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Abstract

An annotation of:

"Brazil slum raids impress, but what's the impact?" By Bradley Brooks. Huffington Post, November 14, 2011.

Keywords

Human rights, Brazil, Drug trafficking, Organized crime, Police, Police killings, Criminal justice, Pacification

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Crime and Human Rights in Brazil: The Police Pacification Units

Article under review: "[Brazil slum raids impress, but what's the impact?](#)" By Bradley Brooks. *Huffington Post*, November 14, 2011.

The rise of drug trafficking and organized criminal networks in Brazil represent a serious threat to the human rights of a vast proportion of this country's population currently living in violent cities with the highest rates of homicide using firearms in the world. The city of Rio, for example, has 1000 *favelas*, and almost half of them are under the influence of drug gangs. Criminals use drugs to purchase weapons in order to tighten their control on *favelas* in major cities. According to a *Small Arms Survey* 2010 report, total small arms holdings in Brazil are estimated at nearly 17 million, making the ratio of legal to illicit small arms holdings almost 40:60.^[1]

This situation is aggravated due to the inefficiency of the state security forces and a persistent lack of trust among citizens towards the state due to a history of police abuse in the country. According to Human Rights Watch,^[2] police were responsible for 505 killings in the state of Rio de Janeiro alone in the first six months of 2010. This amounts to roughly three police killings per day, or at least one police killing for every six "regular," intentional homicides. The number of killings by police in Sao Paulo, while smaller than in Rio de Janeiro, is also very high. Reform efforts have fallen short because state criminal justice systems rely almost entirely on police investigators to resolve these cases, leaving police largely to regulate themselves.

This month's Roundtable analyzes one of the latest governmental initiatives to improve citizen security and reduce violence in the country: the police pacification units (PPU) in the state of Rio de Janeiro. PPU's are only one part of a broader national program for citizen security started by former President Lula Da Silva, including twenty-two states and the Federal District. Yet PPU's are capturing worldwide attention, especially after the security forces took over the *favela* of Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro last November. The PPU project follows a "pacification strategy," and its objectives are: to regain state control of the communities currently under the influence of criminal groups; to bring peace and public security in the *favelas*; and to contribute to breaking the "logic of war" in Rio. Launched in 2007, the PPU's are expected to be fully operational by 2014, covering the eighty-five percent of the population in Rio that currently lives in *favelas* dominated by drug traffickers.^[3]

The PPU model is rather new, and few studies of its outcomes are available today. Research from the International Drug Policy Consortium shows that in pacified *favelas*, the residents feel an increasing sense of personal security. Government officials claim that the Pacifying Units have already made significant progress in the city's struggle against crime, establishing law enforcement control and then introducing social assistance and essential services into *favela* communities.^[4] Yet the success of the PPU program is still unclear and the initiative has many challenges ahead. One of the concerns relates to the possible migration of violence and drug trafficking under the PPU to those areas with less policing. Civil society groups, even those that share the program's goals, worry about militarization, human rights abuse, and the likelihood that the government's commitment won't be sustained.

As the 2014 World Cup approaches, increasing international attention is being focused on the pacification process in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*. The reason is less related to effectively securing public safety of the events, and has more to do with the prospect of reproducing the PPU's model for controlling drug trafficking as a formula to bring peace and security to the many communities around the world that are trapped by a vicious cycle of violence and crime.

[1] Small Arms Survey (2010). "Small Arms in Brazil: Production, Trade, and Holdings" Special Report.

[2] Human Rights Watch (2010). "Country Summary Report: Brazil." World Report, New York City.

[3] Woodrow Wilson Center, Brazil Project.

<http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/ondemand/index.cfm?fuseaction=Media.play&mediaid=C526C3A1-94BB-ECA0-1215B9A579AEF8AC>

[4] International Drug Policy Consortium-IDPC (2010), "Drug control and its consequences in Rio de Janeiro", Briefing Paper, September.

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