



# UN-HABITAT

International Youth Crime Prevention & Cities Summit

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## Feature 2

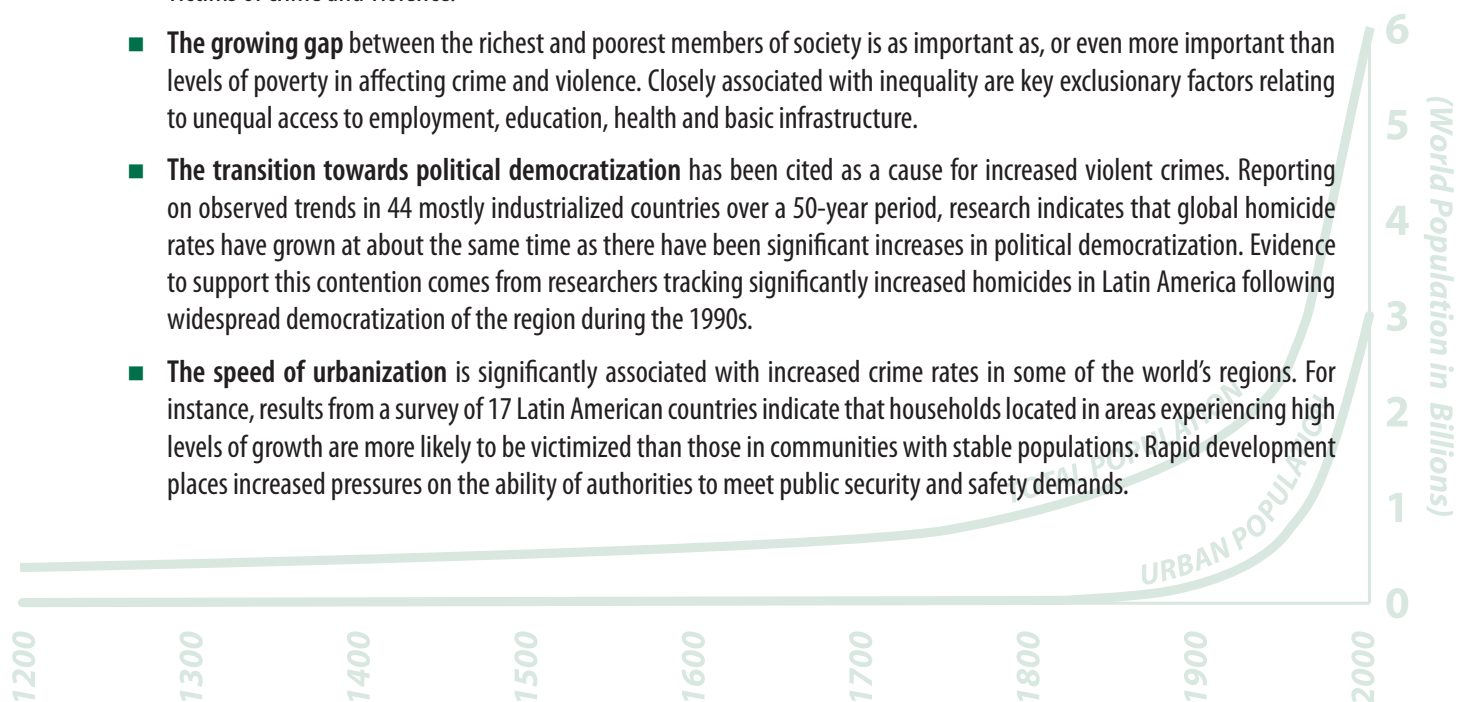
### Causes of crime and violence

Several factors influence the incidence of crime and violence. These include economic and political circumstances that produce opportunities and incentives for criminal behaviour and violent acts, as well as the situations that frame victimization.

Social and cultural factors also exacerbate or mediate crime. For instance, in cities such as Kabul, Karachi and Managua, violence is so interwoven into the fabric of daily life that it has become the norm for many slum dwellers. On the other hand, in Hong Kong and other parts of East and Southeast Asia, Confucianism-based family values and a generally compliant 'pro-social' population are major factors in keeping crime and violence low.

Other factors associated with urban crime and violence include poverty, unemployment, inequality, intergenerational transmission of violence as reflected in the continuous witnessing of parental abuse during childhood, the rapid pace of urbanization, poor urban planning, design and management, growth in youthful population, and the concentration of political power, which facilitates corruption and city size and density.

- **Poverty** is an important factor associated with increased crime and violence. While crime may be seen as a survival alternative in the face of grinding poverty, there are poor communities where crime levels are low because behaviour is constrained by informal social and cultural values. Inequality may be a more important underlying factor in the perpetration of crime and violence than poverty per se.
- **Unemployment** is a fundamental issue related to crime and violence rates among young people. The World Bank estimates that 74 million people between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, which accounts for 41 per cent of all unemployed persons. Most research suggests that unemployed youths are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, as well as victims of crime and violence.
- **The growing gap** between the richest and poorest members of society is as important as, or even more important than levels of poverty in affecting crime and violence. Closely associated with inequality are key exclusionary factors relating to unequal access to employment, education, health and basic infrastructure.
- **The transition towards political democratization** has been cited as a cause for increased violent crimes. Reporting on observed trends in 44 mostly industrialized countries over a 50-year period, research indicates that global homicide rates have grown at about the same time as there have been significant increases in political democratization. Evidence to support this contention comes from researchers tracking significantly increased homicides in Latin America following widespread democratization of the region during the 1990s.
- **The speed of urbanization** is significantly associated with increased crime rates in some of the world's regions. For instance, results from a survey of 17 Latin American countries indicate that households located in areas experiencing high levels of growth are more likely to be victimized than those in communities with stable populations. Rapid development places increased pressures on the ability of authorities to meet public security and safety demands.



- The link between crime and **city size** in developing countries can be explained by three factors. First, returns on crime are likely to be higher in larger cities due to the greater concentration of wealthier victims, more opportunities to commit various types of crime, and a more developed second-hand market for the disposal of stolen items. Second, the chances of arresting a criminal might be lower in larger cities because large cities spend less on law enforcement per capita, or have lower levels of community cooperation with the police, or require more police officers per inhabitant to effect an arrest. Finally, larger cities have a greater proportion of crime-prone individuals/potential criminals.
- **Poor urban planning, design and management** have increasingly been cited as playing a role in the shaping of urban environments that put citizens and property at risk. Thus, the physical fabric and layout of cities have a bearing on the routine movements of offenders and victims and on opportunities for crime. It has been estimated that 10 to 15 per cent of crimes have environmental design and management components.
- Surveys show that conditions supporting the growth of organized crime, such as **globalization of markets and increasingly sophisticated communications technology** are not likely to diminish in the near future.
- Closely related to globalization is the **deportation of criminals** to their countries of origin. This phenomenon, which is common in Latin America and the Caribbean, where offenders are deported from the US, partially accounts for increasing levels of youth crime and gang-related activities in the region. This has resulted in the “transfer” of gang wars from the ghettos of Los Angeles to the streets of Latin America and Jamaica.
- A wealth of international data suggests that crime and violence are strongly associated with the **growth and proportion of youthful populations** and, especially, young males. Cross-national research using data on 44 countries from 1950 to 2000 reveals that “the percentage of young people in the populations and their level of prosperity are jointly more important in explaining the variability of homicide”.