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The main challenge facing humankind today is violence or terror, to use the cliché that has followed the September 11 attacks in the United States. Violence or terror in whatever forms are transcendent in all human societies, whether in the North or South, East or West. That is why this paper's subject matter is extremely important, timely, and worthwhile.

Briceño-León explores the interplay between urban violence and public health in Latin America from a sociological standpoint. The paper addresses two hypotheses. The first is that violence can be closely linked to urbanization and its underlying social processes, while the second is about the public health consequences of urban violence.

The paper begins by suggesting that the rapid pace of urbanization in Latin America has been accompanied by violence. In other words, Briceño-León seems to suggest that there is a positive correlation between urbanization and urban violence. As the Latin American cities have grown in size, so has the level of violence. An attempt is made to support the assertion with data. Further attempt is made in the paper to invoke a paradigm for the phenomenon of urban violence in Latin America. The rest of the paper is about the classification of factors accounting for urban violence, such as poverty, unemployment, and high levels of illiteracy, family breakdown, and the culture of masculinity, drug/abuse trafficking, the decline of religion, and access to firearms in urban centers. Finally, the paper explores the implications of urban violence for public health.

The paper's subject matter reminds one of Emile Durkheim's classic study on suicide¹. Durkheim showed how suicide could be linked to and/or explained by the pervading economic climate in society. While Durkheim successfully made this case, the same cannot be said of the paper under debate here. The reasons for the failure to produce such an explanation are not farfetched and can be found in the following contexts.

First, there is a lack of clarity on the independent and dependent variables in the paper. Violence is a broad concept which includes suicide, homicides, armed conflict(s), assault, violent strikes and demonstrations resulting in loss of lives and property, guerrilla warfare, etc. Violence can also be collective (e.g., violence from political unrest) or domestic (e.g., violence within family units like wife-beating, physical abuse of children, etc.). In any case, Briceño-León fails to define urban violence in the pa-

per. Indeed, the author seems to suggest that urban violence is coterminous with homicides. The need to define urban violence and its scope and to specify which of them is being addressed in the context of the paper is desirable. The paper is therefore not about urban violence in Latin America but about one of its forms, namely, homicide. I hasten to add that the title should reflect the author's concern.

The second observation is about the weak data on the link between urbanization and its underlying social processes. For example, the main cause of homicide in Colombia, currently fraught by guerilla war, is political conflict rather than urbanization. Although Briceño-León is quick to make this clarification, this example undermines the guiding hypothesis about the positive correlation between urban violence (defined as homicide) and urbanization.

The third observation relates to the idyllic picture of urban centers painted by Briceño-León. According to him, urban centers are supposedly a haven for rights, safety, and good manners. This is far from the characterization of urban centers as compared to rural settings in sociological classics and/or in what is generally known about cities. Once more Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Toennies (to name two) argued that urban centers are more socially differentiated than rural, while the Durkheim noted that they (urban centers) are more susceptible to anomie and alienation than the rural. There is no doubt that urban centers are developed, but they are also not necessarily peaceful environments as argued in various sections of the paper, most especially in the penultimate paragraph.

The fourth remark is about the tables used to justify the paper's main hypothesis. The tables in their present form do not provide definitive evidence, because they are descriptive. A rigorous analysis using multivariate statistical methods might indicate the predictors of homicide (see Table 5). Moreover, there is no evidence in the paper to support the following assertion: "*In Latin America, the distance between the poor and the rich is the greatest in the world. On other continents, such as Africa, there is more poverty, but there is also not as much wealth. In Europe, on the other hand, there is more wealth but not as much poverty*" (see section entitled *The City has More Wealth and More Poverty*).

The fifth and final remark is about the theory invoked to explain urban violence. It is difficult to discern the differences among the factors that are grouped under the macro, meso, and micro. Table 11 below shows an attempt to produce a matrix of factors.

Table 11

Proposed matrix of macro, meso, and micro factors for violence.

S/N	Macro	Meso	Micro
1.	More wealth than poverty in the city	Segregation and urban poverty	More firearms in the population
2.	More education, but less employment	Culture of masculinity	Alcohol consumption
3.	More aspirations, but less capacity to meet them	Local drug market and impunity	Inability to verbally express feelings
4.	Less social control by the family		
5.	Less force of religion		

It is self-evident from the matrix that some of the macro factors are not sufficiently overarching and could easily be placed in the meso and micro. A macro factor should be an overarching one that stands out and is therefore fundamental. The macro provides the explanation because it transcends the society. Thus, there should not be more than one macro. It would have been urbanization and its underlying social processes if Briceño-León had settled for one, which according to the guiding hypothesis provides the clue to the high homicide rates in Latin American cities. However, the matrix does not include urbanization, which is proposed in the paper as the macro factor.

Finally, the paper's real challenge is to define urban violence and provide convincing data on the interplay between urbanization and whatever Briceño-León defines as violence.

1. Durkheim E. *Le suicide. Étude de sociologie*. 2nd Ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; 1967.

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When I began reading Dr. Briceño-León's paper on urban violence in Latin America, I thought he was also describing the Philippine urban condition. Had it not been for its geographical location, I would have added the Philippines to the list of Latin American countries with medium to high rates of urban violence. The Philippines have numerous similarities with a number of Latin American countries, due mainly to more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. It is the only Catholic country in Asia.

Violence in Metropolitan Manila where I reside is regularly depicted by the media, particularly in the daily newspapers, radio, and TV

evening news. Often reported are cases of murder, manslaughter, rape, and aggravated assault committed mainly by male adolescents and young adults who are reportedly poor, with little education, jobless or underemployed, and under the influence of illicit drugs. The young men tend to hail from slum and squatter communities, a segment comprising over a third of Manila's population. These cases of violence are reported to cover about a third of all crime or the crimes reported to the police in the past year. The constant presence of security guards in virtually every establishment and location reflect the pervasive fear among residents, not only in Metropolitan Manila but also in large and small cities throughout the country.

The public at large seeks plausible explanations from the media, the police, and other social institutions regarding the escalating urban violence. The various sources of information often attribute this situation to weak leadership by government, an inadequate or poor security system, corrupt politicians and the police, terrorists, drug pushers, mass poverty, and declining moral standards in society.

While many of the above factors may play roles in the rapidly growing violence in Philippine cities, there has been no comprehensive explanation for this situation. Briceño-León and his research institution, the Social Sciences Laboratory (LACSO), offer a sociological framework that is useful for explaining urban violence, not only in Latin America but also in other regions of the world. This framework considers the contributions of other explanatory models on violence, but it appears to be more comprehensive because it considers the situation in society and the cultural dimension which can affect individual decisions and participation in violence. It does not "pretend to be exhaustive", nor is it a "model for universal explanations", and it recognizes urban violence as a complex phenomenon. Thus it posits "three distinct levels of explanation": the structural or