

Public security is an important part of urban life. It is particularly important in the cities of South America where crime rates are relatively high and the fear of crime is a principal reason behind the proliferation of gated communities and marked residential segregation.

There are three dimensions to public security. The first is the empirical recording of crime and crime rates. The second is the strategies and tactics of urban policing. The third is the public perception of security. The three are related but do not move in tandem. New strategies may take a while before crime rates drop. There is often a time lag between rates declining and the public perception of crime reduction. Perceptions may become stuck at one level for a while the empirical reality quickly changes. Public attitudes are often stubbornly fixed and slow to respond to changing realities. In this paper we will look at each of the three interconnected elements in Cali, Colombia and present some intriguing results concerning public perceptions of crime and public security

Crime Rates

Serious crime rates in the city rose rapidly from the early 1980s, peaking in 1994 and have subsequently declined. In 1994 there were 124 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. By 2013 this rate declined to 89. The high rate was function of gang violence, easy availability of guns and alcohol. A more interventionist policy from 1994 to the later 1990s had an impact. Restrictions on gun carrying and alcohol reduced rates by a third. More specifically, the short-term bans on guns on selected week-ends (holiday weekends, weekend following paydays and

election days), imposing curfews for under 18s during weekends, and limiting the hours that alcohol could be sold, effectively reduced the murder rate from 124 in 1994 to 86 per 100,000 in 1997.

Despite this reduction, the figures are still high by international standards. The comparative figure for Washington DC is 24 and only 4 for Amsterdam, which is the highest figure for any major European city.

In more recent years, the picture on crime rate is mixed. Murder rates are down from the highs of the 1990s but have shown a light uptick while the incidence of reported rape and extortion and traffic accidents has increased. There were 67 homicides per 100,000 in 2006 but this increased to 89 in 2013. According to official police statistics, close to 2000 people were murdered in the city in 2013. While murder rates have picked up, rape figures and vehicle thefts have doubled and extortions have increased fivefold. To some extent the increase may be due to more people reporting the crime. Murder is such a serious crime that it is generally always reported whereas for both rape and extortion often, victims have to report the crime to the police.

Public security also encompasses safety on the roads. One disturbing trend is the increase in traffic accident injuries from 618 in 2006 to 2,477 in 2012.

Crime rates vary dramatically by neighborhood. Serious crime rates in the poor neighborhood of Agua Blanca for example are almost double what they are in the rest of the city. If we take the case of murder, for example, in 2013 there were

215 murders in District 13, part the poor neighborhood of Agua Blanca, while only 8 in the richer neighborhood of District 22 (South Ciudad Jardin). In the poor neighborhoods, criminal gangs such as Los Urabenos, Las Rostros and La Ocho run criminal conspiracies underwritten by violence and murder.

Tactics and Strategies

The intervention of the 1990s clearly had an impact on the murder rates. More recently, a variety of tactics have been used. There are enforced arms restriction in 16 of the city' 22 neighborhoods. The military, not Cali police, are responsible for this plan; early estimates suggest that it leads to a reduction in murder rated of around 25 percent.

There are also curfews for teenagers in some communities. In January 2012 a curfew was imposed on weekends for teenagers, from 11:00 pm until 5:00 am, in district 13 and district 15. The plan was extended to districts 14, 16, 18 and 21. Often gangs use teenagers as hired gunmen. Crime rates were reduced by 25% according to local police commanders. The curfew also reduces fights between teenagers in gangs vying for territory,

Elite police groups are also deployed. In 2012 the national government created an elite force, Unipol, for high crime rate cities. By 2013 1,000 members of this group were permanently deployed in Cali working with a task force targeting major criminals. In 2013 Cali's Unipol group arrested 2023 people and seized over 200

arms and jailed a leading criminal Choco, known to provide hit men for criminal gang.

The national government launched a scheme in 2010 to place more police officer at the local level. This was introduced in Cali in 2011 and there are now 329 local police stations, each assigned 6 police officers, two of whom are on duty at any one time. The officers visit all the people in the neighborhood and leave a cell phone number for them to report any criminal activity or suspicious behaviors. An internal assessment of the policy in 2012 suggested that criminal arrests increased by 28 percent. This policy is making the police more an integral part of local communities.

There is also the allocation of more resources. The number of police offices was increased by a thousand more to 5440. The mayor is also seeking funding to use 1000 CCTVs in the city equipped with face recognition.

It is clear that resources are being allocated to combating criminal activity. To what extent these tactics are leading to a decrease in crime are difficult to assess but there is feeling that crime is such an important issue that money should be spent and strategies constantly evolve to meet the challenge.

Perceptions of security

To the first time visitor, one of the most distinctive features of Cali's domestic architecture is the number of gated communities and the pervasive use of walls,

fences, gates and bars. These provide the facade of security but also by their presence indicate a sense of insecurity. That feeling permeates the city.

But when give the opportunity to express the personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction with security in the city and the neighborhood, there are a number of interesting findings. The higher socio-economic status groups consistently rate themselves more satisfied with security than lower income groups. In some respect this reflects lived experience. Living in gated communities, in better-policed and safer areas, their satisfaction records a different objective experience. Crime rates are highest in the poorer areas, almost a third more than the city average and double the rate in the richer areas. Accordingly, the lower socio-economic status groups are the most dissatisfied at both the neighborhood and city level. Although lower socio-economic groups rate the city's security more unfavorably than the highest socio-economic group, all groups rate satisfaction with security at the city level, lower than their satisfaction with security in their neighborhoods. It is clear that dissatisfaction with security is most pronounced amongst lower socio-economic status groups especially at the city level.

The survey results show that, even in a city with a history of violence and high homicide rates, people feel more satisfied than dissatisfied with security in their local neighborhood. This is particularly marked for the higher socio-economic status groups and those living in richer neighborhoods. The lower social-economic status groups and people in the poorer neighborhood feel more satisfied with security in their neighborhood than the city as a whole.

However, when we ask people to rate government performance on different domains (1-10 scale), security was rated at the same level of education or health (5), whereas transportation was rated quite low (1). Given the importance of security to people one would expect people to rate badly government on security. Two reasons can be advanced. First, people may be comparing the present with the more violent past of fifteen years ago and so the present levels, although high, are much lower than people recall. In other words the response may be measuring a sense of longer-term improvement. They also may be sensitive to the more overt use of security theater- the obvious displays of increased police presence, that may be shifting attitudes more quickly than reducing crime rates. Second, people get used to certain conditions. They are more responsive to rates of change than persistent and stable conditions. The term habituation is used to refer to this acceptance of slow moving conditions. In this case, the population of Cali may have become so used to living in an insecure city that it is a minor concern when they are asked to rate government performance.

These intriguing results need further analysis and discussion if we are to untangle the complex connections between the changing reality of security, the shifting tactics of security and the altered and stable perceptions of security.

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