

Editorial

Violence and (In)Security in Latin America

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◆ The second volume of **CROLAR**, the first multilingual online review journal on scientific publications on Latin American Research, treats the topic „Violence and (In)security“. In the last years, the study of violence and (in-)security in Latin America has gained momentum, resulting in a rich output of scientific and journalistic work. This is because violence and insecurity pervade the whole subcontinent, even though their forms and levels as well as the affected persons and perpetrators vary vastly from country to country. Beside this variation the topic of violence and (in-)security is of interest, because of its mayor importance for various aspects of everyday life, culture, economics or politics in numerous Latin American countries.

Violent actors can frequently be found on both sides of the line between legality and illegality and may even blur the boundaries between state and non-state violence. State actors like police officers might work for drug cartels or commit other forms of illegitimate violence such as bodily harm. Such blurrings of the distinction between legally legitimized and not legitimized violence actors is the primary focus of the current volume; an ambivalence which traverses almost all of the reviewed books.

The so-called “war on drugs” (la guerra contra el narco) in Mexico illustrates the complexity and variety of violence and

insecurity in Latin America. The Mexican drug war is attended by a tremendous rise of violence by organized drug traffickers, paramilitary-style armed groups, police and military forces. But it is not clear at all, who stands on which side. Such (il)legitimate actors commit various forms of violence like murders, torture, oppression, threatening different groups like women, civil society actors, journalists, members of enemy cartels, undocumented migrants to the United States, police officers and state officials. Because of its complexity and magnitude, the Mexican drug war is a widely discussed and investigated case of violence and insecurity in Latin America and thus also provides main thematic and regional foci of the current volume.

The Mexican drug war, however, is by far not the first and also not the only example of violence and insecurity as a major impact on Latin American societies. Various configurations in different countries of the region are marked and affected by the persisting violence and insecurity. At the same time, however, these cases also shed light on the changing forms and “faces” of violence and of its actors and victims over time. That’s why publications that analyze the following cases were also selected for reviews: police violence in urban areas in Argentina, the drug conflict in Brazilian favelas, the long-standing conflict between guerillas, paramilitaries and

military forces in Colombia, the civil wars and the violence by organized crime in Central America, and, finally, the conflict between the student movement and the authoritarian regime in Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s. All these examples demonstrate the ways in which violence and security provides a multidimensional phenomenon in Latin America, with different roots, actors and histories.

However, insecurity and violence can hardly be reduced to explicit forms of physical violence: First, the everyday presence of violence and organized and structural crime is likely to lead to a perception of insecurity, which commonly exceeds the real crime rate. Perceived insecurity can affect societies in a similar manner as factually experienced violence. Second, due to severe inequalities in Latin America, social and economic in-security is the norm for large parts of the populations. Constant income insecurity, limited access to the justice system and everyday struggles of marginalized parts of society cannot be ignored when studying violence and insecurity in Latin America.

Taking such a broader perspective of security and violence into account, some authors argue that the neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 90s have influenced the rise of insecurity and violence in the Latin American in crucial ways. This is an argument, which is commonly found in the reviewed publications and should remind us of the socio-economic context in which violence and insecurity persist in Latin America.

Due to the fact that scientific studies take a long time, the journalistic books are often more up-to-date and thus provide important references for scientific debates. Therefore, the second volume of **CROLAR**

reviews both scientific and journalistic literature. Consequently, the present volume contains book reviews treating Latin America as a whole, including comparative approaches as well as case studies from different scientific disciplines. It covers analyses of diverging aspects of general topics such as femicide, (in)security in cities, state (police and military) violence, privatization of security services, or violence by non-state actor groups like crime organizations, guerillas and paramilitary groups. Moreover, this volume of **CROLAR** refers to the theoretical approaches applied in the reviewed works to capture violence and insecurity, such as the concept of violent pluralism. A review of Pierre Bourdieu's lectures (1989-1992) *Sur L'État*, published in 2012, discusses a new piece of his classical work criticizing his understanding of the states' symbolic coercion as a top-down process.

Finally, reviews on political interventions and current debates give further insights into other current topics in Latin American Research like populism, tax policy, or the construction of identities and cultural practices shaped by migration. ♦