

PUBLIC GOODS AND PRIVATE INTERESTS: CITIZEN SECURITY IN THE DEVELOPING CITY

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ABSTRACT: How does violence shape the development of cities in the global south? This essay is part of a broader study to identify what conditions shape the trajectories of efforts to make security a *public* and not predominantly a *private* good in several major developing cities in Latin America. Here I present the preliminary findings derived from a careful comparative analysis of the citizen security reform efforts in two major Colombian cities: Cali and Medellin. The long history of violence in Colombia make Cali and Medellin the appropriate “building blocks” for the development of a new theory to explain variation in the evolution of political projects to curb urban violence. I find that the urban business community is a critical yet largely overlooked variable in the coalitional politics that surface around projects to improve urban citizen security. Preventive citizen security projects that address the social, economic and political roots of crime and violence succeed in cities where the business community aligns itself with civil society to pressure and collaborate with the local urban government. Where business does not align itself with this reform project, the coercive capacity of the state may be augmented without concurrent public oversight and participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

How does violence shape the development of cities in the global south? The landscape of the developing world is increasingly urban: over half of the populations in Africa and Asia and nearly 85 percent of that in Latin America and the Caribbean will reside in cities by the year 2030 (Cohen 2006). Decentralization has transferred authority and responsibility for a wide range of important policy areas to city governments. Parallel to increasing urbanization and devolution of political power is the growing exposure of cities to distinct expressions of violence, including organized crime, ethnic strife, and terrorism. The intersection of urbanization, growing violence, and development efforts provides an important opportunity to advance our existing knowledge of the political economy of development through a theoretically informed and empirically nuanced analysis of efforts to advance urban security governance in the world’s “developing cities”.

This essay is part of a broader study to identify what conditions shape the trajectories of efforts to make security a *public* and not predominantly a *private* good in several major developing cities in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru.¹ I present the preliminary findings derived from a careful comparative analysis of the citizen security reform efforts in two major Colombian cities: Cali and Medellin. The long

¹ I use the term privatization to refer to multiple phenomena, including the hiring of private security firms, the establishment of paramilitary security forces, the targeted channeling of private resources to public security forces in return for privileged services, and lobbying for the prioritization of urban spaces where economic transactions are concentrated, among others.

history of violence in Colombia make Cali and Medellin the appropriate “building blocks” for the development of a new theory to explain variation in the evolution of political projects to curb urban violence. I find that the urban business community is a critical yet largely overlooked variable in the coalitional politics that surface around projects to improve urban citizen security. Preventive citizen security projects that address the social, economic and political roots of crime and violence succeed in cities where the business community aligns itself with civil society to pressure and collaborate with the local urban government. Where business does not align itself with this reform project, the coercive capacity of the state may be augmented without concurrent public oversight and participation. Business is therefore a coalitional “pivot” (Bates 1997) in so far as its decision to support or oppose specific citizen security reform projects weighs heavily on which actors are empowered to participate in the political processes to improve citizen security and the outcomes of these processes. Because violence has multiple economic, social, and political repercussions, this research project speaks to the broader issues and questions that concern scholars and policymakers alike regarding the need to make real-world advances in international development conceptualized as both the objectives and the conditions that enable individuals to realize their full potential (Sen 1999).

II. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study builds upon and contributes to several areas of study. First, it sets the groundwork for a broader research agenda at the intersection of urbanization, violence, and development. The intersection between violence and development has been examined in the canons of the social sciences (e.g., Marx 1848 [2002]); Moore 1966). The field of Urban Studies offers rich insights into the spatial and infrastructural development of cities while scholars of American Politics have advanced our knowledge of “city politics” based on the experiences of Atlanta, Los Angeles, and other major U.S. cities. Missing, however, is a cohesive research agenda that maps and accounts for the links and tensions across *all three areas* of urbanization, violence, and development within the broader framework of the political economy of development in the global south.

Second, this study draws from recent methodological advances on subnational analysis and complements this vertical shift with a horizontal shift away from *developed* to *developing* cities in the study of urban politics. The seminal literature on the political economy of development has focused largely on the nation-state as the unit of analysis. Yet, in his argument linking war with variation in state development, Tilly (1990) concludes that ultimately “*cities* shape the destinies of states” (emphasis added; *Ibid*, 51) because they harbor the capital, transportation infrastructure, and urban networks linked to regional powers that central governments require for their consolidation. A vertical shift in the unit of

analysis from the national to the subnational is increasingly recognized as critical for a variety of theoretical and methodological reasons (Snyder 2001).

The vertical shift to the city level should be complemented with a horizontal shift from cities in the developed to developing countries. While the “global cities” literature (Sassen 1991) has shed some light on contemporary urban metropolises, it has primarily situated these cities as nodes within the global economic system. Yet, the politics of the inner workings of developing cities remain in a black box. A similar limitation is evident in the important scholarship on city politics within the subfield of American Politics (e.g., Stone 1989). How do foundational concepts from the U.S. centric literature on urban development in Atlanta or Los Angeles map onto the terrains of cities in the midst of a civil war, such as Medellin?

Finally, this study moves beyond the dominant focus on violence as an outcome to be explained to examine violence as a variable with causal force unto itself. Contemporary social science has advanced important theories to explain violence as an outcome of divergent political, social and economic processes (e.g., Fajnzylber et al. 1998; Varshney 2002). The focus on violence as an outcome, however, has not been matched with equal analytical effort to unpack the potential for violence to be an explanatory variable. For example, analyses that use violence as an explanatory variable focus largely on its impact for growth of foreign direct investment and gross domestic product (Fajnzylber et al. 1998) without mapping out the causal mechanisms. Missing from our theories of development is thus a nuanced understanding of the potential causal mechanisms through which distinct types of violence (e.g., political, social, and economic) impact processes of democratic consolidation, collective action, political mobilization, social reform, rule of law and other phenomenon considered crucial for a more integral conceptualization of development. In brief, this study will build upon and advance our existing knowledge in several key areas of scholarship.

III. URBAN SECURITY GOVERNANCE IN COLOMBIA: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Pressure for increased urban security both from below in the form of social mobilization (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006) and from above via international donors, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, have led to citizen security reform projects in many of Latin America’s most important cities. Arguably nowhere has this process to improve citizen security been more extensive, complex, and necessary than in Colombia’s major cities. The Colombian capital city Bogota and its two other principal cities, Cali and Medellin, embarked upon a series of citizen security reform projects at the start of the 1990s aimed at reducing crime and violence through *preventive* approaches that tackled the social, economic, and political roots of these phenomena. While Bogota’s reforms have been analyzed by

policymakers and scholars (Moncada forthcoming) alike, comparatively less is known about similar reform projects in the other two major Colombian cities, where levels of violence were even higher. Interviews with the policymakers responsible for Bogota's citizen security policies reveal that the "Bogota model" was actually directly informed by Cali's reform efforts. Interviews in Medellin also indicate that recent success in strengthening citizen security was also based on the "Cali model". Yet, why did Cali's citizen security reform project ultimately fail, while neighboring cities who later adopted the same model experienced relative success?

Cali's mayor in 1992 established an innovative citizen security reform project focused on the longstanding social, economic and political roots of crime and violence. The project marked an important shift away from the state's historical reliance on repression and toward prevention. These precedent-setting projects, which were managed by an institution known as Development, Security and Peace, or *Desepaz* in Spanish, tackled a range of urban dilemmas, including the lack of housing, racial tensions, youth gangs, weak political participation, and poor police-community relations, among others. Despite initial successes and both national and international attention, *Desepaz* was marginalized by mayors who followed its founder. The institution lost funding, staff and – most importantly – its close connections to the mayor's office that had once empowered it with substantive political power. How did this urban security governance model fare in Medellin?

It is important to underscore the significant challenge that Medellin's policymakers faced relative to Cali. While both cities had high-levels of violence as measured by annual homicides per 100,000 city residents, Medellin's homicide rate was consistently and often markedly higher than Cali's. By the 1990s, Medellin was known as the "most violent place on earth". One might expect that these extreme conditions of violence would preclude a preventive urban security model from taking root in Medellin. Yet, field research in Medellin indicates that the city has succeeded in institutionalizing the model that failed to take root in Cali. The city's government now has in place a wide range of institutions, programs and projects that work on many of the same issues that Cali's *Desepaz* originally addressed. By 2008, Medellin had earned a new label based partly on its gains in the area of urban security: the "Medellin miracle" (Washington Post 7/11/2008).

IV. A POLITICAL ECONOMY FRAMEWORK OF URBAN SECURITY: BUSINESS AS A COALITIONAL PIVOT

I argue that business' participation in the coalitional politics that emerge around citizen security projects plays a critical role in the trajectories these projects take.² In simplified fashion, business can either partner with civil society and urban governments to advance citizen security projects – as occurred in Medellin – or oppose local government's focus on making security a public good and instead focus on the privatization of security – as took place in Cali. Given these options, *why is business' support critical for the success of citizen security reform projects?*

First, business brings significant resources to the political coalition they join, including capital, public relations experience, research capacities, technological tools, and connections with international donors.³ Second, interviews with civil society leaders in Medellin indicate that these resources had profound effects on their capacity to effectively pressure Medellin's mayors for security as a public good on at least two fronts. The influx of financial resources from or facilitated by business reoriented the organizational foci of civil society organizations to focus explicitly on issues of crime, violence, and citizen security. Third, a business-civil society collaborative also lent Medellin's civil society an important degree of legitimacy in the eyes of public officials and helped neutralize their depiction as "leftist-radicals". Finally, business' support for citizen security reform projects is critical is because it facilitates collaboration with the public sector in high-violence contexts that often produce calls for hardline, coercive security policies that fail to address the more complex roots of violence. In a country with high levels of violence like Colombia, civil society's demands for a more preventive approach can easily be politicized as "radical" rhetoric. Yet, with business – a historically conservative political force – by its side, Medellin's civil society was empowered to engage and work with the public sector.

Interviews with civil society in Cali indicate that business failed to establish collaborative relationships and instead focused on augmenting the coercive capacity of the state. Business in Cali opted to bypass local government and civil society and instead construct direct links with the police, the military and the national government to discuss how to improve security for security conditions for the business community. The absence of a cohesive and powerful pro-preventive citizen security coalition in Cali has resulted in citizen security policy fragmentation, marginalization, and abandonment.

What conditions influence business' decision to either support or oppose preventive urban security governance projects? I contend that the intersection of divergent economic interests and types of violence shape business' political mobilization relative to urban security. Cali's business elites are concentrated in the historically dominant economic sectors of agriculture (specifically sugar production)

² Business is obviously a very broad concept that encompasses a wide variety of actors and subsectors. While I do rely on a more multidimensional conceptualization of business in my research, length limitations prohibit me from outlining this conceptual model here.

³ See Cammett (2007) for a detailed analysis of how these and other business resources shaped the politics and outcomes of economic liberalization projects in Arab North Africa.

and real estate development, both of which are geographically rooted in the rural outskirts of the city and most exposed to the ongoing Colombian civil war. Cali is neither an exporter of value-added goods nor an importer of foreign investment in value-added sectors. The city has historically been and continues to be a transit hub for goods being imported through the nearby Pacific port of Buenaventura – Colombia’s only port to the Pacific Ocean – to be transported throughout the rest of the country or products from other parts of the country to be transported through Cali to the international market. In brief, a low-value added economy where the principal economic drivers are not located in the heart of the city has resulted in a focus on important but comparatively narrow security interests in the peripheries of the city. Yet, why did Medellin’s business community opt to support reforms to make security a public good despite similar exposure to the country’s civil war?

Ironically, among the products that are channeled through Cali are a variety of goods from Medellin produced by the city for *both the national and international markets*. Efforts to “internationalize” Medellin’s economy began in the mid-1990s, when the city emerged from what is commonly referred to as a “time of terrorism” at the hands of narcotraffickers working in conjunction with organized crime groups and youth gangs within the city. High-profile violence consisting of bombings and massacres were consistently recalled during interviews with the city’s business elites who lamented the title of “the most violent place on earth” bestowed upon Medellin during this point in time. It was this tarnished image induced by widespread, terrorist violence coupled with a *outward* looking economic vision unlike the *inward* looking vision of Cali’s business elites that led Medellin’s private sector to collaborate with civil society and ultimately local government to make security a public and not only a private good. Medellin’s business community was not particularly more altruistic than its counterpart in Cali – it instead saw in security as a public good the opportunity to remake Medellin’s image into a more investment friendly environment. Nonetheless, as has been outlined above, this narrow, rational economic calculation had unexpectedly broad and positive benefits for citizen security in one of the world’s most violent cities.

V. CONCLUSION

Urban security governance is increasingly recognized as a critical for development. This essay provides insights based on ongoing study that builds upon existing theoretical insights to advance our understanding of the conditions under which efforts to advance citizen security in urban agglomerations succeed or fail. A preliminary comparative analysis between Cali and Medellin yields a surprising conclusion: business in cities with high-levels of violence is a coalitional pivot in so far as its decision to either support or oppose preventive citizen security projects weighs heavily on the capacity of civil

society to participate in the political process of reform and the ultimate outcomes of these critical initiatives. This study not only advances our theoretical knowledge, but also generates important insights for future urban security reform efforts.

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