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Interpersonal Violence and Social Networks in the Neoliberal Era: Exploring the Argentinean Case

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Abstract

During the 1990s and up to the initial years of the 21st century Neoliberal policies in Latin America produced growing levels of poverty and unemployment associated with growing crime rates. By combining an historical perspective with social disorganization theory this paper aims at analyzing how neighborhood social networks in deprived urban areas intervened in this process. The combination of an historical perspective with the social disorganization approach (diachronic and synchronic perspectives that have usually been treated separately), brings new insights. Firstly, it allows dimensioning the changes in forms of internal cohesion in relegated urban enclaves and their association with interpersonal violence that have seldom been measured in the Latin American context. Secondly, locating social networks and their association with delinquent behavior as part of historical process constitutes a revealing test to the traditional tenets of social disorganization theory

Introduction

Many researchers have seen the neoliberal policies applied in Latin America throughout the 1990s and up to the initial years of the 21st century as conducing to a dramatic increase in material deprivation, specifically in peripheral urban enclaves (Alman and Baer, 2002; Beccaria, 2002; Gudagani, 2002; Baab, 2005). In this view, increasing levels of poverty led to more conflictive social ties and greater levels of violence among shanty town dwellers (Tonkonoff, 1998; 2000; Duschatzky, 2002; Kessler, 2002; 2004; Puex, 2003; Bonaldi and Del Cueto, 2009; 2010; Diez, 2009; Auyero, 2012). With only few exceptions, in Latin America most of the studies leading to this conclusion have been of a qualitative nature,[2] hence the *extension* of this supposed crisis of territorial social ties and their association to interpersonal violence has seldom been measured. Using data from a victimization survey applied in six argentine cities in 2004, the goal of this article is to estimate the incidence of this 'fragmentation' of territorial social ties in poor urban neighborhoods and their association to a specific form of interpersonal violence locally known as 'street harassment'. That is, a practice developed especially in poor urban enclaves by street corner groups of soliciting money to passers-by in a threatening way, especially those who are not recognized as 'belonging' to that part of the neighborhood. This practice, at the same time, results and reproduces the fragmentation of territorial social bonds, were trust is only possible among those who hold primary relations among them. All those who have no primary acquaintances in a certain area of the neighborhood are exposed to this form of harassment when they transit through it, which is also a way to mark and protect the group's own turf.

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[2] Two exceptions are Villareal and Silva (2006); Reyes et al. (2011).

The design of the study used to measure the levels of fragmentation in territorial social networks and their association with this form of neighborhood crime followed, in general, the classical social disorganization perspective. In this view, locally based social networks, composed mainly by friendship and kingship ties, increase the capacity of neighborhood residents to engage in guardianship against predatory victimization. In addition, they exert structural constraints on the deviant behavior of local residents.[3] This approach proposes that poverty-stricken areas have weaker social ties and community organizations, thus creating the conditions for higher victimization rates.

Although our study parts from this perspective, certain qualifications must be added in order to make it applicable to the Latin American context. One important consideration is that low income settlements in Latin America have historically been internally cohesive and organizationally strong, partly due to the way in which local political leadership has fostered these forms of organization and cohesion. Although some classical ethnographies in the social disorganization perspective have considered the role of local politics (Whyte, 1965), generally speaking, quantitative studies in social disorganization have seldom taken into account the role of local political leaders and usually treat disadvantaged U.S. inner cities as having weak social networks and low levels of internal cohesion.[4] In contrast with this approach we assume that in Argentina low income settlements have traditionally had a strong internal cohesion bolstered by local political organizations and leaderships. However, these conditions changed with the deterioration of the economic situation and the alteration of the role of traditional political parties and leaders produced by the neoliberal policies of the 1990s.

Considering this process of change in the neighborhood social structure introduces a further difference with the social disorganization perspective. This last approach tends to assume an exclusively synchronic view of social networks, which implicitly treats their constitution and roles as constant in time. Instead, we conceive that the structure and role of local social networks can only be properly understood by situating them as part of an ongoing historical process. Another important issue is that, in general, social disorganization studies suppose a lineal causal link where conflictive social bonds lead to neighborhood crime. Alternatively we assume that, in the Argentine case, there are reciprocal influences between these elements. Hence, while conflictive social bonds favor interpersonal violence, episodes of violence reproduce conflictive bonds. Therefore, in addition to measuring the presence of conflictive bonds and their association to crime in the argentine case, this paper aims at providing some insights to the traditional social disorganization perspective by considering the role of politics and historical process.

In sum, the central goal of this article is to measure the extension of conflictive social bonds in poor urban enclaves and their reciprocal association with a specific form of neighborhood crime named street harassment by applying a survey that uses the social disorganization approach as a basic starting point. However, the study aims at making a distinct contribution by interpreting the constitution and role of social networks as part of ongoing historical process, which differs with the exclusively synchronic analysis that usually characterizes the social disorganization perspective. It also seeks to transcend conventional social disorganization analysis by looking at the role of local political leadership and the reciprocal influences between conflictive networks and neighborhood crime, instead of considering only a lineal causal system where conflictive networks cause crime. Consequently, in the next section, a general description of the neoliberal policies and their principal effects is provided in order to locate the association between social networks and neighborhood crime in their historical context. Subsequently, the survey data is presented and interpreted in relation to this context.

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[3] Since the seminal contributions of Clifford Shaw and Henry Mackay, this has been the prevalent point of view in social disorganization theory (*Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. Chicago: University Press, 1942). Robert Sampson and Byron Groves were the first to test rigorously this assumption through quantitative analysis 'Community structure and crime: testing social-disorganization theory.' *American Journal of Sociology.* 94: 4 (1989) p. 779. A vast amount of quantitative studies ensued from these initial contributions, discovering that social networks played more complex roles. For lack of space, we cannot summarize the debates here, for a seminal contribution in this respect see: Christopher Browning, Robert Dietz, Seth Feirberg. *Negative Social Capital and Urban Crime. A Negotiated Coexistence Perspective.* (Paper Nº 7, Ohio State University), 2000.

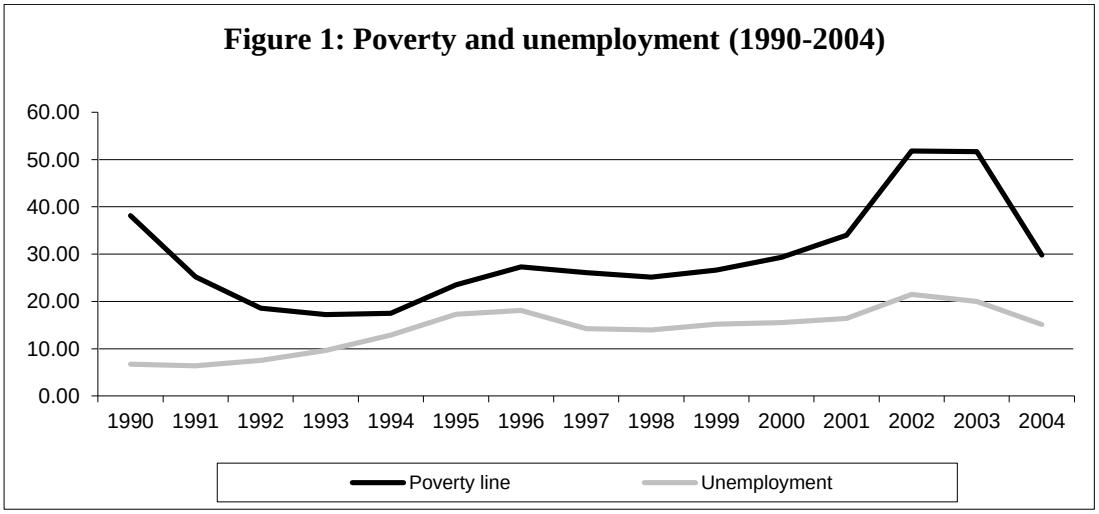
[4] Andres Villareal and Braulio Silva. 'Social Cohesion, Criminal Victimization, and Perceived Risk of Crime in Brazilian Neighbourhoods.' *Social Forces.* 34:3 (2006), p. 1728.

Social Conditions and Crime in the Neoliberal Era

Neoliberal economic policies were systematically applied in Latin America after the 'Washington Consensus' of 1989 and Williamson's (1990; 1993) political recommendations to supersede the economic stagnation Latin America faced during the 1980s (Robinson, 1999; Casilda de Béjar, 2004). In Argentina, neoliberalism reigned during the two consecutives presidencies of Menem (1989-1995 / 1995-1999) who belonged to the Peronista party and continued to a certain extent up to 2002. In general terms, neoliberal policies achieved a moderate increase in the GDP, but at a high social cost expressed in the growth of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Robinson, 1999:48; Amman and Baer, 2002:948; Portes and Hoffman, 2003; Babb, 2005:211). A central feature of these policies was a tendency to 'reform the state' by privatizing public companies (such as telecommunications, airlines, TV and radio stations, petrochemical and steel companies) and also privatizing and reducing the quality and extension of public services, such as education, health care and retirement pension programs. Also worker's rights were reduced in order to promote a 'free labor market', by removing legal restrictions to salary reductions, social benefits and facilitating lay-offs, especially in the public sector (Smith, 1991).

An overall image of the way in which these policies affected the material conditions of the population is reflected in the evolution of unemployment and poverty exposed in Figure 1. We present data until 2004, since that is the year when the survey was applied, but also because the years 2003/2004 represent an inflection point. Unemployment expanded consistently between 1990 and 2002. As of 2003 unemployment decreased due to an increase in the value of Argentine agricultural exports which allowed for a generalized economic growth and the creation of new work positions. With regards to the poverty curb, initially it decreased after the hyperinflation years (1989-1991), and then a more stable monetary context allowed for a recovery of the relative value of incomes until 1993. As of 1993 a new cycle of growing poverty started which ended in an abrupt peak in the new fiscal and inflationary crises of 2001-2002. Poverty finally receded with the improving economic conditions and social policies applied since 2003.[5] Hence, the years prior to the survey represent a moment of dramatic increase in poverty and unemployment before a change of tendency between 2003 and 2004. However, these changes in the social structure implied more than just a transformation of material conditions.

Figure 1: Poverty and unemployment (1990-2004)



Source: National Institute for Statistical and Census Information (INDEC)

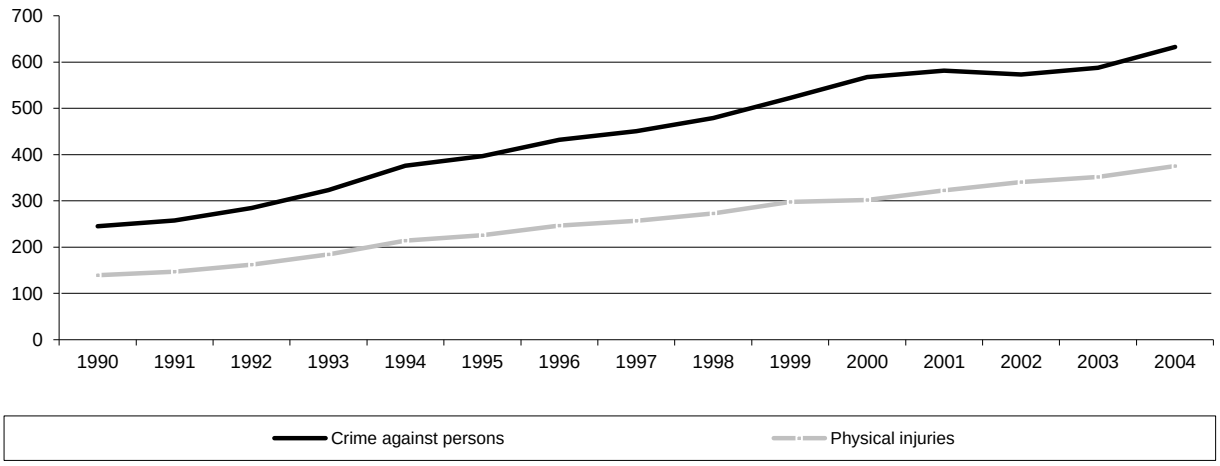
Although there is not enough space to analyze this here in full, another important change was an increasing distrust in politics and political leadership. The Peronist party had traditionally represented workers' rights, especially by promoting social policies and labor laws that in the 1940s and 1950s facilitated the social mobility of the working classes. Through this laws and policies, it had set the conditions that allowed the working classes to normalize a lifestyle that had the nuclear family,

[5] For a more thorough description of this economic trends see Becaria (2002) and Guadagni et al. (2002).

education and a strong work ethic as central tenets (Torres and Pastoriza, 2002). This also fostered strong territorial solidarity networks within the worker's neighborhoods and strong union identity in the work place (Gené, 2005). Several studies show that the fact that it was the same Peronist party in power during the 1990s that instrumented the neoliberal policies that debased these conditions produced a profound transformation in the workers' identities and their forms of solidarity and organization (Martuccelli and Svampa, 1997). This induced a growing distrust in politics and political leadership, which also affected local solidarity networks and union activities (Murmis and Feldman, 2002).

The following Figure shows that there was, at least, a temporal coincidence between the growth of unemployment and poverty and increasing levels of crime.[6] Although there is no specific data on street harassment, crime against persons and physical injuries are appropriate proximate variables since the former include street harassment as one form of crime against persons and the latter is a common result of compulsive soliciting. In addition to the 'temporal' coincidence shown by figures 1 and 2, correlation analysis further reveals that unemployment, poverty and the growth of these types of crime were strongly associated. Regretfully, there is no data to diachronically analyze how the levels of trust in political leadership may have influenced the growth of these forms of crime. However, data from Latinobarómetro[7] shows that the levels of trust in political authorities was low at least since 1995 and that this discredit was particularly strong between 2001 and 2004. In addition, the survey data confirms that low levels of trust in political leaders are associated with a greater probability of victimization for street harassment.

Figure 2: Crime rates 1990-2004
(Rate estimated as cases in a year for every 100.000 inhabitants)



Source: National Crime Information System (SNIC).

As stated, the association between poverty, unemployment and crime is confirmed by correlation estimates. Crimes against persons correlate in .822 (p=.000) with unemployment, while physical injuries have a greater association: .831 (p=.000). Poverty line rates show a less robust association with crime against persons and physical injuries (.382, p=.150; .443, p=0.98 respectively) because the inflationary periods 1990-1991 and 2002-2003 induced a very volatile behavior of the poverty line index. But during the more monetarily stable period 1993-2002, the association was strong and robust: .865 (p=.000) for crimes against persons and .906 (p=.000) for physical injuries.[8]

[6] Between 1990 and 2004 crime against persons expanded 245%, while physical injuries —the more prominent type of crime against persons— expanded 256%.

[7] Latinobarómetro is an international survey measuring political and social attitudes across several Latin American countries, estimates for the 1995-2004 period show that no more than 4 percent of the argentine population declared to trust political parties.

[8] Property crimes correlate with unemployment rates in .790 (p=.000) and .898 (p=.001) for the poverty line index.

These figures provide an overall image of how during the 1990s and until the initial years of the 21st century the increases in poverty and unemployment experienced by argentine society were strongly associated with growing levels of crime. However, while these estimates suggest that in a context of growing material deprivation crime augmented, they do not reveal the specific mechanisms that mediated in this association. Our hypothesis is that, at least partially, the association between material deprivation and crime is explained by a growing deterioration of territorial social ties, which was particularly strong where poverty and unemployment were more strongly felt, like poor urban neighborhoods.[9] In addition to material deprivation, the lack of trust in political leaders was also associated with more conflictive social bonds and a greater probability of been a victim.

In order to test these hypotheses we need to change our unit of analysis. Instead of analyzing general trends across long time spans, we now turn to survey data that takes individuals nested within neighborhood social networks as such units. Regretfully, this introduces several gaps. Survey material will not allow us to reconstruct a diachronic perspective as we have presented with respect to unemployment and poverty, and it will also show the conditions that increase the possibility of being a victim of crime, but it will not provide evidence about their perpetrators. However, even with these limitations, the survey study provides relevant evidence to at least make some informed conjunctures and hypotheses about how detrimental material conditions and lack of trust in political leaders can induce to more conflictive social bonds and neighborhood crime.

The Study

The study consisted in a survey aimed at measuring how certain ecological conditions in different types of neighborhood influence in the extension and type of local social networks and their capacity to inhibit neighborhood crime. The survey was applied in six Argentine cities: Buenos Aires (2,891,082 inhabitants) and its metropolitan area (9,910,282), the city of Córdoba (3,304,825), Mendoza (848,660), Tucumán (586,198) and Tandil (126,300). Interviews amounted to 800 cases for each city, for a total sample of 4800 cases. Since differences between cities were not significant, for parsimony, we have not considered variations between cities in this study.

The sample was representative by social sector in each of the surveyed cities. We used the housing level[10] to establish the socioeconomic status of the population. Then we established the incidence of each housing level in each of the surveyed cities and interviewed a proportional number of residents belonging to each level. Interviews were conducted with the head of household (the main provider) or his or her spouse by an independent surveyor. Interviewers randomly selected the households to be interviewed by choosing one in every three homes on a block until completing the correspondent quota in each area. The response rate was high: 96% of the selected head of households consented to participate in the survey. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary and confidentiality was assured to all participants.

The survey considered several types of neighborhood crime, including burglary, personal injuries, and assault. It also involved several measures to establish the degrees of internal cohesion in each housing level, like the level of trust in local organizations, the police and in local political leaders, the extension of familial bonds and the exchange of favors with nearby neighbors, plus we asked about the extension of conflictive bonds with proximate neighbors as a sign of weak internal solidarity. Since different forms of crime respond very differently to the incidence of political leadership and neighborhood networks, due to space limits in this case we restricted our study only to street

[99] Di Tella et al., (2006) have shown that in poor urban areas crime rates were 50% higher than average.

[10] The housing level indicator differentiates socioeconomic status according to the type of residence and the context in which it is located, it distinguishes six levels: (E) houses made with substandard materials located in illegally occupied plots with no city services (shantytowns or *villas miseria* in Spanish); (D) working class houses, old apartments or buildings with two flats without elevators; (C3) low quality houses with two or three bedrooms, state housing projects; (C2) small or medium size houses done with good quality materials, medium cost apartments with elevators; (C1) flats with amenities or houses in residential areas; (AB) big houses with important gardens in expensive residential areas or luxury apartments with amenities.

harassment using logistic regression models to measure the incidence of different variables on the probability of being a victim of this form of crime.

Variables

Street harassment was measured by asking respondents whether they had been solicited for money in the streets of their neighborhood in a compulsory manner in the year prior to the survey. Forms of internal solidarity were measured by asking respondents with how many neighbors within five blocks of their homes they exchanged favors or participated in common celebrations (like birthdays, Christmas, etc.). Similarly, we asked with how many family members within five blocks of their homes they exchanged favors or participated in common celebrations. These questions resulted in the family social networks and neighborhood social network variables. Conflictive social ties were measured by asking respondents with how many neighbors within five blocks of their homes they had had conflicts in the year prior to the survey, thus the conflictive social networks variable. The incidence of local political leadership was measured asking how much trust respondents had in local politicians.

We also considered that trust in agents of the security forces could influence in the levels of local crime, so we also inquired about the levels of trust in the police. The strength of community organizations may also influence in the levels of neighborhood cohesion and affect the probability of being a victim of street harassment, so we asked respondents if they trusted local community organizations to contribute to the neighborhood wellbeing. In addition to these variables, the survey considered the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample such as gender, age, nationality and family composition. All variables were dichotomized to improve standard errors and significance coefficients. We also nested individual level cases within housing levels in order to consider the territorial effect of cohesive or conflictive social networks.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study's sample are described in Table 1, where frequencies concerning age, gender, nationality and family composition are exposed. After these descriptive statistics, multiple logistic regression models are presented. The first model measures the incidence of conflictive social bonds and trust in political leadership in the probability of being a victim for street harassment (Table 2). The second model shows the influence of socioeconomic conditions, political leadership and street harassment in the constitution of conflictive social bonds within deprived urban enclaves (Table 3). We found that, except for the housing level, no other variables had a significant effect on the presence or extension of familial or neighborhood social networks; thus, we do not present logistic regression models for these cases.

Demographic characteristics of the sample

The study's sample included 2408 (50.1%) females and 2401 (49.9%) males, 3938 (81.9%) were above 30 years of age, while 871 (18.1%) were below that age group. Foreigners represented a 5.7 % (871) and Argentineans a 94.3% (4535) of the sample, while 533 (10.9%) respondents lived in female headed households. In addition, 433 (9%) lived in shanty towns, while 4363 (91%) lived in higher housing levels (working class, middle class and upper middle/high class neighborhoods). Table 1 shows the main demographic characteristics of the sample, comparing shantytown dwellers with the rest of the population. It also shows the incidence of the study's main variables in different housing levels.

Table1: Descriptive Statistics		Shantytowns (percentages)	Other housing levels (percentages)
Sex	Male	49.7	50
	Female	50.3	50
Age	Below 30	30.7	16.9
	30 or more	69.3	83.1
Nationality	Foreigner	17.6	4.5
	Argentinean	82.4	95.5
Female headed households	Yes	13.6	10.6
	No	86.4	89.4
Poor by income	Yes	57.5	19.1
	No	42.5	80.9
Trust in community organizations	Trust	98.7	99.3
	Little or no trust	1.3	0.7
Trust in the police	Trust	53.5	42
	Little or no trust	46.5	58
Trust in politicians	Trust	23.9	25.8
	Little or no trust	76.1	74.3
Family social networks	Less than three	63.5	82.9
	Three or more	36.5	17.1
Neighborhood social networks	Less than three	60.3	61.3
	Three or more	39.7	38.7
Conflictive social networks	Less than three	94.2	96.6
	Three or more	5.8	3.4
Street harassment	Non victim	90.8	95
	Victim	9.2	5

Results in Table 1 already provide important information on the extension and incidence of territorial social networks and neighborhood crime. Initially, they suggest that quite extended neighborhood and family social networks have an important presence in all housing levels. Almost 40% of respondents in all housing levels declared to have three or more neighbors with whom they exchange favors. Familial networks have a similar incidence in the lower housing level, although they are less present in the rest. Further estimations reveal that if we combined family and neighborhood social networks and included cases with two or more contacts, the incidence of social networks would be almost 70% in all housing levels. Thus, we may conclude that, in this respect, territorial social cohesion is still quite strong in argentine society. Furthermore, results show that the incidence of social networks is equal or greater in deprived urban areas as shantytowns. Hence, contrary to what is assumed in social disorganization theory, poor urban enclaves seem to be, at least in this respect, equally or more cohesive than more accommodated neighborhoods.

Another interesting finding is that conflictive social networks have low levels of incidence in all housing levels, although it is somewhat higher in shantytowns. A similar thing happens with street harassment. It has a relatively low incidence in all social levels, although it is higher in deprived urban areas. Hence, this suggests that, consistent with our assumptions, material deprivation is associated with more conflictive social networks and more neighborhood crime. However, this is in need of a certain qualification. Contrary to what is suggested by most ethnographic studies, interpersonal conflict and violence even in marginalized urban enclaves as shantytowns affects only small proportions of the population. Although incidents of interpersonal violence may have repercussions beyond those directly involved as victims or perpetrators, it is important to bear in mind that not all shantytown dwellers are involved or affected in the same measure by conflict and crime. Hence, these data suggests that while

poor urban enclaves are characterized by greater incidence of social conflict and crime this does not mean a lack of internal cohesion. What this implies is that important levels of cohesion among certain members and in certain respects coexist with the presence of rather small groups of neighbors engaged in conflictive networks that experiment greater levels of street harassment.

Located in the context of the historical processes that affected Argentina in the past decades, this suggests that the changes in material and political conditions did not completely destitute traditional forms of association and solidarity among neighbors, but they probably promoted conflictive ties among certain groups where victimization is more frequent. In the next section we present the results of the regression models that more specifically tackle these issues.

Political Leadership, conflictive bonds and street harassment

Table 2 shows that being male, under 30 and a foreigner strongly increments the possibility of being a victim for street harassment. Holding constant these demographic factors, other elements such as living in shantytowns and the levels of trust in the police and political leaders also influence in the probability of being a victim for street harassment. In addition, and confirming our previous inference, conflictive bonds with proximate neighbors have a strong incidence in the probability of being a victim for this form of crime. Hence, independently of other intervening factors, these results confirm our previous inference that small groups of neighbors that hold conflictive bonds among each other are significantly more exposed to be victims of street harassment.

Table 2. Street Harassment	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.512* (.129)	3.848** (.162)	3.847* (.171)
Sex (male=1)	.836* (.149)	.800* (.150)	.765* (.150)
Age (below 30=1)	.493** (.156)	.415** (.159)	.369*** (.161)
Nationality (foreigner=1)	.984* (.217)	.843* (.228)	.876* (.229)
Household (female headed=1)	.088 (.245)	.072 (.246)	.004 (.248)
Trust in the police (little or no trust=1)		.332*** (.162)	.310*** (.163)
Trust in politicians (little or no trust=1)		.348*** (158)	.371** (152)
Housing level (shanty towns=1)		.405*** (.199)	.415*** (204)
Trust in community organizations (little or no trust=1)			.590 (.641)
Family social networks (three or more contacts=1)			-.182 (.187)
Friendship social networks (three or more contacts =1)			-.029 (.147)
Conflictive social bonds (three or more conflicts=1)			.833** (.251)

*p<.000 ; **p < .005; ***p < 0.05 Standard errors in parenthesis

Table 2 presents another revealing result. Contradicting the most common assumption in social disorganization theory, kinship and neighborhood social networks don't have a protective effect. Relatively extended networks of relatives or friendly neighbors do not reduce the chances of being a victim for street harassment. Hence, while holding conflictive relationships with proximate neighbors increases the chances of being a victim, holding positive ties with them does not necessarily protect from crime.

While results in Table 2 confirm our main supposition that conflict among neighbors is associated to certain forms of neighborhood crime, and that they are especially strong in poor urban enclaves, it does not show what may cause conflictive social networks. Table 3 explores the conditions

that foster conflictive ties among neighbors. Results show that being a male below 30 increases the chances of having conflict with proximate neighbors. Independent of these factors, the levels of trust in public agencies such as the police and political leaders has also a net effect on the probability of having conflicts with proximate neighbors. Hence, this confirms our assumption that in Argentina the levels of trust in political leaders and other state agents such as the police have an important influence in the levels of conflicts among neighbors and the probability of being a victim of certain forms of neighborhood crime (as shown in Table 2).

Table 3: Conflictive Social Networks	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Constant	3.660** (.466)	4.134* (.191)
Gender (male =1)	400** (156)	.466** (.163)
Age (Below 30=1)	449*** (179)	.463*** (.179)
Nationality (Foreigner=1)	-.115 (.348)	-.119 (.349)
Trust in the Police (little or no trust=1)		.632* (.168)
Trust in Politicians (little or no trust =1)		.735* (.171)
Street harassment (victim=1)		.972* (.235)
Housing level (victim=1)		.543*** (.222)

*p<.000 ; **p < .005; ***p < 0.05 Standard errors in parenthesis

In addition, results also confirm a reciprocal incidence between street harassment and conflictive social networks. While, as we saw in Table 2, conflictive social networks have an influence in the probability of being a victim of street harassment, being a victim of this form of crime also influences in the chances of having conflicts with close neighbors. Thus, this suggests that causality cannot be understood as a lineal incidence of one factor over another, but as a reciprocal system of mutually influencing factors. Although there is no space to explore this here, we in fact found that trust in the police and in political leaders is also part of a system of mutually influencing elements. While low levels of trust in politicians and the police influences in the chances of having conflicts with neighbors and being a victim for street harassment, the causal link also functions the other way around. Being a victim for street harassment and having conflicts with neighbors reduces the levels of trust in public authorities.

Conclusion

Results have confirmed that there is a strong association between conflictive social networks, street harassment and territorially concentrated material deprivation. However, an important qualification is that even in poor urban enclaves these forms of conflict and crime affect only small minorities. Survey results reveal a low incidence of conflictive networks and street harassment, hence contrary to what is suggested by several ethnographies and social disorganization theory, poor urban enclaves cannot be characterized as exclusively dominated by conflict and crime. At least in the Argentine case, conflict and crime coexist with quite extended solidarity networks of friendly neighbors and kin that exchange favors and engage in common celebrations. Possibly, the long historical tradition of holding cohesive territorial social ties has resisted structural change and thus preserves solidarity networks among neighbors. However, we have found that even if these cohesive social ties subsist, they do not have a preventive effect on street harassment. This possibly contributes to the fact that even if these networks are more extended in deprived urban areas, there is still a greater incidence of street harassment in those areas since these cohesive social ties are not a protective factor.

Another important finding is that respect for political leaders and agents of the security forces is also strongly associated with neighborhood conflict and street harassment. This is also in line with our supposition that given the traditional role that political parties and state agents have played in the constitution of local forms of solidarity, they also have an influence in the levels of cohesion and protection from abusive behavior between neighbors. Hence, the lack of trust in these agents produces greater levels of conflict and crime. Although this insight stems specifically from the Argentine case, it suggests the importance of considering the role of political leadership and public agents and agencies when measuring the levels or causes of social disorder. Since many classical ethnographies show that also in U.S. inner cities local politics and state agents play a role in the internal structure of social ties, adding this dimension in quantitative studies of social disorder seems a good way to advance our knowledge of its causes.

Finally, we have shown that these causal links do not operate in a lineal manner. The association between conflictive social networks and street harassment are reciprocal, hence while those involved in conflicts with proximate neighbors are more exposed to crime, those who are victims of crime have a greater chance of engaging in conflicts with neighbors. Also, while those who have scarce respect for local political leaders and the police are more exposed to conflicts and crime, also those who have been victims will more possibly have low trust in local institutional agents. Again, this suggests that instead of treating disorder as a state of local social ties resulting from a fixed set of causes, it is probably more reasonable to treat it as a complex system of reciprocally influencing factors.

In sum, we have found that in the Argentine case that although material deprivation is associated with neighborhood conflicts and crime, this should not be taken out of proportion. Conflict and crime affect small proportions of the population and coexist with important levels of social cohesion expressed in the presence of quite extended social networks. In addition we found that political leadership and state agents are important factors in explaining the levels of internal cohesion or conflict in deprived urban areas. Also, we discovered that these factors reciprocally influence each other instead of holding lineal causal relationship. Hence, although social disorganization theory has been instrumental in allowing us to produce appropriate measures of the incidence of neighborhood conflict and its association with local crime, two additional insights result from our study. The role of local politics and state agents should be included as intervening factors since they may have a great say in explaining the levels of cohesion and conflict in internal social ties. Also, reciprocal influences between factors should be considered before supposing lineal forms of causality.

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