

Abstract

The three countries of Central America El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, which form the so-called Northern Triangle, are among the most violent countries in the world. One of the actors of local violence are gangs maras. This thesis "Armed Violence - Gangs Maras - Challenge and Threat to the National State in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras." deals with the problem of transnational gangs Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (M-18) and with the interaction between maras and society. The aim of this thesis is to understand the complexity of the maras phenomenon and to provide its detailed analysis. Maras were originally founded in Los Angeles by Mexican (M-18) and Salvadorian (MS-13) immigrants. As a result of tighter U.S. immigration policy, some members were deported to their country of origin – to the northern triangle countries. The strong cultural identity of maras appealed to thousands of young people and helped in the rapid expansion of the gangs. Maras are currently regarded as one of the greatest threats to the Central American region. Since 2003 the governments have led a repressive campaign to combat maras, which is supported by media and which sought to involve military in police actions. However, the politics of firm hand haven't had desired effect. Labeling maras as the main responsible of violence in the countries diverts away attention and resources from deeper problems such as large poverty, unemployment, rampant corruption, weak rule of law, dysfunctional judicial system, social inequality...factors, that are also concerned in the diffusion of maras.