

## **La seguridad ciudadana en Venezuela y America Latina**

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There is no question that throughout Latin America crime and violence has become one of the most important subjects of public debate. In poll after poll, the anxiety of insecurity has become one of the most important issues for public opinion. Even in those few cases where economic crisis replaces insecurity at the top of the list, insecurity never falls far from the top.

It is certainly true that across the region there are important differences in the patterns of crime from country to country, and that these differences affect the framework within which the public policy response to criminal activity is formulated. Nevertheless, there are some crucial similarities in the regional experience which help to understand the nature of citizen insecurity and the public policy responses to it. First of all, the chronology. The concern with crime and violence began to stir public opinion in the 1990s, as the transition to democracy was consolidated. In the first instance, marked by the monthly data of Latinobarometro, the reaction was to stop crime through more effective police action. Citizen demands, sometimes in the form of demonstrations in the streets, focused on getting the state to use stronger methods to prevent crime – policies known as *mano dura* or *tolerancia zero*. Crime prevention and the ability of new democracies to protect their citizens was the issue of the day. In the most extreme cases, Argentina and Colombia, citizens expressed doubts about the efficacy of democratic government to provide the protection they wanted, and, in the latter, crime was the excuse to join with the United States to use military force against insurgents and drug cartels. In Central America, the dramatic increase in gang activity was used by conservative elites to justify their continued control over the state after the peace process and as a justification for restoring the military to its role as keepers of the domestic peace.

At the Wilson Center, we began to study crime as a means of supporting democratic governance. We were interested in understanding the causes of increasing rates of crime and in formulating public policy responses that would strengthen democratic governance. Elsewhere, throughout the hemisphere, there were a number of NGOs that focused on the prevention of crime and police reform by emphasizing the need to protect civil and human rights in the process of preventing crime.

Throughout the decade of the 1990s, in addition to the Wilson Center's focus on crime in its relation to democratic governance which also was the foundation of the NGO community's focus on human rights, there were two other major currents of concern and study. One was the institutional approach that privileged the reform of the police and the judiciary. Here, sadly, there was very little distinction between the so-called new democracies in the Southern Cone and Central America and the more established democratic regimes such as Venezuela. In fact, Venezuela negotiated the first loan given by the World Bank for reform of the judiciary. Unfortunately, the project did not deal with matters of substance, which the government of Venezuela considered too sensitive, and the project did not have an impact on the crime rate.

The other major discussion swirling around the rise in crime had to do with economics – the high cost of crime with its impact on development, and the question as to whether or not crime rates had anything to do with the level of economic development or of poverty. By the end of the decade, the broad consensus among the multilateral agencies was that poverty does not cause instability, nor it is associated with poverty in any meaningful manner. In other words, the Dickensian nightmare of crime caused by poverty, which inevitably led to proposals for a security state that isolated the poor from the less poor and used surveillance measures to protect the wealthy. Of course, in the private sector, there were several responses, such as the construction of walled communities, which appeared to take a dystopian world for granted.

While it was helpful to have the dark vision linking crime and poverty debunked, still the casual observation of crime in shantytowns or rumors spread about pockets being picked kept the focus of policy-makers on economic questions. Fortunately, in the early years of this century, there was a convergence between studies of police reform and the studies of democratic governance that led to a more fruitful approach that combined the social and the economic and that focused on the phenomenon of exclusion and inclusion in the society. To get to this multidisciplinary approach and the multi-sectoral response that it suggested for public policy, it was necessary to study the relationship between inequality or income disparities and instability. In methodological terms, we might call income disparity a contingency variable and then seek the other variables which set the stage for a linkage between income inequality and the rate of crime and violence.

In summary form there is one pair of variables, a dichotomous pair exclusion and inclusion, that serve as indicators of what conditions (generally of exclusion) in combination with inequality are most likely to serve as drivers of criminal activity. By the same token, in the most general terms, recent literature suggests that public policy responses are most successful in containing crime or forestalling criminal activity if they can be aimed at including segments of the population or mitigation their exclusion. The key to understanding how economic factors can drive criminal activity is the difference between inclusion and exclusion in the society.

Because so much has been made of the linkage between crime and poverty in Venezuela, let me turn briefly to a short list of sectoral issues that reveal the causes of exclusion and suggest potential policy responses that would mitigate exclusion and reduce the level of criminal activity. Note that these issues do not deal directly with crime. They deal with exclusion. Today, the broad consensus among students of crime and violence is that what used to be called relative deprivation in economics or socialization, which is now termed exclusion is the clearest single driver of crime rates. This suggests that in addition to a focus on police reform or strengthening the judiciary; or, on a debate over *mano dura* or other modes of punishment; or, on a debate over the use of the military in crime prevention, the policies that are most effective in reducing the rate of crime will be policies that deal with one or more of the following sectoral issues – policies that bring marginal groups or vulnerable groups in the population into the broader society and give them the sense that they have access to the services of the society and can participate more fully in its activities.

Geography and infrastructure: As Richard Stren has pointed out in his many publications, there tends to be a powerful geographical manifestation of income disparity. That is, there is a clear separation in the city between the rich and poor; although, even here there are pockets of the poor living amongst the super rich. The policy responses to this situation obviously includes infrastructure, especially transportation, and the provision of public (and private) services. Because of space limitations in this article, I will offer only one very simple example. If you examine the metro or subway systems in Santiago, Chile and Mexico City, D.F., you will find polar opposites in the social impact of the two urban transportation networks. In Mexico, the system is spread throughout the vast expanse of the Federal District and is subsidized so that even the poorest residents of the city have access to it. As a consequence, there is no rush hour in the Mexico metro – it is jammed to capacity literally on a 24 hour basis. In Santiago, the metro covers the middle and upper middle class neighborhoods quite well. The cost to use the system is so high that, except for the small morning and evening rush hours when government and financial sector workers go to their offices from their homes in the outlying suburbs and back, the subway cars rarely are crowded.

To take a middle ground, it is interesting to look at the metro system in Washington, D.C. The planning for the system was begun while the city was still essentially segregated and the first lines performed a social and economic function similar to the system in Santiago. As the city achieved self-government and then a seat in the House of Representatives, the metro system was modified to take the demographics of the city better into account. As a consequence, the usage of the system looks more and more like the system in Mexico with each passing year.

Access to public services is one of the easiest ways to measure the pattern of exclusion in the society and education is one of the most basic public services. Unequal access to education or unequal quality of education across the space of a city will have a

profound impact on the labor market and on social stability. Providing quality education only to a portion of the city's population certainly would affect the labor market and exacerbate conditions of inequality. When access to quality education is purely a function of the market, the conditions of exclusion become structural and inter-generational poverty is all but guaranteed. Aside from the obvious implications for anger on the part of the excluded, such discrimination also serves as an obstacle to national development. The most successful national policy to reduce the poverty that results from exclusion from education is Brazil's famous bolsa de familia. Begun during the administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and continued by Lula, this policy more than any other effort by the state in Brazil, has reduced the level of poverty and facilitated police reform policies that now allow more activity cooperation between those who live in shantytowns (favelados) and the forces of law and order. It is too soon to say with confidence that these policies will have a marked impact on crime in Brazil's cities. The current issue in Brazil's cities (and elsewhere in Latin America) has more to do with organized crime and drug trafficking, which will be discussed below.

Access to the labor market is crucial in preventing crime or, at least, reducing the temptation of vulnerable populations, particularly youth, women, ethnic, indigenous, other minorities, of turning to criminal activity. Here, especially among the youth, stable employment is crucial. Informality, so common in poor neighborhoods, especially after the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s, makes it hard for vulnerable groups to find work that actually keeps them and their families out of poverty. Transportation plays an obvious role in making the labor market accessible to the poor.

Over the past decade, there has grown to significance a dimension of criminal activity that twenty years ago was only beginning to appear – drug trafficking and organized crime. While the production of drugs in Latin America and the transportation of those drugs to the major consumer markets in the United States and Europe is not new, the criminal activity associated with those drugs has spread geographically to the point where every country in the region is affected by it to some degree. There still is considerable variation across the region. Colombia and Mexico suffer more from the activity of drug cartels and traffickers than other countries. However, as criminal activity becomes more organized, it becomes more international and it becomes more variegated. Gangs involved in the traffic in drugs tend also to become involved in the illegal traffic in people, especially children and women, the traffic in arms, and in laundering the money that is used in these criminal activities.

The final chapter of this argument deserves an article of its own. For the purposes of this general survey, suffice it to say that to the extent that criminal activity becomes organized, it tends to become international. And, as the criminal activity becomes international, it requires policies that are international – regional and hemispheric and even global. Increasingly, the traffickers in drugs are using drugs as payment for their activities. This has resulted in exploding consumption of drugs in countries that before had little or

nothing to do with the traffic. As significant and complicated, dealing with the traffic in drugs and arms involves dealing with the United States. This is complicated for three reasons: first the hegemonic presumption of the United States makes any mode of hemispheric cooperation difficult. Second, the traffic in arms is essentially a matter of the U.S. selling light arms to people in Latin America and the U.S. government is incapable of dealing with this problem because of the power of the so-called gun lobby. Third, the United States is the principal consumer of illegal drugs in the world and yet persists in treating drug consumption as a criminal activity, not a question of public health. The current government in Washington has declared its change of policy, but no legislation has been passed by the Congress that would allow the government to cooperate with other countries on the basis of dealing with drugs as a health problem, not a criminal problem. Until these three reasons are mitigated or the nations of Latin America come up with a means of collaborating among themselves without the United States, dealing with illegal organized criminal activity will continue to be a serious problem.

There is one facet of the international dimension of criminal activity that concerns all of the nations of the hemisphere. Since the end of the Cold War, realists in the United States and the geopoliticians have been looking for threats to U.S. security. For a while, during the Bush administration, people in the Pentagon thought that the regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela was a threat to the U.S. because of Venezuela's ties to the rogue regime of Iran. That is no longer a popular view in Washington. However, there are studies done in Washington and elsewhere that speculate on the likelihood of criminal gangs, now focused on the traffic in drugs, or gangs that now earn money committing crimes in the cities of the hemisphere will, at some point, offer their services to terrorists. In such a case, the gangs would make available to terrorists their transportation networks, their services as couriers, and their services as launderers of money to help those whose goals are to wreak destruction in the United States or in some other country of the hemisphere. The experts are beginning to recognize the linkages between domestic crime and international or transnational crime. In the next few years, the policy proposals will meet the demand for more imaginative approaches.

The response to this hypothetical fear is quite simple. All the countries in the hemisphere have to do is to recognize that all would be threatened by such a perversion of international organized crime and work together to prevent it from happening. Of course, such a solution sounds easier than it might be in the current international climate.

In order not to close this article on a note of pessimism, I would like to return to the original issue – citizen insecurity in Latin America. Here, there are two proposals make. First, in recent work on police reform, experts have come up with the concept of proximity and participation. In dealing with police reform, the policies should focus on mechanisms to reduce the space or distance between citizens and the forces of law and order. It goes without saying that this concept of proximity is another facet of the broader concept of exclusion.

For example, see the work done in the 1990s by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights and published in a series of volumes from 2000 to 2003; and the more recent work by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), which began in 2005 and is ongoing.

See Tulchin and Hugo H. Fruhling, eds., Crime and Violence in Latin America: Citizen Security, Democracy and the State (2003); Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg, eds., Toward a Society under Law: Citizens and their Police in Latin America (2006).

The classic literature putting this Dickensian myth to rest includes: R. L. Ayres, Crime and violence as development issues in Latin America and the Caribbean (1998); P. Fajnzylber, D. Lederman, and N. Loayza, Determinants of crime rates in Latin America and the world: an empirical assessment (1998); A. Gaviria and C. Pages, Patterns of Crime Victimization in Latin America (1999); and J. L. Londono and R. Guerrero, Violencia en America Latina: Epidemiología y costos (1999). The most recent study by the World Bank reiterates the ambiguity in the data. That is, with regard to street crime or petty crime, the preponderance of cases pits a relatively poor thief against a relatively wealthy victim. However, with regard to violent crime, most of the cases are between criminals and victims of the same socioeconomic stratum. And, most compelling, the overwhelming majority of victims of violent crime are young, poor males.

Note that most of the studies of this phenomenon focus on cities, so that most of the literature is about cities. For example, see Allison Garland, Mejjan Massourmi, and Blair Ruble, eds., Global Urban Poverty: Setting the Agenda (2007); Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, Mejjan Massoumi, Blair A. Ruble, Pep Subiros, and Allison G. Garland, eds., Urban Diversity: Space, Culture, and Inclusive Pluralism in Cities Worldwide (2010); and Michael A. Cohen, Blair A. Ruble, Joseph S. Tulchin and Allison M. Garland, eds., Preparing for the Urban Future (1996)

Stren has a chapter in each of the urban volumes cited in footnote #3.

The recent literature on crime and violence and its impact on governance and on economic development is very extensive. See, The World Bank, Crime and Violence in Central America (2011); Tulchin, "Crime and Violence: the Threat of Division and Exclusion in Latin American Cities," in Kihato, et. al, op.cit; Mercedes S. Hinton, Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil (2006); Antonio Sergio Alfredo Guimaraes, et. al., "Inequality and Violence in Latin America," LASAForum (2009); Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg, eds., Toward a Society under Law: Citizens and Their Police in Latin America (2006); Jessica Varat, compiladora, Seguridad Ciudadana en las Americas (2007); Hans Mathieu and Paula Rodriguez Arredondo, eds., Seguridad Regional en America Latina y el Caribe (2011); Erik Alda and Gustavo Beliz, eds., ¿Cual es la salida? La agenda inconclusa de la seguridad ciudadana (IADB, 2007); and the research being done by Rut Sautu and her students at the University of Buenos Aires, e.g., Alejandra Otamendi, "Interpretaciones sobre seguridad ciudadana y sobre el rol del Estado de los argentinos" (2009).

See the recent work at the Wilson Center, to be published in 2011. For example, Douglas Farah, "Organized Crime in El Salvador: the Homegrown and Transnational Dimensions. Two other papers are: Julie Lopez, Guatemala's Crossroads: Democratization of Violence and Second Chances; and James Bosworth, Honduras: Organized Crime Gaining amid Political Crisis.

On the concept of proximity between the citizenry and the police and the key role of participation more generally in reducing crime, see Jessica Varat, ed., Seguridad Ciudadana en las Americas: Proyecto de Investigacion Activa (2007); Win Saxvenije, Maria Antonieta Beltran and Jose Miguel Cruz, "Exclusion social, jovenes y pandillas en Centroamerica," Temas de Actualidad No. 3 (2007); and International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (UN), Prevencion de la Criminalidad y Seguridad Cotidiana: Tendencias y Perspectivas (2010).

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