



POLICE TRANSFORMATION IN LATIN AMERICA BY 2030

Kevin Casas, Paola González, and Liliana Mesías

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1 Introduction

The pages ahead aim to outline the key characteristics we believe will define the police in Latin America over the next decade. To this end, we will first describe the current state of police institutions in the region and identify some of the key challenges they will face in the coming years. Overcoming these challenges will be essential not only in order to more effectively control and prevent crime but also to better adhere to the principles that must guide police work in a democracy. Moreover, we will take stock of the lessons learned from the multiple experiences of police reforms in Latin America over the last generation.

The advent of democracy, combined with the constant pressure of high crime rates in the region, have led to an adjustment process in police institutions marked in many cases by a long history of authoritarianism. As we will analyze later in this report, the results of this adjustment process have been quite limited in most cases. Despite attempts at reform, most Latin American police conserve the rigid bureaucracy, lack of transparency and propensity for abuse of authority of times past. All of this occurs in a new context defined by increasing demands from citizens and unprecedented threats—notably from organized crime—that lay bare the weaknesses of the police institution and sometimes reinforce its worst traits. The result is a police institution that nearly always falls short in the fight against crime and that, with few exceptions, holds very little credibility in the eyes of citizens, which in turn hinders its efforts against crime. Somewhat unfairly, political authorities and citizens alike almost always blame the police for persistent problems of insecurity, which cannot be solved by even the police force alone.

Not all is negative. As unsatisfactory as the results of most police reform efforts have been in the region, important changes have been achieved. The most visible of these is the demilitarization of the police's role, which today with few exceptions forms part of the civil sphere of public policy and is thus, at least in theory, guided by democratic principles. Preserving this fundamental change is, indeed, one of the most important challenges going forward at a time when the widespread presence of organized crime is generating strong pressure to legitimize a renewed military role for the police in the internal security of countries. To the demilitarization of the police, we can also add the broad interest in experimenting with new forms of police-society relations, grouped under the umbrella—albeit an elastic one—of “community policing” practices. This has been an important transformation in the region's police forces, and while it has hardly ever managed to bring structural change to police institutions, it has nonetheless cemented the

mindset that social legitimacy is important for the police to be able to carry out the tasks of crime prevention and control.

This reports presents the idea that what may happen over the coming years with police institutions in Latin America—and their level of success at approaching the ideal of becoming a police force that is effective and imbued with democratic values—will depend on how they contend with six main challenges: organized crime and the militarization of internal security; the dilemma of centralizing or decentralizing police tasks; the professionalization of police forces; the adoption of technology and information systems; the introduction of transparency and accountability practices; and finally, the consolidation of community-oriented policing. The discussion over these challenges will play out in a context defined nearly everywhere by high crime levels, political incentives contrary to long-term reforms, deeply rooted authoritarian traditions, major organizational weaknesses in police institutions and very low levels of public trust in them.

It is impossible to predict the outcome of the interaction among all these vectors in each country. What is very likely is that the complexity of the pending challenges and the adverse surroundings in which they are addressed will make any police transformations in the region rather limited and fragmented. Democratic progress on some fronts will happen alongside significant setbacks in others, while all are subject to the immobilizing effect of powerful institutional inertia.

This paper is comprised of five sections. Following this introduction, we provide a brief description of Latin American police forces in terms of size, political position, functions and level of social support. That section, which offers a cursory overview of the situation, is followed by an exploration of the six main challenges outlined in the previous paragraph. This exploration attempts to identify the dilemmas and some of the fundamental tasks posed by each on the path to more democratic police forces. The fourth section will focus on the experiences of police reform implemented in Latin America in the recent past, in an effort to distill some of the variables that have affected the results; these factors will continue gravitating around any reform efforts undertaken in the coming years. Finally, based on everything in the previous sections, the fifth will pinpoint the key trends that will interact to presumably define the state of the police forces in the region by 2030.

These pages were written in full awareness that characterizing and projecting into the future the traits of the motley landscape of thousands of police forces throughout the region—in Mexico alone there are more than 2000—is an impossible task, one that exceeds the scope of this report. What we have done is to identify some challenges, highlight some trends and point to a few lessons applied throughout most of the region. As always when writing about Latin America, one must paint in broad strokes. We hope the inevitable inaccuracies

of the analysis are compensated for by the intentions behind the work: to provide a few keys that may make the success of democratic police reform, and along with it, the consolidation of the rule of law, more likely in our region.

2 Latin American police today

In nearly all Latin American countries violence and citizen insecurity pose one of the greatest challenges for governments that generally respond by developing policies and short-term measures to get visible results but that don't necessarily prevent or put an end to the problems of insecurity.²

In order to face these challenges, many countries of the region have advocated for considerable increases in the size of their police forces as well as changes in organizational structures and police institutional guidelines. These processes are the result of a historic shift that began in the nineteenth century and was repeated throughout the twentieth, during which these institutions were subsumed within the national security system. The strength of police forces within national security systems were reinforced over the course of the last dictatorships and internal armed conflicts, the legacies of which still persist in the police institutions of many Latin American countries.³

What are the defining features of the police in Latin America after these processes that can provide a baseline for the prospective analyses in the rest of this report?

There are a variety of police institutions in Latin America today that can be classified according to their framework for action:

i. A single national police corps, such as the National Police of Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala, all of which have one national police force. There is also the particular case of Chile, which has two police institutions of national scope: The Investigative Police, dedicated to criminal investigation, and the Carbineros, in charge of crime prevention and control of public order. Since

2011, both corps report to the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. The case of Costa Rica is the most complex. Despite various different legal reforms, there is a dispersion of police forces of national scope that puts serious constraints on coordination due the existence of two governing institutions on security matters. On the one hand, the Ministry of Public Security, to which the majority of the country's police corps report, and the Ministry of Justice and Peace, in charge of rehabilitation and prevention policy. Then on the other hand there are police forces that report to other ministries, such as the Transit police, the Fiscal Control Police and the Immigration Police. As such, relations between the different police corps do not follow any unified guidelines or strategy, but rather their own intentions and decisions.⁴

ii. Regional institutions, which arise naturally from federal political systems, such as those in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. In the latter there are two levels: the federal police and the provincial police in each of its 23 provinces. Normally, there is not much coordination between the two bodies.

iii. Local police corps, when municipalities have their own police forces. An example is the Judicial Police of Córdoba, Argentina, which is exclusively devoted to criminal investigation,⁵ and the Buenos Aires City Police. In Mexico, there are 2020 municipal police bodies and, especially since the government of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), a debate has been underway on whether to eliminate the municipal police or incorporate them into the state police corps. The idea that the state

² Dammert (2007).

³ Saín (2009), p. 6.

⁴ Moya, (2012).

⁵ Dammert (2007b).

police could assume municipal police tasks has raised a number of questions, including whether the functions of the state and municipal police are similar and whether wide-scale police reform in Mexico depends directly on the conduct of the municipal corps.⁶

This classification according to framework for action reflects the efforts in some countries of the region to decentralize security. Ungar asserts that in the last decades this process has manifested in basically three ways: *“the decentralization of the national police force through the creation of provincial forces; the functional division into specialized units in prevention, investigation, traffic and penitentiary systems, and the proliferation of private security companies, which often provide police services.”*⁷

2.2 What are the Latin American police of today like?

In countries that have strong divisions and different police forces, inter-institutional tensions naturally arise more frequently in the face of specific actions, e.g in the fight against drug trafficking, or in general against organized crime, particularly when intervening authorities belong to different ministries. As Ungar points out, the case of Costa Rica exemplifies this situation: *“Costa Rica’s security forces... work with five national ministries in addition to the judicial branch and municipal governments. This broad spectrum of affiliations multiplies the complications when it comes to designing security policy and actions.”*⁸

Table 1 outlines the bureaucratic affiliation and civil or military nature of the major police forces in Latin America. Latin America’s police institutions have traditionally been formed according to a rigidly structured organizational model, encompassing the functions, operational structures, tasks and logistics of preventive security and criminal investigation. All this falls under the institutional management and organic oversight of a single superior police command, whose closed structure is responsible for the general administration of the entire institution. Normally these institutional canopies have been led by a chief of police and made up of a reduced number of high officials in authority positions. Nevertheless, in order to carry out

the tasks of leadership, these superior bodies depend on a vast array of administrative, logistical and human resources offices, composed of uniformed police personnel.⁹ This structure has hindered communication channels between upper commands and the base, rendering these institutions very bureaucratic and inefficient.¹⁰

Furthermore, a large part of the debate about police administration in Latin America is focused on the number of officers. The UN recommends 2.8 officers per 1000 inhabitants and, despite differences by country, the regional average of 3.7 is not far from international practice.¹¹ This exceeds the figures for developed nations like the US, Canada and Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark), all of which range between 1.5-2.2 police per 1000 inhabitants; but it is less than the average for Mediterranean European countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece), which all have over 4 officers per 1000 inhabitants.¹²

Table 2 shows the number of agents per 100,000 inhabitants and the numbers by gender for the countries in the region. In absolute terms, the greatest number of police personnel are found in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Peru. Moreover, according to the OAS Hemispheric Observatory, in 2014 Uruguay was the country with the most police officers per inhabitant in the region: 670 police officers per 100,000 persons.

It is important to note that a greater number of officers does not necessarily make crime rates go down. The increase in personnel without reforms or citizen trust does not lead to greater security.¹³ As a regional study recently pointed out, the success or failure of police action is often measured by indicators such as numbers of arrests, when the chief function of an effective police force should be the control and prevention of crime. Their effectiveness at meeting this objective must guide any evaluation of their performance.¹⁴

Despite efforts to increase the number of police personnel in the region, in most countries in Latin America the presence of police forces on the streets is lower than the numbers suggest. Any potential impact is diminished because instead of patrolling and being closer to citizens and local authorities many officers spend most of their time filling out forms, carrying out traffic checks, and safeguarding leaders,

6 Fondevila & Meneses (2017).

7 Ungar (2011), p. 180.

8 Ungar (2011), p. 181.

9 Saín (2009), p. 8.

10 Arias, Rosada & Saín (2012), p. 14.

11 CAF (2014).

12 CAF (2014); Eurostat

13 Ungar (2011), p. 170; CAF (2014).

14 CAF (2014).

TABLE 1: TYPIIFICATION AND BUREAUCRATIC AFFILIATION OF LATIN AMERICAN POLICE

Source: Authors' own creation from police web sites for each country and various internet resources.

COUNTRY	NAME	TYPE	RESPONSIBLE STATE AGENCY
Argentina	Argentinian Federal Police (PFA)	Civil	Ministry of Security
	Aureonatic Police	Civil	
	National Gendarmerie	Military	
	National Prefecture	Civil	
	Provincial Police	Civil	Provincial jurisdiction
Bolivia	National Police		Ministry of Governance
Brasil	Federal Police	Civil	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
	Policía Rodoviária Federal	Civil	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
	Policía Ferroviária Federal	Civil	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
	Military Police	Military	Governors
	Civil Police	Civil	Delegacia
Chile	Carabineros	Military	Ministry of the Interior and Public Security
	Investigative Police	Civil	
	National Gendarmerie	Civil	Ministr of Justice and Human Rights
Colombia	National Police	Civil	Ministry of Defense
Costa Rica	Public Forces of Costa Rica (Civil Guard, Rural Guard, Coast Guard, Aerial Vigilance, Drug Control).		Ministry of Public Security
	Police of Migration and Foreign Affairs		Ministry of Governance and Police
	Penitentiary Police		Ministry of Justice and Peace
	Transit Police	Civil	Ministry of Transit and Public Works
	Fiscal Control Police		Ministry of Housing
Cuba	National Revolutionary Police	Civil	Ministry of the Interior
Ecuador	National Police of Ecuador	Military	Ministry of the Interior
El Salvador	National Civil Police of El Salvador	Civil	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Guatemala	National Civil Police	Civil	Ministry of Governance
Haiti	National Police of Haiti	Civil	Ministerial cabinet
Honduras	National Police of Honduras	Civil	Secretary of Security
	Military Police of Public Order	Military	Armed Forces of Honduras

COUNTRY	NAME	TYPE	RESPONSIBLE STATE AGENCY
Mexico	Federal Police	Civil	Secretary of Governance
	Ministerial Federal Police	Civil	Attorney General of the Republic
	State Police	Civil	Directly dependent on state government
	Municipal Police	Civil	Secretaries or the direction of municipal public security
Nicaragua	National Police of Nicaragua	Civil	Ministry of Governance
Panama	National Police National Border Service	Civil	Ministry of Public Security
Paraguay	National Police	Civil	Ministry of the Interior
Peru	National Police of Peru	Civil	Ministry of the Interior
Dominican Republic	National Police	Civil	Ministry of the Interior and Police
Uruguay	National Police of Uruguay	Civil	Ministry of the Interior
Venezuela	National Bolivarian Police Corps	Civil	Ministry of Popular Power for Interior Relations, Justice and Peace

state institutions, or large-scale events.¹⁵ The problems of existing personnel assignment are often compounded by a lack of necessary infrastructure to do their work, despite increased public investment in police infrastructure in practically all countries in the region.¹⁶ The nearly always limited success at substantially reducing high-impact crimes suggests that, when it comes to the effectiveness of police work, the size of the police force is less important than the way resources are used.¹⁷

2.2 What do police in Latin America do?

The development of the doctrinal foundations of police institutions is as a process that began with the building of nation-states in the nineteenth century and, much later, the consolidation of the democracies in the region at the end of the twentieth. Military capacity in various Latin American countries was strengthened as a consequence of dictatorships and internal armed conflicts. Widespread political thinking during the second half of the twentieth century was to fortify the military and task them with interior security. It was in that context that public security organizations—the military forces, specifically—

began to negotiate with civil powers, strengthening logistical, infrastructure and personnel-training capacities. Historically, the line between internal and external security has not been clearly drawn in the region, and today military forces in some countries still participate in maintaining internal order, as we will see later.¹⁸ This fact has shaped official police guidelines in some cases.

Institutional police tenets in the region were shaped by military influence and the need to respond to the pressing problems of insecurity and crime. This need has informed an approach in which the government exclusively counts on the police to combat crime and keep public order. Fighting crime is seen predominantly as a police matter, as a fight against criminals that is strongly oriented toward the use of force and, as such, framed within a largely disciplinary conception of security. An overall bellicose logic marks police work when it comes to the prevention and combatting of crime.¹⁹

For instance, in the mid-nineties, the police in Central America constituted an important part of public order maintenance and support for the Armed Forces. In Honduras, the Public Security Force was under the command of the Armed Forces, while in El Salvador, police institutions were

15 Ungar (2011).

16 Dammert (2007a).

17 CAF (2014).

18 Dammert (2007a); Fruhling (2003b).

19 Saín (2009), p. 8.

TABLE 2: POLICE PERSONNEL IN LATIN AMERICA, CIRCA 2014 (1)

Source: Created by authors with data from OEA-Alerta América.org.

COUNTRY	POLICE PERSONNEL (ABSOLUTE NUMBER)	POLICE PERSONNEL (PER 100,000 INHABITANTS)	POLICE PERSONNEL (MEN)	POLICE PERSONNEL (WOMEN)
Argentina	341.627	614,97	n.d.	n.d.
Bolivia	35.908	355,95	31.912	3.996
Brazil	536.018	267,53	441.736	79.824
Chile	49.450	278,39	42.432	7.027
Colombia	149.002	311,78	137.696	11.306
Costa Rica	13.312	280,75	11.334	1.878
Ecuador	43.593	274,12	39.191	4.402
El Salvador	22.995	278,40	20.368	2.627
Guatemala	30.841	338,65	26.776	4.065
Honduras	11.106	135,22	9.984	1.032
México	397.011	316,63	305.015	51.207
Nicaragua	9.752	167,50	7.103	2.648
Panama	16.952	445,40	14.683	2.269
Paraguay	16.578	252,98	15.275	1.303
Peru	105.084	339,28	90.370	14.714
Dominican Republic	35.177	338,05	30.462	4.715
Uruguay	22.917	670,09	18.233	4.684

Note: (1) Police personnel refers to forces whose chief functions are crime investigation, detection and prevention and the apprehension of presumed criminals. Data on support personnel should be excluded (secretaries, office assistants, etc.). All figures are for 2014, except for Bolivia (2011), Brazil (2013), Costa Rica (2013), Nicaragua (2010), Panama (2013) and Argentina (number of police per 100k inhabitants is from 2009).

under the authority of the Ministry of Defense until 1992 when the peace accords were signed,²⁰ This is still the case in Colombia, where, despite numerous failed attempts to change the political purview, the police is still under the authority of the Defense Ministry, along with the military forces.

The coercive, militaristic vision of security throughout the region has fostered an approach that has made citizen security nearly exclusively a police responsibility, leading other government agencies with competence in these matters to evade their responsibilities. This unfair situation has caused citizens to perceive the police as inefficient and ineffective. Indicators on police performance continue to be associated with falling crime and not with their preventive role or any comprehensive evaluation of their programs. Likewise, the use of performance and results indicators for

other government authorities are rare.

There have been numerous attempts to reframe the historic orientation of the police in the region. Perhaps the most important is linked to the debate begun in the 1980s nearly everywhere in the region on the roles played by police and the community in crime prevention, which has resulted in the adoption of different versions of the community policing model. The return to democracy in Chile, Argentina and Brazil made this an attractive model and consequently ushered in some democratic transformations in official guidelines and policy frameworks. Nevertheless, in most countries in the region, the consensus on the importance of prevention and community participation has remained at the level of discourse, as institutional budgets continue to foster increases in police forces, penitentiary infrastructure or reforms to the justice system.²¹ Likewise, the professional training of the police corps in the region

²⁰ Dammert (2007a), p. 110.

²¹ Dammert (2007a), p. 32.

is still very limited when it comes to developing prevention initiatives on a scale consistent with existing problems. This is compounded by an institutional culture in Latin American police that is generally impervious to change, and hierarchical structures—often rigid, vertical, militarized and with broad-scale autonomy—that hinder the development of policies on prevention and participation.²²

Thus, in the majority of countries in the region today, the police's primary objective remains keeping the public order through the exercise of their duties of control. Any efforts at crime dissuasion, prevention and investigation have emerged in a fragmented manner and in response to current needs arising from the problems of insecurity and crime in their territories. This bears a crucial implication: deep down, the police in the region tend to heed the demands of the government in power more than the needs of citizens.²³

2.3 Citizen perception of police performance

The serious problems related to training, equipment, institutional inflexibility and lack of adherence to civil and democratic principles in the region's police forces are further compounded by the institution's poor public image. The deeply-rooted crisis of trust in the police is complex and undoubtedly takes on different nuances across the countries of the region. The persistence of high crime rates as well as prevalence of corruption and police abuse in nearly all Latin American countries contributes to a broad lack of trust.²⁴

First of all, as shown in Table 3, of the 18 countries surveyed, only Chile and Nicaragua saw more than 50% of their citizens express an adequately high level of trust in the police in 2014. Second, between 2010-2014 the levels of confidence in police forces fell in the majority of Latin American countries, as well as the region as a whole. Only Argentina and Ecuador showed significant increases. Third, with the exception of Chile and Uruguay (and Costa Rica and Panama, because they do not have an army), public confidence in the armed forces exceeds that held by the police by a wide margin, in many cases by more than 20 points. And fourth, although the figures are not entirely comparable, Latin America scores much lower on this issue than the countries of Africa and Europe, in the latter case by nearly 40 points. (Latin America: 37.6%; Europe: 75.0%).

Another regional survey reveals very similar results on the prevailing level of confidence in police in Latin America. According to Latinobarómetro for 2016, the percentage of the population with confidence in the police increased by two percentage points from 2015, from 36% to 38%, an increase that is not statistically significant (see Graph 1)

Graph 1 shows that the low levels of confidence in the police are combined with even deeper distrust in judicial institutions, reflective of citizens' perception that courts of justice inefficiently punish criminal conduct. There is a widespread perception in the region—fed daily by the media—that many criminals, even when captured by the police, enter and exit the criminal justice system without punishment, generating a sense in citizens that reporting crime is a useless and, in many cases, counterproductive endeavor.

This perception of inefficacy weighs heavily on the negative image of the criminal justice system. However, more so than inefficacy, the available evidence suggests that corruption and perceived corruption are the most destructive factors when it comes to citizen confidence in the police forces, as can be seen in Table 4.

The data from Latinobarómetro for 2010 show that nearly a third of Latin Americans were convinced that corruption was the main problem with the police in their country, more so than any other factor. This is not surprising if we consider that another international survey done in 2013 found that nearly three-quarters of the population in 11 Latin American countries were convinced that the armed forces were corrupt or extremely corrupt. This is consistent with another recent finding that shows that only 36% of Latin Americans interviewed believe the police protects the population from crime, while 43% are convinced that the police engage in criminal activities.²⁵ This perception is not gratuitous: in 2014, 12.1% of the population in Latin America that interacted with police over the previous year said they had been asked to pay bribes, higher than the figure for 2006 (10.9%). This statistic was much higher in some countries, such as Mexico and Paraguay, where it reached nearly a fifth of the population.

Along with the courts and municipal governments, interactions with the police are the most significant focal point of the day-to-day corruption experienced by Latin Americans. Deep distrust in the police is directly related to the widespread victimization of the population by corrupt officials and an even more deeply-rooted perception that the police lack integrity.

22 Dammert (2007a), p. 41; Ungar (2011).

23 Arias, Rosada & Saín (2012), p. 15.

24 Ungar (2011); FES (2012), p. 15.

25 PNUD (2013), p. 116.

TABLE 3. LEVELS OF TRUST IN THE POLICE AND ARMED FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA

Source: Latin America: LAPOP. European Union: Eurobarometer 2017. Africa: Afrobarometer 2015.

COUNTRIES	CONFIDENCE IN THE NATIONAL POLICE (%) (1)		CHANGE IN CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICE, 2010-2014 (%)	CONFIDENCE IN THE ARMED FORCES 2014 (%)	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POLICE AND ARMED FORCES, 2014 (%) ⁵
	2010	2014			
Argentina	18.9	37.2	+18.3	49.2	-12.0
Bolivia	29.4	22.5	-6.9	40.0	-17.5
Brasil	48.2	37.5	-10.7	59.9	-22.4
Chile	74.6	67.4	-7.2	61.8	5.6
Colombia	50.7	40.1	-10.6	55.7	-15.5
Costa Rica	37.8	37.1	-0.6	--	--
Ecuador	39.0	48.8	+9.7	63.8	-15.0
El Salvador	40.2	42.9	+2.6	67.8	-24.9
Guatemala	21.4	24.9	-3.5	70.0	-45.1
Honduras	47.4	38.8	-8.6	62.9	-24.1
Mexico	25.8	28.2	+2.4	66.3	-38.1
Nicaragua	47.6	53.3	+5.8	65.2	-11.9
Panama	52.0	44.9	-7.1	--	--
Paraguay	27.4	31.6	+4.2	56.0	-24.4
Peru	26.2	24.7	-1.4	44.6	-19.9
Dominican Rep.	29.8	26.0	-3.7	49.8	-23.8
Uruguay	49.5	46.9	-2.6	46.7	0.2
Venezuela	25.2	26.4	+1.2	34.0	-7.6
Average for Latin America	38.4	37.7	-0.7	55.9	-18.2
Average for European Union	--	75.0 ²	--	--	--
Average for Africa	--	53.0 ³	--	--	--

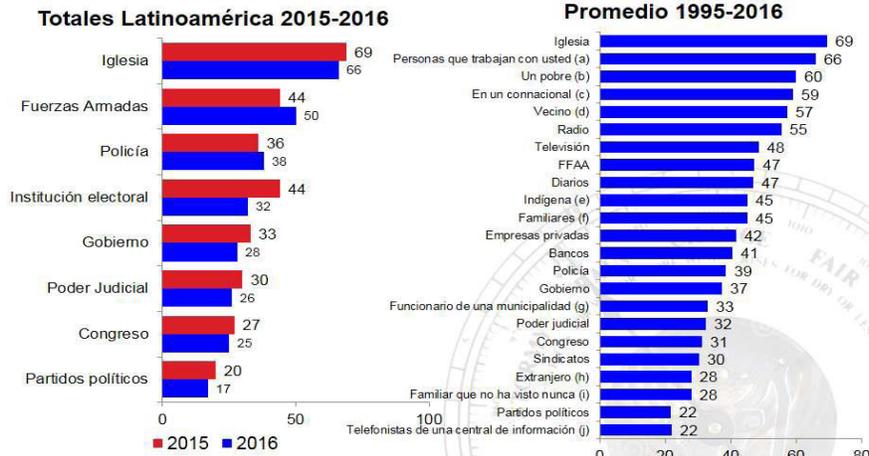
Notes: (1) LAPOP asked interviewees to rate their level of trust on a scale of 1 (low confidence) to 7 (high confidence). The percentages reproduced here are the total sum of responses at levels 5-7 on the scale. (2) Average for 28 European Union member states. On this question, interviewees had three response options: tends to have confidence; tends to not have confidence; doesn't know. (3) Average for 34 African countries, 2011-13. On this question, interviewees had four response options: no confidence; little confidence; some confidence; high confidence. Here the percentage reflects the sum of 'some confidence' and 'high confidence' responses. (4) Results of subtracting results for 2014 from those for 2010. Green cells indicate improvement; red cells indicate decline. (5) Results of subtracting percentage of confidence in Armed Forces from percentage of confidence in police.

GRAPHIC NO 1. CONFIDENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

CONFIANZA EN . . .
TOTAL AMÉRICA LATINA 2016 Y PROMEDIOS POR
INSTITUCIÓN 1995-2016



P1. Por favor, mire esta tarjeta y dígame, para cada uno de los grupos, instituciones o personas mencionadas en la lista ¿cuánta confianza tiene usted en ellas? Mucha, Algo, Poco o Ninguna. *Aquí solo 'Mucha' más 'Algo'.



Fuente: Latinobarómetro 2015. (a) se midió en 2003 y 2005. (b), (c), (e) y (h) hace se midieron en 2007. (d) se midió en 2003, 2006 y 2007. (f) se midió en 2013. (g) se midió en 2001. (i) se midió en 2001 y 2005. (j) se midió en 2000.

In broad strokes, this is the current state of the police in Latin America:

- Heterogeneity in terms of the fragmentation of police structures, some highly centralized models coexisting alongside others with multiple police forces with national scope, and still others defined by the multiplication of forces on a subnational scale;
- Heterogeneous police density, although on average, adequate in comparison to the rest of the world, and growing;
- Functional orientation geared toward control of public order through use of force above duties of prevention and participation; although adoption of the latter is on the rise, this is hindered by the legacy of militarization,

rigid hierarchies and lack of police personnel training;

- Low levels of trust in the police as an institution—and in the criminal justice system in general—generated in large part by a widespread perception of corruption.

All of this exists in a context defined by high levels of criminal violence and a general sense of insecurity in the region. Looking ahead, the need for profound police reform in nearly all Latin American countries is as obvious as the difficulties surrounding these efforts. Such reforms must contend with some fundamental trends and dilemmas. How these evolve will shape the future profiles of the institutions in the region.

3 Trends and dilemmas

There are numerous challenges for police in the region on the road to 2030. The first is to promote less reactive policing, in a context that is increasingly defined by organized crime. The second is encouraging the right amount of decentralized decision-making on security matters in keeping with the contexts in which police action takes place. The third is the challenge of consolidating the community policing model in the region. Additional to these challenges are three fundamental issues related

to the police's internal functioning: police training and incorporation; new technologies and information systems; and mechanisms intended to increase transparency and accountability in the police as an institution.

All of these issues are closely inter-related and directly linked to the fundamental goal of a more effective police which is also democratic and protective of citizens' rights and liberties.

TABLE 4. CORRUPTION AND PERCEIVED CORRUPTION IN POLICE IN LATIN AMERICA

Sources: Corruption is main police problem: Latinobarómetro; Police are corrupt or extremely corrupt: Transparency International España – Global Barometer of Corruption; Population asked for bribes by

COUNTRIES	CORRUPTION IS MAIN POLICE PROBLEM, 2010	POLICE ARE CORRUPT OR EXTREMELY CORRUPT, 2013	POPULATION ASKED FOR BRIBES BY POLICE (%) (1)	
	(%)	(%)	2006	2014
Argentina	40	70	--	--
Bolivia	26	86	17.7	--
Brasil	15	70	--	4.3
Chile	17	53	2.3	--
Colombia	37	61	4.5	7.4
Costa Rica	25	--	8.8	5.3
Ecuador	31	--	10.5	--
El Salvador	26	87	6.6	5.4
Guatemala	43	--	10.9	13.8
Honduras	39	--	11.0	15.4
Mexico	42	90	22.9	18.6
Nicaragua	19	--	7.3	8.6
Panama	25	--	6.5	11.1
Paraguay	41	82	11.6	18.3
Peru	38	80	18.8	16.4
Dominican Rep.	44	--	10.7	16.2
Uruguay	18	47	--	3.1
Venezuela	33	83	--	--
Average for Latin America	31.1	73.5	10.9	12.1

Notes: (1) Percentage calculated based on population that had contact with police during the last year. Average includes only the 11 countries with data available for 2006 and 2014.

3.1 Organized crime and the militarization of interior security

With the transition to democracy and the end of most armed conflicts on the continent, shifting the focus in security policy is an imperative. This means giving greater weight to the police institutions in charge of citizen security and other State bodies that exercise policing functions and contribute to citizen security from a civil perspective. All this must be done without disregarding or suddenly reversing the role of the military in the security agenda.

An important challenge is, thus, to adopt a “citizen-focused” approach to internal security. This concept does not mean delegating the tasks of security to citizens, nor is it intended to automatically prioritize the work of police organizations presumably endowed with “civil” virtues, but rather the notion that any intervention in security matters must privilege the protection of citizens’ rights and liberties, a task in which many institutional stakeholders converge. The paradigm shift away from interior security of a military nature means the public forces and other competent bodies serve in the interest of citizens and not the State and public order. As put in a Constitutional Court ruling in Colombia:

"... the public order must be interpreted as the set of conditions of security, peace and health that enable general prosperity and the exercise of human rights. This framework constitutes the basis and limits of police power, which is called upon to keep the public order, but in the interest of the full exercise of rights. In this sense, the preservation of public order cannot be attained through suppression or disproportionate restriction of public liberties, given that the challenge of democracy is to provide for the broadest and most vigorous exercise of citizen liberties."²⁶

Notwithstanding, on security matters, the militarist tradition of the hierarchical, centralized police force with a reactive vision continues to be a citizen demand and political practice sustained by high crime levels, problems arising from organized crime, and the inertia of functions fulfilled by the military forces in the past. This tradition is further strengthened by a police training system that reinforces obedience and discipline, and focuses on teaching legal regulations rather than procedural methods aimed at obtaining results and understanding context. Likewise, the prevailing military perspective on security owes much to the limited training provided to other officials with competence in this area, as well as to the citizens themselves who demand security. In this context, the problem is not so much military participation in police support and the institutional structure around security, but rather the persistence of models of training, decision-making and action that do not foster democratic security. The challenge is to transform the tenets, decision-making and procedures for intervention in all institutional purviews so that they legitimize citizen security policies, meaning public support for organizations involved in citizen security. This transformation requires greater voluntary cooperation from citizens.²⁷

The legitimacy of security is crucial for democracy. The consolidation of the processes of democratization in the region must permeate the organizations in charge of security. To this end, the police in Latin America have sought to modify their tools of action and their institutional architectures. In particular, community policing programs have been implemented, with varying nuances and results.²⁸ Despite the difficulties and institutional inertia hindering the development of more democratically orientated Latin American police forces, it is clear that democratization processes have at least led to the dismantling of some of their bellicose logic.

This path has been gradual and with some contextual variation contingent on histories of governance and crime: in countries like Chile and Colombia, the discussion about municipal police, which for some means the decentralization of decision-making to give more say on security issues to mayors, has been deliberately postponed.

The symbolic and practical break away from a militarized vision of security is about assuming a citizen-focused public police duty which: recognizes the unique demands arising from the objective and subjective²⁹ dimensions of security; is sensitive to specific security needs with regard to gender, race, age, territorial context, socioeconomic level, among other aspects;³⁰ and takes into account the complexity of criminal violence.

The demilitarization of security requires a transformation of not only the vision guiding police work, but also the relationship between the public forces and other bodies involved in security. The culture of "citizen-focused" security requires competent officials (in the police, justice system and social programs) and committed citizens. It also requires evidence-based decision-making; protecting the public forces from political manipulation; and adopting a rigorous selection process and more professionalization in all the entities involved in citizen security strategy.

Though all of the above is needed, it is not necessarily happening. Despite the democratization processes experienced by police in the region, military participation in public security matters in many is on the rise in many Latin American countries. This is nearly always correlated with the proliferation of organized crime and strong social pressure putting the issue of security at the top of the agenda in the region. As shown in Table 3, the current climate in Latin America is favorable to military participation in public security efforts. This is combined with the perception of police weakness by national and local decision-makers, the reduced social trust in the police and the correlative legitimization of the military corps. An additional compounding factor is the rise of international terrorism as one of the main global threats, particularly in countries where organized crime is publicly viewed as a threat to national security.³¹

All of this has been brought to bear in the new Interior Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Interior) in Mexico, preceded

26 Constitutional Court of Colombia (2004).

27 Vagg (1996).

28 See, in particular, the work of Frühling (2003b) on the balance between community policing and police reform in Latin America.

29 Objective demands refer to the requirements of crime victims. Subjective demands are claims by citizens based on their perception of security, even though they may not have been a direct victim of a criminal act.

30 See, in this regard, the analysis of the opinion survey in Chile by Frühling (2009), which shows how socio-economic strata influence citizens' positive perception of police and other security authorities.

31 Dammert & Bailey (2007).

by many years of military deployment to fight drug trafficking. It also influenced the recent creation of the Urban Operations Support Command (CAOUR) of the Colombian army, and the adoption of renewed intelligence and targeted military intervention strategies against drug trafficking, illegal mining and other criminal organizations. Other noteworthy cases include Honduras with its zero tolerance and “a soldier on every corner” policies aimed at reducing homicides; the deployment of urban gendarmes in Argentina that, while not strictly military, denote a militarized vision of public security; and military participation in the combatting of the maras in El Salvador and the gangs in the favelas of Brazil. All of these examples suggest a marked regional trend of expanded military presence in public security tasks.

Such a trend, which does not appear easy to revert in the short term, may have problematic effects on the construction of a civil, democratic security policy.

3.2 Centralization v. decentralization

Latin America has historically been characterized by pronounced presidentialism and, as a result, a marked concentration of power. The most notorious shifts toward decentralization began in the 80s with the transition to democracy and the fiscal crisis weathered by the countries of region. However, it was not until the 90s that the momentum for decentralization began in earnest, under the heavy influence of international cooperation organizations. It was believed that decentralization would empower localities, that public spending would be optimized, and that the needs of citizens would be better addressed through mechanisms of participation.³² Proponents predicted multiple benefits from the direct election of local authorities and an increased transfer of resources and skills to subnational levels.³³

The process of decentralization has not been simple. The redistribution of roles and resources, deciding which policies to decentralize, reduced institutionalization, the size of countries and territorial entities, rushed implementation of reforms, and sociopolitical circumstances have generated mixed results that are not always promising.³⁴

The decentralization of security has been part of that larger discussion. It is naïve to assume a causal relationship between more local security and better security, or be-

tween diffuse decision-making within security organizations (including the police, local governments, and justice systems, among others) and better decision-making.³⁵ The effect of these variables depends on the levels of institutionalization, electoral systems, degrees of corruption, the type of police organization and justice, and social capital and citizen education, among other factors. The challenge for the countries of Latin America is to find the best model of distribution of responsibilities across central and local levels, in accordance with the institutional capacities of the security sector. For certain contexts and circumstances, the decentralization of security, and specifically of decision-making within police ranks, can be beneficial, but not always.

In the case of police organization, diffusing decision-making (or doing so when there are municipal or autonomous state police) to facilitate communication between the police command and bases could be strategic insofar as the organizational capacities, political windows of opportunity³⁶ and unique context of each country allows. For the diffusion of decision-making processes within the police to have a chance at success requires reducing administrative functions and tasks and extending them to non-uniformed members, in addition to creating efficient mechanisms for coordinating with local government and citizens. To speak of decentralization in terms of security and within police organizations requires rigorous reflection on the history of decision-making on security in each country, including careful analysis of the most significant milestones in the transformation of the security apparatus, noting the causes of institutional inertia in this matter.

The challenges presented by decentralization varies depending on the police structure in each country. Mexico or Brazil, for instance, with their highly federalized police systems, must grapple with the traditional problems of coordination among national, state and local police, resulting in the juxtaposition of actions, uneven training, and contradictory perspectives and ways of handling security dilemmas. At the same time, this scheme allows for a healthy degree of competition and oversight across the different police corps. In the case of Chile and Colombia, with highly centralized police, although their police doctrine may recognize them as structurally decentralized, they must contend with the effects of an extremely hierarchical and less flexible decision-making process, with few internal controls.

³² Jordana (2001), pp. 8-9.

³³ Mascarreño (2009).

³⁴ Jordana (2001), pp. 6-7.

³⁵ Mesias (2017).

³⁶ In Kingdon (1997)'s terms.

3.3 Community policing in Latin America

As pointed out earlier, one of the most important transformations of police institutions in the region in the past two decades is the increasing—albeit still limited—adoption of community policing models. Initially conceived in developed countries—especially the UK and US—these models have gained ground in Latin America, partly in response to problems like the deeply-rooted societal distrust in the police and widespread police brutality that very negatively affect state response to criminal violence in many countries.³⁷

Defining what counts as community policing is controversial and experience in Latin America has shown it to include very heterogeneous police practices, ranging from the establishment of vague mechanisms of periodic interaction between the police and community organizations to much more ambitious experiments aimed at making the police a more central actor in community life. In general terms, community policing models combine most of the following elements:

- Crime prevention through a closer relationship between police and the community and the fostering of relations of mutual trust;
- Reorientation of patrol duty to increase police presence and contact with the community, usually through increased foot patrols;
- Decentralization of command toward smaller territorial units aimed at bringing police work closer to local needs, in some cases defined by intensive use of geo-tracking information on criminal behavior;
- Establishment of mechanisms of periodic interaction between police and the community aimed at fostering information exchange by both, as well as the setting of joint priorities for police work and institutional accountability.³⁸

There are numerous experiences of police reform that share this orientation in Latin America and it is impossible to enumerate them all here. Some of the most prominent

cases include the Carabineros Quadrant Plan in Chile; the reform of the National Police of Colombia in the 90s, followed by the more recent Community Surveillance Model by Quadrants (MNVCC); the reform of the Buenos Aires Provincial Police in the late 90s; the transformation of the Sao Paulo State Military Police, also in the 90s; the “Fica Vivo” Program in the city of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil; the adoption of the Safer Communities Plan in Honduras in 2002; the introduction of Peacekeeping Units in the Río de Janeiro Police a decade earlier; and in some aspects, the “Juárez Somos Todos” Plan in the Mexican state of Chihuahua to counteract the escalation of violence in that city between 2008-2010. To these we can add many other small-scale experiences throughout the region.

Each one of these cases have had their own emphases, ambitions and institutional configurations. In some—notably, the Quadrant Plans in Chile and Colombia—the central goal has been to seek community support to develop highly localized strategies for combatting crime. In other cases, such as Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Honduras and the first phase of the Colombian reform, the emphasis has been on the organization of communal forums for orienting and, in some cases, supervising police work. Still others, like Belo Horizonte, Sao Paulo and Ciudad Juárez, show attempts at creating broad alliances between police institutions, the private sector, communal organizations and academia in order to set security priorities and monitor their implementation. Other cases—notably, the UPP in Rio de Janeiro—constitute very ambitious projects for radically modifying police presence and functions in communities strongly affected by organized crime, placing an emphasis on the joint solution to diverse factors that increase community vulnerability to crime.³⁹

The outcome of all this is hard to establish, in part because the majority of the reforms aimed at establishing community police models have been limited to very specific geographic areas. In other cases, the reforms have been accompanied by limited resourcing or unstable political support, which has truncated their application. The case of Buenos Aires—whose community programs were essentially abandoned after a few years—is paradigmatic in this sense.⁴⁰ However, as with many other things, the core problem is the near total lack of rigorous assessment

37 Its adoption also owes much to the “journey of ideas” and the region’s propensity to adopt public policy trends from developed countries.

38 Labra Díaz (2011), p. 54. See also Fruhling (2009), pp. 188-189.

39 On the Carabineros Quadrant Plan in Chile, see: Labra Díaz (2011), Fruhling (2003a), pp. 36-38, y (2009), pp. 192-196. On National Police reform in Colombia in the 90s, see: Fruhling (2003a), pp. 31-33; González (2016). On Colombia’s National Police by Quadrant Plan, see: Muggah et al. (2016), pp. 18-22; Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2012); PNUD (2013), pp. 187-189. On Buenos Aires Provincial Police reform, see: Fruhling (2003a), pp. 29-31; González (2016). On police reform in Sao Paulo, see: Fruhling (2003a), pp. 33-36, y (2009), pp. 196-198; Gonzalez (2016). On “Fica Vivo” program in Belo Horizonte, see: Arias & Ungar (2009); PNUD (2013), pp. 184-187; Fruhling (2009), pp. 204-205; Muggah (2016), pp. 6-9. On the case of Honduras, see: Arias & Ungar (2009), and Muggah et al. (2016), pp. 26-28. On the UPP of Río de Janeiro, see: Muggah (2016), pp. 10-14; Pinto & Do Carmo (2016). On the “Juárez Somos Todos” Plan, see: Muggah et al. (2016), pp. 32-35; PNUD (2013), pp. 193-195. On other experiences of community policing in Central America, see: Chinchilla (2003); Fruhling (2009), pp. 199-201.

40 Fruhling (2003a), pp. 30-31, and (2009), pp. 206-208.

of the effects of the community policing model in the region. This makes it very difficult to isolate impact. In general terms, it is acknowledged that the community model has had limited effects, mostly confined to improvements in the population's perception of security and in the institutional image of the police, and a reduction in the levels of abuse of authority. Although these are all positive effects, the impact of these programs on crime reduction have been limited or simply unknown.⁴¹ The "Fica Vivo" Program in Belo Horizonte and the National Community Surveillance by Quadrants in Colombia are the exceptions to this rule, and have studies suggesting they reduced various types of crime in the places where the community model has been implemented.⁴²

The proliferation of community policing experiments in the region is not a coincidence. On the contrary, it is in response to keenly felt needs that must be met in the region if the efforts to combat crime are to be successful. This makes their continued adoption nearly certain, very possibly in combination with an increasing emphasis on the use of information systems that, along with community input, contribute to the design of strongly localized police intervention strategies. Whatever their individual nuances, looking forward, community policing strategies will continue to face some crucial challenges in Latin America:

- *Ensuring scalability* in the capacity to go from pilot experiences to major police reforms capable of modifying the perception (including self-perception), behavior and organization of the police institution as a whole;
- *Overcoming skepticism* from the police force, its commanders and political bosses, which often view community programs as little more than a public relations exercise, if not a distraction from the tasks perceived as necessary for effectively combatting crime. Doing this is crucial if programs are to have the continuity that a successful implementation of the model requires;⁴³
- *Establishing rigorous* mechanisms of assessment capable of isolating the effects of community models on crime rates, both in the population's perception and in police conduct;
- *Increasing resources* allocated to community policing programs in order to reach a critical mass and allow the effects of adopting them to be measured.

Without this, community policing programs will end up being a wasted opportunity for bringing the police institu-

tions of Latin America closer not only to the people, but also to more democratic paradigms that are far removed from the authoritarian traditions that unfortunately continue to define much of police work in the region.

3.4 Processes of police incorporation, training and labor conditions

One of the key factors that will define police in Latin America on the path to 2030 is, without a doubt, the professional training of its members. Much has been and done about it. If we compare the levels of professionalism of our police with that of three decades ago, the progress is significant in the region, although not homogeneous. In general, the balance puts an emphasis on access to a professional career with the police institution. There are still no rigorous external evaluations of countries, or a comparison of the quality of education received by police officers in the region. These must be carried out with consideration of the challenges involved in the use of greater police intelligence, the relationship with judicial police, and the adoption of democratic management practices, in addition to community approaches that are both preventive and sensitive to vulnerable population groups (children, youth, seniors). Additionally, there are no analyses on how the training process is coordinated with structural elements vital to the proper functioning of the police, such as the different types of incorporation into the police and the associated labor conditions (routes of ascent, necessary professional profiles, salaries, career ladder, among others).

The police profession must be at the vanguard when it comes to training the men and women who will provide a public service whose *raison d'être* is the promotion of liberties, rights and duties. This entails a strategic vision of CV building, backed by external peer experts, the rigorous selection of instructors involved in the education processes, openness to new ideas and, when possible, association with non-police instructors. This will facilitate the likelihood of moving beyond the endogenous vision of the subjects traditionally taught within the organization to incorporate new subjects that must be part of today's education agenda.

It is important to underscore that, in general, the police schools of Latin America are closed entities and little is known of their curricula and internal testing. In Colombia, a 2015 study by Fundación Ideas de la Paz concluded that "*academic programs and contents must still be effectively*

41 See: PNUD (2013), p. 114; Fruhling (2009), pp. 220-224; Gonzalez (2016), pp. 142-143; Pinto & Do Carmo (2016), p. 127.

42 PNUD (2013), p. 114; Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2012); Muggah et al. (2016), pp. 8-9.

43 Fruhling (2003a), pp. 30-40, and (2009), pp. 210-211.

harmonized with teaching strategies, learning and testing...” and that “*police education could be based on the institution’s own doctrine, as it is currently, and at the same time bolstered by other institutions of the national education system.*” It also pointed out that the institutional education program seems consistent with new challenges, but that said consistence in doctrinal terms does not always translate into practice training.⁴⁴

A study by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) on police training in Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama has underlined the strong international influence of instructors, particularly in the Haitian case. In El Salvador, the program developed by the Academia Nacional de Seguridad Pública (ANSP) has been criticized for its strongly theoretical and abstract orientation.⁴⁵ In other cases, the basic curricula related to legal aspects and practical elements have been expanded to include training in writing, interviewing skills and cultural sensitivity, among others. Although with differentiated results in practice, these elements are present in police training in forces such as those of Mexico, Brazil, Chile and Colombia.

The heterogeneity of the region makes it hard to delve deeply into the reform needed in police professionalization. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to a few fundamental questions that should guide reforms in this area:

- What type of career ladder should the police have in 2030? Should the traditional division between officers and sub-officials remain? How should police training be differentiated in terms of the type of career?
- Should there continue to be a thematic differentiation between training for “hard” and “soft” security,⁴⁶ or a more integrated vision of the specialties with their respective emphases, in the education of superior, middle and subordinate officers?
- What would the education routes be for high school graduates who aspire to a professional career to be able to dedicate the necessary time to that without it conflicting with operative police duties? What would the functions, roles and hierarchies of police professionals be? How to capitalize on their knowledge? What type of incentives must be established from the very beginning of the professional police career to stay in the job?

- What student and teacher evaluation strategies are needed so as to incorporate rigorous measures of the culture of legality and high academic standards?

The processes of recruitment into the force must become transparent and open to other civil and academic peer review of the profiles of recently incorporated officers. The process should review their service vocation, levels of commitment under situations of pressure, leadership, empathy, democratic authority, analysis and production of written documents, methodologies for recognizing multi-causal factors and complex contexts behind crime, among other elements.

In order to have highly effective public forces with good work morale, there must be labor conditions that ensure job stability and proper conditions for police personnel to do their job, with real promotion incentives and full protection of their rights. This will require the creation of mixed commissions, i.e. with police and non-police stakeholders, for evaluating the internal labor conditions within police institutions. The work done by these commissions must be sensitive to the unique specificities of an organization like the police, but must also ensure and protect the conditions that make up the labor rights of all public officials under the rule of law.

3.5 The adoption of technology and information systems

Technological advances in security matters are evident throughout the hemisphere and moving forward at breakneck speed. Currently, police drones, crime-analysis software, brain fingerprinting⁴⁷ (brain scans to more accurately identify possible suspects), portable scanners for instant fingerprinting to run criminal background checks, radio frequency identification (RFID) to obtain data and personal information through credit cards or other types of ID cards, among many other innovations, are the order of the day.⁴⁸ What used to seem like science fiction is now possible, with all the ethical and practical dilemmas this entails.

The biggest problem is not always access to new technology. Quite the opposite, one of the most evident features

⁴⁴ Bulla & Guarín (2015), p. 12.

⁴⁵ Neild (s.f.).

⁴⁶ “Soft security” refers to public policy strategies related to aspects of crime prevention that are fundamentally social in nature; “hard security” involves policy elements associated with coercive actions of dissuasion, prosecution and combatting of organized crime and common criminals.

⁴⁷ For a critical analysis of this technological tool, see Rosenfeld (2005).

⁴⁸ To expand on some examples for Latin America, including the Integrated Security Service (Peru), the National Dignity Strategy and Platform (Mexico), Technical System of Crime Analysis (Chile), the System of Vehicular Control (SISCONVE – Uruguay), or the Electronics and Telematics School (ESTELA, of the National Police of Colombia), see: University of Santiago de Chile.

of public policy in the global world is what authors like Sabatier & Jenkins (1999) referred to some time ago as the “journey of ideas.” As its name implies, the globalized world provides public decision-makers with access to experiences and innovations developed in different latitudes through a process of continuous learning. The largest complicating factor is the adaptation of these innovations to a Latin American context: in matters of technology, the ideas implemented in Latin America are closely linked to advances developed mainly in Anglo-Saxon and European contexts.

Latin America has, for the most part, been a receiver of technology and innovation. However, there continues to be an evident contrast between the hurry to gain access to cutting-edge technology and the rigidity of institutional and organizational structures that must implement these innovations. These structures demand changes in many aspects, starting with senior and subordinate officer education, the transformation of organizational culture, and the modification of the regulatory apparatus and institutional capacities to adapt to new criminal contexts and changing social trends.

In reform processes, technology tends to be looked upon as an end in and of itself, giving it a life all its own in the complex security puzzle. Our governments, regardless of intention, and often lacking knowledge about the scope of new technologies, tend to consider the acquisition of tools of police technology as an automatic solution to multi-dimensional problems. This is a grave error. This viewpoint generally leaves out any analysis of profile and necessary ethics in the personnel who operate the technology, the organizational conditions surrounding its introduction, the impact of new technologies on the protection of human rights, its impact on levels of corruption and on the concentration of power, the balance between the economic cost of acquiring the technology and its impact on achieving effective security. All of these factors make it imperative that there be continuous evaluation of the results from the introduction of any technological innovation.

Technology and information systems are necessary allies in fighting crime. But technology must be seen as a tool that facilitates and provides improved access to information not only on the crime committed, but mainly on the factors that will allow for its prevention. It must then be a priority to put technology at the service of the search for evidence for reliable decision-making. This involves going beyond the mere generation of data and putting that data to work in rigorous analyses for the dissuasion and antici-

pation of crime, for criminal investigation, and the creation of new crime indicators that will shed light on hidden problems. Likewise, the data generated must provide for better administration of security and the protection of those who provide it, as well as foster the strengthening of the regulatory frameworks around international cooperation and human rights.⁴⁹

It has become imperative to give citizens an active role in the use of technology for security purposes, not only on the receiving end of government strategies, but from a cooperation and mutual learning perspective. In the same way, rigorous civil society observation is needed of the police organization and, more broadly, the institutions in charge of citizen security when it comes to the implementation of new technologies. This is in addition to the need to seriously train local or subnational governments and the set of organizations involved in protecting security.

In summary, technological innovation brings as many security challenges as it does benefits. It is undeniable that at present, transnational crime, crimes committed in cyberspace and others perpetrated using technology all put traditional models of police vigilance at stake.⁵⁰ It is therefore essential that we incorporate the technologies that counteract and facilitate response to these new crime challenges, that are not only the responsibility of the police but the entire institutional structure of citizen security. The challenge in countries like ours lies not only in access to the latest technology and information systems, but in fitting them into our existing institutional, cultural, regulatory, economic and public policy structures.

3.6 Police transparency and legitimacy for citizens

As we have seen, the police in Latin America do not enjoy a high level of social legitimacy. This negative perception of the police as an organization is due to both the prevalence of corruption and the persistence of human rights violations. It would obviously be unfair to generalize about police forces across the continent: the Carabineros of Chile enjoy broad popular acceptance when compared to the police in Venezuela, Peru, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala or Bolivia, where trust is very low (see Table 3 above).

Both the prevalence of corruption and persistent abuse of authority are directly related to a consistent lack of transparency in police institutions with deep historical roots in authoritarianism, manifested in multiple ways. Much of

⁴⁹ In this regard, the Latin American Electronic Government Charter (2007), as a document on the urgent need to make the exercise of government public and transparent, is also a step forward for crime work in the region.

⁵⁰ In this regard, see: Universidad Santiago de Chile.

Latin America’s police was created and strengthened under dictatorships and in the context of armed conflicts that gave it a military tint. Among other aspects, this involved inheriting the military tendency towards secrecy and opacity, purportedly justified by the need for confidentiality to defeat enemies. However, in democratic contexts, public transparency is an imperative in all areas of policy, including security and the performance of organizations like the police and military forces. In some cases, such as Colombia, the military tradition protected the police under military systems of justice, which certainly obscures the mechanisms for measuring any public officer’s accountability. In certain contexts, this merits a full-fledged debate that the present document will not resolve, but that should form part of the analysis.

The lack of transparency arising from the militarization of security is compounded by other risk factors frequently used to explain corruption and erosion of police legitimacy in the region. The most important of these is the widespread presence of organized crime and the exorbitant sums of money and political distortions associated with it. However, other important risk factors include the precarious labor conditions and meager salaries in police and judicial institutions; the sketchy ethical training in the police; the tendency to issue hierarchical orders outside the law; the reduced mechanisms of internal and external evaluation and accountability of police organizations; and the obsolete mechanisms for measuring citizens’ satisfaction with police service. Lastly, as noted earlier, Latin America has been characterized by a lack of transparency in its police organizations, with little democratic control, special privileges that are wont to disappear, and an inclination to prioritize attention to political and economic elites over the problems of common citizens. Improvements in the levels of police transparency and the recovery of their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens pose complex challenges for the future:

- Strengthen the “civil” culture of citizen security through media strategies, public and education policies that manage to dismantle the hierarchical and coercive image of security based on a military or exclusively police approach to it;
- Establish ongoing monitoring of security sector expenditures, public policies developed and the roles and competences at all levels of authority involved in citizen security institutions;
- Build specialized routes for providing service to citizens that include rigorous follow-up of user satisfaction;
- Through rigorous strategies of oversight and control, break up circles of favoritism (“grey corruption”) between political and economic elites and the public security forces. For example, creating figures such as the ombudsman or other oversight and control authorities could generate important structural changes. This, combined with the implementation of technological tools for speeding up police procedures for reporting and monitoring abuses of power in police interventions, would allow for progress toward strengthening the legitimacy of the organization;
- Strengthen criminal investigation to generate trust in the security sector as a whole. Among other aspects, the search for scientific evidence must be bolstered, so the facts are not based solely on testimonial evidence. This requires education and specialized resources;
- Regardless of police institutional architecture—federalized and municipalized, like Brazil and Mexico, or centralized like in Chile and Colombia—it is essential that mechanisms of police accountability and responsibility be generated at the local level.

4 Police Reform in Latin America: Obstacles and Opportunities

Addressing the dilemmas examined in the previous section to find adequate solutions—without which, the emergence of democratic police⁵¹ will be impossible—will involve a hard and prolonged effort in the best of cases. However, achieving police reform, in a context of high crime and violence, widespread presence of organized crime, low credibility of the criminal justice system, historical legacies of militarization, and chronic fiscal

weakness is a nearly impossible task. In Latin America, the police forces in need of reform are institutions whose mandates and powers are besieged from three different directions, all of which have surprising levels of legitimacy: the proliferation of the private security industry, the growing involvement of the armed forces in public security tasks, and the appearance of multiple illegal actors ready and capable of providing public order in the territories under their

51 Democratic police here refers to a police force guided by law before government, is committed to human rights and obligated to be accountable to society for its actions. See Bayley (2006), pp.19-22; Bailey & Dammert (2006a), p. 2.

control.⁵² Thus, as the urgency for instituting democratic police reform in the region grows so do the multiple obstacles in its way.

The advent of democracy in the region, and in some countries also peace, has provided a foothold for a great number of reform efforts by police institutions over the last generation. These reforms range from the establishment of new civilian police forces in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala, to programs of profound institutional purging, such as the National Police of Colombia, to the numerous attempts to adopt community policing models and the introduction of information systems in various countries. In general terms, the police reforms in Latin America have touched on, at least in theory, six core pillars of the institution's organization and operations. Some of the reforms have even addressed various pillars simultaneously:

- *Modification of security sector governance structures.* These efforts arose from sensitive debates on where police responsibility for police operations resides. The need to create mechanisms of coordination in a context that is increasingly dominated by the decentralization and/or deconcentration of police work and the multiplication of police forces at the municipal level also played a role in the debate.⁵³ Fitting examples include both the creation of the National Public Security System and the Secretariat of Public Security in Mexico, as well as the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in El Salvador, which removed police functions from the portfolio of the Ministries of the Interior in those countries. Likewise, it is important to mention the creation of the National Security Council in countries like Venezuela (2001) and the Dominican Republic (2013).⁵⁴
- *Demilitarization of the police force.* This has been the case in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala as a consequence of the peace accords of 1992 and 1996, respectively. Demilitarization has also taken place in Panama and Haiti, following the abolition of the armed forces in both countries, which resulted from numerous outside interventions in 1989 and 1994. It is likewise worth mentioning the case of Honduras, where police forces were released from military control in 1998. In other countries, the police have undergone less dramatic changes aimed at abandoning institu-

tional cultures that were strongly determined by the legacy of military regimes, as in the case of the Chilean Carabineros.⁵⁵

- *Strengthening management and information systems.* Improving officers' management skills and knowledge handling was one of the fundamental pillars of the police reform implemented in Colombia's National Police in the 90s, together with the emphasis on community participation.⁵⁶ In other cases, the emphasis has been on the adoption of sophisticated systems for gathering information on criminal behavior and police performance. For example, Mexico developed the National Public Security System, an information centralization mechanism. The Colombian police adopted a National Model of Community Vigilance by Quadrants, as well as the Metropolitan Police of Caracas, that includes an Integrated System of Crime Statistics.⁵⁷ In various cases, these projects have received decisive international support. With assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Regional System of Standardized Citizen Security and Violent Prevention Indicators was implemented in 2009. This project brings the region together to improve and compare statistics on crime and violence. In addition, some police corps in the region have replicated with some variation, the renowned data analysis and police management system, CompStat, that was introduced in the New York City Police Department over two decades ago. Examples of these replicas include the Tactical System for Crime Analysis (Sistema Táctico para el Análisis Delictual (STAD)) in Chile, the Public Security Management Integration Program (Programa de Integración de Gestión en Seguridad Pública (IGESP)) in Minas Gerais, Brazil, and the Police Performance Evaluation Center (Sala de Evaluación del Desempeño Policial) in Mexico City.⁵⁸
- *Police purging and the establishment of outside supervision of police conduct.* One common feature of police reform in Latin America—from Mexico City to Buenos Aires—has been the mass purging of officers whose relation to large police corruption scandals is alleged. In the case of the National Police of Colombia, the purge in the latter half of the 1990s affected more than 7000 officers. These efforts aimed at purification are symptomatic of the failure of internal control mechanisms within police institutions.⁵⁹ For

52 Casas Zamora (2013), pp. 53-74.

53 Fruhling (2009), p. 152, 186, 270.

54 Moloeznik (2006), pp. 175-181; Bailey & Dammert (2006b), pp. 247-248; Fruhling (2009), pp. 272; PNUD (2013), p. 115.

55 Fruhling (2003a), pp. 36-38, y (2009), pp. 273-275.

56 Fruhling (2003a), p. 32, y (2009), p. 187.

57 Moloeznik (2006), pp. 175-176; Muggah et al. (2016), pp. 18-22, 36-38; Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2012)

58 CAF (2014), p. 191.

59 Fruhling (2009), pp. 24-25.

this reason, these purges have in some cases been complemented by the establishment of oversight organizations, independent of police hierarchy, often with citizen participation, to examine reports and determine the respective responsibility in cases of police corruption and abuse. Over the past two decades these reforms have led to the creation of independent police audits in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil, general inspections in the Provincial Police in Mendoza, Argentina and in the National Civil Police in El Salvador, and to the introduction of the National Commission for Police Affairs in Colombia in the early 90s (although this was later dismantled).⁶⁰

- Police training and professionalization. As pointed out, Colombian police reform of the 90s was focused on increasing officers' capacities. This is not the only case where police training has been a priority. More visible still have been the number of police academies founded and/or modernized, a central component of the process of creating civil police in El Salvador and Panama, as well as the professionalization of the public forces in Costa Rica.⁶¹ Particularly in Central American cases, these efforts have had large amounts of outside help, in general from the US and Spain. The most conspicuous example of outside participation is the establishment in El Salvador in 2005 of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), an institution sponsored by the US government to strengthen the training of police forces in the region.⁶²
- Improved police relationship with the community. Perhaps the strongest area of police reform in the region is the aforementioned effort to improve police interaction with the community. The new community police programs are quite diverse, ranging from the creation of simple, informal communication channels between the police and citizens, to much more complex programs like the Police Peacekeeping Units in Rio de Janeiro, intended to drastically modify public police presence in communities and replace antagonistic relations with trusting relationships.⁶³ It is worth noting that, with few exceptions—the Colombian reform and possibly Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires⁶⁴—attempts at adopting community police models have not led to a general transformation of police institutions, but in-

stead have only affected experiences in specific communities and, therefore, have had limited impact on overall police performance.⁶⁵

These paragraphs barely do justice to the considerable diversity of police reform projects undertaken in Latin America in the last generation. However, this summary does not preclude drawing conclusions: with very few exceptions, the results from these reforms have been meager.⁶⁶ The levels of criminal violence and fear, which depend on multiple factors in addition to police performance, continue to be unacceptably high in nearly all Latin American countries and are growing in many cases. And this is not all: in terms of improving the image and credibility of the police as an institution, results have been very poor nearly everywhere. On average, over the past two decades, there has been no improvement in the image held of police institutions in Latin America.

From this record of reform efforts, we can extract a few albeit precarious lessons about the conditions that enable the handful of success stories. The precariousness of these findings can be attributed to one crucial piece of data that permeates this entire discussion: the chronic absence of any rigorous assessment that would allow us to distinguish successful reforms from those that are not. Although the inventory of public policy interventions in citizen security in Latin America since the end of the 90s amounts to approximately 1,300 experiences, only a small portion of those are backed by information capable of sustaining a rigorous assessment of their impact.⁶⁷ This is perhaps the least obvious but most important obstacle to any process of police reform in the region. Without data or assessments, police reform and security policies in general are at the mercy of the biases, trends, transplanted models, and extreme rhetoric that have led to the deterioration of public order in Latin America.⁶⁸

In line with the scheme proposed by Fruhling (2009), it is possible to sustain that the likelihood of police reform success depends, in general terms, on three factors: the conditions of security governance, the characteristics of the police institution in need of reform and, finally, the social context in which the reform is to take place:

60 Fruhling (2009), p. 22-24.

61 Neild (s.f.), p. 2.

62 Enzina (2008).

63 Fruhling (2009), pp. 177-231; Arias & Unger (2009); González (2016); Pinto & Do Carmo (2016); Chinchilla (2003); Mota-Prado, Trebilcock & Hartford (2012).

64 Fruhling (2003a), pp. 27-38

65 Arias & Unger (2009); Pinto & Do Carmo (2016); Fruhling (2009), pp. 207-208.

66 Fruhling (2009), p. 233.

67 Muggah et al. (2016), p. 2.

68 Bailey & Dammert (2006a), p. 7.

Security governance. In order to be successful, a police reform requires committed political leadership and the assignment of sufficient resources to the process of institutional transformation. Resource assignment has been a recurring problem in nearly all processes of adoption of community police, even in cases that have adopted it as a fundamental pillar of police work. In the Colombian capital, the Metropolitan Mayor's Office went from an investment of US\$15 million in the early 90s to US\$72 million by the end of the decade, the vast majority of which was allocated to improving local police equipment and training. However, only 5.7% of all investments made and 6% of metropolitan police officers were assigned to the community model. Similar limitations have been detected in community police projects in Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte, Brazil.⁶⁹

The continuity of leadership is likewise crucial in the reform process as demonstrated by the experience of the Buenos Aires Provincial Police in Argentina. What began in 1997 during the administration of Governor Eduardo Duhalde as an effort of potential transformation of a police force strongly questioned by society—an effort that included one of the most ambitious attempts to incorporate participation of community organizations in the supervision of police work—was derailed by the arrival of a new provincial governor in 1999. By 2002, the changes had been essentially reversed. Throughout both administrations, the average time in office for politicians responsible for security and justice issues in the province was less than seven months.⁷⁰ Similarly, the police reform implemented in Peru a decade earlier suggests that the commitment at the highest political level, the President of the Republic, is indispensable for overcoming institutional resistance to any external efforts aimed at combatting corruption and police abuse and for establishing effective accountability mechanisms. For diverse reasons, in the Peruvian case presidential support was of short duration. The leaders of the reform were eventually replaced and the process of purging the Peruvian police was discontinued.⁷¹ In the presence of highly disjointed party systems and extremely volatile elections in Latin America,⁷² the concern for continuity of leadership in any process of police reform must be given priority. This will require building a political consensus before the start of any reform effort.

Conditions within the police institution. One of the paradoxes of institutional reforms is that the organizations that most emphatically need reform are nearly always in the worst condition to assimilate change. Experience shows that despite commitment by political leadership to the processes of police purging and modernization, it is impossible to implement these changes without a critical mass of officers also committed to changing the institution. This was the case in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where the military police initiated internal discussions in the early 90s about adopting community-approach models. Those internal debates led to a series of significant reform efforts undertaken in collaboration with business associations, civil society organizations, and academic institutions, which have been generally successful.⁷³ The case of the National Police of Colombia also demonstrates the crucial importance of focusing on the institution's middle ranks as catalysts of operative and eventually structural change.⁷⁴

But this is not only about attitude and willingness to change; it is also critical that the police force has a minimum level of professional training and integrity to be able to adopt new ways of doing their work. This is especially critical in cases where community police models are introduced, which nearly always clash with centralized power structures, police practices, and deeply-rooted customs of interacting with the community. Such a capacity for adaptation is doubtful in many countries of the region where police training is extremely short (less than a year), uneven (some specialties, like the fight against drug trafficking generate better opportunities for training) and essentially geared toward obeying orders.⁷⁵ Whether due to lack of competency or ethics, in some cases reform processes prove impossible without a large-scale purge of the police force. The case of Mexico is telling in this sense. The introduction of reinforced police personnel recruitment mechanisms through reforms of the last decade have often had bleak results. In 2012, 65,000 local and state police officials were deemed unfit for service, in many cases due to their ties to organized crime.⁷⁶ In 2014, more than 42,000 federal, state and municipal police officials failed their background reviews for serving in the public force. Not coincidentally, nearly 70% of those who failed at the municipal level were concentrated in the 10 states most affected by organized crime.⁷⁷ Without a significant purge, it is highly doubtful that police institutions filled with incompetent officers can be reformed.

69 Fruhling (2009), pp. 207-208, 247.

70 Fruhling (2003a), pp. 29-31, y (2009), p. 245.

71 Costa & Neild (2007), pp. 123-125.

72 Of the 43 presidential elections in 18 Latin American countries in 2000-2010, 53% brought victories for opposition candidates (Casas Zamora [2010]). On electoral volatility in the region, see Madrid (2005) and Payne et al. (2006).

73 De Mesquita Neto (2006), pp. 47-54; Bailey & Dammert (2006b), p. 254.

74 Sabet (2012).

75 Fruhling (2009), pp. 249-250.

76 Cawley (2013).

77 Gurney (2014).

The frequent need to purge police forces is an indicator of the weakness of recruitment mechanisms and also of existing disciplinary procedures for combatting corruption and abuse. As the case of the Buenos Aires Provincial Police shows, it is nearly impossible to sustainably purge a police force where the mechanisms for sanctioning improper conduct are not duly institutionalized and punitive acts depend on arbitrary decisions by hierarchical superiors.⁷⁸ Thus, improving the conditions of the police institution does not only depend on the decisions themselves, but on how they are implemented and rendered sustainable over time.

In any case, even in reasonably favorable scenarios, the internalization of institutional changes is usually a slow and complex process. For example, years after the adoption of the community police model by the Military Police of Sao Paulo, the police force remains profoundly skeptical of the new model. A survey of Sao Paulo police showed that only 36.2% of high-ranking officers and 17.8% of lower ranks were convinced that the community model was more efficient at combatting crime. For two-thirds of the lower ranks, this model was nothing more than a public relations strategy.⁷⁹ As with any kind of re-education, the transformation of police models is a generational process even in institutions committed to change.

Social context of reform. In nearly all cases, police reforms in Latin America happen amid three sets of highly adverse circumstances: the prevalence of high levels of violent crime, high tolerance for police violence, and low institutional credibility. Each of these brings problematic consequences.

For starters, the high levels of violent crime make it difficult to bring about improvements in security in the short term that would make community support for reform more likely.⁸⁰ This generates visible political pressure to put more police on the street, even at the cost of shortening their training below what is advisable, as has occurred in Guatemala.⁸¹ In addition, it tends to produce strong resistance among the police to the community-approach models because these models are generally perceived as a counterproductive measure to effective crime-fighting.⁸² It is in this context that social attitudes conducive to police abuse of authority are exacerbated. One statistic taken

from AmericasBarometer 2008, a regional survey, demonstrates the magnitude of the problem: 4 out of every 10 Latin Americans agreed with the notion that police occasionally violate the law in fighting crime.⁸³ This context makes the introduction of internal and external mechanisms of control of police abuse one of the frequent pillars of police reform. However, this task is considerably complex.⁸⁴ The difficulty is compounded by low levels of police trust and credibility throughout most of the region as examined earlier, that hinder community collaboration to reform institutions, particularly those aimed at modifying police-community relations. In many cases, such efforts carry baggage of mutual distrust that condemn them from the start. It is no coincidence that one of the regular lessons learned through community policing experiences in the region is that the mechanisms of community participation in managing security tend to work better in places where crime problems are less serious and, therefore, the police image is less tainted by incompetence, corruption, and brutality.⁸⁵

The entire cast of obstacles—particularly those linked to social context and the persistence of authoritarian attitudes of many police in the region—should not be taken as an invitation to accept the status quo. On the contrary, as Fruhling aptly points out, *“regional reality shows that there are examples of promising police reform processes in extremely difficult circumstances.”*⁸⁶ The National Police of Colombia demonstrates a reasonably successful example of reform in the region in the midst of an armed conflict. The police was transformed in the 90s in the midst of challenges to public order, a context common throughout Latin America. The Colombian case, Sao Paulo and more recently the case of Mexico, suggest that a major deterioration of the public order may open a notable opportunity for introducing changes in the police forces, which would be impossible in less pressing situations. It should also be noted that the potential for these changes to be leveraged and prosper also depends on other circumstances already mentioned here, such as commitment from political leadership, the availability of resources, and the existence of a critical mass of personnel within the police force capable and willing to change.

The existence of successful cases of police reform in the region is, in itself, a positive indicator moving forward. With enormous precariousness due to the lack of rigor of

78 Chevigny (2003), p. 58.

79 Fruhling (2009), pp. 210-211.

80 Fruhling, (2009), p. 239.

81 Fruhling (2003a), p. 20.

82 Fruhling (2009), pp. 209-210.

83 Casas Zamora (2013), p. 40.

84 Fruhling (2009), p. 181; Chevigny (2003), p. 47.

85 Fruhling (2009), pp. 217-218; Arias & Ungar (2009), p. 414 Fruhling (2009), pp. 217-218. Fruhling (2009), pp. 217-218.

86 Fruhling (2009), p. 240.

measuring impact, reform-minded leaders can and should draw lessons from a compendium of good and bad experiences of police reform in Latin America over the last generation. Not only this, but added to the experiences in Latin America is the global reserve of police and criminological knowledge, the “journey of ideas,” that is now much more accessible than a generation ago.

There are other positive factors related to the agenda forged by the democratic transition process in Latin America. The development of civil society in the region has exercised pressure on the organizations devoted to promoting reforms in criminal justice systems committed to human rights.⁸⁷ To this we can add the considerable policy and institutional transformations that Latin America has undergone over the last generation to foster greater levels of transparency and accountability in public administration.⁸⁸

These transformations range from the widespread adoption of the figure of the Ombudsman to the promulgation of policies aimed at guaranteeing access to public information, among many other changes. For as opaque as the situation of the police in the region is, the prevailing opacity is considerably less than what it was a generation ago. In general terms, social oversight of public administration in Latin America is greater than it ever has been. This also applies to the police and not in an abstract way. Between progress and regressions, community police models have proliferated in the region, changing, albeit slightly, the expectations of citizens regarding what it means to have a democratic police force and what the role of communities should be in the fight against crime.

5 Where to now?

It is nearly certain that in the next decade and a half, the police institutions of Latin America will continue to experience changes, almost always incremental rather than dramatic. The centrality of the problem of citizen security and the persistent challenge of organized crime in the region call for new efforts to rethink police work.

Such efforts will draw from an institutional base and social context that are less than optimum. With few exceptions, Latin American police are weighed down by hierarchical, bureaucratic, and organizational models, set in traditions of opacity, chronic weaknesses in personnel training, a propensity for prioritizing tasks of controlling the public order over those of preventing crime, and, above all, diminished social legitimacy. This institutional and social context poses enormous obstacles to any police reform efforts. These challenges are heightened by a context of high crime levels and extreme social anxiety. Consequently, this context hinders long-term reformist efforts and instead, creates perverse incentives to reproduce some of the most problematic traits of police in Latin America, like their propensity to abuse authority. Herein lies a paradox: democracy demands a new type of police in Latin America that is removed from the military traditions of the past; however, the immediate electoral incentives that are inherent to democracy often pose huge obstacles to that road to transformation.

In most countries the necessary reform for having an effective and democratic police force is not about adding more officers to the security taskforce. Comparatively speaking, the number of police officials is not low in Latin America. The task is altogether more complex: it is about completely reformulating the models of police organization and the institutional culture, as well as rethinking the ways of interacting with society and other state organizations with authority in the area of security. Given the institutional shortcomings and adverse social context, it is hard to foresee this happening in the region in the near future. It is more likely that progress will occur in some aspects alongside setbacks in others, initiating slow progress due to powerful institutional stagnation. From the foregoing pages, it is possible to infer the following trends. The interaction between these will determine the state of the police forces in the region by 2030:

1. Increased number of police officers. Even in the presence of persistent fiscal constraints, most Latin American countries will increase the number of police officers as a political response to high levels of crime and organized crime. This will occur despite the lack of evidence that this measure alone contributes to improved police performance or, more broadly, to security.
2. Persistently low levels of trust in the police institution. Throughout most of Latin America, there have been very few changes—particularly positive ones—in citizen

⁸⁷ Bailey & Dammert (2006b), p. 260-261.

⁸⁸ Casas Zamora & Carter (2017).

opinion about the police in the last two decades. These opinions are the result of the long history of police interaction with communities and the role of the media in the dissemination and interpretation of the phenomenon of crime. The instances of police corruption and brutality—which affect a significant part of the region’s population every year—cast a long shadow on the image of the police that no public relations campaign can change. Even if it were possible, a dramatic transformation of police performance would not translate to greater levels of trust from citizens until many years later in the best of cases. Moreover, police credibility is affected by prevailing opinions about other components of the criminal justice system, as well as perceptions regarding state institutions that in general are quite negative in Latin America.

3. Continued disjointedness in the security sector. While the challenges of security in Latin America will continue to be substantial, the political and social demands of an effective response will be directed almost exclusively at the police. This will magnify the risk of losing police credibility. As pointed out, the challenges in this area go way beyond the task of policing and demand that many state entities take on a role in security. This convergence is less about expanded military participation than it is about effective coordination between the police and the justice system, penitentiary systems and the institutions associated with crime prevention. This coordination continues to be the exception rather than the rule in the region.
4. Increased military participation in public security tasks. There is no doubt that one of the effects of the consolidation of democracy in Latin America is the transition of the police from the military sphere to the civilian sphere. This has translated to doctrinal and organizational changes intended to bring the Latin American police closer to the democratic ethos. However, these alterations have been incomplete and police cultures remain defined by secrecy and rigid hierarchies, and concepts of public security remain linked to the military. The continued presence of military-style policing is now joined by a much more tangible and alarming phenomenon: even though the police are no longer part of the military sphere, it is now the armed forces who are once again being invited to the sphere of public security to fight organized crime. This is no coincidence: armed forces enjoy much higher levels of trust and credibility than the police practically everywhere in Latin America. If this process is met with any resistance, it does not generally come from the political establishment, whose incentive for involving the military in public security is quite obvious. Instead resistance comes from the military itself, because leaders are usually hesitant to enter into constant friction with society and expose themselves to the dangers of corruption that inevitably surface during the fight against organized crime. It is nearly certain that the persistent high levels of crime will lead many countries to legitimize an expanded military role in combatting insecurity and organized crime, as we are seeing today in Mexico and in northern Central America. This expansion of military tasks does not necessarily constitute a reversion to authoritarianism in the security realm, but it does make it more difficult to emphasize prevention, develop policies that are oriented toward the protection of rights and develop practices of transparency, all of which are inherent to a democratic vision of public security.
5. Strengthening the process of police deconcentration and decentralization. In the majority of countries, both national and international pressure to decentralize and/or deconcentrate state functions will continue to influence public policy and more specifically security policy. The growing use of geo-referenced information on criminal activity, allows us to create strongly localized strategies of crime prevention that will induce a transfer of power to the police units closest to the terrain. In other cases, the low credibility of national or federal police institutions, and the considerable difficulty involved in adequately reforming them, will create incentives for local governments to establish or make their own police forces more robust. These incentives will, nonetheless, face an opposing force: the growing evidence that local institutions—including the municipal police forces—are the most vulnerable by far to penetration by organized crime and corruption, partly due to meager financial and human capacities that generally characterize local governments in Latin America. The re-centralizing momentum of security policies in Mexico provides the most compelling example of this phenomenon, particularly in countries where the presence of organized crime constitutes a threat to national security.
6. Improved police training, but not necessarily professionalization. The strengthening of police academies in the region will continue, hand-in-hand with international cooperation. In principle, this is a positive trend; however, these efforts often become obscured by the political pressures wrought by high levels of crime and the temptation to confront them with more officers on the streets in the short term. It is not clear that the growing role of police academies entails an effort to rethink the training of police cadres in democratic and

modern terms. Furthermore, there is no certainty that this will bring about a dramatic improvement in the processes of recruitment, the professional guidelines of the institution, or the labor conditions experienced by police personnel. However, for now in the majority of cases there are valuable efforts to improve police training. This is an important but incipient step toward the professionalization of police work.

7. Rapid adoption of technology. Information and communication technologies are swiftly transforming police work. Latin American police forces and their political leaders will continue to adopt technological innovations with increasing speed, particularly geo-referenced information systems on criminal activity. However, the adoption of these technologies poses at least two threats: first, the naïve enthusiasm that technology offers a shortcut to resolving security problems, which in reality demands profound institutional and social transformations can lead to complacency. Second, there is an increase in the opportunity of corruption, meaning the temptation to acquire expensive, complex technologies for spurious reasons. That said, these risks cannot and should not stop the process of increasing the technological sophistication of police forces in the region. A technological transformation of Latin American police, specifically the development of information systems, has enormous potential for improving crime-fighting results. Moreover, it offers fertile ground for international cooperation, both North-South and South-South.
8. Growing police transparency. In Latin America the trend toward greater levels of transparency in public administration is overpowering. The evident indignation throughout the region with corruption in public institutions has provided an additional push to a pre-existing process of adopting regulations, standards, and institutions of open governance, aimed at improving levels of transparency and accountability. In the case of security, this process is also linked to the adoption by the police force of diverse methods for interacting with communities and the introduction of new technologies and information systems on police performance to foster accountability. It is hard to imagine a scenario in Latin America in the next decade and a half in which the social pressure for more transparency in police action would wane. This will translate to more external oversight mechanisms for police work, as well as to methods for community interaction and accountability. In many cases, societal indignation with corruption will lead to recurring rounds of police purging—sometimes indispensable—rather than to a structural transformation of institutional practices. This all warrants a note

of precaution: for as compelling as the social pressure for transparency may be, it is naïve to think it will not be met with political and institutional resistance, particularly in the case of police organizations, whose propensity for opacity is well known.

9. Continued experimentation with community police models. As we have pointed out throughout this report, the introduction of diverse practices of closer police-community ties has been, perhaps, the most significant innovation in police work in the region over the past two decades. There have been many experiments in this sense, with different approaches, scopes and results. All, however, must respond to a single basic certainty: in a setting of profound distrust of the police, it is essential that police-community relations be rebuilt if the fight against crime is to be successful. Nearly everywhere in the region, this need will continue to exist in the future. And this need is now joined by the incentive of having information systems to create highly localized strategies to fight crime. The combined use of geo-referenced information and community involvement in defining priorities for police work offers great potential for successful crime prevention. As already pointed out, the challenge going forward will be to ensure the scalability of community policing projects, to increase available resources for them, to change police culture to view community orientation as something more than a mere public relations exercise, and finally, to rigorously evaluate each experience.

Which of these trends will materialize in each case will depend on security sector governance structures, the solidity of the police institution and the social context surrounding reform efforts, including the severity of levels of violent crime in each country. The considerable complexity of the police reform agenda and the adverse setting make it foreseeable that by 2030, the existence of effective, integrated police, committed to human rights and endowed with high social legitimacy will continue to be a far-off objective throughout Latin America. What is important, however, is that Latin American societies and political systems have made the construction of democratic police institutions a priority within the broader effort to fortify the rule of law in the region. There are precedents in Latin America that suggest that, with the proper social pressure, committed leadership, and commitment to learning from both local and foreign experience, it is possible at the very least to make significant strides in that direction.

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