Table 11

Proposed matrix of macro, meso, and micro factors for violence.

S/N	Macro	Meso	Micro
1.	More wealth than poverty in the city	Segregation and urban poverty	More firearms in the population
2.	More education, but less employment	Culture of masculinity	Alcohol consumption
3.	More aspirations, but less capacity to meet them	Local drug market and impunity	Inability to verbally express feelings
4.	Less social control by the family		
5.	Less force of religion		

It is self-evident from the matrix that some of the macro factors are not sufficiently overarching and could easily be placed in the meso and micro. A macro factor should be an overarching one that stands out and is therefore fundamental. The macro provides the explanation because it transcends the society. Thus, there should not be more than one macro. It would have been urbanization and its underlying social processes if Briceño-León had settled for one, which according to the guiding hypothesis provides the clue to the high homicide rates in Latin American cities. However, the matrix does not include urbanization, which is proposed in the paper as the macro factor.

Finally, the paper's real challenge is to define urban violence and provide convincing data on the interplay between urbanization and whatever Briceño-León defines as violence.

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1. Durkheim E. Le suicide. Étude de sociologie. 2nd Ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; 1967.

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When I began reading Dr. Briceño-León's paper on urban violence in Latin America, I thought he was also describing the Philippine urban condition. Had it not been for its geographical location, I would have added the Philippines to the list of Latin American countries with medium to high rates of urban violence. The Philippines have numerous similarities with a number of Latin American countries, due mainly to more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. It is the only Catholic country in Asia.

Violence in Metropolitan Manila where I reside is regularly depicted by the media, particularly in the daily newspapers, radio, and TV evening news. Often reported are cases of murder, manslaughter, rape, and aggravated assault committed mainly by male adolescents and young adults who are reportedly poor, with little education, jobless or underemployed, and under the influence of illicit drugs. The young men tend to hail from slum and squatter communities, a segment comprising over a third of Manila's population. These cases of violence are reported to cover about a third of all crime or the crimes reported to the police in the past year. The constant presence of security guards in virtually every establishment and location reflect the pervasive fear among residents, not only in Metropolitan Manila but also in large and small cities throughout the country.

The public at large seeks plausible explanations from the media, the police, and other social institutions regarding the escalating urban violence. The various sources of information often attribute this situation to weak leadership by government, an inadequate or poor security system, corrupt politicians and the police, terrorists, drug pushers, mass poverty, and declining moral standards in society.

While many of the above factors may play roles in the rapidly growing violence in Philippine cities, there has been no comprehensive explanation for this situation. Briceño-León and his research institution, the Social Sciences Laboratory (LACSO), offer a sociological framework that is useful for explaining urban violence, not only in Latin America but also in other regions of the world. This framework considers the contributions of other explanatory models on violence, but it appears to be more comprehensive because it considers the situation in society and the cultural dimension which can affect individual decisions and participation in violence. It does not "pretend to be exhaustive", nor is it a "model for universal explanations", and it recognizes urban violence as a complex phenomenon. Thus it posits "three distinct levels of explanation": the structural or

macro-social, the meso-social, and the micro-social. The specific factors within each level of the proposed framework appear appropriate to demonstrate their roles in fomenting violence in many cities of the developing world.

The structural factors proposed by Briceño-León are often utilized by social theorists to explain various development issues. However, the evidence and arguments he presents for the widening gap between the small rich and large poor populations in a social setting that showcases wealth and power, the reduction of work opportunities among the educated youth, youth's rising expectations, and the inability of cities to meet their aspirations, as well as declining social control by the family and religion are convincing to demonstrate their relevant association with violence in cities. It would be worthwhile to include the declining ability of the government to control urban violence because of burgeoning population, corruption, and inadequate resources to meet basic needs, including the health and security of city-dwellers.

On the other hand, the author contends that meso-social factors have "less structural roots" and thus instigate violence, because they are easier to modify than macro-social factors. While it is understandable that segregation of a large segment of the urban population in slum and squatter colonies is a factor that foments violence because these settings harbor the poor and dysfunctional, I find the masculinity factor at this level a bit underplayed. As a gender issue, the patriarchy has structural dimensions and has persisted longer. Men across generations and cultures have instigated civil and global wars, so that to box in masculinity as one of many factors that foment urban violence is rather limiting. Men are the ones who are heavily involved in the entry, marketing, and use of drugs, firearms, and alcohol as well the use of force to persuade others to engage in unlawful behavior. They are generally less verbally expressive of their feelings and are more likely than women to act aggressively. They also play a key role in religion, the family, and government because they dominate these social institutions. I believe that this gender perspective should cut across the three levels of the sociological framework.

Briceño-León's description of the resilience of segmented populations to respond to conditions of insecurity is a phenomenon that is taking place in many cities the world over. The presence of security guards in wealthy and middle-class housing areas as well as neighborhood vigilantes to maintain peace and order in poor urban communities, the use of various gadgets to ward off intruders in homes and establishments, the use of malls as "excursion" sites to provide a temporary breath of freedom and security, and the avoidance of neighborhoods and occasions that hasten the victimization of law-abiding citizens are the present-day city-dwellers' coping strategies to survive in the cities. Will the city as a former haven of "freedom and citizenship" ever be restored in this complex world?

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The article follows a line of reasoning that is pleasant to read from beginning to end and demonstrates the theme's scope.

The proposal is to explain urban violence in Latin America. The author uses a sociological theoretical model with three levels of explanation: factors that originate violence, structural factors or those referring to long-lasting social processes that allow violent behaviors to be created; factors that foment violence, of cultural or situational factors with an immediate effect on behavior; and finally factors that facilitate violence, with a more individual nature and which facilitate the violent act.

As the basis for the theoretical model, Briceño-León uses both theoretical justifications and data from surveys. Since he presents some quantitative data, from the scientific point of view it would be interesting if some statistical tests were performed to demonstrate the relations that are discussed, such as the relationship between the urban population percentages and the homicide rates.

All use of indicators is known to involve some limitations, since they are summary measures, it is possible to conceive of studies with a multilevel methodology, which take into account the social, economic, cultural, and other indicators pertaining to the various levels or dimensions in order to test the hypotheses raised in the present article, as well as to verify the factors with the greatest weight or which make the greatest contribution to urban violence (expressed here as the homicide rate) in order to orient actions.

According to the article, individual factors or those that facilitate violence involve greater flexibility of action, but when acting on individuals there are forces representing the contextual factors of the society to which they be-