Overview

• Introduction
• The Broader Context
• Gangs in Central America
  – national variations
  – the dogs that did not bark
• Final Thoughts
Introduction

- Regional manifestation of global problems:
  - States with low capacity and legitimacy deficits
  - The rise of violent non-state actors
  - Urbanization and alternatively governed spaces
  - The global illicit economy
  - The youth bulge
  - The globalization of gang culture (South Africa)

- But distinctive characteristics
  - South America has its own resource curse – coca
  - Central America and Mexico have location curse
The Broader Context: Colombia

- The decline and fall of FARC as insurgency
  - the morphing of FARC into drug organizations
- The unsuccessful DDR process with the AUC
  - The rise of “new criminal organizations”
- Cooperation among some former enemies
  - But some still carrying on the struggle
- Homicide rate – 43.8 per 100,000 (RITLA)
- 15 to 24 year olds 73.4 per 100,000
The Broader Context: Venezuela

- Systemic corruption
- Transplanting of Colombian drug trafficking organizations to Venezuela
- The rise of the European connection
- Growing use of Guinea-Bissau and other countries in West Africa for transshipment
- Homicide rate 29.5 per 100,000
- 15 to 24 year old 66.8 per 100,000
The Broader Context: Mexico

• Rise and spread of Mexican drug trafficking organizations: Peru, Panama, Guinea-Bissau
  Growing use of professionals – Los Zetas
• Spread of trafficking violence to Guatemala
• Homicide rate 9.3 per 100,000
• 15 to 24 year olds 10.4 per 100,000
• But drug killings doubled in 2008
The Broader Context: The U.S.

• 2006 estimate: 30,000 gangs 785,000 members – significantly increased since then
• US deportation policy helped transform gangs into transnational phenomenon – prison bonding
• Also related to immigration from Mexico and Central and South America
• Not new – immigrant gangs – Chinese/Italian
• Organized crime - “the queer ladder of social mobility”
• Gangs becoming increasingly involved in wholesale drug trafficking because of contacts with Mexican and Asia drug trafficking organizations
• Homicide rates 6.0 per 100,000
• 15 to 24 year old 12.9 per 100,000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18th Street</th>
<th>Latin Kings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandidos</td>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)</td>
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<td>Barrió Azteca</td>
<td>Mexican Mafia</td>
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<td>Black Guerilla Family</td>
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<td>Bloods</td>
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<td>Crips</td>
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<td>Florencia 13</td>
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<td>Gangster Disciples</td>
<td>Tango Blast</td>
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<td>Hells Angels</td>
<td>Texas Syndicate</td>
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<td>Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos</td>
<td>Vagos</td>
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Source: Federal, state, and local law enforcement reporting.
GANGS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

- No single model – “Gang members…are not homogeneous. There is no typology applicable to every gang or gang member. Not all gangs have the same objectives, engage in the same type of activities, or exhibit the same level of violence.” (USAID Gang Assessment)
National Variations

• Jose Miguel Cruz – *Street Gangs in Central America*
  
• Problems in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras
  – Over 20 per cent of homicides are gang-related

• Far less in Costa Rica and Nicaragua
  – Dogs did not bark
  – Much smaller phenomenon
  – Not assimilated US cultural expressions (Cruz)
• Spike from 2001 onwards
• Greater violence
• Mara participation in drugs also increased
• Zero tolerance policies created cycle of violence:
  – Gangs became more hierarchical and violent
  – Formal contacts with each other and organized crime
• No single cause – not poverty or war alone
  – Former combatants not as heavily involved as often claimed
• From disenfranchisement and marginalization to re-enfranchisement and importance in the society.
• Sense of belonging to a group
The emergence and evolution of Central American Gangs: the environmental model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of social exclusion</th>
<th>Specific Factors Cause</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic instability</td>
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<td>Inadequacy or lack of basic community</td>
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<td>Lack of opportunities for technical or professional training</td>
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<td>School drop-out</td>
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<td>Unemployment or underemployment</td>
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<th>Culture of violence</th>
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<td>Cultural models regarding personal relations</td>
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<td>Patterns in the transmission and learning of the use of violence</td>
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<td>Cultural permissiveness regarding use of firearms</td>
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<td>Presence of violent actors</td>
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<td>Rapid unplanned urban growth</td>
<td>Urban crowding and reduced personal space</td>
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<td>Lack of recreational areas</td>
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<td>Inadequate or non-existent social services</td>
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<td>Migration</td>
<td>Gang culture adopted abroad</td>
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<td>Return to country without a reference group</td>
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<td>Deported criminals</td>
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</table>
| Community disorganization | Lack of trust among community members  
Lack of citizen participation in local affairs |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Presence of drugs         | Drug use  
Drug-dealing networks |
| Problem families          | Dysfunctional Families  
Abandonment and neglect by parents or caregivers  
History of violence in the family |
| Friends or classmates who are members of gangs | Gang members in the community  
Gang members at school |
| Violence                  | Perpetuation of the cycle of violence  
Identity based violence |
| Difficulties in building personal identity | Search for identity through violence  
Lack of positive role models |
Figure 1.1
The Road to Collective Youth Violence

Human groups involved

- Organized crime
- Maras / youth gangs
- Hooligans
- Youth groups
- Family – socioeconomic environment

Level or degree of violence

- Homicides, drug trafficking
- Homicides, rapes, assaults, robberies
- Minor offenses, Robberies, Street brawls
- Problematic behavior
- Conflicts – violence Victim / witness

• Not necessarily move from one stage to next
• Opportunities for interventions
• Links with drug trafficking organizations
• Some morphing into transnational organized crime – the evolutionary model
  – Predatory
  – Parasitic
  – Symbiotic
• Gangs control more and more territory
• Central American equivalent of African child soldiers
Guatemala

- Homicide rate 28.5 per 100,000
- 15 to 24 year old 55.4 per 100,000
- Organized crime and gangs are successors to a 36 year civil conflict which ended in 1996
- Estimates of membership 14,000 to 125,000
- “The justice and security sectors in Guatemala are weak, corrupt, overwhelmed, and neglected. The judicial system currently does not have the capacity to deal with gang violence. Judicial impunity has emboldened organized criminal entities and gangs” (AID)
Transnational gang leadership
Gang cell members
Neighborhood gang members
Vulnerable youth at risk of joining a gang
Organized crime and international narco-activity bosses
El Salvador

- Homicide rate 48.8 per 100,000
- 15 to 24 year old 92 per 100,000
- 1996 US deportees increased - included members of Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and M-18
- Estimates 39,000 gang members (others)
  - 22,000 in MS-13
  - 12,000 in 18th Street
  - 5,000 in other gangs
18 Street goals and rules

- Take over drug trade
- Purchase more weapons
- Eliminate members who are traitors
- Prohibit new tattoos
- Do not recruit women as new gang recruits
- Execute members consuming crack and cocaine
- Take over drug trafficking corridors in two to three years
• Hard-line not worked
• Media coverage increases recruitment
• Cost of violence 1.7 billion annually (11.5 per cent of GDP)
• Suppression and enforcement exacerbating not alleviating
• Strain on prison system
Honduras

- Homicide rate 41 per 100,000
- 77.7 percent of the rural population is poor
- 63.1 percent of urban population
- Income inequality – the richest 20 percent receive 54.3 per cent of income, whilst the poorest 20 percent receive 3.2 percent of income.
- 41 percent of 7 million citizens are under 14
The Dogs That Did Not Bark

• Nicaragua:
  – Homicide rate 10.4 per 100,000
  – 15 to 24 year old 16.6 per 100,000

• Costa Rica
  – Homicide rate 7.5 per 100,000
  – 15 to 24 year old 9.2 per 100,000

• Emphasized prevention and rehabilitation

• Alternative model to follow
Final Thoughts

• Clearly need a holistic strategy that incorporates prevention and mitigation as well as enforcement.

• Key Question:

• Can the State in Latin America, especially Central America, deliver or will alternative forms of governance get stronger?
• Thank you for Listening
• Questions, Comments, Criticisms to:
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