

Cristian Pliscoff
University of Chile

Police Reform in Times of Collaboration

ies. The final section presents a list of recommendations, taking into account what has been learned so far, for improving and fostering police reform in Latin America.

Cristian Pliscoff is an assistant professor at the University of Chile.
E-mail: cpliscof@uchile.cl

Paulo de Mesquita Neto's observation (chapter 6) is a good starting point to understand the reasons why this book is interesting. According to him, police and judicial institutions in a democratic regime should be

- (1) independent from the government, the military, political parties, and interest groups and accountable to the law and the community;
- (2) effective and efficient in performing their mission, defined as providing security and justice to citizens; and
- (3) equally accessible and responsible to all citizens and groups. (153)

The main objective of this book is to assess the implementation of major police reform processes in Latin America. The book is the result of a research project conducted under the auspices of the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center. It is part of the second phase of the project, in which several authors provided their thoughts about ongoing police reform processes in the region. The book has three sections. The first reviews broad issues of police reform in Latin America. The second provides particular information from different case stud-

Unfortunately, this picture is far from that which prevails in Latin America. The lack of these characteristics has justified the implementation of reform policies in police institutions to improve not only their performance but also their legitimacy. In this context, “police reform refers to improving police forces’ operational efficiency and effectiveness in preventing and repressing crime as well as to strengthening their democratic ethos and accountability” (Bailey and Dammert 2006, 2). In Latin America, the driving forces behind such institutional reforms are, according to Hugo Frühling (chapter 2), democratization processes, crime rate increases, and the wave of reform processes in the public sector that have dominated the developed world since the 1980s. De Mesquita claims that in Latin America, the majority of reform processes have been pushed forward by three different forces: (1) civil society or political agreement, as in the case of Buenos Aires in Argentina and Sao Paulo in Brazil; (2) the state, as in the cases of Colombia, Peru, and Chile; and (3) international actors, as in Haiti and Guatemala. This diversity of forces is important, not only in explaining the characteristics of the reform processes undertaken but also in explaining their subsequent failures and successes.

Why does this book deserve the attention of the public administration community of scholars and practitioners? The first reason is that police reform in Latin America is such an interesting topic because of the history of the police institutions of this region and because of the importance of the social conditions in the places where these reforms have been attempted. The role that police institutions played during the dictatorships of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s in the region, as well as the practices that most police bodies have maintained, even since democracy has been reinstated, have contributed to the lack of legitimacy of these institutions. Police forces have been seen as abusing their authority not only during authoritarian regimes but also after democratic governments have taken office. In fact, Fuentes (chapter 3) claims that police abuse was seen as one of the major reasons for undertaking police reforms in Argentina. Police reform processes have been oriented not only toward improving performance or delivering better service, the usual goals of public organizational reform, but also toward gaining (or regaining) legitimacy among citizens.

The second element that makes this book appealing is the fact that crime rates have soared in almost every country in Latin America since the 1990s. In fact, the primary motivation of the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center to initiate research in this area was the concern that, because of high crime rates in the region and the resulting social pressures, many governments have applied harsh policies that not only were inappropriate but also jeopardized civil rights. The combination of the interest in helping police to gain legitimacy among the citizenry and the increasing levels of crime in the region make the book a timely contribution to a policy domain of the utmost interest in Latin

America. Successful police reform policies would not only help to lower crime rates, making societies safer, but also strengthen Latin American democracies.

The third element of value in this book is the group of case studies dealing with the problem of resistance to change in police institutions, which is a topic that always deserves attention. Scholars in both organization theory and police studies have provided examples of police institutions’ resistance to change (Lingamneni 1979; Reiner 1992; Williams 2003). One of the key findings of these studies refers to characteristics of organizational cultures that tend to jeopardize initiatives for change. Peer pressure, socialization, and other means of indoctrination and control are reported in the literature as reasons for resistance to change in police agencies. This book provides new examples that substantiate this tendency to prevent reforms taking place and also demonstrates cases in which changes have been achieved. Heather H. Ward (chapter 7) analyzes cases in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile as examples of both failure and success in reforming police institutions. One of the most important findings in her research is that “police reform must offer something positive for police, and that is best assured when police of multiple ranks participate in the reforms” (198). Breaking the grip of a strong organizational culture can only be achieved by distributing benefits for all members of the organization being changed and by involvement at all levels of the hierarchy in the process. In addition to such internal participation, the likelihood of breaking the barriers to change in police institutions is much higher when other public agencies and citizens play an active role.

The most important contribution of this book to the literature on public administration concerns collaborative public management and cross-sectoral governance. One of the preferred policy interventions at the local and national levels has been that of community policing programs. These programs are intended to address the issue of public safety by creating spaces of coordination and cooperation among police institutions, other public agencies, and citizens. For instance, Frühling (chapter 2) assesses several cases of community policing in Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, and Colombia and provides a typology of three models for implementing community policing: the commission model, in which a central commission is set up to implement a program of collaboration; the decentralized model, in which police institutions encourage citizens to engage in collaboration; and the mixed model, in which elements of both previous models are taken into account. He contends that community policing programs are pointed in the right direction despite misleading and unclear results in terms of crime reduction and security perception.

This is consistent with the analysis presented by Catalina Smulovitz (chapter 8), who studied cases in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. She claims that reform attempts in

Latin America lack a key element for providing proper community policing and that the reforms have not entailed organizational change in police institutions. Moreover, she believes these attempts tend to (1) elicit low levels of trust among the players involved, (2) result in little communication and coordination with other, nonpolice institutions, and (3) lack consistent or meaningful participation (232). Tulchin and Ruthenburg (chapter 12) claim that “a lack of communication between the forces of law and order and the communities they serve is a crucial barrier to decreasing perceptions of insecurity and to the adoption and implementation of successful measures to diminish crime” (321). Collaboration should be the primary feature in the design, implementation, and assessment of police reform policies. After all, the citizenry is the recipient of the benefits and the bearer of the costs of these policies.

Finally, the book provides interesting insights into the role that citizens can play in improving the performance of other public agencies as well. For instance, Fuentes focuses his analysis of reform attempts in Argentina and Chile on the role of citizens’ organizations in providing oversight of police performance and in preventing abuses. The importance of increasing participation in this policy domain can also be taken into account in other aspects of the policy process, such as the role that citizens can play in the design of major policy interventions. Along this line of argument, Gracia Teruel, Renata Villoro, Andrew Morrison, and James Hammit (chapter 5) propose a citizen-oriented methodology to measure the real cost of crime. The resulting data can

help target the real needs of the society in a given area of intervention, so that police reform policies fit the circumstances in which they are supposed to intervene.

I would recommend this book for those interested in police reform policies, organizational change in police institutions, collaborative public management, and public sector reform in Latin America. In particular, scholars in policy design and implementation will find good examples of how a policy may be doomed to failure, as in Argentina in the late 1990s, and how complex problems such as public safety can be addressed by taking into account a wide variety of factors, as illustrated by the example of the Development, Security, and Peace Program in Cali, Colombia, in 1993.

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