



Thinking Brazil



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UPCOMING EVENTS

- Wilson Awards Dinner, São Paulo

INCOMING SCHOLARS

- Elizabeth Balbachevsky, Universidade de São Paulo. "The Future of the Academic Profession: Challenges for Emerging Countries"

Urban Crime and Violence: Combating Citizens' Sense of Insecurity



CLAUDIO BEATO

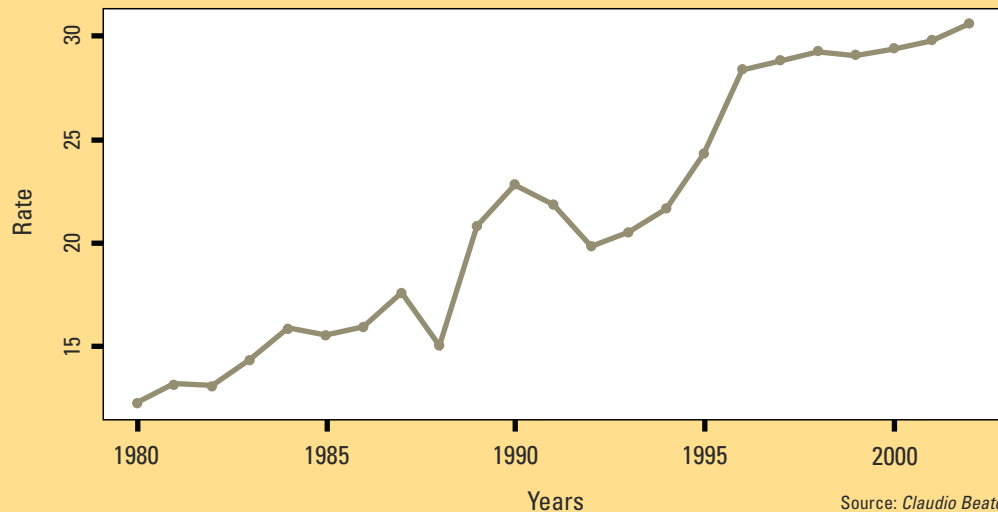
Crime from illegal firearms and drug trafficking runs rampant in Latin America, where homicide rates are among the highest of any region in the world. In Brazil's major cities, homicide is the leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year-olds. Rio de Janeiro ranks among one of the world's most violent cities. São Paulo, a city that has been able to significantly decrease crime levels over the past decade, has just been racked by a severe wave of violence that has killed over 150 people—40 of them police officers, according to official figures. Banks were firebombed and 82 buses were torched by São Paulo State's most powerful organized crime group. Extreme urban crime and violence have increased many Brazilians' sense of insecurity, undermining the institu-

tionalization of democratic governance. Exacerbated by high income and racial inequality, low youth employment, weak judicial institutions, and tenuous police-community relations, this insecurity has led to growing concern about the loss of human and social capital in Brazil.

On April 28, 2006, the Brazil Project organized a panel to analyze causes of Brazil's extreme urban crime and violence, and to discuss possible solutions. Experts included Claudio Beato, director of the Center for Crime and Public Safety Studies, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Bernice Van Bronkhorst, urban social specialist, Latin America and Caribbean Region, the World Bank; and Luis Bitencourt, professor at the National Defense University's Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and a Woodrow Wilson Center senior scholar. Duke University associate professor of history and Woodrow Wilson Fellow John D. French commented on the panels,

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Homicide Rate (per 100,000 people), Brazil, 1980-2002

which expanded the debate from traditional crime fighting techniques to alternative police responses, targeted policing, police-community partnerships, the role of politicians and the mass media in exacerbating fear, and the critical need for strong political will to decrease violence and citizens' sense of insecurity.

Claudio Beato argued that police reform and targeted policing are needed to better address Brazil's severe crime and violence. Brazil's problematic situation of violence is one of the worst in Latin America and has been increasing in scope. Since the 1980s, this phenomenon has spread from rural areas to urban ones and has grown exponentially. Like other urban areas in Brazil, the city of Belo Horizonte has witnessed a sharp increase in violent crimes against property and people. These crimes, Beato claimed, are unequally distributed throughout the city in accordance with Pareto's Principle that, for many phenomena, 80 percent of consequences stem from only 20 percent of the causes: a large

percentage of Belo Horizonte's crime is disproportionately perpetrated in a few small areas.

This spatial concentration has led Beato to refer to Brazil's sharp increase in urban violence not as an explosion, but rather an *implosion*. Ten percent of violent crimes can be traced to just eight of 2,500 census tracts (county subdivisions), and 40 percent of violent crimes are concentrated in ten percent of the census tracts. Of Belo Horizonte's

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110 *favelas* (urban shantytowns), only six are subject to the majority of crime and violence that occurs within the city. These six neighborhoods are characterized by some of the worst social indicators in Belo Horizonte, such as years of school-

ing completed, childhood mortality, and urban infrastructure indices.

Given the context of Brazil's urban crime situation, Beato argued that the state must increase its crime tracking capabilities and redirect its security forces to selectively target those areas suffering from and causing the majority of urban

crimes. Such results-oriented policing involves utilizing innovative techniques to better unify disparate police activities, decentralizing operational planning and introducing new tools to appraise and analyze results and control for independent variables. These changes involve extensive police reform, from decentralizing responsibility to rearranging police units by geographic area and embracing community policing procedures. Such changes are monumental, given that Brazil's security forces have historically avoided policing *favelas*, out of fear and exasperation with the high levels of risk and low levels of community support involved in such operations.

Beato posited that police operations must first effectively locate crime "hot spots" through extensive scientific research and analysis of crime data and statistics. By conducting this investigation, security forces are able to better rationalize the use of police equipment and personnel. With the help of Beato's Center for Crime and Public Safety Studies, Belo Horizonte's military and civilian police forces have adopted these policy recommendations, experimentally implementing the Integration of Management in Public Security Program (IGESP). Results have been promising: the city of Belo Horizonte experienced an 18 percent decline in violent crimes last year and the first decline in homicides (22 percent) in fifteen years.

Beato emphasized the importance in crime prevention and reduction of proactive policies to control predatory criminal activity in urban areas. But he also stressed that police reform does not diminish the need for more efficient and effective social programs that target the social problems that lead individuals to engage in crime in the first place. Data on hot spots should also be used to redirect state resources and efforts to specifically target those areas with poverty reduction and social development programs. Since areas of high victimization are more often than not also

the place of residence of the perpetrators, social assistance projects targeted at these areas will help diminish crime and violence levels in the long

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term. Further, targeted programs, he insisted, are less costly and wasteful than inevitably mismanaged universal programs.

Luis Bitencourt placed Brazil's violence problem in socio-cultural terms. Brazil is afflicted by a perverse socialization, he argued, in which the rule of law is undermined as criminals are trusted more than state agents, and security forces systematically violate the law with virtual impunity. The role models of *favela* youths are the drug dealers, as they have the biggest gold chains and the fanciest motorbikes. Alternatively, the "bad guys" are the military police. Violence often flares up when the police decide to conduct operations inside the *favelas*, as drug gangs subsequently defend their territory from state incursion by whatever means necessary. It is the flawed value system of Brazil's poor to not trust the police and thus contribute to an overall level of lawlessness that fosters increased criminality. To be fair, this distrust of police is well-founded, given the reality of police brutality, violence, and impunity.

With respect to political and institutional factors behind Brazil's crime and violence problem, Bitencourt echoed Beato's policy recommendations for police reform, but added the importance of judiciary and penal reform in strengthening the rule of law. Brazil's criminal justice system is fragmented and inefficient. Corruption aside, within the limits of the law, good lawyers can keep guilty parties out of jail through infinite appeals that can delay rulings and prevent

sentences from being carried out. Crimes are thus committed with virtual impunity, decreasing the cost-benefit ratio of refraining from engaging in criminal activity out of fear of being caught and punished. Likewise, Brazil's jails are overcrowded and prone to rampant violence by both inmates and guards. Academic answers do little to change the reality of life in Brazil, he argued, unless politicians pledge their influence and support toward tackling this social problem.

According to Bitencourt, urban crime and violence persist in Brazil due to a lack of sustained political pressure for reform. Former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso threw funds haphazardly at a public security plan of action. Lula's Workers' Party established an innovative institute that has proposed promising solutions; however, his administration is not implementing any of the recommendations. The structure of law enforcement agencies cannot be easily reformed because of their powerful lobbies. The military police are not subject to democratic oversight. Brazil's highly federal system decentralizes police control and places it in the hands of governors, who for partisan reasons often do not cooperate with city mayors, and vice versa. What is needed, Bitencourt concluded, is strong political will to carry out reform and societal pressure in support of the rule of law. Also, citizens must hold their elected leaders accountable for not effectively protecting them from crime and violence.

The serious economic and social situation in Brazil's cities cannot be separated from the issues of crime and violence, claimed *Bernice Van Bronkhorst*.

...help bring the state into Brazil's crime-infested neighborhoods in a nonviolent way, through support services and social programs.

The best way to ameliorate living conditions of the urban poor and those living in marginalized



BERNICE VAN BRONKHORST

neighborhoods is to learn from success stories; these have disproportionately been the result of well-planned *local government* prevention strategies that go beyond traditional policing responses. Such programs include: Beato's "hot spot" initiatives; "crime and grime" slum upgrading projects; urban design renovations; and implementation of dry laws that prevent the sale of alcohol after a certain time at night. According to Van Bronkhorst, these kinds of measures help bring the state into Brazil's crime-infested neighborhoods in a nonviolent way, through support services and social programs.

Effective crime and violence prevention at the local level requires three key elements. First, new initiatives must build upon existing state activities, such as by-laws and the provision of local security. Second, local government activities must be aligned with crime prevention principles by fostering cooperation between different departments and realigning their capacities and functions to better deal with crime prevention strategies. Once these two elements are established, new projects can be initiated with external partners to engage in activities beyond typical government functions. Such partners may include federal police forces, the national department of education, social workers, as well as the community's youth.

Besides engaging in partnerships with different levels of government and increasing the level of spending on diagnostics, the key to successful integrated municipal programs is community involvement. Van Bronkhorst argued that communities



LUIS BITENCOURT & JOHN D. FRENCH

know how best to decrease insecurity and take back their public spaces if they are included in the planning and implementation process. Additionally important is making use of environmental design to diminish factors contributing to crime. From the design of low-income housing and public parks to even choosing the right type of street lighting or trees to plant, simple upgrades targeted at high-crime neighborhoods have proven very successful throughout Latin America. Such

distrustful of one another. This leads to a lack of cooperation that detracts from the police's ability to prevent crime and bring criminals to justice. Likewise, the police forces (and society in general) need to acknowledge that those that make up the bottom rungs of society have rights, too. The internal sense of mission within the police results in highly unlawful forms of policing. Because so many criminals are killed during detainment, one can argue that, *de facto*, Brazil practices capital punishment: criminals are systematically executed outside of the judicial system.

French agreed with Bitencourt's diagnosis that the political system is partially responsible for the persistence of extreme levels of violence, just as the mass media is as well. Law enforcement is highly politicized in Brazil. When new administrations come in, they jettison the reforms of their predecessors and fill security agency positions with individuals sharing their political affiliations. This lack of a guarantee of continuity is highly troubling, as it calls into the question the survival of public security reform, even in the face of promising results.

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non-traditional methods are hard to sell to politicians and communities, which tend to conceive of public safety in terms of criminal justice measures. However, multi-sectoral crime prevention, she insisted, is equally as important to reducing crime and violence levels as the more traditional reliance on crime-fighting tactics.

The contribution of police ineffectiveness, brutality, and impunity to the situation of extreme urban crime and violence in Brazil must not be overlooked, emphasized *John D. French*. There exists an intense rivalry between the civilian and military police forces in Brazil. Each unit has developed its own culture, *élan*, and institutional mindset, which has made them highly

Brazil's mass media likewise contributes to the social problem, he added, by feeding into the culture of fear and distrust that permeate Latin American society in general.

Given the multi-causal nature of crime, there is no single decisive factor explaining Brazil's situation of extreme urban violence. What is indisputable, however, is the urgent need for a better understanding of the nature of crime and violence, greater social accountability to deal with the troubling absence in the political sphere of the will to tackle the problem, and a rethinking on the part of the country as a whole as to how individual actions strengthen or weaken the rule of law. ■



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Brazil at the Wilson Center

Thinking Brazil is an electronic publication of the Brazil Project at the Wilson Center. This project was created out of the conviction that Brazil and the U.S.-Brazilian relationship deserve greater attention within the Washington policy community. Brazil's population, size, and economy, as well as its unique position as a regional leader and global player, justify this attention. In keeping with the Center's mission to bridge the worlds of scholarship and policymaking, the Brazil Project sponsors activities on a broad range of key policy issues designed to create a Brazil "presence" in Washington.

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