Expanding Mediation Theory
Gang Conflict and Mediation in El Salvador

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ABSTRACT

The field of mediation within peace and conflict studies has remained almost entirely focused on state-based armed conflicts and traditional non-state armed groups (NSAG). This restricts our ability to address other actors and emerging forms of conflict in non-conflict and post-conflict settings. This includes a certain classification of gangs who display strong similarities to typical NSAGs. This study analyses gang mediation and its effects on levels of violence in gang conflicts in El Salvador through the lens of traditional mediation theory from the field of peace and conflict studies. It seeks to answer the question, how does mediation influence levels of violence within gang conflicts? More specifically, addressing the hypotheses that, mediation between gangs, and government support for mediation, will likely lead to lower levels of violence. Using a qualitative comparative case study method, employing a structured, focused comparison between three different time periods in El Salvador, I find support for both hypotheses, showing that gang mediation leads to a significant reduction in violence albeit conditional on government support. In addition, factors such as dialogue, information sharing, leverage, concessions and the signing of an agreement are essential in the process between mediation and lower levels of violence.

Keywords: Mediation, Gangs, Maras, Gang conflict, El Salvador
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARENA National Republican Alliance (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista)
COW Correlates of War Project
DDR Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FMLN Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional)
ICG International Crisis Group
MS-13 Mara Salvatrucha 13
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
NSAG Non-State Armed Group
OAS Organization of American States
SSR Security Sector Reform
UCDP Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WOLA Washington Office on Latin America

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1. INTRODUCTION
The current field of peace and conflict studies offers a somewhat narrow and state-centric view of non-state armed groups, generally focusing on actors aiming to overthrow the state and almost exclusively within war environments.¹ This limited view not only restricts our ability to address other actors and forms of conflict within the field but does not adequately account for the changing nature of violence and conflict as new risks with new actors emerge in non-conflict and post-conflict settings. Some emerging non-state armed groups, while not necessarily vying for political power or existing within contexts of war, can threaten states control and display levels of violence on par with or even surpassing warzones (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 301). Organized criminal groups, such as gangs, are one such example, occupying “a grey zone between ordinary crime and political violence” (Kalyvas 2015, 1517).

While military approaches have been applied to tackling these new threats, little notice has been given to “how lessons from peace negotiations could be applied in non-conflict settings” and to non-traditional actors (Muggah, Carpenter, McDougal, 2015). This highlights a missed opportunity of applying lessons learned not just from conflict theories but more importantly conflict resolution theories. Specifically, while “mediation has developed into a significant tool for peace making in armed conflicts” its study has not “expanded in all direction” leaving gaps for potential application (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 315). The field of mediation within peace and conflict studies has remained almost exclusively focused on state-based armed conflicts and while a shift has been seen from interstate conflicts to civil wars there are many non-state conflicts also resulting in mediation that have not been properly analysed through the lens of traditional conflict mediation theory (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014 318, 324). Furthermore, policy literature on addressing criminal violence and conflict has focused mainly on a law enforcement approach rather than conflict resolution approaches, like mediation (Kalyvas 2015, 1525).

Meanwhile, Latin America and the Caribbean have witnessed devastating gang conflicts as well as various examples of gang mediation far more similar to traditional conflict mediation (Muggah, Carpenter and McDougal 2015). While comparisons between highly organized gangs, such as those in Central America, and particularly El Salvador, and conventional non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are easily made, discussions surrounding gang conflict and mediation

¹ For example, the Correlates of War Project (COW 2018) exclusively deals with war settings and only recently began to address non-state wars while the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP 2018) initially focused on state based conflict and still provides limited data on non-state armed groups such as Cartels and gangs.
have rarely entered the discipline. Whereas criminology has focused on urban street gangs, highly organized and institutionalized gangs as armed actors has largely been ignored by peace and conflict research with only some research recently emerging (Hazen and Rodgers 2014; Banfield 2014). This paper therefore addresses this gap and focuses on these unique types of gangs and their conflicts that neither fit directly into criminology’s experience with street gangs yet have been largely excluded from non-state armed group research within conflict studies.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to provide systematic research into gang mediation and its effects on levels of violence in gang conflicts through the lens of traditional mediation theory from the field of peace and conflict studies. It targets a specific and contemporary phenomenon of gangs which differ greatly from typical urban street gangs and relate more to rebel and insurgent groups. Subsequently, the research question guiding this paper is **How does mediation influence levels of violence within gang conflicts?** More specifically, does mediation influence levels of violence within gang conflicts and if so under what conditions is mediation with gangs more or less effective?

The implications of such a study are two-fold, offering both a policy and academic contribution. Gangs in El Salvador have a profound impact on social, political and economic functions, perpetuating some of the highest levels of violence in the world and undermining and threatening the state (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 312). This study therefore draws attention to the devastating gang conflict between Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 that has recently made El Salvador “the world's most violent country, and its capital, San Salvador, the most murderous city” (The Economist 2017). Conclusions drawn on the impact of mediation on gang conflict and levels of violence could thus provide new and valuable approaches for groups working on the ground with gangs, reducing their spread, influence and violence.

From an academic perspective, drawing connections between certain gangs and typical non-state armed actors “offers an opening into a powerful new line of study and potential in providing new solutions and pathways for research into both sides” (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 312). By applying theory from peace and conflict studies, it offers a new perspective within that field and potential new actors to incorporate. This has further researching benefits as application of traditional conflict theory to gang conflict does not have to end with mediation. Rather it opens the door to possible further crossovers and academic research. Furthermore, this paper can have direct implications for another area of study within the field of peace and conflict

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2 This claim is based on homicide rates alone.
research. Addressing solutions to post-conflict settings particular vulnerability to organised crime, as criminal violence threatens newly achieved peace often giving way to “criminalised peace” (Höglund and Kovacs 2010; Cockayne 2013, 10).

For this paper I apply mediation theory from peace and conflict studies to a specific type of gang conflict which is currently not covered by existing gang mediation theory from the field of criminology. I argue that a certain classification of gangs draws strong similarities to typical NSAGs and their conflict is far better suited to conflict mediation theory. My causal story outlines how, and why, mediation as my independent variable impacts my dependent variable; lower levels of violence within gang conflicts. Through this analysis I pursue my first hypothesis; that *Mediation with/between gangs will likely lead to lower levels of violence*. In addition, I speculate that this is conditional on government support leading to my second hypothesis; *Government support for mediation will likely lead to lower levels of violence*.

I use a qualitative comparative case study method employing a structured, focused comparison between case studies represented by three different time periods in El Salvador, offering variance on my independent and dependent variables. This is complemented by aspects of process tracing within cases and utilizing various data sources to interpret and compare each case.

The results of my study provide support to both my hypotheses, showing that gang mediation leads to a significant reduction in violence albeit conditional on government support throughout the process. Furthermore, my findings add support to my causal mechanism in that factors such as dialogue, information sharing, leverage, concessions and the signing of an agreement are essential in the process between mediation and lower levels of violence.

This paper is comprised of five sections, the first of which will address the theory for this study, including a discussion on defining gangs, previous research, and my causal mechanism followed by the research design, outlining my intended methods, case selection and operationalization. This leads to the empiric’s section, dedicated to presenting the collected data for each of my three cases, followed by the analysis and comparison of cases as well as additional observations and alternative explanations before the conclusion.
2. THEORY

2.1 Defining Gangs

In presenting the theory for this study it is first important to establish clear definitions of gangs and in doing so highlight the focus of this study and potential gap it addresses in applying mediation theory from conflict studies to particular cases of gangs. The word gang encompasses a wide range of varying actors and classifications, from street gangs, youth gangs and pandillas to transnational gangs, institutionalized gangs, criminal organizations and maras. Various definitions generally characterize gangs as a discernible group primarily composed of young males that engage in “violent behaviour patterns that are considered illegal by the dominant authorities and mainstream society” and maintain “a measure of institutional continuity independent of its membership” all the while identifying with or claiming a specified territory (Schuberth 2016, 2; Phelps 2015, 835; Hazen and Rodgers 2014).

For this study I separate gangs into two distinct groups, which moving forward will be differentiated as street gangs and gangs or maras. Street gangs outline the traditional view of gangs which are characterized by “loose and unsophisticated leadership that focuses on turf protection to gain petty cash and on gang loyalty” within highly localized environments such as neighbourhoods (Manwaring 2007, 4). Criminal activities of street gangs “is largely opportunistic and individual in scope, tends to be localized, and operates at the lower end of extreme societal violence” usually involving petty crime and drug sales (Manwaring 2007, 4). Violence usually relates to turf battles and violence between competing gangs rather than violent crime. The benefits of crime are also not the sole reason for their emergence, but rather they form “for a variety of social and psychological reasons and engage in a wide range of group activities” (Phelps 2015, 28). In regard to Central America and El Salvador, localized street gangs or pandillas fit the above definition and have been in the region for a long time (Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 224).

However, the emergence of larger, internationalized, institutionalized and highly organized and hierarchical gangs is also being witnessed (Manwaring 2007, 17). These gangs are a more recent phenomenon with transnational origins and have emerged primarily in Central America where the term mara traditionally refers to gangs known as MS-13 and Barrio 18 or 18th Street gang (Bruneau, Dammert and Skinner 2011, 2; Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 224). Institutionalized gangs or maras, such as MS-13 and Barrio 18, operate across borders and unlike street gangs, participate in coordinated criminal activities including human and arms trafficking, the drug trade and violent crime such as kidnapping (Bruneau et al 2011, 4). They show little restraint
in the use of violence against their own members, rivals and state actors using “violence as political interference to negate enforcement efforts directed against them by police and other national and local security organizations” (Manwaring 2007, 5). They have complex organizations with varying roles and a distinct subculture while easily dealing with leadership changes and adapting to changing environments (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 199). Furthermore, through large scale violence and a continued focus on business they develop economic and political agendas and often take control of ungoverned territory, fulfilling the duties of an absent state (Manwaring 2007, 6; Höglund and Kovacs 2010, 381). Consequently, maras differ greatly from street gangs and can threaten a state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, controlling vast territories in open opposition to the state, highlighting their strong similarity to conventional non-state armed groups (Manwaring 2007, viii).

2.2 Gangs as Non-State Armed Groups

Non-state armed groups usually only include those opposing the state with clear political goals, seeking to conquer territory or seize power and overthrow governments, such as rebel groups, insurgents, guerrillas, militia, or paramilitary forces (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 199; Hazen 2010, 370). Furthermore, there is “a tendency in the literature to focus primarily on their manifestations in war or post-war contexts” (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 301). Gangs are therefore generally excluded from NSAG discussions as they are viewed as criminal actors usually operating outside of war zones and do not seek government upheaval. This mentality of course holds for street gangs as well. However, “an increasing number of studies reveal that such groups [NSAGs] also originate and thrive in non-war situations” while others broaden the narrow definition of NSAGs to include groups that while not directly fighting for state control, nevertheless are “undermining the state by virtue of their violence” (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 301-2).

Maras thus naturally fit into this expanded definition and share numerous characteristics with traditional armed groups within the conflict framework (Hazen 2010, 386). Like rebels, maras use high levels of violence not only targeting their opposition (rival gangs) but also civilians and state actors. Their violence erodes and undermines the state and elicits harsh state responses “which effectively treats them as an enemy ‘other’ in a manner very similar to its treatment of more conventional rebels or insurgent organizations” (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 312). Unlike street gangs, maras in El Salvador “are heavily armed and have developed a sophisticated structure of organized cells that specialize in areas such as logistics, recruitment, attack, and murder” profiting not only from extortion but contract killing and trafficking in drugs, weapons
and humans (Bruneau et al 2011, 43). This, coupled with their hierarchical leadership and internal structure makes them more similar to NSAGs than typical street gangs (Bruneau et al 2011, 48). Furthermore, such gangs can also have close ties to state actors, from open confrontation to collaboration and even if they do not espouse political aims they can “show political dynamics comparable to those of rebels” (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 199).

This papers therefore continues with a focus on maras and their definition as gangs more similar to conventional non-state armed groups rather than typical street gangs. From this, gang conflict also becomes defined as an armed conflict between multiple maras/gangs resulting in 25 or more battle deaths in a year. This of course limits the population of this study to only specific gang conflicts and specific attempts at gang mediation. While clear cases of such gangs/maras are witnessed in the form of MS-13 and Barrio 18 in the Central American countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador there are other potential populations as well, as other gangs, particularly in South America and the Caribbean (Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago) are arguably more similar to maras than street gangs or at the very least are developing into such groups.

2.3 Defining Mediation from Previous Research

Having defined gangs, it is important to frame this discussion within the topic of the paper and research question, which looks at how mediation influences levels of violence within gang conflicts specifically. This entails looking at previous research on gang mediation within the field of criminology as well as defining mediation for this study and highlighting what it entails and various debates surrounding it from within the field of peace and conflict. This allows for an understanding as to why mediation theory from conflict studies is more relevant to the subsequent case studies of this paper and how gangs, as defined in this paper, fall into the gap left between these two efforts from different fields.

2.3.1 Mediation in Criminology Research

Much like traditional conflict mediation theory, within the field of criminology studies have shown that mediation between gangs is an effective tactic and “there is a significant correlation between being referred for mediation and desistance from crime” (Phelps 2015, 150). Furthermore, gang mediation is defined as voluntary and involving an impartial third party (Phelps 2015, 77). Strategies also focus on facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties, arranging concessions and highlighting negative consequences, or leveraging (Whitehill, Webster, Frattaroli and Parker 2014, 84). However, one of the main distinctions between gang
mediation within the field of criminology and mediation within the field of conflict is in the scope and impact of mediation efforts. Typical gang mediation cases in criminology are informal and focus on individual based intervention with parties to the conflict represented by individuals and not official leaders or representatives (Phelps 2015, 152). It therefore usually targets preventing singular instances of personal violence within loosely organized street gangs operating on a local scale (Whitehill et al 2014, 89). Examples of such street gang mediation have been seen in numerous inner cities including London, Chicago, Baltimore and Los Angeles.

This paper, however, seeks to address cases of gang mediation involving highly organized and extremely violent gangs currently seen in Central America and arguably parts of South America and the Caribbean as well. These gangs and their accompanying conflict and mediation attempts do not fall within the context of street gang mediation in criminology and relate more to conventional NSAGs and mediation theory from the field of peace and conflict studies, as outlined below.

2.3.2 Mediation Theory in Peace and Conflict Research

Numerous studies have shown that mediation is a positive tool in reducing conflict and bringing about peace (Walter 2002; Beardsley et al. 2006; Svensson 2007). Mediated conflicts are more likely to reach formal peace agreements and reduce chances of further violence, albeit often with a short-term outlook (Beardsley 2008; Diehl and Greig 2013, 16). Regardless of its longevity, mediation provides “alternatives to conflict which can be accepted by both sides” (Beardsley 2008, 737).

Armed conflict encompasses state based and non-state conflict characterized by armed force between two organized armed groups resulting in at least 25 battle related deaths in a year (UCDP 2018). Building off this, numerous definitions of mediation within armed conflict exist and debate surrounds various aspects of it. Zartman and Touval describe it as “a mode of negotiation in which a third party helps the parties find a solution which they cannot find by themselves” (1996, 446). Others are more nuanced, emphasizing the use of nonviolence (Beardsley 2008) and the inability to impose outcomes by the third party (Wall, Stark and Standifer 2001, 375). Bercovitch, Anagnoson and Wille used the widely accepted definition of mediation “as a process of conflict management where disputants seek the assistance of or accept an offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization to settle their conflict or resolve their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law” (1991, 8). Meanwhile, Nathan emphasizes “confidence building mediation” based on dialogue,
negotiation and cooperation (1999, 2). The definition for this study draws on all of these, characterizing mediation as a voluntary and nonviolent process overseen by an outside third party and utilizing dialogue and other tools to bring sides to an agreement (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 372; Wall et al 2001; Greig and Regan 2008, 761).

Based off the key aspects of voluntary, nonviolent and un-imposed negotiation facilitated by an outside third party there are numerous other debates within, and characteristics of, mediation theory. Young outlines four categories of mediation activities; information, tactical, and supervisory functions and functions relating to reconceptualization (1972, 56). However, in general scholars distinguish between three general types or aspects of mediation. Touval and Zartman and Bercovitch call it formulative, facilitative, and manipulative strategies which align with Richmond and Beardsley’s focus on facilitating communication and information sharing, structuring the process and leveraging costs, and finally manipulation aimed at concessions and enforcement (Touval and Zartman 1985; Bercovitch 1992; Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 2004, 515; Richmond 1998, 708; Beardsley 2008, 724). Others have broken this down further into simply 'forcing' or 'fostering' (Curran et al 2004; Svensson and Wallensteen 2010; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 319).

Facilitating communication and reducing barriers to information is an important role of third parties during mediation (Beardsley 2008, 726). Svensson and Lindgren suggest internal mediators are particularly effective in overcoming information failures as they come from the same society and so face reputational costs (2013). Meanwhile, mediators can also utilize leverage and concessions to influence sides resources for conflict or offer rewards or incentives for peace (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 319). Leverage comes from various sources, including persuasion, threatening to withdraw from negotiations, using sanctions against parties or the use of concessions and offering incentives to parties (Zartman and Touval 1996). Therefore, leverage is an important tool for mediators and is often linked to bias, something else many authors view as an asset for mediators (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 320).

Many view impartiality or neutrality as a requirement for successful mediators (Assefa 1987; Wehr 1979; Ott 1972; Jackson 1952). Richmond explains that mediation can be viewed as a sign of weakness as parties are unable to win and so parties would be sensitive to mediator bias (1998, 717). Empirical studies, however, have shown that biased mediators are often successful as they have more leverage (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 320). Zartman and Touval see leverage as more important than neutrality and here Richmond agrees, emphasizing mediators access to resources (Zartman and Touval 1996; Richmond 1998, 717). Kydd, goes further,
stating that mediators must be biased to be believed by parties whereas unbiased mediators who are only interested in peace are more inclined to lie and so may not be trusted (2003, 597). However, one important distinction is insider-partial mediators and their issue bias which provides an exception to Kydd’s argument. The insider-partial mediator is an internal actor often with religious, political, or business affiliations who faces reputational costs and has their own interests and biases in a conflict which can be used to share information in a credible and trustworthy manner (Svensson and Lindgren 2013, 703-04).

Finally, debate also surrounds those who serve as third parties as “successful mediation is often tied to the attributes of the mediator” (Greig and Regan 2008, 761). Mediators are not only official state actors or international organizations but also encompasses more unofficial actors such as individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local groups or inbetweeners such as academics or religious institutions (Böhmelt 2010, 167, 169). Böhmelt argues that official mediators (states and international organizations) are most effective due to their legitimacy, expanded resources and increased capabilities of leverage, concessions and enforcement in comparison to unofficial mediators (2010, 170). This is supported by examples both within cases of gang mediation and traditional mediation between states and rebels (Kan 2014). However, Böhmelt also recognizes that combined mediation by official and unofficial actors can be even more effective, a claim backed by Svensson (Böhmelt 2010, 167; Svensson 2007).

Much of my theory for why mediation leads to lower levels of violence rests on the above aspects of mediation theory from the field of peace and conflict studies. This is supported by examples from conventional mediation with rebels and other NSAGs as well as previous cases of gang mediation, highlighted in the following section. Mediation within typical inter and intrastate conflicts has proven to be a successful tool in reducing and resolving conflicts. Empirical studies highlight that “mediation and communication are associated with preventing escalation and promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts” (Kydd 2003, 607). Another study on civil wars found that “governments and rebels are 39% more likely to bargain successfully with the help of a mediator than on their own” (Walter 2002, 82). The comparison to traditional conflict mediation of course relies heavily on the already drawn comparisons between gangs/maras and conventional non-state armed groups. Therefore, I argue applying traditional conflict mediation to gang conflict could prove monumental in reducing violence. As such, the following outlines my causal story and mechanism based on the key mediation strategies of
dialogue, information sharing, leveraging, gaining and offering concessions and reaching agreement (Beardsley 2008, 724).

2.4 Causal Story and Mechanism

Building off the previous research surrounding mediation, both within the field of conflict and criminology, and my outlined distinction between various gangs I can begin to apply them to the case of gang conflict, outlining my own research and subsequent causal story and mechanism for this paper. As outlined above, I argue specific gangs are more similar to NSAGs and so traditional conflict mediation can better explain mediation success in gang conflicts. To address how and why mediation influences levels of violence within gang conflicts, I have constructed a research design that sees mediation as my independent variable and lower levels of violence as my dependant variable. However, the above explanation relating two macro properties to each other is insufficient as it does not explain the causal mechanism by which they relate (Hedström and Ylikoski 2010, 59). Therefore, I develop my causal mechanism along the lines that mediation within gang conflicts opens dialogue, allows for information sharing, leveraging and concessions and leads to a truce/agreement resulting in reduced violence levels.

The below diagram (Figure 1) represents my causal mechanism based off Coleman’s boat, a formulation of a cause and effect relationship between macros factors that consists of micro factors that underline the causal relationship (Coleman 1994, 10). Based on Coleman’s argument, my theory outlines the specific micro factors that help to explain the casual relationship and mechanism between mediation and lower levels of violence. Specifically, situational mechanisms (arrow 1) which can increase opportunities of dialogue; action-formation mechanisms (arrow 2) such as information sharing, leveraging and concessions which change behaviour and link desires to actions; and transformational mechanisms (arrow 3) such as agreements or truces through which actions generate outcomes, in this case, lower levels of violence (Hedström and Ylikoski 2010, 59). It is important to note however that the
order of these micro factors is not necessarily set as many of them can be interpreted in regard to different mechanisms, so while their presence is important the order in which they occur may differ. For example, agreements/truces can be understood as a situational mechanism thereby allowing action-formation dialogue and transformational concessions leading to lower levels of violence.

Figure 1: Causal Diagram

All these steps are conditional on government support which makes mediation attempts more effective as supported by research both in the field of traditional mediation and gang mediation (Kan 2014). Many emphasize the effectiveness of official mediators such as states due to their resources, ability to add legitimacy to processes and increased capabilities of leverage and enforcement (Böhmelt 2010, 170; Svensson 2007). They also serve to better “mitigate commitment problems and provide successful monitoring mechanisms” providing “the credible commitment necessary for criminal actors to negotiate” (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 200). Previous research has also found that criminal pacts can be successful in reducing violence if the state is involved, particularly to administer incentives (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 197). This supports the notion that state or government involvement and support can be an important determinant for successful peace negotiations (Umaña, Arévalo de León and Táger 2014; Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016; Rahman and Vuković 2018).
2.4.1 Dialogue

Mediation becomes a valuable tool when conflicting parties or gangs cannot resolve conflict and have reached mutually hurting stalemates (Pruitt and Kim 2004). It revolves around dialogue and negotiation facilitated by a third party and this requires parties to be able to sit down at the bargaining table. Nepal’s Prime Minister hailed the country’s 2006 peace deal as the result of dialogue between the government and Maoist rebels (Pokharel and Sengupta 2006). Engaging in dialogue with traditional non-state actors such as rebels is common practice and this should not be seen as something new for criminal groups such as gangs either.

As previously outlined this has been utilized within the field of criminology already and “dialogue and negotiation have helped to reduce crime and violence significantly and have contributed to building peace in conflict and crime-affected contexts” (Wennmann 2014, 257). For example, in 2006 the government of Trinidad and Tobago organized dialogue between rival gangs to secure a mediated truce which resulted in decreased homicide rates in the short term (Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 271). Dialogue with other organized crime groups has also been common in the past from cases of accommodation in Afghanistan between local warlords to securing deals between peacekeepers and criminal organizations in the Balkans (Wennmann 2014, 263).

During this step, government support is important as it provides legitimacy to a process that could otherwise be viewed as illegitimate or illegal, involving criminal groups. For this reason, dialogue is more likely to be accepted by rival gangs if they know the government supports it. In addition, the success of mediation is tied to timing, often relating to political factors at play, broader contexts and third-party actions. This again emphasizes the importance of government support as they hold relevant influence over such factors (Greig and Regan 2008, 761). Furthermore, mediators facilitate communication and dialogue by providing safe and neutral sites (Pruitt and Kim 2004). When it comes to gang mediation governments hold much sway as they have the power to ensure participants are safe from arrest or able to meet in prisons where leaders may be held.

2.4.2 Information Sharing

Information sharing is an important step in allowing for effective bargaining (Beardsley 2008, 726). Facilitating the exchange of information allows parties to address misunderstandings and identify common goals or areas of agreement (Diehl and Greig 2013, 6). It also plays an important role in overcoming mistrust, as mistrust grows in uncertainties and misinformation
(Kydd 2006, 449). For example, United States intelligence experts serving as mediators in a 1990 crisis between India and Pakistan reduced tensions by providing information on each side’s military capabilities to the other (Beardsley 2008, 726).

Internal or insider-partial mediators, such as a government when looking at gang conflicts, can play a significant role as they are familiar with the environment and context and so privy to information. They are also characterized by an issue bias and face reputational costs so can potentially be deemed more credible and trustworthy (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 321). They therefore can fill information gaps between parties and such mediators have been found to increase the likelihood of negotiated agreements (Svensson and Lindgren 2013, 699).

2.4.3 Leverage/Concessions

Government support also benefits others aspect within the mediation process, particularly leverage and concessions. As opposed to unofficial third parties such as NGOs – or in the case of El Salvador and other countries, individuals and the Catholic church – governments provide vast resources, influence, power and status which are important tools for providing leverage and offering concessions (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016; Rahman and Vuković 2018). For these reasons, their efforts are usually more effective (Böhmelt 2010, 170; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 318; Greig and Regan 2008, 761).

Leverage is the ability of a third party to influence and manipulate the parties of mediation to bring them to agreement (Zartman and Touval 1996). It often utilizes carrots and sticks to maximize the costs of continuing conflict and highlight the benefits of peace (Beardsley 2008, 727). Carrots and sticks can range from sanctions that affect resources, continued conflict and threats of violence to side payments or promises of prestige (Greig and Regan 2008, 761; Zartman and Touval 1996; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 319). Leading up to the 1978 Camp David Accords the US used leverage by way of aid to Egypt and Israel and not abandoning the region to the Soviet sphere of influence (Beardsley 2008, 727). Ultimately, mediators use leverage on one or both sides to extract concessions, although they may also offer concessions to gain increased leverage (Kydd 2003, 598). In 1999 during the conflict between the Serbian government and Kosovo-Albanians, mediators persuaded “one side to make a concession because the other side would fight if no concession was forthcoming” (Kydd 2003, 597).

Concessions are instrumental in reaching agreements as seen in the case of gang mediation in Belize where the government negotiated a gang truce in 2011 based off concessions to gangs regarding their demands for jobs (Bakrania 2013, 9). The attempted gang truce in Honduras in
2013 was highlighted by a unilateral offer by the gangs to halt murders and extortions for state concessions including jobs and security (Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 232-233). An alternative example from another gang truce in Trinidad and Tobago also highlights the importance of government involvement. In this case the government did not actively participate following an established truce and provide concessions resulting in the agreement falling apart as gangs felt they were not benefiting from their good behaviour (Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 272).

2.4.4 Agreement/Truce

Findings show that mediation positively influences parties’ ability to reach formal agreements and truces or ceasefires are usually the immediate goal of mediation, which successfully manages the conflict and ultimately stops or at least lowers violence levels for the time being (Beardsley 2008, 737; Diehl and Greig 2013, 10). Furthermore, the signing of agreements and halts to violence are often perceived as measures of mediation success (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 322). In 1996 Guatemala ended a 36-year civil war through the signing of peace accords between the government and an insurgent rebel group (Janzen 2008, 55).

Government support also plays a part here as agreements often entail guidelines surrounding various stipulations such as disarmament, benchmarks, and monitoring (Muggah et al 2015). Once again, government resources, influence and status are better equipped to enforce rules and monitor agreements. A negotiated agreement between criminal groups and the state in the city of Medellin, Colombia in 2003 resulted in a decline in homicides due in part to the “unified participation of local and national authorities” (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 202).

Further examples highlight that mediation and resulting truces can bring about reductions in violence levels as seen in conflicts between street gangs in Los Angeles and Chicago (Muggah et al 2015) but also in Jamaica where a government-funded initiative has successfully negotiated treaties between gangs (Bakrania 2013, 10).

2.5 Hypotheses:

Gang mediation initiatives have been witnessed in countries with positive results, supporting the argument that gang mediation can lead to lower levels of violence. Government support has also played a significant role in many of these examples and this coupled with the above support provides a firm link between mediation theory and the two hypotheses for this research paper. The below hypotheses allow me to systematically analyse gang mediation and its effects on
levels of violence with findings potentially supporting new approaches to addressing gang conflict and opening new lines of study within the field of peace and conflict.

**Hypothesis 1**: Mediation with/between gangs will likely lead to lower levels of violence
- Addressing if mediation influences levels of violence

**Hypothesis 2**: Government support for mediation will likely lead to lower levels of violence
- Addressing under what conditions mediation is successful

3. **RESEARCH DESIGN**

To properly address and test each of my hypotheses in an empirical manner, this thesis employs a qualitative comparative case study design. Since I hope to answer both, if mediation influences levels of violence in gang conflicts and under what conditions it does so, I utilize a combination of methods to draw both descriptive and causal inference based on empirical observations. I use a structured, focused comparison between multiple cases in El Salvador in order to determine the effects of mediation on gang violence. Meanwhile, I complement this with aspects of process tracing within cases to delve deeper into the causal mechanism I suspect is at play – between mediation and violence within gang conflicts conditional on government support – but also to add to the robustness of the study.

A qualitative study was selected due to the unique situation available in terms of cases, that being three cases over different time periods within the same country, thereby naturally allowing for the control of numerous variables. In addition, the study of gang conflicts and cases of gang conflicts, as outlined by my definition of gangs for this study, is still relatively new and selective to only a few examples. This section begins by outlining each employed method before presenting details surrounding case selection and time period, data sources, limitations, the structure of analysis and finally the operationalization of variables and how each will be specifically utilized and measured.

3.1 **Structured, Focused Comparison**

Structured, focused comparison is a between case design that facilitates comparisons across cases. Structured, refers to a study guided by a clear research objective and specific set of questions developed and applied to each case so results from each case are systematic, consistent and can be easily and clearly compared (George and Bennett 2005, 67). “By using the same set of questions, collecting comparable and apparelled data, about each case, we can develop cumulative knowledge about the phenomena of interest” (Powner 2015, 105). Focused,
means it “deals only with certain aspects of the cases examined” in turn, allowing for a deeper analysis as only the variables or events of interest are examined within a specific time period (George and Bennett 2005, 67). This requires a focused and limited research objective and design addressing only those topics answering the research questions. It also entails analysis limited to the examined variables in the cases and relevant to the hypothesis (Powner 2015, 129).

I use this method to address my hypotheses in an attempt to explain the effects of mediation on gang conflicts through variation between cases as well as to uncover the effect of the condition of government support. However, this method can often fall short in determining the causal path or mechanism between independent and dependant variables, in my case, mediation and lower levels of violence. As my second hypothesis concerns this, I also utilize aspects of process tracing. Often, analysing covariation between independent and dependant variable is not enough due to differences in cases and confounding factors. For this reason, it is important to complement the structured, focused comparison method with process tracing (Gerring 2007, 173).

3.2 Process Tracing

Process tracing is a within case design and important tool of qualitative analysis that “relies on multiplying observations within a single larger case” (Powner 2015, 104). As in my study, it is often used as an adjunct form of analysis to offer supporting evidence, adding robustness to the analysis (Gerring 2007, 184-185). Specifically, it looks at the events of a case over time, establishing temporal order that variables occurred in and if in fact they did occur, paying “close attention to sequences of independent, dependant and intervening variables” (Collier 2011, 823-824). It thereby can be used to identify and evaluate causal claims as a particular process is analysed step by step to identify the mechanism linking independent and dependent variables (George and Bennet 2005, 206–207).

Process tracing can contribute to identifying and systematically describing social and political phenomena, such as gang mediation as well as shedding light on the potential causal mechanism and under what conditions gang mediation leads to lower levels of violence (Collier 2011, 824). By using aspects of process tracing and focusing on causal process observations within cases of gang mediation I can test my causal mechanism and analyse the variables at play and process by which mediation may in fact lead to lower levels of violence, addressing both my hypotheses.
3.3 Case Selection

Case selection is a vital component of qualitative studies as it opens up for possible selection bias. For this study, I have chosen to do a temporal case study of El Salvador, meaning I take three different time periods within the country from 2009-2015 as individual cases. This allows me to utilize between case analysis and compare cases using a structured, focused comparison as well as employ process tracing within cases to address if mediation influences levels of violence within gang conflicts and under what conditions mediation is more or less effective.

El Salvador was chosen for several reasons, one being that it is arguably the country most affected by gang conflict and has had multiple examples or attempts at gang mediation, my unit of analysis. El Salvador is an important case as gang conflict and violence have plagued the nation since the end of its civil war in 1992 and it currently holds the highest murder rate in the world with levels of violence above those seen during the country's 12-year civil war and most war zones (Renteria 2016). Focusing on the period of the study, 2009-2015, El Salvador had the highest homicide rates in the world (coupled with Honduras) with estimates of gang membership in MS-13 and Barrio 18 at nearly 30,000 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and up to 65,000 by the Salvadoran police (UNODC 2012, 16; Whitfield 2013). Furthermore, nearly 8 percent of the population were estimated to be connected to gang activity and around 5 percent of the male population aged 14 to 24 is thought to have been actively involved in gang membership (Bargent 2013).

The gangs that dominate the conflict in El Salvador are also one of the best examples of gangs or maras, as defined in this thesis. This leads to the importance of identifying the population of my cases, for determining the generalizability of my study and its potential results. My population is gang conflicts involving gangs or maras, as defined in this study, such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 in Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala) and emerging gang conflicts in South America and the Caribbean (Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago); not street gangs. My definition of these gangs is therefore an important scope condition.

Another important reason for the selection of El Salvador and the three cases within it is due to the country’s unique history of gang conflict and mediation, involving varying third parties such as individuals and the Catholic church. Because it has seen multiple examples of gang mediation as well as the absence of gang mediation during close periods in time it provides a unique case where the same country can be used for multiple cases within it. This is valuable and important as it naturally allows me to control for many other variables or alternative factors.
at play since I am comparing cases within the same country and within close periods of time. Each case is therefore similar in most regards except for what I will be measuring.

This leads directly to my method of case selection for the between case analysis; most similar method or Mill’s method of difference. This method looks for cases “that are identical in every way except for the independent variable value of interest and the outcome” (Powner 2015, 126). This means the cases attempt to control for all other possible causes expect the variables of interest as it “strives to identify cases that exhibit different scores in the factor of interest and similar scores on all other possible causal factors” (Gerring 2007, 131). One of the main drawbacks of this method is that it is impossible to find exactly alike cases, however, by using cases all based in the same country I can already select examples that are similar in as many ways as possible, excluding those variables as possible causes (Powner 2015, 124). However, there are still disadvantages even with this as it also means there are path dependencies between the three cases and outside factors that occur in the earlier cases may in fact then influence what happens in the later cases.

Using Mill’s method of difference, I have selected three cases, alike in most regards except for variation in the independent variable, that being mediation. Case 1 is El Salvador during 2009-2011 when the country was ravaged by gang conflict and violence but experienced no gang mediation, although attempts were made (ICG 2017, “El Salvador’s…”). This will be compared with Case 2, through a structured, focused comparison, which is El Salvador from 2012 to the end of 2013 when the country, still terrorised by gang conflict, saw gang mediation take place with government support (ICG 2017, “Mafia…”). The comparison and analysis of these two cases will seek to address whether mediation influences levels of violence within gang conflicts and in turn test my first hypothesis; Mediation with/between gangs will likely lead to lower levels of violence. In addition, I have selected a third case, El Salvador during 2014 to 2015 when again mediation took place but without government support. The selection of this Case (3) will once again allow for a structured, focused comparison between Case 2 and 3 to address under what conditions mediation with gang’s is more or less effective, testing my second hypothesis; Government support for mediation will likely lead to lower levels of violence (see Figure 2). While both Case 2 and 3 are examples of mediation they differ greatly, with Case 2 displaying a more typical case of mediation as will be discussed later. For this reason, it was selected to be compared with Case 1, an example of no mediation.
To address the potential drawbacks of Mill’s method, aspects of process tracing will also be utilized “to verify that purported causes are actually causal and not simply covariant” (Powner 2015, 125). Therefore, the structured, focused comparison is supplemented by aspects of process tracing within cases in addressing both hypotheses to better understand my causal mechanism and the micro factors and conditional variable at play and their relationship between mediation and levels of violence within gang conflicts.

### 3.4 Data Sources

This thesis utilises previous research and a wide variety of sources in both English and Spanish from books, journal articles, newspaper archives, both local and international, and policy briefings to reports by state agencies, non-governmental organisations, research institutes and international organizations. It also draws on numerous primary sources, such as official truce agreements and gang communiqués. To mitigate bias, data is triangulated whenever possible so that multiple sources are used to confirm single pieces of information. This is used in identifying indicators within cases and in determining levels of violence or homicides, by triangulating from media reports, UNODC statistics and the Igarapé Institute’s Homicide Monitor.

I do however benefit from homicide statistics easily comparable across cases as I focus on one country, meaning it maintains the same definition of homicide and method of counting offences for each case. To address further issues in bias, attention is paid specifically to local news articles as during the time periods studied bias was often portrayed by a government and media that vilified gangs and gang members. Limitations also exist in regard to sources from local government due to the political sensitivity of the issue even to this day.
3.5 Limitations

It is important to note, that while selecting all my cases from within one country does naturally control for many variables there are still numerous potential confounding factors and differences between the cases that can affect both the independent and dependant variable. Most notable, in this study is elections and the political climate of El Salvador and how it alters throughout each case.

Due to the massive social, economic and political impact gang conflict has in El Salvador, the political climate and in turn elections can greatly affect both mediation attempts and levels of violence. The population is terrorized by crime and violence, blamed on gangs, with the majority believing “that respect for human rights was a barrier to more effectively fighting crime” (Donaldson 2012, 12). Thus, politicians from all parties run on campaigns which forward repressive policies in order to win elections (Donaldson 2012, 3). For example, senior police officials and officers interviewed in 2009 and 2010 “invariably could characterize these policies only in the context of electoral politics” (Bruneau et al 2011, 16). During one administration, it was public outcry that brought about the introduction of increasingly harsh anti-gang laws and in 2013, upcoming presidential elections saw the current administration impede negotiations and communications between gangs (Lakhani 2015; Dudley 2013). Changes in government have also had a large impact as seen in 2015 when the new president’s first public address of the year spoke out against gang mediation, after months of successful mediation supported by the previous administration (Gurney 2015). These are but a few examples of the effect the political atmosphere had and can have on mediation.

Regarding levels of violence, research has shown that hard-handed approaches to crime, or mano dura policies, often emphasized during elections or introduced with a change of government, resulted in the intensification of violence and increased homicide rates. Between 2000 and 2005 in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador mano dura policies “resulted in more organized and violent crime on the part of the gangs” (UNDP 2013, 13). These methods have been proven to do more harm than good serving to incite gang violence and homicide (WOLA 2011, 13). These potential confounding factors will therefore be addressed and kept in mind throughout the study.

Further limitations also included data collection restraints experienced with Case 3. Particularly regarding the steps within the mediation process where details were far more ambiguous and detailed information hard to come by. As well as considerations concerning defining successful mediation in regard to short term versus long term goals and mediation as only part of a peace
process. All these limitations will be further addressed in the additional observations/alternative explanations section at the end of the analysis section.

3.6 Structure of Analysis

The structure of my empirics and analysis begins with a brief background on the history and structure of MS-13 and Barrio 18 as well as that of gang conflict and violence in El Salvador, providing relevant context on past strategies and approaches in contrast to mediation attempts. This is important as it relates back to my definition of gangs and their close comparison to NSAGs. This is followed by separate sections detailing the empirics and collected data for each of the three cases, starting with Case 1 and followed by Case 2 and 3. The analysis then begins with Case 1 and 2 and a detailed comparison utilising a structured, focused comparison guided by specific questions and indicators in order to answer my first hypothesis. The next section provides an initial analysis of Case 3 before using the same set-up for comparing Case 2 and 3 to address my second hypothesis. This is complemented by elements of process tracing, addressing observable implications and indicators, within cases before limitations, additional observations and alternative explanations are addressed.

3.7 Operationalisation

To fulfill my intended methods of structured, focused comparison for between case analysis and aspects of process tracing for within case analysis I use a list of specific questions to guide the empirical analysis of my cases as well as possible indicators for each variable. This allows me to easily and clearly determine whether they have been witnessed or met in accordance with my hypotheses and casual mechanism. Therefore, all indicators do not need to be present but at least one. As I wish to not only see variation between the effects of mediation and no mediation but also investigate the causal process I use indicators and guiding questions for the steps of my casual mechanism to clearly assess observable implications within the process. As outlined previously in Figure 1, those steps are mediation, dialogue, information sharing, leverage/concessions, agreement/truce and lower levels of violence, with government support playing a conditional role throughout.

My operationalization of mediation stems from its theoretical definition, including key aspects such as third-party involvement, voluntary and nonviolence, as well as the specific elements outlined in my causal mechanism. Government support is measured by the presence and involvement of government in different steps of the causal story. From this I develop the below questions and indicators (Table 1 and 2) to guide my empirics and analysis to determine if
mediation and government support were present. In turn, each indicator or question is falsified by its missing presence or the opposite of it occurring. Mediation and government support indicators show high validity in that the indicators directly represent what is being measured however validity can suffer from the fact that some indicators rely on statements by individuals who may not always be truthful, well informed or without bias (Powner 2015, 138). Reliability is more questionable as some indicators open up to individual interpretations of empirics. This is addressed by consulting multiple and varying sources.

Table 1: Mediation questions and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediation</strong> (general)</td>
<td>Did mediation occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was a third party involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was it voluntary and un-imposed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was it peaceful and nonviolent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
<td>Was there dialogue between opposing sides and third parties?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did opposing sides meet and sit down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was a safe and neutral meeting site decided on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information Sharing/Leverage/Concessions</strong></td>
<td>Did info sharing take place between opposing sides?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did either side use leverage against the other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did any concessions take place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agreement/Truce</strong></td>
<td>Was an agreement/truce made/signed/announced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Government Support questions and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediation</strong></td>
<td>Did the government openly support mediation?</td>
<td>- Open/public support for mediation through media or official announcement³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(general)</td>
<td>Was the government a third party?</td>
<td>- Government (or representative) as a third party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
<td>Was the government involved in the dialogue?</td>
<td>- Involved in dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the government help to facilitate dialogue?</td>
<td>- Acted as a facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Helped opposing sides meet face to face or communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the government provide a neutral meeting site?</td>
<td>- Provided a neutral site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>Did the government assist in info sharing between sides?</td>
<td>- Facilitated info sharing between opposing sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing/Leverage/Concessions</strong></td>
<td>Did the government use leverage on either side?</td>
<td>- Leverage used against one or both sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the government make/respond to concessions to/by either side?</td>
<td>- Concessions made to any or both sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agreement/Truce</strong></td>
<td>Was the government part of or supportive of the agreement/truce?</td>
<td>- Signatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Publicly voiced support for the agreement/truce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the dependant variable, or lower levels of violence, will be operationalized through the analysis of the rise and fall of intentional homicide rates⁴ within El Salvador. As previously mentioned gang conflict in El Salvador has a profound effect on society and security within the nation. While not all homicides and violence in El Salvador is gang related the affect is significant. The UNODC stated organized crime/gang violence accounted for 30% of all homicides in the Americas in 2013 while the Salvadoran government estimated 80-90% of homicides in the country were the direct result of gang violence with other outside sources putting it at 60-70% (UNODC 2013, 15; Whitfield 2013, 10; Bruneau et al 2011, 43; Katz, Hedberg and Amaya 2016, 660). For this reason, intentional homicide rates provide a valid operationalization as they capture the concept of levels of gang violence. In turn, such figures

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³ This will not be used as a firm indicator due to possibility of backchanneling and background facilitation.
⁴ Homicide rate refers to the number of homicides per 100,000 people. The Igarapé Institute’s Homicide Monitor counts intentional homicide and does not include deaths resulting from military operations in wars (Homicide Monitor 2018). The UNODC defines intentional homicide as “unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person” excluding “attempted homicide, manslaughter, death due to legal intervention, justifiable homicide in self-defence and death due to armed conflict” (UNODC Statistics 2018).
are recorded by numerous actors, including the government, international organizations such as the UNODC, and research institutes such as Igarapé\textsuperscript{5}, allowing for figures to be triangulated, strengthening their reliability.\textsuperscript{6}

4. EMPIRICS

4.1 Background and Context

As this paper focuses on El Salvador and the gang conflict between MS-13 and Barrio 18 in 2009 to 2015 it is important to first understand the context and history of this gang conflict as well as the nature of the gangs themselves. This helps not only in fortifying their comparison to NSAGs, showcasing the unique structure of the gangs, but also to understand why mediation may be effective with them and why the gang’s members and leadership were open to mediation and assistance by a third party, in some cases actively seeking it out.

The gang conflict in El Salvador is dominated by two gangs, MS-13 and Barrio 18, who are involved in many illicit activities and in many cases control entire areas in the country (Renteria 2016). Both gangs originated in the mid to late-20th century gang culture of Los Angeles, where they were formed by Latin American youth out of a need for self-protection rather than criminality (Fogelbach 2011). As the two gangs became more prominent in LA’s gang scene authorities took drastic steps to combat the rising violence, including prosecuting young gang members as adults and implementing immigration reforms. This allowed for foreign-born American felons to be stripped of their residence and deported while simultaneously expanding the list of deportable crimes (Arana 2005). Many of the deportees returned to an unfamiliar country with no familial ties, limited language skills and few opportunities and so replicated the gang structures they had created in the USA (Cruz 2010). The two gangs continued to grow, flourishing due to the weak socioeconomic conditions and absence of a strong state in El Salvador following the conclusion of its civil war in 1992 (Moreno, Lima, Lambin and Rodriguez 2017, 11). Even then both gangs were already exhibiting differences to traditional gangs due to their increased organizational levels, strict internal norms and widespread use of

\textsuperscript{5} The Igarapé Institute is a think tank based in Brazil which maintains the Homicide Monitor with support from Open Society Foundations and the Peace Research Institute Oslo.

\textsuperscript{6} The Homicide Monitor draws data from the UNODC which in turn collects it directly from governments. However, the Homicide Monitor provides more detailed information on the Americas drawing on primary sources as well from “national police, ministries of interior, justice, defence and health, national statistical offices and national institutes of legal medicine and forensic studies” as well as the Organization of American States (OAS) Observatory for Citizen Security (Homicide Monitor 2018).
violence (Bruneau et al 2011, 45). During the 2000s membership ballooned and violence continued to escalate.

MS-13 and Barrio 18 have complex organizational structures and hierarchies, composed of smaller territorially-based groups known as clicas which are controlled by gang leadership (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro 2010, 57). While there is no evidence of an ‘international’ leadership structure operating across borders, in El Salvador they display vertical structures characterized by defined roles and established chains of command led by national leaders (Fariña et al 2010, 57). While many leaders are imprisoned they nonetheless maintain immense control over criminal enterprises and members on the street (Katz et al 2016, 663-4). They enforce strict disciplinary codes and discourage transgression through violent punishment and even death (Whitfield 2013, 7). The gangs, or rather maras, are extremely territorial and violent with conflict spilling over into the public and occurring with security forces. They primarily fund themselves through the extortion of local businesses and illicit transnational activities such as drug trafficking and alien smuggling (Arana 2005). Furthermore, they greatly influence Salvadoran society, often fulfilling certain roles of the absent state in impoverished neighbourhoods. Yet, while involved in criminal activity many argue that the gangs are not criminal organizations but rather the result of “localised institutional responses to the circumstances of insecurity, exclusion, and uncertainty” and youth join them for reasons outside of criminality and delinquency (Vasilachis De Gialdino 2009; Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 308). This, coupled with the extreme violence and widespread insecurity gang members face lends support to why the gangs were open to truces and actually sought out mediation in some cases. Many gang leaders “were tired of the cycle of violence and wanted a better life for their families” seeing themselves as victims of their environment and harsh state responses (Kan 2014, 129; Wennmann 2014, 267-268).

The past as well as present response to the gang issue in El Salvador has largely been focused on mano dura, or strong hand, highlighted by repressive and violent police and military tactics targeting gang members. Mano dura first emerged in 2003 and was followed by super mano dura in 2004. Both sought to solve the gang problem by high rates of arrests and eliminating gangs through a law enforcement response. They emphasized zero tolerance for gang activity allowing police to arrest suspected gang members simply based on the presence of certain tattoos, hand signals or dress codes (Bruneau et al 2011, 58, 143). This coupled with harsh mandatory sentencing laws and trying children as adults led to Salvadoran males as young as 12 being arrested and imprisoned for up to 5 years (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 308). The
reactive approach saw the countries unprepared prison system swell by 20,000 in one year and a backlogged and weak judicial system overwhelmed (Rodgers and Muggah 2009, 308).

While some of the initial policies ultimately fell apart after a Supreme Court decision, *mano dura* continued albeit reformed, with harsher prison sentences for gang members, extrajudicial killings, harassment against young males and violence against civilians dominating the country’s landscape. Meanwhile, homicide rates continued to climb as *mano dura* pushed the gangs to adopt more clandestine behaviours and formal structures while strengthening their identity and loyalty, all the while further alienating marginalised communities (Bruneau et al 2011, 62-63; Schuberth 2016). It also served to increase their strength and membership as “putting thousands of disaffected youths in prison alongside hardened gang members” effectively created a ‘university of crime’ (Bruneau et al 2011, 16). Prisons dominated by gang members thus became important centres for gang activity (Bruneau et al 2011, 16, 152). Later the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) expressed that iron fist policies like *mano dura* “have had negative repercussions, many unexpected, among which are an increase in levels of lethal violence, the strengthening of criminal networks, congestion in already overcrowded prisons, human rights violations — particularly against youths and minors — and abuse of authority” (2013, 13). Meanwhile, gang mediator Raúl Mijango “saw the gang policies not only as inefficient but as counterproductive” as “the more you repress, the more they reproduce” (Dudley 2013, 15).

However, despite its ineffectiveness *mano dura* continued. It was supported by a fearful population and press that vilified gangs with over 40% of citizens in 2012 labelling gangs as the main threat to security (UNDP 2013, 3). This made El Salvador one of two countries out of 18 in Latin American that placed gangs as the main threat over organised crime and drug dealers, and regular criminals (see Figure 3). Politicians eager for re-election continued to implement such policies leading many to believe *mano dura* was simply “a populist policy whose primary purpose was not to curb street gang activity but to improve the ARENA party’s electoral advantage” (Bruneau 2011, 59).
4.2 Case 1 Empirics (El Salvador 2009-2011)

My first case focuses on El Salvador prior to 2012, particularly 2009-2011, although some details and information from earlier will be introduced to provide context and a larger scope of the forces and policies at play. The case is typified by a lack of mediation and rising homicide rates. From 1999 to 2009, even though El Salvador had two different leaders they both represented the National Republican Alliance party (ARENA) and forwarded a zero tolerance and hard-handed approach to gangs, implementing mano dura and super mano dura policies, emphasizing mass arrests and incarcerations not only anyone who looked or acted like a gang member but associated with gangs (ICG 2017, “El Salvador’s...”; Whitfield 2013, 8). However, in 2009 MS-13 and Barrio 18 released a statement through Catholic priest, Father Antonio Rodríguez López, aimed at the government and public requesting dialogue to address violence levels and improve prison conditions (Infobae 2010; Valencia and Sanz 2010).

Father Rodríguez claimed cooperation between the gangs had been growing and they released the request due to their desire to reduce violence and a belief that “President Funes’ FMLN administration -the first leftist administration in two decades- presented an opportunity for constructive dialogue, social and economic inclusion, and peace” (Valencia and Sanz 2010). In response, the Funes administration brought together church and NGO leaders “to develop a pilot programme of violence prevention, and the rehabilitation and reinsertion into society of

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7 (UNDP 2013, 3).
gang members” (Whitfield 2013, 9). However, this was quickly pushed aside following a violent attack in June 2010 by Barrio 18 gang members resulting in 20 dead civilians and public outcry and upheaval (Whitfield 2013, 9). Instead, Funes introduced a harsh anti-gang law, placed the army in prisons and promised a continuation of mano dura policy (Infobae 2010; Fogelbach 2011, 449). Both gangs protested the new security measures by calling for a nationwide curfew and stoppage of public buses, threatening to kill anyone who defied them (Whitfield 2013, 9; Infobae 2010). Over the next year and a half, leading to the end of 2011, aggressive government sponsored campaigns against the gangs continued, accentuated by further anti-gang laws (Moreno et al 2017, 14).

As previously highlighted in the background section, rather than reduce gang membership and gang conflict levels, mano dura policies exacerbated the issue, encouraging extrajudicial violence and killings against gangs by security forces as well as vigilante groups, thereby causing further gang violence (Bruneau et al 2011, 153). This not only hindered preventative strategies but led to the transformation of the gangs into more violent, organized and strengthened groups as they had to adapt to survive the state response (Bruneau et al 2011, 139). Furthermore, increased incarceration rates of not only gang members but young males in general, a direct result of mano dura, resulted in vastly overcrowded prisons in the country in 2011, as seen in Figure 4. Languishing in prisons separated by gang affiliation, gang leaders could establish more direct connections with other clicas, developing more extensive and structured organizations, discussing decisions, strategies and nationwide operations and establishing national leadership (Bruneau et al 2011, 155). Gang membership also swelled as prisons provided a training ground for incarcerated individuals who were previously not gang members.
Figure 4: Penitentiary overpopulation in Latin America

4.3 Case 2 Empirics (El Salvador 2012-2013)

Case 2 focuses on El Salvador from 2012 to 2013. In early 2012, former guerrilla leader and congressman Raúl Mijango and Catholic Bishop Fabio Colindres began dialogue with imprisoned rival gang leaders with the support of current Minister of Justice and Public Security, David Munguía Payés (Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 231-232; Farah 2012; Milliken 2014, 6). In March MS-13 and Barrio 18 leaders were transferred to the same prison where they met for the first time, through the mediation efforts of Mijango and Bishop Colindres. This ultimately resulted in a truce between the two gangs signed behind closed doors on March 9, 2012. When the truce became public the government initially denied involvement whereas the gang leaders issued their first public communiqué (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14). They admitted their role in the violence plaguing the country and alongside requesting improved prison conditions and reintegration opportunities stated, “that if we are part of the problem, we can also be part of the solution”9 (“Los Voceros…” March 19, 2012, 1; Whitfield 2013, 10-11). Upon signing the truce homicides across the country immediately fell by nearly 60% from around 14 a day to 5.5 (Milliken 2014, 6). This trend continued with the Organization of American States (OAS) joining the process as a guarantor and in September Minister Munguía admitting that the government had not only sanctioned dialogue between the two gangs but designed and

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8 (UNDP 2013, 11).
9 Translated from the Spanish, “Que si nosotros somos parte del problema, también podemos ser parte de la solución” (“Los Voceros…” March 19, 2012, 1).
facilitated it, with Bishop Colindres and Mijango mediating (Táger and Umaña 2013, 12; Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 231-232).

In early 2013 mediation efforts continued resulting in a second phase of the truce regarding the creation of ‘violence free zones.’ Based on further agreements, the gangs agreed to stop violence, surrender weapons and allow freedom of movement in specific municipalities while the local and national government initiated reintegration and job programs with support from civil society and business (Wennmann 2014, 267-268; “Propuesta…” 2012). At this point, the truce became more of a peace process (Umaña et al 2014, 98). One year after the original signing the gangs communicated their continued support, including for the new phase, while Minister Munguía celebrate it as a success (Whitfield 2013, 15; “Los Voceros…” 2013). However, in May 2013 Munguía was forced to step down due to a Supreme Court ruling and his replacement was critical to the truce forwarding a return to mano dura (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 207; Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14-15). With this, Mijango and Bishop Colindres were also replaced and denied access to gang leaders in prison who in turn faced restricted communication (Lakhani 2015). Meanwhile upcoming elections were influencing the governments retreating support as they had been accused of being soft on crime by the opposition (Umaña et al 2014, 98). Viewing the above as a breach to the agreement, the gangs began to rearm with homicides steadily rising from mid-2013 and reaching pre-truce levels by early 2014, signifying the end of the truce (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14-15; Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 207; Gurney 2015).

4.4 Case 3 Empirics (El Salvador 2014-2015)

The third and final case of this study looks at El Salvador in 2014-2015, after the apparent end to the 2012 gang truce. However, because the previously outlined gang truce had no specific or clear end this case will have some overlap with Case 2 as the remnants of the 2012 gang truce continued into early 2014. Nonetheless, Case 3 will set out to present the situation and empirics associated with my variables within the outlined time period.

By the start of 2014 and in the lead up to presidential elections the gang truce had all but disintegrated with the government repressing communication between gang leaders, moving them back to high security prisons, removing third party negotiators from prisons and all but returning to a hard-handed law enforcement approach (Lakhani 2015; Pachico February 13, 2015). This reversal continued under the new Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) government, led by Sánchez Cerén, which imposed “even harsher confinement conditions for jailed gang members and an enhanced role for the military in public security”
Meanwhile, gang leadership continued their attempts to re-establish the truce, emphasizing their commitment to the ‘violence-free municipalities’ strategy and calling on the new government for support and facilitation to no avail (Zoethout 2014, 103). Instead the government launched the National Council for Citizen Security and Coexistence, bringing together government, business, and civil society actors but rejecting a proposal to include a dialogue with gangs (Zoethout 2014, 103; La Prensa Gráfica 2014). Furthermore, President Cerén erased hopes of another gang truce supported by the government when in his first public address of 2015 announced that “we will not return to the scheme of understanding and negotiating with the gangs because this is at the margin of the law,” (Valencia April 9, 2015) and the government’s responsibility was to “go after them [and] punish them” (Gurney 2015).

With a return to mano dura “between 2013 and 2015 El Salvador experienced its steepest escalation in violence since 1994” (ICG 2017, “El Salvador’s…”).

Yet, importantly, during this period new attempts at mediation were made by the gangs. The gangs proposed new talks, asked for government support and even highlighted the possibility of an end to extortion and their own dissolution (Moreno et al 2017, 14; ICG 2017, “Mafia…”). While the government disregarded such offers and refused to participate, the Catholic Church openly engaged in dialogue providing support and legitimation as a third party, stating that “dialogue should be open to everyone, and everyone has to be an actor in this peace process” (Zelaya 2015). On January 17, 2015 MS-13 and Barrio 18 announced their commitment to a new truce voluntarily agreed on among themselves (Pachico February 13, 2015; Daugherty 2015). This, despite what they perceived as “unfavourable conditions” created by the government to prove “it cannot continue ignoring that ‘Maras’ and gangs can be an important part of the solution” (Daugherty 2015). The Catholic Church hoped its involvement would encourage state support, believing “the truce will not be sustainable without government participation” (Zelaya 2015). The announcement of the truce resulted in an immediate albeit short-lived drop in homicides over the following week, including the first homicide-free day of the year (Pachico February 13, 2015; Daugherty 2015). However, the government refused to support it and stuck by its assertion that it “does not and will not negotiate” with gangs (Daugherty 2015; Valencia January 5, 2015). Meanwhile, murder rates quickly returned to levels as seen before the 2012 truce and continued to rise significantly in 2015 (Gurney 2015).
5. ANALYSIS

Having presented both the context and initial empirics relating to each case, I will now relate back to the research design of this study and specifically the operationalization of my variables, to further analyse and interpret the empirics. This allows me to analyse each case in relation to my previously outlined questions and indicators regarding mediation, the steps within it, government support and levels of violence. I begin by analysing Case 1 and 2 before comparing the two cases and drawing conclusions regarding my first hypothesis. I then analyse Case 3 and compare Case 2 and 3 to address my second hypothesis. This is followed by a detailed look at the processes at play in Case 2 specifically to further address my theory and draw conclusions in regard to my causal mechanism. Finally, I address additional observations and alternative explanations as well as limitations. In brief, findings support covariation in my dependant variable as expected with levels of violence rising in the absence of mediation (Case 1), decreasing with government supported mediation (Case 2) and rising with mediation not supported by the government (Case 3) as summarized below in Table 3 and Figure 5.

Table 3: Summary of Cases and Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mediation</th>
<th>Government support</th>
<th>Violence levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 1</strong> (2009-2011)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>INCREASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 2</strong> (2012-2013)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>DECREASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 3</strong> (2014-2015)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>INCREASE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Homicide Rates, El Salvador 2008-2015

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10 This graph is my own creation based on average annual homicide rates taken from UNODC Statistics (2018) and the Igarapé Institute’s Homicide Monitor (2018).
5.1 Case 1 Analysis (El Salvador 2009-2011)

Regarding Case 1 and mediation indicators, in 2009 Father Rodriguez acted as a third-party actor in his attempts to facilitate gang dialogue and communicate statements on behalf of the gangs (Dudley 2013, 12-13; Infobae 2010). This attempt at dialogue was also voluntary as it was the gang leaders themselves who formally requested it, releasing a collective statement directed at the government and society (Whitfield 2013; Valencia and Sanz 2010). While the government acknowledged the gangs statement, rather than support mediation attempts or take on a third-party role they instead proceeded to address violence prevention and rehabilitation and reinsertion strategies (Whitfield 2013, 9). Nonetheless, some dialogue between each gang and father Rodriguez did take place with the aim to secure opportunities for further dialogue and cooperation.

The government meanwhile indicated no evidence of involvement in or facilitation of dialogue. It is also important to highlight that during this attempt in 2009 and throughout 2010-11 violence continued to dominate El Salvador, often exacerbated by mano dura policies which lead to increased gang violence (Bruneau et al 2011, 138, 153). This includes the infamous gang attack on civilians in June 2010 which ultimately led to the governments rejection of prevention and rehabilitation strategies instead opting for a complete return to mano dura (Whitfield 2013). From these examples it is evident that nonviolence was not observed during these initial attempts at mediation.

Once again, during 2009 and 2010 only attempts at indicators such as concessions and leverage were witnessed. In response to the gangs’ statement the government did begin to discuss improving prison conditions and rehabilitating gang members although no direct concessions were made (Whitfield 2013). The gangs’ reaction to the anti-gang law in 2010 may be interpreted as an attempt at leverage, threatening the government and people of the country in attempts to persuade them, although this did not occur within the confines of mediation. While some similarities can be drawn, during this time period the gangs nor the government displayed any examples of concessions, leverage or information sharing. In addition, no agreement or truce between the gangs was ever presented, signed or announced.

Instead levels of violence and crime skyrocketed with rates of robberies, extortion, theft, kidnapping, and assaults increasing or remaining level between 2002 and 2011 and homicide rates rising by over 50 percent (OAS 2015, “OAS Observatory…”; Katz et al 2016, 661). More specifically, according to statistics from the UNODC and Igarapé Institute an average homicide rate of 72 in 2009 with 4,382 murders made it the country’s most violent year in the last decade
However, the murder rate during the time period of this case, 2009-2011, remained quite stable, actually decreasing slightly in 2010 and overall from 2009 to 2011. Yet, when previous context is provided, in the form of the 2008 rate which was on average 52.4 it proves that during Case 1 homicide rates increased greatly within El Salvador (refer to Figure 5). The country witnessed 3,179 murders in 2008 but experienced a yearly average of around 4,248 murders between 2009-2011 (UNODC Statistics 2018; Homicide Monitor 2018). Therefore, the empirics and background of Case 1 while displaying failed attempts at mediation, present this as a case of no mediation between gangs in El Salvador with homicide levels significantly increasing, making it one of the most violent nations in the world at the time (Homicide Monitor, 2018).

5.2 Case 2 Analysis (El Salvador 2012-2013)

In investigating mediation indicators present in Case 2, gang leaders voluntarily took part, emphasizing that they were tired of ongoing violence and allowing Mijango and Bishop Colindres to act as a third party ("Los Voceros…" March 19, 2012). While Mijango gained respect from gang members due to his previous work, Colindres as a bishop represented a higher and unbiased moral authority which brought legitimization to the process (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 13; Dudley 2013, 4). On numerous occasions the gangs both requested continued efforts from the two individuals and thanked them for their support as private mediators ("Los Voceros…” March 19, 2012; “Propuesta…” 2012).

Meanwhile, the OAS’s involvement as a guarantor of the process, monitoring commitments, building support and implementing violence prevention programs brought further legitimacy (ICG 2017, “Mafia…”; Whitfield 2013, 11). The OAS also oversaw numerous actions by the gangs emphasizing a nonviolent process, through voluntary and public handovers of hundreds of weapons (Whitfield 2013, 15). These displays against violence were complemented by the original agreement between both gangs which called for a cease in conflict between the rivals and violence against security forces and civilians (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14).

MS-13 and Barrio 18’s strong organizational structure meant there were identifiable leaders to talk to with most of those leaders in prison. This presented a unique opportunity, allowing for the mediators to easily reach out to and initiate dialogue with rival gang leaders. This lead to
Mijango and Bishop Colindres travelling between prisons as intermediaries between the two gangs before Minister Munguía agreed to transfer them from maximum security prisons to the same prison, opening up a pathway for direct dialogue and information sharing (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14; Farah 2012). This facilitation by the government, a key indicator, provided a space for the gangs to meet and talk while also opening communication channels to their members on the street (Milliken 2014, 6; Rahman and Vuković 2018, 13). This led to the gangs releasing more than 30 communiqués together throughout the truce period with themselves emphasizing the importance of dialogue with Mijango and Bishop Colindres resulting in the agreement to reduce conflict (Thale, Bateman and Goerdt 2013, 2-3; ICG 2017, “Mafia…”). These public communiqués also allowed the gangs to put some leverage on the government and society as they expressed their regret for the suffering they caused, asking for forgiveness and rather than requesting pardons wanting to be treated fairly and as human beings, attempting to seek empathy and understanding from the public (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14).

Prior to the signing of the truce and well after it, both gangs as well as the government made concessions. Initially, the government conceded to transferring high level leaders to lower security prisons, allowing special visitation privileges and permitting communication to the outside (Katz et al 2016, 661). Meanwhile the gangs made numerous requests and concessions of their own, agreeing to stop killings and providing free movement for opposing gangs in gang controlled territories (“Propuesta…” 2012; Zoethout 2014, 77). They also later turned in weapons and agreed to stop recruiting children, reduce violence against women, stop attacks on security forces as well as declaring schools to be safe zones (“Los Voceros…” May 2, 2012; Wennmann 2014, 267-268; Whitfield 2013, 11). In return they asked the government for improved prison conditions, which were 300% over capacity, basic human rights and support “in the social and productive reintegration of [their] members giving them work and educational opportunities” (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14; “Propuesta…” 2012; Umaña et al 2014, 95).

The government indicated a response to concessions by removing the military from prisons and improving overall prison conditions, including providing electricity to some prison which didn't have it (Whitfield 2013, 11). They also eased discriminate and repressive law enforcement practices and pushed to implement reintegration programs for gang members (Wennmann 2014, 267-268; Thale et al 2013, 2-3; Dudley 2013, 3). As previously explained the gangs officially signed a truce document which was later made public as well as releasing numerous other communiqués. The government meanwhile facilitated the signing by allowing prison transfers of the leaders. In addition, in April 2013 President Funes publicly acknowledged his support
for the truce while speaking at an event in Washington DC, an important indicator for government support for the truce (Umaña et al 2014, 97).

Following gang mediation in 2012 and an ensuing truce on March 9 homicide levels in El Salvador fell immediately by approximately 60 percent and the country saw its first homicide free day in over three years (Farah 2012; Seepersad and Bissessar 2013, 231-232; Milliken 2014, 6; Táger and Umaña 2013, 10). This decline was sustained with the homicide rate in 2012 and 2013 the lowest in nearly 10 years. One year after the signing of the truce rates were still maintaining a near 60 percent decline (Umaña et al 2014, 97). Based on statistics from the UNODC and the Igarapé Institute the average homicide rate in 2012 was 41.7 with 2,567-2,594 murders while 2013 saw a rate of 40.4 with 2,513 homicides (see Figure 5) (UNODC Statistics 2018; Homicide Monitor, 2018). The above empirics and analysis show Case 2 as an example of gang mediation with government support resulting in lower levels of homicides.

5.3 Case 1 and 2 Comparison

The above analysis and empirics allows for comparisons to be made between both Case 1 and 2 in order to address the first hypothesis of this study: *Mediation with/between gangs will likely lead to lower levels of violence*. When analysing both cases through a structured, focused comparison highlighted by previously outlined questions and indicators it becomes clear that Case 1 represents a time period when no gang mediation occurred between MS-13 and Barrio 18 whereas Case 2 witnessed mediation.

As outlined in the below table (Table 4), in Case 1 there was a third-party present, through Father Rodriguez, and there was evidence of gangs voluntarily expressing a desire for mediation. However, while attempted dialogue did take place the process was hampered by continuing violence, with no clear examples of information sharing, leverage or concessions by either gangs or the government, key indicators of mediation. Most importantly no truce or agreement was reached or signed. Case 2 however, displayed numerous examples of indicators through the outlined steps in the table below. Identified individuals, Mijango and Bishop Colindres, served as a third party with the OAS joining as a guarantor later on and gangs voluntarily entered into mediation highlighted by nonviolence. Dialogue and negotiation took place resulting in information sharing, the use of leverage and concession by both gangs as well as the state. These steps culminated in the signing of an agreement which was followed by further dialogue, concessions and additions to the signed agreement. The evidence therefore supports that Case 2 was in fact an example of mediation between gangs.
Table 4: Case 1 and 2 Mediation Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third party</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue/negotiation/cooperation</td>
<td>Partial (attempted)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessions</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truce/agreement</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence of mediation in Case 2 and a lack of it in Case 1 had varying results in relation to levels of violence within the country, operationalized through homicide rates. Ultimately, as displayed in Table 5, homicide rates seen in Case 1 averaged around 65.3-72 in 2009-2011 yet fell to between 40.4 and 41.7 in 2012-2013, the years of successful mediation and the subsequent gang truce. Overall cases of homicide meanwhile fell from around 4,000 a year in Case 1 to around 2,500 a year in Case 2, a drop of nearly 40 percent.

Table 5\(^{11}\): Case 1 and 2 Homicide rates and counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homicide rate (UNODC)</th>
<th>Homicide rate (Igarapé)</th>
<th>Average rate</th>
<th>Homicide count (UNODC)</th>
<th>Homicide count (Igarapé)</th>
<th>Average count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008(^{12})</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>3,179</td>
<td>3,179</td>
<td>3,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4,382</td>
<td>4,382</td>
<td>4,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>3,987</td>
<td>4,004</td>
<td>3,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>4,371</td>
<td>4,366</td>
<td>4,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td>2,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>2,513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This claim is backed up by a quantitative study published in 2016\(^{13}\) which concluded that “in the 22 months following the establishment of a national gang truce, the homicide rate was about 40% lower than in the preceding 26 months” (Katz et al 2016, 660). The country experienced

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\(^{11}\) This table is my own creation based on annual homicide figures and rates taken from UNODC Statistics (2018) and the Igarapé Institute’s Homicide Monitor (2018).

\(^{12}\) Homicide rates and counts for 2008 are provided for context to Case 1, showing how rates in 2009-2011 displayed an increase.

\(^{13}\) While this study did consider the effects of the 2012 truce on homicide levels, my study goes further into investigating the causal process of the relationship between mediation and violence level as well as addressing under what conditions it is most effective, looking at numerous cases over time.
a significant drop in homicides during the truce in comparison to rates experience before the March 9, 2012 truce (as seen in Table 5 above). Furthermore, the study found that “even after controlling for potentially confounding municipal-level socioeconomic variables, the presence of other gang interventions and spatial lags in gang presence” mediation efforts in 2012-2013 still resulted in lower homicides rates and “did not result in significant displacement by crime type or method” (Katz et al 2016, 663-4). Interestingly, the UNODC also found that in addition to a decline in homicides the gang truce resulted in a decline in some other criminal activities as well, seen below in Figure 6 (UNODC 2013, 45-46). This indicates that gang mediations effect on levels of violence may extend beyond homicides and reduce other aspect of criminal activities and violent crime as well.

Figure 6: Homicide and extortion rates in El Salvador by department (2011 and 2012)

The above analysis and evidence therefore lends strong support to my hypothesis that Mediation with/between gangs will likely lead to lower levels of violence as seen between Case 1 and 2. Case 1 experienced no mediation with homicide rates remaining stagnant during the time period, but increasing significantly compared to the previous year. Meanwhile Case 2 saw successful mediation between gangs resulting in a truce which lead to significantly decreased murder rates throughout El Salvador. These results lend support to conflict mediation theory and its application to specific gang conflicts. Just as in traditional mediation examples, mediation in El Salvador between gangs represented key steps and aspects of mediation and resulted in reduced violence or conflict. Furthermore, in addition to covariance being established the unique selection of temporal cases across El Salvador maintains confidence in the temporal order. Isolation is also addressed to the best of its ability by looking at cases all within the same country and close time periods, with anticipated confounding factors and alternative

14 (UNODC 2013, 46)
explanations addressed in later sections. These important aspects in determining causality are also evident in the following analysis of Case 3 and subsequent comparison between Case 2 and 3.

5.4 Case 3 Analysis (El Salvador 2014-2015)

Analysing the empirics of Case 3 allows for adequately addressing and operationalizing the independent, dependant and conditional variables of this study. Regarding mediation, Case 3 shows a number of important indicators while missing some related to government support. While previous mediator Mijango stated that he was not involved in talks and negotiations in 2015 the Catholic Church did openly engage with gang leaders as a third party and support the initiation of dialogue between the gangs (Pachico January 26, 2015; Zelaya 2015). Meanwhile the government was not represented and in fact took steps to actively prevent third party involvement, including removing negotiators access to prisons and criminalising association with the gangs by declaring them a terrorist organization (Lakhani 2015). This meant that not only potential mediators but various NGOs working with the gangs could be accused of supporting a terrorist organization (Unger, Dudouet, Dressler and Austin 2016, 21).

Further supporting indicators for mediation in 2015 also include nonviolence and voluntary participation. Gang leaders actually proposed talks and stated that they had voluntarily agreed to them, pledging to stop violence (Daugherty 2015; ICG 2017, “Mafia…”). However, the government refused involvement instead highlighting a more violent approach focused on arresting and punishing gang members with even the head of police encouraging officers to “use their weapons against criminals” with “complete confidence” (Gurney 2015; Pachico January 26, 2015). Nonetheless dialogue took place between the gangs with the Catholic Church for the first time coming out in full support of it and engaging openly with both gangs (Zelaya 2015). This however took place without government support as its new plan to confront violence, while involving business and civil society actors, explicitly excluded dialogue with gangs (Zoethout 2014, 103; La Prensa Gráfica 2014). Rather the government in many instances inhibited dialogue and information sharing by restricting contact between imprisoned gang leaders and mediators (Dudley 2014).

Regarding leverage and concessions, the gangs exhibited examples of both during this time period. As mentioned in the previous empiric’s section, this included offering impactful concessions such as “the possibility of their own dissolution, an end to extortion schemes and revealing the sites of clandestine cemeteries” (ICG 2017, “Mafia…”). Meanwhile the
government reversed previous concessions, moving gang leaders involved in the 2012 truce back to maximum security prisons and “demonstrating a total lack of interest in granting what gang members called “favourable conditions” for any possible “peace process” (Pachico February 13, 2015). This in addition to stating “we are not going to give concessions to those who commit crimes” and “we are executing a security plan that does not admit any concessions,” a key falsifying indicator of government support\textsuperscript{15} (La Prensa Gráfica 2014).

In response, the gangs truce in 2015 ultimately sought to show how influential the gangs were on violence levels and the importance of their involvement in solving it, leveraging this against the government (Pachico January 26, 2015). By controlling the violence levels, as outlined below, they ultimately could improve their bargaining leverage with the government, however to little avail (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 2). As previously mentioned, on January 17, 2015 the gang leaders publicly announced a new truce, reached without government support (Zelaya 2015; Gurney 2015). While homicide rates were already trending up, reaching pre-2012 truce levels by mid-2014, the 2015 truce led to an immediate albeit short lived drop from an average of 14 a day in the weeks prior to an estimated 4.6-7.6 a day over the next week (Daugherty 2015; Valencia April 9, 2015; Valencia and Martín 2015). However, following this brief decrease, homicide rates once again rebounded and continued to rise with 2015 becoming El Salvador’s most murderous year on record (Gurney 2015; Renteria 2016).

Based on data from UNODC and the Igarapé Institute, the country’s homicide rate ballooned to between 103 and 108.6 in 2015 with 6,656 murders, an approximate 70 percent increase from 2014 which saw a rate on average of 62.6 and 3,912-3,921 cases (see Figure 5) (Homicide Monitor 2018; UNODC Statistics 2018; Renteria 2016). By the end of 2015 the country easily overtook Honduras as the world’s most deadly country at peace, with no other country registering homicide rates even remotely close (Moreno et al 2017, 11; The Associated Press 2015).

This, however raises the question of why rates increased so drastically in 2015. As previously outlined, it could have been a purposeful strategy by gangs in order to display their strength and impact, putting further leverage on the government to include them in dialogue or support the most recent truce. It could also have been a response to a crackdown and return to \textit{mano dura} by the government with the Vice President in early 2015 telling police to shoot gang members\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{15} Quotes translated from the Spanish, “Nosotros no vamos a dar concesiones a quienes delinquen” and “Como Gobierno estamos ejecutando un plan de seguridad que no admite concesión alguna, porque nosotros estamos aplicando la ley” (La Prensa Gráfica 2014).
if threatened “without any fear of suffering consequences” (Reuters 2015). This led to increased killings by police and a retaliatory response with 63 police officers killed in 2015, compared to only 39 the previous year (Yagoub 2016). Relating back to assertions within mediation theory that groups may enter mediation for “devious objectives” such as to regroup and strengthen, the drastic rise in homicides could have also been the result of the gangs having had the opportunity to strengthen during the 2012 truce and early 2015 truce (Greig and Regan 2008; Richmond 1998). Nonetheless, Case 3 of this study provides evidence of a case representing gang mediation without government support resulting in increased levels of violence relative to mediation with government support.

5.5 Case 2 and 3 Comparison

Having begun the analysis of my third and final case I am now able to compare Case 2 and 3 so as to address my second hypothesis: Government support for mediation will likely lead to lower levels of violence. First and foremost, it is important to establish whether Case 3 was in fact an example of gang mediation in relation to the theory of this paper and my definition of mediation. Based on my structured, focused comparison approach and subsequent indicators, like Case 2 as previously outlined, Case 3 can be viewed as an example of gang mediation as seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Case 2 and 3 Mediation Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third party</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue/negotiation/cooperation</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessions</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truce/agreement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gangs voluntarily proposed talks and committed to nonviolence while the Catholic church actively took on the role of a third party. Through the facilitation of the church, gang leaders took part in dialogue and information sharing, even offering potential concessions including their own dissolution and an end to extortion activities, something not addressed in the 2012 truce. In their attempts to initiate government support they also applied leverage of their own
through their evident impact on violence levels. These steps culminated in the signing of a peace
agreement or truce by gang leaders on January 17, 2015.

While it can be determined that mediation did take place between MS-13 and Barrio 18 in both
Case 2 and 3, to address the second hypothesis, government support must also be analysed in
each case. As previous outlined in the Case 2 analysis, during the 2012-2013 gang truce the
government, while initially denying support, in fact actively facilitated and took part in
mediation efforts. While not an official third party to the mediation it nonetheless facilitated
dialogue and information sharing between the opposing gangs by allowing for leaders to be
moved to the same low security prisons, offering a safe and neutral meeting site. This also
provided an example of concessions made by the government in addition to later ones
concerning improved prison conditions and rights for prisoners and easing harsh law
enforcement initiatives. Finally, both Minister Munguía and then President Funes eventually
came out publicly in support of the truce, admitting the government’s role and sanctioning of
it, although in some cases this information was not fully confirmed until well after the signing
of the agreement.¹⁶ Nonetheless, evidence surrounding Case 2 presents government support
throughout the mediation process as summarized in Table 7.

Meanwhile, Case 3 provides a different outcome regarding government support for the 2015
truce (see Table 7). Not only was the government not a third party they took active measures to
prevent others from fulfilling the role by removing previous mediators access to prisons and
criminalizing association with the gangs. This in turn hindered dialogue and information
sharing as the government explicitly expressed their opposition to dialogue with gangs. The
government also not only refused to make concessions to criminals but reversed previous ones,
moving gang leaders back to separate maximum security prisons, thereby disrupting
communication channels between gang leaders but also between leaders and their members on
the street. However, the government did not condemn the 2015 truce, in fact the then Security
Minister stated, “he was not opposed to gangs coming to agreements amongst themselves”
however they did not in any way provide support, facilitation or express public backing
(Pachico January 26, 2015). The above evidence adds to the conclusion that in Case 3 the

¹⁶ A 2017 court case accused 18 prison employees and past mediators of crimes including introducing illegal
objects to prisons, relating to the provision of phones and other concessions and facilitations made during the 2012
truce. The final ruling found that the truce was in fact security policy during the Funes presidency, approved by
the government. All the accused were therefore acquitted as they had only been following orders (Cidon 2017).
The government of El Salvador did not provide support to any step during the mediation process, if anything actively interfering with mediation attempts and preventing it.

Table 7: Case 2 and 3 Government Support Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third party</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue/negotiation/cooperation</td>
<td>YES (facilitation)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>YES (facilitation)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessions</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truce/agreement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Support</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsequently, Case 2 witnessed gang mediation with government support which as previously presented, resulted in a substantial decrease in the homicide rate. This is once again displayed below in Table 8 with comparisons to the homicide rate and count seen during Case 3. While 2012-2013 witnessed a homicide rate between 40.4 and 41.7 with around 2,500 murders each year, Case 3 saw an increase in homicides rates starting in 2014 and exploding in 2015. El Salvador in 2014 experienced an average homicide rate of 62.6 with 3,916 murders. While this rate is over 50 percent higher than the previous year it is significantly lower than 2015 and this can be attributed to the fact that the 2012 gang truce had no specific end and so impacts of it partially extended into 2014. Whereas rates rose in the early months of 2014 they did so from the previous incredibly low rates witnessed in 2013.

Referring to the previously mentioned quantitative study by Katz et al, it supports that homicides began to slowly and slightly increase during the latter half of 2013 and into 2014 but had returned to pre-truce levels by around mid-2014 (2016, 664). By the end of 2015, where the country had seen gang mediation albeit without government support, homicide rates exploded reaching an average of 105.8 with over 6,600 murders in the year, a shocking increase of over 160 percent! With this, the situation in El Salvador became more violent than most of the worlds armed conflicts, placing it “second only to Syria in the overall rates of annual violent deaths of any country in the world” (Moreno et al 2017, 11).
Table 8\textsuperscript{17}: Case 2 and 3 Homicide rates and counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homicide rate (UNODC)</th>
<th>Homicide rate (Igarapé)</th>
<th>Average rate</th>
<th>Homicide count (UNODC)</th>
<th>Homicide count (Igarapé)</th>
<th>Average count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td>2,567</td>
<td>2,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>2,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>3,921</td>
<td>3,912</td>
<td>3,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>103.0</td>
<td>105.8</td>
<td>6,656</td>
<td>6,656</td>
<td>6,656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above empirics and analysis of Case 2 and 3 once again shows covariation and strong support for my hypothesis, in this case that *Government support for mediation will likely lead to lower levels of violence*. Whereas Case 2 experience gang mediation with government support resulting in lower levels of violence, Case 3 while also exhibiting a case of gang mediation had no government support and levels of violence skyrocketed. The results also support the view within mediation theory that official actors such as governments or international organizations are better suited to mediation and more effective as they hold valuable sway in regard to resources, enforcement, leverage, concessions and other important elements of mediation such as legitimacy (Böhmelt 2010). Not only did Case 2 show government support but it also benefited from the OAS acting as a third party.

Further research, specifically within gang mediation, supports this highlighting that various criminal pacts such as gang truces can lead to reductions in violence when the state is an active participant providing support and collaboration. The reason being that they have the resources, ability and capacity to provide proper incentives and concessions (Umaña et al 2014, 98; Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 207; Rahman and Vuković 2018, 3). Cruz and Durán-Martínez go so far as to state that “a pact that does not engage the state, or that engages it partially, is likely to fail because police actions and the inattention to the structural conditions that lead to violence can easily motivate gang members to re-engage in violent behaviour” and “it is unlikely to generate incentives for criminals to reduce violence” (2016, 200).

Meanwhile, my findings seem to support that not only is government support important for successful gang mediation but unofficial third parties or mediators such as the Catholic church in Case 3 are not sufficient enough, emphasizing that not all third-party mediation is equal. While Case 2 witnessed unofficial mediators in the form of Mijango and Bishop Colindres it

\textsuperscript{17} This table is my own creation based on annual homicide figures and rates taken from UNODC Statistics (2018) and the Igarapé Institute’s Homicide Monitor (2018).
also had third party involvement from an international organisation, through the OAS, as well as government support. This seems to support the argument that combined mediation by official and unofficial actors can be the most effective (Böhmelt 2010, 167; Svensson 2007).

### 5.6 A closer look at the Causal Mechanism: A within case Analysis

While support has been established for both my hypotheses through a structured, focused comparison between cases, part of the method for this study was to provide a within-case analysis using aspects of process tracing to assess the causality of my causal mechanism and understand the micro factors at play within the process linking my independent and dependent variables. For this reason, I look once again at Case 2 to complement the above comparisons and provide analysis of my causal mechanism while simultaneously relating back to my application of conflict mediation theory to the case of gang conflict. Specifically, considering covariation and under what conditions mediation leads to lower levels of violence. To reiterate, my causal story links mediation as an independent variable to lower levels of violence as a dependant variable, conditional on government support through several steps in the causal process. These include dialogue, information sharing, leverage/concessions and an agreement/truce, representing situational, action-formation and transformation mechanisms (refer to Figure 1).

In Case 2 mediation efforts first began with separate dialogue between rival gang leaders and third-party mediators, Mijango and Bishop Colindres. They initially served as intermediaries in dialogue between the two gangs until gang leaders were moved to the same prison to take part in face to face dialogue. This shows that for further dialogue to take place concessions and possibly even information sharing had to take place. When the government conceded to moving leaders to the same low security prison they facilitated direct dialogue between the two rivals. This continued and enhanced dialogue resulted in further concessions as well as examples of leverage as the gangs agreed to stop violence and the government allowed more open communication between imprisoned gang leaders and members on the street. An agreement then formed which was put on paper and later announced, signifying the beginning of an agreed upon truce by both gangs and supported by the government. While government support was witnessed throughout each step and played an important role, it becomes evident that some steps within the process occurred at various stages and not within an outlined order or process. This is further supported by the notion that following the agreement in March 2012 further dialogue continued, with gangs releasing numerous communiqués over the course of 2 years, and further concessions by both the gangs and government being negotiated. These include
improved prison conditions and a halt in forced recruitment to name but a few, as previously outlined in this paper. Further agreements between the gangs, and government, were then later made regarding the creating of violence-free municipalities. Once again, this reemphasizes that the process outlined in the original causal diagram is not a temporal step by step process but rather dialogue, concessions and agreements follow a non-linear progression, often taking the place of other steps as situational, action-formative and transformation mechanisms. For example, action-formation mechanisms which change behaviour and link desires to actions can be used to describe both concessions as well as agreements as signing agreements brings about changes in behaviours as parties are expected to maintain peace and even face monitoring.

Meanwhile, transformational mechanisms, through which actions generate outcomes, are not only reserved for agreements but also concessions as specific actions are taken when concessions are granted. Mediation is part of a peace process and so as this process develops and grows changes occur and steps within mediation, such as dialogue and concessions, remerge. Also, agreements are updated and amended as the process continues, proving the non-linearity of the steps involved. This is also reflected by the interrelatedness of each step whereas changes in one may bring about a return to others. This is seen in Case 2 where the introduction of a second phase to the agreement, in the form of violence-free municipalities, brought about a return to dialogue and information sharing and further discussions surrounding potential concessions by both gangs. While the analysis and presented empirics offer support to the important role all these steps of traditional mediation theory, including government support, played in the process from mediation to lower levels of violence they did not occur in a specific order or simply once. In the case of El Salvador in 2012-2013 they occurred numerous time throughout the process, at various stages and in various capacities.

Strengthening the above, evidence from Case 1 and 3 provide counterfactuals, displaying the outcomes if certain steps within the causal process are absent. While Case 1 showed some indicators for mediation, key factors such as concessions and an agreement were missing resulting in increased homicide levels. Meanwhile, Case 3 experienced mediation but without government support, emphasizing the importance of this conditional variable as in its absence homicide rates spiked, even though mediation was present. Case 1 and 3 therefore serve as powerful counterfactuals, further supporting the casual mechanism and displaying consequent scenarios if key factors are missing from it. This backs my application of mediation theory to gang conflict showing that traditional mediation theory can be successfully applied to non-conflict settings involving untraditional non-state armed groups.
5.7 Additional Observations, Explanations and Limitations

Having analysed all three cases, making comparisons and finding support for both hypotheses, it is still essential to fortify these findings by putting them to further tests, addressing potential confounding factors or missed explanations. This final section, therefore, presents and analyses additional observations as well as alternative explanations of results and further limitations encountered. These are broken down into specific subjects around which various observations and limitations were encountered. They are: elections and the political climate of El Salvador, national versus local government, critiques of the 2012 gang truce, and measuring mediation success.

5.7.1 Elections and the Political Climate of El Salvador

One of the first key additional observations made when researching and analysing gang conflict and mediation in El Salvador was the impact elections and the political climate had on all cases, as previously outlined. While case section within one country naturally controls for many variables I was not able to control for changes in government and political climate. The government often flip flopped between supporting and preventing mediation attempts, tied to the political climate and upcoming elections. During the first truce in 2012 the government initially denied any involvement as being seen negotiating with criminals was a political risk. While they eventually emphasized their role as a facilitator it wasn't until sustained positive results began to emerge that they openly supported it (Dudley 2013, 16, 20). Even then their complete role remained unclear and it wasn't until a 2017 court case, brought against past gang mediators, facilitators and penal officers by a new hard-line government, that the full truth came out. The court upheld that the truce was in fact state policy, at the time forwarded by Minister Munguía and President Funes, resulting in the acquittal of charges against the individuals who had simply been acting on orders (Cidon 2017; Rahman and Vuković 2018, 13).

Politics also played a significant role in mediation efforts. A change in May 2013 led to Minister Munguía, a key facilitator of the truce, being replaced by a new Minister who was a strong opponent to the truce and advocate of mano dura (Umaña et al 2014, 98; Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 207). This directly affected mediation efforts as mediators lost access to prisons while further shifts in the political climate and upcoming elections saw a government once in support of the truce suddenly reverse tactics in response to criticism from the opposing party (Rahman and Vuković 2018, 14-15; Lakhani 2015). Arguably, also to garner votes as repressive policies played well with voters (Donaldson 2012, 3). These actions ultimately led to the
dissolution of the 2012 truce, with the government playing a key role in its eventual end (Táger and Umaña 2013, 19; Schuberth 2016, 6).

While the above observations have been further outlined and discussed previously, it is important to address their implication and impact on potential alternative explanations for the results of this study. In addition to the political climate and elections impacting mediation efforts they also impacted levels of violence. Mano dura has repeatedly been proven to exacerbate crime and violence, increasing homicide levels (UNDP 2013, 13; WOLA 2011, 13). Influencing both the independent and dependent variable of this study, the political climate and specifically elections becomes a potential confounding factor.

Elections, influenced both the states drawback from mediation and its return to mano dura, affecting violence levels as well. In addition, elections may also influence gangs in much the same way as they resort to increased violence in the lead up to elections to gain future bargaining power as well as display their power and influence on society and politics. Resulting from this, it may have been that ensuing decreases in homicide levels were not the result of gang mediation but rather influenced by a positive political climate that saw the reversal of mano dura policies which in turn led to reduced homicide levels and allowed for mediation. While my second hypothesis does in fact address the importance of government support and so settles some of these concerns, all three cases still experienced these issues surrounding elections and the changing political climate. Therefore, this potential confounding factor and in turn alternative explanation does raise questions, complicating the results of my study.

5.7.2 National versus Local Government

When addressing the importance of government support for gang mediation this study has solely addressed that of the national government. This highlights a potential limitation, realized at a late stage in this study, as some emphasize the significance in distinguishing between national and local government. As early as 2002, while national security policies were based on mano dura, one municipality was already successfully introducing prevention policies at the local level (Zoethout 2014, 30; WOLA 2011, 13-14). In regard to the 2012 truce, while the national government in El Salvador often swayed in their support at times, local government, on the municipal level, completely committed to the ‘violence-free municipalities’ strategy in addition to willingly supporting the truce and dialogue efforts with gangs (Zoethout 2014, 11). One mayor openly lauded the truce as a “historic process” (Zoethout 2014, 39).
In Case 1, the national government ignored invitations by gangs for dialogue and outright refused to include gangs in public dialogue in Case 3. Meanwhile, in Case 2 they did facilitate dialogue between gangs. However, in contrast, in multiple municipalities “gang members [were] included in the political and public dialogue of the pacification process” (Zoethout 2014, 11). This raises questions of the varying impact of government support at the national versus local level. Homicide levels were also only viewed on a national and primarily annual level. This means that further investigation into the mediation efforts by local government and subsequent homicides rates at the municipal level could paint a different picture, potentially adding further support to my hypotheses or detracting from them, a potential avenue for further study.

5.7.3 Critiques of the 2012 Gang Truce

Another important observation and subsequent alternative explanation to the results found in this paper relates to wide shared critiques of the 2012 gang truce; critiques also emphasised in mediation theory. Richmond highlights that mediation may be hijacked by ‘devious objectives’ “unrelated to finding a compromise solution, although the disputants may at the same time be aware of the need to be seen to be cooperating with the mediator” (1998, 708). This suggests that parties may engage in mediation and sign an agreement simply to regroup, gain strength, relieve pressure on them or gain support and legitimacy (Richmond 1998, 707; Diehl and Greig 2013, 10; Wennmann 2014, 267-268). This argument is taken by many critics of the 2012 gang truce. Engaging in dialogue acknowledged the gangs and their impact thereby granting them increased legitimacy, enhancing their bargaining power and providing opportunity for them to strengthen as conflict with rivals was halted and law enforcement efforts relaxed (Schuberth 2016, 4-7). The potential results of which could explain the incredible spike in homicides in 2015.

A further critique highlights potential limitations in the operationalization of my dependant variable, lower levels of violence, and an alternative explanation for the results of lower levels of violence following mediation. While my analysis showed that government supported mediation led to a reduction in homicide levels, other sources reported rises in disappearances during the 2012 truce in comparison to the period the year before (Farah 2012). This suggests that during the truce, gangs simply ‘disappeared’ people and concealed homicides pushing their criminal activities underground, thereby resulting in lowered homicide figures but raised disappearance figures, a separate category of data collection. This is supported by the discovery of mass graves and police reports that showed a 96% increase in disappearances between 2012 and 2013, from 545 to 1,070 (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016, 207). However, while this may
highlight an inadequacy in the validity of homicides as an operationalization of lower levels of violence and provide an alternative explanation to my results, there are rebuttals and reasons this was not addressed earlier.

National figures surrounding disappearances are extremely unreliable as they are not able to be triangulated with international figures from various sources, as is the case with homicides. Rates also vary significantly between those reported by the National Police and those by the National Institutes of Legal Medicine and Forensic Studies, again affecting reliability (Táger and Umaña 2013, 10). Furthermore, the nature of disappearances affects the validity of figures as disappearances are often initially high but fall drastically over time as cases are solved. This means that while police registered 1,564 missing people in 2012 the number fell to 612 by the beginning of 2013 (Stone 2013). Even applying the strongest test, by counting the highest above reported number of disappearances as homicides for 2012 (which is highly unrealistic) and not adding any disappearance figures for Case 1 and 3, shows that 2012 (Case 2) still displayed reductions in homicide levels in relation to the final years of Case 1 and 3 (as seen in Table 9).

Table 9: Homicide count accounting for Disappearances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homicide count</th>
<th>Disappearance count</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Average)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4,368</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2,580</td>
<td>1,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6,656</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7.4 Measuring Mediations Success

Another important observation to address relates to defining mediation success, as this too can impact conclusions drawn in relation to findings and serve as a limitation or alternative explanation in this study. Wallensteen and Svensson put it best when they state, “the meaning of success is much disputed among scholars of international mediation” (2014, 322). In traditional mediation theory, ethical dilemmas emerge “between the short-term goal of ending bloodshed and the longer-term goal of settling the conflict” or facilitating settlements and addressing causes of conflict (Zartman and Touval 1996). While some measure mediation success as an end to violence, others rely on the signing of peace agreements or democratic improvements (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 322). In the short term, mediation is successful in halting violence and “any lulls [in conflict] can be a positive development to the reduction of suffering and instability” (Beardsley 2008, 737). Furthermore, conflicts with mediation are more likely to reach formal peace agreements (Beardsley 2008, 737). Within the field of
Criminology and gang mediation, studies show a significant correlation between mediation and desistance from crime (Phelps 2015, 150).

Limitations thus emerge as mediation in the gang conflict and its resulting decreases in homicides can be interpreted as a short-term effect that was not sustained, marking gang mediation as superfluous and not a solution to the problem. However, supported by further literature in mediation theory and the analysis within this paper, I argue that in El Salvador gang mediation and subsequent truces were never an end all solution. Rather they were initiated as steps to reduce violence to “create the necessary space for addressing underlying structural causes” of gang conflict, causes which were addressed in the later stages of the 2012 truce through initiatives such as violence-free municipalities (Muggah et al 2015). “The truce as a pact between rival gangs to stop murderous violence was never considered a ‘stand-alone’ intervention with violence reduction as the final outcome” and parties involved understood the 2012 gang truce was “the start and not the end of a process” (Unger et al 2016, 84; Muggah et al 2015). Subsequently, the truce can be seen as successful in its own right, and rather the post-mediation environment faced difficulties surrounding long-term policies targeting the roots and underlying causes of gang conflict and violence in El Salvador (Beardsley 2008, 737; Jütersonke, Muggah and Rodgers 2009, 268).

6. CONCLUSION

As high levels of violence dominate areas outside of war and post-war environments, current theories from peace and conflict studies have begun to shift to understand phenomena such as gang conflict (Hazen 2010, 370). The debate on NSAGs has even expanded in recent times to include some focus on organized crime and gang conflict (Wennmann 2014; Schuberth 2016). In addition, some studies have started analysing the potential of applying peace and conflict research to untraditional non-state armed groups, for example Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) (Muggah and O’Donnell 2015; Rodgers and Jensen 2015; Schuberth 2016; Banfield 2014). Wennmann has even called for mediators and negotiators to “turn to existing peacebuilding practices that can be adapted for use in structured dialogue processes with organized crime groups” (Wennmann 2014, 270). That being said, research is limited and the idea of utilizing traditional conflict theory for gang conflict is still in its infancy. Furthermore, “this raises important questions about whether applying a conflict lens to gangs is appropriate, or whether differences in the characteristics, behaviours, and contexts of gangs require a rethinking of this approach” (Hazen 2010, 370).
The purpose of this study has therefore been to build on this prior research and apply mediation theory to gang conflict and in doing so analyse gang mediation and its effects on levels of violence in order to answer the question, how does mediation influence levels of violence within gang conflicts? Through my research and analysis of gang conflict in El Salvador I not only found support for the application of mediation theory to gang conflict but that mediation does influence levels of violence in gang conflicts, reducing violence conditional on government support.

While I have focused on a specific type of actor the results are generalizable to other cases as numerous countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, are facing similar levels of violence caused by highly organized gangs. Meanwhile, other countries are witnessing the emergence of such gangs or similar actors in the form of criminal organizations. The study also allows for a potential broadening within the field as it blurs the lines between crime and conflict, questioning the importance of distinguishing “when one should treat actors as criminal actors and when as conflict actors” which previously have restricted the approaches implemented (Cockayne 2013, 10). Furthermore, criminal violence, by gangs or other actors such as cartels, often plague post-conflict settings. The findings of this study therefore hold application to such cases offering insights into pathways of addressing criminal violence witnessed after peace.

Relating back to the intended academic and policy contributions of this study, the findings provide insight into successfully addressing gang conflict. The lessons from El Salvador and this study can help national and international actors struggling to address organised violence and crime, providing new approaches and lessons learned. Furthermore, the application of traditional conflict theory to gang conflict does not have to end with mediation or with gangs. Rather it opens the door to exciting further research and crossover, potentially addressing other criminal actors and other applications of peace and conflict theory, the world over.
7. LIST OF REFERENCES


