
17. Brazil and violent crime: complexity as a way of approaching ‘intractable’ problems

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil has the unenviable reputation of being one of the most violent countries in the world. In 2011, no fewer than 43913 homicides were recorded in the country, a rate of 22.33 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants.¹

Nowhere has this problem been more acute than in the country’s two biggest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, whose metropolitan areas account for roughly 15 percent of the entire Brazilian population. Since these two cities also represent the major economic hub of the country (in the case of São Paulo) and the country’s major tourist destination (in the case of Rio de Janeiro), what happens in these cities generally attracts more attention than what happens elsewhere.

Yet these two cases are also interesting because of the ways in which the authorities have tried to deal with the problem of violent crime and the seemingly positive results this has achieved. In the case of São Paulo, murder rates have more than halved over the last 15 years, whilst in Rio de Janeiro the installation of so-called *Unidades Policiais Pacificadoras* (UPPs, Pacifying Police Units) in some of the city’s most violent shanty towns (or ‘favelas’) since 2009 has also led to (or coincided with) a significant reduction in homicide cases.²

The aim of this chapter is to analyze and compare these two policies from a complexity perspective. It will be argued that one of the reasons for their relative success has been the fact that violent crime has been seen as a self-organizing process. As such, instead of ‘eradicating’ the perpetrators of these crimes in the hope that this will reduce crime or focusing on *one* particular variable in the hope of moving the problem to an ‘acceptable’ state, the policy aim has been to change the *patterns* of self-organization which helped sustain the conditions in which violent crime flourished, allowing for the *emergence* of new processes of development, and responding to the local boundary conditions of each particular area. In short, they have encouraged ‘adaptive action’, as termed by Eoyang and Holladay (2013). However, a recent upsurge of violence, especially in São Paulo, as well as cases of people going missing after being picked up by police in some of the supposedly pacified favelas in Rio de Janeiro raises the question of whether a sustainable process has been established.

After an analysis of each case and a comparison between them, the chapter will ask what can be learned from these experiences and whether the experiences can serve as a blueprint for further policy development.

THE CONTEXT: VIOLENT CRIME AS A LINEAR PROBLEM

In 1975, the murder rate in Rio de Janeiro was less than 15 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants. By 1995, it had reached 64.9 (Carneiro, 2010a). In São Paulo the situation was even worse, with the official homicide rate reaching a staggering 69.1 per 100 000 inhabitants by 1999. In so doing, both cities were amongst the most violent on the planet and even managed to considerably outstrip the national murder rate, which rose from 11.7 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants in 1980 to 28.9 per 100 000 inhabitants in 2003.³

The causes of this increase have been the subject of debate for many years.⁴ As Carneiro (2010a) has pointed out, they include political incompetence linked to 'traditional' problems such as corruption, and the 'reach' of the state. Within this context, the performance of the Military Police has received particular attention in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, Carneiro (2010b) identifies four principal problems which have seriously undermined the ability of the police force to fight violent crime effectively. First is internal police corruption. Second, there is a general problem of indiscipline within police ranks 'with orders simply not being followed' (Carneiro (2010b: 64). Third, poor training leads to poor operational conduct. Lastly, there simply are not enough police officers to deal with the multitude of issues within an often very difficult physical terrain. In São Paulo, Cardia (2000) identified similar problems, though, as Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012) have shown, the exact expression of them in São Paulo was a little different from in Rio de Janeiro, of which more will be said below.

Linked to these particular institutional problems are deep structural ones of both the Brazilian economy and society at large, which are very evident in virtually every urban center in Brazil. Chief amongst them is the vastly unequal distribution of wealth, as demonstrated by the example of Rio de Janeiro's biggest shanty town, Rocinha. Rocinha is separated from a wealthy neighboring community by one road which marks 'a 9-fold difference in employment, a whopping 17-fold difference in income and a 13-year difference in life expectancy' (Goldstein and Zeidan, 2009: 288). Such problems are the result of 'formal and informal mechanisms which preserve the existing power structures in all its forms', in particular the police, the judiciary, the political structures, as well as the educational system (Guimarães, 2008: 16).

At the beginning of the 1980s, these structural factors had combined with some specific circumstances to produce a steep increase in violence: 'The combination of a weak state, economic crisis inherited from the military which led to harsh economic restructuring, and the expansion of the drugs trade, led to an increase in violent crime' (Leu, 2008: 3). On top of that, both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were facing rapid urbanization. For example, at the start of the twentieth century, São Paulo was a small city of approximately 100 000 inhabitants. By the 1990s, it had become one of the biggest conurbations in the world, with approximately 20 million inhabitants. This expansion was as unplanned as it was rapid and was accelerated in both cases by the mass migration of people from the north to the south of the country in search of economic opportunity. The mass migration underlined the structural problem outlined above, a problem which has been reflected to a significant degree in the two cities under consideration in this chapter.⁵ The unplanned nature of this expansion led to the 'favelalization' of city space, manifested in both the growth of existing shanty towns and the emergence of new

ones. In both cities, therefore, the structural feature of economic inequality led to a particular type of city expansion which reinforced existing divisions – both physically and economically – and which has been seen as a key factor in violence in some studies, such as Richardson and Kirsten (2005). In fact, as one specialist in urban crime remarked to the author, the way Brazilian cities constantly evolve lets people know who belongs to which ‘class’, reinforcing social divisions. According to several studies, it is this *disparity* in income and opportunity which explains, at least in part, the explosion in violent crime, more so than income levels (and therefore poverty) per se, not just in Brazil but for the whole of Latin America.⁶

In Rio de Janeiro’s case, the above factors interacted with a massive expansion of the drugs trade which was often organized by armed groups. Taking advantage of the state’s weaknesses, the armed groups installed themselves in favelas and established alternative power structures for their particular areas, underpinned by their own ‘laws’ and ‘code of conduct’ (breaks of which were often summarily punished through torture or death), the provision of some basic social services, and other functions traditionally regulated by the state, such as television or the internet, as Carneiro (2010b) has shown.

Over the years, there has been an intense debate in Rio de Janeiro about how to confront this problem. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into this debate in detail, it is possible to distinguish between two broad policy approaches which can be termed ‘containment’ and ‘confrontation’ and which were applied sequentially, depending on the political constellations of the state.

As a policy, ‘containment’ essentially limited the number of incursions into areas dominated by drug gangs with the argument that a more confrontational approach within geographically very difficult and heavily populated terrain would lead to the loss of innocent life. Mostly applied during the governorship of Lionel Brizola (1983–86 and 1991–94), the policy was based on the premise that crime was, above all, a social problem which had to be treated within the context of the ongoing process of democratization and human rights, meaning that the preservation of peace for the largest possible part of the population of the city would take precedent over the apprehension of criminals.⁷

The alternative approach of ‘confrontation’ was mostly associated with governor Alencar (1995–99). According to his argument, containment had led to large parts of the city being virtually controlled by heavily-armed drug gangs as they were essentially ‘police-free’ zones into which the state did not venture. To counter this trend, Alencar created incentives (pay rises, promotion and so on) for the police to kill or apprehend as many drug dealers as possible, as well as for seizing drugs and weapons.⁸ Whilst the homicide rate initially dropped and the quantity of weapons and drugs seized by the police soared, the number of innocent people killed rose sharply whilst the structural causes of the problem remained unaddressed. The policy had no appreciable effect on the levels of drug consumption and therefore drug trading. As a result, dead drug dealers were simply replaced by new ones.

In São Paulo, a similar process can be traced. In conjunction with the growth of the illicit drugs market, there was also a rise in organized crime, best represented by the formation of the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) in 1993, on which a bit more will be said below. Just like any other urban area of Brazil, the vastly unequal distribution of wealth represented (and represents) its own challenges.

In policy terms, the response of the authorities in São Paulo to the increase in violent

crime, particularly during the 1990s, was much more tilted towards confrontation. This was due to a number of factors. First, there has always been – and there continues to be – strong public pressure for such a policy approach. One former commander of the Military Police argued that ‘for the public, a good bandit is a dead bandit’.⁹ This pressure for ‘action’ was amplified by the culture of the Military Police which, during the period of military dictatorship, was specifically trained *not* to interact with the public, as de Souza (2009) observed. As such, according to Monjardet (1996), the force is trained to be primarily *reactive* and has little capacity to respond to changing circumstances.

That this should be so is perhaps hardly surprising bearing in mind the principal responsibilities assigned to it. First and foremost, the Military Police – be it in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo or elsewhere – is charged with intervening in disorder at ‘street level’. In other words, it is the Military Police which will confront any type of violent disorder, though it is not responsible for investigating such disorder or bringing the perpetrators to trial (de Souza, 2009: 41).

According to the same author, the combination of the above factors had a significant impact on the way in which policing is done. Policing by officers ‘on the beat’ is offensive in its posture, ‘especially in those regions considered more dangerous or vulnerable’ (de Souza, 2009: 43). As shown by Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012: 4), in the case of São Paulo these regions are on the periphery of the city and are marked by poverty, reinforcing once again the social divisions already mentioned above.

The policy approach in São Paulo, then, was very similar to that of Rio de Janeiro in terms of ‘confrontation’. Yet, despite the similarities in policy, it is important to note some crucial differences between the two cases.

First, there is the geographic component: in Rio de Janeiro, whilst drug gangs were operating in a number of slums, it is noteworthy that these slums were geographically dispersed, with some being located in the middle of some of Rio de Janeiro’s wealthiest neighborhoods. In São Paulo, by contrast, as Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012) have observed, control of drug gangs over particular areas has been concentrated in the periphery of the vast city. At the same time, whereas the key criminal factions of Rio de Janeiro are, in most cases, the specific result of the drugs trade, the PCC in São Paulo emerged out of the local prison system, one of its initial demands being the improvement of prison conditions for inmates.¹⁰ Within this context, ‘just like everything else, even crime is more organized in São Paulo than in Rio de Janeiro’, according to one policy advisor and specialist on violent crime in São Paulo.¹¹ According to the same advisor, the PCC has well-established and coherent structures, which extend until today into the prison system, and do not depend on one particular leader or other: ‘They are resilient and have some support’. This assertion is backed up by research conducted by Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012).

Therefore, despite the undoubted similarities which exist between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in terms of the problems confronted, there were and are crucial differences which had a significant impact over the years on the evolution of policy in the two cities. These differences will be assessed below. During the 1990s, however, what both had in common was their utter failure in bringing violent crime under control. It will be argued that a key explanation for this failure had to do with the definition of the nature of the problem confronted by authorities, and what eventually led to a reversal of the trend in both cases over the last few years.

APPLYING COMPLEXITY: ADAPTIVE ACTION AS A WAY OF CHANGING PATTERNS OF SELF-ORGANIZATION

The key problem with the policy approaches outlined above was the definition of the problem as ‘complicated’. As Chapman (2002) has noted, in a complicated system ‘it is possible to work out solutions and implement them’ (Chapman, 2002). For instance, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, one policy (‘containment’) saw the solution as being the physical containment and concentration of drug dealers in particular areas and that this would lead to the rest of the city living in relative peace. The key determinant variables, then, were the geographical location of the problem as well as the group of people being responsible for the problem (drug dealers). In the second policy, the solution was the physical elimination of drug dealers. At the same time, the policy also had a specific focus on particular areas (the favelas), essentially leaving the rest of the city untouched.

In São Paulo, similar thinking can be detected. In basic terms, as shown above, the idea of confrontation was to kill as many drug dealers as possible. At the same time, just as in Rio de Janeiro, there was a spatial and geographical component to the problem, with concerted efforts being made to leave the problem confined to the periphery of the city, as Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012) have shown.

Yet, as Lehmann (2012) has shown in relation to Rio de Janeiro, the problem of violence is not complicated, but complex. Peirce (2008: 86) has drawn similar conclusions in her much broader study about urban violence in Brazil, arguing that ‘policy solutions must be more complex, moving beyond the assumptions of the ‘rational criminal’ model’. In other words, the problem of violent crime is characterized by:

- a number of elements or phenomena;
- emergence and sensitivity to initial conditions – its development is at best partially predictable;
- parts of the system are reducible whilst others are not;
- the elements of the system form coherent patterns over time;
- the system is open to its environment and therefore capable of adaptation and survival.¹²

As a result, ‘the relationship between cause and effect is uncertain and there may not be agreement on the fundamental objectives [of any given policy]’ (Chapman, 2002: Foreword). Since such systems self-organize, ‘policies and interventions have unpredictable consequences [whilst complex systems] also have remarkable resilience in the face of efforts to change them’ (Chapman, 2002: Foreword). Therefore, policy outcomes are unpredictable.

Yet the policies outlined above were simply not able to account for this unpredictability. In both cases there was an attempt to *simplify* the policy landscape by focusing almost exclusively on a couple of key variables. Little thought was given to the fact that the complex adaptive systems within which policies were being applied *interacted* with other such systems. For instance, as Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012) have shown, just looking at some of the areas of the periphery of São Paulo studied by them, one can detect dynamic interaction between the PCC, local agents of the state, such as the police, and the local population. There was also interaction between that population and the

state, as well as interactions between those areas of the city on the periphery and those closer to the center, as well as the richer and poorer parts of the population. All interviewees also pointed to the tensions between the Civil and Military Police. These tensions, however, are crucial and long-standing. As one former commander of the Military Police in São Paulo put it, 'the tensions between the Military and the Civil Police go back a long time. The PM (Military Police) in São Paulo is over 100 years old and has a very different culture to the Civil Police, but these cultures are deeply ingrained'.¹³ As a result, there is, amongst other things, no tradition of exchanging information and, according to the former commander, mutual suspicion. One former state minister agreed, claiming that there was still more corruption in the Civil Police: 'They solve a crime and then negotiate with the criminal to let him go'.¹⁴

Even with this one example, it becomes clear that the landscape within which violent crime would have to be confronted is very different from the simplified one implied by the policies outlined above. Rather than dealing with a problem which depends on a couple of variables, one is confronted with a problem made up of multiple variables that interact across various levels of analysis. One is dealing not just with a self-organizing complex adaptive system but a highly interdependent one which, in the words of one former minister, was highly disorderly: 'In São Paulo, disorder was everywhere, whether it was fly-pitching in the main shopping street or the growth of favelas across the city. Violent crime has to be seen in this context'.¹⁵

How did both cities manage to reverse the trend of rising violent crime? As will be shown now, essentially both began – at different times and within different circumstances – policies that encouraged the emergence of different patterns of self-organization and began to define the problem of violent crime as one embedded within a broader context and as an *ongoing* process, rather than one which would eventually arrive at an end-point. In short, both began to think in terms of 'adaptive action', as Eoyang and Holladay (2013) have termed this process. In practice, this meant that they started to ask different questions to inform policy, which led to different answers.

ADAPTIVE ACTION IN SÃO PAULO AND RIO DE JANEIRO: CHANGING PATTERNS

The first big change occurred in relation to *what* the problem was that was being encountered. One former minister put it thus: 'We were confronting disorder. [The main shopping street] used to be full of fly-pitchers and unlicensed traders and we removed them. We [also] removed [slums].' According to him, the message being sent out was that *disorder* would not be tolerated in the hope that this would have an impact on violent crime, based on the assumption that the loss of a sense of impunity would lead to a reduction in such crimes.¹⁶

Recognition of the need to redefine the problem being confronted also extended to the Military Police force, at least according to one of its former commanders. There was a need to 'put more value on life': 'I kept insisting that our job was to protect the population, not to kill [criminals]'.¹⁷

This change in and of itself though would not have been enough. There was also an urgent need to create understanding and trust between the population and the police in

particular. According to the former commander, this included the need to communicate to and with the population as to what the police were doing and why they were doing it.

With this emphasis on creating trust, the aim was to shift perceptions of and expectations about the police from fear to one that the police had a positive role to play in *creating order*. According to one former minister at state level, achieving such a goal inevitably meant treating the problems confronted in a broader fashion, linking the fight against crime to the provision of social and basic services, such as education. In other words, at least according to this minister, the approach taken was holistic and again attempted to shift the way that the state was seen by many to a perception that the state existed to *facilitate* the life of its citizens, a feeling which was often very limited or absent. Critical to this was the interaction that was facilitated between the state and civil society, which 'today is common: between the police, the city council, the church etc.'¹⁸ In summary, then, the problem of violent crime was seen as *part* of a much broader context which looked at issues concerning the role of the state.

So, what does such a redefinition mean for policy-makers and implementers? According to the interviewees for this research, the key conclusion drawn from this redefinition was the need to act holistically and across institutional and bureaucratic boundaries across all possible levels of analysis. For instance, for the former minister, as hinted at in the paragraph above, there was a need to coordinate policies across areas of public safety, education, social services and education, to name but a few. For the former police commander, this need for coordination meant the beginning of a process of re-approximation between the Military and the Civil Police.¹⁹

Coordination was also identified as key in terms of the message being sent out across time and space. As one policy advisor pointed out, crucial to the recent decline in crime was the consistency of message which became, at least apparently, self-sustainable for a time. With a consistent message, backed up by – as will be shown below – specific investments and clear strategic actions, 'the message that was being [received] by the population was that things were getting better. The *feeling* of insecurity diminished'.²⁰

This consistency of message translated into clear policies. At a strategic level there was, according to all interviewees, a coordinated effort to invest in equipment, communication and the criminal justice system. For instance, data-sharing systems were created which allowed the police force to become much more agile and proactive in *preventing* crime from occurring. For the former commander of the PM, this investment, together with that in new equipment and the expansion of the prison system, allowed the force to respond much better to the population's demands. It also allowed for tailored responses to particular local circumstances. For instance, as the commander pointed out, areas like *Jardim Angela*, considered to be one of the most dangerous urban areas in the world during the 1990s,²¹ required a different type of policing than some areas in the center of the city. Investment in new technology, according to this argument, allowed the police to finally respond to these differing local boundary conditions.²²

Finally, there was also recognition that there was an urgent need for better communication, not just between the different agents of the state but also between the state and the society it governed. As the former police commander argued, it was critical that the police explained to the population its role and its initiatives and that the media be used to doing so: 'We had to change the narrative about the police and I was very keen to go public about what we're doing'. Only this way, according to him, was it possible

to address the problem of trust identified as one of the key impediments to fight crime effectively. As part of this process, police training was changed significantly towards community policing and more intensive study: 'We now train the police up to university-level education'.²³

Communicating also meant interacting with other police forces across the world to learn and exchange experiences: 'We have been to New York, Toronto, Tokyo . . . lots of places to see how things are done', as both the former minister and the former police commander pointed out, arguing that there was recognition of the need to do things differently and a willingness to learn from those who had also managed to reverse decades-old patterns of crime, such as in the case of New York in particular.

In consequence, several key initiatives were started in order to *transmit* the new message being developed. One of them was to 'de-militarize' society. As one policy advisor pointed out, 'there were various campaigns encouraging people to hand in their guns. The objective was to take guns out of circulation irrespective of *who* had them'.²⁴ Between 2004 and 2005, no fewer than 110 000 guns were taken out of circulation in São Paulo, according to the Institute *Sou da Paz* (2006).

As already pointed out above, a second key plank of the policy strategy was to tackle disorder in *all* spheres of society, be it through the removal of fly-pitchers, the urbanization or removal of shanty towns, or taking guns off the street. For the policy advisor, the campaigns to take guns off the street was the most important amongst these initiatives because it sent out a message regarding the priorities that the authorities had: 'Illegal guns came off the street, [either] handed in, or discovered by the police or they just stayed indoors, either way they were off the streets, this reinforced the message about security'.²⁵

For the former minister, the coherent approach to disorder was critical: 'We wanted to change the sense of impunity [irrespective of the crime committed] in the hope that this [would have an impact] on violent crime'. As shown, this was backed up by heavy investments in the police, the prison system and other initiatives, identified as critical by all those who participated in this research, arguing that, regardless of the efficiency of how that money was spent, in combination with a much more high-profile public presence of the police in the media, it reinforced the *message* that fighting crime was a priority for the government, something which had broad public support.²⁶

The results certainly seemed to vindicate the policies pursued. From the 2000s onwards, homicide rates in São Paulo declined significantly whilst, according to the former minister and the policy advisor, the city today does not possess 'no-go' areas for the state.²⁷

In Rio de Janeiro, the process of change took longer. Hindered by years of political back and forth, and the subsequent alternation of anti-crime policies already outlined above, it was not until 2008 that the government of new governor Sergio Cabral began to reformulate policy, leading to its flagship policy, the establishment of so-called *Unidades Policiais Pacificadoras*, or Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) in some of Rio de Janeiro's most violent shanty towns. The aim of these units was first to establish a permanent presence of the state in areas where it had been absent, in some cases for decades. Secondly, the aim was, in the words of one of those who developed the policy, 'to establish the rights of everybody to come and go when he would like to where he would like to', that is, to establish freedom of movement for the population so far under the arbitrary control of drug gangs.²⁸

To do so, it was felt that the *base* of these gangs had to be eroded. As a result, UPPs were established in those shanty towns that were strategically important for the entry of both drugs and arms into the city. As one strategic commander of the UPPs put it: 'The point was to take their territory away. Without territory and without arms, they simply do not have the influence they used to have. Outside their communities, a drug-dealer does not have the power he has inside'.²⁹

This conclusion led to another critical decision, which was *not* to focus on the apprehension of drug dealers. The establishment of UPPs was announced prior to the arrival of police forces, essentially giving drug dealers the chance to disperse, hide and flee. The government has justified this approach by arguing that 'the aim is to establish peace in these communities and that means avoiding confrontation'.³⁰ This, however, means that drug-trafficking often continues in the affected areas. However, according to one commander, the aim of the policy was to 'de-militarize' the area, not to stop drug trafficking: 'There is a market here, so there will always be a supply. The key point is to preserve life'.³¹

These, then, represent significant changes in terms of defining *what* the problem is and what that means. Shifting the focus from drug dealers to arms is one critical change of pattern in that it says that the key problem encountered is not just drugs but violence and that, just as in São Paulo, the preservation of life should become the priority over the elimination of drug dealers.

According to one person closely involved in the development of the policy, a second key issue was the image of the police, which perpetuated the pattern of violence and state ineffectiveness in parts of the city: 'For many people in the favelas we now occupy, their only experience of the state was that of violence [between police and drug dealers]. Therefore, we need to change that image by guaranteeing their rights, enabling the provision of services and generally [creating order]'.³²

This, though, would mean a significant change in the approach taken by the police force and in the organizational culture that sustained this approach, which would require enormous investment in training and manpower. UPPs are staffed by newly-recruited police officers, subject to a different training program with heavy focus placed on community policing. This was key since, for many citizens, the permanent presence of the state was a new thing: 'Where we are, there was no effective presence of the state for 30 years so clearly there is mistrust. [We need to] establish a relationship of trust with the population'.³³

In order to win this trust, the commander of one of the UPPs argued that his officers needed to show 'practical results'. By that he meant not dead drug dealers, but 'taking weapons out of the area' and, crucially, allowing for the installation of basic services, such as gas, electricity, water and the like. To establish priorities, it was critical to engage with the local population. Said the commander: '[The population] know what they need much better [than we do]. We need to respond to their wishes otherwise they will not [trust us]. There needs to be constant feedback and we have consciously engaged with [representatives of the community] to show them that we are here for them'.³⁴

This approach has had a positive impact on the image of the Military Police, according to both anecdotal evidence and public opinion surveys. 'We are seen in a different light here. People used to [associate the police] with violence, now they perceive us to be here to help and to stop violence', as one unit commander put it.³⁵ Studies done by the

Brazilian Institute of Social Research (IBPS) underscore this impression, with 86 percent of people saying UPPs had made their area 'much better' or 'better', whilst 79 percent said that the presence of the police had eliminated the presence of armed gangs in their area. This led to 80 percent of respondents saying that the image of the Military Police had become 'much better' or 'better' (IBPS, 2010). In terms of hard statistical numbers, since the inauguration of the first such unit in 2009, the number of homicides declined from 2155 to 1209 per year at the end of 2012, according to the *Instituto de Segurança Pública de Rio de Janeiro*.³⁶

On the face of it, therefore, there has been a clear downward movement in terms of homicides in both cities after the adoption of a new type of policing policy. In both cases, the focus was far more on changing patterns than on 'killing bad guys'. Changing patterns included changing the *perception* both of the police force about what it does and how it works, and changing the *perception* of individual police officers in relation to what their job is and how they see their job. These patterns have changed through simple strategic leadership that aimed at setting out and maintaining clear and consistent policy goals which were disseminated throughout the system and facilitated through clear and strategic investments in training, equipment and tactics, often as a result of learning from the best practices across the world. At the same time, at the local, operational level, commanders were given the autonomy and freedom to act according to the local boundary conditions which they encountered.

However, recent events, particularly in São Paulo, have raised questions over the sustainability of these policies and, in the context of complexity, the maintenance of the coherent patterns that have underpinned the process of self-organization.

ERODING PATTERNS OF PROGRESS? RECENT PROBLEMS IN SÃO PAULO AND RIO

Critics of the policies in Rio and São Paulo can be divided into several distinct, yet overlapping groups: those that have questioned the degree of progress that has been made; those that question whether the fall recorded in crime over recent years can be linked to specific policies; those that argue that any progress made is being eroded by current policy and political failures; and those that have questioned whether the policies were ever designed to change the underlying causes of violent crime in the first place. Each will be briefly looked at in turn.

Within the first group, several analysts have questioned whether the progress made in terms of recorded crime is really all that significant. Within this group, one can find those that point to the difficulties in accurately recording crime, bearing in mind the fact that the state often has shown itself to be incompetent or incapacitated to act in particular areas, especially those controlled by parallel power structures. In Rio de Janeiro, despite the tremendous efforts that have been made to pacify some slums, many are still under the control of drug gangs or, increasingly, militias, as Cano and Duarte (2013) have pointed out. In other words, there may not have been a profound sea-change in the way the city functions, quite apart from the fact that, with many others still not under state control, recorded violent crime does not necessarily reflect actual levels of these crimes. This argument can be underscored by recent events of people going missing in areas

already pacified and the police being blamed for such disappearances by part of the population, as well as state authority being openly challenged in others, as has happened recently in Rocinha and the Complexo de Alemão (a very large collection of previously very violent favelas in the north of Rio de Janeiro) respectively. These events serve to emphasize the continued problem of mistrust between population and state.³⁷

In response, those charged with developing and implementing the policy have pointed out that, whilst there are still significant problems to be overcome, 'we now have a waiting-list for UPPs',³⁸ and – for all the problems that persist – the thought of the state having a permanent presence in areas that used to be absolute no-go areas for its agents only some years ago – such as Rocinha or the Complexo de Alemão – represents indeed a sea-change.

The second group of analysts has questioned whether the fall in recorded violent crime can be linked specifically to the policies outlined above or are the result of an overlapping set of circumstances to which the policies may or may not have contributed. Certainly, in their review of the literature on the fall in violent crime in São Paulo, Carneiro et al. (2010) identify such a broad range of possible factors that it would be difficult to isolate particular government policies as being *the* decisive variable. To be fair to those responsible for developing these policies, they have, on the whole, not claimed that theirs is the solution to all problems. For instance, the secretary for public security in Rio de Janeiro, Beltrame, has repeatedly stated that UPPs will only work in conjunction with a broader approach to public order, which involves the community as well as all levels of government, and will only make a significant difference within the particular areas in conjunction with other initiatives.³⁹ This includes the launching of a package of social measures called 'UPP Social'.⁴⁰

In São Paulo, as already pointed out above, the state government claims to have done significant work in terms of combating disorder, social exclusion and other problems associated with crime.

The third group has focused on the erosion of the patterns which have, according to them, underpinned the fall in violent crime over recent years. According to one policy advisor in São Paulo, the recent upsurge in violence can be explained by the 'disastrous administration of public security' in the city, in particular the failure to stem the influence of imprisoned gang leaders on their members on the outside.⁴¹ The former commander of the PM agrees, albeit in somewhat more diplomatic terms: 'There has been a change towards confrontation again, giving more value to the elite forces that do the killing [of criminals], at the expense of ordinary policemen'. This, according to him, has led, amongst other things, to a reaction from elements of the organized crime network, leading to a spiral of action and reaction, including the re-emergence of police death squads, something which the public like but 'which undermines the basis of the state of rights'.⁴²

By way of contrast, one former minister interviewed argued that the recent upsurge of violence, particularly in São Paulo, was to be expected: 'There was always going to be a reaction and I think we are seeing that now.' At the same time, 'it is fairly simple to get the homicide rate from 30 to 10 [per 100 000 inhabitants, as has happened in São Paulo], but quite difficult to get it from 10 to 8. Setbacks are normal.' This same minister also heavily criticized the media for the way that they report crime, especially in areas of the middle and upper social classes: 'If you just had the TV on and did not pay particular

attention you would think that violent crime was an epidemic which affected all parts of the city the whole time. It is not like that but it feeds a sense of insecurity'.⁴³

Yet a further group of critics points out that such setbacks will continue to occur because the underlying causes feeding crime have not been tackled and, in fact, have been reinforced by elements of the current policies. For instance, one community leader in one of Rio's most violent shanty towns pointed out during a seminar attended by the author that the majority of pacified slums in Rio lie in a circle close to the major tourist destinations of the city and close to some of the city's wealthiest neighborhoods. As such, the pacification of these *entrenches* the divisions between those areas of the city considered safe and those that are not, pointing out that even before pacification the richest areas of the city were also the safest, despite the existence of violent favelas in their midst.⁴⁴ Equally, in São Paulo, the policies have done very little to reverse the divisions of wealth between the richer parts close to the city center and those poorer at the periphery of the city. In fact, according to Denyer-Willis and Tierney (2012), in some instances the provision of security in those peripheral areas has essentially been contracted out by the state to the very criminal gangs the state is meant to confront. In Rio de Janeiro, equally, one unit commander admitted that there was no way of knowing how many people had chosen or managed to enter the formal economy as a result of pacification at the same time as living costs – such as rents – in pacified areas have shot up significantly.⁴⁵ Following this argument, it is therefore doubtful whether any drop in violent crime – welcome though it is – is sustainable, since it does not change underlying patterns that underpin crime in the country at the higher levels of analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

The last section should have given a clear idea that the problem of violent crime in Brazil generally – and its urban centers in particular – is a long way from being resolved, and that the patterns which have sustained this issue for so long have not yet been definitively changed. Brazil remains an extremely violent country.

However, it is also undeniable that considerable progress has been made and that significant parts of Rio and São Paulo – as the focus of this chapter – are today much safer than they were 10 years ago. As several analysts have shown, this is due to a number of factors. Yet I would argue that recognition of the problem encountered as complex and multi-faceted – as recognized in both cases analyzed here – represents significant progress. Equally, the fact that in both cases there were efforts to change the *context* within which self-organization occurs represented a massive step forward from the previous belief that one can simply – and literally – eliminate the problem. Thirdly, recognition that initial progress is much easier than sustainable progress later on – as displayed by the former minister interviewed – bodes well in terms of setting expectations about the policy at realistic levels.

The key challenge that emerged out of this research, then, is to make progress sustainable regardless of election outcomes. Both a minister in the Rio de Janeiro state government and the former commander of the Military Police in São Paulo argued that this is difficult in a culture which is geared towards short-termism and in which the media has a huge role in setting the public agenda. In such circumstances, practical results are the

key to convincing the population of the advantages of continuing the current course. As shown, particularly in São Paulo, there was a preoccupation of those interviewed about the chances of making progress sustainable in view of the new direction currently being taken by parts of the government and the public clamor for 'action'.

Dealing with highly complex adaptive systems such as these, such setbacks should, I would argue, be expected and require action across all levels of society and government, bearing in mind the deep structural features of Brazilian society which also help sustain the pattern of violence. Changing those will be a process which will last decades, not months or years. As such, many challenges still lie ahead.

Finally, I think one can sketch out some broader lessons for complex public policy issues from the above case studies. First, objectives and expectations for addressing any complex problem have to be realistic. No given policy – however well thought out and implemented – will, by itself, definitively 'resolve' any given issue. The aim should be to influence and change the patterns which have led to the situation being addressed.

In order to be able to influence and change established patterns, it is critical that policy-makers ask *questions* rather than provide ready-made answers. Policy-makers need to be clear *what* patterns they are confronting, what these patterns *mean* in terms of setting objectives and generating options for actions and what they can then realistically *do* to change these patterns, something that was clearly done in the cases of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in relation to violent crime. Such a process of questioning what one is seeing and doing does not end but, rather, is continuous.

Thirdly, a key lesson is that public policies are made for someone. The participation and feedback of these users is crucial to the success of any policy. Therefore, communication needs to be a critical part of policy development, implementation and adjustment.

Finally, feedback mechanisms are critical in order to achieve coherence across any system. The objectives of a policy need to be *scaled* across the system in the sense that, at any given level of the system, actors (or agents) are working in the pursuit of commonly defined objectives. Violent crime generates very destructive patterns across time and space and only concerted action across all levels of the system will enable the possibility of changing towards more generative patterns. The same rule applies to any other area of public policy, be it health, education or anything else. The role of policy-makers is to enable the emergence of such patterns and to sustain them across time and space once established.

NOTES

1. See <http://tuliokahn.blogspot.com.br/p/world-homicides-homicidios-no-mundo.html> for the full statistics.
2. For a very detailed breakdown of the figures see, again, <http://tuliokahn.blogspot.com.br/p/world-homicides-homicidios-no-mundo.html>.
3. Numbers from <http://mapadaviolencia.org.br/mapa2012.php>.
4. This section is adapted from Lehmann (2012).
5. For details, see Santos and Silveira (2008).
6. See, for instance, Felbab-Brown (2011).
7. See Sento-Sé (2002).
8. See Carneiro (2010b).

9. Interview with former commander of the Military Police of São Paulo.
10. For the history and evolution of the PCC, see Nunes Dias (2013).
11. Interview with policy advisor.
12. Adapted from Lehmann (2012).
13. Interview with former commander of the Military Police of São Paulo.
14. Interview with former minister in state government of São Paulo.
15. Interview with former minister of the state government of São Paulo.
16. Interview with former minister in state government, June 2013.
17. Interview with former commander of the Military Police, June 2013.
18. Interview with former minister in state government.
19. Interview with former commander of the Military Police.
20. Interview with policy advisor.
21. See World Bank (2013).
22. Interview with former commander of the Military Police of São Paulo.
23. Ibid.
24. Interview with policy advisor.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview with former minister of São Paulo state government.
27. Interview with policy advisor.
28. Interview with minister in Rio de Janeiro state government.
29. Interview with UPP commander.
30. Interview with minister in Rio de Janeiro's state government.
31. Interview with UPP commander.
32. Interview with minister in Rio de Janeiro state government.
33. Interview with UPP commander.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. See http://urutau.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp_imagens/Uploads/201212capital.pdf, accessed on 2 August 2013.
37. See <http://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2013/08/caso-amarildo-pode-por-em-risco-pacificacao-na-rocinha-diz-pm.html>, accessed on 14 August 2013.
38. Interview with member of the Rio de Janeiro state government.
39. See, for instance, <http://cbn.globoradio.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/2013/08/02/BELTRAME-NEGA-DES-GASTE-NA-POLITICA-DAS-UPPS-MAS-RECONHECE-PROBLEMAS-LOCAIS.htm>, accessed on 14 August 2013.
40. See <http://www.uppsocial.org/> for more information.
41. Interview with policy advisor in São Paulo.
42. Interview with former commander of the Military Police in São Paulo.
43. Interview with former minister of state government in São Paulo.
44. Community leader from a favela in Rio de Janeiro during a seminar discussing the pacification strategy in the city.
45. Interview with UPP commander in Rio de Janeiro.

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