

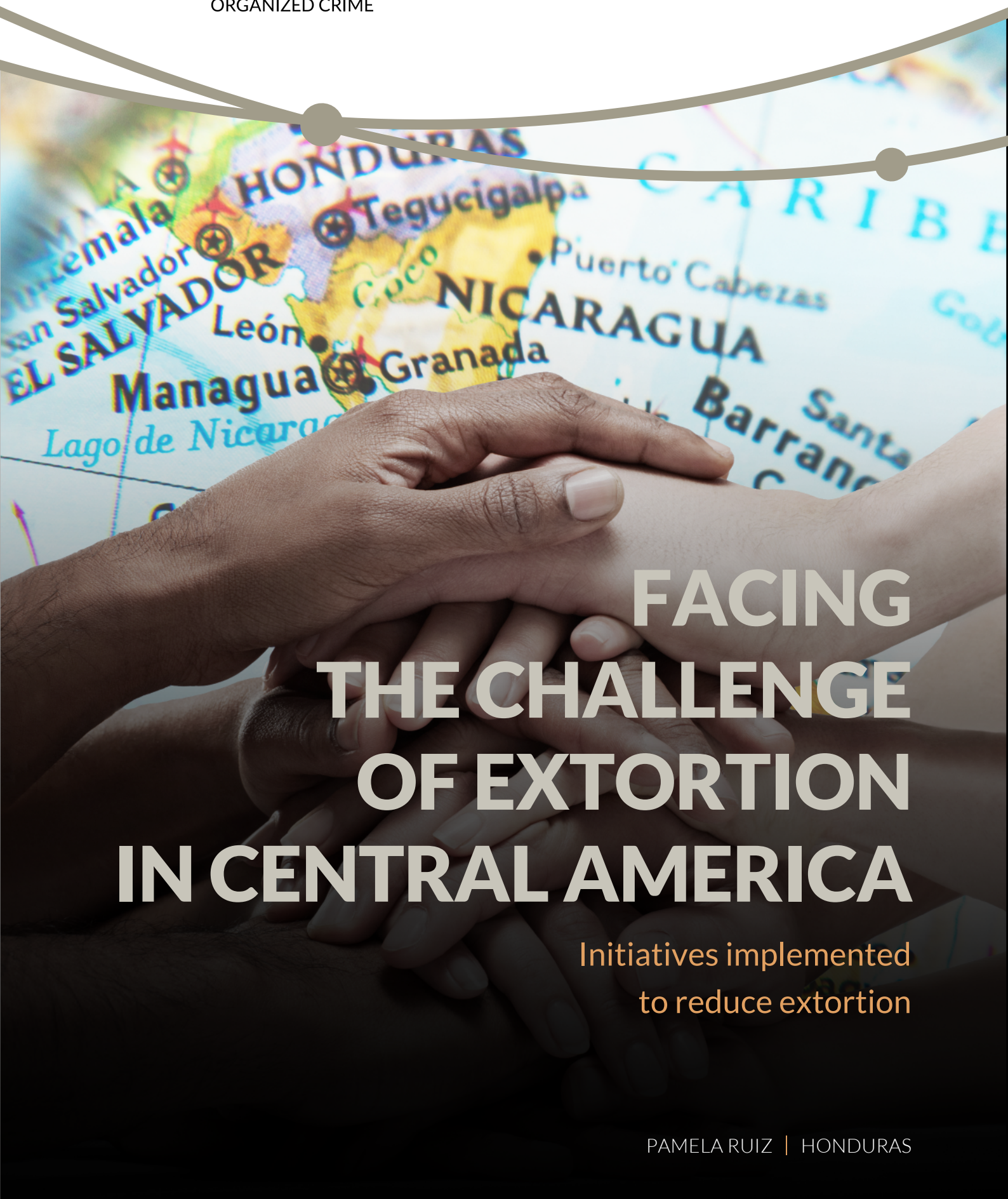


**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME



COALICIONES POR
LA RESILIENCIA



FACING THE CHALLENGE OF EXTORTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Initiatives implemented
to reduce extortion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was developed by the author Pamela Ruiz and her research work in collaboration with local stakeholders and authorities. Editing, graphics and layout were done and prepared by Adrian Ancira, Siria Gastelum, Guillermo Vazquez and Ana Castro.

This document was made possible by funding from the Government of Canada to the Global Initiative. Contents are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Initiative or the Government of Canada.



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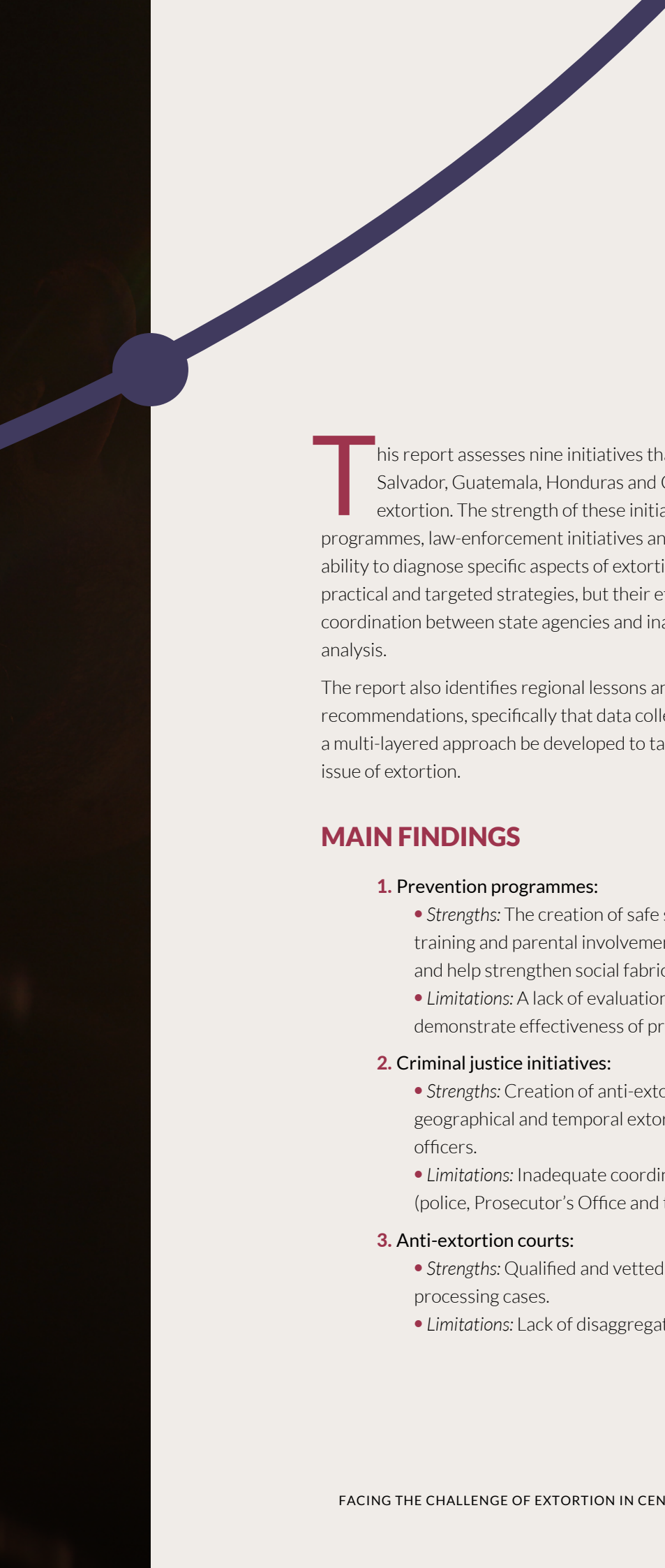
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report assesses nine initiatives that have been implemented in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica aimed to reduce extortion. The strength of these initiatives – which include prevention programmes, law-enforcement initiatives and anti-extortion courts – lies in their ability to diagnose specific aspects of extortion and implement innovative, practical and targeted strategies, but their efficacy is limited by poor coordination between state agencies and inadequate data collection and analysis.

The report also identifies regional lessons and challenges and makes two policy recommendations, specifically that data collection and analysis be improved, and a multi-layered approach be developed to tackle the complex and multifaceted issue of extortion.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Prevention programmes:

- *Strengths:* The creation of safe spaces for recreational activities, job training and parental involvement to prevent youth joining gangs and help strengthen social fabric in communities.
- *Limitations:* A lack of evaluation studies that would empirically demonstrate effectiveness of programme objectives.

2. Criminal justice initiatives:

- *Strengths:* Creation of anti-extortion hotlines, identification of geographical and temporal extortion trends and the vetting of police officers.
- *Limitations:* Inadequate coordination among state organizations (police, Prosecutor's Office and the prison system).

3. Anti-extortion courts:

- *Strengths:* Qualified and vetted personnel, increased efficiency in processing cases.
- *Limitations:* Lack of disaggregated data to examine trends.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve data collection and analysis:

- Increase the availability, quality and quantity of data collection and associated analysis to facilitate a more thorough understanding of extortion dynamics.
- Create a national extortion database.
- Include extortion questionnaires in victimization surveys.

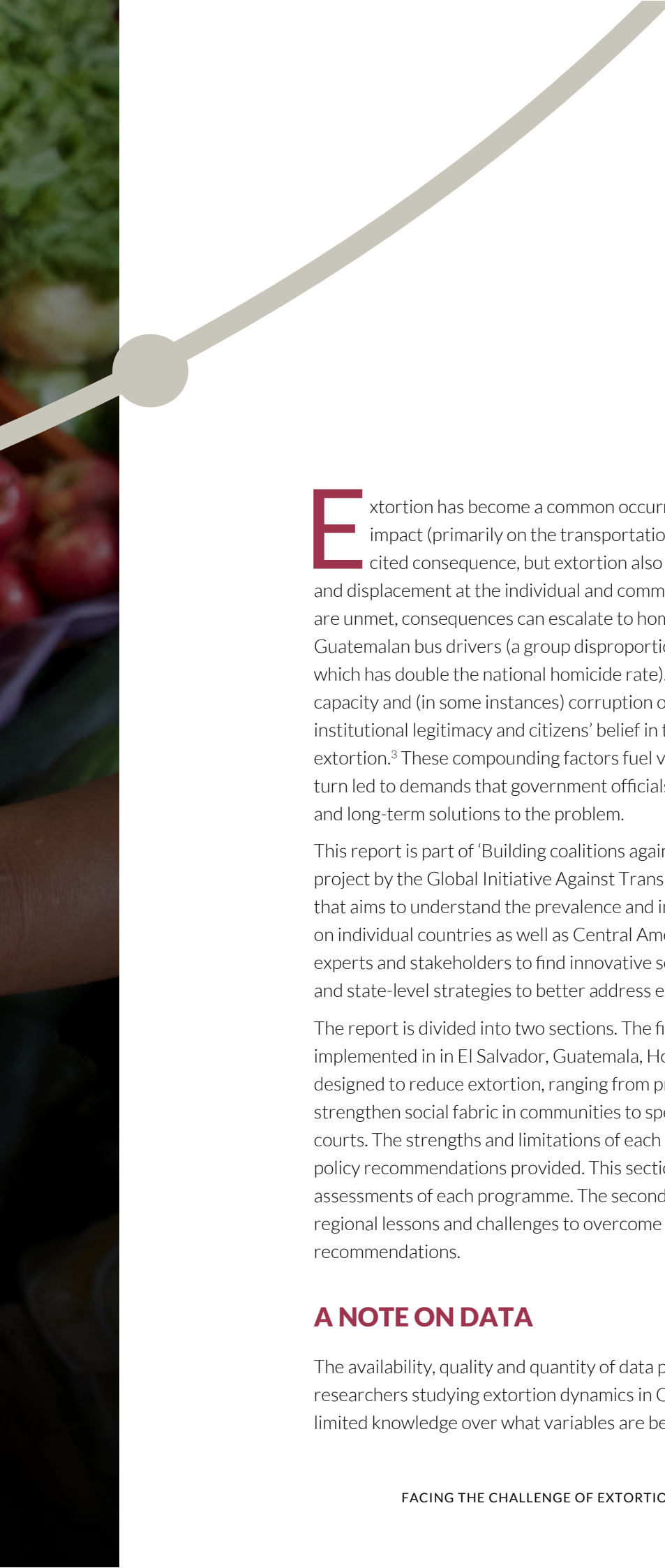
2. Create multi-layered approach emphasizing collaboration

- Prevention programmes and schools should focus on creating safe spaces with recreational activities, educational-certificate training and potential job placement.
- Establish vetted police forces that consistently monitor and analyze extortion dynamics; develop inter-institutional coordination between vetted police officers, the Prosecutor's Office and the prison system.
- Private sector should provide labour opportunities to youth who have received training in prevention programmes and provide logistical support to law-enforcement units.





INTRODUCTION



Extortion has become a common occurrence in Central America. Its economic impact (primarily on the transportation and business sectors) is the most cited consequence, but extortion also contributes to threats, fear and displacement at the individual and community level.¹ When extortion demands are unmet, consequences can escalate to homicide, as is evidenced by the case of Guatemalan bus drivers (a group disproportionately targeted for extortion and which has double the national homicide rate).² Moreover, the limited resources, capacity and (in some instances) corruption of security personnel decreases institutional legitimacy and citizens' belief in the utility of reporting acts of extortion.³ These compounding factors fuel vicious cycles of extortion, which have in turn led to demands that government officials and security institutions find short- and long-term solutions to the problem.

This report is part of 'Building coalitions against extortion in Central America,' a project by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) that aims to understand the prevalence and impact of the phenomenon of extortion on individual countries as well as Central America as a whole; to build a network of experts and stakeholders to find innovative solutions; and to provide community- and state-level strategies to better address extortion in Central America.

The report is divided into two sections. The first section reviews nine initiatives implemented in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica that are designed to reduce extortion, ranging from preventative strategies intended to strengthen social fabric in communities to specialized anti-extortion task forces and courts. The strengths and limitations of each programme are analyzed and specific policy recommendations provided. This section also draws upon individual GI-TOC assessments of each programme. The second section of the report focuses on regional lessons and challenges to overcome and outlines two policy recommendations.

A NOTE ON DATA

The availability, quality and quantity of data poses a series of challenges to researchers studying extortion dynamics in Central America. Researchers have limited knowledge over what variables are being collected by government

institutions responsible for countering extortion, while some institutions deny requests for data. (Some data, for instance, is considered classified, such as that regarding gang-controlled territories in El Salvador.) Issues related to quality of data include data format (e.g. data requested being sent as PDF files rather than Excel) and the absence of any centralized system to validate data, with different government institutions – e.g. police, Prosecutor’s Office and the prison system – recording different variables, with limited or no inter-institutional verification of data to identify and eliminate duplicate cases and provide a final extortion count. In terms of quantity of data, while department- and municipality-level data is available, researchers exploring extortion dynamics require data at the neighbourhood, or colonia, canton/barrio, level. In addition, gang-affiliation information is often missing or stated as ‘unknown’ in arrest data.

Lack of exhaustive data collection on all relevant variables hampers the ability to conduct analyses of the nature and extent of extortion and its consequences. This report evaluates the initiatives based on the available data derived with the caveat that such data is not comprehensive or without error, given the limitations outlined above. By extension, this report emphasizes the importance of data access, collection, analysis and publication to comprehensively understand the multicausal factors of extortion and create public policy strategies that can accurately address this phenomenon.

Review of programmes

This report assesses nine initiatives undertaken in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica aimed at reducing extortion. **Table 1** provides a summary of the intervention strategies discussed (prevention programmes, criminal justice sector or courts), country of implementation, programme name and funding information.

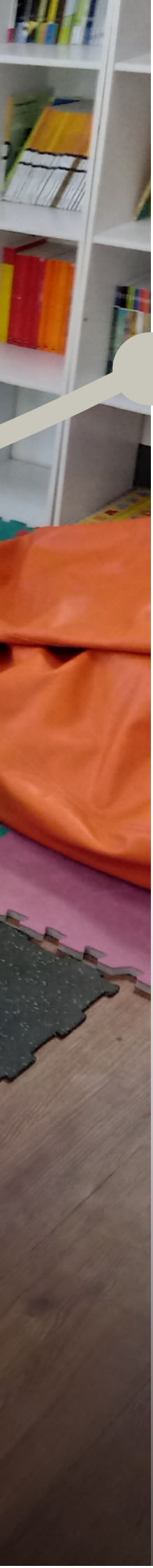
TABLE 1: Summary table of interventions

Intervention Strategy	Country	Programme name and programme launched	Funding
PREVENTION PROGRAMMES	El Salvador	Urban Centre Welfare and Opportunities (<i>Centro Urbano Bienestar y Oportunidades – CUBO</i>) Implemented 2 July 2019	US\$91 million loan from Central American Bank for Economic Integration, of which US\$16.3 million will be allocated to build and operate CUBOs
	Guatemala	Safe Schools (<i>Escuelas Seguras</i>) Implemented June 2009	GTQ 1.9 million (US\$250,000), funded by the Ministry of Interior, National Civilian Police, and Ministry of Education
		Prepaid Card (<i>Tarjeta Pre-Pago</i>) Implemented in 2009	US\$35 million, funded by Guatemalan government
	Honduras	Gang Resistance Education and Training (<i>GREAT</i>) Implemented in 2012	Dependent on US Embassy in Honduras
		Outreach Centers (<i>Centros de Alcance</i>) First center built in 2009	HDL 4.0 million (US \$525,000) for the EDUCATEH programme, funded by USAID and the National Foundation for Honduran Development (Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo de Honduras – FUNADEH)

Intervention Strategy	Country	Programme name and programme launched	Funding
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTOR	Costa Rica	Public Force (<i>Fuerza Publica</i>) Sowing Security programme launched in 2018	Public Force funded by Costa Rican government US\$7.5 million from INL for Sowing Security programme
	Guatemala	National Division Against Gang Development (<i>División Nacional contra el Desarrollo de Pandillas - DIPANDA</i>) Created in 2009	Funded by Ministry of the Interior
	Honduras	National Anti-Gang Force (<i>Fuerza Nacional Anti Maras y Pandillas - FNAMP</i>) Created in June 2018	Funded by Honduran government, with some assistance from USAID for prevention operations
COURTS	Honduras	Anti-extortion courts Began operating in October 2017	Approximately US\$200 000 per court, funded by Honduran government

A photograph of a white fabric teepee set up in a playroom. The teepee is supported by wooden poles and has a black and white zigzag pattern on its lower sections. In the background, there is a white shelving unit with books, a pink and blue child's desk, and a wooden bench. The floor is covered with black and green interlocking foam mats. In the foreground, there is a white fuzzy stool and a blue stuffed animal. A semi-transparent geometric pattern, consisting of several overlapping triangles, is overlaid on the image. The text "PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS" is written in large, bold, white capital letters at the bottom of the image.

PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS



Prevention programmes focus on providing safe spaces with recreational activities, developing employment skills and workshops with parents to prevent youth joining gangs and to strengthen social fabric in communities.

El Salvador's Urban Centre for Welfare and Opportunities initiative (Centro Urbano Bienestar y Oportunidades – CUBO) and Honduras's Outreach Centers (Centros de Alcance) focus on education to prepare young people for the job market.

Guatemala's Safe Schools (Escuelas Seguras) and Honduras's Gang Resistance Education and Training programme (GREAT) provide children with resources to avoid gang membership and encourage parental involvement to develop and strengthen healthy family relations. Finally, Guatemala's innovative Prepaid Card scheme (Tarjeta Pre-Pago) aims to remove the incentives for extortion by reducing the amount of cash carried by transportation employees and users.

EL SALVADOR: URBAN CENTRE FOR WELFARE AND OPPORTUNITIES (CUBO)

Summary

The CUBO project is part of the second phase of the Territorial Control Plan (Plan de Control Territorial), a seven-phase national-security programme designed to tackle gang violence launched by President Nayib Bukele on 1 June 2019. On 13 December 2019, the Salvadoran Congress approved a US\$91 million loan from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration for the second phase, but of this amount, only US\$16.3 million will be used to build, supply and staff the 29 CUBOs located throughout El Salvador in some of the country's most violent communities.

The primary purpose of CUBO is to distance youth from gang violence, regain control of public spaces occupied by gangs and strengthen social fabric in communities. It aims to do this by providing a safe physical space for educational and physical development, helping prepare youth for the job market and empowering them to reject gang membership. For example, CUBOs will have designated educational areas that include spaces to study, hold meeting, a library section, and a computer center. The designated physical areas will provide youth with a place to learn karate, dance, play games and videogames. The Technical University (Universidad Técnica) will train 100,000 young people who wish to learn a trade so they can subsequently get employment.

Strengths

Although the programme is still identifying locations for the construction of CUBOs, the strengths of the CUBO initiative are anticipated to be the provision of safe space for youth to engage in educational and physical activities, which may help prevent youth joining gangs and prepare them for future employment opportunities. The interagency collaboration that is expected to occur between CUBOs and nearby educational centers has the potential to provide additional space to strengthen social fabric with the community. An assessment of Iberia – the only operating CUBO at the time of writing – found that it had 200 participants, reflecting a high level of interest from and engagement with the community.

Programme limitations

The intervention's weakest aspect is the lack of empirical data (e.g. violence, extortion and/or presence of gang activity at the neighbourhood level) to support its argument for the location of the CUBOs. The GI-TOC report on the initiative states that 14 municipalities (out of a planned 29) have been identified for CUBOs so far. Although the selected areas listed are often associated to high levels of violence, there is no quantitative data provided to support these communities are in fact the areas with the highest levels of violence in the country.⁴ Moreover, questions remain as to whether the location of the 14 CUBOs will be able to fulfil the programme's objectives in the community. For example, will CUBOs be in 'neutral territory' (i.e. where youth from rival gang neighbourhoods can enter) without placing youth at risk? If youth are at risk, how will security be arranged and provided?

The lack of data for establishing the location of CUBOs and likely long construction times raises the broader question about whether building CUBOs was the most effective strategy, or if the money should have been invested into programmes that were already working with communities and established networks.

Policy recommendations

High-quality, comprehensive and properly formatted data and a well-thought-out data analysis plan are needed in order to measure the impact of CUBOs. Data of individual programme participants, including gender and demographic characteristics, should be collected in a standardized way. This demographic information could help identify which neighbourhoods may be impacted by gang crimes (e.g. extortion or homicide) and inform the development of community networks to counter these issues. Details on participation in CUBOs, and which activities draw the highest attendance, could help guide the refinement of the programme by revealing which activities are successful and which must be modified or removed at the individual CUBO level. This would also enable the allocation of appropriate resources for each community.

Ultimately, it is crucial to gauge whether youth who attend CUBO activities have been exposed to gangs and/or been recruited, and whether attending CUBOs

and/or participating in their activities help prevent youth from engaging with gangs. Future evaluations of CUBOs must also measure the impact over time of those participating in CUBOs to discern any lasting change. Finally, CUBOs should seek partnership with various business sectors to help provide employment opportunities for youth.

HONDURAS: GREAT

Summary

GREAT was implemented in Honduras in 2012 by the Prevention Security Unit of the National Police (Unidad de Seguridad Preventiva de la Policía Nacional) with the support of the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Section (INL) of the US Embassy in Honduras. GREAT is composed of 235 instructors organized into 32 national teams that operate throughout the 18 departments of Honduras. Officers are vetted and trained by the INL.

GREAT is administered to children in elementary school (ages 7–12) and intermediate school (ages 13–17) at the request of parents and/or schools. The programme's purpose is to educate youth in resilience, resistance and social skills in order to increase their engagement with education and retention in school, as well as raising awareness of the risks associated with gangs and help youth identify the consequences of consuming drugs and develop tools to make good decisions.

Strengths

GREAT's most important achievement in Honduras thus far has been making youth from high crime neighbourhoods more receptive to police, as identified in the GI-TOC's report on the programme.⁵ Moreover, the expansion of the programme throughout all 18 departments of Honduras and the increasing number of participants – which began with 5,000 students in 2012 and has reached 136,420 students in 2019 – in the programme is evidence of a healthy funding partnership and strong student participation.

Programme limitations

GREAT was specifically designed for implementation in the United States, and questions remain over how effectively the programme has been adapted for the Honduran context. For example, how was the factor of 'resistance' (the ability to identify and reject group pressure, gangs and violence norms) modified for the Honduran context and dynamics of gang recruitment among youth? The problem of adaptation is also highlighted by the fact that GREAT does not address the issue of extortion, which is a major part of gang activity in Honduras. There are also questions about

the programme's targeting, given that GREAT is client-based (principals and parents requesting programmes) rather than need-based (identifying areas where gangs are present and implementing the programme in these locations).

More broadly, GREAT does not make available basic metrics on the programme, which would allow for a sound evaluation of its effectiveness. While the programme has clear objectives, the lack of public access to data hampers attempts to understand the link between the programme's objectives and outcomes.

Policy recommendations

At present, a lack of data prohibits an evaluation of the programme's results, accomplishments and spending. To measure GREAT's impact, short- and long-term evaluation plans are necessary, starting with a survey at the beginning of the programme that measures all factors stated in the curriculum, with a follow-up evaluation after six and 12 months to see how students' attitudes have changed and to test their understanding of GREAT's objectives. A longitudinal study of 1–5 years after youth leave the programme is also important to demonstrate whether the programme has had lasting effects. As the GI-TOC report on GREAT identifies, data should also be collected and analyzed regarding family participation.

In order to assess whether GREAT has been implemented in high-risk communities, a map of gang presence at the department/municipality level, together with the location of schools that participate in GREAT, would give a visual display of whether the programme is being offered in violent areas and/or where gangs are present.

HONDURAS: OUTREACH CENTERS

Summary

Honduras has 70 Outreach Centers located in the cities of the municipalities of Distrito Central, San Pedro Sula, La Lima, Choloma, Tela, La Ceiba and Puerto Lempira. The purpose of the centers is to encourage youth to reject violence, develop and strengthen competencies, construct a life plan and participate in their community's development. The centers are administered and coordinated by a local NGO and focus on education, employment and guiding youth how to set up small businesses. Young people between the ages of 9 and 30 can undertake training in various areas, complete their education through a center's EDUCATEH programme and develop skills to gain employment. The programme's eight components include: creative use of free time; I challenge to dream my life; job training; school

educational approval; volunteering; opportunity management; formation of values; and microbusinesses. The programme is set to expire in August 2020, although the selection process to appoint a board of directors – a step towards initiating a second phase of the programme – is underway.

Strengths

The programme clearly identifies risks and needs and provided targeted services. It also gathers essential data proving its impact, making it a promising model for other prevention programmes. Each centers' achievements are assessed against the following measures: the total number of beneficiaries; the number of businesses created by youth; the number of youth who received training and gained employment; and the number of participants who were trained and earned a certificate.

Programme limitations

The weakness of the centers relates primarily to lack of access to disaggregating data and employing internal programme evaluations by site. The GI-TOC identified the centers have dedicated monitoring teams that analyze the centers' data and present results and achievements, these are not publically available.

Internal evaluations by site may provide differences on strengths and weaknesses per center. These in turn can assist in tailoring each center in order to address the needs of participating youth and staff.

The GI-TOC report on Outreach Centers identifies migration – an indicator targetted for reduction with the implementation of this programme – as an area that required additional attention given the country's socioeconomic conditions and family reunification.⁶

Policy recommendations

Future evaluations of the centers could be improved by analyzing disaggregated data according to the various locations, ages, genders, programmes and number of

locations, ages, genders, programmes and number of certificates achieved and employments gained to display differences between centers. An internal evaluation regarding which of the eight components participants found most beneficial would also be helpful, especially as the centers may require restructuring once the second phase of programme begins.

With regards to emigration, migration scholars have shown the multi-causal reasons contributing to migration.⁷ Future studies should conduct a thorough analysis that includes those who participated in the programme and a comparison group of youth who did not participate in the programme, and consequently looking at those who subsequently emigrated. By doing this, programmes can identify which services should be provided to reduce migration push-factors.

GUATEMALA: SAFE SCHOOLS

Summary

Safe Schools, a programme originally designed in Mexico, was launched in June 2009 as a response to an increase in violence within schools and on the way to school. The purpose of the programme is to prevent youth joining armed groups and falling into substance abuse. The initiative focuses on two forms of violence prevention: social and situational. Social prevention is accomplished by providing courses and activities to students, parents and teachers regarding affective education (helping students strengthen their personal and social relations), understand the dangers of drugs and addiction, citizen security and violence prevention. The National Civilian Police is responsible for situational prevention by providing perimeter security, monitoring cameras and conducting workshops that range from socializing Safe Schools in educational centers to interventions for students and families in coordination with the Community Prevention Unit Against Violence (Unidad de Prevención Comunitaria contra la Violencia).





Strengths

The strength of the Safe Schools programme is demonstrated by its multi-layered approach to violence prevention. The programme identifies students, parents and teachers and provides resources through courses to encourage security within schools. It also encourages students to generate their own preventive proposals through Student Committees, thereby encouraging youth empowerment. Moreover, its collaboration with the National Civilian Police to provide security in schools and its surrounding areas has helped in making schools safe places. Specifically, the use of cameras to monitor activities on or near campus may have significantly reduced the risk to students, as reporting threatening gangs or groups close to campus may be intimidating and challenging for youth.

Programme limitations

As highlighted in the GI-TOC's report, the Safe Schools initiative currently lacks measures of institutional and project impact, as well as staff evaluations.⁸ Data on how many schools, students, parents and teachers have participated in the programme is available, but this data would be more useful if recorded at the individual-programme level. An analysis of whether violence has decreased in these schools since the inception of the programme would also be helpful. A list of the various courses taken by participants is available, but there is no indication as to whether participants learned the information presented or whether they found one workshop more beneficial than another. As is documented in the GI-TOC report, the funding of Safe Schools initiative is precarious as it depends on the Community Prevention Unit Against Violence, the General Direction of Physical Education and the National Civilian Police.

Policy recommendations

A sound evaluation plan based on high-quality data is required to measure the impact of the Safe Schools programme. Evaluations should occur with students, parents, schools and partner agencies over which aspects were beneficial, which modifications were made from school to school and which programme components were not implemented (and why). For example, evaluations of student knowledge at the beginning, middle and end of courses would display knowledge gained, while an evaluation of parent and teacher participation would help address school-specific issues. While the GI-TOC report identifies the initiative's goal of preventing substance abuse, data regarding baseline student consumption and any changes after

participating in this programme would display whether the programme has had its intended impact. To ensure consistent financial support, the initiative should also formulate a base budget for operating costs, with flexibility for the organizations involved in the programme for minimum and maximum operation to prevent complete disolvement of the programme. .

GUATEMALA: PREPAID CARD

Summary

The main benefit of implementing this programme includes reducing the amount of cash carried by users and employees and the provision of cameras in the bus units to de-incentivize robbery. In addition, the scheme has overseen the construction of 'safe stops,' which are patrolled by private-security personnel and National Civilian Police officers.

Strengths

The main benefit of implementing this programme includes reducing the amount of cash carried by users and employees and the provision of cameras in the bus units to de-incentivize robbery. In addition, the scheme has overseen the construction of 'safe stops,' which are patrolled by private-security personnel and National Civilian Police officers.

Programme limitations

The GI-TOC's report on the Prepaid Card states that the initiative has had limited results due to accusations of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, which has been most noticeable in the lack of maintenance of the safe stops, some of which have also not been completed.⁹ Data is lacking on basic measures, such as the number of functioning and non-functioning cameras on buses and at safe stops; whether these cameras have assisted investigations; and whether the cameras have decreased the levels of violence and extortion. Moreover, the GI-TOC assessment also cites reports of malfunctioning panic buttons at stops, the security risk posed by small turnstiles if an emergency were to require users to exit immediately and limited information for users. These shortcomings make it difficult to determine the impact of the programme on extortion.


Policy recommendation

In order to strengthen this initiative, data collection and analysis should include which routes/buses are being extorted; the sums extorted; the number of different groups being paid; how often the extortion is paid; how many employees (based on their position) have been threatened and killed; and how many employees leave their job due to threats.

The GI-TOC report also identifies the need to address harassment and femicides, with a possible solution being the provision of buses exclusively for women. To do this, data on which buses/routes women take most frequently would be helpful. The report also highlights that the Prepaid Card website is still under construction; should this website be made available, it could serve as a useful tool to obtain user demographics and improve services. A survey with users can be conducted at the stops regarding whether they have been assaulted; whether the experience of assaults have decreased after implementation of the initiative; and what measures users think would improve the security of the transportation system. Furthermore, action must be taken to ensure that cameras on buses and stops are functioning, as they can contribute to police investigations.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE INTERVENTIONS



The prevalence and impact of extortion in the region have led to the creation of special task forces and courts to reduce extortion and facilitate sentencing. However, officers acknowledge that the lack of citizen trust in institutions has hindered these attempts. Extortions are said to be underreported due to the belief that elements within security institutions are corrupt and security forces have been accused of extortion. In addition, victims often do not report extortion due to fear of retaliation from gangs, or only report the crime when they have been extorted by multiple groups.¹⁰ This reluctance to report crimes not only debilitates the security forces' efforts to protect extortion victims but also limits data collection and analysis, hindering attempts to understand the full scope of this criminal phenomenon.

Specialized task forces have accordingly developed new forms of reporting extortion, such as special anti-extortion hotlines, alongside in-person complaints. More importantly, the inter-institutional coordination of these forces has the potential to provide a buffer against corruption within institutions and increase morale and cohesion among personnel. Examples of such coordination include the Anti-Extortion Task Force (Fuerza de Tarea Antiextorsión – FTA) collaborating with National Division Against Gang Development (División Nacional contra el Desarrollo de Pandillas – DIPANDA) in Guatemala; different agency officers forming the National Anti-Gang Force (Fuerza Nacional Anti Maras y Pandillas – FNAMP) in Honduras; and civil society and lawyers' associations collaborating to select anti-extortion personnel.

This section will assess the impact of Guatemala's DIPANDA, Honduras's FNAMP and the Costa Rican Public Force (Fuerza Publica).

GUATEMALA: NATIONAL DIVISION AGAINST GANG DEVELOPMENT (DIPANDA)

Summary

DIPANDA was created in 2009 and falls under the Ministry of the Interior. Based in the City of Guatemala, DIPANDA utilizes various approaches to counter extortion: 1) victim assistance and advice; 2) the 1574 anti-extortion hotline; 3) criminal - investigation operatives; 4) classic flagrance operatives - where individuals are



arrested while committing a crime (e.g. receiving extortion payments) rather than with a warrant; and 5) analysis of results (arrests versus incidents). The investigation capacities of the unit have allowed it to formulate a '90/10' typology for extortion: 90% of extortions are conducted by opportunists, while 10% are carried out by criminal groups. DIPANDA has also devised a 'Doctrine Against Extortion' that aims to communicate a three-pronged message to victims of extortion: 1) do not lose confidence in authorities; 2) do not lose calm; and 3) do not victimize yourself.

Strengths

DIPANDA's strength lies in its ability to collect and analyze data, investigate crimes and arrest suspected perpetrators. The FTA (which formed part

of DIPANDA before it was dissolved) built the data framework that led to the identification of the 90/10 typology and responsive measures. The unit ultimately recognizes that its efficiency is based on citizens' reports and implemented the 1574 anti-extortion hotline, where individuals can obtain guidance and/or report extortion over the phone rather than risk being seen at a police station and face repercussions. The unit's continued data analysis has allowed it to recognize evolving extortion trends, such as geographic and temporal trends and the increased participation of women in extortion (although it may be that the women are being coerced to participate in extortion). DIPANDA's investigations and arrests have led to disbanding of criminal groups committing extortion.



Programme limitations

DIPANDA's limitations are that it struggles to communicate its resources and success to citizens. If citizens are unaware of the unit and its specialized mission to tackle extortion, individuals may be less inclined to report extortion, which also creates a void in generating data and solutions. Moreover, DIPANDA should demonstrate how extortion decreases after the implementation of its strategies.

Policy recommendations

The GI-TOC report states that DIPANDA would benefit by expanding from its current location in the City of Guatemala to establish a nationwide presence through regional and departmental offices. This should be done after analyzing which

departments/regions are in greatest need and whether extortion dynamics in those areas mirror the same dynamics as the capital. The expansion of DIPANDA's 1574 anti-extortion hotline, its Doctrine Against Extortion and prevention programmes will require mass publication for citizens in new areas to become aware of these resources.

As identified in the GI-TOC's report on DIPANDA, the unit can further strengthen citizens' trust by broadcasting its accomplishments through communication strategies.¹¹ For example, DIPANDA should demonstrate the success of the 1574 anti-extortion hotline by publishing the number of individuals this programme has helped, how many of these cases (compared to in-person complaints) have led to arrests.

In addition, it is important to conduct evaluations of the individuals who have received these services in order to understand their effectiveness. For example, are extortion victims more likely to continue collaborating with DIPANDA throughout an investigation if victims are provided with the adequate guidance over the anti-extortion hotline versus obtaining information in person? Furthermore, which aspect of the Doctrine Against Extortion did victims find most helpful and/or what could be adjusted to improve this service?

Ultimately, DIPANDA can only carry out its mandate of investigating and arresting suspected extorters if the community trusts the unit with information. To build this trust, the unit should develop outreach prevention programmes with communities, street vendors and businesses. These programmes can inform citizens of the services of the unit, ways of preventing extortion and lead to developing targeted strategies. Finally, key players must be identified in regard to inter-institutional work, such as a special unit within the Prosecutor's Office (to compensate for the loss of the FTA) and the prison system to reduce extortion within prisons.

HONDURAS: NATIONAL ANTI-GANG FORCE (FNAMP)

Summary

FNAMP was created in June 2018 through an executive mandate but has no legal support from Congress. Its main purpose is to combat gangs and their illicit activities, including extortion. Officers who join FNAMP go through a vetting process that includes a polygraph, psychometric exams, socioeconomic studies and toxicology exams. FNAMP is composed by officers from the Prosecutor's Office (Ministerio Publico), National Police (Policia Nacional), Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas), and the National Directorate of Intelligence Investigations (Direccion Nacional de Investigacion en Inteligencia), making it an inter-institutional organization under the supervision of active military personnel.

Strengths

FNAMP has achieved an increase in reports of extortion and arrests via their 143 anti-extortion hotline and investigations. The unit's understanding of extortion dynamics is displayed by allowing callers to the 143 hotline to remain anonymous, although citizens who report their identity receive additional resources and support. Moreover, FNAMP's ability to map extortions nationally and base their regional offices in areas of need allows it to implement targeted strategies, as is also evidenced by its deployment of mobile-phone blockers in prisons.

Programme limitations

The unit's major challenge lies in obtaining a greater level of trust among citizens, which it requires if it is to protect and serve Hondurans. In terms of data capacity, FNAMP does not record and/or evaluate its preventative workshops with businesses and universities, an issue identified by the GI-TOC report on FNAMP.¹² Furthermore, the unit only records extortion data at the department level.

Policy recommendations

By improving data collection and transparency, FNAMP may improve citizen trust. This can be done by increasing the transparency and efficiency of the unit as well as by improving its data capacity. In order to address data limitations, the unit can progress from department-level to municipality- or neighbourhood-level data analysis.

By identifying gang activity and extortion at the neighbourhood level, officers can devise preventative workshops as well as suppression operations that target vulnerable populations and/or businesses.

When conducting workshops, it is imperative that FNAMP record data regarding where workshops were given, how many people attended, what were the positions of those who attended, whether there were follow ups with these institutions regarding extortion and if those who attended the workshops later reached out for advice or reported acts of extortion. In order to showcase transparency and efficiency, FNAMP may want to consistently publish a monthly or annual report of how many individuals were arrested, how many had gang affiliations (and to which gangs), where the extortion concentrated at the neighbourhood level and the types of business affected by extortion. If FNAMP can adequately document their effectiveness and accomplishments as a unit, as well as transition to a civilian-led institution, it may obtain support from Congress, which may guarantee the continuation of the initiative.



COSTA RICA: PUBLIC FORCE

Summary

Costa Rica does not face the same dynamics and intensity of extortion as the northern countries of Central America. Extortion in Costa Rica primarily occurs in three forms: 1) gota a gota (easily accessible informal loans with high interest rates); 2) 'sextortion' (exchange of compromising pictures for money); and 3) peaje (an informal transportation toll to pass through communities). Although gangs are involved in extortion, this is often associated with imitating other country dynamics and protecting narcotrafficking activities rather than a means of generating income. To secure arrests, Costa Rica has implemented 'mega operations' (megaoperativos), carried out by the Public Force (the use of the Public Force rather than a specialized extortion task force reflects the lower levels of extortion in the country). Alongside these operations, two preventative programmes – Community Security (Seguridad Comunitaria) and Sowing Security (Sembremos Seguridad) – have been implemented to develop community capacities against crime.

Strengths

The Public Force's application of prevention and suppression measures have specific assets. For example, the strength of the megaoperativos is displayed in the interagency coordination with the Judicial Investigation Agency (Organismo de Investigación Judicial), which uses data to identify high-crime neighbourhoods and sends the Public Force to conduct simultaneous seizures and arrests. Through prevention approaches, the Community Security and Sowing Security programmes help strengthen the social fabric of communities.

Programme limitations

The challenge of these initiatives lies in disaggregated data analysis and evaluations. For example, megaoperativos have contributed to a reduction in crime where they have been implemented, but disappearances and spontaneous truces between criminal groups are not taken into consideration when assessing the effectiveness of these operations, as identified in the GI-TOC report. Furthermore, while there are clear objectives for the Community Security and Sowing Security programmes, there are no cited factors by which to evaluate the impact of each objective.

Policy recommendations

In order to measure the impact of these programmes, disaggregated data collection and analysis is required. Programme-specific factors and variables must be recorded prior to the programme's initiation, during and once it has been completed, and such data subsequently analyzed. For example, the GI-TOC report on the Public Force identifies one of Community Security programme's aims as strengthening the bond between police and the community.¹³ In order to examine whether participants learned how to strengthen this bond, factors such as trust in the police and reporting to the police would have to be measured before and

after the course. Prior to surveying participants, validation of variables is also required: do the community and the police identify the same factors that would strengthen the relationship between the two?

Data collection and analysis should be executed on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis, and go deeper than the number of participants and end results. For example, the Community Security programme measures its results based on how many participants graduate from the programme, but a deeper evaluation of the programme's impact might see each programme objective being measured prior to and after finishing the 16-hour course to determine the percent change in knowledge. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the institution to make data available on specific variables (and how they are being measured), publish internal reports and release programme results more frequently (currently results are only disseminated at the end of a presidential term).

More importantly, it is vital to have additional data sources and practices to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of extortion. For example, the identification of best practices among police, business and community sectors could serve as data sources to triangulate a comprehensive understanding of extortion, as identified in the GI-TOC report. The report also identifies the need to incorporate measures of extortion into national victimization surveys. These surveys would provide an estimate of how much extortion is underreported to security institutions, and should be implemented throughout the region.





COURTS



HONDURAS: ANTI-EXTORTION COURTS

Summary

The anti-extortion courts were created in April 2016 and began operating on 16 October 2017 after a rigorous inter-institutional selection process. The anti-extortion courts are intended to reduce violence with penal punishment and break up organizations that engage in extortion. The anti-extortion courts are organized into three judicial offices: three criminal courts (two in Tegucigalpa and one in San Pedro Sula), one sentencing court and one court of appeals.

Strengths

As identified in the GI-TOC report, the courts have been shown to improve the efficiency of cases, increase transparency and trust in courts and boost morale among personnel.¹⁴ The strength of the anti-extortion courts lies in their decentralized nature - with the courts exclusively reviewing extortion cases- which facilitates the efficient processing of cases, as well as their core of qualified and vetted personnel to provide sentences. The courts demonstrate their efficiency by providing concise measures of processing cases with how many cases enter the courts, how many cases are sentenced, acquitted and dismissed. The consensus identification of key challenges by personnel – such as strengthening investigations with videos or technology, using a specialized unit to investigate criminal structures involved in extortion, and security risks faced by court personnel – could help improve the functioning of the extortion courts if addressed.

Programme limitations

Rigorous data collection for evaluation studies should be developed to ensure satisfactory caseload, justice and interagency coordination. Future studies can assist in developing these capacities by disaggregating court data by location (i.e not exclusive to San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa), the 'three exits' to the courts (sentencing, acquittal and dismissal) and judges' sentencing tendencies. While courts cannot control who is brought to trial (extortion masterminds or those merely executing orders), they can apply sentences that are proportional to the crime.

Disaggregating court data by city could also assist in examining whether a court should be added in one of the established cities or another metropolitan city. Judges and magistrates have recognized the need for more interagency coordination, raising the question of whether courts should be located near some of these agencies to improve collaboration.

Policy recommendation

The anti-extortion courts are a vital step in providing justice for extortion victims, while also preserving the rights of the accused and processing them through the criminal justice system in a timely manner. However, a comparison analysis between centralized and decentralized courts would have to be conducted to empirically demonstrate that anti-extortion courts improve the rule of law in various ways (e.g. waiting time for trial, sentencing trends and proportionality of sentences). Finally, courts should also consider whether they can reduce sentencing for those who provide information on extortion networks.

TABLE 2: displays a summary table of Intervention strategies, country and programme name, strength, limitations and recommendations.

Intervention Strategy	Country and programme name	Strength	Limitations	Recommendations
PREVENTION PROGRAMMES	El Salvador Urban Centre Welfare and Opportunities (Centro Urbano Bienestar y Oportunidades – CUBO)	Provide safe space for educational and physical activities, and preparing youth for future opportunities	Lack of empirical data to support CUBOs	Analyze individual-level data of participants; seek partnership with other sectors for employment placement
	Guatemala Safe Schools (Escuelas Seguras)	Multi-layered approach engaging students, parents and teachers	Lack of data measuring impact; unclear budget allocation	Evaluation of programme with students, parents, teachers and police; develop base budget
	Guatemala Prepaid Card (Tarjeta Pre-Pago)	Reduce cash carried (users and employees); creation of 'safe stops'; cameras on bus units	Allegations of malfunctioning cameras and panic buttons	Replace non-functioning equipment; data collection and analysis of intervention
	Honduras Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT)	Good receptivity among children and adolescents; vetting and training of participating officers	Doubts over programme adaptability to Honduran context; lack of accessibility and availability of data	Conduct short- and long-term-impact evaluations
	Honduras Outreach Centers (Centros de Alcance)	Identified risk factors, implemented programmes and documented programme accomplishments	Lack of disaggregated data; internal evaluations not made public; lack of impact on migration	Disaggregate data by location and programme

Intervention Strategy	Country and programme name	Strength	Limitations	Recommendations
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SEC TOR	Costa Rica Public Force (Fuerza Publica)	Interagency coordination: data analysis for targeted suppressive operations	Lack of disaggregated data and analysis to conduct impact evaluation	Disaggregate data collection and analysis for consistent evaluation
	Guatemala National Division Against Gang Development (Division Nacional Contra el Desarrollo de Pandillas – DIPANDA)	Data collection and analysis, investigation, arrests; 90/10 typology; mobile-phone blockers in prison; 1574 antiextortion hotline	Low citizen trust; lack of communication with public over achievements	Launch an awareness campaign; identify key partnerships for inter-institutional collaboration
	Honduras Anti-Gang National Force (Fuerza Nacional Anti-Maras y Pandillas – FNAMP)	143 anti-extortion hotline; regional offices based on need; mobile-phone blockers in prison	Lack of transparency with data analysis	Develop neighbourhood-level analysis; publish newsletter of accomplishments
COURTS	Honduras Anti-extortion courts (Juzgados Anti-Extorsión)	Qualified and vetted personnel; efficient processing of cases	Lack of disaggregated court data by location, 'three exits' from court and judges' sentencing tendencies; no identification of key institutions for interagency coordination	Disaggregate data collection and analysis and build interagency coordination



REGIONAL LESSONS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



The strength of the initiatives discussed is identifying risk factors and implementing innovative, practical, and targeted solution to reduce extortion. However, without adequate, reliable, and consistent data collection and analysis, the success of interventions becomes challenging to demonstrate. Evaluations would highlight which aspects of programmes are contributing to preventing and reducing extortion, and which programme aspects would require modification; with the overall purpose to strengthen these initiatives and empirically support their contribution to curbing extortion and thereby categorizing them as evidence-based programmes in these countries. Finally, the collaboration between prevention programmes, security forces and/or the private sector can be a step towards developing a multi-layered approach to extortion in the region.

REGIONAL LESSONS

The FNAMP, DIPANDA and the anti-extortion courts provide invaluable examples of institutions that have examined extortion dynamics and challenges and proceeded to implement practical solutions. DIPANDA and FNAMP's understanding of extortion dynamics has been demonstrated by the creation of anti-extortion hotlines for citizens, which may remove the fear that comes with reporting in person and increase trust in these institutions. Moreover, both units identified prisons as a contributing factor to extortion and responded with the installation of mobile-phone blockers. The units have also begun to collect and analyze the concentration of extortion throughout their respective national territories. Through systematic data analysis, DIPANDA has been able to identify a 90/10 typology of the perpetrators of extortion, while FNAMP has regional offices in the areas most affected by extortion. The anti-extortion courts have been shown to increase efficiency of processing cases through the criminal justice system, which preserving the rights of incarcerated individuals compared to centralized courts.

The Outreach Centers in Honduras demonstrate the importance of identifying specific risk factors and countering them with protective factors. For example, the centers identified the need for youth to obtain education, job training and business skills, and tailored their resources accordingly. The centers also documented the number of participants in workshops and certificates gained,

as well as helping create micro-businesses and teach marketable skills. Moreover, the centers have conducted analyses to ascertain the average income of businesses created. They found that 50% of the center-assisted businesses are sustainable – a higher percentage than those which did not receive training from the centers.

In order to further strengthen these initiatives, however, the region will have to overcome certain challenges, namely data limitations, programme adaptability, institutional trust, and rehabilitation.

CHALLENGES

Data limitation

Data limitation is the greatest challenge for initiatives attempting to demonstrate the success of their programmes empirically, with obstacles to access official data from government institutions and/or lack of data collected by initiatives for subsequent analysis and publication. Most prevention programmes provide the total number of participants who benefited from the programmes, but it is unknown whether additional variables/factors were collected from participants that might show how these programmes have positively impacted youth in violent neighbourhoods. Lack of transparency regarding initiatives reports disseminated only for internal use (e.g. GREAT, Sowing Security) or not releasing data until the end of an administration (e.g. Sowing Security) does not permit evaluation studies to determine the success of programmes. Although annual reports are helpful to examine whether changes occurred, a baseline, six-month and annual review would offer a more granular insight into programme impact and highlight possible adjustments. Finally, qualitative interviews could provide in-depth insight into participants' benefits, programme strengths, limitations and areas of growth opportunity.

Adaptation

The adaption of certain programmes to the context of another country is a challenge for some programmes, and the exportation of programmes to Central America requires careful assessment. The case studies of GREAT and Safe Schools (in Honduras and Guatemala, respectively) raises the question as to whether these were the most appropriate programmes to implement, rather than developing in-country programmes to address challenges.

GREAT was designed to prevent youth from joining gangs in the US, but national evaluations studies in the US showed conflicting results, with some studies finding that there had been no effect on delinquency or gang membership, while others found more pro-social attitudes and lower odds for gang membership under the revised GREAT curriculum.¹⁵ The applicability of the programme is made more urgent by the issue of forced gang membership in Honduras, which places into question whether GREAT has the necessary tools to address the heightened dangers youth face in the country. The Safe Schools initiative (originally developed in Mexico) provides security to youth in school settings and along the routes

students take to school. But while the programme targets all students, it fails to establish what additional resources or measures are being provided to students involved in criminal groups and/or substance use.

Understanding the country and neighbourhood context is vital to ensure that participant needs are addressed, programmes deliver their intended outcomes and limited resources are efficiently invested. Rigorous evaluations of these programmes would provide fair and accurate reporting of programme success and limitations and help guide programme adaptability to new country contexts.

Institutional trust

Institutional trust in the security forces is a major challenge. A survey conducted by the National Autonomous University of Honduras revealed that only 38% of those surveyed trust FNAMP.¹⁶ In the case of El Salvador, little more than half – 55.8% – of those interviewed reported that they trusted the National Civilian Police.¹⁷ Absence of citizen trust in security institutions may reduce the reporting of crimes to these institutions. Future studies should examine how citizen trust in security institutions at a geospatial level correlates with crimes reported. This would highlight areas where significant police reforms are necessary.

Rehabilitation programmes

The prison system may be a prime candidate for rehabilitation programmes to reduce extortion, having been identified by DIPANDA and FNAMP as a location from which extortion calls originate. By offering rehabilitation programmes within the prison system, extortion demands may decrease not only while the extorters are in prison but also after they have been released. League Central America in El Salvador provides a successful model for the rehabilitation of former gang members into society – by offering former gang members employment and subsidizing employees' secondary and college education.¹⁸

It is however important to clarify that individuals demanding extortion from prison are not only gang members but can also be imitators/opportunists.¹⁹ The Guatemalan case exemplifies how opportunist groups capitalize on the fear of gangs and limited citizen trust in security institutions, with extortion in the country being characterized by the 90/10 typology (90% of extortions committed by opportunist groups and 10% by gangs). This typology raises the question as to whether there are similar typologies in other countries, and what measures can be implemented to better inform citizens of extortion trends.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes two policy recommendations:

1. Improve data collection and analysis

Although extortion is prevalent in Central America, it is mostly a hidden phenomenon. In order to counter extortion, the crime must be constantly examined and understood to implement successful counterstrategies.

This report calls for the creation of a national extortion database that includes, but is not limited to:

- **Number of extortion complaints**
- **Amount of extortion payment**
- **Type of extortion** (monetary, sextortion, etc.)
- **Frequency of extortion payments: one-time payment or systematic** (every other week, etc.)
- **List of extorters** (gangs, opportunists, etc.)
- **Method of extortion demand** (e.g. in person, by telephone or note)
- **Geographic location of extortion** (department, municipality, neighbourhood)
- **Payment form** (e.g. cash, electronic deposits, products)
- **Type of business** (e.g. transportation, small/medium business)
- **Employee vulnerability** (threatened, harassed, murdered)

A data-driven approach would allow a thorough and consistent analysis of extortion over time and across countries. The availability of this data would allow cross-tabulations that may indicate compounding factors that may help identify vulnerable populations. (For example, the concentration of extortion can display which businesses within which municipalities are most vulnerable.) This information should then be used to develop targeted prevention, intervention and rehabilitation strategies. Should this data be gathered but not made public, security institutions must develop transparency tools to inform their population. For example, if Guatemalans were aware most extortions are committed by opportunists, this may help reduce the fear of retaliation, increase extortion reports and help provide services to victims.

Data triangulation – using more than one method to collect extortion data – from various sectors would assist in a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Since extortion is underreported to official institutions, victimization surveys would help generate data. For example, Mexico’s National Crime Victimization and Public Security Perception Survey

and National Victimization Survey of Business display how much extortion is underreported to official security institutions.²⁰ Another option to take a pulse of extortion may include a survey with informal business owners, small to medium-size businesses²¹ and private companies. An exchange of this information would assist in understanding varying forms of extortion as well as demonstrating impact from strategies implemented.

2. Create a multi-layered approach to countering extortion

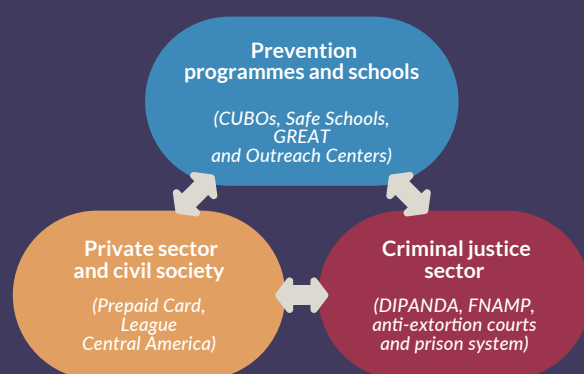
The prevalence of extortion requires the development of a multi-layered approach that draws upon inter-institutional collaboration. Some of the programmes reviewed in this report have begun to develop cross-institution collaborations, such as the Outreach Centers, Safe Schools, FNAMP and DIPANDA. However, inter-institutional collaboration is limited among security forces (i.e. FNAMP, DIPANDA), security forces and schools (i.e. Safe Schools) and the private sector and prevention programmes (i.e. Outreach Centers and CUBO). A multi-layered approach would require political will to collaborate across sectors for a united front against extortion. AddioPizzo, a civil-society movement in Italy, was able to counter extortion from the mafia by having a comprehensive approach that included local businesses, consumers and the police force.

Since extortion is a multicausal criminal phenomenon, it requires a response by all impacted sectors (prevention, security and private sector). Ideally, each sector would exchange and interact with others. For example, security forces (with vetted officers) should provide preventative workshops in the safe spaces run by schools and prevention programmes to ensure trust can be built with youth and communities. The private sector could also partner with prevention programmes to develop employment opportunities for certified youth in such programmes. This relationship would require a mutual agreement whereby the private sector develops organizational needs alongside the prevention

programmes developing capacity within these areas and preparing youth for the workforce. This collaboration would have the potential to help alleviate the situation of youth graduating from prevention programmes but not finding employment opportunities. The private sector should adequately compensate employees and build communities of trust within institutions to create an environment where extortion can be reported to supervisors.

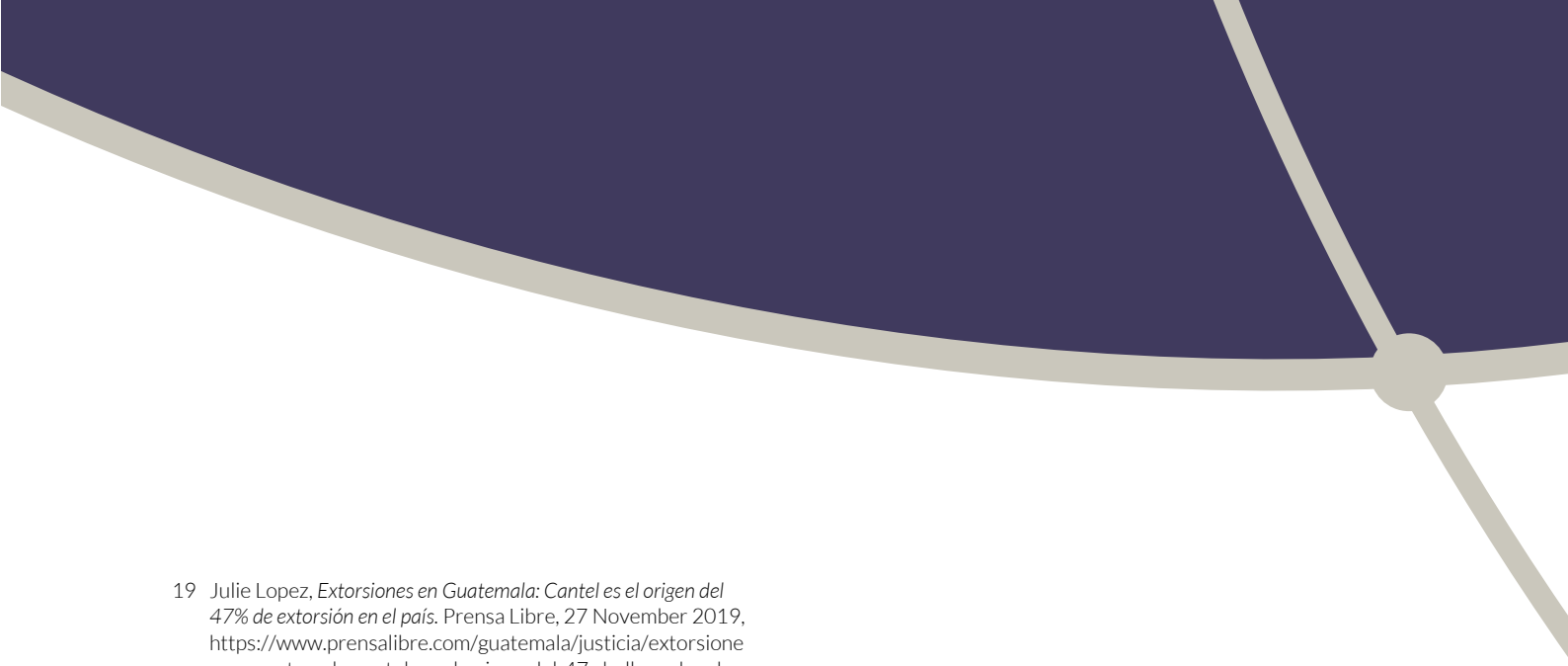
Moreover, the relationship between the private sector and security forces should also include preventative and informative workshops, while the private sector can also provide certain resources (i.e. office furniture, hardware, etc.) that security forces need. Civil society can assist the criminal justice sector with its capacity to collect data and conduct analysis, as well as evaluating programmes and contributing to the creation of national strategic plans. In conclusion, a multi-layered approach that incorporates all sectors of society affected by extortion would strengthen social fabric through a common goal of safety and security (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Multi-layered approach to counter extortion and strengthen social fabric



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