



El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence

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Principal Findings

What's the issue? After fifteen years of failed security policies, the government of El Salvador is in the middle of an open confrontation. Efforts aimed at fighting gangs' deep social roots have not produced desired results due to a lack of political commitment and social divisions that gangs use to their advantage.

Why does it matter? Born in the wake of U.S. deportation policies in the late 90s, gang violence in El Salvador has developed into a national security problem that accounts for the country's sky-high murder rate. The combination of *mano dura* (iron fist) policies and the U.S. administration's approach to migration could worsen El Salvador's already critical security situation.

What should be done? All political actors should honour the government's holistic violence prevention strategies by fully implementing them and reframing anti-gang policies. Specific police and justice reforms, as well as a legal framework for rehabilitating former gang members, are crucial steps toward a future pacification process.

Executive Summary

El Salvador, a small country in the isthmus of Central America, is wracked by an implacable strain of gang warfare. Exceptionally intense and persistent violence pits rival street gangs against one another and in opposition to the police and state. Formerly hailed for its smooth transition to democracy and for turning the two foes of its 1980s civil war into political forces competing vigorously yet peaceably for power, El Salvador once again is famed for its bloodletting. Its recent murder rates rank among the highest in the world and its jails are among the most overcrowded. For the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, its main gang, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), personifies the menace of undocumented immigration. Although the Salvadoran state has developed a series of strategies for violence prevention, its mainly repressive efforts over the past fifteen years have checked the influence of these alternative approaches. It should now implement plans to prevent crime, rehabilitate gang members and spur development in marginalised communities. Most urgently, El Salvador will require protection from the turbulence that U.S. mass deportations could provoke.

The permanence of violence owes as much to the success as to the failings of the peace accords. The two former wartime foes have jostled for democratic supremacy, repeatedly using security policy for electoral purposes by seeking to satisfy public demand for *mano dura* (iron fist) against the gangs. Although government has changed hands, security methods have not altered: mass detentions and incarceration, as well as militarisation of policing, have become standard procedure whether under the rule of right-wing elites or former guerrillas. U.S. authorities have recently offered support to this approach, pledging to “dismantle” the MS-13.

In private, however, high-level officials from across the country’s political divide lament the harmful effects of this crackdown on over-stretched courts and front-line police. Blueprints geared to preventing the drift of young men from low-income neighbourhoods into gang life have been drafted: the government launched the most recent, the “Safe El Salvador” plan, as a holistic strategy to restore the state’s territorial control. But as violence soared after 2014 following the disintegration of a truce with the gangs, extreme measures of jail confinement and police raids have once again become the government’s predominant methods to choke the gangs. Allegations of police brutality and extrajudicial executions have multiplied.

Recent surveys suggest that veteran members of these gangs wish to cease the violence. However, the economic dead-end of El Salvador’s urban outskirts – the country’s recent GDP growth rate of 1.9 per cent is among the lowest in Central America – continues to drive a supply of willing young recruits, and consolidate a rearguard of sympathisers dependent on income from the gangs’ extortion schemes and other rackets. The reality and stigma of gang violence combine to block off alternative ways of life for those born into these communities, cutting years of schooling for young people in areas of high gang presence and alienating potential employers. Instead of succumbing to the state’s offensive, gangs set up roadblocks in their neighbourhoods and impose their own law; their fight against security forces has claimed the lives of 45 police officers so far this year.

The deadlock between a tarnished set of security policies and a gang phenomenon that thrives on the ostracism and contempt of mainstream Salvadoran society can only now be resolved by recasting the way the country treats its security dilemmas. Judicial and security institutions require careful reform to ensure resources are distributed to areas with the highest concentrations of violence, and used to boost intelligence-led policing that targets gang members committing the most serious crimes. Jail-based reinsertion schemes, and cooperation with diverse churches, NGOs and businesses that offer second chances to former gang members, must be strengthened to provide a legal framework for rehabilitation as well as material incentives for the gangs to eventually disband. Although the country's main political parties and most of the public oppose any hint of negotiation with gangs, the reality in many poor areas is of constant daily encounters with these groups. Tolerance for these grassroots efforts, despite the existing legal restrictions on any contact with gangs, is essential to build the confidence that will be required for dialogue in the future.

None of this will be easy, nor is it likely to be assisted by U.S. policy toward either gangs or Salvadoran immigrants. The potential cancellation of the rights to residency in the U.S. of 195,000 beneficiaries of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program threatens to overwhelm the Salvadoran state's capacity to accommodate returnees, not unlike the experience of the late 1990s when mass deportations of gang members from the U.S. to El Salvador exported the criminal capital that led to the lightning rise of the MS-13 and its main rival, the 18th Street gang. El Salvador is simply unprepared, economically and institutionally, to receive such an influx, or to handle their 192,700 U.S. children, many of them at the perfect age for recruitment or victimisation by gangs. At a time when levels of violence remain extraordinarily high, with exhaustion toward an unwinnable conflict voiced on both sides, the arrival of thousands of migrants back to their crime-affected homeland would impose huge strains. To escape its perpetual violence, El Salvador needs support, not the recurrence of past mistakes.

Recommendations

To improve El Salvador's public policies on security and prevent further regional spillover of gang violence and undocumented migration

To the government of El Salvador:

1. Fully implement the five axes of “Plan Safe El Salvador”, and balance investment between law enforcement, institutional strengthening and violence prevention.
2. Approve a legal framework for rehabilitation, with special emphasis on the reinsertion of former gang members into society in coordination with local NGOs and the church.
3. Recognise the existence of forced displacement in El Salvador, adopt the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS), and work in coordination with local NGOs to implement protection mechanisms for its victims.
4. Allow visits from humanitarian organisations to high security jails.
5. Institutionalise by executive order monthly meetings between the security cabinet and human rights groups to monitor alleged violations of human rights by security forces.
6. Create stronger coordination protocols between the National Civil Police and the prosecutor's office, and strengthen the former's internal control unit to ensure those suspected of abuse or corruption are held accountable.

To members of El Salvador's Legislative Assembly:

7. Promote multiparty efforts on security and support the government in the implementation of “Plan Safe El Salvador”.
8. Revise the distribution of resources in the judiciary to ensure they are based on intensity of criminal activity rather than administrative criteria.
9. Stabilise funding to the prosecutor's office by giving it a fixed percentage of the annual state budget, and mandate the office with monitoring forced disappearances.

To the government of the U.S.:

10. Avoid massive deportations, and redesignate El Salvador for Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
11. Continue providing El Salvador with financial support to carry out violence-prevention initiatives, and place a greater emphasis on investigative policing and general skills training in the security forces.

To El Salvador donor countries and institutions:

12. Promote creation of an independent observatory to provide monthly information on crime victims, gang expansion and homicide figures.
13. Finance a plan in coordination with the private sector to offer incoming youth deportees job skills and employment opportunities.

Guatemala City/Brussels, 19 December 2017

El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence

I. Introduction

In January 2017, El Salvador's celebrated the 25th anniversary of the end of its civil war (1980-1992), which killed 70,000 people and displaced over a million. Sealing the end of the conflict, the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords enabled the former guerrilla Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to transform into a political party, and created a new civilian police force. Since then, El Salvador has remained among the most politically stable countries in Latin America, with two main parties that are heirs to the two sides of the internecine conflict – the left-wing FMLN and the conservative National Republican Alliance (ARENA) – peacefully alternating in power.¹

However, the country's post-war political and security institutions have proved singularly unable to respond to an evolving and expanding criminal landscape. The country has suffered at least 93,000 murders since 1993, over half of which can be attributed to gangs.² These groups now have around 60,000 active members and an estimated social support base of 500,000 – 8 per cent of El Salvador's 6.2 million population – making them the largest criminal organisations in Central America.³ Although gangs such as the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the two factions of 18th Street gang have a worldwide presence, their violent behaviour in El Salvador constitutes a national security crisis. Gangs control an undefined number of informal settlements and urban outskirts all over the country, and finance themselves mostly through small-scale extortion.⁴

Since 2003, both FMLN and ARENA governments have anchored their anti-criminal policies in restoring full state control over territory with high gang presence, mass incarceration and joint police and military operations. The current fight against crime, unveiled in early 2015 by President Sánchez Cerén of the ruling FMLN party, is the latest in a long line of law enforcement campaigns, although this initiative places more emphasis than predecessors on violence prevention in selected municipalities. Yet past and present anti-gang policies have achieved little in terms of stemming violent crime, and in some cases have even contributed to gang recruit-

¹ On 26 January 1992, the government of El Salvador and the guerrilla group Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) signed in Chapultepec, Mexico, the final peace accord that ended a twelve-year civil war. "From Madness to Hope: the 12-year war in El Salvador", Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, April 1993.

² Crisis Group calculations, based on homicide counts from Salvadoran police and the prosecutor's office between 1993 and 2016. "Armas de fuego y violencia", UN Development Programme (UNDP), 22 June 2003.

³ The social support base includes both active collaborators and ordinary citizens indirectly related to these groups, but who do not necessarily support them. Estimates from El Salvador defence ministry in 2015. "Munguía Payés: Hay más pandilleros que militares activos", *El Diario de Hoy*, 20 October 2015. Crisis Group interview, Raúl Mijango, gang truce mediator, San Salvador, 9 March 2017.

⁴ Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Report N°62, *Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America*, 6 April 2017.

ment, financial prowess and firepower. Between 2013 and 2015 El Salvador experienced its steepest escalation in violence since 1994, with 11,934 homicides in 2015 and 2016 combined, a 53 per cent increase in comparison to the 2013-2014 period.⁵

Far from abating, El Salvador's extreme insecurity could well intensify in 2018 as a number of threats loom over the country and the Central American region as a whole. These include the potentially devastating shock of new U.S. migration policies, economic and financial strains, and the possibly disruptive interference by gangs in forthcoming local elections.

This report, Crisis Group's first ever publication on El Salvador, assesses the origins of the country's violence, as well as the characteristics of and motives behind past and present security strategies. Combining original quantitative analysis based on official violence and migration statistics from El Salvador and the U.S., as well as extensive fieldwork across the country, the report identifies the principal causes behind security policy failures and highlights opportunities for a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to crime reduction.⁶ Crisis Group conducted over 70 interviews with top-level government officials, grassroots NGOs, academics, humanitarian workers, diplomats, security experts, and victims living in gang-controlled areas. All fieldwork was carried out in the country's most violent areas, such as the capital San Salvador and the smaller municipalities of San Miguel and Santa Ana.

⁵ Crisis Group calculations from El Salvador National Civil Police.

⁶ Crisis Group started monitoring El Salvador and Honduras in January 2017 to expand its Central America coverage. For more on Crisis Group's recent quantitative research work please refer to Crisis Group media release, "Alexander Soros Donates \$500,000 for Crisis Group Fellowships on the Economics of Conflict", 12 January 2017.

II. State and Crime in El Salvador

Two strong political parties with deep social roots, a judicial system marked by an unequal distribution of resources, and a police force increasingly backed by military clout stand out among the main features of El Salvador's public security institutions. The MS-13 gang and the two factions of the 18th Street gang are the largest criminal groups operating in the country; their ability to inflict high levels of violence and intimidation is directly related to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and asylum seekers in the region.

A. Security Policies and El Salvador's Two-party System

El Salvador has a robust two-party system dominated by the FMLN and ARENA. The country's fourteen departments and 262 municipalities depend largely on the central government – controlled by the FMLN since 2009 – for the design and implementation of security policies. Most security powers fall under the remit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which runs the police and the prison system. The country's parliament, the Legislative Assembly – dominated since 2012 by ARENA – has 84 deputies from five parties, and a specific committee overseeing security matters. Local governments have gained a greater say in recent years over the implementation of violence prevention initiatives, but their main role continues to be that of sustaining the parties' social support base in a context of constant electoral campaigning.⁷

The FMLN and ARENA both draw on strong public roots and feature hierarchical structures and leadership cohorts that have remained largely intact for the last 25 years. The FMLN has around 30,000 rank-and-file militants, most of them from urban areas; ARENA has more active affiliates, 50,000, with a support base primarily located in rural municipalities.⁸ The two parties represent opposite social and ideological poles. Whereas the FMLN still deploys revolutionary rhetoric and aligns itself with other left-wing political movements in the hemisphere, ARENA was founded as an anti-communist party and is backed by the country's economic and business elites. In both parties, decision-making is concentrated in a select circle of high-level figures, most of whom have been in charge since 1992.⁹

⁷ Under the Salvadoran constitution, legislative and local elections are held every three years, and presidential elections every five. The next assembly and local elections are scheduled for 4 March 2018. El Salvador constitution (1982). Álvaro Artiga, *El Sistema Político Salvadoreño* (San Salvador, 2015), pp. 7, 123, 206, 233, 268.

⁸ These figures are from the official number of activists who participated in primary elections in recent years. "Apoyan reelección de Medardo González", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 October 2015. "ARENA ya tiene sus 262 candidatos para las elecciones de marzo 2018", *El Diario de Hoy*, 28 July 2017. Crisis Group interview, Álvaro Artiga, political scientist, San Salvador, 10 July 2017.

⁹ The political committee is the highest authority in the FMLN, and is mostly composed of former combatants. Decision-making in ARENA depends on its National Executive Committee (COENA), consisting of leading businessmen and historic party leaders. Álvaro Artiga, Carlos Dada, David Escobar Galindo, Hugo Martínez (eds.), *La polarización política en El Salvador* (San Salvador, 2007), pp. 109-111. Crisis Group interviews, Álvaro Artiga, political scientist, San Salvador, 10 July 2017; Jorge Villacorta, former lawmaker, San Salvador, 13 July 2017.

Despite stark ideological differences, the main parties' approaches to security are surprisingly similar. From 1999 to 2009, ARENA based its anti-criminal strategy on swift judicial processes, more arrests and mass incarceration. The FMLN continued this punitive approach – especially since its second mandate started in 2014 – with even harsher confinement conditions for jailed gang members and an enhanced role for the military in public security. Since losing executive power, ARENA has expressed only modest opposition to decisions taken by the Security Cabinet, the highest authority on these issues. Its most prominent members are the Vice President and presidential appointee for security Óscar Ortiz; the Minister of Justice and Public Security Mauricio Rodríguez Landaverde; and the Director of the Police Howard Cotto.¹⁰

However, decision-making on security and other national priorities has been handicapped in recent years by a divided Assembly controlled by ARENA, which has forced the FMLN to compromise and seek support from smaller groups. New parties such as the right-wing Great Alliance for National Unity (GANU) have benefited from this parliamentary blockage, with its leader Guillermo Gallegos elected president of the Legislative Assembly in 2015.¹¹ Only a handful of cross-party agreements have been reached, while more than 25 negotiation attempts in key policy areas have collapsed.¹² The most recent was a six-month UN-backed mission launched in January 2017 to mark the 25th anniversary of the end of the war, which failed to establish common ground between the main parties. The chief of mission, Mexican diplomat Benito Andión, finished the mandate in July 2017 concluding that “conditions [for consensus] were not met” in the current political climate.¹³

The arrival of young leaders on the national political scene, and a sharp drop in popular support for both the FMLN and ARENA, could be the harbinger of a shift away from traditional two-party rule. “Around 40 to 50 per cent of the Salvadoran population have not made up their minds as to which party to vote for”, affirms a San Salvador-based political analyst.¹⁴ The most well-known representatives of this younger political generation are San Salvador Mayor Nayib Bukele – who was expelled from the FMLN in October 2017 after a series of internal party squabbles – and Johnny Wright Sol, an ARENA lawmaker who opted not to stand for re-election in 2018 due to disagreements with the party's leadership. Both have announced they will stand as independent candidates in the 2019 presidential elections, when the strength of the main parties will be tested.¹⁵

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, FMLN security adviser, San Salvador, 13 July 2017; high-level FMLN official, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, San Salvador, 30 August 2017.

¹¹ GANA is a conservative alliance founded in 2010 by right-wing lawmakers. Along with GANA, the National Concertation Party (PCN) and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) play an important role in strategic legislative alliances. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, San Salvador, 28 September 2017. Álvaro Artiga, *El Sistema Político Salvadoreño*, op. cit., p. 255.

¹² Crisis Group interview, political analyst, San Salvador, 22 November 2017.

¹³ The UN mission began a new phase after the second half of 2017, sponsoring closed-door talks with all political parties on economy, violence and education, among other issues. “Termina mandato de enviado especial de la ONU para el diálogo en El Salvador”, UN News centre, 7 July 2017. Crisis Group interviews, UN officials, San Salvador, February–November 2017.

¹⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, political analyst, 30 November 2017.

¹⁵ In a June 2017 survey by the Central America University José Simeón Cañas (UCA), San Salvador President Cerén received the lowest approval rating of the country's past five presidents at the same

B. *The Judicial System, Security Forces and Jails*

The institutions in charge of investigating and trying crimes in El Salvador are the prosecutor's office, the police and the judiciary. The prosecutor's office (in Spanish *Fiscalía General de la República*) is part of the larger public ministry, while the judiciary is headed by the Supreme Court and its different chambers. Both are independent public powers; in contrast, the National Civil Police is run by the executive branch's Ministry of Justice and Public Security.¹⁶

Saturation of courts and a chronic paucity of forensic evidence are common challenges for most Latin American judicial institutions,¹⁷ but in El Salvador extreme criminal violence and new norms of legal prosecution based on mass detentions have gravely undermined the country's courts. Since the distribution of judicial personnel is purely based on the country's administrative divisions, magistrates working in more violent areas process up to ten times more cases than colleagues in quieter municipalities: "[our work] looks like a *maquila* [a factory that assembles goods]", explained a judge from San Salvador. Poor relations with the police undermine the prosecutor's office, spurring Attorney General Douglas Meléndez to demand that he be given his own investigative force: "we work with borrowed hands and teeth", said Meléndez in a July 2017 conference.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the Salvadoran police have come under increasing pressure as it seeks to deal with demands to combat violent crime and armed attacks from gangs. The National Civil Police has 28,000 officers, around 90 per cent of whom come from humble social backgrounds, and the average salary is \$424 per month. This forces many to live in gang-controlled areas, usually neighbourhoods with lower rents, putting them and their families at risk.¹⁹ Officers in the field describe feeling alone and emotionally exhausted during but also after work. "After work, when we

point in their terms in office. Leading opposition party ARENA did little better, with nearly 70 per cent of participants saying they would not want the conservative party back in power. "Los salvadoreños evalúan el tercer año de Gobierno de Salvador Sánchez Cerén", press release, UCA, June 2017. "Bukele y Wright ponen a madurar los frutos del árbol antipartidos", *El Faro*, 29 October 2017.

¹⁶ The judiciary is considered to be well-funded as it automatically receives 6 per cent of the national budget. On the contrary, the prosecutor's office and the police receive less generous funding and usually require alternative means of financing, such as foreign assistance. El Salvador National Council of the Judiciary, *Criminal Procedure Code of El Salvador commented, Volume I* (San Salvador, 2004), pp. 343-368. Crisis Group interviews, Rodolfo González, magistrate, El Salvador Supreme Court of Justice, San Salvador, 26 September 2017; Arnau Baulenas, lawyer, Central America University Institute of Human Rights (IDHUCA), San Salvador, 26 September 2017.

¹⁷ On the difficulties faced by forensic experts in El Salvador, see the account of efforts to disinter the mass grave found at the bottom of a well in Óscar Martínez, *A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America* (London, 2016), chapter 6. Around 95 per cent of judicial evidence is drawn from testimonies and comes primarily from protected witnesses (*criteriados*, in Spanish). Crisis Group interviews, judges, San Salvador, 12 July-31 August 2017. "La situación de la seguridad y la justicia 2009-2014", Central America University (UCA), 10 September 2014, p. 58.

¹⁸ "Fiscal general quiere una policía aparte de la PNC", *El Faro*, 13 July 2017.

¹⁹ Most low-ranking police officers have to live on around \$170 per month, just above the average cost of living of \$120 according to the official statistics institute of El Salvador (Dygestic). "Bono para 24,000 policías del nivel básico", National Civil Police press release, 4 March 2016. "Las fuerzas de seguridad son un barril de dinamita", *El Faro*, 7 March 2017. "El Salvador: Information Gathering Mission Report – Part 1", Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, September 2010.

become normal citizens, I feel vulnerable ... I just had a colleague killed this week during his time off", said one police officer on the El Salvador-Guatemala border.²⁰ Criminal groups reportedly killed 45 officers from 1 January to 6 December 2017.²¹

Originally designed in the peace accord to have a community-oriented role, the rising gang presence has increasingly pushed the police force toward methods based on armed raids in gang-affected communities as well as direct confrontation and firefights. These rose from 256 in 2014 to 676 in 2015, leaving 83 officers and 359 alleged criminals dead. Human rights groups argue this increase conceals a wave of extrajudicial killings, and presented this data to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in September 2017. Government authorities acknowledged there may be some cases of excesses or misconduct but said they were "personal decisions [by officers], not a state policy".²² However, several media outlets have published in-depth investigations of alleged massacres of suspected gang members, sexual abuse of minors and extortion.²³ Although the police monitors alleged abuses, and senior security authorities meet monthly with human rights representatives to discuss relevant cases, NGOs have denounced lack of accountability for officers suspected of abuse.²⁴

The burdens on the police have pushed the military towards deeper involvement in public security issues, converting its participation in anti-crime operations into a semi-permanent strategy. The Salvadoran army is the national institution with the highest public approval rating, and included around 24,800 active members in

²⁰ Although the government is supposed to give \$2,500 and pay all funerary costs as compensation to families of slain police officers, there are testimonies of widows who declared not having received any help from state institutions. Crisis Group interviews, police officers, El Salvador, August-September 2017. "Ser viuda de un policía es ser nada", *El Faro*, 22 October 2017.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking police officer, San Salvador, 26 September 2017. "Asesinados: 45 policías y militares en 2017", *El Diario de Hoy*, 13 December 2017.

²² Figures presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights indicated that for every policeman who died in armed clashes with gangs in 2016, 59 alleged gang members were killed. Crisis Group interviews, Verónica Reyna, officer, Servicio Social Pasionista, San Salvador, 7 June 2017; Arnau Baulenas, lawyer, Central America University Institute of Human Rights (IDHUCA), San Salvador, 26 September 2017. "Idhuca denunciará ejecuciones extrajudiciales ante la CIDH", *FACTUM*, 1 September 2017; "CIDH interpela a El Salvador por ejecuciones extrajudiciales", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 September 2017. On the issue of rising clashes, see "Nuevas Tendencias de los Patrones de Violencia en El Salvador (2010-2015)", Instituto Centroamericano de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo y el Cambio Social, August 2016, p. 8.

²³ The most notorious cases are: the killings of Cantón Pajales, in San Salvador department, in August 2015, when four suspected gang members who had arrest orders were allegedly shot at close range by the police and armed forces as they tried to escape, according to the official version; and the massacre in Finca San Blas, in the Western department of Santa Ana in March 2015, when seven unarmed alleged gang members and a non-gang suspect were supposedly attacked by the police. Although a September 2017 sentence declared there had been at least one extrajudicial killing in Finca San Blas, the accused officers were acquitted after the judge ruled there was not enough evidence to find them individually responsible. *FACTUM* online magazine also released an investigation in August 2017 based on WhatsApp conversations between members of an alleged elite death squad inside the police suspected of several homicides, sexual abuses and extortion. The police reacted promptly and started immediate prosecution of the suspected officers. "El juicio bufo de San Blas", *El Faro*, 22 September 2017; "Cinco muertes sin explicación", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 25 October 2015. "En la intimidación del escuadrón de la muerte de la policía", *FACTUM*, 22 August 2017.

²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, judges and human rights lawyers, San Salvador, August-September 2017.

2014.²⁵ It understands its security role as a temporary measure limited to following police orders. However, senior officers consider military involvement to have become normal procedure given the transformation of the gang phenomenon: “we operate in a grey area ... the criminal problem in this country has turned from a public security to a national security issue”.²⁶

Corruption is prevalent in Salvadoran judicial and security institutions, though this is also common in many Latin American countries. A total of 31 per cent of Salvadorans report having paid a bribe to access basic public services over the past year according to a 2017 Transparency International study, below other countries in the region such as Mexico (51) or Panama (38).²⁷ The lack of effective internal control mechanisms harms these bodies’ reputation. Accountability in most cases relies on the individual probity and political will of high-level officials, who themselves are chosen by a majority vote of the Legislative Assembly.²⁸ The case of former Attorney General Luis Martínez, detained by his successor Douglas Meléndez, illustrates alleged abuses of state power. Martínez was incarcerated in August 2016 on charges of conspiracy, litigation fraud and withholding evidence during his mandate, although he denies the accusations and so far has not been convicted of any crime.²⁹

At the end of the country’s penal process stands a prison system that is among the world’s most overcrowded.³⁰ Fourteen prisons house approximately 39,000 inmates, of whom 26,000 have been sentenced and 13,000 are remanded in custody. This includes prisoners in police detention stations, some of them converted into longer-term facilities due to lack of space. Roughly 600 officers and prison guards watch over the jail population, far below the ideal ratio of public officials to prisoners.³¹ Some jails have been placed under a state of emergency since early 2016, when the government imposed harsh new confinement conditions on gang members. El Salvador’s Human Rights Prosecutor and several NGOs have denounced “systematic human rights violations” in jails under the new measures.³² One prison officer described the

²⁵ “Legitimidad y confianza pública en la Policía en El Salvador”, Florida International University and Central American University, July 2017, p. 68. Jeanette Aguilar, “El rol del ejército en la seguridad interna de El Salvador: lo excepcional convertido en permanente” in *Re-conceptualización de la violencia en el Triángulo Norte* (San Salvador, 2016), p. 77.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking official, El Salvador ministry of defence, San Salvador, 29 August 2017.

²⁷ “People and Corruption: Latin America and the Caribbean”, Transparency International Report, 9 October 2017, p. 31.

²⁸ El Salvador constitution, op. cit.

²⁹ Martínez was detained along with businessman Enrique Rais and some of their collaborators on charges of justice fraud related to Rais’ business interests. “Ex-attorney general of El Salvador arrested on corruption charges”, EFE, 23 August 2016.

³⁰ According to the World Prison Brief, El Salvador’s has the third most overpopulated jail system in the world. With an occupancy level of 348.2 per cent by August 2016, it is one of the few countries in the world with jails exclusively dedicated to criminal groups. “World Prison Population List: Eleventh Edition”, World Prison Brief, 2 February 2016, p. 2.

³¹ Data from El Salvador penal system online database, accessed 26 September 2017. Crisis Group interviews, officers, El Salvador penitentiary system, 26 September 2017.

³² Due to run until March 2018, these measures include special jail regimes for gang members, suspension of transfer of inmates, restrictions on visits and blocking phone signals near jails. The government has denied the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to the affected jails.

sixth sector of Zacatecoluca prison, where the national leaders of the largest gangs are held, as follows: “[from that place] you either leave dead or demented ... it scared the hell out of me”.³³

C. Gang Violence and Homicide Rates

Gang violence is a regional phenomenon rooted in the countries of Central America's Northern Triangle, but which now has international reach. The largest, most violent groups are the MS-13 and the two factions of 18th Street gang (in Spanish *Barrio 18*), 18-Southerners and 18-Revolutionaries.³⁴ The origin of these groups, and the long history of rivalry among them, can be traced back to emigrant Central American communities in 1980s California. After mass deportations from the U.S. in the late 1990s, Salvadoran gangs adopted U.S. gang culture and identity, and pioneered the expansion of MS-13 and the 18th Street gang in the early 2000s.³⁵ These gangs have a worldwide presence of around 140,000 members, of whom 40,000 live in the U.S. and 100,000 are based in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and Italy.³⁶

1. The exceptional problem of gang violence in El Salvador

In light of El Salvador's size and population, the extent of gangs' territorial presence, as well as its armed power, has no equal anywhere in the world. The country has the largest number of active gang-members in the region, an estimated 60,000, which exceeds the approximately 52,000 Salvadoran police and military officers. The gang social support base rises to 500,000 people – almost 8 per cent of total population – including sympathisers and former members, or *calmados* (gang lexicon for those who have desisted from gang activities).³⁷

“Gobierno niega estar en guerra con pandillas”, *Diario Contrapunto*, 8 July 2015. Crisis Group interviews, local NGOs and ICRC personnel, San Salvador, March-September 2017. El Salvador Legislative Assembly, Transitory Decree No. 321, March 2016.

³³ Crisis Group interview, senior officer, El Salvador penitentiary system, San Salvador, 26 September 2017.

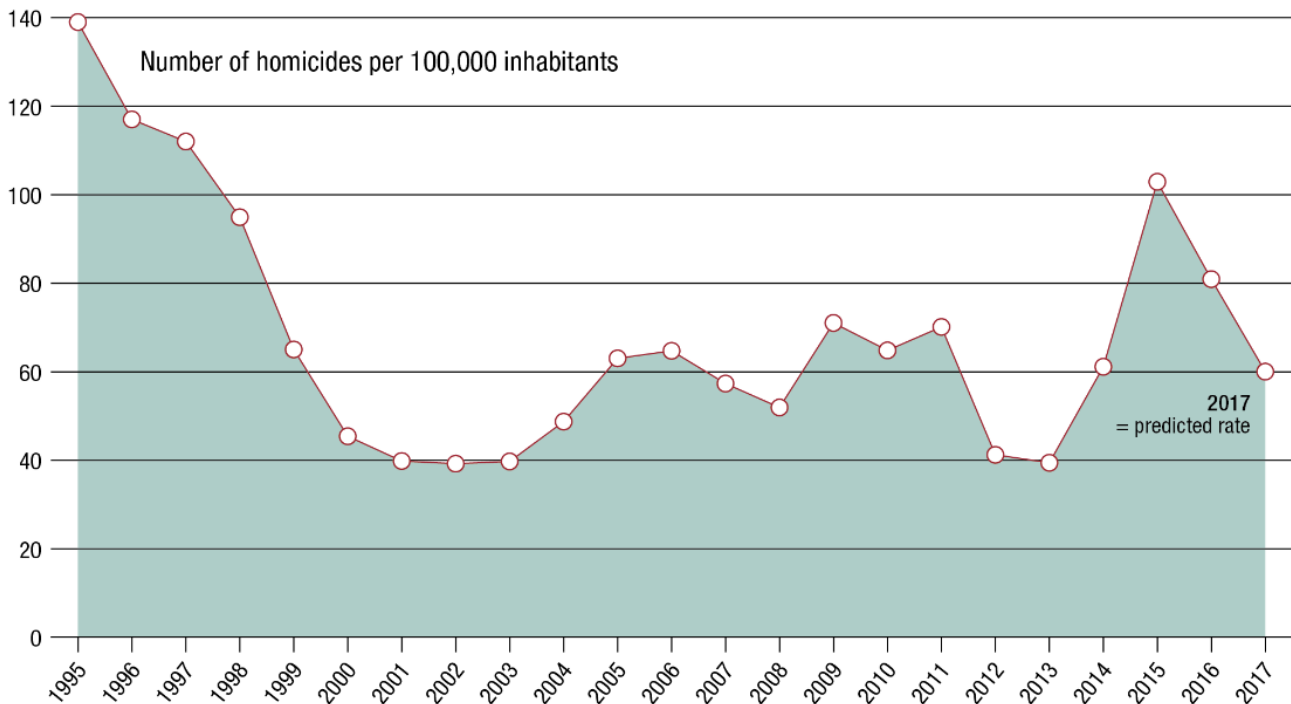
³⁴ The MS-13 is considered the largest and more vertical structure, followed by the 18-Southerners and 18-Revolutionaries. The two factions of the 18th Street gang split after 2004 and become rivals since then. Although the Salvadoran government says there are internal divisions in the MS-13, there is not enough evidence to confirm a fracture. Crisis Group interview, Roberto Valencia, journalist, San Salvador, 12 July 2017.

³⁵ José Miguel Cruz, “Beyond Social Remittances. Migration and Transnational Gangs in Central America”, in Susan Eckstein & Adil Najam (eds.), *How Migrants Impact Their Homelands* (Durham, 2013).

³⁶ Crisis Group Report, *Mafia of the Poor*, op. cit. “Pandillas: el origen del odio”, *El Faro*, 30 October 2017.

³⁷ There are three ways an active gang member can make a case to leave the group or *calmarse*: by joining an evangelical Christian church; demonstrating family responsibilities that are incompatible with gang life; and abandoning criminal activities. After leaving, members become a sort of gang reservist, and are eligible for specific and non-violent requests from the group. Crisis Group interviews, Raúl Mijango, gang truce mediator, San Salvador, 9 March 2017; Otto Argueta, Interpeace program coordinator, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

Figure 1: Homicide rates in El Salvador 1995-2017



Crisis Group, 2017. Data sources: National Civilian Police, UNDP and the World Bank.

The typical profile of a gang member in El Salvador is a young male around 25 years old, born to a low-income, often broken family, who joined the gang at the age of fifteen. According to a March 2017 survey of over 1,000 jailed gang affiliates, most members came from marginalised neighbourhoods, and 70 per cent lived on less than \$250 a month. The same study suggested that some 94 per cent do not have a secondary education; over 80 per cent have never held formal employment; and more than half come from families that had suffered a break-up.³⁸

The relationship between criminal activity and territorial presence is perhaps the most unique feature of the country's gang phenomenon. Gang revenues are drawn from extortion rackets and, to a lesser extent, drug-trafficking and sales. Gangs such as the MS-13 gain up to \$31.2 million per year from extorting 70 per cent of all the businesses in the territories where they are present, estimated at 247 out of the country's 262 municipalities.³⁹ Most of their victims are small- and medium-sized business-owners, informal tradespeople and transport workers.⁴⁰ Unlike their peers in Honduras, Salvadoran gangs do not have direct business control over parts of the

³⁸ "The New Face of Street Gangs: The Gang Phenomenon in El Salvador", Florida International University, 22 March 2017, pp. 21-22.

³⁹ "Killers on a shoestring: Inside the gangs of El Salvador", *The New York Times*, 20 November 2016.

⁴⁰ "Extorsiones a la pequeña y micro empresa en El Salvador", Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES), 23 June 2016, pp. 3-4.

drug trade, but have sub-contractual relationship with narco-traffickers, who employ them sporadically as muscle in some operations.⁴¹

The response from the Salvadoran state to the gang threat has triggered major transformations inside these organisations. After 4,000 gang members were jailed between 2004 and 2008 – and segregated by rival groups to avoid violent clashes – gang leaders began to centralise operations and behave more like traditional criminal bosses. According to Jeannette Aguilar, a Salvadoran academic: “the rise of the jail population [after the first] anti-gang plans ... enabled [these groups] to find in jails a suitable niche for their formalisation and institutionalisation, making jails their new spaces for territorial control”.⁴² El Salvador’s security policies in the 2000s, based on mass incarceration of suspected gang members, also helped gangs diversify their criminal activities – including extortion – by improving communication channels, and discouraging tattoos so as to avoid police identification.⁴³

A failed attempt at state-led indirect dialogue with gang leaders between 2012 and 2013 spurred the most recent transformation of Salvadoran gangs. The collapse of the truce led to “anarchy” inside gangs’ neighbourhood cells, or *clicas*, as leaders were isolated in maximum security prisons after the implementation of “extraordinary measures” in mid-2016. According to various sources, gangs have intensified violence against public officials and expanded their presence into rural areas.⁴⁴ Media investigations and testimony gathered by the prosecutor’s office suggest that, in the run-up to the 2014 presidential elections, ARENA and FMLN party bosses allegedly paid gangs \$350,000 in exchange for votes in territories under their control.⁴⁵

If true, the alleged deal – denied by both political parties – would point to gangs’ extraordinary power to influence electoral processes and threaten candidates. Some local authorities fear ties between gangs and parties could also impinge on voting in upcoming polls.⁴⁶ Many officials confirm in private that communication with gangs

⁴¹ “Organized Crime in El Salvador: The Homegrown and Transnational Dimensions”, Wilson Center, 11 August 2010, p. 8. Crisis Group interview, Raúl Mijango, gang truce mediator, San Salvador, 9 March 2017.

⁴² Jeannette Aguilar, “Los resultados contraproducentes de las políticas antipandillas”, ECA, Vol. 62, No. 708, p. 884.

⁴³ Steve Dudley, “Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras”, Woodrow Wilson Center, 1 May 2010, p. 84. Sonja Wolf, *Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador* (Austin, 2017), p. 12. Crisis Group interview, Carlos Martínez, journalist, San Salvador, 11 July 2017.

⁴⁴ “Hoy toca que los sedientos de sangre, los de las pandillas y los del gobierno, se sacien”, *El Faro*, 12 October 2015. Crisis Group interviews, Raúl Mijango, gang truce mediator, San Salvador, 9 March 2017; Mario Vega, evangelical preacher, San Salvador, 29 August 2017; grassroots NGO representatives, San Salvador, 30 August 2017.

⁴⁵ Released on 10 August, this testimony was from a former 18th Street gang known as “Nalo” – a protected witness of the general prosecutor’s office – and was part of the evidence presented in a trial against 22 individuals prosecuted for their involvement in the gang truce. Nalo accused specific FMLN and ARENA leaders of offering \$350,000 in cash to representatives of the MS-13 and the two factions of Barrio 18 in exchange for votes during the 2014 presidential elections, although both parties have repeatedly denied the accusations. “Relato de un fraude electoral, narrado por un pandillero”, *El Faro*, 11 August 2017.

⁴⁶ “Director PNC: pandillas van a coquetear con políticos de cara a elecciones”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 9 October 2017. Crisis Group interview, mayor, El Salvador, September 2017.

is inevitable: "Let's be honest: every single party in this country talks to gangs, how they would not, since they have to organise rallies in their territories?", said a veteran government official.⁴⁷

Although nowadays gangs appear more dangerous than ever, there are signs that a significant number of members would be willing to lay down arms. In January 2017, gangs released a joint communiqué a week before the 25th anniversary of the 1992 peace accords asking the government for a new dialogue process, and offering to disband.⁴⁸ According to the previously mentioned survey, nearly 70 per cent of jailed gang members have intentions of leaving the group. The authors said respondents commonly gave personal reasons, such as becoming parents, surviving an attack or the effect of a friend's or relative's murder.⁴⁹

2. Beyond homicide rates

With a murder rate of 103 per 100,000 people, El Salvador became in 2015 the country with the highest murder rate in the world.⁵⁰ This rise in homicides includes an increase in mass killings and femicides.⁵¹ According to a 2013 study by Fundaungo, a local think-tank, over half those killed between 2009 and 2012 were fifteen-34 years old; approximately 80 per cent of the victims were male; 70 per cent of the killings were carried out by firearms; and nearly 40 per cent took place in public spaces.⁵²

How many of these murders can be attributed to gang violence is in dispute. But by 2012, the predominant role of gang violence in the overall number of homicides had become much clearer. During the first months of negotiation with the gangs, killings fell by 40 per cent. This sudden drop suggested that by 2012 gang leaders had sufficient power over local branches to reduce killings sharply nationwide.⁵³ Disappearances have also become a grave concern, even though no public institution in El Salvador systematically tracks these cases: between 2010 and 2016, the prosecutor's office received 23,000 reports of disappearances, and the police 11,252.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, government official, San Salvador, 22 November 2017.

⁴⁸ The announcement was released on 9 January 2017 by El Faro digital news site a week before the 25th anniversary of the peace accords. It was followed by a rare day without a single homicide recorded on 11 January 2017. "MS-13 pide diálogo al gobierno y pone sobre la mesa su propia desarticulación", El Faro, 9 January 2017. "A remarkable event in El Salvador: A day without murder", *The New York Times*, 13 January 2017.

⁴⁹ "The New Face of Street Gangs", op. cit., pp. 4-8, 55.

⁵⁰ In comparison, other Latin American countries recorded much lower homicides rates in 2015, including Guatemala (29.5), Colombia (25.5) and Mexico (12.9). "Balance de InSight Crime sobre homicidios en Latinoamérica en 2015", InSight Crime, 15 January 2016.

⁵¹ Femicide is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "intentional murder of women because they are women". Mass killings increased by 126 per cent between 2010 and 2015, and femicides by 750 per cent between 2012 and 2015 according to the study "Nuevas Tendencias de los Patrones de Violencia", op. cit., p. 7. "Understanding and addressing violence against women", WHO, 2012.

⁵² "Atlas de la violencia en El Salvador (2009-2012)", Fundaungo, November 2013, pp. 14-15.

⁵³ Charles M. Katz, E.C. Hedberg and Luis Enrique Amaya, "Gang truce for violence prevention, El Salvador", World Health Organization, 1 June 2016, p. 1.

⁵⁴ "Más de 23,000 desaparecidos en los últimos siete años", *El Diario de Hoy*, 20 March 2017. Crisis Group interviews, San Salvador, July-September 2017.

D. Criminal Violence and Migration

Central America is afflicted by a humanitarian crisis that has spread to the U.S. and Mexico. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers from the three countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) has seen nearly a tenfold increase since 2011 according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In 2016, UNHCR estimated that there were 164,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador combined, as well as 450,000 irregular crossings from these countries to Mexico. Since 2015, Mexico and Costa Rica have experienced a steep increase in asylum requests from Northern Triangle migrants.⁵⁵ While migration in Central America has historically been tied to the search for economic opportunity, the recent spike in undocumented migration owes much to the flight from criminal violence. According to a May 2017 survey by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), nearly 40 per cent of asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle in Mexico mentioned direct attacks from criminal groups as a reason for fleeing.⁵⁶

The scope of the humanitarian emergency in El Salvador is hard to measure given the lack of official data on the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) – itself a reflection of the government's refusal to recognise this phenomenon even though the Supreme Court of Justice and the human rights prosecutor have officially acknowledged it.⁵⁷ While many factors explain this refusal, the high domestic political cost ranks as the most relevant. Human rights groups insist that the state's attitude means victims may go unattended, while NGOs are obliged to set up ad hoc protection mechanisms.⁵⁸ Some government officials also regret the lack of official recognition of this issue, but at the same time claim ongoing police efforts to protect victims is not appreciated either.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Since 2015, asylum applications from Northern Triangle migrants have increased 156 per cent in Mexico and 319 per cent in Costa Rica. "NTCA Situation Update", UNHCR, February 2017.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group Latin America Report N°57, *Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration*, 28 July 2016. "Forzados a huir del Triángulo Norte de América Central: Una crisis humanitaria olvidada", MSF report, May 2017.

⁵⁷ Salvadoran public institutions refer to this phenomenon as "people affected by the crime of illegal limitation of freedom of circulation" (in Spanish, *delito de limitación ilegal a la libertad de circulación*, or LILIC). El Salvador's Human Rights Prosecutor Office nevertheless recorded only 427 victims of internal displacement between January 2014 and March 2016. "Informe de Registro de la Procuraduría de DDHH sobre desplazamiento forzado", El Salvador Human Rights Prosecutor's Office, August 2016; "Sala ordena adoptar medidas para proteger a familias acosadas por pandillas", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 October 2017. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers, San Salvador, March-August 2017.

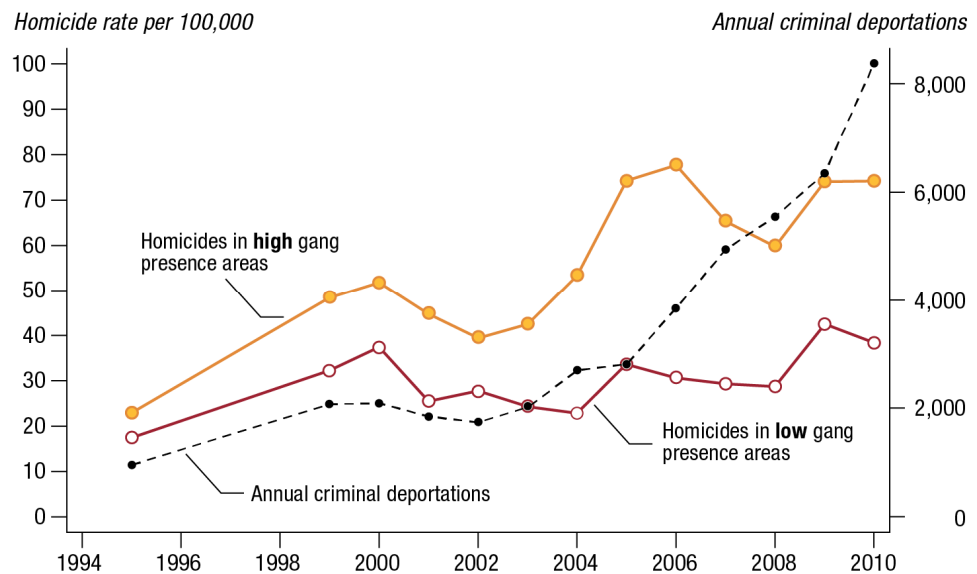
⁵⁸ Honduras is the only country in the Northern Triangle that recognises internal displacement. In a visit to El Salvador in early August, the UN special rapporteur on IDPs also criticised the lack of recognition of this issue. "Statement on the conclusion of the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on IDPs", Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 18 August 2017. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers, San Salvador, March-August 2017; San Pedro Sula, 27 October 2017.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, government official, San Salvador, 24 November 2017.

III. Deportation and Gangs: The Spillover of Insecurity

U.S. migration policies in the 1990s exacted a heavy toll on El Salvador. Between 1998 and 2014, U.S. authorities deported almost 300,000 immigrants with criminal records to Central America. In El Salvador specifically, deportations between 1996 and 2002 led to the return of thousands of Salvadoran gang members who had fled their homeland during the war.⁶⁰ Although U.S. policies sought to curb criminal activity by breaking up Los Angeles gangs, the long-term effect was an increase in violence across Central America and particularly El Salvador. When U.S. deportation figures and homicide data from El Salvador police are compared, the rise in killings that followed mass criminal deportations stands out, especially in areas with higher gang presence. This strong correlation between U.S. deportations and homicide rates in the receiving country suggests some sort of causal link between the two (see figure 2 for the trend lines in murder rates and criminal deportations).⁶¹

Figure 2: Homicide rates in municipalities with low and high gang presence and yearly criminal deportations from the U.S.



Source: National Civilian Police and U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Salvadoran authorities now fear a fresh wave of mass deportations. Initial action and rhetoric indicates that U.S. President Trump's administration does not regard Central American migration so much as a flight from insecurity but rather as a conduit for greater violence in the U.S. Migration control and tough measures against gangs, above all the MS-13, have become matters of paramount importance. Indeed, Salvadoran gangs have received unprecedented attention from top-level U.S. officials,

⁶⁰ "National Policies and the Rise of Transnational Gangs", Migration Policy Institute, 1 April 2006.

⁶¹ See Appendix B for more detailed information on statistical correlation between U.S. deportations and El Salvador criminality. On the basis of U.S. and El Salvador official data, evidence also points to the long-term spillover effects of deportations to El Salvador, which fuels child migration back to the U.S.

including a visit by Attorney General Jeff Sessions to El Salvador in late July.⁶² Tellingly, in the first months of Trump's mandate, undocumented migrant detentions increased 38 per cent while the administration began winding down protection schemes for minors such as the Central American Minors (CAM) and the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA).⁶³

The most critical decision for El Salvador is now the prospective termination in March 2018 of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 195,000 of its nationals living in the U.S., none of whom can be considered criminals since they have registered and reported regularly to U.S. authorities for more than fifteen years, and have not been found to have violated national laws. More than 80 per cent are employed.⁶⁴ Yet according to the U.S. State Department, Central Americans "no longer need to be shielded from deportation".⁶⁵

The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and El Salvador's close ties to Venezuela have complicated the country's search for regional allies as it faces a hostile U.S. administration. Along with its Northern Triangle neighbours, El Salvador has become a Mexican bargaining chip in the NAFTA talks, as Mexico seeks to gain Washington's sympathy and support by stressing its role as a buffer state able to both control undocumented migration along its southern border and foster economic development in Central America.⁶⁶ The FMLN's relations with Venezuela's ruling party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), also have lumped El Salvador together with the small number of Latin American countries still supportive of Caracas.⁶⁷

⁶² Migration helps President Trump to connect with the basis of his electorate. He has repeatedly justified the need for tougher border controls through the spread of gangs such as MS-13. In a 23 October statement, Sessions designated the gang a priority for the U.S. Justice Department. "Jeff Sessions makes MS-13 a priority for drug enforcement task forces", CBS News, 23 October 2017. "MS-13 is Trump's public enemy No.1, but should it be?", CNN, 29 April 2017.

⁶³ For context on the DACA and CAM, please refer to: "Trump Administration Rescinds DACA, Fueling Renewed Push in Congress and the Courts to Protect DREAMers", Migration Policy Institute, 15 September 2017.

⁶⁴ TPS has been extended for some months to Honduras and cancelled for Haiti (albeit with an eighteen-month delay) and Nicaragua (with a twelve-month delay). "Las detenciones migratorias se disparan en Estados Unidos", *The New York Times*, 19 May 2017; "Trump administration ends temporary protection for Haitians", *The New York Times*, 20 November 2017; "DHS ends protected immigration status for Nicaraguans, but Hondurans get extension", *The Washington Post*, 6 November 2017; Warren, R. and Kerwin D., "A Statistical and Demographic Profile of the U.S. TPS Populations from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti", *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, July 2017.

⁶⁵ "Protected status no longer justified for Central Americans and Haitians in U.S., State Dept. says", *The Washington Post*, 3 November 2017.

⁶⁶ Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray has explicitly warned that cooperation with the U.S. in security and migration control would be harmed by an unsatisfactory result in NAFTA renegotiations. "México advierte que reducirá la cooperación en seguridad y migración si Trump rompe el TLC", *El País*, 13 November 2017.

⁶⁷ El Salvador Foreign Minister Hugo Martínez played an important role during the debate on Venezuela in the June 2017 Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly in Mexico. His speech gave Venezuelan diplomats enough time to lobby against resolutions condemning the government of President Nicolás Maduro. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Cancún, Mexico, 19-21 June 2017. El Salvador also refused to sign the 8 August 2017 Lima Declaration condemning the authoritarianism

IV. The Evolution of Security Policies

Law enforcement campaigns based on mass captures and joint operations by police and the armed forces are common denominators of anti-gang policies over the last fifteen years. However, the gangs' rapid evolution has outpaced the rigid policy approaches developed in response.

A. *Mano Dura*

Between 1992 and 1999, the ARENA governments of Alfredo Cristiani and Armando Calderón Sol sought to consolidate the peace accords. With UN support, they undertook landmark security reforms, such as creation of a new civilian police force, separation of the intelligence service from the military, establishment of a human rights prosecutor and major changes to the armed forces' mandate and size.⁶⁸ These swift transformations, along with a sudden peak in post-war violence, hindered the state's response to record criminal violence in the early 1990s, with 131 killings per 100,000 inhabitants in 1994.⁶⁹

After a steady fall in homicides in the ensuing years, U.S. deportations appear to have contributed to rapid gang expansion in the late 1990s. President Francisco Flores (1999-2004), also from ARENA, launched the first anti-gang plans in El Salvador in 2003, through the "Iron Fist Plan" (*Plan Mano Dura*) and Anti-gang Bill.⁷⁰ Both plans were announced eight months before the 2004 presidential election, suggesting to many observers that they were in essence electorally-driven strategies.⁷¹ The "Iron Fist Plan" was launched in October 2003, and included joint operations by the police and the military known as "anti-gang task forces". The Anti-gang Bill, approved in December 2003, provided a temporary legal framework for the plan, criminalising gang membership and allowing detention of underage suspects.⁷²

ARENA again won the elections in 2004, and President Antonio Saca (2004-2009) launched the "Super Iron Fist Plan" (*Plan Súper Mano Dura*), continuing his prede-

of the Venezuelan government, instead attending a meeting in Caracas in support of Maduro on the same day. "Cancilleres de América aíslan a la Venezuela que se olvidó de la democracia", *El Faro*, 8 August 2017.

⁶⁸ Chapultepec Agreement, 1992.

⁶⁹ This peak of homicides is related to post-war violence, the high number of arms in circulation, and the limited response capacity of judicial and security institutions during the reform process. José Miguel Cruz, Luis Armando González, Luis Ernesto Romano, and Elvio Sisti, "De la guerra al delito: evolución de la violencia en El Salvador" in *Asalto al desarrollo: violencia en América Latina* (Washington, 2000), pp. 173-205.

⁷⁰ Mo Hume, "Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs", *Development in Practice*, Vol. 17, N°6, November 2007, pp. 49-53.

⁷¹ This was confirmed by at least two interviewees close to ARENA. A leaked memo from the party also linked the launch of these anti-gang policies to the need for public support in the 2014 elections. "ARENA a pescar votos con el Plan Antimaras", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 August 2003. Crisis Group interviews, current and former ARENA officials, San Salvador, June-July 2017.

⁷² The Anti-gang Bill was declared unconstitutional on 1 April 2004. On the same day, the National Assembly approved a new law with a different name that included the same articles as the quashed bill. Mo Hume, "Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs", op. cit., pp. 49-50.

cessor's approach while incorporating prevention and rehabilitation plans.⁷³ His two initiatives – “Helping Hand” (*Mano Amiga*) and “Extended Hand” (*Mano Extendida*) – identified priority communities and targeted at-risk youth and jailed gang members with special programs. However, lack of investment, delays in implementation and the low number of participants minimised their impact.⁷⁴

A continuous rise in violence led President Saca to relaunch his anti-gang efforts with a focus on strengthening police presence in violent hotspots and dismantling extortion rackets, an important source of gang income by that time.⁷⁵ But the large number of captures – 30,934 in two years – did not result in more convictions. Around 84 per cent of those detained were released by Salvadoran judges due to flimsy evidence of gang affiliation, as well as legal inconsistencies between the recently created anti-gang laws and existing legislation on minors.⁷⁶

B. *The Truce*

Former TV anchor and FMLN standard-bearer Mauricio Funes won the presidential election in 2009 and kick-started parallel prevention and repressive anti-crime campaigns. Funes' government launched the first national violence prevention strategies between 2010 and 2013, which aimed to reduce the effects of criminal activity through actions targeted at the general public, people at risk and convicts.⁷⁷ The strategies nevertheless proved to be little more than declarations of good intentions.⁷⁸ The Funes administration simultaneously intensified joint police and military operations and approved the Gang Proscription Law in September 2010.⁷⁹

⁷³ For the design of the “Super Iron Fist Plan”, President Saca followed the recommendations of a group of policymakers, NGO representatives and international community members who between June-July 2004 agreed on a series of security initiatives that included reform on legislation related to juvenile offenders. José Miguel Cruz and Marlon Carranza, “Pandillas y políticas públicas: El caso de El Salvador” in *Juventudes, violencia y exclusión: Desafíos para las políticas públicas* (Guatemala City, 2006), pp. 133-171.

⁷⁴ “Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment”, USAID, April 2006, p. 54. Mo Hume, “Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs”, op. cit., pp. 54-57.

⁷⁵ These initiatives were part of a renewed version of the “Super Iron Fist Plan” in mid-2006, and Plan “Sarissa” on May 2007. “El Gobierno de Saca reajustará el plan ‘Súper Mano Dura’ para reducir la delincuencia”, Europa Press, 17 January 2006. “Sarissa, la punta contra los homicidios”, *Contrapunto*, 24 April 2008.

⁷⁶ Cruz and Carranza, “Pandillas y políticas públicas: El caso de El Salvador”, op. cit., pp. 162-164.

⁷⁷ “Violence prevention” is a concept that comes from the field of health, and comprises various levels. Primary prevention includes a wide variety of actions, such as building soccer fields or organising social workshops in violence-affected communities; secondary prevention is directed to people at risk, and may include coaching boys living in gang-controlled areas; an example of tertiary prevention would be a job placement program for inmates. “Violence Prevention: The Evidence”, World Health Organisation report, 2010.

⁷⁸ These plans were coordinated by the new Institute of Youth (INJUVE) which replaced two institutions that previously coordinated prevention programs: the National Council on Public Security, in existence since 1996, and the Secretary of Youth, created in 2004. “Systematisation of Public Policies, Programmes and Projects on Violence Prevention and Public Security 2003-2013”, FUSADES internal discussion document, July 2014.

⁷⁹ During the Funes administration the armed forces gained significant powers. The government passed seven decrees between 2008-2009 authorising military officers to participate in police oper-

With the number of killings again reaching historic highs – 4,354 people were murdered in 2011 – Funes and his security cabinet changed tack, initiating an indirect dialogue with gang leaders to reduce killings in exchange for better conditions in jails. The process, known as the “gang truce”, was in essence a ceasefire agreement between the largest gangs starting in March 2012 after the government transferred some of their leaders from maximum security prisons to less restrictive facilities. General Munguía Payés, who was then minister of justice and public security and one of the strongest supporters of the process, appointed Fabio Colindres, head of the military bishopric, and former FMLN combatant Raúl Mijango as mediators, leading to frequent meetings with gang members and a drastic decrease in homicide rates.⁸⁰

However, lack of broad public and political support contributed to the end of the de facto truce. The FMLN and ARENA distanced themselves from negotiations, and were sceptical as to their impact on homicides, as were a majority of Salvadorans. Not even President Funes publicly admitted that the truce was official state policy. The truce started to collapse in 2013 after the Supreme Court declared that it was unconstitutional for a military officer to be in charge of the civilian police force, and Munguía Payés returned to his former post as defence minister.⁸¹ His successor, Ricardo Perdomo, declared in his first week in office that the government was not engaged in dialogue with the gangs.⁸² By the end of this process, in the second half of 2013, killings skyrocketed again, while gang extortion and recruitment, which had remained stable during the truce, increased afterwards.⁸³

C. *New Measures*

Sánchez Cerén, also from the FMLN, narrowly won the presidency in 2014 and the onset of his tenure was marked by deteriorating security.⁸⁴ In early 2015, his administration launched joint military and police rapid-reaction forces and approved so-called “extraordinary measures” in March 2016. The government has also sought to target gang finances under the aegis of “Operation Jaque” in July 2017 and “Operación Tecana” in September 2017.⁸⁵

Although the focus of Sánchez Cerén’s security policies has been law enforcement, violence prevention initiatives also made some headway under the “Safe El Salvador”

ations, with the number of soldiers involved rising from 1,975 in 2008 to 6,500 in 2009. Jeanette Aguilar, “El rol del ejército en la seguridad interna de El Salvador”, op. cit., pp. 74-77.

⁸⁰ The loss of power by President Funes and his disconnection from the FMLN during the second half of his mandate gave greater decision-making capacity to key officials such as General Munguía Payés. Crisis Group interviews, Jeanette Aguilar, director of IUDOP, San Salvador, 22 February 2017; Raúl Mijango, gang truce mediator, San Salvador, 9 March 2017. Charles M. Katz, E. C. Hedberg and Luis Enrique Amaya, “Gang truce for violence prevention, El Salvador”, op. cit.

⁸¹ “Los salvadoreños y salvadoreñas evalúan la situación del país a finales de 2012”, IUDOP press release, 12 December 2012. Teresa Whitfield, “Mediating criminal violence: Lessons from the gang truce in El Salvador”, Oslo Forum papers, June 2013, pp. 12-13.

⁸² “Perdomo se desmarca de la tregua de pandillas”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 29 May 2013.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, San Salvador, July-August 2017.

⁸⁴ “Confirman triunfo de Sánchez Cerén en las elecciones presidenciales de El Salvador”, Univisión noticias, 13 March 2014.

⁸⁵ “Presentan a detenidos por Operación Tecana y los llevan a tribunal”, EFE, 10 September 2017.

plan.⁸⁶ Implementation came in various phases, starting in municipalities affected by higher levels of violence. Costing around \$200 million per year, the plan is financed by international cooperation funds and an earmarked tax approved in November 2015. Of the \$93 million collected in 2017 from these special taxes, around 70 per cent went to financing the police and the armed forces.⁸⁷

The merits of the new strategy have been disputed, as have its alleged accompanying human rights violations in the last two years.⁸⁸ Total homicides fell by 20 per cent from 2015 to 2016, and government officials had estimated another 27 per cent drop by the end of 2017.⁸⁹ However, this foreseen reduction has not been sustained, nor has the general public noted a significant fall in violence.⁹⁰ The second half of 2017 witnessed an uptick in violence, including 887 murders between September and October 2017.⁹¹ In a stunning admission, a senior government official said that authorities were “fighting a war that cannot be won”.⁹²

⁸⁶ The plan was the work of the UN-backed National Council of Citizen Security and Coexistence (CNSCC), the members of which included a wide variety of political and civil society representatives. The plan has five axes: prevention, attention to victims, law enforcement, rehabilitation, and institutional strengthening. “Plan El Salvador Seguro”, CNSCC, 2015. Crisis Group interview, government official, 22 November 2017.

⁸⁷ In October 2015, the assembly approved two special taxes to finance the security plans: the “Law for Big Contributors”, which charges 5 per cent on individuals or companies that earn over \$500,000 annually, and the “Law on Special Contributions”, which applies a 5 per cent tax on all telecommunication services. The government committed to investing 73 per cent of the money collected in prevention. “Consejo reclama al Gobierno por uso de fondos para seguridad”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 11 October 2017.

⁸⁸ “Informe preliminar sobre el impacto de las medidas extraordinarias para combatir la delincuencia, en el ámbito de los derechos humanos”, El Salvador Human Rights General Prosecutor, July 2017.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, journalists and human rights activists, San Salvador, June–November 2017. “Seguridad calcula que necesita cinco años para ganar terreno a pandillas”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 November 2017.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, government official, San Salvador, 22 November 2017.

⁹¹ “El Salvador registró 452 asesinatos en octubre”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 2 November 2017. “Más de 400 homicidios en septiembre”, *Contrapunto*, 2 October 2017.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, San Salvador, 29 August 2017.

V. Critical Flaws in Security Policies

For the past fifteen years, El Salvador's security policies have struggled to contain the gang problem, which puts enormous pressure on the country's institutions. Lack of adequate investment or qualified personnel has undermined prevention initiatives, putting the onus on more aggressive forms of policing. Residents in gang-controlled areas – especially women and children – pay the highest price as a result of the current escalation of violence.

A. Public Policies and Institutional Weakness

The National Civil Police, which spearheads implementation of anti-gang policies, has been profoundly affected both by the tide of gang violence and by the policies chosen to respond to it. Officers argue that the police has become the favoured institution to lead the fight against crime, but that it cannot fulfil its role without support from other government institutions.⁹³ The state response to the rise of targeted killings and armed confrontations with gangs in recent years has focused on small increases in wages, while much-needed support to families of deceased officers and permanent protection mechanisms have been absent, mostly due to financial constraints rather than a lack of political will.⁹⁴ Allegations of abuse by the police have also received limited attention. Although the police has a relatively efficient internal control unit, it lacks the personnel required to process the growing number of allegations against officers.⁹⁵

In the context of generic institutional weakness, the armed forces, which continue to count on broad public support, remain the favoured option to combat gang violence. However, military support to police efforts has expanded without a legal framework determining the military's specific role in public security. According to the Salvadoran constitution, its role is strictly circumscribed to foreign threats, reflecting the de-militarisation of public security that was one of the pillars of the peace accords.⁹⁶ The use of executive decrees over the last decade to normalise its role has put this institution into a legal limbo.

Judicial efforts to prosecute suspected criminals are constrained by the lack of a solid body of legislation to combat gang violence and of forensic evidence to try culprits. The Anti-gang Bill (2003) and its 2004 successor included a broad range of features that could be used to determine membership in an "illicit association". In the following years, prosecutors and police applied the law by rounding up 30,934 suspected gang members, but the courts only sent to prison around 15 per cent of those captured.⁹⁷ Recent legislation has not changed this trend: according to one judge on the criminal circuit, evidence presented in court is still often highly circumstantial.⁹⁸

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking police officer, San Salvador, 26 September 2017.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, government officials, San Salvador, 10-14 July 2017. "Ser viuda de un policía", op. cit.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Arnau Baulenas, lawyer, Central America University Institute of Human Rights (IDHUCA), San Salvador, 26 September 2017.

⁹⁶ El Salvador constitution, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Cruz and Carranza, "Pandillas y políticas públicas: El caso de El Salvador", op. cit., pp. 162-164.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, judge, San Salvador, 31 August 2017.

B. *Violence Prevention and Its Limits*

As illustrated by data on El Salvador's public spending on security, comparatively little is invested in prevention. From 2008 to 2014, the annual budget for justice and security rose by \$120.2 million annually, to reach \$775 million a year, equivalent to about 3 per cent of annual GDP in 2014.⁹⁹ Some 44 per cent of the 2011 security budget was invested in the police and justice ministry, 31 per cent in the judiciary, and only 1 per cent on prevention.¹⁰⁰ The current allocation of funds is similar: though the government has committed to investing over two-thirds of the special security taxes on prevention, in reality it allocates less than 40 per cent.¹⁰¹

Whereas all recent governments have admitted the need for a holistic approach to combating gang violence and its root causes, preventive strategies have tended to feature more on paper than in practice. El Salvador's highly competitive two-party system steers policymakers toward measures that are politically and electorally appealing rather than those that address the multiple causes behind the gang phenomenon. Public fatigue, chronic violence and demands for punishment favour such coercive approaches.¹⁰² An FMLN security adviser identified the lack of political will and public outrage as the main difficulties in promoting alternative security measures: "people fall in love with repression".¹⁰³

Security officials maintain that prevention plans "are the most important" aspects of anti-crime policy but fear they do not produce quick, tangible results. They also are concerned that these results cannot easily translate into either electoral support or attract sustainable funding. In this respect, the challenges faced by the Salvadoran government are not unique and affect other Latin American countries confronting high levels of violent crime. Authorities tend to avoid the political risks and uncertainties of combating criminality and its root causes by handing the security forces discretionary power to tackle the problem.¹⁰⁴

In the context of chronic insecurity, crime experts likewise question whether violence prevention initiatives can have a notable impact. The head of a NGO said, "the [social] disintegration [in El Salvador] is such that [prevention] programs are not sufficient ... [decision-makers] look away when you explain to them that this repression-prevention duality does not work".¹⁰⁵ Both ARENA and FMLN members

⁹⁹ "Aumento de recursos y algunos resultados en seguridad y justicia, 2008-2015", FUSADES report, February 2016, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰¹ In response to criticism for failing to spend more on violence prevention, Minister of Justice and Public Security Mauricio Landaverde stated 31 October that a different allocation of funds would depend on a more stable security situation. "Ministro admite que Gobierno prioriza recursos para represión", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 11 October 2017.

¹⁰² A July 2017 survey by the Central American University (UCA) showed 40 per cent of respondents were in favour of torturing criminals, and 34.6 per cent approved of extrajudicial killings as a means to combat gangs. "Legitimidad y confianza pública de la policía en El Salvador", op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, FMLN security advisor, San Salvador, 13 July 2017.

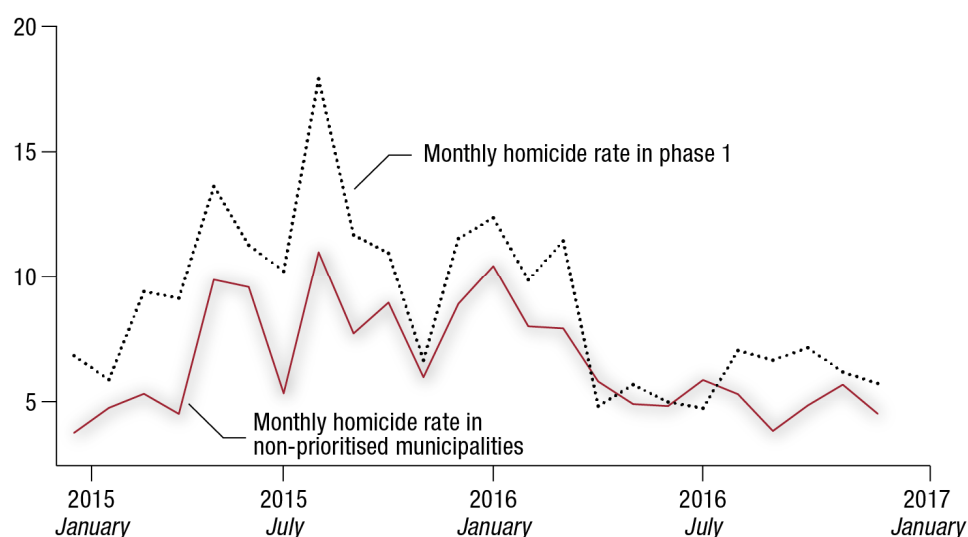
¹⁰⁴ See remarks by Argentine security expert Marcelo Sain in "Marcelo Sain: 'Patricia Bullrich da más para gerenta del Cirque du Soleil que para ministra de Seguridad'", *Política Argentina*, 28 August 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Remarks by president of NGO Fundación Forever Alejandro Gutman in an October 2017 interview "Hay cero posibilidades de que las pandillas se debiliten con el modelo actual de prevención", *El Faro*, 25 October 2017.

referred to the ways ongoing repressive measures undermine alternative policies, with some arguing that “in this context, it [prevention] doesn’t work”.¹⁰⁶

Lukewarm support for prevention initiatives and resort to traditional coercive policing methods also explain the limited impact until now of the “Safe El Salvador” plan. Although it is true that prioritised municipalities have seen a reduction in homicides of up to 60 per cent, statistically murder rates in the plan’s target municipalities have remained quite similar to those in other locations since December 2015, when the plan was first launched. This is illustrated in figure 3 below, which shows similar patterns both in prioritised municipalities under the “Safe El Salvador” plan and non-prioritised municipalities.¹⁰⁷

Figure 3: Homicides rates in municipalities prioritised by Plan Safe El Salvador versus homicide rates in non-prioritised municipalities



Source: National Civilian Police and U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

C. *Lack of Employment Opportunities and Increasing Poverty*

El Salvador’s sluggish economic performance and worsening fiscal conditions have impeded job creation for young men hailing from marginalised areas. According to the IMF, the country’s growth – on average 1.9 per cent between 2010 and 2016 – was one of the slowest in the Central American region, a reality it attributed to “crime, outward migration, consumption bias, and low savings”.¹⁰⁸ The current budget deficit stands at around 3 per cent of GDP, and public debt is expected to reach 61 per cent of GDP by the end of 2017. Some 25 per cent of Salvadorans aged fifteen-24 are neither working nor studying.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, FMLN and ARENA members, San Salvador, 10-14 July 2017.

¹⁰⁷ This plan has been implemented in different phases, with each phase representing a different set of municipalities. The periods of are as follows: phase one, including the most violent areas, started in November 2015; phase two between December 2016 and July 2017; and phase three in November 2017. “Plan Safe El Salvador”, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ “IMF Country Report No.16/209”, 1 June 2016, p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ Rafael De Hoyos, Anna Popova, and Halsey Rogers, “Out of school and out of work: a diagnostic of *ninis* in Latin America”, World Bank report, 2016, p. 8.

Although unemployed youth are more vulnerable to gang recruitment,¹¹⁰ there are few public policies aimed at promoting training and generating employment for young people. According to the 2017 Florida International University study, only 36 per cent of gang members interviewed have ever received professional training. Of those that did, nearly 70 per cent were trained in manual work. Gang members' aspirations, however, are considerably higher, with over 40 per cent wishing to join a profession or become an entrepreneur.¹¹¹

El Salvador also suffers persistently high poverty rates that increased between 2014 and 2015, mostly in urban areas.¹¹² This has made implementation of prevention programs even harder, since officials tend to find that demands expressed by residents in marginalised communities are geared more to basic needs or food than improved public spaces or enhanced community facilities. "I arrived in a prioritised community where I went to give a talk on peacebuilding, and I realised how far from reality we were when people told me they didn't even have drinking water", explained an official from San Miguel municipality in charge of implementing "Safe El Salvador".¹¹³

D. *El Salvador's Social Fabric: The Unaddressed Root Causes*

The most important flaw in security policies is their failure to address living conditions in gang-controlled communities. Social anomie, the victimisation of youth and women, and a climate of constant fear and suspicion help explain both the resilience of gangs and how well-intentioned policies fail to affect realities on the ground.

1. Gang control and community bonds

There is a consensus among the highest security authorities in El Salvador on the need to reestablish state territorial control as the prelude to improving security. In some areas, gangs have accumulated so much power that they have become de facto custodians of these localities, setting up road-blocks, supervising everyday life and imposing their own law.¹¹⁴ "Gangs did not steal the territory from the state, they simply occupied it when it was empty [after the armed conflict]", explained one NGO worker.¹¹⁵

At the same time, vigilante activity has become a common threat, especially in areas with major gang presence. These patrols are formed by civilians, some of them war veterans, who seek to stop the entrance of gang members in their territory. No public policy of the past fifteen years has sought to restrict these groups, or reduce their potential harm. Vigilantism has even been promoted by lawmakers such as the President of the Legislative Assembly Guillermo Gallegos, who has admitted financing

¹¹⁰ Isabel Rosales, "Against All Odds: Youth in Post-War Societies. The Case of El Salvador", German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 2016, p. 6.

¹¹¹ "The New Face of Street Gangs", op. cit., pp. 20-21.

¹¹² "The World Bank in El Salvador", World Bank website. Last accessed 14 December 2017.

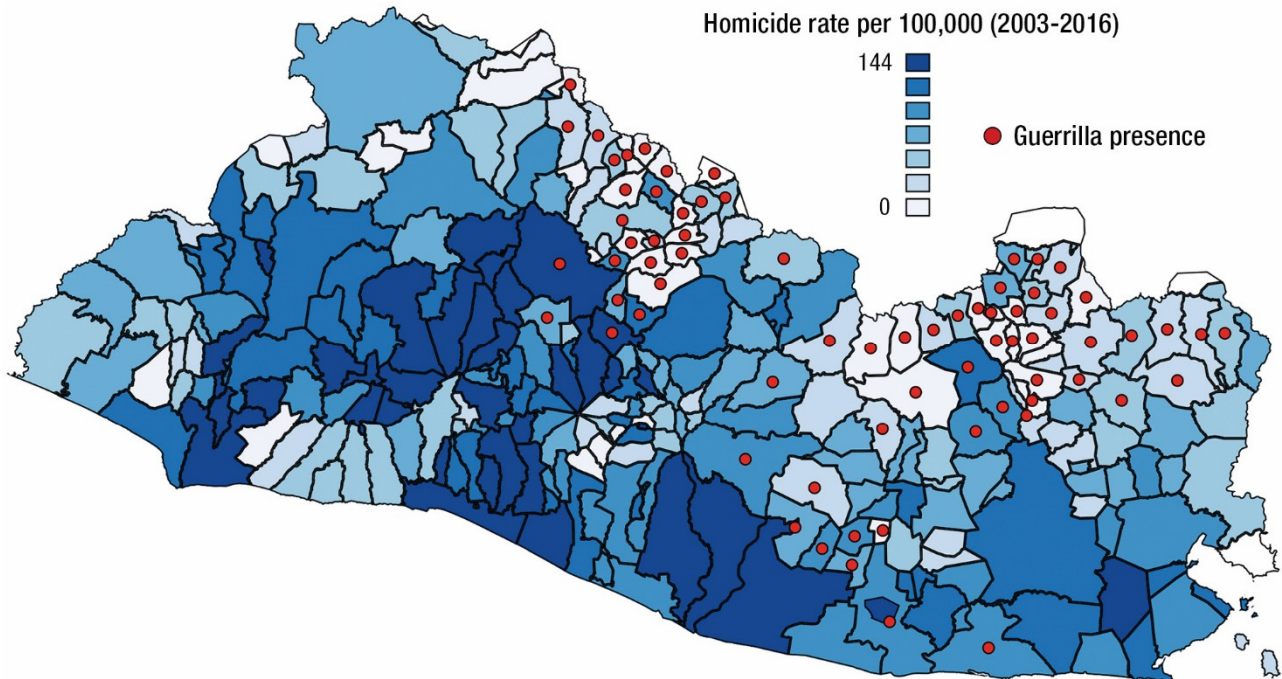
¹¹³ Crisis Group interviews, San Miguel and San Salvador, June-September 2017.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Carlos Martínez, El Faro journalist, 11 July 2017.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Otto Argueta, Interpeace program coordinator, Guatemala City, 6 February 2017.

some of these groups.¹¹⁶ Gruesome pictures of slain alleged criminals appear regularly in social media accounts attributed to these groups, whose followers “celebrate the elimination of gang members”.¹¹⁷

Figure 4: Guerrilla presence in 1982 and average homicide rates 2003-2016



Source: El Salvador National Civil Police; historical map from Cornell University PJ Mode “Collection of Persuasive Cartography” indicating the areas of control by FMLN guerrilla in 1982.

In general, areas with strong social and community bonds have seen far less gang expansion. While there are no empirical studies decisively proving the link, the map in figure 4 suggests a significant correlation. Taking the strength of the insurgency during the civil war as a proxy for social cohesion (since guerrillas depended on strong communal ties and collective mobilisation), the map shows that in 2015 districts where the insurgency had been strong had relatively few homicides in comparison with districts where the insurgency was weak.¹¹⁸

Previous studies have pointed to how a lack of community ties underpinned the expansion of gang control in parts of Central America, and how the presence of these groups proceeded to further undermine social cohesion. Whereas organised commu-

¹¹⁶ “Diputado financia armas para autodefensa de comunidad de Zacatecoluca”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 May 2017.

¹¹⁷ Carlos A. Rosales and Anna Leonor Morales, “The re-emergence of social cleansing in El Salvador”, *Open Democracy*, 20 January 2016.

¹¹⁸ See Elisabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge 2003). The impact of community building on reducing the risk of gang membership has been discussed in many academic papers. K.G. Hill, J.C. Howell, J.D. Hawkins, and S.R. Battin-Pearson, “Childhood risk factors for adolescent gang membership: results from the Seattle Social Development Project”, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 36, 1999, pp. 300-322. Craig D. Uchida, Marc L. Swatt, Shellie E. Solomon, and Sean P. Varano, *Community, Crime Control, and Collective Efficacy: Neighborhoods and Crime* (Lanham, 2015), p. 110.

nities have been able to limit the impact of gang violence in their municipalities,¹¹⁹ a 2007 survey from across the Northern Triangle found that 88 per cent of Salvadorans interviewed in gang-affected areas reported that they did not collaborate with their neighbours in dealing with crime problems in their community. The survey showed that interviewees in El Salvador and other regional countries instead had opted to change their daily habits, such as avoiding walking alone after sunset or buying a gun.¹²⁰ Some individuals who lived in gang-controlled areas also mentioned the limits on free movement imposed by these groups as a crucial factor behind the deterioration of community life.¹²¹

2. The victims: women, children and teenagers

Young people are prime victims of the country's insecurity, targeted by state law enforcement on one side and gangs on the other. The first "iron fist" plans in 2003-2004 targeted youth suspected of criminal activity, despite warnings from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that these new rules were too harsh on minors.¹²²

Lack of investment in education coupled with criminal activity in and around schools allows gangs to use them as recruitment platforms. Tellingly spending on education in El Salvador is the lowest in Central America, representing only 4.4 per cent of GDP.¹²³ Many schools are unsafe for students and teachers, both of whom are threatened by gang members and their children. A 2015 report from El Salvador's Ministry of Education estimated that about 65 per cent of schools are affected by gangs; in these schools, almost 30 per cent of staff have reported threats.¹²⁴

The effect of gang recruitment and presence on education can be illustrated by comparing years of schooling in areas with a high gang presence to those with a low gang presence. Figure 5 shows that individuals who started school in 1990 and lived in what are now high-gang presence areas had significantly more years of schooling than their peers in areas that now boast a low gang presence, largely because education is weaker in rural areas, which tend to have fewer gangs. The schooling gap was reduced by nearly half over the next six years, mainly because of improvements in rural education. But much more strikingly, the gap was erased completely over the next six years, between 1996 and 2002, not because of further improvements in rural education (indeed, years of schooling in rural locations declined slightly over that time) but rather because of the precipitous drop in schooling in high-gang areas. That drop can be explained by the mass deportation to El Salvador beginning in 1996, which had a highly detrimental effect on schooling.

¹¹⁹ "Nuevas Tendencias de los Patrones de Violencia", op. cit., p. 63.

¹²⁰ José Alberto Rodríguez Bolaños and Jorge Sanabria León (eds.), "Maras y pandillas, comunidad y policía en Centroamérica", Demoscopia, October 2007, pp. 79-80.

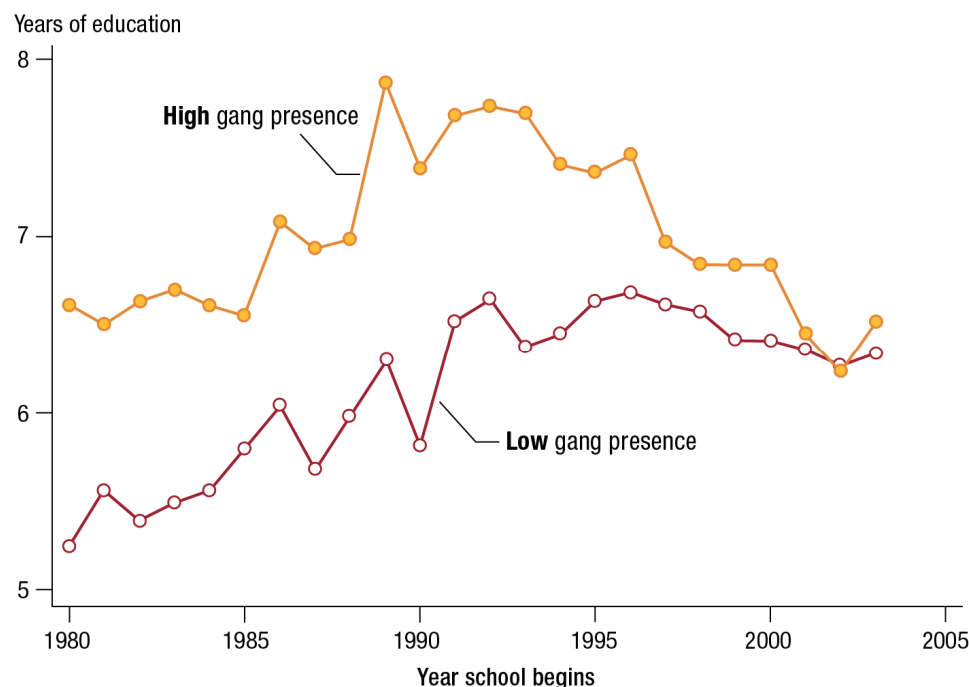
¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, San Salvador, 5 June 2017.

¹²² *Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador*, op. cit., p. 50.

¹²³ "UNICEF 2014 Annual Report El Salvador", UNICEF, 2014.

¹²⁴ "Análisis Rápido de Educación y Riesgo de El Salvador", USAID, June 2015, p. 5.

Figure 5: Average years of education in municipalities with low and high gang presence by the year school began



Source: Household surveys from 2012 and 2013, El Salvador General Directorate of Statistics and Census (DIGESTYC).

Women, meanwhile, are the forgotten victims of the country's security policies. Specific action to tackle the victimisation of women as civilians or as gang members has been missing from security policies. The role of women in the design and implementation of security policies is also limited, with no female members in El Salvador's security cabinet. The levels of violence against women make this absence from key decision-making circles all the more worrying. A total of 10,546 female minors were reported to have been raped between 2006 and 2014, amounting to one of the highest such rates in the hemisphere. Many more go unreported for fear of retaliation.¹²⁵

3. "We fear each other": accounts from gang-controlled areas

Testimony from people living in gang-controlled communities reveal high levels of distrust of public authorities, limited access to public spaces, and physical abuse against young people. Below are some of the most representative and disturbing concerns voiced by interviewees, all young people between fourteen and 25 years old from the suburbs of San Salvador. The statements underline the difficulties in devising and applying effective security policies in a context of widespread control by gangs coupled with public animosity toward them.¹²⁶

"I saw a group of police officers who entered in our neighbourhood and started marking the houses where they thought gang members lived Some families were forced to flee [after that event, by the security forces]".

¹²⁵ "Cada cuatro horas y 42 minutos ocurre una violación", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 December 2015.

¹²⁶ The names and ages of interviewees have been withheld so as not to compromise their safety.

“[I think] the police and us young people fear each other. But if they are scared of me for being young, imagine how I feel ... they are the ones with the guns”.

“I remember I once went to an event [organised by the police in my neighbourhood] and I saw some of my former friends who had become gang members dressed up as officers. I told myself: are these the guys who are going to keep me safe?”

“[Verbal harassment against young girls] is totally normal here. We get that all the time from them [referring to both criminals and security officers]”.

“Do you see that place at the other side of the road? I could never get in there since that is the territory of a rival group ... if they [members of the rival gang, in this case the 18th Street gang] see me there, they may think that I am a spy ... I could easily get killed, for sure I would be beaten up”.

“They [gangs] use murders to send messages to the government ... that is a way to tell the state that they are the ones running the show here”.

“We see investment, but we cannot get access to it [in reference to a sports club in the interviewee's community that was part of the “Safe El Salvador” plan]. They [public officials] want us to join their groups, but unfortunately we can't go there because we would be dead”.

VI. Opportunities Ahead

Conversations with high-level authorities suggest they are fully conscious of the limits of the repressive approach and the impossible task of prosecuting 500,000 alleged members of the gangs' support base.¹²⁷ At the same time, the current government strategy aims at using all resources available to asphyxiate the gangs, including the militarisation of public spaces, to which the gangs have responded with greater violence.¹²⁸ While there is little evidence to suggest that the government or opposition will soon offer distinct policies, actions such as adapting the current security strategy, promoting rehabilitation efforts and reinforcing security and justice institutions could contribute to reducing insecurity.

A. "Safe El Salvador" and Territorial Recovery

Avoiding past mistakes and maintaining political support for government initiatives at the local level are some of the main principles behind the "Safe El Salvador" plan. Although there are doubts as to the plan's achievements on the first score, the local approach of the plan has become a powerful tool for the main parties to bolster their electoral bases in municipalities they control. Large sums of money have been poured into the prioritised locations and allowed mayors to offer visible changes to communities.¹²⁹

Converting "Safe El Salvador" into an effective territorial recovery strategy will require more intensive efforts to support at-risk populations. Since young people are both the primary victims and perpetrators of gang violence, it is essential to ensure that schools remain safe havens.¹³⁰

The changing dynamics of criminal violence in El Salvador also suggest the need for a differentiated security strategy for areas with high and low gang presence. The "Safe El Salvador" plan could be continued for the most affected municipalities, while areas with lower levels of violence could experiment with an alternative approach based on community policing, support for civil society and primary prevention aimed at limiting the appeal and power of gangs. In contrast, the current mass arrests and generic targeting of teenage suspects are detrimental to efforts to win local support and garner information. This was confirmed by a police officer in San Miguel, who acknowledged the importance of community support: "We can have thousands of agents, but if the community does not trust us, we cannot do anything".¹³¹

Supporting this shift in policy will require fresh allocations of resources and a change in the partisan political habits. All political parties, and above all ARENA, should avoid blocking legislation on issues where there is in theory broad cross-party agreement. If ARENA's priority is winning the 2019 presidential elections, it should

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, top-level security officials, San Salvador, July-August 2017.

¹²⁸ "Militarización de San Salvador disminuye al tercer día", *El Diario de Hoy*, 21 September 2017.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, mayors of municipalities of Zacatecoluca and Ciudad Delgado, El Salvador, July-September 2017.

¹³⁰ Local organisation Foundation of Studies for the Application of Law (FESPAD) emphasises the need for legislation on attention to victims in its recent evaluation of the "Safe El Salvador" plan. "Avances y desafíos a futuro del Plan El Salvador Seguro", FESPAD press release, 14 November 2017.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking police official, San Miguel, July-September 2017.

consider that a continued deterioration in security conditions could undermine support for the two-party system as a whole.

Although the government is clear that it has no intention to engage again in dialogue with gangs, in practice thousands of low-level officials and community leaders are compelled to negotiate daily with them.¹³² In private, political parties recognised de facto gangs' territorial presence all over the country. It is uncertain whether the gangs' offer to disband in January 2017 is still in place, but the government should keep the door open to grassroots non-violent approaches through support for the work of local churches and civil society, and avoid demonising those who are trying to reduce local violence. The chances of a fresh attempt at national dialogue with the gangs of the sort that failed between 2012 and 2013 would very much depend on the incoming administration in 2019.¹³³

B. *Improving Judicial and Police Institutions*

Legal reforms are urgently needed to relieve the judiciary of the pressures it faces. Possibilities include reducing sentences for minor offenses such as drug possession, or using trained community mediators to settle disputes outside of the courtroom, which has proven successful in Honduras.¹³⁴ It is clear from interviews with judges and high-level magistrates that the distribution of judicial resources across the country is seriously imbalanced given the geographic clustering of criminal activity.¹³⁵

The prosecutor's office lacks the financial and human resources required to take on additional cases or swiftly process current ones. Ideally, it should receive more funding and revise its annual goals to ensure they are realistic. Alleged corruption scandals affecting the institution's previous leadership also underline the need to reinforce transparent and open selection procedures for high-level officials.

Lessons from police reforms in countries such as Guatemala and Honduras indicate that specific innovations can prove more effective than efforts to reform the entire security system. Better coordination between the police, the prosecutor's office and the courts stands out as one crucial area. The implementation of Guatemala's 2010 law against organised crime – allowing prosecutors working with investigative police to ask judges for permission to use wire taps – is an example of successful inter-agency coordination. The establishment of innovative systems of case management in the homicide investigations unit, which worked directly with prosecutors, has been fundamental to Guatemala's success in reducing murder rates in certain areas.¹³⁶

¹³² Informal negotiation with gang members was brought up several times in interviews with community leaders. Crisis Group interviews, El Salvador, June-August 2017.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, high-level government official, San Salvador, 12 December 2017.

¹³⁴ The project was financed by the Spanish cooperation in Honduras, and according to Spanish diplomats it was "one of the most successful projects" they have financed. Crisis Group interview, Spanish ambassador to Honduras, Tegucigalpa, 3 April 2017. "Seguridad y Paz, un reto de país", op. cit. "Informe de sistematización", op. cit.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, judges and CSJ magistrate, San Salvador, July-September 2017.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Report N°43, *Police Reform in Guatemala: Obstacles and Opportunities*, 20 July 2012.

At the same time, the strengthening of the police internal affairs unit through additional personnel and resources could enhance the institution's transparency at a time of increasing concern over alleged abuses of power.

C. *A State-led Rehabilitation Process*

The most significant government effort in rehabilitating convicted criminals is the "I'm Changing" (*Yo Cambio*) program, which seeks to spur inmates into training each other in specific skills that fellow prisoners can offer.¹³⁷ Despite a lack of resources, authorities argue it has had beneficial effects in jails such as Apanteo, Ilopango or San Vicente. At the same time, a handful of Salvadoran churches and business leaders are carrying out independent rehabilitation programs. The private sector's initiatives depend on the leadership of specific individuals, such as the well-known case of former gang members working for the sportswear company American League. Such programs help former gang members overcome the social stigma that can make it so hard for them to find a job or carry on a normal life.¹³⁸

More rehabilitation opportunities should be provided. The Legislative Assembly could debate and approve a bill initially presented to the Legislative Assembly Security Committee in early 2017 that has been stuck in Congress since then. This could be amended to incorporate lessons from the "I'm Changing" program and other rehabilitation initiatives provided by churches, NGOs and the private sector, and thus help the government develop one of the more neglected pillars of the "Safe El Salvador" plan.¹³⁹ Specific measures should include financing tattoo removal, and developing a methodology for rehabilitation that protects participants from prosecution or offers reduced sentences. Rehabilitation measures could help prepare officials for an eventual handover of arms by some gang members, should this ever happen. As one government official explained: "if they [gangs] one day decide to surrender, we are screwed".¹⁴⁰

The construction of several new prisons is an important step toward reducing overcrowding, but should be accompanied by more and better trained prison personnel. Providing human rights training for guards is especially important.

D. *Coordinating Efforts to Protect El Salvador from U.S. Migration Policies*

El Salvador's security crisis, as well as its past vulnerability to U.S. migration policies, fully justifies continuing the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation that has allowed around 195,000 Salvadoran nationals to stay in the U.S. legally. While El Salvador was originally designated for this program after two earthquakes in 2001, the U.S. administration should also consider current circumstances, especially

¹³⁷ "Programa de Tratamiento Penitenciario Yo Cambio, Centro Penal de Apanteos, Santa Ana, El Salvador. Sistematización de la experiencia", Interpeace report, 2010.

¹³⁸ American League is a Salvadoran company known for hiring and training former gang members in a unique and successful rehabilitation project. On the challenges faced by rehabilitated gang members in El Salvador, see "Raúl no quiere ser el Shadow", *El Faro*, 7 August 2017. Crisis Group interviews, San Salvador, August-September 2017; Crisis Group Report, *Mafia of the Poor*, op. cit.

¹³⁹ A legal framework is needed to carry out reinsertion activities, as the current legislation does not clarify the limits on such programs, especially given that gang members are considered terrorists following a Supreme Court ruling in 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, ministerial adviser, San Salvador, 13 July 2017.

the humanitarian impact of criminal violence.¹⁴¹ The Department of Homeland Security's decision to end the program for Sudan, Nicaragua and Haiti suggests, however, that it will also choose to terminate TPS for El Salvador.¹⁴²

The high levels of violence in El Salvador make the country especially dangerous for returning migrants, especially for the 192,700 children of Salvadorans with TPS, many of whom are U.S. citizens.¹⁴³ To mitigate the impact of TPS termination, the U.S. government should confirm its decision on the issue as early as possible, and preferably provide a long extension before the cut-off date. This would help El Salvador prepare accordingly for the arrival of the first wave, and give its affected nationals some predictability as to their future. Coordination between San Salvador and different consulates in the U.S. will be key to offering potential returnees dignified employment opportunities in their home country. In the best-case scenario, this would allow the country to develop job placement schemes in coordination with the private sector. Spanish education for the children of returnees, many of whom will speak English as their first language, should also be funded by the U.S.

Regardless of the TPS outcome, Salvadoran authorities should work with the main political parties to create and implement a policy for returnees. By the end of 2018, state institutions will need a plan to address the reception of returnees and the humanitarian risks faced by those wishing to migrate back to the U.S. Both the assembly and the incoming government – to be elected in early 2019 – should continue these efforts by intensifying locally-targeted policies to promote development and entrepreneurship in the municipalities that receive more returnees. This mid-term policy should have a strong educational focus, as the most vulnerable groups will be children between fourteen and eighteen years old who are easy prey for potential gang recruitment.

The Salvadoran government also needs to acknowledge the reality of internal displacement – which affects all Northern Triangle countries – and start to work on a humanitarian response in coordination with international agencies. This should include the adoption of the Comprehensive Regional Framework for the Protection and Solution (MIRPS), signed on 26 October 2017 by Mexico and all Central American countries, except El Salvador.¹⁴⁴ The priority should be to offer temporary shelter and support to victims who cannot go back to their communities, most of them vulnerable groups such as children and women. The government could work in coordination with NGOs already handling some cases, learn from their experience, and create a screening system based on information previously gathered by these organisations.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. government official, Washington, 20 November 2017.

¹⁴² Although the acting head of the DHS, Elaine Duke, seems flexible on the TPS issue, other U.S. decision-makers are known as immigration hardliners. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly reportedly called acting Secretary Elaine Duke 6 November 2017 to pressure her to expel some 57,000 Hondurans with TPS, on the day her office deferred a decision regarding their status. "White House chief of staff tried to pressure acting DHS secretary to expel thousands of Hondurans, officials say", *The Washington Post*, 9 November 2017. Crisis Group interview, government official, Washington, 20 November 2017.

¹⁴³ Warren, R. and Kerwin D., "A Statistical and Demographic Profile of the U.S. TPS Populations", op. cit., p. 581.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, UNCHR officers, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, 26 October 2017.

VII. Conclusion

El Salvador's security crisis is a warning for Latin America and the world as to how the unexpected outcomes of a failed post-conflict transition can become more lethal than the war itself. A quarter of a century after the signing of its peace accords, El Salvador is often said to be suffering a "new war" between the state and gangs. However, this "war" is really a manifestation of social breakdown: the sides that are fighting one another are far from cohesive, gang violence has as yet no clear political objective, and the civilians most affected by insecurity, largely young people from low-income backgrounds, are both victims and perpetrators.

For the past fifteen years, the gangs have learned to shield themselves from different state security policies by transforming their operations and internal organisation. The current sophistication of these groups, as well as the repeated failure to address their socio-economic roots – roots which are themselves deepened and perpetuated by ongoing violence – is a sign that many of these policies, even including those aiming at prevention rather than repression, will need to be reformed and enhanced if they are to halt El Salvador's bloodshed.

However, under the umbrella of the "Safe El Salvador" plan, the government now has the opportunity to launch concerted rehabilitation programs and take advantage of the seemingly high number of gang members willing to leave criminal life. Cross-party agreements will be crucial in designing mechanisms to strengthen the prosecutor's office and the police, as well as for preparing integration mechanisms for mass deportations from the U.S. should Washington fail to redesignate the TPS program for resident Salvadorans. Minimising the risks of violence during the March 2018 local and legislative polls will likewise depend on the goodwill and cooperation of the two major parties.

The fact that the FMLN and ARENA have been peacefully alternating in power for the last 25 years after an exceptionally brutal civil war is a sign that Salvadorans have the capacity to overcome hard times. The Salvadoran public and countries in the hemisphere will continue to voice outrage over the gangs' criminal deeds. But this violence is the latest manifestation, and probably not the last, of the country's long and painful history of social divides. Security policy that ignores these causes will do little to halt the carnage, and could well extend it for another generation.

Guatemala City/Brussels, 19 December 2017

Appendix A: Map of El Salvador

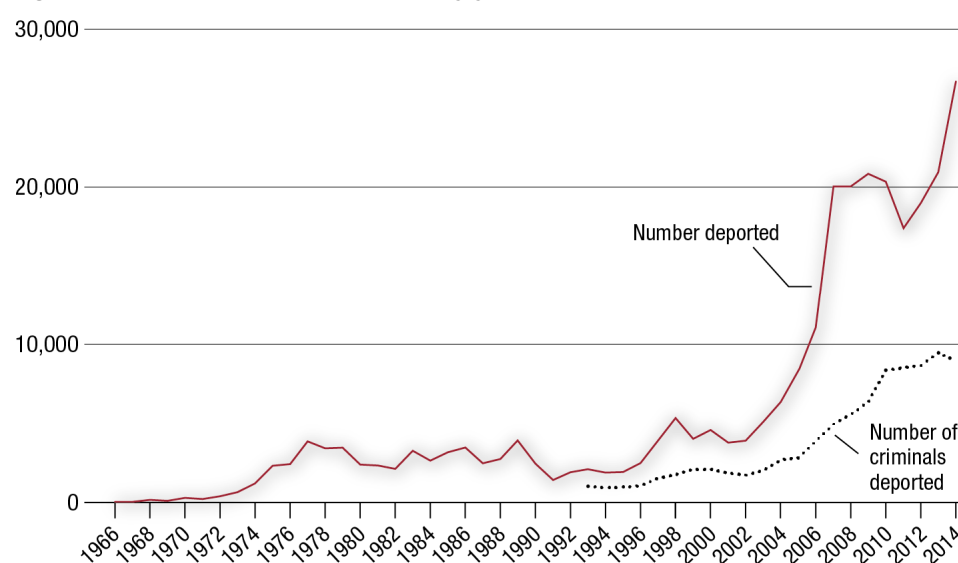


Appendix B: Deportations, Crime and Migration: A Quantitative Analysis

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, followed in 2002 by the Homeland Security Act, sharply increased the number of criminal deportations from the U.S. to Central America. Leaders of large Salvadoran gangs that had developed in Los Angeles were sent back to El Salvador. Aside from the direct effects on security and violence of these gang members' return, quantitative research shows that the arrival of individuals bringing criminal skills and connections generated important spillover effects across Salvadoran society, eventually leading to more unaccompanied minors emigrating to the U.S.

This study brings together data from multiple sources to examine the long-term effect of deportations on El Salvador. Data on deportations comes from the Immigration Statistics of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This data set includes annual information on the number of individuals deported from the U.S., showing a steady increase over the 1990s – with a critical increase from 1996 to 2003, featuring numerous deportations of gang members – followed by a steep rise from 2003 on.

Figure 6: Deportations to El Salvador by year (1996-2014)



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Beginning in 1993, the data on deportations can be divided into those with criminal and non-criminal status. Criminal status includes those cases in which the DHS has evidence of a conviction. Between 1993 and 2013, approximately 40 per cent of the deportations to El Salvador were criminal.

Data on educational outcomes comes from the 2007 El Salvador census, which includes information on total years of education completed by individuals who are born before 1989. These are individuals who turned eighteen by 2007, and have likely finished their education. The 1992 census also provides information on baseline characteristics of municipalities with gang presence. Data from Household Surveys (*Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples*), which have been conducted annually in El Salvador since 1995, includes information on demographic variables, educa-

tional enrolment and attainment, health, labour force participation, as well as income and consumption of Salvadoran individuals and their households. Each survey consists of a stratified sample of over 20,000 households, for a total sample size of over 85,000 individuals. Data on municipal-level homicides for the years 1995 and 1999 to 2010 was provided by the National Civil Police of El Salvador.

Confidential data on individuals who entered prison from 1980 to 2016 was used to examine whether children exposed to the arrival of gangs are more likely to engage in crime as adults by tracking cohorts across different municipalities. The data contain about 140,000 individuals incarcerated in El Salvador between the ages of eighteen and 60, and features information about their exact municipality and date of birth, whether they belong to a gang, their education and type of crime. Data on gang leaders was collected from a special investigation carried out by El Faro, a local news site, which provided the names of the main gang leaders. Most of these gang leaders grew up in the U.S. but were born in El Salvador. To obtain information on their place of birth, data was collected from criminal sentences in 2012 from the Ministry of Justice in El Salvador, the U.S. Department of Treasury, and media investigations.

Finally, administrative data on minors deported from the U.S. between 2012 and 2016 contain information on children's place of birth, thereby helping to show the effect of gang violence on child migration.

Results

An initial finding from analysis of this data is that the return to El Salvador of deported criminals significantly increased homicides and reduced primary school attendance. In particular, children age ten to twelve were affected. Individuals who were exposed to gang deportations during childhood have fewer years of schooling, and are less likely to complete primary education.

Two initial observations stand out for their significance. First, in periods when criminal deportations from the U.S. increase, homicides rate increase. Second, whereas homicides rates in 1995 are at similar levels in areas where the gangs were later active as where they were not, after 2002 areas of gang presence experience a far greater increase in homicide rates. Statistical analysis by coefficients also underlines the effect of criminal deportations on homicides rates. Estimates show that for an increase of 1,000 criminal deportees per municipality, homicide rates increase by four murders per 100,000.

Children of primary school age who have been affected by gang deportations are also more likely to be incarcerated for gang-related crimes when they are adults, suggesting that deported gang members recruit these children. This can be shown by dividing children by ages covering the four different cycles of primary and secondary education. After the arrival of gang leaders, school attendance declines. In particular, children aged ten to twelve years old suffer a 5 per cent reduction in school attendance.

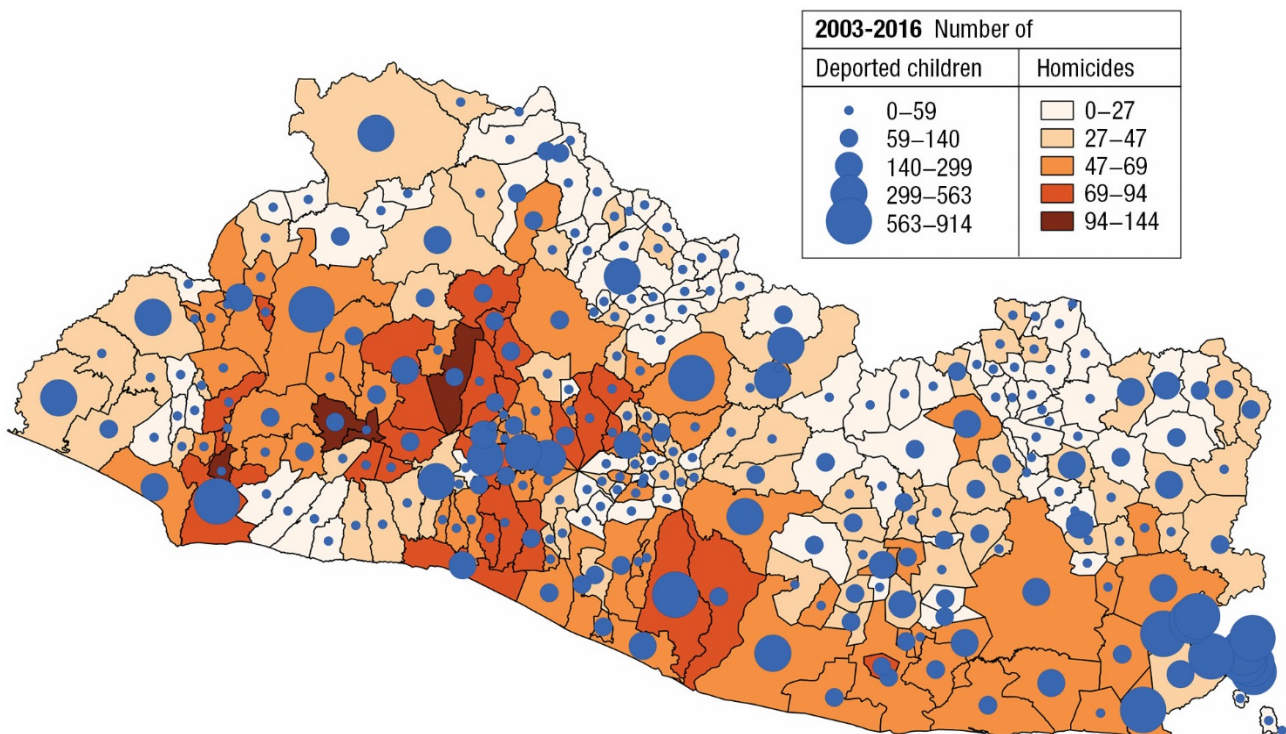
To assess whether these effects are driven by violent crime or gang presence, it is important to consider the 2012 truce in which gang leaders committed to reduce homicides rates in exchange for moving to better prison facilities. While there is evidence that violent crime declined in gang areas by 50 per cent during the truce, schooling outcomes did not improve during that period. These results suggest that effects on schooling may be driven by other factors associated with gangs, and not

only violent crime. Even though homicides declined during the truce, extortion practices continued and even increased.

One reason for this sustained impact on schooling could be gang recruitment of boys who are used to help in extortion practices and other low-level tasks. According to a recent report from El Faro based on statistics from the Ministry of Education, the percentage of dropouts due to delinquency has increased by 120 per cent over recent years. This has to do with insecurity resulting from threats by gangs and the perils of crossing gang boundaries. In addition, gangs often recruit children at schools. The ministry estimates that about 65 per cent of schools are affected by the presence of gangs, while in almost 30 per cent internal security is threatened. A school located in gang territory is generally considered property of the gang. Gangs threaten and extort principals, teachers and students and prevent students from attending school.

Lastly, the history of homicides in children's municipality of births affects the decision of children to migrate. On average, an increase in ten homicides per month in a municipality translates into an increase of three children leaving per month. Figure 7 shows the spatial distribution of children from municipalities in El Salvador who have been deported from the U.S., as well as the homicide rates in each area. A larger share of deported children, though not all of them, comes from municipalities with higher rates of homicide.

Figure 7: Map of origins of deported children and average local homicide rates 2003-2016



Source: International Organisation for Migration (IOM); El Salvador National Civil Police.

Overall, the results from this quantitative analysis show that the increase in U.S. criminal deportations led to an increase in homicide rates in places with gang presence. The results also show that, in these same places, an increase in criminal deportations and gang presence reduced educational outcomes and increased the future criminal behaviour of young cohorts who were presumably exposed to higher gang activity during their adolescence. In short, there is evidence of the indirect effect of gang leaders from the U.S. on Salvadoran children, and of how gang violence in El Salvador may push minors out of the country to the U.S., increasing the number of deported children.

*This analysis was prepared by Crisis Group's Economics of Conflict fellow.
A longer version is due to be published as a scholarly article.*

Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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December 2017

Appendix D: Reports and Briefings on Latin America since 2014

Special Reports

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Left in the Cold? The ELN and Colombia's Peace Talks, Latin America Report N°51, 26 February 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Tipping Point, Latin America Briefing N°30, 21 May 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Corridor of Violence: The Guatemala-Honduras Border, Latin America Report N°52, 4 June 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Dangerous Inertia, Latin America Briefing N°31, 23 September 2014 (also available in Spanish).

The Day after Tomorrow: Colombia's FARC and the End of the Conflict, Latin America Report N°53, 11 December 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Back from the Brink: Saving Ciudad Juárez, Latin America Report N°54, 25 February 2015 (also available in Spanish).

On Thinner Ice: The Final Phase of Colombia's Peace Talks, Latin America Briefing N°32, 2 July 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Unnatural Disaster, Latin America Briefing N°33, 30 July 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Disappeared: Justice Denied in Mexico's Guerrero State, Latin America Report N°55, 23 October 2015 (also available in Spanish).

The End of Hegemony: What Next for Venezuela?, Latin America Briefing N°34, 21 December 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Crutch to Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, Latin America Report N°56, 29 January 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Edge of the Precipice, Latin America Briefing N°35, 23 June 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration, Latin America Report N°57, 28 July 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Colombia's Final Steps to the End of War, Latin America Report N°58, 7 September 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Tough Talking, Latin America Report N°59, 16 December 2016 (also available in Spanish).

In the Shadow of "No": Peace after Colombia's Plebiscite, Latin America Report N°60, 31 January 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Veracruz: Fixing Mexico's State of Terror, Latin America Report N°61, 28 February 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America, Latin America Report N°62, 6 April 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown, Latin America Briefing N°36, 19 June 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace, Latin America Report N°63, 19 October 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Hunger by Default, Latin America Briefing N°37, 23 November 2017 (also available in Spanish).

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