

InSight Crime

Pessimism Pervades El Salvador as Security Crisis Continues (</news-analysis/pessimism-pervades-el-salvador-as-security-crisis-continues>)

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Monday, 30 May 2016



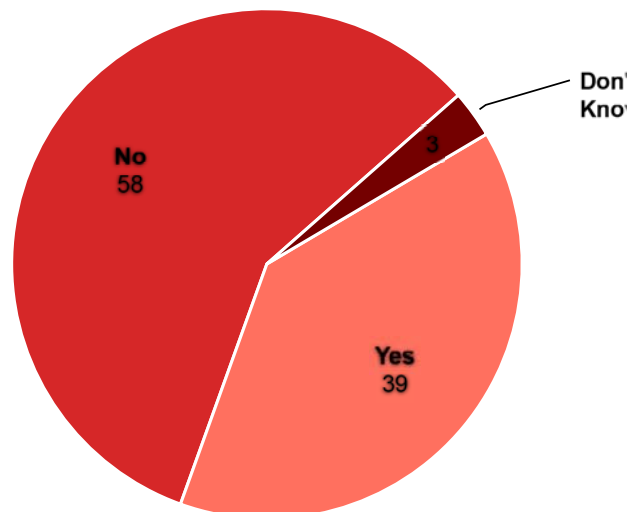
MS13 graffiti in El Salvador

Citizens in El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>) are doubtful that the government's tough anti-gang measures will have any impact, further indication that the public has little faith in

the authorities to pull the country out of a seemingly intractable security crisis.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents to a recent poll (<http://especiales.elsalvador.com/2016/encuesta-2-anios-gestion-presidencial/>) commissioned by Salvadoran newspaper El Diario de Hoy said they do not think the government's implementation of "extraordinary measures" to combat the gangs are producing good results. (See chart below) El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>)'s Congress approved the measures (</news-briefs/el-salvador-moves-to-clamp-down-on-prisons-gangs>) at the beginning of April, which tighten restrictions on incarcerated gang members in an attempt to reduce criminal activity within the prisons.

Do you believe that the extraordinary measures the government is applying in the fight against gangs is producing good results?

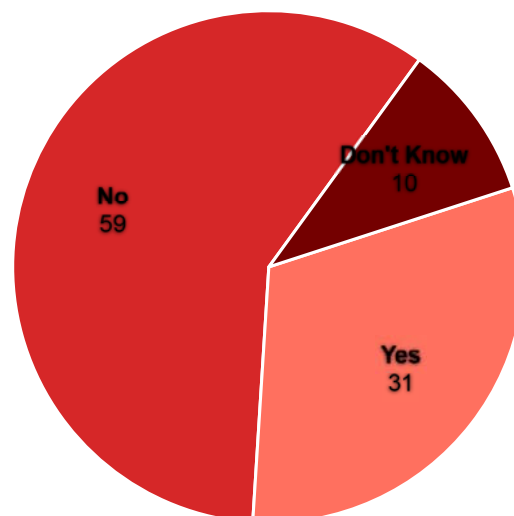


Source: [El Diario de Hoy](#) [Get the data](#)

The respondents were equally doubtful about the long-term prospects of the new security measures. Fifty-nine percent said they do not believe that the extraordinary measures will result in a "real and sustained" improvement to public security.

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/TA1Jm/1/>

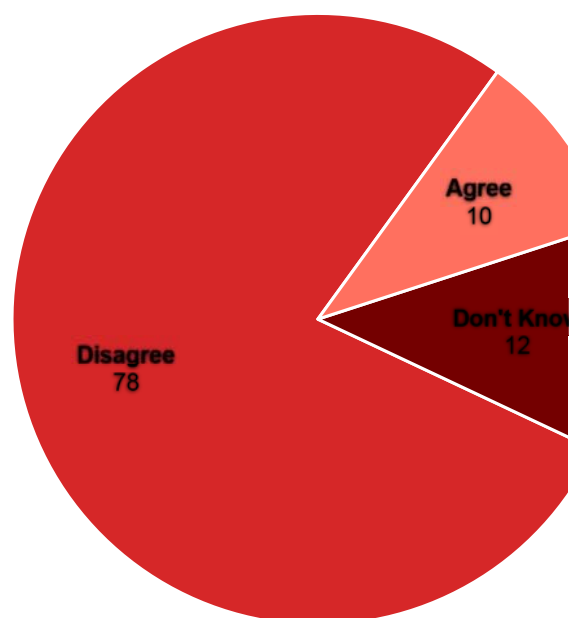
Do you believe the extraordinary measures will be maintained and will end up achieving a real and sustained improvement to public security?



Source: [El Diario de Hoy](#) [Get the data](#)

In keeping with previous opinion polls, (/news-briefs /el-salvador-survey-highlights-opposition-to-gang-negotiations) citizens expressed widespread distrust of the government-facilitated gang truce between the Barrio 18 (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/barrio-18>) and MS13 (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/mara-salvatrucha-ms-13>) that began in March 2012. Seventy-eight percent said they do not agree with the truce, while just 10 percent are in agreement.

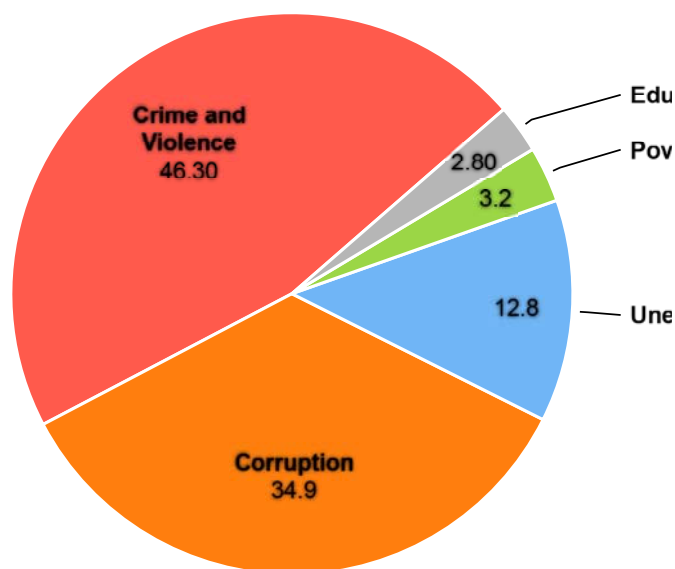
What is your opinion of the truce?



Source: [El Diario de Hoy](#) [Get the data](#)

The poll also found that nearly half of all Salvadorans rank crime and violence as their top concern. A little over 46 percent of respondents said these issues should be confronted as a "national priority," outstripping corruption (34.9 percent), unemployment (12.8 percent), poverty (3.2 percent) and education (2.8 percent).

In your opinion, which of the following challenges that the country is facing should be confronted as a national priority?



Source: [El Diario de Hoy](#) [Get the data](#)

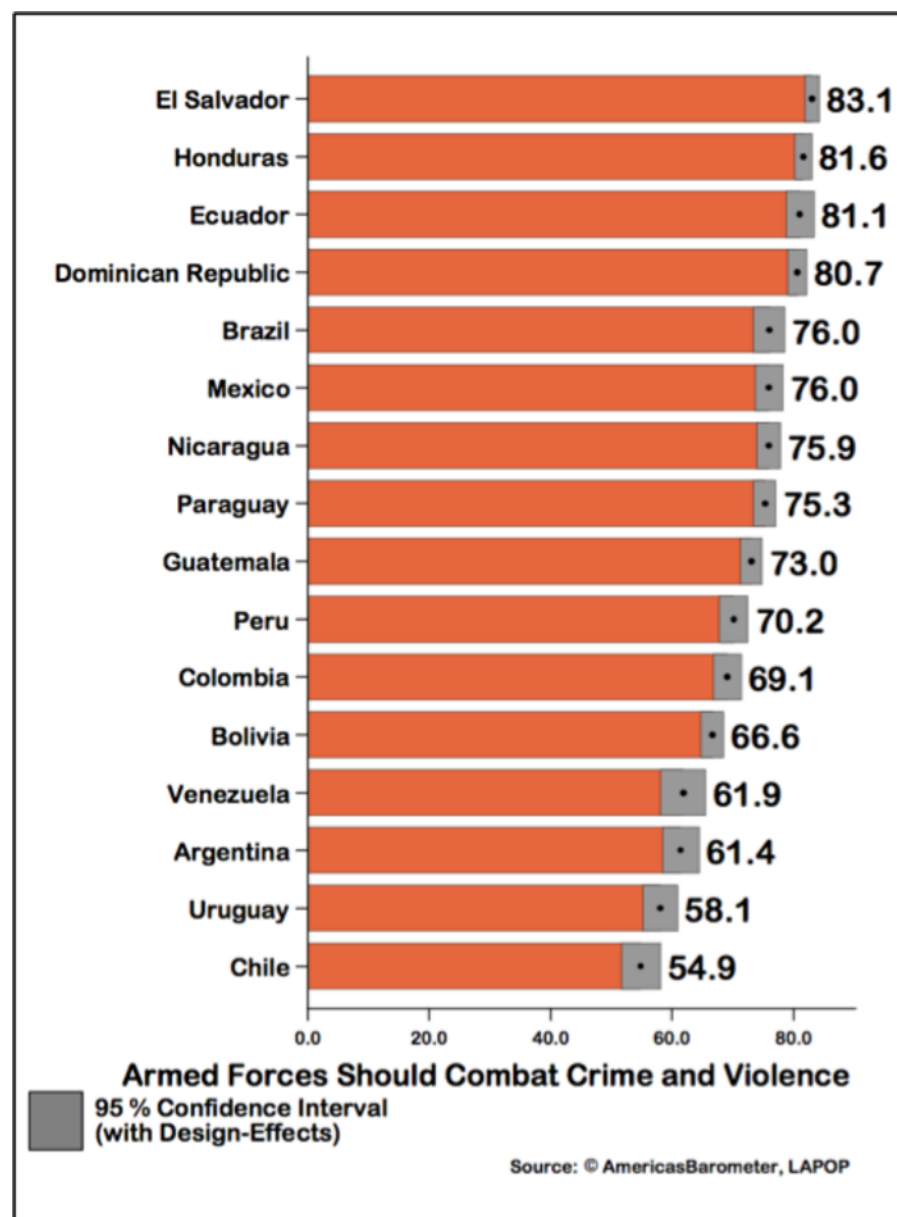
The survey, which gauged the public's perspective on a range of issues at the two-year mark of President Salvador Sanchez Ceren's term in office, indicated that Salvadorans are unhappy with the country's overall outlook. Fifty-five percent said El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>) is headed in the wrong direction, while only 19 percent said it was headed in the right direction.

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Pessimism about El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>)'s security situation -- and the government's ability to improve it -- is permeating the country. One poll (<http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2016/01/07/encuesta-del-iudop-refleja-reprobacion-para-el-gobierno>) earlier this year found 67 percent of citizens feel the government's security strategy is yielding few or no results. Sixty-nine percent said the government's recently launched security initiative, Plan El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>) Seguro, will have little to no impact on crime

rates.

This lack of faith in authorities is not based on political allegiances or preference for a particular security strategy. In fact, most Salvadorans fall on the same ideological spectrum as the government in that they both support a law-and-order approach to tackling crime. According to Vanderbilt University's 2014 AmericasBarometer survey (http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2014/AB2014_Comparative_Report_English_V3_revised_011315_W.pdf), over 83 percent of citizens think the armed forces should be involved in combating domestic security, the highest such approval rating in Latin America.



The public's pessimism most likely stems from something much more fundamental: citizens simply don't feel safe. Even during the truce, when homicide rates dropped by more than half (</news-briefs/el-salvador-sees-almost-60-drop-in-murders-in-april-as-gang-truce-holds>) nationwide, the gangs continued to terrorize local populations through other criminal activities, most notably extortion (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/45-extortion>). The truce eventually unraveled and murder rates have since skyrocketed (</news-analysis/el-salvador-homicides-skyrocket-after-gang-truce-unravels>), while extortion (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/45-extortion>) operations appear to have continued unabated.

Extortion, perhaps even more than homicide, has a tremendous impact on perceptions of insecurity because it touches the lives of so many ordinary citizens. Salvadorans pay an estimated \$400 million (</news-briefs/northern-triangle-world-extortion-hotspot>) per year in extortion (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/45-extortion>) fees, with public transportation and small businesses being among the most frequent targets.

SEE ALSO: Coverage of Extortion (</component/tags/tag/45-extortion>)

Extortion is also one of the most intractable security issues because it serves as the lifeblood of the gangs. Locking up large numbers of gang members has not helped, as many of the gangs' extortion (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/45-extortion>) operations originate from within the prison walls (</news-briefs/el-salvador-gang-members-sentenced-to-200-years-in-prison>).

In the last several years El Salvador (<http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news>)'s government has gone from quietly facilitating dialogue between the gangs to openly talking (</news-briefs/el-salvador-police-at-war-with-gangs>) of waging "war"

against them. Despite these wildly different security approaches, violence and crime remain a fixture in everyday life, leaving the public with little cause for optimism.