


BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Crime and Punishment in Latin America

Enrique Desmond Arias 

Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College and the Doctoral Program in Political Science, The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY), New York, New York, US
Email: desmond.arias@baruch.cuny.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil. By Jaime Amparo Alves. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2018. Pp. 324. \$27.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781517901561.

Prisons and Crime in Latin America. By Marcelo Bergman and Gustavo Fondevila. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xvi + 261. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108738194.

The Limits of Community Policing: Civilian Power and Police Accountability in Black and Brown Los Angeles. By Luis Daniel Gascón and Aaron Roussell. New York: New York University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv + 285. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781479842254.

Authoritarian Police in Democracy: Contested Security in Latin America. By Yanilda María González. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 355. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108820745.

Zonas Peligrosas: The Challenge of Creating Safe Neighborhoods in Central America. By Tom Hare. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 85. \$9.99 paperback. ISBN: 9780823280919.

Self-Defense in Mexico: Indigenous Community Policing the New Dirty Wars. By Luis Hernández Navarro. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 263. \$29.85 paperback. ISBN: 9781469654539.

A república das milícias: Dos esquadrões da morte à era Bolsonaro. By Bruno Paes Manso. São Paulo: Todavía, 2020. Pp. 304. \$30.30 paperback. ISBN 9786556920610.

In the eight issues of *Latin American Research and Review* published in 2020 and 2021, six of forty-five review essays, or 13 percent, focus on crime and violence. Latin America and the Caribbean countries account for eighteen of the highest twenty homicide rates globally, with well more than one hundred thousand homicides annually.¹ Confidence in the police

¹ Robert Muggah, and Katherine Aguirre, “In the Americas, Homicide Is the Other Killer Epidemic,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/20/homicide-murder-violence-united-states-latin-america-caribbean/#:~:text=That%20may%20not%20sound%20like,6.9%20victims%20per%20100%2C000%20people>.

and the political system to address crime is low enough that it engenders support for vigilantism and inhibits citizens' reporting of crime.²

The books reviewed here reflect the attention this painful issue is receiving from scholars and journalists. These excellent monographs emphasize the central importance of crime, violence, and punishment to a host of other issues facing the region. They highlight how the experience of violence and crime is embedded within histories of exclusion and how those experiences are rearticulated under contemporary political regimes and policies, instantiated for our current generation through criminal and police violence. This emphasizes this area's theoretical importance to other political, social, and economic dynamics typically treated separately from crime. These works point to the importance of integrating this research into other areas of study to develop more complex and multivectoral strategies to address violence and studies across regions.

Tom Hare's *Zonas Peligrosas: The Challenge of Creating Safe Neighborhoods in Central America* examines efforts to control crime in four neighborhoods of metropolitan San Salvador. The author seeks to understand the role of social and physical disorder, key notions in the Chicago school framework, in promoting crime and their implications for crime control policies.

The book uses a survey of 193 individuals as well as a series of in-depth interviews. The survey asked about experiences with crime and security programs, as well as respondents' feelings about their neighborhood. The author does not find clear support for either the idea that physical disorder has a strong relationship to crime or the success of "citizen security" policies.

This volume critiques elements of social disorganization theory and illuminates the limits of some citizen security policies. At the same time, there is a great deal more to these policy approaches and to the Chicago school not addressed here. Much of the book dwells on physical disorganization, an approach not very much in vogue among the region's scholars but that occasionally comes up when Latin American officials embrace "broken windows" or zero-tolerance crime control. The Chicago school, whose leading contemporary exponent Robert Sampson critiques the "broken windows" approach, requires more in-depth engagement than offered here, especially in understanding the dynamics of social as opposed to physical disorder.³ Similarly, although this volume makes some compelling criticisms of citizen security, the approach is not analyzed with much depth. There is one reference to UN reports and other writings but little unpacking of the approach. The citizen-security paradigm foregrounds rights and services as a basis for policing, focusing on rational, bureaucratic, and participatory efforts. I left the book wondering what components of this at times vague approach Hare was critiquing.

Hare could do more to exploit his rich data. The survey is small, limiting statistical insights and raising questions about the utility of the book's null findings. The interviews also are not explored in enough depth. There are occasional references to the interviews but no systematic exploration of them.

The book concludes by expressing a lack of strong support for these approaches and recommending that policy makers look beyond neighborhoods for solutions. The author is right that the neighborhood cannot be the only focus for crime control. This, of course, is already well evidenced in the field. At the same time, it is a mistake to dismiss neighborhood-level approaches when there is evidence of successful interventions and

² José Miguel Cruz and Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, "Determinants of Support for Extralegal Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 1 (2019): 50–68; Laura Jaitman and Victoria Anauati, "The Dark Figure of Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy* 3, no. 1 (2019): 76–95, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41996-019-00042-0>.

³ Robert J. Sampson, "Great American City," in *Great American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 125–130.

extensive evidence based on statistically well-grounded studies for neighborhood-level crime effects.⁴

Luis Daniel Gascón and Aaron Roussell's *The Limits of Community Policing: Civilian Power and Police Accountability in Black and Brown Los Angeles* offers an ethnographic analysis of community-oriented policing in Los Angeles. The volume examines how community policing fails to realize expectations of more constructive police-civilian engagement and improved crime control. The book shows that police effectively manage bureaucratic processes surrounding community policing to use citizen groups to advance law enforcement agendas. The strategy perpetuates divisions between Black and Latino residents of working-class communities preventing meaningful reforms. The authors document, for example, how police facilitate permits for businesses that aid them and how police choose which community leaders to work with in ways that promote tensions between communities but benefit police.

This book makes two contributions to Latin American studies. First, it highlights opportunities for critical dialogue on public safety across regions, as changes in US policy often influence approaches in other countries. Second, the United States and Latin America are interwoven, particularly where there exists a great deal of transregional cultural and social connections in areas with large Latino populations, such as Miami, El Paso, New York, and Los Angeles.

The volume engagingly uses collaboratively produced ethnographic field notes to illuminate community policing policy. The book also provides a detailed history of police violence in Los Angeles through the lens of historical scandals and reactive reforms.

The monograph effectively frames debates about policing policy and reform contrasting community-oriented policing, a strategy that emerged in the 1990s, with the more top-down professional policing paradigm that dominated middle- and late-twentieth-century policing policy. This is an important juxtaposition that helps the authors place their concerns in historical context. It is important to recognize, though, that community policing has coexisted with the information technology revolution in policing that has advanced and deepened many bureaucratic practices in the context of using geo-referenced data to control crime and promote accountability.⁵ Community policing was never really an independent third wave so much as an additional strategy in an evolving array of crime control policies.

Community policing has similarly evolved in Latin America. Rio de Janeiro's controversial Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP) program contained elements of community policing and professionally oriented top-down anticrime strategies.⁶ Indeed, the UPP and other community-oriented initiatives evolved in synchrony with efforts to professionalize Rio's police and develop, in the Instituto de Segurança Pública, accurate crime data analysis.⁷ This program also incorporated counterinsurgency approaches that

⁴ Sampson, "Great American City"; David Weisburd, Laura A. Wyckoff, Justin Ready, John E. Eck, Joshua C. Hinkle, and Frank Gajewski, "Does Crime Just Move around the Corner? A Controlled Study of Spatial Displacement and Diffusion of Crime Control Benefits*," *Criminology* 44, no. 3 (2006): 549–592, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2006.00057.x>; Magdalena Cerdá, Jeffrey D. Morenoff, Ben B. Hansen, Kimberly J. Tessari Hicks, Luis F. Duque, Alexandra Restrepo, and Ana V. Diez-Roux, "Reducing Violence by Transforming Neighborhoods: A Natural Experiment in Medellín, Colombia," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 175, no. 10 (2012): 1045–1053, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwr428>.

⁵ William J. Bratton and Sean W. Malinowski, "Police Performance Management in Practice: Taking COMPSTAT to the Next Level," *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 2, no. 3 (2008): 259–265, <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pan036>.

⁶ Vicente Riccio, Marco Aurelio Ruediger, Steven Dutt Ross, and Wesley Skogan, "Community Policing in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro." *Police Practice & Research* 14, no. 4 (2013): 308–318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2013.816494>.

⁷ Enrique Desmond Arias and Mark Ungar, "Community Policing and Latin America's Citizen Security Crisis," *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 4 (2009): 409–429, <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041509X12911362972476>.

targeted disadvantaged communities and ultimately involved corruption and the abuse and killing of civilians. Still, on paper, the community and “professional” aspects of policing are not easy to disaggregate.

There are two important areas that this book could further explore. First, Gascón and Roussell are clearly influenced by scholarship on governmentality and how community policing embodies those theories. Governmentality is a Foucauldian approach to politics in which the state governs by shaping how bodies behave and how people internalize and embody the type of order the state seeks to create. The book could engage more directly with these debates showing the authors’ specific contributions to them and examining their implications for community policing. Second, Gascón and Roussell are rightly concerned with police violence and its effects on black and brown populations. Their contributions, however, are somewhat limited by the ways they split community policing from professional policing rather than exploring how these two approaches build on each other. Police abuses of US citizens, including killings in routine encounters, typically are not driven by community policing initiatives but happen in parallel to activities that are part of the professional policing paradigm. Although the critiques of community policing are important, it is not clear how the authors’ analysis of community policing addresses these issues. Their book concludes with a call for more collective action to change police behavior. This call is well received, but I found myself hoping for more in critically assessing how both community leaders and reforms could work to control police violence but also more adequately deliver public safety.

In *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil*, Jaime Amparo Alves offers an essential new reading of Brazilian crime and security that foregrounds the experience of race in Latin America’s largest country. Alves’s monograph centers race in discussions of violence in Brazil and, as such, provides invaluable new insights—in ways that are often unrecognized in the existing literature—into how race shapes practices of violence and responses to violence.

The Anti-Black City examines how poor black São Paulo residents experience and respond to police violence and crime. The monograph focuses geographically on the inhabitants of Fundão da Zona Sul of São Paulo, what Alves describes as a “conglomerate of predominantly black marginalized communities on the south edge of São Paulo” (1). The monograph, however, follows the author’s various interlocutors across São Paulo as they move to prisons, police stations, and protests around the city. In doing so, the author shows how policies and practices enact racist violence(s) in contemporary São Paulo. As such, the monograph offers a multisited ethnography of the experience of impoverished black residents of the Fundão da Zona Sul focused not just on the community where the research subjects live but also on the various locales, organizations, and individuals they interact with around the city to construct an ethnography of a group that goes beyond the geographic specificity of their residential neighborhood. The analysis examines the role of police, death squads, prisons, and community policing initiatives, as well as broader urban policies in promoting segregation, violence, and death in the city. The book further examines the role of gangs in providing alternatives to top-down state control of Afro-Brazilian life and the role of social movements in redressing police violence.

Alves’ monograph advances conversations about policing, urban policy making, and crime. It highlights the complex and often-overlooked roles race plays in violence in Brazil. In doing so, it builds a critical dialogue between studies of race and violence in Latin America and other world regions that are important to developing collective responses to the problems identified in this volume. The book highlights how centering race in these conversations can mobilize responses to the pervasive violence affecting impoverished populations and communities. Indeed, the author offers a new and insightful approach to collective action that has practical importance and that could, in dialogue with work on

transnational advocacy networks, provide innovative frameworks for considering alternatives to address global human rights challenges.⁸

Alves' reading of the operation of the Primeiro Comando do Capital (PCC) as a criminal organization and crime more generally as a space for resistance, however, could be broadened to fully contemplate this organization's role and its impacts on the city's population. Alves writes near the beginning of chapter 4, "In matters of life and death, the PCC enables a space of resistance regardless of intent, against the state and civil societies anti-black regime of legality, however momentary" (181). Writing of his interlocutors in this chapter, he says: "Their participation in the *mundo do crime* is an attempt to build autonomy in relation to their criminalization and disposability embedded in the city's security logics. Within this context crime appears as a possibility of redrawing the city's geography of exclusion and reasserting their political agency" (207). Although this chapter discusses some of the brutal aspects of the PCC's activities, the chapter focuses on the constructive roles these groups play in laying out alternative frameworks for collective action and governance. This is an important contribution to the literature.

Missing from these insights, however, is the PCCs criminal-political project and its implications for São Paulo's poor communities. Although there may be ways that criminal groups and other armed organizations enforce norms and support conflict resolution or community resistance, as explored in one vignette, a great deal of their behavior reinstates violence against São Paulo's poor. Alves acknowledges how criminal groups perpetuate violence and clearly prefers the mother's movements discussed in the subsequent chapter as a strategy to address violence. Still, there are myriad ways that criminal gangs do more to reproduce state-tolerated violence against excluded populations than they do to provide opportunities to control violence or spaces for resistance. This point, explored in the context of the 2006 mass killings, is addressed but requires more attention. Moreover, even as PCC activities may generate political opportunities, those openings are implicated in this organization's own criminal-political projects. Indeed, beyond the experience of the impoverished men that are the targets of much of the police and criminal violence in Brazil, criminal groups often perpetuate, as Alves notes, violence against other disadvantaged groups, including women and sexual minorities. This is not to say these groups never disrupt politics, but to the extent they do, these actions may favor their particular projects rather than provide meaningful space to promote social inclusion or self-governance.

These political-criminal projects require attention. Indeed, the crimes of May 2006 emerged from a PCC reaction to a change in the detention of its leaders. These actions led to the murder of over five hundred civilians and nearly sixty law enforcement officers. The power struggle was between the PCC and the São Paulo government over the PCC leaders' conditions of detention and their ability to manage the PCC from prison.⁹ The PCC arguably achieved a political opening. However, it was an opening for the PCC's criminal project, in which, following the work of Adorno and Dias, the São Paulo government agreed to conditions of detention that allowed the PCC leadership to maintain a fragile dominance of prisons and many criminal activities in the state in exchange for perpetuating a system of mass incarceration.¹⁰ The PCCs project of dominating portions of urban life through the prison system and the implications of this project for poor residents of São Paulo requires further scrutiny to clarify the cross currents of Brazilian politics and those of the

⁸ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁹ Sérgio Adorno and Camila Nunes Dias, "Cronologia dos 'Ataques de 2006' e a nova configuração de poder nas prisões na última década," *Revista Brasileira de Segurança Pública* 10, no. 2 (2016): <https://doi.org/10.31060/rbsp.2016.v10.n2.698>.

¹⁰ Adorno and Dias, 129.

communities studied here. This book, nonetheless, is an important and timely contribution that brings a great deal to these debates. It should be essential reading and a mainstay of syllabi focusing on violence and on race in Brazil.

Two decades ago, police reform was a starting point for contemporary analysis of violence in Latin America and yielded numerous important publications.¹¹ *Authoritarian Police in Democracy: Contested Security in Latin America*, by Yanilda María González, develops a systematic and comparative analysis of the police reform prospects in Latin America that breathes new life into these debates. Focused on historical case studies in São Paulo state, Buenos Aires province, and Colombia, this book offers insightful analysis of when and how reforms happen, offering an important and new perspective.

Building on pluralist theories of political change pioneered in the US politics literature, González argues in this well-researched monograph that police reform failure in Latin America is driven by the fragmentation of public opinion and the extent of political opposition. Latin Americans are often divided about policing, González argues. On the one hand, many do not want an abusive or corrupt police force. On the other hand, many also want protection against crime. Amid rising crime concerns over the past two generations, citizens tolerated police misconduct in exchange for the police purporting to protect citizens. Sometimes, however, police actions come to light that shock the conscience, generating what González refers to as a convergence of interests. Politicians promoting reforms, however, must balance reform pressures against police resistance that involves policy advocacy among politicians and the public for more resources, less oversight, and a free hand in crime control policy. Politicians are often reluctant to challenge police to take other actions that might increase crime. Amid this resistance, politicians can undertake symbolic reforms to assuage social concerns, but these have limited effect. Reform, the monograph argues, occurs only when public opinion converges in the context of effective political opposition that can pressure the government to undertake meaningful change in the face of police intransigence. González finds that in São Paulo, reforms largely failed because public opinion converged amid weak partisan opposition. In Buenos Aires and Colombia, popular reform demands coincided with robust opposition, leading to material reforms.

The book is both nuanced and insightful. González's theory could explain a variety of other apparently suboptimal outcomes in other locales and subject areas. In the United States, similar police intransigence and the complexities of political opposition have clearly contributed to slow reform. In Latin America, this theory could explain the failures of land reform or anticorruption measures.

Despite this book's manifest strengths, there are two small issues that merit attention. The first is the nature of opposition. González argues that political opposition is key to enacting reform. The author provides good evidence for this, but the nature of political opposition could receive more attention. Mercedes Hinton's 2006 book argues that some types of opposition impede reform. When police scandals occur in the United States, some progressive politicians push for reform amid public outcry, but they are faced with a robust opposition that is seeking to undermine reform, as Hinton noted in her studies of

¹¹ Juan E. Méndez, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, and Guillermo O'Donnell, eds., *The (Un)Rule of Law and The Underprivileged in Latin America*, Hellen Kellogg Institute for International Studies (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1999); Mercedes S. Hinton, *The State on the Streets: Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil. The State on the Streets* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626371439>; John Bailey and Lucia Dammert, *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Michelle D. Bonner, *Policing Protest in Argentina and Chile* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014); Mark Ungar, *Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. There is space for future researchers to examine modalities of opposition and how that shapes police reform during public convergence.¹²

The distinction between democratic and authoritarian violence also requires consideration here. González splits this issue into two separate points in a manner that unnecessarily complicates her argument. In the introduction, she distinguishes between authoritarian and democratic coercion. Authoritarian coercion serves the interests of leaders, lacks oversight, and is arbitrary. Democratic coercion protects citizens, is based on the rule of law, and has robust oversight (15). The goal of police reform, for González, is moving from authoritarian to democratic coercion. Part of this book's puzzle is why voters in democracies sometimes continue to support authoritarian coercion and how authoritarian enclaves thrive for years amid liberal, pluralist systems. I agree with González that these two modes of coercion exist and that authoritarian coercion can occur in a democracy, but it is also important to consider how democratic political systems promote exclusionary *democratic* violence, often targeting marginalized groups. Indeed, some of the violence described here does little to benefit the political leaders, whom González describes as hemmed in by police agencies that maintain support from portions of the public. In Latin America, police violence is not always pursued to protect the interests of political leaders or to repress opposition but often is undertaken because voters support violent policing practices that operate within national legal frameworks. Similarly, in the United States, police violence is often built on legality, emerging from how courts have framed and overseen law enforcement's exercise of force.¹³

In this context, the solution this book offers is more democracy when what may be needed is a different agreement about how democracy should work. One problem we have in much of the hemisphere is that a great deal of the violence we face supports the interests of majorities over excluded groups that suffer at the hands of police, who often operate with judicial protection. Democracy may be better than the alternatives, but it is often built on violence and deeply flawed in its treatment of segments of the citizenry.¹⁴ The pathway out of that violence is not always more democracy but, rather, to understand how and why democracies exercise exclusionary popular violence. With this knowledge, political leaders can consider how to reshape the social interests that favor that violence into something more constructive. González's book answers critical questions about how to move from authoritarian violence toward the rule of law, one problem some democracies in the region have. It tells us less, though, about how to respond to violence embedded in the rule of law that protects majority interests at the expense of the excluded. The important insights the book offers, though, can provide a starting point to answer the second question.

Another important new book is Marcelo Bergman and Gustavo Fondevila's *Prisons and Crime in Latin America*, which offers the first comprehensive empirical analysis of penitentiary systems in Latin America. The book addresses overlooked and poorly understood issues regarding prisons and their effects on public safety. The monograph engages in a much-needed dialogue with carceral studies in the Global North, using Latin American insights to broaden global penology debates.

¹² Hinton, *State on the Streets*.

¹³ Devon W. Carbado, "From Stopping Black People to Killing Black People: The Fourth Amendment Pathways to Police Violence," *California Law Review* 105, no. 1 (2017): 125–164; Osagie K. Obasogie, "More Than Bias: How Law Produces Police Violence," *Boston University Law Review* 100, no. 3 (2020): 771–785.

¹⁴ Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein, "Violent Pluralism: Understanding the New Democracies of Latin America," in *Violent Pluralism: Understanding the New Democracies of Latin America*, ed. Daniel M. Goldstein and Enrique Desmond Arias (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822392033-002>.

The book's core argument can be summarized, paraphrasing the title of Bergman's previous volume, as "more prisons, more crime."¹⁵ Using a survey of approximately eight thousand inmates in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru, this book uses the views of inmates to understand prisons, the criminal justice system, and the experience of crime. The authors outline seven hypotheses or findings: (1) a correlation between incarceration rates and some crimes; (2) poor and young engaged in crime for profit are more frequently imprisoned; (3) prisons grow as a result of the flow of inmates through prisons; (4) gangs suppress violence in prisons; (5) low-quality criminal justice institutions lead to imprisonment for minor offenses augmenting the prison population; (6) most offenders do not desist from crime; and (6) prisoners are not truly isolated from society, thereby mitigating some of the objectives of imprisonment. The result is a growing prison system that increases criminality, making penitentiaries contributors to the broader regional crime problem rather than solutions.

This accessible and thoughtful book addresses key issues in Latin American prison systems by examining various aspects of prison life, including the role of criminal groups, engagement between the prison system and the justice system, women's experience in prisons, and how contacts between prisoners and society affect penal policy.

The book opens a much-needed conversation regarding prisons in the region. It, however, at times seems to only scratch the surface. This is an issue in the second half of the book, where the authors seek to work through causal issues. Chapter 7 raises tantalizing questions about the nature of prison dynamics, showing, for example, that more contacts with the outside, including phone calls, tend to correlate to more crime, a finding in their survey that is in tension with prevailing theories that prisoner-family contact support rehabilitation. This point is not developed with the clarity or depth that would illuminate the nature and importance of these counterproductive communications (153). In chapter 8, on prison gangs, the authors note that their survey shows that prison violence is surprisingly high in São Paulo, despite the dominance of a powerful prison gang there, a point that runs counter to their hypothesis. The author's answer to this seeming tension between their data and theory is to provide a handful of limited citations and suppositions rather than exploring this issue through their data or interviews. Chapter 9 focuses on prisoner incapacitation and other theories of penal efficacy but never quite brings together their analysis of the failure of the incapacitation model with other approaches to understanding the prisons' role in diminishing crime. In particular, the chapter seems to assume that incapacitation is the driver of Latin American prison policies, but it is not clear that this is the case, especially because sentences do not tend to be as lengthy as in the United States, and as the authors show, the region's systems seem to focus on creating some movement between prison and society. It would have been interesting to see the theory of prisons that the authors are critiquing developed further.

In the end, this depth is clearly not the authors' project. This monograph is a thoughtful and critical overview of a major and usually overlooked issue in studies of crime in Latin America. The survey is a powerful tool that provides many important insights and new ways of thinking about prisons in Latin America and around the world and provides a basis for further research and, indeed, a broader research agenda.

The last two books examined here are journalistic monographs concerning the challenges of violence and politics in Mexico and Brazil. Luis Hernández Navarro's *Self-Defense in Mexico: Indigenous Community Policing and the New Dirty Wars* and Bruno Paes Manso's *A república das milícias: Dos esquadrões da morte à era Bolsonaro* both move up levels of abstraction, deftly telling highly local stories and showing their connection into the larger picture of national politics and history.

¹⁵ Marcelo Bergman, *More Money, More Crime: Prosperity and Rising Crime in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Self-Defense in Mexico examines the roots and evolution of indigenous self-protection forces in southern Mexico. González nicely sets up the discussion through a close examination of the history of these forces and their connection to historical movements and tensions. He tells a compelling story about the evolution of Mexican politics and the limitations of how indigenous and rural populations have been incorporated into the country's evolving political and economic system since the neoliberal reforms of the Salinas administration and the post-2000 democracy. The book shows the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on Mexico's agricultural economy and the incentives it created for rural workers to engage in the drug trade. The book also examines the economic and social interconnections between Mexico and the United States and how contemporary Mexican politics have entrenched violence.

The core of the book is a close examination of the experience of violence and responses to it in Michoacán and Guerrero. The volume provides a detailed history of violence in these regions, the emergence of local self-defense groups, and their operation. The core argument is that there are broader national interests that seek to marginalize indigenous self-defense efforts.

A *república das milícias* focuses on a very different type of story that is, nonetheless, resonant with the narrative in *Self-Defense in Mexico*. Paes Manso's book examines the interconnections between vigilante paramilitary groups in Rio de Janeiro, their connection with historical death squads that emerged during Brazil's most recent dictatorship, and the family of former president Jair Bolsonaro. All this, for Paes Manso, is enmeshed in resentment among some sectors of the security services regarding their loss of power after the return to democracy in 1985. The apotheosis of this was the election of Jair Bolsonaro, a longtime pro-dictatorship congressman from Rio whose family has connections with these sectors of the military and the *milícias*.

The book weaves a many-stranded account about Rio de Janeiro in its efforts to tell a broader story of how Brazil, after thirty years of democratic rule, chose a president connected to armed groups who pined for the repressive regime he served as a young military officer. The book begins with the personal story of a member of a Rio *milícia*, a term that refers to a usually police-connected extortion racket, detailing the experiences of inhabitants of the city's suburbs and outlying neighborhoods. The book examines the *milícias'* origins in two neighborhoods in Rio's Zona Oeste (Western Zone), outlining the role of police in leading them. The next chapter examines the Jogo do Bicho (Animal Game), Rio's numbers racket, and how leaders of those groups are tied to the security forces as well as the *milícia*, and how these groups have played roles in repressing the perceived threat that the poor, and in particular those living in favelas proximate to wealthy neighborhoods, pose to the city's middle and upper classes building an ideology of security focused on protecting the *cidadão do bem* (good citizen). The book moves on to examine Rio's drug gangs and the technocratic state responses over the previous two decades, showing both the successes and the limitations of these policies as Rio de Janeiro entered a fiscal crisis after 2010, unwinding policy progress, increasing violence, and contributing to protest.

For Paes Manso, this opened two pathways. On the one hand, there was the progressive route offered by the city councilor Marielle Franco and state (later federal) deputy Marcelo Freixo, which sought to build a cross-class, citizen-led coalition to redress the grievances of Rio's many excluded, thereby liberating the state and society of the limitations of what Caldeira and Holston have called disjunctive democracy.¹⁶ Franco and her driver were assassinated by politically connected *milicianos*. Freixo was elected to the federal congress, where he found himself in office among a Rio delegation substantially connected to

¹⁶ Teresa P. R. Caldeira and James Holston, "Democracy and Violence in Brazil," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 691–729.

milícias. The other route, offered by the far right, calls for redemptive violence against criminals but ultimately against the poor, nonwhite majority that makes up Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. Paes Manso examines this strategy empirically through the emergence of a new era of *milicianos* allied with drug trafficking factions and operating in concert with a state power structure under the control of two right-wing evangelical leaders, Wilson Witzel, the governor from 2019 to 2021, and Marcelo Crivella, the mayor from 2017 to 2020. Following Paes Manso's argument, the Witzel administration sought to combat the Comando Vermelho, a powerful drug gang, in the hopes that the *milícias*, allied with another drug faction, could establish order in the city like the PCC had in São Paulo through its control of the prison system. The book then examines how the politics of resentment and reliance on the violence and order purveyed by right-wing nonstate actors generated a broad national movement that helped elect Bolsonaro president despite the problems he was likely to cause for the country.

The book is engaging and well written. Having researched the *milícias* myself, I found the narrative of these organizations' engagement with the government compelling and nuanced. The main weakness of the book is that it tries to draw too much out about Brazil from the case of Rio de Janeiro. Telling Brazil's story through Rio is always compelling in part because of the central role Rio plays in the country as its cultural capital. Jair Bolsonaro was in power for many reasons, including a loss of faith in the Workers' Party amid corruption scandals and the economic crisis of the 2010s. The *milícias* and their deep implication in Rio politics is a related but different story. Bolsonaro was elected more because of how the use of violence against the people and his attachment to the dictatorship resonated across states in different ways and in concert with the interests of regional leaders than because of the dynamics of organized crime in Rio. Exploring how different practices of violence, such as PCC dominance in São Paulo and the interests of land grabbers in the Amazon, tie together with those of *milícia*-supporting Cariocas is an interesting story but one that is not pursued here.

The findings of the rich array of scholarly works reviewed here point to some broader dimensions of the issue of crime and violence in the region. Broadly speaking, these books demonstrate that the problems of criminal and police violence seen today reflect contemporary manifestations of historical dynamics of violence. Modes of exclusion and abuses that were perpetrated in previous eras under one set of auspices today are perpetuated in the context of criminal violence. These violences are driven by historical dynamics of exclusion based on race, ethnicity, and social class, dynamics that are both cross-cutting and concatenating in much of the region. Second, the failure to resolve these profound issues perpetuates violence across generations and political systems. The experience of entrenched criminal violence over the past two generations reflects the particularities of a moment in the region's history during which generally inclusive electoral democracy was established in the context of limited substantive rights protections for many. Technological advances have enabled the deployment of relatively powerful personal armaments into civilian hands contributing to often intensely violent criminal activity that existing governments struggle to resolve in the context of political systems that have not been developed to address the struggles faced by much of the region's population. Finally, these dynamics, as the reviewed books make clear, affect multiple facets of life in the region, including family life, economic opportunity, leisure activities, community life, and basic political decision-making.

Just as the monographs reviewed here tell us much about the history and dynamics of the region, they also provide a sketch of important directions for future research. First, they suggest that scholars should devote attention not just to the question of crime and how it affects violence narrowly but also to how it affects a variety of different aspects of

social, political, and economic life, something visible in other recent works.¹⁷ Second, these books point in the direction of thinking about how different strategies to resolve these issues that go beyond saying the police should be better or corruption should be limited, including how social movements and other collective responses operate. Finally, these books indicate the importance of more transregional research and developing a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between the real challenges generated by crime and violence in Latin America today and how these same dynamics affect other global regions.

Enrique Desmond Arias is the Marxe Chair of Western Hemisphere Affairs at Baruch College and is the director of the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Affairs and a member of the faculty of the Doctoral Program in Political Science, the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is the author of *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean* and *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro*. He is the coeditor of *Cocaine and Violent Democracies in Latin America*. His writings have appeared in the *Latin American Research Review*, *Comparative Politics*, *Political Geography*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *Current Sociology*, and *Latin American Politics, and Society*.

¹⁷ Eduardo Moncada, *Resisting Extortion: Victims, Criminals, and States in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Matías Dewey, *Making It at Any Cost: Aspirations and Politics in a Counterfeit Clothing Marketplace* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020); Jenny Pearce, "Political Regime and the Reproduction of Violence and Criminality in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Conversation," *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 4 (2020): 859–868, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.1288>.

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