



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO EXTORTION

INSIGHTS FROM EL SALVADOR,
GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to understand how communities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras build and sustain their resilience to extortion, especially in light of state-led anti-extortion measures under emergency regimes in El Salvador and Honduras. It examines how community resilience manifests in environments plagued by violence and organized crime, particularly where gangs operate alongside public security forces under emergency regimes or *mano dura* ('iron fist') policies.

Through six case studies, the report explores the varying contexts of community resilience, the factors contributing to its development and long-term sustainability, and the communities' capacity to absorb the impacts of criminal governance, adapt, and transform their environments.

The findings reveal a shifting risk landscape for communities. Under emergency regimes, while the incidence of extortion and homicides has decreased, there has been an increase in restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms. These restrictions complicate community resilience, as the state – expected to provide public security and protect human rights – has become an enabler of impunity.

The case studies highlight different forms of resilience, driven by diverse actors such as women victims of extortion, private sector organizations, and foundations promoting sports and community development. While not fully representative of each country, these case studies offer valuable insights into community resilience in high-violence and emergency contexts.

Main findings

- **Emergency regimes have negatively impacted community resilience in El Salvador and Honduras.** Each country has unique characteristics in how emergency regimes or 'iron fist' measures are implemented, driven by their respective governments. In El Salvador, community resilience is undermined by an emergency regime that has become entrenched as state policy, weakening communities' ability to resist and recover from threats. In Honduras, community resilience faces a dual challenge: criminal networks that once profited from extortion now operate legitimate businesses within communities, making it difficult to identify and manage threats.
- **Private sector-led initiatives are proving effective.** Activities organized by the private sector, such as those by sugar associations in El Salvador and traders in Guatemala, have been effective in building and maintaining community resilience. The private sector's ability to provide financial resources, along with its organization, leadership and influence over governments, has been crucial in reducing the risks posed by organized crime and transforming environments. However, as seen in the Honduras case study below, mistrust, fragmented initiatives and a highly uncertain context have hindered sustained collaboration between organized entrepreneurs and the police.
- **Organized sports contribute positively to community resilience.** Participation in organized sports has been a key strategy for building resilience in the communities of La Bethania in Guatemala and Chamelecón in Honduras. Sports foster social cohesion by involving not only young people but also parents, coaches and other adults who serve as positive role models. It also offers young people a safe space and instills life values that extend beyond the playing field.

- **Corruption within the state significantly hampers resilience efforts.** Corruption has a detrimental impact on the sustainability and effectiveness of community resilience initiatives. In El Salvador, for example, as extortion by gangs has decreased, police corruption has emerged as a new form of extortion. Unchecked corruption erodes public trust in institutions, allows organized crime to infiltrate state structures and excludes vulnerable groups such as women.
- **Sexual extortion and impunity obstruct the development of resilience.** Under emergency regimes, sexual violence by state actors often receives institutional backing, with arbitrary detention threats becoming commonplace. Victims face severe psychological and social consequences, including stigma and re-victimization. The normalization of sexual violence within communities exacerbates these issues, leaving women feeling unprotected and isolated. Mistrust of authorities and fear of reprisals further hinder the community's ability to organize and respond collectively to such abuses.

Recommendations

Drawing from the experiences highlighted in the case studies, the following recommendations are proposed to build community resilience to extortion (further details can be found in the final section of the report):

- **Programme recommendations:** Invest in training programmes for community leaders, including those from the private sector, and provide tools for effective knowledge management and planning; promote partnerships between community actors, local governments, NGOs and the private sector, with cooperation frameworks that are adaptable and flexible; proactively manage security risks and prevent the misuse of information; tailor interventions to meet local needs and ensure active community participation; engage donors and policymakers to foster transparency and collaboration; and continuously review and adjust recommendations to keep them effective.
- **Recommendations for communities:** Establish and sustain formal and informal support networks to enhance community cohesion and coordination; encourage inclusive participation from all members, with a focus on protecting and involving vulnerable groups such as women and girls in decision-making processes; for private sector initiatives, develop ongoing evaluation systems to measure their effectiveness and adapt strategies as needed; use new technologies and social networks safely and effectively; and build partnerships with the media, the private sector, faith-based organizations, international agencies and academia to leverage resources and raise awareness of community issues and solutions.
- **Recommendations for policymakers:** Promote community involvement in designing public policies that are tailored to the unique context of each community; strengthen the legal framework and ensure the protection of rights during emergency regimes, guaranteeing adherence to human rights norms and providing diverse channels for receiving complaints; support community innovation and adaptability to crime by providing resources, technical support, protecting community leadership and establishing municipal observatories; and encourage the strategic use of data to develop tailored responses, while avoiding approaches that imply resignation to violence.

Methodology

This report is grounded in qualitative data collected from over 50 interviews with community leaders, women, entrepreneurs, NGO representatives and government authorities, including police and municipal officials, across the selected communities. The study was conducted between March and June 2024 by a team of researchers from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, who have extensive experience in contexts affected by criminal violence.

The case studies presented in the report follow a consistent structure: each begins with a description of the context, followed by an analysis of resilience factors – understood as a combination of internal and external elements. The case studies then explore resilience capacities in three dimensions: absorption, adaptation and transformation. These dimensions reflect how communities manage and resist criminal governance, how they find and implement responses, and how they transform their environments for long-term change based on the effects of their actions. To clarify recurring concepts within the case studies, the following definitions are provided:

- **Community resilience:** The collective ability of a community's members to absorb the impacts of organized crime, adapt to survive, and transform their circumstances to improve their living conditions.¹
- **Absorptive capacity:** The ability of a community to manage and withstand threats and challenges from criminal governance using the resources directly available to them.
- **Adaptive capacity:** The preventive measures taken by a community to address threats and stressors, by adjusting or modifying existing systems based on their experiences and perceptions of the threat(s). These measures can be either positive or negative. Negative measures may perpetuate cycles of violence, dependency or vulnerability.
- **Transformative capacity:** The capacity of a community to mobilize and effect changes in external structures, such as state responses, public policy formulation or societal perceptions.
- **Negative resilience:** When strategies adopted by a community inadvertently perpetuate rather than alleviate cycles of violence or dependency. For example, practices such as paying extortion fees or engaging in vigilantism might provide immediate security solutions but often reinforce long-term violence and instability.
- **Community:** This term extends beyond a geographically defined group to include any group of people united by a sense of belonging or identity (such as gender, youth, sugar producers, neighbours, etc.), fostering cohesion and shared objectives.²
- **Extortion:** This term not only refers to coercion by a gang or criminal group for monetary gain but also includes pressure exerted by one person on another to compel them to act in a way that provides financial or other advantages, such as goods or services.
- **Emergency regime:** An extraordinary measure implemented by states to address crime and violence, characterized by a 'tough on crime' approach. It typically involves a punitive and militarized security strategy with negative consequences for human rights and social cohesion. In the context of these case studies, emergency regimes encompasses legal elements (suspension of rights and freedoms), political elements (concentration of power and reduction of legislative and judicial oversight), and social elements with significant community impacts, particularly on vulnerable groups such as women and youth.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: CASE STUDIES

El Salvador: Resilience in times of the emergency regime

Case study 1: Agreement between sugar cane growers and the police

This case study explores the decade-long implementation of an agreement between the Asociación de Azucareros de El Salvador (sugar cane growers' association of El Salvador) and the police, analyzing the factors that have sustained its success.³ Initiated in 2014, the agreement has significantly benefited communities near sugar production areas by reducing crime and fostering collaboration between residents and law enforcement.

Context

The sugar industry is a cornerstone of El Salvador's economy, with an export value of approximately US\$1 211 billion over the past five years.⁴ However, more than a decade ago, the industry was severely affected by crime. 'In the production areas, gang members would enter and even kill some of the workers,' explained a representative of the police workers' movement, a union representing police officers.⁵

In response, the president of the sugar cane growers' association, along with several directors, decided to support the police so they could focus on securing the production areas. This collaboration included providing logistical support such as motorbikes, vehicles and financial incentives to the police. In return, 350 police officers were assigned to protect the sugar cane production areas during the harvest season. One police officer mentioned that each officer receives a monthly bonus of US\$90 and the option to rent a house in rural communities – some of which had been abandoned due to crime.⁶

In 2019, the president of the sugar cane growers' association, Mario Salaverría, expressed positive results of this agreement: 'We have managed to substantially reduce crime in the areas where sugar cane is grown, benefiting not only the crop, but also the surrounding communities, schools, transporters and other productive sectors.'⁷



Rural police in El Salvador photographed with motorbikes and equipment provided by the sugar cane growers' association, 2019. © Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of El Salvador

By the end of 2022, after Nayib Bukele's government declared an emergency regime in response to a spike in homicides, Salaverría acknowledged the positive impact of the government's measures on the productive sector, citing a reduction in insecurity.⁸

By 2024, two years into the emergency regime, a sugar cane industry leader mentioned that support for the police was being scaled back as crime rates had declined.⁹ However, with the decrease in gang activity, corruption within the police force emerged as a new challenge. One source stated that 'some police officers... since 2020... were practically keeping the money and no longer maintaining the motorbikes. Everything deteriorated to the point where the sugar cane growers' association resented this and reduced their support.'¹⁰

Factors influencing community resilience

Internal factors: Economic capacity, organization and leadership

The resilience of the sugar cane growers' association is largely attributed to its economic strength, which provides significant leverage and capital. Over the past decade, this financial capacity has enabled sustained logistical support to the police, amounting to an investment of approximately US\$1.4 million.

The organizational capacity of the association, with its approximately 7 000 members, is another key factor. The agreement with the police, which includes coordination through working groups, exemplifies this organizational strength.

Leadership also plays a crucial role, particularly in its media influence. Beyond managing security in production areas, the association's leadership extends to addressing the social and community roots of crime through educational and preventive programmes aimed at students vulnerable to gang recruitment.

External factors: State support and corruption

Initially, the support from the rural police was vital in boosting confidence in security programmes, which encouraged a culture of reporting within communities. For instance, one police officer mentioned that community members alerted them to gang members infiltrating among the cane cutters, who attempted to monitor production and then extort money from producers affiliated with the association.¹¹

However, the lack of effective transparency and accountability mechanisms led to emerging signs of police corruption, which negatively impacted community trust and participation. While community members trusted the officers on the ground, there was distrust towards their superiors: 'People trusted the officer, but they didn't trust our boss,' one officer explained.¹²

Despite this underlying issue, police corruption has not yet undermined the sustainability of the public-private partnership agreement. Nevertheless, some officers are aware that the diversion of resources has contributed to the reduction in support.

One officer admitted that police corruption is another form of extortion: 'Police chiefs ask for favours or money from cooperative managers and landowners to prioritize sending security to them,' he said.¹³

Community resilience capacities

The internal and external factors that characterize the resilience of the sugar cane growers' association have enabled it to effectively address the challenges posed by extortion in the sugar industry. This resilience is primarily due to the association's robust economic and organizational resources, which facilitate the creation of effective support and response networks.

A decade after the agreement was signed, the association has demonstrated remarkable adaptability to changing circumstances. This adaptability is also evident in initiatives such as a reporting app¹⁴ and the use of drones for aerial surveillance.

While El Salvador's sugar cane growers have succeeded in building transformative resilience by reducing extortion and supporting community prevention efforts, they now face the challenge of police corruption emerging as a new form of extortion.

Case study 2: Victims of sexual extortion in Puerto El Triunfo

This case study examines how women in Puerto El Triunfo, Usulután, have responded to sexual extortion during El Salvador's emergency regime. These women not only bear the burden of seeking justice for relatives arbitrarily detained under the emergency regime, but have also suffered human rights abuses, resulting in their stigmatization within the community. According to Amnesty International, the negligence of institutions responsible for safeguarding human rights and punishing crimes by officials has led to a 'high level of impunity' under the emergency regime.¹⁵

Context

In March 2024, some women from Puerto El Triunfo participated in a citizen's protest in San Salvador, demanding fair legal proceedings for their detained relatives. Through their testimonies, a previously hidden issue came to light – several women reported being victims of sexual extortion by a Naval Force commander.¹⁶ One of the cases – for which the commander was arrested in April 2023, along with other sexual offenders – involves a 14-year-old girl who was reportedly raped by the officer in 2023 while soldiers under his command were guarding the perimeter of the site.¹⁷

The media have also reported on at least two other cases.¹⁸ A journalist who has been following these events claims that the commander is on parole.¹⁹ He was temporarily detained and later transferred to a military facility. The legal case is bound by judicial secrecy as it is subject to judicial process, and access to information is not available. Lawyers from the Ministry of Defence confirm that no internal disciplinary proceedings have been initiated because they are waiting for the court's decision, since 'as an institution they respect the military's right to presumption of innocence,' said the journalist.²⁰

In Salvadoran criminal law, sexual extortion is not classified as a specific offence.²¹ For Gabriela Santos, director of the Human Rights Institute of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, this case cannot be seen as an isolated incident, but requires more thorough structural and systemic analysis.²²

A community psychologist who works with victims of gender-based violence believes that, in the context of an emergency regime, sexual violence perpetrated by state actors appears to receive institutional endorsement or protection.²³ This, according to the psychologist, is because state agents are supported by a government apparatus that, in practice, justifies human rights violations. This perspective is shared by a representative of the police workers' movement, who expresses concern that some police officers and soldiers may be involved in extortion activities, using the threat of detention under the emergency regime. According to this source,

eight cases have been reported during the emergency regime where police officers were detained for alleged extortion, with victims claiming they were threatened with detention if they did not pay or if they reported the incidents.²⁴



The abandoned home of an alleged victim of sexual extortion in Puerto El Triunfo. © Celia Medrano

Factors influencing community resilience

Internal elements: Fear of reprisals and the emerging use of social networks

Puerto El Triunfo lacks formal women's organizations, and external support is scarce. Fear of military reprisals deters victims from reporting abuses. A major barrier to community resilience is the reluctance to assume leadership roles, as people fear arrest when they gather, according to one woman.²⁵

Nevertheless, one useful tool for organizing is the WhatsApp messaging app, particularly in chat groups for Socorro Jurídico Humanitario (humanitarian legal aid) and the Movimiento de Víctimas del Régimen de Excepción (emergency regime victims movement), where some women are active. 'We have groups on our phones where they inform us about upcoming marches and meetings. I tell others, "Look, there's a march; let's see if we can go." We are united by the pain of our relatives, as we demand the freedom of the innocent,' said one community leader.²⁶ However, many people added to these WhatsApp groups often leave them out of fear.²⁷

External elements: Normalization of sexual violence and state exclusion

Sexual violence is normalized in the community, with some victims not recognizing these acts as crimes, which contributes to re-victimization and a lack of community response. Some alleged victims of the commander reported being told by family members and neighbours that if they had complied with the commander's demands, their relatives would not be imprisoned.²⁸

Another external factor hindering resilience is the lack of support from state institutions, which perpetuates impunity, stigma and vulnerability for affected women by failing to ensure criminal prosecution, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. The absence of legal remedies and adequate psychosocial support leaves women unprotected and fearful of seeking justice, further increasing their vulnerability and limiting their ability to organize and defend their rights.

In terms of available resources, respondents note that media reporting has been the only action taken to highlight injustices. Coverage of these abuses has helped make cases of sexual extortion more visible and provided a platform for victims to publicly share their experiences.

Resilience capacities

This case study illustrates how the militarized response of the emergency regime has undermined social cohesion and interpersonal trust, weakening resilience. Despite this challenging situation, the victims of sexual extortion in Puerto El Triunfo have played a crucial role in creating support networks and raising awareness about the systemic nature of these abuses due to impunity.

Recognizing the lack of state support, these women have turned to non-state support structures, such as the media and human rights organizations such as Socorro Jurídico Humanitario. The women in Puerto El Triunfo have adopted an explicitly non-confrontational approach, working within their roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Women's social capital is often built in different networks than men's, frequently in private or domestic spaces rather than public ones.²⁹ These formal and informal networks tend to become engines of resilience in times of crisis.³⁰

Despite the challenges to formal organizing, women use WhatsApp groups to stay informed and organize for marches and protests, demonstrating their adaptability to the restrictions imposed by fear.

Guatemala: Urban renewal and sporting inspiration

Case study 3: Citizen innovation in Guatemala City

This case study explores the Zona Cuatro Segura project, a public-private partnership launched in 2017 in Guatemala City.³¹ It examines its sustainability, highlights the key factors behind its success and outlines the adjustments made over seven years of implementation. The Zona Cuatro Segura project has played a crucial role in restoring security in Guatemala City's Cuatro Grados Norte district, a commercial and residential area. The project demonstrates that resilience can be maintained over time through financial backing, collaboration and commitment.

Context

Cuatro Grados Norte, located in Zone 4 of Guatemala City, was originally developed in 2002 as part of a municipal initiative aimed at creating a pedestrian-friendly area to attract local and international tourists. The plan included recreational spaces, green areas, bike lanes and the introduction of shops, bars and restaurants. However, after this revitalization, the area began to attract illicit activities.³² Agustín Guzmán, president of the Asociación Civil Cuatro Grados Norte (civic association of Cuatro Grados Norte), notes that the district saw a rise in organized crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking and extortion.³³

In response to these challenges, residents and business owners developed their own security model: Zona Cuatro Segura (safe Zone 4). They designated the area to be protected and installed surveillance cameras, established patrol routes and set up a monitoring centre. This initiative was funded by residents and business owners, with support from the municipal government and the police.³⁴ In 2017, the project started with 11 surveillance cameras; by 2024, coverage expanded to 80. The monitoring centre reviews footage, receives alerts and coordinates responses with the police.

Emilio Vargas, the area's auxiliary mayor,³⁵ underscored the importance of inter-agency coordination and community participation. He highlighted that the municipality has been instrumental in revitalizing public spaces by improving visibility through tree pruning and better lighting at night, as well as organizing cultural and social events that encourage public engagement.³⁶

However, the implementation of the security model has been uneven, focusing mainly on ‘safe islands’ – areas where residents and business owners in Cuatro Grados Norte pay for the camera monitoring system – leaving other areas with less security coverage. This economic disparity creates inequalities in the perception of safety and has limited cohesion in less protected areas.



A street in Cuatro Grados Norte after the implementation of the Zona Cuatro Segura project.
© Josué Decavele

Factors influencing community resilience

Internal elements: Cohesion, leadership and technology

One key aspect of internal resilience in Cuatro Grados Norte is community cohesion, reflected in a shared responsibility for security. Aracely, a long-time resident, emphasizes the importance of involving the entire community in the security programme to ensure its long-term sustainability. ‘People here want to be part of the solutions, not just passive observers. When the community is involved, the measures are more effective because everyone is more engaged,’ she said.³⁷ WhatsApp groups have also helped residents better understand and manage local security.³⁸

Business leadership has been another crucial element of resilience, with local entrepreneurs contributing ideas and financial support. The Méndez brothers, who run the digital media outlet Soy 502, spearheaded an initiative to convert streets into pedestrian zones, significantly reducing crime in the area. Other innovative measures include the use of closed-circuit cameras and the establishment of the monitoring centre, which has enhanced police surveillance and response times.

External elements: State support, networking and investment in community development

The Cuatro Grados Norte project was launched with the support of the local government, which has backed it for over 20 years. This support includes political commitment to a preventive approach, with regular police patrols and a visible law enforcement presence that acts as a strong deterrent against criminal activity.³⁹ Additionally, information from the surveillance monitoring centre is used to coordinate police operations.

Community resilience capacities

The success of this community initiative has hinged on close collaboration between residents, business owners and local authorities, fostering transformative resilience that has encouraged commercial investment and property development. The use of technology, such as the integration of WhatsApp groups, has streamlined community organization and improved local security management. The strategic use of pedestrian zones and more than 80 surveillance cameras illustrates the community's adaptability in crime prevention. Ongoing training and security education have also strengthened this capacity.

Despite these advancements, not all residents and businesses have experienced the same level of improved security. Some areas, particularly those outside the so-called 'safe islands', are still perceived as unsafe due to inconsistent security coverage. Expanding these interventions to ensure uniform safety across the entire community remains a critical challenge.

Case study 4: Building resilience through boxing at La Bethania

This case study examines how organized sports can foster both individual and community resilience. The La Bethania boxing school, operated by the Guatemalan Olympic Foundation since 2012, goes beyond teaching boxing skills – it instils positive values in the roughly 400 students who have trained there. Through boxing, students find a safe space where they learn discipline, respect and a strong sense of community belonging. Additionally, parents, neighbours and local businesses actively participate in the gym's activities.

Context

La Bethania, a neighbourhood in Guatemala City, was established in 1949 to house families displaced by an earthquake. Today, it is one of the capital's most densely populated areas, with most residents working in the informal sector. The rapid growth of the community has resulted in a shortage of essential services such as water, sanitation and schools. Adding to these challenges is the presence of gangs, which impose criminal control over the area, further limiting social and economic opportunities. In 2023, there were more than 18 000 reports of extortion in the country, a 23% increase from the previous year, with La Bethania being one of the urban areas most affected.⁴⁰

The boxing school operates within these challenging conditions as a tool to steer young people away from the criminal networks prevalent in the area. The gym offers much more than just boxing lessons – it provides a safe space where youth can express their concerns and seek guidance. 'In the gym, we talk about everything. If someone has a problem, we discuss it as a team and find solutions together,' explained Christian, one of the trainers.⁴¹

Boxing has not only kept young people occupied but also served as a vehicle for instilling positive values. 'We face situations where some youth are tempted by the easy life on the streets, but through boxing, we show them a different path,' said Christian. The sport teaches them discipline and respect, leading many to choose to fight in the ring rather than on the streets.

Christian recalls one of his students, Kevin, who tragically died in a traffic accident. Kevin had been involved in drug dealing, but everything began to change when he took up boxing. 'It was tough at first, but his decision to focus on the sport completely transformed his life,' said Christian. Kevin's achievements in the ring had a ripple effect on his community: he competed at the national level and eventually became a boxing coach in La Bethania, mentoring and leading other young people. 'Sports can motivate young people in a different way, especially in communities where state presence is minimal,' said a resident of La Bethania.⁴²



Pupils of La Bethania boxing school. Boxing has not only kept young people occupied but also served as a vehicle for instilling positive values. © *Josué Decavele*

Factors influencing community resilience

Internal elements: Cohesion, solidarity, leadership and self-esteem

The gym serves as a hub of social cohesion, where young people come together not only to train but also to support one another, discuss problems and find solutions as a group. This personal transformation is also reflected in the community's perception of these young athletes, who shift from being stigmatized to being seen as positive role models and potential leaders. Those who participate in the boxing school often take on leadership roles, positively influencing their peers and the broader community. When these young people are empowered and disciplined, they play a vital role in deterring negative behaviours among their peers, fostering a healthier and more constructive environment. In this way, individual resilience becomes a catalyst for community resilience.

Strong and supportive family relationships are a protective factor for children and youth, contributing to the creation of resilient communities. One student highlighted how the Guatemalan Olympic Foundation's support, especially through the coaches, has been fundamental to her personal and athletic development. Her family and some neighbours have consistently encouraged her, attending her competitions and cheering her on. One father spoke of the transformative impact boxing has had on his daughter, expressing his admiration and surprise: 'Seeing my daughter grow in confidence and discipline is something I never imagined was possible in our neighbourhood.'⁴³

External elements: Positive adult figures, support networks and community involvement

At the boxing school, students find adult role models who mentor them beyond physical training. Coaches not only guide them in the sport but also foster youth participation in the community, create a cohesive and safe community environment, curb antisocial behaviour, promote a sense of belonging and offer emotional support during tough times.⁴⁴

The Guatemalan Olympic Foundation plays a crucial role in providing the resources needed for the boxing school's development and sustainability. This support extends beyond covering operational costs to include training, scholarships and additional resources for coaches and students, such as financial education provided by sponsoring banks. These initiatives enhance leadership skills and emotional intelligence.

Another key factor in the resilience of these young people has been community involvement. Coaches and parents have made the most of available spaces, starting training sessions in the streets and using improvised equipment, such as punching bags made from old rags. As the project grew, it attracted support from local businesses, which contributed donations and resources to organize tournaments and community events. These initiatives increased the school's visibility and recognition, drawing even greater community support.

Community resilience capacities

The boxing school's role as a support network demonstrates its ability to absorb challenges. It provides a safe space where young people can grow away from negative influences. Adaptation is evident in how the school incorporates value-based training that goes beyond sport, teaching discipline, conflict resolution and leadership. One young boxer reflects on his transformation: 'I remember my first day in the ring. I felt defeated but also inspired by the discipline and respect everyone showed inside the gym,' he recalls.⁴⁵ 'Boxing has given me direction in life, taught me discipline and provided me with a community,' says another.⁴⁶ As these young people develop skills and confidence, they take on leadership roles, influencing their peers and fostering transformative resilience within their environment.

Honduras: Resilience amid political upheaval

Case study 5: Strained partnership between the Chamber of Commerce and the police

This case study looks at the partnership between the Cortés Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIC) and the Honduran National Police, which started in 2013 during one of the most violent periods in the history of Honduras. This collaboration was formed during a time of major changes, including a police overhaul, the creation of specialized anti-gang and anti-extortion units, and a president who was re-elected in 2019, further deepening the country's divisions.⁴⁷ By 2021, the partnership had soured due to corruption, organized crime infiltrating the police and some businesses, and changes in leadership at both the police and the Chamber.

Context

San Pedro Sula, Honduras's industrial hub, is located in the Sula Valley, the country's largest and most densely populated metro area. In the 1990s, rapid urban growth in the Sula Valley led to a surge in crime, including gang violence and drug trafficking.

To combat increasing robberies targeting business supply and grocery delivery vehicles, the CCIC – representing over 3 000 businesses – took a leading role in pushing for state protection and punitive measures against extortion. By 2015, extortion payments in the country were around US\$200 million annually.⁴⁸

In 2013, the CCIC held its first official meeting with the police and the national anti-extortion force (FNA), a specialized unit set up by President Juan Orlando Hernández. This partnership aimed to address specific extortion cases and create a system that integrated both public and private security. The following year, they rolled out a plan to fight extortion, continuously adjusting it as needed.

In 2015, they set up joint security schemes to enhance communication and coordination between private security firms and the FNA. This included joint training, GPS tracking of units and safeguarding delivery routes.

By 2018, the FNA was expanded into the national anti-gang and extortion force (FNAMP), involving the police, the military, prosecutors, judges and intelligence agencies with enhanced powers. In the next two years, FNAMP's strategies led to 14 arrest warrants against extortionists and improved operations.

However, in 2021, relations between the CCIC and the police deteriorated due to mutual distrust, corruption, information leaks, changes in leadership and inadequate follow-through on strategies. This decline culminated in the dismantling of FNAMP in 2022 by the new government led by Xiomara Castro, who cited corruption and police misconduct.



The Cortés Chamber of Commerce and Industry in San Pedro Sula.
© Leonardo Pineda

Factors influencing community resilience

Internal elements: Organizational capacity and intelligence, but fragmentation

A major factor in building community resilience was the CCIC's ability to organize and mobilize resources. For example, they set up reporting mechanisms for businesses to report extortion to the police. By channeling these complaints to the FNA, the CCIC served as a crucial link between businesses in the Sula Valley and the police.

The Chamber not only supported entrepreneurs in resisting extortion but also promoted adaptive measures, such as mapping out extortion hotspots for delivery routes and businesses, providing valuable data to prevent future incidents.

However, in an environment marked by distrust of authorities, corruption and uncertainty, some business owners resorted to negative resilience measures, such as paying extortion fees, which provided short-term relief but perpetuated criminal activities.

Mistrust among CCIC members was a significant barrier. 'At first, many didn't want to speak up because they suspected the police were involved,' recalled a police officer.⁴⁹

External elements: Instability, mistrust and limited external networks

Instability and lack of follow-up after leadership changes in the CCIC and the police weakened their collaboration and the effectiveness of their joint strategies. Organized crime infiltration and police corruption fueled ongoing mistrust among private sector participants.

This lack of trust made effective cooperation between businesses and the police difficult. Some delivery drivers even chose to leave the country out of fear of extortion or violence.⁵⁰

On the positive side, USAID and the Public Prosecutor's Office intervened with campaigns to encourage victims to report crimes. However, these efforts were not enough to overcome the pervasive climate of fear and mistrust.

Businesses responded by investing in private security systems and GPS monitoring, making private security a common choice for greater control and protection.

Community resilience capacities

In this case study, resilience capacities navigate a complex environment. The CCIC acted as a mediator between extortion victims and the Honduran police, serving as a trusted contact for both sides. Its capacity for absorption is shown in its implementation of a complaints mechanism that channels reports to the police. The CCIC also fostered the development of an anti-extortion plan with input from its members, improving coordination with the police.

However, transformational resilience was not achieved. Some initiatives showed innovation in addressing extortion but did not significantly change attitudes.

Frequent changes in administrations and security policies negatively impacted the continuity of strategies. Additionally, organized crime and corruption eroded trust between businesses and the police.

Compared to case studies from El Salvador and Guatemala, the relationship between private businesses and the police in Honduras is weaker. This is due to the lack of formal collaboration agreements and the more diverse nature of affected companies in Honduras, unlike the more concentrated impacts seen in El Salvador's sugar sector or Guatemala's Cuatro Grados Norte area.

Case study 6: Collaborative networks of the Chamelecón Intersectoral Committee

The Chamelecón neighbourhood in San Pedro Sula has shown impressive resilience to a range of challenges, including flooding, poverty, violence and insecurity due to the presence of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 gangs. These gangs' struggle for territorial control has split Chamelecón into two areas: Chamelecón north, under Barrio 18, and Chamelecón south, dominated by MS-13. Recently, the neighbourhood has seen a drop in extortion and homicide rates.⁵¹ Some residents report that MS-13 has tightened its grip, establishing a new model of criminal governance that minimizes violence and blends in with legitimate businesses, creating legal jobs while laundering extortion money.

In November 2023, Chamelecón was included in an emergency regime declared by President Xiomara Castro. This measure, which was still in effect as of July 2024, has been controversial given the recent decline in crime rates.⁵² This case study examines how Chamelecón has built community resilience through the collaborative efforts of the Intersectoral Committee.

Context

The high dropout rate at the Modesto Rodas Alvarado High School, situated on the border between MS-13 and Barrio 18 territories, spurred community action. In 2013, the Intersectoral Committee was formed with a board of five leaders from different sectors, including the Church, local trustees and NGOs.

The Intersectoral Committee has fostered community resilience through collaboration with a variety of local actors: neighbourhood associations, women's groups, youth organizations, LGBTQ+ groups, churches and international aid projects. It has spearheaded initiatives ranging from tackling school dropouts and preventing gang violence to protecting women, improving access to health services, supporting migrants and providing disaster relief.



A mural welcomes the 2024 school year at Modesto Rodas Alvarado High School, located on the border between MS-13 and Barrio 18 territories.
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Factors influencing community resilience

Internal elements: Organization, information and networking

A key factor in Chamelecón's resilience to violence and extortion has been the effective organization of the Intersectoral Committee. The Committee has focused on education and worked closely with local churches to run preventive activities, particularly sports programmes.

An evangelical leader noted that these preventive actions have shifted young people's attitudes towards gangs: 'Belonging to a gang is no longer appealing. Kids have seen too many deaths from gang violence,' he said.⁵³

Community leaders also conducted extensive mapping to understand the demographics and identify the most vulnerable individuals in northern and southern Chamelecón. This mapping has been crucial for tailoring strategies to local needs.

Another major strength of the Committee has been its ability to network. As one community member observed, 'When civil society groups and donors started addressing the challenges of sector mobilization, it led to connections with key community leaders who became vital links between us and the community. The earlier mapping proved to be invaluable.'⁵⁴

External elements: High police turnover, clientelist politics and support networks

Several external factors have influenced the resilience-building process in Chamelecón. One significant challenge is the high turnover of police officers assigned to the area, which hampers the development of long-term trust with the Intersectoral Committee. The current police chief points out a gap in this process: 'There's no established protocol for connecting with community leaders, and outgoing chiefs often don't leave behind a list of key contacts,' he explained.⁵⁵

Another external issue is the perception that community activities are politically motivated. During interviews, leaders expressed concerns about political division and sectarianism, with officials from the major parties, Partido Libertad y Refundación and Partido Nacional, often rejecting collaboration with members of the opposing party. This political distrust undermines collaborative efforts and deepens community divisions, negatively impacting resilience initiatives that require a unified approach.

On the positive side, international development partners have played a crucial role. Organizations including USAID, the Red Cross and the Norwegian Council have provided essential resources and technical assistance,

boosting local capacities. Their support has strengthened education and skills development programmes, offering youth opportunities that reduce their vulnerability to gang recruitment and mitigating some of the adverse impacts of other external factors.

Community resilience capacities

The emergency regime has focused efforts on achieving quick wins against criminal structures, but these measures have fallen short due to ineffective localization.⁵⁶ Despite this, the Chamelecón Intersectoral Committee has demonstrated significant resilience through its own resources, showing both absorption and adaptation capacities.

Through detailed mapping, the Committee identified vulnerabilities to gang crime in northern and southern Chamelecón and promoted changes in security and prevention strategies. They emphasized collaboration with police in sectors where working together was feasible, leading to a more peaceful coexistence and reduced conflict with gang structures.

The transformation is evident in the Committee's shift from reactive to proactive approaches, concentrating on education, employability and social welfare, while strengthening social cohesion and community identity. This comprehensive strategy has made a lasting impact, enabling Chamelecón to tackle violence effectively and foster sustainable development and peace.



CONCLUSIONS

Emergency regimes create unique conditions that influence the dynamics of organized crime. The case studies in this report offer valuable insights into how these emergency measures affect crime, evaluate their effectiveness and assess their impact on the most affected communities. The key findings from this study are outlined below:

- **The sustainability of initiatives is conditioned by the financial resources available.** The case studies across the three countries demonstrate that while resilience can be built, its long-term sustainability and transformative potential heavily rely on the availability of financial resources, the quality of collaboration with state institutions (with mutual trust being crucial), and a stable environment that mitigates crime risks.
- **Leadership is key to developing resilience initiatives.** Effective leadership is the driving force behind community responses. Whether an individual or a group, leadership is essential in organizing, motivating and taking action. Resilience cannot be achieved without dedicated leadership.
- **Support networks are essential for coping with adversity.** Support networks play a key role in fostering social cohesion, facilitating collaboration and sharing resources and information. These networks, which include both state and non-state actors, are crucial for enhancing a community's ability to cope and adapt. For instance, in El Salvador, close cooperation with the police is critical for sustaining security programmes in the sugar industry. In Guatemala, the lack of state presence has pushed communities to rely heavily on their own networks for protection and basic services. In Honduras, particularly in Chamelecón, the establishment of support networks through the Intersectoral Committee has been vital in addressing challenges such as school dropout rates, flooding and gang violence.
- **Corruption is a determining factor that compromises community resilience.** Corruption is a significant barrier to building community resilience. In El Salvador, for example, while gang extortion has decreased, corruption within the police and military has emerged as a new form of extortion. In Honduras, police corruption and the infiltration of organized crime have made private sector collaboration with the police unsustainable.
- **Expressions of negative resilience highlight the complexity of community responses to crime and violence.** The concept of negative resilience, as observed in the case studies, illustrates that when faced with life-threatening situations, communities may respond in ways that are counterproductive. Fear, mistrust, fragmentation and uncertainty fuel negative resilience, making it difficult to counteract these emotions, especially during a crisis. In El Salvador, for instance, women victims face violence and a lack of institutional support, perpetuating their vulnerability. In Honduras, negative resilience is evident in the payment of extortion fees by employers.
- **Private sector-led initiatives are effective.** Private sector-led activities, such as those by the sugar association in El Salvador and traders in Guatemala, have been successful in building and maintaining community resilience. However, in Honduras, factors like mistrust, fragmented efforts and an unstable environment have hindered sustained collaboration between organized business groups and the police.
- **Organized sport benefits community resilience.** Participation in organized sports has been a key strategy for building resilience in communities like La Bethania in Guatemala and Chamelecón in Honduras. Sports promote social cohesion by engaging not only youth but also parents, coaches and other adults who serve as positive role models.
- **Sexual extortion and impunity impede the building of resilience.** During emergency regimes, sexual violence by state actors is often tacitly accepted, with threats of arbitrary detention being common. The community's ability to organize and respond to abuses is severely limited by distrust in authorities and fear of retaliation.

- **Effects of emergency regime.** The case studies identify three key factors that influence the intensity, institutional response and social impact of emergency regimes. The table below summarizes these factors and their effects on community resilience in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras:

FACTOR	EL SALVADOR	GUATEMALA	HONDURAS
Level of concentration of power in the executive	High. Power is strongly centralized in the executive, with strict and centralised measures under emergency rule.	Low. The new government lacks sufficient control over the legislative and judicial branches, which diminishes the centralization of power.	Medium. Centralization of power is moderate, but influenced by political instability, frequent policy changes and limited popular support.
Level of territorial coverage of the state	High. Security forces have wide territorial coverage, patrolling extensively even in rural areas.	Low. There are significant limitations in the territorial presence of public security forces, leaving many sectors without sufficient protection.	Low. Territorial coverage is limited and inconsistent, with some areas receiving more resources than others. In Chamelecón, for instance, fewer resources have been allocated since the state of emergency.
Level of popular support for the measures	High. The emergency regime enjoys strong popular support, despite international criticism of human rights violations.	Low. Security measures are not widely supported due to lack of trust in institutions and perceptions of ineffectiveness.	Medium. Some communities support the emergency regime, while others criticize it for lack of results and increased social tensions.

FIGURE 1 Impact of emergency regimes on community resilience.

Recommendations

Drawing from the insights gained through the above case studies and the expertise shared by authorities, journalists, academics, activists and business representatives during a dialogue in Guatemala in June 2024, the following recommendations are proposed to build community resilience to extortion.

Programmatic recommendations: For national organizations or international donors

Capacity building

- **Support community leadership:** Invest in training and capacity-building programmes for community leaders, tailoring the development of their specific skills and leadership profiles. This effort should extend to identifying leaders from other sectors, such as the private and local public sectors.
- **Provide tools and resources for effective planning and support:** Adopt a co-creation approach that recognizes existing leadership and fosters open, horizontal dialogues. This should include strengthening participatory leadership and acknowledging the capabilities and limitations of all involved, building trust and reducing reliance on hierarchical national authorities. Focus on collective and strategic planning processes to measure outcomes and impacts from all perspectives at the end of interventions.
- **Adapt to local needs:** Identify and prioritize local needs, ensuring active community participation in project development. Continuously adapt interventions to align with the cultural and social dynamics of the community.

Support for collaboration

- **Foster cross-sector collaboration:** Promote partnerships among community actors, local governments, NGOs and the private sector to enhance the sustainability of community initiatives. Develop flexible cooperation frameworks that reflect local realities, involving all actors in project creation and encouraging their ongoing

participation throughout implementation. Prioritize cross-sector collaboration to establish strong foundations for cooperation, ensuring leadership and partnerships are well integrated, with clear and effective sources of support.

- **Engage key stakeholders:** Involve donors, policymakers and multiple sectors in implementing these recommendations, creating spaces for transparent and reciprocal exchange and collaboration.
- **Continuously evaluate and adjust:** Regularly review and refine recommendations to keep them relevant and effective, incorporating innovations and lessons learned during implementation.

Security

- **Manage risks:** Intensive support for leaders can increase their personal risk, and the collective planning process can lead to insecurity or misuse of information. It is vital to proactively manage these risks to prevent the exploitation of community platforms for harmful political purposes.

Recommendations for communities: To strengthen their resilience capacities

Networking and collaboration

- **Build and maintain support networks:** Encourage the creation and sustainability of formal and informal support networks within communities, which are essential for resilience. These networks should provide safe spaces for members to connect and coordinate responses to crises. Prioritize strategies that ensure these networks remain adaptable and sustainable, even in the face of challenges such as emergency regimes that may threaten member security. Strengthening connections between local organizations and broader networks at national and international levels can also offer greater support and protection.
- **Forging partnerships with key actors:** Include media, the private sector, religious groups, international organizations and academia in the development of community networks. These actors can provide valuable resources, raise international awareness, and generate relevant knowledge about community issues and solutions.

Inclusion

- **Promote inclusive community participation:** Ensure that all voices, especially those of vulnerable groups such as women, girls and adolescents affected by sexual extortion, are heard and valued in community responses. It is crucial to identify the specific needs of these groups and prioritize their protection. Encouraging their involvement in decision-making and leadership roles is essential to highlight and address their concerns. Strengthen the gender expertise of networks to ensure these groups are actively included in decision-making processes.

Monitoring and evaluation

- **Develop ongoing evaluation systems and review lessons learned:** Implement continuous evaluation systems to measure the effectiveness of community initiatives and adapt strategies as needed. This includes conducting interviews and surveys to better understand resilience dynamics and identify areas for improvement. Address challenges related to the lack of awareness or prioritization of these evaluation mechanisms through community education and capacity building.

Technology

- **Using technology and social media for activism:** Develop strategies for the safe and effective use of technology and social media to bolster activism and community resilience. This includes promoting digital literacy and online safety.

Recommendations for policymakers: Supporting community resilience

- **Encourage community participation in the design of public policies:** Develop public policies that are directly informed by community input in both decision-making and the implementation of security programmes, tailored to the specific context of each community. It is crucial to decide whether these programmes will be reactive or preventive, based on crime rates and risk factors. These policies should foster a sense of community ownership and be perceived as inclusive rather than imposed.
- **Strengthen legal frameworks and protect rights during emergency regimes:** Ensure the effective application of national and international human rights standards when implementing emergency and temporary crime-fighting measures. Diversify channels for receiving complaints beyond the judicial system and improve public understanding of rights that may be affected during emergency regimes. It is also important to increase transparency and clarity about the characteristics and management of these states, with active involvement from community leaders. Without complementary strategies, emergency regimes risk perpetuating a cycle of unresolved issues.
- **Support community innovation and adaptation to crime challenges:** Provide resources and technical support to help communities develop and implement innovative solutions to challenges posed by crime, general violence and state violence. Protect and promote community leadership, and establish municipal observatories to guide specific public actions. Encourage the strategic use of data to design responses tailored to local realities, ensuring data availability and transparency for effective innovation. Avoid framing 'adaptation' as resignation to violence; instead, focus on strengthening community response capacities that reflect and respect their specific needs and priorities.

Notes

- ¹ See Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, August 2017, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/resilience-in-sinaloa/>; Siria Gastélum Félix, Community resilience to organised crime: Building back better, in Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime. Routledge, 2021.
- ² See David W McMillan and David Chavis, Sense of community: A definition and theory, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 1 (1986), 6-23.
- ³ This case study is based on the case 'How the private sector helped counter rural extortion in El Salvador', described in GI-TOC and InSight Crime, A criminal culture: Extortion in Central America, May 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/extortion-in-central-america/>.
- ⁴ Moisés Alvarado, *Las claves para que el azúcar sea el único producto agropecuario en crecimiento en El Salvador*, [elsalvador.com](https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/negocios/el-salvador-azucar-cana-de-granos-basicos/1122704/2024/), 11 February 2024, <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/negocios/el-salvador-azucar-cana-de-granos-basicos/1122704/2024/>.
- ⁵ Interview with representative of the police workers' movement of El Salvador, April 2024.
- ⁶ Interview with police member, April 2024.
- ⁷ National Civil Police of El Salvador, 'Para el presidente de la Asociación Azucarera de El Salvador, Mario Salaverría ve positivo el trabajo desarrollado por la Policía, en cuanto a acciones en seguridad para resguardar los sectores productivos', X, 20 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/PNCV/status/1130545980506558464>.
- ⁸ Kevin Rivera, *Azucareros reportan baja en extorsiones tras régimen de excepción*, *Diario El Salvador*, 13 December 2022, <https://diarioelsalvador.com/azucareros-reportan-baja-en-extorsiones-tras-regimen-de-excepcion/305584/>.
- ⁹ Interview with a member of El Salvador's sugar cane growers' association, April 2024.
- ¹⁰ Interview with representative of the police workers' movement of El Salvador, April 2024.
- ¹¹ Interview with police member of the rural police programmes implementing the agreement between the sugar cane growers and the police, April 2024.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Interview with police officer in El Salvador, April 2024.
- ¹⁴ Gabriela Melara, *Azucareros y PNC se unen en aplicación para prevenir delincuencia*, *El Mundo*, 17 July 2017, <https://diario.elmundo.sv/Nacionales/azucareros-y-pnc-se-unen-en-aplicacion-para-prevenir-delincuencia>.
- ¹⁵ Amnesty International, *El Salvador: One year into state of emergency, authorities are systematically committing human rights violations*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/el-salvador-state-emergency-systematic-human-rights-violations/>.
- ¹⁶ Jorge Beltrán Luna, *Mujeres de Puerto El Triunfo señalan a jefe militar de extorsionarlas con propuestas sexuales*, *El Salvador.com*, 10 October 2023, <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/mujeres-puerto-el-triunfo-relatan-como-jefe-militar-extorsionaba/1095709/2023/>.
- ¹⁷ Javier Urbina, *Capitán de la Naval de Puerto El Triunfo fue capturado en operación "Valentina" contra agresores sexuales*, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Capitan-de-la-Naval-de-Puerto-El-Triunfo-vinculado-en-operacion-Valentina-contra-agresores-sexuales-de-ninos-20230403-0088.html>.
- ¹⁸ El Salvador Now, *Women from Puerto El Triunfo accuse military chief of extorting them with sexual propositions*, 10 December 2023, <https://www.elsalvadornow.org/2023/10/12/women-from-puerto-el-triunfo-accuse-military-chief-of-extorting-them-with-sexual-propositions-mujeres-de-puerto-el-triunfo-senalan-a-jefe-militar-de-extorsionarlas-con-propuestas-sexuales/>.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Claudia Palacios, journalist in Focos digital, April 2024.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ This report adopts the concept of sexual extortion proposed by the International Association of Women Judges and Transparency International, which defines it as 'the abuse of power exercised for sexual gain or advantage'. Sextortion is the form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the bargaining chip. See Guilherme France, *Criminalising Sextortion: Challenges and Alternatives*, Transparency International, 8 June 2022, https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/kproducts/Criminalising-sex-tortion_final_10.06.2022_ESLA.pdf.
- ²² Interview with Gabriela Santos, director of the Human Rights Institute of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, April 2024.
- ²³ Interview with psychologist specializing in gender-based violence, April 2024.
- ²⁴ Interview with representative of the police workers' movement of El Salvador, April 2024.
- ²⁵ Participant in focus group held in March 2024.
- ²⁶ Interview with an alleged victim of sexual extortion, Puerto El Triunfo, April 2024.
- ²⁷ 'People on the marches are afraid of being stopped on the road. Some bring their signs and keep them hidden, and sometimes their mobile phones are searched. When approaching a police or military checkpoint, many leave the WhatsApp groups because news has circulated that anyone associated with the emergency regime victims movement will be targeted as opponents of the regime and arrested. People often panic. We have a group of around 1 000 people, and suddenly, many leave because there was an operation,' said Samuel Ramírez of the emergency regime victims movement in an interview in April 2024.
- ²⁸ Interview with an alleged victim of sexual extortion, Puerto El Triunfo, April 2024.
- ²⁹ Community resilience is largely determined by social capital, which is formed through the bonds, shared values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together.
- ³⁰ See David W McMillan and David Chavis, Sense of community: A definition and theory, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 1 (1986), 6-23.
- ³¹ This case study is based on the case study by Heryliss Edelman, *Zona Cuatro Segura: "Por la seguridad de vivir en paz"*, in *Extortion in Central America: A criminal culture, case studies*, GI-TOC, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/extorsion-ca-casos-de-estudio/>.
- ³² Heryliss Edelman, *Zona Cuatro Segura: "Por la seguridad de vivir en paz"*, in *Extortion in Central America: A criminal culture, case studies*, GI-TOC, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/extorsion-ca-casos-de-estudio/>.
- ³³ Interview with Agustín Guzmán, president of the civic association of Cuatro Grados Norte, May 2024.
- ³⁴ Heryliss Edelman, *Zona Cuatro Segura: "Por la seguridad de vivir en paz"*, in *Extortion in Central America: A criminal culture, case studies*, GI-TOC, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/extorsion-ca-casos-de-estudio/>.

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- ³⁵ In Guatemala, auxiliary mayors (also known as ‘community mayors’) serve as representatives for communities, playing a crucial role in decision-making and acting as a liaison with the municipal government. The appointment of auxiliary or community mayors is made by the municipal mayor, based on the selection carried out by the communities in accordance with their own principles, values, procedures and traditions.
- ³⁶ Interview with Emilio Vargas, auxiliary mayor of Guatemala City’s Zone 4, April 2024.
- ³⁷ Interview with neighbour in zone 4, April 2024.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Natural surveillance is a crime prevention concept rooted in urban design. It is based on the idea that the mere presence of people in a space, observing their surroundings, can deter criminal behaviour.
- ⁴⁰ Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales, *Entendiendo el fenómeno de las extorsiones en Guatemala*, November 2014, <https://cien.org.gt/index.php/entendiendo-el-fenomeno-de-las-extorsiones/>.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Christian, trainer of the boxing school, April 2024.
- ⁴² Interview with a La Bethania resident, May 2024.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ A study involving more than 900 surveys of youth in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala found that those youth whose communities have adults actively involved in community problem solving showed significantly higher levels of resilience compared to those who did not perceive this adult involvement. See Infosegura, *Una mirada a las juventudes expuestas a la violencia en el norte de Centroamérica, desde un enfoque de vulnerabilidad y resiliencia humana*, October 2020, <https://www.infosegura.org/region/una-mirada-las-juventudes-expuestas-la-violencia-el-norte-de-centroamerica-desde-un-enfoque-de-vulnerabilidad-resiliencia-humana>.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with a boxing school student, April 2024.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ This study takes up the case explored in the section ‘Public-private partnerships’ in GI-TOC and InSight Crime, *A criminal culture: Extortion in Central America*, May 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/extortion-in-central-america/>.
- ⁴⁸ La Prensa, *‘Imperios de la extorsión’ están en Honduras y El Salvador*, 30 June 2015, <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/imperios-de-la-extorsion-estan-en-honduras-y-el-salvador-ERLP854572>.
- ⁴⁹ Interview with a police officer assigned to coordinate anti-extortion actions in San Pedro Sula during the collaboration with the CICC, 2024.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Cortés, 2024.
- ⁵¹ Ana Reyes Mendoza, *Chamelecón, la zona con menos incidencia delictiva en San Pedro Sula*, *La Prensa*, 18 October 2023, <https://www.laprensa.hn/sanpedro/honduras-violencia-chamelecon-zona-menos-incidencia-delictiva-san-pedro-sula-IJ15856284>.
- ⁵² See Executive Decree PCM-46-2023, published on 17 November 2023.
- ⁵³ Interview with member of the evangelical church that is part of the Chamelecón Intersectoral Committee, 2024.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with leader of the Chamelecon Intersectoral Committee, 2024.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with police station chief in Chamelecón, 2024.
- ⁵⁶ A religious leader reflected on the situation in the community, saying, ‘Nothing has really changed; it’s still the same here.’ Meanwhile, a member of the Intersectoral Committee raised concerns about working with the police’s anti-gangs and organized crime directorate, noting that ‘People are hesitant to work with the police. Sometimes gang members dress like the police, making it hard to tell them apart, and there are instances where the police use excessive force.’