Policy Brief III
Crime and Security in Maputo, Mozambique

Photo: Fábio Ribeiro

This is the third in a series of policy briefs relating to the research project, "The Ethnography of a Divided City: Socio-politics, Poverty and Gender in Maputo, Mozambique" (2012–2015), funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The objective is to contribute with ethnographic knowledge and 'views from below' to on-going urban development and poverty reduction debates and efforts in Mozambique.

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What the statistics say

This brief addresses perspectives on crime and security in Maputo. Recent national statistics (2010) from the office of the Attorney General (AG) provide a helpful oversight from a Mozambican perspective (Reisman and Lalá 2012), as shown in Table 1.

In addition, there have been general crimes against property (22,040), persons (8,803) and public order and tranquility (2,513) (Reisman and Lalá 2012: 8). Up to date reliable statistics or real-time figures are difficult to obtain and significant variation in how crime is categorized makes it hard to trace patterns over time. Moreover, national figures differ widely: for instance, for 2008, the AG reported 27,454 crimes nationally while the police reported 40,312.

In literature on Southern Africa, crime and security are often analyzed in relation to formal structures of governance and bureaucracy and the capability of the various sectors in relation to policing and the judiciary. What is equally important to keep in mind is that the domains of policing and the formal justice system are distrusted as a result of widespread corruption. Further, there are a number of local conflict resolution mechanisms – many of which address what is often categorized as 'petty crime'.

While these elements suggest that it is unwise to rely solely on such figures, the types of crimes reported (see Table 1) do tend to correspond with our research findings from Maputo. Moreover, it is clear that security provision remains a significant source of popular discontent, with 55 per cent of the population remaining dissatisfied with it (Conselho Municipal de Maputo 2014). For KaMaxakeni and Nhlamankulu, high-density and populous administrative areas close to the city centre, 72 and 64 per cent respectively evaluated the security provision as either 'bad' or 'very bad'. For people in KaMaxakeni, the evaluation of security has not improved measurably since 2011. However, other administrative areas – such as KaMpfumu in the city

Table 1: Crimes in Mozambique 2010, National Level

Type of Crime	Cases
Violent theft	4,827
Aggravated theft	4,408
Simple theft	2,546
Aggravated body offenses	1,837
Simple voluntary body offenses	1,112
Arson	544
Sexual abuse	516
Culpable Homicide	502
Corruption	460
Simple voluntary homicide	219

centre and KaMavota, slightly outside the city – remain mixed in terms of their views of security, with 35 per cent being dissatisfied in the former and 53 per cent in the latter. Given that KaMpfumu is the city's wealthiest area, it seems reasonable to assume that high-density, low-income areas close to the city centre experience the security dimension as more problematic than wealthier, spacious residential areas. This indicates a direct link between poverty and inadequate security arrangements.

Current security arrangements

When addressing current policies and the broader institutional arrangements meant to provide security and combat crime, it is necessary to use an approach that combines both a traditional and state-centric approach to 'security', as well 'human security', which takes into account experienced threats to people's lives and general wellbeing. When pragmatically combining these notions of security, some policies and arrangements become particularly relevant.

One key dimension is Maputo's 'multi-level policing system': beyond the national police force (*Polícia da República de Moçambique* – PRM), which is by far the largest street-level police presence, there is also a national rapid intervention force (*Força da Intervenção Rápida* – FIR). Generally, and from a citizen's perspective, everyday policing is handled by PRM, FIR is deployed in situations of widespread unrest, while members of the special investigative branch (*Polícia de Investigação Criminal* – PIC) are present in larger police stations and mainly deal with major investigations. The traffic police department (*Polícia de Trânsito* – PT) and municipal police (*Polícia Municipal* – PM) comprise the other principal police forces.

All these forces are widely perceived, by citizens and analysts alike, as being subject to corruption, misconduct and lack of funding. Therefore, a system of 'community policing' (*Políciamento Comunitário* – PC) was gradually introduced in urban areas from the early 2000s onwards to reduce criminality through citizen participation, to democratize the police and its performance, and to strengthen the internal coherence of communities and their confidence in the police.

For more affluent Maputo citizens, armed security provision by private security guards is on the rise, often involving off-duty armed PRM officers. In addition, a number of vigilante style neighbourhood watch arrangements have emerged, which are often undertaken by youths. These groups of youth erratically 'patrol' areas but sometimes also take part in criminal activities.

Ethnographic contributions

The ethnographic contributions are made on the basis of multiple collaborative fieldwork sessions carried out in predominantly high-density *bairros* in and around central Maputo from 2011 to 2015. Here, we briefly present how security and crime is perceived, as well as outlining some features of spatial and other organizations that shape such perceptions. There are a number of reasons why this is important, given below.

Firstly, Mozambique has one of the world's lowest citizen-to-officer ratios (1 officer to 1,089 citizens) (Shabangu 2012: 16). Moreover, there is an extremely low level of confidence in police officers, as well as in the institution of the police itself, with statistics indicating that only around 10 per cent of crimes are reported (ibid.). In addition, powerful elite criminal networks as well as street-level gangs are commonly believed to be working with individuals or groups of police officers at different levels – a situation compounded by widespread corruption.

Secondly, in 2010 the AG perceived the main causes of crime being "the degradation of moral values, illegal possession and use of firearms, use of drugs, superstition and alcohol abuse" (Reitman and Lalá 2012: 8). However, this project's ethnographic material also strongly emphasizes dire economic and social circumstances – poverty and vulnerability – in relation to the prevalence of crime. It points to an insufficient level of human security being experienced by our interlocutors.

In our view, crime and a lack of human security relate to several dimensions, as follows.

Gender

It is widely acknowledged that Maputo women are targets of rape and sexual assault; young people especially allege that women are particularly vulnerable. A young woman from Bairro Maxaquene B alleged in a conversation in early

2013, for example, "Normally when the woman recognizes one of the attacking rapists, she will be killed. This is what happened here just recently. They attacked and violated a teenage girl (*uma moça*) here in the area and when she saw who they were, they killed her with a knife." While far from all victims of sexual assault will be killed, the fear of rape nevertheless looms large in people's perceptions of the security of female family members. The fear of violent repercussion from rapists was also frequently given as a reason for what was widely believed to be an underreporting of rape to the PRM. Together with domestic violence, these factors underline a strongly gendered dimension to crime and security.

Race/age

Young people in poor *bairros* express the sense that PRM officers or FIR agents particularly target them. Typically this experience is expressed in the kinds of terms used by this young man from Bairro Nlhamankulu in 2014: "If you are young and black and poor, they will go after you thinking you are a criminal. They look at your clothing and they will stop you, harass you, sometimes beat and rob you. Crime here is also done by the police." This deep-seated mistrust of police officers' intentions towards non-wealthy (particularly) black youths is so commonplace that one could argue that security (and its lack) is racialized and, partly, calibrated according to age. Furthermore, wealth and a high status position seem to correspond to prosecution being less likely to occur, which also tends to undermine general levels of trust in the police.

poorly lit alleyways (*becos*) that snake their way through neighbourhoods are repeatedly expressed as spaces of danger and insecurity. However, spatialization is also relative and relational, with a key perception being that criminals are highly organized: gangs exchange 'turfs' – that is, a gang from *bairro* X will go to *bairro* Y and vice versa – in order not to be recognized by the local population. There are also informal drinking establishments in many *bairros* that people believe serve as places for criminals to gather; local administrators and PRM agents will not intervene because the owners are powerful people seen as insulated from law enforcement. Such places serve as permanent spaces of danger in *bairros*. In addition, a general perception is that *bairro* inhabitants will see other and surrounding *bairros* as more dangerous than their own. While such production of external danger does not resonate with (flawed) crime statistics, in concrete ways it shapes where people will move. It also informs a perception that many inhabitants will perceive people from other *bairros* with hostility or skepticism.

Time

Poorly lit and high-density urban spaces that do not have high levels of surveillance also mean that certain periods of the day are perceived to be more dangerous than others. While it is generally acknowledged that the dead of night is perilous (given the chance of being robbed/harassed by PRM or PC groups, or by regular criminals), in many *bairros* people allege that it is safe to be outside from 05:00 until 21:00 or 22:00 – despite the darkness. Interlocutors also say that certain times of the year are more dangerous

> Interventions need to take into account people's actual concerns, experiences and perceptions of how crime is organized.

During the last few years Maputo has experienced a wave of kidnappings (*raptos*) relating to extortion. As is also widely reported by Mozambican media, it is believed that the kidnappers work with people in financial services to acquire information about potential targets' financial assets and the 'revenue' that can potentially be reaped from kidnapping. Given this, kidnapping victims are often from business-oriented elite circles; individuals with Pakistani, Indian and Portuguese descent are over-represented. In the *bairros* studied here, the kidnappings are often understood *both* in racial terms as a problem of 'Indians' and 'whites', and as a testament to what is perceived as elite criminal accumulation – that is, kidnappings are effectively seen as a form of intra-group predation.

Space

Given the *bairros*' high-density nature and its non-cadastrialized physical layout, crime is unsurprisingly seen as spatialized in a very concrete sense. At a general level,

than others – the worst time being the December festive season (*a época das festas*): the likelihood of robberies and break-ins is higher than usual, it coincides with migrants returning from South Africa with money and, finally, over this period there is a dwindling supply of the agricultural produce from rural kin relations that many urbanites rely on. More generally, the period from December to March is often expressed as being more dangerous than other months.

Protective measures

Given the dimensions of gender, race, age, time and space, lives are largely organized to minimize the risk of being targeted by criminals or exposed to a heightened sense of insecurity. Concretely, measures undertaken to increase a sense of protection include the erection of high walls around household compounds, the purchase of medical or ritual protection from traditional healers, or the seeking of divine protection through affiliation with one of Maputo's numerous churches. Crucially, such measures are also

ambiguous: the high walls attract danger by signaling wealth (and the walls cut people off from their neighbours' intervention); traditional healers are believed to also supply criminal gangs with nefarious magical capacities, and there is always the chance that a pastor or church may lack the capacity to protect the congregation.

Other measures include support for or participation in the various shifting entities dealing with security. Among these, the PC often emerge, as 'the police from PRM do not do anything', as one of the PC heads of Bairro Maxaquene B expressed it in 2013. However, our ethnographic research indicates that the PC system operates in diverse and highly unorthodox ways according to local contexts, and it generally suffers from recruitment problems, and a lack of resources, as well as an absence of clear guidelines and command structures.

In addition to the PC, equally often the practice of 'patrolling' (*fazer patrulha*) is taken on by changing constellations of (particularly) young men who undertake nocturnal rounds in the neighborhood. These groups can form spontaneously (during periods in which lynchings of suspected criminals have been frequent in Maputo, for example) and in times of perceived need. Sometimes patrol groups are constituted on the basis of *teams* – young people organized around a common identity as affiliated and (often) belonging to a certain (area within a) *bairro*. As with the other protective measures, all such forms of security provision – from PC to *teams* – are viewed critically by most inhabitants,

as these groups are (like the police) often believed to be simultaneously involved in crime.

Possible interventions

Given the high rate of uncertainty relating to Maputo security and crime figures, comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research needs to be undertaken in order to establish a fuller oversight of crime trends, experienced crime prevention needs, high-risk urban city spaces and a mapping of particularly vulnerable groups.

Maputo's multi-level and multi-choice policing generates considerable problems of trust, chains of command, physical presence and corruption. The totality of its structure and the entirety of its organization should be reviewed critically.

Interventions need to take into account people's actual concerns, experiences and perceptions of how crime is organized. They should not rely solely on cases assembled by the AG or aggregated from court cases, police records or other official documents.

Poverty and structural violence are linked (statistically and in terms of perception) to crime and insecurity in poorer bairros. This pattern should be addressed by considering raising the minimum wage (for police officers and civilians), intensifying social protection programmes and, finally, considering measures for economic redistribution.

Further reading

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