

The Global Observatory of Transnational Criminal Networks

Firearms Trafficking: Central America

No. 17

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Firearms Trafficking: Central America

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Disclaimer

The facts and the analysis presented herein are sustained in documents and interviews exposed in mass media and judicial records related to the criminal networks analyzed. No primary information uncovering facts has been gathered, which means that only secondary sources were consulted, from legal to media documents. In the case of the names mentioned, quoted or referenced on indictments —with the exception of those specifically mentioned, quoted or referenced in the text as definitively condemned-, the presumption of innocence, in observance of individual rights is always preserved.

The judicial truth is the jurisdiction of the courts, which by law will decide whether the defendants are innocent or guilty.¹ It is stated that belonging to, participating in, being connected to, or appearing on a network, as analyzed herein, does not imply having committed a criminal act or being engaged in a criminal enterprise. It is always possible to belong, participate, be connected, or appear on a network as an agent promoting interests that are socially and institutionally beneficial, or as a result of coercion, among other reasons unrelated to criminal acts committed by the agent.

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Introduction

Central America is one of the most violent and insecure regions in the world. Due to its strategically geographical location, this region is an important route for drug trafficking from South America to United States, which increases other criminal activities in the territories. Central American countries have relevant security challenges related to fragile political and judicial institutions, as well as social issues such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, unresolved post-conflict struggles and high rates of homicides and domestic violence. These factors contribute to widespread insecurity and violence across the Central American region, mainly across the three countries conforming the Northern triangle: Honduras, Guatemala and Salvador.

One specific and key condition fueling the increasing rates of homicides in the region is the proliferation, possession and intense trafficking of firearms in the countries. Bearing this in mind, the aim of this paper is to characterize the traffic of firearms across Central America. As discussed below, as a result of the institutional weakness that characterizes the region, there is a lack of official data sources informing about the movement and trafficking of firearms. Although the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) generates statistical data that informs about the illegal trafficking of firearms between the United States and Central American countries, proxy quantitative variables related to homicides rates and qualitative variables related to legislation, must also be considered to understand the characteristics and effects of the criminal market.

The document has five sections. The first one is a presentation of context characteristics of Central American countries that are mainly related to this type of traffic. In the second section, trends related to main sources, hotspots, routes and the actors agents involved in the arms trafficking market in Central America are explained. The third part is a brief presentation of the main restrictions and regulations of firearms, ammunitions, explosives and other materials in the more affected zone by the traffic in firearms: the northern triangle: Honduras, Guatemala and Salvador. The fourth part includes relevant cases related to firearms trafficking in the region. The fifth part includes conclusions.

1. Background of Arms Trafficking in Central America

The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has pointed out that countries with deep income disparities have homicide rates four times higher than those with more equal societies.¹ Central American countries have been historically characterized by conditions of persistent poverty, inequality, and unemployment. In fact, countries in the region, except Costa Rica and Panama, have a low and medium level of income with increasing rates of population below the poverty line. According to the UNODC's findings, these characteristics are relevant variables, yet not determinant, for explaining the alarming levels of violence and homicide rates in this region.

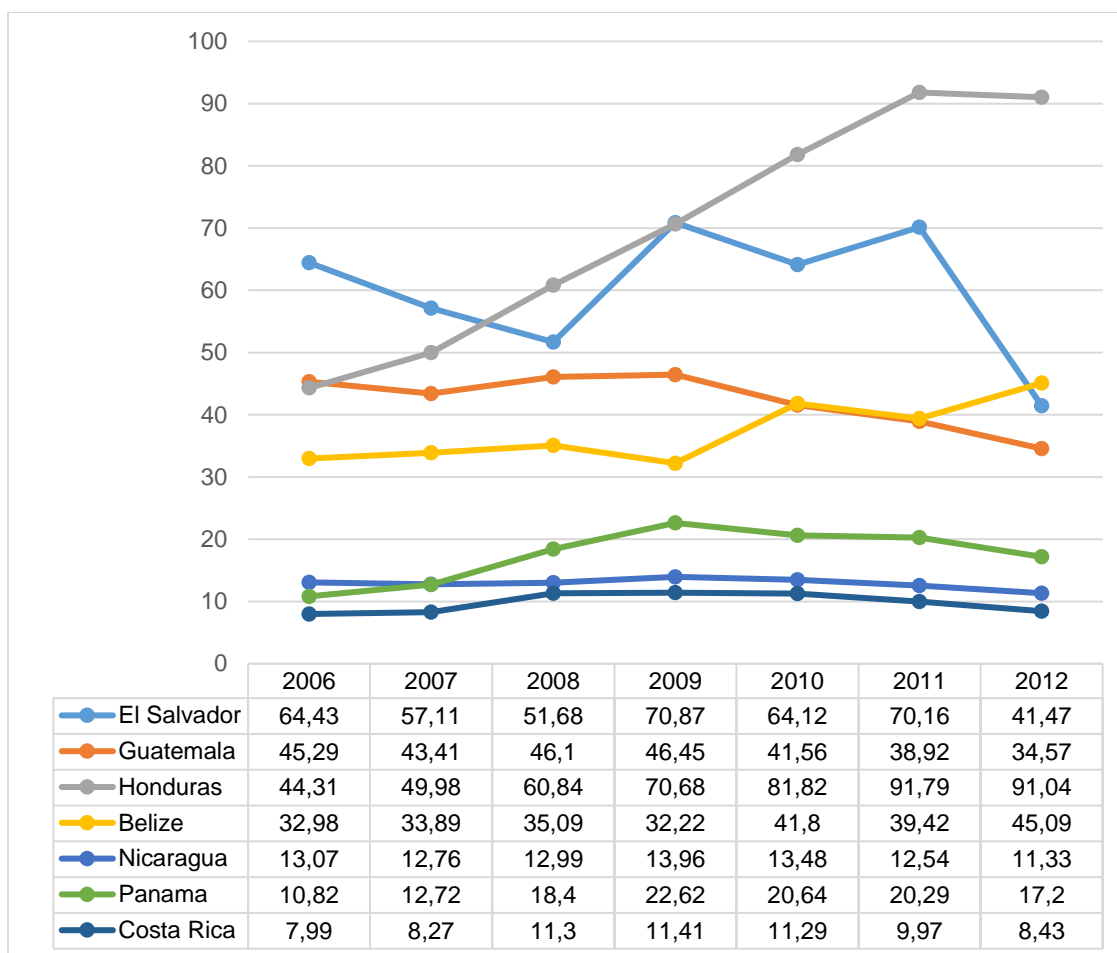
Figure 1. Poverty and vulnerability indicators: Central America

Country	HDI	Gini (2013)	Population in multidimensional poverty	Employment to population ratio
Belize	0,715	53,1	7,40%	56
Guatemala	0,627	55,9	13,70%	65,8
Honduras	0,606	57	20,70%	60
El Salvador	0,666	48,3	n.a	58.3%
Nicaragua	0,631	40,5	19,40%	56
Costa Rica	0,766	50,7	n.a	58,2
Panama	0,78	51,9	n.a	62,8

Source: UNDP and World Bank Data.

¹ UNODC (2011) Global Study on Homicide: Trends, Contexts, Data. p. 30.

Figure 2. Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people) in Central America



Source: World Bank Data. Available in: <https://goo.gl/l92tcq>

Central American countries, with the exception of Belize and Costa Rica, have histories of armed conflicts and dictatorships, with ineffective post-conflict or transition processes from war to peace. Therefore, there is a legacy of conflict and authoritarian rule that have imposed obstacles for the consolidation of democratic institutions and the rule of law. In fact, one specific consequence of this legacy armed conflicts and dictatorships is the widespread proliferation of illicit firearms in the region, as well as a general tendency to the violent resolution of social impasses.²

² Tani Marilena Adams (2012) Chronic Violence and its Reproduction: Perverse Trends in Social Relations, Citizenship, and Democracy in Latin America, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

The isthmus, though the past twenty years, has become a major transshipment point for illicit drugs from South American countries to the United States.³ As a result, the situation of domestic and transnational security has heavily deteriorated in Central America, while local gangs and other criminal groups have expanded their activities and the urban violence has increased. In the “northern triangle” of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, this situation has translated into some of the highest homicide rates in the world.⁴

In fact, this situation is not only affecting the perception of insecurity but massively involving and victimizing young people. According to the UNODC Global Study on Homicide (2013), most homicide victims in the region are young: The homicide rate for male victims aged 15-29 in Central America is more than four times the global average rate for the same age group.⁵ These high rates are related to the operation of gangs, mainly composed by young males.

The actual percentage of homicides that can be specifically attributed to gangs remains uncertain. However, according to authorities, gangs have increasingly become involved in criminal activities that require physical coercion such as extortion and kidnapping. Also, as it can be expected, gangs have also increased their participation in trafficking markets, for instance, of guns and drugs. The most relevant criminal organizations operating in Central America are the “18th Street” gang (also known as M-18) and its main rival, the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13).⁶

However, there is a difference between Maras and regular gangs or “*pandillas*”. Maras are a phenomenon with transnational roots, while *pandillas* are more localized gangs with traditional presence in Central American societies. “*Pandillas*” became a relevant social phenomenon in the region during the post-conflict period. After facing situations of insecurity, lack of job opportunities and political instability, demobilized combatant youths in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, which returned to their home communities, formed vigilante-style groups to protect their communities.⁷

³ Peter Meyer; Clare Ribando Seelke (2015) *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. Available in: <https://goo.gl/6YsSVd>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNODC (2013) *Global Study on Homicide: Trends, Context, Data*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/5SoTEO>

⁶ Peter Meyer; Clare Ribando Seelke (2015) *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. Available in: <https://goo.gl/6YsSVd>

⁷ Dennis Rodgers, Robert Muggah; Chris Stevenson (2009) *Gangs of Central America: Causes, Costs, and Interventions*. Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. Available in: <https://goo.gl/iRpebr>

The *maras*, on the other hand, can be directly linked to deportation actions during the nineties. In theory, there are only two *maras*: the *Dieciocho* (Eighteen) and the *Salvatrucha*. The two groups were involved in the Rodney King riots in 1992, which led the State of California to implement strict anti-gang laws. The result was the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, whereby non-US citizens sentenced to one year or more in prison were to be repatriated to their countries of origin. This measure led to the deportation of nearly 46,000 convicts to Central America and 160,000 illegal immigrants who were living in the United States without the required documents.⁸

Many of these deportees were members of the 18th Street and *Salvatrucha* gangs who had arrived to the United States during the early eighties. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras received more than 90 per cent of the deportations from the United States, and currently this figure of *maras* has almost completely absorbed local gangs.⁹

Both, *pandillas* and *maras*, make use of weaponry that includes firearms such as 9 mm, AK-47s and explosives such as fragmentation grenades that are acquired through diversion and smuggling. As a result, *pandillas* and *maras* are key actors in the firearm trafficking market across in Central America.

2. Flows and Trends of Arms Trafficking in Central America

According to a study conducted by the Congressional Research Service, organized crime in Central America operates through traditional criminal organizations and transnational criminal networks with flexible structures that can be controlled from multiple locations.¹⁰ As expected, the illicit trafficking and misuse of firearms is intrinsically linked to these criminal organizations and networks.¹¹ For instance, in Salvador, illicit networks that smuggled arms during the armed conflict have evolved into transnational criminal networks that also

⁸ UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) (2007) Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire.

⁹ Dennis Rodgers, Robert Muggah; Chris Stevenson (2009) Gangs of Central America: Causes, Costs, and Interventions. Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. Available in: <https://goo.gl/M34xcd>

¹⁰ Douglas Farah (2011) Organized Crime in El Salvador: The Homegrown and Transnational Dimensions, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Working Paper Series on Organized Crime in Central America.

¹¹ Peter Meyer; Clare Ribando Seelke (2015) *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. Available in: <https://goo.gl/6YsSVd>

smuggle drugs, humans, illicit proceeds and other stolen goods across the region.¹² In general, trafficking networks operating across Central American have integrated the smuggling of various goods and commodities, and have also integrated various criminal activities.

There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between trafficking of firearms, narcotics, and gangs' activity. In Costa Rica, for instance, peasants have been armed with AK-47s to protect marijuana plantations, and dozens of armed gangs in Guatemala City have strong ties with international drug dealers.¹³ However, the most popular gun used by members of *maras* and *pandillas* is the 9mm caliber. In fact, between 2008 and 2011, this gun represented almost 61% of the seized pistols in the region. Solely in Honduras, this gun represented 63% of the seized weapons.¹⁴

Traffickers usually use overland smuggling, littoral maritime trafficking, and short-distance aerial trafficking within Central America (Figure 3). Through the same routes drug trafficking networks also transport cocaine, instead of sending it directly from South America to Mexico. In fact, according to the U.S. State Department, about 84% of cocaine trafficked to the United States passes through Central America before reaching Mexico.¹⁵ In fact, the so-called *transportistas* (trafficking organizations) and territorial groups (gangs or organized criminal groups) control the trafficking routes and other trafficking 'markets' in the region.¹⁶

¹² Jhon P Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker (2007) Third Generation Gang Studies and Introduction. In: Journal of Gang Research Volume 14 No 4. Available in: <https://goo.gl/hQTXZr>

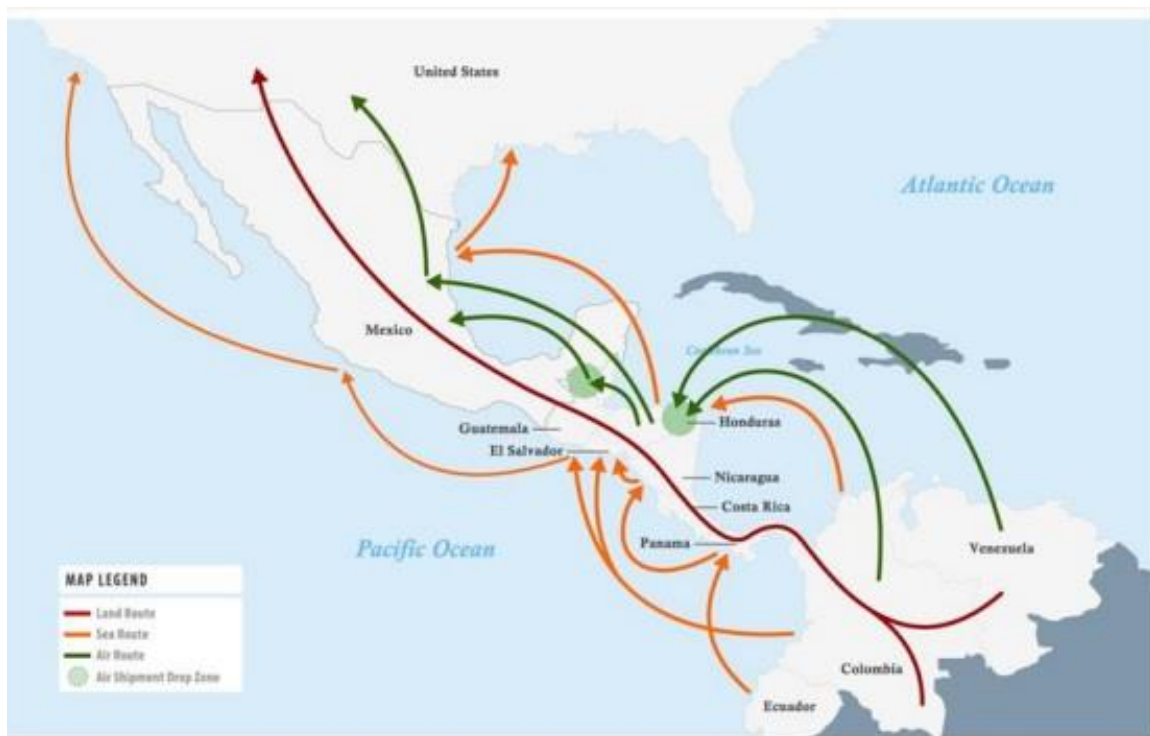
¹³ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle (2009) The Small Arms Trade in Latin America. Available in: <https://goo.gl/8kadUR>

¹⁴ UNODC (2012) Firearms Within Central America. In: *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/9RgQ3P>

¹⁵ 8 U.S. Department of State, 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), March 2015, p. 10 (hereinafter, INCSR, March 2015).

¹⁶ UNODC (2012) Firearms Within Central America. In: *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/9RgQ3P>

Figure 3. Smuggling routes



Source: Peter Meyer; Clare Ribando Seelke (2015) Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress. Congressional Research Service. Available in: <https://goo.gl/6YsSVd>

An historical event related with the traffic of firearms is the armed conflicts in some Central American countries. During the three civil wars in Guatemala (1960-1996), El Salvador (1980-1992) and Nicaragua (1972-1991), several weapons were imported to Central America. Most of these guns were provided by countries involved in the Cold War, and were supplied to both the states and rebel groups in each country.¹⁷

This situation created an overall surplus of weapons in the region that ended up being trafficked in two main ways: Within Central America, and from Central America towards other Latin American countries, such as Colombia and Mexico.¹⁸ In fact, by 2003, Central America represented the largest source of illegal firearms to Colombia, with the third of the weapons shipped into the country originated from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama and

¹⁷ UNODC. Central America. Available in: <https://goo.gl/YNq9IX>

¹⁸ ATF, Department of Justice. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. *Central America*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/TG8ypm>

Costa Rica.¹⁹ Also, by 2008 approximately 36% of flows of illegal firearms trafficked to Colombia came from Central America, particularly from Nicaragua and Panama. One route involved Nicaraguan firearms transported by land or sea, often together with other illegal or stolen goods, to Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia.²⁰

Figure 4. Firearms flows from Panama to Colombia



Source: UNODC (2012) Firearms Within Central America. In: Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean. Available in: <https://goo.gl/LSwplI>

There's also evidence of trafficking of Central American arms to Mexico. Almost half of the military weaponry recovered in Mexico came from Central American countries. Specifically, thousands of firearms and ammunition, as well as hand grenades, have been recovered in the Mexican state of Chiapas, next to Guatemalan border. In fact, according to the UNODC,

¹⁹ Kim Cragin; Bruce Hoffman (2003) Arms Trafficking and Colombia. Defense Intelligence Agency, National Defense Research Institute. Available in: <https://goo.gl/SfW8LH>

²⁰ Stohl, R. and D. Tuttle Small Arms Trade in Latin America. Washington D.C., North American Congress on Latin America, 2008.

the Guatemalan Pacific coast (particularly the San Marcos province) is an important trafficking hotspot for firearms coming from Panama and heading to Mexico.²¹

Currently, military and police stockpiles in Honduras, El Salvador²², and Guatemala²³ have been identified as the largest sources of illegal firearms in the region,²⁴ a fact that points out that (i) central American countries are still the primary sources or entrance points of trafficked guns in the continent and (ii) there is a relevant involvement of military officials in arms trafficking across Central America.

However, the sources of handguns are entirely different than those for assault rifles, since most handguns were actually acquired legally in the United States. These guns are then licitly imported and diverted for illicit use.²⁵ Panama is a key hotspot in both directions, towards south and north, due to its allowance of duty-free arms purchases. In fact, North American weapons can be bought legally in Panama, and then smuggled to other countries in South and Central America.²⁶

United States is currently the main gun importer in the world, so the North American origin of the handguns doesn't surprise, especially bearing in mind the high amount of 9mm guns currently demanded by criminal organizations in Central America. In fact, the United States can be also the source of many of the guns that arrived to Central America during past armed conflicts. In Nicaragua, for example, during the *Sandinista* revolution, United States provided Soviet weaponry (mostly AK-47 machinery) to its allies: the counter-revolutionary Nicaraguan Contras. In El Salvador, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front also received AK-47s sent by the Honduran military, which had raided the CIA's Nicaraguan supplies.²⁷

²¹ UNODC (2012) Firearms Within Central America. In: *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/LSwplI>

²² Arron Daugherty (2016) El Salvador Govt Turned Blind Eye to Official's Arms Trafficking. InSight Crime. Available in: <https://goo.gl/6ULK7H>

²³ Elyssa Pachico (2011) How Much is Guatemala Arming the Zetas? InSight Crime. Available in: <https://goo.gl/xWKwft>

²⁴ Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG), *Armas de Fuego y Municiones en Guatemala*, (Guatemala, 2009); Instituto de Enseñanza para el Desarrollo Sostenible (IEPADES), *El Tráfico Ilícito de Armas en Guatemala* (Guatemala, 2006).

²⁵ ATF, Department of Justice. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (2014) *Central America*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/TG8ypm>

²⁶ UNODC (2012) Firearms Within Central America. In: *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/LSwplI>

²⁷ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle (2009) *The Small Arms Trade in Latin America*. Available in: <https://goo.gl/52QKLH>

Currently, the lack of regulation in the purchase of guns in the southern states in United States fuels the smuggling of firearms from this country to Central America. Recent prosecutions in United States point out Mexican criminal networks involved in the purchasing of guns in Texas, often later delivering those guns to other criminal networks operating in Central American countries, such as Guatemala and Honduras.²⁸ Furthermore, the United States has frequently opposed to international controls on the small-arms trade, and without international measures, the efforts to stop the cross-border trade with Mexico and southern countries are ineffective.²⁹

It is also important to note that a small part of the firearms trafficked across Central America originated from local craft production. Local gangs use mostly homemade arms, or “*armas hechizas*”. The parts of the guns can be licitly purchased online in United States gun stores websites, and then those parts can be locally assembled. According to the journalist Tomás Ocaña, an AR-15 fusil, for instance, can be assembled in less than an hour and there are even tutorials in the internet to learn how to do it.³⁰

These guns have been seized in Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and in Central America, particularly in Honduras and El Salvador. These weapons are not usually exported; therefore, groups supporting larger criminal organizations regularly use these arms, also carrying out big gun smuggling operations across the region.³¹

3. Firearms Control in the Northern Triangle of Central America

The regulations and restrictions in Central America related to possession, use and commercial exchange of firearms depend of each country; however, these laws are usually influenced by the international standards. For instance, most of Central American countries ban similar weapons such as automatic firearms, armor piercing ammunitions and military explosives.

In the past decade (2005-2015) Central American countries have added new regulations to the existing arm control laws, in order to confront the traffic on arms and ammunitions within

²⁸ El Daily Post (2015) Legal U.S gunrunners are arming Mexico’s cartels. Available in: <https://goo.gl/sAzvNt>

²⁹ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle, The Small Arms Trade in Latin America. Available in: <https://goo.gl/52QKLH>

³⁰ Tomás Ocaña (2014) Armas caseras, peligro inminente. Univision. Available in: <https://goo.gl/xfvqa6>

³¹ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle (2009) The Small Arms Trade in Latin America. Available in: <https://goo.gl/52QKLH>

the region, and therefore the insecurity and violence that this traffic is fueling. However, some of the countries are still more permissive than others, representing an obstacle to the international effort to defy arms trafficking in the region.

For example, in the Northern Triangle region of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, known, divergences in gun control laws could affect the propagation of firearms trafficking within the region. While Guatemala and El Salvador gun control laws are considered restrictive, Honduran gun control law is considered permissive, therefore guns are more likely to be acquired in the latter, and then smuggled to the former countries with more restrictive regulations.

According to the Gun Policy portal, the distinction of a permissive and a restrictive gun control law is related to the possibilities of a civilian acquiring one or more firearms. In this case, “possibilities” are specifically linked to the licensing requirements. So, for example, in Honduras the license to acquire a firearm also covers the potential possession, selling and transferring of the firearm³², while in Guatemala and El Salvador different licenses are required for each activity. In fact, in Salvador there are six types of licenses: (i) to acquire, own and use a weapon, (ii) to repair a weapon, (iii) to load ammunition, (iv) to use explosives with industrial purposes and civil works, (v) to manufacture pyrotechnical products and (iv) to commercialize weapons and pyrotechnical products. Also, there are three types of registration: (i) to own and transport, (ii) to carry and (iii) to collect.³³

Another aspect related to the permissiveness or restrictiveness of a control law gun is the specific requirement to acquire the basic license to own and carry a firearm. In Honduras, for instance, the requirements include solely having an adult age (18) and a background check (usually criminal). The license is active for four years and an authorized civilian can acquire until five weapons. The punishment for carrying a firearm without license, or with an invalid license, does not include a criminal conviction, just the seizure of the gun or guns, and a fine.

In El Salvador and Guatemala, on the other hand, requirements are stricter. The background check to acquire the license in both countries includes not only the criminal record screening, but also a certificate on the mental and health records of the civilian. Also, a theoretical and

³² Decreto No 30 – 2000 Ley de Control de Armas de Fuego, Municiones, explosivos y otros similares. Regulación de 2005. Available in: <https://goo.gl/DGvtGH>

³³ Asamblea Legislativa de la República de El Salvador. Decreto No 655 de 1999. Ley de Control y Regulación de armas, municiones, explosivos y materiales relacionados. Regulación de 2013. Available in: <https://goo.gl/1P00jK>

training course in the use of firearms in a certificated institution is demanded. The legal age to apply for the license is 21 to own a firearm, and 25 to carry one. In Guatemala it is also required to apply for the license, which is a letter explaining the reasons to need a weapon. In the case of personal security reasons, the approval of the government is also required.³⁴ The punishment for carrying a firearm without authorization in El Salvador is the suspension of the license and a fine, while in Guatemala a punishment includes a criminal conviction of even 8 to 10 years in prison.

4. Relevant Cases Across the "Northern Triangle"

In El Salvador, 2015, one of the largest, and therefore relevant, criminal networks focused on traffic firearms and ammunition was dismantled while operating in the Northern Triangle. Authorities captured more than 90 people accused of participating in the smuggling and illegal trade of firearms sourced from Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. In fact, 21 alleged members of the criminal network "Mara Salvatrucha (MS13)" were arrested, including **Medardo Arana Castro alias "Pilos"**, a key coordinator of the network.¹⁰ Arana was in charge of articulating the traffickers in other Central American countries, and then coordinating collaborators and distributors in El Salvador. Two workers of a security company were also involved with a professional armorer from San Salvador.³⁵

Some detained suspects in this large case were participating in the network from prison, through outside contacts. The involvement of inmates in this type of criminal activities is currently a persistent situation in the region, specially regarding the drug and arms trafficking operations conducted by the *maras*. For instance, in March 21st, 2016, a 21-year-old woman was captured and charged for leading the criminal operations of a faction of the 18th Street *mara* in Honduras. Amarjit Pabla, aka "La Chuky", was heading the organization, allegedly, with the instruction of his imprisoned husband Cristian Ariel Calix aka "Little Sam", the former leader of this 18th street faction in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.³⁶

Another persistent and deteriorating situation registered in the media is the involvement of state officials, especially military ones, and the tolerance manifested by state institutions.

³⁴ Decreto 15 de 2009. Ley de Armas y Munición. Regulación de 2011. Available in: <https://goo.gl/8MPQOe>

³⁵ La prensa gráfica (2015) Desmantelan red de tráfico de armamento. Available in: <https://goo.gl/wZvikO>

³⁶ The Guardian (2016) Honduras police arrest american woman accused of being a gang leader. Available in: <https://goo.gl/p1eTD7>

For instance, in El Salvador, 2004, Miguel Angel Pocasangre and Carlos Zavaleta Morán, both retired army mayors and officials, were accused of stealing weapons from military arm facilities to sell them illegally. By 2016 both man haven't been convicted. In fact, it was revealed that between 2011 and 2013, National Civil Police and other State institutions have acquired over \$500,000 worth of gun ammunitions and bulletproof vests from those retired army officials, despite their alleged involvement in trafficking.³⁷

Additionally, media information shows that army facilities are the source of many trafficked weapons. In fact, the case of 1,449 stolen grenades in Guatemala confirmed this situation. In March 2013, the colonel Oved Milton Barrios received notification of 40 mm grenades that were stolen from the warehouse at the First Infantry Brigade, Air Force Command, in the province of Petén, Guatemala. Investigations about the event show the potential involvement of guards at the military facilities. The investigation also tracked the guns to "Los Zetas", and to the Guatemalan drug trafficking network "Los Huistas" that initially operated in Huehuetenango, Guatemala.³⁸

Conclusions

- Central America is one the most violent regions in the world, with elevated rates of homicides that may be fueled by the strong presence of local and transnational criminal organizations dedicated to smuggling weapons and other illegal goods, across the subcontinent.
- The local *pandillas* and *maras*, especially the Maras Salvatruchas MS13 and The 18th Street, have been involved in the traffic of firearms in Central America, especially of 9mm handguns.
- Besides the involvement of criminal organizations, military and police officers have also participated in gunrunning operations, especially in El Salvador where many seized firearms are of exclusive use of the army.

³⁷ Aaron Daugherty (2016) El Salvador, Government turned blind eye official arms trafficking. Available in: <https://goo.gl/vyhu9N>

³⁸ Margherite Cawley (2014) Cómo desaparecieron 1500 granadas de la base militar de Guatemala? Available in: <https://goo.gl/sQxsUH>

- The main sources of the illegal firearms are (i) Military stockpiles with remaining weapons of the civil wars, (ii) licit stores in United States where then guns are purchased and then diverted in Central American countries, and (iii) handmade guns or “*armas hechizas*”, fabricated with gun parts acquired licitly in gun websites of United States.
- The flows of illegal arms follow the same routes of drug trafficking transportation, mainly through overland smuggling, littoral maritime trafficking, and short-distance aerial trafficking within Central America.
- Central America is the source of many of the guns trafficked to South American Countries like Colombia and Chile. Also, there is evidence of Central American guns shipped to Mexico.
- Variations in gun control laws across Central American countries affect the conditions for acquiring and transporting guns especially in the Northern Triangle region.

About the Authors

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Philosopher and MsC in Political Science. Founder and CEO at Vortex Foundation. Eduardo has researched in the areas of organized crime, kidnapping, corruption, drug-trafficking and State Capture. As partner, advisor or consultant, he currently researches on the structure and impact of Transnational Criminal Networks with scholars, institutes and Universities in North, Central and South America, Europe and Africa.

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