



WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

PUBLIC POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE INCREASE IN VIOLENT CRIME IN LATIN AMERICA

Carlos Basombrío Iglesias



LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM





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IN LATIN AMERICA**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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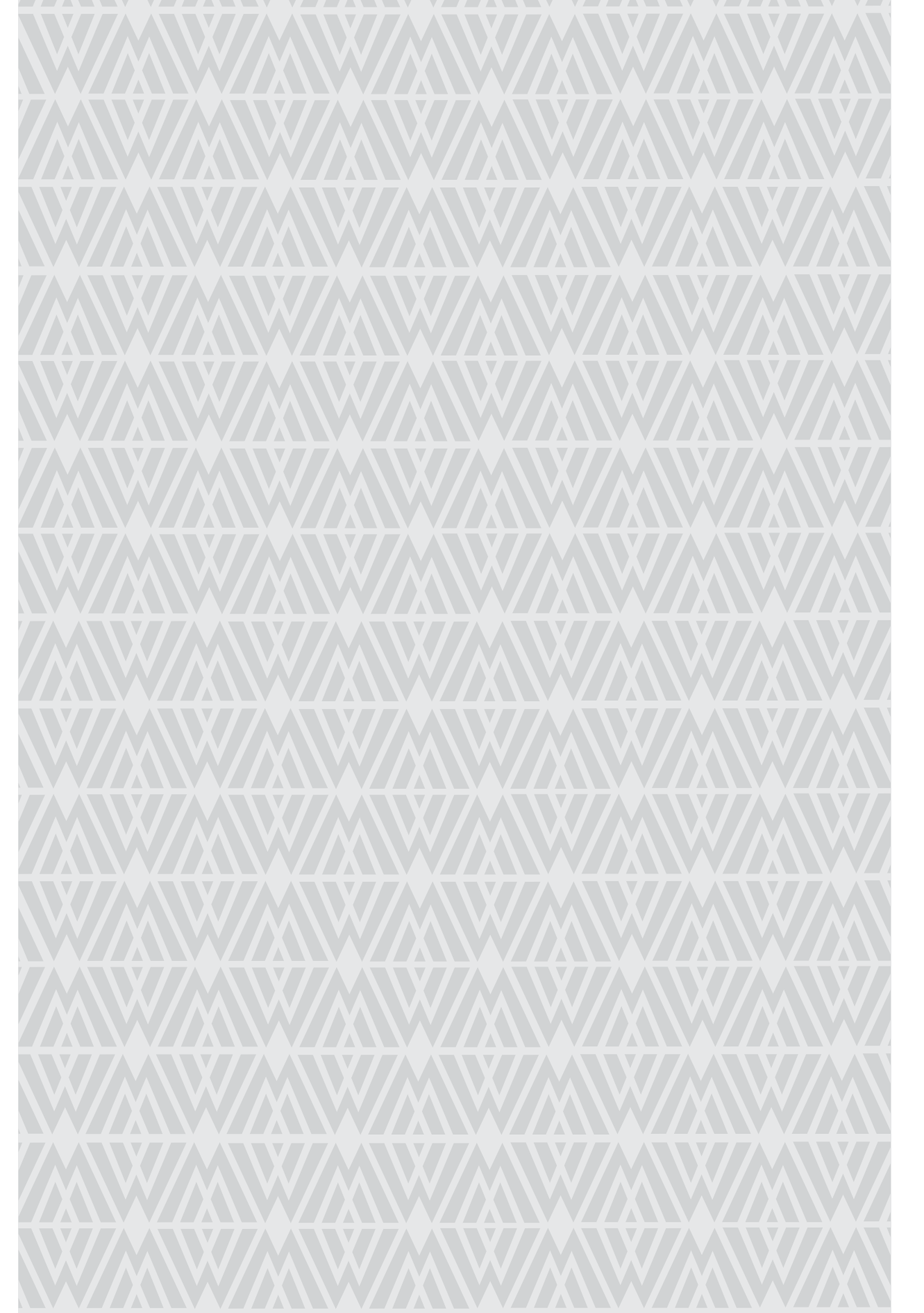
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Riot police, Lima, Peru

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INTRODUCTION

Over a period of the last two decades or more, multiple manifestations of crime and social violence in Latin America have progressively worsened. Today Latin America is, in terms of crime, the most violent region in the world. With each passing day, crime is more at the center of public concerns and the focus of citizens' demands on the state. This is true not only in the countries with the most serious crime problems; it is also true in countries where the situation is not as severe but where the frequency of violent incidents and the sense of vulnerability, impunity, and deterioration create a heightened perception of insecurity. This perception of insecurity is at times higher than in the countries where levels of crime are the worst.

In a study by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), *Gobernabilidad y convivencia democrática en América Latina (Governance and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America)*, researchers conducted surveys in major cities of 18 Latin American countries. In response to the question, "How often do you worry about becoming the victim of a violent crime?" 65.9 percent of those surveyed said that they were "always" or "almost always" worried about becoming a victim of violent crime.

The polling firm Latinobarómetro, which has followed the issue of citizen security since 1995, reports that on average both victimization and the perception of insecurity in the region have worsened year after year. Notably, the gap between perception and reality decreased to only four percent in 2010.

We are faced with one of the most serious and intractable problems in the region; and the contrast with other serious problems in Latin America is notable. For example, notwithstanding the vigorous debates over the best economic development model in the region, there is no question that Latin America as a whole is at least somewhat better off economically than it was two decades ago. Similarly, the data on poverty reduction as well as certain improvements in the quality of education, health, and infrastructure demonstrate that the region is to some extent less unjust and exclusionary than before.

The perception with respect to insecurity in Latin America, however, is that nothing that has been done has shown results, that we are taking blind stabs at the problem and that it has only become worse and more unmanageable. This explains why insecurity has increasingly overcome a combination of economic concerns to be perceived as the principal problem faced by citizens in the region.

This study does not attempt to downplay the seriousness of the situation or the deterioration of citizen security in Latin America; nor does it pretend that the public policies adopted thus far have been sufficiently effective or that it is only a matter of time until they are. Rather, the goal is to break with a simplistic view of reality and paint a broad overview of the various initiatives taken by states, civil society, and the international community to improve citizen security.

The pages that follow consider multiple actions and measures, not always complementary and in my view, frequently contradictory; at times, some have even been outright counterproductive. I consider actions that have been taken by the state, by organized civil society, and by the civilian population at large, along with the role of other important actors such as the media, the churches, and universities. The fundamental purpose of this study is to demonstrate that much has been done. Hence, any analysis or public policy decision should be based on an understanding and evaluation of what has already been attempted. In light of current results, it is clear that the responses to date have been inadequate or have failed altogether. At the same time, there have been some positive developments at certain times and in certain circumstances. We can learn much from what has been attempted.

What follows serves to demonstrate the diversity as well as the complexity of what has occurred.

I. MANO DURA ("IRON FIST") POLICIES

As crime has worsened, Latin American states have systematically turned to a set of policies known generally as *mano dura* or “iron fist.” Whether or not these policies are appropriate or effective, it is important to note that they differ substantively from the other responses discussed below in that they are legal measures. In most cases, these policies are imbued with political legitimacy and respond to strong social pressures to be tough on crime.

Mano dura policies are founded on the assumption that governments have been too weak in their response to crime. Policies that afford too many rights to the accused or that rely exclusively on the police are seen as favoring criminals while leaving society unprotected. In areas where this theory has been put into practice, the argument is that an “iron fist” approach not only punishes offenders more appropriately but also serves as a deterrent to new crimes.

Mano dura policies can be divided into four general types, not all of which are necessarily applied.

HARSHER SENTENCES AND NEW CATEGORIES OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

These policies stem from the belief that sanctions for many crimes are too light and that tougher sentences will serve to deter crime, teach criminals a lesson, and satisfy victims’ desire for justice.

In addition to seeking harsher sentences, proponents of this view advocate the criminalization of actions not usually considered punishable crimes. One well-known example is criminalizing the mere fact of being a member of a youth gang. Supporters of this this policy argue that it will serve as a deterrent, dissuading youth from joining gangs in the future. El Salvador’s “anti-gang law” is an example of such a measure.

Critics of this type of legislation are not necessarily opposed to longer prison terms; they argue that the principal problem is not the severity of the sentences but rather, the inability of the criminal justice system to

make them effective. Such critics point to rates of impunity that often approach 100 percent even for the most serious crimes.

A different criticism of this policy has to do with the counterproductive effects of what is called “sentence inflation” or “punitive populism.” This theory holds that if the prison sentence for a lesser crime approaches the same magnitude as that for a more egregious offense, the system creates a perverse incentive to commit atrocious crimes. For example, if the punishment for theft is on par with that for murder, a criminal may find it a safer bet to kill the person he robs rather than run the risk of being identified by that person later.

A third criticism is that criminalizing gang membership only strengthens the bonds of solidarity inside the gangs, thereby making them more inaccessible. Placing gangs entirely outside the law makes them more vulnerable to the influence of organized crime.

REDUCTIONS IN THE AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY

The protections and safeguards for children and youth established by Article 40 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are reflected in the national laws of most Latin American countries. The incorporation of the principles of this Convention into local legislation requires that crimes committed by minors (usually defined as individuals under the age of eighteen) be treated differently than crimes committed by adults. Minors must be given special treatment and included in processes of rehabilitation.

Increasingly, however, crimes are being committed by younger and younger offenders. There is strong criticism of the fact that these youth—often in collusion with adults who use them for criminal purposes—are unduly benefitting from legislation that was created for other contexts. For this reason, there is a strong tendency in Latin America towards reducing the age of criminal responsibility. Various proposals have ignited intense debates that polarize public opinion.

SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN THE SIZE OF THE PRISON POPULATION

In general, the number of people incarcerated in Latin America is relatively low in comparison to the size of the overall population, and lower still relative to the high levels of crime in the region. This, in turn, is a reflection of the extreme ineffectiveness of the judicial system. We are very far from the situation in the United States, which, with almost 3 million people in prison, has the highest per capita prison population in the world. The fact that the United States has a relatively high level of personal security—at least as compared to Latin America—has become part of an argument used by those favoring tougher criminal sanctions: criminals should spend as much time as possible in jail so that they can't go out and commit even more crimes. This argument notwithstanding, it is difficult to isolate a single causal factor behind a reduction in crime, let alone to show that higher rates of incarceration lead to crime reduction.

In general terms, the size of the prison population is only one of the pervasive problems at every level of the penitentiary system in Latin America. According to the United Nations Development Program, while only 145 out of every 100,000 citizens of the region are in jail, approximately 54 percent of those imprisoned have never been convicted in a court of law; worse still, they are kept in prisons filled to nearly 140 percent of capacity.

With extremely low budgets, high levels of corruption, horrific levels of overcrowding, deplorable health conditions, a lack of criteria for classifying different types of criminals, and virtually no rehabilitation programs, Latin American jails are part of the problem rather than part of the solution to crime and violence in the region.

Indeed, in many countries criminal organizations remain intact and grow even stronger inside the jails. Many of the crimes committed on the outside are planned and directed from inside the prison. A final problem has to do with the way that minor offenders are converted to hardened criminals during their time in the penitentiary system.

SECURITY FORCES

Latin America has a complicated history with respect to the role of the military. Most countries in the region have been governed by the military at some point, either because the armed forces acted on its own or because it had the support of civilians willing to cede to an authoritarian temptation. The region's return to democracy is still very recent, and the armed forces' new role as subordinate to civil authority is still being worked out, with a great deal of effort as well as ups and downs.

As a result of this now prolonged wave of insecurity that has ravaged the region, many voices have clamored for the military to assume a supporting or even leading role in protecting citizens from crime. The perception that the police have failed has prompted some Latin American countries to once again employ the armed forces in policing roles. This is facilitated by the fact that in the majority of countries, the armed forces enjoy higher rates of approval and legitimacy than other state institutions such as the police, the judicial system, or the public prosecutor's office.

It is important to point out that in some countries the presence of the military on the streets has an important symbolic value for the population and that the use of the military in police roles enjoys high levels of acceptance. One can thus not rule out that similar alternatives will be discussed in other places where crime has worsened.

None of this implies that the military necessarily shares the vision regarding its new role. In some cases, the military views the situation as an opportunity to re-legitimize its role in society and obtain a larger budget. In other cases, however, the armed forces view such interventions as risky both politically and legally, especially against the backdrop of sanctions imposed at the end of dictatorships and/or internal armed conflicts.

Critics of military participation in citizen security point out several problems. The first is that it represents a significant political step backwards with respect to role of the armed forces in internal security matters, a role which led in the past to massive human rights violations.

A second important criticism has to do with the uniqueness of police functions and the military's lack of preparation in the citizen security arena. Modern police forces aim to protect the rights and liberties of citizens; the armed forces are trained to confront and destroy their enemies. This kind of military training is as it should be, but to apply this logic to the problems of citizen security can have very negative consequences.

There are those of us who maintain that what is at stake is how to assign priorities and functions in a comprehensive way. This is difficult to do in practice because the military has so much *de facto* power in many of our countries. However, an objective evaluation of the real threats to citizens and to the state indicates that, in most cases, a police, not a military response, is required. The real issue is to have a public discussion about spending priorities, not to embark on the false path toward greater military involvement. This only de-professionalizes the armed forces, obliging them to operate in an unfamiliar arena for which they have not been trained, all the while postponing the necessary strengthening and professionalization of the police.

In the abstract, having more well-trained police together with a smaller but well-prepared military nucleus would appear to be a more sensible alternative. But that formula does not take into account the strength of the "de facto" power of the armed forces and the weight of authoritarian traditions in the region that ascribe to the military a tutelary role in our lives.

II. ILLEGAL PRACTICES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The outbreak of criminal activity in Latin American cities in the 1970s and 1980s occurred at a time when most countries of the region were still controlled by authoritarian governments or had only incipient cultures of respect for democracy and human rights. This facilitated the adoption of a number of illegal practices that openly violated human rights, many of which continue into the present.

THE PHYSICAL ELIMINATION OF PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF COMMITTING CRIMES

Both the state and groups in society considered it possible (and acceptable) to do away with the problem of crime by “eliminating” the perpetrators. This mentality led to the development, especially in some cities of Brazil and Colombia, of social cleansing strategies carried out by secret death squads. According to all indications and suspicions, these death squads were made up of police officers who killed those suspected of involvement in a specific crime or those who were considered future criminals based on their social and family situations, ways of life, etc.

The most horrendous examples of such practices took place in Rio de Janeiro with the extermination of children and teenagers, but large-scale social cleansing operations also took place in Medellín, Bogotá, and Cali against so-called “disposable people.” Similar operations must also have been carried out on a smaller scale in other cities and countries, but the information on these other cases is less systematic.

Twenty years later, practices with these same characteristics continue in Latin America, although less systematically. The extrajudicial executions of petty criminals, the torture of detainees, and trials based on fabricated evidence have not disappeared. Nor have actions against people who are merely suspected of being criminals because their demeanor coincides with some stereotype.

In its *Report on Citizen Security and Human Rights*, the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights indicated that “citizen secu-

rity policies historically implemented in many states of the Americas are characterized in general terms by their divergence from international human rights standards and in many cases, the authorities have resorted to the illegal and arbitrary use of force in the name of crime prevention and control.” The report goes on to say that, “despite the political transitions and the adoption of constitutional and legal reforms, the institutional apparatuses linked to the security forces retain authoritarian characteristics and the judicial mechanisms charged with ensuring transparency and accountability remain weakened. All in all, the institutions associated with the judicial branch, the prosecutor’s office, the police, and the prison system have not developed the capacity to respond effectively to crime and violence through legitimate actions of prevention and enforcement.”

Several factors have contributed to a significant decline in illegal operations, such that they are now more marginal as well as concealed. The first was a strong reaction from Latin American societies in the countries where these practices were occurring. There was both moral repudiation of the methods and compassion for the victims, guilty and innocent alike. This rejection by society was backed by the intense condemnation by the international community which served to support the denunciations of local human rights groups.

A second reason for the decrease in illegal methods was that, in addition to being illegal and immoral, they were ineffective and counterproductive. None of the cities in which these brutal practices were carried out experienced a reduction in criminal activity. Among the dead there were probably as many innocents as there were criminals, but criminal activity continued with equal or greater intensity.

Thus, even if illegal methods continue to some extent, they have been socially delegitimized. There may still be defenders of such methods, but in general they have been forced to disguise or conceal their points of view.

ILLEGAL REGULATION OF CRIME BY THE POLICE

Another manifestation of illegal practices in response to crime is the collusion of certain sectors of the police with criminal activity. This collusion ranges from simple acts of corruption that protect criminals from

arrest or help set them free, to the direct involvement of police bodies or sectors of the police in criminal activities themselves, “regulating crime” often in collusion with corrupt political sectors.

VIGILANTISM (“LYNCHINGS”)

A final illegal practice arises from the desperate reaction of populations who receive very little protection from the state and who feel powerless to confront the crime that takes away the few material possessions they have and puts their lives and tranquility at risk. I am referring to the widespread practice of taking vigilante action against criminals (or suspected criminals) in rural communities or in poor cities of many countries of Latin America. Notorious cases have occurred in Guatemala, Ecuador, and in the highlands of Peru and Bolivia.

There is no evidence that vigilantism has actually solved the crime problems or alleviated the concerns of people in the places where it has occurred; but it creates an additional problem. Since these populations have knowingly acted outside the law, they tend to have a much more distant relationship with the state. This, in turn, generates fertile conditions for other kinds of criminal activities.

III. THE PRIVATIZATION OF SECURITY

One of the most widespread responses of society to the lack of security has been the effort to obtain in outside the actions of the state.

The growth of private security companies to protect the assets of companies and to guarantee the safety of wealthy citizens has been enormous throughout in Latin America in recent years. In 2007 there were an estimated 2.5 million private security guards in the region. Sales in Latin America of the leading international security firms are estimated to be some \$23 billion, fully 24.5 percent of the total income of these firms.

Recent studies show a growth in the supply of private security around the world. These investigations indicate that in the period before the current international economic crisis, private commercial or industrial enterprises in the security field in the world's largest markets had extraordinary growth rates – between 8 and 9 percent from 2001 to 2005. These figures represent twice the rate of growth of the world economy as a whole and are bested only by growth in the automobile industry during that period. In Latin America, the market for private security goods and services has grown at an estimated 11 percent over the last 15 years.

In some Latin American countries, many more people are employed by private security companies than in government police forces. In some extreme cases like Guatemala and Honduras, private security guards outnumber policemen by five or ten to one.

In addition to strictly private security guards, some policemen are also authorized by their institutions to use their uniform and weapon to work for private parties on their days off or during vacations.

Private security raises a number of problems. One of the most serious is that these firms are not properly regulated by the state and the limits of their ability to act are not clearly defined. Their obligation to cooperate with authorities and public security forces is even less well defined. Private security firms also possess arsenals of weapons of increasingly high caliber, something in direct conflict with the notion of the state's

III. THE PRIVATIZATION OF SECURITY

monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In addition, private security employees can get into conflicts with citizens which can result in a variety of abuses.

A perverse business incentive also flourishes when society's perception of insecurity grows, creating a direct interest of some members of the private sector in maintaining this climate of insecurity.

For the wealthiest sectors of the population to use their own resources to ensure security, outside the public services provided by the state, exacerbates social division, inequality, and exclusion. This is aggravated by the fact that the private security structures regularly close off public roads to protect certain neighborhoods that can only be entered with special permission, therefore generating a new type of social exclusion.

Private security also serves as an obstacle to tax reform aimed at ensuring greater resources for public security for all. Those who can make or block these decisions already have protection based on their privileged position in society.

It should be noted that while it is primarily the wealthy who seek to guarantee their own security, popular desperation over the government's incapacity to protect has led middle class and even lower class groups to seek a variety of ways to protect their own security.

The less wealthy informally hire individuals as watchmen, outside of the corporate system of private security. This phenomenon is widespread in large cities where much of the population does not have access to the formal labor market, and involves hundreds of thousands of people who provide security understood as maintaining a presence on the streets or in other public places in order to dissuade petty criminals or alert others to their presence.

An additional form of private security involves the organization of the poorest sectors of the population into citizen security associations, boards, brigades, etc. Individuals volunteer part of their time to provide collective protection in the places they live. This kind of collective action can be viewed as positive; but it ultimately involves a response to something that is lacking. That is, it is a practical solution to a situation in which the state is not fulfilling its duty to provide security. The population is thus forced to spend time improving security instead of devoting themselves to productive or leisure activities.

IV. STRENGTHENING, REFORMING, AND MODERNIZING THE POLICE

Many years ago, as rates of violent crime in Latin America were taking off, one of the first things that became clear was that the police were not prepared to confront problems of security in the new context of democracy.

We must remember that the deterioration in the security situation coincided with the process of democratic transition and the end of internal armed conflicts in the majority of Latin American countries. Police forces for the most part were still acting within a logic of counterinsurgency in which the emphasis was not on attending to citizens but rather, on protecting the state.

THE MAIN EXPERIENCES

Numerous efforts have been made over the last two decades to overcome these limitations by reforming and modernizing the police. One of the most significant achievements was in El Salvador in the 1990s, when the National Civilian Police was created as part of the peace accords that ended the internal armed conflict. The Guatemalan police went through a similar, though less radical, process of reform as a result of that country's own peace accords. The National Police of Nicaragua is a different case. This police force emerged after the victory of the Sandinista revolution in 1979 and was called the Sandinista National Police, a name that reflected its partisan character. Subsequent political developments in the country allowed for the police to be depoliticized without its losing the communitarian vision that had marked it since its founding.

Significant police reform processes have also taken place in South America. The first was undertaken by the Colombian National Police during the period of General Rosso Serrano. This effort enjoyed significant support from the U.S. government in the context of strengthening the war against drugs.

Another relatively old case, promoted from within the police itself, is that of Chile's Investigative Police. Toward the end of the Pinochet

dictatorship, it was so corrupt and had lost so much prestige that the possibility of its absorption into the Carabineros was seriously discussed. Chile's Carabineros themselves have gone through processes of institutional modernization that has resulted in increased legitimacy and prestige. (The autonomy of Chile's police forces vis-à-vis civilian authorities is very great.)

Another important process of police reform took place in Peru between 2001 and 2004 during the return to democracy following the Fujimori dictatorship. The reform made changes in almost every aspect of police life within the framework of a redefinition of its mission.

In countries where there is no single police force, but rather multiple police forces, there have also been numerous processes of reform—both within forces and their relationships with one another.

In Brazil, a number of efforts have been made to reform the police at the state level and, in some cases, at the federal level. One of the processes currently underway is the creation and development of municipal police forces, something new for Brazil. Paradoxically, the primary police reform efforts in Mexico are aimed at recentralizing police forces and eliminating the local police, which have been considered as the most corrupt and the least resistant to the penetration of criminal organizations.

In Argentina there have also been efforts to modernize and reform police forces in a number of provinces. Most significant have been the changes attempted at various times in the province of Buenos Aires. In Venezuela, where the situation of insecurity is alarming, police reform initiatives have been undertaken once again. A new police force is being created, although the results have yet to be measured.

B. MEASURES ADDRESSED

There are a variety of areas in which police reform efforts have been made, but the specific aspects vary from case to case. The most significant processes have involved the “re-founding” and purging of police forces of corrupt and abusive elements. Other efforts have focused on the recruitment of more officers, an increase in police resources, and the introduction of modern technology.

IV. STRENGTHENING, REFORMING AND MODERNIZING THE POLICE

Other important components of reform involve changes in and the modernization of processes of training, professionalization, and specialization. Efforts have also been made to establish mechanisms to increase oversight and accountability within the police forces as well as to improve and modernize disciplinary regimes. The struggle against internal corruption has been particularly difficult to address.

The protection of the rights and dignity of the police themselves has been an area of focus as well. The practice of community policing, which has been implemented in many areas albeit unevenly, represents the greatest change in the relationship between the police and the community they serve.

The scope of this work does not permit a complete assessment of police reform efforts over the past two decades. Yet it is nonetheless clear that efforts at reform have been frequent. Notwithstanding the many limitations of these processes, police forces in the region today are significantly different from what they were 20 years ago. There have been very significant changes in police doctrine and in levels of professionalization. At the same time, little progress has been made in the difficult area of the fight against corruption. This situation is complicated by the fact that organized crime is now one of the dominant aspects of criminality in an ever larger number of countries.

V. VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICIES

Because police reform measures alone have been unable to solve the problem of crime and violence in Latin America, policies to prevent violence have been developed, initially only at the conceptual level but later implemented as concrete actions. Such policies have been based on the belief that there are a series of factors that explain why some sectors of the population become involved in violent crime and that therefore, by adopting the right measures in a timely fashion, states and civil society can act to prevent such crime from occurring.

Many of the antecedents of this approach come from the medical sciences, specifically epidemiology. In other words, there are a number of risk factors that, if controlled, can have a decisive influence on reducing the number of cases referred to the criminal justice system. As with public health policy, the belief is policies of prevention not only achieve important results, but do so more cost effectively.

The risk factors that have been identified are very diverse. Some are rooted in problems of family life and their impact on young people. Social conditions such as urban poverty, a lack of education and job opportunities, and large informal economies also play a role. “Environmental” factors such as easy access to drugs, alcohol, and firearms are also important. Other triggers have to do with the logic of urban development in the majority of Latin American cities where, for various reasons, conditions are more favorable to criminal life than they are to peaceful coexistence.

The main initiatives developed so far in this field have been implemented by non-governmental organizations, churches, and other kinds of civic associations at the local level. These initiatives are often carried out on a very small scale, aimed primarily at preventing family violence and working with at-risk youth.

Efforts to prevent violence within the family have increased significantly. Domestic violence is not just the result of social violence; a great deal of evidence shows that there is a causal relationship between violence in the home and subsequent involvement in violence by young people.

V. VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICIES

Many of the programs currently underway are focused on at-risk youth under the premise that youth are both the most frequent perpetrators of violent acts as well as the primary victims. Many of these programs are carried out at the local level and have demonstrated concrete results for certain groups.

In terms of prevention activities at the national or even international level, the most notable are those aimed at reducing the number of weapons in civilian hands. Significant campaigns of this kind have been carried out in Brazil as well as in Central America, particularly the Central American Program for the Control of Small and Light Weapons (CASAC).

In general, national governments have been slow to adopt prevention policies as a central aspect of their fight against violent crime. This is in large part because prevention is an investment that matures over the long term, whereas the demand is for immediate solutions. Yet progress has been made. In almost all countries prevention is part of the official discourse, and in many countries institutions have been created for this purpose.

Nevertheless, prevention policies are still fairly new in Latin America and the results are not yet fully visible. This is especially true given that by their very nature, such policies require more time to mature and show results.

VI. INITIATIVES BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

There is an important discussion among citizen security specialists regarding the impact of actions taken at the national level (legal and institutional reforms, strengthening of the police, etc.) as compared to those taken at the local level. The debate is a valid one; however, one fact stands out: successes to date, be they relative, partial, or temporary, have occurred in cities, not in countries as a whole.

In general terms, successful initiatives are associated with the following common characteristics, despite slight variations among cases:

- A. Effective local authorities elected by citizens to manage the city. This is true independently of how many legal powers the mayor has in the field of security.
- B. Local leadership and strengthening of the operational capacity of the police, either in cases in which there are local police forces or, more often, in which local authorities have had to coordinate and guide the work of members of the national police who are not formally under their command. In all such cases, the authorities have achieved a degree of leadership of the police and have strengthened them via resources and infrastructure within the context of broader initiatives. In other words, there is no substitute for policing—the control and suppression of crime—as a component of successful experiences, which are otherwise best known for their contribution in the field of prevention.
- C. Implementation of measures of situational prevention. Mayors have the power and ability to directly intervene in situational factors that generate a climate more (or less) favorable to crime. Relevant activities include the recovery of public spaces; the use more fluid and open urban designs (as compared to the urban slums and labyrinths that protect crime); restrictions on the licenses and hours of operation of bars, discos, brothels, and other

VI. INITIATIVES BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

places where many homicides routinely occur; and improvements in public transportation. These combined actions have a favorable effect on citizen security.

- D. Promotion of social prevention programs. Along the lines of what was described in the previous section, there are diverse municipal initiatives for at-risk youth and for the prevention of family violence.
- E. Encouraging citizen participation. Citizen participation in security is often tied to community policing initiatives and is an important element in successful local strategies. This participation is primarily in support of situational or social prevention measures and aimed at providing relevant information so that local governments can take action.
- F. Education in the values of peaceful coexistence. Frequently, local strategies have included educational and cultural campaigns aimed at teaching respect for the law and for the rights of others in daily life.
- G. Improvements in information systems and in the monitoring and evaluation of actions and policies. This is discussed below in greater detail, but these improvements have been part of all successful local experiences.

There are many local governments in Latin America that have developed strategies employing some or a number of the components above. However, several local experiences are paradigmatic. They include Cali, Bogotá, and Medellín in Colombia and Santa Tecla in El Salvador. In Brazil, they also include Diadema in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and recently the Police Pacification Units (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro.

VII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY AND INITIATIVES

As security has become a central concern for citizens, governments are not alone in the search for solutions. In parallel fashion, civil society organizations have also been engaged in a number of activities focused on crime reduction, with varying levels of impact.

These organizations are quite diverse in nature:

Organizations of direct or indirect victims of violence

The family members of kidnapping and homicide victims have organized themselves as platforms with varying levels of stability. Initial actions aimed at pressuring the state and at raising awareness in society about the problem. Several of these organizations have evolved in sophistication and complexity and have become longer lasting.

Human rights organizations that have included a security dimension in their work

Human rights organizations initially become involved in the security issue because of their concerns about police abuses, the problems in penitentiaries, or changes in the law that affect individual rights. In many cases, however, and without necessarily abandoning their basic concerns, they have also contributed to the formulation and monitoring of public policies consistent with human rights and support for victims of violence. The work of these organizations is carried out in a broader context in which security is seen as a human right and the lack of security as a problem that disproportionately affects those sectors of society that have traditionally been the most vulnerable to other rights violations.

Organizations that contribute knowledge

The study of security problems in Latin America has progressed in important ways. States and security sector institutions have not contributed significantly in this area. But many non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) have, whether they are exclusively research-oriented and have incorporated security as one of their areas of study or whether they a broader focus and have added research as an important component of their work.

Organizations that specialize in the field of security

Most such organizations are relatively new, but there are an important number of them in Latin America today. They have emerged as a direct result of rising crime and violence and work in a comprehensive way, combining research, public policy, oversight, and pilot projects at the local level or on a specific theme.

Organizations to support and assist victims

These groups have been created principally to protect victims of violence, particularly women who are victims of domestic violence. These organizations also work with people who have been in trouble with the law, in order to prevent recidivism.

Organizations of the private sector

These organizations seek to create institutional spaces for reflection, proposals, and oversight of security policies in their countries.

Inter-institutional coordination

As the range of non-governmental organizations that deal with security issues has grown significantly, various initiatives are now helping to coordinate efforts and to create platforms or networks. These initiatives seek to foster dialogue among groups working on similar issues so that they can learn from each other and create synergies. Some of these efforts are nationally-based and others take place at the regional and sub-regional level.

VIII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

An important limitation to confronting the crime problem has been, on the one hand, the difficulty of adequately understanding the phenomenon, and on the other, the almost complete lack of indicators with which to develop and evaluate public policies. Much remains to be done in both areas but some progress is worth highlighting.

In terms of research on citizen security, there is now an extensive bibliography of works by academics, civil society organizations, and, to a lesser extent, the state entities working in this arena. There are local as well as national studies as well as many on specific cross-cutting themes. The fact that some Latin American universities have created Master's programs in security studies raises the likelihood that serious research will continue to develop.

Important progress has also been made in devising tools to measure the evolution of various kinds of crime. The problem of relying on police statistics is well known. To begin with, there is the so-called *cifra negra* ("black figure"), which refers to the large number of crimes that go unreported because of a lack of confidence that police authorities will do something as a result of the complaint. In some countries, however, significant efforts have been made to improve the collection and processing of information from complaints. These efforts involve professional training for those in leadership positions and the creation of more efficient systems for auditing results.

The improvement in gathering crime statistics has been critical to mapping and pin-pointing areas of criminal activity; that is, identifying the place and time in which complaints are received, in order to target police interventions. All of the successful crime reduction strategies in the region have used this tool to plan police action.

Even so, crime statistics alone have not proven sufficient. For this reason, different countries of the region have developed—albeit in a very uneven fashion—victimization surveys that measure the incidence and types of crime based on responses given by the population itself.

Victimization surveys always have some degree of distortion, as they are based on the word of one person and that can be influenced by many different factors. Nevertheless, with the standardization of questions and consistent administration, victimization surveys can become an important tool for measuring trends. In fact, in some countries and cities, these surveys have become a matter of public policy and the primary tool for measuring the evolution of criminal trends.

Various “observatories” on violence have been created in Latin America to fill the need for more precise, socially legitimate, and scientifically verifiable information. These observatories seek to establish an autonomous space—transparent and accessible to authorities and to the public—where interagency information on crime can be gathered and processed. For example, in the case of homicide, observatories function as a space for comparing and validating information from the police, public prosecutors, attorneys general, and the health system.

Much more improvement and progress must be made in the field of information and analysis. But it is already a great advance to have reached a consensus that without tools for scientific measurement, it will not be possible to develop the appropriate public policies. In the area of citizen security—as in economics, health, or education—results must be measured objectively, diminishing as much as possible the role of perceptions.

IX. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

As the problem of insecurity has grown in importance and has begun to affect the quality of life and possibilities for development in Latin America, the international donor community has begun to pay closer attention. Donors have begun providing assistance to governments and to groups in civil society to develop initiatives aimed at institutional strengthening of the police and government ministries, social prevention, and the fight against organized crime.

Thus far there is no systematized evaluation of the contributions of international donors in this area, but an initial approximation for Central America could serve as a reference point for the rest of the region.

International security assistance to Central America has grown significantly in recent years and it is safe to say that the region receives no less than \$250 million a year from a variety of sources. Mexico and South America receive noticeably less in the specific area of citizen security, but this is not the case with respect to funds to fight drug trafficking. Through the Mérida Initiative, the United States is channeling a significant assistance to Mexico to combat organized crime, principally drug trafficking. Plan Colombia is a similar initiative that has been underway for more than a decade.

International funding for Central America comes from the following sources:

1. European partners—with the European Commission, Spanish, and German contributions in the lead;
2. Cooperation from the United States, initially through the Mérida Initiative and now through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI);
3. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), through a broad program of loans and grants across the region;

IX. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

4. The United Nations system, through the activities of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); the joint programs of its agencies and in particular the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA);
5. Assistance from non-governmental agencies.

X. FINAL REFLECTIONS

MULTIPLE RESPONSES: As we have seen, responses to Latin America's security problem have been quite diverse, with aspects that are not at all homogeneous or convergent. On occasion there have been serious and informed responses, but more often they have been impulsive and even opportunistic. In some cases there have been integrated strategies, but isolated actions have been more the rule. Whereas in certain cases initiatives have been carried out in complementary fashion, more often they have been contradictory.

1. **MULTIPLE ACTORS:** Given the complexity of the problem and its effect on society and on the state, it is only natural that there are many actors involved in seeking a solution, but they do not always act coherently vis-à-vis one another. There are national governments working primarily through the ministries of security, government, or interior; various police forces with different levels of autonomy from political authorities; local governments with differing capacities, which only occasionally have been able to carry out consistent security initiatives; organized citizens who have sometimes contributed significantly to prevention but on other occasions have acted out of desperation outside the law; civil society organizations with an increasing capacity to develop knowledge and pilot programs; and finally, the increasing involvement and support of the international community.
2. **SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUITY:** Perhaps the most significant challenge for developing successful citizen security policies is the contradiction between public pressure for immediate results and the time that policies need to mature and show consistent results. This problem lies at the root of the difficulties in ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the policies that are put into practice.
3. **UNDERSTANDING, KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERIENCE:** It is still very difficult to understand the full dimension of the crime problem and to come up with adequate measurements. However, today we have greater accumulated knowledge and

experience—and many more institutional resources—than twenty years ago.

4. **THE PAUCITY OF SUCCESS STORIES:** The general trend in the region has been one of deterioration, and this has only been reversed in a few cases. Furthermore, the successful outcomes discussed in these pages have been difficult to sustain over time and are not easily replicated.
5. **THE INTEFERENCE OF POLITICS:** The dynamic of political competition between parties in power and the opposition, above all (but not exclusively) in contexts of deep polarization where consensus is elusive, has become an enormous obstacle to defining consistent policies that can be sustained over time.
6. **THE DIFFICULTY OF MEASURING AND EVALUATING:** Objective parameters do not exist for measuring policy impact or for weighing the importance of specific variables in obtaining a particular result. To the extent that crime suppression, institutional strengthening, and prevention are taking place at the same time, it is difficult to determine with certainty which of these factors has had a greater or more decisive impact on achieving a given result.
7. **NEW CHALLENGES:** The growing presence of organized crime as a factor in the social dynamics of insecurity adds a new level of complexity to the problem. When crime becomes more violent and centralized and is no longer the result of the isolated actions of individuals, new ways of thinking are required.