Peace Without Tranquility.

A comparative analysis of two causal explanations of persistent violence in El Salvador and Honduras

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Abstract

I am interested in exploring the relationship between political and non-political violence in post-civil or quasi-civil war settings, especially in Central America. The problem has had many diagnoses and even more treatments, as academics and public policymakers try to address a very real problem. Unfortunately, the violence seems to only worsen. This paper seeks to explore whether persistent levels of non-political violence can be explained, in part, as legacies of past political violence and what the corresponding policy implications may be. More specifically, my research question is whether the existing literature sufficiently explains the connection between present and past violence and if not, how to improve upon existing explanations. I find that high levels of prolonged political violence, along with an abundance of firearms, can lead to high levels of prolonged non-political violence and I propose my own model with specific indicators to measure its development over time.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I am interested in exploring the relationship between political and non-political violence in post-civil or quasi-civil war settings, especially in Central America. The problem has had many diagnoses and even more treatments, as academics and public policymakers try to address a very real problem. Unfortunately, the violence seems to only worsen. This paper seeks to explore whether persistent levels of non-political violence can be explained, in part, as legacies of past violence. More specifically, my research question is whether the existing literature sufficiently explains the connection between present and past violence and if not, how to improve upon existing explanations.

Through my research, I find that high levels of prolonged political violence, along with an abundance of firearms, can lead to high levels of prolonged non-political violence and I propose my own model with specific indicators (crime underreporting, confidence in state institutions, and estimates of legal and illicit firearms) to measure its development over time. Such indicators could be useful to study one case over time or to compare various cases in a given moment in order to access the impact of public policies aimed at violence reduction and prevention. It must be noted that violence is a complex problem with no silver-bullet solution, and through this research, I merely hope to nudge the analysis forward. I also suggest some policy implications, but this should be considered as a work in progress and more research is needed to further assess policy implications.

I have had a longstanding interest in this topic that grew out of casual conversations with Central American friends whose anecdotes about their childhood or daily lives often reveal pervasive violence that I found shocking in part because of their nonchalance. For instance, I met Liz, a Honduran friend's younger sister, for coffee in Barcelona while she was realizing her dream of traveling through Europe. As we chatted, she would incessantly check her Blackberry, like any girl of her age and socioeconomic status, but would then place it under her upper thigh. Finding this ritual puzzling, I asked Liz about it but it took her a moment to understand to what I was referring; it was so second nature. Everyone she knew was robbed so frequently, she explained, if not something much worse—at gunpoint, while sitting in the car at a stoplight—that they developed the habit of hiding their phones so that after their purses were gone, they could call their families or a friend if need be. Liz's anecdote struck me because it illustrated how pervasive violence can penetrate every aspect of one's life, including the gestures one makes.

Our brief interaction brought to light how she could not count on the police for protection and how fear and violence becomes normalized given sufficient exposure.

It is widely acknowledged that violence is caused by many interrelated variables, and must be understood as a product of the interplay between dynamic and mutually reinforcing factors. The World Bank, for example, explains the causes of violence in the following way:

> The high levels of crime and violence that currently exist in [Latin America] can be attributed to a complex set of factors, including rapid urbanization, persistent poverty and inequality, social exclusion, political violence, organized crime, post-conflict cultures, the emergence of illegal drug use and the trafficking and authoritarian family structures. (2008: 3)

However, to gain insight into a complex issue, its individual components must also be identified and understood in order to assess their interplay. Thus, this paper will focus on the specific connection between past political violence and current non-political violence, while acknowledging that it is just one small piece of a much broader issue.

Most discussions of violence in Central America include a causal connection between current violence and the extensive political violence of the 1980s. Such claims are regularly espoused as though self-evident, without much analysis or empirical evidence. Meanwhile, newer research on violence suggests that while it is causally connected to past violence (reproduced in a variety of social spaces and transmitted through time), protracted political violence is an extraneous factor (see Pearce 2007). In other words, violence begets violence but top-down political violence does not have an independent effect.

El Salvador and Honduras make ideal case studies for this project because the nations have the most similarities today in Central America, in terms of social indicators and the degree of violence, and both have experienced high but varying levels of protracted political violence and repression in the 1980s. Additionally, the theories explored in this project have not yet been applied to these cases. In the following chapters, the evolution of violence will be explored by trying to unpack the claimed causal links between protracted political violence (if it is in fact relevant) and current direct non-political violence. As such, the conclusions that come out of this research could be potential relevant beyond Central or even Latin America to any post-conflict setting where a recent influx of arms into the hands of new actors could have long-lasting societal consequences. Though policies geared at reducing endemic violence must be carried out

thoughtfully and on a case-by-case basis, scholars and policymakers can look to other cases for input.

The methodology for this project consists of two types of research. The first was through the assessment of statistical and survey information available through the World Bank, the Pan American Health Organization, LatinoBáromentro, and other relevant publications. The second type of information came from an original, semi-structured interview with Salvador Samayoa. Samayoa has been a public figure in El Salvador in a variety of capacities since the late 1970s, starting with a brief stint as Minister of Education under the Junta de Gobierno in 1979 before defecting to become a political leader of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), the Salvadoran guerilla movement. He participated in all the peace negotiations between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government during the 1980s, including the final and successful UN-brokered Peace Accords, which he also signed. After the civil war, he supervised the implementation of the Accords for the FMLN and continued to hold other political roles including President of the National Council of Public Security. Although the complete interview with Samayoa could not be included, relevant fragments are integrated throughout the text in text boxes.

This paper is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction and an overview of the layout. Chapter 2 sets up the analytical framework of the paper in several ways. First, it defines terminology that will be used throughout the paper. Secondly, it establishes two main ways that the existing literature link past violence to present violence: Approach 1 which claims there is a causal link between current non-political direct violence and the political violence of the 1980s through the leftover guns and ex-combatants of the time; and Approach 2 which claims that violence is transmitted and reproduced over time in certain intangible ways. Chapter 3 presents a brief overview of recent history in El Salvador and Honduras, the two cases under review. Chapter 4 builds upon the analytical foundation explored in Chapter 2 to suggest an integrated model that would better explain the connection between past and present violence. Additionally, Chapter 4 suggests indicators to better measure the evolution of violence over time. Chapter 5 offers a brief conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Analytical Framework

This section will review two ways in which scholars attribute current high levels of non-political direct violence to past violence in El Salvador and Honduras. Two patterns emerge in the literature and relevant arguments have thus been organized into two groups. **Approach 1** focuses on the tangible legacies which high levels of political violence leave behind, including demobilized men, the availability of weapons and other wartime or quasi-wartime infrastructure. Newer literature, grouped into **Approach 2,** focuses on the intangible legacies of past violence, including a long-term process of gendered socialization, the internalization and normalization of violence and the transmission of that framework from one generation to the next. Each approach suggests a causal relationship between current non-political violence and past historical violence, yet neither sufficiently clarifies how past violence influences present violence.

Table 1 (page 5) indicates definitions of terms used in this paper including civil war, conflict, crime and violence. Of these terms, violence is the most complex to define and can be categorized in many ways such as direct, political, everyday, cultural, structural (indirect), symbolic or chronic. For the purposes of this paper, it is especially important to recognize micro-level and macro-level violence and understand how they overlap, are mutually reinforcing, trigger or reproduce one another. However it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into this debate in more detail.[1]

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[1] **A note about gender and violence:** Many scholars include categories such as "social violence", "gender violence" or "domestic violence" in their typologies (see Moser 2004 for example), which is especially relevant in contexts such as Latin America where "*machista* culture" is often associated with causal factors of violence. Current discussions of gender and violence may include partner violence, sexual violence and child abuse, in addition to other violent acts that may take place at home or in social spaces. While these types of violence are a grave concern and highly relevant in any discussion of violence, it is also true that all types of violence have a gendered dimension.

There is a risk in relegating violence against women and children into a "social" or "domestic" category, inadvertently reinforcing the idea of social space as women's space and obscuring how gender plays a role in all other types of violence. To borrow Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois' critique of the narrow treatment of violence in university curriculum, "[it] misrecognize[s] the extent to which structural inequalities and power relations are naturalized by our categorizes and conceptions of what violence really is. They also fail to address the totality and range of violent acts, including those which are part of the normative fabric of social and political life." (2004: 5)

Table 1. Definition of Terms	
Civil war	• A violent conflict within a country fought by organized groups that aim to take power at the center or in a region, or to change government policies (Fearon 2007).
Conflict	• A perceived incompatibility between parties (Galtung 1996). • Moser (2004) reminds us that conflict and violence are not synonyms. Both can be seen as struggles for power, but conflict need not necessarily be violent.
	• **Structural causes** are underlying factors that are the source of incompatibility between parties. Public policies that address root causes of conflict will ultimately be most effective. • **Necessary causes** must be in place in order for conflict to erupt. For example, for gun homicides to significantly increase, there must be widespread and easy access to firearms. • **Sufficient causes** of conflict or **Triggers** of different phases of conflict can lead most directly to violence. These types of causes are the most difficult to understand with precision because they can vary from one context to another. (Grasa 2010)
Crime	• A legal category that varies from place to place, though often entails violence against persons or property. • There is not an inherent link between crime and power, as is found in the links between power, conflict and violence (Moser 2004).
Violence	• **Political Violence** is used here to mean intimidation, repression, or direct violence perpetrated with the explicit or implicit consent of state agents for a political aim. Political violence can target individuals for their beliefs or affiliations, but it can also be used indiscriminately at the public to instill fear or warn against certain behaviors. • **Non-Political Direct Violence** includes physical harm done to people without a political aim. (Author's elaboration)

Source: Author's elaboration based on references cited. Definitions of violence by the author.

2.1 Approach 1: The Tangible Legacy of Political Violence

Approach 1 is made up of several main threads that tie together to suggest the causal connection between the political violence of the 1980s and the level of post-conflict violence today: leftover weapons (in the wrong hands), demilitarized ex-combatants (who may not have

jobs but may have some military-style training), and organized crime (made possible by wartime smuggling routes).

> Available data suggests that social violence and armed criminality are on the rise in the aftermath of the conflicts that have plagued most countries of [Central America]. In the early twenty-first century, politicized factions that fought in the 1980s are giving way to criminal gangs and organized civilian militia groups that are taking advantage of left-over military-style weapons, including grenades. Disenfranchised ex-combatants and unemployed or otherwise marginalized male youths are easily recruited into such groups. (Godnick, Muggah and Waszink 2002: vii)

The common theme of wartime weapons and ex-combatants runs throughout much of the literature.

This theme does not solely come up in countries like El Salvador that directly experienced a civil war, but in literature regarding Honduras as well.

> It is important to establish that the permanence of armed groups linked to anti-Sandinistas [in Honduras], throughout the entire decade of the 80s, provoked social instability and increased everyday violence. Many people cite this factor as of great importance in the circulation of easy-to-buy weapons that would later become available to common criminals in Honduras. This factor should be understood as an agent of violence, through which violence can be directly exercised and also as a circumstance that provokes violence. (Salomon 1993: 47-8, author's translation)

The idea that the same arms used for the purposes of political violence would later spill over directly into other types of direct violence is well known.

A 2008 NACLA report echoes this idea with regard to small arms in Central America. "The Cold War and its legacies bear most of the responsibility [for the overflow of weapons which] represent the most dramatic threat to public safety" (Stohl and Tuttle 2008: 14). Furthermore, the report goes on to claim that

> [these weapons are] responsible, in part, for the crime and violence that has retarded development throughout Latin America. These weapons last longer than their intended purposes require, perpetuating cycles of violence and underdevelopment that affect the entire region. (*Ibid*., 20)

Again, current violence is directly attributed to the civil wars in the region.

In the same vein, a 2012 report from the preeminent American think tank Council on Foreign Relations concurred with this assessment.

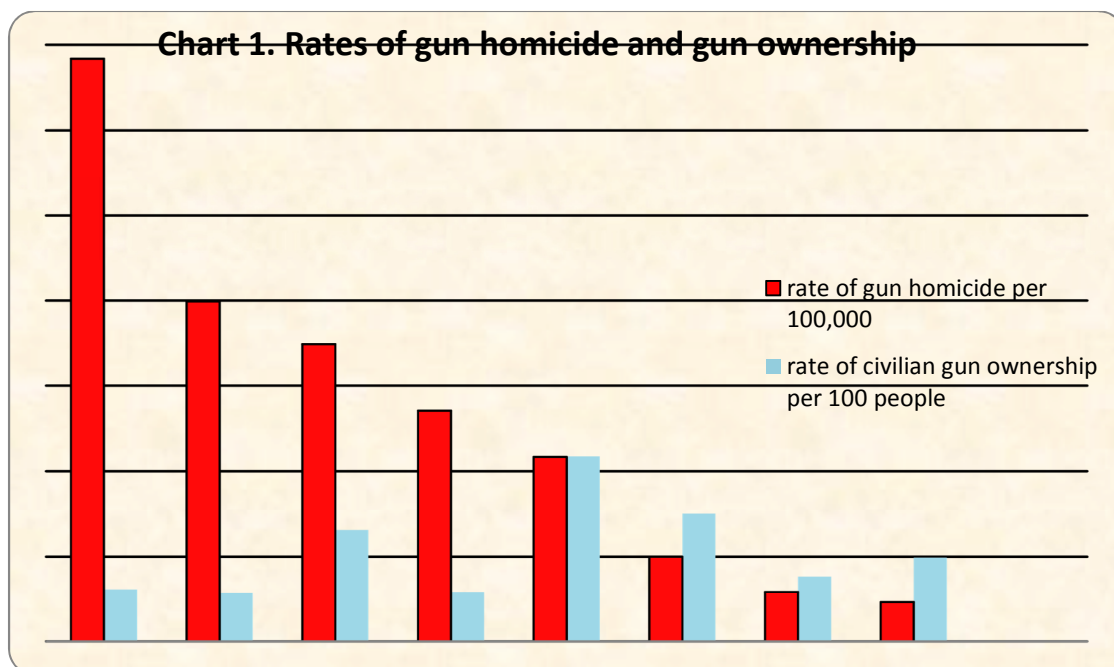> Organized crime…is one clear legacy of the region's war-torn past. Internal armed conflicts in Guatemala and El Salvador featured counterinsurgency campaigns, carried out by military forces supported by paramilitary units and robust intelligence services. Subsequent efforts to build solid democratic institutions failed to dismantle these structures, which have turned to a host of illicit enterprise, including drug smuggling,

human trafficking, illegal adoptions, arms smuggling, and movement of other contraband. (Shifter 2012: 5)

Here, in addition to weapon availability, the author attributes current direct violence to infrastructure of recent war, including smuggling routes.

Limitations to Approach 1:

Though these arguments make intuitive sense, the link between wartime infrastructure and current violence remain unclear. Starting with the connection between wartime weapons and gun homicide, there is no clear causal relationship between the number of guns available and the number of gun homicides committed (see **Chart 1**). Widespread gun availability is necessary cause of unusually high gun homicide rates but it is not itself a sufficient cause. Moreover, Salvador Samayoa, former FMLN political leader during the insurrection and signer of the peace accords claims that the type of weapons being used today in common crimes and those used during the war are simply not of the same caliber. He went on to say that the FMLN turned in the their weapons as stipulated in the peace accords, a process he personally oversaw, and he expressed great pride to the author about the advanced military style weapons which were standard in the FMLN arsenal—not what is associated with local gangs today (Samayoa, author interview 2012).

Chart 1. Rates of gun homicide and gun ownership

- rate of gun homicide per 100,000
- rate of civilian gun ownership per 100 people

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from www.gunpolicy.org

Concerning this particular issue, there is a difference between El Salvador and Honduras that usually goes unnoted. Often, it is made to seem that illicit firearms are of equal concern in both countries, however local research suggests otherwise. A local research team, with outside funding from the government of Finland, concluded that legal firearms are so easy to come by in El Salvador, there is simply less of a black market then in neighboring countries (Marbley Martínez 2006: 11). The study goes on to cite periodic decrees by the legislative assembly that allow for no-questions-asked firearms registration, leading local officials to believe that there are only "minimum levels" of illegal arms trafficking occurring in El Salvador. A similar conclusion was reached in a 2008 UK report regarding the Salvadoran gun buyback program in the late 1990s known as Goods for Guns. "The relative success of the Goods for Guns programme was offset by the high levels of gun ownership in the country. 48,620 more new firearms were legally imported into El Salvador than those turned in during Goods for Guns." (CICS 2008:17)

The second piece of Approach 1, that unemployed ex-combatants were easily drafted into gangs is more clearly correlated, yet the argument for causality remains unclear. Richani points out that a study of incarcerated criminals in the late 1990s suggested that having participated in the civil war increased the probability of committing a homicide in its aftermath, yet 70% of the population did not participate in the civil war. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s, the average age of criminals was between 15 and 21, suggesting that the majority were too young to have been combatants during the war (Richani 2010: 434). This finding indicates that ex-combatants were not responsible for the majority of homicides committed in the immediate aftermath of the war and the correlation only weakens over time as ex-combatants grow older but the majority of crimes continue to be committed by young men.

It is worth noting that many scholars include poverty and inequality as important causal factors for current violence, in addition to tangible Cold War legacies. In fact, one author goes so far as to directly refute any causal connection between wars and current levels of crime in Central America, instead arguing that inequality is a better predictor of homicides in Central America (Cardenal Izquierdo 2008). Yet, the latest GINI Index available shows that Costa Rica is more unequal than El Salvador, yet Costa Rica's homicide rate is less than 1/5 of El Salvador's (Central Intelligence Agency (n.d.); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2010). Furthermore, many other countries in Latin America and elsewhere face similar or worse levels of poverty and inequality and do not register anywhere near the same level of violence. Though

it has been broadly accepted that there is a correlation between poverty and inequality and direct violence, this single variable cannot sufficiently explain all cases to the exclusion of other causal factors. It is beyond the scope of this paper to further assess the link between poverty and violence or to establish the extent to which it is relevant.

2.2 Approach 2: The Intangible Legacy of Political Violence

Alternatively, the relatively new theory of "Chronic Violence", put forward by Jenny Pearce in 2007, provides an innovative perspective. She identifies and defines a type of violence that emerges from and is sustained by extensive and prolonged violence.

> [Chronic violence is] where rates of violent deaths are at least twice the average for high and low income countries respectively; where these levels are sustained for five years or more and where frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death, are recorded across several socialization spaces, including the household, the neighbourhood, the school, inter community and the nation state public space (which brings in disproportionate, sanctioned and non sanctioned acts of violence attributed to state security forces). (Pearce 2007: 07, footnote 4)

This concept suggests that pervasive and prolonged violence effects society on many levels (not just the victims and their families) and in many spaces.

In the 2011 publication "Chronic Violence and its Reproduction: Perverse Trends in Social Relations, Citizenship and Democracy in Latin America", Adams builds on Pearce's theory and refutes Approach 1.

> The World Bank's recent study of violence in Central America […] notes that while armed conflict in the region may have contributed to increased violence by damaging criminal justice institutions and generating a large stock of guns that remain in circulation, *broader evidence does not suggest that the region's high levels of violence are principally a legacy of armed conflict.* (Adams 2011: 23, emphasis added)

Instead, she argues that an overemphasis on procedural democracy and institutional strength in Latin America, may inadvertently distract from dealing with the causal roots of violence. If this is true, the vast amount of time and resources spent on strengthening the state is misdirected and incapable of solving the actual problem. Alternatively, she argues that attitudes towards violence and a lack of social capital, among other factors, may explain persistent non-political violence in Central America.

The intergenerational transmission of violence, which impacts men and women in different but specific ways and is referred to in the theory of chronic violence, is especially clear in Dickson-Gómez's 2002 field research in rural El Salvador. She noted that "expectations of violence and state oppression" are passed from one generation to the next by creating a

framework in which to process current events or justify actions (2002: 415-6). In the author's observations of personal reactions to homicides in the local community or on the news, many believed that the perpetrators were soldiers or ex-guerrilla fighters and the events were referred to as evidence that another war was coming. These conversations, regularly had in front of children, kept the wartime mindset alive and perpetuated fear and distrust (*Ibid.*: 423-4).

Limitations to Approach 2:

One challenge to using this approach is that homicide rates as an aggregate measure may obscure certain trends. **Chart 2** disaggregates homicide statistics by looking at total numbers of external causes of mortality in El Salvador, excluding car accidents. If violence has been transmitted and reproduced through society over time, we would expect homicides to increase by all methods. Yet available information demonstrates that homicides by firearm have disproportionately increased, suggesting that, in terms of violent death, firearms play a special role which cannot be explained by the current theory of chronic violence.

Chart 2. 3 Most Common External Causes of Mortality in El Salvador

assault by firearm

assault by sharp object

assault by hanging, stangulation, suffucation

*1997 only includes data for male victims
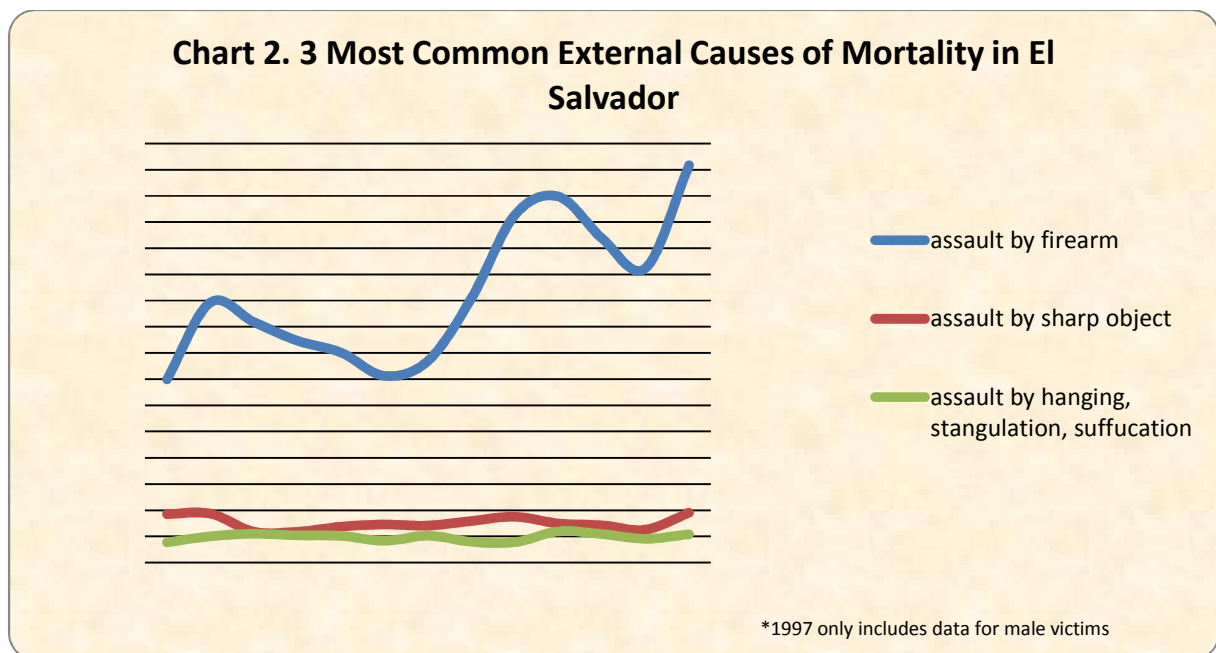
Source: Author's elaboration based on data from the Pan American Health Organization

Of course, chronic violence requires us to not use homicide rates as the sole proxy for violence in a nation, an idea echoed by Valenzuela's analysis of violence in Colombia. He writes "a general analysis of the impact of cultural values on violence should be based not only on the violent acts that take the most life, but also on the acts that most affect people" (2002: 130, author's translation). Yet the practical limitations imposed by available data tie researchers to

homicide rates in order to compare cases. Pearce (2007) overcomes this problem by using homicide statistics in conjunction with qualitative interviews, yet this mixed method could be enriched by additional quantitative indicators.

Another challenge that Approach 2 faces is that there is no clear trigger or starting date to mark the beginning of chronic violence, making measurements and operationalization a challenge. Working backwards, the definition indicates that chronic violence is measured by five years of homicide rates that are twice the average for the income group of the country. In El Salvador, for example, homicide rates during the war were similar to or higher than what they are today and shot up in 1996 to 126 homicides per 100,000 people, 4 years after the war ended. Given that the theory of chronic violence is path dependent, claiming that violence begets violence, civil wars or protracted periods of political violence that go along with high homicide rates cannot be discounted as having no connection to current violence.

Chapter 3: Case Background

In 2011, Honduras held the title of murder capital of the world and El Salvador enjoyed the number two spot. As the two nations made their way up the ranks in recent years, the increasing gravity of the problem has garnered much attention from analysts and experts seeking to explain the causes and effects of the problem and offer policy solutions in hopes of reversing the trend. There was great hope that with the end of the Central American civil wars as well as democratic transitions throughout Latin America, the region would become more peaceful. Unfortunately, even though an uptick in direct violence can be expected in the immediate aftermath of a civil war, the amount of direct violence far surpasses what could be considered a standard trajectory.

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, El Salvador and Honduras have the highest homicide rates in not only Latin America, but in the world (outside of war zones), with 66 and 82.1 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively. To put those numbers in perspective, see **Table 2**. These are not the only similarities between the two nations, (see **Table 3** for current social indicators). Given these current similarities in terms of the composition of the population, economic and social similarities, as well as relatively similar levels of homicide, these two cases are clearly sufficiently similar to provide the foundation upon which to explore the connection between political and non-political violence.

Table 2: Homicide Rates 2010

Country	Homicide rate (per 100,000)
El Salvador	66
Honduras	82.1
Spain	0.9
USA	5
Mexico	18.1
South Africa	33.8
Source: Author's elaboration based on UNOCD data	

Table 3: Social Indicators

	El Salvador	Honduras
Adult literacy rate	84%	84%
Adolescents/whole population	24%	23%
Life expectancy	72	73
GDP/capita	$3702	$2226
Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank data		

One clear difference between these neighboring countries is that El Salvador underwent a protracted civil war and Honduras did not. However, looking qualitatively at each nation's history reveals that the level of protracted political violence in Honduras and the effects of various regional civil wars were severe enough to provoke similar consequences to those seen in El Salvador, an argument which will be further developed in section 3.1. For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in protracted political violence in a civil war context or otherwise, not in civil wars themselves.

3.1 Case 1. Honduras

Although Honduras did not endure a long civil war like most of its neighbors in the Cold War-era, a close look at Honduran politics, policies and history from the 1980s reveals that Honduras suffered significantly from political violence and from the consequences of regional civil wars. Like many other Latin American nations, Honduras was regularly ruled by its military during the Cold War era. Despite not having a formal military until the 1950s, that institution was able to write its autonomy into the Honduran constitution and controlled the country with the active or tacit approval of other elites until the early 1980s.

Honduras began transitioning to democracy in the early 1980s under pressure from the US, giving way to a civilian led government and the creation of a National Assembly. Also around 1980, civil wars were escalating in El Salvador and Nicaragua, bordering Honduras to the southwest and southeast respectively.[2] Refugees fleeing the violence ran to Honduras, though their point of origin dictated their treatment upon arrival. Given that an extreme right wing government was in power in El Salvador, refugees from that country were considered communist sympathizers in Cold War speak, and were mostly placed in refugee camps near the Salvadoran border. Conversely, the successful communist revolution in Nicaragua in 1979 signified that refugees from that country were ideological allies to the Honduran government and were granted freedom of movement and even jobs within Honduras (Salomon 1993: 45).

In keeping with Cold War logic, the Honduran National Security doctrine of the time identified threats solely along ideological lines and labeled as enemies anyone who would "'feed' the Central American crisis" (*Ibid.*: 45). Moreover, state actors in Honduras used violent and repressive methods against their domestic opponents, undermining the recent push towards

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[2] Guatemala is the only other country that shares a border with Honduras and was also undergoing a 36-year civil war, from 1960-1996, meaning that Honduras was surrounded on all sides by nations at war.

institutionalizing democracy. Castellano writes this was not simply reinstating practices from the repressive military rule, but that things had taken a darker turn. There was a shift from sending political opposition into exile to "disappearing" people considered ideologically opposed to the government (*Ibid.*: 7). The implementation of such tactics was a direct result of the "best practices" learned by Honduran military elites during training in Argentine dirty war methods and at the notorious School of the Americas (Pine 2008: 50).

US military aid to Honduras shot up in the early 1980s (see **Table 4**) and the US used Honduran military bases as part of their own regional strategy to fight communism through covert operations. As previously mentioned, local anti-communist elites were not only concerned with their neighboring countries, but also spent domestic resources to stamp out the leftist guerilla movement in Honduras. The local leftist insurgency never grew to have as much support or as many combatants as in neighboring countries, with only 300 active combatants divided among several groups at their peak. They were effectively wiped out by the military and had no chance of accomplishing their stated goals through armed insurgency, and gave up their arms by May 1990 (Allison 2006: 149-50).[3]

Table 4: US Military Aid to Honduras

	1980	1984	1986	1989	1993	1994	1995
U.S. Military Aid to Honduras	$3.9m	$77m	$88.1m	$41.1m	$2.7m	$500,000	$325,000

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from Ruhl 2010

On the domestic front, the US-funded Battalion 316 was a local death squad in charge of capturing "suspected subversives" in unmarked vehicles and took them to secret jails where they would be interrogated, tortured and "disappeared" (Pine 2008: 50-1). Honduras was not officially at war and troubling events were happening on a much smaller scale than in neighboring warzones, however, at minimum, 184 people were disappeared or extra-judicially killed and many more abducted and tortured. Two rounds of amnesty laws were passed in 1987 and 1991, shielding those responsible from legal prosecution. A few legal cases made their way through the court system and the amnesty laws were overturned in 2000, after which the government agreed

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[3] Allison (2006) makes the interesting observation that the success of left-leaning political parties across Central America today is closely correlated to the success of the guerrilla movements from the 1970s and 1980s, as most modern leftist political parties were formed out of those insurgencies. Given this information, the apparent limitations of the Honduran political left today is not surprising.

to pay reparations to just 19 families. Unfortunately, impunity continues to be more common than justice and known members of Battalion 316 remain in the public eye with connections to political leaders (Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.).

As seen in **Table 4** (previous page), US military aid to Honduras dropped off dramatically after the end of the Cold War and troop size was cut by more than half. Also, like many of its neighbors, Honduras undertook some reforms, such as creating a demilitarized police force. Unfortunately, this and similar steps toward "procedural democracy" did not help democratic institutions gain legitimacy (Ruhl 2010: 50). Perception of public and political sector corruption consistently ranked between 1.7 and 2.7 from 1998 to 2011, 0 being perceived as completely corrupt, 10 being perceived as completely uncorrupt (Transparency International n.d.). Crime and perceptions of insecurity have continued to rise, driving citizens to accept evermore-extreme anti-gang measures.

Given the gift of hindsight, it is perhaps unsurprising that 2009 saw the first successful coup d'état in Latin America in the last 15 years when President Zelaya was taken to Costa Rica in his pajamas after trying to unconstitutionally extend his term limit. The military did not impose their own leader and elections were held within the year. Despite tempered recognition of the elected government by the international community, state violence has continued and, since the coup, at least 34 members of the political opposition have disappeared, 300 citizens and at least 13 journalists have been killed by state security forces, according to the leading Honduran human rights organization, COFADEH (Frank, *New York Times*, January 26, 2012). Additionally, the coup distracted attention and diverted funds, both domestic and international, from urgent security concerns, leading many to observe that the coup indirectly but significantly boosted crime and insecurity (Bosworth 2010: 86).

One of the most troubling statistics concerning the small nation is that over 90% of crimes go unpunished (Panting, *La Prensa* May 8, 2012; Economist 2012). The Honduran National Commission on Human Rights cites that between 2005 and 2009, of 12,098 arrest warrants issued for human rights violations, only 20% were successfully followed through (Bosworth 2010: 80). The country's human rights ombudsman worries that Honduras is on its way to becoming a failed state (Economist 2012) and the alarming homicide rates, especially

among the nation's young, have caused some to liken the current situation to genocide (see for example Panting, *La Prensa* May 8, 2012 or Pine 2008).[4]

Finally, a difficulty that Honduras faces today is the ever-increasing use of Honduran territory as a transit point for cocaine on its way from South America to the US, and the organized crime infrastructure that comes with it. Many suggest that this leads to corruption of police and military forces and increases mistrust between government agencies who may become hesitant to share information about ongoing investigations (Bosworth 2010: 80). The apparent impunity faced by local criminals and the seeming weakness of state institutions to respond to crises perpetuates the notion of Honduras as an ideal location to carry out illicit activities.

3. 2 Case 2. El Salvador

For most of the 20th century, El Salvador was ruled by military forces with the consent of the economic elites who benefited from the order and societal control that the military provided. Organized state oppression of Salvadorans goes back at least as far as 1932 when the military killed approximately 30,000 indigenous people in an uprising—a nationally traumatizing event known as La Matanza (The Slaughter). Hume observes that the indiscriminate use of top-down violence that started with La Matanza, and continued in its wake, created a cycle of dependence between economic elites and the military, where their power/protection quid pro quo purposefully blocked political and social change and served as a warning to the public about the consequences of dissent (2008: 70). In this sense, violence was used by the state as a functional means to an end.

Over the next 50 years, rigged elections and extreme inequality did little to alleviate political discontent or resolve social injustices. Tensions grew throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, especially as communist ideals took root throughout Latin America. In 1979 a civil-military alliance overthrew the ruling forces and temporarily installed the Junta de Gobierno. The government quickly deteriorated when the military revealed its unwillingness to share power

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[4] There is a rich and interesting debate within academia as to how broadly or narrowly to define "failed state", "holocaust", "genocide" and other terms connoting extreme circumstances. Such terms should be used with great care and it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into the range of opinion on the subject or argue if its application to Honduras is appropriate. That said, the following is worth considering: "If (as we concede) there is a moral risk in overextending the concept of 'genocide' into spaces and corners of everyday life where we might not ordinarily think to find it (and there is), an even greater risk lies in failing to sensitize ourselves." (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 20)

with civilians, many of whom subsequently defected and joined forces with the growing rural-based guerrillas. By 1980, the 5 previously autonomous guerrilla factions joined forces under the name Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)[5] and fought the government of El Salvador in a long and costly civil war. Neither side was able to win militarily despite, or possibly due to, significant external support on both sides. After a protracted military stalemate and a change in US foreign policy, the two sides signed peace accords on January 16,1992. By the end of the war, approximately 75,000 people had been killed[6], half a million were internally displaced and 1 million had fled the country; this, in a country of just 6 million people (CICS 2008: 1).

One major difference between El Salvador and Honduras in the post-Cold War era is that the Peace Accords are considered to be among the most successful in UN history, bringing real reforms to the nation including a demilitarized police force with a comparatively good reputation, civilian control of the military, and space for the political left. In 2009, the FMLN candidate for president won the national election, something unimaginable a decade earlier. As in Honduras, broad amnesty laws passed in the early 1990s have prevented human rights abusers from being held legally accountable. However, unlike in Honduras, El Salvador did purge military officers named in a UN truth commission.

Within the last decade, El Salvador has continuously courted a close relationship with the US, especially in its steadfast participation in the so-called Coalition of Willing which sent troops to Iraq in 2003. El Salvador was the last Latin American country to withdraw its troops and did so only after the U.N. mandate expired at the end of 2008. Approximately 1 in every 5 Salvadorans emigrate primarily to the US and remittances sent back to El Salvador make up 16% of the national GDP. In Latin America, this is second only to Honduras where remittances make up 19% of GDP, but only 7% of the Honduran population resides abroad (World Bank 2011).

Domestically, 2012 has been a very exciting year in El Salvador where the Catholic Church brokered a peace agreement between the top two rival gangs, suddenly cutting the homicide rate in half. On March 8, the *Mara Salvatrucha* and the *Mara 18* agreed to stop killing

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[5] Agustín Farabundo Martí Rodríguez was a leftist political activist in the early 20th century and one of the leaders of the indigenous people's uprising that would end with La Matanza. After the movement's failure, Martí and the two other organizers were executed on orders of the military dictator at the time.
[6] The estimate of victims is often quoted between 60,000 to 80,000, with 75,000 being the most commonly cited.

each other in exchange for better prison conditions—though not reduced sentences—for their top leaders. Skepticism remains high and many fear that society will prove unwilling to give gang members a second chance. Some warn that the process has in fact empowered gangs as political actors who will now hold sway over elected leaders trying to maintain the peace (see for example Farah 2011). Official numbers suggest that the decrease in gang-related homicides has not led to an increase in other types of violence, such as disappearing people, despite early rumors to the contrary (Valencia, *El Faro* June 11, 2012).

Box 1. The Salvadoran Gang Negotiations: An insider's perspective

In an original interview with Salvador Samayoa, former FMLN leader and public figure in the post-war era, he commented on the gang negotiations, the publicity it has received and why gangs may be ready to negotiate now:

"For 5 years, I was President of the National Council of Public Security from 1999 to 2004. During that time, I maintained a permanent dialogue with those same gang leaders[…]that they are talking to now. Nobody made a big deal out of it because I wasn't trying to make the news and I found ways to keep the dialogue private, but I always favor dialogue…[No one] is forgiving their sentences or reducing their jail time. Instead, what stands out is the age of the group. Because of their age, their kids are becoming adolescents…and they are starting to consider the fact that their kids are going to have the same life, where their only future is kill or be killed. And I think they have important reasons to start deactivating the slaughtering of one another."

Within the context of El Salvador, it is especially interesting that the process of negotiation between gangs is referred to not only as a "truce" but often as a "ceasefire" and a "peace process", recalling El Salvador's own recent history. Certainly, Central America watchers will be keeping a close eye on how the situation unfolds, but researchers interested in the transmission and reproduction of violence from past to present should pay special attention to the possibility that nonviolence could be transmitted and reproduced through the same channels. On a policy level, leaders from neighboring countries and international organizations such as the Organization of American States are also eagerly watching the process to see if it could serve as a model for other contexts.

3.3 Summary

These case backgrounds are meant to highlight protracted periods of political violence and repression and their evolution to the present day. Both Honduras and El Salvador had an influx of firearms during the 1980s and social fabric was corroded by the repressive political

conditions on the ground. These factors are in some ways accounted for in Approach 1 and Approach 2, but further refinement of the theory of chronic violence to create a new mixed approach with objective indicators would correct for some of the flaws outlined in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 outlines what a integrated approach based on the theory of chronic violence could look like and proposes specific indicators to measure it over time.

**Chapter 4: Proposal for an Integrated Model and Indicators**

The approaches discussed in Chapter 2 each have strengths and weaknesses as to what they reveal about violence and how it is transmitted and reproduced through time. This paper argues that the theory of chronic violence, supported by a better understanding of gun possession and gun violence as proposed by Approach 1, would allow for a richer explanation of the causal relationship between past and present violence. Furthermore, the theory of chronic violence would benefit from clear indicators that could offer a snapshot of violence at any given time, predict its future direction or reveal information about its past evolution. It should be noted that this chapter is a proposal and a work in progress, but it recommends a new model to further understand violence with concrete indicators that would help track its evolution.

As previously mentioned, the definition of chronic violence is based on homicide rates that are twice the average for the country's income group sustained for over 5 years, in addition to "high levels" of non-fatal violence with active or tacit complicity from the state. One can assume that Pearce sought to use a flexible definition of chronic violence so that it would be adaptable to a variety of contexts. However, understanding chronic violence is especially useful so that single cases can be studied over time or various cases can be compared in order to assess its evolution and not just the causes of violence. Subjective understanding is ultimately less useful if it does not allow for easy comparison or tracking.

This paper proposes three concrete indicators that would be useful in the context of chronic violence to track it over time and make predictive observations, for example, about whether certain aspects of chronic violence are increasing or decreasing, beyond simply tracking homicide rates. The first suggested indicator is crime underreporting (4.1). This information is available through household surveys, such as LatinoBárometro, that are done regularly throughout Latin America. Statistics on crime underreporting are indicative of the degree of social silence around direct violence in a given society. The second suggested indicator looks at confidence in state institutions, specifically the judiciary (4.2a) and the police (4.2b). This is complementary to the first indicator but is not limited to only victims of crime. Furthermore, confidence in state institutions is a fundamental measurement of the health of a democracy. The third and most complex indicator tries to assess estimates of legal and illicit firearms (4.3), which should play a more prominent role in the theory of chronic violence.

4.1 Crime underreporting: Insofar as crime and violence are related, information about crime underreporting can be revealing in several ways. First, official homicide and crime reports combined with other data sources on the frequency of underreporting give a more realistic sense of the amount of direct violence taking place. Second, if "the most profound effect of crime is the way it undermines the relationship between citizens and their government" (Seligson and Booth 2010: 124, citing UNDP report), then data on underreporting exposes an important component of the relationship between citizens and government.

Table 5 shows data from surveys in El Salvador and Honduras on crime reporting. If respondents affirmed being a crime victim within the last 12 months, they were then asked whether or not they had reported it (this is indicated in Table 5 by "yes" or "no"). The data suggests that approximately 70% of crimes are not reported in both El Salvador and Honduras, with only slight variation over time. Given that homicides are more likely than other crimes to be recorded (by police or the medical examiner) this data indicates that the number of non-fatal crimes is profound and pervasive. Moreover, this shows that there is a high degree of silence surrounding criminal acts, which could indicate both in increased tolerance for crime and a lack of trust in state institutions.

Table 5. Percentage of Crimes Reported

El Salvador
no
yes

Honduras
no
yes
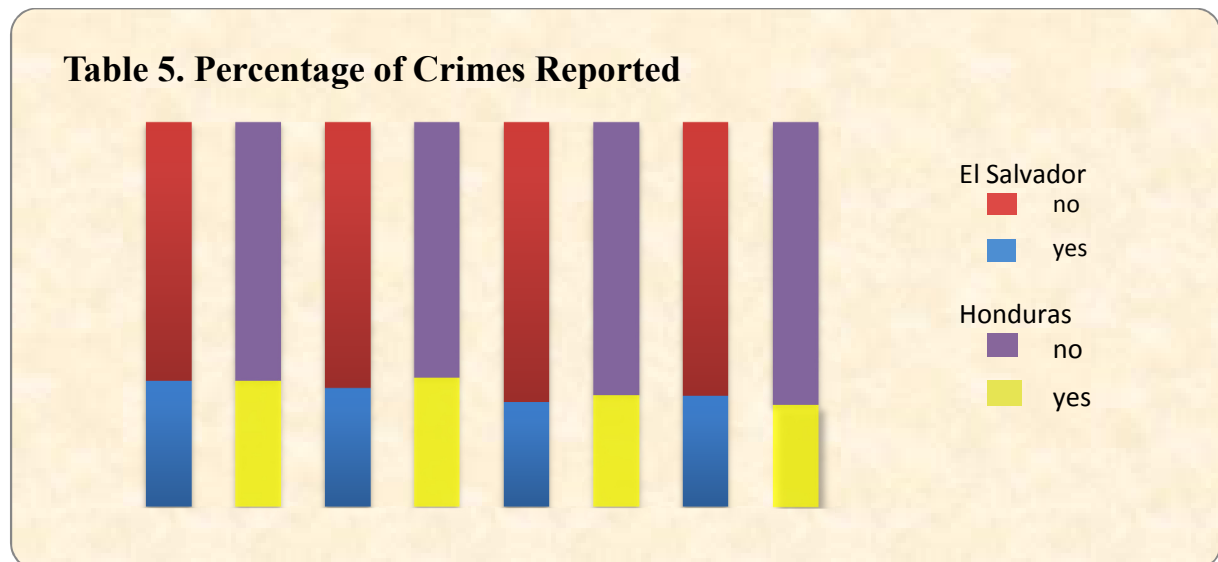
Source: Author's elaboration based on LatinoBárometro data

4.2 Confidence in state institutions: the judiciary (4.2a) and the police (4.2b)

Confidence in the judiciary is an important measurement of how citizens relate to a state institution that is vital for a functioning democracy. Public confidence can be indicative of a
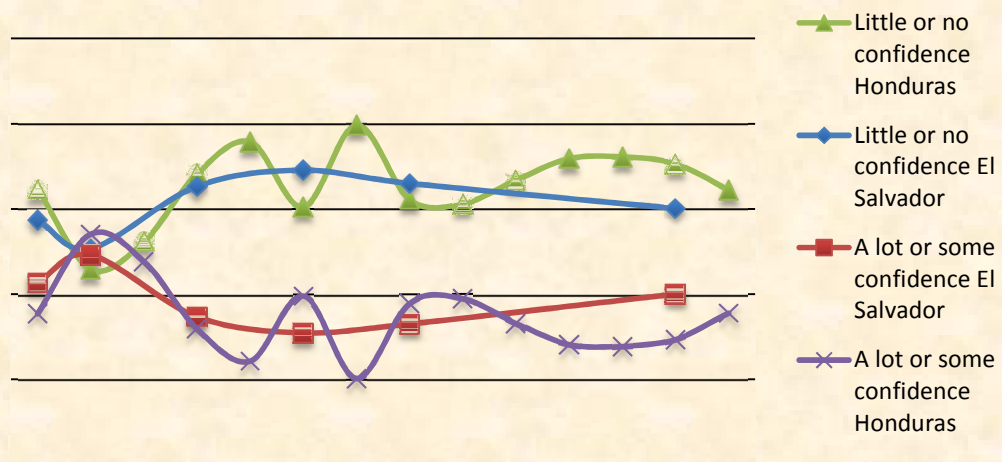
standard to which citizens will hold their institutions (what they will and will not tolerate), how likely citizens may be to comply with a ruling, perceptions of corruption and how responsive citizens feel the state is to their needs. Of course, confidence in police must go hand in hand with a solid judiciary, but a well-functioning police force will not be very effective with a poor judicial system. The inverse, if it exists, is not necessarily true. Furthermore, confidence in the judiciary can be indicative of perceptions of impunity and whether citizens feel that everyone gets equal treatment under the law.

Table 7 (page 23) shows the level of confidence that Salvadorans and Hondurans have in their respective judiciaries over time. Emerging from the civil war, El Salvador's judiciary topped the UN's list of institutions most in need of reform. After the 2009 coup in Honduras, scholars suggested that a sense of pervasive impunity and lack of capacity in the judicial system over time likely contributed to the problem.

> The absence of trials for military personnel who had committed human rights abuses during the authoritarian governments created a sense of impunity that spread through society and in security organizations. Honduran police and citizens have not internalized the idea of "rule of law", the imposition of rights and the supremacy of the legal system. The penal system is arbitrary […]. (Benitez Manaut and Diamant 2010: 147-8, author's translation)

Public perception data suggests that confidence in the Salvadoran judiciary has slightly improved over time, possibly indicating improvements that were a direct result of the peace accords. Honduran opinion has varied more, but it is interesting to note that there was not a significant change in confidence in the judiciary after the 2009 coup. **Table 8** (page 23) shows the level of confidence in the police, which mirrors the overall trend levels for the judiciary, though with slightly less variation.

Table 6. Confidence in Judiciary

Legend:
- Little or no confidence Honduras
- Little or no confidence El Salvador
- A lot or some confidence El Salvador
- A lot or some confidence Honduras

Source: Author's elaboration based on LatinoBárometro data

Table 7. Confidence in police

Legend:
- Little or no confidence Honduras
- Little or no confidence El Salvador
- A lot or some confidence El Salvador
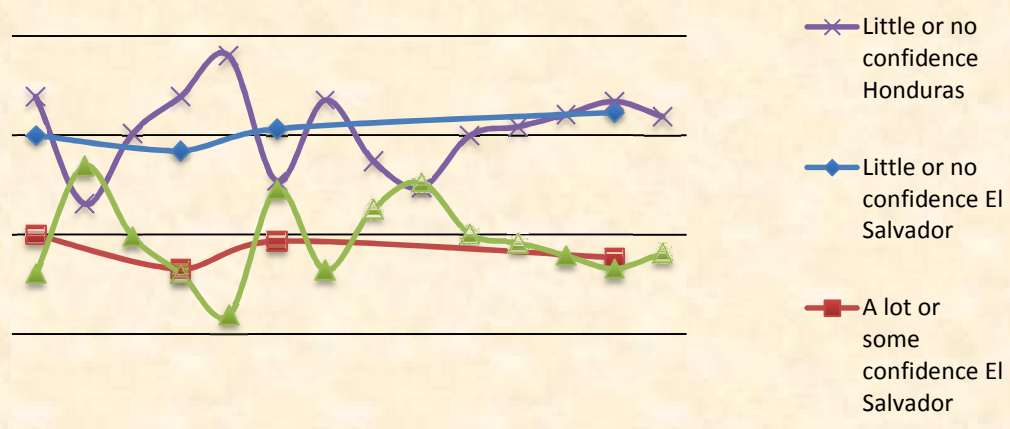
Source: Author's elaboration based on LatinoBárometro data

4.3 Improved estimates on legal and illicit firearms

Researchers and policymakers are regularly frustrated with the dearth of reliable information on the movement of small arms and light weapons (SAWL) and the inability to improve global tracing or registration systems. In preliminary talks leading up to the 2012 UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) negotiations, there were important discussions concerning efforts to

create a UN SAWL registry or to include it in an ATT. Such a registry would be vital for improving policies geared at lowering homicide rates, especially since guns are a significant cause of fatalities in El Salvador and Honduras.

Unfortunately, the ATT negotiations ended without advancements with regard to conventional weapons or SAWL. Fragmentary information along with general estimates continue to be the best available data. Building a database of legal and illicit firearms for the region would be ideal, or at least best estimates of said data. However, creating such a database will need to be left to future research. In the meantime, a few points stand out and would be worth further exploration. Godnick, Muggah and Waszink observed that tens of thousands of US weapons exports bound for Central America were categorized as hunting and sporting weapons. As the state continues to be incapable of controlling mounting security issues, the wealthy increasingly turn to private security companies for protection who need larger and more diverse arsenals. The authors note that "[s]ocio-economic conditions in Central America preclude the existence of a sufficiently large leisure class who would purchase the quantity of weaponry solely for hunting and sports shooting" and they fear such weapons are being used by private security groups (2002: 7).

Secondly, and to this point, the authors note that as of 2002 over 12 private security companies had acknowledged having AK-47s in their inventories despite the fact that only the military is permitted to have such weapons (*Ibid.*: 24). By 2012, the market price of an AK-47 in Honduras was only $200 US, compared to $400 in the rest of Central America, $450 in Mexico, and $500 in the US (www.gunpolicy.org). In basic economic terms, the low cost in Honduras suggests that the market has enough supply to drive the price down.

4.4 Policy Implications

The above indicators provide a way to measure the evolution of violence in situations of chronic violence, while correcting for the subjective nature of originally proposed theory. The capacity to measure certain features of chronic violence is particularly useful to measure the successes or failures of public policies that are continually under review for the region. Though further research is needed, the information presented here supports calls for policies that seek more than short-term results through the use of the military for domestic policing or an increased financial inversion in anti-drug policies. As Cuesta (2009) has argued in his research on social

capital and crime, it is necessary to separate out distinctive causal links concerning violence in order to create effective social policies with any hope of success.

Though a careful analysis of effective public policies is beyond the scope of this paper, it is a critical that further research be undertaken. One example of a seemingly successful public policy that many wish to bring to El Salvador and Honduras is the United Nations' International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The CICIG allowed for UN oversight of domestic criminal prosecutions and pushed for reforms in an effort to stem corruption, restore citizens' confidence in state institutions and hold more criminals accountable. As Shifter (2012) suggests, it is well worth looking at such programs to consider their applicability to Salvadoran and Honduran contexts.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction pervasive direct violence in El Salvador and Honduras is extremely troubling and the situation seems to be getting worse. El Salvador and Honduras are good cases for comparison because their current levels of violence are more similar than any others in Latin America and their recent histories have many commonalities, as explored in Chapter 3. The original research question proposed here was to assess whether the existing literature, reviewed in Chapter 2, could sufficiently explain the causal relationship between past and present violence. However, we have argued that each approach is insufficient on its own. Furthermore, the approaches are by no means mutually exclusive and should be taken together in a complementary fashion to form a new, more comprehensive explanatory model.

The new model, as outlined in Chapter 4, is based on the theory of chronic violence but incorporates protracted political violence as part of the trigger for chronic violence, as suggested by Approach 1. Also, our new approach calls for incorporating the best available data on legal and illegal firearms. This factor would allow researchers to disaggregate data on homicide and other crimes to observe patterns that otherwise may be obscured. Additionally, if firearms (legal or otherwise) are a contributing factor to violence, understanding their origin will allow for policymakers to create more precise countermeasures. The widespread presence of firearms is understood here as a necessary cause of chronic violence, and data tracking SAWL in the region would allow for the creation of more effective policies to counter this factor.

Chronic violence is one of the most interesting theories to be proposed in recent years as it presents a compelling way to understand protracted violence. It is understood here as a structural cause of violence that must be addressed with public policies that look beyond short-term stop-gap measures. In order to craft such policies, it is necessary to operationalize the theory of chronic violence and find ways to measure and compare it, not simply leaving it to the subjective opinion of the researcher. Though this research is still a work in progress, the initial findings suggest three indicators (crime underreporting, confidence in state institutions and estimates on legal and illicit firearms) that can be used to measure and assess contexts of chronic violence more precisely.

Violence is complex and is caused by many factors. Structural factors must be treated differently from necessary factors, and tangible legacies of violence must be addressed with different policies than intangible legacies. The new model suggested here looks at both tangible

factors (firearms) and intangible ones (confidence in state institutions and crime reporting) and calls for them to be objectively measured over time. Looking at these specific aspects of chronic violence which will allow researchers to track its development and for policymakers to consider policies that more specifically target different causes of direct violence. Below, in **Box 2**, we conclude with the thoughts of Salvador Samayoa on the connection between present direct violence and past political violence, which he, as a member of the Salvadoran guerilla movement, participated in.

Box 2. The Connection Between Political and Non-Political Direct Violence: An insider's perspective

I presented Salvador Samayoa with a neutral and very brief overview of Approach 1 and Approach 2 and asked for his opinion about a possible connection between the war and current violence in El Salvador.

He began by referencing a recent debate with Douglas Farah at the Wilson Center, an American think tank. Farah had argued that current violence (especially with regard to organized crime) was a clear remnant of the war, because smuggling routes, the personnel that operate them and available weapons, were created by the war.

I told [Farah] that those ideas were completely and absolutely false. The war didn't create the networks and so their existence is not a consequence of the war. They are intraregional trade networks that can also be used towards illicit ends that don't have anything to do with trade. We used them to bring in weapons, we used those networks and people all the time…No one from the military establishment from that period nor any of the FMLN leaders would have anything to do with organized crime. And that's what I was saying in Washington, that establishing this relationship between organized crime… and the war, or remnants of the war isn't valid. Nor is it valid in terms of weapons. There is a list that anyone can look up that shows that we had really sophisticated weapons. We turned in thousands of weapons, thousands of infantry weapons and hundreds of missiles. We had submachine guns of about .50 and .30 caliber; we had canons and grenade launchers. And all the weaponry that we turned in is not the same that is being used now in drug trafficking, etc. So, there is just no way, *no way* to establish that connection.

On the other hand, the question that you ask me about the other dimension of violence, more social, more quotidian, more related to the gangs, etc., I think there is a connection between a period of war during which an entire generation grew up with the idea that life isn't worth anything and that anyone could be killed, then what the army did during the 80s when death squads appeared and dead bodies thrown into bags or mutilated appeared everywhere. It was a grotesque thing to get used to…and it prompted people to see death differently and to see life differently…It's not like flowers are coming out of your gun in a war. It was ten long years of war. I think that did leave a psychosocial-psychological mark.

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