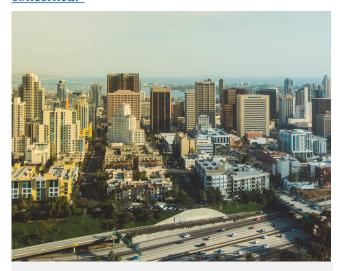# KROC *Insight*

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Global Violence, Urban Innovation: Launching the Peace in Our Cities Campaign

San Diego is one of the safest large cities in America. Its violent crime rate is below both California's and the national average. But even safe cities have variations in levels of violence. In 2017-2018, San Diego saw a three percent increase in violent crime—not a massive spike, but something about which the San Diego police are "definitely concerned."

San Diego, CA

According to recent analysis by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, the recent uptick in crime is concentrated in particular neighborhoods and, even further, particular locations within those neighborhoods. This pattern is not unusual—it can be found in many cities around the world. And, in fact, many patterns of violence present themselves in similar ways across very different cities.

Every incident of violence is unique. Every life lost, family impacted, trauma inflicted is a distinct tragedy. Simultaneously, every such incident contributes to shaping a constellation of violence. Each day we are better able to make out its form, gaining knowledge in the process about how to better reduce and prevent violence.

Unfortunately, San Diego is not unique in trending towards an increase in violence. Globally, violence is on the rise with more armed conflicts in the world today than at any time in the past 30 years and an increase in homicides outside of conflict zones. According to the Small Arms Survey, a status quo trend projection shows a continued increase in such homicides over the coming decade if significant action is not taken.

We have a mismatch here between the knowledge that can be applied to reduce violence and a reality where more people are suffering violent deaths each year. In order to reverse these trends, it's crucial to better understand and disseminate this knowledge so we can begin to apply its insights today—insights that can help reduce human suffering tomorrow.

VIOLENCE IN THE WORLD TODAY

Over half a million people die violently every year, both within and beyond conflict zones. According to the Small Arms Survey, this will increase to [660,000 people killed annually in 2030](#) if the status quo remains.

Roughly 18 percent of all violent deaths take place in conflict zones, meaning that armed conflict accounts for less than one in five victims of all lethal violence worldwide. The remaining victims are killed in homes, towns, cities and countries that are ostensibly "at peace."

Violence impacts not just victims but whole societies. In the most violent countries of Central America, [overall male life expectancy has decreased by three years as a result of lethal violence](#). From birth, boys can expect fewer years on earth as a direct consequence of violence. In the United States, [firearm violence is the leading cause of death for black men and boys ages 15-34](#). These data points tell us two things. First, violence directly impedes society-wide life outcomes. Second, these outcomes are demographically specific. Young men, particularly young men from minority groups or with non-elite status, tend to be the most directly affected by lethal violence.

Women and girls, while they also face lethal violence, are more likely to experience various forms of chronic violence. In fact, [over one-third of all women and girls globally are victims of sexual or physical violence at the hands of intimate partners or of non-partner sexual violence](#). Regardless of gender, exposure to violence, particularly during adolescent years, is associated with [increased substance abuse, mental health challenges and the](#) [greater likelihood of committing criminal acts later in life](#).

VIOLENCE AND URBANIZATION

Over half the world's population lives in cities today. The concentration of people in urban environments is projected to increase from four billion today to five billion by 2030—an unprecedented increase over such a short period of time.

While data presently [does not show definitively that cities are less safe than rural areas (with some regional variation)](#), cities do present certain risk factors, including concentrating victims and perpetrators in close proximity. Further, 75 percent of cities globally have [higher levels of income inequality than they did 20 years ago](#). This inequality fosters areas of under-investment, whether in jobs, social services, security services, political representation or otherwise. It is in these under-resourced areas where high levels of violence tend to concentrate.

Conversely, cities also represent an exceptional opportunity for innovation and new forms of collaboration. Combining this willingness to innovate and collaborate with deep, grounded, local knowledge of the problems of violence in their respective contexts, city leaders in many areas around the world have been able to develop powerful strategies to prevent and reduce violence.

These successes are encouraging, but there remains much work to be done. As cities confront their own violence challenges, and as we see overall levels of violence increase globally, it is important to reflect on key insights that can help us steer a path forward.

INSIGHT ONE: VIOLENCE IS STICKY

Violence is sticky: it tends to concentrate among particular places and even among particular people—a phenomenon that is witnessed here in the United States and in cities around the world, from Mexico City to Cape Town.

Recent analysis from the United States has found that on average fewer than one percent of a city's overall population is connected to over half of that city's violence. That means in a city of 100,000 people—even a city considered extremely violent— fewer than 1,000 people are actually causing serious violence.

Oakland, CA, has long been among the most dangerous cities in the United States. Yet, from 2012 to today, homicides and non-fatal shootings have been cut nearly in half. In 2012 the city launched Oakland Ceasefire. One of the first steps was to conduct an analysis of violent incidents and trends, which demonstrated that—contrary to narratives of a city lost to violence—it was just 400 individuals, or 0.1 percent of the total city population, at highest risk for engaging in serious violence.

These same individuals came from long under-served communities, representing minority populations that have borne the costs associated with intergenerational poverty, segregation and a negative history with law enforcement. By getting specific with the individuals driving violence and better understanding the context within which violence was occurring, Oakland was able to direct specific, targeted interventions that addressed immediate incidents of violence and began to seriously tackle embedded structures of discrimination and inequality.

Oakland, CA

What this indicates is something many people have known for years: the vast majority of the population is not engaged in violence. Rather, areas that are plagued by violence committed by a small number of people often receive punitive enforcement attention that assumes everyone is a criminal, making many people feel unsafe both from the percentage of those criminally involved and from police and other state security actors.

This insight about the "stickiness" of violence is important. It allows for a reconfiguration of resources, shaping the deployment of both law enforcement and non-enforcement capacities to focus support on those who need it most. Indeed, many of the interventions that have proven not to be effective are those that take a sweeping, wide-net approach coupled with heavy enforcement. It is, rather, the interventions that balance limited enforcement with highly targeted support that have proven most effective at reducing violence.

Unfortunately, violence also tends to concentrate in places where people have the least political influence, have historically been the most marginalized from positions of power and are already limited in terms of their access to resources. For this reason, in many of the areas where violence

concentrates, where the vast majority of the population is peaceful, getting sufficient attention to properly address the problem is difficult.

INSIGHT TWO: COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL

In many urban areas around the world "integration" and "collaboration" are more buzzwords than organizing principles. City Halls or their equivalents often operate independently of those social service organizations providing key support to under-resourced areas. Police similarly often do not cooperate with local organizations, including those most familiar with the actors driving the violence and/or best positioned to stop it.

Even within law enforcement, different units often do not coordinate with one another, leaving the arms of the legal system grasping in all directions rather than strategically engaging one another in the interest of public safety. Police count success in arrests, prosecutors focus on convictions, and judges often tout their "tough on crime" records without questioning whether any of these punitive measures are actually increasing public safety. Further, given gaps in mental health and other services, particularly in the under-served communities where violence concentrates, there are often significant opportunities for prevention that are lost when police become responders of first resort.

Because the strategies proven to be most effective are those that are both local and integrated, meaningful attention to improved strategic coordination is essential. Where public and non-public service providers coordinate effectively to prioritize the prerogatives and safety of the impacted community, focusing on the overall reduction of violence rather than on individual arrests or convictions—this is where we tend to observe success.

> Between 2002 and 2006, Belo Horizonte in southeastern Brazil was found to have reduced homicides by a staggering 69 percent. This in a country that is home to a majority of the world's 50 most violent cities.

The Fica Vivo (Stay Alive) program in Belo Horizonte, especially its deliberate efforts at effective coordination, is credited with contributing to this reduction in homicides. Starting from a similar point of analysis as Oakland Ceasefire, it found the highest concentration of violence in six of the city's favelas. A "General Coordination" group was created to help manage interaction among different government agencies, civil society and academia. Initial set-backs due to limited community engagement helped to restructure the effort by scaling up community engagement, with locally impacted residents playing a key role in designing and implementing activities to reduce homicides in the city.

This second insight can help drive change by putting evidence behind city efforts to support integrated approaches. Collaboration does not require including everyone and everything. Rather, collaboration must be oriented around both those at highest risk and the underlying conditions that facilitate the emergence of violence. This focused approach to collaboration can open pathways for surprising and powerful partnerships and, ideally, help to foster more upstream prevention that can not only lower violence in the short term but also encourage greater social cohesion and peace in the long term.

INSIGHT THREE: LEGITIMACY MATTERS

Evidence has shown that a key predictor of the success of violence prevention efforts is whether government institutions, including law enforcement, are seen as legitimate by all key groups in society. A range of effective violence reduction strategies require a minimum level of trust in institutions and that these institutions be inclusive—that is, that they serve all groups in society relatively equitably. Simply stated, lack of legitimacy equals more violence, and an increase in legitimacy equals less violence.

Unfortunately, again and again, we see narratives emerge around violence that are exclusionary and destroy trust, thereby undermining the legitimacy of governmental institutions in the eyes of some population groups. All too often, these narratives rely on scapegoating.

In the United States, we have seen these types of narratives around the Migrant Caravan. In the Philippines, the president has continually pushed narratives that dehumanize drug users and dealers. In Northern Nigeria, security forces cast all young men as potential Boko Haram recruits to justify sweeping raids in which whole towns are targeted.

All these narratives pit a society against itself, thereby making the possibility of inclusive, holistic approaches to violence reduction very difficult. Further, this type of rhetoric has the effect of alienating key segments of society that are essential to knitting together the legitimacy required for effective prevention.

Going back to the first insight, when painted with a broad brush of criminality, whole neighborhoods will shy away from cooperation with authorities and rely instead on their own internal pathways for protection and security. This further breaks down these relationships, creating a cycle of deteriorating legitimacy and increasing risk of harm to individuals.

It has long been understood that there is a link between rule of law and serious violence. But the connection is specific and nuanced. While having strong security and justice systems is important to preventing cycles of chronic violence, it is imperative that these systems operate within and adhere to a framework of respect for human rights. The risk is that "strong rule of law" and the associated institutions of enforcement may be interpreted in ways that violate due process and other human rights. In many countries, for example, torture is allowable under the law. Yet the use of such harsh measures in the long term can alienate people from the systems of law that are meant to serve them.

In Honduras in 2014, the majority of complaints presented to the public ministry were directed against the police, with incidents ranging from abuse of authority to unfair incarceration. In part, these complaints were the consequence of a mano dura style of aggressive policing that includes the systematic violation of human rights.

In 2017, Honduras had an impunity rate of 87 percent, meaning the vast majority of people committing acts of violence got away with it. These two factors are connected: less trust means less cooperation with the police, which means higher levels of impunity, which means more violence.

APPLYING INSIGHTS: THE PEACE IN OUR CITIES CAMPAIGN

The global community has invested significantly in developing an international infrastructure to prevent, resolve, and mitigate violent conflict. This infrastructure is essential and life-saving. But it does not extend sufficiently to the exceptionally high levels of violence witnessed outside of conflict zones, for example in Brazil where in 2015 more civilians were killed than in Syria the same year.

Even within conflict zones, efforts to build peace are often focused on resolving the conflict at a macro-level and not focused specifically on preventing and reducing incidents of violence. Both within and outside of conflict zones, addressing urban violence predominantly remains the prerogative of national governments and local, municipal leadership.

This decentralized approach severely limits the extent to which the preceding insights on violence prevention can be put to use in cities around the world. It is for this reason that Impact:Peace at the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice is helping launch a new campaign to support peace in our cities.

Peace In Our Cities Campaign launch event

Peace in Our Cities—which is being launched together with +Peace and the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies—will bring together cities from around the world, from Colombo, Sri Lanka to Nairobi, Kenya to amplify the urgency of, and support one another in, effectively addressing urban violence.

Peace in Our Cities: Early Adopters

- Bangui, Central African Republic
- Cali, Colombia
- Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago
- Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Durban, South Africa
- Escobedo, Mexico
- Guadalajara, Mexico
- Kibera County, Nairobi
- Kumanovo, Macedonia
- Nairobi Municipality, Kenya
- Tripoli, Lebanon

There are three key elements to the Peace in Our Cities campaign:

1. *Evidence:* The initiative will curate the most relevant and cutting-edge research on effective strategies for preventing and reducing urban violence and make it available for city leaders. This will be a specific contribution of the Kroc IPJ in line with Impact:Peace's overall goal of connecting knowledge with key change processes.

2. *Access:* The initiative will provide city leaders with access to peers in other cities. While much of the published research on what works to address urban violence comes from the United States and Western Europe, there are exceptional cases of prevention coming from Honduras, the Philippines, Colombia, and elsewhere that provide important opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

3. *Momentum:* By creating both a global network and a major international change campaign focused on urban violence, Peace in Our Cities will build momentum and urgency among all sectors of society to address the scourge of violence.

As the increase in violence becomes a concern in San Diego, it is an important time to remember that we already know a great deal about how to reduce violence in urban settings.

The Mayor of Bangui signing the SDG16+ Action Pledge

Peace in Our Cities will build a powerful, global movement of cities equipped to leverage that knowledge to create effective strategies at the local level. The ultimate goal: make an important contribution to achieving the commitment within UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 to significantly reduce all forms of violence worldwide.

> "For us, the Peace in Our Cities campaign is very important, because we find allies with our same vision: the social prevention of violence to consolidate urban peace."
>
> - Mayor Norman Maurice Armitage
> Cali, Colombia

PEACE IN OUR CITIES CAMPAIGN

Rachel Locke is the Director of Impact:Peace

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The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies (Kroc School) at the University of San Diego is a global hub for peacebuilding and social innovation. Founded in 2007, it offers master's degrees in peace and justice, social innovation, conflict management and resolution, and a dual degree in peace and law — programs which have attracted diverse and dynamic students from more than 50 countries who are leading change. The Kroc School is also home to the Center for Peace and Commerce and the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. The Kroc IPJ co-creates learning that is deeply grounded in the lived experience of peacemakers around the world, that is made rigorous by its place within a university ecosystem, and that has immediate, practical applications for those working to end cycles of violence. Through groundbreaking research and forward-thinking programs, the Kroc School is shaping a future in which peaceful co-existence is the new normal. To learn more, visit **sandiego.edu/peace**

The Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) is the bridge between learning and practice within the Kroc School. The core of the Kroc IPJ's mission is to learn with peacemakers how to end cycles of violence and build peace, both locally and globally.

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