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Latin America can reduce homicide by 50 percent in 10 years

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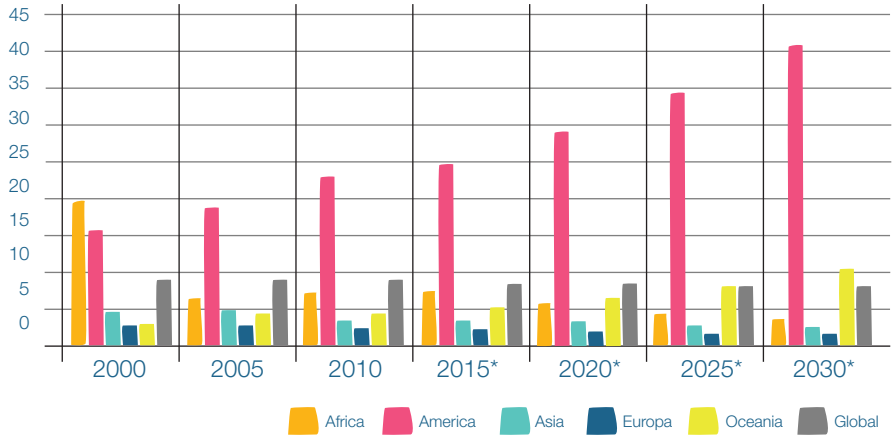
The scale and dimensions of the problem

The scale and magnitude of lethal violence in Latin America is breathtaking. The region experiences on average four homicides every 15 minutes. This amounts to 400 murders every day. Some 144,000 people die every year across the region.[1] Over 2.6 million people were murdered over the past decade and a half. Taken together, the region accounts for only 8 percent of the global population but at least 38 percent of the homicides. Homicide is a serious and persistent problem, and will worsen if urgent steps are not taken.

Projections generated by the Homicide Monitor demonstrate that even as homicide rates are declining in most part of the world, they are likely to rise in Latin America.[2] Assuming trends remain constant, the regional homicide rate could jump from 21 per 100,000 to 35 per 100,000 inhabitants by 2030 – at least seven times higher than the global average.[3]

Figure 1. Regional and global dynamics of the average murder rates – 2000 to 2030



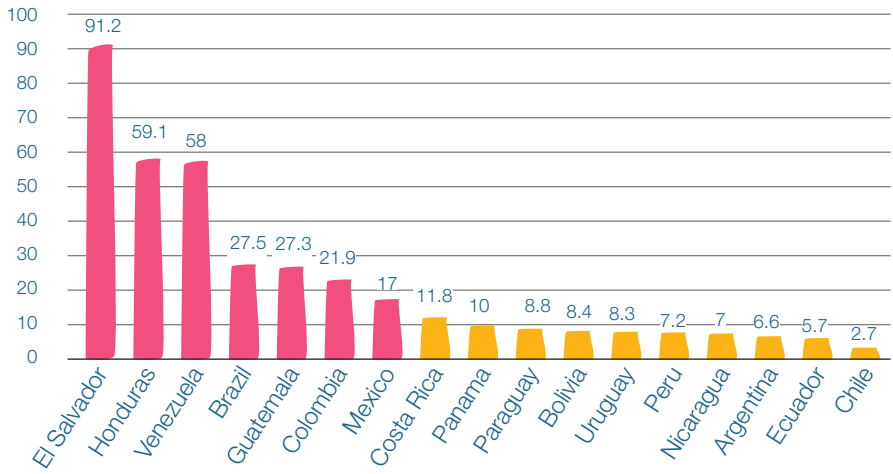
Source: Homicide Monitor, Igarapé Institute

* The asterisk denotes a projected figure.

i Juan Carlos Garzón, Igarapé Institute senior regional consultant, is the principal author. This report was prepared as part of the Instinct for Life homicide reduction campaign. It benefited from specialized workshops held in Bogotá (Colombia), Mexico City (Mexico), Washington DC (USA) and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), with the participation of regional experts and multilateral organizations.

Homicidal violence is both heterogeneous and highly concentrated in Latin America and the Caribbean. Just seven countries account for approximately one third of all global homicides: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela. Many of these countries have murder rates that are well above 20 per 100,000 inhabitants. Meanwhile, in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, levels of lethal violence are closer to European countries, with rates below 5 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Figure 2. Latin American Homicide Rates per 100.000 population, 2016 or latest

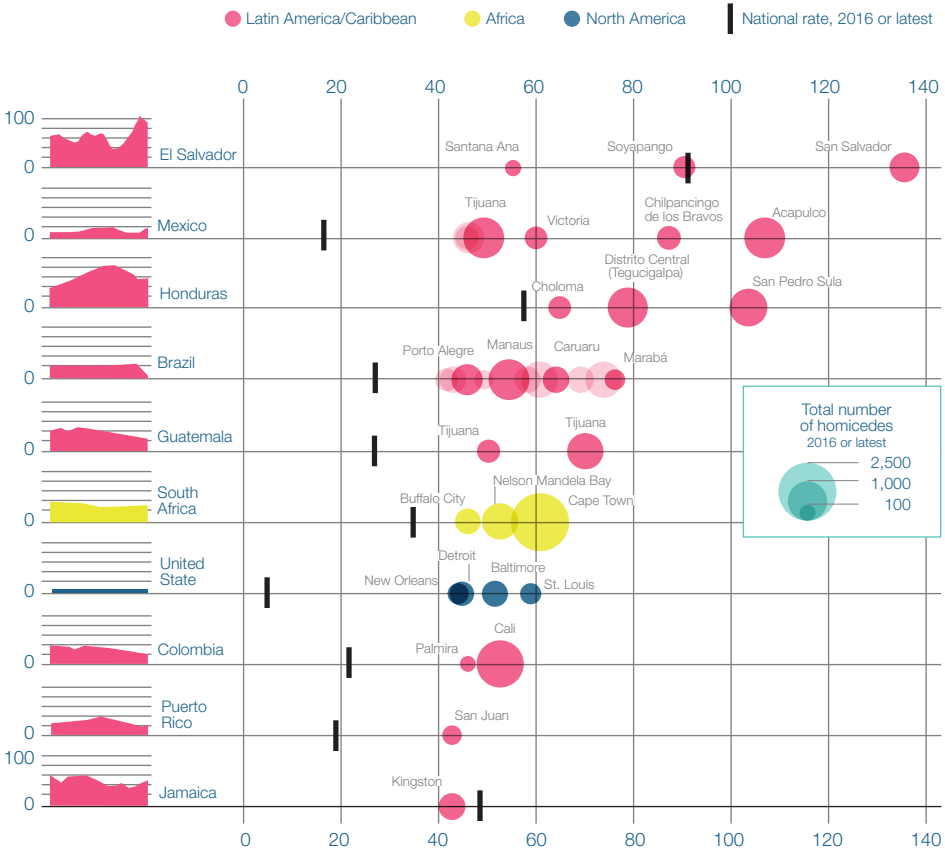


Source: Homicide Monitor, Igarapé Institute

Homicide levels are also exceedingly high in Latin American cities and municipalities. In some urban settings, the levels of violent crime are tantamount to those in war situations. At least 120 cities across the region register homicide rates above 25 per 100,000 inhabitants. Within these cities, a disproportionate amount of lethal violence is concentrated in a selection of neighborhoods or streets addresses.[4] Past violence is also a strong predictor of future events: 0.66 murders in the next year.[5]

Lethal violence is not only concentrated in specific places, but also among certain populations. Victims and perpetrators often share similar profiles.[6] A review of several cities across Latin America from 2003-2014 reveals that 90percent of all murder victims were young males.[7] Skin color and social conditions mattered: men, the poor and non-whites were more likely to be victims than white people with higher incomes.[8] In Brazil, a considerable percentage of those killed include poor black youth.[9] Racism, structural inequalities and discrimination are all factors shaping lethal violence and its prevention.[10]

Figure 3. Homicides per 100.000 population, 50 highest cities, 2016 or latest



Source: Homicide Monitor, Igarapé Institute

Published by The Economist[11]

Lethal violence perpetrated against women is also a serious concern in Latin America. According to the UN Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 12 women are killed every day in fewer than 25 countries. Honduras, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic featured the highest rates of femicide while Honduras, Argentina and Guatemala experienced the highest absolute tolls.[12]

There is no single monolithic factor accounting for the high levels of homicidal violence in Latin America; the risk factors shaping murder vary from sub-region to sub-region. Even so, it is striking to note that economic advances across Latin America have not translated into lower homicide rates. While there is still considerable debate, there are signs that income inequality, social inequality and extreme poverty may play a role in driving homicide at the micro-scale.[13]

There are several other socio-economic risk factors that exacerbate homicidal violence. For example, youth unemployment is strongly correlated with murder. It is not necessarily a function of unemployment *per se*, but rather youth inactivity and poor job quality that explain why individuals resort to violence. In addition, weak social mobility across the region is related not only to the increase in overall crime rates, but also to violent deaths in certain contexts.[14]

Other risk factors for homicide are linked to weak institutions. Specialists have pointed to the low clearance rate of homicides (and other violent crimes) in the criminal justice system. While Asia and Europe feature clearance rates ranging from 80 percent to 85 percent for murder, in the Americas this proportion falls to 50 percent – and below 10 percent in some countries.[15] The impunity rate for homicides in Mexico is approximately 80 percent.[16] In Colombia, it rose to 96 percent between 2005 and 2010.[17] In Honduras and Brazil, the rate is 92 percent[18], while in Venezuela, 92 out of 100 cases of homicide in the country do not result in an arrest.[19]

Latin American citizens also lack confidence in public institutions. Just 4 out of 10 citizens have faith in the police; 3 out of 10 say that they trust judges and the wider judicial system.[20] There are also significant challenges for public authorities to responsibly regulate firearm purchasing, ownership, use and trafficking in the region. The percentage of homicides committed using firearms is significantly higher than the global average of 41 percent; the ratio rises to 59 percent in South America and to 73 percent in Central America.[21]

Another factor driving homicide rates relates to the extremely violent approach to public security adopted by public actors across the region.[22] While organized crime and gangs are responsible for committing a portion violence, these are far from the only – or even the dominant – source of violence.[23] There is considerable inter-personal and intimate partner violence, though statistics on the motivation of crime are still weak across the region. The normalization of violence and the widespread public tolerance for using violence to solve conflicts contributes to higher than average homicide rates.

The consequences of violence are far-reaching and long-lasting. According to recent Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) estimates, the costs of violence and crime amounted to the equivalent of 3.55 percent of Latin American GDP per year.[24] The high public and private expenditures on ensuring security in Latin America and the Caribbean are equivalent to what the region spends annually on infrastructure.

A call to reduce homicidal violence

Preventing and reducing violence is not only necessary, it is achievable. There are many examples of successful efforts to lower lethal violence. Declines of between 10-15 percent per year have been documented around the world, including in Latin America.[25] The **Instinct for Life** campaign has set a goal of reducing the homicide rates of seven countries by 50 percent over the next 10 years. To achieve this goal this would require 7 percent annual declines in the most violence-affected countries, states and cities. If successful, it could save as many as 365,000 lives.

The **Instinct for Life** campaign is a call for action organized by more than 30 organizations from across Latin America. It includes Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Development Bank of Latin America-CAF and the Organization of American States (OAS). The goal is to reduce violence rates through civic mobilization and through the deployment of public policies based on evidence. It requires the active participation of governments, entrepreneurs, media and citizens to de-normalize homicide and introduce data-driven and evidence-based policies.

The campaign has established six positive and forward-looking principles to prevent and reduce homicide. These principles are intended to be supported by comprehensive plans and adequate resources. The expectation is that by focusing on advocacy and mobilization, and aligning interventions to six fundamental principles, collective impact can be achieved. It is worth recalling that the **Instinct for Life** campaign has strong normative support in the form of the recently agreed UN Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 16), which calls for reductions in all forms of violence, including violent death.[26]

SIX PRINCIPLES OF INSTINCT FOR LIFE

1) Evidence-based. Scarce political and material resources must be concentrated on interventions that have the most potential for success. All efforts to reduce homicides must be both data- and evidence-driven.

2) Results-driven. Public awareness and debate are essential for preventing and reducing homicide. However, the most important metrics of success are real results on the ground.

3) Citizen action in policies that value life. The most effective way to ensure short- and longer-term improvements in safety and security is through strategies that are participatory and value the lives of all citizens.

4) Ensuring access to justice and due process. Strategies to prevent and reduce homicidal violence must guarantee that the fundamental rights of citizens – including access to due process and justice – are respected.

5) Violence containment. Interventions to prevent and reduce lethal violence must not lead to displacement effects. A positive strategy in one area cannot have negative ramifications for another.

6) The protection of citizens and security as a public good. At the center of any homicide prevention and reduction strategy must be the protection of people and the provision of security as a public good for all.

Reviewing evidence-based policy options

The reduction of homicides demands measures that are based on evidence and adapted to the needs and capacities of actors at the local level. There is no single formula to reduce lethal violence. That said, one does not need to reinvent the wheel. There is a growing evidence base of what works, and what does not. What is not advocated is direct replication, but rather adaptation and tailoring to local contexts while retaining the key elements essential to their success.[27] At least six key factors were identified that ensured successful reductions in lethal and non-lethal violence.[28]

1. Prioritization

The reduction in homicide rates must be at the top of the public security agenda.

It is important to differentiate between the factors that can be modified in short term and other structural factors which will take more time to change

2. Dynamic concentration

Interventions must be concentrated on places, people and behaviors that impact the lethal violence levels the most.

This impact increases as the efforts are focused and not spread among small initiatives.

3. Simultaneity and integration

The reduction in homicide levels will be the result of multiple actions implemented jointly by key agents. It is important that this simultaneity not work against concentration.

4. Leadership and resources

Leadership from public authorities and the participation of citizens is necessary to ensure the sustainability of specific interventions. Promises are not enough. Adequate resources must be applied in a transparent manner.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

A clear theory of change is essential and interventions must be monitored and evaluated from the outset. This will account for adaptations as needed. Also critical is the development and sharing of high quality data.

6. Do no harm

The interventions must “do no harm”. Under no circumstance should any measure generate intended or unintended violence or harm.

Data collection and analysis is critical to homicide reduction. A review of best practices underlines the importance of generating high resolution reporting and analysis mechanisms. Where possible, such data should be open for public scrutiny and triangulation, as this can help with decision-making as well as monitoring and evaluation. A useful instrument is the Bogota Protocol,[29] which elaborates criteria to ensure valid, reliable and transparent reporting on homicide in Latin America and the Caribbean.

There are several widely-accepted strategies to reduce lethal violence.[30] As noted in the Bogota Protocol, these do not work in all cases, nor can or should they be implemented concurrently. Regardless of which strategies are adopted, it is critical that they be based on a thorough analysis of their likely costs and consequences. Any pre-assessment should also evaluate the ways in which different types of interventions interact, and make a determination of the intended and unintended consequences of their deployment.

Ultimately, different types of lethal violence will require different categories of intervention. Some interventions, such as focused deterrence strategies, may be focused on preventing collective violence generated by organized criminal organizations. Other strategies may involve cognitive behavioral therapies and early childhood interventions to address interpersonal and domestic-related violence. It is important to recall that multiple forms of homicide may be occurring simultaneously, requiring a complex assortment of interventions.

It is possible to group different types of interventions into separate clusters depending on their core focus (Figure 4). At the center, there are *the people* affected by violence, as well as its agents. Around these individuals, there are *the places* where homicides are concentrated — specific neighborhoods and streets that are hot spots. There are also the *facilitators* of violence which include, on the one hand, firearms and ammunition and, on the other, alcohol and the illegal drugs market. And then there are *the institutions*, including formal state entities — the police, justice and security systems. Finally, there is *the environment*, the social space in which these dimensions interact. In practice, of course, these various dimensions are variable and interconnected.

Figure 4. Types of interventions associated with the reduction of homicide rates

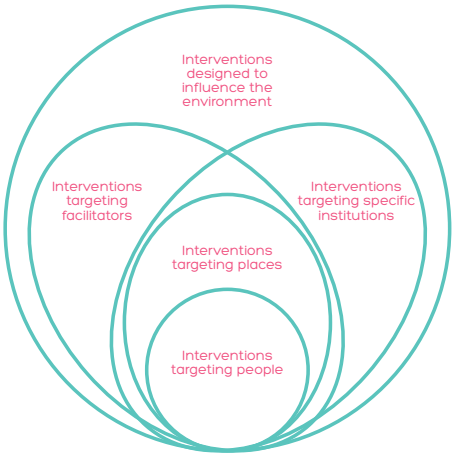


Figure 4 describes a set of policy options for each of the five dimensions. They were selected on the basis of a review of the available criminological and public health evidence. Figure 4 is non-exhaustive and is intended to help shape an informed debate on strategic priorities to prevent and reduce homicide. Each option includes its supporting evidence and potential impact. It is important to highlight that some measures have a direct effect on homicide reduction, whereas other options may indirectly influence a decrease in rates.

Most of the proposed interventions were not originally developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. As indicated by a recent study – *Mapping of Homicide Prevention Programs in Latin America and Caribbean* – there are comparatively few homicide reduction programs in the region.[31] For example, a study by the Igarapé Institute reviewed more than 1,300 citizen security programs in Latin America and the Caribbean and determined that only 7 percent conducted a robust evaluation.[32] While there are growing numbers of positive examples of violence reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean, there is only limited evidence in terms of what works.

Public policy options to reduce homicides[33]

Dimension	Option and brief description
Interventions targeting people Dedicated to reducing the likelihood of people being victims and/or perpetrators of homicidal violence	**Cognitive behavioral therapy** Includes clinical psychology methods to promote positive changes in the behavior of (would-be) perpetrators. Includes training in self-discipline, self-control and anger management. Contributes to preventing behaviors that may turn violent. Results are more robust when associated with other activities such as vocational training.[34] Evidence: Moderate Impact: High
	Preventing recidivism Includes strategies focused on individuals that have had previous contact with the criminal justice/penal system. Activities typically involve focused rehabilitation programs in/outside of penal system, often conducted with the support of community actors. The focus is on individuals involved in non-violent and violent offenses that may be at risk of repeat perpetration.[35] Evidence: Strong Impact: High
	Policies for femicide prevention There are several measures registering positive results, particularly those associated with improving health services to improve identification of acts of violence induced by partners (e.g. using a hazard assessment scale),[36] strict firearm restrictions for abusive partners, and the temporary separation of women involved in abusive relationships. Evidence: Moderate Impact: High

Dimension	Option and brief description
Interventions targeting people Dedicated to reducing the likelihood of people being victims and/ or perpetrators of homicidal violence	**Focused deterrence** Includes a set of interventions focused on individuals and groups registering a higher risk of involvement in violent activities. The strategy works on the basis of changing delinquent behaviors and minimizing harmful actions through penalties and incentives. it requires that law enforcement and judicial actors adopt "strategic selection" with the purpose of reducing homicidal violence. This intervention entails interaction among several actors in the public and civil society arenas.[37] Evidence: Moderate Impact: High
	Conflict mediation Includes the mediation of conflicts with violent groups (members of gangs or larger criminal organizations) with the intention of reducing violence. The strategy may involve pacts — including truces and specific agreements – or it may consist of more targeted micro-level agreements between specific actors. These types of interventions may generate a very sharp positive return in the short term, but they also carry considerable political risk, with uncertain medium to long-term results.[38] Evidence: Limited Impact: High in the short term, but uncertain in the long term
Interventions targeting places Targeted to physical spaces, time and demographic groups where homicidal violence is concentrated	**Interventions in hot spots** Data-driven approaches that focus on geographic areas, specific times and particular people that are implicated in crime. They allow for the targeting of human resources and materials in specific neighborhoods, streets and addresses where homicides have occurred and/or where there is a reasonable probability of homicides occurring in the future. Interventions may be closely monitored by law enforcement, or they may involve a wide range of actors in the public, private and civil society sectors.[39] Evidence: Strong Impact: High
	Urban interventions Includes a range of programs that involve crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), urban renewal or "social acupuncture" with the aim of strengthening social integration, cohesion and efficacy. The goal is to recover public spaces and increase neighborhood incentives to prevent and reduce crime, including homicidal violence. Strategies include the introduction of public lighting, the integration of formal and informal zones of a city through integrated public transport, and the improvement for housing in low-income areas and targeted neighborhood services.[40] Evidence: Moderate Impact: Moderate

Dimension	Option and brief description
Interventions targeting facilitators Dedicated to reducing access to instruments that facilitate homicidal violence	**Regulation of firearms and ammunition** IIncludes measures dedicated to the responsible regulation of firearm ownership, carrying, selling and use. Strategies can include background checks, training requirements, licensing and registration of firearms and users, age restrictions, as well as penalties associated with unlawful carrying and use. Other interventions can involve targeted amnesties, gun collection and destruction programs, though the evidence base is mixed. A priority must be to limit firearm access for those who are most likely to use them illegally.[41] Evidence: Mixed Impact: Moderate/Significant
	Measures to regulate alcohol There are several approaches to regulating alcohol to ensure that it does not contribute to lethal violence. Examples include restricting alcohol retail and consumption hours (at bars/nightclubs), as well as regulating points of sale in regions affected by above-average levels of crime. Strategies also focus on individuals demonstrating a history of abusive alcohol consumption, and are regarded as effective in reducing likely recidivism of violence.[42] Evidence: Mixed Impact: Moderate
	Strategies for reducing drug-related violence Drugs on their own are not a risk factor for homicidal violence. This said, strategies designed to curb violence associated with the drug market and state/non-state responses to encroachment are effective. Examples include reducing sanctions and penalties associated with non-violent offenders, identifying social and health referral services for drug-related users, and intelligence-led operations targeting highly violent offenders.[43] Evidence: Limited Impact: High[44]
Interventions targeting specific institutions Dedicated strengthening law enforcement, justice and penal institutions	**Strengthening oversight and investigation of homicide** A key priority for reducing homicides involves strengthening the criminal investigation system. Strategies generating positive returns include (1) units specialized in homicide investigation and (2) the creation of coordination mechanisms involving the public prosecutor's office, the police force and civil authorities to oversee investigations. In settings where there are significant extra-judicial killings, the adoption and enforcement of zero tolerance policies is strongly recommended.[45] Evidence: Moderate Impact: Moderate/High

Dimension	Option and brief description
Interventions targeting specific institutions Dedicated strengthening law enforcement, justice and penal institutions	**Strengthening police focus, capacities and community relations** A key strategy involves police forces declaring homicide reduction as a priority for relevant precincts and personnel. This means setting targets and establishing hard metrics and definitions of success. It also requires implementing policies that emphasize homicide prevention and the deterrence of individuals and behaviors that are associated with violent crimes. Effective implementation of this strategy requires a well-trained and professional police force that can also forge positive relationships with affected communities.[46] Evidencia: Moderada Impacto: Moderado
Interventions designed to influence the environment Dedicated to affecting the underlying risk factors shaping decisions to resort to lethal violence	**Early prevention focused on parenting skills and family cohesion** Some of the most effective long-term strategies to prevent and reduce lethal violence involve investing in the stability of households and the skills of care-givers, especially parents. Strategies involving the provision of child-care, training in parenting skills, routine household visits, the reduction of child abuse and neglect, as well as targeted subsidies for the most vulnerable families have generated promising outcomes. Such measures are deigned to reduce the exposure of children to insecurity in early childhood and can significantly reduce risk factors associated with violent behavior later in life.[46] Evidence: Moderate Impact: Moderate and indirect
	Access to social and economic opportunity for high-risk groups Highly-targeted social and economic policies in areas of concentrated disadvantage can create the conditions for the inclusion of underprivileged and high-risk individuals. These interventions can improve equitable development that may deter and reduce incentives for violence. Policies designed to improve income inequality, guarantee access to quality education and employment and strengthen social capital can positively influence behaviors that discourage violence.[48] Evidence: Moderate Impact: Moderate and indirect
	Strengthening local community capacities for violence reduction It is widely believed that healthy communities are safer communities. Strategies that reinforce legitimate community leaders and grassroots organizations — including neighborhood associations and community action groups — can in many circumstances improve violence prevention and reduction efforts. Ideally, strategies will involve trained mediation in violence disruption. When carried out with adequate support, skills development and monitoring and evaluation, there is a stronger possibility of successful outcomes. Evidence: Limited Impact: High[49]

Each country, state and city will adopt a range of strategies that are most appropriate to their particular circumstances and contexts. The ordering or sequencing of interventions also varies across time and space. Some strategies may be implemented rapidly, while others may be delayed until the necessary capacities and assets are in place. It is imperative that interventions are guided by a clearly-defined plan, connected to concrete targets and metrics. Interventions intended to respond to urgent challenges must be aligned with longer-term investments and objectives, and take structural risk factors into consideration.

Different institutions will be responsible for different facets of homicide prevention and reduction. It will require coordination across a host of agencies responsible for law enforcement, criminal justice, prisons and rehabilitation, as well as youth, health, education, recreation and others. The private sector and civil society groups – especially universities and non-governmental organizations – should be involved whenever possible. Homicide reduction is seldom the result of a single intervention or actor.[50]

At a minimum, the following questions must be answered if homicide reduction efforts are to be successful:

1. In which places, days and hours are homicides concentrated?
2. Who are the victims and what are the characteristics of their deaths?
3. Who are the perpetrators of the violence and what motivated their actions?
4. Do existing information systems capture all relevant information on homicidal violence?
5. What is the extent of homicidal violence captured by existing information systems, and what explains the limitations?
6. What proportion of homicides is resolved by the justice system?
7. What is the extent of firearms involvement in homicides, and what regulations are in place? How are the regulations enforced?
8. How do alcohol and drug markets influence homicide levels?
9. What measures are already being taken to reduce lethal violence? What is their record of success?
10. Are monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to track changes in homicide prevention and reduction?

The importance of regulating firearms

The availability and uncontrolled proliferation of firearms and ammunition can contribute to the prevalence, intensity and duration of armed violence.[51] While there has been some international and regional progress at the legislative level to control arms trafficking[52], Latin America is still far behind in properly regulating and managing arms.[53]

Key issues to consider include:

The region has a high rate of homicides committed with firearms. In Latin America, the ownership of firearms is highly correlated with their use in homicides. In comparison to other regions in the world, the proportion of murders committed using firearms is very high.[54] Raising awareness of this association could help establish responsible firearms regulation as a priority for the wider public security agenda.

The ownership of firearms by civilians is especially problematic in settings with weak oversight and regulation. In areas impacted by high levels of organized crime, low levels of law enforcement, and weak social controls, firearms in the hands of civilians are a serious risk.[55] The notion that firearms can make a household safer is not supported by the evidence. In Brazil, for example, a recent study shows that a 1 percent increase in the number of firearms is associated with a 2 percent increase in the homicide rate.[56]

The increase in private security and its lack of regulation is one of the factors contributing to an increase of firearms in circulation. The recruitment of private security guards has expanded across Latin America (10 percent a year).[57] In El Salvador alone, private security costs accounted for roughly 1.5 percentof GDP (as of 2006).[58] Private security agents across the region are often better armed than their police counterparts. Strictly-enforced regulation of the industry is a priority.

The region features poor quality oversight systems that hamper the proper management and regulation of firearms. There is a marked absence of reliable information systems to ensure transparent and effective oversight of firearm ownership by state entities, private firms and individuals. In most Latin American countries, comparatively few firearms are registered and information is seldom up to date. As a result, firearms routinely go missing from the arsenals of military, police, customs and private security entities.

Improved cooperation between countries is key to limit the illegal firearms market and avoid their transfer/trafficking between states. A key source of firearms and ammunition is the illegal market. Weapons are not just diverted from legitimate stocks, but also sold illegally into global networks. Traffickers and criminal organizations are often involved in a host of illegal supply chains.[59] These networks include the US, but also Mexico, and countries across Central and South America.[60]

The responsible regulation of firearms can prevent violent death and other forms of victimization.[61] There are numerous examples of progressive policies designed to limit the likelihood of firearms falling into the illegal market and being used to perpetrate violent crime. Brazil's Statute of Disarmament contributed to a 12 percent reduction in homicide between 2004 and 2007.[62] In Cali and Bogotá, Colombia, evidence shows that the restriction of firearm ownership was associated with a decrease in the number of lethal deaths.[63] Responsible controls, together with outreach campaigns and targeted interventions, can generate positive results.[64]

The responsible control of firearms and ammunition is a necessary, but insufficient, policy response. Experience from across Latin America demonstrates that countries and cities must implement multiple measures to reduce lethal violence, especially in areas where violence is most concentrated. Strategies must integrate responsible gun regulation into a wider package of interventions.

Saying "no" to mano dura and "yes" to comprehensive responses

Mano dura ("heavy fist") policies are widely practiced in Latin America. They involve, among other tactics, punitive measures to deter crime. Many national strategies adopted in the region have been strongly influenced by counter-narcotics and anti-gang support from the United States. The expectation was that more assertive law enforcement, tougher penalties and longer sentences would deter actual and would be drug traffickers and gangs. This has not worked out as planned.

At present, there is a growing awareness of the limitations of narrow punitive approaches to crime prevention in Latin America. Enlightened legislators, governors, mayors, entrepreneurs and civic leaders are increasingly investing in locally-based interventions, building citizen security from the ground-up. They have learned important lessons the hard way – through trial and error. They have found that policing, criminal justice and penal systems were simply underprepared, and overwhelmed – and that a more people-centered strategy was required.

The **Instinct for Life** campaign strongly criticizes the application of "mano dura" approaches to preventing and reducing homicidal violence. Not only are such interventions in contravention of many international and regional norms, they are often ineffective in the medium to long-term. They can unintentionally ratchet-up violence, encourage and enable new forms of criminal activity, expose young people to egregious violence, stigmatize entire communities and corrode the rules/sanctions of policing. What is more, they neglect the underlying structural factors shaping criminal violence.

In Latin America, "mano dura" and zero tolerance approaches to crime control have generated far-reaching negative repercussions. They are often associated with police abuse, violations of the due process, a dramatic increase in the prison population and widespread and systemic human rights violations, including torture, extrajudicial executions and disappearances.[65] Such tactics also encourage the politics of confrontation, with high rates of lethal violence perpetrated against security forces and elected officials.[66]

There is comparatively limited evidence that "mano dura" policies have been successful in reducing criminal violence.[67] There is virtually no evidence of their effectiveness.[68] Indeed, "mano dura" measures have increased violence prevalence rates and prison populations in many Latin American countries.[69] Nor is there a clear causal link between the rising prison populations that inevitably accompany "mano dura" measures and improvements in overall public security. They may ultimately impede inclusive and sustainable security models that respect human rights.[70]

Defining next steps

Due to the chronic persistence of homicide in Latin America, there is a risk of it becomingnormalized. Moreover, the inability of state institutions to prevent and reduce lethal violence also means that Latin Americans become apathetic – even tolerant – of the use of violence as a means of resolving disputes. It is critical, then, that Latin American leaders identify the problem, analyze it, and then set out concrete measures to address it. The costs of inaction are severe in human and material terms.

The **Instinct for Life** campaign recommends several steps for moving the agenda forward:

- Name the problem. Accept that the homicide problem is a priority and elaborate a bold agenda for its prevention and reduction. High rates of homicide are neither normal nor acceptable, and it is critical that societies learn about the risks that give rise to violence and the far-reaching consequences.
- Prioritize homicide reduction. There are still comparatively few examples of homicide reduction strategies implemented across Latin America. Instead, there are generic crime prevention and citizen security plans and programs.71 To reduce homicide throughout the region, specific and targeted interventions are urgently required.
- Produce reliable data and analysis. The generation and availability of valid, reliable, transparent and longitudinal data is indispensable for the development and evaluation and implementation of policies to prevent and reduce homicide. New technologies – including the use of big data and information collection systems – is strongly recommended.
- Adopt a homicide reduction strategy with clear goals, targets and indicators. Any plan must establish clear objectives, develop sharp metrics and allocate appropriate resources. It is strongly recommended that the plan include a cogent theory of change. Declarations and statements of intent are meaningless without a clearly articulated plan and resources to back it.
- Tackle the most urgent problems without ignoring the long-term requirements for change. It is necessary to implement measures focused on the most critical places, individuals and behaviors in the short-term. Strategies should achieve some quick wins while also building the necessary capacities to address more structural problems.
- Ensure the continuity and sustainability of homicide reduction interventions. The goal to reduce homicide rates must be shared across government and society. At a minimum, it will require consistency across political terms and administrations. Setting homicide reduction as a priority will require the commitments of multiple political leaders and strong support from civil society.
- Develop cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary alliances to reduce homicide. Combine the capacities and comparative advantages of different actors – whether they are in the public, private or non-profit sector. It is imperative that homicide reduction strategies harness not just the technical skills of experts, but also the abilities of communication specialists, academia and the private sector.
- Define assessment and monitoring mechanisms in advance. Homicide reduction efforts must be accompanied with robust systems to measure outputs and outcomes. There is still a dearth of solid evidence of what works in Latin America. Successful homicide reduction will require ongoing impact analysis and the ability to course-correct interventions in real-time.

The good news is that the number of programs for homicide reduction in Latin America has increased over the past ten years. There is evidence that citizens are more concerned about reducing lethal violence and some governments are responding in kind.[72] But to be truly transformative, a collective approach is required. The **Instinct for Life** is confident that a 50 percent reduction in homicides is not only essential, it is possible.

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The **Instinct for Life** campaign is an initiative designed to reduce homicide rates by 50 percent in selected Latin American countries and cities over the next ten years. The alliance involves more than 30 organizations, including international agencies and non-governmental groups.

Current members of the campaign include:

Agencia de las Naciones Unidades para los Refugiados (Acnur) (Colombia)
Association for a More Just Society (Honduras)
Caracas Mi Convive (Venezuela)
Casa de las Estrategias (Colombia)
Cauce Ciudadano (Mexico)
Colombia Diversa (Colombia)
Dromómanos (Regional)
El Espectador (Colombia)
Enjambre Digital (Mexico)
Efecto Cocuyo (Venezuela)
Favela Observatory (Brazil)
Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (Brazil)
Fósforo (Mexico)
Frente Colimense en Defensa de la Tierra, el Agua y la Vida (México)
Fundación Ideas para la Paz (Colombia)
Igarapé Institute (Brazil)
Instituto Fidedigna (Brazil)
Instituto Sou da Paz (Brazil)
Jóvenes Contra la Violencia (Guatemala)
Kino Glaz (El Salvador)
México Evalúa (Mexico)
Nómada (Guatemala)
Nossas (Brazil)
¡Pacifista! (Colombia)
Parces (Colombia)
Plaza Pública (Guatemala)
PROVEA (Venezuela)
Reacin (Venezuela)
Redes Ayuda (Venezuela)
Teatro Línea de Sombra(México)
Tupa.Yat - Casa de las Redes (Colombia)
Ve por Sinaloa (Mexico)
World Vision (Brazil)

Regional alliances

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
CAF - Development Bank of Latin America
Organization of American States (OAS)

Support

Open Society Foundations

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