



Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, has seen some important security advances in recent years, taking dozens of communities in Rio de Janeiro from criminal gangs through its innovative UPP security program. However, it faces a serious threat from its two largest domestic criminal gangs, the First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando Capital - PCC) and Red Command (Comando Vermelho), who

are becoming increasingly involved in the international drug trade, as well as operating extortion and kidnapping rings at home. Militia groups composed mostly of police are another source of violent crime, extorting entire neighborhoods and carrying out extrajudicial killings. The country is becoming increasingly important as a market and transit point for cocaine.

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## Geography

Brazil is the largest country in South America, with a 16,000-kilometer land border and an 8,000 kilometer coastline, which is used to ship cocaine to Europe and Africa.

It shares a border with every country in South America, except for Chile and Ecuador, including the world's three biggest cocaine producers -- Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. Neighboring Paraguay serves as a hideout for Brazilian criminals,

and as a source and transit point for marijuana and weapons trafficked into Brazil.

## History

Brazil saw a massive exodus of rural dwellers towards the main urban centers of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro from the 1950s to 1970s, which led to the growth of informal settlements known as “favelas.” The inequality and poverty of the country as a whole was intensified in favelas, which lacked state presence, making them ideal breeding grounds for an explosion of organized crime.

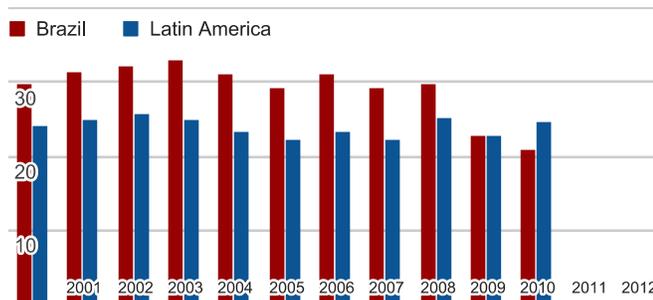
In the 1950s, a powerful criminal mafia began to form around the “bicho,” or the animal game, an illegal gambling racket that became hugely popular in the country. The bosses who ran the game built up large fortunes, laundering their profits through legitimate companies, and branched out into contract killing and prostitution rings, buying off police and politicians. The power of the bicheiros, or animal game bosses, would peak in the 1980s, when they began laundering money through Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival.

Meanwhile organized criminal groups were also developing in the brutal squalor of the country’s prisons. Indeed, Brazil’s organized criminal groups got their start in the prisons and only later grew to conquer the streets. The country’s biggest gangs, the Red Command and First Capital Command (PCC), both began in the prisons, in the early 1970s and the 1990s respectively, before spreading out onto the streets of Rio and Sao Paulo.

During the 1970s, with the entrance of large quantities of cocaine into Brazil, links began to emerge among the bicheiros, drug cartels, and local traffickers. As the global cocaine market boomed in the 1980s, Brazil attracted the biggest

## Brazil Factbox

### Homicide Rate



### Criminal Activities

Drug transit, cocaine production, human trafficking, extortion, illegal gambling, kidnapping, prostitution rings

### Principal Criminal Groups

Red Command (Comando Vermelho), First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC), Third Command (Terceiro Comando), Amigos dos Amigos, militia groups

South American drug producers as a transit point for drugs bound for the European and US markets. Colombian cartels moved into Brazilian territory, attracted by its location and the availability of precursor chemicals, smuggling cocaine into the country in base form. They began to install laboratories close to the points of sale and disembarkation to European and US markets.

Vigilante groups made up of current and former members of the police, known as militias, have emerged in cities under the premise of fighting drug gangs. However, they have moved into operating their own criminal rackets, including extortion and kidnapping schemes.

The national homicide rate has jumped slightly in recent years, going from 22 per 100,000 in 2004, to 25.2 in 2012. While parts of southern Brazil, including its largest city São Paulo, are safer lately, violence and crime in the country's violent northeast is rising fast.

## **Security**

Brazil's police are divided into federal (around 15,000 members) and state, which includes military (over 400,000 active members), and civil (some 123,400 members) forces. The Federal Police are responsible for investigating international drug trafficking, among other federal crimes. The Military Police are responsible for enforcing public order in the states, and have taken a leading role in the pacification of Rio de Janeiro's favelas. The Civil Police handle criminal investigations at the state level.

Brazil's police have long faced accusations of abuse and corruption, especially in connection to misreporting the extrajudicial killing of civilians as acts of self-defense.

Since 2008, Rio de Janeiro has been implementing a program to retake urban shantytowns, or "favelas," that are under the control of militias and drug traffickers. First, the military and the military police "invade" a favela to drive criminal groups out, then policing units, known as the Police Pacification Units (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora – UPP), are installed to provide long-term security in these neighbourhoods. By early 2013 some 30 UPP units had been installed.

## **Armed Forces**

Brazil has 339,300 active members in its armed forces, which are the largest in Latin America. The military's primary role is enforcing border control. Under the Strategic Border Plan, which began in 2011 and will cost \$6.3 billion over eight

years, President Dilma Rousseff has deployed thousands of troops to secure Brazil's frontiers.

## **Judiciary**

Brazil's judicial system is slow, corrupt and ineffective. In the World Economic Forum's 2012-2013 Global Competitiveness Report, Brazil placed 71 out of 144 countries on judicial independence. Only 8 percent of Brazil's annual homicide cases are ever solved, according to official figures. There are both federal and state courts, as well as courts specialized in military, labor or electoral matters, while the country's highest court is the Supreme Federal Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal).

## **Prisons**

Brazil's prisons are overcrowded, with inmates kept in terrible conditions. The largest criminal groups, including the Red Command and the PCC, were founded in the prisons. Their leaders are able to run drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion schemes from inside. The prisons operate at about 170 percent of capacity, with a population of 550,000 as of 2012.

## **Gun Control**

There are an estimated 3.8 million to 9.5 million illegal firearms in Brazil, and 5.2 million registered firearms. Most of the weapons on the black market are believed to have been supplied by Brazil's legal arms industry, the second largest in the Western Hemisphere. Widespread availability of illegal weapons has contributed to the high number of gun deaths in Brazil, which stand at roughly 70 percent of all homicides.

## **Prospects**

The UPP pacification scheme is having a positive impact on Rio's crime and violence rates, but there are concerns that this simply shifts crime to other parts of the city. On a regional level, Brazil is stepping up to take a leading role in combating organized crime. Brazilian organized crime groups are becoming increasingly transnational, with a presence registered in Bolivia, Colombia, and Paraguay.

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