Urban Violence: Building Safe and Inclusive Cities in Latin America

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Opening Remarks
Cynthia J. Arnson

Introduction
Eric Hershberg

Speakers
Juan Pablo Pérez Saínz Roberto Briceño-León
Hugo Frühling
Jennifer Salahub

Commentators
Adriana Beltrán
Adam Blackwell

Moderator
Eric L. Olson
EXCLUSION, VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY RESPONSES IN CENTRAL AMERICAN CITIES:

Guiding policy by explaining variation

by FLACSO-Costa Rica and FLACSO-El Salvador
Description of the project

- **Research question from SAIC**: Why urban communities with similar conditions of social and economic exclusion, have different levels of violence?

- **Main hypothesis of our research**: In urban marginal communities with similar conditions of social exclusion, different levels of violence can be explained because communities capacities to face violence.

- **Methodology**:
  - Nine communities in urban areas (metropolitan and no metropolitan areas).
  - Three communities in Costa Rica and six in El Salvador.
  - Mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques of research.
Three basic thoughts for policy making

- The existence of a community, as social actor, cannot be taken for granted.

- The necessity to identify different types of violence and to balance their importance.

- In the Salvadoran cases, the maras are an ambiguous phenomenon.
FIRST thought: The existence of a community, as social actor, cannot be taken for granted

- Factors that hinder collective action and organization:
  - Territorial factors
  - Social factors
  - Factors associated to violence

- Consequences for policy:
  - Interventions are unavoidable exogenous to the territories.
  - Interventions should also aim to constitute the community as an actor.
  - Factors that can foster or hinder the constitution of the community as an actor: leadership; types of organization; women participation; political clientelism and presence of institutions and especially of local governments.
SECOND THOUGHT:
The necessity to identify different types of violence and to balance their importance

• Contextual violence
  • Micro markets of drugs in Costa Rica and maras in El Salvador.
  • The importance of exogenous factors:
    • Social exclusion (extreme disempowerment in labor markets and the territorial absence of the State).
    • The transformation of Central America as a new corridor for international drug flows.

• Profit seeking violence and social violence
  • Profit seeking violence (assaults, theft, burglary, etc.) emerges as the most dangerous form of violence in the social imaginary.
  • Social violence (intra-domestic and among neighbors) happens in daily basis but it is silenced and tends to become natural and invisible.
  • The necessity for the re-equilibrium between these two types of violence.
THIRD THOUGHT: In the Salvadoran cases, maras are an ambiguous phenomenon

• Nature of ambiguity:
  • The maras have the monopoly of violence in the communities: economic extortion, rape of young women, recruitment of children, etc. Do not forget the victims.
  • But, they offer protection against external violence and they intervene regulating social violence.

• Policy choice in terms of citizen security:
  • Social reinsertion versus repression of maras.
  • Factors that may affect the policy choice:
    • Presence or absence of institutions that challenge the monopoly of violence by the maras.
    • (Un)sustainable economic projects for ex-members of the maras.
    • Hidden agenda by the leaders of the maras.
    • Moment of the prevalence of the logic of reinsertion or repression.