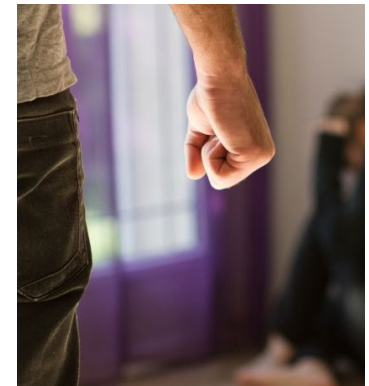


# THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: A RESEARCH AGENDA

Background paper for the  
Regional Human Development Report for  
Latin America and the Caribbean

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**Northwestern University**

# Latin America: The most violent region in the world



# The relation between violence and inequality

- An old question: how does inequality shape violence?

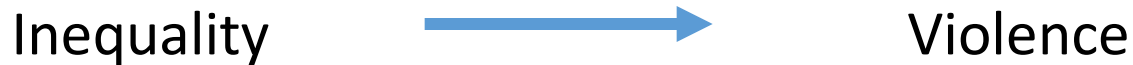
Inequality



Violence

# The relation between violence and inequality

- An old question: how does inequality shape violence?



- But violence can also impact inequality:



# Why consider the effects of violence on inequality?

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Violence has profound effects on key developmental outcomes.

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But these effects do not impact all people equally. Gender, race and ethnicity, class, age, and geographic location can determine the risk of being a victim.

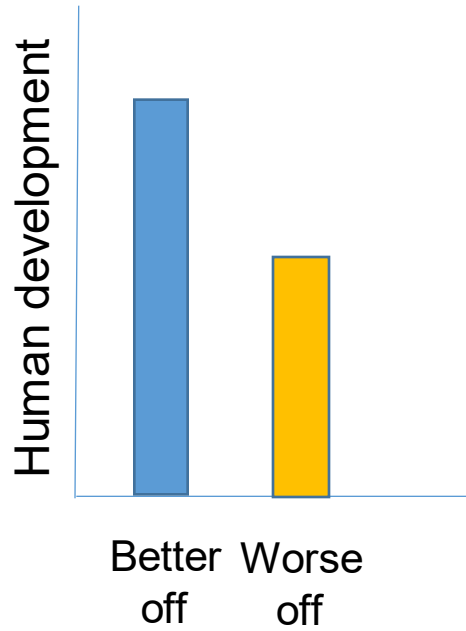
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Vulnerable population groups can endure more pervasive effects.

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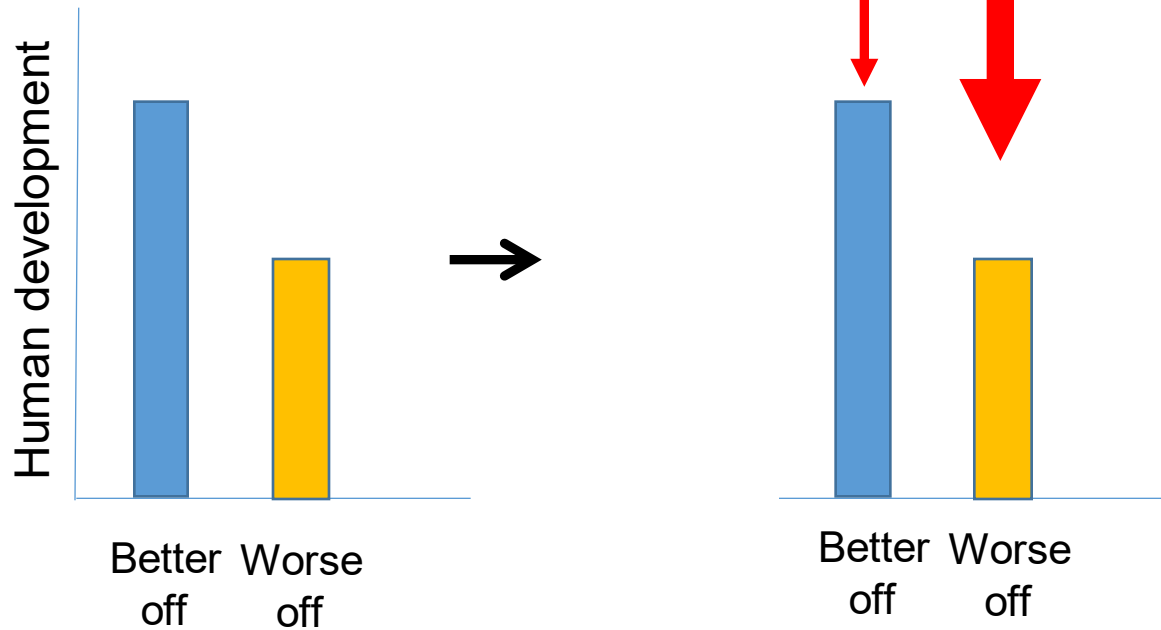
The potential effect of violence on inequality is crucial in Latin America—the second most unequal *and* the most violent region in the world.

## Unequal society



## Unequal society

## Violence disproportionately affects the worse off

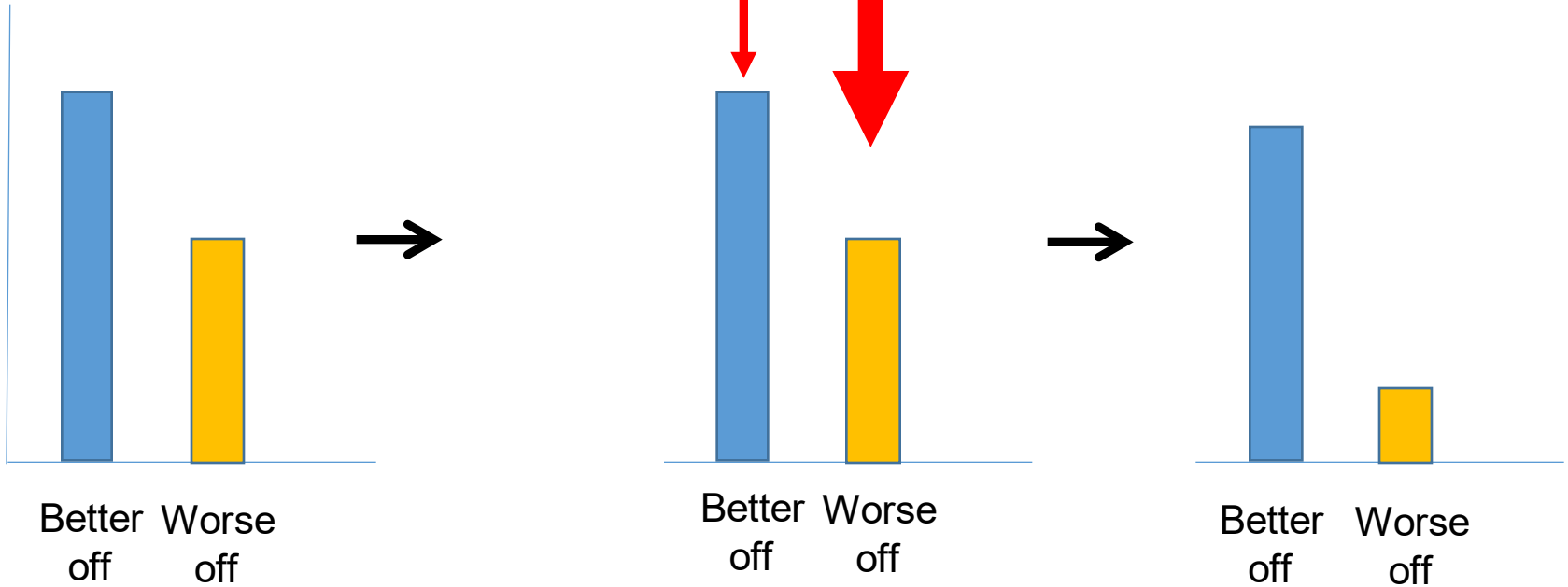


Unequal society

Violence disproportionately affects the worse off

Violence increases inequality

Human development





# A research agenda on the effects of violence on inequality in human development

- (i) The dynamics of different types of violence in LAC
- (ii) The effects of violence on many developmental outcomes

→ Derive hypotheses on the effects of violence on inequality in human development

## Order of the presentation

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1. The patterns of violence in the region

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2. The effects of different forms of violence on several domains

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3. Conclusion

## 2. The patterns of violence in the region



# The patterns of violence in the region

- Historically a violent region.
- In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: mostly political violence.
- After democratization wave, criminal violence has increased dramatically.
- Problems with social violence.
- Focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century.

# The patterns of violence in the region

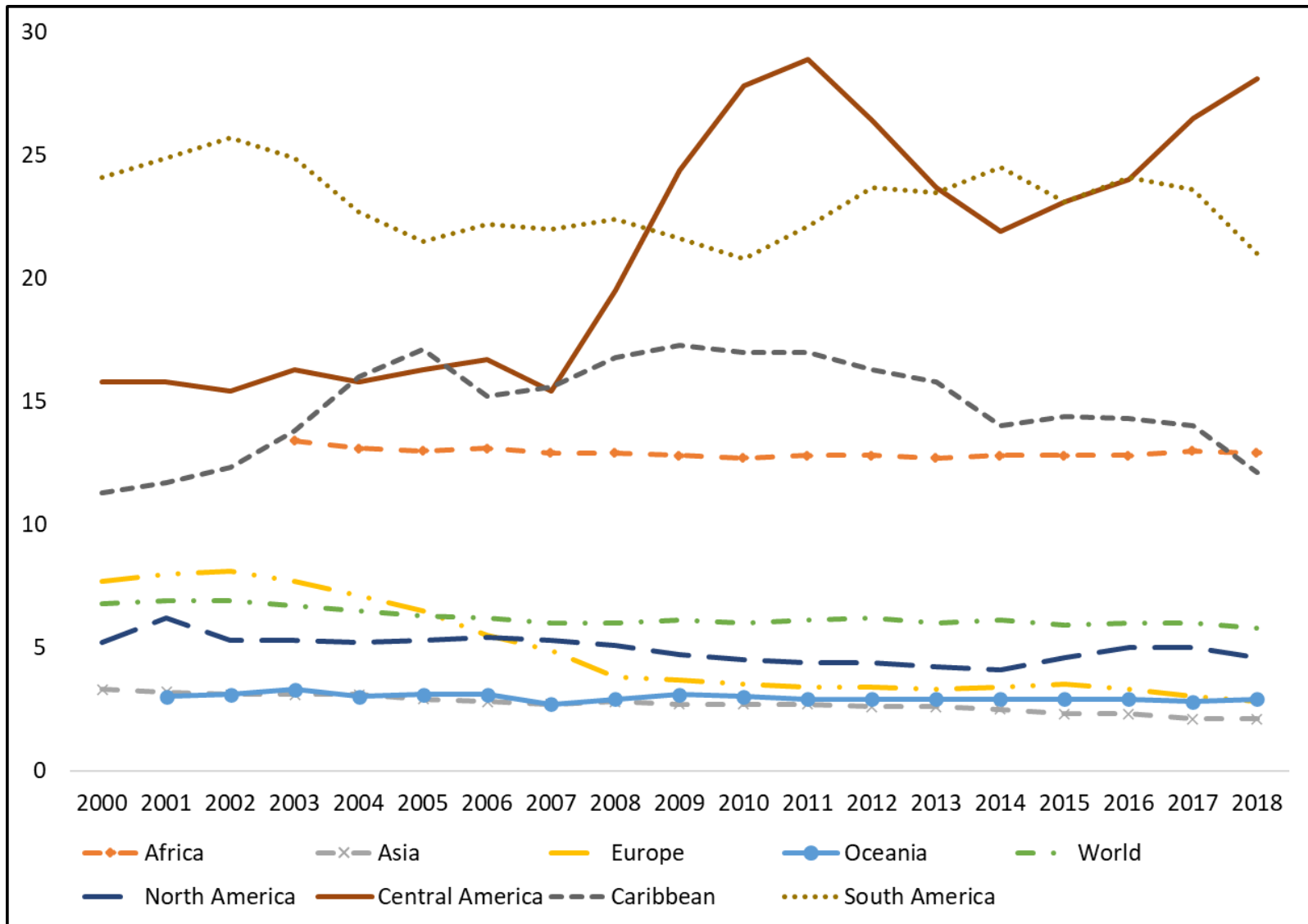
Three broad types of violence:

- Criminal violence
- Political violence
- Social and domestic violence

\* But start with homicides—which are mostly linked to crime.

# Homicides

# LAC: the most violent region



# Homicides

- Variation across countries
- Large subnational variation
- Mostly due to organized crime—but difficult to establish the proportion
- Mostly in slums of large cities and rural areas with illicit economies and weak state presence



# **Criminal violence**

# Criminal violence

- Most violent crime in LAC is linked to the illicit drug trade, especially cocaine.
- Violence escalates when there is competition between criminal groups and between them and the state.
- Some violence due to conflict within organizations.
- Common delinquency.

# Criminal governance

- Criminal groups often become de facto rulers.
- They provide order, enforce contracts, resolve disputes, and regulate economic, social, and political activities.

# Criminal violence

- Human trafficking
- Extortion and kidnapping
- Illicit mining
- Displacement
- Robberies and physical attacks

# Who are the victims of criminal violence?

- Mostly young men.
- Poor individuals and communities more impacted by the presence of organized criminal groups, their activities, and their violence.
- Rural and urban peripheries.
- Afro-descendent populations.
- LGBTI+.
- Robberies may affect the rich more, but conflicting findings.

# Political violence

# Political violence

- Decline in political violence in 21<sup>st</sup> century
- But some forms of political violence continue
- The number of protests has increased since 2013  
(but only a small proportion are violent)

# State violence

- Police brutality
  - 7% of citizens in LAC have been victims of police abuse (LAPOP 2008)
  - Affects young men, and residents of large cities
  - Critical in Argentina, El Salvador, Bolivia and Colombia



# State violence

- Extra-judicial killings:
  - Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Venezuela
- Violence against human rights defenders:
  - Highest in the world
  - Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala

# State violence

- Attacks against journalists:
  - Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, Brazil and Guatemala
- Political violence in the Colombian armed conflict

# Who are the victims of political violence?

- Social leaders: ethnic minorities and poor
- Victims of state violence: young, poor, ethnic minorities

# **Social and domestic violence**

# Violence against women

- Third highest rate of sexual violence by non-partners in the world (WHO 2013)
- Second-highest rate of sexual or physical violence by partners in the world (WHO 2013)
- Femicide: the Americas had the second highest rate of females killed purely by intimate partners in 2018.

# Violence against children

- Lethal violence of adolescents is the highest in the world, especially in Venezuela, Honduras, Colombia, el Salvador and Brazil.
- High levels of violent disciplining at home.

# Other population groups

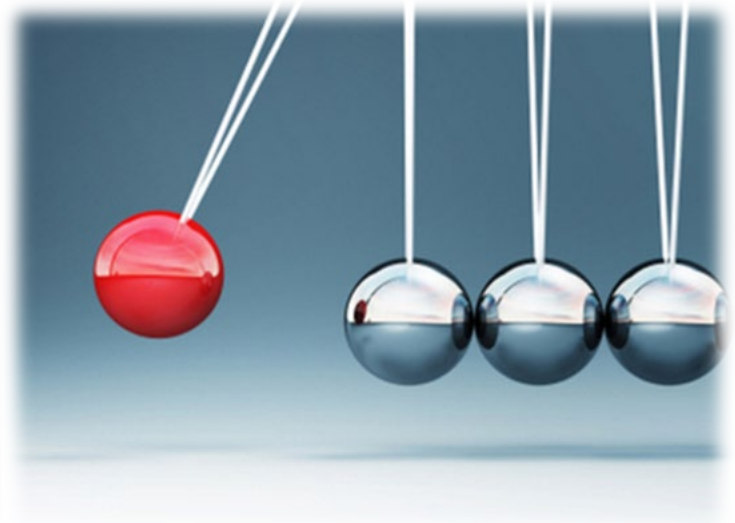
- One of the highest homicide rates of LGBTI+ in the world.
- Ethnic minorities: surprising data scarcity but estimates suggest Afro descendent and indigenous people are victimized at higher rates in many countries.

# Who are the victims of social violence?

- Gender-based violence affect women and ethnic and gender minorities more.
- Some studies find higher prevalence of domestic violence among the poor, but there are mixed findings.



### 3. The potential effects of violence on inequality



# The literature on the effects of violence

- Vast and scattered
- Academic niches that often don't speak to each other
- Many different types of effects

# The literature on the effects of violence

- I focus on effects that can impact inequality because of their effect on already vulnerable individuals or communities
- Interpersonal inequality *and* group inequality
- Different forms of inequality

# The literature on the effects of violence

1. Human security and rights
2. Human development: health, education and income
3. Political participation, social capital and democracy
4. The quality of local governance

# Human security

- Right to life and integrity
- Freedom (adaptive behavior to avoid violence)
- Impact on the poor is likely to be higher as they can neither flee nor pay for private protection
- Even when they flee: hardship for low-income migrants is much higher

# Human security

- Violence can also exacerbate inequality affecting women and LGBT, whose rights are already undermined.
- Criminal governance: affects the rights and freedoms of vulnerable communities even if they are not victims of violence. Akin to living in a local dictatorship.

# Women's health

- Severe effects on their physical mental health.
- PTSD, anxiety, suicidal ideation & attempts
- Functional physical health, chronic pain, memory loss, problems with concentration
- These impacts amplifies their disadvantages

# Children's health

- Violence severely impacts their development and wellbeing
- Cognitive development, non-cognitive skills, educational outcomes
- Violence against their parents, schools and communities also affects them



# Health

- Civil war literature shows important effects on individual and community-level outcomes
- On communities:
  - Local-level effects on overall health
  - Effects on lower levels of physical activity

# Health

- When violence undermines the health of vulnerable individuals and communities, it exacerbates inequality in health as well as in other outcomes impacted by health, like education and earnings.

# Education

- Large effects on children: academic outcomes, attendance, dropping out of school, aggressive behavior in school.
- Effects on schools: teacher turnover.
- Well-identified effects in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Peru.

# Income

- Direct and indirect effects on individuals, localities and countries
- Individual level:
  - By impacting physical and mental health, violence affects labor market participation
  - By impacting education, violence can also impact labor market participation and earnings

# Income

- On Women: mixed findings on intimate-partner violence
- When violence triggers migration: negative effects on income (direct and indirect effects)

# Income

- Many studies on the macro-level impact of crime on GDP
  - Potential impact on inequality if reduced economic growth impacts investments and institutional reforms that can reduce inequality
- A few studies on the negative impact of local economies
- Amplify the gap between vulnerable and wealthier communities

# Political participation, social capital and democracy

Violence can reduce political participation and social capital in the short term (although it can increase it in the long term, once violence decreases)

# Political participation, social capital and democracy

Violence can also affect the supply-side of democracy:

- Less political competition in elections
- Alliances between armed groups and politicians that impact the democratic process and results



# Political participation, social capital and democracy

- Violence can undermine political representation of vulnerable communities
- If social capital is affected, many social, political, and economic effects

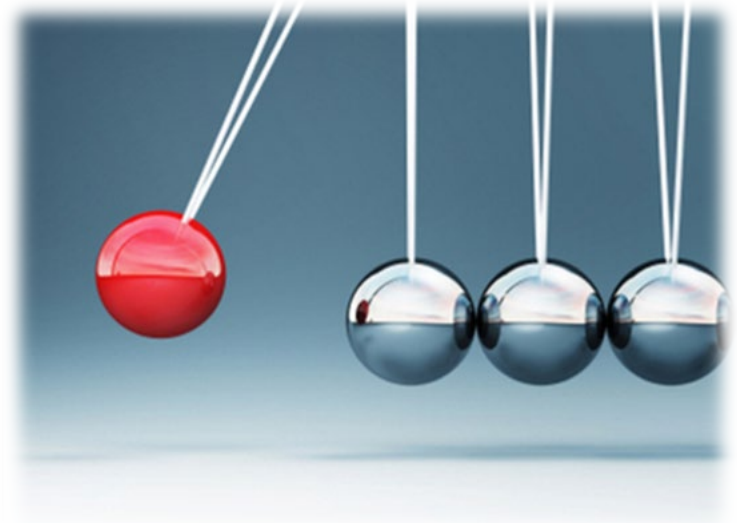
# Political participation, social capital and democracy

- This can in turn undermine political representation of vulnerable communities
- If social capital is affected, many social, political, and economic effects

# The quality of local governance

- Very few studies on this effect
- Given criminal governance, influence on elections, and political influence: the presence and activities of violent groups can undermine the quality of local governments affecting
  - Public goods provision
  - Rule of law
  - Subnational economic inequality

# Conclusion



# Conclusion

- Violence affects individuals and communities in many ways
- Not everyone has the same likelihood of being victimized or impacted by the dynamics of violence
- Multiple forms of inequality can be amplified and perpetuated

# Conclusion

- We need better data on different forms of violence
- Research on the effects of violence on inequality
- The region has even more reasons to prioritize the reduction of violence as it can also help to address inequality