Mano Dura, Mano Amiga, and La Tregua

The Failures of Gang Policy Responses in El Salvador and Honduras

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This thesis is dedicated to the communities and families across El Salvador and Honduras effected by gang violence and to the millions who have fled the region due to violence.
Table of Contents

Introduction.................................................................................................................................5

*Mano Dura: The Reign of Suppression Policies*........................................................................18

*La tregua: Are Gang Truces a sustainable alternative approach?.............................................34

*Mano Amiga: Can prevention and intervention strategies solve the problem?..........................47

Conclusion................................................................................................................................60

Work Cited................................................................................................................................68
Chapter 1: Introduction

In Central America, gang violence has reached endemic proportions. El Salvador has an estimated 60,000 gang members with a presence in 94% of the municipalities (Martinez, Lemus, Sontag 2016). In Honduras, membership estimates are as high as 36,000 according to US AID (Pachico 2016). Both El Salvador and Honduras have violence unprecedented in countries supposedly not at war, ranking first and third respectively in homicides per 100,000 citizens in Latin America (Gagne 2016). Gangs have long existed in Central America; bands of street youths have been part the urban environment of Honduras and El Salvador as early as the 1960s (Wolf, 2011). However, since the late 1990s the gangs have transformed into what today is referred to as “Maras” which are stronger, more cohesive, and more violent criminal gangs that have spread across both El Salvador and Honduras and created a major security crisis. This transformation is largely attributed to the increase in deportations throughout the 1990s which drastically changed the landscape of urban environments in Central America and brought the US gang culture particularly from Los Angeles back to El Salvador and Honduras (Valdez, 2011). The rise of deportation and the exportation of US Latino gang culture to Central America brought the more violent and sophisticated criminal activity seen in the more recent gang phenomenon and is the reason that the two largest gangs in both El Salvador and Honduras, MS-13 and Barrio 18, both have their origin in Los Angeles. In response to this rise violence and expansion of gangs throughout the region, Central American governments have developed three policy responses.

The most frequently used policy is harsh suppression through law enforcement, known throughout the region as Mano Dura (Iron Fist or Firm Hand). This policy includes increases in
law enforcement and reforms to the penal code to criminalize the act of being a gang member and facilitate their arrest and prosecution (Holland, 2013). The second strategy introduced more recently is a gang truce. The first country to attempt one was El Salvador in March of 2012, where prominent prison leaders of the two major gangs, Barrio 18 and La Marasalvatrucha, negotiated a truce (Lohmuller, 2015). The truce was able to reduce homicides by 50% however it fell apart 18 months later and was followed by an intense upsurge in violence (Lohmuller, 2015).

The least common strategy and often most holistic approach is known as Mano Extendida or Mano Amiga (Extended Hand or Friendly Hand) which focuses on the rehabilitation of ex-gang members and prevention work with at risk youth. These programs seem to have the most promise; however, their implementation is limited and often carried out by international NGO’s rather than the governments themselves.

Since the early 2000s, Central America has implemented these varied attempts at curtailing the presence and strength of these gangs, yet gang violence at best has remained constant and arguably worsened. The question that then arises is why have these policies failed to curb the violence or the strength of the gangs? Why have the three different approaches failed? With another tangential question of why are the suppression policies continually repeated after clear evidence of their failure?

This thesis will explore each of the policies and analyze why they have failed. I will use a paired comparison study of anti-gang policy specifically in El Salvador and Honduras. These two countries both began with suppression policies in the early 2000s, experimented with gang truces, and have limited social and prevention programs for gangs. Along with that, they have similar levels of gang membership and levels of violence. Using both El Salvador and Honduras, I can draw conclusions on what has been ineffective about anti-gang policy in Central America.
The thesis will begin with a brief overview of the literature on gang responses looking at the literature on the effectiveness of the three policy responses; suppression, truces, and prevention. The second chapter will examine *Mano Dura* in El Salvador and Honduras and demonstrate how the policy in fact strengthen the gangs instead of eradicating them and explore why both governments continuously reverted back to suppression. The third chapter will explore the gang truce and examine how the truce failed to create lasting peace in El Salvador and had a minimal effect in Honduras and also why the governments now have totally rejected any attempts of implementing another truce or any sort of negotiation with gangs. The fourth chapter will explore the limited prevention and intervention strategies and demonstrate how they have been ineffective and dominated by international donors. The fifth and final chapter will review the three policies from the earlier chapters and offer conclusions to why they have failed and why the governments continue to prioritize suppression strategies.

**Literature Review**

To understand the effectiveness of gang policies in El Salvador and Honduras, I will survey the literature on the policy responses to gangs. Policy responses to gangs are most often divided into three overall strategies, Repression or Suppression, Intervention, and Prevention. Because of the nature of gang policy in Central America, I will be examining a specific intervention policy known as a gang truce. I will separate the literature on this specific policy from other intervention strategies. Thus, in this review of the literature, I will separate the literature into three camps, repression/ suppression, Gang truces, and social prevention and intervention strategies. I will critically review the literature on anti-gang policy and demonstrate the limitations of the literature due to its heavy focus on US gang strategies.
Repression/Suppression

The most common strategy used to combat gangs is suppression through law enforcement (Goldstein & Huff, 1993; Spergel, 1995; Katz & Webb, 2006). The law enforcement suppression approach includes various different strategies including, the creation of special police gang units, community policing approaches, civil injunctions and gang crackdowns. The gang crackdown strategy includes a “vigorous lock-em up approach” which is essentially a substantial increase in law enforcement focused on “apprehension and punishment of offenders” (Spergel 1995; Short 1990). These crackdowns and indiscriminate repression included reforms to the penal code that increase sentences and facilitate prosecution. An example of this is the “weed and seed” strategy of the 1994 Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act in the US which increased funding for federal law enforcement agents to $2.6 billion and created stiffer penalties for gang crime (US Department of Justice 1994). These policies include newer more sophisticated equipment for law enforcement and increased data collecting and intelligence sharing to improve the speed at which these gang members were taken off the street and arrested. (Braga, 2015; Spergel 1995). The crackdown is one of the most common and basic approaches to suppression policies.

Another common gang suppression tactic is the use and creation of police gang units. These gang units have four general principles which include intelligence gathering, enforcement and suppression, investigation, and prevention (Huff & McBride 1990; Katz & Webb 2014). Many of these gang units do not serve all the functions and actually are focused on just a few of them (Katz & Webb 2014). The policing gang units focus on suppression, investigation, and intelligence gathering which track and build information on the gangs to be used in prosecutions and long term investigations. Analysis of these police gang unit’s effectiveness varies; some advocates find that they lack coordination with the actual police forces and thus are often
secondary to these forces and not effective (Katz & Webb 2014; Braga 2015). Other theorist advocate that the more holistic special gang units that follow all four principles are the most effective in reducing gangs in their area (Huff & McBride 1990). Overall police gang units represent a large trend in policy responses towards gangs and another common form of suppression strategies.

The basic premise of the suppression strategy is based on Deterrence Theory (Klein 1993; Mauer 1999; Braga 2015). Malcom Klein wrote a pivotal article describing how gang suppression had its basis in deterrence specifically exploring the way in which policy makers talk about suppression finding their language reflect the different principles of deterrence like celerity, severity, and certainty (Klein, 1995b). Deterrence Theory holds that to prevent social deviation one must raise to costs of the deviation to a point where it outweighs the benefits of the social deviation (Gibbs 1975; Zimring and Hawkins 1973). Within the gang context this means that the increase in penalties for gang related crime and the increased law enforcement presence will rise the cost of participating in gangs to a point at which youth will no longer join gangs due to the high possibility of facing negative consequences (Short 1990; Klein, 1995b). Deterrence theory holds that the effectiveness of the policy is based on three principles, Severity-the measure and severity of sanctions, Certainty- the probability the sanction will be applied, and Celerity- the speed which it is applied (Gibbs, 1975). Many theorists argue that the basis on deterrence theory is the reason behind the failures of the suppression policy.

One of the problems with the deterrence theory is the emphasis on rational social actors which does not take into consideration those that deviate from normal risk assumptions (Lebow & Stein 1989; Klein 1995b). As many theorist point to, “the gang world is not a rational choice model” meaning that in reality, these gang do not function following rational actor’s theory
(Klein 1995b). These theorists hold that the gang world follows more social psychological models and that they react differently to pressures from the external world and that they “feed off their surroundings” (Klein 1995a; Klein 1995b quote). This notion holds that these suppression strategies can be manipulated and framed in this gang world in a manner that could actually increase cohesion within the group and increase their presence and persistence rather than eradicate them (Klein 1995b).

Other criticisms of suppression strategies focus on the negative effect these policies have on society through increased incarceration and profiling, which have a detrimental effect on the innocent non-gang population (Decker, 2003; Gebo & Bond 2012; Parenti 2001). Some theorists demonstrate that the detrimental effects of suppression on non-gang members often can push them towards gangs or just increase the positive views of gangs within the community (Klein, 1993; Spergel 1995; Braga 2015). Specifically, this positivity stems from repression that is perceived as unwarranted. This positive interpretation of gangs by a community can also help increase cohesiveness within gangs and make collaboration between law enforcement and the community more difficult (Klein 1993) (Decker 2003). Many theorists pose that the recent emphasis of suppression policies has been a failure and call for greater emphasis on prevention and intervention strategies however there are some theorists that advocate that some suppression policies are in fact beneficial.

Some specific suppression policies have been found to be successful in reducing violence and gang presence. One suppression policy response being advocated for is the Civil Gang Injunction. The pioneering gang injunction was created in Los Angeles in 1980s which started a trend of almost 37 injunctions in southern California from 1980 to 2000 (Maxson, Hennigan, Sloane, 2014). Civil Injunctions basically include a complex process of intelligence
gathering carried out by law enforcement and prosecutors to obtain the criminal history of the gangs, the names of gang members and the gangs geographical areas which are then used in a lawsuit which can prohibit behaviors such as trespassing, vandalism, and other illegal activities as well as lawful activities such as wearing gang colors, flashing gang signs and it can even prevent the association of two or more gang members with each other (Maxson, Hennigan, & Sloane, 2014; Bjerregaard 2013). Several theorists have found successes in these gang injunctions including reduction in violent crime and improvements in the security and living conditions of the areas they were applied (O’Deane & Morreal 2011). Other theorists have found that they increase the sense of security in the community with less gang intimidation and harassment (Maxson, Hennigan, & Sloane, 2014). Many theorist point to the need for these injunctions to be more specific in their targeting if they are to be successful thus they recommend these injunctions in small geographical areas and that they target specific members not gangs as a whole (Maxson, Henning & Sloane 2014; O’Deane & Morreal 2011; Bjerregaard 2015). The injunctions provide a key suppression tool that many theorists have argued can have a positive effect on reducing gang violence.

Some scholars argue that focused deterrence policies can also in fact reduce the violence associated gang and deter other the negative effects of gangs. David Kennedy in 1997 in his evaluation of Operation Ceasefire in Boston found that focused deterrence can reduce violence through their emphasis on repeat offenders, a gang’s drug dealing, and gang violence (Kennedy, 1997). The policy in Boston explicitly sent the message to gangs that violence would not be tolerated and to communicate that message when violence occurred they “pulled all the levers” meaning they would exhaust all legal possibilities to prosecute and make sure they had stronger prosecutorial mechanisms such as higher bail terms and stiffer plea bargains. (Braga, 2015).
Other scholars also hold that the use of focused deterrence can reduce violence and negative effect of gangs. The heavy enforcement of specific ordinances such as curfews and truancy ordinances can reduce violence in specific hotspot locations (Bynum & Varano 2003; Fritsch & Caeti 1999). Many scholars find that these suppression strategies can help reduce the negative effects of gangs such as violence if they use focused deterrence and are clearer and more specific in their suppression.

Overall the literature on gang suppression and repression agrees that suppression alone and specifically indiscriminate suppression cannot eradicate gangs. Many scholars, however, hold that there are some possible benefits from more focused suppression approaches. Most of the successful suppression strategies require a strong judicial and law enforcement institution. The majority of the literature on suppression theory is focused in the US and thus the literature examines a specific judicial and political culture that can differ greatly from other countries. Although gangs are a worldwide phenomenon there continues to be a lack of literature on the ability of other judicial and law enforcement institutions outside the US to enforce suppression and a lack of literature that explores the specific problems those institutions face in their own country context.

**Intervention: Gang Truces**

A much less explored strategic response to gangs is the concept of a gang truce. However, the strategy has long existed and first was explore during the 1990s. A gang truce is essentially a negotiated settlement typically between warring gangs although it could include negotiations between the government and gangs as well as in the El Salvador case (Maguire 2013). These negotiations can be created or carried out by various different actors, sometimes
members of the particular community, church leaders, governments and law enforcement officials, and sometimes even by gang leaders themselves (Maguire 2013; Klein 1995a).

One of the first assessments of a gang truce was Cotton’s article in 1992 that evaluated the truce between the Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles (Cotton 1992). The assessment found a decrease in drive-by shootings and gang-related homicide and another study found it reduced gunshot wound victims (Cotton 1992) (Ordog 1993). Another community organization in Philadelphia was able to coordinate a meeting between church leaders, community activists and gangs themselves that resulted in a 60-day truce with no gang related murders or violence (Spergel, 1995). The majority of theorists on gang truce have found some sort of reduction of gang related violence after the implementation of a gang truce (Cotton 1992) (Ordog 1993) (Whitehill, Webster & Vernick 2012) (Maguire 2013).

There are many theorists that find that although there is a reduction in violence it is often short lived and followed by a return to violence or an increase in violence afterwards (Ordog 1995) (Klein 1995a) (Maguire 2013) (Katz, Hedberg & Amaya 2016). Many theorists find gang truces fail particularly when instigated by outsiders (Klein 1995a; NGCRC, 1995). The lack of long term success is often attributed to the cohesion and legitimacy that gangs receive from entering in these truths (Klein 1995a). This internal cohesion and organizational tools often help improve other negative gang activities beyond violence such as drug dealing or extortion (Kodluboy and Evenrud 1993; NGCRC, 1995; Maguire 2013). As stated in Kodluboy and Evenrud’s article, truces can help “[validate] the gang as a legitimate social entity, thus buying short-term peace at the price of long-term persistence of the gang” and also improve cohesion which has long been linked to increases in violence (Short 1990; Kodluboy and Evenrud 1993; Klein 1995a; Maguire 2013)
Maguire points to the implicit assumption in gang truces which is that gangs have the “organizational capacity to control the behavior of their members” (Maguire 2013). The literature on gang’s organizational capacity is conflicting some believe there are different generations of gangs with different degrees of organizational capacity depending on their involvement in the drug trade (Sullivan, 2006). Many theories have concluded even within drug trafficking gangs there are low levels of organization and a more individual use of money and lack of corporate structures (Hagedorn, 1994). The conflicting nature of the organizational capacity calls in question whether gangs can actually control their members in a given area to ensure that the truce is upheld. Many gangs stretch across entire cities and often these gangs are loosely connected with other gangs that share their name and traditions across countries. The organizational capacity of a gang to control its members is key to ensuring that the truce can effectively be carried out and will not spiral out of control because an individual member decides to break the truce.

Theorist have also investigated that another reason for the failure of gang truces is the prevalence and importance of violence between gangs. Gangs often have complex and violent histories that have legitimized violence and retaliation (Decker 1996; Maguire 2013). This long history of violence and deeply personal rivalries between gangs makes it difficult to establish lasting peace between them. This concept is addressed in what is called the impression management theory which essentially demonstrates how within gangs, one’s status is essential to the life within the gang and violence is a tool in maintaining one’s status (Felson and Steadman 1983; Hughes 2005; Maguire 2013). Impression management theory demonstrates that even during a truce gangs can still engage in violence within their group or towards other social actors to maintain their status.
Most theorists agree that there is a lack of substantial literature on the topic of gang truces (Whitehill, Webster & Vernick 2012; Maguire, 2013; Katz, Hedberg & Amaya 2016). Besides the lack of literature on the effectiveness of gang truces, there is also a lack of literature on the mechanisms and tactics of a gang truce. The literature does not delve much into the role of mediators and which tactics are most effective. This lack of gang truce literature is particularly relevant when examining modern gang truces such as the one in El Salvador and Honduras.

Social Prevention and Intervention

The third type of gang response is the social intervention and social prevention strategy. These strategies involve various programs that try to address gang membership or try to prevent participation in gangs. These programs can be implemented by governments or by schools or NGOs. Klein and Maxson developed six goals of gang control broken down as three individual goals and three group goals (2006). The first individual goal is the prevention of youth joining gangs (Klein & Maxson 2006). This goal uses theories of why youth join gangs which include theories of individual characteristics, family variables, peer relations, school involvement, and community characteristics (Hill, 1999). Some programs chose one of these social causes of gangs and attempt to address them specifically. For example, some of the earliest prevention programs were gang worker programs that provided employment to try to address the lack of other opportunities for these marginalized youth (Wilson, 1985; Klein 1971). Other programs address the lack of opportunities but focus on education instead of employment as another way to create more opportunities for the marginalized youth (Spergel, 1995; OJJDP 2010). Other’s focus on personality traits and try to socialize youth to teach conflict mediation and combat the low-self-esteem felt due to their marginalization (Spergel, 1995). These programs focus on
prevention and attempting to curtail participation in gangs but other theories focus on intervening with youth already in gangs.

The second goal is encouraging “gang desistance” which is the departure and leaving behind of the gang world (Klein & Maxson 2006). These programs target factors that continue membership instead of factors that prevent joining. The theory on gang desistance from criminal delinquent group focuses on social factors that encourage desistance like the benefits of stable relationships and stable employment (Decker & Lauritsen 2002; Pyrooz & Decker 2014). These factors usually are gradual factors that don’t apply to youth thus youth desistance is often the hardest to achieve. For youth desistance, the most common desistance patterns are a disheartening of membership often caused from a violent experience close to them, like the loss of a friend (Carson & Vecchio 2015).

Other processes include value changes, where youth consciously chose to leave the life of the gang through a personal decision to change their goals and values (Pyrooz, Decker & Webb 2014). These strategies also look to the importance of understanding the motives of gang desistance, method of desistance as well as the degree to which the individual continues their ties to the gang to ensure that the youth does not return to the gang (Pyrooz & Decker 2014). These social prevention and intervention strategies are more comprehensive. They are often implemented by schools, churches, community organizations and even law enforcement. These programs are often the most comprehensive style however the literature points to only limited success of these strategies and encourage a fuller exploration of these strategies to accurately evaluate each program (Ebensen, 2015). Evaluations of these specific gang prevention and intervention strategies continue to be limited, there is a lack of large scale studies across larger variables of time that explore multiple programs. The lack of these studies continues to
undermine the argument that these programs are the most successful and makes it difficult to find information on successful programs to replicate.

Much of the literature on responses to gangs is focused in the US. There is literature on gangs outside the US but the majority does not focus on policy responses towards them. Only a few articles focus on the gang truce strategy in El Salvador and in Trinidad and Tobago and others that look at the failures of some suppression policies internationally. The literature focused on the US can still be useful to exploring the policy approaches in Central America. The theoretical underpinnings of the literature of these policies can be useful when applying it to the context in other countries however special attention must be paid to the difference in institutional structures and the nature of the gangs in each country. The magnitude of the gang phenomenon in Honduras and El Salvador differs greatly from the majority of the literature on gangs which focus around particular programs in particular cities. The scale of programs explored in the literature often are much smaller than policy responses to nationwide gang crises in Honduras and El Salvador. This thesis will analyze the responses to gangs in El Salvador and Honduras which can help address the lack of literature on gang policy responses outside the US and demonstrate some of the challenges of applying the US based literature in an international context.
Chapter 2

Mano Dura: The Reign of Suppression Policies

The most renowned and popular anti-gang strategy in the Northern Triangle countries is known as Mano Dura. This policy is generally characterized as a harsh suppression strategy with a focus on repression and militarization. Mano Dura is marked by three characteristics the first being a focus on “discretionary crimes” or laws that facilitate of arrest through the use of subjective evidence, second by the elimination of procedural protections, meaning the elimination of individual protections against wrongful prosecution and imprisonment, and thirdly the militarization of internal security functions (Holland, 2013; Bruneau, Dammert & Skinner 2011). These three pillars outline the general principles of the suppression policy in El Salvador and Honduras which will be expanded upon later in the chapter.

As outlined earlier in the review of anti-gang literature, there are several arguments as to why suppression strategies fail. The first argument against suppression strategies is the increase in prison populations and the stress these policies place on the penal system (Decker, 2003; Gebo & Bond 2012). The harsh suppression strategies and increases in law enforcement lead to an increase in arrests and an increase in convictions which then fuels overcrowding in prisons and inefficiency within the judicial systems which can’t handle the increase. Another argument against suppression anti-gang initiatives is the failure of the deterrence effect and the misguided view of deterrence (Klein 1993; Mauer 1999). Deterrence is the concept that if one raises the cost of committing a crime or some action to a certain point where people will be dissuading from participating in that activity (Gibbs 1975; Zimring and Hawking 1973). Arguments against suppression strategies point to a misguided use of deterrence principles in the development of the strategy. Similar to this argument are the criticism to the assumption of rational choices in the
gang world and the criticism of the assumption of the connection between disorderliness and crime or the connection between minor crime to sever crime (Lebow & Stein 1989; Klein 1995b, Harcourt 1998). These arguments outline the major criticism of increased suppression and the harsher “zero-tolerance” policies against gangs. The Mano Dura strategies of El Salvador and Honduras exemplify many of these criticisms but also offer their own examples of the failure of suppression strategies. Both Honduras and El Salvador followed similar patterns of Mano Dura strategies however each unique political environment influenced the timing and specifics of each suppression strategy. Both countries, in the end, have reverted back to and continue suppression centric approaches and have harbored back to the original Mano Dura principles.

*Mano Dura and its Failures*

The pioneer of Mano Dura policies in the region was Honduran president Ricardo Maduro who won the presidency in 2001 on a platform of security exemplified by his slogan “Maduro… Futuro Seguro” “Maduro Secure Future” and who had a personal experience with youth violence with the murder and kidnapping of his son 1997 (IPS, 1997; Howarth & Peterson, 2016). This security plan was rolled out with two major initiatives many based on US Zero Tolerance policies in cities such as New York (Cruz, 2011) These policies were Libertad Azul and Cero Tolerancia which were the first Mano Dura strategies in the region. Libertad Azul was an initiative that set out to blur the responsibilities of the military and the police force and encouraged joint police and military raids (Mateo 2011). This militarization, an example of one of the pillars of the Mano Dura policies to come, demonstrated a return to the use of the military to police citizens and the increase use of force and violence to control the gangs. The plan Cero Tolerancia began the process of criminalizing the act of being a gang member. The Honduran Penal code between 2003 and 2006 was reformed 10 times relating to gangs and delinquency
(Does, 2013). The most famous of these reforms is known as the “Ley Anti-Maras” or more specifically the adjustment of Artículo 332 del Código Penal de Honduras:

\[
\text{Asociación Ilícita. Se sancionará con la pena de veinte (20) a treinta (30) años de reclusión y multa de cien mil (L. 100, 000.00) a trescientos mil (L. 300, 000.00) lempiras, a los Jefes o cabecillas de maras, pandillas y demás grupos que se asocien con el propósito permanente de ejecutar cualquier acto constitutivo de delito (Artículo 332 de Código Penal de Honduras)}
\]

*Illicit association. A sentence of twenty (20) to thirty (30) years imprisonment and a fine of one hundred thousand (L. 100, 000.00) to three hundred thousand (L. 300, 000.00) lempiras shall be placed on leaders of Maras, gangs and other groups associated with the permanent purpose of executing any act constituting a crime (Own Translation)*

The Article solidified the criminalization of the act of being a gang member with a stipulation that other members besides the heads of the associations would face a penalty one third that of the heads (7 to 10 years). Other reforms to the act allowed for the continued use of subjective evidence to detain gang members stipulating things such as tattoos and clothing as sufficient evidence for detainment. These programs led to various raids and arrest, in 2003 Honduras was averaging around 277 detained gang members per month (Mencia 2006). The policies of Maduro became the example of *Mano Dura* policies in the region.

Just a year after the implementation of gang suppression strategies in Honduras, El Salvador introduced its own version of the policy. In 2003 only nine months before the presidential elections, El Salvador President Francisco Flores of the conservative ARENA party implemented *Plan Mano Dura* (Does 2013). The plan like other suppression strategies focused on police and military raids and was characterized as a “War on gangs” (Does, 2013). Similar to the pattern of Honduras suppression strategies, the policy came with a legislative component. The Salvadoran “Ley Anti-Maras” passed in 2003 was even more explicit than that of Honduras. The law targeted
all those above only 12 years who belonged to or associated with Maras (Ley Anti-Maras Art.2).

This act stipulated that Maras were considered:

Aquella agrupación de personas que actúen para alterar el orden público o atentar contra el decoro y las buenas costumbres y que cumplan varios... los criterios siguientes: que se reúnan habitualmente, que señalan segmentos de territorio... que tenga señas o símbolos (Art. 1)

A group of people who act to disturb the public order or to attack good customs and that meet several ... of the following criteria: they meet regularly; they indicate ownership of some territory ... they have signs or symbols (Own Translation)

The act also specifically cited a large list of infractions which began with the act of being a member of one of these groups which carried with it an automatic penalty of 5 years in prison (Art. 6), but also penalized graffiti, having a certain tattoo, or even just being outside without a form of identification (Art. 15, 18, 29). The Plan Mano Dura strategy was an example of one of the harshest gang suppression strategies in the region.

The Ley Anti-Maras only one year later was found unconstitutional by the Salvadoran Supreme Court due to its violation of the UN declaration of the rights of a Child. The Salvadoran Constitution stipulation that international treaties El Salvador enters must be upheld and prioritized over national law (Does 2013). Although it was struck down only a few days later, the new president Antonio Saca also a member of the ARENA party implemented Plan Super Mano Dura which focused on military and police raids and raised penalties of being a gang member. The legislative component of the new act, Ley para el Combate de las Actividades Delincuenciales de Grupos o Asociaciones Ilicitas Especiales, required evidence of a criminal act (Art. 20). The law still similar to the older law criminalized the act of being a gang member, increasing the penalty of being a gang member and also criminalized various activities that gangs engaged in. Super Mano Dura solidified the suppression focused strategy of El Salvador for years to come. The plan
was marked by numerous military and police raids across gang strong holds and between the years 2004 and 2008 the imprisoned gang population in El Salvador doubled (Dudley 2010).

The effect of these *Mano Dura* policies on the prison system in both Honduras and El Salvador was drastic. The prison system in Honduras saw an increase in its population by 42% between 2000 and 2014 (Dudley and Martinez 2017). El Salvador’s prison population doubled after a few short years 6,000 to 12,000 however the Director of the Penal Centers said that they only had space for around 700 more prisoners in the whole country (Cáceres, 2005). Both El Salvador and Honduras rank in the top ten in Prison Occupancy rates in Latin America, with El Salvador ranking second in the region (Dudley & Bargent, 2017). The overcrowding has led to disastrous situations within prison and led the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights’ Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty to describe Honduran prisons as “completely contrary to human dignity” and led El Salvador to cram 1,200 inmates in spaces meant for just 300 (Dudley & Bargent, 2017). Not only are the increase in numbers staggering but the deplorable conditions in prisons transformed them into training grounds and strong holds for gangs. With the violence that occurred while mixing gangs within the prison population, both countries have decided to separate gangs in the prison. This has allowed entire prisons to be run by certain gangs and has transformed prison time into a rite of passage for younger members to learn from more hardened members. The prisons now also hold the majority of the highest leadership of both MS-13 and Barrio 18. Commands for the gang on a national level have come as directives from leaders in prison. The leadership with in the prison now contracts assassins and directs extortions from inside the prison, using cellphones that are easily accessible (Dudley and Martinez, 2017). The prison system in both countries now suffer from extreme overcrowding and lack of resources which has fostered a whole ring of smuggling in and out of the prisons as well
(Dudley and Martinez 2017). The prison systems in both El Salvador and Honduras were ill prepared for the increase of gang members into their systems.

![Prison Population Graph](image)

(ICPR Statistics, 2017)

Although *Mano Dura* had a drastic effect on the prison system, *Mano Dura* was ineffective in creating a deterrence. *Mano Dura* was unable to uphold one of the most basic principles of deterrence, certainty- or the probability a sanction will affect you. The *Mano Dura* strategies of both El Salvador and Honduras were plagued with a lack of conviction rates. Although the rates of detention rose the majority of these detainees were released. The fact that there was an increased effect on the prison population did not necessarily translate to convictions due to a common phenomenon in Latin American judicial systems which is prevention detention and pre-trial
detention which is essentially where those accused are held in prison and there is hardly any form of being released on bail prior to trial (Dudley & Bargent, 2017). Between 2003 and 2006 in Honduras, 66 percent of the 6711 gang members detained were eventually released due to lack of evidence (Garcia 2015). In El Salvador, 91% of the gang members were freed due to lack of evidence for Plan Mano Dura and the majority of gang members were also freed under Plan Super Mano Dura (Garcia, 2015). The lack of high conviction rates was due to the inability to gather evidence and the ill prepared justice system to handle such a large uptake in cases. The Salvadoran judicial system is rampant with impunity with 90% of major crimes going without conviction due to a police force with a weak investigative capacity (Insight Crime, 2017; Wolf, 2017). Similarly, the Honduran system is also ineffective with impunity rates for homicides at 96% and also suffering from a similar lack of investigative capacity and corruption (Gurney, 2014). The ineffectiveness of these policies demonstrates how they did not make a dent in the membership in gangs on the streets and shows how these policies failed to uphold the deterrence theory principle of certainty.

Beyond its ineffectiveness, Mano Dura also influenced the gang structures themselves. The first effect of Mano Dura was increased cohesion within the group. One of the greatest criticisms of the Mano Dura strategies is that it increased cohesion between members of the groups and in turn made the gangs more organized and more violent (Cruz, 2011). The groups increased their membership requirements and began to evolve to have stricter guidelines of conduct. The gangs also began to seek out heavier weaponry and as response to the repression adapt to become less conspicuous (Wolf, 2011b). The gangs adjusted and wore normal clothing and started banning tattoos to adapt to the pressures placed by the new policies. The policy forced a certain level of unity to combat the continued police raids. Being targeted can bring members of a group together
and force them to be more organized to confront the ongoing pressure. The prison system also offered them a way to organize and MS-13 is now notorious in El Salvador for its hierarchal structure from within prions starting with the national leaders know as “ranfleros” and range to facilitators between the outside population and the prison population known as “corredors de programa o de clicas” (Dudley & Martinez, 2017). These structures facilitated a more cohesive and hierarchal gang which in turn helped the gang in its criminal activities. Gang suppression has been known to cause increase in cohesion in various circumstances (Klein, 1995b). *Mano Dura* increased this sense of togetherness by forcing them to adapt to the external pressure. They hid their membership and monitored their members’ behavior more thoroughly (Wolf, 2017). The separated prison system between MS-13 and Barrio 18 also increased the cohesion by facilitating a place to congregate and exchange knowledge and techniques.

Another secondary effective of the increase of gang members in prison was the need for more resources to support the prisoners and their families. This need for resources pushed gangs to engage in more extortions of businesses and communities in order to raise enough money to support imprison members and their families (Wolf, 2011b). To support the rise of imprisoned membership and particularly the leadership core within the prison, the rank and file members had to garner more and more funds. The gang often had to support the family members of the imprisoned since often the gang member could no longer earn an income (Moloney, 2016). The change in needs of the imprisoned gang members included the cost of lawyers, as well as bribes and general money for cellphones and other essentials within prison (Dudley & Bargent, 2017). The increase in extortion rings and increased focused on financial resources also transformed the gangs into more organized and more violent organizations.
One of the greatest criticism of the *Mano Dura* policies in the region is the gross human rights violations that occurred under them. The increased militarization of internal public security led to massive accounts of extrajudicial killings and the more subjected penal codes led to large numbers of youth who were wrongfully accused. An example of these violation of human rights is the case known as the four cardinal points which was lawsuit brought against the Honduran government for the imprisonment and extrajudicial killing of 3 young boys (Mateo, 2011). In 2004, the Honduran government accepted responsibility for what happened to the 3 boys and in 2006 the Inter American Commission on Human Rights also found the government responsible and found the connection between the government and the murders (Mateo, 2011). Since then however there has been no prosecution against any members of the police or government associated. The director of the attorney general’s office of El Salvador on Human rights reported that between 2014 and 2015, 92% of the Human Rights complaints that came to his office were targeted at the state security forces (Woody, 2015). There are various other examples of impunity and extrajudicial killings across El Salvador and Honduras. Some scholars argue that there is a process of social cleansing going on in these countries targeting poor urban youth. The legacy in El Salvador and Honduras of military repression also play a factor in the gross violations of human rights as a result of these policies. Both the Honduran and El Salvadoran national police forces have connections to organized crime and the gangs themselves and often will carry out attack in favor of certain gangs. The *Mano Dura* policies in Honduras and El Salvador failed to curb the violence or the strength and presence of gangs in the region and also exacerbated social institutions such as prisons and increased the effectiveness and organizational capacity of the gangs.

*The Return to Mano Dura*
After the criticism of *Mano Dura*, both El Salvador and Honduras shifted focuses temporarily away from suppression strategies. In Honduras, the 2005 election marked this shift towards a different approach. Manuel Zelaya the liberal candidate ushered in a fresh perspective promising an administration that would alleviate poverty, combat corruption, and most importantly change the suppression focused anti-gang strategy (Does 2013). The stagnation of the *Mano Dura* policies, the harsh criticism of the policy, and the inability to diminish the strength and violence of the gangs led to the rise in the popularity of the new alternative, Manuel Zelaya. The country continued to believe that crime and gangs were the main issue facing the country and there was in fact an increase in the percentage of citizens that thought crime was greatest threat to the nation (Mateo 2011). The Zelaya alternative led to changes in policing that prioritized rehabilitation and prevention through various community policing programs. The policies of Zelaya changed the focus away from repression and attempted to address root causes.

These policies however were short lived. The Honduran elites’ distrust of President Zelaya’s associations with Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro bolstered negative sentiments towards his administration. Zelaya’s new vision of reforming the constitution and his call for a referendum on changing the constitution caused so much tension within the spheres of power in Honduras that in 2009 the military overthrew Zelaya with an order from the Supreme Court (Mateo 2011). The country destabilized by the apparent unconstitutional overthrow of the president exploded into protest and the vacuum of power led to an increase in violence. The military attempted to maintain order and the interim president paid little attention to the gang phenomenon. The election of Porfirio Lobo, the handpicked successor of Maduro who lost to Zelaya in 2005, sealed the return of the suppression centered strategies towards gangs. Porfirio Lobo in fact even chose the same minister of public security that served in the Maduro Administration, Oscar Alvarez (Does 2013).
The new administration marked the return of suppression policies and prioritized the militarization of internal security. These suppression policies had a new focus as well which was organized crime. The increase in drug trafficking had pushed priorities to suppress organized crime as well as the Maras. The continued use of Mano Dura policies in Honduras was marked recently with the reform to the penal code in 2015 which augmented the penalty of Article 332 to 50 years for heads of gangs and the new tri-national gang task force introduced in 2016, which will serve as a military police gang task force in the border region of the northern triangle countries (Garcia, 2015; Kinosian 2016). These policies along with other new initiatives such as Operación Avalanche which has targeted the financial assets of MS-13 show a continued suppression focused strategy (Lasusa, 2016). Honduras was the first to implement Mano Dura policies towards gangs in the region and after a brief change in strategy has returned to an emphasis on Mano Dura. Similarly, El Salvador followed an analogous pattern of anti-gang policy.

The failure of many of these suppression policies to curb the violence in El Salvador led to a historic election in 2009. Mauricio Funes won the election in 2009 giving the FMLN the former guerrilla turned political party its first presidential victory. Mauricio Funes entered the presidency with promises of reforms to the anti-gang strategy, the former president Antonio Saca had already begun changing his rhetoric through the implementation of Mano Amiga or Mano Extendida, however the reforms seemed to have only changed the rhetoric and there was little actual programing and the suppression strategy remained the priority during the Saca years. Funes when he entered the presidency reformed the system putting a focus on a comprehensive approach, rehabilitation, institutional reforms and victim support. The change was exemplified by the increase of spending on prevention programs from 1% of the Public Security budget to 14% (Does, 2013). After the gang attack on a bus in 2010 which left 17 dead, Funes returned to suppression
strategies and deployed the army (Does, 2013). In 2010, there was another Anti-Mara law enacted, Law for Proscription of Maras, Gangs, Groups, Associations and Organizations of a Criminal Nature which continued the past criminalization of different aspects of being a gang member and increasing penalties for gang offenses (“Ley de Proscripción de Maras”, 2010).

The failure of these policy led Funes to turn to a new and unseen strategy which was a gang truce. The truce was brokered in 2012 and saw a 45% drop in homicides with in the first four months (Bargent, 2013). However, the end of the truce brought a huge increase in homicides which spiked in 2015 reaching levels not seen since the Civil War (BBC News, 2015). The increase in the violence after the failure of the truce, led to hardline approaches from FMLN President Sanchez Cerén with a rejection of attempting to renter a truce. The priority returned to suppression and repression and again alternative strategies were seen as secondary. The culmination of this return to Mano Dura strategies was the Salvadoran Supreme Courts declaration of MS-13 and Dieciocho as terrorist organizations (Daughtery, 2015). Later in 2016, the Salvadoran legislator went a step further and unanimously approved a reform to the terrorism statutes to include gangs as well as increase the sentence to 15 years for anyone “who solicits, demands, offers, promotes, formulates, negotiates, convenes or enters into a non-persecution agreement [with gangs] or any other prerogative to illegally dispense with applicable laws, or offers benefits or advantages to members of illicit groups” (Tabory, 2016). The suppression centered approaches continued in 2016 with the partnership on the tri-national gang task force and Operación Jaque which targeted the financial assets of MS-13 similar to the program in Honduras (Martinez, Lemus, Sontag, 2016). Both El Salvador and Honduras, prioritized suppression based anti-gang strategies and both reverted back to similar Mano Dura based strategies.

Why return to failed policies?
With all the evidence of the ineffectiveness of the *Mano Dura* strategies, both Honduras and El Salvador’s continued replication of past policies seems confusing. In Honduras, the return to the same type of *Mano Dura* strategies seen during Maduro rule after the coup seemed contradictory to the dissatisfaction with suppression policy just a few years earlier in 2005 that led to the election of Manuel Zelaya. Similarly, in El Salvador, whenever there was a change in strategy towards a more holistic approach there was always a harsh return to *Mano Dura*. What leads to this continued emphasis on suppression policies which have continued until today?

One of the clearest reasons for the return to *Mano Dura* strategies stems from the manner in which the gang phenomenon is framed. As the Antonia Does argues in her article *Construction of the Maras*, security and anti-gang policy became politicized the frameworks of the policies became even more political. An example is the direct involvement of President Maduro and his minister of Public Security on raids, which Does argue transforms the president and the government into “securitizing actors who designate the Maras as an existential threat to the referent object of public and citizen security… the already politicized issue of the Maras is arguably turned into a securitized matter by framing it as an urgent security matter” (Does 2013). This transformation and politicization and securitization of the issue thus requires that the majority of anti-gang initiatives be visible and concrete. Thus, suppression strategies such as increased raids or the literal criminalization of certain acts are easily visible actions that demonstrates direct action against this security threat. Other more complex strategies that look towards root causes and prevention are harder to fit into this political and security mold created by the discourse surrounding gangs in El Salvador and Honduras. This framing of gangs as a security threat is also one of the reasons that suppression strategies continue to be so popular within the citizens of El Salvador and Honduras. In Vanderbilt University’s AmericasBarometer study, surveys found that
of all the countries in Latin America the two populations that supported increasing the military’s role in internal public security the most were El Salvador and Honduras who both had over 80% of the population agree with the statement (Zechmeister, 2014). This popularity allows for the continued political success of suppression strategies allow there are various examples how they have failed. The way in which gangs are framed make prevention programs politically difficult to implement because they are seen as appeasement towards this external security threat. The framing by the governments of Honduras and El Salvador and the media of both countries continues to reinforce suppression strategies.

This framing as a security threat also allows the governments of El Salvador and Honduras to place themselves on the side of poor and marginalized majority of the country effected by this violence as their protectors. The government rhetoric will be framed as protecting the ordinary humble citizen from this wrath of an external threat, gangs. This is often seen in the political rhetoric of current Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez who juxtaposes the “privileges” of prisoners such as access to filtered water and three meals a day with that of poor Honduras that aren’t afforded many of these services to excuse accusations of Human rights violations (Partido Nacional, 2017). This manner of framing those that are concerned with Human Rights abuses as being on the side of criminals continues to reinforce the need of suppression strategies and leaves little room for alternative policies. Often however gangs are embedded in the community and creating this distinction only leads to harassment of all urban marginalized youth. The rhetoric of the government as a protector also allows the government to garner favorability with the majority of the population without addressing the systematic inequalities, or lack of opportunities facing the majority of these marginalized communities. The government can place themselves as
protector and continue gaining support from these communities without addressing the more pressing issues of lack of employment, education or healthcare.

One of the reasons that this framing of the gang phenomenon as an exterior threat on society was particularly effective was the presence of conservative medias. Both El Salvador and Honduras have conservative elites that control the majority of the news outlets across both countries. In El Salvador, the two major newspapers *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Grafica* are traditionally two ultra-right newspapers that have been under control of conservative elite for generations (Wolf, 2017). Although there have been some changes to the papers to make them more comprehensive and critical and with advances in internet there are more available news outlets particularly left leaning outlets like *El Faro*, these two newspapers dominate due to advertising and continue to push conservative viewpoints particularly suppression anti-gang strategies (Wolf, 2017). They helped the government frame gangs as this external security threat to the Salvadoran society helping justify harsh approaches and the laxing of civil protections. Similarly, Honduras media has been dominated by the conservative elites since the 1970s (Dudley, 2016). The conservative elites help support suppression strategies and the halt many alternative programs by framing of Zelaya as an anti-democratic leftist abandoning the constitutional rule of law to stay in power. The conservative control over the media and its ability to frame the gang issue continued to encourage a reverting back to suppression strategies.

Another possible explanation for the continued return to *Mano Dura* policies are fiscal concerns. Both in Honduras and El Salvador, the limited prevention and rehabilitation programs suffer from severe lack of funding. Both President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras and Mauricio Funes in El Salvador had trouble garnering enough funds to support their community policing and prevention initiatives (Does 2013). However, *Mano Dura* strategies are not free of cost, increases
in law enforcement personal and the militarization of the public security have their own expenses. A study by the world bank found that El Salvador spends the highest percentage of their GDP in the Central American region on Security and Justice (2.4%) and ranks among lowest in social spending in Latin America and Honduras also spends a significant amount on security around 2% of their GDP (Wells 2013). These increases in cost due to Mano Dura can come from increases in police and military personal as well as the need for more prisons which both El Salvador and Honduras have planned to implement due to the ever-increasing prison overcrowding. Honduras approved a $59 million prison construction in 2013 and El Salvador announced $8 million prion expansion plan in 2015 and a $47 million plan announced this year in 2017 (La Prensa, 2013; El Mundo, 2015; García, 2017). Although there are possible fiscal concerns, the more convincing argument lies in the securitization of the gang phenomenon in El Salvador and Honduras which created a discourse that favors a continued use of suppression strategies. Mano Dura failed to curb the violence or the strength of gangs across El Salvador and Honduras yet the policy continued to be replicated.
Chapter 3:
La tregua: Are Gang Truces a sustainable alternative approach?

Although suppression strategies have become the most popular anti-gang strategy in Central America, it is hardly the only approach. Recently, an approach that has gotten significant attention in the region is the gang truce policy. Since the implementation of the gang truce in El Salvador in March of 2012, the policy has been viewed as the possible alternative approach to the suppression strategies of the early 2000s. Gang truces are not unique to Central America, truces and have been experimented with across the US at local levels as well as in other countries in Latin America. A gang truce is essentially a “a nonviolent resolution to a larger conflict between groups that has an impact on general levels of violence and other forms of criminality within a community” (Katz & Amaya 2015). This definition is upheld by most of the rather small literature on gang truces (Ordog et al., 1993; 1995; Whitehill et al. 2012, Maguire 2013). There have been very few studies on the effectiveness of gang truces and most mainly examine the effect on violence specifically homicide. The study’s also raise concerns with the implications and negative side effects of truces on the transformation of gangs.

This chapter will explore why truces have failed as a sustainable policy towards gangs in El Salvador and Honduras and also examine the way in which the truce policy was framed after the fact to now make the policy too politically volatile to attempt to re-implement. The chapter will begin by exploring whether the truces worked at a practical level, whether gangs were organized enough to control their members and what members of gang’s interests were served by a truce, rank and file or leaders. Then it will explore whether the policy itself is sustainable and what process are necessary to make a truce last, what support and from what actors are needed to
ensure its continuation. The second portion of the chapter will look to the negative implications of the truce such as solidifying the gangs political power and laying the precedent for violence as a form of gaining political representation as well as allowing gangs to expand their non-violent criminal activities. The final part of the chapter will explore the way in which the press as well as opposition political parties played on the societal fears of corruption and the legacy of state corruption to frame truce policies as ineffective and counter to the interest of the citizens. The framing and concerns of corruption transformed truce policy into too volatile political issue which has blocked any attempt of re-implementing it.

**Gang Truces practicality: Who benefits? Can gang members be controlled?**

The level of organizational capacity of the gang directly relates to the ability of the gang to implement an effective truce. One of the biggest assumptions made by a gang truce is that the members of the organization that negotiate the gang will be able to enforce the truce within the organization whether that means within the local level or a more regional level. The actual level of organizational capacity within Central American gangs is debated. There are various “clicas” of both MS-13 and Barrio 18 that stretch across both El Salvador and Honduras as well as Mexico, Guatemala and in 40 states within the US (US Department of Treasury, 2012). The department of treasury designated MS-13 as a Transnational Criminal organization in 2012 implying that they had a vast and organized criminal network, stating that they coordinated criminal activities across nations and communicated regularly. However, theorist such as Sonja Wolf argue that the perception of Maras as transnational organized crime is actually an exaggeration caused by the media due to their physical appearance, tattoos and symbols and that in reality the Maras are much more loosely organized and mainly “clicas” just share names rather than actual common leaders or purpose (Wolf, 2012).
The most notable example of the importance of the organizational capacity of the gangs to control violence and the understanding of the particularities of gang violence when implementing a truce is the example of Honduras. Honduras attempted to follow the similar gang truce policy implemented by El Salvador in 2012. In 2013, again from a prison a spokesperson for each of the Maras spoke about their agreement to, in Barrio 18 case, stop homicides but not extortions at that time and in the MS-13 stop homicide and criminal activities such as extortion (Pachico, 2013). This truce however for many had lower prospects of reducing violence because theorists believed that gangs were not the main source of violence in Honduras and Honduras gangs lacked the organizational structure to control its members (Pachico, 2013; Bargnet 2013).

In a special report on Honduran Maras in 2015, Insight Crime found that the gangs tended to have a horizontal structure thus individual clica leaders had more autonomy and that there was not a larger more organized overhead leadership (Insight Crime, 2015). This lack of organizational capacity is one of the reasons behind the lack of a reduction in homicides after the announcement of the truce and the actual increase in homicides in the 28 days after the truce (Bargnet, 2013). Katz and Amaya also found that the Honduran gang truce had no substantial effect on violence or crimes, by looking at homicide rates by municipality and cross referencing with other trends in homicide rates in the past (Katz and Amaya, 2015). The homicide rates did drop slightly per municipality but the drop was not significant after cross referenced with regular temporal changes in homicides by month (Katz and Amaya, 2015). The lack of organizational capacity of Honduran Maras to control the individual clica leaders and their individual members led to a failure in the truce policy.

In Contrast, in March of 2012, two individuals who identified themselves as the national spokesman for MS-13 and Barrio 18 announced from prison that their organizations had reached
a truce and that they wanted to address the issues facing El Salvador such as exclusion, poverty, unemployment and called upon the Catholic Church and Civil society to assist them in the implementation of the agreement (Stone 2012). The drop in the homicide rate after the implementation of the truce was one of the most cited arguments of its success. The national homicide rate dropped from 72 per 100,000 residents to 36 per 100,000 residents (Dudley, 2013). There was an over 50% drop in homicides from 2011 to 2012, dropping from 4366 murders to 2246 and in some particularly violent municipalities the drops were astonishing (Instistucion de Medicina Legal Homicide Statistics). For example, in the municipality of Sonsonate, there were 101 homicides in 2010 and 129 in 2011 however a year into the truce, it had dropped down to just 17 homicides in 2013 (IML). The numbers seemed to up hold the previously though assumption that the Maras in El Salvador had a more hierarchal structure so thus the announcement of the truce by gang leaders in prison would translate to a reduction in violence. However, an examination of the homicide rates within different departments and municipalities across the truce years revealed that not all places experienced a reduction of homicides and that the truce had in fact transformed the violence in the country.

The truce varied in effectiveness in reducing homicides likely due to the varying degrees of organizational control of the different gangs in the different parts of El Salvador. The homicide rates in the large urban centers of San Salvador and La Libertad reduced dramatically over truce period. These areas experienced drops of almost 50% over the period of 2012 and 2013 in comparison to the rates in 2010 and 2011 (IML). However, there were departments that did not experience the same drop in homicides and some that experience increases after the truce. One of the most striking examples was the department of Usulután which in 2010 and 8th highest number of homicides with 139 that year and then throughout 2012 and 2013 did not experience a
substantial drop in homicides and actually experienced an increase in homicides in 2013 to 171 (IML). However, the most striking part of the department of Usulután is that by 2015 it ranked as the third deadliest department in El Salvador with 527 homicides (IML). The truce solidified a change in gang violence where the central departments became the most violent (Valencia 2015).

The truce’s effect on homicides also varied by the number of gang members in prison in the municipality (Katz and Amaya 2015). The municipalities with more MS-13 members imprisoned in the municipality tended to have a significant drop in homicides post truce while the municipalities with greater Barrio 18 members imprisoned saw a trend of increasing homicides post truce (Katz and Amaya 2015). This trend also reinforced the notion that MS-13 had more rigid and hierarchical structures and that the prison leadership had a stronger control over its members which led to its designation as a Transnational Criminal Organization in 2012 (US Department of Treasury). The Mara’s lack of a uniform organizational structure led to an uneven result of the gang truce which increased homicide rates in particular zones while decreasing rates in other regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Homicides (2010)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 San Salvador</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>33.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 La Libertad</td>
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<td>14.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sonsonate</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Santa Ana</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>9.80%</td>
</tr>
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<td>290</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
</tr>
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<td>6 La Paz</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
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<td>7 Ahuachapan</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Usulutan</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Cuscatlan</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>121</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
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<td>13 San Vicente</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 La Libertad</td>
<td>541</td>
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<td>3 Usulutan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 San Miguel</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Sonsonate</td>
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</tr>
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<td>6 Cuscatlan</td>
<td>344</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7 Santa Ana</td>
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<td>8 La Paz</td>
<td>278</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,280</strong></td>
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</table>
Homicides in El Salvador (IML Statistics)

Year | Homicides in El Salvador | Homicides in Department of La Libertad | Homicides in the Department of San Salvador
-----|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------
2010 | 4,004                    | 579                                    | 1,350                                         |
2011 | 4,366                    | 525                                    | 1,447                                         |
2012 | 2,246                    | 642                                    | 642                                           |
2013 | 2,513                    | 240                                    | 785                                           |
2014 | 3,912                    | 235                                    | 1,236                                         |
2015 | 6,072                    | 366                                    | 678                                           |
2016 | 4,752                    | 541                                    | 1,598                                         |

Homicides in the Department of Usulután

Year | Homicides in the Department of Usulután
-----|------------------------------------------
2010 | 139                                      |
2011 | 171                                      |
2012 | 132                                      |
2013 | 177                                      |
2014 | 340                                      |
2015 | 527                                      |
2016 | 448                                      |
Positive or Negative peace: Are Gang Truces sustainable?

Beyond the gang’s organizational capacity there are other factors that affect the sustainability and effectiveness of the truce. One question is whether the gang truce by itself is able to create sustainable peace or are other processes needed to accompany it to make it last. One of the common themes through most studies on gang truces is that if the truce has any effect on violence it normally is short lived and there is a return to the violence after the brief period of reduction (Ordog et al., 1995; Maguire 2013, Katz and Amaya 2015). The ability to meet demands as well as what actors are involved or lend support to the truce have a drastic effect on whether the truce will be successful or not. In the El Salvador case, some regions were able to have a significant and somewhat sustainable drop in homicides. While the Honduras case did not see a significant effect on violence. Beyond the organizational capacity argument, possible explanations could be the nature of the demands and the ability of the actors involved to meet those demands as well as the second phase of the truce which was a program specific to El Salvador.

The demands of the truce and which actors could implement them had a huge effect on the effectiveness of the truce. As Katz and Amaya argue in Honduras the demands of the truce were not met to the same extent in which they were met in El Salvador (2015). At the announcement of the Honduran gang truce the demands were more substantial and more complex, the gangs asked for a scale down of the repressive “Mano Dura” policy, exemplified by the spokesperson demand for “the police to stop killing us” (Pachico 2013). Beyond an end to Mano Dura the gang also asked for employment and programs to integrate them into the society (Los Voceros Nacionals de la Mara Salvatrucha 2012). These demands were more comprehensive and actually more difficult to produce in a short time period. The Honduran
government also had a limited role in implementing the truce. The president afford support for the truce when it was announced however the extent of their involvement was not significant (Pachico 2013). The actual mediators of the truce were Adam Blackwell a security official with the Organized American States as well as the archbishop of San Pedro Sula Monsignor Rómulo Emiliani (Miroff 2013). The Honduran government was not able to meet the demands of truce and thus there was little to no effect on violence and crime in Honduras.

The Salvadoran case, in contrast, had a demand that was less complex and more concrete as well as significant government involvement although it was denied at first. The demand forms the spokespersons at the outset of the truce were similar to the those of the Honduras gang and both the spokes persons denied the allegations that they had negotiated with the government (Stone 2012). However, a week before the announcement of the truce 30 leaders of both MS-13 and Barrio 18 had been transferred from maximum security prisons to lower security prisons, the minister of security, Magualin Payés, cited humanitarian reasons and fear of a massacre as the justification for the transfer (Lemus, Luna, Martinez 2012). However, as it was later discovered this transfer of gang leaders was a direct part of the gang truce and that Magualin Payes as well as other members of the FMLN party such as Raul Mijango were part of the negotiation (Arce 2016; Martinez & Sanz; 2012). The demands in the Salvadoran case were much easier to complete and the direct involvement of government officials within the truce also could have contributed to the relative success of dropping homicides in certain regions.

Beyond the demands, the Salvadoran case also had a unique portion of the truce which was named the second phase of the truce or the “zero-violence” communities. This process different from the Honduras case capitalized on the reduction in violence to implement a more comprehensive process involving civil society as well as the business sector to attempt to
embedded the reduction in violence through the disarmament and other intervention strategies (Thale, Batemen Goerdt, 2013). This second phase in the gang truce process attempted to address particularly violent municipalities and work directly with the local government to implement reintegration programs as well as reduce the police’s indiscriminate raids and other suppression policies (Cawley, 2013). There were 11 municipalities identified as “sanctuary cities” or later referred to as “violence free zones” which involved local implementation of the truce, disarmament, as well as the creation of prevention and intervention programs such as in Ilopango the first municipality to be named “Zona de paz” the municipality created a chicken coop where various gang members worked (Cawley, 2013). Of the 11 municipalities labeled as the violence free zones, 9 experienced a drop in homicide 7 experience a massive reduction in violence by 2014 (Valencia, 2015). The one of the two municipalities that experienced an increase in homicides supposedly had split within the Barrio 18 gang in their municipality which was claimed as an explanation for the rise in homicides despite truce and the two municipalities with minimal reduction in homicide had mayors that did not fully implement the program (Valencia, 2015). The “second phase” of the truce seemed to have the most success of any part of the truce. Ilopango experienced large reductions in violence dropping from 117 homicides in 2011 to 50 in 2014 as well as Sonsonate which experienced a drop of 129 homicides in 2011 to 33 in 2014 (IML). These municipalities even withstood the 2014 over 50% increase in homicides across the country, going from 2513 homicides in 2013 to 3912 in 2014 (IML). The implementation of intervention strategies that included several actors on a local level as well as a focus on disarmament and intervention coupled with the truce had the most significant reduction in violence in El Salvador. Gang truce on their own are weak, the level of trust between the parties is low and the likelihood that violence will break out at any moment is high. The relative
success of “zero violence” zones was found in their ability to embed the reduction of violence at a local level through the prevention of future violence by disarmament and other intervention strategies.

(IML Statistics)
The Ultimate Failure of Gang Truces

Although the truce had some relative success in reducing homicides in certain regions of El Salvador, the truce would ultimately break down and in 2015 there was a surge of violence and homicides reached all-time highs even surpassing any homicide rate during the civil war (Planas, 2017). Even in the “zero violence” zones there were increases in violence such as in Ilopango where homicides jumped to 137 in 2015 passing the number of homicides experienced in the years before the truce (IML). The massive increase in violence in 2015 and 2016 can be explained by the breakdown of the truce which occurred around mid-2014 (Planas, 2017; Lohmuller, 2014). The failure of the gang truce in both El Salvador and Honduras also raised concerns of the negative implications that truces had on the development of gangs and whether the policy only served to help them. Several theorists worried that the truce actually increased cohesion within the group and allowed them to reorganize and increase other criminal activities (Farah 2016; Dudley 2013). The truce gave the gang leadership experience in organizing and attempting to control various clicas, it created an environment that fostered greater connection between clicas and communication between leadership and rank and file members. Beyond, the increased cohesion which could lead to an increase in other criminal activities there was little evidence that other crimes such as extortion truly went down implying that the gangs possibly used the opportunity to increase other operations (Dudley 2013).

Beyond the expansion of the gang’s organizational capacity and other criminal activities, the greatest concern is with the gain in political power the gangs achieved through the truce and the precedent set that violence and homicides can lead to political power. The Maras now entered into the political sphere becoming active negotiators with the government and Civil society after the truce. The government by negotiating with them has accepted them as a social actor and
legitimized their political power (Maguire 2013). This recognition can have severe consequences because it lays the precedent that through violence an organization can gain political capital (Dudley, 2013). As a gang member quoted in the article, Central American Gangs are all Grown Up, “We dump bodies on the street until they say yes. And they always say yes” the policy can inadvertently encourage violence as a means to achieving a political goal (Farah, 2016). The Maras may be attempting to use violence as political capital again in El Salvador after the massive rise in homicides in 2015 and 2016, gangs have reintroduced desires to negotiate with the government in early 2017 (Martínez & Valencia, 2017).

2017: Total Rejection of Negotiation

Since the dismantling of the truce in El Salvador in 2014 and the seemingly immediate failure of the truce in Honduras, there has been a return to the rhetoric of securitization and Mano Dura. In 2016, both MS-13 and Barrio 18 in El Salvador attempted to establish a cease-fire and were able to reduce homicides over a six-day period, but since the election of Sánchez Cerén in 2014 the prospects of any sort of negotiations has dwindle (Partlow & Maslin, 2016). The election Sanchez Cerén, a member of the FMLN party, brought about a return to Mano Dura and the use of as Cerén put it “extraordinary measures” to pursue the gangs including large police raids, increased use of force, and the transferring of prisoners to solitary confinement (Partlow & Maslin, 2016). The government of Sanchez Cerén has totally rejected any sort of attempts at negotiation and has even prosecuted those who implemented the truce in 2012, arresting Raul Mijango, the former FMLN law maker who was the primary negotiator of the Salvadoran truce (Arce, 2016). The attorney general Douglas Mendez also hopes to arrest and prosecute more than the 20 officials detained thus far specifically the former minister of security David Manguía Payés (Arce, 2016). The Salvadoran government has now solidified its rejection of any types of
negotiations with gangs and continues to reject negotiations in the year 2017 even with claims that MS-13 will dismantle itself as part of the negotiation (Martínez & Valencia, 2017).

The fears of election fraud in 2014 and the fears that the FMLN was corrupt with the accusations that came towards the Funes administration led to a sharp change in policy by the FMLN. The Sanchez Cerén administration actually had politically benefited from the regional success of the truce receiving the majority of the votes in 9 of the 11 “safe zone” municipalities, 4 being former ARENA party strong holds (Fagoaga, 2014). Despite the political benefits, the fear of corruption and electoral fraud forced Sanchez Cerén to take an aggressive approach towards gangs. Many viewed the Funes and Sanchez Cerén administrations’ close ties to the gangs through negotiation and prevention and intervention strategies as evidence that the administrations are corrupt and used the gangs for voter intimidation to win the election in 2014 (Diario1, 2017). The continued use of the securitization rhetoric surrounding gangs and the continued juxtaposition of gangs as a threat to the common poor reinforces the necessity of Mano Dura. Gang truces have changed the scope of anti-gang strategies across El Salvador and Honduras. The way in which they failed and have been subsequently framed by each countries media sources and government which has led to a now stark opposition to any form of negotiation with gangs and encouraged a return to Mano Dura.
Chapter 4:

Mano Amiga: Can prevention and intervention strategies solve the problem?

Beyond the gang truce interventionist strategy, El Salvador and Honduras have experimented with some social prevention and intervention strategies. Prevention strategies or in this case “mano amiga” (Friendly hand) strategies focus on root causes of gangs and attempt to prevent violence and recruitment before it happens while intervention strategies in this case “mano extendida” (Extended hand) strategies focus more on helping youth already involved with gangs and helping those members of gang desist (Klein & Maxson 2006, Wolf 2011, Does, 2013). Although these programs often address different aspects of the gang phenomenon, they are implemented by similar actors and share common goals. Prevention and Intervention strategies are often seen as the best anti-gang policy as opposed to solely suppression strategies (Gebo & Bond, 2012; Decker, 2003). However, in El Salvador and Honduras prevention and intervention strategies face limitations and their success has been mixed. The lack of political will to implement these strategies and weak institutions across both countries has led to a lack of coordination between programs and a lack of a comprehensive national strategy. Beyond a lack of coordination, both countries also suffer from a lack of available domestic funds creating underfunded programs as well as a dependence on international funding. These complications are also coupled with the difficulty in measuring the success of the program and the lack of independent in depth research on the successes and failures of these programs. In El Salvador and Honduras, more and more prevention and intervention programs have been created since the early 2000s; however, with the continued limitations and the prioritization of security approaches, there success have been limited.
Lack of Coordination, Comprehension and Long term initiatives

After the initial implementation of *Mano Dura* in El Salvador in 2003, there was a push to respond to the critiques of the suppression only focus of the plan (ARENA, 2004). President Antonio Saca introduced *País Seguro* which included a plan for prevention and intervention strategies called JovenEs which focused on culture art, health, recreation, and violence prevention (ARENA 2004). This plan attempted to address the lack of a coordinated effort and established the *Secretaría de la Joventud* which was supposed to lead youth development throughout the country (ARENA, 2004). The *Secretaría de la Joventud* performed a survey of youth to determine the specific issues to address and developed the “Plan Nacional de la Joventud 2005-2015” to improve youth social indicators for the next ten years (Cabrera Giron, 2006). This plan defined youth as people 15 to 24 years old and its objective were those outlined by the United Nations such as reducing hunger and extreme poverty by 50%, addressing AIDS, and establishing universal primary education (Cabrera Giron, 2006). One of the limitations with this first effort to coordinate programing was the broad mandate. This program was meant to address such a wide variety of issues and was not narrowly focused towards gang prevention. To address the problems with gangs the prevention and intervention strategies must be tailored towards specific social aspects that drive gangs. As many theorist point to, gang prevention programs must be tailored towards individuals, communities, families, and overall structural aspects and specifically how these foster gangs (Maxson & Klein, 2006). If the programs don’t specifically address gangs than they will have difficulty drastically curtailing gangs even if they improve other social conditions. The *Secretaría de Joventud* did not specifically address gang problems and its broad mandate stretched the resources thin.
The Secretaria de la Joventud also lacked the institutional strength to coordinate the various youth development programs. The Secretaria’s mandate was to address the lack of coordination between various youth social programing which had caused repeated programs and repeated failed strategies because of a lack of information sharing. In the first three years of the Secretaria there were three different directors (Wolf, 2017). The instability led to inefficiency and many partner programs never received the funding they were promised and some organizations were never contacted by the Secretaria to coordinate (Wolf, 2017). This lack of institutional strength came from both a lack of planning and a lack of political will. The directors were often ill prepared and received a hefty salary while also using the position as a stepping stone for political office (Wolf, 2017). The Secretaria also focused more on advertisement than on actual programing and spent way over market value on the ads and promotional material (Arauz, 2008). The Secretaria de la Joventud in the end lack the institutional strength to coordinate between the various actors implementing prevention and intervention strategies. It failed to create a coordinated effort to specifically target gangs and community or individual characteristics that foster gangs.

In Honduras, the lack of coordination and communication between youth preventative strategies is also visible. In a report USAID released on preventative strategies in Honduras one of the three major problems they found with the programing was a that there is a lack of coordination and collaboration leading to programing developing in isolation, inefficiency and repeated programs and failed strategies (Cohan, Mayberry, Payan and Rosiak 2013). The programs also lacked a coordinating leadership that could foster this collaboration and specifically lacked government involvement directly (Cohan, Mayberry, Payan and Rosiak 2013; Seelke 2016). President Manuel Zelaya entered his narrowly won the presidency in 2006 with a
vision of changing the trend of *Mano Dura* and attempted to apply more prevention strategies (Bosworth, 2010) However, although he developed some programing such as Educational initiatives like *Educación para Resistir y Evitar las Maras* (Education to resist and avoid the Maras) which was a 15-lesson long programing for 5th and 6th graders to help inform them of the negatives of joining gangs (Yanez Escobar, 2007). The lessons were meant to instill social and emotional skills to help them resist peer pressure and have the tools to avoid the joining gangs (Ogaz, 2010). However, these initiatives were often limited and only were able to include a few youths. Abruptly, in 2009 the military coup that ousted Zelaya brought an instability that caused an upsurge in violence and a return to security centric approaches (Bosworth, 2010). Beyond the lack of coordination and comprehensive approaches, another compounding issue facing prevention and intervention strategies is the lack of funding.

**Lack of Funds**

Both in El Salvador and Honduras many prevention and intervention strategies suffer from sever lack of funding as well as a misuse of limited funds. Both the budgets of El Salvador and Honduras lack the necessary tax bases to develop large scale planning and gang initiatives. El Salvador suffers from a significant unequal distribution of wealth which is coupled with a tax system that is biased and is manipulated so many elites in El Salvador pay minimal taxes (Wolf 2017). The minister of the Treasury Carlos Carceres stated in 2015 that the top 100 tax payers only pay 2% of total income in taxes (RCJF, 2015). This manipulation and unequal tax system continues to point to the low tax revenue in El Salvador. The most recent statistics from the World Bank found that in 2013, tax revenue only makes up 15.4% of the GDP of El Salvador while the OCED average is 33.8% (World Bank Group Data). Honduras also struggles to garner the necessary funds from its tax base with high rates of poverty and a decentralized system that
has various tax exemptions particularly in the Tourism industry as well as a lack of enforcement of tax evasion particularly for custom duties (EuropeAid, 2011). Tax revenue in Honduras in 2015 only made up 17.6% of the GDP while the OCED average for that year was 34.2% (World Bank Group Data). This lack of government revenue puts a strain on the limited resources allocated towards prevention and intervention strategies. The lack of private sector involvement also contributes to the lack of funding for prevention and intervention initiatives in both countries (Cohan, Mayberry, Payan and Rosiak 2013; Wolf, 2017). The private sector is reluctant to become involved in violence prevention work focused around gangs due to prejudice towards gang and gang risk youth as well as fear of violence. Various small scale community initiatives, run through churches, community organizations or just concerned members of a community have the potential to have positive impacts but lack the necessary funding to achieve those goals and sustain their programming (Cohan, Mayberry, Payan and Rosiak 2013). Not only do they lack funds but the funds that are received are often mismanaged.

One of the largest concerns with the funding for prevention initiatives is the overhead and managing cost. In both El Salvador and Honduras, the majority of funding for initiatives are spent on overhead cost. The initiative ProJovenes established in El Salvador in partnership with the EU was created to help foster greater opportunities and improve youth development in San Salvador (Yule, 2008). The program had six separate areas of concentration: community organization, leadership in action, sports as prevention, self-employment, rehabilitation and art and culture (Yule, 2008). However, a year into the program, ProJovenes had only used 27% of their budget and worst of all 78% went towards overhead, salaries, and administrative cost while only 4% went towards programing (Wolf 2017). This is a common phenomenon with prevention initiatives and contributed to the corruption of these initiatives with the government directors of
these programs receiving large salaries with no intention of bringing programing to fruition (Wolf, 2017). In Honduras, even internationally driven prevention initiatives suffer from high overhead costs, about half of all the aid funding that goes to Honduras from the US go to the State Department bureaucracy and US companies meant to implement programing instead of Honduran NGOs (Nazario, 2016). In the case of ProJovenes to attempt to use up more of budget to demonstrate the work that was being done, the program greatly increased sports social infrastructure development, including the construction of soccer fields and other types of parks and spaces for recreation (Wolf, 2017). ProJovenes was not able to address all the areas it set out to work in because of the mismanagement of funds and only substantially tackled sports and recreation.

**Dominance of International Funds**

The lack of available funds from within the countries pushes NGOs and governments themselves to seek international aid and funds to sponsor prevention initiatives. In El Salvador, intervention programs suffer from a lack of resources which limits their sustainability. Programs such as ProJovenes, which even had partial international funding through the EU, struggled to continue the program after the end date of 2008 and eventually led the government to take out a 1-million-dollar loan from the US (Wolf, 2017). The most well known gang rehabilitation center in El Salvador is known as *granja-escuela* (Farm-school) in Sonsonate which took young gang members to live for a six-month period on a Farm where they are provided with mental health services, job training, recreation, and tattoo removal in attempt to isolate them from the negative behaviors of their gang peers (Yule, 2008; Wolf, 2017). The program cost $70,000 dollars per six-month session and experienced such severe budget constraints that the actual members needed to work to make sure the program survived and eventually they needed to turn to
international donors to stay afloat (Wolf, 2017). The program was eventually shut down and converted to the *granja-penal* (Farm-prison) run by the prison system director (Wolf, 2017). This need for international donors is the primary reason that many of prevention and intervention initiatives are funded through USAID in El Salvador.

El Salvador has been receiving aid from the United States for many years and since 2012, where they received around 30 million, aid from the US has been increasing to almost 90 million requested for fiscal year 2017 (Meyer, 2017). This increase in funding can be attributed to the *Alianza para la Prosperidad del Triángulo Norte de la América Central* (*The Alliance for Prosperity Plan in the Northern Triangle of Central America, APP*) developed by President Barack Obama and the Presidents of Central America which increased funding to the region by $750 million (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). The APP was developed as a response to the influx of unaccompanied minors that reached the US borders in 2014. The APP focuses on improving “democratic values, strengthening criminal justice systems, promote the rule of law, and advancing rights and protections for civil society and journalists” all which could help with gang violence however the focus was dissuading people from migrating (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). US Congress can withhold 25% of the funds until the State department can verify that the governments are taking effective steps to “inform its citizens of the dangers of the journey to the southwest border of the United States, combat human smuggling and trafficking, improve border security, and facilitate the safe return, repatriation, and reintegration of undocumented migrants” (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). Both Honduras and El Salvador receive large amounts of aid through this new plan and its priorities influence much of the prevention and intervention programs.
Similarly, Honduras also has a large portion of programs funded by international organizations. Honduras is set to receive a large portion of the money allocated in USAID for the fiscal year 2017 specifically over 105 million which is a noticeable increase from past years due to the APP (Meyer, 2017). Surprisingly, however, there is a unique funding source in Honduras that differs from El Salvador. Between 2007 and 2013 Honduras lead all Central American countries in receiving aid from the European Union receiving €223 million and has now become consistently the second highest receiver in aid in the region behind Nicaragua (Rueda-Junquera, 2009; Analysis for Economic Decisions, 2011). The EU has become a major source of aid for all sorts of economic and social development programs particularly violence prevention and intervention initiatives (Mateo, 2011). Both Honduras and El Salvador face complications due to the extensive reliance on foreign aid to sustain prevention and intervention strategies.

One of the concerns with the dominance of international funding is the ability of donor countries to impose their agenda upon El Salvador and Honduras. For example, in the APP, $222 million is specifically allocated to International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funding within the Central America Regional Security Initiative (WHOPS, 2016). Although drug trafficking in Central America is a serious concern, the prioritization of that specific issue has more to do with the stemming the drug flow to the United States than with concerns with security in Central America. Also, the CARSI initiative’s primary two goals are to assist law enforcement and security forces combat drug trafficking and organized crime and improve law enforcements capacity and the justice system in Central America (State Department 2017). CARSI top two priorities are focused more on law enforcement and suppression strategies than prevention strategies. Although the CARSI initiative’s third priority is prevention and
intervention, the focus is clearly law enforcement tactics. Besides prioritizing funding for anti-narcotics programs, the emphasis on awareness campaigns dissuading migration to the US also symbolizes how domestic concerns within the donor country can influence the type of program funding that will be allocated in each country. The fact that the funds can be withheld if significant steps are not made towards dissuading migration and assisting deportees demonstrates clearly the US priorities in the funding and how the US can impose its agenda upon El Salvador and Honduras.

The sustainability of the funds is also subject to the political realities of the other country thus if there is a political shift in the donor country, funds could stop almost immediately. This issue could be concerning Central American officials right now with the release of the blue print of the Trump’s administration’s budget that cut 10 billion dollars from State Department and USAID (Office of Management and Budget, 2017). This cut of 10 billion could include parts of the APP and with such a heavy reliance on the APP for funding, many projects in El Salvador and Honduras could die out due to a lack of funds.

**Political Tool rather than Effective**

Beyond the lack of funding and the international involvement, most the prevention and intervention programs were used as a political tool to appear as if the rhetoric had changed. The prevention programs were often used as a demonstration to the international community or critics that the governments were changing from suppression approaches. As Sonja Wolf described, the Secretaria de la Joventud in El Salvador associated “itself with other actors’ efforts merely for political capital” without being concerned with actual effectiveness of program and thus many NGOs never received the funds promised (Wolf, 2017). The Secretaria de la Joventud also was found to be over spending on ads and promotional materials paying for these
materials at a much higher price than market value (Arauz, 2008). This emphasis on promotion and ad demonstrates the intent for the program to be more of a demonstration than an effective prevention program. This type of corruption and misuse of funds is common in both El Salvador and Honduras, which in 2016 it was revealed that millions of dollars intended for public health were then diverted to the Partido Nacional (National Party) and the campaign of current president Juan Orlando Hernandez (Main, 2016). The corruption and misuse of funds demonstrate the lack of political will to truly implement programs to address the social and structural causes of gangs. Although recently the influence of the US and the APP has pushed the Central American governments to implement more alternative approaches, the APP’s future is uncertain do to the Trump administration’s stance towards foreign aid and whether there will be enough funds for these programs is in question.

**Are the programs successful?**

Although there are various limitations to the success of prevention and intervention programs in both El Salvador and Honduras, there is some evidence that some of these programs have been successful. The programs particularly prevention programs funded by USAID have been viewed as being largely successful. A New York Times report of the program in the River Hernández neighborhood in San Pedro Sula, Honduras found that homicide had diminished by 62% after the implementation of various USAID funded programs including an outreach center that sponsors movie nights, soccer teams, and improves infrastructure such as paying for street lights and trash cans (Nazario, 2016). This news report is not the only evidence to suggest that USAID funded prevention programs have been working. USAID sponsors programing in both Honduras and El Salvador that is focused on crime and violence prevention as well as education, health, and democracy and governance. The programing in EL Salvador focuses on improving
citizen security through improving educational programs, vocational training, and establishing outreach centers (USAID, 2017). The programs focus on providing alternatives to gangs and attempt to provide opportunities by establishing youth centers in troubled municipalities which can provide tutoring, conflict prevention, recreational leagues as well as counseling (USAID, 2017). These outreach centers across both El Salvador and Honduras are at the core of the crime prevention initiatives in both countries.

In 2014, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University partnered with USAID to evaluate prevention initiatives developed by the Central American Regional Security Initiative (Carsi) in the Northern Triangle countries and Panama (Berk-Seligson, Orcés, 2014). The report evaluated the programs by extensively surveying both control communities (communities without USAID funded programs) and treatment communities (communities with programming) (Berk-Seligson, Orcés, 2014). The investigation found that:

*In several key respects the programs have been a success. Specifically, the outcomes in the treatment communities improved more (or declined less) than they would have if USAID’s programs had not been administered. (Berk-Seligson, Orcés, 2014)*

The specific findings included reductions in homicides, extortions, robberies as well as improvements in community organizing, interpersonal trust, and satisfaction with democracy and police (Berk-Seligson, Orcés, 2014). The report found that compared to the control communities the treatment communities showed improvement on several levels including a reduction in the number of residents that reported gangs as being a problem for young people as well as the number of gang fights (Berk-Seligson, Orcés, 2014). This report is one of the only evaluations to date of the USAID programs and found several positive indicators about the programs.
Although report shows hope for these programs, in 2016 the Center for Economic and Policy Research released a study that evaluated the LAPOP study and found that differences in pre-treatment levels of control and treatment communities and the interpretation of differences does not demonstrate a statistically significant positive effect (Jung, Main, & Rosnick, 2016). One of the authors of the study also wrote a report about traveling to one of the Honduras prevention programs and finding that they did not have any sort of monitoring or evaluation system (Jung, 2016). The lack of a monitoring or evaluation system calls into question just how effective these programs can be. The conflicting nature of the two studies also points to the need for more evaluations of the effectiveness of the prevention programs across El Salvador and Honduras. A rigorous and independent evaluation method as well as constant research on the effectiveness of these programs is necessary to determine if these programs should be funded or if the program techniques should be adjusted. Although this could take funds away from programing, there should be a balanced approach that focuses on programing but also evaluates and ensures that the best and most effective programming is being used across the board.

Although there have been some changes in rhetoric concerning prevention and intervention approaches, the securitization of the gang phenomenon and the framing of gang as menacing criminal outsider preying on society has led to minimal actual intervention strategies involving gang members directly. Most programs are preventative focused on all youth in marginalized communities and do not specifically work on gang intervention. Until its closure in 2012, Homies Unidos was the only NGO in El Salvador that worked directly with gang members and included ex-gang members in their staff (Wolf, 2017). The program’s mission was an empowerment strategy which was meant to discourage the negative behaviors of gangs, such as violence, drug use, and criminality and encourage the positives of comradeship, organization
skills, and respect (Wolf, 2017). However, the program faced a variety of difficulties stemming mainly from societal distrust of the organization due to its proximity and relationship with gangs and the ex-gang members staff. This distrust led to claims of corruption and continued criminality of the program staff and even led the US embassy to suspect the director of “pooling money for drugs” and warned the Salvadoran government to be vigilant (Wolf, 2017). Gang intervention strategies specifically tailored towards gangs can have a tremendous effect on reintegrating gang members into society. Particularly in El Salvador and Honduras, the discrimination and prejudice towards ex-gang members and youth in general that may have tattoos makes it difficult to reintegrate gang members into society. With the scale of the gang phenomenon in both countries prevention initiatives alone cannot stem the tide of gangs, direct intervention strategies focused on reintegration are particularly necessary to mend the disruption on society caused by gangs. These intervention strategies can help bridge the divided within the community and help provide alternatives to gangs.

The prevention and intervention programs across El Salvador and Honduras have been underfunded and lack coordination. These programs have taken a secondary place to suppression strategies in the eyes of the governments of El Salvador and Honduras. Until recently suppression strategies were used as the only real response towards gangs in El Salvador and Honduras. In response to the criticism of Mano Dura there has been some change in policy responses to include prevention and intervention strategies. The majority of prevention programs are funded internationally and many through the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle Countries. These programs show promises however continued research is necessary to evaluate if these programs are effective and further involvement of the Central America governments is necessary to ensure the sustainability of these programs.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis was designed to explore why gang policy in El Salvador and Honduras failed to curb gang violence or the presence of gangs in the region. To answer this, I explored the three main policy responses towards gangs and analyzed how they failed in each country. I also examined why suppression policies were continuously repeated both in El Salvador and Honduras. Exploring each policy, I was able to explore what particular parts of each policy failed and what caused their failure.

The first policy, *Mano Dura*, failed to curb gang violence and presence because it increased the gang’s cohesion without causing a deterrence effect. Due to the impunity and lack of convictions, the policy did not create a substantial deterrent. This coupled with the fact that those that were convicted were placed into corrupt and overcrowded prisons which facilitated crime instead of preventing it created a totally ineffective policy. The suppression strategies across El Salvador and Honduras failed to have any substantial effect on gangs in the region and actually transformed them into more organized and violent groups.

The second policy, the gang truce, also failed to create lasting peace and curtail the effect of gangs. The gangs in Honduras were not organized enough to control its members and enforce a truce. The gang’s demands also were comprehensive and difficult to implement in a short period time meaning that the gangs did not see their demands met and thus were less likely to continue a truce. The lack of government involvement also continued to undermine the possibility of a successful truce because it lacked legitimacy. In El Salvador, the truce did reduce homicides however it did not necessarily reduce other crimes committed by gangs and increased cohesion in the gang as well. The truce also effected the level homicides differently depending
on the region within El Salvador. The truce also was not accompanied by enough other efforts to ensure the peace would last. The truce itself was not going to eliminate the gangs and because it was not accompanied with more initiatives that offered alternatives to gangs it eventually fell apart and brought with it an explosion of violence.

The third policy, prevention and intervention strategies, have been limited and the programs established have often suffered from a lack of funding and coordination causing them to also have little effect on gangs. The lack of political will to establish these policies has created uncoordinated and often various small scale initiatives which are unable to have drastic effect on gangs. Most prevention initiatives now are funded internationally particularly through USAID and the Obama initiative the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle countries and thus the Central American government involvement is minimal. Beyond the lack of coordination, there is a lack of programs that work directly with gangs and work on the reintegration of ex-members into the society. The lack of programs that work directly with gangs means that there continues to be few alternative to gangs and that gang members themselves that might want to leave gangs face limited options. Although some internationally funded programs show promise, they are subject to the US political climate which could end aid depending on the president. Many programs also lack effective evaluation methods making it difficult to determine which programs are truly successful and what tactics are effective.

El Salvador and Honduras have not established a policy that has been able to substantially effect these gang’s presence. The responses towards gangs in Central America began in the early 2000s and there still continues to be an incoherent and ineffective strategy towards them. Both El Salvador and Honduras have failed to create diverse or innovative approaches and continue to rely on failed suppression strategies. Their inability to establish an
effective policy points to deeper concerns about the countries’ ability to effectively govern. El Salvador and Honduras share two structural factors that have made it difficult for them to establish any sort of gang policy that it is effective.

**Corrupt and Weak Institutions**

The first is both have corrupt and weak institutions. El Salvador and Honduras lack the necessary institutional capacity on a variety of levels to establish a robust anti-gang policy. The government institutions such as the justice system and the national police forces (the PNC in El Salvador and the PNH in Honduras) are too weak to implement a comprehensive gang policy. Both justice system are rampant with impunity and lack the necessary tools to properly prosecute. Both national police forces are corrupt and have members that have been infiltrated by organized crime and drug trafficking organizations (Stevens, 2015; Insight Crime 2016). The PNC in El Salvador failed to consolidate a peaceful newly democratic police force after the signing of the peace accords in 1992 which has led to a corrupt and weak system with various claims of infiltration of gang members and organized crime and with even directors of the PNC being involved with organized crime and drug smuggling such as the ex-director Ricardo Mauricio Menesses (Silvia, 2014). In Honduras, the national police force is also just as corrupt and the instability caused after the 2009 coup has only exacerbated the corruption, with claims in 2011 that nearly 40% of the police were tied to organized crime and various examples of police acting directly on behalf of organized crime with task as serious as assassination and the transportation of drugs (Fox, 2012). In the US, effective gang policy has been implemented by police forces such as Operation Cease-fire in Boston. The weak and corrupt national police forces and justice systems do not allow El Salvador and Honduras the mechanisms to create and effectively implement and productive and successful gang policy. Beyond the police and justice
system, government institutions are weak and struggle to provide services to its citizens particularly the poorest and marginalized (OCED factsheets, 2014). The governments in both El Salvador and Honduras do not have the institutional capacity to provide services and effectively implement a national gang policy and strategy.

**Politization of Gang Phenomenon**

Beyond the lack of institutional capacity to implement a gang policy, both countries inability to create an effective gang policy stems from the use of gang policy as a political tool. The majority of gang policy responses occurred in or around election years in both El Salvador and Honduras and were normally part of the campaign promises of elected leaders. This was seen throughout the implementation of *Mano Dura* occurring in the election year of 2001 in Honduras and 2004 in El Salvador and the continued changes in policy occurring after changes political power. The FMLN’s win in El Salvador in 2009 marked a huge change in the political landscape. The way in which the conservative media sources and the ARENA party framed the fears of corruption and the Funes administration gang policy instilled distrust towards alternative gang policy. Both political parties use the others gang policy and their failures to score political points and thus long-term effective strategies are hard to produce because they are subject to political changes and elections. In Honduras, the similarly changes in policy towards gangs came about after changes in political power in 2005 with the election of Manuel Zelaya and these changes were subsequently framed by the conservative political parties which inevitably led to a coup. The way in which the gang phenomenon has been politicized hinders the ability of the government to establish a long-term strategy that is free from political manipulation.

These two factors make it difficult for El Salvador and Honduras to establish an effective gang policy. Both countries have implemented the three strategies explored in this thesis
however they continue to rely heavily on suppression strategies. Both El Salvador and Honduras have continuously deployed their armies or stepped up police raids against gangs even after attempting other strategies. They continue to use force as their primary tool for attacking gangs by creating a variety of law enforcement task forces and different military or police operations. Two factors explain the continued use of suppression strategies in both El Salvador and Honduras. The first is the legacy of military governments and suppression.

**Legacy of Military Regimes**

Both El Salvador and Honduras have a long history of a very powerful army and various military regimes. El Salvador is marked by a number of examples of the harsh militarized suppression throughout its history starting as early as 1932 with *La Mantaza* where thousands of workers and “campesinos” were slaughtered in an uprising (Booth, 2011). This started the long myriad of subsequent military regimes heavily focused on suppression that continued throughout the 20th century culminating in the breakout of the Civil War in the 1980s (Booth, 2011). The 1992 peace accords marked the first true transition towards a civilian democracy in El Salvador (Booth, 2011). Although El Salvador began the transition to a civilian democracy, elements of the military oligarchy that ruled for the majority of the 20th century continues to linger particularly in the conservative ARENA party. The government’s tactics follow similar patterns of tactics used towards guerrillas during the Civil War with the use of harsh suppression and extrajudicial killings. This continued legacy of military regimes continues to encourage a return to *Mano Dura* and suppression policies.

Similarly, Honduras has a long history of military regimes. The military involvement with the government began later during the 1950s when the US began training and improving the Honduran military (Booth, 2011). This increase in funding and training turned the military into a
powerful force that became increasingly political (Booth, 2011). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the continued military assistance from the US bolstered a number of military regimes that would maintain power throughout the decades of the 60s and 70s and into the 80s (Booth, 2011). Honduras similar to El Salvador began its transition towards democracy in the 90s however there continues to be elements of the military’s strength and power today. Honduras reliance on suppression and *Mano Dura* stems from a militaristic political system that has an army trained in counter insurgency. The new target since the end of the cold war has become organized crime or gangs. The establishment of national police forces also followed training from the army and other military forces and continues to use the tactics of suppression and repression to respond to the gang crisis.

**Securitization of the Gang Phenomenon**

Beyond the legacy of military regimes, both Honduras and El Salvador have framed the gang phenomenon as a security issue and gangs as an external security threat which lends itself towards a suppression response. The way the media and the governments of El Salvador and Honduras continuously framed gangs as these external threats that preyed on the marginalized continues to encourage the use of suppression policies. The governments of El Salvador and Honduras can frame themselves as the protectors of these marginalized communities, as the protectors from this evil group that preyed on them while not addressing the social issues that gave rise to gangs in that community in the first place. Gangs are particularly embedded within El Salvador and Honduras, the same problems of unemployment, lack of opportunity, lack of adequate education systems and healthcare systems effects both gangs and the marginalized communities where they are located. The ability of the government to separate the gangs and target them with suppression allowed them to place themselves on the side of the marginalized
communities without having to address the social aspects effecting the whole community but instead just demonstrate police raids to show they are attempting to protect the community. Framing the gang phenomenon as a security issue allows the governments of El Salvador and Honduras to score political points for increased repression and suppression and continue to ignore the more difficult social and structural issues like corruption, inequality and unemployment.

The failure of El Salvador and Honduras to create an effective policy continues perpetuate existing problems in the region. The continued violence in both countries stunts growth and continues the insecurity that blocks progresses in education and economic opportunities. The policy response that has been able to show the most progress has been the prevention and intervention approaches. Though they have yet to have a drastic effect in either country. If both the Salvadoran and Honduran government commit to improving and strengthening their justice systems, their police forces and their public service sector and focus on intervention strategies particularly reintegration programs, which are the least common strategy attempted so far, and prevention strategies focusing on education and partnering with the private sector to create more employment opportunities, so that there is a viable alternative to gangs there could be a reduction in gang related activities; however, further scholarship is needed to truly investigate which programs are successful and evaluate what are the most effective strategies in the region. Both governments would have to commit to targeting many corrupt elements within their own institutions and commit to spending money from their limited budgets to fund these social services and programs. So far neither government has been willing to commit to truly rooting out the problems within their regimes, and until newer innovative
policy approaches are taken, gangs will continue to devastate both the Salvadoran and Honduran society.
Works Cited


69


