GANG VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR:

THE IMPACT OF THE 2012-2014 GANG TRUCE ON HOMICIDE RATES

INTRODUCTION

El Salvador has experienced significant violence dating back to the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992). While the war ended, violence proliferated due to gangs such as Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha 13. In 2012, a truce was brokered between Barrio 18 and MS 13 gangs with the support of the Organization of American States and the UK. It rapidly decreased homicides. When the truce fell apart in 2014, El Salvador saw the highest murder rates in over a decade and a massive increase in emigration of women and children. The national number of homicides shot up from 2,513 murders in 2013 to 6,656 murders in 2015. This increase in violence led to a crackdown on Barrio 18 and MS 13 gang activity, leading to what is described by some as a “war” between the gangs and law enforcement. Analyzing gang truce, followed by a massive increase in violence after its failure.

This project’s spatial questions are: Where are the areas with the greatest density of gang violence before, during, and after the gang truce?

METHODOLOGY

This project examines homicide rates by municipality in 2012, 2013, and 2015 and the changes in the number of homicides between 2012 and 2015 through a percent change analysis. Homicide rates are calculated per 100,000 inhabitants and are used as a proxy for gang violence as gang specific data is not available. Homicide data is sourced from El Salvador’s Institute of Forensic Medicine. These years represent the low homicide rate in the first year of the gang truce, followed by a massive increase in violence after its failure.

Additionally, this project includes an analysis of the data collected by Americas Barometer poll in 2014, a public opinion survey taken in El Salvador by the University of Texas and USAID. The survey inquired about perceptions of gangs, unemployment, inequality, lack of education, and lack of security. Included is a pie-chart indicating opinions on levels of gang violence in respondents neighborhoods in 2014. Also included is a line chart, showing the change the number of homicides in El Salvador from 2010 to 2015.

CITATIONS