
Violence in Latin America

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Violent situations are present all over the world, no region escapes criminal episodes; however, Latin America stands out as one of the most violent. It has been like this historically, or at least for a long time, so that today, when we talk about insecurity, our continent is at the top of the list, both for scholars with the results of their social research, and for the common person who watches the news and has the experience of visiting Latin American countries.

It's true that events happen, however, I believe the media make them visible above the positive facts these regions can experience. The newscasts prey on the fateful, and it's important to report because it's reality, but it seems as if people in Latin America have no achievements, no happy moments, and are constantly at odds with each other. We will talk about the role of the media in opinion formation in another text.

Haiti comes to mind. I've never been there and I imagine it as in the medieval confrontations in Europe, or a little more here, in the Old West of the movies: a setting where you cannot even look up because a crossed wink would be enough to unleash a conflict to the death, a confrontation type gunslinger or swordsmen, thirsty for power and riches, whatever the cost.

From the fearsome Vikings and the outlaws of the spaghetti westerns, at present, there are only legends. Why, then, in Latin America do so many criminal expressions continue? A culture of violence reigns. I feel that we did not evolve, that we stayed in prehistorical times, like when we acted on impulse, wildly, without reason.

Social violence in Latin America is due not so much to politics or power reasons, but to

inequalities, and education plays a role. It's also evident in Africa, where facts are just as bloody, but today we will talk about ours. I remember murders and massacres with a high level of morbidity. It's not enough just to kill another man to seize what the criminal wants, it's often the intensity, the stain that's evident at the crime scene, which sometimes does not even respond to economic interests; sometimes they do it to "settle scores", to "cleanse honor" or mark territory, exactly as in fiction, or worse.

I share two facts that marked me. In October 2014, the murder of Robert Serra, a 27-year-old Venezuelan congressman who was gagged, beaten, his throat slit, and stabbed nearly 50 times in the chest. Then it was not enough and there's also the morbidity of those who spread images for all to see, since the photographs of Serra, at the morgue, circulated on Twitter with total impunity. That is also a way of violence to others, and to show how heartless you can be.

The second case, also related to social networks, because it was there that I saw it. It's about the sacrifice of a Brazilian woman in a wood area. At least three men were involved: one of them filmed her, and the others held her while with two huge knives they separated her head from her body. I don't want to detail how she screamed for her life, the sound of the blows, or the look of the individuals. I will only say that with a voice of triumph they repeated never again, in perfect Portuguese, and very easy to translate.

It gave me the idea of punishment. It's the most atrocious thing I've ever seen, and the images do not fade. I think then that I will never understand why people react aggressively, and that there must be a mental imbalance that justifies such behavior.

The violence in certain regions of Latin America seems sick to me, its criminal factor is excessive, and it compromises citizen peacefulness. There are areas where the police forces cannot even show and they are popularly feared. The favelas of Brazil, the Venezuelan hills, the camps in Chile, the slums in Argentina, or the slums in Central America; They are all precarious settlements, where life is very difficult, different from what we know.

Millions of people live in those places. They have in common their irregular composition, poverty, the recruitment of children who begin their criminal activities early. They are organized by parcels where gangs "command" and stalk their surroundings when their needs are not met inside.

Social researchers indicate that crime contexts also have a response in the little access to education, in the lack of job opportunities, that is, in government vacuums, in addition to the increasing availability of firearms, which favors crime.

The high rate of violence does concerns government officials, but sometimes it's not so easy to act, it's too hairy for them. Facing insecurity is almost always on their agendas, and it's one of the campaign messages of each regional or national candidate. Recently, an example that stands out is the work of the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, for his attempts to suffocate the gang groups that ranked that small country as one of the most violent in Central America. But it's only one case and still without really conclusive results.

According to statistics of homicide and street violence, Latin America keeps rates that have an impact on development, politics, and social quality, on top of that the little management of governments, for whatever reasons. There are many groups that defend human rights that make visible the problems of these vulnerable populations and advocate for more work, attention, and disarmament.

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