

Title: Central American gangs as a proxy for third country nationals promoting politically-motivated violence in the U.S.

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Institution: Center for Violence Prevention & Community Safety, ASU

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Objectives:

Going beyond a doorstep defense of U.S. security requires developing strategic responses to serious threats at some distance from U.S. borders. One such threat is that of third-country nationals who use Mexican territory as a gateway to enter the United States, often legally, to engage in criminal activity or to commit political violence. This project extends existing studies of transnational criminal gangs in Central America to anticipate methods and approaches that could be used by third-country nationals to commit politically-motivated violence in the United States. The two primary objectives of this study include: 1) further understanding the organizational structure and sophistication of transnational criminal gangs and their capacity to facilitate mobility and migration through Mexico into the United States; and 2) further understanding the dynamic social networks of transnational criminal gangs and their capacity to facilitate mobility and migration through Mexico into the United States. Accordingly, this project will provide policymakers a description of the migration and mobility patterns of transnational gangs between the U.S. and Central America through Mexican territory and a framework for understanding the mobility patterns of third country nationals and how such persons, using methods similar to those of transnational gangs, enter the United States.

Approaches:

Data sources include: 1) interviews with local experts in Central America on the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), the 18th Street gang (Barrio 18) and others; 2) interviews with gang members detained in U.S. immigration and other facilities; and 3) interviews with active gang member in Central America, through the use of trained interviewers from local communities in Mexico and Central America who have credibility with local residents. The specific locations for the present study will be selected in collaboration with DHS.

Interviews with Local Gang Experts:

Based on work developed by the Euro-gang program and US scholars, in-depth interviews will be conducted with local gang experts to describe the migration and mobility patterns of transnational gangs between the U.S. and Central America. Initial contact will be made with those who have been determined to have expert knowledge on either gangs or migration/mobility patterns. These will include individuals from sectors such as: law enforcement, corrections, military, immigration, social services, NGO's, and researchers. These individuals will be asked to nominate others who have significant contact with gang members or who have substantial expertise in gang-migrant/mobility patterns.

Central American Detainee Survey:

Surveys will be conducted with recently detained Central American gang members, including Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street gang (Barrio 18). This particular method will be modeled after National Institute of Justice’s (NIJ) Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program, which was designed to collect, analyze, and report on the criminal behavior of recently booked arrestees. In-depth survey interviews will focus on migration and mobility patterns of transnational gangs between the U.S. and Central America, including co-occurring criminality, organizational structure and sophistication, and social networks.

Field Surveys:

The research study will employ the use of a snowball sample to identify, recruit, and interview Central American gang members. Similar to prior gang research in the United States and Europe, a select number of individuals will be identified through social service agencies. These individuals will be recruited and interviewed and new subjects will be recruited through their nomination/friendship networks. While the instrument and methodology will be developed by Drs. Katz and Fox, local research firms familiar with the population will be selected to carryout the field study.

Deliverables and Schedule:

- 1) Report on the migration and mobility patterns of transnational gangs between the U.S. and Central America through Mexican territory based on information from gang/migration experts.
- 2) Report on the migration and mobility patterns between the U.S. and Central America through Mexican territory based on reports of active Central American gang members.
- 3) Report on the migration and mobility patterns of transnational gangs between the U.S. and Central America through Mexican territory based on data from U.S. detained Central American gang members.
- 4) Final report on mobility patterns of third country nationals and how such persons, using methods similar to those of transnational gangs, enter the United States.

Project activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Design and testing of survey instruments	Δ-----Δ		
Interviews with gang experts	Δ-----	-----Δ	
Interviews with gang members in US facilities and field surveys		Δ-----	-----Δ
Analysis and reports		Δ-----	-----Δ

Users:

U.S. Immigration, Customs, Enforcement (e.g., field operations, intelligence specialists)
 U.S. Customs & Border Protection (e.g., field operations, intelligence specialists)
 DHS Counter Narcotics Enforcement
 Drug Enforcement Agency

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Central Intelligence Agency

State Department

State and Federal correctional administrators

Local law enforcement agencies (e.g., command staff, gang units, human trafficking task forces, drug task forces)