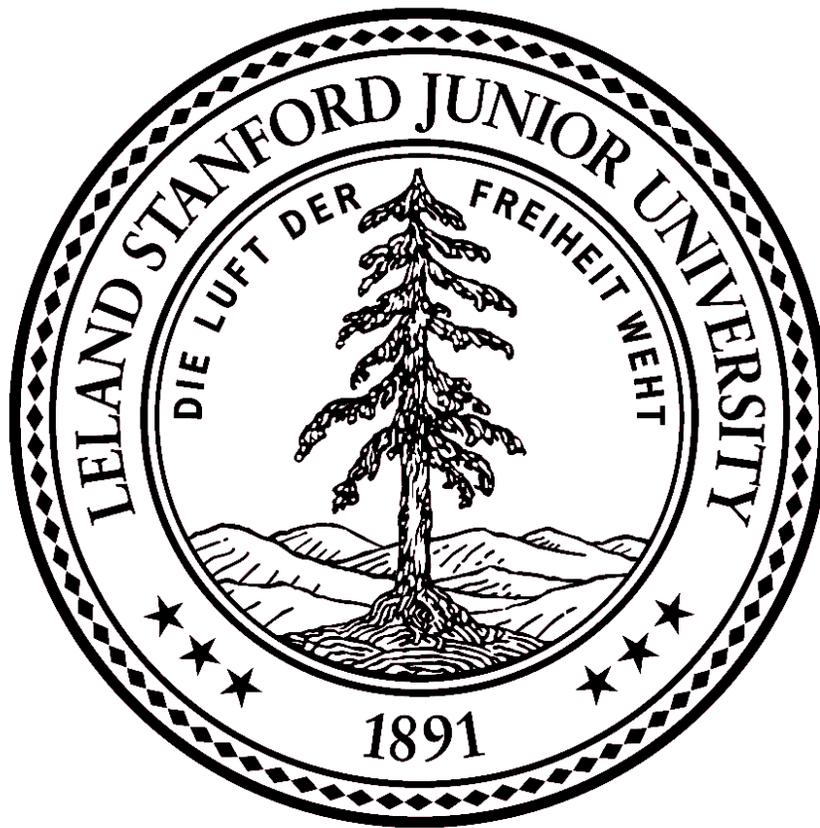


EDUCATION, SECURITY AND YOUTH POLICY  
RESPONSES TO GANG VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL  
AMERICA'S NORTHERN TRIANGLE



Caitlin Doreen Kent  
Master of Arts Paper  
International Comparative Education  
Graduate School of Education  
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**INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION**

**Education, Security and Youth Policy Responses to Gang Violence  
in Central America's Northern Triangle**

**Caitlin Doreen Kent**

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## **Abstract**

The Northern Triangle of Central America, made up of the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is considered to be one of the most dangerous regions of the world predominately due to historic instability and the proliferation of youth gangs. Despite the prominence of research related to government response to gang violence in this region, few studies focus on the educational policies and reforms in the region and examining the ways in which government education policies address this violence in schools. Through a qualitative discourse analysis of 22 policy related documents from the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, this study demonstrates a preference for a softer approach to the problem of gang violence, reflecting each government's desire for policies that work to reproduce existing social structures and which in turn increases their own internal and global legitimacy. This study invites future research focusing on the educationalization of social problems in the Northern Triangle and challenges researchers to consider the potential differences between policy prescription and policy action in the region.

**Keywords:** Central America, gang violence, education policy, social reproduction theory

The Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), made up of the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is considered to be one of the most dangerous regions of the world. According to the 2012 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) the homicide rates in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala per 100,000 inhabitants were 90.4, 41.2, and 39.9 respectively, compared to the global average of 6.2 (UNODC 2013). The power and spread of the most prominent rival street gangs Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and M-18 (M-18) over the last 20 years has led to increasing insecurity, migration, and general instability in the region (Wolf 2010). Due to the tendency of gang violence to manifest itself in the public spaces and in lower income neighborhoods that gang members call home, increasing levels of insecurity also threaten schools (Rivera 2013).

The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are acutely aware of the presence of MS-13 and M-18 gangs within their borders. Rising homicide rates, extortion, and other violent activities perpetrated by gang members have become the focus of security discussions of political leaders over the past 10 years (Fogelbach 2010; Seelke 2010). Students and politicians alike describe the current state of schools as places of youth violence, small-scale drug trafficking, and delinquency (Peetz 2008). In all three countries, schools have become places of extortion, intimidation, forced- recruitment, and sexual violence towards both students and teachers (Fogelbach 2010). In both Honduras and El Salvador, the government enacted zero-tolerance anti-gang legislation to target the needs of the most impacted communities while simultaneously criminalizing gang membership (Bruneau 2014). The Guatemalan government, on the other hand, chose to make broader international commitments to address gang activity and focused efforts on short-term solutions such as increasing arrests and police presence over a more comprehensive plan (USAID 2006). Though each country

developed its own set of policies, a mix of prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches characterize the present reforms in the NTCA.

There has been limited research conducted thus far on the governmental response to gang violence in the region. Studies on the topic tend to focus on the effect of gangs and on government security policies. Research describes governmental response with a focus on the impact of zero-tolerance security policies in response to youth delinquency and gang membership (van der Borgh and Savenije 2014). In areas where gang activity is prominent, the state is considered as weak and lacking authority, as exemplified in the ability of gangs to maintain complete control and regulation of large areas in each country (Manwaring 2007). Due to their troubled pasts the governments must focus their energies on maintaining political sovereignty, which often leaves neglected other aspects of society, which leads to increased crime and gang violence. In this respect previous research has not addressed the role of education policies and reforms in ensuring the continued sovereignty, control, and legitimacy of the state.

As the research on the link between gang violence in the NTCA and education policy is limited, I fill this gap in the literature by providing a new perspective on government educational policies and reforms and examining the ways in which government education policies address this violence in schools. Within the framework of social reproduction theory, my study asks the following questions: (i) How is the issue of gang violence reflected in government policy documents related to education and youth? (ii) How do these policy documents deal with the histories of violence and conflict within these countries? And (iii) How do these policies envision the future of youth? I answer these questions through a qualitative discourse analysis of policy documents and reports from the governments of El Salvador,

Guatemala, and Honduras. This, considered through the lens of the social reproduction theory, will allow me to explore how NTCA governments use education and youth policies to address gang violence. Finally, based on my findings, I argue that the choice of a “soft approach” to gang violence, and the role that education plays in this approach, reflects a government’s preference of developing policies that work to reproduce existing social structures, norms, and values – which in turn increases each government’s own internal and global legitimacy.

## **2. Violence, the Rise of Gangs and Iron Fist Policies**

### **2.1. Instability in the Region**

The Northern Triangle of Central America has faced various periods of instability throughout its history. Both Guatemala and El Salvador experienced times of extreme violence during the civil wars that ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Winton 2004). Though peace accords were signed and no official conflicts have happened since the mid-1990s the region continues to battle increasingly high rates of violence in comparison to the rest of the world.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The comparative homicide rates of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras relative to the global average and the averages of nearby countries are shown in Figure 1 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2015). The 2013 UNODC report characterized the Northern Triangle as one of the most violent, non-warring, regions in the world and notes that along with the high homicide rates the region also has some of the highest rates of femicide and other acts of violence against women (UNODC 2013; Brands 2010). Historic instability in the region, due to civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and coup d’état in Honduras alongside economic and political interventions by the international community –particularly the United States– has led to a mass migration of citizens out of the NTCA (Karemera, Oguledo, and Davis 2000). Due to this instability men, women, and children choose to make the dangerous journey to the US

both in search for better economic opportunities and out of fear for their own safety or the safety of their families (UNHCR 2014).<sup>1</sup>

## **2.2. Gangs and Youth Violence**

The mass deportation of gang members from the US during the 1990s back to their native countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is credited with bringing the Los Angeles street gangs MS-13 and M-18 and subsequent gang activities to the NTCA (Wolf 2010).

Instability in the region combined with easy access to weapons due to prolonged periods of civil war allowed MS-13 and M-18 to then evolve into the most powerful youth gangs in Central America (Cruz 2014). Currently the gangs are credited with activities including the trafficking of drugs, people and arms, homicide, and most prominently, large networks of extortion that extend from bus drivers and local business owners all the way to police officers and judges (Medina 2014).

Increasing levels of gang activity have also led to high rates of youth violence and delinquency in the region. Throughout the NTCA, there is a general sense that the *maras* (street gangs) can also be considered youth gangs due to the young average age of gang members and the tendency of gangs to recruit boys as young as 9 to join their ranks (Wolf 2012a). The nature and networks of MS-13 and M-18 have led them to being characterized as a danger not only to national security but also to civil order and human rights (Boraz and Bruneau 2006). Both

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed history of conflict, violence, and migration in NTCA is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information see Brands (2010), Moodie (2010), and Rivera (2013).

citizens and governments alike perceive *maras* and youth violence as a real threat and they are often called the most significant security risk in the region (Peetz 2008).

### **2.3. Governmental Response**

In response to the threat posed by street gangs the governments of the NTCA have enacted policy changes and reforms focusing on the security of the state and its citizens. During the early 2000s both El Salvador and Honduras put into place zero-tolerance policies that outlawed gang activities within the countries (Liebel 2004). These were called *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) policies and led to mass incarceration of suspected gang members while also changing juvenile offender laws to allow for younger members of gangs to be tried as adults (Hume 2007). The consequence of these Iron Fist strategies, and the similar militarized strategies used in Guatemala, was not a reduction in gang activity and violence but the opposite. Harsh measures used by the governments and the militarization of the police force exposed levels of authoritarianism that led to public backlash (Aguilar Villamariona 2006). Similarly, mass incarceration allowed gang members to become better organized, thus strengthening gangs and increasing members' sense of belonging and territoriality within major urban areas (Rodgers 2009).

The failure of Iron Fist strategies forced governments to look for alternative methods to address gang activity in their countries. In 2012 the Salvadoran government worked directly with leaders of MS-13 and M-18 gangs in an attempt to reduce violence through a negotiated truce. The truce faced widespread public criticism because it was perceived to increase the status and legitimacy of the gangs within El Salvador and the region (Bruneau 2014). Another strategy that the governments used was to develop new policies that centered on the protection of public security and human rights. Laws were enacted to ensure the protection of youth rights from infringement by both criminal organizations and the government itself (Peetz 2011).

Governments also began to implement prevention policies that worked hand in hand with law enforcement strategies and intervention policies focusing on both rehabilitation and reintegration of former gang members into society (Reisman 2006). Yet, despite the laws and policies developed to protect the rights of youth and prevent future violence, gang activity and crime continue to flourish in the NTCA.

The unchanging nature of violence in the region impacts not only the stability of governments but that of communities and civic institutions like schools as well. Each country's desire for increased stability led to a focus on education as a driver for equity and growth (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003). In the following section I explore different governmental approaches to youth violence in order to better understand the role of education within the greater narrative of violence.

### **3. From Prevention to Intervention: Approaches to Youth Violence**

Governments can address the complexity of violence and the influence that gangs and instability have on schools and communities in different ways. In this section I will describe the two primary policy strategies that governments use to address violence: prevention and intervention. Prevention strategies emphasize stopping gang violence before it starts by reducing opportunities for crimes through a focus on the psychological, social, situational and community conditions that make individuals vulnerable to criminal behavior (USAID 2006). Intervention strategies, on the other hand, use policies to support, rehabilitate, and aid communities with histories of gang presence and individuals who may be current or former members of gangs (Buvinic, Morrison, and Shifter 1999). The use of prevention and intervention strategies in the United States and Latin America provides insight into how the

violence and resulting governmental policies impact communities, youth, and their educational opportunities.

### **3.1. Prevention**

#### **3.1.1. At Risk Youth**

Many governments choose to target at risk populations through the use of curriculum reforms, including both violence prevention and conflict resolution curricula, within schools. Violence prevention programs in schools that emphasize curriculum programs using classroom interventions have modest effects on self-reported student behavior (Howard, Flora, and Griffin 1999). In considering the use of violence prevention education as a means to reduce gang violence, these education programs have been seen to reduce negative school behaviors (Hausman, Pierce, and Briggs 1996). However, conflict resolution programs are better able to reduce instances of physical violence in schools (DuRant et al. 1996). Similarly, violence prevention curricula, especially those focusing on communication skills –most often to be found in conflict resolution curricula, can be effective with urban young adults (Chauveron, Thompkins, and Harel 2012). Early elementary education programs also have the ability to break the cycle of violence early on in a child’s educational career (Mercy et al. 1993).

Curriculum reforms are not the only response used by governments to prevent violence by focusing on the behavior of high-risk individuals. School-community collaboration can lead to education reforms that are better able to encourage commitment and accountability from all stakeholders (Warren 2005). In school-based strategies for violence prevention in several major cities across the US, the importance of programs focused on school-community collaboration is emphasized as a strong approach to reduce youth involvement in gangs and violent crimes. These programs are able to reduce violence by providing youth with viable and concrete alternatives to the gang lifestyle (Leshnick et al. 2010). The most prevalent use of this approach

to violence prevention is seen in the targeted outreach programs focused on the needs of communities and individuals by *The Boys and Girls Clubs of America* (Howell 2010). These programs were not only successful in providing their services but were also able to do so at less cost than law enforcement focused gang suppression programs (Arbreton and McClanahan 2002).

### **3.1.2. Safer Schools**

One of the major impacts of gang violence on schools is that schools are no longer considered neutral zones. This means that there is increased opportunity for in-school disputes between rival organizations (Parks 1995). Policies aimed at addressing the institutional needs of schools include the introduction of school uniforms and other measures to target signs of gang membership (Bodine 2003). Yet, in the Southwestern US, uniforms had little effect on students perception of gang presence within the school and little effect on overall school climate (Wade and Stafford 2003). Other attempts to promote safer school environments for students and prevent gang behavior in schools is ensuring the safe passage of students to and from school (Arnette and Walsleben 1998) and ensuring that there are clear rules, expectations, and guidelines for student behaviors (Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998). Fair rule enforcement, clear implementation of non-violent norms, and other school operational policies are similarly able to reduce unrest in schools (Gottfredson et al. 2000).

Schools also attempt to prevent gang behavior through specific modification to facilities and on-campus security practices (Goldstein and Kodluboy 1998). In 1994 the US passed legislation that allotted funding for public schools to implement security measures, such as metal detectors and security guards, in order to reduce violence and schools and make students feel safer (United States of America 2015). Similarly, schools used funding to install security

cameras, alarms, and fencing in order to increase student security. However, these technological improvements to address violent behavior in school were fairly ineffective, as the most common form of violence documented in schools during this period was fist fighting as opposed to conflicts using weapons like knives or guns (Ballard 1998). It is also important to note that these kinds of preventative measures have been shown to decrease students sense of safety in schools and increase students fears (Schreck and Miller 2003).

### **3.1.3. Safer Neighborhoods**

Gang prevention in schools focuses on the importance of community-based violence prevention and the relationship between safe neighborhoods and schools. Similar to the school-based programs focusing on safe passage of students to and from school where parents and community volunteers watch over specific routes to and from school to ensure student safety, community policing is effective at crime prevention (Arnette and Walsleben 1998; Buvinic, Morrison, and Shifter 1999). Collaboration between police forces and community members in Brazil and Costa Rica were effective methods to both reduce violence and increase perception of safety within a neighborhood (Chinchilla and Rico 1997; Velloso et al. 2000) . Similarly, community commitment to reduce access and availability of firearms is key to creating safer neighborhoods (Romano et al. 1998). Especially within high-risk communities, policies regulating the use of and access to firearms and the commitment of the community to these reforms are able to lower homicide rates and reduce violence in and around schools (Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998).

Policies to ensure safe neighborhoods cannot, however, emphasize solely the role of community members. They must also take into account the physicality of the neighborhood and housing within the community. It has been shown that high rates of poverty, income inequality,

and unemployment are precursors to high rates of gang violence (Curry, Decker, and Huff 2002). The governments of South Africa and the Netherlands implemented urban renewal projects in low-income neighborhoods in an attempt to reduce crime and prevent gang violence (Priemus 2004; Samara 2005). Similar to community policing programs, urban restructuring in a favela in Rio De Janeiro found that upgrading neighborhoods with high rates of poverty leads to improved quality of life, and reduced levels of violence for inhabitants (Samper 2011).

## **3.2. Intervention**

### **3.2.1. Social Capital and Community Rehabilitation Policies**

In countries and communities where there is a strong history of violence and gang activity, intervention policies also work to increase social capital and community cohesion in order to counter or change social norms that reward violent behavior. Communities with histories of violent conflict and countries with war torn pasts often struggle to escape from the realities of a situation where violence has existed and was accepted for years (Howell, 2010). Urban low income regions within the US addressed the insecurities of communities with persistent levels of violence and found that policies have the ability to address ways to treat the insecurity and marginalization suffered in these areas (Muggah 2012). Reinvestment in social networks and community ties allows neighborhoods and individuals to feel financially and socially secure whereby decreasing the desire for gang membership and violent activity (Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998).

### **3.2.2. Individualized and Peer to Peer Policies**

In addressing the social capital of a neighborhood, governments often work to reform educational systems so that they can treat the individual actor as well. Many of these intervention programs focus on the reintegration of gang-affiliated youth into their communities and schools. (Arbreton and McClanahan 2002; Bodinger-deUriarte 1993). Policies in the US

that increase opportunities for former gang-members like job programs and vocational schools provide alternatives to traditional schooling that may not only dissuade reentry into gangs but also provide options that would not otherwise be available (Leshnick et al. 2010). As governments increase funding for organizations that engage in peer support and empowerment, like *Homies Unidos* in El Salvador, they are better able to effectively respond to youth violence (Wolf 2012). Policies that focus more on community rehabilitation versus gang suppression have been found to be successful in counteracting criminal activity (Chaskin 2010).

In conclusion, there are many different types of prevention and intervention approaches to the policies governments or schools may choose to put in place. Much of the research focuses on the policies within the US; the research that does address the policies of Latin America focuses mainly on prevention and law enforcement strategies and reforms outside of the education sector (Chinchilla and Rico 1997; Samara 2005; Samper 2011; Velloso et al. 2000). While there is more research on Latin America and developing countries available on the use of intervention policies they emphasize the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of intervention programs (Wolf 2012). Further research in this area needs to shift focus to the NTCA in order to assess the role of government policies and programs in response to gang violence in schools.

#### **4. Social Reproduction Theory: A Lens for Analysis**

In this section I examine the governmental policy response to gang violence from the perspective of social reproduction theory. Government policies in response to violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras overlook each country's violent past and present and use both youth and education policies as a means to focus on the development of the individual and the community. Instead of critically engaging with the matter at hand, the policies emphasize

the reproduction of desirable morals and values to ensure the development of productive citizens. Yet, what are the broader assumptions regarding social order and the power of the state that underlie the policy choices made by these three states? In the following section I suggest that social reproduction theory provides a strong framework for understanding the use of education and youth policies as a tool to solve each state's social problems through the perpetuation of a set of desired values and behaviors.

Social reproduction theory proposes that the structures of a society exist to reproduce and maintain the power structures and hierarchies of a society (Bourdieu 1977). In the recreation of existing power dynamics, society "naturally" replicates inequality by creating social stratification and castes that persist for generations (Doob 2012). There are four main factors that lead to social reproduction, each defined as a different kind of capital or personal stock: cultural capital, financial capital, human capital, and social capital. These different forms of capital refer to one's cultural knowledge, personal wealth, individual skillset, and social networks -- all of which come together to determine one's power and social status (Bourdieu 1986). Schools are thought to perpetuate social inequalities by promoting the "values, skills and attitudes" or the ideology that best serves those in power (Noah and Eckstein 1992).

Schools also represent part of the larger effort by the state to ensure hegemony of pre-existing societal beliefs, morals, and principals. The state cannot maintain power through physical force alone and need support of civil society, which perpetuates belief in and consent to the state, to maintain its own legitimacy (Gramsci and Buttigieg 1992). Furthermore, a state may choose to make up for their inherent deficits through education policies in direct response to their need to be perceived as legitimate by the international community (Weiler 1983). Often states will adopt policies are borrowed from other countries or heavily influenced by foreign

actors not because of their content but because of the political or economic needs of the state (Halpin and Troyna 1995). Thus, the choice for specific policies – or an emphasis on a particular set of values – may act not only to reinforce societal structures but may demonstrate a desire for acceptance within the international community.

The idea of cultural hegemony can be seen in framing of education as giving individuals the tools they need to succeed in their own futures and better contribute to society. Within this framing, education acts to perpetuate of systems capitalist societal values of cognitive skills and educational attainment as a way to justify existing differences in privilege and social status (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Thus schools, as the vessel through which ideology is transmitted to the people, are seen as the most effective way to maintain power relations —especially in times of crisis— as they can hide the systems of power reproduction within the more digestible and acceptable appeals of education.

Social reproduction provides a lens through which I shed light on the motivations that led these three governments choose to fuse prevention and intervention approaches to violence in order to create broader more holistic policies and reforms.

## **5. Methods and Data**

### **5.1. Strategies of Inquiry**

As my study is based around the exploration of a social issue it directly correlates the inductive nature of qualitative research as a way to process and portray the complexities of a situation (Creswell 2013). Much of the current research on gang violence and government policy in the region focuses on security policies of each country thus there is a need to further explore the interrelationship of violence, educational reform, and government policy. In order to better understand this interrelationship I conduct a discourse analysis of document-based data. This kind of discourse analysis strategy allows for the consideration of the power relationships and

dynamics within the written policies themselves to better understand the connectedness between governmental authority, individuals and groups within a society (Rose and Miller 1992).

## **5.2. Research Methods**

The collection of data was conducted by the initial collection of a small number of policy documents from each of the countries to reveal other relevant materials for the study, a process Small (2009) defines as non-representative *snowball sampling*. This process not only allows for an increase in the quantity of data collected but by following a trail of pertinent documents one is able to acquire a deeper understanding of government policies and processes. The direct collection of documents from the each country's government ministries provides extensive bibliographic and in-text references to new interrelated sources of information, which will magnify the analysis of the commonalities and themes. The complete set of documents analyzed from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras can be seen here in Tables 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

These selected documents intend to provide a snapshot of policy discourse on the topic of gang violence and doing so will deliver increased insight into the perspectives of educational, security and youth focused policy in the NTCA.

## **5.3. Data Collection & Analysis**

The data for this study are 22 education, violence and youth related policies and reforms from government ministries within El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras during the 15-year time-span from 2000-2015. The time-span was purposefully selected due to the rise in gang-related violence and homicide rates in each of these countries during this period (Boerman 2007). I collected these documents freely from open-source and open access government websites from

each of the three countries as well as from databases maintained by the United Nations. The documents were all published and analyzed in their original language, Spanish, and then I personally translated the relevant quotes. I analyzed government documents from the NTCA due not only to their shared borders, but also their shared experiences in reaction to the violent presence of MS-13 and M-18. By comparing the policies of each country, we can gain a better understanding of each government's attempts to maintain power and legitimacy within their own state. Though each country has developed its own set of policies; a mix of prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches characterize the present reforms in the NTCA.

## **6. Findings**

In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras state policies clearly recognize the presence and negative impact of gang violence and approach the issue in a variety of ways. Each country establishes that the violence going on within their borders is an epidemic and needs immediate attention due to not only to issues of security but because of the broader implications for the development, economic prosperity and overall modernization of the state and its citizens. The findings demonstrate a trend towards prevention and intervention policies that emphasize the power of the community and deemphasize the responsibility of the state. Furthermore, the policy documents frame education as an important tool in the fight against violence through the emphasis on the values of peace and coexistence and the development of a skilled labor force.

### **6.1. Prevention**

#### **6.1.1. Empowering Families and Communities**

Violence prevention policies and programs in the region aim to address the needs, norms, and precursors to violence in at-risk communities as well as the general population. These policies demonstrate a trend towards understanding and addressing the psychological and social realities

of at risk youth. Identifying and addressing the factors that leave young people and communities vulnerable to victimization or criminal activity is a key tool used in the prevention of violence. In each country there are specific policy documents focused on youth and also the prevention of youth violence, but these themes are also present in documents created by the Ministries of Security, Interior, and Education. In considering the antecedents to violent behavior one particularly strong theme seen across the three countries is the breaking down of barriers for youth, addressing stereotypes, and increasing opportunities for education, employment, and civic participation.

In El Salvador, for example, particular attention is paid to regenerating the positive image of young people and reasserting their importance as members of Salvadoran society. Specifically that “(youth) will be recognized as an important asset of society. This will erase the sensationalist image (of youth) that is currently provided by mass media and has led to harmful stereotypes”(El Salvador 2011). Here, the government is focused on recreating the image of youth; breaking down commonly held beliefs within the country and does so by ensuring that youth are understood not just as troublesome almost-adults but also as rightful participants and actors within society itself. Similarly, in Honduras the law states that “every young person should enjoy respect for their dignity and their integrity. No authority or entity, whether public or private, should act on the basis of generalizations.”(Honduras 2006) Again, there is a renewed focus on the importance of the individual identities of young people within society and ensuring the protection of their rights as citizens. The Guatemalan example focuses on the role of youth in the development of the country and their empowerment in both the public and private sectors that will ensure they are active members of society:

(We must) promote the participation of young men and women as the protagonists of their own development and the development of the country, ensuring the existence of

spaces for active participation and youth empowerment in both public and private institutions. (We must) promote the participation of young people in strengthening the democratic system. (Guatemala 2010)

Here, however, we also see a dual motive – not only the assertion of youth identity but the also the strengthening of the state and its democratic processes. Allowing young people to take ownership in their community, paired with the changing of norms around the treatment and perception of youth, ensures that they will begin to build ties and strong social networks that will reduce both their own vulnerability and the vulnerability of the state itself. Similarly, by putting the focus on the individual, the onus for change is placed on youth and their personal behaviors and takes the responsibility away from the state and removes any pressure for meaningful policy change.

Another mechanism to tackle the factors that may lead to criminal behavior, victimization, or violent activity is to address the role of the family as a key actor in the behavioral, cultural, and societal development of youth. The importance of family in violence prevention is clearly noted throughout documents from each country and is exemplified in this excerpt from Guatemala: “(We must) develop strategies aimed at families with children, adolescents and vulnerable young at risk and to strengthen the nuclear family as the first link in preventing the commission of crimes by their children”(Guatemala 2010). Across all three countries the role of the family in violence prevention is emphasized; showing an understanding abuse and inter-family violence are two of the most prominent psychological and social factors that lead to criminal or violent behavior in adolescents thus increasing the importance of a strong family unit (Chaskin 2010).

### **6.1.2. Reducing Opportunities for Violence through Situational Improvements**

Policies from each of the three countries also place emphasis on the physical and environmental conditions in neighborhoods and communities that increase opportunities for crime. The policies and programs generally recommended key aspects of the situational prevention model including ensuring “adequate lighting and surveillance of parks, schools, sports and recreation centers” (Honduras 2012) as well as improving the safety of public spaces, reducing the availability of weapons and creating community-watch programs in order to reduce the opportunities for and increase the cost of committing crimes. It is under the guise of situational prevention that violence and crime in schools is addressed directly as being the responsibility of the national police to “guarantee the safety” of schools and “avoid risks and reduce vulnerability within schools” by improving school infrastructure and resources (El Salvador 2004). One particularly interesting program aimed at reducing opportunities for crime and increasing community reporting of criminal activity comes from Honduras where the National Violence Prevention policy mandates that:

Every police station have present at least one woman police officer with the capacity and training to deal with cases of harassment and gender-based, domestic violence as well as violence committed against children and youth. (Honduras 2011)

Here we see how the blurring of the lines between situational prevention and the use of law enforcement as a method to reduce violence. Installing a female officer at police stations is an approach that signals to the community an understanding of the complications and barriers to reporting crimes and the increased challenges of reporting crimes that are particularly sensitive and personal in nature. The solution suggested aims to increase community reporting and the effectiveness of surveillance by law enforcement and community leaders in order to bolster not only the security of the neighborhood but also the trust and confidence in the ability and function of the police. Yet again, however, this commitment made by the state puts

responsibility on members to recognize the new accessibility of police action implied in the female officers presence. Yet, her impact may have more symbolic significance as it an outward demonstration of state commitment while removing the responsibility of the greater state policies and the system as a whole to respond to crime and violence.

## **6.2. Intervention**

### **6.2.1. Reintegration and Rehabilitation**

Traditionally, intervention models address criminal activity through policies that aim to control behavior of individuals and communities with violent histories. Yet, a major trend in the policies in each country was a focus on the reintegration and rehabilitation of previous violent actors, particularly youth, back into society. The aim of these programs was to support former offenders and victims as well as to promote civic participation, and ensure the economic productivity and potential of all members of society. For example, in El Salvador:

Reinsertion is focused on people in conflict with the law, in order to achieve their integration into society, reducing, in the case of offenders, conditions that can stimulate recidivism. As for the victims, it refers to the process of restoration of rights and protection against re-victimization. (El Salvador 2013)

The focus on both the criminal actors and their victims shows the blurring of lines between prevention and intervention as true rehabilitation must ensure the recreation of community ties and social bonds that will ensure not only the successful re-entry into society but also prevent future delinquent behavior. In Guatemala, a similar emphasis is placed on reducing the possibility of returning to criminal activity by ensuring the inclusion of former prisoners in society. The Honduran policies focus both on re-entry into society but also re-entry into the labor force and a “strengthening civic values to instill a culture of peace and lawfulness to (former) prisoners”(Honduras 2012).

The importance of community rehabilitation and individual reintegration is also seen in the reframing of the traditional role of jails. Instead of simply representing a place of punishment and wrongdoing they are seen as “security and social defense establishments where rehabilitation, education, and social/labor integration can take place”(Honduras 2012). The emphasis on the role of prisons as a space for education and rehabilitation, coupled with the specific references to the reintegration of former gang members into society, demonstrates a trend in all three countries to move away from a focus on law enforcement. Instead these reforms reemphasize the importance of social and community prevention and intervention as a means to achieve peace and stability.

### **6.3. Beyond Prevention and Intervention**

While education plays a role in both traditional prevention and intervention approaches to violence prevention the policy documents from the NTCA elevate education to a category of its own. Education is seen as a tool that is able to fuse prevention and intervention policies and tackles youth violence at a macro level with a particular focus on the importance of creating moral, harmonious and, ultimately, productive citizens.

#### **6.3.1. Educating for Peace and Coexistence**

Aside from an overall focus on increasing literacy, and education quality throughout each of the three countries there was a common theme of school being a place where the values of society can be shared and taught as a means to ensure peaceful coexistence and harmony between diverse groups of people. A quote from the constitution of El Salvador demonstrates the exact role that education is expected to play within society:

... b) To contribute to building a more prosperous, just and humane democratic society. c) To instill the respect for human rights and observance of corresponding duties. d) To fight all types of intolerance and hatred. (El Salvador 2004)

These goals are seen in each of the countries and are reinforced by the national education policies and also throughout the youth policies, security policies, and violence prevention policies in each country. In this vein, education is also seen as an important tool that should be used by governments and communities to prevent violence, as seen in Guatemala:

A policy to prevent youth violence should direct its efforts to develop and implement an educational and recreational model that affects the development of the individual and collective well-being of Guatemalan youth, to allow, in turn, the development of a culture of peace throughout the entire country. (Guatemala 2012a)

Not only is education seen as a medium for personal development but also a way of changing cultural norms and beliefs and re-instilling the values and morals that the government has deemed to be most important: peace and coexistence. Similarly, programs in Honduras take a strategic approach in addressing violence prevention in schools through the creation of teacher training programs that focus on “human rights, cultural integrity, and diversity” with practical programming taking the shape of conflict resolution, peer mediation, and a focus –again—on the importance of coexistence.

### **6.3.2. Educating for Productivity and Labor**

Morals and values play a large role within the framework of education in the region alongside an emphasis on literacy and international competition; meanwhile, the expansion of non-traditional forms of education and vocational training are seen as a tool to promote the integration of youth into society. Each country states that the primary goals of formal education should be eliminating illiteracy and increasing education quality. The need for improved education quality in Guatemala is due to the poor “standardized evaluation results throughout the national school system and [Guatemala’s] results in international assessments”(Guatemala 2012b). Honduras also emphasizes international competition in its educational policies looking forward:

[Education] will incorporate performance standards that are comparable internationally ensuring the educational training of all Hondurans while strengthening the system of standardized national assessment, and the participation of Honduras in various international tests (such as TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA). (Honduras 2015)

Similarly, education policies in El Salvador emphasize literacy and also the importance of learning English as a second language in order to increase access to information and knowledge and ensure the competitiveness of El Salvador in the global sector.

As high unemployment rates for youth are seen as a factor that contributes to high rates of youth delinquency the importance of skills-based vocational education is seen in both education and violence prevention policy documents. The emphasis on alternative forms of education is seen in the focus on creation and expansion of vocational training programs that will “foster accountability and integration into the labor market” (Guatemala 2012a). Increasing the earning potential and employability of young people is seen both as a short term and long term solution to youth delinquency as it address the social and economic needs of a high-risk population to the economic benefit of society as a whole.

## **7. Discussion**

Overall, these findings demonstrate an emphasis on the perpetuation of a specific set of “values, skills and attitudes” in the similarities in their policy approach to gang violence and youth delinquency. Specifically, the policies of all three countries emphasize the role of youth identity and community ties in violence prevention. The focus on situational prevention highlights the need to address infrastructure and environmental concerns in neighborhoods with histories of violence. The states also converge in their approach to rehabilitation of criminal actors and at-risk communities; focusing not only on the needs of the individual but also on the broader role of the criminal justice system as a means to achieve stability. The trends within policies related to education show an overarching emphasis on nebulous ideas of peace and coexistence but also

a regional focus on testing, international competition, and insertion of youth into the labor force. Finally, the flows of international aid and the overall similarities between policy approaches tie together each aspect of the findings and demonstrate patterns of international influence that suggest a desire for international legitimacy may be the strongest explainer of policy choice in the region.

### **7.1. *Mano Amiga*: A Softer Approach to Violence**

The similarities between each country, seen not only in the broader themes and but also in the use of a common set of models and programmatic recommendations, suggest the creation of a regional response to the issue of youth violence. In all three of the countries there is a de-emphasis on the role of law enforcement and other aspects of the criminal justice system as actors within the process of violence prevention. Instead, each country draws on the role of the community, and in strengthening the social fabric that hold families and communities together within the broader state. A common regime has been developed to address the popular support of prevention techniques as a means to reduce violence in the region. Each country is taking steps to distance themselves from the iron fist strategies of the past and renew their commitment to individuals and communities as part of a *Mano Amiga* or “Friendly Hand” strategy to create a stable democratic state that gained prominence after the previous failure of *Mano Dura* policies earlier in the 2000s (Manwaring 2007).

The perpetuation and emphasis on this common strategy of prevention demonstrates the states’ use of “soft” policies and civil society institutions to maintain existing class and power structures. Through these prevention policies the state appears to be lessening its forceful regulation of violence in exchange for placing emphasis on the responsibility of community and individual. Here we see the way in which the state is able to make use of civil society to perpetuate the status quo of power relations and reinforce desirable behaviors in a way that was

not possible through force alone (Althusser 1971). The soft approach to violence prevention appears on the surface to address the needs of vulnerable communities and individuals but the policies themselves are superficial in nature. The state is making a nod towards comprehensive prevention policies but the emphasis placed on the role of the family and community reduces the pressure on the government to provide for the safety of its citizens. In this way the government's choice to emphasize the role community ends up fortifying the divides between classes allowing the state to preserve their own power.

## **7.2. Education and the History of Violence and Conflict**

The themes and strategies emphasized in the documents analyzed between the three countries bear striking similarities not only in their chosen approach to youth violence but also in their lack of attention to the history of violence and conflict in the region and in each country. Furthermore, references to gang violence and the impact of gang violence on education and society as a whole are made in broad strokes throughout the policy documents, seen primarily as destabilizing forces within communities and the state as a whole.

The lack recognition of the history and conflict within the each country shows a detachment between each country's reality and their policies. The focus on peace and coexistence coupled with the lack of historical context and reference to violent past and present of each country reinforces the idea that education is seen by the government as a tool to reinforce its own power (Althusser 1971). Each of the education and youth policy documents focus on morals and values as a key aspect of the educational process in order to ensure the development of students that have the necessary skills and mindsets to positively contribute to society. This is particularly evident in the lack of recognition of the violent pasts of each country and the lack of contextualization of education within the realities of each society; societies where income inequality and violence are the norm.

School in the NTCA is not only preparing students for the workforce but also instilling a values of peace, coexistence and productivity that intends to replicate the structures that exist in society outside of the classroom, whereby perpetuating the status quo (Bowles and Gintis 1976). The policy choices made in each of the countries in the NTCA and the disembodied nature of education again demonstrates each state's desire to maintain their own "self-constructed" systems of power—the focus on these particular values shows a disconnect between the state and its citizens. Here education is used to reinforce the power of the state by limiting the potential for students to develop any kind of critical consciousness that may lead to the questioning of structural reasons behind poverty and violence.

### **7.3. Education, Youth and the International Community**

In each country, policies focused on youth and education demonstrates a clear emphasis on the development of tools necessary to become beneficial members of society. The emphasis on developing vocational and technical training programs as a means to ensure successful insertion of young men and women into the labor market coupled with the focus on assessments, literacy, and academic achievement reinforce a view of education as a tool to create productive citizens.

Similarly the focus of the educational policies in each country on comparing their own academic performance, through literacy rates and international testing, not to other countries within the region but to countries across the world shows an obsession with comparison and competition. The policies not only take on a human capital tilt but also speak to a broader educational regime that emphasizes outcomes and performance tasks as indicators of broader economic capability, which then acts to further legitimize the state internationally. Though these findings cannot directly be explained through the use of social reproduction theory they provide a connection to the theoretical lens of compensatory legitimation; the state is using education as

a means to make up for its shortfalls in other areas in order to be perceived as legitimate within the international community (Weiler 1983). The power of international testing as a tool for legitimation internationally is supported by research that demonstrates the global and political motivations behind the use of testing as a tool for globalization (Kamens and McNeely 2010).

The dual emphasis on skill building and international competition places a focus on the ability of youth to successfully integrate themselves into society as economic and social actors. Yet, these policies only topically address the barriers that youth face that currently prevent them from meeting these targets. The needs of high-risk communities where youth are overwhelmed by influence of gangs and violence – whether through direct participation in criminal acts, victimization or in bearing witness to scenes of violence on a regular basis – are to be met by the communities themselves. Instead of directly addressing the causes of instability within these communities that are stuck within the cycle of poverty the focus is placed on the role of the family and the community in preventing violence and ensuring the rehabilitation of violent actors. While the tools for individual youth to rise up and become contributing members of society are outlined and strategized, little is said with regard to the needs of these communities and the reality of the situation that young people in these countries face. The focus on the needs of the individual without consideration for their context and the constraints that they may face further demonstrates the lack of government engagement with structural realities that lead to high rates of youth violence. Here again, the disconnect between the actions of the state and the realities of the citizens emphasizes the desire of the state to reinforce its own conception of power and the use of systems that perpetuate a specific set of skills, values, and attitudes to do just that.

#### **7.4. Bringing it All Together: The Search for International Legitimacy**

The majority of the national policies and strategic plans analyzed were developed by the national governments of the respective country with direct assistance from aid organizations including the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Union (EU), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and Save the Children, as well as the governments of Germany, Italy, and South Korea, among others. This international influence has led to a number of striking similarities in documents between the three countries. An example of this can be seen in Table 4 which compares the “National Policy for the Prevention of Violence towards Children and Youth in Honduras” to the Guatemalan “National Youth Violence Prevention Policy” 2012.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

It is not the number or similarity in themes of these sections that stand out but instead the fact that of these all but one of the Guatemalan strategies are mirrored in the Honduran document. The eight strategies in question are identical between the two documents – differing only in only a minor way with reference to specific institutions within countries.

Similarities can also be found in the violence prevention policies in all three countries where each use similar, almost textbook, definitions of the social, community, and situational violence prevention models and its role in reducing opportunities for delinquency. For example in the Salvadoran National Violence Prevention Strategy, created with technical and editorial assistance from USAID and UNDP, the definition a of community prevention models is similar to those provided within Guatemalan and Honduran violence prevention policy documents.

There are equally important questions raised by the similarities between each country’s preference for prevention. The explicit international collaboration and partnerships with aid

agencies sheds light on the similarities in approaches but also brings to question the motivations behind these partnerships, the development of these policies and who the true actors are that are developing and advocating for a particular strategy. For example, the youth violence prevention policy documents from Honduras and Guatemala in Table 4 were both created as a result of \$45-60 million dollars in funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), a multilateral lending organization based in Washington D.C. (Inter-American Development Bank 2012a). The IDB also funded similar violence prevention programs in El Salvador that focus on “work training, institutional strengthening and jail rehabilitation” (Inter-American Development Bank 2012b) three types of programs that are echoed in youth violence prevention policies throughout the region.

Literature on international cooperation and policy borrowing provides insight into the potential economic rationale that may lead countries to adopt similar policies despite different national contexts. The similarities in the strategies and approaches within policy documents described in the findings coupled with the direct link to loans and foreign aid reinforces the state’s need for legitimacy. While the convergence of policies and search for legitimacy may be considered a key indicator of the creation of a world society (Meyer et al. 1997), the particular policy preference chosen by these states may instead indicate an attempt to maintain systems of power that are desired by the state, to construct control where it did not previously exist. Furthermore, the lack of contextualization of education in either of the three countries strongly suggests that the convergence in policy response is encouraged not only by a desire for the state to truly address the needs of its citizens but also by a desire for international aid and a search for international legitimacy.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study expands the literature on violence prevention and the role that gang violence plays in education in Central America by examining the underlying forces and motivations behind policy documents from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. It is a case of how states address violence through education and youth-centered reforms in order to gain or maintain both national and international legitimacy.

The de-contextualization of policy and education from the violent reality and history of the Northern Triangle coupled with the influence of international actors sheds light on the reasoning behind the convergence of policy surrounding youth violence in three countries with such different histories. The policy analysis in this study suggests that the convergence of approaches to face the epidemic of gang violence in the region is due to a push to not only retain the social structures of the state but also a push from international actors to develop policies that will increase compatibility and belonging within the global sector.

Based on the findings, further research on policy and programmatic responses to gang violence and the role of education should focus on the way in which the policies analyzed are implemented in each country. Specific focus should also be paid to the role of community and the development or impact of community-based alternatives as a means to respond to youth violence. On the educational side of things, research on curriculum and teaching within classrooms in order to further evaluate the lack of engagement with the violent histories and the role of schooling as a means to either foster or stifle the development of critical consciousness. Treating the root cause of violence in each of these countries will entail addressing the systemic power imbalances and inequalities within their populations, a task that will inherently challenge the power and legitimacy of those who maintain control of the state. Thus perhaps the most

important potential research should focus on the ways in which the state, civil society organizations, and other actors can address the real needs of citizens without increasing violence and instability in the Northern Triangle.

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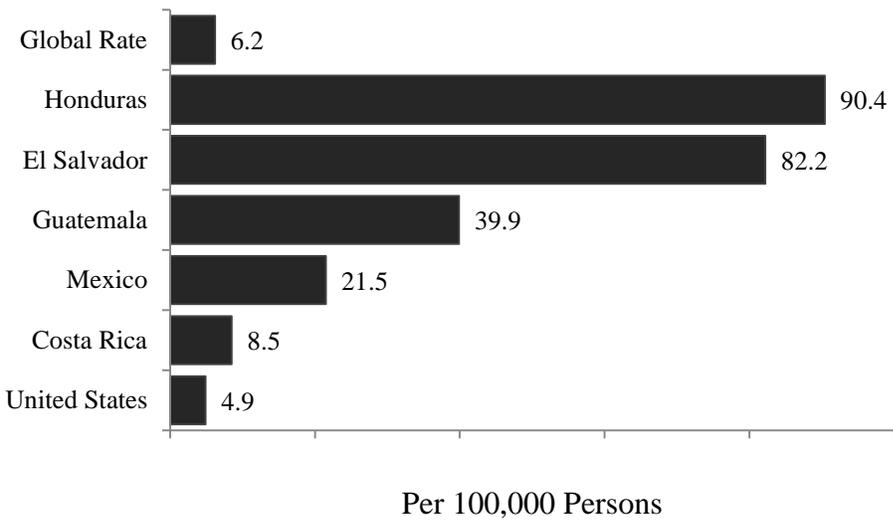
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**Figure 1: Homicide Rates (2013) in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala in Comparison with Mexico, Costa Rica, the United States, and Global Average (UNHCR 2015)**

**Table 1: Complete list of documents used for analysis from El Salvador**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>MINISTRY</b>	<b>DOCUMENT TITLE</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>YEAR</b>
El Salvador	Legislative Assembly	Ley de Desarrollo y Protección Social (Law of Development and Social Protection)	Judicial Document/Official Legislation	2015
	Ministry of Education	Plan Operativo Institucional MINED 2014 (MINED 2014 Institutional Operating Plan)	Ministry Operational Plan	2014
	Ministry of Justice and Public Security	Estrategia Nacional de prevención de violencia (National Violence Prevention Strategy)	Strategic Plan	2013
	Ministry of Social Inclusion	Política Nacional de Juventud 2011-2024 y Plan de Acción 2011-2014 (National Youth Policy 2011-2024 and Action Plan 2011-2014)	National Policy and Strategic Plan	2011
	Ministry of Education	Plan Estratégico para la Prevención del Acoso, Abuso Sexual y otras Formas de Violencia de Género en las Comunidades Educativas de El Salvador (Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Abuse and Other Forms of Gender Violence in Educational Communities of El Salvador)	Strategic Plan	2010
	Supreme Court of Justice	Ley de protección integral de la niñez y adolescencia (Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents)	Judicial Document/Official Legislation	2009
	Ministry of Education	Plan Nacional de Educación 2021 (National Education Plan 2021)	Strategic Plan	2004

**Table 2: Complete list of documents used for analysis from Guatemala**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>MINISTRY</b>	<b>DOCUMENT TITLE</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>YEAR</b>
Guatemala	Ministry of Education	Crear Programa Nacional de Valores  (Creation of a National Values Program)	Ministerial Agreement	2014
	Ministry of Education	Estrategia para una Educación de Calidad para la Niñez y Juventud Guatemalteca  “Strategy for Quality Education for Guatemalan Children and Youth)	Strategic Plan	2012
	Ministry of Education	Plan de Implementación Estratégica de Educación 2012-2016  (Strategic Implementation Plan for Education 2012-2016”	Strategic Plan	2012
	Social and Economic Council	Declaración del consejo económico y social de Guatemala sobre la estrategia para una educación de calidad  (Declaration of the Economic and Social Council of Guatemala on the strategy for quality education)	Committee Declaration	2012
	National Security Council	Política Nacional de Seguridad  (National Security Policy)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2012
	Presidential Commission for Coordinating Executive Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH)	Política Nacional de Prevención de Violencia Juvenil  (National Youth Violence Prevention Policy)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2012
	Ministry of Social Development	Política Nacional de Juventud 2012-2020  (National Youth Policy 2012-2020)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2010
	National Congress	Ley de Protección Integral a Favor de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (DECRETO NUMERO 27-2003)  (Comprehensive Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents )	Judicial Document/Official Legislation	2003

**Table 3: Complete list of documents used for analysis from Honduras**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>MINISTRY</b>	<b>DOCUMENT TITLE</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>YEAR</b>
Honduras	Ministry of Education	Plan Estratégico Institucional 2014-2018  (Institutional Strategic Plan 2014-2018)	Strategic Plan	2015
	General Secretary of State Government Coordination	Plan Estratégico de Gobierno 2014-2018  (Government Strategic Plan 2014-2018)	Strategic Plan	2014
	Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	Política nacional de prevención de violencia hacia la niñez y juventud en Honduras  (National Policy for the Prevention of Violence towards children and youth in Honduras)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2012
	Secretary of Security	Política integral de convivencia y seguridad ciudadana para Honduras 2011-2022  (Comprehensive Policy of Coexistence and Citizen Security for Honduras 2011-2022)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2011
	National Youth Institute (Office of the President)	Política Nacional de Juventud 2010-2014  (National Youth Policy 2010-2014)	National Policy/ Strategic Plan	2010
	National Congress	República de Honduras Visión de País 2010 -2038 y Plan de Nación 2010-2022  (Republic of Honduras Country Vision 2010 -2038 and National Plan 2010-2022)	National Plan/Vision	2009
	National Congress	Ley Marco Para de Desarrollo Integral de la Juventud  (Integrated Framework Law for Youth Development)	Judicial Document/Official Legislation	2006

**Table 4: A Comparison of Quotes from Policy Related Documents from Honduras and Guatemala**

COUNTRY	Honduras	Guatemala
<b>DOCUMENT TITLE</b>	National Policy for the Prevention of Violence Towards Children and Youth in Honduras	National Youth Violence Prevention Policy
<b>SECTION</b>	4. Principles, general objective, specific policy objectives	2. Components of the National Youth Violence Prevention Policy
<b>SUBSECTION</b>	4.4 Principles	2.1 Principles and Strategies of Intervention
	<p><b>4.4.1</b> The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth seeks to develop a new civic consciousness responsible and committed to this country. It is the construction of a new participatory citizenship that strengthens democratic governance. We seek to develop a new value system based on respect, self-esteem, confidence, and tolerance towards people and society in general. This principle can only be accomplished with the active participation and strong commitment of families, social organizations, religious groups, formal and non-formal education systems, the private sector, universities, municipalities, and communities.</p> <p><b>4.4.2</b> The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth is based on a strategy that ensures children and youth access to technical training, proper technological knowledge, and the realization of their potential, allowing for the satisfactory inclusion into dignified work. This requires strategies that are complementary to the formal education system and national non-formal education system, adapting our own models based on national and international experiences demonstrating that cross-sector partnerships can and have been successful in meeting labor demand in the new economic areas of service, industry and trade. It is considered of national urgency strengthen the system of technical education for work, extracurricular education and education for professionalism ensuring that Honduras, in the short term, reaches levels of labor competitiveness in the globalization process.</p>	<p><b>2.1.1</b> The youth violence prevention policy seeks to develop a new civic consciousness responsible and committed to this country. It is the construction of a new citizenship that strengthens democratic governance. Here we seek to develop a new system of values based on self-respect and respect for others and for society in general. This principle can only be accomplished with the active participation and strong commitment of the family, the formal and non-formal education systems, churches, the organized private sector, municipalities and communities...</p> <p><b>2.1.2</b> The youth violence prevention policy is based on a strategy that ensures adolescents and young people access to work based on technical training, proper technological knowledge, and the realization of their potential, allowing their inclusion into a productive life. his requires strategies that are complementary to the formal education system and national non-formal education system, adapting our own models based on national and international experiences demonstrating that cross-sector partnerships can and have been successful in meeting labor demand in the new economic areas of service, industry and trade. It is considered of national urgency to strengthen the system of technical education for work, school education and education for professionalism ensuring that Guatemala, in the short term, reaches levels of labor competitiveness in the globalization process.</p>

**4.4.4** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth is based on ensuring the development and appropriate use of the infrastructure to enable the safe use of facilities and public places to support activities positive use of time and community activities.

**4.4.5** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth is based on a strategy of increased sensitivity of authorities to develop a new vision and positive relationship with the population. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Honduran Institute for Children and Families, the National Institute for Women, the National Prevention Program, rehabilitation and Social Reinsertion, Honduran Institute for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, the National Police and all state bodies involved, will be the entities responsible for proposing a process of awareness that allows for public officials and public servants to take responsibility for a culture of prevention, a new kind of relationship with the country's population to develop attitudes and positive relationships and a new structure of social values within the development of a civic culture.

**4.4.** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth is based on the active, sensitive, and responsible participation of the media and the increased awareness of the general public. As it established the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Youth Violence (Riyadh Guidelines) the Government should encourage the media to ensure that young people have access to information and material from various national and international sources, in order to enable them to learn about the positive contribution of young people in society by highlighting positive examples.

**4.4.7** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth establishes the need to eradicate domestic violence. This public policy recognizes that one of the causes of chronic violence is domestic violence and the use and abuse of alcoholic drinks and drugs in the family.

**2.1.4** The youth violence prevention policy is also based on the development and appropriate use of the infrastructure to enable the safe use of facilities and public places to support activities of the positive use of time and community activities.

**2.1.5** The youth violence prevention policy is based on a strategy of increased sensitivity of authorities to develop a new vision and positive relationship with young people. The Presidential Commission for Coordinating Executive Policy on Human Rights, the Peace Secretariat, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the National Civil Service Office and the Institute of Municipal Development, through CONAPREPI will be the entities responsible for proposing a new process of awareness that allows for public officials to take responsibility for a culture of prevention and a new type of relationship with the country's youth to develop positive attitudes, positive relationships and a new structure of social values within the development of a culture of peace.

**2.1.6** The youth violence prevention policy is based on the active, sensitive, and responsible participation of the media and the increased awareness of the general public. As it established the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Youth Violence (Riyadh Guidelines) the Government should encourage the media to ensure that young people have access to information and material from various national and international sources, in order to enable them to learn about the positive contribution of young people in society by highlighting positive examples.

**2.1.7** The youth violence prevention policy establishes the need to eradicate domestic violence. This public policy recognizes that one of the main reasons why children, adolescents and youth choose a life on the street is domestic violence, violence against women and the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs in the family.

**4.4.9** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth is based on the principle that prevention can only be done with public participation in the governance of Civic Security and Coexistence, with primary community activities based at the local and municipal level, as well as in the areas of national decision-making. National and international experience shows that successful prevention programs are those rooted in and appropriate for the communities themselves. For prevention programs to be successful, effective coordination should be ensured between entities in the executive branch responsible for following up this policy, municipal corporations, municipal women's offices, municipal children's offices and municipal offices of youth, citizen transparency commissions, non-governmental and business organizations that share the same territorial space where violence prevention programs are established, under an inclusive participation of all citizens and Civil Society organizations.

**4.4.10** The policy of prevention of violence against children and youth requires updating national legislation. On the one hand, there is the need to reform national legislation to make it consistent with the commitments made by Honduras internationally through conventions ratified by the country, such as: declarations, conventions, rules, platforms, resolutions and statutes of the United Nations and Latin American and national frameworks linked to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, rights of women and indigenous peoples, the protection of childhood, adolescence and youth, rehabilitation and social reintegration and on the other hand, to raise the penalties for those persons who threaten the security, dignity and integrity of the population.

**2.1.8** The youth violence prevention policy is based on the principle that prevention can only be done with the active participation of the community on the local and municipal level. National and international experience shows that successful prevention programs are those rooted in and appropriate for the communities themselves. For prevention programs to be successful, effective coordination among the entities of the Executive responsible for following up this policy with municipalities, the Local Safety Committees, non-governmental and business organizations that share the same territorial space where youth violence prevention programs are established.

**2.1.9** The policy of prevention of youth violence requires updating national legislation. On the one hand, there is the need to reform national legislation to make it consistent with the commitments made by Guatemala internationally through conventions ratified by the country in relation to the protection of childhood, adolescence and youth conventions, and on the other hand, to raise the penalties for those who violate security, dignity and integrity of children and adolescents.