



Crime in Latin America (CRIMLA):

The role of family, employment, culture and the state

This was the project presented for the grant application. Four main changes were done to the project: a. Bolivia was included as a seventh country (50 participants) and fieldwork in Brazil was expanded from 50 to 100 participants, b. El Salvador has been replaced with Honduras, c. One of the postdoctoral positions was replaced with a researcher one, and d. the advisory board changed (see table below). The interview guide and the guidelines for fieldwork can be also downloaded in the project's webpage.

Advisory Board

Antonella Tiravessi (Argentina)	Alejandro Colanzi (Bolivia)
Fabiana Severi (Brazil)	Mauricio Deter (Brazil)
Ricardo Lillo (Chile)	Astrid Liliana Sánchez Mejía (Colombia)
Luis Enrique Amaya (Honduras)	Corina Giacomello (Mexico)
Benedicte Bull (Norway)	

1. Excellence

1.1 State of the art, knowledge needs and project objectives

Since the early 1990s there has been a significant growth of criminal activity in Latin America (see e.g., Durán Martínez 2018; Bergman 2018). Violence and murders are escalating, and the security situation for most citizens has worsened. States that are already weak and unstable democracies have been further destabilized and weakened, due to this rise in crime. This is reflected in low public trust in governments (OECD 2019). Gangs and drug cartels challenge security, stability and political and economic development, and crime is one of the main reasons for national and international migration. Even so, there has been relatively little research on crime in Latin America, as compared to other parts of the world.

The main idea in CRIMLA is that exploring **offenders' criminal careers and life-trajectories** is crucial to understanding crime. Given the current reliance on perspectives and data from the Global North (especially the UK and US), this project will be an important addition to contemporary research on crime and criminal careers worldwide. The main objective is to develop a **culturally and contextually sensitive life course criminology** emphasizing the particular social, economic and institutional factors of crime in Latin America. We focus especially on the role of the family, employment, culture and the state.

State of the art

CRIMLA is based on the idea that **cultural and contextual specificity** (e.g., Collins 2000; Segura and Pierce 1993), and situating studies in time and place (Carlsson and Sarnecki 2016), are crucial to understanding life-course trajectories. Latin America has made considerable progress since the military dictatorships of the seventies and eighties, but most countries in the region still score high on indexes of corruption and clientelism, and have inefficient law enforcement and justice systems. State failure involves a wide range of issues related not only to security, but also to the redistribution of income, economic development and political representation (Aguirre 2006). In Latin America, bureaucracies with little autonomy face the growing power of **drug trafficking organizations** and **gang activity**, and many states are incapable of providing



functioning public services and compete with armed groups for control of parts of their national territory (Astorga and Shirk 2010).

Despite important regional differences between weak or failing states such as Mexico and El Salvador and stronger ones such as Chile (Urteaga Quispe 2017: 435), throughout Latin America, state capacity, stability and legitimacy are limited (see also Waldmann 2006). **Weak or failing states** are thus an important element of the institutional context of criminal careers and trajectories. In high-crime areas, where informal and illegal markets dominate, the difference between an 'ordinary' and a 'criminal' lifestyle may for example be blurred, and little distinction may be made between legal and illegal goods and markets (Chomczyński et al. 2019).

In Latin America, the **demanding labour market**, where jobs are often secured through informal connections, and the lack of a welfare state mean that **extended family networks** are decisive. While domestic social networks provide resources, they also reinforce and maintain traditional gender norms, which makes women vulnerable in a gendered hierarchy of **familism**: a culture that places the family 'ahead of individual interest and development' (Ingoldsby 1991: 57). Unintended pregnancies, teenage marriages and a patriarchal structure, where women's paid labour is considered secondary to men's, are also prevalent, especially in socio-economically marginalized families (Robichaux, 2002). Women in Latin America face gendered challenges, both in family life and in the labour market, that have been neglected in research and should be taken into consideration when studying their criminal careers (Fleetwood 2015).

Knowledge needs

Life-course criminology has come a long way in terms of conceptualizing and studying criminal careers in the Global North, but there has been a notable absence of studies from outside the USA and Europe (Carlsson and Sarnecki 2016). We know from global criminology (Franko 2019) and southern criminology (Carrington et al. 2016) that definitions of crime, criminal behaviour, and trajectories of crime and desistance are highly dependent upon societal and cultural context. CRIMLA will fill this knowledge gap with new empirical data. There is also, theoretically, a lot that could be gained from combining life course criminology with insights from political science (e.g. Durán Martínez 2018) and narrative criminology (e.g. Fleetwood et al. 2019).

A pilot study conducted by CRIMLA researchers (Sandberg et al. 2020a, 2020b; Agoff et al. 2020) and previous research literature provided the initial observations that will be explored in more detail in this project: First, risk factors such as early traumatic experiences, often in childhood, are important in both the established Western literature and in Latin America, but the **family** plays a somewhat different role in Latin America. In the absence of functioning welfare systems (Giacomello 2020), families occupy the role of many formal institutions in Europe and the USA, and extended families are more important than nuclear families (Esteve and Florez-Paredes 2018). The weakening of social ties caused by increasing independence from the family, which helps explain crime in many Western contexts, seems less apparent. Starting a family for example, is usually associated with a drop in crime in the Western context (Sampson and Laub 1993). For women, and teenage pregnancies and marriages however, the picture is more complicated (e.g. Bersani et al. 2009), and this might also be important in Latin America. CRIMLA will address the need for knowledge about the role of gender and family for the criminal careers of Latin American offenders.

Secondly, the role of **employment** is fundamentally different in the USA and Europe compared to Latin America, where a huge percentage of the work force is employed in the unregulated black economy (Villaseñor 2020). This may have important consequences for the role of employment in criminal careers. Those interviewed in the pilot study had some access to work, but jobs were available when they were young (replacing basic education), were in the black economy, poorly paid and did not provide stability (Maldonado 2013). Connection to the labour market may thus be less of a protection than it is usually described as in Western life-course criminology. CRIMLA will address the knowledge need related to the role of employment for the criminal career of Latin American offenders.

The many **grey areas** between **legal and illegal markets**, and groups, mean that processes such as peer vs family socialization, the onset of crime and the way youths mature out of crime must be rethought, to better fit a context where there are less marked differences between criminal and law-abiding life-styles. Criminal activities may be not so much a phase of youthful rebellion as an integral part of established labour markets.



On the one hand, this makes it easier to get recruited and socialized into offending, and to persist in it. On the other hand, it might also make it easier to get out of a criminal career, because crime is less stigmatized and offenders have had lives not much different from those of the societal mainstream. CRIMLA will explore these grey areas between legal and illegal activity and study their impact on crime and criminal trajectories.

Finally, **the role of the State** is also very different from that in Western contexts. Weak states, the absence of welfare systems, security issues, and institutions such as schools and prisons, play a different role in criminal trajectories and careers in Latin America. Prisons for example, have integrated and semi-legal formal and informal labour markets, and prisoners rely upon their families while incarcerated (Agoff et al. 2020). In some areas, drug trafficking organizations take the place of the state and government institutions (Chomczyński and Guy 2021). CRIMLA will address the knowledge needs related to the role of the state, and its relative absence and failure, for criminal careers and life-course trajectories in Latin America.

In sum, mainstream criminological theories developed in the USA and Europe fall short, or need considerable adjustments, when applied outside Western contexts. CRIMLA will fill this knowledge gap and theorize in life-course criminology with data and insights from Latin America and the Global South.

Project objectives

The main objective of CRIMLA is to develop **a culturally and contextually sensitive life course criminology of Latin America**. Results and insights gained from the project will have great importance for studies of the role of crime, security and development in this region, inform research on crime in the Global South more generally, and be crucial for further theorizing in life course criminology. This project objective is closely connected to the secondary objective of CRIMLA, which is to get a better empirical understanding of the role of family, employment, culture and the state for criminal trajectories in Latin America.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses, theoretical approach and methodology

CRIMLA explores the overarching research question: *What is the best way to theorize and understand the criminal careers and life-course trajectories of Latin American offenders?* The analytic sub-questions and theoretically informed hypothetical assumptions detailed in the table below are not exhaustive, but are examples of the type of research questions and thinking that will guide the study.

RQ1	What is the best way to theorize and understand the criminal careers and life-course trajectories of Latin American offenders?	H1	There are crucial differences between Latin American offenders and those described in existing life-course criminology. This implies a need to rethink basic assumptions and develop new theory in this field.
RQ 1.1	How does crime enter into the life-courses of offenders in different Latin American countries?	H 1.1	Crime enters early and can be part of legal spheres of life. There are important differences resulting from crime rates and state organization between Latin American countries.
RQ 1.2	Do major life course transitions and turning points coincide with changes in crime?	H 1.2	The role of family formation and employment is less important for desistance from crime in Latin America than in Europe/the USA.
RQ 1.3	What is the part played by state institutions and local cultures in criminal careers?	H 1.3	The absence of state institutions, and cultures of <i>familism</i> and patriarchy shape criminal careers in Latin America.
RQ 1.4	What is the role of drug trafficking organizations in criminal careers and life-course trajectories?	H 1.4	Drug trafficking organizations sometimes take the role of the state, or the family, in areas where the state is weak or failing.
RQ 1.5	How are criminal careers and life-course trajectories conveyed in offenders’ life-stories?	H 1.5	Life-stories reflect and reproduce institutional and cultural contexts and are pivotal for the



			onset of crime, and for continuation and desistance
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Theoretical approach

Scholars in life-course criminology have explored the criminal careers of offenders by using concepts such as developmental trajectories, transitions, and turning points. **Trajectories** are interdependent sequences of events in different life domains (e.g. drug use, criminal justice involvement, employment) (Teruya and Hser 2010; Sampson and Laub 2003). **Transitions** are changes in stages or roles (e.g. getting married or divorced, obtaining one’s first job) that are short-term. Some, but not all, transitions lead to turning points that produce long-term behavioural change (Teruya and Hser 2010). **Turning points** are processes of family formation, stable employment, the disintegration of peer groups and subjective shifts in identity that are important for changes in offending (Carlsson 2012: 1; Laub and Sampson 1993).

Life-course criminology is concerned with differences in offending *within* individuals over time (Skardhamar 2010:1), not differences in offending between people. The perspective brings together insights from numerous disciplines to explain **why criminal behaviour happens and why it changes over time** (peaking in late adolescence, for example). In life-course criminology a distinction is usually made between studies of risk factors, the onset of crime, the persistence of crime and the desistance from crime (Carlsson and Sarnecki 2016). Life-course criminology uses both quantitative (mainly register and survey data) and qualitative (mainly life-history interviews) data, and is among the most central criminological traditions.

CRIMLA is based on the premise that life-course criminology needs retheorizing to fit the Latin American context. In efforts to make life-course criminology more contextually specific it is important to account better for the role, or lack of role, of basic **institutions** in society and for how **the state** operate differently in different contexts. Such efforts necessitate more integration of insights from political science into life-course criminology – when considering, for example, how the state and its basic institutions function in different societal contexts. For good reasons, much theorizing of crime in Latin America has emerged from political science (e.g. Durán Martínez 2018) – and in Norway too, Latin American studies developed out of this discipline. Insights and research from political science must therefore be included in life-course criminology to understand crime in this area.

When seeking to make life-course criminology more culturally specific, it is useful to explore the way life-courses are actively shaped in life-stories. PI (Sandberg) is one of the co-founders of **narrative criminology** (Presser & Sandberg, 2015) and CRIMLA will combine this framework with life-course criminology, and expand it to include Latin America and the Global South. The project thus advances PI’s main academic project during the last decade and broadens his theoretical repertoire to include life-course criminology. **Storytelling** traces trajectories, transitions, and turning points through, for example, what (Carlsson 2012) describes as narrative turning points. The narrative approach has been particularly important for studies of desistance (Maruna 2001), but life-stories motivate all kinds of crime-related change. In CRIMLA, storytelling, combined with developmental and structural factors, are seen as influencing both the onset of crime (for example, by cultural stories driving crime) the persistence of crime (through cultural stories justifying reoffending) and desistance (through cultural stories supporting desistance from crime).

Methodology

Sveinung Sandberg, University of Oslo (UiO), **Gustavo Fondevila**, the Center for Economic Research and Teaching in Mexico (CIDE) and **Carolina Agoff**, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) are the three main researchers on this project. In 2019, they did a pilot study in Mexico City prisons that serves as the basis for the methodology and research design of CRIMLA. The pilot study involved repeated life-story interviews with 24 inmates – 12 women and 12 men. The participants were interviewed three times each over a period of a six months, to increase rapport and trust. Interviews were semi-structured and organized as life-story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) covering participants’ lives from childhood to the present. The advantages of such interviews include the access gained to personal conceptions of the past at different stages, and the readily interpretable nature of data (Tagg 1985: 163). Moreover, open life-story interviews are culturally sensitive and can help researchers to avoid ethnocentrism (Birkbeck 2006; Nelken 2009).



CRIMLA will expand upon this research, by doing 276 more repeated qualitative life-story interviews with incarcerated women and men in six Latin American countries. The countries represent important differences in terms of state organization and stability, incarcerations rates, and culture. **Mexico and El Salvador** are combined in a WP because they are high-crime and weak state societies in central and North America, **Colombia and Brazil** are high-crime societies in South America, and **Argentina and Chile** are relatively low-crime societies with better functioning states. There are other important differences, of which this proposal can only mention a few: for example, Brazil and Mexico have huge economies and large populations. Mexico is the main smuggling route for illegal drugs to the USA. El Salvador has the least developed state and most serious issues as regards democracy. Colombia has recently emerged from civil war. There are also important differences in the countries' criminal justice and welfare systems, ethnic populations, and political histories. Despite these differences, these countries also have many similarities, as regards language, and histories of migration from Europe, colonization and subsequent independence.

A qualitative study with a total of **300 participants** provides immense opportunities. It will be possible to make important contributions to existing life-course criminology based on this data. Using the flexibility of the qualitative approach, it will also be possible to expand beyond the focus of this research and explore other questions that emerge from the research process. Importantly, the aim is to recruit as many women as men (the majority of the prison population in Latin America, as elsewhere, is male) to highlight gendered mechanisms neglected in existing research, which is often male-centred.

The open-ended life-story approach to interviews is mainly used for what Kohli (1981) describes as the 'referential function' of life stories, or the description of events in temporal order. The interviewee will expect some kind of shape in a conversation and the life-story interview provides this. It is a pragmatic approach, but one that is flexible in terms of focus (making it possible to add research questions based on the data collected) and sensitive to the cultural and societal contexts of life-trajectories. Interpreted with care, it allows for an early analysis of life-course trajectories as well as the role of life-stories for crime. A qualitative approach is particularly valuable when a research field is relatively unexplored and knowledge is missing on what research questions to ask, for example, when using register data or on how to carry out a culture- and context-sensitive survey (Noaks and Wincup 2004).

The practical implementation of data collection will start with an initial presentation at penal institutions, to give directors and staff general information about the study. This will also give the team a chance to establish first contacts with potential participants. We will request: a) a space equipped with table, chairs, ventilation and bathroom, b) that there are no guards present during the interview, c) that the interviewees can stay for the required time in each session and d) authorization to record interviews. The interviews will be conducted in prison visiting rooms, or in cells. They will typically last 2-3 hours, depending on the dynamics of the interview. The flexible research design enables participants to concentrate on the topics most important to them. We will aim for topics to emerge naturally in the course of interviews.

All interviews will be **recorded and transcribed**. We use thematic analysis and constant comparison to identify primary analytic themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Data collected in interviews will be analysed by an interdisciplinary group of researchers. The themes will be produced in two iterative data coding and analysis processes, identifying the first set of emergent themes and developing the final conceptual framework. We will use NVivo (2020) to facilitate data management and coding. Codes will be inductively drawn from the interviews and then refined through discussions between researchers. Codes and themes will thus be both data-driven and theoretically informed. CRIMLA has six work packages (WPs):

Work package 1: 100 life-story interviews with prisoners in Mexico and El Salvador.

Data collection will follow the design and organization of the pilot study: 26 new interviews will be conducted in Mexico (combined N = 50) and 50 in El Salvador. Data from WP1 will enable there to be publications on the national sample and context, as well as ones that combine the two countries.

Work package 2: 100 life-story interviews with prisoners in Colombia and Brazil.



Data collection will follow the design and organization of WP1. The interview guide will be similar, but adapted to the particularities of the social, economic and cultural context of Colombia (50 interviews) and Brazil (50 interviews).

Work package 3: 100 life-story interviews with prisoners in Argentina and Chile

Data collection will follow the design and organization of WP 1. The interview guide will be similar, but adapted to the particularities of the social, economic and cultural context of Argentina (50 interviews) and Chile (50 interviews).

WPs 1-3 each contains two countries that have important similarities, as well as differences. It will be possible to publish using data from each country, each WP, to make comparisons between the two countries in a WP, or between WPs, or publish using data from all the WPs, depending upon the research questions.

Work package 4: A pilot study for a large-scale survey in Latin America

To consolidate the findings from the qualitative life-story interviews, we will do a quantitative pilot study in Mexican prisons. The pilot will seek to check the generalizability of the qualitative findings and will build directly on insights and information gained from the qualitative interviews. A survey will be carried out in several prisons, to ensure the inclusion of as many respondents as possible. Being a non-random sample, its main purpose is to lay the groundwork for a possible large-scale survey at a later stage. WP4 will include a survey-based experiment where respondents are randomly divided into groups which get slightly different questions; this will make it possible to estimate the effects on future prospects. The quantitative pilot study will be important for an ERC grant application during the CRIMLA project.

The first four WPs address all the RQ and H in the project. The two last WPs are concerned with the organization of the project. They are essential to the practical implementation of WPs1-4 and for mutual learning between academics in Scandinavia and Latin America.

Work package 5: Field work and research exchanges

Several research exchanges will be central to the project. The principal investigator (PI Sandberg) will spend one academic year as a guest researcher at CIDE in Mexico City (from 01.09.2021 – 01.07.2022). In 2022-2023, Agoff, Fondevila and Chomczyński will spend a month in Oslo at the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law (UiO). Both postdocs will spend 12 months at CIDE in Mexico City at the start of the project period (while taking field trips for data collection to their respective countries of research, accompanied by senior project staff). The remainder of their postdoc time will be spent in the Department of Sociology and Criminology of Law in Oslo.

Work package 6: Advisory board

An advisory board will meet yearly (online) to discuss methods, preliminary findings, etc.; it will consist of a contact for each of the countries involved in the study, together with the foremost European qualitative life-course scholar and a leading Norwegian Latin American scholar. The Latin American members will help organize data collection in their respective countries and will all be invited to co-author papers if/when appropriate.

Risks and ethical issues

There are many risks and ethical issues involved in researching crime in Latin America. They include both risks to project staff and ethical issues regarding research on marginalized populations in the Global South. Each of the main researchers in the team has **more than 15 years of experience** of carrying out prison interviews both in Norway (Sandberg) and Latin America (Fondevila, Agoff, see also Chomczyński’s research experience and that of other members of the advisory board). Sandberg also has experience of ethnographic research on marginalized groups in criminal environments, and on highly sensitive issues outside prisons. He has also published on issues such as safety and ethics in research (Sandberg and Copes 2013). The combined previous experience of all the main researchers and the advisory board will be of great use to the project.

We will seek permission to do research from **ethics boards in Latin America and local penitentiary authorities**. In some countries ethics boards are in universities (e.g. Mexico) in others they are state bodies (e.g. Brazil). Informed consent will be obtained and strict confidentiality maintained. During transcription we will remove details such as names and other recognizable information. Measures will be taken to ensure the



safety of project staff. We will: a) consult with local prison authorities on general safety and the selection of participants, b) not recruit high-profile and prominent cartel members (lower rank members, which are the majority, will be recruited) c) not recruit psychologically unstable prisoners, d) organize an escape route from the interview location (with an alarm or similar), e) train project staff in an open and affirmative interview style, to avoid provocation, f) instruct participants not to mention names or unnecessary details about their crimes, and g) instruct participants not to mention plans for future crimes. Taken together, these measures should reduce risk to a minimum. Inmates are generally glad to have someone to talk to, and appreciate the interest researchers' show in them (Copes et al. 2013).

One of the main problems of life-story interviews is that participants' memories cannot always be trusted (Tagg 1985). It may also be in the interviewees' interest to give a particular slant to their stories. This is a challenge for all research using **self-reported data** (qualitative and quantitative), and results must be interpreted with caution (see, for example, Sandberg 2010). Techniques to elicit better data include probing (asking the same question in different ways), returning to questions in later interviews, asking for details, observing body language, and making comparisons with other similar data (to see if there are pattern in replies). Repeated interviews will help **build trust** and thereby improve the quality of data. In this project, the way prisoners narrate their lives is also an object of study. This means that, even when the factual content may be open to question, interviews may contain important information (for example about culture, identities and life-stories). Self-reported data is, for good reasons, at the core of many well-established research traditions in criminology and related fields: They provide an important **'insider' source of knowledge** that sheds light on crime and other social phenomena.

Another methodological problem is the limitations of a study that has 300 participants from six different countries. We cannot claim representativeness and will **contextualize findings in time and place**, e.g., their national, cultural, ethnic context, the prisons and prisoners we recruit from and get access to (e.g. safety limitations), the dynamics of the interview relationship, and the positionality of researchers. To be better able to generalize and test insights from the qualitative part of the project, WP4 will prepare for a larger quantitative study.

Other more practical problems for this research project are to do with access to participants, institutional vulnerability when organizing research in Latin America, and access to qualified staff. The most critical is probably access to participants. In Mexico, the project team already has contacts with and access to several prisons. Fondevila has **extensive experience** of empirical prison research in Latin America (Bergman and Fondevila 2021). The countries included in CRIMLA are partly chosen because he has particularly good contacts in them. If Covid19 restrictions limit access to prisons, prisoners will be provided with iPads or similar equipment with Internet connections and interviews will be done online. Working with Mexico's most prestigious international university (CIDE), which has a long history of international cooperation will make organizing easier. The offer of attractive positions at UiO will make it possible to recruit the most talented researchers in Latin America, or other Spanish-speaking candidates. The size of the pool of potential recruits makes it likely that highly qualified people will be found. One advantage of postdocs (compared with PhDs) is that they have knowledge of the research context, and previous experience of gaining access to and operating within risky environments. They can also start to publish earlier in the project.

There are potential **ethical issues** in researchers coming from Europe/the Global North to do research in Latin America/the Global South, which can be seen as problematic because of outsiders' lack of knowledge of local contexts, the use of theory developed in another context, and the return of knowledge to participants and the local ownership of research (see e.g. Sandberg and Rojas 2021). In our project we avoid several of these pitfalls by working closely with well-known Latin American researchers, hiring local research assistants, and advertising for postdocs in Latin America. Research collaboration and co-authorship will ensure the research done will have a local foundation. We will follow all the ethical rules and standards laid down by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees regarding permission, consent, impact etc. However, ethical approval for the research will also be applied for locally, and we will discuss ethical issues with the main local actors involved (most importantly prisoners, but also NGOs, families, prison authorities, local researchers and policy-makers) to make sure that the research has legitimacy in the context where it is done.



CRIMLA is a high risk, high gain project. High gain is to be expected because the research team has **long experience** of doing research on prisoners and offenders, **large networks** in the region, which will facilitate data collection, and has successfully **completed a pilot project**. The main researchers has also already published **several articles** (Sandberg et al. 2020a, 2020b, Agoff et al. 2020) based on data from the pilot project and the new project is theoretically situated within a solid and acknowledged **interdisciplinary criminological tradition**. CRIMLA is therefore eminently realistic and feasible. Being firmly set in the local research context, and designed to return research outcomes to actors there, it is also ethically well-founded.

Interdisciplinary and gender perspectives

The three main researchers in the project have backgrounds that range from **sociology and political science** (Sandberg), to **social psychology** (Agoff) and **law and criminology** (Fondevila). The wider team also has experience of various methods, both **qualitative** (Sandberg, Agoff, Chomczyński) and **quantitative** (Fondevila, Skardhamar). We believe this interdisciplinary and multi-method team will benefit the project, especially since life-course criminology is inherently interdisciplinary. Gender issues will be important, and were highlighted in publications from the pilot study (Sandberg et al. 2020a, 2020b, Agoff et al. 2020). The emphasis on **gender** explains our aim to get an equal number of women and men participants. We expect there to be considerable differences in the life-course trajectories of women and men prisoners, and our research will explore these using gender theory and analysis. On the project staff, one of the three main researchers is a woman, and at least one of the postdocs will be a woman; five out of the eight members of the advisory board are also women. Importantly, the project will work closely with the advisory board, including members in publications etc. CRIMLA will be an opportunity to broaden the international networks, boost publications and thus advance the careers of women academics in Latin America.

1.3 Novelty and ambition

CRIMLA will be the **first qualitative life-course project** in Latin America. In it, the life-trajectories of incarcerated people in six Latin American countries will be examined to study their particularities and the relative importance of societal and cultural context for criminal careers. Our study will prepare the ground for life-course criminology in a Latin American context. CRIMLA also includes a pilot and a research design for a **quantitative life-course criminology study** that will be **the first of its kind** in Latin America. Collecting life-story interviews with incarcerated people in Latin America will make it possible to answer questions about criminal trajectories and about the role of life-stories for crime, and how these are shaped by prisons and patriarchal low-income societies. This project thus offers an opportunity to create a basis for a **societally specific and culturally sensitive life-course criminology** that both avoids the pitfalls of contemporary criminological ethnocentric theorizing and aids development and policy-making in the region.

2. Impact

2.1 Potential academic impact of the research project

Because of the spiral of violence, drug and human trafficking and social, economic and political problems that Latin America is currently facing, the region has great interest for political scientists, sociologists and criminologists alike. The situation cannot be understood without bringing together studies of state failure, culture, and the nature of criminal trajectories. **Working closely with Latin-American researchers** can offer Scandinavian social scientists to gain more knowledge, comparison, and the opportunity to consider some of the most pressing issues facing international politics, development and contemporary international criminology. Based in major research universities (UiO, CIDE and UNAM), and with input from researchers and universities throughout Latin American and Northern Europe, CRIMLA will pioneer extensive collaboration between Northern Europe and Latin America.

In addition to developing a Latin American life-course criminology, an important aim of this project is to contribute to a **global** (Franko 2019) and **southern criminology** (Carrington et al. 2016). Hiring two Latin American researchers for postdoc positions in Oslo will be valuable for academic knowledge exchange and learning. The Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law (IKRS) at UiO has outstanding international



expertise in prison research, qualitative and narrative methods, and cultural and global criminology. Scandinavian research has also been at the forefront of life-course criminology. The opportunity to be in this research environment for an extended length of time will give Latin American researchers valuable experience and knowledge.

Scandinavian sociology, criminology and social science in general, have long been focused on Norway, Scandinavia, Europe, and the US. CRIMLA will be an opportunity for all involved to gain wider perspectives and **mutual learning**. Research exchanges and a big conference towards the end of the project will bring international expertise to Oslo. The research project will develop a major centre for studies of crime in Latin America in Northern Europe – an immense addition to UiO and Norwegian academia.

2.2. Potential for societal impact

While the impact of the project will primarily be academic, the project also has the potential to help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals of the **reduction of poverty** (through reducing crime and incarceration), **good health and well-being** (through increased security and safety), **decent work and economic growth** (through economic development), and **peace, justice and strong institutions** (through an emphasis on the role of the state). This societal impact will result from CRIMLA's development of **a strong local knowledge base** on crime in Latin America and close cooperation with the Latin American researchers on the advisory board. These researchers have close and continuous contact with policymakers and other stakeholders who could make use of the knowledge developed in the project.

The main CRIMLA researchers will disseminate results broadly, to increase the societal impact of the project. This will also be of interest for Norwegian policymakers: crime and lack of security are the greatest challenges to development in Latin America, but this fact has not been taken sufficiently into account when developing policies and strategies for this region (e.g. NORAD 2020). It is vital that crime is understood and addressed, before there can be economic, social, health or institutional development in Latin America.

2.3 Communication and exploitation

The target audience is the international sociology, criminology, and political science community – especially academics interested in life-course criminology and/or Latin America. The plan for dissemination includes 15 academic articles, a book describing the project and preparing the ground for a life-course criminology in Latin America (published by a leading university press). Summaries and briefs, in English, Spanish and Norwegian will be posted on project websites and social media. CRIMLA will also publish op-eds in newspapers, communicate on websites, Twitter etc., engage in dialogue with stakeholder groups and participate in conferences, both academic and non-academic.

3. Implementation

3.1 Project manager and project group

Sveinung Sandberg, professor in Criminology at the University of Oslo (UiO), is one of the world's best known qualitative criminologists. In a recent survey of qualitative criminological researchers of the last ten years he ranked third in terms of publications, (with an h index of 30 in the last five years, and a total of 3650 citations). On and off, Sandberg has lived and done research in Mexico City for two years, conducting prison interviews (for the pilot study) and writing about crime more generally in Latin America during the coronavirus pandemic (Sandberg and Fondevila 2021). Throughout the 2021-2022 academic year he will continue to be in Mexico City, so **NFR-funding in 2021 would be highly beneficial** for the implementation of the project. While at CIDE in Mexico City (WP5) he will train research assistants and postdocs in interview techniques, assist with data collection throughout Latin America and be responsible for coding and coordinating the early analysis of data (WP 1, 2, 3). Sandberg will have the main responsibility for academic dissemination (in articles and a book), writing with the other researchers and offering guidance, comments and help.

Gustavo Fondevila, professor at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE) in Mexico City. His research focuses on empirical quantitative comparative criminology in Latin America and he is one of the leading prison scholars in the region. He recently published *Prisons and Crime in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press 2021), which is based on prison surveys he carried out in the same countries that CRIMLA



will study. Fondevila has good contacts in these countries, which will facilitate access to prisons and assist the organization of the project. He will have the main responsibility for data collection, hiring and supervising research assistants, and getting permissions and access to prisons (WP1, 2, 3). He will co-author the main book, and several articles, on the project. His stay in Oslo (WP5) will enable him to follow up postdocs and will facilitate co-authorship and the exchange of knowledge crucial for, and gained by the research.

Carolina Agoff, professor at the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM). Her main research interest is the empirical study of gender violence in settings such as indigenous communities, universities, and among undocumented Latino workers or lower-class urban working women. Her current work focuses on prison population in Mexico. Her extensive knowledge of socio-psychological theory, gender perspectives and cultural analysis will benefit the project immensely. She is one of the leading qualitative social psychologists in Mexico. Agoff will mainly be involved in analysis and writing on data (in WP1, 2, 3). Her stay in Oslo (WP5) will facilitate co-authorship and research and knowledge exchange.

Postdoc1, will take part in data collection in Colombia and Brazil, and write a postdoc project on these data (WP2), utilizing data from the other WPs when relevant. **Postdoc2**, will take part in data collection in Argentina and Chile, and write a postdoc project on this (WP3), also using data from the other WPs when relevant. Both postdocs will get assistance on all practical and academic issues by Sandberg, Fondevila, and Agoff. **Research assistants**: the project will hire local research assistants in each country to help do interviews and transcriptions. **Piotr Chomczyński**, an Associate Professor at the University of Lodz has a scholarship at the European Eurica program at UNAM and has conducted ethnographic research on organized crime in Mexico. He specializes in qualitative methods of sociological research on deviance, adult and juvenile crime, domestic violence and organized drugs crime. He will assist with collecting and analysing data, and also participate in writing (WP 1-3). **Torbjørn Skardhamar**, a Professor at UiO, is an internationally known quantitative life-course criminologist with several major publications on the topic. He is regarded as the most important European criminologist in this field. With Sandberg and Fondevila, he will be responsible for the design of the quantitative life-course pilot study (WP4).

Advisory board, the advisory board (WP6) will meet yearly online, and its members will help with organization, opening doors and providing resources during data collection in their respective countries. They will also be invited to co-author publications on the project. The Latin American members of the advisory board have long academic careers and substantial experience of prison research in their respective countries. Carlsson is the leading European expert on qualitative life-course criminology and Bull is the foremost Norwegian expert on Latin America. All have accepted their roles on the board with enthusiasm:

1. Ana Safranof, University of 3 de Febrero, Argentina,	5. Luis Amaya, Francisco G. University, El Salvador
2. Fabiana Severi, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil	6. Corina Giacomello, University of Chiapas, Mexico
3. Ricardo Lillo, Diego Portales University, Chile	7. Christoffer Carlsson, IFS, Sweden
4. Liliana S. Mejía, Pontifical J. University, Colombia	8. Benedicte Bull, University of Oslo, Norway

3.2 Project organisation and management

	2021	2022	2022	2023	2023	2024	2024	2025
Month	3	6-9	9-15	15-21	21-27	27-33	33-39	39-48
PI Sandberg								
Agoff, Fondevila								
Postdocs								
Chomczyński								
Skardhamer								
Advisory board meeting								
Interviews Mexico and El Salvador								
Interviews Colombia and Brazil								
Interviews Argentina and Chile								
Write academic articles								



Conclude book									
Conference									

Sandberg, Fondevila and Agoff form the core group of senior researchers that have day-to-day responsibility for organizing and conducting the project. Sandberg and the UiO will be in charge of postdocs and the general administration of the project. Fondevila will manage research assistants in Latin America through CIDE. The proposed project design will produce a tightly interwoven group of researchers and solid support for the postdocs at all times (for example, by doing field research in groups, and several research exchanges). It will also facilitate extensive knowledge exchanges, in the first place, between CIDE and UNAM in Mexico and UiO in Norway, but also between advisory board members and other Latin American research networks and European and US research networks on this topic. Cooperation with internationally known life-course criminologists, both quantitative and qualitative, will ensure the academic quality of the project and cooperation with political scientists and Latin American scholars will create a better understanding of its political and societal context. All this combined will ensure the effective management of possibly the most ambitious criminological project based in this region to date – a project with huge implications for anyone interested in the economy, security and social development of Latin America.

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