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INTRODUCTION

URBAN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AMID GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

HOW CITIES ARE NAVIGATING GLOBAL TRENDS WHILE INVESTING IN LOCAL SAFETY

By Rachel Locke, Jai-Ayla Sutherland, and Flávia Carbonari

New technologies, rising authoritarianism, climate change, and the unraveling multilateral system threaten safety and security at all levels. Cities will feel these global shifts most immediately. This compendium supports city leaders in responding to these trends while implementing evidence-based approaches to violence prevention across a spectrum of safety-related factors, such as political violence, organized crime, access to justice, and fair housing and land policies.

Cities are places of connection, of innovation and imagination. They are remarkable for their tangible density of people, infrastructure, and commerce—but also the intangible density of ideas, narratives, and beliefs. The way people move through cities influences not only trade and production but also their sense of belonging, safety, and cohesion. As sites of constant interaction and home to the majority of the world’s population, cities constantly manage the complexity of interactions that fall within their borders.

While cities have their own unique ecosystems, they are also connected to and influenced by their broader environments, surrounding areas, subnational governorates, national dynamics, and global trends. Urban networks play an important role in helping cities understand the local implications of these broader contexts and to influence them in return. For a

network specifically focused on supporting cities in preventing violence and building peace, this interplay doesn't just require awareness, it requires active analysis, planning, and capacity building.

Peace in Our Cities is a member-driven network focused on supporting cities to significantly reduce and prevent serious forms of violence. Current global geopolitical shifts are significantly impacting the dynamics of crime and violence and the way governments at all levels respond. Public safety is both highly localized and highly influenced by global trends. Take, for example, how the flow of weapons across countries impacts local violence dynamics. But while global trends are highly impactful at the city level where the majority of people live, the ability of cities to influence those trends, particularly around violence dynamics, has historically been weaker than comparable nation-state governing bodies. That means the flow of influence moves more strongly in one direction than the other.

This situation must not, however, result in apathy. Instead, it reveals an opportunity for a new approach. This approach elevates cities to have a louder and stronger voice in global decision-making and to strengthen local multilateralism in the post-2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, and it empowers and encourages city actors to more deliberately integrate external dynamics into internal planning and policymaking.

This compendium focuses on identifying and sharing these strategies within a broader discussion of four global trends to help city partners think through their own violence-prevention architecture in a way that meets the moment we are in.

Advancing Peace and Security in the Current Context: Situating the Compendium

The size, power, and potential of cities have been growing consistently over the past two centuries. But it was not until 2007 when the global population of city dwellers surpassed the global population of rural inhabitants for the first time in history.¹ This is an important reminder that throughout nearly all of human history, the majority of people clustered in small communities.

Today there are more than 34 megacities, or cities with more than 10 million people, which is larger than many nation-states. But a city doesn't need to be "mega" in order to exert influence. Geneva is widely recognized as a globally influential municipality, but it has fewer than 300,000 residents. Regardless of size, what most cities have in common is their density—of things tangible and intangible—and a degree of self-governance. More than 4 billion people around the world today live urban lives, making the particular ecosystem of cities crucial to whether the majority of humanity lives in peace or is exposed to violence.

We know cities are not immune from the broader environment, and the world is facing a range of trends that are upending established systems and assumptions regarding human governance, existence, and cohabitation. This compendium highlights four specific trends that Peace in Our Cities has identified as having particular impact and influence vis-a-vis local efforts to uphold citizen security and public safety in cities around the world. These trends were selected from two overlapping sources. First, analysis completed by institutions such as the World Economic Forum and others.² Second, trends that demonstrate significant influence on local violence dynamics as highlighted by Peace in Our Cities members.

The four trends identified through this process are:

1. The advance of authoritarian systems of governance.
2. The rapid, largely unregulated technology revolution, including the advance of artificial intelligence and machine learning.
3. The increasingly unchecked and growing impacts of climate change.
4. The weakening and dismantling of the multilateral system.

We start by setting a baseline of what precisely is meant by these trends and their general impacts on safety and violence in the world today.

The Rise of Authoritarianism

Democracy around the world is in decline. Globally, we have reverted to pre-1978 levels, according to the V-Dem Institute's 2026 Democracy Report. The world today comprises 92 autocracies and 87 democracies, and most people—74 percent—now live in autocracies. Only 7 percent live in liberal democracies.³ In Latin America, less than half—48 percent—of survey respondents selected a preference for democracy over any other form of government, representing the lowest level of support ever recorded.⁴ The decline in democratic systems is not solely about voting or electoral processes. It is also about dismantling the institutions that are essential to consolidated democracies, including free press, due process, adherence to rule of law, respect for human rights, thriving civil society, advances in political participation, and more. These trends have important implications for safety and security.

Around the world, leaders with autocratic tendencies are using narratives of crime and violence, or fear, to reinforce their own power base. As Robert Muggah writes, "Politicians exploit it by converting diffuse anxiety into a straightforward electoral exchange that consists of expanded coercive power in return for the often false promise of control."⁵ The state of exception in El Salvador that Enrique Betancourt speaks to in chapter 1 is not solely about reducing crime, it is also about reinforcing the central power of President Nayib Bukele and his administration. The two are intrinsically linked. Consolidated democratic systems that respect a free press, administer due process and equality under the law, ensure fair electoral processes, and ensure a balance of power are so important; they provide a bulwark against power-hungry leaders who will use and manipulate fear and force to their own ends. Further, in contexts where organized criminal organizations, political leaders, and/or public sector agencies broadly collaborate, the use of punitive control—whether enforced by the state or elements of criminal groups—substitutes for institutional reform.⁶ In addition, as highlighted by Santiago Tobón in chapter 2, these heavy-handed approaches often fragment criminal markets, increase violence, and fail to displace criminal governance. They may also revert progress made by years of investment in building trust between law enforcement and communities. And as Patrick Mutahi discusses in chapter 6, in these authoritarian settings, "police have become central actors in managing social unrest, migration, and political dissent, reshaping everyday policing, public safety in urban spaces, and police-community relations."

Throughout history, the greatest atrocities, massacres, or genocides have all been framed by a narrative of protecting certain groups from a threatening "other." While the specifics differ from place to place, the very same fear-based narratives are taking root today. Cities—as places where concentrated diversity is managed on a daily basis and government is empowered to make change—hold immense capacity to call out and undermine these efforts to demonize, within their own contexts and collectively at the international level. But cities aren't innately benevolent; they are also places where large numbers of people can be detained, killed, or subjugated. And because autocrats know the power of cities, dissenting subnational leaders are also often threatened with being stripped of resources and decentralized power, as Betancourt discusses in chapter 1.

The chapters in this volume that address the trend of rising authoritarianism do so from a place of recognizing the various ways backsliding democracy is impacting public safety. They simultaneously highlight the innovative, brave, and community-oriented ways that people living and working in cities are responding.

The Rise of Unregulated Technology

While technology has been advancing at a steady pace since at least the Industrial Revolution, the advent of machine learning and adaptive artificial intelligence (AI) pose new and unprecedented opportunities and challenges for humanity.

New innovations hold vast potential benefits across sectors of society such as health and education, but they also pose significant risk, from labor market upheaval to distorting fact from fiction to autonomous robots and weapons systems to exceptional strains on global energy supplies. While technology—in particular social media and useful AI tools—have quickly become absorbed into daily life for many people, anxieties about technology—either moving too fast or falling behind—also run high.

According to the World Economic Forum’s *Global Risks Report*, adverse outcomes associated with advances in AI is the risk with the largest rise in ranking over time.⁷ The use of technology to spread mis- and disinformation is an associated risk, which connects this global trend with the other three trends in a variety of ways. In particular, AI tends to be sycophantic, telling users what they want to hear. In a world with declining free and fair media, these tools are resulting in greater uptake of false narratives and conspiracy theories that reinforce confirmation bias. The power of these tools can—when used by autocratic regimes—fan the flames of division and repression, reinforcing biases and fears across social groups. As Rachel Locke discusses in chapter 3, the average resident of a city can easily and regularly find reasons to hate those defined in some way as “other,” linking these broader power ambitions, typically of national politicians but also external actors,⁸ with violent actions carried out locally within municipal boundaries. This is but one example of the threat posed by a combination of rapid technical advancement and authoritarianism.

Those working in the public safety and violence-prevention space know that technology can be hugely beneficial to helping solve crimes through tools like facial recognition and ammunition tracing but can also be used to surveil and control. As is discussed by Luisa Portugal and Juan Camilo Cock Misas in chapters 4 and 5, this can impose burdens on certain segments of society that are somehow deemed a “threat,” and these tools, when not managed effectively and justly, can also be used to repress groups that the government sees as a risk. Technology has the potential to make court cases function more efficiently, thereby reducing pretrial detention. This advantage and others must be balanced against the risk for false identifications or further increasing divides between communities and the security agencies meant to serve them.

These advanced technologies also require huge amounts of energy and resources to function. In particular, the data centers that power AI need tremendous quantities of water to cool servers. In a world that is increasingly facing drought and where “water wars” influence past and future conflict, this truth cannot be overlooked. Unless there are significant policy changes and political commitments to alleviate these demands, AI in particular will make climate change outcomes worse in the short term, likely with generational implications, reinforcing the Gordian knot that ties these various trends together.

The Growing Impacts of Climate Change

As Jessica Varat writes in chapter 8 of this compendium, “Climate change exacerbates many of the same conditions that also undermine peace and incentivize violence. The severity of climate change impacts on people depends on such pre-conditions as levels of inequality, poverty, resource scarcity, and institutional strength.” Climate change impacts everyone, everywhere in terms of more extreme weather patterns and the knock-on effects of extreme weather.

The impacts we feel globally include significant damage to food systems, whether the denuding of agricultural land, the wildfires that devastate grazing areas and livestock, the warming oceans that lead to marine life die-offs, or otherwise. And of course, these impacts are often felt most deeply by those with the fewest resources to cope, adapt, or transform; though, these trends are changing as neighborhoods burn, sea levels rise, and chaotic weather patterns erupt universally.

Under all of these circumstances, competition for resources increases, creating more grievances and opportunities for conflict. Reduced resources can also create or expand opportunities for illicit groups to corner markets and control access, as has been observed in many countries, as Varat discusses, and to grab urban land and properties, as Antônio Sampaio discusses in chapter 7. The significant shifts in markets, production, and value chains impacted by climate

change—when paired with the weakening of the multilateral system—exacerbates this challenge as the political will and resources to manage and regulate system shocks shift away from a system of diplomatic cooperation to one of nationalist competition.

Further, climate change impacts patterns of displacement and migration. People are forced to leave their homes in search of more-fertile or safer ground elsewhere, often seeking greater safety or productive opportunity in urban or periurban areas. The vast majority of displacement and migration occurs within national borders, and migration is often very productive, helping to provide workers for labor-intensive industries and reinforcing connections between urban and periurban or rural areas. Therefore, nothing about displacement or migration in and of itself creates violence, but the movement of large numbers of people does require thoughtful management. This includes anticipating and responding to impacts on infrastructure, transportation, language resources, and cultural sensitivities. Without this management, a rapid population increase can create tension in receiving communities, particularly when migrants as a group are weaponized by leaders looking to stoke fear and reinforce their own power.

Beyond these indirect impacts on safety, climate change can also directly drive violence levels. Researchers have documented how the stressors caused by climate influence safety outcomes. This research includes work that demonstrates how an increase in family stress caused by a natural disaster can increase domestic violence. It also links increased “heat days” to higher levels of urban crime and violence, all of which Varat addresses in chapter 8.

Cities around the world are working hard to help lessen the factors that contribute to climate change, as is evidenced by the work of C40 and the leadership demonstrated in global climate negotiations. Cities are also in many instances at the forefront of finding adaptation techniques to reduce the impacts of climate change on their residents. But, as this compendium points out, more-intentional and deliberate investment is needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change specifically from a safety and security perspective. While cities can’t control the weather, people in cities can do a great deal to alleviate harm and suffering that results from extreme climate patterns.

The Dismantling of the Multilateral System

With adversarial relationships on the global stage in ascension, the weakening of systems meant to prevent cataclysmic confrontation is extremely worrying, a point reinforced in the World Economic Forum *Global Risks Report*: “Declining trust, diminishing transparency and respect for the rule of law, along with heightened protectionism, are threatening longstanding international relations, trade and investment and increasing the propensity for conflict. Geoeconomic confrontation is top of mind for respondents and was selected as the top risk most likely to trigger a material global crisis in 2026 by 18 percent of respondents, increasing two positions from last year.”⁹

The increasingly fragile multilateral space presents a range of challenges—yet also opportunities—for urban actors striving to advance peace and security. First, fewer financial and political resources are being deployed to support violence prevention and peacebuilding. A 2023 report by the OECD showed how, despite increasing trends of conflict and violence worldwide, the share of international development assistance dedicated to prevention and peacebuilding had been increasingly dropping in recent years to a small fraction—about 10 percent—of all development assistance; and that was before major blows, such as the closure of the US Agency for International Development in 2025.¹⁰ The withdrawal of resources doesn’t just limit actual financial investments in things like wraparound services for high risk youth or research into recruitment of organized criminal groups, but it also creates unhelpful competition among actors in the prevention space. It places significant burdens on decentralized funding streams, which, around the world, have seen years of austerity and recently have been further eroded as the wars in Ukraine and Iran have created massive strains on and shifts in budgets because of rising costs and changing priorities across a range of sectors.

Beyond these resource constraints, the fragmented multilateral context combined with rising authoritarianism has limited the effectiveness of global responses to massive human rights abuses. Consider, for example, the anemic response to the mass atrocities that took place in El Fasher, Sudan, including the systemic killing of over 6,000 in just three days in October 2025.¹¹ Furthermore, in all the most recent theaters of war—from Ukraine to Sudan to Gaza to Iran, to name just a few—cities are where the majority of deaths have taken place. Thus, civilians are increasingly the targets—not just unintentional casualties—of war, a violation of the international laws and norms our multilateral institutions have been established to protect. In Colombia, which has been working hard to cement gains made during the 2016 peace process and where President Gustavo Petro committed to “total peace,” nearly a third of the country, or 386 municipalities, are vulnerable to violence from armed groups.¹²

For cities, protection of civilians is strongest where local investment in peace architecture complements and is complemented by national and global architecture. The weakening of the global system is dealing a heavy blow to this protective webbing, but city leaders still have options to work locally and collaboratively with other municipalities to uphold these global standards and implement the policies and priorities that will keep their citizens safe. The research is clear that peace, stability, and safety are possible at the local level. At a time when global institutions are largely failing in their mandate, there is reason to be hopeful about the capacity of cities to make progress on their violence-reduction and peace priorities.

Chapter Breakdown and Flow

The trends identified here are consequential in their own right, but they also influence urban strategies for violence prevention in a range of obvious and less obvious ways. The chapters in this compendium provide insight into how cities are advancing particular aspects of public safety within the context of these trends, analyzing impact and response options. Peace in Our Cities asked each chapter author to consider the four identified trends and speak to the ones that were most relevant for their particular chapter topic. For some, one or two trends are most salient and are featured more prominently, whereas other authors treat all four trends in relatively equal measure. There are also three chapters—one on authoritarianism, one on technology, and one on climate change—that mirror the trends. Again, this is intentional. For these topics, the editors felt as though there was sufficient impact, sufficient material, and sufficient demand to do a deeper dive. These areas in particular often feel so far outside the control or influence of city actors, and yet there is a wealth of good practice to reference that is being done and can be strengthened at the city level.

All chapters in this compendium have been selected based on needs from Peace in Our Cities members. The chapters focus on:

1. Balanced versus repressive public safety strategies.
2. Organized crime.
3. Political violence.
4. Technology and AI.
5. Justice and access to justice.
6. Community-police relations.
7. Housing and urban land.
8. Climate change.

This compendium does not address one critical global challenge: misogyny. This trend is not new, but its manifestations across societies are deepening in spheres of power and influence with important implications for the strength of authoritarianism, how communities respond to climate change, and the use of technology to recruit and reinforce narratives that promote harm worldwide. For example, “In 2019, the Department of Homeland Security awarded a grant to fund research that aimed to understand the misogynistic incel movement, and a year later, a US Secret Service report named online

misogyny as a concerning source of radicalization for mass attackers.”¹³ Yet “the misogynistic and gendered dimensions of extremist movements are often ignored or brushed aside in media reports, policy analyses, or during prosecution.”¹⁴

For those of us working to undermine the sources and drivers of violence, we must recognize misogyny as the menace it truly is—not just to women but to societies as a whole.¹⁵ City leaders must contend with the subversive presence and influence of misogyny across each of these trends and its direct impact on peace, citizen security, and violence. For this reason, in October 2026, the Peace in Our Cities network will be launching a working group focused specifically on gender and violence prevention.

Structure of the Chapters

Each chapter offers a brief overview of its topic, for example what political violence means in the context of urban violence prevention. Chapter authors then detail the relationship between their topic area and the identified global trends, which resonate differently across each chapter.

Each chapter then offers case-based, city-specific examples of the implications of the chapter’s theme for crime and violence and explores the related work that is being done across policy, programs, and partnerships. This includes a discussion of both good practice and failed or challenged practice. Authors considered the following:

- How are global trends impacting city governments with regard to the specific key area under investigation?
- How are different actors responding to the dynamics covered in chapters, and what are some good examples of what can be done from policy, research, advocacy, and international cooperation perspectives?

By exploring these questions through concrete case studies, the editors and authors are aiming to help readers see themselves in the material, in order to help them think about strategies that could work in their own contexts.

Finally, each chapter provides recommendations or principles that cities can utilize to think about their own efforts in this arena. These recommendations, as briefly summarized below, are intended to provide food for thought based on the particular context of global-local dynamics across different city contexts.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Chapter 1. Cities Under Pressure: Delivering Integrated Solutions for Urban Peace

Cities that have produced sustained safety improvements—ones that simultaneously strengthened rather than eroded the state’s legitimate authority—have constructed integration as a governance function. This requires cities to:

- **Engage in shared problem framing.** Four conditions must be present: a shared diagnostic that all key agencies accept; a coordination mechanism with authority to convene across silos; data flowing in real time to operational decision makers; and a political principal willing to defend the strategy publicly.
- **Build an architecture for collaborative design and implementation.** Cities require coordinating structures capable of convening agencies across sectors and sustaining implementation over time.
- **Iterate to adapt to progress and evolving implementation capabilities.** Solution design must build in flexibility from the start to sequence and iterate effectively based on reliable information.
- **Anchor solutions to political narratives.** Alignment between what strategies do and what political principals can credibly claim credit for is not a communications afterthought—it is a design requirement.

Chapter 2. Organized Crime as Urban Governance: How Criminal Groups Rule Cities and What Local Governments Can Do

Cities have options for addressing organized crime, even under constrained authority, fragmented policing and justice systems, and shifting global pressures.

- **Diagnose the governance problem, not only the violence problem.** Build a governance and extortion dashboard and map criminal governance as a service market.
- **Address the economic foundations of criminal governance.** Redesign public spaces that sustain retail markets, build local harm-reduction partnerships, and coordinate with national agencies.
- **Build state capacity where residents experience governance.** Strengthen municipal dispute resolution and small-claims justice and deliver services reliably.
- **Use enforcement in ways that reduce harm and avoid consolidation.** Pair focused enforcement with clear limits on the use of force, strong oversight, transparency, and community engagement, and avoid broad crackdowns that create leadership succession crises and prison-based consolidation.
- **Treat prisons as part of the city's governance system.** Build a city-prison coordination agenda, monitor prison-based coordination among criminal groups, and expand reintegration and post-release supervision.
- **Govern technology to protect trust while improving effectiveness.** Adopt technology with rules, oversight, transparency, and community safeguards.
- **Protect civic space and reduce criminal capture of community life.** Create anonymous reporting mechanisms, support community leaders, monitor and prevent criminal group capture of local territory and systems, and invest in witness-protection coordination.
- **Plan for global shocks and shifting criminal portfolios.** Monitor changes in trafficking routes and markets that affect local rents, shifts in national enforcement priorities and extradition patterns, digital payment adoption and laundering opportunities, and migration and labor-market shocks that affect recruitment.
- **Join international networks that track geopolitical risks and organized crime trends.**

Chapter 3. Under Attack: The Enduring Impact of Political Violence and How Cities are Pushing Back

Political violence must be understood as a violence challenge and an antidemocratic challenge that simultaneously erodes rights-based and justice-centered systems. The dynamic and ever-evolving tapestry of urban life contains the very ingredients to prevent political violence.

Reducing the risk for political violence requires municipal leaders to:

- **Prepare:** Proactively monitor risk and consider what capacities are available to prevent or respond to political violence.
- **Research:** Conduct research that pulls broad trends into the local reality and clarifies accessible protective factors.
- **Communicate:** Provide clear communication to residents, strengthen listening among key actors, consider the narratives that are circulating in communities, and proactively respond.
- **Resource:** Resource appropriately according to risk, ideally with funding support from national or regional sources.

Efforts to fortify communities against political violence include:

- Reinforce rights-based norms, confront othering, and build strong propeace narratives.
- Build local social infrastructure through cross-sector collaboration to promote peaceful engagement and social cohesion in shared urban spaces.
- Engage in dialogue, especially during heightened moments, and model constructive behavior by calling for calm and establishing norms of productive disagreement.
- Counter disinformation and use technology in prosocial ways by leveraging preexisting resources, always ensuring controls for bias and responsible data management.

Chapter 4. Technology-Empowered Urban Violence Prevention in the Era of AI

Cities have the opportunity to build the foundation of a future in which technology is used to enhance the public good while safeguarding basic rights.

- **Leverage AI and technology.** Analyze your city at the hyperlocal level and understand the microdynamics that have reverberating impacts in the city as a whole.
- **Be data informed instead of data driven.** Use data to prepare, perform, and reflect, but consider the broader social, political, and economic context in which the data was produced, and be guided by social values and ethical boundaries.
- **Meaningfully include communities—particularly the historically marginalized—in debates about technology governance, and prioritize building trustworthiness.** AI should be used to increase community participation, including by incorporating community insights and creating open channels of communication between government, civil society, and the general public.
- **Ensure clear and transparent protocols, accountability systems, and proper human oversight.** Government staff have to be trained and empowered to exercise their human judgment at all times, recognizing that human intervention is required beyond AI processing.
- **Use technology to support legitimate, integrated, and holistic violence-prevention strategies, not to replace them.** Keep in mind that the human element is as integral to the success of policies as these new tools.

Chapter 5. Harnessing the Justice System to Reduce Violence in Cities in Times of Global Uncertainty and Technological Change

A fair, accessible, and effective justice system can help reduce violence in cities in multiple ways. Such a system will put checks on state violence; ensure rights and fair treatment for everybody; be easy to understand, access, and navigate; effectively solve problems and conflicts; and sanction offenders who commit serious crimes in ways that prevent further violence.

- **Violence-prevention strategies should be timely, balanced, and evidence based.** They must be perceived as fair and legitimate, be implemented before violence escalates, and reduce popular demand for tough-on-crime or authoritarian measures.
- **City governments and local actors can legally challenge exceptional measures that suspend constitutional guarantees and the normal rule of law.** To do so, cities should have strong legal counsel and legal departments capable of challenging authoritarian measures.

- **Coalitions, networks, and associations of cities and local governments—within and across national boundaries—can also push back against authoritarianism by promoting rules-based and fair violence-reduction strategies.** International cooperation and common agendas between cities can counterbalance this trend.
- **Cities should work to make justice systems and procedures easier to access and navigate.** Many legal problems can be solved outside the formal judicial system, in community settings, especially in excluded neighborhoods. Technology can be harnessed to make justice services more accessible and efficient.
- **Cities should work with law enforcement agencies, detective and attorney offices, and the court system to progressively adopt, with safeguards, new technologies that can improve the agility and capability to manage high caseloads and to solve cases.** A criminal justice system that is swift, can handle larger caseloads, and produces better outcomes that are perceived as fair and legitimate can contribute to reducing violence. Technology, including AI, can help achieve this, and cities can incorporate it in the areas under their responsibility or support other agencies in adopting them, including by ensuring proper oversight and training.

Chapter 6. Police and Community Trust in Contested Urban Spaces: Pitfalls and Policy Lessons

The central challenge for urban policymakers is to manage the expansion of community policing programs and community-police relations while protecting their democratic integrity.

- **Accountability must be treated as the foundation of community policing.** Authorities must provide protection without harm, fairness without discrimination, and consequences when police abuse their authority.
- **Effective community policing requires genuine community ownership and autonomy.** Communities should be encouraged to set priorities, lead local initiatives, be offered protection during community forums, and be enabled to hold police to account.
- **Cities must adopt transparent and ethical information governance.** Authorities should clearly articulate rules governing the collection, storage, and use of community-provided information, including robust protections for informants.
- **Cities need to invest in relational policing rather than simply creating new structures.** Practical policing reforms should prioritize continuity of neighborhood officers, training in mediation and conflict resolution, and performance metrics that reward trust building.
- **Community policing must be understood as part of a broader urban governance system.** Community policing delivers better outcomes when it is integrated with social programs and multiagency problem solving.
- **Approaches must be tailored to the realities of informal settlements and marginalized neighborhoods.** Community-led safety arrangements should incorporate existing local structures—such as elders’ councils, women’s groups, and youth networks.
- **Cities must ensure that community policing is genuinely inclusive and protective of vulnerable groups.** Design participation mechanisms that deliberately amplify marginalized voices (e.g., women, young people, migrants) and create safe reporting pathways for victims of police misconduct.
- **Cities must rethink how they measure success.** Effective evaluation should focus on outcomes as well as outputs. Do residents feel safer? Do they trust and engage with police? Are community priorities reflected in policing practices?

Chapter 7. Predatory Urbanization: Urban Land and Housing As Targets for Armed Groups and Mafias

Organized groups deliberately evict, grab land, illegally build, and conduct violence related to housing or land in cities to maintain control.

Governments, civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and expert communities can collaborate to break down silos and develop useful solutions.

- Tackle predatory urbanization as a critical step in achieving safer, politically stable, and responsive cities.
- Establish unified language (e.g., predatory urbanization) and a consistent, coordinated approach to identify deliberate action by organized groups to evict, grab land, illegally build, and conduct violence related to housing or land in cities.
- Conduct more research on predatory urbanization through academia, think tanks, and NGOs to identify points in common between policy areas and geographies that are currently siloed.
- Join city networks that can help break down siloes, harmonize definitions, strengthen the evidence base, and share challenges and solutions.

Promising approaches to address these challenges include:

- Simplify laws and close regulatory loopholes in land markets.
- Reform or create public agencies tasked with formalizing property ownership.
- Issue collective land titles to communities, which can increase residents' tenure security and investment in their buildings and communities.
- Develop area-based assessments and urban profiles that integrate housing needs with other areas, such as infrastructure bottlenecks, basic service provision, and public security issues like criminal violence.
- Establish regular and institutionalized community consultation mechanisms on land tenure and codevelopment of alternatives to eviction between governments, civil society, and law enforcement.

Chapter 8. Climate Change, Urban Safety, and Violence: What City Leaders Need to Know

Cities are well positioned to identify practical, low-cost, and inclusive solutions to addressing the nexus between climate change and public safety.

Five actions most cities can take right now:

- Integrate public safety considerations into heat-action plans and disaster-preparedness strategies.
- Use existing data tools to overlay climate risks with violence or insecurity hot spots.
- Design cooling centers and green spaces with safety, accessibility, and community trust in mind.
- Invest in social-cohesion initiatives alongside climate-adaptation projects.
- Generate community-led vulnerability assessments that aim to capture the security context, as well as climate change risks.

Conclusion

This compendium is meant to be read in a few ways. First, specifically as food for thought to help city partners—across the public, private, and community sectors—explore and consider strategies to help reinforce peace and violence prevention. Second, to foster more intentional conversation on precise ways cities are coping with the massive shifts that are taking place globally. It is essential that city actors see themselves as agents of change, not merely passively coping with these shifts but finding ways to proactively manage them, investing in strategies that reinforce solidarity, community, connection, and inclusion, all of which are essential to peaceful, productive, and just urban environments.

Endnotes

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About Peace in Our Cities

Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) is a unique global network of over 30 cities and more than 50 community-based and international partners.

PiOC seeks to reduce and prevent urban violence worldwide—preserving lives and helping cities thrive. It does so by creating concrete, participatory, and evidence-based platform exchanges to reduce and prevent severe violence in member cities, while also building a global movement of urban-violence-reduction advocates.

The PiOC approach is based on three lines of action:

- **Amplify** policymaker awareness of the genuine scope and scale of urban violence and opportunities available to help cities address it.
- **Advance** evidence-informed, balanced policy solutions and peacebuilding approaches to reduce the most severe forms of violence in urban contexts.
- **Accompany** city leaders, community partners, and civil society through peer exchanges and information access to realize ambitious targets for violence reduction.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies at New York University's Center on International Cooperation; the Stanley Center for Peace and Security; Co-founder and Principal, Rachel Locke; and Expert Advisor and Membership Liaison, Flavia Carbonari. To learn more, donate, or join, please contact info@peaceinourcities.org or visit www.peaceinourcities.org.