

Educational and Entrepreneurial Initiatives to Support Youth in Places of Violence

A Conference Presented by
The Program on Poverty and Governance (PovGov)
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Following in the footsteps of last year’s international conference on violence and policing in Latin American and U.S. Cities, on April 28th and 29th of 2015, the Program on Poverty and Governance (PovGov) at Stanford’s Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) turned Encina Hall at the Freeman Spogli Institute of International Studies (FSI) into a dynamic, instructive and stimulating discussion platform. The exchange of experiences, expertise and ideals that flourished within this space helped create a “dialogue for action,” as speakers and participants explored the various dimensions of youth and criminal violence in Mexico, Brazil and the United States, while advocating for the importance of opening up adequate pathways to hope. The event was sponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies, The Bill Lane Center for the America West, The Mexico Initiative at FSI, and The Center on International Security and Cooperation.

The motivation for the conference reflects PovGov’s active agenda on criminal violence, which seeks to analyze the interplay of different crime networks and governance as it affects poverty, economic activity and citizen security throughout Latin America. Through the Stanford Violence and Crime Lab (CrimeLab), PovGov works to develop scientific and action-oriented research to assist community organizations, government agencies, policy-makers, police departments, and other relevant players in Latin America - and elsewhere in the developing world - to reduce

violent crime and its devastating consequences. One of CrimeLab's main areas of research focuses on youth and violence, including efforts to explore initiatives successful in attracting (and maintaining) affected youth in educational and career-oriented programs in territories ravished by poverty and crime.

With scarce options for a quality education, prospects for gainful employment and the possibility for future economic sustainability, on a daily basis, young individuals from poor communities throughout Latin American and U.S. cities are exposed to a violent environment with easily accessed - and often attractive - gateways into the world of criminality. From casual affiliation to gangs in schools and neighborhoods in Southern California, to full-time armed participation in international drug cartels in Juarez and drug factions in Rio de Janeiro favelas, youth are the biggest target – and victims – of violence.

In attempts to shed light to this very complex and fundamental issue that is claiming thousand of lives every year and deteriorating the social fabric across cities, PovGov's two-day conference brought together a group of activists and practitioners from grassroots civil society organizations, community leaders, educators, professionals from development agencies, policy-makers, politicians and scholars - as well as some of the very individuals who have benefited from programs highlighted during the event - to discuss the many challenges faced by the youth population in these different locations and to share innovative and inspirational initiatives to generate opportunities and foster change.

Political Science Professor and PovGov Director, **Beatriz Magaloni**, introduced the event's main objectives during the welcoming remarks and emphasized its focus on exploring opportunity structures in territories impacted by poverty and violence: "This conference is the result of a long reflection on the connection of poverty, violence, inequality and corruption. However, our goal is not to reflect on the costs of violence, but to highlight alternatives that organizations, public officials and individuals are helping create. We want to reflect on this work that has been happening and on the revolution that these players are making."

Larry Diamond, CDDRL Director and Political Science Professor, also gave an opening speech and took the opportunity to publically applaud the work PovGov has been carrying and its continuous effort to open up platforms to bridge practice, public policy and research: "PovGov and other centers in this building that are also part of FSI aren't just academic programs... [the work] goes beyond writing papers and evaluating theories. We want to make a difference in the world. We are happy to have here individuals that have life stories this conference seeks to address and that are dedicated to make the difference on the ground and give hope to the hopeless."

The 27 panelists participating in the event shared their work and knowledge through seven panels spread over the two-day conference. They were joined by a group of influential

discussants and two keynote speakers, whose expertise and efforts to promote life opportunities for youth in Mexico and Brazil brought in an added wave of promise into the future of the field. Panel 1, ***Youth Violence: Risk Factors and Consequences***, introduced issues of youth crime and violence mainly within the Latin American and U.S. context and explored the consequences of widespread criminality on youth development possibilities, future life outcomes in terms of education and employability and society as a whole. Speakers included Professor ***Beatriz Magaloni***, PovGov Post-Doctoral Fellow ***Brenda Jarillo Rabling***, and ***Monica Véldez González***, Director of Research and Studies at the *Mexican Institute of Youth (IMJUVE)*.

In her presentation, ***Monica*** expanded on the extensive research process that goes into the construction of suitable public policies to benefit youth in Mexico, particularly in scenarios of social exclusion and inequality. The proposed actions included the advancement of socio-emotional tools to help youth make responsible future life decisions, programs to encourage youth to use their free time more effectively, a reform in the judicial system to expand national and local schemes toward a proper engagement with young offenders, and finally, an increased focus on the capacitation of personnel working with youth populations.

Monica also talked about issues of systematic prejudice, asserting that negative perceptions of young people influences how the government, security forces and the society engages with them: “The greatest majority of governmental agencies in Mexico and Latin America carry a stigma towards the youth and what they represent. In Mexico, there is an exacerbation of violence against this population... the brown, poor youth. There is also a social stigma, and a stigma around discourses that are created around the youth.”

As the panel’s discussant, ***Francis Fukuyama***, Professor of Political Science and Director of CDDRL’s Program on Governance, attempted to connect the broader themes of the conference to the recent events in Baltimore and expanded on the polarized debate that stems from the right and left-wing discourses on issues of crime and violence. Fukuyama explained that one side of the pool claims structural arguments (the problem is largely driven by incentives such as lack of jobs, educational opportunities and the monetary gains offered by the drug trade) while the other pool expands on matters of values, culture and norms.

For him, all of these issues are intertwined and need to be tackled simultaneously if we hope to formulate effective solutions for the youth: “If you look carefully to any of these situations, you see a mixture of both strands. We socialize young men into norms that allow them to be productive participants in the economic activities of society... the effects of economic and structural changes undermine the cultural norms and expectations that people have. And then you have the trap... there are a number of interactive factors that have to be solved simultaneously before people can be lift out of poverty [and are then less likely to engage in criminal activities].”

The panel was followed by a passionate and informative presentation from our first keynote speaker, Brazil's Sub-Secretary of Youth and President of the National Council on Youth (CONJUVE), **Angela Guimarães**. In light of her work as a longtime supporter of social movements in the country, **Angela** began her talk by reflecting on the social, economic and educational advancements that Brazil has experienced since the ascent of the Worker's Party (PT) in 2003 - particularly in benefit of the poorest segments of the population (including a large number of young people). However, despite recent developments, Brazil's youth still lack access to proper educational and income opportunities - an issue that is further aggravated by the high levels of violence in the country. "The current youth experience is marked by violence... indeed, there has been an expansion in access to education, work, formalization and quality of life, but violence continues to mark this generation. 51% of youth in Brazil have lost someone close to them in a violent act."

As the issue of youth, race, crime and violence took center stage, **Angela** proceeded to discuss the current scenario for young people in Brazil, while expanding on nationwide policies put into place to benefit this specific segment of the population and guide future work in the field. She presented the campaign *Juventude Viva* (Youth Alive), a federal strategy that seeks to reduce the vulnerability of the Black youth to violence and prevent the occurrence of homicides. The plan works with base in a few main strategic areas, which includes proposals and public campaigns to break the logic of violence that mainly victimizes the black youth, opportunities for inclusion through the creation of local spaces for education and professional qualification, the transformation of territories via public investments in a variety of fields such as cultural, health, security and infrastructural spheres, and finally, increased institutional support and the collaboration of the federal, state and municipal actors in the creation and provision of public policies for development and violence prevention directed at the youth population.

In the second panel of the day, *Initiatives for At-risk Youth in Rio Favelas*, practitioners, educators and politicians with extensive experience working in Rio favelas gathered to discuss issues of local governance, public security, youth culture and development in these territories, as well as to share successful strategies to improve educational and life opportunities for the youth from popular origins and their communities at large. Some of the initiatives highlighted during their talk addressed advancements in education, college-prep programs, job placements, psychological guidance, actions to support local culture and arts, as well as pathways for strengthening citizenship on various grounds. Speakers included **Eliana de Sousa e Silva**, Founder and Director of the civil society organization *Maré's Development Network*, **Jailson de Sousa e Silva**, Co-Founder and Director of the organization *Favela's Observatory*, as well as **Ivana Bentes**, Brazil's National Secretary of Citizenship and Cultural Diversity.

Ivana framed her presentation around the need to improve and expand youth policies in the cultural field, but from an approach that recognizes the agency and knowledge of individuals in the development process and in the creation of methodologies. That is, actions from the people

and for the people. Ivana highlighted the “ideological and practical crisis” in the current policy model that informs youth work in favelas and peripheries, from overly structured and restricting formal education schemes for socialization to “pre-given” and “pre-fabricated” provisions of competencies exclusively for the market.

For **Ivana**, in order to build effective grounds in which to fight issues of poverty, violence and drug trafficking in Rio favelas - as it relates to the youth population and their victimization - we need not to oppose public policies in place, but seek to complement this insufficient model, working to amplify different forms of cultural expressions and platforms where the “richness of poverty” can shine and thrive. “Favelas have the power to create solutions in all grounds of informality that goes beyond our imagination. Social imagination has the power to transform violence and poverty in richness and production... the youth creates the economy of culture, a symbolic and affective culture. And that is worth a lot.”

Professor **Larry Diamond**, who served as a discussant in the panel, echoed Ivana’s core argument on the fundamental need to guarantee youth’s subjectivity, rights and dignity in the attempt to transform their social conditions through mainstream public policies: “It’s not just about jobs and education, and getting formality and security, and so on. All of that feeds into something bigger. How do we get these 15-29 year-olds to feel that they are someone so they feel like they have a path to follow?”

The third and last panel of the day, ***Reducing Youth Gang Activity and Violence in the U.S.***, focused on the work of three experienced U.S. practitioners who have been engaged in the development of innovative initiatives to support young people and strengthen crime prevention practices in the East and West Coast. Speakers included **Lateefah Simon**, Director of the *California’s Future Initiative* at Rosenberg Foundation and national recognized civil rights leader, **Amy Crawford**, Deputy Director of the *Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York*, and **Christa Gannon**, Founder and Director of *Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)*.

In her talk, **Christa** took the audience on a voyage into her early work as a law student and a volunteering teacher in the juvenile hall system, and how those experiences helped shape her activism and inspired the founding of her organization. *Fresh Lifelines for Youth* is an award-winning nonprofit dedicated to breaking the cycle of violence, crime and incarceration among teens in Northern California by providing legal education, leadership training and one-on-one mentoring. FLY believes in the potentiality of each individual and their activities are centered on the principle that youth have the power to change their own reality. That is, they do not seek to “save” the youth, but to provide a platform so they can “save” themselves. “We have learned how important it is to be strength finders. We have challenges and frustrations, but we try to find the strength to magnify [so they can be] part of the solution... we try really hard to take on an “inside-out” approach with young people’s voices helping us pave the way.”

During his discussion comments, **Bruce Cain**, Director of Stanford's Bill Lane Institute for the American West, spoke to the value of conducting "targeted work" and focusing on individuals who are most likely to be violent in efforts to lower crime rates. However, he also called attention to the malpractices and injustices embedded in some segments of the U.S. judicial system and how that can jeopardize potential effective interventions to provide new pathways and recovery opportunities for individuals who engage in criminal activities. According to Cain, this obsession with "visible actions" stems from a performance-oriented democratic society, which consequently, drives the state and the police to invest in "zero tolerance" policies, such as locking people up for simple little crimes or incarcerating individuals with mental illness. "Whenever there is a problem with violent men, there is a problem with people that are supposed to be bringing in the law. It only takes a handful of people to diminish the work being done by the larger part."

The second day of the conference kicked off with a panel primarily dedicated to exploring a large-scale program from the municipality of Zapopan, Mexico (*Jóvenes con Porvenir*) aimed at offering work and educational opportunities for youth living in underserved communities throughout the region. The panel entitled *Evaluating Effective Interventions for Youth* counted with the participation of **Claudia Domínguez Sánchez**, Director in the Institute of Capacitation and Educational Offer of Zapopan (the body responsible for delivering the initiative), and **Gustavo Robles Peiro**, PhD Student at Stanford's Political Science Department and Pre-Doctoral Fellow at the Program on Poverty and Governance. While **Claudia** focused on laying out the rationale, objectives and strategies behind the program, **Gustavo** shared the results of a comprehensive impact evaluation study carried out by Stanford in partnership with the municipality of Zapopan, shedding light to the initiative's overall achievements and on the ground impact. *Jóvenes con Porvenir* has benefited over 28,000 youth since its inception, reaching almost 12.5% of the youth NEET (not in education, employment or training) population living in the municipality.

In addition, the panel was enriched by an inspiring personal account of participation in a second-chance educational program based in California. **Felix Lucero**, a graduate from the *Prison University Project* – an initiative that provides higher education to incarcerated individuals in San Quentin State Prison – shared his experience as a student during his 18-year incarceration sentence as well as his current work with youth in a post-prison setting. Felix spoke to the importance of the program in providing a new life outlook for young men in prison and of serving as an alternative to violence: "[The program] affects people not only when they get out of prison, but also while they are in there... it gives us something to look up to. It also has an impact on the prison system, instead of turning to violence, people tend to try and work things out more... Education allows people to think critically about their surroundings and empower people to do things differently."

Martin Carnoy, Professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education, served as the panel's discussant and called attention to the need of pushing the discussion further to also include issues of employability and actual life advancements for individuals participating in educational programs, inside and outside the formal educational system. "Finishing high school, for example, has great non-monetary impacts, and that is all very important. I don't want to diminish those non-monetary qualities, but increasingly, having a Bachelor's does not mean having a better life... there is a lot of thinking around the idea that education can solve all problems in Latin America, but we have to be skeptical of that. If everyone has a Bachelor's, that won't solve the problem. Job training also does not have a very good record of securing employment," he said, calling for more "harmony" between the labor market and education and training for the youth populations, in Mexico and beyond.

Panel 5, the ***Network for Youth Agency Experience***, focused on exploring the methodology and efforts of a Rio-based educational program that seeks to foster individual and community change in Rio favelas and peripheries through entrepreneurial projects that showcase the youth's agency and creative power. The first section of the panel entitled, ***Instruments to Make a Difference***, brought together three young ladies from *Agency* who are active players in the development of the project on the ground and have benefited greatly by the initiative, both professionally and personally. Speakers included **Veruska Delfino**, *Agency*'s Production Coordinator, **Ana Paula Lisboa**, a writer from the Maré favela complex who acts as a Methodology Coordinator in the program, and **Elaine Rosa**, a former *Agency* student from the Chapadão favela in Rio's North zone. During her talk, **Veruska** explained the rationale behind the program: "The youth cannot just be considered a student, they also need to be creators. So that's what we want to do... we want to open up opportunities so these youth can create... we want to stimulate them, mediate their desires inside the territory, not just for the youth, but for the entire community."

During the second section, ***World Exchange of Methodologies***, a group of practitioners and activists, including scholars and educators, discussed the advancement of platforms to exchange methodologies and experiences between Brazil and the United Kingdom in youth-related issues - with *Agency* as the model program. Using art and entrepreneurship as central pieces in the development process, these actors have helped create pathways of possibilities for youth from disenfranchised communities in close connection with the needs and potential of the community. Speakers in this section included **Marcus Faustini**, writer, actor, director and *Agency* founder, **Paul Heritage**, Professor of Drama and Performance at Queen Mary University of London, who has been actively engaged in the promotion of cultural platforms interchange between the two nations, as well as **Liz Moreton** and **Suzie Henderson**, both who work for important institutions within the UK's theater and arts scene.

Highlighting the need to invest in the construction of platforms where the youth can become active participants in the city, formulating, developing and promoting life opportunities for themselves and their own communities, **Marcus** said: "[Agency] is an artistic methodology, it

isn't theory. We don't want to prove anything; we want to display what is hidden. We want to break with the didactic approach to using art... it [art] needs to be an instrument to inventing new "time spaces" for the favela youth. The disengaged youth in Brazil and in Europe does not recognize himself/herself in the diaspora, and the city has yet to allow him to create his own place."

During his discussion comments, **Steve Commins**, Associate Director for Global Public Affairs and Lecturer in Urban Planning at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, talked about the importance of helping people find their own voices and potentiality in the transformational process, particularly in work that engages with youth populations exposed to poverty and violence. "We need to get people thinking about the horizon of opportunity. Security is about more than violence... it's about empowerment, it's about the opportunity to change lives and find ways to be productive. To quote one of my favorite expressions "we drinks from our own wells..." from within these communities there is profound value... the meaning the purpose and power comes from people's own wells."

Following Agency's brief symposium, our second and final keynote speaker, **Hector Castillo Berthier**, took the stage to expand on his work at *Circo Volador*, a social platform that promotes arts and culture for youth from popular origins and seeks to find solutions for pressing urban issues in Mexico. *Circo* invests in a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to work with youth in places of violence that combines elements of multi-country and multifaceted sociological investigation and methodologies - as well as community participation - to its on-the-ground practices. The 28-year-old self-supported initiative is regarded as one of the most successful social interventions in the country.

During his presentation, **Hector** talked about some of his experiences as a researcher and practitioner in the field of social sciences, from living and working as a trash collector in attempts to submerge himself in a field-work project, to starting a local radio show to open up an avenue for engagement with young men involved in gangs and criminal organizations in order to better understand their local popular culture and lives. "From earlier on in my career, I tried to think of things that would be useful for people," he declared. **Hector** and *Circo* took on to the streets of Mexico before many of the programs we see today were ever established, helping pave the way for a new approach to how we view and engage with youth in violent settings. "As we asked the youth to tell us about their own problems, we started to change the process. We created a new common language that we could all understand. We planned things with them, we drew with them... we produced things at the base."

Panel 6, ***Victims and Perpetrators of Violence: Redirecting Youth in Mexican Prisons***, focused on issues of human rights, crime and violence and expanded on experiences and practices aimed at providing new life pathways for youth and young adults impacted by the Mexican prison system. Speakers included Professor **Beatriz Magaloni**, who presented primary results of a study

on the rise of torture in Mexican prisons in light of the war on drugs and an increase in incarceration rates, **Humberto Padgett**, an award-winning journalist who has written extensively and conducted investigations around issues of youth crime and violence (including a recently-published book expanding on the experiences of incarcerated young men in Mexico), **Antonio Cervantes**, a producer from Mexico City who reflected on the “culture of violence” in the country and proposed new media contents to combat it, and finally, **Carlos Cruz**, Founder and Director of the organization *Cauce Ciudadano*.

Cauce is a network of community centers aimed at reducing youth violence in Mexico through the provision of education and support platforms. With the help of volunteers, psychologists, medical doctors and other professionals, *Cauce* provides a series of workshops, therapy sessions and activities to combat addictions, reintegrate families, attempt to modify dangerous behaviors and prepare young Mexicans for employment. A core aspect of the program is that ex-gang leaders work as mentors to connect with at-risk youth at a deeper personal level. **Carlos**, a former gang member himself, briefly talked about some of his that past experience with violence during his talk: “We assume that we are *pandilleros*, and some of our friends die because they don’t want to work for different groups. From 1987 to 1990, 20 people from my group were killed by rival gangs. Only 3 of us survived... that was a permanent discussion. That was the lifestyle that we were subjected to.”

Carlos also talked about the principles guiding the work that *Cauce* develops; much like *Circo*, they shine a new light on the “mainstream approach” to providing support and opportunities for youth in impoverished and violent territories: “Fundamentally, we don’t see ourselves as vulnerable groups, and from very early on, we build on a principle of building resistance, at the individual and community level. Then we look for ways to do this together, to provide alternatives to what is lacking from part of the state.”

The final panel of our event, ***Youth Experiences: Sharing Lives, Practices and Knowledge***, built on the lives experiences and on-the-ground work carried out by a group of young adults involved in the advancement of grassroots development initiatives aimed at supporting individuals and communities in different fronts in Brazil, Mexico and the U.S. Most of these young leaders have been benefited by different local programs and have received institutional support to develop their own activities and/or take part in larger endeavors.

Speakers included **Francisco Valdean Alves dos Santos** and **Valnei Succo**, two cultural promoters working in the Maré favela complex at Rio’s North zone; **Emanuelle Pereira Mallette**, an Agency-affiliated cultural producer that advocates for the importance of radio in community based communication; **Mariluce Mariá de Souza**, a community leader and social entrepreneur from Complexo do Alemão; **Alma Yureni Esqueda Garcia**, who coordinates the ground activities of *Cauce Ciudadano* in the state of Morales; and finally, **Christian Paronable**, a former participant of *Fresh Lifelines for Youth* in California, who shared his emotional account

to recovery from a life of violence and abuse. “FLY didn’t judge me from my past, they were there for me... they showed me the good instead of the bad, and that is really powerful. FLY opened their hands and heart to me, which is something I had not experienced before,” he revealed.

The panel summoned up unconnected, but similar life stories of struggles and hardship; nonetheless, all of these stories were primarily filled with elements of hope and resilience - which these inspiring individuals managed to translate into action and tangible change for themselves and their communities making use of the tools already present within that space. As Mariluce defined it during her talk: “A language from the community to the community... we come together to demand respect and rights.”

At PovGov, we believe in the importance of creating an environment where actors with different backgrounds across sectors, disciplines, realities and environments can come together to share their first-hand experiences, challenges and aspirations. We hope this wide-reaching and multiplayer conference offered suitable examples of different theoretical basis, policy strategies, practical models and individual narratives to enrich the discussion around the formulation of policies and development strategies to benefit the youth in places of violence and better inform the work moving forward. As stated by Professor **Beatriz Magaloni** during the event’s closing remarks, universities play a major role in addressing serious development problems around the world, but they need to be more in touch with people’s realities – which is a core element of PovGov’s work: “We are an academic institution; we want to leverage the resources that we have and provide feedback to policy-makers, local organizations and communities... [yet] what we really want to do is understand what is going on on-the-ground.”

***This executive summary was written by **Veriene Melo**, Research Assistant at the Program on Poverty and Governance (PovGov), and it is based on a written record drafted during the conference, not on the official voice recordings from the event. Some quotes in this document were slightly modified to assist with clarity in the writing process and coherence of the final document. Though not verbatim at times, the main ideas/meanings conveyed in the speech were kept unchanged at all instances for all participants.*