



Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Washington, D.C.

## **UPP's (Pacifying Police Units): Game Changer?**

**Mauricio Moura**

Prepared for and presented at the seminar, "*Citizen Security in Brazil: Progress and Challenges*," organized by the *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* in Washington D.C., 28 March 2014.

**Washington, D.C.**  
**March 2014**

*DRAFT PAPER: Do not cite without permission of author*

## Section I: Introduction

The World Cup 2014 and the Summer Olympic Games 2016 present an enormous challenge to Brazil regarding public security. This paper intends to summarize available data about Brazilian (especially focused on the city of Rio de Janeiro) overall violence scenario and present empirical results from two surveys (run on 2011 and 2013) focused on the UPP's (Pacifying Police Units). Section II provides an overview about Latin America and Brazil homicide rate data; Section III presents specific data (3,816 interviews in 2011 and 5,200 interviews in 2013) about the State and City of Rio de Janeiro before and after the UPP's (Pacifying Police Units); Section IV and V presents data from the two surveys about the UPP's and Section VI concludes.

## Section II: Fact: Brazil is a dangerous place.

A toxic combination of organized crime, drug trafficking, internecine gang wars, government corruption, and desperate poverty have merged to form the world's most brutal, murderous region: Latin America. According to the United Nations, Latin America hosts 28% of the world's homicides despite clocking in at only 8% of world population.

As study conducted by Mexico's Citizen Council for Public Security has provided the Top 50 most violent cities across the globe (Statistics do not include war zones or areas where the murder rate is not reported by the authorities). San Pedro Sula in Honduras, is the leader with a homicide rate of over 169 homicides per 100,000 residents.

The official Brazilian statistics has shown that more than 1.2 million people were murdered in Brazil between 1980 and 2012, making it the world's seventh most violent country. During the period, homicides soared 132 percent from a rate of 11.5 murders for 100,000 inhabitants in 1980 to 27 per 100,000 in 2011, according to the Map of Violence report developed by the Latin American Studies Center (Cebela). The figures are one for 100,000 in China, 3.4 in India, 5.3 in the United States and 12.2 in Nigeria.

Among those aged between 14 and 25, homicides skyrocketed 326 percent to reach 53 per 100,000 inhabitants, said the study published by the Latin American Studies Center (Cebela).

In 2012, Brazil, recorded 47,136 homicides, ranked seventh among the world's most violent nations after El Salvador, the US Virgin Islands, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Colombia and Guatemala. Brazil is beyond some war-zone countries such as Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many academic authors blame impunity (only five to eight percent of crimes are solved in Brazil compared with 80 percent in France) and insufficient efforts to combat a prevailing culture of violence. Others claim that the well-known combination of corruption, drug trafficking and under-development are the key factors that sustain high homicide rates.

Despite the academic discussion, the concrete fact is that Brazil is clearly a dangerous place. However, some progress has been achieved, especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

### Section III: Rio de Janeiro is still dangerous but the UPP's could be a game changer.

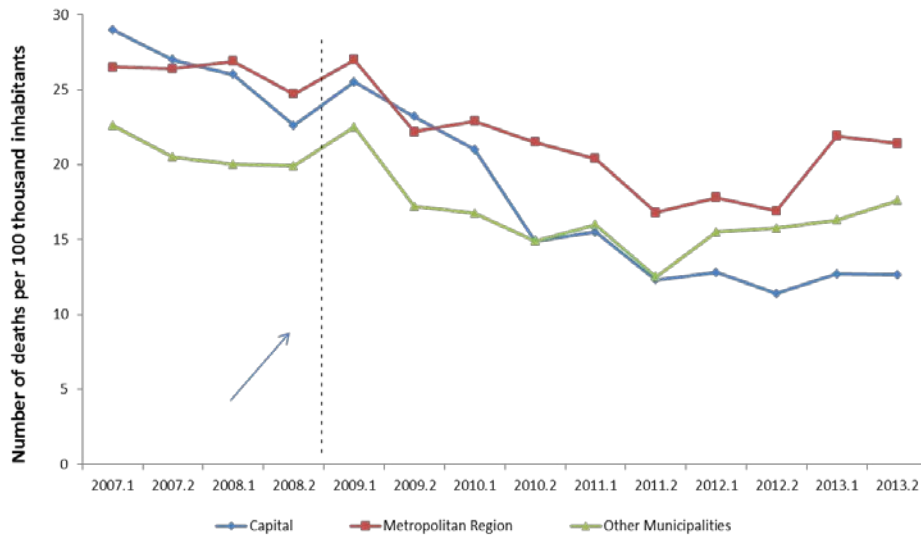
The Rio de Janeiro State Department of Security's statistics has shown that the homicide rate in the city of Rio de Janeiro was 24 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012.

The United States State Department (*Brazil 2013 Crime and Safety Report: Rio de Janeiro*) demonstrates that Rio de Janeiro's homicide rates have been falling. Since 2005, homicides in the state and city of Rio de Janeiro have declined over 50 percent in real numbers and in the homicide rate (homicides per 100,000 inhabitants). Despite this drop, in 2012 there were still 4,041 homicides in Rio de Janeiro state and 1,209 homicides in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The homicide rate in the state and city of Rio de Janeiro has dropped dramatically from 42 homicides per 100,000 in 2005 (and 73 per 100,000 in 1990) to 24 homicides per 100,000 in 2012.

A major factor responsible for the reduction in violence is due to the Favela Pacification Program (UPP). First introduced in November 2008, specially recruited and community police trained officers enter Rio's favelas (slums), expel drug gang members and other armed criminal elements, and establish a permanent presence, called a Unidade de Policia Pacificadora (UPP). Pacified

favelas are those that have a permanent presence of Rio de Janeiro State Military Police.

Diagram I: Homicide rates per 100,000 (State of Rio de Janeiro)

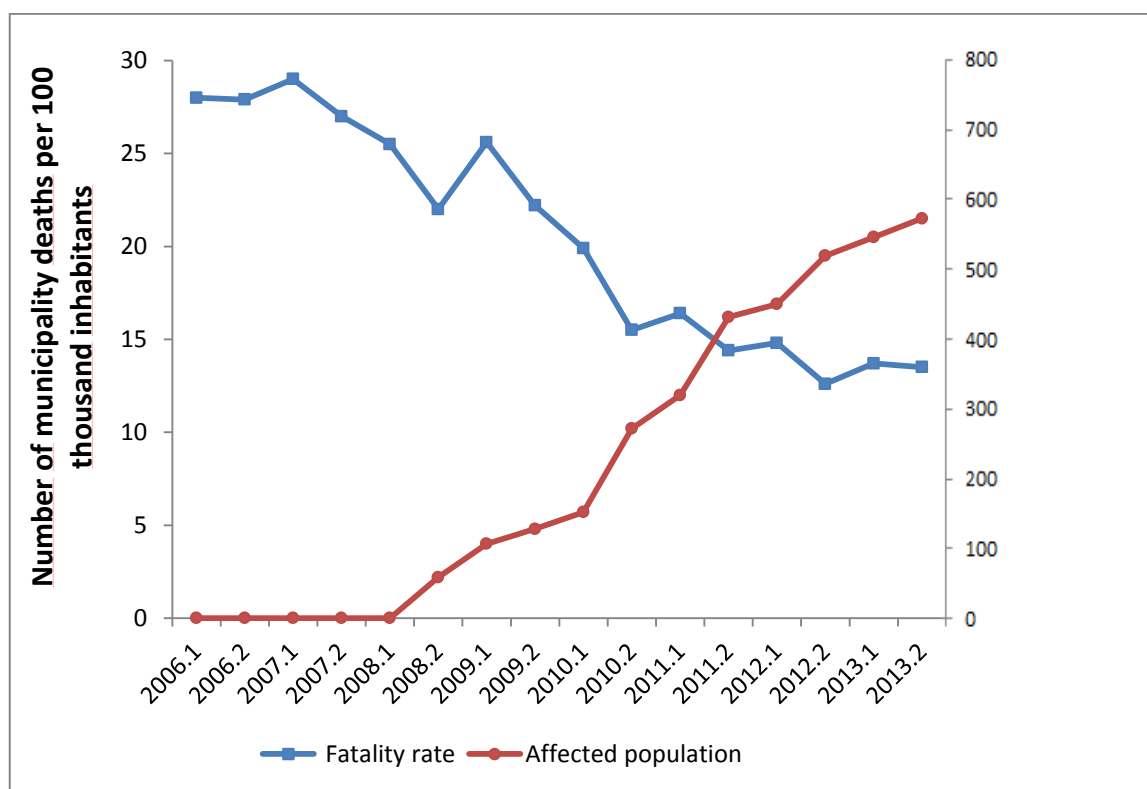


Source: Rio de Janeiro State Department of Security

As the Diagram I clearly shows, the City of Rio de Janeiro (State's capital) has had the highest decrease level in homicide rates if compared to the other regions of the State (metropolitan region is basically known as “Baixada Fluminense”).

Furthermore, Diagram II below also presents a positive trend. Homicide rates are homicide rates with the increase of the population affected by the UPP's.

Diagram II: Homicide Rate per 100,000 x Population affected by UPP's



Source: Rio de Janeiro State Department of Security

Officially, the main goal of the UPP's, according to the government of Rio de Janeiro, was for favela (communities) inhabitants to be free to come and go, which was virtually impossible under the rule of drug traffickers and private militias made of former and off-duty police officers. With an average of 150 police officers in each community, do the UPPs make residents feel safer? The next section presents how people in the city of Rio de Janeiro really felt about the UPP's.

#### Section IV: From the people's perspective: a real game changer

From August 22 to September 2, 2011 and from January 22<sup>nd</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, two comprehensive surveys examined the impact of the government strategy to reduce crime and violence and bring peace and services to the affected areas. The main findings are presented below. The goal was the gauge the opinion of the people supposed to benefit from the government

intervention and compare answers overtime.

Both studies confirmed the overall positive reaction the UPPs have generated among the affected population, but also shed light on the challenges that the residents of these communities face, from lack of public services to employment, which must be overcome to secure its sustainability in the long run.

During the first survey, 3,816 residents, from 17 communities where UPPs were established, were interviewed. The purpose of the first survey, commissioned by the Secretary of Labor and Employment, was to draw a picture of the communities, to be used as a tool for public policy decision-making.

The second survey interviewed 5,200 residents from 30 communities but also interviewed UPP's surrounded areas residents. The second purpose was funded by the Rio de Janeiro Department of Security and was mainly focused on the security aspects.

For the majority of the inhabitants interviewed in the first survey, 66.8 percent, safety indeed improved after the UPPs, as opposed to 24.4 percent who believe there were no changes and 4.7 percent who think that it worsened. For the second, the overall result has changed (considering only the 17 communities interviewed in both surveys) to 57.0 percent expressing that security has improved and 33.6 who believe no changes had occurred.

On top of the overall numbers, there are real differences among the communities. In general, the longer the UPPs are in a community, the safer people feel. From a overtime perspective, some communities felt safer in 2013 compared to 2011: Santa Marta, Sao Carlos, Sao Joao Matriz/Quieto and Tabajara Cabrito. Other communities, basically motivated by on-going disputes among drug-dealers and the police, felt safer in 2011 compared to 2013: those are the cases of Andaraí, Mangueira, Cidade de Deus and Escondidinho/Prazeres.

A key factor for people's safety is sufficient and reliable police force. The majority of respondents agreed (in both surveys) that the number of police officers is adequate, 54.5 percent, or entirely adequate, 9 percent in 2011 and 51.8 and 7.7 in 2013 – a very stable context overtime.

Another positive and stable finding was the public's perception of police training. The majority of the respondents that UPP's police officers are well trained and/or very well trained (54.9 percent in 2011 and 52.3.

A qualitative observation from the ground has shown that communities that experienced more struggles and attempts by drug dealers to regain control were less satisfied with the number of police officers and its training.

Furthermore, for 42.6 percent of interviewees in the first survey, the UPPs officers have no involvement with corruption. In 2013, this number has decreased to 23.0 percent. However, only 6.9 (in 2011) and 7.0 (in 2013) percent said they believe the pacifying police to be corrupt. What has improved is the perception of “some involvement” (an increase of 20.0 percentage points). On the other hand, corruption is mentioned as UPP’s most negative aspect by only 4.6 percent of the residents (actually, for 34.4% the UPP’s have “no weakness”).

#### Section V: UPP’s – the future: temporary or permanent game changer?

The second survey has also interviewed, as previously mentioned, 1,915 from UPP’s communities surround areas. The main goal was to measure safety perception of households indirectly affected by the new context.

The overall perception of both “insiders” and “outsiders” is similar and positive: for 56.0 percent of “insiders” and 60.0 percent of “outsiders”; life is better with the UPP’s presence. On top of that, 82.8 percent of surround areas residents think the UPP’s “have some problems but are the best thing that ever happen in Rio in terms of public security” (68.2 percent of UPP’s communities residents share the same feeling).

Additionally, most of them, 83 percent of surround residents and 75 percent of UPP’s community inhabitants, also think that the UPP’s should expand and be present in more communities.

However, the future of the UPP’s are uncertain for almost half of respondents – 44.5 percent of “insiders” and 37.5 percent of “outsiders” think that UPP’s are “temporary – only designed for the World Cup and Olympic Games”.

#### Section VI: Conclusion

Hence, the Brazilian society faces a daily treat with violence and lack of safety in its major metropolitan areas and also faces. In particular, the city of Rio de Janeiro has benefited from a different approach to face public security: the UPP's.

The homicide gross data from Rio reveals a potential positive impact after the program begun. Furthermore, public perception collected from two extensive surveys that provides an empirical signs that people feel safer and overall better off with the UPP's presence – for most of them, UPP's are a real game changer.

However, UPP's future is uncertain and it is certainly the beginning and not the end of a long and difficult battle for public security.