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The emergence of the democratic citizen security policy in the Dominican Republic

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Democratic security policies have become a major innovation in the last decades in Latin America and the Caribbean. This article analyses the Dominican Republic's recent attempt to address the escalation of violence and complex criminality through the Plan for Democratic Security (Plan de Seguridad Democrática), launched in 2005. The Plan emerged from a complex process that involved multiple and overlapping reforms, innovative social and political strategies and the concertation of public and private actors with contradictory interests. To implement the Plan over the past five years, the government confronted an unfavourable environment of crisis, disenchantment, mutual distrust and precarious institutionalisation. Not surprisingly, the Plan has had mixed results, yet for that reason offers many lessons to be learned. Three major lessons are: (1) basing security policies on a clear understanding of the social, political and cultural contexts that foment crime and violence; (2) obtaining firm support from both the public and the political and social leadership in order to promote institutional reforms and (3) guaranteeing the sustainability of the new crime prevention strategy by transcending short-term measures such as massive police deployment.

Keywords: citizen security; police brutality; police reform; Dominican Republic; community participation

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Introduction

For decades, across Latin America and the Caribbean, democratic transitions and the concomitant processes of institutionalisation have coincided with an increase in criminal and social violence, which many governments have responded to with institutional violence (Sain 2004, Davis 2008, Ungar 2008). The intersection of these phenomena has escalated the interaction between citizens and public and private violent agents under the shelter of defective models of democracy. To be sure, the disparity between growing insecurity of the citizens and the dearth of adequate strategies to face it are not a new phenomenon, nor are they characteristic of any country or region. But their effects are felt in the increasing complexity and redefinition of social relations, and in the renewed antagonism between the states and their societies (Arias and Goldstein 2010).

The ineffectiveness of reactive and short-term responses to these challenges of violence has prompted Latin American and Caribbean governments and their political leadership to reconsider the need to implement systemic, far-reaching

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reforms (Frühling 2004, Baile and Dammert 2006). The main hurdle is staying on track in the face of the typically underestimated and not always anticipated challenges: (1) to successfully harmonise interests which are frequently in opposition, at a moment when the issue of safety has become commodified as political merchandise; (2) to synchronise the different governmental institutions focusing on macro-objectives and micro processes of implementation; (3) at the same time, to achieve and consolidate the necessary institutionalisation of policy objectives and their implementation, especially given the tendentious abrogation of initiatives that are implemented upon the arrival of each new administration; (4) finally, the spread of democratic security principles across the board and throughout all the institutions of the state. This final point poses a challenge, in view of the precarious bonds between institutions which most governments labour under.

In this context there are several questions regarding the possibility of redefining security for the citizenry in democratic terms. Can control of crime and violence be made compatible with the preservation of citizens' rights and the rule of law? If the answer is affirmative, what factors contribute to make this balancing act sustainable and what forms should the government take to provide for the safety of the citizenry?

This article deals with the complex processes involved in bringing about reforms and establishing regimes of citizen security in fragile institutional and social contexts, where demands for public safety have frequently validated the violation of citizen's rights (Davis 1994, Ungar 2002, Zaverucha 2003). In contrast, the Dominican Republic's Plan for Democratic Security (PDS), a work in progress, is presented here. This project represents the country's first comprehensive effort to execute a policy of citizen safety within a democratic context. As it reveals obstacles to change, the PDS also points to the institutional reforms needed to confront new criminal tendencies that have shaken the foundations of Dominican society.

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Context of the Democratic Security plan

In August 2004, when President Leonel Fernandez Reyna took office for the second time, he was faced with a rising level of criminal violence and prevailing insecurity. Since the early 1990s, the pattern of criminality in the region has become more complex due to the dominant presence of drug trafficking and its national and local manifestations (Gamarra and Rogers 1998). The National Police, traditionally responsible for controlling political unrest, proved to be incapable of understanding the new conditions of public insecurity (Newlink 2005c).[1] The rate of violent deaths climbed from 12.49 per 100,000 people in 2001 to 25.25 in 2004. The number of Dominicans who did not feel safe either in their homes or outside doubled, going from 42% in 1994 to 79% in 2006. The number of people who claimed to have been victims of criminal acts increased from 9% in 2004 to 16% in 2006 (Duarte *et al.* 1994, Morgan and Espinal 2006, pp. 88–89). The number of people who died at the hands of the police escalated as well. Between 1997 and 2004, killings of alleged criminals by the police rose from 78 to 200 per year. During the latter decade one out of five homicides was the result of police violence.

General public opinion considered these deaths extra-judicial executions. In other words, the institutional response was not a part of the solution, but rather a part of the problem. That situation led a number of organisations to demand substantial

reforms in the Dominican justice and security systems, including a change in the military logic of the National Police and the transformation of that institution into a democratic force with much closer relations to the civilian population.

In February 2005, President Fernández announced a ground breaking policy for citizen safety, the PDS.[2] The Plan had two primary goals: the first was to restore the authority of the state by rebuilding the trustworthiness of the police among the citizenry and by promoting a participatory and democratic style of police work that respects the rights of citizens. The second aim was to strengthen the shared responsibility of the citizenry in the development of security policy. During the first two years after the PDS was put into effect, it had a noticeable impact on several factors that undermined safety, including a reduction of the rate of violent deaths from 25.25 per 100,000 in 2004 to 20.2 in 2008, a proactive police presence in the most vulnerable communities and the re-establishment of control over space and free movement in poor neighbourhoods. The result made a favourable impression on the part of 82% of residents of these poor neighbourhoods (Centro Juan Montalvo 2007).

Experts have long insisted on the need to address the structural problems that give rise to criminality and violence by creating employment programmes and relief from chronic problems such as overcrowding, lack of access to education and health care and environmental degradation. The government's lack of attention to these problems over several decades of rapid urbanisation helped to create the zones of social exclusion most plagued by crime. This integrated approach to the structural underpinnings of criminality was, in fact, one of the premises of PDS. Nevertheless, these deeply rooted problems have been the Plan's biggest challenge.

Prior to implementation of the PDS, security policies were based on iron-fist tactics (Gitlitz and Chevigny 2000, Bobea 2003). These practices were validated by the administrative weaknesses of the judicial system and the police, as well as the unchallenged exercise of state violence shielded by an impenetrable impunity. Maintaining the 'iron fist' for decades has required a system based on inequality and discrimination that punishes infractions of lesser importance with the harshest penalties, while the higher-status authors of serious crimes are scarcely sanctioned.

The killing of suspected criminals by police has for decades constituted a de facto means to fight crime in poor neighbourhoods (Bobea 2003). Police have long enjoyed almost complete discretion in the use of lethal violence because of the lack of controls within the force itself and a larger culture of impunity for state agents.

The DSP led to a marked decline in the number of suspects killed in 'exchanges of fire' in its first year. This can be understood in part as a result of the Plan's attempts to reform the police, which directed public attention to conduct. This tendency was reinforced by the new Code of Penal Procedure (CPP), which established that police agents accused of serious crimes would be tried in normal courts of law. Despite this progress, illegal practices have not disappeared, a sign of how deeply rooted they are within the institutional culture of the police.

Instead, the institutions of law enforcement are themselves plagued by abuses committed against their own personnel. During my investigation, prior to the implementation of the PDS, new recruits and lower-ranking officers insisted that the institution would have to be democratised internally before its members could be expected to act as guardians of citizen rights.[3] Low and mid-ranking officers repeatedly complained of abuses and disciplinary excesses suffered at the hands of

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their superiors, incarceration without charges and punishment in the form of arbitrary transfers to distant areas far away from families. Recent recruits denounced miserable wages and poor working conditions as practices that violate their rights as citizens.

Among the factors that have made it possible to maintain this odd regime of public control points out the lack of either external or internal mechanism to regulate and monitor the police behaviour in its relationship with citizenry, combined with a deep corporatism that approves of repression and violence (Chevigny 1995, López-Portillo and Martínez Solares 2007). For that reason the PDS focuses on strengthening internal controls and making respect for human rights as an essential part of the training of police officers.

Another failing of the 'old' security regime, deeply embedded on the institutional culture has been the glaring lack of coordination among the different agencies of the state, especially the Ministerio Público (hereafter referred to as the Dominican Department of Justice), the Town and City Halls, the police themselves and the Department of the Interior and the Police. All these institutions operate as bureaucratic islands, reflecting the absence of a national security plan. The PDS encouraged institutional coordination through weekly cross-departmental meetings.

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Opposition to reform

Prior to the launching of the PDS, previous attempts at reform at the end of the 1990s failed due to resistance within the bureaucratic and political sectors of the institutional hierarchy, including some hundred retired military officers who held high positions in the police force until very recently. Although the PDS has gradually transformed the approach to public safety for the first time in the history of Dominican democracy, resistance to change is still palpable among key sectors of the police force. Opponents of police reform argued that the control and administration of the police are too important to the security of the State to delegate to the citizenry and second, that democratic procedures are incompatible with the efforts to fight crime. Both assumptions coincided with a militarised vision of public safety. The existence of special police courts was also a throwback to the militaristic profile of the institution. The exclusive jurisdiction that the police enjoyed through these courts of exception was abolished in 2004 with the reform of the CPP. The new norm compelled the police force to protect the civil rights of suspects and of the accused.

The persistently repressive approach to law enforcement had traditionally been permitted by a system that was de facto autonomous. Although the constitutional subordination of the national police to the executive branch seemingly guaranteed civilian control over the institution, in the course of many different administrations the police had successfully obliterated genuine oversight by the Secretary of Interior or the Office of the Attorney General. In practice, the functions of direction, execution and sanctions have essentially rested with the police. Therefore, one of the challenges that the PDS faced from its inception was to develop the hierarchy proper to every modern state, by strengthening the role of the Secretary of the Interior and the Police, fostering bonds between institutions and monitoring security policy planning as part of the Department of Justice's responsibilities. The collection of

accurate statistics on crime and violence were also emphasised as vital inputs for a systematic response from a modernised police force.

In one of the focus groups created in the first stage of the PDS some police admitted that,

> The police force was created during the dictatorship of Leonidas Trujillo, 70 years ago, when his main mission consisted in ideological persecution. Never before have we been immersed in the kind of reform we are moving toward. We have always remained backward, in a state of regression.[4]

Breaking with this entrenched institutional culture will be a gradual process. The new public security policy creates a framework in which that process can unfold. The long-term goal is to strengthen the state as regulator and generator of incentives that will satisfy the interests of all the stakeholders in a transparent and mutually beneficial manner (Gault 2007, p. 96). That process demands that the state build a favourable political atmosphere for the changes by enhancing technical and administrative capacity within the national police while civil society develops greater confidence in government institutions. Some specialists (Frühling 2004, Basombrío 2006) consider police re-education to be one of the best strategies of community crime prevention.

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Results of the reforms

The PDS became official public policy in 2005, six months after the beginning of President Fernandez' administration.[5] According to the documents that outline the policy and its strategy for the safety of the citizenry, the Plan 'is proactive and preventive, and it promotes concerted action across different sectors because it combines integral measures that will directly reduce the incidence of crime, malfeasance and violence in (Dominican) society' (Newlink 2005b). As State policy the PDS parts from the premise of its continued existence in time, fostering the development of a critical, collaborative conscience between the citizens and the institutions that provide security services. To these ends the PDS emphasises the need for coordination between institutions, restoration of trust in the police, communication between community organisations and the police and the development of a communitarian police. In order to reach those objectives, which sought a new role within the community for the police, the PDS considered the territorial decentralisation of law enforcement by creating regional and local commands, directed from the centre but working closely with local governments as well. This proposal for community policing, still under consideration, would ideally optimise police work by allowing the institution to focus on prevention and control at the local level.

Community participation

Historically, Dominicans have not been consulted by the authorities about citizen security. Although a variety of non-governmental organisations have accumulated a great deal of experience working with communities on collective strategies that include security, those initiatives have remained within civil society. From the start the PDS broke with the state's traditional unilateralism in security matters by applying a series of diagnostics in the poor neighbourhoods that were the Plan's

priority target. Every one of the barrios included in the first phase of the PDS participated in the diagnostics, which applied surveys, interviews and focus groups, to address such problems as crime, social conflict, security, drug trafficking and violence as well as the resources needed to address those issues. As one resident put it, 'The PDS is a strategy to bring together all the people from the neighborhoods in order to hear their needs expressed in their own voices.' Another said: 'When we talk about democracy, we are talking about participation, and that means we are looking to bring everyone together, so that each individual feels more secure'.[6] Through the initiative of the Secretary of the Interior and Police, neighbourhoods chose community leaders (*voceros*) as liaisons with the police and other institutions involved with the new security plan. These community representatives have played a key role in following up on the PDS through Barrio Seguro (Safe Neighbourhood), as explained below.

The Community-Oriented Policing programme, another part of the PDS, follows a distinctive philosophical vision that requires organisational and operational changes. The objective is to prevent and fight crime and to guarantee public order by coordinating actions among the community, the police and other authorities. Elaborating from other experiences, community policing was conceived as an 'educational process in which the tasks of policemen are not merely to identify, diagnose, and recommend solutions to problems; instead, the police empower the community to organize, define issues and needs, formulate individual and group goals, and implement ongoing citizen action'.[7] This approach assumes the active participation of the community and its emerging role as watchdog of police policies and conduct, noted elsewhere by Chinchilla (1999).

Although the concept has gained ground in Latin America over the past decade, there is no single definition of what community policing means, and as a result the idea has received excessive praise from some while being dismissed by others. The term has been adopted in some cases as a public relations tactic to project a more favourable view of the police, while the impact of the approach has varied with the institutional context and social conditions where it has been tried (Goldstein 1998, Frühling 2004). One factor to keep in mind is that community policing cannot be launched without parallel reforms in the institution itself; one is inconceivable without the other. These are some of the many challenges facing the Dominican National Police in the ongoing reform process.

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The social side

The PDS's main components are: (1) institutional reform (the police, the courts and the prison system; (2) new programmes (Safe Neighbourhoods; A Ceiling for my Neighbourhood; Scholarships for my Neighbourhood; Support for Victims of Violence, Centres for Community Training; Centres for Technological Training) and (3) crime prevention and security in tourist zones. The Plan's priorities are to (1) strengthen the role of the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General; (2) bring about cooperation and shared responsibility among the institutions of the state via joint planning and implementation of the PDS (3) involve NGOs and grassroots community organisations by means of agreements with state agencies; (4) educate the nation through outreach programmes and media coverage of PDS operations; (5) and put into effect a set of fast-impact measures

(arms control; control of drug dealing hotspots; restriction of hours for alcohol sales; improved processing of police reports and complaints; treatment for victims of criminal and domestic violence (Newlink 2005b). Some of these goals were reached at the very beginning of the Plan, others however, has been very difficult to achieve.

Locally the PDS is implemented through the Barrio Seguro programme, which currently operates in 101 lower-income neighbourhoods in the capital and the province of Santo Domingo as well as Santiago, the country's second-largest city. Barrio Seguro coordinates a greater police presence in these vulnerable areas, channels government investment into essential infrastructure and manages a number of social projects through the Secretary of Interior and Police. Intersecting with these activities is community participation through volunteers, neighbourhood representatives and assemblies as well as working sessions between residents and institutions involved in the Plan.

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Police reform

All of these activities and the success of the Plan more broadly depend on the transformation of the National Police. Police reform is an intricate and complex process of social and political transformation still in its early stages.

Fundamentally, the new strategy seeks demilitarisation of law enforcement institutions and endeavours to reduce the autonomy of the police by establishing doctrinal, organisational and functional changes. Specifically, the reform seeks to affirm civilian control of the police by the Secretary of Interior and the Police, create a police doctrine that is clearly different from military doctrine, change from a state-centred to citizen-focused security paradigm, foster bonds between the police and the Office of the Attorney General, decentralise control and implement community policing and reduce impunity by abolishing special courts for police (Newlink 2005b). Structurally, it aims to guarantee the operability of police functions throughout six domains: (1) Preventive, (2) Academic, (3) Criminal investigation, (4) Internal affairs, (5) Intelligence and (6) Administrative (Newlink Research and SEIP 2005). In general, the reform of the police is linked to changes in the judicial and prison systems as well.

Police reform draws on inputs from various sources, including testimony by the sectors most affected by crime and by current modes of police and judicial practice. Opinions were also collected through an evaluation of the police conducted by the Interamerican Institute of Human Rights (Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, IIDH), through exchanges between community members, police officers and judicial personnel in workshops organised by the Plan, and by surveys and focus groups with police officers of different ranks. The data helped to identify attitudinal and institutional strengths and weaknesses. Table 1 shows the results of focus groups with the police.

Promoting reform

The embrace of the PDS by some upper-echelon officials, especially by the Secretary of Interior and the Office of the Attorney General became an incentive to its implementation. Nevertheless, securing the support of the remaining state institutions was more difficult. The same was true of maintaining broader political support

Table 1. Strengths and weaknesses of the National Police.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Ability to adapt to the conditions of work	They project a negative image to the community
The community is aware of the risks they take	The use of force is not regulated
Many members have a favourable attitude towards change	They lack strong links to the community and do not work jointly with it
There are positive experiences of joint work with communities	

Source: Lilian Bobea, Diagnóstico sobre la situación de seguridad en los barrios de Santo Domingo y Santiago; Newlink 2005a.

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for the Plan – a serious challenge to its long-term sustainability. To reignite popular support in late 2008, the government launched a series of national dialogues on security with community organisations, business leaders and the general public. Most critical of all was winning the adherence of the police themselves to the reform process. Only a strong commitment by the leadership of the national police could lead to effective transformation of the cultures and practices of rank and file who actually deal with citizens on the street.

The first step towards police reform was for the police authorities, the Department of the Interior and the Office of the Attorney General to formulate joint proposals based on the qualitative evaluations and quantitative findings. In addition, the judicial branch set-up a task force to revise and reformulate the police code. In conjunction with hired consultants, authorities designed new rules for promotion that contrasted with the traditional system of patronage. This initiative promised greater professionalism, promotion based on merit and more incentives for newly hired personnel.

Professionalisation also entailed the improvement of working conditions such as available vehicles, communications and geo-referential systems, as well as better wages and benefits. Police officers are in fact among the worst-paid public servants and the most exposed to occupational risks. That fact brought to the fore the issue of corruption, an all-pervasive condition that characterised the institution at all levels.

The reform process revealed different views of the problem. Community members demanded the rotation of police officers or their replacement by the military, while the police authorities asked for more manpower. The issue was not simply a lack of local police presence, since the Plan deployed new contingents of police in each district, but the objectives of their presence. The fundamental issue was that police detachments did not function as links to the community. Surveys showed that 64% of officers were not assigned to a specific district or sector, but they are rotated from an area to another, which made it difficult to build ties to the community. The Dominican police force has been centralised at the national level and its functions have been concentrated mainly in the capital. Local police units seldom established ties to city councils, schools, clinics or community organisations. The new structure seeks to implement policies at the local level via regional offices, which would operate as decentralised operational units. To function, this new architecture requires administrative capacities and resources as well as political will. Above all, modernisation of the police is just one dimension of a larger reform that must be

pursued in accordance with democratic principles. These pre-conditions have proven elusive over the past three years, however.

At the opposite extreme, from these efforts to ground the police locally, the reform created a National Security Council, chaired by the President of the Republic and including the Secretary of the Interior and Police, the chief of the National Police, the Attorney General and the director of the national drug enforcement agency, among other officials, to discuss and formulate national strategies related to security issues. The strengthening of the oversight of the National Police by the civilian Secretary of the Interior and Police has increased the latter's role in planning, supervising and evaluating the work of the nation's primary instrument of security and thus favours the viability of long-term security reform.

Balancing decentralisation with supervision

At this point, the PDS faces the following dilemma: how to attain the right balance between the relative empowerment of police officers through decentralisation and the incorporation of citizens into matters related to their safety and that of their communities.

The PDS has approached this dilemma by overhauling the content of educational programmes designed to train personnel of different ranks within the institution. Workshops were held to educate police trainers on human rights and manuals on the subject were made available for use in the training of active personnel and future recruits. In addition, the police established opportunities for community volunteers join the force in return for nominal compensation. At the same time, workshops provided feedback to the community leaders who organise volunteers within the PDS. This education and training component is fundamental to the qualification of personnel and the establishment of recruitment standards as well as improved relations with the community.

Abolishing aberrant practices requires commitment, constant monitoring efforts and open processes to deal with complaints and denunciations by victims. In spite of the initiatives to use higher standards in recruiting new officers and to train these personnel in human rights, abusive practices persist, including extrajudicial executions and high levels of corruption. The fact that 50% of citizens interviewed recently affirmed that police violence has declined is a good sign, given that the reform process has scarcely begun. Nevertheless, 21% of those interviewed say that police violence has increased, while the remaining 29% find no change. The glass is half full, but it is also half empty.

Since the 2004 CPP became law, a crucial factor in promoting structural changes has been developing the judicial police. The CPP transformed the Dominican judicial system from an inquisitorial model to an accusatory one which rests on an adversarial process and the use of evidence. The new code forced a major change in police procedure by moving part of the task of criminal investigation to the office of the Attorney General, with district attorneys now assuming the duties of interrogation. The investigative police have had to slowly adjust to sharing their functions with civilians. The Achilles heel of the CPP has been precisely the gathering of evidence, a task the judicial police still participates in. For this reason, one of the priorities was to build investigation techniques, including expertise in ballistics and

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forensic science, and to link the judicial police to the Dominican Department of Justice. The process is just beginning.

Other strategies were deployed to attain a delicate balance between community and police empowerment. One consisted of developing rapid interventions in notorious barrios such as Capotillo, with the highest homicide rates in the city. The programme concentrated on reclaiming public spaces from criminals through the coordinated deployment of police and other officials, using base-line data obtained on site. The findings helped to define a strategy that was approved by the responsible institutions to guarantee public order. The first step was to reorganise patrols to restore stability to what had become a war zone. A mid-ranking officer was put in charge of operations in Capotillo. A charismatic officer who was influential in the community, he established at the outset a new pattern of relations with leaders and residents in that barrio. Indiscriminate raids were stopped, and house searches prompted by complaints of drug trafficking were carried out selectively and under the supervision of a public prosecutor in possession of a search warrant. The immediate effect of these measures was a reduction in the rate of violent deaths at the hands of the police. However, this model of police work must to be expanded and thoroughly institutionalised in order to have a mayor and consistent effect on crime prevention at the national level. This has proven to be a real challenge for reformers.

Simultaneously, other measures related to community participation were adopted, such as establishing voluntary neighbourhood councils integrating them with the inter-institutional work committee, coordinated by the Department of the Interior and the Police, the National Police and the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic. Gradually, many more neighbourhoods participated in the PDS under the same scheme.

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Prevention and participation

As mentioned earlier, the implementation of the PDS and the reform of the security sector have not followed a linear trajectory. In fact, as an exercise in the practical application of a holistic conception of citizen security, it has displayed inconsistencies conditioned by the complex reality it seeks to transform. Even though the Plan has the status of a state security policy and as such it is a valid and important frame of reference, there is no guarantee that it would be sustained by the political leadership as a whole, since it has been almost impossible the establishing of a consensus among those in the government and those in the opposition. The PDS's long-term strategy is to incubate a police force with a communitarian orientation and vocation contributes to transform the police structurally. In this sense the community police force is an end in itself in the send that it seeks to remake the police democratic law enforcement institution. Favourable conditions for community-based policing depend on the extent to which the regional departments become consolidated and the management of security is decentralised to those regional commands, so that planning and allocation of resources from the budget occur at the local level. Likewise, the ongoing development of the preventive aspect of security in its situational, social and environmental manifestations will result in police work that relies less on repression and more on resolving problems before they erupt in violence.

Community-based policing is by definition preventive, proactive and situational. It integrates citizen participation in the management of security in the interests of neighbourhood safety and peaceful coexistence. In terms of police function, community-based police work is an ideal, with the preventive approach constituting the norm. However, in order to be successful it also has to be concordant with other components of policing, such as the display of regulated coercion when required. It is important to make the distinction between the two, since often situational and proactive interventions are seen as contradictory with community policing despite that the former requires a comprehensive understanding by the police of the environment in which they will intervene. Frequently, the community-based paradigm is viewed as a panacea that solves everything, distorting the specialised functions of the police. It is certainly a far more complex model because it involves multiple institutional and non-institutional participants. That said, to prevent crime the police must go beyond the community orientation and develop technical capacities such as criminal intelligence, specialised units and targeted patrolling (Basombrío 2006). Beginning in late 2006, 900 newly enlisted police officers and cadets (officer candidates) were trained for community-based, proximity and situational police work within the PDS framework. Since then, 6185 police officers have received training on issues such as equal treatment, human rights, situational approach and the CPP. Even these minimal educational efforts have gradually contributed to improving relations between the community and the police, as well as popular perceptions of the police. Two years after the PDS was implemented, neighbourhood residents were asked to express their perceptions regarding police corruption; compared with the data collected initially the results registered a positive change, in contrast to the mutual suspicions reflected in Table 2, before the Plan's implementation.

The success of institutional reforms and a paradigmatic shift in the concept of citizen security depend on mutual trust between the authorities and the community. Data collected before the PDS's implementation reveal that these perceptions were tinged with mutual prejudices. Moreover, the images expressed by police and community residents are mirror images of one another.

Both sets of opinions reflect on citizens' insecurity. It is not possible to guarantee citizen safety without community involvement, and without some level of trust between police and community such involvement cannot materialise.

Table 2. Police–community mutual perceptions.

Community view of police	Police view of community
Poor performance	Apathetic
Corrupt	Hide offenders and criminals
Perpetrators	Associations with delinquents
Acts of discrimination	Afraid to report crimes
Association with offenders and criminals	Favour police repression
Afraid to face offenders and criminals	Incapable of organising themselves
Violators of human rights	

Source: Lilian Bobea, Reporte Diagnósticos Barriales, República Dominicana; Newlink 2005a.

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The complaint of officials that the community does not report offenders ignores the fact that residents and wrongdoers share the same space, making citizens a target of retaliation if they collaborate with police.

The mutual mistrust reflects the fact that, with the exception of confrontations, there is little real contact between the police and community. In a culture that puts a premium on personal relations, many residents said they did not know the police that patrol their neighbourhoods. Similarly, a survey of police showed that 42% of officers did not know community leaders where they work. The community, nonetheless, has a clear perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the police and other government officials. As shown in Table 3, although community understands the institutional limitations of the executive branch and the police, in their view there is still a persistent lack of coordination, diminished capability and lack of professionalism that constrains the delivery of security services to the citizenry.

Community residents believe that poor police performance is rooted in low salaries, dishonesty and corruption, inadequate training and a lack of resources. A large percentage also says that the lack of supervision and control was a factor in police performance.[8] When asked how to improve the work of the police, residents said that police should: (1) increase the number of daily patrols; (2) improve work conditions for the police and (3) improve police relations with the community.

During the research that I conducted in the poor barrios of Santo Domingo, residents in at least five focus groups identified 'police corruption' and 'inefficiency' as serious problems that deserved more profound analysis. As shown in Table 4, using a qualitative technique called Arbol del Problema (Problem Tree), participants were able to pinpoint several causes (roots) that promote these problems. A fruitful discussion of the root causes of the problems led to a reflection on the major impacts (the branches of the tree) that these factors provoke in their communities. A series of proposals on how to address them came as the final product of the exercise. Inputs like these helped the authorities have a clearer sense of the issues they needed to

Table 3. Community view of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Institution	Strengths	Weaknesses
President	Support of the reform of the Department of Justice, Interior and Police	Poor coordination of governmental initiatives, resources and security
Department of Justice	Awareness of social problems.	Lacks of mechanisms to supervise and evaluate police
	Executing modernisation of justice system and crime prevention	Fails to solve cases at the local level
	Receptivity to citizen inputs	Lacks of mechanisms to solve conflict
Department of Interior	Can implement strategies for citizen safety Awareness of social problems	Poor investigation and evidence gathering
Police	Has greatest awareness of local needs	Lack of institutional presence at local level

Source: Lilian Bobea, Diagnóstico sobre la situación de seguridad en los barrios de Santo Domingo y Santiago; Newlink 2005a.

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Table 4. Corruption and police inefficiency.

Trunk (problem areas)	Roots (cause of the problem)	Branches (consequences)	Proposals
Police Corruption and Inefficiency	Bribes; complicity with offenders	Rise in crime, Impunity; police abuse	Ongoing training and education Meetings to achieve integration between police and communities
	Low wages	Limited social	More 'destacamentos' (stations)
	Little monitoring by supervisors responsibilities by community members		Police purges
	Lack of communication police-citizens	Increasing fear, insecurity, hold-ups, conflicts, hatred, deaths, violations, rapes, lynchings and settlings scores	Increase volunteer recruitment
	Police lacks readiness; and training, low academic level	Discrimination, frustration	Increasing police monitoring
	Some police posts are not operational	Payment of toll and protection quotas	Better lightning of alleys and streets
	Recruitments by patronage	Citizen mistrust	Rotation and supervision of patrols agents Police's wage increase
	Complicity, lack of public awareness	Extortion	More selective recruitment, higher academic level.
	Slow rotation	Increasing of crime rates	Jointly work between the department of Internal Affairs and local organisations, to carry out investigations and to implement corrective measures
	Lack of institutional values	Bribes, violence, impurity	Gradual wages increases as the performance improve (incentives)
	Not enough officers	Moral degradation	Reorganisation of the PN
	Involvement on illegal activities	Lack of solidarity	Implementation of academic training programs
	Incompetence		Follow up formal police reports filed by the community
	Politicisation		Set time limits for police transfers

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Table 4 (*Continued*)

Trunk (problem areas)	Roots (cause of the problem)	Branches (consequences)	Proposals
	Lack of institutional organisation; logistical limitations; inadequate number of officers in detachments; lack of planning		Professionalisation and equipment Redefine roles, develop public awareness and effective ties with the community

Source: Lilian Bobea, based on the Plan for Democratic Security's baseline, 'Diagnostico de la seguridad ciudadana en los barrios de Santo Domingo y Santiago'; Newlink 2005b.

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address when delivering social services and security to their 'clientele'. This awareness had an impact: a year after the PDS was launched, an interim evaluation found that residents of the barrios felt that police violence and corruption had declined.[9]

Performance from the standpoint of the police

Generally, little is known about the way police officers perceive themselves or their understanding of citizens' views of the police. As important as are the opinions of the citizens regarding police performance, so too are the views of the officers themselves posted at the police detachments. To that end, we conducted two focus groups with 12 low-ranking police officers and eight middle-ranking officials in Santo Domingo. Our focus was on the factors that in their view contributed to crime and insecurity in the barrios. The discussion led to the exploration of social, institutional and situational causes of the problem as well as their impacts in the communities. From the perspective of the police, the problem of public safety within the neighbourhoods is multifaceted. Table 5 classifies police responses according to social, situational and institutional causes, and also according to the consequences as expressed by interviewees.

Officers identify three chief factors that hinder them in the performance of their duty. First, plaintiffs do not follow up on police reports. Second, police detachments are responsible for extensive population areas, often more than 35,000 people. Third, the work they perform is complex, it earns them enemies, and they feel that they lack the understanding of community members when one of them is a victim or is affected somehow.

In spite of these limitations, officers perceive positive changes inside the institution. They note increased democracy inside what was once a highly authoritarian body:

> The times are changing; in the past a police officer could not have an opinion. If we noticed one of us was doing something illegal, we could not tell anybody, there was no freedom of expression, in the past the words of our superiors were the only thing that mattered, whereas now low-ranking officers can have an opinion.[10]

Table 5. Causes and consequences of insecurity in urban areas.

Insecurity/lack of safety: roots of the problem	Consequences
Social causes	
Drug addiction	People leave their jobs due to fear and insecurity
Unemployment, lack of public health, lack of education	People move out of neighbourhoods
Population density	Communication within society decreases
Parents mistreatment of children; lack of control; homeless children; family problems	
Institutional causes	
Unethical police behaviour	
Prosecutors release the detained	Deterioration of the image of the police
Arbitrary warrants and lack of evidence	Citizens mistrust
Searches without warrants	Corruption
Lack of support for the police institution	
Poor conditions of work (low wages, lack of equipment)	
Corrupt justice system	
Ignorance of Penal Procedural Code	
Superior abuses lower-ranking police officers	
Lack of training	
Exploitation (excessive hours)	
Situational causes	
Difficult access to alleys and cul de sacs	Local commerce backs offenders
Lack of adequate street lighting	Shops close early
Increase in the number of robberies, murders	
Gang warfare	No patrolling during nights due to lack of electrical power and street lighting
Community protects offenders	
Plaintiffs drop cases – no follow up	
Little community cooperation	
Illegal arms	
Community hides misdeeds	
Neighbourhood meetings are politicised	

Source: Lilian Bobea, Reporte Diagnósticos Barriales; Newlink 2005a.

Despite that view, corruption continues to be an impediment to reform. Several agents from middle to low rank interviewed at a police focus group justified taking bribes in the context of the economic constraints that low wages place on officers.[11] Others say that *mordidas* (bribes) denigrate the work and violate police ethics. This discussion is relevant in determining the extent to which the working conditions of police officers contribute to their acquisition of inappropriate and inadmissible professional habits and practices. In this context, it is clear that the price for perpetrating a wrongful must be greater than the benefits supposedly gained by committing it.

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Conclusions

This article has analysed the reach and the impact of security reforms in the Dominican Republic since 2005. By addressing the previous lack of a citizen security policy, the designers and implementers of the PDS recognised that the phenomena of crime and violence posed an existential challenge to the consolidation of Dominican democracy. Consequently, the Plan sought to re-establish the authority of the state in the realm of security from a holistic and inclusive perspective that embraced the rule of law, promoted public participation in security matters and sought the structural reform of security institutions, above all the judiciary and the police.

Underlying the Plan was the premise that greater citizen engagement in security issues, as well as improved citizen–police relations, would have a positive impact on curbing crime and violence. In the Dominican case, this premise represented a challenge since civilians and community groups have historically been excluded from discussions with government about how to deal with issues such as drug trafficking, violence and social exclusion. Nevertheless, surveys, interviews and focus groups carried out with residents in the barrios, and outreach to community leaders to take part in planning and evaluation with the authorities, created a space for citizens to play a new role in devising a public agenda to address violence, crime and citizen security. As a result the PDS recognised these as multidimensional, complex and dynamic phenomena whose solution lay beyond the power of the police. The problems identified by communities require responses that are themselves complex and that imply the involvement of public and private actors.

At first, the PDS earned high marks from different sectors of Dominican society. Residents of the crime-ridden neighbourhoods where the Plan was launched embraced a number of the components of Barrio Seguro such as initiatives to improve housing and generate employment for the young. Nevertheless, over time the programme elicited criticism for failing to make more significant investments and for not creating legitimate sources of income in poor neighbourhoods. Because prioritising short-term results over long-term social investments is, in fact, what has allowed criminal activity to proliferate in recent decades, those concerns address one of the greatest challenges that citizen security programmes face throughout Latin America and the Caribbean: to close the gap between the expectations that political rhetoric generates and the capacity of the state to implement change.

More than five years after the launching of the PDS, major challenges still remain in order to establish community-based policing in a country with a long history of repression and extra-legal police practices. Residents of the neighbourhoods most affected by crime, poverty and alienation are caught in a paradox: on one hand they require the support of the police to fight crime, while on the other they often become victims of abuse by the police, whom they consequently distrust. This reality leads us to two major conclusions: (1) for anti-crime strategies to work, communities must be, and see themselves, as joint organisers and managers of security policies, and (2) before initiating a major collaboration with communities, the institutional nature of the police must change.

The PDS in the Dominican Republic has initiated a positive evolution, as police reform has been reconceived as one aspect of a larger reform in national security policy. However, strong resistance to these changes remains embedded in the forces of security. Moreover, given the dearth of resources and the high costs of crime, the state

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needs to redirect its spending and reorient its planning towards achieving strategic goals. An effective state policy of public safety must rest on the synchronisation of different agencies of government according to the macro-objectives and the micro processes required for executing the policy. Even this will not be enough; real reform requires the unwavering support of the political and social leadership of the country, the political parties, the congress and local authorities.

Along with security reform efforts in other countries (Berliz 2007), the Dominican experience offers a singular opportunity to understand the legal structures, institutions, political contexts and actors involved in the complex task of guaranteeing safety on a daily basis within a democratic framework.

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Notes

1. According to residents of most populated neighbourhoods the greatest problem they faced was the street crime (37.6%), followed by the sale and use of drugs (14.9%) and the lack of electrical power (11.1%).
2. Starting in 1999 social pressure in favour of police and judicial reform intensified. Academic institutions and human rights organisations submitted proposals and participated in public audiences, some of them promoted by the National Congress Commissions on Security.
3. These opinions were expressed within the focus groups with police agents in Santo Domingo, 2005.
4. Focus group with police officers, October 2006.
5. It was made official by presidential decree No. 263, issued in Santo Domingo, 2005.
6. Focus groups with residents of poor neighbourhoods in Santo Domingo, baseline PDS, 2005.
7. This definition incorporates elements from the 'Cartilla de Policía Comunitaria' from the Natinal Police of Bogotá, Colombia, 2004.
8. Survey for the base line collected at Barrios Distrito Nacional, Newlink, 2005.
9. A survey in several communities where Barrio Seguro has been implemented by an NGO reported that 60% of the people expressed its satisfaction with police and authorities actions.
10. This opinion was expressed in a focal group of Santiago de los Caballeros, 2005.
11. Focus group with police agents in Santo Domingo, 2005.

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