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ASJ
HONDURAS

Extortion Under the Looking Glass

Evaluating the first six months of
the state of exception and anti-
extortion plan in Honduras



Extortion under the Looking Glass: Evaluating the First 6 Months of the State of Exception and the Anti-Extortion Plan in Honduras

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Association for a More Just Society - ASJ

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We thank The public institutions that have provided the data that allowed the analysis. We also thank the experts who met with our research team. For their security, we have decided to keep many of the experts we consulted anonymous.

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Executive Summary

The 6th of June, 2023 marks the six-month anniversary of the state of exception in Honduras. Under the government's *Plan for the Treatment of Extortion and Related Crimes* (better known as the Anti-Extortion Plan) a state of exception was adopted that suspends a number of constitutional rights with the aim of combatting the growing phenomenon of extortion and organized crime. The plan and the state of exception are still in effect.

After these six months, this report evaluates the extent to which the Anti-Extortion Plan has been implemented and the results that have been achieved. Our analysis is based on a national survey, official data, and a series of meetings and focus groups with key actors.

ASJ considers that the plan has good components that could be successful if they are implemented well. However, we find that of the 30 actions listed in the government's Anti-Extortion Plan, only one has been achieved to date. Two can be considered 'in progress' and the other 26 have either not been completed or there was not enough information publically available to evaluate the government's progress on the goal.

Although more than one billion lempiras have been allocated to DIPAMPCO, the police unit in charge of tackling extortion and gang-related crime, only 4% of this budget has been executed in the first 5 months of its administration and the institution continues to have severe weaknesses.

We found that, in spite of the government's efforts, extortion in Honduras continues. Our latest survey shows that while extortion has fallen, the

reduction has been marginal from 9% of households reporting that they were victims of extortion in 2022 to 8.4% in 2023.

Our survey also found that while the state of exception remains broadly popular with 45.3% of the respondents reporting they either agreed or were in strong agreement with the state of exception, 77.4% of respondents felt less safe or the same amount of safety as before the state of exception was implemented.

Further, even though state authorities continue to publish statistics indicating an impressive number of detentions have been made under the state of exception, very few arrests ever make it to court on extortion charges. Only 86 cases of extortion were brought to court in the first 5 months of the state of exception. From 2017 to 2021, the average number of cases entered the courts per month was 38. The highest number of cases entered in a month during the state of emergency was 20, a little more than half of the average number of cases before the state of exception.

It is not clear whether the government is getting value for money in terms of the results of the anti-extortion plan and the state of exception. According to data from the Honduran National Police (HNP), police officers have successfully detained 194 people for extortion during the first 5 months of the state of exception. A continuation of this rate would suggest that by the end of the year, 466 people will have been detained on extortion charges. This means that, if the entire budget granted to the Honduran National Police under the Anti-Extortion Plan is executed by the end of the year, this would

represent an investment of 2.2 million lempiras for each person arrested.

There are also concerns about human rights abuses. According to the National Commission for Human Rights, there were 174 complaints for human rights abuses under the state of exception, or about two complaints for every case entered into the court system for extortion.

There has been an uptick in violence against transport workers. Since the beginning of 2023, **27 transport workers have been assassinated.**

In light of this, ASJ recommends to President Xiomara Castro that:

1. There should be an objective technical evaluation to measure

the implementation and the effectiveness of the anti-extortion plan and the state of exception

2. A collective and comprehensive strategy that includes all relevant sectors should be developed and
3. There should be a focus on investigating criminal and financial networks using a follow-the-money approach that allows the prosecution of those higher up in criminal organizations.

There is still time to strengthen the anti-extortion strategy and give an effective response to the demands of citizens for a more secure Honduras free from violence.

Introduction

The 6th of June, 2023 marks the sixth month of the state of exception in Honduras. For decades the country has struggled with high rates of crime and violence. There is a growing problem of gang criminality and extortion. Gangs in Honduras recruit vulnerable young people, suck resources out of the Honduran economy, and contribute to the insecurity and poverty which has caused tens of thousands of Hondurans to flee each year.

In November 2022, different sectors of Honduran society raised their voices and marched in the streets to bring attention to the country's extortion problem. The transport sector, one of the groups most affected by extortion, has a particular cause to protest: from the beginning of 2022 to November of that year, 16 transport operators had been assassinated by violent criminal groups.

The Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP) also raised concerns and issued a statement noting that, "the crime of extortion [was] getting out of hand in Honduras [...]."¹

In the same month, the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) published "War Tax", a study that analyzed the phenomenon of extortion and evaluated the measures taken by the State to control the crime. The study revealed that 9% of the Honduran population, which corresponds to more than 200 thousand families, were affected by extortion in 2022.

War Tax investigated how extortion was changing in Honduras. It showed new groups of extortionists and new extortion methods. It also found that the FNAMP, the police unit in charge of tackling extortionists, had a poor record at adapting to the new methods used by the



President Xiomara Castro announcing the state of emergency on November 24, 2022. Photo by Hondusatv.

extortionists. Its methodology only was working in cases of cash-based extortion where a complaint was made by a victim. This methodology fell down because extortion tends not to be reported to the authorities and extortionists are increasingly using non-cash-based extortion methods. While hundreds of people were being prosecuted, the majority of those convicted were money handlers for gang organizations as opposed to gang leaders and the intellectual authors of extortion crimes. The strategy was not effective at reducing the levels of extortion in the country.

In response to the demands of the different affected sectors, Honduran President Xiomara Castro convened a press conference on November 24, 2022, where the Integral Plan for the Treatment of Extortion and Related Crimes (the Anti-Extortion Plan) was presented and a "war against extortion was declared." In addition, the President announced a state of exception that clamped down on constitutional rights in a bid to facilitate the actions of law enforcement to investigate and detain suspected extortionists and members of criminal groups. This came into effect on December 6, 2022.

This response didn't come from nothing. In neighboring El Salvador, a state of exception had been in place for a year. It's electorally popular. When this report went to press, 66,417 people had been arrested under El Salvador's state of exception and the majority were imprisoned. There has been a perceived improvement in security with marked reductions in homicides. Support for both the state of exception measures and the President who

implemented them, Nayib Bukele, remain high. According to the March 2023 Fundaungo survey, 85.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the state of exception in El Salvador.ⁱⁱ

But the costs of this apparent success story are high. One report by Cristosalⁱⁱⁱ revealed that 153 people have died in state custody during the state of exception in El Salvador. These people were detained without investigation or trial and none of them had been found guilty of the crime attributed to them.

In Honduras, the impact of the state of exception does not resemble the case of El Salvador, although official data has been unclear.

Despite the state the state of exception in Honduras, 27 transport workers have been killed in 2023 to date, according to transport leaders.^{iv} This represents a higher number than the number of transport workers killed from January to November 2022 (16). In addition, the newspaper El Heraldo revealed that during the first two periods of the state of emergency (December 6, 2022, to February 20, 2023), of the more than 8 thousand arrests reported by the police, 90% of the arrests were for misdemeanors¹ and not for crimes such as extortion.^v

This document analyses the implementation and the results of the anti-extortion plan and the state of exception in Honduras. It is based on a national survey, the monitoring of official statistics and meetings with state and private actors who fight against extortion or are themselves affected by extortion activities in Honduras.

¹ For example: disrespect for authority and disorderly public conduct.

National Extortion Survey

Extortion Victims

According to the national survey conducted on behalf of ASJ, in May 2023, 8.4% of Honduran families were victims of extortion in the last 12 months.

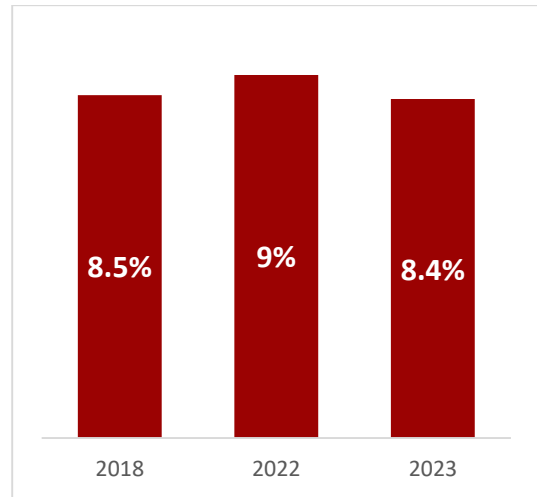
This represents a slight improvement compared to the previous year. However, the victimization rate has remained almost the same over the past 5 years, as shown in Chart 1.

Further, the survey shows that extortion is not just a problem in the country's large cities: extortion takes place nationwide in urban and rural areas. It is not a crime limited to Francisco Morazán y Cortés.

The departments with the highest rates of extortion were Islas de la Bahía (17% of families reported being extortion victims in the last 12 months), Colón (13%), Atlántida (12%), and Santa Bárbara (12%). However, because our sample sizes in each

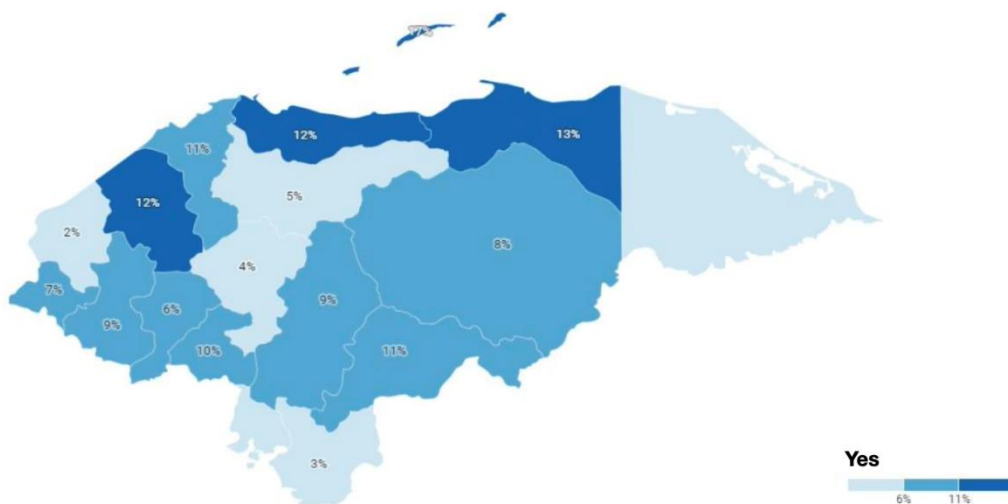
department are small, there is some uncertainty as to the exact incidences of extortion at the departmental level.

Chart 1: Percentage of Households Victim to Extortion between 2018 and 2023



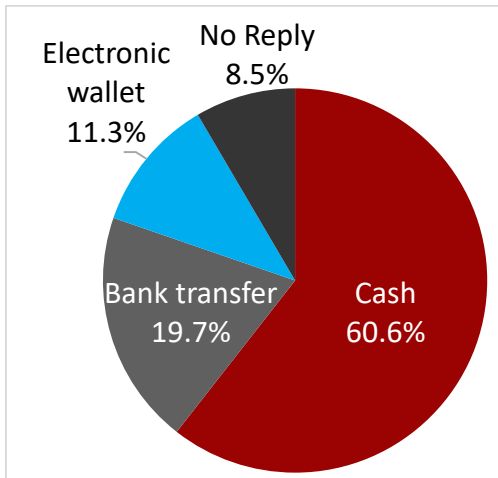
Source: For 2018: LAPOP Americas Barometer. For 2022 and 2023: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote. The question was: "Have you or anyone in your immediate family (children, husband, wife) been a victim of extortion in the last 12 months?"

Chart 2: Percentage of Families Who Report Being Victims of Extortion in the last 12 Months by Department



Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "Have you or anyone in your immediate family (children, husband, wife) been a victim of Extortion in the last 12 months?"

Chart 3: Reported Form of Extortion Payment

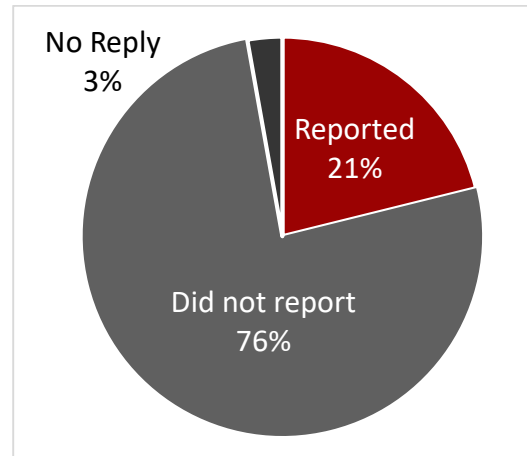


Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "What was the method of payment you were asked to make?"

Traditionally, extortion payments have been done in cash. However, extortion methods have been evolving as extortionists explore new ways to increase extortion revenues and reduce the risks of being caught. While the majority of payments are still done in cash, 19.7% of payments in 2023 were completed using bank transfers and 11.3% were made through electronic wallets.

A major challenge for the investigation of extortion is the reluctance of victims to report it to the authorities. Of the total number of respondents who had been victims of extortion in the last 12 months, 21.1% of them claim to have filed a complaint.

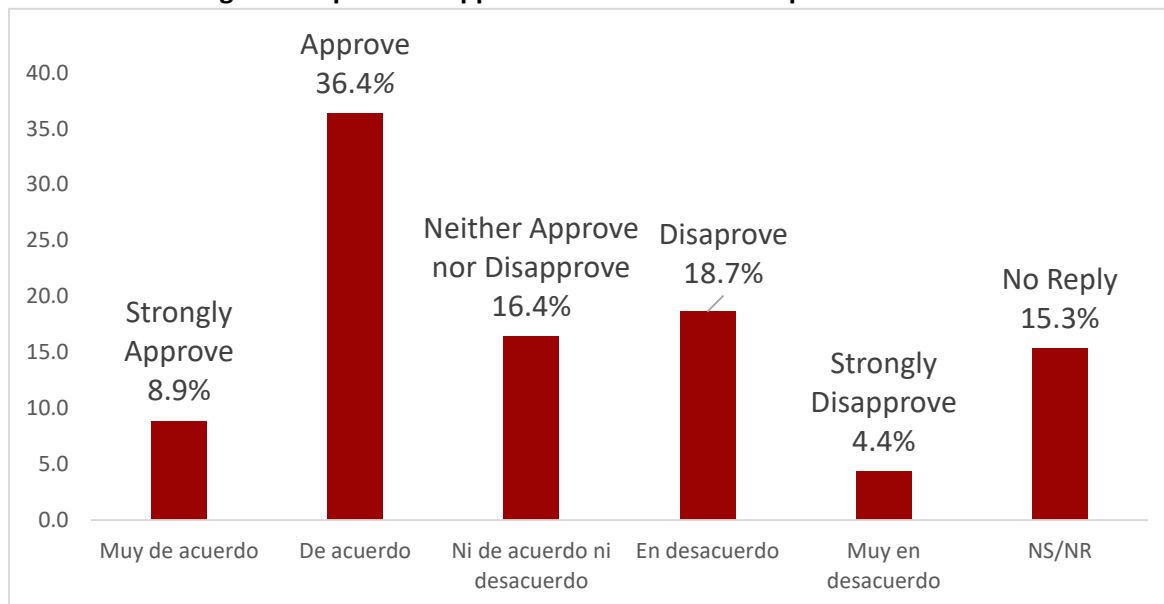
Chart 4: Percentage of Extortion Victims Who Reported an Extortion Complaint



Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "Did you report to the authorities?"

Perception of the State of Exception and the Anti-Extortion Plan

Chart 5: Percentage of People Who Approve of the State of Exception

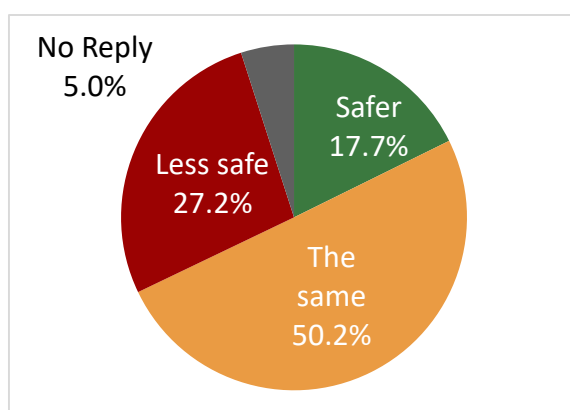


Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "How much do you agree with the State of Emergency implemented by the government for crime control?"

According to our survey, more respondents were in favor of the state of exception than against. A total of 45.3% of respondents were either in strong agreement or agreement with the state of exception. A total of 23.1% were either in disagreement or strong disagreement.

However, while the public support for the state of exception seems relatively strong, this did not translate into the population feeling more secure. While 17.7% of respondents to our survey said they felt safer since the state of exception started, 27.2% said they felt less safe and 50.2% of people said they felt that their security had not changed.

Chart 6: Percentage of Respondents Feeling More or Less Safe Since the State of Exception

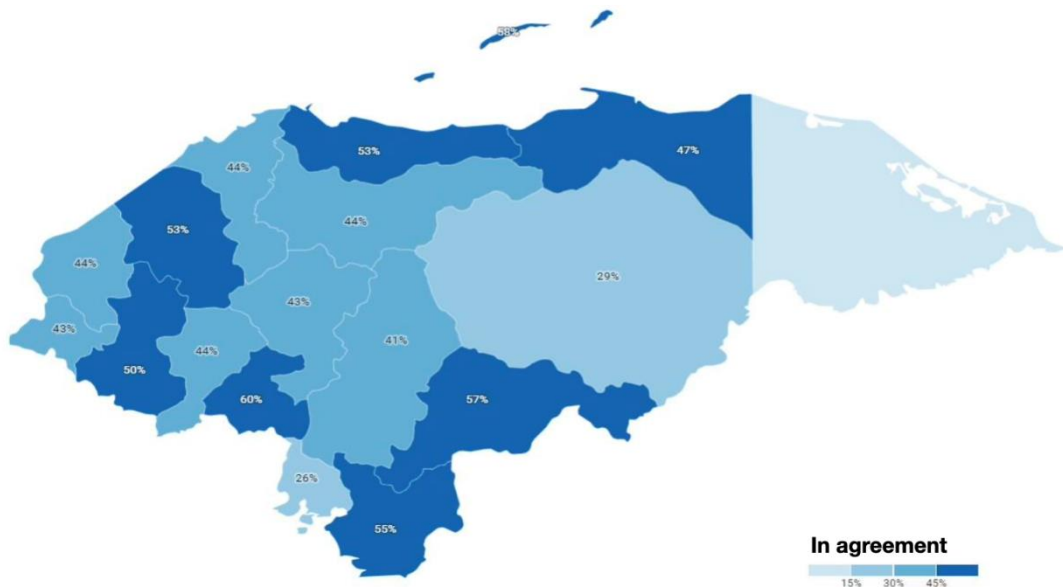


This could indicate that the population agrees with the state of exception as an idea, but not with how it is being implemented.

At the regional level, approval for the state of exception varies significantly. The departments where the levels of approval are lowest are Valle (26%) and Olancho (29%). There is greater approval in El Paraíso (57%) and La Paz (60%).

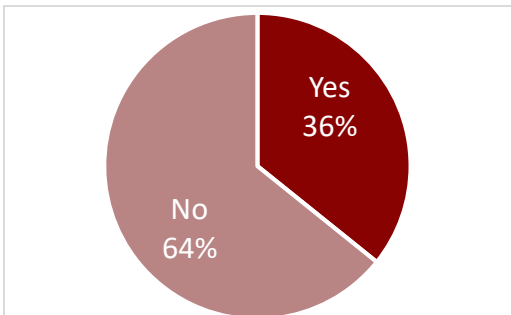
Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023.

Chart 7: Percentage of People Who Approve of the State of Exception by Department



Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "How much do you agree with the State of Emergency implemented by the government for crime control?"

Chart 8: Percentage of Respondents Aware of the Existence of an Anti-Extortion Plan

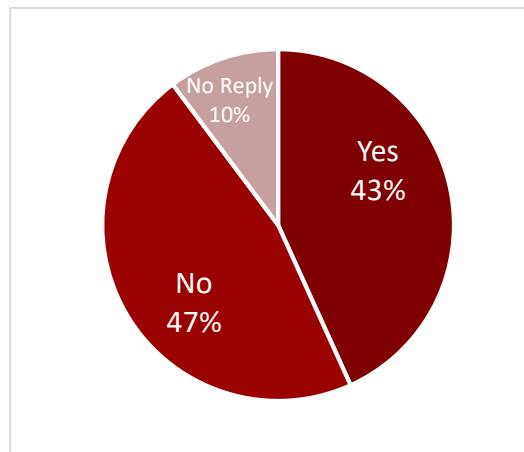


Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "Did you know that this government has created a National Plan against extortion?"

The Government's Plan for the Treatment of Extortion and Related Crimes (better known as the Anti-Extortion Plan) is separate from the state of exception. The plan summarizes 30 actions in 8 areas that the government intends to implement to crack down on extortion and gang-related crimes. This plan was first presented in November 2020, but surprisingly few people in Honduras seem to be aware of it. Our survey suggests that just over a third of Hondurans are aware of the government's Anti-Extortion Plan.

We also asked those familiar with the plan whether they believed the plan would be successful in reducing extortion in Honduras. The respondents were almost equally split. 46% said no, 43% said yes and 10% said they did not know or did not respond.

Chart 9: Percentage of Respondents Who Believe that the Plan Will Reduce Extortion



Source: National telephone survey of the general population applied for ASJ by Le Vote in May 2023. The question was: "Do you think that with this National Anti-Extortion Plan extortion will be reduced"

The Official Statistics

The state of exception was announced in a press conference which declared a "war on extortion". This language mirrors the language and strategy being used in El Salvador.

However, the impact of each country's state of exception has been very different. On the 31st of January, the Honduran newspaper, El País, wrote that, according to data published by the police, of the 8,155 people detained by police forces during the state of exception, 8,050 had been released within 24 hours. In addition, El Heraldo revealed that 90% of those detained were held on misdemeanor charges such as disorderly conduct, disrespect of authorities, and crimes not related to extortion.

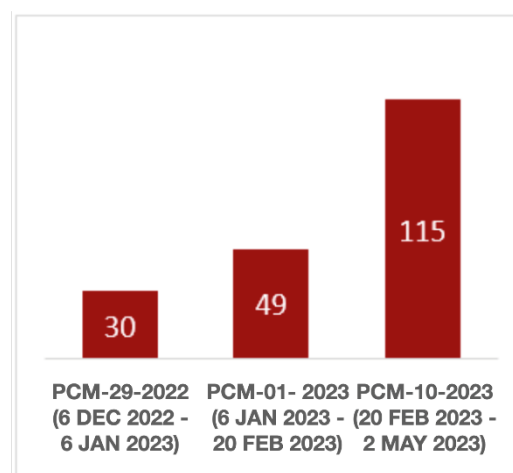
More recently, the Honduran National Police has opted not to announce the number of arrests in thousands. In May 2023, DIPAMPCO, a branch of the Honduran police created to tackle gang violence and extortion, announced that it had managed to capture around 800 gang members during 2023. However, it is unclear whether these detainees were released after 24 hours as was done in most cases at the beginning of the state of emergency.

What is clear is that many of these 800 people were not detained for extortion, rather, most were arrested for other crimes. We will analyze this further in the next section using data from the Ministry of Security (Secretaría de Seguridad).

Detentions

The following graph shows the number of detainees broken down between the first three periods of the state of emergency. In total, there are 194 people detained in the period from December 6, 2022, to May 2, 2023.

Chart 10: Number of Extortion Arrests from December 6, 2022 to May 2, 2023

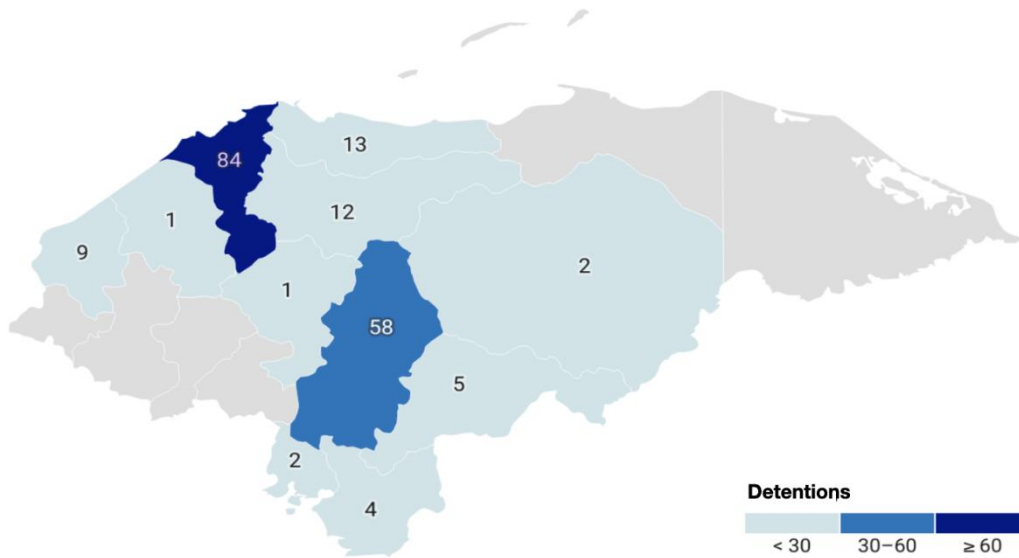


Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Security obtained through information requests No. SSSS-1845-2023 and SSSS-1737-2023.

There is a wide variance in the number of arrests between departments. Arrests have occurred almost exclusively in the departments of Francisco Morazán and Cortés. These two departments accounted for 73% of the arrests. This is a cause for concern because the national telephone survey revealed that extortion is a national phenomenon and not exclusive to these two departments.

The department with the highest percentage of victimization was Islas de la Bahía (17%, see Chart 2 above). However, not a single person has been arrested for the crime of extortion in the almost five months from December 6, 2022, to May 2, 2023, as shown in the following graph:

Chart 11: Number of People Arrested for Extortion by Department



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Security obtained through information requests No. SSSS-1845-2023 and SSSS-1737-2023.

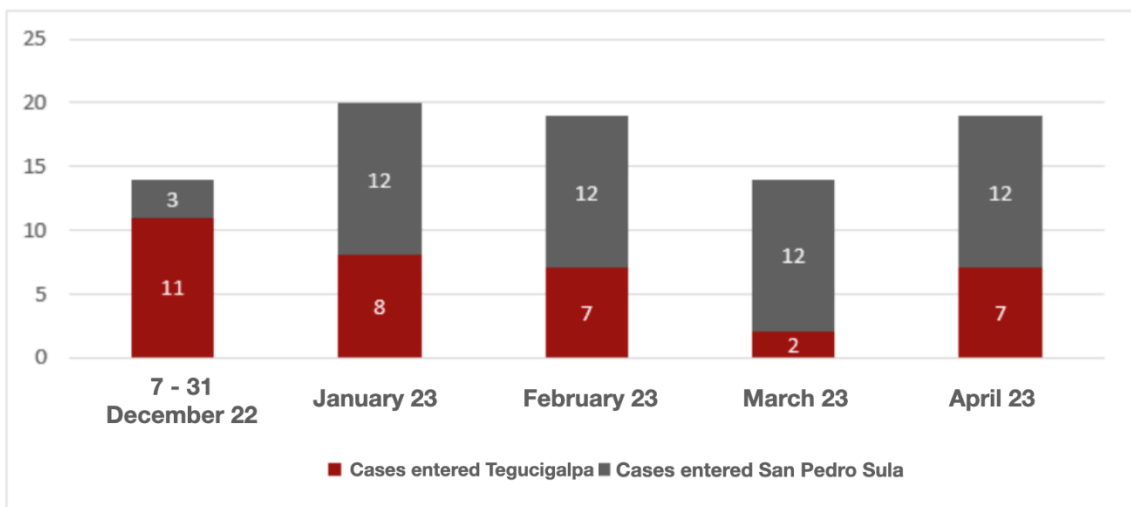
Prosecutions

Despite the 8,000 arrests announced as part of the "war on extortion," as of May 1, 2023, only 86 extortion cases had been prosecuted before the extortion courts based in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

The month with the highest number of cases being prosecuted was January with

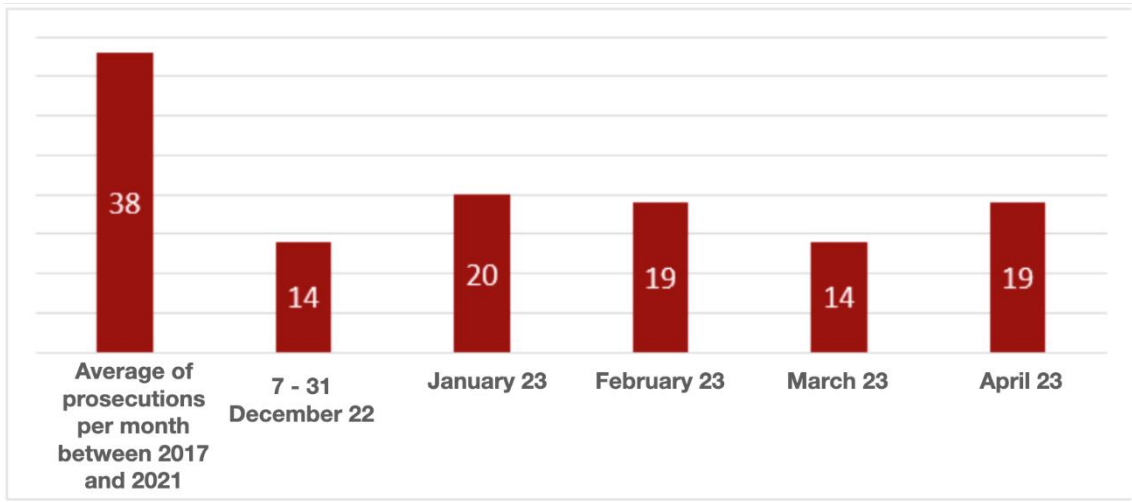
20 cases, while in December and March, only 14 cases were prosecuted. The highest concentration of cases being prosecuted was in San Pedro Sula with 51 cases, compared to Tegucigalpa with 35 cases during these 5 months.

Chart 12: Cases Prosecuted for Extortion from December 6, 2022 to April 30, 2023



Source: Compilation based on data provided by the extortion courts of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.

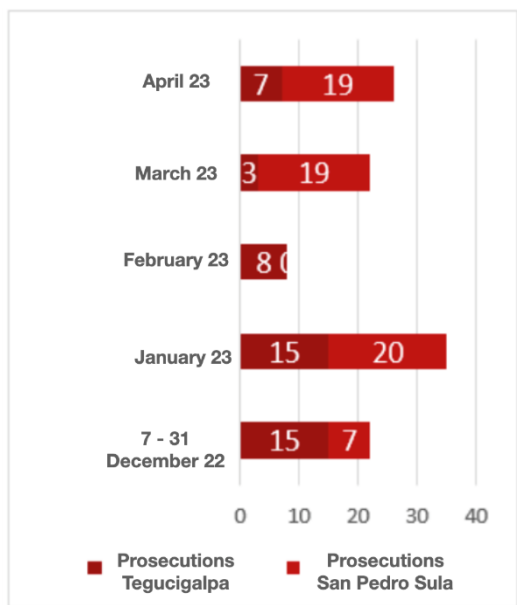
Chart 13: Comparison of Cases Prosecuted for Extortion from December 6, 2022 to April 30, 2023 and the Average Number of Cases Filed per Month from 2017 to 2021.



Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the extortion courts of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa and data presented in the study: "War Tax: The phenomenon of extortion and the state response in Honduras, Association for a More Just Society, 2022, <http://biblioteca.asjhonduras.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Estudio-Extorsion-2022.pdf>.

In some extortion cases, more than one person is charged, so the number of persons charged is higher than the number of cases filed.

Chart 14: Number of Persons Charged with Extortion from December 6, 2022 to April 30, 2023

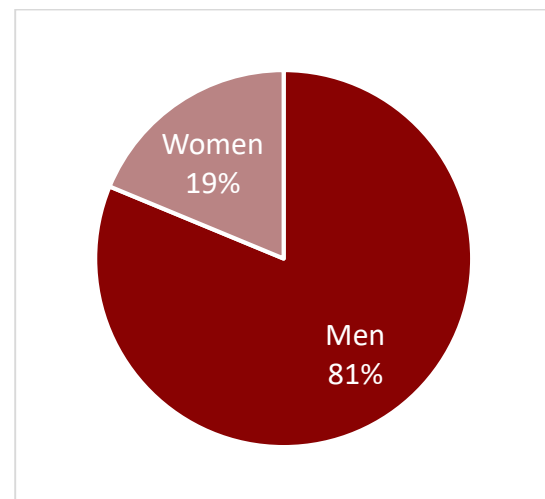


Source: Compilation based on data provided by the extortion courts of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa

Once again, there is a higher concentration of defendants in the San Pedro Sula court.

In terms of gender, 81% of the defendants are men compared to 19% women. It is of interest for this study to identify the increased participation of women in this crime. In our previous study, War Tax, the people being prosecuted for extortion related crime were overwhelmingly men.

Chart 15: Number of Persons Charged with Extortion from December 6, 2022 to April 30, 2023 by Gender



Source: Compilation based on data provided by the extortion courts of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.

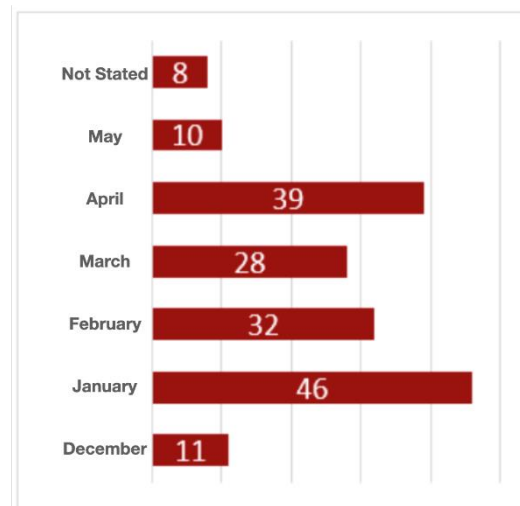
Human Rights Violations

The risks of using states of exception and "mano dura" approaches in countries like Honduras with poor human rights protection performance are considerable. The National Human Rights Commissioner (CONADEH) has counted a total of 174 complaints of human rights violations under the state of emergency.

The months with the highest incidence are January with 46 complaints and April with 39 complaints. At the departmental level, there is a concentration in Francisco Morazán with 41 complaints and Cortés with 23 complaints.

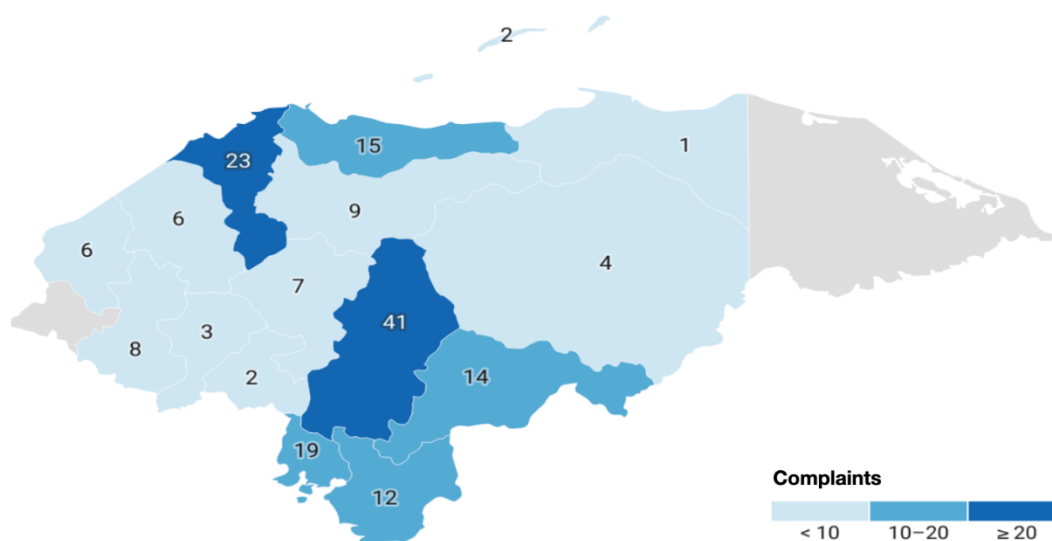
There are two complaints of human rights violations for each case of extortion presented to the courts. However, it is worth noting that it is not necessarily the same persons detained for extortion who have filed complaints for violation of their human rights.

Chart 16: Complaints Received by CONADEH for Human Rights Violations under the State of Emergency, by Month



Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the National Commissioner for Human Rights for the period from December 6, 2022 to May 18, 2023.

Chart 17: Complaints Received by CONADEH for Human Rights Violations under the State of Emergency, by Department



Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the National Commissioner for Human Rights for the period from December 6, 2022 to May 18, 2023.

Budget for DIPAMPCO

The budget allocation for DIPAMPCO, the police unit in charge of tackling extortion and gang activity, for the year 2023 amounts to 1,023.6 million Lempiras which represents 10% of the budget of the entire Ministry of Security (L.10,552.9 million). This new budget allocation to DIPAMPCO for 2023 is 14 times higher than that of 2022, which was L.73.3 million.

62% of the budget is earmarked for the acquisition of security equipment, 25% for operations, 8% for human resources, and 5% for social assistance to police officers.

In terms of budget execution, the performance shown this year is worrisome. To date this year, only 4% of the budget for operational and human resources has been

executed and 0% of the budget for security equipment has been executed.

More than one billion lempiras were requested to implement the anti-extortion plan in 2023, but only 4% have been spent in the first 5 months of the year. The authorities must plan and execute these funds in a way that strengthens the investigation capacity in the long term.

DIPAMPCO does not seem to be getting value for money. In the first 5 months of the year, only 194 people have been arrested for extortion. If they continue at this rate, the projected number of arrests at the end of the year will reach 466 people. In other words, for every arrest, there is a budget of 2.2 million lempiras.

Table 1: Analysis of budget and execution by DIPAMPCO

BUDGET OF DIPAMPCO AS OF MAY 31ST 2023

Millions of Lempiras

Institution	Approved	Valid	% of Budget	Executed	% Executed
CAPITAL GOODS	637.5	637.5	62%	-	0%
Security Equipment (Police)	637.5	637.5	62%	-	0%
NON-PERSONAL SERVICES	172.7	179.9	17%	18.7	10%
Rental of Transportation, Traction and Lifting Equipment	148.1	148.1	14%	15.2	10%
Rental of Buildings, Homes and Premises	10.8	10.5	1%	0.5	5%
National Per Diem	8.0	8.3	1%	2.0	24%
Water	-	7.0	1%	0.9	13%
Training Services	5.0	5.0	0%	-	0%

Maintenance and Repair of Equipment and Means of Transport	0.5	0.5	0%	0.0	4%
Ceremony and Protocol	-	0.3	0%	0.1	20%
Maintenance and Repair of Office Equipment and Furniture	-	0.1	0%	-	0%
Internet Service	-	0.0	0%	0.0	18%
Maintenance and Repair of Computer Equipment	-	0.0	0%	0.0	6%
Other Commercial and Financial Services	-	0.0	0%	0.0	100%
Printing, Publications and Reproductions Service	-	0.0	0%	0.0	100%
Maintenance and Repair of Buildings and Premises	-	0.0	0%	0.0	100%
Cleaning, Cleaning and Fumigation	0.4	-	0%	-	0%
MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES	96.4	81.9	8%	0.9	1%
Diesel	61.0	54.6	5%	0.6	1%
Petrol	14.4	14.6	1%	0.2	1%
Clothing	6.0	6.0	1%	-	0%
Repairs and Accessories	10.9	3.2	0%	0.0	1%
Footwear	1.3	1.3	0%	-	0%
Tires and Inner Tubes	0.5	0.5	0%	-	0%
Paper & Cardboard Products	-	0.4	0%	0.0	3%
Desk, Office and Teaching Supplies	0.0	0.4	0%	0.0	3%
Food & Beverage Products	-	0.3	0%	0.1	15%
Lubricating Oils and Greases	-	0.2	0%	0.0	6%
Cleaning and Personal Care Items	-	0.1	0%	0.0	11%
Electrical Supplies and Materials	-	0.1	0%	0.0	2%
LPG Gas	-	0.1	0%	0.0	37%
Chemicals	-	0.1	0%	-	0%
Kitchen and Dining Utensils	2.4	0.1	0%	-	0%

Graphic Arts Products	-	0.1	0%	0.0	25%
Textile Apparel	-	0.1	0%	-	0%
Hardware	-	0.0	0%	0.0	55%
Plastic Products	-	0.0	0%	0.0	100%
Small Tools	-	0.0	0%	-	0%
Paints and Dyes	-	0.0	0%	0.0	100%
PERSONAL SERVICES	81.0	79.7	8%	9.2	12%
Additionals	60.0	39.1	4%	-	0%
Basic Salaries	13.6	30.1	3%	8.0	27%
Thirteenth Month	1.1	2.5	0%	-	0%
Fourteenth Month	1.1	2.4	0%	-	0%
Contributions to the Instituto de Previsión Militar (Military Social Security Institute) - Employer's Contribution	1.5	1.5	0%	-	0%
Contributions to the Instituto de Previsión Militar - Reserva Laboral (Military Social Security Institute - Labor Reserve)	1.1	1.1	0%	-	0%
Social Security Contributions	0.5	1.0	0%	0.6	53%
Contributions to the Instituto de Previsión Militar (Military Social Security Institute) - Special Risks Regime	1.0	1.0	0%	-	0%
Supplements	1.0	1.0	0%	0.6	65%
DONATIONS AND TRANSFERS	50.0	50.0	5%	11.1	22%
Social Assistance to Individuals	50.0	50.0	5%	11.1	22%
Total	1,037.6	1,028.9	100%	39.9	4%

Implementation of the Anti-Extortion Strategy

At a press conference on November 24 2022, the Director of the National Police, Gustavo Sanchez, presented a summarized version of the Anti-Extortion Plan in a presentation. At the time of publishing this report, there was still no official document of the Plan in its entirety available to the public. However, the day before the press conference announcing the state of exception, a one-slide version of the 28-sheet document was leaked to the media.

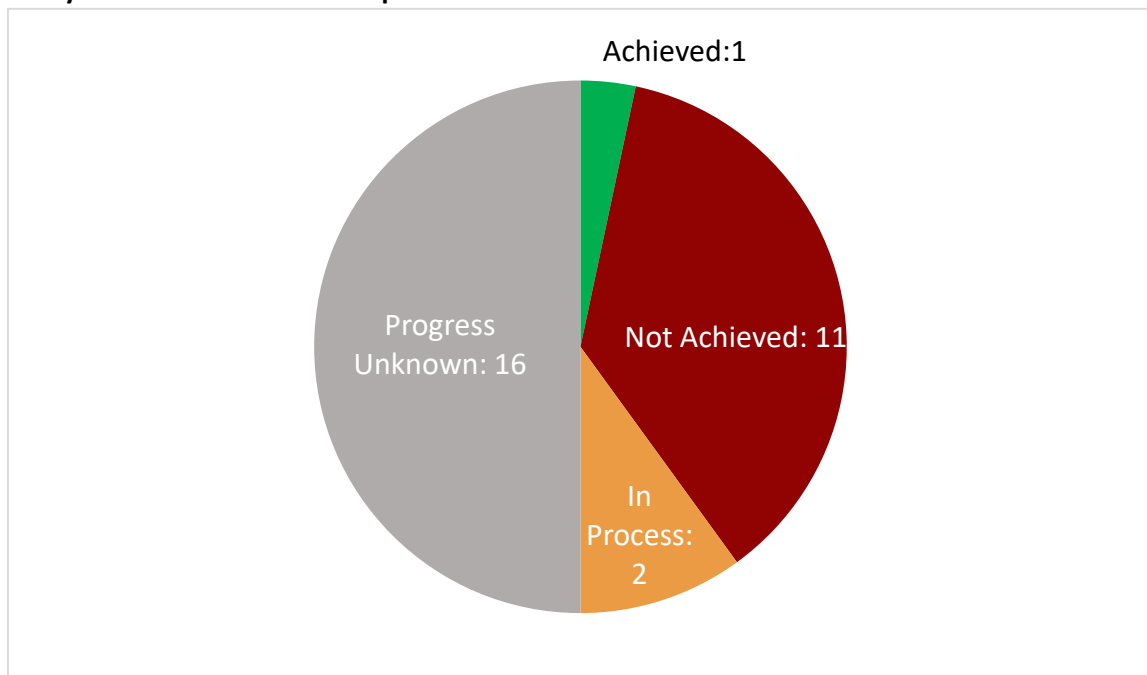
We regret that an official version of the Anti-Extortion Plan has not been published, as this makes it difficult to analyze the extent to which the government is achieving its plan. For this analysis, we use the version shared among the media and social networks.

ASJ considers that the plan as leaked to the press has good technical elements and that if executed efficiently it could achieve the reduction of extortion in Honduras.

The leaked plan is composed of eight axes and contains a total of 30 concrete actions that allow the evaluation of its implementation. Table 3 lists the total number of actions per axis and evaluates their fulfillment.

Security experts in the country, who prefer to remain anonymous, have been consulted, and together with the ASJ monitoring, the level of compliance for each of the actions is detailed as follows: a) fulfilled, b) not fulfilled, c) in process, or d) unknown.

Chart 18: Number of Actions Completed of the 30-Point Anti-Extortion Plan According to the Analysis of ASJ and External Experts Consulted:



Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of ASJ and external experts consulted during the month of May 2023.

Of the 30 actions listed in the plan, only one has been completed in the first six months of implementation. two are considered to be in process and the remaining 27 actions have not been fulfilled or there is no publicly available information to evaluate the extent to which the action has been completed.

In fact, the only thing that seems to have happened so far is that the budget outlined in the plan has been allocated. However, as discussed in the last section, only 4% of this budget has actually been executed.

Table 2: Summary of the Compliance Evaluation Matrix for Each Action Item of the Plan for the Treatment of Extortion and Related Offenses (The Anti-Extortion Plan)

Fulfillment	Operations	Technology	Reform of the legal system	Community	Prison System Reform	Inter-institutional management	Education	Budget	Total
Completed								1	1
Not Completed	2	1	6	1	1				11
In Process						1	1		3
Progress Unknown	1	2		3	3	1	6		15

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of ASJ and external experts consulted during the month of May 2023.

The following table includes a detailed analysis of the actions outlined in the anti-extortion plan in terms of their progress toward completion based on ASJ's analysis and 16 consultations with external experts.

It is worth mentioning that since the plan was leaked, other actions have been taken that were not in the original plan. For example, it is known that the National Banking and Insurance Commission (CNBS)

has now taken initiatives to improve the regulation and control of mobile wallets to reduce the risk of their use for extortion. At the same time, the Honduran Institute of Land Transportation (IHTT) has taken steps to implement payment cards in public transportation to reduce the use of cash, which could reduce the risk of extortion.

Another aspect to analyze is the fact that in the last extension of the state of exception,

Authorities made a territorial division of responsibility for security tasks between the police and armed forces.

However, for this study, it was decided to focus on the Plan presented in November of last year. It is evident that there are several challenges that hinder the implementation of the Plan and the fight against extortion in general. These include in particular:

1. Weak and fragmented coordination between the National Police, the Armed Forces, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Judiciary, and other public institutions.

2. The crisis in the Public Prosecutor's Office during the first months of 2023.
3. The increase of responsibilities for the police, which is understaffed. The National Police acquired responsibilities over the penitentiary centers, DIPAMPCO, and other tasks previously under the control of the Armed Forces. At the same time, the police only have a little more than 18,000 officers while they should have around 30,000 to be at the level recommended by the United Nations (300 officers per 100,000 inhabitants).

Table 3: Compliance evaluation matrix for each action item of the Anti-Extortion Plan

	Action	Achieved	Not Achieved	In Process	Progress Unknown	Comment
Operations	Create a comprehensive commission to address extortion and related crimes (National Police, Public Prosecutor's Office, Judges of National Jurisdiction, RNP, CNBS, IP, DNII, INM, IHTT, and INP, among others).		x			There have been isolated meetings and some alliances between some institutions, but there is no permanent commission with these actors. Judges, prosecutors, and the sectors affected by extortion have so far not been included in these meetings.

	Strengthen intelligence, investigation and tactical operational units.		x			At the budgetary level, we observe that not enough resources have been invested in this strengthening. At the same time, extortion prosecutors state that DIPAMPCO agents lack basic investigative skills including basic jobs such as how to fill out forms.
	Development of strategic structural and impact operations against High Strategic Value Objectives (HVO) (Leaders of organized criminal groups).				x	ASJ is not aware that organized crime leaders have been arrested and prosecuted.
Technology	Increase the use of technology in information management processes to strengthen information collection and consultation platforms and processes.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved.
	Build and interconnect technological platforms with entities that contribute to improve the investigative response to extortion and related crimes.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved.
	Acquire, upgrade and implement: - HARDWARE - SOFTWARE		x			It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved. Considering that they have only executed 4% of the budget, it is considered unlikely that they have been able to make meaningful investments in either hardware or software.

Reform of the Legal System	Penal Code Reform.		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
	Interception of Communications Law Reform.		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
	Penitentiary System Laws and Regulations Reform.		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
	Money Laundering Law Reform.		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
	SEDS and National Police Organic Law Reform..=		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
	Childhood and Adolescence Code Reform.		x			This law has not been approved or submitted.
Community	Implementation of the Integral Citizen Security Diagnosis in prioritized municipalities as a crosscutting axis.				x	It is not to ASJ's knowledge that this action has been achieved.
	Implementation and execution of action plans aimed at recovering public spaces occupied by crime.		x			It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved. Considering that the national telephone survey indicates that citizens feel less safe under the state of emergency compared to before, we consider that meaningful progress has not been made.
	Strengthen citizen outreach and trust.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved.

	Implementation of the Citizen Round Table Plan.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved.
Reform of the Penitentiary System	Improve prison equipment, conditions and infrastructure.				x	With an intervention of the Maximum Security Center (El Pozo) in Ilima Santa Barbara, this action is considered to be in process. However, it is a pending action in all penal centers around the country.
	Acquisition of technology for blocking communication signals and networks used by prisoners.				x	It is known that steps have been taken but it is not known to what level they have been achieved.
	Classification and separation of the prison population by legal status and type of crime.		x			An enforcement judge was consulted and stated that convicted prisoners are still mixed with non-convicted prisoners. Several other experts have also affirmed the same.
	Develop ethical, technical, and operational capabilities of security personnel in prisons, focused on prevention, deterrence, and control of risk-generating factors.					x

Inter-institutional management	Promote strategic alliances and national and international agreements.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in the process of being achieved.
	Creation of inter-institutional and international technical roundtables to promote the exchange of information and spaces for inter-agency training.			x		It is known that several meetings have taken place, but they have not achieved the collaboration and alignment of strategies and information exchange as planned.
Education	Strengthen the training, specialization and improvement of justice operators.			x		Practically all of DIPAMPCO's personnel are new and require considerable training. However, at the budget execution level, 0% of the budget allocated for training has been executed. At the same time, the Judges in extortion matters state that they have not received training in the last 6 years.
	Exchange of experiences (internships, consulting and mentoring).				x	According to ASJ's knowledge, there is some exchange, but we do not know the extent and impact it may have at the operational level.
	Strengthening of the educational system within the police (infrastructure, technology and professional follow-up).				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in process of being achieved.
	Profile, select and certify members of the police career.				x	It is known that new recruits have been selected for DIPAMPCO. However, it is not known to what level the new members

						have been certified and under what criteria.
	Develop preventive campaigns to counter extortion				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in process of being achieved.
	Specialized services offered to vulnerable sectors				x	Private sector individuals affected by extortion claim that no such services are being carried out. We do not know if in some isolated cases, it is being carried out.
	Raise awareness among the population to file the corresponding complaints and take the necessary measures to avoid becoming victims of extortion.				x	It is unknown to ASJ whether this goal is in process of being achieved.
Budget	Allocate 1 billion lempiras to the Honduran National Police.	x				We note that at the budgetary level, almost this full amount has been allocated to DIPAMPCO. However, it is also worrisome that only 4% of the allocated resources have been executed.

Conclusions

After six months of the state of emergency, extortion continues. There was a slight drop in the percentage of victimization of extortion falling from 9% in 2022 to 8.4% in 2023.

While citizens surveyed tend to agree more with the state of exception (45.3%) than disagree (23.1%), they tend to feel less safe under the state of exception compared to before the state of exception.

Data on the impact of the state of emergency and the implementation of the Anti-Extortion Plan have been unclear. While at different times figures of arrests in the hundreds and even thousands have been presented, only 86 cases of extortion have been presented to the courts for crimes related to extortion.

The Anti-Extortion plan that was formulated in November 2022 has good components, but implementation has been very weak. Of the 30 actions that were set out in the government's plan, only 1 has been fulfilled, two are in process, 11 have not been fulfilled and for 16 of them, there is no public information to evaluate the extent of the progress.

There is still time to implement an effective strategy and take efficient measures against extortion and organized crime to achieve security for Hondurans who for decades have been victims of extortion by gangs and criminal groups.

Recommendations

ASJ calls on President Xiomara Castro to consider and implement the following recommendations:

1. **Conduct a technical and objective evaluation of the implementation of the plan and the state of emergency.** This evaluation should be carried out by persons external to the Security and Defense Ministry (Secretaría de Seguridad y Defensa) to ensure its objectivity and the evaluation should point out weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. Afterward, political will is required to make the necessary adjustments.
2. **Develop a collective and comprehensive strategy.** The fight against extortion should not be the sole responsibility of the National Police. An integral commission should be established as soon as possible as mentioned in the Plan and all sectors involved in the extortion issue in Honduras including the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Judiciary, and Civil Society should be invited to the table to share knowledge and recommendations.
3. **Focus on criminal investigation. Use the budget allocated to DIPAMPCO to train and equip agents in the area of criminal investigation.** DIPAMPCO should increasingly employ investigative strategies to dismantle criminal networks through a follow-the-money approach that can catch those higher up in extortion networks as opposed to just the money collectors.

Methodology

To carry out this evaluation of the implementation and results of the first six months of the state of exception and the Anti-Extortion Plan, three main methodologies were used: First, a national telephone survey was applied to 847 people through the polling company Le Vote.

Second, official data on arrests and judicial cases were requested and analyzed from the Ministry of Security and the Judiciary. Third, a series of consultations, interviews, and focus groups were conducted with experts, authorities, and victims of extortion.

National Telephone Survey

The survey was conducted by the well-known polling company Le Vote. The sample was 847 people in 173 municipalities of the country with a confidence interval of 95%.

The following questions were asked:

1. To what extent do you agree with the State of Exception implemented by the government to control crime?
2. After the implementation of the State of Emergency, do you feel: (Safer, the same, or less safe)?
3. Have you or anyone in your immediate family (children, husband, wife) been a victim of extortion in the last 12 months?
4. What was the method of payment you were asked to make?
5. Did you file a complaint with the authorities?

6. Did you know that this government has created a National Plan against Extortion?

7. Do you believe that with this National Plan against Extortion, extortion will be reduced?

Details of the national telephone survey

- Target Population: Hondurans 18 years of age and older.
- Collection Date: May 9th to 16th, 2023
- Geographic Coverage: National Level
- Sample Size: 847 Hondurans
- Sample Dispersion: 18 departments
- Sampling Error: + - 3.37% (confidence interval: 95%)
- Collection Method: Cell phone interview
- Type of Sampling: Simple Random (Probabilistic)
- Sample: 173 municipalities

Analysis of Official Data

The list of arrests for the crime of extortion of the Ministry of Security was requested through requests SSSS-1845-2023 and SSSS-1737-2023. Additionally, data on the number of cases filed and the number of defendants disaggregated by gender were requested directly from the Extortion Courts located in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

Focus Groups

A total of 16 consultations were conducted with experts, victims of extortion, former employees of the National Anti-Maras and Gangs Force, judges, and prosecutors. The consultations were conducted through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and telephone calls.

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The logo for ASJ Honduras features the letters 'ASJ' in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Below 'ASJ' is a white curved line that underlines the letters. Underneath the curve, the word 'HONDURAS' is written in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font.

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