The securitization of street gangs in El Salvador

An analysis of anti-gang policies and the gang truce of 2012

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Contents

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

ARENA	*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* or Nationalist Republican Alliance - a right-wing, conservative party in El Salvador
Clica	A local sub-group within a gang
El Faro	Online investigative Salvadoran newspaper
FESPAD	*Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho* or Foundation for the Study of the Application of the Law
FMLN	*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* or Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front - a left-wing political party in El Salvador.
IIRIRA	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
IUDOP	*Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública* or University Institute for Public Opinion Research
LAM	*Ley Anti-Maras* or Anti-Gangs Act of 2003
LAM 2	*Ley para el Combate de las Actividades Delincuenciales de Grupos o Asociaciones Ilícitas Especiales* or Act to Combat Delinquent Activities of Certain Illicit Groups or Associations of 2004
M-18	*Mara Dieciocho* or 18th Street Gang
Mano Dura	Severe anti-gang policy initiated by Salvadoran government beginning in 2003, involving i.a. large-scale arrests of gang members
Mano Extendida	'Soft hand' gang policy that includes reaching out to gangs not only with repressive measures, but also with prevention and rehabilitation programs
Mara/marero	A gang / gang member
MS-13	*Mara Salvatrucha* gang
Pandilla / pandillero	A gang / gang member
PNC	*Policía Nacional Civil* or National Civil Police
Súper Mano Dura	Renewed anti-gang plan which maintained the repressive characteristics of its predecessor, the Mano Dura plan
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1. Introduction

Twenty-three years have passed since the peace accords were signed in El Salvador in 1992. Ever since, its authoritarian rule and bloody civil war has ended. However, the country is far from being peaceful nowadays. On the contrary, El Salvador is among the most violent countries in the world today (SICA 2014, UNODC 2014). In the last decade, crime and homicide rates have been skyrocketing and amongst the highest in the world. Levels of violence in the region are as high as, or even higher than during the state terror, insurgency and war of the 1970's and 1980's (Oettler 2011: 262). Much of the crime in El Salvador and its neighboring countries has been ascribed to youth gangs, also known as *Maras* or *Pandillas* (Rodgers and Muggah 2009; Savenije and Van der Borgh 2009; Cruz 2010; Wolf 2011; Aguilar 2012*)*. In the first decade of the 21st century these gangs have been portrayed as a major security threat by the media, the public, and their respective governments (Hume 2007; Savenije and Van der Borgh 2009; Bruneau 2011; Peetz 2011). Security grew into the number one priority issue in the region and became the rationale for all of the policies formulated by political leaders in Central America (Bruneau 2011: 3). The Salvadoran administration started a 'war on gangs' and carried out severe and repressive anti–gang policies, also known as Mano Dura. The idea was that security could only be safeguarded if gangs were to be repressed and more penalties and tougher sanctions would dissuade criminals and reduce criminality (Apel & Nagin 2011). However, it soon became apparent that these security policies failed shortly after they were introduced and seemed counterproductive, with gang related activity and violence rates higher than ever (Hume 2007; Savenije and Van der Borgh 2009; Rodgers 2009; Cruz 2011, Gutiérrez Rivera 2011). Note that in the last few years several authors do see a trend towards a more integrated gang policy (Jütersjonke et al. 2009) and there have been several experiments with prevention and rehabilitation programs. Nonetheless, these softer approaches were never fully implemented and remained underfunded (ibid). Despite some initiatives and changes of different governmental regimes, Mano Dura continued to be the preferred choice in gang policy in the last decade.

However, March 2012 heralded an important event: a unique gang truce took place in El Salvador. The two biggest and most powerful rival gangs; the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Barrio Dieciocho (M-18) signed a truce with each other, 'facilitated' by the government and brokered by the catholic church and a former guerrilla commander. Essentially, the truce entailed an agreement between the gangs, in which they pledged to stop killing each other and end attacks on police, military and prison staff (Cruz 2013). The Salvadoran Mara truce appeared to have a dramatic effect on violence levels. Especially in the months following the truce the murder rate

dropped with a 50 percent; from an average of roughly 14 murders per day to 5.5 per day (Seelke 2014a: 11).

The truce process however, is surrounded with ambiguity. Not only its level of success and its sustainability, but above all, the role the government played in it and its attitude towards it. Initially, authorities denied any involvement in the truce. Even when a Salvadoran newspaper broke the news that the truce was secretly facilitated by the Salvadoran government, the authorities kept on announcing different and contradictory stories of their role in the whole process. This generated strong criticism and enormous distrust among civil society, influential academic writers and political opponents, even within the government itself. The truce suggests that 'negotiated' solutions to counter a security problem are indeed possible (see also Farah 2013; Figueroa et al 2013; Peeters et al 2013; Seelke 2013; Van der Borgh et al 2015). The facilitation of the truce may be seen as a new 'dialogue centred' policy approach, and a step away from the government's repressive anti-gang strategies of the last decade. But the ambiguous attitude and contrasting stories of the Salvadoran government with regards to the cease-fire process, does not indicate an equivocal clear-cut and well-defined government plan, nor policy.

The main aim of the thesis is to understand and explain the attitude of the Salvadoran government towards gangs and the recent gang truce. To achieve this, the thesis has a dual approach. Firstly, it seeks to investigate the development and framing of the anti-gang policies in the years preceding the gang truce (2003-2012), while uncovering the incentives and consequences behind the anti-gang policies. Secondly, this paper places a big emphasis on the gang truce of 2012 itself and the role and attitude of the government in this process. It analyzes the build-up to and implementation of the truce process, and tries to understand and explain the contradictory role of different governmental actors (proponents and opponents). In the years leading up to the truce the government had an equivocal anti-gang approach, advocated a Mano Dura gang policy and successfully 'securitized' the gang issue (Van der Borgh et al 2015). The truce could be seen as a different approach. Both government proponents and opponents of the truce framed the process and legitimized their actions in different ways. How and why did these 'securitizing actors' try to convince the public? The main question of the thesis is: "How and why did (different key actors within) the Salvadoran government frame gangs and relate to the gang truce of 2012?". To answer this question, one has to take a broader look at the government's anti-gang approach in the years preceding the truce in which the gangs were framed as a security threat. To explain and understand these policies, the research is built on the advancements of the securitization theory (Buzan, Wæver 1998; Balzacq 2009).

This thesis is based on high standard academic articles, government reports, policy

papers, but also on investigative journalistic articles. Anecdotal information from media outlets, citizens, NGOs, and some local and state government officials is plentiful and will be used in full. The collected data in this research draws mostly from investigative newspapers, such as El Faro and InsightCrime, UN reports and policy papers written by scholars who conducted long-lasting research in the field. El Faro has proven itself to be a valuable and reliable source for many scholars (Cruz 2013, Van der Borgh et al 2015). Especially, the investigative crime reporting platform Sala Negra, an offshoot of El Faro, has been found to be useful for this research. It sheds light on violence and instability in El Salvador in particular and documented the government policies of the last decade and the truce process extensively.

The thesis is written in four parts. Before discussing the truce, it is indispensable that one first looks at the historical and political context in which the gangs emerged and the truce evolved. Since the gangs in El Salvador are part of a broader regional gang phenomenon, the first chapter starts off with a general description of gangs in Central America, briefly tracing the gang's evolution and discussing its development and activities in the region. Subsequently, the next chapter provides the theoretical framework and takes a closer look at the concept of security. The Securitization Theory predominantly looks at the construction of threats and examines how security problems emerge, evolve and dissolve (Balzacq 2011). For this thesis, Balzacq's amended and deepened version of the theory provides an excellent lens to explain and understand how the gangs were framed as a threat in the years leading up to the truce. In the subsequent chapter the case study of El Salvador will be discussed. The chapter begins by discussing the implementation of exceptional government gang policies of 2003-2012, in the years preceding the truce. The development of the anti-gang policies will be examined, all in while fitting these policies in the securitization framework. It is important to clearly outline the political discourse and policies regarding gangs in the years prior to the truce, to see in which context the cease-fire arose. The subsequent chapter discusses the gang truce and elaborates on what the gang pact exactly entailed, whereupon the focus will shift to the role of different key actors within the government in the process. The overall aim of that chapter is to understand and explain how and why both proponents and opponents of the truce framed and legitimized their stance and actions. In an exploratory way, the chapter ends by briefly placing the truce within the broader securitization theory, building on the work of Van der Borgh et al (2015). The concluding chapter then critically draws conclusions on the findings of the previous chapters.

2. Central American Gang Phenomenon

The gang phenomenon in El Salvador has to be seen in light of the wider gang phenomenon in the region. Therefore, this chapter describes the development of the gang phenomenon across Central America, with a particular focus on the countries of the Northern Triangle, which make up Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (UNODC 2007: 25). These countries share a similar historical, cultural and political background, including authoritarian and military governments, periods of political instability, prolonged civil wars (Guatemala and El Salvador), and they all share the presence of gangs, in particular the presence of the two rival gangs Mara Salvatrucha or 'MS-13' and Barrio 18 or 'M-18' - the latter designations will be used throughout this thesis. However, the numbers of street gang members in the countries of the Northern Triangle, vary widely from report to report. Estimates range from 85.000 gang members (Brownfield 2012) to 54.000 gang members according to the UN (UNODC 2012). The latter, divides this number by stating that 20.000 gang members are present in El Salvador, 12.000 in Honduras and 22.000 in Guatemala (ibid). El Salvador has the highest concentration of gang members, with some 323 for every 100.000 citizen (ibid).

In the next section gangs will be briefly defined, after which its development will be discussed and the gangs' main activities. In addition, this section ends by elaborating on the amount of media and political attention gangs have received in the last decade.

Map 1: Countries of the Northern Triangle including El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras

2.1 Defining gangs

When referring to Central American gangs, some studies and academics use the Spanish terms 'pandillas' and 'maras' interchangeably (Demoscopía 2007), while others distinguish between the two (Rodgers et al 2009; Jütersonke et al 2009; Seelke 2014). In general, researchers that differentiate between the two types of Central American gangs define localized groups with a long presence in the region as pandillas, whereas maras are defined as a recent phenomenon with some transnational roots. In this thesis the terms are used interchangeably. Also interchangeably used, are the English term 'gang member' and the Spanish terms 'marero', 'mara' and 'pandillero', which have the same meaning. In addition, some academics classify gangs into "first generation" (localized groups), "second generation" (national groups with some transnational links), and "third generation" (internationalized, networked, and complicated structured) gangs (Sullivan 2009). Opinions among researchers are divided whether the maras embody second or third generation gangs. Several security specialists argue that the MS-13 and M-18 gangs have contact and communicate between different sections in different countries across Central America. These gangs could change from first and second generation gangs into third generation gangs which, according to Franco (2008) and Sullivan (2009), are highly organized transnational criminal groups. In addition, Cruz holds the opinion that gangs have already grown into "protection rackets with features of transnational organizations" (2010: 379) - a process enhanced by the suppressive anti-gang policies implemented by the governments of the Northern Triangle.

2.2 Development of gangs

The presence of gangs in Central America is not a new phenomenon. Pandilleros with names as Chancleta, la Máquina, la Gallo, la Morazán and la Mao did exist in El Salvador long before the 1990's (Savenije 2007). These youth gangs were active in the region since the 1960's and 1970's, and some of them were considered violent, but they drew little attention from the authoritarian regimes and the media at the time (Bruneau 2010: 140). Only after the postwar years of the 1990's, the maras started to come into prominence (Whitfield 2013: 7), especially the two rival gangs MS-13 and M-18. These gangs – which in 2012 declared a gang truce - are the largest and most notorious maras in the region. Both originated in Los Angeles.

During the country's civil war, one in six Salvadorans were displaced from their homes (Dudley 2013a: 8). Many sought a safe place in the United States, the majority in Southern

California (Whitfield 2013:7). In the 1970's and 1980's these areas suffered from serious gang problems and many new immigrants were targeted by local gangs. M-18 was formed in the 1960's by Mexican youth in the streets of Los Angeles and its members began recruiting Central American immigrants (Mateo 2011). MS-13 was created during the 1980's by Salvadorans in Los Angeles who had fled the country's civil conflict. The M-18 and MS-13 rapidly became bitter rivals, frequently fighting each other on the streets of Los Angeles (ibid). Both gangs later expanded their operations to Central America. This process increased when the US immigration legislation acquired a more restrictive character and became more intolerant towards migrants. After the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the city police blamed most of the violence on local gangs, including MS-13 (Arana 2005). In response, California toughened its anti-gang legislation, and started charging young gang members as adults instead of minors, which resulted in hundreds of young Latinos being sent to jail. In 1996, as a response to rising illegal migration, the United States enacted new restrictive legislation by passing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant responsibility Act (IIRIRA), after which they began repatriating illegal immigrants, many with criminal convictions, back to the region (Seelke 2014). Between 1998 and 2005, the USA deported almost 46,000 convicts to Central America, in addition to 160,000 illegal immigrants caught without a permit (Rodgers and Muggah 2009: 6). The Northern Triangle - Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador – received over 90% of the deportations from the USA (USAID 2006: 18–19). Once these street gangs were deported back, many continued their activities back home (Seelke 2014). While M-18 and MS-13 began as loosely structured street gangs, there is some evidence that suggests that both maras, but particularly the MS-13, have now expanded geographically and became more sophisticated and organized (Cruz 2010). Still, the term "transnational gangs" is misleading to describe the maras, since their primary focus continues to be on local issues, such as controlling a particular extortion racket or local drug distribution (UNODC 2012: 28).

Note that the gang's migratory background is not the only factor why the gangs emerged in Central America. Domestic factors also play a role in their emergence, such as a culture of violence, dysfunctional families, increasing urban growth and socio-economic inequalities, as well as a lack of educational and employment opportunities (Savenije and Van der Borgh 2004; Hume 2007: Rodgers 2009; Imbusch 2011: 131).'

2.3 Gang activity and attention

Press reports and many Central American officials have blamed the MS-13 and M-18 for a large percentage of violent crimes committed in those countries (Seelke 2014: 4). However, several

organizations such as the UNODC found limited evidence to support that conclusion, and still maintains that disputes between other crime groups over cocaine trafficking routes are the primary source of violence in most of the region (UNODC 2012). Gang experts have argued that, although gangs may be more visible than other criminal groups, gang violence is only one part of the broad range of violence in Central America (ibid). Still, the decline in homicides that occurred in El Salvador during the gang-truce in 2012, is a sign that gangs could indeed be responsible for a significant percentage of violence in that country.

It remains unclear how many homicides can be attributed to Central American gangs, but the maras have undeniably carried out other criminal activities. Several reports state that gangs are guilty of kidnapping, human trafficking; and drug and weapons smuggling (Seelke 2014: 4). Furthermore, gangs have increasingly been involved in extortion of inhabitants, bus drivers, and business owners in the big cities throughout the region. If a citizen fails to pay, this often results in harassment or violence by mareros (ibid). Hence, they have a big influence on the daily life of Salvadoran citizens. And the various gangs do not only operate alone, but also conduct actions collectively - even before the gang truce – as the joint effort of MS-13 and M-18 in September 2010 demonstrates. To protest against a recently enacted anti-gang legislation, both gangs united and issued a warning for public transport workers to stay home for three days or face reprisals. Consequently, the threats paralyzed the country's transport system (Seelke 2014: 4).

As mentioned above, gangs have existed in El Salvador long before the civil war in the 1980's but it's only during the past two decades that they have gotten extensive political (and media) attention. In the first half of the nineties, gangs were tolerated in El Salvador, up to the point at which they were even promoted (Valencia 2014). Newspapers wrote about the "mara fashion" and showed how they dressed, talked and published photos and articles on how to learn their 'sign language' (ibid). However, since the second half of the 1990's gangs have become subject to sensationalist stories of the media, the general public and politicians. The media and the governments' security discourse have contributed to creating an image of the maras as 'criminal' and 'violent' by which "their marginalization and criminalization as well as their persecution has become justified and legitimized" (Gutiérrez Rivera 2013).

Chapter four will further elaborate on the security framing of gangs and the Salvadoran government's anti-gang policies. To see how and why the maras have been framed and securitized in the years leading up to the truce, the next chapter starts with the theoretical foundations of the securitization theory. This theory provides an excellent way through which one can understand and explain the government's relation to gangs expressed in their actions and anti-gang policies of the last decade.

3. Securitization Theory

In the following section the theoretical framework is outlined. The securitization theory studies the construction of threats and explains how public problems (not only threats) emerge, spread and dissolve (Balzacq 2011). The theory is useful for this thesis, because it provides an excellent lens through which the attitude of the government towards – and framing of - gangs can be explained and understood. This chapter will start off with a description of the original securitization framework as it is laid out by the Copenhagen School. Subsequently its limitations and critiques will be discussed, followed by the presentation of an alternative, more integrated framework, the "sociological securitization theory". In line with Van der Borgh et al's research (2015) on Salvadoran gangs and the application of Balzacq's amended version, this thesis will apply this framework to the study of Salvadoran anti-gang policies in the next chapter.

3.1 The Copenhagen School

The concept of securitization is primarily associated with a group of scholars who can be referred to as the 'Copenhagen School' (hereafter 'CS'), of who Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde are its founders. The CS has contributed significantly to the security studies literature, which traditionally defined (international) security in a military context (Emmers 2007). However, the CS soon adopted a multi-sectorial approach to security which included non-military threats to security and non-state actors (Emmers 2007: 110). The CS added four categories to the concept of security: environmental, economic, societal and political security. The dynamics of each of these categories are determined by "securitizing actors" and "referent objects". The former are actors who securitize issues by declaring something - a referent object - existentially threatened (Buzan et al.1998: 36). According to Buzan et al (1998: 21) security "is about survival" which means that a matter is presented as "posing an existential threat to a designated referent object". Securitizing actors can range from political leaders and governments to pressure groups. In the analysis of the Salvadoran gang policy and truce, government officials are the securitizing actors. Referent objects are 'things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival' (ibid). It depends on the security sector but referent objects can refer to a wide range, such as the state, an ideology, national economies, collective identities etc. In this thesis, the referent objects are national and citizen (in)security of El Salvador.

To describe the concept of security and to determine how a specific issue becomes securitized and de-securitized, the CS came up with a useful analytical framework (Emmers 2007:

111).   The authors argue that any issue can be non-politicized, politicized, securitized and de-securitized. That is to say, a matter is non-politicized when it's not in public debate and there is no need for state action (ibid). Issues that are politicized are part of public policy and require normal government decision. Securitized issues however, need emergency measures beyond the states' standard political procedures (Ibid). A de-securitized issue implies the opposite, when a matter moves from the emergency level back into the normal political arena. Politicized issues can be transformed into a securitized issue through means of an 'act of securitization', which will be discussed in the next.
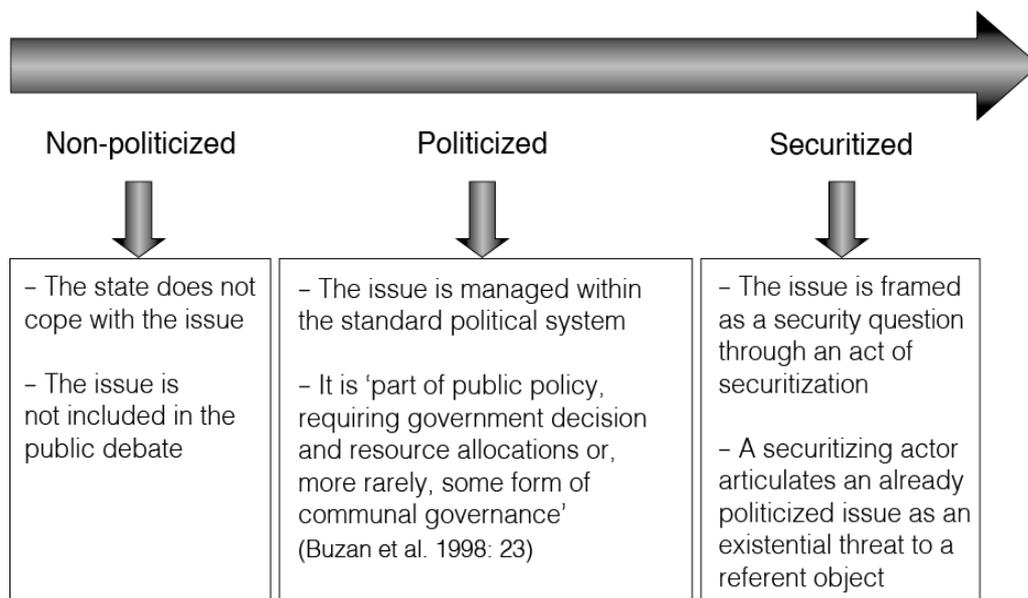

Figure 1: Securitization spectrum (Emmers 2011: 138)

An 'act of securitization' implies that an issue that is normally managed within the standard political system moves to the securitized end of the spectrum in which the issue is framed as a security problem. How does this happen? According to the CS it all begins by 'saying security'; by saying it, a state declares an emergency condition. Every securitization is composed of a "security act" (by speaking the language of security and asking for the adoption of extraordinary counter-measures) and a "political act" (political decision to express and frame the threat in such a way as to convince the target audience). These two components highlight how difficult it is to draw a clear line between politicization and securitization. For example in cases when political reasons are the motivation behind securitization, e.g. when politicians seek to boost their popularity to increase their chances of re-election (Emmers 2011: 144). It is relevant to pay attention to such political motivations in securitization processes – especially as with regards to the case of Salvador and the way the maras and the truce process are portrayed and dealt with.

The CS presents two stages in securitization (Emmers 2011: 139). The first is the framing of a certain issue as a threat. In the second stage the audience needs to accept the idea that the specific referent object is indeed existentially threatened. At the first securitization phase, (non)state actors depict certain issues or persons as existential threats to a target object or community (Emmers 2011: 139). Issues are labelled as national security issues because they are considered of having a greater importance than other issues. They may even be exaggerated, amplified and presented to be of 'absolute priority' in order to enable securitizing actors to deal with them above all other matters. According to Buzan et al (1998: 24) security is a socially constructed, "self-referential practice". Hence, securitization theory clearly has a constructivist component. Matters can become security issues by means of their presentation and acceptance as such, rather than because of any inherent threatening qualities of itself (Peoples et al 2010: 78). In other words, there may not even be a real threat, but the framing of the issue as a threat is enough to make it a security issue. However, this portrayal in itself does not automatically make an issue a security matter. In the second phase of securitization the securitizing actor must convince a relevant audience (this could be public opinion, the military, other politicians etc.) that a specific referent object is indeed in substantial danger. The CS states that only with the audience acceptance can extraordinary measures be imposed to fight against a security threat. In addition, the audience has to accept "the use of counteractions outside the normal bounds of political procedures" (Emmers 2011: 139) at this level of 'urgency'. The success of a securitizing move – consequently a successful securitization – does not depend on the adoption of such extraordinary means, but rather on the acceptance of the security threat by the audience. It is important to note that the audience, in the CS' version of securitization, "excludes the wider population and consists solely of political elites and some state institutions such as the military" (Emmers 2011: 140). Even when the majority of the population rejects a security discourse and sees the extraordinary measures as illegitimate, the securitization move can still be successful when being accepted by a smaller group (Collins 2005).

The Copenhagen School's analytical framework also talks about 'facilitating conditions', which influence the success of a securitizing move. These internal and external conditions determine when a speech act (or securitizing move) works and is accepted by an audience. First off, the way the speech act is performed and the way an issue is framed as an existential threat is determined by the linguistic grammatical form. In the second place, the position of the securitizing actor depends on the context and the social conditions. It matters if the securitizing actor has authority, which could help the audience accept the speech act. In addition, an external condition can also have connection with the threatening characteristics of the portrayed issue

that either facilitate or hinder securitization. In brief, a successful speech act therefore depends on a "combination of language and society" (Buzan et al. 1998: 32). Accordingly, the portrayal of an issue as an existential threat is the most important aspect for the Copenhagen School, which places the 'speech act' at the center of securitization. It therefore doesn't matter if the threat is real or not (Emmers 2011; Buzan et al. 1998). An hypothesis which is limited and therefore criticized by several other securitization theorists, which will be discussed below.

3.2 Critiques and new approaches

"When theory is advanced, ideas are elaborated in some new way" (Ragin 1994). This can also be applied to the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. Various scholars have tried to work with the original securitization theory of the CS, but this approach to securitization has often been criticized for being too limited, too focused upon the speech act and thus not serving a useful purpose in the study of real world situations (Balzacq 2005, 2011; Stritzel 2007; McDonald 2008). Balzacq, among others, wanted to extend the concept beyond the speech act (or securitizing move), and make it better applicable to empirical research and more deployable to explain "the development of specific security problems" (Balzacq 2011: 4) – for example the Maras in El Salvador. These endeavours to expand the concept of securitization are very useful for this thesis, because this can help explain and understand why and how the Salvadoran gangs are dealt with and framed as a threat. Balzacq argues that the word 'security' does not point towards an objective reality, but states that security is rather "an agency in itself, to the extent that it conveys a self-referential practice instantiated by discourses on existential threats that empower political elites to take policy measures (sometimes extraordinary) to alleviate 'security' "(Balzacq 2011: 12).

In addition, Balzacq makes a distinction between 'philosophical' and 'sociological' forms of securitization. The original underlying rationale of securitization is that "no issue is essentially a menace" but turns into one via discursive politics (Balzacq 2011: 1). Precisely this development is explained differently from a philosophical and from a sociological perspective within securitization. The philosophical view, which lies at the heart of the Copenhagen School's approach to securitization, is based on the power of language and the core concept that "by saying it, something is done" (Wæver 1995: 55), which therefore relates security with a speech act. On the other hand, securitization is sociologically viewed as a strategic or pragmatic process that cannot be detached from "practices, context and power relations that characterize the construction of threat images" (Balzacq 2011: 1). Balzacq largely bases himself on the

sociological view and its implications on how securitization is related to a broader reality that goes beyond the speech act. He argues that, securitization, seen as a practice, can be of linguistic or non-linguistic nature. He goes on to suggest that the non-linguistic version does not disprove the linguistic and in fact incorporates several of its characteristics (Balzacq 2011). Instead of clearly determining one approach to be linguistic or not (most are non-linguistic), Balzacq believes it is more important to see in which way the philosophical and the sociological form of securitization go in line with his three assumptions: (1) the centrality of the audience, (2) the co-dependency of agency and context and (3) the dispositif as well as the structuring force of practices. Balzacq argues that one should give the audience a central role in securitization and he dismisses the 'disaggregation' of the audience between for example the judiciary and the general public. Particularly, Balzacq rejects the strict division of roles between 'securitizing actors' and 'audiences', claiming that their roles can be blurred. It's not a one-way stream in which securitizing actors can only communicate towards the audience. The audience has the agency to also pressure for securitization. It can exert pressure on the securitizing actor to adopt certain measures to counter a threat. In addition, Balzacq argues that the external reality does matter, as opposed to Buzan and his colleagues who argued that 'security is what language constructs – which makes what is 'out there' thus irrelevant. In Balzacq's sociological view, the statements of the securitizing actor need to correspond to reality. The discourse of a threat arises in a certain 'security context'. But this security discourse need to match with the audience' experiences, interpretations and expectations about who is threatening who and what one can do to tackle it. Furthermore, Balzacq underscores that for one to understand securitization process one cannot leave out the local political histories of how security is conceived and how this is translated into practice (Van der Borgh 2015: 155).

A final critique is that the CS' focus on language and the speech act runs the risk of ignoring other forms of representation – such as images, material or bureaucratic practices – that play an important role in constructing and communicating security and that are not only consequences of the speech act itself (McDonald 2008; Balzacq 2011). Although security practices are mainly enacted via policy tools and bureaucratic practices, images or visual representations are key elements of securitization as well.

As it now appears, the sociological securitization theory of Balzacq provides a good theoretical foundation on which to analyse the government's relation to the gangs prior to the gang truce of 2012. The theory will help to analyse the development, transformation and consequences of the gang-policies of El Salvador. Considerable attention will be given to Balzacq's three levels of analysis: 'agents', 'context' and 'acts'. The level of agents concentrates on

the actors and the relations that structure the situation that is being analysed (such as securitizing actors, audiences, referent objects etc.). The level of context is important because "discourse does not occur nor operate in a vacuum; instead it is contextually enabled and constrained" (Balzacq 2011: 36). Threats arise out of specific contexts and Balzacq argues that it is therefore necessary to situate the discourse both socially and historically (ibid). The level of acts is interested in discursive and non-discursive practices (use of language, including metaphors, stereotypes, frames that are used etc.) and the policies that are being applied. The latter level will receive specific attention in the next chapter.

4. Governmental responses to gangs 2003-2012

The next section will outline how the Salvadoran government discussed and framed gangs in the nine years preceding the gang truce (2003-2012). In line with Van der Borgh et al (2015) this thesis argues that the gang issue was successfully securitized in this period. The chapter explores the development of the anti-gang policies, laws and strategies to counter gangs in the past decade, tracing it back to the first Mano Dura (best translated as 'Iron fist' or 'Heavy Hand') policies in the beginning of the new millennium, followed by Super Mano Dura, Mano Amiga ('Friendly Hand') and back to Mano Dura. In addition, this chapter explores the outcome and consequences of these government policies that arose in a violent historical context and albeit El Salvador being a democratic country it also shows characteristics of authoritarianism. This chapter furthermore argues that public support and the electoral context are important factors in the framing of gangs as threats to security.

4.1 Mano Dura

In an early survey on crime in El Salvador in 1993, ten years before the Mano Dura policies were implemented, the government did not acknowledge gangs as a pressing issue, at least for a while (Wolf 2011a: 59). However, in the period after the peace agreements, crime and violence soon became an issue of concern for many Salvadorans (Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015: 157). Public opinion surveys already showed that nearly half of the respondents considered 'delinquency, violence and gangs' to be the main problem the country had to deal with. At the time however, there didn't exist a serious governmental gang policy or answer to counter the gangs yet (ibid). This remained the case up until 22 July 2003, when a radical change in gang

policy came to the fore. Nine months before the 2004 presidential elections, ruling President Francisco Flores (1999-2004) of the right-wing ARENA Party, launched a gigantic military law enforcement plan: Mano Dura (translated as "Iron fist" or "Strong Hand"), aimed at cracking down on the Maras in the country (Pedraza Farina 2010:108). Mano Dura represents the beginning of what has become to be known the 'war on gangs' and characterized El Salvador and its neighboring countries Guatemala and Honduras during most of the first decade of the 21st century (Rodgers & Muggah 2009: 308; Savenije and Van der Borgh 2014). The Salvadoran authorities started with the expansion of military and police controls and gang members were arrested and sent to jail en masse (Rodgers & Muggah 2009: 308; Peetz 2011: 1484). According to President Flores, gangs were responsible for 40% of the homicides in the country (Cruz 2011: 148) - a number which was not backed by official reports and even contradicted with police reports. However, president Flores held the gangs responsible for most of the violence in the country and saw the Mano Dura plan as a necessity in his fight against them. The president legitimized these anti-gang policies with public statements in which he framed gangs as a threat to the national and citizen security. The statement below clearly demonstrates the way Flores tried to convince the Salvadoran public – an important aspect of securitization - that gangs were a common enemy that needed to be clamped down:

> Criminal gangs have descended into dangerous levels of moral degradation and barbarism. We have all known cases of decapitations, mutilations, satanic acts and dismembering committed against minors, old people and defenseless women. It is time we freed ourselves from this plague. - Flores (as quoted in Hume 2007: 745)

The crackdown on gangs needed new legislation. On 12 November 2003 the new "Ley Anti-Mara" (LAM) or Anti-Mara Law was adopted. This law explicitly targeted youth gang members (Hume 2007). It practically made "being young and poor a crime" (Zilberg 2007: 76). Article 1 of the LAM described gangs as a 'group of people that disrupts the public order and offends decorum or good customs' (LAM I). The law furthermore permitted judges to sentence Mara members older than twelve to two until five years of prison for having gang-specific tattoos or for publicly using gang signs (Peetz 2004; Rodgers & Muggah 2009). Moreover, Article 29 of the LAM introduced a fine for anyone "found wandering about without an identity document in…any settlement, without justified cause or who is not known by the inhabitants" (Amnesty International 2003). In addition, the gathering of two or more gang members in public spaces was outlawed, which included standing, sitting, walking, driving, gathering, appearing, whistling

or gesturing in public view (Zilberg 2007: 112). The Anti-Gang law was presented by President Flores as a "matter of state pride, and [that] the state must display its strength in the face of gang violence" (Hume 2007: 745).

However, the LAM made no distinction between minors and adults, which violated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), whereupon the Anti-Gang law was declared unconstitutional by the Salvadoran Supreme Court (ibid). As a consequence, approximately 95% of the 20.000 arrested gang members between July 2003 and July 2004 were released without charges (Hume 2007, Savenije and Van der Borgh 2014). Furthermore, the government's repressive policies were vigorously opposed by human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. They not only saw a violation on civil liberties and human rights, but both organizations also presented evidence of the existence of paramilitary death squads in El Salvador (and Honduras) that were linked to state authorities and that were deliberately targeting gang members, and often youths more generally (Faux 2006). The widespread criticism of the severe and abusive measures as well as the expiry of the Anti-Maras Law, made Flores' successor, President Saca, adopt a more comprehensive gang policy which included preventive and rehabilitation approaches as well (Wolf 2011: 60f), see section 4.2. In general however, the new president Saca continued with the war on gangs. He is known for introducing the new super anti-mara initiative: plan Super Mano Dura.

Super Mano Dura

When the ARENA party won the elections in 2004, Flores' successor, Elías Antonio Saca (2004-2009), continued with the implementation of anti-gang policies. He started the initiative "Super Mano Dura", which included greater police power to search and arrest suspected mareros and harsher penalties for convicted gang members, insisting that gangs were mainly responsible for violence in the country (Cruz 2011: 148). This new plan respected the provisions of the UNCRC but made the penalties for gang membership harder by prolonging prison sentences. Although under the new law the police needed proof of active delinquent behavior in order to arrest an individual, the amount of prison inmates doubled in just five years, from 6.000 to 12.000 prisoners, 40% of whom were labeled gang members (Hume 2007).

At first sight, it seemed like the reforms were working: the Salvadoran government reported that the gang legislation increased gang incarceration and a 14% drop in murders in 2004 (Seelke 2014: 9). Approximately 60,000 Salvadorans were incarcerated during the first three years of the program including some 14,000 youngsters in El Salvador between mid-2004 and

late 2005 (Seelke 2014: 9). As the table below displays, prisons became heavily overcrowded in the first decade of the 20th century.

Country	2005-07		2011	
	System Capacity	System Population	System Capacity	System Population
El Salvador	7,770	12,581	8,187	24,399

Figure 2: Prison Overcrowding in El Salvador 2005-07 and 2011 (Source: Carranza 2012)

Although the heavy anti-gang policies and subsequent gang incarceration didn't lead to a reduction in homicides, or violence in general, Saca still continued depicting gangs as criminals. Being a gang member was tantamount to being member of a terrorist organization, which provided for 5 to 10 years in prison (Pedraza 2010: 124). And just like former president Flores, Saca heavily promoted policies that referred to the elimination of security threats (the gangs). According to the president the wider population needed to be protected against these threats. Another such example of framing gangs as a threat to national security and citizen security is the following quote by President Saca:

> It is in the issue of citizen security where we confront the biggest challenge. Organized crime and the delinquency of gangs constantly hit decent citizens, who are the immense majority, and this is an attack against the stability of the country. – Saca (as quoted in Peetz 2011: 1472).

The language of security – an important aspect of securitization – is very obvious in the speech acts of both President Flores and Saca; the keyword gang is constantly associated with words like criminals, plague, and the solution to the problem (heavy hand policies). The Mano Dura period is characterized by an effective and strong 'securitization' strategy with heavy anti-gang measures and public speeches in which gangs are constantly framed as a threat. This strategy allowed the administrations to increase public support for its anti-gang policy (to be discussed later in section 4.4). Saca's period however is not entirely marked by repressive measures. During his cabinet there were also preventive and rehabilitative approaches to gangs, which will be discussed next.

4.2 Mano Amiga and Extendida

> We are going to use "Super Iron Fist" to bring the delinquents before the law, but at the same time we will lend our hand to avoid that those who are in risk become delinquents and to rescue and rehabilitate those who want to be reintegrated into society. - Saca 2004 (as quoted in Peetz 2011: 1478)

The statement above shows that the repressive anti-gang discourse of president Saca has been mildly combined with a preventive and rehabilitative gang discourse. This time, the president did not only promote repressive measures to combat gangs, but he focused on softer measures as well. Another example is the statement the president made in December 2007, at the opening of the regional summit of the Central American Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana – SICA). At the summit, Saca underscored the importance of coordinated efforts against crime as well as a focus on prevention (Seelke 2012: 12). This came to be known as Mano Amiga (Friendly Hand), an early prevention program designed to help at-risk youths not to join gangs. The program was supplemented by Mano Extendida (Extended Hand) and aimed at the reintegration and rehabilitation of gang members into society (Wolf 2011). In addition, Saca organized various dialogue sessions with civil society actors. During these sessions he discussed the gang problem and tried to bring up alternatives for the anti-gang law (Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015: 159).

Various authors label Mano Dura and Súper Mano Dura as first-generation policies, whereas Mano Amiga and Mano Extendida are often seen as second generation policies (Rodgers et al 2009; Krause 2010: 110). In a sense, you can argue that Saca thus moved from first- to second-generation policies. However, the latter were just accompanying the former; and prevention did not replace suppression (Rodgers & Muggah 2009; Wolf 2009; Peetz 2011). In general, government-sponsored prevention programs have tended to be small-scale, ad hoc, and underfunded, which resulted in only a very limited impact (Wolf 2009). The authorities have been even less involved in sponsoring rehabilitation programs for individuals that want to leave gangs. As a result that most reintegration programs are funded by church groups or civil society organizations. Saca's cabinet thus continued in its repressive approach and maintained the rationale that "hard lined law enforcement policies are the only effective way to deal with the gang problem" (Manwaring 2007: 22).

However, the next President, Mauricio Funes, was the first to actually promote an alternative anti-gang strategy. When this newly elected president of the leftist party FMLN came

to the presidency in 2009, he committed himself to developing an alternative anti-gang strategy, based on prevention, prison-based rehabilitation and investigative policing (Wolf 2011: 69). Not only did his administration increase the funding for prevention programs (from 1 to 14% of the budget of the Ministry of Security) (Seelke 2011: 12), Funes furthermore replaced several staff of the Salvadoran Public Security Council (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública – CNSP) and the National Civil Police (PNC) (Wolf 2011: 69). Placing the gang phenomenon within a broader spectrum of social and security problems (Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015: 160), the repressive crackdown policies seemed to be replaced by prevention and rehabilitation policies. There were multiple indications of a more dialogue centered approach than the previous two presidents had undertaken. By introducing these initiatives, Funes moved the gangs from the securitized end of the spectrum into the normal political arena, i.e. the de-securitization of the gang phenomenon (ibid). "The gangs were still seen as an important security issue, but there was a willingness to 'de-mediatize' and de-securitize the issue", according to Van der Borgh and Savenije (2015: 161). However, Funes would soon fall back into the repressive measures of his predecessors (see section 4.5). In addition, these "prevention" and "rehabilitation" plans had several gaps. One being the lack of political will. In fact, these programmes did not receive the same political attention and resources as the Mano Dura plans that continued to incarcerate gang members in El Salvador. As a result, the programmes ended up as an illusion of good intentions, despite the genuine goodwill of the creators. In some cases, maras who participated in these programmes were detained while undertaking the programme, which increased the suspicions surrounding the programmes themselves (Peace Studies Group 2012: 10).

In short, Mano Amiga and Mano Extendida (the preventive and rehabilitative approaches) were not to be considered a "serious step towards less repressive policies" (Peetz 2011: 1485). An anti-gang policy remained to be the preferred choice. To better understand the government's repressive anti-gang attitude and actions, it is important to place them in their historical and political context. The next two sections will elaborate on the context in which the policies arose.

4.3 A violent historical and authoritarian context

The Mano Dura policies have to be understood and explained in their violent historical context. Hume argues that "repressive policies tend to be employed by weak states that do not have the capacity to develop other strategies to contain crime and violence" (2007: 744). In El Salvador's political history, violence has for over a long time played a central role in shaping society (ibid: 740). In addition, the country has a "historical problem of endemic violence". Structural and

socioeconomic problems together with this violent context, are important to explain the 'climate of fear and violence' that defines El Salvador (ibid).

The historical context matters because it has an impact on how the Salvadoran public (the audience) absorbs a securitizing move or a speech act, and hence determines if securitization is within reach. In addition, Cruz argues that in a context of violence citizens find 'order' more important than human rights and civil freedoms. This is a reason why the public is prone to authoritarian speech acts and demands Mano Dura policies to make sure security is supported (Cruz 2000: 518). As is outlined in chapter three, the process of moving an issue from the (non)political to the securitized end of the spectrum is mostly handled by powerful state actors (Emmers 2011). Along these lines, Collins demonstrates that there is a difference in the legitimacy of democratic and authoritarian countries (2005: 570). The governing elite controls the ways in which information is dispersed in authoritarian regimes. This causes a one-sided and unbalanced depiction of an issue (ibid). The authoritarian system presupposes the acceptance of a discourse by the audience and this way ensures that the public or 'audience' receives the securitizing move as was planned. On the contrary, in a democratic regime, the right of political leaders to undertake securitizing moves and the legitimacy to implement extraordinary measures to control a threat, stems from being elected by its national citizens (Collins 2005: 570). In a democratic system, the audience can agree or disagree with the government's perception of occurrences (ibid: 571). El Salvador nowadays is a democracy, but Hume argues that the country is still marked by a legacy of authoritarian rule, which shows itself in the form of the state as an "agent of repression" (2007: 744). The one-sided framing and perception of the gangs by the ruling Salvadoran elite (and the media) shows that authoritarian characteristics are still visible in this country.

4.4 Political context: public support and electoral interests

> The real motivation for plan Mano Dura was not the preoccupation with delinquency, but the electoral elections of 2004 – Sonja Wolf (as quoted in Figueroa 2013: 34)

In line with Sonja Wolf's statement above, this thesis argues that the Mano Dura policies of the Salvadoran governments were not only created to combat the mara violence, but have to be understood in their electoral context as well. Bruneau supports this claim by stating that "Mano Dura can be best understood as a populist policy whose primary purpose was not to curb street

gang activity but to improve the ARENA party advantage in the run up to the 2004 elections"
(2011:59). Opinion polls showed that the Salvadoran public greatly agreed with the strong
repressive anti-gang approach of the government. With the upcoming elections in 2004 in mind,
Flores' right-wing ARENA-party knew it could gain electorally. It was not for nothing that
Flores presented his Mano Dua plans nine months before the presidential elections. The
ARENA party was up against the leftist party "Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front"
(FMLN), who rejected the heavy Mano Dura approach based on human rights issues (Cruz
2013). In the end, Flores succeeded in framing the issue in a way that portrayed the FMLN as
pro-gangs (ibid). The ARENA-president candidate Antonio Saca came to power promising to
maintain the iron fist policies of his predecessor Flores and to continue his 'war on gangs'.
Thirteen months later, Saca (2004-9) promoted the Super Mano plan, a continuation of the
previous anti-gang policy. Super Mano was launched in the context of another electoral
campaign, this time for mayors and deputies of the Legislative Assembly (Cruz 2011:334).

Despite (international) criticism of human rights violations committed because of the
anti-gang policies, the general public supported the hard anti-gang measures the government
implemented. As Buzan et al (1992) argue "securitizing claims make an audience tolerate
violations of rules", and Stritzel talks of "the toleration [by the public] of emergency measures"
(2007). Even though human rights violations came to the surface, the public was still convinced
that these measures were necessary to combat the gangs. In a country in which 'pandillophobia'
dominates, human rights violations are inferior than countering a threat (the gangs). The term
pandillophobia refers to the way in which "gang stigmatization produced by media and
government officials translates into attitudes of rejection of any reference to the stigmatized
actor, in this case the social group composed of gangs" (Aguilar 2013: 23). The existing
pandillophobia in El Salvador not only affects the opportunities of peace building but also easily
lead to violent actions against citizens identified as gang members. This situation gets worse
when in the electoral context the candidates and their parties exacerbate the pandillophobic
discourse because of electoral purposes. On this account, a candidate knows that his
speech/discourse should be extremely careful and calculated on security issues. "To publicly
show actions that involve gangs, is in any way, a clear risk" (Aguilar 2013: 23).

The claim that gangs were an existential threat to society was also accepted by the public
because they could 'look around' and see for themselves what the influence of gangs was on the
daily life of citizens. Be it in the form of gang threats which paralyzed the public transport
system in the entire country, be it in the form of extortion. It thus was not difficult to confirm
the claims made by the securitizing actors (i.e. the government officials). Both president Saca, as

his predecessor Flores, portrayed the maras as a threat to the country's stability and to the citizens' security by implementing anti-gang policies and uttering public anti-gang statements. In this way, both presidents engaged (as securitizing actors) in speech acts or securitizing moves, moving the gang issue towards the securitized end of the spectrum. Van der Borgh et al outlines how the new leftist FMLN-president Mauricio Flores(2009-2014) successfully de-securitized the issue in the first few months of his presidency (2015). However, as will be outlined below, this president soon returned to repressive anti-gang measures as well.

4.5 Return to Mano Dura

The first year of his presidency, Funes showed a greater enthusiasm than previous governments to cooperate with NGO's and organizations of gang members' families. He proposed an alternative gang policy in which he focused on prevention and rehabilitation (see last part of section 4.3). However, as soon as homicide rates in El Salvador began to rise again, from 51,9 per 100,000 habitants in 2008 to 70,9 per 100,000 in 2009 (UNODC 2011), the president saw himself forced to improve security, and decided to take new (anti-gang) measures. The Salvadoran Constitution prescribes that its ruling president can deploy the military as an exceptional measure, and this is exactly what Funes did; he brought the military back into the streets of El Salvador (Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015: 164). To arrest suspected criminals, Funes set up special elite military units, which could stop and search people and vehicles in specific areas and hand them over to the police (ibid). Van der Borgh et al (2015) argue that this measure not only showed that the Salvadoran authorities were doing something about the worrying homicide numbers, but this way the authorities could also show off that they were not incompetent and 'soft on crime' (ibid).

In addition, after a gang attack on a bus in June 2010, which left many civilians killed, Funes launched a new law to stop the gang violence. The new law doubled the maximum prison sentence for minors, declared gang membership illegal, and gave authorities permission to freeze bank accounts and seize the assets of gang members (InSightCrime 2010). Just as with previous Mano Dura policies, the new repressive anti-gang law received widespread public support (Lambert 2010, Van der Borgh 2013).

Another remarkable anti-gang move of the President was the appointment of the retired General David Munguía Payés as Minister of Security and Justice on 20 November 2011. It was the first time since El Salvador ended twelve years of civil war that a military official had been in charge of the country's domestic security. The appointment of a former military was a sign that

the government toughened its stance on crime (Cruz 2013: 12). Munguía promised to lower the homicide level by 30 percent in a year (Whitfield 2013: 9). Even before taking the post, Munguía had publicly spoken out for a tough position on crime. The minister held the gangs responsible for 90% of all homicides in the country (El Faro 2012a), despite the lack of providing the public with evidence to back up his statements. Munguía's statements also contrasted heavily with official police records, which held the gangs responsible for only 20% of the homicides (ibid). This, didn't seem to stop him criminalizing gangs and proposing Mano Dura as the solution to counter the gang threat: "There are places[..], marked by crime. So what do we do? Get there with soft hands and tips about life? No, there must be interventions and it must be with a tough hand" (Munguía as quoted in De Dios, 2011). In addition, Munguía advocated to unblock legal 'bottlenecks' and put as many gangs in prison, saying that it could be necessary to lock up to 10.000 people (El Faro 2012a).

Shortly after Munguía's appointment, Funes also appointed Francisco Salinas – yet another ex-general - as head of the National Police (Whitfield 2013: 9, Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015). Together with Munguía, Salina set up a new elite anti-gang police unit, which was accompanied by a new anti-gang department (ibid). In the end, the selection of former military officers as the new officials responsible for public security was a change in security policies and reshaped the relations between the government and gangs in El Salvador (Cruz 2013: 13). The gangs were once again framed as a security threat that needed extraordinary measures. In line with what Van der Borgh et al argue, the deployment of the military back into the streets, the creation of new anti-gang laws and new anti-gang units and the above mentioned statements of Salvadoran government officials, are examples of how the Maras were re-securitized under Funes' presidency (2015).

Within this repressive anti-gang context it is remarkable and surprising that a truce took place between the two biggest and rival gangs MS-13 and M-18 in March 2012. A truce which was said to be facilitated or arguably negotiated by the same government that had implemented harsh and severe anti-gang measures that same year. On the face of it, this 'facilitation' does not really fit into the securitizing measures the government employed as described above, but could rather be seen as a new security policy. In the next section the truce will be discussed and specifically the role of the (key actors within the) government in the truce process will be explored.

5. Gang truce

To many it came as a surprise that after the successful securitization of gangs by three different governments, with years of repressive anti-gang policies, massive gang incarceration and violence levels high as ever, a truce had taken place between the two major rival gangs MS-13 and M-18. As a result, the homicide dropped tremendously in only a few days. The truce was brokered by the catholic church and facilitated by the government. The latter being very ambiguous about its role in the process. The fact that the government facilitated the truce could be seen as a new 'mano amiga' approach of the government towards the gangs. And although the truce officially died in 2014, the truce suggests that negotiated solutions in confronting gangs are indeed possible (see also Farah 2013; Figueroa et al 2013; Peeters et al 2013; Seelke 2013; Van der Borgh and Savenije 2015).

To understand and explain the way the government is involved in the truce and how different actors (both proponents and opponents) legitimated their actions in the truce, it is necessary to discuss the background and development of this unique process first. What happened exactly? What did the agreement entail and how did the process unfold in the months after the announcement was made by the investigative newspaper El Faro? The first section of this chapter will seek to answer these questions. The next section then discusses the government's role in the process. It will explore the key governmental actors involved in the truce and how and why they positioned themselves and framed this unique cease-fire process. This section will also elaborate on the motives why the actors framed the truce the way they did and argues that - in line with other authors (Valencia 2015; Whitfield 2013) - electoral interests once again play a prominent role. This chapter furthermore tries to place the truce process in the general government policy. Could it be seen as a new governmental gang policy; softer and more dialogue orientated than the previous anti-gang policies. Or can the truce process be seen as a continuation in the government's anti-gang policies?

5.1 Background and development

On 14 March 2012 the investigative newspaper El Faro, broke the news that a few days earlier, high-ranking jailed gang leaders of MS-13 and M-18 had been transferred from a maximum-security facility to other less severe prisons, in order to facilitate negotiations for a truce between the two rival gangs (Cruz 2013). From their headquarters in the Salvadoran prison the gang leaders instructed their fellow gang members in the country to stop murdering each other. This

was a big deal, considering that the two gangs had been rivals since the 1960's. Insofar that the gangs wouldn't even pronounce each other's names or words containing their rival's number (Llano 2014). The arch enemies not only agreed to stop killing each other, but they also pledged to end attacks on police, military and prison staff (Cruz 2013). The mara gang leaders furthermore promised to stop "forced recruitment" and "all forms of harassment" in schools, as well as guaranteeing free access of aid and medical workers in gang-controlled areas (Latin news 2014: 13). In exchange the government took the army out of the prisons and gave gang prisoners several privileges, including increased visitation rights (Perez 2013: 230, Whitfield 2013: 11).

The truce was brokered by a former congressman (and ex-guerillero) Raul Mijango and Catholic bishop Fabio Colindres. They had negotiated in secret for months prior to the announcement, under the umbrella of the Security Minister at the time, General Munguía Payés. Formal meetings between the negotiators and gang leaders had already taken place in February and by the end of that month negotiators had reached a basic agreement (Cruz 2013: 14). Cruz argues that government negotiators decided to delay the truce process due to the approaching legislative national elections that would take place on 11 March 2012 (2013:14). After the announcement of the truce, the government quickly denied any involvement and stated that Colindres and Mijano were responsible. The government's version was backed by a press release signed by Mijango and later backed by the gangs. The document i.a. stated that the maras didn't "wish to keep making war" and that "after a process of reflection they too see that they are part of the pressing problems facing the country" (Stone 2012b). Besides the two mediators, the Organization of American States (OAS) also played a mediating role in the truce process, overseeing the handover of weapons, monitoring the commitments made by the gangs, and building support for the process among a variety of social actors (Whitfield 2013: 11).

In November 2012 the truce saw a second phase of the cease-fire process when the two government negotiators, Mijango and Colindres, proposed the institutionalization of the truce by establishing 'sanctuary municipalities', or "Special Peace Zones" across the country (Cruz 2013: 8). Ilopango was the first free municipality of violence. These municipalities were meant to become violence-free zones, in which maras would stop all criminal activities, including extortion and theft. One year into the truce, there were already six violence free municipalities, gang members had handed in 267 weapons and the government announced that it would propose new legislation to facilitate rehabilitation of maras (Whitfield 2013: 15). Simultaneously, national and local authorities and civil society organizations would promote violence prevention and reinsertion programs for criminal youngsters. In addition, the proposal of the government negotiators recommended that community police units should be primarily deployed and that

massive and nighttime police raids should end immediately, as this prevented the success of the process (ibid). In early December 2012 the gangs agreed to the terms of the proposal and announced that they were ready to carry out the plan in ten municipalities. While the peace zone program appeared to be working, the truce had not completely stopped the violence in the peace zones (Parkison 2013).

However, the effect the gang truce had on homicide levels in general was spectacular. Especially in the months following the truce, in which the murder rate dropped with a 50 percent; from an average of roughly 14 murders per day to 5.5 per day (Seelke 2013: 11). There was a reduction of nearly 1,800 homicides in comparison with the previous year. The homicide rate dropped to 41.2 per 100.000 inhabitants in 2012: a decrease of 43%. The capital San Salvador went from the 20th most violent city in the world (in 2011) to the 44th, in 2012 (Pachico 2015). El Salvador had not seen such a dramatic decline in homicides since the Civil War.
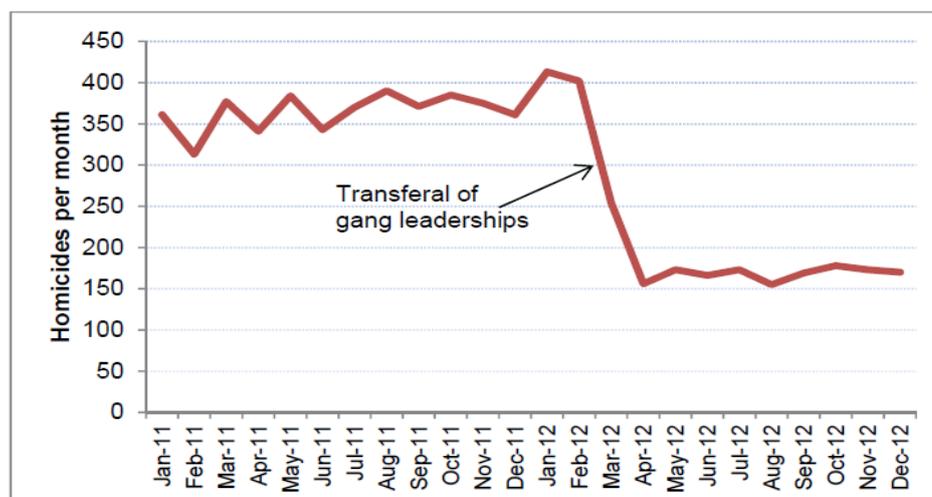

Figure 3: Number of homicides per month in El Salvador 2011-2012 *(Source: Cruz 2013: 5)*

However, despite the truce' success in terms of declining homicides, the truce provoked starkly divided opinions and criticism among politicians, academics, NGO's, and the Salvadoran public. Some reports show that homicide rates indeed declined in the period following the truce, but other crimes such as extortions did not (El Faro 2013a; Wolf 2014; Farah 2013). Salvadoran transport unions and other trade companies even reported that the amounts of ransom monies demanded by gangs, had significantly increased. (El Mundo 2012b). Note that some reports contradict those allegations stating that extortion rates went down with 18.4% (Wilson Center 2012). However, other reports show that the rate of some other crimes - such as rape - even increased during the truce. While the lack of investigations makes it impossible to attribute these increases to gangs, it does show that the truce itself has not lowered rates of victimization for

many other types of crime. Other allegations state that murders have not declined at all, but people rather disappeared and ended up in clandestine graves (Bargent 2013). In addition, Farah Douglas and Pamela Phillips Lum, the former a prominent skeptic of the truce, published a much debated report in February 2013, in which they even suggested that the ties between some elements of the gangs and organized crime were deepening because of the truce (2013: 6). Other authors in turn raise multiple questions about the benefits and risks of direct engagement with delinquent groups (Peeters 2013). The truce could have provided the gangs with a great deal of political leverage. Farah even warns that gangs have now become political actors (2013). She argues that any concessions by the government imply acknowledging the gang's status as political actors. Farah's severe criticism was backed by the Salvadoran public. An opinion poll in late 2012 reported that 89 percent of Salvadorans had little or no confidence in the truce (Whitfield 2013: 12). How could the government possibly negotiate with criminals? After years of framing the gangs as a threat, which needed to be repressed, how could the authorities talk with them and give them any concessions? How could they be 'soft on crime'? The lack of transparent information and contradictory statements of the government further diminished support.

The next section deals with the role and attitude of the government in the truce process. It was not easy for the government to come up with a coherent story and speak with one voice regarding its role in the truce. Ambiguous and contradictory statements frequented each other off and on. Different government actors framed the process in a different way. For over a decade government officials have framed gangs as criminals, which whom one should not talk, let alone negotiate. Now some governmental actors seemed to change their stance.

5.2 The government's role and stance: contrasting stories

"Government negotiates reduction in homicides with gangs" read the article published by El Faro on 14 March 2012 (El Faro 2012b). This breaking article caused a political scandal in the media. Contradictory statements of law enforcement officials frequented each other off and on. To say the least, the government's role in the entire truce process has been ambiguous since the beginning and continues until this day. At the time when the story came out, the authorities spoke with one voice, quickly denied any official involvement in the gang talks and opposed any negotiation with these criminal actors. As it now turns out, government officials not only hid the truth about the truce, but also repeatedly lied and gave the Salvadoran public a different version about the transfer of gang leaders, the motive of the transfer, the reason why homicide rates went down, the meetings between gang leaders and the Ministry of Security and about the

distribution of public funds focused on gangs (El Faro 2015). For example, the authorities attributed the drop in killings to an increase of police operations against gangs and ascribed the transfer of imprisoned gang leaders to "humanitarian reasons" (Cruz 2013: 2).

The lack of transparency about the agreements that led to the truce and about the role that government officials played in the dialogues leading to and during the truce have left doubts and concerns in the minds of many analysts (Wola 2013). Both government proponents and opponents of the truce framed the process and legitimized their actions in different ways. There are important differences in the interpretation and representation of the truce process. The objective of this section is to look at how and why both government actor proponents and opponents, in their role as 'securitizing actors', framed the gang truce and positioned themselves in this unique cease-fire process. This part starts with an outline of several key government truce stakeholders, with great influence over Salvadoran politics and the Salvadoran public at large; President Mauricio Funes, former Security Minister David Munguía Payés, his successor Ricardo Perdomo and Public Prosecutor Luis Martínez. These actors are carefully selected because of the role they play and influence they have in Salvadoran politics regarding the gangs. After examining their stance towards the truce, the last section will discuss the truce' rhetoric and elaborates on the motives why the actors framed the truce the way they did. This chapter concludes by placing the truce process in the general government gang policy and briefly touches upon the question how to place the truce in the broader securitization framework.

5.2.1 President Funes

When El Faro broke the news with the assumption that the Salvadoran government had secretly negotiated with gangs (El Faro 2012b), president Funes immediately denied any involvement. In the following months, the president delivered numerous contradictory and ambiguous statements of what the truce process actually entailed and about his administration's role in it. On 28 March, two weeks after the truce announcement, Funes stated that his government was only supporting the efforts of the Catholic Church to promote an understanding among gang members, but he didn't admit having entered into negotiations with any gang (El Faro 2012d). However, the president did plead for a national campaign to reverse social exclusion and added that "the gangs have the right to jobs […] the right to education and the right to health care" (Garrett 2013a). In addition, the President presented his three security plans: a national accord for jobs and security; prevention (to include new legislation to institutionalize state policy); and rehabilitation and reinsertion including conversion of prisons into rehabilitation and reinsertion

centres (Garrett 2013a). Yet, he emphasized that the government's participation in the truce only consisted of providing the trucks, guards and helicopters needed to monitor the transfer of prison leaders from the maximum security prison El Zacatraz to several less-restrictive facilities (Pachico 2012). Even when - six months after the announcement of the truce – his own security minister Munguía Payés admitted that the truce was a carefully designed government plan in close consultation with the President, Funes still denied the affair and repeated the claim that his cabinet had not negotiated with gangs, nor that there was an official government plan to accommodate the gang truce (El Faro 2012e). However, the statements he uttered a month later contrasted heavily with what he was saying previously.

On 25 September 2012, during the UN General Assembly, the president promoted the ceasefire by highlighting that the decrease of violence in his country was due to a truce between the two rival gangs. Funes attributed the decrease in homicide rates to a "public safety policy that was bringing positive results" and to a recent "non-aggression pact between rival gangs". (Valencia 2015). When the president visited Washington in search of funds for gang prevention programs in April 2013, he went a step further when he fully admitted internationally both the support and ownership of the truce and made it public policy before the US State Department (Cawley 2013). Funes emphasized the need to combine actions that allowed for the integration and reintegration of gang members, for which he offered the redirection of funds from the General Budget of the Nation (ibid). That same month, he met with US Secretary of State John Kerry, and participated as a speaker on a high-level panel organized by the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank on citizen insecurity in Latin America. During these visits President Funes emphasized the reduction of homicides of about 52% and elaborated on the particular aspects of the truce process between the two main gangs (Aguilar et al 2013: 14).

Despite his acknowledgements of the truce process abroad, at home Funes showed a different, more ambiguous face. The president not only continued with his ambiguous statements whether he was or was not involved in the gang truce, be he also maintained the repressive anti-gang measures, keeping the anti-gang law of 2009 in place, while continuing with military and police night raids which incarcerated many gang members. In a speech to the graduating class of new military officers, President Funes applauded the participation of the Armed Forces in public security duties as "vital" to the peace process (Garrett 2013a). However, while Funes defended the anti-mara law as being a 'valid instrument of the law' which had shown its efficacy, he also stated that it could be made more efficient. Pointing to leave the door open for further negotiations about any changes in the statute (Bargent 2012).

Towards the end of 2013 – while the new security minister Perdomo was in place and campaigns for the 2014 presidential elections had just begun - homicides were rising again. In an interview with 'CNN en Español', President Funes still defended the truce process admitting that the truce was in crisis but hadn't been broken; most of the homicides were due to internal purges (Garret 2013:3). The President insisted that the government did not make a pact with anyone, but simply facilitated the truce and added: "It is not a failure... Sustainability depends on the government response… There must be opportunities and jobs" (ibid). Before leaving office however, Funes withdrew support for the truce process and proclaimed that the truce had failed. He furthermore blamed much of the violence on a turf war between two sections of the M-18 gang, Los Revolucionarios and Los Sureños, claiming the latter group are responsible for attacks on the police (COHA 2014).

5.2.2 Security Minister Munguía Payés

In the months prior to the truce, Security Minister Munguía Payés (2011-2013) was completely following the repressive anti-gang line of his predecessors. While official statistics did not back up his story, he claimed that gangs were responsible for almost all deaths in the country (El Faro 2012a). Hence, it didn't come as a surprise that when the truce story came out, the security minister, like the president, denied the allegations of any government involvement in the gang talks: "I want to be loud and clear, the government of the Republic is not at any time negotiating with any gang"(Valencia 2015). Munguía argued that the gang leader's transfer was due to three different reasons: firstly, he had been given information that the maras disposed of anti-tank rocket launchers and an attack would take place on Zacatraz to liberate the gang leaders (Valencia 2015, Eduardo et al 2013: 5); in second place the gang transfer was due to humanitarian reasons since several gang leaders were suffering of severe illnesses and had to be treated (Cruz 2013); and third, the maximum amount of time gangs could be in high maximum prisons was expired. Additionally, Munguía attributed the decline of homicide rates to the good work of the police in its fight against crime (Eduardo et al 2013: 5).

However on 16 June 2012, Munguía announced that, after 100 days since the start of the truce process, the average homicides a day had declined from 14 to 6 (ibid), but he repeated that there was no direct dialogue or negotiation between the government and the gangs: "The violence is down without the direct participation of the government. I don't see (any reason) to change that when there are results. We continue in the role of facilitators" (Garrett 2013a: 20). The security minster also dismissed the allegations of truce critics who presumed that the

murders had declined while disappearances had increased (Eduardo 2013: 8). Nevertheless, in September 2012, the security minister finally gave in and admitted that his Ministry had indeed orchestrated the truce process months before El Faro broke the story. He also claimed that President Funes had known all along and backed the process since the start (El Faro 2012d).

After the establishment of the first violence free zone Llopango, the security minister stated that "the country has hope [...] It's not just a truce between gangs, but a real peace process" (Aguilar et al 2013: 13). Furthermore Munguía declared that "gang members would no longer be arrested for being gang members, for dressing differently" – a statement which clearly appeared to be in direct violation of the anti-gang law (El Faro 2013b). Moreover, when truce critics in 2013 claimed that the truce was not sustainable because of rising homicides and only benefited the gang members, the minister warded this off and attributed the murder increase to internal gang violence and gang discipline: "it is an advantage that a criminal group has a structure [..] their ability to convince is that they kill the gang member who does not conform" (Whitfield 2013: 12). All in all, the minister has been an outspoken proponent of the truce process, focusing on the positive outcome – the lowering homicides. His statements and pro-truce attitude stand in sharp contrast by his successor, Ricardo Perdomo.

5.2.3 Security Minister Perdomo

In May 2013 the Constitutional Court ruled the appointment of Munguía Payés and police director Francisco Salinas unconstitutional. Both former generals were immediately dismissed from their government positions (Whitfield 2013: 15). Funes replaced Munguía by the economist Ricardo Perdomo as new Minister of Justice and Public Security. Being a firm critic of the truce process, Perdomo openly criticized the truce opponents mediator Mijango and Perdomo's predecessor Munguía. Perdomo made it clear that he did not agree with Munguía's strategy of promoting dialogue between the gangs. Perdomo removed the new general prison director, Nelson Rauda, and suspended all privileges given to the incarcerated gangs (Eduardo 2013: 14). The new security minister furthermore limited the contact between the incarcerated gang leaders and their groups outside prison as much as possible. Up to that point, the presidency had maintained that it was precisely this contact that permitted the groups to fulfill the terms of the truce and helped cut the country's homicide rate in half. Perdomo also prohibited the media from accessing jails to interview gang leaders, cancelled the regular meetings in which the leaders of rival gangs met, and broke ties with the principal mediator in the process Mijango (Martinez 2014a). In addition, Perdomo claimed that the truce had expanded drug-trafficking in the

country. He argued that it allowed both MS-13 and M-18 to strengthen ties with transnational drug traffickers (Cawley 2013b). Perdomo's comments are in line with Douglas Farah's report (see section 4.3.1), which said the MS-13's relationship with local drug transport groups was expanding. Former minister Munguía had dismissed Farah's views at the time, but the new security minister vision was clearly in line with that of Farah.

When El Faro asked the new security minister about his apparent change in stance regarding the gang truce compared to his predecessor Munguía, Perdomo said it was down to new instructions from the president to "conform to reality" (Cawley 2013b). However, Perdomo's sudden change against the process is ironic. He became security minister at the end of May 2013, after his time as the director of the State Intelligence Body (Organismo de Inteligencia del Estado - OIE), a part of the security cabinet that was directed at the time by Munguía Payés. According to Martínez et al (2014a) Perdomo – while leading the OIE - played an active role in Munguía's strategy to promote dialogue with the gangs. When Munguía had to step down, Perdomo was quickly appointed as the new security minister. When he started his post, the average daily homicide rate during the first months of 2013 was 5.57. Under his management however, the clear downward trend in killings was reversed: from 5.57 to an average of 8.38 murders a day (ibid). Nevertheless, Perdomo remained negative about the gangs or the truce process in general and in that opinion he was not alone. Public Prosecutor Luis Martinez has also been an outspoken opponent of the truce process and will be discussed next.

5.2.4 Public Prosecutor Martínez

> This false truce does not really exist because you can still, on a daily basis, see
> victims…of working people, struggling people, not those lazy gangs that are only
> out to steal, extort and murder – Luis Martínez (as quoted in Tager et al 2013: 21).

This is just one of the many negative statements the public prosecutor of El Salvador, Luis Martínez uttered during the course of the gang truce. Since the start, the Prosecutor has been another outspoken opponent of the truce process (Eduardo 2013: 15). By labeling it a 'hypocrite truce" on national television and saying that gangs did not stop its attacks against the Salvadoran populace at all, Martínez repeatedly expressed his horror for the gang truce (Eduardo 2013: 15). The prosecutor strongly advocated that the truce process "should have been a process with the Salvadoran public, not with criminals" (Diario de Hoy 2013). He also proclaimed that the truce

"did not decline crimes, especially extortions, not even in the peace zones" (ibid). These peace zones were later described by the prosecutor as 'pandillalandia' or gang-lands (Robins 2013).

In addition, the prosecutor also attacked the truce' proponents. Not only did he openly criticize the work of the government mediator Raul Mijango, he also announced the investigation of his role in the peace process (El Mundo 2013). Furthermore, obsessed with the idea of dismantling the 'hypocrite truce' the prosecutor was aired live on television with a photograph of three masked men with weapons in their hands, arguing that these were Salvadoran gang members in training. Not much later, it turned out that these photographs were actually Mexican drug traffickers (Valencia 2015). After Security Minister Munguía was replaced by newcomer Perdomo in May 2013, and after which homicides rose and some repressive measures were re-introduced, Luis Martinez said in reference to the homicides on May 23, "What we're seeing is the result of what I warned about a while ago: the truce was always a fake scenario" (Martinez 2014a).

5.3 Truce rhetoric

After having outlined the truce process itself, the government's role in it and the way several key governmental actors responded to the truce, this section starts off with some general observations which can be drawn from the previous part. After which this section will seek to understand and explain the way these actors framed and legitimized their stances regarding the truce and gangs in general. At last, this section places the truce process within the general government policy and briefly touches upon the question how to place the truce in the broader securitization framework.

The role and stance of several key government truce stakeholders in the gang-truce or their attitude towards gangs during the process can be described as highly ambiguous in several ways. In the first place, the government – when it still spoke with one voice - denied any involvement in the truce process when the story came out, giving false testimonies about the gang prison transfer, but later changed its story to having 'facilitated' the cease–fire process. In second place, especially President Funes' attitude is ambiguous and inconsistent which reveals itself in the way he expresses support for the truce process abroad, but disapproves the process at home. In the words of Roberto Valencia, reporter at El Faro: "The government [President Funes] acted like a father who despises his son at home but who praises him in the streets" (Valencia 2015). In the third place, in contrast with the security framing of gangs as a threat in the years preceding the

truce, in which the government spoke with one voice, this time the government is not univocal in its gang approach and opinions are starkly divided. Once former security minister Munguía admits the government's involvement in the cease-fire pact, six months after the announcement of the truce by El Faro, one can observe opposing camps within the government so to speak. On the one hand you have truce proponent Security Minister Munguía and on the other hand you have truce opponents, Security Minister Perdomo and Public Prosecutor Martínez. Both 'camps' focused on two distinct aspects of the truce. The stance of President Funes does not really fit into either camps, since Funes is highly inconsistent in his statements and anti-gang measures. At times he was an outspoken opponent of the truce, at other times he promoted the process publicly and took credits for the declining homicides. It seemed like the president didn't want to be seen as taking sides politically.

The opponents alleged that the government should not - under whatever circumstance - start a dialogue, let alone negotiate with criminals. They argued that the truce could not be labeled a success - in terms of declining homicides - since disappearance rates and other crimes such as extortion went up. Both Perdomo and Martínez continued to frame gangs as criminals, emphasizing the horrible act of 'negotiating with gangs' and even argued that gangs had gained more power and influence. The gangs were furthermore involved in organized crime and narco-trafficking, according to the new security minister. One side of the government clearly continued with the securitization of gangs as a threat to society; focusing on the gangs, on what they represented (a threat), rather than focusing on the 'positive' outcome of the truce process itself. Besides the strong focus on language with regard to the minister and prosecutor's speech act, images and visual representations are an additional key component of the construction of security threats (see chapter 3). An example is the broadcasting of the Prosecutor on national television showing an image of three dangerous masked men with weapons in their hand. These men turned out to be Mexican drug traffickers in the end (see section 5.2.4). A previous example of how the maras were portrayed as a security matter with images on television, was the national broadcast live press conference, in which Mano Dura was launched in 2003.

The proponent's story was of a different character. They legitimized their involvement and their approach by emphasizing the success of the truce in terms of declining homicides, but they went further than that. The proponents not only focused on the lowering murder rate, but the focus and discourse of gangs as merely being criminals, also changes. They tried to create a new discourse in which gangs are not only the perpetrators of violence, but also victims of the system that needed the government's help. The president openly advocated a campaign to

reverse social exclusion and stated that gangs also have rights to jobs, education and health care (see section 5.2.1).

But how to understand the new relationship between the government and the gangs and explain these ambiguous stances and attitudes? Can you actually speak of a new gang policy and attitude? In line with Van der Borgh et al (2015), this thesis argues that the government's involvement and 'facilitation' of the truce process was never meant to be made public. Prior to the gang truce, Security Minister Munguía continued its hard stance against gangs, publicly stating not to be soft on gangs and objecting any type of negotiation or dialogue with the pandilleros (Van der Borgh 2015). With murder rates high as ever, his main concern was to bring homicides down. It was not a strategic purpose to publicly speak out for the truce process, but Munguía had no other choice when the story came out (ibid). At the time of the introduction of the mano dura policy in 2003, the government decided - when and how - to make this strategy public and always recognized it as its own; the truce process however, was revealed by journalists against the will of its promoters (the government). No one was sure how the truce process would unfold. Furthermore, the Salvadoran public had always backed the government's previous hard line and repressive measure against gangs; a softer - dialogue centered - approach towards gangs could come off as being 'soft on gangs'. Both Funes' and Munguía's ambiguous statements right after the announcement of the truce is thus understandable. The truce was meant to stay a secret, but once 'out in the open', government officials had to deal with this new turn of events and legitimize their actions in a new way. The sustained impact on violence gradually legitimized it and allowed the government to acknowledge involvement. The proponents came up with a new frame which advocated that 'it pays off to talk with gangs' and which described the 'truce as something good' since it lowered the homicide rate.

The attitudes of these governmental actors have to be understood in light of public support and the electoral context. An early survey on the truce in 2012 had already demonstrated that the majority of the population was against any negotiation between the government and gangs (Cruz 2013: 3). Another survey showed that 89% had little or no trust in the truce process. And in May 2013, a year into the truce, this percentage had only slightly dropped (ibid). But how could a policy that cut the homicide rate in half be so unpopular? The truce was not publicly attractive to people that were used to political parties who were tough on crime (Wolf 2011). For more than ten years the Salvadoran public had to listen to politicians who only spoke negatively about the gangs, framing them as a threat and creating a culture of fear. In this context, one must also take into consideration the 'talk of crime', which consists of "the permanent repetition and

high social importance of the subject of insecurity in different spaces of communication (here in politics, the media and 'everyday life')" (Peetz & Huhn 2008: 364). In addition, Jeannette Aguilar explains the unpopular gang truce by arguing that is has to do with El Salvador's political culture and a history of the authoritarian military governments and the violence of civil war (Nolen 2015). "In a country where everyone is touched by the gangs, either through extortion or the imminent threat of violence, "people tend to support these kinds of measures and ask for even tougher ones." Many Salvadorans did not worry about gang members killing each other, or the terrible prison conditions. They furthermore saw no reduction in criminal gang activities beyond homicides (Whitfield 2013: 13). The Salvadoran public expect the government to be tough on gangs, they want Mano dura policies, and the idea of making concessions to gang leaders were making many outraged. With no visible decline in extortion, and no promise that the gang structures would be dismantled, confidence in the truce remained low (Whitfield 2013: 13). By late 2012, the political environment was already shaped by the upcoming presidential elections in 2014 (Whitfield 2013: 13). It is not a popular policy to talk with gangs; no politician wants to be seen as soft on the gangs. In general the public supports this strategy (ibid). In other words, politicians offer mano dura because the electorate wants mano dura (Aguilar 2013: 24). Even former security minister Munguía put this aptly when he said that: "the electoral campaign has "contaminated" the truce, but the legacy I left is that homicides were reduced...to 5.4 (per day)" (Garrett 2013b: 3). In line with Adam's Blackwell - spokesperson of the Organization of American States – "it's much easier to sell 'Mano dura' [iron fist policies]: more police, more prisons, more cameras, more protection [...] The softer side of security is always a more difficult and nuanced sales job when you are in a political campaign" (Robins 2013).

At last, how to place the truce process and the attitude of the opposing government stakeholders in the broader securitization framework? Van der Borgh et al (2015) argues that the truce can be seen in light of a re-securitization move - stating that the gangs were depicted as "being a far more important threat to security than was conceded before" (ibid: 172), but the authors also state that the ceasefire should be seen as a different kind of extraordinary measure. This however, can be contested, and needs further exploration. It is outside the scope of this thesis to investigate if the truce should be seen as a re-securitization or extraordinary measure or not, but what can be noted is that the attitudes of the truce stakeholder can also be seen as de-securitizing; bringing the issue (i.e. the gang threat) into the normal arena of politics again. Doing 'politics as usual', meaning a status quo that upholds a repressive anti-gang discourse in which the audience is used to an anti-gang rhetoric, that has been present in El Salvador for a long time. Future works on gangs and securitization will most likely dive into this more in depth.

5. Conclusion

Since the beginning of the new millennium the relationship between the Salvadoran government and the street gangs is on edge. Although gangs have been present in the region since the 1970's, it's only since the 2000's that Salvadoran politicians and the media started focusing on them and framing them as a security threat. While the gangs undoubtedly play a major part in driving violence, they are far from the only criminal actors in El Salvador. Nevertheless, gangs have been blamed and scapegoated for much of the violence in the country and attempts to clamp down on them have mostly been of a repressive and punitive nature. The implemented anti-gang policies, such as Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura increased the incarceration of gang members, but didn't lead to a reduction of violence. On the contrary, the hard hand policies – which often disrespected human rights - rather increased delinquency. The few preventive and rehabilitative approaches have always been inferior to the hard hand strategies of both the Flores, Saca and Funes administrations. Although the latter began his term with an alternative softer gang policy, he soon turned back to more repressive measures as well. At the same time, the Funes administration also facilitated a unique gang truce which cut the homicide rate in more than half, a measure which was not in line with the typical repressive gang policy of his predecessors. The gang truce of 2012 has shed new light on the relationship between the Salvadoran government and gangs.

This paper had a dual approach. First it aimed at understanding and explaining the governmental anti-gang attitude and policies in the years preceding the gang truce of 2012, applying securitization theory to see how and why gangs have been framed as a security threat during this period. Second it aimed at covering the gang truce process and the government's stance towards it, since it has shed new light on the relationship between the Salvadoran government and gangs. As the analytical part has uncovered, Salvadoran officials used Mano Dura programs not only to tackle the gang problem, but also as a means of winning votes for the elections. The electoral conjuncture influenced the way the gangs were framed. The hard hand policies were convenient tools for presidential candidates to show that they were 'tough on crime', a rhetoric which paid of well by the electorate. The Mano Dura policies were complemented by extensive one-sided publicity and media campaigns in which the gangs were constantly depicted as criminals, a plague and worse. This hard stance of the government towards gangs has been supported and encouraged by the public. Opinion polls showed that the Salvadoran public highly trusted in the mano dura strategies of their government. Note that suppressive measures are strongly embedded in the authoritarian and violent past of the country.

The framing of gangs into a security threat – the securitization of gangs – has been highly successful. The Salvadoran government - in the role of securitizing actor - used a discourse of security that convinced an audience – the Salvadoran public - of the threat posed by gangs. The anti-gang rhetoric was quickly followed by state action to counter gang violence. This way the gang issue moved from the political side of the spectrum towards the securitized end of the spectrum. Anti-gang laws were implemented, military and police patrols were extended and gangs incarcerated en masse – all of which are securitizing measures. These extraordinary measures were accepted by the general public. The acceptance of the security discourse by one or several audiences is a crucial component in a successful securitization. The Salvadoran society is marked by a 'climate of fear', which is important in how the public receives a speech act of a securitizing actor and whether the public accepts this. This sense of insecurity and fear of crime was an important factor for the support of the repressive policies that pledged to make Salvador secure again. In a context of violence, citizens find 'order' more important than human rights and civil freedoms. This is a reason why the public is prone to a repressive discourse and demands Mano Dura policies to make sure security is supported (Cruz 2000: 518).

The anti-gang discourse formed the backdrop in which the Salvadoran government 'facilitated' the gang truce of rival gangs MS-13 and M-18 in the spring of 2012, after which homicides declined tremendously. The analysis shows that the attitude of several key actors within the Salvadoran government was highly ambivalent and unequivocal. Contrasting stories, lies and distancing oneself from the process alternated with promoting this same process and crediting oneself with the successful outcome: the decline in homicides. The government's ambiguity was most visible in terms of internal resistance - the anti-gang stance and statements of the new security minister Perdomo clearly contrasted with that of President Funes and his predecessor Munguía. But also externally - President Funes shows support for the truce process abroad, but disapproves the process at home. In addition, both proponents and opponents focused on different aspects. Opponents continued to frame gangs as public enemy number one – a security threat - with whom one should not negotiate with. They furthermore labelled it a 'hypocrite and fake truce' since disappearances and extortions had not declined. On the contrary, the truce proponents legitimized their stance by emphasizing the success of the truce but they also try to change the discourse of gangs 'seen merely as criminals' into a discourse in which gangs are not only the perpetrators of violence, but also victims of the system that needed the government's help. The president openly advocated a campaign to reverse social exclusion and stated that gangs also have rights to jobs, education and health care.

It is likely a confluence of factors , rather than one in particular, that better explains the outcome of the truce as it did and the government's attitude towards it. For one, the truce process was never meant to be made public. No one was sure how the truce process would unfold and if it would have an impact on violence levels. It was supposed to remain a secret, while other (publicly visible) anti-gang measures, such as police night raids and the establishment of an elite anti-gang unit, continued. Furthermore, the Salvadoran public had always backed the government's previous hard line and repressive measure against gangs. The government was well aware that a dialogue centered approach towards gangs could come off as being 'soft on gangs'. However, as soon as there was a sustained impact on violence (the declining homicides), it gradually legitimized it and allowed the government to (ambivalently) acknowledge involvement. Still, just as with the repressive gang policies in the years preceding the truce, public opinion and electoral interests played a decisive role to explain the government's role. It is inevitable that the electoral situation influenced the political handling of the gang truce. Public surveys on the truce in 2012 had demonstrated that the population was against any negotiation between the government and gangs and heavily distrusted the entire process. Funes and Munguía had a hard time selling a 'negotiated approach' to their electorate. The truce was framed by its opponents as a weakness and a sign that the government could not handle the problem, nor control the issue. With the approach of presidential elections in February 2014, the government dropped its support for the truce. The presidential election was tight, and the ruling party concluded that the perception it negotiated with criminals did not play well.

Currently El Salvador faces a series of heavy gang related violence and homicides are skyrocketing again. The country has even overtaken Honduras as the most violent country on earth - outside those that are at war. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss why the truce died in the end of 2014 and why the new FMLN cabinet, under the lead of Sanchez Ceren, fell back on the mano dura approaches of the Flores and Saca government. The fear that gangs might have a double and hidden agenda and actually want to strengthen their position or become political actors might be factors in Ceren's decision to return to an anti-gang rhetoric. Electoral motives and public support will most likely play a role here too. Facing an election, the government reversed course and now backs a mano dura approach, which involves the police and army wresting control of neighborhoods from the gangs (The economist 2015). Its tough line is popular, but so far has made matters much worse. What we have learned from the past is that mano dura strategies alone, which do not address the root causes of gang violence - will not eradicate violence, but rather worsen it. However, in El Salvador's climate of fear it just pays off to be tough on gangs.

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