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Urbanization and Security

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Written for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars' Comparative Urban Studies Project on Urbanization, Population, the Environment, and Security. The project brings together a diverse group of urban scholars and practitioners to examine issues of population, environment, and urbanization. Our goal is to consider urban problems within an international security framework. This initiative will examine specifically what elements of urbanization contribute to social conflict or political instability and how that conflict or instability might affect the international community. Critical issues for examination include: urban violence and crime, migration to and from urban centers, population growth, public health, housing provision, and conflict over urban space, cultural symbols, and environmental resources.

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Alan Gilbert is a professor of Geography at the University College London. He received his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and his B.A. in Social Science from the University of Birmingham, U.K. Gilbert's research covers such issues as housing, poverty, and urban/regional development in Latin America and South Africa. He has been the director and coordinator of five major research grants investigating housing issues in Latin America. In addition, he has advised a number of international organizations including the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Population Fund, and the Business Monitor International.

Currently, Gilbert is researching self-help housing in Columbia, housing processes in South Africa, and housing subsidy practices in Chile. In the last book he edited, *The Mega-City in Latin America* (1996), Gilbert examines urban development in six large cities of the region: Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Lima, and Santa Fé de Bogota. Gilbert has contributed to a variety of books on migration and development in the Third World including: *The Latin American City* (1994*), In Search of a Home: Rental and Shared Housing in Latin America* (1993, together with Camacho, O., et. al.); and *Cities, Poverty and Development: Urbanization in the Third World* (1992, together with Gugler, J.)

Alan Gilbert argues that no consistent or meaningful relationship exists between urbanization and security. Even if we observe some correlation between those two factors, it does not tell much about the nature of causation. It fails to explain how the links between urbanization and variables like life expectancy, nutrition, and literacy actually operate. No doubt, urbanization often contributes, and sometimes detracts from, the quality of people's lives, but we cannot tell by how much.

According to Gilbert, the very words "urbanization" and "security" do not mean a great deal because they embrace too many cross-cutting ideas and processes. The definition of "urbanization" is not universal since virtually every country in the world describes it somewhat differently. In the case of security, it is hard to define whether the term relates to international relations, national matters, the city, a neighborhood or an individual feeling of welfare.

Gilbert divides the existing literature on urbanization and security into eight popular theories or, in his words, "urban myths of our times." He reviews debates whether urbanization has positive or negative effects on the lives of city dwellers. Gilbert comes to the conclusion that a city's success or failure to create a secure environment depends on specific policies employed by the city government rather than urbanization itself. Secure urban development, therefore, is predominantly the outcome of policies – tools of government action-and urbanization is only a secondary explanation.

Urbanization and Security

by Alan Gilbert,

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Introduction

This paper will argue that no consistent or meaningful relationship exists between urbanization and security. First, the words "urbanization" and "security" do not mean a great deal because they embrace too many cross-cutting ideas and processes. Second, researchers have found few consistent correlations between the numerous dimensions of security and urbanization. Third, insofar as one can find a close correlation, independent variables usually account for the statistical relationship. Fourth, even when a direct correlation between security and urbanization exists, the direction of causation is by no means obvious. Finally, every country and every city contains so much internal variation that most generalizations across nations, let alone across regions, are rendered meaningless.

Of course, because urbanization does not produce poverty, crime, and political protest either automatically or inevitably does not mean that poorly managed urbanization cannot stimulate undesirable forms of social development. What is required across the globe, and particularly in the poorer parts of the world, are sensible urban policies backed by adequate resources. Providing that the shantytowns receive electricity and water, the poor have the opportunity to work, the transport system allows them to get to work, and urban wealth is not distributed so unequally that the system appears wholly inequitable, then cities will continue their historical role of helping to improve the human condition.

What is meant by "urbanization" and "security"?

The terms urbanization and urban development are often confused. Urban development, or urban growth, simply means an increase in the number of people living in urban areas. Insofar as urbanization is used as an analogy for urban development, it means precisely the same thing. But urbanization also has a more subtle meaning that conveys something about economic, social, and cultural change. It is part and parcel of the process of modernization—a phenomenon that involves a shift from agricultural to urban forms of work, a change in social relationships, and important modifications in family life. People change their lifestyles when they move from the countryside to the city.

None of this is especially complicated, although measuring it can be. It has never been very clear what

distinguishes an urban from a nonurban area. When I was at school in Britain, a handy definition was that a town had a Woolworth's; a city had a cathedral. Today, the first definition has ceased to be very helpful; perhaps McDonald's should be substituted for Woolworth's? Elsewhere such definitions are even less helpful. As a result, virtually every country around the world defines an urban area, a town, and a city somewhat differently. If we have difficulty defining an urban area, we will naturally have difficulty measuring the level and rate of urbanization (I will set aside the seemingly increasing difficulty that most countries have in actually counting people).

Perhaps the greatest problems, however, lie with interpreting the limited data that we have. Urbanization is a heterogeneous process, even in a single country. Life in a small town is very different from that in a huge city. Lifestyles among the urban poor are very different from those of the rich. Unfortunately, when writing about the effects of urbanization, many people only seem to think about large cities. And, within large cities, mental blinders often exclude large chunks of the population: the poor in the case of most planners and the middle class in the case of most academics. The quality of writing about urbanization is vitiated by value judgments and selective thinking.

However, certain problems in defining urbanization shrink into insignificance in the face of the problems involved in defining security. As usual, my Oxford English Dictionary is both useful and unhelpful. Security is "a secure condition or feeling," and secure means "untroubled by danger or fear; safe against attack; reliable." The major problem in defining the meaning of security is twofold. First, what variable is under discussion; if I feel insecure, what is the nature of my insecurity? The answer might be almost anything: nuclear warfare, unemployment, my savings, my roof falling in, my students rebelling, and so on. Second, there is the problem of scale. Does security relate to international relations, national matters, my particular city, my neighborhood, my street, my family, my household, or my individual feeling of welfare?

Once we narrow down the issue and the scale in question, then we may be better placed to measure the relationship between security and urbanization. Only then might we attempt to measure whether a particular form of security at a specific scale rises or falls with the level of urbanization, the rate of urban growth, the nature of the urban process, or the size of urban centers.

Links between urbanization and security

Table 1 represents an extremely tentative attempt to show some likely links between the level of urbanization and different manifestations of security. The number of question marks constitutes clear warning that this is a highly problematic exercise.

Table 1
Correlation between level of urban development and different types of security

	Impact of % living in urban areas nationally rising:			
	International	**National**	**City**	**Neighbourhood**
Economic security				
Proportion of non-poor	+	+	+	+
Economic growth	+	+	+	+
Equality	?	?	0	0
Access to employment	?	?	?	?
Political				
Democracy	+	+	+	+
Reduces riots	0	0	0	0
Social and cultural				
Infrastructure improvement	+	+	+	+
Level of literacy	+	+	+	+
Access to higher education	+	+	+	+
Access to entertainment	+	+	+	+
Safety				
Official violence	0	0	+	+
Decreasing political violence	0	0	0	0
Decreasing violent crime	0	0	0	0
Decreasing non violent crime	0	-	-	-
Safety against natural hazard	0	0	0	0
Safety against environmental threats	?	?	?	?
Pollution-free environment	-	-	?	?
Psychological				
Decreasing personal stress	?	?	?	?

Notes:
+ Improvement   U Deterioration then improvement
- Deterioration   0 Denotes no change
 ? Uncertain link

The number of plus signs suggests that urbanization is good. However, there are problems with such an interpretation. First, what may have been good for decades can change; after years of economic growth, rapid urbanization, and improving welfare, the debt crisis led to a serious deterioration in living standards in most parts of Africa, Latin America, and limited areas of Asia. Second, the impact of urban growth may vary according to its speed and the level of urbanization achieved. For example, the early stages of urban growth may lead to environmental deterioration, but later stages may lead to improvement. Life in urban Britain was probably worse in 1850 than in 1750 but much better in 1960 than in either 1750 or 1850. Third, the correlations depicted in the table tell us little about the nature of causation; the intervening variable of economic development is probably a better explanation of both urbanization and security than the latter are of one another.

Some urban myths of our times?

1. Migration to urban areas causes social anomie

Urbanization has frequently been portrayed as a social ill by novelists of the nineteenth century, such as Dickens, Hardy, and Zola, as well as many twentieth-century novelists from the Third World, such as Ngugi and Paton. Social scientists have often echoed this negative attitude toward urbanization, particularly when referring to the Third World city. Hoselitz (1957) compared the "generative" cities of the developed world to the "parasitic" cities of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. And, Lerner (1967: 24-25) condensed most forms of bias against urbanization as follows: "Every student of development is aware of the global spread of urban slums . . . that infest the metropolitan centers of every developing country from Cairo to Manila. . . . [T]his suffering mass of humanity displaced from the rural areas to the filthy periphery of the great cities . . . are neither housed, nor trained, nor employed, nor serviced. They are . . . a human flotsam and jetsam that has been displaced from traditional agricultural life without being incorporated into modern industrial life."

This flotsam and jetsam was doomed to live in desperate circumstances and develop some kind of "culture of poverty" in order to survive (That idea did not disappear with Oscar Lewis' discovery of Cuba). Speaking of contemporary Lima, Sánchez-León (1992: 201-2) declares that: "a large part of the population, particularly the children and young people, lives in poverty. These are the children of chaos, of poverty, and of urban violence. . . . [A] city like Lima produces an immense population with distinctive traits: people who know only despair; young people who live alongside criminals, and drug addicts, who may at any moment fall into prostitution; people who carry in their lungs a concentration of smog."

Relatively few social scientists share that view any longer. Innumerable studies have demonstrated that social anomie and mental dislocation are not the fate of most cityward migrants. We know that most migrants in poor countries move for sensible reasons and are equipped for urban life (Butterworth and Chance 1981; Roberts 1978; Gilbert and Gugler 1992). Once they arrive they stay with or are advised by family and friends (Doughty 1970; Mangin 1959; Gilbert and Ward 1986). Although some no doubt go off the rails, the majority get work, establish themselves in self-help communities, and manage to make the best of an unpromising situation. There is little sign of a "culture of poverty," "marginality," "irrationality," or "despair" (Perlman 1976; Portes 1972;

Roberts 1978; Mangin 1970). As Castells (1983: 175) once put it: "contrary to the expectations of those who believe in the myth of marginality and in spite of the fears of the world's establishment, social organization seems to be stronger than social deviance in these communities."

2. Shantytowns are hotbeds of radicalism

For those who recognized only the negative side of urban life, the political future looked bleak. The seething masses would one day revolt and overthrow the system. There would be protests, riots, and, in places, even revolution. In practice, there is limited evidence of such behavior and even those who have looked hopefully for signs of political radicalism have been forced to note its absence: "It is remarkable how few riots—even food riots—there have been in the great Latin American cities during a period in which the masses of their impoverished and economically marginal inhabitants multiplied, and inflation as often as not was uncontrolled" (Hobsbawm 1967: 56).

What quickly became clear was that the majority of the population was conservative. They were more interested in making good in the city than attempting to overthrow an admittedly rotten system. Certainly the consensus in the 1970s was that few revolutions would start in the city: "Few theories have been more widely held than that of slum radicalism. Few have met with more consistent rejection from empirical research. Studies in almost every Latin American capital have found leftist extremism to be weak, or even nonexistent, in peripheral slums" (Portes 1972: 282). Cornelius (1975: 167) underlined the patience and tactical nous of the urban poor: "demand articulation usually does not involve table-pounding, protest demonstrations, or other aggressive behavior." Subsequent studies have found political radicalism to be very thin on the ground (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Mainwaring 1989; van Garderen 1989; Roberts 1970).

Of course, a few Third World cities have experienced major protests and even riots over the years. But the incidence of protest is low because there are too many reasons why it has not been in the interest of the poor to kick up a fuss. For a start, most are extremely busy earning their living and building their own self-help homes. They may also face a hostile audience; many governments are anything but gentle in handling dissent, particularly in societies under authoritarian rule where repression is often extremely violent. At other times, the poor's inclination to riot is reduced by political patronage; politicians of every hue are adept at making promises and offering jobs and services in return for obedience (Gay 1990; Mainwaring 1989; Gilbert 1998).

3. A crisis of collective consumption causes urban social movements and revolution

In the 1970s, Manuel Castells' book, *The Urban Question* (1977) provided many radicals with theoretical justification for renewed hope in revolution. Clearly influenced by the events in Paris in 1968, he argued that as urbanization proceeded, urban life became more complicated. The private sector could not, or would not, cope with the demands for infrastructure and services. Only government involvement could begin to satisfy the basic needs of the population. The state would enter into the arena of the "collective means of production." Either it would invest in housing, infrastructure, and public services itself or it would persuade or subsidize the

private sector to do so. In intervening in this way, the state would inevitably polarize different interest groups and be drawn into an ever deepening political morass. The difficulties involved in supplying services would increase with rapid urban growth and be impossible to solve where most of the population were poor. Arbitration would become ever more difficult and, eventually, the state would be unable to satisfy most demands and urban protest would break out. If carefully channeled, these protests might develop into true social movements that would demand the radical restructuring of society.

During the 1970s, many "Marxists lost faith in the labor-proletariat as a vanguard of social change [and looked to the] huge masses of people living on illegal occupied land near the major urban centers" (van Garderen 1989: 27). Experience had increasingly shown that most trade unions did not play the revolutionary role expected of them. Therefore, it would be the urban masses, alienated by the lack of infrastructure and basic services, who would mobilize and challenge the state. The search for social movements was on.

In practice, most researchers found urban protests against specific actions or policies rather than urban movements. Many people might get upset about a specific problem, but few were interested in structural change. They were outraged about the quality of public services or about the introduction of wage freezes but had little awareness of the structural causes of their poverty. They wanted improvement for themselves and were not much interested in building up alliances with other neighborhoods or with the labor movement (Evers 1985).

A second Castells (1983) book recognized that there was little in the way of social movements in cities and political conservatism was the dominant feature of urban life. Some on the left accepted his argument and moved into other fields of inquiry, others denounced him for selling out. The latter group continued to discover social movements. Indeed, urban social movements seemed to appear out of a hat, almost by magic. Many Latin American and Latin Americanist scholars became excited by their discovery of protests emerging from the most diverse sources. Movements were "made up of young people, women, residential associations, church-sponsored 'grass-roots' communities, and similar groups" (Portes 1989: 36). They were perhaps best reflected in the community-based protests supported by the Church in Brazil, the collectives established in Chilean campamentos, and in the urban coalitions being built across Mexican cities (Boran 1989; Kowarick 1988; Kusnetzoff 1990; Schneider 1995; Haber 1990; Coulomb and Duhau 1989).

I have several doubts about these social movements. The first is whether they are essentially urban movements; although some have clearly been based in urban problems, many others were rural-based—for example, the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas in 1994, the Sem Terra movement in Brazil, and the guerrilla movements in Colombia and Peru. Second, are these movements sustainable or are they, as Evers (1989) argues, too anarchist and disorganized in nature to bring about real change? And, finally, are such protests responsible for as much change as has been attributed to them? For example, did the proliferation of social movements in Latin America in the 1980s bring about the return to democracy or was it merely an outcome of the rejection of totalitarian rule throughout society? Weakening authoritarian regimes were in no position to stop people protesting in the streets.

4. Austerity riots constitute a new form of urban social movement

There are others who also see signs of a turbulent future. Gizewski and Homer-Dixon (1995: 17) for example, believe that it will be the disenchanted young of the cities who will be the future dissidents: "Although rural-urban migration will continue and will, in many cases, magnify the social and economic problems of cities, it seems likely that the participants in urban violence will be urban born."

Such an interpretation is compatible with what some have designated the "austerity" or "IMF" riots that broke out during the 1980s as a result of the debt crisis. The terms laid down by structural adjustment were alienating the previously passive urban dweller. According to Walton (1989: 309), austerity led to "an unprecedented wave of international protest; unprecedented in the scope and essentially singular cause of a global protest analogous to earlier national strike waves." These "modern austerity protests begin in the mid-1970s, first in Peru and then Egypt. We shall define austerity protest as large-scale collective actions including political demonstrations, general strikes, and riots, which are animated by grievances over state policies of economic liberalization implemented in response to the debt crisis and market reforms urged by international agencies" (Seddon and Walton 1993: 39).

The riots broke out because of general disappointment and outrage at sudden rises in fares, food prices, and unemployment and sudden falls in real incomes, subsidies, and future prospects. Frequently, it was the suddenness with which IMF policies were implemented that provoked outrage (Drake 1989: 53-54). Sometimes, as in Caracas in 1989 or in Rio de Janeiro in 1987, it was because recently elected and trusted politicians suddenly changed their economic strategies (Hellinger 1991; Roett 1988). No doubt, too, the limited resources now available to the public sector reduced the opportunities for politicians to buy off opposition (Roxborough 1987: 107). For me, perhaps the key factor was that there were fewer autocratic governments likely to send in the troops.

However, even if we accept that there was a wave of austerity riots, this does not mean that there will be political instability in urban areas in the future. The rate of economic growth in most parts of the Third World has been higher in the 1990s than in the 1980s. If there is a relationship between the pace of economic growth and social protest, faster growth will reduce the amount of protest.

But perhaps the most significant question is whether the austerity riots were essentially urban in nature. Did they occur mainly in urban areas because the population was more prone to protest than in rural areas or because the urban authorities were less able to use force in a democratic society? Or is the fact that most such riots occurred in the cities not a simple outcome of the nature of the debt crisis, which hit the cities much harder than the rural areas (Gilbert 1992; Cohen 1990)? As O'Connor (1993: 117) argues in the African context: "Cuts in government spending . . . affected the cities more than the rural areas, partly because such spending has been heavily concentrated there. City hospitals reliant on the government health budget naturally feel the impact

more directly than traditional healers in remote rural areas. The breakdown of electricity supplies is of more concern to urban residents and enterprises than to most in rural areas." It is logical that protest would be greatest where austerity measures hit hardest. It is also a fact that the countries most affected by IMF policies were the most urbanized countries of the Third World. The riots occurred where most people lived.

But not every city that was badly affected by austerity programs suffered from riots. In Mexico City, for example, where policy measures "resulted in abrupt price increases in basic foods and transportation," the population did not resort to "riots, looting, street demonstrations, and other forms of protest" (Eckstein 1990: 176). Why this should be the case can only be explained by local political and social circumstances. And Walton (1998) is clearly correct when he argues that we need to know much more about the different circumstances that either cause or fail to cause conflict to break out.

5. Urbanization encourages the development of democracy

Modernization theory suggested that a series of social, economic, and cultural processes were linked to industrialization. Urbanization and the rise of democratic government were prominent examples of the kinds of change that could be expected to follow from industrialization: "economic development, industrialization, urbanization, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and of a middle class, the development of a working class and its early organization, and the gradual decrease in economic inequality all seem to have played some role in the movements toward democratization in northern European countries in the nineteenth century" (Huntington 1991: 39). Africa, Asia, and Latin America were expected to follow this example and become more democratic as they became more developed. Table 2 provides a measure of quantitative support for modernization theory by showing how, at the beginning of the 1990s, most developed countries were broadly democratic while most of the least developed countries still labored under totalitarian regimes.

Table 2
Economic development and third-wave democratization

1976 per capita income ($US)	Democratic in 1974	Democratized or liberalized 1974-89	Non-democratic	Total countries
<250	1	2	31	34
250-1000	3	11	27	41
1001-3000	5	16	5	26
>3000	18	2	3	23
Total	27	31	66	124

Source: Huntington (1991: 62)

Unfortunately, many analyses have demonstrated that the path from totalitarian to democratic government is narrow and prone to disappear. In most parts of Africa, the path has never appeared on any map, and in Latin America, regular military incursions have blocked the path for decades at a time. Table 3 shows that in practice the tide of global democracy has ebbed and flowed.

Table 3
Democratization in the modern world

Year	% democratic states	Total states
1922	45.3	64
1942	19.7	61
1962	32.4	111
1973	24.6	122
1990	45.0	129

Source: Huntington (1991: 26)

Had there been a simple correlation between economic development, urbanization, and democratization, the results in Table 3 would have been different. In practice, only urbanization among the three processes has continued uninterrupted. Economic development effectively stopped in Africa between 1970 and 1990 and in Latin America during the 1980s. Urbanization in Latin America was loosely associated with increased numbers of democratic governments during the 1960s, but the 1970s produced urbanization and totalitarian rule (Hartlyn and Morley 1986; O'Donnell 1973).

Of course, there is plenty of evidence that urbanization encourages political liberalism and sets in motion a whole series of forces that change societal attitudes. Over the years, many Colombians moved to the city and shifted their political allegiance from the Conservatives to the Liberals. According to Huntington (1991: 98), urbanization helped to undermine racially based government in South Africa: "Apartheid was compatible with a relatively poor rural economy: it was not compatible with a complex, wealthy, urban commercial and industrial economy." The problem is that under conditions of economic dependency, urbanization can point up contradictions that help to destroy democracy. The history of the rise of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Latin America after 1964 is ample testimony to that fact (O'Donnell 1973; Skidmore and Smith 1997; Tulchin and Bland 1995). Similarly, if urbanization helped destroy apartheid, it also played an important role in creating it.

Fortunately, the totalitarian wave has ebbed (temporarily?) in Latin America and democracy has returned to South Africa. However, it is difficult to argue that the return of democracy was brought about by the angry urban poor. According to Huntington (1991: 67), the working class, let alone the lumpenproletariat, were not in the vanguard of change: "Third-wave movements for democratization were not led by landlords, peasants, or (apart from Poland) industrial workers. In virtually every country the most active supporters of democratization came from the urban middle class."

Huntington's argument suggests that urbanization and development lead to democracy rather than to revolution. This is not, or at least was not, the belief of the radical left who hoped that capitalist development would lead sooner or later to social revolution. But history has tended to suggest that most revolutions have been fostered in the countryside, and that even when the urban poor have participated, they have rarely been among the leaders of radical political change. The differences between Marx and Mao on this issue are well known, as well as the fate of Che Guevara in the depths of rural Bolivia; but to me there appears to be little evidence in support of a unilineal link between urbanization and revolution. Perhaps the safest conclusion is that it is impossible to generalize because there are so few true social revolutions on which to base reliable judgment.

6. Urbanization reduces living standards

Despite fears, urbanization was long associated with an increase in most households' level of economic security. Certainly, the figures suggest that the average person living in urban areas lives better than those in rural areas (Table 4). We also know that most migrants tell researchers that they have moved to the city because of better opportunities for employment (Butterworth and Chance 1981; Gilbert and Gugler 1992; Cornelius 1975). Theory also suggested that inequality would fall with urbanization and economic development (Kuznets 1955).

Table 4
Rural and urban poverty (% households)

Country	Area	Year	Poor	Extremely poor
Brazil	Urban	1990	39	17
	Rural	1990	56	31
Colombia	Urban	1992	23	10
	Rural	1992	51	31
Costa Rica	Urban	1990	22	7
	Rural	1990	25	12
Venezuela	Urban	1990	33	11
	Rural	1990	38	17
Latin America	Urban	1990	34	13
	Rural	1990	53	30

Sources: Altimir (1994: 11-12) and World Bank (1994: 200)

Unfortunately, the 1980s threatened to change that situation. In Latin America, stabilization policies led to poverty increasing in most urban areas and declining in many parts of the countryside (Altimir 1994:11; UNDIESA 1989:39). In certain cities, the combination of rapid inflation and structural adjustment hit the urban poor very hard. In Peru, for example, "in 1985-86 one out of every 8 residents of Lima were poor, but by 1990 more than half were poor" (Glewwe and Hall 1992: 25).

For some, increasing urban poverty was a temporary problem that would be resolved once structural adjustment had corrected macroeconomic distortions (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991; Edwards 1995). The New Economic Model would stop inflation, the most significant poverty tax, and would eventually lead to economic expansion and the creation of more work. In practice, the economic conditions of the 1990s, although undoubtedly better for the urban poor than those of the 1980s, have often failed to raise living standards.

As the Inter-American Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme (1993: 1) point out: "The tendency for income to concentrate in the wealthiest sectors has not only continued, it has also intensified. An additional result of the crisis and of some of the stabilisation and adjustment measures, is that broad segments of the middle-income sectors and most of the workers in the industrial and service sectors have slipped below the poverty line, while conditions for their access to housing and basic health care and education services worsened."

What many fear is that under the new conditions of global competition, economic growth will not create enough work and will reward only those with the requisite skills to sell in the marketplace (Klak 1989; Tardanico and Menjívar-Larín 1997). There are signs that if the New Economic Model does not necessarily increase absolute poverty, it increases the differences between the rich and the poor. The evidence is that this is occurring in the United States, in Britain, and in most parts of the Third World (Philips 1991; Tardanico and Menjívar-Larín 1997; Londoño and Szekeley 1997). Clearly, there will be places that will not be able to compete in the global marketplace and there it is feasible that urban poverty may well increase. The rise in urban unemployment in the very different circumstances of Argentina and South Africa suggests that this could become a real problem (Tardanico and Menjívar-Larín 1997; May 1998; Nattrass 1998). It is possible that in the future we will see growing evidence of a link between urban poverty and urban growth. Arguably, in much of Africa, that link has been very evident for the last twenty-five years (O'Connor 1993; Stren and White 1989; UNDIESA 1989).

7. Urbanization increases crime

"It is held as a matter of common sense that the main cause of violence in society is urban development and the growth of huge cities. This conviction has deep roots that go back to the wave of urbanization that started in the twelfth century and the resulting polarization between town and country" (Pinheiro 1993: 3).

Pinheiro does not believe that urbanization is the cause of crime; nor do I. Unfortunately, it is difficult to present any reliable evidence either way because in most countries the figures on crime are desperately unreliable. Many people do not report crimes to the police, the police only record certain kinds of crime, different police forces record crimes in different ways, and politicians manipulate the figures according to the argument they wish to demonstrate. In Britain, the statistics are so poor that it is not even certain whether crime levels are rising or falling over time. If that is true in a country where many people report crime because they are insured, where there is broad trust in the police and where the police are expected to tabulate the crimes reported to them, what is the situation like elsewhere?

Despite the statistical problems, it is likely that certain forms of crime are more common in urban areas if only because urban people are more affluent and therefore have more to steal than their rural compatriots. The limited figures available for developed countries suggest that crime is more common in urban areas than in the countryside (Richardson 1973: 102). However, this does not mean a great deal because there are such important variations in crime rates between urban and rural areas. Within the same country, some cities are much safer than others, and within cities most suburbs are very much safer than many inner city areas. In Britain, crime rates in certain "sink" estates are horrifyingly high, in the suburbs of most towns and cities crime is relatively uncommon. The nature of crime also varies by area (not many tractors are stolen from the center of Manchester, even if a lot of other things are).

In any case, there would appear to be no obvious logical connection between urbanization and crime levels. Like most of the other supposed linkages discussed here, crime is predominantly the outcome of a range of social factors and urbanization is only a secondary explicator. This is clear if we look at variations in crime rates across urbanized countries. In some parts of the world, such as the Middle East, most urban areas are largely free of crime; in Latin America, the United States, and South Africa, many urban areas are major crime centers.

Even when crime levels rise in urban areas, it is difficult to associate that rise with urbanization per se. For instance, the rapid rise in crime that has been noted in so many Latin American cities during the 1980s and 1990s (Green 1995: 203) can hardly be blamed on urban growth since the pace of urbanization has been slower during the 1980s than it was during the 1970s. The same is true in Western Europe. Another explanation of rising crime might be found in the employment situation or the level of poverty. In fact, there is no clear link; in Britain at least, crime rises and occasionally falls without any clear relationship with rising poverty or unemployment. It is more likely that crime is a cultural phenomenon, and that in the increasingly unequal globalized world of today, many view crime as the only way to obtain their rights to the good life (Amis 1994). A further explanation, at least in some societies, is that crime is linked to drugs. As the level of use rises, addicts need to steal in order to feed their habit (some estimates in Britain blame addicts for up to one-half of the robberies committed).

If general levels of crime are probably higher in urban areas than in the countryside, this is much less true of murder and violence. However, received wisdom points in precisely the opposite direction: "From Los Angeles to New Delhi, urban crime statistics reveal that not only is the incidence of violence becoming more frequent but the nature of those crimes more heinous" (Hasan 1993: 1). While not denying that urban violence is often on the rise, Archer and Gartner's (1984: 105-7) figures suggest that violent crime in Third World countries is just as common in rural areas as in the cities. And, if we include political and official violence in the category of crime, it is likely that many rural areas are much less safe than most urban areas. In Colombia, most people are much safer from paramilitaries, guerrillas, and drug gangs if they are living in the cities; the flood of people out of many "battle" zones is ample testimony to that fact. In Peru, when the Shining Path was at its most effective, it was the countryside that was most dangerous. Only later did some of the violence spread to Lima (Riofrío 1996).

The violence associated with drug production and trafficking is of course found in both urban and rural areas. Parts of Colombia are virtually no-go areas, and the level of violence in Medellín in the years preceding Pablo Escobar's death reached truly frightening proportions: 34 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 1992. Similarly, the drug trafficking going on in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro is generally blamed for the recent rise in violence in that city. Since Rio's population is growing relatively slowly, it is unlikely that the murder rate is associated with the process of urbanization.

Unfortunately, whenever crime and violence rise, politicians, journalists, and the general public are all eager to attribute the rise to some clear culprit. Thus in different countries crime seems to be rising because of drugs, the arrival of too many people from the countryside, foreign immigration, illegal immigration, alcohol, gangs, social exclusion, poor policing, or the nature of capitalism (Amis 1994; Pinheiro 1993; Archer and Gartner 1984). All I am prepared to say is that crime is a sin of society. Of course, this makes it an "urban" phenomenon insofar as most societies are becoming increasingly urban. But, if we attribute growing crime to urbanization, we are falling again into the trap of confusing causation with correlation.

8. Big cities make every kind of problem worse

Aristotle is said to have believed that in a healthy democracy every citizen should know every other, and that Plato "set the number of citizens in his ideal city at 5,040" (Max-Neef 1992). Most social observers since, and certainly most politicians, have come out with similar nonsense about city size. Certainly very large cities have rarely been popular with decision makers. Queen Elizabeth I wanted to stop London's "excessive" growth when it contained around 100,000 people, and the proliferation of new cities from Brasília and Dodoma to Milton Keynes suggests that the attitude of modern politicians has not been very different (Gilbert and Gugler 1992).

However, despite the frequency with which urban size and social pathologies are linked, it is difficult to determine objectively whether there is any connection or not. Even if sufficient data existed, the fundamental problem of how to separate the effects of size from those of other variables would remain (Richardson 1973). Research studies examining the relationship have produced little in the way of reliable results. The problem is easy to demonstrate. Although Los Angeles, New York, and Rio de Janeiro are giant cities that have terrible crime rates, other megacities, such as Tokyo and Cairo, do not suffer from a great deal of crime. Nor is there any clear relationship within countries between city size and the quality of life. To continue with the example of crime, violence is worse in Rio than in the much larger São Paulo, worse in Detroit than in New York, and more common in six other Colombian cities than in Bogotá (Richardson 1973; Coyuntura Social August 1993: 32).

Equally problematic for the relationship between social pathology and urban size is that some large cities suffer from different problems than other cities of similar size. Some big cities have a great deal of poverty whereas others do not; some have terrible traffic congestion and others less. Most of the differences can be attributed to intervening variables. Air pollution is worst in cities with a great deal of manufacturing industry (Shanghai, Seoul, and São Paulo), that use coal as a domestic and industrial fuel (Shanghai and most Eastern European cities), and that suffer from temperature inversions (Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo). Other large cities experience less air pollution (UNEP 1992). Certainly the debate about optimum city size suggests that urban problems are not generally worse in giant cities, except possibly with respect to traffic congestion, land prices, and nonviolent crime.

In addition, very large cities have certain advantages over smaller cities with respect to economic performance and service provision (Richardson 1973). This is reflected in the fairly common finding that the incidence of poverty is less marked in large than in small cities. For example, a United Nations study in the mid-1980s found that levels of poverty in Bogotá, San José, Panama City, Lima, Montevideo, and Caracas were all lower than those found in other urban areas of their respective countries (Fresneda 1991: 164; Bolvinik 1991).

Overall, therefore, the case for or against megacities is inconclusive. However, even if the case were made, this kind of analysis would not take us very far given that it takes no account of government policy. For many years, Latin American governments tended to pamper their largest cities. Not only did such cities contain a significant proportion of active voters, they also had most of the gossiping classes. Insofar as the largest cities were also capital cities, governments were particularly sensitive to protest in their own backyards. Megacities needed to be placated and, consequently, large cities did well in terms of government spending. Large city bias meant that rich and poor alike were treated rather better there than their cousins elsewhere. If research showed that the poor in Mexico City did better than the poor in Veracruz or Oaxaca, the only sensible conclusion might be that "megacity size is not a critical policy variable" and therefore "effective megacity management is much more critical than megacity size" (Richardson 1993: 52).

Conclusion

I have been forced by the evidence to come to the extremely boring conclusion that there are few clear linkages between urbanization and most dimensions of security. This is true at most levels of analysis, across most countries, and over time. Even when correlations can be found, they do not explain much. This key point can be illustrated by a trite example. Personal security is higher in the most urbanized countries than in the least urbanized countries. It is safer, in terms of most social and economic variables, to live in Britain, Japan, or Switzerland than to live in most parts of Africa or India. People live longer, eat better, and are more literate in more urbanized countries than in less urbanized countries. But, what does this correlation prove? It proves absolutely nothing about the link between urbanization and security because it fails to explain how the links between urbanization and variables like life expectancy, nutrition, and literacy actually operate. No doubt, urbanization often contributes, and sometimes detracts from, the quality of people's lives, but we cannot tell by how much.

If we are interested in the link between urbanization and different forms of security, we should be asking different questions. Why do some cities have more people living in poverty than others with similar levels of per-capita income? Why is it that crime and violence are particularly high in one city and very low in another? Why are living conditions for the majority so much better in some cities than in others? Comparing broadly comparable cities, why do some do well and some badly on a particular indicator of welfare and security?

Perhaps most critical of all is to examine why, despite our hugely impressive economic and technological progress over the last century, we have not done a better job in removing poverty. Why are so many urban people living so badly and why is inequality increasing rather than decreasing? Unfortunately, I suspect that we know the answer to that question and the answer does not have much to do with urbanization. Sending the proletariat back to the countryside or bringing the peasants to the city is not going to make a huge difference.

What will make a difference is to introduce policies that give people hope for a better future, assuring them that their children will lead better lives than they have. Satisfying that criterion requires that they have access to work, services, and transport. It requires seldom disrupting their lives by extreme events, preventing human-induced disasters, ensuring that the economic situation does not fluctuate violently, guaranteeing that governments are not constantly changing, and making sure that prices are under control. Satisfying my criterion for ensuring "security" also requires fairness, not in the sense of total equality, but in giving everyone some kind of life chance and removing any perception that everything is loaded against the disadvantaged. In turn, this means that crime must be under control, that there be a relatively efficient and honest police force, that blatant forms of social discrimination are reduced, and that people with genuine complaints have someone in power to whom

they can appeal with some expectation that something will be done. Of course, rather few cities in the world satisfy most of the conditions on that list. Nevertheless, in a rapidly urbanizing world, it is only by satisfying those conditions that we can be sure that business will proceed as usual. Otherwise, what has in the past been predominantly a process of sustained, harmonious, and secure urban development, will not remain so in the future.

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