

VIOLENCE, POLICING, AND CITIZEN (IN)SECURITY

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Violent Democracies in Latin America. Edited by Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. vii + 324. \$89.95 cloth. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822346388.

Fear and Crime in Latin America: Redefining State-Society Relations. By Lucía Dammert. New York: Routledge, 2012. Pp. xv + 179. \$130.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780415522113.

Outlawed: Between Security and Rights in a Bolivian City. By Daniel M. Goldstein. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 327. \$89.95 cloth. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822353119.

Seguridad: Crime, Police Power, and Democracy in Argentina. By Guillermina Seri. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012. Pp. ix + 228. \$130.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781441145789.

Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America. By Mark Ungar. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. Pp. xxiv + 389. \$60.00 cloth. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780801898587.

The authoritarian regimes that governed Latin America from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s were often violent, and governments justified their violence through the National Security Doctrine.¹ Postauthoritarian Latin America remains violent but in a different way. Insecurity is now one of the most pressing issues on the public agenda. In most countries, levels of crime are worrisome. For example, the crime rate in Honduras—including homicide, assault, kidnapping, rape, theft, attempted robbery and theft, and drug offenses—was the highest in the world in 2009 (Ungar, 50, 106). In most countries, police remain violent, corrupt, and ineffective. Police reform is elusive or temporary. Nonstate actors such as paramilitaries, vigilantes, and private security have stepped in to provide “security” and in the process contribute to greater insecurity. In response, many national and international actors have adopted the term “citizen security” as a way of reconciling the idea of security with democracy and distancing it from the authoritarian past.

The relationship between security and democracy is an uneasy one that begs for conceptual clarity and a better understanding of the conflicting demands

1. J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

from citizens for both greater rights and iron-fist policing. Over the last decade a new and growing area of scholarship on policing, violence, and security has taken on this challenge. Given the magnitude of the problem, it is not surprising that scholars have come at the issue in multiple ways. Some have chosen to focus on a particular issue, such as violence, crime, or policing, and aim to define it and understand its forms, causes, and possible solutions. Other scholars have taken a more institutional approach, assessing the structure of the police or criminal justice institutions, analyzing attempts at reform, and proposing better methods for reform. Both approaches (institutional and noninstitutional) and all four areas of study (violence, crime, policing, and criminal justice institutions) are interconnected and necessary if we are to achieve a better understanding of the current form of democracy that has emerged in the region and find the best path forward.

The five books under review here make important contributions to this literature. While only one of the reviewed books takes an institutional perspective, they all force us to ask similar key questions: What do we mean by security? What is the relationship between rights and security? What role do the police play in security? And, most provocatively, what is the relationship between security, neoliberalism, and democracy? These questions are threads that join the volumes together, yet each book also tackles its own question and provides a unique contribution to the field of inquiry.

VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRACY

Like most of the books reviewed here, in *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, editors Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein argue that if we are to understand violence in the region and its relationship to democracy, we cannot limit our analyses to state institutions. They argue that such analyses point to either the failings of democracy in Latin America, exemplified by modifying the term with adjectives (e.g., illiberal, disjunctive, or delegative democracy), or to the false assumption that the region is on a natural evolutionary path in which institutions will lead the way to less violence and greater democracy. Instead, Arias and Goldstein hold that we need to better understand the political and social contexts that contribute to the current reality in Latin America of democracies with high levels of violence. This reality they call “violent pluralism.”

The term “violent pluralism” emerges from combining Arias’s and Goldstein’s disciplinary backgrounds in political science and anthropology, respectively. They argue that the concept allows us to better understand the centrality of violence to the lived experience of current forms of democracy in the region and to appreciate the variety of types of violence that have emerged. This violence is perpetrated by state and nonstate actors; it is political and seemingly apolitical. The different forms of violence are often interconnected in important ways that affect how politics functions and the success (and lack of success) of institutional reforms.

The editors and contributors to the volume all contend that violent pluralism is an outcome of Latin America’s path-dependent history of authoritarianism

and, more important, of the reinforcement and distortion of authoritarianism by neoliberalism. Indeed, while the authors eschew the use of adjectives to describe democracy in Latin America today, they strongly link violent pluralism to what they call “neoliberal democracy.” The pursuit of neoliberalism in the region has brought increased inequality, decreased social services, decreased employment, and the privatization of security. Violence, they argue, maintains neoliberal institutions and policies as well as providing a way to cope with “the myriad problems that neoliberal democracies have generated” (16). These themes of authoritarian pasts, neoliberal presents, and violent pluralism are explored through case studies of Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil.

The contributors each use a different starting point to highlight the messy nature of violence in Latin America today. As Javier Auyero points out in his analysis of lootings in Argentina, the distinction between state and nonstate violence is not always as clear as it may seem on the surface. Auyero dissects a case of mass looting that appears to be nonstate mob criminal violence. However, upon closer examination he exposes what he calls “clandestine relations” in which looters were “signaled” and “certified” for looting in particular ways by political leaders. Political leaders then were able to leverage the violence to affect politics. His analysis draws our attention to the limitations of institutional reforms, for example of the police. Political leaders clandestinely ensured the police were cleared from areas where the looting was going to take place. It is unlikely that police reform would have changed the actions by the police.

Indeed, the uncertain commitment of political leaders to institutional reforms is explored throughout the chapters in different ways. For example, many authors noted political leaders’ use of “the populism of fear” and of calls for iron-fist policing to win elections. Yet some of the cases reveal that political leaders’ commitment to violence runs deeper than simply winning elections. The two chapters on Colombia, by Mary Roldán and María Clemencia Ramírez, contend that violence is being used by political leaders overtly and covertly to maintain the exclusionary duopoly of the two traditional political parties and resist demands by civil society for a more inclusive participatory democracy. Other chapters highlight not only the exclusion of alternative visions of democracy but the exclusion of certain people (particularly the poor living in shantytowns) from enjoying the rights of democracy. The poor are the most common perpetrators and victims of violence as the state has receded from social welfare provision and reinforced repression or ceded control to drug traffickers.

Thus, Arias and Goldstein argue, violence in Latin America today is not just an aberration or phase; it is part of what is sustaining a particular form of democracy in the region. To be successful, institutional reforms need to better understand these systems of violence and the politics they sustain.

POLICING AND DEMOCRACY

Violence is of course linked to policing. As the Arias and Goldstein volume repeatedly shows, police are perpetrators of violence, they support and participate in crime and drug trafficking, they ignore some forms of violence, and they

can escalate violence. In *Seguridad: Crime, Police Power and Democracy in Argentina*, Guillermina Seri picks up many of the same themes as Arias and Goldstein but places policing instead of violence at the center of her analysis. She notes that since the return of electoral democracy in Argentina in 1983, 3,393 people have been arbitrarily killed by police (146). Like Arias and Goldstein, Seri argues that democratization is best understood not only by its institutions and institutional reforms but also, and perhaps more importantly, by its practices. She argues that, since the mid-1990s, the emergence in Argentina of security as a governing framework has favored more violent and authoritarian practices that threaten to erode democracy.

Seri holds that police discretion is central to understanding regime types and violence. Police use their discretion to determine who has access to and the ability to exercise their rights and in this way “make a core impact on citizenship and democracy” (9). Providing more depth, she examines the “geography of exclusion” through looking at the ways in which police govern poor communities (74). She analyzes the discourses of her many police interviewees and reveals how they describe a criminal (poor, male, young, guilt determined by clothes, skin color, location) and their rejection of what one officer calls “human rights fundamentalism” (113). Using political theory, extensive interviews, and quantitative analysis she builds a strong argument for a more complex understanding of policing in the region in order to better understand the possibilities and limitations of democratization.

Placing Arias and Goldstein’s book next to Seri’s, it remains unclear if violence or policing are more central to democratization. There certainly are important connections between the two that need to be unpacked further. Many questions remain unanswered. For example, are there forms of violence that exist regardless of the quality of policing or the absence of police? What type of policing is needed for a better quality of democracy? On this last point Seri cautions against the idea of democratic policing as something established democracies have achieved and to which Latin American democracies should strive. Her alternative is not spelled out as clearly, but she points to building a society with greater equality and an ethos of care rather than security. This, she holds, has been shown to be a better predictor of “respect for the law, accountability and quality of democracy” (141).

Indeed, like Arias and Goldstein, Seri also sees an important link between neoliberalism and the form of democracy we find in Latin America today. Artfully combining political theory and comparative politics, Seri argues that neoliberalism and democracy are not necessarily compatible. Indeed, neoliberalism has coexisted quite nicely with authoritarianism in the past. She argues that the challenge for political and social elites in Latin America has been to find a way to make democracy and neoliberalism compatible and, in particular, to maintain inequality in democracy. This has been achieved, she argues, through the discourse of *inseguridad*, which produces fear of crime, even when crime is not increasing, and encourages calls for iron-fist policing. She tracks the role of the media in producing this fear and the benefits that accrue to an expanding private security industry. *Inseguridad* has become a basis for governing, defining citizenship, and

diminishing the relative importance of human rights. This quest for security, Seri argues, is subverting democracy.

In many countries in Latin America fear of crime appears well founded in statistics that show growing homicide rates and the expansion of a transnational drug trade and corresponding gang warfare. However, statistics on crime are often unreliable and can include crimes committed by police. Indeed, as the next books show in even more depth, fear of crime and actual crime levels may be two very separate issues.

DECONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF FEAR AND INSECURITY

When one thinks of violence and corrupt policing in Latin America, Chile is not usually the top country that comes to mind. Indeed, the Chilean police, the Carabineros, are one of the most respected police forces in Latin America. Yet citizen security and crime top the list of public agenda concerns, and fear of crime is pervasive in Chile. Given this context, in *Fear and Crime in Latin America: Redefining State-Society Relations*, Lucía Dammert encourages us to “rethink fear and insecurity” (1).

Dammert argues that fear of crime has less to do with violence and policing than it has to do with increased individualism and the loss of collective space, identity, and trust, all of which are both a legacy of authoritarianism and a product of neoliberalism (what she calls modernization). Fear of crime is “the most visible aspect of a more diffuse apprehension characterized by being afraid of losing one’s individual identity, social roots, and collective being” (16). In Chile, this includes a fear of job loss and poor health care coverage. The criminal is the objectification of deeper anxieties.

Dammert’s book is rich with details from interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Although the theory connecting the chapters is sometimes lost in this rich data, Dammert makes a number of important points that speak less to how the fear of crime can be addressed than to its causes and consequences. For example, drawing on Robert Putnam’s work on social capital and on focus groups and surveys, Dammert argues that authoritarianism and neoliberalism have decreased interpersonal trust in Chile.² The dictatorship eliminated political participation and gave it a negative association. In turn, neoliberalism has left people with little time or desire to engage with their neighbors in collective projects (or even just get to know them). This accumulated lack of trust, which is not unique to Chile but rather problematic across Latin America, weakens civil society and increases citizens’ fear of others and their own sense of insecurity. Indeed, she notes that a 2010 survey found that large numbers of people (over 50 percent in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru and 40 percent in Chile) felt that increasing crime can justify a military coup.

The state’s discouragement of political participation and its emphasis on the

2. Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

individual, combined with people's fear of crime, also have led to changes in the use of urban space. Dammert's interviews reveal that many Chileans avoid large parts of Santiago, including downtown, for fear of crime. Some people, especially women and the elderly, structure their time in accordance with their fear of crime and avoid leaving their homes at night. The number and use of public spaces has decreased, as people prefer private "public spaces," such as shopping malls, that encourage patron self-selection based on socioeconomics. Those who cannot afford private spaces, notably youth and the poor, then become the primary patrons of public space. In this way, Dammert argues, people become "users" of public space rather than citizens, and the city as a space for citizenship construction is threatened. People lack the space and opportunities needed to strengthen interpersonal trust and participate in the building of a collective identity that is based on something other than fear and insecurity.

Moreover, if crime control is a real goal, then fear of crime is not helpful. Dammert notes that fear contributes to the inclusion of individualistic demands from the public into policy debates, and to short-term solutions when long-term ones are needed. While she applauds the police and citizen security reforms that have been made in Chile, she gives a perhaps too careful nod to concerns about the "political utilization of fear" (151). Unlike Arias and Goldstein and Seri, Dammert does not elaborate on how the construction of fear and citizen security discourse may be intentional means of uniting democracy and neoliberalism while maintaining inequality. However, she does subtly recognize the connection. In particular, throughout the book she notes the role of the media and communications agendas in the production of fear, leaving the reader wanting to know more.

Like Dammert, Daniel M. Goldstein is also concerned about the meaning of fear and insecurity. In *Outlawed: Between Security and Rights in a Bolivian City*, he explores governance through state practices rather than institutions. Using what he calls a "critical anthropology of security" (15), he examines the lived experience of insecurity in an indigenous marginal neighborhood on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia. Like the previous authors, he finds that neoliberal democracy has produced a "security state" that combines discourses on security and rights in particular ways that justify violence (238). Most significantly, the right to security comes to trump all other rights and legitimates state abuse of these other rights to achieve it.

To be sure, many scholars have spoken of a post-neoliberal Latin America, of which Bolivia is an example. Bolivian president Evo Morales and his party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) came to power through their opposition to neoliberalism and support for indigenous rights. However, Goldstein contends, as Seri does in the case of Argentina, that neoliberalism persists despite anti-neoliberal presidents. Neoliberal security is maintained "by necessity or default" (85), and changes in laws do not necessarily lead to changes in practices. Neoliberal security limits the definition of security to crime and defends this definition against attempts to broaden it. Neoliberal democracies roll back social welfare and make security the state's main responsibility, with the prerogative to subcontract security work to the private sector. The state uses its security role to protect the inter-

ests of global capital (over citizens) and to gain political power by labeling people or events a security threat.

Through his ethnography Goldstein shows how people in the community he is involved in have experienced and engaged with insecurity. Like Dammert, Goldstein is interested in how people understand insecurity. While in his introduction he holds that the dominant understanding of insecurity in his community of research is crime, in chapter 3 he explores a broader understanding of insecurity that includes the illegal status of many of the residents. In particular, many residents were swindled when they "bought" their land but did not receive secure title to it, so they now live with the threat that their homes could be taken away. In addition, residents are impeded from obtaining national identity cards, which they need to access many rights of citizenship. Along with corrupt police, a lack of social welfare, and the absence of even basic infrastructure, Goldstein contends that "insecurity" is the lived experience of a lack of social order. His choice of the term "social order" is unfortunate, given its militaristic connotations reminiscent of the National Security Doctrine, but the idea is an important one. The term "uncertainty," which he uses occasionally, would have been a preferable choice.

While many scholars and local residents view this lack of order or certainty as stemming from the absence of the state in these marginal communities, Goldstein argues that the state is in fact very present, albeit negatively. The state is involved in imposing a definition of order that is about controlling the threat of these communities to the rest of Cochabamba. It "erects obstacles" that impede members of the community from meeting their security needs by providing ineffective policing, creating monetary and time costs to justice claims, making aspects of their lives illegal, and raising barriers that impede them from becoming legal (6).

In the face of this disorder, members of the community respond creatively using what Goldstein calls "legal bricolage" (as opposed to the legal pluralism supported in Bolivia through community justice) (30). He holds that lynchings, along with "watchfulness" and community leaders, help residents find some social order in an ad hoc and constantly changing manner (chapter 4). This is a very interesting and nuanced argument. It attempts to show community members as agents in their own security and not simply victims or criminals engaged in coordinated, consensus-led lynchings. Yet this argument walks a very fine line that does not clearly provide an alternative to neoliberal insecurity.

Indeed, in his conclusion Goldstein appears to celebrate the local answers to security as a possible path forward: "Disorder, then, rather than representing a destructive force that only undermines social life, can here be seen as the fertile ground from which sprout new examples of human creativity and imagination" (254). While he does show that lynching is not the only example of "creativity" and there is no community consensus on lynchings, Goldstein's conclusion removes the state from responsibility for improving security in these communities and in some ways accepts the dominant discourse that the right to security trumps all other rights. This was an odd conclusion, given the author's well-developed and convincing criticisms of neoliberal democracy throughout the book.

ACHIEVING POLICE REFORM

Mark Ungar's *Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America* takes a very different approach to addressing violence, policing, and citizen security than do the other books reviewed here. Ungar centers his analysis on institutions and institutional relations in particular. Like other authors who take this approach, he is concerned with police reform as part of the broader goal of achieving citizen security.³ In keeping with dominant international and national citizen security policies, he is interested in crime control and the police and criminal justice reforms that will better enable the police to achieve it. As a result, Ungar's book does not provide as critical an analysis of citizen security policies as do the other books, and thus implicitly accepts the centrality of security to governance that the other authors question. Taking the perspective of the police, Ungar proposes a move from traditional (centralized, hierarchical, and forced-based) policing to what he calls "problem-oriented policing," defined as "the process of grouping criminal acts together to identify and address their causes" (5). Through impressively detailed case studies of the criminal justice systems and attempts at reform in Honduras, Bolivia, and Argentina, he provides us with a much-needed understanding of what police in Latin America are doing—not, as he points out, just what the police are doing wrong.

In many ways, Ungar's book is much more optimistic than the other four. While he recognizes the significant obstacles to reform, he offers concrete steps that could be taken toward overcoming some of them (chapter 7). A number of these possibilities are very specific and conceivably achievable, such as regular information-based evaluations of police and policing practices throughout the reform process. Others are more complex. For example, like Seri, Ungar sees police discretion as important for change but also highly politicized. Unlike Seri, Ungar specifies that the solution lies in integrating police discretion into training and emphasizing it in reforms to ensure that officers feel they still have some control over their choices. He offers some very interesting, well-researched, and innovative ways in which discretion can be integrated into both training and reforms.

However, unlike the other four books reviewed here, Ungar assumes that political leaders actually want to achieve citizen security defined as problem-oriented policing. Indeed, he challenges the citizen security literature that takes "police resistance and political inflexibility as a given" (13). When political leaders are discussed in the book as opposing reforms and supporting iron-fist policing, they are portrayed as doing so in response to media scandal, for electoral gain, and responding to civil society demands. Yet, the other books suggest that political and social elites may in fact be resisting this broader understanding of security because of the challenge it poses to neoliberal democracy.

Although Ungar does not discuss neoliberalism with any depth, he does discuss some of the tensions between citizen security and democracy. Without add-

3. See for example David H. Bayley, *Changing the Guard: Developing Democratic Police Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mercedes S. Hinton, *The State on the Streets: Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006); and Niels Uildricks, ed., *Policing Insecurity: Police Reform, Security, and Human Rights in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

ing adjectives to the term “democracy,” he points to the political resistance to establishing greater accountability in Latin America and explores how the politics of fear has diminished the power of civil society to advocate for problem-oriented policing instead of the iron fist. In the conclusion to his case study of Bolivia he finds that socioeconomic issues need to be tackled for problem-oriented policing to succeed. Similarly, in the conclusion of the book he notes that pollution is also a significant security issue in the region that needs to be addressed.

Ungar does agree with the other authors that the concept of security has to do with more issues than simply crime, though this is not central to his argument. Yet, problem-oriented policing places the police as central actors in at least mediating and directing these multiple security demands, a role, Ungar notes, that police are reticent to take on given its potential magnitude. Is this a role police should play? What are the consequences of framing socioeconomic and environmental issues as security issues? Why do they need to be framed in terms of security? These questions are part of the debate around the concept of human security.⁴ While they go beyond what Ungar’s book attempts to do, they need to be asked and answered if an expansion of the role of the police is to be advocated. The reforms he proposes are a promising step forward, but to be successful, there must be conceptual clarity as to what we mean by security, why, and who should provide it.

CONCLUSION

Violence, policing, and citizen (in)security in contemporary Latin America are pressing issues. These five books contribute to our understanding of the challenges and possibilities for change. They each move away from an understanding of current violence as simply a legacy of the past and instead encourage us to better understand how this legacy has combined with neoliberalism to produce new and varied forms of violence. This new environment poses significant challenges to police reform and public security, however defined. These books offer fresh insights into some of the first steps that might be taken to overcome these challenges. Left dangling for further research are many questions, such as these: How can the politics of fear be altered? What is the role of the media in police reform? How can uncertainty that is not connected to crime be given the attention it needs without being framed as a security issue? As these books highlight, answers are important to democracy and must come from multidisciplinary approaches that tackle conceptual, social, political, and practical issues.

4. Michelle D. Bonner, “Applying the Concept of ‘Human Security’ in Latin America: An Argentine Case Study,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 33, no. 65 (2008): 7–31.