

BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: URBAN VIOLENCE IN THE CITY OF CAMPINA GRANDE-PB



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ABSTRACT

Urban and rural violence in Brazil affects the development and appropriation of public spaces. The increase in crime generates fear, reducing interaction in urban environments and favoring their privatization. Campina Grande, a medium-sized city, faces challenges typical of large centers, such as violence that restricts the use of public areas. This study analyzes how violence influences the appropriation of these spaces, highlighting socioeconomic, legal, and ideological factors that shape their perception and use. It seeks to understand the impact of violence on the quality of life and the right to the city, exploring strategies of urban reorganization. The survey uses data from public agencies, such as IBGE and the Ministry of Justice, as well as academic sources, to map neighborhoods with higher crime. The study reveals that violence in Campina Grande has fluctuated in the last two decades, with an increase until 2016 and a recent recovery. However, vulnerable areas such as Bodocongó and Malvinas remain impacted, with insecurity and lack of infrastructure limiting the use of public spaces, reinforcing urban segregation. Even with the reduction in violence rates, the perception of insecurity still hinders social interaction in these places.

Keywords: Urban development, Urban violence, Geographycities.

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INTRODUCTION

Social violence has been a growing phenomenon in Brazilian cities, directly affecting both urban and rural spaces. This problem, characterized by aggressions against individuals and damage to public and private property, significantly interferes with urban development, increasing the feeling of insecurity and discouraging the use of public spaces. In general terms, violence impacts the quality of life of citizens, affecting mobility, coexistence and even economic and social relations in the daily life of cities.

However, it is important to highlight that, despite its importance, the problem of urban violence is often amplified by the media, which can contribute to the intensification of the feeling of insecurity. This phenomenon, although global, is especially noticeable in countries with large socioeconomic disparities, such as Brazil. Social inequality, lack of opportunities and the exclusion of large sections of the population from the benefits of development are factors that fuel urban violence, creating a vicious cycle of insecurity and lack of prospects. In the Brazilian context, urban violence becomes a central issue in the debate about cities, and this situation is no different in Campina Grande, a medium-sized city located in the interior of Paraíba.

Campina Grande, located approximately 118.9 km from João Pessoa, capital of the state of Paraíba, is a medium-sized city with an estimated population of about 383,764 inhabitants, according to the 2010 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Although it is not a metropolis, Campina Grande faces challenges typical of large urban centers, such as physical and psychological violence, which directly affect the quality of life of its residents. The city is located in a strategic position in the Northeast region of Brazil, serving as an important hub for economic, educational and cultural development. In addition, its proximity to smaller cities, such as Boa Vista, Fagundes, Lagoa Seca, Massaranduba, Puxinanã, Queimadas and Serra Redonda, expands its regional relevance.

The economic growth of Campina Grande is remarkable, being the second largest economy in the state of Paraíba, according to IBGE data from 2010 and 2020. This development attracts a significant number of migrants from neighboring cities on a daily basis, in search of specialized services, job opportunities and access to a more robust urban infrastructure. This fluctuating population increase, combined with the intense circulation of people and vehicles, results in typical problems of accelerated urbanization, such as urban stress, congested traffic and, in some cases, increased crime. Although the

city has a relatively well-developed infrastructure compared to smaller municipalities in the region, the pressure on its public services is significant, which, added to the increase in population, contributes to the increase in violence.

Over the last two decades, violence in Campina Grande has gone through important oscillations. Compared to Brazilian municipalities with similar populations, between 300 thousand and 600 thousand inhabitants, the city presented variations in the ranking of national violence. According to studies carried out by Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz (2012, 2016), who analyzed violence in Brazilian cities, Campina Grande rose from 180th place in 2010 to 169th place in 2016 in the ranking of municipalities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants. However, between 2016 and 2023, the city managed to improve its position, falling to 224th place, according to a survey by Cerqueira and Bueno (2024, p. 14). This downward movement in the ranking is a reflection of more effective public security policies and greater social participation in violence prevention projects, in addition to being an indication that local public management has sought solutions to deal with crime.

However, despite the reduction in violence rates in recent years, the marks left by the long period of insecurity are visible in the way the population uses urban spaces. The appropriation of public spaces, such as squares, parks, and streets, was progressively reduced as levels of violence increased. In a scenario where the fear of violence prevails, many citizens choose to frequent private or restricted-use spaces, such as gated communities, shopping malls, and shopping centers, which offer a greater sense of security. This behavior of retraction contributes to the reduction of public life in cities and can, paradoxically, aggravate violence itself, since the absence of occupation and use of public spaces favors their degradation and increases the feeling of abandonment and insecurity.

The dialectical analysis of urban violence and the appropriation of public spaces in Campina Grande is fundamental to understand how these two phenomena relate to each other and feed each other. The increase in violence may have been the factor that triggered the retraction of the population, but, on the other hand, the reduction in the occupation of public spaces may also have contributed to the worsening of violence. In cities where the presence of the community is strong, there is a tendency towards a greater sense of security and a lower crime rate, since the constant use of space inhibits violent and criminal actions. Campina Grande, as well as other medium-sized cities in Brazil, faces the challenge of rescuing its public spaces and promoting a culture of peaceful coexistence, which encourages the use of these places by the population.

In this sense, it is crucial that integrated public policies are developed, aiming not only at reducing violence itself, but also at creating conditions for citizens to feel safe and encouraged to resume the use of public spaces. Planned urbanization and the provision of quality public facilities, combined with social inclusion projects, can be effective solutions to reduce crime rates and improve the quality of life in Campina Grande.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES: VIOLENCE AS A FACTOR OF RESTRICTION IN URBAN APPROPRIATION

The interest in the development of actions aimed at the use of urban public spaces is one of the main concerns of the promoters of urban management and planning, as well as of the different segments of society. In medium-sized cities, these concerns are intensified due to the emergence of urban problems similar to those of large centers, although not very complex.

This perspective is perceptible from the superposition of three approaches: socioeconomic, legal-political and ideological, which share similarities and influence the reordering of territorial configurations, especially in urban environments for public use. It is important to define "urban environments for public use" as spaces with free access, such as squares, parks, and streets, in contrast to public spaces conditioned by private interests, such as shopping malls.

Such perspectives act dialectically, producing conflicts and continuously transforming geographical space. This process influences society, which begins to see urban space as "more a juxtaposition of places than an interactive space" (SILVA, 1997, p.90). In this context, there are clashes between the public policies formulated by the State and the social needs claimed by other actors, within a specific socio-spatial organization.

Chart 1 – Perspectives for the management of public spaces

Perspective	Feature	Applicability
Socioeconomic	It focuses on the economic and social relations that influence the use and appropriation of public spaces	We can observe how income inequality affects the use of public spaces. For example, in low-income areas, there may be a greater concentration of street vendors and informal activities, while wealthier areas may have better-maintained public spaces with less presence of informal commerce

Legal-political	It involves laws, regulations, and public policies that define rights and duties in public spaces	We can analyze how urban laws and regulations influence the use of public spaces. For example, legislation prohibiting street vending in certain areas can directly influence the dynamics of these spaces, creating areas with greater or lesser commercial activity
Ideological	It relates to the beliefs, values, and ideologies that shape the perception and use of urban spaces	We can consider how society's beliefs and values affect the perception and use of urban spaces. For example, in areas where there is a strong appreciation of nature, it is possible to observe a greater preservation of parks and green areas, with the local population getting involved in actions to preserve and conserve these spaces.

Source: Souza Júnior, 2024

In medium-sized cities, the contrasts of social interests and the search for development alternatives are evident. Political-administrative strategies and tactics, influenced by different social subjects and by the historical process of space formation, often complement and oppose each other. Although the search for socio-spatial development is a common concern, its origin and evolution are marked by contradictions and dichotomous positions, especially in relation to the use of public spaces.

The production and consumption of space only make sense when considering processes of appropriation by the different social subjects, which define the roughness and establish new spatial forms to meet the demands of the current socio-spatial conjuncture. These concerns reveal that the urban problem is not only theoretical, but practical, related to the limits of the use of public environments due to the growth of violence and the consequent feeling of fear and insecurity. This indicates an urban crisis, materialized in the continuous reduction in the use of these spaces.

The city's crisis is linked to the complexity of the use of the terms "urban" and "public space". The urban is the field where social relations intensify, a place of social contradictions. Seabra (2001, p.191) defines the urban as "spaces deeply cut by property, divided or fractioned, which are functionally and strictly articulated at the level of everyday life". Lefebvre (2019, p.47) complements, describing the urban as a "highly complex field of tensions (...) a possible-impossible that attracts to itself the accomplished, a presence-absence that is always renewed, always demanding."

Spaces are defined as public or private according to their socio-spatial use or practice, shaped by ideological, cultural, social, political and/or economic orders. The difficulty in understanding how individuals appropriate space makes the distinction between public and private spaces complex. Fischer & Moll (2000) use H. Arendt's conceptions to define public space as linked to citizenship, an environment shared and legitimized by public and intersubjective recognition.

In this context, the public-private relationship is antagonistic. Public spaces are those for collective use, without restrictions, while private spaces have restricted use to certain segments. In socio-spatial relations, this distinction is often presented more as an exception than a rule, generating private public spaces for use and private spaces for public use, such as shopping malls (CARLOS, 2017). Dupas (2003, p.24) understands the limit between private and public through the dialectical articulation between individual action and collective structure.

The complexity of spatial appropriation in the context of the public-private relationship can be exemplified in the case of the Children's Park. Located in a privileged area on the banks of the dam, despite being fenced and having previously defined opening hours to prevent urban violence, this park is characterized as a public space since it makes no distinction as to the use of almost all its environments. However, some objects in this space became private when they were determined for specific segments of society (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Children's Park



Source: Souza Júnior, 2024.

Public space is the environment in which relationships value collective and egalitarian participation, being fundamental for spatial appropriation. Aggressive practices in these spaces cause disturbances in the urban environment, which are environments of social contact. It is necessary to analyze how violence is expressed from a geographical perspective.

Violence is observed as a social evil that affects both urban and rural areas, resulting from different practices and varied reasons, often mistakenly associated with poverty. It is a physical or moral attack that causes damage to the victim (EUFRÁSIO, 2009). This practice spreads rapidly on various scales and expressions, such as individual, sexual, property and psychological violence.

In public spaces, violence intensifies with segregation, where activities of certain social groups dominate and impose fear, resulting in the problem of urban violence. This segregation occurs through the limitation of accessibility and urban infrastructure.

Violence found in urban areas favorable conditions for its diffusion, being considered a consequence of capitalist societies and directly influencing urban growth (TANGERINO, 2007). In relation to urban fear, it is in the urban environment that we find greater complexity of objects and actions, represented by social exchanges.

This socio-spatial issue affects thousands of citizens daily, causing setbacks in human development by manipulating population actions (EUFRÁSIO, 2009). Violence and insecurity in public spaces are sequels of radical transformations in urban spaces, resulting from conflicting events involving various social subjects, and have become a challenge for public management. In urban spaces, violence manifests itself in crimes against property and people, representing a struggle for quality of life and social justice (SOUZA, 2004).

Gomes (1993, p.11) states that "the terrible social conditions and quality of life and the unjust structures in which the majority of the population lives constitute (...) the bases and the germs of violence." However, the debate on urban violence still generates uncertainties due to the difficulty of identifying its impacts in public spaces.

Violence is disseminated in public spaces due to the complexity of socio-spatial practices in these places (TANGERINO, 2007, p.3). Concern about violence is a constant theme in debates about the functional and collective use of public spaces, given their importance for the social context.

CAMPINA GRANDE: THE CONTEXT OF URBAN VIOLENCE AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Urban violence is a persistent and complex social problem, especially in urban areas, where its effects are most felt. The city of Campina Grande, in Paraíba, is no exception. In recent years, urban violence in Campina Grande has manifested itself in a significant way, directly affecting the daily practices of individuals and the appropriation of urban space.

Violence in the city manifests itself in a territorially delimited way, with specific sectors exhibiting higher levels of crime. This unequal distribution of violence has profound consequences for residents, especially in public areas, where fear and apprehension are most intense. As a result, many individuals avoid these spaces, compromising community life and social cohesion.

Campina Grande plays a strategic role in regional development, being a center of services and commerce that attracts people from various parts of the state. However, this prominent position also brings challenges, especially with regard to public safety. Tangerino (2007) observes that, although the city does not determine violence, the lack of adequate infrastructure and access to basic services can facilitate the reproduction of criminal practices.

Factors such as economic deprivation, social inequality, access to firearms, and the presence of illicit drugs play critical roles in the perpetuation of violence. The media also plays a significant role, often exacerbating the sense of insecurity among residents. Silveira (2008) points out that violence "makes it impossible to exercise the right to the city", impairing the quality of life and limiting the social interactions of citizens.

Data from the National Secretariat of Public Security indicate that Campina Grande exhibits indicators of lethal and non-lethal crimes comparable to those of large urban centers, despite its smaller population. This reflects the complexity of the problems facing the city, where violence not only threatens the physical safety of individuals, but also affects socioeconomic dynamics and urban spatial organization.

Based on records obtained between 2010 and 2024, the GIDs research group was able to map the main risk sectors and their relationships with geographic factors and urban conditions in the city. We found, for example, that the topographic configuration of Campina Grande, with its irregular and narrow streets, combined with a diversified territorial organization, aggravates the challenges of accessibility and safety. Neighborhoods such as

Bodocongó, Malvinas and Santa Rosa, which concentrate populations with low purchasing power, are particularly vulnerable. These neighborhoods form an arc of influence that affects adjacent areas, such as Pedregal and Centenário, intensifying the problems of violence and social exclusion.

Urban infrastructure, or lack thereof, plays a crucial role in the reproduction of violence. More favored neighborhoods, such as Catolé and Centro, have better infrastructure conditions and attract people from different parts of the city. However, the concentration of people in these spaces can also attract criminal practices. Disorderly urbanization and a lack of adequate investment in infrastructure make some areas more susceptible to violence, creating a geography of fear that negatively impacts the lives of residents.

Another important factor is the perception of security. The feeling of fear generated by urban violence directly influences the behavior of individuals, limiting their mobility and participation in community activities. The creation of safe and well-designed public spaces is essential to promote coexistence and social inclusion. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends on an integrated approach that considers both physical security and underlying socioeconomic factors.

Socioeconomic exclusion is one of the main drivers of urban violence. Unemployment, lack of decent housing and inadequate access to basic services are chronic problems that affect a large part of the population of Campina Grande. Economic inequality creates an environment conducive to crime, where individuals excluded from economic and social opportunities seek alternatives through illicit activities. This reality is aggravated by the presence of drug, arms and human trafficking, which fuel violence and urban insecurity.

Disorderly urbanization and the lack of proper planning also contribute to the spread of violence. The creation of informal neighborhoods, without basic infrastructure and essential services, results in precarious living conditions that foster crime. The lack of investment in peripheral areas and the concentration of resources in wealthier regions increase disparities and contribute to the marginalization of large segments of the urban population.

To address these challenges, it is necessary to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that involves effective public policies, investment in infrastructure, and social inclusion programs. Public security must be treated as a priority, with integrated actions aimed at

both preventing and repressing violence. Additionally, it is crucial to promote community participation and civic engagement to build a culture of peace and security.

Urban violence in Campina Grande is a reflection of broader social problems that affect many Brazilian cities and one of the causes is precisely the reduction in the use and appropriation of public spaces. Addressing these issues requires a collective commitment and a long-term vision that prioritizes social justice, economic equality, and quality of life for all citizens. By addressing the root causes of violence and investing in sustainable solutions, it is possible to create a safer and more inclusive urban environment, where everyone can fully exercise their right to the city by understanding the indicators of violence and reducing the use of public spaces.

INDICATORS OF VIOLENCE AND USURPATION OF THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: ANALYSIS OF AGGRESSIVE PRACTICES IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The indicators of the diffusion of practices aggressive to the urban environment are usually associated with social exclusion resulting from a historical process of distancing part of society from the use of the urban environment. According to Eufrásio (2009, p. 104), this is expressed in the "cultural and anthropological relations by subjection or even by necessity". It is characterized, therefore, as a "voluntary physical intervention of one individual or group against another, with the aim of torturing, offending or destroying" (Diniz, 1998, p. 781), making it impossible for the other to exercise the right to the city.

Among the indicators responsible for the usurpation of the right to the city are both those related to socioeconomic exclusion (unemployment, lack of decent housing conditions, among others) and those of a social order, represented by the spread of drug, arms and human trafficking. These factors result in armed disputes over the control of territories, increased prostitution, and depredation of public property, with the media often exacerbating the sense of urban fear (Silveira, 2008).

Violence is seen as the result of a complex system of causes, and cannot be understood only based on the motivation of the perpetrator. Factors can be structural (absolute or relative economic deprivation) or situational (conflicts and disputes), access to firearms, and the influence of illicit drugs and alcohol. Some authors also highlight the role of the media and other institutions that foster a culture of violence (Silveira, 2008, p.129).

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scenarios), access to firearms and the influence of illicit drugs and alcohol. Some authors also highlight the possible role of the media and other institutions that foster a culture of violence (SILVEIRA, 2008, p.129).

Contrary to what was evident in previous decades, the increase in urban violence and the consequent "fear of living in the city" is a reality common to all urban spaces, regardless of territorial extension or population density. The absence of organized surveillance in medium or small cities has served as an attraction for the dissemination of this practice.

Urban violence is not a new theme in today's urban spaces. In the Middle Ages, for example, the city represented both security and the spread of violence. For Le Goff (1998), robbery was a crime punished severely, unlike today's cities, where violence has become an expression of psychological aggression against the collectivity. According to Le Goff (1998, p.73), "today, we would be almost more concerned with incivilities, daily disagreements apparently without gravity, small aggressions".

The meaning of violence in today's cities is different from its meaning in other historical moments. The current social complexity puts in check not only the physical integrity or personal or collective property, but the psychological integrity of the individual-citizen and the social collectivity. The urban space has become a space of differences, ignorance, estrangement and fear of physical and symbolic aggression (Carlos, 2017). The city, when materialized as a relationship of exchange, ceases to have a use value, becoming a space of transgression supported by the culture of fear (Lefebvre, 2019).

These impressions are evident in the urban reality of Campina Grande. Since its constitution as a city (Law n. 167, of 11/10/1864), Campina Grande has played a crucial role in the development of the State of Paraíba. However, between the 1950s and 1990s, the city experienced a period of stagnation due to the political options of the military government, which prioritized the integration of large centers, leaving Campina Grande on the margins of federal investments in urban restructuring.

The topographic configuration and territorial organization of the neighborhoods of Campina Grande, with some planned areas and others irregular and chaotic, make the city difficult to access and vulnerable to urban subversion. The irregular and narrow streets, entangled in a complex layout, represent a risk for individuals who are unaware of the alternatives for connecting the urban labyrinth.

According to the Institute of Municipal Development of the State of Paraíba, Campina Grande had, in 2003, 49 neighborhoods, with an average of 5,000 residents per neighborhood, except for seven neighborhoods that concentrate more than 10 thousand residents: Cruzeiro, Jeremias, Santa Rosa, Bodocongó, Catolé, José Pinheiro and Malvinas. Neighborhoods such as Bodocongó, Malvinas and Santa Rosa form an arc of influence that affects adjacent areas, such as Pedregal and Centenario, characterized by populations with low purchasing power.

Violence, both material and psychological, is a strategic theme for urban scholars, as "security is one of the basic needs of human beings" (Silveira, 2008, p. 129). The study identified the center as the most violent neighborhood in Campina Grande, followed by Bodocongó and Catolé, highlighting robberies, homicides and drug trafficking as the main crimes.

The results of the research served as a basis for policies to combat urban violence, constituting the database of the city observatory on the spatialization of urban violence. Since 2012, there has been an improvement in surveillance and mobility in the central region, with the implementation of surveillance cameras and accessibility controls.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the challenges that Campina Grande and other Brazilian cities face, it is essential to adopt an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to combat urban violence. Cooperation between governments, civil society, and academic institutions can bring solutions ranging from improving urban infrastructure to public policies that reduce social inequalities.

Investing in education, health, and safety is crucial to creating a safer and more inclusive urban environment. Violence prevention programs, combined with actions to promote citizenship and social inclusion, can change the way residents relate to public spaces, encouraging their use and reducing the feeling of fear.

It is also essential to encourage community participation in urban management and planning, ensuring that local needs and demands are met. Creating quality public spaces that promote social interaction and community integration can be an effective strategy to combat violence and promote sustainable urban development.

Urban violence in Campina Grande is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which requires an equally complex and coordinated response. By addressing the structural

causes of violence and working to build a fairer and safer city, we can transform urban spaces into places of peaceful coexistence and human development. With continuous and coordinated efforts, we believe that Campina Grande can overcome the challenges of urban violence and become a model of a resilient and inclusive city.

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