

# CHAPTER 4

## THE LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE, INEQUALITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

- Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region in the world.
- Inequality fosters criminal, political, and social violence in LAC.
- Because violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, it perpetuates and amplifies inequality in various aspects of human development, including rights, income, health, education, and political representation.
- Violence also impacts economic growth through its impact on individuals, firms, communities, and institutions.
- Violence is therefore an important factor underlying the high-inequality low-growth trap in LAC and its eradication requires active policy interventions in several areas.
- Given the prevalence of violence and its serious impact on human development, the region desperately needs more and better data, especially on the most serious forms of violence that afflict the region.

## 4.1. Violence underlies the high-inequality, low-growth trap in LAC

Violence remains all too common for many people across the Latin America and the Caribbean region. The region is home to only 9 percent of the world's population, but currently accounts for 34 percent of total violent deaths.<sup>1</sup> UNDP signalled in 2013 that most LAC countries exhibited homicide rates that are considered epidemic by World Health Organization (WHO) standards, a fact that still holds.<sup>2</sup> Violence or the threat of violence in various contexts have become a bargaining chip among state and non-state actors to reach and sustain agreements. It is thus a fundamental part of the struggle over the distribution of resources, rights, opportunities, and power in the region.<sup>3</sup> And it is a common underlying factor that both propels and is driven by the region's high-inequality, low-growth trap.

Greater inequality may foster the conditions for more violence. From an economic standpoint, the reasoning behind this link is that greater disparities are likely to introduce incentives that make the returns to illegal activities comparatively more attractive than the returns to legal alternatives.<sup>4</sup> From a sociological standpoint, the theory of relative deprivation suggests that inequality engenders frustration and alienation among the dispossessed through perceptions of disadvantage, a lack of opportunity, and unfairness, which, together, spur violent conduct.<sup>5</sup> The contours of criminal conduct are influenced by contextual characteristics, including the effectiveness and reliability of social control networks and punitive systems.<sup>6</sup> Criminal conduct may also be affected by changes in the behaviour of potential victims in response to crime through greater reliance on private security.<sup>7</sup> Potential victims may also modify their consumption decisions.<sup>8</sup> In the past, UNDP diagnosed the rising levels of violence and insecurity in LAC as a product of the absence of inclusive growth and the stagnation in social mobility, which triggered persistent inequalities, job precarity, and expansions in consumption expectations.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, political scientists have long debated whether inequality is a critical determinant of political violence, especially civil war. Although several studies have not found a systematic relationship between the two, others contend that both political and economic inequality contribute to the onset and duration of civil war.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chioda (2017).

<sup>2</sup> UNDP (2013); WHO defines epidemic homicide rates as those that surpass 10 homicides per 100,000 population.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (2009), (2012), (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Becker (1968); Ehrlich (1973).

<sup>5</sup> Merton (1938).

<sup>6</sup> Shaw and McKay (1942); Kornhauser (1978); Kelly (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Di Tella, Galiani, and Schargrodsky (2010); Amodio (2019).

<sup>8</sup> Mejía and Restrepo (2016); Galiani, Jaitman, and Weinschelbaum (2020).

<sup>9</sup> UNDP (2013).

<sup>10</sup> See Cederman and Vogt (2017) for an overview of the debate and recent findings.

However, violence and crime victimization may potentially also reproduce inequality by broadening gaps in developmental outcomes. Although less often the focus of academic research, this directional impact seems credible if one acknowledges that violence is often experienced disproportionately by populations already facing socio-economic adversities, thus amplifying or perpetuating their state of deprivation.<sup>11</sup> The effect of violence is multidimensional because it can lead to the deterioration of rights and liberties, worsen physical and mental health, reduce educational and labour participation outcomes, and lower political participation among victimized individuals. Violence can also fracture social capital, threaten democratic institutions locally and nationally, and obstruct public goods provision in victimized communities. Violence can therefore be both a consequence and a cause of inequality.<sup>12</sup>

Violence is linked not only to inequality, but also to growth. At the macroeconomic level, crime and violence can reduce and distort investment, affect human capital formation and thus productivity, and lead to physical and natural capital depletion.<sup>13</sup> Recent calculations peg the average cost of homicide across the countries of LAC at close to 4.1 percent of national gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>14</sup> The direct and indirect costs of crime in LAC are estimated at 3 percent of GDP in the average country and more than 6 percent in the most violent Central American countries.<sup>15</sup> The World Bank estimates that the cost of medical expenses, lost productivity, and public expenditures on security is equivalent to 3.7 percent of yearly production.<sup>16</sup> This represents a substantial waste of public resources that becomes necessary for defense, policing, prevention programmes, and punishment. The macroeconomic costs of violence translate into greater income inequality, especially if they prevent countries from investing in policies that would reduce inequality or if lower levels of economic growth derived from violence force governments to abandon institutional welfare interventions. Violence is thus capable of distorting public and private resource allocation, thereby contributing to the persistence of inequality.

The rest of this chapter explores the role of violence as an underlying factor in both high inequality and low growth.<sup>17</sup> It first investigates recent historical patterns in crime and violence in the region and disentangles criminal, political, social, and domestic violence. It then offers a careful reflection on the channels through which violence translates into inequality and perpetuates a vicious cycle, and it examines the routes through which violence is detrimental to productivity and economic growth. It discusses lines of action that would contribute to lessening the incidence of violence, leading to more equal and productive societies.

<sup>11</sup> Arjona (2021).

<sup>12</sup> UNDP (2013); Arjona (2021).

<sup>13</sup> Lederman, Loayza, and Menéndez (2002); Soares (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Fearon and Hoeffler (2014).

<sup>15</sup> Jaitman (2017).

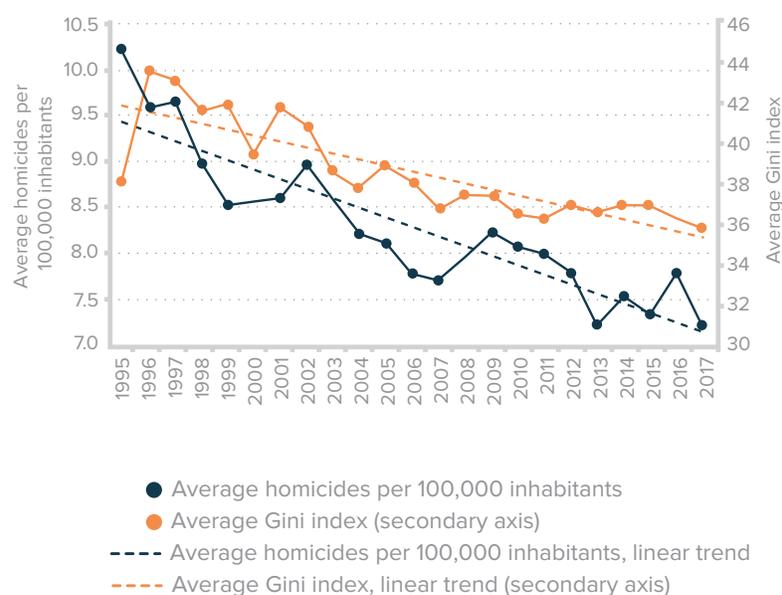
<sup>16</sup> World Bank (2004).

<sup>17</sup> This chapter builds on two background papers for this RHDR: Arjona (2021) and Schargrodsky and Freira (2021).

## 4.2. Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most violent regions in the world

The turn of the century has seen a generalized decrease in income inequality and violence in the world (figure 4.1) and in LAC (figure 4.2). Yet, LAC has maintained its position as one of the most unequal and most violent regions in the world. Between 2000 and 2018, intentional homicide rates in each of the LAC subregions significantly surpassed worldwide averages.<sup>18</sup> Central and South America consistently experienced higher rates than the Caribbean (figure 4.3). Moreover, the countries in LAC exhibited vastly higher homicide and crime victimization rates than other countries at similar levels of inequality (figures 4.4 and 4.5).

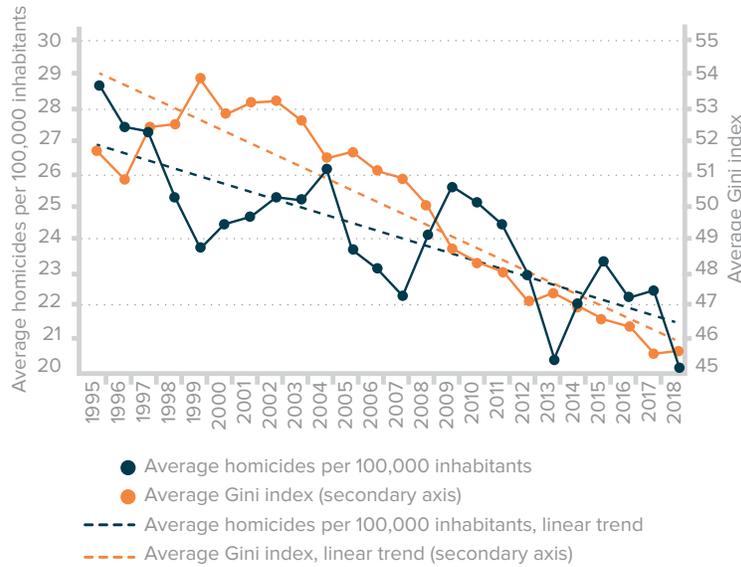
**Figure 4.1: In the world, both the homicide rate and income inequality have decreased**  
*Homicide rate and income inequality (Gini), world, 1995-2017*



Source: Schargrodsky and Freira 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.  
Note: Averages are calculated using the sample of countries available for each year. The total number of countries is 106: Africa (21), Asia (24), Eastern Europe (21), LAC (21), North America (2), Oceania (1), and Western Europe (16).

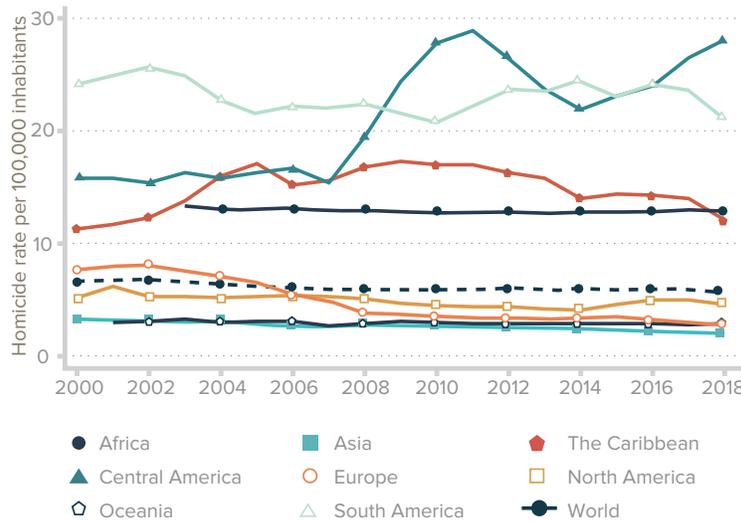
<sup>18</sup> Intentional homicide statistics include all deaths with origins in interpersonal, criminal, and socio-political violence, excluding deaths from civil unrest, killings in self-defense, killings in legal interventions, and non-intentional deaths.

**Figure 4.2: In LAC, both the homicide rate and income inequality have decreased**  
*Homicide rate and income inequality (Gini), LAC, 1995–2018*



Source: UNDP elaboration; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.  
 Note: Averages are calculated using the sample of countries available for each year. Not every country is available every year. The sample includes 21 LAC countries.

**Figure 4.3. Homicide rates in LAC subregions significantly surpass worldwide averages**  
*Intentional homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in world regions and LAC subregions*



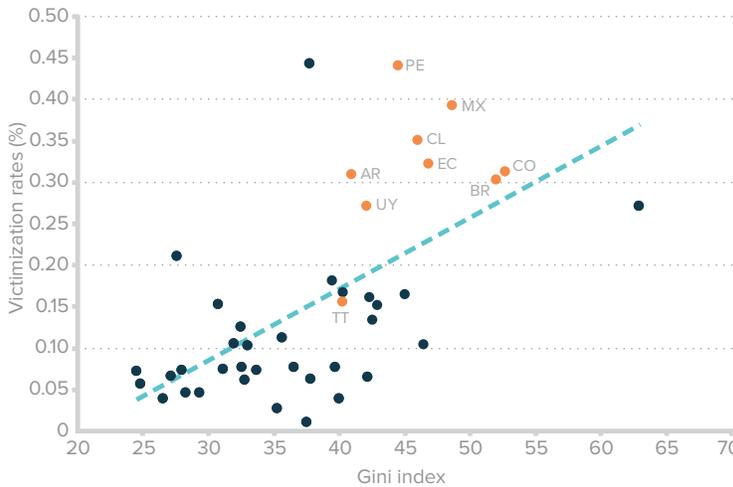
Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; data of Global Study on Homicide: 2019 Edition (dashboard), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>.

**Figure 4.4: LAC countries have higher homicide rates than countries at similar inequality levels**  
*Homicide rates and income inequality (Gini), world, 1995–2017*



Source: Schargrodsy and Freira 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.  
 Note: LAC countries are represented by orange dots. Averages are calculated for each country using the available year observations from 1995 to 2017. The total number of countries is 106: Africa (21), Asia (24), Eastern Europe (21), LAC (21), North America (2), Oceania (1), and Western Europe (16).

**Figure 4.5: LAC countries have higher victimization rates than countries at similar inequality levels**  
*Crime victimization rates and income inequality (Gini), world, 2010–2014*



Source: Schargrodsy and Freira 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>; WVS (World Values Survey) (dashboard), King's College, Old Aberdeen, United Kingdom, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.  
 Note: LAC countries are represented by orange dots. The crime victimization question was included in the World Values Survey between 2010 and 2014, but during only one year in each country. The Gini index corresponds to the year the victimization rate was available or the closest available year. The total number of countries is 42: Africa (7), Asia (12), Eastern Europe (10), LAC (9), North America (1), and Western Europe (3).

Homicides and other forms of crime victimization are only two of many ways in which violence manifests itself in the region, however. Arjona (2021) proposes a typology of violence based on three categories: criminal violence, that is, interpersonal or collective violence linked to criminal activities; political violence, that is, interpersonal or collective violence that occurs in relation to socio-political agendas; and social and domestic violence, that is, interpersonal and occasionally collective violence linked to conflicts among people who do not live in the same household (social) or people who do live in the same household (domestic).

The widespread influence of organized crime, fuelled by the drug trade, on the region's economic and socio-political landscape has made LAC home to an array of manifestations of criminal violence that include human trafficking, illicit natural resource extraction, threats to highly ecologically valuable ecosystems, forced displacement, criminal governance, robberies, physical attacks, extortions, and kidnappings. Political violence is also prominent. Although most violent forms of contentious politics and state repression have been decreasing in the region, some forms of political violence have risen, including abuses by militarized public security forces and the persecution and assassination of politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, and environmental and civic leaders. For instance, United Nations data indicate that 75 percent of worldwide assassinations of human rights defenders between 2015 and 2019 occurred in LAC.<sup>19</sup> In the case of social and domestic violence, the region is currently struggling with high levels of sexual violence, femicide, and violence towards children. It has the third highest lifetime prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated by non-partners and the second highest rate of violence perpetrated by partners. Violence against sexual minorities is also among the highest in the world.<sup>20</sup>

Measuring violence entails multiple challenges. Violent events, including serious ones such as rape, often go unreported. Even homicides, more likely to be recorded in official data, are tricky because the legal definition of intentional homicide varies across countries, as does the capacity of governments to collect and report data on homicides systematically. It is not uncommon for different agencies within a same country to report different numbers of homicides. The challenges in measuring other forms of violence are even greater because this relies on individuals to denounce violent events or report them in surveys. While some recent efforts have strengthened information reporting systems in the region (box 4.1), statistical reliability and cross-country comparability are generally inadequate. This report recognizes these limitations. It does not pretend to quantify precisely the various violent phenomena afflicting the region. Rather, relying on available data, country reports and comparative studies, it seeks to describe the main trends in different forms of violence in LAC.

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<sup>19</sup> HRC (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; CIDH 2015; SinViolencia LGBTI (2019).

## Box 4.1: Infosegura: Innovation at the service of citizen security

New technology is making it easier to produce and disseminate information at greater speeds. Yet, data alone do not guarantee the social or cultural changes required to advance towards sustainable development. The Infosegura Regional Project, which was first implemented by UNDP in 2014 with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to strengthen institutional capacities in information management and promote comprehensive gender-sensitive and human rights–based policies through innovation in matters related to citizen security in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

Infosegura helps national institutions and UNDP country offices broaden their view on information management, concentrating on the development of tools and the production of knowledge to inform policies on violence prevention, the promotion of citizen security, and social cohesion. This involves a complex multidimensional approach aligned with the Sustainable Development Agenda. The initiative has enhanced the capacity of participating institutions to generate information with new, automated tools and integrated data ecosystems. It encourages analysis at greater levels of disaggregation, territorialization and georeferencing. All this helps reach the most vulnerable demographic groups and geographic areas through targeted interventions that leave no one behind.

To establish greater transparency and integration, the initiative also encourages institutions to advance towards an open data policy in matters of citizen security, create partnerships for the exchange of information and produce, analyse and disseminate information formerly restricted to each country's security agency across state or local institutions. This has allowed a more effective use of evidence in the design and monitoring of public policies. It has also led to a better understanding of the immediate surroundings of vulnerable communities exposed to violence and insecurity. This has occurred through a territorial prioritization and targeting methodology that has already been incorporated by El Salvador's Ministry of Justice and Public Security and Guatemala's Ministry of the Interior. In Honduran municipalities, it has supported local governance by facilitating the establishment of observatories on violence and assisting in the design of strategies to tackle insecurity and promote coexistence.

Infosegura is committed to bringing together a community of regional knowledge on citizen security by endorsing national and regional knowledge networks and producing a digital platform (Datacción). The purpose is to stimulate regional multisectoral work in information management on citizen security, showcase the efforts of UNDP country offices and government institutions and facilitate

the transfer and scaling up of best practices and innovation proposals. Likewise, Infosegura has helped strengthen the technical capacities of information sources and their information management techniques and tools to compile indicators on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16. Apart from better data on violent deaths, femicides, and sexual violence, support has been supplied in survey harmonization, the mapping of national actors who produce information, and Sustainable Development Agenda–oriented monitoring frameworks.

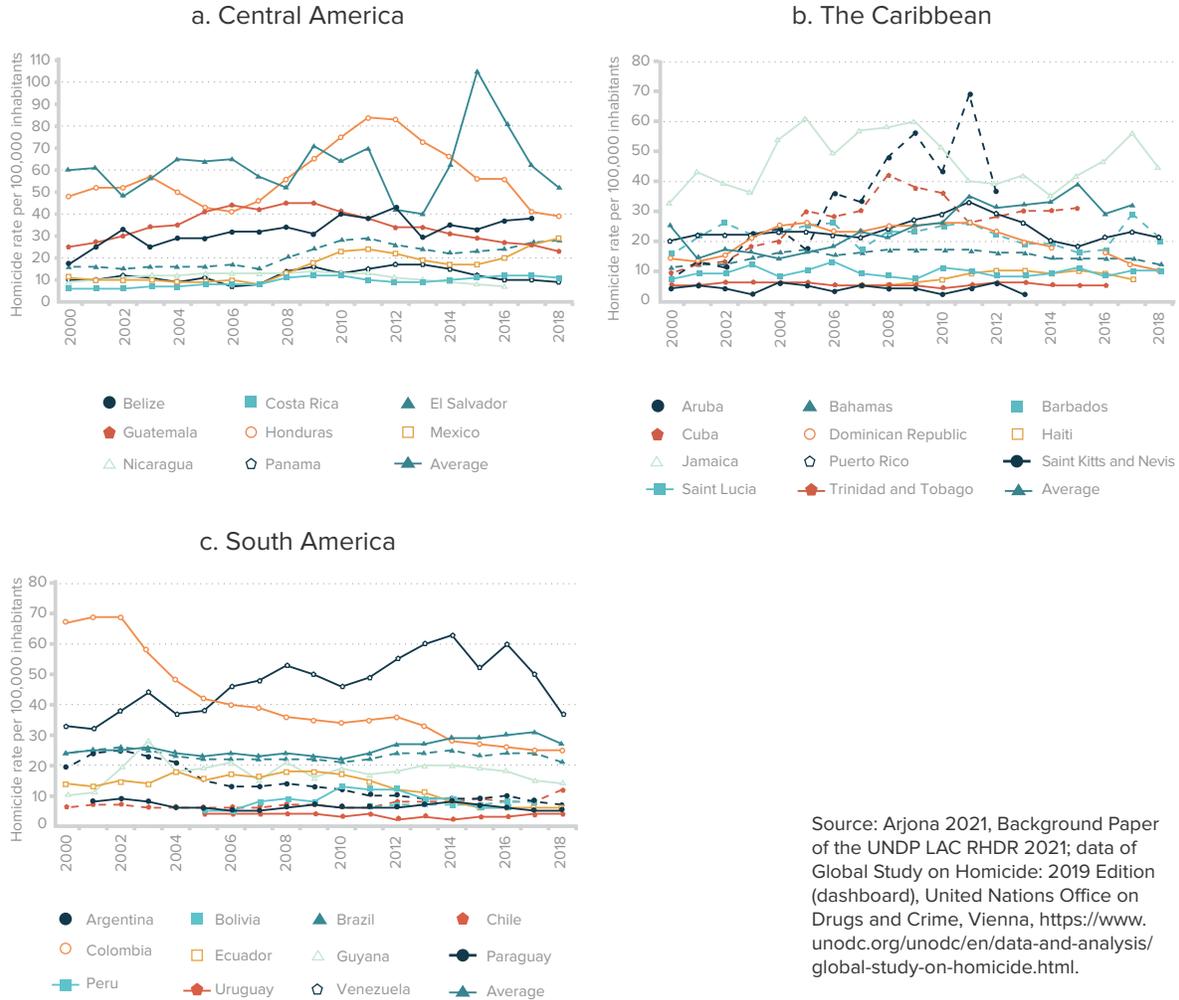
Source: Infosegura, Regional coordination unit of the Infosegura project, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean & Regional Center for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Development Programme, Panama <https://infosegura.org/>.

## Patterns in criminal violence

During the 20th Century, LAC was profoundly permeated by violence of a predominantly political nature because of turmoil derived from the vestiges of struggles for independence, severe state repression of civil rights, and internal civil conflicts aggravated by the growing strength of insurgencies and pro-state militias. It was only after the democratization wave of the 1980s and the subsequent advent of organized crime and expansion of drug trafficking during the 1990s that patterns of violence in the region shifted from political to criminal motives, which currently explain most homicides. Yet, despite this shared history of violence, there is substantial intraregional and subnational heterogeneity. Not all crimes and violence are equal, and countries in the region differ greatly by the types and the intensity of the crimes and violence they face. The trends by subregion in the current century indicate that the intentional homicide rates in some countries exceed the rates in other countries in the same subregion by two, three and even thirteen times (figure 4.6). The highest rates in Central America during the period are observed in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, while Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and the Bahamas display the highest rates in the Caribbean. In South America, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela had significantly higher rates than the rest of the countries in the subregion. Overall, average intentional homicide rates in LAC between 2000 and 2018 show tremendous variation across countries (figure 4.7).

**Figure 4.6: Homicide rates in some countries are three or thirteen times the rates elsewhere in the same subregion**

*Intentional homicide rate across LAC subregions, 2000-2018*



**Figure 4.7: There is huge variation in homicide rates across LAC countries**

*Average intentional homicide rate in LAC, 2000–2018*



Homicidal violence in the region also varies greatly within countries. For instance, some states and cities in Mexico have homicide rates above 200 per 100,000 inhabitants, while others have rates below 2, and some regions in Chile experience 3 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants whereas others report a rate of 0.5.<sup>21</sup> Violence may even be concentrated in a few localities, as in El Salvador, where about 5 percent of the municipalities accounted for almost half of all homicides in 2013, and Brazil, where violence in cities such as Belo Horizonte takes place principally in 6 districts out of 81.<sup>22</sup> Even within cities, there is large variation. For example, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, 50 percent of homicides in 2016 occurred in only 1.1 percent of the urban space.<sup>23</sup>

Lethal crime in the least violent nations, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay, is mainly a result of domestic violence and acts of common delinquency.<sup>24</sup> However, homicides in the most violent countries are typically linked to the drug trade and other illicit economies.<sup>25</sup> This violence is often associated with competition among organized criminal groups, their confrontations with state security, and conflict within criminal organizations.<sup>26</sup> Although there is temporal variation in the levels of criminal violence within and across countries, organized crime in the region has become increasingly violent over the last two decades. Owing to the instability and subsequent splintering of Mexican drug trafficking organizations and their confrontation with each other and state authorities after changes in the political sphere, the country's homicide rate tripled in 10 years.<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, the international focus on cracking down on Colombian and Mexican drug networks pushed criminal groups to expand towards Central America to establish new routes for their trafficking operations. It is estimated that gangs in charge of coordinating the drug trade in this subregion were involved in about 26 percent of all the homicides in Latin America in 2011.<sup>28</sup> Organized crime has made Central America the most violent subregion in the world in per capita terms. El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala lead the trend.

Meanwhile, Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela are the countries most affected by criminal violence in South America. The use of profits from the drug trade by both guerrilla and paramilitary groups to fund their operations has tightly linked political and criminal violence in Colombia, and transitional efforts have been unsuccessful in dismantling dissidences from both factions that continue to exert their influence in vulnerable areas. In Brazil, the homicide rate oscillated between 25 and 30 per

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<sup>21</sup> Muggah and Tobón (2018).

<sup>22</sup> UNDP (2013); Jaitman (2017).

<sup>23</sup> Chainey and Muggah (2020).

<sup>24</sup> Lagos and Dammert (2012).

<sup>25</sup> Yashar (2018).

<sup>26</sup> Reuter (2009); Yashar (2018).

<sup>27</sup> Lessing (2018).

<sup>28</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011).

100,000 population between 1990 and 2019, but there is great subnational variation. Homicides in the country's northeastern and midwest states have been on the rise since 2000, while the southeastern states have become less violent; in addition, more highly populated municipalities have recently seen homicide rates stabilize or decline, while smaller municipalities have become increasingly more violent.<sup>29</sup> Venezuela saw the homicide rate increase from 13 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1991 to 60 in 2019.

The impact of the drug trade in the Caribbean, which had ceased to be important after the cocaine boom during the 1980s, has regained its influence since the mid-2000s.<sup>30</sup> Nowadays, it has not only turned Dominican Republic and Jamaica into key traffic routes to North America and Europe, but has also increased the levels of violence, corruption and the coercive capacity of gangs.<sup>31</sup> All countries in the subregion except for Barbados and Suriname faced rising homicide rates and increasing gang-related killings during the 2000s.<sup>32</sup>

Criminal violence in LAC has also been characterized by the prevalence of forced displacement, which affected about 265,000 Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorians between 2013 and 2018.<sup>33</sup> Forced displacement has also affected thousands of Mexicans and, as a result of both criminal and political violence, more than eight million Colombians.<sup>34</sup> Robberies and physical attacks are rampant, making LAC the region with the highest level of reported physical assaults and violent robberies worldwide, according to the crime statistics of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The AmericasBarometer survey found that, between 2010 and 2014, an average of one respondent in five in the region reported that they had been a victim of a robbery in the previous 12 months.<sup>35</sup> The average share of respondents who report that they have been a victim of a crime in the previous 12 months varied greatly across countries between 2010 and 2014 (figure 4.8). The respective rates in Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay exceed 20 percent; rates in Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay oscillate between 10 percent and 20 percent, and the rates in the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago are all below 10 percent.

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<sup>29</sup> Nsoesie et al. (2020).

<sup>30</sup> UNODC (2012).

<sup>31</sup> UNDP (2012).

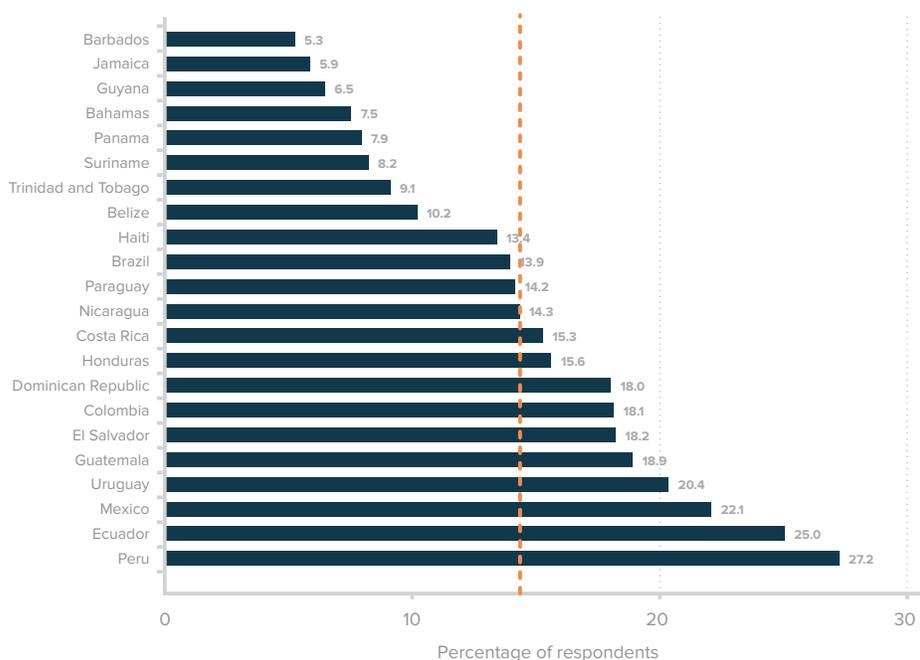
<sup>32</sup> UNDP (2012).

<sup>33</sup> CRS (2019).

<sup>34</sup> Ríos Contreras (2014); UNHCR (2018).

<sup>35</sup> See AmericasBarometer (dashboard), Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.

**Figure 4.8: More than 1 LAC resident in 10 has been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months**  
 Respondents who report they were victims of a crime in the previous 12 months, average %, 2010–2014



Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; data of AmericasBarometer (dashboard), Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.  
 Note: The LAC average is shown by the dotted orange line.

In the region's most violent countries, extortion and kidnappings have also represented a pervasive form of criminal violence. Colombian guerrillas, paramilitaries, and criminal groups have relied on both, although kidnappings have decreased substantially since the early 2000s.<sup>36</sup> Gangs in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras rely on extortion as a main source of income.<sup>37</sup> It is common for drug trafficking organizations in Mexico to carry out extortions and kidnappings in their areas of influence.<sup>38</sup> Organized criminal groups have also found abundant profits in illicit mining, particularly in the extraction of gold. These mining operations, which account for 28 percent of all gold mined in Peru, 30 percent in Bolivia, 77 percent in Ecuador, 80 percent in Colombia, and between 80 percent and 90 percent in Venezuela, are associated with labour exploitation and human trafficking as well as drastic environmental degradation and the contamination of water resources (box 4.2).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See Observatorio de Memoria y Conflicto (dashboard), Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia, <http://micrositios.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/observatorio/>.

<sup>37</sup> International Crisis Group (2017).

<sup>38</sup> Magaloni et al. (2020).

<sup>39</sup> Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (2016).

## Box 4.2: Illegal, unregulated mining is a source of environmental conflict and destruction in LAC

Illegal mining operations are widespread across LAC, and regulatory conditions and environmental and health standards in operations that do have legal concessions or permits are often unenforced. Because of the extractive character of mining, its abundant economic benefits are often unevenly distributed among local communities or diverted into the hands of corporations, corrupt state authorities, or organized criminal groups.<sup>a</sup> The resulting permanent damage to natural resources and ecosystems predominantly affect local livelihoods. For this reason, mining projects in the region have repeatedly been met with resistance or unrest among local communities.<sup>b</sup> Moreover, local territorial, political and economic rights are often disregarded in the context of large extractive activities, and the demands raised among communities against these violations have in some cases been ignored or met by violent persecution.<sup>c</sup>

In LAC, artisanal and small-scale gold mining is largely unregulated and continues to be practiced using traditional techniques that negatively impact the environment. As the main driver of deforestation in Suriname, the world's most forested country, gold mining was responsible for 73 percent of forest clearance between 2000 and 2015, resulting in greenhouse gas emissions of close to 55 million tonnes of carbon dioxide.<sup>d</sup> In addition, this type of gold mining leads to soil degradation and the erosion and sedimentation of water streams. Without adequate restoration and rehabilitation, mined areas degrade into naked soil, grass and stagnant water, irreversibly diminishing biodiversity, carbon stocks, and environmental goods and services provided by ecosystems. Biodiversity losses derived from this type of mining are especially associated with the decimation of fish species. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining is also the main source of anthropogenic depletion of mercury into the environment, amounting to roughly 37 percent of global mercury emissions in 2018.<sup>e</sup> LAC is the main contributor to mercury emissions derived from artisanal and small-scale gold mining, representing around 42 percent of total emissions associated with this activity. Through the ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, countries in the region have committed to phasing out the use of mercury.<sup>f</sup> Some have even banned its use. Nonetheless, miners still lack the tools and skills to operate without mercury, and thus a black market for the metal has emerged,

pushing many miners in predominantly informal work conditions into illegality, and leaving them the tough choice between ensuring their livelihoods and preserving the health of ecosystems and themselves.

<sup>a</sup> Loayza and Rigolini (2016).

<sup>b</sup> Schröder et al. (2020).

<sup>c</sup> GRISUL (2018).

<sup>d</sup> NIMOS, SBB, and UNIQUE (2017).

<sup>e</sup> AMAP and UNEP (2019).

<sup>f</sup> BCCC, SCRC, and UNEP (2014).

The region has also witnessed violence against indigenous groups. This violence is associated with state and private actors who are seeking to control natural capital assets of strategic value, including forests that are to be transformed into agriculture pastures in land speculation schemes, as well as mineral, fossil, and water resources. The commodities boom during the 2000s that resulted in high prices on many key metals elevated the demand and pressure for extractive activities, making violence over resources even more prevalent. Tensions rose between local communities attempting to protect their rights over land and extractive industries intent on seizing control over valuable assets, triggering violence in many countries in the region.<sup>40</sup>

### Patterns in political violence

State violence and violent acts associated with contentious politics have declined in the region during the 21st Century. Social mobilization has generally been peaceful. Only 23 percent of the average 39 protests each year between 2000 and 2012 were violent.<sup>41</sup> Since 2013, there has been a slight increase in both the number of protests and the proportion that are violent, but the numbers vary widely within and across subregions (figure 4.9). Between 2000 and 2019, violent protests in South America were most common in Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela. Mexico was the scene of substantial violent protests, and most violent protests in Central America occurred in Honduras and Nicaragua. According to the limited data on protests in the Caribbean, Haiti and Jamaica had the highest number of violent protests in the subregion.

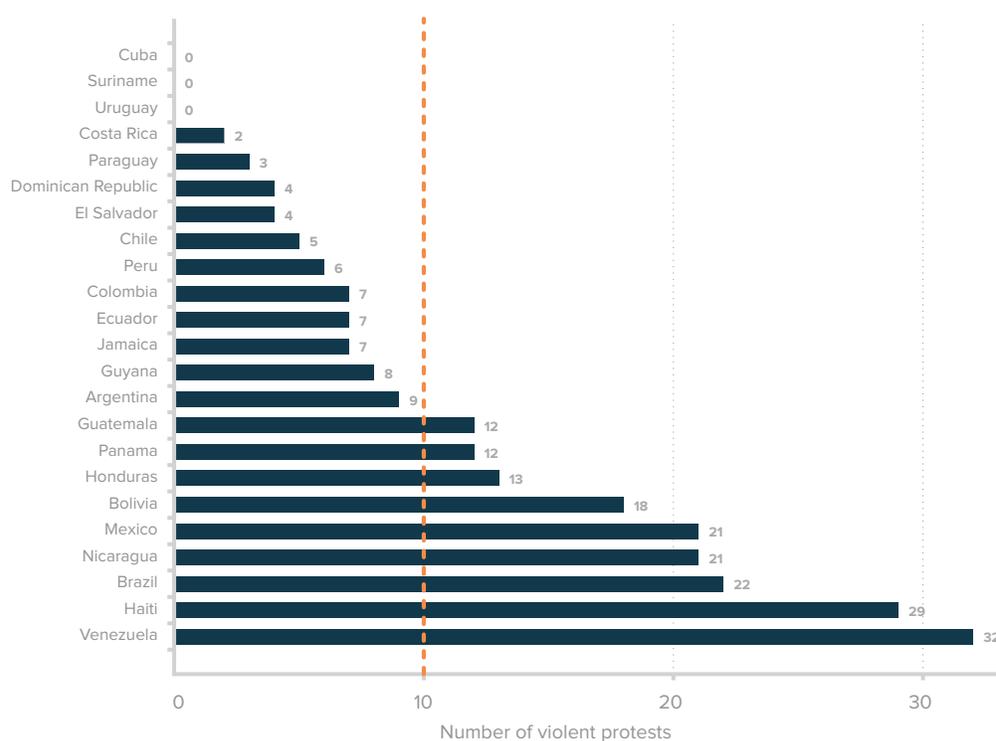
<sup>40</sup> Rasch (2017); Martínez-Alier (2021).

<sup>41</sup> Clark and Regan (2016).

Another form of violence related to this phenomenon, which became particularly evident during the widespread protests across the region in 2019, was the excessive use of force and emergency declarations that suspended basic rights and freedoms with which several states responded to demonstrations and which were responsible for more than 200 deaths.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 4.9: Demonstrations have been generally peaceful, but violent protests are an issue in several countries**

*Number of violent protests in LAC countries, 2000–2019*



Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; data of Clark and Regan 2016; Mass Mobilization Protest Data (dashboard), Harvard Dataverse version 5.0, Harvard Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/MMdata>.

Note: The LAC average is shown by the dotted orange line.

Even after structural reforms among police forces as part of the transition to democracy, police brutality and abuse continue to be a significant problem in the region. They are particularly critical in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and El Salvador, where they affect mostly men, young people, and residents of large cities.<sup>43</sup> In Venezuela, the rate of civilians killed by government forces rose from 2.3 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010 to 19.0 in 2016, and as many as 22 percent of all violent deaths in the country in 2016

<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International (2019).

<sup>43</sup> Cruz (2009).

were caused by state security forces.<sup>44</sup> In El Salvador in 2016, the equivalent rate was 9.5 per 100,000, and around 11 percent of all homicides were perpetrated by state security forces.<sup>45</sup> Brazil's state homicide rate is lower, closer to 2.0, but the number of people killed by the police in the last decade has reached 33,000.<sup>46</sup> In Colombia, the reported rate of civilians killed by state forces is below 1.0, but extrajudicial killings are commonplace; more than 3,800 people have been killed by the army to present them as members of illegal armed groups.<sup>47</sup> Aggressions carried out by armed forces have also intensified following the decision by some countries to militarize public security duties, which has resulted in an increase in violence in Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela.<sup>48</sup>

Political violence in LAC has also taken a toll on people who have been systematically targeted and assassinated because of their convictions, opinions, and political activities. These include human rights defenders, social leaders, environmental activists, politicians, and journalists. Most cases of assassinated human rights defenders have occurred in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.<sup>49</sup> Conflicts over environmental issues have become especially violent in Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>50</sup> Hundreds of Mexican politicians have been killed by drug-trafficking organizations.<sup>51</sup> Around 2,000 local politicians in Colombia were assassinated between 1980 and 2015.<sup>52</sup> It is estimated that 450 journalists were killed or disappeared in the region between 2000 and 2017; Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico are the most dangerous countries for this profession.<sup>53</sup>

### Patterns in social and domestic violence

In addition to the critical problems LAC is facing because of political and criminal violence, the region is also struggling with social and domestic violence (box 4.3). About a third of women who have ever been in a relationship have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner at least once in their lives, and more than 10 percent of women ages 15 and above have been subjected to forced sex by a non-partner.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ávila (2018); Fernández-Shaw (2019).

<sup>45</sup> Bergmann (2019).

<sup>46</sup> Marques et al. (2019); Muñoz Acebes (2020).

<sup>47</sup> Castillo Muñoz, Suárez Rueda, and Acero Velásquez (2019); Legrand (2020).

<sup>48</sup> Diamint (2015); Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2019).

<sup>49</sup> Front Line (2020).

<sup>50</sup> Temper, del Bene, and Martínez-Alier (2015).

<sup>51</sup> Trejo and Ley (2021).

<sup>52</sup> Arjona, Chacon, and Garcia (2020).

<sup>53</sup> Díaz Nosty and de Frutos García (2017).

<sup>54</sup> WHO, LSHTM, and SAMRC (2013).

### **Box 4.3: The reduction of violence against women and girls is a requisite for sustainable development**

Violence against women and girls represents a scourge against human rights, public health, citizen security, and women's physical, political, and economic autonomy. In LAC, the levels of this type of violence are overwhelming. The rate of non-partner sexual violence is the third-highest in the world, and the rate of violence at the hands of partners or ex-partners is the second-highest rate globally. The most radical expression of this violence, femicide, has reached worrying dimensions: according to the Gender Equality Observatory of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 4,555 women were victims of femicide across 18 countries in LAC in 2018.<sup>a</sup>

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries are experiencing a socio-economic crisis as a by-product of the health crisis, which has generated greater inequality gaps, mainly affecting girls and boys, adolescents, and women, all of whom are the most vulnerable and at-risk within their own homes. Evidence across the world shows that, in contexts of crisis, conflict, or emergencies, violence against women and girls increases. Data of the UNDP Global Gender Response Tracker show that governments in the region have placed the fight against this type of violence at the centre of emergency policy responses: 177 measures carried out in 29 countries focus on preventing or countering violence against women and girls, comprising around 68 percent of all gender-sensitive actions.<sup>b</sup>

The elimination of this type of violence is a catalytic factor in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Not only is it fundamental for women's economic empowerment, but also for poverty reduction, peace consolidation, social cohesion and access to justice. As has been demonstrated widely in recent years, public policies aimed at eradicating violence against women and girls must adopt a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, care, sanction, and reparation. This approach should also integrate economic, social, cultural, and justice perspectives to confront the issue across the stages of the life cycle of women.

The Spotlight Initiative for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls is at the heart of reforms within the United Nations.<sup>c</sup> It embodies a new way of fulfilling the 2030 Agenda in an integrated manner. It is a multi-year global alliance between the European Union and the United Nations to help eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The main objective of the Spotlight Initiative's Regional Programme for Latin America is to prevent, respond to,

and eliminate violence against women and girls, with a focus on femicide. The Spotlight Initiative's Regional Programme for the Caribbean is mainly committed to addressing domestic violence.

<sup>a</sup> See Femicide or Femicide (dashboard), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile, <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-femicide>.

<sup>b</sup> UN Women and UNDP (2020); see COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (dashboard), United Nations Development Programme, New York, <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/c> GRISUL (2018).

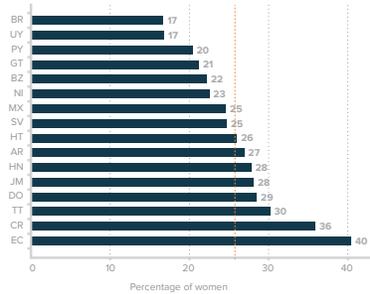
<sup>c</sup> See the website of the Spotlight Initiative, at <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/e> AMAP and UNEP (2019).

However, there is wide variation across countries. Data on intimate partner violence (IPV) against women during the most recent available year between 2003 and 2017 show that Ecuador had the highest rate (40.4 percent), followed by Costa Rica (35.9 percent) and Trinidad and Tobago (30.2 percent) (figure 4.10). All other rates ranged between 20 percent and 30 percent, except the rates in Brazil and Uruguay, which were the lowest: 16.7 percent and 16.8 percent, respectively. The share of women who have been physically or sexually abused by their current or most recent partner also varies broadly across countries (figure 4.11). Bolivia exhibits the highest rate (almost 60 percent); the rates in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru all lie between 30 percent and 35 percent, and Uruguay reports a rate at less than 10 percent.

There were noticeable differences in the average femicide rates across countries in the region between 2010 and 2019 (figure 4.12). In the Caribbean, the highest femicide rates were reported in Dominican Republic (3.1), Trinidad and Tobago (2.3), and St. Lucia (1.8). In South America, the highest rates were in Bolivia (2.0), Brazil (1.6) and Uruguay (1.5). In Central America, the subregion with the highest rates, the countries with the most femicides relative to their population were Honduras (7.1) and El Salvador (6.3).

**Figure 4.10: Intimate partner violence against women in the region is widespread**

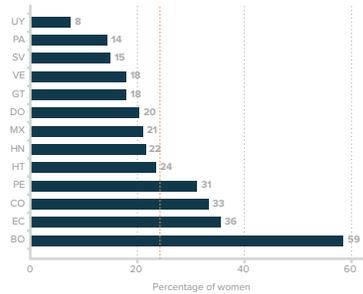
*Share of women physically or sexually abused by any partner, %, latest available year, 2003–2017*



Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021 based on data of Bott et al. 2019.  
Note: The dotted orange line indicates the LAC average.

**Figure 4.11: In most countries, more than 1 woman in 10 has been sexually or physically abused by her most recent partner**

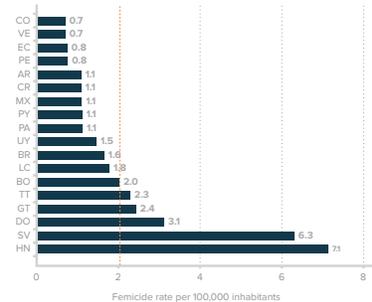
*Share of women physically or sexually abused by most recent partner, %, latest available year, 2003–2017*



Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021 based on data of Bott et al. 2019.  
Note: The dotted orange line indicates the LAC average.

**Figure 4.12: Within LAC, Central America is the subregion with the highest levels of femicide**

*Average femicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in LAC countries, 2000–2019*



Source: Arjona 2021, Background Paper of the UNDP LAC RHDR 2021; Femicide or Femicide (dashboard), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile, <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-femicide>.  
Note: The dotted orange line indicates the LAC average.

Violence has also severely impacted the region’s children and sexual and gender minorities. It is estimated that 58 percent of children in the region have been subjected to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.<sup>55</sup> Data of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) suggest that, in most LAC countries, the majority of children experience violent discipline at home. Close to two million children in the region have fallen victim to sexual exploitation, and 48 percent of the victims of human trafficking in Central America and the Caribbean are children, compared with 34 percent worldwide.<sup>56</sup> All five countries with the highest homicide rates of adolescents in the world are located in the region: Venezuela, Honduras, Colombia, El Salvador and Brazil.<sup>57</sup> Data on violence against the LGBT+ community are even more scarce because of misreporting and underreporting. The available data suggest that LAC also has a large share of homicides against transgender individuals, for instance, but the datasets include countries reporting only one occurrence of this type of violence between 2008 and

<sup>55</sup> Hillis et al. (2016).

<sup>56</sup> Save the Children (2017); UNODC (2018).

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF (2017).

2011, which does not inspire confidence in the accuracy of the information.<sup>58</sup> The most reliable information is provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grass-roots organizations that build their own observatories to follow local news (box 4.4).

<sup>58</sup> Balzer and Hutta (2012).

### **Box 4.4: There has been progress in protecting the rights of the LGBT+ community, but levels of violence are still high**

The LGBT+ community in LAC continues to encounter mismatches between legal rights and reality. According to SInViolencia LGBTI, a regional network of LGBT+ advocacy groups, four LGBT+ people are murdered in the region every day.<sup>a</sup> In Colombia, impressive accomplishments in protecting the rights of LGBT+ people contrast with high levels of discrimination and violence. Against this backdrop, the country provides a valuable case study for the region because of the availability of recent evidence on the issue and the response of grass-roots organizations investigating, reporting, and providing legal counsel to LGBT+ victims.

A 2019 survey carried out by the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, that interviewed almost 5,000 LGBT+ participants in Colombia, revealed highly disturbing patterns.<sup>b</sup> Among the respondents, 72 percent reported psychological distress; 55 percent had experienced suicidal thoughts, and 25 percent had attempted suicide. Among these last, 33 percent were bisexual women, and 31 percent were transgender. Among the respondents, 67 percent had been verbally assaulted; 35 percent had been threatened; 21 percent had been sexually assaulted, and 23 percent had been beaten. The shares of respondents who had been verbally or physically abused by public authorities were 20 percent and 11 percent, respectively. Among the participants, 75 percent had been bullied when they were minors, and 73 percent reported they had been routinely subjected to microaggressions. These shares were dramatically higher among the transgender respondents.

Prejudice and violence go hand in hand, and the killings of Colombia's LGBT+ population are often the last step in a long individual history of abuse and discrimination inside and outside the home.<sup>c</sup> In August 2020, a 17-year-old in the

city of Sincelejo brutally attacked Luis, a gay neighbour of the same age, with a machete, mutilating his arm. This happened after Luis had been repeatedly harassed for being homosexual. Three organizations that are active on issues related to the LGBT+ community—Colombia Diversa, Pink Consultores, and Sucre Diversa—are currently providing support to Luis and his family after the aggression. Similarly, the NGO Red Comunitaria Trans, which actively follows up on cases of violence against transgender sex workers in Colombia, reported in June 2020 that police officers had beaten, shot at, and chased five sex workers in Bogotá, the country’s capital, after verbally taunting them.

According to Temblores ONG, there were 1,944 acts of violence against LGBT+ people in Bogotá from 2010 to 2020.<sup>d</sup> Friends, strangers, distant acquaintances and the police and military are the most frequent perpetrators. Colombia Diversa has documented that transgender women were among the most usual victims of homicides linked to discrimination against the LGBT+ community in public spaces in 2015.<sup>e</sup> They face elevated exposure to victimization because of the highly criminalized occupations they are forced to take on in the absence of better job opportunities. Of the homicides targeted at LGBT+ people between 2012 and 2015, 95 percent have never led to arrests.

The persistence of crimes motivated by prejudice against the LGBT+ community is not likely to diminish without a strong commitment and a clear, open line of action by governments across the region to confront intolerance towards diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>a</sup> SInViolencia LGBTI (2019).

<sup>b</sup> Choi et al. (2020).

<sup>c</sup> Moloney (2019).

<sup>d</sup> Temblores ONG (2019).

<sup>e</sup> Colombia Diversa (2016).

Another alarming fact is the growing popular support for the use of extralegal violence as an acceptable way to solve conflicts among countries in the region, which reflects a low level of trust in institutions. The share of the population who support such methods is between 40 percent and 52 percent in Belize, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Peru; between 30 percent and 40 percent in Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and between 20 percent and 30 percent in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Panama.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cruz and Kloppe-Santamaría (2019).

## 4.3. Inequality is both a result and a source of violence in the region

### Inequality is associated with increases in violence

Empirical studies have explored the relationship between inequality and crime. Most find a positive association.<sup>60</sup> Others do not discover any significant connection.<sup>61</sup> In studying inequality and crime trends across the world during the second part of the 20th Century, researchers have identified possible underlying causal effects of inequality on crime rates.<sup>62</sup> Some have illustrated how crime rates in Latin America are closely related to urban socio-economic traits.<sup>63</sup> More recently, researchers have successfully identified a causal relationship between variations in socio-economic factors and crime in the context of the Mexican drug war.<sup>64</sup>

This report builds on this previous work to analyse new data from more recent periods and provide fresh empirical evidence on the relationship between inequality and homicide and victimization rates.<sup>65</sup> It uses subnational and national data from various sources to compose a longitudinal analysis. The analysis accounts for various measures of violence, includes different model specifications, and corrects for potential endogeneity in inequality using historical data as instruments. The findings point to a positive, significant, and robust relationship between inequality and violence. They are consistent across all the measures of violence under study and suggest that the greater levels of income inequality as measured by the Gini index are associated with increases in homicide rates and crime victimization rates. The effect of inequality on homicides seems stronger in the case of victims who are men. This is also true of victimization rates. Victimization decreases with age. When coupled with indicators of the association of gender and crime, young men are found to suffer the main burden of crime. Victimization increases with educational attainment. If ethnicity is considered, mestizo and mulatto groups face greater victimization rates. The results also suggest that the richest households in LAC experience more overall crime victimization, especially robberies, theft, and larceny, but households at lower socio-economic status suffer more homicides. The study also finds that, relative to Western European countries, LAC countries display significant additional homicide rates and crime victimization rates. (Box 4.5 offers details on the econometric reasoning and process supporting these conclusions.)

<sup>60</sup> Kelly (2000); Machin and Meghir (2004); Demombynes and Özler (2005); Buonanno and Vargas (2019).

<sup>61</sup> Bourguignon et al. (2003); Corvalan and Pazzona (2019).

<sup>62</sup> Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza (2002).

<sup>63</sup> Gaviria and Pagés (2002).

<sup>64</sup> Enamorado et al. (2016).

<sup>65</sup> See Schargrofsky and Freira (2021) for additional detail on the recent empirical contributions covered in this section.

## Box 4.5: New empirical evidence on the relationship between inequality and violence

Schargrodsky and Freira's (2021) background paper for this report, "Inequality and Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean: New Data for an Old Question", explores the relationship between inequality and violence in an empirical setting. It finds robust evidence that higher income inequality is accompanied by a higher incidence of violence. The authors use homicide and crime victimization rates as measures of violence and alternative model specifications to control for other determinant factors. They also use various samples, either including countries on all continents, or focusing only on LAC countries or regions within LAC countries.

Given the shortcomings of statistical systems on crime and violence in the region, data are extracted from various sources, as follows:

- *Homicide rates*: (a) an unbalanced panel of intentional homicides per 100,000 population per year covering 106 countries from 1995 to 2017 (World Development Indicators) and (b) an unbalanced panel of homicides per 100,000 per year covering 123 countries from 1995 to 2017 (Global Burden of Disease Study).<sup>a</sup>
- *Crime victimization rates*: (a) a cross-sectional database of the share of respondents who reported they had been victims of crime in the previous 12 months covering 42 countries and 60,472 individuals in one year for each country between 2010 and 2014 (World Values Survey) and (b) an unbalanced panel of the share of respondents who reported they had been victims of crime in the previous 12 months covering 18 LAC countries and an average of 14,000 individuals per year from 1995 to 2018 (Latinobarómetro).<sup>b</sup>
- Country Gini coefficients or indices (PovcalNet) and subnational Gini coefficients or indices for LAC countries (SEDLAC).<sup>c</sup>
- GDP data (World Economic Outlook), poverty rates (World Development Indicators), poverty gaps (PovcalNet), and primary-school completion rates (World Development Indicators), all used as controls.<sup>d</sup>

To address potential estimation biases because of the explanatory simultaneity of political and institutional factors on inequality and crime and potential endogeneity because of direct reverse causality from violence on inequality, estimations include country fixed effects and rely on historical data in an instrumental variable setting. Specifically, the study uses the settler mortality rates and ex-colony variables of Acemoglu et al. (2001) and the African and Native slavery measures of Soares, Assunção, and Goulart (2012) as instruments. These instrumental variables are shown to have strong explanatory power on inequality.

Schargrodsky and Freira (2021) find that an increase of 10 points in the Gini index translates into 9.3 additional homicides per 100,000 population. Estimates in regressions using crime victimization rates as the dependent variable vary across data sources. An increase of 10 points in the Gini index implies a rise in the World Values Survey victimization rate of 3.7 percentage points, which represents a 20 percent bump from the baseline level. Meanwhile, an increase of 10 points in the Gini index leads to an increase of 5.9 percentage points in the Latinobarómetro victimization rate, equivalent to an additional 16.6 percent relative to the baseline. The analysis of this relationship at the subnational level shows that a rise in the Gini index of 10 points is equivalent to an increase of 4.1 percentage points in the victimization rate.

Schargrodsky and Freira's findings also highlight the magnitude of the problem of violence in LAC from a global perspective. Comparing world regions, they find that the countries in LAC have 14.3 more homicides per 100,000 population per year and an additional 11.8 percentage points in crime victimization rates relative to Western European countries. LAC regression coefficients are the largest among world regions and suggest that the "additional" violence in the region represents two thirds of the region's total homicides.

The impact of poverty on homicides and crime victimization rates is less robust and more unstable than that of inequality. While the latter appears to be a determining factor behind the levels of violence, the former does not.

<sup>a</sup> See GBD Results Tool (database), Global Burden of Disease Study, Global Health Data Exchange, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Seattle, <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/gbd-results-tool>; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.<sup>b</sup> UN Women and UNDP (2020); see COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (dashboard), United Nations Development Programme, New York, <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.<sup>c</sup> GRISUL (2018).

<sup>b</sup> See Latinobarómetro (dashboard), Corporación Latinobarómetro, Santiago, Chile, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>; WVS (World Values Survey) (dashboard), King's College, Old Aberdeen, United Kingdom, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.

<sup>c</sup> See PovcalNet (online analysis tool) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/>; SEDLAC (Socio-Economic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean), Centre for Distributive, Labour, and Social Studies, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, La Plata, Argentina, and Equity Lab, Team for Statistical Development, World Bank, Washington, DC, <http://sedlac.econo.unlp.edu.ar/wp/en/estadisticas/sedlac/estadisticas/>.

<sup>d</sup> See PovcalNet (online analysis tool) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/>; WDI (World Development Indicators) (dashboard), World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>; WEO (World Economic Outlook Databases) (dashboard), International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2016/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

## The most vulnerable are overrepresented among victims of violence

To shed light on the disproportionate effects of violence on already disadvantaged people and the implications for inequality, the analysis starts by laying out the evidence showing how the most vulnerable are regularly overrepresented among the victims of violence.

As elsewhere in the world, most victims of homicide in LAC are young men. Yet, not all young men face the same risk of lethal violence. Criminal violence is concentrated in the poorest urban neighbourhoods, rural areas with precarious state presence and strong illicit economies, and border communities.<sup>66</sup> Homicides tend to affect the poor disproportionately.<sup>67</sup> Ethnic minorities have also been shown to be at higher risk of lethal victimization. The homicide rate among Afro-descendant youth ages 12–29 in Brazil in 2012 was 70.8 per 100,000 population, while the equivalent rate among non-black or brown youth was 27.8.<sup>68</sup> On crime and delinquency, some studies find that specific crimes, such as street robberies in Argentina, affect the rich and the poor equally.<sup>69</sup> Others find that crime usually affects rich and middle-class households in larger cities.<sup>70</sup> People with primary or secondary educational attainment are more likely than people with higher educational attainment to report gang violence in their places of residence.<sup>71</sup> The same is true of black, indigenous, or other ethnic minorities in relation to white respondents.

Victimization has also been found to be more common among people who face multiple overlapping disadvantages because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, or socio-economic status. For example, ethnic minorities and members of the LGBT+ community are at higher risk of being killed, and LGBT+ women who are poor are more likely to be victims of police harassment and exhibit higher rates of imprisonment.<sup>72</sup> Indigenous and black women in Ecuador experience more gender-based violence.<sup>73</sup> Homicides of Afro-descendant women in Brazil rose by 54.2 percent between 2003 and 2013, while homicides of non-black or brown women declined by 9.8 percent during the same period.<sup>74</sup> Among all female victims of homicide in Brazil, 66 percent were of African descent even though black and brown people comprise 51 percent of the country's population.<sup>75, 76</sup> Studies have found that

<sup>66</sup> Yashar (2018).

<sup>67</sup> Soares (2006).

<sup>68</sup> ECLAC (2017).

<sup>69</sup> Di Tella, Galiani, and Schargrotsky (2010).

<sup>70</sup> Gaviria and Pagés (2002).

<sup>71</sup> 2018 data of Latinobarómetro (dashboard), Corporación Latinobarómetro, Santiago, Chile, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>.

<sup>72</sup> IACHR (2015).

<sup>73</sup> ECLAC (2018).

<sup>74</sup> (Ibid).

<sup>75</sup> Cerqueira et al. (2019).

<sup>76</sup> For Brazil, the term Afro-descendant is used to refer to both pretas and pardas.

women who are poor are more likely than non-poor women to experience domestic violence in Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Haiti and Nicaragua.<sup>77</sup> However, other studies have not found a positive relationship in Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, or Peru.<sup>78</sup>

In the realm of political violence, aggression towards social leaders accounts for a greater burden on ethnic minorities and economically vulnerable groups, which are usually the ones who represent the demands of those affected by territorial and environmental injustice. Most assassinated leaders in Colombia between 2017 and 2019 were indigenous and black people, rural workers, or representatives of labour unions.<sup>79</sup> In Brazil, most social leaders who have been assassinated belonged to communities facing multiple forms of dispossession, such as rural worker organizations mobilizing for land and public services or indigenous people defending their lands and natural resources.<sup>80</sup> In the midst of the Colombian civil conflict, armed actors concentrated their operations in rural areas, and most violence took place outside large cities.<sup>81</sup> They would recruit low-income individuals who had usually already been victimized.<sup>82</sup> Most victims of Peru's civil confrontation were living in rural areas and worked in agriculture.<sup>83</sup> Concerning state violence, the proportion of victims of police abuse among low-income groups or ethnic minorities is higher than among the rest of the population in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia.<sup>84</sup> Black people in Latin America, especially youth, are more likely to be stopped and registered on the street by police because of racial discrimination; they are also more likely to be arrested and imprisoned, and their penalties tend to be more severe.<sup>85</sup> The criminalization of protests seems to also disproportionately affect the poor.<sup>86</sup>

Individuals and communities that already face adversity in terms of income, rights, access to social services, or political representation are at greater risk of becoming victims of most forms of violence. All types of crimes, except for robberies and kidnappings, tend disproportionately to impact poor individuals and communities, as well as geographical areas with precarious state presence. This all means that the negative effects of violence propagate inequality because they impact people who are already at a disadvantage. Violence thus has the power to augment existing inequalities in human development because it makes some members of society worse off in the many domains of human development in which they are underprivileged. Arjona

<sup>77</sup> Larrain (1993); Ellsberg et al. (2000); Flake and Forste (2006); BSS (2014).

<sup>78</sup> Flake and Forste (2006).

<sup>79</sup> International Crisis Group (2020).

<sup>80</sup> Amnesty International (2016).

<sup>81</sup> GMH (2013).

<sup>82</sup> Arjona and Kalyvas (2012).

<sup>83</sup> CVR (2003).

<sup>84</sup> González (2019).

<sup>85</sup> ECLAC (2017).

<sup>86</sup> Doran (2017).

(2021) argues that the precise impact of violence on human development, including the magnitude of the impact, will be determined by the kind and the severity of the violence, the attributes of the victims or their context that can moderate the effects.

### Violence restricts rights and liberties

Violence can increase inequality by undermining the right to life and the physical integrity of underprivileged groups. Much of the violence against indigenous and afro-descendant groups is associated with the land they occupy. This land often represents a valuable asset for highly profitable economic activities, from the access to fresh water and metals in the higher Andean mountains to mining in the Amazon and Orinoco basins in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. These economic activities pose a threat to the ecological integrity and cultural and biological diversity of the land and local peoples. Indigenous leaders and environmental organizations are frequently intimidated and victimized. Meanwhile, the concentration of lethal violence among poor neighbourhoods and in rural areas with precarious state presence exacerbates subnational inequality because economically disadvantaged and institutionally abandoned communities must face greater insecurity. This is aggravated by the fact that the members of these communities lack the political influence of more affluent individuals, and their concerns and claims about security receive less attention from policymakers and security forces.

Similarly, because people often adapt their behaviour to lower the risk of being victimized in ways that constrain their choices, violence and the threat of violence can increase inequality by undermining people's freedoms.<sup>87</sup> A 2012 survey found that up to 65 percent of Latin Americans stopped going out at night because of insecurity, and 13 percent thought about moving to a new location out of fear of crime.<sup>88</sup> This impact is more severe among the poor because they have fewer alternatives for adapting their behaviour to avoid crime given that they are less likely to be able to afford security and protection measures or relocate to safer areas. This effect can be significant. About half of all homicides in the region in 2012 occurred in the homes or neighbourhoods of the victims, and an additional 30 percent occurred in the municipalities of the victims.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, women face greater barriers to mobility based on fears of sexual harassment. For example, a 2018 study found that 70 percent of women surveyed in Buenos Aires, Quito and Santiago de Chile felt unsafe while travelling on public transport.<sup>90</sup> The responses of the government apparatus to curb crime and political

<sup>87</sup> Lane (2014).

<sup>88</sup> UNDP (2013); AmericasBarometer (dashboard), Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.

<sup>89</sup> Chioda (2017).

<sup>90</sup> CAF and FIA Foundation (2018).

violence can also increase inequality by provoking a sense of insecurity and violating individual rights among low-income populations and ethnic minorities because the persecutory actions tend to be biased towards the underprivileged.

### **Violence affects social outcomes such as health and education**

Violence has critical impacts on human capital formation. In the context of health, this applies not only to the physical health impairments that may result from victimization, but also to the repercussions on mental health. Both sets of effects can exacerbate existing inequalities. For example, in the context of gender inequality, the impact of violence on women's mental health is severe and has been associated with most forms of mental distress and disorder.<sup>91</sup> The direct effect of violence on women's physical and mental health not only implies a profound undermining of a central aspect of women's well-being, but also exposes women to greater disadvantages because of the interference with the economic, social and political activities of women. The inequalities in education, health care, access to employment, and political participation that women in LAC face can be exacerbated by violence, which hinders cognitive, emotional, and social skills.<sup>92</sup> In the case of children, violence can widen the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged by impacting physical and mental health. Children may suffer enormous psychological and physiological trauma from experiences of violence against themselves and their parents, teachers and communities.<sup>93</sup> These experiences can have irreparable effects on the areas of the brain regulating affection, memory and attention.<sup>94</sup> These negative effects are likely to widen gaps in human development because low-income and ethnic minority children are at greater risk of experiencing most forms of violence.

Inequality in health outcomes can be aggravated by political and criminal violence that disproportionately impacts people living in areas where armed groups operate. In addition to the death toll and injuries, civil war often increases the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and may exercise an impact on public health even in the post-war period, disproportionately affecting women and children.<sup>95</sup> Because of violence and forced migration, refugees tend to display higher rates of mood disorders, psychotic illness and PTSD compared with non-migrant residents.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, illicit mining can widen subnational inequality in health by causing environmental damage, directly affecting communities near mining sites that already experience lower levels

<sup>91</sup> Jordan, Campbell, and Follingstad (2010).

<sup>92</sup> UN Women (2012).

<sup>93</sup> Molteno et al. (1999).

<sup>94</sup> Teicher (2002); Arnsten (2009).

<sup>95</sup> Collier et al. (2003); Iqbal (2006).

<sup>96</sup> Porter and Haslam (2005); Steel et al. (2009).

of development and that may experience health debilitating consequences such as contact with contaminated water, setting them back in health and well-being with respect to the rest of the country.

The gap between privileged and deprived individuals and communities in education may be widened by the impact of violence on the educational outcomes and achievements of children and youth. The effect of violence on the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills may debilitate learning capacity and diminish academic performance.<sup>97</sup> This effect is larger among schools located in poor urban areas and in secondary schools in areas with gang activity. Deteriorated educational outcomes may persist long after the occurrence of violent events, and the impact of violence on the mental health of children and youth may lead to mental illness, implying lower grades, higher absenteeism and higher drop-out rates.<sup>98</sup> Violence may likewise amplify inequality through the detrimental effect on the quality and accessibility of schools. The destruction of schools or disruptions in schooling limits children's opportunity to obtain education.<sup>99</sup> Violent settings may discourage students from attending school out of fear of violence or the danger of passing through insecure neighbourhoods on their way to school. If aggressions are directed at parents, violence widens the gap in household support for education by interrupting the crucial role of parents in the development of the cognitive and socioemotional skills of children and youth. The absence of parents who are at greater risk of falling victim to crime may leave the children emotionally undernourished and affect their decision-making abilities.<sup>100</sup> By creating barriers to access to education, negatively affecting child development and academic performance and causing mental illness among children who are already at a disadvantage, violence can lead to greater inequality.

### **Violence affects income generation, increasing inequality**

The effects of violence on income inequality operate at various levels. At the individual level, violence may jeopardize the earning prospects of disadvantaged individuals through multiple channels, creating additional obstacles to the reduction of inequality. For example, it may widen the income gap by reducing mental health among the poor, thereby altering the participation of the poor in the labour market. The fear and anxiety created by the threat of violence may alter work behaviour and thus negatively affect educational attainment and cognitive development, worsen labour market outcomes, and undermine non-cognitive skills.<sup>101</sup> For these reasons, gender-based violence may

<sup>97</sup> Molteno et al. (1999); Burdick-Will et al. (2011).

<sup>98</sup> McLeod and Fettes (2007); Molano, Harker, and Cristancho (2018).

<sup>99</sup> Molteno et al. (1999).

<sup>100</sup> Cuartas, Harker, and Moya (2016).

<sup>101</sup> Heckman and Rubinstein (2001); Murnane et al. (2001); Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua (2006).

also worsen existing gender inequalities in the labour market.<sup>102</sup> It may also amplify economic inequality given the disproportionate effect of IPV on low-income women. Violence-triggered migration may exacerbate income inequality because migrants, internally displaced persons, and refugees face greater difficulties in finding work and thus have fewer prospects for improving their economic conditions. If those fleeing are the most disadvantaged, greater inequality is bound to prevail.

Violence may destabilize local economies in underprivileged areas, condemning them to less economic growth. Waves of violence in local rural economies that already exhibit lower economic growth and underperforming institutions broaden subnational inequality through an additional deterioration in the economic well-being of the population. In Mexico, localities affected by drug-related violence experience declines in production, profits, salaries, and the number of businesses and workers in manufacturing.<sup>103</sup> In Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro, In Brazil, crime represents 5 percent and 4 percent of yearly production, respectively.<sup>104</sup>

Violence may represent an obstacle to inequality reduction efforts. High levels of violence often become the greatest concern among people in a location, effectively preventing inequality from becoming a policy priority. Crime in LAC has led to reduced support for welfare policies. Elevated rates of criminal violence have facilitated the spread of perceptions of insecurity, and this has impeded the consolidation of welfare systems. Paradoxically, the victims directly affected by surges in crime are often the individuals in most need of welfare support.<sup>105</sup> Violence may even operate as an instrument of power allowing elites to preserve the distributional status quo, given the contribution of violence to the political exclusion of large sectors of the population that cannot make demands for greater equality through the democratic process. Elites have tolerated, facilitated, and participated in violence, intervening in resolute ways against violence only if the violence threatens the balance of power between the centre and the periphery or the distribution of economic and political power locally.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Swanberg, Logan, and Macke (2005).

<sup>103</sup> Gutiérrez-Romero and Oviedo (2017).

<sup>104</sup> Rondon and Andrade (2003).

<sup>105</sup> Altamirano, Berens, and Ley (2020).

<sup>106</sup> Gutiérrez Sanín, Acevedo, and Viatela (2007); Carroll (2011); Robinson (2013); Saffon Sanín (2021).

## Violence affects governance by reducing political engagement

Violence may introduce distortions in political engagement that suppress the voices of the underprivileged and the participation of the underprivileged in public debates and decision-making. Some studies find that victims of violence tend to participate more than non-victims in political activities in the aftermath of war and that victims of crime tend to engage more in various forms of political participation, possibly because of post-traumatic growth and the expressive value of participation.<sup>107</sup> However, other studies find that victims participate less during wartime.<sup>108</sup> They may also withdraw from political life in the presence of high levels of violence, as in the case of Mexico.<sup>109</sup> Across the region, while non-violent crime appears to increase political participation, violent crime seems to have the opposite effect.<sup>110</sup> Armed non-state actors may undermine political participation through their mere presence.<sup>111</sup> They may also force citizens to abstain from voting or vote for specific candidates.<sup>112</sup> A negative impact of violence on political participation in LAC would be more evident in cases where violence is prevalent or pervasive, and this negative impact would operate against equality if it widens the gap in political influence between the more well off and the less well off, or among deprived communities and ethnic minorities.

Some forms of crime and violence may have an effect on society through their direct impact on governance systems and mechanisms. Criminal and rebel groups affect people not only by their use of violence, but also by their de facto governance in locations under their control. This phenomenon occurs in the slums of large cities, rural towns along drug trafficking routes, and villages near coca and poppy plantations. Victimization and the violation of rights are commonplace under coercive local regimes in which these groups operate as armed rulers.<sup>113</sup> Inside these corrupt social orders, criminal authorities seize control of security, regulate economic activities by organizing labour and issuing work permits, regularize extortion as tax collection, establish rules for markets, provide public goods, and regulate social, economic and political behaviour.<sup>114</sup> They influence politics by infiltrating local governments to access sensitive information, persuading local officials to design and implement policies that favour criminal activity, making alliances with parties and politicians, vetoing candidates that run for office or preventing them from campaigning, coercing civil organizations, and mobilizing voters to support particular candidates or participate in

<sup>107</sup> Bateson (2012); Bauer et al. (2016).

<sup>108</sup> Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos (2013); Gallego (2018); Arjona, Chacon, and Garcia (2020).

<sup>109</sup> Trelles and Carreras (2012); Ley (2018).

<sup>110</sup> Berens and Dallendörfer (2019).

<sup>111</sup> Córdova (2019).

<sup>112</sup> Jaffe (2013); Arjona (2016); Arias (2017).

<sup>113</sup> Mampilly (2011); Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly (2015); Arjona (2016); Arias (2017); Lessing (2020).

<sup>114</sup> Arjona (2016); Arias (2017).

protests. They may ban certain activities, while making others mandatory. They may even punish abusive partners, thieves, and rapists harshly.

Violent criminal governance affects inequality at the subnational level through its effects on representation, democracy, the rule of law and the quality of local governments. It may increase inequality by undermining political representation in vulnerable communities. The interference of armed groups in democratic processes is widespread within several countries in LAC.<sup>115</sup> It typically leads to a reduction in political competition and plurality and a generalized distrust in democracy and local governments because of the lack of trust in elections as mechanisms of accountability and leadership selection.<sup>116</sup> This interference is usually targeted at localities already under criminal influence that are also typically the most vulnerable.

Inequality may also increase if democracy and the rule of law in deprived localities have been weakened. Crime in LAC has been repeatedly found to erode citizen support for democracy, institutions, and the rule of law.<sup>117</sup> The direct effect is that underprivileged populations in contexts where violence is frequent or localities that have underperforming state institutions and less economic development are less likely to demand that politicians uphold democratic values and the rule of law. Political elites can exploit crime to justify authoritarian security measures and avoid addressing structural conditions that facilitate crime.<sup>118</sup> Iron fist policies have become more prevalent in LAC.<sup>119</sup> They undermine democracy and the rule of law and often lead to the violation of human rights.

The effects of violence on the quality of local governance can be particularly consequential for inequality, especially because of the asymmetrical government presence and the inherent distortion in local institutions and in the development of marginalized communities that are a common feature in countries in LAC.<sup>120</sup> If organized criminal groups obstruct democratic participation and representation, the quality of local politics becomes diminished because the incentives for skilled, honest politicians to run for office and win elections are reduced.<sup>121</sup> Violence may shrink the spending capacity of local governments in vulnerable communities by decelerating economic growth or diverting the resources necessary for public goods provision to combating crime. It can worsen the quality of local institutions directly by modifying political activities through the threat of political assassination, the erosion of citizen

<sup>115</sup> Arjona, Chacon, and Garcia (2020).

<sup>116</sup> Albarracín (2018); Gallego (2018); Ponce (2019).

<sup>117</sup> Pérez (2003); Malone (2010); Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro (2011); Blanco and Ruiz (2013); Carreras (2013); Krause (2014); Visconti (2020).

<sup>118</sup> Chevigny (2003); Soares and Naritomi (2010).

<sup>119</sup> Muggah (2019).

<sup>120</sup> O'Donnell (1993).

<sup>121</sup> Arjona, Chacon, and Garcia (2020).

trust, the suppression of demands for transparency and accountability, the subversion of the justice system and the implementation of extralegal conflict settlement.

Ultimately, the combination of these factors means that LAC countries that experience substantial and frequent violence will persistently struggle to develop a healthy political environment and consolidate democracy. Political inclusion is interrupted as traditional elites preserve or extend their influence, while the less well off lose the incentives to participate, demand less from democracy and the rule of law, and are faced with greater adversity because of the weakened protection of rights. Spotlight 7 highlights the importance of greater women's participation in political leadership as a necessary condition for stronger and more inclusive democracies in the region.

## 4.4. Violence is linked to inequality, but also to productivity

### Violence reduces and distorts investment

Violence and crime may contribute to low productivity growth in LAC. One channel through which this may occur is the decline in investment brought about by the greater uncertainty on property rights and the rule of law that accompany crime and violence. Criminal activity can be interpreted as a hidden tax on all participants in the economy. It can scare off direct domestic or foreign investors, make firms less competitive and distort the allocation of resources because it elevates uncertainty and inefficiency.<sup>122</sup> Decreases in growth caused by reductions in private investment may also originate from corruption, which has the additional effect of impeding the translation of economic stability into better purchasing power and living conditions among those most affected by the drain on resources.<sup>123</sup> Corruption may also modify the composition of foreign direct investment, as investors may avoid placing their resources in a country altogether or prefer to associate with local partners to gain knowledge on how to deal with bureaucracy if corruption is not prohibitive.<sup>124</sup>

Studies have found that, within LAC, crime fractures networks and ties among kin, friends and business partners, especially in the presence of migration, but also that there is no significant effect of victimization on trust in informal institutions in the private sector — embodied in business networks—.<sup>125</sup> The economic impact of crime greatly

<sup>122</sup> Detotto and Otranto (2010).

<sup>123</sup> Arcia (2012).

<sup>124</sup> Gaviria (2002).

<sup>125</sup> Corbacho, Philipp, and Ruiz-Vega (2012).

depends on a country's vulnerability to violence and the magnitude of the destruction violence causes, both of which determine the severity of the obstacles to economic growth and performance, as may be seen in the recent evidence on Guatemala.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, homicide and theft proved particularly forceful in disincentivizing foreign direct investment in Mexican states between 2005 and 2015, especially affecting those states with the highest levels of violence.<sup>127</sup> Studies that do not restrict their scope exclusively to the region have determined that foreign direct investment, which is regarded as an essential financial flow in propelling the efforts of developing countries to overcome development obstacles, is discouraged by violent crime.<sup>128</sup>

The elevated costs of significant criminal activity on Latin American societies, especially those costs associated with behavioural changes, investment reductions, productivity losses, and shifts in government resource allocation, have been found to respond to attempts to lower the risk of victimization.<sup>129</sup> Businesses may avoid seeking growth alternatives and market opportunities to diminish their visibility and exposure to violent aggressions.<sup>130</sup> However, evidence on Colombia suggests that there may be declines in investment as a result of firm-related kidnappings, while violence that does not specifically target corporate officials do not show a statistical relationship to such reductions.<sup>131</sup> These findings suggest that changes in corporate investment do not seem to reflect an expectation of falling demand, a deterioration in financial credit ratings, or increases in administrative costs, but are a result of a fear associated with the threat to the personal security of corporate personnel.

### Violence affects human capital formation and thus productivity

Based on discussions on the effects of violence on education, health, and income, crime and victimization may also explain slowdowns in economic growth as victims often see their income-generating capacity, their learning ability, or their labour productivity compromised. This is especially true among women, children and minorities, whose economic prospects and aspirations may be severely transformed by traumatic experiences related to violence. Women who are victims of violence may thus face additional challenges in the labour market because of mental health challenges, and children who are victims of violence may face worse future job prospects because of the adverse impacts of violence on educational trajectories. Refugees and the forcefully displaced who break off their economic links and stability

<sup>126</sup> Ruiz-Estrada and Ndoma (2014).

<sup>127</sup> Cabral, Mollick, and Saucedo (2018).

<sup>128</sup> Brown and Hibbert (2017).

<sup>129</sup> Jaitman (2017).

<sup>130</sup> UNDP (2013).

<sup>131</sup> Pshisva and Suarez (2010).

may encounter difficulties in adapting to new productive contexts and maintaining stable work commitments. Previous studies led by UNDP have concluded that the years lost in life expectancy because of excess homicides in Latin America during 2009 represented the equivalent of 0.5 percent of the region's GDP per capita in that year.<sup>132</sup> Added up, these effects of violence on individual productivity mean that societies and countries must forgo the productive potential of a significant share of the population and face serious contractions in human capital accumulation.

Violence may also weaken state and productive capacities by making them more vulnerable to rent-seeking behaviour and corruption. Rent seeking by powerful economic actors that leads to welfare losses among the less powerful is more likely in contexts of high inequality and environments in which the influence of elites over policies and laws is excessive.<sup>133</sup> Expansions in corruption are typically accompanied by declines in growth because corruption discourages foreign and domestic investment, eliminates incentives for innovation, increases uncertainty, leads to misallocation of human capital and increases the operating costs of firms.<sup>134</sup> Corruption tends to become more widespread as political instability increases. In such situations, politicians and bureaucrats tend to abandon their sense of accountability and have greater incentives to extract rents. The expansion of illicit crops in Colombia brought about severe increases in crime and violence. This structurally reduced economic growth through the decline in total factor productivity that resulted from the damaged social infrastructure and encouraged predatory and less productive rent-seeking activities with low contributions to output.<sup>135</sup> Corruption and crime may likewise reduce firm competitiveness through substantial reductions in sales.<sup>136</sup>

### Violence leads to physical and natural capital depletion

Either directly or indirectly, acts of violence can obstruct capital accumulation or reduce existing stocks of capital. Crimes that are explicitly targeted at destroying or seizing control of assets or other property represent perhaps the most evident case of capital depletion. Violence directed at natural capital—such as water contamination because of illegal mining, pipeline destruction, or the seizure of fossil fuels, deforestation aimed at clearing land so powerful groups can introduce resource-heavy production schemes (monoculture, extensive livestock breeding, illicit crops), and biodiversity losses associated with full-scale violent confrontations—is especially damaging. It creates implicit costs in society by inefficiently exhausting current resources and deprives future

<sup>132</sup> UNDP (2013).

<sup>133</sup> Arcia (2012).

<sup>134</sup> Gaviria (2002).

<sup>135</sup> Cárdenas and Rozo (2008).

<sup>136</sup> Gaviria (2002).

generations of the opportunity to make use of these resources. Violence against ethnic communities that have, over centuries, established alternative systems of settlement and conservation in ecologically rich territories may threaten the maintenance of this natural capital for future generations. Several studies have documented the positive impact of these indigenous arrangements in reducing deforestation.<sup>137</sup> Spotlight 8 underlines recent policy accomplishments and challenges in dealing with climate change through the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in countries across the region, as well as the potential of incentive-based programmes to tackle this issue.

The macroeconomic effects of violence are manifested in losses in potential productivity and in the exhaustion of the resources necessary to combat and mitigate violence, but which could have otherwise been directed at other productive uses (see section 4.3). The public and private sectors are confronted by the trade-off between setting aside economic resources to limit exposure to crime and violence and effectively avoiding victimization. The benefits springing from combating and mitigating violence generally outweigh the costs. Nonetheless, it is imperative that nations evaluate how this cost-benefit analysis can be adapted and reflected in their respective strategies, particularly if they involve considerable shares of GDP, as is the case in some LAC countries. The costs of crime prevention and punishment, which include health costs because of homicides and injuries, losses arising from property crime, corruption, and public expenditure on prosecution, prison services and rehabilitation, are estimated at 1.04 percent of the GDP of Costa Rica in 2010, 1.21 percent of the GDP of Chile, 2.27 percent of Uruguay's GDP, 2.53 percent of the GDP of Honduras, and 2.45 percent of Paraguay's GDP.<sup>138</sup> Victimization has been estimated to have cost 1.18 percent of the GDP of Uruguay, 1.47 percent in Costa Rica, 2.11 percent in Chile, 6.36 percent in Paraguay, and 8.01 percent in Honduras. While these economic costs of violence can be estimated, it is impossible to quantify the true human cost of violence or the long-term trauma that violence can perpetuate far into the future.

## 4.5. Combating violence is a pathway to establishing more equal and productive societies

This chapter highlights the role of violence as an underlying factor propelling the high-inequality, low-growth trap in the region. It explores the patterns of the significant criminal, political, and social and domestic violence in the region and illustrates how the persistence of this violence is both a result of and a contributor to the double trap

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<sup>137</sup> Vélez et al. (2020); Romero and Saavedra (2021).

<sup>138</sup> Aboal et al. (2016).

in LAC. This vicious circle of violence, inequality, and slow growth offers a somber horizon for policy solutions, particularly given the current setbacks expected to result from the ongoing COVID-19–induced economic and public health crises.

However, progress is possible, though it will only be achieved if the policies adopted address the underlying imbalances of power between actors to foster conditions in which conflicts may be settled through peaceful rather than violent mechanisms. While there is no single policy solution that will work to address violence, box 4.6 highlights a few priority areas that may be more or less relevant depending on the context. If these are successfully dealt with, progress in combating violence may pave the way towards more equal, more productive and more peaceful societies.

### **Box 4.6: A few policy priority areas for combatting violence**

#### **Establishing more independent and effective judiciary systems**

Establishing independent and effective justice systems capable of safeguarding human rights, facilitating access to justice for all without discrimination and supplying transparent and objective services is key to combating violence effectively. By not allowing crimes to go unpunished and preventing revictimization, the justice system would make committing crimes more costly. These systems must adequately respond to differentiated needs, for example, by building the capacity to tackle violence against women, LGBT+ people, and ethnic groups through a more detailed classification of crimes within legal structures and through sensitivity training among public officials. Justice systems require increased government capacity as well as social legitimacy to be effective. Supporting civil society organizations, a free and active press, and social research that aims to gather information, generate knowledge, and inform the public about the realities of violence and the importance of institutionalized solutions is essential if society is to support and defend the work of the justice system.

#### **Considering new approaches to dealing with illicit trade**

In LAC, illicit trade is one of the principal causes of violence and the growth of powerful criminal organizations, both of which widen inequality in various critical developmental areas. Contemplating the decriminalization and legalization of controlled substances might help LAC take a step forward in the fight against crime, violence, human rights abuses, and corruption, while also facilitating nation building and effective governance, democratic consolidation, and environmental justice. To meet sustainability objectives, the shifts in regulation should also aim

to address illegal mining, deforestation and land speculation, which are another source of violence under the management of illegal organizations and which are accompanied by severe environmental degradation and public health problems.

### **Economically empowering marginalized groups**

As this chapter shows, economic marginalization may render people additionally vulnerable to violence. In the context of domestic violence, for example, promoting women's economic empowerment is essential to reducing situations of dependency that may foster violence. This would require actions on multiple fronts, including recognizing the labour involved in unpaid care and domestic work and reducing and redistributing it through, among other things, increased access to care services. In the same vein, governments should work together with schools to identify child abuse early and educate parents and communities on the dismantling of gender stereotypes that may reinforce inequality and violence. Policy actions targeted on the specific economic barriers that adolescents, ethnic minorities, LGBT+ populations, and others face will be critical to identifying sustainable pathways out of violence and supporting the well-being and human dignity of all.

### **Expanding mental health care for the victims of violence**

Violence-induced trauma transcends the purely psychological dimension. It blocks opportunities, damages networks, and shatters aspirations. It keeps victims from achieving their goals, overcoming the challenges they face, and actively sharing in the benefits of economic, social and political participation. Health care provision and initiatives directed at victims must acknowledge the importance of mental health in the integral reparation of the afflicted.

### **Investing in social capital to reform local politics**

When the voices of the powerful drown out the voices of the underprivileged, violence leads to the deterioration of the social fabric and democratic governance. To reform local political landscapes, investments in social capital should be directed at reestablishing social trust and cooperation among victims and impoverished communities and encouraging collective action. There are major lessons to be learned from the struggles of indigenous populations throughout the region, particularly in Central and South America, to protect their lands based on their social capital and motivated by their natural wealth.

### **Building statistical capacity for data on violence**

In many countries, the statistical capacity for measuring, diagnosing and analysing violence in the region is limited. Statistical systems are often flawed in collection periodicity and data disaggregation, lack uniform criteria in data collection and classification across agencies, lack independence and transparency, or are subject to political mishandling. Without accurate data on violence, governments risk being unable to design and target adequate policy responses. Collecting better data on violence in the region will require a large, collaborative effort involving actors across sectors of society and at various levels, including multilateral organizations that can promote cross-country collaboration on data collection initiatives.

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## PARITY DEMOCRACY AS A POLITICAL HORIZON FOR RECOVERY

In the last three decades, LAC has witnessed significant accomplishments in the exercise of women's right to political participation. In Latin America, six women were democratically elected as presidents, though no woman currently holds this position. Since the 1990s, women's leadership in the public sphere has expanded swiftly. Women's participation in ministerial cabinets, parliaments and city councils has doubled or tripled (UNDP, UN Women, and IDEA International 2019). Gender parity is still a long way off, however. Assuming all countries in the region experienced the same dynamics of increasing gender representation without setback, it would still take around 30 more years to reach a parity scenario in parliaments.

At the national level, women's involvement in decision-making still faces obstacles: In 2019, 30 percent of ministerial cabinet posts and 27 percent of supreme court seats in Latin America were held by women, while the share of women in national parliaments was 27.4 percent as of early 2021.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, women in the Caribbean were acting as heads of state or government or as viceregal representatives, and they occupied 23.8 percent of ministerial posts (UN Women 2018). In 2018, they accounted for 47 percent of supreme court judges and 63.3 percent of the seats on the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court.<sup>2</sup> Women legislators in the Caribbean currently hold 39.5 percent of parliamentary seats.<sup>3</sup>

In local governance, progress towards gender equality in political leadership has not fared well. Across LAC, women held only 24.5 percent of local government seats.<sup>4</sup> In Latin America, women's participation in mayoral offices reached an all-time peak of 13.3 percent in 2018 (UNDP, UN Women, and IDEA International 2019). Equivalent data on the Caribbean are scarce, but only 9.1 percent of mayors in Kitts and Nevis are women, and the share of women mayors in Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago is practically null.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, UN Women, and IDEA International (2019); see also IPU Parline (Global Data on National Parliaments) (data repository), Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, <https://data.ipu.org/content/parline-global-data-national-parliaments>.

<sup>2</sup> See Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (dashboard), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile, <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

<sup>3</sup> See IPU Parline (Global Data on National Parliaments) (data repository), Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, <https://data.ipu.org/content/parline-global-data-national-parliaments>.

<sup>4</sup> See SDG Indicators (dashboard), Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>.

Recent changes in women's political participation in the region has been characterized by the following:

- *The disparity between countries:* Few countries have introduced measures designed to have widespread gender parity impacts on democratically elected deliberative bodies.
- *Notable advances in the legislative branch:* The parity (53.1 percent in Bolivia) or near parity (48.2 percent in Mexico) in lower chambers is in direct contrast with the still unbreakable glass ceilings that persist in judicial and electoral branches across the region.
- *Some improvement in the executive branch reflect the complexities inherent in change:* The regional average share of women in leadership may have tripled, but women leaders continue to be relegated to positions of lesser political impact.
- *Wide gaps at various levels of government:* Setbacks to gender parity in local government illustrate that women face the most significant obstacles in gaining access to single-member appointments
- *The slow pace of change in the dynamics of access to power within political organizations.*
- *The absence of an intersectional approach to the expansion of political rights:* Progress towards parity has not translated into greater representation of indigenous, afro-descendant, disabled, migrant, sexually diverse or young women (UN Women 2021).
- *The persistence of institutional and cultural barriers:* This includes the harmful practices, discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes and political violence that limit the full realization of women's political rights; opposition within political parties towards gender equality, and the existence of unequal conditions in the positioning of women leaders and their access to campaign financing (UN Women 2021).

This is the new context of a region that has privileged legal reforms as an engine of change to address the underrepresentation of women in the public sphere. Legislation on temporary affirmative action measures has not always been able to guarantee substantive equality for many reasons, including poor policy design, the political-electoral systems in which policies are implemented, and policy resistance among political actors. Given these limitations, new approaches have progressively led to a shift to a new paradigm: parity democracy. Parity democracy operates in the region as a political horizon, expressed in regional political commitments embedded within an international normative framework that recognizes the need to achieve substantive equality. The new approaches have also encouraged fresh designs in legislation that promote political-electoral parity at the national level and that have had unprecedented impacts on women's access to parliament. Although decisive, these initiatives have

yet to address ethno-racial gaps. Thus, similar impacts have not been observed in the case of the political representation of indigenous and afro-descendant women who are simultaneously confronted with more pressing structural barriers.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION AND ILLEGALITY IN LAC

Aggressive resource extraction in institutionally distressed areas has taken a toll on regional ecosystems. The region has lost nearly 13 percent of forested area in the last three decades (FAO 2020). Tens of thousands of species face widening threats of extinction in LAC despite the region's status as a biodiversity hotspot.

Deforestation and forest degradation are interrelated results of complex changes in land use. Various economic, technological, cultural, demographic, and institutional factors have generally been identified as drivers of the dynamics of these changes. Agricultural expansion, illegal extractive activities, and infrastructure expansion are among the main direct drivers. The illegality is manifest in at least two ways, related to governance and lack of monetary resources: (1) direct illegal resource extraction in land and (2) illegal methods to obtain permits or concessions to develop activities resulting in deforestation or forest degradation. In both scenarios, local stakeholders attempting to stop the illegal activities in their areas have been the target of violent attacks. The prevalence of poverty among local communities may aggravate environmental destruction, particularly if the locals regard these activities, legal or illegal, as an opportunity to generate income. While the policy fight over climate change has opened the possibility to address this last aspect, confronting the harmful synergies that underlie deforestation and forest degradation is more complex and requires a wide variety of interventions.

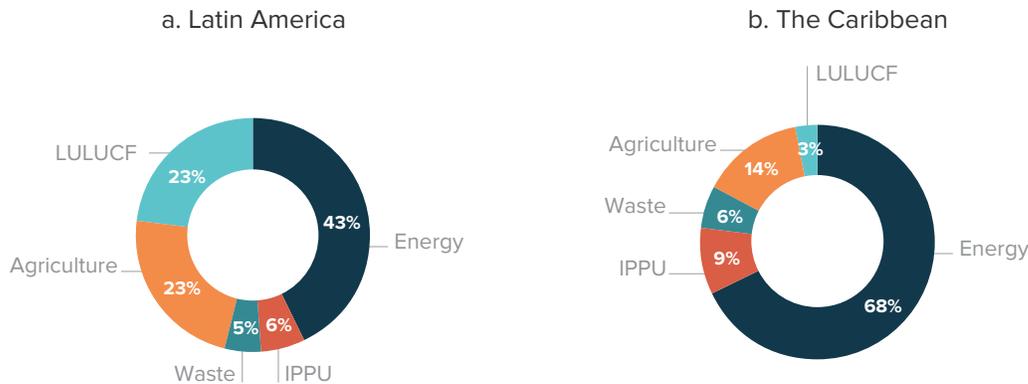
In Latin America, the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector is one of the main sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, amounting to around 23 percent of total emissions, while, in the Caribbean, it produces only 3 percent of total emissions (figure S5.1).

Achieving the objective of a 36 percent reduction in net emissions by 2030 set in nationally determined contributions will largely depend on greater investments in mitigation alternatives. Overall, 80 percent to 85 percent of countries in Latin America are committed to mitigation strategies in agriculture and the LULUCF sector. These strategies are predominantly focused on forest land: 81 percent of the countries are promoting sustainable forest management; 75 percent have taken on reforestation or afforestation projects; 38 percent have adopted general forest land management schemes; 36 percent have introduced policies to reduce deforestation and promote forest conservation, and 31 percent include some form of forest fire management. Around one third of these countries have also contemplated mitigation strategies

in croplands and integrated systems, but few are promoting mitigation within the livestock sector (Crumpler et al. 2020a).

**Figure S8.1: The LULUCF sector: a main source of GHGs in Latin America, but a smaller problem in the Caribbean**

*Economy-wide emissions in Latin America and the Caribbean, by sector, share of total emissions*



Source: Crumpler et al. 2020a, 2020b.

In the Caribbean, 85 percent of countries with an explicit adaptation component in their nationally determined contributions contemplate at least one policy in agroecosystems, and 69 percent propose at least one measure specifically related to the forestry subsector. The efforts in this subsector are concentrated on reducing degradation and implementing sustainable forest management practices, as well as carrying out reforestation and afforestation projects, reducing deforestation and promoting forest conservation. Across this subregion, 38 percent of countries with nationally determined contribution adaptation components propose at least one intervention in the livestock sector (Crumpler et al. 2020b).

UNDP has supported countries throughout the design and implementation process of national policies and measures to reduce deforestation and manage forests sustainably. This has helped mitigate climate change, while creating enabling conditions for inclusive growth that bridge economic, social, and environmental gaps in the path towards sustainable development. This includes allocating resources to support the implementation of payments for ecosystem services (PES) schemes and community forest management programs. PES schemes are unlike other cash transfer programs insofar as they prioritize conservation over poverty reduction as the main objective (Wunder 2013). Nonetheless, well-designed PES schemes have the potential to protect environmental resources, while improving living conditions among poor communities in rural areas. This is because they increase the value of the ecosystem services that are generated in local areas given the opportunity cost implied in protecting these services rather than exploiting them (Pagiola, Arcenas, and Platais 2005; Milder,

Scherr, and Bracer 2010). However, synergies between environmental protection and poverty reduction are not automatically embodied in PES schemes because the influx of additional resources may cause communities to adopt consumption decisions that disregard the sustainability of the surroundings, somehow implying that extrinsic incentives may be at odds with a willingness to conserve (Wunder 2005). Moreover, the fact that PES schemes are often meant to correct environmentally negative behaviours rather than reward appropriate behaviours implies that the goal of fairly compensating the rural poor who protect the environment and provide ecosystem services may be hindered by the need to prioritize payments to other agents who represent the biggest threat to these services. Finally, the role of PES schemes in the reduction of poverty across the region will be largely determined by the specific way in which poor participants are included and remunerated in the projects, as well as by their inclusion under policies aimed at reducing generalized conditions of poverty at the national level (Pagiola, Arcenas, and Platais 2005). UNDP is committed to supporting PES schemes targeted at indigenous communities and family farmers in Brazil and Ecuador and to improving PES design across the region.

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