



STUDENT PAPER SERIES

23



**The dramatic increase of violent crime in Venezuela since 1999:**

The Relationship between homicide and the country's new role in drug trafficking

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Master's in International Relations

Academic year 2014-2015



INSTITUT  
BARCELONA  
ESTUDIS  
INTERNACIONALS

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### *Abstract*

The purpose of this research is to explain the increase of violent crime (homicides) in Venezuela since 1999. Although the literature shows a positive correlation between poverty, inequality and homicides, the available data does not support this explanation. During this period, the homicide rate has increased while poverty and inequality has fallen. Due to the failure of the literature to explain this particular case, this study conceives the role of Venezuela in the trafficking route for shipping drugs to Central America, Europe and the United States as an important and missed factor in the relation that the literature shows. This paper analyzes the route within the country and evaluates its link to the homicide rates of each state in order to establish geographical patterns. Moreover, this paper investigates the effects of drug trafficking activity on the rise of violent crime in the country. This research shows a positive relationship between the role of Venezuela in trafficking activities and the increase in homicide rates since 1999. The findings fit in Deborah Yashar's theory: the states' role in the drug trafficking routes and key states in these activities, such as ports and border states, tend to experience a higher increase in homicide rates than others that are not as involved in the trafficking operations. The results contribute to the fields of violence and development in Latin America.

Abstract Word Count: 235 words.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. Problem Statement:

Since 1999, after Hugo Chávez became the president of Venezuela it is possible to observe an increase of violent crime levels within the country. Although Venezuela has always suffered high levels of violence, typical of Latin American countries, the increase seen after 1999 is terribly dramatic.

In 2013, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) published the homicide report, and Venezuela was positioned as the second highest homicide rate in the world with a homicide rate of 53.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Honduras took the first position with a homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants.

This is a situation that currently affects the life of every Venezuelan. People avoid being out of their homes past 6:00 PM and most stores close before sunset. Middle class families have been forced to hide their homes behind walls and have hired private security guards. Others also request the service of experts to get advice on how to protect themselves to avoid kidnappings and murders.

According to the UNODC data, the homicide rate in Venezuela has increased from 32.9 per 100,000 people in 2000 to 53.7 per 100,000 in 2012, an increase of 63,22%<sup>2</sup>. This homicide rate has kept growing over the past two years. The UNODC has not yet revealed an updated report. However, the nongovernmental organization called Venezuelan Violence Observatory, formed by researchers from seven national universities, has developed homicide and crime reports for the last five years.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: *Global Study on Homicide 2013*.  
[http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf) [Last access: May 3rd, 2015]

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> The Venezuelan Violence Observatory OVV. *Informe del observatorio venezolano de violencia*

The Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV) estimated that about 24,980 people were killed in 2014, pushing the homicide rate up to 82 per every 100,000 inhabitants<sup>3</sup>. In 2013, the observatory counted 79 murders per 100,000 people.

According to an article from *The Telegraph*, there are more murders in Venezuela than in the United States and the 27 countries of the European Union combined<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, Romero S. (2010) from *The New York Times* states, “In Iraq, a country with about the same population as Venezuela, there were 4,644 civilian deaths from violence in 2009, according to Iraq Body Count; in Venezuela that year, the number of murders climbed above 16,000”<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, Venezuela is facing one of its biggest challenges of the last decade. The relevance of this issue is related to a massive and constant privation of the basic human right, the right to life. As previously shown, the amount of homicides has been increasing, and there is currently no explanation for this situation.

## **2. Structure of the dissertation.**

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter II covers the existing literature and establishes the theoretical framework that will be used for this investigation. Chapter III defines the design of the research ruling the research question, variables, and data collection methods. Chapter IV displays the data analysis, explains the data sources used, and shows the empirical findings through tables, charts and maps. Chapter V provides the discussion between the findings and the theoretical framework; it also provides an in-depth case analysis of Delta Amacuro in

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<sup>3</sup> The Venezuelan Violence Observatory OVV. *Informe del observatorio venezolano de violencia 2014*.

<http://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/ws/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/OVV-INFORME-DEL-2014.pdf> [Last access: June 4th, 2015]

<sup>4</sup> Allen, Nick. 2012. Venezuela murder rate soars. *The Telegraph*.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/venezuela/9769897/Venezuela-murder-rate-soars.html> [Last access: June 4th, 2015].

<sup>5</sup> Romero, Simón. 2010. Venezuela More Deadly than Iraq, Wonders Why. *The New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/world/americas/23venez.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/world/americas/23venez.html?_r=0) [Last access: June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015]

order to comprehend the link between the dependent and independent variables. Moreover, this section presents some drug trafficking groups that operate in the country in order to prove how the theory can be applied to Venezuela's case. Finally, Chapter VI concludes this paper.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally speaking, the literature offers a variety of explanations related to the increase in homicide rates. In this section, I will provide the key arguments of the theoretical framework and the limitations they have for explaining the Venezuelan case.

Firstly, the literature finds a positive relation between poverty and violent crime, especially homicides. Then the first theoretical explanation is poverty. Sampson and Lauritsen (1994) discovered that “almost without exception, studies of violence find a positive and usually large correlation between poverty and violence –especially homicide” (p.63)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, Pridemore (2002) concluded “the positive relationship between poverty and homicide is the most consistent finding in the literature” (p.144)<sup>7</sup>.

Messner and Tardiff (1986) analyzed homicide rates across 26 neighborhoods in Manhattan in 1981. They found a strong positive relationship between poverty and homicide ( $r = .55, p < .01$ )<sup>8</sup>. In addition, McDonalds (1976) also found a positive relationship measuring poverty through the GNP per capita of 31 members of the United Nations, and 40 from INTERPOL<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Sampson, Robert and J. Lauritsen, 1994, ‘*Violent Victimization and Offending: Individual-, Situational-, and Community-Level Risk Factors*’, in A. J. Reiss Jr. and J. A. Roth, eds, *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, Vol. 3: Social Influences. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (p.63).

<sup>7</sup> Pridemore, William, 2002. ‘*What We Know about Social Structure and Homicide: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature*’, *Violence and Victims*, 17: (p.144).

<sup>8</sup> Messner, Steven and K. Tardiff 1986. (cited in Sampson, R. J. and Lauritsen, J. L. (1994), ‘*Violent Victimization and Offending: Individual-, Situational-, and Community-Level Risk Factors*’), in A. J. Reiss Jr. and J. A. Roth, eds, *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, Vol. 3: Social Influences. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (p. 49).

<sup>9</sup> Pridemore, William. 2011. ‘*Poverty Matters: A reassessment of the Inequality-Homicide Relationship in Cross-National Studies*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (p.747).

Most of the researchers who support the relationship between poverty and homicide use the deprivation argument. Pridemore (2002) points out:

Absolute deprivation theorists maintain that the strain of deprivation creates increased crime and violence rates. Relative deprivation theory asserts that increased violence can be attributed to anger due to the perception that others have increased economic advantages. (p.127)<sup>10</sup>.

Nevertheless, the poverty argument fails when it comes to explain the Venezuelan homicide problem. According to the World Bank data, the nation has experienced a big decline in poverty levels between 1999 and 2012. The country's poverty level was reduced from 48.7 % to 25.4 %<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, it is not possible to observe the positive relationship expected by the literature. Even though the poverty levels have decreased in the country, the homicide rate has increased. Consequently, the poverty theory does not work for Venezuela.

On the other hand, inequality is also suggested in the literature as an explanation for the rise in homicide rates. Messner and Rosenfeld (1997), for example, stated that a “finding that has emerged with remarkable consistency is that high rates of homicide tend to accompany high levels of inequality” (p.741)<sup>12</sup>.

Krahn, H. *et al.* proposed an explanation based on the concept of relative deprivation. They prepared multiple regression analyses, and they discovered the analyses revealed positive net effects of inequality and homicide rates<sup>13</sup>. Pratt and Godsey (2002) also found this relationship. However, they found that the Gini index of economic inequality tends to be unreliable in cross-national settings. In order to improve the reliability of the measure, their indicator of economic

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<sup>10</sup> Pridemore, William, 2002. ‘*What We Know about Social Structure and Homicide: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature*’, *Violence and Victims*, 17: (p.127).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank. *Poverty data. Venezuela*.

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC/countries/VE?display=graph> [Last access: June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015]

<sup>12</sup> Pridemore, William. 2011. ‘Poverty Matters: A reassessment of the Inequality-Homicide Relationship in Cross-National Studies. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (p.741).

<sup>13</sup> Krahn, Harvey *et al.* 1986. ‘*Income Inequality and Homicide Rates: Cross-national data and criminological theories*’. University of Alberta. *Criminology*. Volume 24. Issue 2 (pages 269-294)



inequality is measured as the ratio of the median incomes of the richest to the poorest 20% of citizens<sup>14</sup>.

Nonetheless, the inequality theory does not provide an explanation for Venezuela. The country has experienced a reduction of the Gini index in the past decades, moving from 0.47 in 1998 to 0.30 in 2010<sup>15</sup>.

Scott, S. and Lawrence, C. (1985) proposed a link between unemployment and homicide rates. They analyzed unemployment levels of the postwar United States. In order to demonstrate an empirical connection between economic conditions and crime rates, they paid attention to the level of unemployment and the changes in unemployment. They discovered that unemployment was positively related to the homicide rate. However, Venezuela's unemployment rate has also decreased from 18% in 1999 to 7,5 in 2013 % while the homicide rate has increased<sup>16</sup>. So the unemployment theory cannot explain the increasing homicide rates in Venezuela.

Thus, the literature has not been able to explain the problem surrounding the increasing homicide rate in Venezuela. In this thesis, I will consider another theory, the role of the country in drug trafficking activities, to explain the situation in Venezuela. To the extent of my knowledge, this is the first work that considers drug trafficking activity in the country and the micro-level competition to control trade routes or territorial enclaves as a potential explanation for the increased violence in Venezuela.

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<sup>14</sup> Pratt, Travis and T. Godsey, 2003. '*Social Support, Inequality, and homicide: A cross-national test of an integrated theoretical model*'. Washington State University. Criminology. Volume 41, Issue 3, (pages 611-644).

<sup>15</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística INE. Síntesis estadística de pobreza e indicadores de desigualdad. 1997-2011.  
[http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/Boletines\\_Electronicos/Estadisticas\\_Sociales\\_y\\_Ambientales/Sintesis\\_Estadistica\\_de\\_Pobreza\\_e\\_Indicadores\\_de\\_Desigualdad/pdf/BoletinPobreza.pdf](http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/Boletines_Electronicos/Estadisticas_Sociales_y_Ambientales/Sintesis_Estadistica_de_Pobreza_e_Indicadores_de_Desigualdad/pdf/BoletinPobreza.pdf) [Last access: June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>16</sup> World Bank. Unemployment Rate: Venezuela  
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS> [Last Access: September 13th, 2015]

Yashar, D. (2012) built a theory in which she focused on the transit and trade of cocaine in Guatemala and El Salvador as a factor directly related to the increase in homicide and violence in these countries <sup>17</sup>.

In her argument, she moves away from these prior-crisis arguments where the main attention was focused on the economic activity rather than on the illicit economies. Yashar's observation lies in the change of geography of the trade and transit of illicit drugs. She focused on cocaine since cocaine became one of the higher illicit commodity flows in the world. Latin America has become not only a world producer of cocaine, but also the trade and transit of these goods has had phenomenal consequences. South America produces an estimate of 900 tons of cocaine annually. Yashar points out the importance of this perspective, as it is overlooked while focusing primarily on the legal economies.

Moreover, she suggests it is not the production of these goods but its movement that is becoming consequential. To support this argument, she explains that if you look at the countries that have produced cocaine, one finds that they are generally the Andean cases of Peru and Bolivia. However, these are not the cases with the highest rate of violence. Instead, they are located specifically in those areas where the trade and transit take place<sup>18</sup>.

Yashar advises the necessity to observe the levels of violence within the affected areas. In her research, she performed this process in the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador. Yashar discovered that homicide rates are higher in the port cities and in areas where these goods are actually moving. She also explains that, based on secondary research, the cases of Mexico and Brazil shows this relationship, although, it happens to include the border areas. It does not necessarily include the region as a whole, but rather, the border areas and ports<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Yashar, Deborah, 2012. *Violence: The illicit, the complicit, and competition in Contemporary Latin America*. Center for Latin American Studies. University of California, Berkeley. (Video file).

<http://clas.berkeley.edu/event/violence-illicit-complicit-and-competition-contemporary-latin-america> [Last access: September 9th, 2015]

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem

The author also suggests that “the illicit economies are growing in areas where you have either state weakness or state complicity”. Weak states do not have the capacity to control, which makes it easier for these economies to develop. Therefore, these weak states will attract organized crime and provide a more propitious ground for gains.

Yashar describes the decision process for Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO). According to her argument, illicit organizations try to identify places where it is possible to make more profits. As a consequence, the first key factor involved in this process is geography. DTOs select these countries closest to the market desired in order to move the narcotics. Secondly, DTOs search for places where the lowest monitoring and the highest complicity could be granted. So DTOs avoid places with increased monitoring<sup>20</sup>.

Even though, Yashar considers it hard to assess state capacity, she tries to prove it low in the case of Guatemala making a comparison with Nicaragua. She examines not only quantitative data, such as rule of law and the corruption index, but also perceptions of police involvement in Crime and the Homicide clearance rate (HRC). The HRC’s purpose is to determine the percentage of recorded crimes for which a suspect is identified. Yashar found a higher state capacity in Nicaragua with a stronger prison system than Guatemala’s. This explains why DTOs move drugs in Guatemala rather than in Nicaragua<sup>21</sup>.

She finally explains why these organizations perpetuate violence. Her argument is based on the increase of violence occurring not just in the presence of drug trafficking organizations or gangs, but also occurring at the micro-level where there is competition to control the trade routes or territorial enclaves.

In conclusion, this investigation takes Yashar’s theory into consideration since Venezuela has become one key route for drug trafficking worldwide, specifically to traffic cocaine. Unfortunately, Venezuela is in presence of a relevant theory that has not yet been evaluated,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem

which could be the explanation for the dramatic increase of the homicide rate in the country since 1999.

### **III. RESEARCH DESIGN:**

#### **1. Research Question**

Regarding the problem previously identified, the research question for this essay will be the following. “Is there a possible connection between the new role of Venezuela in drug trafficking activity and the increase in homicide rates the country has experienced since 1999?”

#### **2. Hypothesis**

The hypothesis for this research is “in a comparison of the Venezuelan federal entities, those that are part of the drug trafficking routes are more likely to experience an increase of homicide rates than those who are not part of the drug trafficking routes”

#### **3. Research Variables**

- A. Dependent variable: The increase of violent crime (homicide) in Venezuela since 1999.
- B. Independent variable: Venezuelan federal entities as part of the drug trafficking routes and key states (ports and border states) for drug trafficking.

#### **4. Type of Research**

The type of research that will be used in this study is descriptive, mixing qualitative and quantitative research. The description of the situation will use data from document reviews, observations, and quantitative data such as statistical descriptions (rates/percentages) directly related to the ruled hypothesis.

## 5. Data Collection Method

Having already established the basis of the theoretical outlook of this paper, it is now necessary to reflect how the evidence will be collected to support the arguments espoused in this essay.

In order to determine the homicide data, collection and analysis of the homicide rates will be completed for each federal entity in Venezuela. Furthermore, this information will be collected from 1999 until the most recent data available. Nonetheless, in order to compare the situation prior to the government of Hugo Chávez, it will also be necessary to search for data from previous years.

The homicide rates will be used to understand violent crimes because, as Braithwaite, J. (1980) establishes, “Homicide is the only crime category for which there is an acceptable level of uniformity among nations.” (p.45)<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, in order to facilitate the comprehension of the data, a table gathering all the information will be constructed. This will allow the researcher and the reader to easily observe the evolution of the homicide rates among the federal entities in the country. In addition, some geographical maps of the country will be developed in order to observe the results established in the tables.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 1. Data Sources

For the creation of the tables below, I used information from five sources: The Venezuelan Violence Observatory, the CICPC, the “*Ministerio del Poder Popular Para la Salud*” (MPPPS),

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<sup>22</sup> Braithwaite, John. 1980. *Effect of income inequality and Social Democracy on Homicide*. British Journal of Criminology. Volume 20. Issue: 1. Pages: 45-53.

the media, and finally an article by Briceño-León, R. of the book “*Asalto al Desarrollo: Violencia en America Latina*” published by the IDB.

In order to explain and clarify the nature of these sources for non-Venezuelan readers, a brief section about the two main data sources used (the OVV and the CICPC) will be developed.

#### **a) The Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV):**

The Venezuelan Violence Observatory OVV (*Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia*) was created by LACSO (*Laboratorio de Ciencias Sociales de Venezuela*). LACSO is an organization created in order to contribute to the study and understanding of the Venezuelan social reality and the development of social sciences.

In 2005, LACSO set out to build an observatory that could monitor and track the situation of interpersonal violence in Venezuela, “given the constraints that already existed at that time for journalists and academics in order to access the “known cases” of violence recorded by the police”<sup>23</sup>.

The OVV is not politically oriented. The organization’s core mission is to promote the peace culture using tools and strategies in the actions of everyday life and alerting the authorities to respond to the demands of citizens to build a society without violence. However, it is possible to observe that the organization has a different political approach from the incumbents. That is not surprising because its creation relies on government restrictions to access to the official crime data.

Even though the OVV was created in 2005, it does not have data per federal entity for each year since 2005 due to difficulties accessing the information from official bodies.

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<sup>23</sup> The Venezuelan Violence Observatory OVV. *La Historia del OVV*. <http://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/ws/historia/> [Last access: August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

## **b) Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (CICPC):**

On the other hand, the CICPC (Spanish: *Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas*) is the main body of scientific and criminal investigation of the country affiliated with the Ministry of Home Affairs. It was created in 2001 after the constitutional reform. The CICPC replaced its predecessor the PTJ (*Policía Técnica Judicial*).

The CICPC is responsible for the scientific investigation of crimes with a view to later application of justice by competent organizations. Furthermore, it develops and analyzes crime statistics, in coordination with the National Institute of Statistics (INE). They finally submit this data to the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to adopt prevention policies and apply the necessary measures to ensure safety in the country<sup>24</sup>.

Due to the affiliation between the CICPC and the Ministry of Home Affairs, which depends on the executive, it could be considered that the political orientation of this body is pro-government. The media usually claims the CICPC does not act in an impartial way so it is common to find news in which people demand impartial investigation from the CICPC<sup>25</sup>. While composing this research it was possible to observe this affirmation. Although the regulatory law establishes it is mandatory to publish the crime data, the CICPC tend not to publish it. The same situation was found in the National Institute of Statistics (INE) that has not published any crime or poverty data since 2012. That could explain the reason why the World Bank does not possess this information either.

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<sup>24</sup> Decreto con fuerza de Ley de los Órganos de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas. Article 11<sup>th</sup>.

<https://www.cicpc.gob.ve/institucion/funciones/>. [Last Access: August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>25</sup> *La Vanguardia*. 2014. Periodistas venezolanos piden investigación imparcial de secuestro de colega.

<http://www.lavanguardia.com/sucesos/20140410/54405693631/periodistas-venezolanos-piden-investigacion-imparcial-de-secuestro-de-colega.html> [Last access: August 2nd, 2015].

## 2. The links between the data sources

The problem in the access of official data is the reason why five data sources were used. However, although there are different data sources in the table, it is possible to observe the same increasing tendency of the homicide rates. Furthermore, the data is also compatible for comparison since the sources used for the writing of the article by Briceño-León were the MPPPS data and PTJ data (ex CICPC), and also as Mr. Briceño-León has been the president of the OVV since its creation. Therefore, the methods of analysis are the same as the data of his article published in the book. Subsequently, the compatibility is visible due to the relationship among each of the sources. The first source comes from an article by Briceño-Leon using data from the former CICPC and the MPPPS, the numbers from 2005 come directly from the CICPC, and the most recent numbers come from the OVV, where Briceño Leon is the president.

Moreover, it is important to highlight the political orientation of the data sources. Even though the OVV should not have a political orientation, as mentioned before, the organization acts in opposition to the government. On the other hand, the CICPC publicly acts following the incumbent party. Despite the political orientation of both organizations, the increasing tendency of the homicide rates still persists. However, the more the numbers increase, the harder it is to access official data from the CICPC.

While investigating for this paper, homicide rates per federal entities were only published one year since 1998 from the CICPC, INE or the Ministry of Home Affairs. The CICPC has only published the national homicide rate several years and the most recent years they have not published any number but it has been leaked to the media<sup>26</sup>. Due to this situation, it could be considered that there is a censorship on the crime data in the country. For this reason, the alternative research organizations such as the OVV were created.

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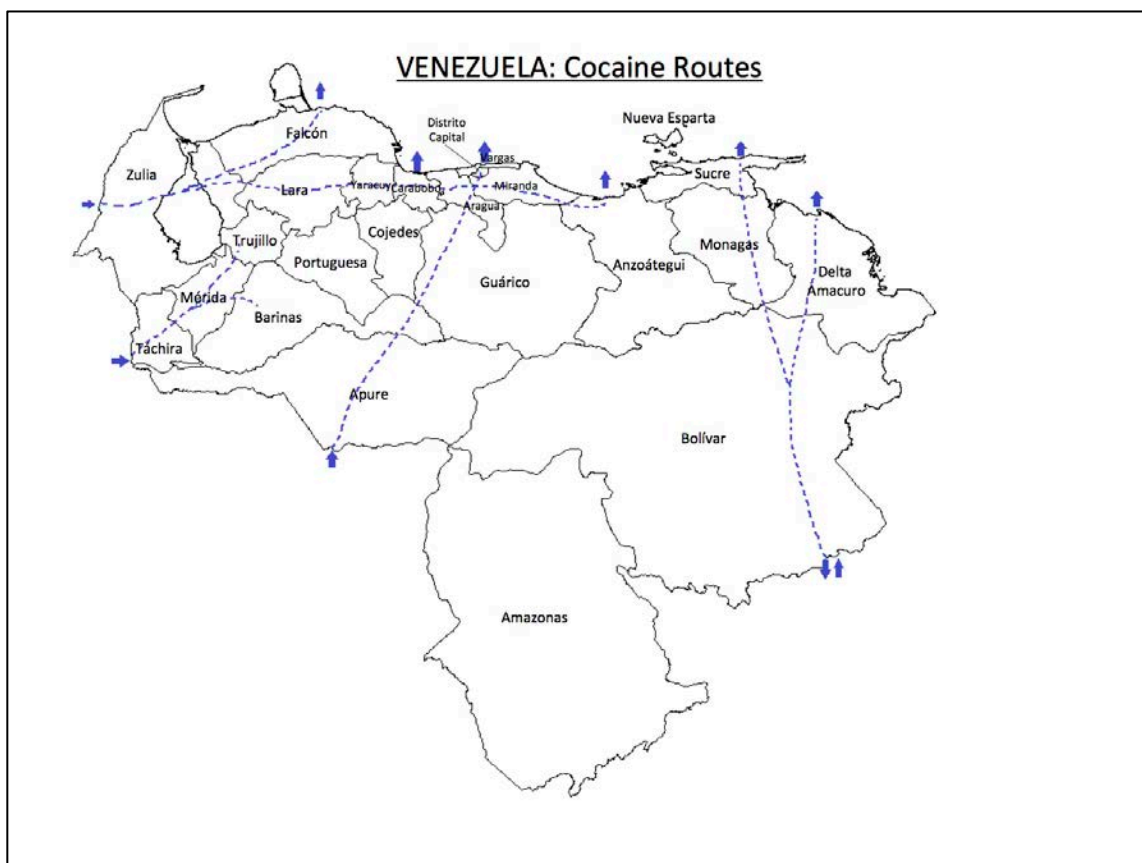
<sup>26</sup> *El Impulso*. 2014. Venezuela registra 4.680 homicidios en primer cuatrimestre de 2014. <http://elimpulso.com/articulo/venezuela-registra-4-680-homicidios-en-primer-cuatrimetre-de-2014> [Last access: August 23th, 2015]



### 3. The Data:

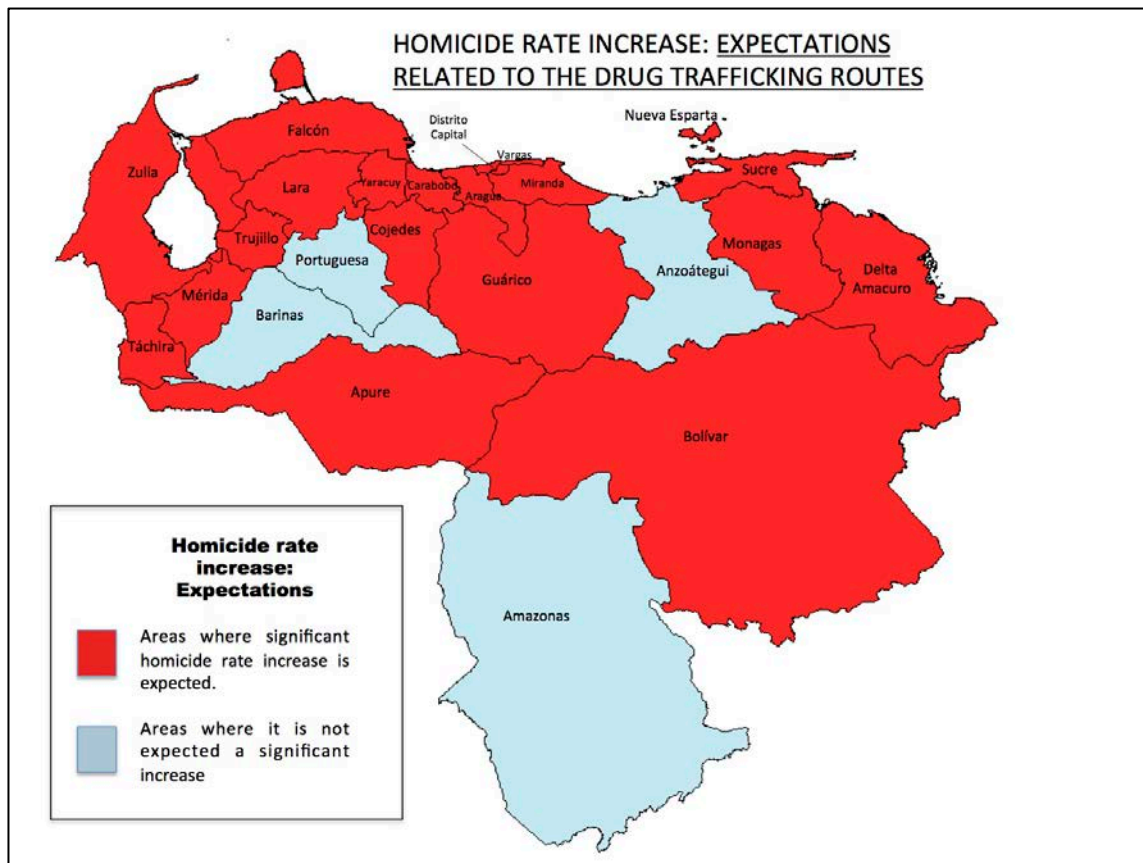
In order to establish the drug trafficking route, information from different sources was gathered: investigations, NGO data and news from the media<sup>27</sup>. This allowed the creation of a map where it is possible to observe graphically the trafficking routes throughout the country and the key points for the entrance and exit of cocaine in Venezuelan territory (Map. 1).

Additionally, the routes drawn in Map 1 were used. A second map was created to show the areas, according to Yashar's theory, where a high homicide rate increase is expected. These are the areas that are part of the drug trafficking routes, port and border states. (Map 2)



**Map 1. Drug Trafficking Routes**

<sup>27</sup> Corcho, Germán. 2015. Las rutas del narcotráfico aéreo desde Venezuela. *El Herald* <http://www.elheraldo.co/judicial/las-rutas-del-narcotrafico-aereo-desde-venezuela-198542> [Last access: August 24th, 2015]



**Map. 2 Homicide rate increase expectations**

After gathering all the information and using the sources already detailed, a table with all the results was created (Table. 1)<sup>28 29 30 31</sup>. The table shows the homicide rates per 100,000

<sup>28</sup>The Venezuelan Violence Observatory OVV. *Report 2012*.

<http://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/ws/informe-del-ovv-diciembre-2012/> [Last access: June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015]

<sup>29</sup>Acero, Hugo. 2006. *Situación de violencia y Delincuencia de Venezuela y Concentración delincriminal*. Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas Penales y Criminalísticas (data 2005). <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Security/citizensecurity/Venezuela/documentos/violencia.pdf> [Last access: May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>30</sup>Briceño-León, R. and P. Pérez. 2000. *Violencia en Venezuela: Un fenómeno Capital*. (p.270) . From the book Londoño, J. *et al.* (2000). *Asalto al Desarrollo: Violencia en America Latina*. Interamerican Development Bank.

inhabitants in the 24 federal entities of the country between 1990 and 2013. As explained in the data sources section, the table uses data from five sources: the OVV, the CICPC, the MPPPS, the article published by the IDB, and the media. To facilitate the distinction, each of the sources has its own color on the table. The year 2005 has two different data due to information found from two sources, the MPPPS and the CICPC. There is one federal entity where the information is available from 2005. This federal entity called Vargas became a state in 1998. It was previously part of the Distrito Capital (state of which Caracas is the capital), and the earliest homicide rate found is from the year 2005.

Table 1 shows all the information found. For the discussion and conclusions, the data comes from four specific years where the data sources can be compared. As it was explained in the previous section, those years are 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2012. Therefore, in order to facilitate the comprehension of the data, a second table was created that summarizes the information with the homicide rates of the 24 states in the selected four years (Table. 2). A chart was also created where it is possible to graphically observe the increasing homicide rate and compare the data between the federal entities.

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<sup>31</sup> Magallanes, Rodolfo. 2010. *Violence during the Bolivarian Revolution in red and black figures*. Politeia. Volumen 33. Data from the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Salud (MPPPS).

Federal Entities	Amazonas	Anzoátegui	Apure	Aragua	Barinas	Bolívar	Carabobo	Cojedes	Delta Amacuro	Dto. Capital	Falcón	Guárico	Lara	Mérida	Miranda	Monagas	Nva. Esparta	Portuguesa	Sucre	Táchira	Trujillo	Vargas	Yaracuy	Zulia	Source
1990	5,66	8,45	10,05	6,92	7,48	11,61	12,17	7,7	6,42	44,03	6,06	12,21	4,94	6,54	7,89	6,51	5,98	8,61	4,8	8,77	9,8	N/A	5,58	10,9	
1991	1,12	8,14	8,68	5,78	7,49	12,92	11,95	5,47	5,13	45,56	4,88	14,17	4,52	6,71	7,62	7,74	3,07	7,86	4,99	8,81	10,23	N/A	4,73	10,4	
1992	4,4	9,4	1,26	8,34	10,82	14,34	15,18	5,78	9,85	67,7	4,95	15,69	4,93	6,72	11,59	10,82	3,64	6,54	4,79	8,96	10,84	N/A	7,38	12,2	
1993	11,94	9,69	9,66	11,34	7,09	15,68	19,08	5,6	11,35	90,63	6,34	15	6,21	7,5	15,58	12,48	5,77	10,17	7,48	9,55	9,44	N/A	4,72	15,5	IDB
1994	7,5	11,65	10,63	15,73	9,48	17,12	21,03	9,5	10,91	96,02	7,11	16,09	5,71	64,12	20,87	9,34	6,85	9,15	6,61	7,96	9,16	N/A	6,81	16,6	
1995	5,29	11,99	9,41	17,63	10,59	17,51	20,18	7,9	6,12	88,04	5,43	11,83	7,27	3,38	18,1	9	6,36	12,07	6,76	7,08	10,84	N/A	6,65	14,6	
1996	6,26	11,93	13,8	21,21	11,09	20,43	28,63	8,95	7,57	83,39	7,19	15,98	8,35	7,21	18,91	10,09	5,89	16,03	8,47	8,5	12,85	N/A	7,76	17,1	
1997	3,77	9,3	6,65	25,68	10,82	18,82	20,4	9,56	8,51	76,68	5,23	13,4	9,64	8,72	3,2	4,8	7,59	19,38	5,65	8,07	10,23	N/A	6,82	15,1	
1998	2,75	10,41	8,3	25,81	11	20	19,19	12,19	8,26	80,98	5,52	13,13	8,28	7,32	3,75	2,33	9,86	14,79	6,94	7,62	11,06	N/A	6,07	16,4	
1999	7,99	12,32	12,14	34,46	11,33	22,99	38,46	15,48	13,65	107,07	8,77	22,13	11,1	10,94	5,06	6,23	16,31	14,87	11,02	9,16	11,85		10,49	21,1	
2000	5,17	18,86	14,33	41,89	17,41	43,12	64,62	22,12	7,81	107,52	9,11	24,78	28,9	12,79	8,49	12,82	29,52	22,74	14,62	11,71	25,23		16,86	26,5	
2001	9,2	21,3	19,56	41,38	16,82	37,44	45,29	25,41	15,2	95,18	9,56	23,24	24,4	17,76	26,12	16,52	22,24	35,82	17,76	15,48	23,38		21,06	29,5	MPPPS
2002	9,74	23,82	21,73	36,31	24,99	41,57	52,44	31,51	16,29	123,47	14,73	14,65	25,6	18,72	32,65	25,4	23,79	42,57	29,97	26,38	31,13		21,72	31	
2003	16,53	34,48	27,96	28,29	33,8	49,28	65,48	42,76	13,71	128,22	16,12	21,32	36,6	25,39	30,05	22,9	23,82	51,64	33,01	47,01	29,81		37,62	37,7	
2004	14,53	38,56	25,32	19,27	27,67	31,69	43,69	32,97	21,12	97,19	13,36	19,06	33,3	29,78	19,72	23,35	29,39	50,51	27,17	40,67	21,84		34,88	33,2	
2005 MPPPS	18,57	46,98	25,2	21,02	32,58	44,12	49,69	39,84	19,92	91,9	12,7	21,76	23,7	29,69	20,47	16,72	23,42	40,84	16,76	37,01	14,01		23,05	34,9	
2005 CICPC	22	57	27	37	33	44	52	29	15	86	17	32	25	23	41	36	19	36	36	47	19	51	20	34	CICPC
2006	8,67	55,25	35,21	26,08	38,36	56,66	58,04	38,4	16,76	98,13	18,07	20,39	29,3	33,22	25,99	12,2	33,03	39	21,49	26,13	14,75		28,17	40,3	
2007	1,41	40,19	41,14	44,92	53,4	57,47	66,14	36,96	13,1	121,86	13,64	17,98	29,4	35,79	21,2	4,21	44,86	31,49	43,86	29,31	18,98		32,46	43,3	
2008																									
2009																									
2010						64,06		75,61		126,56			40,5		65,36				36,12					30	
2011										108															
2012	42	56	47	92	52	83	66	66	87	122	56	73	51	41	100	62	54	57	79	54	55	83	73	44	OVV
2013		56		87		72,9	92,6				72,2				113					80,4	83		86	48,8	MEDIA

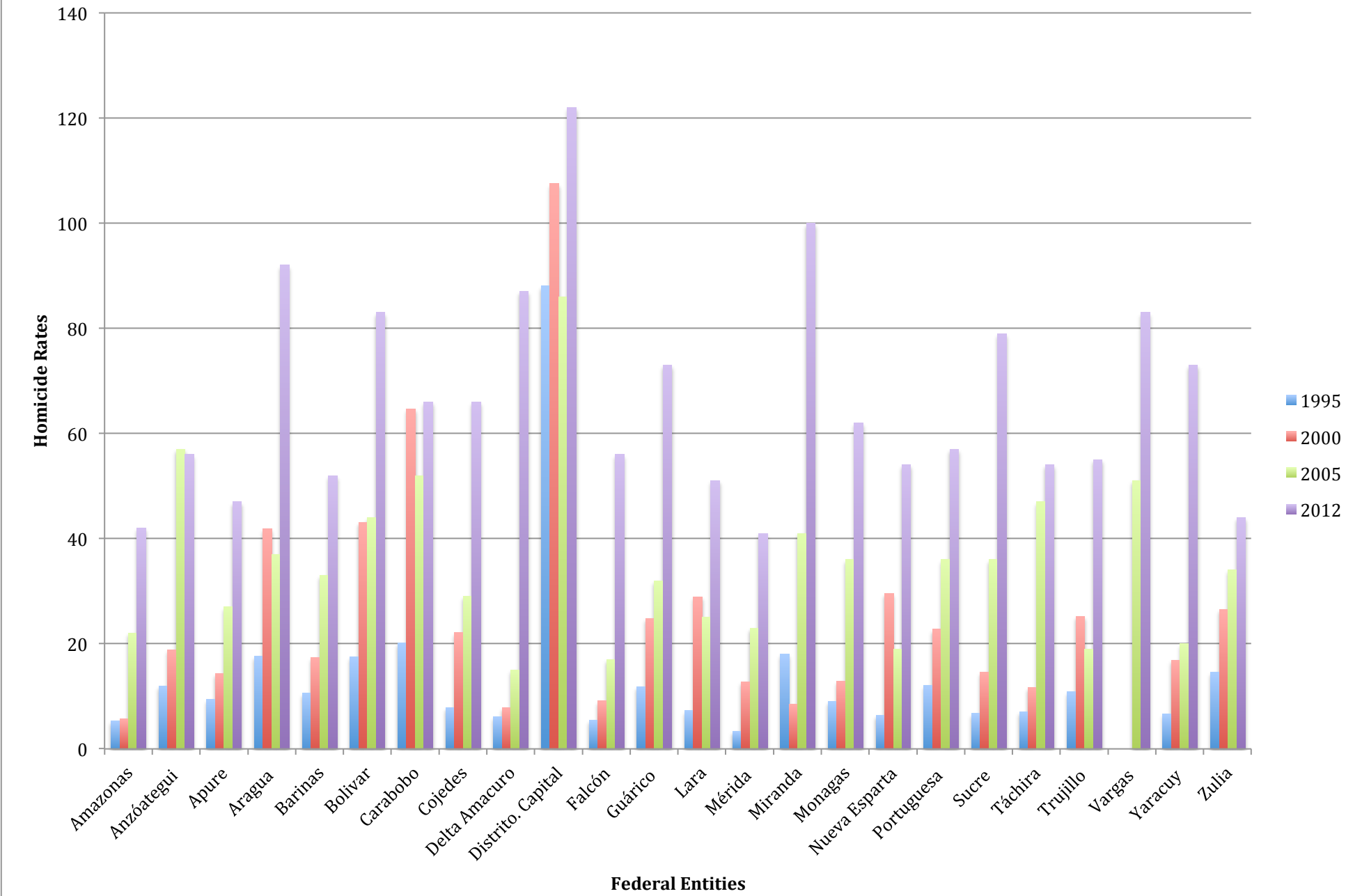
Table 1. Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV). Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Salud (MPPPS). Briceño León, Perez, P. Violencia en America Latina (IDB)

Federal Entities	Year				Total Increase Percentage
	1995	2000	2005	2012	
Amazonas	5.29	5.17	22	42	529%
Anzoátegui	11.99	18.86	57	56	467.05%
Apure	9.41	14.33	27	47	499.46%
Aragua	17.63	41.86	37	92	219.62%
Barinas	10.59	17.41	33	52	491.02%
Bolívar	17.51	43.12	44	83	474.01%
Carabobo	20.18	64.62	52	66	327.05%
Cojedes	7.9	22.12	29	66	835.44%
Delta Amacuro	6.12	7.81	15	87	1421.56%
Distrito Capital	88.04	107.52	86	122	138.57%
Falcón	5.43	9.11	17	56	1031.3%
Guárico	11.83	24.78	32	73	617.07%
Lara	7.27	28.9	25	51	701.51%
Mérida	3.38	12.79	23	41	1213.01%
Miranda	18.1	8.49	41	100	552.48%
Monagas	9	12.82	36	62	688.88%
Nueva Esparta	6.36	29.52	19	54	849.05%
Portuguesa	12.07	22.74	36	57	472.24%
Sucre	6.76	14.62	36	79	1168.83%
Táchira	7.08	11.71	47	54	762.71%
Trujillo	10.84	25.23	19	55	507.38%
Vargas	N/A	N/A	51	83	162.7%
Yaracuy	6.65	16.86	20	73	1097.74%
Zulia	14.57	26.47	34	44	301.99%

Table 2. Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV). Briceño León, Perez, P. Violencia en America Latina (IDB)

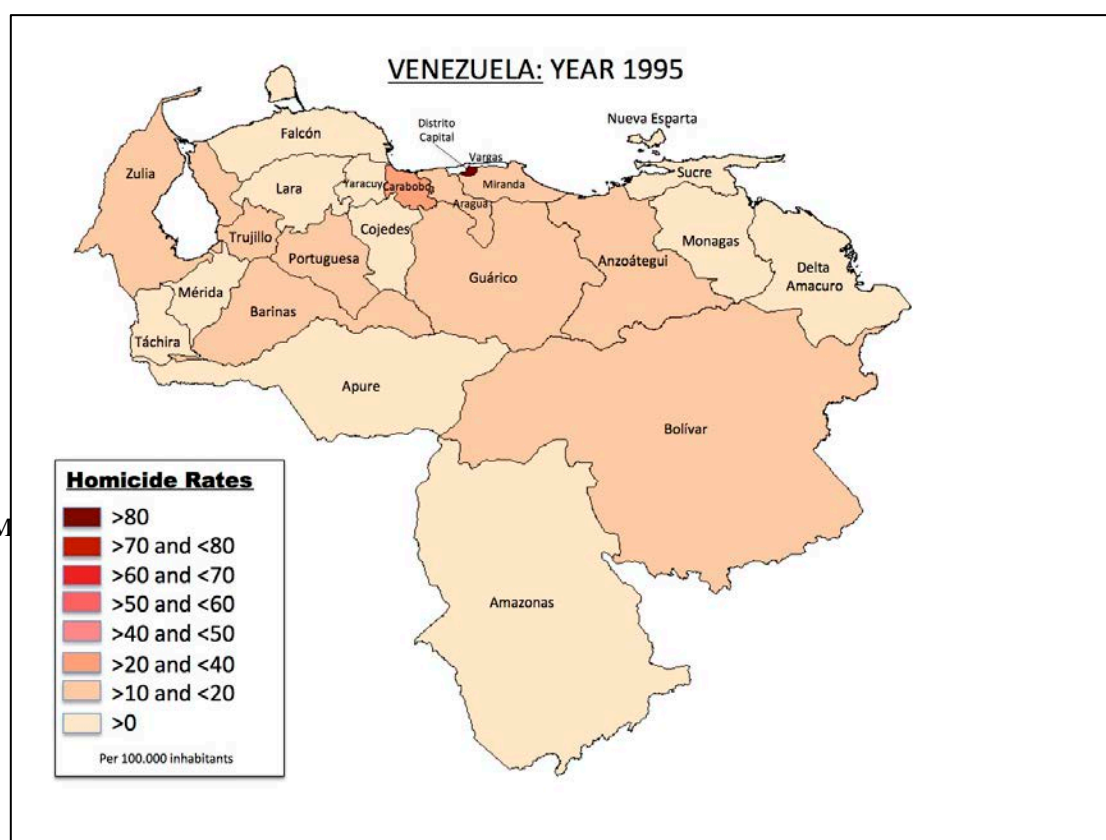


Chart 1: Homicide Rates in Venezuela per Federal Entities

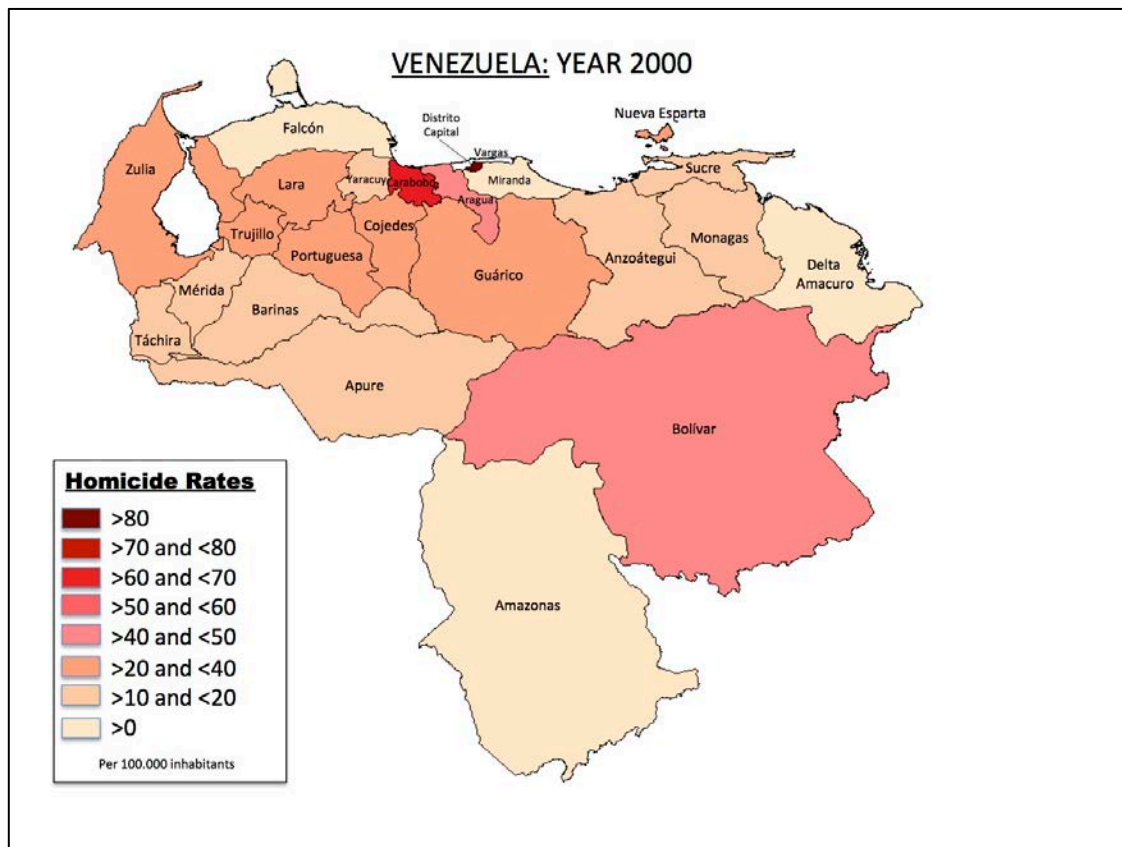


On the other hand, using the data from Table 2, I created four maps that illustrate the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in each of the studied years. Using a discoloration effect, the differences in the homicide rates among the territories are visible. The areas with the darkest tone are the areas where the homicide rate is higher than 80, and the lightest areas are where homicide rate is between 0 and 10. This allows the reader to compare the evolution of the homicide rate in the studied years.

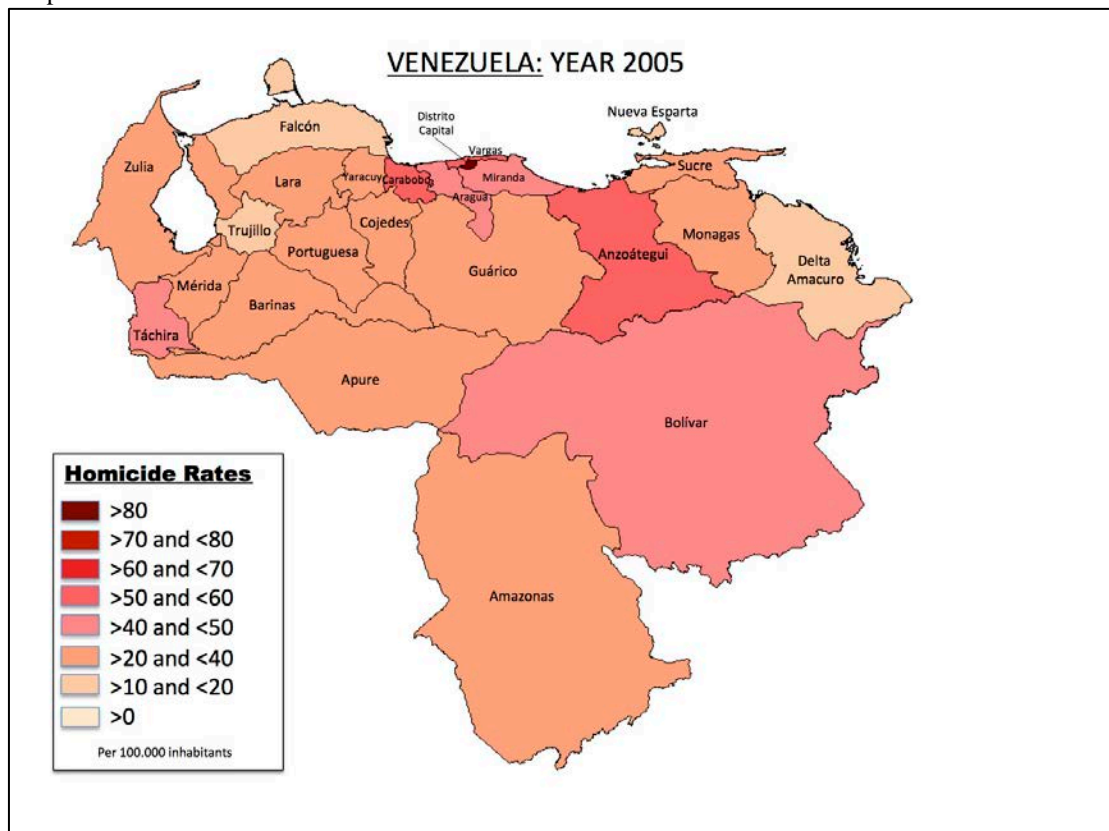
Map 3 shows the homicide rates in the country in 1995. Map 4 in the year 2000. Map 5 in 2005. And finally Map 6 in 2012.



Map 3. Homicide Rates: Venezuela. Year 1995

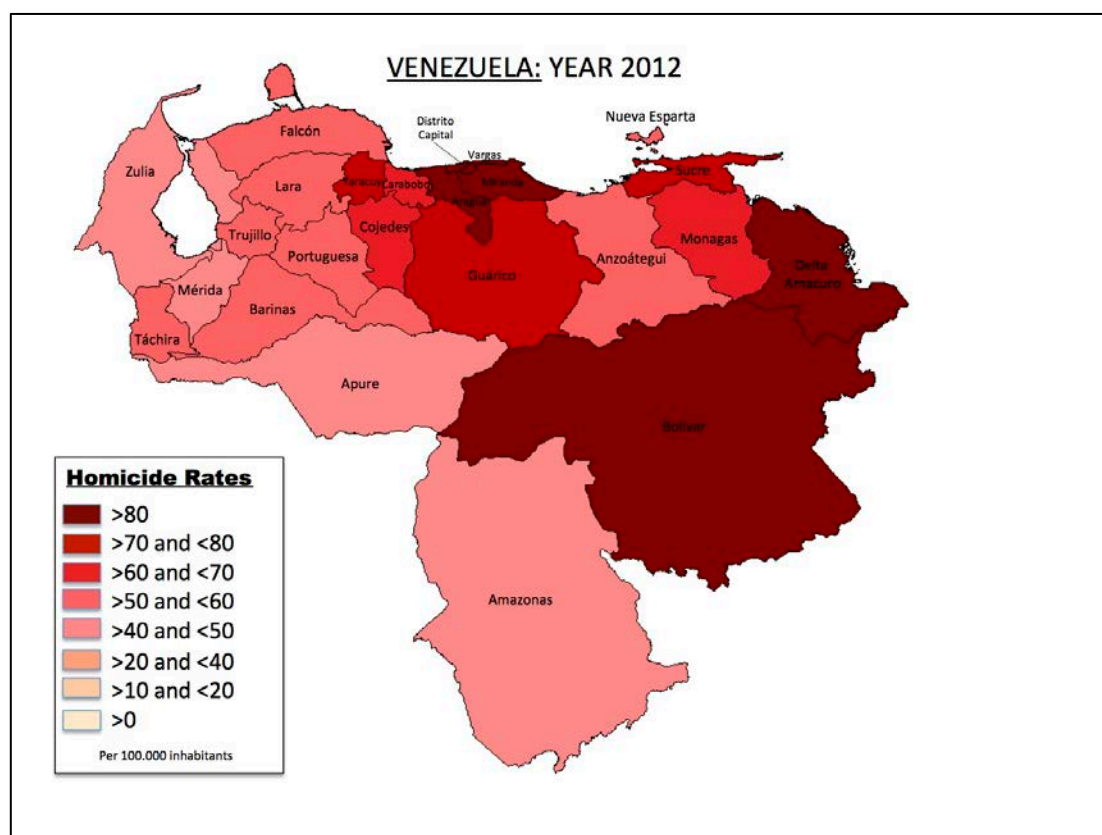


Map 4. Homicide Rates: Venezuela. Year 2000



Map 5. Homicide Rates: Venezuela. Year 2005





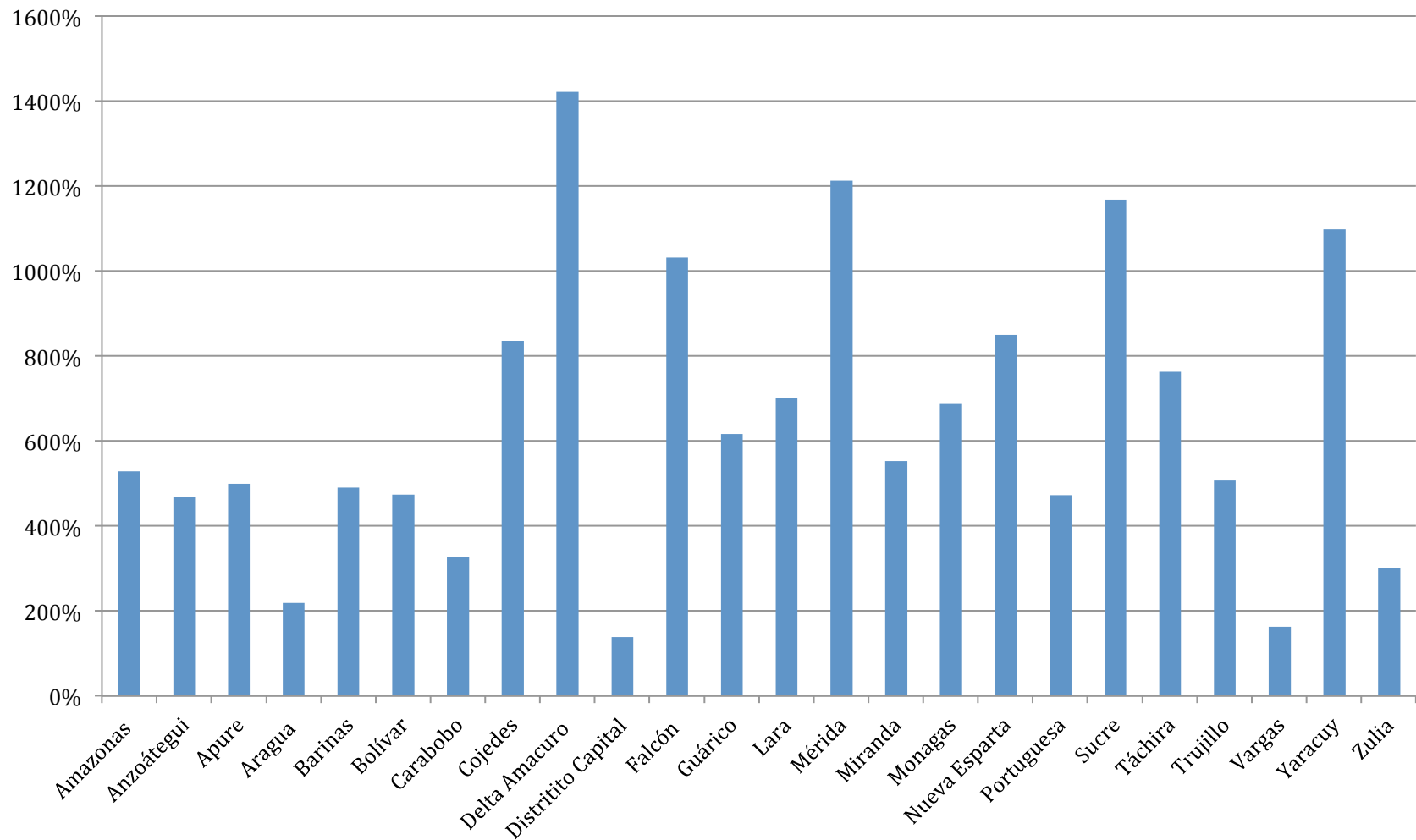
Map 6. Homicide Rates: Venezuela. Year 2012

Thirdly, the percentages of the increase of homicide rates in the country are shown in table 3. I took 1995 as the base year and compared it to the latest data in 2012. The data is organized from the highest data to the lowest each year. Using table 3, a second chart was also created to ease the comprehension and comparison of the data (Chart 2.)

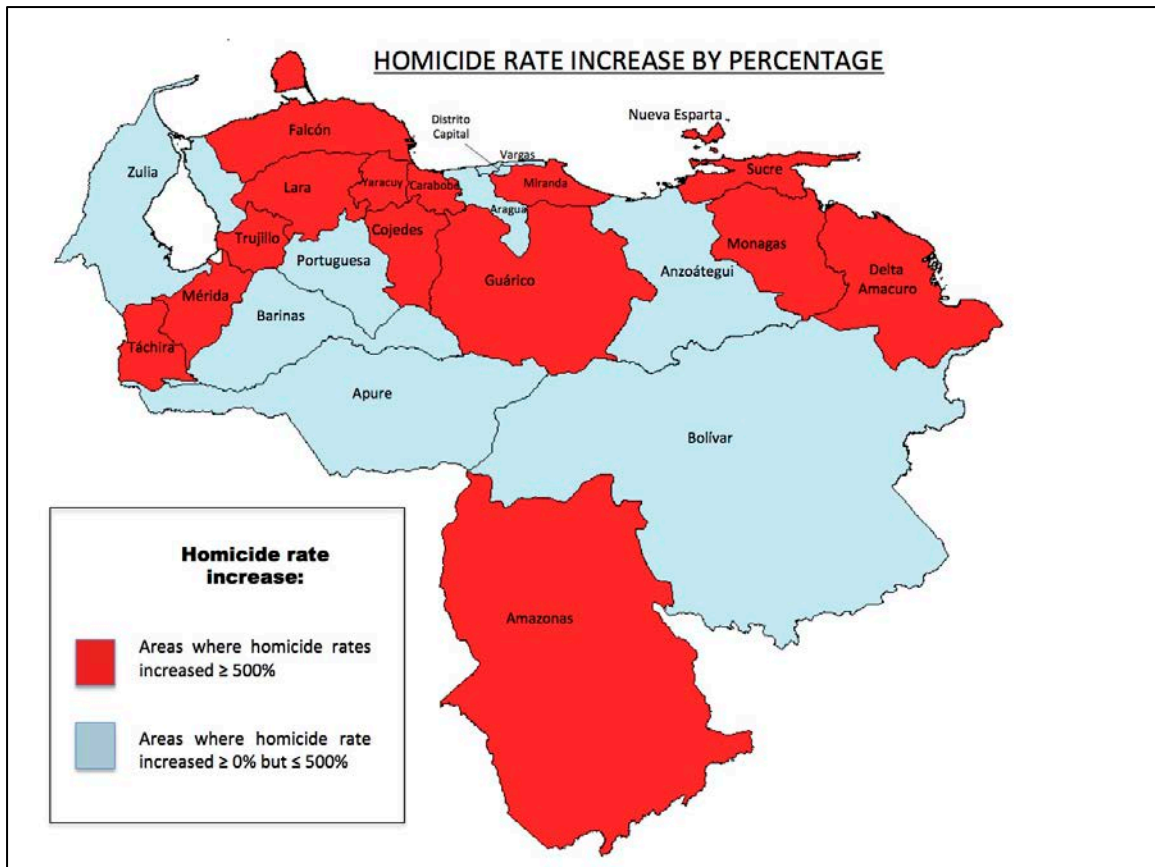
Federal Entities	1995	F.E	2000	F.E	2005	F.E	2012	F.E	(%)	Aumento Total
Distrito Capital	88.04	Distrito Capital	107.52	Distrito Capital	86	Distrito Capital	122	Delta Amacuro	1421.56	80.88
Carabobo	20.18	Carabobo	64.62	Anzoátegui	57	Miranda	100	Merida	1213.01	71.82
Miranda	18.1	Bolívar	43.12	Carabobo	52	Aragua	92	Sucre	1168.63	72.24
Aragua	17.63	Aragua	41.89	Vargas	51	Delta Amacuro	87	Yaracuy	1097.74	66.35
Bolívar	17.51	Nueva Esparta	29.52	Táchira	47	Bolívar	83	Falcón	1031.3	50.57
Zulia	14.57	Lara	28.9	Bolívar	44	Vargas	83	Nueva Esparta	849.05	47.64
Portuguesa	12.07	Zulia	26.47	Miranda	41	Sucre	79	Cojedes	835.44	58.1
Anzoátegui	11.99	Trujillo	25.23	Aragua	37	Guarico	73	Táchira	762.71	46.92
Guarico	11.83	Guarico	24.78	Monagas	36	Yaracuy	73	Lara	701.51	43.73
Trujillo	10.84	Portuguesa	22.74	Portuguesa	36	Carabobo	66	Monagas	688.88	53
Barinas	10.59	Cojedes	22.12	Sucre	36	Cojedes	66	Guarico	617.07	61.17
Apure	9.41	Anzoátegui	18.86	Zulia	34	Monagas	62	Miranda	552.48	81.9
Monagas	9	Barinas	17.41	Barinas	33	Portuguesa	57	Amazonas	529	47
Cojedes	7.9	Yaracuy	16.86	Guarico	32	Anzoátegui	56	Trujillo	507.38	44.16
Lara	7.27	Sucre	14.62	Cojedes	29	Falcón	56	Apure	499.46	37.59
Táchira	7.08	Apure	14.33	Apure	27	Trujillo	55	Barinas	491.02	41.41
Sucre	6.76	Monagas	12.82	Lara	25	Nueva Esparta	54	Bolívar	474.01	65.49
Yaracuy	6.65	Merida	12.79	Merida	23	Táchira	54	Portuguesa	472.24	44.93
Nueva Esparta	6.36	Táchira	11.71	Amazonas	22	Barinas	52	Anzoátegui	467.05	44.01
Delta Amacuro	6.12	Falcón	9.11	Yaracuy	20	Lara	51	Carabobo	327.05	45.82
Falcón	5.43	Miranda	8.49	Nueva Esparta	19	Apure	47	Zulia	301.99	29.43
Amazonas	5.29	Delta Amacuro	7.81	Trujillo	19	Zulia	44	Aragua	219.62	74.37
Merida	3.38	Amazonas	5.17	Falcón	17	Amazonas	42	Vargas	162.74	31
Vargas	N/A	Vargas		Delta Amacuro	15	Merida	41	Distrito Capital	138.57	33.96

Table 3. Evolution of the Homicide rate and it percentage of change between 1995 and 2012

**Chart 2: Homicide Rates: Percentage Increase 1995-2012 by Federal Entities**



Finally, with the information from Tables 2 and 3, a new map was created that represents the increase in homicide rates according to the percentage. Those areas where the homicide rate increased by 500% or more are marked in red and the areas where it increased less than 500% are indicated in blue. It was created in order to be compared with map 1 and observe if the results expected are fulfilled.



Map 7. Homicide Rate Increase by Percentage.

## V. DISCUSSION

### 1. Empirical Discussion:

After the collection of the data previously presented, it is now possible to determine which federal entities have the highest homicide rates for the year 2012. As highlighted in Tables 1 and 2, the federal entity with the highest homicide rate in that year is Distrito Capital. Nonetheless, Distrito Capital has been the federal entity with the highest homicide rate even before 1999,

Hugo Chávez's first term. It is also true that this is one of the most populated federal entities of the country. The following entities are Miranda, Aragua, Delta Amacuro, Bolivar and Vargas.

Moreover, Miranda, Vargas and Aragua, which are the three neighboring states of the Capital, have tended to have high homicide rates as well. On the other hand, Bolivar has held a position between the first 6 in the observed years in table 3. However, Delta Amacuro is the fourth state with the highest homicide rate in 2012. It is one of the least populated federal entities in Venezuela, holding the position 23 of 25 states by population density in 2011 according to INE. It has a population of 167,676 inhabitants compared to Miranda with 2,676,165 inhabitants<sup>32</sup>.

These are federal entities that are key for the drug trafficking. All of them, except Bolivar, are ports in which there are high flows of drug trafficking. Even though Bolivar is not a port, it is a border state with Brazil, and it is one of the main entrance and exit points for drugs between the two countries.

Another relevant finding is the percentage of change in the homicide rates. As it is possible to observe in Table 3 and Chart 2, the federal entity with the highest increase was Delta Amacuro with an increase of 1421.56%. Delta Amacuro has been recently involved in the drug trafficking activity. It is followed by Merida that, although it does not have the highest homicide rate, shows an increase in homicide rates of 1213.01% being also an important part of the drug trafficking route known as *Corredor del Caribe* that transports cocaine to Colombia, Honduras and Nicaragua<sup>33</sup>. This relationship is also visible in the cases of Sucre, Yaracuy, Falcón, Nueva Esparta, Táchira, and Lara because all of them are states where the trafficking route has been intensified, and the percentage increase of all of them is larger than 700%.

Comparing the information from Table 1 and Table 3, one can notice a relevant fact: The federal entities with the lowest homicide rates in 1995 are the ones that have experienced the

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<sup>32</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística INE. Censo 2011 de Población y Vivienda. Available from: <http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/Demografia/CensodePoblacionyVivienda/pdf/ResultadosBasicosCenso2011.pdf> [23, August 2015]

<sup>33</sup> Corcho, Germán. 2015. Las rutas del narcotráfico aéreo desde Venezuela. *El Herald* <http://www.elheraldo.co/judicial/las-rutas-del-narcotrafico-aereo-desde-venezuela-198542> [Last access: August 24th, 2015]

biggest increase in percentage on homicide rates. The bottom-up 10 states according to the homicide rates in 1995 are the top 10 states with the highest percentage increase by 2012. The only exception is Amazonas that occupies position number thirteen. Although the homicide rates have increased in the entire country, it is possible to visualize that the increase is not proportional in the same amount throughout the national territory.

While Distrito Capital increased its homicide rate by 138.57%, as the state with the highest homicide rate since 1995, some federal entities that used to have low homicide rates are now in the top 5, as is the case of Delta Amacuro. As a result, when some authors pretend to explain the increase in the homicide rate by poverty and inequality, it is expected to observe a proportional increase in the federal entities at least by population density. This situation is not fulfilled according to the empirical evidence because states such as Nueva Esparta, which is not as populated, has experienced an increase in homicide rate by 849.05 %<sup>34</sup>.

## **2. The empirical evidence and the theoretical framework.**

According to Yashar's theory, the violence is higher in port cities and areas through which drugs are moving, as she evaluated in the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador. As it is possible to determine from the tables and Chart 1, the federal entities with the highest homicide rates are key states for the trafficking route. The main port and airport of the country are located in Distrito Capital and Vargas, from where numerous clandestine flights and ships depart towards the Caribbean, the U.S and Europe. In addition, it is not only through clandestine flight, but also commercial flights. For example, take the case of the Air France flight from Caracas to Paris on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in which 1,382 kilograms of cocaine were found in Paris after its arrival to

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<sup>34</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística INE. *Censo 2011 de Población y Vivienda*. <http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/Demografia/CensodePoblacionyVivienda/pdf/ResultadosBasicosCenso2011.pdf> [Last access: August 3rd, 2015]

the country<sup>35</sup>. Also, take the Air Canada flight number 075 to Toronto, in which one kilogram of cocaine was found hidden on the fuselage of the plane<sup>36</sup>.

The states that had relatively low levels of homicides in 1995 and are part of the cocaine drug trafficking has dramatically increased the homicide rate for 2012. Here, we can mention Delta Amacuro, which has become relevant in the trafficking to Guyana and Europe. All the states that are part of the route from Zulia that crosses Lara, Yaracuy, Carabobo, Aragua and finally arrives at Distrito Capital and Vargas have high homicide rates, even though some of them did not have these high numbers before. The same result can be seen in the route from Táchira to Barinas and Merida or from Bolivar to Monagas, Sucre and Anzoátegui.

Even though the homicide rates have increased throughout the entire country, they have developed in the areas of drug trafficking, as the theoretical framework suggested. A state such as Amazonas, which is not part of the route, has higher homicide rates in 2012 than in 1995, but it increased less as compared to the states that are part of the route that were mentioned before.

Finally, as it was expected by Yashar's theory, Venezuela's monitoring capacity is poorly used, so that makes the DTOs to choose transport and transit the cocaine throughout the Venezuelan territory. *World Justice Project* has punctuated Venezuela's rule of law with a 0.32 for 2015, the lowest in the region, and it is in position 102 of 102 analyzed<sup>37</sup>. This means that it takes the position of the lowest rule of law of the 102 countries analyzed. Moreover, in 2014, *Transparency International* ranked Venezuela in the position 161 of 175 of the most corrupted countries<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *El Universal*. 2014. Fiscalía acusa a 27 personas por caso de drogas en vuelo Air France. <http://www.eluniversal.com/sucesos/141014/fiscalia-acusa-a-27-personas-por-caso-de-drogas-en-vuelo-de-air-france> [Last access: August 24th, 2015]

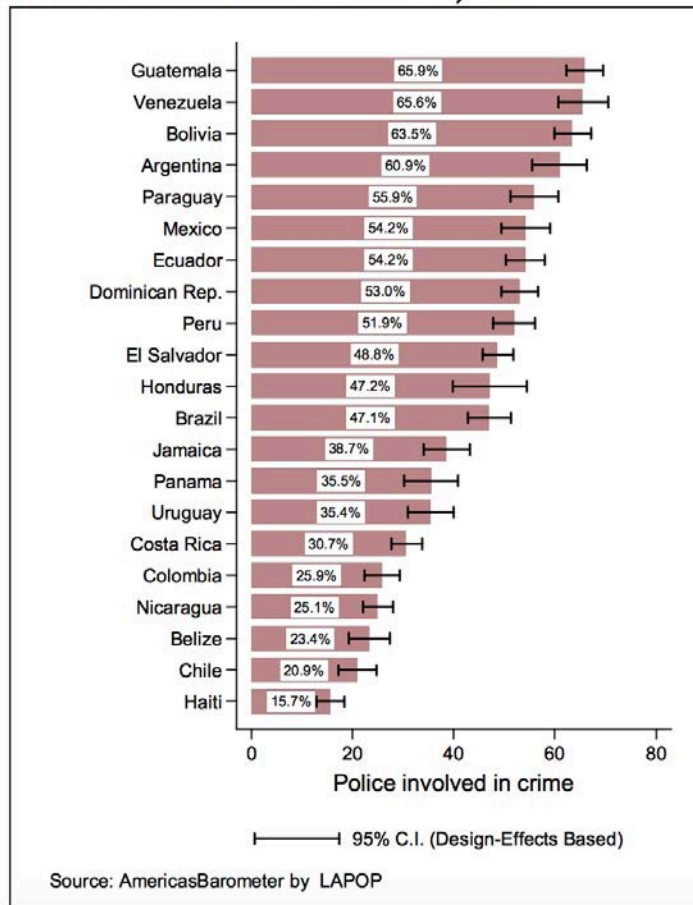
<sup>36</sup> *Noticias 2001*. Dos panelas de cocaína fueron encontradas en avión de Air Canadá en Maiquetía. <http://www.2001.com.ve/en-la-calle/dos-panelas-de-cocaina-fueron-encontradas-en-avion-de-air-canada-en-maiquetia.html> [Last access: August 15th, 2015]

<sup>37</sup> World Justice Project. 2015: *Rule of law 2015*. <http://data.worldjusticeproject.org/#table> [Last access: June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>38</sup> Transparency International. 2014: *Corruption index 2014*. <http://www.transparency.org/country#VEN> [Last access: June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015].

Furthermore, this idea can also be seen in the research made by Cruz, J. (2010) about some indicator of complicity. He used a table to discuss the perceptions of police involvement in crime in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2008. According to his results, Venezuela had one of the highest scores with a perception of 65.5% of police involvement in crime, which once again shows its low capacity for control of the territory.<sup>39</sup>

**Perceptions of Police Involvement in Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.**



### 3. The case of Delta Amacuro

In order to provide a more extensive explanation of why the theoretical framework can be applied to the case of Venezuela, this section about Delta Amacuro will be developed. Some

<sup>39</sup>Cruz, José. 2010. *Police Misconduct and Democracy in Latin America*. Latin American Public Opinion Project, “insights” series. 2010. No. 33. (p. 2)

contemporary authors have been trying to link the violence and homicide crimes in Venezuela to politically oriented crime due to the recent protest that the Venezuelan society has experienced over the last several years. That means the higher the homicide rate in one federal entity, the higher the social mobilization and politically oriented homicides should be as a result of the protests.

However, Delta Amacuro did not have a relevant participation in the massive protests of the opposition party registered in sixteen states in 2014. Moreover, Delta Amacuro's government is from Chávez's party. The governor Lizeta Hernández belongs to the PSUV (Hugo Chávez's party). Only on February 21<sup>st</sup>, the civil society from the Delta peacefully protested. The reason was not politically oriented, but to stop the repression on the protests to find a solution to the conflict through dialogue between the two positions<sup>40</sup>.

As a consequence, politically oriented crime at protests cannot explain the increase in the homicide rates in Delta Amacuro because of its lack of participation in the protests. Furthermore, the repression situation in the country is true, and it resulted in the murder of 33 students that participated in protests in different states of the country. However, the amount of homicides in the country has increased, so it cannot be entirely related to politically oriented crime<sup>41</sup>.

Nevertheless, applying Yashar's theory and analyzing the role of the state in the trafficking route, it is possible to obtain important facts about the state. Delta Amacuro is characterized by its river network. As its name mentions, the state is the delta from four main rivers: the Orinoco, Amacuro, Barima, and Grande. It is also part of the border with Guyana, and the mouths of the rivers finish in the Atlantic Ocean. This is an important door for the trafficking to Trinidad, Tobago, and Europe.

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<sup>40</sup> *El Joropo*. 2014. Grupo de Jóvenes deltanos protestaron pacíficamente, estado Delta Amacuro. <http://www.eljoropo.com/site/grupo-de-jovenes-deltanos-protestaron-pacificamente-estado-delta-amacuro/> [Last access: August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>41</sup> Lozano, Daniel. 2014. La oposición se impone al Chavismo. *El Mundo* <http://www.elmundo.es/america/2014/03/22/532dd37522601d55208b4573.html> [Last access: August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015].



Therefore, after some research about the role of the state in drug trafficking activity, it was found that Delta Amacuro is now one of the main ports in the country for clandestine ships that navigate throughout the 3,622 branches of the rivers located in the state. In October 2009 a narco-submarine was discovered in a shed built near the village of Mariusa in Delta Amacuro, the first in the country<sup>42</sup>.

News about drugs seized has become usual in the state. In November 2014, the *Guardia Nacional Bolivariana* (GNB) seized 377 kilograms of cocaine in a cargo ship in Caño Mánamo<sup>43</sup>. Delta Amacuro is the third federal entity with the biggest drug seizure in 2014, with a total amount of 797,972 kilograms of cocaine<sup>44</sup>.

*El Nacional*, which is one of the main newspapers in Venezuela, interviewed the former governor Armando Salazar in 2012. Salazar considered “there is a drug coexistence under the gaze of the authorities in Delta Amacuro”<sup>45</sup>. The former governor denounced the existence of numerous drug laboratories in the entity<sup>46</sup>. He explained, “Delta suffers the scourge of insecurity that can evidenced with trafficking gangs fighting for control of the state. 41 people die monthly and GNB cannot monitor all branches of the rivers”<sup>47</sup>. Salazar pointed to the level of corruption in the courts is high and that sentences have a price when it comes to releasing drug traffickers. 300,000 Bolívares (Venezuela’s currency) is the cheapest<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> *El Nacional*. 2011. En Delta se fabrican “narcosubmarinos”. <http://www.noticierodigital.com/2011/04/el-nacional-venezuela-fabrica-submarinos-para-trafico-de-drogas/> [Last access: August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>43</sup> Dam, Germán. 2014. Decomisan 377 Kilos de cocaína en Delta Amacuro. *Correo del Caroní*. <http://www.correodelcaroni.com/index.php/sucesos/item/23144-decomisan-377-kilos-de-cocaina-en-delta-amacuro> [Last access: August 25, 2015]

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem

<sup>45</sup> Lugo-Galicia, Hernán. 2012. Denuncian que narcotráfico controla a tribunales y políticos en Delta Amacuro. *El Nacional*. [http://www.el-nacional.com/regiones/Narcotrafico-controlaria-tribunales-Delta-Amacuro\\_0\\_44995765.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/regiones/Narcotrafico-controlaria-tribunales-Delta-Amacuro_0_44995765.html) [Last access: August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015]

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem

The former governor explained that the presence of prison mafia is relevant in the entity. The police killed one of the drug trafficking chiefs “*pran*,” Dourgelis García. As a consequence, the gangs kidnapped the current governor’s father, and they also detonated a charge of C-4 in Luis Razetti hospital in Tucupita, addressed to the governor's sister, a doctor who was saved by not being on duty on site<sup>49</sup>.

The same article denounced the existence of a drug cartel in the country formed by members of the military force “National Guard” (*Guardia Nacional Bolivariana GNB*) called “*el cartel de los soles*” with a strong presence in the aforementioned federal entity.

As it was developed before the drug trafficking activity in the state became relevant, that drug laboratories in the state are more prevalent, and it is the third state with the most seized drugs in 2014. As the article mentioned, gangs fight for control of the state, as it is strategically well located for drug trafficking. This characteristic fits in Yashar’s theory because DTOs will try to dominate this territory because of the low monitoring capacity of the state and the high complicity level of the authorities.

#### **4. Drug trafficking groups in Venezuela**

The presence of drug trafficking groups in Venezuelan territory corroborates the relevance of drug trafficking activity since 1999. The Insight Crime Foundation has developed some research about the presence of drug cartels or *carteles* in Venezuela. The Insight Crime is a foundation created in 2010 dedicated to the study of the main threats to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime. In the particular case of Venezuela, they have identified the presence of some national *carteles* and Colombian armed forces operating in the country<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem

<sup>50</sup> Insight Crime Foundation: *Grupos de Venezuela*.

<http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela>  
[Last access: September 1st, 2015]

The first group they list is the ELN or *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*. The ELN is part of the Colombian guerilla and its presence in Venezuela increased since 2000, when they had to move their operations from Colombia to the border due to the attacks of the Colombian security forces. According to InSight Crime, the ELN uses Apure (another Venezuelan state) not only to hide their main leaders, but also as an operation center for criminal activities such as kidnapping, extortion, human and drug trafficking<sup>51</sup>.

The ELN has a strong social control in some areas of Apure. In some cases, the ELN acts as a *de facto* state power to resolve disputes between citizens and maintain some semblance of order<sup>52</sup>. The Insight Crime Foundation has developed the following map 8, in which it is possible to observe the areas where the ELN operates in Venezuela.



Map 8. The ELN and their routes for drug trafficking in Venezuela<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Insight Crime Foundation: *ELN en Venezuela*. <http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/eln-en-venezuela> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015].

<sup>52</sup> Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris. 2012: *Arauca el gran fortín del ELN*. <http://www.arcoiris.com.co/2012/04/arauca-el-gran-fortin-del-eln/> [Last access: September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015]

<sup>53</sup> Insight Crime Foundation: *ELN en Venezuela*.

Secondly, the InSight Crime foundation lists the AUC or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* in Spanish). Although they stopped being active in 2006, they had controlled the cocaine exportations from the states of Sucre, Bolivar, and Delta Amacuro. However, the group evolved into a new group called BACRIM or *Bandas Criminales Emergentes*. The BACRIM is a criminal group, formed by different smaller groups, allied to ELN and FARC that operates in Colombia, Panama and Venezuela. In 2008, the first BACRIM group to announce its presence in Venezuela was the “*Aguilas Negras*” in Tachira. They have been involved in several criminal acts: systematic kidnappings and extortion. A second BACRIM group, *Los Rastrojos*, has also announced its presence in Zulia. According to InSight Crime research, Los Rastrojos work with the Mexican Cartel *Los Zetas* and use the port of Maracaibo and clandestine airports for transnational cocaine trafficking<sup>54</sup>.

Thirdly, another important group listed with presence in Venezuela is the FARC or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* in Spanish), which is considered a terrorist organization involved in the Colombian Armed conflict since 1964. Venezuela has been a fundamental operation center for the FARC since three of its seven branches work in Venezuelan territory<sup>55</sup>. The country offers one of the major drug trafficking corridors and a place to escape the pressure of the Colombian security forces. It is also a space to train and resupply their weapons<sup>56</sup>.

The FARC has increased its presence in Venezuela since the arrival of Hugo Chavez to the presidency of the country in 1999, since they lost the territory they used as a refuge in 2002 when Alvaro Uribe increased the paramilitary attack on the insurgent group<sup>57</sup>. The link between the

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<http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/eln-en-venezuela> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015].

<sup>54</sup> InSight Crime Foundation. *BACRIM en Venezuela*.

<http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/bacrim-en-venezuela> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015]

<sup>55</sup> InSight Crime Foundation. *FARC en Venezuela*.

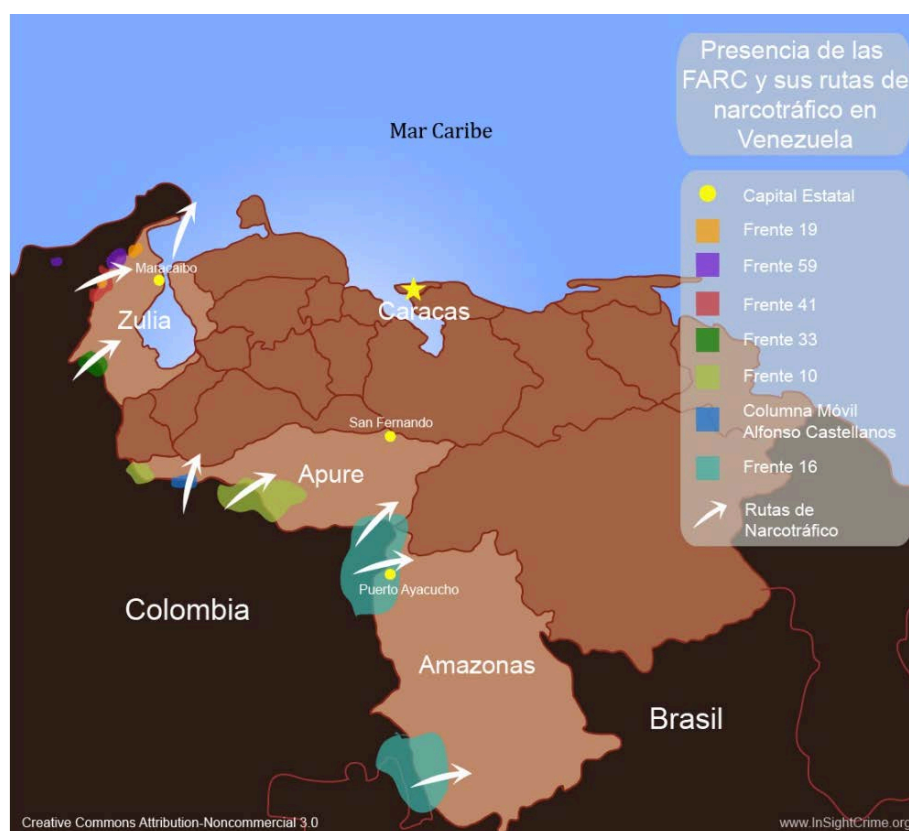
<http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/farc-en-venezuela> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015].

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.

FARC and the Venezuelan government has become a subject of debate internationally. The U.S Office of Foreign Assets Control has sanctioned several senior officials in the Venezuelan security forces for allegedly helping the FARC in cocaine trafficking, including General Henry de Jesus Rangel Silva, Minister of Defense of Venezuela during Chavez's presidency<sup>58</sup>.

The FARC has been involved in criminal activities in Venezuela such as kidnapping, extortion, drug production, and drug trafficking, especially cocaine<sup>59</sup>. The InSight Crime Foundation has created the following map. 9 with the areas of operations of the FARC in Venezuela:



Map 9: The FARC and its drug routes in Venezuela.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> U.S Department of the Treasury Press Center. *Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Supporting the FARC*.

<http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp1132.aspx> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015]

<sup>59</sup> InSight Crime Foundation. *FARC en Venezuela*.

<http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/farc-en-venezuela> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015].

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

Finally, the InSight Crime Foundation lists the name of a cartel that nowadays has become well known in Venezuelan society and the international scene, the *Cartel de los Soles* or Cartel of the Suns. The Cartel de los Soles is a criminal organization formed by different cells of the main branches of the Venezuelan Armed Forces –Army, Navy, Air Force and National Guard- with the purpose of controlling drug trafficking operations in the country<sup>61</sup>. Its name comes from the military decorations “soles” or its equivalent in most English Armed Forces “stars”.

The power of the *Cartel de los Soles* is linked to their access to the principal airports, jails and ports in the country including Puerto Cabello in Carabobo<sup>62</sup>. The *Cartel de los Soles* has been linked to the FARC and some papers consider that FARC is the main drug provider to the cartel<sup>63</sup>.

The increase in the presence of the cartel is related to three key events. Colombia signed the Colombia Plan with the United States that allowed Colombian security forces to press the guerrilla FARC and ELN as never before. In 2002, during the government of President Andrés Pastrana, the Colombian Peace Process between the Colombian government and the FARC ended, depriving the guerrillas of their refuge in South Colombia. Therefore, they had to move to other places such as the Colombia-Venezuela border and Venezuelan territory as well. On the other hand, the Hugo Chávez coup d’état intent forced Chávez to strengthen his circle of trust, which meant that many influential positions in government were granted to senior officials loyal to him<sup>64</sup>. Hugo Chávez established a military operations center along the border with Colombia due to the fear of invasion by the United States via Colombia. This is considered one of the main events that triggered corruption of the Venezuelan Armed Forces through drug trafficking<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> InSight Crime Foundation. *El Perfil del Cartel de los soles*. <http://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-sobre-crimen-organizado-en-venezuela/cartel-de-los-soles-perfil> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015]

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem

According to the same report, the *modus operandi* of the Cartel de los Soles consists of trading cocaine for arms along the border through negotiations with the FARC, then the cartel uses different trafficking routes. The most popular ones are by plane to Dominican Republic and Honduras, by car to Suriname, and by ships to Africa where it is moved to Europe. When it is transported by car, the cocaine tends to be kept on farms owned by civilian contacts<sup>66</sup>.

An elite unit of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Washington (DEA) and federal prosecutors in New York and Miami are investigating several high-ranking Venezuelan officials, including the president of the country's congress, Diosdado Cabello, on suspicion that they have turned the country into an international hub for cocaine trafficking, linking them to the Cartel de los Soles<sup>67</sup>. The DEA has been using evidence provided by former cocaine traffickers, informants who claim to be once close to top Venezuelan officials and defectors from the Venezuelan military<sup>68</sup>.

Consequently, the presence of these armed groups and *carteles* controlling drug trafficking activity in the country is related to the complicity element ruled in the theoretical framework used in this paper. The complicity is visible when members of the security force and high-ranking officials of the country are linked to the drug trafficking activity, even leading the main drug cartel, as numerous international investigation points out.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the empirical evidence allowed us to observe that there is a positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. The federal entities

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<sup>66</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>67</sup> Córdoba, José. 2015. Venezuelan Officials Suspected of turning Country into Global Cocaine Hub. *The Wall Street Journal*.  
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelan-officials-suspected-of-turning-country-into-global-cocaine-hub-1431977784> [Last access: September 2nd, 2015]

<sup>68</sup> Scharfenberg, Ewald. 2015. Nueva Luz sobre el misterioso Cartel de los Soles. *El País*  
[http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/20/actualidad/1432081421\\_097807.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/20/actualidad/1432081421_097807.html)  
[Last access: September 2nd, 2015]

where the drug trafficking activity is more intense experienced the highest effects of the rise of the homicide rate, which answers the previously established research question.

As shown in the tables and maps, the federal entities that used to have the highest homicide rates in the country have maintained high levels of homicides, especially the Distrito Capital and its surrounding areas. Some border states such as Zulia, Bolivar and Apure are commonly known as the drug entrances in the country. Most anti-drug trafficking plans are developed in those states. Although that does not necessarily mean there is no trafficking activity (as it is possible to observe in the previous section, the drug trafficking activity in those states is still very intense) the plans do not increase the homicide level more as we could expect. Nonetheless, the percentage increase in those three states is between 300% and 500% as seen in Chart 2.

As Yashar's theory suggested, the states that have experienced the biggest increase in the homicide rate are part of the cocaine trafficking route, especially port cities and border states. Although the state that has had the highest homicide rate between the period of time evaluated has been Distrito Capital, the states that had the lowest homicide rates in 1995 have experienced the biggest increase, not necessarily densely populated federal entities. The most visible case is Delta Amacuro, a low populated federal entity ruled by the incumbent party. It has experienced the biggest increase in homicide rate between 1995 and 2012, increasing the rate by 1421.56%. Therefore, after investigating the federal entity, it was found that its role in the cocaine trafficking route has increased recently due to its geography, not only because of the number of rivers perfect for the navigation of clandestine ships, but also because it is a border state with Guyana and the closest port from Trinidad and Tobago.

Also, as it was expected in the theory, Venezuela has low levels of state capacity with low levels of rule of law and high levels of corruption. The presence of different drug trafficking organizations operating in the country, drug cartels directed and formed by members of the Security Forces and Senior Official sanctioned and being investigated by the DEA for their relationship with the FARC and the *Cartel de los Soles* (including the president of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello) is evidence of the complicity level that DTOs expect in the



country. Also it is strategically located in the Caribbean, being the perfect exit for drugs to the United States and Europe. It thus fulfills the decision process drawn by Yashar, in which DTOs pick the countries to transport drugs not only for geography, but also for the monitoring capacity of that country.

The geography, the high level of complicity and low monitoring capacity experienced in Venezuela since 1999 made the country perfect for drug trafficking activities. Once the routes were set, as Yashar suggests, there has been a competition to control the trade routes and territorial enclaves, as is the case of Delta Amacuro, where the news shows that there is a fight for power between the gangs. This is the key reason why violent crimes continue to occur in the country.

Nevertheless, this research has the limitation of the data. As mentioned before, the access to official data has been limited during the studied period. Therefore, it was not possible to use only one data source to make the comparison. However, the data used showed the same increase tendency and shares elements already explained that make it suitable for comparing and drawing conclusions. On the other hand, further studies could take place if there is more available data in the future in order to compare the results shown in this research.

This research has shown that there has been a negative effect in the drug trafficking activity in the country and the homicide rate increase since 1999. This investigation recommends developing anti-corruption policies in the country in order to reduce the interaction between the DTOs and the government institutions. Anti-corruption formation, sanction processes and control in the security forces are also desirable to reduce drug trafficking activity. However the most relevant issue to work with is the impunity level in the criminal system that not only allows drug trafficking gangs to operate in the country without any sanctions, but also lets common crime increase as impunity has become socially acceptable in the country.

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