

Preventing Gun Violence in the Americas: Challenges and Paths to Solutions



Graphic by Silvia Minguzzi

2020 Webinar Series Monograph

The Network for the Prevention of Gun Violence in the Americas

December 17, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Background: Recent reports indicate that the global burden of gun violence accounts for more than 250,000 deaths worldwide, and half of these deaths occur in just six countries – all in the Americas. This public health and humanitarian crisis have significant challenges, requiring multiple policies and program approaches for making our respective nations healthy and safe. For decades now, gun-related violence has been an ongoing problem that alarmingly increases every year, thus being an epidemic that needs to be given attention through three main approaches: awareness, action, and advocacy. Gun violence is a 21st century disease of modern societies. In this vector-borne disease of violence, guns - mainly coming from the USA- are the main agent.

Given the multiplicity of challenges that must be addressed with urgency, an effort to create a group devoted to advocate and raise awareness of this critical burden was initiated for the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) 2019 annual conference in Chicago, Illinois. This group was convened initially by Dr. Stephen Hargarten of the Medical College of Wisconsin, Dr. Arturo Cervantes of Anahuac University Mexico, Jeremy Biddle of Metropolitan Peace Institute, and Andres Villaveces of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Along with representatives from the Heartland Alliance, Global Cities, the University of Chicago Crime Lab, and the City of Medellin Colombia they presented a breakout session on “Gun Violence in the Americas” on March 10, 2019. The panel sought to build on the public health model of addressing gun violence by highlighting innovation and evidenced-based anti-violence approaches. Obtaining positive feedback from the presentation, additional experts and organizations were invited to this original group and together, they planned a daylong conference in Washington, DC for April 2020 in alignment with CUGH’s 2020 annual conference.

When the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic forced the 2020 conferences’ cancellation, the group organized instead a series of individual virtual webinars. Building on the broad public health and humanitarian interest in this tragic burden, the series of webinars were planned and executed from the spring through fall of 2020, virtually hosted by the group’s professional affiliations and organizations. The webinar series covered diverse perspectives with multiple experts from across the Americas to discuss gun violence, gun trafficking, and their impact in Mexico and Central America. The webinars themes were threaded with a focus on bullets and the guns that carry them.

The purpose of this monograph is to summarize the Network for the Prevention of Gun Violence in the Americas’ 2020 webinar series. The webinar series highlighted the global burden of gun violence and impacted populations. It sought to frame gun violence as a public health, humanitarian, trade, and security issue. The series reviewed the policy suggestions, intervention recommendations, ways to improve systems and to adopt new approaches to reduce gun violence in the Americas.

On June 10, 2020, this group formally established themselves as *the [Network to Prevent Gun Violence in the Americas](#)* with a purpose to bring awareness of the global small arms trade and to frame gun violence as a public health issue. It was formed to bring together arms trade specialists, health professionals, human rights advocates, and violence prevention activists to focus on current and future challenges, find solutions, and undertake advocacy efforts to address gun violence in Mexico and Central America. The current *Network to Prevent Gun Violence in the Americas* affiliated organizations include: Anahuac University; Center for American Progress; Consortium of Universities for Global Health; Forum on the Arms Trade; Giffords Law Center; Global Exchange / Stop US Arms to Mexico project; Medical College of Wisconsin Office of Global Health; Metropolitan Peace Institute; Newtown Action Alliance; and Stimson Center.

DEVELOPMENT

Webinar Series: A series of webinars in 2020 highlighted whether through illegal channels or through legal exports, the flow of U.S. guns has an impact on security and stability in Mexico and Central American countries. Often under-examined is how these weapons affect violence against vulnerable populations. At the webinars, experts discussed how populations in these countries face unique risks and challenges related to gun violence while also identifying policies and actions to address them. The webinars reached a wide global audience, with participation from around the World including Austria, Australia, Belize, Brazil, Columbia, El Salvador, Germany, Mexico, United Kingdom, and the United States of America (U.S).

Table 1. Date, theme, host, and number of participants of The Network for the Prevention of Gun Violence in the Americas’ 2020 Webinar Series

Date	Webinar Theme	Institutional Host	Views
March 24	"Gun Violence in the Americas: Focus Mexico"	Consortium of Universities of Global Health	124
April 21	" Gun Violence in Mexico and Central America: Facing the Challenges and the Path to Solutions"	Center for American Progress	133
May 14	"Arms Trafficking in the Americas"	Stimson Center	185
May 28	"National Strategies to Address the Flow and Use of Firearms in Mesoamerica"	Global Exchange	2K
June 25	"Flow of U.S. Guns and Violence Against Women in Mexico and Central America"	Center for American Progress	102
July 9	"Assault Weapon Bans in the Americas"	Newtown Action Alliance	132
July 16	"Gun violence in the Americas: Local Solutions to a Hemispheric Challenge"	Consortium of Universities for Global Health	123
August 3	"The shooting in El Paso and the control of arms trafficking in Mexico"	Global Exchange	7K
September 26	"German weapons and the Ayotzinapa case"	Global Exchange	3K

March 24, 2020 Gun Violence in the Americas: Focus Mexico

Hosted by the Consortium of Universities of Global Health and moderated by Keith Martin, the Consortium’s Executive Director, this webinar focused on gun violence as a public health crisis – one which can be addressed by governments using the same methods as they would address epidemics. Three panelists were brought in to discuss their expertise relating to the issue of gun violence in the Americas, with particular attention given to Mexico.

First, Dr. Stephen Hargarten of the Medical College of Wisconsin spoke about why gun violence must be considered a public health crisis, and how the same methods of tracing and rooting out causes and cures can be employed. A public health approach enables us to identify the agents, vectors, environments, and hosts affected by gun violence – much like how one would study the cause and cure for a disease.

Dr. Hargarten concluded by calling for governments to hunker down and find the solution to treat the disease of gun violence, just as they are with COVID-19.

Second, Natalia Báez presented her work with the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights on increased militarization and human rights abuses in Mexico. In 2006, the Mexican government initiated a “war on drugs,” resulting in the arming of state and local police forces and leading to the increased transfer of firearms to criminal organizations. Military deployment in public security has steadily increased over the years: between 2006 and 2019, over 650,000 army and 115,000 navy personnel were tasked with supporting police to supposedly combat drug trafficking. Furthermore, a staggering 99.3% of crimes in Mexico are not investigated, and an extremely high impunity rate allows perpetrators to walk free. To confront the crisis, Báez recommends demilitarizing public security, imposing criteria for end-users of legally exported firearms, implementing efficient tracing mechanisms, and reducing legal firearm exports to Mexico – particularly from the United States – to the significantly lower levels seen before the war on drugs began.

Third, John Lindsay-Poland from the Stop U.S. Arms to Mexico Project discussed the illegal flow of firearms to Mexico from the United States. U.S. border control tends to focus on items or persons traveling north rather than south. As a result, it is relatively easy to move firearms from the U.S. to Mexico. Indeed, about 70% of firearms collected from crime scenes in Mexico were U.S.-made – and about 41% of that 70% came from Texas. Additionally, as Báez also discussed, increased militarization has led to an uptick in Mexican demand for assault weapons, more so than handguns. Assault weapons are relatively easy to procure in Texas and can oftentimes be bought and sold without a license at gun shows. The increased demand for military-grade firearms has also driven demand for high-capacity magazines, over 112,000 of which have been recovered from Mexican crime scenes since 2011. Lindsay-Poland argues that a federal ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines by the U.S. government would slow down the legal transfers of such weapons and limit violence against vulnerable populations – particularly migrants along the border.

In the discussion portion of the webinar, the three experts emphasized again the importance of recognizing gun violence as a public health crisis and allocating the appropriate resources to treat it as such. Báez also discussed the need for a perspective shift, and a recognition that combating gun violence through militarization in fact serves the opposite purpose. This requires resolve from all governments involved – particularly, in this instance, the U.S. and Mexican governments.

Event replay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtV-FWGCD8A&feature=emb_logo

April 21, 2020 Gun Violence in Mexico and Central America: Facing the Challenges and the Path to Solutions"

Focusing on the challenges and possible solutions to gun violence, this webinar, hosted by the Center for American Progress, convened a panel of experts to discuss the lasting humanitarian and human security issues in Mexico and Central America as a result of gun violence, perpetuated by domestic U.S. firearms exports. Moderator Rachel Stohl, Vice President at the Stimson Center, began the discussion by introducing the panelists, who each presented on relevant aspects of the topic.

John Lindsay-Poland, Coordinator of the Stop U.S. Arms to Mexico Project, began by covering how firearms get to Mexico from the U.S. – both legally and illegally. He noted two important things to frame the conversation: 1) the Leahy Laws prohibit the provision of American assistance to international human rights violators, but do not apply to arms sales; and 2) the transfer of oversight of gun exports

from the State Department to the Commerce Department in March 2020 has resulted in less implementation of protocols for end users. In Mexico, the only institution capable of distributing firearms is the army. Federal, state, and local police forces are therefore all purchasing guns from the army, and some have been implicated in human rights abuses. Additionally, police forces do not have adequate infrastructure to prevent firearms from being lost or stolen. For example, of the 4,000 firearms sold to Guerrero state police between 2010 and 2016, 20% were lost or stolen. Lindsay Poland then elaborated on the ease with which parties can smuggle firearms across the U.S. border. Because U.S. border control is more concerned with movement north, anything or anyone traveling south is subject to less scrutiny. As a result, between 2013 and 2018, 70% of recovered firearms from crime scenes in Mexico originated from the U.S.

Eugenio Weigend, the Associate Director for Gun Violence Prevention at the Center for American Progress, then discussed how U.S. policy can respond to these issues. To drive home the fact that this is not just a Mexican issue, Weigend expanded on how the rising rates of gun homicides in Mexico correspond with the rates of gun production in and exports from the U.S. Between 2004 and 2017, the percentage of gun homicides in Mexico rose from 25% to 66%. To contextualize his policy recommendations, Weigend also noted that not only would these policies reduce gun trafficking in Mexico but would also reduce gun violence in the U.S. He suggested increasing access to data related to U.S.-manufactured guns being recovered from crime scenes in other countries, banning assault weapons in the U.S. (again), implementing universal background checks, preventing efforts to weaken oversight of arms exports, implementing policies to reduce lost/stolen gun rates, regulating ammunition sales, mandating reporting of multiple sales of long guns, and creating oversight of the American gun industry.

Following Weigend's discussion of what the U.S. can do to reduce gun violence, Lauren Carlsen – Director of the Americas Program – provided a more in-depth look into how the war on drugs feeds into the cycle of gun production, sales and violence. American attempts to promote the rule of law in Mexico and more strictly enforce border controls have had the opposite effect – drugs continue to flow, criminal organizations flourish, and gun violence is rampant. Without the necessary health, economic, and drug policy reforms, the implications of increased militarization are harmful to Mexican and Central American citizens. A new model is needed – one that takes into account the human toll of firearms proliferation.

During the discussion, the panelists discussed the key challenges to implementing policy reforms in the U.S. Besides the impact of COVID-19 on government decisions, there are three main issues confronting those trying to lobby for legislative change: the influence of the gun industry, white supremacy and the culture of 'us versus them,' and the dependency Mexico already has on the U.S. Also, there needs to be a concerted effort to trace not only the guns, but the money – this would be, as Carlsen noted, critical in reducing the power of organized crime and corruption. To end on a positive note, panelists spoke about the success that civil society organizations have had in working together to enact local reforms, as well as the power that victims organizations have in influencing policies. As we look forward, the change we seek to reduce gun violence internationally and within the U.S. will be brought about by committed individuals willing to push the relevant governments and stakeholders.

Event replay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F3pERLA-aE&feature=emb_logo

May 14, 2020 Arms Trafficking in the Americas

Hosted by the Stimson Center, this webinar focused on illicit arms trafficking between the U.S., Mexico, and Central America. Moderator Rachel Stohl, Vice President at the Stimson Center, began the discussion by noting that the illicit arms trade is a significant and often poorly understood aspect of the global arms trade, and affects every country around the world.

Panelist Kristen Rand, Legislative Director of the Violence Policy Center, discussed the types of firearms that are often involved in illicit trafficking between the U.S. and Mexico, drawing from 183 federal cross-border gun trafficking prosecutions. The Center's research has revealed that the types of weapons in greatest demand by nefarious actors are assault rifles, assault pistols, and high capacity standard pistols. Especially attractive to traffickers are variations of AK- and AR-type rifles. Additionally, an important aspect of firearms trafficking is the role of straw purchasers – people with clean backgrounds who legally buy weapons from licensed gun dealers, only to turn around and sell to people who cannot purchase weapons themselves. Essentially, traffickers have figured out how to bypass background checks with relative ease.

Matt Schroeder, Senior Researcher with the Small Arms Survey, then explained that in addition to firearms, traffickers often smuggle improvised grenade components, grenade launchers, and machine guns. Schroeder also provided more insight into the methods used in smuggling weapons from the U.S. to Mexico. Modes of transport range from cars to commercial airliners and maritime shipping. At times, pedestrians will attempt to walk across the border with the trafficked items. Traffickers may also employ more elaborate means of avoiding detection by the authorities – for example, by falsifying sales and shipping documents, using aliases or stolen identities, obliterating serial numbers, and transporting shipments through different ports of exit. Finally, Schroeder spoke about the Small Arms Survey's work advocating for increased transparency from governments. Civil society does an excellent job of compiling data, but it is oftentimes inconsistent and/or incomplete because of the lack of available information.

Next, William Kullman, formerly with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, spoke about the domestic challenges to reducing illicit arms trafficking from U.S. The U.S. is the largest producer and consumer of firearms; each year, the U.S. produces eight to ten million firearms and imports an additional four million. Because export controls limit firearms exports from the U.S. to half a million, the surplus of firearms in the country increases substantially each year. This surplus, combined with insufficient trafficking regulations, has facilitated widespread, oftentimes intricate arms smuggling from the U.S. to Mexico. However, Kullman also highlighted some recent, positive developments that have contributed to arms trafficking mitigation. For example, eTrace, a system that facilitates electronic tracing of firearms based on markings that are required to be placed on a weapon during its manufacture, has allowed authorities to trace a weapon's chain of custody and identify trafficking routes.

Following the panelists' presentations, Stohl facilitated a discussion of the potential implications of the shift in firearms export oversight from the State Department to the Commerce Department, as well as the impact COVID-19 may be having on the trafficking business. While it is too soon to answer either question definitively, COVID-19 presumably has created new challenges for arms traffickers – although, as Rand noted, demand for firearms has gone up during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the transfer of oversight of firearms exports to the Commerce Department may imply a lesser concern for nonproliferation efforts, as Commerce is in the business of promoting American products abroad, not restricting their sale.

Event replay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=102&v=s5lxEeflxP4&feature=emb_logo

May 28, 2020 National Strategies to Address the Flow and Use of Guns in Mesoamerica

This webinar, hosted by Global Exchange and moderated by Suhayla Bazbaz, Founder and Director General of Community Cohesion and Social Innovation, brought together a panel of five experts to

discuss the impacts of gun violence in Mexico and Central America, with particular focus on the national strategies that should be adopted by individual countries to reduce the flow and use of weapons in the region. The first speaker was Natalia Báez, who conducts research for the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Protection of Human Rights. Báez discussed the effects of militarization in Mexico with respect to the legal and illegal trafficking of firearms. To illustrate the severity of the issue and how deeply involved the U.S. is, Báez stated that more than \$35 million in firearms, components, and ammunition were exported from the U.S. to Mexico in 2019. This coincides with increased militarization as a result of the war on drugs, beginning in 2006. Furthermore, annual rates of firearms being lost or stolen have risen, creating a higher risk that said weapons will enter the illicit trade.

Arturo Cervantes of Anahuac University then provided insights into the staggering levels of gun violence in Mexico over the last two decades. Referring to gun violence as an epidemic, Cervantes showed several graphs indicating the upward trends in homicide and suicide rates involving guns. Additionally, he showed the correlation with increased firearm imports from the U.S. following the beginning of the war on drugs. In 2015, gun homicide was the number one killer for people between 29 and 25 years old – an age group that is especially necessary in growing the economy. More than 20 million crimes were committed with firearms in Mexico in 2019 alone. In his final few statements, Cervantes powerfully stated that the U.S. “floods the world with guns,” therefore contributing to the public health crisis of gun violence.

Following Báez and Cervantes, the three other panelists quickly presented their thoughts on national policies that can be adopted in the region to combat the issue of gun violence. Montserrat Martinez of 24/0 Hours Without Violence in Mexico touched on the importance of local level reforms – namely creating safe environments for common victims of gun violence, creating public records of offenders, and opening dialogue with civil society to advise on executing reforms. Mark Ungar from the City University of New York followed with recommendations for Honduras, which currently has the third highest homicide rate in the world. In addition to criminal justice reform, Ungar recommends that a civil registration process be implemented so as to more accurately trace weapons, improve ballistic investigative techniques at crime scenes, and exercise greater oversight over the legal arms market. However, simply instituting laws will not making a difference alone – there have to be reforms at all levels of society in order to create a safer environment for all Hondurans.

The last panelist, Suchita Chávez, a journalist with Periodista, further examined the legal arms market in El Salvador and Guatemala. Homicide rates in both countries have gone up since the war on drugs began in Mexico, and in correspondence with increased gun exports to the region from the U.S. In order to mitigate these issues, stronger attention must be given to arms trafficking: end-user verification must be mandatory and evenly applied; arms exports and imports data must be publicly available; civilian oversight over the arms industry must be imposed, to avoid a conflict of interest involving military leaders; and criminal justice reform must be implemented to lower the levels of impunity.

In the concluding discussion, each panelist clarified issues from their presentations. To conclude, Cervantes provided his reflections: that gun violence is a systemic problem – one that requires “systemic therapy” in order to see results. The problem so many governments have is that they do not employ the right methods to mitigate gun violence, because it is never considered a public health issue. Should this diagnosis be taken seriously, and governments proceed by solving the problem scientifically, the disease can be cured.

Event replay:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1648&v=d7B2L_0t5o&feature=emb_logo

June 25, 2020 Flow of U.S. Guns and Violence Against Women in Mexico and Central

Hosted by the Center for American Progress, this webinar took a deeper dive into how the flow of American guns into Mexico and Central America contributes to gender-based violence (GBV) in the region. Moderator Rukmani Bhatia described the event as a discussion on arms trafficking, U.S.-Mexico relations, and gender issues in the region.

Giada Greco, a Crime Statistics Technician with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, began by discussing statistics on firearm violence in the Americas and what they mean for efforts to mitigate GBV. Greco explained that firearms are more often involved in homicides in the Americas than they are in any other part of the world. The three main factors impacting firearm homicide rates are income inequality, the proportion of youth among the general population, and the rate of civilian-held firearms per person. And while a majority of intentional homicide victims are male, most victims of intimate partner or family-related homicides are female. Greco asserted that, based on recent trends, there are no signs of a decrease in the number of gender-related killings of women and girls. To combat this, cultural norms enforcing violent masculinity and gender stereotypes need to change. Furthermore, regional and sub-regional analyses have highlighted the outsized role that firearms play in contributing to high rates of homicides. It is therefore imperative to undertake serious efforts to stop the illegal firearms trade in order to mitigate the harm it causes.

Estefania Vela Barba, Executive Director of Intersecta, continued by providing more specific statistics relating to GBV in Mexico. Vela Barba began by pointing out an important fact. In order to talk about violence against women in Mexico, one must also talk about gun violence – the two are linked. Homicide rates in Mexico had been decreasing for years, reaching a record low in 2007. However, in subsequent years – and coinciding with the beginning of the war on drugs – homicide rates exploded. Between 2007 and 2018, approximately 272,000 people were killed. Men remain more likely to be the victims of homicide than women; since 2007, homicides targeting men rose 234%, while homicides against women rose 170%. However, what Vela Barba highlights is the differences in how women are killed versus men. For example, one in three women are killed in the home, compared to just one in ten men. It is also more likely for men to be killed in public (six in ten) than women (four in ten) – though the number of women killed in public has risen substantially since 2007. Additionally, it is more common for women to be killed by asphyxiation or by blunt objects than by a firearm. Still, there is no question that when it comes to firearm homicides, the gender gap is closing – today, seven out of every ten men and six out of every ten women killed in Mexico are killed by firearms.

Following this discussion of recent trends in Mexico, Ana Yancy Espinoza shifted the focus to arms trafficking in Central America, a region that is especially vulnerable to arms trafficking because of its location, porous borders, and limited national capacities for control and monitoring. Most firearms in circulation on the street are unregistered, and more than 50% have been supplied by the U.S. in some way. The U.S. also has an influence in the region through the National Rifle Association, which played a direct role in getting Brazil to reject a referendum that would have banned the sale of firearms and ammunition to civilians. Espinoza then stated that women represent somewhere between 7 to 17% of armed violence victims in Central America, and that small arms and light weapons are involved in at least 70% of homicides and 80% of other crimes. In closing, she emphasized that firearms are lethal even when they are not fired; they are instruments of death and injury, but are also used to promote submission, deliver threats, and perpetrate psychological violence. Firearms represent an overwhelming mechanism of control and power over women's lives.

Cecilia Farfán-Mendez, of the Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies at the University of California San Diego, then presented her thoughts on existing problems and possible solutions in U.S.-Mexico cooperation. She reiterated that gun control is an issue for both the U.S. and Mexico, and that it is therefore in both countries' interest to do something about it. But bilateral communication and policy coordination is complicated by the fact that there is no Mexican equivalent to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. Additionally, American federalism means that there are different regulations in different border states. While California is at the forefront in implementing robust gun controls, Texas – the state with the most land bordering Mexico – has few controls on who can purchase weapons. Farfán-Mendez's recommendations for the U.S. government include improved monitoring of north-south traffic by U.S. border control and sharing with Mexico information obtained through monitoring bulk purchases. She also recommended that advocacy groups take advantage of federalism by pursuing reforms at the local level, where there is potential to enact real change. What Mexico can do is to continue working with European exporters to monitor and trace European-origin weapons, take up leadership roles in multilateral working groups to help mobilize stakeholders, and attempt to use federalism to its advantage. Not all changes have to be made in Mexico City or Washington – much of the difference is made when people mobilize locally.

In the brief concluding discussion, panelists once again emphasized that violence against women in Mexico and Central America is intrinsically linked to gun violence, which in turn is directly linked to the U.S. In order to reduce rates of GBV in the region, we must take a step back and analyze the flow of U.S. weapons.

Event replay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR7o8mWY928&feature=emb_logo

July 9, 2020 Assault Weapon Bans in the Americas

This webinar, hosted and moderated by Newtown Action Alliance's Po Murray, focused on assault weapons and their lethality, as well as the impact of weak U.S. gun policies on the Western hemisphere and actions that can be taken to mitigate these impacts. Murray began the panel by defining assault weapons as: 1) any semiautomatic rifle or handgun that accepts a detachable magazine and has at least one military feature; 2) any semiautomatic rifle or handgun with a fixed magazine that accepts more than 10 rounds; 3) any semiautomatic shotgun with one of the following characteristics: detachable magazine, revolving cylinder, fixed magazine that accepts more than five rounds, or includes at least one military feature; or 4) any semiautomatic firearm. Murray went on to discuss the impact of the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban (AWB), which expired in 2004. During the 10-year period of the ban, gun massacres fell substantially. Since the ban expired, they have increased and contributed to a 347% increase in fatalities. Murray also noted that there is no federal registry of the between 15 and 20 million assault weapons circulation in the U.S. These weapons are banned in seven states and in Washington, DC, while large-capacity magazines or ammunition-feeding devices are banned in nine states and in DC. No substantive federal gun legislation has been passed since the 1994 AWB.

Dr. Stephen Hargarten of the Medical College of Wisconsin then discussed the damage that a bullet fired from an assault rifle does to human tissue. While a normal bullet does extensive damage, an assault rifle bullet practically explodes upon impact with human tissue due to the sheer amount of force with which it enters the body. To further demonstrate the lethality of assault weapons, Hargarten used the example of Sandy Hook, where 26 people – including 20 children – were killed in a mass shooting. The shooter unloaded 154 bullets in less than four minutes, which is equivalent to the number of bullets that would have been fired if approximately 19 militiamen stormed Sandy Hook in the late 1780s.

Following Dr. Hargarten, Manuel Oliver shared his story with the panel. Manuel's son, Joaquin, was one of the 17 people killed in the February 2018 mass shooting in Parkland, Florida. As an immigrant from Venezuela, Manuel is no stranger to gun violence. However, he distinguished gun violence in his home country from gun violence in the U.S. due to the power of the American gun industry, and the fact that it could be your neighbor that is harboring guns, unbeknownst to you or the authorities. Manuel is also the founder of Change the Ref, an organization dedicated to raising awareness of the devastating impact of assault weapons and promoting legislation to ban them.

Eugenio Weigend, Associate Director for Gun Violence Prevention at the Center for American Progress, followed by elaborating on how U.S. guns contribute to violent crimes abroad – specifically in Mexico. Statistics show that American gun ownership is increasing, and that the volume of the U.S. firearms trade is enormous. Between 1994 and 2015, Americans purchased 70 million guns. During the same time period, the U.S. produced or imported 156 million guns. Meanwhile, homicide rates have risen in Mexico. In 2004, the year the AWB expired, 25% of homicides involved a gun. By 2017, it had risen to 66%. Weigend recommends that when analyzing the U.S. gun industry, one has to consider international markets as well. Furthermore, the U.S. must acknowledge its shared responsibility in reducing gun violence in the region while Mexico and Central America address internal factors contributing to violence. The two policies that would have the most effect in mitigating harm now would be for the U.S. to ban assault weapons and high capacity magazines and institute universal background checks.

A recorded presentation from Philip Alpers, the Director of GunPolicy.org, discussed assault weapons bans and gun legislation in other countries, and what the U.S. can do to follow suit. First, he introduced a statistic from the Small Arms Survey: 1 billion firearms are in circulation around the world, and 86% of them are in civilian hands. The rate of civilian firearm ownership is highest in the U.S. Alpers, like Dr. Hargarten, described gun violence as a disease, stating that “guns are to gun violence as the mosquito is to malaria.” Additionally, he argued that Americans have already tested and proven solutions to address pandemics, either in the sense of disease or conflict. An example he used was in reducing motor vehicle deaths, where the U.S. led the way in imposing seatbelt mandates, licensing all drivers, and registering all vehicles. By doing so, motor vehicle accidents were significantly reduced. Moreover, registering vehicles did not make them unavailable – rather, it made it more of a financial and moral responsibility to own and operate one. Alpers argues that if this can be the case with cars, then certainly the U.S. can regulate guns – because it has the capacity to do so.

Dr. Kyleann Hunter – a veteran of the Marine Corps, a Brady Fellow, and a professor at the Air Force Academy – then explained why assault weapons, as weapons of war, should not be in civilian hands. Modern assault weapons are designed, as requested by the Department of the Defense, to be lightweight, easily maneuverable, and easy to reload – and therefore easier to target others. Additionally, they were designed with the intent to pierce an enemy soldier's helmet from 300 yards away. Therefore, in terms of home defense, an assault weapon is simply not necessary. Bullets are unlikely to find their targets and are likely to put neighbors at risk. Hunter emphasized that while assault weapons make up a minority of guns owned by Americans, they have an outsized impact on death rates due to their use in mass shootings. Quelling the supply by instituting an assault weapons ban would reduce firearm deaths, not only in the U.S. but in the long list of countries where American-made guns are used.

Finally, Eve Levenson, a student at George Washington University and the Policy and Government Affairs Manager for March for Our Lives, discussed avenues for change in the U.S. Levenson and Murray emphasized the importance of education; the majority of the American population support limiting access to assault weapons, but many believe it would infringe on their 2nd Amendment right to bear arms. This is not the case. Additionally, Levenson spoke about the importance of voting – and in particular ensuring

that those who are most affected by gun violence (black and brown populations) are able to get to the ballot box. Murray, in her closing statements, built on this point and advocated for gun safety candidates, and stressed the importance of working with civil society to campaign for a ban on assault weapons.

Event replay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzHE8DSPpR0&feature=emb_logo

July 16, 2020 Gun violence in the Americas: Local Solutions to a Hemispheric

This webinar, hosted by the Consortium of Universities of Global Health, focused on addressing the epidemic of gun violence in cities, which have faced unprecedented surges in gun violence in recent years. According to moderator Jeremy Biddle, Executive Director of MetroPEACE, 47 of the world's 50 most violent cities are in the Americas. The panelists all presented on their efforts in cities and through organizations to bring about change on the local level to stem gun violence.

Dr. Rodrigo Guerrero, the former mayor of Cali, Colombia, presented on his experience as mayor of one of the most violent cities in Colombia, a country already heavily affected by gun violence. Guerrero's efforts to address gun violence came from identifying the contributing factors to violent behavior, including the availability of firearms, alcohol consumption, cultural norms, and organized crime. In 1993, 79% of homicides in Cali involved a firearm, and 57% of the homicide victims were found to be intoxicated. Guerrero led initiatives to limit alcohol sales in public places at night and to restrict firearm permit approvals on high-risk weekends, such as New Year's Eve. The result was a significant decrease in firearm-related mortality – a result that has spearheaded efforts to reduce gun violence in other parts of the country.

Kim Smith, Director of Programs at the University Chicago Crime Lab, presented on what the lab calls its "theory of change" – by leveraging private resources to conduct demonstration projects with the public sector, they can help the government deploy resources more effectively and humanely. Smith set the stage by showing the increase in Chicago's homicide rate between 1985 and 2016. Based on evidence that gun violence often stems from rash decisions in high-stakes situations, the Crime Lab has deduced that positive behavioral therapy encouraging kids to breathe and think before making decisions reduces violent crime arrests in youth age groups. However, in 2016, 58% of shooting victims were 18-29 years old, an age group that lacks the necessary outreach programming. To address this, READI Chicago was created to engage with hard to reach, vulnerable populations (adult men of color). The program allocates 18 months of outreach that includes cognitive behavioral therapy and career and support services. While it is too soon to know the full impact of the program, results so far show promising trends and could be a blueprint for addressing vulnerable populations in other cities.

Vaughn Crandall, Co-Director of the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC), then presented on his work in Oakland. The CPSC works to reduce serious violence, build police-community trust, and achieve better outcomes by engaging in long-term partnerships with cities. Using the "focused deterrence" framework, which focuses on the populations with highest risk, the CPSC has led long-term successful initiatives to reduce gun violence in Oakland. A universal problem that Crandall has found is that there are common misconceptions about why gun violence is so rampant. Oftentimes, people think the problem has to do with drug disputes – but in Oakland, the problem lay with specific running group/gang conflicts and personal disputes between group members. Due to the CPSC's efforts, Oakland saw a 50% reduction in shootings and homicides between 2012 and 2018. Rodrigo Canales, Crandall's colleague with the CPSC and a faculty member at the Yale School of Management, followed up with the preliminary findings of CPSC's latest efforts in Mexico City. While the general model of the project is the same as in Oakland due to similarities in the dynamics of violence, Mexico presents different issues involving the justice system, a lack of trust in institutions, corruption, impunity, and the presence of

criminal organizations. Currently, efforts are underway in Plateros, a section of Mexico City in which high levels of gun violence have been stable at about 100 homicides annually. The main challenge will be adjusting to the differences in reliability and speed in the system, a symptom of poor institutional capacity for such an endeavor. Still, while the project is in its early stages, it is making good headway in the community thus far.

Finally, Ciera Walker of Live Free Chicago brought the conversation back to the United States and addressed the roots of gun violence in Chicago. Live Free emphasizes directly working in communities to ensure the resources are there to institute the changes being discussed. Walker argued that violence is a symptom of racism and poverty, and to address those root causes one has to address the policies marginalizing black and brown communities. Live Free recommends that direct funding be targeted toward communities most impacted by gun violence. 60% of homicides in Chicago occur in the same 15 neighborhoods – funding should be directed toward those areas. Furthermore, a public strategy investing in access to mental health and employment resources to promote the economic vitality of black and brown communities, coupled with a public health model and education campaign against gun violence, could have lasting beneficial impacts. Touching on current public discourse, Walker mentioned the calls to defund the police, arguing that the re-allocation of resources is necessary to re-imagine policing.

To finish the discussion, Biddle led a short discussion allowing the panelists to give their thoughts on the recent calls for defunding the police. The panelists agree with the proposition as a long-term goal, but all stressed the importance of engaging with the police to ensure that reforms can have lasting positive effects. As Walker stated in her presentation, gun violence, as a deep wound, must be treated at the source rather than patching over it with a band-aid. The importance of countering gun violence in cities across the Americas in addition to blanket federal regulations is how this epidemic of gun violence can be treated.

Event replay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8A4an3LTCA&feature=youtu.be>

August 3, 2020 The shooting in El Paso and the control of arms trafficking in Mexico

On the one-year anniversary of the mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, which claimed 23 lives, Global Exchange hosted this webinar to discuss the importance of stemming the flow of weapons from the U.S. Fabián Medina from the Office of the Secretary of Foreign Relations in Mexico first gave a broad overview of the statistics and the damage done in both the U.S. and Mexico as a result of illegal trafficking of firearms. The violence statistics in Mexico are linked directly to firearms trafficking from the U.S.: 75% of illicit weapons being brought into Mexico come from just three U.S. states (Texas, Arizona, and California). Moreover, the U.S. arms industry accounts for \$52 billion annually, and produces about 33% of all the world's small arms and light weapons. While highlighting the issues in Mexico derived from firearms trafficking from the U.S., Medina made a point to illustrate that this is not solely a Mexican issue: in the U.S., 102 people lose their lives to an incident involving a firearm daily. Medina called on the U.S. government to work with Mexico in instituting common sense gun control measures, and in stopping the flow of weapons across the border.

Next, journalist Victoria Estrada spoke about her experience covering the El Paso shooting story, and her convictions concerning the shooter's racist motives. El Paso, being near the Mexican border, is largely populated by immigrants – the shooter did not choose the particular Walmart in this particular town for no reason. Harmful rhetoric and hatred against non-white Americans and the availability of weapons pushed the shooter to act. It is therefore necessary not only to work on long-term solutions to gun violence, but also long-term solutions to the underlying factors: racism and hatred. Picking up on

Estrada's discussion, Fernando Garcia – Director, Border Network for Human Rights in El Paso – agreed with Estrada about the access to firearms and racism pushing the shooter to act. But he took it a step further to argue that it was President Trump's unprecedented levels of harmful rhetoric targeting immigrants, particularly Mexicans, that led the shooter to believe his actions were necessary. President Trump has used racist language, condoned white supremacy throughout his time in office, and enacted inhumane immigration policies on the border (such as the separation of children policy), pouring gasoline on the fire.

Finally, following Estrada's and Garcia's conversation about the structural factors contributing to the shooting in El Paso, John Lindsay-Poland reviewed the path trafficked firearms take from the U.S. to Mexico. As Medina stated before, 75% of firearms trafficked to Mexico come from three states – of that 75%, 41% come solely from Texas. Gun shows in the U.S. are common, particularly in states with fewer regulations, and do not always conduct the appropriate background checks. And, when background checks are a factor, oftentimes a "straw purchaser" with a clean record will buy the weapons and sell to others who could not have passed the background check. Furthermore, it is incredibly easy to purchase ammunition and equipment at stores like Walmart, and it is relatively easy to smuggle weapons across the border – patrol agents are often more concerned with the movement of people north rather than the movement of contraband south. While Lindsay-Poland remains hopeful that political tides in the U.S. will lead to more gun control legislation, he acknowledged that as long as Texan gun laws remain lax, trafficking will flourish.

In the brief discussion session, panelists provided parting thoughts on their hopes for the future, their belief that the American government could be doing more, and that the El Paso shooting victims have not died in vain: their memories will be honored by the continued efforts of advocacy and civil society groups to address gun violence in the U.S. and Mexico.

Event replay: <https://youtu.be/q8En0wy2Xi8>

September 26, 2020 German Weapons and the Ayotzinapa Case

Hosted by Global Exchange, this webinar commemorated the sixth anniversary of the attacks at Ayotzinapa, which resulted in 43 students being forcibly disappeared. The 2014 attack was carried out by criminal organizations that colluded with police forces in the region, all with weapons originating from Germany. Moderator Sara San Martin Romero began by acknowledging the anniversary of the tragic event. Sofia de Robina, a lawyer with the International Human Rights Center, represents the family of one of the casualties of the Ayotzinapa attacks. Robina elaborated on the ongoing investigation, which shows the extent of police collusion in the incident. Evidence was tampered with or removed before investigations could begin, leading to the issues that have arisen over the years in convicting those responsible. Families continue to push not only the Mexican government, but also the German arms producers and exporters.

Investigative filmmaker Daniel Harrich discussed how he became involved in bringing perpetrators to justice through research involved in his films. In his initial foray into the illegal arms market, Harrich's perceptions were that there would be evil Russian brokers, Arab middlemen, and wars in Africa. When he actually got involved in investigations, he realized his assumptions were incredibly biased – and he was further surprised by Germany's role in the arms trade as one of the world's top producers of weapons. While abroad doing research, Harrich was contacted about German weapons being used in the Ayotzinapa case – and his work in uncovering the truth around the circumstances has contributed to the information now available to families of victims.

Wolf-Dieter Vogel, a German journalist based in Mexico, spoke about German complicity in the Ayotzinapa case. Vogel argued that German (and American) export controls are “not worth the paper they are written on” – meaning that they are inherently flawed. He also noted that there has been no punishment for the specific German arms exporters involved in the case, even with the lethal consequences of the industry on full display for the German government and public. In his closing comments, Vogel emphasized the complicity of the American, German, and Mexican governments in the Ayotzinapa case, and advocated for the institution of more regulation and oversight.

In a brief discussion session, Robina discussed how the Mexican authorities originally refused to commit, instead choosing to present false information to the public. However, the current government has committed to the process, creating a commission for justice – as a result, more arrests have been made and more investigations have been conducted. Still, more information is needed. Furthermore, as Vogel and Harrich added, improved transparency is vital – not only from the government, but also between civil society organizations and journalists, to make it easier to connect the dots in the supply and demand chain of illicit networks. Sara San Martin Romero ended the panel by emphasizing the need for continued efforts in bringing the perpetrators of Ayotzinapa to justice and calling on governments to make more responsible decisions in regulating their arms exports, to avoid the lethal consequences.

Event replay: <https://fb.watch/1BezMZrGsz/>

CONCLUSION

Looking ahead: The *Network to Prevent Gun Violence in the Americas'* webinar series has developed an educational initiative that focuses on building awareness of gun violence in the region. The webinars have highlighted the demand and need for the Network's continued awareness raising. Civil society, particularly in countries intimately impacted by arms trafficking and violence is crucial to the work of the Network and to developing pragmatic policy solutions.

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic requires flexibility in the convening of events. Virtual webinars provide a useful platform for convening civil society organizations from around the world. In light of the successful webinar series in 2020, the Network will plan additional virtual events in 2021.

The Network is also committed to producing research papers on relevant issues related to arms trafficking in the Americas. Forthcoming papers include defining the scope and burden of gun violence in the Americas, with a focus on Mexico and Central America; a focus on the gun industry, with particular attention to the United States; recommendations to reduce the flow of guns to unauthorized users, with a specific focus on preventing arms trafficking to Mexico and Central America.

NOTES

The following organizations are affiliated with the Network for the Prevention of Violence in the Americas:

Anahuac University Mexico: <https://www.anahuac.mx/mexico/en>

Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/>

Consortium of Universities of Global Health: <https://www.cugh.org/>

Forum on Arms Trade: <https://www.forumarmstrade.org/>

Giffords Law Center <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/>

Global Exchange / Project to Stop US Arms to Mexico: <https://stopusarmstomexico.org/>

Medical College of Wisconsin Office of Global Health: <https://www.mcw.edu/>
Metropolitan Peace Institute
Newtown Action Alliance: <https://www.newtownactionalliance.org/>
Stimson Center: <https://www.stimson.org/>

REFERENCES

1. CIC, C., & NYU, N. (2020). SDG 16 Pathfinders. Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <https://www.sdg16hub.org/landing-page/sdg-16-pathfinders>
2. CMDPDH, C. (2020, May 28). Carta a SRE para impulsar el cumplimiento de las obligaciones de México en el marco del Tratado sobre el Comercio de Armas. Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <http://cmdpdh.org/project/carta-a-sre-para-impulsar-el-cumplimiento-de-las-obligaciones-de-mexico-en-el-marco-del-tratado-sobre-el-comercio-de-armas/%C2%A0>
3. Bromley, M. (2020). Actividades relacionadas con el TCA en América Latina y el Caribe: Identificación de brechas y Mejora de la coordinación. Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24417>
4. Heartland, A. (2020). We create opportunities for a different outcome. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/readi/program/>
5. Heartland, A. (2020). Evaluating and understanding our impact. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/readi/impact/>
6. Chicago, U. (2020). About Urban Labs Science in Service of Cities. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/about>
7. Oakland, C. (2020). Oakland's Ceasefire Strategy. Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/oaklands-ceasefire-strategy>
8. Arms Survey, S. (2020, October 23). About the Small Arms Survey. Retrieved October 23, 2020, from <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/mission.html>
9. HME, I. (2020, April 21). About IHME. Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <http://www.healthdata.org/about>
10. Igarape, I. (2019, June 05). About Igarapé. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://igarape.org.br/en/about-igarape/>
11. McEvoy, C. (2017). Time to decide. Retrieved 2020, from <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-GVD2017.pdf>
12. DOJ, U. (2019). Project Safe Neighborhoods. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.justice.gov/file/1149381/download>
13. Siegel, M. (2020). The Impact of State-Level Firearms Laws on Homicide Rates by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/254669.pdf>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Global status report on preventing violence against children. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Goodman, C. [Holes in the Net: US Arms export control gaps in combating corruption](#). Transparency international defense and security program.

Lindsey-Poland, J. et al. [Gross Human rights abuses: The legal and illegal gun trade to Mexico](#). Stop US Arms to Mexico. August 2018.

Picard M, Holtom P, Mangan F. Trade Update 2019 Transfers, Transparency, and South-East Asia Spotlight. Small Arms Survey. December 2019

Gilgen E. Small Arms Survey. Chapter 1, 12. 2012.

Carapic J, De Martino L. Violent Deaths due to Legal Interventions. Small Arms Survey. Research Notes Armed Violence. Number 53. July 2015.

Hideg G., Alvazzi del Frate A. Darkening Horizons Global Violent Deaths Scenarios, 2018-30. Small Arms Survey. May 2019.

RESOURCES

Key Agency Websites:

Network to Prevent Gun Violence in the Americas: <https://stopusarmstomexico.org/resources/prevent-gun-violence-americas/>

Stop US Arms to Mexico: www.stopusarmstomexico.org

The Americas Program: www.americas.org

Center for American Progress: www.americanprogress.org

Reports, Data Platforms, Map, Articles

Gun trafficking U.S. to Mexico and Central America

[Beyond our Borders](#) (Center for American Progress, 2018)

[Regulatory Challenges](#) (Mexican Law Review, 2015)

[Map of Guns Recovered in Mexico](#) (Stop US Arms to Mexico)

[Operation Fast and Furious: Obama's Mexicogate?](#) (Americas Program)

Legal exports to Mexico and Central America

[How U.S. Guns Sold to Mexico End Up with Security Forces Accused of Human Rights Abuses](#) (The Intercept, 2018)

[Gross Human Rights Abuses: The legal and Illegal Trade to Mexico](#) (Stop US Arms/Mexican Commission for Human Rights, 2018)

[Trump is sending guns South as migrants flee North](#) (Foreign Policy, 2019)

[Transfer of Arms Exports to Commerce Department](#) (Forum on Arms Trade)

[Fact Sheet on U.S. Weapons Sales to Honduras](#) (Stop US Arms, 2019)

Assault Weapons and High Capacity Magazines

[Assault Weapons and High Capacity Magazines must be Banned](#) (CAP, 2019)

[Cross-Border Spillover](#) (American Political Science Review, 2013)

Background Checks

[Require Background Checks for All Gun Sales](#) (CAP, 2019)

Stolen guns

[Gun Theft in the United States](#) (CAP, 2020)

[Firearm dealer licensing \(by state\)](#) (Giffords Law Center)

Gun Violence in Mexico

[Mexico's LeBaron massacre and the war that will not cease](#) (Counterpunch, 2020)

[Measuring the Rise of Gun Violence](#) (Journal of Law and Policy, 2019)

[Webinar recording: Gun violence in Mexico](#) (Consortium of Universities for Global Health, 2020)

Violence in the Americas

[What if We Stopped Fighting Drugs and Started Caring for People?](#) (Americas Program)

[Cost of Violence in Mexico](#) (USAID-Arturo Cervantez)

CONTRIBUTORS

Victor Andrade, Dillon Fisher, Alejandra Cortes, Caitlin Moe, Rachel Stohl, Steve Hargarten, Arturo Cervantes, Tiffany Frazer