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Research Report

Crime, Violence, and Community-Based Prevention in Honduras

Justice, Security and Development Series

Louis-Alexandre Berg
Marlon Carranza

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The Justice, Security and Development Series

This research report is part of a series on Justice, Security and Development, produced with the generous support of the Bank-Netherlands Partnership Program (BNPP). The series presents the findings and critical reflections of a three-year work program aimed at improving development approaches to justice and security stresses in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Drawing from reviews of current scholarship, in-depth field research, and engagement with development programs, the papers in the series seek to identify the key challenges and obstacles to effective development, and propose ways to re-frame the challenges and solutions as a basis for more effective development programs. The framing paper for this series, *Justice and Institutional Change in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: Re-Framing the Challenges and Solutions*, presents the rationale, organizing logic and conclusions of this work.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

Louis-Alexandre Berg is a Research Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and a Justice and Conflict Specialist in the World Bank's Justice, Rights and Public Safety Practice. He has conducted extensive field research on local dynamics of crime and violence and on the politics of security and justice system reform in conflict-affected countries. He previously served as a Rule of Law Adviser at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), an adviser to the U.S. Institute of Peace's Security Sector Governance Program and a consultant to the United Nations Development Program. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University, an M.P.A. from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and a B.A. from Brown University.

Marlon Carranza is completing a PhD in cultural anthropology at the University of Florida. He was previously the Coordinator of the University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP) at the Central American University Jose Simeon Canas (UCA) in El Salvador. He has conducted research on youth violence and gangs in Central America and is the co-author of *Maras y Pandillas en Centroamerica, 2002-2006*, as well as several book chapters and reports. He has contributed to the design of public policy to prevent youth violence as the coordinator of several technical committees on gangs, and as a consultant for the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, USAID, and several United Nations agencies.

Executive Summary

Violent crime has emerged as a growing development challenge, affecting large segments of societies and taking a severe toll on economic development. In many high crime environments, weak institutions, fiscal constraints, and political resistance have undermined the effectiveness of development programs and threatened their sustainability. The World Bank has begun to confront this challenge. Building upon successful experiences, it has expanded its support to crime prevention through an approach that balances criminal justice and law enforcement with efforts to address the factors associated with violence and its prevention.

The country of Honduras is the most violent in the world as measured by its homicide rate, which reached 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012 (UNODC 2013). Yet levels of violence vary across time and space. In 2012, 65 percent of homicides occurred in 5 percent of urban municipalities, and within those areas, they were further concentrated in a small number of "hotspot" neighborhoods. Understanding why some neighborhoods in Honduras are more affected than others can point the way toward effective prevention approaches.

This report presents the findings of a study of crime dynamics and prevention practices focused around a comparison of nine neighborhoods in three of the most violent cities in Honduras: La Ceiba, El Progreso, and Choloma. The research revealed that although the transnational drug trade, economic downturn, and political crisis have deepened the country's vulnerability, some neighborhoods have successfully prevented crime. Drawing from extensive qualitative research in these neighborhoods, the study identified practices that communities pursue to prevent violence through collective responses. It also examined the characteristics of communities, societal factors, and institutional context that have enabled or constrained these responses. The research points to measures that can be built upon, scaled up and tested through future research and programming to strengthen community-based crime prevention. It illustrates how deep examination of the dynamics of insecurity—and the ways communities manage it—can inform efforts to improve public safety in violence-prone countries.

THE EVOLUTION OF VIOLENT CRIME IN HONDURAN NEIGHBORHOODS

A combination of transnational and national forces in Honduras has contributed to sharply rising crime rates since 2006. The shift in the transnational drug trade into the country has fueled a change in the nature and structure of criminal groups, while economic instability and political conflict have increased the vulnerability of Honduran society to these changes. As a result, homicide rates have climbed sharply in recent years.

In northern Honduras, these trends have contributed to a change in the nature of crime as it is experienced by urban residents. Neighborhood-based youth gangs have declined as new groups have emerged to contest control over drug transit routes. Crimes, which include widespread homicide, drug trafficking, extortion, assault, robbery, and domestic violence, are today more often conducted anonymously than when neighborhood gangs were the primary perpetrators. This shifting landscape has generated widespread fear and uncertainty regarding where and when violence will take place and who will perpetrate it. Yet many residents nonetheless perceive their own neighborhoods to be safe, even in areas with high homicide rates. This variation points to the highly localized nature of crime and suggests that some communities have prevented crime from taking hold in their neighborhoods.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE WITHIN COMMUNITIES: COERCION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The study identified two distinct forms of violence prevention in vulnerable neighborhoods. In some communities with relatively low homicide rates, armed groups have pushed out their competitors and achieved a level of control that inhibits violence. The identity of these groups varies, from known criminal gangs to secretive vigilante groups and organized crime networks. Although residents of these neighborhoods sometimes report a greater sense of safety due to fewer homicides, they also point to ways in which violence and insecurity persist as other crimes, such as extortion, assault, and robbery, remain widespread.

In other communities with low levels of violence, residents have taken actions to prevent incidents of crime and minimize the conditions that might allow violence to thrive. Residents organize collective measures to address a range of problems, including violence prevention. These forms of violence prevention, summarized in figure 1, are remarkably low cost and relatively simple to organize.

Figure 1. Community Crime Prevention Actions

THE CONDITIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION

The ability of communities to organize collective prevention measures depends on the extent of fragmentation or integration within the neighborhood. While community associations are present in most urban neighborhoods in Honduras, they tend to be highly fragmented. Individuals frequently know only members of their own group and rarely collaborate across groups for community-wide action. In some neighborhoods, however, dense interpersonal ties between these associations, along with a shared identity and norms, facilitate community-wide collaboration. These attributes provide the foundation for the organization, interpersonal knowledge, and communication that facilitate collective responses to violence. Although neighborhood associations thus form the building blocks of effective violence prevention, their role and impact vary. Yet strengthening and integrating community groups *can* enable effective violence prevention.

Community-level capacity for violence prevention also reflects a broader range of societal factors and the institutional context. Urban migration, unemployment, and the lack of access to education weaken community organization and shared identity. The prevalence of drugs, guns, and organized crime creates a climate of fear and inhibits collective action. Unreliable access to basic services from the municipal and national governments—due to a combination of polarized politics, weak institutional capacity, and limited resources—constrains community

efforts because of the challenges involved in securing basic resources or protection from the state. As people lack trust in state authority and community leaders to address widespread insecurity, they become less willing to participate in community organization and more willing to rely on alternative sources of authority, including protection by criminal armed actors.

Figure 2. Conditions for Community-Based Prevention

Fragmented Community

Sparse Internal Ties

Weak Community Identity

Community Organization
Patronato
Churches
Primary School
Sports Teams
Informal Leaders
Women's Groups

Community Risk Factors
Rapid Migration
Unemployment
Access to Education
Drug Consumption
Proximity to Drug Routes
Access to Firearms
History of Vigilantism

Cohesive Community

Dense Internal Ties

Strong Community Identity

Some communities have nonetheless succeeded in securing resources through a combination of effective organization, persistence, and the ability to pursue multiple channels to municipal and national government. The research pointed to changes in municipal governance, such as improved data, planning, and financing systems, that have created more favorable environments for community prevention in some places. Yet the research also found that proactive support by community networks remains essential even in the presence of more effective state institutions.

Based on these findings, the following areas can serve as entry points for further investment and research in support for violence prevention in Honduras and elsewhere.

Invest in community organizations by incorporating efforts to deepen inter-group ties, community identity, and shared norms into interventions, while encouraging communities to organize collective measures to prevent violence.

Target specific risk factors—especially drug and alcohol consumption, the prevalence of firearms, and the limited access to secondary education—that constrain community organization and deepen the effects of other risk dynamics and that can be addressed through focused community-, municipal-, and national-level intervention.

Strengthen municipal-level planning and response, focusing on systems to collect and analyze data on crime, population, and service-delivery needs; municipal financing systems; inclusive planning processes to prioritize responses; and the monitoring of outcomes.

Explore opportunities for police and justice sector reform. The research found widespread support for reform despite the deep challenges. Efforts to understand the constraints, facilitate policy dialogue, and measure results could help drive reform efforts. Municipal governments could explore neighborhood-level responses, learning from pilot community policing, local mediation, and alternative dispute-resolution initiatives.

Build the evidence base. Data collection and analysis facilitates crime prevention by identifying the nature of crime, its causes and actors, and the impact of different approaches. Data collection processes should be strengthened and used more systematically by municipal and national governments to plan responses and monitor impact.

"All processes of violence have diverse causes and are dynamic, they are not static, they are constantly evolving, therefore the ways to overcome them must also continually evolve."

—Municipal Official, Choloma, Honduras

1. Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW

Honduras is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Its homicide rate reached 90.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012, the highest in the world (UNODC 2013). The impacts of this violence have grown increasingly broad, affecting a large swath of the population and taking a severe toll on economic development. The annual cost of violence in the country has been estimated to be as high as 10 percent of GDP, or nearly US$900 million (World Bank 2010, 31). Despite consensus on the need to reduce crime, however, disagreement remains on the most effective means of achieving this goal (Pine 2008; Cruz 2010). While the emphasis on repression and law enforcement has increasingly been complemented by preventive approaches, evidence is scarce regarding the nature of crime at the local level or the impact of different approaches to combatting it. Within this context, in 2012, the Government of Honduras launched the Safer Municipalities Program (*Municipios más Seguros*), with financial and technical support from the World Bank and other donors. The program aims to strengthen policy coordination while boosting the capacity of national institutions and municipal governments to plan and manage crime prevention programs. A central component of this program is to build the evidence base needed to plan and evaluate prevention programming.

This report sheds light on the changing nature of crime in Honduran cities and the means that have been effective in preventing it, focusing on the role of communities and municipalities. Differences in violence over time and space suggest that both the causes of crime and the capacity to prevent it vary considerably. The overall crime rate in Honduras has increased dramatically over time, doubling between 2006 and 2011. Yet violence is highly concentrated geographically, with 65 percent of homicides occurring in only 5 percent of urban municipalities in 2013 (UNAH-IUDPAS 2014). The Departments of Cortes, Atlántida, and Yoro on the northern coast reported homicide rates for 2013 of 133.3, 115.1, and 105.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively, while other regions have a homicide rate as low as 20 (UNAH-IUDPAS 2014). Within the most affected cities, violence is concentrated in specific "hotspots," with stark differences between neighborhoods that appear similar demographically, socially, and economically.

The research conducted for this study examined this variation to shed light on the approaches that have successfully prevented crime in violence-prone cities. The study found that neighborhood characteristics affect the presence and intensity of violent crime, and that communities with certain capabilities have successfully prevented crime even in the most violent surroundings. In these neighborhoods, community organizations cut across neighborhood subgroups to foster shared identity and facilitate communication, enabling residents to organize collective responses to violence. Densely tied community organizations thus mediate the effects of broader social, economic, and demographic pressures. At the same time, the presence and impact of densely tied community organizations depends on how these trends have played out in particular neighborhoods, as well as on the features of the urban political economy. Since

communities depend on municipal and national institutions, the political economy that shapes the distribution of resources and determines patterns of authority and control affects opportunities for community-level prevention. Prevailing modes of governance in Honduras tend to constrain neighborhood-level prevention efforts, but the success of some communities points to ways in which municipal and state governments can facilitate prevention efforts through targeted improvements in governance, management, and planning.

The report is laid out as follows. After a brief description of the analytical framework and re-search methodology employed for the study, the second chapter describes the trends behind rising homicide rates that have contributed to shifts in the actors involved and the nature of crimes, and how communities have experienced these changes. The third chapter presents findings that explain the variation in violence between neighborhoods. It describes two distinct means through which communities achieve lower levels of violence, one facilitated by collective action on the part of community members and the other achieved by informal armed groups that control territory and eliminate rivals. The fourth chapter identifies the community-level factors that enable or constrain collective responses to crime, highlighting the fragmentation or integration that exists between community organizations. The fifth chapter explores the political and institutional environment that shapes a community's ability to avert violence. The report concludes by identifying ways in which efforts to strengthen national- and municipal-level policy making can be directed toward more effective prevention approaches.

1.2 FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

In analyzing the dynamics that drive violence in Honduras and shape local capacities for prevention, this study draws from three broad strands of research. First, it draws on research on the factors associated with risk among individuals, communities, or societies that are afflicted by high levels of crime.[1] This "social-ecological model" considers how the complex interplay between factors involving the individual

(e.g., educational attainment, unemployment), family relationship (e.g., family size), community (e.g., poor urban infrastructure, weak community organization, social norms), and society (e.g., economic inequality, unemployment, migration and urbanization, the prevalence of drugs and firearms) puts people at risk for violence or protects them from experiencing or perpetrating it (Dahlberg and Krug 2002; Bronfenbrenner 1979). Rather than any one factor causing or preventing crime, it is understood that the accumulation of risk and protective factors increases or decreases the likelihood of involvement in it, and that factors at various levels interact in complex ways (Moser and McIlwaine 2006). These findings have been applied to the design of crime prevention policy through efforts to identify the most salient risk factors at different levels of analysis—individual, family, community, and society—and design interventions to address them (IDB 2012; Krug et al. 2002; Moser and Shrader 1999; Welsh and Farrington 2010).

In the Latin American context, most research on violent crime has focused on individual or societal-level factors (Briceño-León 2005; World Bank 2010). Yet emerging research has increasingly demonstrated the importance of the features of the urban social context at the community level (Moura and Neto 2015; Imbusch, Misse, and Carrion 2011; Villarreal and Silva 2006). Chapter 2 explores the macro-level factors that have fueled an evolution in the nature of crime in Honduras and then turns to a focused exam-ination of community-level influences. It describes how these structural changes interact with factors at the neighborhood and individual levels and how they have been experienced by urban residents.

To explain variation in crime rates across neigh-borhoods, this study particularly draws from research on neighborhood and community-level factors that affect the risk of involvement in crime. Criminology research in North America and Europe has demonstrated that crime tends to concentrate in geographic "hot spots," and that efforts to target crime have been effective (Groff, Weisburd, and Yang 2010; Braga and Weisburd 2010). One explanation for these findings, known as routine activity theory, examines how patterns of individual behavior

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1 For an overview of this literature that cuts across criminology, sociology, economics, and public health as applied to the Latin American context, see Imbusch, Misse, and Carrion (2011); Briceño-León, Villaveces, and Concha-Eastman (2008); Winton (2004); and World Bank (2010).

lead to the salience of certain locations—malls, movie theatres, and other public spaces—in which perpetrators and victims tend to cluster (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger 1989; Cohen and Felson 1979). This approach has tended to focus on "micro-level" spaces and does not account for why entire neighborhoods or communities tend to be more violent than others.[2] A second approach focuses on features of the physical environment that affect the cost and benefit of perpetrating crime by facilitating surveillance or deterring criminal acts (Clarke 1997, 2008). This theory has been applied, including in Latin America, through an approach known as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), which looks for changes in the physical environment, such as street lighting, that might reduce opportunities for crime (Eck 2006). Although such approaches have been quite effective, research suggests that changes in the physical environment may actually be proxies for underlying characteristics of the community (Welsh and Farrington 2010).

Another approach to explaining local-level variation, known as social disorganization theory, focuses on the characteristics of the community that shape opportunities for crime and facilitate prevention (Bursik 1988; Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Sampson and Groves 1989; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Dense internal ties, interpersonal trust, and shared expectations enable community members to activate shared norms through informal social control referred to as "collective efficacy" (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sampson and Raudenbush 1999; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001). Communities with dense internal ties have also demonstrated greater resilience to violence and the ability to prevent crime from taking root even after facing episodes of violence (Norris et al. 2008). These community characteristics are in turn influenced by structural factors, such as poverty, residential instability, and racial and ethnic heterogeneity, that vary across neighborhoods.

The community characteristics explored in the latter strand of research are especially relevant to understanding neighborhood-level variations in violent crime in Honduras. Given the weakness of state institutions, local social and political networks

that operate within communities play an especially important role in mediating structural factors. Yet the specific forms of collective action and informal social control—and how they differ from those found in North America and Europe—have not been explored in depth. Collective efficacy manifests in a range of actions that are shaped by the cultural, historical, and social context. Both the specific measures and the conditions that enable them may differ significantly in the Honduran context from those that have been found in more developed countries and even in other parts of Latin America. Through qualitative research within communities, this study explores these variations and how they play out in the Honduran context, as a basis for formulating hypotheses to be tested through further research and programming. Chapter 3 explores the particular forms of informal social control exercised at the neighborhood level, while Chapter 4 explores the community characteristics that enable them.

The study also draws from a third body of work that situates the capacity of communities to prevent or mitigate violence within the urban political economy. Violent crime, state responses, and the ability of communities to respond reflect the changing nature of relations between political decision makers, economic elites, and local leaders (Agostini et al. 2007). Research in North America has found that communities that can mobilize resources outside the community—from government, businesses, and private networks—tend to be more effective in community-based crime prevention (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Sampson 2012). In countries where the authority of the state is weaker, the urban political economy affects crime in other ways. Some cities in these contexts have struggled to keep up with changing trade flows, urban migration, and the growth of illicit economies, resulting in significant variation in the provision of public goods like security across time and space (Rodgers 2009). Varying responses to violent crime by national, state, and municipal governments reflect the nature of political alliances, economic interests, and community organizations (Moncada 2013; Gutierrez Sanin et al. 2009; Arias 2013). In shaping policy responses, these features of the political economy affect the degree to which personnel and resources for law enforcement

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2   Studies of "hot spots" emphasize that since crime tends to cluster in micro-areas within neighborhoods, targeting at that level is more efficient than focusing on neighborhoods (see Groff, Weisburd, and Yang (2010)). However, such approaches may be less feasible in Honduras for reasons discussed below.

and crime prevention are present or accessible for a given community. Varying state response has also resulted in urban areas in which formal state authority is barely present and in which criminal armed actors have gained authority through various forms of coercion, accommodation, and legitimation with communities, businesses, and political entities (Lemanski 2006; Rodgers 2006; Penglase 2009). Studies of the Brazilian *favelas* (slums), for instance, reveal that organized criminal groups have established and enforced certain types of predictable order, in part by establishing themselves as brokers between communities and political elites (Penglase 2009; Arias 2004). The ways in which the political and institutional context shapes opportunities for crime and community-based prevention in Honduran neighborhoods are explored in Chapter 5.

In sum, the study explores how community-level factors affect the incidence of crime and the capacity to prevent it in the urban neighborhoods of the Northern Coast of Honduras. Through qualitative research, it examines how various risk factors interact; how specific forms of informal social control protect against the risk of crime; how certain community characteristics enable prevention at the neighborhood level; and how the features of the institutional landscape and political economy shape community-level efforts to prevent violent crime.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in three municipalities of Honduras, La Ceiba, El Progreso, and Choloma, in April–August 2013. These cities have among the highest homicide rates, at 140.7, 132.3, and 68.7 homicides per 100,000 people, respectively, in 2013,[3] and were also chosen for the World Bank's Safer Municipalities Program. The core of the analysis involved a structured comparison of nine neighborhoods, including three from each municipality, with similar characteristics but different

levels of violence.[4] Neighborhoods in Honduras are geographically defined areas that are recognized by municipal governments as the basic unit for the delivery of services and infrastructure. In each neighborhood, the research team examined residents' perceptions of violence and crime, the nature of community organization, the presence of government institutions, and the experience of residents in preventing or responding to incidents of violence. The research thus examined how community-level characteristics shaped the way residents responded to violent crime in their areas.

Selection of Neighborhoods

The study compared three neighborhoods in each municipality with higher and lower levels of violence. Neighborhoods were selected following a two-step process. First, neighborhoods across each municipality were ranked according to demographic and socioeconomic data, including population size,[5] energy consumption (as a proxy for income level),[6] and the presence of primary and secondary schools,[7] to define a set of comparable neighborhoods in terms of basic risk factors for violent crime.[8] For each municipality, neighborhoods at the bottom two quartiles of energy consumption, of medium population size (between 200 and 1,500 households), and with a primary school were pre-selected through this process. Next, three of these neighborhoods were chosen from each municipality based on their level of violence as measured by their homicide rates:[9] one with above average levels of violence, another with low levels of violence, and a third with a significant reduction in homicides during the past four years. Additional criteria included the feasibility of conducting research as well as a basic level of community organization to ensure comparability.[10] To protect the participants in the study, the names of the selected neighborhoods have been withheld from this report. (See Annex 1 for data and selection results.)

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3   UNAH/IUPDAS (2014).

4   Neighborhoods in Honduras are administratively defined geographic territories with a leadership structure and territorial boundaries.

5   Data provided by municipal governments, based on the number of households.

6   As a proxy for income level, energy consumption data was collected from the *Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica (ENEE)*.

7   Based on official registries from the Ministry of Education.

8   Few other reliable data were available disaggregated by neighborhood.

9   Homicide was the only statistic reliably reported and disaggregated at the neighborhood level. Data were verified by the National Violence Observatory of the University of Honduras.

10 For each neighborhood, a brief questionnaire on community organization was administered to municipal government officials to ensure a basic level of community organization.

Data Collection

The methodology used in the data collection and analysis was primarily qualitative, including 27 focus group discussions (three in each neighborhood) and 55 semi-structured interviews, for a total of roughly 250 respondents. In each neighborhood, one focus group was conducted with adult women, another with adult men, and another with youth aged 16–25, both male and female. Interviews were conducted with neighborhood leaders and with victims of crime. Participants were selected through a three-stage "snowball" technique, starting with community leaders, who referred other leaders of community organizations (including sports teams, churches, women's groups, youth groups, etc.), who in turn each referred additional individuals.

The research applied four types of methods to explore multiple facets of community life. First, the focus group discussions employed a "social mapping process," followed by semi-structured discussion. Through participatory techniques, participants "mapped" the community organizations, leaders, and actors present in a given neighborhood, their roles in fueling or preventing violence, and the links between them and with government officials. They also discussed the particular forms of violence and risk factors that affected them. Second, "case-process tracking" interviews were conducted with individuals who had been victims of a violent crime or conflict, including gender-based violence, theft, assault, or an interpersonal dispute with neighbors, to explore how individuals reacted after the incident and how community organizations, leaders, and state institutions responded. Third, interviews were conducted with neighborhood leaders to provide context and detail on the historical evolution, institutional presence, and social and political dynamics in the community, and with municipal officials and public figures outside the communities on the dynamics within the municipality and the relationship between communities, municipal governments, and national authorities. Finally, the research team conducted participant observation, through extensive time in the neighborhoods over a six month period to observe types of violence and dynamics of informal social control.

In addition to interviews, focus groups and observation, the research drew from a variety of supplementary data sources. Municipal- and national-level data provided the basis for the selection of neighborhoods and served to confirm observed patterns of crime and service delivery. The team also consulted reports and secondary sources that are cited throughout the report.

Contributions and Limitations

The research enabled an in-depth exploration of how communities experienced and responded to violent crime in their neighborhoods. The structured comparison of neighborhoods with higher and lower levels of violence enabled the research team to identify distinct ways that communities manage violence and to demonstrate how specific conditions and practices within communities contribute to lower and higher violence levels. The small number of neighborhoods and non-random selection does not allow for causal attribution. Given the insecurity in these communities, the research team selected areas where they could operate without significant security risk to themselves or community residents. The three municipalities selected for the study are not necessarily representative of cities in Honduras or elsewhere, thus raising questions of external validity. Nonetheless, the high levels of violence make them particularly relevant, and identifying ways in which communities within such contexts succeed in preventing crime is especially valuable. The combination of comparison and extensive qualitative research provided rich nuance regarding how crime has evolved and how communities have responded. It also pointed to specific practices and approaches that can be built upon, scaled up, and tested through further research.

2. The Evolution of Violent Crime in Honduran Neighborhoods

The nature of violence in Honduras has evolved considerably over the past decade. The most obvious shift—the sharp rise in homicide rates from 32 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2004 to 90.4 per 100,000 in 2012 (UNODC 2013)—masks other changes in the nature of criminal actors and the types of crimes that are most commonly experienced. This section lays out these changes and the broader trends that have fueled them, drawing from country-level data as well as perceptions of residents of the selected neighborhoods. The growth of crime can be understood in the context of several risk factors that have worsened during this period, including poverty, unemployment, urban migration, and shifts in the transnational drug trade, along with a political crisis

that weakened the capacity of the state to respond. The resulting changes in criminal activity have altered the intensity and the nature of insecurity experienced by urban residents.

Although crime has evolved in the last decade, this evolution has been neither linear nor consistent. A clear finding from the qualitative research is that the nature of crime and insecurity vary across time and space—even within a given neighborhood—resulting in uncertainty that exacerbates perceptions of insecurity. Understanding this landscape and its internal variations sheds light on the experience of residents, as well as the possibilities for violence prevention.

Figure 3. Homicide Rates in Central America and Mexico, 2000–2012
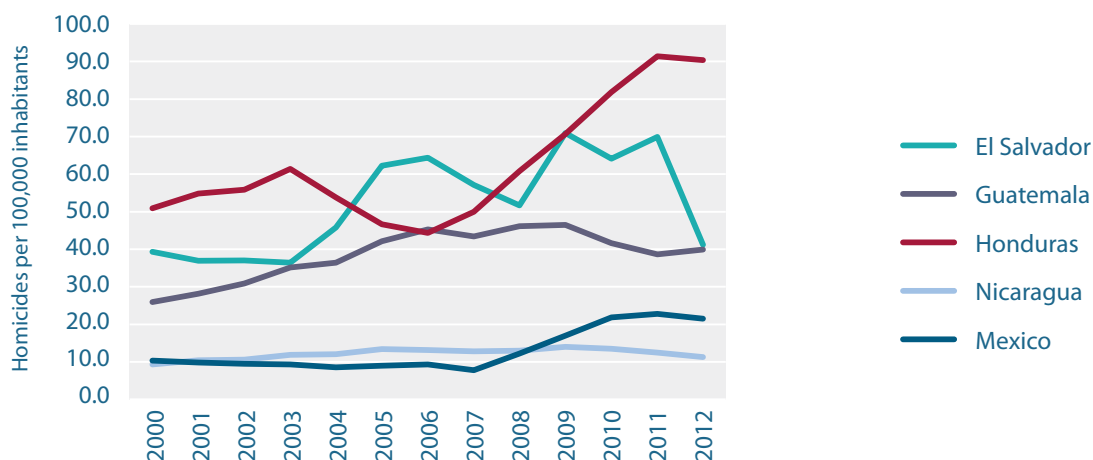
Source: UNODC (2013).

2.1 NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL TRENDS

A combination of transnational and national-level forces has contributed to rising homicide rates in Honduras since 2006. The shift of the transnational drug trade into Honduras has fueled a change in the nature and structure of criminal groups, as neighborhood gangs have declined relative to larger organized crime groups. Economic crisis, institutional weakness, and political conflict have deepened the vulnerability of Honduran society. These trends have produced changes in both the intensity and the nature of crime experienced in urban neighborhoods.

Long vulnerable to the influence of external forces, Honduras was particularly affected by the global economic crisis in the late 2000s. The second-largest country in Central America, its economy has been driven largely by international investment since the 19th century. Today, with a population of nearly 8 million people and a GDP of US$18.4 billion, Honduras is considered a lower-middle-income country. Its economy has shifted from reliance on agricultural exports toward services and manufacturing exports, which now account for roughly 55 and 30 percent of GDP, respectively, while agriculture accounts for only 14 percent (World Bank 2014). Yet it remains vulnerable to global trends and suffered acutely following the 2008 crisis. The percentage of the population living in poverty increased from 58.3

percent in 2007 to 66.2 percent in 2012, while youth unemployment increased from 4.9 to 8.2 percent in the same period (World Bank 2014). Honduras has also maintained one of the highest levels of income inequality in Latin America.

Urbanization and migration further increased the vulnerability of Honduran cities to violent crime. During the 1980s and 1990s the creation of dozens of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) accelerated urban migration, especially around the industrial city of San Pedro Sula in the north (Kerssen 2013). Some cities struggled to maintain the infrastructure necessary to cater to the growing population, leading to uneven access to services. In the city of Choloma, the EPZs fueled a 78 percent population increase between 1988 and 2010, with 44.3 percent of the current population originating from other parts of the country.[11] El Progreso shifted from a center for agricultural workers in the nearby banana plantations to an industrial center and trade route from the coast to San Pedro Sula. These cities have formed pockets of high unemployment—especially among youth and other new entrants to the job market—since opportunities do not equal the demand from new migrants. Limited labor market opportunities have also driven a steady stream of emigration, which has contributed to the vulnerability of individual youth who lack parental supervision.

Figure 4. Youth Unemployment and Homicide Rates, 2000–2012
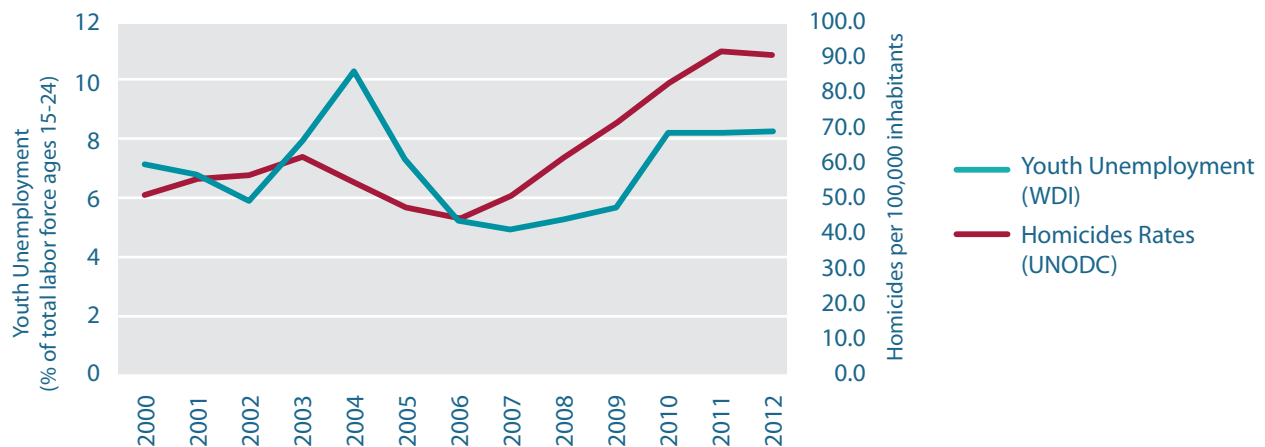
Source: World Development Indicators; UNODC (2013).

11 Based on projections by the Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas of the Government of Honduras.

Youth gangs first appeared in the 1980s in poor urban communities. The transition from military to civilian rule along with rapid urbanization fueled the rise of small, disconnected groups that conducted such minor criminal activities as vandalism, robberies, and assaults (Castro and Carranza 2001, 238). In the mid-1990s, the mass deportation of Hondurans from the United States fueled the emergence of the transnational *maras* (gangs), led by gang members from Los Angeles who exported their style and organization to countries around the region. By the late 1990s, most gangs in Honduras were affiliated with either the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS) or the 18th Street Gang (*Barrio 18*) (Mateo 2011). Yet the *maras* remained largely decentralized, with local cells rooted in individual neighborhoods and motivated by a combination of peer pressure, identity, small-scale crime, and control over turf (Cruz 2007).

The gang phenomenon evolved in the 2000s in response to policy changes by the Honduran government. During the presidency of Ricardo Maduro in 2002–06, through a series of measures known as *mano dura* (strong hand) the government adopted an approach of zero tolerance for gang activity, including through repression by the police and the military. For example, the reform of article 332 of the penal code (the so called anti-gang law) established the crime of "illicit association," which allowed for the mass incarceration of alleged gang members. Homicide rates initially declined from 56 per 100,000 in 2002 to 34 in 2003 and 32 in 2004; since 2005, however, they have climbed steadily. Following these repressive measures, gangs appear to have altered their organization, becoming less visible in public spaces and spreading from the capital of Tegucigalpa to other parts of the country. Contact with other criminal groups while in prison also led to new links to organized crime (Farah 2012).

The combination of rapid urbanization, economic crisis, and the proliferation of youth gangs deepened the country's vulnerability to a geographic shift in the transnational drug trade. Increased pressures by law enforcement in the Caribbean and Mexico, along with competition between trafficking networks, pushed smuggling routes out of those regions and into Central America, as shown in figure 4 (UNODC 2012). Honduras now serves as the primary transit country for cocaine shipments from South America to the United States (ONDCP 2012). The U.S. State Department has estimated that as much as 87 percent of all cocaine smuggling flights departing South America first land in Honduras (U.S. State Department 2013). As shown in figure 5, the areas of the country with the highest homicide rates lie near transit routes that run along the Honduran coast and into Guatemala. Of the cities included in this study, La Ceiba lies in an especially strategic position along the coast, where planes and speedboats land ashore.

Figure 5. Number of Primary Cocaine Movements Destined for or Interdicted in Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico, 2000–2011.
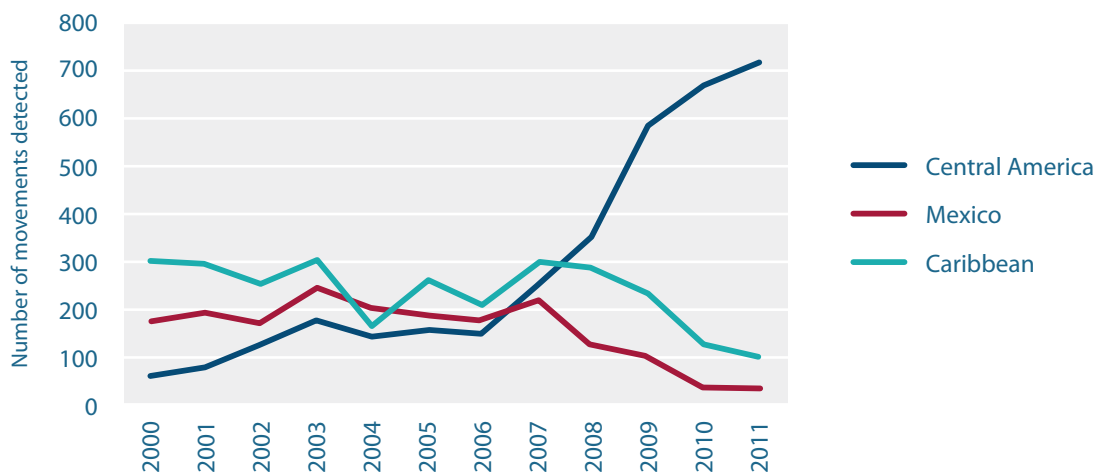
Source: UNODC (2012).

Figure 6. Cocaine Trafficking Routes and Homicide Rates in Honduras
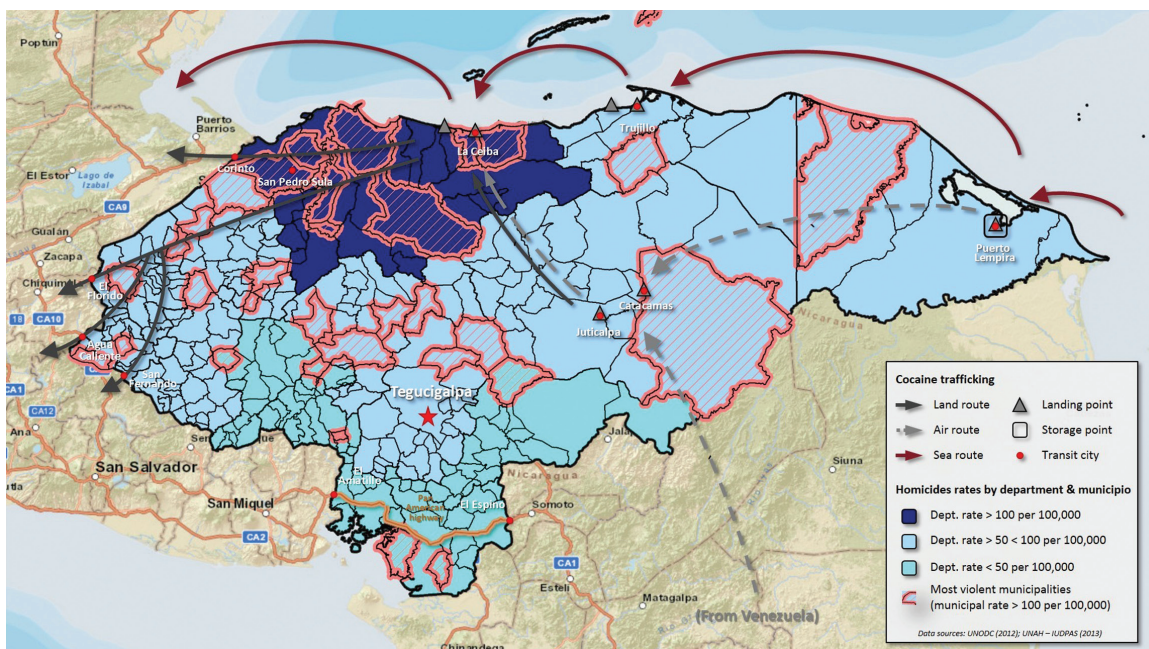
Source: UNODC (2013); UNAH-IUDPAS (2014).

Choloma and El Progreso sit along the route between San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, which represent important internal markets. In 2013, the three cities had the highest homicide rates after Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula (UNAH-IUDPAS 2014).

The society's vulnerability to these changes deepened as a result of political conflict. In June 2009, President Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a coup d'état following political tension over his efforts to lift presidential term limits. The coup paralyzed state institutions for months and led to a fiscal crisis as external donors suspended aid disbursements (Bosworth 2010). The events also fueled deep polarization between supporters of the left-leaning Liberal and right-leaning National parties, which has manifested itself in local political divisions. The events created an opportunity for organized crime networks to expand their influence while weakening already fragile state security forces and municipal government institutions.

In the face of these challenges, policy responses have continued to evolve. Following years of preference for *mano dura* policies in the 2000s, the government gradually began to move toward greater attention to prevention, particularly at the municipal level. In 2012, the Honduran government adopted the Safer Municipalities Program, which called for an integrated approach to fighting violence, and appointed a Secretary of State for Security in charge of prevention efforts. It also announced several measures aimed at reforming the police and criminal justice system, including a vetting process for the police. At the local level, some municipalities have sought to strengthen their response by providing resources to the police and through planning processes supported by external donors.[12] Implementation of these efforts has been mixed, however, and policy makers—especially those at the national level—continue to express a preference for repressive approaches. Moreover, few of these efforts have so far been grounded in a clear understanding of the changing dynamics of crime at the local level.

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12 Several municipalities, including La Ceiba and Choloma, completed a "Local Coexistence and Citizen Security Plan" (*Plan Local de Convivencia y Serguridad Ciudadana*) in 2012, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

2.2 EVOLVING ACTORS: YOUTH GANGS, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND VIGILANTE GROUPS

From the perspective of residents of urban neighborhoods, a visible change has occurred in the nature of criminal groups, notably the declining influence of youth gangs (*maras*) and the increased presence of groups involved in transnational organized crime. Two distinct narratives emerged from the field research regarding the causes of this evolution: the gangs were either eliminated or transformed into something different. As studies of high crime areas in other developing countries have found, in the context of weak state institutions and in areas at the "margins of the state," "law and other state practices are colonized by other forms of regulation that emanate from the pressing need of population" (Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). The combination of increased vulnerability, weak state institutions, and shifts in transnational crime has led to changes at the neighborhood level in the nature of the criminal actors, leaving local authority and regulation increasingly under contest.

Many of the residents who participated in the study described a shift in the structure and activity of criminal groups. While the *maras* were involved primarily in local forms of violent crime and motivated by a mix of collective identity and peer pressure, residents have more recently observed an increasing level of organization and involvement in more lucrative economic activity.[13] Although certain forms of extortion—known locally as *impuesto de guerra* (war tax)—have long been carried out by gangs, extortion now involves larger scales and greater sophistication. Other organized criminal activities, such as drug trafficking and *sicariato* (contract killing), have also become more common and visible. Unlike in the past, however, these activities are conducted mostly anonymously rather than by recognized neighborhood groups; as a result, community members are no longer certain whether those involved are gang members. One interviewee claimed that although people commonly refer to those involved in crime as "*mareros*" (members of *maras*), they should stop doing so since they are no longer "*en las esquinas*" (on the street corners) the way *maras* used to be. A resident of La Ceiba claimed that most of those involved are actually not gang members but other groups entirely:

> Here in the downtown area, some people charge "war taxes." But those groups do not include any members of *maras* (gangs). They charge war taxes in the name of a *mara*, and sometimes the actual members of the *mara* find out that they are using their name, but they may have nothing to do with them. (Community leader, La Ceiba)

Some people attribute this change to the cooptation of the traditional *maras* by drug cartels that operate in the area. Cartels have established control over larger segments of territory to manage smuggling and local sales, and gang members have either joined the cartels or act at their behest in distributing drugs within communities. Several police and municipal officials confirmed this shift, claiming that some neighborhoods formerly controlled by gangs are now run by drug cartels that control several neighborhoods at once. As one resident explained:

> Here, we can see that there is a strong presence of a cartel. I don't know what it's called, but they operate through the gangs that grew up within this neighborhood. All of the gangs are part of this group. The cartels have succeeded in converting the gangs into their drug distribution arm. (Community leader, Choloma)

People also claim, although less frequently, that gang members have been eliminated from their neighborhoods. The disappearance of gangs is attributed to three inter-related phenomena. In some cases, cartels and organized crime groups seeking to control the sale and transit of drugs forced gangs either to join them or to flee their neighborhoods, while killing those who did not cooperate. As the new groups face competition from rivals, they may themselves be eliminated or coopted, leading to frequent shifts in the dominant criminal groups in many neighborhoods.

> A new style of organized crime has emerged, they control and maintain a certain order, but then a new group becomes powerful and establishes control over a certain block for drug trafficking, and eventually they achieve power over all of it. (Community leader, Choloma)

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13 On the structure and motives of gangs in the past, see Cruz (2010, 379, 398); and Aguilar and Carranza (2008).

In other neighborhoods, people attribute the decline of gang presence to government repression that resulted in the incarceration, killing, or disappearance of gang members. The "Zero Tolerance" policy and criminal code reforms pursued under the government of President Maduro put tremendous pressure on the gangs, leading to the arrest and detention of 1,148 youth in 2003 alone. Local human rights activists reported numerous killings through drive-by shootings, as well as massive killings of gang members in prisons. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Casa Alianza reported a total of 3,091 such killings between 1998 and 2006 (Casa Alianza Honduras 2006; Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner 2011), and several cases reached the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.[14] Reported killings continued beyond the end of the explicit *mano dura* policies.

Other residents trace the disappearance of gangs to the rise of vigilante groups. During the Maduro government, so-called *Comites de Seguridad* (Security Committees) formed autonomously in many neighborhoods, as residents sought to monitor gang activity and respond—often violently—on their own. Although not an official policy, local officials often provided tacit support to these initiatives. Under the government of President Zelaya (2006–09), the government sought to rein in these groups and formalize community participation in local security through an initiative known as the *Mesas de Seguridad Ciudadana* (Citizen Security Tables). Actively promoted by the national police and some local governments, the initiative recruited community leaders to participate in the fight against crime. Although the idea of the *mesas* was to focus on prevention, in practice their primary role was to provide information to the police to facilitate investigation and enforcement, as one resident explained:

> It was common to create Comites de Vigilancia (vigilance committees). They established a committee. It was an armed group that patrolled the community during the day and the night. The group was armed, and if they saw something out of the ordinary they would capture them on their own… But then, three or four years ago they created the famous Mesas de Seguridad, and the presidents of the *patronatos* [community leadership boards] formed a major part

of the community-level mesas. Their function was to serve as an observer or to report crimes, but it was a very risky job. (Community leader, El Progreso)

Many members of the *mesas* were targeted and killed, as a resident of Choloma recalled:

> I was involved [in the *Mesas de Seguridad Ciudadana*], but I didn't really want to commit myself completely. My friend got involved in it, he thought it would bring him a certain status, from being close to the police, the organization, the committee, the oath, to the point that he lived at the police station. And when a police chief arrived he put on a hood and went out with them, but since he was small everyone could identify him. Months later, my friend was found dead… Since their educational level was lacking, they mostly served as informants and many *patronatos* in those days were killed. (Community leader, Choloma)

Although the *mesas* were eventually abandoned, vigilante groups remain active in some places, with varying effects. Official support to these groups ended, but some residents claim that they still operate in their neighborhoods, with varying levels of support. Some of the *mesas* evolved into "community patrols," in which community members act as informal "police." Some of these patrols have even received weapons and training from the police, leading to direct confrontation with gangs and numerous deaths. Residents of some neighborhoods nonetheless view these groups positively, as in one neighborhood in Choloma where residents attribute an improvement in safety to the presence of a group that remains active in "eliminating" criminals. In other areas, as in one neighborhood in La Ceiba, vigilante groups are viewed as another violent criminal group. Nonetheless, in many neighborhoods, at least tacit support for these groups was widespread, as residents struggle to stay safe in the face of widespread violence and an ever shifting landscape of local armed groups.

> What we saw is that people were dying, I don't know whether the people who were dying were the bad ones… Some say they have eliminated those who go around assaulting, but I don't know if that's the case. (Woman, Choloma)

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14 For example, in the case "Pacheco Teruel and others versus the State of Honduras," the court declared responsibility to the state in the death of 107 inmates at the San Pedro Sula Prison on May 17, 2004, during a fire.

> When I arrived here in 1999, that street over there, which is the main street, was full of gang members, but then they were controlled, I won't say how they controlled them but now there are very few. (Community leader, Choloma)

The research thus pointed to a proliferation of armed groups and a change in their nature, from the predominance of youth gangs to a shifting landscape of gangs, organized crime, and vigilante groups. The identity of these groups and the linkages between them remain murky and continue to evolve. As explored further below, these groups sometimes overlap, for example, as vigilante groups become involved in criminal activity or organized crime groups eliminate rival criminals. This rapid evolution and fragmentation itself contributes to insecurity, as residents are increasingly unsure of the identity of armed groups. As the criminal landscape has changed, it has changed the way crime is experienced by the residents of urban neighborhoods.

2.3 THE SHIFTING GEOGRAPHIES OF VIOLENCE AND FEAR

Changes in the nature of criminal actors have contributed to a pervasive sense of uncertainty and fear, although some residents still feel safe in their own neighborhoods or blocks. As *maras* have become less prevalent, the visible forms of extortion and the turf battles that accounted for many homicides have also declined. The evolving forms of criminal activity no longer require gang members to be permanently and visibly present in neighborhoods they control; rather, crime has become more anonymous, and the actors involved frequently change. Although people can still identify territories controlled by the *maras* where they maintain their traditional rules and practices, the size of these areas has decreased. Instead, people more commonly attribute violent crime to unknown individuals who come to their neighborhoods from "outside" or from "the communities around us." As one resident put it:

> Although robberies are against people here, people come from elsewhere, from other neighborhoods, they sometimes walk around armed and one can't oppose them. (Youth, El Progreso)

The difficulty in discerning exactly where violence is coming from contributes to a profound sense of uncertainty and fear. When the *maras* were present, they operated in accordance with visible territorial limits, and people knew who they were and how to live with them. The way to stay safe was to know which gang controlled specific territories. Now, different types of criminal actors and forms of violence have emerged but without a clear face. Since people no longer know what to expect in terms of violence, they face greater difficulty in managing it (Rodgers 2006). In this climate of uncertainty, the only way to stay safe when leaving one's immediate neighborhood is through individual measures, as one resident described:

> Among the measures I take with my children is not to walk around with a fancy cellphone, not to walk in the street too late, avoid the temptation of walking around with anything ostentatious so that people think you don't have anything. (Man, Choloma)

Generalized uncertainty may also stem from the changing geographic concentration of violence even within neighborhoods. Consistent with research in other countries, violence appears to cluster not only in certain neighborhoods but in specific "hotspots" within these neighborhoods (Groff, Weisburd, and Yang 2010). In one neighborhood in El Progreso, for instance, residents recognize that crime occurs primarily around the main street that connects the neighborhood with the downtown area or close to the public high school on its border, but these "hotspots" change over time. There is also some confusion regarding where neighborhoods start and end; although *barrios* (wards or sections) and *colonias* (neighborhoods) are formally recognized, their boundaries sometimes shift in the absence of reliable land registries and as a consequence of rapid population growth.

The effects of this shifting crime landscape extend beyond the effects of violence itself, with implictions for neighborhood reputations. Even where they report that violence has declined, residents still feel its repercussions. Inhabitants of neighborhoods that are perceived as violent often lie about their place of residence to avoid discrimination when seeking employment or other opportunities. Taxis and buses refuse to enter these neighborhoods or charge higher fares, and commercial distributors avoid delivering food to neighborhood convenience stores and other businesses. Even as the geography of violence evolves, its effects remain after changes occur.

At the same time, even amid pervasive insecurity and its consequences, many residents reported feeling

secure in their own neighborhoods or blocks, despite the violence all around them. As one resident put it:

> Look, I feel quite safe and secure in my sector over there, really good, but these areas here are much more dangerous, there is a lot of insecurity. (Woman, Choloma)

This perception stems in part from the geographic concentration of violence even within neighborhoods, but it also appears to be linked to other factors. Many respondents even in violent neighborhoods—especially youth—claimed that in Honduras, the key to feeling secure is to know and to be known by others in the community. As Donna Goldstein found in her research on Brazilian slums, residents of particular communities "feel secure within the boundaries of certain kinds of relationships" (Goldstein 2003). In some places, the feeling of safety extends beyond the immediate subcommunity to the entire neighborhood. How some communities achieve this is the subject of the next chapter.

2.4 EVOLVING FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Along with the evolution of criminal groups, the types of violent crime experienced in urban communities have also evolved. As the drug trade has generated new opportunities for economic gain, violent crime appears to be driven less by turf battles linked to gang identity. Homicides have evolved from visible gang violence to hired killings with unknown motives and perpetrators. The local sale and consumption of drugs have increased substantially, while a wide range of economic crimes, from extortion to assault and robbery, has become more common. This section outlines the changes in the nature of violence experienced in urban communities over the past five years. The findings are based on the perception and experience of residents who participated in the study and are corroborated through other data sources when possible.

Homicides

Homicides remain the most dramatic and visible form of violent crime in Honduras, but they have evolved in form and motivation over the past five years. In the past, homicides most commonly resulted from turf battles between gangs that led to the deaths of both gang members and innocent people caught in the cross fire. In most neighborhoods, this type of homicide has all but disappeared. As a Choloma resident said:

> There are no longer massacres committed during the clash of two groups [MS and 18th Street], when one is attempting to remove the other one from a specific territory. (Community leader, Choloma)

According to residents, homicides appear to be more commonly planned in advance and involve contract killers (*sicariato*). Rather than taking place within the neighborhood for all to see, they usually occur elsewhere, as victims are taken from their houses to be killed in uninhabited areas and their bodies later dumped in other neighborhoods. The motives of these planned murders vary considerably, including everything from organized crime and drugs to interpersonal disputes or social or political conflicts. Community residents perceive that the profile of perpetrators has also evolved into more professional and trained killers. Another common perception is that targeted killings often involve elements of military or police units, as one resident related:

> They captured a man in Choloma, he was a police officer and a member of the *Cobras* [special police unit]. They arrested him, and suspected that he participated in at least 50 assassinations as a hired killer. But how did they not capture him until he had committed 50 assassinations? Why didn't they detain him after three or five? They detained him, but the question was whom he has been working for. (Community leader, El Progreso)

Official data, although limited, appear to confirm this trend. According to an analysis by the University of Honduras National Violence Observatory, of the homicides in 2013 that were assigned a motive in media reports, 64 percent were related to *sicariato* or organized crime, while 13 percent were associated with assault and robbery, 8 percent with interpersonal disputes, and 6 percent with gangs.[15] The Honduran National Police assigned motives to only 30 percent of homicides in 2013, but of those, 44 percent were related to *sicariato* or settling scores, 22 percent to interpersonal disputes, and 3 percent to an

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15 The analysis found that 1,698 homicide cases were assigned motives out of 3,446 reported in the media and out of a total of 6,757 homicides committed in 2013. See UNAH-IUDPAS (2014).

association with gangs.[16] Human rights organizations have reported on a large number of killings that target people on account of their social or political activities. For example, the country's National Human Rights Commission reported in 2013 that lawyers have been targeted,[17] and human rights reports from Honduras' Aguán Valley reported systematic killings and forced disappearances of local leaders.[18] A 2012 UNESCO report condemned the systematic killing of journalists in Honduras.[19] Most of these murders appear to be highly organized and conducted by hired killers. Although the motives vary, the level of organization and the use of hired killers appear to have increased.

Drug Consumption and Trafficking

A widespread perception emerged from the interviews and focus groups that the sale and consumption of drugs have increased significantly in the cities of Honduras' northern coast. This perception is consistent with recent survey research: according to a 2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey, 66 percent of Hondurans identified drug consumption as the primary security problem at the neighborhood level, with alcohol and inhalants reported to be the most commonly abused substances, followed by marijuana and cocaine. In many of the neighborhoods included in this study, residents noted that cocaine has become more prevalent and that the consumption of marijuana has become more widespread than alcohol. They also observed that the sale and consumption of drugs have become increasingly visible. In addition to the locations traditionally known as distribution points (such as billiard halls, for example), they see that other types of businesses openly sell drugs, including barber shops, convenience stores, and other establishments. Drug users no longer hide their consumption and use it in crowded areas. One resident summarized this perception:

> They take drugs in public places, they smoke in the health center when there are medical consultations,

in the kindergarten when there are classes, and this frightens people. It's a bad influence on the community. (Woman, La Ceiba)

Residents further noted that young people are most directly affected. High schools are increasingly used for drug distribution, due to the potential for access to a large market, reduced costs, and higher profit. Respondents claimed that children as young as 10 years old were known to be using drugs in their communities, and that consumption affects both boys and girls, contrary to what it is often believed. A school teacher explained how girls in the sixth grade have been targeted by drug dealers:

> I have a situation now with a girl in the sixth grade… I thought this girl was naive, but they are being seduced with drugs… Finally, the girl came to me to ask for help because she did it once and wants to get out, but now they're threatening her. (Teacher, El Progreso)

The local consumption and sale of drugs are associated with an increase in larger-scale drug transit through the cities and neighborhoods. People understand that their geographic position along drug transit routes fuels drug consumption, especially in La Ceiba, where criminal groups compete for control of neighborhoods along the coast with strategic value for the drug trade. In all three cities, municipal authorities claim that some communities are completely coopted by organized groups involved in the drug business. As discussed further below, increased trafficking is also associated with a variety of other forms of criminal violence.

Extortion and "War Taxes"

The collection of "war taxes" and other forms of extortion are pervasive across communities. There are multiple forms of this crime, ranging from the periodic extortion of local businesses to threats made by cell phone. The targets also vary; sometimes it seems that anyone can be a victim of ex-

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16 Ibid. Given the low number of homicides assigned motives, this data should be treated with caution.

17 Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, "Estado General de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras" 2013, available at: http://app.conadeh.hn/Anual2013/intro.html. See also report by the Colombian NGO InsightCrime, available at: http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/report-highlights-lawyers-honduras.

18 See Council on Hemispheric Affairs, "Honduran Killing Fields: Repression Continues against Campesinos in Bajo Aguán Valley," June 6, 2013, available at http://www.coha.org/honduran-killing-fields-repression-continues-against-campesinos-in-bajo-aguan-valley/.

19 See UNESCO, "The Safety of Journalists and The Danger of Impunity: Report by the Director-General" (Paris: UNESCO, 2012), available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/FED/Safety%20Report%20by%20DG%202012.pdf.

tortion, while in other cases, people believe that only small and medium-sized businesses are targeted. The following accounts were echoed in accounts across neighborhoods.

> Now they are calling us to ask for war taxes. Just yesterday they called to more of my neighbors randomly. We are now prepared when we hear a strange voice to hang up. They have called my neighbor and me five times… Three weeks ago I was with my mother and they told me they were asking her daughter for 300 lempiras of war tax [US$15] and if they don't pay, heads are going to roll. And I asked did she pay? Yes, they drove a Prada, they were well-dressed. She had to run away. (Woman, El Progreso)

> Most of the time they commit their crimes, they do it up there, there were some that were captured that were assaulting the milk trucks, the soda trucks… (Man, El Progreso)

The accounts above reveal two distinct modalities of extortion, although they constantly evolve as actors change and authorities respond. The first is an organized approach, using anonymous calls, intimidation, and the collection of a specific amount of money. In these cases, the amount collected ranges from L 300 to L 600 (US$15–$30), and the perpetrators appear to be structured and well resourced—or at least well dressed. The second modality involves people who operate in the streets and primarily target trucks with commercial products, although these efforts are also sometimes organized by local gangs. Business owners in certain neighborhoods also report being targeted by local gangs to collect "protection money." In almost all neighborhoods, wealthy and poor alike, residents report experience with some form of extortion.

Official data on extortion are unreliable, as most victims do not report it to the police. Still, the threat was deemed pervasive enough that the Honduran government created a special National Anti-Extortion Task Force in 2013, comprising vetted personnel from the Public Ministry, the National Police, the Armed Forces, and the National Office of Investigations and Intelligence. From January to December 2013, the task force received 1,960 reports of extortion.[20] Although residents reported a temporary drop in certain forms of extortion as a result of this task force, other forms, especially those carried out by small-scale groups, remain pervasive.

Assault and Robbery

Robberies are a daily reality in Honduras. Residents report that they hear of robberies almost every day and in nearly every neighborhood, involving varying levels of organizations and amounts of loss. These incidents range from pickpocketing to bank robberies, from residential to street robberies, from assaults with knives to attacks with powerful weapons, and from incidents that cause no physical harm to those resulting in mass killings. Urban residents feel that robbery can happen everywhere, and that no neighborhood, home, or business is completely safe. According to official data, the prevalence of robberies in Honduras has increased dramatically over the past decade, from 33.2 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005 to 276.3 per 100,000 in 2011 (UNDP 2013, 57).[21] The following example illustrates the impact on communities.

> A couple of months ago, here in the school they came to assault the teachers. One thief came. They were in a meeting with the teachers and they came to assault them. This was a Saturday that they had a meeting, and the same week on Monday they made an anonymous phone call in which they said that they had to give them money, and if they didn't give them money they would come to kill everyone in the school. The teachers and the students from this neighborhood were so concerned that they closed the school and there were no classes since the parents were frightened. (Man, El Progreso)

The forms and consequences of robberies vary widely. According to residents interviewed for this study, certain tactics appear to be common, including the use of a gun to intimidate the victim, and the use of a bicycle to intercept the victims and escape after the assault. Victims report losing cash as well as cell phones or laptops. The effects of robberies are felt both by the victims and by witnesses, who are often threatened to ensure they do not provide information to the police. A high proportion of

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20 See Jessica Figueroa, "Se reduce número de denuncias por extorsión" La Prensa, April 2, 2014, available at http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/632188-96/se-reduce-n%C3%BAmero-de-denuncias-por-extorsi%C3%B3n.

21 The data are drawn from official crime statistics, which are likely to be underreported.

robberies involve violence; according to a 2012 survey, 67 percent of all robberies reported involved violence (UNDP 2013, 62). In some cases they spin out of control, especially those that involve drugs or alcohol. The following account of one of the many incidents reported during the study illustrates the types of consequences involved.

> I was trying to help my father. They were assaulting him and I went toward them and told them not to hit him because he was a senior, and one of them came and took out a 9 millimeter and shot me in the chest. In this moment I felt like a hot coal went through my body, but I didn't worry about it and I went to pick up my father who had been beaten. They hit me in the head with the 9 millimeter and then I fell on the ground. I didn't know I was injured, but when I fell, I couldn't get up. It was at this moment that I touched the blood and realized that I had been shot. But the guys left because my father had a gun and he shot at them… The next day a friend told me to leave the hospital because those guys wanted to eliminate me, without my owing anything, but they didn't want to leave a trace. (Man, La Ceiba)

Robberies are so widespread that it is difficult to discern any clear trends, other than that they happen everywhere. They also appear impossible to deter, since even when people decide to report them, the authorities rarely take any action in response. The prevalence of robbery fosters a perception that it is a normal part of daily life; when people are asked whether their community is insecure, they tend to think of crimes other than thefts. In a place where homicides, targeted killing, and drug trafficking occur daily and organized crime is widespread, robberies seem like a minimal problem.

Domestic violence

Cases of domestic violence were reported in all the neighborhoods visited for the study. Almost all involved physical abuse. Women's organizations report a rising number of cases of femicide, amounting to 2,851 cases between 2005 and 2013 at a rate that increased steadily every year. Yet community members rarely spoke about domestic violence as a form of violence unless specifically asked. The notion

persists that it is a private problem, and few women were willing to discuss it openly. Nonetheless, interviews with victims of domestic violence, along with women's focus group discussions, revealed several insights regarding its nature and consequences.[22]

The experiences of victims interviewed for the study varied widely. All of the victims interviewed were women who ranged in age from 24 to 55 years old with a diversity of income levels and educational attainment. The victims were all literate and several had completed secondary school. They reported a range of experiences, from isolated incidents to living with sustained violence for nearly 10 years. Most victims described a process of increasing aggressiveness and decreasing respect on the part of their spouses, starting from positive experiences in the first stages of dating and marriage to deteriorating behavior as their partners became increasingly violent. The victims were mostly unclear about the reasons for this change, but some saw an increase in aggression after their first child, and many associated the violence with drug or alcohol consumption or with multiple cases of infidelity. As one victim related:

> All marriages start off well. As time passed and I became pregnant, there were frequent telephone messages and calls from women, and he was always out in the street. My son was born and that really changed the situation. He spent three days drinking in the street, I couldn't ask him where he was coming from or where he was going; if I asked him it was a problem. He told me not to ask and would curse at me. (Woman, El Progreso)

The cases involved a wide range of forms of violence, including death threats, physical violence, psychological violence, verbal abuse, kidnapping, and stalking, some of which brought the victims close to death. One victim described how her husband, a police officer, used his gun to threaten her and her children. Another woman was almost thrown out of a moving car as she argued with her husband about his infidelities. Another victim described how the psychological violence was so intense when her husband was in the house that she and her children could not speak or even look him in the eyes since that could lead to an episode of aggression or violence.

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22 A total of eight in-depth interviews with victims of domestic violence and nine focus groups with women were conducted. The majority of victims interviewed had subsequently separated from their husbands.

Most victims emphasized the economic consequences of domestic violence. They described how drug consumption and infidelity drained household finances, leading to extreme poverty, debt, and malnourishment, in addition to the stress directly related to the violence. Many women cited economic pressures stemming from these developments as the ultimate reason for their decision to leave their husbands. The situation was so dire for some women that they felt forced to leave the country, fueling migration to the United States.[23] Focus group participants linked such cases to a range of negative consequences for children, who lacked parental supervision and suffered emotionally. Other victims succeeded in obtaining child support payments after reporting the crime. Yet even for those who reported the offense, this benefit did not come automatically. As discussed further below, the outcome of their cases depended on the combined support of community networks and effective institutions responses.

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23 See Jaime Septién, "Aumentan las Deportaciones de Estados Unidos a Honduras, Muchas de Ellas son Mujeres," *Aleteia*, May 13, 2014, available at http://www.aleteia.org/es/politica/articulo/aumentan-las-deportaciones-de-estados-unidos-a-honduras-muchas-de-ellas-son-mujeres-5216847951560704.

3. Preventing Violence within Communities: Coercion and Collective Action

Visitors to Honduras quickly realize that violence is not distributed uniformly across the country, within municipalities, or even within neighborhoods. This section explores this variation at the neighborhood level, to address the question of why some neighborhoods are more violent than others. It focuses on processes within neighborhoods through which local actors confront violent crime in the absence of state presence, by means of "informal" forms of social control. The research revealed two dramatically different forms of crime prevention, one imposed by lective responses by communities.

This study goes beyond identifying the risk factors associated with violence in Honduras by examining community capacity to prevent violence and mitigate its effects. These capacities constitute "resilience factors" that mitigate societal and individual-level risks (Dahlberg and Krug 2002). While the risk factors described above have exacerbated communities' vulnerability to violent crime (World Bank 2010), particularly along Honduras' northern coast, they do not account for variations at the neighborhood level. As shown in figure 7, comparing neighborhoods in the three cities included in this study by average income level reveals that the poorest communities are not

Figure 7. Homicides and Monthly Energy Consumption by Neighborhood, Annual Average 2009–12
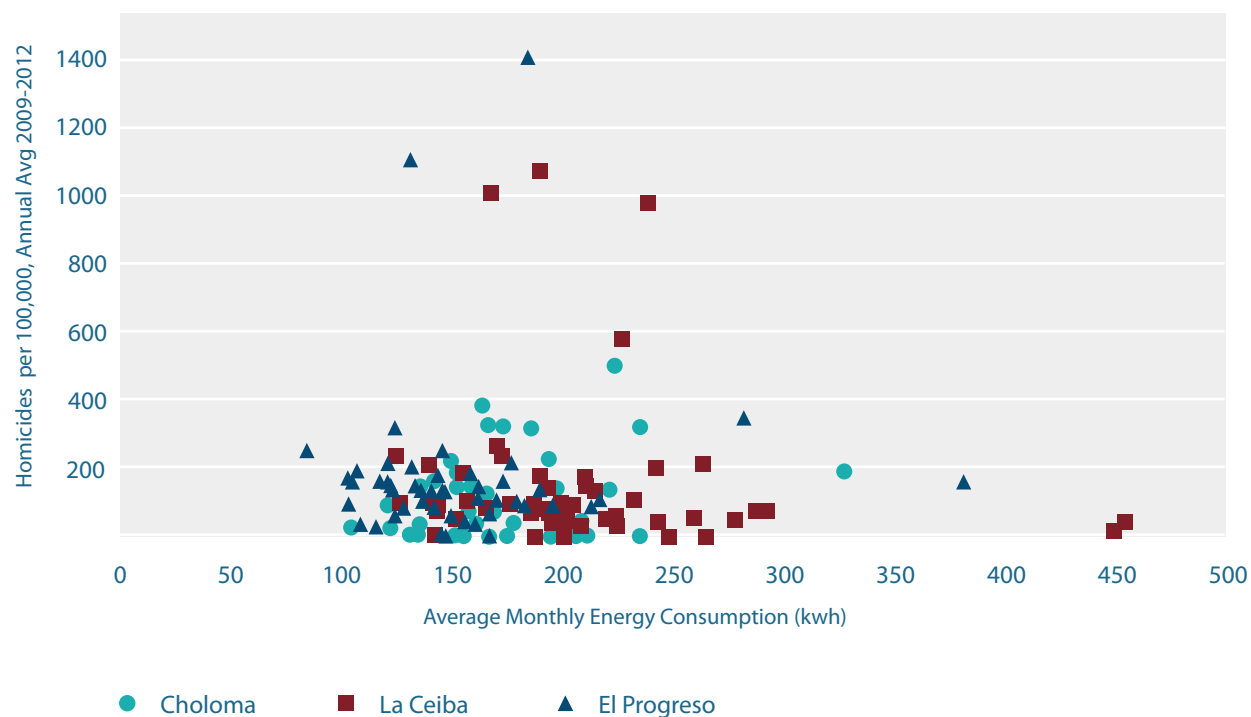
Source: UNAH-IUDPAS; Government of Honduras.

necessarily the most violent and that considerable variation occurs in the lower-middle-income neighborhoods that are at the highest risk.[24] Nor do other factors associated with violence, such as population size or access to education or other basic services, account for variations in homicide rates at the neighborhood level.[25] Even among neighborhoods with an accumulation of risk factors, the level of violence varies significantly.

The qualitative research conducted in the nine communities with varying levels of violent crime revealed a disparity in the ways communities respond to the widespread risk of violence. For those communities with lower levels of violence, two broad patterns emerged. Consistent with research on "collective efficacy" summarized above (see Section 1.1), in some neighborhoods, community members exercised "informal social control" through their own collective measures. The basic principles of informal control were remarkably similar to other experiences in North and South America (Sampson 2012; Moura and Neto 2015). Yet the particular forms of collective action and social control practiced by these communities are quite distinct to the social and institutional context.

In other communities, low levels of violence reflected the control of a single criminal armed group that succeeded in eliminating rivals. Such groups reduced crime to varying extents, from keeping the neighborhood totally safe to eliminating rival drug traffickers while allowing other forms of violent crime to thrive. This form of informal control is broadly consistent with findings from studies of crime-affected urban areas in South America, where in the absence of an effective presence of the state, alternative forms of order emerge (Das and Poole 2004; Penglase 2009; Arias 2004). In contrast, this research suggests that in Honduras, a wide range of alternative forms of governance exist across communities and many armed groups have no interest in enhancing public order or interacting with state authorities. Moreover, the control of these groups is often legitimized by a widely shared narrative that the state has collapsed, particularly the justice system, and the only possibility of justice in these neighborhoods is in the hands of local armed groups. The 2009 coup d'état followed

by the militarization of the state has strengthened this narrative and deepened the legitimacy of local coercion as a legitimate form of justice and security.

Two Forms of Violence Prevention

Two neighborhoods with low homicide rates in El Progreso illustrate the distinct forms of violence prevention. One neighborhood was established by agricultural workers with jobs in the nearby banana plantations. Community leaders, who have been present since its founding, have fostered community-wide organization. Residents share a neighborhood identity, describing each other as "warm, humble people, who are ready to collaborate." They have adopted their own crime prevention measures, from rehabilitating public spaces to banning the sale of alcohol, and boast that gangs have never been present in their neighborhood. The other was constructed in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch and settled by migrants. Plagued by poverty, limited ties between residents, and an absence of shared identity, the neighborhood came under the control of a notorious criminal group. Monitoring by this group prevents certain forms of violence—no outsider can enter without permission, for example—but it conducts extortion and crime within and outside the neighborhood.

Focusing on community-level responses and the context that shapes them is particularly relevant for understanding violence and the means to prevent it in the urban neighborhoods of Honduras. Given the limited—and sometimes abusive—presence of state institutions such as the police, justice system, residents of urban neighborhoods must look elsewhere for assistance in preventing or mitigating crime. When they are rooted in community organization, these local forms of prevention may serve as essential building blocks to prevention approaches that are sustainable

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24 Income proxied by energy consumption.

25 Based on the authors' analysis of available data at the municipal level.

in the Honduran context. This study identifies the particular forms that collective efficacy can take even in these environments of low institutional capacity and limited resources. Yet in many cases, communities have become victim to more coercive forms of control which must also be understood in crafting crime prevention strategies. The remainder of this section lays out these distinct forms of violence prevention and how they operate in practice. The following two sections explore the characteristics of neighborhoods and municipalities that contribute to these variations in ways communities confront and manage violence.

3.1 COMMUNITY CONTEXT: DISORDER, CONTROL, AND COHESION

Understanding how violence is prevented and managed from the perspective of violence-prone communities requires examining the concepts of *disorder*, *control*, and *cohesion* as they are defined by the residents of those neighborhoods. First, the concept of disorder emerged through the interviews and focus group discussions as an informal way of talking about crime and violence. It may be that residents avoid the words "violence" and "crime," since they sound too strong, too revealing, or too straightforward. The term *disorder* (*desorden*) also links violent crime with other aspects of economic and political crisis, as well as the limited capacity of the state. People therefore tend to use this term as a way of describing their reality.

> **I:** How would you describe the level of insecurity in your community?
>
> **R:** Before we could go out, now we can't go out because there is always some *disorder*. (Woman, La Ceiba)
>
> **R:** Sometimes he wants to use offensive words, but I tell him: well, if you want to create *disorder* here, you'd better go back to where you came from. (Woman, El Progreso)

Understanding violent crime as a crisis of *disorder* implies the need for greater *control* through the establishment of authority where it is absent. The vast majority of respondents expressed the belief that the state has lost control of what is happening in the country, particularly with regard to public safety. Many people identify organized crime groups or

local vigilante groups as the most powerful actors in their communities. Some residents are willing to rely on whatever actors emerge to establish the control necessary to minimize the crime and violence they experience on a daily basis. Yet as the two quotations below indicate, the extent to which these actors actually reduce violence varies considerably.

> The state has lost total *control*, it lost its function of regulating, of promoting *cohesion*. Now others are controlling, and those that control, since they help me live with a little more security, well I support them. (Man, Choloma)
>
> Look, I don't think [security] will improve, this is my point of view. I don't think it will improve because the problem is that organized crime has taken *control* of this country. (Man, La Ceiba)

Violence in the public imagination also emerges from the state's failure to promote *cohesion* among members of society. The political conflict that has simmered since the 2009 crisis has resulted in the polarization of society. These tensions have trickled down to communities, where social fragmentation has contributed to the increase in violence. To prevent violence, residents of affected communities ultimately require the establishment of some level of cohesion to enable them to act collectively against the common threat. As is explored below, cohesion has become increasingly difficult to achieve. In its absence, they rely on other forms of control.

> You know that this topic of prevention, or of improving the security situation in Choloma and in Honduras, can't only be addressed through prevention, but the state must fulfill its role of *control* and *cohesion*. (Community leader, Choloma)

The two forms of violence prevention in urban neighborhoods reflect these conceptions of *control* and *cohesion* in the face of widespread *disorder*. One form relies on coercion and violence by criminal and vigilante groups to control the most visible forms of violence, while allowing other forms of violent crime to persist. The other relies on cohesion among community members to respond collectively based on shared expectations and organization. The remainder of this section describes these two mechanisms and then outlines the practices of collective forms of violence prevention and how they operate in Honduran cities.

3.2 COERCIVE CONTROL BY INFORMAL ARMED ACTORS

In some neighborhoods with lower homicide rates, armed groups have achieved a level of control that limits some forms of violence. The identity of these groups varies from known gangs to secretive vigilante groups and organized crime networks. Those that successfully push out or eliminate rivals sometimes create a partial sense of security as a result of the absence of turf wars. In some areas, these groups also protect residents of their neighborhoods from robberies, assault, and other forms of crime, as described by one resident:

> In these areas if someone is assaulted, they go to them (the organized crime group), and they respond much more quickly than the police. These people are in the community, when I worked there it was rare that they would steal cellphones, that they would assault, or that there would be shootings in the bus. (Man, Choloma)

In the most extreme cases, a criminal group has achieved such a strong level of control over the neighborhood that no stranger can enter it without the group's permission. Visitors must seek permission from the group's leader and are monitored throughout their stays. Thieves or smugglers who are not part of the dominant group are forced out. Meanwhile, many neighborhood residents—especially youth—are recruited into the group and maintain its structure and hierarchy. Even children are put to work as "*banderas*" (flags) who stay in the street to monitor incoming traffic and identify newcomers.

> They are involving young children, from 9 to 12 years, involving them as *banderas*. They are the ones who walk around in the street and when they see an unrecognized car they send an alert that the car has entered. The chiefs find out. If this person knows the procedure he must lower the windows if he has darkened windows and they ask him where he is going. And if they tell, several people accompany him to the house and ask at the house if the person is there that they are visiting. It is total control of the neighborhood by the gang through the children. (Community leader, Choloma)

Two variants of this form of control emerged from the research, one exercised by known criminal groups and another exercised by vigilante groups (although the two variants sometimes overlap when vigilante groups become involved in criminal activities). A case that illustrates the former mode of control is the San Jorge neighborhood in El Progreso.[26] Although this neighborhood is known as one of the most dangerous in the city, official homicide rates there dropped to among the lowest in the city in 2011–13 (UNAH-IUPDAS 2014). It is widely understood that one of the city's largest criminal groups—known as the San Jorge group—operates from the neighborhood and that outsiders are rarely allowed in. Within the community, however, residents are largely kept safe.

The Research Team's Experience with Coercive Control

While driving to visit a municipal project site in Choloma, the research team had to pass through a neighborhood with a reputation for violence. A young man standing with a cellphone at the main entrance to the neighborhood watched the vehicle as it entered. After driving several meters, another young man on a bicycle saw us and moved behind us into the middle of the street. He started to make symbols with his hands (not the traditional symbols from the MS or 18th Street *maras*) to send a message to someone else. After a brief visit to an adjacent neighborhood, as we drove back through the neighborhood the young man on the bicycle followed us to the highway, while the man at the entrance was talking on his cellphone while looking at us.

An example of the second variant was observed in a neighborhood in Choloma with low levels of homicides. The research found that unlike some low-violence communities, this neighborhood also had low levels of community organization, since most

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26 San Jorge was not included as one of the communities selected for the study, but its situation is well known and described by several municipal officials and residents of other communities.

adult residents work long days in the factories and have little time for community activities. Residents explained that several years ago, an armed vigilante group killed many of the gang members who were operating in the neighborhood. Ever since, the frequent homicides that were attributed to gang warfare have ceased. Although it was unclear to what extent the vigilante group was still active during the research, no other group had emerged to replace the gangs. As one resident described:

> What accounts for our community being safe is that there is a group of men called "the X men." It is a group that takes care of the community. If they hear that there is a criminal, first they call him out, and then they might kill him. (Woman, Choloma)

The effects of these forms of control vary, but they generally involve violent coercion and often fuel other forms of crime. Although residents sometimes report a greater sense of safety due to a reduction in visible homicides, they also point to ways in which violence and insecurity persist. Dominant armed groups that focus on large-scale drug trafficking sometimes combat petty crime that affects neighborhood residents, to prevent the rise of competitors or to build local support. In other neighborhoods where one group has achieved control, homicides decline but other crimes continue unabated. Residents suggest that some criminal groups tolerate assault, robbery, and other crimes by smaller groups as long as they do not threaten their control of the drug trade. In some places, local gangs that previously formed part of the *maras* have been co-opted into drug trafficking organizations to assist with local transit, but they also continue their traditional activities of extortion, assault, and robbery. Moreover, even where they reduce crime, the form of control exercised by these groups can be especially violent, as described below.

> If "Jose" robs my cellphone and I go to the police, they won't do anything, but if I go to the group I mentioned, within minutes Jose will get a good beating, and will be assaulted and will pay in terms of teeth knocked out. So the people know that they will respond, and the population goes looking for this type of feeling of safety and in general this type of group is not a threat to people…here in the Lopez neighborhood due to this group. It's a very peaceful area for going out at night and during the day. (Woman, Choloma)

This form of control also leads to greater insecurity on the margins of neighborhoods, as groups seek to expand their control over drug trafficking routes, sources of extortion, and other revenue opportunities. The resulting battles over territory differ from the turf battles that previously occurred between *maras*. Criminal groups now seek to control entire sections of drug transit routes rather than individual neighborhoods. As a result, larger zones of control have been established in some cities, creating areas where turf fights are rare and residents feel a greater sense of security. Where confrontations over territory do occur, however, they may result in large numbers of homicides.

> A new form of organized crime has arisen from there. They control, maintaining a certain level of order, but then there is a group that becomes more powerful and establishes its control. The approach that "I would control this block to sell drugs" is over. They are now consolidating various areas. Supposedly it's a single group. (Community leader, Choloma)

Coercive control also leads to other pernicious effects, including in undermining community organization and fueling a vicious cycle of violence and criminal control. Residents report a fear of taking actions in the community's interest that might threaten the dominant group. Where crime persists despite control by one group, they must resort to individual coping strategies, such as staying home at night or leaving cellphones at home. As one Choloma resident noted, "It is complicated here because when people want to organize, there are other people who see it differently and as a result people live in fear." In some neighborhoods, criminal groups have exerted influence over community leaders and even set rules on acceptable behavior within the neighborhood. Many people perceive that organized crime is likely to fuel further violence in the future, both at the community level and more broadly. For these residents, there is little hope that violence can be reduced in the near term.

> This country is as if it's upside down. The bad guys have taken power and we must become their subjects. To bring control to the neighborhood is difficult since we know each other but through fear. (Man, El Progreso)

> Look, I don't think [security] will improve, this is my point of view. I don't think it will improve because the problem is that organized crime has taken control of this country. (Man, La Ceiba)

3.3 COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE ACTION

In other communities with low levels of violence, the research team observed a very different environment. In these neighborhoods, residents themselves have taken actions to prevent violence and minimize the conditions that might allow it to thrive. The specific actions varied, but in all cases they required a high level of organization, interpersonal knowledge, and communication among community residents that facilitated collective responses. This form of violence prevention is consistent with the notion of "collective efficacy," defined by the enactment of shared norms for social control, but the types of norms, the practices that emerge, and the characteristics that enable them are particular to the Honduran context.

The high level of community organization in these communities can be illustrated through the example of one neighborhood in El Progreso, where community groups facilitate daily forms of collective action. As described by one community member, with the help of the *patronatos*, residents have established their own form of social control through constant monitoring and an efficient strategy for communication and response.

> The leaders have divided us by sector. In the *patronato* there are leaders for the lower zone of the neighborhood, for the central zone, and for the upper zone and that way we stay informed on what is happening in the different sectors of the neighborhood. Based on respect for this unity, whenever there are problems, whether they are natural disasters or violence, we find out and try to be supportive among neighbors. If one neighbor had a problem between neighbors, we are supportive. Along with our *patronato*, if there is a death with limited financial resources, we pursue the issue with the municipal government. (Community leader, El Progreso)

This kind of organization enables various forms of mutual assistance and solidarity on a range of issues, including the prevention of violence. Collective responses to shared problems arise on a daily basis, as neighbors assist each other with day-to-day challenges. Most of these actions are spontaneous, triggered by illness, accidents, economic difficulties, or disputes between neighbors. Yet they are based on and reinforce a set of relationships and networks that bring different segments of the community together, enabling community-wide actions that go far beyond assistance to individual neighbors.

People with greater economic resources or connections to the authorities tend to play a central role in these networks. Although they may not be in formal positions of authority, as a result of strong community norms they are expected to contribute their resources. For example, the neighbor with a car provides transportation, the one with a business donates a food basket, the one with medical skills provides assistance in cases of health emergencies, and so forth. The examples in the text box below go far beyond dealing with violence, but they are crucial foundations for violence prevention in sending a message to the community that it is possible to do good despite the widespread crime, violence, and other problems surrounding them.

The foundation for community collective action can be summarized with a phrase that was repeated in these neighborhoods: "we all know each other." For the residents of these neighborhoods, knowing their neighbors is the key to taking action to prevent violence. They can quickly identify people who are not from the community, they know whom to contact in case of an emergency, and they know with whom to talk when young people behave inappropriately. This knowledge transcends the religious and political beliefs that divide many communities, thus enabling forms of collective action beyond those found in other neighborhoods.

Collective action in these neighborhoods serves as the foundation for a form of order that is distinct from the coercive order in neighborhoods where one armed group dominates. Based on shared norms, interpersonal knowledge, communication, and community-wide organization, community leaders and residents collectively exercise sufficient social control to prevent violence. The types of actions and their functions in preventing violence are laid out in the next section, and the characteristics that enable these actions are explored in the one that follows. The most striking feature of these forms of violence prevention is that they are remarkably low cost, simple, and effective in preventing violence.

3.4 COLLECTIVE MEASURES OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The research identified several collective measures that low-violence communities employ to prevent violence. All of these actions originate from within the community and involve community leaders, residents, and resources. Many of these actions are

We are united neighbors when there is a necessity, we assist each other among ourselves. In the entire community we don't all know each other, but on each street we get along well… One of the things that brings us together is when a neighbor is sick and we are all ready to assist one another. (Community leader, Choloma)

Two or three years ago, my grandparent had an accident and the neighbors from across the street came to help without being asked. My mother came to where they had the accident and the neighbor was with them. The neighbor stayed there in the house with us, they are good neighbors and trustworthy. (Woman, El Progreso)

When the neighbor nearby has problems we all get together and if he needs money, we all contribute. Of course we are going to go. We have to help our neighbor so that he is better off. (Man, El Progreso)

We get along very well… In fact I am a bit tired because the neighbor had a problem last night, well not directly him, but the neighbor that is in the back went out late to work and there was not transportation so we served as a telephone and I called the neighbor who has a car and he came from the brewery by foot. (Man, Choloma)

In front of my house there was a guy with a tank of propane gas who cut his finger. So all of the neighbors ran to see what they could do for him, and one neighbor who had a car took him to the hospital. There they put back the finger, they fixed him up and they left him with something. He healed because all of the neighbors came to see what they could do, and one neighbor who was a nurse told us what we had to do. (Youth, El Progreso)

quite simple and involve little or no cost, while others involve slightly more local organization and resources, but they all require ongoing communication and interpersonal knowledge between residents. Overall, their effects can be remarkably effective.

These community actions fulfill three basic functions that combine to reduce the risk of violence. The first, consistent with literature and practice on violence prevention, involves indirectly preventing violence by reducing risk factors at the individual or community levels (Krug et al. 2002). Community actions help youth to find jobs, education, or constructive leisure activities, reduce the presence of alcohol or firearms, improve physical spaces in the community, or resolve conflicts before they escalate. Second, they limit opportunities for criminal groups to operate or take root in a given community. By identifying criminals and constraining their operations, they directly prevent incidents of crime and criminal actors from taking control. Third, they reinforce the community organization that facilitates collective action in times

of crisis. As community members become involved in regular activities, the networks and communication that enable collective action deepen, leaving them ready to quickly and effectively respond when violence threatens the community. These three functions, along with the primary forces of violence prevention, are summarized in figure 8.

Monitoring and Reacting to Suspicious Activity
One of the most effective ways for communities to prevent violent crime is through monitoring suspicious activity and responding through community networks. The research team heard several examples in which neighbors saw someone suspicious and reported it to others, leading to immediate responses that prevented break-ins, assaults, and other crimes. The response can involve simply inquiring what the person is doing to seeking assistance from the police or other authorities, usually through community leaders with contacts in the municipalities. This form of community action fulfills the function of limiting

Figure 8. Community Crime Prevention Actions and their Functions
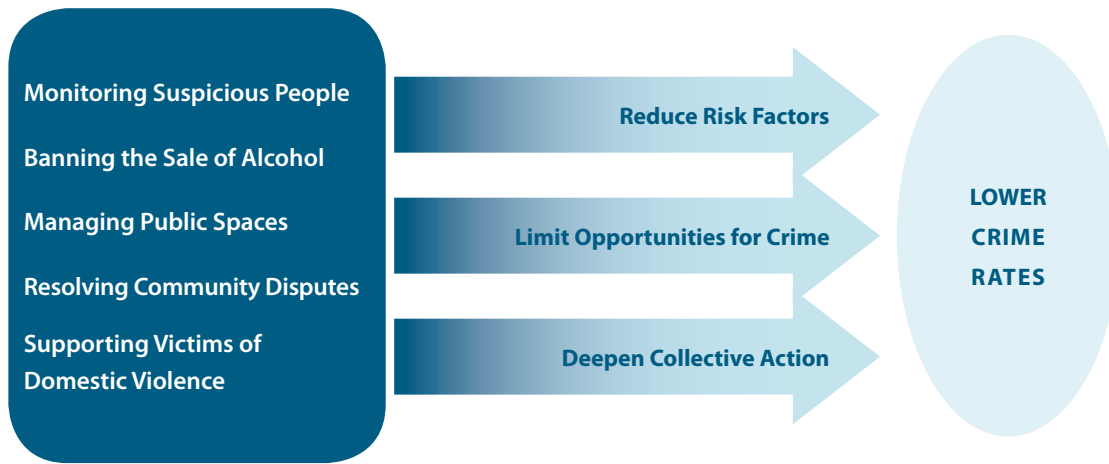
opportunities for criminals to operate while creating an inhospitable environment for armed groups to settle and organize operations.

Although this form of violence prevention is relatively simple and requires little formal organization, it does require a high level of interpersonal knowledge and communication. Such knowledge enables residents to identify potential threats, while active communication networks allow them to respond quickly. In many communities, women play a central role in this process, given their dense personal networks within the neighborhoods and their presence in their homes throughout the day. As the resident of a relatively safe neighborhood in Choloma describes, this form of monitoring contributes to a general feeling of safety in one's neighborhood.

> They talk about assaults and everything but on my street, they have never assaulted me, nor have they assaulted others because we get along well and we all keep watch there. (Woman, Choloma)

Banning the Sale of Alcohol

Many low-violence communities cited efforts to ban the sale of alcohol in their neighborhoods as a crucial measure for preventing violence. This finding is consistent with studies that show a correlation between the targeted control of alcohol sales and a reduction in homicide rates, including in Latin America (Briceño-León, Villaveces, and Concha-Eastman 2008). Residents of Honduran communities note an additional twist. Most studies attribute these effects to the reduction in an individual-level risk factor—alcohol consumption exacerbates the escalation of disputes and can turn ordinary conflicts into homicides. Participants in this study noted this effect, but identified an additional function. They explained that in Honduras, the bars and billiard halls where alcohol is consumed also tend to serve as centers for the distribution of drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, and crack. In addition to reducing consumption, closing such establishments limits the presence of criminals and armed actors in their neighborhoods.

In contrast to alcohol control measures in other contexts, the initiatives observed through this study were driven, organized, and enforced from within neighborhoods, most often with little support from municipal authorities. In each case, neighborhood residents decided themselves to close bars and billiard halls and to limit the sale of alcohol in local shops. With support from neighborhood residents, the members of the *patronato* used their authority to force local businesses to comply. The president of the *patronato* in one neighborhood in Choloma proudly recounted how she personally went to talk with the owner of the bar to enforce the decision and described the impact on community safety.

> Here, there are no bars or billiard halls. It has been years since they haven't permitted them, they left quickly after the decision was taken. When there are billiard halls selling alcoholic beverages in a community, people from other areas come and the crime begins to organize. But here, I know that I can meet 10 guys from our community, and I won't be afraid. This is because the leaders did not permit bars and billiard halls. (Community leader, El Progreso)

Although closing a bar or a billiard hall might seem like a modest action, it serves as a clear demonstration of the community organization needed for collective responses to violence and further deepens that organization. Given the likely opposition of business owners, enforcing the ban requires widespread community support. The members of the *patronatos* also forego a source of personal revenue, since according to municipal law, every bar and billiard hall requires their authorization and some of them sell this authorization for personal profit. Whatever their motivation, these actions reveal the ability of neighborhood residents to achieve consensus and leaders to act concretely in their interest.

It is not possible from this study to determine whether the alcohol bans caused a reduction in violence or merely indicated a level of organization that reduced crime in other ways. It may be that banning alcohol in a single community has no impact on crime, and a ban may even be counterproductive if young people must go elsewhere to find alcohol. Nonetheless, these bans serve as a clear signal of a community's capacity to organize collectively and are clearly associated with lower levels of crime. At the very least, they plainly illustrate the types of actions and organization found in low-violence communities.

Organizing and Maintaining Public Spaces

In explaining low levels of crime, residents frequently pointed to collective measures to rehabilitate public space. They described different forms of this action, from cleaning up vacant lots to maintaining local infrastructure and building public spaces for recreational activity. According to residents, these actions serve three different functions. First they directly prevent crime by limiting the presence and activities of criminals. Since abandoned spaces are often used for selling drugs or for assaults, keeping such spaces clean can minimize the possibility that criminals use them to conduct illicit activities. Maintaining public infrastructure such as streetlamps and bridges also eliminates situational opportunities for crime. Second, these actions can reduce the risk that youth become involved in crime through the creation of recreational spaces that provide alternative opportunities to violence. One respondent summarized these two effects:

> Where I live, or rather seven blocks in front of me, there used to be a vacant lot where they used to assault a lot and they would end up in that lot. So they agreed to present a project and built a football field. Another one is that they had broken a streetlamp and they looked for my father and he came and got a ladder and fixed the lamp. Sometimes there is a sewage pipe that is always causing problems, so we all go to that block and fix the sewage. And once a pipe was broken so we changed it and cleaned up the block. (Woman, Choloma)

A third effect of such efforts emerges not from the space itself but from the process of reclaiming and managing it, which helps to deepen community organization. Lacking a budget for such activities, *patronatos* must typically rely on members of the community to contribute their money, labor, and time. Such participation helps to strengthen community organization; as one resident of El Progreso described, "people live well, the vacant lots are clean, other lots that the *patronato* has, they send us to clean them." It also ensures that the spaces become a focal point for community organization and facilitates further action. Once the initial work is complete, community members must maintain the field or community center and resolve disputes around its use. In one neighborhood that lacked sufficient organization, a football (soccer) field that was rehabilitated by the municipal government—without community involvement—was used as a point for drug distribution and consumption, and residents saw it as a source of violence. As one resident of this neighborhood noted, "The football field is being used by youth to smoke drugs—they build things but the community itself destroys them." In another neighborhood, residents not only built a football field themselves, they also created a system to ensure that all residents—including women and children—could use it. The residents proudly explained:

> You can see the women going around, which provides an activity now that it is lit up—we all cooperated to illuminate the field." (Woman, Choloma)

Resolving Community Disputes

Disputes between neighbors occur frequently and sometimes escalate toward interpersonal violence. The most common cases involved disputes over property and trespassing, as well as interpersonal, family, and neighbor disputes such as fights between children and noisy neighbors. In the absence of legitimate mechanisms for resolving such disputes, many of them fester while undermining residents' confidence in their community or state leaders. In other cases, they lead to violence. The capability within communities to resolve such disputes thus reduces violence directly by preventing escalation and indirectly by enhancing communities' trust in community leaders.

> In most neighborhoods, community disputes are rarely resolved and reports to authorities never followed up. Most often, they are simply abandoned over time, leading to uncertainty about the possibility that they might reemerge. In such cases, neighbors simply counsel residents to "leave everything in God's hands."

Residents who receive support from neighbors and community members are more likely to resolve their cases, whether through the formal justice system or through informal mechanisms. Residents of one community described how the president of the *patronato* frequently mediates disputes, ranging from noise complaints to land disputes, without recourse to state institutions. For those who refer their cases to state institutions, support from neighbors and community members can lead to a better outcome and ensure that the outcomes are enforced. For example, in Choloma, a woman reported to municipal authorities that her neighbors were raising pigs in their yard against municipal ordinance. The municipal health office eventually intervened and ordered the neighbor to remove the pigs, but the support of other neighbors helped to ensure that the dispute was resolved amicably. Neighbors also put pressure on the neighbor in question to remove the pig and implement the order.

Responding to Domestic Violence

The support of communities in responding to incidents of domestic violence has a tremendous impact, both on those involved and on the community at large. Interviews with victims revealed the ways in which community networks enabled them to end abusive situations and prevent future violence. By demonstrating that such cases can be resolved, these actions further generate confidence among community members and strengthen community networks. Community responses also facilitate response by the police and justice system.

An Unresolved Community Dispute

A dispute in La Ceiba illustrates both the difficult of resolving such cases and the role of community organizations in doing so. One resident, "Don Carlos," lived next to the "Lopez" family, which he considered problematic because of their frequent late night parties. One day, Don Carlos lost two chickens and someone told the Lopez family that Don Carlos thought they had stolen them. The Lopez family threatened him by telling him that they were friends with gang members and that he would receive a visit. Although Don Carlos reported the threat to the state prosecutor, the neighbors never responded to the citation and no enforcement action was taken. In the end, the problem was resolved after the family was persuaded to join a Pentecostal church and ended the late night parties.

The support of neighbors and community networks facilitates the decision by victims to take action to end abusive situations. Several victims described how they took their first step after neighbors noticed that violence was occurring and encouraged them to act. Others found their community networks to be eager sources of advice and emotional support. For women who remained undecided about reporting—whether due to lack of knowledge or as a result of psychological abuse—friends, relatives, neighbors, and colleagues were instrumental in persuading them to report their cases to the authorities. One woman recounted that although her mother advised her not to report the crime, she took action after colleagues who had witnessed the violence advised her to do so. Another victim described the support from her neighbors:

> I had a friend, whom I trusted, that I would tell things, and also a neighbor. I would tell them, would vent

bitterly, I cried because sometimes I didn't even have any milk to give my daughters… All of my neighbors would ask me "what's happening Maria," they would say "what is happening? Raise your head, you are young. Look, the truth is that you can't be like that. Look, leave, you're not going to destroy your home. This man is not right for you, Maria." And from there they would tell me I had to think hard about it. (Woman, Choloma)

For women who choose to report domestic violence, community networks facilitate the judicial process. Neighbors help to protect victims from further abuse, serve as witnesses in court, and help attend to the needs of victims. In one case, a victim described how community leaders granted her the use of the community center to live in, provided her with clothing, and found her work in the neighborhood to allow her to support her children. Another victim described how her employer allowed her to take paid time off to report the crime and attend court hearings. Others pointed to assistance by community members in caring for children or taking care of other duties. Women's rights organizations also play an important role, as in the case of *El Movimiento de Mujeres de la Colonia Lopez Arellano* (MOMUCLA) in Choloma, which provides information and encourages victims to take action. In all of the cases recorded through this study in which women succeeded in leaving abusive situations, the support of community networks proved to be crucial. As one victim described:

My neighbors served as witnesses for how he mistreated me. He kept on abusing me until they gave me the Community Center to live in and they gave me clothing to wash so I could maintain my children. I didn't work outside, but I stayed working in the neighborhood so that I could be with my daughter. (Woman, Choloma)

4. Conditions for Community-Based Prevention

The ability of some communities to prevent crime through collective measures is rooted in the characteristics of life in those neighborhoods. This section examines these characteristics to explain why some communities succeed in using collective measures to prevent violence and others do not. In comparing more organized communities with those under the control of armed groups or with higher levels of violence, the clearest variation emerged in the extent of fragmentation or integration between groups and individuals within the neighborhood. As described above, collective prevention measures require interpersonal knowledge, frequent communication, and shared values and identity. These characteristics are most evident in neighborhoods with a high level of integration between subgroups. In neighborhoods with higher levels of violence or control by armed groups, fragmentation between community groups results in more limited ties, communication, and shared values across the community.

The fragmentation or integration within a given neighborhood depends, in turn, on the leaders, associations, and individuals there, as well as on broader social and economic factors. Most urban neighborhoods in Honduras possess similar associations, including a *patronato*, churches, schools,

sports teams, and youth and women's groups. Yet the same type of association can either strengthen integration or contribute to fragmentation. The impact of these groups reflects, in part, the conditions they face. Such factors as urban migration, the presence of economic opportunities, and the prevalence of drugs, alcohol, and firearms constrain or facilitate community integration. At the same time, the research revealed that effective leaders, with sufficient support, can sometimes transcend the conditions they face and foster the integration necessary for collective crime prevention.

Understanding these factors and how they interact is central to designing effective prevention strategies at the neighborhood level. Although some low-violence communities in Honduras developed their capabilities for violence prevention over long periods of time, others appear to have evolved relatively quickly and lowered crime levels in short timeframes. Recent interventions that have deliberately sought to address community fragmentation have shown promising results. The findings from this research suggest that the capacity to organize and sustain collective prevention measures can be built at three levels: by working to integrate the community through the development of shared norms, values,

Figure 9. Community Characteristics and Capability for Prevention

Fragmented Community

Sparse Internal Ties   Weak Community Identity

Community Organization

Community Risk Factors

Integrated Community

Dense Internal Ties   Strong Community Identity

and ties; by strengthening the associations and leaders that contribute to community integration; and by addressing the broader social and economic risk factors that shape the conditions they face. Community organization, in turn, provides a foundation upon which other community-level prevention efforts can build.

The findings in this section are drawn primarily from a series of "social mapping" exercises, as well as interviews with victims of violence. In separate focus groups with men, women, and youth in each neighborhood, participants were asked to identify the individuals, organizations, and institutions that benefit the community, as well as those that fuel violence and other social problems. They were then asked to trace the connections between them, describing how they relate to each other and how they address specific forms of violence. In addition, interviews were conducted with victims of violence who described the role played by community organizations in responding to incidents of crime and violence as well as disputes. These methods revealed a striking contrast between integrated communities with dense internal networks and neighborhoods with sparse internal ties, along with a spectrum of neighborhoods in between.

4.1 FRAGMENTATION AND INTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

At first glance, Honduran neighborhoods appear to be rich in community organization. Every Honduran city is divided into recognized *barrios* and *colonias*

(neighborhoods), and in each one a community leadership board known as the *patronato* is elected and recognized as the official liaison to municipal government. In most neighborhoods, residents also join churches, sports teams, parents associations, and sometimes youth and women's groups, which constitute the bedrock of civic life within neighborhoods. A closer look reveals that in many neighborhoods, these associations are highly fragmented, play little or no role in community life, and rarely cooperate to strengthen ties across the neighborhood. In some neighborhoods, however, dense ties between these associations facilitate a strong community identity and community-wide collaboration. These attributes provide the foundation for the organization, interpersonal knowledge, and communication that facilitates collective responses to violence.

Looking across the three cities included in the study, a comparison of the neighborhoods at the highest risk of violence appears to confirm the relationship between community organization and violence. Figure 10 displays the "community organization score" for neighborhoods in the bottom half of the socioeconomic spectrum. The score is based on a survey of municipal officials in each city who were asked about the presence and activity of common forms of community association (see Annex 1) in each neighborhood. The results show that a higher community organization appears to be correlated with lower homicide rates. This relatively superficial survey does not tell the whole story, however. A deeper look into the neighborhoods revealed that more important than the presence of community

Figure 10. Homicide Rate and Community Organization by Neighborhood

associations was the way that they function, and in particular, the ties and collaboration between them.

In most urban neighborhoods in Honduras, increasing fragmentation between individuals and associations has weakened community identity and inhibited collective action. Urban migration, the erosion of traditional practices, a decline in neighborhood-wide cultural activities, and the proliferation of churches—every neighborhood contains several Protestant and Catholic churches—have weakened connections between residents. Lacking a common identity or neighborhood-wide networks, individuals know only members of their own church or organization and rarely collaborate with others. This trend could be observed most starkly in the neighborhoods of Choloma with the highest proportion of internal migrants, but it is present to some extent in most urban neighborhoods.

> Very few of the inhabitants are natives, they don't carry on activities and customs that emerged in this city. We see that families come and those who are born from these families have none of this tradition, there is an uprooting with respect to the municipality, there is no commitment to resolve problems in the neighborhood, in the city, much less in the country. (Man, Choloma)

Although social fragmentation appears to be a defining feature of urban life around the world, in Honduras its effects are particularly pernicious. Sociologists have pointed to the rise of social distance and the absence of a common culture as phenomena inherent to contemporary urban society (Day 2006). Various identities and occupations pull people away from communal space in their geographically defined neighborhoods toward other forms of community. Individuals typically see themselves as belonging to multiple communities, for example, one's church, family, Facebook friends, etc. (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The practical problem for Hondurans is that geographically defined neighborhoods (*barrios* and *colonias*) still have responsibility for organizing the delivery of services and managing everyday problems. The *patronatos*, in coordination with the municipality, are responsible for ensuring the provision of electricity, water, sewage, and security and for serving as the liaison between individual citizens and the state. In the absence of a visible or constant police presence, community associations also play a crucial role in preventing and mitigating crime. When neither the

patronato nor other community leaders exercise a community organizing role, few alternatives exist to ensure the provision of services and facilitate the neighborhood's connection to the state.

Amid this fragmentation, some communities stand out in the existence of dense ties and shared identity that promote interaction between community members. The neighborhood of Esperanza de Jesus in El Progreso illustrates this level of integration. The sense of shared history, narrated by one community leader in the text box, was expressed in interviews and focus groups by many neighborhood residents. This community identity has helped to foster a high level of interpersonal knowledge and a sense of belonging that facilitates community-wide actions.

History of a Low-Violence Neighborhood, El Progreso

The Colonia Esperanza de Jesus was founded on February 17, 1981… At the beginning around 100 families came, and then the number gradually increased. We located ourselves here the 17th at 5 a.m. We came, having already organized the *patronato*, which I was a part of as secretary… When we arrived, they started to set up property boundaries, streets, intersections, but only measurements and everything. In this community there is a large number of people from the banana plantations who lived in this area… We are now around 400 families in this community. We started with around 15 families that came to live here, there was don Moncho Zelaya who has passed away, don Braulio Pérez who has also passed away, don Santos Aguilar, who has also passed away, don Jesús Delcid who is my brother, and my father named Jesús who has also passed away. These were the first families that settled here.

The narrative in the text box not only provides an account of the community's history, it also highlights the strong community identity felt by one of its oldest residents. Several residents emphasized that the community's origin has shaped the characteristics and values that hold sway in the community (most original residents had worked in the nearby banana plantation). They emphasized that the original

residents were all hardworking people and that the value of hard work has been transmitted through the generations. Leaving aside the veracity of this version of their history, the existence of a common narrative that is shared throughout the community and across generations is remarkable, especially in contrast to many other neighborhoods. The belief that most residents are willing to collaborate and support each other was common to many of the communities with lower levels of violence. The sense of shared identity, often rooted in the history of a community or its response to a crisis, provides a basis for collaboration by creating a foundation of common values. The fact that this identity is shared across the community generates the belief that working together across subgroups within the neighborhood can bring benefits to the community as a whole.

> These are very generous people, and when some-one is working on a project, people are ready to work. And La Esperanza has this advantage over any other community. If someone has organized a project, people say let's do it. Here the people are warm, humble people, who are ready to collaborate. (Community leader, El Progreso)

Another feature common to low-violence communities is the presence of dense ties between community associations and individuals. Residents not only pointed to multiple leaders and associations, they also described how many of them overlap. For instance, the members of the *patronato* are also involved in one or more churches and maintain close personal ties to the school principal and the parents association. Unlike in most communities where the proliferation of churches has contributed to fragmentation between residents, in less violent neighborhoods, different churches collaborate on community festivals and other joint activities. As the quotation below illustrates, various organizations—in this case, the parents association and the *patronato*—frequently cooperate and strengthen the neighborhood-wide ties that facilitate prevention.

> We have to work with the parents association because they organize trips, festivals, and other activities. For example, recently for the *dia del indio* they organized activities: *yuca con chicharon, pastelitos, chichas, tamales.* All of us ate because all of us had to collaborate. (Woman, Choloma)

These characteristics, including a sense of community identity, shared values, and dense internal ties, can evolve over time even within a neighborhood. The next section describes how the particular forms of association interact with broader social and economic conditions to shape the level of integration or fragmentation in a given neighborhood.

4.2 THE VARYING ROLES OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS

Effective and integrative community associations form the building blocks of successful violence prevention in Honduran neighborhoods. Yet although virtually all urban neighborhoods in Honduras have community associations, including the *patronato*, churches, schools, and youth and women's groups, that look quite similar across neighborhoods when viewed from the outside, similar types of organizations can play very different roles. Moreover, organizations are not static; their roles sometimes reflect historical circumstances and broader social forces, and they sometimes reflect the traits and motivation of individual leaders. Herein lies a core challenge for community-based violence prevention: despite the often negative examples of how community leaders and organizations act in practice, for collective violence prevention to succeed, people need to believe that community associations can play a beneficial role and that supporting them can bring benefits. On the other hand, the fact that such associations are prevalent in most neighborhoods ensures that opportunities exist to strengthen prevention by enabling them to serve as forces for community integration. This section outlines the most common forms of community organization and their roles in affecting community integration.

The *Patronatos*

In most Honduran cities, the most widely recognized community leaders are the *patronatos*. Elected every two years by each *barrio* and *colonia*, they serve as the official representatives of the neighborhood to the municipal government. They generally consist of 6–10 members, including a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, but the president tends to be the most active. In theory, *patronatos* serve as a community leadership body, as the focal point for community activities, and as a means to mobilize resources for community needs from among the residents and from the municipal government.

Table 1. Forms and Effects of Community Association

PROTECTIVE CAPABILITIES						
Fragmented Communities				Cohesive Communities		
Sparse Internal Ties	Weak Shared Identity			Dense Internal Ties	Strong Shared Identity	
Mobilize municipal resources but exert little community leadership		*Patronato*		Play multiple roles, connect community organizations, mobilize community resources, deal with armed actors/ alternative authorities		
Lack of cooperation between churches weakens community ties		Churches		Promote constructive norms, organize community projects, resolve disputes, create social structure for youth		
Teachers uninterested, corrupt, abusive, or ill-equipped to deal with challenges		Primary School		Promote constructive norms, opportunities for youth, integrated community networks, forum for activities		
Coaches fail to promote constructive values, facilitating involvement in drugs, alcohol		Sports Teams		Promote constructive norms, keep youth away from crime, bring community together around sports		
Fuel conflict, lead youth into crime		Informal Leaders		Organize at-risk youth, serve as role models		
Changing role weakens backbone of community life		Women's Groups		Act as repository of community knowledge, organize community events, monitor suspicious activity		

In practice, *patronatos* serve primarily as a liaison between the neighborhood and the municipal government, and most play a limited leadership role within their communities. Since all requests for services and infrastructure must be channeled through the *patronatos*, they tend to spend most of their time seeking resources from municipal authorities. The most successful *patronatos* are those with the best connections to those authorities. At the same time, most *patronatos* make little effort to organize their neighborhoods. As one resident put it, "the *patronatos* don't have the capacity to bring people together, they are closer to the municipal government than to the community." In the absence of strong ties to the members of their communities, they lack knowledge of community needs, and their requests to government focus on immediate and visible needs, such as resurfacing unpaved roads, repairing bridges, expanding the neighborhood school, or improving water, electricity, and sewage facilities. Although they may be beneficial, these small-scale projects rarely affect community dynamics and many do not last. The following description captures the sentiment of many people regarding a relatively effective *patronato*.

> We don't really see much of what the *patronato* does. What the *patronato* does, the rain undoes. They have built many small bridges. They built someone a house near the bridge. The *patronato* tries to solve problems for people who actually have their houses flooded… Sewage and all that was managed by the *patronato* as was the community hall and the day care… What happens is that these are things that we can't really see, because the field is built and then destroyed, these are things that get done and undone." (Man, El Progreso)

In a few communities, the members of the *patronatos* go beyond securing resources to exerting leadership and addressing community problems. These *patronatos* resolve interpersonal disputes and organize activities that contribute to violence prevention. In such cases, the individuals who lead the *patronato* tend to play multiple roles, often serving as leaders in churches, schools, or youth groups, naturally bringing these groups together and coordinating community-wide activities. As described in the following example, such *patronatos* play a critically important role in mobilizing the resources for violence prevention and in facilitating the collective action to manage them.

> The youth worked together with the *patronatos* and succeeded in building a sports field. They produced a document about how the youth from the three communities would manage it for their teams. And recently they requested support from the mayor to illuminate the field, and now they have lighting. Now they play until 11 p.m., and those are communities that are now very safe. (Community leader, Choloma)

In communities with a strong presence of criminal armed actors, *patronatos* must also develop strategies to deal with them. One common approach is to negotiate with the dominant group to obtain permission to operate and thus preserve space for community organization. Yet this task has become more difficult in the context of the shifts in the nature of armed groups and where the criminal actors do not live in the neighborhood. Nonetheless, the research found that some *patronatos* approach criminal groups to voice their concerns and seek ways to minimize risk and harm to the community. In some cases, community leaders have actually mediated between victims and armed groups. For example, when a member of one community had his computer stolen, the victim asked the *patronato* to ask the local criminal group to use its networks to recover the computer, since people have recovered stolen goods this way. Effective *patronatos* can mitigate the effects of violent crime even in the presence of armed groups.

The Churches
The most common experience with community organizations in urban neighborhoods occurs in churches. As a result of the rapid growth in the evangelical movement, multiple churches are present even in the most dangerous neighborhoods. This growth has

in some places facilitated violence prevention, but it has also contributed to community fragmentation.

As the most common space for formal social interaction, churches often play a central role in violence prevention. They promote shared identity, organize community projects, and facilitate actions directed at preventing violence. According to residents, churches promote values and social norms conducive to preventing violence, such as tolerance, honesty, respect, and communication. They pointed to the churches and their leaders as the "moral compass" of the community in "teaching right and wrong." Church leaders advise on addressing cases of violence, resolve disputes, and work as counselors in "growth groups." Several women interviewed said that they sought help from these counselors for cases of domestic violence. Some churches allow their space to be used by the community for violence prevention initiatives.

> I think that the church tries to address all of the risk factors. For example, addiction and drugs, since most are youth, the church tries to rehabilitate these young people. With regard to infidelity, the church always insists that couples should remain loyal because when there is a lack of morals, it is the church that takes it on. (Adults, La Ceiba)

> Churches contribute to building values in our children, because when I couldn't communicate well with my children, at the church I learned how to listen to them and how to get them to listen to me. (Woman, La Ceiba)

Churches play an especially important role for youth. Several churches maintain programs aimed at offering young people constructive alternatives to violence, including for gang members and criminals seeking a way out. In his research in El Progreso, Jon Wolseth found that youth draw on the moral power of churches to avoid violence. Protestant churches have been especially successful in drawing youth away from violent groups, since conversion entails commitments such as a prohibition on drinking, drug use, dancing, and sexual licentiousness (Wolseth 2011). Membership in these churches alters youths' social structure and reduces their exposure to risks of violence, as they no longer spend time on street corners or in bars where they are exposed to shootings. As one resident recalled:

> I have a son that used to take drugs. Recently, he converted and he brought other young people and they are now very punctual and regular at church, and this enables the others to do it too. (Woman, El Progreso)

Yet churches also contribute to fragmentation. Every urban neighborhood contains several churches, and individuals tend to participate in their own church activities but rarely communicate with members of other churches. The emphasis of most churches on affiliation—and the hostility of some to other denominations—limits the benefits that accrue to the community. Few churches address social problems beyond their own membership, nor do they cooperate with other churches. Churches sometimes reinforce feelings of marginalization among youth by failing to integrate those who already feel excluded from school, job opportunities, and community life. As a result, while they may promote positive values among their members, they sometimes undermine the community integration necessary for violence prevention. In a few of the neighborhoods examined for the study, church leaders have made efforts to collaborate with other churches and community associations; most situations, however, are similar to the one described by this Choloma resident:

> Community groups are quite fractured due to the churches… Often those who participate in one church communicate among themselves, but there is little communication with other churches… Ultimately they may collaborate among their own faithful, but when it comes to a community problem they have lost the ability to respond, as when the gangs invade the community and the churches don't communicate with each other. (Community leader, Choloma)

Primary Schools

Neighborhood primary schools can serve as a space for community-wide interaction and as a forum for promoting values that enable violence prevention. Their impact can be felt at two levels—on individual youth and children, as well as on the overall community—in strengthening cohesion and enabling collective action.

At the individual level, schools can protect children and youth from exposure to risk factors. Several studies have found a correlation between dropping out of school and incorporation into criminal

organizations, and residents provided accounts consistent with those findings (Thornberry, Moore, and Christenson 1985; Jarjoura 1993). Residents also expressed the belief that schools instill social values and norms that help to prevent youth involvement in violence and crime. In the context of widespread poverty, lack of education, and migration, many parents recognize that they are unable to instill such values in their children, and schools teach their children what they themselves cannot.

> Primary and secondary schools provide an opportunity to youth, so that instead of getting into drugs or crime, they give them the opportunity to study. (Youth, El Progreso)

> Sometimes [the schools] are what influence us a lot, because there is no education at home, and if we don't bring this education from the home, at least we are partially formed in school. (Youth, Choloma)

Schools also play a role beyond individual students in projecting values and facilitating collective action. Primary schools serve as a hub for coordinating and integrating various community associations and social networks across the community. For example, they organize community festivals in coordination with the parents association and the *patronato*, or invite parents and community members to school activities. Below, the principal of a school in a low-violence neighborhood describes the school's impact beyond its walls in involving the community in its projects and in contributing to activities that involve other groups.

> We reforested areas in the community. We have held sports, social, and cultural events. On the protection of natural resources, we recently participated in work with plastics making murals, internal and external, that we presented in the *Casa de la Cultura*. All of these activities were conducted inside and outside of the school, and also through the municipality… At times, [the *patronato*] comes to ask us that we send children to award prizes and medals for [community festivals such as] *palo encebado, carrera de cinta, la coronacion de la reina de las flores*… We communicate with the mothers so that they can gather with the community. (School director, El Progreso)

The impact of schools on both levels varies, however. Not all directors or teachers have the desire or creativity to work beyond their walls. Young people

interviewed for the study emphasized that some teachers do not deserve to serve as role models and pointed to examples of teachers seen as corrupt, disrespectful, or tainted by scandals ranging from drug abuse to asking money for grades and sexual abuse. Well-intentioned teachers do not always find that the members of the *patronatos* are willing to collaborate or that the parents are interested in getting involved. As illustrated below, parents are sometimes themselves young adults in difficult situations, and teachers are ill-equipped to overcome the resulting challenges.

> The problem is that there are parents who are 14 years old. They are in the process of being educated, so who will educate their children? We explored this issue in classes. We brought people from the health center to speak with them. We wanted to organize "schools for parents" but not everyone comes. Remember that many children who come are under the supervision of their grandparents, the parents are working or are in the United States and the grandparents don't have authority over the children. We have also lost authority over the tender years, where the educator was like a parent. Now we exercise the work of the parent but in a restricted way. (Teacher, El Progreso)

Sports Teams

Sports are central to neighborhood life in Honduras and frequently turned to as a violence prevention activity. Like other community associations, their value in preventing violence varies. According to many residents, sports draw youth away from violence by keeping them busy while instilling values such as discipline, communication, and teamwork. In nearly every neighborhood, individuals volunteer their time coaching soccer and basketball teams for neighborhood youth. Community leaders and municipal officials often prioritize the construction of sports facilities for community-based violence prevention, both because of the potential to involve youth and because they serve as visible symbols of neighborhood transformation.

> I think it has helped to have the football fields next to the hills, and even more that they put light reflectors so that some people are playing and others are watching, instead of thinking of going to drink or smoke, it's better that they go play or watch football, and this results in the community not being violent. (Woman, Choloma)

Sports teams can be source of violence, however, if leaders fail to foster constructive values or if the team members are involved with alcohol, drugs, or crime. Most volunteer coaches receive little or no training to enable them to work with at-risk youth and may not even involve those most at risk of participating in violence. Many neighborhood sports teams also struggle with access to fields, uniforms, and equipment. Successful sports teams require support from various actors to help secure space and resources and to ensure that they promote constructive values.

> The *patronato* is working in coordination with sports to illuminate the fields of Bellavista and Las Lomas. The *patronato* took care of the administration, and now they have this benefit that there is no time limit on playing, if they want to play until dawn they can. (Community leader, Choloma)

> Last Sunday they had a tournament that ended at 8 p.m., the *patronato* organized the illumination of the field, as well as the small field and the playground for the kids. The *patronato* turns on and off the lights, sometimes it's 10 p.m. and they are playing because it's well lit. Because of this, I tell you it's a healthy neighborhood, you can see people all around, while you go to other neighborhoods and it is scary to enter at 8 p.m. (Man, Choloma)

Community Leaders

Leadership within communities is often exercised by informal leaders with no official position. Residents of most low-violence neighborhoods point to individuals who organize activities for children and youth or who resolve disputes between residents. Most of these activities involve sports, but in some neighborhoods, informal leaders provide material resources, advice, and other benefits to their communities. The leaders who tend to be most respected do not operate with any economic interest and often without any formal organizational structure. Because their motivation appears to be primarily moral, they become important examples in the community, as illustrated in the following example.

> The person I really admire is a 70-year-old man, he is so active. They say he prefers seeing young people fishing with him in a river or whatever, rather than seeing them involved with drugs. So you can see him with a ton of kids behind him, my younger brother is one of them, and they spend the whole day with

them instead of not doing anything. He is like a father to them. (Man, La Ceiba)

Although many informal leaders benefit communities, others contribute to violence by fostering conflict and fragmentation or leading youth into drugs and crime. In many neighborhoods, residents lament the absence of positive leaders and the ample space for youth to be influenced by members of gangs or images in the media. As one resident put it, "for a young person to get involved in crime, somebody would have had to teach him or tell him about it." Residents find that many adults provide negative role models in their involvement in illicit activities or their failure to foster values that prevent crime. In the absence of positive leadership, youth seek to join peer groups from neighboring communities that lead them into negative behavior.

> There are many people who join, for example, with other neighborhoods up there, where there are many bad people. Sometimes new young people come to the neighborhood, and since there is no one with whom to join they start to join those bad friendships, and from there the influence begins over them and they start to harm the community. (Woman, La Ceiba)

Women's Groups

This section would not be complete without highlighting the role of women as community leaders. Women serve as part of formal associations, including as presidents of the *patronatos*, women's rights groups, and parents associations, and their daily contributions to community life are remarkable. Women tend to be most active in organizing and participating in community activities, from festivals to social welfare programs, and provide the majority of the time and energy necessary to make them happen. Their dense social networks enable violence prevention activities, such as monitoring crime, identifying at-risk youth, and promoting values. Women's associations help to prevent gender-based violence by raising awareness and supporting victims.

> Most [women] get involved in preparing food and in gift giving. Here we also have help with school feeding, and when there are social activities and we don't want people to spend money, we ask Dona Moncha and her right hands. They make enchiladas for everyone, and that way we don't spend too much. Also, for Mother's Day, we do various activities, we put the members of the parents association to

singing and dancing so that they participate and feel motivated, but the women enjoy coming more than the men. (Woman, El Progreso)

Although women have traditionally served as the backbone of community life, their increasing participation in the labor force has undermined this traditional role. As a result, the shared identity and interpersonal knowledge that they helped to maintain has gradually eroded. Women's associations have taken on valuable roles, including in advocating for women's issues, but they have generally not filled this gap in community integration. To be sure, their impact on gender-based violence has deepened, especially as younger women become more aware and willing to act, as described below. Nonetheless, women's associations have been less involved in maintaining and integrating community-wide networks.

> My mother told me not to report because it could be dangerous. But I continued with the process until reaching the end at which point they gave him a separation order from my family and my house. (Woman, La Ceiba)

4.3 RISK FACTORS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Although community associations can enhance capability for violence prevention, their role is often shaped by broader social and economic factors. The study revealed how the conditions that facilitate or inhibit collective prevention measures reflect such factors. In discussing common risk factors such as the lack of economic and educational opportunities, the rising drug trade, the presence of firearms, and urban migration, residents of urban communities pointed to their effects not only on the individual risk of involvement in crime, but also on community-level dynamics. These factors create a climate of fear, undermine community organization and shared identity, and inhibit collective action. The absence of educational or basic services undermines confidence in state authority and weakens the role of community leaders. As people come to feel that violence can be prevented only by individual responses, they become less willing to participate in community-level solutions and more willing to rely on alternative sources of authority and protection. At the same time, community-level conditions can mediate the effects of individual or societal-level risk factors by either mitigating the effects of widespread poverty, unemployment, and urban migration or by

exacerbating their effects on individuals in a given neighborhood. Focusing on the community level can thus elucidate how the complex interactions between these factors drive violent crime at the neighborhood level.

The study thus points to the effects of macro-level conditions on violence that are poorly understood, with implications for violence prevention efforts. The qualitative research pointed to specific ways in which these conditions shape the risk of violence by either affecting the level of community integration or fragmentation, or interacting with community organization to mitigate or exacerbate risk. A summary of the main findings, presented as a series of hypotheses which could be tested through further research, is presented in Table 2. The findings suggest that the conditions for community-based prevention can be supported at different levels, either by directly trying to strengthen community associations or by trying to shift the structural conditions that shape them. Although some of these conditions may be difficult to affect in the short term, changes over time might enable more sustained and effective violence prevention efforts.

Urban Migration

Many of the most violent neighborhoods contain a large share of recent migrants. Despite certain neighborhoods' reputation for violence, proximity to labor opportunities and access to cheap housing continue to fuel a steady stream of new and transitory residents. Residents discussed how migration can contribute to the risk of violence if it exacerbates competition over job opportunities and fuels unemployment. Rapid urban migration also shapes the conditions for community-based prevention by

Table 2. Hypotheses Regarding Community-Level Effects of Known Risk Factors

RISK FACTORS					
Fragmented Communities			**Cohesive Communities**		
Sparse Internal Ties	Weak Shared Identity			Dense Internal Ties	Strong Shared Identity
Undermines shared identity and interpersonal knowledge; weakens confidence in state		Migration/Stability of Residency		Stable residency fuels neighborhood identity and interpersonal knowledge	
Few job opportunities lead to individual involvement in crime; allows crime and drug trade to take root in neighborhoods		Economic Opportunities		Job opportunities provide alternatives to crime	
Limited access to secondary education fuels youths' turning to crime and undermines confidence in formal authorities		Access to Education		Primary schools serve as visible presence of state and focal point for community life	
Risk that disputes escalate; violence to buy drugs; fear of taking action		Drug Consumption		Lower drug consumption reduces fear and enables community-focused action	
Opportunities for involvement in drug trade; competition for control over neighborhoods; widespread fear		Geography/Proximity to Drug Routes		Distance from drug routes limits risk of presence of armed groups	
Risk that crime and disputes escalate; widespread fear; individual rather than collective response		Access to Firearms		Lower risk of individual violence or fear	
Cycle of retaliation and homicide; commodification of justice and human life; delegitimization of state institutions.		History of Vigilantism		Absence of vigilante groups allows space for community mobilization	

weakening community ties. Residents of neighborhoods with a high proportion of migrants expressed little sense of belonging or identity tied to their neighborhood, inhibiting collection actions and contributing to a culture of individual survival that downplays social responsibility. Residents come to feel that "if nobody cared about me, why should I care about others," which lowers their inhibitions to participating in criminal activity. In some cases, mobility also fuels violence between newcomers and prior residents. The absence of shared identity limits the ability of the community to address these tensions, as described by a young person from Choloma:

> Violence is also when someone new arrives in the neighborhood and they start to humiliate him/her for being new, if he/she comes with other things that are not common in the community like with another style, or a different accent. They get together and start to laugh, because this is what you see mostly here, because they start to make fun of him/her. (Youth, Choloma)

Rapid urban migration further creates the conditions for violence at the community level through the inconsistent access to services experienced in many neighborhoods, which weakens confidence in the state. Internal migration in Honduras often focuses on tax-free zones, which fuel a large number of migrants in search of jobs while generating low revenue for the cities that house them.[27] The municipality of Choloma, home to several tax-free zones, has especially struggled to manage the services and infrastructure needs associated with a rapidly growing population. Municipalities that receive migrants become highly segregated in terms of access to infrastructure and services, with neighborhoods with a high migrant population—and often the highest need—least served. Residents of these neighborhoods exhibit low confidence in the state and in members of the *patronato*; as a result, they are more willing to trust alternative leaders who provide basic security, including armed actors.

Drug Consumption and Trafficking

The consumption of drugs, which appears to be on the rise overall, similarly interacts with other factors to increase the risk of violence for individuals and communities. As several respondents pointed out, drugs fuel violence by motivating individuals to steal money to buy them or because disputes, celebrations, and crimes can escalate toward violence when individuals are under the influence. It was also common to hear that drug consumption triggers domestic violence. Drug consumption thus increases the risk that any conflict within the neighborhood will turn violent and that innocent bystanders may be harmed, as one resident explained:

> I think they should eliminate drugs, vice, and weapons. For example, when people walk around under the influence of drugs and alcohol and have parties here, they start firing in the air, which is dangerous. (Youth, La Ceiba)

The prevalence of drug consumption also affects neighborhood-level conditions by contributing to a climate of fear and mistrust of authorities. Although people generally support stronger measures to control drug consumption, the fear surrounding drugs undermines any response. People observe that measures taken so far have not had any impact and have in some cases led to more problems, as criminal groups react violently to efforts to curb consumption. As one respondent stated, "the more drugs and alcohol are prohibited, the most consumption there will be…more consumption and deaths." People therefore tend to remain silent when they see people consuming or selling drugs and simply stay away from them rather than report or prevent their activities. This attitude is further reinforced in communities where a transient population, high unemployment, and a lack of confidence in the state inhibit collective action. The unwillingness or inability of community members to address consumption among individual youth and children enables drug use to expand, fueling a vicious cycle. The example below epitomizes the situation in many communities, where no one is available to address specific cases of drug use.

> There is a girl whose mother goes to work and the girl stays alone. Over there is a place where older people meet, and then another girl arrives, and she feels bored of waiting so she doesn't go to school instead she goes to the house where they do illicit things. (Woman, El Progreso)

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27 The International Labour Organization (ILO) at the United Nations has constantly pointed out how these industries take advantage of the lax labor legislation of specific countries to weaken some basic labor rights, such as the right to organize, and also to avoid paying overtime or to discredit the need for health services. They also avoid paying health care, child care, or other benefits, putting further strain on municipalities to provide these services.

Geographic Proximity to Drug Transit Routes

The three municipalities included in the study all lie along the main corridor for drug trafficking through Honduras, and La Ceiba sits on a major landing point for drugs transiting by boat or air. This proximity expands opportunities for individual involvement in the drug trade and shapes neighborhood-level dynamics. The presence of armed groups fuels widespread fear among residents of taking any action that might threaten the group and undermines their confidence that the state might respond. As a result, they must keep authorities at arm's length and rely on the armed group to resolve problems.

> All of this violence is a result of drugs, I'm telling you honestly, all of it is a result of drug trafficking. The damage from this small group of people is affecting all Honduras. Unfortunately, as a result of being located in this corridor we have become affected. (Man, La Ceiba)

In addition to inhibiting prevention efforts, the drug trade directly fuels neighborhood-level violence. Residents recognize that along the major drug routes, both small-scale traffickers and highly organized groups compete for control of strategic locations or large swaths of territory and engage in other types of crime. As one respondent explained:

> There was a criminal group here in the community called *Los Toritos*. They were involved in narco-trafficking, and they robbed and killed until they had drugs, and stole the money and the drugs. They were a family, from Olancho. Eventually they were killed. It happened close to *el Bodegon de la Ceramica* in a gun fight, they killed there two of the brothers, and later they killed the others. (Man, La Ceiba).

Poverty and Unemployment

Economic conditions were often cited as the root of everything that is wrong in the country, including crime, but residents also revealed how these problems contribute to violence in particular ways. Most respondents pointed to the individual-level effects of poverty in driving people, especially youth, to participate in crime. Their decisions depend, however, on the presence of opportunities for crime, fueled

by the presence of drugs, organized crime networks, and proximity to the drug trade. These perceptions are consistent with previous research in Honduras that has pointed to specific pathways through which poverty shapes the life histories of those who are considering involvement in criminal activities (Castro and Carranza 2001). People described how the link between poverty, drug trafficking, and crime runs in two directions. As violence negatively affects a particular neighborhood, the turn to criminal activity becomes increasingly attractive, creating a vicious cycle fueled by the combination of unemployment and drugs. A resident of La Ceiba, which has been hit hard by a slowdown in tourism linked to the rise in crime, observed:

> We're finished in Honduras because supposedly tourists won't come. I heard some countries have prohibited their entry into Honduras, I think it was Panama or France. Now they won't enter and this will bring more poverty. (Man, La Ceiba)

Widespread poverty and unemployment also affect neighborhood-level conditions. People consumed with searching for basic resources are less likely to participate in community activities. Several teachers pointed to another effect of poverty: it forces children to work long hours, thus undermining their psychological development while limiting their participation in constructive activities.[28] Yet neither poverty nor unemployment alone contribute to crime; rather, they interact with other conditions to shape the individual and neighborhood-level risks.

Access to Education

The incentive to join criminal activity also depends on access to education, especially at the secondary level. In all the municipalities selected for this research, primary education (first–sixth grades) is well covered, as most neighborhoods have their own primary school. Access to secondary or higher education, however, is extremely limited. Although secondary school enrollment hovers around 73 percent at the national level, in some urban areas those numbers are much lower. Only two public secondary schools exist in El Progreso, three in Choloma, and five in La Ceiba. All of these schools are severely overcrowded,

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28 A report by the international organization Covenant House provides further details on how this problem is linked to poverty and to the economic crisis in the country. See Covenant House, "El Trabajo Infantil en Honduras: Diagnóstico Situacional de Algunas de las Peores Formas de Trabajo Infantil en el País" (New York/Tegucigalpa: Covenant House/Casa Alienza, 2011).

running multiple shifts per day. Students in Choloma and El Progreso are forced to commute outside of the city to San Pedro Sula due to the lack of seats for them in the high schools in their own cities, and the costs are often prohibitive. Beyond public schools, vocational and technical schools are at least partially private and require fees and equipment purchases that some students cannot afford. Students who struggle to access secondary education are more likely to become involved in crime, as one resident explained:

> We have seen many children who finished sixth grade with major sacrifices but could not get into secondary school due to their situations, nor did they have the option of going to vocational training. What they try to do is to look for a job, and if not, they seek to join whatever group is forming or is in the margins of the community. (Community leader, El Progreso)

Limited access to education also contributes to community-level risks of violence by undermining residents' confidence in the state. Although most communities have their own primary school, community leaders often emphasize that their schools were established through their own initiative, with limited assistance from the state, and that the government does little to maintain them. The government's inadequate involvement in the primary schools and the limited presence of secondary schools reinforce the perception that communities are on their own and cannot count on the support of their authorities. On the other hand, where communities do manage to organize, building a school can reinforce internal ties. Leaders in more organized communities recounted how the residents contributed the materials and labor to build the school, while the municipality provided only a few gallons of paint and some roofing materials and the state covers only teachers' salaries, which often go unpaid. As one leader described:

> You see this beautiful school? It is not because the government came to set it up. I built this school here, it's not in such bad shape but it's due to the sacrifice of the parents association and the community. (Community leader, Choloma)

Access to Firearms

The prevalence of weapons similarly increases the risk and severity of violence. According to the University of Honduras National Violence Observatory, 83.3 percent of homicides in 2013 were committed with a firearm. Honduran law permits individuals to own up to five weapons, and regulations on carrying weapons are rarely enforced. Weapons are commonly used for intimidation not only in robberies but also in cases of domestic violence and disputes between neighbors. Residents also pointed to frequent news reports of private security guards being killed as a result of attempts to steal their weapons.

> Now they don't walk around as they did before, when you could walk around with your gun visible on your pants and nobody would say anything. Now they would kill you for it. (Man, La Ceiba)

> You do not observe guns on the street, but inside houses. Or maybe they are on the street but under shirts. There are guns in the billiard halls. There you see any kind of people, that is risky. You see AK47s and 9 millimeters. (Youth, Choloma)

The pervasive presence of firearms also inhibits collective responsibility and community action by contributing to widespread fear. Several respondents described seeing people in public with their guns visible, contributing to a sense of powerlessness among members of the community because it sends a message of criminal groups' total power, impunity, and control. Rumors that criminal groups are storing large arsenals in their homes, fueled by reported incidents of police confiscating those arsenals, further contributes to this fear. The prevalence of firearms thus undermines trust and communication between neighbors, inhibits efforts to work together to prevent violence, and contributes to greater reliance on individual rather than collective measures for enhancing individual safety. In interviews, several crime victims described how they decided to buy a gun after being victimized, especially if they had reported the crime, due to the fear of retaliation by a criminal group. Many individuals mentioned owning at least one gun as the only means to protect themselves and their families. Although people are cautious and keep them hidden, respondents indicated that under extreme circumstances, they would use them.

> After [the assault] what I did was that I bought a weapon to defend myself on my own, since they told me they would kill them, so I said: I will need to kill also. (Man, La Ceiba)

History of Vigilantism

The long experience of Honduran communities with vigilantism as a way to confront insecurity has contributed to the expansion of violence as it has taken on new forms. Rooted in the narrative that the state is unable to provide justice, the system of *sicariato*, or hired/contract killing, has become commonplace in some communities and fueled an increase in homicides. Hired killers are widely available, and the price is sufficiently affordable that anyone who claims to be a victim can hire a *sicario* to resolve a dispute or redress a crime. According to one respondent, although the system of hired killing is not new, it had previously been used predominantly by elites but is now a common practice within communities. The danger of this system is obvious, since any dispute, conflict, or threat can justify the use of this system and lead to homicide. Indeed, the research suggests that contract killing is an important driver of increased homicides, in addition to gang violence and organized crime.

The increasingly widespread practice of hired killing results in a vicious cycle that undermines collective violence prevention. Justice and human life are seen as commodities that anyone with sufficient means can purchase, even on an individual basis. This practice is also consistent with the privatization of security for much of the population, which reinforces the belief that the state is incapable of guaranteeing justice and safety. Yet although users of this practice appear to achieve a sense of security, it is clear from particular narratives and experiences with hired killing that it increases the risk for all involved, as it leads directly to retaliation, blackmail, and extortion, which deepens the cycle of violence.

5. Navigating the Institutional and Political Context

The evolution of violence and the capacity to prevent it also depend on communities' relationships to municipal and national government institutions. Community leaders rely on these institutions to secure resources and to address challenges (such as organized crime) that they cannot resolve on their own. The institutional context also shapes the opportunities for criminal actors to establish and maintain their authority in certain neighborhoods. The interactions between communities, municipal governments, and national institutions thus shape the "local orders" that govern how violence arises, is managed, and can be prevented. In Honduras, the political and institutional context mostly creates obstacles for crime prevention, as the combination of polarized politics, weak institutional capacity, and limited resources creates an environment in which services are unreliable and institutional actors tend to extract rather than to serve. Most communities struggle to secure the resources that could enhance crime prevention activities, and people tend to mistrust state institutions. Yet the research also sheds light on how some communities succeed in building effective networks with municipal and national authorities and in securing resources that enable them to enhance their own crime prevention efforts. These experiences further point to specific municipal policies and practices, such as planning, outreach, and transparency, which facilitate community-based prevention measures. As examples below demonstrate, the proactive support of community networks remains essential to crime prevention, but improvements in municipal governance can help.

Drawing from interviews with community members, leaders, and municipal officials, this section outlines how the political and institutional context shapes community-level responses. It describes the prevailing order and identifies variations that have facilitated prevention efforts. Highlighting both the institutional constraints and examples of effective service delivery by municipal and state institutions reveals avenues for strengthening violence prevention efforts.

5.1 MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE FROM COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Although for most urban residents relationships with the state are channeled through their *patronatos*, these community leaders are themselves embedded in a broader system of municipal governance that shapes their role and impact on community life. As the official liaisons to the municipal government, the members of the *patronato* (usually the president) are responsible for bringing all requests for infrastructure improvements or for access to water, electricity, or other services to the municipal government. In the cities examined for this research, once a request is approved by the mayor, it is put on a list of pending projects until the municipal government finds the resources to fund it. In the absence of sufficient budget to cover projects or any planning processes to prioritize them, projects are typically funded only after long delays, and the city governments rarely find the resources to cover projects in their entirety. Instead, municipalities typically provide some materials—often purchased through favored contracting arrangements—while the community must cover the labor, equipment, and remaining materials to complete the project. As a result, the provision of infrastructure and services by the municipal government often appears arbitrary, insufficient, and unpredictable. In addition, since neighborhood residents have few alternative means through which to make requests or register grievances, the members of the *patronatos* retain significant discretion over the management of requests and the delivery of municipal resources, and many use their positions to extract resources for personal gain. As one *patronato* president noted:

> Since I am the president [of the *patronato*] I exercise more than others because I say so. If we have to make a request, only I draft it and then I send it to the secretary and only then he does it or sends it back. I am the only contact with the municipality, even personnel from the school can't go directly to the municipality, they must go through me." (Community leader, Choloma)

These local-level processes are themselves shaped by a system of governance that is highly centralized, with limited authority or resources allocated to municipalities. Although Honduras began to decentralize certain authorities with the 1990 Law of Municipalities, the law has been only partially implemented. Pledges by the central government to increase the municipal share of revenue from 5 to 20 percent by 2017 and to 40 percent by 2038 have not been fulfilled (World Bank 2013, 32). Transfers have been repeatedly delayed and politicized, especially in the polarized political context following the 2009 coup. In the absence of steady financing, municipal governments often rely on short-term loans from private banks to finance recurrent spending, with high interest rates that divert spending from other purposes. Plans to delegate authority over service delivery functions beyond solid waste management, regulation of public spaces, and local infrastructure have also stalled, resulting in a patchwork of arrangements between municipal, national, and private entities governing water, sewage, electricity, education, and other basic services (Vargas 2011, 66). Municipalities end up shouldering the costs for most infrastructure inputs while retaining limited influence over the delivery of services.

In the absence of sufficient resources or clear lines of authority, the system responds to political pressure and generates opportunities for corruption. Especially in the environment of deep political polarization since the 2009 political crisis, municipal governments play a deeply political role. Mayors and their governments mobilize votes for their parties, and the *patronato*'s role as liaison to neighborhoods places it in a unique position to support this task. Given the absence of planning or basic data systems—none of the three cities included in the study had access to a complete property registry or cadastre that could provide a basis for allocating resources—investments in neighborhoods tend to reflect the *patronato* members' loyalty and effectiveness in mobilizing supporters. Recognizing this reality, many neighborhoods select *patronatos* based on their political connections to the mayor's party rather than their organizational capacity within the community. Even where resources do not follow political imperatives, they are sometimes diverted for other reasons, for example, when the members of the *patronato* collude with municipal officials for personal benefit. One *patronato* president described the process for planning a project as follows:

We make an agreement and put in 50 percent because the engineer told me they would provide 50 percent, of course they won't give us money but they will give us sand, machinery, fuel, the *gravin*, and everything necessary and we put in the cement and the labor. But now we haven't received a response, we are hoping that in the coming months now that it's time for politics (elections), we will have a response. (Community leader, Choloma)

From the perception of residents of urban neighborhoods, the system produces small and often incomplete infrastructure projects that do not resolve basic needs for water, sanitation, education, or health, let alone more complex requirements like violence prevention. Residents of every neighborhood can recall examples of half-completed sewage pipes and bridges and other stories of small- and large-scale corruption that are etched into their collective consciousness and shape their relationship to the state. As in the case described below, such incidents can fuel violence by fomenting conflict and creating the conditions for violence to take root.

The presidents of the *patronatos* used to sell [publicly owned] properties and kept the money… They began to sell the properties once, again and again, until the point that there were properties with up to four titles, up to three or four owners… Now we don't have a school, and this is the result of these dishonest actors, of the first *patronatos*. They didn't bother leaving property for a park, for a football field, for a church, for a health center, for a school, for a day care. (Community leader, La Ceiba).

The difficulty in accessing state resources also fuels violence by weakening confidence in the state. When it is unable to meet community requests or carry out initiatives that require resources, equipment, or expertise, the *patronato*'s credibility declines. As one *patronato* president lamented, when they go back to the community to ask for support, "people are bothered because they say you are just going to steal from them, they criticize you, and they won't participate" (Community leader, La Ceiba). The loss of credibility not only affects the *patronato* president's prospects for reelection, it also strengthens other actors who seek to establish their authority. Neighbors turn to informal leaders—some of whom are linked to criminal networks—to resolve disputes, confront criminals, and seek resources and benefits. In some neighborhoods, armed groups

have even taken over positions in the *patronato* and serve as their community's official leaders and representatives.

> When the *patronato* has the most credibility is when he has an adequate response. When he has what he needs to solve the problems, when you are in the midst of conflict, that is when people believe in you, but when we come and convene the people and tell them we are going to do this project and we start to organize it and go to the municipality, when we don't receive a response, that is when our credibility begins to decline. (Community leader, Choloma)

In some neighborhoods, however, *patronatos* have succeeded in securing resources and earning the support of their communities. Integrated community associations and dense ties within the neighborhood foster downward accountability and promote responsiveness by the *patronato*. When they are embedded in community networks, the patronatos tend to be more committed to delivering results, and residents have greater knowledge of their activities. Even in these neighborhoods, access to political networks and personal connections to municipal authorities remain crucial to securing resources. As one *patronato* president explained, "For things to go forward you need to latch on to a member of parliament, or to someone who is not a politician but is friends with the mayor" (Community leader, La Ceiba). In integrated communities, however, *patronatos* more often use these connections for community benefit rather than personal gain. Another *patronato* president explained how this works in practice:

> These bridges are works that we, with pride, completed with the help of the community, since the labor we put in ourselves through our own activity, and this is also the biggest contribution from the municipality which, through the FHIS [Honduran Social Investment Fund], also built the first classroom that we requested. Since we were doing the school, and I was working in the municipality, I told the mayor who happened to be from the National party that it would be great if they could put in a classroom since we needed it. (President of the *patronato*, Choloma)

In some cases, changes in municipal governance have facilitated community initiatives. Some municipal governments have taken steps to strengthen financing and planning systems or to increase revenue and strengthen their service delivery. The most prominent example affecting security were the so-called "security taxes" (*tazas de seguridad*) adopted by several municipal governments (World Bank 2013, 40). Involving revenue contribution and oversight by the private sector and civil society, the taxes funded municipal collaboration with the police, including such initiatives as municipal crime and grievance hotlines, equipment purchases, and joint crime analysis, as well as the rehabilitation of public spaces. Although in some cases they merely funded *ad hoc* requests for equipment by the police, in the most successful cases, these measures were embedded within a broader set of reforms of municipal governance. In the municipality of Puerto Cortes, which initiated the tax, a decade of reforms involving successive mayors led to increased revenue mobilization, improved data collection and planning, and agreements with the local private sector. The homicide rate dropped from 109 to 88 per 100,000 inhabitants between 2010 and 2012.[29] Yet these efforts ran into obstacles when the national government decided to centralize the security tax in 2011, demonstrating that even well-organized municipal efforts depend on the national institutional context (World Bank 2013, 40).

5.2 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION: THE POLICE, THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND BEYOND

National-level institutions also affect community-based crime prevention both directly and indirectly. National agencies such as the police and justice system, as well as schools, health care facilities, and job creation and crime prevention programs nominally operate at the neighborhood level. From the perspective of most urban residents included in this study, however, national institutions were noted primarily for their absence. In interviews and focus group discussions, the presence of the central state was most often reduced to schools, with other services ostensibly provided by the state, such as health, job, or housing programs, rarely mentioned.

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29 As of 2013, the rates once again increased to previous levels. See UNAH-IUDPAS, Observatorio Nacional de la Violencia. Data available at http://iudpas.org/observatorio.

Residents reported little direct experience with the police and justice system, and those experiences mostly reinforced their lack of confidence—and sometimes contributed to insecurity and fear.

Not only does the limited police presence enable criminal activity, low confidence in the police can also inhibit collective crime prevention measures. Respondents across communities expressed the belief that they were more likely to receive assistance from informal armed groups than from law enforcement or other state officials. This limited credibility contributes to the sense that no one can help—neither the state nor the *patronato*—and that only they on their own can protect themselves against crime. This attitude can quickly translate into support for criminal groups.

The perception of national authorities as it relates to violence emerged most commonly through discussions regarding the police. On the surface, these discussions echoed the low level of confidence in the police that is common throughout the region and especially pronounced in Honduras. A survey conducted in 2013 by *Cid Gallup Latinoamerica* in Central America found that Hondurans have the lowest confidence in the police in the region, with 84 percent of the population expressing little or no confidence in the police, and 18 percent expressing the belief that the police are mainly responsible for crime.[30] A 2012 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey found that the police have the worst trust among government institutions, even though they are among the institutions citizens are most likely to have encountered directly (Perez 2013). Several high-profile cases of abuse and criminal activity by the police, followed by stalled reform efforts, have reinforced these perceptions.[31] Within neighborhoods, the most common complaint was that the police rarely—if ever—respond to calls for help.

"The security problem is that even the police are corrupt. Here there is a police station nearby that is located in the neighborhood…and when there are problems once in a while, even the police from the nearby station don't come." (Man, El Progreso)

Discussions and interviews yielded a more nuanced perception of the police, in which residents expressed both a desire for greater police presence and a fear of retaliation if they called upon them. Many respondents saw more police as a priority for reducing violence and called for the construction of new police stations and more frequent patrols in their neighborhoods. One interviewee from La Ceiba credited the establishment of a police station between two neighborhoods with improving public safety, since "crime groups from above do not come down to the community anymore." At the same time, the vast majority of the victims of assault and robbery interviewed for this study chose not to report the crimes to the police. This decision appeared to be based on a combination of a lack of confidence—victims do not believe that they will receive a response—and a fear of retaliation. The widespread perception that police officers are linked to crime fuels the impression that reports to the police may be leaked to criminals, and the consequence could be dangerous. As one respondent described is response to extortion:

I: Did you formally report the crime to the authorities?

R: No, I was afraid. I was afraid of those who were supposedly arrested. I prefer paying to reporting. Then I feel more relaxed, I don't go around thinking why did I report, they will arrest them and investigate them and I will have problems, while if I pay my mind will be at ease and I would be in a healthy and safe atmosphere. (Man, Choloma)

Other elements of the criminal justice system appear even less relevant from the perspective of reducing violence. According to the 2012 LAPOP survey, trust is higher in the justice system than the police, with 37 percent of respondents expressing trust in the justice system compared to 29 percent for the police. In reality, however, residents of affected neighborhoods rarely encounter the state justice

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30 Cid-Gallup, 2013, available at: https://www.cidgallup.com/es/virtual-library/download/21-los-centroamericanos-se-preocupan-mas-por-el-crimen-callejero-.

31 In the most prominent case, four police officers were convicted for the October 2011 murder of the son of Julieta Castellanos, the rector of the National University of Honduras. The Commission for the Reform of Public Security, established in the aftermath of the murder to overhaul the police, Attorney General, and the judicial branch, along with an initiative to vet and remove corrupt police officers, has largely stalled and not produced any significant reforms. See Adriana Beltran and Geoff Thale, "Police Reform in Honduras: Stalled Efforts and the Need to Weed out Corruption" (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), 2013).

system. When they do report crimes, perpetrators are seldom apprehended, and fewer still are convicted.[32] As a woman in El Progreso lamented, "what the authorities do is they take cases, put them on paper and leave them there, there is no one who follows up to see if the case gets resolved… They say there's no time to go around looking at every case." In some localities the court system is costly to access, as in Choloma, where residents must travel to the nearby city of San Pedro Sula to go to court. For small-scale disputes or violations, citizens can go to the municipal "justice departments," which are mandated with enforcing local ordinances, and some municipalities have established municipal mediation services. For criminal matters, however, they must use the national justice system, though that system appears to be captured by powerful individuals. As the following comment suggests, the widespread perception of corruption in the system undermines most people's willingness to pursue justice even when they can.

> The violence is quite intense, and if we try to confront this with the authorities so that they help us, but the authorities themselves are linked to them, that is where the problems come in. (Man, La Ceiba)

Low confidence in these institutions undermines a range of strategies aimed at preventing or mitigating violence. Residents of affected communities rarely report criminal behavior and routinely decline to cooperate with police investigators or serve as witnesses. They generally seek to stay as far away from the police as possible, and many prefer dealing with criminal groups, especially when the members of those groups are known within the community. The lack of alternative recourse further deepens the feeling of helplessness and the fear of even working on prevention efforts. As one resident put it:

> If even the police don't arrive in response to an incident of violence, how is a simple civilian supposed to intervene without risking his life? (Youth, Choloma)

Nonetheless, the desire for a police and justice response despite these perceptions suggests that the lack of confidence could be overcome. Repeated calls for more police presence, the willingness

among some individuals to cooperate with police-led initiatives like the *Mesas de Seguridad*, and the decisions by some victims to report crimes all suggest that many residents of violent communities are willing to give the police a chance. This appears to have occurred in cases of domestic violence, which many victims do report. As discussed below, in some cases—notably those of domestic violence—the police and criminal justice sector have played a constructive role, which shows it is possible for the situation to improve. These experiences shed light on some of the elements that would improve responsiveness and overcome the negative perception of these institutions.

5.3 EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE RESPONSE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Within this context, examples of effective response by state institutions to incidents of violent crime shed light on the types of solutions and institutional changes that could improve their responsiveness more broadly. This section focuses on two such examples, drawing from interviews with victims of crimes and their communities: responses to domestic violence and school-based drug prevention. These examples highlight two crucial elements for an effective response. First, community networks were instrumental in encouraging and enabling victims to seek assistance from authorities. Second, the response came from multiple agencies with overlapping and complementary responses. These elements could be reinforced for a more successful response to violent crime more broadly.

5.3.1 Responding to Domestic Violence

The most striking examples of effective institutional response emerged in interviews with victims of domestic violence. Several victims reported positive experiences and outcomes from reporting their cases to the authorities. They found that the police acted immediately, often arresting the offender within 24 hours or providing protective measures to the victim. Cases were referred to specialized prosecutors and family courts. When they reached the court, the

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32 In 2013, the prosecutor general admitted that only 20 percent of reported homicides are investigated. See http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Pais/story.csp?cid=575652&sid=299&fid=214.

core issues, including economic disputes, right of housing, and custody, were most often decided in their favor. Most importantly, victims recalled being treated with empathy, respect, and efficiency, attributing a stark improvement in their personal security to the support of these institutions, as described in the following two quotations.

> I felt confident because I spoke to the chief of the investigative police (DGIC). He asked me and I told him [what happened]. He patted me on the back and told me: don't feel bad, we are going to help you here. They told me we are going to follow the procedure, and if he comes back to bother you, call us and we will arrest him. (Woman, El Progreso)

> All of the positive feelings I have are due to them [the women's prosecutors]. As a woman, I feel secure that I can get married and if something happened again I would report it. I feel that everything they told me was very positive. (Woman, La Ceiba)

Further examination reveals the importance of active support from community networks and organizations. In the successful cases, neighbors, community leaders, and colleagues provided crucial moral support, encouraged victims to report, helped them find temporary housing and employment, and served as witnesses before the court. Employers allowed victims to take paid time off to report the case and attend hearings. Local NGOs and women's groups provided information and counsel.

> My colleagues at work, the moment when this person came to insult me, they would come out and protect me, sometimes accompany me to my house. They always paid attention to my case. The support I received from my colleagues was more than support, they never asked me anything, it was sufficient for them to see my bruises, and the times they served as witnesses when he came to insult me, my colleagues never asked me. (Woman, La Ceiba)

Overlapping responses by multiple state institutions, each of which provided specialized assistance, also improved outcomes. In addition to the police, specialized prosecutors and judges attended to their needs. Women's offices in the municipal governments provided information and helped victims navigate the system. The police officers, judges, and prosecutors who provided the services, in turn, relied extensively on community networks to ensure victims' needs were met. In the following case, the

Human Rights Ombudsman provided an additional avenue when the police were initially unresponsive due to influence by the perpetrator.

> When I went the third time to report, there was a man named Sanchez who was a friend of his stepmother and he didn't want to take the report. I went at 7 in the evening and he sent me away and told me he was not taking any reports, and that it would be better if I came during another shift because they know it perfectly. The next day I came back because it had been 24 hours, and each time I went to the prosecutor so that forensic medicine would examine me. Then I went to Human Rights to file a report, and they told me to go back to the police so that they could receive the report, and they finally received it. (Woman, El Progreso)

Not all cases included in this study were resolved successfully. Some victims remained too afraid to report or found that their cases did not move through the system with sufficient urgency. Even when they received a favorable judgment, women described how men avoided support payments despite multiple court dates and threats of imprisonment. The support is often quite low—one woman reported receiving L 600, or about US$30 per month—as some men negotiate the payment down if they cede their house or control over the children. Some men succeed in obstructing the judicial process through their connections, as described in the example above. Moreover, it may be that domestic violence cases are actually much easier to resolve than other criminal cases, in part because the identity of the perpetrator is always known, suggesting that such problems are even deeper for other crimes. Nonetheless, the fact that some cases were resolved successfully—through the combination of community support and overlapping institutional responses—suggests that similar elements might facilitate improved responsiveness in other areas.

5.3.2 School-Based Drug Prevention

The same elements, including active community support combined with overlapping responses from municipal and national institutions, contributed to effective responses to drug consumption in primary schools. As many teachers and parents related, primary school students are increasingly at risk of drug use and recruitment into criminal groups. Schools therefore have a critical role to play in prevention by fostering positive norms and intervening in indi-

vidual cases. The following case illustrates a situation in which school-based prevention played an important role in the life of one student through the combination of community support and a thoughtful response by a state official.

> I have a situation now with a girl in the sixth grade… When I found out what had been happening, I held an emergency meeting on a Friday with the parents association. I could not tell them specifically who was involved due to security concerns, since by the end of the meeting and as soon as I stepped outside, they would kill me. So I only asked that they pay attention to what their children are doing and who is accompanying them to their homes… I think these girls are naive, but they are being seduced with drugs… Finally, the girl came to me to ask for help because she did it once and wants to get out, but now they're threatening her. (School principal, El Progreso)

This incident reveals both the power and limitation of community support and state responses. The incident occurred in one of the communities with relatively low violence and vibrant community organization. The principal, a state official who was also embedded in community networks, succeeded in mobilizing community members and school resources to encourage the girl to seek help. Yet although the teacher played a critical role, she lacked the expertise needed to respond to teen drug use or to the threats from criminal groups. The example therefore highlights where more coordinated services could strengthen crime prevention efforts.[33]

In sum, where institutions responded effectively, community actors helped to navigate the institutional landscape, and multiple institutions responded to provide overlapping support. These experiences suggest that building on community capacity may be necessary for the state to act effectively and that collaboration between state agencies may be as important as the role of each one. In this respect, municipal governments appeared to play a central role in serving as the link between individuals, communities, and national institutions.

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33 The CONVIDA program provides a promising model in the Honduran context, especially in Choloma.

6. Conclusion and Entry Points

Even in the midst of widespread crime and insecurity, some urban communities in Honduras have found ways to prevent violence. A comparison of nine neighborhoods in three cities with high and low levels of violent crime revealed the strategies that communities pursue, the capabilities required to pursue them, and the conditions that facilitate them. By organizing collectively and building networks with municipal and national authorities, these communities have prevented criminal groups from taking root in their neighborhoods. Understanding their perspectives, as well as the difficulties they face and the ways they have managed them, sheds light on the building blocks for effective and sustainable approaches to prevent violence.

The residents of these urban neighborhoods face numerous challenges. A combination of societal-level factors, including a shift in the transnational drug trade, rising unemployment, the prevalence of drugs and firearms, and rapid urbanization, have deepened their vulnerability to violence. Competition between armed groups has increased at the local level, and the capacity of state institutions to confront these forces has degraded as a result of the political crisis. Examination of how these factors play out within urban neighborhoods further revealed that the effects of some factors, including drug trafficking and consumption, unemployment, and limited access to secondary education, are felt especially acutely as they shape incentives and opportunities to participate in crime.

In some neighborhoods, residents have collectively organized measures that have reduced incidents of violence, alleviated some risk factors, and prevented armed groups from achieving control. The findings are consistent with theories of "collective efficacy" that focus on the role of informal social control within communities in preventing crime, but they also highlight forms of collective action that are specific to Honduras. These measures range from informal efforts to monitor suspicious activity and resolve neighborhood disputes to organized initiatives to

ban the sale of alcohol, rehabilitate public spaces, and organize neighborhood youth. The conditions that enable such actions are similar to those in other contexts, including a strong sense of community identity, dense interpersonal ties, and shared norms. The research also highlighted the role of specifically Honduran forms of community associations—the *patronato*, churches, primary schools, sports teams, and youth and women's groups—but found that the ties between them facilitate crime prevention more than the associations themselves. Moreover, it showed how integrated community organization can deepen the impact and sustainability of prevention approaches that rely on changes in individual behavior or in the physical environment.

Although the study shows that community-based crime prevention is feasible in Honduras, it also found a prevailing trend toward the weakening of the conditions that enable prevention and the emergence of more violent forms of maintaining local order in many neighborhoods. As a result of trends like urban migration and the shift in organized crime, communities have grown increasingly fragmented, fear and uncertainty have increased, and neighborhood-wide, collective efforts have become more difficult—and sometimes risky—to organize. In the absence of a reliable state presence or trusted local leaders, local armed actors have successfully asserted their authority. In some neighborhoods, dominant criminal or vigilante groups have achieved sufficient control to reduce certain forms of crime, but they also tend to tolerate crimes such as extortion, assaults, and drug trafficking. In other neighborhoods, the residents have nowhere to turn for support and must face widespread crime and violence on their own.

The study also shed light on how the political and institutional context in Honduras affects community-level efforts. In general, a seemingly arbitrary and unpredictable system of local governance, combined with unreliable police, justice, and other national institutions, constrain prevention efforts by limiting access to resources and services. This insti-

tutional reality has also weakened residents' confidence in the state and increased their readiness to rely on criminal armed actors to protect them. Yet the residents of some neighborhoods have succeeded in using their networks and connections to state officials to bolster prevention initiatives, demonstrating that it is possible to navigate even a challenging institutional context. Changes in some municipalities that have improved planning, revenue allocation, and transparency show how improvements in municipal governance can enable prevention efforts.

The research therefore points to approaches that can contribute to preventing violence in Honduras and to providing entry points for building on and expanding these approaches. It suggests three broad tactics for strengthening community-based prevention as a foundation for broader crime prevention efforts. First, the research found that it is possible to strengthen the type of community organization that enables prevention in relatively short periods of time by promoting community identity, shared norms, and ties between associations and individuals. Such efforts directly reduce crime and enhance the impact and sustainability of other programs. Second, it identified the factors that have weakened community capability for prevention, factors that, if alleviated, over time could strengthen the foundation for prevention efforts. Third, it highlighted features of the institutional context at the municipal and national levels that could be addressed to facilitate community-based prevention efforts. Each of these approaches is elaborated on below.

The research also highlighted challenges that go beyond the scope of neighborhood-level efforts and that complicate crime prevention. The factors driving violent crime in Honduras go far beyond what individual neighborhoods can handle, particularly the transnational drug trade, economic inequality, political polarization, and governance challenges. Violence has become deeply entrenched, as evidenced by the growing recourse to paid assassinations to settle disputes. Control of some neighborhoods by criminal armed groups is rarely going to be overcome by urban residents acting on their own. The police, justice, and local governance systems remain unreliable, but reforms have been contested as a result of competing visions and entrenched political polarization. Even organized communities can resist the onslaught of violent crime for only so long without the support of responsive police and justice systems, municipal resources, and access to education

and employment opportunities. Even positive examples of community-based prevention, such as school-based drug prevention, highlighted how communities need government financing for infrastructure and services or for expertise to deal with complex issues such as drug consumption and organized crime. At the same time, the research found that especially in the context of state weakness, organized communities can facilitate institutional responses by connecting residents to authorities, enhancing trust, and supporting victims. Community-based prevention can thus deepen the impact and sustainability of other prevention efforts.

The research points to the following entry points for further programming and research.

Invest in community organization. Integrated and organized communities constitute a foundation for crime prevention at the local level. Although in some neighborhoods the type of organization that facilitates prevention evolved over time, the research found that in several neighborhoods this type of organization improved significantly within only a few years. Interventions by local organizations, some with external support, that have invested in strengthening community organization, promoting shared identity and norms, forging links between associations, and facilitating collective measures that deepen community organization have yielded significant effects in enabling prevention. Such efforts complement approaches that emphasize improvements in physical infrastructure or that focus on alleviating specific risk factors. A strong finding from the research is that other neighborhood-level approaches are unlikely to be sustained—and may even backfire—without the community organization that can ensure that public spaces are managed effectively, resources are targeted appropriately, and efforts are accepted and sustained by neighborhood residents. Prevention programs, whether supported by municipal, national, or international actors, should thus routinely devote resources and attention to strengthening and integrating community organization.

Target risk factors that affect community capability for prevention, especially drug and alcohol consumption, the prevalence of firearms, and the limited access to education. Although multiple factors interact to increase the risk of violent crime, the research found that certain elements appear to deepen the effects of other risk factors. An increase in drug consumption, the prevalence of

firearms, and insufficient access to secondary education exacerbate the effects of unemployment, poverty, and urbanization by creating opportunities for participation in violent crime. These factors also directly undermine community-based prevention efforts by fueling widespread fear of acting collectively, limiting community interaction, and undermining confidence in community leaders and state officials. Perhaps most importantly, these factors can be addressed more readily than deeply rooted factors like poverty, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and the transnational drug trade, including through neighborhood-level responses. Community-wide efforts to prevent drug consumption and access to firearms, especially among youth, along with policy intervention aimed at increasing access to secondary schools, could address salient risk factors for crime and build the foundation for other community-based prevention efforts.

Strengthen municipal-level planning and response. Strengthening core systems of municipal governance for revenue extraction, data collection, and urban design and planning can enable prevention programs by building the necessary revenue and evidence base, facilitating the targeted allocation of resources, and enhancing citizen confidence. Experience from Latin American cities that have reduced homicides suggests that such reforms were integral to those successes. In particular, strengthening systems for transparently collecting and analyzing data on violent crime, population, and service-delivery needs; developing inclusive planning processes to prioritize responses; and monitoring outcomes in partnership with the local private sector and civil society can lead to a visible impact on crime.

Explore opportunities for police and justice sector reform. The challenges facing the police and justice system in Honduras point to the need for comprehensive organizational reforms to address weak performance and widespread corruption. Although efforts so far have made some progress, they have also faced deep political and organizational resistance, as well as competing visions for the most appropriate response. Nonetheless, the research points to widespread support for reforming the police and justice system from within communities, municipalities, and private sector actors. Building on local-level support, donors and partners should explore possible entry points for reform, identify the constraints that have impeded reform, and work with local actors to facilitate policy dialogue and discussion. In the meantime, municipal governments could explore approaches to improving the responsiveness of the police and justice actors at the community level, for example, by learning from pilot community policing programs or expanding local mediation and alternative dispute-resolution programs in partnership with municipal and national justice actors.

Build the evidence base. Since crime is constantly evolving over time and space, efforts to confront it must evolve as well. Experience in other countries has demonstrated the value of systematic data collection and analysis to understand its nature, causes, and actors and to identify the elements that can be tackled by different actors and institutions. In Honduras, data on crime, risk factors, and prevention approaches remain limited and unreliable. Neighborhood-level data on the types of crime, risk factors, and conditions and practices elaborated here should be tested more systematically across neighborhoods to determine their validity for prevention programming, and efforts to implement these approaches should be measured and evaluated. Municipal- and national-level observatories could enhance the collection and monitoring of data on crime and risk factors, and regular surveys could examine the way that crime, risk and protective factors, and changing social, political, and economic conditions are experienced by urban residents. Most importantly, systematic efforts by municipal and national governments to use such data to plan responses and monitor their outcomes could provide the foundation for more effective evidence-based crime prevention.

Annex:
Neighborhood Selection Methodology and Data

The neighborhoods included in the study were selected to enable a structured, focused comparison between three different categories of neighborhoods in each city: neighborhoods with high levels of violence, neighborhoods with low levels of violence, and neighborhoods that had previously experienced high violence followed by a visible decline. The neighborhoods were similar enough in most other categories to permit a controlled comparison. All had a medium population size (middle two quartiles) and an income level in the bottom two quartiles, and all were located in the urban sections of the municipality. All of the neighborhoods were required to have a minimum level of organization to permit comparisons of the type and nature of organization. A set of eligible neighborhoods that met these criteria was categorized by homicide rate, and the team conducted inquiries with municipal officials and community leaders as to the feasibility of conducting research in these communities, based on security considerations and any notable characteristics. One neighborhood from each category (low homicide rate, high homicide rate, and recent reduction in homicide rate) was selected in all three municipalities.

The selection process coincided with the process of neighborhood selection for the Honduras Safer Municipalities Project, financed by the World Bank. The same data and indicators were collected in order to select treatment and control municipalities, all of which were to have similar socio-demographic characteristics, a basic level of community organization, a primary school, and a relatively high level of crime. The communities were assigned a score and ranked numerically based on a weighted total of points assigned for each indicator. The top 20 neighborhoods were deemed eligible and "clustered" geographically in order to maximize positive spillover effects and expand impact to form between three and six eligible clusters of three neighborhoods each. One of these clusters was assigned to be the treatment, and the other cluster was assigned to be the control.

The indicators used for the selection of the neighborhoods for the comparative study and the project are listed below, followed by a list of neighborhoods with data assigned. Note that due to the different objectives of the selection (structured comparison vs. treatment and control), the same neighborhoods were not selected for both the study and the project. The selected neighborhoods have not been listed to preserve the confidentiality of the community leaders and members interviewed for the study.

- **Homicide rate:** This was used as the primary proxy for level of violent crime. Data were collected from the National Preventive Police and the National Violence Observatory for the period 2009–12. Although other crime and dispute data were collected from municipalities and the police, they were deemed to be too inconsistent and unreliable to be used.

- **Population:** As a proxy for population size, data were collected from the municipal cadastre on the number of housing lots in each neighborhood. This proxy was required, since the last census was conducted in 2000 and some of the municipalities have experienced significant demographic shifts since then.

- **Income level:** The most reliable indicator to measure neighborhood-level poverty in Honduras is household energy consumption. Data on monthly electricity consumption per neighborhood from 2009 (the most recent available data) were collected from the national electrical company (*Empresa Nacional de Energía Electrica, ENEE*). Neighborhoods in the lowest quartile in terms of average electricity consumption were selected.

- **Presence of primary school:** The school is an important community institution that can serve as the platform for a variety of prevention activities. Data on the presence of primary and secondary schools and numbers of students will be collected from the official registries of the Ministry of Education and cross checked with municipal officials.

- **Community organization:** Data on community organization were provided by municipal authorities through a rapid assessment of the types of community organizations present and active in each neighborhood. Designated officials with experience working in communities were given questionnaires regarding the presence and activity of common community organizations (i.e., *patronatos*, water committees, parents associations, youth and women's groups, and churches, among others); the management quality of these organizations; and the types of projects recently implemented or currently under implementation by these organizations. Only neighborhoods that met the other criteria were assigned community organization scores.

- **Prioritization by municipality for crime prevention:** The municipal governments and civil society in two of the cities, Choloma and La Ceiba, had developed *Municipal Citizen Security and Coexistence Plans*, which included priority neighborhoods for prevention efforts. These neighborhoods had been selected based on homicide rates as well as peoples' knowledge of "hot spot" areas of the city that needed attention. Although El Progreso did not have a written plan, municipal officials had their own list of priority neighborhoods.

CHOLOMA	No. of Homicides 2009	No. of Homicides 2010	No. of Homicides 2011	No. of Homicides 2012	Avg. No. of Homicides 2009-2012	Prioritized by Municipality for Crime Prevention	No. of Households (municipal cadastre)	Community Organization Score	Income Level (Monthly Energy Consumption in Kw, 2009)	Presence of Primary School
Lopez Arellano	26	34	29	39	32	Y	1653		172.6	Yes
El Chaparro	13	4	16	4	9.25	Y	679	8	193.5	Yes
El Centro	6	12	9	5	8	Y	265	14	223	Yes
Concepción	1	9	2	5	4.25	Y	184		163.28	No
Santa Fe	4	2	7	3	4	Y	809	17	157.36	Yes
San Antonio	2	2	12	0	4	Y	210	6	185.21	No
Exitos de Anach 1	9	2	4	0	3.75	Y	493	25	165.55	Yes
Rubí	7	0	4	4	3.75	Y	383	5	141.23	No
Las Torres	1	5	1	6	3.25		1504	16	135.25	Yes
Victoria	1	0	4	8	3.25		1383	17	160.45	Yes
Cocos del Norte	1	7	3	2	3.25		169		234.47	No
Trincheras	0	3	3	7	3.25	Y	165	10	165.97	No
Libertad de Anach	3	2	2	4	2.75			12	151.97	Yes
Armando Gale	1	3	3	4	2.75	Y	315	15	158.28	Yes
Ceden	4	5	2	0	2.75	Y		19	206	Yes
Cerro Verde	2	2	4	2	2.5		958	17	208.05	Yes
Primavera	4	3	1	2	2.5		302	10	196.84	Yes
11 de Abril	3	2	5	0	2.5			20	149.13	Yes
Brisas Del Rio	4	1	2	2	2.25		338	6		No
San francisco	1	0	6	2	2.25		201	22	152.09	No
Las Cascadas	3	2	4	0	2.25			9	208.95	Yes
El Kilometro	2	1	2	3	2	Y		26		No
Jardines Del Campo 1	1	4	0	2	1.75				193.95	No
Edilberto Zolano	0	1	6	0	1.75	Y	1333	18	121.8	No
Canada	1	2	4	0	1.75	Y	213	16	220.46	Yes
Las Pilas	1	4	2	0	1.75		202	16	135.61	Yes
Profesionales	1	2	2	2	1.75		153		327.05	Yes

Name										
Japón	0	3	3	0	1.5	Y	272	17	120.91	Yes
Milenio	0	1	1	3	1.25		325			No
Las Lomas	0	0	4	0	1.0	Y	228		168.39	Yes
La Fortuna/Tuana	0	1	0	2	0.8		700			No
Las Americas	1	0	0	2	0.8	Y	678		153.7	Yes
Brisas Del Norte	0	0	0	3	0.8		500	22	104.27	No
El Porvenir	0	0	3	0	0.8					
Las Flores	0	0	3	0	0.8					
Unidad	0	2	1	0	0.8	Y			143.72	Yes
Crematorio Muni	0	0	0	2	0.5					No
Manantial	0	0	0	2	0.5				166.61	No
Sinaí	0	0	0	2	0.5				137.6	No
Alianza	0	0	0	2	0.5		509	26		No
La Granja	0	2	0	0	0.5		207		177.4	Yes
INFOP	0	2	0	0	0.5	Y			151.67	Yes
Los Almendros	0	1	0	0	0.3	Y	879		130.77	No
Inez Carranza	1	0	0	0	0.3	Y	0	15	174.7	Yes

LA CEIBA	No. of Homicides 2009	No. of Homicides 2010	No. of Homicides 2011	No. of Homicides 2012	Avg. No. of Homicides 2009-2012	Prioritized by Municipality for Crime Prevention	No. of Households (municipal cadastre)	Community Organization Score	Income Level (Monthly Energy Consumption in Kw, 2009)	Presence of Primary School
Las Delicias	7	13	9	10	9.75	Y	1613	19	156.37	Yes
El Confite	6	10	13	9	9.5	Y	1063	18	210.25	Yes
Bonitillo	5	5	11	10	7.75	Y	128	10	167.49	Yes
Pizzaty	5	6	8	11	7.5	Y	1777	21	193.89	Yes
La Isla	2	8	10	9	7.25	Y	721	22	210.25	Yes
El Centro	9	11	5	3	7		201		226.42	Yes
Irias Navas	3	4	14	5	6.5	Y	608	9	189.35	Yes
1 de Mayo	1	2	8	7	4.5	Y	409	27	154.38	Yes
Alvarado	6	1	4	6	4.25		712	15	186.46	Yes
Solares Nuevos	6	3	3	4	4		779		200.50	Yes
San Judas	1	5	2	8	4	Y	473	29	193.20	Yes
Nueva Esperanza	1	9	1	5	4					No
La Julia	2	2	6	4	3.5		610		204.15	No
Suyapa	3	4	4	3	3.5		1171		151.65	No
Ingles	3	3	7		3.25		477		165.08	No
El Bufalo	1	2	4	6	3.25	Y	229	17	172.23	No
Melgar Castro	2	2	6	3	3.25	Y	1498	17	195.01	No
San José	2	2	6	3	3.25			22	141.06	No
Sierra Pina	3	5	2	3	3.25		708	17	189.91	Yes
Bella Vista	1	2	5	4	3		719		185.89	No
Dantillo	4	2	6		3		190		170.02	Yes
La Libertad	0	1	6	5	3		242		138.89	No
Sinai/Altos de Sinai	2	4	6		3		51		238.38	No
Mejía	4	5	1		2.5		1033		242.83	No
Armenia Bonita	0	3	2	4	2.25	Y	386	20	141.72	Yes
Nueva Era	1	1	4	3	2.25					No
Yessenia Castillo	1	0	2	6	2.25		184		241.92	Yes

Neighborhood								
El Danto	1	3	4	2		2		186.83	Yes
El Naranjal	4	0	1	3		2	410	683.39	No
Gracias a Dios	2	2	0	4		2	342	143.09	Yes
Herrera	1	1	2	4		2		200.40	No
Palmira	0	4	1	3		2	158	262.98	Yes
Ponce I etapa	1	2	5			2	463	291.03	No
Villas Neem	3	1	1	3		2	31	189.63	No
El Toronjal	2	5	0			1.75	756	453.20	No
Los Maestros	2	1	4			1.75	561	258.89	Yes
Lempira			6			1.5	269	176.07	No
Miramar	1	1	1	3		1.5	726	207.37	Yes
SUTRASFCO				6		1.5	536	278.12	
Villa Nueva	0	0	2	4		1.5		247.73	No
Independencia	2	2	1			1.25	414	219.54	Yes
Pradera	0	1	4			1.25	199	231.96	No
Los Laureles	1	0	4			1.25	219	125.94	Yes
Miramontes	1	0	0	4		1.25	380	223.16	No
Raul Pineda	1	0	4			1.25	220	198.83	No
La Barra	0	5	0		Y	1.25	199	11	223.59	No
Bautista				4		1	218	142.63	No
Carmen Elena	0	0	4			1	232	287.05	Yes
El Siete			4			1		139.20	No
Lomas de Palmira	0	0	1	3		1	71	123.72	Yes
Nueva Esperanza	0	0	1	3		1			No
Sam Creek			4			1	828		Yes
Buenos Aires	0	2	1	0		0.75	253	201.45	Yes
El Sauce	0	0	0	3		0.75	833	448.14	Yes
La Esperanza	0	0	0	3		0.75	146	163.85	No
Casa Blanca	2	0	0	0		0.5	63	214.13	Yes
El Iman				0		0	351	264.20	Yes

EL PROGRESO	No. of Homicides 2009	No. of Homicides 2010	No. of Homicides 2011	No. of Homicides 2012	Avg. No. of Homicides 2009-2012	Prioritized by Municipality for Crime Prevention	No. of Households (municipal cadastre)	Community Organization Score	Income Level (Monthly Energy Consumption in Kw, 2009)	Presence of Primary School
El Centro	8	14	5	14	10.25		121	7	184	Yes
Palermo	6	9	5	6	6.5	Y	1043	23	169.62	Yes
Mang y	4	0	6	9	4.75		680	27	160	Yes
Bendeck	3	5	9	2	4.75		884	22	182.1	Yes
Suazo Córdova	0	0	8	9	4.25	Y	615	24	140.6	Yes
San Miguel	5	3	2	6	4	Y	325	20	131.6	Yes
Los Angeles	6	5	0	4	3.75		431		195.6	No
San Francisco	2	5	4	2	3.25		519	13	178.77	Yes
Corocol	1	3	5	2	2.75		331		145.53	No
Rodolfo Cárcamo	3	3	4	0	2.5		163	19	144.99	No
Primavera	1	5	1	2	2.25	Y	646	18	154.1	Yes
Los Castaños	5	0	1	2	2		246	16	137.9	Yes
Sinaí	2	3	1	2	2		30	7	130.81	No
12 de Junio	3	2	3	0	2		317		122.98	No
Canaan	2	4	1	0	1.75					No
Suyapa	5	1	1	0	1.75		306	16	124.2	Yes
Kennedy	1	0	2	3	1.5		170		161.98	No
Los Pinos/El Pino	1	1	1	3	1.5		72		281.22	Yes
Rodas Alvarado	0	1	2	3	1.5		235		123.41	Yes
Alex er López	0	2	4	0	1.5					No
Berlín	0	1	5	0	1.5		417		149.2	Yes
Buenos Aires	0	4	2	0	1.5		137		158.08	Yes
Las Acacias	0	1	2	3	1.5		156		380.51	No
Subirana	0	2	0	3	1.25					No
19 de Julio No.1	0	2	1	2	1.25		177		122.24	Yes
San José	0	3	0	2	1.25		193		216.17	Yes
27 de Octubre	1	2	2	0	1.25		129		104.96	Yes
Las Mercedes	1	0	4	0	1.25		229		157.13	No

Neighborhood									
Las Palmas	2	3	0	0	1.25		65		123.96	Yes
Penjamo	2	3	0	0	1.25		141		133.23	Yes
San Antonio	3	1	1	0	1.25					
Los Laureles	2	0	0	2	1	Y	204	27	127.53	Yes
2 de Marzo	1	1	2	0	1	Y	472	24	159.58	Yes
Altos de El Progreso	3	1	0	0	1	Y	86	9	106.72	No
Brisas del Sur	3	1	0	0	1		66		84.45	No
Carlos Roberto Reina	0	1	3	0	1		104		117.25	Yes
Centro América/Centro Americana	1	0	3	0	1		112		122.3	No
Fraternidad de la Paz	3	0	1	0	1		179		186.47	No
Nueva Jerusalén	0	1	3	0	1		78		120.92	No
Juan Ramón Morales	2	1	1	0	1	Y	97	20	103.4	Yes
La Libertad	2	2	0	0	1		90		142.25	Yes
Las Delicias	0	0	4	0	1.0		116		189.9	No
Nuñez	0	3	1	0	1.0					Yes
Policarpo Paz García	2	2	0	0	1.0	Y	192	13	141.9	Yes
Quebrada Seca	1	0	3	0	1.0		383		155.9	Yes
Aurora	0	0	0	3	0.8		76		172.8	No
Paredes	0	1	0	2	0.8		120		136.7	No
Cabañas	0	0	3	0	0.8		146		212.6	No
Monte Fresco	0	1	2	0	0.8					No
Montevideo	0	2	1	0	0.8		145		194.4	No
Nueva Jerusalen	0	0	3	0	0.8		78		120.9	No
Ramirez Reina	0	1	2	0	0.8		182		166.9	No
San Jorge	2	0	1	0	0.8	Y	436		115.4	Yes
Castillo	0	0	0	2	0.5		39		176.3	No
3 de abril	1	0	1	0	0.5	Y	224		108.1	Yes
Fátima	0	1	1	0	0.5	Y	87		102.8	Yes
7 de abril	0	0	1	0	0.3	Y				Yes
San Martin	0	0	1	0	0.3	Y	67		124.0	No
Canadá	0	0	0	0	0		150		147.0	Yes
Esperanza de Jesús	0	0	0	0	0		288		166.4	Yes
19 de Junio	0	0	0	0	0		188		145.4	No

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