

# Crime and Governance in Contemporary Honduras

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*“We are rotten to the core. We are at the border of an abyss. These are criminal organizations inside and out.”* Gustavo Alfredo Landaverde, November 2011

Gustavo Alfredo Landaverde, founder of the Christian Democratic Party and former deputy drug czar of Honduras, made this statement two weeks before he was murdered in a drive by shooting. His words underscore the grim reality of contemporary Honduras, a country that now holds the infamous distinction as the murder capital of the world. Domestic and international headlines drive home the extent of the crisis with captions like “Honduras student murders highlight crime concerns,” “Graft, greed, mayhem turn Honduras into murder capital of world,” and “Blaze at Prison Underscores Broad Security Problems in Honduras.”<sup>1</sup> Average citizens in Honduras share these concerns about the deterioration of basic security in their country. In a recent public opinion survey, crime even eclipsed economic concerns, as citizens identified crime and corruption as the most serious problems facing their country (LAPOP 2012).

Contemporary events in Honduras beg several questions. How did violence become so pervasive in Honduras? Why have efforts to control the violence failed? Most importantly, what impact will these trends of violence have on democratic governance and political stability? This article addresses these questions, focusing in particular on the perspective of citizens in Honduras. With this focus, this article determines whether average people’s experiences with crime weaken their commitment to democracy and its norms. Relying upon survey data from the 2012 AmericasBarometer, this article examines ordinary people’s reactions to violence and state responses, and their views on future governance and political stability.<sup>2</sup>

## **Historical Overview**

For much of its history, Honduras escaped the widespread violence that engulfed many of its neighbors. Even during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when nationalist revolts emerged in neighboring countries, Honduras was comparatively calm. As Booth explains, “Honduras, less party-polarized, less

integrated into the world economy, and with less concentration of wealth than elsewhere in Central America, also experienced less turmoil in the early twentieth century than its neighbors” (Booth 1998, 20). Labor strikes were common, but comparatively speaking, Honduras used less repression against workers and companies made more concessions to labor. The Honduran military did not begin to intervene regularly in politics until the 1950s. This decade ushered in land shortages, accompanied by tensions between socio-economic classes and the mobilization of rural peasants (Booth et al 2010). The beginning of the Cold War further increased political polarization by casting long-standing disputes in a new light. For example, the frequent labor unrest on banana plantations was no longer a matter of workers protesting for better wages and working conditions. Rather, some political actors worried that communists might see political opportunities in these labor protests. The United States responded to such concerns and dramatically increased its military aid to Honduras during the Cold War, from an annual average of less than half a million U.S. dollars in the 1950s to an annual average of over \$57 million at the end of the 1980s (Booth et al 2010, 272).

With this new influx of foreign funds and training, the Honduran military grew more powerful throughout the Cold War and used this power to intervene in politics, starting with an army coup in 1956. While the military intensified its engagement in politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s, during this time it was not as repressive as the juntas of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, acting “more as an arbiter between other political groups than as an agent of a ruling class” (Booth et al 2010, 162). To address increasing unrest and peasant mobilization, the military did rely on repression, but also employed populist measures to reduce poverty, such as agrarian reform. The press retained some of its freedoms, and human rights violations never reached the same level of atrocity as in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. By the early 1980s, however, military rule changed dramatically. Death squads targeted political opponents, and political disappearances and murders increased, as did the numbers of the comparatively small guerrilla forces. Still, despite this rise in repression and resistance, Honduras avoided the full-fledged civil wars of its neighbors. By the mid 1980s, the military began to turn over power to civilians, although it retained the power to repress dissent and influence political elites.

As the Cold War drew to a close at the end of the 1980s, military support from the United States dwindled, and the Honduran military increasingly entrusted political matters to civilians. Starting in 1986, presidential elections resulted in the peaceful transfer of power from one civilian government to the next, and human rights abuses declined. In 1990, the new commander of the military reduced and punished abuses of power and infringements on human rights, and subsequently reconciled the military with opposition forces (Booth et al 2010, 170). By 1996, constitutional reforms solidified civilian control over the military, the final element needed to fully demilitarize the political system.

## Democratization and Its Security Challenges

While welcomed, the transition to democracy was not without substantial problems. During the process of democratization, political institutions are in a state of flux as democratic fixtures replace authoritarian ones. Particularly in the case of justice institutions like the courts and the police, it takes time to reform laws and legal codes (or write new ones altogether) and train judges, lawyers, and police officers to uphold them. This is a difficult process in any democratizing country, yet in Honduras these challenges were even more acute. While Honduras did not experience civil war itself, its geographic location meant that it inherited many of the problems of post-conflict countries anyway. In the 1990s, Honduras found itself home to former combatants from the conflict in Nicaragua, many of whom were unable to assimilate into the workforce and retained access to weapons. U.S. policy further exacerbated postwar problems, as the United States deported record numbers of Salvadoran gang members (particularly from Los Angeles) back to postwar El Salvador, where legitimate job prospects were dim (Wolf 2011). The gangs found it easy to set up shop in El Salvador, and these criminal networks began to branch out to neighboring countries like Honduras. When gangs and organized crime have taken advantage of political transitions, rates of violent crime have escalated exponentially, particularly when the transition takes place against a backdrop of demobilized soldiers and incomplete disarmament. As Millet (2009) notes:

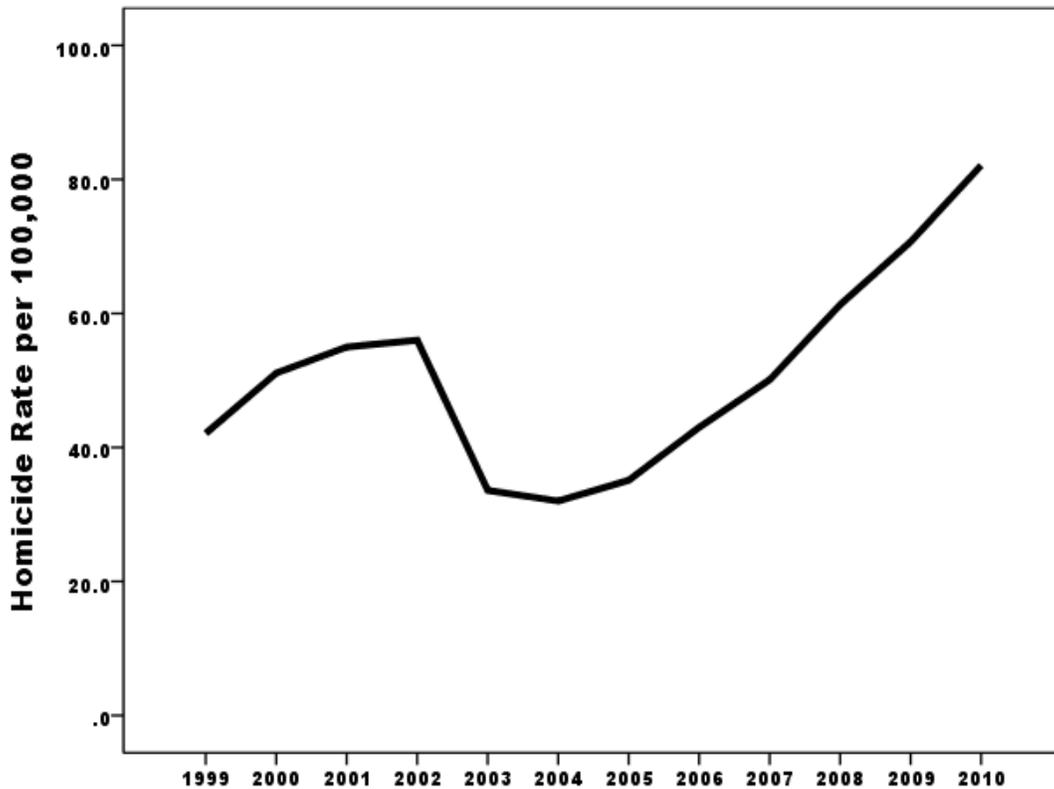
The end of civil conflicts frequently leaves thousands of former combatants, drawn from all sides, without jobs, land, or education and accustomed to a violent lifestyle. Efforts to incorporate these individuals into society are often inadequate and not sustained, providing ready recruits for criminal organizations (Millet 2009, 252).

In addition to the political transition to democracy, Honduras (like most Latin American countries) experienced major economic upheavals during the same timeframe. The debt crisis of the 1980s led to massive economic changes throughout the region, and by the 1990s, a global consensus emerged that neoliberal economic policies were the best prescription for ailing or lagging economies. Dubbed the Washington Consensus, this emphasis on neoliberal economic policies meant that countries like Honduras needed to embrace free market principles in order to compete in the global economy and have access to international markets and loans. Ultimately neoliberal reforms increased the power of the market, vis-à-vis that of the state. When examining the post Cold War era, Naim (2005) notes that market forces, even illegal market forces like drug traffickers, are far more powerful than states. Pérez concurs, pointing out that contemporary trends of liberalization and economic integration have

rendered borders more porous, and provide “golden opportunities to illicit entrepreneurs to hide their profits among the licit flows” (Pérez 2000, 139). In sum, when taken together the political and economic transitions of the 1990s weakened the power of the state, and created opportunities for non-state actors to exert their influence.

Political and economic changes open up opportunities for new actors, and unfortunately in the case of Honduras, many of these actors did not have good governance at the top of their priorities. Organized criminal elements were able to take advantage of the space created by these transitions and establish themselves into Honduran politics and society. Public insecurity began to deteriorate, as evidenced by rising homicide rates. As Figure 1 illustrates, despite a drop in 2003, rates of violent crime increased sharply over the last decade. By 2010, Honduras registered the highest homicide rates in the world – 82.1 per 100,000. As a point of comparison, in 2010 homicide rates in neighboring Nicaragua were 13.2, and 4.6 in the United States (UNODC 2011).

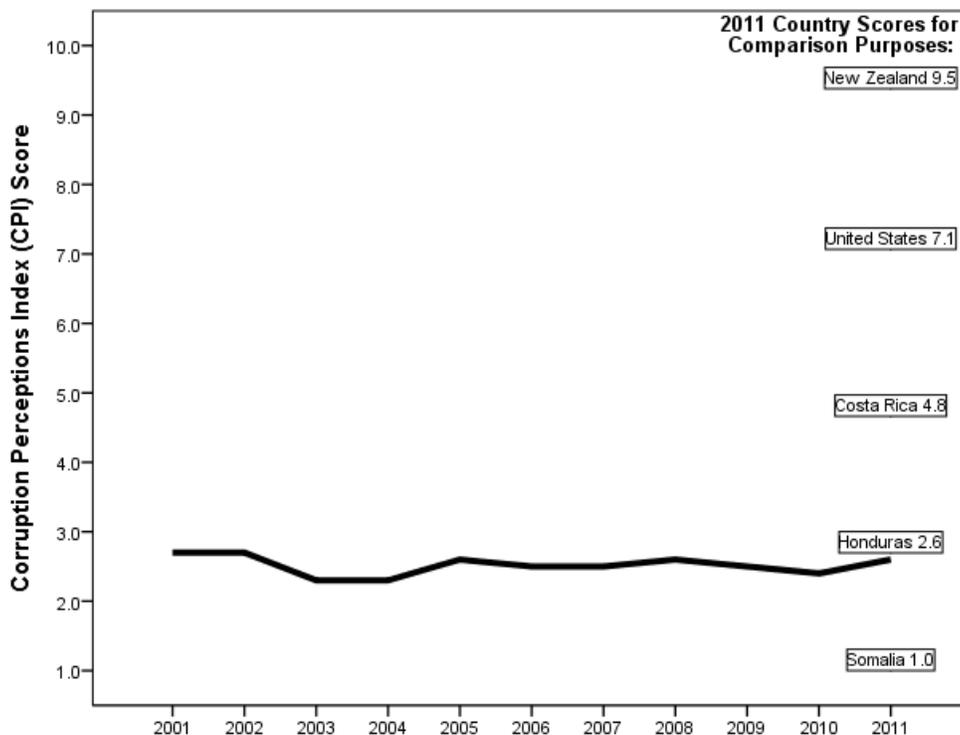
**Figure 1: Homicide Rates in Honduras (per 100,000)**



**Source: UNODC (2011)**

In addition to the problem of violent crime, Honduran democracy has also been plagued by corruption. Figure 2 depicts the extent to which corruption pervades Honduras, relying upon the widely used Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International. Transparency International rates the extent to which governance around the world can be characterized by transparency or corruption, on a scale of one to ten. Countries with the highest levels of transparency (and therefore lowest levels of corruption) earn scores closer to the perfect mark of ten, while countries compromised by corruption receive scores closer to zero. As Figure 2 illustrates, over the past decade Honduras has consistently ranked near the bottom of this scale.

**Figure 2: Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index**



Seligson and Booth (2010) note that by the mid 2000s, average citizens of Honduras expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Of all the Latin American countries, people in Honduras registered the highest levels of “triple dissatisfaction,” whereby support for democracy, support for national institutions, and evaluations of the government’s economic performance were very low. By 2008, survey data identified Honduras as “the single case in Latin America with the highest level of triply dissatisfied citizens, with relatively low

support for democracy, and with high support for coups, confrontational political methods, and rebellion” (Seligson and Booth 2010, 133).

Democracy was particularly vulnerable in Honduras, and political elites took advantage of this fragility in 2009. President Zelaya and his opponents clashed over Zelaya’s attempts to hold a plebiscite and subsequently fire the head of the military. Both of these presidential moves were ruled to be illegal, and the military responded in kind, disregarding the constitution to exile Zelaya to Costa Rica.<sup>3</sup> The breakdown of democracy in Honduras sparked an international firestorm. Latin American leaders were divided in their support of President Zelaya, but virtually unanimous in their opposition to military intervention. The Organization of American States (OAS) suspended Honduras from the organization, the first time such action had been taken since the 1962 suspension of Cuba. The United Nations passed a resolution (whose sponsors included both the United States and Venezuela) by acclamation “after sustained applause in the 192-member body,” condemning the coup and demanding Zelaya’s “immediate and unconditional restoration” as president (Lacey 2009, A6). Zelaya was not reinstated as president, but on November 29, 2009, new elections were held to determine who would govern the country as president. Porfirio Lobo won these elections, and was peacefully inaugurated into office on January 27, 2010. The OAS reinstated Honduras’s membership on June 1, 2011.

The coup and its corresponding political instability created further space for non-state actors to operate. Most notably, organized crime took the opportunity to entrench itself further into the social, economic, and political fabric of Honduras. As Bailey and Taylor (2009) explain, there is an important distinction between organized and non-organized crimes. While violent crime poses problems for governance, organized crime is an even more formidable opponent, as it tends to be a well-financed, well-organized counterpart with ready access to weapons and ammunition. When organized crime is able to systematically challenge the state’s monopolization of force, it also jeopardizes the legitimacy of governance.

The power vacuum presented by the 2009 created a political opening for organized crime, but regional trends also contributed to the problem. In particular, the Mexican anti-drug offensive pushed organized criminal elements deeper into Central America. In 2006, 23% of cocaine shipments moving north passed through Central America. By 2011, this amount had jumped to 84%, as the Mexican offensive pressed cartel activity south (Archibold and Cave 2011, A1). Honduras has proven to be a particularly attractive haven for drug traffickers circumventing the Mexican crackdown against cartels, as Honduras’s northeastern coast “offers a remote, largely uninhabited rainforest that is perfect for the single-engine planes traffickers use, then hide or burn to

destroy the evidence” (Archibold and Cave 2011, A1). Dense jungles and a long Caribbean coastline position Honduras as “the first corner of the triangle, leading into trade routes that eventually reach Mexico and the United States” (Shifter 2011, 51).

### **Government’s Response to the Crime Crisis**

The Honduran government has recognized the toll that crime has taken on democratic governance. A series of presidents have pledged to curb crime and crack down on corrupt officials who are complicit with criminal activities. There is widespread recognition that additional reform of the justice system is needed, and that the state must increase its resources to fight crime. There has been less agreement on how exactly the government should translate these abstract goals into tangible policies, however. The reality is that much-needed reforms are time-consuming and resource-intensive, and it can take years before such reforms translate into a police force and justice system that can successfully confront crime. Thus, many politicians have looked for at least a temporary quick fix, which tends to take form in a series of “mano dura” (iron first) proposals.

Reforms to overhaul the justice system began in earnest in 1996, just as the civilian government was consolidating its control over the country and sidelining the military from governance. Constitutional reforms created a civilian police force, followed a year later by new police laws and penal process codes in 1997 (Ungar 2009). These reforms were short-lived, however, as *mano dura* politicians denounced them as prioritizing the rights of criminals over those of victims. For example, when President Ricardo Maduro took office in 2002, he deemed the new reforms to be too soft on crime (Ungar 2009). President Maduro’s disregard for the reforms resonated on a personal level with many voters, as his son had been killed in a botched kidnapping. Maduro’s government distanced itself from the new reforms, opting instead for penal codes that would fight crime decisively by targeting gang members, such as Provision 332. Provision 332, an amendment to the penal code, punished gang membership with mandatory prison terms of nine to twelve years (Ungar 2009). Other laws went even further. The Law of Police and Social Coexistence increased the discretionary powers of police by allowing them “to detain arbitrarily ‘vagabounds’ – people who have no honest means to earn a living or are suspected of intending to engage in criminal activities” (Ungar 2009, 98). Such measures have swelled the prison population, leading to riots and subsequent prison massacres in 2002 and 2004. Even in the absence of riots, overcrowded prisons serve as a base of operations for gangs, as well as recruitment and training grounds for new members (Arana 2005).

Both Provision 332 and the Law of Police and Social Coexistence widened the discretionary powers of police without providing additional training or resources to fight crime, essentially relegating police back to their roles as

“border guards” between social classes (Booth et al 2010). In addition to augmenting the powers of the police, Honduras also joined a regional trend in deploying the military to fight crime. Under Operación Guerra Contra la Delincuencia (Operation War against Crime), President Maduro dispatched approximately 10,000 officers to patrol the streets under the leadership of a military official (Booth et al 2010, 173). Current President Porfirio Lobo has continued this trend, launching joint military and police patrols to fight crime under Operación Relámpago (Operation Lightning).

Mano dura crackdowns did initially coincide with a dramatic plunge in murder rates at the national level between 2002-2004 (UNDP 2009, UNODC 2011). According to some estimates, mano dura also resulted in “an 80% decline in kidnapping and a 60% decline in youth violence” (Ribando 2005). However, by 2004 the murder rate again began to rise steadily, particularly as maras (gangs) regrouped and responded to government crackdowns with harsh reprisals of their own, opening fire on crowded buses and parks, particularly in the high crime area of San Pedro Sula. Leading politicians argued that the only way to change these trends was to be harsher, but critics have charged that mano dura tactics are not only unsuccessful, they also jeopardize respect for civil liberties and human rights. Ungar, for example, argues that the mano dura measures of the Maduro administration “encouraged the increased use of mass raids, extended preventative detention, forced confessions, and extrajudicial killings of suspected mareros (gang members)” (2009, 98). Booth et al document that between 1998 and 2002, “more than 1,500 youths were murdered, most of them males under the age of eighteen” (2010, 173). In the face of harsh criticism from organizations like Amnesty International and the United Nations, the government investigated the extrajudicial killings and acknowledged that police and security forces had played a role. This acknowledgment did not lead to convictions, however, as the investigator who implicated the police officers and security forces received death threats after the report went public.

To address concerns about human rights, Honduras has attempted to mix mano dura tactics with other initiatives, with varying levels of success. For example, in 2002 the Maduro government launched a national community policing program, Comunidad Más Segura (Safer Community), which focuses on preventive strategies like fixing street lights and regularly meeting with the community to address local security concerns (Ungar 2009). Some communities have reported success under these programs, measured by drops in local homicide rates. Still, this community-based policing model has also been plagued by violence. Ungar relates that the “head of community policing of one district was arrested in connection with police killing youths, for example, and a member of the citizen policing group in LaCeiba said that they used it to attack suspected delinquents” (2009, 100). This example serves as a reminder that citizen participation does not automatically translate into more

respect for human civil rights. Citizens themselves can use such forums to call (and in this case engage in) extralegal action that undermines the rule of law.

Finally, both the government of Honduras and citizens themselves have also increasingly turned to private security measures to combat crime. Typically the state jealously guards its monopolization of force, and is loathe to relinquish this monopoly to private actors. Recently, however, states throughout Central America have been willing to share this function with private actors. In Honduras, for example, in 2006 the government invited private security forces to join the police and the military in a *mano dura* crackdown on crime, called Operation Thunder (Booth et al 2010). This invitation drew swift condemnation from human rights organizations, especially Honduran Human Rights Commissioner Ramón Custodio, who criticized the government for failing to heed the important distinction between private and public security forces, as well as failing to provide security through the appropriate legal institutions, like the Ministry of Security (Mejia 2006). Given Honduras's human rights track records during these *mano dura* campaigns, human rights activists have strongly opposed adding new actors to the mix, particularly when such actors lack institutional oversight and horizontal accountability (Booth et al 2010). Still, even though security privatization poses numerous pitfalls for the rule of law, it is easy to see why such measures are appealing to a fearful public, as many perceive private security as the only lifeline out of a dire situation. By the early 2000s, private security forces outnumbered public security forces, as there were 114 private security forces per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to the rate of 91 per 100,000 for public forces (Silva 2003).

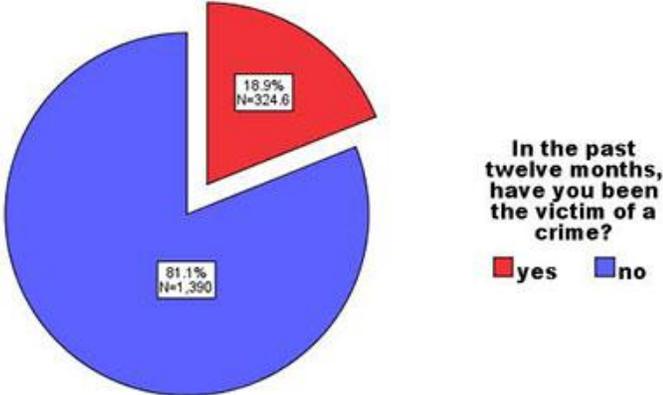
### **Impact of Crime on Democratic Governance**

Given the violent status quo and the proven vulnerability of democratic governance in Honduras, what impact will the crime crisis have on democratic governance and political stability in the future? This study turns to answer this question at the micro level, focusing on citizens' experiences with crime, as well as their evaluations of political institutions and governance. This empirical analysis aims to determine whether people's personal experiences with crime reduce their support for democracy and/or democratic principles and norms. This analysis relies upon the 2012 survey data of the AmericasBarometer, conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).

To begin, this empirical analysis measures respondents' personal experiences with crime. In 2012, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey asked respondents, "*Now, changing the subject, have you been the victim of some type of crime in the past twelve months? That is to say, have you been the victim of a robbery, theft, fraud, extortion, blackmail, threats, or any other type of crime in the past twelve months?*" The survey data reveal that in addition to the problem of high homicide rates, other types of crime also

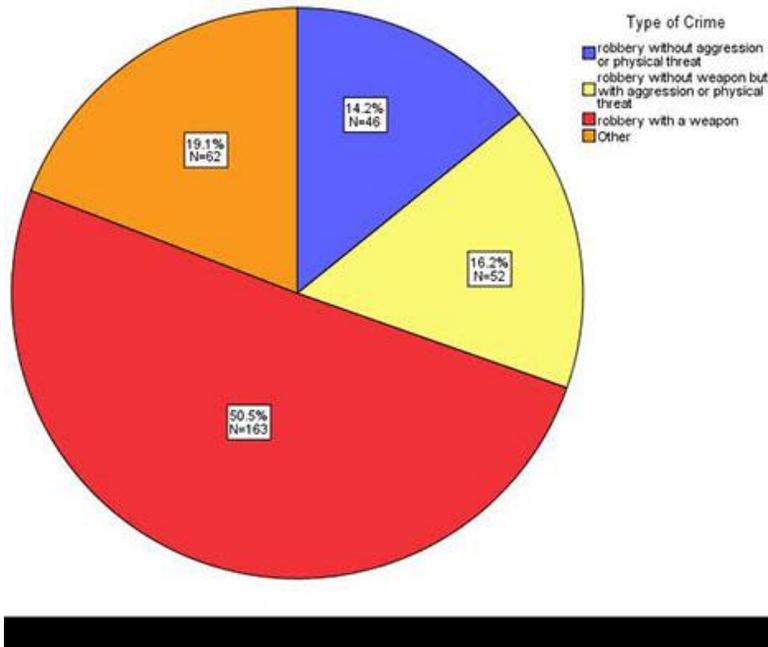
feature prominently in daily life in Honduras. As Figure 3 reports, when asked about personal experiences with crime, almost 1/5 of respondents reported that they had been a victim of a crime.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3: Self-Reported Victimization (LAPOP 2012)**



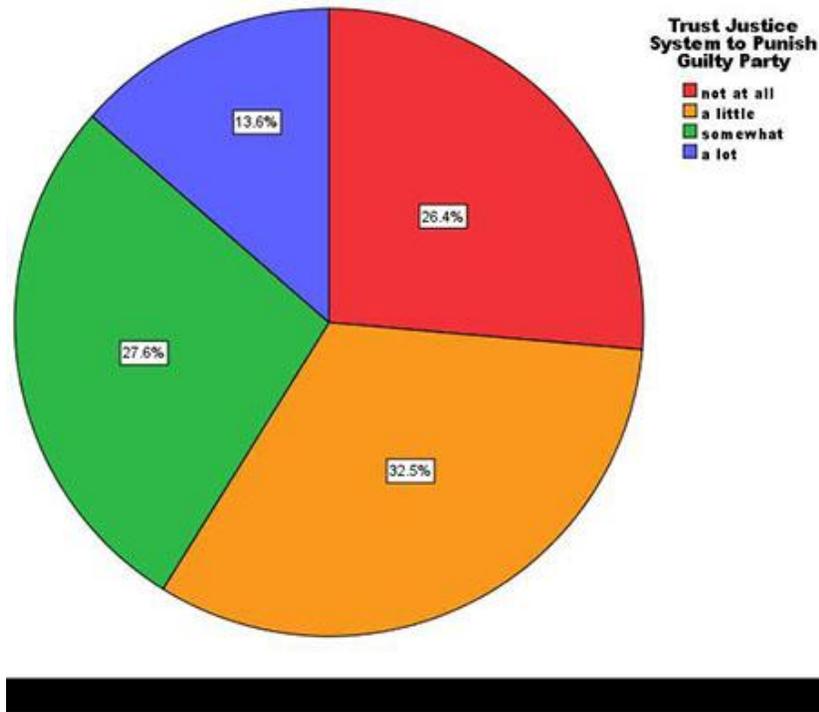
As Figure 4 illustrates, the most frequent type of crime respondents reported was robbery.<sup>5</sup> Half of the victims indicated that they had faced armed robbery, and an additional 16% indicated that they had confronted robbery with the threat of force. Fourteen percent indicated that the robbery was not marked by violence or the threat of violence. All other types of crimes (e.g., property damage, extortion, assault) never exceeded 5% each.

**Figure 4: Type of Self-Reported Victimization (LAPOP 2012)**



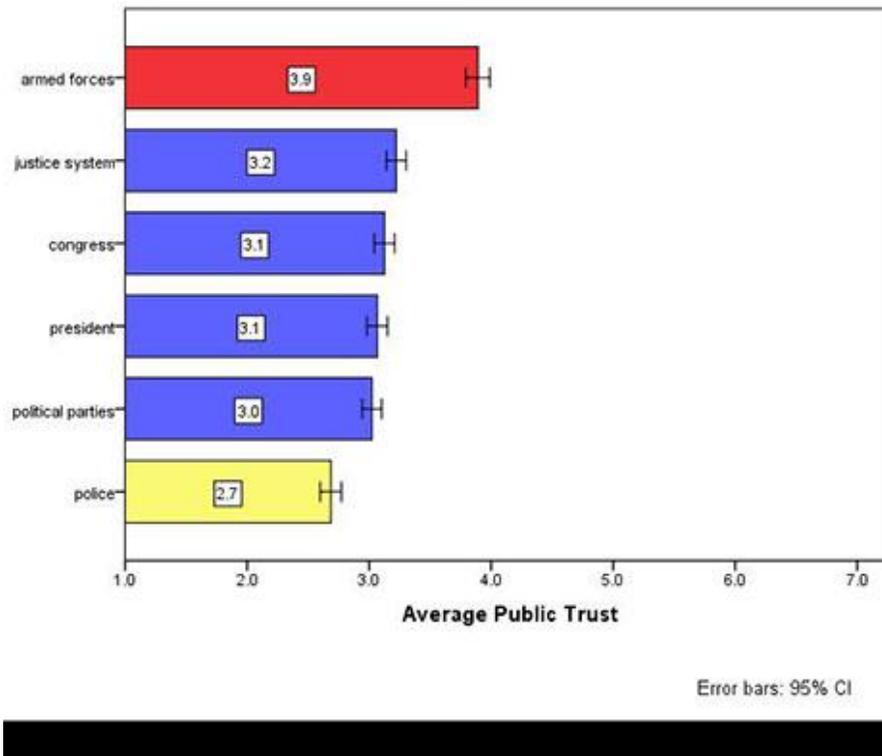
Unfortunately, many Hondurans do not think that the legal mechanisms for addressing these types of victimization are effective. Figure 5 examines respondents' answers to a survey question that gauges trust that the justice system can adequately respond to victimization: *"If you were the victim of a robbery or assault, how much would you trust the judicial system to punish the guilty party? Would you trust it . . . (1) not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) very much."* As this graph indicates, approximately one quarter of respondents do not trust the justice system to punish the guilty party at all, and an additional 32.5% register only a little trust. Thus, high levels of victimization are matched with low levels of trust that the justice system can actually punish the guilty parties.

**Figure 5: Trust in Justice System to Punish the Guilty Party (LAPOP 2012)**



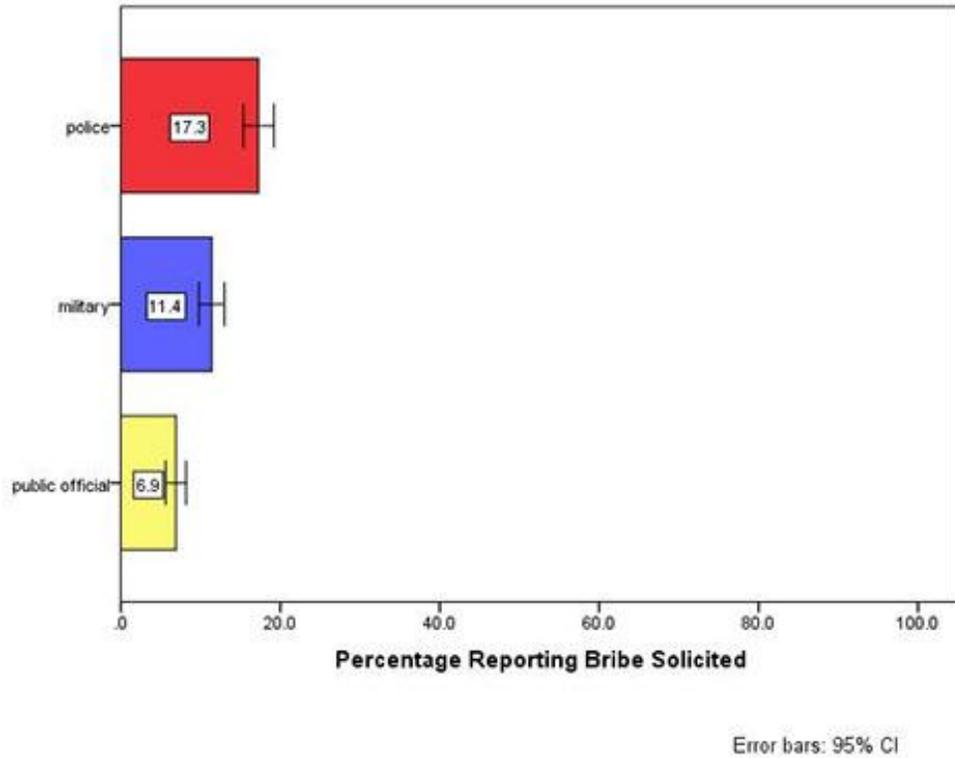
In addition to low levels of trust that the justice system will punish guilty parties, most Hondurans also register low levels of trust in the police. Figure 6 compares levels of trust in a series of institutions, relying upon a battery of survey questions designed to gauge public trust in key political institutions. Respondents were asked, “*To what extent do you trust . . .*” institutions including the armed forces, justice system, congress, president, political parties, and police. Responses ranged from a low of one to a high of seven. Figure 6 depicts average responses to these survey items, and finds that public trust is lowest in the police, but significantly higher in the military.<sup>6</sup> When compared to all the other domestic political institutions in Honduras, the military significantly outranks them all.

**Figure 6: Trust in Institutions in Honduras (LAPOP 2012)**



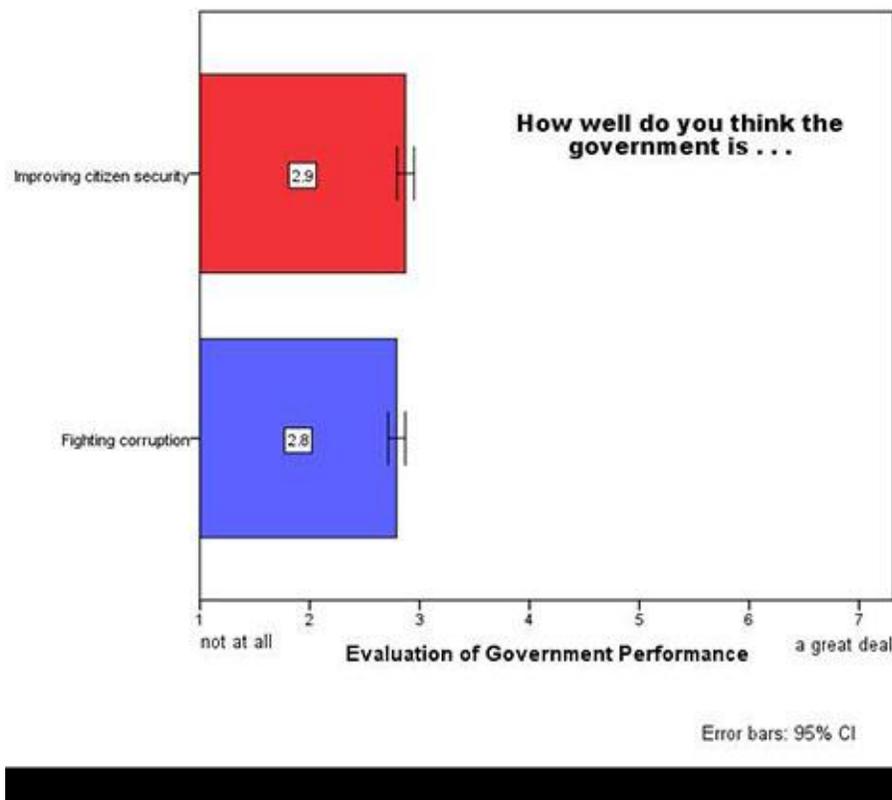
One reason respondents register lower levels of trust in the police is most likely tied to experiences with personal corruption.<sup>7</sup> In Honduras, respondents reported very high levels of police corruption. As Figure 7 indicates, when asked whether a police officer had solicited a bribe in the past twelve months, 17% responded in the affirmative. This rate of bribery is among the highest in the region in the 2012 survey. A significantly lower percentage of respondents reported that members of the military and other public officials had solicited bribes, but it is important to remember that the average person in Honduras tends to have less contact with members of the military and other types of public officials.<sup>8</sup> Overall, police tend to be the officials with whom average people have more contact. Unfortunately, many of these interactions tend to be tainted by corruption.

**Figure 7: Personal Experiences with Corruption in Honduras (LAPOP 2012)**



As Figure 8 indicates, when compared to other Central American countries and Mexico, police corruption is particularly high in Honduras. In this regional comparison, Honduras ranks third in terms of police corruption, statistically on par with rates in Guatemala, and 4.5% lower than in Mexico. In contrast, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama reported rates that were significantly lower than Honduras, by at least 10%.

**Figure 8: Personal Experiences with Corruption in Central America and Mexico (LAPOP 2012)**



As the chilling quote of Gustavo Alfredo Landaverde in November 2011 reminds us, the problem of public insecurity is interlaced with the problem of corruption today in Honduras. Increasingly, the public has indicated high levels of frustration with government performance in both these areas. In 2012 LAPOP asked respondents to evaluate government performance in the areas of fighting corruption and crime with two questions:

- How much would you say the current government fights corruption in government? (1) not at all -- (7) a great deal
- How much would you say the current government is improving citizen security? (1) not at all -- (7) a great deal

**Figure 9: Evaluations of Government Performance (LAPOP 2012)**

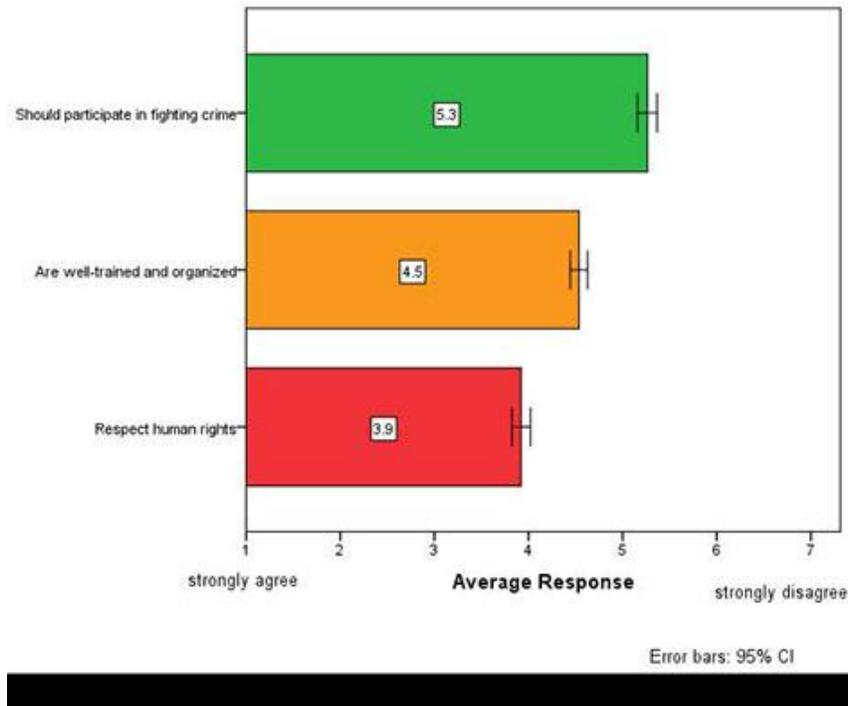


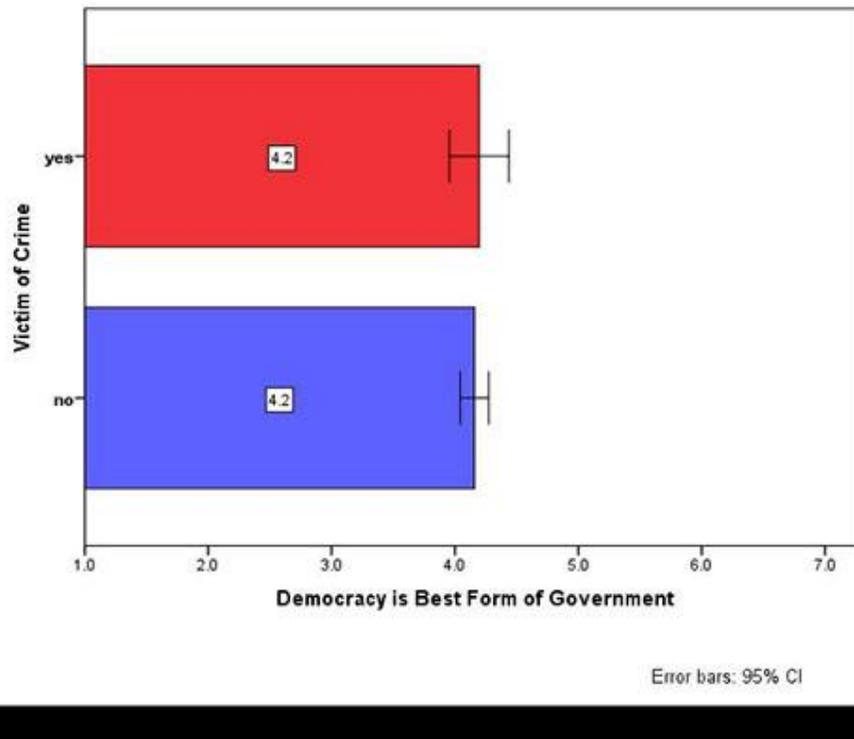
Figure 9 demonstrates that on average, public evaluations of government performance in these two areas is quite low, clustered at the bottom of the scale. While the public has clearly indicated that crime and corruption are the two most pressing issues facing Honduras today, it has a dismal evaluation of government efforts to address these two problems. Not surprisingly, this opens the door for alternative solutions, such as pressing the military into domestic service. As highlighted earlier in this paper, Honduras has increasingly incorporated the military into its crime-fighting policies. Honduras is not unusual in this sense, as the military has increased its domestic role in several countries, most notably in Mexico and Guatemala. The decision to enlist the military typically results when governments view their domestic police forces as too corrupt, under-trained, and inefficient to confront the crime crisis (Ellingwood 2010). As evidence from Mexico indicates, however, once the military assumes a domestic role in security provision, typically it is also plagued with similar problems of corruption and inefficiency, as organized criminal elements chip away at the military's reputation with offers of bribes and threats of violence. As discussed earlier in this article, when the military engages in domestic crime-fighting operations, human rights violations frequently increase, as military forces are typically trained to fight external insurgencies and are often under-prepared for extensive operations with civilian populations.

The 2012 survey data highlight this tension between the incorporation of the military in crime-fighting initiatives and respect for human rights. LAPOP asked respondents a series of questions to measure both evaluations and expectations of the armed forces, particularly in terms of the military's role in domestic affairs:

- “To what extent do you think the Honduran armed forces are well-trained and organized?”
- “The armed forces should participate to combat crime and violence in Honduras. How much do you agree or disagree?”
- “How much do you think the Honduran armed forces respect the human rights of Hondurans today?”

Responses for these three questions ranged from a low of one to a high of seven. As Figure 10 indicates, there is strong support for the military's participation in fighting crime, even though perceptions that the military is well-trained and organized are significantly lower (although still above the midpoint of the range). The Honduran military scored lowest in the areas of respect for human rights, however. Overall, respondents registered lukewarm evaluations of the military's performance in the area of human rights. While respondents did not think the military's human rights record today is poor, they most certainly do not give it very high marks either. This is a concern if the military is to expand its participation in domestic activities like crime control.

**Figure 10: Evaluations and Expectations of the Military (LAPOP 2012)**



Finally, this paper turns to examine the impact of crime on public support for democracy and its norms. Observers have warned that the crime epidemic could undermine democracy not only in Honduras, but in neighboring countries in Latin America as well. In Guatemala for example, Seligson and Azpuru (2001) find that both victimization and fear of crime lower support for democratic institutions, reduce interpersonal trust, and lead citizens to prefer radical change. In a study of Mexico City, Parás (2003) uncovers similar trends, linking victimization to significantly less support for democracy. In a comparative study of Central America, Pérez (2003) finds that crime can create pressure for “democradura,” or strong government action, which can result in repressive and undemocratic measures.

Other scholars have found that crime has the potential to erode the quality of democracy. One component of democracy that is particularly vulnerable is the rule of law, as research has linked public insecurity to support for extra-legal justice, and a willingness to disregard the law in order to target suspected criminals more aggressively. For example, Diamond cautions that crime might lead citizens to engage in, or at least support, extreme measures at odds with democratic norms, such as “popular vigilante squads that mete out instant justice to suspected perpetrators, police torture and killing of prisoners and suspects, and police-led extermination squads”

(1999, 91). In an empirical examination, Parás and Coleman (2006) also find a link between victimization and support for authorities' circumvention of the law.

Given this theoretical and empirical evidence, this analysis tests the ability of crime to weaken support for democracy and its norms in contemporary Honduras. In particular, this analysis examines two key elements:

- Public support for democracy as the best form of government
- Public support for the rule of law

To determine the impact of crime on support for democracy and its norms, this analysis relies upon a statistical tool called the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which uses the F test for statistical significance to determine whether the means of different groups are statistically different from each other. In this case, ANOVA can determine whether victims of crime register different levels of support for democracy and its norms than non-victims, for example.<sup>9</sup> To illustrate these differences between groups, and whether these differences are significant, this report relies upon a series of graphs depicting the means of each group on indicators strongly related to democratic governance. In each graph, error bars illustrate whether the observed difference (if any) is statistically significant. Plainly speaking, if the error bars on either side of the mean do not overlap, the observed difference is statistically significant.

This analysis relies upon ANOVA to determine whether those personally touched by crime, as measured by personal victimization in the past year, are less supportive of democracy and/or the rule of law. Of course this is just one test, measuring the direct relationship between victimization and key political attitudes. It does not measure other ways in which crime might affect public support for democracy. For example, it could be that if a family member or personal friend is victimized by crime, people will register less support. Public fear of crime, not just the personal experience with crime itself, might also be important. While personal victimization is not the only crime-related factor that can theoretically be tied to public support for democracy and its norms, it is an important place to start. If victimization is tied to attitudes towards democratic governance, high levels of crime could lead to lead people to endorse undemocratic means to fight crime.

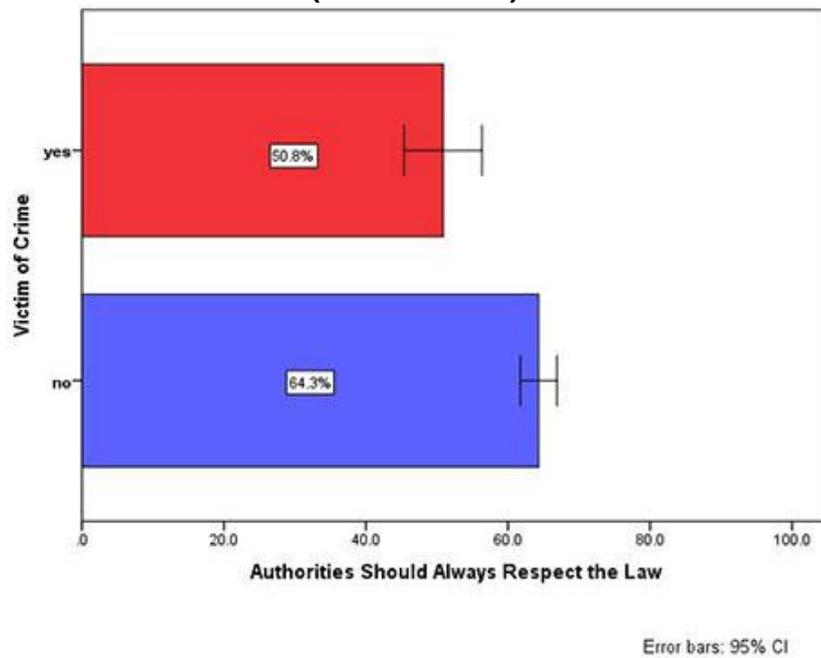
### *Support for Democracy as the Best Form of Government*

The first ANOVA analysis examines public support for democracy. Democracy is stable when it is “the only game in town.” When citizens agree

that democracy is the best form of government (despite its many problems) they demonstrate a commitment to democratic governance and a rejection of alternative types of rule. In contrast, if citizens are not completely committed to democratic governance and willing to entertain other types of governance, the political system could be at risk. Political instability can result when citizens do not unequivocally endorse democratic governance.

To measure the amount of support democratic rule generates in Honduras, respondents were asked how much they agree with the following statement: *“Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?”* Responses ranged from a low of one to a high of seven. Figure 10 compares the average responses between those who reported being victimized by crime in the past year, and those who did not. As Figure 11 demonstrates, there is no significant difference between these two groups. Victims of crime registered identical levels of support for democracy as non-victims. In both cases, support for democracy was slightly above the midpoint of the scale.

**Figure 11: Support for Democracy as the Best Form of Government by Victimization (LAPOP 2012)**

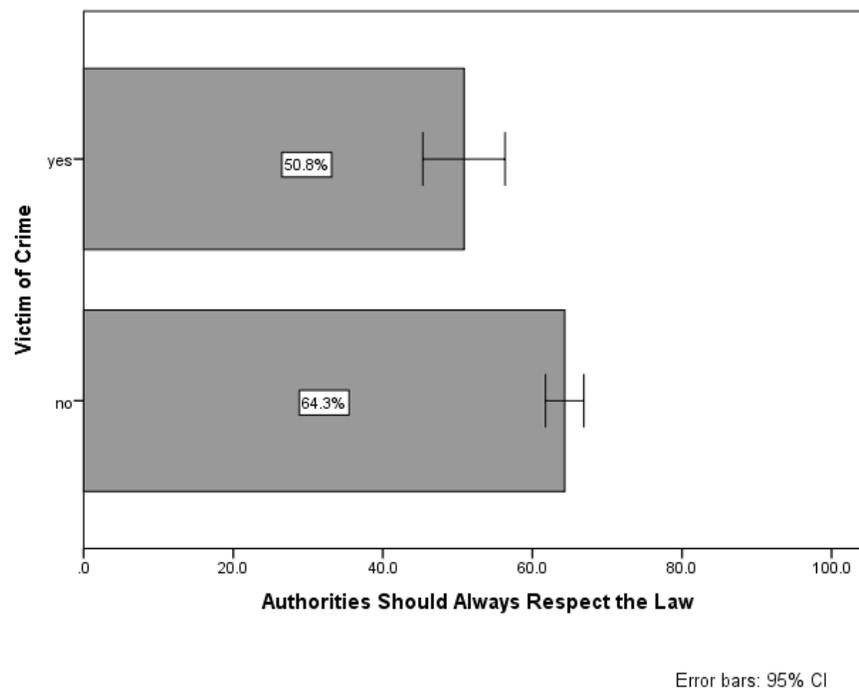


*Support for the Rule of Law*

In addition to assessing support for democracy, it is also imperative to explore citizens' attitudes towards specific components of democratic governance. Citizens might endorse the "name brand" of democracy, but support for some of its individual components might be more tepid. This analysis turns to examine support for a key component of democracy: the rule of law. In order for a country to be democratic, the law should be upheld equally for all citizens, and should effectively regulate relationships among citizens and between citizens and their governments. While the rule of law is a fundamental component of democracy, it has proven to be a particularly weak link in many Latin American democracies, particularly Honduras. High rates of crime may tempt citizens to disregard some democratic norms when they are viewed as cumbersome. Indeed, today there are numerous examples of police, military, and paramilitary groups sanctioning suspected criminals extra-judicially (Cruz 2008, Ungar 2009).

To examine citizens' respect for the law, LAPOP included a question measuring citizens' willingness to allow authorities greater leeway to pursue suspected criminals, and act on the margins of the law: "In order to catch criminals, do you believe that the authorities should always abide by the law or that occasionally they can cross the line?" Responses were answered dichotomously: (1) should always abide by the law (0) occasionally can cross the line. This dichotomous variable was transformed to a 0-100 scale.

**Figure 12: Respect for the Law by Victimization (LAPOP 2012)**



As Figure 12 demonstrates, people who report being victimized by crime in the past year do register significantly lower levels of respect for the rule of law. On average, 50.8% of victims said that authorities should always respect the law, compared to 64.3% of those who had not reported victimization. This 13.5% difference is statistically significant, and indicates that the crime epidemic can chip away at public support for the rule of law, a cornerstone of democratic governance.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a macro level overview of crime and corruption in Honduras, as well as citizen evaluations of these national trends. Crime and corruption have plagued democratic governance in Honduras over the past decade, but as Figure 1 demonstrated, the magnitude of the crime crisis has increased exponentially since 2006. Honduras now reports the highest homicide rates in the world, and survey respondents indicate that they do not think the government is doing a good job at confronting the crisis. Both the military and private security forces have been tapped to bolster police forces, but these “quick fixes” are not foolproof. Oversight mechanisms for these supplemental forces are not firmly in place, and there is the potential for civil liberties and human rights to become casualties of *mano dura* crackdowns on crime.

At the same time, this analysis of 2012 survey data indicates that fearful citizens might endorse the suspension of some democratic liberties in the name of fighting crime. While personal experiences with crime did not lead people to turn away from democracy as a form of government, it does appear to have dampened support for the rule of law. This is a troubling finding for a struggling democracy, particularly as international organizations have expressed concern about respect for human rights in the ongoing battle against crime. Furthermore, the track record of *mano dura* approaches to fighting crime is far from clear – despite a series of crackdowns, murder rates have continued to rise since 2005.

This analysis has concentrated on the micro level, examining citizen evaluations of crime and governance. While this analysis has found that personal experience with crime can reduce support for the rule of law, this of course is not the only way in which crime could have an impact on democratic governance. There are several ways that crime could affect democracy at the macro level, for example. If the militarization of anti-crime crusades results in human rights violations, such incidents obviously undermine the quality of democracy. Furthermore, anti-crime campaigns might monopolize the resources of the state, rendering it less able to respond to the other needs of its

citizens. This examination of the relationship between crime and democratic governance at the macro level is an important area for future research.

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Mary Fran T. Malone is an associate professor in the department of political science at the University of New Hampshire. Her research focuses on the rule of law, examining the impact of the current crime epidemic on citizens' evaluations of their justice systems and support for the rule of law. Her most recent book, *The Rule of Law in Central America*, examines how Central American countries abandoned civil war and dictatorship in favor of democracy in the 1990s, and whether this step is threatened by the current crime crisis. Prof. Malone is currently working on a second monograph, *Confronting Crime without Undermining Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*, which examines how some Latin American countries have successfully reformed their police and justice systems.

#### Notes

1. These headlines are from the BBC (2011), Miami Herald (2012), and New York Times (2012) respectively.
2. The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University is directed by Prof. Mitchell Seligson, and receives support from the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, and the Inter-American Development Bank. For over three decades, LAPOP has conducted interviews to gauge political attitudes and behaviors throughout the Latin American region. Information concerning sampling, as well as reports using the LAPOP data are available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>.
3. For a clear and concise overview of the events of the 2009 coup, see Seligson and Booth (2009).
4. According to the 2012 LAPOP survey of the other Central American countries and Mexico, Honduras ranked third just behind Mexico and Guatemala, which had victimization rates of 23.1% and 20.9% respectively.
5. The survey question read: "Thinking of the last crime of which you were a victim, from the list I am going to read to you, what kind of crime was it?"
6. It is interesting to note that trust in the justice system more broadly is slightly more positive than evaluations of the justice system specifically in the area of punishing guilty parties (as a comparison between Figures 5 and 6 indicates).
7. According to a Pearson's correlation, there is a significant and negative relationship between the solicitation of a bribe and trust in the police more broadly.
8. Given the typically lower levels of contact between the public and the military, the bribery rate of 11% reported in Figure 7 is quite high.
9. To calculate significance, ANOVA compares the variance between two or more groups, and then determines whether this variance is greater than the variance within each group. If the variance between groups (i.e., between victims and non-victims) is significantly greater than the variance within the groups (i.e., the variance within the victim group and the variance within the non-victim group), we can conclude that these two groups do indeed register different outcomes on the selected indicator (e.g., support for democracy).



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