

# 2015 Emory Global Health Case Competition

## “¡Alto a la Violencia!” Reducing Gun Violence in Honduras



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**Emory Global Health Institute**

**The Emory Global Health Institute Case Writing Team**

All characters, organizations, and plots described within the case are *fictional* and bear no direct reflection to existing organizations or individuals. The case topic, however, is a true representation of circumstances in Honduras. The case scenario is complex and does not necessarily have a correct or perfect solution, and thus encourages a judicious balance of creative yet perceptive approaches.

The authors have provided informative facts and figures within the case and appendices to help teams. The data provided are derived from independent sources, may have been adapted for use in this case, and are clearly cited such that teams can verify or contest the findings within their recommendations, if it is pertinent to do so. Teams are responsible for justifying the accuracy and validity of all data and calculations that are used in their presentations, as well as defending their assertions in front of a panel of knowledgeable judges representing different stakeholders.

## Introduction

Letter from the President  
January 19, 2015

Fellow Hondurans,

As we start a new year, we open a new chapter in our beloved country's life. We have faced a tumultuous decade and have been declared the most violent nation in the world because of our devastatingly high murder rate. But we are not a violent people. Our parents, grandparents, and ancestors were full of love and hope, but somewhere we lost our way. We have become a nation so distraught that we wreak havoc on brothers, sisters, mothers, and children. We live in fear and sadness as we watch our friends and family die at each other's hands. When did we develop such a love of arms, a thirst for violence? This is not who we are, and we must work together to redefine our identity. I stand here asking you, the heart and soul of this great country, to help me find a solution.

We have decided to hold a competition, which will allow the great minds of this nation, and the world, to come together and design a solution to the violence we face on a daily basis. We are hopeful that this new endeavor will be transformative, that it will strengthen relationships across nations and carry our country into a peaceful future. In five years' time my wish is for our country to see drastic reductions in violence. I believe that if these reductions can be achieved and sustained, then they will re-invigorate our country's hope - our belief in ourselves as a great nation and a great people. With this renewed hope, we will see our health, our society, and our economy transformed.

We are confident that, working together, we will stop the epidemic of violence affecting our nation. We will heal the scourge it has inflicted on our people and our nation. The journey to change will not be easy, but we, together, will do what it takes.

Thank you.

Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado  
President of Honduras

### **Quick Facts [See also Exhibits 1 &2]**

Population (2014) – 8.261 million [1]

Annual population growth – 2.0% [2]

Largest sector contributor to growth: Agriculture [1]

Population density (2012) – 70.6 per square kilometer [2]

Life expectancy (2012) – 73 years (Females: 76.2 years; Males: 71.3 years) [2]

Infant mortality rate – 22.3 per 1,000 live births [2]

Gross Domestic Product (GDP, 2013): USD 18.55 billion [2]

Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (2013) - 64.5% [3]

Percent of workforce unemployed – 4.3% [2]

Youth unemployment rate (ages 15-24) – 11.2% [5]

Percent of workforce underemployed<sup>1</sup> – 57.7% [4]

Top countries exported to, respectively – United States, Germany, and Belgium [2]

Top countries imported from, respectively – United States, China, and Mexico [2]

GINI coefficient (2011) – 57.4 [1]

The Republic of Honduras is a Central American country that neighbors El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala and has direct access to the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The ethnic makeup of the country primarily consists of Mestizos (mixed race individuals, in Latin America, of mixed American Indian and European descent) (90%) and Amerindians (7%), and the official language spoken is Spanish [6]. In regards to religion, the majority of Hondurans are Christians, although there is a lack of reliable data on the subdivisions within Christianity. Roman Catholics account for the predominant group, with estimates ranging from 47 to 97%; Protestants account for the remaining minority, although the number of Protestant, and especially evangelical, churches has been rising since the 1980s [6, 7, 8].

### **Foreign Aid to Honduras**

The United States began providing aid to Honduras in the 1950s, including agreements to train the Honduran military and finance projects in agriculture, education, and health [8]. In 2013, the US was the largest bilateral donor to Honduras followed closely by the European Union and Canada. In 2013, the United States provided USD 73 million to Honduras, of which approximately 30% went towards peace, security, democracy, human rights, and governance initiatives [9]. For fiscal year 2015, the United States committed USD 77 million to “improve education, reduce poverty and generate jobs” in addition to improving “regional security and reduc[ing] gang violence” [10]. Honduras receives additional support for security and law enforcement through its membership in the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), which has disbursed USD 650 million to Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras since 2008 [11].

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<sup>1</sup> Underemployment is defined as labor with workers that are highly skilled but working in low paying jobs, workers that are highly skilled but work in low skill jobs, and part-time workers that would prefer to be full-time (<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/underemployment.asp>).

## Social and Political History of Honduras

Honduras was established as an independent country in 1821 after gaining its independence from Spain. It was a part of the United Provinces of Central America until 1838, at which time it entered several decades of political turmoil, including periods of civil conflict and military rule. Political parties were established early on, with the rival parties being the conservative Partido Nacional de Honduras (PNH, aka. The National Party) and the liberal Partido Liberal de Honduras (PLH, the Liberal Party)<sup>2</sup>. These parties remain in place today [8]. The country's current governmental structure is a democratic constitutional republic with a civil law system.

Since the Spanish colonization of Honduras, the Catholic Church has played a central role in the culture of Honduras, though it has at times found itself at odds with the country's government due to its activism and criticism of government practices [8]. In the 1970's, the Catholic Church was viewed as "radical"; in 1971 it partnered with the Christian Democratic Movement of Honduras (Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano de Honduras-- MDCH) to form the Coordinating Council for Development (Consejo Coordinador de Desarrollo--Concorde). Foreign clergy also played a role in encouraging social activism [8]. For example, in 2007, Catholic leaders in Honduras were noted for confronting transnational logging and mining companies in defense of poor Hondurans, who were not benefiting from these industries, and pushing instead for "humane and sustainable development" [12]. Protestant denominations also play a role in politics and in offering social services; their presence tends to have a conservative influence [8].

The past decade has proved to be a politically tumultuous one in Honduras; scholars propose that this lack of political stability enabled the expansion of gangs, drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime into the country, with subsequent increases in violent crime [13]. In 2005, the election of President Manuel Zelaya of the left-leaning Liberal Party, with 45.6% of the vote, brought substantial social and political changes to the country. Zelaya's tenure oversaw an 80% increase in the minimum wage, introduced free primary education to all children, achieved resolution of 98,000 acres of disputed land titles in favor of peasant farmers, and saw poverty reduce by 10% [14, 15]. In 2009, Zelaya attempted to force voting on a highly controversial ballot initiative to modify the Constitution. Many saw this initiative as an attempt to extend his presidency. Following months of political escalation, the military, acting on orders from the Honduran Supreme Court, forcefully deposed Zelaya to Costa Rica. Congress immediately voted to remove Zelaya from office and named the President of Congress, Roberto Micheletti, a member of the Liberal party, as the acting President of Honduras. In the three months following the coup, the human rights organization Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH) documented 4,235 human rights violations. These violations included extrajudicial killings, torture, and illegal detentions [15].

The subsequent November 2009 elections were highly contested. The conservative, Porfirio Lobo was elected with 55% of the votes. During the Lobo administration, Honduras saw changes in public policies and reductions in social spending, notably on health and education, "even as total spending has [had]

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<sup>2</sup> For a description of the two major political parties in Honduras please see: <http://www.country-studies.com/honduras/political-parties.html> and for an analysis of the smaller parties see: [http://www.photius.com/countries/honduras/government/honduras\\_government\\_smaller\\_political\\_pa~18.html](http://www.photius.com/countries/honduras/government/honduras_government_smaller_political_pa~18.html)

increased as a percent of GDP” [3]. Health care workers and teachers went on strike, protesting the lack of wages. Hugely popular government education programs, including the Programa Matricula Gratis which provided free enrollment and the Merienda Escolar, which ensured free school meals, were scaled-down or eliminated entirely [3].

To some Hondurans, the 2013 elections promised to be the first free and fair elections since Zelaya’s presidency. The campaign brought a number of new political parties and new voices to Honduran politics. The election was closely scrutinized by international monitors, many of which cited gross intimidation by the extensive military presence throughout the country. When final votes were counted, Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado of the National Party was declared the winner with 36.9% of the vote. Though results were initially disputed, they were subsequently reviewed and confirmed. The Hernández administration took office in January 2014. It has since been criticized for militarizing the administration, especially for transferring civilian posts to the military. The most recent example of expanding military control is the installation of active military general Julian Pacheco as Minister of Security, which effectively puts the civilian police force under military jurisdiction [16]. Partly as a result of the political upheavals over the past decade, high levels of corruption and human rights violations, civilian trust in the government is at an all-time low [17, 18].

## Violence and its Consequences in Honduras

In 2012, Honduras was identified as having the world’s highest murder rate [19], with 90.4 homicides per every 100,000 people [19; see Exhibits 3 & 4]. This rate is eight times greater than the rate of its southern neighbor, Nicaragua, and significantly greater than the global average of 6.2 homicides per 100,000 population [20]. The country’s second-largest city, San Pedro Sula, has ranked as the world’s most violent city for the past four years running, with homicide rates increasing from 159/100,000 in 2011 to 171/100,000 in 2014 [21]. Young males between the ages of 15-24 are at greatest risk of being victims and perpetrators [22]. The use of a firearm is the most common mechanism of homicide in the country; in 2011 84% of all homicides were committed with a gun [19]. Gangs, drug traffickers, private security firms as well as police and military members are often implicated as perpetrators of gun violence.

### Economic Impacts

It has been estimated that violence in Honduras results in an 8-10% loss of GDP annually, largely as a result of health costs, policing, justice system and prison costs, and private security costs. Violence costs the private sector approximately 4% of its potential annual profits [23]. However, economic impacts may be much higher as these estimates do not account for non-monetary costs related to mortality and morbidity, nor do they account for economic and social multiplier effects [24].

### Health Impacts

The Global Burden of Disease 2010 study identified interpersonal violence as the third leading cause of death, the leading cause of years of life lost (YLLs) and the leading cause of disability adjusted life years lost in Honduras [25; Exhibit 5]. Since 1990, DALY’s due to interpersonal violence increased more than 140%. Mental and behavioral disorders are the leading contributor to years lived with disability [25].

Gun-related trauma and violence, especially persistent exposure, has both negative short-term and long-term emotional, psychological, and physical effects, including increased anger, aggression, depression,

anxiety and post-traumatic stress syndrome [26, 27, 28]. People can be exposed through victimization from, perpetuation of, witnessing and hearing about violence in their communities and elsewhere [29]. While the severity of gun violence effects can vary depending on a person's risk factors and relationship to the victim, the effects of gun violence on the general population in Honduras are troubling [30]. In Mexico, studies show that exposure to violent conflict is directly linked to anxiety and depression in men, women, and children as well as both victims and non-victims [31].

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable as they have limited emotional, physical, or cognitive resources to prevent the internalization of violence [32, 33, 26]. Children exposed to community level violence are at higher risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, hyper-vigilance, aggressive behavior, conduct disorder, later substance abuse. They often exhibit poorer academic achievement, lower career and educational goals and social and emotional withdrawal [34, 33, 35]. Studies of children in the US who immigrated from Mexico are at high risk of experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder due to violence they experienced while living in Mexico [36]. In addition to mental issues, violence takes a toll on physical health. Research in Mexico indicates that exposure to violent crime significantly decreases birth weight of babies [37] and that violence "creates situations in which people are afraid to spend time outside, both limiting their ability to exercise and access nutritious food and contributing to higher rates of chronic disease" [38].

The capacity of Honduras' health system to manage the physical, mental, and emotional consequences of violence is severely limited. Funding and infrastructure for mental health especially is grossly inadequate [39]. In 2006 less than 2% of the health budget was allocated to mental health and of this, 88% was allocated to mental hospitals. There are 2 mental hospitals located in or near Tegucigalpa, 1 day-treatment facility for adults in Tegucigalpa and 31 mental health outpatient facilities throughout the country, 3 of which are for children and adolescents only. Of all users treated in these facilities, 75% are females and 8% are children or adolescents. Poverty and distance to facilities mean that most of rural users and minority groups usually do not seek mental health care unless symptoms become so severe that they need hospitalization [39]. Community-based mental health services, differentiated care for children and adolescents, and training of primary care workers in mental health issues were cited in a 2008 WHO-AIMS report as critically neglected aspects of the mental health system in Honduras [39]. This finding was in spite of the 2001 "National Mental Health Policy 2004-2021" that promotes community mental health and describes priority areas for implementation.

### **Societal Impacts**

Violence has been described as a contagious, infectious disease because its presence commonly causes more violence [40, 41]. Chronic exposure to violence, either directly or indirectly experienced, desensitizes and normalizes violence. For this reason chronic exposure has been shown to foster acceptance of violence, an expectation of violence and greater inclinations to respond to triggers with violence [26, 42, 41]. A cyclical nature of violence has also been cited as victims of violence may become perpetrators of violence. According to Social Disorganization Theory, community violence leads to a loss of social integration, social capital and social control, particularly with respect to young people [43, 44]. When communities have low social integration, they have more limited social support to help people deal cope with violence in healthy manners [27]. At the community level, guns are intertwined into a larger culture of fear. While the potential harm that can be caused by guns causes fear, people also carry and use weapons to feel protected, safe, and secure [45].

In Honduras, a direct impact of violence on community cohesion and disintegration of communities is seen in the migration of families, most notably children, out of affected communities, with some willing to endure significant hardships and risks in the process. While emigration from Honduras to the US began following the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 it has accelerated in recent years. Migrant flows to the United States have been largely illegal and in 2011, an estimated 75% of Hondurans in the US lacked legal status, the largest share among Central American immigrant groups. As a result, Hondurans are disproportionately affected by U.S. deportations. Many deportees experience difficulty reintegrating back into Honduran society [46].

The recent plight of unaccompanied child migrants to the US has been directly attributed to the escalating violence in Honduras [47]. Honduras is among the top three countries of origin of unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S. border [48]. From January to June 2012, approximately 2,500 Honduran unaccompanied minors were referred for foster care. A study conducted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services found that 85% of a representative sample of unaccompanied children placed in foster care between 2007 and 2011 had experienced a traumatic event [49]; half the children identified with a mental health disorder at the time of referral came from Honduras and the majority of these were boys.

## Overview of the Causes of Violence in Honduras

The growing epidemic of violence in Honduras can be traced through the country's socio-cultural and political history of poverty and inequity, as well as its culture of machismo, corruption and military rule [22, 50, 18, 51]. Over the past two decades, the escalation of violence in Honduras, and especially gun violence, is increasingly attributed to 1) the interplay of the drug trade fueled by demand for drugs from the US [52, 18], 2) the expansion and institutionalization of gangs and transnational organized crime [13], 3) the escalation of the war on drugs [53, 54] and immigration policies that see large populations of Honduran deportees returning to Honduras with limited reintegration [46].

While the above mentioned are indeed drivers of violence in Honduras, the origin and perpetuation of a culture of violence is complex, multi-faceted and deeply rooted in structural factors including but not limited to poverty, inequality, and underemployment; rapid urbanization and development of informal settlements; corruption, government impunity and government abuses; an inability to meet the needs of victims of violence and break the cycle; and targeted violence against specific groups [55, 49, 56].

Social scientists from the Central University of Venezuela recently proposed a sociological model to explain the influence of these various factors in causing and perpetuating violence in Latin America. This model describes the nested relationships between the macro-social and structural factors that originate violence, the meso-social and socio-cultural factors that foment violence and the individual-level and interpersonal factors that facilitate violence [Exhibit 6, [50].

## Inequalities in Honduras

In 2014, Honduras was the second poorest country in Central America, with one of the lowest per capita incomes in the region [6]. Poverty and extreme poverty rates<sup>3</sup> have both increased to 66.5% and 46%, respectively [5], despite steady growth in GDP. This growth has been unrealized by the majority of Hondurans. From 2003-2005, “73% of all income gains...went to the top 10 percent of households.” In 2010 and 2011, the wealthiest continued to prosper while “the bottom 90 percent experienced a sharp contraction in their incomes,” [5]. These income inequalities are reflected in Honduras’ increasing Gini Coefficient<sup>4</sup> [1]. The Center for Economic and Policy Research reports that, since 2009, Honduras is one of three Latin American countries to see its Gini Coefficient rise, and of those three, Honduras has seen the largest increase (12.3% in two years) [5].

While official unemployment is low (4.6% in 2013), underemployment, or the proportion working full time for less than minimum wage, affects more than 50% of the population and has increased in recent years [5]. Urban males aged 15 to 24 years of age and with seven to twelve years of schooling suffer the highest un / underemployment rate [50]. Of the population engaged in formal employment, approximately 40% are employed in agriculture, 30% in services, and 16% in industry. Approximately 17% of Honduras's gross domestic product comes from remittances, a higher source of domestic income than any other sector of the economy [57].

Inequalities extend beyond income and age. In 2011, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranked Honduras at 105 out of 146 countries. Within the country’s labor force, 80% of men are active participants in the labor force, as compared to only 40% of women [58]. Men have much greater asset ownership than women [59]. Interestingly, large foreign-owned maquiladoras<sup>5</sup> produce textiles and other goods and predominantly employ women. However, this imbalance has led to disaffection in the young male population. Within Latin America, Honduras has the sixth highest rate of femicide, or the killing of women based on their gender, with violence against women increasing by 236% between 2005 and 2013 [60]. Honduras is the third worst Latin American country for indigenous populations, which make up approximately 10% of the total population, with regard to access to education [61].

## Gangs, Drugs and Organized Crime in Honduras

The rise of gangs, and later transnational organized crime, in Honduras and throughout Latin America and can be traced back to US anti-gang and immigration policies. Following riots in Los Angeles in the early 1990s, California toughened prosecution of and penalties for gang youths. In 1996, US Congress applied similarly strict prosecution practices to immigration. Noncitizens sentenced to a year or more in prison, regardless of crime, were deported to their countries of origin. Foreign-born, American citizens

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<sup>3</sup> Extreme poverty is defined as average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence (<http://data.worldbank.org/news/extreme-poverty-rates-continue-to-fall>).

<sup>4</sup> The Gini coefficient is a measure of inequality of a distribution. It is defined as a ratio between 0 and 1 (<http://www3.nccu.edu.tw/~jthuang/Gini.pdf>)

<sup>5</sup> Maquiladoras are mostly American-owned factories along the Mexican border (or in countries such as Honduras) that assemble products for export to U.S. markets (<http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/maquiladora.htm>).



convicted of felonies, and later petty misdemeanor offenders, were stripped of their citizenship and deported [62]. From 2002-2004, Central America was flooded with deportees, many of whom had been in the US since childhood, were native English speakers and whose only connections in their country of origin were each other.

The ouster of President Manuel Zelaya in 2009 and the two years of political turmoil that followed under President Michelleti, including economic sanctions, diverted attention, weakened political and judicial institutions and reduced the country's capacity to combat the increasing flow of illicit activity into the country. Furthermore, US-led counter-trafficking operations squeezed drug cartels to the south in Colombia and to the north in Mexico [63]. As a result, drug gangs turned to Honduras as an alternative staging post. Recent estimates put the flow of cocaine through the country at 140 - 300 tons annually. Pompeyo Bonilla Reyes, Honduras's former security minister, explains, "We are between those who consume drugs [US] and those who produce them [South America]. Logically, we are a corridor of traffic" [52]. Nearly 80% of all cocaine from South America makes its first stop in Honduras, smuggled largely through La Mosquitia, a sparsely-populated rainforest along the Nicaraguan border and Caribbean coast. In 2010 it was estimated that Honduras had the largest criminal gang presence in Central America, with an estimated 36,000 members belonging to more than 100 local and transnational groups. While the presence of transnational criminal organizations are increasing, Honduran groups, it should be noted, make up the majority of drug trafficking gangs in the country; they are well connected with the country's wealthy elite and the Honduran police force [64]. Continued high levels of deportations by the United States exacerbate this situation [65].

Today, gangs are integrated into all sectors of Honduran society. Members are mostly young males (median age, 19 years), though leaders may be in their 30s or 40s. They recruit skilled members, such as lawyers, architects, and engineers, to choose properties and customize them to maximize gang operations. Prisons are remodeled to be more comfortable for incarcerated gang members and families. Each gang also employs a medical team [66]. Although originally relegated to urban slums, gangs are now targeting sectors of the middle class [67]. They run communities, charging "war taxes" and "protection taxes" (citizens pay, leave, or get killed) and serving as the protectors of their territories [47]. Neighborhood problems, like robberies and domestic abuse, are handled by the ruling gang. Venturing a few blocks in the wrong direction into rival gang territory could become a death sentence [68].

Strong networks of influence and manpower have also allowed gangs to spread into schools. Schools are also used by gangs as areas to sell drugs, recruit new members, and as hubs for prostitution. In some situations, gang members approve the school curriculum and teachers are forced to modify anything deemed 'controversial'. Due to their position of power, gang members are viewed as heroes in the eyes of many children [69]. Membership is not a concern for gangs, as many children join willingly, especially boys [70], –the exaggerated machismo in gang culture entices disaffected male youth [71]. The increasing trends towards un- and underemployment among Honduran youth highlight the lack of alternative opportunities and the role of gangs in filling this void [56]. Joining gangs has also been identified as a protective behavior for youth that fear violence [72].

The two most notorious gangs in Honduras are Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (M-18) [Exhibit 6], both of which originated in Los Angeles, California. Both have a large sphere of influence, and are sworn rivals [73]. For years, the two gangs were in constant conflict. In an attempt at mediation, facilitated by the Roman Catholic Bishop Romulo Emiliani of San Pedro Sula, the two gangs declared a truce in 2013

[74]. While it was expected that gang-on-gang violence would decrease, this was not the case. Rather, murders increased in the month following the truce [75].

## The Rule of Law in Honduras

There is little confidence in the rule of law in Honduras due to a pervasive culture of corruption, impunity and heavy handedness on the part of ruling parties and security forces, both the police and the military [76]. Honduras ranked 129th out of 183 countries in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perception Index. Human rights abuses committed by security forces are rarely dealt with. In 2013, the entire police investigative unit (1300 police officers) was suspended for alleged corruption and ties to organized crime. It has been estimated that nearly 40% of the police workforce has ties to organized crime [77]. It is likely not surprising then that impunity for criminals is also rampant. A study conducted by the Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ), a Honduran NGO, found that only 8% of violent crimes in the three largest cities were investigated and 1% resulted in a conviction [78].

## Laws Governing Gun Access

There are an estimated 850,000 guns (both licit and illicit) held by civilians in Honduras [79]. According to the country's human rights commission, CONADEH, "close to 70 percent were illegal" [80]. Though regulations are in place, [79] gun policy in Honduras has remained quite elusive and has not been enforced in any efficient or regulated manner. There is also resistance by Hondurans for gun restrictions given its history of military rule and human rights violations at the hands of police and military. This point was illustrated by Leo Valladares, former national commissioner for human rights, and a former member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. "Many years ago, when I was a human rights commissioner, I proposed that everyone should be disarmed," he said. "But everyone said that was crazy, because the police and the military would still have guns. That was going to leave the 'good people' without weapons and the 'bad people' with weapons."

Interestingly, recent research suggests that, in Latin America, there are limited correlations between gun laws, the estimated number of civilian-owned guns, and homicide rates. Rather, other factors such as drug trafficking, illegal arms flows and governance, including the strength of institutions are more critical [81]. Although arms imports and exports in Honduras are controlled by legal measures, nearly half of guns recovered from criminals can be traced back to the USA [82]; it is believed more than 20% were purchased from US gun dealers and smuggled across the border. Due to the nature of gun trafficking, this is likely a gross underestimation of the total guns being illegally smuggled into the country [83]. There is also suspicion of arms provided by the United States government being misused in Honduras [84].

## Addressing Violence in Honduras

The typical approach to rising gangs and violence in Central America has been the application of zero-tolerance, suppression policies. The Honduran government, for example, introduced a policy called *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) and *Ley Antimaras* (Anti-Gang Law) in 2003. These zero tolerance suppression policies typically criminalized gang membership, arrested those suspected of participating in illicit activity, and extended prison sentences for those convicted. These policies backfired for numerous reasons. Institutional capacity to enforce these policies was insufficient. Gangs retaliated against the crackdown with escalation of violence and exhibitions of power. In December 2004, MS-13 members stormed a civilian bus with AK-47s, killing 28, most of whom were women and children [85]. Lastly, these policies concentrated gang members in prisons resulting in overcrowding and increased illicit activity and gang recruitment in prisons.

There are a variety of anti-violence initiatives in Honduras. “*Jovenes Contra la Violencia*” (Youth against Violence Movement), for example, is a youth violence prevention program that is co-funded by the Honduran government, the private sector, and the USAID-sponsored *Alianza Joven Honduras* [86]. Honduras is also one of nine Latin American countries to receive anti-violence programming from the United Nations under its “*UNiTE to End Violence against Women*” campaign [87]. The U.S. Government also supports the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). This USAID implemented program in Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, and Guatemala aims to build resilience in high-crime, urban communities through community crime prevention committees, community policing, and improving access to public services, jobs, and justice [88]. The program focuses specifically on youth at risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence. In November 2014, the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras announced their participation in the “*Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity,*” which outlines guidelines for economic and social transformation targeting education, policing, energy, finances, and legal systems. The initiative is being funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the US government, among others [89].

Many evangelical congregations in Central America have also made ministry to gang members a central aspect of their work, deliberately establishing churches in communities with high gang activity. The churches view gang members as potential converts [90]. While most gangs require membership until death, many make exceptions for those who convert and demonstrate devotion to their faith. For example, the Pentecostal Church’s frequent services and “strict morality” provide gangs with a useful test for this conversion. Catholic churches, on the other hand, tend to be more involved in youth ministries aimed at gang prevention, rather than at the conversion of current gang members [90].

Other Latin American countries face similar challenges to Honduras but experience less violence. Countries like Nicaragua have allegedly held violence to a minimum by taking different approaches to drug trafficking. Some analysts allege that Nicaragua’s government administers and manages its organized crime, which “regulates” the drug trade and minimizes violence [91]. Others suggest that Nicaragua’s social programs, such as youth training centers and community policing, have broken the cycle of violence [92].

## Summary

The Honduran government seeks innovative and multi-disciplinary proposals that will reduce the high prevalence of violence and its health and social ramifications. The task will not be an easy one -- a complex web of structural, social and transnational factors contribute to the epidemic of violence in the country. However, President Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado is hopeful that teams will produce innovative and effective strategies that will improve the health and safety of the nation.

¡Felicidades!

Your team has been shortlisted to present your proposals to address violence in Honduras on Saturday, March 28, 2015. Your strategy will be judged critically by a panel that includes internationally renowned experts in public health, law, development, business, international relations, ethics, and the sociocultural and political context of Honduras. Judges will critically review each proposal and select the one that holds the highest potential for maximum impact. The most outstanding proposal will:

- Incorporate expertise from multiple disciplines to address the myriad of contributors to and consequences of violence
- Innovate, either by offering new solutions or approaches or by adapting proven strategies so they are appropriate for and effective in the Honduran context
- Demonstrate, using a sound evidence base, the health, economic and social impacts of the proposed strategy and the potential health, social, and economic returns on investment
- Consider risks, externalities, and potential unintended consequences of the proposed strategy, including, for example, impact on Honduran communities, the Honduran economy, business, and relationships with other nation-states
- Consider local, national and / or transnational approaches and diplomatic cooperation to break the cycle of violence and achieve impacts
- Include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy that is grounded in a theory of change and details specific indicators to measure process and anticipated outcomes and impacts at two, five, and ten years

There is no budget ceiling for this proposal, though value for money should be demonstrated. The government is able to allocate up to 1% of the 2014 public health expenditures and up to 2% of 2014 security expenditures per year for the next five years. We welcome recommendations for sources of funds beyond those provided by the government and pledge our assistance to secure those funds.

We anxiously await your proposals.

¡Buena suerte!

President Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado

## References

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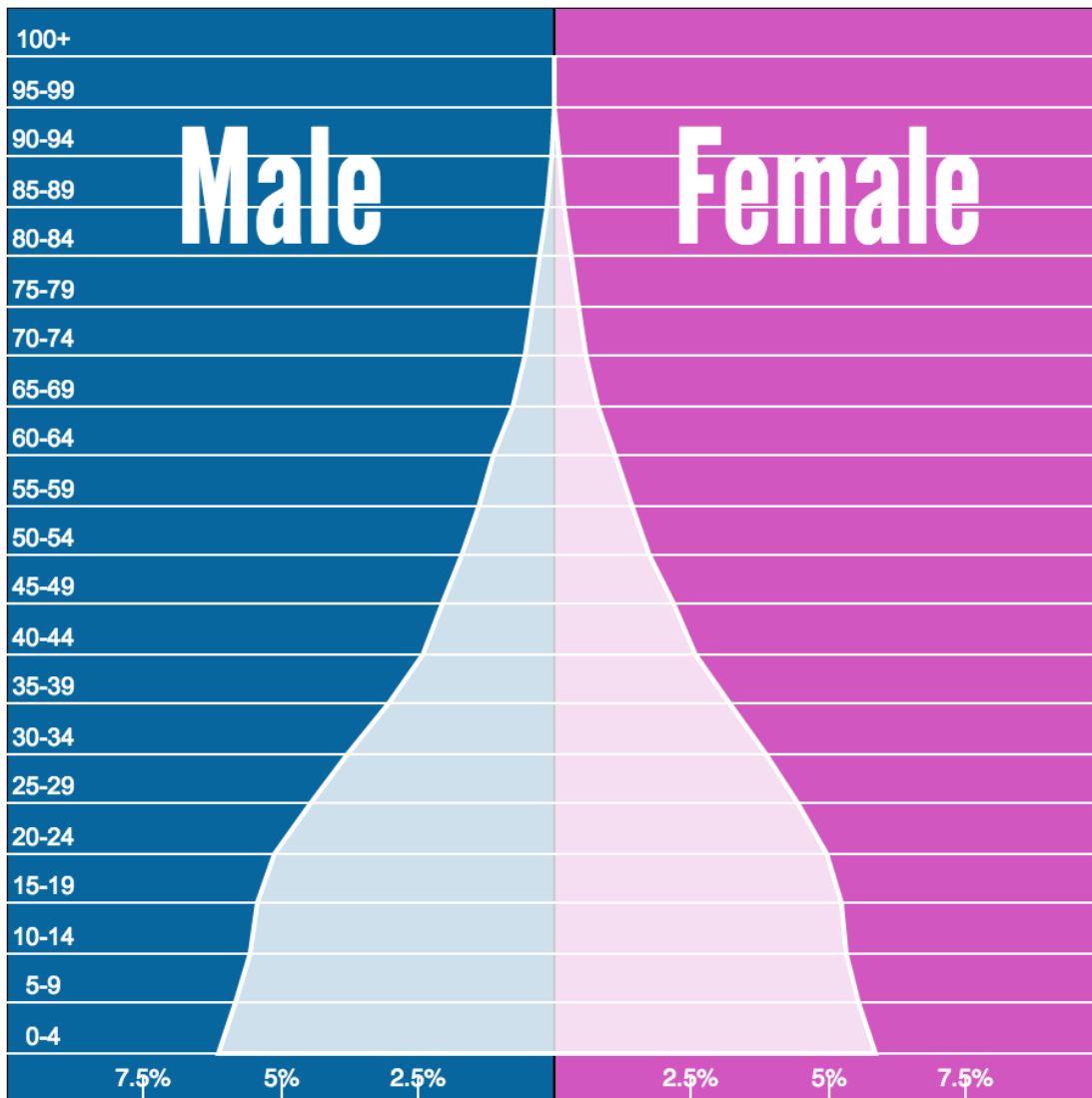


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Exhibit 1: Population Pyramid for Honduras in 2015. <http://populationpyramid.net/honduras/2015/>

# Honduras 2015

Population: **8.423.000**



**Exhibit 2:** Country-Specific Development Indicators.

	Honduras	Guatemala	Nicaragua
Total Population (2013) <sup>1</sup>	8,097,688.0	15,468,203.0	6,080,478.0
% Under 15 (2012) <sup>2</sup>	38%	41%	35%
Life Expectancy at Birth (2014) <sup>3</sup>	70.91	71.74	72.72
Under-5 mortality rate per 1000 (2013) <sup>2</sup>	22	31	24
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births (2010) <sup>2</sup>	120	140	100
Total expenditure on health as % of GDP (2012) <sup>2</sup>	8.6	6.7	8.2
Human Development Index Rank, out of 187 countries (2013) <sup>4</sup>	129	125	132
% Adult (15+) literacy rate (2012) <sup>2</sup>	85	78	Not available
% households with access to improved drinking water source (2012) <sup>2</sup>	90	94	85
% households with basic sanitation (2012) <sup>2</sup>	80	80	52

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2102rank.html>

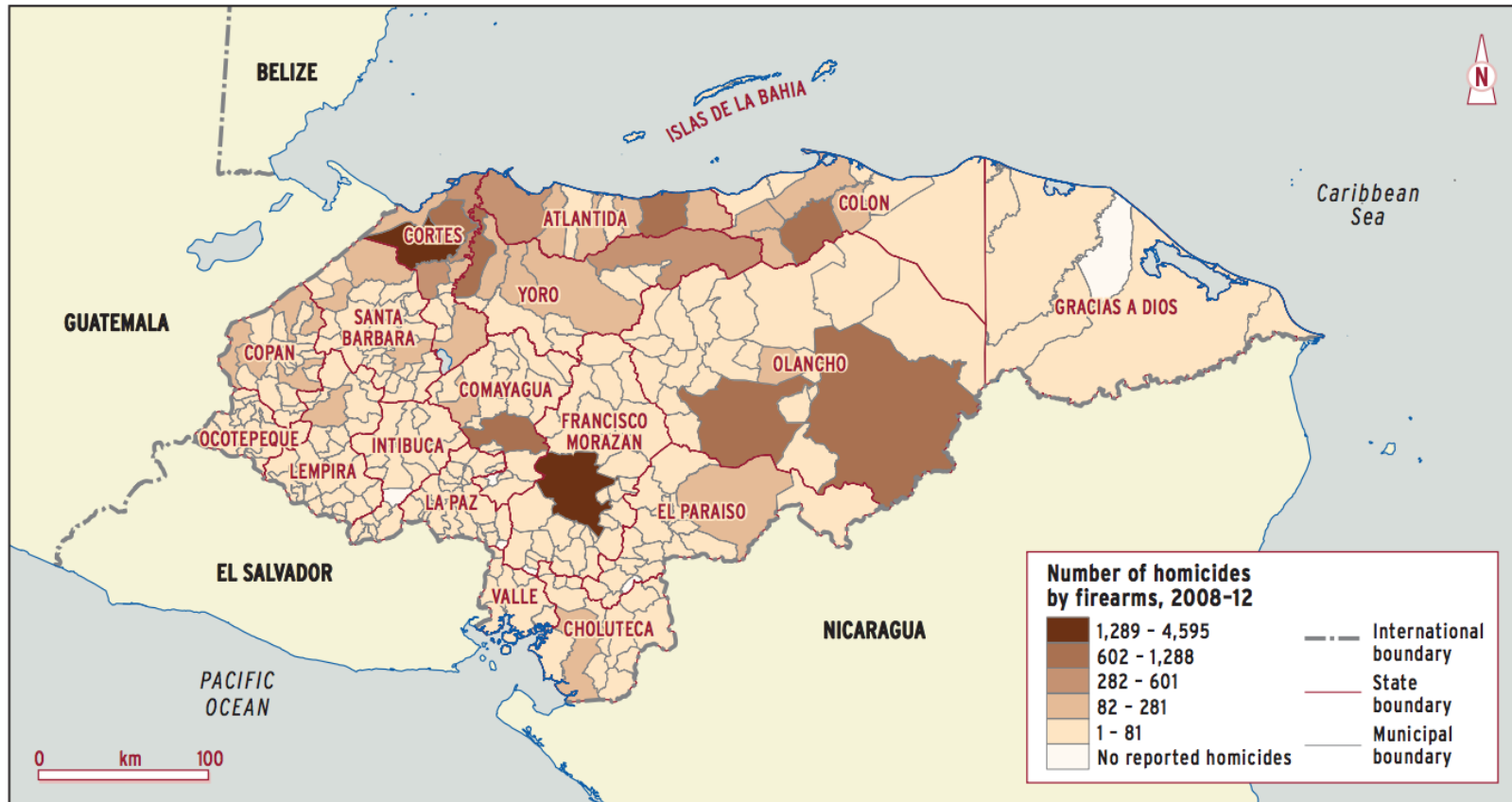
<sup>2</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://kff.org/global-indicator/population-under-age-15/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components>

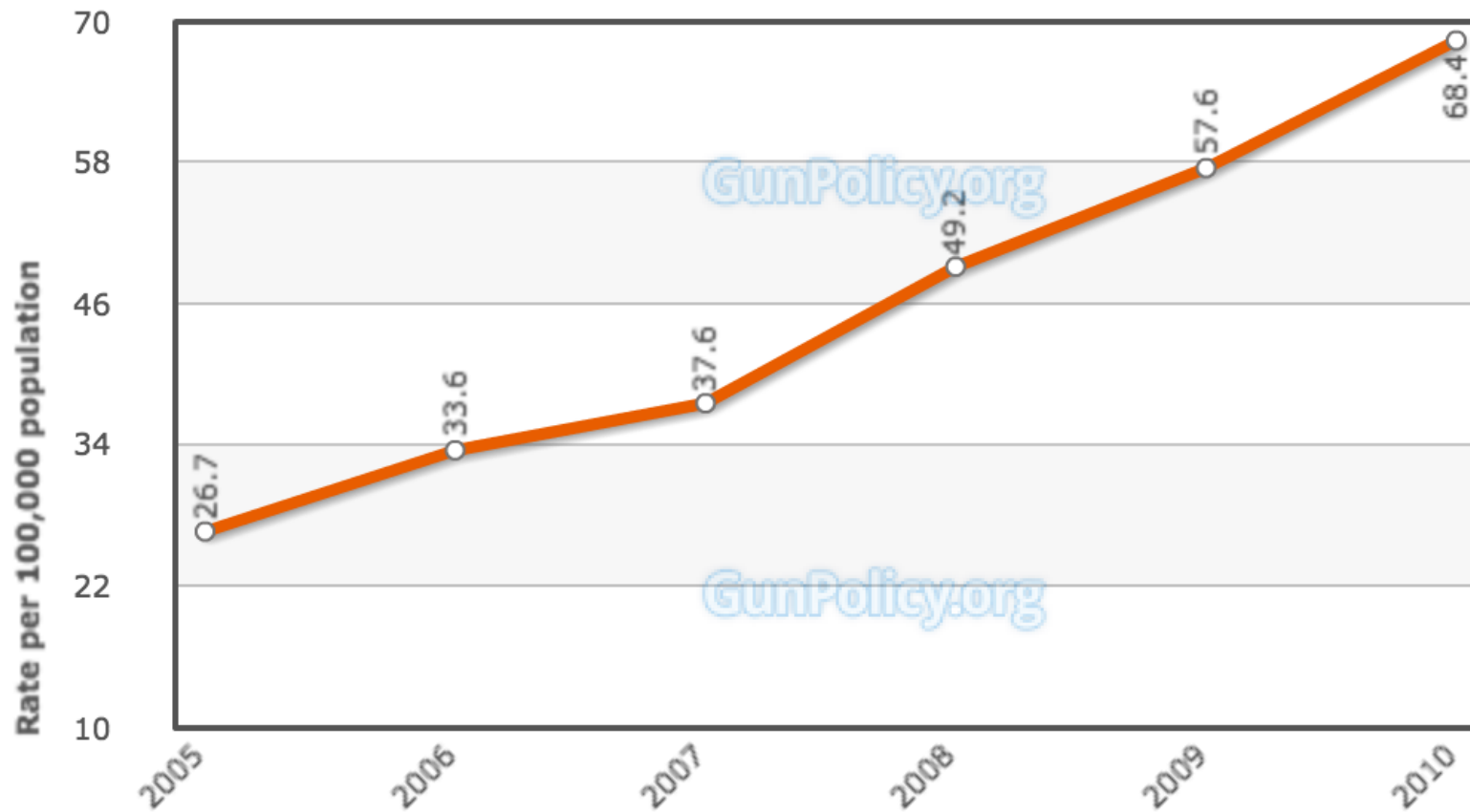
Exhibit 3: Distribution of homicides by firearms in Honduras. [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research\\_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-39.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-39.pdf)

Map 1 **Distribution of homicides by firearms in Honduras, 2008-12**

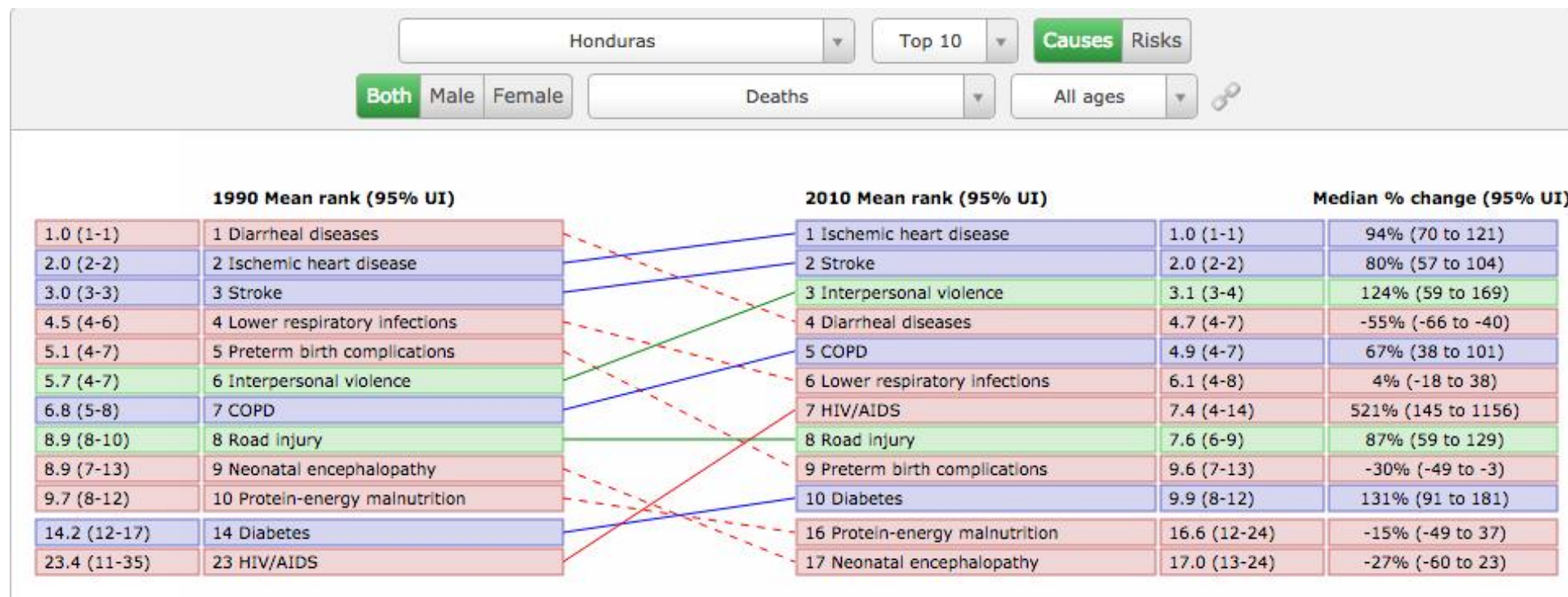


Source: Sánchez (2013)

**Exhibit 4:** Rate of Gun Homicide per 100,000 people in Honduras. Alpers, Philip and Marcus Wilson. 2015. *Guns in Honduras: Rate of Gun Homicide per 100,000 People*. Sydney School of Public Health, The University of Sydney. GunPolicy.org, 28 January. Accessed 29 January 2015. at: [http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/compareyears/79/rate\\_of\\_gun\\_homicide](http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/compareyears/79/rate_of_gun_homicide)



**Exhibit 5.** Global Burden of Disease (DALYs) for men and women, all ages. Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). Accessed 5 March 2015 from: <http://vizhub.healthdata.org/irank/arrow.php>



**Exhibit 6:** The sociological framework of violence levels. Source: Briceno-Leon, R. Urban violence and public health in Latin America: a sociological explanatory framework. 2005. *Cad. Saúde Pública*. Vol.21, n.6, pp. 1629-1648.

The sociological framework of violence levels.

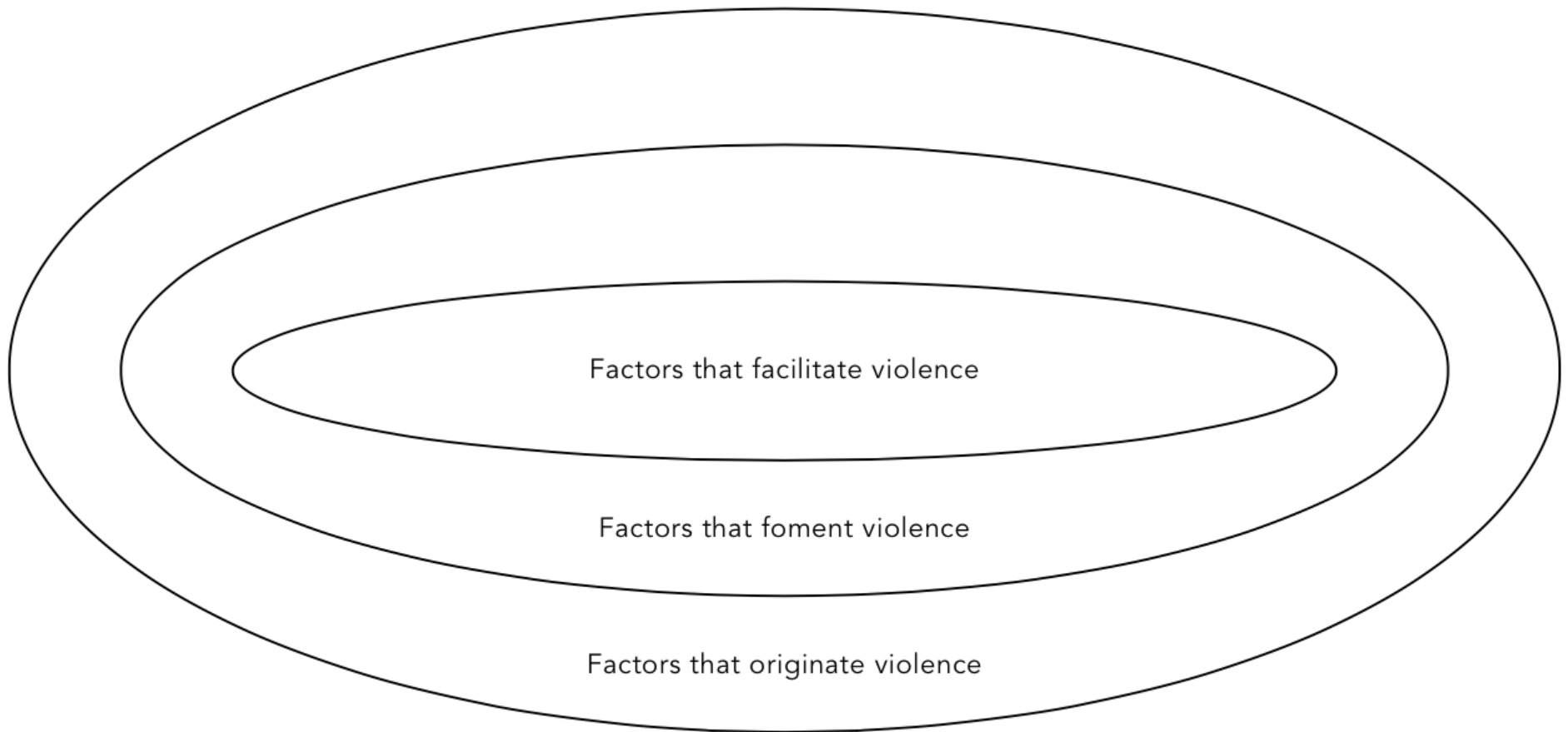


Exhibit 7: Gang Distributions in Honduras in 2012.

<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/after-govt-crackdown-honduras-gangs-rethink-tactics>





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