



PROJECT MUSE®

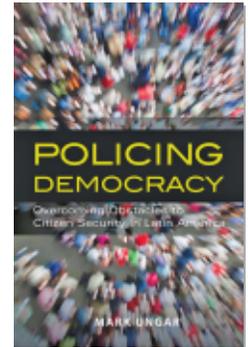
## Policing Democracy

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60322>

Access provided at 21 Sep 2019 00:04 GMT with no institutional affiliation



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Taking a biblical approach to reform, one police commander in Bolivia said that change will come only after the entire generation of police officers no serving “dies off.” In the meantime, reformers are trying to produce the kind of overhaul that so many citizens want to see in the meantime. Throughout Latin America the growing limits of incident-centered, standardized, and forceful responses to crime have spurred efforts to replace these responses with problem-oriented policing based on newly empowered citizens, clearer police structures, and more accountable judicial procedures. But as reformers confront an array of political, institutional, and societal obstacles, they must continually adopt the flexibility that defines problem-oriented policing itself. Such an approach is needed to defuse the tensions between traditional and problem-oriented policing—that is, instead of being at odds, traditional and problem-oriented policing can be constructive checks on each other. And instead of being a drag on democracy, citizen security can tap into the participation and standards that underlie it.

The connections among the four typologies developed in this book and summarized in table 8.1 can help explain why similar obstacles to reform develop in different cases and how, despite those differences, they can be overcome through strategies such as those discussed in chapter 7. On a basic level, each reform type described in chapter 1 should take into account the realms of change discussed in chapter 2 by supporting strategies that can bring concrete change within preexisting limitations. One of the best ways is to give citizens well-defined tasks. Neighborhood “security stations” staffed with police officers, violence observatory volunteers, social service agents, and youth interns are some of the many ways to do so. Surveys on

*Table 8.1 Summary of Typologies Developed in This Book*

Major reform types	Realms of change	Democratic governance areas	Recommended strategies
Agency restructuring	Opinion and politics	Power	Addressing points of tension
Professional support	The law	Geography	Discretion
Control mechanisms	Police career		Information-based evaluation
	Police structure	Civil society	Structured citizen engagement
Legal changes	Information management		Police management: standards without standardization
Community policing	Criminal justice		
	Police-society relations		

*Source:* The author.

less controversial issues such as pollution, or the recent formation of gender violence observatories in Central America, can create public momentum for security actions that breaks down institutional resistance. Police professionalism and citizen-police relations may be improved through targeted crackdowns on sales of addictive substances (such as glue in Honduras, alcohol in La Paz, and *paco* in Buenos Aires). Educational incentives for investigators and promotional forms that include a public relations evaluation can help boost restructuring and control mechanisms by altering informal power relations within the police.

To overcome some of the social and geographic divisions discussed in chapter 2, an environmental approach to policing can at times be pursued. In particular, pollution is one of the biggest security concerns of urban Latin Americans, and the airborne contamination over public lands such as forests and seashores causes tensions in rural areas. By helping connect people to the appropriate services, the police can help resolve these problems and avoid some of the violence they generate.

Connections among the typologies are evident for each of the five major reform types. Structural reorganization of police forces should begin with changes least likely to have unintended consequences for police careers, such as slowing promotions of officers suddenly demoted in a simplified hierarchy. Combining ranks must have enough support within the police, creating new units must have sufficient external support, and decentralizing opera

tions must be carried out using a national formula of resource collection and distribution. Under such constraints, tying incentives to professional support and gradually giving *comisarios* more authority are two concrete steps that can help change practices. Control mechanisms must also take into account the power and limits of the police. In response to perceived infringements on authority or internal decision making, officers may cover up abuses faster than accountability agencies can uncover them. Instead, steps such as professional incentives for service in internal affairs and citizen information efforts could make the police more transparent while also strengthening civil society. As Avritzer (2002, 105) points out, "Modern administration must seek to connect itself with a process of communication that starts at the periphery." Legal changes can benefit from concrete steps such as decentralized prosecutor offices, which, by improving public access, may also give prosecutors the public support needed in corruption cases. The broadest reform of all, community policing, should be cognizant of society's anticriminal hostility and how it is stoked by police influence. Strategies such as tying community police programs to drug investigations should be based on structured citizen engagement on specific points of tension identified by both citizens and police that recognize both citizen demands and police prestige.

As with policing, the public's abysmal views of criminal justice can be a trigger for reform. To improve the judiciary's image and efficacy, many U.S. cities are combining court and social services to provide more support for citizens as well as preventive strategies and alternatives to incarceration. One example is the fifteen-city Family Justice Centers (FJCs). In Boston which has one of the more extensive centers, each of the city's eleven police stations has a civilian advocate who reaches out to the victims in every case of domestic or other forms of violence. The FJC works closely with the Family Justice Division (FJD) of the Boston Police Department, which is made up of units on domestic violence, sexual assault, crimes against children, and human trafficking. The Children's Advocacy Center, a forensic examining room, interview spaces, and two full-time registered nurses all make the response to violence against women and children more comprehensive and effective. Once on the premises, civilians can access services they would not have known about otherwise or were unable to reach, such as shelter referrals. In the same building as the FJC and the FJD is the district attorney, whose presence makes the subsequent and often slower steps in the criminal justice system run more smoothly. The whole process works, says the FJD's chief, because FJC facilities are designed to allow

victims of violence to talk about their experience on their own terms, which helps both in their treatment and in criminal prosecution.<sup>1</sup>

Even the broad areas of democratic governance discussed in chapter 3 can lead to concrete reform models. One approach that can help identify points of tension and improve police discretion is crime mapping, which provides a visual and moving picture of crime patterns, hot spots, and the most dangerous times of day. When available on the Internet, such maps are an invaluable aid for citizens. They also help policymakers to better use resources and schedules by overlapping theory with reality. For example, mapping sites of drug sales and overdoses can test preconceived ideas about the impacts of the routes used by traffickers (see Eck 1998). Such criminological uses of technology will only grow as a more computer-savvy generation comes into public office. For example, Joge Nazer, Chile's national secretary of public safety, wants to combine technology and prevention in ways that are both innovative and bring short-term results.<sup>2</sup> Aware of how easily reality can upset the delicate balance of these elements, the government is introducing them as pilot projects in tough neighborhoods where positive results can give the approach the credibility and political support it needs to expand.

A combined focus on geography and civil society also leads to other efforts. One of the most important links between them is the way at-risk individuals navigate their neighborhoods' physical demarcations, economic realities, and social pressures. Understanding this socialization process is a key to unlocking the kinds of prevention that underscore problem-oriented policing. In most low-income areas many interactions among youth are based on antisocial attitudes that take shape in a "street code" of language, behaviors, and recognition that they strive to attain for peer acceptance. Gangs and acts of violence are two of the faster routes toward mastering the street code and of gaining the credibility, respect, and self-esteem that society does not provide. Although such "street cred" is hard-won, it is also "easily lost" (Office of Justice Programs 2009, 2), keeping even seasoned gang members off balance. As part of the evaluations discussed in the last

1. Genevieve King, captain, Boston Police Department, and chief, FJD, phone interview with author, November 6, 2009.

2. Jorge Nazer, national director of public security Republic of Chile, interview with author, New York, June 16, 2010; Rodrigo Chacón, "Definen plan de inversión en R con miras a 2011," *La Nación*, May 26, 2010.

chapter, police should therefore try to assess the depth and extent of a street code, particularly how it validates violence and how much security it actually provides. When South Africa liberalized its bail laws, many of those let out were killed in their communities, showing how unprotected they were even in areas they considered their bases. U.S. programs with the approaches applicable to Latin America and other regions include California's Homerun program, in which parole officials give "life habits" courses in high schools to help youth manage time, and they train teachers, keep the school and courts in contact with each other, visit youths' homes, and organize meetings for parents (see Presman, Chapman, and Rosen 2002). The STOP the Violence program, headed by students in the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, is a community-based training curriculum to help youth find innovative ways to prevent violence, such as through identifying warning signs and holding a national competition for anti-violence projects.

One of the most innovative efforts is that of the "violence interrupters," who literally see violence as a virus that can only be stopped by direct and personal intervention. Spurred by the view that urban violence is spread largely by the patterns of revenge among youth that are driven by the iron-clad combinations of peer pressure and street cred and transmitted, like a virus, from person to person and gang to gang, this approach regards violence as a public health epidemic, a contagious disease spreading in ways like tuberculosis, HIV, and cholera. This approach took root in Chicago, which recruited outreach workers from troubled neighborhoods who had been gang members and who probably had spent time in prison. These "violence interrupters" immerse themselves in street culture to identify who might be seeking revenge. They then physically intervene with these individuals, often in hospitals, helping them consider the consequences of retaliation for themselves and their families, while offering them ways out, such as school or job training. The program has spread to many U.S. cities, and many Latin American governments have adopted programs that use the same approach.

One of the most productive connections made among at-risk youth, social conditions, and criminal justice is the Los Angeles Police Academy Magnet School Program, which offers a full high school curriculum, along with specialized coursework in communications, science, community service, constitutional law, criminal justice, forensic science, police science, and computer software. Serving over a thousand students, the program has been implemented at five high schools, each of which has a full-time police of

ficer as program coordinator. Because of the students' greater financial, emotional and family needs, a complementary Mentoring Partnership matches individual police officers and students. Although the effort required years of "hammering" away at officials to get the program going and "an enormous amount of cooperation by schools and police" to keep it going, says its executive director, the police became more supportive as the program became a high-quality recruiting source of minority cadets.<sup>3</sup> As with police reforms in any country, a reform must be seen through its full arc—and attention must be paid to politics at every step of the way—before a reform attracts sufficient backing to survive on its own. As attention to youth grows among police reforms in Latin America, such a process can be replicated there.

Each of the book's three case studies further reveals how the threads that connect the four typologies listed in table 8.1 may weave the most durable fabric for reform. In Honduras the main pillars of change are shaky but still standing: the community policing program, the penal process code, and the set of governmental and nongovernmental agencies that are working to hold the state accountable. All three pillars have been sideswiped by the willful neglect and legal maneuvering of the state, as well as by the political turmoil that makes concerted policy difficult. But, as in Argentina and Bolivia, the upheaval of 2009 brought greater awareness of the underlying power dynamics, which may motivate citizens to organize (as in the city of Danlí) and enable local officers to replace national directives with local issues as the locus of their daily work (as in La Ceiba). As they do so amid Honduras's extreme levels of poverty and violence, they may succeed in turning anti-violence projects into the sturdiest stepping-stones to the kind of progress that will allow people to gradually assert their control of public space.

In Bolivia, corruption and poor administration, distrust by society, and regional divisions are undoing the steady progress made in the 1990s. The extensive mobilization and participation by citizens are not penetrating the security and criminal justice system, allowing the gap between expectations and practice to widen. The long list of aborted national plans, the proliferation of police units, the lack of statistical and financial transparency, the corruption of autonomous police units, and the scattered nature of community policing all exemplify the frustrated potential and need for reform in Bolivia. The Morales regime may be able to use its popular legitimacy and commitment to change to address these related challenges in a comprehen-

3. Roberta Weintraub, executive director, Los Angeles Police Academy Magnet School Program, phone interview with author, October 30, 2009.

sive way that utilizes the immense potential of citizens' willingness to act, but it is racing against the clock in the face of severe geographical and financial constraints.

Given the extent to which the periodic economic and political meltdowns since the democratic transition in 1982 have galvanized Argentines, it is ironic that political maneuvering and competition continue to block reform in that country. Buenos Aires Province was finally able to overcome much of the impediment, but only after radical political change and decades of extreme abuse and corruption. In provinces such as Mendoza and La Rioja, as chapter 6 describes, comprehensive and innovative change continues to be thwarted primarily by politics. But the process has brought in many projects—a lot with staying power—that have opened up the next stage of reform.

After decades of sweeping change, as these countries show, citizen security is one of the last frontiers in Latin America's political evolution. Like the transition from authoritarianism, it is forcing each country to take another hard look at how it is moving into the future. It challenges executives, especially those more closely identified with the right wing or left wing of their countries, to wrestle down partisanship and political stereotypes to emphasize the collective interests of security. It challenges the police to loosen their grip on the thin blue line separating the "good" from the "bad" and order from chaos. As for society, it is a challenge to temper immediate dangers and raw fears with long-term perspectives. But if states and societies can turn the tide on insecurity by addressing its causes and their own contributions to it, they will strengthen the democracy that holds them together.