

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Public Security Approach to Peru's Economic Reactivation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the structural challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Peru's economic reactivation. We analyze archetypal problems in Peruvian society that have persisted since pre-pandemic times, including informality, urban lawlessness, and negative perceptions of security among citizens. These challenges significantly influence public policies and reflect broader socio-cultural issues that hinder economic reactivation. We explore alternative approaches to traditional obstacles deterring economic growth, emphasizing the crucial role of public security policies in promoting a balanced economic reactivation strategy at the national level. Citizens' protection and security in their daily urban activities are essential to enhancing economic interactions in cities. We also highlight the need to reconsider governmental ideology when planning public security policies, which often discriminate against social classes and stigmatize certain areas without a solid rationale to support such actions.

Keywords: criminology; marginalization; public policies; economic reactivation; public security.

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INTRODUCTION

The current global scenario has become a harsh test of the socio-economic development advocated by the neoliberal system throughout the planet. It is worth noting that climate change had gained strength in the international political agenda many years before the COVID-19 pandemic (or endemic to be precise) (Aranibar and Patiño, 2022), as its effects pose insurmountable difficulties threatening human survival in regions facing rapid environmental degradation, in other words, most of the inhabited earth. This stance, evidently accurate, has generated deep criticism of the Western model of exploitation advocated by hegemonic countries (Wezler, 2010). However, in practice, understanding this constantly evolving problem from an academic perspective, criticizing the structures that promote it, and paying more attention to it from a governmental point of view have not resulted in radical changes in public policies aimed at controlling global economic activities in various sectors that massively deplete environmental resources and worsen pollution. On the contrary, the world is facing complex times, and while it is already grappling with an unprecedented health crisis, the situation is further exacerbated by a war whose immediate consequences have led to an increase in the inflationary process in Latin American countries, currency devaluation, and an environment that seems to point towards a possible global famine if preventive measures are not taken to ensure the sustainability of food production and the population's nutritional security (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2022).

In this context, the global crisis is compelling nations to reconsider certain doctrines to address current challenges. While external factors may seem unchangeable, it is essential to address underlying structural issues to achieve a just, organized, and comprehensive economic reactivation that fosters sustainable development. This requires designing effective structures and plans to mitigate future risks. This reality is particularly challenging in Latin American nations because policies aimed at achieving "economic reactivation" often prioritize facilitating access to financing for pandemic-affected individuals and companies, without considering the prevalence of informal

economies in most of the region's countries. Additionally, citizens in this region have traditionally exhibited limited willingness to borrow and leverage finances, which hinders the efficacy of this public policy (Reyes *et al.*, 2021; Aranibar *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, a scenario that should be paid more attention to in order to achieve a balanced economic reactivation, albeit a challenging one to address, is the realm of public security. This is because it presents the opportunity to fight the factors that undermine the credibility of Latin American governments, namely insecurity and informality. The implementation of policies that ensure order, peace, and tranquility is now being considered as an alternative approach to reducing the social inequalities prevailing in the region. Security is a fundamental element that reinforces people's access to their human dignity and protects their liberties and property unequivocally. The existence and maintenance of security is of utmost importance in shaping public policies. In the case of Peru, it is essential to examine the main areas in which security agents can contribute to the promotion of economic reactivation.

However, it must be considered that while directing the attention of the State on public policies applied to citizen security is a dynamic way to restore and/or rebuild the population's trust in their elected leaders and the country's institutions, we are facing a society that presents a cultural lethargy in the way it perceives insecurity, and is a constant victim of the fear that archetypically leads it to segregate the less favored groups of society, desensitizing citizens to the violence suffered in the marginal neighborhoods abandoned by state policies (Hidalgo *et al.*, 2021) and it is against this stigma that the construction of public policies must fight to succeed in guaranteeing the integrity and equity of the actions to be carried out.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Given the external factors that affect Peru's internal development, it is essential to analyze the situation through a holistic and inclusive internal approach that takes into account the needs of the population. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the role of public security as a critical element for economic reactivation, with a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates

anthropological, sociological, and economic factors.

ARGUMENTATIVE REVIEW

Traditional challenges in new scenarios

The issue of security in urban areas remains a significant challenge for government authorities in Peru. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI, 2021), only 15.3% of individuals who fell victim to a crime in urban areas felt encouraged to report the incident. This figure represents a 1.7% decrease as compared to the previous year.

The limited confidence in the effective action of the institutions responsible for public security is evident from the small sample of surveys on victimization in the country. This perception is a longstanding issue in the public's view with respect to government policies. However, the decision not to report crimes inevitably leads to an increase in the "dark figure" of crime – unreported crimes that exist in reality but are not reflected in official statistics (Sozzo and Montero, 2020). This situation has continued into the current crisis and has led to a scenario that is misunderstood by the authorities, since in the current Peruvian context a reduction in the number of complaints is interpreted as progress in the fight against insecurity. However, the real dimension goes along with a more disturbing explanation, since the reduction in the number of complaints must be understood as a reduction in the capacity of the state to register them (Mujica, 2013). Given this premise, it becomes evident that progress in addressing crime is limited by a flawed analysis of information obtained from official institutions responsible for measuring this problem. It is worth noting that the effects of the pandemic, such as the state of emergency and health restrictions, have acted as a significant catalyst in reducing the reporting of potentially violent situations that would have been reported under normal circumstances. As a result, this prevailing circumstance impedes the effective design of clear policies to address both the measurement of crime and alternative solutions to reduce it. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that the existing operational system for dealing with potentially dangerous or violent

situations is not effective on its own. Instead, it is more practical to strategically combine crime prevention and control mechanisms to achieve optimal results within public policies, since each crime requires a unique methodology to be measured and/or fought (Andrade *et al.*, 2021). It should be understood that public security policies cannot be developed objectively without addressing concepts such as the real meaning of crime reports (Mujica, 2013; López, 2020), dark figures (Sozzo and Montero, 2020), the stigmatization of disadvantaged groups and/or territories, and the stigmatization of the most vulnerable groups and/or territories (Ruíz, 2019; Estay, 2021). It is key to the correct administration of public resources and the designation of real objectives that will allow a reduction in urban chaos and crime in Peru. The principles of economic reactivation are closely related to the concepts discussed above, as high levels of trust in social control mechanisms can increase the public's confidence in policies aimed at economic growth and enable the achievement of precise objectives (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, stable levels of order and tranquility encourage both public and private investment in the cities, thus further promoting economic development.

Freedom and responsibilities

The analysis highlights the importance of revising concepts that are essential for the development of security policies in urban areas and addressing the messages conveyed in the social sphere at a symbolic level, which have led to the normalization of insecurity as part of everyday life. This has resulted in a specific effect on the common thinking of Peruvians, known as the 'culture of gated areas.' This culture comes, to some extent, from the fear of crime, but, in this case, far from pointing to a single point of the city as the focus of its evils (Santos and Jiménez, 2019), it develops the idea of a city so insecure that it is necessary to fence off public spaces such as parks, squares, alleyways, government and private buildings, neighborhoods, residential areas or housing complexes in order to prevent access by anyone who might commit a crime, regardless of whether this totalitarian measure of restricting freedom has a real effect on crime control. It seems that the only real message sent by this model that recreates

feudalistic patterns is that the state's capacity to guarantee security, order and/or tranquility in an area is too limited to be effective. In this case, the basic principles dictated by the theory of social disorganization are ignored, i.e., among other things, that crime and insecurity are not caused by a competition of individuals seeking to ensure their survival, but rather by the absence of devices to ensure the security and control of a sector (Brunton-Smith and Jackson, 2011). Therefore, a comprehensive rethinking of the systematic fencing off of urban areas is necessary, considering that far from solving the problem it is an aggravating factor and prevents the insecurity perception levels from improving over time since the message that is being conveyed to both the population and the offenders is that security is a task that depends exclusively on the residents of an area and security agents are left as lesser elements for this function.

The result of this environment of exoneration is, generally, an increase in informal activities and disregard for the norms established by citizens, since a good maintenance of social control is necessary to preserve the fenced off public services that, due to its effectiveness, may ensure the order of a place (Grasmick *et al.*, 1993).

Deconstructing perceptions

It is crucial to note that the formulation of public security policies aimed at economic revitalization must include clear and concise communication of their accomplishments to the public. While the perception of insecurity is a constantly evolving element that requires substantial effort over time to transform positively (Gélvez-Ferreira (2019), it is of immense significance for the success or failure of public policies in general to communicate to the population the progress of state actions that aim to resolve, decrease, and/or study a problem, regardless of its complexity. This process strengthens several factors, including the citizens' familiarity with the government responsible for implementing the policy, the residents' identification with the location where the policy is executed, and their appreciation for the success of security agents in fighting insecurity, among others (Shaw, 1995). It is therefore understood that, based on this approach, public policies in

charge of security not only ensure a package of measures aimed at reducing crime rates within urban areas, but also seek to ensure that the statistical results of these actions consolidate a growing change in citizens' perception and that this fact may allow the establishment of new lines of economic development for the benefit of the population, such as the growth of local businesses, the encouragement of tourism, and the development of improvements in the transportation system. The point is that the guarantee of security in the urban space allows the state to deal with more complex problems, such as health or education (Gélvez-Ferreira, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The economic reactivation has become a necessity within the priorities of the Peruvian State, and since it cannot directly influence highly complex global issues such as climate change, pandemics and/or armed conflicts, it becomes necessary to solve national/local problems that allow better prospects for the investment of public and private resources in socio-economic projects throughout the country. In this scenario, the key element that could foster greater public confidence and operational efficiency of state institutions to attain the desired revitalization is closely related to resolving local and traditional issues. Thus, public security holds significant importance since, while the public's perception of insecurity can often be quite unstable and challenging to be altered in the short run, a collection of measures aimed at reinforcing public security policies can generate a trusting environment that promotes citizens' reporting of crimes. Adopting this outlook makes it possible to enhance intervention and prevention strategies aimed at public security, given that a better understanding of the situation is a direct way to measure actual crime rates. This rationale infers that specific and transparent objectives, as recognized and pursued by the state and society, provide an unambiguous approach to speed up national economic reactivation, thus promoting investment proposals, both public and private.

It is vital to note that the Peruvian government has the responsibility to update the ideology underpinning its public security policies to establish explicit, tangible, and achievable

objectives that align with the government's initiatives for deploying security agents in unstable urban areas. This approach ensures proposals for social integration and restoration of state authority, showcasing the government's resolve. Governmental measures along these lines are crucial in reestablishing public interest in their leaders, thereby fostering a novel framework for urban planning and economic development in the areas where such policies are implemented.

Lastly, it is crucial to note that public security policies must be widely and systematically disseminated to gain support and acceptance from the population. Publicity campaigns or excessive showcasing of results are not convenient because they can actually lead to policy failure. Each of the premises outlined above is equally significant, as the ultimate goal is not just to demonstrate effective actions but also to foster a public security culture that is balanced and aimed both at the government rethinking its policies and the citizens accepting and supporting them.

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Competing interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contribution

Luis Carlo Zanabria Cabrera (lead author): Conceptualization, research, supervision, writing (original draft, review and editing).