

Homicides: the condemnable social annihilation

Abstract

In this article, we seek to understand the practices and foundations directly linked to homicides that impact the increase in violence rates. The increase in social unrest is noticeable in movements and collective actions in opposition to the generalization of violent actions produced by criminal groups. It should be noted that the issue is not simple, since complex factors are directly associated with this social phenomenon. In this investigation, based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative material, we will seek to produce a detailed description of the flow of homicides that occurred in the city of Juazeiro, in the state of Bahia - Brazil. In the text, we will concisely highlight the motivations for these crimes, with the aim of guiding the reader to reflect on the incompatibility between life and social annihilation.

Keywords: Homicides, criminal groups, violence, victims.

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Introduction

In this work we seek to highlight how the dynamics of criminal gangs are directly linked to high levels of violence, illustrating the primacy of the criminal universe in controlling homicidal practices in popular regions. As already discussed by Lima, et al.,¹ "in the context of the development of Brazilian democracy, public responses are constructed in the face of crime, violence and the democratic assumption of access to justice and the guarantee of rights". Seen as a social problem and included in the list of serious crimes in Brazil, homicide has a negative notoriety in all levels of society, affecting the country's routine and especially the victims' families and communities. In recent decades, homicide rates in the country have been alarming. It is true that in 2019 there was a drop in the rates of violent deaths regionally¹ and even at the national level,² which has led public managers to presumptuously claim responsibility for this fact. Empirical evidence, however, can demystify such a demand-based discourse, presenting new causal possibilities for the aforementioned decrease, but originating in the crime environment itself. In this regard, this article aims to contribute, along the same lines as authors of other texts on the subject, such as Feltran^{2,3} who also lists arguments contesting these demands of governments and police, specific to the case of São Paulo. São Paulo remains the state with the lowest homicide rate in the country,³ coincidentally, it is the state where the Primeiro Comando da Capital PCC gang has supremacy.

This article is motivated by the author's own point of view, based on qualitative and quantitative research that aimed to describe and interpret the dynamics that portray the violence of the war between criminal gangs in the city of Juazeiro da Bahia - Brazil. Based on the announcement of Juazeiro's position in the ranking of the 10 most violent cities in Brazil for two consecutive years. A city with economic prominence on the national scene that contrasts with the precarious reality of its population, a condition that reveals that not only criminal actions deserve attention, but also government policy must be observed very carefully as responsible for the social chaos. A process of social, factional and political conflicts with accumulated demands that have been penalizing the population.

The municipality of Juazeiro

¹The State ended the first quarter of 2019 with an 18.8% reduction in Intentional Lethal Violent Crimes (CVLIs) compared to the first quarter of 2018.

²Gazeta do Povo. Brazil records 22% drop in homicides. 2019.

³Secretariat of Public Security of the State of São Paulo. 2025.

Approximately 500km from the capital of Bahia, Salvador, Juazeiro is located in the northern region of Bahia. A city located in the São Francisco valley, in the lower-middle course of the São Francisco River, its population is 237,821.⁴ With its economy supported by irrigated fruit farming, which gives Juazeiro national prominence when it comes to agribusiness, an attractive municipality for investments, being the 12th Gross Domestic Product - GDP⁵ of the State and the 269th GDP of Brazil. This economic indicator of agricultural production has a positive impact on the municipality's trade and services sectors, resulting in 34% of the workforce generated in the first four months of 2024.⁶

All these economic qualities demonstrate a prosperous city. However, the social and economic reality in practice is different from the economic data presented here; just walk around the neighborhoods to see a reality that is antagonistic to its economic visibility. Juazeiro "has not shown orderly or egalitarian growth, which has led to the creation of slums in the areas",⁴ a city classified by the Social Process Index - IPS Brazil as having an average social indicator of 59.8/100⁷ and in recent years with national prominence for a dark reason, its placement among the most violent cities in Brazil, according to the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook 2023⁸ (10th position) e 2024⁹ (7th position). Factual situation that follows a generalized indication in the country.

Conflicts and violence an irrefutable reality

Society's frustration with the lack of security and justice is reflected in the country's violent events. Frequent news reports broadcast daily by the media are a channel for inducing this state of social concern. "The population becomes fearful in the face of so many lethal events, in an environment surrounded by violence and unexpected threats".⁵ "Security is a government concern",⁶ also defined as a social right,¹⁰

⁴IBGE: Population in the last census 2022. 2022.

⁵IBGE: GDP at current prices / Revised series, 2020. 2024.

⁶Agência Sebrae de Notícias. Juazeiro 146 years: small businesses boost the local economy. 2024.

⁷Social Process Index - IPS Brazil, 2024. City of Juazeiro - Bahia. Result relative to other municipalities in the same GDP per capita range in 2021. 2024.

⁸Brazilian Public Security Yearbook 2023.

⁹Brazilian Public Security Yearbook 2024.

¹⁰Security in the Brazilian Federal Constitution is a fundamental right and

“the right to security forms a pair with the right to freedom”.⁷ The theme of violence is increasingly present in political debates related to models of managing social conflicts. Even though the reduction in Intentional Violent Deaths – IVD¹¹ in 2023 at the national level was 3.4%, as revealed by the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, the situation is still worrying. There are 46,328 intentional violent deaths in Brazil in 2023, a rate of 22.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. Brazil is undoubtedly a violent country, a nation that records high homicide rates, a peculiarity that has been sustained over the years and without tangible solutions.¹² Newspapers reported daily on violence in the country; “Violent deaths are falling, but Brazil is still the 18th country with the highest death rate in the world”.⁸

“Despite the decline, the lethality rate is still considered quite high when compared to the global scenario. In absolute numbers, Brazil is the country with the most homicides on the planet. In relative terms, it ranks 18th among the most violent countries among the nations that have made data available to UNODC, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, over the last eight years. With 3% of the world’s population, Brazil is responsible for 10.1% of the 458,000 homicides recorded in 119 countries in 2021, the most recent data.”⁸

It is clear from the note above that Brazil is a hostile nation. During the years of high homicide rates, political and ideological discussions between politicians, security experts, journalists and organizations that sided with the fight against violence exchanged accusations regarding the real cause of the problem. Several theories were suggested when the rates dropped slightly, and each party in these disputes presented their arguments, even without scientific proof, a true political belligerence.

Lethal violence in Brazil is decreasing, according to data released in recent weeks. (...) This downward trend, reported monthly, has been publicly celebrated by the Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) government. However, four public security experts consulted by EL PAÍS disagree with this celebration. Two of them, from the police forces of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, believe that it is premature to indicate the reasons and do not see, at least for now, any relationship between the fluctuation and government policies. The others, who closely follow national data, explain that the downward trend began at the beginning of 2018 and is explained by the **dynamics of the criminal market itself**.⁹

The fact is that Brazil faces a complex situation related to an uncertain, asymmetric scenario of intimidation and risks to its internal security, imposing a condition of vulnerability on citizens. The expansion of crime affects all layers of society. “The fact is that the recent history of public security in Brazil has been marked by accumulated demands and incomplete changes”.¹⁰ “Under threats, the security and freedom of the population depend on profuse, multilateral and effective public security policies. However, what we are presented with is a belligerence between public spheres, when the issue is public (in)security”.¹¹

The protagonism of violence

guarantee of the citizen and as a social right Art. 6 of the Federal Constitution - CF.

¹¹The Intentional Violent Deaths (IVD) category corresponds to the sum of victims of intentional homicide, robbery, bodily harm resulting in death and deaths resulting from police interventions on and off duty. The IVD category represents the total number of victims of violent deaths with defined intentionality in a given territory.

¹²We suggest exploring the violence reports from the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook over the years. These reports are what have been used as a parameter of national violence.

“How gestures perceived as being from gangs are causing deaths in Brazil”,¹³ This is the title of a news article by reporter Galtieri Rodrigues, published on 12/23/2024 in Metr opoles Brasil. What draws attention to this news article? The usurpation of nonverbal forms of communication culturally adopted by Brazilian society. People are paying with their lives for the lack of knowledge of the criminal takeover by gangs, who have adopted it as their own symbolism. It is worth noting that this is not an isolated incident. And what are these gangs? These are groups of criminals who come together with the aim of joining forces in the search for greater power in the world of crime. A social problem that has existed for decades in the country. As we easily know, gangs were born or are born inside prisons, under the tutelage of the State. The most common and referenced example today is Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), which emerged in 1993 in the Taubat  Custody Center, claiming the need for inmates to unite against “the system”, because “it is in the prisons that their regime is legitimized”.³

And what dimension do criminal gangs assume in our society? According to news broadcast nationally in the media, “The Ministry of Justice and Public Security, through the National Secretariat for Penal Policies (Senappen), mapped 88 criminal organizations operating in Brazilian prisons”.¹⁴ However, this number can be questioned, as no institution has yet been able to accurately report this amount. Researcher Misse¹⁵ (2004) question the true number of criminal factions in the country. In his work entitled “How many factions really exist in Brazil?”¹⁶ Misse (2024) in his writing, lists some research that shows different numbers of gangs operating in Brazil, casting doubt on the statistical numbers, including those of the government itself. The fact is that national dominance is disputed by two distinct gangs, Comando Vermelho (CV), originating in Rio de Janeiro, and Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), originating in S o Paulo. The others continue as regional structures associated with a national force, usually the Comando Vermelho (CV) or Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC). These associations result in localized conflicts that directly reflect the levels of violence in the disputed regions.¹⁷ It was recently reported that Bahia is the Brazilian state with the largest number of gangs in operation. The total number of gangs in the state is 20, most of which are based in the capital. However, in the interior of the state, the dispute over the drug trade continues.

In the city of Juazeiro da Bahia, the focus city of our study, the following local factions are present: Bonde do Maluco (BDM), Honda, F milia do Norte, Raio A and Raio B. The BDM maintains the position of largest faction in the state and has an alliance with the Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP), also from Rio de Janeiro and an enemy of the CV. The BDM uses the three fingers raised as a greeting signal for its members, mainly laterally. To greet the members of the CV, two fingers are raised laterally. Making these gestures is a symbol of affront to the rival gang, which has resulted in deaths, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This shows a little of the dimension assumed by the factions in the social sphere. In Juazeiro, the BDM, in the fight for hegemonic control of the territory through the drug trade, has been waging a bloody war to annihilate its rivals. The result of these conflicts grants the city the title of the 7th most violent city in Brazil and the 5th in the state, according to the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook 2024.

¹³Metr opoles. 2024.

¹⁴Jornal de Bras lia. 2025.

¹⁵CNPq Researcher I-B

¹⁶Fonte Segura. 2025.

¹⁷We suggest searching on search engines for the topic, “Gang warfare as a cause of violence”, this way the reader will notice the number of articles and news reports that highlight this topic, and may have a greater understanding of the subject.

Social annihilation

It is noticeable in our society that people experience a dominant sense of perplexity regarding the voracity of daily violent events. “The values of freedom and security are inseparable and interdependent in a democratic society” (Duque, 2015, p. 57), and we know that a population will rarely have freedom in an environment lacking public security. Ensuring the feeling of security and freedom “consists in the absence of threats to the fundamental values of citizenship”.⁷ These principles of social norms are of little value in criminal practices. According to the UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2023 report, “The Americas have the highest regional homicide rate in the world and high rates of homicidal violence related to organized crime.”¹⁸ Gangs are a constant threat with huge dimensions, reaching various sectors of this country called Brazil. In general, when we talk about public safety, more emphasis is given to the negative results than to the dynamics of organized crime taking over, increasingly powerful and influential in society and, why not, in politics.¹⁹ The debate is lacking and too limited. There is a noticeable inconsistency when talking about possible solutions to the problem of violence in the country, as these discussions are always loaded with political discourse and ideological disputes. Meanwhile, society suffers in a warlike and inhumane environment.

In Juazeiro da Bahia, the situation is worrying, as the average homicide rate increased from 63.8 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022 to 74.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023, an increase of 9 points, moving from 10th to 7th place in the ranking of the most violent cities in Brazil. It is a true collapse in the defense of the right to life and citizenship. The State responsible for guaranteeing the right to life, liberty, equality, security and property,²⁰ has not proven to be efficient in its role, statistics help to prove this statement. The circumstances make explicit the need for greater commitment from political authorities in the social and public security areas around a pact against all this violence, seeking to assume its role as provider of diverse public policies for the well-being of the population. A city that stands out nationally when it comes to agribusiness, an attractive municipality for investments, with aspects that denote a city with sufficient resources to have better infrastructure, education, health and security conditions, however, just walking through the city’s neighborhoods you will be able to notice that the reality is antagonistic to its economic state. In an interview with investigators from the city’s police station, the question was asked: what would be the main cause of homicides in Juazeiro-BA? The answer was unanimous: “the war between gangs”. So, if a gang achieves territorial hegemony, will these homicides tend to decrease? A resounding “Yes” echoed in the police unit’s investigation service room. Two brief answers that raise a big question: do criminal gangs hold a certain amount of social control, especially in the poorest areas, where the absence or negligence of the state is noticeable? Do they? It is undeniable to judge the fact that a population is fearful in the face of so many lethal occurrences, in an environment surrounded by violence and unexpected threats, as a result of a noticeable increase in crime that ends up imposing a state of vulnerability on the Brazilian citizen.^{12–26}

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this article is well-known to present an understanding of the motivations linked to homicides that impact the increase in violence rates in the city of Juazeiro in Bahia, Brazil.

¹⁸Unodc.org. 2025.

¹⁹An example of a recent case was the last elections in the municipality of Camaçari-Bahia-Brazil. See: News. 2025.

²⁰Art. 5 of the Federal Constitution of Brazil of 1988.

Such a broad and relevant issue cannot be exhausted within the limits of this article. On the contrary, it opens space for broad discussions that include the protagonists of violence. It was not our intention to attribute exclusive responsibility to gangs for homicides in the city that inspired our work, but to reveal a predominance. The orientation of the information provided in this article seeks to point out, through the situation presented, to contribute to questions about the reality in cities in the interior of Brazil, specifically Juazeiro, a city that stands out nationally when it comes to agribusiness, a city with sufficient financial resources. This situation reveals a problem: government policy that, in its line, indicates evidence of incompetence in managing public money in its role of providing decent conditions for society. The absence of the State leaves gaps filled by gangs in war zones for the power of drug trafficking and, consequently, social annihilation. In the interest of provoking productive reflection on social behavior and the role of the State, we seek, based on empirical and statistical facts, more productive and efficient alternatives for dissolving social conflicts.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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