2016


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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/manuel_dammertguardia/17/
According to the Citizens’ Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice, a Mexican nongovernmental organization, more than 86 percent of the world’s most violent cities in 2015 were located in Latin America. Homicide has become an epidemic in cities such as Tegucigalpa, San Salvador, Caracas, and Rio de Janeiro and in specific neighborhoods of almost all major cities in the region. Although violence has always been a part of Latin American history, the past three decades have witnessed a complex confluence of factors that have led to an emergence of an environment prone to violence. In this regard, an interaction of key structural and individual variables plays an important role: the undermining influence of institutions, lack of interpersonal trust, an increased presence of organized crime groups, and a process of accelerated urbanization marked by segregation, fragmentation, and relinquishing of public spaces.

Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt in this book not only affirm that Latin American cities are vulnerable, but also note their resilience in acting in response to the spread of violence and inequality. The contributing authors show a diversity of case studies focusing on cities with high rates of violence, such as Caracas, Bogotá, San Salvador, San José, Kingston, and Santo Domingo; they also offer a comparative analysis of five megacities: Buenos Aires, Lima, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. Despite the multiple differences amid the cases, the editors include an introductory chapter that delineates a theoretical framework, which, they propose, could be used to understand the idea that the urban violence phenomenon is related to the concept of resilience.

In a context marked by urban fragmentation, abandonment of public spaces, increased use of private security, and lack of interpersonal and institutional trust, the concept of urban resilience refers to “the mechanisms that allow cities as well as specific populations, spaces and institutional domains to resist or recover from violence and insecurity” (16). The editors recognize multiphase and multidimensional characteristics of resilience as a concept, defined in their work as “communities, networks, grassroots organizations, and public and nongovernmental support structures [that] mobilize to create alternative, nonviolent spaces and practices in cities” (2). In their own words, Latin American cities are not only about fragility.

The perspective introduced in this book has a direct impact on scholars and public policy experts in at least three ways. It represents a step forward in the detailed analysis of resilience as an important concept in urban studies. It also defines multilevel and organizational arrangements that individuals and organizations use to deal with increasing urban violence, and it sets a comparative agenda for future research at the local level. The second chapter presents an analysis of the link between fragility and resilience in megacities, despite the difficulties in gathering empirical information to characterize either urban violence or microlevel responses to this matter.
The book proposes a departure from the traditional analysis of urban violence often linked to poverty and offers the idea of resilience as a tool to overcome socio-economic and symbolic disadvantages. In order to contribute to the prevailing debates about the causes of increasing levels of violence throughout the Latin American urban landscape, this compilation utilizes empirical evidence to further analyze the relationship between poverty and violence and to highlight a complex connection between inequality and violence.

The case studies present an in-depth analysis of urban violence and its specific characteristics in each city, with special emphasis on the fragility element of the Latin American urban experience, following the framework proposed by Koonings and Kruijt. In the chapters that discuss San Salvador, San José, Kingston, and Santo Domingo, the resilience component is more precisely explained. Most chapters show the increasing presence of a “gray area” where resilience is the link to adaptation strategies instead of efforts to change the presence of urban violence. The chapter on El Salvador analyzes the presence of gangs in many neighborhoods and highlights the fact that for a majority of young people, “coping with the gangs seems to have become a way of life, a practice considered normal” (107). The question of the link between resilience and urban safety remains open, and as the editors insist, more research is necessary to understand how urban violence has become a constant feature in the daily life of Latin Americans.

An important contribution of the book is the statement that further research at the local level, grounded in empirical evidence, would allow for better and more refined analysis. However, homicide rates or crime data are not the only indicators needed for further understanding the problems that most cities in Latin America face nowadays. Context and historical processes are also common features in the analysis. Further explicated in the chapters on Bogotá and Caracas, a longitudinal analysis of the transformation and continuity of urban violence dynamics shows that there is a permanent interaction between political and economic systems, which points to a potential relationship with the type of violence existing at different historical moments.

The relevance of urban growth to understanding the dynamics of violence also is explained by Wim Savenije and Chris van der Borgh and by Abelardo Morales Gamboa, relating to San Salvador and San José, respectively. These Central American cities face very different criminal problems but share a common process of urban fragmentation. Furthermore, in the interest of understanding city processes, it is important to include a national perspective. The case of Bogotá is paradigmatic in this regard, since it has been considered a “best practice” case for the prevention and control of urban violence, more specifically homicide. However, the author, Alan Gilbert, recognizes the importance of understanding policies implemented at a national level in order to fully understand why such changes took place at a city level.

By upgrading the discussion of urban violence beyond the traditional perspectives on crime, such as insecurity and poverty, this collaboration suggests more sophisticated ways to understand the challenges raised by urban violence and offers
the development of a new framework that can contribute to producing better strategies for more inclusive and safer cities in Latin America.

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This edited volume represents a timely and substantive contribution to a broad literature encompassing a wide variety of issues, including land reform, inequality, poverty, state, political parties, and social movements. The volume includes writings by Brazilian as well as U.S. scholars, and the stellar job done by Miguel Carter in providing a framework that links the many contributions together is clearly evident.

The introductory chapter by Carter lays out the stark realities as well as the consequences of social inequalities in Brazil, one of them being extreme land concentration. Carter notes the many structural and institutional factors that perpetuate this inequality in land structure. They include the origins of the situation in colonial-era arrangements, a patrimonial and oligarchic state, a tradition of autocratic decisionmaking, power asymmetries, and other political practices that render great political strength to large landholders, who then challenge the authority of the state even in its meager attempts to bring accountability or protect human rights.

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), in its mobilizing and political strategies, has generated possibilities for changing that inequality. Carter sets up the discussion by first exploring the issue of land reform as one of the main redistributive mechanisms adopted throughout Latin America, but also more globally, during the twentieth century. This comparative approach to land reform serves to highlight the extremely disappointing state efforts to date in addressing rural inequality in Brazil. In terms of land inequality, Brazil ranks first in the world, despite the approximately 3.7 million hectares of land that were redistributed, largely due to the mobilizations of rural workers from the 1980s to 2006.

Carter then brings attention to the whole spectrum of arguments among advocates and opponents of land reform in Brazil, but he leaves a more complete understanding of the full weight of the opposition among a handful of conservative Brazilian scholars—who argue widely that the MST offers essentially nothing good—to the concluding chapter. This is a strategic move, as the bulk of the chapters in this collection are organized first to include the arguments of scholars whose research and findings underscore the historical and contextual background to MST mobilizations, as well as the internal organization, nuances, and impact of the MST in different regions of Brazil. In the concluding chapter that pulls the many excellent con-