



## STUDY AFFIRMS IMPACT OF USAID PREVENTION APPROACH TO CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

### For Immediate Release

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USAID Press Office

Telephone: +1.202.712.4320 | Email: [USAIDPressOfficers@usaid.gov](mailto:USAIDPressOfficers@usaid.gov) | Twitter: [@USAIDPress](#)

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – An impact evaluation released today shows the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) community-based crime and violence prevention programs in Central America help residents feel safer, perceive less crime and murders, and express greater trust in police. The three-year study, considered the gold standard of randomized control trials, was conducted by Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Panama.

"Gangs and citizen insecurity are hindering Central America's economic growth and progress," said Mark Feierstein, USAID's Associate Administrator. "The evaluation findings show the need for and impact of prevention. We call on Central American governments, the private sector, and multilateral organizations to work with us to ensure a cohesive approach to reduce crime and violence in these countries."

With the highest murder rates in the world, Central America is increasingly embracing crime and violence prevention efforts over traditional iron-fisted tactics, which only lead to wrongful arrest of youth, overwhelmed prisons and justice systems, and empowered gangs.

Through the U.S. Government Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), USAID builds resilience to insecurity in high-crime, urban communities by improving access to public services, jobs, and justice. With 50 percent of the Central American population under 25 years old, USAID focuses on youth at particular risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence.

The evaluation gauged perceptions over time of crime victimization and citizen security. The findings, which assessed the success of USAID-presence neighborhoods compared to how they would fare without USAID assistance, show that:

- 51% fewer residents reported being aware of extortion and blackmail.
- 51% fewer residents reported being aware of murders.
- 35% fewer residents reported avoiding dangerous areas because of fear of crime.
- 25% fewer residents reported being aware of illegal drug sales.
- 19% fewer residents reported being aware of robberies.
- 14% fewer residents perceived youth in gangs as a problem.
- 18% more residents supported their community's crime prevention efforts.
- 9% more residents had trust in the police.

Based on the study's positive findings and USAID's extensive prevention experience, the Agency calls on Central American governments, U.S. government counterparts, private sector partners, and multilateral organizations to join together and increase prevention efforts to: 1) expand USAID's proven community-based prevention model in more dangerous communities in Central America; 2) target youth that are most likely to become perpetrators of crime and violence and support re-entry programs for those in gangs; 3) implement a place-based approach that integrates law enforcement efforts closely with community-based crime and violence prevention programs; and 4) align resources to ensure economies of scale on public security programming.

The findings will also be shared next week at [Together for Action: Partnerships for Youth Crime and Violence Prevention in the Americas](#), an international citizen security conference hosted by USAID, the World Bank, and the Government of Guatemala to explore and debate key prevention efforts, including community-based models; youth in conflict with the law; and the reintegration of former gang members into society.

For more information:

- [Fact Sheet on the USAID Impact Evaluation](#)
- [USAID Impact Evaluation of Crime and Violence Prevention Efforts](#)

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