CHAPTER 2

Armed conflict and failed public security in cities

(Opposite:) **The bodies of people killed in a gang turf war lie on a street in the Rocinha slum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.** (February 2006)

Today one billion people live in slums.[21] This is expected to increase to two billion by 2030. Slums are largely poor, densely populated, unplanned and informal communities in urban or peri-urban areas.[22] In some cities, *most* of the population lives in slums: 60 percent of Nairobi's population lives in slums on only five percent of the city's land.[23] In other cases, slums have gradually merged into each other, spanning hundreds of square kilometres and housing millions. UN-HABITAT estimates that in 2005, 57.4 percent of South Asia's urban population and 71.8 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's urban population were living in slums.[24]

The growth of slums can breed violence and insecurity largely for two reasons. First, their sheer size and population can stretch state capacity to the point at which the state is *unable* to provide these areas with basic public security. Second, state security forces may be *unwilling* to provide security in slums, due to, for example, a lack of incentive to risk their lives entering dangerous areas. In the absence of

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effective public security, slum residents and urban elites alike may seek ways to protect themselves, resulting in the privatization of security. This can, in turn, contribute to a process illustrated in Figure 2.1, in which the failure of public security and the rapid growth of urban slums feed into a cycle in which community security is continually undermined.

The failure of public security can occur both in countries that are experiencing conflict and those that are not — and even in relatively stable states. The violent threats