



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Honduras: Gangs

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Executive summary

The main criminal gangs operating in Honduras are Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (Pandilla 18 or 18th Street gang). They generally operate and exercise control within the 3 main cities of Tegucigalpa and its surrounding area, San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba.

Gang members are usually youths/young men under 26 years old from poor backgrounds with little formal education or previous employment. Women are also recruited into gangs. Children as young as six can be forcibly recruited into gangs.

Gangs' main activities and sources of revenue are extortion and drugs smuggling, and exercising control of territory through violence, often influencing entire neighbourhoods. Gangs may also impose invisible borders, curfews and dress codes within areas under their control. Gangs routinely use violence and intimidation in their criminal activities and maintaining control of territory.

A person fearing persecution from MS-13 or Barrio 18 is **not likely** to fall within the Refugee Convention on the grounds of political opinion. However, women, former gang members, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI) persons are likely to demonstrate a nexus to the RC as members of a particular social group.

A person is likely to face persecution or serious harm if they live in an area controlled by MS-13 or Barrio 18 **and**

- are considered to be a threat to the gang and/or
- have not complied with a gang's rules or demands and/or
- belong to a particularly vulnerable group, such as being female or a LGBTI person

The state is likely to be willing but not able to provide protection.

Internal relocation is likely to be viable depending on the facts of the case.

A refused claim is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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Assessment

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is information in the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm from a gang
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave is likely, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

This note primarily focusses on the activities of street gangs, or ‘maras’, primarily the 2 dominant groups: Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13 or Mara 13) and Barrio 18 (also Pandilla 18 (or 18th Street Gang)). However, there are a number of other international and domestic organised criminal groups operating the Honduras, primarily involved in drugs trafficking from South America into the USA and Canada.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 A person who fears one/both of the 2 dominant gangs, MS-13 and Barrio 18, or a smaller gang is not likely to be able to demonstrate a link to the Refugee Convention on grounds of political opinion.
- 2.1.2 However, a person who fears a gang may belong to a particular social group (PSG) under the Refugee Convention where they have
 - an immutable characteristic/common background/belief or characteristic so fundamental that a person cannot be expected to renounce this **and**
 - a distinct identity within Honduran society.
- 2.1.3 The following groups are **likely to form a PSG**:
 - women/girls
 - lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons
 - former gang members (see [Targets of gang violence](#))
- 2.1.4 In the country guidance case of [EMAP \(Gang violence, Convention Reason\)](#), heard on 27 April and 9 June 2022 and promulgated on 16 November 2022, the Upper Tribunal (UT) considered whether persons who fear a gang in **El Salvador** fall within the scope of the Refugee Convention on the grounds of political opinion and membership of a PSG.
- 2.1.5 The UT in [EMAP](#) held that the main gangs operating in El Salvador, MS-13 and Barrio 18, are ‘political actors’ and that:
 - ‘... (ii) Individuals who hold an opinion, thought or belief relating to the gangs, their policies or methods hold a political opinion about them.
 - ‘(iii) Whether such an individual faces persecution for reasons of that political opinion will always be a question of fact. In the context of El Salvador it is an enquiry that should be informed by the following:

- (a) The major gangs of El Salvador must now be regarded as political actors;
- (b) Their criminal and political activities heavily overlap;
- (c) The less immediately financial in nature the action, the more likely it is to be for reasons of the victim's perceived opposition to the gangs.' (Headnote, paragraphs (ii) and (iii))

- 2.1.6 The UT in [EMAP](#) provided further analysis of the applicability of political opinion in paragraphs 112 to 122 of the determination. It considered that there are a range of reasons why a gang (or gangs) target a person, not all of which will fall within the Refugee Convention.
- 2.1.7 The UT's findings in [EMAP](#) are **specific to El Salvador** but the situations in El Salvador and Honduras are similar and merit comparison. Both have high levels of organised crime dominated by the same gangs, MS-13 and Barrio 18, which have de facto control over parts of the country and have sought to influence the state (see [Risk](#)).
- 2.1.8 However there are significant differences between the 2 countries:
- Honduras has a more diverse criminal landscape with a number of organised criminal groups - international drugs cartels as well as smaller local outfits - working and competing with MS-13 and Barrio 18. As a result, MS-13 and Barrio 18 are not as dominant as their counterparts in El Salvador (see [Risk](#)).
 - MS-13 and Barrio 18 are reported to be absolutely and relatively smaller in Honduras (upto 40,000, 0.4% of the population) than in El Salvador (60,000 members, 1% of the total population). As a consequence, gangs in Honduras exert less control. While there are no detailed figures on the extent of MS-13's and Barrio 18's control / influence in Honduras by taking gang-linked crime as a proxy for control, less than 75% of municipalities had a homicide (more than 25% did not), while 85% extortion is concentrated in just 5% of municipalities. In comparison in El Salvador sources describe gangs having control or exerting influence in over 94% of the country (see [EMAP](#), [Risk](#), [Internal relocation](#) and [Gangs size and location](#))
 - MS-13 and Barrio, and gangs generally including international drugs trafficking groups, have sought to influence the state. However, MS-13 and Barrio 18's influence on political affairs is not as extensive as in El Salvador (see [Risk](#) and [Gangs in politics](#)).
- 2.1.9 On the available evidence, the situations are sufficiently different to conclude that gangs are not 'political actors' and that the UT's findings in [EMAP](#) **do not apply** to a fear of gangs in Honduras. Therefore a person who fears a gang in Honduras does **not** fall within scope of the Refugee Convention on grounds of political opinion. However, the UT's findings in [EMAP](#) with regard to women, LGBTI persons and former gang members forming PSGs are likely to apply to Honduras (see [Risk](#)).
- 2.1.10 Establishing a Convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

2.1.11 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3. Risk

3.1.1 In general, a person living in an area controlled by MS-13 or Barrio 18 who is considered to be one or more of the following:

- a threat to the gang and/or
- has not complied with a gang's rules or demands and/or
- belongs to a particularly vulnerable group (for example a woman or LGBTI person)

is likely to face persecution or serious harm **in that area**.

3.1.2 Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate a risk of persecution or serious harm.

3.1.3 Honduras has a more diverse criminal landscape than the neighbouring 'Northern Triangle' countries of El Salvador and Guatemala. There are estimated to be 40+ organised criminal groups (OCGs) operating. However 2 gangs (or mara) dominate: MS-13 and Barrio 18 (see [Organised criminal groups \(OCGs\), including gangs](#)).

3.1.4 There is limited detailed information about the areas that MS13 and Barrio 18 control or exert influence over. Sources indicate these gangs are concentrated in the 3 main cities: the capital, Tegucigalpa and its surrounding area, the economic hub of San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba. One source, the expert Maria Gomez, observed gangs were in predominantly in poor, marginalised urban neighbourhoods (colonias). International Crisis Group stated gangs are expanding into coastal areas and along the borders with El Salvador and Guatemala. Human Rights Watch claimed that while gangs only controlled some areas they are able to extort people throughout the country – however they did not provide detailed evidence of this and other sources do not provide corroboration (see [Control of territory, Freedom of movement](#) and [Gang size and distribution](#)).

3.1.5 Gangs impose curfews, dress codes, and restrict entry to, and movement within, and access to public services in areas they control (see [Control of territory, Freedom of movement](#) and [Gang size and distribution](#)).

3.1.6 There are not reliable statistics of the number of gang members, with estimates ranging between 5,000 and 40,000 (0.05 to 0.4% of the total population). The Honduran National Police (HNP) estimate there are 25,000 active members of MS-13 and Barrio 18 but other sources provide lower figures (see [Geographical context](#) and [Gang size and distribution](#)).

3.1.7 Gang members are usually males aged younger than 26 years old from poor backgrounds with little formal education or previous employment. Gangs recruit and use children to act as look-outs and to collect extortion money. Boys may be targeted from age 6 and girls from age 8. Girls may also be used for sexual exploitation, some being forced to become 'girlfriends' of gang members. Gangs sometimes also forcibly recruit members, including

from within schools, where pupils are targeted by peers with gang associations. Sources noted that it is possible to leave a gang, usually to join a church or faith group. However this often requires the permission of the gang leader, while those entering the church are tracked to ensure their religious calling is genuine (see [Structure](#) and [Profile of members](#)).

- 3.1.8 Gangs' main source of revenue is drug smuggling (particularly MS-13) and extortion of individuals and businesses (particularly Barrio 18). Gangs are involved in other criminal activities including robbery, drug dealing, gun sales, carjacking, kidnapping, prostitution and human trafficking (see [Extortion](#) and [Gangs' activities and impact](#))
- 3.1.9 Gangs harass, intimidate, use violence, including torture and murder, against persons who they consider to be a threat or who do not comply with their demands and to exert territorial control. Persons targeted include rival gang members and their families, business owners who resist extortion, passengers on public transport, and persons who have, or are perceived to have, collaborated with security forces, such as informants and witnesses. Other vulnerable groups include persons – and their friends and families – who refuse to join a gang, who have left or want to leave a gang or who are perceived to have betrayed a gang (see [Gangs' activities and impact](#) and [Targets of gang violence](#))
- 3.1.10 Women are also involved with gangs but are unlikely to be seen as equal to male gang members. Gangs may sexually abuse women and girls, and those who refuse sexual involvement with gang members may face violent reprisals. Women and girls who are not linked to gangs but who live in areas controlled by them may be vulnerable to violence and intimidation, including sexual violence and forced prostitution (see [Characteristics of gang members](#), [Gangs' activities and impact](#) and [Targets of gang violence](#))
- 3.1.11 Gangs are reported to coerce LGBTI persons to assist with criminal activities. LGBTI persons may also be subjected to violence, such as corrective rape, or forced to leave gang-controlled areas (see [Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex persons](#))
- 3.1.12 Gang activity and the use of intimidation and violence has displaced tens of thousands of Hondurans, both within and outside the country. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in a report from 2019 suggested that returnees may be threatened by gangs because they are perceived to have resources. A couple of sources cited by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin Asylum Research and Documentation observed some returnees have been killed by gangs after their return, with one expert stating she was aware of over 100 murders at some point following return since 2014. However, detail is absent about these cases, with some deaths occurring months or even a year after return (see [Displacement](#) and [Returning migrants](#)).
- 3.1.13 Over 500,000 people returned to Honduras in the period January 2015 and July 2023. Other sources consulted do not describe a clear causal link between return and violence from gangs. Taking the scale of returns compared to the small number of returns who may have faced problems because of their status as a returnee, and the relatively high levels of violent

crime, the evidence does not indicate that returnees are targeted by and are generally are at risk from gangs per se (see [Displacement](#) and [Returning migrants](#)).

3.1.14 Whether a person is at risk from a gang will depend on:

- their profile, actions and reason(s) for the gang's interest
- the area the person usually resides and will return to
- the gang's intent, size, reach and capability

3.1.15 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

4.1.1 In general, the state is willing but owing to a lack of resources and competence, and high levels of corruption, is unlikely to be able to provide effective protection. Each case must be considered on its facts, taking into account the nature, capability and intent of the gang and profile of person.

4.1.2 Honduras has introduced various 'iron fist' policies, most recently the state of exception in December 2022, to combat gang activity (see [Government strategy to combat gangs](#)).

4.1.3 The Honduras National Police (HNP), which has around 17,000 officers, is responsible for maintaining public order. It includes specialised teams such as an anti-gang unit and has a separate oversight body. The army can support police operations targeting arms and drug trafficking, including gang activities. There is a functioning judicial system with first instance and appeals courts established to consider civil and criminal cases. The current government has taken steps to strengthen the rule of law and judicial independence (see [Protection](#)).

4.1.4 The government has had some success in dismantling drug-trafficking groups. Over 4,000 gang members were arrested between 2015 and 2019, and the government has claimed to have arrested thousands more since the introduction of the state of exception in December 2022. The US State Department acknowledged that the government has investigated and prosecuted some gang-related crimes (see [Police effectiveness](#)).

4.1.5 However, sources consider the HNP to be under-staffed and under-equipped, with high levels of corruption. There are also reports that some police have been involved in criminal activity and collaborated with gangs. Some sources suggest that due to a lack of resources many crimes are not fully investigated, and when investigations do take place they are lengthy and inefficient leading to high levels of impunity. Some people are reluctant to file complaints for fear of reprisal or retaliation from gangs and lack of confidence in state institutions. However a reluctance to seek protection does not in itself mean protection is not available (see [Police effectiveness](#)).

4.1.6 A witness protection scheme exists but is underfunded, understaffed and ineffective. If a conviction is secured then witness protection comes to an end, leaving the witness vulnerable to orders issued from prison (see

[Witness protection](#))

- 4.1.7 The judiciary's effectiveness is hampered by being poorly resourced and subject to intimidation, political influence, and corruption. The USSD observed that criminal groups are able to exercise influence on the outcomes of court proceedings. As a result, there are reportedly high rates of impunity and barriers to accessing justice (see [Judiciary](#)).
- 4.1.8 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 In general, internal relocation is likely to be reasonable depending on the facts of the case. Decision makers must consider the profile of the person, their previous experiences, the reasons why the gang has an interest in them, and the size, capability and intent of the gang they claim to fear.
- 5.1.2 Honduras is about half the size of the UK. More than 60% of its over 10 million population live in urban areas, mostly in the main cities of Tegucigalpa and its surrounding area, San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba. Gangs control some parts of the 3 main cities – usually the poor and marginalised neighbourhoods – plus several municipalities in rural areas. However, there are parts of the main cities and some rural areas where gangs do not have control, or exert influence. This is evident by using the distribution of homicides and extortion as proxies for gang control and influence: Infosegura reported that over 25% of municipalities had no reported homicides and that 85% of extortion took place only in 5% of municipalities (see [Geographical context and Freedom of movement](#)).
- 5.1.3 The IDMC report of 2019 stated that people who gangs believe are guilty of betrayal or emnity may be tracked by them. The source also noted the chances of finding safety in another area vary according to economic resources: safer neighbourhoods are generally more expensive and often gated (see [Displacement](#)).
- 5.1.4 Gangs monitor movement in and out of areas they control and reportedly check people moving from one gang-controlled area to another, with reports that residents must request and pay for a permit to travel between neighbourhoods. LGBTI persons, women, girls and youths, without support networks, may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and may find it difficult to support themselves in areas of relocation (see [Gangs size and reach](#), [Women and children](#), [Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex persons](#), [Displacement](#) and [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 5.1.5 For more on internal relocation and factors to be taken into account, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content of this section follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

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Updated to 6 October 2023

7. Geographical context

- 7.1.1 Honduras is 112,492 sqkm¹, just under half the size of the United Kingdom (about the size of England)². The population is estimated to be around 10 million^{3 4}, with 6 million in urban areas of whom 1.5 million live in the capital, Tegucigalpa⁵, and 1 million in the second city, San Pedro Sula⁶.
- 7.1.2 The US CIA World Factbook noted 'most residents live in the mountainous western half of the country... [the] urban population... is distributed between two large centers - the capital of Tegucigalpa and the city of San Pedro Sula; the Rio Ulua valley in the north is the only densely populated lowland area'⁷.
- 7.1.3 Honduras is comprised of 18 departments (departamentos)⁸, which are subdivided into 298 municipios (municipalities) then aldeas (villages/hamlets) in rural areas⁹ and colonias (neighbourhoods) in cities^{10 11}. The UN map below¹² describes the capital, main provincial cities/towns and departments:

¹ UN data, [Honduras](#), no date

² US CIA, 'The World Factbook' ([United Kingdom](#) - People and society), updated 15 November 2023

³ UN data, [Honduras](#), no date

⁴ World Bank, '[Data](#)' (Honduras), no date

⁵ US CIA, 'The World Factbook', '[Honduras](#) - People and society', updated 14 November 2023

⁶ US CIA, 'The World Factbook', '[Honduras](#) - People and society', updated 14 November 2023

⁷ US CIA, 'The World Factbook', '[Honduras](#) - People and society', updated 14 November 2023

⁸ US CIA, 'The World Factbook', '[Honduras](#) - People and society', updated 14 November 2023

⁹ Clegern, WM, and others, '[Honduras](#)' (Administration and social conditions), 18 July 2023

¹⁰ Insight Crime-ASJ, '[Gangs in Honduras](#)' (pages 9 to 11), 21 April 2016

¹¹ UNOCHA HDX, '[HND_AdminBoundaries...](#)', updated 4 April 2023

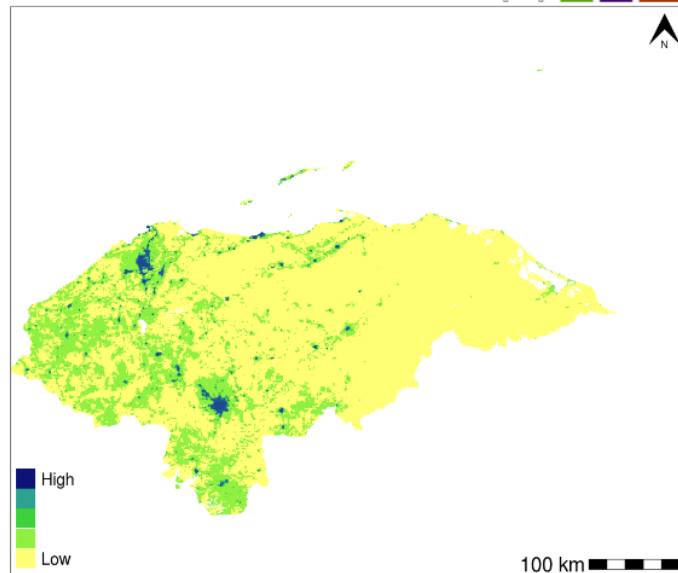
¹² UN Geospatial, '[Map of Honduras](#)', 1 May 2004



7.1.4 The WorldPop website, operated by the School of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Southampton, Department of Geography and Geosciences, University of Louisville; Département de Géographie, Université de Namur) and Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University (2018), produced the map below¹³ described population density and distribution:

Honduras population 2020

Estimated total number of people per grid-cell at a resolution of (3 arc seconds approximately 100m at the equator)



WorldPop (www.worldpop.org – School of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Southampton; Department of Geography and Geosciences, University of Louisville; Département de Géographie, Université de Namur) and Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University (2018). Global High Resolution Population Denominators Project – Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (OPP1134076). <https://dx.doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/WP00645>

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¹³ WorldPop, 'Honduras population 2020', 1 November 2018

- 7.1.5 Population data by department and municipality based on the Honduras National Institute for Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Honduras; HNIS) is available on the website citypopulation.de.
- 7.1.6 Demographic as well as other socio-economic data is available on the [HNIS website](#) but Spanish only.

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Updated to 6 October 2023

8. Economic and political context

8.1 Castro government – January 2022 onwards

- 8.1.1 The UN High Commissioner of Human Rights report on the human rights situation in Honduras in 2022 (UN OHCHR 2023), 28 February 2023, noted ‘The arrival of a new government on 2 January 2022, led by the country's first female president, with political will in the area of human rights and the fight against corruption, sets a new stage for human rights work in Honduras. The administration assumed its functions in a context of pre-existing structural challenges underlying human rights violations: poverty and inequality, land conflicts, violence, insecurity, impunity, institutional weakness and patriarchal culture, among others. Such challenges require short, medium and long-term measures to be resolved.’¹⁴
- 8.1.2 An International Crisis Group (ICG) report, ‘New Dawn or Old Habits? Resolving Honduras’ Security Dilemmas’, 10 July 2023, based on interviews with a range of interlocutors between September 2022 and June 2023 informed about the political and security situation, (ICG report 2023), noted ‘... left-leaning Xiomara Castro won the Honduran presidency by a large margin in November 2021. Her victory raised hopes for change in a country that, since a coup in 2009, has suffered soaring rates of violent crime and poverty, along with flare-ups of political unrest, all of which have helped drive an exodus of migrants and asylum seekers...’
- ‘... [Previous] governments used heavy-handed tactics to fight crime, expanding the military’s role in public safety and working to break up drug trafficking organisations. The murder rate fell from a peak of 93 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011 to 38 per 100,000 in 2021. But even this lower rate makes Honduras one of the world’s most violent countries, and hundreds of city neighbourhoods remain under the control of criminal gangs.
- ‘... [Previous] governments’ collective record when it came to the economy and internal accountability were also a source of frustration among many Hondurans... Hondurans fleeing the country’s high crime rates and weak economy were apprehended more than a million times at the U.S. southern border between 2010 and 2021, while over 107,000 filed for asylum in Mexico... At the same time, a string of corruption scandals tainted politicians and high-level officials, including during the pandemic... Of these, the case that most tarnished the National Party’s image, and that of Hernández, was

¹⁴ OHCHR, ‘[Situation of human rights in Honduras](#)’ (paragraph 4), 28 February 2023

the former president's brother Tony's conviction in U.S. courts on drug trafficking charges...

'Castro vowed in her electoral manifesto to reduce the army's role in public safety, give greater powers to the national police, and encourage dialogue between police officers and the people they are charged to protect... But a quarrelsome start with Congress, high-profile violent crimes, an apparent surge in extortion and a desire to maintain public support have diverted her attention.'¹⁵

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8.2 Economic situation

8.2.1 The World Bank in overview of Honduras, updated 4 October 2023 noted:

'Annual real [Gross Domestic Product] GDP expanded by 4 percent in 2022, driven by remittance-fueled household consumption and increased private investment, despite global headwinds and the impact of Hurricane Julia (1.2 percent of 2021 GDP). Honduras' economic growth is expected to slow to 3.2 percent in 2023. This is explained by slower growth of exports and especially of remittances, as they normalize following the exceptionally high 2022 inflows, in addition to low private investment and weak budget execution.

'The inflation rate in 2022 rose to 9.1%, the highest since 2008, impacted by high global commodity prices, while monetary authorities did not hike the key policy interest rate. However, since February 2023, the inflation rate has been declining and is currently at 5.7% in August, helped by the decrease in international food inflation.

'Honduras remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the region. In 2020, as a result of the pandemic and Hurricanes Eta and Iota, the share of the population living under poverty (US\$6.85 per person per day at 2017 PPP) reached 57.7 percent, an increase from 49.5 percent in 2019. Since then, the recovery of the economy and the labor market, as well as the inflow of remittances, have contributed to reducing poverty. In 2022, the poverty level is estimated to have decreased to 52.4 percent, although this is still above pre-COVID levels. Extreme poverty (measured under the US\$2.15, 2017 PPP line) is estimated at 13.3 percent for the same year, and the Gini Index, which measures inequality, is at 47.5.'¹⁶

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8.3 Gangs and politics

8.3.1 The InSight Crime profile of February 2021, considering the situation before the current government came to power, noted:

'Honduras is one of the most important drug trafficking operation centers between South America and Mexico. With all of its branches of government and its armed forces plagued by corruption, Honduras has evolved into a transit nation in which criminal groups, protected by the political system,

¹⁵ ICG, '[New Dawn or Old Habits?...](#)' (Section I, Introduction), 10 July 2023

¹⁶ World Bank, '[Honduras](#)' (Overview), 4 April 2023

have developed the capacity to produce cocaine hydrochloride in local laboratories.

‘Since the end of the last decade, political protection has allowed the traditional drug trafficking groups to flourish. Testimony provided by drug traffickers and Honduran politicians on trial in the United States have revealed the deep-seated connection between organized crime and the governing National Party [the National Party lost power following elections in November 2021].

‘Control of illegal activities in Honduras lies in the hands of local criminal groups connected with the country’s political and economic elite...’¹⁷

8.3.2 The InSight Crime Honduras profile updated February 2021 stated:

‘The former leader of the Cachiros Cartel, Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga, alleged in his testimony [that he operated](#) with the assistance or complicity of various [political](#) and [economic](#) elites. He even alleged bribing Tony Hernández [the brother of the former president, who was found guilty on cocaine and arms trafficking charges in a US court in October 2019].. . [Further] Tony Hernández acted as a link between the government and various drug trafficking groups, like Los Valle, Los Cachiros and the Atlantic Cartel.’¹⁸

8.3.3 The Honduras profile continued:

‘The Atlantic Cartel was another important group at the beginning of the century. The group is presumed to have operated under the protection of military agents, police and judges. Its leader, Wilter Neptalí Blanco, was arrested in Costa Rica in November 2016. As of July 2017, he has agreed to collaborate with the US criminal justice system.

‘On the other hand, several politicians on the local level – primarily associated with the National Party – have been linked to these structures, and it is presumed that they may have inherited the drug trade once the traditional kingpins were extradited. In El Paraíso, Copán, for example, former mayor Alexander Ardón controlled the drug trade from his municipality to Guatemala. In the remote region of La Mosquitia, a political clan formed by the Paisano Wood brothers operated a drug trafficking network in order to receive cocaine shipments and send them to the border with Guatemala. These types of examples of collusion between politicians and criminal actors, are repeated in various regions around the country, such as in Yoro, Lempira and Olancho.’¹⁹

8.3.4 HRW’s world report, covering events in 2021, noted: ‘There have been repeated allegations of collusion between security forces and criminal organizations.’²⁰

¹⁷ Insight Crime-CLALS, [‘Honduras profile’](#), 15 February 2021

¹⁸ Insight Crime-CLALS, [‘Honduras profile’](#), 15 February 2021

¹⁹ Insight Crime-CLALS, [‘Honduras profile’](#), 15 February 2021

²⁰ HRW, [‘World Report 2022 – Honduras, Events of 2021’](#), 13 January 2022

- 8.3.5 Freedom House in its report covering events in 2022 observed ‘Gangs, many with ties to drug trafficking, also sway decisions at the subnational level.’²¹
- 8.3.6 The ICG report 2023 noted: ‘Street gangs, such as MS-13 and the 18th Street gang, at times partner with or work for drug trafficking groups that have penetrated the highest echelons of state. U.S. prosecutors believe that former President Hernández maintained mutually beneficial relations with various drug traffickers, even while supposedly leading an unstinting assault against them.’²²

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9. Organised criminal groups (OCGs), including gangs

- 9.1.1 The Global Organised Crime Index 2023, covering events in 2022, produced by the NGO, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GIATC), released 26 September 2023, stated:

‘Mafia-style groups operating in Honduras are involved in a range of criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, car theft, and extortion. The revenue generated from drug trafficking has contributed to the growth and sophistication of these groups. There are two main mafia groups in Honduras, both of which employ extreme violence and extortion to control the [MS-13 and Barrio 18] they operate in. Despite a recent decrease in domestic homicide rates, Honduras remains one of the most violent countries globally. During the COVID-19 pandemic, mafia groups in Honduras refrained from extortion, which allowed them to enter the political sphere by funding allies’ campaigns for municipal positions. Additionally, transportista groups, comprising family-based networks, assist mafia groups in criminal activities, such as transport logistics, cargo security, and money laundering.

‘Bribery and corruption play a significant role in organized crime groups’ operations, with deep political ties to local law enforcement and public officials facilitating their activities. Corrupt officials at different levels of government create opportunities for organized crime, and even construct infrastructure and transportation necessities for criminal entities. State security forces are involved in the arms and drug trafficking markets. In April 2022, a former president was extradited to the US for his involvement in drug and arms trafficking, as well as for using drug-related revenue for political campaign funding.

‘Foreign criminal entities, particularly Colombian and Mexican drug trafficking networks, operate in Honduras through small emissary groups located in large cities and border regions. These groups engage in drug production activities such as poppy cultivation and laboratory cocaine processing within Honduras, and subcontract Honduran transportista groups to facilitate the illicit transport of drugs northbound to the US via Guatemala. Central

²¹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World](#)’ (Honduras), March 2023

²² ICG, ‘[New dawn or old habits?...](#)’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

American and Chinese criminal networks are involved in local illicit activities such as human smuggling.

'Private sector actors such as banks, insurance companies, and remittance companies play a considerable role in illicit activities, especially corruption, in Honduras, facilitating the flow of illicit revenue. Criminal entities often own or exploit the bank accounts of private sector businesses, such as hotels, to launder drug-related and other criminally sourced revenue. Additionally, business elites in Honduras have notable influence over the state judicial system, exacerbating corruption by manipulating legal processes to avoid the consequences of their actions.

'Honduras-based criminal networks collaborate with other criminal groups, including state-embedded actors and foreign counterparts, to facilitate various organized criminal markets, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms trafficking. These networks diversify their activities by targeting transportista groups and stealing drug shipments along smuggling routes.'²³

- 9.1.2 Dr J M Cruz and colleagues at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) & Florida International University (FIU) published a report on gang disengagement in Honduras in November 2020 (AIR/FIU) report 2020). The research is based on a survey with a sample of 1,021 respondents with a record of gang membership, and 38 in-depth interviews with former gang members and community members. Respondents were interviewed in prisons, juvenile detention centres, parole programmes, rehabilitation centres and at faith based organisations between October and December 2019²⁴.
- 9.1.3 The AIR/FIU report 2020 noted: 'MS-13 and Barrio 18 [also known as Pandilla 18 (or 18th Street Gang)²⁵] are the dominant street gangs in Honduras, with MS-13 as the largest one.'²⁶ Similarly, InSight Crime, a US think tank specialising in crime in Latin America, in its 'Honduras profile' updated February 2021, stated '... the primary gangs present in Honduras are MS13 and Barrio 18...'²⁷ The US State Department's Overseas Security Advisory Council Honduras security report of July 2023 (OSAC CSR 2023) stated: 'The MS-13 and Calle 18 gangs [Barrio 18] are the most active and powerful gangs present in Honduras.'²⁸
- 9.1.4 The AIR/FIU report 2020 also noted 'There are other, smaller gang groups ... such as Vatos Locos, Los Chirizos, and El Combo que no se deja.'²⁹ While the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) in a December 2022 report (ACCORD response 2022), citing various sources, stated:
- 'According to a 2020 report by the United Nations Development Programme on the situation of maras and pandillas in Honduras in the year 2019, there is much more gang diversity in Honduras than in the other two countries in

²³ GIATC, '[Global Organised Crime Index 2023](#)' (Honduras), 26 september 2023

²⁴ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (pages 1 and 5), November 2020

²⁵ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 7), November 2020

²⁶ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 5), November 2020

²⁷ Insight Crime-CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021

²⁸ USSD - OSAC, '[Honduras – Country Security Report](#)', updated 18 July 2023

²⁹ Cruz, J. M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 7), November 2020

the Northern Triangle, El Salvador and Guatemala... Pamela Ruiz notes that the Honduran National Anti-Extortion Force (Fuerza Nacional Anti-Extorsión) identified 48 different gangs/criminal bands guilty of extortion, but the number includes “independent actors” ... The following minor gangs are mentioned by several sources: Chirizos, El Combo que no se Deja, Los Benjamins... Los Tercereños, Vatos Locos, Olanchanos ... Sources further mentioned other small gangs such as Los Ponce and Parqueños, however, virtually no information could be found on them. ³⁰

- 9.1.5 The ICG report 2023 noted: ‘Competition between [MS-13 and Barrio 18]... and other minor groups is fierce... Many of the smaller organisations are composed of just a handful of criminals, united by family ties, who alternately work for, ally with and fight the main outfits...’³¹

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10. Structure and organisation of Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18

- 10.1.1 The AIR/FIU report 2020 stated:

‘The two main Honduran gangs, MS-13 and Barrio 18, have a clearly defined structure and organization, with specific roles and norms which regulate the activities and behavior of their members. Although gangs in Honduras do not seem to have a national leadership who would be recognized by all the groups, they have regional structures which are controlled from prisons. They organize their neighborhood cliques in sectores (sectors), which are overseen by regional leaders inside and outside prison. The MS-13 gang seems to be the largest and most organized of the gangs... both MS-13 and Barrio 18 are composed of regionally fragmented structures which operate in an autonomous fashion. Neither MS-13 nor Barrio 18 acknowledges a single national leadership council or individual leader in Honduras.’³²

- 10.1.2 The AIR/FIU report 2020 also noted: ‘The two main gangs in Honduras are composed of a collection of neighborhood groups, called cliques, with a close link to the territory in which they operate and orchestrate their criminal activities. These cliques are the basic gang unit and are made up of several members... [comprising of] regular members and collaborators or informants.’³³

- 10.1.3 According to AIR/FIU:

‘Regular members make up the core and muscle of the gang. They are in charge of carrying out most of the criminal and revenue-generating activities, such as extortions and drug dealing. Depending on the gang organization, they take different titles: soldier, paisa, paisa firme, gatillero, or traqueto. Collaborators or informants are not considered official members of the gang; they have not undergone an initiation rite, and they function as aides to the regular members. Their activities include communications, transportation of drugs and weapons, and surveillance, flagging the presence of strangers

³⁰ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 48), December 2022

³¹ ICG, ‘[New Dawn or Old Habits?...](#)’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

³² Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 22), November 2020

³³ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 22), November 2020

and potential rivals in the territory. Collaborators take different titles, which also may reflect a hierarchy within the group of collaborators: bandera, mula, aspirante, puntero, and colaborador...

'Neighborhood cliques are grouped in sectores, which are the largest grouping level in the gang's organization. Sectores are composed of several cliques which form a regional cluster, which usually involves a city or a region. Thus, as organizations, gangs in Honduras operate regionally. Each region or sector has a top leader, who usually is imprisoned and operates from any of the penitentiaries in the country. Those leaders are called Palabrerros in the MS-13 organization and Toros in Barrio 18. They work in tandem with other leaders, who are outside prison, called Sargentos or Homies. These individuals oversee the activities of the cliques under their command on behalf of the imprisoned leader and themselves. One practice that both gangs observe and have in common is seniority. As explained by a former gang member who now leads rehabilitation programs in Honduras, "Seniority and loyalty to the gang is not only how [you] earn respect within the organization, but it is also how an individual can climb amongst the ranks of the organization.'³⁴

- 10.1.4 Further detail about structure, organisation and roles with MS-13 and Barrio 18 is available pages 23 to 25 of the [AIR/FIU report 2020](#) and pages 30 and 31 of the [ACCORD report 2022](#).

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11. Gang size and distribution

11.1 Size

- 11.1.1 The ACCORD response of December 2022, citing various sources, stated:

'Regarding the numbers of gang members in Honduras the most current information that could be found is provided in an April 2016 report by InSight Crime and the ASJ. The authors also discuss that estimates vary widely and estimates of NGOs are considerably lower than official estimates by the Honduran police or the US Agency for International Development (USAID). While according to estimates by two NGOs the number of active gang members of both MS-13 and Barrio 18 together amounts to around 5,000 – 6,000, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) says Mara Salvatrucha has 5,000 and Barrio 18 has 7,000 members. The Honduran police contends that both gangs together have about 25,000 active... and according to a USAID report there are 36,000 active gang members in total ..., but this number is of 2006 and it includes members of other Honduran gangs as well. An article by InSight Crime, published in 2012, speaks of some 1,340 MS-13 members in San Pedro Sula and some 410 members in Tegucigalpa ...'³⁵

- 11.1.2 Human Rights Watch in their World report 2022 (HRW World report 2022) covering events in 2021 estimated that there were between 5,000 and 40,000 active gang members in Honduras although it is not clear where this

³⁴ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 23), November 2020

³⁵ ACCORD, ['Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...'](#) (page 30), December 2022

information originated³⁶. There were no up to date figures for gang members in the HRW World report 2023³⁷.

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11.2 Location

- 11.2.1 There is limited accurate and detailed information in the sources consulted about the areas controlled by the 2 main gangs (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 11.2.2 The most recent detailed data is provided by InSight Crime in association with the Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ Honduras), a Honduran civil society organisation promoting justice and changes towards a fairer society for the most vulnerable³⁸. This paper published in 2016 stated:

‘Broadly speaking, gangs have little presence outside the three largest urban areas: the capital city of Tegucigalpa and its surrounding metropolitan area; the city of La Ceiba, the third largest in the country; and Cortes province. In Cortes, most gangs are concentrated in greater San Pedro Sula, the country’s industrial and economic capital. That is not to say that there is not gang presence in some rural areas. A prime example is the municipality of Tela, between La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula, where the MS13 has established a strong base of operations.

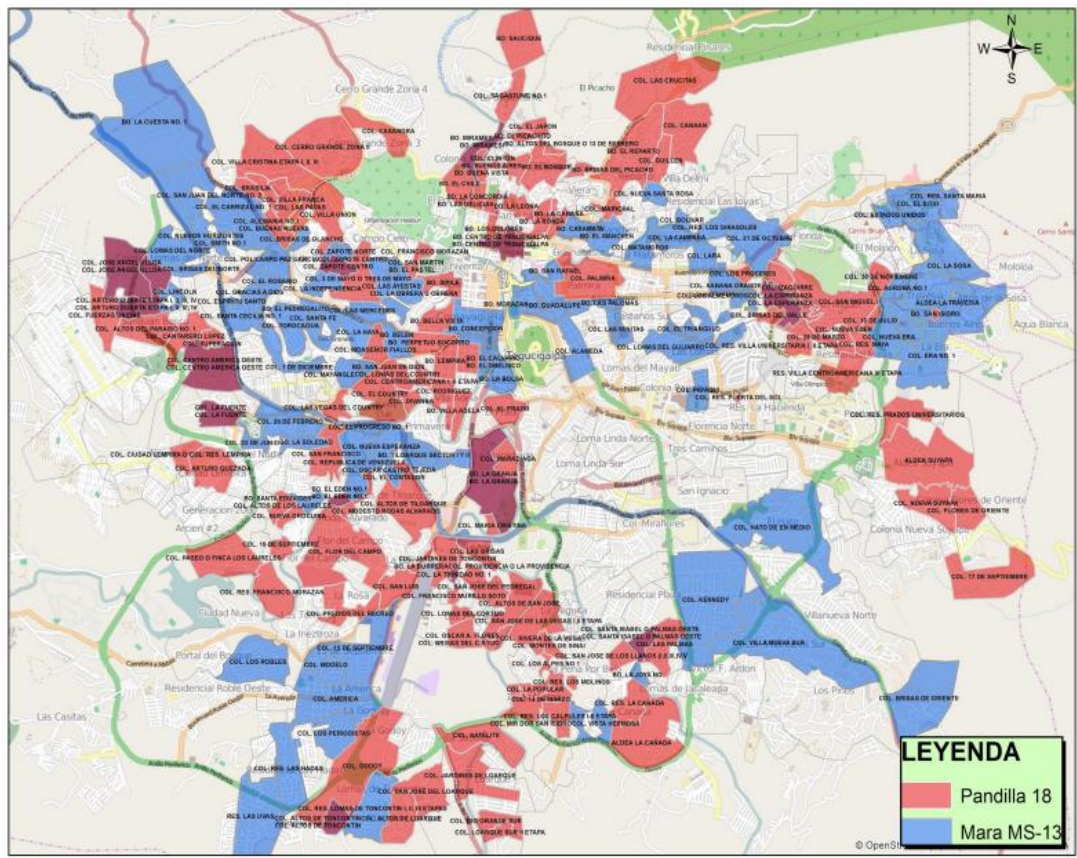
‘... gang presence in these cities gives no clear pattern of why gangs occupy certain territory and not others. According to police intelligence, the Barrio 18 is currently operational in approximately 150 neighborhoods, or “colonias,” in Tegucigalpa. As can be seen in the map below... Barrio 18’s largest extension of territory is in the southern part of the Capital District, including Tegucigalpa’s sister city, Comayagua. Meanwhile, MS13 is operational in some... colonias in the capital district, while the gang’s largest concentration of forces is believed to be in the western part of the city. There are thought to be just 12 colonias out of 222 in which both gangs are present at the same time, including Tegucigalpa’s city center.

³⁶ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Honduras, Events of 2021](#)’, 13 January 2022

³⁷ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023 – Honduras, Events of 2022](#)’, 12 January 2023

³⁸ ASJ Honduras, ‘[Sobre ASJ \(asjhonduras.com\) – About us](#)’, no date

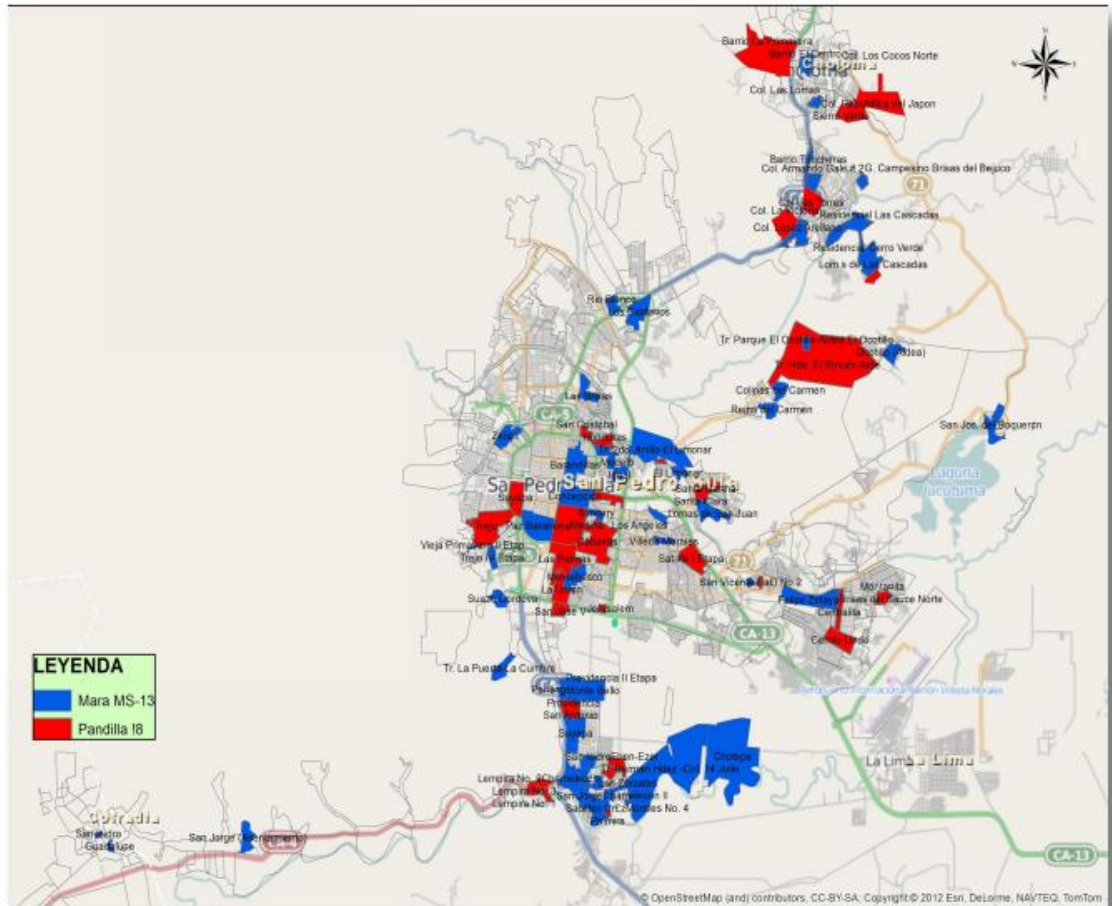
MS13 and Barrio 18 Presence in Tegucigalpa



Source: Honduras Police Intelligence

'In San Pedro Sula, ... meanwhile, Barrio 18 is present in 22 colonias. The MS13 is also present in 11 of those, explaining in part why the city sees so much violence, as the gangs jostle for dominance within these contested areas. In addition to those 11 colonias, the MS13 is present in another 58 colonias in San Pedro Sula. It should also be noted that other gangs are interspersed in both San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa...

MS13 and Barrio 18 Presence in San Pedro Sula



Source: Honduras Police Intelligence

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- 11.2.3 InSight Crime in its 'Honduras profile' updated February 2021 stated: 'Gangs are concentrated in the country's largest urban areas, including the capital Tegucigalpa, the economic hub of San Pedro Sula and the Caribbean coastal city of La Ceiba... or in rural areas close to the border with El Salvador, where they find a safe haven...'⁴⁰
- 11.2.4 The ACCORD response of December 2022, citing various sources, stated: '... maras are, according to the January 2020 publication by María Luisa Pastor Gómez, essentially an urban phenomenon. They are much more predominant in poor and marginalised neighbourhoods, where there is little state control (Pastor Gómez, 29 January 2020, p. 6). However, Elizabeth Kennedy [Central America Monitor Research Director for the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), social scientist and expert in Central American migration and indigenous and Garífuna People] disagrees with this statement and refers to interviews she has conducted with children and families from rural as well as from urban areas in 13 of 18 departments in

³⁹ Insight Crime-ASJ, '[Gangs in Honduras](#)' (pages 9 to 11), 21 April 2016

⁴⁰ Insight Crime-CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021

Honduras, which showed that gangs operate in rural areas as well (Kennedy, 6 December 2022)

‘... The gang territories are marked by specific graffiti that adorns the walls of affected communities. Mostly the graffiti shows the numbers 18 for the Barrio 18 and 13 for the MS-13 (McGrath, 10 February 2021).’⁴¹

- 11.2.5 The Crisis Group report of 10 July 2023, based on 50 interviews with a range of sources, observed: ‘MS-13 and the 18th Street gang are prevalent mostly in suburbs of the capital Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, the country’s second largest city, but they are reportedly expanding into coastal regions and along the borders with Guatemala and El Salvador.’⁴²
- 11.2.6 The USSD’s Overseas Security Advisory Council in its report on Honduras updated 18 July 2023 (OSAC report 2023) observed: ‘Hondurans continue to be affected by MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) and Calle 18 [Barrio 18] gang activity in cities such as Tegucigalpa, Choloma, La Ceiba, Tela, and San Pedro Sula.’⁴³
- 11.2.7 The HRW World report 2022 covering events in 2021 stated: ‘Gangs exercise territorial control over some neighborhoods and extort residents throughout the country.’⁴⁴ However, HRW do not provide detail or indicate how this information was obtained. HRW make no comment on gang control in their report on events in 2022⁴⁵. The AIR/FIU report November 2020 noted that the smaller gangs - such as Vatos Locos, Los Chirizos, and El Combo que no se deja - had a limited reach compared to Barrio 18 and MS-13⁴⁶.

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12. Profile of members

- 12.1.1 An AIR/FIU report November 2020 stated: ‘These organizations [Barrio 18 and MS-13] are composed of networks of turf-based groups of youth and adults.’⁴⁷ The paper further noted:

‘... gangs remain a predominantly male phenomenon, and the average age at which males join a gang is 15. Interviewed females joined the gang at an average age of 13.2. Nearly 46 percent of the subjects interviewed for this study are active members of a gang, while the rest are in different stages of gang membership. Approximately 54 percent of the subjects interviewed in the survey belong—or have belonged—to Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), while 35 percent expressed their loyalty to the 18th Street Gang, also known as Pandilla 18 (or 18th Street Gang). The rest of the interviewees indicated membership in smaller gang groups: Los Chirizos, El Combo que no se deja, Los Olanchanos, Los Vatos Locos, etc.’⁴⁸

⁴¹ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 26 to 27), December 2022

⁴² ICG, ‘[New dawn or old habits?...](#)’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

⁴³ USSD – OSAC, ‘[Honduras Country Security Report](#)’, 18 July 2023

⁴⁴ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Honduras, Events of 2021](#)’, 13 January 2022

⁴⁵ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023 – Honduras, Events of 2022](#)’, 12 January 2023

⁴⁶ Cruz, J. M & others, ‘[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)’ (page 7), November 2020

⁴⁷ Cruz, J. M & others, ‘[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)’ (page 7), November 2020

⁴⁸ Cruz, J. M & others, ‘[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)’ (page 1), November 2020

12.1.2 Based upon 1,021 survey respondents, the November 2020 AIR/FIU research paper found that 94% of both current and previous gang members were male and 6% were female; 65% were under 26 years old and 15% were over 40. Women tended to be younger than men, with an average age of around 18 and 25 years respectively⁴⁹.

12.1.3 With regards to education, the AIR/FIU research paper found that a large majority of the survey respondents had not completed high school (90.3%) and 1.4% had never attended school. Gang members on average dropped out of school around 12-13 years old⁵⁰.

12.1.4 As to membership profile according to gender the AIR/FIU research paper stated:

‘The research team interviewed government officials, pastors, and leaders of organizations which work with former gang members. These interviewees said that while women used to play secondary roles in gangs, mostly as partners of gang members, there is no longer a significant gender difference in terms of gang affiliation and participation in gangs. Most former gang members in our sample shared the view that there are few differences between men and women with respect to their participation in gangs; many explicitly said they do not see any difference in terms of gender, noting that women can become more lethal than men because people tend to assume that women are not violent. One former Barrio 18 gang member from San Pedro Sula said, “Now gangs use women as hitmen (sicarias) because most people believe they are harmless, but when you give arms to women, they are lethal”...

‘Moreover, female gang members are often used for tasks traditionally associated with women’s roles, such as cooking for the gang members, attending to those who are injured and visiting them at the hospital, and doing errands, including sometimes transporting drugs from one place to another. Former female gang members whom we interviewed also said that women are used as sex objects to seduce or distract police officers during an operation.

‘Whether or not female gang members end up doing other jobs typically associated with men, data indicate that it is likely that the relationship between males and females in the gang is unequal and is consistent with the patriarchal or “macho” culture already prevalent in Honduras. Even former gang members who believed there were no differences between men and women in the gangs expressed the belief that women are “more passive” than men or that in the end, women are not the “head of the household and always obey the man.”⁵¹

12.1.5 The InSight Crime profile updated February 2021 stated ‘...gangs like the Barrio 18 and MS13... concentrate their criminal activities in urban areas and recruit young people, many of whom are suffering from widespread economic inequality and a lack of opportunity.’⁵²

⁴⁹ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 14), November 2020

⁵⁰ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 15), November 2020

⁵¹ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 27), November 2020

⁵² Insight Crime-CLALS, [‘Honduras profile’](#), 15 February 2021

12.1.6 The ACCORD response December 2022 citing various sources stated:

‘A 2020 analytical paper on Central American maras by María Luisa Pastor Gómez of the Spanish governmental Institute for Strategic Studies, explains that gang members join as young people: mostly boys, who come from broken and low-income families and who usually left school before the age of 16. These children seek an alternative space for socialisation and solidarity in a hostile environment. Some join to protect themselves or because they are forced to... With respect to female gang members, the paper adds that they tend to join around the age of 18, often to escape family problems and in approximately 12 percent of cases, because they are forced to do so... Joining a gang involves harsh and violent rites of passage.’⁵³

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13. Recruitment

13.1.1 The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in a thematic report ‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement in Honduras’ from March 2019, by Vickie Knox of London University, (IDMC paper 2019) stated:

‘Young people are particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment, which may start with grooming when children are given small gifts and attention in return for involvement. Boys are targeted from as young as six to act as lookouts, make deliveries and collect extortion money. Girls are targeted from the age of eight for sexual exploitation by the clika, and from 11 or 12 years to be sexually involved with a specific gang member... Forced recruitment in schools has triggered significant displacement. Gangs have infiltrated many education centres, particularly in urban areas, and pupils are targeted by their peers who try to convince them to become involved in gang activities. They must comply with the gang’s demands or leave...’⁵⁴

13.1.2 The AIR/FIU report 2020 stated: ‘... being out of school may increase the vulnerability of some youths to gang membership, because they have few other alternatives, either for entertainment or for income generation.’⁵⁵

13.1.3 The AIR/FIU report described reasons for joining a gang:

‘Most survey respondents provided reasons for joining the gang which reflected the allure of the gang: They did so to be with peers and to be part of the organization. However, in-depth interviews revealed that beyond those reasons, youths were coming from problematic families, inattentive communities, and institutions which do not provide development opportunities to minors. In any case, gangs seem to represent a viable alternative to satisfying the emotional needs of individuals in their adolescent years. Gang leaders take advantage of this vulnerability and quickly push their members to criminal schemes and violence.’⁵⁶

⁵³ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 25), December 2022

⁵⁴ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence...](#)’ (page 22), March 2019

⁵⁵ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 15), November 2020

⁵⁶ Cruz, J. M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 28), November 2020

13.1.4 The AIR/FIU report 2020 found:

‘... most of the [survey] respondents [of former and current gang members] did not undergo a process of initiation when joining the gang... In Honduras, only 31.8 percent of respondents with a history of gang affiliation said they joined through a process of initiation. Among female gang members, this percentage is even lower: 9.8 percent of the female respondents said they had to go through an initiation rite... rites of initiation were more common among the older respondents than among the younger ones.’⁵⁷

13.1.5 The AIR/FIU report added:

‘... although rites of initiation are not very common in Honduras, the largest and more powerful groups practice them much more frequently than the smaller gangs... The most common rite of “jumping into” the gang is for member initiates to take a beating from their own peers and future fellows in the gang... The survey also revealed that nearly 27 percent of the individuals who went through a formal process of initiation had to complete a “mission.” Those missions frequently entailed killing a person—or a few people—designated by the gang. In some instances, those missions involved the participation of more structured criminal schemes, such as setting up an extortion ring in a predetermined community. A comparison between gang organizations shows that although members of the MS-13 gang tend to endure more beatings as a form of initiation than Barrio 18 members, there is no statistically significant differences between the groups. The modes of joining the gang were very similar between the two largest gangs.’⁵⁸

13.1.6 With regard to women, the AIR/FIU report 2020 stated:

‘Although men and women allegedly have similar roles in the gangs, most women are sexually abused once they are in a gang. This happens sometimes as part of their initiation ritual, wherein all members of the clique rape the woman before she can be admitted. Often women are abused only because members of the gang want to have sex with them. As one former Barrio 18 gang member from San Pedro Sula said, “If several members of the gang want to have sex with a woman, so long as she is not committed in a relationship to someone in the clique, she cannot refuse” ...’⁵⁹

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14. Leaving a gang

14.1.1 The AIR/FIU report 2020 stated:

‘Intentions to leave the gang are more frequent in the early stages of membership. Those intentions decline for a while and then increase again with age. Successful disengagement is closely associated with interactions that provide social and instrumental support to reintegration.

⁵⁷ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 29), November 2020

⁵⁸ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 30), November 2020

⁵⁹ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 27), November 2020

- ‘Members of the two major gangs (MS-13 and Barrio 18) express less intention of disengagement than members of the smaller gangs or combos...
- ‘There is a U-shaped curve relationship between the number of years in the gang and intentions to leave. During the first years of gang membership, intentions to leave are stronger; then they subside for a while and start growing again after six years of being in the gang. This pattern suggests that the early months and years of gang life are probably full of doubts about membership. These doubts are later quenched by gratifying experiences as a gang member and then reemerge as the individual matures.
- ‘Religion also plays a critical role in the process of leaving the gang. Belonging to an Evangelical church in Honduras contributes to one’s intention to disengage from the gang and provides safe passage out of the group.
- ‘Non-gang groups and social networks of non-gang members are key to supporting gang members’ intentions to leave the gang. Active members who spent the most time with non-gang individuals (their family and non-gang friends) were more likely to disengage from the gang.’⁶⁰

14.1.2 The AIR/FIU report added:

‘Respondents said it is easier for a lower ranking gang member to get permission to leave the gang or to disengage from gang activities; respondents said lower ranking members are less likely to pose a threat to the gang or reveal information to rival gangs or the police. In contrast, the path to disengagement is difficult for someone who ranks higher in the gang... As with men, women who ascend to positions of leadership in the gang have a more difficult time disengaging from the gang than those who are not leaders. Having more authority and decisionmaking capacity in the gang gives them greater access to information, which top gang leaders regard as one of the most valuable assets.’⁶¹

14.1.3 With regards deserting a gang, the AIR/FIU paper stated:

‘Deserters are threatened with murder, and anyone who wants to leave the gang needs to obtain special permission from the top leadership. In a case described in a qualitative interview, a female former gang leader said she had to obtain a special permit to leave the gang. She explained that she was granted the permit because she was pregnant, and she said she was committed to God; however, the gang leader made it clear to her that “if it is true that you are attached to God, you have to keep your devotion, because the minute you detach yourself, I will give the order to kill you.”’⁶²

14.1.4 The AIR/FIU report noted: ‘Pastors and experts indicated that gangs would track former members as they integrated into a community of faith to ensure they did so “with sincerity”; the gang respected one’s decision to leave for

⁶⁰ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement...Key Takeaways](#) (page 1), November 2020

⁶¹ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement...Key Takeaways](#) (page 43), November 2020

⁶² Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement...Key Takeaways](#) (page 44), November 2020

religious reasons, but potentially would retaliate against those whom they determined were not following a religious lifestyle...’⁶³

14.1.5 The AIR/FIU report stated:

‘Despite the difficulties associated with leaving a gang, many people are successful in leaving the gang in Honduras. In fact, nearly half of our survey sample were no longer active in the gang and see themselves as former gang members. In addition, most respondents (62 percent) know someone who has done so... These numbers suggest that in general, cases of disengagement are relatively frequent..’⁶⁴

14.1.6 The table below⁶⁵ is based on information from the AIR/FIU paper on what an individual has to do to leave a gang.⁶⁶

Mechanisms of leaving the gang	Percentage
Impossible to leave	37%
Join church or rehab programme	28%
Talk to leaders	19.4%
Just leave	11.9%
Accomplish a mission (usually understood as killing someone)	2.7%
Other	0.9%

14.1.7 The ACCORD response December 2022 citing María Luisa Pastor Gómez of the Spanish governmental Institute for Strategic Studies who spoke about leaving a gang:

“Once in [a gang], the new members accept a series of strict rules and values and find themselves forced to develop strong ties of belonging, unity, loyalty and solidarity with the new ‘family’ while simultaneously weakening their links to their own families and to society. In principle, joining a gang is an irreversible process, as the leaders do not allow anybody to leave, unless this is achieved through joining some evangelical church”...

“If done without permission [leaving a mara]... implies certain death, and obtaining the leaders’ blessings involves long and arduous negotiations... Many departures take place via religious conversion and integration into an evangelical church, an experience which provides a safe haven that allows aspiring deserters to reestablish links with the community, to build their families and to look for educational or job opportunities without harassment from the gang. However, this way is not easy either, as any members wishing to leave the Mara are subjected to very close monitoring... Other challenges faced when leaving a gang are the total lack of the skills needed for regular work, the lack of training opportunities, the constant threat emanating from old gang rivals, harassment from the police and security forces, and social discrimination on account of their past and their

⁶³ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 40), November 2020

⁶⁴ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 45), November 2020

⁶⁵ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 45), November 2020

⁶⁶ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (pages 43 to 44), November 2020

appearance, since one of the most visible features of Mara members until recently were their tattoos, which are almost impossible to get rid of.”...⁶⁷

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15. Gang activities - control of territory

15.1.1 The IDMC report 2019 stated: ‘Street gangs’ territorial control extends to all people within their area, and particularly women and girls... The territorial control that organised crime groups exert over border areas means that women and girls who live there are also vulnerable to human trafficking and forced prostitution as well as sexual abuse by the groups’ members...’⁶⁸

15.1.2 The AIR/FIR report November 2020 stated:

‘Gang activities revolve around the concept of territorial control. All gangs seek to exert control inside the communities in which they operate in order to extract resources and revenues. Both the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs use violence and participate in similar criminal activities... local drug trafficking, extortion, and assassination for hire, among others. However, most testimonies provided during the in-depth interviews coincide with the notion that MS-13 gang members concentrate their criminal activities around the control of drug markets, while Barrio 18 gang members focus more on extortion activities which directly affect the communities in which they operate.’⁶⁹

15.1.3 The AIR/FIU report 2020 also noted:

‘... As one former MS-13 gang member explained, Mara Salvatrucha will do everything in their power to keep the police from entering their territories. When a community member has a problem inside MS-13 gang territory, people go to the gang leaders before contacting authorities to solve the problem. These findings are consistent with past research which indicates that MS-13 gang members stopped extorting inside their neighborhoods to leverage support with the people who live in those communities. Regardless, MS-13 gang members are violent and constantly engaging in criminal behavior.’⁷⁰

15.1.4 The InSight Crime profile updated February 2021 stated: ‘[Barrio 18 and MS13]... often exert influence over entire neighborhoods, imposing their own order, demanding extortion payments from businesses and residents, and running local drug sales and kidnapping rings.’⁷¹

15.1.5 ACCORD in their response of December 2022 gangs report citing a September 2022 publication by the [Global Protection Cluster](#) stated:

‘... territorial control by the maras is reflected in the imposition of invisible borders, in curfews and dress codes. All persons living in gang-controlled areas face restrictions in accessing the rights to health, education, work and

⁶⁷ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human...](#)’ (pages 25 to 26), December 2022

⁶⁸ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 26), March 2019

⁶⁹ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 25), November 2020

⁷⁰ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 25), November 2020

⁷¹ Insight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

the use of public spaces. The publication further notes that territorial disputes in areas historically impacted by violence, such as San Pedro Sula, La Lima, Choloma and Tegucigalpa as well as in areas where the level of violent incidents was historically lower, such as Danlí, Choluteca, Olancho, Valle, La Ceiba and Gracias a Dios, have intensified. Controls and restrictions imposed by the maras have increased in recent years, especially in peripheral areas of urban centres, where restrictions on mobility have worsened.

‘France 24, a French state-owned international news television network that also broadcasts in Spanish, in July 2022 publishes an article on such an invisible boundary. The article describes a dirt road that separates the territories of MS-13 and Barrio 18 in the Chamelecón neighbourhood, a hotspot for gang violence in San Pedro Sula... The dirt road is known as “la frontera” and in July 2022 was crossed by members of Barrio 18, who fired machine guns on a street and demanded of locals living on the MS-13 side to vacate the area. Ten families had to leave, and even though the police reinforced their presence, they didn’t return’⁷²

- 15.1.6 The ACCORD response of December 2022, in an interview with María Luisa Pastor Gómez of the Spanish governmental Institute for Strategic Studies, stated:

“Gangs are groups that create their own rules and membership criteria and that are marked by an obsessive territorial logic. The territorial framework — usually a marginal neighbourhood or a hill— is their place of action which they consider their property. Mara members fight to maintain control over their physical space and defend it to the last. They even impose restrictions on the movement of its inhabitants, often according to the territorial limits established with the rival gang. Maras secure the support of local gang family members and also rely on “falcons” or informers who act as their eyes and ears inside the neighbourhoods and supply them with all information. ...The Maras impose tacit codes of conduct on inhabitants, and if the latter reject those, they suffer violence. Refusing to collaborate also means death, as does accidentally trespassing on a rival gang’s territory. Gang members lay down the rules in the communities. People can see and hear, but they must never speak about or report anything or they risk being tortured or, in the worst case, murdered. At night, vehicles trying to enter the neighbourhoods must switch off their lights, otherwise they can come under fire. If a person wants to move between neighbourhoods, they must request a permit and pay 5 dollars. Everyone is asked to produce their ID, and there are even rules regarding clothes. For example, wearing a Tshirt with the number 18 in a neighbourhood controlled by the MS13 Mara can be a reason to die.” ...’⁷³

- 15.1.7 A UNHCR report from March 2022 stated:

‘Community leaders reported incidents of housing dispossession and occupation by street gangs, resulting in the forceful displacement of families or, in the case of San Pedro Sula, preventing people affected by Eta and Iota

⁷² ACCORD, [‘Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...’](#) (page 28), December 2022

⁷³ ACCORD, [‘Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...’](#) (page 27), December 2022

hurricanes to return to their place of origin. In San Pedro Sula, communities stressed major loss of income, assets, community spaces, while elders and community leaders expressed unusual fear over crossing “invisible borders”...

‘Chamelecón is one of the largest sectors of San Pedro Sula and is made up of 62 colonies. The sector has historically suffered from the impact of violence and territorial control of two gangs over northern and southern areas of the sector, causing many families to abandon their homes in search of safer communities.

‘Choloma is a municipality in the Department of Cortés, located on the outskirts of San Pedro Sula.... The situation of generalized violence is mainly caused by fragmented street gangs that frequently dispute territories to maintain strategic control over drug trade and the road to the main national port of Omoa. The violence affects disproportionately children, youth, and women, making it one of the municipalities with the highest femicide rate in Honduras.’⁷⁴

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16. Gang activities - drug trafficking

16.1.1 The AIR/FIU report 2020 noted ‘The MS-13 gang... tend to specialize to a larger extent in local drug trafficking and assassinations for hire. They tend to operate with more consideration for the community in which they are based, and they are more effective in penetrating criminal justice institutions for their own advantage.’⁷⁵ The same report stated ‘In the in-depth interviews, former MS-13 gang members explained that their organization focuses on petty drug trafficking and maintains a good relationship with the people within their neighborhoods.’⁷⁶

16.1.2 The ICG report 2023 noted:

‘... street gangs, such as MS-13 and the 18th Street gang, at times partner with or work for drug trafficking groups that have penetrated the highest echelons of state... The country’s most widespread criminal activities are drug trafficking and extortion... A peculiarity of Honduran gangs compared to those in other Central American countries is their apparent prominence, particularly the MS-13, in drug smuggling... Once controlled by a few cartels, drug trafficking in Honduras is now run by myriad groups, including gangs... Some of these groups reportedly hold a tight grip over remote parts of the country, particularly La Mosquitia, a stretch of land along the eastern coast, and are responsible for some 30 per cent of the country’s violent deaths, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime... They also seem to be trying hard to turn Honduras from a transit country into a cocaine producer. In 2022, authorities eradicated approximately 140 hectares of coca, more than thirteen times the previous year’s total. This area is but a

⁷⁴ UNHCR, ‘[Community-Based Protection Initiatives Cortés Department](#)’, 3 March 2022

⁷⁵ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 22), November 2020

⁷⁶ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 25), November 2020

fraction of that under cultivation in Colombia, but the rise suggests an effort to concentrate both production and trafficking in Honduras...⁷⁷

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17. Gang activities - violence

17.1 Use of violence

- 17.1.1 An AIR/FIU research paper from November 2020, citing other sources, stated: 'Despite the difficulties in pinpointing the precise number of active gang members in Honduras, government officials and experts view street gangs as responsible for an important share of the criminal violence taking place in the country. However, as with the number of gang members, there are no reliable data about the number of murders and crimes committed by gangs in the country.'⁷⁸ The same AIR/FIU report stated: 'As with the gang-related statistics, scholars and journalists interviewed by the research team maintained that the data [on murder rates] are not completely reliable. More importantly, however, the gang problem in Honduras continues to be severe, even with the reduction in homicide rates.'⁷⁹
- 17.1.2 The OSAC CSR 2023 stated: 'The MS-13 and Calle 18 gangs [Barrio 18] are the most active and powerful gangs present in Honduras. Gangs are not reluctant to use violence, and specialize in murder-for-hire, carjacking, extortion, and other violent street crime... Drug trafficking and gang activity are the main causes of violent crime in Honduras.'⁸⁰
- 17.1.3 The InSight Crime homicide round-up for 2022, dated February, 2023 stated 'Many of the violent deaths in Honduras are attributed to gangs known for retail drug trafficking and extortion.'⁸¹
- 17.1.4 The USSD's OSAC report 2023 noted: 'Drug trafficking and gang activity are the main causes of violent crime in Honduras... Major cities (e.g., Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba) have homicide rates higher than the national average, as do several Honduran departments... including Atlántida, Colón, Cortés, and Yoro.'⁸²

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17.2 Homicide statistics

- 17.2.1 The InSight Crime profile updated February 2021 identifies Barrio 18 and MS13 as the primary drivers of homicide⁸³.
- 17.2.2 The table below has been created by CPIT based on data presented by UNODC and InSight Crime but drawn from Honduran government sources. It documents the intentional homicide rate in Honduras between 2010 and 2022:

⁷⁷ ICG, '[New Dawn or Old Habits?...](#)' (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

⁷⁸ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 7), November 2020

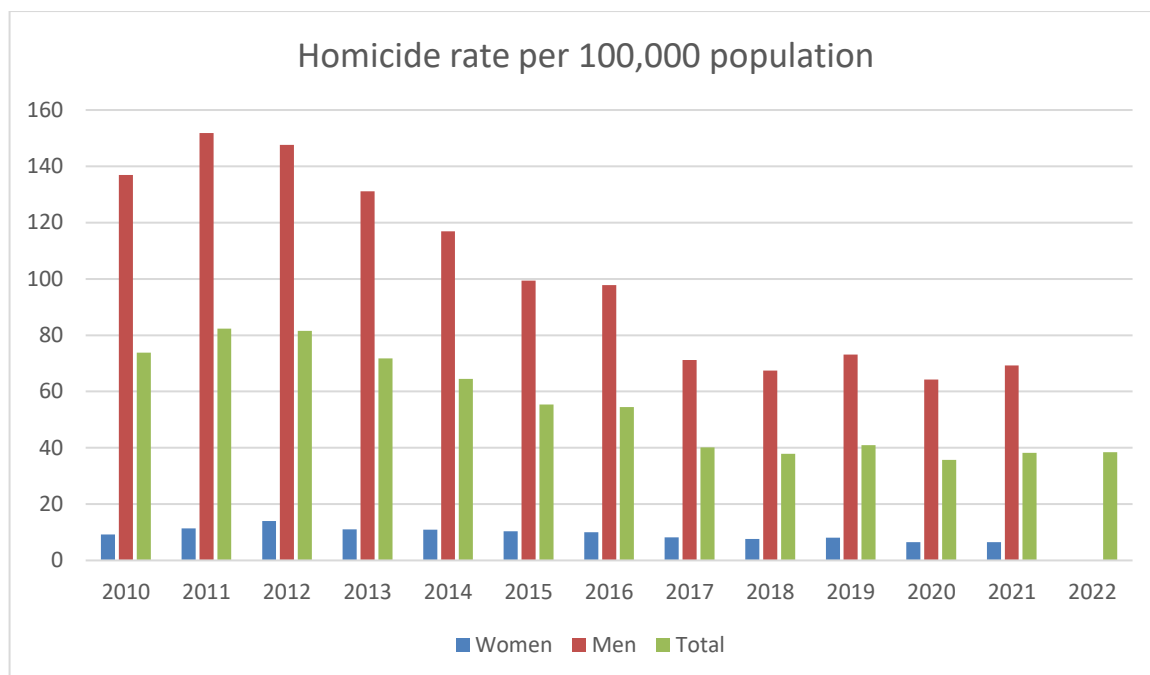
⁷⁹ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 8), November 2020

⁸⁰ USSD - OSAC, '[Honduras – Country Security Report](#)', updated 18 July 2023

⁸¹ Insight Crime, '[2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)', 8 February 2023

⁸² USSD OSAC, '[Honduras Country Security Report](#)', 18 July 2023

⁸³ Insight Crime - CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021



84 85

17.2.3 The InSight Crime homicide round-up for 2022 dated February 2023 stated: ‘Honduras continued its streak as Central America’s deadliest country in 2022, with a homicide rate of 35.8 per 100,000 people, [according](#) to government figures. Nonetheless, the country reduced homicides by 12.7% compared to 2021. The government has not registered such a low number of deaths since 2006, [according](#) to a statement from the Security Ministry....’⁸⁶

17.2.4 The Infosegura, a regional strategic partnership of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for policymaking and implementation, provided data for 2022 noting

- ‘Homicides decreased by 12.8% in 2022 with regard to the previous year.’
- ‘... a homicide rate of 35.8 per 100,000 population, which is the lowest in the last decade.’
- ‘45% of homicides are associated with social conflict and other causes not attributable to organized crime.’
- ‘40% of homicide victims are between 18 and 30 years old.’
- ‘145 municipalities [out of 298] reduced the number of homicides.’
- ‘34 municipalities maintained the same number of homicides...’
- ‘44 municipalities [had]... zero homicides.’⁸⁷

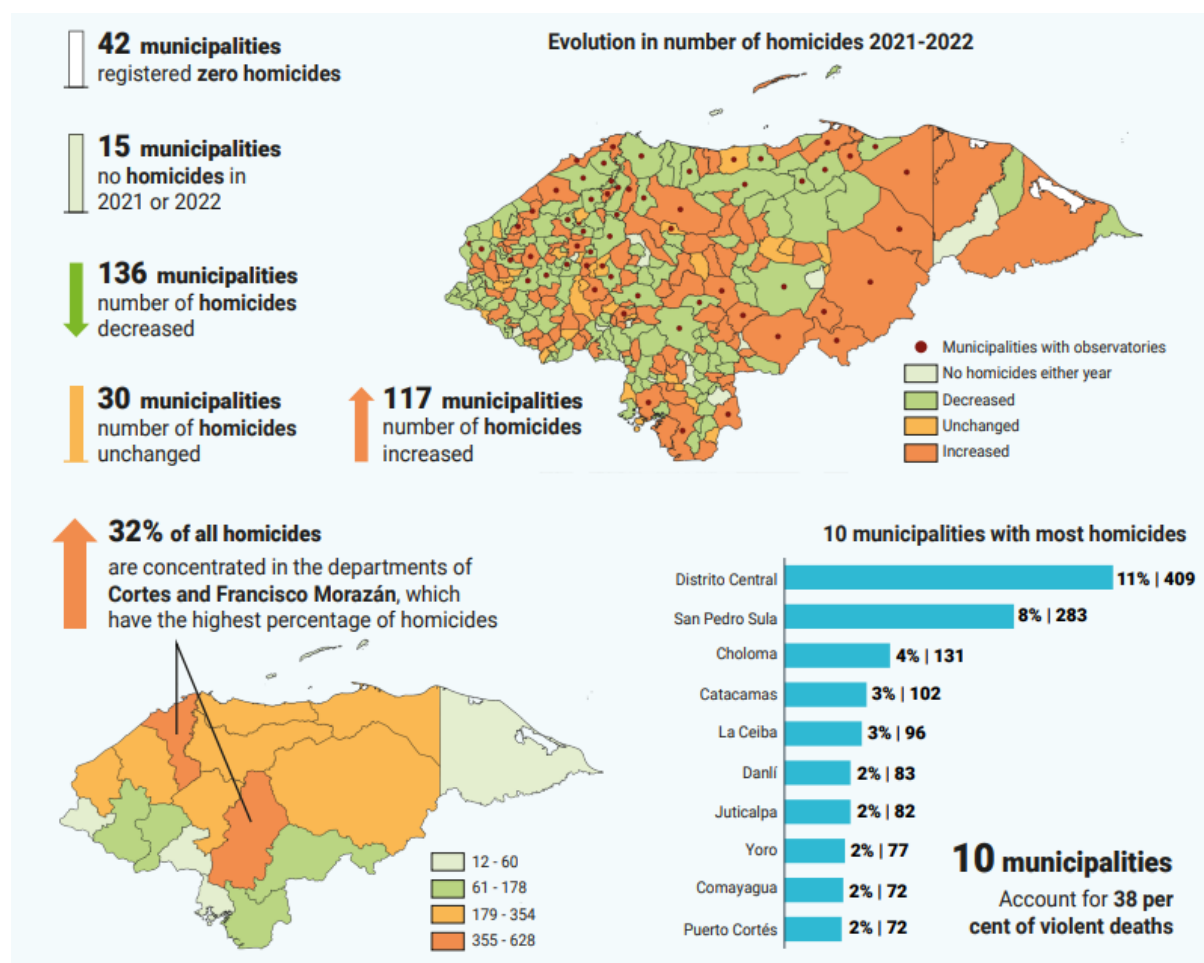
⁸⁴ UNODC, dataUNODC, ‘[Intentional homicide](#)’, no date

⁸⁵ Insight Crime, ‘[2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)’, 8 February 2023

⁸⁶ Insight Crime, ‘[2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)’, 8 February 2023

⁸⁷ Infosegura, ‘[Honduras](#)’ (2022), no date

17.2.5 An Infosegura report on citizen security in 2022 provided detail about change in homicide rates and distribution between 2021 and 2022⁸⁸:



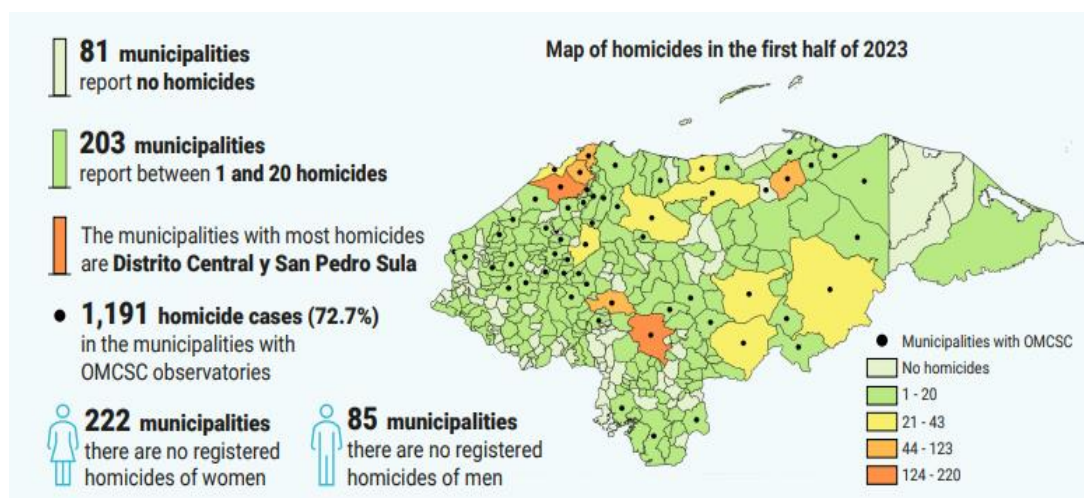
17.2.6 The Infosegura report provided data on violence and citizen security between January and June 2023 (Infosegura report 2023) based on preliminary data from Technical Board on Violent Deaths: National Police, Public Prosecutor's Office/Directorate of Forensic Medicine, National Registry of Persons, Observatories of Coexistence and Citizen Security, National Institute of Statistics, Undersecretariat of Security in Police Affairs and the Technical Unit for Inter-institutional Coordination (UTECI). The report stated:

- there were 1,639 homicides in the first half of 2023 – the number of homicides in same period in 2021 was 2,059 in 2021 and in 2022 was 1,900
- 86% of homicide victims were men
- 37.4% homicide victims were aged 18 to 30⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Infosegura, '[Citizen security analysis in Honduras 2022](#)', 31 August 2023

⁸⁹ InfoSegura, '[Analysis of the situation of violence... January to June 2023](#)', 27 September 2023

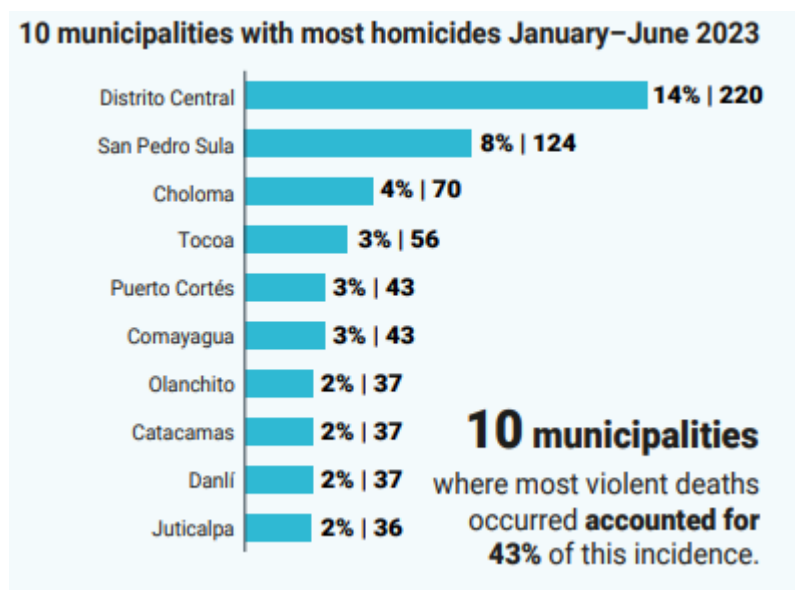
17.2.7 The Infosegura report 2023 provided the graphic and map below⁹⁰ describing the number of homicides by municipality between January and June 2023:



Source: Preliminary data provided by Working Group on Violent Deaths: National Police, Public Ministry/Directorate of Forensic Medicine, National Registry of Persons, Citizen Coexistence and Security Observatories, National Statistics Institute, ONV-IUDPAS/UNAH, Technical Inter-Institutional Coordination Unit (UTECI) Secretariat for Security.

NB OMCSO stands for Municipal Observatories of Coexistence and Citizen Security of the Secretariat of Security.

17.2.8 The Infosegura report 2023 also provided the chart below of municipalities with the highest number of homicides:



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17.2.9 The ICG report 2023, however, noted ‘... the growth of extortion may have intensified violence in at least some places, as rival gangs battle for turf... Though authorities report a reduction in homicides nationwide, murder rates increased in six of the country’s eighteen departments... Mass killings –

⁹⁰ InfoSegura, ‘[Analysis of the situation of violence... January to June 2023](#)’, 13 September 2023

⁹¹ InfoSegura, ‘[Analysis of the situation of violence... January to June 2023](#)’, 13 September 2023

often involving attacks by one gang on another – have continued unabated, with 50 recorded in 2022, taking 185 lives altogether... One recent massacre in a pool hall in Choloma claimed the lives of thirteen people...'

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18. Gang activities - extortion

18.1 Prevalence

18.1.1 The AIR/FIU report 2020 observed 'the Barrio 18 gang seems to be more focused on extorting their own communities [than MS13], and they tend to use violence more frequently to enforce their threats.'⁹²

18.1.2 The AIR/FIU research paper continued:

'In contrast, the Barrio 18 gang is viewed as even more ruthless. They impose extortions, which they call "war taxes" (impuestos de guerra) against the residents of the communities which they control. Former 18th Street gang members said that the gang does not care whom they extort. They will extort and threaten any members of the community regardless of their economic situation. Victims range from the person selling candies on the corner of the street to formal businesses which operate inside the neighborhood. In addition, the 18th Street gang runs local drug-dealing points inside their territories, but according to different sources, their operations remain less organized and more fragmented than those of the MS-13 gang.'⁹³

18.1.3 In September 2022, Julia Yansura, Program Director for Latin America & the Caribbean at Global Financial Integrity, a Washington DC-based think tank focused on illicit finances/trade, corruption and money laundering estimated that extortion payments in Honduras amount to between US\$52 million and US\$72 million⁹⁴.

18.1.4 The ACCORD response of December 2022, in an interview with María Luisa Pastor Gómez of the Spanish governmental Institute for Strategic Studies, stated: 'The Mara gangs have established themselves on the ground as an alternative authority to the state that exacts "taxes". From that position, they run drug traffic or small dealing schemes as well as extorting small businesses and residents within their catchment area. The latter are charged "rent" or "housing" ...'⁹⁵

18.1.5 The ACCORD response of December 2022 report, citing several sources, stated:

'According to Elizabeth Kennedy [Central America Monitor Research Director for the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)], the estimate by Julia Yansura [above] is a very conservative estimate, she states that "in some neighborhoods all residents must pay extortion. Likewise, all

⁹² Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 22), November 2020

⁹³ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 25), November 2020

⁹⁴ Julia Yansura, '[Extortion in the northern triangle...](#)', (page 20), September 2022

⁹⁵ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality...](#)' (page 27), December 2022

companies/organizations in some industries – public transport, trash collection, etc. – must pay extortion”...

‘Regarding the portion of the Honduran population affected by extortion, numbers vary widely depending on the sources reporting on this issue. A 2019 ONV [The National Violence Observatory (Observatorio Nacional de la Violencia)], survey concerning citizen perception on insecurity and victimisation in Honduras revealed that two in 1,000 Hondurans, or 0.2 percent, fell victim to extortion in 2019...

‘LAPOP, a survey research lab carrying out surveys of public opinion in the Americas at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, based on a survey carried out from October to November 2018 including 1,560 interviews... reports a much higher number: it notes that 8.5 percent of Hondurans fell victim to extortion within 12 months preceding the survey period October/November ...’⁹⁶

18.1.6 ACCORD stated: ‘Approximately two million US Dollars are paid to criminal groups by the public transport sector in extortion per month.’⁹⁷

18.1.7 The Honduran newspaper, La Tribuna, reporting in Spanish but translated using Google Translate, on 23 November 2022:

‘99 percent of Honduran victims of extortion do not dare to file a formal complaint, according to a report by the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ)... In the study “War tax: the phenomenon of extortion and the state response in Honduras”, the organization details that around 206,000 Honduran households have been victims of extortion in 2022.

‘The data was obtained through requests for information sent to the Judiciary, Secretariat of Security, Public Ministry, National Penitentiary Institute (INP) and the National Banking and Insurance Commission (CNBS). Judicial files were also consulted, between November 2021 and April 2022, mainly evaluating the management of the previous government and the National Anti-Maras and Gangs Force (FNAMP)... The document indicates that 847,154 boys, girls, youth and adults have been impacted by extortion in Honduras during this year, however, this number could be even higher due to new trends in crime.

‘According to the report, 96 percent of the defendants had an alleged affiliation with organized crime structures; cases of former public employees, imitators and people conspired or forced to get involved in the extortion process were also recorded.

‘Regarding the amount paid in extortion, it is estimated around 18,000 million lempiras [around £600million⁹⁸] per year, an approximate 87,427 [around £2,900⁹⁹] per victim..’¹⁰⁰

18.1.8 The ICG report 2023 noted:

⁹⁶ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’, (page 16), December 2022

⁹⁷ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’, (page 21), December 2022

⁹⁸ XE.com, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, 4 October 2023

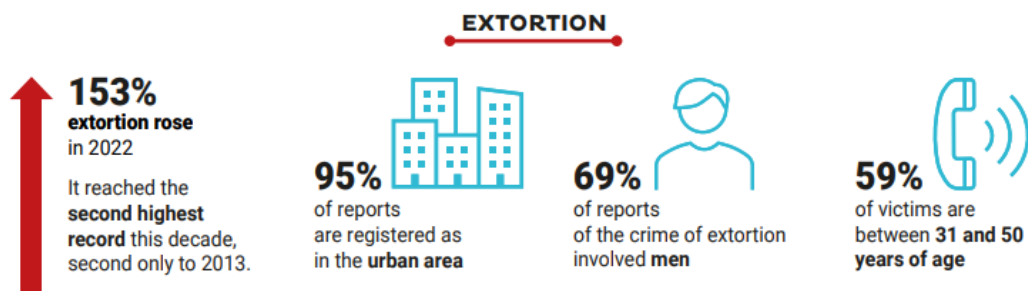
⁹⁹ XE.com, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, 4 October 2023

¹⁰⁰ La Tribuna, ‘[Every year, Hondurans pay L18 billion in "war tax"](#)’, 23 November 2022

‘One crime in particular, extortion, appears to be on the rise... The main gangs, along with an apparently growing number of imitators, have been ratcheting up extortion demands, particularly from private and public transport services, and expanding their rackets to more places...

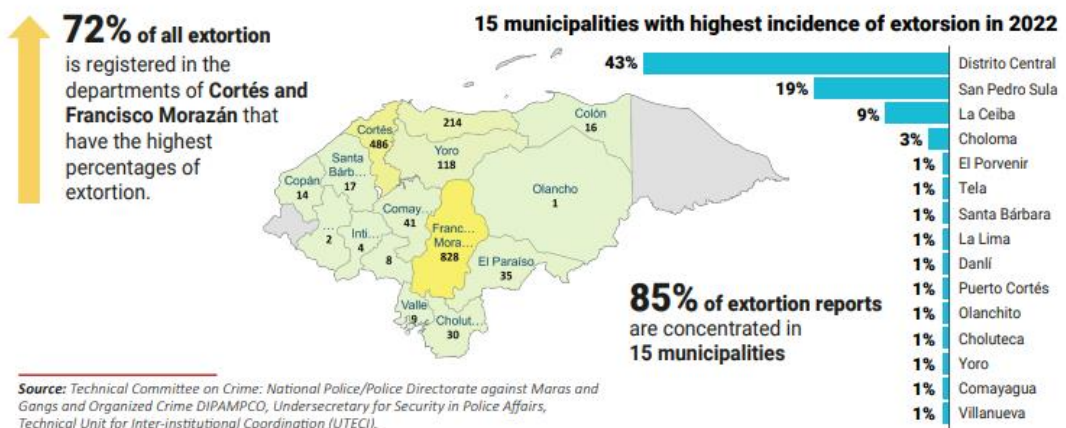
‘Early in 2022, new groups emerged in the San Pedro Sula transport terminal... Humanitarian workers say Salvadoran gang members, fleeing President Nayib Bukele’s crackdown, have settled in Honduran cities, particularly those along the border but also the industrial centre of Choloma outside San Pedro Sula... It also appears that the MS-13 has intensified its shakedowns of residents in some areas after briefly suspending this practice when COVID-19 broke out in 2020 (although this extortion could be the work of impostors)... Extortion has started to occur more often in border departments like Ocotepeque, Copán and Santa Bárbara, as well as in the central region of Colón, all places where it was once quite rare...’¹⁰¹

18.1.9 The Infosegura report on citizen security provided data¹⁰² on rate of extortions and profile of victims in 2022:



Source: Technical Committee on Crime: National Police/Police Directorate against Maras and Gangs and Organized Crime DIPAMPCO, Undersecretary for Security in Police Affairs, Technical Unit for Inter-institutional Coordination (UTECI).

18.1.10 The Infosegura report also provided data¹⁰³ on the distribution of extortion in 2022:



Source: Technical Committee on Crime: National Police/Police Directorate against Maras and Gangs and Organized Crime DIPAMPCO, Undersecretary for Security in Police Affairs, Technical Unit for Inter-institutional Coordination (UTECI).

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¹⁰¹ ICG, ‘New Dawn or Old Habits?...’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

¹⁰² Infosegura, ‘Citizen security analysis in Honduras 2022’, 31 August 2023

¹⁰³ Infosegura, ‘Citizen security analysis in Honduras 2022’, 31 August 2023

18.2 Perpetrators

18.2.1 Julia Yansura, in the report 'Extortion in the northern triangle of Central America: Following the Money', September 2022 stated 'Honduras has a heavy presence of gangs and criminal groups, but they are fragmented and numerous, which leads to unpredictable, costly and violent extortion trends... In San Pedro Sula, for example, transportation companies report paying extortion to up to five different criminal groups at the same time... With regards to the two largest Honduran gangs, extortion is primarily carried out by Barrio 18, with MS-13 more involved in drug trafficking...' ¹⁰⁴

18.2.2 The ACCORD response of December 2022, citing various sources, noted:

"Multiple groups were identified to conduct extortion in Honduras. The Fuerza Nacional Anti-Extorsión, FNA (Anti-Extortion National Force) had identified 48 different gangs/criminal bands that commit extortion, including 'independent' actors. Officers had identified MS-13, Barrio 18, Los Chirizos, El Combo Que No Se Deja, individuals who use the gangs name, and corrupt police officers to commit extortion. Interviewees provided examples of transportation personnel collaborating with gangs to extort bus owners or competing companies, unhappy employees using the gangs name to extort their employers, and/or family members knowledgeable of individuals receiving remittances. Officers distinguished [between] gangs [which] extorted a specific amount on a routine basis while imitators asked for one large sums of cash. ... Most disturbing in the case of Honduras, was the common theme of corrupt National Police officers involved in extortions. Participants described officers acting as delinquent groups committing extortion, involved with gangs committing extortion, and/or not arresting gang members in exchange for a portion of extortion funds."... ¹⁰⁵

18.2.3 The same ACCORD response of December 2022 stated that women and minors are also involved in extortion:

'From 2013 to 2021, 534 or 17 percent of persons detained for this crime were under the age of 18. Of those 25 percent were female minors.... The article states that in some parts of Honduras gang members force children to collect war taxes or otherwise threaten their families. Even so, the children benefit from the collection of the war tax, because they receive around 10 percent of the proceeds with which they support their families. The article further states that 20 to 40 percent of gangs are made up of women and among their most frequent tasks are the collection of extortion payment.' ¹⁰⁶

18.2.4 An Insight Crime article of 29 November 2022 stated:

'...while the traditional narrative is that the MS13 and Barrio 18 are responsible for virtually all the extortion happening in Honduras over the last ten years, this is not the current reality, according to Daugaard.

"There are a lot of groups involved in this. Local, smaller local gangs, insiders within the police, within the judiciary," said Daugaard [Andreas Daugaard, a research coordinator at Asociación para una Sociedad más

¹⁰⁴ Julia Yansara, '[Extortion in the northern triangle...](#)' (page 9), September 2022

¹⁰⁵ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 19), December 2022

¹⁰⁶ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 19), December 2022

Justa (Association for a More Just Society - ASJ), the Honduran chapter of Transparency International]. "The other big group is so-called imitators. People who don't necessarily belong to any gang use the notoriety and fear of gang membership to extort. Once you mention 'I'm from Barrio 18' or 'I'm from MS13,' many people will automatically pay up."

'Extortion schemes have also become easier to carry out as digital money transfers become more commonplace in Honduras. Using apps like TigoMoney, extortionists can demand faster payments that appear in the banking system as legitimate transactions. No electronic payment extortion cases end up in court, only extortion involving cash, which is becoming far less frequent, according to Daugaard.'¹⁰⁷

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18.3 Targets of extortion

18.3.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated:

'... People in certain lines of work, such as market stallholders, informal street vendors, transport workers, teachers and owners of small and micro businesses, are particularly vulnerable to extortion. People who receive remittances and those who have returned from abroad may also be targeted because they are presumed to have money.

'Residents of gang-controlled areas may also be charged the impuesto de Guerra [extortion]. The level of risk depends on the area people live in and the type of business they run, with payments for businesses such as car dealerships running into tens of thousands of lempira, or hundreds of dollars, a week... Recent research found that some gangs focus more on local and small-scale extortion than others. "Barrio 18 relies much more on micro-extortion – targeting the street vendor, corner store or the local mechanic – than MS13. This puts them at odds with the community"¹⁰⁸

18.3.2 The December 2022 ACCORD response stated, based on an interview with Pamela Ruiz:

"Extortion impacts a wide cross-section of society. Victims include individuals, households, and businesses of all sizes. Victimization data suggests that men of working age in sectors such as sales or transportation are particularly vulnerable. Victims come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. They include those perceived to have a little extra money, such as small business owners who are doing well or remittance recipients who are receiving money from abroad."¹⁰⁹

18.3.3 The ACCORD response of December 2022 stated:

'CONADEH [The National Human Rights Commission] in August 2022 lists the following victims of extortion: merchants, housewives, people working in the transport sector, mechanics, teachers, members of the justice sector, journalists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, drivers of private student transport or employees of public or private companies, who must pay every time they

¹⁰⁷ InSight Crime, '[Honduras' State of Exception May Set Worrying Precedent](#)', 29 November 2022

¹⁰⁸ IDMC, '[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)' (page 23), March 2019

¹⁰⁹ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 19), December 2022

enter neighbourhoods controlled by criminal groups, either to enter or leave the place... UNHCR in November 2022 also mentions sex workers being targeted for extortion by gangs... Yansura adds that victims also include people living in poverty and prison-inmates... InSight Crime in an undated article on extortion mentions that allegedly in Honduras political parties must often provide cash or other benefits to gangs to be able to campaign in certain territories under their control...'¹¹⁰

18.3.4 Regarding women and girls as victims of extortion, the ACCORD response of December 2022 stated:

'WAGE, Women and Girls Empowered, a consortium led by the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, in an October 2019 publication on women's economic empowerment in Honduras states that gang members attack small and medium enterprises - such as those owned by women - rather than large businesses, because they have less power to react...'¹¹¹

18.3.5 Freedom House in their 2023 Freedom in the World report and covering events from 2022 stated: 'Criminal groups undermine academic freedom, as they control all or parts of schools in some areas and subject staff to extortion schemes.'¹¹²

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18.4 Homicides linked to extortion

18.4.1 The ACCORD 2022 gangs report stated: 'According to the ONV Boletín Nacional [The National Violence Observatory (Observatorio Nacional de la Violencia)] on violent deaths for 2020, in 44 cases of homicides extortion was a possible motive... with a significantly higher number registered in 2019, when ONV observes 89 homicides possibly related to extortion motives... Two women lost their lives in consequence of incidents related to extortion.'¹¹³

18.4.2 The ACCORD 2022 gangs report stated:

'[El País.hn](#) in May 2022 reports that this sector in recent years has lost more than 500 drivers and other personnel, who were killed by organised crime due to non-payment of the war tax. All of these murders have gone unpunished, reports the newspaper... Expediente público, a magazine for investigative journalism in Central America, in a video on extortion in Honduras dated May 2022, cites ONV data that recorded 1,781 drivers were murdered between 2010 and 2019. Between January and 23 March 2022 alone, ONV recorded 27 murdered drivers... The leader of the public transport sector, Wilmer Cálix, notes that working in the transport sector is one of the most insecure professions in Honduras, as did CONADEH which categorised this profession as a high-risk job in 2019...'¹¹⁴

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¹¹⁰ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 20), December 2022

¹¹¹ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 20), December 2022

¹¹² Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#) (section D3), 2023

¹¹³ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 18), December 2022

¹¹⁴ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...s](#)' (page 21), December 2022

19. Targets of gang violence

19.1 General

- 19.1.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated: ‘Gang victims broadly fall into two groups: those individually targeted and actively persecuted, and those more generally affected by criminal violence. People from both groups may have to flee, but the former have heightened security concerns before and after their displacement, and this results in different patterns of movement and outcomes.’¹¹⁵
- 19.1.2 The same IDMC report citing other sources stated:
 ‘Enmity presents the greatest risk, and includes refusing to join a gang, leaving a gang, wanting to leave a gang, refusing to comply with a gang’s demands and being suspected of belonging to a rival gang. It may also include having friends or family who are deemed to fall into any of these categories. People accused of enmity are highly vulnerable to extreme reprisals. They and/or their relatives may be killed, tortured, raped or disappeared, and gangs are equally brutal in their response to those who deemed to have disrespected them and their relatives. Those suspected of belonging to or associating with a gang, or having friends or family who do so, face persecution and murder by rival gang members, social cleansing squads and security forces conducting raids in gang areas... People flee to avoid this fate, or if a family member has fallen victim...’¹¹⁶
- 19.1.3 IDMC also stated: ‘Harassment and threats are highly targeted on individuals and families. People flee if they receive a serious threat or if they refuse a group’s demands. People in rural and Garifuna areas leave if they know their children are about to be co-opted or because of a more general fear of them falling into the drug trade.’¹¹⁷
- 19.1.4 ACCORD in their December 2022 report stated: ‘UNHCR in a March 2021 report on displacement and violence against women in Honduras assesses that in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and Choloma crimes such as extortion, murder, kidnappings and other types of violence against women, against the LGTBQ+ population and other vulnerable groups are part of the daily life for a large number of inhabitants...’¹¹⁸
- 19.1.5 In a report for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) dated 12 September 2022, the Advocates for Human Rights, an NGO with special consultative status, citing other sources, stated: ‘In their exercise of territorial control, gangs forcibly recruit and sexually abuse children... Those who resist recruitment are killed, raped, displaced, or disappeared...’¹¹⁹
- 19.1.6 The USSD human rights report 2022 stated: ‘Criminal groups, including local and transnational gangs and narcotics traffickers, were significant

¹¹⁵ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 21), March 2019

¹¹⁶ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 22), March 2019

¹¹⁷ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 25), March 2019

¹¹⁸ ACCORD, [‘Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...’](#) (page 21), December 2022

¹¹⁹ UN CEDAW, [‘NGO report on discrimination against women...’](#), 12 September 2022

perpetrators of violent crimes... directed against human rights defenders, judicial authorities, lawyers, business community members, journalists, bloggers, women, and other vulnerable populations.’¹²⁰

19.1.7 The OSAC CSR 2023 stated:

‘The public transportation sector is a regular target of extortion, and experiences higher levels of homicide than many other sectors. There have been multiple incidents of gang members destroying city buses and taxis, and reports that gang members rob, assault, rape, kidnap, or murder passengers. Passengers on public buses have been the victims of robbery at roadblocks and bus stops, during daytime and nighttime hours... Most of the reported incidents on public transportation involved gang members demanding extortion payments.

‘...Some passengers opt to travel armed when using public transportation, which has resulted in armed confrontations where innocent bystanders are injured or killed in the crossfire. Some would-be muggers and gang members keep to a daily schedule, riding city buses from one stop to the next, committing criminal acts with impunity along the way.’¹²¹ The OSAC CSR 2023 noted: ‘Most crime victims are members of rival gangs, small business owners who resist gang extortion, passengers on public transportation, or those involved in land disputes.’¹²² The OSAC report also stated: ‘Gangs control some of the taxi services, primarily in the large cities.’¹²³

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19.2 Current and former gang members

19.2.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated:

‘Street gangs demand absolute loyalty from members and their partners and families, and from people who live in the areas they control. Perceived acts of betrayal carry extreme risk and may be punished with death. Such acts include owing money, particularly for people who collect extortion payments or sell drugs, refusing the recruitment of a child and refusing sexual involvement with a gang member. People accused of betrayal tend to flee rather than filing a report, which may aggravate the threat even after displacement.’¹²⁴

19.2.2 IDMC further noted:

‘Because gangs perceive failure to comply as an act of betrayal, the risk of those who flee being sought out and persecuted is high, making safe options within the country extremely limited.... The murder, attempted murder, disappearance, violent assault or rape of a relative, partner or friend perceived to have committed and [sic] act of enmity or betrayal often triggers

¹²⁰ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (Exec summary), 20 March 2023

¹²¹ USSD - OSAC, ‘[Honduras – Country Security Report 2023](#)’, 18 July 2023

¹²² USSD - OSAC, ‘[Honduras – Country Security Report 2023](#)’, updated 18 July 2023

¹²³ USSD - OSAC, ‘[Honduras – Country Security Report 2023](#)’, updated 18 July 2023

¹²⁴ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 22), March 2019

the displacement of whole households, because its members fear the risk will extend to them.’¹²⁵

19.2.3 The AIR/FIU report 2020 stated:

‘According to the survey results, nearly 33 percent of former gang members said they or their families had been threatened by the gang. During the in-depth interviews, former gang members explained that the immediate challenge they faced as they tried to leave the gang was death. Across respondents who were formerly in a gang and among community leaders, 20 of the 36 respondents said that former gang members perpetually fear being killed by a rival gang or their own former gang, in cases in which gang members perceive that a person who disengaged from the gang leaked information...

‘Relatedly, respondents said another consequence of desisting is having to leave the community or country in an attempt to escape the threat of being killed. One community member from La Ceiba said, “You could say that it is advisable for them to start a life in a different place, a different environment” (Interview 30, community member).’¹²⁶

See also section [Leaving a gang](#)

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19.3 Informants, witnesses and victims of crime

19.3.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated:

‘Reporting a crime or being suspected of passing information to the authorities or a rival gang violates the code of ver, oír y callar and also invites extreme retaliation. Even the mere fact of witnessing a crime, particularly a murder, may put people at risk, and the threat of reprisals is meant to terrorise and exert control. People who live in areas where bodies are dumped are terrified of being considered a casual witness if, for instance, they see a car pull up. Witnesses and informants are regularly killed, disappeared, tortured or raped. Given the acute risks they face, witnesses to crime may be forced to flee... Reporting a crime is doubly risky, given that gangs have infiltrated the police, who are often also inefficient and may leak information, unwittingly or otherwise.’¹²⁷

19.3.2 The same IDMC report stated: ‘Victims and witnesses of crime have a well-founded fear of reporting and state protection because of complicity and tolerance and the fact that drug-trafficking groups have infiltrated the police and military. If someone reports a crime, they most often will flee...’¹²⁸

19.3.3 The OHCHR report 2022 noted ‘... harassment and reprisals against victims and witnesses who cooperate with investigations, as well as challenges for their effective protection, including lack of resources and risks due to the manner in which confidential information is handled...’¹²⁹

¹²⁵ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 26), March 2019

¹²⁶ Cruz, J M & others, [A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#) (page 45), November 2020

¹²⁷ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 22), March 2019

¹²⁸ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 25), March 2019

¹²⁹ OHCHR, [‘Situation of human rights...’](#) (paragraphs 37, 38 to 40, 42), 28 February 2023

19.4 Health workers and teachers

- 19.4.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated: ‘Health workers have also fled threats after treating victims of violence, gang members or victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. Teachers who are at risk because of gangs’ infiltration of schools have been forced to displace or request a transfer elsewhere.’¹³⁰
- 19.4.2 The New Humanitarian, an independent non-profit news organisation focussing on humanitarian issues, quoted a nurse who had worked for 10 years at ‘Hospital Escuela, the main public medical facility that receives most of the casualties of gang violence in Tegucigalpa.’ The nurse commented:
- “The hospital can become a battleground for the gangs as there is no space which they will not creep in... Sometimes gang members enter to ‘finish the job’, or come to supervise the emergency treatment we provide to their wounded compañeros, threatening staff and waving weapons around.”
- “[Their compañeros] check the syringes and ask about the medicine I administer to be sure I am not making a mistake or trying to kill the patient,” she said. “Every day, we fear the Maras. It’s paralysing.”¹³¹

19.5 Women and children

- 19.5.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated:
- ‘Women and girls who refuse sexual involvement with gang members or who want to remove themselves from such a situation are at high risk of extremely violent reprisals. This includes former partners and those forced or coerced into sexual involvement. Failure to comply with demands may be met with murder, sexual violence or death threats that extend to the whole family. Killings tend to involve torture and the mutilation or dismemberment of the victim’s body. People flee in response to such risks, but may also do so pre-emptively if, for example, parents have been told to bring their young daughter to a gang leader...’¹³²
- 19.5.2 IDMC continued: ‘... Girls are forced into sexual involvement with individual gang members from the age of about 12 and subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation by the entire clika from as young as eight. Girls who live in gang-controlled neighbourhoods “receive clear messages that they and their bodies belong to the gang, and that gang members have power to exercise sexual violence with complete impunity”. Refusal can result in death.’¹³³
- 19.5.3 The same IDMC report stated:
- ‘Gangs and organised crime groups perpetrate sexual abuse and violence in several forms connected to their assertion of power and territoriality. These include the direct punishment of a woman who has offended a gang, reprisals against men meted out against their female relatives, the gang rape of kidnapped minors in casas locas, forced or coerced involvement with

¹³⁰ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 24), March 2019

¹³¹ New Humanitarian, ‘[How aid workers are learning to adapt...](#)’, 22 August 2023

¹³² IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 26), March 2019

¹³³ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 26), March 2019

gang members, sexual slavery and forced prostitution. Threatened girls may be hidden or resort to self-containment before fleeing elsewhere in the country or abroad, and in some cases whole families may leave because risk extends to them. The femicide or disappearance of a close female relative may also lead to the displacement of whole families.’¹³⁴

19.5.4 The ACCORD response of December 2022 citing various sources stated:

‘Boerman describes that any refusal of a female to enter into a relationship with a gang member is perceived as challenge to the gang member’s dominant position over women and therefore entails a “punitive response” that is visible also to the other gang members and “demonstrates and reinforces their dominance over ‘their woman.’” Boerman goes on to explain:

“Once females have entered into relationships with a gang member—or have been targeted for such a relationship—they are considered to be that gang member’s jaina or morra, his property and, at times, the property of the gang itself. Because they are perceived as ‘property’ with no rights, authenticity or authority, in addition to being subjected to extreme and routine physical violence, women often become sex slaves and are also frequently forced to engage in criminal activity on behalf of the gang under threat of death to them and their family members, including smuggling drugs and other contraband into prisons.” ...¹³⁵

19.5.5 The HRW World report 2022 stated that: ‘Child recruitment by gangs has caused many children to flee, abandoning school.’¹³⁶

For information on forced recruitment, including of children, see [Recruitment strategies and reasons for joining](#).

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19.6 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex persons

19.6.1 IDMC in a March 2019 report stated:

‘...Signs of torture were found on the bodies of all LGBT+ people examined at autopsy in 2017... Violence and abuse is particularly extreme for those who do not conform to patriarchal gender norms and for LGBT+ rights defenders. Street gangs’ macho codes or códigos mean LGBT+ people living in areas they control face particular risks and movement restrictions....

‘Gangs may forbid LGBT+ people to live in areas they control and may harass them and order them to leave. They may also flee to avoid being forced to undertake criminal activities. Trans women engaged in sex work flee if they ... experience difficulties in paying extortion or if they are targeted with violence as a result.’ ...¹³⁷

19.6.2 The 2019 IDMC report added:

‘LGBT+ people generally do not receive support from either their families or the state but rely instead on the broader LGBT+ community. This includes a strong network of LGBT+ organisations in the region and abroad, which

¹³⁴ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 26), March 2019

¹³⁵ ACCORD, [‘Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...’](#) (page 75), December 2022

¹³⁶ HRW, [‘World Report 2023 – Honduras, Events of 2022’](#), 12 January 2023

¹³⁷ IDMC, [‘A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...’](#) (page 24), March 2019

helps them plan and prepare for cross-border flight, including the asylum process, and to find sympathetic hosts in their destination country. Given the lack of protection and persistent abuse they face in Honduras, LGBT+ people are among those most likely to flee the country.’¹³⁸

- 19.6.3 The USSD HR report 2022 stated: ‘NGOs reported gangs engaged in “corrective rape” of lesbian or transgender individuals.’ With regard to the displacement of children, the same report stated: ‘Civil society organizations reported that common causes of forced displacement for youth included... discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, sexual harassment...’¹³⁹

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19.7 Journalists

- 19.7.1 The 2019 IDMC report stated: ‘Journalists who report on crime have fled after being targeted with violence and threats or after the murder of a colleague. They have also been killed after their displacement and as far away as Veracruz in Mexico while waiting for their asylum claim to be processed...’¹⁴⁰
- 19.7.2 The USSD human rights report 2022 stated: ‘Media members and NGOs stated the press self-censored due to fear of retaliation from criminal groups, drug trafficking organizations, or corrupt government officials.’¹⁴¹

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19.8 Public transport workers

- 19.8.1 The Honduran online media company, Criterio, reporting on 24 November 2022 about a strike by transport workers (in Spanish but translated by Bing) on
- ‘Of the little money they make, although they work seven days a week without much rest, the transporters give most of their earnings to the criminals, if they are not in danger of being killed.... According to the statistics [transport workers have]... in recent years, almost a thousand carriers have been killed. However, violence has increased rather than been combated.
- ‘... Transport leaders said that, in 2022, at least 60 of them have been killed for carrying out their work. In 2019, the Honduran Institute of Land Transport (IHTT) announced that there were 32,148 registered transport units (buses, taxis and mototaxis). However, nearly 25 percent of workers have abandoned their jobs due to extortion in Honduras.’¹⁴²
- 19.8.2 The InSight Crime homicide round-up for 2022, dated February 2023 stated ‘Honduras’s [transport sector](#) has been particularly persecuted by extortion and ensuing violence, with at least 60 workers losing their lives in 2022.’¹⁴³

¹³⁸ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 46), March 2019

¹³⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

¹⁴⁰ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 26 & 28), March 2019

¹⁴¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2), 20 March 2023

¹⁴² Criterio.hn, ‘[Transportistas se llevan ataúdes a las calles...](#)’ 24 November 2022

¹⁴³ Insight Crime, ‘[2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)’, 8 February 2023

19.8.3 Freedom House Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022 stated: ‘Taxi and bus drivers are notable targets of gangs...’¹⁴⁴

19.8.4 The UNHCR Operational Update 17, April 2023, noted that

‘The transportation sector is one of [the] most exposed to violence and forced displacement triggers. Bus drivers operating in the route San Pedro Sula Yojoa (one of the most important in the country) went on strike after receiving extortion [sic] threats by gang members. This happened less than a week after three bus companies resumed its activities following similar threats. In addition, the Honduras Airport Infrastructure and Services Company (Ehisa) denounced [sic] that [sic] gang members are trying to extort job applicants at the airfield demanding monetary payment to apply for job offers.’¹⁴⁵

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19.9 Returning migrants

19.9.1 The UNHCR noted in its August 2023 situation update that a total of 588,557 Hondurans had returned to the country between January 2015 and 31 August 2023. This included 41,320 between January and August 2023¹⁴⁶.

19.9.2 UNHCR’s Operational Update covering the period April to June 2023 noted:

‘In 2023, a total of 27,719 Hondurans were returned to the three Assistance Centres for Returned Migrants located in the department of Cortés. From April to June, 11,552 people were returned, a 58% decrease in comparison with the same quarter of 2022.

‘... UNHCR works strategically in the three Centres for Returned Migrants available in Honduras to identify and refer cases of returnees in need of protection, which on average account to 5% of the total returned population. Between April and June 2023, UNHCR attended 101 cases (149 people). The returnees received information on protection alternatives, available services for protection cases, including third country solution’s programmes, psycho-social assistance, and internal relocation. In addition, with the support of UNHCR, DINAF is providing some of the children returned with psychosocial support.’¹⁴⁷

19.9.3 The 2019 IDMC report stated: ‘Gangs may target returnees and deportees for extortion because they believe them to have financial resources, and this may lead to further displacement. Others may be vulnerable to gang recruitment if they lack connections to family or social networks and economic stability in the country...’¹⁴⁸

19.9.4 ACCORD’s 2022 report¹⁴⁹ on gangs, citing various sources, noted:

‘The Latin America Working Group (LAWG), a non-profit advocacy group calling for just US policies towards Latin America based in Washington D.C., in a 2018 publication writes about what awaits deportees from the US upon

¹⁴⁴ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section G2), 2023

¹⁴⁵ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras Operational Update 17](#)’ (page 2), April 2023

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras - Operational Update - August 2023](#)’, 30 September 2023

¹⁴⁷ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras - Operational Update - April to June 2023](#)’, 31 July 2023

¹⁴⁸ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 37), March 2019

¹⁴⁹ NB all square brackets in the quote have been introduced by ACCORD

their return to El Salvador and Honduras. The LAWG describes the situation as “one of uncertainty, fear, and little hope for their future outside of a life in hiding”. It continues:

“The situation of insecurity, corruption, and impunity that all deported migrants return to remains the same and in some cases has deteriorated. In the worst cases, an individual may face direct threats to their life or be assassinated shortly after returning. In the best cases, returning often means a life in hiding and facing daily challenges alone, including possible trauma from the journey and rights violations suffered at the hands of organized crime, authorities, and immigrant enforcement agents. [...]

“In many cases, the fears migrants have of returning to their communities are the same ones that propelled them to leave in the first place, including threats from gangs and organized crime. These risks are heightened for unaccompanied children, women, youth, and LGBTI individuals. Deported migrants may be targeted for various reasons: they may have already been under threat before they left, the gang control in the community may have worsened, or perhaps they may be perceived as returning from the United States with money and become immediate targets for extortion.

“Fear may also be compounded with other stigmas upon return to the community. Deported migrants might experience feelings of failure and disappointment at the way things turned out and rejection by family members. Stigmas can be greater for deported women, especially because they might suffer sexual and gender-based violence along the migration journey. In some cases, deported migrants may fear the situation so much that they may not want to return to their home communities at all. Some NGOs report that they have witnessed cases where children don’t want to leave the repatriation centers due to fear. [...] [H]alf of the people interviewed were displaced internally before deciding to leave the country, and when they returned, these individuals again depended on family so as not to return to the community from which they fled. Thus, upon deportation to their home country, they also return to the very situation of displacement, uncertainty, and fear they fled from in the first place. In instances where deported migrants do return to their communities, many resign to living in states of confinement and being locked up in their own homes to avoid threats, suffering restrictions on their personal freedoms. Individuals at risk often turn to their families for protection instead of the state, and those without families, such as unaccompanied children or youth, are often at most risk.” (LAWG, 11 January 2018)”

‘In her December 2022 e-mail response Elizabeth Kennedy states that the risks upon return to Honduras are probably the highest for males, aged 15 to 39, LGBTI individuals, indigenous and Garífuna persons as well as for persons from neighbourhoods with high levels of violence. 78 Kennedy has documented 100 persons killed after their deportation to Honduras since 2014, and she stresses that this number does not reflect the total of cases of

persons deported to and then killed in Honduras. She has identified some of the reasons why persons are killed after their deportation: residence in a neighbourhood with high levels of violence, long-term residence in the US, tattoos, perceived or actual past or current organised crime membership (Kennedy, 6 December 2022).

‘Several other sources also report cases of migrants to the US who were deported to Honduras and killed shortly after their return. Among those sources are Just Security, an online forum for analysis of US security based at the New York University School of Law, The San Diego Union-Tribune, San Diego’s largest media company and an older article of 2015 by UNHCR, all of which report that killings of returnees are not exceptional events:

“Santos Chirino pleaded with an immigration judge to not return him to Honduras, where he feared he would be killed by the gang members against whom he had testified in court. The judge denied his asylum claim and he was shot to death less than a year after being deported. Chirino’s case was unusual only in that his fate upon return was documented.” (Just Security, 17 February 2022)

“[...] Yovin Estrada Villanueva returned to his family home just months after fleeing for his life [...]. His attempt to win asylum in the United States had failed. Just over a year later, shortly before his 28th birthday, Villanueva was killed by the very people he fled. He was shot while driving his mototaxi — a dangerous occupation in neighborhoods under gang control. [...] Villanueva’s decision to seek asylum [...] began with a murder — he witnessed a fellow mototaxi driver get killed. Details of what happened that day are not safe to talk about and remain unclear. [...]

“Villanueva’s murder was not an isolated incident. [...] In Honduras, that violence is far from a private matter. A complex web of issues, from economic struggles to corrupt government, have created an environment ripe for gang domination that touches the majority of its citizens’ lives. [...] There is no comprehensive database that tracks exactly how many people were deported to their deaths after telling the United States they were afraid to go home. But in places like San Pedro Sula, it is difficult to find someone who doesn’t know of at least one person who was returned and killed.” (San Diego UnionTribune, 11 October 2020)

“The gunman was waiting as Marco Antonio Cortés boarded a bus in the north-west Honduran city of San Pedro Sula. One pull of the trigger and the 18-year-old was dead, adding to the alarming toll of young Honduran males who are attacked, killed or simply disappear after being deported from the United States or Mexico. ‘It’s not just one, two or three that are killed after their deportation,’ says Sister Valdete Wilemann, who runs a state-owned centre that puts up some of the deportees who return to Honduras.” (UNHCR, 29 January 2015) 79

‘Thomas Boerman notes in his 2019 paper on the visibility and vulnerability of family members of individuals targeted by organized criminal groups that

the act of fleeing can increase the risk of gang violence a person faces upon return:

“[...] [T]he act of fleeing or going into hiding to avoid gangs’ demands and risk of harm is perceived as a challenge and antagonistic act, so if one flees and is forced by circumstances to return to the area or relocates and is later found, the level of risk that he or she encounters is likely to be substantially higher than at the time of his or her departure. Beyond a desire to punish the individual who fled, the intent is to convey a message to the larger community that attempting to escape by fleeing will result in even more serious reprisals. The act of fleeing may also result in risk to the family members left behind as gangs routinely seek them out to coerce information on the person who fled [...]” (Boerman, December 2019, p. 11)

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20. Government strategy to combat gangs

20.1 Iron fist ('Mano duro')

- 20.1.1 The InSight Crime profile of February 2021 observed: ‘Since 2003, Honduras has pursued an “iron fist” [mano duro] security strategy against gangs. These policies, which did not address the root causes of gang membership or provide rehabilitation for gang members, have led to an increase in the prison population and burdened Honduras’ already stumbling penal system.’¹⁵⁰
- 20.1.2 The HRW World report 2022 covering events in 2021 stated: ‘Historically, governments have responded to organized crime with iron-fist security strategies. In 2018, the government created a special force to fight gangs (Fuerza Nacional Anti Maras y Pandillas), with members from the police, military, and Attorney General’s Office.’¹⁵¹

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20.2 State of exception: extortion and gang strategy 2022/23

- 20.2.1 The InSight Crime noted in an article of 29 November 2022:

‘Honduran President Xiomara Castro declared a state of exception [in December 2022] as extortion cases reached uncontrollable levels, raising fears she may be inspired by controversial but widely popular measures in neighboring El Salvador.

‘The measures will suspend some constitutional rights in urban areas with a significant presence of criminal groups, deploy 20,000 national police officers, and institute security checks on roads, among other steps to clamp down on gangs, reported Reuters.

‘Most of the authorities will be placed in neighborhoods across Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, where the Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and Barrio

¹⁵⁰ InSight Crime-CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021

¹⁵¹ HRW, '[World Report 2022 – Honduras, Events of 2021](#)', 13 January 2022

18 have a strong presence and carry out high levels of extortion, according to El Heraldito [media site].

'The state of exception is part of a larger anti-extortion strategy announced in a press conference on November 24 [2022]. Other measures included creating stricter regulations for businesses selling SIM cards for cellphones, tracking phone numbers used by extortionists, and requiring motorcycles to have a license plate and helmet with matching numbers.

'During the press conference, the government also announced plans to implement a "follow the money" strategy, not to prosecute low-level collectors but to trace extortion payments and how they are laundered into the formal economy, investigating involved businesses.'¹⁵²

20.2.2 An article Arturo Matute, a citizen security expert at the US Institute of Peace, a think tank, of 19 January 2023 noted the government introduced an:

'... "Integral Plan for the Treatment of Extortion," which proposed legal reforms, technological and institutional improvements, community programs, prison reforms and mechanisms for institutional coordination. [President] Castro then announced that the government was declaring a national security emergency, which would suspend certain constitutional guarantees in communities affected by gangs, drug traffickers and other criminals.

'Under this "partial state of exception," which began December 6 [2022] after its approval by congress, the government can suspend rights in 162 sectors of Tegucigalpa, and San Pedro Sula, the country's two largest cities. It extended the emergency for 45 days in early January, expanding its scope to municipalities in 16 departments, including some on the country's northern Atlantic coast, an important trafficking hub for U.S.-bound cocaine, which arrives in Honduras from South America via boats and airplanes.'¹⁵³

20.2.3 The Guardian in an article from January 2023 commented:

'... steps were taken to demilitarize public security forces and a community policing model was announced, with the hope being that the measures would increase public trust in an institution that has historically been dogged by corruption and infiltrated by the very same organized crime groups it is supposed to combat.

'But the removal of military officers from an anti-gang taskforce resulted in a messy divorce that temporarily reduced the unit's already limited capacity – opening a window for criminals – and before the community policing model could have any effect, the political pressure to take decisive action against extortion boiled over.

'Police presented a comprehensive plan to reform laws and ramp up institutional capacity – measures that experts believe could have a positive effect long-term – but which were pushed aside by the short-term political decision to declare a state of exception...'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Insight Crime, '[Honduras' State of Exception May Set Worrying Precedent](#)', 29 November 2022

¹⁵³ USIP, '[Honduras Makes Progress in Tamping Violence — But at What Cost?](#)', 19 January 2023

¹⁵⁴ The Guardian, '[Honduras declares war against gangs...](#)', 4 January 2023

20.2.4 InSight Crime observed in an article of 28 June 2023 that:

‘The Honduran government is intensifying its anti-gang crackdown following recent outbursts of criminal violence, but its one-size-fits-all response fails to acknowledge the variety of organized crime dynamics at play.

‘President Xiomara Castro announced new security measures on June 22 and June 25, bolstering a state of exception in place since December 2022 that aims to curb gang violence and extortion.

‘The government put the military police in charge of the prisons and implemented curfews in Choloma and San Pedro Sula, the two largest cities after the capital Tegucigalpa... [However] The government’s single-minded focus on gangs targets only one source of violence caused by organized crime in Honduras... By solely blaming gangs for Honduras’ violence, the government ignores the role of other actors, like drug trafficking organizations and corruption networks... the application of an El Salvador-style security strategy in Honduras has thus far failed to significantly curtail crime because of the countries’ differing criminal dynamics, Jennifer Ávila, director of Honduran news site Contracorriente, told InSight Crime.

‘In Honduras, "drug cartels play a fundamental role in territorial control, in the control of other crimes and in the politics of the country itself," she said. "It is totally simplistic to copy [Salvadoran President Nayib] Bukele's propaganda of the 'iron fist' or 'war' against the gangs when in Honduras the criminal structures are more complex and diverse."¹⁵⁵

20.2.5 The ICG report 2023, citing various sources, explained:

‘Since its introduction, Congress has renewed the state of exception five times. Lawmakers extended it to 123 of the country’s 298 municipalities in February. In late March, the government launched a parallel Solution against Crime Plan, dividing the country into civilian and military police areas of operation and mobilising over 3,000 military officers in seven rural departments where drug trafficking is prevalent... On 22 June, the presidency announced that the state of exception would be broadened to encompass still more areas and that the military would be assuming security responsibilities alongside the police throughout the country...¹⁵⁶

20.2.6 A press release from the UN’s High Commissioner of Human Rights of 7 July 2023 stated: ‘On 5 July, the Government extended, for an additional 45 days... The state of emergency, in force in 17 of the 18 departments in Honduras...¹⁵⁷ The UNHCR in a situation update of August 2023 noted ‘the Government to extend the State of Exception decreed in December 2022 for the sixth time and... expand[ed] it to a total of 158 [out of 298] municipalities. The Decree is now valid until 6 October.¹⁵⁸

20.2.7 The ICG report 2023 noted ‘Despite similarities in rhetoric and legal provisions, Honduras’ emergency measures have not brought the same kind of crackdown or yielded the same results as those reported in neighbouring

¹⁵⁵ InSight Crime, ‘[Honduras Anti-Gang Crackdown Targets Only One Source...](#)’, 28 June 2023

¹⁵⁶ ICG, ‘[New Dawn or Old Habits?...](#)’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

¹⁵⁷ UNHCHR, Press release, ‘[Honduras: Militarization of public security](#)’, 7 July 2023

¹⁵⁸ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras – Operational Update 20](#)’, August 2023

El Salvador...’¹⁵⁹ While the USSD’s OSAC report of July 2023 noted: ‘... the State of Exception does not seem to have had a large impact on crime as in the streets, new groups have emerged, and extortion of the transport industry has expanded.’¹⁶⁰

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21. Protection

21.1 Criminal justice system

21.1.1 The USSD HR report 2022 covering events from 2022 stated:

‘The Honduran National Police maintain internal security and report to the Secretariat of Security. The armed forces, which report to the Secretariat of Defense, are responsible for external security but also exercise some domestic security responsibilities in support of the national police and other civilian authorities. Some larger cities have police forces that operate independently of the national police and report to municipal authorities. The Military Police of Public Order report to military authorities but conduct operations sanctioned by civilian security officials as well as by military leaders. The National Interinstitutional Security Force coordinates the overlapping responsibilities of the National Police, Military Police of Public Order, National Intelligence Directorate, and Public Ministry during interagency operations. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.’¹⁶¹

21.1.2 The USSD OSAC security report of July 2023 noted:

‘The Honduran National Police (HNP) maintains internal security and reports to the Secretariat of Security. The force is organized into regional headquarters, municipal headquarters, headquarters of fixed or mobile stations, and police posts. There are at least 360 police centers throughout Honduras.

‘The National Interinstitutional Security Force (FUSINA) is an interagency command that coordinates the overlapping responsibilities of the national police, military police of public order, National Intelligence Directorate, and Public Ministry during interagency operations. It brings together elements of the Honduran military, national police, investigators, judges, intelligence, and other relevant offices across the Honduran government to better coordinate the “whole-of-government” operations against organized crime and insecurity in the country. Although FUSINA reports to the National Security and Defense Council, it plays a coordinating role and does not exercise broad command and control functions over other security forces except during interagency operations involving those forces.

‘The armed forces, which report to the Defense Secretariat, are responsible for external security, but also exercise some domestic security

¹⁵⁹ ICG, [‘New Dawn or Old Habits?...’](#) (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

¹⁶⁰ USSD - OSAC, [‘Honduras – Country Security Report 2023’](#), updated 18 July 2023

¹⁶¹ USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices’](#) (Exec summary), 20 March 2023

responsibilities in a supporting role to the national police and other civilian authorities. The Military Police of Public Order (PMOP) report to military authorities, but conduct operations sanctioned by civilian security officials as well as by military leaders.

'The National Anti-Gang Task Force (FNAMP) has been replaced by the Direccion Policial Anti Maras y Pandillas Contra el Cimen Organizado [Police Directorate against Maras, Gangs and Organized Crime] or DIPAMPCO and is under the control of the Honduran National Police (HNP).'¹⁶²

- 21.2.7 The OSAC CSR 2023 stated: 'In March 2019, the Honduran Government created the National Urban Transportation Security Force to combat extortion and other crimes perpetrated by gangs.'¹⁶³
- 21.1.3 A December 2022 ACCORD report on gangs stated: 'As of August 2022, the Honduran National Police has a total of 17,320 police officers, including 2,667 women (15.40 percent), according to an article by Honduras Verifica, a media organisation focused on fact-checking and countering disinformation... It consists of several units, including for prevention and community security, criminal investigations, protection and special services, anti-drug operations, special forces and others...'¹⁶⁴
- 21.1.4 The US CIA World Factbook updated July 2023 stated that there are 'approximately 16,000 active personnel [in the armed forces] (7,500 Army; 1,500 Navy, including about 1,000 marines; 2,000 Air Force; 5,000 Military Police of Public Order); approximately 18,000 National Police (2022)'¹⁶⁵.
- 21.1.5 The US CIA World Factbook also provided information on the judicial system noting the highest court is the 'Supreme Court of Justice or Corte Suprema de Justicia (15 principal judges, including the court president, and 6 alternates; court organized into civil, criminal, constitutional, and labor chambers); note - the court has both judicial and constitutional jurisdiction'. The subordinate courts include 'courts of appeal; courts of first instance; justices of the peace'¹⁶⁶.
- 21.1.6 Roberto Moneada and others in Encyclopaedia Britannica stated that 'The justices of the Supreme Court are appointed by the president. The Supreme Court exercises centralized control over the lower courts, including the appointment of justices, and has original and exclusive jurisdiction to declare acts of the legislature unconstitutional.'¹⁶⁷
- 21.1.7 The InSight Crime Honduras profile from February 2021 stated:
'Honduras' highest judicial body is the Supreme Court of Justice, which includes chambers for constitutional, criminal and civil cases. Below this are an appeals court, first instance trial courts for criminal and civil cases, and municipal and district-level justices of the peace. Honduras has an Attorney

¹⁶² USSD OSAC, '[Honduras Security Report 2023](#)', 18 July 2023

¹⁶³ USSD OSAC, '[Honduras Security Report 2023](#)', 18 July 2023

¹⁶⁴ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 58), December 2022

¹⁶⁵ US CIA, '[World Factbook](#)' (Honduras), updated 25 July 2023

¹⁶⁶ US CIA, '[World Factbook](#)' (Honduras), updated 25 July 2023

¹⁶⁷ Roberto Moncada, R J and others, '[Honduras](#)' (Administrative and social conditions), 18 July 2023

General's Office (Fiscalía General) that functions as part of the independent Public Ministry (Ministerio Público) and handles criminal investigations.'¹⁶⁸

- 21.1.8 World Prison Brief, collated by Birkbeck, University of London, reported that the prison administration, Instituto Nacional Penitenciario, included 26 establishments and there 191 prisoners per 100,000 of the national population¹⁶⁹. The OHCHR report 2022 noted, however:

'As of December [2022], the National Penitentiary System housed an average of 19,842 adult inmates in the country's 25 penitentiary centres, despite only having the capacity to house 14,780 persons, resulting in an overcrowding rate of 34.2%. At least 51.6% of the prison population does not have a final sentence. The absence of guidelines for the classification of persons deprived of liberty that would allow for adequate prison management in accordance with international human rights standards and reduce prison violence is concerning.'¹⁷⁰

- 21.1.9 The NGO, World Justice Project's, Rule of Law Index 2022, released October 2022, analyses 'in-depth survey data in 140 countries' to assess how the rule of law is experienced and perceived. The Index is based on 8 factors: constraints on government powers; absence of corruption; open government; fundamental rights; order and security; regulatory enforcement; civil justice; and criminal justice¹⁷¹. Honduras' overall rule of law was 0.41 (with 1 being complete rule of law), ranking it 121 out of 140 countries. With regard to the sub-category evaluating criminal justice, Honduras scored 0.26 ranking 134 out of 140 countries¹⁷².

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21.2 Police effectiveness

- 21.2.1 The AIR/FIU report 2020, citing other sources, commented on the possible reasons for the reduction in homicide rates:

'To date, there are no reliable studies which explain this dramatic reduction in homicide rates [upto 2019/20]. The government claims the reduction is related to three factors: (1) its offensive against police officers linked to organized crime (the so-called "police depuration"); (2) tightening of controls in the penitentiary centers, from which gang leaders issue orders to kill rivals; and (3) the creation in 2018 of the Anti-Gang National Force (Fuerza Nacional Anti-Maras y Pandillas), integrated by police officers, military police, staff from the national intelligence agency, and prosecutors... While a more effective police crackdown against gangs in Honduras may account for some of the reduction in homicide rates, the decrease also may be explained by issues in the quality of the homicide data.'¹⁷³

- 21.2.2 The InSight Crime Honduras profile from February 2021 stated: 'Honduras' most important criminal organizations [primarily drug trafficking groups] have largely been dismantled over the last decade, with the arrests of their top

¹⁶⁸ Insight Crime-CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021

¹⁶⁹ UofL, '[World Prison Brief](#)' (Honduras), no date

¹⁷⁰ OHCHR, '[Situation of human rights...](#)' (paragraphs 37, 38 to 40, 42), 28 February 2023

¹⁷¹ WJP, '[WJP Rule of Law Index 2022 Global Press Release](#)', 26 October 2022

¹⁷² WJP, '[Rule of Law Index 2022](#)' (Honduras), October 2022

¹⁷³ Cruz, J M & others, '[A study of gang disengagement in Honduras](#)' (page 8), November 2020

leaders and their extraditions to the United States. Nevertheless, testimony given by these criminal bosses during their trials has provided evidence of their continued operations in the country and its penetration into the highest spheres of political power.’¹⁷⁴

21.2.3 A contribution from the Advocates for Human Rights to a September 2022 CEDAW report stated: ‘The director of the Observatory of Violence at the National Autonomous University of Honduras noted that weak social policies and institutions fail to gain control of the territory currently run by gangs.’¹⁷⁵

21.2.4 ACCORD’s 2022 report on gangs, citing various sources, stated:

‘Criterio.hn, a Honduran investigative platform, in an August 2022 article refers to the director of the ONV, Migdonia Aystas, who explains that since 2004 up to August 2022 more than 83,000 violent deaths are still under investigation in Honduras. The ONV director states that 95 percent of crimes in the country go unpunished because there is no criminal investigation. Another interview partner in the same article, the Fiscal Management coordinator of the Association for a Fairer Society (Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa, ASJ), Ninoska Reyes, stated that of 100 cases that are brought to the security and justice authorities, only six are followed up by prosecution and lead to a conviction ... Even cases of homicides mostly go unpunished: the January 2022 publication by Pamela Ruiz observes that according to official data, 87 percent of homicides in 2017 went without punishment ...’¹⁷⁶

21.2.5 A UN Human Rights Council report from February 2023 (UNHRC report February 2023) on the situation of human rights in Honduras from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022 stated: ‘The Office welcomes the closure of the National Inter-Institutional Security Force and the transfer of the National Anti-Mara and Gangs Force to the Secretariat of Security through the establishment of the Police Directorate against Maras, Gangs and Organized Crime. However, this transfer did not result in a decrease in the number of cases of unnecessary or disproportionate use of force.’¹⁷⁷

21.2.6 The USSD HR report 2022 stated with regard violent crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs, local transnational gangs and drug traffickers: ‘The government investigated and prosecuted some of these crimes, but impunity was widespread.’¹⁷⁸

21.2.7 The OSAC CSR 2023 stated: ‘The government lacks resources to investigate and prosecute cases; police often lack vehicles/fuel to respond to calls for assistance. Police may take hours to arrive at the scene of a violent crime or may not respond at all...’¹⁷⁹

21.2.8 The ICG report 2023, citing various sources, noted:

‘President Castro may inadvertently have created an opportunity for gangs and their imitators to expand the extortion rackets when she handed the

¹⁷⁴ Insight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

¹⁷⁵ CEDAW, [NGO report on discrimination against women...](#), 12 September 2022

¹⁷⁶ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 23), December 2022

¹⁷⁷ OHCHR, ‘[Situation of human rights in Honduras](#)’ (paragraph 47), 28 February 2023

¹⁷⁸ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (Exec summary), 20 March 2023

¹⁷⁹ USSD - OSAC, ‘[Honduras – Country Security Report 2022](#)’, 15 August 2022

police a far bigger role in taking on gangs and running the prisons. For one thing, the police appear to have been ill prepared for these mandates. The army officers formerly in charge of the anti-gang task force reportedly took with them intelligence collected over years, and it was almost four months before the police assumed management of jails... All the while, the police were operating with the previously allocated budget, with which they had to do old and new jobs alike...

‘Staffing has also been a problem. Police ranks were depleted when Castro took office, after Hernández had moved to rid the force of corrupt officers and others who did not meet age, physical fitness and education requirements... While acknowledging the scarcity of qualified personnel, a high-level police commissioner said the force aims to recruit 2,000 new officers per year to reach a total of 25,000 by 2025...

‘Besides being short on personnel, the police are often under-equipped to attend to crime victims. Crisis Group heard testimonies of people who had suffered extortion and could not file a police report due to “lack of paper” at the station... Jails, now under police command, have too little money for routine repairs. “Of 500 cameras [we have installed], 300 are out of service”, a high-level prison commissioner observed... The government also faces disputes with contractors handling security cameras in the streets and emergency telephone lines serving the general public, apparently related to its attempt to renegotiate the licences. As a result, these services have not been operating for months, seriously affecting the police’s ability to receive complaints from the public and act on them...’¹⁸⁰

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21.3 Gang collusion with security forces

21.3.1 The ACCORD response of December 2022, citing various sources, noted:

‘... IDMC notes that organised criminal groups have infiltrated security forces and the judicial system to a degree that this compromises security forces’ ability to effectively fight organised crime. Moreover, victims were often reluctant to report a crime fearing that gang-related police officers might leak the information (IDMC, March 2019, pp. 16; 22). IACHR notes that the “State recognizes that in the last decade it has been one of the most violent countries in the world, and that drug trafficking and organized crime are factors generating violence, which have infiltrated several State institutions” (IACHR, 27 August 2019, p. 12).

‘UNDP/ASJ describe the role of state officials within a gang’s network of sympathisers and collaborators, including police officers and other officials: This network of collaborators includes senior police officers with the power to let them [the gangs] free to pursue their criminal activities. Low-ranking police officers are also involved. Moreover, this organisational structure includes a more clandestine but equally important figure – that of professionals and political operators. These people have university studies, knowledge and contacts to the world of legitimate business with levels of influence in state institutions. They communicate directly with the more

¹⁸⁰ ICG, [‘New Dawn or Old Habits?..’](#) (Section I, Introduction), 10 July 2023

socially acceptable-looking gang leaders. They act to resolve gang-related problems such as defence in courts or procedures to obtain transport operating licences. These are people who have influence with the police, prosecutors and even judges. The political figure is tasked with buying friendship with the authorities. (UNDP/ASJ, 2020, p. 31, working translation from Spanish)

'Al Jazeera reports in August 2022 on an investigation by Honduran journalists into the collaboration between security forces and MS-13:

“Amid allegations that an elite Honduran police force colluded with a notorious gang while carrying out death-squad activities, observers are asking whether the administration of President Xiomara Castro has the political power or will to reform the country’s security 64 forces. According to an investigation last month by Honduran journalists, the National AntiGang Police Force and military police conducted extrajudicial executions and torture, while planting evidence and working in collusion with MS-13, the most prominent street gang in Honduras. ‘Cases were fabricated, evidence was planted, and false positives were created in exchange for bribes,’ said Wendy Funes, who runs Reporteros de Investigacion, the media outlet that uncovered the allegations. The police squad was ‘embedded in the Honduran state [and] existed to execute people’, she told Al Jazeera.” (Al Jazeera, 24 August 2022)¹⁸¹

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21.4 Arrests and convictions

21.4.1 The HRW World report 2022 covering events in 2021 stated: ‘From 2015 through 2019, authorities arrested 4,196 gang members, the National Police reported.’¹⁸²

21.4.2 ACCORD in their gangs 2022 report citing various sources stated:

‘El País.hn in February 2022 reports that eight members of Los Tercereños are being investigated for contract killings, extortion, drug trafficking, storage of weapons and ammunition of permitted and prohibited use, robbery of homes, robbery of persons, forced displacement, rape and coercion, among other crimes in San Pedro Sula and surrounding areas ... In May 2022 the Ministerio Público, the public prosecutor’s office, posted on its website that a series of raids in the Rivera Hernández neighbourhood were carried out to investigate the involvement of supposed members of the Tercereños in criminal acts, specifically some violent deaths in the area ...’¹⁸³

21.4.3 The USSD HR report 2022 in the case of the killing of Said Lobo Bonilla, son of former President Porfirio Lobo and three other men stated: ‘On September 22, the court in a preliminary hearing charged Eber Ezequiel Espinoza and Erick David Macías Rodríguez with quadruple homicide. Authorities continued to search for the individuals who ordered the homicide.’¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human...](#)’ (pages 63 to 64), December 2022

¹⁸² HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Honduras, Events of 2021](#)’, 13 January 2022

¹⁸³ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 51), December 2022

¹⁸⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

21.4.4 InSight Crime in an article from February 2023 stated: ‘President Xiomara Castro stirred controversy near the end of the year by [implementing](#) an anti-gang crackdown that arrested 652 suspected gang members and dismantled 38 gangs, [according](#) to statistics reported by the newspaper El Heraldo.’¹⁸⁵

21.4.5 The ICG report 2023, citing various sources, noted:

‘... The Honduran police claim to have captured 4,000 people in the first six months of the state of exception, but 81 per cent had to be released due to lack of evidence... But the National Human Rights Commissioner’s office found that only 25 of the 1,348 arrests it could verify during the first month were related to extortion, the main crime targeted by Castro’s campaign. The online media outlet ContraCorriente, meanwhile, reported that the country’s two anti-extortion courts had handled just 49 cases by early February...’¹⁸⁶

21.4.6 The Honduran newspaper, La Tribuna, in article of 21 July 2023 in Spanish but translated by Bing, citing information provided by a police spokesman, reported:

‘In the so-called "War on Extortion" and a year after it was created, the Anti-Maras, Gangs and Organized Crime Police Directorate (Dipampco) has captured 1,900 people... . Among the captures... [include] at least 500 members and people linked to the dangerous... [Barrio] 18...[additionally] the special teams of the Dipampco, managed to capture some 400 people linked to... Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13).

‘Another 900 people from Organized Crime Groups (GDO) were taken out of circulation and the vast majority are already under the process of prosecution... From 2022 to date, 400 extortionists have been captured, when they made rounds of collection of the so-called "rent", in the main cities of the country.’¹⁸⁷

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21.5 Judiciary - effectiveness

21.5.1 The HRW world report covering events in 2022 stated:

‘President Castro campaigned on a promise to work for independent and impartial justice. The justice system’s weak response to corruption, a structural problem in Honduras, and a series of laws hindering prosecutors’ capacity to investigate have enabled impunity for corrupt acts that contribute to human rights violations...

‘Lack of transparency and clear criteria also plague the selection of lower-court judges and decisions over their careers. The Supreme Court president has ultimate power over selection, promotion, transfer, and discipline of lower-court judges.’¹⁸⁸

21.5.2 The OHCHR report 2022 stated:

‘In 2022, progress was made towards strengthening the rule of law and judicial independence through the implementation of the new legal

¹⁸⁵ Insight Crime – CLALS, ‘[2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)’, 8 February 2023

¹⁸⁶ ICG, ‘[New Dawn or Old Habits?...](#)’ (Section II, A New Security Doctrine), 10 July 2023

¹⁸⁷ La Tribuna, ‘[Más de 1,900 detenidos por Dipampco en su primer año](#)’, 21 July 2023

¹⁸⁸ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023 – Honduras, Events of 2022](#)’, 12 January 2023

framework for the election of Supreme Court justices... The information received regarding attacks and retaliation against justice officials in relation to their work, particularly those linked to the anti-corruption circuit, is of concern. The lack of an effective institutional response to protect the personal integrity, judicial independence and autonomy of justice officials represents an obstacle to their work, exacerbates their vulnerability, and negatively impacts access to justice.¹⁸⁹

21.5.3 The OHCHR report 2022 went on to note:

‘The justice administration system remains characterized by high rates of impunity, structural barriers and systemic issues for accessing justice, mainly due to weak judicial independence, procedural delays and limited participation of victims of human rights violations in the criminal process.

‘... Several specialized prosecutors’ offices of the State Attorney’s Office lack sufficient resources or permanently assigned investigators, which negatively impacts their effective investigation capacity and limits the implementation of an effective criminal prosecution strategy. Consequently, most investigations are carried out without an analysis of the context, without establishing the criminal offenses that correspond to the gravity of the violations, without characterization of the victims, or analysis of intellectual authorship and chain of command for cases involving the security forces and non-state actors.

‘The publicity of hearings and the participation of victims in judicial proceedings remains limited due to restrictions imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting physical access to hearings. Courts, particularly those at the local level, did not adopt measures to mitigate the negative impact of such restrictions on the access to hearings and publicity of proceedings...’ Effective access to justice with a gender perspective remains a challenge.¹⁹⁰

21.5.4 The USSD HR report 2022 stated:

‘The law provides for an independent judiciary, but the justice system was poorly staffed, inadequately equipped, often ineffective, and subject to intimidation, corruption, politicization, and patronage. Low salaries and a lack of internal controls rendered judicial officials susceptible to bribery. Powerful special interests, including criminal groups, exercised influence on the outcomes of some court proceedings...

‘The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial; however, the judiciary did not always enforce these rights.

‘Credible observers noted problems in trial procedures, such as a lack of admissible evidence (i.e., prosecution failed to submit sufficient evidence of guilt), judicial corruption, witness intimidation...’¹⁹¹

21.5.5 The same USSD report continued:

¹⁸⁹ OHCHR, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraphs 32 and 34), 28 February 2023

¹⁹⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraphs 37, 38 to 40, 42), 28 February 2023

¹⁹¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

‘Judicial inefficiency, corruption, and insufficient resources delayed proceedings in the criminal justice system, and lengthy pretrial detention was a serious problem... The law mandates that authorities release detainees whose cases have not yet come to trial and whose time in pretrial detention already exceeds the maximum prison sentence for their alleged crime. Nonetheless, many prisoners remained in custody after completing their full sentences, and sometimes even after an acquittal, because officials failed to process their releases expeditiously.’¹⁹²

21.5.6 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022, stated:

‘Political and business elites exert excessive influence over the judiciary, including the Supreme Court. Judicial appointments are made with little transparency, judges have been removed from their posts for political motivations, and several lawyers have been killed in recent years...

‘The Castro administration has taken some steps to address due process and law enforcement problems. Ramón Sabillón, a former national police chief who was dismissed by former president Hernández and spent years in exile after arresting drug-trafficking suspects, was named security minister in January 2022. In August, the administration transferred control of prisons from the military to the national police for a one-year period. However, the government’s announcement of a “war against extortion” in November and the resulting state of exception in December led to a suspension of constitutionally protected rights and raised due process concerns.’¹⁹³

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21.6 Corruption

21.6.1 Honduras was ranked 157 out of 180 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, with a score of 23 out of 100 (a lower score indicates a higher level of corruption)¹⁹⁴.

21.6.2 The InSight Crime ‘Honduras profile’ updated February 2021 stated: ‘Honduran police agents have been accused of one of the greatest varieties of criminal activities, that include corruption, passing information to criminal groups, letting drug shipments pass through without inspection, protecting drug trafficking activities and participating in violent criminal operations, and in some cases even directing them.’¹⁹⁵

21.6.3 The InSight Crime profile added:

‘Honduras’ judiciary is widely considered to be weak, ineffective and highly corrupt. The selection processes for Supreme Court magistrates and Attorney General have both been subject to manipulation by members of Congress, many of whom have been implicated in corruption scandals...

¹⁹² USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1d), 20 March 2023

¹⁹³ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section F1 and F2), 2023

¹⁹⁴ Transparency International, ‘[Corruption Perceptions Index](#)’ (Honduras), January 2023

¹⁹⁵ InSight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

Given the weakness of Honduras' judiciary, many high-profile drug trafficking suspects have been extradited to the United States.¹⁹⁶

21.6.4 The USSD OASC report 2023 stated:

'President Xiomara Castro came into office on a platform of anticorruption and transparency. Some steps have been taken to demonstrate commitment, including the extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernandez to the U.S. In June, the Castro government announced they would begin a process of constitutional reform, another campaign promise. It is too early to assess the extent to which this government will be able to address corruption, which remains a pervasive problem, especially at a local level given the strong presence of armed gangs who often target local officials for corruption.'¹⁹⁷

21.6.5 ACCORD in their gangs 2022 report citing various sources, although it is unclear what time period is being referred, stated:

'... there are reports on corruption within the National Police and allegations of security forces collaborating with criminal groups, including by HRW (13 January 2022), the Borgen Project (26 July 2019) and researcher Pamela Ruiz in the context of a study on gangs, violence and extortion, that includes interviews with stakeholders:

"Most disturbing in the case of Honduras, was the common theme of corrupt National Police officers involved in extortions. Participants described officers acting as delinquent groups committing extortion, involved with gangs committing extortion, and/or not arresting gang members in exchange for a portion of extortion funds. An NGO participant shared local vendors perspective: 'Si la policía es ineficiente, mejor le pago a los pandilleros. Además, no me van a matar y me va a cuidar.' (If the police are inefficient, it's better to pay gang members. Besides, they won't kill me and will take care of me.) ... Academic and NGO participants described extortion to function as an informal form of security. In conclusion, violence is not exclusive to gangs in Honduras, but aggravated with domestic narco-trafficking groups, imitators, and corrupt police officers. While gangs are prevalent in urban centers, narco-trafficking groups are prevalent in trafficking corridors. It should be noted that territory control is exclusive for these groups. Extortions were also committed by imitators and more concerning is the involvement of corrupt police officers." ...¹⁹⁸

21.6.6 The USSD HR report 2022 stated: 'The law provides for criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but authorities did not implement the law effectively, and officials continued to engage in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption.'¹⁹⁹

21.6.7 Freedom House Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022 stated: 'The lack of due process is a serious issue in Honduras. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies are often compromised and underfunded. As

¹⁹⁶ Insight Crime-CLALS, '[Honduras profile](#)', 15 February 2021

¹⁹⁷ USSD - OSAC, '[Honduras – Country Security Report 2022](#)', 15 August 2022

¹⁹⁸ ACCORD, '[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)' (page 59), December 2022

¹⁹⁹ USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 2), 20 March 2023

such, they are corrupt, targets of influence peddling and undue influence, and often engage in criminal activities.²⁰⁰

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21.7 Security force human rights violations

21.7.1 The USSD HR report 2022 stated:

‘The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that authorities at times failed to enforce these requirements effectively...

‘CONADEH [The National Human Rights Commission] reported 33 cases of arbitrary arrest through August [2022]. The Public Ministry reported 11 cases of alleged illegal detention or arbitrary arrest as of September [2022].’²⁰¹

21.7.2 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022 stated: ‘PN [National Party] governments utilized the armed forces to combat crime and violence. Arbitrary arrests and detentions were common, as was lengthy pretrial detention. Many people remained in pretrial detention in 2022.’²⁰²

21.7.3 A UNHRC report February 2023, citing media reports stated:

On 31 May [2022], members of said Force [National Anti-Mara and Gangs Force] fired shots during a foot chase of a 21 year old man who was under investigation for allegedly assaulting a Police officer during a football match. The Office documented the excessive use of force during illegal and arbitrary searches of homes without warrants in the context of search operations for the man. After the State Attorney’s Office filed an appeal based on the Minnesota protocol, on 23 October the Criminal Court of San Pedro Sula indicted four members of the Force for murder, torture, concealment and falsification of public documents .

21.7.4 The USSD HR report 2022 stated ‘On May 31 [2022], members of the National Anti-Gang Unit shot and killed Wilson Ariel Pérez Hernández in San Pedro Sula, Cortés Department. He was allegedly killed while antigang unit officials tried to arrest him for assaulting a police officer at a soccer match on May 29. On October 17, the Public Ministry charged four unit officials for their involvement in Pérez’s killing...’²⁰³

21.7.5 Freedom House Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022 stated: ‘In response to widespread violence, the government of Juan Orlando Hernández empowered the Military Police of Public Order and other security forces to combat security threats, and that policy has continued under President Castro. However, these units often employ excessive force when conducting operations.’²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section F2), 2023

²⁰¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

²⁰² Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section F2), 2023

²⁰³ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

²⁰⁴ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section F3), 2023

21.7.6 A OHCHR report 2022 stated:

‘Abuses by the National Anti-Mara and Gangs Force continued to be reported. On 25 February, the Office documented an irregular raid in Marcovia, Choluteca, when officers from this Force made unnecessary use of lethal weapons, firing against the population, killing one and wounding four other men. While the investigation continues, no charges have been made against the alleged perpetrators, thereby compromising the right to prompt and effective justice for the victims.’

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21.8 Witness protection

21.8.1 The IDMC report 2019 stated ‘A witness protection scheme exists, but there is understandably little confidence in it, leaving those who do report crimes no choice but to flee immediately, most often outside the country. In the rare event that the authorities secure a conviction, witness protection ends, but orders to kill witnesses and their family members may still be issued from prison...’²⁰⁵

21.8.2 ACCORD in their gangs 2022 report citing various sources stated:

‘In 2007, Honduras passed Decree 63-2007, the Law on Witness Protection in Criminal Proceedings (Ley de Protección a Testigos en el Proceso Penal) (Decreto No. 63-2007, 21 June 2007), and subsequently established a witness protection programme at the Public Prosecutor’s Office. The Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA) explains in a joint report with the University Institute for Democracy, Peace and Security (IUDPAS, Instituto Universitario En Democracia, Paz Y Seguridad) that: “With this law, the Witness Protection Program was created in the Public Prosecutor’s Office to provide greater protection to witnesses at risk who are admitted to the program. This protection includes their family circle, their spouse, housemates, relatives, or other people with ties to the witness. The program can also include temporary or permanent relocation, an identity change, or physical modifications. Additional protection measures are also contemplated, such as police measures (bodyguards, surveillance, communication modalities, etc.), prison measures, and judicial measures (videoconferencing, voice distortion, anonymity, or identity protection, etc.)...”’²⁰⁶

21.8.3 The same ACCORD report continued:

‘Implementation of the witness protection programme, however, appears to be challenging, for example due to underfunding and -staffing: WOLA and IUDPAS describe that in 2014, the programme had only one office in Tegucigalpa with ten employees, but without social workers, psychologists and other experts as foreseen by the law, and a budget of USD 119,941. In 2017, the number of staff members had reportedly risen to 13 and the budget increased to USD 383,812....

‘Similarly, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) quotes in an information gathering mission report of February 2018 the Honduran

²⁰⁵ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 22), March 2019

²⁰⁶ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 55), December 2022

National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH, Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos), saying that the number of protection requests was “out of proportion” considering the lack of funds of staff, which affected the state’s ability to provide effective protection...’²⁰⁷

- 21.8.4 The USSD HR report 2022 and IDMC both described the witness protection programme in Honduras as ineffective^{208 209}.

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21.9 Oversight bodies and mechanisms

- 21.9.1 The Insight Crime Honduras profile 2021 stated:

‘In 2016, public protests against corruption led to the creation of the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (Misión de Apoyo contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras - MACCIH), which is backed by the Organization of American States (Organización de Estados Americanos - OEA).

‘MACCIH worked with a specialized unit within the Honduran Attorney General’s Office to reveal the existence of embezzlement networks involving hundreds of officials across the spectrum of political parties. They also uncovered a scheme to divert money destined for social programs to electoral campaigns, including those of Juan Orlando Hernández. The scheme was run by the [previous] president’s late sister, Hilda Hernández.

‘Nevertheless, at the end of 2019, the Honduran Congress issued a recommendation to disband the MACCIH. The mission left the country in January 2020 and a few months later, several of the most emblematic cases started to be buried.’²¹⁰

- 21.9.2 The Insight Crime profile also noted:

‘At the beginning of 2016, Honduras created a commission for purging the police following revelations that leading members of the police had participated in the 2009 murder of the country’s drug czar. Unlike previous efforts to purge the police force, the commission made some early progress, reviewing hundreds of senior officials and discharging thousands of agents from the institution. The commission’s mandate remains in force and by January 2020 [more than 6,000 agents](#) had been removed.

Nevertheless, [scandals](#) involving relations between organized crime and police leadership have put the commission’s legitimacy into question.’²¹¹

- 21.9.3 The same Insight Crime profile stated with regard to the judiciary: ‘The internationally-backed MACCIH supported the Attorney General’s Office in its corruption investigations from 2016 until 2019, when Congress voted to end its mandate.’²¹²

²⁰⁷ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human...](#)’ (pages 55 to 56), December 2022

²⁰⁸ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

²⁰⁹ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 27), March 2019

²¹⁰ Insight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

²¹¹ Insight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

²¹² Insight Crime-CLALS, ‘[Honduras profile](#)’, 15 February 2021

21.9.4 The National Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (CONADEH) has responsibility for protecting and promoting human rights²¹³ and headed by Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano who was elected by congress for a 6-year term in 2020²¹⁴. The USSD human rights report 2022 noted

‘A semiautonomous commissioner for human rights, Blanca Izaguirre, served as ombudsperson and investigated complaints of human rights abuses. NGOs and other civil society groups generally considered the commissioner independent but at times ineffective. With offices throughout the country, the ombudsperson received cases that otherwise might not have risen to national attention.

‘The Secretariat of Human Rights served as an advocate for human rights within the government. The Public Ministry’s Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights handled cases involving charges of human rights abuses by government officials. The Public Ministry also has a Special Prosecutor’s Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators, and Justice Officials. There is also a Human Rights Committee in the National Congress. The Ministries of Security and of Defense both have human rights offices that coordinate human rights-related activities with the Secretariat of Human Rights.’²¹⁵

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Updated to 6 October 2023

22. Freedom of movement

22.1 Legal rights

22.1.1 The USSD human rights report for 2022 stated: ‘The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these related rights.’²¹⁶ With regard in-country movement the USSD report stated: ‘There were areas where authorities could not assure freedom of movement because of criminal activity and a lack of significant government presence.’²¹⁷

22.1.2 Freedom House Freedom in the World 2023 report, covering events in 2022 stated: ‘Ongoing violence and impunity have reduced personal autonomy and freedom of movement in Honduras. Those living in gang-controlled territories face extortion, and dangerous conditions limit free movement and options for education and employment... The December 2022 state of exception curtailed constitutional rights, allowing authorities to restrict movement in parts of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.’²¹⁸

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22.2 Displacement

22.2.1 The UNHCR’s Operational Update 17, April 2023 also observed that ‘+247,000 people have been internally displaced in Honduras as a result of

²¹³ UNCHR, ‘[Honduras](#)’, no date (Bing translation from Spanish)

²¹⁴ Tunota, ‘[¿Quién es Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano...](#)’ 22 December 2020

²¹⁵ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 5), 20 March 2023

²¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

²¹⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1), 20 March 2023

²¹⁸ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Honduras](#)’ (section G1), 2023

violence between 2004 and 2018.²¹⁹ NB that the IDMC caveated that this figure

‘... is extrapolated from a survey using a sample size of 836 displaced households and 837 non-displaced households. It could be lower or higher due to the margin of error. This figure is considered an underestimate, given the sensitivity of displacement associated with violence, as those displaced by violence may prefer not to disclose their situation.’ In addition, it includes people who joined displaced households after the event that caused the displacement, and, thus, who may not necessarily be IDPs themselves. Finally, this figure has not been updated since 2018. It is unclear whether these IDPs are still displaced and what their current living conditions. IDMC is not able to assess that. We have medium confidence in this figure.’²²⁰

22.2.2 The USSD human rights report 2022 noted there were ‘... estimated [to be] approximately 937,000 individuals [who] were forcibly displaced by 2020 natural disasters. Official data on forced displacement, especially displacement due to violence, was limited in part because gangs controlled many of the neighborhoods where individuals were forced from their homes and communities...’²²¹

22.2.3 The USSD report 2022 stated

“Gang activity, including attacks on and exploitation of nonmembers, was the primary contributor to violence-related internal displacement... The government maintained the Interinstitutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence and created the Directorate for the Protection of Persons Internally Displaced by Violence within the Secretariat of Human Rights. Both the secretariat and the commission focused on developing policies to address IDPs. Additionally, under the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework, with significant support from UNHCR, the Secretariat of Human Rights and Secretariat of External Relations and International Cooperation continued to build capacity to provide services to vulnerable populations, including IDPs, those at risk of forced displacement, refugees, and returned migrants.

‘Despite incremental progress, government capacities remained relatively nascent and limited.’²²²

22.2.4 The UNHCR explained in April 2023 that:

‘The main causes that drive forced displacement in Honduras due to generalized violence include (i) social and territorial control by criminal gangs or armed groups, (ii) extortion, (iii) force recruitment, use and association; (iv) the dispossession, usurpation and destruction of housing, land and property; (v) gender-based violence; (vi) political violence; (vii) human rights violations. Apart from these forced displacement triggers, the effects of climate change and related disasters are increasingly impacting Honduras.’²²³

²¹⁹ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras Operational Update 17](#)’ (page 1), April 2023

²²⁰ IDMC, ‘[Country profile – Honduras](#)’, no date

²²¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2f), 20 March 2023

²²² USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2f), 20 March 2023

²²³ UNHCR, ‘[Honduras Operational Update 17](#)’ (page 2), April 2023

22.2.5 On the matter of displaced children in Honduras, the USSD human rights report 2022 stated:

‘Civil society organizations reported that common causes of forced displacement for youth included death threats for failure to pay extortion, attempted recruitment by gangs, witnessing criminal activity by gangs or criminal groups, domestic violence, attempted kidnappings, family members’ involvement in drug dealing, victimization by traffickers, rape (including commercial sexual exploitation by gangs), discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, sexual harassment, and discrimination for having a chronic medical condition.’²²⁴

22.2.6 HRW world report covering events in 2022 noted that most affected by displacement ‘... are children fleeing forced gang recruitment, professionals and business owners facing extortion, domestic violence survivors, and LGBT people and members of ethnic minorities enduring discrimination and violence, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reports.’²²⁵

22.2.7 The IDMC report 2019, citing various sources, noted:

‘The same risks and threats that caused displacement may persist after flight, particularly for those persecuted by gangs because they are perceived to have committed an act of betrayal or enmity, those who flee political persecution... New risks may emerge when people flee from one marginalised and gang-controlled urban area to another, or from rural to urban areas. They may also arise as a result of people’s economic coping strategies, which can make them vulnerable to extortion, dangerous work or violence in the workplace...’

‘People’s inability to find safety and security within the country may make their situation unsustainable, leading to further displacement and psychological and economic harm. Some may eventually decide they have no option but to leave the country, while for others internal displacement may not be a viable option in the first place. Others still may resort to self-containment in an effort to escape their continued persecution.’²²⁶

22.2.8 The IDMC report, citing various sources, further considered:

‘People’s chances of finding safely [sic] in displacement vary significantly depending on their economic resources. Many poor IDPs are restricted in terms of destination to areas that are equally if not more dangerous than their places of origin. Safer neighbourhoods are more expensive, and they are often gated or reserved for long-term residents... Effective protection is elusive. The state is largely unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, and people have a deep mistrust of the authorities and fear of reprisals. The state is also often all but absent in urban areas under gangs’ control and border areas where organised criminal groups operate. This lack of security often means displacement fails as a protection strategy.’²²⁷

²²⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

²²⁵ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023 – Honduras, Events of 2022](#)’, January 2023

²²⁶ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 8), March 2019

²²⁷ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 34), March 2019

22.2.9 And aslo stated:

‘People unable to find safety in displacement are often forced to flee again. Many are displaced internally several times before deciding they have no choice but to leave the country. The risk that led to their initial displacement may persist or they may face new risks that arise in the areas they seek refuge... If gangs and other criminal groups believe someone is guilty of betrayal or enmity or they have another serious grievance, they may track that person down in their place of displacement. Their extensive network of look- outs, strong communications networks and the fact that Honduras is a relatively small country combine to mean that internal displacement may not be a viable option for many people...

‘People’s freedom of movement may be restricted when the level of risk they face is high, whether it comes from state or criminal perpetrators. The most severe form of restriction is self-containment, in which someone confines themselves to the house and does not go out. It may be a protection strategy to avoid displacement, or it may precede flight. It is most common among directly threatened men between the ages of 15 and 29 before they flee. Families may also try to avoid displacement by taking their children out of school and confining them- selves to the home, or they may send their children to stay with relatives.’²²⁸

22.2.10 The USSD human rights report 2022 noted: ‘... NGOs reported IDPs were at increased risk of victimization and exploitation by criminal groups.’²²⁹

22.2.11 The USSD also noted:

‘Civil society organizations reported that common causes of forced displacement for youth included death threats for failure to pay extortion, attempted recruitment by gangs, witnessing criminal activity by gangs or criminal groups, domestic violence, attempted kidnappings, family members’ involvement in drug dealing, victimization by traffickers, rape (including commercial sexual exploitation by gangs)... and discrimination for having a chronic medical condition.’²³⁰

22.2.12 The ACCORD response of December 2022 citing various sources stated:

‘In its annual report on forced displacement, CONADEH informs that in the year 2021, it recorded a total of 917 complaints related to forced displacement, affecting 2,529 persons. In 338 of these cases, a total of 942 persons had already been forcibly displaced, while 579 complaints (affecting 1,587 persons) were submitted by persons at risk of being forcibly displaced.

‘The main violent incidents causing forced displacement or the risk of it were threats (56.1 percent), the killing of family members (14.4 percent), extortion (10.6 percent) and attempted murder (5.9 percent).

‘The main perpetrators continue to be gangs and maras: in 260 of the 917 complaints, they were identified as aggressors.’²³¹ (No information could be

²²⁸ IDMC, ‘[A web of violence – Crime, corruption and displacement...](#)’ (page 35), March 2019

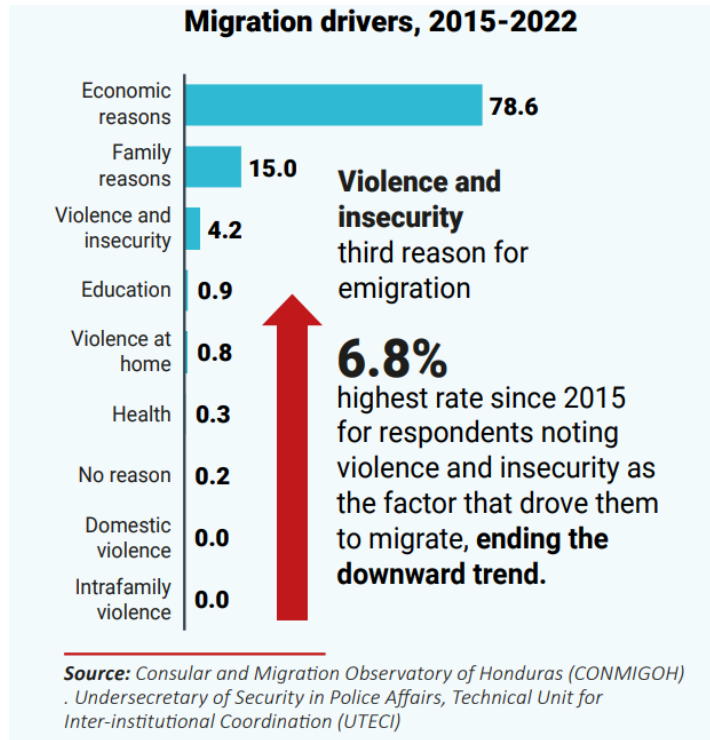
²²⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2f), 20 March 2023

²³⁰ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

²³¹ ACCORD, ‘[Gang based violence, criminality and human rights...](#)’ (page 75), December 2022

obtained by CPIT to indicate if CONADEH followed and resolved these complaints in the sources constled – see [Bibliography.](#))

22.2.13 The Infosegura citizen security analysis report considering events the drivers for migration between 2015 and 2022 provided the following graph, noted:



²³² Infosegura, '[Citizen security analysis in Honduras 2022](#)', 31 August 2023

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and i provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

Criminal gangs

- History
- Gangs
 - Structure
 - General characteristics of gangs and its members
 - MS-13
 - B-18
 - Other Gangs
 - Activities, Size, Reach
- Government response
 - Law and policies
 - Witness protection
- Targets of gang violence
- Criminal justice system
 - Police and military
 - Effectiveness
- Freedom of movement

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **23 November 2023**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

First version

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Feedback to the Home Office

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The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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