



BRAZIL

Public (In)Security Experiences in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro

Introduction: Challenges in Combating Organized Crime

In 2020, the Latinobarometer survey evaluated public perceptions on a range of critical issues, including democracy, trust in institutions, the economy, social inequality, justice, crime, and security. Among the questions posed, one particularly stands out and has served as the trigger for this analysis: the perception as to the presence of organized crime, armed groups, drug trafficking organizations, or gangs in the respondents' municipality or neighborhood. The results are especially striking in the case of Brazil, where 75% of respondents confirmed the presence of such groups. This places Brazil at the top of the rankings, with the highest reported prevalence of these criminal elements compared to other Latin American countries.

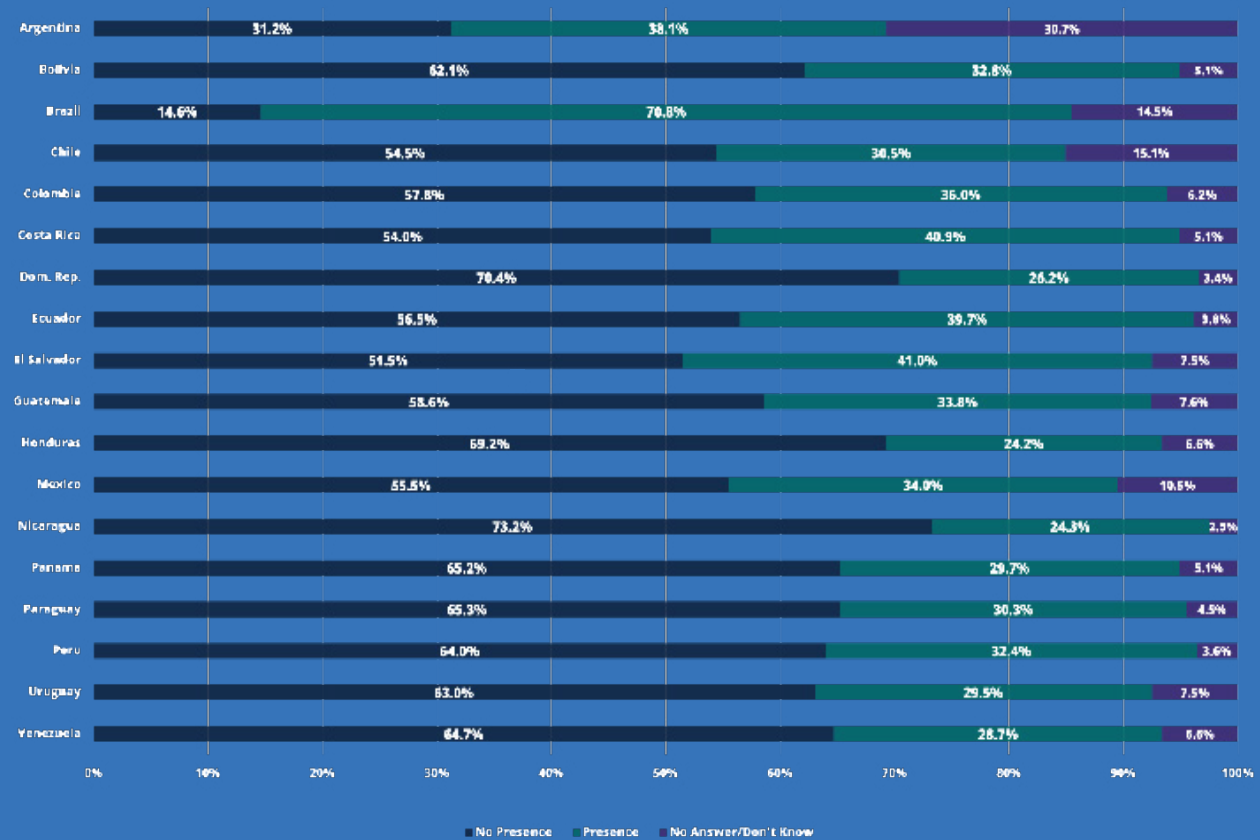
Since at least the early 1990s, there has been a persistent growth of organized criminal groups, initially rooted in the prison system, which have gradually spread to various territories, especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast of the country. These groups originally

gained strength by accumulating capital, primarily through armed and tyrannical control of urban territories and illicit markets, with drug trafficking at the core of their activities. These groups exert significant influence over the lives of populations in the areas they control, usually in urban peripheries, where they regulate various aspects of social relations, such as the local economy, the movement of goods and people, social interactions, entertainment activities (like parties and dances), and parallel systems of justice.

It is common for these groups to also provide forms of assistance to the local community, intertwining aid with the imposition of dominance through force. According to data from the Brazilian Forum on Public Security and Esfera Brasil, there are at least 72 criminal factions involved in drug trafficking.¹ This reality has pushed the fight against organized crime to the top of the national public security agenda, posing numerous challenges to state institutions and the population at large.

GRAPHIC 1: PRESENCE OF ORGANIZED CRIME, ARMED GROUPS, DRUG GROUPS, OR GANGS WHERE YOU LIVE

Source: Latinobarometer 2020.



Four critical factors are essential to understanding the primary challenges in confronting organized crime in the country, which has grown significantly in recent years in terms of financing, geographic presence, transnational ties, and technology, exerting influence through politics, money, and weapons:

1. The erosion of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty in prisons and territories controlled by crime. How can the state reassert its authority over these spaces?
2. The diversity of illicit markets controlled by criminal organizations that generate billions of dollars. How can such markets be identified and dismantled?
3. The pervasiveness of crime and corruption into state institutions, including the criminal justice system (police, judiciary, and prisons). How can corruption be identified and eradicated, particularly within police institutions?
4. The steady increase in violence. How can both police and criminal violence be controlled within the bounds of the law and with respect for human rights?

Methodology

This document aims to provide a clear and informative overview of Brazil's most pressing public security challenges, with special focus on the activities of organized crime in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

As part of a broader regional initiative aimed at developing democratic alternatives for public security policies led by the Rule of Law Program of the Inter-American Dialogue, this project results from a collaborative effort with the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation. The primary goal of this project is to propose effective alternatives to the abusive or militarized policies that have become increasingly prevalent across the Americas in recent years, and to propose feasible solutions within the framework of the rule of law. The goal is to address these issues with a scientific and objective approach, identifying the key challenges and suggesting short- and medium-term solutions, while acknowledging the complexity of the issue.

Recognizing organized crime as the most significant challenge, the project convened a close meeting at the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Institute in São Paulo, bringing together experts from diverse fields of knowledge and government agencies. Participants included sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, legal scholars, experts in international affairs, journalists, community educators, business people, economists, public servants, and policy-makers.

At the meeting, experts engaged in thorough discussions on several nuances of public security, including past challenges, lessons learned over the years, and potential avenues for improving public security. They provided valuable input to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue and identify promising strategies for enhancing public security, strengthening democracy, and effectively communicating these security policies.

This document serves as a summary of that meeting, briefly presenting the main points discussed by the experts, with additional information from the research team. While it does not aim to answer all questions, it serves as a starting point for building consensus, identifying areas warranting deeper discussion.

Why São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro?

Brazil is a very large country, which makes it even more difficult to contain criminal activities. Its vast continental territory of approximately 8.51 million square kilometers is divided into 26 states and the Federal District, or 27 federative units. In 2024, the population was estimated at approximately 217.24 million people,² making Brazil the world's fifth largest country, both in terms of territory and population. Conventionally, the country is divided into five regions.

If we were to account for the different historical, economic, geographical, cultural, political, and social contexts, dimensions that significantly shape criminal activities and criminal control in each area, each region would undoubtedly require its own dedicated report. In considering each of these territories, it is worth noting that in recent decades, Brazil has become a significant "transit corridor" for international drug trafficking routes, especially towards Europe and Africa. This affects all regions of the country, particularly port areas, which are prime targets for territorial disputes.

NORTHERN REGION

In the Northern Region, a complex ecosystem of illicit activities has developed, featuring illegal logging, deforestation, land grabbing, wildlife trafficking, and illegal mining. These criminal activities directly challenge the ability of the country's law enforcement and the Armed Forces to control the territory.

These emerging threats are expanding not only in Brazil but also across other Pan-Amazonian countries. Addressing this challenge requires integrated and coordinated actions by regulatory and public security agencies, which has proven difficult to achieve so far. In addition to the numerous rivers and ports, which are highly targeted for illicit trafficking, the region features several tri-border areas (Brazil-Bolivia-Peru, Brazil-Colombia-Peru, Brazil-Colombia-Venezuela, and Brazil-Venezuela-Guyana). Border control is a significant challenge, not only because of the territorial extension but also because they are key points for trafficking, smuggling, money laundering, and other activities carried out by land, water and air routes.³

NORTHEAST REGION

In the Northeast Region, there is a diversity of factions that violently control and dispute urban territories. These are armed groups that originated in the region, with the most influential being: Família do Norte (FDN), Grupo de Extermínio da Bahia (GEB), and Guardiões do Estado (GDE).⁴ Because of the dynamics and conflicts between these groups, the Northeast is the region with the highest homicide rates, according to the 2024 Brazil Public Security Yearbook [Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública].

MID-WEST REGION

The Mid-West Region faces a variety of challenges related to land conflicts, trafficking routes, deforestation, smuggling, and illegal mining. The extensive borders with Bolivia and Paraguay make it even harder to implement effective border controls.

SOUTHERN REGION

The Southern Region is home to criminal groups such as Os Manos (OM), Bala na Cara (BC), and Primeiro Grupo Catarinense (PGC). In this region, the tri-border area (Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina) is perhaps the most attractive and strategic for organized crime, due to its connectivity potential, demographic density, and geographic position, with land, river, and air routes connecting the three neighboring countries.⁵

SOUTHEAST REGION

This report focuses on the Southeast Region, the one with the largest population and economy, and highest urbanization levels of all Brazilian regions, with special emphasis on the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The reasons for this selection are laid down below:

1. São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have, respectively, the country's largest and second largest populations, with 46 million inhabitants and 17 million inhabitants, respectively;
2. These two states are the operational centers of Brazil's two largest factions: Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV), whose influence spreads to all other regions of the country;
3. Rio de Janeiro was the city to witness the emergence of the militias—clandestine paramilitary groups, mostly composed of military police, firefighters, and civilian police, involved in a wide portfolio of illegal activities.

Violence and Police Lethality in Brazil

Brazil recorded more than 46,000 violent deaths in 2023, resulting in a rate of 22.8 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, primarily resulting from the conflicts among different organized criminal organizations and from the use of lethal force by the police. Violent deaths include murders, robbery leading to death, fatal injury, or police action. The Global Study on Homicide, published by the UN in 2023, reveals that Brazil ranks first globally in absolute numbers. Of the 458,000 homicides registered worldwide in 2021, 10.4% occurred in Brazil, a country that accounts for 3% of the world's population. The global average of violent deaths is 5.8 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Despite having lower crime rates compared to other states, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro still report significant figures. In 2023, São Paulo recorded 3,481 intentional violent deaths. By August 2024, there was a rise in intentional homicides and rapes. Homicides increased by 5.63% compared to the same period in 2023, with 225 cases reported in August 2024, while rapes rose by 8%, with 216 incidents. Property crimes, including robberies and thefts, also saw notable spikes, increasing by 24.57% and 44.13%, respectively.

A Black person in Brazil is nearly four times more likely to be killed by the police than a White person.

The city of São Paulo, the capital of the state of the same name, ranks third among cities with the highest rates of cellphone thefts and robberies, with 1,781.6 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants. In Rio de Janeiro, the number of homicides in 2023 surpassed those in São Paulo, despite having one third of the population of São Paulo. That same year, Rio de Janeiro recorded 3,388 violent deaths, averaging nine per day, which places it third in absolute numbers of violent deaths. By 2024, this number had increased, with 4,270 intentional violent deaths reported. Part of this rise can be attributed to conflicts between criminal groups over territorial control. Despite these increases, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro still register some of the lowest homicide rates among the most densely populated states.

Police lethality remains alarmingly high in Brazil, with 6,393 victims in 2023, marking an increase of 188.9% since 2013 and a 189% rise over the decade from 2013 to 2023. There were 6,393 deaths caused by police intervention between 2022 and 2023 alone. A crucial factor to consider is the profile of the victims, which remains consistent: predominantly young, black men, underscoring the racial dimension of these statistics. A black person is nearly four times more likely to be killed by the police than a white person.

According to the aforementioned Brazil Public Security Yearbook, 82.7% of those killed by the police are black, and of these, 72% are between the ages of 12 and 29. Criminal selectivity appears then as a critical aspect to consider. Racial discrimination and the selective nature of police intervention are present early in the lives of black children and adolescents, as highlighted in the 2023 report "A experiência precoce e racializada com a polícia" [The Early and Racialized Experience with the Police], produced by the Center for the Study of Violence of the University of São Paulo. The report shows that black adolescents in São Paulo were stopped by police up to twice as often at the ages of 11, 12, and 14. The racial disparity is also evident in Brazilian prisons. According to data from the 2024 Brazil Public Security Yearbook, 69.1% of Brazil's prison inmates in 2023 were black.

In addition to the challenges discussed above regarding the criminal justice system's efforts to strengthen institutional legitimacy and effectiveness in the eyes of the public, it is also necessary to consider the inherent difficulties in social control actions in a multiracial society marked by high levels of inequality, poor academic achievement, and structural deficiencies in the labor market. A critical stock-taking of the role of security and justice institutions within this socio-economic context, and the identification of pathways to eliminate discriminatory practices against the poor, black, and marginalized urban populations, remain among the key challenges in the field.

Brazil's Social Context and the Democratic Transition

Brazil has concerning levels of economic and social inequality. According to the World Bank, the Gini Index—a measure of a country's income inequality—was 0.53 in 2021,⁶ reflecting pronounced inequality and ranking Brazil among the world's most unequal nations. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) indicates that by 2020, the wealthiest 1% of Brazilians controlled about 28% of the country's total income, while roughly 27% of the population lived on less than \$5.50 per day. These inequalities also impact other areas of social life, such as access to healthcare, education, employment, and leisure. Brazil continues to grapple with persistent inequalities, further compounded by racism and discrimination against the black population.

Over the nearly forty years gone by since its return to democracy, the country has gone through various cycles of debates on the agendas of public security reform and institutional development. During the political transition to democracy, the focus was on overcoming the negative legacy of the military dictatorship on police work practices. In the initial period of the New Republic, a series of institutional reforms were undertaken with the aim of eradicating the tradition of arbitrariness, as well as the blatant disregard for guarantees or rights by prisons and police forces under the authoritarian regime.

The implementation of the new democratic standard in the area of public security institutions progressed more slowly than in other areas. The public security agenda from the 1990s onwards was driven by the adoption of the new Federal Constitution in 1988 and the first cycles of open and free elections, in which the issues of security and justice also began to shape electoral debates. Several states have reformed their police academy curricula, adopted standard operating procedures and programs to curb police lethality, reformed their training procedures, strengthened their inspectorate structures, created of police ombudsmen, expanded the role of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the external control of police activity, and made progress towards the investigation and control of death squads with police officers among their members. This broad reform agenda progressed without much visibility on the front line of political-electoral debate, but was gradually institutionalized in the security and justice secretariats of Brazil's main states. Policies such as the creation of the PRONASCI program attempted to articulate an institutional development agenda for the police with designs for pacification and social inclusion

policies. Another important milestone in this journey was the creation of the Unified Public Security System (SUSP), a proposal that has been slowly evolving towards institutional consolidation, which fundamentally seeks to promote coordination and facilitate cooperation between federative agencies in the area.

Also, an important dimension in this debate concerns the problems faced by the Brazilian prison system. There are many political, social, and economic challenges involving prisons, such as the occurrence of possible selective penalization and overcrowding. According to the latest survey by the National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN), in 2023, the number of prisoners was approximately 820,000, thus exceeding facilities' capacity by 25%. This points to a serious level of overcrowding.

In Brazil, the richest 1% controls 28% of the country's income, while 27% of the population lives on less than R\$5.50 per day.

According to the National Secretariat of Criminal Policy, the country's most overcrowded facility is the Tiago Teles de Castro Domingues Prison, with a population three times its design capacity. This prison, located in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, has 640 places and hosts 1,855 inmates, i.e., 190% above its maximum capacity. Prisons in São Paulo face similar issues, holding the largest prison population in the country and housing 43,700 inmates in excess of their capacity. There are 195,700 individuals for 152,000 available spots, which represents a 29% capacity gap. Beyond structural and overcrowding issues, there is the problem of criminal organizations operating within the prisons.

In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the prison system functions as a kind of command center for the activities of the PCC and the CV. These leading criminal networks organize, deliberate, and issue orders from within the prisons to their territories.

Understanding the Issue of Organized Crime: Underneath the Tip of the Iceberg

The economic and social impacts imposed by so-called organized crime must be addressed and understood broadly. An objective approach to this issue calls for a thorough reflection on the wide range of criminal activities across the different territories. In this regard, it must be noted that criminal activities in Brazil are not limited to drug trafficking. There is an intricate network of relationships intertwining money laundering, financial fraud, hotel and gas station management, arms trade, extortion, security services, real estate rentals, TV and internet services, betting, online scams, fuel smuggling, and the illegal financing of political campaigns.

The range of activities is broader than traditionally thought and is constantly expanding. A concerning aspect is the recent involvement of organized crime in the fuel industry, which has been plagued by smuggling, counterfeiting, and tax evasion. It is estimated that the Brazilian economy loses around 30 billion reais annually on account of the fraud in this industry. Following the money trail is a complex but yet crucial strategy to understand the true scale and reach of these activities. This parallel economy moves significant amounts of money, not solely from cocaine trafficking.

The PCC controls a parallel economy, generating over 1 billion dollars annually.

The PCC may plausibly be deemed Brazil's most influential criminal faction. Although its origins may be traced to the state of São Paulo, it now operates in all Brazilian states.⁷ Over the past 20 years, the group's revenues have grown exponentially. Ten years ago, the PCC was making around 40 million annually. In 2024, it has accumulated revenues in excess of 1 billion dollars. The PCC can now be seen as a large federation of criminal factions overseeing market activities, much like a regulatory agency, controlling pricing, access, and opportunities. It has established a horizontal organizational and logistical structure that attracts other groups.⁸ Under this structure, there is no need to be affiliated with the PCC to benefit from the services

they provide, as they impose rules, standardization, conduct norms, prices, etc. In this light, conflicts with the authorities are not good for business, so levels of violence are always strictly controlled by the leadership.

The case of Rio de Janeiro is no less complex, especially given the disputes between the CV and the militias—paramilitary groups formed mainly by military police, firefighters, and civil police officers involved in a wide range of illegal activities. While the CV sees itself as a group opposing the state apparatus, the militias are composed of corrupt police officers.⁹ The militias' business model has been spreading to other states, such as São Paulo. Rio de Janeiro's police strategies for combating organized crime have contributed to the rise of militias. Years of armed territorial occupation by the police allowed certain groups to use the state's force for private purposes. According to the Group for the Study of New Illegalisms (GENI) from the Federal Fluminense University, about 30% of the territory of Rio de Janeiro is controlled by criminal groups.¹⁰

Both the militia and the CV dominate areas where most activities are taxed, including commerce, housing, communications, energy, water, and entertainment. This again shows their revenue-generating activities extend far beyond drug trafficking, making the recovery of the territories controlled by these factions and militias—in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro—one of the most pressing challenges for state authorities.

The organizational structure of crime in Brazil may be better understood through the notion of "Criminal Insurgency", which refers to groups that operate similarly to rebel armies, with heavily armed "soldiers" controlling areas, as if they were in a state of war. However, unlike political insurgencies, the factions in Brazil are primarily financially driven, seeking profit rather than political power.¹¹ Additionally, one important element to consider is that these groups have significant capacity to infiltrate various areas of public and political life. It is precisely in this gray zone, between legal and illegal activities, that these problems become more acute and harder to identify.

A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF THE PUBLIC SECURITY AGENDA

The Latinobarometer data cited in the introduction ranks Brazil among the Latin American countries with **the highest rates of perceived organized crime presence in society**. In fact, since the 1980s, the country has become more violent every year. The homicide rate has risen almost uninterruptedly for more than four decades. In 2016, the country reached an all-time high of 62,000 intentional violent deaths, with a rate of 30.3 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Since 2016, the number of intentional violent deaths has fallen in the country, but Brazil is still the 11th most violent country in the world, according to the World Health Organization's most recent study on homicide. An important fact to consider in this diagnosis of the public security context is that the country is in a group of countries that are equally violent but much poorer, such as El Salvador, Venezuela, Lesotho, Guatemala and Honduras.

- ▶ **Prison System and Violence:** There are over **700,000 inmates in the country's prison system, with a shortage of around 350,000 beds**. The overcrowding, lack of health care and constant violations of inmates' basic rights destroy any possible expectation of a significant reduction in criminal recidivism. On the contrary, these are precisely the conditions that allow criminal organizations to thrive. Estimates from 2018 indicate that the cost of crime rose from 113 billion to 285 billion reais between 1996 and 2015, which accounts for 4.38% of national revenues.
- ▶ **Fragmentation of the Institutional Model:** The country's vulnerability can largely be attributed to the **fragmented and overlapping institutional model of public security**. Several agencies carry out the same work, with no mutual visibility. Moreover, coordination and articulation efforts are sporadic, reaching operational levels at best. There are no national public security databases to enable comparison of states performance in this area and identify the system's strengths and weaknesses. The creation of the Ministry of Public Security in 2018 was an effort in the right direction, but it was soon discontinued. The creation of the Unified Public Security System (SUSP), also in 2018, was another positive sign, but it remains a promise awaiting proper regulation.
- ▶ **Challenges of Law Enforcement Forces:** The police, investigative, and prison systems are not up to the challenges they face. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, there is a shared understanding that the Military Police's preventive patrolling is ineffective, while their operations often exhibit a pattern of violence, accounting for 17% of all violent deaths in 2017. Similarly, the poor performance of the Civil Police in Rio de Janeiro is reflected in the impunity of unresolved crimes; with a meager 12% of reported crimes resulting in criminal charges in 2015. The state's prison system mirrors this inefficiency, marked by a notorious inability to enforce sentences as prescribed by law, allowing criminals to continue to pursue illegal activities with significant freedom even from prison.
- ▶ **Coordination and Training:** Although, under Brazil's federal structure, the primary responsibility for public security lies with state administrations, the Federal Government plays a key role in coordinating public security agencies. Through the National Public Security Secretariat, the Federal Government has strengthened its capabilities to train and certify police officers through different administrations and

has contributed to discussions on establishing a national minimum curriculum for police training.

The public security and criminal justice policy agenda proposed below focuses on the need to develop **mechanisms capable of increasing coordination and interoperability between law enforcement and criminal justice systems at the federal and state levels**. Other important elements in this agenda involve:

- ▶ Curbing police lethality.
- ▶ Increasing internal and external oversight of police activities.
- ▶ Strengthening arms and ammunition control strategies.

COORDINATION AMONG FEDERAL AGENCIES

It is particularly important to promote the coordination among federal law enforcement agencies and to encourage initiatives such as: establishing minimum quality standards for law enforcement and prisons (by adopting technical norms such as ISO standards), creating standardized procedures for the production of statistical data, developing training programs for police forces, creating funding mechanisms to enhance the technical and operational capacity of police agencies, improving the prison system, and implementing secure systems for intelligence data sharing. The Unified Public Security System (SUSP) offers a pathway for the development of effective policies in these areas, while respecting the country's federal organization while strengthening the local capabilities of states and municipalities.

USE OF POLICE BODY-WORN CAMERAS

The adoption of police body-worn cameras, particularly the pioneering experiences in São Paulo and Santa Catarina, has proven effective in reducing both police lethality and the number of on-duty officer deaths, besides strengthening citizen security. The program essentially mandates the use of cameras affixed to police uniforms, which record officers' daily work. The footage is stored in a database and can be accessed on an as-needed basis.

The Olho Vivo Program was first implemented by São Paulo's military police in the 2020s. By the end of 2022, 62 of the 135 Military Police corps in the state of São Paulo had adopted the program, accounting for 45.9% of total officers. According to data from the Brazilian Forum on Public Security, there was a 62.7% reduction in deaths caused by interventions of on-duty military police officers. In Rio de Janeiro, body-worn cameras were first implemented for the Military Police in 2021, prioritizing battalions with high lethality rates. The implementation of this policy showed a reduction in fatalities caused by police interventions, which led to the program's expansion. By 2023, the police force had equipped 42 battalions with body camera monitoring.

In 2024, deaths due to police interventions dropped by 45% compared to 2023. Despite these positive outcomes in reducing fatalities, the program has faced resistance from some segments of the police, political parties, and public opinion aligned with political right-wingers, who advocate for full police

autonomy in deciding on approach and response procedures. Even within the police forces, there is no consensus on the cameras: some argue that the program hinders police work and represents an unnecessary public expense, while others contend that the cameras provide greater security to their operations, as they ensure the preservation of evidence of their actions.

BORDER MANAGEMENT

A sensitive issue on the agenda is border management. Over the last two decades, programs have been created to develop mechanisms for shared management and integration of information and intelligence systems between different levels of government and the agencies responsible for border control. However, the resources invested are still insufficient to guarantee effective coordination and to increase the capacity to manage monitoring technology and the operational deployment of police forces in sensitive areas.

Progress in this area depends on simultaneous efforts in diplomacy and international assistance to the most vulnerable neighboring countries, such as Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru. In addition, there is the great challenge of welcoming the Venezuelan diaspora, which is being accompanied by the expansion of Tren de Aragua, one of the most aggressive criminal organizations in South America. Initiatives such as the Integrated Border Monitoring System (SISFRON) and the Amazon Protection System (Sipam) provide inspiring examples in this field.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM

There is heated debate in the National Congress on the need to reform the country's criminal laws, which could bring benefits in containing crime, especially through changes to the Lei de Execução Penal (Criminal Enforcement Act) (LEP). One of the most relevant points in this debate is the reduction of sentence progression mechanisms for repeat offenders, perpetrators of violent crimes, or those with proven ties to criminal organizations. Strengthening the capacity to neutralize offenders convicted by the courts is one of the country's major challenges, as it could help disrupt the criminal activities of criminal organization leaders within the prison system. An amendment to the LEP would pave the way for the authorities to swiftly neutralize dangerous offenders already convicted of a crime.

CRIME-SOLVING CAPACITY

A critical aspect of Brazil's criminal system is its poor crime-solving capacity. The current performance of state civil police is far from attaining international standards. Performance target systems for these institutions could reverse this pattern of poor outcomes without significant investments in new hires, for example, by creating a national homicide investigation indicator to measure and monitor the progress of criminal investigations in each state, rewarding and incentivizing those who adequately perform their duties with priority access to federal funds.

EXPANDING THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

On the management side, it might be worth exploring the possibility of expanding the scope of the Ministry of Justice and Public, particularly with regard to the development of a system of performance targets for police forces and the provision of management platforms to be offered to states and large municipalities. Results-based management models based on performance targets have been implemented throughout the country over the last two decades with good outcomes.

These measures make it possible to stimulate increased police activity, law-enforcement accountability, improved management and planning of public security policy at state and federal levels. The Unified Public Security System can play the role of promoter and disseminator of results-based management systems for states and municipalities.

The fight against organized crime in Brazil is progressing slowly and there are still no clear priorities defined at federal level by the MJSP. Organized crime has a profound impact on legal trade, the service sector (including financial services), the state bureaucracy, the police and the country's politics. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to develop new ways of organizing, operating and coordinating the security forces, in particular by promoting the integration of police intelligence and information systems (at state and federal level), internal control bodies, the Public Prosecutor's Office, etc., in order to enable the exchange of information and strategic management of the problem of organized crime in the country.

FIREARM CONTROL SYSTEM

Another priority in the area is the restoration of the regulatory capacity of the firearm control system. Law No. 10,826, enacted on December 22, 2003, outlined the current rules for the possession, carrying, and commercialization of firearms and ammunition. In addition to increased oversight, the program also promoted voluntary disarmament campaigns, encouraging the population to surrender weapons in exchange for compensation. These campaigns contributed to the removal of hundreds of thousands of weapons from circulation.

An issue not yet addressed involves tracking firearms and ammunition produced, imported, and sold in the country. Strengthening SINARM and promoting integration with the SIGMA system is an important ongoing process that needs to be reinforced and expanded. The incumbent administration has taken an important step by revoking regulations that were not in compliance with the Disarmament Statute. Investigations by Gaeco (Special Task Force for the Repression of Organized Crime) of the São Paulo Public Prosecutor's Office regarding the participation of CACs (Collectors, Sport Shooters, and Hunters) in renting weapons to criminal organizations engaged in "controlling cities" highlight the need to develop articulate actions against the illegal use of firearms and ammunition in the country.

MANAGEMENT OF THE PRISON SYSTEM

Within the prison system, there is a need for adequate actions to promote a national policy to improve the management of federal and state prisons and reduce pretrial detention. The country has almost 750,000 prisoners (or 360 per 100,000 inhabitants) serving sentences with an occupancy rate of 197% (almost two prisoners per spot), with 45% of these prisoners serving sentences for property crimes and 28% for drug-related offenses. Between 35% and 40% of these prisoners are awaiting trial. Pretrial detention has an undesirable impact on factors such as prisoners' income and reinsertion in the labor market, besides the fact that they are forced to socialize with convicted organized criminals in the prison system.

OPTIMIZATION OF CUSTODY HEARINGS

Also along the lines of criminal enforcement, the optimization of custody hearings, a significant legal innovation implemented in 2015 by the National Council of Justice (CNJ), could drive a major advancement. This measure, widely adopted throughout the country, could expedite the appearance of individuals arrested in flagrante delicto to a judge, reducing the time spent in custody and encouraging the use of alternative measures to pretrial detention in non-violent crimes or offenses, provided there is no actual threat against third parties.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

One last important aspect to consider in this debate is community engagement, which is a fundamental element in building effective public security. Community Security Councils (CONSEGs), created in the 1980s, have proven to be a relevant strategy for engaging civil society and promoting its active participation in public security discussions. These councils function as forums for dialogue among citizens, community leaders, government representatives, and security forces such as the military police and the civil police. Their aim is to discuss local problems related to crime and violence and to seek joint solutions. Interaction between different sectors is the hallmark of this program, which has become a key instrument of community policing, a model that emphasizes proximity and partnership between the police and the community.

CONSEGs were first implemented in São Paulo and later expanded to other states, customizing them to each regional context. Despite challenges such as low community participation in some localities, limited resources and difficulties in reaching all sectors of society, the Community Security Councils remain one of the main channels of communication between civil society and law enforcement, promoting transparency, accountability and the construction of crime prevention strategies.

Public Security Institutional Responsibilities

The organization of law enforcement in Brazil stands out for the fragmented work of the different police and security forces operating at the state and federal levels, complemented by municipal guards, which, despite not recognized as law enforcement, have seen a steady and gradual increase of their functions.

- ▶ **The Federal Police (PF)** is responsible for the security of federal authorities, border and airport control, and the investigation of crimes of national reach such as drug-trafficking, financial crimes, corruption and cybercrime.
- ▶ **The Federal Highway Police (PRF)** monitors federal highways, vehicle traffic, and crimes on the roads (such as drug trafficking and smuggling).
- ▶ **The State Civil Police** acts as judicial police, responsible for conducting criminal investigations, which are forwarded to the state Public Prosecutor's Office, responsible for overseeing the investigations and filing charges with the judiciary.
- ▶ **The State Military Police** is responsible for preventive policing, crime prevention, public order maintenance, emergency cases, and controlling public disturbances.

When the Military Police make arrests and seize offenders, they must bring the cases to the Civil Police, responsible for opening police investigations. In some states, such as São Paulo, the Military Police provide direct support to the criminal investigations conducted by the Public Prosecutor's Office, assisting in investigations and executing operations. Municipal Guards are municipal forces without constitutional police status. They operate under the mayor's command and play the role of public agents responsible for protecting public property and facilities, secondarily assisting state police upon request.

Constitutional Amendment No. 104, of 2019, created federal, state, and federal district criminal police forces responsible for intelligence activities, control, and management of the prison system. There is a communication problem between police forces in Brazil, resulting in lack of synergy and making it difficult to articulate efforts to combat crime.

Public security in Brazil is fragmented among different police forces, resulting in a lack of communication that hinders an integrated approach to fighting crime.

CONCLUSIONS

Citizens will willingly relinquish guarantees when living in fear. Contrary to the growing regional narrative that preaches that the only way to strengthen security is by sacrificing individual rights and democracy, we believe in building a democratic security agenda to enhance the efficiency of both police forces and the judicial system in fighting crime. The best possible response to the threats posed by crime in all of its forms is to boost the respect for individual rights and the law, not to undermine them. To start working toward these goals, any security policy rooted in the rule of law must necessarily feature these four pillars:

1 EFFECTIVE CRIMINAL SANCTION AND PREVENTION

Measures articulating an effective criminal enforcement policy in line with due process of law, including the investigation, prosecution and arrest of criminal offenders with social policies seeking to mitigate the conditions that lead people, especially the youth, to engage in criminal activities.

2 NONPARTISAN POLICIES

This articulation would require an approach transcending the ideological divide that tends to characterize public policies in Latin America, since it requires the combination of punitive measures, social protection policies and expanded access to justice. These are not incompatible, and there is no reason to continue to seem as antagonistic in response to partisan politics.

3 ENDURING SECURITY POLICIES

Given the complexity of addressing the structural causes of crime, it is necessary to think of long-lasting security policies, which inevitably require a consensus among different political forces, regardless of who is (or will be) in power and who is (or will be) in the opposition.

4 REGIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST CRIME

Due to the transnational reach of organized crime, no policy to address it is viable without regional coordination and cooperation.

5 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

However, even a public policy encompassing all the elements described below would prove of limited utility if it fails to be effectively communicated to the population. Without this, there will be neither citizen engagement nor commitment to the matter, nor incentives for politicians, relying on votes to attain and maintain power, to appropriate this initiative and promote implementation. A **strategic communication policy** is hence fundamental to the success of any security policy and to begin reshaping the prevailing narrative in the region.

Besides effective communication and transparency, the control of the use of state force also plays a fundamental role in the planning, implementation, and effectiveness of public security policies. **Monitoring and controlling police actions** is essential to guarantee legitimacy and the use of force within the limits of the law and in respect of human rights. This is an efficient way to prevent abuse and corruption and to stimulate public trust in the public institutions responsible for security and crime control.

Clear and straightforward communication between the state and society is another fundamental element. Open dialogue and transparency allow public security policies to be relatable, understood, and discussed by citizens. The flow of communication between state institutions is also vital for the full implementation of these policies. Additionally, broad and democratic dialogue enables policies to be adjusted in response to the needs of the population, increasing their effectiveness, support, and participation.

Finally, **transparent monitoring and dialogue processes** allow for an effective and objective assessment of security policies, enabling the correction of failures and the expansion of successful practices. For this structure to be sustainable, it is essential to put in place a permanent policy for the production, management, and access to qualified data on the subject. These three elements, when adequately integrated, guarantee the construction of a more effective and just public security system aligned with fundamental democratic rights, fostering an environment of greater security and social peace.

ENDNOTES

1. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2024/06/25/brasil-tem-72-faccoes-criminosas-e-falta-bracos-para-seguir-o-dinheiro.ghml>
2. Estimates based on data from several sources, including demographic projections by the United Nations and other specialized organizations, such as PopulationPyramid.net.
3. For more information on the dynamics of crime and crime control on Brazilian borders, see: Misse, Michel. Final Report for the Project "Gestão da Política de Segurança Pública nas Regiões de Fronteira". Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ- NECVU, 2014.
4. For more information on the factions operating in the Northeast, see: PAIVA, Luiz Fábio S. "AQUI NÃO TEM GANGUE, TEM FACÇÃO": as transformações sociais do crime em Fortaleza, Brasil. Caderno CRH, v. 32, n. 85, pp. 165-184, 2019.
5. In addition to the 2014 NECVU report cited above, for more information see: DUARTE, Tiaraju Salini; PINHEIRO, Robinson Santos. Escalas territoriais e as fações no Rio Grande do Sul: A expansão do crime organizado para a fronteira do Brasil com o Uruguai. Geographic Bulletin of Rio Grande do Sul, n. 34, pp. 78-98, 2019; CIPRIANI, Marcelli; DE AZEVEDO, Rodrigo Ghiringhelli. Um estudo comparativo entre fações: o cenário de Porto Alegre e o de São Paulo. Sistema Penal & Violência (Online), 2016.
6. <https://geni.uff.br/2022/09/13/mapa-historico-dos-grupos-armados-no-rio-de-janeiro/>
7. DIAS, Camila Caldeira Nunes. Da pulverização ao monopólio da violência: expansão e consolidação do Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) no sistema carcerário paulista. 2011. Doctoral thesis. Universidade de São Paulo; BIONDI, Karina. Junto e misturado: uma etnografia do PCC. Terceiro Nome Publishing House, 2018.
8. See FELTRAN, Gabriel. Irmãos: uma história do PCC. Companhia das Letras Publishing House, 2018.
9. See MANSO, Bruno Paes. REPUBLICA DE LAS MILICIAS. Todavia Publishing House, 2020.
10. <https://geni.uff.br/2022/09/13/mapa-historico-dos-grupos-armados-no-rio-de-janeiro/>
11. See MANSO, Bruno Paes; DIAS, Camila Nunes. A guerra: a ascensão do PCC e o mundo do crime no Brasil. Editora Todavia SA, 2018.

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