

Drugs and Drug Trafficking in Brazil: Trends and Policies

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Improving Global Drug Policy: Comparative Perspectives and UNGASS 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

- Brazil is one of the most violent countries in the world with a national homicide rate of 27.1 per 100,000 inhabitants. A large part of this violence and criminality can be linked to arms and drug trafficking operations by organized crime groups.
- Brazil's increased domestic drug consumption in recent years has affected the domestic drug market and changed the structure, profile, and modes of operation of organized crime groups.
- In 2006, Brazil adopted a new drug law intended to make a clear and definitive distinction between drug users and dealers. However, a discriminatory culture in the justice system, combined with great discretion given to the authorities to classify offenses as trafficking, resulted in increased imprisonment of addicts.
- Today, Brazil has the world's fourth largest imprisoned population, which points to the need for alternatives in dealing with violence and crime, particularly when related to drug consumption.
- Brazil boasts innovative programs, such as the São Paulo de Braços Abertos program and the Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora in Rio de Janeiro, but each of these faces complex challenges to their success.

Policy Recommendations

- Brazil needs criminal justice system reform, together with improved drug legislation that classifies offenses more precisely, to minimize the discretionary imprisonment of addicts.
- Brazil should develop improved mechanisms to prevent police brutality and lethality, and should also adopt reforms to improve police efficiency and effectiveness.
- Brazil should mainstream the concept of prevention in its domestic drug policy programs.

Introduction

Urban violence and crime have been rising in Brazil for the past four decades, despite progressive improvement in the country's social and economic conditions.¹ Violence is usually recognized as a multi-causal phenomenon in Brazil, linked to a broader social and economic context. Violence should also be understood as a result of the activities of organized crime groups who run illegal drugs and firearms markets, combined with weak institutions and poor policy responses.

This paper will examine the operational models of Brazilian organized crime groups, the changes in drug market and consumption patterns in the country, and how a cycle that feeds violence is established in tension with new legislation and policy responses. By analyzing initiatives such as a program to reduce crack use in São Paulo (São Paulo de Braços Abertos) and the Police Pacification Units (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora, UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro, the paper points to the limits of the current conceptualization of safety and security in Brazil and indicates how an understanding of these limits should be used to shape new policy responses.

Background and Context

In the past decade, Latin American countries have experienced undeniable advances in their financial and economic conditions. While this has changed countries' economic situations, it has not necessarily engendered the same impact in areas related to social and human development. Thus in much of the region,

economic development and growth coincide with numerous and persistent social challenges. Crime and violence-related issues are particularly critical, making public safety a priority for governments, civil society, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the region.²

Extremely high homicide rates affect many countries in the region. According to a recent report published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Latin America registers approximately 100,000 homicides per year.³ Moreover, Latin America is the only region in the world where homicides increased between 2000 and 2010.⁴ Homicides particularly affect the young, especially young men.⁵ Much of this violence is perpetrated by organized crime groups linked to drug, gun, and human trafficking, among other activities. But the violence is also an outcome of the policy responses adopted by Latin American countries.

Latin America's largest economy, Brazil, follows this regional pattern of rapid development coupled with lingering social challenges. In the last decade, 47 million Brazilians have obtained formal jobs. Between 2001 and 2011, 16 million jobs were created. Unemployment reached its lowest level, falling from 12.3 percent in 2003 to 5.5 percent in 2012, while the average salary of Brazilian workers increased by 24 percent during the same period.⁶ Furthermore, the number of Brazilians with higher education, formal jobs, or who own their own businesses has increased dramatically in the last decade.⁷ Thirty-seven million people have come out of poverty and joined Brazil's middle class.⁸

¹ Maia Fortes contributed valuable research assistance to this paper.

² United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014. Seguridad Ciudadana con rostro humano: diagnóstico y propuestas para América Latina* (Panama: UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013), 285, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/img/IDH/IDH-AL%20Informe%20completo.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, v.

⁵ The UNDP study also identifies burglary as one of the most frequent types of crime committed in Latin America. Aggravated burglary, which is always coupled with violence, has been increasing, as has commerce in stolen goods.

⁶ National Secretariat for Strategic Affairs, *Vozes da Nova Classe Média* (Brasília: National Secretariat for Strategic Affairs, 2013), 32, <http://www.sae.gov.br/vozesdaclassemedia/>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

At the same time, however, Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. Intense and rapid urbanization led to unplanned and haphazard expansions of cities, creating vulnerable areas lacking basic infrastructure, public goods, or an effective presence of the state. These *favelas*, *morros*, and *periferias* are epicenters of violence, with the highest numbers of homicides and other violent crimes in the country. Although often subject to the control of organized crime groups and marginalized by the rest of society, communities in these areas nonetheless maintain full and culturally-rich lives.⁹ This urban divide—determined by spatial and social factors—characterizes Brazilian cities.

Overall, Brazil is one of the most violent countries in the world, with a homicide rate of 27.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011.¹⁰ As in other parts of Southern and Central America, a large part of this violence and criminality can be linked to organized crime groups participating in drug trafficking. The murder victims are frequently young black men from poor urban areas who are constantly recruited by drug gangs. At the same time, the Brazilian military police,¹¹ the principal law enforcement units dealing with gangs and organized crime groups, has one of the highest fatality rates in the world. According to the Brazilian Forum of Public Safety, the military police kills an extraordinary six civilians a day.¹² Deaths caused by the police of Rio de Janeiro grew 40 percent between 2013 and 2014 alone, from 416 in 2013 to 582 deaths in 2014.¹³

This combination of weak state presence, spatial segregation, and territorial control by non-state actors is essential for understanding the characteristics and behavior of organized crime groups as well as the structure of the illicit drug market in Brazil today.

Drug Trends and Their Impact on the Illegal Drug Market

Significant changes have taken place in Brazil's illicit drug market in the past decade, affecting the structure, profile, and modes of operation of organized crime groups.¹⁴ These changes reflect an evolution of global drug markets and the significant rise of drug consumption in Brazil. Due to Brazil's vast land borders with all three major production sources of cocaine—Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia—Brazil emerged over the past decade as a privileged transit point for cocaine smuggling to Europe through Central and West Africa. In 2011, more than half of the cocaine seized in Brazil came from Bolivia (54 percent), followed by Peru (38 percent), and Colombia (7.5 percent).¹⁵ Its long coastline facilitates easy access to the Atlantic Ocean, to Africa, and ultimately to the Iberian Peninsula. The linguistic and cultural ties with Portugal and Lusophone African countries also seem to advantage Brazilian drug traffickers: Portugal seizes more cocaine shipments originating in Brazil than Spain does, and the number of seizures is growing.¹⁶ This flow of cocaine through (and increasingly to) Brazil is the dominant factor affecting trends in drug use, drug trafficking, and illicit markets in this country.

⁹ Paula Miraglia, "Homicídios: guias para a interpretação da violência na cidade," in *São Paulo: Novos percursos e atores - sociedade, cultura e política*, eds. Lúcio Kowarick and Eduardo Marques (São Paulo: Editora 34/Centro de Estudos da Metrópole, 2011), 321-345.

¹⁰ Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz, *Mapa da Violência* (Brasília: General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, 2013), 33, http://www.mapadaviolencia.org.br/pdf/2013/mapa2013_homicidios_juventude.pdf.

¹¹ The name Polícia Militar (military police) is misleading, as these state-level agencies retain only nominal links to the armed forces, legally serving as a reserve component should national military mobilization take place. The military police provides routine policing throughout Brazil.

¹² Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (FBSP), *Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2014* (São Paulo: FBSP, 2014), 6, <http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/storage/download/8anuariobsp.pdf>.

¹³ According to data released by the Public Security Institute (ISP), an agency of the State Security Secretary. See "Mortes provocadas pela polícia aumentam 40% no Rio," *Agência Brasil*, January 24, 2015, <http://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/redacao/2015/01/24/mortes-provocadas-pela-policia-aumentam-40-no-rio.htm>.

¹⁴ Karina Biondi, "Relações políticas e termos criminosos – o PCC e uma teoria do irmão-rede," *Teoria e Sociedade* 15, no. 2 (2007): 206-235; Gabriel Feltran, "Resposta ilegal ao crime: repertórios da justiça nas periferias de São Paulo" (paper, 32nd Annual Meeting of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in the Social Sciences [ANPOCS], Caxambu-MG, Brazil, 2008); and Adalton Marques, "'Liderança', 'proceder' e 'igualdade': uma etnografia das relações políticas no Primeiro Comando da Capital," *Etnográfica* 14, no. 2 (2010): 311-335, <http://www.scielo.oces.mctes.pt/pdf/etn/v14n2/v14n2a05>.

¹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2013* (Vienna: United Nations, 2013), 42, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/secured/wdr/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-4.

Drug Use in Brazil

Brazil has recently become a key destination country for cocaine. Indeed, the consumption of cocaine and crack has skyrocketed in the past decade. Although cocaine use in North America decreased significantly between 2006 and 2012, the annual prevalence of cocaine use among Brazil's college students has remained the same, at 3 percent.¹⁷ The estimated prevalence of cocaine use among the general population is estimated at 1.75 percent; this is also consistent with the increasing trend of cocaine use in Brazil.¹⁸ The use of cocaine has more than doubled since 2005—when about 0.7 percent of the population had used cocaine—and is four times higher than the average worldwide (0.37 percent).¹⁹ The growth of the country's urban population and increases in affluence and disposable income appear to be the principal causes of expanding drug use.

The expansion of crack use follows a different trajectory in Brazil. For many years, drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro informally banned its commercialization based on its lower profit margin, and its high capacity to destroy consumers' lives and the associated revenues they provide. Although the drug was present on the streets of São Paulo since the early 1990s and emerged in the city of Belo Horizonte in 1995, Rio de Janeiro traffickers prohibited its commercialization until at least 2001.²⁰ After 2001, crack began to be

sold due to pressure from one of Brazil's largest criminal organizations, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (First Capital Command, PCC).²¹ Based largely in São Paulo, the PCC at that point refused to sell shipments of cocaine to other significant criminal organizations in Rio de Janeiro—such as Comando Vermelho (Red Command)—without including crack in the transaction.²²

Since then, the entire country has experienced a continuous increase in crack use. Two household surveys on the use of psychotropic drugs in Brazil conducted in 2001 and 2005 by the Centro Brasileiro de Informações Sobre Drogas—a non-profit organization managed by the Federal University of São Paulo's Department of Medicine—revealed that the number of people aged 12 to 65 who had tried the drug nearly doubled in the four years between the surveys, from 0.4 to 0.7 percent of Brazil's population.²³ The surveys also recorded increasing use trends for virtually all types of drugs, including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and cocaine.²⁴

A 2012 study found that in the 26 state capitals and the federal district, 0.81 percent of the population consumed crack (or similar cocaine-based drugs such as *oxi* or *merla*) on a regular basis (i.e., for at least 25 days over the six months prior to the research), representing about 370,000 users, of which 50,000 are minors.²⁵ Overall, the study also estimates

¹⁷ Ibid., 37, 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹ “Tendência é de aumento do consumo, diz estudo,” *Em Discussão!* 2, no. 8 (August 2011): 25-26, http://www.senado.gov.br/noticias/Jornal/emdiscussao/Upload/201104%20-%20agosto/pdf/em%20discuss%C3%A3o!_agosto_2011_internet.pdf; and UNODC, *World Drug Report 2013*, 38.

²⁰ Luciane Raupp and Rubens de Camargo Ferreira Adorno, “Circuitos de uso de crack na região central da cidade de São Paulo (SP, Brazil),” *Ciência e Saúde Coletiva* 16, no. 5 (2011): 2613-2622.

²¹ Mario Hugo Monken, “PCC fornece crack para o Rio, diz polícia,” *Folha de S. Paulo*, November 2, 2002, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/cotidian/f0511200217.htm>.

²² Pedro Dantas, “Delegado diz que PCC levou Cracolândia para o Rio,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, September 26, 2008, <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,delegado-diz-que-pcc-levou-cracolandia-para-o-rio,248474>.

²³ See “Tendência é de aumento do consumo, diz estudo,” *Em Discussão!*; and Centro Brasileiro de Informações Sobre Drogas Psicótropicas (CEBRID), *Household Survey on the Use of Psychotropic Drugs in Brazil* (São Paulo: Universidade Federal de São Paulo [UNIFESP], 2005), 315. CEBRID conducted the study in 2001 and again in 2005 in the 26 Brazilian state capitals and the federal district, surveying 8,000 people between the ages of 12 and 65.

²⁴ There are no official statistics about the use of meth in Brazil. However, several exploratory studies conducted by the “scientific police” (part of the civil police force, the Polícias Científicas are experts in scientific methods of criminal investigation and evidence) and the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) suggest that consumption has increased and the drug is more potent than it was several years ago. See Morris Kachani, “Droga de ‘Breaking Bad’ se populariza,” *Folha de S. Paulo*, August 12, 2013, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2013/12/1382405-droga-de-breaking-bad-se-populariza.shtml>.

²⁵ Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ), *Estimativa do número de usuários de crack e/ou similares nas Capitais do País* (Brasília: Ministry of Health, 2012), 4, <http://portal.fiocruz.br/pt-br/content/maior-pesquisa-sobre-crack-j%C3%A1-feita-no-mundo-mostra-o-perfil-do-consumo-no-brasil>.

that 2.28 percent of the surveyed population (approximately one million people) uses illicit drugs, excluding marijuana; crack users thus accounted for around 35 percent of illicit drug consumption.²⁶ According to the 2012 Second National Survey of Alcohol and Drugs by Brazil's National Institute for Public Policy Research on Alcohol and Other Drugs, Brazil is the world's leading consumer of crack and accounts for 20 percent of the world's market for the drug.²⁷ Compared to other drugs, crack is cheap, readily available, very addictive, and highly marketable. As later sections of this paper will discuss, the growing prevalence of crack in Brazil has already impacted criminal dynamics, resulting in higher rates of violent acquisitive crime in Brazil's largest cities.

Organized Crime in Brazil

The drug trade in Brazil is controlled by three main criminal groups: the Primeiro Comando da Capital, Comando Vermelho, and Amigos dos Amigos (Friends of Friends). Ironically, problematic and repressive policies of incarcerating political dissidents, criminals, and drug offenders inadvertently gave rise to the PCC, one of Brazil's most powerful and dangerous organized crime groups. After more than two decades of existence, the PCC today is present in 90 percent of prisons in the state of São Paulo.²⁸ And, although originally based in São Paulo, the PCC has also established a presence in most peripheral districts of Brazil's big urban centers. In addition to smuggling and distributing drugs, the group operates a number of other illicit businesses and frequently

controls territory and many aspects of life in local communities.²⁹

There is no agreement on the exact date that the PCC was established. According to researchers, the group is believed to have been founded in 1993 in a prison facility in the city of Taubaté.³⁰ The "Party," as the prisoners call it, was originally created to organize the coexistence of detainees held in overcrowded spaces and to represent the claims of the imprisoned population to the prison authorities. Over the ensuing years, the organization developed and expanded its scope of action, corrupting the system and its agents, imposing rules on the prison population, and recruiting via violent coercion.³¹ The establishment of rules of conduct and protocols, as well as the normalization of violence, produced new dynamics in prisons. Today, the PCC de facto shares the management of the prison system in São Paulo with the state.³²

The PCC publicly demonstrated its power inside and outside of Brazil's prisons for the first time in 2006 when it conducted a series of attacks in São Paulo. Simultaneous rebellions organized by the PCC broke out in 82 prisons, and security forces were attacked throughout the state of São Paulo, with smaller attacks in states such as Espírito Santo, Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Minas Gerais.³³ Of unprecedented proportions, the attacks and prison rebellions killed 23 military police officers, three municipal guards, eight prison guards, and four civilians. Another nine inmates died in the riots.³⁴ The police retaliated with force: many homicides from that period remain

²⁶ Ibid., 4-5, 7.

²⁷ Bruno Paes Manso, "Brasil é o maior mercado mundial de crack; de cocaína, so fica atrás dos EUA," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, September 5, 2012, <http://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,brasil-e-o-maior-mercado-mundial-de-crack-de-cocaina-so-fica-atras-dos-eua,926473>. Despite these surveys and data, there is still little comprehensive knowledge about crack consumption and commercialization in Brazil.

²⁸ Biondi, "Relações políticas e termos criminosos," 206-235.

²⁹ Feltran, "Resposta ilegal ao crime: repertórios da justiça nas periferias de São Paulo."

³⁰ Camila Caldeira Nunes Dias, "Estado e PCC em meio às tramas do poder arbitrário nas prisões," *Tempo Social: Revista de Sociologia da USP* 23, no. 2 (2011): 213-233, <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ts/v23n2/v23n2a09.pdf>; and Biondi, "Relações políticas e termos criminosos," 206-235.

³¹ For the history of the PCC, its development, examples of "baptism rituals," dynamics of the organization, and its business activities, see Nunes Dias, "Estado e PCC," 213-233.

³² Nunes Dias, "Estado e PCC," 213-233.

³³ "Três ônibus são incendiados na Bahia," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, May 15, 2006, <http://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,tres-onibus-sao-incendiados-na-bahia,20060515p27331>.

³⁴ Miraglia, "Homicídios: guias para a interpretação da violência na cidade," 321-345.

unsolved, which strongly suggests extrajudicial revenge killings by the police.³⁵

The PCC and the other *Comandos* (criminal organizations operating mostly in drug trafficking) are now the main perpetrators of urban crime and violence in Brazil's major cities, especially in Rio de Janeiro where their history, operations, and disputes with rival organizations largely explain the evolution of violent deaths and high homicide rates in the city.³⁶ As with the PCC, most *Comandos* originated in the prison system during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985); they then spread into local communities, creating a criminal network that operates inside and outside prisons. The model for *Comandos* first appeared in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, but it has spread across the country and today there are similar organizations in at least five states in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Paraná). The four main groups in Rio de Janeiro are: Comando Vermelho, Terceiro Comando (Third Command), Terceiro Comando Puro (Pure Third Command) and Amigos dos Amigos.³⁷ In general, these groups in Brazil can be classified as territorially-defined factions whose operations mostly, but not exclusively, involve drug trafficking and controlling poor communities or favelas.

These *Comandos* have a direct impact on community life. Either through control of territories or through imposing rules, the *Comandos* manage informal justice systems. Gabriel Feltran, an expert on life in the urban peripheries of Brazil, has conducted extensive

research on the "crime courts" established by criminal organizations in the outskirts of São Paulo.³⁸ He argues that the operation of such institutions indicates the legitimacy criminal organizations have acquired among residents of these areas, in a context of profound changes taking place in the social life of the city's peripheries. In São Paulo, for example, the PCC has assumed jurisdiction over even small conflicts between neighbors and cases of petty theft, meting out punishment and restitution to keep incidents from escalating, and in general maintaining peace and security in local communities. The PCC in essence has claimed a monopoly on crime, and on homicide in particular, in the areas it controls. According to Feltran, these new dynamics are the true explanation for the drastic reduction in the homicides rate in São Paulo during the last decade.

Illicit Markets in Brazil

Drug trafficking and arms trafficking are interwoven in Brazil, which exacerbates violence. The Brazilian non-governmental organization Viva Rio conducted a national mapping and found that 50 percent of the weapons circulating in Brazil today are illegal.³⁹ According to estimates of Viva Comunidade, there are between 7.6 million and 10.7 million illegal firearms in circulation in Brazil.⁴⁰ Of that number, perhaps as many as six million are in the hands of criminals, although estimates vary.⁴¹ An illegal market operated by heavily armed actors such as the *Comandos* in areas where state presence is weak lies at the root of urban violence in Rio de Janeiro. The result is a com-

³⁵ Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República (SDH/PR), *Relatório sobre os crimes de maio de 2006* (Brasília: SDH/PR, 2012), 6, <http://www.sdh.gov.br/sobre/participacao-social/cddph/relatorios/relatorio-c-e-crimes-de-maio>; and International Human Rights Clinic at the Harvard Law School and Justiça Global Brasil, *São Paulo sob achaque: Corrupção, Crime Organizado e Violência institucional em Maio de 2006* (May 2011): 73-97, <http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/full-with-cover.pdf>.

³⁶ See Luke Dowdney, *Nem guerra, nem paz: Comparações internacionais de crianças e jovens em violência armada organizada* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 7Letras, 2005); Christovam Barcellos and Alba Zaluar, "Homicídios e disputas territoriais nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro," *Revista de Saúde Pública* 48, no. 1 (2014): 94-102, doi: [10.1590/S0034-8910.2014048004822](https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-8910.2014048004822); and Michel Misse, "Crime organizado e crime comum no Rio de Janeiro: diferenças e afinidades," *Revista Sociologia e Política* 19, no. 40 (2011): 13-25, <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rsocp/v19n40/03.pdf>.

³⁷ Dowdney, *Nem guerra, nem paz*, 23.

³⁸ Feltran, "Resposta ilegal ao crime: repertórios da justiça nas periferias de São Paulo."

³⁹ "Arms Control," Viva Rio, <http://vivario.org.br/en/human-security/arms-control/>.

⁴⁰ Viva Comunidade, *Estoques e Distribuição de Armas de Fogo no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Publit Soluções Editoriais, 2010), 23, http://www.vivario.org.br/publico/media/Estoques_e_Distribui%C3%A7%C3%A3o.pdf.

⁴¹ Viva Comunidade, "Relatório Preliminar: Ranking dos Estados No Controle de Armas: Análise Preliminar Quantitativa e Qualitativa dos Dados sobre Armas de Fogo Apreendidas no Brasil" (preliminary report, Viva Comunidade and the Brazilian Ministry of Justice Nacional Secretariat for Public Security [SENASP], 2009), 11, http://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/upload/congresso/arquivo/mapa_das_armas_brasil.pdf.

bination of territorial disputes among drug trafficking organizations, a mostly violent response from the police, and the emergence of other criminal groups competing for drug trafficking space in these communities. Drugs for these violent markets are supplied principally via Brazil's land borders with Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru. The vast Brazilian Amazon is frequently a staging ground for the distribution of cocaine throughout the country; cocaine enters through Tabatinga in the state of Amazonas or through the state of Acre. There are two criminal organizations present in this region that control the distribution process: the Família do Norte (North Family, FDN), a local group, and the PCC. Investigators from the police unit known as the Specialized Department in Prevention and Repression of Narcotics (Delegacia Especializada de Prevenção e Repressão a Entorpecentes) claim that the FDN is still expanding and now commands 90 percent of trafficking in Amazonas and Acre, leaving 10 percent for the PCC. To regulate relations among each other, the two factions have a published "statute" that spells out the procedures by which the two groups decide on the business of trafficking, money laundering, and the purchase and sale of drugs.⁴² A similar statute reportedly governs the interaction of FDN with Comando Vermelho.⁴³ These business models regulate the relationship among criminal groups, determine specific market shares, and may even determine the type of drugs being sold; they merit further investigation.

Policy Responses

The visibility of crack consumption and the resulting public outcry has motivated government and law

enforcement authorities to adopt a tough approach toward drug users and pushers. Despite some rare exceptions (described below), policy responses have struggled to find an adequate balance between the criminal justice system response and a public health approach.

Brazilian drug legislation was developed largely in accordance with United Nations drug control conventions. The penal code became the main legal instrument to address the illegal drug trade, placing both drug consumption and trafficking into the criminal justice sphere.⁴⁴ Consequently, Brazil has adopted a repressive "war on drugs" approach, with many legal, social, and policy consequences.

As a result of "tough on crime" changes in national legislation and a weakening of civil liberties and protections, Brazil has effectively implemented a mass incarceration policy. Brazil imprisons 245 people per 100,000. Although Brazil only ranks 47th in terms of incarceration rates, in absolute numbers its prison population consists of 513,713 inmates: the world's fourth highest number, after the United States, China, and Russia. Notably, the prison population has more than doubled over the past decade.⁴⁵ According to data from the Brazilian Integrated Penitentiary Information System, by the end of 2012, 27 percent of those incarcerated were convicted under drug trafficking penalties.⁴⁶ Several studies strongly suggest that Brazil's current drug policy, based on its 2006 Drug Law, combined with a historically "tough on crime" approach, has contributed to the increase in the country's prison population.⁴⁷

⁴² "Polícia diz que crime organizado na capital do AM se fortalece com quatro pilares de atuação," *A Crítica*, July 21, 2014, http://acritica.uol.com.br/noticias/manaus-amazonas-amazonia-Investigadores-policia-dizem-crime-organizado-pilares-atuacao-FDN-PCC_0_1178882110.html.

⁴³ Oswaldo Neto and Bruna Souza, "Polícia prende homem e localiza suposto estatuto da maior facção criminosa do AM," *A Crítica*, October 31, 2013, http://acritica.uol.com.br/manaus/Policia-localiza-estatuto-criminosa-AM_0_1021097902.html.

⁴⁴ For a historical overview of the drug legislation in Brazil, see Luciana Boiteux, "Drugs and Prisons: The Repression of Drugs and the Increase of the Brazilian Penitentiary Population," In *Systems Overload: Drug Laws and Prisons in Latin America*, eds. Pien Metaal and Coletta Youngers (Amsterdam / Washington: Transnational Institute and Washington Office on Latin America, 2011), 30-38, http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Drug%20Policy/2011/TNIWOLA-Systems_Overload-def.pdf.

⁴⁵ Boiteux, "Drugs and Prisons," 36.

⁴⁶ Integrated Penitentiary Information System (Infopen), National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN), Ministry of Justice, *Penitentiary System Statistics 2012* (Brasília: DEPEN/MJ, 2013), <http://portal.mj.gov.br/main.asp?View=%7BD574E9CE-3C7D-437A-A5B6-22166AD2E896%7D&Team=¶ms=itemID=%7BD82B764A-E854-4DC2-A018-450D0D1009C7%7D;&UIPartUID=%7B2868BA3C-1C72-4347-BE11-A26F70F4CB26%7D>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The 2006 Drug Law intended to make a clear and definitive distinction between drug users and dealers.⁴⁸ Although drug possession remained defined as a crime, users caught with amounts intended only for personal consumption would no longer face imprisonment; instead, special drug courts would impose socio-educational measures. To define the amount intended for personal consumption, the law specified that a judge take into account the nature of the substance seized and the conduct and previous record of the supposed user. This rather vague criterion, however, left the legal intent and policies subject to manipulation and enabled undesirable judicial and police discretion.

The 2006 law permits a wide range of penalties for users and addicts, from a warning about the effects of drugs to court-ordered community service or participation in educational programs in lieu of imprisonment. A judge can deliver a verbal warning or even impose a fine on a user who refuses—without justification—to fulfil these socio-educational obligations. While reducing penalties for users, the 2006 law also toughened punishment for drug traffickers still tried in ordinary criminal courts; the minimum prison sentence was increased from three to five years (the maximum sentence was maintained at 15 years). The law also ended compulsory treatment for addicts, although it granted tax relief initiatives for drug prevention, treatment, and social reintegration initiatives. Nonetheless, municipal governments in cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro tried to reinstate compulsory treatment for crack users in 2013.

Despite the improvements in the 2006 drug legislation, the judicial and law enforcement culture in Brazil

remained the same, leading to a major increase in prison populations for drug trafficking offenses. The lack of a clear legal specification of what drug amount constitutes personal use has become a loophole allowing judges to imprison more people as drug dealers than was the case before 2006. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of people incarcerated for drug trafficking increased by 123 percent, from 60,000 to 134,000.⁴⁹ This jump was mostly the result of incarcerating first-time offenders caught with small quantities of drugs, but without links to organized crime. Disturbingly, there has been a consistent and extensive increase in drug-related incarceration among women. In fact, 80 percent of the female inmates in Brazil have been convicted on drug trafficking charges.⁵⁰

Even more troubling, a close look at the data shows that arrests and convictions by authorities are not targeting traffickers strategically in ways that might actually contribute to reducing the homicide rate and other forms of drug-related violence. São Paulo has one of the highest rates in the country for solving murders, yet only manages to solve 50 percent of cases; in Rio de Janeiro, merely 15 percent of murders are solved by the police. Despite Brazil's high homicide rate, only 14 percent of persons currently incarcerated were convicted of murder.⁵¹

The ineffectiveness of the justice system and the disparities regarding access to justice explain this outcome. Today, 44 percent of the prison population in Brazil consists of pre-trial detainees.⁵² The Defensoria Pública (public defender's office), designed to provide legal aid for people who cannot afford it, still lacks infrastructure and an adequate budget. Most importantly, justice in Brazil is known to treat unevenly certain

⁴⁸ Lei Nº 11.343, de 23 de agosto de 2006, Diário Oficial de União de 24/08/2006, 2 (2006) (Brazil), http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2006/lei/l11343.htm.

⁴⁹ Organization of American States (OAS), *The Drug Problem in the Americas* (Washington, DC: OAS, 2013), 60, http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf.

⁵⁰ Regina Bandeira, "Governo discute política para mulheres detentas," *Agência CNJ de Notícias*, <http://www.cnj.jus.br/agencia-eventos-cnj2/23851-governo-discute-politica-para-mulheres-detentas>.

⁵¹ Infopen, DEPEN, *Penitentiary System Statistics 2012*; and Arthur Trindade Maranhão Costa, "A investigação de homicídios no Brasil," in *Gestão e disseminação de dados na Política Nacional de Segurança Pública* (São Paulo: FBSP, 2013), 19, <http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/publicacao/gestao-e-disseminacao-de-dados-na-politica-nacional-de-seguranca-publica>.

⁵² Instituto Sou da Paz, *Relatório da Pesquisa Prisões em Flagrante na Cidade de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Instituto Sou da Paz, 2012), http://www.soudapaz.org/upload/pdf/justica_prisoeflagrante_pesquisa_web.pdf.

segments of the population. In a pioneer study, Sérgio Adorno shows that black defendants get a “more rigorous penal treatment, and are more likely to be punished when compared to white defendants who committed similar crimes.”⁵³

Overall, the overuse of incarceration, including for drug offenses, has generated tremendous social, human, and economic costs, as well as inadvertently enabled the formation of complex and powerful organized crime groups. “Tough on crime” policies and high levels of police violence and repression have shown themselves to be ineffective in preventing or reducing crime, drug trafficking, and/or consumption. Instead, in Brazil they perpetuate vicious cycles of violence, marginalization, and counter-violence.

However, Brazil has recently begun experimenting with new and innovative approaches to combat drug trafficking and reduce drug use. The following section examines two of the most visible programs.

A Promising Practice: The “São Paulo de Braços Abertos” Program

Launched in January 2014, the program São Paulo de Braços Abertos (São Paulo with Open Arms, referred to below as Braços Abertos) aims to boost the social reintegration of crack addicts and homeless people living in downtown São Paulo, particularly in the Luz neighborhood.⁵⁴ Known as *cracolândia* (crackland) due to the intense concentration of addicts within a few blocks, the area became associated with high levels of violence and insecurity that drove residents and visitors away.⁵⁵

Previous efforts to restore public safety in the area were based almost exclusively on law enforcement interventions or compulsory treatment of drug users, aggravated by the automatic association authorities made between drug use and crime. This association was then used to justify imprisonment and human rights violations perpetrated by the municipal guard and the military police.⁵⁶ This approach proved ineffective in reducing drug use in the area, in improving public safety, or even in improving the social and economic life of the neighbourhood. Rather what the public saw during those years was an increase of crack addicts on the streets.⁵⁷

By contrast, through the provision of social assistance, the Braços Abertos program seeks to socially reintegrate and restore the lives of the drug users who live on the street. Benefits provided to addicts include health care (daily treatment by multidisciplinary teams of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and occupational therapists) and other forms of assistance such as temporary housing, job openings, meals, technical training, and a daily wage of R\$15 (approximately US\$6). In addition, all women are supported by a gynecological team.

The program is coordinated by the Municipal Health Secretariat and also involves several other government agencies, including the Secretariats of Safety, Labor and Social Assistance. One month after its launch, the Braços Abertos program had reduced the use of crack by its participants by 50-70 percent, according to the municipality.⁵⁸ Two months into existence, the program had delivered 10,555 health interventions,

⁵³ Sérgio Adorno, “Discriminação Racial e Justiça Criminal em São Paulo,” *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 43 (November 1995): 45-63.

⁵⁴ São Paulo Executive Secretariat of Communication, “Beneficiários do ‘De Braços Abertos’ recebem carteiras de trabalho assinadas,” news release, August 5, 2014, <http://www.capital.sp.gov.br/portal/noticia/3516#ad-image-0>.

⁵⁵ Gio Mendes, “2 mil usuários de droga frequentam a crackolândia,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, July 23, 2011, <http://sao-paulo.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,2-mil-usuarios-de-droga-frequentam-a-cracolandia-imp-,748839>. According to the São Paulo Department of Investigations on Narcotics, in 2011 there were 2,000 crack addicts in the Cracolândia neighborhood.

⁵⁶ Taniele Rui, “Vigiar e cuidar: notas sobre a atuação estatal na ‘cracolândia,’” *Revista do Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* 6, no. 2 (2012): 340.

⁵⁷ Heitor Frúgoli Jr. and Mariana Cavalcanti, “Territorialidades da(s) crackolândia(s) em São Paulo e no Rio de Janeiro,” *Anuário Antropológico* 2 (2013): 7-8, doi: [10.4000/aa.561](https://doi.org/10.4000/aa.561).

⁵⁸ Gisele Brito, “Participantes do programa De Braços Abertos reduzem consumo de drogas em até 70%,” *Rede Brasil Atual*, February 14, 2014, <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/cidadania/2014/02/em-media-participantes-do-programa-de-bracos-abertos-em-sp-reduziram-consumo-de-drogas-em-ate-70-4065.html>.

including health and dental treatments.⁵⁹ As reported by one of the program's consultants, Antonio Lancetti, by the end of December 2014 the program was assisting around 500 people, of whom 50 were already living with their families, about 20 were employed with a formal contract, and 42 received training courses and were working at the municipality's Fábrica Verde (Green Factory) project, where they grow plants and are responsible for gardening in some areas of the city.⁶⁰ In addition, 59 cases of tuberculosis were diagnosed and are now being treated, 89 people have received mental health services, and 10 teenagers and five adults are living downtown in the city's shelter, with another 22 in houses spread across the city.

Braços Abertos also has a public safety arm conducted by the São Paulo Municipal Guard, whose main responsibilities are building surveillance and police assistance. In organized searches, 25 dealers have been arrested and over 4,000 crack doses have been seized. Data from the State Department of Public Safety, based on records of 14 streets in the area, show that crime rates recorded in Cracolândia fell in the first half of 2014 when compared to the same period of the previous year.⁶¹ For example, theft and general vehicle theft decreased by 32.3 percent and 47.4 percent, respectively, over the same period.⁶²

Although the initiative is only implemented on a small scale and lacks robust evaluations, the program is nonetheless significant as it is the first time the government of São Paulo has approached consumption from a public health approach, rather than resorting

to police repression and further victimization of drug addicts. Despite initial resistance from the local community, in a small amount of time, Braços Abertos has earned the support of those who live and work in the neighborhood and is being offered as a model for other public policy responses to Brazil's drug-use epidemic.

The program still faces a critical challenge: treatment adherence. According to the municipality, this is crucial for decreasing consumption, yet already there are reports of recidivism. In addition, the policy still faces many challenges related to its capacity to grow and become institutionalized. A long-term evaluation of its impact is therefore an essential component in understanding the effectiveness of this approach and the future of the program.

Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora: The UPPs in Rio de Janeiro

The first UPP was established in the informal community of Morro de Santa Marta in Rio de Janeiro in 2008. The UPPs represented a major shift in the city's public security strategy, particularly relative to previous efforts to combat drug trafficking and organized crime groups.⁶³ According to official documents, the main objectives of the new policy were to (1) "consolidate state control over communities under strong influence of armed crime"; and (2) "reestablish peace and tranquility in local communities, both essential elements to the full exercise of citizenship, as well as to ensure their social and economic development."⁶⁴

⁵⁹ São Paulo Executive Secretariat of Communication, "Programa 'De Braços Abertos' realizou mais de 10 mil atendimentos de saúde," news release, May 9, 2014, <http://www.capital.sp.gov.br/portal/noticia/2236>.

⁶⁰ Antonio Lancetti, "Programa anticrack De Braços Abertos, da Prefeitura de São Paulo, tem tido êxito? Sim," *Folha de S. Paulo*, December 27, 2014, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opinia/2014/12/1567423-programa-anticrack-de-bracos-abertos-da-prefeitura-de-sao-paulo-tem-tido-exito-sim.shtml>.

⁶¹ Sindicato dos Bancários e Financeiros de São Paulo, Osasco e Região, "Programa De Braços Abertos será ampliado," news release, November 11, 2014, <http://www.spbancarios.com.br/Noticias.aspx?id=9484>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ For an in-depth analysis of the UPPs (Police Pacification Unit), see André Rodrigues, Raíza Siqueira, and Maurício Lissovsky, eds., *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora: Debates e Reflexões*, Comunicações do ISER, no. 67 (Rio de Janeiro: ISER, 2012), <http://www.iser.org.br/website/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Comunica%C3%A7oes-do-Iser-UPP-n.67-2012.pdf>.

⁶⁴ See Decreto N° 42.787 de 6 de janeiro de 2011, Diário Oficial do Estado do Rio de Janeiro de 07/01/2011 (2011) (Brazil), http://arquivos.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp_imagens/Uploads/DecretoSeseg42.787Upp.pdf, which regulates the UPP. Note that the decree was created more than two years after the implementation of the first UPP, when there were 13 of these units in operation.

Previously, the strategy adopted by the Rio de Janeiro government and the police could best be described as armed raids on slums, motivated by complaints from neighbors or ongoing investigations, necessarily relying on the element of surprise. Usually such invasions resulted in violent clashes and gunfire between police and criminals, and produced police and criminal deaths as well as deaths of residents with no ties to criminal groups. In addition to being extremely ineffective, this strategy stigmatized and victimized the inhabitants of the communities where the raids took place, the vast majority of whom do not belong to organized crime groups but rather live under their constant oppression.

Under the responsibility of the Secretary of Security for the State of Rio de Janeiro, UPPs are deployed exclusively to territories controlled by armed groups. In this sense, the UPPs are an innovative concept: they are not presented as a tool to combat drug trafficking or organized crime groups, but rather aim solely to regain territorial control on behalf of the state. They replace a logic of war and confrontation with a strategy based on constant police presence and interaction with the community. The community policing or proximity policing approaches are the key to guaranteeing that the police presents itself as an agent capable of ensuring community safety.

The year 2010 marked the consolidation and expansion of the policy as well as the creation of a “Social UPP.” This new component of the program served to coordinate public services previously lacking or insufficient in these regions. It reflected the recognition that police presence alone would not change communities. With both law enforcement and social components, the UPPs have emerged as a truly new policy alternative in a scenario where repression and confrontation had been the default choices. As a result, they were considered as possible models for other Brazilian cities. However, during the implementation process events involving police violence and corruption began

to surface on a repeated basis, jeopardizing the credibility of the program.

The most emblematic case is perhaps the episode known as “Where is Amarildo?” In December 2013, Amarildo Dias de Souza was taken from his home in Rocinha, the biggest favela in Brazil, to the headquarters of the local UPP during a police operation. After that day, Amarildo was never seen again. The ensuing investigation was full of problematic incidents, including attempts to bribe witnesses, and the policemen from the local UPP were accused of the disappearance of Amarildo, whose body was never found.

Changes in Brazil’s Drug Policy: The Potential for and Resistance to Reform

Over the past several years, public understanding and discussions of anti-drug efforts have experienced radical changes in Latin America. Even sitting presidents and other high-ranking government officials have called for abandoning the “war on drugs.” Undeniably, there is a need for a balanced approach that combines public security and public health. Embracing such a change in approach, a path-breaking report by the Organization of American States (OAS), *The Drug Problem in the Americas*, has become a reference for policy reformers throughout the region as well as internationally.⁶⁵ Following the release of the report, Uruguay became the first country in the world to fully legalize marijuana.

In Brazil, a clear division on drug policy persists between the government and many civil society advocacy groups. Brazilian NGOs working with the Global Drug Commission, whose membership roster includes Brazil’s former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and groups such as *Marcha da Maconha* (Marijuana March) or the *Pense Livre* (Think Free) network, are some of the advocates for reforming laws and public policy on marijuana and other drugs.⁶⁶ Their mission is to create a social, political,

⁶⁵ OAS, *The Drug Problem in the Americas*.

⁶⁶ For information on these organizations see “Missão,” Rede Pense Livre, <http://www.oesquema.com.br/penselivre/missao/>; and “Aviso: Marcha da Maconha,” Marcha da Maconha, <http://marchadamaconha.org/>.

and cultural context where all Brazilian citizens can express themselves freely and democratically on drug policy, guaranteeing a more transparent, fair, effective, and pragmatic elaboration of laws and policies that respect citizenship and human rights.

However, Brazil's federal government exhibits great reluctance to engage in this debate. As organized crime groups remain the principal public security threat in the country, the government continues to be seduced by and repeats the "tough on crime" discourse, distancing itself from any discussion of drug decriminalization or legalization, including of marijuana. This attitude by the federal government therefore shapes the entire political dialogue on drug policy. During the 2014 presidential elections, discussions of drug policy were almost non-existent in candidates' campaigns and platforms. In a January 2015 interview by one of Brazil's leading newspapers, *O Globo*, the Rousseff administration's Minister of Justice José Eduardo Cardoso reiterated that there is no interest in dealing with broader changes on the issue, such as reforming the current Drug Law. For Cardoso, overcrowding of prisons should be solved by the building of new prisons and the use of precautionary measures such as electronic monitoring and alternative sentences.⁶⁷

At the international level, the Brazilian government has not taken any official position regarding the regional drug policy debate or the OAS drug report that has stimulated so much vibrant discussion in and among other governments of the region. At the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016), Brazil is thus likely to take a cautious approach. While endorsing both human rights principles and the United Nations drug conventions and treaties, Brazil will likely argue that countries should have the sovereignty to decide their own national drug policies.

Policy Recommendations

- Criminal organizations are evolving, becoming more complex and sophisticated, and expanding both their geographical markets and commercialized merchandise. Further research is needed to understand how they operate, their business models, and how they become a part of and impact community life.
- The criminal justice system needs to be reformed. The high numbers of pre-trial detainees underline the need to guarantee and expand access to justice, notably by strengthening public legal aid.
- Police brutality, lethality, and ineffectiveness remain huge obstacles to security policies that reduce rates of violent victimization, such as the UPPs. The need for police reform and stronger police accountability and oversight is urgent.
- Brazil's huge illegal firearms market, which provides access to weapons for organized crime groups, needs to be addressed. Gun ownership regulations should be more aggressively enforced.
- Brazil's national drug legislation should be more precise in defining drug possession amounts in order to better distinguish between users and traffickers.
- To avoid the over-imprisonment of non-violent drug offenders who are not members of organized crime groups, Brazil needs to change the culture of the judiciary, which today relies almost solely on a punitive approach based on judges' discretion. This would reduce prison overcrowding and also limit access to new recruits for criminal groups operating within the prison system.

⁶⁷ Jailton de Carvalho, "Governo descarta debater liberação das drogas, diz Cardozo," *O Globo*, January 10, 2015, <http://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/governo-descarta-debater-liberacao-das-drogas-diz-cardozo-15016285>.

- Prison overcrowding also indicates the need to develop efficient and reliable alternatives to incarceration.
- The concept of prevention still needs to be mainstreamed within Brazil's drug policies, both in programs designed to deter youth from becoming users, and in programs designed to reduce the incidence of criminal activities.
- Local governments are key to developing crime prevention strategies, but they often lack resources to implement such policies. Financial incentives and capacity building would help overcome barriers to change.

well-being. These are topics that remain strongly and narrowly associated with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Despite the more than 50,000 homicides each year, at the policy level, the issue is less of a government priority than other topics such as income inequality, health, or housing policies. In this void, punitive measures have emerged as the sole response, distancing the country from a rational, planned, and effective long-term strategy. The review of the global counternarcotics regime at UNGASS 2016 offers an opportunity to advance a process of change in Brazil's domestic approach to drug policy.

Conclusions

Extremely high violence rates in Brazil over the past decades indicate a clear need for change. One of the best indicators of the ineffectiveness of current policies is the dramatic increase in incarceration numbers in the country, paired with growing rates of homicide and property crimes.

From a conceptual point of view, security and safety in Brazil are still not perceived as rights or as elements associated with the country's development and citizen

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