Gang Crackdowns

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Abstract

In the mid-1990s, after the deportation of gang members from the United States, El Salvador witnessed the emergence of two powerful gangs, MS-13 and 18th Street, which significantly limited socioeconomic development and displaced economic activity in the country. In 2022, the Salvadoran government was at last able to regain territorial control over parts of the country that had been subject to gang rule. Using detailed surveys and the exact boundaries of the neighborhoods previously controlled by the gangs, we analyze how the removal of gang territorial control affected socioeconomic outcomes in these areas. We find that, after the 2022 gang crackdowns, individuals from former gang-controlled areas experienced substantial improvements in their mobility and economic conditions. Despite this, we find that employers are still hesitant to hire individuals from former gang-affected areas, plausibly due to their perceived affiliation with the gangs.

Keywords: gangs, crackdowns, development, mobility, crime

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I Introduction

Can the dismantling of entrenched organized crime networks fundamentally restructure a country's socioeconomic institutions and alter its development trajectory? Governments worldwide have pursued this objective through diverse enforcement strategies—from Colombia's targeted operations against the Medellín and Cali cartels, to Mexico's militarized anti-drug campaigns, the Philippines' war on drugs under Duterte, and Brazil's implementation of Pacifying Police Units in favelas. Yet despite varying approaches and contexts, these interventions have yielded limited lasting success. While some policies have generated localized improvements, none have achieved sustainable elimination of criminal networks. Instead, enforcement efforts have frequently produced unintended consequences: geographic displacement of illicit activities, fragmentation of criminal organizations, and, paradoxically, escalations in violence as competing groups vie for control of vacated territories.

In this paper, we examine the socioeconomic consequences of a unique natural experiment that took place in El Salvador in 2022. For decades, the country had been plagued by gang violence, with as much as 60 percent of its population living under the territorial control of two major criminal organizations, MS-13 and 18th Street (Martínez, 2016). These gangs severely constrained socioeconomic development: residents of gang-controlled neighborhoods had lower incomes, wealth, and educational attainment than their peers living just 50 meters away but outside gang territory (Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025). The situation changed on March 27, 2022. Following a series of gang-related homicides that left 87 people dead, the Salvadoran government declared a "State of Exception," granting the police and military sweeping powers to detain suspected gang members and collaborators. In the ensuing months, more than 80,000 people were arrested—over 1% of El Salvador's population. Although the measure was controversial, it largely achieved its immediate objective of restoring state control over areas previously controlled by the gangs. This paper investigates how this dramatic policy shift reshaped El Salvador's socioeconomic landscape.

Before the 2022 crackdowns on crime, one of the main channels through which gangs constrained development in El Salvador was by restricting the mobility of individuals living in the areas under their control. To maintain territorial dominance, the gangs established a network of checkpoints that limited individuals' ability to move freely across the gang borders, preventing residents of gang-controlled neighborhoods from accessing better-paying jobs in large firms outside gang territory and effectively confining them to low-wage employment within their own communities (Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025). To estimate the effects of the crackdowns on individuals' mobility, we use detailed police data on the exact borders of the neighborhoods previously controlled by MS-13 and 18th Street in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. Taking advantage of the stability of these borders over at least two decades, we implement a spatial regression discontinuity design (RDD).

We find that, following the 2022 crackdowns, residents of neighborhoods formerly controlled by

gangs responded to improved security by becoming more likely to go out at night, leave their homes alone, and use public transportation. These security gains, together with the removal of gang-imposed restrictions on mobility, led to substantial increases in overall mobility among individuals from former gang areas. Before 2022, compared with residents of nongang neighborhoods, these individuals were significantly less likely to visit parks, malls, restaurants, cinemas, or engage in recreational activities more broadly. They also reported lower freedom of movement and noted that gang borders prevented them from getting jobs in large firms in other parts of the city. After the crackdowns, these disparities disappeared, with the mobility of residents from former gang areas converging with that of their peers from nongang neighborhoods.

The improvements in mobility contributed to a convergence in labor market outcomes between residents of former gang and nongang areas. Before 2022, individuals from gang-controlled neighborhoods were approximately 50 percentage points more likely to work within gang territory and 12 percentage points less likely to be employed by large firms with at least 100 workers. They also had lower levels of income and wealth. After the crackdowns, residents of former gang and nongang areas became equally likely to work in former gang neighborhoods and in large firms employing 100 or more people. The policy also led to partial convergence in income and wealth. Although residents of former gang neighborhoods continue to earn lower incomes, the gap is now significantly smaller, and for some economic indicators—such as having enough money for food or owning a mobile phone—it has fully closed. In contrast, for outcomes requiring greater savings, such as purchasing a car or making home improvements, as of 2023, we find little to no convergence.

However, we find evidence of a new problem emerging. In 2023, individuals from former gang areas were substantially more likely to report having recently experienced discrimination based on their place of residence—a pattern not observed before the crackdowns. This pattern is corroborated by evidence from a survey we conducted among employers in San Salvador. Individuals responsible for recruitment decisions in their firms were presented with pairs of CVs and asked to select which candidate they would prefer to consider for a position. When the only difference between the two CVs was that one applicant lived in a former gang neighborhood, employers chose the candidate from a nongang area 60% of the time. These effects were not driven by the socioeconomic conditions of the neighborhoods listed on the CVs or by their distance from the firms, as the neighborhoods were deliberately selected to have similar characteristics and to be equidistant from each respondent's firm. Therefore, employers appear less willing to hire workers from former gang areas because of their perceived association with gangs. As a result, while the crackdowns dismantled gang-imposed restrictions on mobility, individuals living in former gang-controlled areas now face a new barrier to employment: residence-based discrimination by employers.

This shift is also evident in the changing policy priorities of individuals living in former gang neighborhoods. Following the crackdowns, they became 12 percentage points more likely than their peers from nongang areas to identify employment opportunities as one of the three most pressing problems facing the country. Conversely, they became 10.4 percentage points more likely to name

inequality of opportunity, poverty, and vulnerability among the country's top three problems.

We also examine the political implications of the 2022 crackdowns. Overall, we find broad public trust in both the police and the national government, with no significant differences between residents of former gang and nongang neighborhoods. However, levels of trust are partly determined by individuals' experiences during the crackdowns. Specifically, we analyze how trust in the police and the national government varies depending on whether respondents personally know someone who was arrested under the State of Exception and whether they witnessed police abuse. The latter includes arrests perceived as unjustified, incidents of physical violence, and arbitrary seizures of property. Knowing someone who was arrested—which applies to about half of all respondents—has little to no effect on trust in the police or the government, suggesting that most arrests are viewed as legitimate. In contrast, witnessing police abuse—which applies to approximately 20% of respondents—reduces trust in the police by roughly 30 percentage points and in the government by about 25 percentage points. These results indicate that, while the Salvadoran government's campaign to dismantle criminal networks has broad public support, this support can quickly erode if citizens perceive the police as abusing their authority.

This paper contributes to several strands of the existing literature. First, it relates to research on policing and crime prevention policies. While prior studies generally find that increased police presence reduces local crime (e.g., Blesse and Diegmann, 2022; Di Tella and Schargrodsky, 2004; Draca, Machin and Witt, 2011; Weisburd, 2021), evidence from large-scale campaigns against organized crime (e.g., Castillo, Mejía and Restrepo, 2020; Dell, 2015) reveals more complex dynamics. For instance, Dell (2015) shows that targeting drug kingpins during Mexico's war on drugs created power vacuums that intensified violence as rival groups competed for territory. Similarly, the Pacifying Police Units in Rio de Janeiro failed to consolidate state authority and, in some cases, exacerbated violence (Magaloni, Franco Vivanco and Melo, 2020). Thus, El Salvador's crackdowns on crime, which successfully dismantled gang structures across the country—plausibly due to a combination of the unprecedented resources allocated to fighting crime and the gangs' limited financial capacity—represent a unique natural experiment. This paper aims to provide the first systematic analysis of the broad economic and social consequences of this natural experiment.

Second, our work relates to the broader literature examining the social and economic consequences of organized crime (Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2013; Acemoglu, De Feo and De Luca, 2019; Bandiera, 2003; Brown et al., 2025; Daniele and Marani, 2011; Dell, 2015; Gambetta, 1996; Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025; Mirenda, Mocetti and Rizzica, 2022; Murphy and Rossi, 2020; Pinotti, 2015; Sviatschi, 2022*a*,*b*), as well as to the related studies on the organization of society under criminal governance (Blattman et al., 2025; Blattman and Miguel, 2010; De la Sierra, 2020; Lessing, 2021; Lessing and Willis, 2019; Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000). We contribute to this literature by analyzing the consequences of an unprecedented event—the sudden and lasting removal of criminal organizations that had constrained socioeconomic development in the areas under their control for more than two decades. This context enables us to address a fun-

damental question: which consequences of organized crime can be rapidly reversed (e.g., mobility constraints) and which are likely to persist (e.g., stigma and residence-based discrimination). By examining how the dismantling of criminal governance affected socioeconomic outcomes, we assess the extent to which the legacy of crime continues to shape development patterns even after the restoration of state authority.

Third, our paper contributes to the literature studying group-based employment discrimination. Existing studies have largely focused on discrimination based on salient group identities, such as race, gender, or nationality (e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Goldin and Rouse, 2000; Lippens, Vermeiren and Baert, 2023; Martínez de Lafuente, 2021). We complement this literature by documenting labor market discrimination based on a characteristic that is not inherent to an individual's identity and can change multiple times throughout their life: their place of residence. In this literature, the paper that is perhaps closest to ours is Doleac and Hansen (2020), which shows that "ban-the-box" policies—preventing employers from asking about applicants' criminal histories—led to increased statistical discrimination against demographic groups with higher average conviction rates. Residence-based discrimination in El Salvador plausibly follows a similar pattern: employers likely perceive individuals from former gang areas as higher-risk hires.

Finally, this paper relates to the literature studying the socioeconomic effects of barriers to geographical mobility. Research on the removal of transportation barriers, such as the construction of roads and railways, shows that increased connectivity fosters market integration and local economic growth (Asher and Novosad, 2020; Donaldson, 2018). Conversely, borders and checkpoints fragment labor markets and reduce economic welfare (Calì and Miaari, 2018; Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025). In El Salvador, the 2022 crackdowns resulted in the sudden and lasting dismantling of the barriers to individuals' mobility previously imposed by the gangs. This paper examines how the dissolution of these barriers affected the spatial reorganization of economic activity.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section II describes the history of criminal groups in El Salvador and how the 2022 crackdowns dismantled these structures. Section III describes the main data sources and the empirical strategy. Section IV presents the results. Section V concludes.

II Gangs in El Salvador

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the history and organizational structures of Salvadoran gangs. We also describe how the 2022 crackdowns dismantled these structures and discuss the factors that made this possible. For a more detailed discussed of gang dynamics prior to the 2022 crackdowns, see Sviatschi (2022*b*) and Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi (2025).

II.A Origins and Evolution of Salvadoran Gangs

El Salvador's gang phenomenon traces its origins to the mass deportations of Salvadoran migrants from the United States in the mid-1990s. Following U.S. legislative reforms that broadened the grounds for deportation and intensified immigration enforcement, thousands of Salvadorans—many of whom had fled the country's civil war during the 1980s—were forcibly returned after becoming involved in criminal networks in the United States, particularly in California (Sviatschi, 2022*b*). Among those deported were members of MS-13 (*Mara Salvatrucha*) and 18th Street (*Barrio 18*), two gangs that would come to dominate El Salvador's criminal landscape over the next quarter century.

Upon returning to El Salvador, deported gang members quickly transplanted the organizational model they had developed in California to their new environment. They rapidly expanded their ranks by recruiting local youth, particularly adolescents, offering them identity, protection, and a sense of belonging (Cruz and Portillo Peña, 1998; Martínez and Martínez, 2018). According to local authorities, by the end of 1996, MS-13 and 18th Street together counted at least 20,000 members (Cruz and Portillo Peña, 1998). By the late 1990s, both groups had evolved into structured criminal organizations with defined hierarchies, territorial divisions, and internal codes of conduct (Dudley, 2020).

To protect themselves from the police and their rivals, and to prevent local residents from acting as informants, the gangs established a system of checkpoints to control movement into and out of their territories. The boundaries of gang-controlled areas were often delineated by natural barriers such as major roads and boulevards, marked with graffiti, and monitored by a network of junior members and local collaborators (*banderas*), who observed border activity and reported outsiders or unauthorized crossings (Boerman and Golob, 2020; ICG, 2018).

As a result of gang-imposed mobility restrictions, most individuals living in gang-controlled neighborhoods were unable to work outside gang territory—where the largest and best-paying firms were located—and were forced to accept low-wage employment within their own communities. Previous work shows that residents of gang-controlled areas were 50 percentage points more likely to work inside gang territory than their peers living just 50 meters away but outside gang control (Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025). They were also 12 percentage points less likely to be employed by firms with at least 100 workers and earned, on average, approximately $350 less per month.

II.B Historic Approaches to Combating Gang Activity

Successive Salvadoran governments have long sought to eradicate gang violence and restore state authority in areas under criminal control. Historically, they have oscillated between two fundamentally different strategies for confronting gang activity: aggressive law enforcement crackdowns, known locally as "mano dura" (iron fist) policies, and direct negotiations or truces with gang

leaders.

In the early 2000s, the Salvadoran authorities initially embraced punitive security measures. Policies such as "mano dura" (2003) and its intensified successor, "super mano dura" (2004), sought to dismantle gang structures through mass arrests, harsher sentencing, and expanded military and police patrols (Holland, 2013). Instead of weakening the gangs, however, these measures inadvertently strengthened them. Overcrowded prisons became grounds for recruitment and coordination, reinforcing gang hierarchies and identities, and ultimately intensifying the very violence the government aimed to eradicate (e.g., see Lessing and Willis, 2019).

Conversely, recognizing the failures of purely punitive measures, governments periodically turned toward negotiation-based approaches. The most notable attempt was the 2012 gang truce brokered under President Mauricio Funes. Initially, this truce appeared promising, substantially reducing homicide rates in the short term (Dudley, 2013). However, due to limited transparency, allegations of corruption, internal gang rivalries, and insufficient institutional support, the truce rapidly unraveled, demonstrating the complexities and pitfalls of such negotiations (Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2019).

The inconsistent and reactive shifts between these opposing strategies highlight the deeper structural weaknesses in the Salvadoran government's pre-2022 approach to dealing with the gangs. The oscillation between these policies failed to produce lasting solutions to gang violence and eroded public trust in government institutions.

II.C The 2022 Crackdowns

The most recent chapter of El Salvador's gang policy began with President Nayib Bukele's ascent to power in 2019. Initially, Bukele adopted a less confrontational stance toward the gangs, pursuing informal negotiations aimed at reducing violence. Reports suggested that his administration reached a tacit understanding with the gang leaders—resembling earlier truces—which temporarily lowered homicide rates and ushered in a period of relative calm.

However, this informal agreement collapsed in March 2022, when El Salvador experienced an unprecedented surge of violence: 87 gang-related murders over the span of just three days. In response, President Bukele declared a national state of emergency—the State of Exception (*Régimen de Excepción*)—marking a dramatic shift back to hardline enforcement (González, 2024). The declaration suspended several constitutional protections, granting law enforcement broad authority to conduct mass arrests of suspected gang members without warrants or adherence to due process (Díaz Trujillo Portilla, 2024; González, 2024).

In statistical terms, the de facto rationale behind the policy shift can be understood as a rebalancing of the trade-off between type I and type II errors within the criminal justice system. Before the 2022 crackdowns, the criminal justice system operated with a relatively low tolerance for type I errors (i.e., the probability of arresting an innocent person), which resulted in relatively

high incidence of type II errors (i.e., failures to arrest the guilty). The State of Exception sought to correct this perceived imbalance by dramatically reducing the likelihood of type II errors, at the cost of increasing type I errors.

In the months following the declaration of the State of Exception, more than 80,000 individuals were arrested as part of the gang crackdowns—equivalent to over 1 percent of El Salvador's total population. While about 10 percent of those detained have since been released, as of late 2024, the remainder remain incarcerated for indefinite periods without formal charges (Méndez Dardón and Thale, 2024). It is not possible to determine precisely how many detainees were genuinely involved in gang activities and how many were wrongfully accused due to negligence, misconduct, or flawed intelligence. However, local civil society organizations put the number of "false positives" in the thousands and documented cases of police abuse, arbitrary detention, allegations of torture, and deaths in overcrowded prisons (Cristosal, 2023). Thus, although the 2022 crackdowns effectively dismantled gang territorial control and mobility restrictions—leading to a sharp declines in crime and violence—these security gains came at a substantial societal, institutional, and human rights cost.

II.D What Made the 2022 Crackdowns Effective?

While El Salvador's 2022 gang crackdowns were not the first tough-on-crime campaign in Latin America, they were uniquely successful in dismantling criminal structures and substantially improving security across the country. For instance, perhaps the most closely related policy—Mexico's comparably ambitious, militarized "war on drugs"—failed to dismantle cartel networks. Instead, it altered the balance of power among them, intensifying competition over illicit markets and triggering a surge in violence (Castillo, Mejía and Restrepo, 2020; Dell, 2015). What, then, distinguishes El Salvador's crackdowns from earlier approaches to fighting organized crime?

While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from a single case study, several factors can help explain the effectiveness of El Salvador's 2022 crackdowns relative to previous tough-on-crime campaigns. First, unlike many other criminal organizations—such as drug cartels or the Italian Mafia—Salvadoran gangs operated with very limited financial resources (Martínez et al., 2016). As a result, although they were capable resisting the police and military, they lacked the financial capacity to sustain a prolonged confrontation with the state. Second, because Salvadoran gangs depended on the extortion of local residents and businesses as their main source of revenue, they were unpopular among the communities under their control—a fact reflected in the broad public support for the 2022 crackdowns. In contrast, drug cartels in other contexts often channel a part of their illicit profits into building local loyalty through employment, patronage, or social assistance, which can make repressive policies much more difficult to implement (Magaloni et al., 2020). In a similar vein, previous efforts to combat drug-related organized crime frequently reduced the supply of illegal substances (e.g., coca or poppy), driving up prices and creating incentives for new criminal

actors to enter the market. This dynamic did not occur in El Salvador. Because the value of extortion remained largely unchanged, the 2022 crackdowns sharply increased the costs of engaging in criminal activity without raising its returns, leaving limited incentives for organized crime to resurface. Finally, unlike Mexico's war on drugs, which targeted only certain criminal groups, the Salvadoran government implemented a comprehensive and centrally coordinated operation aimed to swiftly incapacitate of all major criminal organizations in the country. This strategy prevented the displacement of crime, in which some criminal groups might otherwise have exploited the relative weakening of their rivals to seize their territories and sources of revenue.

III Data and Empirical Strategy

III.A Data

Boundaries of former gang territory. The map delineating the boundaries of former gang-controlled neighborhoods in San Salvador was published in 2015 by the Salvadoran newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* (EDH), which created it using cartographic materials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the National Civil Police (PNC) (EDH, 2015). Figure 1 presents this map. EDH validated the map's accuracy by confirming that the neighborhoods identified as gang-controlled corresponded to areas its distribution teams could not freely access due to gang checkpoints. In our previous work, we independently verified the reliability of this map, finding it to be nearly identical to the version used internally by the PNC in later years (Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025).

In San Salvador, the borders of former gang-controlled areas were established in the late 1990s, shortly after the first wave of gang member deportations from the United States, and have remained relatively stable since then. Appendix Figure A.1 illustrates this fact using data from our 2023 survey, described in detail below. In the survey, respondents were asked whether their neighborhood had been under gang control 20 years earlier, in the early 2000s. As shown in the figure, respondents from former gang areas were significantly more likely to answer in the affirmative.

Como Vamos surveys. Some of the outcome variables used in this paper are drawn from the Cómo Vamos surveys—large-scale, representative surveys designed to measure socioeconomic conditions, social behaviors, perceptions of security, and related outcomes in the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador. The surveys were conducted by the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (*Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social*, FUSADES) with support from USAID in late 2021, several months before the 2022 gang crackdowns, and again in late 2022, approximately half a year after the crackdowns. The two survey waves followed the same structure and methodology.

2023 survey. To measure outcomes not covered by the Cómo Vamos surveys (e.g., individuals' labor market outcomes), we conducted our own survey in 2023, following the sampling procedure

used in our previous study Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi (2025). Specifically, we divided the census tracts in San Salvador into 30-meter distance bins based on their proximity to gang-territory boundaries, distinguishing between former gang and nongang areas.[1] The goal of this sampling design was to ensure representativeness by distance to the borders of former gang territory. From each bin, we randomly selected 10 census tracts and surveyed between 8 and 10 individuals per tract.[2] When fewer than 10 census tracts were available in a bin, all eligible tracts were included. To be consistent with our previous work (Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025), we conducted the survey in areas within 420 meters of the former boundaries of gang territory. The final sample comprises 2,315 respondents.

CV experiment. To examine employers' attitudes toward hiring individuals from former gang neighborhoods, in 2024, we conducted a CV experiment. Individuals responsible for recruitment decisions in 500 firms were presented with multiple pairs of CVs and asked to choose which candidate they would prefer to consider for a position in their firm. The exercise was introduced as a market research study aimed at understanding employers' hiring preferences, though its main purpose was to assess how employers respond when the only difference between two otherwise identical candidates is that one resides in a former gang-controlled neighborhood. To ensure that results were not driven by neighborhood characteristics or proximity to firms, the neighborhoods listed on the CVs were selected to have comparable socioeconomic profiles and to be equidistant from the participating firms. A subsample of employers was additionally asked to evaluate the perceived competence of selected candidates and the potential risks associated with hiring them.

III.B Empirical Strategy

To analyze the effects of the 2022 crackdowns and the accompanying dismantling of gang territorial control on individuals' socioeconomic outcomes, we employ a spatial regression discontinuity design (RDD). Specifically, for each survey respondent, we compute the distance from the centroid of their census tract to the nearest boundary of former gang territory (measured in tens of meters) and use this distance as the RDD forcing variable. Then, to determine how the 2022 crackdowns affected socioeconomic outcomes, we estimate the following regression specification, both before and after the crackdowns (Equation 1):

$$y_{ic} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \, distance_c + \alpha_2 \, former\ gang_c \, distance_c + \alpha_3 \, former\ gang_c + \varepsilon_{ic} \tag{1}$$

Depending on the outcome variable, i indexes individuals or households, and c indexes census tracts. y represents the outcome variable of interest, *former gang* is a binary indicator for whether the location was previously under gang control, and *distance*—the distance to the boundaries of

[1] Due to uncertainty regarding their treatment status, census tracts located within 15 meters of the gang borders were excluded. Consequently, the tracts closest to the gang boundaries were situated 15–44 meters away from them.

[2] In areas within 250 meters of the gang borders, we surveyed 10 individuals per census tract; in more distant locations, 8 individuals per tract.

former gang territory. The coefficient of interest is α_3, which represents the difference In our baseline specification, standard errors are clustered by 30-meter bins denoting distance to the former gang borders, separately for locations inside and outside former gang areas. The rationale for this way of clustering the standard errors is that the correlation between the error terms is expected to depend primarily on proximity to the former gang boundaries due to differential spillover effects of gang activity prior to the 2022 crackdowns.

IV Main Results

IV.A Security

We begin our analysis of the consequences of the 2022 crackdowns by examining their effects on the security perceptions of individuals living in former gang-controlled neighborhoods, using data from the Cómo Vamos surveys. Table 1 presents the results of estimating Equation (1) for these outcome variables, both before and after the crackdowns. We find that, following the crackdowns, residents of former gang neighborhoods became 13.6 percentage points less likely than their peers from nongang areas to avoid going out at night, 5.3 percentage points less likely to avoid leaving their homes alone, and 15.4 percentage points less likely to view public transportation as insecure. The latter reflects the fact that gangs regularly stopped public transport to extract extortion payments from drivers and passengers. None of these differences existed before the 2022 crackdowns, consistent with the analysis in Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi (2025), which shows that although gang territorial control substantially restricted the mobility of individuals living in gang areas, residents on both sides of the gang borders were equally exposed to violence and extortion because MS-13 and 18th Street regularly carried out raids into neighboring nongang areas. Appendix Figure A.2 presents the regression discontinuity plots for the average of the three outcomes in Table 1, before and after the crackdowns.

In addition to the improvements in security perceptions within former gang neighborhoods, Table 1 also shows general improvements in individuals' security assessments across San Salvador. Following the crackdowns, the share of respondents avoiding going out at night fell from 28.3 to 17 percent, the share avoiding leaving the house alone declined from 7.8 to 2.7 percent, and the share considering public transport insecure dropped from 63.1 to 27.3 percent. These findings are further supported by results from our 2023 survey, presented in Appendix Table A.I. For example, the table shows that approximately 88 percent of respondents in both gang and nongang areas believe that gang presence in their neighborhood decreased after the State of Exception, and 52.7 percent report that the police are present in their neighborhood at least most of the time.

IV.B Mobility

We next examine how the improved security situation and the dismantling of gang territorial control—which had previously severely restricted the ability of residents from former gang areas to move freely around the city—affected individuals' mobility. Table 2 presents the results. The estimates in Columns 1–12 use data from the Cómo Vamos surveys and focus on various measures of recreational mobility, including visits to malls, parks, bars, restaurants, and cinemas. The results show that, before the crackdowns, residents of former gang neighborhoods were significantly less likely to engage in recreational activities, but by the end of 2022, these differences had disappeared. Appendix Figure A.3 presents the regression discontinuity plots for the average of the six outcome variables in Table 2, before and after the crackdowns.

The closure of the gaps in recreational mobility between former gang and nongang areas is highly unlikely to be explained solely by improvements in the socioeconomic conditions or transportation access of residents from former gang areas. For example, before the crackdowns, residents of former gang areas were 17.8 percentage points less likely than individuals from neighboring nongang areas to visit Parque Cuscatlán, a highly rated public park located directly outside former gang territory and accessible free of charge. Half a year after the declaration of the State of Exception, this gap had fully closed. Taken together, these patterns are much more consistent with the removal of gang-imposed mobility restrictions than with changes in residents' socioeconomic conditions or access to transportation.

We also present direct evidence indicating that the 2022 crackdowns helped dismantle the restrictions on individuals' mobility previously imposed by the gangs. In Columns 13–18 of Table 2, we use data from our 2023 survey to analyze how the crackdowns affected respondents' perceptions of their freedom of movement and the importance of gang borders for their labor market outcomes. In addition to being asked about conditions in 2023, respondents were also asked the same questions retrospectively for the end of 2021, immediately before the 2022 crackdowns. When describing their experiences in 2021, only 32.9 percent of respondents reported having freedom of movement in their neighborhood, with residents of former gang areas being 13.5 percentage points less likely to do so than their neighbors from nongang areas (Column 13). Likewise, 40.7 percent of respondents stated that, in 2021, gang borders prevented them from obtaining jobs in large firms in other parts of the city, with residents of former gang areas being 10 percentage points more likely to face these restrictions (Column 17). However, when describing conditions in 2023, 95 percent of respondents reported having freedom of movement, and only 5.1 percent indicated that gang borders continued to limit their labor market outcomes, with no differences across former gang and nongang areas. The top two panels of Figure 2 present the regression discontinuity plots for the results reported in Columns 13–14 and 17–18 of Table 2.

Overall, two patterns emerge from the findings of the 2023 survey. First, the 2022 crackdowns dismantled the long-standing restrictions on individuals' mobility, leading to substantial improve-

ments in freedom of movement for individuals throughout San Salvador. Residents of nongang neighborhoods were also affected because, although they did not live under gang territorial control, the network of gang-imposed checkpoints had still profoundly limited their ability to move between different parts of the city. Second, because residents of former gang-controlled areas had previously been much more constrained in their movements than individuals from nongang areas, the removal of these barriers had a larger effect on them, resulting in a convergence in mobility between the two groups.

IV.C Labor Market and Socioeconomic Outcomes

To analyze the consequences of dismantling the system of gang-imposed mobility restrictions, we examine how this change affected the labor market outcomes and socioeconomic conditions of individuals from former gang neighborhoods. Table 3 presents the results. In Columns 1–10, we compare the RDD estimates from the 2023 survey with those from our earlier 2019 survey (see Melnikov, Schmidt-Padilla and Sviatschi, 2025), focusing on individuals' labor market outcomes.

Before the crackdowns, gang-imposed mobility restrictions prevented residents of gang-controlled areas from working in nongang parts of San Salvador. As a result, they were 49.5 percentage points more likely to work within gang territory and 11.1 percentage points more likely to work in the same neighborhood where they lived, compared to individuals from nearby nongang areas. They were also 12.3 percentage points less likely to work in firms with at least 100 employees, and their monthly household income was approximately 350 USD lower. After the 2022 crackdowns, the labor market outcomes of individuals from former gang neighborhoods markedly changed. By 2023, they were no longer more likely than their peers from nongang areas to work within former gang territory or in the same neighborhood where they lived. The bottom panel of Figure 2 presents the regression discontinuity plots for the outcome variable of working inside gang territory, before and after the crackdowns (Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3). The gap in the likelihood of working in large firms had also closed (top panel of Figure 3). Residents of former gang areas continued to earn approximately 100 USD less per month, but this difference was substantially narrower than before the crackdowns.[3]

In Columns 11–18 of Table 3, we use data from the Cómo Vamos surveys to further examine how the 2022 crackdowns affected other socioeconomic conditions in former gang neighborhoods. Consistent with the narrowing of the income difference, we find that although residents of former gang areas were 18.3 percentage points more likely than their peers from nongang areas to experience financial difficulties before the crackdowns, by 2023, this disparity had disappeared. The middle panel of Figure 3 presents the regression discontinuity plots for this outcome. The crackdowns also resulted in increased financial inclusion in former gang neighborhoods. In 2021, there was a 23.6 percentage point gap between gang and nongang areas in the likelihood of having a

[3]After the crackdowns, the 100 USD difference in household income is no longer statistically significant (Column 10 of Table 3), but this likely reflects limited statistical power to detect relatively small differences in income.

bank account. By the end of 2022, this gap had closed (bottom panel of Figure 3). Similarly, after the crackdowns, former gang and nongang areas converged in their access to basic digital technologies. While in 2021 former gang areas had a significantly lower digital access index—defined as the average of owning a smartphone, owning a computer, and having access to the internet—following the crackdowns, these differences disappeared.[4]

Finally, in Columns 17–18 of Table 3, we examine a placebo outcome that should not change in the immediate aftermath of the crackdowns: the availability of sanitary services inside the respondents' homes. Home improvements that involve installing new plumbing systems are costly and slow to complete, making it highly unlikely that residents of former gang neighborhoods would have had the time or resources to undertake such upgrades only half a year after the crackdowns. The results in Columns 17–18 of Table 3 confirm this notion. At the end of 2022, individuals in former gang areas continued to have poorer sanitary services in their homes than residents of nongang neighborhoods. This finding indicates that the observed convergence in other socioeconomic conditions between gang and nongang areas reflects actual changes in those outcomes and is not an artifact of the sampling design.

IV.D Differences between Former Gang and Nongang Areas

Despite experiencing substantial convergence in socioeconomic conditions, certain differences continue to persist between former gang and nongang areas. Table 4 illustrates this fact for several outcome variables. First, it shows that the mobility improvements in former gang neighborhoods were not determined by increased access to private transportation. Following the crackdowns, residents of former gang areas remained more likely than their peers from nearby nongang neighborhoods to get around San Salvador by bus or on foot (Column 1). They were also less likely to use or own a car (Columns 2 and 3, respectively).[5] Although these patterns are unsurprising given that purchasing a car typically requires a period of sustained savings, they underscore that the convergence in mobility between gang and nongang areas was driven primarily by the dismantling of gang-imposed mobility restrictions rather than by improved access to private transportation.

Second, we document a new barrier to formal employment experienced by residents of former gang-controlled neighborhoods. Both the Cómo Vamos surveys and our 2023 survey asked respondents whether, during the past year, they had faced labor market discrimination because of their place of residence. In 2021, only 4.6 percent of respondents reported this form of discrimination, and there were no differences across the boundaries of former gang territory (Column 4 of Table 4). After the 2022 crackdowns, however, this share increased to 11.3 percent, with residents of former gang neighborhoods 6.5 percentage points more likely to report experiencing it (Col-

[4]We observe a similar pattern for each of the three components of the digital access index.

[5]The question about respondents' means of transportation was asked in both the Cómo Vamos surveys and our 2023 survey. Therefore, to increase the precision of our estimates, we combine these two data sources. To account for potential differences arising from the timing of the surveys, these regression specifications also include a dummy variable indicating whether the observation comes from the Cómo Vamos surveys.

umn 5 of Table 4). These findings suggest that the gang-imposed mobility restrictions that once limited employment opportunities for individuals from former gang areas have now been replaced by a different obstacle to formal work: residence-based discrimination by employers. The absence of this pattern before the crackdowns is plausibly explained by the fact that residents of former gang areas previously faced severe mobility constraints that limited their ability to search for jobs outside gang territory, and therefore their exposure to this form of discrimination.

To assess whether residents of former gang neighborhoods indeed faced residence-based employment discrimination, in 2024, we conducted a CV experiment in which employers were presented with consecutive pairs of CVs and asked to choose which candidate they would consider more suitable for a position in their firm. As shown in Column 6 of Table 4, employers were 10 percentage points less likely to select the CVs of candidates from former gang areas relative to the random 50–50 benchmark, corresponding to a 40–60 split against those applicants. Figure 4 illustrates these results. These differences cannot be attributed to the socioeconomic conditions of the neighborhoods listed on the CVs or their proximity to the firms, as the neighborhoods were selected to have similar socioeconomic characteristics of gang and nongang areas and to be approximately equidistant from the firms. The subset of employers who were additionally asked to evaluate some of the CVs gave lower assessments to applicants from former gang areas compared with otherwise identical applicants from nongang parts of San Salvador (Column 7 of Table 4). Overall, these results indicate that employers are hesitant to hire individuals from former gang neighborhoods, plausibly due to their perceived association with the gangs.

We find that this shift in employment barriers faced by residents of former gang-controlled neighborhoods is reflected in their policy priorities. Using data from the Cómo Vamos surveys, we examine which issues respondents identified as being among the top three problems facing the country. As shown in Appendix Table A.II, following the 2022 crackdowns and the removal of gang-imposed mobility restrictions, residents of former gang areas became less likely to list the availability of employment opportunities among the country's top three problems. At the same time, they became more likely to identify inequality of opportunity, poverty, and vulnerability among their key concerns. A small share of respondents from former gang areas also became more likely to state that the country does not face any major problems, plausibly because the crackdowns addressed the issues they viewed as most important.

IV.E Trust in Police and Government

To examine how the crackdowns affected support for the police and the government, we use data from our 2023 survey to analyze how respondents' attitudes were shaped by their experiences during the State of Exception. Specifically, we assess whether knowing someone who was arrested during the crackdowns influenced respondents' trust in the police and the government. If a substantial share of those arrested had not been involved in gang-related activities, individuals who knew them

would be expected to reduce their trust in the institutions responsible for these unjustified arrests. We also examine how respondents' attitudes were affected by witnessing police abuse, including incidents of physical violence and arbitrary arrests or seizures of property.

Figure 5 presents the results of our analysis for three outcome variables: trust in the police, trust in the national government, and approval of the president. For each outcome, the first of the four bars shows its average value among individuals who neither know anyone arrested during the crackdowns nor witnessed police abuse (45 percent of the sample). These respondents were not directly affected by the crackdowns but benefited from the improved security situation and the removal of gang-imposed mobility restrictions. Unsurprisingly, therefore, they exhibit high levels of trust in government institutions.

The second bar for each outcome shows its average value among individuals who have not witnessed police abuse but who know someone who was arrested during the crackdowns (35.5 percent of the sample). Since our definition of police abuse includes unjustified arrests, this group predominantly consists of respondents who know someone who was arrested but perceive the arrest to have been justified. This group exhibits levels of trust in government institutions that are comparable to those of the first group, which was not directly affected by the crackdowns.

However, once we consider individuals who witnessed instances of police abuse—whether they also knew someone who was arrested during the crackdowns (the fourth bar for each outcome; 13.7 percent of the sample) or not (the third bar; 5.8 percent of the sample)—we observe substantially lower levels of trust in government institutions. Specifically, they are 30-35 percentage points less likely to trust the police, 25-30 percentage points less likely to trust the national government, and 15 percentage points less likely to approve of the president. These results indicate that, while the Salvadoran population generally exhibits high levels of support for the government's tough-on-crime policies when they view its actions as justified and directed at criminal actors, this support can quickly erode if law enforcement abuses its power.

As shown in Appendix Figure A.4, the patterns presented in Figure 5 hold both for former gang and nongang areas, with no distinctive differences between the two. Appendix Table A.III also shows that trust in government institutions generally does not change at the boundaries of former gang territory, with the possible exception of attitudes toward the police among individuals who witnessed police abuse or who knew someone perceived to have been justly arrested.

V Conclusion

This paper shows that El Salvador's 2022 crackdowns on crime brought about a profound restructuring of social and economic dynamics in former gang-controlled neighborhoods. The dismantling of gang territorial control eliminated long-standing barriers to individuals' mobility, leading sharp increases in freedom of movement and a rapid convergence in recreational and labor market mobility between residents of gang and nongang areas. These changes, in turn, narrowed the disparities

in employment, income, and basic indicators of material well-being. At the same time, individuals from former gang areas now face a new barrier to employment: residence-based discrimination. Finally, we find that, while overall public trust in the government and police remains high, it is much lower among individuals who witnessed police abuse during the crackdowns, highlighting the potential pitfalls of tough-on-crime policies if law enforcement is not held accountable and abuses its power. Together, these findings aim to inform—and caution—governments considering whether to replicate El Salvador's State of Exception in their own countries.

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Tables

Table 1: Security before and after the Crackdowns, Cómo Vamos surveys

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Avoid going out at night		Avoid leaving the house alone		Consider public transport insecure	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	0.036	-0.136***	0.007	-0.053**	0.001	-0.154***
	(0.068)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.023)	(0.063)	(0.055)
Mean dep. var	0.283	0.170	0.078	0.027	0.631	0.273
Observations	848	880	848	880	658	604

Note: This table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to security perceptions, before and after the 2022 crackdowns. The unit of observation is an individual. The outcome variables come from Cómo Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 2: Individuals' Mobility, before and after the Crackdowns

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Been to the mall during past year		Been to cafes, bars, and restaurants during past year		Been to the cinema during past year	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	-0.243***	0.032	-0.150*	0.028	-0.120***	0.049
	(0.063)	(0.062)	(0.079)	(0.059)	(0.036)	(0.040)
Mean dep. var	0.695	0.732	0.542	0.626	0.162	0.197
Observations	848	880	848	880	848	880
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Been to a park during past year		Been to Parque Cuscatlán during past year		Participated in recreational activities during past year	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	-0.135**	-0.034	-0.178***	0.072	-0.202***	-0.006
	(0.060)	(0.087)	(0.044)	(0.086)	(0.056)	(0.054)
Mean dep. var	0.514	0.520	0.363	0.449	0.834	0.848
Observations	848	880	848	880	848	880
	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
	Freedom of movement where you live		Gang borders prevented you from getting jobs in large firms		Gang borders prevented you from getting jobs in large firms in other parts of the city	
	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023
Former gang neighborhood	-0.135**	0.002	0.088**	-0.004	0.100**	-0.004
	(0.050)	(0.026)	(0.039)	(0.020)	(0.041)	(0.018)
Mean dep. var	0.329	0.950	0.428	0.064	0.407	0.051
Observations	2,315	2,315	2,313	2,313	2,313	2,313

Note: This table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to individuals' mobility. The unit of observation is an individual. In Columns 1–12, the outcome variables come from Como Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. In Columns 13–18, the outcome variables come from the survey we conducted in 2023. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 3: Economic Conditions, before and after the Crackdowns

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Works in former gang territory		Works in neighborhood where they live		Works in a firm with $\geq$ 100 employees	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023
Former gang neighborhood	0.495***	-0.035	0.111***	-0.042	-0.123***	0.030
	(0.039)	(0.054)	(0.031)	(0.045)	(0.019)	(0.034)
Mean dep. var	0.334	0.480	0.302	0.429	0.169	0.184
Observations	1,738	2,200	2,071	2,315	2,071	2,315
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Works in a firm with $\geq$ 200 employees		Household income		Have financial difficulties	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	-0.115***	0.048	-352.596***	-98.293	0.183***	0.006
	(0.028)	(0.031)	(112.216)	(74.666)	(0.059)	(0.065)
Mean dep. var	0.133	0.139	625	631.5	0.328	0.295
Observations	2,071	2,315	2,314	2,133	848	877
	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
	Has bank account		Digital access index		Has sanitary service inside the home	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	-0.236***	-0.052	-0.172***	-0.019	-0.057**	-0.074**
	(0.077)	(0.090)	(0.045)	(0.034)	(0.025)	(0.031)
Mean dep. var	0.448	0.455	0.646	0.665	0.935	0.923
Observations	848	880	847	877	848	880

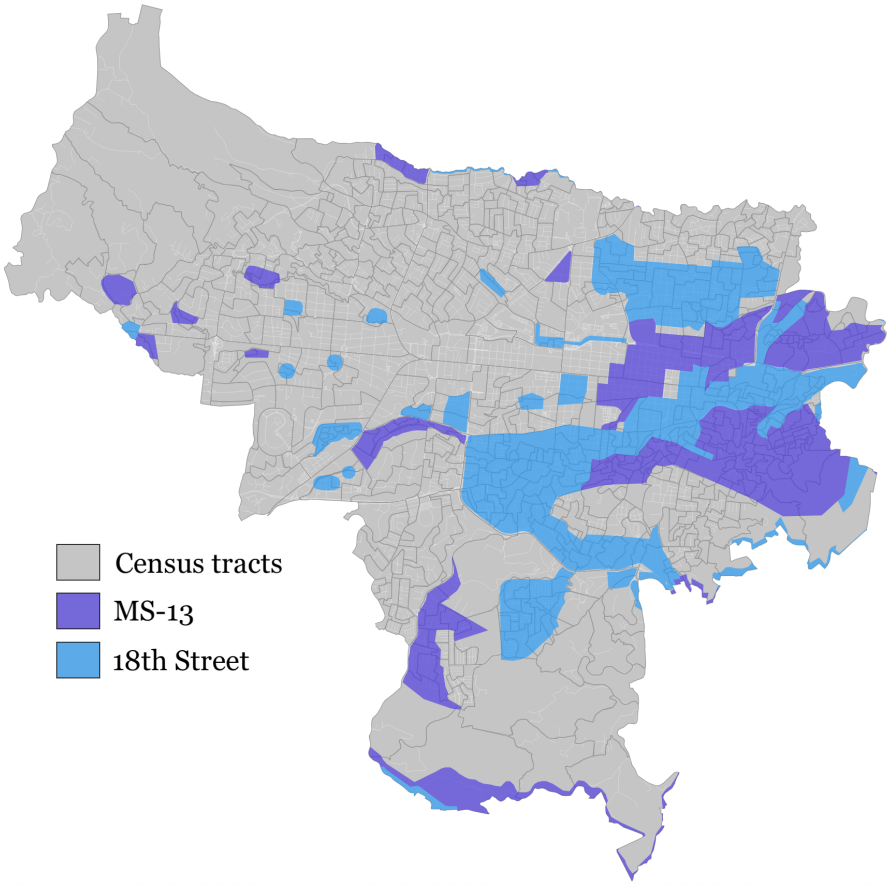
Note: This table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to individuals' mobility. The unit of observation is an individual. In Columns 1–10, the outcome variables come from the surveys we conducted in 2019 and 2023. In Columns 11–18, the outcome variables come from Como Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 4: Differences between former Gang and Nongang Areas

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Use bus or walk	Use car	Own a car	Experienced address-based discrimination		Employer choice of CV	Employer evaluation of CV
	2022–23	2022–23	2023	2021	2022–23	2024	2024
Former gang neighborhood	0.084**	-0.062*	-0.070*	0.017	0.065***		
	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.040)	(0.033)	(0.017)		
CV with former gang address						-0.100***	-0.059*
						(0.017)	(0.035)
Mean dep. var	0.652	0.300	0.334	0.046	0.113		
Observations	3,193	3,193	2,315	848	3,195	1,726	188

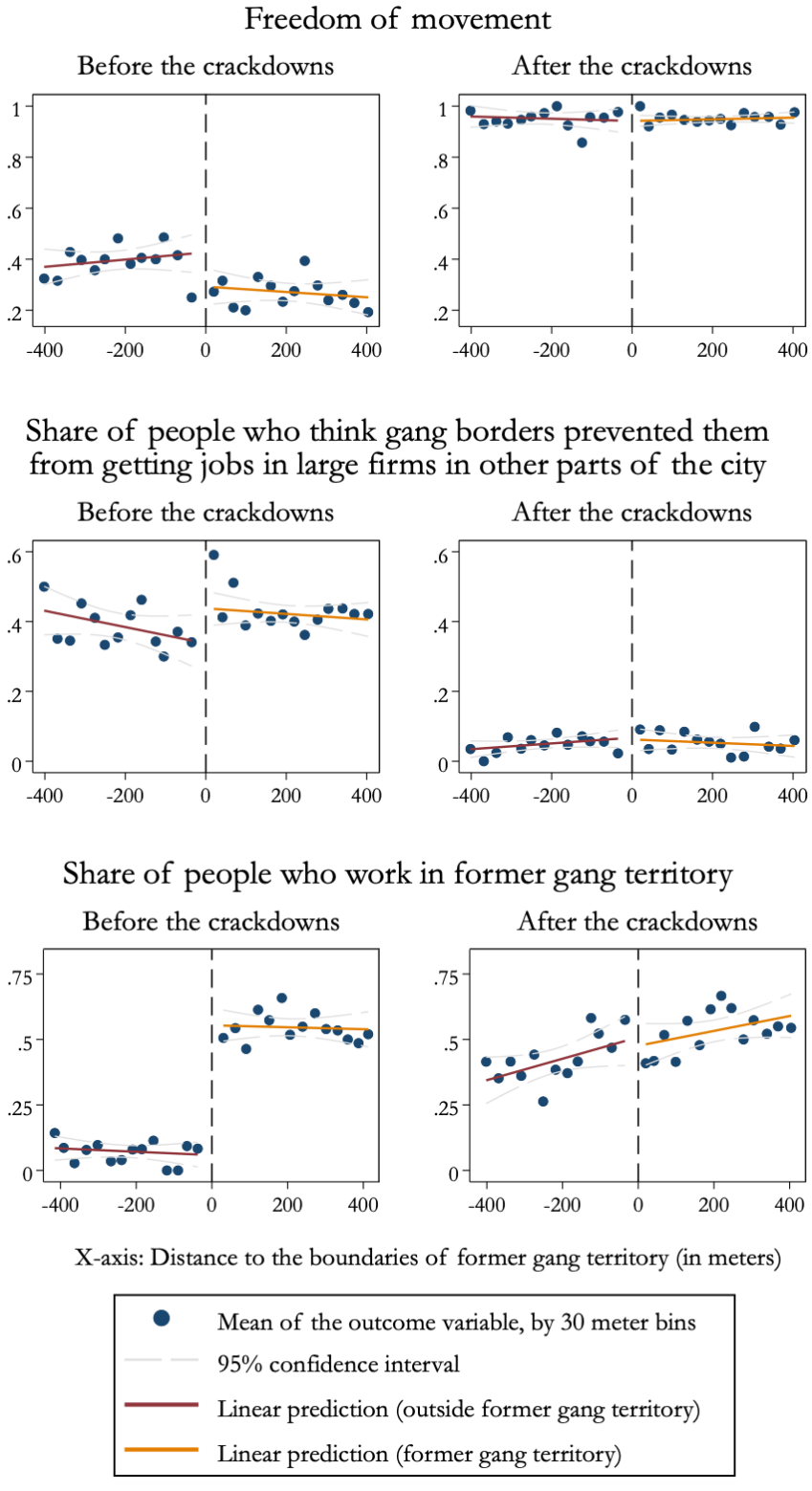
Note: This table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to transportation and employment discrimination. The unit of observation is an individual. In Columns 1, 2, and 5, the outcome variables come from the combined sample of the survey we conducted in 2023 and the 2022 wave of the Cómo Vamos survey. In Column 3, the outcome variable comes from the survey we conducted in 2023. In Column 4, the outcome variable comes from the 2021 wave of the Cómo Vamos survey. In Columns 6 and 7, the outcome variables come from a CV experiment that we conducted with employers in 2024. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. In Columns 1, 2, and 5, we additionally include a dummy for whether the variable came from the Cómo Vamos survey. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure 1: Former Gang Territory in San Salvador



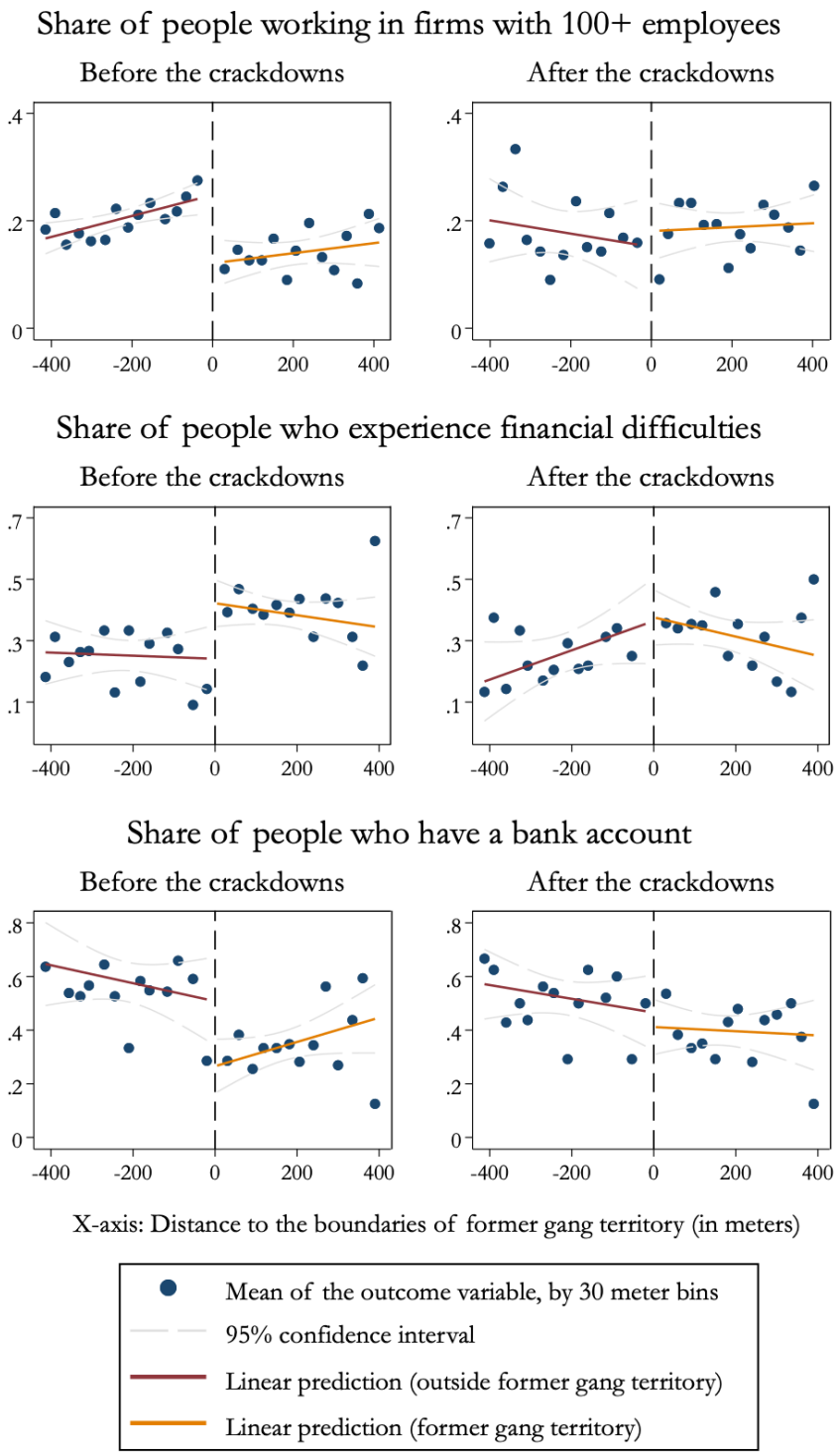
Note: This figure shows the map of San Salvador neighborhoods that were formerly controlled by gangs. The gray areas correspond to census tracts from the 2007 population census, which serve as the sampling units for the surveys used in this study.

Figure 2: Labor Mobility Restrictions, before and after the Crackdowns



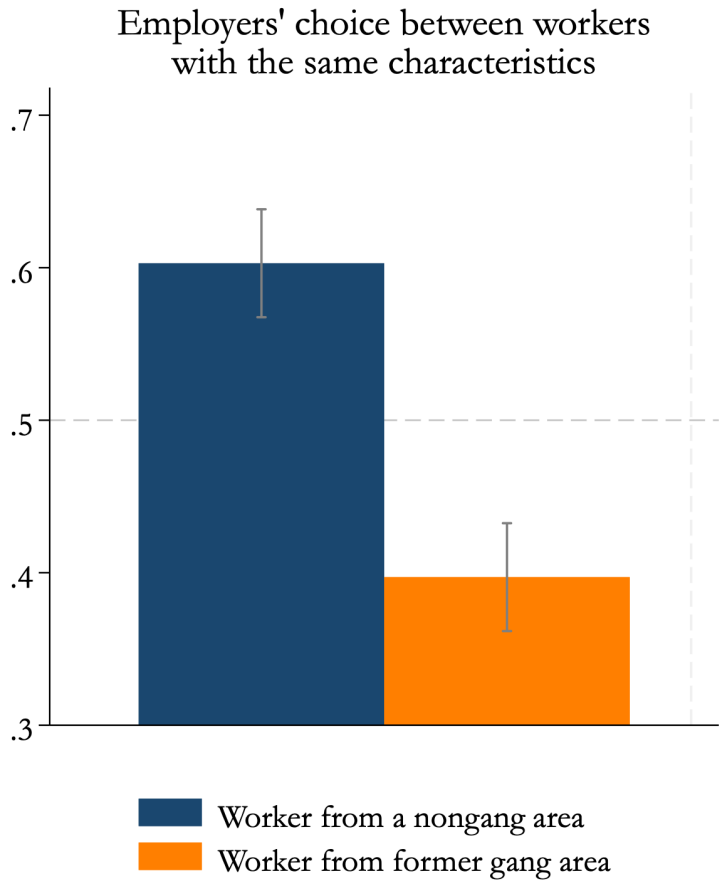
Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' labor mobility. The outcome variables come from the surveys we conducted in 2019 and 2023. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—distance (in meters) to the boundaries of gang territory. Areas to the left of the dashed line are located outside of former gang territory; areas to the right were formerly controlled by the gangs. The dots represent the averages of the outcome variable, by 30-meter bins.

Figure 3: Economic Outcomes, before and after the Crackdowns



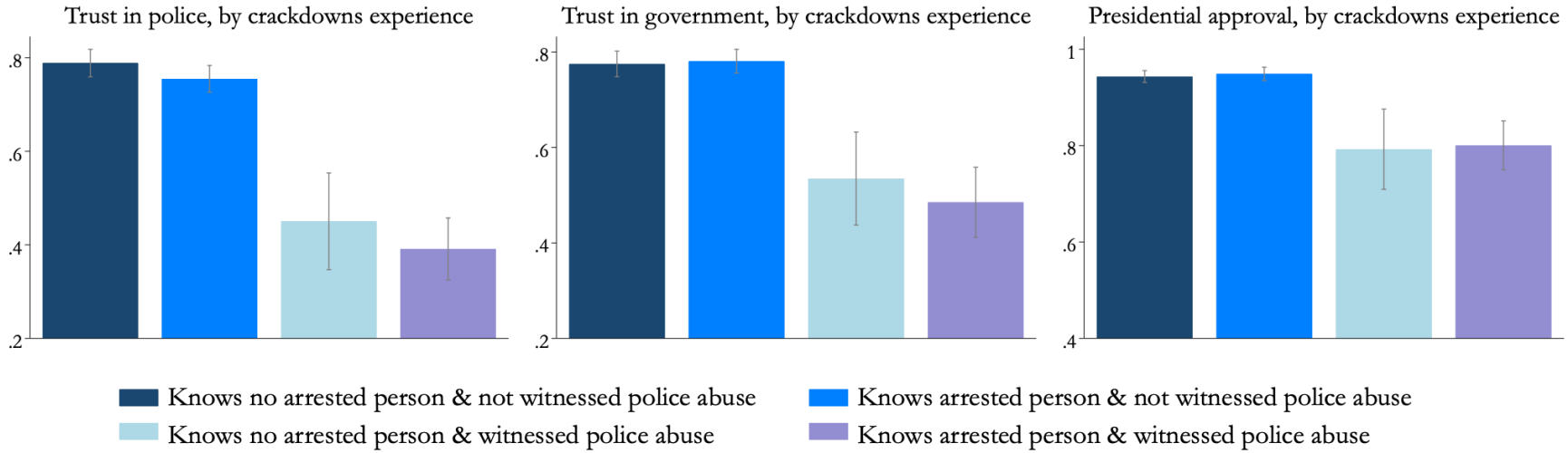
Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' economic well-being. The outcome variables in the top panel come from the surveys we conducted in 2019 and 2023. The outcome variables in the two other panels come from Como Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—distance (in meters) to the boundaries of gang territory. Areas to the left of the dashed line are located outside of former gang territory; areas to the right were formerly controlled by the gangs. The dots represent the averages of the outcome variable, by 30-meter bins.

Figure 4: Residence-based Discrimination



Note: This figure presents the results of the CV experiment conducted in 2024. The left panel shows the share of cases in which employers selected the CV of an applicant from a nongang neighborhood when choosing between two otherwise identical CVs. The right panel shows the corresponding share for applicants from former gang areas. The gray bars represent 95% confidence intervals, with standard errors clustered at the employer level.

Figure 5: Political Views, by Crackdowns Experience

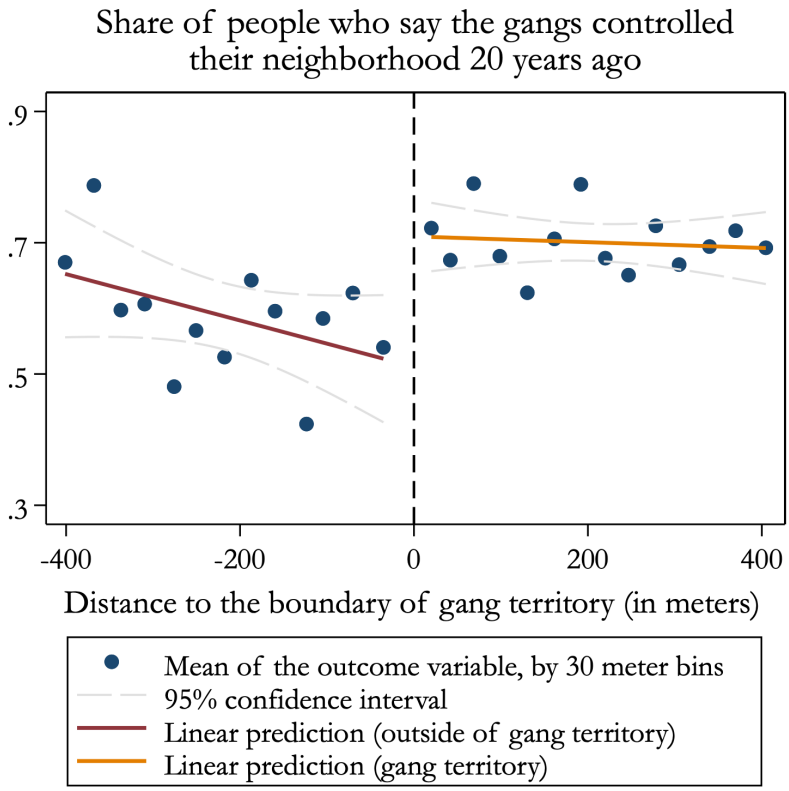


Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' political views, by experience during the crackdowns. The outcome variables come from the survey we conducted in 2023. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—the respondents' experience during the crackdowns.

Online Appendix

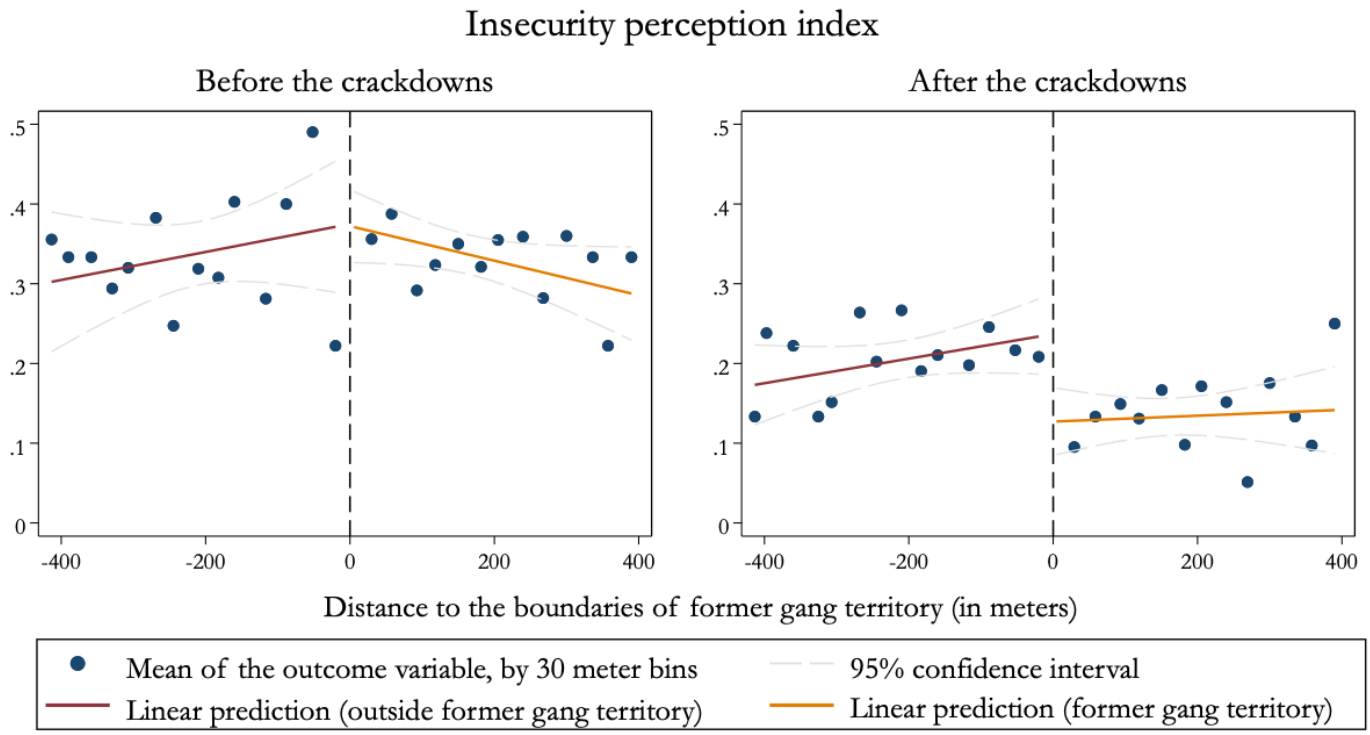
Online Appendix Figures

Figure A.1: Persistence of Gang Borders



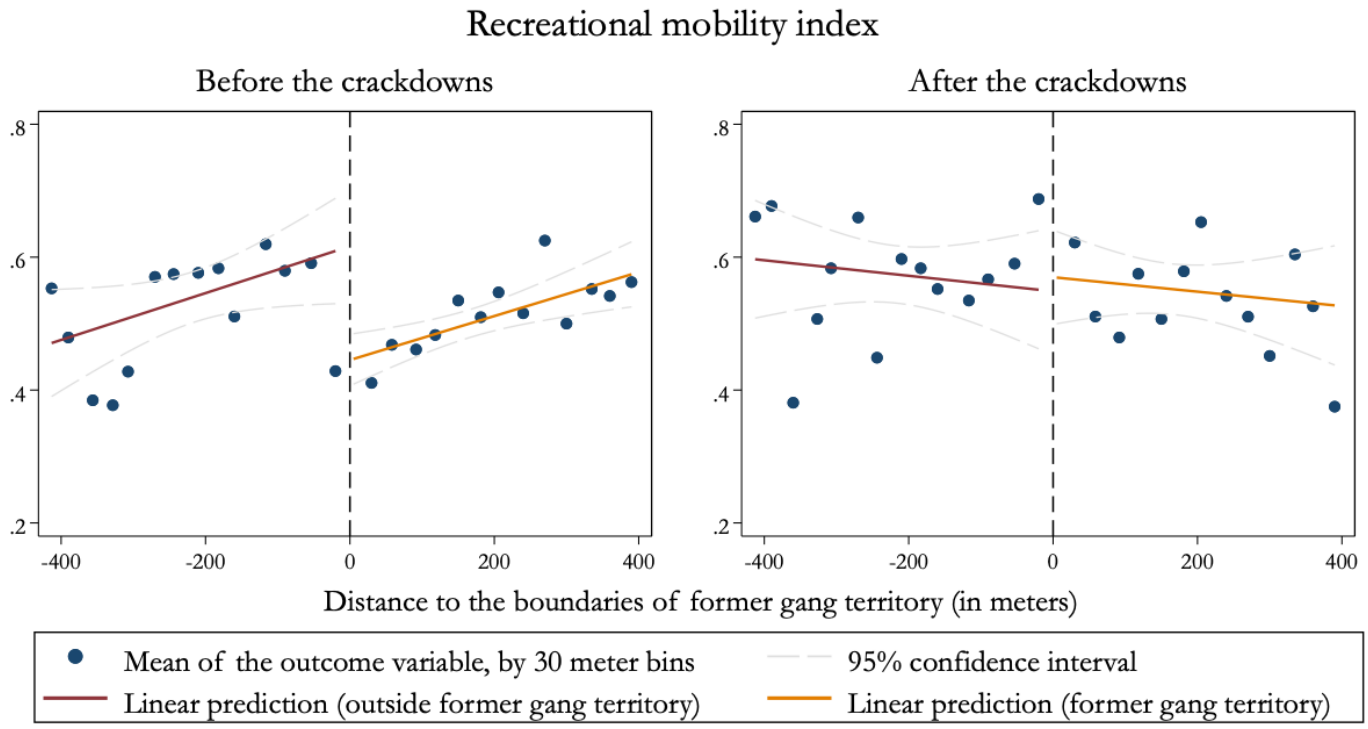
Note: This figure illustrates the stability of gang territorial boundaries. The outcome variable, derived from our 2023 survey, is a binary indicator equal to one if the respondent believes their neighborhood was under gang control twenty years earlier, in the early 2000s. The unit of observation is the individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcome variable; the horizontal axis—distance (in meters) to the boundaries of former gang territory. Areas to the left of the dashed line lie outside former gang territory, whereas those to the right were previously controlled by gangs. The dots display average values of the outcome variable, by 30-meter bins.

Figure A.2: Insecurity Perceptions, before and after the Crackdowns



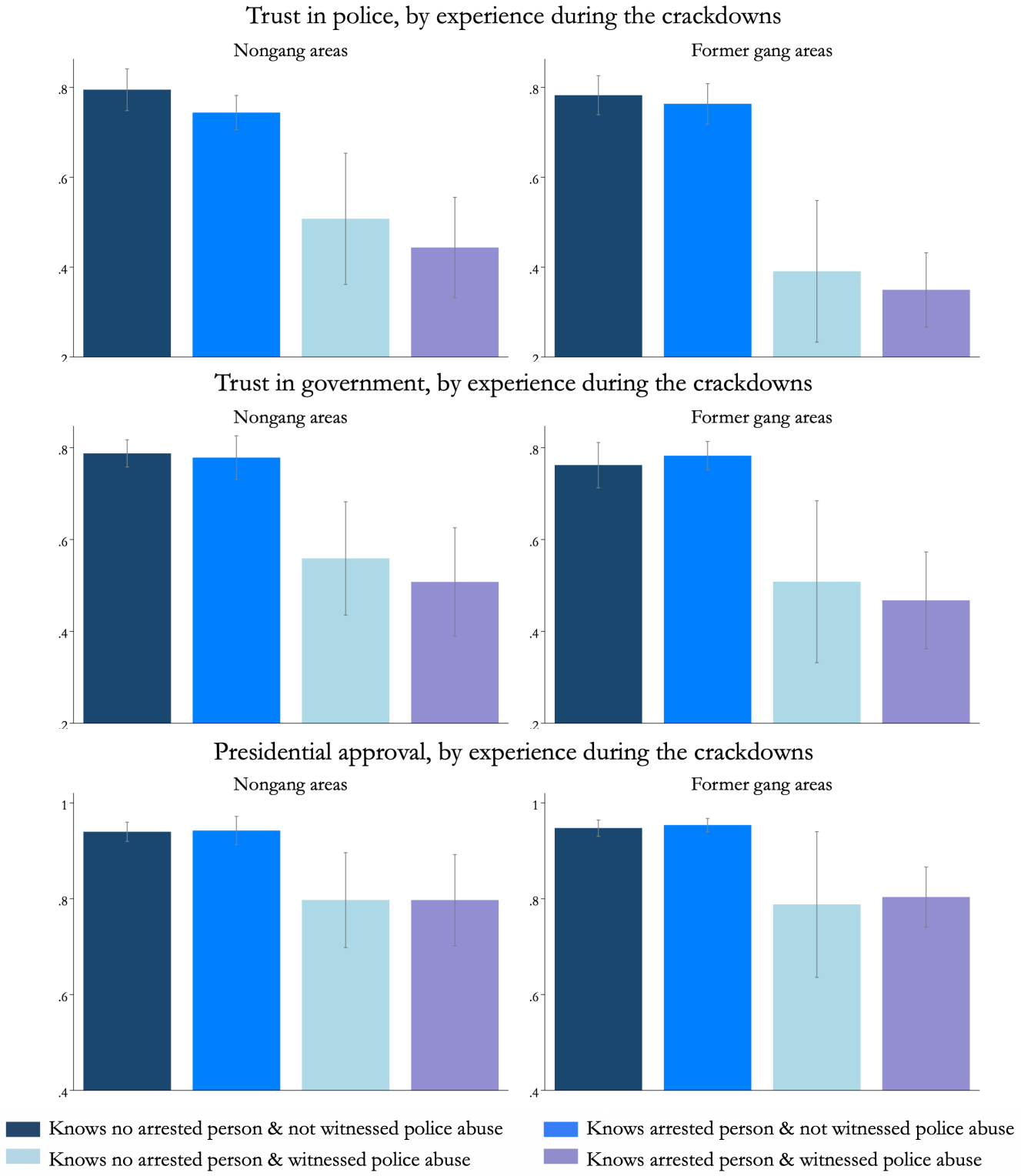
Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' perceptions of insecurity. The outcome variable represents the average of the three outcomes in Panel B of Table 1, before and after the crackdowns. The outcome variables come from Como Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—distance (in meters) to the boundaries of gang territory. Areas to the left of the dashed line are located outside of former gang territory; areas to the right were formerly controlled by the gangs. The dots represent the averages of the outcome variable, by 30-meter bins.

Figure A.3: Recreational Mobility, before and after the Crackdowns



Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' recreational mobility. The outcome variable represents the average of the six outcomes in the two top panels of Table 2, before and after the crackdowns. The outcome variables come from Como Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—distance (in meters) to the boundaries of gang territory. Areas to the left of the dashed line are located outside of former gang territory; areas to the right were formerly controlled by the gangs. The dots represent the averages of the outcome variable, by 30-meter bins.

Figure A.4: Political Views, by Crackdowns Experience



Note: This figure illustrates the results related to individuals' political views, by experience during the crackdowns, separately for former gang and nongang areas. The outcome variables come from the survey we conducted in 2023. The unit of observation is an individual. The vertical axis represents the average value of the outcomes variable; the horizontal axis—the respondents' experience during the crackdowns.

Online Appendix Tables

Table A.I: Security after the Crackdowns

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Gang presence decreased	Gang influence decreased	Police are present most of the time	Knows a person who was arrested	Witnessed police abuse
Former gang neighborhood	0.011	0.003	0.067	0.053	-0.028
	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.073)	(0.061)	(0.045)
Mean dep. var	0.879	0.852	0.527	0.491	0.195
Observations	2,313	2,313	2,313	2,315	2,315

Note: The table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to security following the 2022 crackdowns. The unit of observation is an individual. The outcome variables come from our 2023 survey. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.II: Policy Preferences

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Employment opportunities among top 3 problems		Inequality & vulnerability among top 3 problems		No major problems facing the country	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Former gang neighborhood	0.048	-0.120**	-0.019	0.104*	0.001	0.025**
	(0.062)	(0.056)	(0.062)	(0.060)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Mean dep. var	0.517	0.428	0.623	0.618	0.007	0.018
Observations	848	880	848	880	848	880

Note: This table presents the results of estimating Specification (1) for the outcome variables related to individuals' policy preferences. The unit of observation is an individual. The outcome variables come from the Cómo Vamos surveys conducted before and after the gang crackdowns. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.III: Trust in Police and Government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Willing to get help from the police				Trust in the police			
Former gang neighborhood	-0.041	-0.031	-0.027	-0.044	-0.006	-0.009	0.007	-0.036
	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.036)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.036)	(0.044)
Knows an arrested person		0.000				-0.104***		
		(0.028)				(0.029)		
Former gang neighborhood ×		-0.018				0.014		
× Knows an arrested person		(0.037)				(0.041)		
Witnessed police abuse			-0.113***				-0.310***	
			(0.033)				(0.039)	
Former gang neighborhood ×			-0.094**				-0.103**	
× Witnessed police abuse			(0.041)				(0.047)	
Knows an arrested person &				0.083***				0.044*
Not witnessed police abuse				(0.024)				(0.023)
Former gang neighborhood ×				0.000				0.071**
× Knows an arrested person &				(0.030)				(0.033)
Not witnessed police abuse								
Mean dep. var	0.674	0.674	0.674	0.674	0.702	0.702	0.702	0.702
Observations	2,315	2,315	2,315	2,315	2,183	2,183	2,183	2,183
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Trust in the government				Approval of the president			
Former gang neighborhood	0.020	0.011	0.020	0.000	0.025	0.023	0.022	0.019
	(0.035)	(0.042)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.028)	(0.033)
Knows an arrested person		-0.060**				-0.022**		
		(0.025)				(0.008)		
Former gang neighborhood ×		0.021				0.005		
× Knows an arrested person		(0.037)				(0.016)		
Witnessed police abuse			-0.259***				-0.143***	
			(0.038)				(0.030)	
Former gang neighborhood ×			-0.034				-0.008	
× Witnessed police abuse			(0.053)				(0.040)	
Knows an arrested person &				0.067***				0.043*
Not witnessed police abuse				(0.021)				(0.022)
Former gang neighborhood ×				0.044				0.010
× Knows an arrested person &				(0.029)				(0.024)
Not witnessed police abuse								
Mean dep. var	0.723	0.723	0.723	0.723	0.917	0.917	0.917	0.917
Observations	2,183	2,183	2,183	2,183	2,315	2,315	2,315	2,315

Note: The table presents the results of estimating Equation (1) for the outcome variables related to individuals' trust in the police and in government. The unit of observation is an individual. The outcome variables come from our 2023 survey. Omitted controls include a linear trend in distance to the boundaries of former gang territory, separately for locations on each side of the boundaries. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by 30-meter bins, denoting the distance to the boundaries of former gang territory (separately for each side of the boundaries). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.