

Crime, Democracy, and Development in Latin America

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Summary

Soaring crime in Latin America is taking a significant toll on the region's political, economic, and social development. Crime—particularly violent crime—is deterring foreign investment, reducing worker productivity, and increasing operating costs for foreign and domestic firms. The costs are considerable: the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) estimates that Latin America's per capita gross domestic product would be an astounding 25 percent higher today if the region had a crime rate similar to the rest of the world.

Crime also is slowing—and sometimes undermining—democratic consolidation. Throughout the region, voters are turning to law-and-order civilian populists who promise a “heavy hand” to deal with street crime, even at the cost of short-circuiting democratic institutions and norms. Politicians are scoring points by promising get-tough policies, such as establishing larger anticrime and internal security roles for the armed forces. A growing number of citizens, apparently convinced that the ineffective courts and police will only return criminals to the streets, are increasingly taking law into their own hands, with vigilante justice and mob lynching becoming commonplace from Central America to rural Argentina.

Available information suggests that Latin America's crime epidemic will worsen considerably in the years ahead. World Bank research convincingly demonstrates a strong link between crime and income inequality, which has worsened in Latin America in the past decade and is unlikely to improve dramatically in the years ahead. Central America and several Andean countries will face explosive youth bulges in the next generation, suggesting that the combination of population density, rapid urbanization, and persistent income

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inequality will fuel additional violence. The fact that many countries in the region are experiencing domestic drug-addiction crises—and that international organized crime groups are moving into the region to exploit its porous borders and weak law enforcement—also portends a steady rise in crime in countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Mexico.

Because the root causes of crime cannot realistically be solved in the short term, the international community can usefully focus its efforts in the coming years on some relatively simple, affordable measures that strengthen deterrent institutions, build local capacity, and target at-risk communities and demographic groups:

- Some of the region's most innovative success stories—gun buyback programs, neighborhood watch committees, anonymous police hotlines, community policing efforts—are occurring at the local level, suggesting that reform-minded leaders and international donors could expand grassroots initiatives to the national level.
- Anticrime efforts that seek active roles for the private sector and civil society have paid dividends, defraying costs, broadening the community of stakeholders in anticrime projects, and developing local expertise to administer projects when foreign donors eventually leave the scene.

Reform-minded officials and the international donor community also must bear in mind several cautionary notes. Traditional strategies focused primarily on providing additional financial resources needed to hire more police, judges, and prosecutors are unlikely to have any lasting impact unless governments first take steps to increase accountability and transparency in the criminal justice system. Without increased accountability, lavishing more resources on tainted institutions could inadvertently strengthen local actors most resistant to reform and may amount to throwing good money after bad. Even technically sound reforms will bring with them tradeoffs and unintended consequences that democratic governments and foreign donors may consider unacceptable because they undercut other development objectives. For example, Latin America's transition from centuries-old Roman-law legal systems to more transparent, U.S.-style common law systems is increasing transparency but adding to judicial logjams as judges and prosecutors struggle to learn new procedures. Easing the much-abused practice of pretrial detentions has increased human-rights protections for the accused but has inadvertently returned thousands of repeat offenders to the streets and is causing urban crime to skyrocket. Finally, and most ominously, some governments that pay lip service to anticrime efforts will not be genuinely committed to reducing crime because they are systematically engaged in illicit activities like drug trafficking, which fuels violent crime downstream, suggesting that international donors will need to begin looking for creative ways to work around rather than with tainted or corrupt regimes.

Introduction

In recent years, Latin America has earned the dubious distinction of being the world's most violent region. The region's rate of 23 homicides per 100,000 citizens is more than twice the world average, putting Latin America on par with the war-torn countries of Africa.¹

In the past decade, homicide rates have risen 336 percent in Colombia, 300 percent in Argentina, and 379 percent in Peru; murder is now the leading cause of death in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and nearly half of Brazil's 27 states.² Other indicators paint an equally bleak picture. More than 80 percent of respondents in a 17-country region-wide poll say that crime has increased in the past year; 40 percent say that they or a family member have been a victim of crime in the past year; and 80 percent expect crime to get worse in the year ahead.³ Not surprisingly, the Pan American Health Organization has labeled violence "the social pandemic of the 20th century."⁴

As a result of these startling trends, crime—particularly violent crime—has emerged as one of the most serious obstacles to development in Latin America, slowing economic growth, undermining democratic consolidation, and eroding vital social capital. The spiraling crime epidemic is likely to worsen considerably in the years ahead because of the self-perpetuating nature of crime waves, the multidimensional causes of crime that cannot be significantly improved in the short term, and the staggering lack of political will to tackle the problem with anything beyond standard and discredited policies. A review of practical "lessons learned" could help reform-minded Latin American governments—and the international donors who finance their efforts—make at least modest headway in the short term, building on incremental successes, while avoiding some of the pitfalls that have traditionally undercut anticrime efforts elsewhere in Latin America and the developing world.

¹ Mayra Buvinic and Andrew R. Morrison, "Living in a More Violent World," *Foreign Policy* 118 (Spring 2000): 58–72.

² Lucía Dammert, "Violencia Criminal y Seguridad Pública en América Latina," *Revista de Política y Gestión* 2 (November 2001): 17; Lucía Dammert, *Violencia Criminal y Seguridad Pública en América Latina: la situación de Argentina* (Santiago: CEPAL, 2000); and Irma Arriagada and Lorena Godoy, "Prevenir o reprimir? falso dilema de la seguridad ciudadana," *Revista de la CEPAL* 70 (April 2000): 107–132.

³ Julia Flynn, "Global Kidnappings Climb to a New Peak," *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 2000, p. A1; and Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush, "The Wages of Fear: A Plague of Kidnappings Hits Latin America and its Middle Class," *Time International*, September 17, 2001, p. 64.

⁴ The phrase is taken from Cesar Chelala, *Violence in the Americas: The Social Pandemic of the 20th Century* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Health Organization, 1997).

Table 1. Latin America's Homicide Epidemic: Murders per 100,000 Citizens, 1990s

City	No. of murders
Escuintlá, Guatemala	165
San Salvador	150
Diadema, Brazil	140
Izabál, Guatemala	127
Medellín, Colombia	124
Cali, Colombia	114
São Paulo, Brazil	103
Santa Rosa, Guatemala	111
Guatemala City	101
Embú, Brazil	93
Caracas, Venezuela	76
Vitória, Brazil	64
Rio de Janeiro	63
Oaxaca, Mexico	54
<i>Detroit, Michigan</i>	43
<i>Washington, D.C.</i>	36
<i>New York, N.Y.</i>	9
<i>Paris, France</i>	7
<i>Tokyo, Japan</i>	2

Sources: InterAmerican Development Bank, United Nations.

Framing the Scope of Crime and Violence in Latin America

Any effort to understand the costs and implications of crime and violence in Latin America requires three methodological caveats. First, data on crime is notoriously poor. By its very nature, crime is clandestine and inherently difficult to measure; apparent shifts in crime rates may simply reflect better information-gathering techniques.⁵ Moreover, more than half of all crimes in the region go unreported, either because citizens are unaware of their due process rights, suspect that police officials are the perpetrators, or fear reprisals.⁶ Even when crimes are reported, corruption and poor recordkeeping mean that many cases are “lost” during processing; the fact that governments classify crimes differently complicates

⁵ Some crimes—homicides, for example—are easier to measure than crimes against property, if only because it is more difficult to conceal the physical evidence. For a discussion of the difficulties inherent in assessing rates of crime and violence, see Mayra Buvinic and Andrew Morrison, “How Is Violence Measured?” Technical Note 2 (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 1999).

⁶ Country-specific data generally confirm this estimate. The rates of unreported crimes reach 70 percent in Argentina, 75 percent in El Salvador, 67 percent in Chile, 74 percent in Colombia, and 83 percent in Mexico. See Mauricio Rubio, “Los costos de la violencia en América Latina” (paper presented at the Foro sobre convivencia y seguridad ciudadana en el itmo Centramericano, Haiti, y República Dominicana [unpublished manuscript, 1998]).

efforts to make cross-national comparisons.⁷ Some government agencies routinely underreport crime data to show “progress” on the crime front, reassure nervous investors, and continue the flow of donor assistance; police skew homicide data simply because policemen are the culprits in a significant percentage of cases.⁸ In short, we can assemble baskets of data to develop an understanding of the basic scope, trends, and contours of the problem, but the specific numbers are imprecise.

Second, the terms “crime” and “violence” are frequently used interchangeably, both in academic literature and in this report, when in fact they are distinct concepts; not all crime is violent and not all violence is criminal. Some crimes—corruption, for example—are not violent in the strictest sense.⁹ Conversely, domestic violence in Latin America is widespread—as many as 40 percent of women in Latin America have suffered physical violence inside the home—but such actions do not constitute a crime in many countries.¹⁰ As Paulo Sergio Pinheiro argues, on balance there is sufficient overlap between criminal and violent acts in Latin America that the two serve as rough proxies for the other—if only because crime in the region is becoming more violent and because we lack reliable, cross-country data.¹¹

⁷ Statistical discrepancies are not unique to Latin America. Even in the United States, with some of the most advanced data collection systems in the world, different federal agencies employ different methodologies for measuring homicide rates. Homicide rates published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Federal Bureau of Investigation vary considerably because the two agencies differ over how to classify deaths resulting from application of the death penalty and fatalities resulting from confrontation with state and local law enforcement officers. See Rodrigo Guerrero Velazco, “El control de la violencia a nivel municipal” (Washington, D.C.: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1999): 2.

⁸ Alejandro Gaviria and Carmen Pages, “Patterns of Crime Victimization in Latin America” (paper presented at the International Conference on Crime and Violence, May 5, 2000, Bogotá, Colombia); and Hernán Cappiello, “Los porteños, resignados a la inseguridad,” *La Nación*, July 2, 2002, p. A19.

⁹ Some international development agencies blur the distinction between “crime” and “violence” by positing that all crimes constitute some form of violence, such as “violence against assets,” “violence against property,” and “violence against the environment,” although this approach seems excessively elastic.

¹⁰ Even in cases where domestic abuse is a crime, underreporting appears to be substantial problem. Available data indicate that only 5 percent of women report the crime. See Elizabeth Shrader, *Methodologies to Measure the Gender Dimensions of Crime and Violence* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000), p. 3. Brazil illustrates how lethal violence is sometimes legal. Until the late 1980s, Brazilian law allowed a husband to kill his spouse if he could credibly cite centuries-old “defense of honor” laws. Brazil’s Supreme Court invalidated the law in the early 1990s, but state-level courts continue to assert that a husband who catches his spouse committing an act of infidelity may commit homicide to defend his family’s honor. See Laura Sue Nelson, “The Defense of Honor: Is It Still Honored in Brazil?” *Wisconsin Journal of International Law* 11 (Spring 1993): 531–56.

¹¹ Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, “Reflection on Urban Violence,” *Urban Age* 1 (1993): 3–4; and Irma Arriagada, “Latin America Violence and Citizen Security” (paper presented at the 2001 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, September 6–8, 2001). Arriagada notes that some governments simply make no effort to record data on nonviolent crimes, meaning that homicide rates serve as a de facto proxy for all crimes.

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Third, there are multiple types of violence—focus groups in Latin America have identified as many as 70 different types of violent behavior—but this study focuses on economic and social violence, where the goal is usually material gain, rather than political violence, where the goal is policy or regime change.¹² Even this distinction is sometimes blurry, though. In Colombia, the country's leading insurgent group claims it seeks political change but sustains itself with ordinary criminal behavior such as narcotics trafficking, and opinion is divided whether the group is motivated by political aspirations or greed alone.¹³ The line between ordinary street crime and state-sponsored violence can be equally vague, as military officers in El Salvador and Guatemala or off-duty policemen in Argentina and Brazil use their formal positions and access to weapons and sensitive information to support and conceal their involvement in criminal activity.¹⁴

Crime, Development, and Democracy

The rampant growth of violent crime in Latin America is taking a significant toll on the region's development in at least three ways: slowing economic development; undermining the strength and credibility of democracy and key democratic institutions; and eroding social capital—a core ingredient for economic and democratic development. Each aspect merits brief consideration.

Economic Development

A wide body of literature has established that crime drains economic activity through loss of life and destruction of property, but researchers have recently begun to identify a broader set of direct and indirect costs, as well:

- Foregone foreign investment, as business executives calculate that the costs of crime make expanding operations in the region prohibitively expensive. A series of World Bank and InterAmerican Development Bank-funded surveys of private-sector managers found that 67 percent of respondents doing business in Latin America cite crime as an obstacle to operations there—more than three times the response rate of counterparts doing business in OECD countries.¹⁵
- Reduced tourism, particularly in Central American and Caribbean countries that rely on a pristine international image as their major

¹² Robert L. Ayres, *Crime and Violence as Development Issues in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998).

¹³ Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (December 2000): 839–53.

¹⁴ Ana Araña, "The New Battle for Central America," *Foreign Affairs* 80 (November-December 2001): 88–101; and Martha Huggins, "Urban Violence and Police Privatization in Brazil: Blended Invisibility," *Social Justice* 27 (Summer 2000): 113–134.

¹⁵ Alejandro Gaviria, *Assessing the Effects of Corruption and Crime on Firm Performance: Evidence from Latin America* (Bogotá: Fedesarrollo, 2002), p. 10. The impact of crime on foreign investment in Argentina is detailed in Alfredo Sainz, "La inseguridad, triste atractivo de inversiones," *La Nación*, September 13, 2000, p. A3.

comparative advantage.¹⁶ In recent years, the governments of Italy and Japan have begun urging their citizens not to visit various countries in Latin America, warning that traveling there would increase their risk of being a victim of violent crime.¹⁷

- Reduced worker productivity through increased absenteeism and labor incapacity. Studies in Chile and Nicaragua found that battered women earn only 39 to 57 percent as much as nonbattered women, according to InterAmerican Development Bank estimates.¹⁸
- Increased insurance costs for firms operating in the region that leads the world in kidnappings-for-ransom cases.¹⁹ In 1999, Brazilian firms spent more than \$20 billion on theft insurance and health insurance for employees.²⁰ In 2000, the Sony Corporation threatened to close operations in Mexico because crime was costing the company millions of dollars in soaring insurance costs and stolen cargo.²¹
- Reduced commercial transactions limited to certain neighborhoods or regions known to be safe. In Guatemala, foreign firms have closed operations in some rural parts of the country and halted nighttime operations for fear of violence.²²

Perhaps most significantly, mounting crime has forced the private sector throughout Latin America to turn to private security firms to protect physical property and business executives, diverting resources from productive endeavors such as worker training or capital investments. The Brazilian private sector spends \$3 billion annually on private guards, bullet-proof cars, and electronic alarm systems, while the Guatemalan private sector spends more than \$200 million annually—an amount equal to 10 percent of the government’s national budget and

¹⁶ See, for example, Anthony Bryan, *Caribbean Tourism: Igniting the Engines of Sustainable Growth* (Miami, Fla.: North-South Center, 2001); and Shelley Emling, “Crime wave plagues Guatemala City, Threatens Tourism Safety,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1992, p. A12.

¹⁷ See Danillo Valladares, “Corrupción y crímenes son noticia en el japon,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, October 21, 2001, p. 4; and “Italia aconseja a los turistas no viajar a la Argentina,” *La Nación*, August 2, 2002, p. 4.

¹⁸ Mayra Buvinic and Andrew Morrison, “Violence as an Obstacle to Development,” Technical Note 4 (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2001), p. 4; and María Loreto Biehl, *Violencia doméstica contra la mujer* (Washington, D.C.: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2001), p. 6.

¹⁹ Even countries that historically have had low kidnapping rates have recently begun reporting record-level abductions of businessmen as economic conditions have soured. See “Rècord de secuestros en Buenos Aires,” *La Nación*, February 10, 2003, p. 11.

²⁰ Carline Piva, “Combate á violència levou R\$40 bilhões no ano passado,” *Gazeta Mercantil*, July 9, 2000, p. A6.

²¹ Elisabeth Malkin, “Sounding the Alarm in Mexico,” *Business Week*, June 26, 2000, p. 74; “Cost of Crime Worries Companies that Invest in Mexico,” *Orange County Register*, May 10, 2000, p. C3; and “Investors Rail About Crime and Corruption,” *Business Mexico* 10 (June 2000): 14.

²² Chris Barnet, “Highway Robbery Rampant in Guatemala,” *Journal of Commerce*, May 6, 1999, p. A6; and Andrew Morrison, Mayra Buvinic, and Michael Shifter, *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Framework for Action* (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000), p. 7.

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more than the national government spends on public security—on private security companies.²³ In Chile, private outlays for security reached \$238 million dollars in 1997, while private firms in Venezuela spend a staggering \$154 million monthly on private security guards and surveillance equipment.²⁴

Coupled with other direct and indirect costs, the economic impact is considerable. Economists with the World Bank estimate that Latin America's average per capita income would be 25 percent higher if it had a crime rate similar to the rest of the world.²⁵ Researchers with the InterAmerican Development Bank conclude that the costs of violence in Latin America in 1997 amounted to 14.2 percent of the region's gross domestic product, reaching 5.1 percent of GDP in Peru, 10 percent in Brazil, 11.8 percent in Venezuela, 12.3 percent in Mexico, and 25 percent in Colombia and El Salvador.²⁶ Using data from the early 1990s, Daniel Lederman judged that homicides alone in Argentina cost the economy an estimated \$28 billion in 1997, an amount equal to 8 percent of GDP.²⁷ The fact that homicide rates have doubled in Argentina since the early 1990s suggests that the economic costs are even higher today.²⁸

Democratization

Less noticed but equally pernicious is the effect that crime is having on democratic consolidation. The impact is especially corrosive in three ways: the delegitimization of state institutions; the public's growing willingness to turn to heavy-handed or antidemocratic "solutions"; and the degenerative effects on civil society.

Region-wide polling data confirm that high crime rates undercut public faith in democratic institutions. To be sure, a variety of factors account for the low confidence in democratic institutions, but the level of distrust and cynicism in Latin America is high by global standards, and those institutions responsible for

²³ Piva, "Combate á violencia levou R\$40 bilhões no ano passado"; and Inforpress Centroamericana, "Guatemala: Nation Earns Notoriety Abroad for Crime Rate," August 6, 1999.

²⁴ *Desarrollo humano en Chile, 1998* (Santiago: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 1998); and Serge Kovaleski, "Violence Heightens Despair in Venezuela; Crime, Storm Damage Erode Leaders' Polls," *Washington Post*, February 17, 2000, p. 25.

²⁵ Javed S. Burki and Guillermo Perry, *Beyond the Washington Consensus: Institutions Matter* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998), p. 23.

²⁶ Juan Luis Londoño and Rodrigo Guerrero, *Violencia en America Latina: Epidemiología y Costos* (Washington, D.C.: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1999), pp. 3–9. Estimates on the cost of violence in Colombia vary considerably because of differences over whether to include war-related violence along with street crime. One study that includes homicides related to the armed conflict concludes that GDP in Colombia would be 32 percent higher today if homicide rates were at their 1970 level. See Mauricio Rubio, "Crimen y crecimiento en Colombia," in *Hacia un enfoque integrado del desarrollo: ética, violencia, y seguridad ciudadana, encuentro de reflexión* [no ed.] (Washington, D.C.: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1996), p. 94.

²⁷ Daniel Lederman, *Crime in Argentina: A Preliminary Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999), p. 2.

²⁸ "Hay casi el doble de asesinatos por día que en la última década en la provincia," *La Nación*, October 14, 2002, p. A12.

detering crime and administering justice are particularly discredited.²⁹ Confidence in the police and courts nears the single digits in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Guatemala; more than half of respondents in Brazil and Mexico say they do not even bother reporting crimes to police because such efforts would be “pointless” or a “waste of time.”³⁰ Citizens who have been victims of crime are especially disillusioned: crime victims in Latin America are 13 times less likely to have confidence in the courts and 5 times more likely than nonvictims to be dissatisfied with the performance of democracy.³¹ This crisis of confidence cuts to the heart of regime legitimacy in Latin America, because Latin Americans generally hold a more statist view of democracy than do citizens in consolidated democracies.³² According to analysis of region-wide polling results, Latin Americans define a government as “democratic” primarily on the basis of its ability to deliver substantive benefits, not because it protects certain processes, rights, and liberties. In this mindset, a state that cannot deliver basic services—such as public security—is not only inefficient; it also risks being viewed as illegitimate.

The lack of confidence in the courts and police has prompted a growing number of Latin Americans to support quick-fix “solutions” that short circuit or undercut democratic norms. The clearest manifestation of this trend has been the growing support for law-and-order populists who pledge a “heavy hand” against criminals and delinquents to compensate for the alleged failings of the criminal justice system. Throughout the region, candidates score points by promising to institute get-tough policies such as public beatings, hangings, televised executions, and limiting due process rights for accused criminals.³³ Strong anticrime platforms were crucial to the electoral success of retired military officers such as Hugo Banzer in Bolivia, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Efraín Rio

²⁹ Marta Lagos, “Between Stability and Crisis in Latin America,” *Journal of Democracy* 12 (2000): 137–145.

³⁰ Ronald Soria, “Deshonestidad: 54,4% de ciudadanos no cree en nadie,” *El Universo*, July 30, 2002, p. A3; and Javier Girado, “Corrupted Justice and the Schizophrenic State in Colombia,” *Social Justice* 26 (Winter 1999): 31–54.

³¹ Mary Fran. T. Malone, “Determinants of Public Support for the Judiciary in Latin America” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 31–September 3, 2000).

³² Mary Fran T. Malone and Siddhartha Baviskar, “What ‘Satisfaction with Democracy’ Means and Measures—and Why It Matters” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Mass., August 28–September 1, 2002).

³³ See, for example, Pablo Morosi, “La mano dura triunfa en Buenos Aires,” *La Nación*, August 11, 2002, p. A10; Mauro Silveira, Valter Goncalves, and Valdir Suzin, “A Bancada Dos Xerifes,” *Machete*, December 9, 1995: 62–65; Fanian Debasa, “La mano dura se hace sentir en Buenos Aires,” *Clarín*, May 27, 2000, p. A2; Dinorah Azpuru, “Voting in the Strongmen in Guatemala” (paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, 2001); and Amber Seligson and Joshua Tucker, “Feeding the Hand that Bit You: Voting for Ex-Authoritarian Rulers in Russia and Bolivia” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Mass., August 28–September 1, 2002). In Venezuela, President Chavez signed a decree in 1999 mandating a 10-minute time limit on criminal trials, claiming that if the accused could not prove his innocence within 10 minutes he probably is guilty anyway. The move was widely popular, despite complaints from human rights groups that the procedures denied basic due process rights guaranteed under domestic and international law.

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Montt in Guatemala, and quasi-authoritarian civilians such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru and José Portillo in Guatemala; indeed, one factor enhancing Portillo's electoral prospects during his 1999 presidential campaign was the fact that he had served prison time in Mexico for murder—a fact Portillo proudly highlighted on the campaign trail.³⁴ Anticrime platforms frequently have included a larger domestic security role for the armed forces, an especially worrisome development given the fact that democratic reformers spent much of the 1980s trying to reduce the military's role in internal affairs. In recent years, presidents in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Paraguay have called on the military to perform anticrime police work, occasionally declaring states of siege, authorizing the armed forces to gather domestic intelligence, and empowering them to enter homes without search warrants.³⁵

Crime also is hampering democratization by eroding state authority and blurring the lines between the state and civil society. Setting aside the question of whether and under what circumstances the armed forces could legitimately perform domestic anticrime functions, observers generally accept the classic definition of a modern state as one in which the government has a legitimate monopoly on the use of force. Citizens understand that certain government bureaucracies are legitimately and uniquely empowered to enforce agreed-upon notions of law. Rampant crime in Latin America is undermining that notion in several ways. The rise of private security firms and private police forces has led to “the privatization of justice,” erasing the boundaries and functions of the state and the private sector.³⁶ In Colombia, private security agents now exceed in number the size of the armed forces, while in Guatemala, the ranks of private security forces outnumber the entire national police force.³⁷ In São Paulo, businesses employ the services of a 400,000-man private security force—more than three times the size of the state's civilian police force.³⁸ Because many of the security firms are staffed by off-duty police officers still in uniform, and a majority of the

³⁴ Serge Kovalski, “A Killer, and Perhaps a President: Candidate with Violent Past Leads in Polls for Today's Guatemalan Vote,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 1999, p. A 29.

³⁵ Central America Report, “El Salvador: Politicians Respond to Crime,” June 18, 1998, at <http://inforpressca.com/CAR/magazi/2523-6.html>; Catherine Elton, “Honduras Eyes Crackdown on Crime,” *Washington Times*, July 9, 2002, p. A12; and Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, “In Honduras, Borrowing a Giuliani Idea,” *Washington Post*, July 2, 2002, p. A17. Military officers who commit human rights abuses while engaged in anticrime operations are tried in military rather than civilian courts, further undercutting governmental accountability and the credibility of civilian institutions. See Anthony Pereira and Diane E. Davis, “Introduction: New Patterns of Militarized Violence and Coercion in the Americas,” *Latin American Perspectives* 27 (March 2000): 3–7; and Anthony Pereira, *Virtual Legality: The Use and Reform of Military Justice in Brazil, the Southern Cone, and Mexico*, Working Paper Number 99/00-2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 1999).

³⁶ The term is taken from James Holston and Teresa P. R. Caldeira, “Democracy, Law, and Citizenship: Disjunctions of Brazilian Citizenship,” in *Fault Lines of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America*, eds. Felipe Aguero and Jeffrey Stark (Miami, Fla.: North-South Center Press, 2000), pp. 263–98.

³⁷ Rachel Van Dongen, “Lacking Faith in Police, Colombians Turn to Bodyguards,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 21, 2002, p. A7.

³⁸ Francisco Neves, “It's War,” *Brazil* (October 1999), at <http://www.brazil.com/cvroct99.htm>.

companies are not even licensed to carry firearms, this trend virtually eliminates the boundaries between official and unofficial law enforcement.

This “privatization of justice” applies to civil society, as well. Citizens throughout Latin America, apparently convinced that courts and police will not punish criminals, have begun to take the law into their own hands, arming themselves at record levels and committing abuses that were once the preserve of the most authoritarian governments.³⁹

- In 1999, Caracas began experiencing one lynching every three days as crime-weary citizens began forming mobs to execute suspected criminals.⁴⁰ State and local officials have begun calling for public hangings and executions to serve as a warning to future criminals.⁴¹
- Public lynchings—of accused criminals and sometimes even judges viewed as “soft on crime”—have become commonplace in Guatemala. One poll found that approximately 75 percent of respondents supported mob justice, while another found that 70 percent of respondents endorsed vigilante groups that engage in public hangings.⁴²
- A similar phenomenon has emerged in Ecuador, where lynchings have become so commonplace that public executions no longer shock the average citizen. In Colombia, the public voices increasing support for extermination groups that target criminal gangs, street children, drug abusers, and urban poor suspected of shoplifting and other petty crimes.⁴³

Impact on Social Capital

Crime also has a significant and negative impact on social capital, which scholars increasingly recognize as a vital component of social, political, and economic development. The term “social capital” is imprecise, but a broad definition is the accumulated result of social networks, norms, contacts, associations, and memberships in private organizations.⁴⁴ According to Robert Putnam,

³⁹ See, for example, “El 11,4% de los porteños está armado,” *La Nación*, July 30, 2002, p. A12.

⁴⁰ “Mob law,” *The Economist*, September 18, 1999, p. 50.

⁴¹ Asked whether he would instruct law enforcement officials to intervene and halt the lynchings, the governor of Lara state dismissed the reporter’s question, claiming “The police will not intervene to protect any crook, rapist, assailant, or murderer. I have to look after honest and decent people. I have to set priorities. I’m too busy to be protecting criminals.” See “Venezuelan Governor Says He Won’t Stop Lynchings,” August 16, 1999, Reuters Wire Service dispatch.

⁴² Vince Beiser, “Frustrated Guatemalans Turning to Vigilante Justice,” *St. Petersburg Times*, February 9, 2000, p. A24; and David Clark Scott, “Public Demands Lead to Reforms in Guatemala,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 16, 1994, p. 4.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, *Generation Under Fire: Children and Violence in Colombia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994); Tim Johnson, “Mob Justice Revives Death Penalty Debate,” *Miami Herald*, November 16, 1996, p. A1; and William C. Prillaman, *The Judiciary and Democratic Decay in Latin America* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), chapter 6.

⁴⁴ There is broad agreement over the basic concept of social capital, even though experts have debated Robert Putnam’s judgment that social capital is declining in the United States. Others have refined his thesis by noting that some civic associations do not espouse democratic values, but these caveats do not alter the basic judgment that, on the whole, social interactions contribute positively to a community’s development.

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policymakers in disciplines ranging from health care to education to crime reduction have found that policies are more likely to succeed in communities with high levels of civic engagement.⁴⁵ Studies of social capital in Latin America have generally supported these views, finding that countries with higher levels of social capital—measured through community involvement—tend to have higher levels of political awareness and interpersonal trust.⁴⁶

Persistent violence undermines social capital, community networks, and development of human potential. In Argentina, 70 percent of residents in Buenos Aires province say that fear of crime has forced them to spend more time at home.⁴⁷ One-quarter of Venezuelans and one-third of Mexicans say they limit their working hours and social activities because of fear of violence, suggesting that they may curtail other activities, as well.⁴⁸ Focus groups with Guatemalan and Colombian women found that fear of crime and violence made them less willing to participate in community organizations and activities, while 30 percent of young women in Jamaica say they are afraid to go to school for fear of violence.⁴⁹ This erosion of traditional social networks also appears to create a “perverse social capital” in which alienated youth seek membership in violent gangs as a form of social interaction. Researchers have found that youths in Colombia and Nicaragua join gangs primarily for the sense of community rather than for the material benefits, viewing the gangs as a source of order, stability, and community.⁵⁰ Gang membership is, ironically, both a cause and a result of declining social capital.

⁴⁵ Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* (January 1995): 65–78.

⁴⁶ Amber Seligson, “Civic Associations and Democratic Participation in Central America: A Test of the Putnam Thesis,” *Comparative Political Studies* 21 (May 1999): 342–62.

⁴⁷ Rates were even higher among women and the elderly. See “Por la inseguridad, el 70% de la gente cambió sus hábitos de vida,” *La Nación*, September 13, 2002, p. 16; “Un tema que preocupa cada vez más,” *La Nación*, August 24, 2002, p. 4; and Jon Jeter, “As Crime Soars, Argentines Alter Outgoing Ways,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 2003, p. A11.

⁴⁸ Beatriz Zurita et al., *Trends and Empirical Causes of Violent Crime in Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999), p. 43.

⁴⁹ Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine, “Violence in Colombia and Guatemala: Community Perceptions of Interrelationships with Social Capital” (paper prepared for the International Conference on Crime and Violence, Bogota, Colombia, May 2000), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Mauricio Rubio, *La violencia en Colombia: dimensionamiento y políticas de control* (Washington/New York: InterAmerican Development Bank); and Dennis Rodgers, *Youth Gangs and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Literature Review* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999), pp. 22–23.

Brazil: The Costs and Politics of Privatizing Security

Brazil is the clearest example of crime taking a direct toll on a country's economic, political, and social development. By the late 1990s, crime rates had soared to all-time highs; homicide rates in São Paulo, Espirito Santo, and Rio de Janeiro exceeded levels experienced by El Salvador during the height of its civil war in the 1980s.⁵¹

Alarmed by soaring crime, middle class and wealthy Brazilians increasingly moved into so-called fortress communities, gated communities, and private estates, walled-off properties in which affluent Brazilians physically and socially segregate themselves from society.⁵² The number of Brazilians living in these walled communities has doubled to more than 1 million in the past five years. São Paulo alone has 300 such communities, resulting in an economic elite that is retreating to a hyper-insulated lifestyle.⁵³ Research of the urban poor in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* has found that crime has also made low-income Brazilians less likely to interact with their neighbors, blocking formation of already low social capital.⁵⁴

The responses of government, the private sector, and civil society have been alarming. The administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003) and Luis Inacio “Lula” da Silva (2003–present) have responded to police ineffectiveness by stepping up reliance on the armed forces for basic internal security functions, ranging from street patrols to crowd control and riot control.⁵⁵ Polls showed that more than 70 percent of the public approved of army sweeps through shantytowns in Rio de Janeiro during the late 1990s, even as respected nongovernmental organizations detailed a steady stream of human rights violations committed during those operations.⁵⁶ Private firms and wealthy citizens increasingly have turned to private security firms, locally known as “rent-a-cops.” By the late 1990s, Brazil hosted some 400,000 registered “rent-a-cops” and an estimated 600,000 unregistered ones; many of them are off-duty policemen and use police resources, vehicles, and weapons to support their private security operations. A random sampling of data in late 1999 found that nearly two-thirds of all police homicides in São Paulo were actually committed by state police working off duty for

⁵¹ “1,8% das cidadãos concentram 51% dos homicídios,” *Folha de São Paulo*, October 17, 1999, p. A3.

⁵² Licia Valladares and Martine Jacot, “A Brazilian’s Home Is a Castle,” *UNESCO Courier* 6 (June 1999): 16.

⁵³ Anthony Faiola, “Brazil’s Elite Fly above their Fears; Rich Try to Wall Off Urban Violence,” *Washington Post*, June 1, 2002, p. A1. Faiola found that wealthy Brazilians increasingly rely on private helicopter pads to move from one part of town to another. He found that Rio de Janeiro has 240 helipads—by contrast, New York City has only 10—averaging 100 liftoffs per hour.

⁵⁴ See Janice Perlman, “The Metamorphosis of Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the Favelas in Rio de Janeiro, 1969–2002” (unpublished manuscript). Perlman’s update of her 1979 study found that the once-vibrant community life of the impoverished Rio de Janeiro slums had been significantly curtailed because of the fear of violence and the spread of organized criminal networks.

⁵⁵ “Indústria do crime consome 10% do PIB,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 11, 2002, p. 4; and Adriana Chiarini and Felipe Werneck, “Nem exército evita violência,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, March 4, 2003, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Jorge Zaverucha, “Fragile Democracy and the Militarization of Public Safety in Brazil,” *Latin American Perspectives* 27 (June 2000): 8–32.

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private security firms, further blurring the lines between public and private law enforcement.⁵⁷

Soaring crime rates, coupled with the inability of the criminal justice system to deter crime and the widespread belief that the judges will only return criminals to the streets, have fostered an increasing tolerance for human rights abuses and vigilante justice.⁵⁸ Indeed, a 2002 survey asking residents of Rio de Janeiro to identify their preferred anticrime strategies revealed that 47 percent of respondents believe police should kill murderers and thieves, and 28 percent endorses lynchings.⁵⁹ A series of incidents throughout the past decade reflect this hardening of public attitudes and the tendency to fight violence with more violence.⁶⁰

- In 2001 and 2002, angry mobs in southern and northeastern Brazil engaged in a series of grisly lynchings that included dismembering criminals and forced entries into jails to drag the criminals into the streets for public beatings.⁶¹
- When a policeman in Rio de Janeiro was unwittingly filmed shooting an unarmed teenager in 1995, polls found that 60 percent of city residents supported the policeman's actions—a position later echoed by the state governor, himself a former human rights advocate.⁶²
- State authorities in Rio de Janeiro had to disconnect a police hot line following a police massacre of eight street children in 1993 because the line was flooded with callers voicing support for the off-duty officers. Residents claimed that the actions were justifiable because the street children committed petty crimes that scared off tourists.⁶³
- When São Paulo police executed 110 inmates in a 1992 prison uprising, 60 percent of the public supported the actions. A subsequent poll found that 56 percent of respondents agreed that human rights should not be extended to criminals.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Huggins, "Urban violence and police privatization," p. 121; and José Vicente da Silva Filho, "Segurança pública e privada," *O Estado de São Paulo*, August 31, 2000, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Asked to identify what measures would most reduce crime rates, 51 percent of Brazilians named the death penalty, 72 percent cited life imprisonment with no chance for parole, and 84 percent cited assigning anticrime functions to the army, according to a 2002 poll. Only 38 percent believed that better training for the police would improve crime rates. See "Brasileiro acredita que violência sucumbe criminalidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 17, 2002, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Daniela Dariano, "Pesquisa revela insegurança do carioca," *Jornal do Brasil*, March 17, 2002, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Fighting Violence with Violence: Human Rights Abuse and Criminality in Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996); and Matha K. Huggins, "Urban Violence and Police Privatization in Brazil: Blended Invisibility," *Social Justice* 27 (Summer 2000): 115.

⁶¹ Bras Henrique, "Mãe pede a prisão do filho para evitar linchamento," *O Estado de São Paulo*, August 20, 2002, p. A17; and Clarissa Thomé, "Mulher é salva de linchamento pela polícia," *O Estado de São Paulo*, February 13, 2002, p. A7.

⁶² "Brazil Shooting Points to Massacre: Rights Group," May 12, 1995, Reuters press release.

⁶³ Prillaman, *The Judiciary and Democratic Decay in Latin America*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ "O inimigo das ruas," *IstoÉ*, August 4, 1993, p. 57.

The Growing Crime Epidemic: A Grim Look into the Future

Three factors suggest that Latin America's crime epidemic will get considerably worse before it gets better:

- The self-perpetuating nature of crime waves;
- The multidimensional causes of crime—particularly income inequality—that cannot be realistically improved in the short term; and
- The staggering lack of political will to tackle the problem with anything beyond standard law-and-order solutions.

First, the nature of crime and crime waves suggest that the current crisis will persist or even deepen in the years ahead. World Bank researchers have demonstrated the existence of a “criminal inertia,” in which high rates of criminality endure long after the latent socioeconomic causes have disappeared or been addressed through policy interventions.⁶⁵ The reasons range from high recidivism rates—particularly worrisome given anecdotal evidence that an increasing number of crimes in Latin America are committed by juveniles—to criminal perceptions that overburdened police are incapable of catching perpetrators and punishing illegal behavior.⁶⁶ Persistent violence also erodes traditional inhibitions and accustoms citizens to viewing violence as a legitimate way to resolve conflict.⁶⁷ Crime erodes social capital in the future, and low social capital, in turn, breeds crime.⁶⁸ In short, crime spirals are easy to start—but infinitely harder to break.

Second, a series of domestic, regional, and global trends will encourage the spread of crime in Latin America during the years ahead. Scholars have linked criminal behavior to factors ranging from income level to employment status, family background, marital status, education level, national ethnic fragmentation, and credibility of deterrent institutions, but recent research has convincingly demonstrated that income inequality is the strongest determinant of violent

⁶⁵ Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza, “What Causes Violent Crime?” (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998), pp. 3–7.

⁶⁶ Data on the dramatic rise of juvenile crimes is taken from Pablo Morosi, “Creció un 142% la delincuencia juvenil en apenas cuatro años,” *La Nación*, July 29, 2002, p. A11.

⁶⁷ Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza, *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998); and Arriagada, “Latin America Violence and Citizen Security,” p. 4. Broader social perceptions may also contribute to criminal inertia, as a climate of criminality removes social inhibitions against deviant behavior. The classic statement of this argument is James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, “Broken Windows,” *Atlantic Monthly* 211 (March 1982): 29–37. Even critics who disagree with the controversial policy recommendations of Wilson and Kelling nonetheless generally agree that the appearance of chaos and disorder within a community can encourage crime.

⁶⁸ Daniel Lederman, Norman Loayza, and Ana María Menendez, “Violent Crime: Does Social Capital Matter?” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3 (April 2002): 509–539; Richard Rosenfeld, Steven F. Messner, and Eric P. Baumer, *Social Capital and Homicide* (Saint Louis: University of Missouri Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 1999).

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crime.⁶⁹ This finding bodes ill for crime-reduction efforts in the short term for several reasons. At the most basic level, income inequality in Latin America has worsened in the past two decades, leaving the region with the worst income inequality on the world.⁷⁰ Worse yet, the experience of the past two decades suggests that pro-growth policies that reduce relative poverty may increase income inequality in the short term—particularly in societies that already demonstrate high levels of income inequality.⁷¹ In other words, addressing one determinant of crime may inadvertently worsen another.

Other domestic trends will worsen patterns of crime and violence. There is a strong correlation worldwide between population “youth bulges” and high urban crime rates, and households in cities with rapidly expanding populations are more likely to be victimized than households in cities with stable population levels.⁷² Latin America’s percentage of the total world population is expected to remain stable in the decades ahead because of successful family planning policies in Brazil and Mexico, a fact that has prompted some observers to play down the importance of changing demographics in Latin America. But the region’s average population growth masks ominous trends in several countries. According to U.S. Census Bureau projections, between 2000 and 2020 populations will increase by more than 60 percent in Guatemala and Paraguay, 50 percent in Bolivia, and 40 percent in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, suggesting that those countries will experience a surge in crime as growing numbers of youths enter the stagnant job market.⁷³ The fact that crime tends to be an urban phenomenon—and Latin America leads the world in the number and size of urban “megacities”—indicates that the combination of population density, accelerated rates of urbanization, and persistent income inequality will fuel more violence in the years ahead.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Francois Bourguignon, *Crime as a Social Cost of Poverty and Inequality* (Paris: DELTA, 1998); C. Hsieh and M. D. Pugh, “Poverty, Income Inequality, and Violent Crime: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Aggregate Data Studies,” *Criminal Justice Review* 18 (1993): 182–202; and Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza, *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World*.

⁷⁰ Miguel Szekely and Marianne Hilgert, *The 1990s in Latin America: Another Decade of Persistent Inequality* (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 1999), pp. 3–9.

⁷¹ Miguel Szekely, *The 1990s in Latin America: Another Decade of Persistent Inequality, but with Somewhat Lower Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2001). Szekely’s survey of 17 Latin American countries found that pro-growth policies caused modest reductions in poverty but also correlated with stagnating or increasing levels of income inequality. Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza reach similar conclusions in their study *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World*.

⁷² Alejandro Gaviria and Carmen Pages, “Patterns of Crime Victimization in Latin America Cities,” *Journal of Development Economics* 67 (February 2002): 181–203.

⁷³ By way of comparison, total world population during this period is expected to increase 23 percent. See U.S. Census Bureau, *World Population Profile*, at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/wp98.html> (accessed March 3, 2003).

⁷⁴ See, generally, *The Mega-city in Latin America*, ed. Alan Gilbert (New York: United Nations University Press, 1996). The correlation between expanding city size and diminishing effectiveness of law enforcement institutions in Latin America is laid out in Ellen Brennan-Galvin, “Crime and Violence in an Urbanizing World,” *Journal of International Affairs* 56 (Fall 2002): 125. There are anecdotal accounts of urban residents leaving capital cities in Argentina and Brazil,

The explosive growth of international crime groups—particularly those that engage in narcotics trafficking—will add to the incidence of violent crime in the region. To be sure, organized crime groups do not automatically resort to violence to further their aims; some maintain low profiles to avoid drawing attention to their activities, and others actually enjoy a level of popular support because they bring “peace” and material benefits to impoverished communities, thereby denying police the pretext to move in.⁷⁵ These instances appear to be the exception rather than the rule, however, particularly as crime cartels fragment and fight for control of turf, neighborhoods, distribution networks, and even government agencies.⁷⁶ Organized crime groups from Russia, Asia, and Japan are establishing operations from Central America to the Southern Cone, and Latin American drug traffickers are establishing footholds in new areas—rural Argentina, northern Chile, southern Brazil—a development that portends further corruption of civil society, state institutions, and even legitimate private-sector activity. Finally, some countries in Latin America—traditionally a source and transshipment point for narcotics—are beginning to experience a domestic drug addiction crisis. If worldwide patterns hold true in Latin America, then the trend portends a subsequent increase in drug-related crimes and violence in countries as diverse as Brazil, Chile, and Mexico.⁷⁷ At a minimum, the trend suggests that Washington’s counternarcotics policies, traditionally focused on eradication and interdiction in Latin America, will need to significantly increase the attention and resources devoted to demand-reduction efforts in the region.

A third and final factor that heralds a worsening of crime and violence is the absence of political will to fashion credible anticrime strategies. The lack of focus is confounding given the scope and magnitude of the problem, but several factors appear to be driving the policy drift.

- At the most basic level, crime is only one of several competing policy concerns vying for attention from publics and political elite. Indeed, asked to name their top concern, respondents region wide consistently cite other

but these incidents appear small in scale and are not sufficient to offset urban migration. See Evangelina Himittian, “Cada vez más gente abandona la ciudad,” *La Nación*, September 13, 2002, p. A1. The notable exception to the statement that crime is an urban phenomenon is Colombia, where 90 percent of homicides occur in rural areas. This trend is probably due to the fact that most of the fighting between Colombia’s two insurgent groups, the paramilitaries, and the armed forces occurs in rural areas.

⁷⁵ Robert Neuwirth, “Rio Drug Gangs Forge a Fragile Security,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 36 (September/October 2002): 32–37.

⁷⁶ Arriagada, “Latin America Violence and Citizen Security,” p. 4.

⁷⁷ Traci Carl, “Mexico to Launch War on Drug Trade,” *Washington Post*, November 4, 2002, p. A38; Anthony Faiola, “Drug War on the Home Front: Latin America, Long an Exporter, Fights a Growing Addiction,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1999, p. A18; and *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 2001* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2002), chapters four through six. Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza demonstrate a strong and positive correlation between intentional homicide rates and narcotics production and consumption levels. See their study *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World*, p. 22.

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factors—unemployment, job security, poverty, lack of health care—as more immediate priorities.⁷⁸

- The hardening of public attitudes described earlier apparently has convinced large portions of the population that law-and-order measures are a sufficient policy response; that pursuing long-term, comprehensive solutions reflect “soft-on-crime” attitudes or are simply impractical in the short term; and that the victims of crime and violence are, by and large, members of the social underclass who brought their condition onto themselves.⁷⁹
- The transnationalization of crime described above also brings with it the possibility of “state capture”—the opportunity for criminal groups to influence or undercut law enforcement and criminal justice systems. The ability of drug cartels to influence government policy in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru has been well documented, but transnational crime groups also have penetrated law enforcement agencies, the courts, legislators, and regulatory agencies from Mexico to Argentina, Brazil, and the Caribbean, enabling these groups to undermine or thwart anticrime policies at the working level.⁸⁰
- Nationalistic sensitivities make even some of the most crime-ridden countries reluctant to tackle crime and violence through multilateral approaches. The government of Canada proposed an ambitious “human security” agenda for the hemisphere-wide Summit of the Americas in 2000 but had to scale back the initiative in the face of diplomatic complaints that the agenda would cast a pall on the region’s international image.⁸¹ When local officials in Venezuela announced in 2001 that they had hired a former New York City police chief as an anticrime consultant, President Chavez quickly overrode their decision, announcing that foreign anticrime assistance represented “outside interference in [Venezuela’s] internal affairs.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Lagos, “Between Stability and Crisis in Latin America.”

⁷⁹ Martha K. Huggins, “Urban Violence and Police Privatization in Brazil: Blended Invisibility,” *Social Justice* 27 (Summer 2000): 115.

⁸⁰ On the corrosive impact of transnational and organized crime, see generally David C. Jordan, *Drug Politics: Dirty Money and Democracies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); and *Transnational Crime in the Americas*, ed. Tom Farer (New York: Routledge, 1999). An insightful journalistic account can be found in Larry Rohter, “A Brazilian State Battles Crime in High Places,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2002, p. 3.

⁸¹ Paul Heinbecker, “The Concept of Human Security: A Canadian View,” *RUSI Journal* 6 (December 2000): 27–31. Latin American governments instead preferred events that celebrated the region’s progress toward democracy, even as they sidestepped one of the core issues that was undermining the very achievement they celebrated. See Brook Larmer, “Latin America’s Biggest Problem is Common Crime: So Why Isn’t it on the Santiago Agenda?” *Newsweek*, April 20, 1998, pp. 16–19.

⁸² Larry Rohter, “Caracas Journal: A Veteran Cop on a Tough New Beat,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2000, p. A1.

Identifying Opportunities—and Pitfalls—for Anticrime Efforts

Where, then, does this bleak outlook leave policymakers, international development agencies, and donors looking to help reduce crime rates and boost political and economic development in Latin America? The conundrum is obvious. There is alarmingly much that we do not know about crime in Latin America—what patterns of policing are most effective, how different crimes respond to different deterrents, and even the role of political culture in determining whether some societies have different thresholds for tolerating violence—and these gaps undoubtedly include vital information that could help fashion successful anticrime strategies. But calls for “more research” are impractical and platitudinous for governments already facing some of the world’s highest crime rates and under growing pressure to “do something” now. The inability to fundamentally alter income inequality in the short term (and the lack of political consensus on how to remedy it) suggests that reformers stand their best chance of progress in devising institutional and social reforms that target at-risk communities, strengthen deterrent institutions, and alter the incentive structures for would-be criminals.⁸³ None of these approaches are “solutions” in and of themselves, but for those governments that appear genuinely willing to address the growing crime crisis, the successful experiences of some national and local governments—worldwide and locally—suggest certain lessons that could help governments take modest steps forward. Several important lessons stand out, both from successful reforms and failed ones.

First, it is clear that the international donor community needs to move strategies for crime reduction and prevention to center stage. Of the \$4.4 billion in development assistance the World Bank devoted to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2001, less than 1 percent was allocated for rule of law programs. The majority of that amount was directed at civil courts rather than the criminal justice system, because World Bank internal guidelines require that bank activities have a clear and direct impact of economic activity, and bank officials maintain the position that criminal justice reform has no clear economic impact.⁸⁴ If IDB estimates of crime’s impact on economic development are even close to accurate, then clearly crime has a strong and direct impact on economic activity, and the World Bank is justified in elevating crime-prevention efforts and criminal-justice reform to the status it currently affords issues such as environmental-resource management, gender-inclusion programs, and electronic-procurement programs for government ministries.⁸⁵

⁸³ Caroline Moser and Bernice van Brockhorst, *Youth Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: Costs, Causes, and Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999), p. 9.

⁸⁴ *The World Bank Annual Report*, Volume 1 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2002), p. 106.

⁸⁵ The Pan-American Health Organization has only belatedly begun to address the impact of crime and violence because of the associated health costs. The InterAmerican Development Bank has been among the most active on the issue, primarily because of the efforts of experts like Andrew Morrison.

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Second, in searching for effective anticrime strategies, the donor community and Latin American governments should not allow the elusive quest for the complete and comprehensive strategy to become an excuse for immobilism. Policymakers and development agencies repeatedly—and correctly—stress that any durable, lasting approach to crime reduction should be holistic and comprehensive, targeting the multiple causes of crime, addressing prevention, and incorporating policy tools ranging from medical to educational and judicial remedies.⁸⁶ The guidance is true enough, but it runs the risk of being impractical, given that most governments lack the resources for major anticrime reforms, most “root causes” of crime cannot be solved in the short term, and governments are under pressure to produce results immediately.⁸⁷ Even though there are no silver bullets to solve the region’s crime epidemic, there are in fact some simple, affordable, and practical steps that have successfully strengthened deterrent institutions or reduced crime in Latin America. Many of these initiatives are modest or targeted enough that they do not rely on broader macroeconomic trends and generally involve modest outlays or reallocating existing resources. For example:

- Aid officials report that successful crime-prevention programs throughout the region have included diverse preemptive measures ranging from curriculum changes in public schools to regular visits by healthcare providers to at-risk homes, controls on alcohol and firearms sales, and curfews.⁸⁸
- Community policing programs that have sought greater public input and replaced feckless, random police patrolling with targeted saturation of at-risk communities have reduced crime rates in parts of El Salvador and Brazil, while police hotlines enabling citizens to anonymously report crimes without fear of retribution have seen explosive growth in Argentine, Chile, El Salvador, and Uruguay.⁸⁹
- Alternative dispute resolution has decongested court dockets in Chile, strengthening the deterrent capabilities of the courts, while alternative sentencing in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Belize has

⁸⁶ Mayra Buvinic and Andrew Morrison, “Violence as an Obstacle to Development” (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000), pp. 3–4; and Mayra Buvinic and Andrew Morrison, “Preventing Violence” (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000).

⁸⁷ Andrew Morrison and Mayra Buvinic, “Causes of Violence” (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000).

⁸⁸ Mark Rosenberg, “Violence as a Public Health Problem,” in *Violence and Social Capital: Proceedings of the LCSES Seminar Series, 1997–98*, eds. Caroline Moser and Sarah Lister (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999), pp. 13–14.

⁸⁹ Nicole Hertvick, “El Salvador: Effecting Change from Within,” *UN Chronicle* 39 (September–November 2002): 75–76; Glenn Garvin, “Salvador Cops Learn U.S. Ways,” *Miami Herald*, April 24, 2000, p. A1; and Andrew Morrison and Mayra Buvinic, “Controlling Violence” (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000).

reduced prison overcrowding and enabled officials in the criminal justice systems there to embark on modest rehabilitation efforts.⁹⁰

The international community is well positioned to help Latin America strengthen its deterrent institutions in ways that increase the state's ability to prosecute crimes while protecting civil liberties of the accused. For example, currently more than 20 countries in the region are reforming their criminal justice systems by adopting aspects of U.S.-style oral, adversarial proceedings, moving away from the plodding, inquisitorial systems inherited from the colonial era.⁹¹ International donors can lend vital expertise to ease the rocky transition as local law enforcement and judicial officers struggle to learn, operationalize, and routinize new roles. Washington does need to shoulder the load on these reforms, however—and probably should not, given its own lack of familiarity with Roman law systems and poor track record “exporting” U.S.-style legal codes—and an international division of labor may yield more dividends. Observers note that Latin America's “hybrid” legal systems have more in common with legal systems of France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain than with the United States, suggesting that some European Union donors may be more logical candidates to provide training and expertise.⁹²

Third, the dramatic region-wide crime spike masks the fact that promising models for reducing crime and violence can be found at the local and grassroots level, a surprising development given the fact that most municipal and subnational governments face resources constraints even more austere than national governments.

- Some municipalities in Colombia dramatically reduced homicide rates through a mix of curfews, limits on sales of alcohol, access to justice programs, educational curriculum reform, gun buyback programs, and changes in police oversight during the 1990s.⁹³
- In Argentina, following a series of ineffective federal government initiatives in 2000–2001, residents from 30 different neighborhoods in and around Buenos Aires joined together to design strategies for sharing information about roving criminal gangs, constructing maps of crime

⁹⁰ Wendy Singh, *New Models of Accessible Justice and Penal Reform in the Caribbean* (London: Penal Reform International, 1999).

⁹¹ Fernando Carrillo, “Los retos de la reforma de la justicia en América Latina,” in *Reformas a la Justicia Penal en las Américas* [no ed.] (Washington, D.C.: Due Process of Law Foundation, 1999).

⁹² On some of the similarities between Latin American and European “hybrid” judicial systems and institutions, see Carlo Guarnieri, “Judicial Independence in the Latin Countries of Western Europe,” in *Judicial Independence in the Age of Democracy*, ed. Peter H. Russell and David M. O'Brien (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); and Linn Hammergren, *Do Judicial Councils Further Judicial Reform?* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

⁹³ Guerrero Velazco, “El control de la violencia a nivel municipal,” p. 7; and Andres Villaveces, Peter Cummings, Victoria Espitia, and Thomas D. Koepsall, “Effect of a Ban on Carrying Firearms on Homicide rates in Two Colombian Cities,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 283 (March 2000): 1205–09.

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patterns, and identifying priority areas for better lighting and police patrolling.⁹⁴

- Local police officials in another neighborhood of Buenos Aires introduced incentive structures modeled after reforms in Madrid, Spain, in which new pay and promotion systems were based on factors such as how quickly police responded to requests for backup support, processed paperwork associated with an arrest, or responded to emergency calls from distressed residents. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) gave the program high marks in its early phases.⁹⁵

Fourth, the quest for innovative government solutions also should recognize that some of the most promising anticrime strategies involve an active role for the private sector and civil society organization, either individually or through public-private partnerships. Indeed, a worldwide review of development projects has found that government partnerships with local nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, and university research centers helps broaden the community of stakeholders, achieves economies of scale in projects with limited financial resources, fine-tunes programs through trial and error, and facilitates the handoff to local actors once the donor community withdraws.⁹⁶ The Chamber of Commerce in Caracas funded some of the city's crime-mapping efforts in 2001, while El Salvador's leading private-sector organization financed community-policing programs in rural El Salvador that helped reduce homicides by 67 percent and carjackings by 42 percent in less than two years.⁹⁷ Alarmed by spiraling crime and increasing insurance costs, leading business groups in Argentina and Honduras organized a series of anticrime marches demanding congressional action on several long-stalled criminal justice reforms.⁹⁸

Fifth, national and local governments also can work with the private sector to incorporate anticrime features into urban planning through public bidding and contracting processes, zoning regulations, building codes, and tax incentives.

⁹⁴ Gustavo Carbajal, Fernando Rodríguez, and Hernán Capiello, "Los vecinos se unen contra el delito," *La Nación*, July 9, 2002, p. A3.

⁹⁵ Hernán Capiello, "Un modelo policial que imita el funcionamiento de una empresa privada," *La Nación*, November 30, 2002, p. A19.

⁹⁶ Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), chapter nine; and Derick W. Brinkerhoff, "Exploring State-Civil Society Collaboration: Policy Partnerships in Developing Countries," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1999): 59–86.

⁹⁷ Andy Webb-Vidal, "New York Supercop Takes a Crack at Caracas," *Financial Times*, March 22, 2001, p. A1; and Marc Lifsher, "If He Can Fight Crime There, He'll Fight It...Anywhere," *Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2000, p. A1. The efforts in San Salvador were so successful that authorities expanded the program to other cities, as well. See Garvin, "Salvador Cops Learn U.S. Ways," and Araña, "The New Battle for Central America." The police reforms focused on flexible patrolling patterns, police deployments based on changing crime patterns, and internal reforms aimed at improving case-management systems.

⁹⁸ Alejandra Rey, "Un bocinazo con ecos en todo el país," *La Nación*, September 11, 2001, p. A13; and José León Aguilar, "Claves de la experiencia ciudadana en la reforma del sistema de justicia de Honduras," in *Iniciativas de la Sociedad Civil para la Transparencia en el Sector Judicial* [no ed.] (Washington, D.C.: Fundación para el Debido Proceso Legal, 2002), p. 67.

Experience in large and mid-sized cities in Australia, Europe, Japan, and the United States has demonstrated that urban design can contribute significantly to crime reduction through a series of simple measures, many of which can be retrofitted to existing infrastructure such as public housing projects and planned communities. These measures include requiring contractors to install reinforced door locks, shatterproof windows, and closed-circuit television or surveillance cameras; placing windows along high-traffic corridors; limiting the points of entry to encourage facial recognition among residents while reducing transient pedestrian traffic; installing more evenly distributed lighting; introducing landscape designs that create wide spaces easily viewed by residents, neighbors, and bystanders; and introducing the use of magnetic identification cards.⁹⁹ The fact that these relatively simple and cost-effective innovations have contributed to reduced crime rates in urban settings on three different continents suggests that they would have some application in Latin America, as well.

Sixth, governments can take concrete steps to reduce the supply of handguns that are used in an increasing share of violent crimes in most of Latin America.¹⁰⁰ The World Bank and United Nations have noted that the growing use of firearms in the commission of crimes in Mexico and Central America account for the increasing lethality of crime there, and São Paulo police have found that handguns are used in nearly 90 percent of all homicides—and that illegally imported U.S. handguns are used in more than half of those cases.¹⁰¹ Despite widespread cynicism, gun amnesties in New York City in the mid-1990s led to the surrender of more than 10,000 firearms in one week, narrowing the range and types of guns on the street and facilitating ballistics testing.¹⁰² Gun amnesties and buyback programs have also been surprisingly successful in crime-plagued districts in Argentina and Guatemala, and Nicaraguan officials encouraged thousands of rural peasants to trade in firearms for vocational training and agricultural credits.¹⁰³ At

⁹⁹ John E. Eck, “Preventing Crime at Places,” in *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising?*, ed. Lawrence W. Sherman et al. (College Park, Md.: National Institute of Justice/Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 1997); Neal Kumar Katyal, “Architecture as Crime Control,” *Yale Law Journal* 111 (March 2002): 1039–1139; Ellen M. Walsh, “Crime Prevention through Environmental Design,” *Journal of Housing and Community Development* (July/August 1999): 42–44.

¹⁰⁰ On the general correlation between handguns and violent crime, see John J. Donohue III and Steven D. Levitt, “Guns, Violence, and the Efficiency of Illegal Markets,” *American Economic Review* 88 (May 1998): 463–67. Other researchers have found that the presence of guns both reflects and sows a distrust of state authority and public justice, perpetuating traditions of violent dispute resolution. See Edward L. Glaeser and Spencer Glendon, “Who Owns Guns? Criminals, Victims, and the Culture of Violence,” *American Economic Review* 88 (May 1998): 458–62.

¹⁰¹ Nelson Portillo, “Armas de fuego: una respuesta a la inseguridad ciudadana? Su impacto y prevalencia en la morbilidad del AMSS,” *Realidad* 64 (1998): 359; Edson Luis, “Contrabando de armas pela fronteira é ‘livre,’” *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 16, 2000, p. A4; “No mercado clandestino, é possível comprar fuzil AR-15 por US\$2 mil,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 20, 2000, p. 14; and “Gun Law in Brazil,” *The Economist*, June 19, 1999, p. 38.

¹⁰² Louis Anemone, *Controlling Illegal Firearms* (Sao Paulo: Instituto Fernand Braudel, 1999).

¹⁰³ “Destruyen más de 3000 armas ilegales,” *La Nación*, September 14, 2002, p. A15; and Camilla Waszink, *Small Arms and Violence in Guatemala* (Monterey, Calif.: Program on Security and Development, 2000).

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a minimum, governments in the region—particularly the United States and Brazil, homes to thriving small arms industries—can reduce the flow of black-market guns by fully implementing and enforcing the InterAmerican Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, a measure that would help reduce arms trafficking by implementing a standardized system for marking weapons at the point of manufacture and point of import.¹⁰⁴

Reform-minded officials and the international donors who fund these anticrime efforts must bear in mind several cautionary points, because failed crime-reduction efforts offer important lessons, as well. At the most basic level, more is not necessarily better. Faced with calls for immediate action, governments typically opt for a standard package of policies—more police, more judges, and more resources for law enforcement agencies. The approach is understandable enough given what we know about the region’s overburdened criminal justice institutions and the fact that such steps represent an easily quantifiable metric. But there is considerable reason to doubt the wisdom of such an approach. Research from other regions of the world has repeatedly shown no clear correlation between crime rates and numbers of police, particularly when there have been no corresponding efforts to correct the underlying conditions that led to criminal activity in the first place.¹⁰⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests a similar pattern in Latin America. Mexico has the highest number of police officers per person in Latin America, but also one of the highest crime rates, while increases in the number of police officers in Argentina and pay raises for police in São Paulo, Brazil, have had no impact on crime rates there.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, many Latin American governments already have more judges per citizen and spend a higher percentage of their national budgets on the judiciary than the United States, Spain, or Japan.¹⁰⁷ Without first developing a coherent plan for allocating and deploying additional resources, funding increases alone may be duplicative, counterproductive, and amount to throwing good money after bad.¹⁰⁸

In designing future crime-reduction strategies, donors need to be acutely aware of the fact that the *sequencing* of institutional reform matters significantly. If Latin American governments opt for policies that increase the number of

¹⁰⁴ William Godnick, *Tackling the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons* (London: British American Security Information Council, 2002); and Renan Antunes de Oliveira, “Fuzis não tem barreiras entre Miami e Brasil,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 16, 2000, p. A1.

¹⁰⁵ David H. Bayley, *Patterns of Policing* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985), chapter one.

¹⁰⁶ Luis Moreiro, “Sólo con más policías en la calle no se baja el delito,” *La Nación*, September 17, 2002, p. A5; and “Brazil Grapples with Crime, Punishment, and Policing,” *The Economist*, June 24, 2000, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Néstor Humberto Martínez, “Rule of Law and Economic Efficiency,” in *Justice Delayed: Judicial Reform in Latin America*, ed. Edmundo Jarquín and Fernando Carrillo (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Haiti is perhaps the most instructive if tragic example. Some 1,200 domestic and international NGOs and aid organizations are currently involved in development, capacity building, and poverty reduction efforts in Haiti, but the international community’s saturation of Haiti appears to have made little or no change in the past decade. See Peter Paproski, “Community Assets and Violence in a Haitian Urban Slum,” in *Violence and Social Capital*, eds. Moser and Lister, p. 40.

police, it is imperative that they first establish mechanisms for enhancing accountability and transparency, particularly given the fact that police forces account for a disproportionate share of homicides in some countries.¹⁰⁹ Past police and judicial reform efforts region wide have consistently demonstrated that those agencies targeted for reform are the most resistant to change.¹¹⁰ The experience of New York City is instructive. While the city's "zero tolerance" policies received the lion's share of media attention in the 1990s, a crucial factor in the success of the anticrime program was the introduction of greater internal accountability: new metrics to measure success and failure; precinct commanders empowered with greater disciplinary tools; and standardized complaint forms to reduce the discretionary and potentially abusive powers of frontline officers.¹¹¹ In Latin America, some of the most promising mechanisms for ensuring accountability include the impressive growth of "ombudsman" offices to investigate public complaints against government agencies in Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru; civilian review boards composed of members of the bar association, private sector, judiciary, and public prosecutor's office in Argentina; and an Office for the Defense of Human Rights in El Salvador.¹¹² In short, more resources first require more efficiency and more accountability, and these factors must be addressed alongside or prior to any funding increases.

Latin American governments and the international donor community also should rethink their current fascination with state-of-the-art anticrime technologies as solutions to the region's crime woes. To be sure, sophisticated crime-mapping programs in the United States have successfully identified certain neighborhoods and buildings that account for a statistically disproportionate share

¹⁰⁹ Paul Chevigny, *Edge of the Knife* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 15.

¹¹⁰ Charles T. Call and William Stanley, "Protecting the People: Public Security Choices after Civil Wars," *Global Governance* 7 (April-June 2001): 151-172; and Linn Hammergren, *Do Judicial Councils Further Judicial Reform? Lessons from Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), p. 15.

¹¹¹ William J. Bratton and William Andrews, "Driving Out the Crime Wave: The Police Methods that Worked in New York City Can Work in Latin America," *Time*, July 23, 2001, p. 43; and Anthony DePalma, "The Americas Court: A Group that Changed New York," *New York Times*, November 11, 2002, p. A3. The government of Mexico failed to take such steps during its anticrime efforts in the 1990s and found that some neighborhoods began mobilizing to keep police out, on the grounds that a larger police presence would only increase crime. See Howard Lafranchi, "When Police Arrive, Some Mexicans Serve and Protect Themselves," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 2, 1994, p. 13.

¹¹² See Hugo Frühling, "La prevención del crimen: notas sobre la Justicia Penal y la Reducción de Oportunidades para la delincuencia" (paper presented at the InterAmerican Development Bank Conference, "The Challenge of Urban Criminal Violence," Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, March 1997). See also Hugo Frühling, "Police Reform and Democratic Consolidation: Chile," in *Crime and Policing in Transitional Societies: Conference Report* (Johannesburg: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2001), p. 154. The same applies to reform of the criminal court system. The international community has rightly emphasized access-to-justice programs as a way to resolve disputes through legal channels and reduce private score settling. But governments that have increased access without also addressing efficiency have inadvertently flooded the courts with cases, increasing trial delays, fueling dissatisfaction with the courts, and contributing to the mob justice the reforms were intended to eliminate. See Prillaman, *The Judiciary and Democratic Decay*, p. 169.

of all reported crimes, enabling law enforcement authorities to focus resources on troubled locations.¹¹³ Computerized crime-mapping technologies were a key ingredient in helping New York City anticipate crime waves and preemptively target at-risk communities. Deployment of similar technologies in Caracas helped reduce crime rates there in the late 1990s.¹¹⁴ Such technologies also can help determine whether government policies are actually reducing crime or merely displacing it to different communities, a familiar pattern in Latin America.¹¹⁵ New technologies can also strengthen the institutional capacities of the criminal justice system, and have been shown to streamline basic recordkeeping operations in Guatemala, reducing opportunities for corruption.¹¹⁶

But there are practical limits that ought to dampen the international community's enthusiasm.

- Criminal cases involving DNA sampling, fingerprint matching, and biometric identification, for example, currently account for less than 5 percent of police caseload in Latin America, and studies worldwide demonstrate that the key to crime-solving efforts usually is whether the public—victims or witnesses—provide police with information that helps identify the suspect.¹¹⁷ These findings raise the possibility that more basic training and skills building—and efforts to enhance police credibility and trust with the public—would be a more cost-effective way of building institutional capacity.
- Studies of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) previous judicial reform efforts in Latin America also have found an overreliance on technology and administrative automation as a source of change, only to find that unaccountable bureaucrats have misused or abandoned the technology once the foreign donors depart the local scene.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Lawrence W. Sherman et al., "Hot Spots of Predatory Crime: Routine Activities and the Criminology of Place," *Criminology* 27 (1989); Wesley G. Skogan, *Disorder and Decline* (New York: Free Press, 1990); and J. Thomas McEwen and Faye S. Taxman, "Applications to Computerized Mapping to Police Operations," *Crime and Place*, eds. Johns Eck and David Weisburd (New York: Criminal Justice Press, 1996), pp. 259–284.

¹¹⁴ Hugo Vergara and Daniela Santelices, "América violenta," *Qué Pasa*, February 3, 2002, p. 18; and Bratton and Andrews, "Driving Out the Crime Wave."

¹¹⁵ Rafael di Tella, Sebastian Galiani, and Ernesto Schargrotsky, *Crime Victimization and Income Distribution* (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2002), p. 5. The authors note that crime is "mobile," meaning that changes in government policies and introduction of new anticrime technologies may cause crime to shift to different regions or to affect different economic groups over time.

¹¹⁶ Steven Hendrix, "Innovation in Criminal Procedure in Latin America: Guatemala's Conversion to the Adversarial System," *Southwest Journal of Law and Trade of the Americas* 5 (Fall 2000): 365–418.

¹¹⁷ Rachel Neild, "The Role of the Police in Violence Prevention," Technical Note 9 (Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank, 2000), p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Linn Hammergren, *Institutional Strengthening and Justice Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, 1998), pp. 64, 80.

- Finally, better technology in the hands of police is hardly a solution if police and judicial agents are unaccountable or part of the criminal structure. These patterns suggest that donors should rethink where such technology procurement efforts fit into a broader list of priorities and when they should be introduced into the reform effort.

Three final points stand out, none of which is encouraging. First, reformers need to anticipate the likelihood that incremental reforms—even well-designed and thoroughly democratic ones—face a dauntingly uphill battle. In the best case, they will invariably bring with them potential trade-offs and unintended consequences that governments, civil society, and international development agencies may consider unacceptable because they undercut or contradict other developmental goals.¹¹⁹

- For example, proponents of community policing correctly stress the importance of frequent community-police interactions, but opponents question whether it is desirable—particularly given Latin America’s weak democratic traditions—to institutionalize a process in which most of the best intelligence police receive comes from residents reporting on their neighbors.¹²⁰ Community policing rightly invites greater public input into selecting target neighborhoods, but these same efforts tend to invite reprisals from criminals by making it easier to identify perceived “informants.”¹²¹
- Brazilian researchers have identified a strong and positive correlation between crime and youths with idle time on their hands and have found that lowering working-age requirement laws has contributed to reducing at-risk behavior—but at the potential cost of backsliding on internationally accepted child labor standards.¹²² Similarly, researchers have found that increasing the income of young males through minimum-wage hikes significantly reduces the likelihood that they will commit violent crimes—but increases by a similar percentage the likelihood that they will become a *victim* of crime during the same period.¹²³

¹¹⁹ This problem is not unique to developing countries. Robert Putnam has shown, for example, that well-intentioned slum-removal efforts in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s had the unintended consequence of breaking up social networks among traditional communities.

¹²⁰ José Vicente da Filho, *Homicides: What Can the Police Do?* (Sao Paulo: Instituto Fernando Braudel de Economia Mundial, 1999), p. 3.

¹²¹ Fruhling, “La prevención del crimen.”

¹²² In the late 1990s, 40 percent of homicides in São Paulo occurred on weekends, suggesting that idle time is a factor and that redirecting at-risk populations to productive efforts—even correctional behavior—reduces incidences of violence. See Bruno Paes Manso, “Ação e discurso: sugestão para o debate da violência,” in *Insegurança Pública: Reflexões sobre a criminalidade e a violência urbana* [no ed.] (São Paulo: Nova Alexandre), p. 54. Some Caribbean countries have opted for community-service punishments rather than mandatory three-year jail terms—also an effort to reduce the idle time of potential offenders—but have encountered resistance from human rights groups that claim the extended programs violate the civil liberties of the accused.

¹²³ Mônica Viegas Andrade and Marcos de Barros Lisboa, “A Violência como causa de mortalidade,” *Conjuntura Económica* (May 2000): 61–64.

- Laudable efforts to reduce judicial delays by adopting more efficient, transparent oral proceedings—a move away from plodding and secretive written proceedings of Roman law systems—initially caused trial delays to more than double in Argentina and Uruguay as judges and prosecutors struggled to learn new procedures, clogging court dockets and causing prison populations to swell.¹²⁴ Conversely, Venezuela enacted a criminal code that eased the much-abused practice of pretrial detentions, but the measure inadvertently returned more than 2,000 repeat offenders to the streets and caused urban crime rates to skyrocket in a matter of weeks.¹²⁵

Second, the scope of the crime crisis is so severe that even comprehensive, holistic programs, implemented by well-intentioned and accountable, democratic governments, can do all the right things and still simply fail. World Bank researchers have detailed programs targeting at-risk communities in Central America that have involved close collaboration with NGOs, subsidized credits for at-risk youths, job-skills training, and financial aid, only to find the program failed because the crime-plagued communities lacked the requisite social capital to make the efforts succeed.¹²⁶ Seemingly comprehensive reforms of the criminal justice system in Buenos Aires and Cordoba Provinces enacted in the 1990s were followed by a dramatic increase in crime rates because of the onset of the worst economic crisis in 50 years.¹²⁷

Finally, and perhaps most distressingly, the sad reality is that some governments in the region will simply not want to support significant crime-reduction programs, even as they pay lip service to such efforts and accept financial support from international donors. Current debates on crime-reduction strategies—prevention versus deterrence, narcotics demand reduction versus supply reduction, and so forth—all assume that Latin American governments are committed to effective anticrime strategies and that the chief obstacles to success are financial, bureaucratic, and technical. That assumption clearly merits closer scrutiny. Organized crime groups have been credibly linked to senior officials in successive Colorado Party governments in Paraguay, the Guatemalan Republican Front Party in Guatemala, factions of the Liberal Party in Colombia, and various local governments in Brazil, Central America, and Mexico, among others.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Prillaman, *The Judiciary and Democratic Decay*, p. 119.

¹²⁵ “Venezuelan Justice Reform Backfires, Sparking Crime Wave,” August 17, 1999, Reuters press release.

¹²⁶ Rodgers, *Youth Gangs and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Literature Review*, p. 21.

¹²⁷ Eduardo E. Estévez, “Reforma de sistemas de seguridad pública e investigaciones judiciales: tres experiencias en la Argentina,” (documento de trabajo presentado en el panel de cierre de la Conferencia Internacional “Crimen y Violencia: Causas y Políticas de Prevención,” May 4–5, 2000), pp. 1–14. For a recounting of one failed effort by political leaders and civic organizations to channel popular frustrations into a coherent antcrime agenda, see “Fue débil la protesta contra la inseguridad,” *La Nación*, October 11, 2002, p. 15.

¹²⁸ On the growing presence of organized crime groups in Guatemala, see David Gonzalez, “Graft Aggravates Woes Plaguing Central America,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2003, p. A3; Christopher Marquis, “U.S. Lists Guatemala’s Anti-Drug Cooperation as Inadequate,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2003, p. A3; Juanita Darling, “Guatemala Sees Organized Crime as Security

While no government in the region actively promotes street crime as a matter of policy, there are compelling indications that some governments are involved in (or deliberately indifferent to) the same narcotics-related activities that fuel ordinary street crime downstream. What appears to be a “crime problem” may in fact reflect a “regime problem.” No amount of international assistance can remedy that shortcoming, and donors may be forced to think of ways to work creatively around rather than with corrupt regimes.¹²⁹ Clearly, none of the policy options is easy. But unless and until Latin American governments are ready to begin making the hard choices, crime and violence will only grow, with the fate of Latin America’s fragile democratic and economic development hanging in the balance.

Threat,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2000, p. A3; and “Investigan mafia rusa en C.A.,” *Prensa Gráfica*, May 9, 2000, p. A1.

¹²⁹ Jordan, *Drug Politics: Dirty Money and Democracy*, chapter one.

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