



Analysis

‘More police’ is not a synonym for ‘more security’

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In May next year the mayoral elections for the city of Barcelona will take place. Candidates for the position have recently intensified their discourse over the perception of insecurity in the city, yet many experts recommend alternative solutions to simply increasing police presence in public places.

Insecurity came up as the fourth-biggest concern of the residents of Barcelona in the most recent poll on municipal services, the results of which were published in October. It is the main concern of residents in six of the city’s ten districts – Ciutat Vella, Sants-Montjuïc, Horta-Guinardó, Nou Barris, Sant Andreu and Sant Martí.

This perception of insecurity contrasts markedly with residents’ views of both the municipal management of ‘citizens’ security’ and of the *Guàrdia Urbana* (the local police force, responsible to the municipal authorities). 77.9% of those polled approve of the management of ‘citizens’ security’ by the city; regarding the work of the *Guàrdia Urbana*, 62.9% approve. These figures show, then, that the perception of insecurity is not directly linked with the perception of the work done by the police. More police in the streets is not a synonym for more security.

Police presence, one further ingredient

Until now, increasing police manpower has been the recipe applied by successive municipal governments when crime figures or the perception of insecurity have increased. The most recent example was an increase in funding for the *Mossos d’Esquadra* (the regional police force, responsible to the Catalan government) in the district of Ciutat Vella after the publication of figures showing a 19% increase in crimes between January and August, in comparison with the same period last year. Experts consulted by *NacióDigital*, however, consider that the presence of the police in the streets should not be the only ingredient of public safety policies.

¹ This is a lightly edited translation of the article: ‘Més policia no és sinònim de més seguretat: el debat de la precampanya a Barcelona’, *NacióDigital*, 17 November 2018, <https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/166812/policia/no/sinonim/seguretat/debat/precampanya/barcelona>

For Andrés García Berrio, a lawyer for the human rights association *Irídia*, the fight against property crimes such as theft requires ensuring citizens' "social guarantees". He links this affirmation with the declarations of Ada Colau (the mayor of Barcelona) at the World Forum on Urban Violence, which took place in Madrid at the beginning of November. "The best tool against insecurity is social cohesion," she said.

Jordi Armadans, the director of *FundiPau*,² takes the same approach: "Behind the problems of physical violence there are those of structural violence; if we don't see that, we will always fall into immediate responses," he considers. "More than 16,000 police officers can generate a perception of security, but it doesn't imply a foundational change."

A foundational change, that of social cohesion, that Barcelona is still far from reaching. A good example of this is the difference in the disposable per capita income of a family in the city's richest neighbourhood (Pedralbes) and the poorest (Ciutat Meridiana). Between the two, the distance is more than €26,000 annually.

But that isn't the only figure that reflects the inequality of the Catalan capital. Since January, when 'energy assessment points'³ were put in place across the city, the council has seen to more than 50,000 people seeking help with fuel and energy costs. If the goal of social cohesion remains out of the city's reach, there is a need to ask which tools the administration has at its disposal to counter the perception of insecurity, beyond the deployment of more police officers.

Training and proximity

According to Sònia Andolz, a professor of international security at the University of Barcelona, ESADE⁴ and the Ramon Llull University, the first thing that must be taken into account is the impossibility for the administration to change the city's security model in just one term in office. Andolz calls for rethinking the paradigm of security and conceiving of it in a way that goes beyond simply physical safety. "It's also necessary to address emotional, gender and political security," she says.

For the professor, this is a challenge that requires more training for the officers of the *Guàrdia Urbana*: "there is a need for more training on gender, migration, anthropology... At the moment the officers are not trained on issues beyond physical and road safety." It is this fact that, for Andolz, often leads the police to respond "with violence", because they feel "overcome and impotent".

Her analysis, however, is not shared by Soufiane Ouaraab, a *Guàrdia Urbana* officer and doctor of global public law. For him, changes in the local police have to come through other routes. Ouaraab defends the model of "proximity policing" that, in Barcelona, carries the name of "neighbourhood policing". However, he thinks that there is a need for further steps

² "FundiPau (Foundation for Peace) is an NGO founded in 1983 that works for a world in peace. By means of increasingly better informed and active public opinion, it promotes all the cultural and structural changes required to enable the eradication of violence in relations between people and cultures." Source: 'About us', FundiPau, <http://fundipau.org/about-us/>

³ *Punts d'assessorament energètic*. These are spread throughout the city's districts and offer information to citizens about their energy consumption, recommendations on saving energy, as well as advice on potential auto-generation, for example through the installation of solar panels. Source: 'Els punts d'assessorament energètic amplien serveis', Ajuntament de Barcelona, 27 January 2018, http://habitatge.barcelona/ca/noticia/els-punts-dassessorament-energetic-amplien-serveis_606483

⁴ *Escola Superior d'Administració i Direcció d'Empreses*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ESADE>

forward. “Proximity that allows attending to and resolving problems requires more horizontal structures of political power; it may be that there is a need to decentralise municipal competences to the districts,” he proposes.

What’s more, the officer thinks that an auxiliary body of the *Guàrdia Urbana* would permit an “optimisation” of resources and in turn make possible the application of the law at the same time as working for social cohesion. “More police in the street to confront a problem or social alarm will make it possible to contain a situation, but it’s not the same as establishing a solution,” he admits.

Experts demand a rethinking of the security paradigm that goes beyond a concept of physical security

Montserrat Iglesias, director of the school of prevention and integral security at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, also has doubts about the results of an increased police presence in the street. “When officers are sent to one place, crimes shift elsewhere,” she says, and thus there is a need for a global and integral focus on prevention. García Berrio also wants greater emphasis put on prevention than the punishment of crimes, and sees the model of “proximity policing” positively. “It has a greater link with the community, a better knowledge of the social actors and more capacity to generate spaces of mediation,” he points out.

These are tasks that, on paper, are already being carried out, but according to Iglesias there is a need to intensify them. The director of the school of prevention and security calls for more intensive cooperation between the police and social actors, beyond mere exchanges of information. This is also demanded by Andolz: “When an officer leaves their job, information should not only be passed on from [the old] officer to [the new] officer – there is a need to bring in the community.” This would allow the *Guàrdia Urbana* to guarantee their principal vocation, as highlighted by Armadans and Andolz: service to the public.

Protagonist of the pre-campaign

With less than half a year to go before the municipal elections, the issue of security has been high on the agenda in the first events hosted by the candidates, and has been a theme used to attack Ada Colau. From one side, Manuel Valls (the former French interior and prime minister, who was born in Barcelona) has alleged that Barcelona “has ceased to be a safe city,” while the leader of the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) in the city, Jaume Collboni, has accused the mayor of neglect. “It was not until Barcelona found itself number one in the ranking of least-safe cities in Spain that Colau decided to act,” he said.

For her part, the mayor maintains the discourse of social cohesion while continuing to call for a reinforced presence of the *Mossos d’Esquadra* in the street. From now until May, the mayoral candidates will have plenty of time to delve further into their diagnoses of the perception of insecurity in Barcelona.

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