



September 2022

# Gang Violence: Concepts, Benchmarks, and Coding Rules

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>When is gang violence political?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Political gang violence in Latin America</b>	<b>4</b>
Table 1: Indicators to Assess Political Gang Violence	5
Benchmark 1: Public safety and security	5
Benchmark 2: De facto control	6
Benchmark 3: Public acts of violence	7
Conclusions	7
Table 2: Summary of gang violence inclusion as political violence	9
<b>The attribution of gang violence in Latin America</b>	<b>12</b>
Complex actor landscape	12
The various generic actor labels in Latin America	13
<b>Coding armed groups in Latin America</b>	<b>15</b>
Coding armed groups in countries where ACLED has deemed gang violence should be included as political violence	16
Coding armed groups in countries where ACLED has deemed gang violence should not be included as political violence	16
<b>Annex 1: Summary results</b>	<b>18</b>

## Introduction

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects data on political violence using a bounded definition of political violence that does not include ordinary crime. The operations of large-scale organized gangs like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in El Salvador, drug cartels in Mexico, and anti-drug operations in the Philippines pose conceptual problems by occupying “a gray zone between ordinary crime and political violence” ([Kalyvas, 2015](#)). Political violence can be understood as “the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation,” according to the [ACLED Codebook](#). Such violence generally manifests as attempts to take over control of a state, make secession demands, increase one’s political influence or position, and/or express demands or views regarding specific political issues. Gang violence in some Latin American countries (e.g. El Salvador, Mexico, and Brazil) and other countries in other regions (e.g. [Kenya](#), [Nigeria](#)), however, is not perpetrated with any of these intentions in mind. This seems to render such gang violence ‘non-political’ and sets it apart from more clear-cut examples of political violence seen in these regions.

Yet, large-scale organized crime is not so easily classified as simply ‘criminal.’ Organized crime is not well-defined, but most definitions highlight elements of material or economic benefit and – for larger groups – a notion of monopolizing illegal markets ([Reuter, 2015](#); [von Lampe, last accessed on 1 February 2020](#)).<sup>1</sup> While these definitions fit the *raison-d’être* of groups like MS-13, the Sinaloa Cartel (Mexico), or the Red Command (Brazil), it does not fully capture their range of activities. These groups directly involve themselves in politics through pressure, bribery, directed violence, financing of campaigns, and even grooming cartel members to become politicians. Moreover, some groups have effectively supplanted the state in certain areas by rendering them *de facto* no-go zones for state forces and instituting state-like structures, such as a judicial system based on their own statutes to hand out penalties to wrongdoers. These indirect yet highly-relevant political acts severely challenge the state’s monopoly of force. *The agenda of gangs may not be directly political, but their actions often have a political purpose, motivation, or effect, including the destruction of public order and security.* To complicate matters further, these patterns are not always restricted to large and transnational groups; they hold equally true for some national, regional, and sometimes even local gangs.

ACLED’s mission is to understand political violence in its fluid and fast-changing manifestations ([OECD, 30 November 2016](#)). Rather than sticking to a rigid definition separating political violence from criminal violence, ACLED aims to capture the disorderly nature of the political manifestations of criminal violence across the globe. This methodology resource intends to tackle the gray area between political and criminal violence by providing conceptual clarifications around when gang violence is political. This document provides specific benchmarks and indicators used to determine the countries in which gang violence should be considered to have extended into the realm of the political, and discusses the complicated issue of attributing violence to unknown actors, who may or may not be gangs. This resource is particularly tailored towards Latin America, but the general

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. [UNODC](#) has no definition to “allow for a broader applicability of the UNTOC to new types of crime that emerge constantly as global, regional and local conditions change over time.”

approach, benchmarks, and indicators apply equally to other contexts. The term ‘gang violence’ is used to describe violence committed by criminal groups without an overt political agenda. This term is solely meant to communicate that the gangs discussed in this document are organized, have leadership ([Spergel, 1995](#)), and that their objective is not political but economic in nature.

## **When is gang violence political?**

ACLEd uses a relatively bounded definition of political violence that does not include purely criminal activity. In certain contexts, gang violence may be considered to be more than purely criminal, i.e. when the violence serves a broader political goal or has significant political impacts. Accordingly, ACLEd considers gang violence to be political violence and, thereby, includes it in its dataset when the violence is used towards meeting overt political goals. Further, when violent gang activity directly and fundamentally challenges public safety and security, it is also deemed political violence.

Organized crime evolves through gang competition and monopolies over illegal markets. As [Klaus von Lampe](#) explains:

*“It is true that illegal markets can be linked to high levels of violence. However, not all illegal markets in all countries are equally violent or not all violence that occurs in the context of illegal markets is directed against competitors in an effort to increase market shares and eventually to achieve a monopoly position (Andreas and Wallman, 2009). Violent conflicts can also occur between suppliers and customers, within illegal enterprises, and in the form of predatory attacks on illegal market participants (Amir, 1995; Berg and Loeber, 2015; Wright and Decker, 1997)” (von Lampe, 2016).*

Further, ACLEd argues that the competition for monopolies and territories involves a perverse incentive to act as a violent governing entity combatting both security services and civilians. It is within this context that ACLEd explores the political nature of gang activity.

Many explanations of gang violence point to the political origins of these groups, including political and economic deprivation or failed social policy ([Rodgers, 2012](#); [Hagedorn, 2003](#)). While failed social policies and neglect undoubtedly play a role in the emergence of gangs, there are reasons for a more restrictive understanding. The study of political violence is typically concerned with how violence is *used* as a tool by political actors. ACLEd ensures that ‘political intent’ is a key part of defining political violence.

ACLEd’s interpretation of gang activity dictates that it qualifies as political violence when it has direct political targets and/or is used for political purposes. For example, when a criminal group or gang targets a (standing or former) mayor, councilor, parliamentarian, minister, or civil servants and their families; the destruction of symbols of public authority (e.g. bombing government property); and assaults on those in the public domain including journalists, human rights activists, and other civil society members. In many cases, this type of violence is employed for a political purpose, and

politicians or those with a public interest act as funders, instigators, or benefactors. In the African context, for example, gangs are frequently employed during elections. Across ACLED, this type of gang violence is included for each country and region.

ACLED also includes gang violence when a state's public security and safety are fundamentally challenged. This happens in places like Haiti and Jamaica, where gangs can act as *de facto* local governments and public service providers. In the Brazilian favelas, gangs control territory and engage in highly public acts of violence, rendering these places essentially a no-go area for state forces. This violence is neither carried out with an overt political purpose or motivation, nor is it used to that end. However, the decision to include gang violence in these specific circumstances is based on the assumption that the level and nature of gang violence *affects* and challenges the existing political order. Hence, *while the overt purposes and motivations of these groups may not be explicitly political, the consequences for residents and security services are.*

When does gang violence fundamentally challenge a state's public security and safety? Generally, this happens under two conditions. First, when gangs assert some form of ***de facto control over their territory*** (e.g. by assuming a role in law and order and/or limiting the state's entry into the territory, either physically or politically). Second, when gangs challenge the state's ability to enforce public security and safety by engaging in regular **public acts of violence** (e.g. battles on the street, public killings, and violence against civilians). These conditions are present in some countries. For example, gang violence in Mexico has rendered state control over some key territories ineffective, and some gangs have taken advantage of crises, like the coronavirus pandemic, to entrench their control in marginalized communities plagued by widespread poverty and lack of access to essential services (*for more, see ACLED's [Central America and COVID-19: The Pandemic's Impact on Gang Violence](#)*).

In short, gang violence poses a challenge to the definition of political violence. It is perpetrated by groups that have no overt political motivation. However, some gang violence has clear political connotations and consequences. ACLED considers gang violence as political when it is employed by political actors acting as funders, instigators, or benefactors, and serves identifiable political goals. ACLED also considers gang violence 'political' when it fundamentally challenges the public safety, security, and control of the state.

## **Political gang violence in Latin America**

Gang violence that is directly political — e.g. with public figures as targets, investors, instigators, or beneficiaries — is included in every country and region. In addition, as laid out in the preceding sections, ACLED also includes gang violence without such overt political connotations in contexts where it fundamentally challenges public safety, security, and control of the state. This section lays down the benchmarks and indicators used to determine when and where such contexts exist.

Based on key elements identified in the previous section, the determination is made using: a set of general measures about public safety and security; more specific indicators on the extent of *de facto* control; as well as indicators on the nature of public acts of violence (*see Table 1 below*).

ACLED’s conclusions about which countries should have their gang violence considered as political were ultimately reviewed by external country experts before being applied systematically in the coding methodology. Similar reviews of countries continue to be done regularly. ACLED researchers collect information weekly in line with real-time coding procedures. Researchers flag cases in which they deem, qualitatively, that a new assessment is warranted for a country (i.e. if its ‘status’ should be changed from a gang exclusion country to inclusion, or vice-versa). In cases where a country previously did not meet inclusion criteria but later does, gang violence in that country is systematically back-coded for the appropriate period before the new gang violence data are published.

*Table 1: Indicators to Assess Political Gang Violence*

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Public safety and security at stake	Share of overall violence that is gang violence	ACLED pilot + subsequently qualitative
	Homicide rates	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
	Links between politicians and gangs	Qualitative
<i>De facto</i> control	Spatial dispersion of violence	ACLED
	Specialized anti-gang police/military units	Qualitative
	Control of large cities	Qualitative
Public acts of violence	Share of gang violence that targets civilians	ACLED
	Type and style of public violence	Qualitative

### **Benchmark 1: Public safety and security**

Three indicators are used to determine the general challenge gangs pose to public safety and security directly.

The first indicator is **the share of overall violence that is gang violence**, based on event data collected by ACLED. To carry out this analysis, ACLED required consistent data for all countries on both political violence as well as gang violence. As existing data could not be found on Latin American gang or political violence in a comparable format, in the lead up to [ACLED’s initial expansion](#) to Latin America, ACLED constructed a pilot database containing all reported violence in each country during 2018 and the first half of 2019 (with the exclusion of petty and domestic

crime). These event data allowed ACLED to systematically assess the prevalence of gang violence in each country.<sup>2</sup>

Based on ACLED's pilot study, the cut-off point for this indicator was set at 10% of overall violence that is gang violence, representing countries with high rates of gang violence. Since this initial assessment, ACLED Researchers flag cases they deem merit a new assessment and this indicator for such cases is reviewed.<sup>3,4</sup>

The identification of gang violence should be understood as an approximation rather than a definitive statement on gang violence in the country. The attribution of gang violence to actors was carried out in line with the protocol described in **Annex 1** at the end of the document.

The second indicator, **homicide rates**, uses the average homicide rate for the last five years of available UNODC data.<sup>5</sup> The indicator shows the number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Based on ACLED's pilot study, a conservative threshold of 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants was set as the cut-off point to determine countries with a high homicide rate.

The third indicator assesses whether there are known **links between politicians and gangs** (e.g. gang members/leaders holding political positions, financing or provision of services by gangs to politicians and vice versa) and is a qualitative indicator. This was applied to countries with at least one reported gang-related incident. This information is based on publicly-available information collected by ACLED researchers with specialized knowledge on those countries.

## **Benchmark 2: De facto control**

Three indicators are used to assess the extent gangs *de facto* control territory and challenge state control.

---

<sup>2</sup> For the pilot database, ACLED researchers coded all Latin American data for a period of time spanning from January 2018 to July 2019, including both criminal and political violence. Petty and domestic crime was not included. A classification was subsequently assigned to each event: either political violence (in line with the standard ACLED definition) or criminal violence (non-political murders, robberies, etc.). Each event was classified based on whether a gang was involved or not. All analysis was carried out under the most restrictive conditions, meaning that only events where a report specifically mentioned gang involvement were used to determine gang violence inclusion. Nevertheless, ACLED controlled for each indicator by examining whether alternative specifications led to different results (e.g. considering all unclear violence as gang violence and vice-versa).

<sup>3</sup> Researchers flag these new cases based on qualitative information and methods, following which a more thorough assessment is carried out based on the indicators in Table 1.

<sup>4</sup> As of writing, ACLED is investigating the inclusion of Colombia and the Dominican Republic in the list of countries for which gang violence is considered political violence.

<sup>5</sup> In the lead up to [ACLED's initial expansion](#) to Latin America, this information was based on an average number determined by UNODC data from 2013 to 2017. In 2022, this was updated to reflect UNODC data covering 2016 to 2020.

The first indicator assesses the **spatial dispersion of gang violence** and takes a high level of gang activity that is geographically clustered as an indication that gangs exercise a form of *de facto* control over territory. This is a quantitative indicator based on ACLED data.

The second indicator assesses the extent to which **gangs control large cities**, representing centers of power and often includes the capital. This is a qualitative indicator based on ACLED researchers' knowledge, drawing on information from reports on the extent of geographic control in these urban areas.

The third indicator assesses whether the **police and/or military have specialized units for combating gangs**. This is meant to capture whether the state itself recognizes gang activity as a particular problem. This is a qualitative indicator for which information comes primarily from official police and military websites and press releases.

### **Benchmark 3: Public acts of violence**

Two indicators are used to assess the extent to which gangs engage in public acts of violence.

The first indicator is the **share of gang violence that targets civilians**,<sup>6</sup> based on event data collected by ACLED. This indicator is based on the assumption that a higher share of civilian targeting suggests a purposeful focus on challenging public safety and security through instilling fear in the local population, rather than a focus on engagement with state forces or other armed agents.

The second indicator assesses the **type and style of gang violence** within a specific country (i.e. the nature and methods of this violence). This indicator is based on a qualitative reading of reports of gang violence in the country, with an aim to capture very 'public' violence, such as: daylight attacks; attacks on taxi and bus drivers, government officials, as well as seemingly innocent bystanders; the mutilation of bodies along with their public display; and drive-by shootings. Reports reviewed include general reports on the country and its violence by non-governmental organizations, and both local and international think tanks, as well as violent incident reports used by ACLED researchers for coding purposes. The latter includes over 180 sources in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English, spanning from local media to international news.

### **Conclusions**

A total of 51 countries and territories<sup>7</sup> were assessed based on these eight indicators. A country's gang violence is determined to have a political connotation and, therefore, accepted for inclusion if

---

<sup>6</sup> Civilian targeting is defined as direct and indirect [remote] violence that specifically targets, or solely affects, civilians (i.e. all 'Violence against civilians' and 'Excessive force against protesters' events and all 'Explosions/Remote violence,' and 'Riots' events with "Civilians (Country)" or "Protesters (Country)" in the Actor 1 or Actor 2 columns), per ACLED coding methodology (see the [ACLED Codebook](#)).

<sup>7</sup> The territories discussed here are coded as separate from their colonial countries for the sake of analysis, as they have high levels of autonomy and exist within a separate cultural region from the colonial country.

at least five or more of the eight indicators were satisfied. **The results accepted the inclusion of gang violence as political for 11 countries in Latin America of the 51 that were assessed. These countries include Belize, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela.**<sup>8</sup> Summary results are available in *Table 2* below, while full results can be found in **Annex 1** at the end of the document.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ten countries were included in this list when ACLED's Latin America coverage launched in 2020. The regular review of these indicators by the ACLED team led to the addition of Venezuela in 2022, raising the total to 11 countries.



*Table 2: Summary of gang violence inclusion as political violence*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>
Anguilla	No gang violence reported.	NO
Antigua and Barbuda	No gang violence reported.	NO
Argentina	No inclusion. While public acts of violence exist and civilian targeting is high, all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Aruba	No gang violence reported.	NO
Bahamas	No inclusion. Most indicators either do not have sufficient data to draw robust conclusions, or suggest exclusion.	NO
Barbados	No inclusion. While gang violence is high, specialized police units exist, and gang murders are common, all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
<b>Belize</b>	<b>Inclusion. Gang violence is common, clustered, frequently targets civilians and public, and homicide rates are high.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Bolivia	No inclusion. While links between gangs and politicians exist, gang violence mostly targets the government and other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Inclusion. Nearly all indicators suggest inclusion.</b>	<b>YES</b>
British Virgin Islands	No inclusion. Nearly all indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba)	No gang violence reported.	NO
Cayman Islands	No gang violence reported.	NO
Chile	No gang violence reported.	NO
Colombia	Most indicators are satisfied: homicide rate is high, specialized anti-gang units exist, and gangs have territorial control.	TBD*
Costa Rica	No inclusion. Gang violence involves public killings, but all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Cuba	No gang violence reported.	NO
Curacao	No inclusion. Most data are insufficient to draw robust conclusions.	NO
Dominica	No inclusion. Homicide rate is high, but all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Dominican Republic	Most indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, close links, specialized units, territorial control, and lethal violence.	TBD*
Ecuador	No inclusion. Most indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
<b>El Salvador</b>	<b>Inclusion. Homicide rates are highest in Latin America, gang violence is common and very public, gangs hold control of areas, deep links between gangs and police, and specialized units exist.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Falkland Islands	No gang violence reported.	NO
French Guiana	No inclusion. Most data are insufficient to draw robust conclusions.	NO
Grenada	No inclusion. While the share of gang violence is high, all other indicators suggest exclusion. Little data available in general.	NO

Guadeloupe	No inclusion. Small share of gang violence, low homicide rates and generally little information.	NO
<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Inclusion. Most indicators suggest inclusions, such as very high homicides rates.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Guyana	No inclusion. Although sufficient data is generally lacking.	NO
<b>Haiti</b>	<b>Inclusion. Most indicators suggest inclusion. Share of total violence is high, many groups control territory and violence is relatively endemic and public. Moreover, there is clear political usage of these groups.</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Inclusion. All indicators suggest inclusion. Homicides rates are high, there is gang control over territory, and there is highly public violence.</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Jamaica</b>	<b>Inclusion. Nearly all indicators are satisfied. Jamaica has one the highest homicide rates in the region. There are clear political links and many small groups engage in common, lethal, and public acts of violence.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Martinique	No inclusion. All indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>Inclusion. All indicators suggest inclusion.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Montserrat	No gang violence reported.	NO
Nicaragua	No inclusion. None of the indicators suggests inclusion. Gangs are nearly absent and levels of violence are low.	NO
Panama	No inclusion. Few indicators suggest inclusion. Instances of violence and homicide rates are relatively low. Gang violence occasionally high, but contained within remits of gang feuds.	NO
Paraguay	No inclusion. Most indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Peru	No inclusion. Almost all indicators indicate exclusion. Share of gang violence is low, low homicide rates, and dispersed violence.	NO
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	<b>Inclusion. Border case as indicators are mixed and sometimes unclear. Homicide rates are high, but bordering exclusion. No clear control of territory. Close links between politicians and gangs, public acts of violence, and high share of gang violence tips balance in favor of inclusion.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Saint Kitts and Nevis	No inclusion. While homicide rates are among the highest in the region, other indicators suggest exclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO
Saint Lucia	No inclusion. Little data and status unclear.	NO
Saint-Barthelemy	No gang violence reported.	NO
Saint-Martin	No gang violence reported.	NO
Sint Maarten	No gang violence reported.	NO
South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands	No gang violence reported.	NO
St. Vincent and Grenadines	No gang violence reported.	NO
Suriname	No inclusion. No indicators supporting inclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO

<b>Trinidad and Tobago</b>	<b>Inclusion. Majority of indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, high homicide rates, specialized units, links, and type of violence.</b>	<b>YES</b>
Turks and Caicos Islands	No gang violence reported.	NO
Uruguay	No inclusion. All indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Virgin Islands, U.S.	No inclusion. No indicators supporting inclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO
<b>Venezuela</b>	<b>Inclusion. Majority of indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, second highest homicide rate in the region, violence is concentrated in large cities, specialized units, links, and type of violence.</b>	<b>YES</b>

*\* ACLED is currently investigating the inclusion of gang violence as political violence in Colombia and the Dominican Republic.*

## The attribution of gang violence in Latin America

This final section discusses the problem of when to attribute responsibility for violence by unidentified actors to gangs. ACLED does not use a 'blanket rule' by assigning all violence by unidentified actors to gangs in Latin America or in any context. While gangs may be responsible for a significant portion of unattributable violence in countries with a strong gang presence, they do not conduct all of it. This premise has been corroborated through discussions with local partner organizations in the region. For example, a 2016 study on gang violence in Guatemala concluded it could not assign responsibility in 35% of cases where it reviewed homicides in two major hotspots of gang activity, Chiquimula ("trafficking corridor"), and Zona 18 of Guatemala City ("gang area"). In both cases – 28% and 41%, respectively – homicides could be credibly attributed to gangs. The study, therefore, concluded that: "*the information from authorities was fragmented, disorganized and sometimes missing altogether*" (USAID, 2016). This equally applies to a host of other Latin American, Asian, and African countries, where reporting on violence often does not include the identity of the group involved because it is deliberately concealed by the perpetrator or victim,<sup>9</sup> self-censorship by the outlet, or simply because no one observed the actual violence, but only its consequences.<sup>10</sup> As such, blanket rules of resorting to gang attribution, even in countries with a strong gang presence, are not appropriate.

Further, there are various incidents for which it is not clear whether the activity is carried out by an individual or an armed group. There are also a large number of other armed groups active in these spaces, often in response to gang violence, who can also be responsible for unidentified violence. And lastly, the demarcation between gangs and other groups is not always clear. These three reasons are briefly discussed below.

### Complex actor landscape

A significant problem for the attribution of gang violence is that criminal violence can be perpetrated by an individual rather than an organized armed group (i.e. a gang). For example, an event that reads "*On 16 February, a civilian was killed in an armed attack over drugs at Miragoane. Motives are unknown*" may have involved an organized group, but may have been perpetrated by an individual. To ensure that only gang violence is included, ACLED only includes events when it is clear that either multiple people were involved in violence (e.g. reports mention "a gang"), or when there is evidence that an individual was acting on the orders of an armed group (e.g. an assassination by a hitman).

Further, there are often various forms of local armed groups present in the same space. For example in Brazil, *milícias* operate within some of the same neighborhoods as gangs and also contest territory. These *milícias* were initially formed to 'protect' citizens from drug trafficking groups; yet over time, their methods became more coercive as they began charging 'taxes' – illegal fees – from residents for 'protection.' Typically, these groups fight drug cartels and provide public goods —

---

<sup>9</sup> See ACLED's [The Strategic Use of Unidentified Armed Groups In Conflict Zones](#)

<sup>10</sup> See for further readings on event-data bias [Weidman, 2016](#) and [De Bruijne & van Veen, 2018](#)

though they have also become violent and pose a threat to civilians ([ALERI, 2008](#)). Some *milicias* in Rio state have begun working in drug trafficking themselves, further complicating event attribution ([O Globo, 10 October 2019](#)). Moreover, many of these *milicias* are sponsored by or led by state actors and police, both current and former. In Mexico, communal militias of indigenous groups – so-called *Policia Comunitaria* — were likewise established to protect the community against the activity of gangs. Yet, like in Brazil, police authorities incorporated these self-defense groups into the indigenous justice system, making them state agents in some areas (Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí, and Guerrero). Meanwhile, non-indigenous groups in Mexico have established self-defense forces that have not been integrated into the state. Finally, in countries like Haiti and El Salvador, there are combatants from former paramilitary groups that engage in political as well as criminal violence for various bidders. As a result, the splintered landscape of violence-brokers in countries with active gangs makes it impossible to apply standardized rules across these countries without considering the context.

Finally, even in those contexts in which it is relatively clear that a gang operates, it is not clear to *which* actor exactly the violence should be attributed. Gangs in Latin America are generally discerned as *pandillas* and *maras*. *Pandillas* are criminal groups organized with a local character (street gangs), they are rooted within a community, and they often provide some level of local public services ([Bruneau, 2014](#)). *Maras*, instead, are nationally or transnationally organized gangs (e.g. MS-13) that often engage in transnational crime and have a different mode of operation. ACLED typically describes armed actors with strong local ties as communal militias – “violent groups that act locally, in the pursuit of local goals, resources, power, and retribution,” according to ACLED’s [Definitions of Political Violence, Agents and Event Types](#). In this way, *pandillas* are indeed comparable to communal militias in other contexts. While *pandillas* are still quite common in the urban areas of Haiti or Jamaica, their professionalization in much of Latin America since the 1990s has led to the integration of many *pandillas* into *maras*. This factor, in addition to the vagueness of source information, makes distinguishing between *pandillas* and *maras* next to impossible, however. As such, gangs in general are treated as akin to political militias given their goals of influencing and impacting governance, security, and policy.<sup>11</sup> The difference between groups identifying as *pandillas* versus *maras* is quite fluid. A group might identify as one today and the other next month. This makes the distinction around agent categorization (i.e. ‘Interaction’ codes in the ACLED data) less meaningful — and, as such, unlikely to significantly impact analysis.

## **The various generic actor labels in Latin America**

Any actor that is named in the source, including gangs, is coded as such. Hence, an event with notes that read, “On 6 June 2018, the leader of the Compound Gang was killed in a confrontation with the

---

<sup>11</sup> Per the [ACLED Codebook](#), political militias are coded with an ‘Interaction’ code of 3 while communal militias are coded with an ‘Interaction’ code of 4. Political militias are a more diverse set of violent actors than communal militias and are often created for a specific purpose or during a specific time period and for the furtherance of a political purpose by violence. These organizations are defined by their political goals of influencing and impacting governance, security and policy, and operate in conjunction, or in alliance, with a recognized government, governor, military leader, rebel organization, political party, business elite, or opposition group.

*police in Saint Catherine, Jamaica*” will be coded as an interaction between the Compound Gang and the state police. However, it is common that violence cannot be attributed to a specific armed group: for example, an event may have notes that read, *“On 16 August 2018, an alleged gang member was shot and killed by an unknown armed group In May Pen, Jamaica.”* This section defines how ACLED treats these latter cases of various generic actors operating in Latin America, and how they can be discerned from one another and coded.

“Unidentified Gang (Country)”: This label is used for gang violence in countries that qualify for the inclusion of gang violence (outlined in *Table 2*). This actor is coded when it is clear from reports that a gang is responsible – or it is extremely likely a gang is responsible – for the violence, but the specific gang name (e.g. MS-13) is unknown. Criteria include explicit mention of gang-related violence or some indication of the actor’s criminal nature in the source (e.g. drug trafficking). For some countries, specific modes of violence point to the operation of gangs (e.g. narco message, public hanging, decapitation, drive-by shootings, etc.). As mentioned previously, given that most gangs in Latin America are no longer street gangs but have been integrated into larger gangs, ACLED uses an ‘Interaction’ code of 3 for all gangs. Gang members are considered to be generally armed on every occasion and, therefore, always coded as “Unidentified Gang (Country),” even if reported as ‘off-duty.’ Hence, the 16 August example above would be coded as an interaction between an “Unidentified Gang (Jamaica)” and an “Unidentified Armed Group (Jamaica).”

“Communal Militia (Country)”: This actor is used when the source indicates that a group is a self-defense group from a particular area, or when this point is clearly inferred from circumstantial evidence. The main differences between communal militias and gangs are apparent in the scope of their membership, actions, and goals. Communal militias only act locally and pursue local goals, resources, power, and retribution. These groups identify as part of a neighborhood, village, or other community. They typically manifest as members of a communal self-defense group against gangs or other armed groups, despite their ability to engage in attacks themselves. Communal militias are coded with an ‘Interaction’ code of 4 per ACLED coding methodology. Consider the following example: *“On 23 April, a body was found by the police forces in Ciudad Cuauhtemoc, Ciudad de Mexico. A message was left on the body of the victim warning gangs operating in the area and signed by a vigilante group.”* This event is coded as a “Communal Militia (Mexico)” that has attacked an “Unidentified Gang (Mexico).”

In Mexico and Brazil, some communal militias have taken on different forms and have started to cooperate with or incorporate into state actors. In these cases, they may be classified either as political militias (coded by ACLED with an ‘Interaction’ code of 3), with their specific group name as the actor handle, or as state actors (coded by ACLED with an ‘Interaction’ code of 1) if fully integrated into the state structure.

“Police Militia”: This actor is specific to Brazil and refers to the *milícias*<sup>12</sup> – armed groups that are organized and led primarily by current and former police and other state agents. Because of their

---

<sup>12</sup> For more on this, see ACLED’s [Methodology and Coding Decisions around Political Violence and Demonstrations in Brazil](#).

leadership, they have access to powerful positions within the state and are often more powerful than drug trafficking groups. They were initially formed as a way to ‘protect’ the citizens from drug trafficking groups; however, their methods have since become coercive and they often extort the community in exchange for their protection. An essential characteristic of these *milícia* groups has been that they are against drug trafficking and contest gang territorial control. However, reports have surfaced describing new alliances between police militias and drug traffickers in Rio state ([UOL, 11 January 2019](#); [Instituto Igarapé, 22 May 2018](#)). Sources will name certain police militias (e.g. Liga da Justiça and Chico Bala); most often, however, sources will refer to these groups simply as *milícia* or *miliciano*. Given their existence and organization outside of the state, despite their usage by certain state agents, police militias are coded with an ‘Interaction’ code of 3.<sup>13</sup> The following is an example event containing police *milícias*: “On 1 July 2019, in Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro state), a shootout took place in Morro do 18 (Água Santa) between a militia group and drug traffickers from the gang Amigos dos Amigos (ADA). During the shootout, several members of the ADA were injured.”

## Coding armed groups in Latin America

Coding rules have been developed as a means to determine when to attribute violence to armed actors based on information provided by sources. In countries for which ACLED considers gang violence to be political violence and countries with active insurgencies (*see Table 2*), ACLED has opted to keep a relatively large amount of violence unattributed to a specific actor; the identity of actors is often hard to verify and the complex environment with a very large number of potential actors as well as their usage of different types of violence complicates attribution. ACLED uses the “Unidentified Armed Group (Country)” label for all these events where attribution is impossible, but the events meet a minimum threshold for inclusion.

Yet there are cases in which it is highly certain that gangs (or other groups) are responsible based on certain tactics, techniques, or procedures (TTPs) or other indicators such as the identity of the victims. Various coding rules are used across different cases where the identity of actors is unclear (discussed below). Unidentified Gangs are generally coded in ‘Battles’ (‘Armed clashes’), in which the source mentions that groups were engaged in drug dealing/trafficking and/or organized crime. For ‘Violence against civilians’ events, except for specific cases in Mexico and Brazil, it is generally unclear who is responsible for attacks against and kidnappings of civilians, and in most cases no responsibility is assumed; some exceptions may include obvious indicators such as narco messages left at the scene.

---

<sup>13</sup> Conflict environments of most countries are complex with communal militias, ex-combatant groups, local and transnational gangs, drug cartels, police militias, and rebel groups all operating. In Brazil, however, the environment is simpler with actors limited to either gangs or police militia’s operating alongside state forces. Hence, when it is clear that violence is not perpetrated by a rebel group or state force, yet it is unclear whether those responsible for violence are gangs or police militias, ACLED uses the ‘Unidentified Gang and/or Police Militia’ actor with an ‘Interaction’ code of 3.

## **Coding armed groups in countries where ACLED has deemed gang violence *should* be included as political violence**

In cases where the group or gang is specifically named, the named actor is coded in the event (e.g. Barrio-18). If the source report calls an unnamed group a ‘narco gang’, ‘narco-criminal group’, or ‘drug gang,’ etc., then the unnamed actor is coded as “Unidentified Gang (Country).”

In cases in which violence is carried out by an unidentified armed group, ACLED researchers rely on answers to certain questions to determine whether or not the unnamed actor should be coded as “Unidentified Gang (Country)” or “Unidentified Armed Group (Country)” — or not at all.

In short, such events are only attributed to Unidentified Gang actors if there is mention of drugs (e.g. “two people were shot dead by armed actors; authorities believe the killing is linked to drug-related feuds”) or a narco message.

Otherwise, the event is coded and attributed to “Unidentified Armed Group (Country)” if:

- There is evidence that the perpetrator is an armed group (i.e. it is a group of two or more using sophisticated weapons).
- If the victim is political. These victims include politicians, government employees, former political actors, public prosecutors, lawyers, judges, other overtly political groups (e.g. human rights defenders), journalists, etc.<sup>14</sup>
- If there is evidence of the use of TTPs in non-gang-inclusion countries that would be attributed to gangs elsewhere in the region. These TTPs include drive-by shootings, the mutilation of bodies, public hanging of corpses, mass shootings, etc.

In all other cases, the event would *not* meet the threshold for inclusion at all in the ACLED dataset as political violence, or specifically, gang violence. Examples of such events could be “dead woman found,” “man was killed by an unknown person,” “bones of a man were found,” etc.

Coding of such violence in [Mexico](#), [Brazil](#), and Venezuela (countries for which ACLED considers gang violence to be political violence), as well as Colombia (a country with an active insurgency), follow additional parameters which are outlined in the respective methodology documents.

## **Coding armed groups in countries where ACLED has deemed gang violence *should not* be included as political violence**

If the source report calls an unnamed group a ‘narco gang’, ‘narco-criminal group’, or ‘drug gang’, etc., or cites a specific gang by name, then the event is *not coded* as the violence is deemed to be specifically criminal in countries for which ACLED considers gang violence *not* to be political violence. This includes cases in which there is mention of drugs or a narco message. However, in cases where the group is specifically named as a transnational cartel (e.g. MS-13, Sinaloa Cartel), the

---

<sup>14</sup> Per ACLED methodology, cases of interpersonal violence are not coded.



event *is* coded and is attributed to the group. Such groups are coded when active in their ‘home countries’ – provided the countries are included in the list of gang-inclusion countries – where their activity is considered to meet the political violence threshold, and so continued coverage of such actors is deemed appropriate.

In cases in which violence is carried out by an unnamed armed group, the event is only coded and attributed to “Unidentified Armed Group (Country)” if the victim is political. These victims include those such as politicians, government employees, former political actors, public prosecutors, lawyers, judges, other overtly political groups (e.g. human rights defenders), journalists, etc.<sup>15</sup> In all other cases, the event would not meet the threshold for inclusion in the ACLED dataset.

---

<sup>15</sup> Again, per ACLED methodology, cases of interpersonal violence are not coded.

## Annex 1: Summary results

	Benchmark 1: Public safety and security at stake			Benchmark 2: De facto control			Benchmark 3: Public acts of violence		Conclusions	
Country	Share of overall violence that is gang violence	Homicide Rate (out of 100,000)	Link between politicians and gangs	Spatial dispersion	Specialized anti-gang units	Gang control	Proportion of civilian targeting	Type & style of public gang violence	Conclusion	Inclusion
Anguilla	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No control over territory.	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Antigua and Barbuda	N/A	3.09	Unclear, though reports suggest only low-level state actors facilitate criminal markets, including arms, drug and human trafficking ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No control over territory.	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Argentina	Low (1.69% based on initial pilot data)	5.46	Alleged, but unproven, links exist between gangs and politicians. However, links between gangs and police at the local level are common ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. Tactical police unit called the Federal Operations Special Group (GEOF) conducts both counter-terrorism and counter-narcotic operations, while the Anti-Drug Trafficking Police Forces (FPA) aims to fight the sale of drugs ( <a href="#">Defensa, 4 July 2020</a> ; <a href="#">InSight Crime, 5 May 2015</a> ). However, neither seem to have a specific focus on deterring gangs.	Gangs control limited territory ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Civilian targeting is most common (based on initial pilot data)	Low levels of violence, though there are reports of public violence (killings), including attacks and threats on public officials, such as judges ( <a href="#">El Pais, 28 January 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. While public acts of violence exist and civilian targeting is high, all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO

Aruba	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. While police have an Organised Crime Unit focused on money laundering, drug trafficking, smuggling, and human trafficking (activities commonly linked to gangs), there is no unit dedicated specifically to combating gangs ( <a href="#">CFATF GAFIC, July 2022</a> ).	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Bahamas	High (12.96% based on initial pilot data)	25.58	Unclear, though reports suggest some police officials might exert influence over criminal markets. Nonetheless, there is weak evidence that the government is involved in criminal markets ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. The police force has a Drug Enforcement Unit, and the creation of a specialized task force to tackle gun violence was announced in April 2022, but neither of these seem to have an explicit anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">Government of the Bahamas, 7 April 2022</a> ).	Unclear, though gang turf wars have been reported in New Providence ( <a href="#">EW News, 24 March 2022</a> ).	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Gang murder is common, and on the rise in 2022 ( <a href="#">Loopnews, 7 April 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Most indicators either do not have sufficient data to draw robust conclusions, or suggest exclusion.	NO
Barbados	High (13.89% based on initial pilot data)	11.17	Few known links between gangs and politicians, though lenient sentences and/or dismissal of gang members' offenses have given rise to allegations that gang leaders are able to exert influence on political circles ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	Yes, police have an Anti-Gun and Gangs Unit ( <a href="#">Associates Times, 21 February 2022</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Gang murder is common. Some reports suggest that violence is on the rise, though with few killings ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 1 June 2021</a> ).	No inclusion. While gang violence is high, specialized police units exist, and gang murders are common, all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO

Belize	Low (5.06% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (36.96%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	34.51	Unclear, though there are allegations that high-profile politicians collude with gangs to facilitate criminal operations. Police and military officials are known to participate in various levels of criminal economies ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	High levels of violence highly clustered in cities, mainly in Belize City (based on trends in 2022)	Yes. Former Gang Suppression Unit (GSU) disbanded in 2021 and was replaced by the Gang Intelligence, Investigation and Interdiction Unit ( <a href="#">Breaking Belize News, 31 December 2020</a> ).	Gangs have substantial territorial control, with some areas being off-limits to authorities ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Over half (58%) of gang violence targets civilians (as of trends in 2022)	Violence is public, such as the killing of public workers.	Inclusion. Gang violence is common, clustered, frequently targets civilians and the public, and homicide rates are high.	YES
Bolivia	Low (1.43% based on initial pilot data)	5.91	Yes, leaders of drug clans and their relatives and allies have held political positions. Police and state institutions have been involved in drug trafficking "at all levels" ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. Police have a Special Anti-Drug Trafficking Force (FELCN), but it does not seem to have an explicit anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">FELCN, last accessed on 25 August 2022</a> ).	No control over territory.	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Gang violence mostly involves state forces vs. producers of cocoa. In 2022, there were rather public clashes between transnational gangs in border areas ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 10 February 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. While links between gangs and politicians exist, gang violence mostly targets the government and other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Brazil	Low (6.20% based on trends in 2022), though much higher	26.97	Links possible as various political links exist between gangs and politicians. Widespread white-collar crime to facilitate corruption and money laundering for	Very high levels of violence clustered in large cities	Yes. The Special Action Group to Combat Organized Crime (GAECO) (often with support of military police) and the Pacifying Police Unit	Gangs control favelas, but police militias often fight gangs and also control parts of favelas ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 25 March 2022</a> ).	Non-civilian targeting most common (71% of gang violence,	Battles between gangs, police, and police militias at public places are common and often deadly.	Inclusion. Nearly all indicators suggest inclusion.	YES

	(31.96%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named		criminal groups also involves government officials ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).		(UPP) in Rio de Janeiro ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 1 August 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Public Ministry of the State of Paraná, last accessed on 22 September 2022</a> ).		as of trends in 2022), with violence largely taking place between gangs as well as against military police			
British Virgin Islands	N/A	N/A	Links likely exist. High-level government officials have alleged links to gangs. The Premier was charged with drug trafficking in 2022 ( <a href="#">LBC, 29 April 2022</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	Unclear	N/A	Unclear	No inclusion. Nearly all indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Cayman Islands	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Chile	N/A	3.99	No known links, though there are reports of state officials and police participating in the local trafficking of arms and drugs. Military equipment is frequently reported as lost or stolen and transferred to	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. Police have an anti-drug and organized crime unit as well as a special joint task force to combat organized crime, but no units with an explicit anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">PDI, last accessed on 22 September 2022</a> ;	No control over territory, though there are claims that territorial conflict in southern regions of Chile might be linked to organized crime ( <a href="#">Emol, 22 April 2022</a> ).	N/A	Gunfire attacks are on the rise as of 2022 and also increasingly public, though still limited to marginalized neighborhoods or border areas	No gang violence reported.	NO

			criminal groups ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).		<a href="#">Ministry of Interior and Public Security of Chile, 29 September 2018</a> ).			<a href="#">(Biobio Chile, 10 March 2022)</a> .		
Colombia	Low (5.26% based on initial pilot data)	24.55	Known links between gangs and politicians. Gangs use their connections with public officials and members of the armed forces to further their activities ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 5 November 2013</a> ). Also, a new generation of gangs (i.e., BACRIMs) is trying to infiltrate politics ( <a href="#">BBC, 29 August 2013</a> ; <a href="#">InSight Crime, 24 October 2011</a> ). There are reports of alliances between politicians and criminal actors for electoral purposes in exchange of favors (e.g. embezzlement of state funds to criminal actors) ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	High levels of violence very well-dispersed across the country	Yes. Compañías Antinarcóticos Jungla fights narco-trafficking as well as narco-insurgent groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) ( <a href="#">Policía Nacional, 21 September 2022</a> ). Other groups such as the Colombian National Police Special Operations Command (COPEs), the National Police Intervention and Antiterrorism Unit (UNIPOL), as well as the Army Joint Task Force Titan or the CONAT (military unit specialized in fighting narco-trafficking) also fight organized crime groups ( <a href="#">Policía Nacional, 22 September 2022</a> ; <a href="#">Policía Nacional, 22 September 2022</a> ; <a href="#">Diálogos Américas, 14 September 2021</a> ).	19 or more gangs have a presence in Colombia with control over specific territories/ cities, including Bogotá, Medellín, Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Cúcuta, Puerto de Santander, Buenaventura, and Cali ( <a href="#">El Tiempo, 16 February 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Semana, 17 July 2021</a> ). Border area of Catatumbo is hardly penetrated by state forces, with armed groups exerting control over local communities and key resources (coca crops and illegal mining areas) ( <a href="#">La Silla Vacía, 1 April 2022</a> ).	Civilian targeting less common than other organized violence (based on initial pilot data)	Significant number of massacres (3+ fatalities in one attack) ( <a href="#">Indepaz, 31 July 2021</a> ).	Most indicators are satisfied: Homicide rate is high, specialized anti-gang units exist, and gangs have territorial control.	TBD*

Costa Rica	Low (5.97% based on initial pilot data)	11.52	No known links. Limited engagement of state-embedded actors in organized crime. Reports of link between law enforcement officers and organized crime ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. Special Tactical Response Service unit (SERT) and Criminal Investigations Police (OIJ) are special forces that operate as anti-narco forces in addition to other special tasks, but they do not have an explicit anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">OIJ, last accessed on 22 September 2022</a> ).	Violence is pervasive in Limon, Alajuela but unclear whether gangs exert control over specific territories ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 26 May 2015</a> ). There are also reports of the presence of <i>maras</i> from the Northern Triangle ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 16 June 2015</a> ).	N/A	Gang violence involves public killings (drive-by shootings) and occasional property destruction. Yet rates are relatively limited - 48% of the deaths are from gang violence and 25% are related to drug trafficking ( <a href="#">Business Insider, 19 January 2018</a> ). Notable gang feuds in November 2021 in Limon, which led to a rise in homicides and unusually violent killing (beheading) ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 24 November 2021</a> ).	No inclusion. Gang violence involves public killings, but all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Cuba	N/A	5.05	Unclear, though there are reports of state-embedded actors (e.g. military and police officers) involvement in the illegal economy ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No	No control over territory.	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO

Curacao	Low (6.25% based on initial pilot data)	N/A	Unclear, although there were reports in the past (2016) that high-level politicians were bribed by foreign organized crime groups ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 9 February 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. The Dutch Special Police Forces (RST) support the Curacao Police Corps (KPC) with anti-drug, money laundering, human trafficking, and other high profile crimes, but there is no specialized anti-gang unit.	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. Most data are insufficient to draw robust conclusions.	NO
Dominica	Low (6.25% based on initial pilot data)	21.50	Unclear. Limited corruption within law enforcement ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. The police anti-drug squad unit focuses on drug interdiction operations but does not seem to focus on dismantling gangs specifically ( <a href="#">ISSAT DCAF, 12 January 2015</a> ).	No, domestic gangs have limited membership and organization.	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. Homicide rate is high, but all other indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Dominican Republic	High (11.26% based on initial pilot data)	11.11	Political parties and gangs have close links and established alliances. Moreover, security forces are believed to have been involved in up to 90% of cases of organized crime, including contract killings, arms trafficking, extortion, and extra-judicial killings ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 20 March 2015</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	Yes, police forces have an anti-gang unit. The unit produces intelligence on gangs, investigates, and designs operational plans and violence prevention programs to deter gang-related activities ( <a href="#">Policia National, accessed on 25 August 2022</a> ).	Gangs have territorial control and even provide services in some places ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Civilian targeting equally common as other organized violence (based on initial pilot data)	Violence is very lethal.	Most indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, close links, specialized units, territorial control, and lethal violence.	TBD*



Ecuador	Low (1.24% based on initial pilot data)	6.41	Links possible as there are reports of state officials facilitating the drug trade and criminal groups using ties with officials to bypass border controls ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	Yes, the Specialized Unit Fighting Organized Crime (ULCO) produces police intelligence in order to identify, investigate, neutralize, and dismantle organized crime organizations ( <a href="#">Policia Nacional del Ecuador, 19 May 2016</a> ).	Unclear. Violence centered in Guayaquil, but the level of gang control over the area is unclear ( <a href="#">El Pais, 8 February 2022</a> ). Gangs also have some control over the penitentiary system ( <a href="#">NACLA, 16 March 2022</a> ).	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Homicide reached record levels in 2020 and further doubled in 2021 ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 1 February 2022</a> ). This includes increasing public killings, often perpetrated by hitmen, as part of gangs settling scores. Also rising gang disputes in jails, resulting in nearly 330 fatalities in 2021 ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 20 May 2021</a> ). Instances of sophisticated attacks, including a car bomb explosion and drone attack ( <a href="#">Rise to Peace, 15 May 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Most indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
---------	---	------	---	----------------------------------	--	---	--	--	--	----

El Salvador	High (24.31% based on trends in 2022), and even higher (72.25%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	58.58	There are deep ties between gangs and politicians ( <a href="#">El Faro, 6 May 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Insight Crime, 6 February 2018</a> ), with successive administrations accused of negotiating ceasefire and electoral favors with gangs ( <a href="#">EFE, 5 February 2020</a> ; <a href="#">DW, 8 December 2021</a> ). Links also exist between police and gangs.	High levels of violence well-dispersed across the country, with some clustering in cities.	Yes, the Specialized Anti-gang and Homicide Unit (Unidad Especializada de Homicidios y Antipandillas) was created in 2013 to support the police Anti-gang Unit (Unidad Antipandillas) ( <a href="#">El Salvador, 1 February 2013</a> ).	Gangs have control of large areas in towns, and sometimes serve as <i>de facto</i> authority providing community services ( <a href="#">Crisis Group, 26 November 2018</a> ).	Civilian targeting versus all other gang violence is relatively equally distributed (as of trends in 2022)	Inter-gang fighting and public killings are common. Extensive use of drive-by shootings and targeted public attacks on business owners/workers related to extortion. There also have been killing sprees in response to state operations, as seen in March 2022 when over 80 were killed in three days ( <a href="#">Al Jazeera, 28 March 2022</a> ).	Inclusion. Homicide rates are highest in Latin America; gang violence is common and very public, gangs hold control of areas, deep links between gangs and police, and specialized units exist.	YES
Falkland Islands	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
French Guiana	Low (4.76% based on initial pilot data)	N/A	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. Police have an anti-crime Unit (Brigade Anti-Criminalité) and the central office for the fight against organized crime (OCLCO), but it does not have a specific anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">Police National, last accessed on 21 September 2022</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Homicide levels are low, but 2021 reports indicate it is on the rise in French overseas territories, including French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique ( <a href="#">France Info, 4 February 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Most data are insufficient to draw robust conclusions	NO

Grenada	High (14.29% based on initial pilot data)	11.47	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. Police have a Drug Squad, but it does not have a specific anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">Royal Grenada Police Forces, last accessed on 25 August 2022</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. While the share of gang violence is high, all other indicators suggest exclusion. Little data available in general.	NO
Guadeloupe	Low (3.85% based on initial pilot data)	5.75	Unclear, though there are allegations that local politicians have allocated state funds to gangs to sow unrest ( <a href="#">France Info, 21 January 2022</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. Police have an anti-crime unit (Brigade Anti-Criminalité) and the central office for the fight against organized crime (OCLCO), but it does not have a specific anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">Police National, last accessed on 21 September 2022</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Homicide levels are low, but 2021 reports indicate it is on the rise in French overseas territories, including French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique ( <a href="#">France Info, 4 February 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Small share of gang violence, low homicide rates, and generally little information.	NO
Guatemala	Low (7.22% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (57.44%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs), yet no gang is named	29.12	Unclear, though state actors are reportedly involved in criminal markets, with ties between law enforcement and gangs ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 28 March 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	High levels of violence highly clustered in cities, mainly in Guatemala City (based on trends in 2022)	Yes, the Anti-Gang Operation Group (GOA), created as an armed wing of the National Division against the Development of Gang Criminals (DOANDA) to dismantle gangs ( <a href="#">Diario de Centro América, 20 September 2021</a> ).	Reports mention MS-13 and B-18 have influence across the whole country, challenging state authorities in areas under their control. Gang-controlled areas are mainly around urban centers, notably Ciudad de Guatemala, Escuintla, and Quetzaltenango ( <a href="#">Prensa Libre, 8 July 2022</a> ).	Non-civilian targeting most common (78% of gang violence, as of trends in 2022), with violence largely taking place between gangs	Public killings occur, including attacks on family members and in public transport. Local gangs tend to resort to torture and targeted killings using small weapons, while regional cartels tend to use high-end weapons ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Inclusion. Most indicators suggest inclusions, such as very high homicide rates.	YES

Guyana	High (9.64% based on initial pilot data)	16.96	Unclear, though there are reports of collusion between state and criminal actors, with high-level and law enforcement officials supporting criminal trade in exchange for bribes ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Small Arms Survey, February 2012</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. Police have a Special Organized Crime Unit (SOCU), but it focuses on financial crimes ( <a href="#">Demara Waves, 24 June 2021</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Gang violence is limited but deadly ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	No inclusion. Although sufficient data is generally lacking.	NO
Haiti	High (27.35% based on trends in 2022), and even higher (56.24%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	8.08	Politicians and gangs have known links. Members of the ruling elite have supported gangs who, in exchange, repressed members of the opposition in key constituencies. There are also reports that state collusion with gangs is common (e.g. gangs have used law enforcement's arms and resources during clashes with rival groups and mass killings in neighborhoods) ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 21 July 2022</a> ).	High levels of violence highly clustered in cites, mainly in Port-au-Prince (based on trends in 2022)	Yes. Police forces have over 10 specialized organized crime units, such as the Anti-Gang Temporary-Unit (UTAG) ( <a href="#">International Crisis Group, 27 July 2022</a> ; <a href="#">Le Nouvelliste, 30 May 2022</a> ).	Gangs hold significant control over neighborhoods with clearly defined boundaries in urban areas of the Ouest region ( <a href="#">RNDDH, 20 May 2021</a> ). Gangs have also emerged in rural areas ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 3 August 2022</a> ).	Civilian targeting versus all other violence is equally distributed (as of trends in 2022)	Substantial public violence with many kidnappings-for-ransom and deaths, with attacks including dismemberment and gang rape ( <a href="#">RNDDH, 20 May 2021</a> ; <a href="#">RNDDH, 16 August 2022</a> ; <a href="#">CARDH, March 2022</a> ).	Inclusion. Most indicators suggest inclusion. Share of total violence is high, many groups control territory, and violence is relatively endemic and public. Moreover, there is clear political usage of these groups.	YES

Honduras	High (11.13% based on trends in 2022), and even higher (34.50%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	42.76	Links between gangs and politicians exist. Gangs also have links with elite families who control large enterprises ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 16 April 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	High levels of violence highly clustered in cites, mainly in San Pedro Sula and in Tegucigalpa (based on trends in 2022)	Yes, the former National Forces against Maras and Pandillas (FNAMP) was transformed into the Anti-Maras and Gangs and Organized Crime Police Directorate (DIPAMCO) in 2022 ( <a href="#">Criterio, 15 July 2022</a> ).	Yes, gangs hold control over specific neighborhoods, especially in large cities ( <a href="#">New York Times, 13 May 2019</a> ).	Nearly three-quarters (72%) of gang violence targets civilians (as of trends in 2022)	High homicide levels with characteristics such as body mutilation, attacks against labor groups that do not pay extortion money and attacks against family members of targets. Gang violence has led to internal displacements and migration abroad ( <a href="#">Human Rights Watch, 2022</a> ).	Inclusion. All indicators suggest inclusion. Homicides rates are high, there is gang control over territory, and there is highly public violence.	YES
Jamaica	Low (7.78% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (28.64%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	47.88	Gangs have clear links with state actors and state entities. Criminal groups (posses, yardies, and paramilitary forces) have become part of the political system, with well-established alliances with political party members and sectors of the state ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 15 September 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	High levels of violence clustered in cites, mainly in Kingston (based on trends in 2022)	Yes, the Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency law enforcement entity ( <a href="#">MOCA, last accessed on 21 September 2022</a> ). Additionally, in 2022, a joint anti-gang task force was formed, consisting of members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) and the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) ( <a href="#">Jamaica Information Service, 11 February 2022</a> ).	Unclear. Gangs exert control over specific neighborhoods but unclear whether it challenges state authority in these areas ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Nearly two-thirds (61%) of gang violence targets civilians (as of trends in 2022)	Violence is public; mostly drive-by shootings, attacks on public workers, public killings, and attacks on youths. Gang feuds are also common.	Inclusion. Nearly all indicators are satisfied. Jamaica has one of the highest homicide rates in the region. There are clear political links, and many small groups engage in common, lethal, and public acts of violence.	YES

Martinique	Low (1.45% based on initial pilot data)	N/A	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. Police have an anti-crime unit (Brigade Anti-Criminalité) and the central office for the fight against organized crime (OCLCO) but it does not have a specific anti-gang agenda ( <a href="#">Police National, last accessed on 21 September 2022</a> ).	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Homicide levels are low, but 2021 reports indicate it is on the rise in French overseas territories, including French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique ( <a href="#">France Info, 4 February 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. All indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Mexico	Low (4.93% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (54.29%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs), yet no gang is named	26.36	Links likely exist. There are reports of state and law enforcement officials colluding with gangs and cartels at various levels. Criminal groups ensure that politicians securing their interests remain in office ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Very high levels of violence clustered in large cities	Yes, the Special Force of Reaction and Intervention (FERI) unit within the National Guard ( <a href="#">Infobae, 17 August 2022</a> ).	Gangs/ cartels have de facto control over many areas across the country, with some gangs providing services in areas under their control ( <a href="#">Washington Post, 29 October 2020</a> ; <a href="#">The Guardian, 20 April 2020</a> ).	The vast majority (85%) of gang violence targets civilians	Very high levels of public violence (e.g. signature killings, drive-by shootings, killings of family members, killings of public workers).	Inclusion. All indicators suggest inclusion.	YES
Montserrat	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO

Nicaragua	Low (0.79% based on initial pilot data)	8.09	Politicians and gangs have shallow links. Some members of gangs are allegedly part of paramilitary groups that support the government ( <a href="#">Open Democracy, 2 July 2018</a> ). Criminal groups potentially acting in collusion with state actors in the judicial branch and law enforcement ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 15 July 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No	No known control of gangs over specific territory.	N/A	There have been some cases of violent killings on the coast, with cases of torture, dismembering, and kidnapping targeting members of indigenous communities in territories disputed by settlers and prone to extractivist activities. Unclear if these are gang-related.	No inclusion. None of the indicators suggests inclusion. Gangs are nearly absent, and levels of violence are low.	NO
Panama	Low (3.42% based on initial pilot data)	10.30	Deep links between politicians and gangs once existed in the 1980s, though these links are now no longer as clear ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 24 March 2021</a> ). Nonetheless, there are still links between gangs and police forces, as well as local politicians ( <a href="#">Global Initiative, May 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	Somewhat - the former Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta Águila, Anti-Gang Unit was disbanded in 2019 and replaced by an urban rapid intervention force (Fuerza Alfa) unit focusing on crime at large ( <a href="#">TVN, 22 August 2019</a> ).	The two main gangs in Panama hold significant control over strategic areas (e.g. Colón Province, some areas of Panama City) ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A	Occasional gang feuds, fights, and killings but use of violence is rather limited. Occasional clashes with the police. Gangs have possession of sophisticated weapons to protect drug transit but usage of these seems limited ( <a href="#">Panama America, 19 September 2014</a> ). Rising homicides since 2017, with worrying indicators in 2021, which are largely	No inclusion. Few indicators suggest inclusion. Instances of violence and homicide rates are relatively low. Gang violence occasionally high, but contained within remits of gang feuds.	NO

								attributed to organized crime ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 3 November 2021</a> ).		
Paraguay	Low (5.09% based on initial pilot data)	7.90	Links likely as there are reports of state actors facilitating criminal markets, with instances of state officials prosecuted for supporting criminal activity. Also, links between police and gangs are common ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No. There is the Specialized Unit against Organized Crime within the Prosecutor's Office but it is unclear if it is a law enforcement unit dedicated to combating gangs ( <a href="#">Public Ministry of Paraguay, 2018</a> ).	State authorities reportedly face difficulty in maintaining control over vast areas where criminal groups have a strong presence ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	Many public killings, often part of gang feuds. About a third of homicides in 2021 were contract killings ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 16 February 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Most indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Peru	Low (2.31% based on initial pilot data)	7.69	Links exist between gangs and government entities, with frequent reports of officials and police forces supporting illegal activities of criminal groups ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	Somewhat - pending the foreseen implementation of a new specialized unit against organized crime in La Libertad region to fight gangs involved in extortion, executions, and other crime ( <a href="#">Government of Peru, 22 August 2022</a> ).	Unclear. Some criminal groups dealing in specific trades (e.g. timber extraction, drug trafficking, illegal mining) hold control over strategic areas, where local authorities have limited access ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ). Violence has affected indigenous communities in the central Peruvian rainforest, where organized crime groups have reportedly spread ( <a href="#">Amazon Watch, 12 November 2021</a> ).	Civilian targeting less common than other organized violence (based on initial pilot data)	While gang battles are most common, murders are equally committed by gangs. Contract killings occur publicly and have been on the rise since 2020, especially in the capital, including the port of Callao ( <a href="#">Perú 21, 2 January 2022</a> ).	No inclusion. Almost all indicators indicate exclusion. Share of gang violence is low, low homicide rates, and dispersed violence.	NO



Puerto Rico	Low (2.48% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (23.37%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	20.82	Close links and alliances exist between gangs and political parties as well as government entities. Gangs played a critical role in helping the former ruling party, the New Party for Progress (PNP), win multiple victories in past municipal elections ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 23 July 2013</a> ).	High levels of violence well-dispersed across the country, with some clustering in cities	Law enforcement agencies fighting organized crime groups and street gangs include the DEA, ATF, FBI, HSI, and IRS ( <a href="#">The United States Attorney's Office, District of Puerto Rico, last accessed on 25 August 2022</a> ). It is, however, unclear if there is a unit exclusively operating to combat gangs.	Unclear	Civilian targeting versus all other gang violence is equally distributed (as of trends in 2022)	Many gang-related executions and settling of scores between rival gangs. Usually specific targets, not aimed at public workers or family. Executions common through gunshots, drive-by shootings ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 17 January 2019</a> ).	Inclusion. Border case as indicators are mixed and sometimes unclear. Homicide rates are high, but bordering exclusion. No clear control of territory. Close links between politicians and gangs, public acts of violence, and high share of gang violence tips balance in favor of inclusion.	YES
Saint Kitts and Nevis	High (30% based on initial pilot data)	42.22	Unclear, though reports mention that state actors enable money laundering through state-run programmes ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ; <a href="#">OCCRP, 18 March 2022</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. While homicide rates are among the highest in the region, other indicators suggest exclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO
Saint Lucia	High (14.29% based on initial pilot data)	23.14	Unclear, though there are allegations that law enforcement (e.g. customs) has facilitated drug trafficking ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A; very low levels of violence	Yes, the Gang Investigations Unit was created in June 2022. The unit is part of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force and aims to restrict the influence of criminal gangs and activities ( <a href="#">The Voice, 24 June 2022</a> ).	No control of territory.	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. Little data and status unclear.	NO

Saint-Barthelemy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Saint-Martin	N/A	27.73	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Sint Maarten	N/A	N/A	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
St. Vincent and Grenadines	N/A	N/A	No evidence of links between gangs and politicians.	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	Unclear, though there are reports that gangs hold significant control over certain communities, where residents facilitate drug shipment in exchange of money ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Suriname	Low (8.33% based on initial pilot data)	6.11	Close links exist, with former President Bouterse having known links to organized criminal groups ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 16 July 2020</a> ; <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Low levels of dispersed violence	No	Unclear	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. No indicators supporting inclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO

Trinidad and Tobago	Low (4.08% based on trends in 2022), though much higher (20.85%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	36.25	Close links between gangs and politicians exist, and gang leaders have used these links to influence politics ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 21 October 2013</a> ; <a href="#">UWI, 4 November 2011</a> ).	High levels of well-dispersed violence	Yes, the Police Organised Crime And Intelligence Unit aims to "dismantle, disrupt, suppress, and prosecute members of organised criminal groups" ( <a href="#">Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, last accessed on 25 August 2022</a> ).	Reports suggest that gangs have a high influence in the capital and Laventille area, and control public infrastructure in the latter ( <a href="#">Organized Crime Index, 2021</a> ).	Civilian targeting versus all other gang violence is relatively equally distributed (as of trends in 2022)	Violence is public and deadly. Drive-by shooting and execution-style killings are common.	Inclusion. Majority of indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, high homicide rates, specialized units, links, and type of violence.	YES
Turks and Caicos	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A; very low levels of violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No gang violence reported.	NO
Uruguay	Low (8.7% based on initial pilot data)	9.85	No known links.	N/A; very low levels of violence	No. The General Directorate for the Fight against Organized Crime was created in 2011, but it is unclear whether a specialized anti-gang law enforcement unit exists ( <a href="#">Ministerio del Interior, 8 February 2011</a> ).	No control of territory.	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. All indicators suggest exclusion.	NO
Virgin Islands, U.S.	High (21.43% based on initial pilot data)	N/A	Unclear	N/A; very low levels of violence	No	No	Little violence reported (based on initial pilot data)	N/A	No inclusion. No indicators supporting inclusion. Generally, little data available and status unclear.	NO

Venezuela	High (27.56% based on trends in 2022), and even higher (58.73%) if including events that are very likely gang violence (based on TTPs) yet no gang is named	54.10	Links between state and criminal groups are substantial among a number of high offices ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 16 May 2018</a> ). Prison gangs have also been linked to politicians, as well as Colombian criminal groups ( <a href="#">El Nacional, 26 January 2022</a> ; <a href="#">InSight Crime, 13 August 2021</a> ). Moreover, police officers and supervisors in Carabobo state have been linked to the Tren de Aragua gang ( <a href="#">El Cooperante, 12 September 2018</a> ).	High levels of violence clustered in cities, mainly in Caracas (based on trends in 2022)	Yes, the elite Special Action Forces (FAES) unit was created to combat gangs. The Directorate Against Organized Crime (DCDO) is also involved in anti-gang efforts ( <a href="#">El Diario, 27 May 2021</a> ).	Gang control is limited except for some control in the southern region of the country (including sections of Bolivar state). However, gangs have significant presence in and control over key neighborhoods in large cities (including Caracas) ( <a href="#">DW, 1 July 2021</a> ).	Nearly a third (31%) of gang violence targets civilians (as of trends in 2022)	Gang violence can occasionally be very deadly ( <a href="#">InSight Crime, 21 September 2017</a> ). High rate of robberies and street violence perpetrated by organized crime groups.	Inclusion. Majority of indicators are satisfied: high share of gang violence, second highest homicide rate in the region, violence is concentrated in large cities, specialized units, links, and type of violence.	YES
-----------	---	-------	--	--	--	--	--	---	---	-----

\* ACLED is currently investigating the inclusion of gang violence as political violence in Colombia and the Dominican Republic.