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FEATURED Q&A

Which Factors Are Lowering Brazil's Homicide Rate?



Brazil's murder rate fell by double digits last year. Police officers in training are pictured in Rio de Janeiro state. // File Photo: Military Police of Rio de Janeiro State.

Q Homicides in Brazil are projected to have fallen 16 percent in 2019 as compared to the previous year, although Latin America's most populous nation still had more than 41,000 murders, the highest total number in the region. The drop coincides with increased use of technology in policing, with federal police deploying military drones and some state police forces applying machine learning and advanced crime dataset tactics. How well are Brazilian security forces using advanced technologies in policing? Are data-driven tools being used in ways that respect citizen rights and privacy? What tactics are emerging as most effective, and which are drawing the most controversy?

A Robert Muggah, co-founder and research director, and Pedro Augusto Pereira Francisco, senior researcher, both at the Igarapé Institute: "Brazil's recent homicide decline is breathtaking. The drop from 64,000 to 41,000 reported murders between 2017 and 2019 in Brazil is unprecedented. It is also the subject of furious debate, not least because police killings have skyrocketed over the same period. There are many theories about what explains this nationwide reduction in killings, ranging from the country's economic recovery and its rapidly aging population to reduced inter-factional fighting among drug trafficking groups and improved state-level policing. One thing is for certain: the reduction in murder started well before the Bolsonaro administration came to power in 2019. Changes in law enforcement tactics, including the use of data-driven crime prevention methods, likely

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Lima Group Meets on Venezuela, Nations Urged to Do More

Members of the so-called Lima Group met in Canada to discuss Venezuela's political and economic crises. Canadian Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne urged countries to do more to restore democracy in the Andean nation.

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BUSINESS

Microsoft to Invest \$1.1 Bn in Mexico Over Five Years

The technology company said the investment will include education and training programs.

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POLITICAL

Morales Barred From Senate Run in Bolivia

Bolivia's electoral tribunal barred former President Evo Morales from running for Senate in the country's May 3 general election, saying he does not reside in the country.

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Morales // File Photo: Bolivian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Bolivia Election Officials Bar Morales From Senate Run

Bolivia's Supreme Electoral Tribunal on Thursday barred former President Evo Morales from running for Senate in the country's May 3 election, saying he does not live in Bolivia, the Associated Press reported. After 13 years in office, Morales resigned last November and fled the country amid anti-government protests following his disputed re-election. He first went to Mexico and now lives in Argentina. The head of the electoral tribunal, Salvador Romero, told reporters Thursday that the decision to bar Morales from running for Senate cannot be appealed with the panel, but added that the former president "can explore any judicial routes he sees as pertinent." Morales called the ruling a "blow to democracy," and leaders of his Movement Toward Socialism party are expected to file an appeal with Bolivia's Constitutional Tribunal. Morales is also barred from running for president in the May 3 vote, which is a do-over of the disputed Oct. 20 election. Morales denies that his re-election in the October balloting resulted from fraud, and he has called his ouster from office, which happened

under pressure from the military, a coup. "The members of the TSE [electoral tribunal] know I meet the requirements to be a candidate" for Senate, Morales tweeted Thursday. The electoral tribunal accepted the candidacy of Luis Arce, the presidential candidate of Morales' party. Former President Carlos Mesa, who finished second in October, and current interim President Jeanine Áñez are also in the running.

Nations Urged to Do More on Venezuela as Lima Group Meets

Time is running out to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Venezuela, members of the so-called Lima Group regional bloc said on Thursday, Reuters reported. The group, which recognizes opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president, wants Nicolás Maduro to resign and call elections. Maduro, who maintains the backing of the Venezuelan military and foreign governments including Russia, has refused to do so. "Time is of the essence," Canadian Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne told a news conference after a Lima Group meeting in Gatineau, Québec. "We are facing a humanitarian crisis and an environmental crisis of a historic proportion," he added, noting that nearly five million

NEWS BRIEFS

Protesters Seek Elections Officials' Resignation After Failed Vote in DR

Hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets in the Dominican Republic on Thursday to demand the resignation of the country's elections commission, in the fourth straight day of protests over Sunday's failed municipal elections, the Associated Press reported. The latest demonstration followed a police statement that authorities believed the ballot failure was a result of people tampering with the electronic voting system. Officials said Wednesday that they had arrested a police colonel who provides security to an opposition party candidate and an information technology expert. Neither has been charged.

Uber Resumes Operations in Colombia Under New Service Model

Ride-hailing service Uber on Thursday resumed operations in Colombia using a new service model, less than a month after exiting the Andean nation following a ruling by regulators that Uber violated competition rules, Reuters reported. The new model allows users to rent cars with drivers under an agreement between both parties, Uber said. "The application will be the point of contact which connects the two parties to form a contract," the company said.

Brazil's Federal Tax Revenue Surges to Record

Revenues from federal taxes in Brazil in January hit a record high of 175 billion reais (\$40 billion), official figures showed on Thursday, Reuters reported. The amount was more than the 167.1 billion reais expected in a Reuters poll, and it is an increase of 4.7 percent in real terms from the same month the previous year, the federal tax service said. Revenues were boosted by adjustments to corporate taxes on 2019 earnings, the tax service added.

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helped. For more than a decade, Brazilian states have been experimenting with new technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. As we reported in Americas Quarterly this month, São Paulo was a first mover, launching InfoCrim and Detecta—crime-mapping systems that are credited with hastening a drop in violent victimization. Following a wave of reforms, these platforms were combined with more investment in community policing, guidelines regulating the use of force, better training and sharper coordination between different police forces. Since then, hot spot mapping and crime forecasting systems have been tested in Rio de Janeiro, Fortaleza and Santa

Catarina. The appetite to apply new technologies to track, deter and investigate crime is growing in Brazil. License plate and face recognition technologies are being deployed across the country. More controversially, the governor of Rio de Janeiro even floated the idea of equipping drones with automatic weapons to target suspects, though this was never implemented. Not surprisingly, civil rights groups are pushing back. These tools can help, but if poorly implemented and managed, they can do more harm than good. There is a need to introduce transparency not just over the use of tools, but also with the algorithms that power them."

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people have fled the economic and political crises in Venezuela. Champagne called on other countries to do more to restore democracy in Venezuela. "The international community should come with us shoulder to shoulder," he said, Reuters reported. Champagne hosted the meeting, which representatives from numerous countries in the Western Hemisphere attended, including from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guaidó's administration, CBC News reported. The meeting was an effort by the Canadian government to renew the group's campaign to foster democracy in Venezuela, a year after changes in membership and few developments on the ground in the Andean nation.

BUSINESS NEWS

Microsoft to Invest \$1.1 Billion in Mexico Over Next Five Years

Microsoft will invest \$1.1 billion in Mexico over the next five years, said Chief Executive Satya Nadella, according to a promotional video that the Mexican government released on Thursday, Reuters reported. The investment is "focused on expanding access to digital technology for people and organizations across the country," Nadella said. The plan includes education and training programs with the creation of three labs and virtual classrooms, in cooperation with Mexican public universities, with the aim of strengthening the development of digital skills, El Universal reported. Microsoft will also build a new data center to deliver "client services to help every organization to really get an advantage and drive digital transformation," Nadella added. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador met with Nadella last year. During his daily morning news conference on Thursday, López Obrador said the announced plan showed that Mexico is an attractive investment destination, with a strong local currency, stable inflation and prudent debt management by the government. Mexico's economy contracted by 0.1 percent last year.

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

Diaz-Balart Applauds Move to Sanction Russia's Rosneft Over Venezuela Ties

U.S. Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) on Tuesday applauded the Trump administration's move to sanction a subsidiary of Russian state oil company Rosneft for what the United States sees as helping the government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, which it considers illegitimate. "I congratulate the Trump Administration for supporting the Venezuelan people by sanctioning those who support tyranny while at the same time helping to preserve Venezuela's natural resources for those to whom they really belong: the Venezuelan people," Diaz-Balart wrote in Spanish on Twitter. Earlier the same day, the U.S. Treasury announced it was sanctioning Rosneft Trading, the company's brokerage, and warned that anyone doing business with it is also at risk of U.S. sanctions.

More Than 110 House Democrats Call for End to 'Remain in Mexico' Policy

More than 110 Democratic lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives called for the "immediate end" of the "Remain in Mexico" migration policy, which allows U.S. officials to send asylum seekers to Mexico while they await trial in the United States. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chairman Joaquin Castro (D-Tex.) led the initiative, and another 112 Democratic members of the House signed the letter. "Under this dangerous and illegal policy, the Administration has forced tens of thousands of vulnerable children, families, and other asylum seekers into unsafe conditions before their asylum requests can even be heard," said the letter, which was posted to the Hispanic Caucus' website. "'Remain in Mexico' repeatedly jeopardizes the physical safety and emotional well-being vulnerable populations sought to escape from in the first place," the letter added.

Panetta Expresses Concern Over Bukele's 'Blatant Acts of Political Intimidation'

U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta (D-Calif.) on Feb. 15 led a group of Democratic lawmakers expressing their concerns about Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's recent decision to deploy military and police forces to the country's Legislative Assembly. In a letter addressed to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the legislators wrote that "such blatant acts of political intimidation must be met with swift and broad rebuke," according to a statement published on Panetta's website. "We strongly believe that bilateral relationships with our Latin American neighbors provide critical stability in the region. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore authoritarian tendencies and tactics in pursuit of policy outcomes," the letter said. Bukele's show of force earlier this month, which sought to pressure lawmakers to pass his government's public security proposals, sparked international and national criticism and calls for Bukele to respect democratic institutions.

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A **Gene M. Smith, president and CEO of Smith Brandon International:** “President Bolsonaro was elected on a law-and-order platform. Homicides in Brazil have declined under his administration and his minister of Justice and Public Security, Sérgio Moro—famous for his aggressive role in Operation Car Wash. Both are hardliners in pursuing law enforcement goals. Bolsonaro’s support for police extrajudicial killings has included a Christmas pardon for police officers charged with on-duty shootings (such as accidental shooting of bystanders). Improved technology and access to

“Improved targeting of drug gangs may have led to something of a truce between violent drug gangs...”

— Gene M. Smith

artificial intelligence may play some role in enhanced law enforcement operations, particularly in combating narco-trafficking and gang-related activities in Brazil. In turn, improved targeting of drug gangs may have led to something of a truce between violent drug gangs, which have long been engaged in persistent and violent turf battles. Reduced homicides may be due to both better policing and coordinated criminal activities. Is change in the wind for Brazil, where violence is a fact of life in cities such as Rio de Janeiro? Operation Car Wash reflected a philosophy of targeting corruption among government officials. Why not among police officers? Turning away from corruption and the violence that can accompany it has its benefits. The swing to the right with the election of President Bolsonaro could also reflect a change in mindset and rejection of the glorification of violent acts. Before there can be true change in the widespread acceptance of violence in Brazil, the possibility of

change must be recognized. The decline in the homicide rate may be part of a change in society that had to start somewhere (such as with the opposition to smoking in the United States).”

A **Henrique Rzezinski, member of the executive committee and former president of Amcham Rio and member of the board of the Council of Foreign Relations of Brazil (CEBRI):** “Although still far from developed countries’ standards, technology has been largely improved in fighting criminality in Brazil. The present federal government was elected having security as one of its main campaign promises, and such a significant reduction has to be partially credited to the improvement of intelligence measures. The crackdown on criminality has also improved, although the number of innocent victims has also increased in such crackdowns, mainly in poor areas where drug traffic is present, with obvious negative media coverage. There is much controversy regarding the blame for the casualties of innocent people. The police claim it is part of the drug dealers’ strategy to kill and blame the police, and drug dealers blame the police. The truth is probably in the middle, as both the weapons of drug dealers and police are smuggled. At the same time, Justice Minister Sérgio Moro has sent Congress legislation to employ tougher measures to combat criminality. The government’s reforms agenda is not popular, as it addresses innumerable privileges in the current social security legislation, in legislation regarding civil servants in the legislative, judiciary and executive branches of the government, in the unfair tax system and in the criminal legislation. It is very difficult from a political view. We will see how it develops over the next three years.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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