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The Effects of Gang Violence on Inequality in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE EFFECTS OF INEQUALITY ON GANG VIOLENCE IN COSTA RICA, EL
SALVADOR AND NICARAGUA

By

Amanda Milena Alvarez

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2012

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THE EFFECTS OF INEQUALITY ON GANG VIOLENCE IN COSTA RICA, EL
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The Effects of Inequality on Gang Violence in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua

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As gang violence has become a prominent issue in Central America, understanding its root causes becomes critical to its reduction. This analysis seeks to examine the effects of economic growth and inequality on increasing gang violence in the democratic countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Through the use of simple regressions the relationships between economic growth, inequality and gang violence were examined. The results found that inequality and economic growth were statistically correlated in all three countries. Although, there was positive correlation between inequality and economic growth in Costa Rica, and there was a negative relationship in El Salvador and Nicaragua. This negative or positive correlation was found to be the deciding factor on the type of effect that economic growth had on gang violence. The results indicated that the strength of democracy within a country is not necessarily a predictor for equality. However, changes in equality during periods of economic growth do serve as indicator of the effects of economic growth on gang violence.

Para mi mamá y mi papá, que una de las miles cosas que me enseñaron es que una conciencia social es esencial para ser un buen ser humano. And for Chris, who pushes me everyday to be better and to do better, and without whose sacrifice this thesis would not have been completed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Dennis Rodgers writes, “Violence in Latin America has arguably become democratized, ceasing to be the resource of only the traditionally powerful or of the grim uniformed guardians of the nations and increasingly appearing as an option for a multitude of actors in pursuit of all kinds of goals” (2006). This is true of gangs in Central America. Historically, governments enforced their will on citizens through violence, but now citizens are enforcing their will on the state through violence. Every week a new article on gangs either in Mexico or in a Central American states is printed. According to salacious headlines, they are responsible for increasing murder rates in the region to the highest in the world. The 2006 USAID Central American and Gang Assessment states “It is much easier to crack down on gang members than to deal with more complicated social issues that support gang activity, such as income inequality and poverty.” This is the dilemma in many Central American states. Many Latin American countries have enacted zero-tolerance policies towards gangs in an effort to decrease gang violence. Many of these states fail to examine the causes for the establishment of gangs and their purpose. Gang members provide security for the citizens of their neighborhoods, they provide familial bonds in communities with weak family structures, and they provide gang members with remunerative opportunities.

This thesis will examine the connections between economic growth and gang violence in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and El Salvador. These cases will be examined in the context of their existing regime type classifications. Political Scientist Samuel Huntington seems to hint at the relationship between economic growth and gang violence, stating that “economic growth increases material well-being at one rate but

social frustration at a faster rate”. (1968) This theory focuses solely on economic growth and not democratic development, but in the case of these countries that were undergoing a democratic transition and then experienced high levels of gang violence, it is important to examine the effects that this process had upon the increase in the sates wealth as well as the effects that the state had in fomenting socioeconomic inequality. Later theories that followed Huntington’s emphasized the importance of democracies not only in economic growth, but also redistributive policies (Feng 1997, 391-418). This is particularly important because as more countries have become democratic in Latin America, economic conditions have not improved. The disparity between the rich and the poor has not lessened; Latin America is now the second most unequal region in the world (Lopez and Perry 2008, 2).

A central part of this analysis focuses on inequality. Under democratic regime types it was supposed that there are low levels of corruption, inequality, and therefore states and citizens would choose democratic means by which to solve internal problems. This ability to solve problems through democratic institutions would in turn create a more egalitarian society in which members of society would not find a need to resort to violence to achieve any of their goals (Boix, 2008,392).

The selection of these countries was due to several factors; Mitchell Selligson and John Booth (1993) write in regards to Nicaragua and Costa Rica, that:

These countries are remarkably similar in many respects. They are poor, small, predominantly Catholic, and share a common border. During their colonial period, they were part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Until the nineteenth century, a major section of present-day Costa Rica formed part of Nicaragua.

With relatively few Indians, both nations developed mestizo cultures. After Independence both were provinces of the federated Central American Republic. The same can be said of El Salvador, it was also once a part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, has a mostly mestizo culture, and was also once a part of the federated Central American Republic. The only real distinction is that El Salvador's borders do not touch Nicaragua or Costa Rica. Looking towards more recent history it would seem that Nicaragua and Costa Rica would have more in common with one another, since they are severely affected with the issue of gang violence, and have only in the past twenty years worked towards a democratic consolidation. Costa Rica provides a model for democratic stability and does not appear to be plagued with the issue of gang violence like the other two states are.

The time period that will be most carefully examined is beginning in 1992 in El Salvador after the Peace Accords were signed that ended the Civil war, for Nicaragua the time period that will be looked at begins after 1990. In 1990 the Contra war in Nicaragua had officially ended. The Costa Rican case will begin with 1990, providing a more thorough look at the longest lasting democracy in Latin America. The time period after the end of the civil wars is chosen because it allows for a better examination of the gang violence phenomenon instead of looking at the overall picture of collective violence at the time. Economic growth added to weak political institutions that are unwilling or unable to distribute what they have in areas such as education, health care or basic infrastructure can lead to disastrous consequences and lead individuals in society to seek alternative means by which they can improve their own well being. Data will also be presented from the 1980's for all three countries. This data will provide a framework by which the comparison for current and existing levels of violence, economic growth and

regime type classification can be understood. This comparison will allow for a better understanding of trends that are occurring in the countries.

Beginning in 1970 both El Salvador and Nicaragua were involved in intense internal wars. The FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) was engaged in a two decades long revolution against the Somoza Dynasty who had controlled the nation by force (Anderson 1968). Citizens were repressed through state sponsored violence. In El Salvador the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Liberation Army) experienced the second longest lasting civil war in Central America from 1980 to 1992 (White 2009,91). Though violence in EL Salvador had been occurring since the 1970's, an official war within the state did not occur until 1980. Costa Rica during this time period was not experiencing the high levels of political and social violence. The country had experienced a civil war in 1948, but it was in defense of their democratic governance. Costa Ricans felt that democracy had been put at risk in a presidential election that year and fought to restore order (Bell 1971). In the case of the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan wars, youth were recruited on both sides (government and insurgents) to fight. During the peace negotiations in El Salvador, youth were completely left out of the demobilization negotiations (Courtney 2010, 550). The involvement of youth in these wars is important to understanding gang violence today, because there is a history of youth violence in these countries, which sets the precedence for the continuation of youth violence today.

During the 1980's and 1990's a main concern in Political Science literature was democratic transitions in Latin America, but also worldwide. During these two decades across the world, many countries experiences what Samuel Huntington termed as "The Third Wave of democratization" (1991). This was perhaps the most important work to

discuss the transitions during this time. Once states became democratic it was believed that economic growth would take place and that social conditions would improve. But in Latin America, the success of this democratic transition has been uneven. Governments have been unable to tackle issues that have been exacerbated by democratization. One of those main issues has been the increasing income inequality (Handelman and Tessler 1999, 2). This thesis situates itself within this discussion. The main hypothesis is that economic growth increases inequality and therefore increases gang violence in these three democratic countries.

First the issue of gangs must be discussed, the first chapter will be aimed at defining a gang, understanding the various reasons why gangs arise and will provide statistics on the levels of gang activity in the countries being examined. It is imperative to the study of gangs in Central America, to understand the conditions of inequality, which allow for the persistence of these groups. The study of inequality will be the second chapter and it will provide for a better understanding of the socioeconomic conditions in existence in these countries that draws individuals to joining gangs. The third chapter will delve into the issue of democratic transition that took place during the era in which these gangs became more prevalent. The third chapter will also examine the issue of economic growth, it will primarily look at the level of growth that each of these states has achieved after the end of their civil wars. Regime type classifications also form an integral part of this analysis and will form chapter four. Though these states will not be classified as authoritarian at this point in time, the degrees to which they are considered democratic will be insightful as to how they are able to redistribute the resources that are available to them. It will also allow examining the types of policies that these states are using to

combat gang violence within the state. The fifth chapter will provide a data analysis of the correlation between all of the aforementioned factors, and the factors that are most closely tied together.

CHAPTER TWO: GANGS

The most important aspect that will be analyzed in this paper is that of gangs. In the Central American region there are three main types of gangs that exist, the small neighborhood gangs (which are also known as pandillas), barras estudiantiles, and the transnational gang also known as mara. Barras estudiantiles are composed of secondary students, that are divided along school lines. The barras evolved out of soccer rivalries in the 1940's and 1960's, and has now manifested itself in school alliances (Savenije 2009,163). Barras estudiantiles are very different from maras and neighborhood gangs in that its membership has a definitive end, and also, membership provides no economic gain. Once students reach a certain age, or simply get tired of fighting with rival schools they leave the barras and do not necessarily engage in group violence again (Savenije 2009,173). Neighborhood gangs and transnational gangs are quite similar, they are youth groups that are established in particular neighborhoods. Membership is limited to youth within those neighborhoods. Members of both of these groups join in order to hang out, fight neighborhood groups, and protect their neighborhoods (Savenije 2009, 98)..One of the main differences is that transnational gangs, like the MS-13 and 18th street gangs originated on the streets of Los Angeles in California. These transnational gangs are now in most Central American countries, in local bands called clikas. Clikas are specific to neighborhoods yet by name they are associated to larger transnational gangs . The clikas maintain connections with one another through a hierarchical system of organization by taking orders from leaders in the United States (Savenije 2009,98). Here the main focus of the study of gangs will be on L.A style gangs. These gangs began in the streets of Los Angeles, where Central American youths created a community in marginalized

neighborhoods. Central American young men and women were not welcomed into the Mexican gangs, so they created their own that welcomed individuals from all nationalities, and thus the MS-13 and the 18th street gangs were born (Ribando, Foreign Affairs Defense and Trade Division 2005, 2).

These youth and their parents migrated from their countries during the period of intense civil wars. After the civil wars ended in Central America the United States began deporting many of these youth back to their 'home' countries, such as Nicaragua and El Salvador. Home being a very loose definition since these young men and women did not remember these countries nor did many of them speak Spanish. Gang culture was then shipped off to these states and adapted to the new environment (Monteith, 2010:7; Pinheiro 2007, 66). In the early 1990's the United States enacted the "Three Strikes and You're Out law" (Bruneau, Dammert and Skinner 2011, 198). This law made criminal detention for repeat offenders longer (in California), many of these individuals were Central American immigrant gang members. This law coupled with more stringent criminal deportation laws (Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility and Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act) led to greater numbers of Central American-born individuals being deported back to their countries (Arana 2005,99). Once in their home countries, the states are unable to control this kind of delinquent social phenomena. The states were also plagued with much higher social inequalities and have a tendency to rationalize the use of violence as a conflict resolution mechanism (Savineje 2009, 217). These two factors greatly contributed to the rise of gangs in the countries of the region.

These gangs are more commonly referred to as transnational gangs, because members engage in criminal activities in more than one country, criminal activities may be performed in one state but being planned and directed in another. Most importantly, that these illicit activities are highly organized and they go beyond national boundaries. (Monteith, 2010: 2). As the world becomes smaller with the free movement of people, goods and ideas to and from different states, this movement also changes the nature of gangs. As gangs are forced to adapt to new states, their social and territorial structures do as well (Monteith, 2010:5)

According to John Hagedorn, a prominent researcher in the study of gangs, “Gangs are organizations of the socially excluded” (2007, 309). Gangs, are not a part of ‘mainstream’ society, they are found in the margins of society where politics and policy do not reach. Hagedorn continues by stating that gangs begin as groups of youth, and that most gangs do remain in this stage. This stage in gang formation is also characterized by a lack of organization, leadership, petty crime and theft (Monteith, 2010:4). Others become institutionalized in these marginal areas where they are able to develop “business enterprises”. Interestingly Hagedorn finds that gangs “have variables ties to conventional institutions, and in given conditions assume social, economic, political, cultural, religious or military roles” (309). The other factor that this youth centered definition takes into account is that these groups are established in marginal neighborhoods. These marginal areas in addition to being social areas of exclusion, are also perceived as “no-go”(Fukuyama 2008, 12) zones, that are geographically marginalized from the other sectors of society. This geographical marginalization creates a socio political void where traditional law enforcement and government intervention are

nearly non-existent. Dennis Rodgers writes, “Violence can be conceived as coherent modes of social structuration in the face of state and social breakdowns” (PG 269). In these areas, gangs fill the void by providing access to certain services or by a means by which the community can resolve disputes and seek justice for themselves (Brotherton 2007, 254; Manwaring 2010, 105). Gangs seek to insert themselves in the void that is left by “the permanent fragility of the state’s monopoly of legitimate force” (Koonings and Kruijt 2007, 7).

Hagedorn continues “Many of today’s gangs are an institutionalized bricolage of illicit enterprise, social athletic club, patron to the poor, employment agency for youth, substitute family, and nationalist, community or militant organization” (2008, 23). This definition is the best fitting because it does not ascribe gangs as merely a youth phenomenon, or a rite of passage. This is important because not every single youth in these states engages in these kinds of activities (Rodgers 2006, 285). Gangs are no longer organizations solely for youth. During the 1990s, gang membership was limited to around fourteen years of age. These gangs are now institutionalized and membership can last into mid-twenties (Wolf 2012, 82). This effect is evident, when comparing gangs with barras estudiantiles which only ascribes youth membership.

Marginality alone cannot be completely blamed for the increase in gang violence and membership in these states. A factor that contributes to this increase in violence is that potential gang members are geographically marginalized by residing in areas that are outside of the government control and that they do not have access to many things that are available to other sectors of society. Though geographically marginalized, gang members and their families are able to move about their cities so their marginalization is

not constant. Many of the individuals that live in these marginal areas come in contact with non-marginalized groups, through domestic work. Domestic work is a sector that employs many women from these marginal areas. Media and advertisements portray a particular kind of lifestyle that all individuals in society ought to aspire to. This constant interaction creates a desire for these vulnerable individuals that are in the outs of material wealth to attempt to gain it in any way possible. This would go along with what Dennis Rodgers refers to as political reasons why individuals join gangs, wherein they confront their inability to access certain opportunities that they believe they should be entitled to (Rodgers 2006, 282).

Dennis Rodgers writes that the lack of economic and social opportunities are indicative of gang formation in any area (2006, 272). Once again delving into a main issue that these youth choose to engage in is that they are able to obtain a means by which they can provide for themselves. These youth seek a means by which they are able to provide their own access to means that they feel they have been denied, or would otherwise not have any access to (Savinje 2009, 220). Once they recognize that the illegal activities are profitable, the gang once again changes and becomes organized, then these groups are more able to more formidably provide for themselves (Hagedorn 2008, 303). It is useful to examine how this culture of illicit activities becomes embedded in the neighborhoods as well. Francis Fukuyama claims, "Poverty and exclusion, however, form the backdrop to violence and fear in the sense that they lower barriers and inhibitions and tend to make non-violent practices less attractive and legitimate" (Koonings and Kruijt 2007, 2)

Belonging to a gang permits these youth to be included or at least acknowledged by society even if it is either because they are violent or because of the threat of violence that they pose, as a group but also as individuals belonging to these groups.

Among the many purposes that gangs serve is that they create a type of sub-politics. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson point out that gangs belong to a different sphere of politics, that is outside of the traditional politics of the state. In many cases the areas in which they reside are outside of the realm of traditional politics, so they create a new arena by which they can represent themselves. Gangs in this sense become political because they are able to control and make decisions over a certain area (288). This demonstrates that gangs are not just concerned about material well-being but also about political representation. Political representation in so far as it affects their neighborhoods (barrios).

Examining the case of Nicaragua youth joined gangs immediately end of the Civil war for several reasons. Firstly, they sought reaffirmation in the broader context of society. These individuals had no other means by which they could reintegrate themselves into mainstream society' so they established groups that were based on the things that they had learned during the civil war. Many young men and women only knew how to use violence, because that is what war entailed. These groups were excluded from formal reintegration after the end of the civil war, which reaffirmed their socio political exclusion. Gangs for these individuals, who sought legitimization, became an acceptable form of social banditry rather than being considered unsocial banditry (Rodgers 2006, 278). Another explanation of the formation of gangs after the Civil War in Nicaragua is that youth sought to recreate the exhilaration that they felt while fighting

in the Civil War. They were able to recreate these feelings by engaging in acts of violence. The last reason that these individuals did this is a theme that arises numerous times, and that is that they pursued ways thought which they would be able to provide first for themselves but also for their families (Rodgers 2006, 284). This view is interesting in that it aided in explaining why some joined gangs after the civil War ended but it does not encompass what is currently occurring in these states. Many of the men and women that are involved in Central American gangs today did not experience civil wars, most live in urban areas and do not have any of the same experiences that the people that joined gangs after the civil wars had.

During the war in Nicaragua, a gang known as Charrasca participated in fighting against the Somoza Dynasty (Hagedorn 2008, 31). In the 1980's and 1990's other gangs emerged, such as the Barilochis, Mau-Maus, Ptiufos, Ramleros, Cancheros, and Power Rangers (Rocha 2010, 105). Very little is actually known about how institutionalized these groups were, but they used institutional weakness to gain control over their territory (barrios).

2.1 Return Migration

The issue of U.S deportations to Central America after the end of the Civil wars is a contentious one. Some scholars believe that return migration is the primary cause of the exacerbating gang violence in the region (Quirk 2008, 24; Wolf 2010, 257). Yet looking at the numbers for deportation in comparison to those of gang violence, deportations of criminals do not match up to the increase in violence. Examining the numbers for return migrants , there seems to be a downward trend for Costa Rica migrants. Numbers of

return migrants are also much lower for Costa Rica than they are for either Nicaragua or El Salvador. Looking at return migration rates for Costa Rica for the time period from 2001 to 2010 is interesting because at first, levels are relatively low, then there is a large increase in 2006, and then there's a fluctuation from lower to higher.

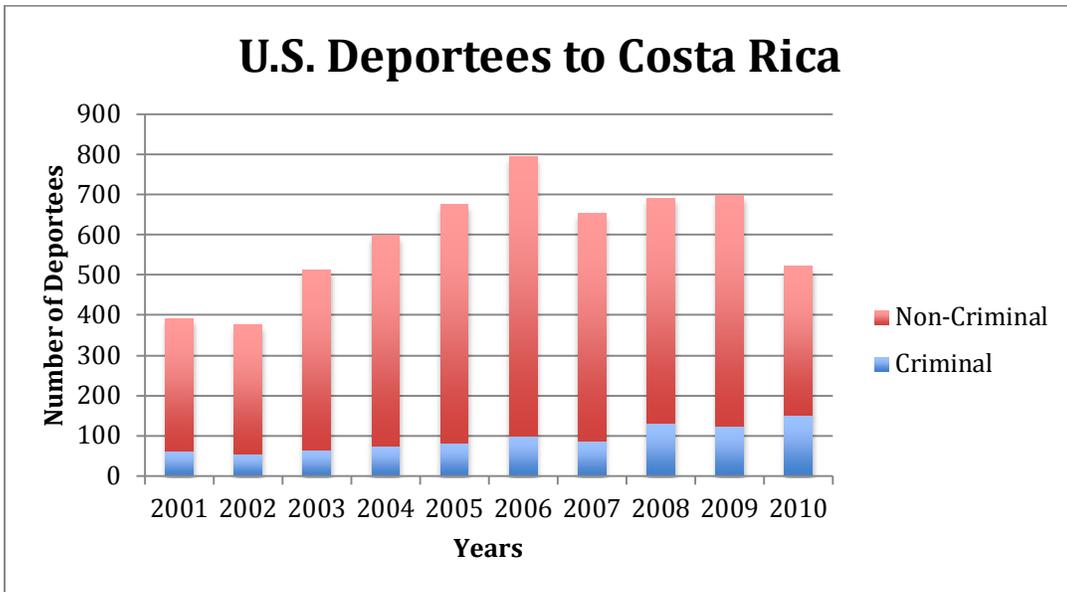


Table 2.1. (Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

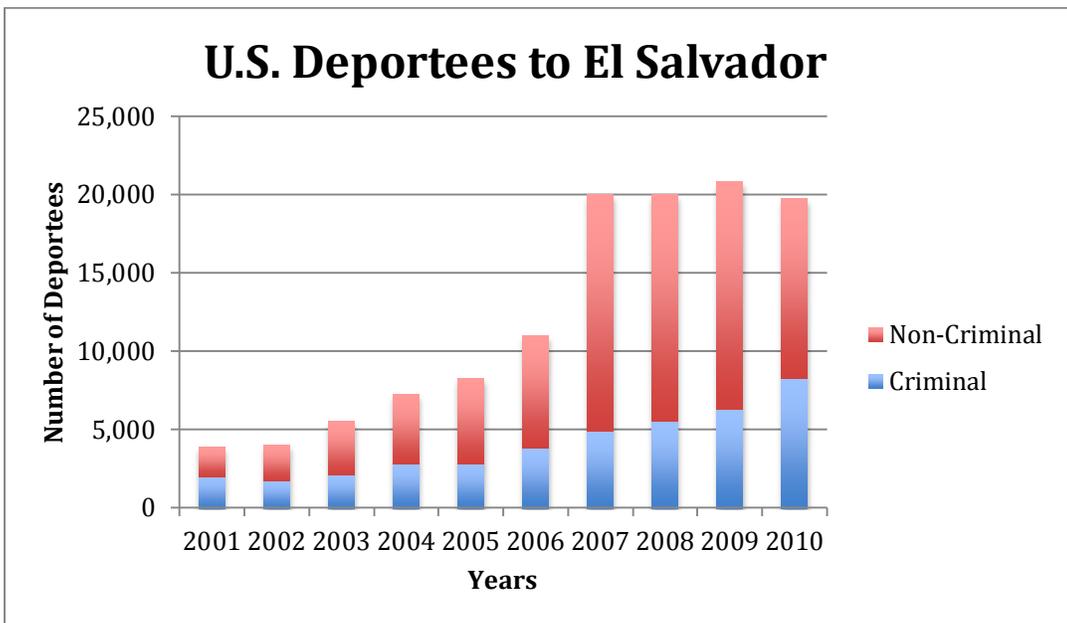


Table 2.2 (Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

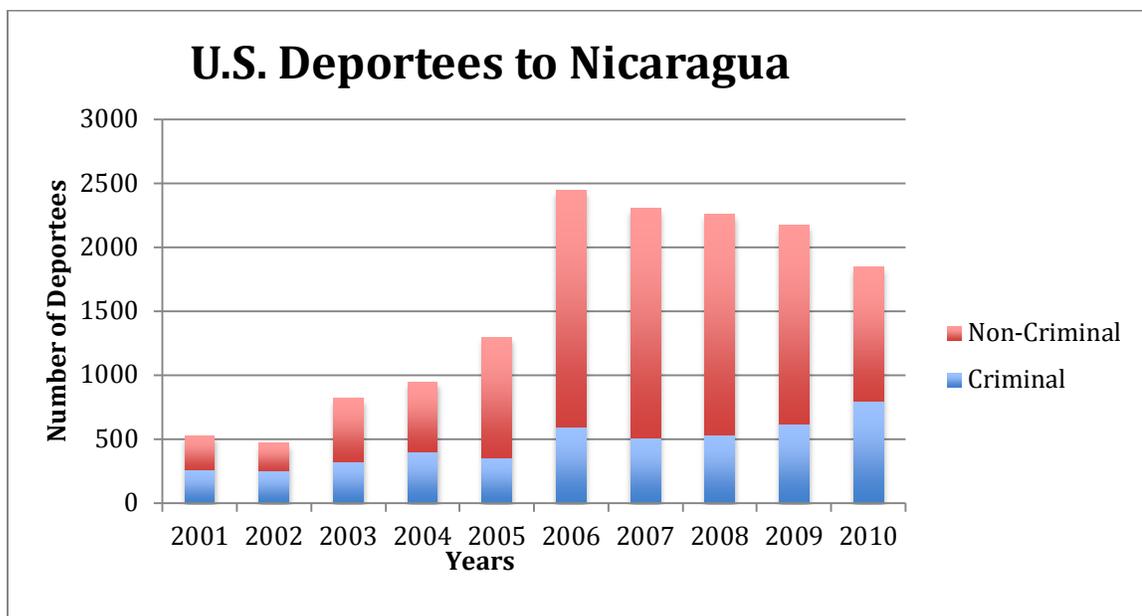


Table 2.3 (Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

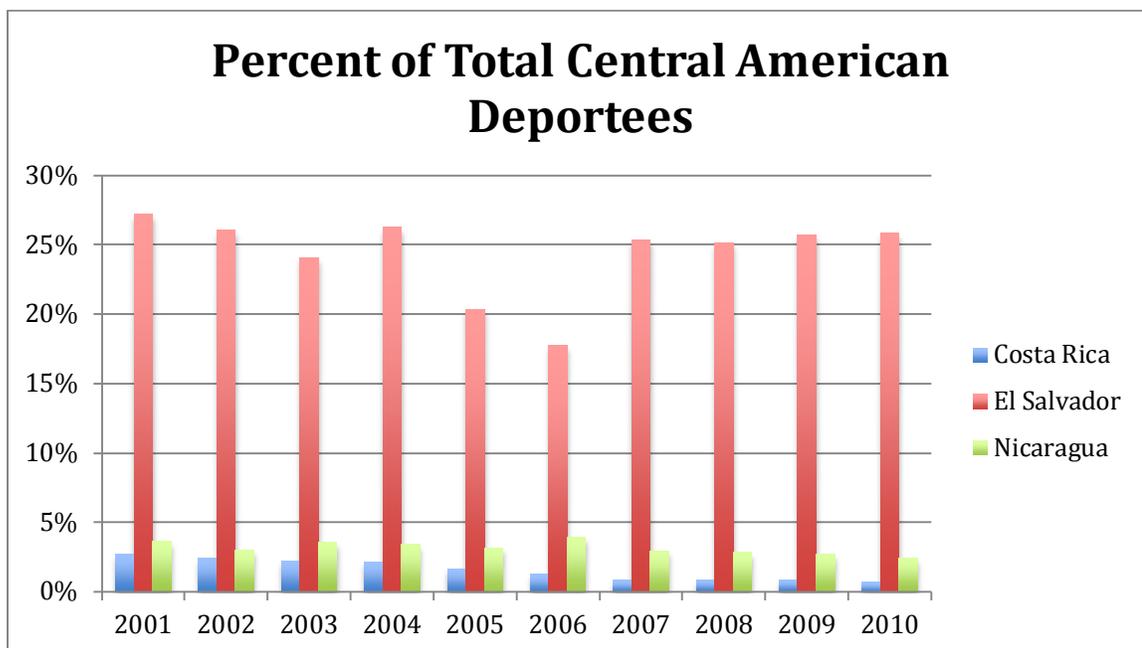


Table 2.4 (Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

2.2 Proliferation of Gangs and Violence

Quantifiable measurements are the most important portion of this thesis, it should be noted that there are some methodological problems associated with this. In the case of examining gang violence, there is no solid definition of what gang violence is versus individual level violence. Gang members may engage in violence and crime apart from the gang, and this makes it nearly impossible to make a distinction between the two (Wolf 2012,88). This also leads to problems with measurements. For the sake of this thesis intentional homicide levels will be used to examine gang violence levels as a whole. If gangs have any involvement in violent crimes, then an increase in violence should also occur. Also, due to the varying figures for gang membership levels, Table 1.5 will provide a snapshot of the number of youth in each of the three countries. Since youth make up a large percentage of gang members it can be assumed that an increase in youth within the country will correlate with an increase in gang membership. From 1980 to 2010 there has been a steady increase in population aged 15-64. Nicaragua and El Salvador would naturally have lower numbers, particularly prior to the 1990's because the countries were engaged in wars. What is surprising is that from 2008 to 2010 these two countries have had the same percentage of the population aged 15-64. If percentage of total population being young was a true indication of gang violence Costa Rica would have the largest problem of all these three countries. When looking at table 1.6 Costa Rica's homicides rates are much lower. This demonstrates governments' inability to deal with a younger population, rather than just a problem that affects youth.

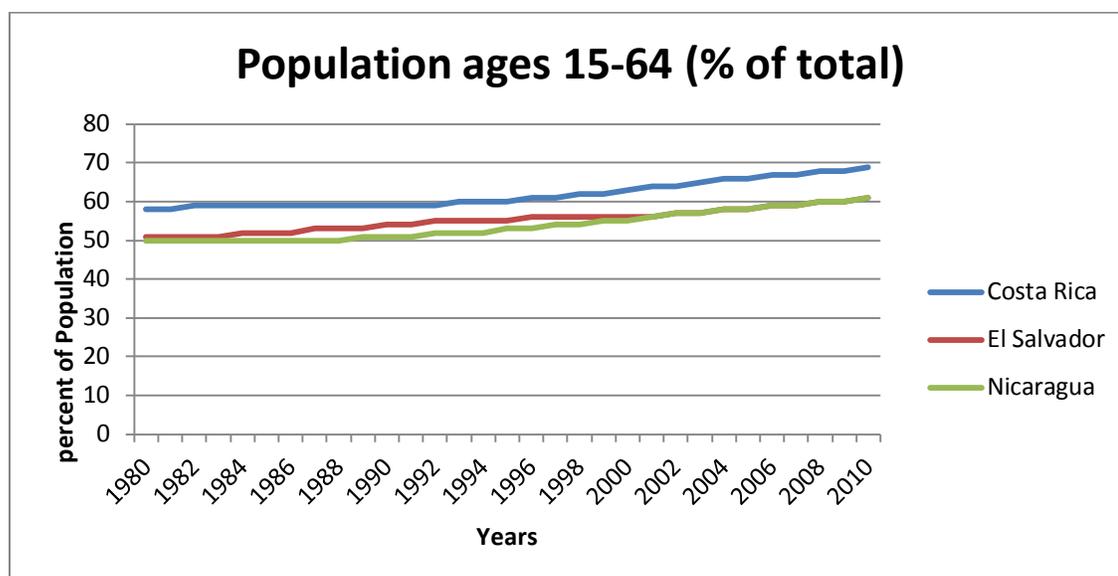


Table 2.5 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

Koonings and Kruijt in Fukuyama, they state three important factors that work in conjunction that allow for the emergence and furthermore the continuation of gangs in these states. Governance voids, are the first of these factors. The second factor is that in these states governments tend to work in a militarized fashion to repress rather than police or aid in the control of violence. States like El Salvador, implemented Mano Dura (zero tolerance policies). These types of policies though not new to Latin America when dealing with violence, criminalized gang membership. Furthermore, these policies allowed for military intervention by allowing the police and military forces to enter into areas that they believed were areas of high concentration of gang members (Moodie 2009, 81). These policies have made gangs adapt and change. Gang membership is more covert; new members do not have visible tattoos or engage in criminal activities out in the open.

Kooings and Kruijt's third factor, which is that violence builds upon the hierarchical and privileged history of the security forces (Fukuyama 2008, 18), creates a sense of insecurity from the perspective of those individuals that live in areas controlled by gangs because they simply don't trust the police or the military, and further foment the divide between the police forces and the people they are attempting to protect. This is something that deals with the establishment and maintenance of strong democracy within the state. In a strong democratic state, with an established rule of law the sense of insecurity would not be felt by many of its citizens.

It is important to analyze something that is evident in the mano dura policies and also in the use of violence by gangs. These states have long histories of violence within the state. Violence then becomes a legitimate source to gain access to goods and services that they would have no other means to. Violence is not just legitimized from the bottom rungs of society (gang members), but also from the government as a means to ensure that laws are enforced. The historical use of violence in these states has made citizens feel that these violent measures are the most successful when dealing, in a 2003 IUDOP Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica, survey which was taken shortly after the implementation of Mano Dura policies found that 20.8 percent of the population was in favor of these measures in order to reduce violence. This creates a culture of violence in which it is a legitimate way to achieve an individual or a groups' goal.

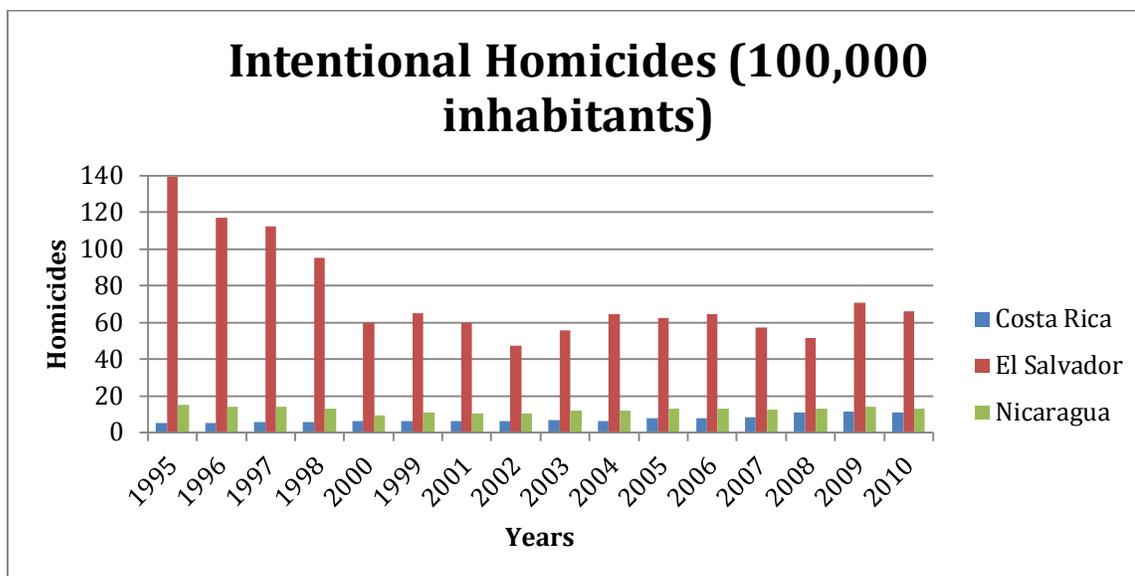


Table 2.6 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

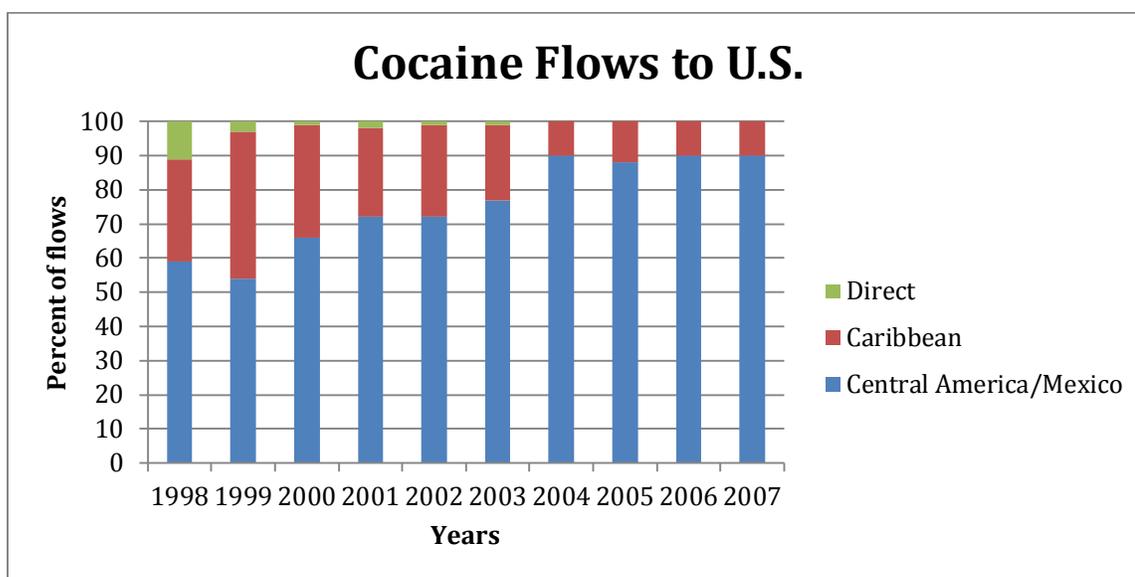


Table 1.7(UNODC World Drug Report 2011, 106)

2.3 Effect of Return Migration on Homicides

A simple linear regression was run to examine the relationship between total deportations from the United States to each of the three states (Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Nicaragua). An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend.

Tables 1.8 and 1.9 show that for Costa Rica and El Salvador, there was not a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. As deportations to Costa Rica increased to a maximum and then decreased, homicides continued a consistent increase over that time period. El Salvador deportations followed a similar pattern to those of Costa Rica, while homicides fluctuated without showing a consistent trend. Nicaragua proved to be statistically significant with an R^2 value of .676, which meant that 68% of variance in homicides was uniquely explained by deportations from the United States. However, taking the slope of the regression line into account ($\beta = .0013$), the effect of deportations was still very small.

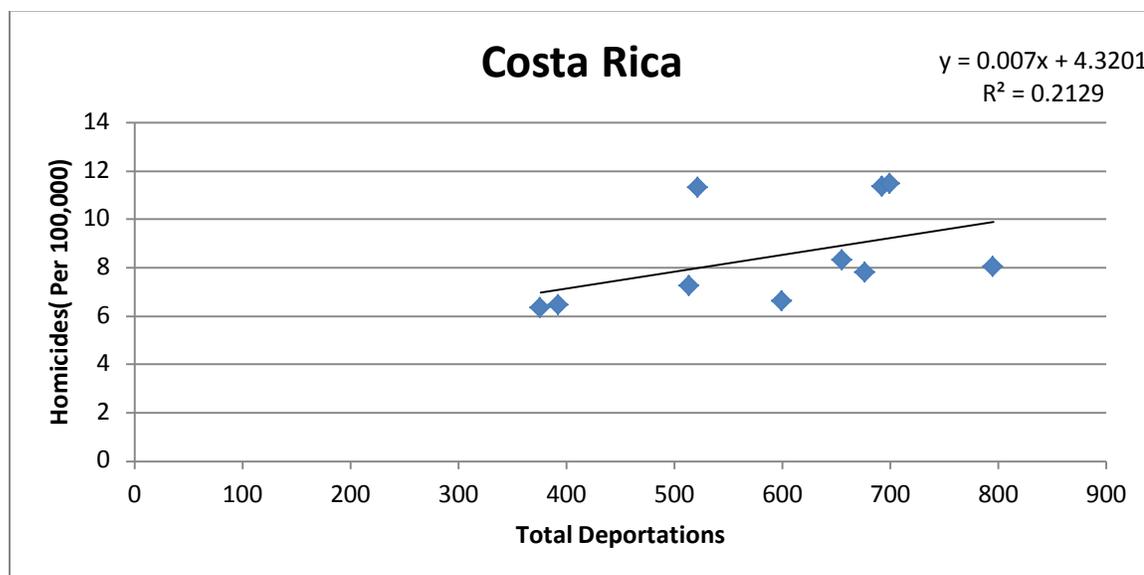


Table 2.8 (World Bank 2012, WDI, and Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

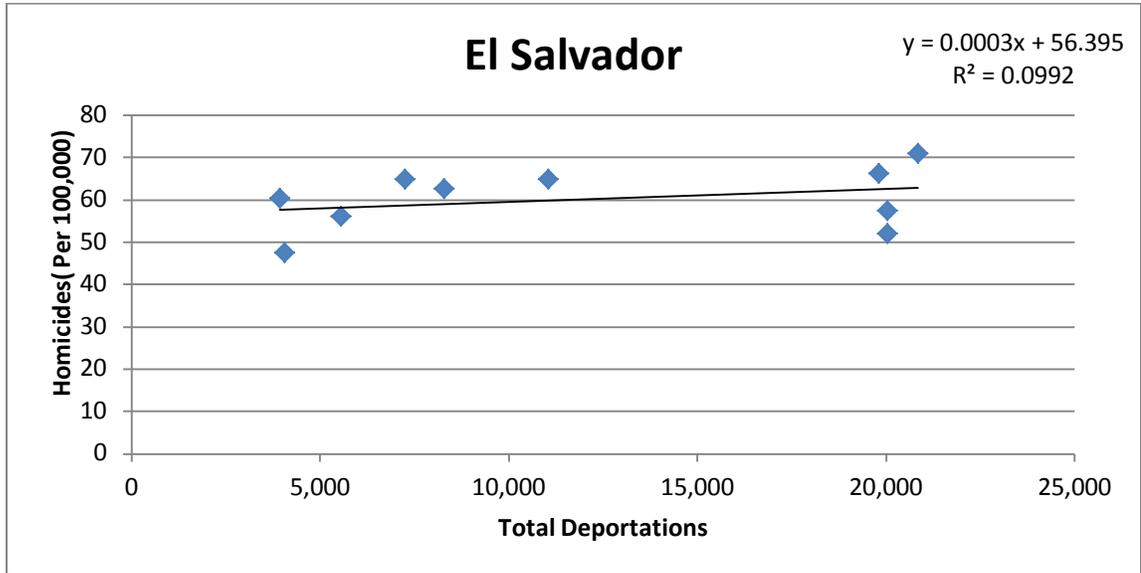


Table 2.9 (World Bank 2012, WDI, and Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

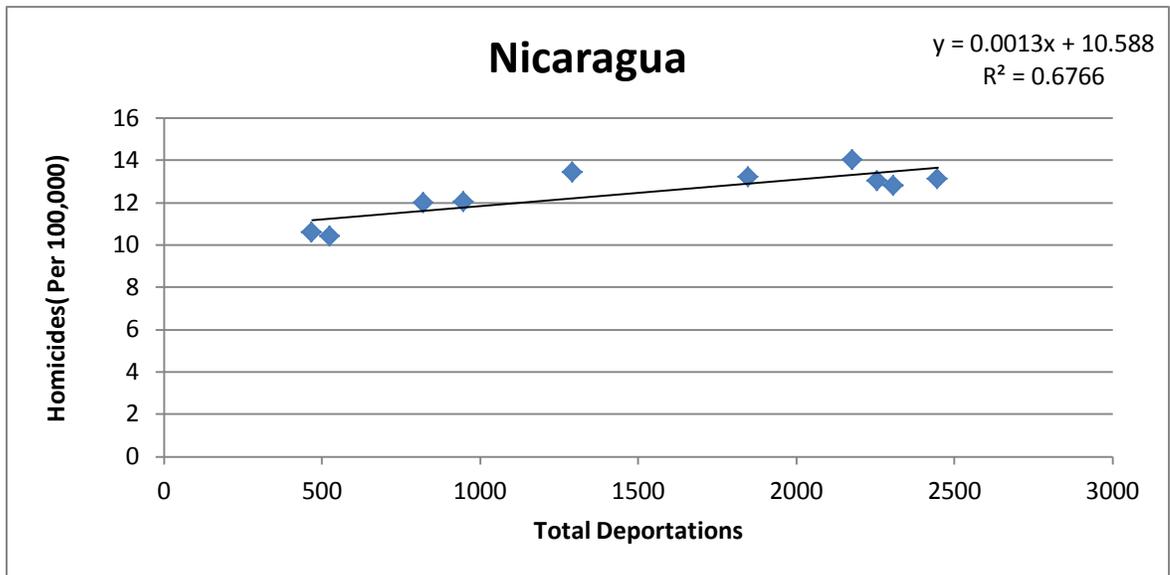


Table 2.10 (World Bank 2012, WDI, and Department of Homeland Security 2010, Table 43)

CHAPTER THREE: RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND INEQUALITY

The social conditions that allowed these groups to thrive must be examined in order to better understand the issue of gangs more wholly. This section will discuss the effects that relative deprivation and inequality have on individuals within any society. These two things (relative deprivation and inequality) together help to understand why these individuals seem all too eager or willing to join gangs and engage in these risky and often times illegal activities. These gangs are not a recent phenomena they have existed for upwards of twenty years, but it is only in the latter half of the last decade that they have become an issue not just of state concern but also a global issue (Pineiro 2007,65). In order to frame this discussion a look at the levels of inequality within the state alongside the levels of economic growth must be examined. Relative deprivation will seek to explain why the increase in inequality accompanied by an increase in economic growth has created conditions for gangs to thrive. Inequality and extreme poverty are directly linked to how a society interacts with violence because of the impact that these two factors have on families and furthermore the community at large (Kramer 2000, 124).

Inequality affects gang members in two ways. In the first way it allows individuals to seek alternative means by which they are able to legitimize themselves within society at large. Inequality does not just take the form of economic disparity, but also social and political. Groups of people may not have the same access to education, health care or basic infrastructure that many of the other citizens of a nation have access to. This inequality is problematic and can lead to issue in violence, particularly gang violence (due to age of members). In any community that is already economic marginalized the

propensity to resorting to violence only increase when the community is further marginalized by their government. Secondly, as can be seen through the more narrow lens of relative deprivation, inequality forces individuals to compare themselves to one another and want to achieve more, primarily in the face of economic prosperity.

Prominent Latin Americanists Margaret E. Crahan and Peter H. Smith wrote, “Socioeconomic inequity and deprivation of fundamental human rights would seem to provide ample reason for popular rebellion”. This seems to be a very interesting concept when discussing the levels of inequality that exist in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and how the popular rebellion is not necessarily one that may seem political but rather one that is driven by economic aims, and mostly by youth (the gangs). As discusses previously, one of the many factors that can drive an individual to join a gang is a desire to improve their socioeconomic stature. Individuals see what other members in society (be that of their own or of other individuals in different states) and they want to have the same kind of material well-being and social security.

Simon Kuznet’s theory on economic growth claimed that economic growth (per Capita income) would at first cause some amount of inequality, the effects of this initial inequality would later be reduced because of the trickle down of wealth from the top rungs of economic society (Zweimuller 2000, 3). Citizens would be forced to endure a time where inequality would perhaps be greater than it had ever been before. This short time of inequality though, was supposed to pay off because in the long run, states would experience much lesser amounts of inequality than they had ever experienced before.

Relative deprivation can be best explained

If A who does not have something but wants it, compares himself to B, who does have it, then A is 'relatively deprived' with reference to B. Similarly if A's expectations are higher than B's or if he was better off than B in the past, he may when similarly placed to B feel relatively deprived by comparison with him (Webber 1958, 99)

The main focus of the theory of relative deprivation is that individuals feel deprived because of circumstances that they have absolutely no control over (WEBBER 1958, 100). The problem then lies in what the individual believes that he or she should have access to, so the problem arises when expectations are not matched by reality (Conteh-Morgan 2004, 33) As discussed earlier gang members join these groups because it provides a sense of belonging and control that otherwise would not be available to them. Relative deprivation in itself though does not in itself explain how inequality has exacerbated violence; it does perhaps provide insight into how it is that inequality has exacerbated violence in today's globalized society. Globalization is an important aspect of relative deprivation because it has affected the movement of people and the access to comparisons of peoples from very different states.

The theory of relative deprivation is not just an explanation for those who are being 'deprived'. This theory also allows us to understand that those that are not being deprived are also able to compare themselves. People who are succeeding and thriving in a highly unequal society are able to look down on those that are not succeeding and are able to feel better about their socioeconomic status (Webber 1958, 112). This suggests that those that are content with their social and economic status do not feel the need to do anything to improve the lives of those at the bottom, because it would then lessen their

position relative to many of the other individuals around them. This then provides an explanation why states may remain more unequal than others for longer periods of time. If those that have more access to education and policy change are not willing to demand more for society as a whole it becomes increasingly difficult for those that are marginalized to enact any change on their own.

Relative deprivation also affects the ways in which families are broken down. The breakdown of the social fabric that binds families and social groups together is thought to be a contributing factor of increased youth violence, particularly youth joining gangs. Families and communities at large are broken down in two ways. Families are first broken down, because of parents employment opportunities. Parents, therefore become more absentee figures in the household in order to be able to obtain and maintain employment outside of the home. This absenteeism of adult parental figures in the home but also in the community at large creates a vacuum that is often filled with friends. Friends then become an extension of the family, and the activities that these young individuals partake in are not policed since there is not anyone around to tell them what to do. This of course, is a very simplistic explanation of the phenomena. The second way in which relative deprivation and inequality further break the familial bonds is through migration. Individuals that are more impacted by relative deprivation and have less power (monetarily) are more likely to engage in international migration to seek more formidable employment internationally (Stark 2006, 173). This often times means that parents are separated from their children for long periods times (years) and children are left in the care of other relatives or family friends. Youth might then feel the need to fill the gap that

is left by this close familial relationship by joining gangs, who then become their families.

2.1 Inequality Measures

Inequality and relative deprivation must not just be understood from an economic point of reference but it also must be understood from a lack of resources as well. What is meant by this is that unequal societies do not provide equal access to health care education and other services that aid in the development and maintenance of a healthy population. There are several measures that could have been examined such as literacy rates, infant mortality and many others. Unfortunately, due to the lack of data available for Nicaragua and El Salvador the only two inequality measures that will be utilized are life expectancy and the GINI coefficient.

Life expectancy rates for Costa Rica, as early as 1980 exceeded those of the other two states. El Salvador and Nicaragua have been relatively close to one another, yet Nicaragua seems to follow a linear increase in life expectancy. El Salvador, in contrast, has had sharp increases with plateaus, and in recent years has experienced a near leveling off of life expectancy rates. What is interesting to observe is that Nicaragua has now surpassed El Salvador in life expectancy.

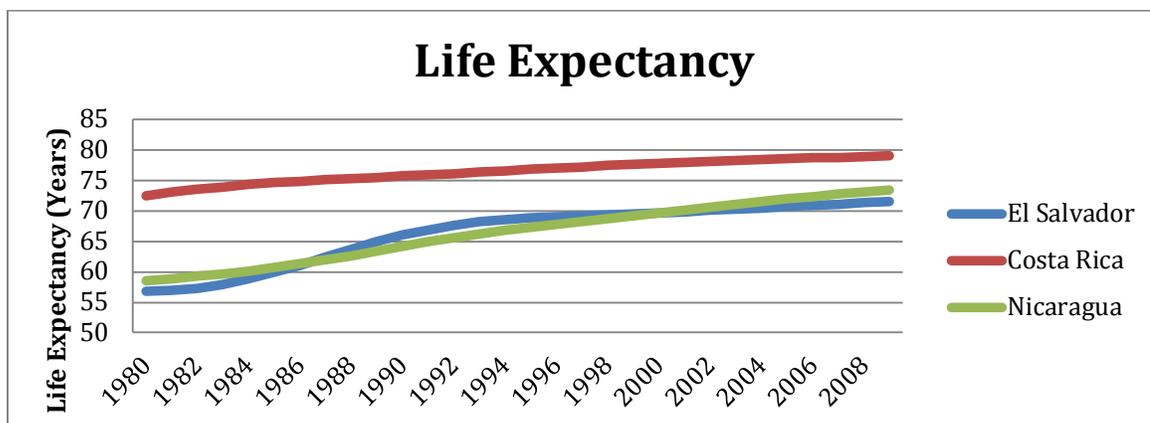


Table 3.1 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

The GINI coefficient is the most widely accepted measure of inequality (Shkolikov, Andreev and begun 2003,306). The coefficient ranks states from zero to one; zero being perfect equality and one being perfect inequality. One of the problems encountered with this research was that the GINI Index was missing quite a bit of data points for all of the three states. This data will be used later on to observe correlations between different variables.

Table 2.2 shows the GINI coefficient for the three countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Nicaragua). As would be expected, Costa Rica is the most equal of all three countries. The last data point available for Costa Rica is higher than its 2004 measures. This is interesting because if equality and democracy went along with one another there should not be a change. El Salvador has experienced a significant decrease in inequality for its last measurement in 2007. This is most likely due to the fact that democratic institutions are also improving, particularly from its post-civil war time period. Inequality for Nicaragua is difficult to discuss because there are only three data points available. No trends are noticeable, but a significant decrease from 1997 can be noted.

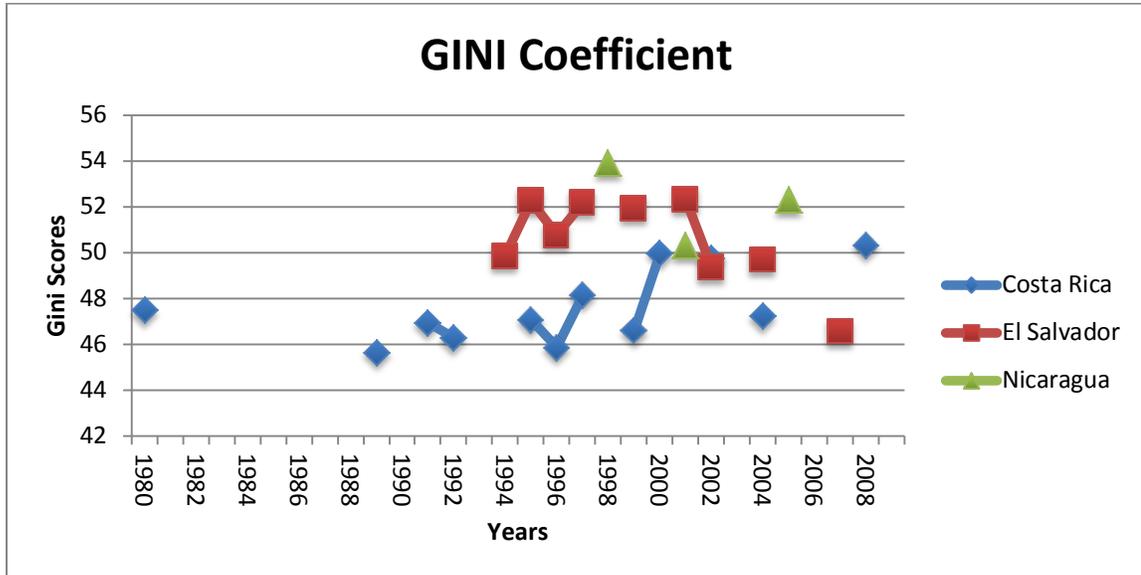


Table 3.2 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

CHAPTER FOUR: DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Political Scientist Carles Boix wrote, “in those nations that have more democratic means of solving conflicts, violence does not arise, because the individuals are more equal to one another and not as discontent with the status quo”(2008, 392). Though Boix, is writing about civil wars this would also seem to be the case for gang violence. When applying this to the countries being studied it would mean that all of these states being democratic would have no violence occurring within their state borders.

Measures of democracy become increasingly important in this study because Nicaragua and El Salvador experienced higher levels of violence during the democratic consolidation process than they had during their civil war periods. Costa Rica on the other hand has had the longest lasting democracy in the region and yet the fear of increasing of violence does not evade it.

In the 2006 foreword of *Political Order in Changing Societies*, which was written by Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama writes that this seems to be perhaps the last great effort on political development, and that much has been written on democratic transitions, institutional design and specific regions. But Fukuyama failed to notice that Huntington was simply part of a wider literature that attempted to address the same issue of democratic development. The literature began with Max Weber in his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). His main theory was that capitalism was the engine that catalyzed the move towards democratization. Then, political culture theorists, led by David Easton, claimed that culture was the most important determiner of how societies became democratic, or why they were able to

maintain their current political state (1953). Political culture theorists were never fully accepted, because it was believed that they concentrated too much on culture and not on any other factors that might influence democratic political development. Ethnic homogeneity theories have been used to explain income inequalities, violence and corruption. Huntington claimed that, in Latin America, countries that were more ethnically homogenous were less prone to corruption. The argument for ethnic homogeneity has not only been used to explain political corruption, but also, has been used to explain unequal sociopolitical conditions that lead to insurgencies. The best predictors of these possible insurgencies seem to be overall state weakness, lack of democratization and discrimination, specifically, discrimination by the state of particular minority groups (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 80). Political culture can be evidenced in these explanations, but this a new adaptation of political culture studies. Easton and others were discredited, because their theory was too narrow and claimed that political culture was the only factor that was inhibiting democratic development within a state.

After Weber, Huntington's school believed that economics were the main engine that drove social change, mainly democratic development. The belief was that certain preconditions had to be established, and then democracy would come afterwards (Hood, 2004, 175). This seemed to be a return to the Weberian theory that the economy was where democratization began. Another important aspect about this approach to democratization was that a crisis was needed in order for democratic consolidation to occur. The crisis that a state would experience would allow the government to make institutional changes to address it and therefore develop a more democratic form of government.

Andre Gunder Frank's school of thought followed with his theory of the development of the underdeveloped. This is that economic development in one sector would lead to the underdevelopment of other sectors of the economy. Gunder Frank's theory is most commonly known as dependency theory (1969). Capitalism was dangerous, not simply because it failed to distribute wealth evenly, but because it created conditions that made it even more difficult for those who are marginalized to ever benefit from the existing economic order (Hood 2004, 175). This seemed to be an approach that was completely against what Weber and Huntington had thought before. Rather than stressing economic development first, this approach emphasized that democratic development would further cause social problems within a society.

When examining the economic growth rates alone or Costa Rica, El Salvador in Nicaragua it is very clear that Cost Rica has a much higher GDP Per Capita than do the other two countries. Costa Rica has experienced some fluctuations in growth rates, but overall has seen a steady increase over the 1990 to 2010 time period. When comparing El Salvador to the other two states, GDP per capita growth has been pretty constant, and is not as low as Nicaragua's.

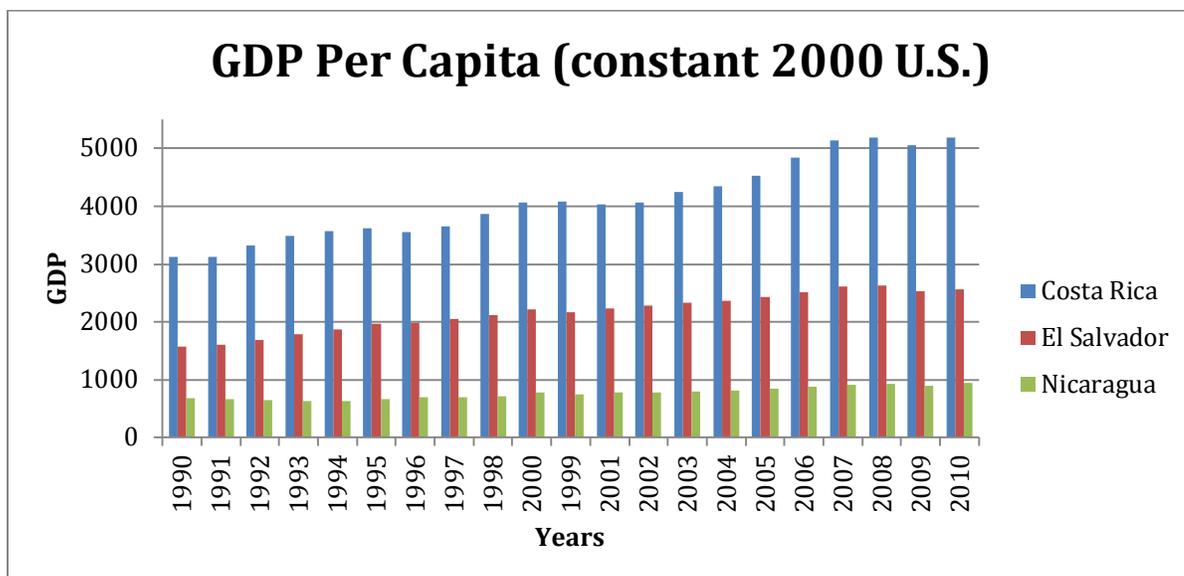


Table 4.1 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

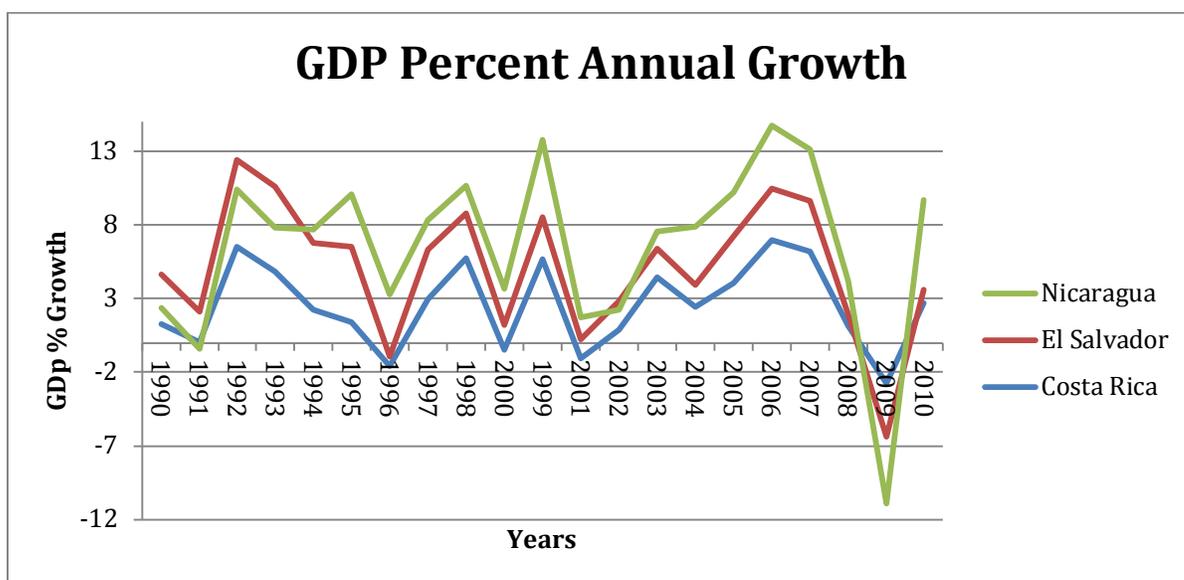


Table 4.2 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

One of the most crucial factors that must be taken into account is the type of government system that is in charge of a country during these rapid periods of economic growth. This is particularly important when looking at Central America. “United Fruit company employed thousands of local workers and created an export infrastructure where one did not exist before” (Bucheli 2008,434). All of this investment within these

nations came at the expense of the people of these countries many times, because they were under the control of “some of the most infamous dictators of the Western Hemisphere... strong military men who maintained a highly unequal social system by repressing the mass of agrarian workers for the benefits of local landowners and foreign investors” (Bucheli 2008, 433). Much like in dependency theory internationally, applying it within a country there would be a small core (landowners) and a large periphery (agrarian workers). In the periphery, there would be this unequal distribution of wealth, which would in turn cause civil unrest. According to Carles Boix, “In unequal societies, the well off sectors tend to be more reticent about setting by democratic means. The losses they would incur (from redistributive mechanisms voted by the majority) would be just too substantial. Similarly, resorting to violence to effect political change becomes attractive to those who do not own most of the wealth when the wealthy own a sizable fraction of the economy” (392).

In recent years, much has been written on violence and the adverse effects that violence has on economic growth and, furthermore, development (Gupta 329). This is very important, because it follows along with Huntington’s school of thought. A new problem that also seems to be addressed along these same lines is that of globalization and the effect that globalization has on violence within a state. There are two opposing theories on globalizations’ influence on civil wars. One of the theories is that “globalization reduces the risk of civil war because openness to trade, FDI, and Foreign Portfolio Investments (FPI)” (Barbieri and Reuveny 2005, 1229). According to Economy Watch, “Foreign direct investment is any form of investment that earns interest in enterprises which function outside of the domestic territory of the investor”. The other

theory states “globalization raises the risk of civil war” (Barbieri and Reuveny 2005, 1231). Foreign Portfolio Investments are stocks or shares of a company that are bought through foreign investments. This should not be mistaken with foreign ownership of a company. Much of this second theory is based on dependency theory, which deals with a very small, developed group of core countries and many periphery countries. These periphery countries are not as developed, “The core-periphery terms of trade harm the periphery. The periphery’s development is distorted: industrialization is limited, and the masses remain poor...Distorted development promotes dissent, since the masses in the periphery represent the status quo. The dissent is countered with state repression. A cycle of violence ensues, making rebellion and civil war more likely” (Barbieri and Reuveny 2005, 1228). This second theory of how globalization increases risks for civil war is very similar to that of Huntington’s, because they both rely heavily on the fact that there is an unequal distribution of wealth when economic growth takes place. Barbieri and Reuveny find that:

In recent decades, nearly all civil wars have taken place in the LDC’s. These countries tend to be less open to the world economy. We find that Economic openness reduces that likelihood that civil war will be present in LDC’s, but not the likelihood of its onset. Policies that raise per capita income, reduce population size, and reduce dependence on oil exports are likely to be the most effective strategies to reduce the risk of civil war outbreak. (1243).

Though Barbieri and Reuveny are looking at civil wars, it is important to note that they do seek to find a causal relationship between globalization and civil war. Their study is also significant in that many of the globalizing factors that increase the likelihood of civil war may also increase the instances of collective violence within a state. Globalization,

then becomes important in that increases inequality, not only by forcing families to be separated, but also through direct economic aims within a state.

Roberto Briceño Leon and Veronica Zubillaga, in *Violence and Globalization in Latin America*, seek to explain the phenomena of the spread of violence in Latin America in terms of globalization. This looks at how the various factors that are tied to globalization lead to an increase in violence. The authors find that there are five correlated relationships that increase violence that are direct effects of globalization. “(1) the changes occurring in the drug economy (2) the massive proliferation of firearms (3) the similarity of the cultural patterns of violence and the emergence of an actor- the young man from a marginal neighborhood (4) a generalized fear among the population; and (5) citizen support for extralegal action by the police” (23). The most important aspect that Briceño-Leon and Zubillaga mention is that of the young man from the marginal neighborhood (2002).

CHAPTER FIVE: REGIME MEASUREMENTS

One of the most important aspects of the methodology is which method of regime type will be used this is not only an integral section of the methodology but also of the literature. Regime type classification is integral to the literature because different classification methods use different definitions of democracy, and these measures also look at different factors. There are three main types, each have benefit as well as disadvantages. There are three main regime coding systems that are most frequently used: these are the Polity Project, Freedom House, and the last one being the Alvarez et al. All of these coding systems have different means by which democracies are defined, therefore yielding different results, since they are all examining different things.

The first of such coding systems is the Polity IV project, this is the most recent data collection of the polity set and its data is until 2010. Countries are ranked from -10 to 10. At the lowest end governments would be considered hereditary monarchies, while at the highest end they would be considered full democracies. The definition that is utilized for democracies in this coding system encompasses access to governmental institutions, limitations on the exercise of power, and civil liberties of citizens (Marshall, Jagers and Gurr 2010, 14). States are given an autocracy score (authoritarian regime) and this is then subtracted from the democratic score to obtain the total polity score. One of the greatest advantages of this data set is that it is a year by year analysis of each country. The data set was changed in the polity IV project to take account the statistical changes that were adopted in the Polity III project but also incorporate the original polity I project analysis (Marshall, Jagers and Gurr 2010, 6). Polity IV scores also go back as far as the 1800's.

Freedom House data sets are similar to polity scores in that they are a year by year analysis of each country. What is different about this data set is that it rates civil liberties and political rights in accordance with Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and though it may seem as if it were not a direct coding mechanism for regime type, the scores do take into account various attributes of democratic regimes. This lack of explicit coding for regime type is perhaps its greatest disadvantage, but also proves to be one of its advantages since it accounts for a more in depth analysis of existing rights of citizens within a nation.

The regime coding system that was set up by Alvarez et al (1996) is a dichotomous coding system. States are either coded as democratic or dictatorships. The focus of their classification lies in the definition of democracy, and they claim that the main factors by which democracy can be identified is as through the contested elections to fill governmental offices. The other classification (dictatorship) is simply the absence of democracy. So what this coding system is actually doing is simply coding for democracy, their definition of democracy. Though they are only really coding for two things, the coding system is devised of four categories: Dictatorship, parliamentary, mixed and presidential (Alvarez et al, 1996,15). For the most part the latter of the two categories is a sub-division of the dictatorial classification. Two of the greatest disadvantages of utilizing this coding system in the study is that governments are not classified by degrees of democratization, they are either democratic or not. The other disadvantage is that the governments are classified as entering into a particular regime type and then exiting. This is problematic because it seems as if an abrupt change in regime type has occurred, which may not be the case at all.

Scott Mainwaring, Daniel Brinks and Aníbal Pérez Liñán devised a coding mechanism that was specific to Latin American states from 1945 to 1999. The definition that they utilize for democratic governments has several components. The integral components of their definition are: those free and fair elections are held for the governing body of the state, all adults have the ability to vote in these free and fair elections, the government protects civil and political rights. The final element of their definition is that the military is under civilian control, and the government is the one in charge of governing the state. (2001,38).

The coding system that will be used in this analysis is the polity IV project. It is the most extensive time series analysis for regime types. Polity IV also incorporates much broader definitions of regime types. The greatest advantage of this coding system is that it also allows seeing patterns of democratization that occur over time. Slight changes in regime type can be seen since countries are ranked yearly, versus being ranked over a period of time.

Examining the Polity score differences between the countries what seems most obvious is that Costa Rica, would of course be considered a full democracy for the time period from 1990 to 2010. El Salvador starts off at the same ranking as Nicaragua and then from 1991 to 1994 is ranked more democratic than Nicaragua. This ranking is partly is due to the fact that Peace Accords are being negotiated in the state at this time. Nicaragua surpassed El Salvador in democratic governance rankings and since 2008 has experienced relatively high levels of democratic governance. Though, Nicaragua's level of democracy is not as high as Costa Rica's it is pretty quickly and steadily getting very close. Perhaps in the upcoming years they will be ranked similarly.

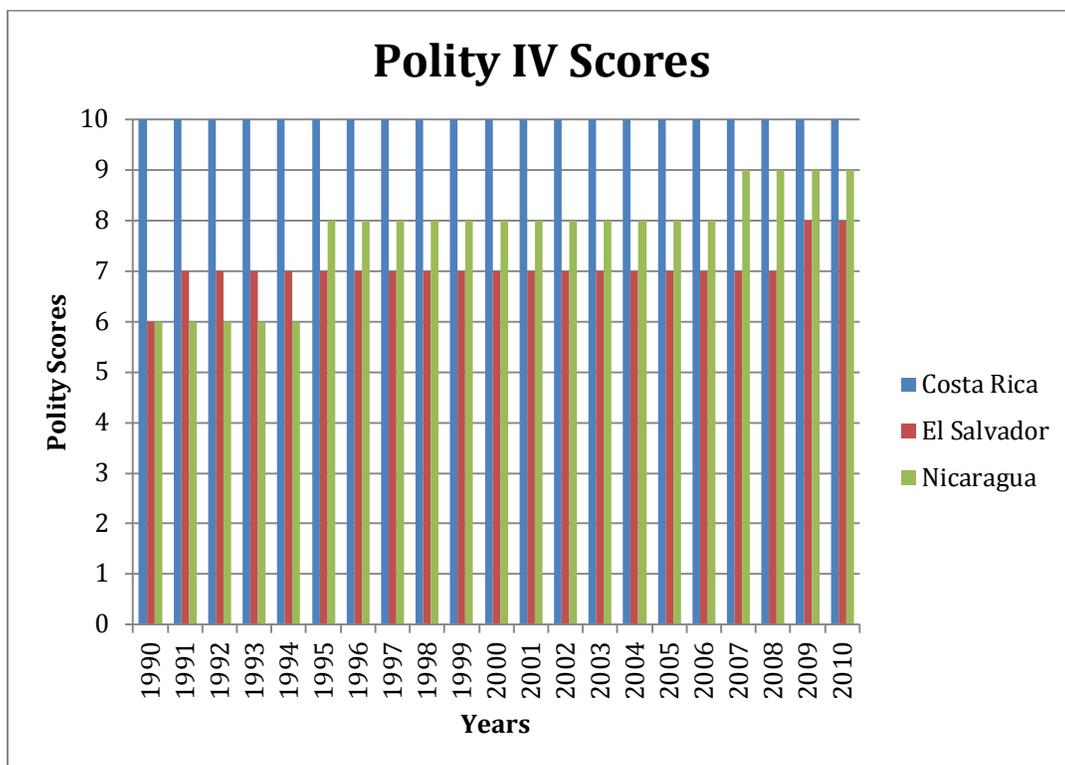


Table 5.1 (Marshall, Jaggers and Gurr. 2011.)

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS

A simple linear regression was run to examine the correlation between GINI index and GDP Per capita, for all three countries. This was to compare whether economic growth had a significant correlation with inequality. One of the main problems that was encountered was that the GINI coefficient had very few data points. Some countries had more data points than others. The one advantage is that the smaller the sample size, the easier to see if a relationship between variables exists.

Table 6.1 shows the relationship between GDP per capita and the GINI coefficient for Costa Rica. An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend. In the case of Costa Rica the R^2 value was .511, which meant that it was statistically significant. This means that 51% of variation in the GINI Index was explained by GDP Per Capita. As economic growth increased in Costa Rica during 1990 to 2010 inequality also increase. This was no expected in Costa Rica, since it is a democratic state. The Costa Rican government is supposed to be more capable of providing access to health care, education, and Costa Rican citizens are also then better able to access employment that allows them to live.

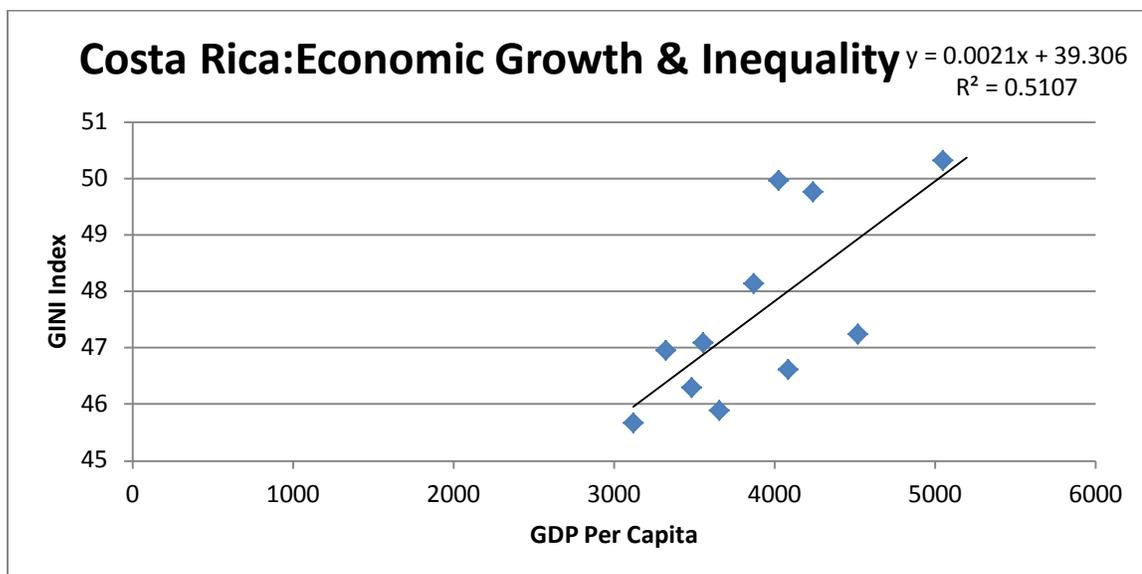


Table 6.1 (World Bank 2012, WDI)

Table 6.2 shows the relationship between GDP Per Capita and the Gini coefficient for El Salvador. An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend. The R^2 value for El Salvador was .481, which was taken as a trend, but not statistically significant. This means that 48% of variance in the GINI coefficient was explained by GDP Per Capita. As economic growth increased during the time period from 1990 to 2010, inequality increased. This finding was in accordance with my initial hypothesis that economic growth increased inequality. This of course does not take into account the regime type of the country at the time, which does seem to have an effect on income distribution, and inequality overall.

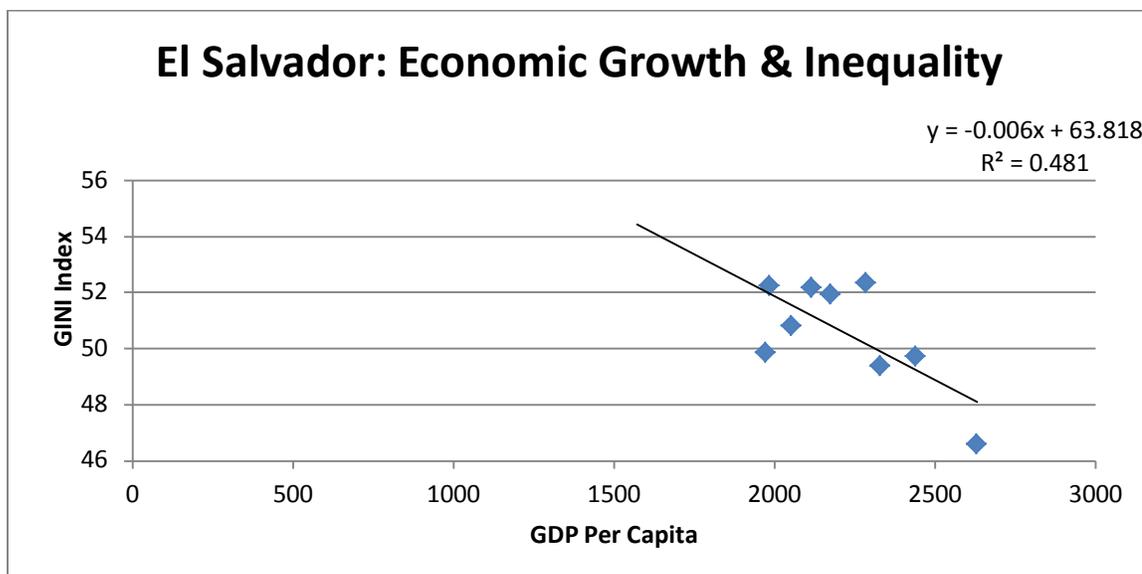


Table 6.2 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

Table 6.3 shows the relationship between GDP Per Capita and the GINI coefficient for Nicaragua. An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend. The R^2 value for Nicaragua was .679, this means that 68% of variance in the GINI coefficient was uniquely explained by GDP Per Capita. This was the country that demonstrated to have the highest significance level amongst all three. This goes along with the original hypothesis because Polity IV Scores were much lower for both of these states, and as economic growth increased their inequality also increased. However, it should be noted that although this effect was much higher in Nicaragua (based on R^2 value) when compared to El Salvador, the Polity IV scores were not very different and Nicaragua's were slightly higher during certain years. Due to this fact, the correlation between these two factors would be expected to be higher for El Salvador and not Nicaragua. This higher correlation level is likely a consequence to the

few GINI data points available. If more GINI scores had been calculated, the significance would most likely be closely related to that of El Salvador's.

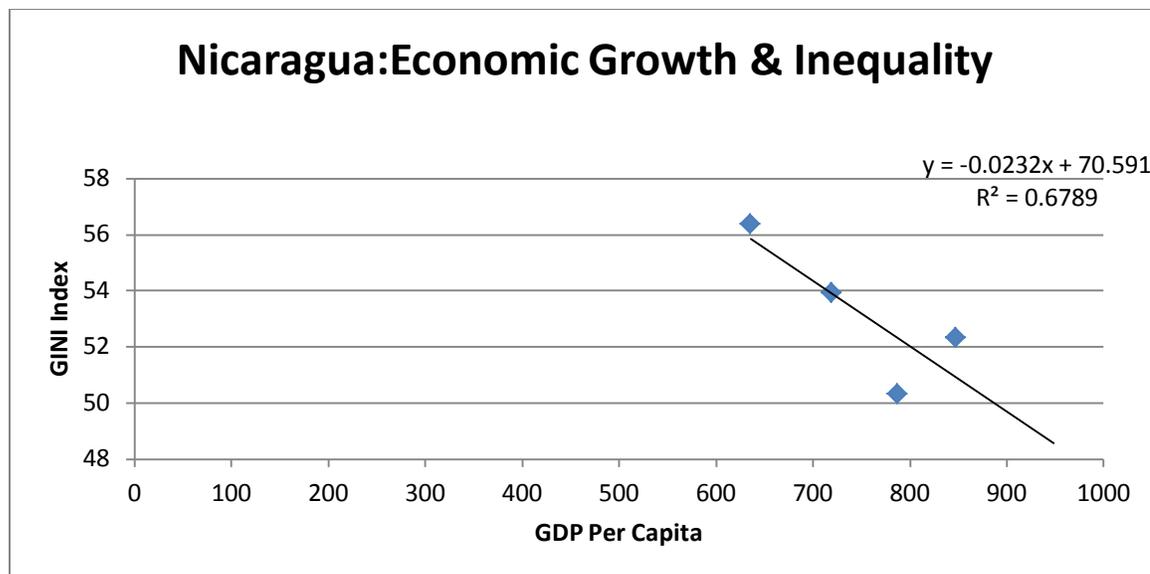


Table 6.3 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

A simple linear regression was run to examine the relationship that GDP Per Capita had on homicide levels per 100,000 inhabitants. An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend.

The first country that was analyzed was Costa Rica. The R^2 value was .838, which means that 84% of variance in homicides was explained by GDP per capita. This was highly statistically significant, even with three outlier points. These three outlier points represent the years 2008, 2009, and 2010 during which the homicide rate grew significantly within the state. Table 6.4 shows this regression.

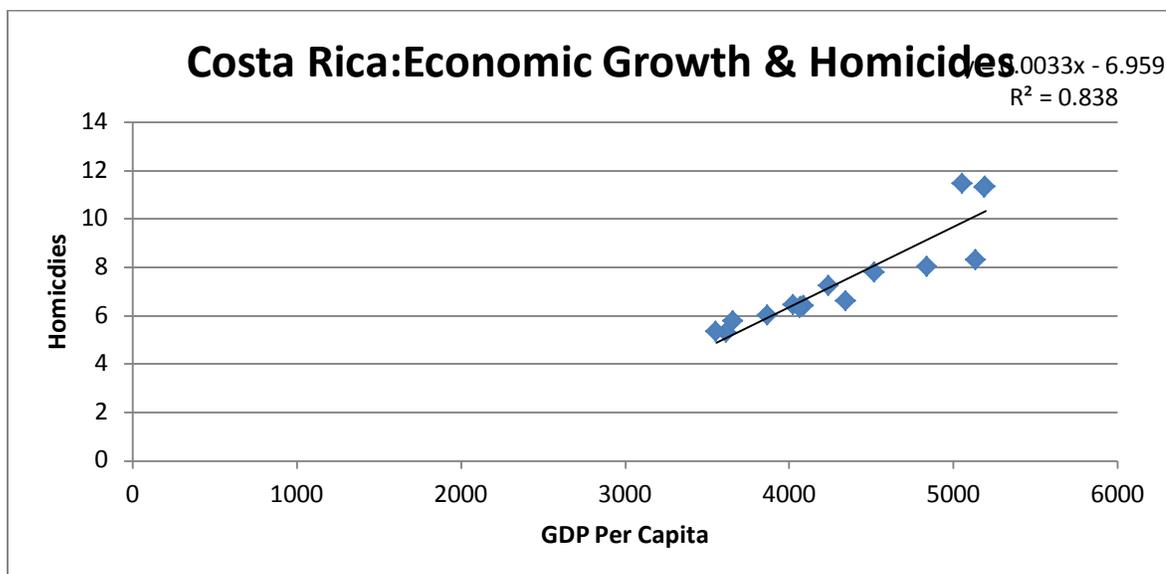


Table 6.4 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

Table 6.5 shows the regression analysis when the three outliers are removed. The R^2 value increase to .938, which would mean that 94% of variance in homicides was explained by GDP per capita. Both of these findings are interesting in that rather than violence diminishing in this stable democratic state, violence actually increases as the economy grows. When examining this relationship in contrast to that of GDP per capita and inequality (as seen through the GINI Index), the relationship is a confounding one. While on one hand the state is experiencing economic growth, and higher levels of equality, violence is increasing during this time period.

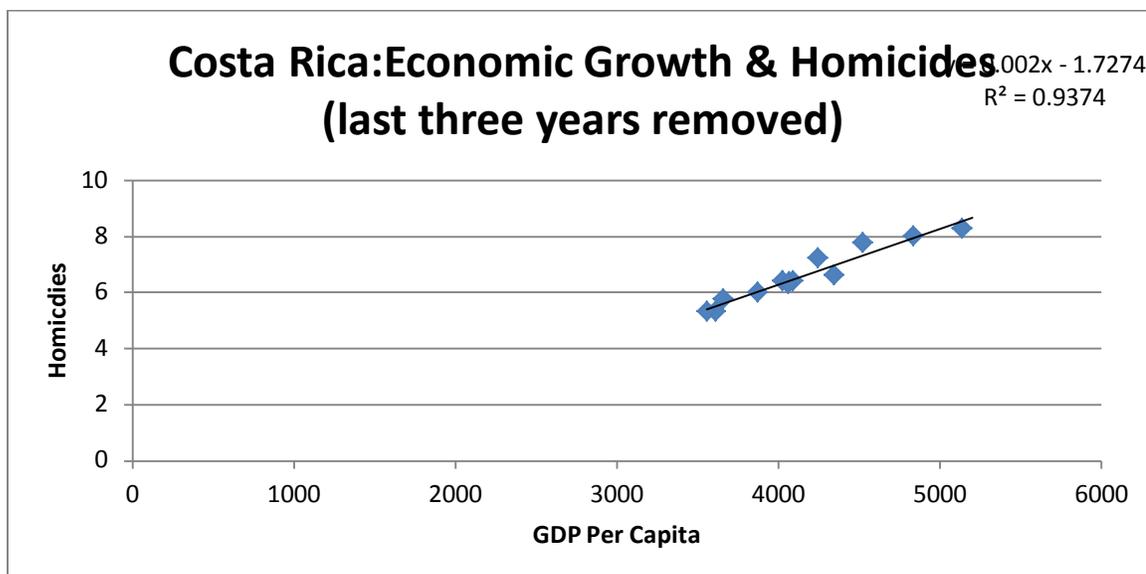


Table 6.5 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

Table 6.6 shows the regression analysis for the second country, which was El Salvador. The R^2 value was .54, which was statistically significant. 54% of variance in homicides was uniquely explained by GDP per capita. In El Salvador as the economy grew, homicide rates actually decreased. It is also interesting to compare the least squares regression lines for both Costa Rica and El Salvador. Regardless of which line from Costa Rica is used, GDP Per capita has a much larger effect on homicide rate in El Salvador than in Costa Rica. The slope of the regression line for El Salvador is an order of magnitude higher than the slope of the regression line for Costa Rica. This indicates that the effect of GDP per capita on homicides is much greater in El Salvador than in Costa Rica, even though the effect is negative not positive.

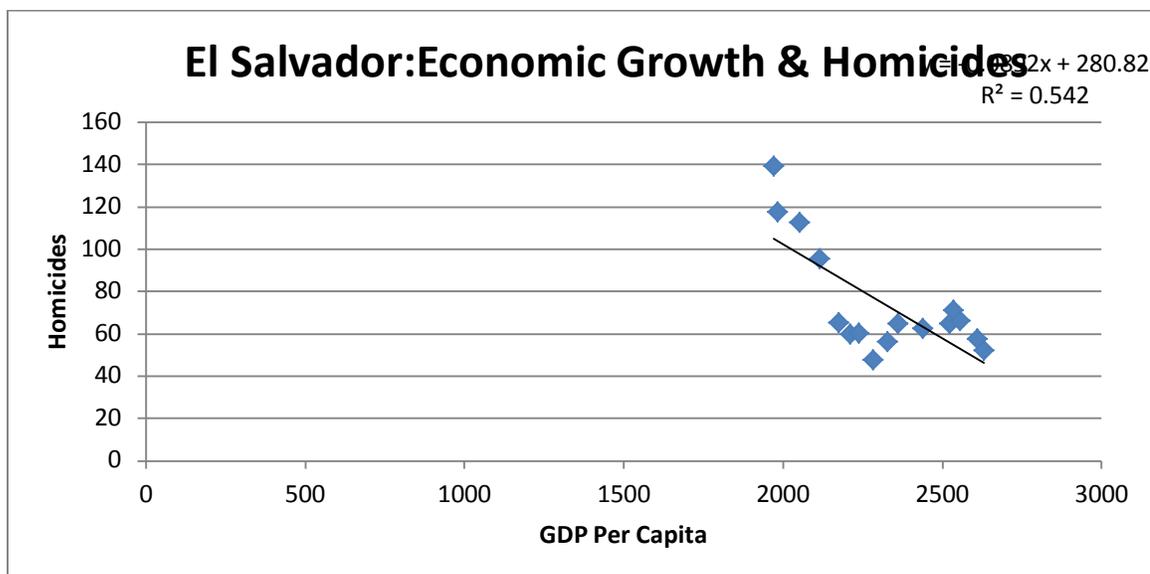


Table 5.6 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

The third country that was examined was Nicaragua and the R^2 value was .001, which was not statistically significant. From this regression, these two factors are completely unrelated. This could be due to a number of factors, because as homicide rates stayed pretty stagnant, GDP steadily increased. Looking at Table 3.1, there is not enough change from year to year to correlate with homicide rates.

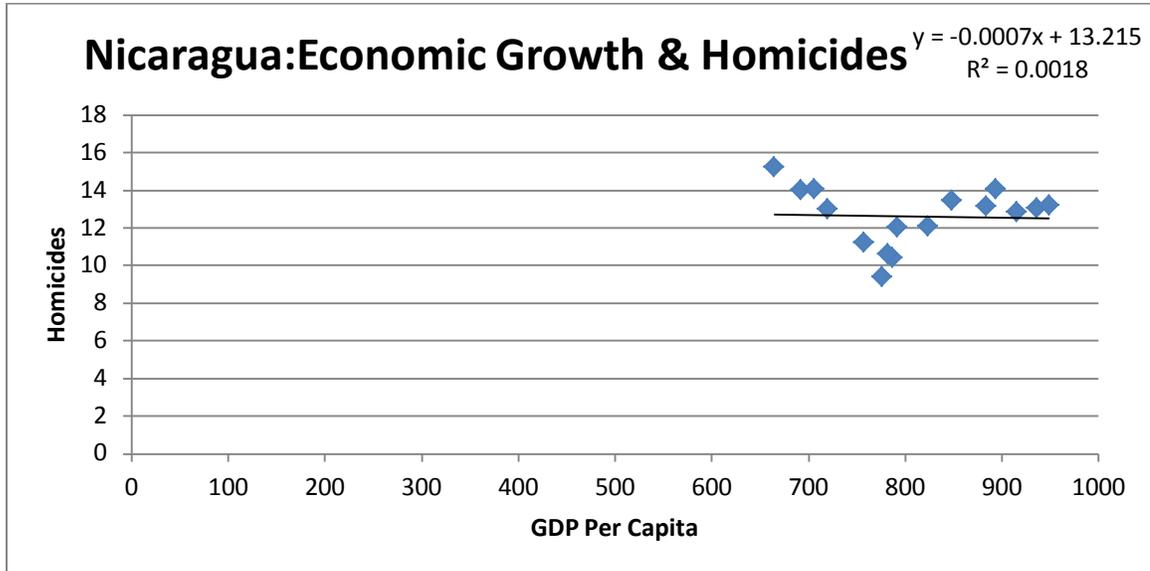


Table 6.7 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

A simple linear regression was run to examine the relationship between the GINI index and homicides per 100,000 inhabitants for all three countries. An R^2 value $\geq .50$ was considered statistically significant and an R^2 value $\geq .40$ was considered to be a trend.

The regression analysis for Costa Rica, proved to be insignificant with an R^2 value of .357, which means that 36% of variance in homicides was explained by the GINI Index. Homicides were independent of inequality, which should be expected in a democracy since they are more egalitarian. The culture of violence is independent of democratic culture, and in some cases is indicative of popular culture acceptance of violence. The lack of correlation was due to a steady increase in homicide rate in Costa Rica, whereas the GINI Index fluctuates around a value, and does not have a trend.

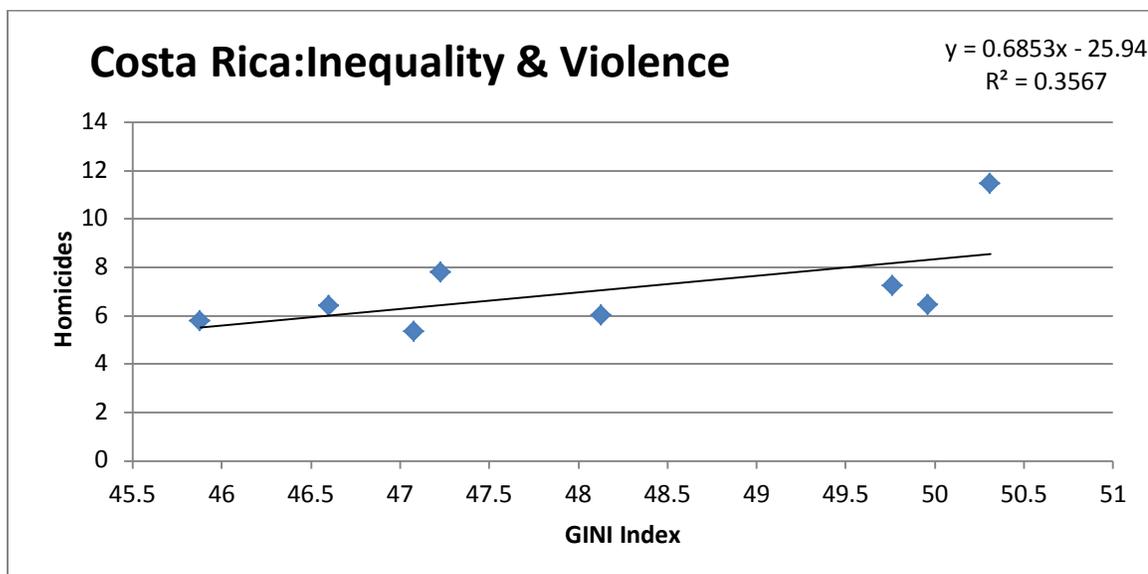


Table 6.8 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

El Salvador's regression analysis between the GINI Index and homicides was not statistically significant. With an R^2 value of .066, the regression demonstrated that only 1% of variance in homicides was uniquely explained by the GINI index.

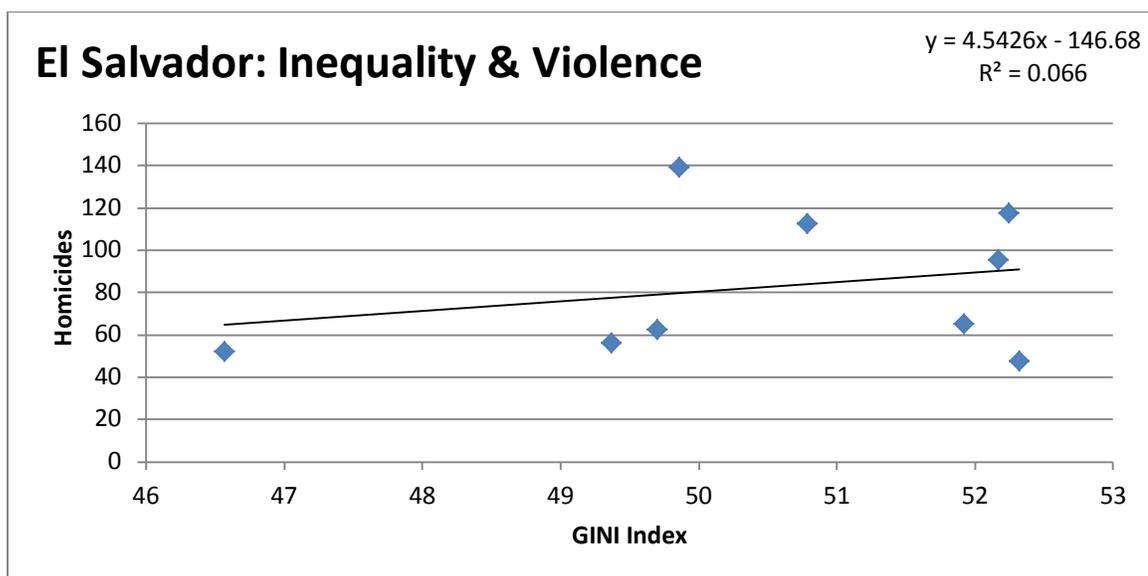


Table 6.9 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

The R^2 value for the relationship between GINI index and homicide rates for Nicaragua was .691, which means that 69% of variance in homicides was uniquely explained by the GINI index. This is very misleading, because even though a significance level does exist, there are only three data points. The small sample size really limits the ability to see if a true relationship exists between these two variables.

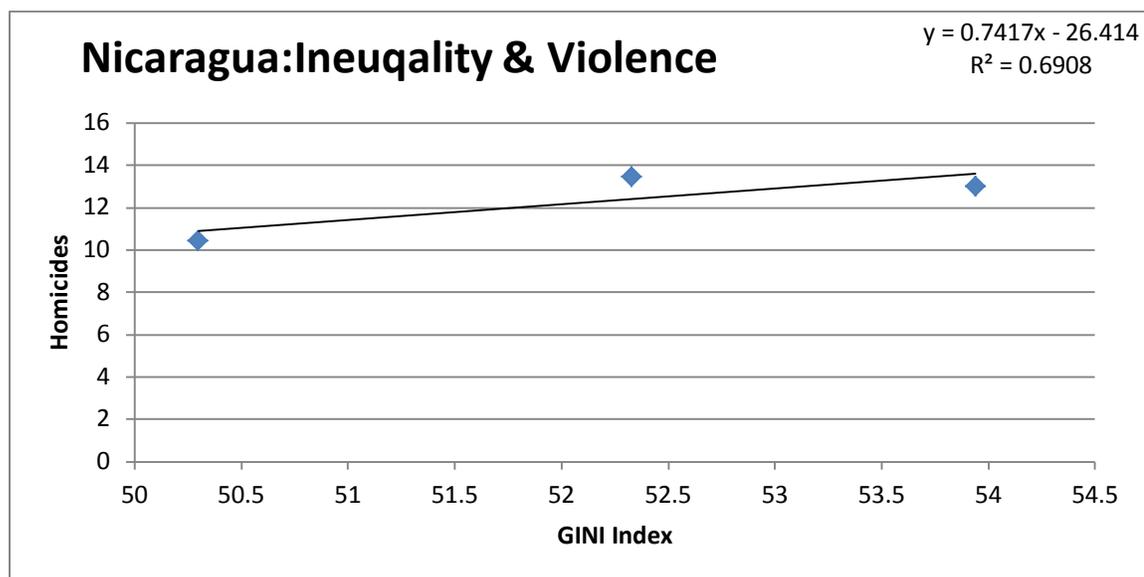


Table 6.10 (World Bank 2012, WDI.)

The regression analysis for Nicaragua was the only one that showed correlation. In El Salvador and Costa Rica a correlation was not found, because gang violence may not be dependent on inequality. Other social and governmental factors may be better indicators of increasing gang violence.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

Inequality as measured by the GINI is not positively related with an increase in violence levels in Costa Rica and El Salvador. This partially disproves the original hypothesis that in these two countries democratization increased inequality and therefore increased gang violence. In El Salvador the correlation was actually negative so as economic growth increased homicide rates decreased. In these two countries GDP per capita had a much stronger correlation with violence increase. Though, it should be noted that if an inequality measure was used that was more complete the correlations could have been much stronger. In Nicaragua the GINI coefficient proved to be statistically correlated with an increase in violence, yet GDP per capita was not statistically related to an increase in homicides. These findings seem to indicate that inequality plays an important role in Nicaragua. For Costa Rica as GDP per capita increased inequality and violence also increased as well. Further analysis on other levels of inequality and their effects on homicide levels would provide a more accurate description of the correlation between the two factors. Given these findings, economic growth should be fostered in El Salvador and Nicaragua in order to see a greater decrease in inequality as well as a decrease in homicide levels. Contrary to what was seen in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and contrary to the original hypothesis as economic growth, measured by GDP per capita, occurred in Costa Rica, inequality increased. This led to an increase in violence as measured by homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This was not expected because it is the longest lasting democracy, and highest ranked democracy on the Polity IV score. In this case democracy was not a good measure for redistribution, because as the economy improved equality deteriorated. This becomes extremely when foreign countries are

investing these states. Foreign companies must be certain that their investments are going to be safe. Many companies do not feel comfortable investing in a country that is riddled with violence, government corruption, and gang activity.

As evidenced by this data, it is not sufficient to evaluate the type of government that is in place. A better indicator is equality, because it can be utilized to assess the sociopolitical health of the nation. Democratization must also be examined further in order to understand the surge in gang violence. During democratization violence levels increased more so than they had during the wars. This demonstrates that something occurred during democratization that allowed for this increase to occur. Furthermore, that which was not resolved during the democratic transition process has allowed for gangs to grow. All of these very complex relations would create a better understanding of how gangs are now growing in the region.

These findings also lead to further questions about the root causes of gang violence. It seems that a single factor cannot be attributed for an increase in gangs and their violence. Individuals choose to join gangs for a plethora of reasons, and these same factors contribute to their continuation in gang membership. It would be much simpler to attribute the rise in gang membership to one particular factor. If inequality had been the cause of a gang violence increase, prior to the wars in these states, gang violence would have been a significant issue. Which in Nicaragua and El Salvador there was proof of gangs, but their impact on violence was not heavily reported. It also would be the case, that Costa Rica would have no levels of gang violence. Though the majority of the gangs that inhabit Costa Rica are not transnational gangs, but rather local neighborhood gangs

(Rodgers 1999, 8), there's still the concern that these groups could become more of a threat to social stability. There is also the issue that in Costa Rica as economic growth has increased violence has also increased as well. This leads to further questions about the effects that violence in the region has had on violence in Costa Rica. While economic growth is beneficial for Costa Rica, as the country continues to experience economic growth it becomes important for the government to monitor how money is redistributed. Redistribution would result in higher levels of equality, which would lead to lower levels of violence based on this analysis.

The methodological difficulty has been to identify gang violence as its own type of violence apart from other types (petty crimes, drug violence unrelated to gangs, domestic violence etc.). This is not unique to this particular thesis, but to the study of gangs in this region overall. A better definition would have provided for better measures and better correlations and trends could have been observed. Though some interviews have been conducted with gang members, a better understanding of what members actually believe to be gang violence would be beneficial to advancing this field. Another problem that was encountered was the lack of available data for all three countries. Data for Nicaragua was the most difficult to obtain, while Costa Rica had the most complete data sets. The history of these countries contributes to the difficulty in accessing information. Much like the other studies that are done on gangs, interviews and surveys would benefit this thesis further. They would provide a better understanding of the cultural acceptance of violence, and furthermore a definition of gang violence from gang members, could be ascertained.

Gangs as an institution can be seen as a continuation of the wars that took place in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Young men and women were left out of the demobilization process and were not reinstated into civil society. These individuals only knew how to fight wars, they were accustomed to violence and knew how to utilize weapons. When the wars ended and democratization began, the only viable option for them was to create violent groups to achieve their goals, be they economic or sociopolitical. Gang membership can also be seen as a continuation of the wars that were fought in these countries because it has created a culture where the use of violence by certain individuals is acceptable. Young men and women, within their communities are allowed to use violence because generations before them were allowed to use it. This compounded with migration of ex-U.S. gang members allowed for the creation of U.S style gangs in the region. Once again, the distinction must be made that though U.S gang members were deported to their Central American countries, this is grossly over reported in comparison to actual numbers.

The correlation between deportation and homicides was only statistically significant in Nicaragua, with an R^2 value of .68. Yet the effect size as mentioned earlier was not that large, in order to see an increase in violence there would need to be a really large number of deportations to the country. In Costa Rica and El Salvador deportation and homicides were not statistically correlated to one another. Theories on the effects of deportations on increasing gang violence must be reexamined since they are not true for these countries. A better explanation would be that gang culture in the receiving countries was influenced by deported gang members. Current theories rests on the premise of deportation of gang members, but fail to take into account gang culture within the

receiving states. As ex gang members were deported, some were able to find communities that were similar to the ones that they had left in the United States. This finding indicates that it may not be a simply a matter of L.A gang members creating new gangs in Central America, but rather Central American gangs adopting L.A. style gang culture. In the future it may be important to not only study the culture that is adopted by the deportees but also the gang culture of the countries that they were deported to. As gang violence becomes a greater problem in the region, local neighborhood gangs and their effects on violence must be examined more closely. How these neighborhood gangs adapt and change will be important into creating gang reduction measures, and for states to focus on youth within countries, rather than blaming these issues on deportees.

Ultimately, when economic growth occurs without an increase in inequality a clear increase in violence levels can be observed (Costa Rica). The original hypothesis focused on the levels of democratization as a predictor for the equal distribution of this economic growth to the population. Using the Polity IV scores as a measure of democracy, demonstrated that this was not the case. Costa Rica which ranked as a perfect democracy experienced more inequality as the economy grew, but Nicaragua and El Salvador experienced lower levels of inequality. This analysis demonstrates that it is important to emphasize the redistribution of wealth when economic growth is occurring. While economic growth is generally seen as positive for a country, failing to monitor what its effect is on equality can be highly detrimental, as evidenced by Costa Rica. In order to properly assess a government, its efforts to curtail inequality cannot be overlooked. Democracy does not indicate equality especially during times of economic growth. Internally, this analysis is important for a states efforts to curtail gang violence

within its territorial boundaries. While there was no direct correlation between inequality and violence, there was a clear relationship between economic growth and violence levels. In Costa Rica and El Salvador, the predictor for whether there was a negative and appositive correlation between economic growth and violence, was the relationship between economic growth and equality. Additionally, Nicaragua, which had a similar relationship between economic growth and equality, as El Salvador, showed a direct correlation between inequality and violence. In establishing methods to curtail gang violence inequality has to be examined. Based on this analysis this is especially important during times of economic growth. Although there was only a direct correlation with inequality and violence in Nicaragua, inequality was the deciding factor in whether economic growth led to increased or decreased violence. Therefore, in countries that are experiencing economic growth it becomes integral to intensify efforts to increase equality. Economic growth on its own will not decrease gang violence. It is the states responsibility to continually work to make sure, that at the very least, status quo levels of equality are maintained. If governments fail to prioritize equality during times of economic growth, the benefits of the growth will come at the expense of a corresponding increase in gang violence.

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