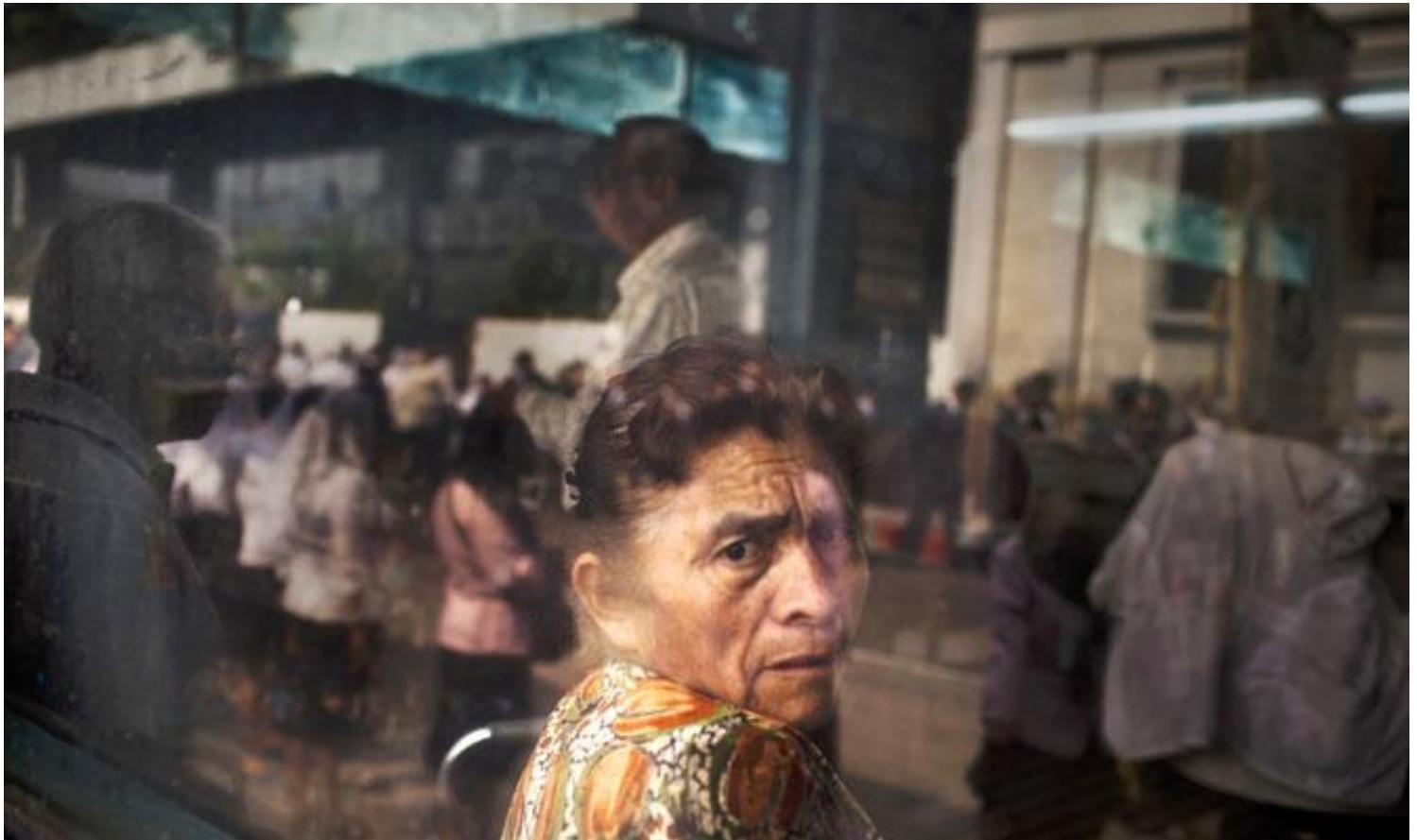


World

'Life Is Worth Nothing in Guatemala'

By Lianne Milton / December 02 2013 1:36 PM



Violence is a way of life in this Central American country. Lianne Milton

There's a common phrase that Guatemalans say about violence in their country: *En Guatemala, la vida no vale nada*. In Guatemala, life is worth nothing. During the country's bloody and genocidal 36-year civil war, about 200,000 people were killed or "disappeared" and buried in mass graves. It left a brutal legacy of violence on the social fabric of this nation of 15 million.

Just two years ago, Guatemala elected its first peacetime military leader, President Otto Perez Molina, a former army general who emerged from retirement to run on using an "iron first" to fight crime. He's been criticized for the way he's used the country's military to respond to

protests or combat organized crime, and has faced accusations of human rights violations from his role in Guatemala's civil war.

There are reports of improvement in the country, but cartel, gang, and street violence persists. A hired assassin can earn about \$20 per murder. Mexican drug cartels, such as the Zetas, are new players in a complex mix of paramilitary and vigilante groups that lurk in the country's shadowlands. Today, Guatemalans live in a society where 98 percent of all crimes go unprosecuted.

Last year, there were 34.5 murders for every 100,000 people in the country. That's a decreased rate from previous years, although the first half of 2013 actually showed an increasing number of murders. Violence still touches far too many lives in Guatemala, where nearly 100 people were murdered each week last year.

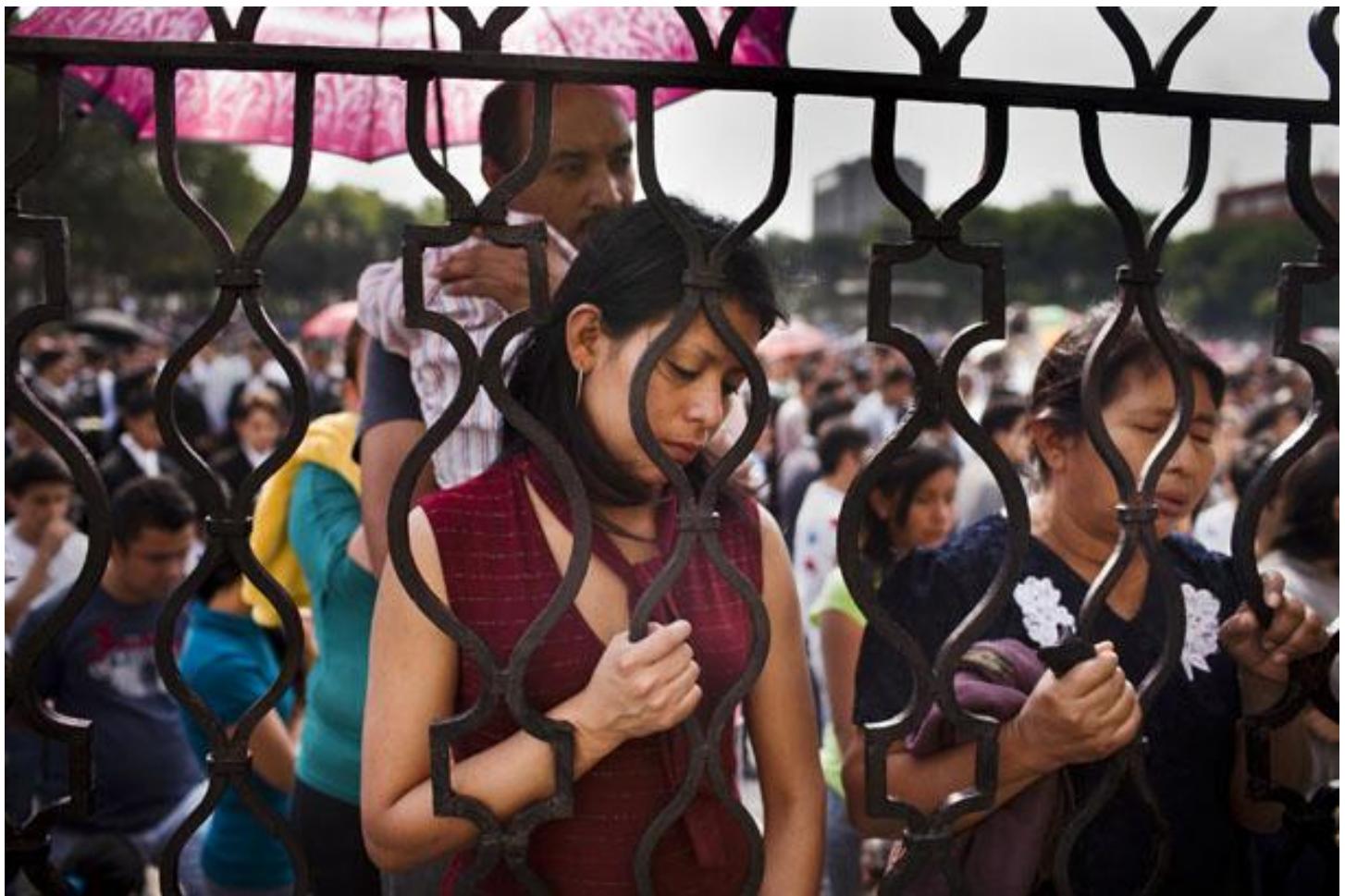
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Guatemalans celebrate Dia de los Muertos by flying colorful kites to scare off bad spirits so that the dead can enjoy offerings by the families. Many Guatemalans seek solace from violence in religion. Lianne Milton



Family members react to the death a 31-year-old man who was shot in his car in Guatemala City in 2011. Lianne Milton



Catholics pray at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Guatemala City during a procession. Lianne Milton



A Guatemalan firefighter, right, interviews family members inside a home where three drug dealers were shot and killed in Mixco, Guatemala, in 2011. Mixco is a transit point for drug traffickers, including the ruthless Los Zetas Mexican drug cartel. Lianne Milton



Paramedics push a blood-soaked gurney from a shooting victim at Roosevelt Hospital in Guatemala City last year. The victim, who carried no identification, was killed when police shot his truck after he did not stop at a checkpoint. Lianne Milton



A 17-year-old young woman was shot and killed by a friend's abusive husband after she advised her to leave him, in a gang-controlled neighborhood outside of Guatemala City last year. Women are especially vulnerable to violence in Guatemala. Lianne Milton



Women walk home after dark in Mixco. Lianne Milton



A young couple is kisses late at night in Guatemala City in 2011. Lianne Milton



A family drives past a crime scene where officials investigate the 2011 shooting deaths of four drug dealers in Mixco. Lianne Milton



A gang member in a holding cell at the Supreme Court of Justice, in Guatemala City, last year.
Lianne Milton



Members of the Maya-AchÃ indigenous community from northern Guatemala watch court proceedings for five former members of right-wing paramilitary groups sentenced to 7,710 years in prison for participating in a 1982 massacre during the country's civil war. Lianne Milton



Officials respond to a call where a man was found shot dead in Guatemala City in 2011. Police say the conflict began as a dispute between two mechanics. Lianne Milton



Two teenage boys were shot and killed outside of Guatemala City last year. Lianne Milton



In Guatemala City, family members mourn the death of 24-year-old Eder Cruz, who was killed by drug cartels in 2012 because his family couldn't pay a ransom. Lianne Milton



Gloria Cruz mourns the death of her son, Eder Cruz. Lianne Milton



A wall of posters of “the disappeared” from the country’s civil war line a building where three mass graves are located inside the La Verbena Cemetery in Guatemala City. Lianne Milton

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