

**Understanding Transnational Gangs and Criminal Networks:
A Contribution to Community Resilience**

A Social Network Analysis of the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region

by

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This article is based on three premises. First, gangs are a permanent feature of urban life (at least for now) in all major cities around the world. Second, while the majority of youth gangs are not involved in transnational organized crime, some gangs are becoming engaged in criminal enterprises normally associated with better organized and more sophisticated crime syndicates. Third, community resilience to gang violence refers less to efforts at eradicating gangs themselves, but understanding and differentiating between their various types, and taking proactive and multi-faceted actions to reduce social vulnerability and boost communities' adaptive capacities.

Undertaken with these three ideas in mind, this research aimed to document transborder collaboration between "second generation gangs" operating in the cities of San Diego and Tijuana. Second generation gangs, according to a popular typology, differ from small, turf oriented first generation gangs because they are "organized around illicit economies like drug trafficking...operate across several cities or even internationally, have links to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) like drug cartels, and feature a more centralized leadership and a more hierarchical structure than first-generation gangs" (Brands 2009). The devastating war in Mexico between TCOs (commonly referred to as drug cartels) raised the relevancy of this question for San Diego communities concerned with potential increases in gang violence, and bolstering their capacity to manage the ever fluctuating dynamics of armed groups involved in illicit trades. Our view was that future trend analysis would depend on analyzing the cohesiveness of trans-border networks of gangs and criminal organizations, and that doing so could make a modest contribution to community resilience by increasing knowledge, and connecting research to decision support and action.

Communities can increase their resilience in areas dominated by gang culture and crime by attending to sources of greatest social vulnerability (Norris et al. 2008), with efforts to build social capital, and challenge anti-social behavior. “At risk” communities are thus crucial in the fight against urban violence (Davis 2012), so it was important to identify and map the gang presence of second generation gangs in San Diego and Tijuana. When this research began in 2010, the Washington Office on Latin America published a credible and well-researched report concluding that the perceived threats of spillover violence from Mexico into US border cities was unwarranted (Isacson and Meyer 2012). Since 2010 however, homicides in San Diego county have risen 59 percent (according to 2012 data), many attributable to gang violence.

Literature Review

Community Resilience to Gang Activity

Generally speaking, resilience refers to the ability to rebound, maintain or strengthen functioning during and after a disturbance, or to cope successfully in the face of extreme adversity or risk (Carpenter 2008). Resilience is both a metaphor for the durability, strength or adaptive capacity of particular things (people, ideas, institutions, societies, or ecosystems) and a theoretical framework for studying the dynamics of this durability, strength, or adaptive capacity in relation to those objects. Today, resilience is referenced on a wide range of issues associated with social and ecological systems, including disaster management, economics, community planning, urban renewal and development.

Across these five main disciplines – psychology, material sciences, engineering, ecology, and economics – resilience is often conceptualized as a property of systems. For Jütersonke and Kartas (2012:2), systems resilience refers “to what extent the component parts [regime] of a dynamic, constantly changing system can absorb a shock without experiencing overall system failure.” Regardless of discipline, scientists have converged on three basic models of resilience, each referring to different but interrelated capacities: buffer capacity, adaptive capacity, and transformational capacity.

For purpose of illustration, let us use a neighborhood as the unit of analysis, and level of basic services as the outcome variable. Buffer capacity refers to the ability of a system to weather dramatic changes without undergoing significant changes to its regime. For example, San Diego neighborhood City Heights absorbed a massive influx of Somalian refugees in the 1990s while providing the same level of clean water, food security, and healthcare to old and new residents.

Adaptive capacity refers to a system that, from the onset of a large change or disturbance, undergoes significant changes in order to survive in its same state. In this instance, the ongoing influx of over 20,000 Somalian

refugees in City Heights to date has necessitated major changes in the kinds of services needed – for example halal markets and neighborhood mosques – as well as integration services provided by the San Diego refugee resettlement program and the International Rescue Committee.

Transformational capacity essentially means that the system – the neighborhood – changes in ways that sustain continued existence, but that look quite different from its prior state. To return to the specific example of City Heights, the neighborhood has transformed from a predominantly white suburban community to mosaic of ethnic enclaves and a social services hub for immigrants. The transformation began in the 1970s with the end of the Vietnam War when thousands of fleeing Vietnamese refugees became the first major refugee group to settle in City Heights. Cambodians and Laotians fleeing their own civil wars followed soon after, along with Somalians in the 1990s, and Iraqis after the onset of the 2003 US-Iraq war. Today, City Heights consists of plethora of organizations that provide health care, resettlement assistance, job training, education, and other services to those who are new to America. This transformation has permitted City Heights to continue functioning as a center of population and commerce, but represents a significant reconfiguration of its regime (from white, middle-class to ethnic mosaic) and has caused important changes in how and where important services are provided.

Community Resilience

Combining all three models for a comprehensive approach, the Centre for Community Enterprise (2000) views community resilience as a characteristic of how people, organizations, resources and community processes are set up (that is, characteristics of “the regime”) but counsels communities to assess their level of resilience and take intentional action to respond to and influence social and economic change (or characteristics of “people’s actions”). Likewise, the World Resources Institute (2008) links community resilience to “regimes” (good governance practices and adaptive networks that distribute authority and management of local resources) and “actions” (competent management, ecosystem-based enterprises, fair distribution of income).

We understand community resilience as a set of adaptive capacities, and as a strategy for promoting violence prevention and community health. In the past four decades, resilience has gained considerable traction in studies about how communities cope with war and violence. Of particular interest is positive resilience or the “condition of relative stability and even tranquility in areas recently or intermittently beset by violence (Davis 2012:9).”

Probably the most dramatic form of resilience is that evidenced by concerted

or proactive efforts on the part of communities to actively wrest control of their daily situation in ways that could be considered a form of resistance to the power and influence of armed actors.

Resilient communities engage pro-actively with the dynamics of violent conflict and are able to adapt so that their pro-social infrastructure is maintained and strengthened, not destroyed. In the context of urban violence,

Positive effects of resilience might thus be observed when legitimate actors and institutions – local government, schools, faith-based organizations or NGOs – offer urban services that strengthen civil solidarity or generate new practices and coalitions capable of managing or reducing violence.

Resilient communities are characterized by *adaptive capacity* – the ability of the community to adjust its characteristics of behavior and expand its coping range under existing or future conditions (Brooks and Adgers 2005). In human social systems, adaptability¹ is in large part a function of the management of these systems by individuals and groups and has a great deal to do with the ability of humans to imagine the future, to plan forward, to act collectively, and to resolve conflicts (Holling and Walker 2003). Returning to our previous contention that communities can increase their resilience in areas dominated by gang culture and crime by attending to sources of greatest social vulnerability (Norris 2008), it was important to identify and map the gang presence of second generation gangs in the San Diego/Tijuana border region.

Second Generation Gangs

San Diego County is located in the Southwest corner of the state of California and shares its southern border with Mexico. While gangs are present throughout the county, the city of San Diego, in particular, is plagued with a “significant gang problem” and is home to over 90 distinct gangs. Although the actual number of gang-involved individuals is potentially much higher, there are the approximately 4,100 registered² gang members, less than five percent of them juveniles, in the City of San Diego (Baker and Hall 2011).

Hispanic gangs are deeply embedded in US-Mexico border communities through generations of family members. As one gang expert put it, “They are deeply embedded in the community...We are never going to get rid of those gangs because they are part of that community, they are the community” (Gangland 2010). The logic, according to John Hagedorn (2005:163), is that gangs and criminal organizations are more than a crime problem. “Many are deeply involved with politics, real estate, religion, and community organizations and cannot be easily destroyed by suppression or repression of the drug economyAs social actors within poor communities with weak

mechanisms of formal social control, gangs, militias, factions and cartels have the capacity not only to wage war, but to rein it in.

To combat the “violent street gangs whose members threaten, terrorize, and commit a multitude of crimes against the peaceful citizens of their neighborhoods,” and to aid in the prosecution of gang members the state of California enacted Penal Code 186.20, the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (S.T.E.P. Act). Gangs are defined in this report according to Section 186.22 of the S.T.E.P Act as follows:

“Criminal street gang” means any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal act enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (25) inclusive or subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

According to a 2011 news report, there are over 170 gangs operating in San Diego County (Cavanaugh and Tintocalis 2011). However, it was beyond the scope of this study to document the presence and activity of all of them. Instead, we concentrated our efforts primarily on groups concentrated within the city limits³ and those involved to varying degrees in organized criminal behavior – so-called Second Generation gangs.

Second Generation gangs are “organized around illicit economies like drug trafficking, second-generation gangs operate across several cities or even internationally, have links to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) like drug cartels, and feature a more centralized leadership and a more hierarchical structure than first-generation gangs”(Brands 2009). Classifying San Diegan gangs as second generation required examining various components including indicators of their cohesion, structure, and threat to public safety – including which gangs were involved in transnational organized crime, and to what extent.

Second Generation San Diego street gangs are affiliated with umbrella organizations: La Eme, Bloods, Crips, and Chaldean Organized Crime Syndicate. The Mexican Mafia prison gang, also known as La Eme, was formed in the late 1950’s in the California Department of Corrections. La Eme is not presided over by a single leader. Leadership structure consists of a very small, tight knit group of people who have the authority to order murders. Each individual has a specific crew consisting of “comandadas” (officers) who carry out those orders and oversee criminal activities. La Eme controls all Hispanic Gangs in California, which are known collectively as Surenos.

Surenos refers to all Southern California criminal street gangs except the Maravilla gangs of East Los Angeles.⁴ The word sureno translates to

“southerner” in Spanish. Surenos are not a cohesive unit. The term is a designation that ultimately all pay taxes and allegiance to La Eme. Surenos consists of different gangs, many of whom are rivals. The largest Sureno gangs in San Diego City are Logan Heights, Shelltown, Imperial Beach, Del Sol, and Old Town National City (OTNC) or “Old Town”, National City, and Sherman. The largest in North County are the Posoles.⁵ All are subordinate to La Eme and four – Posoles, Logan Heights, National City, and Del Sol – have collaborated with Arrellano Felix Organization (AFO) in Tijuana.

All seven gangs exhibit a core –periphery structure.⁶ The core is made up of older individuals, usually run by a “big homie” who has been released from prison and has direct ties (perhaps is an “associate) of La Eme. They are mistrustful of peripheral members, and contain activity within core group.

Bloods gangs include African American gangs like Lincoln Park and Skyline as well as Asian gangs including Asian Insane Boys and Samhang Dumong Pinoy (SDP). Traditional rival to the Bloods, Crips gangs are equally diverse. They include the Somali African Mafia Crips and Philipino Bahala Na Barkada alongside older, African America gangs (i.e. Rollin 40s). The Chaldean Organized Crime Syndicate in Detroit is directly linked with Chaldean Iraqis gangs in El Cajon.

The strength of affiliative ties between umbrella organizations and gangs are varied, fluid and amorphous. There are plenty of rivalries between different Surenos (i.e. Old Town National City and Shelltown) and Blood gangs (i.e. Lincoln Park and Skyline). In addition, ethnic identity may trump affiliation to the umbrella as in the documented cross-overs between Asian Crips and SDP (a Blood gang).

Methodology

Over a nine month period in 2011 and 2012, we focused on building relationships with individuals working on gang control⁷ to gain insight into local groups, their activities and dynamics. Using the survey we developed, we conducted field interviews with 60 people, on both sides of the border, including law enforcement agents working in vice, gang units, and criminal intelligence units, academics and those working with community organizations, ex-gang members and Southern California gang experts/trainers.

We used three primary methods of data collection and analysis: in depth interviews (IDIs), composite analysis of crime and arrest records from the San Diego Police Department, and document analysis of media reports, gang blogs, and recent research reports. We used these three sources to derive GIS maps of violent incidents and gang territories, and to understand the characteristics of gang networks in the border region.

GIS Mapping

Geographic information systems (GIS) – used for data display, data analysis and data storage – is a tool that can be utilized to solve real-world, location-based problems; it is “a system for capturing, storing, checking, integrating, manipulating, analyzing and displaying data which are spatially referenced to the Earth” (Fazal 2008:7). GIS enables users “to map, model, query, and analyze large quantities of data all held together within a single database” making it a useful tool with enormous potential in any field where geography matters. (Fazal 2008:5). A spatial database can manage different types of data, including vector, raster and non-spatial data⁸, all compiled from a variety of sources. Each file, or collection of similar elements, is stored and displayed as a separate layer. Overlaying, combining, and analyzing these files can help to answer a variety of spatial questions about location, patterns and trends. GIS enables users to query and combine separate layers, to generate files of relationships and get results back that are or can be displayed in the visual format; “GIS analysis is a process for looking at geographic patterns in...data and relationships between features” (Mitchell 1999:11).

Using GIS technology and the incident data we received from the San Diego Police Department, we were able to map the location of the crimes and arrests that occurred between November 2008 and November 2011 and identify hotspots of potentially gang-related activity with the city of San Diego. Mapping this data enabled us, not only to visualize where these incidents took place but also to identify patterns and trends.

In addition, with the help of local gang experts, we were able to map the boundaries of over 40 established gangs within San Diego. This file of polygons shows which group “controls” particular areas of the city. By then overlaying the gang boundaries and the incident data, we were able to identify the territories in which the majority of crimes have been taking place and the type illicit activities concentrated in each of the territories.

Social Network Analysis (SNA)

Social network analysis (SNA) is a method for visualizing relationships between people and groups and analyzing the structure of their interactions. It is based on a theoretical approach that studies how patterns of social relationships (i.e. alliances or rivalries) affect the behavior of individual people, groups, and organizations (Marsden 1990; Wasserman and Faust 1994; Wellman 1983). Social networks are typically depicted in a social network diagram which use nodes to depict people and groups, and ties to represent the relationships between the notes (such as alliances, rivalries, or organizational position).

Social network analysis of gangs can use individual members or the whole gang as the unit of analysis. This study used gangs as the unit of analysis, and conceptualized ties or relations between gangs as levels of cooperation. To understand networks and their participants, we evaluated the location of gangs in a transborder network using four *centrality* measures to identify core and peripheral actors, and to measure varying levels of cohesion, or “relatively strong, direct, intense, frequent, or positive ties” (Wasserman and Faust 1994:249).

Centrality metrics measure the importance of a particular node or edge within the overall network. The measures we chose were betweenness, degree, Eigenvector centrality, and reachability. *Betweenness* is a measure for quantifying the control of an organization on the communication between other organizations in a social network. *Degree* refers to the number of ties or direct connections that an actor (node) has. This study associates ties positively as indicators of cooperation, thus the more ties a gang has, the more power they (may) have. *Eigenvector centrality* measures how many other nodes each node is connected to, like the degree measure. However, this measure gives greater weight to nodes that are more connected to other highly connected nodes. A node connected to three highly connected nodes will receive a higher score than one connected to three weakly-connected nodes. It is often interpreted, then, as a measure of the overall importance of that node in the network. *Reachability* is another centrality measure. An actor is “reachable” by another if there exists a set of connections by which we can go from the source to the target actor, regardless of how many others fall

between them.

Using two of the three data sources (IDIs and document analysis), weights and directions were assigned to the edges to account for different types of links including rivalries. These can be understood as frequencies of communication. The values associate with each vertex or link are as follows. Nonzero values indicate deviations from randomness. To assign numerical value to these relationships, we used Borgatti's technique where F is the change in the fragmentation caused by the removal of any node from the network. Borgatti developed the F -value to range from 0 to 1, with higher values corresponding to greater network fragmentation. Shorter path lengths between nodes result from higher levels of frequency of contact.

0 = No relationship (and self to self).

.10 = Rivalry between gangs (indication of 'capacity to cooperate based on trust').

.15 = Relationship exists but its nature is unknown.

For example, Chaldean Iraqi San Diego gang is connected to Sinaloa. cartel, but whether or not the connection is direct through a particular individual is unknown.

.25= Affiliative ties with an umbrella organization. For example, ties between Surenos to La Eme, Skyline to Bloods and West Coast Crips to Crips.

.40= Indicates cross-over members connect rival organizations. For example, cross-over between Asian Crips and Samhang Dumong Pinoy (SDP) Blood gangs.

.50 = "Cool with" relationship between gangs (trust) For example, the relationship between La Eme and AFO.

.70 = Relationship between gangs and subsets.

For example, links between the Logan Heights sets: 30th Street, Logan Heights 13, Red Steps, and 33rd Street.

Then, using social network analysis software, we performed a set of centrality measures to identify how influential particular gangs and organized criminal groups were in the San Diego/Tijuana region.

Results

Areas of Vulnerability

While gangs are present in almost every neighborhood in San Diego, the majority of them are concentrated in the more socially disadvantaged neighborhoods of the city⁹ and within the Mid City, Southeastern, Central and Southern police divisions.

The gang territories are among the more violent areas of the city San Diego. While potentially gang related¹⁰ violent incidents occur throughout

the city, the majority of violent incidents take place within the mapped gang-territories. From January 2009-November 2011, there were 226 incidents of unlawful homicide or manslaughter¹¹. Over 60 percent of them took place in an active gang area. Conversely, although all San Diego gangs in this study are involved in drug trafficking, only 35 percent of the narcotic related arrests occurred within the mapped gang territories.

In addition to incidents of homicide and manslaughter, other violent crimes are concentrated in these areas as well. Within the three year period for which SDPD provided incident data, almost half of all violent incidents¹² occurred within the mapped gang territories, including over 40 percent of the crimes violating penal code 245 (assault with a deadly weapon or by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury), both incidents of attempted murder, and 75 percent of the kidnappings. More than 50 percent of the deadly weapon¹³ arrests and over 50 percent of carjackings occurred in these specific areas as well.

Trans-border Social Networks

Respondents identified the three primary Mexican TCOs with whom San Diego and armed Mexican gangs had formed linkages as Arellano Felix Organization (AFO), Sinaloa, and Los Zetas. By “armed Mexican gangs”, we do not refer to the thousands of small youth gangs or *pandillas*, which are organized by barrio and contain less than a few dozen members.

Field interviews indicate that a few *pandillas* are morphing into cliques in the periphery of armed Mexican gangs, becoming involved in extortion and drug trafficking, but not violent or lucrative jobs (assassination, trafficking, kidnapping, money laundering) carried out by the core.¹⁴ For example, Barrio La Linea 13 was a *pandilla* that gradually became involved in cross-border human trafficking in Colonia Libertad, a neighborhood in Tijuana that straddles the border.¹⁵

*There are lots of “pandillas” in Baja but those are really just groups of kids who are territorial and engage in delinquent behavior (graffiti, some robbery, but nothing really organized). Then there are criminal groups (delinuencia organizada) which are more like cells of the cartels.*¹⁶

The systematic use of weapons by a gang signifies more organized involvement in illicit industry, for example taking control of a nightclub where women and drugs are trafficked. “Setting up a store” for greater control over product and distribution requires arms for protection, and indicates that the store pays taxes to “the establishment” (DTOs) for access to their product (LoneWolf 2004). According to interviews, Mexican gangs tended to focus either on enforcement (assassinations and other forms of instrumental violence), kidnapping/ ransom, or trafficking/distribution. For example, Los Palillos “The Toothpicks” was a Mexican enforcer

gang that used to work for Arellano Felix Organization (AFO), before AFO ordered the assassination of the Los Palillos leader, and the gang moved to San Diego.

In addition to gangs like Los Pandillas, some enforcer and trafficking gangs are affiliated with MS-13 and Calle-18 or M-18. MS-13 and M-18 are structured as loosely connected cells or *cliques*. The TCOs sometimes contract individual cliques “for specific tasks: contract killings, storage and sometimes transportation. More often than not, they represent disposable personnel (“desechables”) who will never fit into the hierarchical and disciplined structures that the large criminal organizations have created (Dudley 2011).”

These specializations appear to be fairly cemented. As one law enforcement officer put it, “I’ve had several guys tell me ‘I’m an enforcer, not a trafficker.’” A Department of Justice official discussed his perception of the network structure between a TCO and *delinencias organizadas*.

Enforcers and distributors [have] so many different crews, organized hierarchically. The more blood you have in the family, the better. In AFO, you have five brothers making all the decisions – then each had 10 lieutenants, and each of them had three sergeants, and each sergeant had six crews, and each crew 10-30 people. Each group was self-sufficient, everything they got they split half – half went to the boss. Whatever they needed to go to pay their overhead: kidnapping, extortion, moving dope, they’d pay their guys with money or dope. They’d get holiday bonuses. Some groups were really good at distribution and not killing, some good at both, some at kidnapping, some at money laundering.¹⁷

At any rate, transborder trade alliances are a pattern of social relationships that affect the behavior of individual San Diego gangs. Figure II illustrates the links between regional gangs broken out by horizontal cooperation and vertical hierarchy. The vertices are sized according to Eigenvector centrality in vertical hierarchies. Four findings are of particular interest. First, La Eme and AFO¹⁸ have the greatest number of ties (the most direct connections) and are thus considered ‘connectors’ or ‘hubs’ in this transnational network. They are the most active nodes, and thus control communication between other actors. Unsurprisingly, La Eme has the largest number of ties to San Diego street gangs, and little direct influence over street gangs in Tijuana (LoneWolf 2004).

La Eme doesn’t control TJ’s or Baja Califas Prison system... The Norte vs Sur [rivalry] doesn’t really fly down here where everybody is Mejicanos (LoneWolf 2004).

Instead, La Eme has high betweenness centrality because the organization has ties with all three regional Mexican TCOs – Los Zetas, Arellano Felix Organization (AFO), and Sinaloa.¹⁹ In the parlance of social network analysis, La Eme is a primary go-between for pairs of other actors and is in a position to broker many – potentially lucrative – connections. It is worth emphasizing that the nature of these connections is loose affiliation through discrete working relationships between core members of each organization. “One or two individuals in La Eme in San Diego would connect with one or two individuals in TJ cartel”.²⁰ In addition, “some members of La Eme escape to Mexico and they’ll work down there for the cartels”.²¹

Second, the most isolated organizations in the network (according to reachability measures) are Chaldean Iraqi Crime Syndicate (Detroit and El Cajon), Hells Angels, Mongols, two Somalian gangs – African Mafia Crips (AMC) and RuffTuff – and Blood gang Lil African Piru. Isolation within the larger network is likely due to (1) a focus on discrete activities requiring little cooperation with other gangs and/or (2) ethnic or religious solidarity. For example, Hells Angels and Mongols are explicitly race oriented although they cooperate as needed with Mexican TCOs for purposes of drug and weapons trafficking. Likewise, Somali gangs tend to form based on the clan or tribe from which they originated. “Homicides involving Somali victims are often the result of clan feuds between gang members” (20), as reported by the FBI’s 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment.

Third, according to the Eigenvector centrality measure, Sureno gangs are more highly connected than African American gangs. This finding meshes with what we heard in interviews. As one ex-Blood put it, African American gangs are not connected to the “mothership” like Sureno gangs are. In other words, despite aligning with the blue and red of the Crips and the Bloods, there is no higher organization or overarching ethnic identity that that controls or binds these groups. Bloods gangs include African American gangs like Lincoln Park and Skyline as well as Asian gangs including Asian Insane Boys and Samhang Dumong Pinoy (SDP). Crips gangs are equally diverse. They include “newer” groups such as Somali African Mafia Crips and Philipino Bahala Na Barkada alongside older, African America gangs (i.e. Rollin 40s). In fact, ethnic identity may trump affiliation to the umbrella as in the documented cross-overs between Asian Crips and SDP (a Blood gang).

Fourth, the centrality metrics help determine, given a network of criminal organizations who must coordinate in order to smuggle drugs, arms, and humans and given that only a small number can be intervened with (investigated, arrested), which ones should be chosen in order to maximally disrupt the network. The most active subset of Sureno gangs in San Diego – those with the greatest number of direct connections - included Shelltown, Logan Heights (13, Redsteps, 30th, 33rd), and Old Town National City (OTNC).

Implications and Conclusions

The research paints a complex picture of transnational criminal networks in the San Diego/Tijuana border region. The implications of this study are three-fold. First, taken as a total transnational network, street gangs in San Diego, Mexican gangs and TCOs form a decentralized system of actors that is resilient to intentional disruptions (arrests, or killings). Clearly, some organizations are more important than others, but overall this means that many individual nodes and links can fall while allowing the remaining organizations to still reach each other over different network paths.

It might seem that the reliance on individual contacts, rather than institutional contracts, for brokering partnerships between different organizations presents a potential point of weakness that facilitates short-term gains against particular groups. David Barron who connected Logan Heights to AFO, and Bat Marquez who connected Del Sol to Sinaloa, are examples of these points-of-contact. The partnerships between these San Diego street gangs and Mexican TCOs essentially represented centralized sub-networks, because they were dominated by a very central node – an individual. Highly central nodes can easily become single points of network failure, as happened with Barron and Marquez were arrested.

However although a particular network – the participation of Logan Heights members in AFO’s enforcer gangs – might have disappeared, similar social networks have reappeared in National City, Chula Vista and Imperial, “the result of physical proximity and strong familial ties that many US-based Hispanic gang members retain with family and friends in Mexico” (National Gang Intelligence Center 2011:40).

*The Hispanic street gangs do operate in conjunction with some of the Mexican cartels. The gangs are used to protect the drug shipments and to guard those who are brought to the US for human trafficking. Many of the agreements are done through the control and direction of the prison gangs.*²²

During this study, human trafficking emerged as one of the most worrying trends in gang activity and one which engenders a high degree of inter-gang cooperation. Different ethnicities and gangs have called truces and worked in conjunction to run joint circuit trips, share resources, help “protect” and discipline each other’s girls, and share information²³. While law enforcement often reported that pimping was an industry only related to African American gangs, IDI’s with ex-gang members and documentary analysis show evidence that La Eme, Sureno gangs, Aryan Brotherhood, Mongols, Somalian gangs, a Chaldean Iraqi gang were all involved in sex-trafficking. Future research on this specific topic is forthcoming.²⁴

Two findings stand out as particularly important to community resilience in areas dominated by gang culture, violence and crime. First, gang-related

violence is localized within gang territories, but drug-trafficking is not. This suggests that (1) the nature of gang violence in San Diego is turf and honor oriented and (2) communities within defined gang territories are thus at risk for higher levels of violence and require targeted efforts to enhance resilience. Turf and honor-related violence (tit-for-tat killing) can be reduced through a combination of engagement strategies with local gangs and community organizing, even though the drug-trafficking industry is virtually impossible to disrupt. Doing so requires linking minority communities to local agencies and governments (particularly law enforcement), increasing funding levels for institutions serving minority populations, and resolving inter-communal rivalries between neighborhoods in areas with histories of ethnic strife (Moore 2010).

A second implication is that groups at the periphery of the regional network – Chaldean Iraqi Crime Syndicate, Hells Angels, Mongols, Lil African Piru, and the two Somalian gangs: African Mafia Crips (AMC) and RuffTuff – warrant vigilance. A peripheral location does not mean that a group is tangential to the network, even though their centrality scores are very low. Instead, peripheral nodes are often connected to networks that are not currently mapped. For example, some African Mafia Crips are sympathizers with al-Shabaab, an Islamist militant group operating in Somalia that is rumored to have ties with Al Qaeda. “Vigilance” involves different approaches. The approach taken by the San Diego Police Department was to building bridges with numerous federal intelligence agencies in order to strengthen SDPD’s investigative capacity for monitoring AMC. Different approaches can be taken by community organizations and leaders. A study out of Minneapolis has concluded that building community resilience to violent extremism in Somali-American communities involves diminishing three risk factors “1) youths unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; and 3) the potential for contacts with terrorist recruiters or associates” (START 2012:2).

Broadway Heights is an example of a minority community in Southeastern San Diego that enhanced its resilience to violence by tackling these impediments head on. Separated by one street from Encanto, a notoriously crime ridden area dominated by street gang Varrio Encanto Locos, Broadway Heights has the lowest crime rate in the southeastern division, and has reduced its murder rate to 0 percent. Leaders in the neighborhood from long-standing families launched a community organizing campaign, aimed at breaking down the racial barriers between Hispanic and African American residents and building social solidarity. They constructed a highly organized community council, an autonomous youth

council, forced drug houses to close, and built intentional bridges with the police department culminating the establishment of their own personal police beat.

In closing, while we find that links between San Diego and Mexican gangs are flexible and resilient, the good news is that a variety of actors are, and should continue taking, proactive and multi-faceted actions to reduce social vulnerability and boost communities' adaptive capacities to armed actors. Ultimately community resilience to gang violence is a function of how individuals and groups act collectively, and learn and incorporate new knowledge (Holling and Walker 2003).

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END NOTES:

¹ According to Folke, Ibid (2006), Adaptability is the capacity of actors in the social-ecological system to manage resilience – that is, to handle change so that systemic resilience is not lost.

² An individual must meet certain criteria to be documented. Aware of higher punishments with the S.T.E.P. Act, some gang members avoid being documented. The requirements can be found on the San Diego Police Department's Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Gang Documentation (<http://www.sandiego.gov/police/pdf/gangfaq.pdf>)

³ The City of San Diego has the "highest number of street gangs in the county [and] most claim Midcity and Southeastern community" (Cavanaugh 2011).

⁴ Maravilla gangs are so named for the nickname they gave to the housing project of which they were residents: *maravillosa* or "marvelous". Maravillas were members of the Mexican Mafia prison gang when it began in the 1950s, but became disillusioned with the rules of the organization and decided to un-align themselves. They refused to pay taxes to the Mexican Mafia; as a result, the Mexican Mafia put Maravilla gangs on "green list" meaning kill on sight. It was not until recently that the "kill on sight" order against the Maravilla sets was recalled by the leadership of the Mexican Mafia.

⁵ Confidential JM North County Official, field interview, July 2012.

⁶ According to the majority of experts interviewed.

⁷ Gang control consists of prevention, intervention and suppression tactics

⁸ With vector files objects are represented as points, lines or polygons and can contain a number of attributes, or descriptive characteristics, for each record. Raster data sources, on the other hand, use a grid structure, a matrix of cells, to store geographic information; each raster layer represents one attribute.

⁹ Gangs cluster in disadvantaged and disorganized neighborhoods often characterized by poverty, inequality and family disruption.

¹⁰ Qualifying offenses under PC 186.22, the S.T.E.P. Act.

¹¹ Violation of California Penal Code 187.

¹² The file included approximately 4,600 violent incidents including: Aggravated mayhem, Mayhem, Assault with a deadly weapon or by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury, Attempted Murder, Kidnapping, Rape, Shooting at an inhabited dwelling or occupied motor vehicle, Torture

and Unlawful homicide or manslaughter.

¹³ Deadly weapon charges include PC 12021 - Prohibited possession of a firearm; PC 12025 -Carrying a concealed firearm; PC 12101 - possession of a pistol, revolver, or other firearm capable of being concealed upon the person; HS 11550 - under Influence-Narcotic-W/Firearm.

¹⁴ Felix Aguirre, Field Interview, July 2011

¹⁵ Confidential Border Patrol official, field interview, December 2012.

¹⁶ Confidential Baja Police Officer (Mexicali), field interview, December 2012.

¹⁷ Confidential Department of Justice (DOJ) official in San Diego, interview, December 2012.

¹⁸ In the San Diego/Tijuana border region at time of research, AFO had almost triple the number of ties than Sinaloa and Los Zetas, although this may have changed.

¹⁹ Confidential MA Law Enforcement, interview, November 20, 2012.

²⁰ Confidential SDPD Gang Unit, interview, November 12, 2012.

²¹ Confidential TD Law Enforcement, Drug Focus, interview, November 20, 2012.

²² Sergeant, San Diego County Sherriff's Department, email correspondence, November 4, 2012.

²³ Confidential interviews with local gang and trafficking experts between August 2011- June 2012

²⁴ NIJ Grant 2012-3096 "Gangs and Sex Trafficking in the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region."

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