

Central American Gangs as a Proxy for Criminal Activity and Terrorism

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Background

- **Increased flows in undocumented immigrants resulted in a concurrent rise in gang migration**
- **Deportation policies may have exported U.S. gang culture to Central America and Mexico.**
- **“Revolving door” migratory pattern emerged among MS-13 and 18th Street Gang (i.e., M-18).**

Sources: Maxson (2001) *Gang Members on the Move*, *The Modern Gang Reader*; Franco, *The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs*. CRS Report for Congress, January 30, 2008.

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MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs are known to have:

- **Increased criminal activity related to guns, drugs, and human smuggling**
- **Engaged in activity related to extortion, kidnapping, and murder for hire**
- **Substantially increased social networks for illicit purposes**
- **Substantially increased their transportation infrastructure across the US-Mexican border**

Sources: National Drug Threat Assessment, 2008; Franco, The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs. CRS Report for Congress, January 30, 2008.

Concerned threat to national security

- **“MS-13 & M-18 gang members may be involved in smuggling operations and, by extension, could potentially use their skills and criminal networks to smuggle terrorists into the U.S.”**

(Franco, Congressional Research Services, 2008: 1; also see Johnson & Muhlhausen, 2005: 42).)

- **El Shukrijumah (i.e., an al Qaeda representative) meets with Mara Salvatrucha gang to smuggle members through Mexico to the U.S.**

(The Washington Times, October 5, 2004).

Research questions

1. What is the scope and nature of the problem (El Salvador & US)

- Number of members
- Involvement in illicit activity
- Etcetera

2. Informal and formal organizational structure of MS-13 and M-18.

- Cliques and subgroups
- Connectivity
- Types of association
- Group activities
- Leadership structure

Research questions, Cont.

3. Illicit activity (U.S. & El Salvador) of MS-13 and M-18

- Drugs
- Violence
- Human smuggling
- Etcetera

4. What methods and approaches could be used by third-country nationals to enter the U.S.

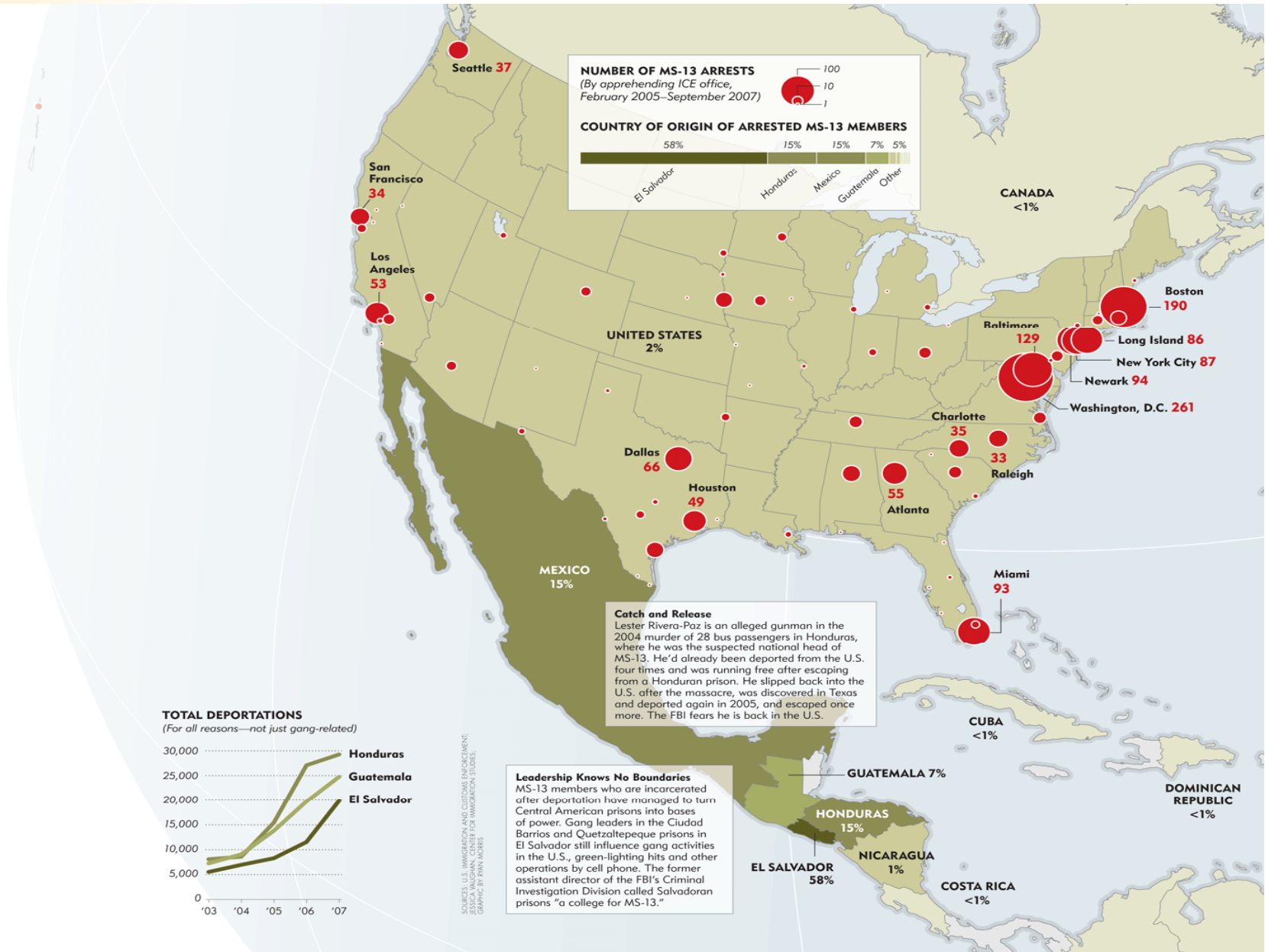
- Location of cross-national network ties
- Coordination with non-gang entities
- Embeddedness within legitimate institutions

Study Setting

- **Preliminary sites selected**
 - Washington DC- Virginia Corridor
 - Alternate sites (Los Angeles, Boston)
 - El Salvador
 - Alternate site (Honduras, Guatemala)

See next slide

Number of MS-13 arrests: Feb 2005-Sept 2007



A Multi-methodological Research Design

- **Interviews with local gang experts**
- **Document reviews**
- **Central American detainee survey**
- **Central American field surveys**

Interviews with gang experts

■ In-depth interviews

- Semi-structured interviews
 - Approx. 2 hours long
 - Recorded (taped or notes) and transcribed
- Conducted in El Salvador and USA
 - Interviews with line personnel will take place in the field
- Conducted with key stakeholders

Examples of key stakeholders

Police	Federal authorities	Intelligence officials
Courts	University personnel	Analysts
Prisons	Street workers	Service providers

Document reviews

Official documents

- Annual reports
- Intelligence, training and task force bulletins
- Inter-office communications
- Statistics kept by organizations

Public documents

- Newspaper articles
- Scholarly manuscripts

Central American detainee survey

- Methodology is modeled after the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) project and the Arizona Arrestee Information Network (AARIN)

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/drugs/adam.htm>

<http://cvpcs.asu.edu/aarin/>

- Data to be collected in federal immigration detention facilities
- Core interview instrument
- Voluntary, anonymous, and confidential interviews
- Professionally trained interviewers and site staff

Central American field surveys

- **Methodology has been used extensively in the past to study gangs, drug traffickers, robbers, gun offenders, burglars, etc.**
- **Skilled locals will conduct data collection**
- **Snowball sample methodology**
 - Initial contact through community organizations such as churches, social service agencies, etc.
 - Participants will be asked to provide the names of other community members for sample recruitment
- **Monetary incentive provided to subjects for participation and for referrals**
- **Voluntary and anonymous/confidential**

Frequently asked questions

- **Are there any potential issues with Human Subjects Protection (a.k.a. IRB)?**
 - Detention surveys and field surveys have been conducted by universities throughout the world, numerous times, with IRB approval.
 - Arizona State University has approved these methodologies in the recent past with adults and juveniles (e.g., ADAM, AARIN, Trinidad gang project, Mesa Gang Intervention Project).
- **What about interviewer safety?**
 - Interviewing gang members in the field has a long and rich history in the US & Latin America (since the early 1900s).
 - Follow established interviewer safety guidelines.
 - Incident reporting procedure.