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Wilson Center
LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM

Presentation delivered at the event:

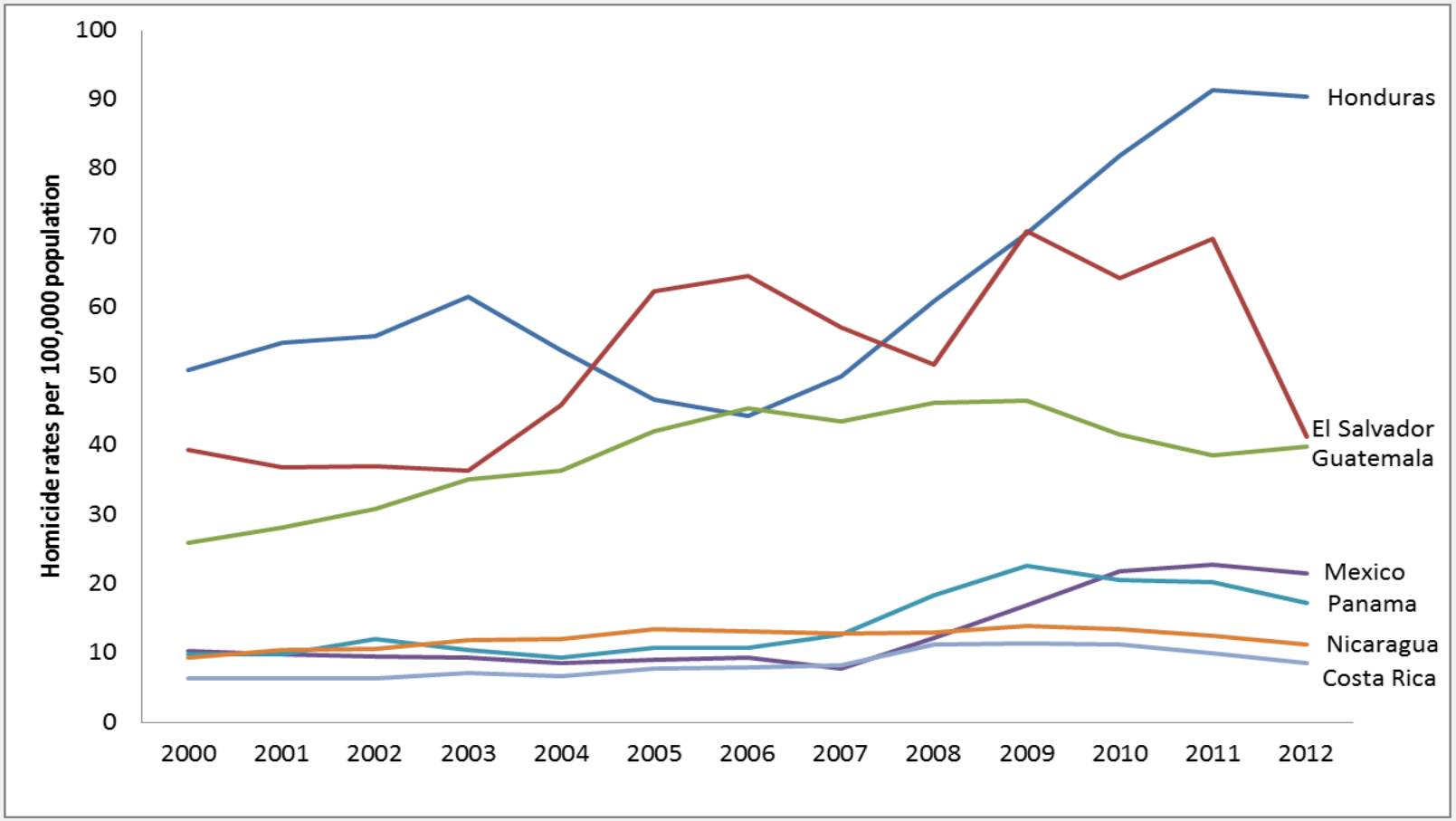
Are Crime and Violence Prevention Programs Working in Central America?

Thursday, October 30, 2014
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Washington, D.C.

Impact Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach

- Methodology
- Results
- Recommendations

Crime and Violence in Central America



U.S. = 4.7 / 100,000 (2012).

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Homicide Statistics 2000-2012

Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

- U.S. Government response to insecurity in the region
- USG: ~$640M (FY08-13)
  - USAID: ~$175M
- USAID leads crime and violence prevention
  - At-risk youth, communities, municipal governments, private sector

Goal of USAID's crime prevention efforts

Reduce crime and violence and improve security in Central America by strengthening *community* capacity to combat crime and violence and creating education and employment opportunities for at-risk youth.

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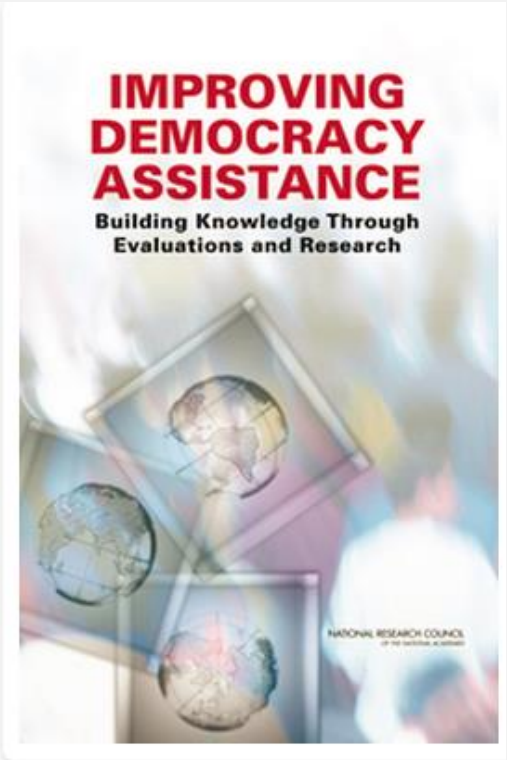
Evidence-based approach: Impact Evaluation of USAID's Crime and Violence Prevention Approach



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Research Design

Multi-year (2010-2014)

- Data collection before, during, after program implementation: baseline, mid-point, final

Multi-country

- El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama

Subnational focus, and multi-method

- Individuals and neighborhoods

Experimental design

- Treatment and control groups of neighborhoods
- Comparisons with national level data from the AmericasBarometer

Research Design: Mixed Methods

Quantitative

- Individual surveys of residents in their neighborhoods

Qualitative

- Systematic neighborhood observation
- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with community stakeholders and implementing partners

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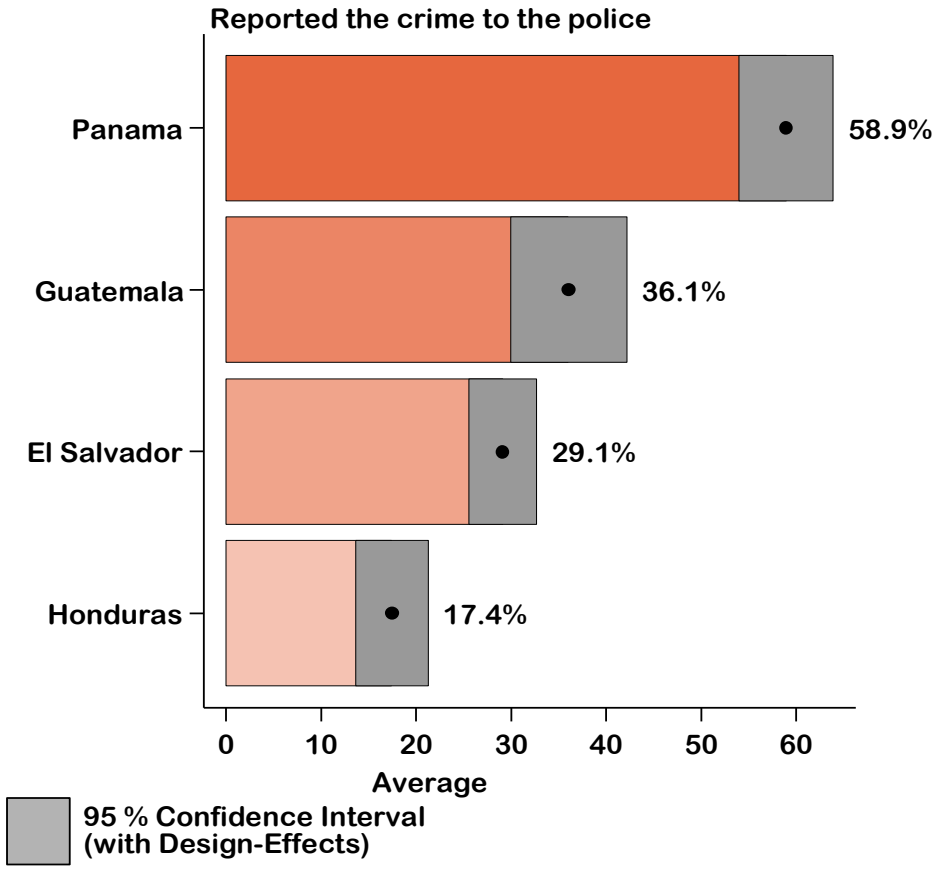
Evaluation Field Work

- Four countries
- 29,621 household survey interviews
- 848 stakeholder interviews
- 44 focus groups
- 65 treatment and 62 control neighborhoods

Surveys vs. Official Police Data

1. **Vast underreporting of crime to authorities**
   - Homicide vs. extortion
2. **Weak official data**
   - Neighborhood level
   - Definitions
   - Politicization
3. **Perceptions go beyond crime rates**
   - Perceptions of insecurity vs. victimization



At-Risk Neighborhood Selection

1. **USAID: Identified target municipalities**

2. **LAPOP: Made "at-risk" neighborhood selection**
   - Gather data for every neighborhood in municipality
   - Choose at-risk neighborhoods using data and consultations
     - Unmet basic needs
     - Proportion of youths
     - Children not attending school on a regular basis
     - Under- and unemployment, single-parent households
   - Exclude those with USG or donor overlap
   - Randomize assignment to treatment and control groups

3. **LAPOP: Collected baseline, mid-term and final data**

At-risk Neighborhood Conditions

Inadequate public lighting

Garbage disposal and sewage

Abandoned houses

Signs of gang presence

Difficult access and poor road conditions

Protective Factors

Police stations

Schools and health centers

Community organizations

Churches

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What is the "Treatment"?

- Public health model
- Municipal-level crime and violence prevention
  - Committees and planning
- Crime observatories
- Crime prevention through environmental design
  - Improved street lighting, graffiti removal, cleaned up public spaces
- At-risk youth programs
  - Outreach centers, workforce development, mentorships
- Community policing

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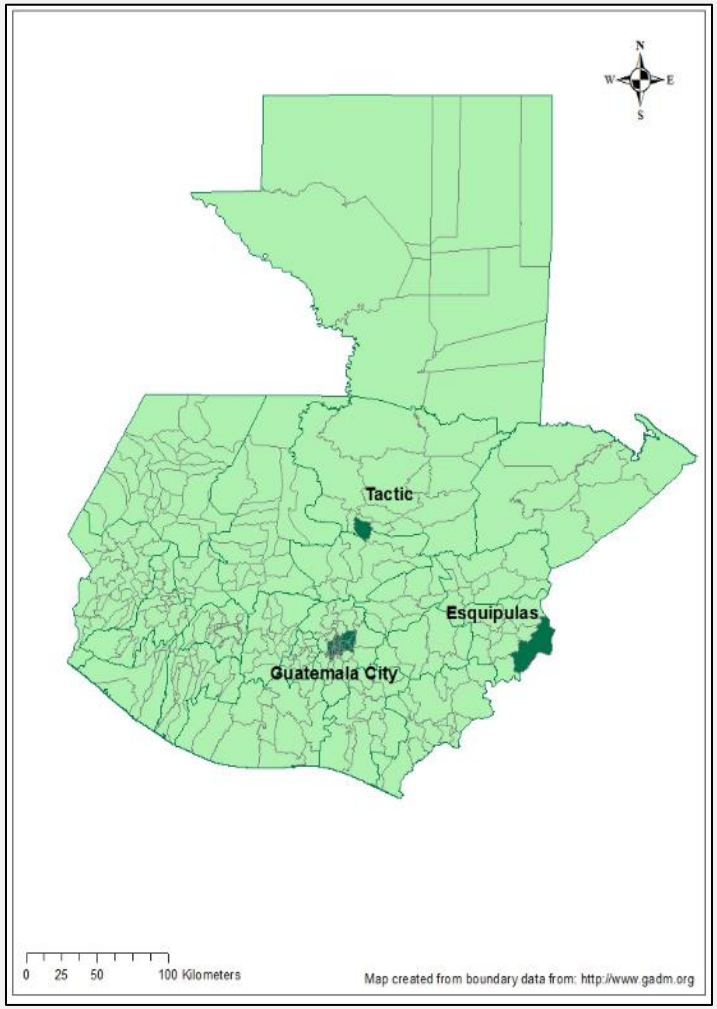
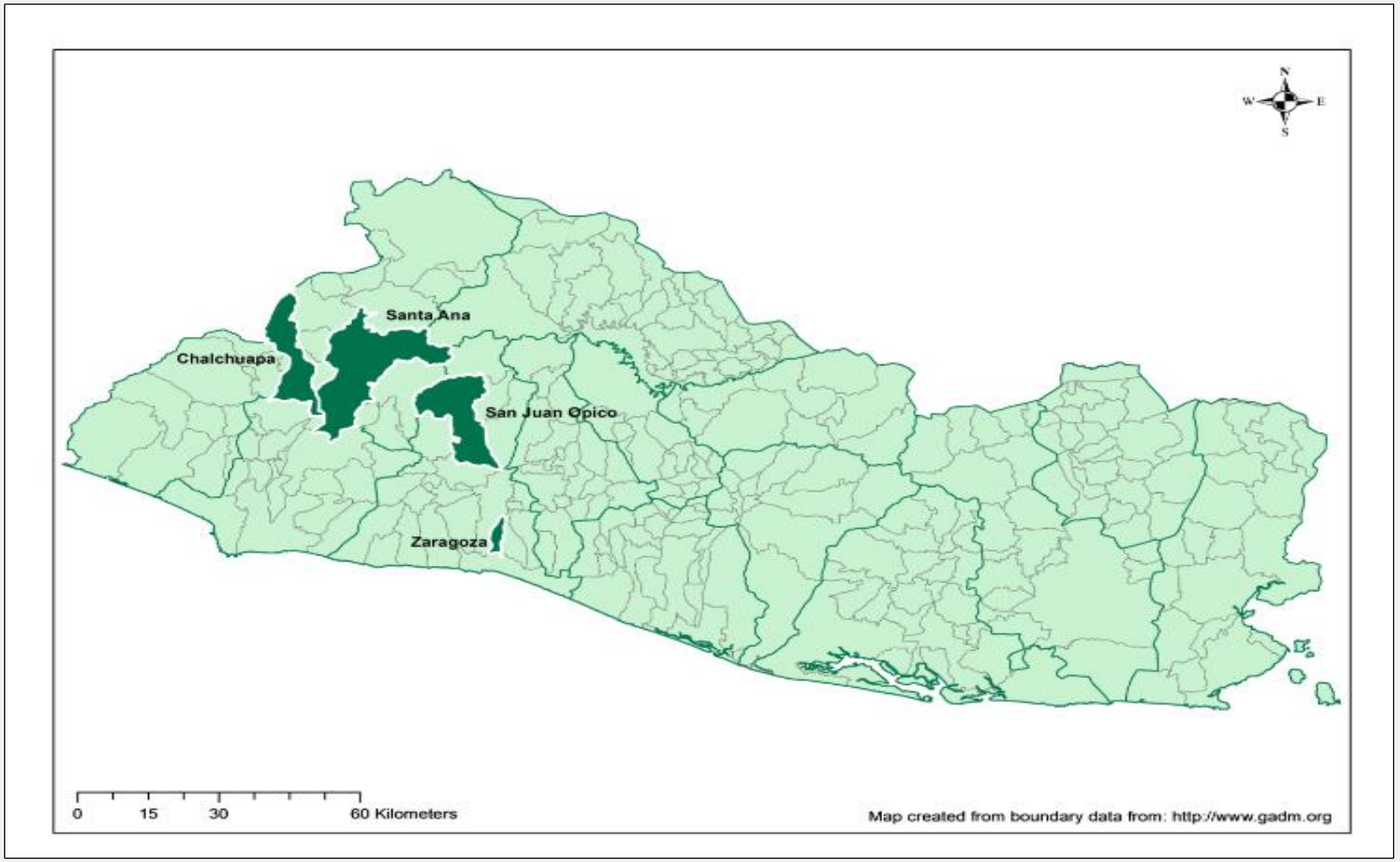
Neighborhood Crime Prevention Treatment

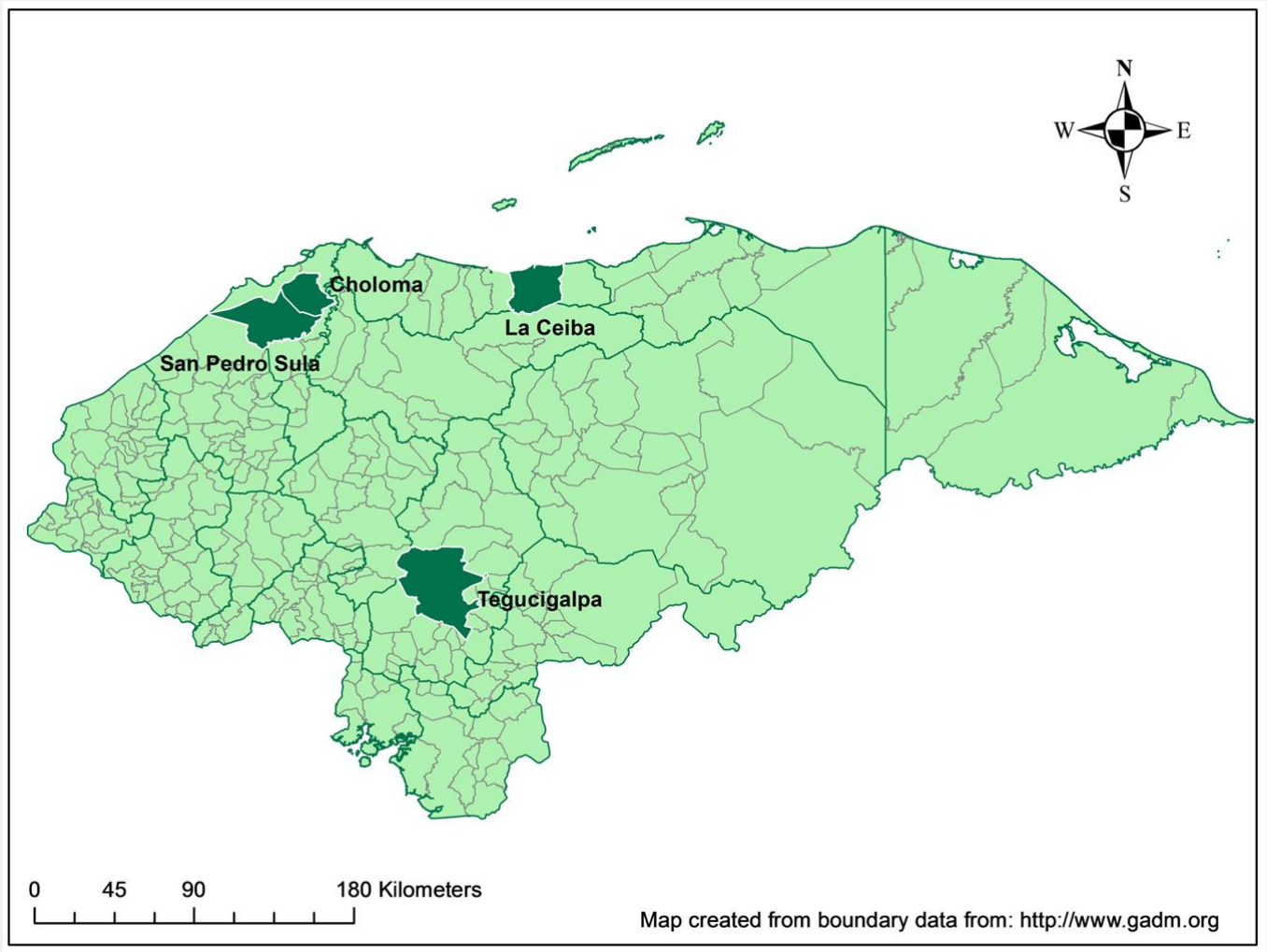
Study Municipalities: Guatemala



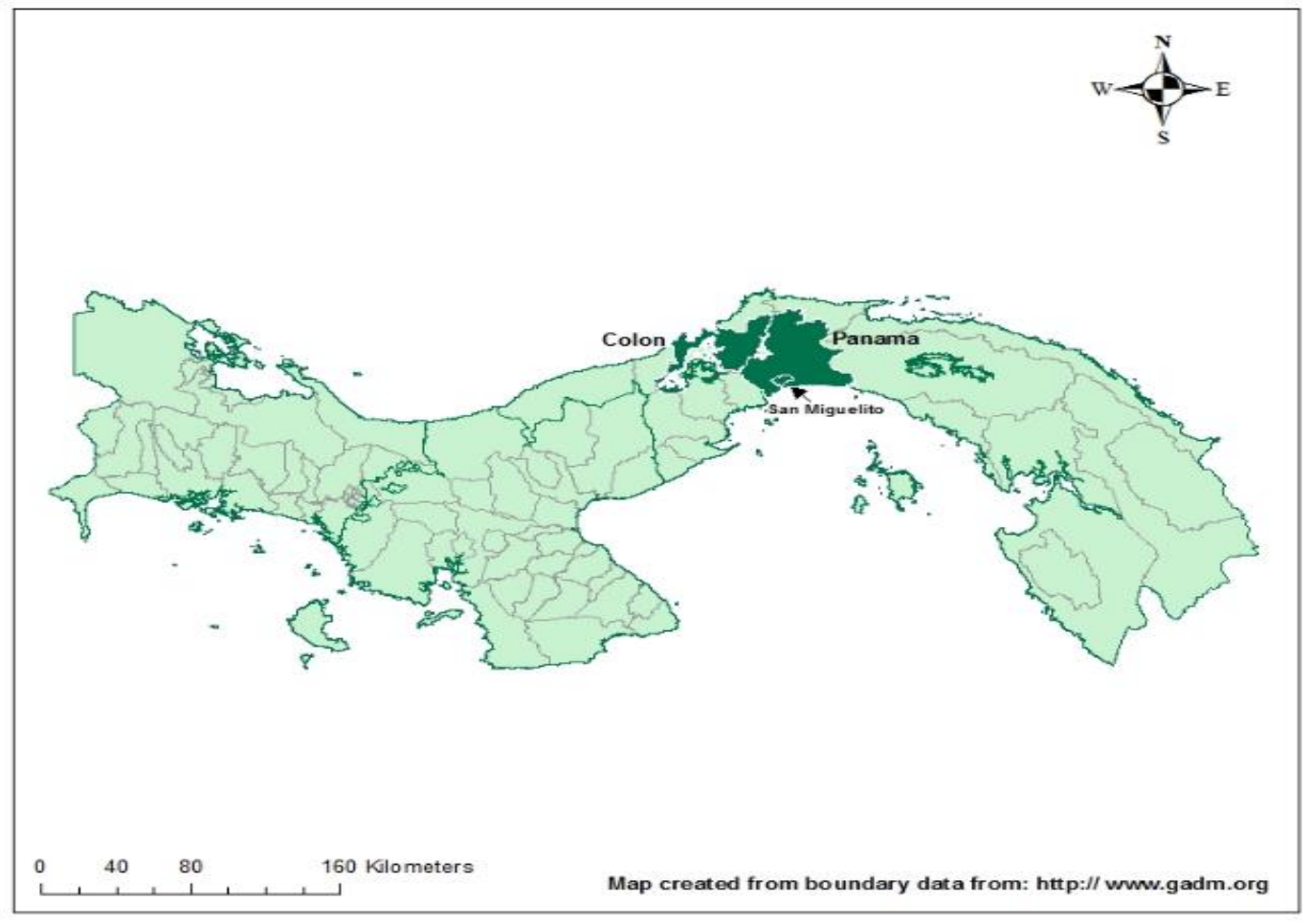
Study Municipalities: El Salvador



Study Municipalities: Honduras



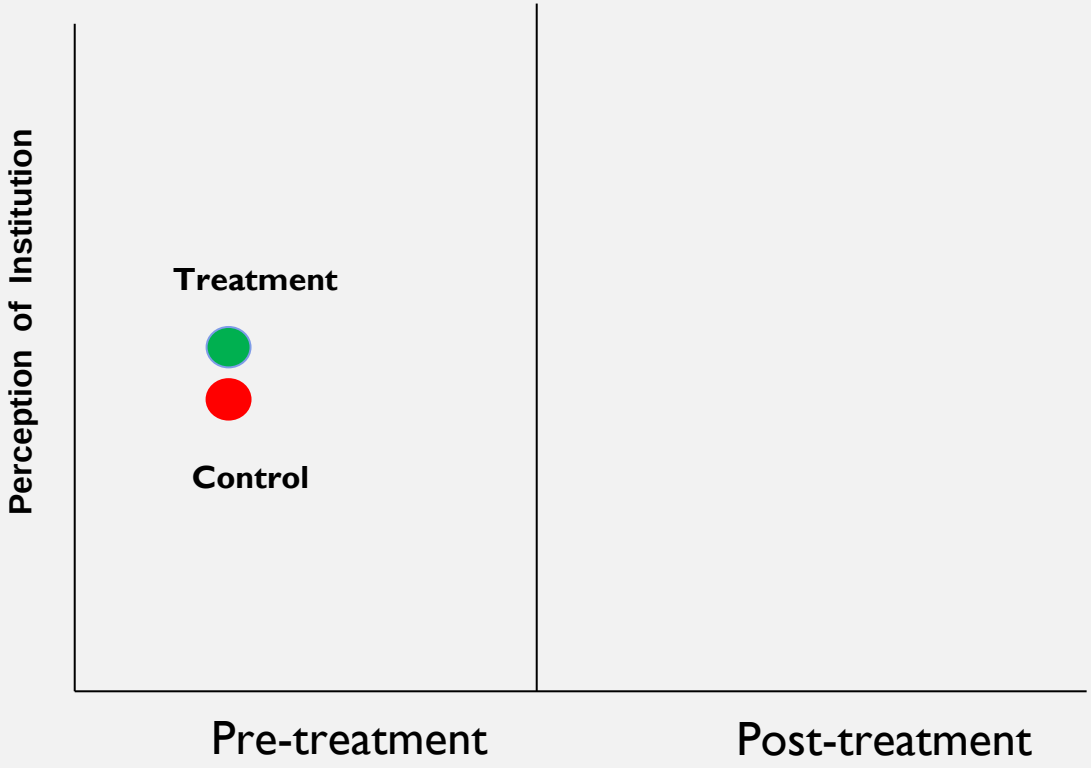
Study Municipalities: Panama



Statistical Method: Difference-in-Difference

Difference-in-Difference Design

Assumes that what has happened to the control group over time is what would have happened to the treatment group in the absence of the intervention



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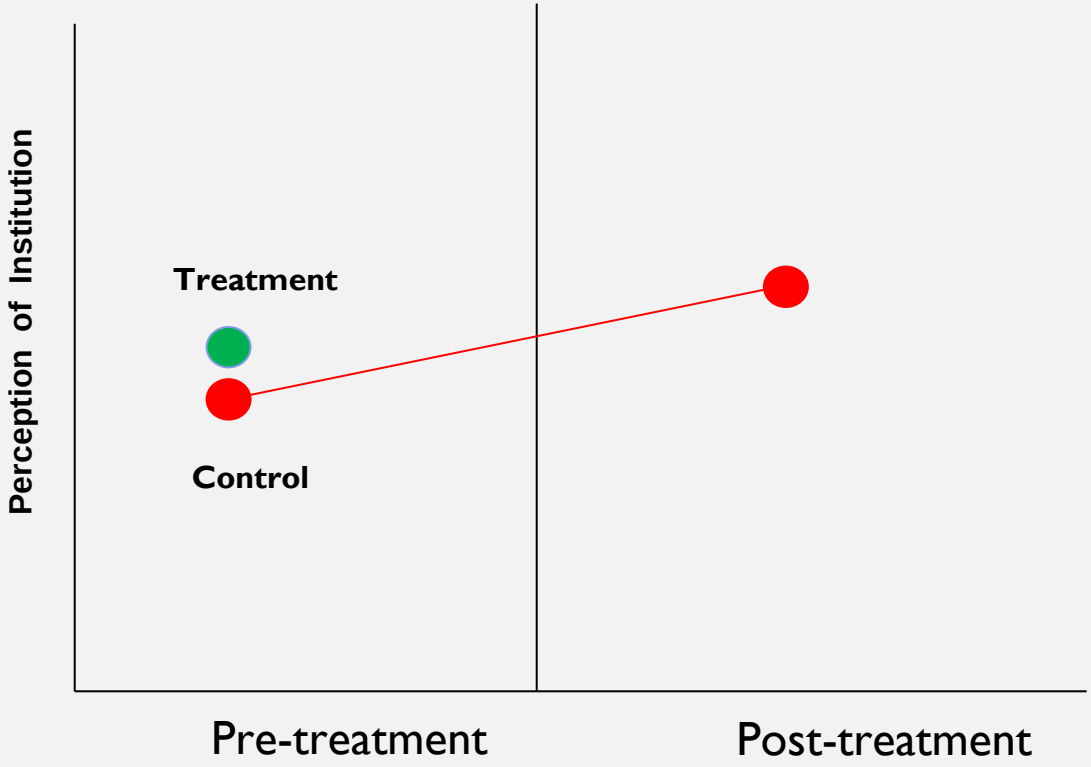

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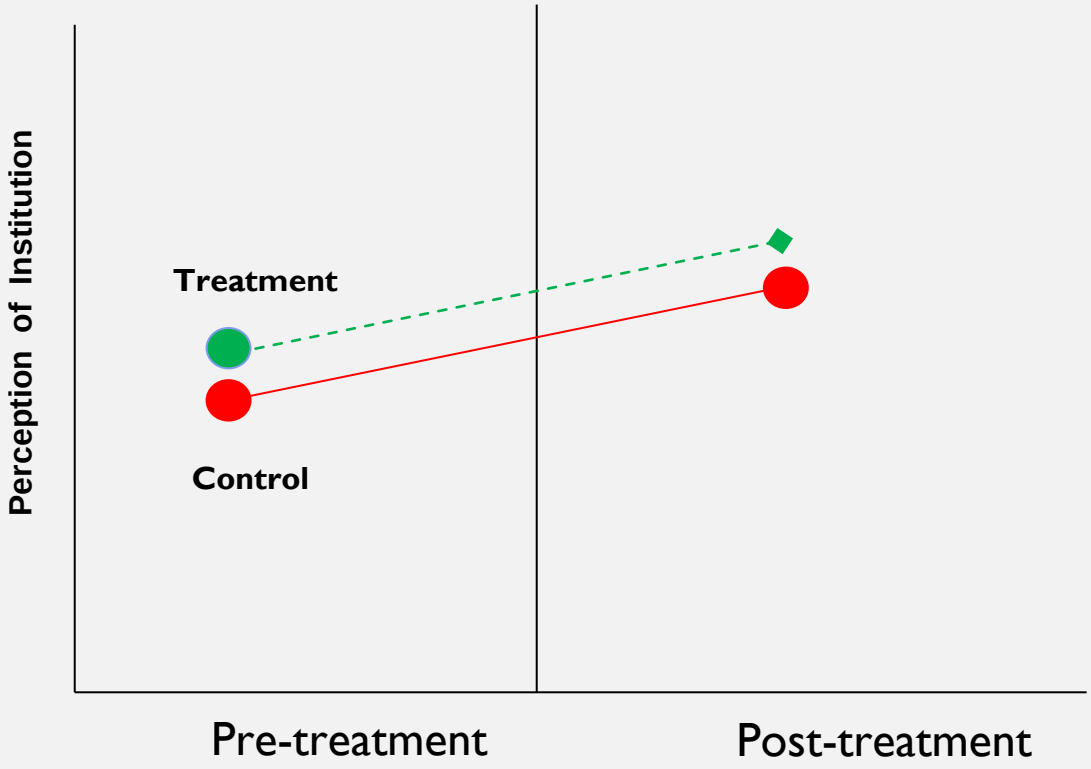

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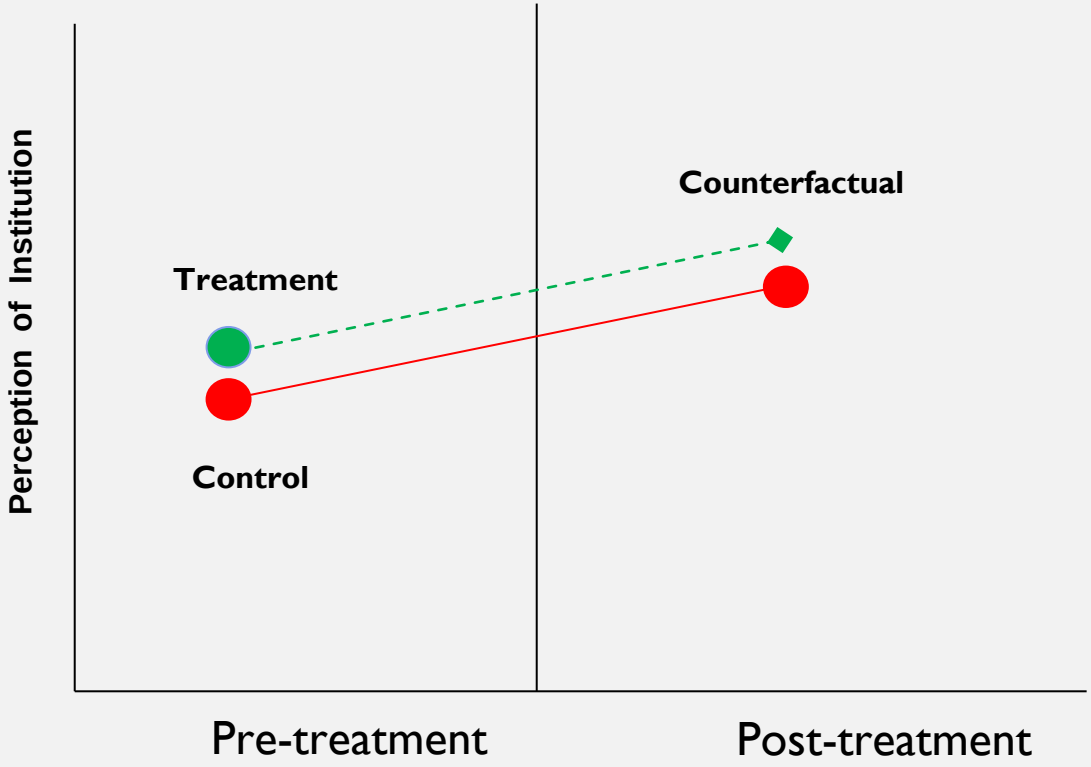

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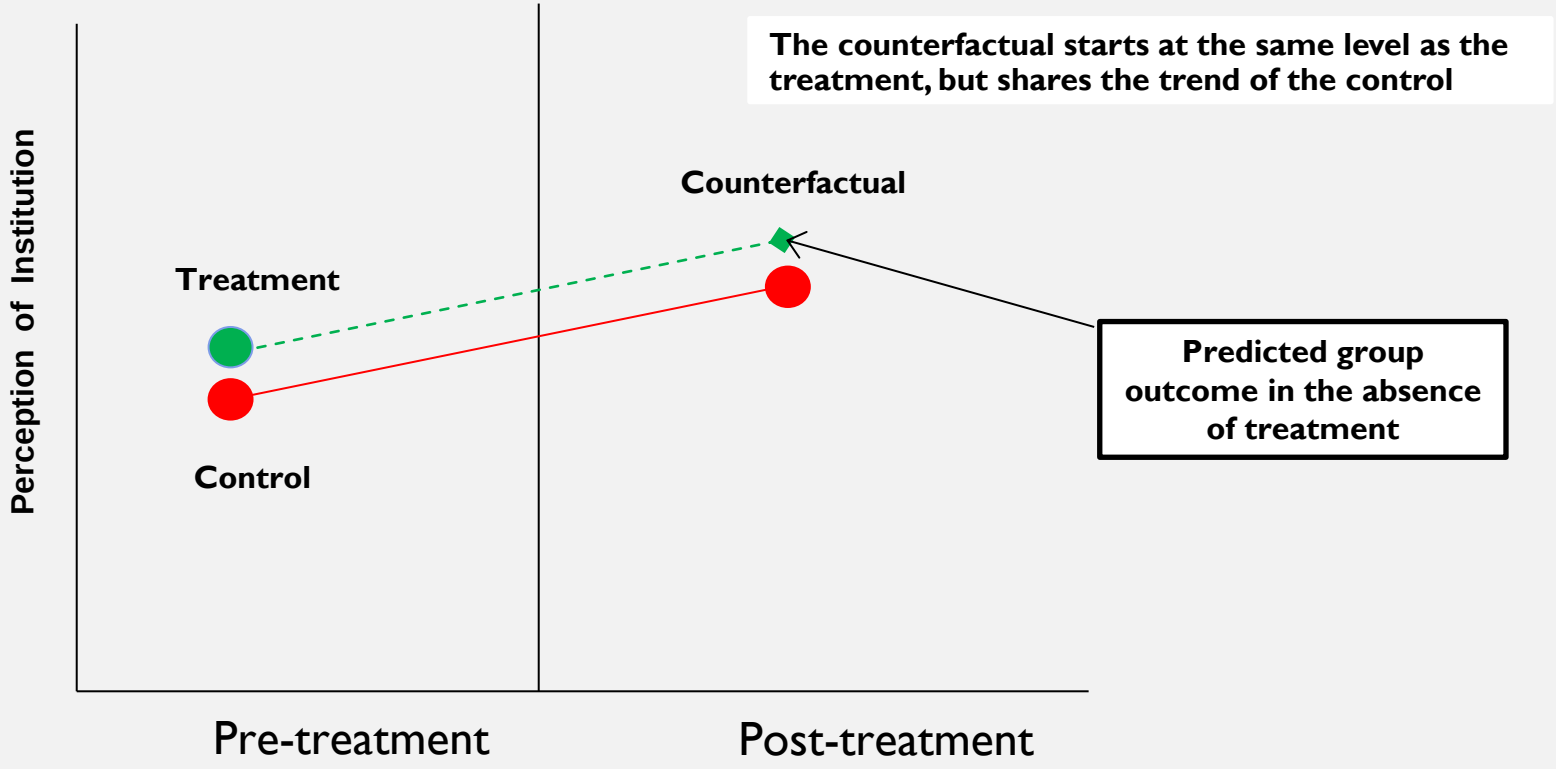

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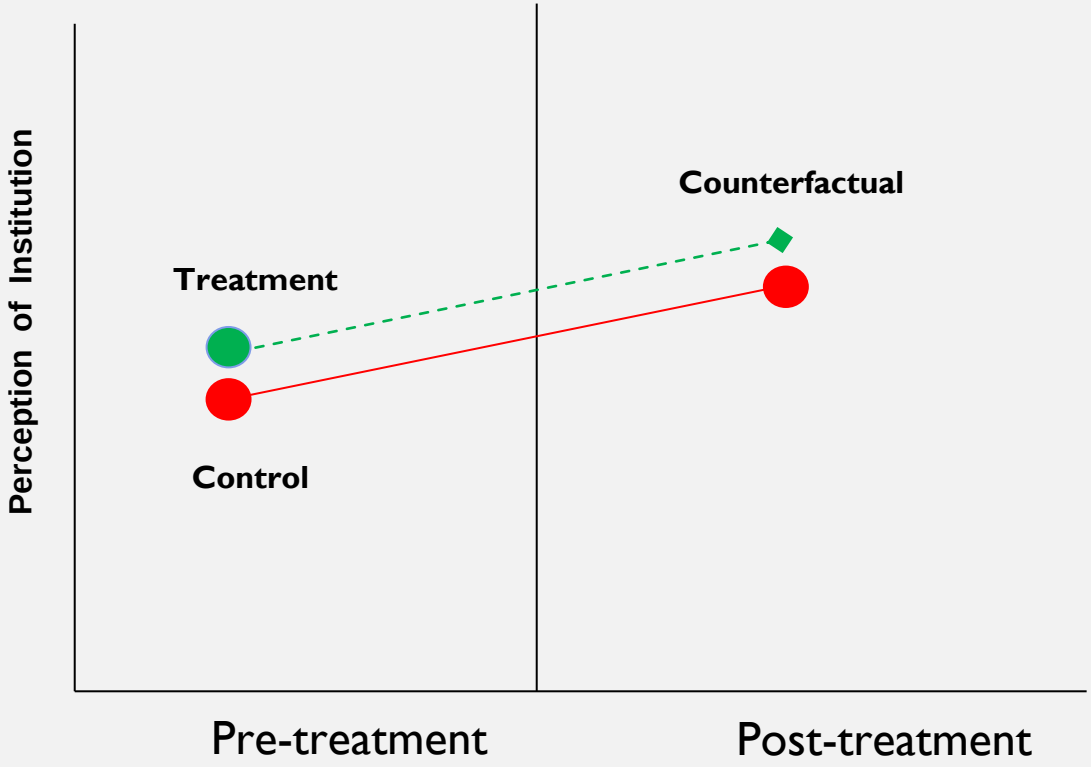

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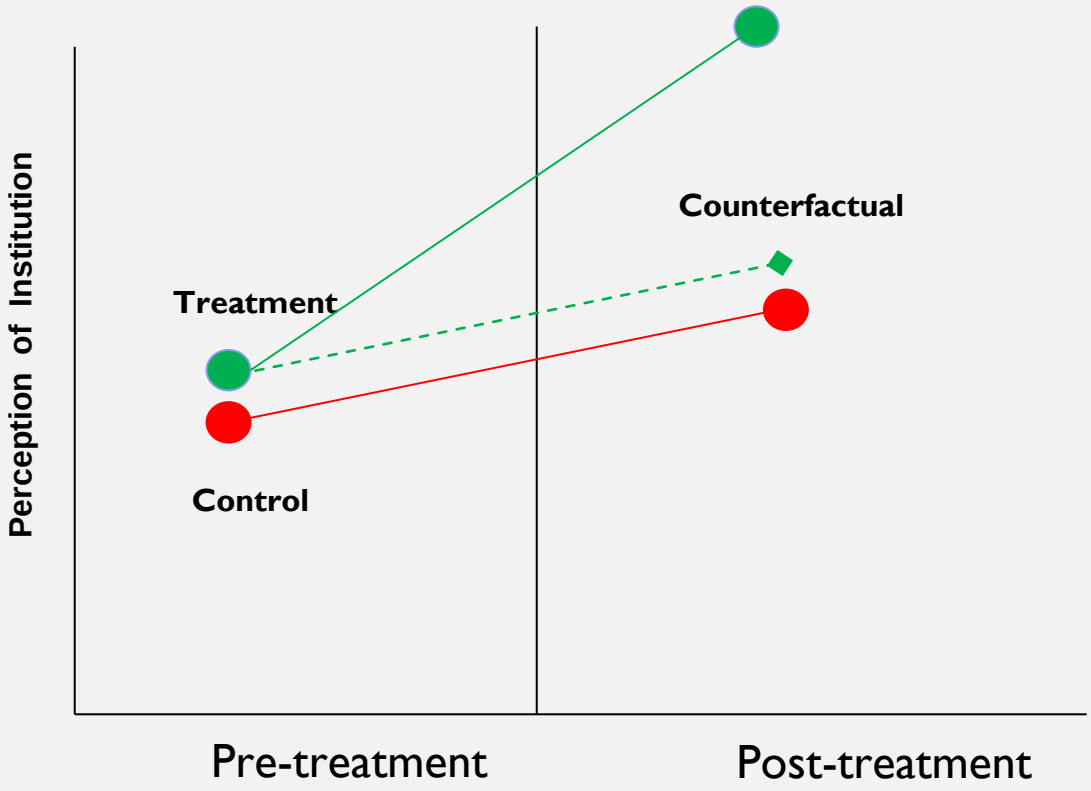

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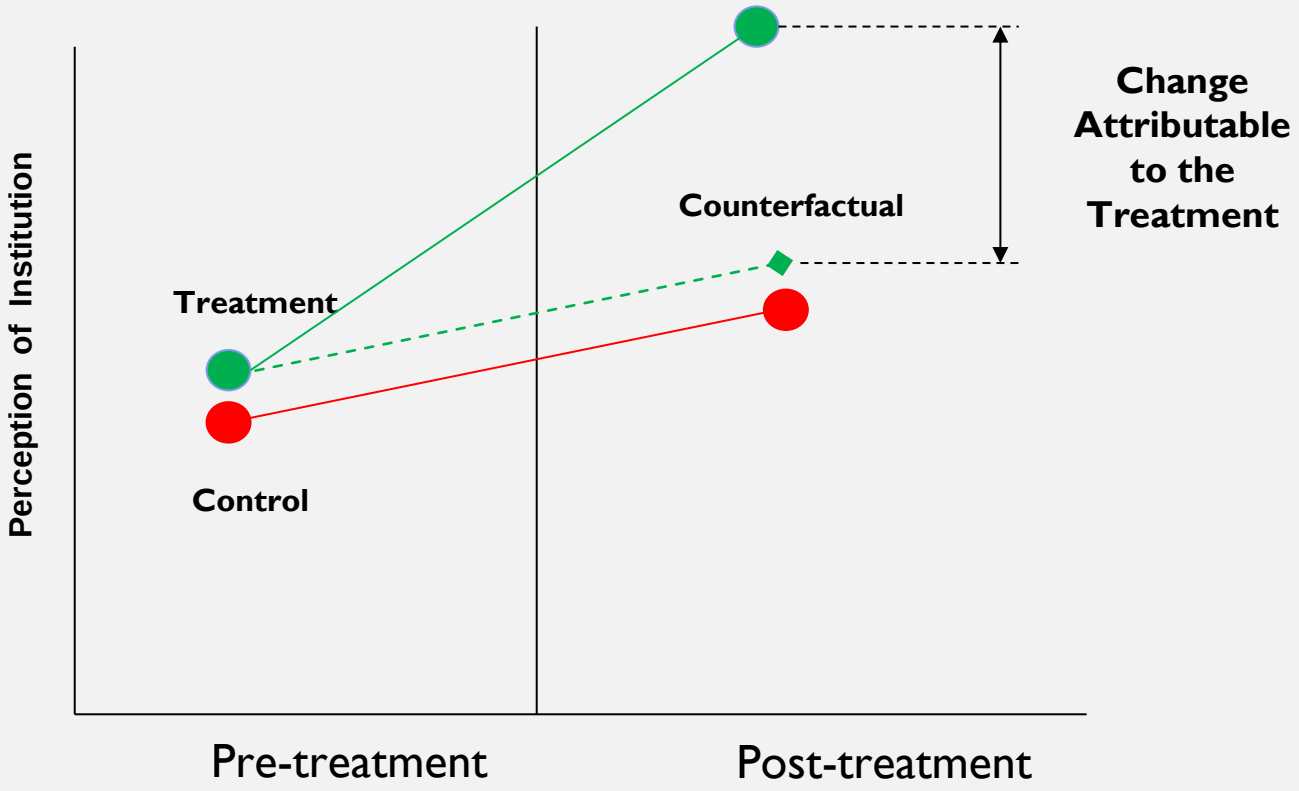

Difference-in-Difference Estimation

- Observe control and treatment prior to and after the intervention
- Use control to determine trajectory of change under non-treated conditions
- Remove exogenous (i.e., non-treatment) change by removing it from calculations of the treatment effect
  - E.g., control for national economic downturns that increase national crime rates
- Treatment effect = percent change in the dependent variable relative to its predicted level in the absence of the treatment
  - Example: If we predict that, all else equal, 20% of respondents in the treatment communities would have reported extortion but we observe 10%, we report this as a 50% decrease in the likelihood of respondents reporting extortion *compared to what we would have observed in the absence of the treatment*

Results

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Key Findings

Significant reduction in reports of crime victimization and violence

Compared to what would be expected without treatment:

- 51% fewer residents reported being aware of murders
- 51% fewer residents reported being aware of extortion and blackmail
- 26% fewer residents reported being aware of illegal drug sales
- 19% fewer reported being aware of robberies

Example of a survey question:
Have extortion or blackmail occurred over the last twelve months in [Name of Neighborhood]?

Key Findings

Significant reduction in reports of crime victimization and violence

"*Currently, **I feel that we have lowered the crime rate substantially**, compared to previous years, because now you certainly can enter certain neighborhoods, which before if you entered them, perhaps you were risking some type of mishap".*
Police officer, El Salvador

*"**In the [NAME] municipality, robberies and … drugs, … I think that it has gone down a bit, you see?** Because we've been working on this thanks to the support of USAID, you know, uh, we've worked hard in this area."* **Police officer, Guatemala**

Key Findings

Significant improvement in perceptions of security

Compared to what would be expected without treatment:

- Residents were 11% less likely to report feeling unsafe walking alone at night through their neighborhoods
- Residents were 5% less likely to described their neighborhoods as unsafe

Key Findings

Significant improvement in perceptions of insecurity

"Right now I'm almost 90 per cent safe *because, … because I know all the people and, and if anyone who's unknown walks around, and* ***if we see that he looks suspicious, we immediately call the police so that they investigate what it is that he's doing and who he is, and so we resolve the problem right then."***
Community leader, El Salvador

"I feel safe walking there, but five or six years ago at that hour [10 PM], I didn't." **Leader of a municipal violence prevention program, El Salvador**

Key Findings

Significant improvement in perception of neighborhood disorder

Compared to what would be expected without treatment:

- Perceptions of youth loitering as a problem was 6% lower
- Perceptions of youth in gangs as a problem was 14% lower
- Perceptions of gang fights as a problem was 13% lower
- 35% fewer residents avoided parts of their neighborhoods because of fear of crime
- Residents' evaluations of communities' organization for crime prevention were 18% higher

Key Findings

Satisfaction with police has increased, but not with the government

Compared to what would be expected without the treatment:

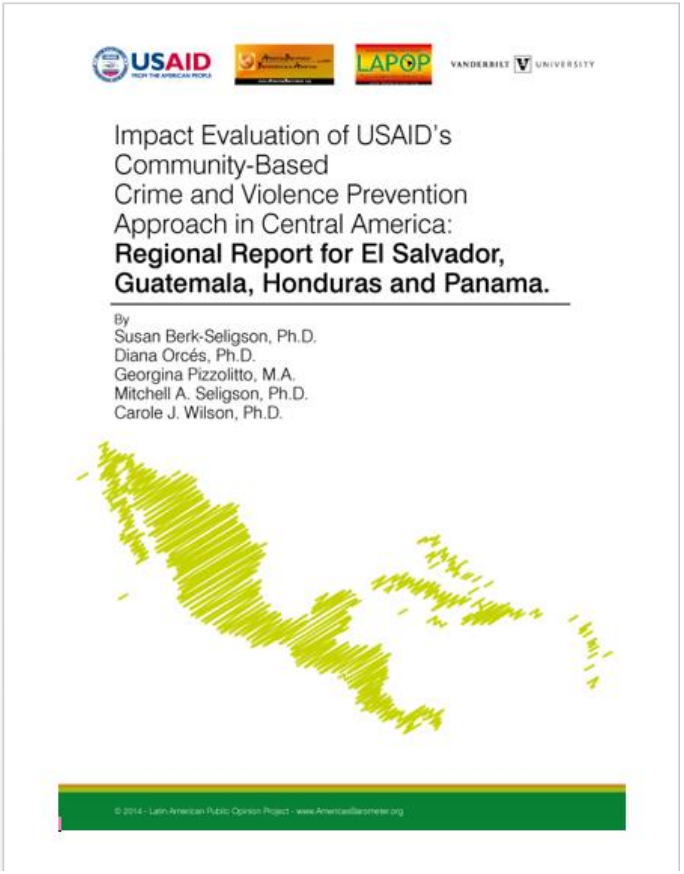
- Satisfaction with police performance was 5% higher
- Trust in police was 9% higher
- There was no significant change in residents' views of the governments' handling of security

Policy Recommendations

- Make prevention a cornerstone of any effort to reduce crime and violence
- Scale up community-based prevention
- Increase family support for child care and supervision
- Leverage school resources
  - Psychologists, conflict mediation, leadership activities
  - Awareness of physical and sexual abuse
  - School transfer and suspension policies
- Improve community coordination for planning
- Partner with religious organizations
  - Youth programs
- Improve police response and assignment patterns

Download the full report:

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/carsi-study.php



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