Godoy Cruz, Argentina: An Example of Data-Driven and Evidence-Based Public Security and Safety Solutions

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"Government efforts to reduce violence must begin with a detailed diagnosis of its main characteristics, particularly its temporal and geographical distribution, to develop targeted solutions and avoid stigmatizing entire communities."[1]

"We urge cities to pursue public safety and security policies that minimize harm and human rights violations. (Commitment no. 10) Unless state institutions, particularly but not only the police, are viewed as legitimate, efforts to reduce violence while upholding the rule of law will not be successful. Illegitimate police departments ultimately lose effectiveness, as citizens are less likely to cooperate with police."[2]

Research Team

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Introduction and Overview of the Intervention

The municipality of Godoy Cruz, Mendoza Province, Argentina, is implementing a comprehensive model of citizen security that combines evidence-based strategies, a focus on human rights, and community participation, all facilitated by important technological advancements. At the forefront of the model is the connection between the community alert system (SAC) and a hot-spot policing program called Godoy Cruz + Police. These programs communicate with, and complement, each other, improving communication between neighbors and the government while generating key data for targeted policing efforts.

Emphasizing a collaborative approach, the SAC began through a community participation workshop that included neighbors and technology students. Ideas exchanged in these workshops facilitated a transformation of the traditional alarm system. Utilizing mobile apps and cellular networks, the new system classifies incidents and georeference emergencies instantly, while also facilitating direct communication between citizens, the city's Observatory of Citizen Security, and emergency services, including police and ambulances. The SAC now has more than 16,788 users and 683 alarm centers. This system of direct communication involving citizens both in design and implementation has strengthened social networks, reduced fear of crime, and, most importantly, improved trust between neighbors and police.

Further, the SAC provides vital insights to the Observatory of Citizen Security to inform data-driven strategies, such as hot-spot policing. Launched in March 2025, the

1   Hernán Flom, *Guiding Principles and Inspiring Actions: Operationalizing the Resolution to Reduce Urban Violence* (Peace in Our Cities, 2022), 13, https://stanleycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Guiding-Principles-Inspiring-Actions-PiOC.pdf.
2   Flom, *Guiding Principles*, 23.
3   Flavia Carbonari and Rachel Locke served as peer reviewers.

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Godoy Cruz + Police hot-spot policing program complements the SAC by focusing policing in areas of high crime concentration. Rather than a reactive response, data from the SAC and the Observatory of Citizen Security allows for proactive policing, meaning early conflict management before incidents occur. The police officers, trained in active listening and community interaction, help to channel citizens' concerns—reinforcing integration between the community and the state—and take a proactive approach to policing.

In the first months of the experimental implementation of the local policing program, there was a 25 percent reduction of crime throughout the city.[4] The integration of the SAC and Godoy Cruz + Police emphasizes a participatory, data-driven approach to citizen security facilitated by technology and provides a replicable example of citizen security.

Background and Rationale

In 2014, the province of Mendoza saw a significant increase in violent crimes, reaching the highest homicide rates in 10 years (10.3 per 100,000)[5] and prompting calls for innovations to address security needs. Godoy Cruz began to address citizen security, prioritizing the local government's responsibility for crime prevention and conflict management through data-driven and evidence-based strategies that prioritize human rights. Significantly, in 2015, the municipality established the Directorate of Prevention, Community Participation, and Human Rights. This new office signaled not only an administrative change but a statement that the local government was committed to developing a citizen security plan/strategy/approach that integrates prevention, participation, and human rights.

This foundational focus on human rights distinguishes Godoy Cruz's approach to security. Understanding that security is coproduced between neighbors and authority requires an approach that emphasizes collaboration between citizens and institutions. Overarching Godoy Cruz's approach is an ethical framework that highlights the "right to the city."[6] This approach prioritizes community empowerment and human rights throughout development and integration of its programs. This avoids punitive and technocratic approaches, ensuring respect for freedoms and a focus on community. By designing and implementing programs with active citizen participation, the city established a proactive model of security that promotes coexistence and social cohesion, and reduces the fear of crime. In particular, through the collaboration between citizens and institutions, the SAC and Godoy Cruz + Police work together to promote safety and citizen security.

4 See Municipalidad de Godoy Cruz, "Godoy Cruz + Policía: se detuvieron 32 personas en el primer cuatrimestre," Godoy Cruz, May 12, 2025, https://www.godoycruz.gob.ar/godoy-cruz-policia-se-detuvieron-32-personas-primer-cuatrimestre.

5 For more on the "right to the city," see La Nación, "Mendoza alcanzó en 2014 el récord de asesinatos en los últimos diez años," *La Nación*, January 4, 2015, https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/mendoza-alcanzo-en-2014-el-record-de-asesinatos-en-los-ultimos-diez-anos-nid1763087.

6 Abigail Friendly, "Right to the City," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Urban Studies*, ed. Carole Rakodi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024).

Strategy—The What

The comprehensive security strategy emphasizes three key pillars: a multidisciplinary approach, evidence-based decisions, and the transformation of traditional policing. At the forefront of this strategy is the integration of the SAC and Godoy Cruz + Police.

- **The Community Alert System** (**SAC**): The SAC is an innovative mechanism to prevent violence and crime, which arose from the collaboration between neighbors and technology students. It is a public, free, and supportive service. Its success lies not only in technology but in how it facilitates human connections and supports community building. Key functionalities of the SAC include incident classification (general alerts, medical emergencies, gender-based violence, bicycle theft, and fires) and georeferencing, which locates the incident for rapid response. The system establishes direct communication between neighbors, the monitoring center, the police, and ambulances. In addition, it allows the monitoring of events and the evaluation of crime trends. Annex 1 provides a detailed description of all the steps that are followed through this system. The SAC employs a multipronged approach to prevention that goes beyond situational prevention, aiming at a more complex social deterrence. Combining situational, community, and social methods with simple technological resources, the system includes:

    - **Sound deterrence** (**alert sirens**): When a user submits an alert through the app, sirens are activated from a central device in the neighborhood, indicating and most likely deterring an incident that is occurring or is about to occur. Alerts also include a silent alarm and functioning for the hearing impaired.
    - **Neighborhood reaction**: Neighbors receive a message on their phones, generating a collective response that supports the police for a faster and more efficient intervention while also increasing a sense of direct connection to protection. They also carry out community awareness and sensitization activities to promote a responsible use of the system without creating a sense of hyperalertness and without having communities try to take justice into their own hands.
    - **Direct communication with the monitoring center:** The system guarantees immediate communication with the Municipal Monitoring Center, which verifies and coordinates the response.
    - **Participation of police prevention and response units:** The system streamlines police response with accurate and georeferenced information, allowing for an efficient and directed response. The Godoy Cruz + Police program integrates this strategy, using the SAC's georeferencing to focus policing efforts.
    - **Use of deterrent signs**: Visible signs are used in areas covered by the SAC to deter violence. The posters symbolize an organized community, building a local social contract where citizens participate in its security and the government provides the institutional and technological framework.

Godoy Cruz monitoring center.

Godoy Cruz SAC app (left) and alarm system (right).

- **Godoy Cruz + Police Program:** The community involvement that characterizes the SAC is essential for the effectiveness of the hot-spot policing program, namely the Godoy Cruz + Police program. Meaningful neighborhood collaboration allows the early detection of suspicious behavior, helping to prevent conflict and violence before it escalates. Through data from the SAC and the Observatory of Citizen Security, the program identifies microterritories with a high concentration of crimes for focused police efforts. Some key elements of the program are:

- **Data-driven:** Data acts as a feedback loop, allowing policies to be driven by centralized data, adapted and coordinated between institutions, overcoming fragmentation in security efforts. The analysis of SAC activations, which provide early warning of suspicious behavior and allow for the planning of responses, was incorporated into the strategy. This transforms the policing approach from reactive-repressive to proactive-preventive since the SAC's early warnings are addressed as a priority by the police program.

- **Integrated training**: Police and municipal staff training supports these strategies. Police personnel were trained in soft skills, such as communications, active listening, and conflict resolution, as well as evidence-based hot-spot policing. This makes them not only security agents but also recipients of concerns and neighborhood requests related to municipal issues such as lighting, abandoned vehicles, weeds, debris, lack of cleanliness, disturbing noises, and pruning of public trees, among others.

- **Facilitated by technology:** The municipality acquired 10 patrol vehicles equipped in a similar way to police vehicles, with communication and biometric identification systems. These patrol cars, with police personnel, carry out continuous and preventive patrols in pairs by sector, at critical times and with alternating fixed posts, following a nonrandom pattern to optimize deterrence. During these operations, random people are identified using biometric systems linked to a national database to verify if they have pending judicial issues.[7]

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7   This practice requires continuous monitoring and oversight to ensure certain groups are not being more systematically targeted. Law 6.722 legitimizes these practices by framing them as regulated policies rather than arbitrary actions. The ambiguity of "suspicion" is addressed by redefining it through "reasonableness" and using extreme examples to justify police discretion. Furthermore, biometric systems, being encrypted and limited to verifying identity and judicial warrants, do not infringe upon individual privacy. However, the line between police discretion and arbitrary action remains contentious, especially in nuanced scenarios. Concerns over the mass collection of biometric data persist, regardless of its subsequent use. The government is aware that there is a need to balance public security efficacy with the protection of individual rights.

Godoy Cruz + Police officers (left) and Director of Traffic and Control Roberto Munives (center right) explaining the program to the mayor of Peñalolén, Miguel Concha Manso (right), during a PiOC program exchange.

Intervention Design—The How

The success of citizen security programs depends on the active participation of the community. The development process of the SAC included several meetings with the community on how to prevent different forms of violence and promote social cohesion and neighborhood integration. This community-based approach is essential for the effectiveness of the alert system as well as for the hot-spot policing program.

Periodic community meetings and collaboration between different actors not only increased citizen participation but modernized the alert system. Throughout the years, the SAC evolved and transformed a traditional alarm system by replacing pushbuttons with mobile apps and cables with cellular networks, eliminating the need for expensive infrastructure. Although sirens continue to sound, their primary function is complemented by digital data transmission, allowing for a more comprehensive exchange of information. This innovation made the system more accessible and scalable. The initial software and hardware of the SAC are municipally owned, and small local businesses have invested in their development and provision.

The local Observatory of Citizen Security processes information from the SAC, security cameras, and community meetings. It records municipal interventions and security claims, following responses from authorities. This database is critical for identifying crime patterns and directing strategies, including hot-spot policing. The SAC's georeferenced information is crucial for planning preventive actions, evaluating results, and identifying priority areas. Through data from the SAC and the Observatory of Citizen Security, the program identifies microterritories with a high concentration of

crimes and facilitates proactive responses through the Godoy Cruz + Police program.

Implementation—The Who

While community participation is prioritized and facilitated throughout the implementation of the strategies discussed above, coordination efforts led by the mayor are crucial to ensure the local government's proactive role in the prevention and management of conflicts.

The municipality acts as a central axis of response. For example, centralization of alerts from the SAC are received by the Municipal Monitoring Center, which shares space with police personnel and prosecutors' offices. An operator verifies incidents and collects details, facilitating a direct connection for the Godoy Cruz + Police program to not only reduce response times but expand the ability to coordinate, design, and evaluate prevention strategies in a centralized space.

The municipality is also key in coordinating an interinstitutional response. There are periodic meetings for joint coordination where the municipality, the police, and justice and private security firms and personnel share experiences to analyze results and plan security interventions. From these meetings emerge protocols to address, for example, gender-based violence and illegal occupation of properties and land, prioritizing dialogue over force. The SAC also tracks police responses to improve efficiency. This integration improves efficiency and strengthens the legitimacy of the state, contributing to overcoming state fragmentation and building trust and cohesive governance.

Impact and Results

Godoy Cruz's SAC is a solid and innovative model that integrates technology with social and institutional reforms. Its key achievements include strengthening community solidarity, improving interagency coordination, providing data for evidence-based strategies, lowering crime rates, and improving perceptions of safety. The municipal commitment and coordination have helped to ensure a sustainable security ecosystem. The interaction between the SAC and Godoy Cruz + Police is crucial to these achievements.

Since 2017, the SAC has grown to include 16,788 users and 683 alarm centers (out of a population of over 191,000), organized into 400 neighborhood groups. User satisfaction is high (>80 percent, while overall approval of municipal management is 65 percent), making it a highly valued municipal service. When comparing security perception data compiled by the Observatory of Citizen Security based on victimization surveys carried out by the city, an improvement is observed in the period following the implementation of the SAC. The perceived likelihood of becoming a crime victim decreased from 64.3 percent in 2016 to 54.1 percent in 2018, and the opinion that crime in the city had increased fell from 67.8 percent to 50.5 percent. The data maintained this trend until the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the perception of vulnerability. In Mendoza Province, the homicide rate fell 35.47 percent and aggravated robberies 25.86 percent between 2016 and 2024.

In the first months of the experimental implementation of the Godoy Cruz + Police

program, the city registered a 25 percent reduction in its overall crime rate. However, crimes are concentrated between 3 and 7 AM, a range not covered by the Godoy Cruz + Police program, which suggests that further analysis needs to be done to assess its impacts and indicates the need to expand and adapt it.

Lessons Learned and Observations for Replication

The SAC is an original model of community prevention that has been replicated by several other cities in Argentina.[8] The city of Concón in Chile has also adopted the model. Although the software and hardware are easily transferable, the human factor (neighborhood participation and political will) is irreplaceable and requires commitment to develop.

The challenges in interinstitutional cooperation, derived from the fragmentation of the state, have been addressed with coordination mechanisms, such as the integrated interinstitutional management group. This group includes the Ministry of Security of Mendoza and meets weekly to monitor the evolution of the joint security efforts. The challenge of maintaining community participation has been met with proactive engagement and cocreation of solutions.

To improve and expand the model, Godoy Cruz seeks to use the Observatory of Citizen Security to adjust policies (e.g., impact of economic crisis), institutionalize training for police and municipalities to address social vulnerabilities, explore new technological integrations (e.g., motion sensors in LED lighting connected to the SAC), and foster decentralized cooperation, emphasizing local political will and community engagement. This implies strengthening the synergy between the SAC as a citizen sensor and the police as an executing arm.

Conclusion

The Godoy Cruz model is a sociopolitical ecosystem that requires deep local commitment. Political will, community engagement, and a comprehensive understanding of security, illustrated by the strong emphasis on interinstitutional coordination and involvement of different sectors and actors of society, are key.

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8 These include Las Heras, Guaymallén, Ciudad de Mendoza, Tupungato, San Martín, Rivadavia, General Alvear, Lavalle (Mendoza Province); Viale, Nogoyá, Crespo (Entre Ríos Province); Justiniano Posse (Córdoba Province); Recreo (Santa Fe Province); and Zárate (Buenos Aires Province).

Annex 1. Community Alert System Information Flow