RESILIENT CITIES, SAFE SOCIETIES

HOW CITIES AND STATES CAN COOPERATE TO COMBAT THE VIOLENCE NEXUS AND PROMOTE HUMAN SECURITY

The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies

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Cover: *Medellin, Colombia. The Medellin Escalators (in the front of the picture) in the infamous Comuna 13 district represent the city's powerful transformation from the most violent city on Earth to one of the most innovative.*

HCSS identifies and analyzes the developments that shape our security environment. We show the intricate and dynamic relations between political, military, economic, social, environmental, and technological drivers that shape policy space. Our strengths are a unique methodological base, deep domain knowledge and an extensive international network of partners.

HCSS assists in formulating and evaluating policy options on the basis of an integrated approach to security challenges and security solutions.

INTRODUCTION

In his well-known book *The End of Power*, Moises Naim argues that urbanization – which he regards as "the most aggressively power-transforming aspect of the mobility revolution" – will have "intense" consequences for the distribution of power within a country.[1] Because of the emerging role of cities in world politics[2], urbanization has now become a truly global issue.[3] Taken together, this makes governance of cities not just a local or national issue, but an international - or, if you will, a transnational - issue. This issue is particularly important in view of the fact that, as a fresh study by the United Nations and the World Bank found, "much of the violence [against civilians, who overwhelmingly bear the brunt of today's violent conflict] occurs in urban areas."[4] A recent online report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which highlighted the plight of cities such as Aleppo and Mosul states that "[a]s the world urbanizes, so does conflict. City centers and residential areas are now the battlefields and frontlines of our century."[5] This indicates that good governance for the purpose of reducing or minimizing the incidence of violence in urban areas is becoming more important than ever. In recognition of this development, promoting safer cities has even been elevated into a full-fledged Sustainable Development Goal.[6]
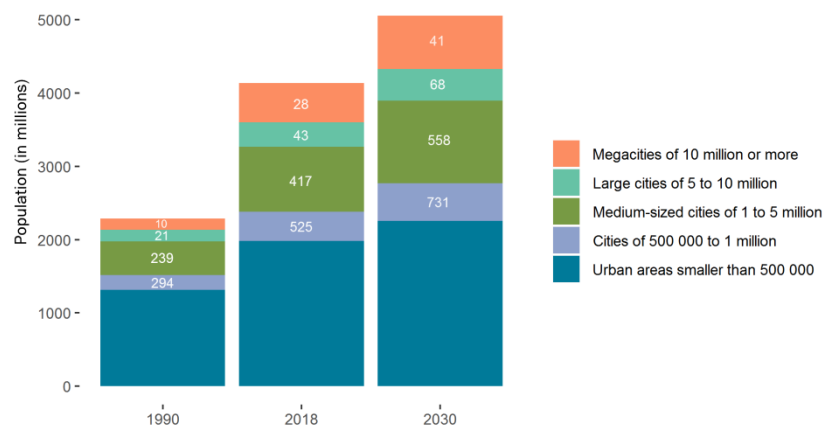

FIGURE 1. WORLD URBANIZATION PROSPECTS

Urbanization and violence evolve in an interlinked fashion due to various worldwide trends.[7] The most poignant is demography. Many statistics point to the dramatic increase of urban dwellers as a proportion of the total global population. For instance, the National Intelligence Council's (NIC) 2017 report *Alternative Worlds* stated that "[t]he lion's share of the world's 20-percent population increase

between 2015 and 2035 will end up in cities [and that c]ities of all sizes will continue to increase in number, led by "megacities" of 10 million or more residents."[8] By 2050, it is calculated that "cities will be home to two-thirds of the world's total population, and every one of the world's inhabited continents will have more people living in cities than in rural areas."[9]

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More people living in cities will inevitably have consequences for the nature of conflict. Strategist David Kilcullen argued that "the cities of future – mostly coastal, highly urbanized, and heavily populated – will be the central focus of tomorrow's conflicts, [and] will be heavily impacted by the four megatrends of population growth, urbanization, littoralization, and connectedness."[10]

These developments clearly have important consequences for governance. The same NIC report cited above proffered that "[d]uring the next 15-20 years, as power becomes even more diffuse than today, a growing number of diverse state and non-state actors, as well as subnational actors, such as cities, will play important governance roles."[11] Sociologist Saskia Sassen argued that cities will themselves give rise to new power relations altogether.[12] In some quarters, this is seen as a positive, and sometimes inevitable, development, and led the late Benjamin Barber, a political scientist, to argue in *If Mayors Ruled the World* that "to save ourselves from (...) anarchic forms of globalizations such as war and terrorism (...) we need global democratic bodies that work."[13] At the core of these global democratic bodies ought to be cities, given that, in Barber's view, nation-states complicate rather than facilitate necessary cross-border cooperation to combat violence.

However, it is not a given that cities working together will themselves be able to tackle conflict and violence, let alone take the lead in combating global violence and conflict, especially in the developing world. This is because, as urban researcher Peter Engelke wrote, "[a]cross Asia and Africa, cities tend to be governed by complex and poorly coordinated governmental authorities at all levels (national, state, local). Moreover, local governments often lack both the financial resources and the technical capabilities to deal with the enormous problems created by rapid urbanization."[14] The consequences of failing governance can be dire: "[A]s centers of power and conflict, cities are natural sites for criminal rent-seeking, or for political actors vying for the state's attention [in which] armed groups or "violence entrepreneurs" [can] use their control over territory and populations for political or financial ends."[15]

At the same time, it is also well-established that cities have been a source for generating prosperity and security.[16] As a result, an 'urban dilemma' emerges, referring to "the paradoxical effects of urbanization in the twenty-first century: as a force of unparalleled development on the one hand, and as a risk for insecurity amongst the urban poor on the other."[17] For authorities at multiple levels, this prompts the need to rethink existing governance structures so as to ensure not only that different forms of violence and conflict in urban areas can be combated in the most effective ways, but also that appropriate preventative policies that tackle root causes be implemented. The result of such an exercise can be to create an ecosystem of stakeholders, from citizens to international organizations, suitable to address these very issues from a broad-based human security perspective.

As the guiding question of this study focuses on governance, we will briefly sketch the contours of the governance conundrum involving national government and cities against the background of wider trends concerning the diffusion of power in the international system. Subsequently, some key trends, developments and interconnections will be teased out concerning what will be called the crime-terrorism-conflict nexus in relation to urbanization. Thirdly, the sources of resilience that cities and societies possess, and which can be mobilized in addressing the consequences of the violence nexus are examined (see figure 2, below). This all culminates in input for further discussion about practical solutions regarding governance, urbanization and violence.
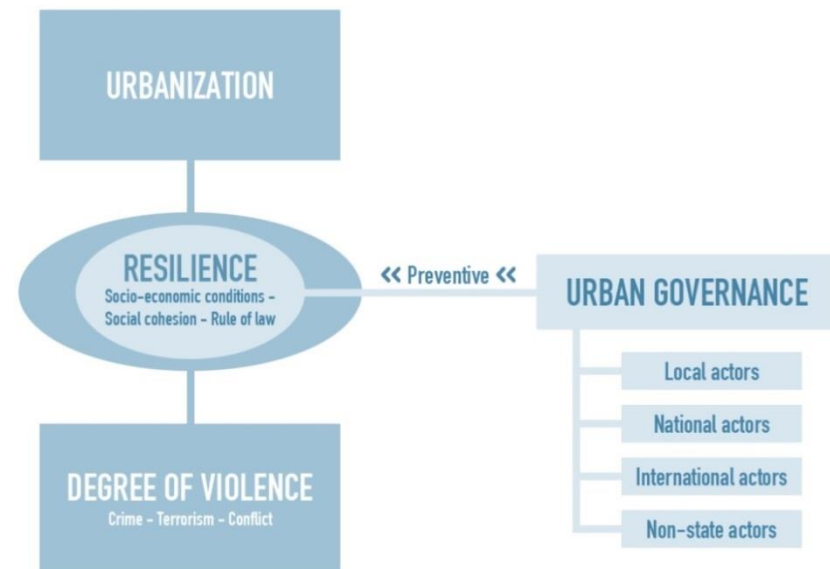

FIGURE 2. STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

THE GOVERNANCE CONUNDRUM

Before describing the complex ways in which forms of violence occur and evolve in urban environments and how resilience can contribute to stemming these forms of violence, we first briefly outline how this affects governance. Concretely speaking, this is about how responsibilities and means are divided between different actors and levels of governance, and which configurations work best to address challenges relating to instability or violence in urban zones.

At the national level, there are four different ways in which interaction between central governments and urban authorities can be organized (see figure 3). One is through a clear demarcation of responsibilities between the polity levels. A second is by creating shared responsibilities, for instance through involvement of city authorities in national councils. A third option is through third-party bodies, for instance sub-national parliament or federal arrangements. Finally, responsibilities can be shaped on the basis of power structures within networks. For instance, civil society or employers' organizations can be given more formal roles in decision-making structures reflecting their influence in the policy-making process. Of course, these different modes of organizing responsibilities can also exist in combination.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

| Divided responsibilities | Shared responsibilities | Mediated responsibilities | Networked responsibilities |

URBAN GOVERNMENT

FIGURE 3. DIFFERENT FORMS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIONAL AND URBAN AUTHORITIES.

However, developments such as globalization make that neat demarcations are no longer easily agreed upon given that, as one study claims, it has "resulted in the nationalization of international issues and the diffusion of power into the hands of non-state and sub-state actors, demand[ing] cities to complement national governments in areas where they "can no longer fulfil their tasks sufficiently and effectively.""[18] And because cities "have become important actors on the world stage, and are forging new patterns of transnational relations and new forms of global governance"[19] they have taken on a more prominent role in global affairs, and have increasingly started to cooperate directly in tackling forms of violence.

However, it is also argued that cities will continue to need support from national levels: "Only a handful of city governments of the developed and developing world have control over their metropolitan area, reflecting different institutional arrangements [which are not aligned] with political boundaries."[20] Indeed, organizational capacity seems to be at the heart of the matter as "[p]oor governance in great urban areas will become a fertile breeding ground for organized crime, terrorism and other forms of violence."[21] One example is the development of so-called 'informal settlements' or 'slums'[22] about which it has been said that "[l]ocal and state governments often cannot deal with slum problems effectively. [And g]overnments' inability to create secure conditions in turn externalizes the problems of violence and insecurity originating within the slums, allowing such problems to emanate outward to other parts of the city and country and even

abroad."[23] Thus, even a quintessentially urban issue such as expanding slums is far from being only of concern to cities.

Recognizing the fact that urban governance increasingly becomes a global issue, there is also a role to be played by international organizations, whether state or non-state. A number of transnational initiatives such as United Cities and Local Governments or the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities project are indicative of more direct city-to-city collaboration. But more traditional players such as the World Bank and OECD also continue to play an important agenda-setting role. In the area of conflict and security management, international organizations can play key roles, for instance by promoting best practices in prevention[24], managing migration flows[25] or supporting local security sector reform.[26]

> " Networks of government officials – police investigators, financial regulators, even judges and legislators – increasingly exchange information and coordinate activity to combat global crime and address common problems on a global scale. "

Taken together, the rise of new actors and the interconnectedness of factors that give rise to violence indicate that urban governance needs to be reconsidered as a whole. For some, a networked response looks to be the obvious approach: "terrorists, arms dealers, money launderers, drug dealers, [human] traffickers, and the modern pirates of intellectual property all operate through global networks.[2] So, increasingly, do governments. Networks of government officials – police investigators, financial regulators, even judges and legislators – increasingly exchange information and coordinate activity to combat global crime and address common problems on a global scale. [However,] these government networks (...) are underappreciated, undersupported, and underused to address the central problems of global governance."[27] Decentralization is also often proffered as a

solution providing more powers to city authorities, and has long been promoted by institutions such as the World Bank[28] – albeit with more reservations in the recent past. But decentralization may bring about its own unintended – and undesirable – consequences[29] if it entrenches local authority less amenable to comply with international governance standards.

In practice, this means that pragmatic solutions need to be found with respect to allocating or deploying means. For instance, means available for law enforcement differ between cities and national governments, and cities could call upon the government to deploy extra force if needed, or vice versa. Another is in terms of fiscal responsibilities: who determines what funds will be allocated to what end in urban zones? And to what extent does the fact that cities are the economic engines in many countries make a difference in this respect?[30] A third concern is socio-economic policy, an area in which it is inevitable that national and local policy will intersect. In view of such issues, the World Bank highlighted that a "clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government is needed to ensure that funding gets to the areas in which it is most needed for prevention."[31]

In general, a focus on cities is thoroughly warranted in discussions on governance and tackling violence: "Cities (…) are where many of our civilization's greatest challenges are felt most acutely. If these challenges are to be solved during this century, the world's foreign, security, and development policy communities must not only become far more aware of the significance of global urbanization, they also must create the processes that will integrate cities more effectively into global governance structures and processes."[32] But the effective integration of cities into these structures presupposes a clear understanding of the security challenges they face, and how other governance actors and stakeholders can contribute to mitigating these.

THE CRIME, TERRORISM AND CONFLICT NEXUS IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

From a long-term global perspective, an inverse relationship between urbanization and homicide levels has been observed.[33] What is more, as engines of economic growth, cities have helped lift millions of people out of poverty – often considered a factor that engenders violence – over the last 200 years and even more so over the past few decades. Millions more worldwide are moving to cities. Also, there appears to be a strong relationship between high GDP levels and high degrees of urbanization in relation to homicide numbers (see below). If these were not hubs of opportunity or if they presented bigger physical dangers, why would people move there in the first place?
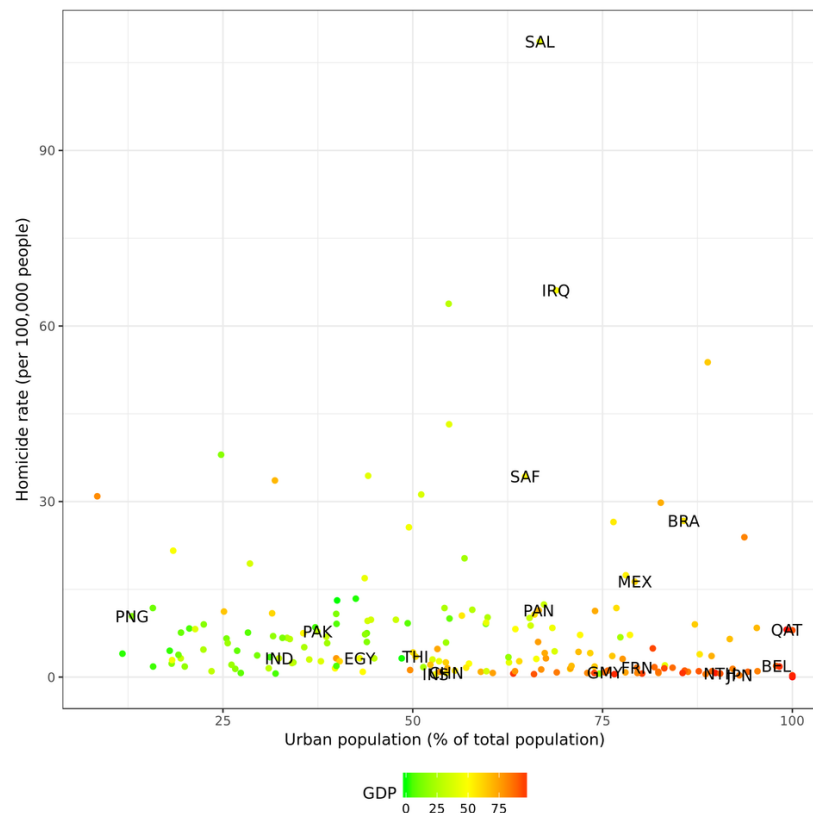

FIGURE 4. THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN URBAN POPULATIONS, HOMICIDE RATES AND GDP

At the same time, cities also provide an environment for many types of violent activity to emerge, develop and metastasize well beyond the city limits. Indeed, cities can even pose a security challenge to countries as a whole as they can be used to generate coercive resources for authorities.[34] These two sides of the same coin highlight that there is no straightforward relationship between urbanization and violence. Indeed, it has even been concluded that urbanization itself does not have a statistically significant effect on crime rates.[35]
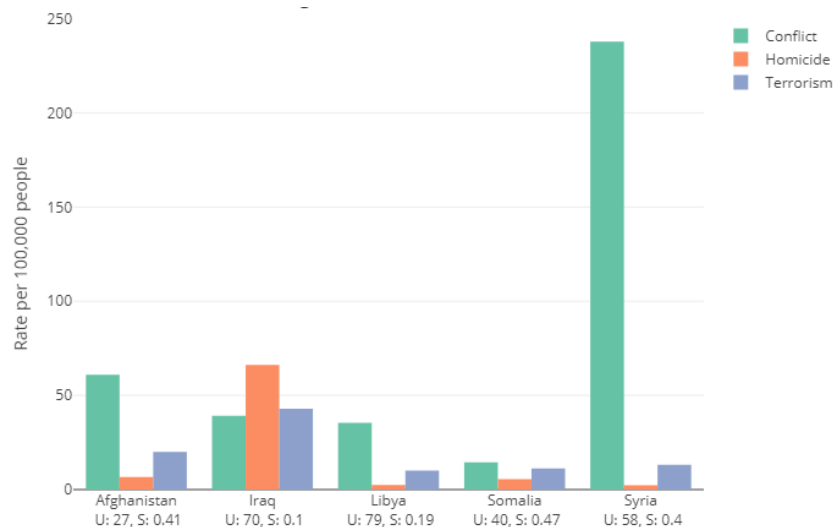
FIGURE 5. COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST LEVELS OF ARMED CONFLICT AND TERRORISM
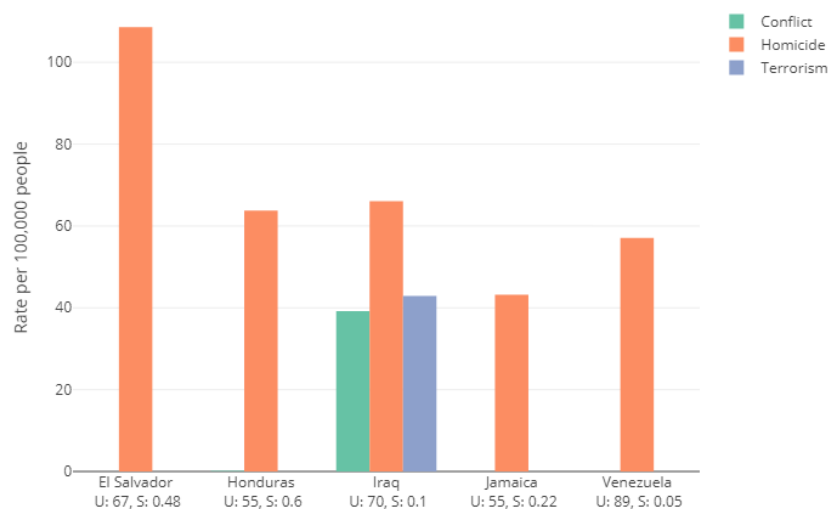
FIGURE 6. COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST LEVELS OF HOMICIDE

Looking at some statistical data for the top-five countries which have suffered most from armed conflict, terrorism or homicides, no evident and immediate patterns emerge (see figures 5 and 6). What is striking, however, is that while the most conflict-affected countries have different degrees of urbanization, all of the most homicide-affected countries have above-average degrees of urbanization. In addition, given that among the top homicide-affected countries only one also suffers from conflict and terrorism, there may not be an easy link between average numbers of murders and other forms of violence. In this section, we lay out some of the dynamics at work, which in turn provides insight into how governance solutions can be applied to substantive policy areas.

How Types of Violence are Interlinked

When tackling forms of violence or their root causes, it is important to acknowledge the interrelationship between forms of violence, especially given that "the lines between different expressions of violence – from domestic to collective political violence – are very blurry."[36] Urban contexts are more prone than rural areas to witness a combination of types of violence.[37] The basic idea is that if cities bring together all segments of society in a compressed space, this will mean that, depending on the general circumstances in a country, cities will also exhibit a large part of the violence spectrum – often in interlinked ways.

Urban Crime

Crime in urban zones is not only unsettling at the neighborhood level, but can support even more disturbing forms of violence. For instance, criminal activity has been found to source terrorism. On an intra-organizational level, terrorist organizations have become increasingly reliant on criminal activities to sustain their operational capabilities.[38] Dependence on urban contexts has partly come about because terrorist organizations have suffered both from a stark decline in state sponsorship of terrorism[39] and from international efforts to constrict their funding.[40] The post-Cold War international environment,[41] porous borders, modern communication and travel technologies as well as weak state structures have further facilitated criminal or terrorist activities.[42] Examples are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) having engaged in various criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and extortion,[43] and the suspicion that the Italian mafia has worked with ISIS to sell oil from Syria and Libya in Europe.[44]

One consequence of such developments is that cities have become trading hubs for illicit goods. UNODC notes however that cities are more the victim than the culprit in this case: "The security challenges of individual cities are increasingly a result of the intersection between local vulnerabilities and illicit flows from across national borders. States as a whole are affected by the destabilizing effects of these flows of

illicit commodities and the associated challenges of organized crime, corruption and terrorism."[45] Nevertheless, because of economic opportunity, "markets for firearms and illicit drugs are more prominent in urban areas [rather than rural areas]."[46] Another issue is that cities may generate specifically 'urban' types of crime. One study showed that "an increase in the degree of urbanization leads to a rise in the robbery rate. This type of property crime seems to be an urban phenomenon, apparently more than homicides."[47]

Urban Terrorism

While cities have thus become important for the purpose of supporting terrorist operations, they have also become the main targets of such operations. Worldwide, a staggering three out of four attacks and four out of five deaths from terrorism occur in cities.[48] It is well-known that large cities have been the primary targets, chiefly because they tend to be government centers and because this is where the biggest impact, given their symbolic value, can be achieved.[49] Attacks worldwide have been particularly prevalent in the developing world, where cities such as Baghdad, Mosul, Mogadishu and Karachi top the list between 2002-15, with the Iraqi capital suffering no fewer than 18,637 deaths as a result of terrorist violence in that period.[50] Furthermore, it has been found that terrorism "reduce[s] the space for social and economic interaction and brake[s] the economic growth and social development"[51] of cities.

The increasing connectedness and anonymity of cities also turns them into hubs for coordination among terrorists – and then targets as well. Even in the age of online indoctrination, commanding and coordination, there is still a premium on direct personal contacts for the purpose of purchasing, trading and storing goods, making financial transactions, getting access to sizeable numbers of (potential) recruits, use as a hideout and as convenient hubs to travel within, to and from.[52] This also means that the interconnectedness of cities can be used to the advantage of terrorist networks. An example is of course the Paris-Brussels network which was involved in deadly attacks in both cities.[53] But networks can also easily extend from Mosul to Gaziantep, and onwards to Istanbul and London. Jihadist networks in Syria and Iraq provided aspiring fighters with documents containing practical information on how to get into Syria, including routes, contact information of facilitators and more.[54]

Urban Conflict

Finally, there is the conflict dimension, meaning that a country experiences either domestic or internationalized armed conflict. It emerges in three forms: as a result

of developments indigenous to a city or particular neighborhoods; as a result of wider conflict in a country; or a combination of the two. Most commonly, it is rooted in structural socio-economic factors in combination with a lack of governance and/or law enforcement. Some of these cities can be considered 'feral cities', a notion coined by Richard Norton in 2003. He defines this as a "metropolis with a population of more than a million people, in a state the government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city's boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system."[55] In such circumstances, control over parts of cities or urban zones can be taken over by one or more armed non-state actors. The emergence of these actors can partly be the result of established criminal networks.[56] As Kilcullen described it, these groups can include "urban street gangs, communitarian or sectarian militias, insurgents, bandits, pirates, armed smugglers or drug traffickers, violent organized criminal organizations, warlord armies, and certain paramilitary forces."[57] In turn, these groups can also take on a political role, leading to "the hybridization between politics and criminality in many settings, [and the enhancement of] local legitimacy of patronage systems."[58]

> " Cities prove to be the hardest locations to conquer or control, whether from outside their limits or from within, and with urbanization being on the increase, urbanization and conflict are set to become ever more interwoven. "

Where cities can be a source for conflict, they can also become their fulcrums. As the ICRC noted: "It's not just the general population that is growing in cities – hostilities in armed conflicts are increasingly taking place in population centers. This is a trend that is only likely to continue. While past insurgencies could conceal themselves in mountainous areas or jungles, the vulnerability of conducting warfare in the wide-open terrain of the Middle East has driven fighters to base their operations in cities."[59] Another reason is that most recruits are based in urban zones. The effects of this trend need no illustration beyond mentioning the names of

Aleppo, Homs, Raqqa and Mosul. It shows once more that, just as was the case with 16th century warfare and the 19th century bourgeois revolutions, cities prove to be the hardest locations to conquer or control, whether from outside their limits or from within,[60] and with urbanization being on the rise, urbanization and conflict are set to become ever more interwoven.

BOX 1: URBAN VIOLENCE AND UN PEACE OPERATIONS

One of the areas in which urban violence will become an increasingly important aspect is UN peace operations. Where traditionally, it can be said that such operations took place in non-urban areas (think of Kashmir, Sinai, Golan Heights or eastern DRC), in the future they are more likely to take place in urban settings. This already became apparent in Timor-Leste, Haiti but also today in Cote d'Ivoire and Somalia.[61] Nevertheless, it appears that at this time, "[d]espite its significant new focus on cities (...) the United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian response continues to struggle to understand the impact of rapid urbanization. U. N. officials may recognize that their peacekeeping efforts are increasingly located in urban contexts (...), but they are not framing their policy frameworks around this reality."[62] Indeed, the 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations ("HIPPO") does not even mention urban contexts at all.[63]

In military circles, the necessity for future engagement in urban zones is generally acknowledged. For instance, a leading US study concluded that "[g]rowing urbanization throughout the world raises the possibility of future military operations taking place in urban environment."[64] Indeed, we are already seeing such operations take place in many locations, in particular in the Middle East.

There are two possible responses to such developments. One is to say that peace operations are not equipped for dealing with urban conflict and instability. The HIPPO report itself notes that "UN peacekeeping missions, due to their composition and character, are not suited to engage in military counter-terrorism operations."[65] Elsewhere, it was said that "peace operations may not necessarily be the best actors to tackle organized crime. Indeed, crime-fighting may jeopardize other aspects of the mission's work."[66]

Another is to squarely acknowledge this new reality. Indeed, a General Assembly debate in 2016 highlighted "a need to 'further reflect on tools and means for UN peace operations to respond to terrorism and violent extremism'."[67] Furthermore, "UN police are facing new protection challenges in situations where organized conflict coexists with other types of criminal/urban violence, or post-conflict scenarios in which major organized conflict has been settled in a peace agreement but criminal, communal, and/or revenge-based violence continues to pose significant physical threats to civilians."[68]

Given that in urban areas, the chances that UN forces encounter armed non-state actors who generally have less respect for UN insistence on impartiality, in combination with the fact that UN forces are likely to operate with broader mandates, that include intelligence gathering and dealing with criminal groups, member states will likely be more reluctant to commit to such operations in the future. At the same time, the unique nature of UN peace forces – especially if they operate on the basis of the comprehensive approach – could actually give such forces advantages over intervening militaries for they may be better able to build trust with local populations and are less likely to be seen as partial.

Urbanization and Violence

Because of the dual nature of cities in terms of offering opportunities as well as posing threats, the links between urbanization and violence have not been clear-cut. A signature World Bank study concluded that "common violence and organized violence have not followed the growth of urban centers everywhere —and the relationship between urban growth and violence is not absolutely clear."[69] It also established that urban zones are not by definition more violent than rural zones, nor are larger cities necessarily more subject to violence than smaller cities.[70] Also, "crowded cities [are not] always more violent."[71] This is not to say of course that urban environments, especially megacities, do not bring forth instability or violence.[72] "When functioning at their worst," as another study summarized, "cities increase the risk of political instability, make residents' lives insecure through crime and violence, encourage illicit trafficking, contribute to pandemic disease formation, and constrain national economic performance, while stressing local, national, and global ecosystems."[73]
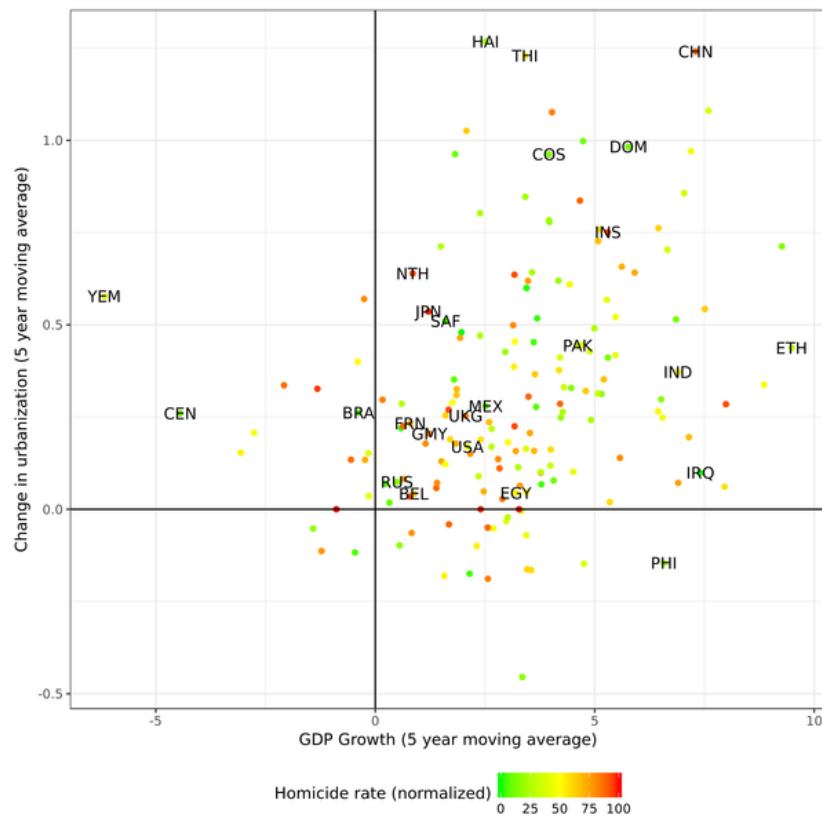
FIGURE 7. THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN URBANIZATION RATES, GDP GROWTH AND HOMICIDE RATES

As it turns out, the problem is not so much urbanization per se, but the speed at which cities develop,[74] with one study concluding that there appeared to be a statistically significant correlation between the speed of urban population growth and homicide rates.[75] Figure 7 shows that Haiti, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica are particularly problematic. The major exception to the rule is China, which manages to maintain a relatively low homicide rate despite fast urbanization.

One danger, as Kilcullen explained, is that so-called "urban no-go areas" in megacities in developing countries can easily become "safe havens for criminal networks or non-state armed groups, creating a vacuum that is filled by local youth who have no shortage of grievances, whether arising from their new urban circumstances or imported from their home villages."[76] What is worse is that "the

resulting close proximity of disparate ethnic, religious, linguistic and economic groups has been seen in some instances to result in social divisions. Terrorist groups strive to take advantage of gaps – for example, by cultivating safe havens and staging grounds in the anonymous urban sprawl – and exploit social divisions to radicalize sympathizers."[77]

In sum, many, if not all, types of violence are likely to persist or even increase in cities which develop rapidly and which find themselves in fragile contexts. But while this might conjure up images of Mogadishu, Kinshasa or Manila, similar dynamics are also at work in less fragile states. Especially in cities, it can be the case that some parts could be deemed well-organized and stable, while others rather seem to belong to fragile countries. Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro and perhaps even Marseille or Paris could belong to that category. Also, there is not a mechanism that determines that high homicide rates will inevitably lead to cities or countries becoming actual conflict zones. Significantly though, the underlying factors that undergird violence in urban areas also suggest its sources of resilience.

SOURCES OF RESILIENCE IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

While written in a different time and a different context, the title of Jane Jacobs' famous book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* suggests that death is often not the end for urban communities, for they can also revive again. Indeed, a rising from the ashes is something that many cities have witnessed in history. Jerusalem and Belgrade have sustained several dozens of sieges, while places such as Warsaw and Tokyo revived after having been largely flattened. This suggests not just that other places including Aleppo and Mosul could one day again be teeming with life, but also that cities possess enormous amounts of resilience, both in terms of recovery and in terms of prevention. In that sense, urbanologist Edward Glaeser is right to call cities "humanity's greatest invention."[78]

Of course, cities do not only exhibit such a capacity to bounce back when they appear 'down and out.' As the cumulative expression of the human 'will to live', they contain various sources of resilience in order to prevent a descent into violence and instability in the first place. While many other factors can be considered to contribute to a city's resilience[79], here we focus on three factors, which, taken together, have the largest impact on urban security – and therewith, urban resilience:

▶ Socio-economic conditions
▶ Social cohesion
▶ Rule of law/governance at the urban level

These three areas capture issues such as grievances, (mis)trust and the degree of law abidance and enforcement which directly or indirectly affect the incidence of violence in urban areas.

Socio-Economic Factors

In general, there is strong evidence that urbanization has been a key factor in driving GDP growth.[80] What is more, cities offer opportunities to essentially all segments of society. However, "[cities can] also create new axes of exclusion. For one thing, income and wealth in urban areas are more unequal than in rural areas. High levels of wealth and modern infrastructure coexist with areas characterized by severe deprivation and lack of services, creating a strong divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" and intensifying the social exclusion of the latter."[81] Similar to crime, the speed of urbanization also seems to be an important factor in that "fast urban growth doesn't always translate into fast GDP growth."[82] If fast urban growth means that service provision and economic opportunities lag, then this is most likely also an explanatory factor in understanding the link between rapid urbanization and violence.

> " In cities where ever richer people live increasingly close to poorer people, *perceptions* could matter more than *actual opportunities.* "
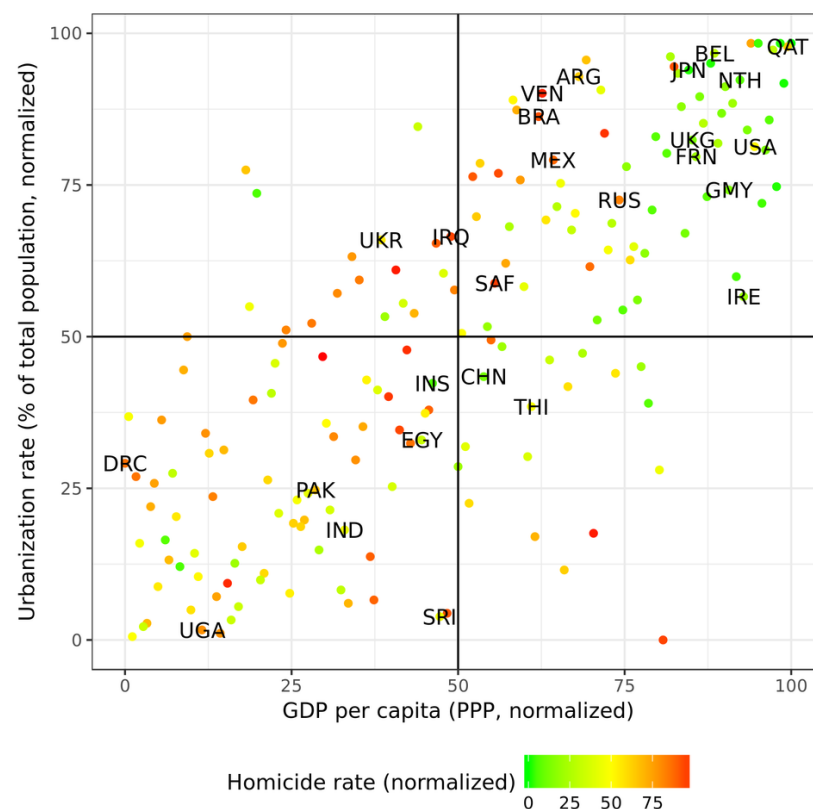
In brief, there are two ways in which socio-economic development levels matter in urban contexts. One is that, as was shown above, "reasonable urbanization generally also has a positive impact on economic growth."[83] In turn, higher GDP and higher GDP growth correlate positively with lower crime figures[84], also in urban areas.[85] Indeed, figure 8 shows that more urbanized societies generally also enjoy higher GDP rates and lower homicide rates.[86]
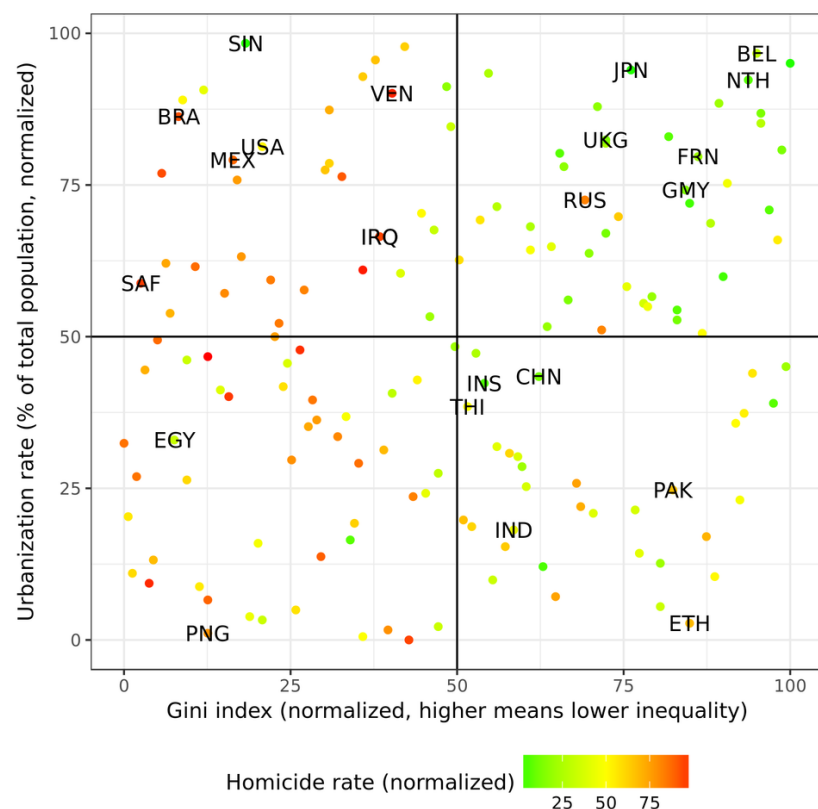
FIGURE 9. EFFECT OF URBANIZATION AND INEQUALITY ON HOMICIDE RATES

The other – arguably more important one – is inequality levels. They matter mostly because, "as the gap between the rich and the poor in most countries is at its highest levels in 30 years (...) the urban divide both stigmatizes and excludes."[87] In addition, inequality is said to be "nurtur[ing] high perceptions of crime and violence in various cities around the world."[88] Interestingly also, "there is a strong perception in all of the communities studied that unemployment, especially of youth, is driving violence."[89] Nevertheless, research shows that there is no definite relation between unemployment and violence. Figure 9 shows that urbanization has, in fact, little relation to GINI coefficients, albeit that higher scores do correspond to lower homicide rates. Hence, in cities where ever richer people live increasingly close to poorer people, *perceptions* could matter more than *actual opportunities*.

The role of youth in urban security has elicited much debate over the years. On one hand, there is a common narrative about youth between 15-24 years – especially men – who are seen as a prime risk factor when it comes to instigation of urban violence or conflict.[90] This is particularly because youth, more than any other societal cohort, seek to establish themselves in society and are more in search of opportunities than any other group. When they feel their chances are thwarted, whether for economic, political or socio-cultural reasons, youths tend to assert themselves. This effect is likely even bigger in urban zones where social success and failure are so close together.[91]

But youth can also be victim of urban violence of course. For instance, young men are disproportionately victims of armed assault, while young girls are disproportionately victims of sexual abuse.[92] In reality, young people can be both perpetrators and victims.[93] At the same time, youth are also a great source of vibrancy in cities, and a critical source for cities to succeed. Partly this is because young people – who are on average more mobile – contribute to knowledge-building and dissemination, bring and generate capital and represent the 'future of a city.' This is also why cities across the world seek to attract educated youth.[94]

Creating more employment opportunities for young people is often seen as a means to reduce anxiety.[95] However, "providing employment opportunities for youths through job programs has often failed as a long term solution as the occupations are of low status and low pay."[96] This can be the case particularly when economic standing relates to social standing in relation to marriage prospects.[97] Yet, the contribution of young people to cities goes well beyond potential economic benefits. Their commitment to city life can help improve social cohesion (see below) as well as promoting positive values such as volunteering and social justice.[98]

Social Cohesion

Another compelling, but somewhat less tangible factor in understanding urban security dynamics, is the role of social cohesion. One description has it referring to "the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other."[99] One OECD study formulated it as a society which "works towards the well-being of all its members, fights

exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility."[100] Hence, social cohesion is regarded as important in terms of presupposing a set of shared values that enables iterated interaction between members of a community.

Generally, more social cohesion – often focused on trust – is seen as a positive factor. One study concluded that "[t]he prevalence of trust on community members seems to have a significant and robust effect of reducing the incidence of violent crimes."[101] Related to this is the concept of social capital, which "is seen as providing the basis for communities being able to act together to address violence and disorder."[102] The assumptions behind these notions are that cohesion promotes a sense of inclusion and trust which makes it less likely for an individual, or a part of a community, to engage in deviant behavior that affects the well-being of that community. In short, there is less of an incentive to commit a crime if someone is being looked after in a community, or senses that they have an equal and fair chance to develop and be prosperous.

The inverse has also been found – that a lack of cohesion correlates with higher degrees of violence, especially in urban settings. For one, "opportunistic behavior is one of the problems of big cities, where individuals are less likely to be long-term residents and urban anonymity protects criminals from the social stigma."[103] Worse, "[r]adical income disparity, and racial, ethnic and sub-cultural separation [have been found to be] major drivers of instability in megacities."[104] Of course, crime and violence can in turn further erode trust, social capital and cohesion.[105] Figure 10 shows that while the link between urbanization and trust is weak, there is a stronger connection between increasing degrees of trust and homicide rates.
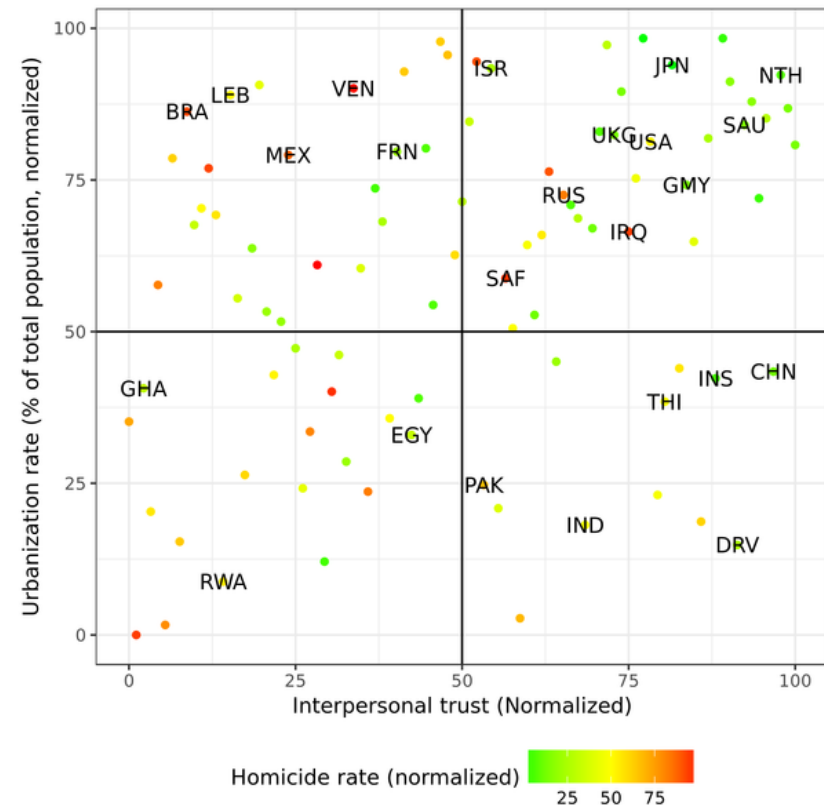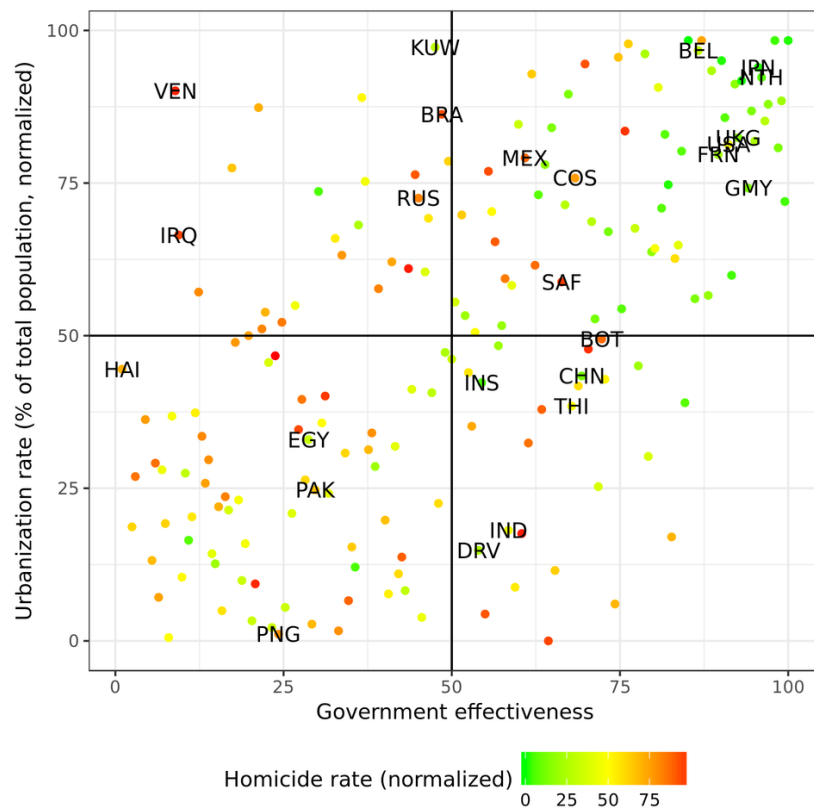

FIGURE 10. EFFECT OF URBANIZATION AND INTERPERSONAL TRUST ON HOMICIDE RATES

Social cohesion can also mean that communities isolate themselves from the rest of society, and/or bring about an *omerta* system which will be detrimental to the resilience of a city as a whole.[106] In fact, "the trust and cohesion within a group of criminals (as in organized crime or neighborhood gangs) may lower crime inside the group but increase it for the city or country as a whole."[107] Therefore, the key to advancing social cohesion in ways that promote urban security is to focus not just on the bonds within a community as a whole, but also whether certain segments exhibit higher degrees of cohesion which might lead to cleavages in a community.

Urban Governance

A lack of governance and low levels of law enforcement are frequently identified as the key reasons for persisting or increasing levels of violence in urban areas.[108] This can pertain to a lack of governance at the national level, at the urban level, or both. To be sure, good governance is more than just patrolling the streets and having effective police squads at hand. In fact, it has been argued that "a policy oriented exclusively on repression or dissuasion gives poor results."[109] Hence, for good governance to have a positive effect on reducing violence, it needs to be context-driven, take the needs of local populations into account, and privilege prevention over repression.

Much of the discussion about urban governance has revolved around debating the merits of decentralization. One is that a "need for decentralization derives from the nature of prevention, which requires proximity to actors in order to be implemented."[110] Another is that it is likely to enable city authorities to act more swiftly should conditions in particular neighborhoods deteriorate swiftly. But for decentralization to be effective, there needs to be both a delegation of authority and of fiscal means to the local level. Squabbles over such issues can make that "this process (...) does not guarantee effective capacity and performance." [111] Furthermore, decentralization can also create further opportunities for corruption at the local or sub-local level, which is one reason why dysfunctional cities are sometimes put under the direct control of the national government, rather than have their authorities expanded.

But rather than discussing state-level governance, for many cities around the world the role of non-state actors in governance is becoming a much more pressing issue. These can include "social, business, religious, labor union, political or hybrid organizations competing to govern territory, populations, flows or simply markets, within the city."[112] What is more, "[m]any of these groups avoid formal political roles and associations, but play central informal roles, mediating between the state and populations."[113] Also, private armed or criminal groups can play roles in providing informal security governance, which can depress economic prospects and weaken the social bonds between authorities and their constituents. [114] This plethora of actors drives home not just the need for a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, but also that fresh, networked approaches are most likely the most effective and inclusive way to achieve good governance.[115]

One such approach can be by boosting citizen participation through e-solutions and networked urban governance.[116] This can perhaps also be used to bring in what would otherwise be considered 'spoilers.' More in general, multilateral organizations can also support cities in finding solutions to problems that surpass borders, set global norms to create a level playing-field between cities and facilitate exchange of information on criminal or conflict-related matters. Hence, multi-tiered governance from the level of citizens all the way up to the international level provides fresh opportunities for cities to tackle instability and boost resilience by working together.

FIGURE 11. EFFECT OF URBANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS ON HOMICIDE RATES

CONCLUSIONS

Developments in terms of urbanization worldwide portend a future in which cities will come to confront greater degrees of violence, increasingly perpetrated by aggressive non-state actors. However, the more resilience urban communities possess, the better they are able to act in preventive ways so as to put the protection of civilians first. Some key findings in this regard are:

▶ Even if in the future a larger share of human conflict plays out in cities, this does not mean that urbanization is a negative development per se. What matters more is the speed at which countries urbanize, or at which urban areas grow, even more so if GDP growth figures remain behind.

▶ There appears to be a relatively strong connection between having a high degree of urbanization, a high GDP, and low homicide rate.

▶ There is no inevitability that a high degree of non-conflictual violence (in this case: homicides) in highly urbanized societies increases the risk that actual conflict might transpire. Various countries in Latin-America stand out in that regard in that they have among the highest homicide levels in the world yet do not rank high in conflict or terrorism casualties.

▶ In terms of inequality, urbanization appears to have no independent effect on homicide rates. It is likely that perceptions rather than realities play a bigger role in this dynamic in urban areas.

▶ Social cohesion does have a discernible effect on homicide rates, and is related to the level of urbanization. In short, there appears to be a positive link between social cohesion and urbanization.

Whether or not cities can mobilize their resilience repositories depends to a great extent on enabling governance structures. In part of course, resilience exists separate from public interventions: for instance, if average GDP or social cohesion are important factors, it is first of all up to local communities themselves to generate and maintain these. However, public authorities can make a significant difference when it comes to reducing inequality and promoting social cohesion. As the research assembled here suggests, good governance is itself a key factor that affects levels of violence in urban areas. Some findings on this issue are:

▶ While decentralization is often mentioned as a way to enhance urban security, it depends on the context whether or not this is an effective strategy, for decentralization can create its own dynamics which can have a negative impact on urban security.

▶ Government effectiveness in combination with high degrees of urbanization appear to have a positive effect on lowering homicide rates.

▶ The debate regarding how best to divvy up powers between the state and local/municipal levels also needs to take into account power or influence wielded by third parties, in particular aggressive non-state actors.

From a broader perspective, it is important that urban governance discussions go beyond the traditional binary opposition of local versus national authorities. First of all, there is a need for governance actors to cooperate vertically *and* laterally in order to produce preventive policies that work, or to tackle violence when it is needed. The second point is that a greater role can be played by international (multilateral) organizations as well as civil society, individual citizens and other committed stakeholders. This corresponds to a wider human security perspective that focuses not just on individual security – including protection of civilians – in all its dimensions but also on communal security. Such an approach also serves to respond to increasing bottom-up demand especially in developed countries for public authorities to take the security needs of 'ordinary citizens' better into account. The result could be to create a responsive ecosystem of actors that can act promptly across the policy intervention spectrum.

In sum, in spite of all the risks that city life brings with it, more people than ever, both in absolute and relative numbers, choose to live in cities. This dynamic can be captured by Nobel Prize economist Ronald Coase's ideas[117] about how firms emerge, grow, endure and decline. But to be sure, this is not just an economic calculation. Issues such as community spirit, local identity and trust are just as much part of this analysis. And the more that cities are able to foster such sentiments of loyalty, the more likely they are to possess repositories of resilience to deal with the negative dimensions of city life. This also explains why megacities emerge more often in developing rather than developed countries, why some cities seem to suffer from perennial bouts of violence and why some cities even shrink. The effectiveness of urban resilience depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of urban governance. Especially in an interdependent world in which power is more dispersed than ever before, instability can manifest itself in new ways, and in which city-to-city diplomacy and transnational networks of non-state actors proliferate, further reflection on how governance can be made fit for the future is more warranted than ever before.

FINDINGS

In summary, an examination of the recent literature on urban governance and security in combination with in-house research and an international expert meeting[118] yields the following findings:

Urban Violence

▶ Conflict will increasingly take place in urban settings as more people move to cities and cities become convenient theatres for non-conventional conflict and even warfare.

▶ Urban areas are more likely to face a combination of crime, terrorism and civil conflict.

▶ Cities will have a larger role to play in dealing with global migration flows, especially as migration also impacts identity issues, which in turn can shape competition for limited resources.

▶ Perceptions or realities about safety and security can differ between groups or segments of society, including men, women and children. For instance, homicide figures may only tell part of a story if domestic violence is a much larger issue but goes unrecorded.

▶ Cyber threats can bring about instability and violence if left unchecked. This can be the result of disruption of vital infrastructure, or due to hacking and spreading disinformation.

▶ There is always a need to contextualize urban violence. Cities can learn from one another, but different circumstances require differentiated and tailored responses.

▶ Weaker state governance in some parts of the world have helped make cities nodes of criminal or terrorist activity.

▶ About four-fifths of all deaths from terrorism occur in cities, meaning that terrorism is by most measures an urban phenomenon.

▶ The UN at present lacks a doctrine for dealing with urban warfare for the purpose of peace operations.

▶ In relation to levels of violence, the problem is not urbanization *per se*, but the speed at which it occurs in relation to the ability of authorities to provide basic services – including law enforcement – across growing urban areas.

▶ Good and accurate data is hard to come by, with the consequence that it can be more difficult to isolate or even identify causes of instability or violence in urban zones. This is principally a three-pronged issue: 1) reliability of the collected data in the first place; 2) breadth of the data across various sectors; 3) comparability of data across cities and countries (over time).

Urban Resilience

▶ Inequality and social coherence are becoming prominent themes in policy discussions about resilience.

▶ Socio-economic conditions can be a source of instability if urban population growth exceeds GDP per capita growth.

▶ There appears to be no connection between levels of inequality and urbanization, albeit that lower levels of inequality do correspond with lower levels of homicides.

▶ Youth can be both a source of instability and of resilience, depending on whether they have sufficient opportunities to develop themselves.

▶ There appears to be no strong link between social cohesion and urbanization. Still, while city neighborhoods could help foster cohesion, at the city-wide level the anonymity of interaction is likely to predominate.

▶ Preventative approaches can go much further than programs to keep people from joining gangs. In effect, implementing a human security approach can foster trust and good socio-economic prospects and discourage engagement with violence in the first place.

▶ Even if cities find themselves in different parts of the world and at different levels of development, this does not mean there are no useful comparisons to be made between cities in Africa, Asia or Europe, or that they cannot learn lessons from one another.

▶ Distinguishing between shocks and stresses: in the case of The Hague, shocks would be terrorist attacks, infrastructure collapse, cyberattacks, and stresses – social instability, inequality, aging infrastructure.

Urban Governance

▶ Especially in the developing world, many large cities struggle with local governance, being short on financial means and technical capabilities in particular.

▶ Cities do play a bigger role in the international governance framework and do take more responsibility vis-a-vis national governments, but a new balance between national and urban governments also requires involvement of international and civil-society based agents.

▶ Urban governance can be complicated if local authorities have a different political color from national authorities.

- The digital revolution also has consequences for reshaping the social contract and thus governance, also at the local level.
- Criminal activity is particularly nefarious if it also infiltrates local governance and law enforcement structures.
- Short-term political perspectives focusing on quick gains can provide negative incentives in not tackling persistent problems relating to crime or violence.
- Decentralization is not the end-all-be-all. Other modes of governance also need consideration.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders in the area of urban governance can undertake a host of activities in order to help combat urban violence and promote the objectives of cities at home and abroad, which together contribute to a country's security, economic and development policies. The recommendations listed below are primarily aimed at national governments, but could also be taken on board by non-state or non-national actors.

Tackling Violence

- Facilitate the building and maintenance of more comprehensive databases that not only help to map emerging or ongoing urban zones of violence, but also help to deepen understanding of root causes, and how related factors interact. Based on this evidence, new policies can be shaped to help tackle violence, or existing policies be refined.
- Combine intelligence-led policing (including a system of incentives) with social programs (education, addictions). Examples are UPP[119] in Rio de Janeiro, Ciudad Juarez and Medellin. As far as assessment is concerned, evidence shows this method to be successful in reducing urban violence and fostering urban integration even if questions remain regarding the timing and extent of the force that should be applied.[120]
- Promote urban renewal as a tool to help reduce the incidence or probability of violence occurring: the structure of cities also affects the structure of urban social relations, and should concentrate on providing positive incentives ("nudging")[121] rather than amount to 'social engineering'.
- More in general, integrate urban perspectives and good practices in various strands of development policy, including on combating violent

extremism (CVE), migration, post-conflict peacebuilding and socio-economic stability.
- Have the UN develop an urban peacebuilding doctrine that leverages the organization's advantages in terms of impartiality and legitimacy.
- Facilitate integration of urban conflict and governance specialists or even city representatives as civilian experts in peace operations, if possible by fostering a dedicated ecosystem.

Increasing Resilience

- Urban development strategies should focus on reducing inequality since it is an important factor contributing to urban resilience. In this regard, addressing perceptions about existing inequality is an important dimension, as is taking into account motivations that can lead stakeholders to refrain from addressing inequalities (e.g. because it means affecting existing power structures).
- Where possible, make nurturing social cohesion at the neighborhood level part of development policies, but in such ways that they involve local governance structures (local councils, sounding boards, representation in social institutions). In doing so, it is important not to inadvertently create new divisions with the urban community as a whole.
- Make youth as a source of resilience more central in development interventions, in particular in the socio-economic realm.
- Giving women more leverage in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and resilience is an effective means for promoting social stability in urban zones or at the neighborhood level, and can be particularly effective when it comes to reducing socio-economic inequality as a root cause for conflict.
- Focus development assistance destined for urban areas on those cities where population growth clearly outpaces GDP growth or service provision, for these cities are more likely to experience (higher degrees of) violence in the future.
- Integrate the risk associated with cyberthreats more fully into policies that aim at strengthening the vital infrastructure of cities, especially in emerging economies.
- Adjust development assistance policy so as to leverage the informal sector – which contains much 'hidden capital'[122]- in urban environments in positive ways.

- Mobilize more support in general to generate attention within international development agencies to address violence in urban environments.

Improving Governance

- National governments should help foster a mindshift and seek to embrace cities as a level of governance that can contribute to enhancing security and welfare policy initiatives rather than as an 'alternative' pole of international governance.
- Broaden urban governance discussions so as to include citizens and international bodies alike so as to create an ecosystem approach to governance. This is also a way to prevent discussions about shared authority and competences between urban and national levels to be framed as zero-sum issues.
- Put more emphasis on the fact that urban governance strategies should also take into account interaction with a city's hinterland. The way how the city of Amsterdam created strategies to 'spread its gains' with other cities in the Netherlands is an example here.
- In the face of hybrid threats, hybrid coalitions consisting of public, private and civil society stakeholders should be assembled to tackle these threats. These coalitions can include stakeholders that might otherwise be deemed as 'spoilers'.
- Create hybrid forms of diplomatic representation:
    - Have city officers in strategic embassies abroad;
    - Have national government staff located in key city governments domestically;
    - Have national government staff located in consulates in a larger number of key cities abroad;
    - Have city officers be included in national missions to relevant international organizations (UNODC, UN Habitat, UN DPKO…).
- Smaller cities should also be included in inter-city exchanges, not just megacities.
- Export successful best practices on infrastructure and fostering social cohesion: in this context, the Netherlands could export knowledge on infrastructure (water, public transportation, tech, sustainability projects in universities), but also values (open, transparent, democracy, rule of law).

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[117] Coase's ideas hinges on the notion of 'transaction costs', and the idea that such costs are too high in a market environment, thus prompting consolidation in more hierarchical structures ('the firm'). In that way, cities can be seen as analogous to firms in that they reduce transaction costs for many aspects of life, and would attract more people if circumstances are propitious. Also, people will be willing to 'invest' themselves in the city, for instance by helping enhance social cohesion, thus making a city an even more attractive place to live. See R. H. Coase, "The Nature of the Firm," *Economica* 4, no. 16 (November 1, 1937): 386–405, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0335.1937.tb00002.x.

[118] Held on November 8 in The Hague, Netherlands

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