

## 4 days ago Community-based crime and violence prevention success in Central America

The Latin American Public Opinion Project recently released its study on the effectiveness of USAID programs in Central America with [USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America Found Effective in LAPOP Impact Evaluation](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO914en.pdf) [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO914en.pdf]. Basically, everything that USAID is doing is effective and should be the foundation for additional US assistance to Central America - not going on a war footing in El Salvador. However, and not surprisingly, not all programs are equally successful.

Specifically, LAPOP found that the approach produced a *significant reduction in the level expected of crime victimization and violence* and also resulted in a *significant increase in the level expected of citizens' sense of security. Perception of neighborhood insecurity and perception of insecurity when walking alone at night declined* more than would be expected without USAID intervention. *Levels of satisfaction with police performance and trust in the police have increased significantly* over the levels expected in the absence of the treatment. *Indirect effects of the programs include strengthening democratic values*, which increased significantly over the expected level in the absence of the program.

Following the qualitative and quantitative analyses, they make the following policy recommendations:

Making community-based crime and violence prevention programs a frontline weapon to improve citizen security is key. So, too, is improving community organizations to address crime and violence.

Schools and families also play a vital role in decreasing instances of crime and violence. Expanding pre-school, after-school, and day-care access for children living in single-parent homes would be beneficial. Working with school administrators is important. Continuing to inform administrators and teachers on important issues such as recognizing signs of abuse in children is necessary. Directing more resources to school security, especially in the form of patrols when students enter and leave school, could prove useful both in cutting down violence in the schools and protecting children from gang members who lurk outside the school grounds. Lastly, given the aforementioned positive role of religious organizations, actively partnering with these organizations to support church-affiliated youth programs is likely to be fruitful.

The situation in Central America often feels overwhelming to me. Just where do you start amidst such poverty, violence, and corruption. However, building upon the successes of previous US AID programs, extending CICIG's mandate in Guatemala (and hopefully considering an extension to the rest of Central America, and some limited immigration reform on the part of the US can bring about an improvement in the quality of life of a significant number of Central Americans.