Individuals and Organizations Consulted

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Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 2: Guatemala Profile*

April 2006

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* *Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.*

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Assessment Objectives

This Guatemala Country Profile is part of a broader five-country Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, initiated by the USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, with support from the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (DCHA/CMM). The assessment consists of a main report along with five country profiles – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. The information that informed the Guatemala Country Profile was gathered from interviews conducted during a one-week trip to Guatemala in October of 2005, and from readily available documents and published reports. The Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment had four main objectives:

- To analyze the nature of gangs and identify root causes and other factors driving the phenomenon
- To examine the transnational and regional nature of gangs in Central America, Mexico, including the impact of deportation and immigration trends
- To identify and evaluate policies and programs to address gangs in the five assessment countries and in the United States
- To provide strategic and programmatic recommendations to the LAC Bureau and LAC Missions in the five assessment countries[64]

Historical Context

Guatemala's Post-Conflict Woes

When Guatemala signed the Peace Accords in 1996, ending a 36-year civil conflict that left over 200,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands more maimed and internally displaced, the label of "post-conflict country" was officially bestowed on the country. However, the transition from war to peace has not been a painless passage and peace continues to remain elusive. Since the Accords were signed nearly a decade ago, Guatemala has earned the dubious distinction of being one of the most violent countries in the region and in the world, with homicide rates comparable to those in war-torn African countries. According to the Government of Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, homicides in the country have risen 40 percent from 2001 to 2004. The homicide rate in Guatemala was 35 per 100,000 people, compared to 5.7 per 100,000 in the United States. The year 2005 did not see an abatement of crime, with the number of homicides through September 2005 at 3,154, already approximately eight percent higher than in all of 2004. Violent crimes as a proportion of total crimes committed have increased in much of Latin America with lower-income areas – particularly those on the

[64] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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peripheries of cities – suffering from the highest levels of severe violence.[65] This holds true in Guatemala where Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan – all located on the periphery of Guatemala City – exhibit relatively high levels of violence. High crime rates are impeding economic growth, as businesses shift trade and investment to more secure countries in the region. Public faith in democracy is also threatened by high crime rates as governments are perceived as unable to deliver key services such as public security and justice. According to a 2004 USAID-funded survey on attitudes toward democracy, Guatemalans that perceive insecurity in their communities – even citizens that have not actually been a victim of crime – have less support for the democratic systems and the values that define it. Guatemalans cite crime, along with corruption, as one of their top concerns and high levels of crime is cited as the top justification for a military coup.[66]

Violence is undeniably not a new phenomenon in Guatemala. The 36-year civil conflict was characterized by high levels of violence, much of it state-sponsored or institutional, the effects of which continue to manifest in the country today. There are significant levels of economic, institutional, and social violence in Guatemala. Organized crime networks exploit the weak rule of law to carry out their illicit businesses of money laundering, kidnapping, and trafficking of narcotics, contraband, weapons, and people. Youth gangs[67] have emerged on the scene as willing functionaries of these organized crime networks at one end of the spectrum and, at the other end, as their convenient criminal scapegoats. Indeed, since the end of the conflict, "*maras*," or gangs, have become public enemy number one. Despite the end of the civil conflict, there are still incidents of institutional violence in the country, including police brutality and extra-judicial killing, as the state attempts to respond to mounting pressure to address high crime levels, particularly gang violence. Levels of social violence are also elevated in Guatemala, with a very high incidence of intra-familial violence including domestic abuse, child abuse, and sexual violence, all of which contribute to perpetuating the cycle of violence within successive generations.

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon

There are several theories in circulation that attempt to explain the emergence of gangs in Guatemala and other Central American countries. Some analysts claim that the most notorious gang – Mara Salvatrucha[68] or MS-13 – originated in El Salvador over three

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[65] Briceno-Leon, R., and V. Zubillaga. 2002. "Violence and Globalization in Latin America." *Current Sociology* 50 (1): 19-37; Fundacion Mexicana para la Salud/Centro de Economia y Salud 1998. "Analisis de la magnitud y costos de la violencia en la Ciudad de Mexico." Working Paper R-331, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC; Lira, I.S. 2000. "Costo economico de los delitos: Niveles de vigilancia y politicas de seguridad ciudadana en las communes del gran Santiago." Serie Gestion Publica No. 2, CEPAL, Santiago, Chile; Reyna, C., and E. Toche. "La inseguridad en el Peru." Serie Politicas Sociales No. 29, CEPAL, Santiago, Chile; Valuar, A. 1999. "Violence Related to Illegal Drugs, Youth, and Masculinity Ethos," Paper presented at the conference "Rising Violence and the Criminal Justice Response in Latin America: Towards an Agenda for Collaborative Research in the 21st Century," University of Texas-Austin, May 6-9.

[66] Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura politica de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

[67] This report uses Dr. Malcolm Klein's definition of "youth gang," as being any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its identity."

[68] *Mara* means "gang" in Spanish and *Salvatrucha* means "smart/clever Salvadoran."

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decades ago and their membership spread to neighboring Guatemala and Honduras. Another account calls the birth of Guatemalan *maras* a by-product of an urban youth protest movement that first appeared in Guatemala City in the 1960s in response to social injustices and government abuses, and became increasingly violent in the mid-1980s when the clashes with police became common along with looting and bus-burning[69]. One of the more widely accepted explanations traces the origins of gangs in Guatemala back to the wars that seized Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Guatemalans and other Central Americans fled to the United States to escape the turmoil. Many of the children of these immigrants encountered a thriving gang culture and, for various reasons, joined these gangs. When the Central American wars began to wane in the early to mid 1990s, the United States deported thousands of convicted, jailed gang members to Central America at the end of their sentences. These deportees found themselves suddenly forced to eke out a new life in a country that was nearly or completely foreign to them. Jobless and, in many cases, unable to speak Spanish, these returnees began to replicate the social structure and economic base that had served them well in the United States – the gang. They set up new gangs in Guatemala and other Central American countries, which have now evolved into their own particular strains, though many have maintained strong links to gangs in the United States.

The problem of gang violence is of particular concern to Guatemala's future since it impacts a critical segment of the population – the youth. Youth under the age of 18 comprise nearly half of the country's population. Many studies have correlated the "youth bulge" factor with increased potential for violence.[70] The majority of gang members in Guatemala are under 24 years of age. The average age of gang recruits appears to be on the decline, with youth as young as eight years old now joining gangs and serving low-level functions such as serving as *banderas*, or "look-outs," and drug distributors in their *barrios*. Similar to other countries in the region, estimates of the number of gang members in Guatemala vary widely, ranging from 14,000[71] to 165,000. This reflects the weaknesses and limitations of data collection systems in the country, where data varies by source and where police and judicial data systems are plagued by consistent underreporting. According to the National Civilian Police, there are 340 *maras* in Guatemala and the localities with the greatest gang presence are Zones 6, 7, 12, 18, and 21 in Guatemala City, along with Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan on the periphery. The two largest youth gangs in Guatemala are the *Mara Salvatrucha* 13 (MS-13) gang, with members comprising approximately 80 percent of the total number of gang members in the country, and 18th Street (*Barrio 18*), whose members comprise about 15 percent, and the remaining five percent making up other smaller, copycat gangs.[72] The majority of gang members are male, and young men are both more likely to be victims of gang violence, as well as perpetrators. While there are females in male-dominated gangs, their role within these is subordinate and sexual exploitation of women by male gang members is common.

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[69] "Faces of Violence" study, World Vision International, 2002.

[70] Goldstone, Jack A. 1991. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Fuller, Gary A. and Forrest R. Pitts. 1990. "Youth Cohorts and Political Unrest in South Korea." *Political Geography Quarterly* 9: 9-22.

[71] The FBI estimates the number at 14,000 based on data from the Guatemala National Civilian Police.

[72] Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

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One Mara Does Not Fit All

Gangs and gang members in Guatemala are not homogenous. There is no single typology applicable to every gang or gang member. Not all gangs have the same objectives, nor engage in the same type of activity nor with the same degree of violence. The pyramid below reflects the various types of gangs, and their different objectives, that currently operate in Guatemala. While the pyramid does not capture the level of diffusion and complexity of gang structures and organized crime networks (for example, there is significant variation within each strata of the pyramid), the pyramid does provide a general understanding of the various groupings of gangs and their relation to organized crime networks and the broader at-risk youth population. One characteristic that appears to hold true for all gangs is their extreme cohesiveness and loyalty to the gang, which is a function of their "oppositional culture";[73] that is, gang activity is defined by their opposition to rival gangs and, similar to other groups ranging from military troops to sports teams, they band together more intensely in the face of opposition or adversity.

The different types of gangs reflected in each strata of the pyramid are described in greater detail here.

[73] Klein, Malcolm. Extract from Professor Klein's statements during conference entitled "*Voices from the Field: Local Initiatives and New Research on Central American Youth Gang Violence*," February 23, 2005, organized by the Due Process of Law Foundation, the Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence, and the Pan-American Health Organization.

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Organized Crime and International Narco-Activity Bosses (international): The top block of the pyramid represents the highest levels—the leadership—of organized crime and narco-activity networks. Most analysts do not believe that there is a direct ascension from street or neighborhood gangs to organized crime, yet this leadership works closely with the leadership of the most sophisticated transnational gangs. In general, these bosses do not have communication with members below the regional and national levels.

Transnational Gang Leadership (regional): This block represents the leaders of 18th Street, MS-13, or other gangs with international presence. These individuals oversee well-connected cells with extensive communication networks that are engaged in extortion and support drug and arms trafficking through territorial control of specific *barrios* (neighborhoods), or of other places such as nightclubs. When detained, many have lawyers who are able to help them avoid prison sentences.

Gang Cell Members (national): At this level, 18th Street or MS-13 *clickas* (cells) are involved in lower-level trafficking and have lesser territorial control over *barrios*. These gang members may be involved in extortion, such as the collection of *impuestos de guerra* (war taxes) from bus and taxi drivers and small businesses owners, and they often carry out orders from regional leaders. They often receive special privileges in prison from other gang members when detained. These members communicate up to the bosses and down to the lower level members.

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Neighborhood Gang Members (local): Maras de Barrio (neighborhood gangs) are not necessarily members of 18th Street or MS-13 gangs, but they may imitate these two gangs. They often fight for territorial control over *barrios*, have tattoos, consume alcohol and drugs such as crack, and carry homemade arms or arms in many cases acquired through robbery of private security guards. These gangs typically comprise youths from marginal neighborhoods. They do not receive special privileges from other gang members while in prison and are often viewed as illegitimate by gang members who consider themselves true members of specific gang *clickas*.

Vulnerable Youths at Risk of Joining a Gang: This group represents the largest segment of the population – youth between the ages of 8 and 18 that are vulnerable to joining a gang because their lives are characterized by several risk factors, which are explained in greater detail in a later section entitled *Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity*. The majority of youth in this group are poor, ladino, and live in marginalized urban areas. These youth represent the lowest level of the gang supply chain. This group can be further broken into three subsets. The first group of at-risk youth are often referred to as "simpatizantes," or sympathizers. This group includes at-risk youth who are exposed to gang activity, may have a relative who is in a gang, are somewhat familiar with certain aspects of gang culture (e.g., gang symbols, graffiti), and often display allegiance to one gang over another; that is, they are sympathetic to one particular gang, but have not been officially inducted, or "jumped into" a gang. This group is perceived to be the group of youth most at risk of making the decision to join a gang. The second group of at-risk youth, often referred to as "aspirantes," or aspirants, includes often the youngest youth who have some exposure to gang activity but have not yet become very familiar with specifics of gang culture. With continued exposure, this group of youth will become well-versed and more sympathetic to gang life. Finally, the third and largest subset includes the broader at-risk youth population that includes youth living predominantly in poor, urban areas without access to education, employment, and other opportunities. While this group has not yet been exposed to any significant level of gang activity, the likelihood does exist that they will be drawn to gang life in the future if their basic needs such as income and fulfilling social ties are not satisfied in other ways. Making a clear distinction between these subsets is critical in order to be able to target activities to prevent full-fledged gang membership.

Gang structures in Guatemala are not static. Gangs appear to have a very strong adaptive capacity and are able to readily evolve to changing political, economic, and social contexts. For example, in response to stepped up state efforts to arrest gang members in Guatemala and other countries, the face of gangs has evolved. Some gang members are getting fewer tattoos and wearing atypical attire to make their identification more difficult. In addition, globalization has not neglected gangs, as they are increasingly using more sophisticated communication techniques (i.e. cell phones, websites) and more advanced weaponry. More advanced communication is making gang activity more efficient and more public. Whereas the earlier strains of gangs, formed in the early-mid 1990s, began as neighborhood gangs that served primarily social functions (giving youth an identity) or economic functions (lower level robbery to generate income), gangs are becoming more sophisticated and the nature of crimes of certain gangs is becoming more violent. Beheadings, for example, are becoming increasingly common. Gangs in

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Guatemala, specifically the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, are becoming progressively more transnational with communication taking place between gang members within Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the United States. Deportation, fluid migration across country borders, and the Internet and cell phone revolutions have all inevitably resulted in the transnationalization of gangs.

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

The costs and impacts of gang activity on Guatemala's development can be categorized into three general areas – impacts on economic, social, and democratic/political development, many of which are interrelated and overlap.

Impacts on Economic Development

- **Deterred Trade and Investment.** While up-to-date country-level data is limited, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has made notable headway in measuring the costs of violence in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In measuring the costs of violence, the IDB considers four cost categories[74] – *direct costs* (i.e. health system, police, justice system, housing, social services); *indirect costs* (i.e. higher morbidity and mortality due to homicides, suicides, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and depressive disorders); *economic multiplier effects* (i.e. macroeconomic impacts and impacts on the labor market and intergenerational productivity); and *social multiplier effects* (i.e. impact on interpersonal relations and the quality of life). Using this classification, the IDB estimates that violence in Latin America costs the region an estimated 14.2 percent of GDP. While data specific to Guatemala for all of the aforementioned cost categories is scarce, per the table below, the economic costs of crime (not just gang violence) in Guatemala in 1999 were estimated to be 565.4 million dollars, with violent crime exerting a more costly toll than non-violent crime[75]. It is estimated that firms in Guatemala suffer average losses of about $5,500 annually due to crime.[76]

[74] Inter-American Development Bank, 2000b. "Economic and Social Consequences of Violence." *Technical Notes on Violence Prevention*, Note 4, Social Development Division. Washington, DC.
[75] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Rubio, M, "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.
[76] Ibid.

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Incident	Estimated Loss (in millions of Quetzals)	$ Equivalent (in millions)
Robbery without violence	1,925.80	250
Armed assault	2	304
Threat, extortion, or blackmail	341.3	8.7
Physical aggression	15.9	2
Sexual attack	3.9	0.5
Total	4,353.80	565.4

Source: Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa, 2002.

- **Privatization of Security.** Guatemala has experienced an extensive proliferation of private security firms in the last several years as wealthier businesses and citizens alike are increasingly relying on the private sector to address security needs that the state cannot fulfill. According to a national victimization survey conducted in 2000, 7.1 percent of households pay for their own private security.[77] In that year, the total budget for private spending on security was at least 20 percent greater than the public security budget and amounted to approximately $3.5 million.[78] In Guatemala, there are currently approximately 80,000 private security guards compared to 18,500 police. Of the 180 private security companies in the country, only 28 are legal. Oversight of these private companies is negligible, with a total of eight police tasked with providing oversight to all. Without sufficient controls in place, the potential of these private security firms to be exploited by organized criminal networks is considerable. There are a number of concerns related to the growth of the private security sector. First, significant resources are being invested in this sector which results in overall productivity losses. Second, the poor, by virtue of not being able to afford private security, increasingly become targets of crime and gang violence. This is reflected through the extortion rings that exploit poor "barrios," and, according to one U.S. State Department official, have resulted in upward of 100,000 thousand dollars of "war taxes" being extorted annually from local businesses, bus/taxi drivers, and schoolchildren in poor neighborhoods.[79] In addition, the poor sometimes end up relying on gangs or vigilante justice for personal security since they cannot afford private security and have extremely low confidence in the state's ability to provide effective and just security. According to the 2004 USAID attitudinal survey, 31 percent of Guatemalans believe that taking justice into one's own hands is an acceptable response.[80]

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[77] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Arriagada and Godoy, 2000. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.
[80] Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura politica de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

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Impacts on Social Development

- **Stigmatization and Victimization of Youth.** Given that the majority of gang members are youth associated with poor, urban areas, several individuals interviewed claimed that a stereotype has emerged, fueled in large part by the media, wherein youth from poor, urban areas are by default associated with gangs. As a result, they are often victims of discrimination, leaving a large segment of the population (poor urban youth) with unequal access to employment and community and social structures. For example, anecdotal evidence reveals that youth are often denied jobs based on their residential address alone. The exclusion of this key segment of society could have adverse long-term effects on Guatemala's development. As the USAID Youth and Conflict Toolkit aptly states, "a deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment violent conflict for decades."[81]

- **Weakening of Social Capital.** Increased perceptions of insecurity have resulted in a growing unwillingness of citizens to participate in community affairs and a high level of distrust in other community residents. According to a 2004 survey,[82] 44 percent of Guatemalans believe that "few to no people are trustworthy." Regarding perceptions of insecurity, 86 percent of Guatemalans surveyed feel that the level of insecurity facing Guatemala presents a threat to the future well-being of the country, and 45 percent feel that insecurity poses a threat to their own personal security. Interestingly, while *perceptions* of insecurity are relatively high, actual crime victimization is much lower, with only 13 percent of those surveyed having been actual victims of a crime. Thus, it is the perception of insecurity that is taking the greatest toll on the lives of Guatemalans, as many are afraid to even walk the streets of their neighborhoods despite not having been a victim of crime. This is particularly true of Guatemalans living in urban areas. This weakens the base of social capital in a community which in turn fuels the growth of crime and violence, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. This phenomenon is most intense in the urban context, where social capital tends to be weaker.

Impact on Democratic Political Development

- **Reduced Public Faith in Democracy.** Guatemalans are becoming increasingly frustrated with the government's inability to provide public security and justice for its citizens. This is empowering politicians to support the use of heavy-handed approaches to address gangs to attract votes, often at the expense of democratic values such as human rights and due process. Unless crime levels are considerably abated over the next year, the issue of crime and gang violence will

[81] USAID Youth and Conflict Toolkit for Intervention; USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance.
[82] Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura politica de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

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likely be at the center of the political platform of the next Presidential election in the Fall of 2007. With crime topping the list of citizens' concerns, there is a strong likelihood of candidates running on a hard-line, heavy-handed approach to crime.

- **Diverting of Resources from Critical Development Sectors.** As governments ratchet up efforts to combat gang violence, other developmental needs suffer such as investments in health, education, and water. The Government of Guatemala, in an effort to have a visible impact that will produce results in the short term, has resulted in a disproportionate investment in short-term efforts vis-à-vis long term development needs. This has resulted in the root causes of gang violence being left largely unaddressed, while the state invests primarily in short-term, more politically attractive, law enforcement efforts. Guatemala already owns the unenviable title of lowest public investment in social services, and the lowest tax collection base, in the Central America region. However, there are rumors circulating that the Government is considering levying a new "security tax" on Guatemalans to finance public security needs. Thus, a further diversion of resources away from the basic citizen needs is of great concern.

- **Media Sensationalism.** Not unlike many other countries in the world, the media in Guatemala is equally guilty of sensationalizing and focusing disproportionately on violence, to the neglect of other important social issues. However, not all violence in Guatemala is considered equally worthy of media attention. The more visible crimes, such as gang violence, receive significantly more media attention than less visible violence such as intra-familial violence including child and/or sexual abuse. Organized crime, which arguably has much higher-scale and more damaging effects on the country, is also given much less attention than gang violence, the reluctance perhaps being a function of perceived and actual state involvement. This has two important consequences. First, the information the public receives through the print and broadcast media paints an inaccurate picture of violence in Guatemala – one in which gangs are seemingly responsible for a greater proportion of violence than they actually are. The resulting high visibility of gang violence in the public sphere, relative to other types of violence, contributes to high levels of fear and insecurity among citizens. Second, the portrayal of gang violence in the media has the unintended consequence of glamorizing violence to youth not yet in gangs as well as to gang members themselves. Anecdotal evidence reveals that gangs often compete for the media spotlight, with each rival gang trying to outdo the other by committing increasingly more violent acts.

- **Deterioration of State-Citizen Relationship in Poor, Urban Areas.** As gangs exert their control over local *barrios* which are largely poor and urban (and vastly more insecure than the wealthier urban areas that can afford costly private security) governments, in response – often with support from donors – focus their efforts on strengthening law enforcement and exerting control to quell the violence and dismantle gang networks in these targeted areas. This has important consequences. As police step up efforts in these poor, marginalized areas, what

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was already a relationship of mutual fear and distrust between police and communities in these areas is exacerbated. Many citizens increasingly feel that they are being targeted rather than protected by the police. The history of conflict in Guatemala, characterized by high levels of state-sponsored violence, ensured that it would take generations to mend a troubled relationship between state security forces and citizens. However, as the government increases the police presence in marginalized areas to combat gangs, this is instilling a greater level of alarm than confidence in the citizenry. The state-youth relationship is the most disturbing. Whereas anti-establishment, anti-state sentiments among adolescent and teenage youth is common across the world, what distinguishes and exacerbates these feelings of animosity in youth in poor, urban areas in Guatemala is that most of these youth have never experienced a single positive interaction with the state. Often, their only view of the state is the police officers that make arrests and incarcerate individuals. Often, this is the only view that police forces have of themselves. Until state authorities and communities can begin to see each other as allies – a relationship that must be based on mutual beneficial actions – this poor relationship will continue, or deteriorate.

- **Enabling Environment for Institutional and Extra-Judicial Violence.** As police are pressured by the government and the public to bring gang violence under control in poor, marginalized, urban areas, a few key factors converge which create an enabling environment for increased institutional and extra-judicial violence. First, media sensationalism and the resulting stigmatization of all youth from poor neighborhoods as associated with gangs creates a mentality within the police that places the state on the side of "good" and all gang members and "suspected" gang members as "evil." This can result in increasing levels of police brutality and extra-judicial killings as well as increasing levels of violence against police as communities increasingly view the police as their enemy. Second, the focus of the police is on the number of arrests, while the collection of proper and sufficient evidence, along with due process, become secondary priorities. Third, as the public becomes increasingly frustrated with high levels of crime, their support for extra-judicial measures, also referred to as "social cleansing," increases, lending a dangerous level of legitimacy to the human rights and due process violations committed by the state. In Guatemala, a number of corpses were discovered in and around Guatemala City in 2000, with signs of torture and violent death. Nearly all of the corpses were young males, many with gang-style tattoos, leading some to suspect the government of a social cleansing operation.[83] If perceptions of government involvement in the execution of gang members and suspected gang members are common among citizens in gang violence-ridden areas, so is the belief that such acts are justified in dealing with public enemy number one. While the Government of Guatemala is firm in its denial that any such social cleansing policy exists, authorities do acknowledge that such acts may have occurred but that they are isolated events. Such acts of extra-judicial killing are often extremely difficult to prove since, first, it is

[83] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from US Department of State, 2001b. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

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relatively easy for police to blame such deaths on inter-gang disputes and, second, victims and family members of victims are often too afraid to report such violations for fear of reprisal by the police.

- **Oversaturated and counterproductive prisons.** As the state increases the number of gang-related arrests, an already saturated prison system is becoming even more overwhelmed. There are currently approximately 576 gang members in the Guatemalan prison, of which 18 are women. The majority of these (approximately 289) are in the Escuintla prison, characterized by severe overcrowding and inadequate facilities.[84] Currently, all gangs are held in the same facility, increasing the risk of intra-gang violence as was experienced in August 2005 with the massacre of several 18th Street gang members by rival MS-13 gang members. With members of the same gang sharing cells, prisons have evolved into graduate schools or training camps for gang members. Rehabilitation programs for imprisoned gang members are nonexistent and prisons are egregiously insecure, with communication, weapons, and drugs flowing easily in and out of prisons.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

While gang activity impacts Guatemala's development on several levels, it is, above all else, a symptom. A number of factors, socioeconomic and contextual, create an enabling environment for gang activity to flourish in Guatemala. These include:

Socioeconomic Factors

- **Marginal urban enclaves**. While rural Guatemala is by no means crime-free, crime levels, narco-activity, and gang activity are most intense in urban and peri-urban areas of Guatemala. Lack of jobs in rural areas and the search for a better life have brought many rural-born Guatemalans to urban and peri-urban areas that are expanding rapidly and uncontrolled. Rapid urbanization has concentrated the demographic group most inclined to violence – unattached young males. Gang members themselves largely come from poor, marginalized, urban areas, and are products of an environment characterized by overwhelmed and ineffective service delivery, social exclusion and weak social capital, disintegrated families, overcrowded living conditions, and greater population density. In 2000, the average number of children per household in poor urban areas of Guatemala was nearly five.[85] This has resulted in large families, often headed by single mothers that must work excessively long hours outside of the home to sustain their large families. Fathers are scarce and where they are a part of the family, alcoholism and domestic abuse are common. As families struggle to fulfill their most basic needs (food, shelter, electricity), other needs are neglected such as the

[84] Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.
[85] INE-MECOVI. Encuesta Nacional Sobre Condiciones de Vida, ENCOVI. 2000.

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development of healthy emotional bonds between parent and child and the transfer of positive values from parent to child.

- **Large numbers of unemployed youth.** The youth bulge in Guatemala, accompanied by joblessness, is creating a dangerous situation wherein large numbers of youth desperately in need of income turn to gangs to fill the economic void. Many gang members in Guatemala are the primary or secondary breadwinners of their families, making the economic pull of gangs particularly potent. The urban informal economic sector has provided both licit and illicit means for surviving in spite of a lagging formal economy. The high level of unemployment is both a function of the lack of jobs available due to a struggling economy and the inability of youth to obtain existing jobs due to lack of education. Education levels in Guatemala are dismal with only one percent of all children enrolled in primary school finishing secondary school. Since the Peace Accords, the Government's focus has been nearly entirely on primary education, with 90 percent of primary schools funded by the government. By contrast, 80 percent of secondary schools are private, and thus unaffordable to the poor. In addition to quantity, the quality of education is equally drab. As one individual the Team interviewed stated, "Primary schools in Guatemala are useless. These schools train youth for one profession alone – teaching; yet there are 50,000 unemployed teachers in Guatemala today."

- **Poverty and Inequality**. Although contrary to popular belief, poverty is not the primary cause of crime and violence, it is one of several key factors. The poor are disproportionately impacted by gang violence. First, they are often targeted since they are unable to afford private security. In many poorer Guatemalan neighborhoods, gangs are involved in extortion by forcing, upon threat of violence, local businesses such as taxi/bus drivers and small business owners to pay "*impuestos de guerra*," or "war taxes." Second, the youth directly suffer the effects of poverty, which include unemployment, poor education, and minimal access to high quality services. This is particularly significant for Guatemala, where inequality in income and access to services is enormous and where more than half of the population lives in poverty and nearly a quarter live in extreme poverty.[86] While poverty is undeniably an important factor, Guatemala illustrates the importance of being cautious about labeling poverty as the singular cause of violence. A study revealed that departments in Guatemala with the highest levels of violence are those with higher literacy levels, fewer households living in extreme poverty, a higher Ladino population than indigenous, and largely urban. Conversely, departments with lower homicide rates were likely to have higher indigenous populations, lower literacy levels, more extreme household poverty, and rural.[87]

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[86] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

[87] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Centro de Investigaciones Economicas Nacionales. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

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- **High levels of intra-familial violence**. There is a cycle of violence in motion in Guatemala. Levels of intra-familial violence, including sexual violence, spouse abuse, and child abuse are extremely high and, in many cases, are fueled by alcohol and/or drug abuse. Compounding the problem is the societal norm of keeping quiet about such violence which perpetuates the problem, results in gross underreporting to authorities, and contributes to a general lack of resources for families – women in particular – to effectively deal with the issue. Intra-familial violence is inextricably linked to youth gang violence, with an extremely high percentage of gang members reporting coming from disintegrated families with some level of intra-familial violence.

- **Minimal state presence.** Guatemala suffers from the region's lowest public investment in social services and lowest tax collection base (less than 10 percent of GDP) from which to fund these investments. Guatemala scores consistently low on the United Nations' Human Development Indices including infant mortality, life expectancy, and literacy. Service delivery in poor, urban areas is increasingly characterized by increased law enforcement efforts to make arrests, but much less so by improvements in service delivery in the areas of health, education, and other critical social services. For example, in Villa Nueva, where intra-familial violence is a major problem, there is a not a single government-funded program to address it.

- **Drug consumption.** Drug consumption is practically a given with gang members. Guatemala's position as a trans-shipment point for narco-trafficking ensured the eventual emergence of a domestic drug consumption problem. Crack, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, and alcohol are easy to obtain in most poor, urban neighborhoods in Guatemala, particularly in those where narco-traffickers and gangs have exerted control over local drug markets. The drug trade is linked to inter-gang violence to control the drug market in local *barrios*. Drugs are often the motive behind robberies and assaults to purchase drugs, intra-family quarrels between drug users and their families, and the murder of drug addicts by "social cleansing" groups.[88]

- **Deportation and migration.** Deportation of convicted gang members and illegal aliens from the United States into Guatemala, post-conflict return migration, and migration within Central America are key factors that have contributed to a growing problem of gang violence in Guatemala and in the United States. According to the State Department, during the 2004-5 period, the United States deported 9,487 Guatemalans, 2,210 of which had a criminal record. There are few services provided to non-criminal deportees or returning migrants and none provided to criminal deportees, including convicted gang members. In addition, in response to newly enacted anti-gang legislation in El Salvador and Honduras, there is evidence that Salvadoran and Honduran gang members are migrating to Guatemala to avoid their own countries' harsher penalties against gang members.

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[88] Moser, Caroline and McIlwaine, C. 1999. "Participatory Urban Appraisal and its Application for Research on Violence." *Environment and Urbanization* 11 (2): 203-26.

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Contextual Factors

- **Legacy of conflict and violence.** The violent, oppressive civil conflict, which pitted state against citizen and killed over 200,000 Guatemalans, did not end with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. The survivors inherited a legacy of institutional violence, hostility, and injustice that continues to affect the daily lives of Guatemalans. There exists a widespread acceptance in Guatemala that violence is an acceptable means of resolving conflict and Guatemalans do not have faith in the state's ability to provide anything other than partial and arbitrary justice. The conflict also ensured a high level of availability and possession of arms among the populace.

- **Weak, ineffective, corrupt police, criminal, and judicial systems.** The justice and security sectors in Guatemala are weak, corrupt, overwhelmed, and neglected. The judicial system currently does not have the capacity to deal with gang violence. Judicial impunity has emboldened organized criminal entities and gangs. Guatemala is also plagued with a shortage of judges, which is a particularly serious problem since the law states that every case must be presented before a judge within six hours of arrest. The result is that individuals generally end up spending days in pre-trial detention before ever seeing a judge. Pre-trial detention centers are often in worse conditions than the prisons and themselves present recruitment opportunities for gangs and organized criminal elements. The conviction rate is less than ten percent for all cases where a complaint is filed. Police suffer from weak capacity, lack of equipment and, due to extremely poor police investigative capacity, police use "*flagrancia*" – or "catching someone in the act" – as primary grounds for arrest. As a result, many of those arrested end up going free due to lack of evidence. In many cases, police send those they arrest immediately to pre-trial detention, which is illegal without an order from a judge. Perceptions of the justice sector and police are dismal. According to a 2004 survey, 73 percent of those surveyed who live in metropolitan areas in Guatemala believe that the police are directly involved in crime, leaving only 27 percent who believe that the police actually protect them.[89] Similarly, Guatemalans have the lowest level of confidence in their country's justice system than every other country in the region.[90]

    - The *juvenile justice system*, which is the most relevant given that gang members are predominantly youth, exhibits a number of weaknesses. The law states that police must send youth to the *Fiscalia de Menores*, who makes the determination whether to press charges or follow an alternative course such as recommending enrollment in a rehabilitation program. If the *Fiscalia* (Attorney Genreal's Office) chooses to press charges, then the youth is sent to the *Juzgado de Ninez y Juventud* (Children's and Youth's

[89] Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura politica de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.
[90] Ibid.

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Court) who directs that the youth be sent to pre-trial detention or prison, where the youth then awaits trial and sentencing by a judge. Unlike adults, judges are authorized to give juveniles alternative sentencing, such as "*libertad vigilada*," or surveiled liberty. In addition, the judge can order that a youth be placed in custody of a relative or an NGO-administered, government program instead of pre-trial detention. However, defense lawyers generally do not have confidence in the effectiveness of these options since NGO capacity is weak and they lack the ability to keep tabs on youth in their programs at all times. Similarly, oversight of youth when they are in custody of a relative is minimal and youth may run away or worse, get killed. While juvenile detention centers are not as overcrowded as adult prisons, they similarly suffer from insecurity and violence. In August of 2005, a number of gang members were massacred by a rival gang that broke into the detention center.

- *The Ley de Proteccion Integral de Ninez y Adolescencia* (Law of Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents), enacted in 2003, was inspired by the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child and transformed the way youth transgressors were being treated. Its intention was not to reduce penalties, but rather create more stiff and certain penalties. Under the law, youth under 12 years of age cannot be charged with a crime. Many believe that this law, which essentially gives impunity to youth under the age of 12, is the motivation behind the steady falling age of youth being recruited by gangs.

- **Access to small arms.** The availability of arms in Guatemala and other Central American countries is closely tied to the armed conflicts that engulfed the region in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the conflict, very few weapons have been taken out of circulation. Approximately two million arms are estimated to be in the hands of 36 percent of the civilian population.[91] Of these, only approximately 253,500 are legally registered, according to the National Civilian Police. In addition, organized criminal groups are believed to have imported large quantities of arms.[92] Finally, the rapidly growing number of private security firms in the country has also increased the number of firearms in Guatemala.

- **Narco-Activity**. The international drug trade is closely connected to gang activity in Guatemala. Guatemala serves as a critical point of trans-shipment of drugs originating in Colombia and destined for United States markets, which has created thriving narco-trafficking and organized crime networks in the country. As a result, there is a constant flow of drugs entering Guatemala which has given rise to high levels of drug consumption and addiction in the country, which in turn is linked to a rise in gang and other violence.

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[91] Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Arriagada and Godoy, 1999. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.
[92] Ibid, extracted from Rodriguez and de Leon, 2000.

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Current Responses to Gangs in Guatemala

Like its neighbors, the Government of Guatemala has not yet developed a comprehensive national plan to address the various dimensions of the gang problem including prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. Currently, government investments to address the gang problem overwhelmingly favor short-term law enforcement efforts, to the neglect of long term prevention-oriented programs that address the root causes of the problem. While some donors and nongovernmental organizations have attempted to fill some of these gaps by implementing prevention-oriented programs that address the risk factors for gang involvement and intervention programs that work directly with former gang members, such programs are few and scattered.

Although there are clear gaps and imbalances in the government's approach to dealing with gangs, the government has taken some critical steps that could have a positive impact on reducing gang violence in the country. Below is a more descriptive review and assessment of some ongoing initiatives of government, civil society, and other donors that directly or indirectly impact the gang phenomenon in Guatemala.

Government Response

Like his Presidential counterparts, Tony Saca in El Salvador and Mel Zelaya (and former President Ricardo Maduro) in Honduras, President Oscar Berger was elected in 2003 after a successful campaign that put tackling crime and corruption at the center of his political platform. Like his neighbors, President Berger inherited a country with its share of demons, including high levels of public sector corruption, rising crime levels, a weak and partial judicial system, a distressed tax base, a sluggish economic growth rate, and substantial social infrastructure deficits. However, unlike in neighboring El Salvador and Honduras, which have enacted *Mano Dura*, *Super Mano Dura*, and *Ley Anti-Mara*, each designed to strengthen law enforcement approaches to control gang violence by employing low evidentiary standards to incarcerate gang members, President Berger did not follow suit. The Government of Guatemala has not passed specific legislation to address gangs or organized crime. There are no Guatemalan equivalents of America's anti-racketeering laws, which allow suspects to be charged with conspiracy to commit a criminal act, rather than the act itself.[93] The Guatemalan legal system considers all cases as illegal single acts, where proof of guilt is accepted only when it is individualized.[94]

The Government of Guatemala has endured less criticism from the international human rights community than the Governments of El Salvador and Honduras, primarily because it has not enacted any *Mano Dura*-type legislation. However, the Government has received its share of accusations from human rights organizations of using social cleansing tactics or of turning a blind eye to the use of such tactics by rogue elements in the police force. When the Guatemalan government claims to have "begun a softer war

[93] "Out of the Underworld," *The Economist*. January 5, 2006.
[94] Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

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against gangs that focuses on recreation and rehabilitation programs,"[95] it has overstated the situation a bit. While the Government did donate a large farm, *Finca Santo Tomas*, to be used for gang rehabilitation programs, there is still a clear imbalance between government investments in prevention/rehabilitation and law enforcement activities. Despite not having enacted specific anti-gang legislation, the Government of Guatemala has nonetheless stepped up efforts to control gang violence in selected neighborhoods with high crime levels. As organized crime, particularly drug-related crime, establishes a firm foothold in the poor urban areas of Guatemala and other countries in the region, the standard government response has been to increase efforts to control the violence through increases in arrests and/or police presence. In Guatemala, this response has been representative of the state response to gangs. The state has stepped up efforts to control violence and dismantle gang networks by increasing law enforcement actions in areas with high crime levels. The short- and long-term effectiveness of this approach is debatable. Crime levels have not abated in Guatemala, despite increased law enforcement efforts. In addition, a legitimate concern of many analysts is that the targeting of low-income communities by state security forces in the fight against drugs highlights the fact that it is the low-level, not the high-level, actors who are vulnerable.[96]

Another concern relates to the role of the military in addressing crime in Guatemala. While a stated goal of the Peace Accords was to reduce the role of the military in civilian affairs and establish a new Civilian National Police force, the Government of Guatemala has instituted plans for joint police-military action to patrol crime-ridden civilian areas for up to three years as institutional improvement projects are being implemented. Given the history of state-sponsored, military-led violence in Guatemala and the stated objective of reducing the military's role in civilian activities, this is a disquieting development. In response to an increase in reports of state-sponsored violence and "social cleansing," the Government's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office has begun to send observers along with police patrols to monitor potential abuses of power.[97]

Although the government response has overwhelmingly favored stepped-up law enforcement efforts to confront gang violence in targeted communities, the Government of Guatemala is supporting certain strategies, policies, and programs whose implementation could significantly impact the problem of gang violence by tackling key socioeconomic and contextual factors that are fueling the gang phenomenon.

- *National Policy on the Prevention of Youth Violence* – The policy, approved in June 2005, is a product of the Presidential Commission of Human Rights (COPREDEH) with support from the Ministry of Government. The development of the plan appears to be a step in the right direction by focusing its efforts on mitigating key socioeconomic risk factors such as youth unemployment, weak social capital, and poor education. In addition, the policy lays out concrete strategies and interventions to implement the policy. However, sufficient resources have yet to be identified for its implementation.

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[95] Thompson, Ginger. New York Times article *Guatemala Bleeds in Vise of Gangs and Vengeance*, January 1, 2006.
[96] Leeds, E. 1996. "Cocaine and Parallel Politics in the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local-Level Democratization." *Latin American Research Review* 31 (3): 47-85.
[97] Christian Science Monitor

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- *National Civilian Police (PNC) Reform Strategy* – The GoG has taken difficult, but critical, steps to address corruption in the police force. In addition to firing several officers that have engaged in corrupt activities, the three-year police reform strategy seeks to accomplish a number of important tasks. In 2005, the focus will be on upgrading equipment, training, and communications. In 2006, the PNC will emphasize legislative reforms, management evaluations, and field professionalization programs. The objectives of these reforms are to strengthen the police academy to improve the quality of recruits, develop more effective promotion criteria, increase the number of women in the force, and upgrade learning to include more permanent instructors and incorporate distance learning. In addition, the strategy plans to improve prison programs to incorporate more rehabilitation, such as education services. Finally, an evaluation of the program will take place in 2007. While there is currently political will behind the much needed reforms at the highest levels of the GoG and PNC, given the deep-seated nature of corruption, progress in this area will require a sustained commitment over a number of years and additional funding for implementation.

- *Ministry of Education* – The Ministry supports an innovative program that addresses some of the key socioeconomic drivers of youth gang activity – poor education and unemployment – by providing alternative delivery education systems. The program is administered by the *Direccion General de Educacion Extra-Escolar*, or DIGEEX and is working closely with CONAPREPI (*Comision Nacional de Prevencion de la Violencia y Promocion Integral de Valores de Convivenca* – National Commission for the Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence). The philosophy driving many of DIGEEX programs is to bridge theory and practice, school and the "real world," by providing education that is directly relevant in a particular community context and that is directly linked to employment. For example, training in a community in a textile market would focus on developing textile industry-relevant skills. Classroom lectures emphasize "real world" problem-solving. DIGEEX provides, as the dynamic Director calls it, "formal informal education." Specific programs include "centros polyfuncionales," or capacitation centers, that work directly with municipalities to provide technical and vocational training and education to residents. Currently, there are 425 such centers in Guatemala, including in Villa Nueva and Mixco – two areas with high levels of gang activity. DIGEEX also provides accelerated primary education, working through municipalities and NGOs, and has plans to improve secondary level education in public schools as well.

Civil Society Response

- *Nongovernmental organizations* – while there are some non-governmental organizations implementing activities aimed at preventing at-risk from joining gangs and working towards rehabilitating and reinserting former gang members into society, such efforts are few, scattered, and relatively small scale. Some of the more prominent NGO-led activities are briefly described below.

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- *Ceiba* – a Guatemalan NGO that provides a number of prevention-oriented services to at-risk youth and some former gang members, primarily in Limon - an area in Guatemala City that is home to many gang members and high levels of narco-activity. Programs range from daycare for 2-6 year olds to advanced information technology and training and job placement for teenagers. The *Ceiba* program is demonstrating the value of NGOs that are based and focus their programs within crime-affected communities. *Ceiba* is staffed primarily with community residents who understand the nuances of their community and thus are much more attuned to the specific needs of youth in their community, and have avoided the "cookie-cutter" programmatic approach that often reduces the impact of programs managed outside of affected communities.

- *Youth Alliance Program (Program Alianza Joven - PAJ)* – the objective of this program, funded by USAID/Guatemala and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. is to build multi-sectoral relationships between the public, private, and civil society spheres to prevent crime at the local level. The PAJ model supports NGO alliances, such as the Association for Crime Prevention (APREDE) which has created youth development centers that provide a range of services to at-risk youth and former gang members to prevent their involvement or to return to gangs. Services include vocational/skills training, job placement, computer skills development, English language training, agricultural extension, and accelerated learning. The PAJ model is particularly useful in that it recognizes that youth are in need of multiple services, all of which any single NGO would be unable to fulfill alone, but which alliances of NGOs can successfully address by leveraging resources and skills, thereby maximizing impact. PAJ is also supporting local crime prevention councils, which convene several local stakeholders (local authorities, local businesses, and civil society) to develop local crime prevention strategies, conduct public awareness campaigns, and related activities. PAJ has provided grants to APREDE, the Association for the Monitoring and Support for Public Security (IMASP), and six Crime Prevention Councils. PAJ is also involved in rehabilitation, by providing rehabilitation services to vulnerable youth and former gang members at *Finca Santo Tomas*, a large farm donated by the Government of Guatemala. Finally, PAJ recently launched a five-episode reality show, called "Challenge 10: Peace for the Ex," which features ex-gang members working together to develop small businesses.

- *Fundacion REMAR* – the Foundation provides drug rehabilitation and counseling services to youth addicted to drugs. Judges have the option of sending sentenced youth here instead of a juvenile detention center.

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- *Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence* – This newly created coalition, less than a year old, was created as a regional counterpart to the Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence.[98] The new coalition is comprised of violence prevention champions from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador and recently received a one-year grant from the Pan-American Health Organization for its first year of operation. It is expected that the Coalition will assume such roles as advocating for balanced government approaches to dealing with gangs that include significant prevention and intervention components, and improving information-sharing across countries on best practices in youth violence prevention.

- *Faith-based organizations* – Churches, particularly evangelical churches and less so the Catholic establishment, have a growing influence on the lives of gang members, particularly those interested in leaving the gang. However, their capacity for service provision appears to be limited to the provision of religious services. One champion whose efforts are worth noting is Father Manuolo Makela, a Jesuit priest, who is working in Zone 6 in Guatemala City to provide services for at-risk youth, including education, vocational skills training, and life skills. In addition, a group of Franciscans are providing services for at-risk youth and former gang members in El Mezquital. Finally, American missionary groups are involved in providing education services, primarily in rural areas.

- *Private sector* – while the Guatemalan private sector appears to recognize the negative impact that crime and gang violence are having on trade and investment in the country, their direct engagement and support for initiatives to address it has been fairly limited to date. The USAID PAJ activity has had some success obtain private sector support, specifically from Microsoft, Grupo Geo, and the Jorge Toruno Foundation.

A lesson that can be drawn from the above NGO-led activities is the importance of supporting community-based activities that are designed and managed with the direct involvement of NGOs in affected areas. The push and pull factors that draw youth into gangs vary by community. Community-based needs assessments are essential to accurately mapping the patterns of crime and violence to determine what types of specific activities are needed to counter these factors in any specific community and draw upon the knowledge (that donors and traditional American implementing partners don't always have) of communities in identifying problems and developing solutions. For example, in Limon, Guatemala where narco-activity is more intense than many other locales, activities should be tailored to specifically counter the pull of youth into narco-activity, both as consumers and drug distributors. The status and income that is conferred on youth working in the narcotics trade is relatively higher than other trades. Alternatives must recognize this. As a *Ceiba* employee stated, "if you offer a kid from Limon a job in a *panaderia* (bread shop), he will laugh in your face. Whatever alternative you provide

[98] Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence is comprised of the Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Pan-American Health Organization, Organization of American States, World Bank, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and USAID. The Coalition's objective is to advocate for and coordinate violence prevention activities in the Americas.

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must be able to compete with the status and self-esteem that a savvy job in the narcotics trade offers." Community residents, other members of civil society, local governments, and youth in particular, should be engaged in assessing community problems, needs, and existing capacity. Community-based assessments should be undertaken in communities where socioeconomic risk factors are prevalent, such as El Mezquital, Escuintla, Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan. These assessments, particularly when conducted just prior to a new program being implemented, can also serve as a baseline for measuring the impacts of programs implemented in these communities. This is a key challenge that needs to be addressed – the lack of NGOs willing and/or without the capacity to work in crime-affected neighborhoods.

Donor Response

Donor assistance in support of crime prevention activities in Guatemala is growing steadily, highlighting the importance of communication and coordination among donors.

- *US Government*:
    - *US Department of State and USAID* – the joint US Government Rule of Law Strategy identifies "creating a new vision of policing" as a key objective. The US Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) and USAID are working together to implement a pilot project in Villa Nueva, a satellite city of Guatemala with high levels of gang activity. The activity's objective is to combine law enforcement approaches with community-based policing methods to reduce gang violence. Specific elements of the program include the creation of a specialized "Gang Unit" to use improved criminal investigative methods to identify gang members involved in drugs/arms trafficking, homicides, and extortions and process them through the formal justice system. The program has developed a vetted, trained cadre of investigators and crime scene specialists addressing priority concerns of the community, including gang violence, extortion, and homicides. A confidential hotline has also been set up to provide residents a means of sharing information about criminal activity with the police. Building on this joint USAID-State activity, a new community-based policing pilot program is being launched that expands ongoing USAID crime prevention and rule of law programs and the NAS law enforcement program. The program will strengthen justice sector capabilities with emphasis on improving prosecutorial capacity; strengthening the institutional capacity of the National Civilian Police; increasing forensic investigation capabilities; and increasing national and local government engagement on crime prevention. Given that the National Civilian Police is a highly centralized institution, efforts to strengthen community-based policing and other interventions that necessitate devolution of authority to the local level will be both challenging and risky.

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- *Other USAID/Guatemala Programs* – The USAID Rule of Law program (implemented by Checchi) is working to strengthen the justice sector and, through the creation of and support to Justice Centers, improving coordination between different justice sector actors. This coordination fosters crime prevention efforts by reinforcing peaceful conflict resolution. This includes the mobilization of community members to work together in preventing crime through a comprehensive approach that directly addresses the causes and opportunities for crime in their communities. For example, the Rule of Law program is working in several departments in Guatemala to conduct community-based crime mapping to develop community-driven solutions. These crime prevention efforts are coordinated with other international donor and other related U.S. Government-sponsored programs, including the USAID's Youth Alliance Project activities. The Rule of Law program has also begun production of a *radionovela* program entitled "*Amor Entre Rejas*", about a Guatemalan family struggling with crime and gangs, and examining the different approaches to dealing with crime. In addition, the Mission's anticorruption program (implemented by Casals and Associates) is working with the judiciary to develop a national action plan to increase internal transparency and accountability within the justice sector. Lastly, USAID/Guatemala is also currently working through its local governance program (implemented by DevTech/International City and County Managers Association) to support implementation of the GoG National Youth Violence Prevention Plan at the local level.

- *Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation* (CECI) –While CECI is most active in El Salvador on the issue of gangs and at-risk youth, they are working to develop a regional database of information on issues related to at-risk youth. The database will include information about organizations working on at-risk youth themes and specific programs. The database will cover activities in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

- *Inter-American Development Bank* (IDB) – The IDB recently approved a $30 million, 2.5-year loan to Guatemala focused on citizen security projects, which directly address the socioeconomic roots of gang activity including joblessness, insufficient education, and weak social capital. The emphasis will be on working with Ministries that already have resources and policies in place, to implement those policies. Specifically, the IDB will focus on working with COPREDEH to elaborate the new youth violence prevention policy; strengthening the police, especially community-based policing; developing a citizen security "observatory;" job training and youth employment; improving communication and social awareness on crime issues; preventing domestic violence; and supporting community crime prevention projects.

- *United Nations (UN)* – Several UN offices (UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF) are joining forces to work with the GoG Ministry of Government to strengthen the police, protect human rights, and work with NGOs to implement youth violence

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prevention activities. In addition, UNDP is working with *Ceiba* to strengthen police capabilities to analyze the gang phenomenon in Guatemala. In addition, UNDP is supporting a pilot social/laboral insertion program in Antigua, with private sector support. UNICEF is working with APREDE to provide rehabilitation services through *Casa Joven – Edy Gomez*, or the Edy Gomez Youth House, as well as analyzing the potential for an increased use of alternative sentencing for youth.

- *World Bank* – The World Bank has developed a useful tool entitled "A Resource Guide for Municipalities: Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention in Urban Latin America," which it uses as the foundation of training it conducts for municipalities in the region. The document is based on the "Manual for Community-Based Crime Prevention," developed by the Government of South Africa, but was adapted to the Latin American urban context. The guide includes specific municipal approaches for addressing crime, best practice principles in crime prevention, and numerous examples of international municipal crime and violence prevention and reduction strategies.

With so many donor assisted activities underway, a key challenge will clearly be coordination of gang/crime-related programs, to avoid duplication and gaps.

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Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 3: Honduras Profile[99]

April 2006

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[99] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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Historical Context

The Central American conflicts in the 1980s left deep scars throughout the region, including in Honduras. While not immersed in its own civil war, Honduras played host to the anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan Resistance fighters (Contras). During the 1980s, Honduras was considered a repressive society, and human rights abuses were a common occurrence. The signing of peace accords in the 1990s in neighboring countries signaled a turning point for the region, as economic reform and transitions to democracy became the dominant paradigm for development.

With a per capita income of US$800 per year, Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the region. Overall, 71.1 percent of Hondurans lives in poverty, and 77.7 percent of the rural population is poor. In urban areas, some 63.1 percent are poor. Income inequality is a critical issue. The richest 20 percent of households receive 54.3 percent of the total income of the country, while the poorest 20 percent receive only 3.2 percent. Of the country's 7 million inhabitants, 41 percent are under age 14. Because the population is fairly young and economic conditions are harsh, a large number of marginalized youths struggle daily to subsist. Youths head 10 percent of Honduran households, and 68 percent of these households are below the poverty line.

Economic growth has been generally weak and is characterized by underproduction. From 1995 to 2002, average annual growth fluctuated between 2.6 and 5 percent. Hurricane Mitch, which caused US$2 billion in damage and killed 5,000 people in 1998, affected growth negatively (-1.9 percent in 1999), but the economy grew 5 percent the following year before slowing to about 2 percent in 2002.

Honduras is creating a niche in textile manufacturing. The *maquila* (manufacturing plant) industries, which accounted for 6.5 percent of the growth in GDP last year, employ one in three Hondurans. Honduras' ratification of CAFTA in 2005 could help this industry expand.

Honduras's population is fairly young: 41 percent are under 15, and 20 percent are 15-24 years old. Approximately six percent of the youth population is illiterate. Twenty-nine percent of children drop out of school before grade 5.[100]

Honduras is considered one of the most violent countries in Latin America. In 1999, the homicide rate reached 154 per 100,000 inhabitants, which was attributed largely to juvenile gangs, organized crime, drug trafficking, and social violence. More recent levels are lower—46 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants—but are still higher than other countries in the region. [101]
A high homicide rate is coupled with a high rate of physical violence and crimes against property are prevalent. Most of the crime that does take place occurs in the major urban centers of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. There are claims that groups composed of both public and private sector individuals have committed unsanctioned acts of violence

[100] UNESCO statistics. www.uis.unesco.org
[101] Clare Ribando. CRS Report for Congress. Gangs in Central America. Order Code RS22141. September 21, 2005.

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against youth and gang members. During the last five years extra-judicial killings of street children have raised concerns about social cleansing and the possible involvement of police in some of these murders. Marta Sabellón from *Casa Alianza*, an international NGO involved with youth issues, reported that 2,825 youths had been killed in the last five years, and about 35 youths are killed each month. In at least 55 percent of the cases, the assassins have not been identified.

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon in Honduras

The current level of youth violence in Honduras is among the worst in Central America. The gang phenomenon is considered by many as one of the biggest problems affecting Honduras. According to police statistics, at the end of 2003, there were 36,000 gang members in Honduras.[102] Gangs established themselves in Tegucigalpa in the 1980s. MS-13 became prominent in Honduras in 1989; 18th Street became prominent in 1993. These two gangs are now well entrenched, particularly in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, where they are responsible for many crimes. Their real growth was not felt, however, until the 1990s, which coincided with legal and illegal migration to the United States and subsequent deportations back to Honduras. [103]

For many, however, immigration to the United States was not a dream come true. Instead of finding economic opportunities, many found gangs. As one gang member in the San Pedro Sula Prison stated, "I went to the U.S. because I dreamed a lot. I would say: 'Hey man, I'm going to the U.S., I'm going to bring me back a car, and this and that.' In the end, I didn't bring back anything, instead I went to ruin my life . . . I didn't go to get ahead, instead to ruin myself, to become a *marero*, to become a gangster."[104]

In 1992, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began to deport these youths in earnest. As one INS official explained, "If a gang member is out on the street and the police can't make a charge, we will go out and deport them for being here illegally if they fit that criteria."[105] Many people who work with gangs cite 1995 as a year of massive deportations of gang members to Honduras. Deportees who returned to Honduras were instrumental in the proliferation of the two dominant gangs there.
At the outset of 1995, there was a significant assimilation of small-scale street gangs into the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs in Honduras. As the assimilation took place, members of smaller gangs began to imitate the two main rival gangs, adopting the hand signs, clothing, and language that originated on the streets of Los Angeles. In El Progreso in Honduras, for example, at least 10 gangs disappeared.[106] It is unclear whether the police were involved in eliminating some of these young gang members or if they merged into other gangs. Regardless, the consolidation of the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs as the two

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[102] Ernesto Bardales, *La "Mara Salvatrucha" y el "Barrio 18 St": Un Fenómeno Transnacional*, 2005.
[103] Many Hondurans never made it as far as the United States and either attempted to work in Mexico or were seized by Mexican authorities on their way north. According to Honduran officials, Mexico deported 75,000 Hondurans in 2004, and deported 37,000 in 2005. Honduras is second in deportations from Mexico after Guatemala.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ernesto Bardales, La "Mara Salvatrucha" y el "Barrio 18 Street.": Un Fenómeno Transnacional, 2005.
[106] Interivew with unnamed gang member. September 2006. The ten gangs were los Shaggys, la 21, los Chucos, los Papi Chulos, los RT, los Pau, los Casi Natos, los Condor, los Demonios de la Noche, and the Los Muertos.

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main gangs has been felt throughout the country. Street graffiti, or "tagging," delineates gang territories from one another.

For the most part, Honduran gangs exist to defend territory. Where there is an MS-13 gang, 18th Street gang members are generally close by. This naturally leads to many violent confrontations, including deaths.

Violence is one means to enhance the reputation of the gang. Honduran media have facilitated the glamorization of gangs by reporting gang violence on a daily basis. Rival gangs compete over who can demonstrate the most brutality or audacious delinquent behavior. Daily news in Honduras often shows gang members displaying their tattoos and using hand signs to show their gang affiliation.

Based on interviews, the field team estimates that the number of gang members in Honduras ranges from 5,000 to 70,000. Mario Fumero, Director of Proyecto Victoria, a rehabilitation center in the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, categorizes gang members according to four types: (1) Sympathizers; (2) Recruits; (3) Members; and (4) Leaders. Sympathizers start as lookouts on sidewalk corners and later become involved in selling drugs and other crimes. A sympathizer is voluntarily "jumped" into the gang two to three years later. The interview team was told that lately, before the new gang members are "jumped," they are required to kill or commit a crime. As another aspect of gang initiation, the initiate is beaten. In the case of MS-13, the beating goes on symbolically for 13 seconds. According to Fumero, women make up 7 percent of gang membership.

Honduras implemented anti-maras legislation in 2001 after the National Congress approved an amendment to the Penal Code intended to deal with crimes committed by gangs. In response, gangs are now less territorial and have changed their dress, some members have fled to El Salvador and the United States, and some *clickas* still charge war taxes or extortion on bus drivers, taxi drivers, and small business owners. Others have been hired as mercenaries and are used for executions, drug distribution, and distractions for the police while other gang business is being conducted. As gangs have become more sophisticated, many have become involved in trafficking of drugs and arms. Many youths in gangs are also substance abusers, and their payment for services is often drugs, especially crack and marijuana. Up until 2000, gangs used homemade weapons, but gangs are becoming more sophisticated as some drug traffickers pay gang members with firearms. Honduran gangs tend to be located around prisons to allow easier communication with incarcerated leaders.

Sub-Commissioner Sabellon, from the Honduran police's Frontier Program, believes that gangs have no ties to Colombian narco-trafficking; he says that gangs are normally at bottom of the food chain and work for a *Capo* (neighborhood drug wholesaler) and have no direct links to international narco-drug traffickers. He also states that in urban centers along the Atlantic coast, 60 percent of youths are involved in gangs.
Sub-Commissioner Sabellon's views do not correspond with those of other Honduran authorities. Oscar Alvarez, Secretary of Public Security, said that in 2002, Honduran communities were under siege and that President Maduro's hardline approach has allowed communities to breathe again.

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There are lots of local opinions about what the problem is and what should be done to address the gang issue in Honduras. For example, Henry Fransen Jr., Executive Director, Association of Maquiladoras in San Pedro Sula and current funder for the Jovenes Hondurenos Adelante, Juntos Avancemos (Jha-Ja – Young Hondurans Together Advance) program (see Current Responses to Gangs section later in this profile) said that Honduras needs 80,000-120,000 new jobs per year, and that the *maquila* industry plans on creating 15,000 jobs yearly. He said that gangs are a significant threat to the private sector, as many businesses are paying war taxes and businesses are spending lots of money on private security. Improving security would help improve the image of the country.

Fransen also stated that the new legislation, *Ley Anti-Maras* (see Current Responses to Gangs section later in this profile) does not get to the root of the problem, but is necessary for the moment to stop delinquent acts committed by gangs. Because gang members are often deported from the United States and elsewhere back to Honduras, he sees the anti-gang law as a positive move.

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

Impacts on Economic, Social, and Democratic/Political Development

Estimates of the costs related to gang violence are difficult to ascertain because no concrete data exist. Honduras has adopted a hard-line law enforcement approach to dealing with gangs. As a result, the majority of government resources goes towards law enforcement, and very little is allocated for prevention and intervention. Police officers nevertheless believe their efforts are under-funded. The Honduran Border Police and the Special Cobras Force do not have adequate resources to deal with the problem of youth violence. As the government responds aggressively to the gang phenomenon, there has been an increase in the execution of street children. As reported by Casa Alianza, some 2,825 have been killed in the last five years alone.

Almost a third of all Hondurans feel a sense of insecurity, which is exacerbated by the overwhelming attention given to gang violence by the media and government. In a survey conducted by Mitch Seligson in 2004, some 18 percent responded that public security and violence—delinquency, crime, violence, drug trafficking, and gangs—were the most serious problems facing the country.[107] The same survey found that those under age 26 accounted for almost 20 percent of those victimized by crime. Those who have higher feelings of insecurity also tend to have little faith in the workings of democracy and the police system and institutions in general. Perceived personal insecurity has triggered a tremendous growth in private security agencies and firearms sales.

Crime also can affect citizens' responsiveness to and confidence in the governing system. In Seligson's survey, only 32.7 percent of citizens reported crimes to the authorities.

[107] Seligson Survey on Honduras, 2004

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Thefts in general were not reported by 30 percent of the population, whereas more serious crimes had a higher reporting percentage.[108] Some 57.2 percent reported that they have little or no faith that the judicial system would punish those guilty of crimes. In the survey, those who had been a victim of crime were more apt to have a lessened trust in the overall institutions, and their levels of satisfaction with democratic performance were lowered.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

Youths join gangs in Honduras for many reasons; it is difficult to pinpoint any one cause. As in other parts of the world, there seem to be a series of risk factors that drive youths to become gang members. Some of these factors are discussed below.

Lack of opportunities and alternatives for youth and adolescents. There are too few educational opportunities, skills training, recreation and sports activities, and artistic and cultural activities for Honduran youths. Educational options are often of poor quality or irrelevant to their lives, this can lead to school drop-out, leaving youths open to gang recruitment.[109]

Family breakdown. Many families are single-parent households. In some cases, both parents are absent and other relatives (grandparents, aunts, and uncles) assume responsibility for raising the family. Many parents are forced to work long hours to earn enough income to subsist, which consequently means they have little time to spend with or supervise their children.

Movement of Hondurans to and from the United States. There are large numbers of Honduran immigrants—both legal and illegal—in the United States. A cultural confrontation occurs when the children of these immigrants return to Honduras, either voluntarily or involuntarily, such as in the case of deportations. These youths, who may have belonged to gangs in the United States, return to Honduras with different customs and socialization, which clash with the Honduran culture.

Abuse of drugs and alcohol. Many youths who join gangs are often drug dependent, and commit delinquent acts to acquire more drugs. The proliferation of drugs like crack, marijuana, and glue seem to be on the increase and are cited by many for the increase in violence among gangs.

The presence of weapons. The proliferation of weapons, many left over from the conflicts of the 1980s in Central America, has contributed to the gang violence. Whereas in the past gangs would use rocks or homemade weapons, gang members today are more prone to resort to deadly violence. During the 1990s, it became possible to buy an AK-47 for very little money. The lack of controls has allowed many citizens to have access to

[108] Ibid.
[109] This is the primary focus of the USAID/Honduras' current education portfolio.

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these weapons, in particular gang members. The Attorney General's Office declared in the mid 1990s, that there were 67,000 AK-47s in circulation.

Current Responses to Gangs

Although the gang phenomenon in Honduras is fueled by a plethora of complicated issues, the Honduran Government reacts to gangs and gang violence with law enforcement alone. Many in the NGO community believe that the government's approach is too heavy-handed and violates basic human rights, and that it should spend more resources on prevention and intervention.

Government Response:

The government of President Maduro has responded with a hard-line approach to gang activity, similar to that of El Salvador. Maduro's call for a zero-tolerance campaign against the *maras* resonated with voters, particularly given that Maduro's own son was killed by an organized crime group. The campaign against the *maras* is based on article 332 of the penal code —known as *Ley Anti-Maras*—to round up gang members using "illicit association" as the legal basis. [110] Youths with tattoos on their bodies can be detained and processed under this legislative reform. Intent to commit a crime is interpreted through article 332 as applying to youths who have the appearance of gang members and are found congregating in their neighborhoods.

President Maduro has also attempted to reform article 198 of the *Codigo de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (Code of Children and Adolescents) in order to extend (from 8 to 12) the number of years that youths 12-18 years old can be incarcerated. Interestingly, statistics provided by the police indicate that only 7-8 percent of crimes are committed by youths associated with gangs. Massive government campaigns against gang activity and the media's tendency to over-exaggerate the problem have created a misinformed perception that youths in gangs are to blame for the majority of crimes in the country. Other organized crime syndicates and white collar criminals do not receive the same level of attention or notoriety that gangs receive.

Currently, it is difficult to determine precisely whether due process guarantees are respected in the application of the *Ley Anti-Maras*. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that for the most part, they are. Assessment interviews indicated that there are approximately 500 gang members currently in prison. About 40 percent have been sentenced, and the remaining inmates are awaiting sentencing. On the other hand, processing youths and branding them as gang members merely for having tattoos—which is not a crime—raises doubts about whether due process is indeed being respected. Moreover, the impunity exhibited in the recent deaths of some 235 gang members in the prisons of El Porvenir and San Pedro Sula, together with claims of extrajudicial killings of 2,825 youth in the last five years, further energizes critics who claim that human rights

[110] Illicit association, as used in Honduras, is generally accepted to mean (and contrary to normal convention) those that have as their objectives the commission of a crime or after their formation or promotion of the commission of crimes.

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are not being respected by the Maduro government. The assessment team visited members of 18th Street in the San Pedro Sula prison, and the consensus among those interviewed is that eventually they will be killed in prison. There exists a high level of animosity toward the police and a perception that the private sector is out to kill gang members.

Prisons in Honduras are a serious problem in general. They are not built to house gang members, and overall security is bad. Drugs are consumed, and alcohol consumption within the prisons is not addressed. Sentences for gang members can average up to 15 years. Gangs are segregated, and rehabilitation programs in jails are targeted at the non-gang population only. Many gang members have died in prison. The government's response is to build a new prison, *Escorpion* (Scorpion), to deal exclusively with gang members.

The San Pedro Sula prison is especially overcrowded. The assessment team visited approximately 60 members of 18th Street gang who were housed in a one-story cinder block building with open roofs (allowing rain to come in) and tight sleeping quarters. They had few recreational activities, and they openly consumed drugs. The gang was separated from the rest of the prison population, and there were no rehabilitation programs offered to them.

Honduras has approximately 7,500 police officers, 2,500 of whom are on duty at any given time. In addition, the police force has over 1,000 investigators and Special Services and Investigations officials as well as several thousand correction officers in the penal facilities. Government officials believed this was not enough, and indicated that the number of police officers must be increased by about 60 percent if crime prevention is to be effective. The current police force is understaffed, underpaid, and it lacks training and resources such as vehicles and other equipment. Intelligence sharing or standardized types of information collected on gangs among various police divisions appear uncoordinated and usually does not occur.

The *Ley Anti-Maras* in Honduras has had mixed results. Gang violence has subsided somewhat. Many youths are having their tattoos removed. In San Pedro Sula, one group removing tattoos estimated some 16,000 youths had gone through their tattoo removal program. It is not clear if this figure is accurate. Some gang members have removed their tattoos to better disguise their gang affiliations.

While the hard-line policy has perhaps served as a deterrent for some at-risk youths, those remaining in the gangs have bonded together to resist the government's crackdown, creating a cadre of much more violent youths. Anecdotal evidence about hardened initiation rites involving killing, drinking blood, and other violent behavior, as well as increased involvement in organized crime lead some to believe that gangs are making the leap to more mafia-type behavior.

Tomás Vaquero from the San Pedro Sula Chamber of Commerce said that the government's repressive tactics have had a negative impact on controlling gangs. Regarding the *Ley Anti-Maras*, Mario Fumero from *Proyecto Victoria* (Victory Project)

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said that although many gang members look for ways out of the gangs as a result of the law, a negative result is that gangs often take radical positions. In essence, he said, the law is not bad, but its implementation—indiscriminate detentions of gang members—is.

Marta Sabellón from Casa Alianza remarked that the Anti-Mara Law is a repressive response in that punishes youths for who they are rather than for what they've done. Not all gangs commit crimes. She is of the opinion that there has been a reduction in gang membership. Though even before *Ley Anti-Maras*, the numbers of gang members were going down. Another source said that as a result of Law 332 (*Anti-Maras*), there is an increase in detentions, extrajudicial killings by "death squads," overcrowding in jails, and fear in the communities.

Even some government officials in charge of public security acknowledge off the record that law enforcement has not been as effective as the public discourse would lead some to believe. The need for prevention and intervention programs is recognized as an integral component to any law enforcement effort. While Ricardo Maduro's term is coming to an end and Manuel Zelaya, from the opposition Liberal Party, won the recent election, Zelaya's win was only with a 40 percent voter turn out. President-elect Zelaya proposes to double the number of police officers and supports life sentences along with job training to minimize gang recruitment.

Many of those hyping the threat of gangs have tried to draw linkages with international terrorism to justify the hard-line law enforcement approaches. At this juncture, it is difficult to conclude that any such linkages exist. Even so, the same people within the Maduro government making the case for zero tolerance and the potential terrorist linkages now recognize that more could have been done to prevent at-risk youths from joining gangs and rehabilitating those who were willing to leave gang life. However, little money has been allocated for either prevention or intervention.

As in most countries, Honduras has countless laws and codes applying to children. Honduras also is signatory to numerous international conventions on children and youths, including the *Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia*, the United Nations directive on the prevention of youth delinquency, the United Nations guidelines on the protection of detained youths, and the Convention on the Rights of Youth. As a result, the penalties for children committing crimes are not as severe as those for adults. Juvenile offenders are housed in less secure detention centers. Procedures with juveniles are more lenient, and juvenile convicts serve less time than adult offenders. Gangs take advantage of the juvenile offender procedures and recruit minors, since they know they will spend less time in detention than adults. The 13-year-old gang member who recently killed a DEA agent on vacation in Honduras has been linked to 18 other homicides and has managed to escape from four juvenile detention centers.

Three recently approved laws awaiting implementation aim to prevent youth violence: the Ley de Prevención, Rehabilitación y Reinserción Social de Personas Vinculadas a Maras y Pandillas (approved by Congress in October 2001); the Política Nacional de Salud Mental for the period 2004– 2021; and the *Ley Marco para el Desarrollo Integral de la Juventud y Propuesta de Política Nacional de Juventud* (the Law for Integrated

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Youth Development and the National Youth Policy Proposal), an initiative that was approved in September 2005. The two main promoters of this legislation have been the *Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes* (ACJ – Association of Christian Youth) and the *Foro Nacional de Juventud* (National Youth Forum). Both organizations have worked for many years with youths and understand the challenges facing this group.

Donor and Civil Society Response:

USAID/Honduras does not have a specific strategic objective or and intermediate results dealing with youth violence or gangs. However, the Mission has several programs that attack the risk factors associated with gang membership and violence, such as the Strengthened Rule of Law Program, 2004-2009, which aims to improve the effectiveness and transparency of the justice system; the Advisory Center for Human Resources Development (CADERH), 2003-2009, which addresses socioeconomic issues that are the root causes of gang membership and violence; and Education for All (EDUCATODOS), 1995-2009, which provides at-risk youths who have dropped out of the formal education system with the opportunity to acquire basic education skills needed to gain and keep employment and increase income.

Other donors have supported anti-gang activities. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), for example, has provided the major share of external assistance, with a $32 million violence reduction loan program, *Paz y Convivencia*. About US$8 million, will go towards training gang members in micro-entrepreneurship and reintegrating them back into society. The training component of the IDB project, which is expected to reach 400 youths, will be implemented by the Fundación Unidos por la Vida. The intervention process will include diagnosis, psychological tests, social work, therapy, skills training, and employment opportunities.[111]

In 2003, the World Bank developed a Resource Guide for Municipalities to help Latin American mayors design and develop violence and crime reduction programs.[112] Since that time, the World Bank has been sponsoring workshops and other events to help bring attention to these issues.

Save/UK has focused on political advocacy on children's issues and has been an active part of the Global Working Group on Children in Conflict. Four years ago, they started a small center with the NGO Jha-Ja (*Jovenes Hondureños Adelante Juntos* – Young Hondurans Together Advance) in San Pedro Sula, which offers skills training former gang members and builds bridges between police and gangs. Young Hondurans Together Advance focuses on five phases to engage and eventually assist gang members to reintegrate into society: 1) Investigative and networking – provides insights of the

[111] The loan was approved in 2001 and it has been delayed four years, with only $1 million implemented to date. However, a recent meeting with IDB indicates that the GOH will obligate approximately $15 million in 2006 and IDB feels significant progress will be made in the short term.

[112] World Bank. A Resource Guide for Municipalities – Community-based Crime and Violence Prevention for Urban Latin America. November 2003.

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situation and the geographic environment; 2) Engagement and reconciliation of gang-related conflict—shows gang leaders and members that the program is not a threat and takes into account the gang code of honor; 3) Individual and group programs – provides psychological support, vocational training, the identification of job opportunities,[113] and assistance in exploring family conflicts and drug rehabilitation; and 4) follow-up with families – involves family and attempts to reconcile conflicts; and 5) social reintegration, which pulls all of the phases together, resulting in reconciliation, regained trust by gang members and community, and reintegration of gang members into society.[114]

Unfortunately, since its start, 23 youth participating in this program have been killed. Save the Children/UK is closing operations in Honduras in March 2007.

GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Tecnische Zusammenarbeit) is helping to systematize a local program that since 1996 has had 120 Honduran community police training nearly 120,000 school-age children in grades 5 and 6. GTZ's program includes drug and gang prevention units with parental and teacher involvement.

The Mennonite Church supports the *Paz y Justica* (Peace and Justice) program, which worked with MS-13, Barrios 18, and the *Batos Locos* gangs to paint murals and play in soccer competitions.

In addition, local NGOs are operating programs:

- *Centro para la Prevención Victoria* works on prevention and rehabilitation of drug addicts. Approximately 30 percent of the center's interns are former gang members.
- *Centro para la Tortura* implements the Club de Sofia discussion groups with gang members in prisons. The center also provides intervention activities through art. Approximately, 200 gang members have attended this intervention program.
- *Casa Alianza* works with vulnerable youths 12-18 years old, helping them to tackle employment issues, drug addiction problems, and incidents of sexual abuse. Currently 100 youths are at the center.
- *Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia* (IHNFA – Honduran Institute of Children and Family), headed by the First Lady of Honduras, has three detoxification centers, with a capacity for 800 youths. One hundred and twenty youths that have attended the centers were gang members.
- Jha-Ja helps gang members eventually reintegrate into society.[115]

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[113] *Jha-Ja* and local NGO, FUNDESERH, helped 60 ex-gang members found the Generation X cooperative. Generation X formed out of the fact that local businesses were reluctant to employ rehabilitated gang members. Generation X operates a metal shop and a tortilla factory to generate income. Save the Children UK. 2005.

[114] Martin and Parry-Williams. The Right Not to Lose Hope. Save the Children UK. 2005.

[115] Ibid.

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Development assistance to Honduras in 2004 totaled approximately $308 million ($65 million in grants and $243 million in loans). The United States, Sweden, and Japan were the largest providers of grant funding. Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, World Bank, IDB, IMF, the European Union, UNDP, and numerous others provide development assistance to Honduras. Further investigation is needed to identify synergies between these programs and potential anti-gang work considered by USAID.

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Individuals and Organizations Consulted

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Honduras Government

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Deputy Commissioner Carlos Chinchilla, Executive Director Secure Community under the Presidential Program
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Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 4: Southern and Northern Borders of Mexico Profile[116]

April 2006

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[116] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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Historical Context

Over the last two decades, Mexico has undergone a profound political transition, spurred largely by electoral reforms. The defeat of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the 2000 presidential elections was a watershed moment for the country, as President Vincente Fox's National Action Party ousted the PRI from 71 years of unbroken Mexican rule. Since then, Mexico has seen an evolution in many of its institutions, including more independence for the media, the weakening of the dominant political party, and dismantling of a controlling state apparatus.

Despite the advances that have been made, government corruption and impunity still weaken the country. The police and military are under state control, and corruption persists throughout police ranks. Despite the government's general respect for human rights, there are still many problems, especially in Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca. In 2004, for example, state law enforcement officials were accused of unlawful and vigilante killings and disappearances. Mexico has the highest incidence of kidnapping in the world, with an unofficial estimate of 3,000 kidnappings during 2004, some with alleged police involvement.[117]

Mexico is the world's tenth largest economy, with a mixture of modern and traditional industry and agriculture that is increasingly dominated by the private sector. In 1994, Mexico adopted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which tripled Mexico's trade with the United States and Canada. Mexico also has 12 free trade agreements with over 40 countries. As a result, the economy has expanded in recent years. Leading growth sectors include seaports, railroads, telecommunications, electricity generation, natural gas distribution, and airports. Leading exports include petroleum and manufactured and assembled products (electronics and consumer goods).

Economic growth has brought mixed results to Mexico's 106 million people. The gross domestic product (GDP) was expected to grow by 4 percent during 2005. Average manufacturing wages increased by 1.2 percent during 2003, less than the 3.98 percent rate of inflation in the same period. An estimated 25 percent of the population resided in rural areas where subsistence agriculture was common. Currently, the per capita income of Mexico is one-fourth that of the United States, and income distribution remains highly unequal. In 2002, the top 10 percent of the population earned 36 percent of total income, while the bottom 20 percent earned an estimated 4 percent.[118]

Violent crime is a critical issue. At the national level, the rate of homicides varies between 11 and 14 per 100,000 people, depending on data from the justice or health sectors.[119] This places Mexico slightly above the category of 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, which the World Health Organization considers "epidemic." The highest incidence of reported deaths were in Estado de México (5,798), Chiapas (1,793), Oaxaca

[117] State Department Report, Human Rights report. 2005
[118] U.S. State Department, Bureau for Human Rights, Country Report, Mexico, 2005.
[119] www.seguridadpublicaenmexico.org.mx

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(1,568), Distrito Federal (1,535), and Veracruz (1,453).[120] Politically motivated violence continues to occur throughout the country, particularly in the Southern States of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca.

Narco-trafficking continues to be a thorn in the government's side. Drug cartels are active along the U.S.-Mexican border. Gangs are also present along the border, in what appears to be collaboration with various drug cartels. Not surprisingly, the northern border is also considered the most dangerous place in the country for journalists. Many are targeted by drug traffickers working with corrupt law enforcement personnel. In 2004, Roberto Javier Mora, editorial director for the Nuevo Laredo-based daily *El Mañana* and Francisco Javier Ortiz Franco, a lawyer and co-editor of the Tijuana-based weekly newspaper *Zeta*, were killed by gunmen. Apparently, Ortiz was killed in retaliation for an article that revealed details and identities behind a scheme to obtain fake police credentials for members of the Arellano Felix drug cartel.[121]

The issue of police corruption and collusion with drug cartels has been an ongoing problem. Some 400,000 police are employed in the country. The military loans some 5,000 personnel to the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) for counter-narcotics activities. Despite efforts to reform the police, there continue to be reports of human rights abuses and police involvement in kidnappings and extortion. In an attempt to keep themselves safe, citizens and business owners employ 75,000 private security guards annually. Attempts to investigate allegations of police corruption are often met with more corruption and inefficiency. Even as judicial reforms move forward, there are still challenges with arbitrary and sometimes lengthy pretrial detention, lack of due process, and judicial inefficiency and corruption.

Although Mexican laws prohibit the trafficking of persons, the problem persists, with much trafficking involving children and women who are often sold into prostitution. There have been credible reports that police, immigration, and customs officials are involved in trafficking. In 2004, the Fox government had 12 cases in progress against trafficking organizations in various states. Some 664 suspects had been detained for trafficking-related offenses as of September of that year. During the same period, the government reported the rescue of 2,747 victims.

Immigration is an important issue along Mexico's southern and northern borders. The number of migrants detained along the southern border of Mexico is seldom reported in the United States. During the first ten months of 2005, the following nationalities were detained on Mexico's southern border by Instituto Nacional de Migracion:

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

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Chinese	556
Cuban	375
Ecuadorian	575
El Salvadoran	**15,166**
Ethiopian	70
Guatemalan	**46,842**
Honduran	**23,000**
Nicaraguan	**1,299**

This does not include the approximate 200,000 illegal migrants detained in other parts of Mexico during the same period.[122]

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon in Mexico

There are no official statistics in Mexico on the number of crimes committed by gangs.[123] Unfortunately, most of the information provided on gang involvement in crime is difficult to confirm, as decentralized record keeping means that data is not necessarily consistent from one state to the next. Government authorities have no consistent figures on the number of active gang members in the country. For example, the recently named Minister for Pubic Security, Eduardo Medina Mora, has stated that there are 5,000 MS-13 members in Mexico.[124] The Guatemalan National Police, the Mexican police, and the Consejo Municipal de Seguridad Pública from Tapachula all agree that in the southern border towns, at least 200 gangs of MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, with some 3,000 members, both Mexican and Central American, are operating. The Secretaria de Seguridad Publica claims there are up to 15,000 members of Barrios 18 in Mexico and that the gang is present in 24 Mexican States. While these figures vary, they collaboratively confirm a gang presence in Mexico.

Recent media reports of the arrival of the *maras* from Central America also tend to demonstrate the presence of MS-13 or 18th Street gangs in the country. In November 2004, the Mexican press reported a gun battle between MS-13 and 18th Street gangs during the commemoration of Mexico's revolution. The municipal police rounded up 34 members of these groups. All were Mexican nationals.[125]
MS-13 and 18th Street gangs in southern Mexico allegedly traffic in drugs and persons. MS-13 apparently has gained control over the trafficking of illegal immigrants along this border, where some 95 percent enter illegally on their way to the United States.

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[122] Interview with official at the Instituto Nacional de Migracion. Tapachula. December 2005.
[123] Anuarios Estadísticos de las 32 entidades federativas elaborados por el INEGI; Cuadernos de Estadísticas Judiciales en Materia Penal elaborados anualmente por el INEGI y los Informes de Gobierno que anualmente rinde el Presidente de la República.
[124] "Ubica SSP 5 mil Maras en México", en: *Reforma*, 3 de octubre de 2005.
[125] http://www.esmas.com/noticierostelevisa/mexico/407564.html

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The press has reported many accounts of *mara* activity in the south of Mexico, although it is difficult to confirm this information. Information reported by the press includes stories about the police operation, *Operativo Costa*, which resulted in the arrest of 167 gang members in 2004. Some new accounts report that 365 gang members from MS-13 and 18th Street gangs have been arrested. Others mention that 70 percent of those detained are Mexican, while 12 percent are Salvadoran, 9 percent are Guatemalan, and 1 percent are Nicaraguan. Supposedly, 54 percent are under 18 years of age and some 46 percent are 18-26. The Secretaria de Seguridad Publica has a permanent anti-gang operation called Operacion ACERO that dates back to 2003. This operation has been implemented one time each year during the last three years and has detained 179 gang members.

Other press accounts describe the rivalries among various drug cartels involving the El Chapo cartel and the cartels from the Gulf (Osiel Cárdenas Guillén cartel), Tijuana (Benjamín Arellano Félix cartel) and Ciudad Juárez (Carrillo Fuentes cartel). Interesting to note are various accounts of El Chapo hiring MS-13 gangsters to combat the rival cartels, while other accounts describe the Tijuana and Juarez cartels using MS-13 members to fight El Chapo. The validity of these accounts is impossible to corroborate. Throughout the assessment, the field team repeatedly heard that gang members from the United States were working for the various cartels. One specific example alluded to Logan Height and Mafia Mexicana (EME) gang members working for Arellano Felix in Baja, California. Along the Texas border, there was much mention of the Los Aztecas and the Mexicles gangs—both based in the United Status—working as hired guns and drug runners for the Juarez and Gulf cartels.[126] Matamoros was anecdotally mentioned as a city with a concentration of MS-13, but the field team did not visit the city and cannot corroborate the claim made by a local gang member in Ciudad Juarez.

Others reported that the gang situation on the northern border seems to involve the drug cartels using gangs to provide specific services. Criminal activity seems confined to the trafficking of drugs and people. Gangs, where they do exist, seem to be at the service of established drug cartels like Arellano Felix and the Osiel Cárdenas Guillén. This link between gangs and drug cartels implies increased gangs participation in organized criminal activity. As a former gang member from Nuevo Laredo explained to the assessment team, “There are no more gangs here. What exists now is more dangerous than gangs. The gang member obeys orders from drug cartels. The gangs used to fight for territory, culture, and identity. Now the cartels recruiting them just fight for power and money.”

Information from universities, think tanks, and the media suggests that the cities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo are home to established and aspiring gang members. In Nuevo Laredo, local authorities reported that two MS-13 members were arrested last year. They mentioned to the team that some years ago there were more gangs than there presently are; many of the older but minor-gang members have now joined criminal organizations. The information provided by local authorities and experts states that there are currently 24 gangs operating in Nuevo Laredo. In Ciudad Juárez, the

[126] Interviews conducted in Tijuana, San Diego, Ciudad Juarez, El Paso and Nuevo Laredo, October 2005.

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problem of gangs is more evident and more widely recognized. It is estimated that there are about 320 active gangs, with 17,000 gang members in Ciudad Juárez,[127] although only 30 gangs are considered responsible for the most serious crimes, while the remaining gangs are mainly dedicated to petty crime, robbery, or vandalism. According to local officials in Ciudad Juarez, the problem of gangs is related to the fact that 30 percent of teenagers ages 12 to 15 do not attend school or work. Local authorities also relate this fact to the lack of public investment in education, since the number of secondary schools is not sufficient for the resident school-age population.

The gang phenomenon on the northern border is quite different from the rest of Central America or even other parts of Mexico. For the most part, these gangs could be categorized as "generational" gangs, some with 40-50 year histories. Many family members have belonged to these gangs, crossing over generational lines. It is not uncommon for a youth to be in a gang today that his father or uncle belonged to.

Incarcerated gang members are not necessarily inactive members. The proliferation of gangs in Los Angeles and the further consolidation of gang norms and practices extended to the border cities during the late 20th century. Moreover, the California prison system has been the origin of gang proliferation and led to the development of the Mafia Mexicana (Mexican Mafia). All gangs south of Bakersfield must pay homage to the Mafia Mexicana once in the California prison system. The *tregua de sur* (truce of the south), as it is called, is characterized by those southern gangs, including the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, taking their orders from the Mafia Mexicana.[128] Lately, there is evidence of a rupturing of this purported truce, and the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs in Guatemala supposedly broke the prison truce in 2005. Moreover, as more gangs align themselves with different rival drug cartels, the potential for more confrontation among gangs is a possibility.

The overall socioeconomic situation on the northern and southern borders is problematic. In the border towns of Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo, many youths and adults are using drugs, particularly heroin. Drugs are readily available in little stores (*tienditas*) that are found in these cities. Ciudad Juarez is experiencing a serious heroin addiction problem, with many repeat offenders incarcerated for drug possession.

The growth of *maquilas* (assembly plants) in Ciudad Juarez has created a dramatic urbanization of the city without proper planning and service delivery. This rapid expansion has resulted in large numbers of immigrants from Mexico and Central America arriving to work in this industry. Often, both parents and single parents enter the *maquila* labor force, and children grow up unsupervised or with little parental involvement. Although no reliable statistics are available, the dropout rate from primary and secondary school appears to be high for these locations. These at-risk youths are much more

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[127] This figure is an estimate of the number of gang members in Ciudad Juarez based on an interview held in the Direccion de Prevencion Municipal office. October 2005. Gang member numbers were difficult obtain and substantiate in the other northern border towns visited by the Assessment Team.

[128] The *tregua del sur* is a prison pact in which all southern gangs like the MS-13 and Barrio 18 that operate south of Bakersfield must respect each other when in prison. They come under the umbrella of the Mafia Mexicana, which is the supreme gang in California on the street and in prison.

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susceptible to recruitment by youth gangs, which serve as the training ground for more established gangs that have links with drug cartels. This dire situation has created more opportunities for criminality to prosper, and subsequently violent deaths have been on the increase. From January to October 2005, there were 355 violent deaths in Tijuana, 152 in Nuevo Laredo, and 187 in Ciudad Juárez.[129] In Ciudad Juárez, 28 out of 187 the deaths that occurred in 2005 were attributed to gang members.

An increase in drug use was explained by many as a consequence of the tightening of the borders by the United States beginning in the early 1990s making it more difficult to transport drugs across the border. Also, many now say that Mexicans are increasingly becoming drug consumers, not merely drug traffickers. Others in law enforcement explain this increase as a spillover effect from the copious amount of drugs now available for trafficking into the United States. More and more young people are used to smuggle drugs into the United States in small amounts so as to avoid detection. Many also point to police collusion in the drug trade on the border.

Northern border tensions continue to rise as concerns for U.S. national security and the safety of U.S. customs and border protection officials are threatened. A recent Department of Homeland Security Officer Safety Alert reports that, "unidentified Mexican alien smugglers are angry about increased security along the U.S./Mexico border and have agreed that the best way to deal with the U.S. Border agents is to hire a group of contract killers." The alert mentions that MS-13 is the group the smugglers intend to use to conduct the targeted assaults on U.S. border agents. The president of the National Border Patrol Council stated that, "MS-13 has shown that its members have very little regard for human life."[130]

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

Impacts on Economic and Social Development

A major challenge to determining the costs of gang violence relates to how Mexicans classify the different gangs: as youth gangs, street gangs, or organized criminal groups (*bandas delictivas*). This typology tends to de-emphasize the criminal activity of youth and street gangs. The more serious crimes committed by more sophisticated gangs get classified as *bandas deliticas*, which has a different connotation in Mexico. For that reason, it is not possible to find statistics that disaggregate criminal activities carried out by the different groups. As such, it is nearly impossible to measure the true cost of gang violence. One can infer that violence in general is a drain on national resources, particularly law enforcement and health care, along with lost productivity.

One of the challenges to enumerating gang violence is accurately reporting on gang activity. Tijuana, as an example, is a major tourist venue for United States citizens who

[129] This last figure does not include the number of women murdered in the area during 2005.
[130] Associated Press. "Smugglers Planning to Kill U.S. Border Agents, Federal Memo Warns." *San Diego Union Tribune*. January 10, 2006.

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come for the weekends to party, buy prescription drugs, or stop on their way to southern Baja, California. The city has a high incidence of criminality involving drugs, prostitution, youth gangs, and the Arellano Felix cartel that controls most of the drug trade. Every weekend, at least one American in incarcerated in Tijuana or loses his or her life there.[131] Despite this, the Chief of Police for Tijuana readily asserts that gangs are nonexistent in the city. This could have a kernel of truth to it, as the drug cartel Arellano Felix is the major criminal player, and the youth or street gangs are insignificant in comparison. In Mexicali, Ciudad Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo, however, the panorama changes drastically. Government officials admit openly that they have a gang problem. Unfortunately, statistics on the cost of violence are not kept, and the information on the number of gangs is difficult to corroborate.

In 2003, the number of intentional homicides totaled 10,087.[132] Of these people killed, 244 were children under age 9; 3,765 were 10-29; and 6,078 were 30 years and older. Those homicides of people 10-29 included 158 deaths of those 10-14; some 860 deaths of those 15-19; another 1,292 of people 20-24; 1,455 of people 25-29.[133] Also, according to the statistics from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática* (INEGI), 43 percent of those sentenced for federal crimes during 2003 were 16-29 years old, while 54 percent of those in that age group were sentenced for other crimes.

Other delinquencies were committed in 2004. The *Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad* (ICESI), which records the types of delinquencies committed, reported other delinquencies to include car theft, break-ins, violent robbery, fraud, attacks or threats, sexual offenses, kidnappings, possession of arms, and robbery.

The proliferation of arms within Mexico has contributed to an increase in violent crimes. According to a United Nations report in 2004, Mexico ranked third in Latin America as a result of homicides resulting from guns.[134] It is calculated that 60 percent of homicides in Mexico result from the use of guns. Moreover, 60 percent of the weapons decommissioned by the state are illegal.[135] According to the study, *Armas ligeras y pequeñas: Caso México,* there are 15 million small arms in circulation in Mexico, almost four times more than the 4,492,692 arms that were registered with the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional in 2003.[136]

Impacts on Democratic and Political Development

Not surprisingly, given high levels of corruption and distrust for political institutions, many crimes go unreported. In the Seligson survey for 2004, some two thirds of victims do not report the crime and only 37 percent of Mexicans believe that the judicial system

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[131] U.S. Cónsul Office, Tijuana, Mexico.
[132] Estadísticas Vitales del Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, (INEGI) 2003.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Small arms survey. *The Small Arms Survey 2004:Rights at Risk.* ISBN-10:0-19-927334-0. Oxford University Press. May 27, 2004.
[135] Alejandro Moreno, *Comparación Internacional sobre el impacto social del uso de armas de fuego,* en: www.diputados.gob.mx/cesop/boletines/no1/4.pdf
[136] Elaborado por Magda Noriega y patrocinado por Oxfam Internacional. (See note in *Reforma,* 19 octubre de 2005, p. 4A).

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will punish violators. Mexico has the highest levels of criminality in comparison to the other countries dealing with gang problems in Central America, so the fact that most people do not report crimes has an important social cost. This is owed mainly to Mexicans' lack of trust for any institution affiliated to the police.

Although the costs of gang activity cannot be measured in Mexico, there is information that provides a glimpse into the growing problem and the ways that democratic processes could be eroded due to citizen insecurity. When citizens feel more insecure, they are less likely to trust in the police and the justice system.

The perception of the gang problem in Mexico has not reached the level of hysteria as in some Central American countries, though a growing fear of the *maras* is brewing. While there are gangs, their sphere of influence seems linked to the numerous operational drug cartels and other organized crime organizations. The news is mainly with reports about disputes between cartels or confiscation of drug shipments. However, there are frequently reports of gangs, mainly involving the encroachment of MS-13 into the southern part of the country (Tapachula and Tuxla Guiterrez). These reports describe very violent acts carried out by these gangs and leave the reader with a sense that southern Mexico is in chaos and disorder.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

The causes and risk factors for youths joining gangs in the Mexican border regions are similar to those found in other countries. Many Mexican youths do not have access to education and employment opportunities. Others live in overcrowded living conditions, are victims of sexual abuse, become involved in substance abuse, or simply feel social exclusion as do many other marginalized youths in Latin America.

Mexico, though, has two additional causes that are not found in the other countries: (1) opportunities on Mexico's southern border to make money through the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and humans; and (2) the generational gangs found on the northern border.

Regarding the southern border, numerous risk factors coalesce to attract gang members from all of the Central American countries to the Tapachula area. As an example, the *Secretaria de Seguridad Publica* in Tuxtla-Gutierrez told the assessment team that of the 105 Central American MS-13 and 18th Street gang members imprisoned in Chiapas, 20 percent are Guatemalan, 52 percent are Salvadoran, 25 percent are Honduran, and 2 percent are Nicaraguan.

The movement of people, drugs, weapons, and other illegal substances is a major reason gang members come together in the southern border area. Until Hurricane Stan ravaged southern Mexico in October 2005, the Chiapas-Mayab railway line was a major source of income for MS-13. MS-13 allegedly extorted migrants as they attempted to illegally board the train for a ride north. The train is now back in operation.

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Enterprising buses called *tijuaneros* are filling part of the transportation demand for travelers heading to the northern border. In an interview with the press, one leaders MS-13 leader stated that their job was now to protect the illegal immigrants, collect their fees, and ensure that no one else harmed them, or they themselves would be killed.[137] According to this purported MS-13 gang leader, the fees are to support "homies" (fellow gang members) in jail, pay their attorney fees, and provide money for food and laundry.

As explained earlier (see "The Nature of the Gang Phenomenon"), Mexico's proximity to the United States, where the gangs originated, has encouraged the presence of the gangs in cities along Mexico's northern border for almost 40 years. The causes for gang activity and associated risk factors in this northern border area relate closely to illicit commerce between the United States and Mexico. Gang activity in this part of Mexico is related to drug cartels; the trafficking of drugs, people, weapons, and other illegal substances; the *maquiladora* industry; lack of sufficient educational opportunities for many children of *maquiladora* employees; substance abuse among youths, dysfunctional families; minimal parental supervision; and family traditions to join gangs.

One final factor that contributes to the growth of youth gang members in the northern border area is the movement of individual youths attempting to join relatives in the United States. In 2004, the U.S. Border Patrol caught about 10,000 unaccompanied minors on their way north. Often, when these children's plans are thwarted and they do not make it to the United States, they find themselves trapped at the border of Mexico as prostitutes, homeless wanderers, or gang members.

Current Responses to Gangs

Government Response:

To date, Mexico has not adopted a national level *anti-mara* law as has El Salvador and Honduras. The *mara*-phobia generated by the press, however, could pave the way for this type of hard-line law enforcement approach. In Tapachula, in the state of Chiapas, after the 2004 confrontation between MS-13 and 18th Street gangs which resulted in the massive deployment of police to the region (according to press reports), the local municipality passed an ordinance similar to the hard-line *anti-mara* laws of Central America, citing that gang members could be detained for illicit association.[138]

Current government programs aiming to deter youths from gang membership are limited. Although the Federal District has implemented one program, its impact has been minimal and it has not reached the stated results. Another program called "*Oportunidades*" with significant outreach in the country provides scholarships for youths and adolescents who have limited resources for remaining in school. The government institution, Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, (DIF), provides services to street

[137] http://www-ni.laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2005/abril/10/nacionales/nacionales-20050410-02.html

[138] Illicit association describes three or more gang members who are found together in what can be described as a "meeting." It serves as the justification for police to apprehend and detain gang members who they deem are together. In some ways, illicit association can also be described as "loitering."

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youths and adolescents. A total of 80,355 youths have received DIF services during the last four years, but funding was recently cut back.

Civil Society Response:

According to the Secretariat of Government's Directorate of Liaison with Social and Civil Organizations there are over 5,300 NGOs registered in Mexico. Many of these NGOs are working on various facets of prevention and rehabilitation. A few of these include:

- *Red Fronteriza Juventud* (REFAJ – Youth Frontier Network) in Ciudad Juárez – focuses on increasing educational and cultural opportunities and preventing drug use;
- *Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Juvenil* (CASA – Youth Assessment and Promotion Center) in Ciudad Juárez – aims to prevent youth violence and marginalization;
- Center Victory Life in Nuevo Laredo – operated by former gang members to rehabilitate gang members;
- *Centro de Integración y Recuperación para Enfermos de Alcoholismo y Drogadicción* (Intergration and Recuperation Center for Drug and Alcohol Addiction) in Tijuana – works to help youths recover from drug and alcohol abuse.

Donor Response:

To date, USAID/Mexico has not directly supported anti-gang activities. However, the new USAID regional strategy for Mexico and Central America will emphasize more responsive and transparent governance; open, diversified, and expanding economies; investments in health and education; and timely and effective crisis response, which will address some of the causes and risk factors associated with gang activities.

It is not known to what degree other donors are supporting anti-gang responses. The largest donor working with Mexico is the World Bank, followed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The World Bank's 2004 portfolio was $3.8 billion in commitments. Both World Bank- and IDB-funded activities have seen implementation delays because they require that funds from their loans be administered by the National Bank for Public Works and Services (BANABRAS). The World Bank has a promising $240 million education program, the School-based Management Project – Phase I, which was ratified with the Mexican Government in late 2005. The World Bank project is justified on the grounds that the net enrollment in secondary school is 53 percent while 89 percent of school-aged children complete primary school. One of the education project's goals is to increase equitable expansion by including disadvantaged schools. Schools in geographic areas with high gang activity and crime may qualify to be included in under this project. Other donors working in Mexico are the Japanese, British Department for International Development, the French, the United Nations, and the European Union. Further investigation is needed to identify synergies between these programs and any anti-gang work considered by USAID.

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Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 5: Nicaragua Profile[139]

April 2006

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[139] Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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Historical Context

Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America and the second poorest in Latin America. Approximately 70 percent of Nicaraguans lives in extreme poverty (less than US$1 per day), and unemployment hovers around 60-65 percent. Fifty percent of the unemployed are people under the age of 24. Many employed Nicaraguans lack stable jobs that pay fair wages. The average monthly per capita income is US$60, which means that most Nicaraguans live on US$2 per day.

Nicaragua is saddled with a large fiscal deficit (6.8 percent of the GDP in 2003), limited GDP, and a trade deficit that reached 31 percent of the GDP in 2003. The mean annual economic growth rate for the 1994-2003 period was 3.7 percent, with an average inflation rate of 8 percent. To further complicate matters, the country is heavily in debt, as various Nicaraguan governments incurred domestic debts to deal with indemnification of those whose properties were expropriated in the 1980s, as well as to deal with the bank collapse of the 1990s.[140] All this has made economic growth very difficult.

Nicaragua's population is fairly young: 40 percent are under 12, and 35 percent are 13-29 years old. Of these youths, 35 percent are in secondary school, and only 8 percent have reached the university level. Over 13 percent have never had any schooling. Forty-five percent of children drop out of school before grade 5.[141]

Many people leave Nicaragua in search of better opportunities abroad. An estimated 850,000 to a million Nicaraguans have left for the United States, Guatemala, or Costa Rica. Most of these migrants are young: 42 percent are 15-24, and nearly 40 percent are 25-44. This labor force remits US$800 million annually to family members back home, making it the largest source of income for the country.

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon in Nicaragua

Nicaragua's gang problems are much different from those of its neighbors to the north. The level of violence reported in El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala is not found in the country. This is remarkable, given the number of weapons cached from the conflict in the 1980s. During this time, the population migrated from rural areas to urban areas, and gangs began to form in urban neighborhoods as a mechanism of survival. By the mid-1990s, neighborhood gangs were prevalent in many cities. Gangs, or *pandillas,* saw themselves as motivated by their "love for the neighborhood."[142] Gang criminal tendencies were mugging, pick pocketing, shoplifting, and other low-level crimes. Gang warfare was waged between rival gangs in many of the 600 neighborhoods and squatter settlements in and around Managua. Confrontations with other gangs would start with

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[140] Mitch Seligson "The Political Culture of Democracy in Nicaragua 2004. A study of the Latin American Public Opinion Project." Vanderbilt University. 2004.
[141] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Statistics In Brief. *Education in Nicaragua*. October 2005.
[142] Rodgers. From Primitive Socialism to Primitive Accumulation: Gangs, violence, and Social Change in Urban Nicaragua 1997-2002. CERLAC Bulletin. Volume 2 Issue 3 February 2003.

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sticks and stone-throwing and eventually escalate to guns, fragmentation grenades, and mortars. Neighborhoods became war zones, and people were reluctant to leave their homes unless necessary. Drug use was a part of the gang culture, although it was usually limited to marijuana, glue sniffing, and alcohol. By the early 2000s, Nicaraguan youth gangs became involved in the narco-trafficking trade that had existed along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua for decades.[143] Gangs were involved in local wholesaling and pushing on the streets.

Some of Nicaragua's newest gangs are not concerned with protecting neighborhoods, and they even resort to robbing their own neighbors for personal gain.[144] The new generation gang member is more individualistic and is focused more on accumulating wealth than on protecting territory. The kind of gang warfare that existed five years ago is gone because violence deterred drug clients from entering their neighborhoods.
For the most part, gangs in Nicaragua are small youth gangs that are territorial in nature, concerned with wealth accumulation, and involved in petty crime. MS-13 and 18th Street gangs have not made their presence felt in the country. The combination of lingering socialist structures such as the neighborhood watch, the crime prevention role the police have carved out for themselves during the last few years, and Nicaraguans' interest in deterring the proliferation of "outside" gangs may have prevented these two transnational gangs from establishing a foothold in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan homegrown gangs are resistant to foreign gangs attempting to set up shop in their *barrios*.

Gang activity in Nicaragua has decreased over the years. In 1999, there were 110 *pandillas* (bands) in Managua, with about 8,500 gang members.[145] According to the National Police, there were 184 gangs in 2004, with 2,614 members, while in 2005 the number went down to 108 gangs, with 2,201 members. According to 2004 and 2005 data, some 30 gangs comprising 517 members have been disbanded. The crimes committed by these youth gangs only make up 0.57 percent of all the criminal activity. Police statistics demonstrate that 0.11 percent of youths between the ages of 13-29 years belong to active gangs, whereas 0.12 percent of these youths are in high-risk groups. Although the media's obsession in Nicaragua with sensationalizing news stories about violence (known as the *Noticias Rojas*) has created the perception of a more serious public security problem, in reality, gangs currently pose a minimal security threat in Nicaragua. The country has one of the lowest homicide rates in Central America with levels at eight homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.[146]

Nevertheless, Nicaragua's fragile economic situation is fertile ground for increased youth gang activity. While most youth gangs have not yet made links to organized crime, some are hired by various political parties to cause disturbances at rival political or social events. Others are mainly involved in petty crime to feed crack and glue habits. Many of these youths end up on the street with no future and find themselves joining a street or neighborhood gang, which becomes the basis for delinquent activities.

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[143] The proximity of the Colombian island of San Andre makes Nicaragua a convenient transshipment point for crack and cocaine.
[144] Rodgers, ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Acuna. *Informe del Estudio de Pandillas en Nicaragua*. November 2005. Page 16.

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Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

Impacts on Economic and Social Development

The cost of violence in Nicaragua does not reach the same proportions as it does in neighboring countries, and gangs have not had the negative impact in Nicaragua as they have in other Central American countries. While there has been an increase in general violence since the 1980s, growing from a low of 8,552 crimes in 1983 to 60,000 crimes by 1997, and more than 64,000 in 2004,[147] a very low percentage of these crimes can be associated with gang activity.

Much has been attributed to the *Sandinista* revolution in the 1980s as one of the underlying reasons for this initial decline in criminality. At the outset, the creation of the Committees for the Defense of the Sandinista Revolution instilled a certain moral order and allegiance to the revolution. However, after 1984, when the conflict with the Contras began in earnest, obligatory military service was instituted and with it came an escalation in the level of armed violence. The economic situation deteriorated as a result of the civil conflict and the U.S. trade embargo imposed at the time. The subsequent breakdown in the social fabric created the conditions for increased criminality. Interestingly, despite the amount of weapons left over from the war, Nicaragua is considered one of the safest countries in Central America.

As a result, Nicaragua has not had to invest precious resources in huge law enforcement campaigns to deal with gang violence as seen in neighboring El Salvador and Honduras. Rather, the current government, with support from international donors, has directed resources towards prevention and intervention efforts. Those who are rehabilitated in prisons are encouraged to participate in vocational and artistic activities, on the belief that inmates can use their prison time to make reparations to society by working in prison-run leather or license plate-making factories. Other prevention programs focus on the community and the police as the principal actors in identifying risk factors and designing appropriate programs and interventions to target at-risk youth. The positive outcome has been a perceived reduction in costs normally associated with violence; that is, increases in health-related costs, costs associated with law enforcement and the justice sector, and lost productivity.

Impact on Democratic/Political Development

The more serious potential cost is a further deterioration of Nicaraguan's trust in the political system. With the recent corruption scandal fresh on people's minds and continuous political battles, the average citizen perceives Nicaragua's democratic system as dysfunctional.[148] This view exacerbated by the sense of insecurity that many Nicaraguans feel, fueled in large part by the media's sensationalist reporting (*noticias*

[147] Acuna, Informe del Estudio de Pandillas en Nicaragua, 2005.

[148] Arnoldo Aleman, former president of Nicaragua, is under house arrest as part of a 20-year prison sentence for money laundering and fraud against the state. Other cases being brought against Aleman for similar charges are by the U.S., Panama and the State of Florida. http://www.nicanet.org

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rojas). A 2004 Seligson survey indicated that most Nicaraguans feel a sense of insecurity despite the fact that only 18 percent of those surveyed have suffered criminal acts in the previous year. Regardless, in the survey many claimed that there is a high level of criminality in the country.

Moreover, Nicaraguans surveyed show little trust in the judicial system, though they have high regard for the services provided by the National Police. A recent survey conducted by M&R Consultores indicated that from September to early December 2005 the number of people who believe that police vigilance will prevent crime has declined. When asked if police were corrupt, 31 percent said yes, while 28 percent said police do not care about the problems of the public. When asked about police professionalism, 64 percent polled said they were usually professional, 17 percent said they were very professional, and just over 15 percent said they were not professional.[149]

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

The causes and risk factors that leave Nicaraguan youths at risk of joining a gang are similar to those in other countries. The National Police's Directorate for Juvenile Affairs has identified the following risk factors:[150]

Individual Factors:

- The loss of self esteem and values in general
- Aggressive and impulsive personality
- Feeling of rejection by society
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Need for sense of permanence or identity
- Dramatic mood swings
- Educational challenges
- Victim of abuse and/or family neglect
- Family whose members have criminal records

Relational Factors:

- Family disintegration
- Intra-familiar violence
- Friends and family in a gang
- Stigmatization
- Difficulty in socializing and resolving conflicts
- Violence assumed to be a part of normal conduct
- Need for solidarity and security
- Violence as part of daily life

Community Factors:

- No recreation and sports

[149] La Prensa. Policia pierde puntos en opinion ciudadana. December 21, 2005.
[150] Aurora Acuna, Informe del Estudio de Pandillas en Nicaragua, 2005.

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- Marginalization and poverty
- No basic services
- Easy access to drugs and alcohol
- Fear of reprisals and threats from gangs

Social Factors:

- Unemployment
- Culture of violence
- Large-scale migratory patterns
- Transfer of gang culture from other countries
- Illiteracy

Current Responses to Gangs

Government Response:

Nicaragua's approach to the problem of youth gangs has been quite different from that of other countries in the region. Where El Salvador and Honduras have taken a hard-line law enforcement approach, Nicaragua has focused most of its efforts on prevention and intervention, which have had important results in reducing criminality and youth violence. However, this was not always the case. In 1999, the police adopted a repressive approach to the problem of youth gangs, although they changed course in 2000 towards more preventative actions.[151] This change is in line with Article 97 of the 1987 constitution, which states that the role of the police is preventative.

On another front, the differences between the penal systems of Nicaragua and those of its neighbors (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) are striking. For example, in the San Pedro Sula Penitentiary in Honduras, approximately 60 members of the 18th Street gang are housed in a one-story, concrete block building in overcrowded living conditions, with no activities. In contrast, at the La Modelo Penitentiary in Nicaragua, inmates are offered several activities, including music, art, and work opportunities in leather and license plate factories. The approaches in both countries are on opposite ends of the spectrum: where Honduras has confined its inmates to life with no hope, the Nicaragua penal system provides rehabilitation programs that allow its inmates to make amends with society. There was an initiative on an anti-gang law sent to the Nicaraguan National Assembly in 2005. However, the Justice Commission and local experts felt such as law would violate the Constitution and no other anti-gang laws are under consideration.[152]

Nicaraguan legislation favors the protection of youths. Several constitutional articles and laws protect youths and provide resources for various programs directed at improving the situation of youths, including Law 392, which encourages the establishment of youth programs; Law 228, which directs the National Police to establish plans and policies to prevent youth violence; Law 212, which names a Special Inspector for Youth and

[151] Interviews conducted in Managua, Nicaragua, September 20, 2005.
[152] Information provided by USAID/Nicaragua from the Nicaraguan National Assembly, Justice Commission. February 2006.

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Adolescents to ensure respect of human rights for these population groups; Article 98 of the *Codigo de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (Code for Children and Adolence), which emphasizes that juvenile delinquency should be treated through restorative justice and focus on the reintegration of delinquent youths back into society, and more.

This legal framework has been translated into specific programs to deal with at-risk youths. Nicaragua has developed programs on both the government and civil society sectors dealing with the prevention of youth violence. Most significant is the government's Program for the Attention and Prevention of Violence implemented by the *Secretaria de la Juventud* (Secretary of Youth), which provided marginalized and at-risk youths with alternatives to gang membership. There is also a significant government intervention program that looks to transform former gang members into productive members of society. Some 550 former gang members have been reintegrated back into society.

The Ministry of Interior (*Ministerio de Gobernacion*) has initiated a significant program called Co-Existence and Citizen Security (*Conviviencia y Seguridad Ciudadana*), which has funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (US$7.2 million for five years) and its government counterpart (US$700,000) to pilot youth crime prevention initiatives in 11 municipalities of the country. The program, expected to be underway by March 2006, is being coordinated with seven government institutions, including the Ministries of Family and Education and *Secretaria de la Juventud* (Secretary of Youth), along with civil society organizations. The program targets youths at-risk, youths in gangs, and other youths in the penal system. To date, the program has disbanded ten youth gangs in the municipality of Ciudad Sandino with the collaboration of the Fundacion Nicaragua Nuestra.

Through its Prevention of Juvenile Violence program, the National Police is working with different state institutions, *Comités de Prevención del Delito*, the media, the private sector, and gangs members to rehabilitate those who leave the gangs. The program provides psychosocial counseling, educational opportunities, vocational training, and job placement. The police were able to find jobs for 100 ex-gang members in 2004. For Independence Day celebrations, the police trained and used 800 youths formerly belonging to gangs to maintain order during the festivities. During the field team visit, Nicaraguan police were observed as visibly outgoing towards incarcerated gang members. When an individual officer was asked why they treated the gang members differently than police do in other countries, he said, "We have a commitment [to our country]."

Civil Society Response:

Civil society has also played an important role in addressing the problem of youth violence. The NGO Centro de Prevención de Violencia/CEPREV has programs working with at-risk youths and gang members to build their self-esteem, provide psychosocial counseling, and train 705 police officers and teachers as promoters to replicate the Center's model for working with these youths. Also, the Center has planned training for journalists as a means of sensitizing them to the problems of youths and decreasing the

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stigmatization of these youths in media reports. This NGO works in 23 *barrios* in Managua and has served 1,500 adolescents and youth. The NGO *Instituto de Promoción Humana* (INPRHU – Human Advancement Institute) works with at-risk youths in Managua and Esteli. In Esteli, they implement the Education for Peace and Justice Program in coordination with 34 other NGOs. This program focuses on reintegrating youths into the communities and building collaboration with the police. The police have gone as far as removing delinquencies from the records of youth who successfully reingegrate into society. The private sector has also participated by providing employment and scholarships to these youths.

Civil society organizations Fundación FENIX and Fundación Nicaragua Nuestra have also made important efforts. Fundacion Fenix works with one thousand at-risk youth and gang members who are interested in reintegrating into society. This program is coordinated with the universities, the National Technological Institute (INATEC), the private sector, the Office of the Mayor of Managua, and the National Police. Fundacion Nicaragua Nuestra implements a youth mediation program and promotes education and vocational training. Some 100 former gang members have been reintegrating into society. The NGO, *Desafios* (Challenges), works to empower youths in eight municipalities. This NGO has a television program that includes footage on gangs, does youth camp exchanges with youth camps in Honduras, supports political advocacy to influence youth-oriented policies, and has a youth agenda that attempts to bridge the gap between youth and political candidates.

Two of the several factors that have facilitated more community participation in crime prevention councils are the social network remnant of the Sandinista period and the development of the police as a result of focused training. After the Sandinistas took control of government in 1979, they created the Sandinista Defense Committee. The Committee, however, failed to prevent upsurges of organized crime, armed robbery, and attacks by youth gangs. Around this time, the Panamanian National Guard and the Cuban government were asked to help train the police to be a more professional police force. Hundreds of Nicaraguan police were trained at the Panamanian police-training academy. The resulting network of nearly 1,600 local committees with more than 12,000 community volunteers working with the 1,500 police created an early warning system and may be one of the major reasons why MS-13 and 18th Street gangs have not made inroads to Nicaragua. Moreover, the level of confidence and contact between the local communities and police is remarkable. No other country visited for this assessment has this level of community coordination with the police or the extensive social network in place to prevent violence and gang proliferation.

It appears that, although Nicaragua may have a serious problem with high levels of common violence; it does not currently have a major gang problem. Moreover, its prevention and intervention approach appears to be working well and may be a model for other countries in Central America and Mexico.

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Donor Response:

The USAID Mission works in the areas of democracy and governance, trade and agricultural diversification, and health and education. Several of USAID's responses to the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 offer good examples that are worth analyzing to determine if future activities could be developed based on these experiences. Several activities cited below focused on vulnerable youths and the issues they faced while attempting to re-start their lives after a catastrophic event.

Under the Mission's Good Governance activity, the *Centro Pro-Desarrollo Socio-Economico Creativo* (CEDESEC) worked directly with 200 high-risk youths 12-20 years old in several districts in Managua. Specific activities under the project provided psychiatric counseling, workshops/seminars to stimulate better family and social climate, youth empowerment training, and awareness campaigns to reduce drug use and prevent drug abuse.

Under a Good Governance and Rule of Law activity, the Fundacion Nicaragua Nuestra helped identify productive activities for youths, continue youth education, and tackle the problems of delinquency, gang activity, and drug use after Hurricane Mitch. USAID supported psychological and emotional counseling, human development workshops for community leaders, the creation of neighborhood associations, and the establishment of a youth work program with the Municipality of Managua.

From November 2001 to July 2002, under the Education Recovery Component with BASE II, Fundación Nicaragua Nuestra, Centro de Prevención de la Violencia (CEPREV), and *Centro Juvenil Don Bosco* (Don Bosco Youth Center) implemented the "youth at risk pilot" that S03 had in the last strategy.[153]

A current project implemented with the Fabretto's Children's Foundation indirectly supports anti-gang responses. The project aims to improve school attendance, raise the level of education achievement in primary schools, and improve health and hygiene in the participating schools.

These projects offer valuable lessons learned and have already established levels of organizational and community confidence that could be used to analyze the next best steps to take for future anti-gang responses. USAID/Nicaragua does not have specific programs targeting youth gangs.

While many of the Mission's programs may coincidentally support youth, it does not have a specific strategic objective or intermediate result dealing with youth violence or gangs.

Other donors, including IDB and GTZ, are working on activities related to youth violence and the phenomenon of gangs. UNDP funding has supported the development of a

[153] Castillo A., Melba. *Proyecto Piloto Juventud en Riesgo – Informe Final.* http://mail.mecd.gob.ni/PbaseII/download/proyectos_jer.pdf. USAID/Nicaragua, Proyecto Base II. 2002.

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database on gangs and at-risk youth and made efforts to help ensure that information collected by the various NGOs was shared.

The level of donor assistance to Nicaragua averages about $500 million per year. The largest donors are the United States and Sweden. The United States leads the donors' Economic Growth roundtable and influences donor approaches towards economic growth. Other bilateral donor support comes from Denmark, Germany, Spain, Japan, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The World Bank, IDB, European Union, World Food Program, and Central American Bank provide multilateral support for Economic Development. Further investigation is needed to identify synergies between these programs and any anti-gang work considered by USAID.

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Annex 6: U.S. Case Studies

I. Introduction

There has been a steady decrease in crime in the United States over the past decade. This decline began slowly in the mid-1990 largely in a handful of big cities. Within a few years, the drop in crime accelerated with the benefits reaching most metropolitan areas in the United States. A major contributor to the overall drop in crime has been the commensurate decline in youth and gang-related violence.

Although there may be many reasons for the reduction in crime, the law enforcement community contends that the decline occurred at the same time that police changed their tactics and implemented community policing practices. Law enforcement has certainly contributed to the declining crime rate. And, the fact that police forces in many U.S. cities have adopted specialized, strategic, and innovative approaches for confronting violent gangs and criminally active juveniles must be viewed as a significant contributing factor. At the same time that general and gang-related crime has declined in the United States, crime and gang-related violence has increased in many Latin American countries. Some contend that the deportation of convicted criminals and gang members back to their Latin American country of origin has contributed to the rise of overall crime and gang-related violence in those countries. Regardless of the relationship between law enforcement efforts in the United States and possible repercussions in other countries, the fact remains that many Latin American countries are struggling to address an upsurge in crime and gang-related violence.

The United States has had both success and failure in addressing gang-related crime and violence over the last decade. This section highlights some of the major approaches used to address gangs in the U.S. and presents conclusions and lessons learned based on these initiatives. Next, the section outlines some of the key characteristics of gangs and briefly examines the effectiveness of individual prevention and rehabilitation approaches being used to address gangs in the United States. Finally, the section presents policy implications of the U.S. approaches to gang activity and violence. In sum, The overall aim of this section aims is to provide some best practices as guidance to Latin American countries as they address their gang-related problems.

II. The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence

Boston, like most major U.S. cities during the early to mid-1990's, was experiencing a homicide epidemic. In poor, largely African-American and Latino neighborhoods, the resident youth had become active in gangs and locked in a pattern of violence and fatalism. Community leaders and youth advocates were discouraged and frustrated by the seemingly endless cycle of violence.

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In the spring of 1990, the Boston Police Department (BPD) formed an Anti-Gang Violence Unit charged with using community policing approaches to develop intelligence about gangs, and to focus on intervention and deterrence. Although meant to be quite different from past approaches, initially few things were done differently. As police, probation officers, and community leaders became directly involved with active gang members, they began to see common interests and began to cooperate together. In 1994, the various stakeholders formed an alliance with four basic goals: 1) identify the incorrigibly violent youth and deal with them; 2) enforce the law; 3) offer alternatives and opportunities to vulnerable youth; and 4) follow through on both threats and promises. With community support and collaboration from other local and federal law enforcement, the BPD conducted a series of crackdowns on targeted groups and attempted to control the supply of guns. At the same time, BPD collaborated with the private sector in intensive and coordinated effort to provide at-risk youth with employment opportunities and alternatives. Despite these efforts, the homicide rate remained at an intolerably high number.

With a new mayor and Police Commissioner, Boston deepened and expanded its commitment to community policing. This approach was rooted in three key principles: partnership, problem solving, and prevention. The BPD launched an in-service community policing training program aimed at giving greater voice and influence to people working at the community level. The BPD ensured that everyone on the force passed through the training program. The BPD invited hundreds of community groups and social-service agencies to participate in a year-long process of strategic planning, precinct by precinct, to address the special needs of each individual neighborhood. BPD asked the Criminal Justice Policy and Management Program at Harvard University to research the gang problem and provide hard data on patterns of violence and gun trafficking, and to develop a detailed street map of gang turfs and activities. From these efforts emerged a program that became known as “Operation Cease Fire.”

Operation Cease Fire built on the previous anti-gang approaches but with some significant differences. First, instead of localized and episodic crackdowns, it was a systematic, city-wide operation with the clear purpose of continuing until the gang violence stopped. The police and others communicated directly with gang members, particularly chronic offenders, and made it clear that their operations were aimed at violence and would continue until the violence stopped. Moreover, law enforcement agencies took advantage of any vulnerability of chronic offenders and “pulled every lever” to ensure severely unpleasant consequences for those that continued the violence. When a violent incident occurred in Boston, the multi-agency team responded by imposing all possible sanctions on chronic offenders residing in the crime area. The plan for Cease Fire also included a focused law enforcement attack on illegal gun traffic. The Operation maintained continuous and coordinated communications with gang members relaying its message that violence would not be tolerated and would be met with an unprecedented law enforcement response. Second, Operation Cease Fire offered a broad array of prevention and rehabilitation programs providing support to gang members interested in making positive choices for their future. Third, Operation Cease Fire worked to institutionalize the BPD training program and shift the way in which police and probation officers worked on gang issues. Operation Cease Fire ushered in a new era

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of police-community relations in which the BPD focused as much on prevention and rehabilitation as it had formerly done on traditional law enforcement.

Operation Cease Fire had a dramatic impact on Boston's youth homicide rate. In the twelve months of 1995 following the introduction of Operation Cease Fire, the number of youth homicides fell by two-thirds and remained low until 2001. Unfortunately, in 2001, Boston homicides increased by two-thirds back to the levels of the early 1990's. Although homicides declined again in 2002 and Boston has fewer problems with violence than other cities its size, shootings have been rising steadily since 2003.

Lessons Learned from the Boston Experience

- Climbing the learning curve. The Boston strategy developed over time as law enforcement and community leaders gradually gained confidence in each other and recognized the need to work as a cohesive unit. In addition, the developing program was molded through trial and error. Thus, while others can learn from Boston's mistakes, it is reasonable that any new initiative will take time to develop before an appropriate and effective program is in place.
- Collective accountability. The Boston program was successfully predicated on using the social structure inherent in gangs to enforce collective accountability for violent actions by individuals.
- Key elements. The Boston Strategy has three essential elements which may be important for any successful intervention with gangs: 1) programs - focused on both law enforcement and a broad array of prevention and intervention programs; 2) principles – clear objectives that inspire and guide the implementation of the programs; and 3) process - a coordinated, problem-solving approach developed in collaboration with community leaders by which the principles and programs were developed.
- Assessment first. Conducting a communitywide assessment of the gang problem is an important first step in reaching consensus among stakeholders to: 1) set goals and objectives, 2) work together to address the gang problem, 3) develop strategies, sanctions, and services, and 4) form an interagency and community-based team to target problem areas.
- Strong communication. A direct communications strategy ("pulling levers") aimed at chronic offenders and backed by the community may have the potential to generate at least short-term declines in criminal activity.
- Short-lived victories. Although the tactics of Operation Cease Fire were apparently effective in controlling violence among traditional gangs, they may need to be modified in order to address emerging gang problems. Given the shifting nature of gang problems, victories may be short-lived, conflict may be cyclical, and the task of addressing gang problems may be repetitive.

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III. Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership

Following an upsurge of homicides in Indianapolis in 1997, Indianapolis officials, familiar with the success of Operation Cease Fire, pursued a similar initiative entitled the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP).

The IVRP's formed a working group of federal, state, county and city criminal justice officials. Although there was recognition within the law enforcement community that Indianapolis had a gang problem and that gangs were disproportionately involved in violent crime and drug distribution, there was no consensus on how to proceed. Moreover, the existing data systems could not provide accurate and reliable estimates of the extent, trends, and geographic patterns of gang-related crime. As a result, IVRP invited researchers from Indiana University and the Indianapolis-based Hudson Institute to participate in the partnership. Following the Boston model, the goals of the working group were to: 1) share information; 2) bring expanded resources to the problem; and 3) develop a systematic, problem-solving process involving analyzing the problem, developing strategies, and then evaluating and refining those strategies.

The initial analysis of homicides utilizing existing information indicated that Indianapolis followed patterns similar to most urban U.S. cities; the majority if homicides involved young men with prior involvement in the criminal justice system using firearms in concentrated geographic areas. The official reports indicated that very few of the homicides involved gangs or drugs even though subsequent discussions with investigators and front-line officers revealed that drugs and gangs were involved in many of these homicides. To gain additional knowledge, the IVRP reviewed every homicide incident with professionals working the cases. The results of that analysis showed that about 60 percent of the homicides involved chronic offenders who were not part of a gang and over half had some kind of drug connection.

Following the homicide analysis, the IVRP held a series of meetings to develop a strategic plan focused on the key factors identified in the analysis. The first set of strategies focused on tightening the criminal justice system to concentrate on violent repeat offenders and the illegal possession of firearms. The most serious, violent, repeat offenders in the city were identified and probation and parole officers worked with the police to increase the accountability of probationers and parolees. The second set of strategies was based on the "pulling lever" concept developed in Boston where the aim was to increase the perception through direct communication with high-risk individuals that they were likely to face criminal sanctions and, at the same time, increase the awareness of high-risk individuals to opportunities and social services. Over time participants were increasingly selected because of their involvement in gangs but the attention to gangs was not as strong as it was in Boston. Meetings intended to reinforce the antiviolence message involved groups, chronic hot-spot locations and or drug markets. Known gang members participated in many of those meetings.

Following the implementation of the IVRP, there was an immediate decline in homicides, which coupled with other indicators such as declines in gun assaults and armed robbery, suggested that the IVRP strategy had at least a short-term impact on crime in

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Indianapolis. Additionally, a survey of arrestee's perceptions of the effectiveness of the criminal justice system showed that as the result of the IVRP direct communication strategies over 70 percent of arrestees were aware of the high likelihood of arrest, conviction and being sent to prison for crimes that the IVRP targeted.

Lessons Learned from the Indianapolis Experience

- Importance of Working groups. The involvement of the research team in the IVRP initiative generated new knowledge about the nature of crime in Indianapolis. The shared understandings that emerged from the analysis modified strategic interventions in a positive manner.
- Importance of Data collection . The data collection demonstrated that newer gang cities like Indianapolis, in contrast to jurisdictions like Los Angeles, could develop focused deterrence strategies.

IV. Los Angeles Experience

In 1998, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded the RAND Corporation to develop and test strategies for reducing gun violence among youth in Los Angeles. The goal, in part, was to determine which parts of the Boston experience might be replicated in Los Angeles.

Central to the Boston experience was the concept of a "working group" consisting of representatives from all agencies that deal with violence as well as all community-based entities. It was not clear that such an approach could be replicated in Los Angeles because the government is decentralized over a large geographic territory and is composed of a network of competing and overlapping power centers. Moreover, in Los Angeles, differences in the race and ethnicity of gang members, the intergenerational and the quasi-institutional nature of the gangs might alter the design of the intervention.

After considerable work with community and law enforcement representatives to identify trouble spots where an intervention could be expected to have an impact, the Hollenbeck area of Los Angeles was selected. Hollenbeck is largely (81 percent) Latino, mostly of Mexican heritage, has had gangs since before World War II and has especially violent and youth oriented crime. In addition, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) maintains a gang intelligence unit in Hollenbeck and the area has many able community partners.

An analysis of the Hollenbeck area revealed that there were 37 criminally active street gangs that were highly overrepresented in homicidal acts. Approximately 75 percent of all homicides in the area were gang motivated or gang-related and about half involved drugs. A spatial analysis identified "hot spots" where much of the violence took place.

The project team designed an intervention that incorporated both "carrots" and "sticks." As in Boston, the enforcement strategy was simple: hold the gangs collectively responsible for the gun violence of individuals. Gangs were only targeted to the extent

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that they were responsible for gun violence. Given that the social structure of gangs in Los Angeles are amenable to deterrence-based approaches, the working group developed profiles that detailed gang member vulnerabilities ("levers") that could be pulled against gang members in the wake of violence. The levers included: 1) targeting all members of the given gang, regardless of who committed the act, with strict law enforcement; 2) increased police patrols in the offender's and victim's gang area; 3) stricter enforcement of public housing requirements; and 4) rapid application of intervention elements to ensure that perpetrators understood there were consequences to supporting crime.

The carrot side of the intervention focused on community-based violence prevention programming through a consortium that included local churches, job referral agencies, gang workers, and others and included a community-based assessment team that was responsible to manage the action directed at a gang member. Some of the support services offered for gang members included job training and placement, tattoo removal, and substance abuse treatment.

The overall results of the initiative were mixed. Although violent gun-related crimes involving gang members dropped by one-third in the Hollenbeck area during the intervention, the effects decreased over time, particularly when the program relied on the deterrent value of earlier actions. A number of factors influenced the outcomes of the intervention. The program was implemented without all the prevention programs in place and, as a result, the researchers were unable to determine the effects of many of the interventions or how long the intervention would have had to operate in order to achieve its full effect. The study also recommended that officials consider the cost-effectiveness of crime reduction programs involving interagency coordination before undertaking such programs, suggesting that resources were sometimes withheld from potentially valuable programs because cost-effectiveness could not be established.

Lessons Learned from the Los Angeles Experience

- Focused efforts. Violence reduction strategies must set clear goals and focus its efforts on reducing the problem at hand. In Los Angeles, many prevention efforts focused on root causes like increasing job opportunities but it appeared that the efforts should have been more focused on efforts that promise more immediate payoff.
- Start small. In a large geographic area like Los Angeles, with a wide range of ethnic, political, and socioeconomic differences, researchers thought it doubtful that a city-wide intervention would have succeeded.
- Working groups. The working group provided a regular forum for exchanging ideas and focusing attention on a discrete and manageable problem.
- Role of facilitator-analyst. RAND Corporation, like Harvard, Indiana University and the Hudson Institute, play an important role in cutting through the bureaucratic channels to reach key people, provide unbiased analysis, and maintaining program momentum.
- Climbing the learning curve. It takes a substantial amount of time for stakeholders and decision-makers to become comfortable and to work together.

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- Growing carrots. Once law enforcement decided to implement the intervention, they had significant resources to carry out the action and well-developed procedures and command structure to produce outcomes. The community partners, on the other hand, had less resources, less flexibility, and less experience mounting a coordinated effort with other agencies. Community-based organizations may need additional resources and training to become more effective partners.

V. Mountlake Terrace Experience

In the early 1990's, local concern grew as the juvenile violent crime rate doubled in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, a working-class suburb of Seattle. Instead of using traditional suppression techniques as some stakeholders demanded, the Police Chief held a series of public meetings to discuss the problem and to weigh the costs and benefits of various solutions. Those meetings produced two significant outcomes: 1) the creation of the Mountlake Terrace Community Action Resource Team (CART), and 2) the establishment of a Neutral Zone as a solution to the juvenile crime problem.

The Neutral Zone, managed by CART, was conceived as a safe place where at-risk youth aged 13-20 could voluntarily congregate and engage in pro-social activities during the times and days of the week typically associated with high criminal activity (10 p.m. to 2 a.m.). The program provided area youth with recreational activities, social services, and general socialization with adult role models. Neutral Zone volunteers provided youths with a variety of activities, including basketball, volleyball, foosball, watching videos, listening to music, evening meals, job and substance abuse counseling, anger management, and mediation skills. Later in the program, with funding from the AmeriCorps youth service program, educational opportunities and conventional mentoring programs were provided for at-risk youth after school.

The evaluation of juvenile crime rates show mixed results. One evaluation showed that the Neutral Zone may have been partially responsible for a significant drop in juvenile crime rates, while another evaluation over a different time period showed no statistically significant differences in the juvenile crime rates due to the Neutral Zone. Moreover, the total number of violent crimes across a five-year period (1994-1998) shows no particular pattern or trend.

Lessons Learned from the Mountlake Terrace Experience

- Necessary conditions. Although the Neutral Zone model seems to incorporate many of the prevention and intervention strategies recommended by criminologists and had strong community support, it does not appear to have resulted in a clear-cut reduction in crime.
- Prevention-only. Prevention approaches applied without suppression strategies do not appear to be effective in reducing violent crime.

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VI. St. Louis Anti-Gang Initiative

Throughout the 1990's St. Louis ranked among the top five cities in the United States in its rate of homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault. Levels of youth firearm violence in St. Louis were considerably higher than the national average and the number of homicide victims had doubled in ten years. The increase in homicide victims was most pronounced among those under 18 years of age. In 1995, there were an estimated 280 gangs in the St. Louis area with 3,500 members, half of which were under 17 years old.

In 1996, the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department launched the COPS Anti-Gang Initiative. The overall strategy was zero-tolerance enforcement against gang members in two target neighborhoods. Three strategic approaches were pursued: 1) aggressive curfew enforcement, 2) consent-to-search tactics to reduce firearm availability and use by juveniles, and 3) intelligence gathering by the Gang Intelligence Unit.

The effectiveness of the program in the two targeted neighborhoods was compared to two control neighborhoods, where the program was not applied. Nine crime categories were reviewed: 1) murder, 2) robbery, 3) robbery with a firearm, 4) robbery without a weapon, 5) assault, 6) gun assault, 7) crime against persons, 8) crime against property, and 9) all other crimes. The overall results of the evaluation showed that crime rates in both the targeted and control neighborhoods declined and that the declines in the targeted neighborhoods were not statistically significant when compared to the control neighborhoods. The overall results were discouraging, insofar as the targeted suppression provided high levels of suppression activity in a small geographic area with a modest population and poor results.

Lessons Learned from the St. Louis experience

- <u>Suppression-only does not work</u>. Although the St. Louis Police Department gained some experience and improved the sophistication of its Gang Intelligence Unit, the disappointing results from a purely suppression program adds grist to the consensus opinion of criminology experts who contend that suppression tactics alone can not address youth and gang violence.

VII. Detroit Anti-Gang Initiative

Detroit's crime trend in the late 1990's showed a mixed pattern. While the levels of some major crimes attenuated over the period, the decline was not as dramatic as in other crime categories. The frequency and rate of murder and robbery decreased at the same time that aggravated assaults and burglary increased. Despite these trends, Detroit's high rates of gang-related crime posed a significant problem in the city, especially since gangs were heavily involved in the sale and distribution of drugs.

Three elements were at the core of the Detroit Anti-gang efforts: 1) a new unit was created that focused only on gang-related crime; 2) the program focused on two specific target precincts for the intervention; and 3) precinct patrol officers with knowledge of

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their precinct were brought into the gang unit. The Detroit program model was an aggressive suppression strategy with two components. First, the program used traditional crackdown components such as aggressive enforcement of city ordinances, including curfew and truancy sweeps, especially in hot spots of gang activity. Second, the program incorporated the intensive supervision approach used by the Boston Police Department and, in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Corrections, focused on gang members in the target areas to ensure that they were abiding by the conditions of their parole or probation.

The frequency of reported crime decreased in the targeted precincts during the program period. For example, over the period of the intervention there was a considerable decline in gun crimes in the target precincts, whereas the number of such offences rose in the comparison precinct. Although there was a strong indication that the aggressive policing tactics contributed to this reduction in crime, the researchers concluded that the result could not be directly attributed to the Detroit Anti-Gang Intervention.

Lessons Learned from the Detroit Experience

- Suppression-only works. The Detroit Anti-Gang Initiative, an aggressive patrol and suppression strategy reduced crime in two precincts and demonstrates that concentrated, aggressive gang enforcement can have a considerable impact on gun crimes.

VIII. National Capital Region Anti-gang efforts

Although efforts to develop anti-gang programs in the National Capital region, which includes the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia (Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties) and Maryland (Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties), are just getting underway, a review of these programs is included here for a number of reasons. First, many of the readers of this paper live and work in the national capital area and may be interested in the kinds of approaches employed here. Second, although the programs are very new and have not been evaluated, they have been designed from the best practices developed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice and represent some of the best current thinking on anti-gang initiatives. Third, many of the services provided under the program are directed toward emigrants from El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala and may provide some insight into the types of programs that might be developed in those countries.

Law enforcement research shows that there are approximately 3,600 gang members in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, and that there are nine major active gangs and more than 100 additional minor gangs and cliques region-wide. Like the rest of the population in the region, which is heavily interactive, with families, friendships, social organizations, and jobs routinely existing across borders, gangs are mobile. Some gangs operate nationally and even internationally and have enough organizational structure to track members who move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) is the most violent gang in the region, as well as the largest and fastest growing.

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In response to the growing threat of gangs in the region, both Maryland and Virginia have launched Anti-gang initiatives.

Maryland Joint Country Gang Prevention Initiative

Prior to 2004, multiple public and private county agencies and institutions worked independently to respond to gang activity in local communities with minimal exchange of information between them. Early in 2004, the two County Executives established the Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force, which was directed to work collaboratively to share strategies, identify best practices, and make recommendations that would maximize the coordinated use of public and private resources to address the problem. Although each county convened and managed its own individual meetings and subcommittees, the Joint County Task Force met regularly to monitor the progress and direction of those efforts. Among other things, the Joint County Task Force followed a problem solving process that: 1) examined approaches to gang prevention in other jurisdictions in the U.S.; 2) analyzed local and OJJDP research data with the assistance of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of Maryland; 3) solicited community input from community leaders, teachers, parents, mentors, interested citizens and youth through town hall forums; 4) developed guiding principles; and 5) formulated recommendations for a prevention, intervention and suppression approach.

The recommendations included:

General Recommendations

- Establish a Joint County Gang Prevention Steering Committee and coordinating entity for each county;
- Develop an inventory of gang prevention materials;
- Develop a public awareness campaign and solicit support from the business community; and
- Develop a partnership with the University of Maryland, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice to assist in research, program development, and evaluation.

Suppression Recommendations

- Review policies to ensure that schools can suppress gangs in schools;
- Expand the number of in-school police officers;
- Create, expand, and sustain in-school suppression programs and provide opportunities for academic assistance and social development; and
- Evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of the truancy process.

Prevention Recommendations

- Conduct a school safety assessment;
- Implement and sustain after-school programs and strengthen partnerships with private non-profit agencies; and

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- Implement a series of community meetings that reach out to youth, adults, and parents about youth violence and gangs.

Intervention Recommendations

- Develop a standardized information collection and data-management system and share the information;
- Design and implement a joint county program in Takoma Park/Langley, a cross jurisdictional hot-spot area, to address the needs of youth at risk for gang involvement;
- Establish an anonymous tip hotline;
- Provide assistance to municipalities, civic associations and community organizations to help them establish grassroots community programs focused on at-risk youth;
- Create safe haven program for youth who wish to leave gangs;
- Expand remedial education, technical education, employment training and entry level employment opportunities; and
- Actively participate with the Council of Governments to develop a regional strategy to address gang activity.

In November 2005, Congress provided $2,375,000 to implement this initiative.

Northern Virginia Anti-gang Task Force

Northern Virginia is 6 to 9 months behind Maryland in the planning of its anti-gang efforts, but has followed much the same process and path. Northern Virginia has adopted a "comprehensive model" for anti-gang efforts that coordinates the work of local law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, schools, and community leaders. The goal of the program is to provide effective "carrots and sticks" that increase the formal and informal supervision of the most at-risk youth and also provides additional support and services for targeted individuals to pull them away from involvement in crime and gangs. Based on the anti-gang model developed by OJJDP, the approach focuses on keeping troubled kids out of gangs and cutting off the pipeline that delivers new kids into gangs. The approach uses interventions like Functional Family Therapy (FFT) to convince families with at-risk youth to communicate their needs more effectively and develop family management tools to monitor and control their children's behaviors. After-school programs like Boys and Girls Clubs, adult mentoring programs and anti-bulling programs are used to help children avoid gangs. In addition, the police departments in each jurisdiction is conducting public education and awareness campaigns, providing gang awareness training in schools, organizing gang graffiti removal programs, providing gang coordinators in each district police station, and encouraging and participating in youth mentoring programs in schools. In November, 2005 Congress provided $2.5 million for this effort.

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IX. Suppression or Prevention: What's the mix?

In general, most of the efforts reported above, with the exception of the program in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, are heavily weighted toward suppression and prosecution. Even the program in Boston, arguably modeled on a mix of suppression and prevention activities, relies on suppression to gain the attention of gang members and then to encourage them to avail themselves of social services. Several other programs, including those in Indianapolis and Los Angeles, give considerable emphasis to suppression activities and some "lip service" to prevention strategies to minimize crime and gang violence. The other two case studies, St. Louis and Detroit, describe suppression-only approaches.

Given that most of these interventions were organized by law enforcement, it is not surprising that suppression activities have been in the forefront of anti-gang efforts in the United States. It may be the case that gang violence had risen to a level where suppression was a necessary first step in regaining control, perhaps setting the stage for prevention activities. Nevertheless, if we are to solve the problem of gangs in the future, we need to know "what works."

Unfortunately, this review shows that there is a lack of high-quality evaluation research conducted on gang programs. As Klein pointed out ten years ago, there is a "paucity of respectable evaluations of gang intervention programs" and that observation remains true today. The lack of basic knowledge about the impact of gang interventions on gangs and youth violence – and the mix of interventions that work best - should be a clarion call to police, researchers, policymakers and everyone concerned with the gang issue.

Overall, analysis of the reviewed programs shows that the success of any initiative, as demonstrated by the Boston experience, hinges on its ability to integrate a number of approaches. Both the suppression-only and prevention-only approaches appear to have failed or at best provided mixed results. Gang and youth violence problems are complex and it appears that without a coordinated response that involves both suppression and prevention approaches, little progress will be made responding to gangs.

The question of what is the best mix of interventions can also be explored by reviewing the existing literature that examines the characteristic of gangs and the experience of individual approaches to addressing gang problems.

X. Characteristics of Gangs

It is important to review some of the characteristics of gangs and gang members because they have a bearing on the types of individual approaches employed in the United States.

- Risk Factors Longitudinal studies of adolescents in multiple sites identified risk factors for gang membership to be youth who: 1) grow up in disorganized neighborhoods; 2) come from impoverished, distressed families; 3) do poorly in school and have low attachment to school and teachers; 4) associate with

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delinquent peers, and engage in various forms of problem behaviors (Thornberry, 1998 and Hill, 1996).

- Target Group The typical age range of gang members is 12-24 years old with an average age of 17-18 (older in cities like LA where gangs have existed longer). The median age at which youths start in gangs is 13 (youths typically join gangs at 14 (Huff, 1996). Female gang membership is increasing (Klein, 1995) but male gang members outnumber females by a wide margin (Miller, 1992). The ethnicity of gang members is about 48 percent African-American, 43 percent Hispanic, 5 percent white, and 5 percent Asian (Curry, 1996). Some evidence suggests that African-American gangs are relatively more involved in drug offenses, Hispanic in turf-related violence, and Asian and white gangs in property crimes (Spergel, 1990). Although the Spergel research is dated, it remains largely valid.
- Push and Pull Factors Youths choose gangs for many reasons. The "pull" reasons, among others, are enhanced prestige or status (Baccaglini, 1993), excitement (Pennell, 1994), economic reward (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). The "push" reasons, among others, are protection and general well-being (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996), underclass status and "belonging" (Wilson, 1987).

XI. Lessons learned among the various individual approaches

The following is a brief review of the most common preventive and rehabilitation approaches used in the United States to combat gangs.

Family-focused interventions

- Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) CBT combines two effective kinds of psychotherapy – cognitive therapy, which concentrates on thoughts, assumptions, and beliefs, and behavioral therapy, which focuses on actions and environments. CBT has been successfully applied across settings (schools, prisons, community-based organizations) and across ages and roles (students, parents, and teachers). Problem behaviors that have been particularly amenable to change using CBT in young people have been: 1) violence and criminality (Little, 2005; Lipsey, Chapman and Landenberger, 2001), 2) substance use and abuse (Botvin and Ruchlin, 1998), 3) teen pregnancy and risky sexual behaviors (Harrington, 2001), and 4) school failure (Eronen and Nurmi, 1999).
- Drug, Alcohol Therapy and Education These therapies and education strategies encompass a wide variety of prevention approaches (focused on mothers, school age children, families, high risk youth and families, and communities) and intensive intervention approaches (treatment centers and juvenile drug courts). These type of strategies have been generally successful. Among other things, research has show that certain types of school-based curricula can effectively reduce abuse in adolescence (Botvin, 1992; Dusenbury and Falco, 1997; Tobler and Stratton, 1997); assist parents to steer children away from drug involvement (Ferrer-Wreder, 2003); and reduce re-offending rates and violence-related crime (Holder, 1998).

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- Family Therapy Family therapy refers to a variety of therapy models that attempt to address family dysfunction, an important influence on adolescent delinquent and antisocial behavior. The research on a variety of programs aimed at helping at-risk youth aged 11-18 is very impressive and the programs have immediate and direct impact (Howell, 1995; Chamberlain and Mihalic, 1998; Molgaad, Spoth, and Redmond, 2000).
- Parent Training Since parents are a critical, if not the most critical, factor in the social development of children, a plethora of studies produced empirical findings showing that parental behavior can either increase or decrease an adolescent's risk for delinquency and other problems. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that children are at risk of developing antisocial behaviors when they are exposed to ineffective parenting behaviors. The programs, therefore, aim to improve parenting practices through behavioral parenting training, parent education, parent support groups, in-home parent education or aid, and parent involvement in youth groups (too many studies to list here).

School-based Interventions

- Academic Skills Enhancement Since there is a strong positive association between academic failure and future delinquency and gang involvement (Maguin and Loeber, 1996; Catalano, Loeber, and McKinney, 1996), one of the primary strategies used in the U.S. to increase academic skills for at-risk populations is alternative schools. The purpose of alternative schools is to provide academic instruction to students expelled or suspended for disruptive behavior. Evaluations of alternative schools show some short-run positive effect on school performance, attitudes toward school, and self-esteem but no effect on delinquency (Cox, Davidson, and Bynum, 1995). Other examples of academic skills programs like the Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA) and Upward Bound show similar success in educational impact but they have not been evaluated in terms of the impact on delinquency. Interestingly, when impacts are evaluated by ethnic group, Hispanic students benefit most from Upward Bound but the programs showed no impact on academic performance or school attendance (Myers and Schrim, 1997).
- Classroom Curricula Well-tested curricula that target a variety of gang-related issues (reducing violence, aggressive behavior, conflict resolution, gang involvement, drug use, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality) can be effective, especially when delivered in an interactive format with small groups, when the curricula gives students tools to recognize internal pressures like stress, anxiety and peer attitudes, and when the curricula enables students to practice refusal and resisting skills (Botvin, 1992; Dusenbury and Falco, 1997; Quinn, 1998, Gottfredson, 1998).
- Leadership and Youth Development Although not a single program or with a particular content, this broad-based strategy attempts to steer juveniles away from antisocial norms through interventions that concentrate on education, social competencies, employability, and civic and life skills. Programs are semi-structured processes, often in the form of curricula and guidelines in school-based or community-based settings, which guide youth development activities.

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Examples include YMCA and YWCA, Boys and Girls clubs, Boys and Girls Scouts). A meta-analysis (Catalano, 1998) of 25 programs showed that they developed positive behaviors (self-control, interpersonal skills, assertiveness, school achievement, self-esteem) and decreased negative behaviors (carrying weapons, vehicle theft, school failure, and substance use).

- School/Classroom Environment Schools offer the only consistent access to crime-prone youth during their early years. According to several authors (Gottfedson, 1998; Sherman, 1998), programs that build school capacity, set norms for behavior, improve classroom organization and management, and reorganize classes into smaller units are good models for gang prevention, especially in urban, poor, disorganized communities. Research also suggests that changing the school environment in these communities to more nurturing, inclusive schools reduces levels of violent behavior (Godfredson, 1995, U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
- Vocational/Job Training Providing youth with employment opportunities in high crime and high unemployment communities is a common strategy to discourage delinquency and can be applied as an early intervention, or after the youth is involved in the justice system. Types of vocational training programs include summer work and subsidized employment, short-term training with job placement, and long-term residential programs. Unfortunately, most of the programs evaluated had negligible or very modest success impacting earnings and employment or long-term delinquency, and had greater costs than benefits (Bushway and Reuter, 1998; Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman, 2000; Cave, 1993).
- Mentoring Mentoring is one the oldest form of gang prevention and spreads across many fields, including health, schools, and juvenile courts. Research findings (Herrera, Sipe, and McClanahan, 2000; LoSciuto, 1996; Tierny and Grossman, 1995) suggest that mentoring is successful in producing positive results but that different program types provide different results. For example, school-based mentors spend more time on academics and are effective in influencing educational achievement, while community-based mentors spend more time on social activities and are more effective influencing social behavior. Preliminary evidence on Group mentoring (one mentor with around 10 youths) suggests that it may not be as effective as traditional one-on-one mentoring.

Community-based interventions

- Community Awareness and Mobilization Because community characteristics can serve as both risk and protective factors for criminal and delinquent behavior, strengthening institutions within communities with gang activity can have positive effects on crime but, the evidence shows tremendous variability from community to community, depending on their resources, objectives, and local leaders' capacity to collaborate. Community mobilization programs which work through the formation of local partnerships, coordinating councils and steering committees, aim to alter the basic patterns of social interaction, values, customs, and institutions is a state-of-the-art approach but the evidence for effective crime

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prevention is thin (Sherman, 1997). Research evidence of preventing antisocial behavior through policy change (Catalano, Loeber, and McKinney, 1999; Loftin, 1993; Wagenaar and Holder, 1993), media campaigns (Black, 1989; Flynn, 1995), and civil regulation (Mazerolle, Price, and Roehl, 2000) is also thin but promising.

- Truancy Prevention Truant students have a higher risk than non-truant students in drug and alcohol use, violence, and gang activity (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). Moreover, truancy, especially among males, has been clearly identified as an early warning sign that youth are headed for delinquent behavior, violence, criminality, and incarceration (Kelly, 1997). Some of the strategies to prevent truancy are: law enforcement, mentoring programs, increasing parental involvement and parent-teacher communication, and community mobilization.
- Wraparound Case Management Rather than forcing young people into traditional, pre-determined, inflexible treatment programs, the wraparound case management system, as the name implies, involves "wrapping" a comprehensive array of individualized services and support networks "around" the client. The basic elements of a wraparound case management program would include: 1) a collaborative, interagency, community-based team responsible for designing, implementing, and managing the initiative; 2) a formal interagency agreement that records and spells out exactly how the effort will work; 3) care coordinators who are responsible for helping participants create a customized treatment program and guiding people through the system; 4) child and family teams consisting of family, service providers, and community members who work with the care coordinator; 5) a Plan of Care developed and updated by the child's team that outlines the steps to achieving the goals set; and 6) clearly defined performance measures. An example of this type of program is Wraparound Milwaukee. Evaluations of the program have consistently found that its participants show marked improvement in behavior and socialization and that they are significantly less likely to recidivate than graduates of conventional programs. Moreover, the average cost of Wraparound Milwaukee is less than half the cost of traditional programming.

XII. Policy and Program Implications

Stages

Following identification of a gang problem, the first and dominant response is suppression through law enforcement. Law enforcement officials focus on suppression because their mandate by its nature involves apprehending persons who violate the law and placing them into the criminal legal system. Law enforcement officers have limited ability to address prevention and rehabilitation factors. For example, police can do little to address poverty issues. Moreover, suppression is the necessary first step in getting control when infractions of the law are reported. Suppression efforts alone, however, do not address the overarching problem and cyclical nature of gang violence. Evidence-based research on the success (or failure)

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of anti-gang interventions does not support proceeding with only suppression activities (St. Louis). In fact, a review of the Criminology literature shows that suppression is the least effective approach or may even worsen the problem (Spergel, 1995; Howell, 1998; and Decker, 2002). Moreover, the case studies on anti-gang programs in Los Angeles, Boston, and Indianapolis suggests that over time each city came to the conclusion that suppression alone could not solve the problem and adopted the suppression, prevention, rehabilitation model now accepted by most observers. In addition, it is clear from the review of the Boston and Indianapolis experience that success was somewhat fortuitous, short-lived, and the result of trust and collaboration developed over time.

Latin American countries have traditionally embraced strong suppression-only programs. Accordingly, it may be difficult politically to implement comprehensive programs that feature prevention and rehabilitation elements. As a result, it may be necessary to approach the problem in stages.

In the short-run, the USG, working with selected Central American Universities, may wish to enter into a policy dialogue and develop "white papers" on policy options with selected countries or sub-regions to demonstrate the importance of prevention and rehabilitation programs. Exposing Latin American decision-makers to the research-based tools available from the OJJDP would boost forward-looking thinking on gang problems in Latin America. In addition, the USG could conduct community-wide assessments, develop strategic action plans, and assist the various stakeholders in "climbing the learning curve." This could lead, in the short run, to the USG playing an important role in helping Latin American countries develop a clear vision of the guiding principles behind gang-intervention programs, the purpose and goals of such programs as well as identifying the process towards achieving consensus-building and strengthening of institutions needed to support such programs.

Following development of strategic plans and identification of key stakeholders, the USG may need to assist community-based organizations involved in prevention and rehabilitation in their ability to deliver effective services. This may involve helping such organizations improve their management capacity and organizational procedures. It might also be important to develop and maintain a gang prevention and rehabilitation web site, where Latin American researchers and implementers can obtain information on best practices and gang prevention materials that could be adopted for use in: Latin America. In the medium-term, some effort might also focus on developing a social marketing campaign and developing private sector support for community-based anti-gang efforts.

In the longer-term, the USG could consider offering technical assistance and financial resources to selected countries or sub-regions within countries to develop exemplary anti-gang programs.

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Complex interventions

Multiple risk factors support the use of a more complex multi-dimensional approach involving suppression, prevention, and rehabilitation strategies to strengthen youth resilience toward gang involvement. Given the diversity of gangs, it is also important to be able to provide different interventions and intervention combinations that correlate to the distinct demographic, structural and behavioral characteristics of each gang and its members. Moreover, it must be recognized that the ability of the local infrastructure to support and sustain complex interventions may be weak or non-existent in resource-poor environments. Many of the potential client countries struggle to provide basic services like education, clean water, and adequate sanitation. The failure to provide these and other community services may be partly responsible for the gang problem. Developing complex interventions may be difficult with limited resources and potentially a management nightmare. Accordingly, sites for intervention should be carefully selected.

Coordinated Response

Given the limited research-based evidence, it appears that successful anti-gang interventions in the U.S. employed a comprehensive, broad-based set of prevention, rehabilitation, and suppression strategies. These strategies required the engagement, coordination, and cross-boundary collaboration of a broad array of community and neighborhood leaders as well as local, state and federal officials. Mounting similar comprehensive, broad-based strategies in Latin America may require substantial networking and policy dialogue with local stakeholders and a social marketing campaign to strengthen the political will necessary to proceed.

Windows of Opportunity

It appears that there are two main windows of opportunity for prevention and rehabilitation strategies.

The first opportunity exists in preteen and early teenage years. Research shows that youth who join gangs may do so out of “belonging” needs at about age 13. They join the gang about six months later and six months after that most have criminal records (Huff, 1998). This suggests that gang-resistance prevention programs should be directed at preteens, especially those prone to delinquent and violent behavior, and early teens, capturing the brief window between the “belonging” stage and the age of first arrest.

The second window of opportunity for program intervention exists in the time period between a gang member’s arrest for their first crime and before they graduate to more serious and repeat offences (about two years). These interventions should focus on young offenders within the gang subculture (Huff, 1998). This suggests that rehabilitation efforts might be best directed at 14 to 16 year old youth. OJJDP has done additional work and reviews on anti-gang strategies and best practices by three

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age groups, 6-11; 12-17; and 18-22, and can be found on their website, (http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org).

One of the great challenges of research is to achieve practical results. Performing high-quality research is a challenging task but even more challenging is the ability to translate the results of research into operational terms that influence policy and practice. That this is a daunting task in criminal justice practice should come at no surprise considering the complexity of the gang problem. A good case in point is the Boston experience. Youth homicide in Boston experienced a dramatic decline and continued to remain low for five years following the implementation of Operation Cease Fire. Yet, in 2001, Boston homicides increased by 66 percent bringing the level back to that of the early 1990's. If the Boston strategy was so successful, how could homicides rise so precipitously? Perhaps, the answer to that question is that the nature of the gang problem changes quickly, needs constant analysis, and requires intervention programs characterized by the flexibility needed to address changing needs.

Note: Bibliography available upon request from USAID.

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Annex 7: Individuals and Organizations Consulted in the United States

United States Government

United States Agency for International Development:

Anu Rajaraman, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Regional Sustainable Development/Democracy and Human Rights Team

Richard Loudis, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office for Regional Sustainable Development

Connie McGuire, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Regional Sustainable Development

Ana M. Tenorio, Bureau for Latin American and the Caribbean/Office of Regional Sustainable Development/Office of Education and Human Resources

Christina del Castillo, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Central America and Mexican Affairs

Michael Maxey, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Central American and Mexican Affairs

Cheryl Kim, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, Office of Regional Sustainable Development/Office of Education and Human Resources

Katie Hamlin, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation

Jim Hoxeng, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade/Office of Education

Cathy Niarchos, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Democracy and Governance/Rule of Law Division

Patricia Alexander, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Democracy and Governance/Rule of Law Division

Rob Schneider, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade/Office of Poverty Reduction/Urban Programs

Louis-Alexandre Berg, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Democracy and Governance/Rule of Law Division

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Edgar Thornton, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade/Office of Poverty Reduction/Urban Programs

Kelly Wolfe, Bureau for Global Health/Office of Regional and Country Support

Kelly Saldana, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Regional Sustainable Development/Population, Health, and Nutrition Team

Zachary Rothschild, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation

U.S. Department of Justice:

Federal Bureau of Investigations:
Robert Clifford, Director MS-13 National Gang Task Force
Stanley Stoy, Supervisory Special Agent

Bureau of Prisons:
Linda Thomas, Administrator, Correctional Services Branch

International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program:
Raymond Rivera, Program Analyst
Eric Beinhart, Acting Assistant Director

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention:
William Woodruff, Deputy Director
Phelan Wyrick, Gang Program Coordinator
Steffie Rapp, Gang Program Specialist

Drug Enforcement Administration:
Germán Blanco, Staff Coordinator, Enforcement Operations Division

U.S. Department of Homeland Security:

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement:
Claude Arnold, Human Rights Violations and Public Safety Unit Chief
Tom Virgilio, Human Rights Violations and Public Safety Unit Officer
John Tsoukaris, Office of Detention and Removal, Detention and Deportation Officer
Pablo Campos, Office of Detention and Removal, Chief for Air Transportation Unit
Dana Salvano, Office of Detention and Removal, Attorney

Department of State:

Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement:
Aimee Martin, Program Officer
Natalia Bozzolo, Caribbean Programs Officer

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Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs:
Fay Armstrong, Rule of Law Officer

NGOs, Private Sector, and Local Government

Candace Kellar, Identity, Director
Gabriela Fernandez-Coffey, Identity
Adrean Rothkopf, Association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America
Manuel Suárez-Mier, Bank of America
Rich Buchholz, Gang Coordinator, Gang Response Intervention Team, Prince William County
Michael Mackey, City of Alexandria Gang Coordinator
Jennifer Renkma, Montgomery County Office of Community Outreach
Kevin Sanchez, Fairfax County Youth Worker
Juan Pacheco, Barrios Unidos, Inc.
Richard Rodríguez, Detective, Arlington County Police Department
Luis Cardona, Montgomery County Health and Human Services
Gustavo Velasquez, Office of Latino Affairs, District of Columbia Mayor's Office
Mai Fernandez, Latin America Youth Center
Dennis Hunt, Center for Multicultural Human Services

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