



Ordinary citizens are increasingly using social media to protect themselves in Latin America.

Violent crime rates in Latin America are six times higher than in any other region and most residents have little trust in the state's ability to fight crime. Several communities have taken to social media to boost security.

Violent crime has soared in the past decade with murder rates for Latin and Central America four times higher than the global average in 2011, at 29 per 100,000 people, according to a 2013 UN Development Programme (UNDP) report.

In parallel, internet access in Latin America has multiplied thirteenfold in the past decade, providing communities with new ways to report crimes in near anonymity, share information on violence hotspots, mobilize community policing and organize protests calling for greater security.

“The use of social media can allow for the scale, speed and specificity that most traditional approaches [to fighting crime] lack,” Robert Muggah, Director at the Igarapé Institute told IRIN news.

Today, ordinary people are banding together with smartphones and social media to protect themselves from crime.

The Argentinian social media group Basta de Inseguridad (Enough of Insecurity) has recruited nearly 100 supporters to periodically protest what they call poor policing throughout Argentina.

Meanwhile, in Mexico's Ciudad Juarez - one of the most violent cities in the world, according to a March 2013 study in the International Journal of Stability - neighbourhood groups have taken crime management into their own hands, or smartphones.

Communities rely on text messaging and mobile calls to alert one another about crimes.

In Monterrey, in southwestern Mexico, the Centro de Integracion Ciudadana (CIC) – a public-private partnership founded in 2004 - crowd-sources crime data from Twitter and Facebook. It has 47,488 Twitter followers and 10,118 Facebook “likes”.

CIC receives thousands of texts, tweets, Facebook posts, emails, calls and drop-ins reporting crimes every day, according to its records. The organization compiles social media reports for the authorities to review and investigate.

One concern, however, is that the internet not only has empowered citizens to exercise their rights, but also enabled and extended the reach of gangs, cartels and organized criminals,” the Igarapé Institute reported in a study on cyber crime, which found cyber-crime threats are highest in countries with the greatest number of online users, including Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

In Mexico, at least four bloggers have been murdered in recent years after criminals traced their identities. Their bodies were placed in public areas with threats pinned to them, an effort to discourage further citizen reports.

Source: IRIN News

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