Mauro Cerbino
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Volumen II
Política pública y proyectos/modelos de intervención con jóvenes

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Ethnographic encounters: civil society campaigns against El Salvador's Mano Dura

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Introduction

El Salvador's gang history dates back to the 1960s. The neighborhood-based crews of that time, bringing together marginalized youth to hang out, fight their rivals, and commit petty crime, were a nuisance but not a public security threat (Argueta et al., 1991). The situation changed markedly when members of Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Dieciocho were deported to their countries of origin. Both groups had been founded in Los Angeles' immigrant *barrios* that provided shelter to many Central Americans fleeing repression or U.S.-sponsored civil wars. In response to difficult personal circumstances and gang harassment some refugee youths joined existing gangs, notably the Dieciocho, or created their own group, Mara Salvatrucha. Once the isthmian conflicts had ended, the U.S. authorities stepped up the deportation of offending non-citizens. Exporting U.S. gang culture and hostilities, the returning gang members absorbed local gang phenomena and made them more virulent. Over the years they intensified their drug activities, accelerated their criminal involvement, and exercised greater violence (Cruz and Portillo, 1998; Santacruz and Concha-Eastman, 2001). El Salvador, however, long lacked a gang policy.

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In July 2003, eight months before the 2004 presidential elections, President Francisco Flores (1999-2004) of the conservative ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) party introduced Mano Dura to curb gangs and homicides. Comprising police/military patrols and area sweeps, the measure was accompanied by temporary anti-gang legislation (Ley Antimaras/LAM) that sanctioned the arrested of suspected gang members based on their physical appearance. Echoing the official discourse, the mass media demonized gang members and portrayed Mano Dura as the only viable response (Wolf, 2008). The timing and content of the initiative suggested that it constituted a populist penal policy that sought electoral advantage rather than effective gang control. ARENA had held the presidency since 1989, but in recent years the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional), the ex-guerrilla grouping and main opposition party, had made important electoral advances at the municipal and legislative levels (CIDAI, 2003). Although in 2004 victory would again go to the right, in the preceding months it was widely felt that the FMLN's gains had strengthened prospects for an alternation in power. Since the elite remained concerned at the possible erosion of its privileges, ARENA (the oligarchy's political vehicle) would rapidly have to bolster its electoral standing if it was to retain its influence over the state.

Mano Dura appealed to a population that had tired of chronic insecurity, and since it afforded ARENA substantial political benefits, it became a central campaign theme and proved crucial for the right's presidential victory (Cruz, 2004). However, the plan was manifestly ineffective in achieving its objectives. Arrest figures spiraled, but most detainees were released for lack of evidence (FESPAD, 2005). Homicides rose from 2 172 murders in 2003 (six per day) to 3 928 in 2006 (11 per day) (*El Faro*, June 2 2008), making El Salvador the most violent country in Latin America. Furthermore, the gang problem became increasingly unmanageable. Gang-segregated prisons, instituted to avoid clashes, permitted inmates to strengthen gang-internal structure and cohesion while rampant penitentiary corruption facilitated cell phone smuggling and hence the planning of crimes. At the same time, gang youths required more money to support their imprisoned peers, yet Mano Dura had inflamed

social intolerance and diminished licit job opportunities for them. Consequently, large-scale extortion soared, especially in the transport sector (Savenije, 2009).

Mano Dura was hugely popular with ordinary Salvadorans, but heavily criticized by judges, the political opposition, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on youth and public security issues. These sectors rejected the initiative because of its suppressive focus, the unconstitutional anti-gang legislation, and its neglect of prevention/rehabilitation. The critique, though, remained largely ineffective. For Súper Mano Dura President Antonio Saca (2004-2009) announced a stronger emphasis on prevention/rehabilitation, but the programs were dispersed and underfunded (Jütersonke et al., 2009). Suppression remained the dominant approach both at the domestic and transnational levels where El Salvador became more heavily involved in U.S.-sponsored regional anti-gang initiatives that view the gangs as transnational organized crime networks and favor law enforcement cooperation over prevention/rehabilitation (Wolf, 2009b). The spiraling murder rate made Mano Dura a political liability, and in mid-2006 the measure was quietly withdrawn. Hardline policing, however, continued, suggesting that criticism of it had made little impact.

This article presents the findings of eight months of ethnographic research conducted in 2006 in three Salvadoran NGOs that had challenged suppression and promoted an alternative gang policy encompassing investigative policing and prevention/rehabilitation. The objective is to examine how these civil society groups –the legal advocacy organization FESPAD (Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho), the peer rehabilitation group Homies Unidos, and the Catholic development NGO Polígono Industrial Don Bosco– contested Mano Dura and why their activism remained relatively ineffective. Specifically, the article considers how both the domestic context and organizational characteristics shaped NGO strategies –legal and policy advocacy, gang empowerment/rehabilitation, and modeling a gang program– and ultimately their policy influence. I argue that while contextual factors constituted critical advocacy barriers, for organizational and tactical reasons NGO advocacy failed to generate sufficient pressure to motivate policy change. The

article begins by outlining El Salvador's socio-political context and the organizational criteria that shaped NGO advocacy. It then supplies a portrait of each agency, discusses their advocacy strategies, and compares the approaches to show why these largely failed to reorient the government's gang policy. Lastly, I offer some comments on gang control under the first FMLN government that was elected in 2009 and had pledged to focus on crime prevention. This research sought neither to evaluate the gang programs of specific NGOs nor to undermine their reputation, even though it entails an appraisal of these organizations and their work. Rather, the intention is to show how these agencies operated and why their efforts to foster comprehensive gang control ultimately failed. The findings entail lessons for future gang-related advocacy.

NGO ethnography

Explaining NGO attempts to promote an alternative gang strategy requires investigating the socio-political environment as well as agency characteristics and strategies. Both dimensions help appreciate the exogenous and endogenous factors inhibiting or facilitating NGO advocacy.

El Salvador's historical and contemporary context

El Salvador's economic and political affairs have traditionally revolved around the country's oligarchy. By virtue of their vast social and financial power these dynasties were able to exercise substantial influence over state institutions and policy-making. Until the early 1930s they protected their interests through direct political control and institutionalised violence (Dunkerley, 1982). Over the next five decades the elite retained its economic dominance but ceded the reins of government to the military, which acted as the guardian of the moneyed classes and forcibly quelled any challenge to the status quo (Stanley, 1996). Permanent exclusion of the majorities prompted recurrent challenges to unjust socio-economic structures, but all resistance was violently crushed. This cycle convinced many Salvadorans that peaceful change was unattainable and armed

struggle the only feasible route. Alarmed by the revolutionary threat, in October 1979 a progressive faction of the Salvadoran army staged a coup to create a democratic political system and initiate pro-poor policies, but the junta's reforms were blocked by conservative officers (Paige, 1997). The military-oligarchy alliance had broken and soon thereafter the civil war ensued, pitching the government army against the guerrilla organizations of the FMLN. The elite, however, moved swiftly to reassert its dominant position in the country and in 1981 created a political party that would henceforth defend its economic and political interests. Following its 1989 presidential victory, the government of Alfredo Cristiani embarked on a United Nations-mediated process that culminated in the 1992 peace accords and ended the fighting that had occasioned more than sevety thousand civilian deaths and shattered the nation's economy.

The factors that facilitated a negotiated settlement include a change in post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy, the erosion of the FMLN's external support and a softening of its own ideological stance, a military stalemate, international outrage at the Jesuit killings, the impact of the regional peace process, the war's socio-economic costs, and pro-peace public opinion (Dunkerley, 1993; Montgomery, 1995). A prime factor, however, was a shift in elite economic interests and an associated preference for ending the war and managing a transition to electoral democracy. ARENA's electoral success convinced moderate parts of the elite that a more pluralistic political system was a desirable concession in return for a cessation of the conflict and the prospects of rebuilding its influence (Juhn, 1998). Yet, the right endorsed only a limited conception of democracy –restricted to elections and free speech– and rejected the notion that it might be used to redress the imbalance of socio-economic power (Paige, 1997). Elite indifference to democratic consolidation would stall the creation of an institutionality and policy-making consistent with the new regime.

Over the past two decades the country has made important strides, including the definite cessation of hostilities, the military's removal from political life, the creation of a new civilian police force, the political integration of the left, improved respect for human rights, and greater freedom of expression. Notwithstanding these advances, El Salvador's democracy remains fragile. State institutions remained politicized, protective of elite

interests but unresponsive to majority needs (Wolf, 2009a). The judicial system lacks independence and effectiveness in dispensing justice, and weak investigative policing means that only four percent of homicides are successfully prosecuted (Blanco and Díaz, 2007). The media, traditionally the elite's mouthpiece, have reversed some of their earlier openings and provide only limited space for dissenting voices. The neoliberal policies followed by successive ARENA administrations have preserved economic inequalities, and the poverty reduction that has occurred is due to large-scale out-migration and the associated flow of remittances (PNUD, 2003). Gang activity flourished in many marginal urban zones, and crime and violence reached unprecedented levels. Persistent economic problems and insecurity, as well as a generalised perception that little has been done to tackle them, has led to widespread disillusionment (Cruz, 2002).

In short, the country's transition to electoral democracy bolstered civil and political rights, but produced no fundamental power realignment and preserved certain dynamics that neutralize social change efforts. Three contextual factors in particular were salient in affecting NGO advocacy: the persistence of elite influence, the nature of the ruling party, and concentration of media ownership. If the environment supplies facilitating and inhibiting conditions for NGO advocacy, organizational characteristics and strategies are all the more crucial for impacting policy formulation and implementation.

Researching NGOs

This research departs from the view that "[w]hat is on paper an organization becomes a 'living, breathing' social organism, with all the intricacies, emotions, and contradictions we associate with human relations" (Schwartzman, 1993: 18). Rather than merely analyzing how and under what conditions NGOs sought to promote an alternative gang policy, I was interested in the ways that staff constitute the organizations on a daily basis. In each setting the research explored everyday activities and social processes, including NGO workers' motivations, the stories they tell, and the interests, values, beliefs, and experiences they bring to their job.

NGO activist capacity and strategies depend on organizational formation and maintenance. These internal factors are critical for understanding why some agencies are politically influential while others are not (Ahmed and Potter, 2006). Organizations often arise because an individual or group identifies a problem, decides that it should be addressed, and seeks to mobilize people and resources to achieve that purpose. These "organizational entrepreneurs" (Ahmed and Potter, 2006: 25) commit time and energy –and sometimes funds– to establish an NGO, define its mission, and steer it through its initial phase of development. Once created, agencies must acquire the capacity to conduct their operations whilst ensuring their sustainability. Maintaining an organization requires not only commitment, but also human and material resources. Therefore, staffs need to develop their fundraising ability as well as the skills and knowledge required to advance their agenda. A shortage of funds and technical know-how affects NGOs' ability to create policy change, and for many of them organizational survival often becomes a challenge in itself.

Advocacy strategies vary depending on the objectives pursued. NGOs' strategic choices, while circumscribed by organizational capacity, hinge on two endogenous factors: status and ideology. Groups with a positive reputation, often won through demonstrated competence, can draw on their credibility to access the political system and the media more easily. However, the strategies NGOs adopt are also informed by their ideological position. NGOs differ in how they view an advocacy issue and seek to effect policy change. The stance they take on each question has consequences for the political outcomes they strive for. NGOs may support policy changes, but what transformations they can induce will depend on the nature of their involvement in the policy process (Casey, 2004). Their ideological position shapes the broader tactical style, which in turn determines substantive priorities and the degree of antagonism with which the authorities are approached. The organizations I studied implemented different advocacy strategies, which gave preference to direct policy influence or change on the ground. Although the immediate targeting of decision-makers may seem the more obvious approach, NGO advocacy can aim for policy alternatives through other means such as the empowerment of

weaker social groups or the creation of innovative programs. While these efforts do not constitute direct interventions in the policy process, they alter the policy context and can pressure the administration to adopt different guidelines.

To assess the organizations' influence I compare their policy positions with their achievements at three levels: government discourse, policy change, and state behavior (see Keck and Sikkink, 1998). An administration's rhetorical commitments may be interpreted as a victory for the NGOs or an attempt to stifle further criticism. More importantly, one must ascertain whether a shift occurs in both policy and behavior: the adoption of new guidelines may seem to denote success, but the existence of policy documents and institutions is meaningless in the absence of implementation. Indeed, the outcome of the advocacy efforts, notably the persistence of Mano Dura, points to limitations in the NGO strategies.

Contesting Mano Dura FESPAD

- The institutional history

FESPAD emerged during the final years of the armed conflict when a group of local lawyers hoped to craft a more democratic and rights-respecting society. Combining academic work with popular legal education, the agency managed to raise its public profile and establish itself as a reference point in the areas of human rights and the administration of justice. When FESPAD sought to promote an alternative gang policy, its reputation as a respectable and professional organization would be important in affording it access to decision-makers. In its attempts to influence the design and implementation of legislation and public policies, the NGO draws on a variety of tools, including citizen organizing, legal aid to human rights victims, the documentation of abuses, the evaluation of policies and state behavior as well as legal and policy proposals.

In 2006 FESPAD was structured around two thematic centers one of which, the Center for Criminal Studies of El Salvador (CEPES), was

tasked with advocating an alternative gang policy. Originally formed around a critically-minded group of law students, CEPES members were sensitive to the country's political history and sought to infuse their thinking into the centre's work. The small cluster of staff had been carrying out activities in the fields of public security and criminal justice, producing legal analyses and assessments of policies and institutional developments. To stimulate changes the CEPES disseminated reports and publicized its stance in paid ads placed in the country's principal newspapers. This preference for research over action-oriented work helps understand the limitations of the center's gang-related advocacy.

The NGO's technical expertise, however, is hard to deny, and government officials have quite readily consulted the lawyers on legal affairs or sent police officers to FESPAD's community policing workshops. Given both the organization's extensive range of concerns and the persistent difficulties in resolving them, FESPAD enjoys regular participation in the country's political life and, by implication, public visibility. However, the NGO lacks the resources to make a sustained commitment to the resolution of long-term problems and mostly limits its involvement to particular junctures. Its gang-related advocacy exemplifies the implications of this choice.

- The strategic repertoire

FESPAD challenged Mano Dura through several instruments. Initially, the NGO protested the plan through media and research-based advocacy, issuing public statements and reports disclosing ineffectiveness of suppression and the HRVs associated with it (FESPAD, 2003; 2004). The mainstream press offered FESPAD the means to reach decision-makers, but rightist groups used the same platform to assail the NGO for coddling criminals while leaving upstanding citizens unprotected (*EDH*, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c). Pro-Mano Dura news coverage crowded out the agency's voice, and the publications, valuably exposing illegalities to public opprobrium, were not followed by additional lobbying. The reports aimed to stir the government into action, yet this "shaming methodology" (Roth, 2004:

67) depended on the media's willingness to reveal abuses and the authorities' vulnerability to such publicity. Since the administration was presumably aware of Mano Dura's adverse effects but lacked the political will to take a different approach, FESPAD would have needed to buttress these advocacy mechanisms with greater pressure. The failure to do so was one of the most glaring omissions in the NGO's tactic.

In an important second step the agency resorted to multilateral institutions. As Antonio Saca's Súper Mano Dura campaign was in full swing, FESPAD and other civil society organizations submitted a shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The body's recommendations (UNCRC, 2004) echoed the concerns of Salvadoran human rights defenders. By projecting this information onto the international stage and triggering external demands for state compliance with human rights standards, these actors had initiated a "boomerang pattern" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) that helped unblock the local policy process. Although a comprehensive gang policy would ultimately not be implemented, these developments had at least sent the message that suppression and constitutional infringements were unacceptable.

When the incoming Saca administration convened an Anti-Gang Forum, ostensibly to reach a consensus on comprehensive gang control, FESPAD was among the few civil society groups that had been invited to share their expertise. CEPES members participated to prevent the design of further LAM-style gang legislation and to insist on prevention/rehabilitation programs (Montoya, 2005). The event received considerable media coverage, allowing the government to imply that it was serious about gang control. From an advocacy perspective, however, the outcome was disappointing. Participants decided against special anti-gang laws and reaffirmed the need for prevention/rehabilitation (Montoya, 2005), but these alternative measures would not be pursued with the same urgency as suppression. While FESPAD's positive reputation had afforded it access to policy-makers, at the decision-making table it proved less adept at managing the power dynamics involved. On the one hand, the forum had amounted to "invited" rather than "created" policy space (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2007: 208) in which FESPAD did not participate on its own terms. On the other hand, the NGO appears

to have misjudged the possibilities for consensus and underestimated the need to demonstrate greater negotiating power. Having failed to anticipate that they might be co-opted for publicity purposes (Montoya, 2005), the lawyers could not translate their access to decision-makers into influence over them.

While FESPAD remained expectant that prevention/rehabilitation programs would materialize, it sought to carry forward its advocacy through its legal aid clinic. Specializing in the defense of low-income juvenile offenders, the advice centre aimed to set legal precedents as a means of lobbying for state accountability on HRVs, particularly police harassment/malpractice and abuses in juvenile reformatories. As part of this work the NGO hoped to challenge Mano Dura through an emblematic case of police harassment. The example concerned a deported ex-gang member who had suffered repeated blows and unfounded arrests since his return to El Salvador in early 2003. FESPAD formally requested an investigation into arbitrary acts, but the matter did not advance both for lack of evidence and institutional reluctance to oppose police misconduct. The public prosecutor assigned to the case considered it "political" and refused to investigate police who he thought merely sought to tackle El Salvador's gang problem (Gallegos, 2006). Another case, concerning the suspected police killing of a gang member, did not prosper either, because the victim's mother received threats by PNC members and desisted from proceeding against the institution (Montoya, 2007). Thereafter FESPAD resigned to the apparent impossibility of criticizing Mano Dura through the legal aid clinic and instead worked on a local gang program.

This initiative formed part of the Children in Organized Armed Violence (COAV) project that had begun with a ten-country study (Dowdney, 2005) and required developing a proposal for gang violence prevention. The target site was the south-central city of Zacatecoluca, which witnessed drug and gang activity and as of 2004 ranked sixth among the nation's twenty most violent municipalities (IUDOP and FESPAD, 2007). For the COAV Cities Project, the CEPES and the Jesuit University's public opinion institute (IUDOP) convened a working group of governmental and civil society actors to craft the policy document. The

committee, created earlier to address the town's broader problem of violence, enjoyed the support of the FMLN mayor who was also meant to execute the strategy.

Over a six-month period twelve workshops were held, requiring participants to analyze risk factors, propose solutions, and identify the actors responsible for implementing them. The organizers drafted the policy paper and submitted it to the FMLN mayor for implementation. However, the 2006 municipal elections brought into power an ARENA government, which declined to undertake the pilot intervention (Montoya, 2007).

The principal shortcomings of the project were fourfold. First, most members of the inter-institutional committee lacked gang expertise and instead based their ideas on intuition and personal experiences. Second, the policy document failed to specify how the recommendations might be implemented and ignored issues of targeting, gang processes/structures, and community contexts (see Klein and Maxson, 2006). Third, the community-based gang prevention program was not paired with a national gang strategy and –in the absence of multi-level inter-institutional cooperation, less suppressive policing, and macro-level responses to structural issues– was unlikely to have had much impact. Fourth, FESPAD's failure to anticipate the mayor's antagonism to the project suggests both a lack of preparation for the way political developments may interfere with advocacy and a perception of gang control as a technical –not a political– problem. Their policy rejected, the lawyers permitted the project to peter out when it needed to be reinforced.

Homies Unidos

- The story of Homies Unidos

Homies Unidos (HU) emerged due to the inspiration, organizing skills, and fundraising efforts of Magdaleno Rose-Ávila. During a temporary stay in San Salvador the Mexican-American ex-gang member turned activist happened upon deported gang youths and eventually persuaded

them to conduct a gang study and establish their own NGO (Rose-Ávila, 2007). Having secured external funding and research support, Magdaleno recruited 22 gang members, mostly of MS-13 and the Dieciocho. The group was trained to conduct a survey among more than a thousand active gang members to explore their reasons for gang joining and their perceptions of gang life and personal needs. The resulting study (Cruz and Portillo, 1998) concluded that gang joining is facilitated by factors such as social exclusion and poor educational/job opportunities and found that 85% of interviewees were prepared to abandon the most pernicious aspects of gang membership but not its perceived benefits (friendship, solidarity, and respect). The research thus invited gang pro-grammers to offer youths opportunities and accept them as *pandilleros calmados* (gang members retired from drugs and violence).

Basing its philosophy on this study, Homies Unidos aimed to empow-er gang members by bringing together former rivals who would design solutions to their peers' problems and encourage them to abandon drugs and violence. The HU objective was to act as a bridge between gang mem-bers and the conventional world and provide access to opportunities. HU staff recruitment and training were reserved for gang members, because they were thought to identify with, and respond to, their peers more read-ily than those with no experience of gang life. During the formative years Magdaleno worked to bring together MS and Dieciocho personnel in equal measure. However, given the long-standing hostilities between them it proved challenging to maintain a balance, and one of the groups tend-ed to dominate the organization at one point or another (Rose-Ávila, 2007). By 2006 the agency had come to be staffed exclusively by former Dieciocho members working mostly with this gang. HU workers' identi-fication with gang culture, I argue, limited their policy influence since it informed their strategic choices and shaped external perceptions of the NGO which in turn restricted their relationships with other actors.

During Magdaleno's time emphasis was placed on staff training, the internalization of the HU mission, and the development of programmat-ic content. The leadership, however, neglected transforming HU mem-bers' values and thinking patterns and monitoring whether they did indeed withdraw from drugs, crime, and violence. Sexual harassment and

other inappropriate behavior, for example, was largely ignored, some personnel were suspected of drug sales and one apparently killed over it (Gage, 2007). These incidents suggest that Homies Unidos struggled early on to establish itself as a professional organization. When Magdaleno ended his participation after two years to move on to other activities, he left NGO maintenance and operations in the hands of individuals who had yet to overcome their gang past. Indeed, the organizational entrepreneur acknowledged (Rose-Ávila, 2007) that after his departure the agency experienced an institutional deterioration, because some of the recruits sought a cover for continued gang activity. In short, after Magdaleno's departure HU staff had yet to successfully address both their personal situation and institutional strengthening before they could be reasonably expected to conduct gang-related advocacy.

Today Homies Unidos carries out six programs to further its empowerment strategy: staff development; prevention (information politics); education (school placement and provision of access to university scholarships); health (sexual health education and HIV/AIDS awareness sessions); rehabilitation (provision of access to drug treatment, tattoo removal, and job training/development); and human rights (activities related to the defense of gang members' rights). Additionally, the agency assists journalists, students, and researchers in gaining information about, or access to, gangs.

Three areas that are fundamental to successful NGO operations constituted critical barriers to HU advocacy: funding; job routines; and staff skills. First, like other Salvadoran NGOs Homies Unidos is constrained by the project-driven nature of donor assistance and a hostile domestic funding environment, but its fundraising situation is compounded by personnel's past gang membership and criminal involvement. Besides, HU members lacked the ability or motivation to hone their grant-seeking skills and strengthen organizational sustainability, pursuing instead a series of stop-gap measures to keep the organization afloat. Second, if Homies Unidos was to function as an organization, its employees had to internalize conventional values and to conform to agency norms. However, personnel were highly individualistic and often failed to adhere to NGO-internal rules and practices. Overall, the NGO lacked strong

leadership, the commitment to perform tedious but necessary chores, and the ability to plan and organize its advocacy agenda. Third, Homies Unidos has probably had to cope with a higher staff turnover than other NGOs. Frequent personnel changes weakened the organization and required time and resources to be invested in staff training rather than advocacy efforts. HU workers are streetwise and emotionally dedicated to gang members, but have not developed the professional skills required either for NGO maintenance or for gang-related advocacy. Despite their apparent skills deficit HU staff have resisted the recruitment of outsiders who have no gang past but abilities that might strengthen Homies Unidos and therefore its advocacy.

An important characteristic of Homies Unidos was the use of story-telling, which can aid individuals in communicating certain experiences, explaining successes and failures, or sustaining a particular impression of their organization (Schwartzman, 1993). The accounts HU members narrated were of two kinds (rationalizations and image-management) and concerned maintenance difficulties and NGO activities. The most prominent tale came to the fore whenever NGO personnel were required to speak about Homies Unidos and its work. Staff had developed the habit of documenting events with photos and presenting them with "the story of Homies Unidos" to construct a particular account of the group and its contribution to gang control. However, the information largely concerned past activities and conveyed little about the organization's contemporary situation. Rather, it seemed designed to sustain a positive image of Homies Unidos and its work. What was in appearance a functioning NGO had not matured sufficiently to effectively advance its agenda.

- Gang empowerment and rehabilitation

As part of its prevention program HU staff use their first-hand experience of gang life to warn about its perils and insist on the need for alternative responses. These speaking engagements take the form of a testimonial discourse and are performed during school-based events or gang violence seminars to raise awareness among the target audience. The stories

address what it means to be a gang member and draw attention to the social marginality surrounding gang youths. As an advocacy tool gang *testimonios* illustrate not only the possibility of positive change, but also underscore the need to prevent the destruction of more human lives. While the stories' impact on gang control remains uncertain (Decker and van Winkle, 1996; Hoffmann, 2004), as a form of "information politics" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 18) they can help alter the policy context and increase pressure for comprehensive gang control. Information politics had the potential to advance HU advocacy. However, in 2006 the talks did not get beyond the planning stage, partly because renewed funding difficulties made organizational survival a priority, partly because the arrest of one employee (discussed below) temporarily displaced any concern for routine work.

The human rights program was important in that it confronted the discrimination, police harassment, arbitrary arrests, and appalling detention conditions facing gang members. Yet, it reflected organizational and strategic weaknesses and could hope to achieve little more than to address immediate problems in an isolated fashion. Over the years Homies Unidos countered gang suppression by (unsuccessfully) challenging the constitutionality of the LAM, supporting protests against the prison situation, and reporting abusive policing practices, but made no sustained effort to reorient gang enforcement. These steps aside, HU staff spent much of their time at police stations to secure the release of recently-arrested gang members, often without success. The human rights program offered perhaps most scope for lobbying activities, such as the targeting of government, media outreach, or collaboration with other NGOs. Its difficulties, however, were twofold. First, the authorities were largely unreceptive to calls to respect gang members' rights, especially if these requests came from ex-gang members. Second, HU staff had learned to speak the rights language, but had no strategy to advance these principles in practice. Instead, personnel invested time and scarce resources in activities that responded to their peers' needs but were unlikely to further their advocacy.

To kindle gang youths' transition to a more conventional lifestyle, Homies Unidos helps them access services such as skills and job develop-

ment. The NGO has reportedly placed a number of ex-gang affiliates in vocational training (Romero, 2006), but employment opportunities have been more difficult to secure given the scarcity of meaningful jobs and private sector reluctance to hire gang members. Self-employment in the form of a microenterprise can therefore constitute a valuable source of income for individuals with tattoos or a criminal record. In 2006 Homies Unidos began one such experiment as part of a rehabilitation project for members of the Dieciocho clique in La Campanera, Soyapango, a deprived industrial conurbation outside San Salvador. The agency provided the inductions and infrastructure for a bakery and offered to organize workshops on issues such as HIV/AIDS and human rights. The gang members were expected to prepare bread and pastries for daily sale by non-tattooed helpers and turn the scheme into a self-sustainable venture. Although the bakery got off to a successful start, soon after its inauguration arrests of some of the youths prompted the work to come to a standstill. To protest the harassment and detentions Homies Unidos solicited appointments with the police chief and even requested his appearance before a legislative commission. However, all petitions remained unsuccessful, suggesting that the organization lacked the capacity to gain access to, let alone exercise influence over, officials and press for changes in policing. The bakery was to encounter yet greater problems, but meanwhile the NGO faced its own internal crisis that distracted from its advocacy activities.

In May 2006 Heriberto, the director of rehabilitation, was arrested for the murder of another Dieciocho member. In February 2007 Heriberto and the co-defendant (an active Dieciocho member) would be sentenced to 16 years in prison for the crime, ostensibly committed over a gang-internal drug dispute (Tribunal Quinto, 2007). The country's media instantly seized on the case, and even though HU staff set aside routine tasks to mobilize support for Heriberto, news of the arrest quickly spread and dented the NGO's reputation. International donors phoned in to voice their concern, and domestic actors expressed to me their wariness of an organization they had already perceived as biased and unreliable. However, HU personnel remained focused on Heriberto's welfare and made no public relations effort to restore some of the agency's previous status.

On my following trip to La Campanera I accompanied two HU employees who wanted to check on the bakery and hold an HIV/AIDS awareness workshop for which they had enlisted an external speaker. My companions filmed the event and provided the youths with food and a generous amount of condoms. While these contributions were positively received, it is unclear how they might contribute to gang violence reduction. In fact, HU staff seemed more concerned with meeting their peers' personal needs than with finding ways of translating their rhetoric of gang empowerment and alternative gang control into a more powerful advocacy agenda. The bakery team, on the other hand, had incurred financial losses and suffered under the irregular working hours of some youths.

When I next visited La Campanera, this time with two probation officers, the community was under a police-military siege and the bakery closed. Homies Unidos and the gang members would publicly condemn police harassment and fault the PNC for its perceived interference with the rehabilitation initiative (LPG, 2006). The police, however, had increased their presence in the area after one youth had killed a particularly bothersome law enforcement officer (Poveda, 2006). As tensions grew the police even raided a 200-strong funeral wake, forcing the males to strip down to their underwear and beating them prior to their arrest (IHRC, 2007). The incident offered an opportunity to highlight police abuse against gang members and press for more rights-respecting law enforcement. However, Homies Unidos closed the Campanera bakery and ceased its activities in the community, arguing that gang suppression had made its work impossible (Romero, 2006).

Two observations are warranted here, one about the project's place in gang-related advocacy, the other concerning its premature end. First, the bakery could have helped to alter the policy context and pressure the authorities into pursuing an alternative to Mano Dura. Specifically, Homies Unidos could have combined it with media work to show that gang control required employment opportunities and that it could offer a way of addressing the problem. However, staff neglected to tie the project into a broader lobbying strategy. Second, the NGO insufficiently monitored the bakery to determine whether the youths were beginning to withdraw from crime and violence. Oversight was important partly

because skills/job provision does not necessarily lead to gang desistance, partly because Mano Dura had encouraged more gang members to solicit a rehabilitation initiative from Homies Unidos (Romero, 2006). I do not argue that the Campanera youths merely sought to convert the bakery into a gang hangout, but some of them were often unaccountable, and drug consumption in the bakery continued (Poveda, 2006; Ramírez Campos, 2006). Instead of closely supervising the youths and fostering dialogue with the police, HU staff lacked the creativity or motivation to design a project that fulfilled the dual purpose of rehabilitation and gang-related advocacy.

The Polígono Industrial Don Bosco (Polígono/PIDB)

- The Polígono's Salesian roots

The Polígono emerged and expanded largely due to the creativity and fundraising efforts of its founder and director, the Spanish priest José Moratalla. "Padre Pepe" designed the organization to meet its host community's development needs, but retained his congregation's traditional concern with the spiritual-material welfare of society's most underprivileged youths. Moratalla's attempts to alleviate their social marginality began in 1985 when he assumed a teaching post at the Salesian School in La Iberia. Situated in eastern San Salvador, this *barrio* grew from a temporary, 1960s post-earthquake settlement into a permanent housing option for many low-income families.

Upon his arrival in La Iberia the Father found a community rife with alcoholism, drug consumption, and high levels of crime and violence. In the absence of meaningful jobs many girls had turned to prostitution while male youths were involved in delinquent gangs. Over time the priest realized that education and work training alone did not permit individuals to secure decent employment. A possible solution lay in the creation of co-operatives, which could provide jobs and enable people to overcome a culture of dependency (Moratalla, 2006). Moratalla persuaded the local mayor to lease a piece of land, and on what was the municipal

rubbish dump youths started building their future workplace. In 1988 the Polígono commenced operations with ten mostly industrial, co-operatives and later added a multi-storey educational institute (Cuerno, 2004; Moratalla, n/d).

La Iberia offers a picture of progress, but social problems persist in this community of 45 thousand inhabitants. Bordered by a defunct railway line, factories, a market, and a bus terminal, the zone lacks recreational space, suffers from noise and air pollution, overcrowding, and insalubrious living conditions (UCA, 2003). At least 80% of families work in the informal sector (EDYTRA, 2006), and due to job-related migration most homes are single-parent households (Azucena, 2006). More significantly, crime remains pervasive, particularly homicides, robberies, extortions, drug sales, and gang activity. Indeed, the Polígono's location in MS territory has exposed staff and students alike to gang harassment and extortions (Ramírez, 2006).

The NGO's residential program for at-risk youth, gang members, and juvenile offenders was adopted in a rather fortuitous manner. Moratalla and his staff had been worked with street children, but these began to be absorbed by gangs. When in 1995 UNICEF proposed a scholarship-based alternative to the deficient rehabilitation in juvenile reformatories, gang members started being transferred to the Polígono for sentence completion (De Varela, 2005). Over the years, however, PIDB staff recognized the challenges of gang rehabilitation and restricted entry to applicants who had demonstrably relinquished their gang mentality (Ramírez, 2006).

Despite these limitations the agency has acquired a reputation as a successful gang prevention/rehabilitation centre. Its standing afforded the NGO positive media coverage and facilitated access to policy-makers and funding. Like many NGOs the Polígono has experienced financial difficulties, but developed a robust donor base. Besides gifts in cash and kind, the institution receives much of its revenue from multilateral or bilateral donors and the Salvadoran government. At the time of my research the authorities provided –under annually renewable contracts– more than sixty percent of the Polígono's income (Leiva, 2006). The receipt of public funding had two implications for the Polígono's gang-related advocacy. First, it threatened the NGO's independence and required cautious

criticism of Mano Dura. Second, since the government could demonstrate its commitment to gang prevention/rehabilitation without needing to carry out programs of its own, the Polígono's cooperative attitude might have inadvertently decreased the pressure for an alternative policy.

- Showcasing the Polígono's gang program

The NGO's work with gang-prone and gang-involved youths is structured around a residential education and job-training project that also constituted the basis of its anti-Mano Dura advocacy. Scholarship holders, generally aged 14-18 years, join the Polígono following a lengthy admissions process, and recurring agreement violations can lead to the students' expulsion from the institution. Participants receive free medical care and gender-separate lodging where they must follow rules designed to maintain order and morality on the premises. Their daily schedule includes compulsory activities such as prayers, recreation, and counseling, but focuses on education and vocational skills.

For Moratalla (2006) the chief problem in gang prevention/rehabilitation is the dearth of job opportunities. The Polígono's educational and training activities are therefore aimed at preparing individuals for self-employment in a co-operative or microenterprise. At the heart of the Polígono are the Instituto Técnico Obrero-Empresarial (ITOE) and the largely industrial co-operatives that provide employment to Iberia residents. The ITOE offers education from the pre-school to high school level and serves more than 300 students (Leiva, 2006). The curriculum, emphasizing technical training and business administration, requires those in secondary education to attend vocational workshops while high school students must join a co-operative as unpaid apprentices.

The Polígono tries to demonstrate the viability of its entrepreneurial model by means of its own co-operatives, dedicated primarily to the fabrication of easily marketable products in areas such as furniture-making, shoe manufacture, bakery, and ceramics. Over time, however, three firms ceased operations for competition-induced reasons or staff flight

(Ramírez, 2006) while the remaining seven can pay little more than the minimum wage. Like co-ops, microenterprises are characterized by relatively low skills and capital requirements which is what makes them attractive. Yet, the risk of concentrating on low-entry-barrier activities is one of market overcrowding and resulting low returns. Microenterprises therefore function mostly as survival strategies. Their profitability and viability is particularly uncertain in El Salvador's economic environment, which is dominated by large domestic and transnational corporations that sell locally-manufactured or imported products at more competitive prices.

Conversely, the Polígono may not adequately prepare its youths for entrepreneurism. This skepticism is illustrated by the case of 19-year-old Carlos (a pseudonym), a heavily-tattooed, primary school educated Dieciocho member who joined the institution to complete a murder sentence. Two years into his stay, however, security concerns prompted his release into house arrest where he started his bakery. When I visited the six-month-old installation, lauded by the Polígono as a rehabilitative achievement, I found a one-person firm operating in rudimentary and unsanitary conditions. At the time Carlos acknowledged that while his start capital was insufficient to expand the bakery, he did not know how to raise more funds. The example suggests that the agency provides youths with some degree of vocational training, but not with the necessary business administration skills. Indeed, their unpaid apprenticeships seem to benefit less the youths (some of whom were not interested in the trades they learned) than the Polígono, which can keep down its labor costs.

Moratalla and his team support microenterprises, because these can provide individuals with a modicum income where meaningful employment is scarce. An approach to job creation and poverty alleviation that requires people to manage their own welfare through participation in the market economy, microenterprise development is consistent with the neoliberal values espoused by ARENA administrations and permitted the NGO to gain governmental backing. However, it is unclear to what extent such income-generation can encourage gang desistance and constitute a feasible alternative for individuals who can reap greater (and faster) profits with extortions or drug sales.

More generally, the showcasing of the Polígono's gang program displayed limitations concerning its perceived success and the advocacy methods used. The NGO does not target people for services but receives them through referrals (juvenile offenders/gang members) or self-referrals (at-risk youths). After the first intake of gang members it developed a screening mechanism –based on interviews and psychometric tests– to filter candidates and exclude more difficult cases. According to its selection criteria, the Polígono now bars youths with a nuclear family, a drug addiction, a low IQ or special learning needs, and gang membership/identification. These standards exclude those most in need of assistance, but the organization also resorts to "net-widening", supplying services to adolescents who are disadvantaged but not necessarily at risk of gang joining. The lack of independent evaluations makes it difficult to ascertain the Polígono's contribution to gang prevention/rehabilitation. The agency's own estimates indicate that ninety percent of participants changed their life while 10 percent re-offended or were killed (Ramírez, 2006). The boarders I interviewed could only confirm that the number of gang youths had decreased over the years and –by the time of my research– had declined to one.

The Polígono's location in gang territory may lie behind this downward trend –one participant was killed on the premises by local gang members (Ramírez, 2006). However, the organization's applicant screening –discriminating against gang members in favor of individuals more amenable to intervention– also raises questions about its capacity for gang control. The fact that staff (mostly trained teachers and psychologists) did not tackle the gang problem in the community –where the impact could have been greater than in the residential setting– suggests that they lack the necessary expertise. While the Polígono's work with marginalized teenagers is valuable in a country that has little to offer to its youth, it is debatable whether a gang program that essentially rejects those it claims to serve merits this label. Notwithstanding the poor evidence for its model gang program, the NGO had acquired –and successfully defended– its reputation as an effective gang prevention/rehabilitation center. This status allowed Moratalla to become a prominent champion of alternative gang control, but ultimately served

the Polígono more in strengthening its institutional visibility and sustainability than in influencing gang policy-making. The limitations of this advocacy are largely related to the tactics employed to showcase the program and promote an alternative gang strategy.

The primary objective was to create a professional and sustainable model of gang prevention/rehabilitation that could be replicated by others. Believing that democracy required civil society to engage political leaders not through opposition but dialogue and consensus, Moratalla wished not to merely condemn Mano Dura but to demonstrate a more appropriate response. In other words, the priest and his team hoped to build an initiative that might "contaminate" reality and transform it (Moratalla, 2006). Given the Polígono's reputation as a successful gang intervention agency, the Father was also frequently invited to present his work in media interviews and gang-related forums. Although this permitted the organization to share ideas and highlight policy alternatives, quiet pressure was unlikely to reorient the government's existing approach to gang control. A more confrontational strategy that incorporated, for example, lobbying or media work, would have been more powerful. However, as a largely state-funded agency the Polígono was effectively inhibited from criticizing the authorities in more explicit terms. Non-adversarial in style, the showcasing of the model program provided the Polígono with certain benefits (a greater institutional profile and improved funding) and therefore an incentive to maintain it, despite its ineffectiveness as an advocacy strategy.

Recognizing the limited reach of his project and the need for a national strategy, Moratalla joined several civil society initiatives aimed at advancing comprehensive gang control. Successful alliances with other groups could have made the Polígono a politically more powerful advocate of prevention/rehabilitation. However, the priest withdrew from one network because he considered it a talking shop (Ramírez, 2006), and another coalition disintegrated because participants disagreed about the gang phenomenon and its solutions and lacked common objectives (organizational survival took precedence) (Moratalla, 2006; Ruano, 2006). I would add that the NGOs had not developed the strategies and skills required for the articulation of political demands. Gang control contin-

ued to be seen as a technical issue (to be resolved through proposal-making) rather than a political one (to be addressed through more creative and confrontational advocacy strategies). Overall, the challenge for gang-related NGO advocacy remained one of better understanding the power dynamics in El Salvador and persuading economic and political elites to embark on the structural changes that gang prevention/rehabilitation ultimately requires.

Discussion and conclusion

The article examined how three Salvadoran NGOs sought to promote alternative gang control and why their advocacy efforts remained largely ineffective. Mano Dura, launched by the Flores government in 2003, proposed to cut the homicide rate by cracking down on gangs and permitted the arrest of their members on account of physical traits. The mass media legitimized the initiative by fanning a gang panic, depicting suppression as the most appropriate response, and thus increasing public support for it. Given widespread criticism of the measure the Saca administration ostensibly incorporated prevention/rehabilitation into Súper Mano Dura, but resisted the implementation of a full-fledged gang policy. Indeed, since Mano Dura constituted a populist penal policy introduced to enhance ARENA's electoral appeal, it was modified only to deflect criticism and to avoid addressing structural gang-spawning factors. The ethnographic analysis of NGO advocacy permitted a holistic understanding of the organizations and highlighted the possibilities for, and limits, of activism in a post-war context that remains marked by historical patterns of economic and political dominance. The research showed how the agencies' strategies –and ultimately their policy influence– were shaped not only by organizational characteristics and tactical decisions, but also by contextual factors, notably elite influence over the state, ARENA's elite-protective nature, and the absence of a pluralistic media system. The remainder of the article offers a comparative discussion of NGO organizational characteristics and advocacy strategies before concluding with an observation on the prospects of comprehensive gang control in El Salvador.

NGO advocacy strategies compared

The NGOs' capacity for, and approach to, activism, depended on their formation and maintenance. The lawyers institute FESPAD, dedicated to the defense of justice and human rights, contested Mano Dura through legal and policy advocacy while the Polígono, a Salesian-based development agency, channeled its educational services to marginalized youths into a gang program. Homies Unidos, founded by gang members to foster peer empowerment/rehabilitation, remained focused on this goal even when it began to promote alternative gang control. Importantly, the impetus for the project came from an organizational entrepreneur whose departure left a vacuum that staff seemed unable to fill.

The strategies were also informed by the NGOs' ideological positions. How they viewed the advocacy issue and how antagonistically they approached the authorities had consequences for the policy influence they pursued. While the agencies agreed on the need for prevention/rehabilitation, FESPAD and the Polígono endorsed the official view that gangs should be dissolved and thus could directly convey to policymakers –though with mixed results– the importance of rights-respecting policing and social intervention. By contrast, the *pandilleros calmados* of Homies Unidos argued that youths should abandon drugs and violence but not a group that fulfilled positive functions. Since this standpoint, and HU identity, conflicted with the authorities' disapproving perception of gang members, the agency found it inevitably more difficult to even meet with officials. In their relationship with the state the NGOs preferred confrontation or collaboration. HU members, given their gang attachment, were the only activists who maintained an explicitly antagonistic stance. FESPAD and the Polígono, on the other hand, rejected a purely adversarial rapport and sought to assist the government in developing more effective gang control. Importantly, neither confrontational nor collaborative efforts were backed up by greater political pressure, but since the administration lacked the incentive to counter police abuse and pursue gang prevention/rehabilitation, it was unlikely to respond to NGO advocacy demands unless compelled to do so. The organizations that embraced collaboration because they considered it more legitimate

political behavior weakened their strategies insofar as an adversarial style was discarded when the advocacy situation required it.

Agencies with a positive reputation are more likely to be consulted by the media and policy-makers. However, they must also have the necessary funds to operate and professional skills/knowledge advance their advocacy agenda. Deficits in these areas may threaten organizational survival and affect NGOs' ability to create policy change. For FESPAD and the Polígono, widely respected for their work, access to the authorities and the media was comparatively easier. By contrast, HU staff received little media attention, and their status as ex-gang members implied strained relations with government and police. The NGO's public reputation was further dented when of its directors was arrested (and later convicted) for homicide. Funding was a shared concern of the agencies, which had all experienced severe financial crises. FESPAD and Homies Unidos faced particular constraints, because the domestic funding environment is hostile to NGOs that are critically-minded or run by ex-gang members. However, whereas the Polígono and FESPAD dealt with fundraising needs relatively successfully (through official funding or commercial activities), Homies Unidos had not developed appropriate grant-seeking skills and was too preoccupied with organizational sustainability to devote much time to advocacy work.

The promotion of alternative gang control required writing/research abilities, subject expertise, and media and advocacy-planning skills. The need for writing and research competence arose only in FESPAD, which prepared legal analyses, documented HRVs, and revealed the policy gaps of Súper Mano Dura, but showed little capacity for researching and offering policy alternatives. The NGOs drew on different kinds of expert knowledge to carry forward their advocacy. HU members were streetwise, but did not display the capacity or interest to effectively tie gang empowerment/rehabilitation to a broader strategy. Polígono staff, providing young people with education and job training, lacked gang intervention skills but –absent evaluations of its work– could maintain its status as a model gang prevention/rehabilitation center. FESPAD, on the other hand, possessed extensive legal knowledge that was employed to improve gang legislation, but did not demonstrate the expertise that its proposal

for gang violence prevention warranted. Media skills remained underdeveloped in all the NGOs: Homies Unidos faulted unfavorable reporting for not undertaking any media work, the Polígono neglected a proactive communications strategy in its focus on job training/development, and FESPAD's approach could not turn the news about Mano Dura into ideologically contested terrain.

Most importantly, to effectively promote their policy objectives the NGOs had to develop advocacy planning skills –including an analysis of the political environment, its power relations, and its possibilities and limits for advocacy– and map a strategy that reflected these dynamics. All agencies had discerned the characteristics of the domestic context, particularly its power structures, but none tailored its strategy to the intricacies of the advocacy issue. The Polígono applied quiet pressure on the government through its model gang program and seemed unprepared to adopt a different, more effective tactical style. Homies Unidos and FESPAD not only failed to anticipate some of the barriers to their advocacy, but also proved unable to deal with them. In each case advocacy-planning weaknesses were reflected in the choice of advocacy tools and targets.

Advocacy success depended to a great extent on the methods that were adopted (and how they were used) and the actors that were targeted (and how they were approached). To promote alternative gang control the NGOs selected among four tools (information politics, legal mechanisms, public condemnation, and proposals) and four actors (government, the private sector, the media, and civil society). Information politics was a key element of Homies Unidos' prevention program whereby staff talked about their gang experience to raise awareness of the nature of the gang problem and the need for alternative responses. These speaking engagements could have helped increase the pressure for comprehensive gang control, particularly if combined with media work. However, organizational weaknesses precluded a more regular use of this advocacy tool. Legal mechanisms were used exclusively by FESPAD, which sought –unsuccessfully– to obtain redress for an ex-gang member and victim of police harassment and to challenge Mano Dura through this case. The experience demonstrated that legal channels are not a viable advocacy tool where the political class shows little interest in strengthening the

country's institutions and rule of law. If anything, the NGO's inability to recognize the limitations of this approach suggested some degree of political inexperience.

Public condemnation of Mano Dura-related HRVs was pursued by Homies Unidos and FESPAD, either by alerting the Human Rights Ombudsperson (PDDH) to perceived abuses or by publicly exposing violations and thus shaming the government into adopting a rights-respecting gang policy. To motivate a change in state behavior this methodology requires the media's willingness to reveal abuses and the authorities' vulnerability to such publicity. However, the mass media had created a suppression-supportive climate, gang members were widely regarded as perpetrators rather than victims, and the authorities were cognizant of, but indifferent to, the illegalities committed under Mano Dura. More political pressure was therefore needed, but the NGOs failed to keep activating the boomerang pattern (which had shown some initial effects) or to explain to the skeptical public that human rights were no obstacle to gang control. Proposals were favored by the Polígono and FESPAD, which provided constructive criticism of Mano Dura through a model gang program or legal/policy documents. Yet, proposals are unlikely to induce change in the absence of the necessary political will. Both organizations seemed to perceive gang control as a mostly technical issue and –by not effectively balancing confrontation and collaboration– were co-opted into partisan causes.

In important ways NGO advocacy was informed by organizational views of the political context and its power dynamics. There exist three interactive dimensions of power (and hence actors) all of which need to be addressed if an issue is to be advanced successfully: *visible power* (observable decision-making), *hidden power* (the influence of powerful individuals and groups), and *invisible power* (culture and ideology) (Lukes, 1974). NGO preference for some facets over others helps understand why the agencies achieved only limited policy change. First, in their promotion of constitutional anti-gang legislation, prevention/rehabilitation, and rights-respecting policing the agencies focused extensively on the government, even though decision-making occurred largely behind closed doors and the elite had remained the de facto power

in El Salvador. Activities aimed at improving laws and policies could not, and did not, change the structures, values, and behavior that had subverted democratic institutions and conspired against alternative gang control.

Second, the organizations recognized the importance of opportunities provision in gang prevention/rehabilitation, but did not target the private sector, especially economic elite influence over policy-making. Homies Unidos and the Polígono offered self-employment options, even though these were inadequate given the magnitude of the problem. FESPAD, expecting corrective measures from the government, did not aim its criticism at the economic power groups that could improve the structural conditions facilitating gang development and create more resources for prevention/rehabilitation. Third, the NGOs could have used the media to publicize policy positions, alter public perceptions of the gang problem, and create pressure for alternative gang control. FESPAD's basic media strategy afforded the institute some visibility, but its voice was largely silenced by the abundant pro-Mano Dura coverage. Importantly, the lawyers considered the media an advocacy site, but did not confront them in their own right, for example to improve reporting practices. Since journalistic work was shaped by media owners' political and business interests, only changes in the sector itself could have permitted a more responsible news treatment and a more pluralistic debate on gang control.

Fourth, given the complexity of the advocacy issue and organizational resource constraints individual NGOs could advance alternative gang control only to a limited extent. Civil society alliances would have allowed them not only to share advocacy tasks, but also to amplify their political voice and influence. The NGOs all attempted some form of networking or alliance-building, but for different reasons and with different outcomes. Homies Unidos resorted to networking mostly to solicit help with resolving their peers' immediate problems, but these possibilities diminished after the criminal conviction of one employee. FESPAD and the Polígono participated in a civil society-based initiative aimed at promoting a national gang policy, but this coalition disintegrated largely due to disagreements over the gang problem and its solution and a lack of common objectives. Ultimately, NGO strategies differed in style, yet they

all failed to create sufficient political pressure for the implementation of alternative gang control.

Gang control under the first FMLN government

In March 2009 former journalist Mauricio Funes was elected as the first FMLN President in post-war El Salvador. A moderate who was widely respected for his professionalism and integrity, the reporter had been chosen by the old guerrilla movement to attract voters who had previously been deterred by the left's perceived radicalism. In line with his campaign slogan "Safe Change", it was expected that his government's security policy would diverge from the Mano Dura policing of earlier administrations. Due to internal differences over the nature of a gang strategy and fears that rehabilitative opportunities for gang members might be misinterpreted as positive discrimination towards them, the Funes government lacks a gang policy. Instead, its Five-Year Plan proposes to tackle crime in all its forms through social prevention, law enforcement, rehabilitation, victim support, and institutional and legal reforms. Faced with near-empty state coffers, however, the new administration is struggling to finance its security policy (GOES, 2010). More importantly, under mounting political and media pressure the President has quite abruptly turned away from his initial aspirations. These developments can only be understood in the context of the country's political moment.

Its electoral defeat after twenty years of uninterrupted rule left ARENA divided and reeling. Since the party is chiefly concerned with defending elite privileges it is not in its interests to be a constructive opposition and enable the FMLN to govern smoothly. Its strategy therefore consists in discrediting the Funes government –contending that it is to blame for worsening crime and other problems– and implying that ARENA is the better choice when it comes to ruling the country. The private sector and the media have vigorously supported these claims, surprisingly to great effect. After a slight drop in 2007/2008, homicides once again climbed, thus lending weight to arguments that the authorities were too soft on crime. In November 2009 the escalating violence and public

clamor for respite led the President to authorize a six-month army deployment that was subsequently extended. The military has been participating in public security tasks since the mid-1990s, but is now given broader powers, permitting it to carry out patrols and arrest criminals caught red-handed; curtail contraband in unguarded border areas; and conduct perimeter control and searches in prisons.

When in June 2010 Dieciocho members set ablaze a crowded microbus, causing the deaths of more than a dozen passengers, pressure for immediate solutions to the violence only intensified. Shortly after the massacre the President announced an anti-gang law that was unnecessary but evidently introduced to satisfy public opinion. In short, the Funes government is rhetorically strong on prevention/rehabilitation, but has revived populist measures that proved fruitless under previous administrations. NGOs expressed their opposition to the tough-on-crime approach but to no avail. Their capacity to sway crime policies was conditioned by the earlier organizational and tactical limitations, but is now exacerbated by the recent NGO-to-government brain drain. Conversely, their critique failed to impact partly because Funes, non-confrontational and careful not to upset powerful interests, has remained indifferent to their position, partly because the press has been portraying crime as an emergency situation that only the military can alleviate. As in previous years, NGOs could contest Mano Dura policing more effectively through a more adversarial advocacy style, civil society alliances, and the targeting of the business and media sectors. Ultimately, such campaigns will need to tackle structural constraints as much as specific policy issues.

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