The policy of pacification is considered a milestone of public safety for the residents of Rio de Janeiro city. What should be the next milestone?

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FIVE YEARS AGO, the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro, after prior notice and without confrontation, took the Santa Marta slum from traffickers in the south of the city. Santa Marta was the pilot for the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) policy that today is considered a public safety success. With 36 UPPs covering 252 areas of the city and plans to add 40 units in 2014, it seemed appropriate to assess the outcomes of the pacification policy. The UPPs were therefore discussed at a seminar on “Citizenship and Security: Outcomes and Future of Pacification Policy in Rio de Janeiro policy,” held by the Brazilian Institute of Economics on December 9, 2013.

In pacified communities the number of armed clashes between drug dealers and deaths as a result of police raids have been significantly reduced, as has crime in general. Partly as a result, in Rio as a whole homicides have declined from 34 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2008 to 19, according to a survey from the Institute of Public Security (ISP) in the state. More dramatically, homicides in pacified communities dropped from 36.5 per 100,000 in 2008 to 8.7 in 2012.
No silver bullet

The government’s seizure of territory under the rule of drug lords, experts say, has made it possible to bring investments in sanitation and access to social programs to residents of those communities, as well as restoring the right of free passage. But more complex measures are now needed if violence is to be reduced sustainably. “I am in favor of the UPPs, but I think society does not understand the magnitude of the problem. It is extremely complex. ... The number of shootings has fallen significantly in pacified slum communities, but we cannot consider [UPPs] to be a silver bullet that will solve all the problems of violence for Rio,” says Joana Monteiro, an IBRE researcher.

The top priorities now are improving education, which can prevent children and young people from committing illegal activities; integrated actions of police intelligence and investigation, making them more efficient in seizing drugs and guns and arresting outlaws; the creation of community policing models that fit the different characteristics of each community; and necessary changes to the public security system.

“We have to expand the scope of this debate to the criminal justice system. The model of the public security system is broken. The Constitution establishes very generic missions for the military, civilian, and federal police forces, and we end up with a rigid public security system,” says Antônio Roberto de Sá, Rio de Janeure state undersecretary of Planning and Operational Integration of Security Secretary. Today, military police cannot investigate a person who has no criminal record but who may be involved with a crime because that is a function of the civil police.

Children of the slums

Another issue is the training of UPP officers, who have not yet all built a good relationship with local communities. Gleide Guimarães, a 55 year resident of Manguinhos slum, points out that with the UPPs commerce has expanded in the streets, which were once deserted, and shootings have declined, but her biggest concern, even after pacification, persists: the future of the children.

To avoid attracting police attention, she says, drug dealers use 12-or 13-year-olds to transport or sell drugs; these children disrespect the police but are ignored by them. “I’ve seen children throw stones at police officers ... . This reflects not only organized crime instructions, but it is also a response to the bad attitude of police.” Does this attitude reflect how police are trained? she asks. Guimarães confesses that she still does not feel comfortable addressing a UPP police officer. “I’m not stupid, I realize that the UPP project might work, but I see a great estrangement between authorities and residents.”

Despite complaints and some uncertainty on the part of residents, there has been some improvement in their confidence in the police force since 2008. According to the ISP, there has been an increase in reporting crimes with no deaths, such as car thefts and fights.

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Colonel Paulo Teixeira, CEO of the ISP, believes that “before, residents did not report crimes, because either the police were not in the slums or the residents did not have enough confidence in the police. Today, they are less afraid of reprisals from gang members.”

A study by researchers Claudio Ferraz and Bruno Ottoni of the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC), using data from crime-reporting hotline and police records for Rio municipality between 2007 and 2012, found a 70% increase in crime reporting, a 100% increase in seizure of drugs, and a 50% reduction in homicides in the 18 pacified communities.

Conflicts
Using information from the crime-reporting hotline from 2003 to 2013, IBRE’s Monteiro mapped the risk areas of Rio to study conflicts between rival drug dealer gangs before and after the UPPs began operating. UPPs seems to have had a beneficial effect on the control of armed conflicts between gang members. In 2003-2013, residents reported 4,693 shootings in slums: 3,053 reports before the UPPs and 1,640 after the UPPs. “There is a considerable fall in the number of reported shootings in pacified slums .... The pacification policy broke the logic of confrontation,” she says.

On the negative side, the study found that criminal violence is still widespread in Rio. Although lessened, confrontations among gangs are still frequent: in 65% of the days between 2003 and 2012, there was at least one report of shooting in slums. “The residents of slum communities continue to pay a high cost in terms of lower school performance of children and youths because shootings often disrupt school operations.

“We found that 46% of municipal schools are 250 meters (270 yards) away from a slum and exposed to shootouts. We compared student performance of these schools in years of frequent shootings with years of relative peace [and] concluded that gang confrontations cause a significant decrease on average of three points in the National Assessment of Educational Achievement,” says Monteiro.

UPPs are now present in 11 of the 30 most conflict-ridden slums in Rio, but is that sufficient? Monteiro says no. She fears that pacification will not reach slums located in the Northern and Western districts of Rio. “The UPPs have occupied almost all of the most difficult places in Rio’s Southern district and around the Alemão slum, but a significant area of the Northern district has no UPPs. No one knows what will happen with the next government and in these troubled slum communities poverty is widespread,” she says.

Teixeira agrees that the challenge of reducing violence in Rio is now in the region from Maré to Bangu neighborhoods. “The places where we have recorded high numbers of robberies and murders are in that area. Perhaps the UPPs are not the remedy for all ills. We are counting on other actions, a joint effort between the existing and new homicide police squads,”

Niteroi city and the eastern region of Rio are areas that may have received drug gangs that abandoned pacified slums and hence seen an increase in gang confrontations. Monteiro studied reported shootings in all the counties in Rio de Janeiro state in 2009–13, and found that “Indeed, drug gangs relocated in the same month or within six months after a slum was pacified. But that does not mean that the pacification policy is a failure. The question is the extent of drug gang reallocations.”