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**Maras and youth gangs: two different
worlds.**

Abstracts.

ABSTRACTS

The coldness of fear: Violence and culture in Mexico

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Why do Mexican gangs not give rise to the same levels of violence as their Central American counterparts do, or those in Los Angeles? Why are their towns and neighbourhoods not flooded with lawlessness and gang violence? In the light of the fact that violence is decreasing in Mexico (even though this has not brought about the disappearance of criminal activity), this work carries out an examination of urban conflict to explore the forces that are preventing violence from proliferating in the country. To this end, the author studies the experience of a gang member in Tijuana. First of all, his testimony is transcribed, and the result is a direct view without any mediation of the inaccessible world of gangs. Secondly, the author examines the aspects and elements through which this individual forms part of the “customs and behaviour” typical of the world of gangs, and which have now spread throughout the world. Thirdly, the work highlights the uniqueness of the Mexican case; that is to say, the aspects that differentiate the violence of the country’s gangs. Finally, the author presents the cultural elements that explain the containment of violence that exists in Mexico.

Key words: Mexico, crime, youth, violence, specific experiences, cities

Central America’s Maras: Public policies and best practices

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In recent years, youth gangs in Central America have become a significant focus of great attention, both in the region itself and in the United States. Nevertheless, there is a general lack

of understanding as to who they are, why they form and how best to tackle the violence and crime that are commonly associated with their activities. Generally speaking, the local authorities have opted for repressive, hard-line policies to eliminate the problem. However, these policies have proved counter-productive, and recent studies have shown that the most effective way of reducing the high rates of crime and violence caused by youth gangs is to develop policies aimed at prevention, so as to tackle directly the causes that lead young people to join these gangs.

Key words: Central America, United States, youth, violence, specific experiences, crime

Are civil wars to blame for crime in Central America?

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The countries of Central America are high up on the list of nations with the highest crime rates in the world. According to the literature, the most common argument is that these high crime rates are a legacy of the armed conflicts of the 1980s. This article subjects this theory to an empirical examination. Even though the analysis is preliminary and limited, the results serve to question the existence of such a link between war and crime. The data show that the areas most affected by war in El Salvador and Guatemala are not the ones that show the highest rates of crime. Furthermore, no direct relation exists between the presence of armed conflict and crime rates at a national level. The presence of armed conflict is neither a necessary factor nor a sufficient one for criminal violence. On the contrary, this work points to a close link between inequality and crime rates at a national level.

Key words: Central America, criminality, conflict, civil war, social inequality

Social cohesion and peace education: Alternatives for preventing child-youth violence in El Salvador

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This article presents a general overview of the current situation of the phenomenon of child-youth violence in El Salvador. It describes some of the measures, both governmental and those

deriving from international cooperation, that have been implemented to date, in order to seek a solution to the problem. The authors also explore more deeply the new trends in preventing the phenomenon. In this sense, the article is aimed at the prevention of violence through two specific mechanisms: peace education and social cohesion. As the authors demonstrate, both mechanisms are potentially adaptable to the reality of El Salvador.

Key words: El Salvador, youth, violence, peace education

Social adaptation of Latin American youth gangs in Spain: Gangs and street youth organisations

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This article carries out a brief summary of the evolution of the phenomenon of what are known as “Latino gangs” in Spain since the late 1990s. The upsurge of these new street youth organisations is closely linked with the mass arrival of thousands of young Latin Americans in Spain during the past decade, and the consequent integration challenges that this has brought for both the welcoming society and for the young newcomers. In the sphere of public policy in Spain, there have been two main approaches to the phenomenon: one which is more oriented towards repression than prevention, and the other, known as the “Barcelona model”, which has promoted a process of normalisation and integration of these groups into Spanish society. The second option makes it possible for different social actors to carry out coordinated actions, and may serve as a guideline for developing similar initiatives in different countries in Europe and Latin America.

Key words: Spain, immigration, youth, social exclusion, integration, Latin America, specific experiences, violence

Public intervention on Latin American youth gangs: A few considerations based on immigration laws and their application in Catalonia

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Administrative intervention on young people from Latin American origins and who belong to youth gangs can be relatively complex, at least from a legal standpoint. On one hand, the young people in question may possess varying types of legal status (foreigners-nationals, youths-adults, regular or irregular) which determine the type of administrative intervention that is applied. On the other hand, the resources and routes of administrative intervention that currently exist (intervention on minors deemed to be socially at risk, youth justice, prosecution for crimes, etc.) should be modulated and adapted to the peculiarities of these groups, and of the young people themselves. This study is based on the premise that, with certain exceptions, the youth gangs that exist in our cities still do not possess a criminal structure or organisation comparable to the *Maras* of Central America or the “Latino gangs”, but rather that their proliferation is a symptom of the lack of social integration and the educational failure of these young people in our society. As a consequence, the article stresses that in addition to policing and legal initiatives aimed at fighting crime, there is a need to reinforce social and educational resources to prevent this phenomenon and, particularly, a need to enlarge and make more flexible the non-regulated education-training services that currently exist in order that they should serve as a bridge for these young people’s insertion into the labour market, and thus to prevent their social and legal exclusion.

Key words: Catalonia, immigration, youth, Latin America, integration, violence, specific experiences, immigration law

Latino gangs: An approach of social recuperation in Barcelona

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This work presents an approach of what have become known as “Latino gangs”, and has been carried out in Barcelona since this reality first came to light, in late 2002. The approach is based on one of the criteria that Barcelona City Council has defined as a basic element of its urban policy, that is, to develop interventions that facilitate the integration of new emerging urban realities, even

those that may result in the generation of conflict in the city's social and political life. Meanwhile, one *sine qua non* condition is the acceptance of the rule of common law, and of the very diversity of the city's community life. In the case under study, the aim has been to encourage groups of young Latinos who have been "branded" as dangerous to commence processes of normalisation, by exploring the associational route as a democratic resource for functioning socially.

Key words: Barcelona, cities, culture, youth, conflict, prevention, security, specific experiences

Barcelona and Madrid: Two different realities in the phenomenon of the Latino gangs

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The Latino gangs that have come into existence in Spain represent a potential risk factor for citizens' security and coexistence. That is the view of security forces and organisations, and it also seems to be the understanding reached by the administrations of the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia and Madrid, whose actions in the light of this phenomenon are assessed in this work. To this end, the author begins with an analysis of the significance of Latino gangs in Spain, from their origins to their introduction, and carries out a review of their current situation, including their organisation, recruitment, impact and risk for citizen security. Only with such an analysis can one begin to comprehend the scenario of dangers that will appear in the future, and the police strategy that should be introduced to deal with the phenomenon.

Key words: Spain, immigration, Latin America, youth, violence, conflict, security

The diplomatic battle between Beijing and Taipei in Central America and the Caribbean

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Half of the 23 countries that maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan are in Central and South America. One of the main objectives of China's growing presence in this region is to achieve diplomatic recognition from these countries. This article examines the factors

that are taken into consideration by Latin American and Caribbean countries when deciding whether to establish official diplomatic relations with China or with Taiwan. In this analysis, the author claims that over the short-term, there will not be a rapid, sharp drop in the number of Taiwan's political allies in the region, in spite of the fact that Costa Rica decided to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing in June 2007.

Key words: China, Taiwan, Latin America, bilateral relations, diplomacy, foreign policy

Just war in the age of terror

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International terrorism and the “war on terror” have led to the advent of a climate of extreme conflict in the international sphere. Humanitarian law and war conventions, the author claims, have been made obsolete as a result of which the need for security is imposed on legality, at the same time as a generalised militaristic discourse which accentuates the “moral polarity” of the two parties in conflict. This article analyses terrorism and the war against same through one single framework of ethical reflection (the theory of “just war”), with the aim of outlining impartial definitions, assessing them in terms of justice and proposing global (though not exclusively military) strategies against terrorism. Furthermore, the article warns of the risk of the erosion of democracy that is brought about by prioritising security over freedom and human rights—as the “war on terror” has clearly demonstrated. Finally, by considering terrorism as a problem of distribution of political resources, the study ends with a reflection on the international order and the conflicts that result from same.

Key words: terrorism, international order, war, international law, security