



June 2024 | R2404



# GROUND WORK FOR PEACE

Reorienting Jamaica's  
ZOSOs for Sustained  
Violence Reduction

---



# **Groundwork for Peace**

## **Reorienting Jamaica's ZOSOs for Sustained Violence Reduction**

Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI)  
Kingston, Jamaica

Lead Researcher: Alexander J. Causwell  
Research Supervisor: Diana Thorburn  
Research Assistant: Stanea McIntosh

# Table of CONTENTS

Figures	iii
Maps	iii
Acronyms	iii
Executive Summary	iv
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2 A Fresh Perspective</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3 Organised Violence and Undergoverned Spaces</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4 Land Tenure and Urban Upgrading</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5 Reorienting ZOSOs Towards Order-Making</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>6 Conclusion</b>	<b>50</b>



# Figures

Figure 1: Category One Crimes Annual Incidents by Type, 2021-2023

Figure 2: Annual Incidents of Category One Crimes, 2021-2023

Figure 3: Number of Gangs in Jamaica 2010-2023

Figure 4: JSIF Expenditure on Five ZOZOs

# Maps

Map 1: Informal Settlements Distribution across Jamaica, 2013-2023

Map 2a: Informal Settlements Distribution in Kingston and St. Andrew, 2020

Map 2b: Informal Settlements Distribution in St. Catherine, 2020

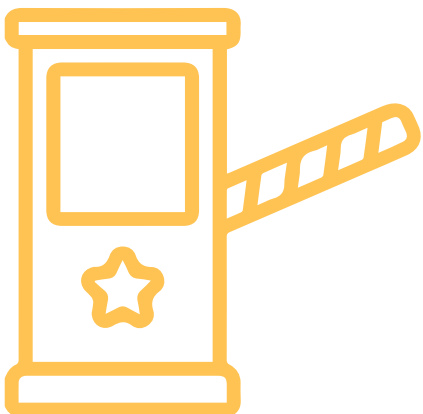
Map 2c: Informal Settlements Distribution in Greater Montego Bay, 2020

# Acronyms

COIN	Counterinsurgency Theory
CPTED	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
CPTSD	Crime Prevention through Social Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSS	Citizen Security Secretariat
HEART TRUST	Human Employment and Resource Training/ National Service Training Agency
JCF	Jamaica Constabulary Force
JDF	Jamaica Defence Force
JSIF	Jamaica Social Investment Fund
KSA	Kingston and St. Andrew
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation/ North Atlantic Alliance
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NSP	National Security Policy
UIP	Urban Integrated Projects
SOE	State of Emergency
TCP	Territorial Control Plan
UN	United Nations
UPP	Unidad de Policía Pacificadora
ZOSOs	Zones of Special Operations



# Executive Summary



Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) is a government initiative launched in **2017** to address Jamaica's high rates of violent deaths.

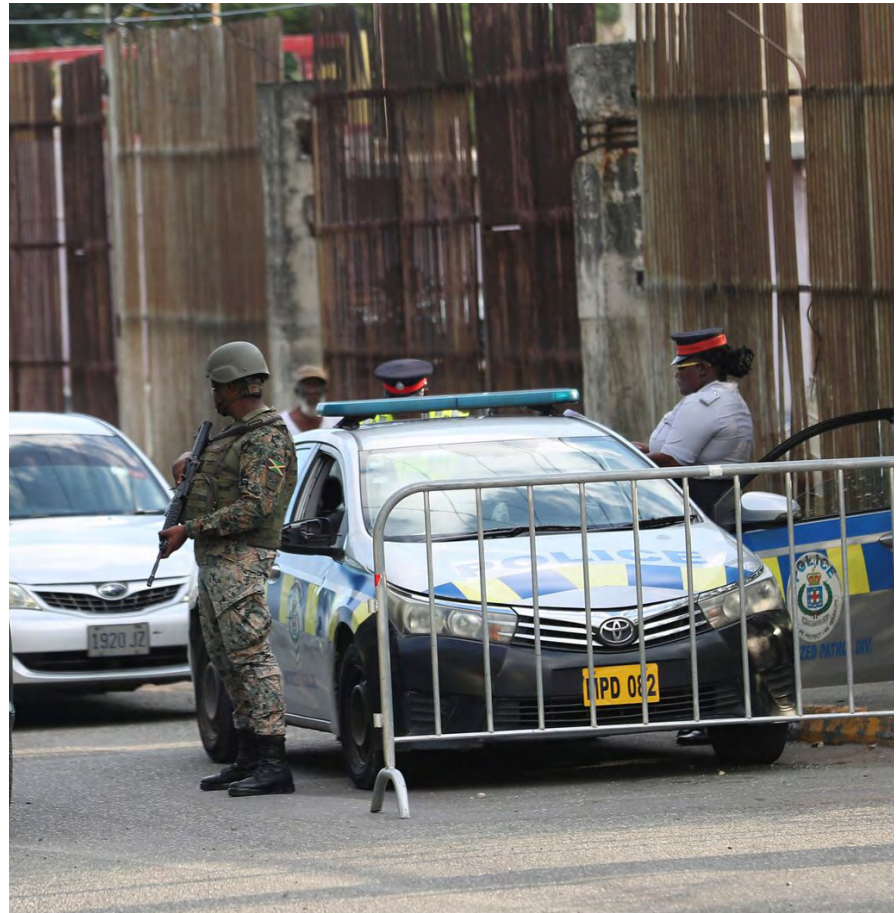
This report evaluates the strategic framework and operational design of Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs), a government initiative launched in 2017 to address Jamaica's high rates of violent deaths. ZOSOs aim to address volatile and vulnerable communities using a "clear, hold, and build" strategy derived from Counterinsurgency Theory. This strategy involves displacing gangs, maintaining a continuous security presence while fostering behaviour modification—winning over the “hearts and minds” of the residents—and community strengthening through social investments, including infrastructural work.

This strategic review questions the efficacy of the “hearts and minds” approach that underpins the ZOSO strategy, noting its historical failures in other contexts. The analysis advocates shifting the perception of Jamaica's violence from merely criminal or cultural to one rooted in organised violence perpetrated by gangs operating from informal communities—a perspective embodied in the 2013 National Security Policy, yet not reflected in the activities of ZOSOs. These areas are identified as concerns due to their role in fostering high levels of violence.

ZOSOs currently focus on social development initiatives and cursory infrastructural projects, neither of which address how the irregular settlement patterns of

these communities make them havens for violent gangs. By ignoring that, the strategy fails to effect the transformations that would reduce extreme violence sustainably. Regularized land tenure and compre-

hensive infrastructure upgrading in informal communities will undermine gang strongholds, enhance community development, and increase state legitimacy in these as yet undergoverned spaces.



**Regularising land tenure in informal communities will undermine gang strongholds, enhance community development, and increase state legitimacy.**



## Theory of Change

Security operations that constitute the "clear" and "hold" phases of ZOSO, supported by a localised states of emergency, must be complemented by structural changes during the "build" phase to be effective. A key element of this strategy is the regularisation of semi-formal and informal communities as a catalyst for breaking the cycle of violence. This can be done by regularising land ownership in gang-prevalent areas. This reform not only empowers residents economically but also aligns their interests with the state's interests, thereby enhancing state legitimacy and fostering support for state governance over gang rule.

One of the pivotal aspects of land tenure regularisation is facilitating residential mobility: providing residents with the option to sell their properties and relocate, thereby disrupting entrenched social dynamics that favour gang control.

This increased mobility helps to integrate informal settlements into the formal governance framework, boosting the state's capacity to enforce laws and maintain security.

By eliminating the structural and social conditions that allow informal communities to act as sanctuaries for gangs, land tenure regularisation directly reduces gang violence. That, in turn, frees up police resources for addressing non-gang activity while reducing the pool of contract killers, thereby also reducing non-gang violence.

Further integration of marginalised communities into the broader economy and society is achieved through enhanced infrastructure and improved service access. This reduces isolation and diminishes gang control, weaving these communities into the societal fabric where the rule of law prevails.

Economically, transforming "dead capital", that which cannot be sold or used to earn a financial return, into viable economic assets through formalised land ownership brings multiple benefits. It promotes financial inclusion, encourages participation in the formal economy, and improves living conditions by giving residents the incentive and means to invest in their properties. This economic and social development is instrumental in fostering long-term peace and stability nationwide.

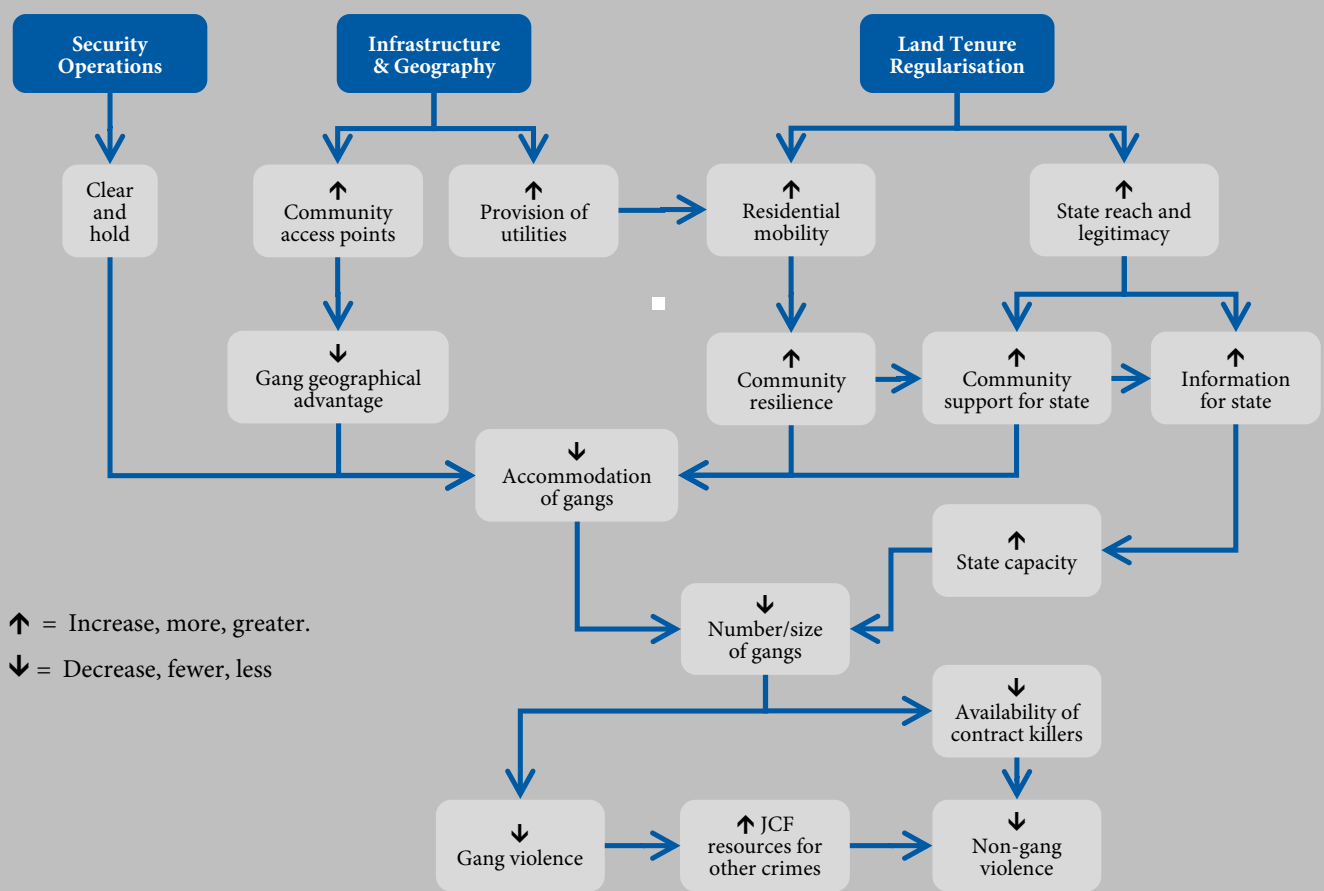
While ZOSOs provide a platform and policy window for violence reduction initiatives, reorienting towards land tenure regularisation is essential for sustained impact. This strategic shift can reduce organised violence in Jamaica, bringing the murder rate down from one of the top five most murderous countries in the world down closer to the world average.





This diagram shows the chains of events through which the recommended actions lead to the intended outcome of a reduction in criminal violence.

## 1 Theory of Change Diagram



## Recommendations



# 1

Shift the ZOSO strategy away from winning “hearts and minds” to prioritising territorial control, facilitated by the coordination of land tenure regularisation, infrastructure upgrading, and security operations.

Maintain localised SOEs to support the trident strategy. This will enable ZOSOs to operate without violent disruptions and reduce armed violence in the short term.

# 2



# 3

De-prioritise social interventions aimed at behaviour modification, to redirect focus and resources for the priorities above.









# 1 Introduction



**Strong anti-gang measures are needed to normalize and integrate the worst affected communities.**



Since the 1970s, Jamaica has experienced rates of violent death that surpass those of similar countries in its region or economic bracket, even outpacing states experiencing civil war. Efforts to curb this violence have not had sustained success. In 2017, the Jamaican government launched a new initiative, Zones of Special Operation (ZOSOs), to address the violence. ZOSOs have since been established in seven communities across the island identified as violent "hotspots." They are based on a "clear, hold, and build" strategy, drawing from Counterinsurgency (COIN) Theory.

Traditionally, COIN refers to the totality of measures employed by the state security forces of a country against insurgent or rebel groups in the context of a civil war. Aside from direct confrontation with insurgent groups, these measures also seek to counter the insurgent strategy of evading the state's security forces by integrating themselves into a local population, hiding amongst them, and sustaining themselves through that population's resources and assistance.

The population-centric model of COIN—one variation of COIN—emphasizes efforts to convince targeted populations to cease supporting the insurgent groups and to support the state instead—to win over their "hearts and minds"—thereby denying armed groups the resources and operational assistance the community provides. This population-centric model of COIN is often referred to as "armed so-

cial work," as it usually involves providing social services, development initiatives, and security.

Jamaica's 2013 National Security Policy (NSP 2013) recommends adapting a population-centric counterinsurgency approach to combat Jamaica's violent gangs. The strategic approach of ZOSOs is consistent with this framing. NSP 2013 puts forward that this approach is instrumental to "integrating" Jamaica's marginalized communities, which serve as safe havens for organised crime, into mainstream society, through a combination of forced gang displacement, community policing, the provision of social services and interventions from civilian agencies, and infrastructure projects.

In accordance with the population-centric COIN model, ZOSOs entail security forces occupying troubled communities and displacing gangs, followed by social interventions, or "social investments," as per the official literature. These interventions aim to transform the physical environments of the targeted communities and promote human capacity development of residents, with a view to making the communities inhospitable to gangs.

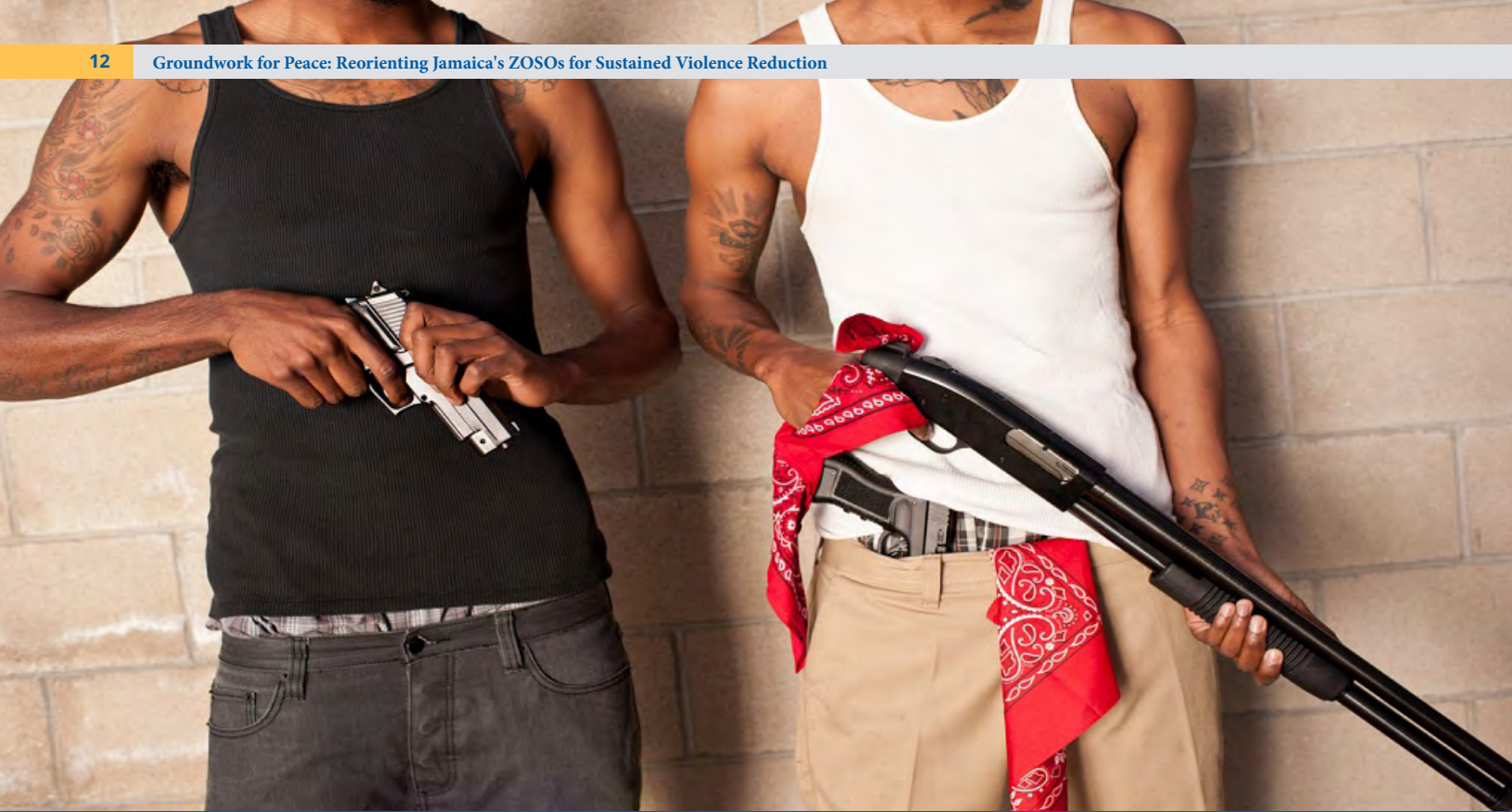
The effectiveness of the population-centric strategy has come into question with the failure of NATO's COIN campaign in Afghanistan (2001–2021). The strategy has also had unimpressive outcomes when applied to organised crime, such as in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This poor track record of population-centric COIN calls attention

the strategy's prospects for success in Jamaica. Is the population-centric COIN framework fit for purpose in helping Jamaica arrest its high levels of armed violence? To what extent can the failures of this approach elsewhere inform modifications to the framework in Jamaica, so that Jamaica can avoid those pitfalls?

This report evaluates the ZOSO strategy and operational design against its stated goals and the potential for transformation promised by the COIN model. It aims to ascertain if the measures outlined in a population-centric COIN approach are well-suited to address the patterns of armed violence experienced in Jamaica, and how the ZOSOs might be optimised.



"Strong anti-gang measures are needed to normalise and integrate the worst affected communities. In areas where gangs are deeply entrenched, this will require a Clear, Hold, and Build strategy. These are operations that can clear gangs out of entire communities; hold those areas by maintaining a strong, continuous police presence to provide lasting security, and then build a robust civil society by engaging other government agencies and NGOs to provide education, training, economic opportunities, health care and prompt justice. The goal of this clear, hold, and build strategy is to reassure the community, remove their fear of gangs, build sustained popular support, increase the flow of intelligence about gang operations, and ensure that gangs have no safe haven anywhere.<sup>1</sup>"



# 2

## A Fresh Perspective



Jamaica's chronic violence problem originated in political conflicts in the **1960s** and **1970s**, that precipitated organised criminal networks.

Jamaica's chronic violence problem originated in political conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s, that precipitated organised criminal networks, which later entered the transnational drug trade. Following a governmental crackdown on narco-trafficking, these gangs fragmented and, after 2010, splintered further. They have since engaged in widespread violence primarily against each other, and people subject to their control, driving rates of violent death higher than that of many civil wars.

The nature, or ontology, of this violence is the subject of debate. The prevailing view attributes the high rate of homicides to a "culture of violence."<sup>2</sup> Ongoing work on the question of Jamaica's high levels of armed violence has, however, since prompted a re-examination of that hypothesis. A fresh look at the available evidence suggests that Jamaica's high violence levels are less about cultural tendencies and more about an environment fostered by specific governmental policies since the early 1970s that have created and maintained communities that function as incubators of, and safe havens for, violent gangs. This shift in perspective entails understanding Jamaica's problem as an outcome of the logic of organised violence, rather than a culture of violence; it prompts a critical re-evaluation of the data, which yields new insights and conclusions.

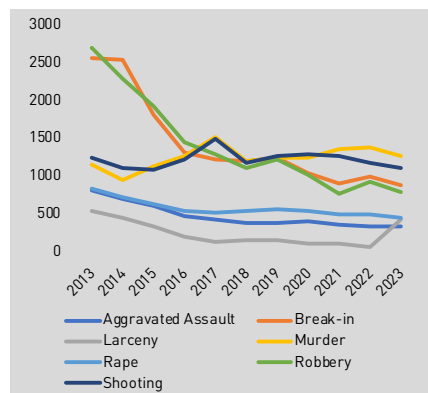
## A Geo-Spatial Perspective on Crime and Violence

Jamaica's "crime problem" is more accurately conceptualised as an "armed violence" problem. Data from 2013 to 2023 shows that all category one crimes have gradually decreased in frequency, except for murders and shootings, which have remained relatively constant.<sup>3,4</sup> (See Figure 1.)

The majority of murders in Jamaica are gang-related or interpersonal.



### Category One Crimes Annual Incidents by Type, 2021-2023



Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force. Calculations by author.

Monthly trends show a high degree of synchronisation between murders and

shootings, suggesting they represent different outcomes of the same type of act; i.e. shootings are "would-be" murders.<sup>5</sup> The persistently high levels of murders and shootings suggest that these acts are driven by different factors from other category one crimes, or are less responsive to policing strategies that have driven down other types of crime.

The distinction between "crime" and "violence" becomes even clearer when considering the geo-spatial aspects, which refer to the analysis of crime locations and patterns across different geographic areas. The spatial density of incidents of murders and shootings, referring to the concentration of murders and shootings within specific areas, overlap with each other, but not with other crimes.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, 93 percent of the combined category of murders and shootings (which we are calling "armed violence") are stand-alone events. That is, they are not committed in conjunction with other crimes, such as in the process of a robbery or break-in.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that armed violence in Jamaica is overwhelmingly purposeful, rather than instrumental to other forms of crime.<sup>8</sup>

These analyses support the longstanding assessment by the security forces, that in Jamaica armed violence is a distinct phenomenon from other types of crime. Jamaica's high murder rate is thus better understood not as a crime problem, but as the outcome of the prevalence of violent

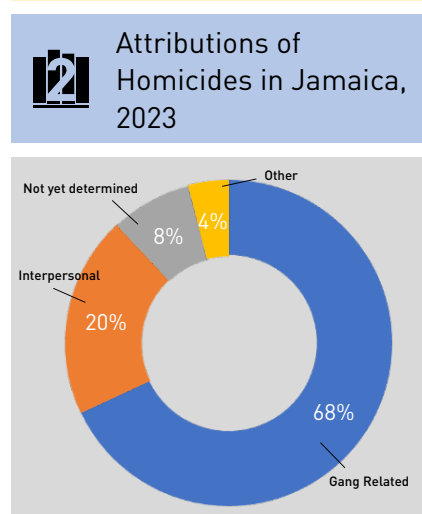
Jamaica's violence is less about cultural tendencies and more about an environment fostered by specific governmental policies since the early 1970s that have created and maintained communities that function as incubators of, and safe havens for, violent gangs.



gangs throughout the country, who are in violent competition with each other, within themselves, and with the state security forces. It is purposeful and organised, as borne out by the homicide data.

Homicides in Jamaica have followed a fairly consistent pattern for the past five-plus years. Murders that are directly related to gangs account for some 70 percent of homicides, interpersonal murders 20 percent, and the remaining 12 percent mostly undetermined. (See Figure 1.)

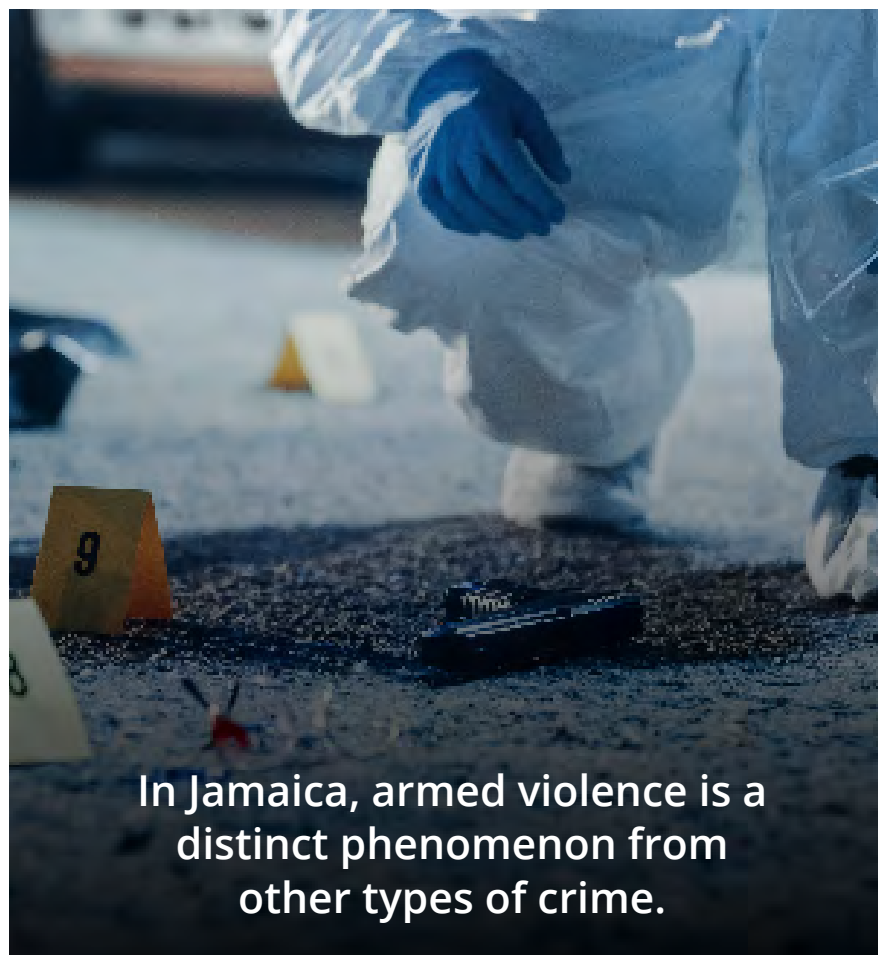
The majority of murders in Jamaica are gang-related or interpersonal.



Source: "Organised Violence: The Jamaican Perspective," presentation at the Office of the National Security Advisor seminar, "Organised Violence and the Threat to Peace in Jamaica and the Region," Kingston, Jamaica, February 7, 2024.

Jamaica's violence is not only geographically concentrated, as will be more clearly shown, but also predominantly takes place within the organised criminal underworld. This is borne out by the data point that though Jamaica has one of the highest rates of violence in the Caribbean and Latin America region, it has one of the lowest victimisation rates.<sup>9</sup> Also clear is that the majority of homicide victims and perpetrators are young adult males (ten times more than females) who are deeply entrenched in organised crime. Such individuals are 136 times more likely to be murdered than the general population.<sup>10</sup>

These statistics highlight a consistent pattern of violence in areas dominated



by gangs. For example, in Newark, New Jersey, 47 distinct gangs and criminally active groups, comprising less than 2 percent of the local population, were involved in 69 percent of the area's murders. Nearly a third of all shootings were linked to a network of less than 4 percent of the city's population, with gang membership increasing the likelihood of being shot by 344 percent. Similar patterns are observed in other US cities; in Chicago, 70 percent of all gunshot injuries occurred within networks representing less than 6 percent of the city's population, and in Boston, 85 percent of shootings in a Cape Verdean neighbourhood were concentrated among 763 individuals linked to 10 gangs, less than 3 percent of that neighbourhood's population.<sup>11</sup>

As Jamaica's Commissioner of Police has stated: "it is mostly persons within the organised violence ecosystem that are dying, and the same people who are the perpetrators are the victims."<sup>12</sup> Jamaica's homicide rate, excluding killings directly

or indirectly related to organised crime, would stand at 4.3 per 100,000, which is below the global average of 6.1 per 100,000.<sup>13</sup>

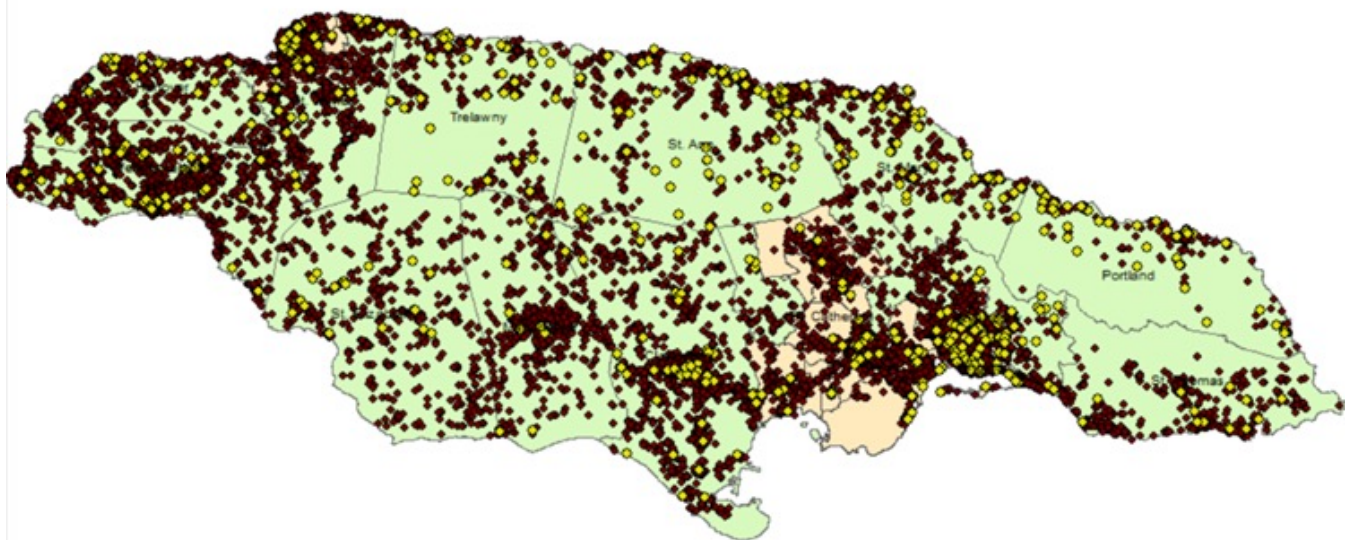
### Informal Communities and Gang Safe Havens

NSP 2013 identifies the prevalence of informal communities in Jamaica as the source of organised violence, since violent gangs rely on such communities for safe haven.<sup>14</sup> That theory is supported by a spatial relationship between geo-locations of armed violence incidents with those of informal communities, which reveals a concentration of armed violence in and around such settlements.<sup>15</sup> Notably, 49.3 percent of armed violence incidents occur within 750 metres from the centre point of an informal settlement, approximating the total area and immediate vicinity of each community. This accounts for 6.5 percent of Jamaica's total land area.

This map shows the distribution of informal settlements across Jamaica, overlaid with locations of all recorded incidents of armed violence over an 11-year period.



## Informal Settlements Distribution across Jamaica, 2020



Map showing incidents of Armed Violence 2013-2023 (Red) and Informal Communities (Yellow)

As shown in Map 1, both the prevalence of informal communities and incidents of armed violence are concentrated in Jamaica's major urban areas. Within those

major urban areas, the concentration of violence in and around informal communities increases. In the Kingston and St. Andrew (KSA) region informal

communities altogether make up 44 percent of all urban space in KSA.<sup>16</sup> Three-quarters of armed violence incidents occur within these spaces.



Jamaica's high murder rate should be understood not as a crime problem, but as the outcome of the prevalence of violent gangs throughout the country.

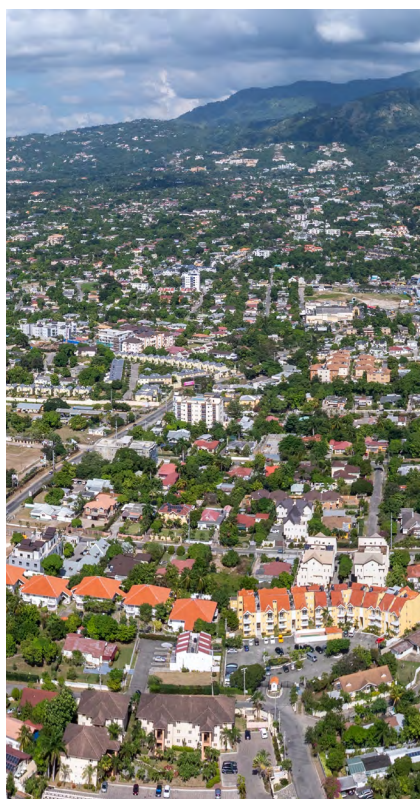


St. Catherine's urban space, spread out amongst Spanish Town, Portmore, and Old Harbour likewise exhibits the clustering of informal communities associated with higher frequencies of violence.

In St. Catherine, within that 750 metre radius, which covered only 7 percent of the urban land area, 35 percent of armed violence incidents occurred.

The situation in Greater Montego Bay mirrors the pattern seen in St. Catherine but with even more pronounced concentrations of crime in and near informal communities.

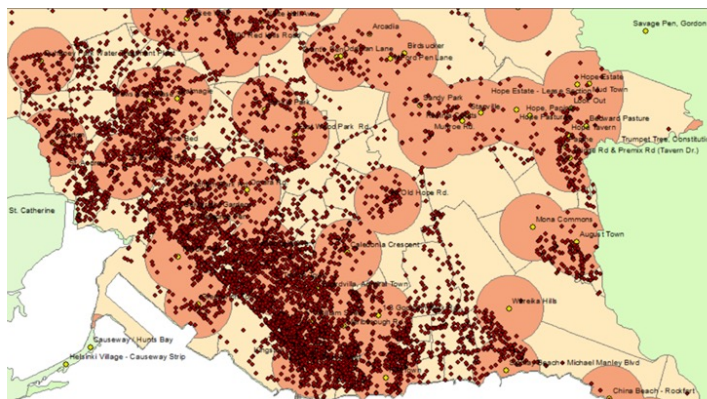
The 750m radius around the informal communities accounts for 21 percent of the urban area; 62 percent of all armed violence incidents occurred within this space. Unlike in St. Andrew and St. Catherine, where both informal communities and associated levels of violence are more spread across the urban space, in St. James the clusters are more proximate to the Montego Bay Downtown area, whereas other densely populated areas of the city have fewer informal settlements and much fewer incidents of armed violence.



## Violence clusters in informal communities.

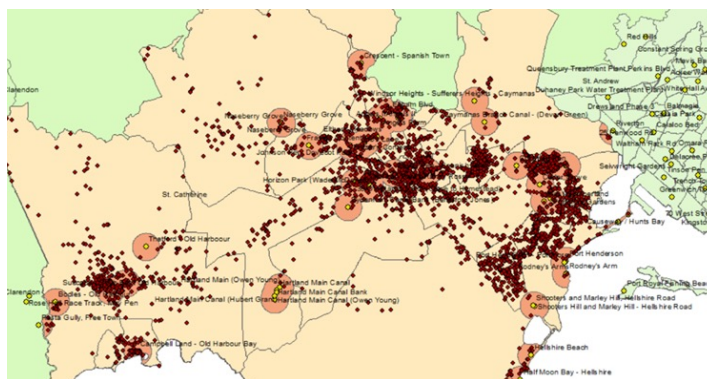
2a

Informal Settlements Distribution in Kingston and St. Andrew, 2020



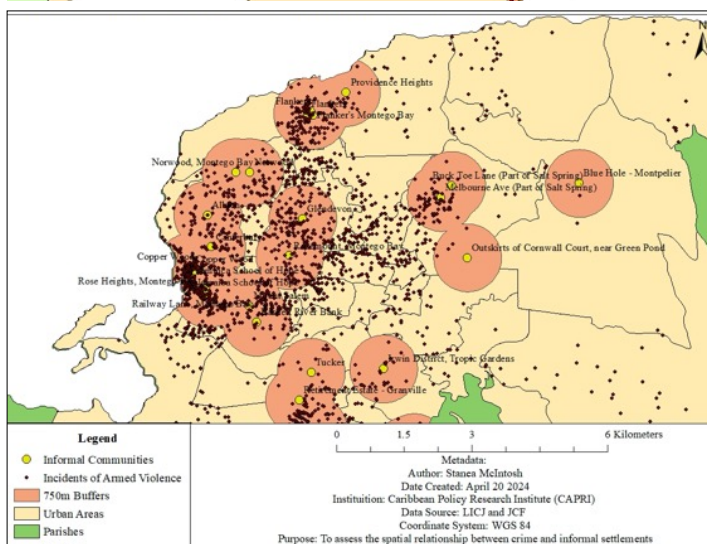
2b

Informal Settlements Distribution in St. Catherine, 2020



2c

Informal Settlements Distribution in Greater Montego Bay, 2020



Source: CAPRI map based on data from the Jamaica Constabulary Force and Mona GeoInformatics.



The majority of the **JCF's** resources are necessarily devoted to combating gangs, which in turn diverts attention away from investigating other non-gang-related violent crimes.

The visualisations of the spatial relationships between urban informal communities and armed violence also reveal that where there is a clustering of informal settlements there is also a higher frequency of armed violence, which likely reflects the prevalence of “border” disputes between organised gangs engaging each other in turf war.

### The Relationship Between Gang Murders and Interpersonal Murders

Interpersonal murders, which account for 20 percent of murders, are indirectly attributable to gang violence. “Interpersonal violence” is defined as that not resulting from gang conflict nor committed during the commission of another crime. According to the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), these murders are nonetheless an integral part of Jamaica’s “ecosystem of organised violence.”<sup>17</sup>

The connection between interpersonal and gang violence manifests in several ways. First, gang members’ access to firearms influences the likelihood of their using guns in interpersonal conflicts. For instance, in Boston (USA), gang members—whether as victims, offenders, or both—were involved in 53 percent of shootings related to personal disputes and 40 percent of domestic violence incidents.<sup>18</sup>

Second, interpersonal murders can often be indirectly linked to gang violence due to what might be termed an “impunity effect.” The high rate of unresolved gang-related murders creates a perception of impunity among the general population, not just gang members, notwithstanding the recent speedy arrests of several high profile murder accused. The perceived lack of consequences leads individuals to resort to murder to resolve personal disputes, under the belief that they can similarly evade justice. In contrast, in places where murderers are swiftly caught and prosecuted, people are less likely to turn to homicide as a means to settle differences.<sup>19</sup>

Further, the majority of the JCF’s resources are necessarily devoted to combating gangs, which in turn diverts at-



Interpersonal murders, which account for **20%** of murders, are directly and indirectly attributable to gang violence and violent gangs throughout the country.

tention away from investigating other non-gang-related violent crimes. This situation stretches the police force thin, making it challenging to thoroughly address the broader murder problem without increases in manpower and resources.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the pervasiveness of organised crime provides a ready supply of contract killers, whose services individuals can procure to settle personal matters through violence, further escalating the rate of homicides.<sup>21</sup> These overlaps underscore how mitigating the gang problem would also lead to a reduction in interpersonal violence.

### The Genesis of Jamaica's Organised Violence Ecosystem

The disproportionate occurrence of armed violence in and around informal communities can be traced back to developments that began nearly a century ago. This historical context is crucial for understanding the landscape of Jamaica’s contemporary violence problem.

The explosion of poor, informal settlements in and around Jamaica’s urban areas mirrors the global trend of “urbanisation without industrialisation” seen in the 20th century, especially following the Great Depression (1929). Rural populations were pushed to cities by failing agriculture, not pulled by industrial jobs, leading to “over-urbanisation” and the proliferation of slums. These areas, marked by poor living conditions and insecure land tenure, find residents trapped in a dependent relationship with politi-

cians, powerless to improve their living conditions, and functionally isolated from the city’s development.<sup>22</sup>

The envelopment of Kingston by these informal communities led to public health crises, labour conflicts, and a breakdown in public order beginning in the 1930s. In Downtown Kingston, several formal communities also regressed into squatter settlements, as former residents abandoned their homes to escape the growing disorder. These issues hastened the push for Jamaican self-governance and eventually independence, as local political leaders rose to take the reins of the new paradigm.

Post-1962 independence, politicians tried to provide structure to some of these communities through social housing projects with a view to alleviating poverty, but also to solidify political control of their respective constituencies, thus creating the first “garrisons.”<sup>23</sup> However, even communities that remained informal became “garrisonised” as they grew to depend on political patronage to stave off eviction. In both semi-formal and informal communities, local enforcers, or “dons,” ensured community loyalty to political parties through jobs, goods, services, and violence. In exchange, politicians tacitly or intentionally facilitated these “area leaders” in establishing organised criminal networks.<sup>24</sup>



Through the reciprocal relationship between local enforcers or “dons” and political parties the communities evolved into gang strongholds, became semi-isolated from mainstream city life, and served as incubators for armed groups that governed their respective communities through violence. Such garrisonised communities have since proliferated across the island, and they constitute the locus of Jamaica’s organised violence problem.<sup>25</sup>

In 2010, there was a turning point the ramifications of which shape the present-day (mid-2020s) situation. Operation Garden Parish sought to dislodge the Shower Posse, at the time considered Jamaica’s only third generation gang, from the garrison of Tivoli Gardens, marking a pivotal moment in Jamaica’s treatment of organised crime.<sup>26</sup> This operation, along with subsequent police actions, resulted in measurable gang member displacement and a notable decline in Jamaica’s murder rates, dropping from 1,682 in 2009 to 1,005 by 2014, a near halving of the rate of 62 in 2009 to 36 per 100,000 in 2014, a level Jamaica had not experienced in decades.

The 2011-14 policing strategy that brought about that reduced murder rate was undermined by evidence that the crackdown may have entailed extrajudicial actions and other abuses. At the same time, the state failed to maximize the opportunity presented by the vacuum, resulting in the splintering of established gangs and the proliferation of new, mostly first generation gangs, contributing to an increased proportion of gang-related murders post-2010.<sup>27</sup> Gangs also expanded into rural areas, with recorded gang activity in rural parishes rising between 2010 and 2018. The number of gangs increased from 191 in 2010 to 381 in 2018. Though the decline in homicides was not sustained, and the homicide rate climbed back to 60.37 per 100,000 people by 2017, the crackdown demonstrated that inhibiting gang operations drives down homicides.





## An Alternative Perspective: Organised Violence and Criminal Terrorism

The data presented and analysed here supports the determination that Jamaica's high murder rate is primarily driven by organised violent groups (gangs) and predominantly executed by small groups of young men (gang members) through deliberate, targeted shootings. These incidents are usually isolated from other crimes and are disproportionately concentrated in and around informal communities. This phenomenon has led to a discursive and policy distinction between "crime" and "violence," which the Jamaican state now labels "organised violence" and "criminal terrorism."<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to the commonly held belief that high levels of violence in informal and garrisonised communities are due to poverty and lack of economic opportunities, our findings challenge this view. A regression analysis of poverty prevalence in communities across Jamaica compared with statistics on armed violence reveals no significant correlation with poverty.<sup>29</sup> Other empirical research examining the relationship between violence levels and factors such as employment, education level, and income identified incarceration rates as the only variable reliably linked with rising or falling violence levels (in an inverse relationship).<sup>30</sup>

Despite these findings, the narrative that armed violence is primarily a function of socio-economic deficits in low-income communities remains entrenched and continues to influence policies aimed at addressing these issues.<sup>31</sup> However, an alternative, strategic understanding of organised violence and its intersection with undergoverned spaces—such as informal and semi-formal communities as pertains in the Jamaican context—yields useful insights into more precisely targeted interventions that stand a chance of quickly and sustainably reducing violence in Jamaica to “normal” levels.

This understanding points to a dual strategy for addressing the violence problem: firstly, through targeted anti-gang initiatives, which the security establishment

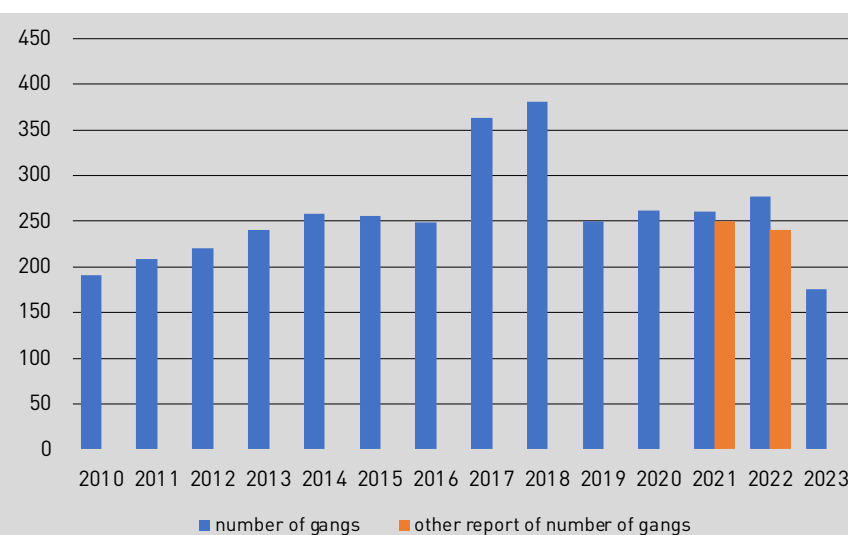
and justice system are currently implementing with some degree of success. (See Figure 1.) Secondly, it involves an acknowledgment and appreciation of how and why informal communities

are the predominant locations for such violence and determining effective interventions; this remains a less defined and under-prioritised goal.

There is a downward trend in the number of active gangs since 2018.



Number of Gangs in Jamaica 2010-2023



Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force, media reports of JCF data<sup>32</sup>





# 3 Organised Violence and Undergoverned Spaces



To eliminate gangs, destroy their safe havens; this can be achieved by formalising these communities.

In adapting Counterinsurgency Theory (COIN), the 2013 National Security Policy and the ZOSO strategy serve as the Jamaican state's acknowledgment that the close relationship between Jamaica's violence problem and its undergoverned areas is comparable to an insurgency. As insurgents embed themselves in populations away from state influence, so do informal communities serve as havens for organised crime. The policymakers and strategists behind ZOSOs, whether explicitly or implicitly, recognise that COIN provides a way to comprehend how violent groups establish themselves in these areas, and offers solutions to dislodge them.

While NSP 2013 explicitly states that its recommendations are premised on COIN, the outright naming of “counterinsurgency” as the approach is rarely mentioned directly, except in criticisms of the strategy.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, NSP 2013 is seldom referenced in the political or policy discourse. Jamaica's leaders seem reluctant to forthrightly acknowledge the strategic underpinnings of their key initiative to tackle the country's most pressing problem. This is perhaps understandable: the rhetoric of counterinsurgency invokes a state of war, which could give the impression that the government is at war with its own citizens—a framing they likely want to avoid.



Nevertheless, COIN in the broad sense—where a state directly confronts insurgent and rebel groups, and counters their strategy of embedding themselves in the local population—is an appropriate and useful framework for understanding the dynamics of Jamaica's violence issue, particularly in how it relates to the way that undergoverned areas, such as informal (and semi-formal) communities, perpetuate gang activity. By analysing how armed groups use social capital in densely populated urban areas, and advocating the principle of territorial control, COIN provides methods for developing effective and relevant interventions for Jamaica's particular violence issue.

### The Political Economy of Organised Violence

Organised crime refers to a specific type of criminal enterprise that uses violence to extract revenues.<sup>34</sup> This typology is key to understanding the logic that motivates gang violence and conceiving effective solutions to the problem. As such, organised crime is primarily violence-based, targeting both illegal and legal businesses, and is thus differentiated from other criminal activities.<sup>35</sup> An ensemble of burglars, in this framing, does not constitute organised crime.

Understanding organised crime in Jamaica in this frame—as producers of violence to extract revenue from populations and entities under their control—makes it virtually indistinguishable from the phenomenon of insurgency, wherein rebel groups sustain themselves through violent “taxation.”





In Kingston's garrisonised communities, gangs effectively provide alternative governance, as was clearly exhibited in **Tivoli Gardens** before the 2010 Operation. This pattern of control is comparable to that exercised by groups like the Taliban during the war in **Afghanistan** and to **Hezbollah** in **Lebanon**.

In Jamaica, organised crime has historically been linked to corrupt government contracting and narco-trafficking, and lottery scamming, but within the criminal economy, gangs are mainly specialists in the production of violence. Initially, gangs secured political voting blocs through violence in exchange for government contracts, then evolved to "taxing" (extorting) illegitimate and legitimate businesses lacking state protection. Gangs do not necessarily engage directly in activities like lottery scamming or narco-trafficking, but they often provide "protection" to scammers and traffickers, and eliminate competition, taking a cut of the proceeds or forcibly integrating these operations.

Understanding organised crime in Jamaica in this frame—as producers of violence to extract revenue from populations and entities under their control—makes it virtually indistinguishable from the phenomenon of insurgency, wherein rebel groups sustain themselves through violent "taxation." Despite differing in *raison d'être*, there is overlap in the modus operandi of organised crime and insurgencies, as seen in present-day Colombia and Mexico. Colombia's conflict with cartels and rebel groups that engage in similar violent and illegal activities, exemplifies the challenges in differentiation. Mexican drug cartels exhibit insurgency-like behaviour, using guerrilla tactics and providing social services and "protection," effectively competing with the state for control over local populations. As such, there is a growing body of research on "criminal insurgencies," as scholars and practitioners have identified the utility of using the phenomenon of insurgencies to understand organised crime and vice versa.<sup>36</sup>

An adjacent emerging argument makes the case for the relevance of counterinsurgency strategies and tactics in combating organised crime. The basis of the argument, in part, is that there are other shared phenomena between organised crime and insurgencies, extending to the patterns of violence they produce. Much of the violence in the context of a civil war is used to settle personal scores, under the fog of the overarching political conflict. Most murder is facilitated by armed groups to punish and deter informants and defectors to competing groups so as to maintain control of the population within their territory.<sup>37</sup> This brings to the fore that competition between armed groups to control territory creates an enabling environment for high levels of homicide.

There is a nuanced geo-spatial dimension to this framing: armed violence is more concentrated in areas under some but not absolute political control by either the state or the insurgents, where selective violence based on local information and personal vendettas is carried out in competition over contested territory. Complete control of territory or total lack thereof reduces the likelihood of such violence.<sup>38</sup>

This pattern of violence—where there is a concentration of armed violence in areas with partial political control, and where competing groups use violence based on local vendettas and information to vie for territory—has been found in countries with pervasive organised criminal presence. In these places, gangs solve local disputes and personal feuds with violence.<sup>39</sup> Despite one kind of violence, insurgency, being explicitly political in nature and the other, organised crime,

primarily criminal, both situations involve non-state armed actors that operate according to a similar logic, and thereby escalate the rate of homicide within their respective contexts.

### Jamaica's Criminal Insurgency

The literature makes a compelling case for viewing organised crime and insurgencies as manifestations of a single phenomenon—non-state organised violence. The spatial pattern of armed violence in Jamaica specifically resembles that of a de-centralized insurgency, with multiple organised violent groups competing with the state and each other for control over informal and semi-formal communities.<sup>40</sup> These communities are the primary contested spaces, and it is here that the violence is most concentrated.

That Jamaica's gang situation is akin to an urban insurgency is not a novel proposition; Jamaican military officers have made this comparison since at least 2008, and international observers with extensive COIN experience have concurred.<sup>41</sup> David Kilcullen, an architect of the US COIN strategy in Afghanistan, has described sections of the Kingston metropolitan area as a "balkanized patchwork of entrenched strongholds perpetually at war with each other."<sup>42</sup>

In Kilcullen's telling, Jamaica's criminal underworld demonstrates "competitive control" in action, where organised violent groups like gangs or militias exert control over populated enclaves, often rivalling the state in their particular locales. These groups employ a variety of incentives, from providing services and resources, to enforcing their own laws.

In Kingston's garrisonised communities, gangs effectively provide alternative governance, as was clearly exhibited in Tivoli Gardens before the 2010 Operation. There, the Shower Posse gang offered the community amenities and enforced strict rules, perpetuating a system where residents relied on the gang for social services and were held in check by the threat of violence. This pattern of control, Kilcullen observed, is comparable to that exercised by groups like the Taliban during the war in Afghanistan and to Hezbollah in Lebanon.



**"Garrisons are characterised as being closed and they undermine and disregard the legitimate authority but exercise a separate system of law and order directed by an area leader who metes out "justice" through the use and/or threat of violence. The social arrangements within a garrison community inhibit the ability of the security forces to function properly.<sup>43</sup>"**

*- Jamaica's 2007 National Security Policy supports Kilcullen's observations, describing garrisons in similar terms*

The "social arrangements" of informal communities, be they garrisons such as Tivoli Gardens in Kingston, semi-formal social housing communities such as Tawes Pen in Spanish Town, or informal communities such as Newlands in Portmore, are solidified by the irregular land tenure arrangements of those settlements. Irregular land tenure prohibits residents from transferring land holdings on the formal real estate market and disincentivizes their own investments in those holdings, thus restricting residential mobility and community development. The restrictions ensure the social dynamics within these communities perpetuate themselves ad infinitum, as families are effectively tied to their respective low-income communities over generations.

### **The Nexus of Dark Social Capital and Gang Proliferation**

Understanding the social dynamics of urban informal and semi-formal communities is key to understanding how and why they become safe havens for organised violent groups. Social capital typically refers to the fabric of trust and cooperation within communities which fosters cohesive social structures. However, in situations such as civil wars and rapid urban densification, this social

fabric can be warped, providing opportunities for armed groups to rule through violence and manipulation.

The intimate violence of civil wars is a function of the "dark face of social capital," where the usual social structures that foster trust and cooperation are perverted to facilitate violence through the denunciations of neighbours, paradoxically reflecting not a dissolution but a distortion of strong social ties. During civil wars, resolving personal vendettas can be outsourced to professional violence-producers. Homogeneous, tight-knit, and egalitarian social settings are especially susceptible to this dynamic, where high social capital can lead to more interpersonal conflict and violence.<sup>44</sup> This phenomenon is on clear display in informal communities that have been co-opted by organised violent groups, whether gangs or insurgents.

The tendency of urban informal communities towards rapid densification intensifies the corruption of community social capital, making them more vulnerable to co-optation by organised violent groups than rural communities.<sup>45</sup> The rapid densification is a function of the community residents lacking property rights to the captured land, negating their ability to exclude strangers or otherwise undesirable co-habitants.

Urban informal settlements develop in three stages: foundation, with a few dozen families illegally building shelters on vacant land; infill, where the population booms as newcomers follow the initial occupants; and then a stage where rapid growth in a small geographic area leads to an exponential growth in interpersonal disputes that warp social ties, weakening community cohesion. This social fragmentation allows violent groups to infiltrate and dominate, often eliminating or seizing non-violent community groups. Violence becomes a means of social control, with the violent groups displacing or intimidating residents to cement their authority.<sup>46</sup>

The enduring marginalisation of urban informal communities is owed to environmental and structural factors that reinforce the dominant organised criminal networks present and create "poverty traps."<sup>47</sup> The general squalor due to insufficient access to suitable living space, water, and sanitation, and the lack of adequate educational services available to captured land-dwellers, are not conducive to a level of human capital development that would readily allow a critical mass of informal residents to integrate into mainstream socio-economic life.<sup>48</sup> Informal communities often receive less attention in urban planning due to their relative inaccessibility to state services, such as government land surveyors. Additionally, insecure land tenure in informal communities deters investment, as residents cannot claim land ownership, sell their property, or collateralise it to take advantage of opportunities offered by the financial system, perpetuating poverty across generations.

Untitled households in vulnerable communities also tend to be larger as they more often comprise extended family members and thus are not limited to the nuclear family due to both the inability to divide inheritance and to exclude members without the backing of the law.<sup>49</sup> The inability of untenured households to exclude members helps explain why such households may harbour individuals involved in gang activity, and scaling upward, why concentrations of untitled households in urban enclaves often serve as safe havens for organised criminal gangs.

Urban informal settlements thus serve as breeding grounds for violent criminal enterprises. In a state of semi-isolation from formal governance, organised violent groups operate with relative freedom. These groups, which can be likened to firms facing operating costs, benefit from the resources and complicity of the informal communities. Such safe havens effectively reduce their operating costs, including the costs associated with evading state security forces. Consequently, these communities act as incubators for "start-up" gangs, which, in their competition with each other and the state for territorial control, inevitably resort to armed violence.

### Governance and Territorial Control

Organised violent groups, including gangs and insurgents, use the geography of urban informal communities to assert control and disrupt social order. Their exploitation methods include: 1) Taxation through extortion of residents and businesses; 2) Illicit free trade like drug trafficking; 3) Sanctuary, using these areas as safe havens; 4) Clandestine manufacturing of illegal goods and weapons; 5) Staging bases for planning and launching violent operations; 6) Safe transit routes for contraband; 7) Recruiting locals, often coercively; and 8) Using these areas as makeshift prisons or graveyards. These activities help organised violent groups maintain power and challenge authority in urban settings.<sup>50</sup>

These gang exploitation activities are readily identifiable in several of Jamaica's gang-ridden urban areas, where the strategic imperative to control territory leads to territorial disputes between gangs that incentivise violent operations, including invasions, kidnapping, skirmishes, reprisals, and assassinations. Even without active conflict, the threat of territorial challenges is a constant concern due to past conflicts and the proximity of rival gangs.

Organised violent groups also maintain territorial control through governance of urban enclaves, involving the provision of state-like services such as property protection, contract enforcement, and dispute resolution. These groups establish their own laws and norms, sometimes curbing undesirable behaviours and enforcing community standards, with their extortion of businesses and

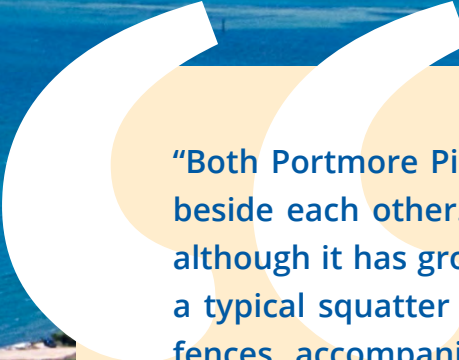
residents resembling state taxation. This alternative governance necessitates a level of violence that impedes residents' engagement with the mainstream governing establishment, as seen in Jamaica.<sup>51</sup> Such petty authoritarian regimes, described as "the despotism of self-appointed community leaders" by Jamaica's Citizen Security Plan (CSP), isolate their communities from the broader society, preventing socio-economic integration, and creating a "duopoly of violence" with both state and gangs wielding power to some degree.<sup>52</sup>

Governance of their respective communities also accrues intrinsic benefits to organised violent group members. Some view leadership as a moral duty and a way to gain legitimacy by doing "good work" for their community. For example, many Medellín gangs originated as community defence forces against communist militias, and perceived their role as moral and social protectors. Governance elevates their status, yielding personal benefits and social privileges, and fostering community loyalty, which in turn reduces the likelihood of residents providing damaging information to law enforcement or rival gangs.<sup>53</sup>

While the state's inability to assert sovereignty in such communities is a constant across these conflicts, the actors that the state aims to eliminate are constantly changing, leading to a "continuum of violence." This refers to the fluctuation of different armed groups and individuals who perpetuate violence, often switching sides or affiliations.<sup>54</sup>

That continuum of violence is facilitated by the enduring physical aspects of urban informal communities that offer a strategic advantage to organised violent groups relative to state security forces. These groups occupy houses in key locations for control, leveraging the irregular, maze-like layout of informal settlements—with their complex networks of tree-like streets and hidden passages—to freely maneuver and monitor access points.<sup>55</sup> Concealed exit and entry points, known colloquially by Jamaican security forces as "trappies," challenge the ability of security forces to access, patrol, and respond quickly to emergencies.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, local organised violent groups, with their intimate knowledge of the terrain, maintain the tactical edge against state forces, enhancing their operations in urban conflicts.





“Both Portmore Pines and Newlands are located in Portmore, beside each other. Newlands has been there from the 1960s, although it has grown considerably over the last 50 years. It is a typical squatter settlement with the board houses and zinc fences, accompanied by an inordinate amount of bloodshed. Portmore Pines is a typical two-bedroom housing development.

In Portmore Pines, each house, of which there are hundreds, has an individual pipe that carries water to it from the main, as would be expected. Newlands, however, had two pipes that ran from the main into the entire settlement that had over a thousand residents using them at the time. The roads in Portmore Pines were paved, the roads in Newlands were dirt. It is only in the last seven years have they been paved. It took over 50 years.

Newlands has a massive gang, Portmore Pines has none. Portmore Pines has many children attending traditional high schools, Newlands has precious few. The environment that exists in the informal settlements, the inner cities, and the gully side communities provide a perfect environment for gang activity to develop, once the individuals are so stimulated.”

- Jason McKay, “A Social Platform for Crime,” *Observer*, November 4, 2023.





## The Failure of Hearts and Minds

The political and strategic advantages that gangs enjoy in urban informal communities help explain the inefficacy of population-centric COIN. Historically, empires suppressed insurgencies through brutal force, compelling the population's compliance with intimidation and violence. Modern democracies, constrained by legal and ethical considerations, cannot deploy such tactics, and so have instead turned to a population-centric approach to counterinsurgencies. NSP 2013, having identified the operational similarities between Jamaica's organised crime situation and insurgencies, proposes adapting population-centric COIN strategies to address the problem.

This population-centric counterinsurgency approach requires a long-term, multi-faceted commitment that extends beyond military action, aiming to address the social, economic, and political grievances that underpin insurgencies.<sup>57</sup> Ideally, this would win civilian allegiance—capturing people's “hearts and minds”—through development projects, essential services, and enhanced local governance, often in collaboration with civilian agencies and NGOs. In this

model, the military's role shifts from direct confrontation with insurgents to first clear and then hold, and then to enforce peace, mainly through community policing, during the build phase.

However, this Hearts and Minds COIN model, when implemented by NATO in Afghanistan, was criticised as “military malpractice” partly because it underestimated the insurgents' deep social ties within communities, allowing them to maintain support and resume operations once state pressure waned.<sup>58</sup> This dynamic—organised violent groups' ties with the community—is also seen in urban areas where criminal gangs are embedded within the community fabric. After two decades, the population-centric counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan failed; the Taliban swiftly regained control post-NATO withdrawal.

Population-centric COIN failed not only in Afghanistan, but also in Brazil where it was attempted in an anti-gang endeavour. In Rio de Janeiro, the Police Pacification Unit (UPP) programme aimed to counter organised crime in the favelas through population-centric COIN strategies, similar to ZOSOs. Between 2008 and 2013, 36 UPPs were established, initially reducing violence. However, budget

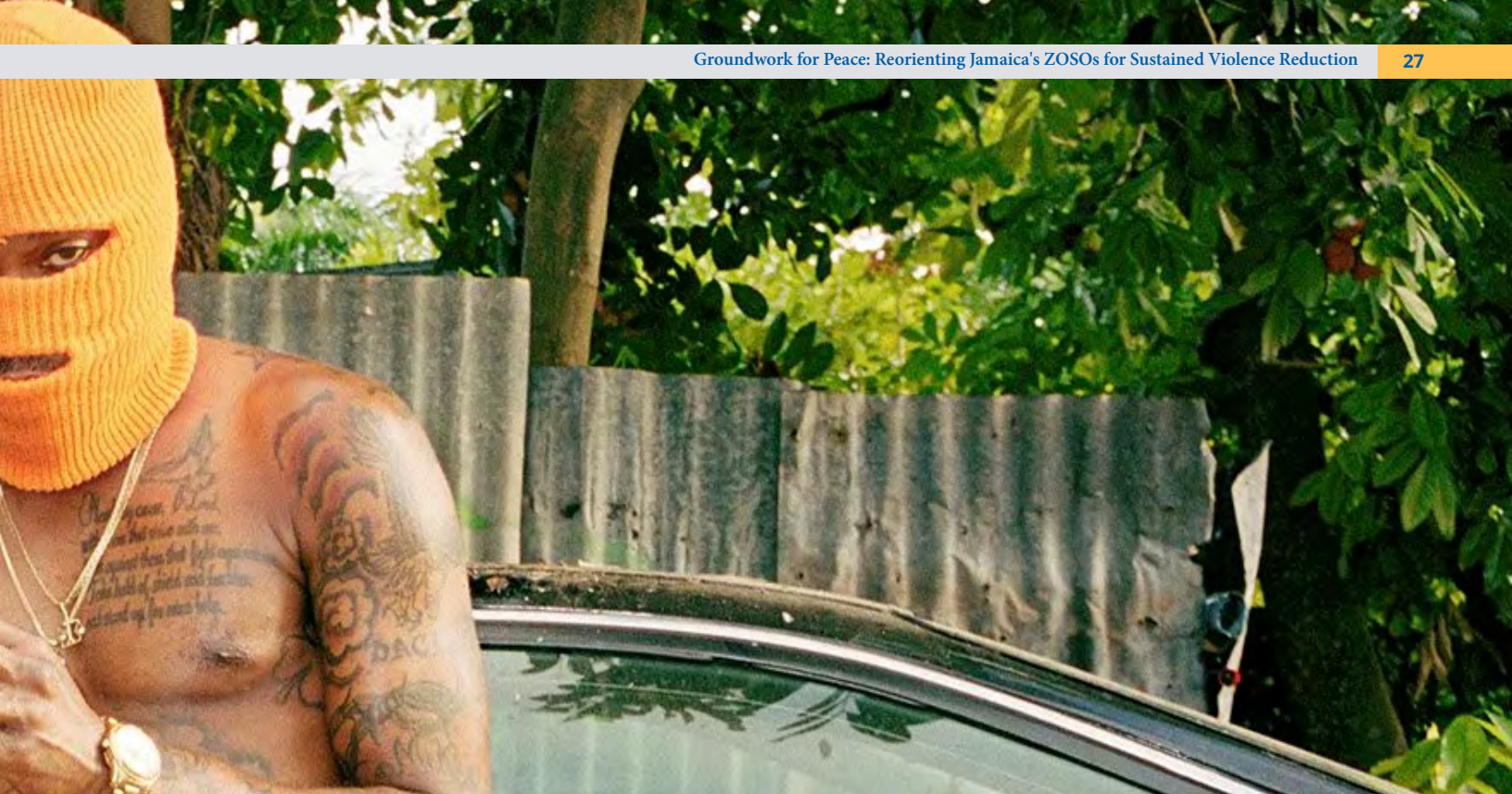
cuts led to the reduced presence of security forces post-2015, and violence resurged. Clashes between favela residents and soldiers damaged civil-military relations, and well-organised gangs adapted and reclaimed territories once security forces withdrew.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time that the UPP was clearing and holding favelas in Rio, the Brazilian army was also applying population-centric COIN in Haiti, with similar ill-fated results. As leaders of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission from 2004 to 2017, that strategy temporarily suppressed gang activity in Port-au-Prince.

Once the UN withdrew from the island, gangs quickly re-emerged, dominating the capital, eventually taking virtually full control of the country in late 2023. This failed expedition further demonstrates the limitations of this approach in transforming community conditions permanently.<sup>60</sup>

Community policing, the “armed” component of “armed social work,” in particular has failed to make headway in urban areas under gang control. A 2021 comprehensive review of community policing in Latin America, Africa, and Asia found it ineffective as an anti-organised crime





strategy. Despite more police engagement, such as foot patrols, town halls, hotlines, and problem-solving strategies, there were no significant improvements in citizen-police trust, cooperation, violence reduction, or perception of safety. Community policing did not significantly affect perceptions of police intentions or capacity, nor trust in the state, nor communal trust.<sup>61</sup>

The study showed that local priority issues in the treated areas often differed from police priorities, creating a mismatch in focus. In particular, the police were interested in security issues, whereas community residents tended to avoid talking about security issues in favour of quality-of-life issues. Further, there were instances where interventions may have had positive effects on individuals who cooperated with the programmes, but these did not translate to broader community impacts. A primary implication is that for community policing to be effective in places with high violence levels, broader structural changes might be necessary.<sup>62</sup>

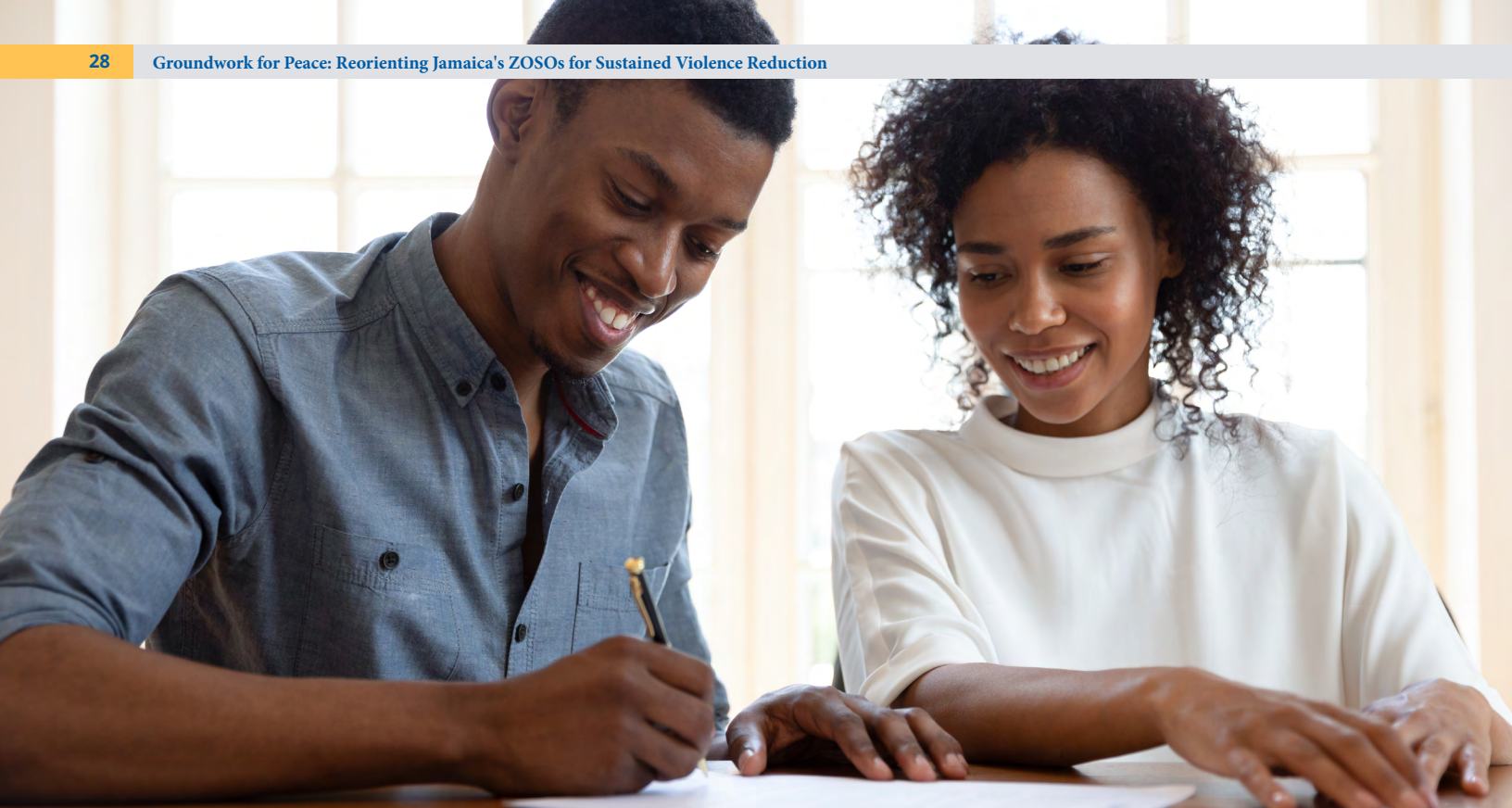
The reluctance of residents in communities undergoing anti-gang interventions to discuss security issues is key to understanding why community policing has

suboptimal results, as it has been found to be a determining factor in those interventions' outcomes. In Rio's *favelas*, the residents who were more willing to discuss security issues were located near main roads, linking ease of discussion with proximity to mainstream society and distance from gang-control, both of which allow for greater mobility and anonymity that makes residents more comfortable cooperating with security forces.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, those living farther from main roads were less comfortable, potentially due to greater scrutiny and less perceived protection. The presence of public spaces like parks did not affect willingness to discuss security, especially if these spaces were away from the main roads. The implications are that residents deep in informal enclaves, literally and otherwise, are disinclined to discuss issues of community security, while residents more physically and presumably figuratively proximate to mainstream society exhibit greater willingness to discuss security.<sup>64</sup> These findings suggest that gangs in informal communities retain allegiance of and sustain fear within communities even when there is increased state presence, but their sway diminishes towards the peripheries of such commu-

nities, as persons on the margins of an informal community are closer to mainstream society.

Hearts and Minds COIN gained prominence due to its normatively appealing narratives, not because the strategy is effective. Despite initial successes, all the efforts detailed here failed to transform community conditions permanently, with violence resurging and gangs reclaiming territories once external forces withdrew. The debacle in Afghanistan highlighted this, leading to a re-evaluation of what were thought to have been successful COIN strategies. Upon review it was clear that victories in counterinsurgency often stem from strategic power consolidation, altering local structures and politics, rather than merely providing social services and seeking popular support.<sup>65</sup> The ensuing shift towards "counterinsurgency as order-making" focuses on state-building and territorial control.<sup>66</sup> This—the failure of Hearts and Minds and the imperative to focus on territorial control—is the key take-away for Jamaica in its counterinsurgency-like battle against violent gangs.



# 4

## Land Tenure and Urban Upgrading



Improving public spaces by paving roads and removing zinc fences is beneficial, but it is not enough to weaken gangs' territorial control.



**Z**OSOs represent the Jamaican state's principal initiative to "contain crime while safeguarding the human rights of residents and promoting community development through social intervention initiatives."<sup>67</sup> The stated priority interventions of ZOSOs include measures to change the physical environment to improve community safety and citizens' perception of safety, but also to augment human capacity through employment, livelihood and skills development, and business and economic development; the provision of spiritual and faith-based intervention; and the promotion of "leadership."<sup>68</sup>

This chapter provides an overview of ZOSOs in its current iteration, focusing on the Build phase, and critiques the interventions implemented. Drawing on theoretical frameworks, comparative experiences, and Jamaica's specific circumstances, the discussion argues that the strategy of "armed social work"—social programmes intended to build human capacity—is not effective in addressing the unique violence issues in Jamaica. Additionally, the sequencing of urban improvement initiatives, initiated without prior land tenure resolutions, is premature. The chapter will emphasize the central importance of land tenure regularisation, illustrating how it could not only reduce violence but also achieve a broad spectrum of other beneficial

outcomes. Thus, it advocates for land regularisation to be the focal point and driving force of the ZOSO's build phase.

### The Transformative Potential of ZOSOs

The ZOSOs Clear, Hold, and Build approach unfolds as per the population-centric COIN model which undergirds it. The Clear phase consists of a security operation to displace armed gangs from the targeted communities. This takes the form of a Joint Command comprised of Jamaica Constabulary Force and Jamaica Defence Force personnel. The primary objective is to reduce the immediate threat posed by armed gangs and to seize illegal weapons, thereby creating a safer environment for residents and setting the stage for the subsequent Hold and Build phases.<sup>69</sup>

The Hold phase marks a transition from initial threat-displacement operations to longer-term stabilisation and community engagement efforts. It focuses on maintaining the security gains achieved, preventing the return of criminal elements, and laying the groundwork for sustainable community development. During this phase, the Joint Command maintains an extended presence in the targeted communities, where their roles evolve to include community policing, enforcing cordons and curfews, and fostering a sense

of security and normalcy among residents. Continuous security operations such as routine patrols, checkpoints, and curfew enforcement are carried out to deter criminals' returning to the community, and to safeguard community members.

The removal of known violence producers from the designated area and surrounding areas constitutes the Clear phase of ZOSOs. Localised States of Emergency (SOEs) have been employed as they grant the security forces the power to detain individuals without charge. Their removal from target communities minimizes the risk of them simply being displaced, and limits the gangs' ability to interfere with the subsequent operations in the Hold and Build phases. The use of SOEs in this way has been the subject of political debate and difference. The Opposition has taken the position that they are unconstitutional, and that they breach human rights, and has sought to block them at several instances.

However, while the Opposition rejects the use of States of Emergency (SOEs) in their current form, their proposed alternatives suggest a recognition of the necessity for similar measures. The Leader of the Opposition's contribution to the 2024/5 Budget Debate contained a stated intention to "enact legislation that targets the known vicious purveyors of criminal violence across Jamaica and bring them to justice,

**The Build phase, the culmination of the ZOSO strategy, is where the focus shifts to long-term stabilization and community development. In this phase, the state purports to address the root causes of violence and underdevelopment through comprehensive social and physical transformation initiatives.**

including a court-supervised process of pre-charge detention that targets persons on whom there is credible intelligence to facilitate building viable cases that can result in successful prosecution.”<sup>70</sup> This underscores a shared understanding that some form of measure to remove violence producers is required for any violence reduction strategy to be effective.

In the Build phase of the ZOSO strategy, the “armed social work” component of Hearts and Minds COIN is implemented. It is the culmination of the ZOSO strategy, where the focus shifts to long-term stabilization and community development. In this phase, the state purports to address the perceived “root causes” of violence and underdevelopment through social and physical transformation initiatives. A range of activities to promote human capacity development, infrastructural development, economic growth, and community well-being are put forward. There are eight key sub-areas: 1) working with HOPE/HEART/NTA to provide employment-related training; 2)

Building capacity of Community Based Organisations and community members; 3) Providing short term employment linked to infrastructural works and an environmental wardens programme; 4) Providing civil documents; 5) Providing social protection benefits; 6) Providing health and educational services; 7) Providing parenting support services; and 8) Connecting residents to social services.<sup>71</sup> These activities are a collaboration of government ministries, departments, agencies (MDAs), and private sector partners, coordinated by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF).<sup>72</sup>

It has been estimated that each ZOSO would need two decades to significantly reduce violence through human capacity development initiatives.<sup>73</sup> Given the insights from COIN literature and Jamaica's history of unsuccessful social interventions aimed at reducing violence, this phase should be re-assessed. Relying on interventions targeted at behaviour modification of residents in ZOSO communities makes the current strategy

open-ended and complex, and thus vulnerable to mission creep. Moreover, it diverts efforts and resources away from the elements of ZOSOs that actually have transformative potential. As the research and case studies illustrate in high-violence settings dominated by organised violent groups—whether rebel insurgencies or organised crime—a targeted approach to establish state control over territory is more effective, in a shorter time.

It has been estimated  
that each ZOSO would  
need two decades  
to significantly  
reduce violence  
through human  
capacity development  
initiatives





### Social Interventions as a Means of Violence Reduction in Jamaica

The widely held belief that the “root causes” violence are socio-economic informs various violence reduction strategies globally, including in Jamaica. Key elements of the state security bureaucracy and the state social development complex, as well as a range of non-governmental and civil society organisations, endorse social interventions as a crucial component of a comprehensive strategy for reducing crime and violence. They assert that there is evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of social investments when sufficient time, effort, and targeted approaches are utilized. Despite facing criticisms, they maintain that efforts to change behaviour should remain a priority. They consider these efforts essential, believing that addressing the underlying socio-economic causes of crime and violence through social interventions is vital for enhancing community well-being and ensuring citizen security. However,

despite considerable financial investment, notwithstanding the time, effort, and good intentions, such interventions have failed to put a sustained dent in the chronic violence experienced in Jamaica.<sup>74</sup>

In keeping with the conviction that social interventions are mission-critical, the framers of the ZOSO programme have stated two specific approaches in the effort to make communities less susceptible to organised violence, “Crime Prevention Through Social Development” (CPTSD) and “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” (CPTED). These constructs can be viewed as policymakers translating the logic of military strategy, represented by “Clear, Hold, and Build,” into the grammar of citizen security. Important context, however, is lost in that translation.

The state security bureaucracy, state social development complex, and various non-governmental and civil society organisations endorse social interventions as key to reducing crime and violence.



## Crime Prevention Through Social Development

Traditional crime prevention methods like policing and incarceration focus on security and deterrence. In contrast, the CPTSD approach, developed in Canada during the early 1980s amid rising social justice concerns, looked to integrative social strategies that addressed the societal conditions linked to criminal behaviour.<sup>75</sup> Similar to the public health approach to violence reduction that emerged concurrently in the U.S., CPTSD strategies target poverty, educational disparities, and inadequate community resources as the “root causes” of crime.<sup>76</sup>

The origins of CPTSD are mentioned as one indicator of its inapplicability to armed violence in Jamaica. The model may have been suited to Canada's context, in which violence is predominantly an individual-level behavioural problem, or to other jurisdictions where there is evidence linking criminal behaviour to factors like family dynamics, suboptimal education, and unstable living conditions. That model, however, whether explicitly named or implemented through social interventions in that same vein, does not effectively address the specific logic of organised violence in Jamaica's informal and garrisonised communities.

A key challenge in the effectiveness of these kinds of interventions to reduce violence is intricately linked to the specific characteristics of organised violence in Jamaica. Social interventions designed to modify the behaviours of violence pro-

ducers or potential violence producers encounter challenges in reaching their intended targets, particularly in areas dominated by organised violent groups. In Jamaica, approximately 20,000 (as of 2020) active gang members form the pool of violence producers; the likelihood of these individuals participating in behaviour change programmes—such as skills training or conflict resolution sessions—is low to nil.<sup>77</sup> This has been observed in the ZOSO communities, where the take-up for rehabilitation programmes for adults is “extremely low.”<sup>78</sup>

The effectiveness of interventions aimed at deterring youth from joining gangs is compromised by the highly competitive environment in which gangs are dominant. Gangs rely on the recruitment of young individuals to sustain their operations and have proven adept at attracting new members through various means of conscription and manipulation. In comparison, social programmes intended to divert youth from engaging in armed violence face disadvantages. These programmes necessarily struggle to compete with gangs in terms of influence. They are thus unlikely to make a substantial impact on reducing gang recruitment or the overall production of violence. In ZOSO communities, and other vulnerable communities where state-led social interventions are being carried out, this is well substantiated: there is a low take-up rate for “at-risk youth” programmes, and only 25 percent of the target for certification for at-risk youth has been met.<sup>79</sup>

Organised violent groups that are suc-

cessful in continuous recruiting offer an appealing lifestyle that social interventions do not, even when those interventions promise realistic alternative opportunities. Further, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that adolescent and young adult males are naturally drawn to violence.<sup>80</sup> The kind of individual who wields violence to defend his family and his community of peers is an archetype into which many young men wish to grow. For youth in formal, middle-class communities, this draw may manifest in ambitions to join state security services; for youth in urban informal communities, it likely manifests in the desire to form or join gangs. Seeing role models of that particular archetype present in their community gives the impression that this archetype is achievable.

Young men also see evidence that being in a gang can come with the fringe benefits of money, power, status, and appeal to the opposite sex, which are not so obviously available to carpenters, call centre workers, or any other of the range of jobs that skills training programmes may result in. If this lifestyle did not have such an inherent appeal, it would not play such a prominent role in popular dancehall culture, which garners the positive attention of youth even in formal communities from more privileged backgrounds.

To dissuade young men from willingly joining armed gangs is to convince them that this lifestyle is non-viable. The only way to do that is to permanently remove the embodiments of the gang lifestyle from those communities. This requires



In Jamaica, approximately **20,000** active gang members form the pool of violence producers; the likelihood of these individuals participating in behaviour change programmes—such as skills training or conflict resolution sessions—is low to nil.



more than just clearing gangs out of the community, as has happened in El Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro, and Port-au-Prince, but also making the structural changes necessary to render the community inhospitable to gangs.

Behaviour-modification interventions are ineffective at reducing violence because they operate under the assumption that personal deficits—such as inadequate education, limited employment opportunities, poor reasoning and conflict resolution skills—are the root causes of Jamaica's chronic violence. This viewpoint, however, is not supported by evidence, including Jamaica-specific evidence, nor does it fully capture the complex realities of organised violence, which is driven by calculated and strategic decisions within structured groups. Consequently, focusing on individual behaviour change—be it of active perpetrators or potential ones—does not effectively address the sources of armed violence.

Organised violent groups engage in violence not out of irrationality or desperation but as a strategic endeavour to control territory and assert dominance. This violence is systematic and involves reprisal killings and efforts to prevent defection within their ranks or against other competing groups, including the state's forces. Such actions are based on rational decisions made by these organisations to maintain or expand their power and are supported by individuals who see these acts as necessary for their survival within these structures. As such, approaches that go beyond individual behaviours and address the structural and systematic features of violent communities stand a greater chance of success.

Another factor mitigating against the success of behaviour-change type interventions is the nature of the target communities. In communities with high levels of violence, gangs vie with the state and each other to control territory and extract economic rents (extortion). In this competitive context, the social services provided by interventions can not only be ineffectual, but can have adverse consequences.





Evidence from Medellín shows the various ways that unintended negative outcomes can happen. In one example, subsidies intended for healthcare and unemployment benefits aimed at assisting low-income families had counterproductive outcomes as they inadvertently fostered an increase in gang participation and related violence. Specifically, the healthcare subsidies, more accessible to informal workers, incentivized individuals to abandon formal employment. This shift enlarged the pool of potential recruits for organised crime, indicating an unforeseen consequence of well-meaning social policies.<sup>81</sup> Another set of interventions in Medellín promoted access to social services in areas with high gang activity, including educational and healthcare initiatives as well as dispute resolution interventions. However, these activities led to gangs attempting to consolidate their control over these communities, a phenomenon referred to as the "crowding-in" effect.

Contrary to expectations, the presence of state services does not necessarily displace organised violent groups; rather, it can enhance their incentive to govern local territory. As the state extends its services, it inadvertently increases the strategic value of these territories for gang control. Further, as state services increase economic activity within contested areas, the incentive for gangs to exert influence and offer alternative governance services grows. This escalation in value makes the territories prime targets for gangs seeking to establish and expand their authority, further complicating the challenge of restoring peace and state control in these regions.<sup>82</sup>

Gangs are incubated in and maintain control of urban areas where state presence is weak, regardless of the economic, educational, or healthcare opportunities available to residents. While it is desirable for people, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances, to have educational and employment opportunities, the availability of and access to those opportunities by way of social interventions will not redound to a reduction in violence. That is, interventions to improve people's human capacity may be worthwhile for other reasons, but the evidence is clear that they will not diminish gang-related violence.



## Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The other approach under which ZOSOs social interventions fall is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).<sup>83</sup> CPTED is founded on three primary strategies designed to increase environmental security and deter crime by naturally structuring physical spaces to reduce crime opportunities. These are territorial reinforcement, which uses defined spaces to promote social control; natural surveillance, which enhances the visibility of spaces to deter potential offenders; and natural access control, which employs physical barriers to restrict access to potential targets.

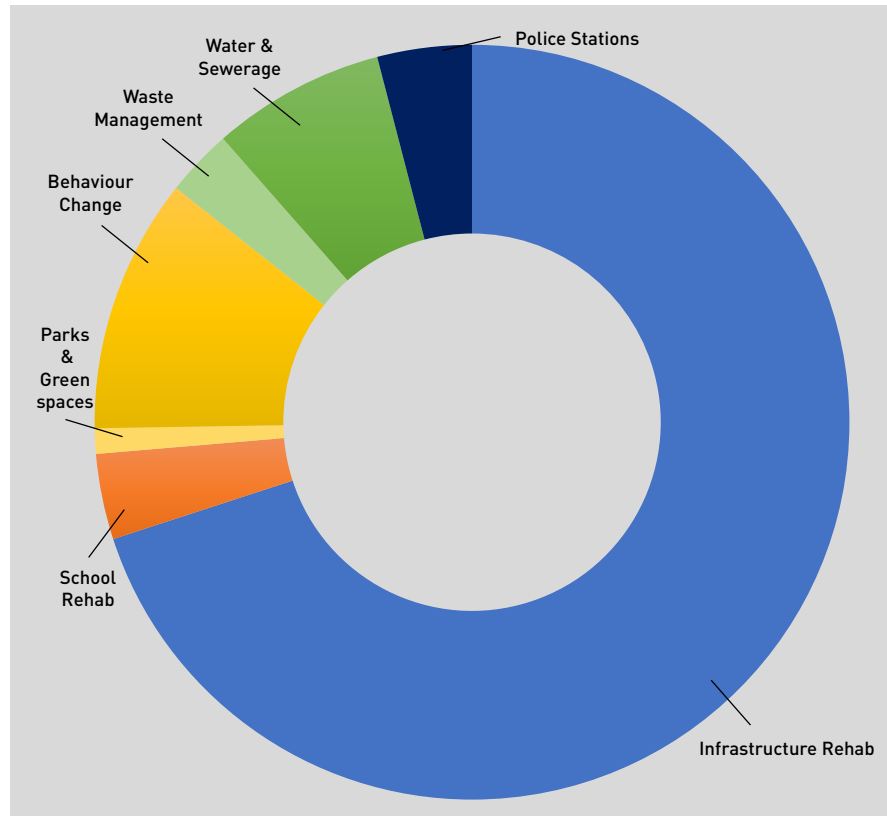
Evidence of CPTED's effectiveness is varied. Some studies have shown that it helps reduce property crimes, thefts, and burglaries by modifying environmental designs to increase the effort and risks associated with committing crimes. Conversely, other studies suggest it has been ineffective or even counterproductive, sometimes facilitating crime, displacing it, or leading to overfortification and social issues such as segregation and reduced quality of life through the creation of hostile or exclusionary environments.<sup>84</sup>

CPTED activities garner the largest proportion of resources allocated to ZOSOs. (See Figure 2.)

Of the financial resources accounted for by JSIF on five ZOSOs, nearly 90 percent have gone to infrastructure-related activities, and the remainder to behaviour change-type social interventions.



### JSIF Expenditure on Five ZOSOs



Source: JSIF, calculations by author



However, despite the varied outcomes of CPTED globally, its application in Jamaican urban informal settlements—areas prone to harbouring gangs—is not sufficient to achieve the expected violence reduction outcomes. The measures fail to counter the logic of organised violence, as they do not address the specific conditions within these communities that make them safe havens for gangs.

CPTED initiatives, such as enhancing parks and greenspaces, do not impact the ability of gangs to control territory, and existing literature casts skepticism on the effectiveness of these initiatives in improving the relationship between residents and the state. While measures like paving roads and removing zinc fences do enhance public spaces, and improve security forces' access to target communities, thereby promoting social integration and deterring gang violence, these steps alone are insufficient. To truly undermine the territorial advantages held by gangs, further measures are necessary, specifically the regularization of community layouts. This approach would disrupt

the physical environment that gangs use to maintain control.

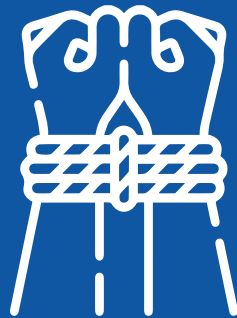
The critical step of regularizing land tenure, though not a traditional component of CPTED, has been recognized by the Jamaican state, but has been overlooked as a priority. NSP 2013 explicitly states that resolving gang issues in Jamaica is contingent on addressing the challenge of informal settlements. It advocates for land tenure regularization—titling captured land where possible, relocating residents as needed, and curbing the formation of new illegal settlements—as crucial for integrating these areas into mainstream society. Despite being listed second in the planned activities in ZOSO ministry papers, the Citizen Security Plan, which is intended to align with NSP 2013, lacks specific mention of land tenure or the objective of integrating informal communities in its Monitoring and Evaluation framework for ZOSOs. Instead, it merely focuses on the need to "improve conditions" in vulnerable communities, sidestepping the more strategic matter of land titling.

Land tenure regularization has hardly featured in ZOSOs, with only two land titling initiatives recorded so far among over 100 interventions across seven ZOSOs up to December 2023. Both initiatives—Comfort Lands, an informal community in Mount Salem, and August Town—appear to be incomplete.<sup>85</sup> According to the ministry papers detailing the activities in the Mount Salem ZOSO, the Comfort Lands initiative "took longer than expected due to the underestimation of the time and logistics involved in transferring it from its previous owners, and the need for drawings."<sup>86</sup> That status remained in each ministry paper up to June 2023.<sup>87</sup> For August Town, the initiative was simply listed, "Land regularization – provision of subdivision and land titling," with no other details.<sup>88</sup> The state recognizes that land tenure issues should be addressed in the ZOSO communities, but this recognition has not materialized in actuality.

## The Promise of Land Tenure Regularisation

The underprioritising of land tenure regularisation is a strategic oversight, as this measure is pivotal for integrating garrisonised communities, dismantling gang safe havens, curtailing violence, and bolstering national security. Land tenure regularisation should not only receive more resources, it should be central to the ZOSO intervention, and any other measure whose primary goal is to bring peace to volatile communities, reduce the murder rate, and enhance citizen security in Jamaica.

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, Jamaica is second only to Haiti in the proportion of its urban residents living in informal settlements. Approximately 600,000 people throughout the island—over 20 percent of the population—live on the 350,000 parcels of land lacking formal registration. This represents 40 percent of all occupied land on Jamaican territory.<sup>89</sup> This is a widespread, large-scale problem, but there is enough evidence on successful land titling programmes pertaining to larger and more complex scenarios, that the solution is available and achievable.



**Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design** measures fail to counter the logic of organised violence, as they do not address the specific conditions within Jamaica's informal communities that make them safe havens for gangs.

The case of Peru demonstrates that widespread land tenure regularization is feasible within the short to medium term, even in densely populated cities. In Lima, Peru a pilot programme titled approximately 200,000 households from 1992 to 1994.<sup>90</sup> Following the success in Lima, the programme expanded into a comprehensive urban titling initiative that eventually covered about 90 percent of the country's informal housing. By 2004, the government had registered 1.2 million households and issued 920,000 titles.<sup>91</sup> Considering advances in geographic information systems technology available to Jamaican state agencies, as well as groundwork laid by previous initiatives, full regularization of land tenure in Jamaica is feasible within one election cycle.

## Social and Economic Outcomes of Land Titling

Land tenure's promise as a violence reduction strategy is in its direct and indirect effects. The direct ways in which land tenure reduces violence have been clearly detailed and evidenced. The indirect effects, however, are extensive and varied. A well-understood benefit is the economic argument that land titling turns "dead" capital into "live" assets, offering a viable escape from poverty. This point, while familiar, is worth reiterating given the persistent poverty in volatile communities and the positive implications of large-scale land titling for the broader economy. Additionally, there are several less apparent social and governance benefits associated with land titling, including outcomes that align with the goals advocated by proponents of behaviour-change-focused social interventions.

## The Economic Case

The economic rationale for prioritizing land titling is evident; in Jamaica it would transform ~350,000 parcels of "dead capital" into live assets, benefiting both residents and the national economy. Formal land titling not only facilitates a way out of poverty by promoting investments in informal communities but also enhances financial inclusion by allowing residents to use titled property as collateral for accessing credit markets. Thus, land titling



serves as a critical mechanism for economic empowerment.<sup>92</sup>

The example of Peru is instructive: its land titling programme, which provided formal titles usable as collateral, improved access to credit markets and the formal banking system. From 2000 to 2003, the number of mortgages registered increased by 106 percent, and their total value doubled from US\$66 million to US\$136 million. This growth reflected greater trust from financial institutions and enabled property owners to invest in their properties and pursue economic opportunities. Additionally, home improvement investments surged; 75 percent of titled property owners improved their homes, compared to 39 percent without titles. These investments not only enhanced living conditions but also contributed to the overall physical and economic revitalisation of urban areas.<sup>93</sup>

The formal housing market is strengthened by land titling endeavours. In developing countries, urban squatting intensifies competition for land, squeezing the formal housing market. Squatters, who generally don't pay for the land they use, limit the land available for formal development, resulting in scarce resources for housing. This scarcity pushes up the prices of formal housing as the demand remains steady or increases, while supply is constrained. Consequently, those seeking formal housing encounter higher costs and limited availability, increasing rents and home prices. Full formalisation of land would increase the availability of affordable, quality housing in Jamaica's urban areas.<sup>94</sup>

## Increasing Residential Mobility as a Strategic Goal

The advantage of securing legal land tenure extends beyond the immediate economic effect that property holders can sell their properties; it profoundly influences social dynamics and systems within volatile communities. Residential mobility refers to the ability of individuals or families to move residences within or between communities. This mobility is facilitated by the capacity to legally sell and purchase property, providing desirable



**The lack of tenure security results in static informal settlements where generations of families remain in the same location, fostering social isolation and vulnerability to manipulation by organised violent groups. Land titling empowers residents economically and increases residential mobility, which can integrate these communities into broader society.**

social benefits. The ability to sell one's property does more than merely convert fixed assets into cash; it grants newly titled homeowners the freedom to relocate, an option not available to squatters who cannot legally sell their land.

The lack of tenure security results in static informal settlements where generations of families remain in the same location, fostering enduring social isolation and vulnerability to manipulation by organised violent groups. Land titling empowers residents economically and increases residential mobility, which can disrupt entrenched dark social capital and integrate these communities into broader society. Without land tenure regularisation, ZOSOs may only marginally improve communities. For ZOSOs to be transformative, they must strive to integrate those communities, as stated in NSP 2013, and that entails enabling greater residential mobility.

The impact of land titling on enhancing residential mobility is demonstrated by the Peru and Medellín cases. In Peru, legal titling led to a 25 percent average increase in property values, which boosted property transactions from 58,000 in 1999 to 136,000 in 2003 due to enhanced legal certainty and marketability. In Medellín, under the Urban Integrated Projects (PUIs) between 2004 and 2011, land titling and infrastructure improvements in the Popular and Santa Cruz neighborhoods led to increased real estate transactions. In Popular, transactions more than doubled from 672 to 1692 per year, and in Santa Cruz, they rose from 584 to 898 per year.<sup>95</sup> The influx of new residents helped disrupt the social networks that previously supported organised violent groups, reducing armed violence in these areas.<sup>96</sup>

Enabling residential mobility serves as a powerful mechanism by which the state can influence the behaviour and social relations of residents in vulnerable communities. This approach is more efficient than the behaviour modification interventions currently utilised in the ZOSOs. As residential mobility increases, the need for community-specific social interventions may diminish, as the desired outcomes of changing social relations would have been achieved organically.

### **Land Tenure Regularisation's Social Effects**

Secure land tenure can enhance labour productivity, a relevant insight for Jamaica's labour productivity deficit. In Peru, formal titles led to a 17 percent increase in the average work hours per household, with a notable 40 percent rise in individuals working outside the home, as people shifted from in-house to external employment. This change paralleled an increase in formal labour market participation where tenure was regularized.<sup>97</sup> The security provided by land ownership reduced the need for residents to guard their properties, allowing more time for productive employment. This shift not only boosted individual incomes but also contributed to the Peruvian Growth Miracle, the sustained period of economic growth between 1993 and 2013.<sup>98</sup>

In households with formal land titles, there is a notable reduction in child labour. This occurs as adults, feeling more secure with newly acquired tenure, are more likely to seek employment outside the home, diminishing the economic need for children to contribute to household income. Previously, children often

worked to compensate for adults who stayed home to guard properties without secure tenure. This change enables more children to focus on education rather than earning, thus enhancing their human capital development and future opportunities.<sup>99</sup>

Having title to one's property also disincentivizes high fecundity which increases the allocation of resources for existing children. Untenured households typically exhibit higher fertility rates than those with secure tenure. In these households, adults often view children as a form of pension, which incentivizes higher fertility. An increase in the number of children strains household resources and reduces the likelihood of each child completing their education.<sup>100</sup>

The demonstrable socio-economic benefits of land tenure security suggest that many of the individual and community development goals of social interventions carried out under ZOSOs can be achieved through land tenure regularization. Unlike those interventions, land tenure regularisation also offers a strategy for undermining organised violent groups and promoting systemic and structural change in these communities.

### **Landownership and State Legitimacy**

The ability of land tenure enforcement to influence social behaviour also makes it an effective facilitator of a counterinsurgency-as-order-making strategy, as Peru's experience demonstrates. Peru initially tried the population-centric counterinsurgency approach to win over peasants who supported the insurgency, with initiatives related to rural development and

support for peasant farmers. This strategy backfired, giving Shining Path operational room to expand their reach. The government then shifted to a combination of targeted intelligence gathering, cooperation with civilian self-defense groups, and, critically, widespread land titling.<sup>101</sup>

This approach led to a reduction in violence and the gradual disintegration of insurgent influence. The gains by state security forces and local civil patrols against Shining Path insurgents were attributed to improved intelligence and operational effectiveness. The evidence suggests that land tenure regularisation re-aligned citizens' interests with the state's, leading to greater cooperation in the domains of intelligence gathering and operations against the insurgents.<sup>102</sup>

A government's ability to simply convince residents to stop supporting armed groups is limited if organised violent groups maintain the same political advantage within their respective populations that enable their operations in the first place. Endowing residents of informal communities with a legally recognised stake in the property drives a wedge between residents and organised violent groups. It incentivises support for state governance instead, as the security of their newly gotten capital hinges upon their recognition of state authority and concomitant protection from state security forces and the legal system. The asymmetric political advantage previously enjoyed by organised violent groups is thus erased.

Land titling's potential to align citizens with the state has already been demonstrated in Jamaica through an urban land titling programme in Rose Town during 2011. Rose Town is a garrisonised community characterised by a "web of ill-lit alleys, interconnected yards, and flimsy shacks." However, conferring deeds on residents fostered a sense of permanence and belonging that stimulated neighbourhood engagement in residents' associations and promoted more vocal resistance to anti-social behaviour in the area. Formalised tenure "directly encouraged many residents to look beyond the zinc fence towards wider community and municipal engagement."<sup>103</sup>

Formal recognition of property will also give titleholders the ability to exclude from their land holdings, with the help of law enforcement, extended family members who participate in armed violence and thus endanger the remainder of the household. When a critical mass of households in a community have this ability, members of organised violent groups lose their places of refuge.

### Informational Resources and State Capacity

Land tenure regularisation strengthens the state's reach into undergoverned territories, thereby crowding out organised violent groups. Effective territorial reach prevents the emergence of power vacuums in those spaces that can be exploited by malicious actors. The common conception of state penetration of territory emphasizes the physical presence of state agencies and actors, state-provided infrastructure such as roads and electrical grids, and institutions such as schools and hospitals. Beyond these visible, tangible markers, the state's presence also pertains to informational resources. These include data on land ownership and demographics, which are vital for infrastructure development, service provision, taxation, and policy implementation. Land tenure formalisation is a key tool in this process, facilitating the gathering of this data through infrastructure and institutional penetration, which in turn supports the formulation and implementation of state policies.<sup>104</sup>

Lack of standardised information about land and populations creates governance vacuums, often leading to the rise of organised violent groups that provide alternative governance. This challenge, known as "illegibility," involves the absence of clear data on citizens' wealth, land, production, and identities, obstructing the consolidation of centralised authority.<sup>105</sup> Addressing this through improved information gathering and processing is crucial for extending state power and enhancing governance.

Furthermore, limited state penetration at the subnational level affects information gathering, thereby impacting national capacity for law creation and enforcement. Implementing land tenure regularisation in areas with informal settlements increases state territorial control by producing essential cadastral maps. These maps detail land parcels, property boundaries, land ownership, and physical characteristics of specific areas—elements critical for effective governance. This enhanced data gathering has national security implications, as it standardizes information about territories and populations, enabling state actors to govern more effectively and assert authority. Additionally, legal recognition of land tenure provides judicial security, bolstering state legitimacy and extending governance into remote, informally settled, or undergoverned spaces, thereby strengthening overall state capacity.<sup>106</sup>

**Gangs are incubated in and maintain control of urban areas where state presence is weak, regardless of the economic, educational, or healthcare opportunities available to residents.**





## The Infrastructural Power of the State

A state's infrastructural power—its capacity to effectively implement and enforce policies through the coordination of its physical and organisational resources—is closely tied to its legitimacy. When state organisations are viewed as bearers of legitimate authority, it facilitates the actual exercise of state infrastructural power. A legitimate state can more effectively mobilise its resources and infrastructure to combat violent crime. Moreover, as the state's infrastructural power grows and it successfully tackles crime, its legitimacy among its citizens is further enhanced.<sup>107</sup>

Aside from land tenure, the degree of infrastructure connectivity underscores the state's ability to exercise control through its institutions and policies. A robust infrastructure allows states to radiate their influence and control from the centre to the peripheries, ensuring that all regions are under the protective umbrella of the state. A state with strong infrastructural power can effectively deploy its security apparatus to areas plagued by violent crime, ensuring swift responses to threats and maintaining law and order. Moreover, the everyday presence of state organisations, such as police forces, can deter potential criminals and engender a sense of security among the citizenry.

Infrastructure extends beyond roads, bridges, and buildings to include the spatial organisation of settled territory. Historically, urban modification has been used to enhance security; for example, 19th-century Paris used broad boulevards to improve control and restrict armed groups' movements. In contemporary settings, urban upgrading in informal communities enhances security by developing coherent road networks, creating open spaces, and improving accessibility, thus disrupting the territorial advantages of armed groups.<sup>108</sup>

In Medellín, the Urban Integrated Projects (PUIs) focused on investing in underserved neighbourhoods to enhance infrastructure, public service access, and transport connectivity in an endeavour to mitigate the locational disadvantages

of peripheral communities. These large-scale projects included the construction of mobility infrastructure enhancements such as cable cars and urban escalators, particularly for semi-isolated communities in the steep Andean areas. The overarching goal was to integrate informal settlements into the formal urban fabric of Medellín by creating continuous public urban spaces and enhancing social connectivity through improved transportation systems. Thus the PUIs not only transformed the physical and social conditions but also weakened organised violent groups by improving infrastructural connectivity and reconfiguring urban layouts. This integration of marginalised communities into the broader urban society improved access for national security forces, further enhancing community security.<sup>109</sup>

The case of Medellín highlights the relationship between infrastructure connectivity and armed violence, whereby the more connected and less isolated the community, the lower the violence. Infrastructure projects designed to enhance the connectivity of gang-dominated areas to mainstream urban life are demonstrably effective in diminishing gang control. While Jamaica's garrisonised communities are not nearly as distant from the urban centres of gravity as in Medellín, the density and haphazard layout of many of these settlements render them practically impenetrable to public services and outside residents, even if they are geographically proximate.

Key to vulnerable and volatile communities' impenetrability are the tree-like street networks. In haphazardly built informal settlements these street patterns allow organised violent groups to control who enters and leaves the areas they dominate. These networks typically have a hierarchical structure with one or few main routes branching into smaller paths (resembling a tree structure). This layout can limit the number of access points into an area, which can be leveraged by armed groups to monitor and control movement.

In Jamaica, post-land-tenure-formalization street upgrades would enhance

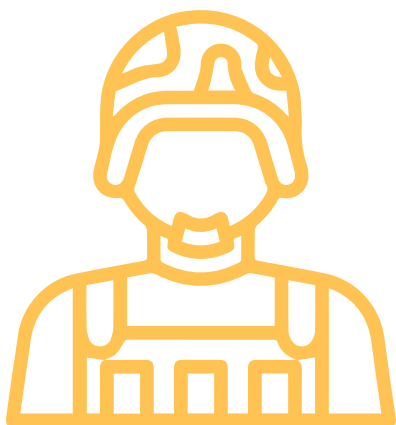
neighbourhood accessibility by introducing new streets and paths, reducing the control organised violent groups have over these areas. Pre-established metrics would be used to evaluate accessibility and identify interventions to diminish such control. By disrupting the complex, tree-like street networks and increasing access routes, the influence of armed groups would be weakened, leading to improved security and reducing violence. Furthermore, creating a main spine network of roads alters the community's dynamics, allowing a more diverse mix of individuals near these main roads, which increases anonymity and safety. This heterogeneity contrasts with more homogeneous areas, where residents face greater scrutiny from local armed actors. Enhanced accessibility infrastructure also improves the strategic leverage of security forces, further increasing neighbourhood safety.<sup>110</sup>

Prioritizing land tenure regularisation within the framework of ZOSOs holds transformative potential not just for reducing violence but for fostering broader socio-economic development. This reform is not merely a procedural necessity; it is a fundamental strategy to disrupt the cycles of violence and underdevelopment that have long characterized informal and garrisonised communities. By directly addressing land ownership, the state can assert a more potent presence in these areas, enhancing security, promoting economic opportunities, and ultimately, allowing for these marginalized areas to integrate into the national fabric.





# 5 Reorienting ZOSOs Towards Order-Making



**ZOSOs present an ideal opportunity for the state to significantly reduce violence and the murder rate, achieving lasting and sustained peace, by refining the current model and prioritising structural change over behaviour change.**

Jamaica's commitment to reducing gang influence and violence is clear from the substantial investments in ZOSOs. However, the current strategy, focused on winning "hearts and minds," does not meet Jamaica's specific needs and hinders desired outcomes. A strategic reorientation in ZOSOs towards prioritising land tenure regularization and comprehensive infrastructure upgrading would greatly enhance territorial control and integrate undergoverned areas. This recalibration would leverage existing resources more effectively, aiming for sustained violence reduction, community improvement, economic upliftment, and social integration of marginalized communities, aligning with broader goals of community betterment and security enhancement.

### The Role of Security Force Operations

Implementing land tenure regularisation and infrastructure improvements in ZOSOs are critical for transforming communities and curbing the influence of organised violent groups. However, the presence of armed groups poses risks, as seen in El Salvador. President Nayib Bukele's administration faced violent push-back when it encroached on gang territories, despite an initial truce that reduced violence in exchange for concessions. This conflict escalated into resumed gang violence and led to a State of Exception, resulting in mass incarcerations.

If the land tenure legalisation process increases the asset value of individual

properties and, in the communities, it incentivizes homeowners to invest in improving their housing units, this may make them extortion targets. Moreover, infrastructure improvements will open up new avenues for extortion. The case of Medellín demonstrates that contractors engaged in the requisite infrastructure improvements in gang-ridden communities can be subject to extortion, the competition over which can fuel increased violence between the gangs present. The presence of security forces in ZOSOs does not preclude these risks since urban areas are densely populated with civilians who may be difficult to distinguish from organised violent group members.

The risks associated with the non-security operations in ZOSOs while gangs remain present make a compelling case for the continued use of localized SOEs, or similar policy, to temporarily detain members of armed groups known to military and police intelligence. This will allow land titling and infrastructure work to proceed without interference from organised violent groups. However, because violence-producers cannot be detained indefinitely under the Jamaican constitution, this places a time-limit on ZOSOs' transformational activities. Pre-planning and surveying of the targeted territory would be necessary to ensure the roll out and completion of activities within



Key metrics can include the number of land titles issued, the percentage of land in targeted communities that has been regularized, and the completion rate of infrastructure projects, such as roads and utilities.



a reasonable timeframe. Maintaining a reasonable timeframe will also help maintain bipartisan and judicial support for the SOEs (or similar measure).

Under an active SOE, security forces can more effectively engage in community policing. Despite the doubts raised by the evidence about its effectiveness in building trust and reducing violence, community policing is still valuable for gathering intelligence and deterring flare-ups of violence during the course of a ZOSO. Granting property titles aligns residents' interests with the state, fostering cooperation that provides the security forces with information about violent actors and weapons caches. This cooperation will aid in the legal proceedings against detained individuals and enhance the safety of civilian contractors involved in land titling and infrastructure projects, thereby supporting the overall success of ZOSOs.

This strategic community policing does have a time limit, as the longer

security forces maintain a presence in a community, the greater the likelihood of clashes between members of those forces and the residents themselves, which undermines the sustainability of a ZOSO and perception of the strategy overall. Such clashes between residents and security forces have already occurred under ZOSOs that have been active for years.<sup>111</sup>

Outside of ZOSOs, it is critical that the security forces, together with the other designated state entities, maintain a vigilant watch to prevent the establishment of new informal settlements, less they become entrenched and perpetuate the cycle of foundation, infill, and rapid densification that precedes co-optation by displaced and newly formed organised violent groups.

### The Role of Social Interventions/Investments

The primary goals of ZOSOs are violence reduction and community development,

both of which are most effectively and sustainably achieved through land tenure regularization. In recalibrating ZOSOs to prioritise this objective, only social interventions that directly support the core activities of land titling, infrastructure regularisation, and security operations should be considered. Any additional social interventions should be clearly aligned with specific objectives other than violence reduction, and prioritised accordingly. Strategy is inherently paradoxical: involving more participants in a campaign than necessary to achieve strategic goals, the less likely the campaign will achieve those goals.<sup>112</sup> The experience thus far in the ZOSOs corresponds with the theory and other evidence that the larger the number of entities involved in an endeavour, the more adversely complex, and the greater the potential for operational paralysis.<sup>113</sup>

In cases where communities are in hazard-prone areas ineligible for titling or infrastructure due to risks like landslides or flooding, social interventions can assist with emergency relocations. Social





interventions can support the relocation of these households to safer areas where they can receive land titles. This approach prevents persons from settling in dangerous zones and promotes effective integration into safer, formally recognized areas. The primary concern is avoiding social programmes that inadvertently encourage residents to stay in these communities for continued benefits, contradicting the goal of increasing residential mobility necessary to dismantle entrenched social structures and achieve broader social integration.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Adopting a targeted land titling-first approach to Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) will expedite the integration of garrisoned communities. To monitor progress, key metrics can include the number of land titles issued, the percentage of land in targeted communities that has been regularised, and the completion rate of infrastructure projects, such as roads and utilities.

Other operational metrics to consider are the number of operations conducted by the Joint Force, the geographical areas covered, the number of gang members apprehended, and the quantity of illegal weapons and any other contraband seized. The impact will be measured by tracking the displacement of gangs and the reduction in the number of active gangs and their membership, according to police and military intelligence.

These implementation and impact indicators should be aligned with rigorous data collection and analysis to assess the ZOSO strategy's effectiveness against organised crime and in promoting urban integration. This structured approach to data ensures transparency and accountability, and enables all stakeholders, including people in the ZOSO communities and the general public, to evaluate the performance of ZOSOs.

Regular, data-driven adjustments will optimize ZOSO initiatives, allowing

them to respond to new challenges and community needs effectively, fostering trust and public support through evidence-based successes and data-informed decision-making. This approach promotes continuous improvement and strategic adjustments in response to any changes in the urban violence landscape.

### Resources for Reorienting ZOSOs to Prioritise Land

Though Jamaica is accustomed to facing resource constraints that curtail it pursuing transformative developmental goals, a major land titling initiative is viable within the current funding landscape. Tremendous amounts of financial and administrative resources have been expended in ZOSOs. Though there is no line item in any ministry, department, or agency's budget, nor in the national budget, specifically for ZOSOs, over J\$1.6 billion has been spent across five ZOSOs over six and a half years on school rehabilitation,



police station refurbishing, enterprise business training and loans, parenting classes, sports competitions, creation of parks and green spaces, and civil registration. Extensive infrastructural work has been undertaken, including road paving, replacing zinc fences, and electricity regularisation. Miles of roads have been paved, hundreds of metres of zinc fences have been replaced, and several kilometres of water distribution mains have been laid.<sup>114</sup> The 2024-5 national budget contains an allocation of J\$543 million for the administration of a new social housing programme, Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE).<sup>115</sup> Securing a title is far less costly than building an entire house. These sums already spent and allocated show that financial resources are available for ZOSOs, and for housing for the poor. The bureaucracy, technology, and policy framework are already in place, though they may need additional capacity. Jamaica has the means to do this, even without donor support.

Donor funding is likely also available, via concessionary loans, grants, and technical support. Land tenure regularisation not only reduces violence and promotes economic development but also enhances social outcomes, objectives that align well with sustainable development goals, making it appealing for both traditional and non-traditional donor partners. These partners often have diverse agendas, from enhancing citizen security to reducing poverty, and the benefits and outcomes of land titling can be framed to fit many of these. The evaluation of such initiatives is clear-cut, with tangible, easily measured results.

Private real estate developers, infrastructure sector entities, and service providers are potential investors in newly tenured communities, providing another source of resources to fulfill the promise that volatile informal communities can be transformed into safe neighbourhoods, and integrated into the broader social and economic fabric of the nation.



**Land tenure regularisation not only reduces violence and promotes economic development but also enhances social outcomes, objectives that align well with sustainable development goals, making it appealing for both traditional and non-traditional donor partners.**

### **Obstacles to Formalizing Informal Settlements Through Land Tenure Regularisation Titling**

The complex link between informal settlements, land tenure insecurity, and high violence levels in Jamaica is well-documented, stemming from deeply entrenched political and economic structures. Historical analyses, including seminal works from the 1970s and 1980s such as those by Alan Eyre, have consistently highlighted the nexus between low-cost social housing and informal communities, and the elevated murder rates in these areas.<sup>116</sup> This correlation, along with the associated cycles of poverty and violence, has been extensively discussed in academic literature, government reports, and political discourse over the decades.<sup>117</sup>

However, land tenure regularisation as a violence reduction strategy has not, beyond the seldom-referred-to NSP 2013, been elaborated in policy statements or discourse. There is a suggestion that this may be due to the political system's reliance on the quid-pro-quo dynamics in these communities. Residents with insecure tenure often trade votes for short-term benefits from political patrons, sustaining a

cycle that benefits local politicians by maintaining a dependent voter base without addressing underlying issues. This system stifles initiatives aimed at formalising land tenure and dismantling informal settlements that support this political economy. If ZOSOs were to focus on land tenure regularisation, it would threaten to disrupt these voting blocs by increasing residential mobility, which would understandably be concerning and lead to resistance from political actors.

An adjacent observation might be made regarding the state entities, NGOs, and CSOs that promote and implement behavioural change-type social interventions. These organisations are wedded to the belief that such interventions are crucial for reducing crime and violence, and maintain that evidence of the effectiveness of social investments warrants their beliefs. This strong adherence to their belief systems can lead to resistance to considering new, potentially more effective strategies for violence reduction and community development. These organisations are usually deeply committed to serving low-income communities and uplifting the people in them. While their intentions are undoubtedly commendable, their approach can be interpreted as if they view themselves as indispensable facilitators of change in these communities, which may

not align with the actual needs or desires of the people they aim to help.

Further, the reality of programme sustainability given their operational model presents certain complexities. They often operate within a framework that necessitates ongoing financial support, which may come from foreign donors, and so the continuation of their work can be tied to the sustained need within these communities. This funding model creates an implicit challenge: while the ostensible aim of these organisations is to effectuate positive change, their continued relevance and function within vulnerable communities can inadvertently depend on the persistence of the very issues they seek to address. Consequently, well-intentioned interventions may inadvertently lean away from strategic, long-term actions and activities aimed at transformative community reform.

To effectively integrate informal communities and reduce violence, ZOSOs must recalibrate their focus towards structural changes, of which land tenure regularisation is the most relevant and effective. This will require clear boundaries between political influences and operational activities and a realignment of the existing social intervention bureaucracy to support long-term community needs, ultimately reducing residents' dependency on external support and promoting self-sufficiency and broader societal integration.

## The Case for Informality

Some academics, activists, and others argue against formalisation, believing that the economic upliftment and residential mobility provided by land titling do not serve the best interests of informal dwellers. Their arguments range from promoting the benefits of informality, such as the flexibility and community autonomy that informal settlements often provide, and the innovation that informality forces upon them. They contend that formalising these spaces can lead to unbearable property tax obligations, displacement due to rising costs, and the loss of community networks that form the social fabric of these areas. Moreover, critics of formalisation argue that it can result in "gentrification", where original residents are priced out of their own neighborhoods as new investments and wealthier outsiders move in, ultimately changing the area's character and dynamics.

These arguments suggest that informality offers certain advantages to marginalised individuals and communities. Informal settlements can provide affordable, albeit low-quality, housing solutions for low-income residents, who might otherwise be excluded from the public goods that support economic and social development in more formal communities.<sup>118</sup> However, these assertions conflate cause and effect, mistaking the consequences of lacking formal land tenure—which perpetuates poverty—for benefits.<sup>119</sup> The general squalor due to inadequate access to suitable living space, water,

and sanitation, and the lack of adequate educational services are not conducive to sufficient human capital development to allow a critical mass of inner-city residents to integrate into mainstream socio-economic life.

Characterising the push for formalization as a top-down approach that doesn't align with the residents' desires suggests that the poor lack the capacity to make decisions that best serve their own interests. Such positions smack of paternalism and deny poor people agency over their own lives. It presumes to know the needs and wants of the informal settlers without considering their voices directly. It presumes that informal dwellers prefer to remain in less secure and often precarious living conditions, for the sake of community autonomy and flexibility, amounting to a romanticization of poverty.

Residents of informal communities might welcome the opportunity for formal recognition and the stability it brings, which could lead to enhanced access to credit, improved public services, and greater economic opportunities, or simply because they have secured shelter for themselves and their families. This was the experience of Rose Town, an informal community in downtown Kingston in which several dozen squatters got titles to their properties in a pilot titling initiative in the early to mid-2010s.

In Rose Town, residents' engagement in land titling was primarily motivated by the desire to secure shelter and establish ownership over their homes.





The process of securing land tenure was often linked to personal development and the upliftment of the neighbourhood. Residents saw it as an opportunity to attain a sense of legacy and provide for future generations, emphasizing the security and well-being it brought to their families and the broader community. Rose Town residents did not view formal tenure as a tool for economic leverage; the primary motivations for seeking land titles were to ensure shelter for the present and to leave an inheritance for the future, rather than as a means to access credit or capitalise on their property in financial terms. While a few households experienced the downside of formalisation—such as mounting debts from unpaid utility bills, which underscored the potential risks of entering the formal economy—the overall sentiment towards land titling was positive.

Opposing formalisation based on the risks of "gentrification" and displacement overlooks the long-term benefits that

secure land tenure and improved infrastructure could bring to these communities. By arguing that formalisation would simply lead to higher property taxes and displacement, there is an implicit assumption that these communities are incapable of thriving under formal economic conditions.

Furthermore, the informal nature of these communities typically leads to them being de-prioritised or rendered ineligible for public infrastructure improvements that benefit other urban areas.<sup>120</sup> This exclusion is compounded by the difficulty state agents, such as census takers, face in accessing these areas, which contributes to these communities being undercounted and overlooked in urban planning. In this way, the lack of formal land tenure renders these communities "illegible" to the state, leading to their under-prioritization.<sup>121</sup> The state's capacity for policy formulation and implementation is compromised by the extent of territory that is illegible, due to the lack of critical

information needed for these processes, thus limiting the state's ability to provide public goods. This could apply to ZOSOs, as they now seek to improve the provision of infrastructure in such communities: land tenure regularisation is a necessary first step for sustainability.

While the intentions behind preserving informality may stem from a desire to protect vulnerable communities, they could also be seen as a refusal to facilitate meaningful change that could genuinely uplift these communities out of poverty. The compelling economic and social benefits of land titling for residents of informal communities override its detractors' objections. Providing and enforcing land tenure security is the only way to permanently integrate marginalized communities and their residents, and preclude the ability of armed groups to co-opt and terrorise them.

"I think the [Rose Town land titling pilot] is a wonderful project, although the community is really a poor community, and people are unemployed, but I think that will give people the drive to sort of upgrade themselves. Because if you know you have to pay certain bills, and you acquire the land and you want to develop, and so on... it sort of give you the drive. If you are young, you might go back to school to educate yourself to upgrade yourself... to upgrade yourself 'cause to really buy a house uptown its millions. And I always tell people that Rose Town, that parcel of land that is called Rose Town, is one of the best places to live in Kingston. Because you are close to uptown and you can actually walk to uptown. You can walk to downtown. You are close to the hospital... a lot of people in Jamaica, to get to the hospital, take hours maybe. So we are blessed to be living on this parcel of land."

- Newly titled Rose Town resident, quoted in David Howard, "New Agendas and 'Good' Urbanism? Shelter and Tenure Transition in a Low-Income Jamaican Neighbourhood,"

*International Development Planning Review* 41 (4), 2019.









# 5 Conclusion



**This research has critically evaluated the potential for Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) to effectively and sustainably reduce violence in Jamaica.**

**T**his research has critically evaluated the potential for Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) to effectively and sustainably reduce violence in Jamaica. It argues that the strategic framework underpinning the current iteration of ZOSOs is based on versions of Counterinsurgency Theory that have been found wanting. Key findings indicate that while security operations within ZOSOs have been somewhat successful in immediate gang displacement and violence reduction, the transformative potential of ZOSOs is best maximised through prioritising land tenure regularisation and infrastructure regularisation. Security measures alone are insufficient, and social interventions targeted at behaviour modification will not lead to a sustained outcome; some may even prove counterproductive. Effective violence reduction requires formalising garrisonised, informal, and semi-formal urban and urban-adjacent settlements. This strategy will not only disrupt existing negative social networks but also facilitate positive community engagement and mobility. This approach aligns with more nuanced counterinsurgency principles that emphasise the importance of state-building and territorial control.

### Implications for Jamaica's Violence Prevention Efforts

The report underscores the importance of land tenure regularisation as a critical factor in reducing organised violence within the Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs). It outlines how insecure land tenure is a critical issue in the communities targeted by ZOSO initiatives, contributing to the cycle of violence and poverty. Residents without formal rights to their land are often marginalised and lack access to legal protections and economic opportunities, making them and the spaces they live in more vulnerable to exploitation and control by organised criminal groups.

Regularising land tenure, as detailed in the report, can provide several key benefits that directly impact violence reduction. Firstly, it gives residents a stake in their community, promoting greater investment in their properties and surrounding areas. This investment not only improves living conditions but also fosters a sense of pride and ownership, which can diminish the influence of gangs and other violent actors who exploit the lack of formal structures.

Additionally, secure land tenure can facilitate the provision of public services and infrastructure improvements. When people have legal rights to their land, the government can more effectively and confidently invest in necessary infrastructure such as

roads, utilities, and public buildings. Improved infrastructure can lead to better policing and security services, reducing the geographical and logistical challenges that often hinder effective law enforcement in areas with unclear land ownership.

The report also highlights that land tenure regularisation can be a foundation for economic development. Legal property ownership allows residents to use their land as collateral for loans, opening up opportunities for business ventures and other economic activities that can elevate the community out of poverty and reduce the appeal of joining criminal organisations. Additionally, securing land titles can help relieve the housing shortage by encouraging the construction and improvement of properties, further bolstering the real estate market. As more people gain clear ownership, they can invest in and enhance their homes, which not only improves their personal living conditions but also stimulates broader economic growth through increased demand in construction and related industries.

The report also discusses the role that infrastructure regularisation plays in reducing organised violence within the Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs). It identifies that poor infrastructure is a common feature of areas with high levels of organised violence, contributing to social and economic instability which in turn fosters

**The report underscores the importance of land tenure regularisation as a critical factor in reducing organised violence within the Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs).**



the conditions for criminal organisations to thrive. It recommends comprehensive infrastructure regularisation through urban upgrading.

Urban upgrading in the context of ZOSOs should not be merely targeted at physical renewal but also integrating informal communities into the city by providing access to basic services and public utilities, and the regularisation of public and private spaces. The physical integration of such communities will facilitate social integration, as new families move into the area and long-time resident families move elsewhere, disrupting the dark social capital of those communities and reducing the communities' physical and social isolation which can be exploited by armed groups.

Furthermore, the regularisation of infrastructure is shown to aid in effective governance and law enforcement. Better roads and lighting improve the mobility and effectiveness of security forces, allowing for more consistent and effective policing. Well-planned infrastructure can also disrupt the physical spaces that facilitate criminal activities, such as secluded areas that serve as hideouts or unmonitored spots that are used for illegal activities. Planners for these urban upgrading projects should collaborate with international agencies and organisations that have expertise in urban upgrading and security strategies. This can provide access to best practices and resources for effective implementation.

The primary role of security forces in ZOSOs should be to establish a secure environment where criminal activities are displaced and order maintained. The presence of security forces is crucial in the initial "Clear" phase of the ZOSO strategy, where removing violent actors and securing the area is a priority. This involves targeted actions to dismantle organised criminal networks that have entrenched themselves through the continued use of localized SOEs.

Another important role of security forces outlined in the report is facilitating the safe implementation of land tenure and infrastructure regularisation pro-

grammes. Once the area is stabilized, these forces can help ensure that service delivery and development projects are carried out without interference from criminal elements. Their presence can provide the necessary security for other

government agencies and non-governmental organisations to operate effectively within the community. Outside of ZOSOs, security forces should monitor and respond swiftly to prevent the development of new illegal settlements.



## Recommendations

Zones of Special Operations hold the potential to transform Jamaica's socio-geographic landscape such that vulnerable and volatile communities no longer function as safe havens for organised violent groups. Realizing this transformative potential necessitates a shift in the strategy that currently undergirds ZOSOs, from one which focuses on changing the behaviour of static populations who live in targeted communities to one aimed at territorial control and community integration.



1

ZOSOs should be revised to a three-pronged approach targeted at formalizing informal and semi-formal communities. That approach entails a coordination of land tenure regularization, comprehensive infrastructure upgrading, and security operations. The strategic goal is to integrate marginalized communities into the mainstream social fabric of the country, which will be realised through increased residential mobility for families between those communities and other parts of the country. No armed group will be able to find safe haven in an integrated, regularised community.

To facilitate this trident strategy, the government should continue to implement localized SOEs or similar measures to temporarily detain known violence producers who operate in target communities. This will allow ZOSOs to proceed unhindered by violent disruptions and reduce the level of armed violence in the short term. To stave off constitutional and political challenges, these measures should be designed with short timeframes. This necessitates a high degree of pre-planning for land tenure and infrastructure regularisation before each ZOSO is implemented.

2



3

Making land tenure and infrastructure regularisation the primary focus of ZOSOs implies a de-prioritisation of social interventions targeting behaviour modification. Not only is there little evidence that these efforts can contribute meaningfully to ZOSOs' success in reducing violence, but their incorporation into the strategy diverts resources from transformative initiatives, carries an increased risk of counterproductive efforts in the operational space, and adds to operational complexity that verges on paralysis.



# Endnotes

- 1 "A New Approach: National Security Policy for Jamaica 2013," Prepared by Anthony Clayton for the Ministry of National Security and Cabinet Office, Jamaica, 2024.
- 2 CAPRI, "Guns Out: The Splintering of Jamaica's Gangs," Kingston, Jamaica: Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2020, [https://capricaribbean.org/sites/default/files/documents/r2001guns-out-splintering-jamaicas-gangs202003\\_0.pdf](https://capricaribbean.org/sites/default/files/documents/r2001guns-out-splintering-jamaicas-gangs202003_0.pdf).
- 3 There is a clear decreasing trend in both break-ins and robberies over the period. Break-ins fell from a high of 2,537 incidents in 2013 to 878 in 2023; robberies dropped from 2,674 to 797 over the same period. Incidents of rape and aggravated assault trended down over the period. Rape incidents decreased from 840 in 2013 to 442 in 2023, and aggravated assaults from 800 to 327. Larcenies also exhibit a downward trend, from 532 incidents in 2013 to 70 in 2022, although there was a sharp increase in 2023 to 432 incidents. The trends in murder and shooting incidents are more constant. Both categories peaked around 2017, with murders reaching 1,513 incidents and shootings at 1,485.
- 4 Category One crimes are: Aggravated Assaults, Break-ins, Larcenies, Murders, Rapes, Robberies, Shooting. The records include information on the general geographic area of the incident, the specific police division where the incident occurred, the police station associated with the incident, the detailed place where the incident occurred (address, road, etc.), the community in which the incident happened, the geographic coordinates (longitude and latitude), the date on which the incident was committed, the type of incident, the type of weapon used, and the number of victims. The records recount 15,647 break-ins (16,980 victims), 15,384 robberies (20,372 victims), 13,637 murder incidents (14,759 victims), 13,383 shooting incidents (21,300 victims), 6,277 rape incidents (6,386 victims), 5,137 aggravated assault incidents (5,298 victims), 2,639 larceny incidents (2,700 victims).
- 5 Shooting and Murder are highly correlated (0.815). Grouped together, they show weak or negligible correlations with other Category One crimes: Aggravated Assault (0.045), Break-in (-0.031), Larceny (-0.088), Rape (-0.225), and Robbery (0.052). These correlations suggest little to no alignment in monthly crime rates across these categories.
- 6 The Kernel Density Estimation (KDE) plots for each type of crime reveal that certain types of crimes, like Break-ins and Robberies, show strong concentrations in specific areas, which might suggest common targets or areas with higher risk. Murders and Shootings also display overlapping high-density areas, supporting the earlier noted correlation between these two crime types. Other crime types like Rape and Aggravated Assault show less pronounced but still noticeable concentrations in certain locations.
- 7 Over the 11-year period, only three murders are recorded as being committed "unarmed". These entries were removed from subsequent analyses.
- 8 Author's calculation from JCF data. The Kernel Density Estimation (KDE) plots for each type of crime reveal that certain types of crimes, like Break-ins and Robberies, show strong concentrations in specific areas, which might suggest common targets or areas with higher risk. Kernel Density Estimation is a statistical technique used to estimate the probability density function of a random variable. In the context of crime analysis, KDE helps visualize the distribution of crime events over a geographic area, highlighting regions where crimes are most densely clustered. Murders and Shootings also display overlapping high-density areas, supporting the earlier noted correlation between these two crime types. Other crime types like Rape and Aggravated Assault show less pronounced but still noticeable concentrations in certain locations.
- 9 LAPOP AmericasBarometer Survey, 2023.
- 10 Commissioner of Police Major General Antony Anderson, "Organised Violence: The Jamaican Perspective," presentation at the Office of the National Security Advisor seminar, "Organised Violence and the Threat to Peace in Jamaica and the Region," Kingston, Jamaica, February 7, 2024.
- 11 Anthony Braga and Philip Cook, *Policing Gun Violence: Strategic Reforms for Controlling Our Most Pressing Crime Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
- 12 Anderson, "Organised Violence: The Jamaican Perspective."
- 13 2022 figures. "Murder Rate by Country," World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/murder-rate-by-country>.
- 14 See Appendix 1 for detailed discussion on how the term "informal communities" is used in this report.
- 15 Only the standalone incidents of murders and shooting were considered in this analysis.
- 16 Considering the informal community as comprising all the space within a 750-metre radius from the community's centre.
- 17 Anderson, "Organised Violence: The Jamaican Perspective."
- 18 Anthony Braga and Philip Cook, *Policing Gun Violence: Strategic Reforms for Controlling Our Most Pressing Crime Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 205.
- 19 Alexander Causwell and Diana Thorburn, "The Impunity Effect: Second Order Consequences of Extreme Gang Violence," *Our Today*, October 27, 2022, [www.our.today/alexander-causwell-and-diana-thorburn-the-impunity-effect-second-order-consequences-of-extreme-gang-violence/](http://www.our.today/alexander-causwell-and-diana-thorburn-the-impunity-effect-second-order-consequences-of-extreme-gang-violence/).
- 20 Corey Robinson, "Heavy JCF Attrition," *Gleaner*, August 10, 2023, <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead->

stories/20230810/heavy-jcf-attribution.

21 Causwell and Thorburn, "The Impunity Effect."

22 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

23 See Appendix 1 for explication of "garrison" and "garrisonised".

24 Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2019).

25 Patterson, *Confounding Island*; David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2015).

26 The Jamaica Constabulary Force classifies gangs according to generations. A first generation gang is considered to have loose leadership, limited resources, localized, opportunistic criminal activity, and a desire to prove themselves, which can lead to virulent violent behaviour. A second generation gang is more moderately organised and has centralized and distinct leadership, expanded area of control, and engages in both licit and illicit profit oriented activities. Third generation gangs, under which transnational organised crime is included, tend to be more sophisticated transnational organisations with more of a focus on economic and political agendas, than on violence and localized territorial disputes. CAPRI, "Guns Out."

27 CAPRI, "Guns Out."

28 Prime Minister Andrew Holness, Keynote Address at the Office of the National Security Advisor seminar, "Organised Violence and the Threat to Peace in Jamaica and the Region," Kingston, Jamaica, February 7, 2024.

29 Author's calculation based on the results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census and the 2012 Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, provided by the Planning Institute of Jamaica; Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN - Columbia University, "Gridded Population of the World, Version 4 (GPW) v4: Population Density Adjusted to Match 2015 Revision UN WPP Country Totals, Revision 11," NASA Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC), 2018, <https://doi.org/10.7927/H4F47M65>.

30 Alfred Francis et al., *Crime and Development: The Jamaican Experience* (Kingston: SALISES, 2009).

31 Paul A. Bourne, "Re-visiting the Crime-and-Poverty Paradigm: An Empirical Assessment with Alternative Perspectives," *Current Research Journal of Economic Theory* 3, no. 4 (2011): 99-117; Aldrie Henry-Lee, "The Nature of Poverty in the Garrison Constituencies in Jamaica," *Environment and Urbanization* 17, no. 2 (2005): 83-99.

32 A complete data set on this from the JCF for this report was not made available. 2010-2018 data reproduced from CAPRI, "Guns Out." originally sourced from JCF. Several media reports quoting JCF sources were reviewed; however, the numbers were inconsistent from one article to another for 2021 and 2022; the numbers do not vary widely, however. Mark Titus, "Dismantling the Gang Culture," *Gleaner*, October 16, 2022, <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20221016/dismantling-gang-culture>; Latonya Linton, "Gov't's Multifaceted Approach to Reducing Crime Yielding Dividends – Prime Minister Holness," *Jamaica Information Service*, March 21, 2024, <https://jis.gov.jm/govts-multifaceted-approach-to-reducing-crime-yielding-dividends-prime-minister-holness/>; Alicia Dunkley-Willis, "Extortionists in Uniform," *Observer*, April 23, 2024, [www.jamaicaobserver.com/2023/11/06/extortionists-in-uniform/](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2023/11/06/extortionists-in-uniform/).

33 Yonique Campbell and Anthony Harriott, "The Resort to Emergency Policing to Control Gang Violence in Jamaica: Making the Exception the Rule," *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2024): 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X24000075>.

34 Thomas C. Schelling, "What is the Business of Organised Crime?" *The American Scholar* 40, no. 4 (1971): 643-652.

35 Game theory is a branch of mathematics and economics that explores strategic decision-making among interacting individuals or entities. It was notably championed by Thomas Schelling in his work "The Strategy of Conflict," in which he analysed how actors' decisions are shaped not only by their actions but also by the actions of others in diverse social and economic scenarios.

36 Dennis Rodgers, "Slum Wars of the 21st Century: Gangs, Mano Dura and the New Urban Geography of Conflict in Central America," *Development and Change* 40, no. 5 (September 2009): 949-76; Dennis Rodgers and Robert Muggah, "Gangs as Non-State Armed Groups: The Central American Case," *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 2 (August 2009): 301-17; John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, "State of Siege: Mexico's Criminal Insurgency," *Small Wars Journal* 12, no. 4 (2008): 1-12; Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, "Integrating Feral Cities and Third Phase Cartels/Third Generation Gangs Research: The Rise of Criminal (Narco) City Networks and BlackFor," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 22, no. 5 (2011): 764-786.

37 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 358.

38 Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 350.

39 Stathis Kalyvas, "How Civil Wars Help Explain Organised Crime—and How They Do Not," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (2015): 1517-1540.

40 See Appendix 1 for detailed methodology.

41 Wayne Robinson, "Eradicating Organised Criminal Gangs in Jamaica: Can Lessons be Learnt from a Successful Counterinsurgency?" Unpublished dissertation, United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, US (2008): 2-10.

42 David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford, England: Oxford English Press, 2015).

43 Government of Jamaica, "National Security Policy for Jamaica: Towards A Secure and Prosperous Nation," 2007.

44 Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 354-374.

45 Jota Samper, "Eroded Resilience, Informal Settlements Predictable Urban Growth Implications for Self-governance in the



# Endnotes

- Context of Urban Violence in Medellín, Colombia," *UPLanD-Journal of Urban Planning, Landscape and Environmental Design* 2, no. 2 (2017): 183-206.
- 46 Samper, "Eroded Resilience."
- 47 Benjamin Marx, Thomas Stoker, and Tavneet Suri, "The Economics of Slums in the Developing World," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2013): 187-210.
- 48 Aldrie Henry-Lee, "The Nature of Poverty in the Garrison Constituencies in Jamaica," *Environment and Urbanization* 17, no. 2 (2005): 83-99.
- 49 Sebastian Galiani and Ernesto Schargrodsky, "Property Rights for the Poor: Effects of Land Titling," *Journal of Public Economics* 94, no. 9-10 (2010): 700-729.
- 50 Geoffrey Demarest, "Urban Land Use by Illegal Armed Groups in Medellín," *Small Wars Journal* 7, no. 10 (2011): 1-10.
- 51 Rivke Jaffe, "The Hybrid State: Crime and Citizenship in Urban Jamaica," *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 4 (2013): 734-748, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12051>.
- 52 Government of Jamaica, "Citizen Security Plan (Jamaica)," 2020; Constantinos Syropoulos and S. Skaperdas, "Gangs as Primitive States," *The Economics of Organised Crime*, 61-81, 1993.
- 53 Stergios Skaperdas and Constantinos Syropoulos, "Gangs as Primitive States," In *The Economics of Organised Crime*, edited by Gianluca Fiorentini and Sam Peltzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61-84.
- 54 Jota Samper, "The Role of Urban Upgrading in Latin America as Warfare Tool Against the 'Slums Wars,'" *Critical Planning* 19 (2012).
- 55 Jota Samper, "Physical Space and Its Role in the Production and Reproduction of Violence in the 'Slum Wars' in Medellín, Colombia (1970s-2013)," *Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (2014): 145, 214, 221,232.
- 56 GOJ, "National Security Policy for Jamaica."
- 57 Kilcullen was an advisor to the Pentagon in the U.S. War in Afghanistan, where he tested his population-centric counterinsurgency approach. David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles," *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 10 (2007): 53; Army, United States, and US Marine Corps, "Counterinsurgency Field Manual," No. 3-24, Cosimo Inc., 2010.
- 58 Edward N. Luttwak, "Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice," *Harper's Magazine*, 2007, 33.
- 59 Carlos Caicedo, "Security in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro Likely to Deteriorate in Two-year Outlook Due to Budget Cuts," *Janes*, 2016, <https://customer.janes.com/display/jiwb34442-jiwb-2016>; Nicholas Barnes, "The Logic of Criminal Territorial Control: Military Intervention in Rio de Janeiro," *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 5 (2022): 789-831.
- 60 Moritz Schuberth, "Brazilian Peacekeeping? Counterinsurgency and Police Reform in Port-au-Prince and Rio de Janeiro," *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 4 (2019): 487-510; Markus-Michael Müller, "Entangled Pacifications: Peacekeeping, Counterinsurgency and Policing in Port-au-Prince and Rio de Janeiro," in Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller eds., *The Global Making of Policing: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2016), 77-95.
- 61 Graeme Blair et al., "Does Community Policing Build Trust in Police and Reduce Crime? Evidence from Six Coordinated Field Experiments in the Global South," *Science* 374, no. 6571 (2021).
- 62 Blair, "Community Policing."
- 63 A favela is a type of low-income informal settlement in Brazil, typically characterized by dense, makeshift constructions and often lacking in formal municipal services such as water and electricity. Favelas are frequently located on the outskirts of major cities and are known for complex social structures that sometimes include significant gang influence and control.
- 64 Jota Samper, "Urban Upgrading in a Context of Violence: Perceptions of Security and Physical Space in the Case of the Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 4, no. 12 (December 2016).
- 65 Jacqueline L. Hazelton, "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare," *International Security* 42, no. 1 (July 2017): 80-113; Raphael S. Cohen, "Beyond Hearts and Minds," PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2014.
- 66 Hazelton, "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy"; Michael W. Skjelderup and Mukhtar Ainashe, "Counterinsurgency as Order-Making: Refining the Concepts of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Light of the Somali Civil War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 34, no. 6 (2023): 1180-1203.
- 67 Chris Patterson, "First Zone of Special Operations to be Declared Within Days – Chuck," Jamaica Information Service, August 31, 2017, <https://jis.gov.jm/first-zone-special-operations-declared-within-days-chuck/>.
- 68 Office of the Prime Minister, Jamaica, "The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) Special Security and Community Development Measures. Social Intervention Report," Ministry Paper 106, December 10, 2021.
- 69 Office of The Prime Minister, "Nt'l Security Council Reviews Accountability Framework for Security Forces in Special Zones of Operation," Jamaica Information Service, July 11, 2017a, <https://jis.gov.jm/national-security-council-reviews-accountability-framework-security-forces-special-zones-operation>; Office of the Prime Minister, "Prime Minister Meets with

Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies to Outline Operations of Special Zones,” News From the OPM, August 2, 2017b, <https://opm.gov.jm/news/prime-minister-meets-with-permanent-secretaries-and-heads-of-agencies-to-outline-operations-of-special-zones>; Office of the Prime Minister, “Speech by the Prime Minister Zone of Special Operations (Mount Salem),” Prime Minister Statement To Parliament, September 12, 2017c, <https://opm.gov.jm/speech/zone-of-special-operations-mount-salem-statement-to-parliament>; Latonya Linton, “Denham Town in West Kingston Declared Second Zone of Special Operations,” Jamaica Information Service, October 17, 2017b, <https://jis.gov.jm/denham-town-west-kingston-declared-second-zone-special-operations>; Ian Boyne, “Important Provisions in the ‘Zones of Special Operations’ Law,” Jamaica Information Service, July 13, 2017, <https://jis.gov.jm/important-provisions-zones-special-operations-law>.

70 “Future PNP Gov’t to Revamp Peace Management Initiative as Part of Crime Fighting Strategy,” *Observer*, March 20, 2024, [www.jamaicaobserver.com/2024/03/20/future-pnp-govt-revamp-peace-management-initiative-part-crime-fighting-strategy/](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2024/03/20/future-pnp-govt-revamp-peace-management-initiative-part-crime-fighting-strategy/).

71 PBC Jamaica, “Joint Select Committee: Law Reform Act, 2017.”

72 Douglas McIntosh, “Zones will be Carefully Assessed to Determine Intervention Needs – Sweeney,” Jamaica Information Service, September 16, 2017, <https://jis.gov.jm/zones-will-carefully-assessed-determine-intervention-needs-sweeny/>; Office of the Prime Minister, “Speech by the Prime Minister Zone of Special Operations (Mount Salem),” Prime Minister’s Statement to Parliament. September 12, 2017c, <https://opm.gov.jm/speech/zone-of-special-operations-mount-salem-statement-to-parliament/>; PBC Jamaica 2021b, “JSC on The Law Reform ZOSO, Special Security and Community Development Measures - February 10, 2022,” YouTube video, 3:19:27, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLXAJTx\\_Bqo&list=PLwsv2rUy4DmWQ4Kff-JO8kzBOu5tk5UC&index=8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLXAJTx_Bqo&list=PLwsv2rUy4DmWQ4Kff-JO8kzBOu5tk5UC&index=8).

73 During the January 13, 2021 sitting of the Joint Select Committee to review the ZOSO Act the presiding chairman (Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of National Security) Dr Horace Chang, asked about the human capacity development component of ZOSOs, with regard to timeframe and indicators of progress, and how the government would determine that ZOSOs have successfully achieved behavioural change. In response, the head of the social intervention coordinating entity, declared that it would take 20 years for ZOSOs to achieve the desired levels of violence reduction through its human capacity development initiatives. Joint Select Committee on the Law Reform Act, 2017, Sitting of the Joint Select Committee at the Jamaican Houses of Parliament; PBC Jamaica, “Joint Select Committee: Law Reform Act, 2017,” January 13, 2021, YouTube video, 2:56:18, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFUTvsaaaeU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFUTvsaaaeU).

74 CAPRI, “Zero Murders: Searching for Lessons from Two Decades of Anti-Violence Interventions in August Town,” Kingston, Jamaica: Caribbean Policy Research Institute, September 2019; CAPRI, “Testing Testing: Challenges to Measuring Social Programmes for At-Risk Youth,” Kingston, Jamaica: Caribbean Policy Research Institute, May 2021.

75 Irvin Waller and Dick Weller, “Crime Prevention Through Social Development: An Overview with Sources,” Canadian Council on Social Development, 1984, [www.ccsd.ca/resources/CrimePrevention/pdf/cptsd1984.pdf](http://www.ccsd.ca/resources/CrimePrevention/pdf/cptsd1984.pdf).

76 Linda Dahlberg and James Mercy, “History of Violence as a Public Health Issue,” February 2009, Center for Disease Control, [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/history\\_violence-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/history_violence-a.pdf).

77 GOJ, “Citizen Security Plan.”

78 “The Citizen Security Plan. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Report: Measuring Change,” Citizen Security Secretariat, Ministry of National Security, December 2023.

79 “Citizen Security Secretariat, MNS, “The Citizen Security Plan.: Measuring Change,” Citizen Security Secretariat, Ministry of National Security, December 2023.

80 Justin M. Carré, “Testosterone and Human Aggression,” *The Wiley Handbook of Violence and Aggression*, September 8, 2017; Carole Hooven, T: *The Story of Testosterone, the Hormone that Dominates and Divides Us* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2021).

81 Gaurav Khanna et al., “Formal Employment and Organised Crime: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Colombia,” *The Economic Journal* 133, no. 654 (2023): 2427-2448.

82 Christopher Blattman et al., “Gang Rule: Understanding and Countering Criminal Governance,” No. w28458, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021.

83 Paul Cozens and Terence Love, “The Dark Side of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED),” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.2>.

84 Cozens and Love, “Dark Side.”

85 Tally of activities enumerated in Ministry Papers “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) Special Security and Community Development Measures. Social Intervention Report,” from 2020 to 2023.

86 Office of the Prime Minister (Jamaica), “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) Special Security and Community Development Measures. Social Intervention Report,” Ministry Paper 106, December 10, 2021.

87 Office of the Prime Minister (Jamaica), “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures). The Mount Salem Community Zone Social Interventions (April 14, 2023 – June 15, 2023),” Ministry Paper 68/2023, June 15, 2023.

88 Office of the Prime Minister (Jamaica), “The Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development Measures). August Town. Social Interventions (October 18, 2023 – December 8, 2023),” Ministry Paper 109/2023, December 8, 2023.



# Endnotes

- 89 Federico M. Butera, "Urban Development and Energy Access in Informal Settlements. A Review for Latin America and Africa," *Procedia Engineering* 161 (2016): 2093-2099; "LAMP to Be Expanded to More Parishes," Jamaica Information Service, May 20, 2010, <https://jis.gov.jm/lamp-to-be-expanded-to-more-parishes/>; Ministry of Water and Housing, "Rapid Assessment of Squatting Report," Government of Jamaica, 2007.
- 90 Timothy Mitchell, "The Work of Economics: How a Discipline Makes its World," *European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2005): 297-320.
- 91 Mitchell, "Work of Economics."
- 92 Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- 93 Fernando Cantuarias and Miguel Delgado, "Peru's Urban Land Titling Program," presentation made at Scaling-up Poverty Reduction Conference, Shanghai, China, May 2004.
- 94 Jan K. Brueckner and Harris Selod, "A Theory of Urban Squatting and Land-tenure Formalization in Developing Countries," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 1, no. 1 (2009): 28-51.
- 95 Sotomayor, "Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects."
- 96 Samper, "Nexus between Informality and Armed Conflict."
- 97 Erica Field, "Entitled to Work: Urban Property Rights and Labor Supply in Peru," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122, no. 4 (2007): 1561-1602.
- 98 Kevin Ross, "Explaining the Peruvian Growth Miracle," In Peru (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513599748.071.ch003>.
- 99 Erica Field, "Entitled to Work: Urban Property Rights and Labor Supply in Peru," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122, no. 4 (2007): 1561-1602.
- 100 Sebastian Galiani and Ernesto Schargrodsky, "Property Rights for the poor: Effects of Land Titling," *Journal of Public Economics* 94, no. 9-10 (2010): 700-729.
- 101 See Appendix Case Study of Peru.
- 102 See Appendix Case Study of Peru.
- 103 David Howard, "New Agendas and 'Good' Urbanism? Shelter and Tenure Transition in a Low-Income Jamaican Neighbourhood," *International Development Planning Review* 41 (4), 2019.
- 104 Ezra Spira-Cohen, "Expanding State Reach: Land Tenure Reforms, Informational Resources, and State Capacities in Brazil," PhD diss., Tulane University, School of Liberal Arts, 2022.
- 105 James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
- 106 Ezra Spira-Cohen, "Expanding State Reach: Land Tenure Reforms, Informational Resources, and State Capacities in Brazil," PhD dissertation, Tulane University, 2022, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A124150/datastream/PDF/view>.
- 107 Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology* 25, no. 2 (1984): 185-213.
- 108 Jota Samper, "The role of Urban Upgrading in Latin America as warfare tool against the 'Slum Wars,'" *Critical Planning* 19 (2012).
- 109 See Appendix Case Study on Medellín.
- 110 Jota Samper, "Urban Upgrading in a Context of Violence: Perceptions of Security and Physical Space in the Case of the Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 4, no. 12 (2016): 760-778.
- 111 Garfield Angus, "Gov't Committed to Ensuring Security Forces Respect Citizens' Rights—PM," Jamaica Information Service, May 7, 2022, <https://jis.gov.jm/govt-committed-to-ensuring-security-forces-respect-citizens-rights-pm/>.
- 112 Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of Peace and War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2001).
- 113 European Commission, "Support to Citizen Security in Jamaica," Action Document for Support to Citizen Security in Jamaica under the European Development Fund, annex to the Commission Decision on the financing of the Annual Action Programme in favour of Jamaica for 2019, last modified 2019.
- 114 Author's calculations based on information on five ZOSOs provided by JSIF.
- 115 Ministry of Finance and the Public Service, "Jamaica, Estimates of Expenditure 2024/2025, for the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2025," March 26, 2024, [www.mof.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024-2025-As-Passed-Estimates-of-Expenditure.pdf](http://www.mof.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024-2025-As-Passed-Estimates-of-Expenditure.pdf), 19000-12. Note that the version of the budget available online as of May 13, 2024 contains an error, as the amount stated is J\$543 billion.
- 116 L. Alan Eyre, "Political Violence and Urban Geography in Kingston, Jamaica," *Geographical Review* 74(1984): 24-37; L. Alan Eyre, "The Shantytowns of Montego Bay, Jamaica" *Geographical Review* (1972): 394-413.
- 117 Barry Chevannes, "The Formation of Garrison Communities," paper presented at the Grassroots Development and the

- 
- State of the Nation Symposium, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1992; James Kerr, Report of the Jamaica National Committee on Political Tribalism, July 1997; Peter Espeut, "The Rule of the Dons," *Gleaner*, September 30, 1998, A4, A8; Anthony Harriott, "Social Identities and the Escalation of Homicidal Violence in Jamaica," paper presented at the Centre for Hemispheric Defence Studies, Research and Education in Defence and Security Studies (REDES), August 7–10, 2002, Brasilia, Brazil; Mark Figueroa and Amanda Sives, "Homogeneous Voting, Electoral Manipulation and the Garrison Process in Post-independence Jamaica," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 40, no. 1 (March 2002): 81–106.
- 118 Alexander Monge-Naranjo, Pedro C. Ferreira, and Luciene T. de Mello Pereira, "Of Cities and Slums," Working Papers 2018-005, 2018; Kenan Handzic, "Is Legalized Land Tenure Necessary in Slum Upgrading? Learning from Rio's Land Tenure Policies in the Favela Bairro Program," *Habitat International* 34, no. 1 (2010): 11–17; Jose Samper, "Granting of Land Tenure in Medellín, Colombia's Informal Settlements: Is legalization the Best Alternative in a Landscape of Violence?" *Colombia's Informal Settlements: Is Legalization the Best Alternative in a Landscape of Violence* (2012).
- 119 Aldrie Henry-Lee, "The Nature of Poverty in the Garrison Constituencies in Jamaica," *Environment and Urbanization* 17, no. 2 (2005): 83–99.
- 120 Benjamin Marx, Thomas Stoker, and Tavneet Suri, "The Economics of Slums in the Developing World," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2013): 187–210.
- 121 Scott, *Seeing like a State*.



# Appendix 1: Methodology

This report conducts a strategic evaluation of Jamaica's Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) within the context of the population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) model. It employs several quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

Compilation of crime and violence statistics from the Jamaica Constabulary Force were used to conduct a situation analysis, which offers a backdrop to understand the operational environment of ZOSOs. An analysis of violence data over an 11-year period focused on geospatial aspects to understand the distribution and concentration of violence within and around informal communities in Jamaica. This included mapping tools to visually represent patterns of violence.

Employing a qualitative methodology, a thorough review of academic literature, policy analyses, and media reports focused on violence reduction and counterinsurgency strategies was undertaken. This review provides a foundational understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of ZOSOs.

Information on ZOSOs was obtained from official sources, as well as Jamaica Information Service articles, submissions to the Joint Select Committee Meetings on the Law Reform Act 2017 (that are available on the Public Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica's YouTube channel), and Jamaica Gleaner and Observer articles related to ZOSOs. Central to the evaluation was an in-depth interview with the originator of the ZOSO initiative, which provided essential insights into its strategic objectives and implementation nuances.

Comparative analyses of similar initiatives in El Salvador, Colombia, and Peru were conducted to draw parallels and learn from their successes and failures.

## Limitations

This report encounters two primary limitations: the extent of the analysis concerning Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) and land tenure regularisation, and the unavailability of specific data.

We were unable to access detailed data on gangs, such as the number of gangs, their membership sizes, and their locations, despite receiving GIS datasets from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) that facilitated our geo-spatial analysis. Additionally, the information on the two land titling activities identified within the ZOSOs, in Comfort Gardens in Montego Bay and August Town, was confined to what was available in ministry papers.

The report touches on the historical context of land tenure regularisation efforts in Jamaica, which span several decades. However, a thorough enumeration and evaluation of all related initiatives, such as Operation PRIDE and LAMP, were beyond the parameters of this study. Such an analysis would involve a detailed look at the bureaucratic, political, and economic aspects of these programmes and their outcomes, providing a more comprehensive insight into past efforts.

Moreover, conducting an in-depth prospecting analysis of a new land titling endeavour—including assessments of cost-benefit, political risk, and other detailed factors that would delineate precisely what such an initiative might entail and the resources it would require—was also outside the scope of this report.

Including these detailed examinations would enhance the report's proposals for comprehensive land titling and tenure regularization initiatives; these are ideally the subject of a separate study.

## Definition and Use of “Informal Communities”

The term “informal communities” is used in this report to refer to areas often euphemistically labeled in official circles as “troubled,” “vulnerable,” or “volatile.” Traditionally known as “squatter settlements” or “squatter communities,” these terms have been eschewed in recent political discourse. The term “squatter” is now considered pejorative and its use has declined due to a shift in the political zeitgeist that frames squatting as a consequence of historical injustices like colonialism and enslavement. In the case study on Medellín these would be what are referred to as peri-urban communities.

In this report, informal communities may also include semi-formal communities. These are areas with a mix of tenured and untenured properties or tenured properties occupied by persons without legal rights to the land. Often, these are individuals unaffiliated with the rightful owners but who have moved in nonetheless. These communities are predominantly impoverished, with high birth rates and teenage pregnancy rates, and typically feature weak, albeit often multigenerational, family structures. The physical infrastructure in these areas ranges from poor to extremely dilapidated, with wooden houses and zinc structures, though many feature concrete dwellings, albeit irregularly constructed. Livestock pens may be situated dangerously close to human dwellings. The layout is generally characterized by a chaotic arrangement of alleyways and dirt footpaths. Utilities such as electricity and water are usually accessed through irregular connections, with many residents relying on community pipes for water, as their homes lack indoor plumbing. Such a community tends to lack formal social infrastructure. In many of these communities, living conditions are just marginally above homelessness.

The informal communities referred to in this report are also described as garrisons, garrison-like, or garrisonised. While these terms are used interchangeably for rhetorical convenience, it is acknowledged that a more detailed investigation into the specific political economy of these communities might find such interchangeability to be misleading. However, this level of detail is beyond the scope of the current analysis.

A garrison community is that which emerged out of attempts to semi-formalise squatter communities through social housing projects aimed at poverty alleviation and securing political loyalty. Over time, even communities that remained informal became garrisonised, growing dependent on political patronage to stave off eviction. Local enforcers, or “dons,” play a pivotal role in these areas, securing community loyalty to political parties in exchange for jobs, goods, services, and at times, through acts of violence. This patronage allows these area leaders to establish and maintain organised criminal networks.

Garrisons are thus semi-isolated communities that operate under a separate system of law and order, directed by an area leader who administers “justice” through the use or threat of violence. The social arrangements within garrison communities impede the functioning of the state and its security forces. The irregular land tenure and the presence of armed groups further entrench these communities as loci of organised violence across the island, hence their official designation as “violence hotspots.”



# Appendix 2: Comparator Case Studies

## Case Study: Bukele's Mano Dura (El Salvador)

El Salvador was dubbed the "world's deadliest peacetime country" due to its high homicide rate throughout the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> The pervasive violence has been definitively attributed to the actions of major gangs like MS-13 and 18th Street who control swathes of territory throughout the country's informal communities, leading analysts to deem them criminal-insurgencies.<sup>2</sup> "Mano Dura" (heavy hand) policies from 2003-2006 achieved temporary success in reducing violence with mass arrests, but the gangs eventually adapted their strategies by diversifying their areas of influence and adjusting their visible identifiers and behaviours to evade detection, such as altering tattoos and adopting less conspicuous modes of communication. A state-brokered truce between gangs in 2012-2013 temporarily reduced homicides but ultimately empowered the gangs by conferring them legitimacy and allowing them to strengthen their hold on their respective territories. A surge of homicides in 2015 prompted the Supreme Court to officially designate both groups terrorist organisations.<sup>3</sup>

Nayib Bukele was elected president in 2019, having campaigned on a promise of eliminating gangs and reducing murder. Upon assuming office, he introduced the Territorial Control Plan (TCP), a phased strategy aimed at denying non-state armed groups (NSAGs) control over territory. Simultaneously, his administration covertly brokered a truce with key gang leaders, offering improved prison conditions, resistance to extradition, and tacit allowance of extortion operations in exchange for reduced violence.<sup>4</sup>

The TCP's initial phase, "Preparation," began in June 2019: it focused on seizing control over gang-held areas through increased military presence and video surveillance, and disrupting gang communication from prisons by declaring a state of emergency in all prisons, and imposing strict measures such as visitation halts and solitary confinement. The subsequent phase, "Opportunities," launched in July 2019, introduced social interventions and economic opportunities for youth in gang-dominated areas. "Modernization of Security Forces," the third phase launched in August of the same year, aimed to enhance military and police capabilities with advanced technology.

The truce between the state and gangs was effectively broken by the fourth phase, "Incursion of Police and Military Personnel into Territory," which commenced in July 2021. Gang violence resumed, triggered by the state's encroachment into gang territory. A "State of Exception" was declared on March 27th, 2022, initially for 30 days but subsequently renewed monthly.<sup>5</sup>

El Salvador's State of Exception (SOE) encompasses a focus on mass arrests and detention, newly stringent prison oversight, and the militarization of security forces. Legislative amendments to support the SOE were applied to the Criminal Procedural Code, Telecommunications Law, Law against Organised Crime, and Organic Law of the Judiciary.<sup>6</sup> With these changes, security and state authorities possess powers for arbitrary detention based on suspicion of gang affiliations (usually evidenced by distinguishing tattoos), anonymous tips, and residence in gang-dominated areas.

1 Ludovica Laccino, "El Salvador to Become Deadliest Peace-Time Country in the World: Who Are MS-13 and Barrio-18 Gangs?" International Business Times UK, April 10, 2015, [www.ibtimes.co.uk/el-salvador-become-deadliest-peace-time-country-world-who-are-ms-13-barrio-18-gangs-1495637](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/el-salvador-become-deadliest-peace-time-country-world-who-are-ms-13-barrio-18-gangs-1495637).

2 Juan R. Gómez Hecht, "Gangs in El Salvador: A New Type of Insurgency?" *Small Wars Journal* (September 2017), <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/gangs-in-el-salvador-a-new-type-of-insurgency>.

3 Merlin Delcid, "El Salvador Declara como Grupos Terroristas a las Pandillas," [El Salvador Declares Gangs as Terrorist Groups], CNN en Español, August 25, 2015, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2015/08/25/el-salvador-declara-como-grupos-terroristas-a-las-pandillas/>.

4 Ioan Grillo, "Three Uncomfortable Truths About Bukele's Crackdown on Gangs," CrashOutMedia, August 29, 2023, [www.crashoutmedia.com/p/three-uncomfortable-truths-about](http://www.crashoutmedia.com/p/three-uncomfortable-truths-about); Hector S. Avalos, "States of Exception: The New Security Model in Central America?" Washington Office on Latin America, 2023, [www.wola.org/analysis/states-of-exception-new-security-model-central-america/](http://www.wola.org/analysis/states-of-exception-new-security-model-central-america/); Jonathan D. Rosen, "Understanding Bukele's Gang Crack Down in El Salvador," *Small Wars Journal* (2022) <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/understanding-bukeles-gang-crack-down-el-salvador>; Manuel Meléndez-Sánchez, "Bukele Has Defeated El Salvador's Gangs—for Now. How? And What Does It Mean for the Region?" *Lawfare*, March 27, 2023, [www.lawfaremedia.org/article/bukele-has-defeated-el-salvadors-gangs-now-how-and-what-does-it-mean-region](http://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/bukele-has-defeated-el-salvadors-gangs-now-how-and-what-does-it-mean-region); Sarah Kinoshian, "EXCLUSIVE Salvadoran Prosecutor Says Government Quashed Probe into Pact with Gangs," Reuters, December 28, 2021, [www.reuters.com/world/americas/exclusive-salvadoran-ex-prosecutor-says-government-quashed-probe-into-pact-with-2021-12-28/](http://www.reuters.com/world/americas/exclusive-salvadoran-ex-prosecutor-says-government-quashed-probe-into-pact-with-2021-12-28/).

5 Gangs murdered more than 87 people dead in the span of 72 hours; "El Salvador: Authorities Extend Nationwide State of Emergency Until at Least Aug. 14 /update 16," *Crisis 24*, July 14, 2023, <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/07/el-salvador-authorities-extend-nationwide-state-of-emergency-until-at-least-aug-14-update-16>.

6 "One Year Under the State of Exception: A Permanent Measure of Repression and Human Rights Violations," Cristosal, 2023, <https://cristosal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/One-year-under-the-state-of-exception-1.pdf>.

The SOE permits warrantless arrests, extends pre-trial detention to 15 days, and allows intensified searches and eased regulations on phone wiretapping. It empowers judges with unprecedented capacities, including the ability to conceal their own identities, hold mass trials for up to 900 individuals simultaneously, and hold trials in absentia. The reforms also lowered the age individuals can be tried for gang-related offences to twelve-years-old. Furthermore, it legitimizes confessions as direct evidence, imposes severe minimum sentences for gang-related offenses, and extends investigative powers to the police that were previously reserved for the attorney general's office.

Since March 2022, El Salvador has reported an unprecedented decline in homicide rates. Daily homicide rates have dropped from 18 in 2015 to less than 0.40 in 2023.<sup>7</sup> The government's data indicates the arrest of 52,541 MS13 members, 13,682 Barrio 18 Sureños members, and 10,741 Barrio 18 Revolucionarios members as of October 2023.<sup>8</sup> The number of armed groups has decreased from 97 in 2022 to 53 in 2023, following a downward trend from 107 in 2020. El Salvador now has the highest prison population in the world, with one in every 50 citizens in jail.<sup>9</sup> The State of Exception has effectively neutralized El Salvador's gangs.

El Salvador's efforts to combat organised violence offer valuable insights for Jamaica, given the similarities in violence patterns and anti-violence approaches in both countries. Both nations have faced chronic armed violence concentrated in specific neighbourhoods, with non-state armed groups (NSAGs) driving high homicide rates.

El Salvador's experience shows that direct actions against gangs are effective, but the extent to which they are sustained depends on the strategic underpinnings of each method. Negotiations, truces, and "Mano Dura" policies may bring about reductions, but these have been temporary and also come with blowback and drawbacks.

Negotiating with gangs, as happened with the 2012-2013 truce between MS-13 and 18th Street, can inadvertently legitimise and strengthen these groups, allowing them to regroup, rearm, and expand, and to a resurgence of violence. Such negotiations can also erode public trust in the government and law enforcement, as citizens may perceive the state as being in collusion with criminal entities or as incapable of protecting them without making concessions to gangs.

"Mano Dura" initiatives also have demonstrable pitfalls. The initial mass incarceration resulted in overcrowded prisons, which inadvertently facilitated gang communication and coordination, strengthening their organisational structure rather than dismantling it. The adaptability of gangs to law enforcement strategies, including their expansion into new territories and altering identifiers to evade detection, further challenges the effectiveness of repression-based approaches.

Neither approach emphasised addressing the structural factors that allow gangs to co-opt shantytown areas as safe havens: as long as NSAGs hold territory, the decline in violence is likely to only be temporary, even with the dramatic changes brought about by the SOE. Bukele's TCP could only proceed by first neutralising NSAGs via an unprecedented campaign of mass incarceration to free their community strongholds from gang influence, which has also aided in drastically reducing homicides in the short run. Sustaining the reduction in armed violence in the long run will require the TCP to make drastic changes to the socio-geographic landscape that will permanently render El Salvador's slums inhospitable to NSAGs. For the moment, the Integration phase of this plan is in effect, however, the main thrust of this phase seems to involve a national skills training campaign of shantytown residents, and not a regularisation of informal communities.<sup>10</sup>

El Salvador's success in reducing armed violence has drawn worldwide attention, including from countries suffering from similar gang violence issues, with regard to how the strategy might be replicated. Further, his policies have boosted his domestic support and popularity, as evidenced by his re-election to office with 85 percent of the vote, his party taking 54 of 60 congressional seats, and allied parties taking three other seats.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding, Bukele's aggressive approach to combatting gang violence, and the resulting actions, have raised concerns, particularly among Western leaders and political commentators, about human rights and judicial fairness.<sup>12</sup>

7 Eddie Galdamez, "Nayib Bukele's Territorial Control Plan: Transforming El Salvador's Security Landscape," El Salvador INFO, 2023, <https://elsalvadorinfo.net/nayib-bukeles-security-plan/>.

8 Alex Papadovassilakis, "Too Many Soldiers: How Bukele's Crackdown Succeeded Where Others Failed," Insight Crime, December 6, 2023, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/too-many-soldiers-how-bukele-crackdown-succeeded-where-others-failed/>.

9 Papadovassilakis, "Too Many Soldiers"; Breda, T. "Why El Salvador's Anti-Crime Measures Cannot (and Should Not) Be Exported," Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2023, [www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/why-el-salvadors-anti-crime-measures-cannot-and-should-not-be-exported](http://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/why-el-salvadors-anti-crime-measures-cannot-and-should-not-be-exported).

10 "President Bukele Unveils Phase 6 of Territorial Control Plan, called «Integration»," El Salvador in English, September 18, 2023, <https://elsalvadorinenglish.com/2023/09/18/president-bukele-unveils-phase-6-of-territorial-control-plan-called-integration/>.

11 Marcos Alemán and Megan Janetsky, "El Salvador's Bukele Wins Supermajority in Congress After Painstaking Vote Count," AP News, February 19, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/el-salvador-nayib-bukele-election-8637667ca3b9f35c9ffd2baf805a9ade>.

12 K. Funes, "El Salvador's State of Exception Turns One," NACLA, March 27, 2023, <https://nacla.org/el-salvadors-state-exception-turns-onehttps://nacla.org/el-salvadors-state-exception-turns-one>; Cristosal, "One Year Under the State of Exception": A Permanent Measure of Repression and Human Rights Violations"; J. E. Cuéllar, "No One is Safe in Bukele's Gang War," NACLA, 2022, <https://nacla.org/bukele-gang-war>; Global State of Democracy Initiative, El Salvador, September 2022: President Bukele announces his intention to run for a second term in office; Amnesty International, "El Salvador: One Year into State of Emergency, Authorities are Systematically Committing Human Rights Violations," April



The El Salvador “model” is impractical for Jamaica in its totality. The ethical, legal, and political dimensions and repercussions render it unsuitable in Jamaica’s current political economy.<sup>13</sup> In August 2023, 17 months in, at least 153 pre-trial detainees were reported to have died under questionable circumstances, suggesting a disregard for human rights and legal principles such as the presumption of innocence. Over 7,900 human rights violation complaints, including torture and starvation in prisons, have been reported. This has burdened the penal system and detracted from its capacity to manage non-gang-related issues.<sup>14</sup> Bukele’s government has been accused of compromising democratic integrity by centralizing power, undermining checks and balances, and eroding institutions, including replacing critical judges and the attorney general with loyalists.<sup>15</sup> His administration has been reported to have targeted journalists, activists, and opponents, curtailing civil liberties and employing illegal surveillance.

Similar results can be achieved in Jamaica without imposing many of El Salvador’s measures, particularly those that violate human rights and democratic principles. Jamaica enjoys and values stronger rule of law protections, democratic norms, and commitments to human rights than El Salvador does. The main lesson from El Salvador is that removing gangs from communities—clearing--to spaces where they cannot regroup, is a necessary first step to allow the state to hold and build--to reclaim and introduce governance and institutions to those territories so that the conditions that made them hospitable to gangs are removed. El Salvador’s underworld is dominated by a handful of sizeable armed groups; Jamaica’s gangs are splintered into over 200 smaller NSAGs, each with much smaller territorial strongholds. This makes it a logistically more feasible proposal to judiciously use more localised SOES to neutralise violent groups as ZOSOs mitigate the features of informal urban communities that make them vulnerable to co-optation as NSAG safe havens.

---

2023, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/el-salvador-state-emergency-systematic-human-rights-violations/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/el-salvador-state-emergency-systematic-human-rights-violations/); Anna M. Méndez Dardón, “Mass Trials in El Salvador Reflect Unsustainability of the State of Emergency,” Washington Office on Latin America, 2023, [www.wola.org/analysis/mass-trials-el-salvador-reflect-unsustainability-state-of-emergency/](https://www.wola.org/analysis/mass-trials-el-salvador-reflect-unsustainability-state-of-emergency/); Tiziano Breda, “Why El Salvador’s Anti-Crime Measures Cannot (and Should Not) Be Exported,” Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2023, [www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/why-el-salvadors-anti-crime-measures-cannot-and-should-not-be-exported](https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/why-el-salvadors-anti-crime-measures-cannot-and-should-not-be-exported); Alex Papadovassilakis, “‘Too Many Soldiers’: How Bukele’s Crackdown Succeeded Where Others Failed,” InSight Crime, December 6, 2023, <http://insightcrime.org/investigations/too-many-soldiers-how-bukele-crackdown-succeeded-where-others-failed/>.

<sup>13</sup> Yonique Campbell and Anthony Harriott, “The Resort to Emergency Policing to Control Gang Violence in Jamaica: Making the Exception the Rule,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2024): 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X24000075>.

<sup>14</sup> Ana M. Méndez Dardón, “Mass Trials in El Salvador Reflect Unsustainability of the State of Emergency,” Washington Office on Latin America, August 3, 2023, [www.wola.org/analysis/mass-trials-el-salvador-reflect-unsustainability-state-of-emergency/](https://www.wola.org/analysis/mass-trials-el-salvador-reflect-unsustainability-state-of-emergency/).

<sup>15</sup> Breda, “El Salvador’s Anti-Crime Measures.”

## Case Study: The Medellín Slum Wars

In the 1980s, non-state armed groups in Colombia took hold of the settlements built on unstable land on the mountain-side around the city of Medellín. The violent competitions between these groups and the state, what came to be called the "slum wars," led to Medellín becoming one of the most violent cities globally, with extraordinarily high homicide rates, reaching a world-record peak of 381 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 1991.<sup>16</sup> From the 1970s to 2013, several urban planning strategies were implemented as part of the effort to address armed violence in the city's peri-urban informal settlements.

PRIMED (the Integrated Slum Upgrading Programme of Medellín, pronounced pri-med) was initiated in 1993 by the newly established *Consejería para el Área Metropolitana de Medellín* (Advisory for the Metropolitan Area) to address violence, social issues, and unplanned urban growth. With few exceptions, the communities in question had no formal planning and lacked basic services like clean water, sanitation, and secure land tenure for most residents.<sup>17</sup> PRIMED aimed to improve living conditions in informal settlements by enhancing infrastructure, legalizing land tenure, and fostering community participation alongside socio-economic development through education, healthcare, and job training.

There was some success in mitigating NSAG influence in informal areas, but PRIMED faced obstacles from Medellín's complex socio-political environment, continued NSAG interference, and logistical issues in coordinating involved parties. Political, financial, and priority shifts led to the programme's discontinuation in 2000. The PRIMED story shows how challenging and unsustainable it is to maintain comprehensive anti-violence initiatives in informal urban areas, particularly amidst dynamic political and operational landscapes.<sup>18</sup>

A follow-on, more targeted urban reform initiative was the Urban Integrated Projects (UIs), operational between 2004 and 2011 under local government leadership. UIs focused on investing in underserved neighbourhoods to improve infrastructure and access to public services, as well as transport connectivity, in an endeavour to mitigate the locational disadvantages of peripheral communities. The latter were large-scale projects that saw the construction and installation of mobility infrastructure enhancements, such as cable cars and urban escalators for semi-isolated communities in the steep Andean areas. Library-parks, schools, recreation centres, and public spaces were built and upgraded, and avenues were revitalised. Housing upgrades and land titling were also done. The overarching goal was to integrate informal settlements into Medellín's formal city fabric by creating continuous public urban spaces and fostering social connectivity through improved transportation systems and land tenure regularization.<sup>19</sup>

The improved infrastructure, new public spaces, and increased access to public services brought about by the UIs led to increased property values and real estate transactions. In the Popular and Santa Cruz neighbourhoods, between 2004 and 2007, transactions in the Popular neighbourhood increased three-fold, from 672 to 1692, while Santa Cruz transactions increased from 584 to 898. New residents entered, and long-standing residents' property values increased.<sup>20</sup>

There was a dip in violent crime in areas that had UIs. Over the period 1997–2007, there was a 13-point increase in the quality of life index in the intervention neighbourhoods due in large part to increased life expectancy, compared to an average of eight points in other city districts. And the city's homicide rate had fallen to 37 (2007) from 58 per 100,000 in 2004.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of the MetroCable, a new cable line in northwestern Medellín, reduced the propensity for residents engaging in crime by connecting neighbourhoods more effectively to the city's transportation network, resulting in a 9 percent reduction in crime participation rates for areas with at least a 10-minute cut in commute times. The effect was strongest in areas that previously experienced higher levels of violence.<sup>22</sup> However, there was a rise in violence at the outset as gangs extorted construction efforts and competed for extortion rights. Gang control and violence eventually diminished along with the communities' isolation which had facilitated gang rule.<sup>23</sup>

16 Luisa Sotomayor, "Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects: A Planning Tool to Reduce Socio-Spatial Inequality," Working Paper WP21LS1, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, May 2021.

17 John Betancur, "Approaches to the Regularization of Informal Settlements: The Case of PRIMED in Medellín, Colombia," *Global Urban Development* 3, no. 1 (2007): 1–15.

18 Betancur, "Approaches to Regularization of Informal Settlements."

19 Jota Samper, "Physical Space and Its Role in the Production and Reproduction of Violence in the 'Slum Wars' in Medellín, Colombia (1970s–2013)," *Urban Studies and Planning* (2014): 277–296; Luisa Sotomayor, "Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects: A Planning Tool to Reduce Socio-Spatial Inequality," Working Paper WP21LS1, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, May 2021.

20 Sotomayor, "Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects."

21 Sotomayor, "Medellín's Integrated Urban Projects"; "Socialización Encuesta de Percepción Ciudadana – 2007," Medellín Como Vamos, 2007, [www.Medellincomovamos.org/socializaci-n-encuesta-de-percepci-n-ciudadana-2007](http://www.Medellincomovamos.org/socializaci-n-encuesta-de-percepci-n-ciudadana-2007).

22 Gaurav Khanna et al., "Spatial Mobility, Economic Opportunity, and Crime," Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 24-106, September 2023.

23 Jota Samper, "Nexus between Informality and Armed Conflict: Looking at Medellín Transformation through the Lens of Urban Conflict," In Catalina Ortiz ed. *Comparative Urban Design: Border-Making Practices in Medellín and Beirut* (London: The Development Planning Unit, 2018), 91–103.



The Medellín case underscores how targeted, rather than comprehensive, approaches to countering gang dominance in urban areas, stand a greater chance of success. The original programme, PRIMED, had some success in improving physical infrastructure regularizing land tenure, and reduced spaces where gangs could operate. However, the reach and sustainability of the programme were hampered by the additional interventions aimed at direct socio-economic upliftment benefits for residents in treated communities, which required coordination across several organisations.

Its successor, PUI, was more targeted. PUI aimed to integrate informal communities into the broader urban fabric by focusing on improving infrastructure, transport connectivity, and access to public services. The neighbourhoods grew more appealing, increasing residential mobility between the formerly isolated communities and the central urban area. The admixture of new residents helped disrupt the social networks which had previously supported NSAGs. Gangs were crowded out, and the communities no longer provided safe haven from which to operate. As a result, armed violence in the targeted communities subsided.<sup>24</sup>

Another lesson from Medellín concerns the relationship between transport connectivity and armed violence, whereby the more connected and less isolated the community, the lower the violence. Infrastructure projects designed to enhance the connectivity of gang-dominated peri-urban areas to mainstream urban life are demonstrably effective in diminishing gang control. While Jamaica's peri-urban areas are not nearly as distant from the urban centres of gravity as in Medellín, the density and haphazard layout of many of these settlements render them practically impenetrable to public services, even if they are geographically proximate.

Though Medellín is held up as a model of urban innovation and violence reduction, the persistence of extortion by organised crime groups indicates that even with the successes in lowering its murder rate, gangs still hold sway. Much of the reduction in violence since the advent of the PUI has closely followed a shift in the methods used by criminal gangs and their leaders in managing their territories. Specifically, key figures in the criminal underworld achieved a type of monopoly over the city's criminal activities. This monopolistic control allowed for more regulated and less visible forms of violence, as these leaders could orchestrate the city's criminal dynamics to avoid open conflicts that would lead to high-profile violence and draw law enforcement attention.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, while the PUIs succeeded in crowding out gangs in the targeted communities, there are still communities in Medellín that are yet to be integrated and remain under gang control.

<sup>24</sup> Samper, "Nexus between Informality and Armed Conflict."

<sup>25</sup> Caroline Doyle, "'Orthodox' and 'Alternative' Explanations for the Reduction of Urban Violence in Medellín, Colombia," *Urban Research and Practice* 12, no. 3 (2019): 211-229.







## Case Study: Land Tenure and Counterinsurgency in Peru

The rise of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru during the late 20th century led to widespread violence and instability in Peru. Thousands lost their lives, and many more were displaced due to the conflict. The insurgency disrupted economic activities, particularly in rural areas. Agriculture, trade, and infrastructure development suffered setbacks. From 1980 to 2000, nearly 70,000 people (around 15 per 100,000 people annually) were killed in Peru, over half of all deaths were attributed to Shining Path (the remainder committed by the state military).<sup>26, 27</sup>

This Maoist guerrilla organisation aimed to overthrow the Peruvian government and establish a communist state. It originated in the 1980s from the Andean region of Ayacucho, and expanded across rural areas of Peru. The Shining Path employed guerrilla warfare tactics, targeting state institutions, local leaders, and civilians. Over time, Sendero Luminoso managed to establish control over large portions of the Peruvian countryside, setting up parallel administrative structures and exerting influence over local communities.

The initial effort to displace Sendero Luminoso was a population-centric strategy starting in 1985. The goal was to enhance rural investment and support peasant farmers with credits and loans. However, this strategy backfired by allowing Shining Path to expand its territory, even setting up strongholds in the informal communities around the capital Lima, and violence continued to rise.<sup>28</sup> This led to a more aggressive approach to counterinsurgency and in 1989 the state's strategy shifted in to coordinate with organised civilian self-defense such as the *rondas campesinas*, peasants who formed anti-Shining Path patrols, and to focus on targeted intelligence gathering. From 1990 on this strategy was expanded and accelerated.<sup>29</sup>

The innovation, and ultimately the key to success, came with recognising the need to regularize land rights to undermine the insurgency's support. The Peruvian government initiated the Special Land Titling Project (PETT). Many rural farmers lacked legal land titles, making them vulnerable to exploitation and enhancing the appeal of the insurgency's promise to protect and redistribute land. This project was influenced by the work of Hernando de Soto and his Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD).

From 1992 to 1994, the pilot programme in Lima titled approximately 200,000 households, symbolizing the state's recognition of citizens' rights and helping to rebuild trust in areas controlled by insurgents.<sup>30</sup> This initiative not only mitigated the root causes of insurgency support but also spurred agricultural investment and productivity.

Following the success in Lima, the programme expanded into a comprehensive urban titling initiative that eventually covered about 90 percent of the country's informal housing. This phase coincided with gains by state security forces and local *rondas* (civil defense patrols) against Shining Path insurgents, greatly attributed to improved intelligence and operational effectiveness. By 2004, the government had registered 1.2 million households and issued 920,000 titles.<sup>31</sup>

The ILD's land titling initiative isolated the insurgents from one of their key support bases: small rural farmers and urban slum dwellers. By formalizing land ownership, the project cut off vital resources, safe havens, and potential recruits for the insurgency.<sup>32</sup> This strategic victory was enough that the Shining Path perceived the ILD's efforts as a direct threat, attempting to bomb its offices in retaliation.<sup>33</sup> The reduction of the insurgency's influence facilitated a steady decline in violence, and restored order and stability to Peru.

Land titling had a direct effect on neutralizing the Sendero Luminoso conflict in Peru, reducing violence, and restoring peace and order to the country. One study showed that there was an inverse relationship between the intensity of land tenure regularisation prior to the 1980s and the intensity of the conflict in the treated districts between 1980 and 2000.<sup>34</sup> Districts that received more intensive land reform saw a decrease in the number of conflict events compared to those with less intensive reform. Specifically, the regression results showed that core areas of land reform zones experienced 11.7 fewer conflict events on average than peripheral areas.

The intensity of land reform, measured by the percentage of land redistributed in a district, was inversely correlated with the intensity of conflict. Districts in the core of land reform zones, which experienced more extensive reform, reported fewer incidents and casu-

26 Author's calculation based average annual population size of Peru over the period.

27 Michael Albertus, "Land Reform and Civil Conflict: Theory and Evidence from Peru," *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 2 (2020): 256-274.

28 Michael A. Bottiglieri, *How To Defeat Insurgencies: Searching For a Counter-Insurgency Strategy*, Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School, 2000.

29 Albertus, "Land Reform," 256-274; Bottiglieri and Simons, *How to Defeat Insurgencies*.

30 Timothy Mitchell, "The Work of Economics: How a Discipline Makes its World," *European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2005): 297-320.

31 Mitchell, "Work of Economics."

32 "The Economist Versus the Terrorist: Hernando de Soto Believes that Capitalism Can Defeat Terrorism," *The Economist*, January 30, 2003, [www.economist.com/business/2003/01/30/the-economist-versus-the-terrorist](http://www.economist.com/business/2003/01/30/the-economist-versus-the-terrorist).

33 Tamara Feinstein, Peru in "The Eye of the Storm": Declassified U.S. Documentation on Human Rights Abuses and Political Violence," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 64, January 22, 2002, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB64/index2.html>.

34 Albertus, "Land Reform."

alties. Statistical analysis showed that districts with more intensive land reform were less likely to be controlled by guerrillas. This was evident in the higher likelihood of holding elections without disruption in these areas.<sup>35</sup>

The reduction in violence is attributed to land titling's role in aiding counterinsurgency efforts by improving intelligence gathering, enhancing the local organisational capacity of the rondas, undermining insurgent groups' ability to control territory, and raising the costs of supporting or joining these groups.

The lessons to be drawn from Peru for Jamaica pertain to the relationship between regularizing informal settlements and the impact that would have on violence reduction. Peru initially tried the population-centric approach to win over peasants who supported the insurgency, with initiatives related to rural development and support for peasant farmers. When this failed, the strategy shifted to a combination of targeted intelligence gathering, cooperation with civilian self-defense groups (rondas campesinas), and a landmark initiative for widespread land titling.

This approach, combined with aggressive security operations, led to a reduction in violence and the gradual disintegration of Sendero Luminoso's influence. Turning informal peasants into landowners who valued their community's stability motivated them to support state security operations and participate in defence groups, thereby reducing the pool of potential insurgent recruits and making rural areas less conducive to insurgent activities. Secure land tenure also fostered a stronger relationship between the state and rural communities, as the government's enforcement of property rights and provision of agricultural support services established its positive role in the peasants' economic lives, building trust and cooperation essential for counterinsurgency and aligning their interests with the state.

Peru's experience with Shining Path demonstrates how NSAGs flourish in regions characterised by informal land occupation. They leverage the vulnerabilities and grievances stemming from the lack of formal land rights to establish control and support bases. Peru's comprehensive land titling programmes underscore the effectiveness of formalising land ownership as a strategy to undercut the operational foundation of such groups, thereby reducing violence. It may even be proposed that land titling can be a preventive measure against the proliferation of NSAGs non-state armed groups in informally occupied areas. In 2023, there were approximately 3.2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in Peru, well below the global average.

While Sendero Luminoso still maintains a nominal presence in the country's Amazonian hinterland, it is clear Peru has been successful in undermining their ability to control swathes of territory and have arrested the high levels of violence that plagued the country.

In addition to aiding in the counterinsurgency, the land titling programme had an impact on the Peruvian economy. One of the key economic impacts was the increase in property values. The formalisation process conferred legal titles to properties, which led to an average increase in property value of about 25 percent. This appreciation in value was attributed to the enhanced legal certainty and marketability of the properties.

The recognition of property rights through formal titles made the properties more attractive to buyers and investors, leading to increased property transactions and, thus, greater residential mobility. The programme saw property transactions in the secondary market grow from 58,000 in 1999 to 136,000 in 2003, a clear indication of the heightened activity and liquidity in the real estate market following titling.

Access to credit was another crucial economic benefit. By providing property owners with formal titles that could be used as collateral, the programme facilitated greater access to the formal banking system and credit markets. Between 2000 and 2003, the number of mortgages registered increased by 106 percent, and the total value of these mortgages doubled from US\$66 million to US\$136 million. This expansion in credit was not only a testament to increased trust by financial institutions in titled properties but also provided property owners the means to invest in their properties and other economic opportunities.

Investment in home improvements also saw a substantial uptick as a result of the programme. The security of ownership provided by formal titles encouraged property owners to invest more in their properties. A survey indicated that 75 percent of property owners with titles had invested in improving their homes compared to only 39 percent of those without titles.<sup>36</sup>

These improvements not only enhanced living conditions but also contributed to the overall physical and economic revitalization of urban areas. The security of property ownership allowed families to spend less time guarding their homes against encroachment or eviction, freeing up more time for productive employment. This was reflected in an increase of available labour hours, with the formalization associated with a 17 percent rise in labour hours among beneficiaries.<sup>37</sup> This shift not only boosted individual income but also contributed to the sustained period of economic growth between 1993 and 2013 known as the Peruvian Growth Miracle.<sup>38</sup>

35 Albertus, "Land Reform."

36 Fernando Cantuarias and Miguel Delgado, "Peru's Urban Land Titling Program," presentation made at Scaling-up Poverty Reduction Conference, Shanghai, China, May 2004.

37 Field, "Entitled to Work"

38 Kevin Ross, "Explaining the Peruvian Growth Miracle," In *Peru* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513599748.071.ch003>.



## About Us

The Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) is a not-for-profit, public policy think tank dedicated to the production and dissemination of impartial, evidence-based knowledge to inform economic, governance, sustainable and social policy decision-making in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.

## Vision

CAPRI's vision is to contribute to the promotion of informed dialogue on socio-economic development in the Caribbean, in which decision-making in public policy and the private sector is based on relevant and transparent information grounded in verifiable evidence.

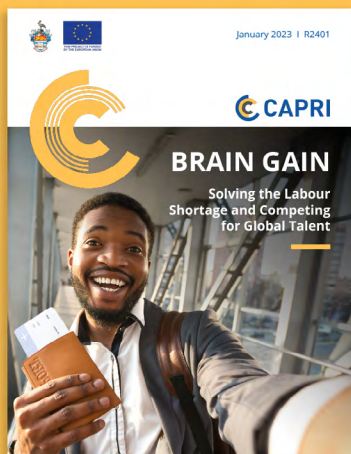
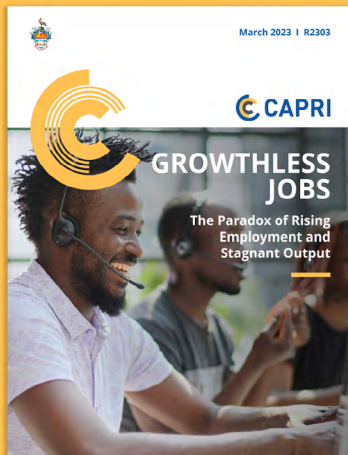
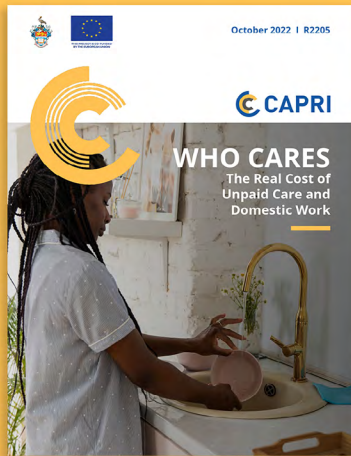
## Mission

CAPRI's mission is to provide quality research in an accessible manner to policy-makers, their constituents and the public to inform a constructive debate around critical social, economic, and developmental issues facing the region.

## Methodology

CAPRI's methodology puts the constituents of each policy proposal at the heart of its investigation and this guides the research methods adopted in order to effectively execute sound and relevant research, and its dissemination, with the aim of contributing to the social and economic development potential of Jamaica and the Caribbean at large.

# Publications



Download at  
[capricaribbean.org](https://capricaribbean.org)



# Notes





## **Groundwork for Peace**

### **Reorienting ZOSOs for Sustained Violence Reduction**

---

To read any of our published reports in full,  
please visit

[\*\*www.capricaribbean.org/reports\*\*](http://www.capricaribbean.org/reports)

Contact us at:

[\*\*info@capricaribbean.org\*\*](mailto:info@capricaribbean.org)

or by telephone at

**(876) 970-3447 or (876) 970-2910**



**CARIBBEAN  
POLICY  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE**