Research Briefing

Everyday (In)Security in Contexts of Hybrid Governance: Lessons from Medellin and San Salvador

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Crime and insecurity in cities in the global South, where levels of violence are elevated, have become a major concern for citizens, academics, and the media. Security provision in these places is also a priority area for policy makers, governments and development agencies. This is particularly the case in Latin America and the Caribbean where in the search for ways to reduce or contain urban violence, different tiers of government have attempted strategies that particularly target marginalised communities.

Security responses in some of the most affected cities often attempt to establish state's presence, intervention and territorial control, in what are regarded as problematic areas where different types of illegal armed groups have the capacity to exercise violence and different forms of control over residents. Security responses involving various combinations of hard-fisted measures, community policing models, negotiations with local armed actors, preventive programmes and improved service delivery, are making interactions between state institutions, illegal armed actors and citizens ever more complex on the ground.

This briefing paper presents preliminary findings from an empirical study carried out in Medellin and San Salvador, which explored the way residents of marginalised areas experience security and justice provision in contexts where governance reconfigurations are occurring as a result of different security strategies, as well as what type of informal and formal practices are deployed to deal with people's daily security needs in these contexts characterised by the coexistence of state institutions and other coercive actors. The briefing also explains what can be learnt from people's daily experiences and practices of (in)security in urban communities of these two cities.

Overview

Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing a regional security crisis that results in 400 people losing their lives violently each day.[1] The 144.000 murders committed each year in the region, together with extremely high levels of violent crime, impunity and victimization are only the most visible signs of a more complex problem: the ongoing reproduction of different forms of violence. Marginalised urban communities have become the epicentre of this crisis and also of the attempts to curtail it. In the past two and a half decades, governments at national and local levels have articulated several types of responses. While hard-fisted measures and zero-

tolerance policies have been dominant, more recently emphasis has been placed on the capacity of the state to ´intervene´ and to establish territorial control of areas where illegal armed actors have the capacity to exercise coercion and provide services to communities, using a mix of preventive approaches, urban upgrading initiatives, community policing and militarised tactics.

These responses to complex security problems in the region are shaping state-society relations and the nature of statehood in intended and unintended ways. Intervention and permanent presence by the state in the most marginalised communities has prompted ever more complex forms of interaction between representatives of

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[1] Muggah and Szabo de Carvalho, March 22, 2017. Latin America's Murder Epidemic How to Stop the Killing
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-

america-caribbean/2017-03-22/latin-americas-murder-epidemic

state institutions, citizens and legal and illegal actors on the ground.

With marked differences in their histories and 'trajectories' of violence, and in efforts to contain violence and establish a degree of order, Medellín in Colombia and the metropolitan area of San Salvador (AMSS) in El Salvador are strategic sites to explore not only the kind of governance reconfigurations and re-negotiations that are taking place, but also what these mean for people living in the most affected communities.

Our Study

Funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation Dr. van der Borgh and Dr. Abello Colak conducted research in San Salvador and in Medellin with the support of Carlos W. Moreno, Adrian Bergmann, Lina Maria Zuluaga and Isabella Wüstner. The research project involved case specific literature reviews on security provisioning in the past 5 to 10 years and around 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews in each city. These interviews were carried out with residents, members of local civil society organisations, municipal officials and police officers living or working in communities with high incidence of violence[2] (present or in the recent past), with low levels of quality of life and human development and where gangs and/or criminal groups played a role in security provision[3].

In Medellin

Colombia's second largest city, Medellin, is often portrayed as a successful example of urban renewal. Its physical transformation and an impressive reduction in homicide rates[4] allowed this city to establish itself as a ´laboratory´ of promising security initiatives in the late 2000s. The epicentre of the city's transformation, which according to the Wall Street Journal and Citigroup Inc. made it the most innovative city in the world, were marginalised communities in the sidehills of the city. Since 2002 these communities were subject to a wide range of interventions by national and local governments. Pacification operations combining military and police forces, urban regeneration projects, social urbanism, expansion of basic services, prevention programmes targeting vulnerable groups, and a demobilisation process were put in place to weaken illegal armed actors and drive young people away from organised crime[5].

Branded as 'the Medellin model', this mixed approach was implemented by three consecutive local administrations (2004-2015) and led to the gradual sophistication of local state institutions and to the establishment of permanent state presence in historically neglected areas. Despite undeniable progress, local armed actors involved in illegal economies have been able to adapt and mutate. Criminal groups have found ways to exploit and benefit from services and programmes brought to communities[6] and have undergone their own sophistication while diversifying their sources of revenue.

This research focusing on security governance in marginalised communities, points to an ongoing process of adaptation, not only on the side of criminal actors, but also on the side of state officials and institutions which entered these communities. These areas have been pacified by navigating, rather than challenging or eliminating, the power and influence of criminal

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[2] Interviews with police officers only took place in the case of Medellin. The research in San Salvador included informal conversations with police staff, and interviews with experts about the role of the police.

[3] In Medellin the research focused on three communities: Comuna 1-Popular, Comuna 8-Villa Hermosa and Comuna 13-San Javier. In El Salvador research was conducted in 10 neighborhoods located in seven different municipalities of the Area Metropolitana de San Salvador (AMSS), including San Salvador, Soyapango, Mejicanos, and Ilopango.

[4] From 381 homicides per 100.000 people in 1991 the rate reduced, in 2015, to a record low for the city of 20,13.

[5] Abello Colak, A. (2018) Provisión de Seguridad en una Ciudad entre el Conflicto Armado, el Narcotráfico y Otras Violencias: Lecciones de Medellín 2002-2015 (ICIP Research, 05).

[6] Abello Colak and Guarneros Meza, 2014. The Role of Criminal Actors in Locla Governace. Urban Studies, 51(15), 3268-3289

organisations. Coexistence, mutual tolerance and occasional collaboration between police officers and members of criminal organisations, for example, are more common forms of interaction than antagonism. Although the aim of the Medellin model was to regain sovereignty and state control over these communities, it is clear that a hybrid form of security governance in the city has developed.

Levels of lethal violence remain low compared to the city's historic high levels and people's perception of security has increased. However, coercion (including the threat to use violence) is constantly and simultaneously exercised by legal and illegal actors in communities. Police officers often encourage residents, tacitly or openly, to resort to armed actors to resolve daily problems, while criminal actors 'leave' other issues to the police. As one interviewee pointed out 'one's survival in these contexts depends on one's capacity to read who has the power at a certain point and adapt' (AA, E6).

Informal arrangements between state and illegal actors allow criminal groups to profit from a wide range of illegal activities such as drug trafficking and sexual exploitation for example, and to intensify their coercive control of communities, unchallenged by police. At the same time, informal arrangements as well as pacts between criminal factions help maintain homicide rates and crime rates under control, and allow state institutions to function in these communities, providing basic services and giving an impression of state competence. To some extent citizens end up navigating the legal and illegal security provision options available to them and are forced to 'choose' which actor to resort to when dealing with problems, depending on their assessment of the costs and potential benefits they foresee[7].

The social and economic control exercised by local gangs linked to more sophisticated criminal organizations in these communities has increased. Armed groups control who can live in these communities and often force residents out. They illegally tax any economic activity or

transaction, no matter how formal or informal it is (from selling or renovating properties and carrying out projects for infrastructure improvements, to selling products or informal services in public spaces or homes). These actors have also established rules to control crimes like rape, robbery, burglary, and vehicle theft, and they provide de facto and violent forms of justice when people break those rules, or when residents resort to them in search for solutions to community, family and interpersonal conflicts. This does not mean that state institutions do not exercise power in these communities too, nor that people do not want and value state presence. People often demand more presence and intervention from the state; however, the type of services that armed actors provide and the kind of 'arrangements' they have established with state actors in these areas do not necessarily make state and criminal presence seem as mutually exclusive or incompatible.

Throughout the history of the city and long before the state decided to enter and establish a permanent presence in these communities, different armed groups have been able to exercise their power. What seems interesting is that people have normalised the power and capacity of these groups to exercise territorial, social and economic control of their communities, even more than and despite state intervention in these areas. The paradox is that the type of relations that criminal actors have established with representatives of state institutions, like the police, has reinforced these actors' influence over the community and in some cases, their legitimacy.

Criminal actors have also been able to establish even more exploitative relations with residents than before. Communities where the study was carried out are vastly affected by the expansion and diversification of pervasive forms of extortion by local gangs and criminal organisations. Residents have to pay an illegal 'tax' for a wide range of daily activities, such as parking motorcycles or cars in front of their

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[7] When dealing with incidents of intrafamily violence, conflicts caused by unpaid debts, interersonal problems or loss of property due to theft, for example, residents decide to go to a police station or contact the local gang leader, depending on their assessment of how effective and violent the 'solutions' offered by the police and the local armed group might be.

homes, owning certain type of dogs who are classified as dangerous, or being involved in altercations. Bus and taxi drivers and owners of bus companies are also extorted. Contractors of local works are pressured to pay 'security taxes' to the gangs. The extortion system run by criminal organisations and gangs in these communities has an impact on cost of living for residents, as delivery and prices of key products and services are controlled and increased by these groups. Despite the negative effects of these forms of economic and social control, the research carried out shows that residents have routinised some of these illegal and violent forms of taxation and that people tend to not question or challenge the power criminal groups exercise, as long as it prevents indiscriminate violence against residents and confrontations between local gangs or between these and the police. In areas where there is constant risk of gangs from other neighbourhoods taking over the community, residents also tend to see the ransom paid to the local gang as an acceptable price for 'protection' by the local gang.

This research reveals that multiple violences and forms of insecurity affecting residents of poor communities remain pervasive. There is evidence that violence against women, exploitation of children and young people, threats to local leaders and intra-city displacement are recurrent in these communities. The security situation in the city is still very complex today even though the use of lethal violence is more selective.

Criminal actors have increased their influence in marginalised communities and diversified their relations with citizens and state institutions on the ground. The state presence in these communities is visible and permanent, but it has not prevented these actors from routinely exercising high levels of coercion and violent control over residents' lives. Reductions in the most visible indicators of violence in the city seem to be more the result of the 'management' of violence rather than of its eradication, and there are worrying signs that dynamics holding homicides rates in a descending trajectory since 2012 might be changing.

In San Salvador

El Salvador has faced staggering homicide rates over the past decades, and the metropolitan area of San Salvador belongs to one of the most violent cities in the world today.[8] The high levels of violence are not a new phenomenon, as they were already comparatively high before the civil war. While street gangs can be held responsible for a considerable part of that violence, there are numerous other types of violence, including domestic violence, and police violence.[9] Over the past decades the government's efforts to stop the gang phenomenon and to contain gang violence have largely failed. Repressive policies have been the dominant government response, but the effectiveness of these policies is questionable and has not only led to the incarceration of thousands of gang members, but also to the transformation rather than the abolition of gangs. A government-facilitated truce initiative between gangs in 2012 led to a marked reduction in homicide rates, but the truce eventually unravelled, leading to a new 'wave' of violence in the country. In the years thereafter, the involvement of military personnel in public security tasks increased and there are strong indicators that police violence against gang members has increased and has led to extrajudicial executions.[10]

[8] 'Rivers of Blood. Violence in El Salvador.' The Economist, 10 October 2015.

[9] Ainhoa Montoya, 2018, *The Violence of Democracy: Political Life in Post-War El Salvador*, Palgrave; Christine J. Wade, 2016, *Captured Peace. Elites and*

Peacebuilding in El Salvador, Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Research in International Studies.

[10] United Nations (UN), 2018, El Salvador End of Mission Statement, Agnes Callamard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or

Gangs can be seen as (perverse) institutions mostly based on violence, coercion and fear, which reproduce themselves and are in many ways 'threatening' to a broad range of actors (although in different forms). There is variation in local gang presence, and in the places where they have built up strong power positions, all local actors need to take them into account. For example, a procession of a local Catholic Church was no longer allowed to cross the 'invisible frontier' between different gang territories.[11] Local residents experience severe restrictions in terms of freedom of movement (it is impossible to enter territory of enemy gangs), freedom of expression (hear, see and remain silent), and freedom of property. However, these restrictions also depend on the specific local context. In some neighbourhoods with a historical gang presence, there seems to be a relative acceptance of the gang by residents. In these neighbourhoods, the increasingly repressive government policies are felt by many residents, even those who are not affiliated to gangs (particularly youth).

The local security situation in the Salvadoran margins is quite different from Medellin. Instead of stabilization and new equilibria between government actors and illicit groups, the picture is more mixed in the case of San Salvador. While street gangs are illicit groups that may have connections with transnational organised crime, they are a different type of organisation. Transnational organized crime has penetrated the police apparatus, political parties and the fabric of society.[12] Street gangs have a local territorial presence, and the control they exert over territories and people provides them with some income. The extortion of local businesses, bus companies and residents is the primary source of income, but the local retail of drugs is also an important source. The relations with the police and military have become extremely tense and conflictive over the past years; however, gangs have the ability to put pressure on other government staff, especially at the local level. Government officials often have no other choice than to deal with street gangs, leading to unstable relations in which gangs usually are the 'upper dog'. Overall, the picture that emerges is – as one mayor put it—that 'there is no order' in the marginalized neighbourhoods where there is a strong gang presence. However, it is fair to say that a degree of unstable and hybrid order exists in which gangs are a dominant local force, and local governments, local associations as well as political parties have no other choice than to deal with this gang presence.

The capacity of gangs to provide security or order is, thus, very limited, and only in a limited number of neighbourhoods do gangs seem to play a role in local security for residents. One local NGO worker put it bluntly: 'It is a control of territories by 'machos'. The one who is biggest is the one who rules. They are not interested in ruling rightly, they are not interested in obtaining resources for the community. It is tyranny.' However, in a number of cases it was reported that gangs have internal rules about the ways to relate and behave with local residents, which includes the non-use of force vis-à-vis local residents. In a number of cases, and depending on the personal local networks of residents, it was reported that gang leaders had offered residents help to stop extortion or

Arbitrary Executions, 5 February 2018, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22634&LangID=E

[11] Las Fronteras que ni Jesucristo Puede Cruzar en Soyapango, Diario1.com, 22 March 2016, http://diario1.com/zona-1/2016/03/las-fronteras-que-ni-jesucristo-puede-cruzar-en-soyapango/
[12] Hector Silva, 2014, *Infiltrados. Crónica de la corrupción de la PNC (1992-2013)*. San Salvador: UCA editores. Silva, Hector, 2014, 'The Infiltrators. Corruption in El Salvador's Police', in Insight Crime, 21 February 2014, https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/the-infiltrators-a-chronicle-of-el-salvador-police-corruption/

maltreatment by other gang members. Only in few cases residents reported a more proactive role of local gangs in the resolution of conflicts. The best kind of security that gangs seem to provide to residents is that they cause 'no problems'.

Despite the continuing focus on repressive approaches, the capacity of police and military to secure marginalized neighbourhoods is limited. There is a capacity to hunt down gang members, but the relationship with local residents (especially with young males) is problematic and often hostile. Indeed, the task of the security forces is not an easy one, as street gangs oppose contact between residents and the police. This leads to a situation in which residents are caught between fires. Local residents – especially those living in areas with a strong gang presence – often reported negatively about the police: 'When you are from a 'conflict zone' they see you as a delinquent, a collaborator.' Many residents reported about the police that 'they don't provide security but frighten us.' In neighbourhoods where this was the case, some residents argued that they trusted the gang more than the police. The police efforts to improve the relations with local residents are often distrusted by gangs, who prohibit residents from being in touch with police.[13]

In turn, national government officials, members of political parties, and local municipal staff who are not involved in law enforcement, often need to negotiate access to neighbourhoods with a strong gang presence. Municipalities need to deal with gangs, either indirectly, for instance through local neighbourhood associations that are in touch with street gangs, or directly by negotiating access to certain neighbourhoods. In a number of cases it was reported that an important criterion for the recruitment of local government staff was that they resided in areas

controlled by a particular gang or clique so as to facilitate government access. Government staff working in the field maintain relations with gangs, or with local organizations that are in touch with gangs. Gangs usually expect "benefits" for their cooperation with the local government, which, for example, can be projects in their neighborhood, access to government jobs, or money. Local neighborhood organizations can play important roles in the communication between government staff and gangs. Indeed, these organizations also need to position themselves vis-à-vis gangs.

All in all, despite the continuing efforts to crack down on gangs by the national security forces, at the local level, arrangements between local government officials, politicians, grassroots organizations and gangs come into existence. These arrangements are mostly ad-hoc and unstable, and they lead to low levels of perceived security by citizens. It is fair to say that most local actors, including residents, members of community organizations, municipal officials, police officials, as well as gang members, look for their own security, and the mélange of security practices by each actor results in an insecure and unstable local order. There is not one single agent controlling a 'territory', but different armed and unarmed actors that have different degrees of influence over territories and people.

Preliminary Conclusions

A micro level analysis of everyday security and hybrid security governance in Medellin and San Salvador shows that local communities are strategic sites to understand the dynamics of urban violence and security and reconfigurations of governance. In the case of Medellin, multiple actors claim the right to control people and territory and to provide security and justice, despite successful efforts to improve state sophistication and efficiency at delivering public

[13] Jorge Beltran Luna, Asesinato de lideres comunales: El precio de una iniciative de seguridad, elsavaodr.com, 28 April 2018.

services and goods. The sharp reduction in homicide rates over the past decades in this city does not imply a weakening of organised crime, but rather the emergence of more stable relations between high-level organised crime and lower level 'combos', and state actors. This leads to a situation with a relatively clear division of labour, where government agencies and the police can provide services, while organised crime is still present and exerting a lucrative control over communities. The case of Medellin shows that hybridity does not only happen in contexts where state presence and capacities are low, but rather takes shape in a context where state institutions have been strengthened as well.

The situation in El Salvador is far less stable, with a crack-down of the police and military against gangs and the persistence of high homicide rates. However, also in a situation where the state forcefully tries to (re) establish its control over territory, along with preventive and social programmes, at local level there are multiple dealings between gangs, governments, political parties and local organisations. Gangs negotiate with and put pressure on local government officials, they are in contact or make deals with political parties, and they are in touch with or exert control over local community organisations. The result is an unstable order, where most actors look after their own security. Hence, increasing the presence of government institutions in a context of chronic violence, although highly desirable and necessary, is no guarantee for the debilitation of criminal actors, as it may also lead to criminal sophistication and to the mutation of violence.

Our research also points at the need to look beyond quantitative indicators of security (such as homicide rates and crime statistics) in contexts of chronic violence. These indicators do not allow us to see how relations between the state and other actors are mutating and how hybridity unfolds on the ground. Reductions in homicide and crime rates can be the result of illegal pacts or the hegemony of a criminal faction, and not necessarily the result of changes in structural factors or of the state's capacity to monopolise the use of violence. This highlights the importance of studying urban (in)security at the local level, including the perspective of residents and recognising people's daily experiences.

In general, residents in the marginalised neighbourhoods of San Salvador perceived a very low level of security, due to the instability of the situation, and an almost total lack of clarity and predictability about who will protect local residents. However, local residents in neighbourhoods with a stronger gang presence have become used to this and often seem to trust the gang more than the police. There are also reports that the relations between gangs and residents have become closer as a result of growing police repression. In the case of Medellin, residents who live in constant fear of experiencing the extreme violence and intense urban conflict they endured in the past, perceive that the current security situation in their neighbourhoods has improved. In these communities, coercion and multiple forms of violence are routinely exercised in ways that violate residents' basic rights. However, the imposed order that exists today has reduced the likelihood of turf wars and the danger and limitations that come with them. In this context, people value the current level of predictability, even if it does not protect them from the exploitative power of illegal armed actors.

There are strong differences in the type of hybridity we see configuring in Medellin and San Salvador. In Medellin the provision of security and justice in marginalised communities (where state and non-state actors complement, cooperate and negotiate with each other in multiple ways) might work for containing homicide rates and to create a sense of control and order, but it does not necessarily lead to the monopoly of violence by the state or to increase its legitimacy. It certainly does not prevent the reproduction of other violences, such as violence against women and forced displacement.

Residents are still subject to forms of exploitation, extortion and insecurity. The presence and impact of other forms of violence is equally strong in San Salvador. An important difference with Medellin is that the situation in San Salvador is less stable. There are both violent confrontations between gangs and law enforcement agencies, and pragmatic dealings between gangs and local level actors, such as local governments, political parties and community organisations. Levels of lethal violence are much higher, and a sense of order is generally lacking. Thus, the forms of hybridity that have taken shape are mostly conflictive in the case of San Salvador, and more cooperative in the case of Medellin. And while the local security situation in San Salvador might seem more difficult for local residents, the more cooperative forms of hybridity in Medellin do not necessarily lead to satisfactory outcomes for local residents.