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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**DEFINING MARA SALVATRUCHA'S TEXAS
NETWORK**

by

Juan M. Arredondo

September 2015

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Thomas Bruneau
Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez

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DEFINING MARA SALVATRUCHA'S TEXAS NETWORK

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
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from the

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the criminal networks used to penetrate Texas by the Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) street gang. MS 13's internal reach is analyzed by examining the existing and potential horizontal integration of the known cliques (gang cells). Additionally, the organizations' existing reach and potential transnational reach are analyzed by examining the existing and potential vertical integration between its domestic and Central American components. The identification of MS 13's criminal networks is completed by using a first-generation manual approach lens. This approach involves examining data to uncover associations between criminals, resulting in the creation of an association matrix that links MS-13 with affiliates.

The research shows that MS 13 is a significant threat to public security in the state of Texas for two main reasons: proximity to cartels and demographics of the state. Research shows that criminal networks are already at work and that MS 13 should be taken seriously in Texas. The risk to Texas stems from the similarities, in terms of demographics and proximity to transnational cartels, to Los Angeles, California, where MS 13 originated.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	DEFINING MARA SALVATRUCHA’S (MS 13) TEXAS CRIMINAL NETWORK	1
A.	MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
B.	SIGNIFICANCE OF DEFINING THE MS 13 NETWORK IN TEXAS	2
C.	LITERATURE REVIEW	5
II.	A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE	11
A.	1872–1932.....	12
B.	1932–1969.....	19
C.	1969–1992.....	21
D.	CONCLUSION	25
III.	ESTABLISHMENT AND EXPANSION OF THE MARA SALVATRUCHA NETWORK	29
A.	ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH IN LOS ANGELES.....	30
B.	CENTRAL AMERICA	34
C.	WASHINGTON, DC, REGION	38
D.	CONCLUSION	41
IV.	TEXAS	43
A.	HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION OF MS 13’S NETWORK.....	44
B.	VERTICAL INTEGRATION OF MS 13’S NETWORK	49
C.	RELEVANCE OF INTERSTATE CORRIDORS.....	63
V.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	67
A.	CONCLUSIONS	67
1.	MS 13 Presence in Texas Will Likely Grow Substantially in the Next Five Years.....	67
2.	Texas Will Not Defeat MS 13 with Law Enforcement and Anti-immigration Policy	68
3.	Stopping the Zetas Does Not Equate to Stopping MS 13	70
B.	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	71
1.	Keep the Big Picture in Sight.....	71
2.	Use Best Practices in Dealing with MS 13	72
3.	Ask the Media to Help Limit Gang Exposure	73

LIST OF REFERENCES	75
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Tier 2: Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13)	45
Figure 2.	Side-by-side comparison of the major highways/interstates in Texas and MS 13 activity	46
Figure 3.	Smuggling and traffic routes into and through Texas.....	50
Figure 4.	Map of drug trafficking organization (DTO) areas of dominant influence in Mexico by Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)	52
Figure 5.	Train routes used by Central American migrants in Mexico	57
Figure 6.	Train routes by intended entry point to the United States	58
Figure 7.	Joint Crime Information Center 2013 Gang Rankings	61
Figure 8.	Los Zetas and their links with US-based gangs	62
Figure 9.	State-wide Trafficking Corridors	63
Figure 10.	Concentration of Gang Activity in Texas	67

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARENA	Nationalist Republican Alliance
CNN	Cable News Network
DC	Washington, DC region
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DPS	Department of Public Safety
DTO	drug trafficking organization
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Popular Revolutionary Army)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front)
FPL	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación “Farabundo Martí” (Popular Liberation Forces Party)
GAFES	Mexican Airborne Special Forces Group
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IH	Interstate Highway
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
IRIRA	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act
MS 13	Mara Salvatrucha
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
PCS	Partido Comunista de El Salvador (Salvadoran Communist Party)
PRTC	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Workers Revolutionary Party)
RN	Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance Party)
TCO	Transnational criminal organization
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America

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I. DEFINING MARA SALVATRUCHA'S (MS 13) TEXAS CRIMINAL NETWORK

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore horizontal and vertical relationships of Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) and analyze the criminal network MS 13 is using to establish gang-controlled territory in cities throughout the state of Texas. The data analyzed will focus on the horizontal and vertical relations of other gangs and transnational criminal organizations vis-à-vis MS 13. The first-generation manual approach of analyzing criminal networks provides an appropriate tool to identify horizontal and vertical network expansion throughout this thesis. Using the first-generation manual approach, the analysis of MS 13's criminal network is achieved by "examining data files to identify associations between criminals," resulting in the creation of an association matrix linking MS 13 and known affiliates.¹ By taking open source information detailing the associations of criminal elements with MS 13, this thesis will identify the network MS 13 is using to penetrate cities across the state of Texas.

Mara Salvatrucha has a presence in the state of Texas, and this thesis will examine the networks used to expand its presence within the state.² By explaining the potential and existing horizontal integration of the known cliques in cities within the state, this thesis will describe MS 13's internal reach. Additionally, a look at potential and existing vertical integration between MS 13's stateside based component, Latin American components, and other transnational criminal organizations will be studied to understand MS 13's potential and existing transnational reach within the state of Texas. As the reported most dangerous gang in the United States, Mara Salvatrucha has many known networks with the strongholds in Los Angeles (L.A.), Central America, and

¹ Jennifer J. Xu and Hsinchun Chen, "CrimeNet Explorer: A Framework for Criminal Network Knowledge Discovery," *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 23, no. 2 (2005): 201–26, doi: 10.1145/1059981.1059984.

² Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Gang Threat Assessment* (TX: Joint Crime Information Center, Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division, 2014), 8–9, http://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2014/txGangThreatAssessment.pdf.

Washington, DC, region. These established networks can serve as blueprints for expansion to cities within the state of Texas.³

This thesis seeks to define the networks used by MS 13 by analyzing known associations used by MS 13 to penetrate Texas. The research question, significance, and relevant literature are addressed in the first chapter. The second chapter focuses on the historical background of El Salvador; it links the origins of the violent gang known today as MS 13 to a violent past dating to 1932. The third chapter discusses the establishment and expansion of the MS13 network through the lens of U.S. policy, media, and demographics. This chapter introduces MS 13 strongholds in L.A., Central America, and DC. The first three chapters set the background for the fourth, which covers MS 13 networks in Texas. The fourth chapter addresses what known horizontal and vertical networks can tell us about the current networks utilized by MS 13 to further penetrate the state of Texas. The final chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of best practices utilized elsewhere for employment in Texas.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF DEFINING THE MS 13 NETWORK IN TEXAS

This thesis seeks to analyze data pertaining to MS 13 and its known affiliates to answer the following question—what criminal network(s) has MS 13 used to penetrate cities within the state of Texas? As early as 1993, MS 13 was established in L.A. and suspected to be involved in criminal activity, including, but not limited to, drug trafficking, extortion, robbery, and murder.⁴ In 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) gave Mara Salvatrucha the title of being the most dangerous street gang in America.⁵ In 2014, the gang is noted as having expanded and migrated across the United States, being active in forty-two states and the District of Columbia.⁶ Texas is one of the

³ Sam Logan and Ashley Morse, “MS – 13 Organization & U.S. Response” Samuellogan.com, February 2007. <http://www.samuellogan.com/publications.html>.

⁴ Al Valdez, “*The Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs*,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 29.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan, “MS-13 Leadership: Networks of Influence,” *Counter Terrorist*, August-September 2010, http://digital.ipcprintservices.com/display_article.php?id=428186.

forty-two states in which MS 13 is active. Taking U.S. policy, demographics, and the Cable News Network (CNN) effect into consideration allows the similarities between South Texas and other MS 13 strongholds to become evident.

Being a border state, Texas is front and center for the nation's battles on immigration. Additionally, the Texas border offers two drop points for *La Bestia*, or the immigrant train, that provides Central American immigrants access to the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and El Paso in West Texas.⁷ With the recent influx of Central Americans into the state, it is important to understand the risk of allowing these immigrants to fend for themselves. A similar influx of repatriated gang members led to big problems for Central America due to the opportunity repatriation allowed for expanding the MS 13 network. Network expansion is a major concern for Texas.

Other concerns for all cities in regard to horizontal and vertical integration within the state of Texas are the alliances of MS 13 and other criminal elements. Shortly after organizing in L.A., MS 13 formed alliances with the prison gang Mexican Mafia, which ran the street gang *Sureño* 13 network. Both of those criminal groups are present in Texas. The Texas Department of Public Safety divides the state into six regions and provides an assessment of the most significant gangs in each region. Regions one and two include the larger cities of Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston, respectively. MS 13 is noted as having a significant presence in both regions.⁸ The additional four regions have listed associates of MS 13 as having a significant presence in each of them.⁹ With the Mexican Mafia having a major presence in Texas, as they do in California, the expected continuance of the alliance formed by both gangs would be a reasonable hypothesis. According to the El Paso Police Department and El Paso County Sheriff's office, Sureños "are now the second largest and criminally active gang in El Paso."¹⁰

⁷ Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas, "Central American Migrants and 'La Bestia': The Route, Dangers, and Government Responses," Migration Policy Institute, September 10, 2014, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-migrants-and-la-bestia-route-dangers-and-government-responses>.

⁸ Ibid., 18–19.

⁹ Ibid., 19–20.

¹⁰ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 21.

The vertical integration or transnational element of MS 13 is also a significant concern for the state of Texas. MS 13 has documented partnerships with *Los Zetas*, Gulf, *Sinaloa*, and *La Familia Michoacãna* cartels that originate in Mexico.¹¹ All four cartels have networks that stretch into Texas.¹² Their presence in Texas means there may be potential for further expansion of the MS 13 Network within the state. Since MS 13 has a known affiliation with both transnational criminal organizations and prison gangs, it is necessary to understand the depth of these relationship. Additionally, in terms of recruitment, Texas presents favorable conditions when compared with other locations where the gang grew.

The demographics of the state of Texas are an important aspect of the potential and existing horizontal and vertical criminal associations. Once MS 13 establishes itself in the Hispanic dense communities of South Texas, the reputation it has built for itself may have a positive effect on its ability to recruit. The Hispanic population of Texas has shown signs of growth across the board but specifically in South Texas.¹³ The growth among the Hispanic population, MS 13's experience in recruiting, and its understanding of the culture could pose a risk to cities in South Texas. Hypothetically, if a young man or woman has an option between joining a local gang or the local chapter of the most dangerous gang in America, one can only guess what the choice will be. MS 13 recruitment efforts have led to a network that consists of ten thousand members nationwide.¹⁴

For the aforementioned reasons and others that will be discussed later, the significance of the networks used by MS 13 to penetrate Texas are extremely important. The consequences for not intervening and disrupting the networks used by MS 13 could place cities in Texas in a worse position than L.A. was in the 1990s. MS 13 has a

¹¹ National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report* (Washington, DC: Author, 2013), 23, <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/national-gang-report-2013/view>.

¹² Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013* (TX: Author, 2013), 14, http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/director_staff/media_and_communications/threatOverview.pdf.

¹³ Susan Combs, "Window on State Government," Texas Comptroller, accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/tif/southtexas/demographics.html>.

¹⁴ National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report*, 23.

significant presence in and around Dallas and Houston, Texas.¹⁵ Yet San Antonio is not mentioned as a stronghold of MS 13. Coincidentally, San Antonio is the second largest city in Texas with only Houston outranking it in population.¹⁶ Texas' second largest city is closer to both drop points of La Bestia than Houston or Dallas, making it a city that could be the next MS 13 stronghold. The city's size, location, and demographics make it a location for MS 13's growth.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is little literature pertaining to MS 13's criminal networks within the state of Texas. All literature found in books covering MS 13 is focused on the gang itself and on areas outside of Texas. This is due to the threat MS 13 constitutes to areas such as L.A. and the Washington, DC, region. The vital role of U.S. policy, demographics, and media vis-à-vis MS 13's exponential growth is a common occurrence in relevant literature. All books and scholarly articles also detail the origins of Mara Salvatrucha in L.A. and link the gang to the Salvadorian immigrants who fled the country during the civil war. The account of marginal, impoverished Salvadorian immigrants looking for means of protection from the African American and Mexican American gangs is recounted in every piece of literature found.

Additionally, there are many terms and definitions that will be used throughout this thesis while working to define MS 13's Texas network. Horizontal integration, vertical integration, balloon effect, CNN effect, Texas Gang Threat Assessment report's weights, and the Washington, DC region will all be discussed to clarify their significance and definition throughout this thesis. These terms and definitions require the reader to be familiar with the context in which they are used throughout this thesis.

Horizontal and vertical integration are terms that will be used to describe domestic and transnational growth. Horizontal integration refers to lateral expansion here

¹⁵ Celinda Franco, *The MS-14 and 18th Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?* (CRS Report No. RL34233) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34233.pdf>.

¹⁶ Bureau of the Census, "2010 Census: Population of Texas Cities, Arranged in Descending Order," Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 2010, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/popcity32010.html>.

in the United States. Vertical integration refers to transnational integration. Furthermore, the term balloon effect will be used outside of its normal definition, which ties policy to the displacement of drug production. In this thesis, the balloon effect is used to define the displacement of people, cliques, and networks due to implemented anti-gang/immigration policies.

Another term from the literature that will be heavily utilized is the CNN effect. The notion of the CNN effect emerged after media pundits across the nation noticed the propensity of Americans to be glued to their television sets watching nonstop war coverage during the Gulf War.¹⁷ CNN was the first nonstop news channel available. The Gulf War, and later U.S. military interventions, showed that people would gravitate to news coverage, even at the risk of becoming addicted to late-breaking details.

The formal definition of the CNN effect varies. For some commentators of post-Cold War interventions, it “described the capacity of images of human suffering, delivered in real time, to mobilize outrage worldwide, forcing national governments and international agencies to ameliorate humanitarian crisis or take up arms on behalf of the underdogs in ‘other people’s wars.’”¹⁸ Others reveled at the ability of television to “animate Moral consciousness.”¹⁹ Conversely, George F. Kennan saw television’s cardinal sin as an induction of an emotional reaction causing “sentimentality that could only impede the formulation of sagacious policy.”²⁰ Overall, the CNN effect’s focus is on the media’s power to make issues relevant, inciting a push for policy vis-à-vis the display of powerful images. Philip Seib, the vice dean and professor of the Public Policy Program at the University of Southern California, states, “the media, local, and global, are the means of communication through which the public mind is formed.”²¹ The CNN effect will be used to portray the importance of the media along with U.S. policy and demographics in the creation of the horizontal and vertical MS 13 networks we see today.

¹⁷ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 142.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Philip Seib and Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10.

Additionally, the Texas Gang Threat Assessment report's three-tier system will be referenced to categorize the risk MS 13 represents. The weights used to calculate the risk each gang represents include the following:

- **Relationship with Cartels:** This factor examines the extent to which a gang is connected to Mexico-based drug cartels. A gang may be assessed as having no relationship, a temporary or short-term association, or a long-term business venture or exclusive relationship.
- **Transnational criminal activity:** This factor considers whether a gang has transnational criminal connections, as well as whether the gang's criminal activity has spread into the transnational realm.
- **Level of criminal activity:** This factor rates the type and frequency of crimes perpetrated by the gang. Crimes are rated on a scale covering a range of offenses, from misdemeanors to felonies.
- **Level of violence:** This factor assesses the overall level of violence perpetrated by the gang in its criminal activity. It ranges from generally non-violent offenses, such as money laundering, to crimes involving extreme violence, such as torture and murder.
- **Prevalence throughout Texas:** This factor determines the extent to which a gang is active throughout the state. The geographic reach of some gangs is limited to specific cities or regions of Texas, while others are widespread across the state.
- **Relationships with other gangs:** This factor examines the nature of a gang's alliances and influence with other gangs. This may involve limited and temporary contact or formal alliances, or the direct oversight of some gangs by others.
- **Total strength:** This factor assesses the known size of the gang, measured by the number of individuals confirmed by law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to be members. This number is almost always an underrepresentation of the true size of the gang, as many members are unknown to law enforcement.
- **Statewide organizational effectiveness:** This factor examines the gang's effectiveness in organizing members under its leadership across the state.
- **Juvenile membership:** This factor considers the extent to which the gang recruits juveniles and is active in schools, as recruitment of minors is a unique threat.
- **Threat to law enforcement:** This factor considers the extent to which the gang represents a threat to law enforcement. Some gang members may

only use violence to resist arrest or to flee from law enforcement, while others may actively target officers.

- **Involvement in human smuggling and trafficking:** This factor considers the gang's involvement in human smuggling and human trafficking activities.²²

An understanding of these weights is crucial to understand why MS 13's movement from one to another is significant. A tier one threat constitutes the biggest risk to the state and is much more significant than a tier two or tier three gang. The weights above are all considered by the state to determine the tier a gang belongs to.

MS 13's growth in Central America and the U.S. is discussed to explain how the gang acquired the influence it has today. The two U.S. locations discussed are Los Angeles, CA and Washington, DC. Traditionally, the Washington, DC, region normally consists of the District of Columbia (DC) and 19 counties across Maryland (MD) and Virginia (VA). The entire region is not included in the source used. The areas included under DC from this point forward will be limited to the same areas included in Connie McGuire's research paper titled "Working paper on Central American youth gangs in the Washington, DC, area."²³ She completed this paper while working for the Washington Office in Latin America (WOLA). The areas included in MD are Montgomery and Prince George's counties. In VA, only Fairfax County is included with the final area being DC itself.²⁴ McGuire's paper offers insight into the Salvadoran presence in the region and illustrates the relationship between Salvadorans and MS 13 in DC.²⁵

The terms and concepts from the literature pertaining to the expansion of MS 13's Network in Texas will be used along with the first generation manual approach in analyzing associations of the actors in MS 13's criminal networks. This approach will allow for a location-based comparative framework to analyze the role U.S. policy, demographics, and media have had in the creation of MS 13, its networks, and its growth.

²² Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 9-10.

²³ Connie McGuire, "Working paper on Central American youth gangs in the Washington, DC, area," (*Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America* 2007), 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Specifically, relevant data from L.A., Central America, and DC region will be analyzed comparatively to identify horizontal and vertical networks in Texas.

The data used to support this thesis come from a variety of sources. The goal is to construct and support my thesis using only open source information. Since there is no concise literature that defines the MS 13 network in the state of Texas, it was necessary to reach far and wide to define the MS 13 Network. Sources that will be referred to in this thesis range from local newspaper articles to national task force reports that focus on street, prison, and transnational gangs. Sources such as Insight crime, Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), and the U.S. Border Patrol are key references in defining the MS 13 Network. Open source information from the Texas Department of Public Safety and various police departments across South Texas are also used to identify MS 13's Texas Network.

The analysis of a Texas network, however, would not be possible without the works of the leading researchers on MS 13 such as Thomas Bruneau, Al Valdez, Sonja Wolf, and Jose Miguel Cruz. The combined work of these researchers allows for a great base for further research. Sonja Wolf's explanation of how the Salvadoran media spurred the growth of MS 13 allowed me to use "Nexis" to analyze the effects of the media here in the United States.²⁶ It is by following the groundwork of these researchers that I will be able to analyze the myriad of sources compiled to define the MS 13 network in Texas.

Analysis of the information found will focus on the alliances set up in each stronghold across the United States and then in Texas. The intelligence gained from Brenda Paz will be analyzed to establish existing networks. Information provided by Paz will be used to highlight the already established horizontal integration of MS 13 and paint the picture of what MS 13 believes is its destiny. Through the use of available literature, the comparative analysis of MS 13's domestic and transnational strongholds will be used to define the networks used by MS 13 to penetrate Texas.

²⁶ Sonja Wolf, "Creating Folk Devils: Street Gang Representations in El Salvador Print Media," *Journal of Human Security* 8, no. 2 (2012).

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II. A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Although Mara Salvatrucha was established in L.A., the gang's home country is where its legacy of violence originates. El Salvador is a country with a past that is riddled by repression and violence. This chapter will address the legacy of violence, linking the historical repression and violence of El Salvador to the American experience with MS 13. On October 11, 2012, MS13 was designated as a transnational criminal organization by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, a first for a street gang.²⁷ Today, MS 13 represents a threat significant enough to warrant attention at the federal level. It is important to draw the link between the legacy of violence stemming from El Salvador to the United States because many of the originating members were immigrants of El Salvador who fled to the United States during and after the Civil War. Scholars have stated that the violent habitat that the Salvadorians left never left them. The violence experienced in El Salvador provided the founding members of MS 13 with a propensity for violence unmatched by American gangsters.²⁸

To help link violence between El Salvador and MS 13, this chapter will discuss the economic, political, and social repression Salvadorans experienced since from 1887–1992. The first section will cover 1872–1932, the period that included La Matanza. The second section covers 1932–69, the period that included The Hundred Hour War of 1969. The Final Section will take us from 1969–92, focusing on the Civil War that engulfed El Salvador from 1980 through 1992. The relevance of these events will help explain how a historical background saturated with repression and cyclic violent acts aided the quick rise of MS 13 in the United States.

²⁷ Sam Quinones, Andrew Blankstein, and Danielle Ryan, "Southern California—This Just In," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2012, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/10/in-a-first-us-labels-ms-13-street-gang-criminal-organization.html>.

²⁸ Sam Logan and Ashley Morse, "MS-13 Organization & U.S. Response," Samuel Logan website, 2007, <http://www.samuellogan.com/publications.html>.

A. 1872–1932

Peasant, or campesino, uprisings in El Salvador began to take place as early as 1872 in the coffee producing regions of El Salvador.²⁹ These outbursts were due to the government ousting campesinos from their land in favor of coffee producers. Development of dyes in Europe in 1879 rendered indigo, El Salvador's largest export, useless.³⁰ The lack of demand for indigo opened the door for coffee to become the country's leading export. In 1881, the Salvadoran government instituted land reform that stripped communal land from campesinos, leaving them without livelihood.³¹ The uprisings continued into the 20th century as did the deterioration of the campesinos' living conditions. The uprisings slowly morphed into violence by 1932.

The violent civilian-led uprising that took place on January 22, 1932, was the birth of the legacy of violence in El Salvador. This outburst, and the reaction known as La Matanza, started an era laden with violence that continued through the end of the Civil War in 1992. La Matanza, demonstrates the violent history and origins of what the FBI named America's most dangerous street gang.³² La Matanza offered El Salvador a window into the future of the country. It provided the violent origins for a nation born in a bloodbath.³³ Starting in 1932, the military government and the oligarchs continually worked hand in hand to suppress the left and remove any challenges to their authority in El Salvador. This repression led to various violent clashes often resulting in the death of peasants by way of government death squads. The conflict cemented a relationship

²⁹ Rafael Menjivar Larin, *El Salvador: El Eslabón Más Pequeño (El Salvador: The Smaller Link)* (Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centro-americana, 1980), 69, and William H. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1979), 43. Quoted in Liisa North, *Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1981), 19.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 240.

³² Al Valdez, "The Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs," in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, ed. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2011), 29.

³³ Yvon Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 1.

between the oligarchs (born of the coffee boom in El Salvador) and the armed forces.³⁴ This relationship lasted through the Civil War. Scholars agree that economic, political, and social repression were causal factors that led to the violent clashes in 1932. Economic, political, and social repression along with violence associated with efforts to quell campesino uprisings will be shown to be consistent causal factors for the legacy of violence left to the people of El Salvador. The same legacy of violence that has roots dating back to the time of La Matanza is seen in the establishment of MS 13 in LA.

In 1932, La Matanza left 30,000 dead. These deaths originated from the well-documented history of repression and violence between the campesinos and the oligarchy. Repression is the root cause of the bloodbath that created a period of praetorianism the campesinos endured from 1932 through the Civil War. Bloodbath refers to La Matanza, the government's reaction to a *campesino* uprising in 1932. Campesino uprisings, however, came far before La Matanza.

The difference in 1932, was the reaction by the new president, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1931–1944).³⁵ The consensus among scholars is that president “General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who had assumed the presidency just weeks following a military coup that deposed President Araujo, responded swiftly and decisively; on his orders the National Guard and local military and police forces marched through the countryside and systematically targeted all those suspected of participating in the rebellion.”³⁶ This reaction by President Martínez left El Salvador an estimated 30,000 dead, mostly campesinos. Furthermore, “This ‘grotesque’ revenge, for which president Martínez earned the nickname *El Brujo* (The Sorcerer), resulted in so many thousands dead that burial became impractical; fearing epidemics, the Salvadoran department of Sanitation ordered the incineration of all corpses.”³⁷

³⁴ Cynthia Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1982), 12.

³⁵ Thomas P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1971), 63.

³⁶ Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 175.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

Aside from the sheer brutality the campesinos faced after their unsuccessful rebellion, the culture of violence by the government continued. Violence served as a solution to the peasant problem. La Matanza served as an inaugural episode, which showcased the praetorianism period linking the military and oligarchs to control of El Salvador. Since La Matanza, the oligarchs and military have continued a relationship that remains focused on removing any opposition to their mutual interest. The establishment of the relationship between the military government and the oligarchs was built around a quest to maintain power. La Matanza and later episodes of government violence aimed at campesinos kept the pattern of violence through the Civil War.

The campesinos also employed violence in their rebellion in 1932 so to say the use of violence was solely on the government's side would be wrong. Since 1932, when the campesinos chose to rebel against the oligarchs due to their economic and political conditions, violence has been the solution to problems within El Salvador. Scholars agree that economic, political, and social repression were causal factors that led to various violent clashes between the campesinos and the government of El Salvador. Additionally, Elisabeth Jean Wood suggests the campesino motivation to mobilize rested in "participation, defiance and pleasure in agency," with previous exposure to violence and proximity to insurgent forces shaping mobilization paths.³⁸ According to Wood, participation is tied to liberation theology and the campesino belief that social justice is the will of God and thus a moral commitment. Defiance, too, is tied to liberation theology and the will of those who survived governmental violence to not let the death of previous campesinos be in vain. Pleasure in agency refers to "the pleasure in together changing unjust social structures through intentional action."³⁹ As for the exposure to violence, Wood makes a rational suggestion that those who saw the violence of the government were likely to support the guerrillas and vice versa. She also explains that the closer campesinos were to guerrilla forces, the more likely they were to support them. Campesinos had to act rationally to ensure their survival.

³⁸ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 231.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

The government and oligarchs also had some identifiable attitudinal characteristics. Cynthia Arnson best sums up the attitude of the government and oligarchs when she writes, “both the military and the oligarchy were determined that ‘communist agitation’ would never again be allowed to disrupt the social fabric of El Salvador.”⁴⁰ Since their marriage under President Martínez in response to the uprising of 1932, the government and the military worked hand in hand. Further, the constant economic, political, and social repression led the people of El Salvador to resort to violence from the time of La Matanza through the Civil War.

The economic causal factor for La Matanza is centered on coffee and the depression era economy, which put an already poor campesino population in an economic bind. Campesino victimization at the hand of the coffee industry began when the “Indigenous tribal lands and large municipal landholdings were abolished by presidential decrees in 1881–82.”⁴¹ The eviction from the land the campesinos called home was not without force. The government formed security forces to police the eviction. These security forces that were put in place to police the campesinos would go on to become the National Guard of El Salvador.⁴² One could tie the origins of the government—oligarch relationship to the stripping of land from campesinos as the government and oligarchs both saw the benefit of repressing the campesinos. The benefit for both was economic prosperity at the expense of the defenseless campesinos.

An amplifying factor to the loss of land for the campesinos was the worldwide depression that took place from 1929–1931. The depression caused a chain of events that left many campesinos without a source of income. First, the depression brought about a free fall of the price of coffee. This is critical when one considers that by 1928, 92% of El Salvador’s exports were coffee.⁴³ The worldwide depression created a worldwide lack of

⁴⁰ Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution*, 15.

⁴¹ David Browning, *El Salvador: La Tierra y El Hombre (El Salvador: The Earth and the Man)* (San Salvador: Ministry of Education, Department of Publications, 1975), 337–57, and Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution*, 11–13. Quoted in Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner, eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 91.

⁴² Campbell and Brenner, *Death Squads in Global Perspective*, 91.

⁴³ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 240.

demand for coffee. Lack of demand led to lower prices, and lower prices meant cuts had to take place to try and keep the agrarian system operational. The cuts forced thousands of campesinos out of work. This created a landless and jobless population. Those who kept jobs were not much better off than the jobless. Campesino salaries did not normally provide enough to purchase coffee from their harvest.⁴⁴ However, loss of those salaries, no land to grow their own food supply, and hunger brought on by the lack of wages to purchase food created the uprising that led to La Matanza. Ultimately, it was the depression that caused an uprising fueled by hunger. As vassals of their landowners, the campesinos mobilized in an attempt to improve labor conditions, establish a minimum wage, and end unemployment.

The initial mobilizations set a pattern of unequal reactions to the non-violent protest. Author Molly Todd says, “The government met campesino petitions, protest, and strikes with increasing force,” ultimately leading to a lawful inability to organize after reaching numbers of approximately eighty thousand.⁴⁵ The campesinos took to the streets without resorting to violence until violence became their only option. Campesino organization began to take place in 1929, as soon as the impact of the dwindling coffee prices reached El Salvador. When then President Arturo Araujo (March–December 1931) began to allow his military force to be the primary option to deter the unrest, by allowing his men to open fire on protestors, the campesinos’ violent reaction was in short order. The violent reaction came in mid-January when “poorly armed and poorly organized peasants staged an uprising in western El Salvador, led by Socialist organizer Augustin Faramundo Marti”—La Matanza was the government’s counter.

Political repression also fueled the violence that ensued in 1932 and the uprising that caused La Matanza. The campesinos were a people with no representation in the Salvadoran government. After the stock market crash and reciprocal uprising of under and unemployed campesinos, President Pio Romero Bosque (1927–1931) outlawed the circulation of leftist material, and strikes, and he allowed the Army and National Guard to

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 241.

⁴⁵ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 175.

imprison anyone who supported opposition activities.⁴⁶ Without representation for the campesinos, the government and oligarchs fused their similar interest in keeping their opposition to a minimum leaving the campesinos politically isolated. In 1931, a wealthy landowner by the name of Arturo Araujo was elected president. The labor movement saw a potential ally as Araujo “promised a minimum standard of housing, health, education, and wages for all Salvadorans” but fell short because of uprisings, which were violently handled by his vice president General Martinez.⁴⁷ In December of the same year, General Martinez took the presidency by way of coup.

President Martinez was tested immediately by the left with the violent uprising, which led to La Matanza. Seeing the political instability within the right, Martì saw an opportunity to pull off an armed revolt.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the campesino revolt was too little, too soon. Having only been president for less than two months, President Martinez dealt a swift hand to the campesinos through La Matanza. As a known member of the opposition, Martì was initially arrested before the revolt on January 19, 1932, and faced death by way of firing squad on February 1, 1932, after the failed revolt.⁴⁹ Violence was the answer for Martinez. His death squads killed an estimated thirty thousand people associated with the left.⁵⁰ President Martinez’s violent nature may have been one formed from an admiration of other violent leaders. His admiration of violence was evident when “In the 1930s, he proclaimed his admiration for Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler.”⁵¹

The praetorian system in place after La Matanza kept the characteristics of the regimes that caused the uprisings. The military government worked hand in hand with the oligarchs who had a vested interest in the continued repression of the campesinos. The violent element had a precedent, which dated back prior to La Matanza, as explained

⁴⁶ Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution*, 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador’s Communist Revolt*, 138.

⁵⁰ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 240.

⁵¹ Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution*, 15.

earlier. Features of the partnered government of an Oligarch backed military regime, cemented by the events in 1932, that can be seen through the Civil War are as follows:

(1) (A) weak state that never succeeded in challenging the interest of the dominant class, even when a challenge might have benefitted the long term interest of that class; (2) a division of labor between the armed forces, which controlled the major positions in government, and the land owning class, which dominated positions concerned with the economy; (3) a limited opening of the political process to the middle class and some urban workers (particularly after 1960) accompanied by the exclusion of independent political organizing in the country-side and repression directed against radical challenges to the system, both urban and rural; and (4) weak institutionalization of a political party and electoral system that never reach the point of a democratic transfer of power prior to 1980, though it possessed some of the trappings of democratic process.⁵²

The same economic, political, and social causal factors that caused the revolt led to La Matanza in 1932, and continued as the political and economic avenues for repression of campesinos remained in place. The violent actions taken by the governmental death squads directed at the campesinos resulted in dead bodies and continued violence. The marriage between the military and oligarchs benefited both parties. Both parties were interested in keeping obstacles from impairing their ability to impose their will. In El Salvador, the campesinos were the obstacle. The failure of the government to identify the root cause of the revolt left the potential for continued violence among the feuding campesinos on the left and the government on the right. As campesino uprisings occurred, violent counters in the form of death squads took action on behalf of the government. As the evidence will show, the violence experienced by Salvadorans in 1932 continued. The era of violence had just begun. The economic and political repression caused the social repression of campesinos, which led to further violence. The economic hardships endured by the landless campesinos led many to move to the Honduran border region for work. That area would be the center of gravity for The Hundred Hour War of 1969. The Salvadoran government proclaimed their stance was rooted in the defense of the Salvadorans who were ousted by the Honduran government.

⁵² Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War: A Study of Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Rienner, 1996).

B. 1932–1969

On July 14, 1969, the Salvadoran army launched an attack on Honduras in honor of the campesinos who had lived through decades of being ignored, leaving a thousand casualties in the wake of the four day conflict.⁵³ Violence did not end in El Salvador after the gruesome experience the country had with La Matanza. The time period between La Matanza and the Hundred Hour War was a continuation of the status quo set by the marriage of the oligarchs and the government. The continued repression of campesinos led many to immigrate to Honduras where there was work to be found. Industrial expansion in El Salvador led to higher employment numbers; however, employment came in urban areas such as San Salvador. This formed the beginnings of a new middle class in San Salvador “thereby worsening the disparities in living standards between this centre and the country as a whole.”⁵⁴ Campesinos in both Honduras and El Salvador had the same enemy—landowners. As Lisa North explains, “during his fieldwork in the Honduran countryside, William Durham found no hostility among Honduran peasants toward Salvadorans. On the contrary, all evidence pointed to cooperation in a joint struggle against large landowners.”⁵⁵ Having an estimated three hundred thousand Salvadorans living in Honduras, the Honduran elite had a viable scapegoat in the Salvadoran immigrants for peasant uprising within Honduras.⁵⁶ The peasant uprisings happening in Honduras, stemming from socialist ideals, were also seen as a threat to the Salvadoran government.

The Salvadoran government painted the Hundred Hour War as a defense of the Salvadoran campesinos who were experiencing a violent dispossessing at Honduran hands. The government reported, “Hondurans had systematically swept through their border region territory in the weeks prior to military engagement, violently dispossessing Salvadoran immigrants of their land and belongings and forcefully expelling them from

⁵³ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 178.

⁵⁴ North, *Bitter Grounds*, 53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁶ Durham, *Scarcity and Survival*, 165–70. Quoted in North, *Bitter Grounds*, 61–64.

their country.”⁵⁷ The Salvadoran government did not acknowledge the reason behind there being immigrants from El Salvador in Honduras. Instead, they chose to focus on the similar treatment of campesinos by the Honduran government. The government of El Salvador would go on to claim the campesinos who were now being prosecuted were the same ones who were Honduran agricultural pioneers. Furthermore, “in the words of the Salvadoran President, ‘no nation that values its own dignity can permit its own children to be massacred with impunity.’”⁵⁸ Expectedly, the campesinos had a very different perception of the Hundred Hour War.

The campesinos, whose rights the Salvadoran government claimed it was defending, were of the belief that the conflict was instigated by El Salvador.⁵⁹ The sentiment among campesinos was one of a fraud on the part of the Salvadoran government. Campesinos claimed the main goal of the war was to militarize the northern border with Honduras then gain control over the “increasingly mobilized peasant population.”⁶⁰ The organization of campesinos in peasant leagues, agricultural co-ops, and mutual aid groups had gained strength throughout the 1960s. Prior to the mobilization within the campesino communities in the border region, the government paid no attention to the campesinos.⁶¹ The demonstrations that were occurring prior to the war were due to the same economic and political isolation the campesinos faced before La Matanza.

The political and economic situation the campesinos faced in the late 1960s mirrored those of the early 1930s. By 1969, the coffee industry had bounced back from the industry collapse due to the world economic crash in the early 1930s. As coffee and other cash crops began to take up additional land for additional production, it was the campesinos who gave it up. Analysis shows, “in 1961, 19.8 percent of families were

⁵⁷ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 178.

⁵⁸ Fidel Sanchez Hernandez, “Presidential Speech to the Salvadoran Public, July 14, 1969,” in *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador* (Np: n.p., 1970), 30–31, 44–45. Quoted in Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 179.

⁵⁹ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 180.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

without land; in 1971, 41.1 percent were landless.”⁶² As production of crops grew, the campesinos’s situation got worse. Their organization only made matters worse. The lack of political gains since the early thirties made it so that the organization of campesinos was seen as a threat. When the government and oligarchs saw this threat, similar to that of 1932, it was met with violence. The percentage provided above on land loss shows the repression did not stop in 1969. The economic and political repression continued to plague the campesinos through the next decade and into the Civil War.

C. 1969–1992

The Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992) was a continuation of the violence by both the campesinos and the government of El Salvador. However, the struggle within El Salvador began to involve groups outside of the Salvadoran oligarchy/government and campesinos. The Catholic Church, United States and Soviet Union were all heavily involved in the events that took place during the Civil War. The Church was looking out for the peasants, while the United States and Soviet Union were fighting the Cold War with Salvadoran bodies. In El Salvador, the government backed oligarchs used death squads to control any opposition to their rule.⁶³ The left, after years of trying to achieve equality through political avenues, turned to violence.⁶⁴ The same struggles that plagued El Salvador in 1932 were alive and well during the Civil War. The campesinos were still predominately a landless people struggling economically while striving for political equality within their country. The oligarchs still had their grasp on the economy and had the government in pocket to help deal with any type of opposition to their rule.

The campesinos’ movement and the Matrì led uprising in 1932 had continued to develop since then. Various parties of campesinos had formed since the original

⁶² Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Génesis de Una Revolución: Análisis del Surgimiento y Desarrollo de la Organización Campesina en El Salvador (Genesis of a Revolution: The Rise and Development Analysis of the Peasant Organization in El Salvador)*, vol. 16 (N.p.: Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology, 1983). Quoted in Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 20.

⁶³ Julie Mazzei, *Death Squads or Self-Defense Forces?: How Paramilitary Groups Emerge and Challenge Democracy in Latin America* (NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), 157.

⁶⁴ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 243.

Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) in 1932.⁶⁵ After the Hundred Hour War of 1969, The Popular Liberation Forces Party (FPL) was established in 1970. Two years later the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP) was established in 1972. Further creation of political parties continued through the end of the 1970s with The National Resistance Party (RN) and Workers Revolutionary Party (PRTC) being established in 1975 and 1976 respectively. These five parties, although not always of the same mind, would join forces in October of 1980 forming a formidable opponent to the right of El Salvador.⁶⁶

It is important to capture the spirit of the various opposing organizations formed by campesinos. By the 1970s, “forty years since the 1932 uprising and massacre, the left had tried to redress the inequities through political organization. But in the 1970s the politicians and their followers tired of waiting started to form guerilla armies.”⁶⁷ The formation of various parties show the frustration among the rebels in how best to deal with the situation. By the time the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) was formed, the political option was gone. Violent action was an option in the fight for equality among campesinos. Violence had been the government’s way of dealing with campesinos, and since 1932, it had only become worse. By forming an alliance among themselves, the left assured a violent war with the right who had not let up on repressing the campesinos.

The violence of the right through the use of death squads caused an environment which surely left an impression on those who were forced to live through the battle. A glimpse of what one may have seen in El Salvador during the early stages of the Civil War is sobering when considering, “most Salvadorans could conjure up the image of a dead body glimpsed on the way to school or work. Some were missing their heads. Many had suffered torture before their death that left them slashed or burned beyond recognition.”⁶⁸ The Church also moved into the cross hairs of the right.

⁶⁵ Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 67.

⁶⁶ Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 62.

⁶⁷ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 243.

⁶⁸ Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 134. Quoted in Sarah Garland, *Gangs in Garden City: How Immigration, Segregation, and Youth Violence are Changing America’s Suburbs* (NY: Nation Books, 2009), 48.

Some sections of the Church in El Salvador led a liberation theology movement in the late 1960–1970s, through small groups, which discussed biblical and church teachings on social justice.⁶⁹ Being a vassal of the government, campesinos found that liberation theology provided a biblical bases for new found hope in social reform. Many of the priests teaching liberation theology took part in the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* conference of bishops in Medellín Colombia that introduced a mandate to work on behalf of the poor in 1968.⁷⁰ With the campesinos being part of the left, the clergy too became part of the movement. The clergy helped in organizing movements to establish campesino rights. While the priests never encouraged the campesinos to arm themselves, the right saw them as a threat and chose a slogan which said, “be patriotic, kill a priest.”⁷¹ The hatred of clergy in El Salvador was especially true of one archbishop. Archbishop Oscar Romero was originally a favorite of the oligarchs as he never denounced the landowners for their failure to pay a livable wage and criticized the priest who did speak out of campesino repression.⁷² The oligarchs were pleased with his selection as archbishop and showed it by paying for an elaborate investiture ceremony upon his selection.⁷³ However, Archbishop Romero’s welcome was quickly replaced with hatred once he took up the fight of the poor.

Archbishop Romero’s change of opinion originated from the government’s violation of human rights and increasing repression against the campesinos.⁷⁴ He served as a voice for the voiceless poor who were painted red in the Cold War influenced Civil War. His views were not in accordance with the oligarchs and that meant he was part of the opposition. One of his pleas was for organization to be allowed as the ability to organize was recognized by church.⁷⁵ Additionally, he encouraged the soldiers to

⁶⁹ Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷¹ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 247.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ John Frederick Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2011), 254.

⁷⁵ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 247.

question their tactics in the killing of civilians encouraging them to disobey orders issued which were a violation of human rights.⁷⁶ His attempt to reason with the soldiers led to his death the very next day. The government was not satisfied with his death so police shot and killed another forty mourners at his funeral and an assassination attempt caused the investigator of his death to flee the country.⁷⁷ The Civil War was a culmination of repression and frustration. The United States and the Soviet Union funded parties but the people of El Salvador were the ones who lived through the violence.

The United States, under President Carter came into the situation in El Salvador under the cause of looking to protect human rights and promote reform. The Reagan administration wanted a military “win” to keep the country from becoming communist over protecting human rights.⁷⁸ The United States backed the Salvadoran right through the war committing “6 billion to counter what President Reagan considered a ‘textbook case’ of Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaraguan aggression in the hemisphere.”⁷⁹ The Guerillas received help to fund their fight during the Civil War too. The Guerrillas had the Soviet Union providing backing by way of Cuba and Nicaragua. The arms the guerrillas received to fight with early in the Civil War came from the Soviet bloc.⁸⁰

The Civil War of El Salvador was an intense display of violence considering the war was a small piece of the bigger east west conflict. The war was small but locally disastrous. Salvadorans experienced repression as long as they could remember and became mobilized, looking for a method to get past the economic, political, and social repression the government brought down on them. Seventy-five thousand lives were lost during the Civil War in El Salvador, yet the campesinos of El Salvador did not end up in power. Campesinos were the heart of the opposition and suffered the most casualties. The

⁷⁶ Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 26.

⁷⁷ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 247.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁷⁹ Cynthia J. Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America, 1976–1992*, 2nd ed. (PA: Penn State Univ. Press, 1993), 54–56. Quoted in Cynthia J. Arnson, “Window on the Past: A Declassified History of Death Squads in El Salvador,” in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, ed. Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 85–124.

⁸⁰ Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 57.

result was a forced negotiation with the U.S. backed government they were fighting to overcome. In the end the Guerrillas “had lost their patrons in Nicaragua and the Soviet Union; their arms flow had dwindled, their allies were pressuring them to negotiate, and their civilian supports had been largely assassinated.”⁸¹

D. CONCLUSION

The relevance of the violence El Salvador experienced is that more than one million Salvadorians left their war torn country during the Civil War and came to in the United States.⁸² Most of these immigrants landed in the poorer areas of L.A. and DC.⁸³ MS 13’s earliest members survived the violence of the Civil War in El Salvador. Further, some founding members were combat veterans, fighting for both sides of the belligerents involved: FMLN and the government.⁸⁴ These men immigrated to the United States out of desperation due to the condition of their country. Many soldiers also came after the war due to their unemployment by way of demobilization in El Salvador.⁸⁵

The suggested link, is between MS 13, FMLN, and El Salvador’s governmental soldiers and the legacy of violence which dates back to La Matanza in 1932. In the case of FMLN, El Salvador’s government soldiers, and MS 13, we are talking about violence perpetrated by the same person. Both governmental soldiers and members of FMLN immigrated to the United States. With the motivation for the earlier mentioned uprisings varying between participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency, it is not coincidental the same people who endured a violent history filled with repression formed a gang when repression in the United States continued. The Salvadoran immigrants were looking for a supportive group and the betterment of their people. They left their war torn country in

⁸¹ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 269.

⁸²Valdez, “*Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs*,” 25.

⁸³ Sonja Wolf, “Street Gangs of El Salvador,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, ed. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2011), 48.

⁸⁴ Carlos A. Poveda, Jr., “The Likelihood of Collaboration between Central American Transnational Gangs and Terrorist Organizations” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2007).

⁸⁵ Jose Luis Rocha, “Street Gangs of Nicaragua,” trans. Michael Solis, in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, ed. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2011), 111.

search of a better future and were not going to allow themselves to be oppressed, as they were by the Salvadoran government. The violence displayed by MS 13 stems from the deep roots of violence the founders and their predecessors experienced in El Salvador.

Economically, the Salvadoran immigrants were stuck in the poverty-ridden areas of L.A. that provided little opportunity when put up against the Mexican immigrants who also occupied the area. Politically, the Salvadoran immigrants had no legal backing due to the United States funding the war that caused their immigration. Only two percent of immigrants who arrived in the first five years of the war were granted refugee status, the rest of the request were denied.⁸⁶

With more than a million Salvadorans immigrating to the United States, it is understood, that not all demobilized combatants became gang members in the United States. One can only speculate as to what other combatants have done in the United States. However, it is certain not all joined MS 13. Those who did had a violent history, which made them dangerous enough to become America's most dangerous gang in a short period of time.

This chapter discussed the legacy of violence that preceded and birthed the founding members of MS 13. The legacy of violence began in 1932 and even now shows no sign of slowing. Today, El Salvador is notorious for the level of violence in the country. The homicide rate suggests the legacy of violence that produced the originating members of MS 13 continues. In 2014, El Salvador had 3,192 homicides (8.74 per day)—up 57% from the homicide rate, the now collapsed gang truce between MS 13 and their rival *Calle 18*, netted in 2013.⁸⁷ In just the first six days of 2015, El Salvador experienced 90 homicides, or 15 per day.⁸⁸ That rate grew to 16 homicides per day with 677 murders

⁸⁶ Garland, *Gangs in Garden City*, 56.

⁸⁷ Kyra Gurney, "El Salvador Homicides Skyrocket after Gang Truce Unravels," *InSight Crime*, January 9, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/el-salvador-homicides-skyrocket-after-gang-truce-unravels>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

taking place in June alone.⁸⁹ The 677 murders in June is the highest amount of killing to take place in the country since the Civil War, leaving a total 2,965 Salvadoran's dead within the first six months of 2015.⁹⁰

The legacy of violence thus continues in El Salvador, as does the gang problem, which includes MS 13. Since MS 13 continues to grow in the United States and El Salvador it is important to understand this violence translates to the growth of MS 13 both in El Salvador and the United States. Since their inception, MS 13 has grown exponentially. The following chapter will detail the pattern of their overall growth. Additionally, the role of the U.S. policy, demographics, and media vis-à-vis expansion of the MS 13 network will be discussed.

⁸⁹ Matt Rocheleau, "This Is How Bad El Salvador's Murder Rate Is," *Boston Globe*, July 9, 2015, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/07/09/salvador-murder-rate-skyrockets/RnCTlaZILn10qLJuIvZ9pL/story.html>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

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III. ESTABLISHMENT AND EXPANSION OF THE MARA SALVATRUCHA NETWORK

Founded in the barrios of Los Angeles in the 1980s, Mara Salvatrucha started as a small group of Salvadoran immigrants grouped together for protection from the Mexican immigrants, who inhabited the same barrios. It is reasonable to believe that the founders of what is known today as MS 13 would have never imagined having 70,000 members.⁹¹ The gang is also the first street gang to be named a transnational criminal organization. On October 11, 2012, MS 13 became the first street gang designated as a transnational criminal organization by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.⁹² The logical question is how did this happen? How could a street gang grow a network large enough to warrant the attention of the federal government? This chapter looks to answer that question and will argue that in L.A., Central America, and DC-U.S. policy, demographics, and the media are the three factors that enabled the horizontal and vertical integration (domestic and transnational growth) of the MS 13 Network.

Each of the following sections will discuss how U.S. policy impacted the expansion of MS 13. U.S. domestic and foreign policies had a major effect on the gang's network—specifically, the policies that aided MS 13's growth in L.A., Central America, and Washington, DC. Additionally, each section will discuss how the favorable demographics of the areas where the gang flourished enlarged MS 13's network. Specifically, the socio-economic disparity characterizing each location will be discussed. Finally, the role of the media though the CNN effect will be discussed—specifically, how the CNN effect further influenced policy, which inadvertently helped expand the gang's network in each location, resulting in with the first street gang to be categorized as a transnational criminal organization.

⁹¹ InSight Crime, "Mara Salvatrucha MS13 Profile," accessed May 2, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/mara-salvatrucha-ms-13-profile>.

⁹² Quinones, Blankstein, and Ryan, "Southern California—This Just In."

A. ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH IN LOS ANGELES

MS 13 was formed during the 1980s by Salvadorans who immigrated prior to and during the Salvadoran Civil War.”⁹³ More than one million Salvadorians fled their country during the Civil War, heading to the United States.⁹⁴ Most of these immigrants landed in the “already impoverished, over crowded, and gang-affected neighborhoods of East and South Central Los Angeles,” while others went to the greater Washington, DC region.⁹⁵ In the gang-infested neighborhoods in L.A., the Salvadorans faced constant persecution by the African American and Mexican American gangs. Some Salvadoran immigrants were experienced combat vets, fighting for either the FMLN or the government.⁹⁶ The end of the war led to a massive demobilization of the military in El Salvador, leaving many of Salvador’s combat veterans with no livelihood and with immigration as a rational choice.⁹⁷

Two ingredients placed the Salvadorans in a tough spot: U.S. policy and demographics. Demobilization after the Civil War encouraged hardened veterans to immigrate to the United States out of desperation brought on by the political and economic conditions in El Salvador. It is not coincidental that the same people who endured a violent history filled with repression formed a gang when repression in the United States continued. Salvadorans faced isolation on all fronts upon arrival to L.A. Landing in the poverty-ridden areas of L.A., Salvadorans faced a lack of opportunities for employment. Additionally, they could not seek social aid to help cope with their poverty since the U.S. was funding the governmental side of El Salvador’s Civil War that caused their immigration. Many who arrived in the first five years attempted to become citizens. Only two percent of those who took the legal route to citizenship were granted refugee

⁹³ Sonja Wolf, “Mara Salvatrucha: The Most Dangerous Street Gang in the Americas?” *Latin American Politics and Society* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 65, doi: 10.1111/j.1548-2456.2012.00143.x.

⁹⁴ Valdez, “*Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs*,” 25.

⁹⁵ Wolf, “Street Gangs of El Salvador,” 48.

⁹⁶ Poveda, *Likelihood of Collaboration*.

⁹⁷ Rocha, “Street Gangs of Nicaragua,” 111.

status.⁹⁸ The low acceptance rate left 98% of the immigrants who were looking to do the right thing as immigrants with no legal rights—and the Mara Salvatrucha gang was born.

Before Mara Salvatrucha 13 was known as MS 13, the gang was known as MSS or Mara Salvatrucha Stoners. Stoners would later fall off, leaving the gang to be known as Mara Salvatrucha. In 1993, MS saw the benefit of alliances and became MS 13 after forging an alliance with the Mexican Mafia or “*La Eme*” as it is known in places it dominates.⁹⁹ The number 13 is a reference to the letter “m,” which is the thirteenth letter in the alphabet and the first letter in Mexican and Mafia. Affiliation with the Mexican Mafia was the first expansion of the MS 13 network. Affiliation led to alliances with prominent gangs in L.A., which helped further establish and expand MS 13. The Mexican Mafia runs street-level operations in Southern California. Use of the number 13 affirmed the alliance between MS 13, La Eme, and the Sureño network. The Sureño network includes street gangs loyal to the Mexican Mafia in Southern California.¹⁰⁰ That same year, MS 13 was suspected to be committing crimes, which included trafficking drugs, extortion, robbery, and murder.¹⁰¹ While growing, MS 13 was a small part of the bigger gang war that was consuming the city of L.A. throughout the rocky 1990s; however, the police reaction to the gang problem only led to MS 13’s growth.

Municipal policies in L.A. combined with aggressive U.S. immigration policy led to a reaction against the increased gang activity within L.A., placing street gang members into deportation proceedings during the early 1990s. The United States had strict deportation policies, and in L.A., through the cooperation of LAPD and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now known as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the number of MS 13 members being deported was high.¹⁰² Moreover, the Three Strike Law of 1994, while not a deportation centered effort, was

⁹⁸ Garland, *Gangs in Garden City*, 56.

⁹⁹ Valdez, “*Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs*,” 30.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Mary Helen Johnson, “National Policies and the Rise of Transnational Gangs,” *Migration Policy Institute*, April, 1, 2006, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/national-policies-and-rise-transnational-gangs>.

intended to “keep murders, rapists, and child molesters behind bars, where they belong.”¹⁰³ MS13 and other Sureños found themselves in some of the targeted categories. In 1996, the federal government introduced legislation targeted at MS 13 by way of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IRIRA).¹⁰⁴ The IRIRA made felonies of what used to be considered misdemeanors, criminalizing nonviolent actions that were previously menial- like petty theft.¹⁰⁵ The criminalization of minor infractions made illegal and legal immigrants easy targets for law enforcement officials who were looking for a reason to deport them.

By 1996, the Civil War in El Salvador ended and the United States favored deportation as the solution to the perceived imported problem of MS 13.¹⁰⁶ Between 1996 and 2004, the annual number of deported Central Americans tripled from 8,057 to 24,285, respectively.¹⁰⁷ Along with deportations, another factor that compounded the growth was the thousands of gang members released after being arrested in the early 1990s and serving their sentences.¹⁰⁸ Some of these released MS 13 members were deported upon release, but others fed back into their communities in L.A..¹⁰⁹ MS 13 gang members, who experienced the prison system were released back out on the streets. The danger associated with the release of these gang members comes from the networking experience gained from prison gangs that run multiple street-level gangs.

U.S. policy, which helped fund the government side of the Salvadoran Civil War abroad and domestically, used deportations as a method of dealing with MS 13 gang members created a balloon effect. The law enforcement squeeze that took place in L.A.

¹⁰³ Stanford Law School, “Three Strike Basics,” *Three Strikes Project*, accessed March 10, 2015, <https://www.law.stanford.edu/organizations/programs-and-centers/stanford-three-strikes-project/three-strikes-basics>.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, “National Policies.”

¹⁰⁵ Brian Brown and Greg Jolivet, “A Primer: Three Strikes - The Impact After More Than a Decade,” Legislative Analyst’s Office, October 2005, http://www.lao.ca.gov/2005/3_strikes/3_strikes_102005.htm.

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, “Mara Salvatrucha: Most Dangerous,” 71.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, “National Policies.”

¹⁰⁸ Logan and Morse, “MS-13 Organization & U.S. Response.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

caused an inflation of gang members arriving in Central America. The U.S. - sponsored one way trips for gang members, served as a network expansion for MS 13. Immigration figures of the mid-1990s show that “40,000 criminal illegal immigrants — some of whom were experienced, U.S.-’trained” gang members—were repatriated to Central America annually.¹¹⁰ A direct result of the mass repatriation of these previously convicted immigrants was that “Central American countries experienced an unprecedented growth of street gangs and violence” during that period.¹¹¹ It is important to remember that the increased street gang violence of the mid 1990s was more of a continuation of violence that was present during the Civil War, which ended in 1992.

The Civil War left El Salvadorans reeling from their traumatic experiences. Directly after the war, the country had little to offer those who survived in terms of employment much less the influx of repatriated Salvadorans. The Salvadorans who were repatriated faced a similar atmosphere vis-à-vis demographics that they found in L.A. The unemployment rate in El Salvador reached 7.97 in 1996—the highest ever—after the influx of repatriated Salvadorans arrived from L.A.¹¹² The effects of U.S. immigration policy thus played a significant role in the network expansion of the MS 13 from L.A. to Central America. By placing repatriated gang members in the unfavorable demographics of a country that just endured a Civil War, the MS 13 network was able to grow exponentially. The glaring absence in the initial expansion of MS 13 was the media coverage present during the further expansion of the gang.

The media was not as prevalent in their coverage of MS 13 during the 1990s, they were more focused on the bigger systemic gang problem that engulfed Los Angeles. L.A. represents an interesting case of the CNN effect due to the amount of gang activity consuming the area during the late 1980s and 90s. The influence of the media was indirect and geared towards the bigger immigration and gang issues. The bigger deal in the media was Rodney King and L.A.’s reaction to his beating. Due to the consuming

¹¹⁰ Valdez, “Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs,” 30.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Trading Economics, “El Salvador Unemployment Rate 1996–2012,” accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/el-salvador/unemployment-rate>.

nature of the riots in 1992 and all the other gang activity, the anti-gang effort vis-à-vis MS 13 was relatively minor. A search in “Nexis” shows that from 1990–94 there were only four news stories that covered “Mara Salvatrucha.”¹¹³ Media coverage focused more on the overall gang problem and not the mass MS 13 deportations taking place. When the immigration reform legislation took effect in 1996 only 17 items of news media were about “Mara Salvatrucha.”¹¹⁴

In terms of media coverage the CNN effect focused on the overall gang problem. Violent images of gangs led the public to push for tough anti-gang policy. Policy arrived in the form of the three strikes legislation and the immigration reform act of 1996 previously mentioned. Three strikes legislation made it mandatory for any criminal charged with more than one individual felony would serve double time for the second and 25 years to life for the third. These policies were not MS 13 centric even though the effects led to the growth of MS 13 through the deportation of MS 13 members to Central America. While the gang violence consuming L.A. led to an anti-gang uproar, the CNN effect had unforeseen consequences as those very anti-gang policies led to more gangs—both in L.A. and in Central America.

B. CENTRAL AMERICA

Of all three sections in this chapter, Central America can attribute the majority of the growth of MS 13’s to U.S. policy. As the deportations continued, Central American countries experienced an unprecedented growth of street gangs and violence.¹¹⁵ The deportations of MS 13 members allowed for American-influenced gang members and newly found gang practices to infiltrate a war torn country. MS 13 did not represent the first gangs of El Salvador, street gangs were present there as early as 1963.¹¹⁶ MS 13 members did introduce a more structured, violent, identifiable gang for which adult

¹¹³ Nexis, “Search Results: Mara Salvatrucha 1990–94,” accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.nexis.com/search/homesubmitForm.do#0||BOOLEAN||search.common.threshold.narrowrange>.

¹¹⁴ Nexis, “Search Results: Mara Salvatrucha 1996,” accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.nexis.com/search/homesubmitForm.do#0||BOOLEAN||search.common.threshold.narrowrange>.

¹¹⁵ Valdez, “Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs,” 30.

¹¹⁶ Wolf, “Street Gangs of El Salvador,” 45.

responsibilities did not qualify as a reason for separation.¹¹⁷ Membership into MS 13 meant a lifelong commitment.

MS 13 was established in San Salvador by 1992, by way of “*clicas* (cliques, cells, or groups) deported from the United States and replacing earlier, less violent, and less sophisticated gangs.”¹¹⁸ Once established in El Salvador, gang members then immigrate back to the United States causing what Jose Miguel Cruz called the Boomerang effect; many times reentry of MS 13 members is paid for by the various trafficking businesses.¹¹⁹ Deportations along with migration for work by El Salvadoran immigrants led to a large number of cliques being established around the United States and in Central America. These cliques of gang members identified with MS 13. Since the Civil war did not end all the violence, just like in L.A., “some youth joined gangs as a way to deal with the violence affecting their communities.”¹²⁰ U.S. immigration policy landed repatriated gangsters in areas prime for recruitment. The demographics of the areas gangsters returned to in El Salvador lacked options for security and economic survival outside of MS 13. Recruitment is easy when there are not many options available for employment and survival. MS 13 provided both protection from the continued violence and a means of employment for the poor in the areas they inhabited.¹²¹

The demographics of the repatriated gangsters who returned from the U.S. to El Salvador were favorable to the expansion of the MS 13 network. El Salvador as a whole did not offer much in the way of employment nor protection from the growing gang problem.¹²² Repatriated Salvadorans were poor, as were those whom welcomed them home in El Salvador. With little else to provide a steady income, the market for recruits was expanding by the planeload in El Salvador. MS 13 represented a way out for many

¹¹⁷ Wolf, “Street Gangs of El Salvador,” 45.

¹¹⁸ Thomas C. Bruneau, “The Maras and National Security in Central America,” *Strategic Insights* 6, no. 5 (May 2005), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/11121>.

¹¹⁹ Valdez, “Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs,” 39.

¹²⁰ José Miguel Cruz, “Beyond Social Remittances: Migration and Transnational Gangs in Central America,” in *How Immigrants Impact Their Homelands* ed. Susan Eckstein and Adil Najam (NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2013), 227.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Trading Economics, “El Salvador Unemployment Rate 1996–2012.”

who idolized the new culture that the American influenced gang members brought with them. Poor Salvadorans faced a life filled with the possibility of violence and extreme poverty. MS 13 represented a safety net to rely on for protection from the violence and a potential to escape poverty through illicit activity.

By the early 21st century, the upswing of criminals coming courtesy of U.S. foreign policy led to pressure in solving the gang pandemic that originated in L.A. and was now in Central America. Many gang members, some of whom grew up in the states, were sent to Central America causing an emergence of MS 13 clicas that mimicked southern California Chicano Gangs.¹²³ MS 13 had a solid foothold in L.A. and was establishing one in Central America. Central America's reaction to MS 13 was a U.S. backed policy named *Mano Dura*. The U.S. worked with the Nationalist Republican Alliance Governments (ARENA) of the 1990–2000s and saw them as a reliable ally.¹²⁴ ARENA's aggressive, law enforcement centered approach to dealing with gangs would prove to be an abusive policy.¹²⁵ *Mano Dura* "favored area sweeps and mass detentions, while Honduras and El Salvador also adopted anti-gang legislation that sanctioned the arrest and prosecution of suspected gang members for their physical appearance alone."¹²⁶ As the push to quell gang violence in El Salvador grew politicians began to capitalize on the public fear. Additionally, Central American Media provided the public with a definition for MS 13's physical appearance and pushed for *Mano Dura* as the solution for the problem.

Central America presents a clear case of the CNN effect. Sonja Wolf identified the CNN effect in Central America, saying, "media depictions influence citizen views of crime and narrow the choice of policy options people are inclined to support."¹²⁷ The

¹²³ José Miguel Cruz and Nelson Portillo Peña, *Solidaridad y Violencia en Las Pandillas del Gran San Salvador: Mas Alla de la Vida Loca (Solidarity and Gang Violence of Greater San Salvador: Beyond the Vida Loca)* (San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA, 1998).

¹²⁴ Clare Ribando Seelke, *El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43616) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 8, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43616.pdf>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Wolf, "Mara Salvatrucha: Most Dangerous," 72.

¹²⁷ Sonja Wolf, "Creating Folk Devils: Street Gang Representations in El Salvador Print Media," *Journal of Human Security* 8, no. 2 (2012): 39.

media engaged in some strategic communication on behalf of the elite, influencing the masses toward a favorable sentiment to fulfill the mission of the elite and pass Mano Dura legislation. The media used dehumanizing lexicon consistent with the description of MS 13 as animals, allowing the government to be the hunters of those animals.¹²⁸ Wolf identifies some key issues concerning the bias current media has in favor of the rich indicating that objective media reporting simply cannot afford to report.¹²⁹ She argues that the media simply ignored the community aspect of reporting on the gangs instead focusing on the criminal, savage aspects associated with the gang.¹³⁰

The media engaged in some strategic communication on behalf of the elite, influencing the masses toward a favorable sentiment to fulfill the mission of the elite and pass Mano Dura legislation. The Central American CNN effect caused unforeseen consequences that ultimately led to a stronghold formed in the prisons of Central America. The media's portrayal of the good being the politicians and the bad security threat being MS 13 led, to the implementation of Mano Dura by President Francisco Flores in 2003.¹³¹ Mano Dura helped create a stronghold of MS 13 in Central America through the mass incarcerations and adaptations to the policy itself. The transformation of MS 13 in response to Mano Dura policy was one of the unforeseen consequence. In an effort to avoid detection and subsequent incarceration under Mano Dura policies, MS 13 instituted a toughening of entry requirements, a restriction on the consumption of drugs, an increase in the use of firearms, a reduction in visible tattoos, encouragement to disperse in the region, and making the MS 13 prisons the command centers.¹³² The aggressive approach by ARENA in El Salvador led to a united, stronger MS13 network, which now had motivation to stick together in the prisons and in society as they were being targeted by the strict Mano Dura policies.

¹²⁸ Wolf, "Creating Folk Devils," 47.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47–52.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³² Wolf, "Mara Salvatrucha: Most Dangerous," 72–73.

In Central America, the consequences of U.S. immigration policy, demographics, and the CNN effect all aided the expansion of the MS 13 network. Like L.A., Central America presented favorable demographics for the expansion of the MS 13 network. After U.S. policy landed repatriated gang members in recruitment friendly demographics, the gang grew quickly. Media portrayal of the gang as animals, aided in uniting the gang for self-preservation and led to practices which attempt to make the affiliation of individual members ambiguous to police. While not as extreme as the war torn Central America, the further expansion of the MS 13's network due to policy, demographics and CNN effect can also be seen in the DC region.

C. WASHINGTON, DC, REGION

Starting with demographics, according to the 2010 census, 1.7 million Salvadoran's can be found in the United States—most being in Los Angeles and the Washington, DC region.¹³³ The consistent growth of the Hispanic community in DC presents interesting facts about the growth of MS 13. Connie McGuire uses U.S. census data to depict the demographics of DC highlighting the 19.4 rise in the Hispanic population from 2000–03.¹³⁴ Further she notes that DC and inner counties there have neighborhoods that are 30–50 percent Hispanic, with half of the people in DC being from Central America and 31 percent from El Salvador.¹³⁵

Presented with a different scene, the Salvadoran immigrants that arrived in DC did not have to contest with a large Mexican population like that of L.A. McGuire discusses how unreliable statistics and extensive media attention increase the difficulty of accurately assessing the presence of Central American gangs in the DC area. Additionally, the anti-immigration sentiment that took hold in DC after 9/11 further influenced the hostility towards MS 13'. The irony in this is that McGuire says the Bloods and Crips were more of a threat in the area than MS 13. DC was known as the

¹³³ Cruz, "Beyond Social Remittances," 217.

¹³⁴ Rose Ann M. Renteria, "A Vibrant Latino Presence in Washington, DC," *Footnotes*, May-June 2000, <http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/mayjune00/washington.html>, in Connie McGuire, "Working Paper on Central American Youth Gangs in the Washington, DC, Area," (working paper, Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, DC, 2007), 6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

murder capital of the United States from the 1980s to the 1990s, accounting for over 500 murders a year.¹³⁶ McGuire asserts, “while there are cases of Central American gangs attacking random citizens, the overwhelming majority of their crimes are perpetuated against rival gangs, or against other Latinos in their communities.”¹³⁷ Yet, DC, after the Brenda Paz murder, was the place most policy against MS 13 originated.

The Brenda Paz case serves as the best example of the CNN effect in the U.S. as most anti-gang policies originated after this trial took place. The effect of U.S. policy on MS 13 in DC was substantial after the murder of Brenda Paz. Brenda was a 17-year-old Salvadorian born gangster turned informant who was killed while seven months pregnant the morning after spending the night with her killer. The weapon of Choice—a machete. The murder took place in 2003. The trial for her murder took place in 2005.

Coincidentally, 2005 marked the beginning of the onslaught of anti-gang policy aimed at MS 13. That year alone, the FBI formed a task force targeting MS 13, the National Gang Intelligence center was created, and Operation Community Shield was implemented by Immigration and Customs Enforcement; enabling ICE officers to work with foreign official to prosecute transnational street gangs, or MS 13. The following year, (2006) the FBI named MS 13 the most dangerous street gang in America.¹³⁸ In 2012, MS 13 became the first street gang to be named a transnational criminal organization.¹³⁹

The Murder of Brenda Paz was horrific. However, gruesome murders happen, what doesn’t normally happen is a federal level reaction to a problem that has a street gang capacity. The media continued to portray a glamorized version of MS 13 since the Brenda Paz trial in 2005. Coverage of her actual murder was not at all sensational. From January 2003 through January 2005 “Nexis” indicates there were 372 items of news

¹³⁶ Pan American Health Organization, “Statistics on Homicides, Suicides, Accidents, Injuries, and Attitudes towards Violence,” n.d. in McGuire, “Working Paper on Central American youth gangs,” 7.

¹³⁷ McGuire, “Working Paper on Central American Youth Gangs,” 29.

¹³⁸ Logan and Morse, “MS-13 Organization & U.S. Response.”

¹³⁹ Quinones, Blankstein, and Ryan, “Southern California—This Just In.”

pertaining to MS 13 with 172 sources reporting.¹⁴⁰ Per “Nexis,” 2005 had four times more items of news with 2138 and 192 different source reporting.¹⁴¹ Media coverage during the trial assessed MS 13 as a transnational gang that was worthy of national attention—which it got. However, the accuracy of the assessment is questionable.

The language used to describe the gang is very different in L.A. where it originated and in DC where the murder of Brenda Paz occurred. A reading of the *L.A. Times* blog conveys a very different description of MS 13 than the Department of the Treasury’s press release. The *L.A. Times* blog is titled, “In a first, U.S. labels MS 13 street gang Criminal Organization.”¹⁴² The Department of the Treasury’s press release is titled “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization.”¹⁴³ The title gives insight into framing by the media to influence the reader in a manner only the media can. Instead of recognizing that MS 13 originated in L.A. and only expanded after one-way trips to El Salvador were provided for incarcerated gang members in accordance with U.S. policy; MS 13 is described as a Latin American Criminal organization. When the media influences the public, pushing the public to press the government for particular policy—this is when the CNN effect takes place.

The effect of MS 13 media coverage is proven to be significant when one looks at the policy enacted after 2005. In 2005 Coverage of MS 13 exceeded any years prior and has exceeded every year since. Scholars such as Sonja Wolf and Connie McGuire highlight the sensationalization of MS 13 by the media. The media picked a target and convinced the people, including members of Congress who reside in the area that MS 13 was the most dangerous gang in the country. The rise in coverage of MS 13 in the DC region brought up a subject that previously could not be found on the agenda of

¹⁴⁰ Nexis, “Search Results: MS 13 1996 January 2003–January 2005,” accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.nexis.com/search/homesubmitForm.do#0||BOOLEAN||search.common.threshold.off>.

¹⁴¹ Nexis, “Search Results: MS 13 2005,” accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.nexis.com/search/homesubmitForm.do#0||BOOLEAN||search.common.threshold.narrowrange>.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization,” news release, October 11, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.

Congress.¹⁴⁴ McGuire points out, the murder rate in 2005 DC was not even half of what it was in 1991; prior to MS 13's presence. It is hard to dismiss the role the media had in the growth of MS 13. Even President Bush mentioned youth gangs in his 2005 State of the Union Address.¹⁴⁵ Since the Brenda Paz trial various documentaries have further continued the glamorization of the Gang. The most popular being a National Geographic documentary narrated by Lisa Ling entitled *MS 13: The World's Most Dangerous Gang*.

D. CONCLUSION

MS 13's network has grown substantially, especially in areas where a high concentration of Salvadoran immigrants contend with other Latin American immigrants. However, not all the growth has been due to organic strategy. U.S. Policy, demographics, and the CNN effect have all contributed to the growth of MS 13. Without domestic policy pushing MS 13 members to El Salvador, their growth may have never reached the level it has today. Further, without U.S. backed policies like Mano Dura that mimic our own law enforcement centric policies, the gang may have never been able to organize itself the way it has. Lastly, for every documentary produced there are MS 13 members ready to talk about their gang activities. MS 13 has capitalized on its glamorization and taken to social media and YouTube to communicate with sympathizers, using both music and videos. In fact, a simple "MS 13" search on YouTube returns over a million hits.¹⁴⁶ It is unlikely that a gang would dedicate the time necessary to produce music and videos without receiving an incentive—in this case growth. The 2013 National gang report provided by the National Gang Intelligence Center states that MS 13 has partnerships with *Los Zetas* Cartel, Gulf Cartel, *Sinaloa* cartel, and *La Familia Michoacana* cartel.¹⁴⁷ In 2014, MS 13 expanded its network across the United States by becoming active in forty-two states and the District of Columbia.¹⁴⁸ Since their establishment in L.A., MS 13

¹⁴⁴ McGuire, "Working Paper on Central American Youth Gangs," 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴⁶ YouTube, "Search Results: MS 13," accessed March 19, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=MS+13.

¹⁴⁷ National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report*.

¹⁴⁸ Sullivan and Logan, "MS -13 Leadership."

has been able to recruit ten thousand members nationwide and has received a lot of attention due to their portrayal in the media.¹⁴⁹ Coverage offers exposure, and one must question if the media's glamorization deters or promotes a potential gang member to join the MS 13 Ranks? Having grown up in gang-infested neighborhoods, the author suggests exposure only helps recruitment efforts.

MS 13 shows no sign of slowing the expansion of their network. However, in order for an accurate response to the growing MS 13 threat, an accurate depiction of the gang must be presented. Sensationalization will only lead to more growth as the Latin demographic mentioned by both Sonja Wolf and Connie McGuire is growing in the United States. Illegal immigration is a hot button issue today as it was when MS 13 was established. The anti-immigration sentiment after 9/11 may have caused isolation of the Hispanic population, leading to the growth of MS 13. Furthermore, it is evident that the media's portrayal of gangs has not been to the benefit of society. U.S. policies that stemmed from events in L.A., Central America, and DC such as the Illegal Immigration reform, *Mano Dura*, and MS 13 being named a transnational criminal organization, all worked to unite and grow the MS 13 brand. Today, clicas all over the United States take pride in being part of the bigger MS 13 network that has a national presence. The brutal images displayed in most stories have generated the perception of MS 13 as the most dangerous gang in America. While the brutal representation of the gangs can be beneficial in helping to "focus attention on the problem, these benefits do not outweighing the cost of glamorization."¹⁵⁰ After all, glamorization and policies driven by the CNN effect in the United States and Central America led to the first transnational street gang.

The background this chapter provides on the horizontal and vertical expansion of the MS 13 network by way of U.S. Policy, demographics, and the CNN effect will be helpful in analyzing the level of threat MS 13's current criminal network presents to the state of Texas. An analysis of MS 13's networks within Texas will be followed by recommendations for action based off the actions of L.A., Central America, and DC region.

¹⁴⁹ National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report*.

¹⁵⁰ McGuire, "Working Paper on Central American Youth Gangs," 29.

IV. TEXAS

Building from the data provided in the previous three chapters, this chapter will combine relevant data from established strongholds to define the MS 13 network, highlighting its presence in cities across the State of Texas. The horizontal relationships of the gang within the state will be discussed as will the current vertical transnational relationships. Additionally, the relevance of highway corridors to horizontal and vertical relationships of the gang will be addressed. Details of these relationships will provide an accurate account of the networks currently utilized by MS 13 in Texas. Potential expansion on both the horizontal and vertical levels will be discussed using data pertaining to known associates of the gang. New street gangs and transnational cartels will be introduced to represent the horizontal and vertical integration being used for this expansion. Moreover, U.S. immigration policy, demographics, and the CNN effect visible in L.A., Central America, and the DC region will be discussed as applicable to Texas. All three topics continue to be relevant to the horizontal and vertical integration of the MS 13 Network.

The process to be used in defining the Texas Network of MS 13 will consist of three distinct sections. Section one will discuss known horizontal integration by using information gathered throughout the FBI's use of Brenda Paz and other open source reporting. Section two will discuss the vertical integration of the gang by using its known relationships with transnational cartels. Once MS 13's horizontal and vertical integration/network expansion in Texas is identified, section three will provide an explanation of the role highway corridors play in its expansion and analyze the threat the defined networks present to the state. Like the previous chapters, the expansion of MS 13's network will be viewed through the lens of U.S. policy, demographics and CNN effect with a concentration on the effect each had on growth. Additionally, proximity vis-à-vis transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), the border, and South and West, Texas will be addressed to discuss MS 13's network expansion.

Proximity is an important factor as Mexico is in a well-documented Narco-war and has been for some time. Cartels such as *Los Zetas*, *Gulf*, *Sinaloa*, and *La Familia*

Michoacán are all based in Mexico and have a known presence in Texas.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, with *La Bestia* presenting a well-known transit option for immigrants fleeing the violence of the Central American narco-war and criminals alike, Texas' significance in the bigger picture of transnational criminality needs to be addressed.

A. HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION OF MS 13'S NETWORK

The horizontal integration of MS 13 is made clear throughout the interviews provided by Brenda Paz after her arrest. In Samuel Logan's *This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha*, Logan uses Paz's FBI interviews to show how Brenda first encountered the gang in Texas.¹⁵² The beginning of Logan's book is focused on Carrollton, Texas, a suburb of Dallas where Brenda joined MS 13. Houston is also included in the book as is the bigger network that the Texas cliques have access to.¹⁵³ When speaking to detectives about the movement of girls who work for MS 13, Paz details how the network Texas is included in reaches Colorado, Virginia, Idaho, Las Vegas, L.A., Oklahoma, and North Carolina.¹⁵⁴ It is important to note that this information originates from a female member of a small clique that is based outside Dallas. There are much larger cliques throughout the state that may have more knowledge of MS 13' activity in Texas.

Figure 1, was generated by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) depicting the current MS 13 presence within the state.

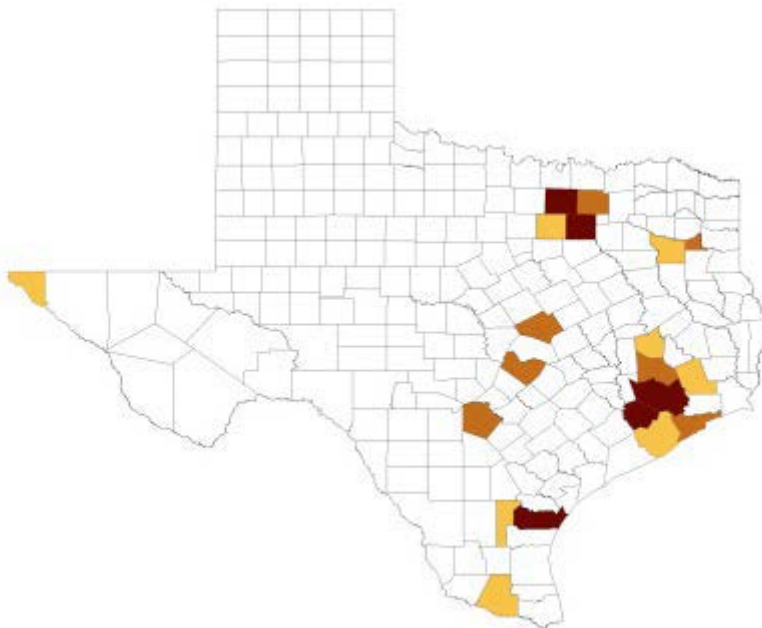
¹⁵¹ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013*, 14.

¹⁵² Samuel Logan, *This is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang* (New York: Hyperion, 2009), 92.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

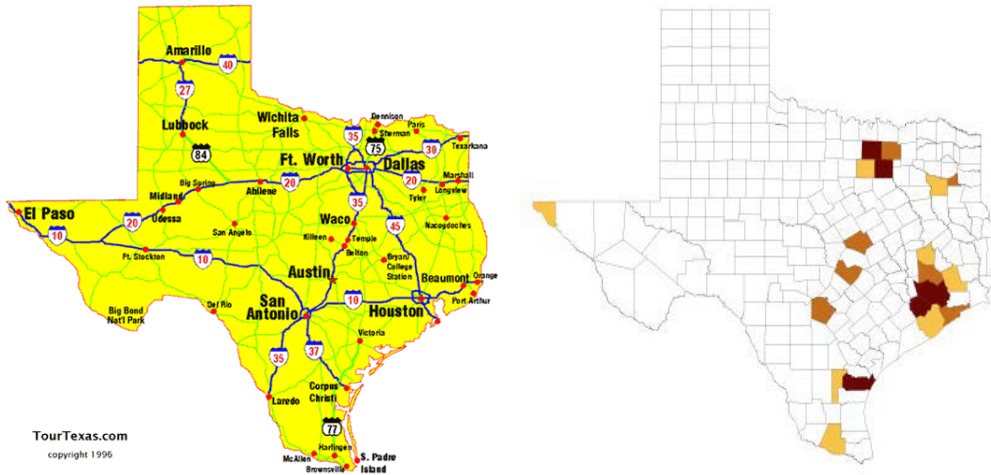
Figure 1. Tier 2: Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13)



From Texas Department of Public Safety, “Tier 2: Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13),” image, *Gang Threat Assessment* (Austin, TX: Texas Department of Public Safety, 2014), 33, http://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2014/txGangThreatAssessment.pdf.

Figure 1 shows there are high levels of MS 13 gang activity in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, Corpus Christi, El Paso, and San Antonio. The darkest areas represent the highest level of activity. On this map, the darkest areas are in the Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Corpus Christi areas. Figure 2, allows for a comparison of the major interstates in Texas and MS 13 activity.

Figure 2. Side-by-side comparison of the major highways/interstates in Texas and MS 13 activity



Map on left is from TourTexas.com, “Texas Maps: Major Texas Highways/Interstates,” image, 1996, http://www.tourtexas.com/texas_maps_highways.cfm, map on right is from Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, (Austin, TX: Texas Department of Public Safety, 2014), 33, http://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2014/txGangThreatAssessment.pdf.

Figure 2 suggest that MS 13’s activity is centered on areas that offer major corridors to get in and out. In particular, the Interstate Highways (IHs) 10 and 35 routes, which run from El Paso to Houston and the Rio Grande Valley to Dallas, respectively, seem to have the most activity. IH-10 has activity in El Paso, San Antonio, and Houston. IH-35 has activity in Laredo, San Antonio, and Dallas. Corpus Christi, a highly active MS 13 city, is the only active city along IH-37. However, IH-37 is a direct route from Corpus Christi to San Antonio, which has both IH-10 and IH-35 within the city. This allows San Antonio to be the biggest city that is not at the highest level of activity and the link between all of the current cities with the highest level of activity. This is good news for MS 13 and bad news for law enforcement because San Antonio’s ZIP codes with the highest level of poverty are in the predominantly Hispanic inner west and south side of the city.¹⁵⁵ With poverty being the highest in these areas, the demographics are favorable

¹⁵⁵ Tyler White, “San Antonio’s High-poverty ZIP Codes Fall Closer to Downtown, South Bexar County,” *mySA*, December 29, 2014, <http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/San-Antonio-s-high-poverty-ZIP-codes-fall-5980210.php#photo-7317370>.

for MS 13 recruitment. Demographics of every area where MS 13 is active are worthy of review.

The demographics of both El Paso and San Antonio show they have a larger Hispanic population than the three cities with the highest level of activity. El Paso is the sixth largest city in Texas and has an eighty-nine percent Hispanic population. San Antonio is the second largest city in Texas and has a sixty-three percent Hispanic population. In comparison, both of these cities have a higher Hispanic population than the forty-nine percent of Los Angeles, where the gang originated.¹⁵⁶

There is a link between demographics and U.S. immigration policy in Texas. Once immigrants make it into the United States by way of Mexico, Texas is a landing spot for many. This is because, “the Texas-Mexico border makes up 1,254 miles of the 1,900-mile-long U.S.-Mexico border.”¹⁵⁷ The response to illegal immigration, at least since as early as 2006, has been militarization by way of an increased border patrol presence and the use of National Guard troops.¹⁵⁸ Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and Governor Rick Perry have ordered forces to the border to help quell illegal immigration.¹⁵⁹ Further, armed militias have taken it upon themselves to patrol the Texas- Mexico border to help prevent illegal immigration.¹⁶⁰

The militarization of the border may have unintended consequences on the immigrants who cross illegally and make it into Texas. The Border Patrol repeatedly reports that along with ordinary immigrants, criminals and gang members are also being apprehended. This is important because gang members who do not get caught have known networks in Texas that normally lie in poverty-ridden areas that offer little in the

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “State & County QuickFacts: Corpus Christi (city), Texas,” last modified July 8, 2014, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4817000.html>.

¹⁵⁷ *Texas Tribune*, “Tribpedia: Texas-Mexico Border,” accessed July 21, 2015, <http://www.texastribune.org/tribpedia/texas-mexico-border>.

¹⁵⁸ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, “Texas Gov. Rick Perry Says National Guard ‘Tip of Spear’ Guarding Border,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-perry-texas-guard-border-20140813-story.html>.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Russia Today*, “Armed Citizen Militias Build Up along US-Mexico Border,” last modified September 11, 2014, <http://www.rt.com/usa/186744-citizen-militia-texas-border>.

way of employment opportunities. Like the Salvadoran immigrants who landed in L.A., the ordinary immigrants of today are looking for a way to provide for their families. When MS 13 becomes an option, being an illegal immigrant becomes a secondary concern to the effects that gang membership will have on the individual and the surrounding community. Samuel Logan referred to MS 13 as being “as fluid as the labor market that attracted Latino immigrants. Wherever there was a Latino community, the MS burrowed in and thrived.”¹⁶¹ This is concerning when one thinks back to the CNN effect, which initially enabled MS 13 to grow. The immigrants come from Central America and the Rio Grande Valley is where the most are being apprehended.¹⁶² The Rio Grande Valley is a prime spot for expansion of MS 13 through its known alliances.

The alliances of MS 13 present a threat to the state as a whole in that network expansion is readily available. Shortly after organizing in Los Angeles, MS 13 began to build alliances. MS 13’s relationships with the Mexican Mafia and Sureño 13 are worth review since both are present in the state of Texas. The Texas Gang Threat Assessment of 2014 has the DPS dividing Texas into six regions. The division is done to provide an assessment of the most significant gangs in each region. Of the six regions, one and two include the larger cities of Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston, respectively—MS 13 has a significant presence in both regions.¹⁶³ The additional four regions have listed associates of MS 13, like Sureño 13, as having a significant presence in each of them.¹⁶⁴ With the Mexican Mafia having significant reach in Texas, as they do in California, the expected continuance of the alliance formed by both gangs would not be an unreasonable hypothesis. The number of Sureño 13 members leaving California and coming to Texas to avoid the Three Strikes Law continues to grow. El Paso has seen a significant increase in the amount of Sureño 13 members per the 2014 Texas Gang Threat Assessment. These Sureño 13 members have a familiarity to MS 13 that dates back to the early 1990s and could suggest an expansion of the MS 13 Network via the interstate corridors.

¹⁶¹ Logan, *This is for the Mara Salvatrucha*, 92.

¹⁶² Haeyoun Park, “Children at the Border,” *New York Times*, last modified October 21, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html>.

¹⁶³ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 18–19.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

B. VERTICAL INTEGRATION OF MS 13'S NETWORK

The transnational element of MS13 is a significant concern for the state of Texas. MS 13 currently has a partnership with various TCO's. The 2013 National Gang Report provided by the National Gang Intelligence Center has MS 13 in partnerships with *Los Zetas*, *Gulf*, *Sinaloa*, and *La Familia Michoacãñ* cartels.¹⁶⁵ All four cartels listed are actively operating in Texas.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, in Texas's three-tier rating of gangs, the most significant gang threats are considered to be a tier one threat. The tiers are constructed by analyzing eleven factors to determine an appropriate threat level associated with each gang.¹⁶⁷ MS 13 rose from a level-three to a level-two threat from 2012 to 2013.¹⁶⁸ This is significant when one considers that the weights used to calculate risk include "relationship with cartels, transnational criminal activity, level of criminal activity, level of violence, prevalence throughout Texas, relationships with other gangs, total strength, statewide organizational effectiveness, juvenile membership, threat to law enforcement, and involvement in human smuggling and trafficking."¹⁶⁹ Should MS 13 rise from a tier two to a tier one gang, its vertical integration will likely be a primary justification for the elevated risk. The DPS speaks to this transnational threat posed by MS 13 by saying,

The Mexican cartels are the most significant organized crime threat to Texas, with six of the eight cartels having command and control networks operating in the state and using it as a transshipment center for the movement of marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and people into and throughout Texas and the nation, and transporting bulk cash, weapons, and stolen vehicles back to Mexico.

The second most significant organized crime threat in Texas is the existence of state-wide prison gangs, many of whom now work directly with the Mexican cartels, gaining substantial profits from drug and human trafficking, including prostitution. Prison gangs operate within and outside of prison and are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent

¹⁶⁵ National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report*, 23.

¹⁶⁶ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

crime. With access to the large profits from drug and human trafficking, they are less dependent upon robberies, burglaries, and larcenies as a source of income.¹⁷⁰

With MS 13 having a documented reach of a TCO and being affiliated with the Mexican Mafia prison gang since its infancy, the risk of further vertical integration is real. Figure 3 details the “smuggling and trafficking routes into and through Texas.”¹⁷¹

Figure 3. Smuggling and traffic routes into and through Texas



From Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Public Safety Threat Overview,” Smuggling and Trafficking Routes Into and Through Texas,” (Austin, TX: Texas Department of Public Safety, 2013), 10, http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/director_staff/media_and_communications/threatOverview.pdf.

Figure 3, provides a vivid depiction of how Texas serves as the gateway for human smuggling and drug trafficking that originates from countries to the south. With

¹⁷⁰ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 2–3.

¹⁷¹ Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Public Safety Threat Overview (2013), 10. http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/director_staff/media_and_communications/threatOverview.pdf.

various cartels being active in Texas, it is important to identify the biggest threat to the state because the cartel that controls the majority of the border is likely the best option for MS 13's quest to vertically extend its network. Figure 4, provides insight into which cartels run the border regions of Texas.

Figure 4 shows that Zetas control the majority of the Southwest region of the border. The Sinaloa Cartel controls the eastern region of Texas, after overrunning the Juarez Cartel in Ciudad Juarez, which borders El Paso.¹⁷² The overtaking of Juarez also enabled the Sureño 13 gang, which is a close associate of MS 13 through their bond to the Mexican Mafia prison gang, to set up a working relationship with the Sinaloa Cartel.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 21.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Figure 4. Map of drug trafficking organization (DTO) areas of dominant influence in Mexico by Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)



From June S. Beittel, image, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Violence* "Map of DTO Areas of Dominant Influence by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (2013)," (CRS Report No. R41576) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41576.pdf>.

By being linked to other TCO's such as the Zetas and Sinaloa Cartels, MS 13 gains notoriety among aspiring gangsters. Media coverage of high profile cases including MS 13 are not hard to find. The continual display of violence being reported and shown on television creates a reputation that precedes MS 13. Additionally, the Zetas are an ultra-violent cartel and the relationship between MS 13 and Zetas extends well past Texas and Mexico. A congressional research service report from May of 2015 notes that, "drug-trafficking organizations, including Mexican groups such as Los Zetas, have increased their illicit activities in El Salvador, including money laundering, albeit to a lesser extent

than in Honduras and Guatemala.”¹⁷⁴ This places the TCO with the largest influence in South West Texas together in Texas, Mexico, and Central America.

Los Zetas of Mexico, commonly referred to as simply Zetas, were birthed as the muscle of Osiel Cárdenas Guillèn, a former head of the Gulf Cartel.¹⁷⁵ Stemming from a pre-existing relationship with his confidant Guzmàn Decena, a former lieutenant in the Mexican Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFES), Osiel birthed a security detail consisting of prior military Special Forces.¹⁷⁶ The ability of Osiel and his confidant to lure elite members of the military over stemmed from the low morale and unfavorable circumstances that encompassed military service in Mexico.¹⁷⁷ Unfavorable circumstances included but were not limited to “measly pay, long hours, deplorable food and housing, harsh and arbitrary discipline, and low morale; meanwhile, rank-and-file fighting men watched as senior officers used their position to steal from the government and integrate themselves with crime chiefs.”¹⁷⁸

The group did not limit itself to solely Mexican defectors of the military; Guatemalan defectors too joined to take advantage of the opportunity for advancement and compensation valued at “more than six times the amount they received from the military.”¹⁷⁹ The capabilities of Osiel’s security detail resulted in successes that led them to continually acquire new responsibilities. On top of providing security Los Zetas, the Zetas began to use their skills to keep trafficking lanes open, maintain order within the Gulf Cartel, and executed obstacles to the cartels success.¹⁸⁰ The Zetas working under Osiel were able to obtain support from various gangs by the late 90s one of which was

¹⁷⁴ Seelke, *El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations*, 8.

¹⁷⁵ George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan, *The Executioner’s Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State They Created* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2012), 3–5.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

the Mexican Mafia (La Eme).¹⁸¹ The growth and influence of the Zetas paralleled the rise in conflict between the feuding Sinaloa and Gulf cartel. When the feuding bosses realized their infighting was consuming their business of trafficking and called a truce, the Zeta leadership voted to accept the truce and separate from the Gulf cartel—using Osiel’s networks to establish the Zetas we know today.¹⁸²

While the Zetas are a Mexican Cartel, their influence is greatly linked to the prohibition of narcotics by the U.S. The U.S. war on drugs has used Mexico as a great stage for various failed policies. Policies such as the Mérida Initiative, which aim to enhance citizen security and target cartels and trafficking, have been far from successful. One of the main reasons for the failure is the lack of buy-in at all levels. Mexico has taken the law enforcement focused approach to dealing with their cartels and in turn they have prisons currently using preventative detention for suspects of organized crime—this leaves suspects incarcerated for up to 40 days void of legal counsel.¹⁸³ While U.S. backed policies like the Mérida Initiative have looked to correct this problem, it seems as if problems were accentuated with the funding that came from the United States. In addition to failed drug policies, non-related policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provided criminals with access to global systems for illicit activity.¹⁸⁴ The unintended consequences of NAFTA combined with a failed war on drugs created many issues for Mexico.

One of the major issues that has emerged is the internal level of corruption. It is true that corruption is no secret in Mexico. An example of the corruption within the prison system is seen when a vetting of police officer in late 2014 yielded 18,000 municipal and 20,000 state police failing their vetting exams.¹⁸⁵ Zetas can make use of this information and capitalize on the information exposed when corruption is trying to

¹⁸¹ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner’s Men*, 9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 17–19.

¹⁸³ Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin Finklea, *U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond* (CRS Report No. R41349) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 11–12, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner’s Men*, 12.

¹⁸⁵ Seelke and Finklea, *US-Mexican Security Cooperation*, 12.

be stomped out due to the overwhelming failure of such policies. Additionally, the incarceration of Zetas or even Zetitas (young Zetas) only further incorporates these members as in prison, being a Zeta is a form of security from all the other gangs and cartel members who are incarcerated. The growing prison size only lessens the security of each prisoner leaving illicit activity a stable environment to expand. The Zetas ability to capitalize on the prisons inability to thwart criminal activity was exposed through Osiel's ability to call shots after his incarceration.¹⁸⁶ In addition to using U.S. backed foreign policy and integral corruption to expand their brand, the Zetas have been able to systematically employ violence to gain influence and control of territories they want to claim.

The Zetas are no strangers to violence—violence is what made them who they are. As prior Special Forces military members the Zetas have an advantage in tactics and procedures to eliminate targets. Another ability that has proven to be beneficial to the Zetas is their member's ability to eliminating threats. Countless reportings of their violence can be found in the areas of Mexico and the United States that they occupy. Multiple images can be seen of the Zetas handy work, where they leave messages for feuding cartels on paper or bodies.¹⁸⁷ Violence has been at the core of the Zetas efforts and will continue to be as it is who they are. What more can one expect from special operators that multiple governments trained to execute enemies? While the level of violence exhibited by Zetas is consistently higher than that of MS13 both TCO's use violence as a means of communication. This was seen when these two organizations began to feud over a group of trains better known as *La Bestia*, which travels through Mexico and offers a method of transit for Central Americans looking to immigrate to the United States.

La Bestia is a Spanish nickname given to the trains that travel from the Guatemalan-Mexico border region to the Mexico-U.S. border region. The cargo trains have become a notorious choice for a large amount of immigrants looking to get out of Central America. Immigrants can choose to coordinate their own route or employ a

¹⁸⁶ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner's Men*, 12.

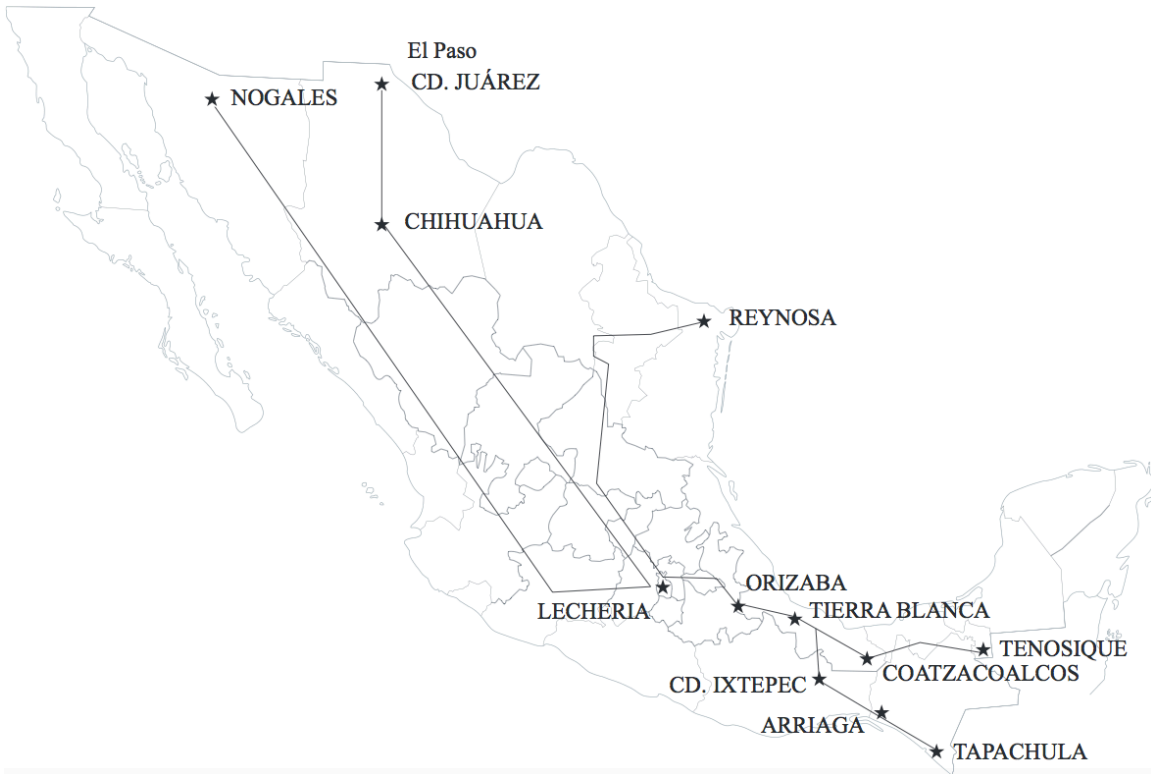
¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

smuggler who is familiar with available routes. MS 13 had exclusive control of the route until 2010 when the Zetas attempted to overtake what had proven to be a lucrative route for MS 13.¹⁸⁸ After each TCO murdered the other's men for a time period spanning several months; each TCO decided that half of the route was a fair compromise to stop the war that was going on resulting in "MS 13 taxing the Southern part of the route and the Zetas taxing the northern section."¹⁸⁹ This MS 13 joint venture poses a major risk to Texas due to the mutual presence of both of these TCO's in Central America, Mexico, and the United States. With various drop points along the border, and others outside of Texas, this Zeta-MS 13 vertical network poses a huge threat to the state of Texas. Figure 5, illustrates the routes the Zeta-MS 13 partnership dominates.

¹⁸⁸ Douglas Farah and Pamela Phillips Lum, *Central American Gangs and Transnational Criminal Organizations: The Changing Relationships in a Time of Turmoil*, International Assessment and Strategy Center, February 2013, 15, http://www.strategycenter.net/docLib/20130224_CenAmGangsandTCOs.pdf.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Figure 5. Train routes used by Central American migrants in Mexico

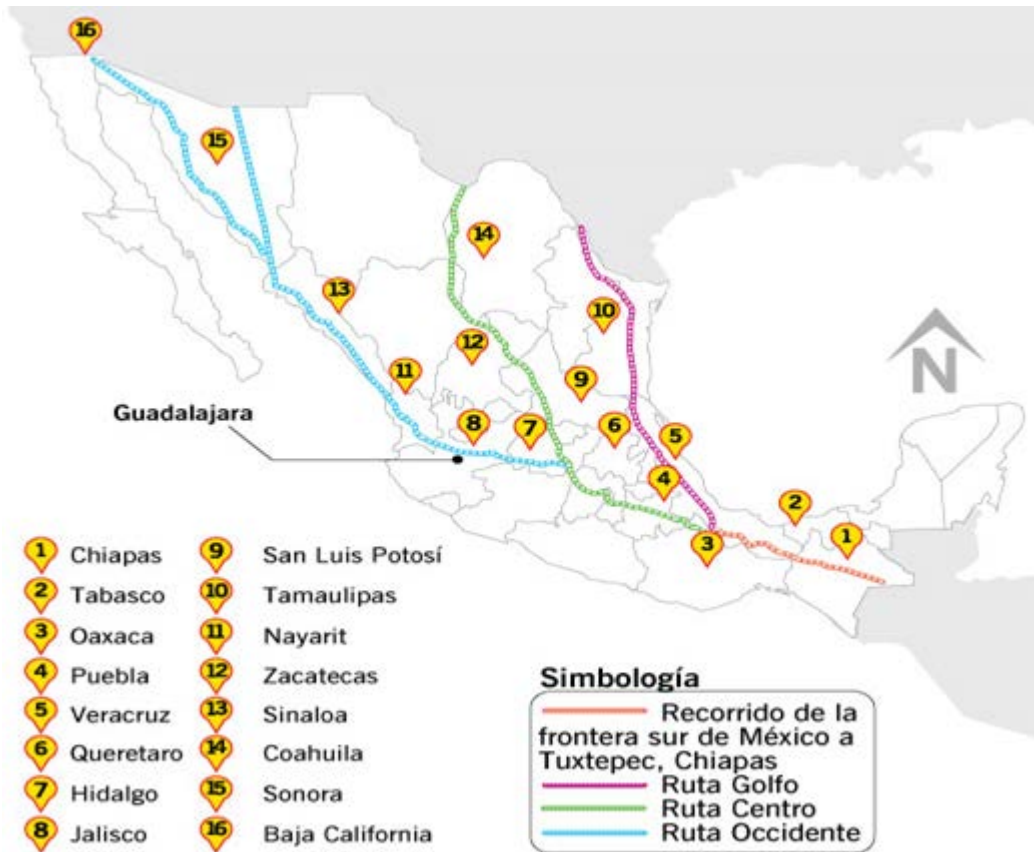


From Martin Gabriel Barrón Cruz, *La Bestia: La Tenue Línea Entre la Migración y la Trata de Personas (The Beast: The Fine Line between Migration and Human Trafficking)* (Mexico: National Institute of Penal Sciences, 2013), 18, http://www.inacipe.gob.mx/stories/publicaciones/temas_selectos/LaBestia.pdf.

The various options as to crossing points into the United States are described in Figure 6. Each route is given a color to depict the route used to reach a certain region. The color, route, and region set up in the map below are as follows: pink–Gulf Route, Rio Grande Valley and Eastern Texas; green–Pacific Route, Arizona and California; blue–Center Route, Western Texas and New Mexico.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Villegas, “Central American Migrants and ‘La Bestia.’”

Figure 6. Train routes by intended entry point to the United States



After *El Informador*, “Migrantes Eligen la Ruta del Pacifico (Empowering Migrants Pacific Route),” May 23, 2011, <http://www.informador.com.mx/primer/2011/294583/6/migrantes-eligen-ruta-del-pacifico.htm>.

La Bestia is a Mexico based operation. Most immigrants from Central American countries must first make it to the Guatemala - Mexico border to board the train and further risk their lives to reach the United States. An excerpt from a woman who made the journey is provided below to further display the capacity of the Zeta-MS 13 union.

Navarro said she and her family rode a bus to Guatemala, crossed the border into Mexico, hopped on several non-passenger trains along the “Bestia” route, and rode a bus from Torreon, Coahuila, to Chihuahua state.

“I saw one of the Zetas on a train shoot and kill a young Salvadoran boy, a teenager, who couldn’t pay \$300 and didn’t want to get off the train,” Navarro. “On another occasion, a train conductor felt sorry for me because I was pregnant, and told us how to get on the train before it started moving. You had to pay extra if you didn’t want to catch a moving train.”

Throughout the trip that took several days, Navarro said she and her family suffered hunger, slept outdoors in the rain, walked for hours and dodged dangerous characters.

Her family witnessed a woman left behind in a remote area after she had lost her foot when a train ran over her. They also watched as gang members yanked a young woman off the train.

“The girl the gang took was beautiful,” Navarro said. “We heard her scream, but no one could do anything.”

“After we reached Chihuahua, my husband did odd jobs and finally got a decent-paying job with a mining company in Guadalupe y Calvo,” Navarro said. “... A group of men wearing ski masks picked him up at night, and I never saw him again. That’s when I decided to head for the border to Juárez.”

Navarro and her son reached Anapra, by then she was having sharp labor pains. A smuggler in Anapra told her he could get her and the son across the border for \$1,000 cash. She didn’t have the money. The smuggler threatened to kill her if she didn’t come up with the money when he returned.¹⁹¹

This woman’s account of her trip is common. The violence that is currently taking place in Central America and Mexico is now spilling over into the United States and Texas Specifically. Since MS 13 leadership structure has shifted to Central America, specifically El Salvador, it is possible that commands for action of MS 13 members across the United States originate from El Salvador where there is a Zeta-MS 13 presence.¹⁹² Further, if continued deportation is favored with the influx of Central American immigrants, MS 13 has the capability to move repatriated gang members from the Northern Triangle in Central America to the United States in 72 hours.¹⁹³ The Zeta-MS 13 alliance in Central America is the primary partnership for MS 13, and has the potential to become the same for the Zetas. If that partnership becomes primary for both, the Zetas will have a presence in the majority of the United States, just like MS 13.

¹⁹¹ Diana Washington Valdez, “‘La Bestia’—Honduran Immigrants in El Paso Describe Journey on Notorious Train,” *El Paso Times*, May 18, 2014, http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_25788970/la-bestia-mdash-honduran-immigrants-el-paso-describe.

¹⁹² Farah and Lum, *Central American Gangs*, 11.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

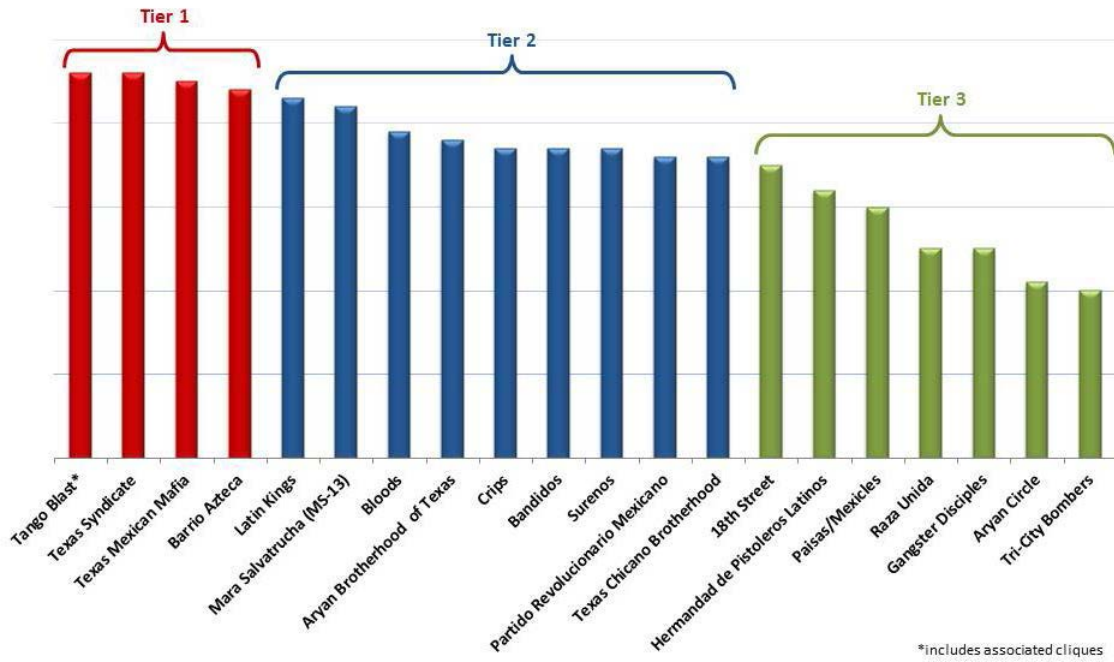
The extended description of the Zeta-MS 13 vertical partnership is intentional and reflects the threat that arises from that alliance. The Zetas are military men, military men tend to act in a systematic manner. Their tactics and methods are useful to criminal organizations like MS 13. While the Zetas were using MS 13 as a gateway to the underworld of Central America, MS 13 was coming away as better criminals as it “absorbed skills and deviousness from their considerably more sophisticated and potent Mexican patron.”¹⁹⁴ The Zetas have reportedly trained various members of MS 13 in locations across Central America¹⁹⁵ Zetas also hold courses for up to six months at a time in Mexico and per the FBI have extended training into Texas using a ranch as a location for “training and ‘neutralizing’ of competitors.”¹⁹⁶ Figure 7, shows the current tier ranking as provided in the Texas Department of Public Safety’s Gang Threat Assessment report. Figure 8, is a depiction of the Zetas known alliances. Both Figure 7 and 8, are useful in comprehending the potential for vertical integration of MS 13.

¹⁹⁴ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner’s Men*, 163–65.

¹⁹⁵ Farah and Lum, *Central American Gangs*, 18.

¹⁹⁶ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner’s Men*, 47.

Figure 7. Joint Crime Information Center 2013 Gang Rankings



From Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Gang Threat Assessment* “Joint Crime Information Center 2013 Gang Rankings,” (Austin, TX: Joint Crime Information Center, Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division, 2014), 9, http://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2014/txGangThreatAssessment.pdf.

Figure 8. Los Zetas and their links with US-based gangs

Major Mexican TCOs and their Links with US-based Gangs	
 Mexican TCOs	 US-Based Gangs
Los Zetas	ABT ALKQN Bandidos MC Bloods Crips Eme Emi HPL La Raza XIV Latin Kings Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) Norteños Sureños TS

From National Gang Intelligence Center, *2013 National Gang Report*, “Major Mexican TCOs and their Links with US-based Gangs,” (Washington, DC: Author, 2013), 22, <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/national-gang-report-2013/view>.

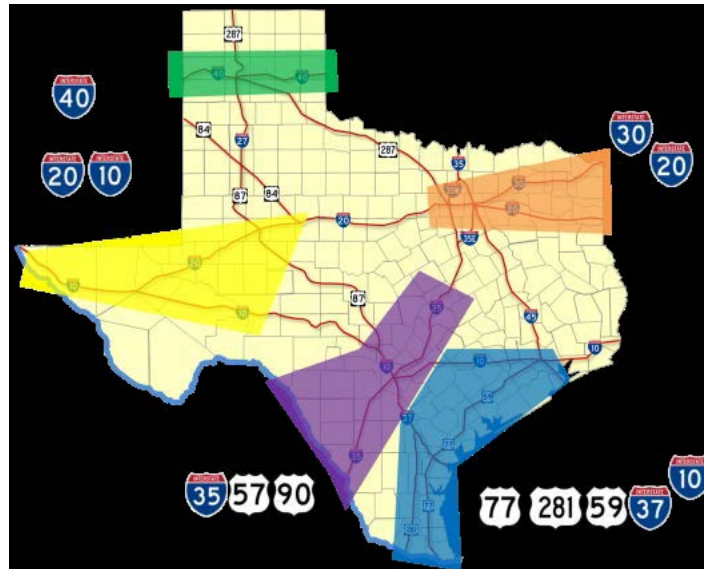
Aside from the alliances in the U.S., Zetas have also worked with other cartels in Mexico. The Zetas have “situational alliances with the badly weakened Beltràn Leyvas, the even-more debilitated Juárez Cartel and La Resistencia in Jalisco.”¹⁹⁷ Their allies may not be the strongest, but the opportunity still exists for vertical integration by MS 13. The gang has an organic capability for further vertical integration into Central America through their own network. Having the Zetas there simply offers more potential growth by the use of the Zeta Network. This is relevant to Texas because the use of corridors within the state will likely take place a vertical and horizontal expansion take place.

¹⁹⁷ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner’s Men*, 110–11.

C. RELEVANCE OF INTERSTATE CORRIDORS

The Interstate Highway corridors of Texas are relevant and worthy of consideration when addressing the MS 13 network because of the proximity to Mexico. These corridors present the ability to move illicit materials into and across the United States. Illicit activity MS 13 is involved in includes, “drug distribution, extortion, prostitution, robbery, theft, human trafficking, and acting as sicaritos (assassins for hire) for transnational drug cartels.”¹⁹⁸ The literature suggest that the horizontal and vertical integration of the MS 13 network will likely take place along the corridors as the corridors allow for movement of whatever product the gang looks to move. Figure 9, represents the various corridors within the state as identified by the DPS. The following is a list of the colors and what corridor they identify: green–Panhandle, yellow–West Texas, purple–Central Texas, blue–Gulf Coast, and orange–East Texas.¹⁹⁹

Figure 9. State-wide Trafficking Corridors



After Texas Department of Public Safety, “State-wide Trafficking Corridors,” image, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013*, (TX: Author, 2013), 21, http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/director_staff/media_and_communications/threatOverview.pdf.

¹⁹⁸ Sullivan and Logan, “MS -13 Leadership.”

¹⁹⁹ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013*, 21.

The corridors in Figure 9, detail the ability of illicit material to travel across the state. Due to Texas' proximity to Mexico, the potential for the vertical integration of MS 13's network has also be taken into account. Earlier, a reference to Mexico's war on drugs was made. Since Mexico has various gateways into the United States, use of these corridors is highly likely by MS 13 to further establish its horizontal and vertical network. A detailed explanation of these drug corridors by the DPS is included below.

- (U) The Texas–Mexico border area is one of the most active drug smuggling areas in the United States. There are 27 land Ports of Entry (POEs) spread along the border, including El Paso, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Laredo, McAllen, Brownsville, and numerous small border towns. The five principal Texas corridors are West Texas, Central Texas, Gulf Coast, Panhandle, and East Texas. These corridors coincide with clusters of POEs along the border and major highways throughout the state. The Southwest Border remains the primary gateway for moving illicit drugs into the United States, mostly through overland smuggling.
- (U) West Texas: There are four land POEs in El Paso. IH10 is the main route into and out of the El Paso region. IH10 crosses the country from California to Florida, serving as a trans- continental smuggling corridor. Once on IH10, traffickers can travel to San Antonio or Houston, or to Dallas-Fort Worth via IH20.
- (U) Central Texas: The Central Texas Corridor includes the Laredo area and extends up to the Del Rio/Eagle Pass region. There are three major highways: 57, 90, and IH35. All three are used regularly by traffickers going to and from San Antonio, Dallas, and Austin.
- (U) Gulf Coast: This corridor extends along the border from Brownsville to the Rio Grande Valley area, north to Houston and San Antonio. It includes highways US281, US77, IH37, IH10, and US59. These highways provide direct routes to and from Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas-Fort Worth, all of which are major consolidation points for drugs and currency.
- (U) Panhandle: The main highway in the panhandle corridor, IH40, is a main artery for drug trafficking movement from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and California to other states.
- (U) East Texas: IH20, IH30, and IH35 are the main highways in the East Texas Corridor. IH20 and IH30 leave the east side of Dallas and connect with numerous other interstates and secondary roadways, while IH35 provides access to the north.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Texas Department of Public Safety, *Texas Public Safety Threat Overview 2013*, 21.

The figures provided throughout this thesis show that vertical and horizontal integration is taking place along these corridors, in and out of Texas.

According to the research of Susan Ritter, Chair of the University of Texas Criminal Justice Department, there are at least 15 MS 13 cliques in Houston. Police in Houston have traced phone calls from MS 13 members there to Baltimore, Maryland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, New Orleans, and Nuevo Laredo Mexico. These traced phone calls suggest constant communication between members of MS 13 Cliques located in cities across the nation.²⁰¹

The Houston Police Department was able to identify vertical integration by mentioning Nuevo Laredo, Mexico as a contact MS 13 cliques in Houston. While Mexico's proximity makes it an ideal candidate for vertical integration, MS 13's ability to vertically integrate from Texas extends far past Mexico—as does the presence of MS 13.

The dangers presented by the horizontal and vertical integration of MS 13 by using corridors in Texas are that the Zetas are a multifaceted TCO with ties to various prison and street gangs in the State. Texas Syndicate, Tango Blast, Mexican Mafia, Barrio Azteca, are all tier one gangs who operate with the Zetas in their human smuggling operations.²⁰² MS 13 is named but represents the only tier two gang on the list. A question worth asking is how long will the only street gang to be named a TCO be considered a tier two gang by Texas? Considering the corridor centered horizontal network that is present in the 41 states plus Texas, and a vertical network that has a direct line to the border—the MS 13 network illustrated in this chapter will likely demand a tier one rating soon. The Zetas will be a primary reason for the increase in threat as the Zetas greatly expand the MS 13 Network. The risk does not end with the Zetas though. Any cartel that is able to reach the Texas border can take advantage of MS 13's placement along corridors provide access to most places in the United States.

²⁰¹ Logan and Morse, "MS-13 Organization & U.S. Response."

²⁰² Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, 25.

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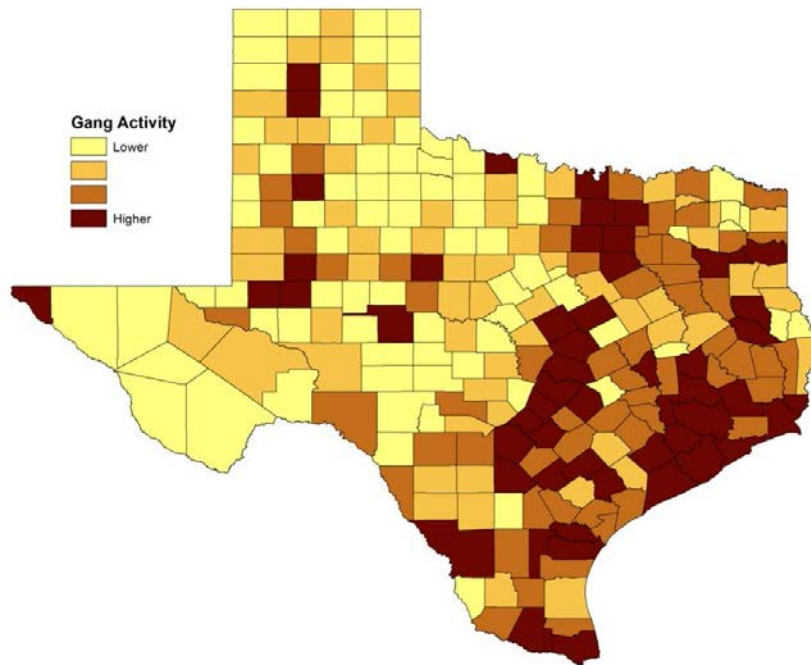
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

1. MS 13 Presence in Texas Will Likely Grow Substantially in the Next Five Years

The current immigration issues in Texas due to escalating violence in Central America suggest more and more Central Americans are going to immigrate into the United States and very likely use Texas as a landing pad. The map below shows over all gang activity in the state.

Figure 10. Concentration of Gang Activity in Texas



From Texas Department of Public Safety, *Gang Threat Assessment*, "Concentration of Gang Activity in Texas," (TX: Joint Crime Information Center, Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division, 2014), 17, http://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2014/txGangThreatAssessment.pdf.

The majority of Texas counties in the border region are gang infested. The situation of incoming Central American immigrants is almost identical to that of their compatriots who immigrated to escape violence more than thirty years ago. They are

poor, fleeing a country where homicide rates are on par with what they were during the civil war, and entering poor, gang-infested neighborhoods of the United States. Further, the anti-immigration sentiment is at an extremely high level.

An example of the hostile environment Central Americans face upon arrival was made evident on July 23, 2015 when the U.S. House of Representatives used a recent murder in which the perpetrator is an illegal immigrant to launch an attempt to crack down on Sanctuary Cities.²⁰³ The White House said the bill calling for a crackdown would impede civil liberties by “allowing law enforcement officials to gather immigration status information from any person at any time.”²⁰⁴ Again, the current situation in Texas is almost identical to the environment that immigrants faced in L.A. where the gang originated – the difference today is the gang has established horizontal and vertical networks that reach Central America and most of the United States.

Brenda Paz left no room for questions when she stated, “One day The Mara Salvatrucha will take over the United States.”²⁰⁵ Law enforcement and countless academics have documented the recruitment efforts of MS 13. MS 13 recruits youths, and with the influx of unaccompanied children coming into Texas in 2014, they offer some sense of familiarity to a young kid may feel alone while being detained in the United States. The proximity of Texas to Mexico and the various routes used by immigrants that land them along the Texas-Mexico border suggest MS 13 will have a large pool of potential members until the violent environment improves from Mexico to Central America.

2. Texas Will Not Defeat MS 13 with Law Enforcement and Anti-immigration Policy

The data in this thesis highlights the results that stem from a U.S. policy and law enforcement centric approach being used to fight gangs. The use of immigration policy to deal with the gang problem in the early 1990s caused the balloon effect that established

²⁰³ Erica Werner, “House Debates Bill to Crack Down on ‘Sanctuary Cities,’” *PBS NewsHour*, July 23, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/house-debates-bill-crack-sanctuary-cities/>.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Logan, *This is for the Mara Salvatrucha*, 92.

MS 13 in Central America. Today, MS 13 is one of the main reasons the immigrants who are leaving Central America are trying to come to the U.S. The gang has flourished in Central America. A sign of the gang's strength was shown when MS 13 and *Calle 18* formed a government-recognized truce in El Salvador. There was a well-documented drop in homicides. The homicide rate steadily climbed after the gangs stopped recognizing the truce.

If a law enforcement approach is continued, Texas prisons will mimic Central American prisons in a very short time. This is due to the effect prison has on newly incarcerated gang members. The majority of Latinos, rivals or not, who are incarcerated tend to gravitate to gangs affiliate with the Mexican Mafia due to the need of protection from other prison gangs.²⁰⁶ The result of this is members of rival gangs could end up working side by side for the “most powerful and influential gang operating in the United States”—the Mexican Mafia.²⁰⁷ The likelihood of the prison gang MS 13 is affiliated with is high due to the demographics of South Texas.

The Texas comptroller Susan Combs' last report on South Texas demographics stated, “By 2012, the Hispanic population is projected to rise to 82 percent in South Texas, versus 37.6 percent in the state as a whole.”²⁰⁸ Bexar County, the county San Antonio is in, is showing that a Hispanic dense population will result in a Hispanic dense prison population. A report in *The Prison Journal* shows that almost 70% of men age 16–45 that are incarcerated in Bexar County are Hispanic.²⁰⁹ Should a Law enforcement centered approach continue this could be disastrous for Bexar County and South Texas as a whole. As the second largest City in Texas, San Antonio will likely become a stronghold just like Dallas and Houston, if the approach to fight the gang is centered on law enforcement.²¹⁰ San Antonio has a sixty-three percent Hispanic population, which is

²⁰⁶ Grayson and Logan, *Executioner's Men*, 185.

²⁰⁷ Sigifredo Gonzalez, Jr., *Southwest Border Gang Recognition* (Zapata County, TX: Army National Guard Project, 2010), 15.

²⁰⁸ Susan Combs, “Window on State Government.”

²⁰⁹ Mike Tapia, Corey S. Sparks, and J. Mitchell Miller, “Texas Latino Prison Gangs: An Exploration of Generational Shift and Rebellion,” *Prison Journal* 94, no. 2 (June 2014): 174.

²¹⁰ Franco, *MS-14 and 18th Street Gangs*.

significantly higher than L.A. where the gang originated.²¹¹ In L.A., a city with a smaller Hispanic population, MS 13 was implicated in five hundred murders by the early 1990s.²¹² Possessing access to IH 10, IH35, and IH 37, and IH 90 San Antonio has the potential to be an artery for illicit activity across the state and nation.

3. Stopping the Zetas Does Not Equate to Stopping MS 13

The Zetas are the primary cartel that MS operates with but they are not the only one.²¹³ MS 13 has shown the ability to work with multiple TCO's as well as other gangs. MS 13 has stated that they can work with anyone but not for anyone.²¹⁴ This means that the next Cartel that is calling shots in Mexico will be welcomed just like the Zetas were in place of the Sinaloa cartel. MS 13, aside from being a street gang is very aware of the benefits each alliance brings and what it brings to the table too. The Texas Gang Threat Assessment discusses the changes in traditional gang rivalries summarizing that in the end it is the money that matters. MS 13 has shown that very characteristic through their negotiation on *La Bestia* with the Zetas. In El Salvador, which is now the command center for MS 13, they held a truce with their biggest rival *Calle 18*. Other gangs in South Texas as well as cartels have shown the ability to put rivalries aside in the name of economic prosperity. With the rise of bosses who have spent their life in cartels like *El Mencho* of *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion*, the likelihood of a continued power struggle among cartels is high.

Mexico's cartels use prison and street gangs to enforce and transport for them. Since rival street gangs are going to prison and working together under the Mexican Mafia it is suggested that partnerships among American based street gangs will also continue to rise. Once street gangsters transit through prison and go back into the streets the bigger picture is easier to see and traditional rivalries will likely not stand in the way of making money. Further, MS 13 has visions of a much larger presence than they have

²¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "State & County QuickFacts."

²¹² Valdez, "Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs," 61.

²¹³ Farah and Lum, *Central American Gangs*, 10.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

today. Many MS 13 members are using the government's deportation practices to be sent to places with no MS 13 presence such as Chile, Peru, and Spain.²¹⁵ MS 13 has also taken steps to develop a code in which to communicate. One of the avenues the gang is using to develop this code has the gang "sending members to study Nahuatl and other almost extinct regional languages, most with fewer than one hundred native speakers."²¹⁶

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Keep the Big Picture in Sight

Texas has taken aggressive steps to construct a combined law enforcement approach to dealing with the increase of immigrants crossing the border and cartel activities. The Texas Department of public safety, Border Patrol, Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies have all been involved in Texas-Mexico border operations. The Zetas' ability to own a 2 million dollar drug field in Webb County Texas shows that the field of vision may be too broad in my opinion. With the amount of law enforcement present, joint operations should expand the overall reach of all agencies involved. Yet, there seems to be a focus on catching as many immigrants as possible and not the right ones. Immigration has and will most likely always be an issue with our southern border, as long as the standard of living across the border is inferior to that of which we enjoy here. That does not mean that immigration enforcement should be relaxed. What I am recommending is a strategic, targeted approach to immigrant prosecution. It has been proven constantly that our borders are porous and that many are able to cross undetected. This is where keeping the big picture in mind will help focus our efforts. My recommendation is that we focus on the threat.

The U.S. must make a decision on the target of law enforcement efforts. MS 13 has shown the ability to get repatriated gang members back to the U.S. border within a 72-hour period.²¹⁷ Criminals should be the focus of our forces in my opinion. The other immigrants who come here are like any other American, simply trying to better their

²¹⁵ Farah and Lum, *Central American Gangs*, 20.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

future in a country notorious for opportunity. A proper risk assessment is critical in targeting the threat and not simply casting a wide net to catch anything out there. We can catch huge numbers of immigrants; we have proven that. However, the big picture here represents national security and keeping violent criminals out of our country. Most Central Americans are leaving the homicide capital in the Americas to try and survive, not commit crime. The non-criminal Central Americans risking their lives to get here should experience the same treatment as the working class Cubans who did so in the 1980s. If they did, it is my opinion that they would quickly assimilate and become productive members of society.

2. Use Best Practices in Dealing with MS 13

Connie McGuire described many programs that had a positive effect on the Latino Gangs in Washington, DC. Some of these practices should be used by Texas to decrease the potential growth of MS 13 and other Latino gangs across the state. The most important best practice that should be employed being prevention. The increase of young Central American immigrants crossing the border leaves a huge number of potential recruits for MS 13 members across the state. Preventing these youths from seeing MS 13 as their best option is crucial to stopping the growth of the gang.

A kid who joins MS 13 is required to “put in work” which in most cases involves committing a crime. Imagine this kid is 13 at the time of the crime and gets caught. Automatically the trajectory of this kid’s life will be changed. Instead of going to school, the kid will most likely spend time in a juvenile detention center with other criminals who will influence the kid in one way or another. The worst part is once he gets out the kid will have earned stripes in the gang and be called on for criminal activity at a higher level. By the time this kid turns 18 a criminal record filled with previous police encounters will likely keep meaningful employment out of reach. Leaving manual labor or illicit activity through the gang the kid is now entrenched in as the only option. The cycle for a kid who joins a gang at a young age is vicious. Prevention through government involvement in schools, local churches, community centers, or neighborhood groups in at-risk Latino neighborhoods is highly recommended.

Having grown up in a gang-infested neighborhood I see prevention as the most useful tool for keeping kids out of gangs. Most of my friends' families were affiliated with gangs until I began to play sports. Yet, my story is a little different because I had both parents at home and church was mandatory. Most kids in my neighborhood lived in single parent homes and the projects that were across the street from my house were constantly infested with latchkey kids running around while their parent(s) were at work. I have many friends and cousins that chose to be a part of a gang and in most cases, there is one event in their youth that changed the trajectory of their life. Some were able to pull away, but most did not. Getting a good paying job with gang affiliated tattoos and a criminal record keeps their gang as the primary source of income. Gang life is a cycle, and unless Texas focuses on prevention and providing an alternate course for youth MS 13 will surely grow.

3. Ask the Media to Help Limit Gang Exposure

Throughout my thesis, I give credit to the media, through the CNN effect, for the expansion of MS 13. The media has power because people see what they broadcast across the world. I believe the media can still get their job done and limit the exposure provided to gangs and cartels. Currently, anytime a gang or cartel does something noteworthy their name is broadcasted before the world providing free exposure for the gang. By relaying the images of the gangs and cartels violent acts the media is spreading the influence of the gang through the images they come across the screen. This is why I believe gangs and cartels should remain nameless when being reported on.

The idea of keeping MS13 nameless in the media came after reading an article pertaining to a mass shooting that took place in Aurora Colorado in 2012. The families of some of the victims asked for the killers name to not be mentioned sighting that more attention was being given to the killer instead of the victim.²¹⁸ The same can be said for gangs and cartels- specifically MS 13 and Zetas. There are countless documentaries made on MS 13. For every documentary there is a gang member ready to talk about gang life

²¹⁸ Lisa Black, "Theater Shooting Victim's Family Asks That Killer Not Be Named," *Chicago Tribune*, March 22, 2015, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-colorado-theater-shooting-no-notoriety-met-20150322-story.html#page=1>.

and make the most of the appearance. Instead of giving MS 13 the spotlight it would help if the media would limit the use of their name. By simply using “gang” or “cartel,” the media can have a significant effect in limiting the exposure of these groups. The reasoning behind keeping the gang nameless in the media is the hope the MS 13 will lose motivation to gain media coverage as individual crimes will no longer be spreading its name over the airwaves as a reward for criminal behavior. MS 13 is prime for expansion in south Texas, as long as law enforcement knows who committed the crime, the media should do what it can to end the free publicity.

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