

No end of violence

Law enforcement remains a weak spot

In May 2006 a gang of jailbirds declared war on South America's biggest city. For the better part of a week shock troops of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), a prison-based criminal organisation, wrought havoc on São Paulo, killing policemen, firebombing buses and banks and bringing the city to a virtual standstill. The police struck back with even greater ferocity. By the time the violence subsided 150 people had died. In December Rio de Janeiro's locked-up criminals orchestrated similar attacks in that city. They were less lethal but introduced a horrific novelty: one of the burnt-out buses was full of passengers.

Eyevine



A marketing campaign with a difference

Brazilians are obsessed with crime. Prosperous paulistanos (residents of São Paulo) live behind high walls, drive armoured cars and send their children to school in the company of bodyguards. Last month violence displaced unemployment as Brazilians' top worry for the first time in years, according to a poll. Yet the trend in violent crime in Brazil is downwards, particularly in big cities such as São Paulo, where the murder rate has dropped by more than half since 2000.

No one is sure why. Among the reasons put forward are the peaking of crack addiction, lower immigration and a tougher policy on guns. All of these may have played a part. What is known is that more than half of all the murders in São Paulo are provoked by personal disputes; murder for profit has not fallen, says Guaracy Mingardi of the São Paulo public prosecutor's office.

But violence is moving out of the main cities, along with jobs and industry. "Crime follows the path of wealth, not poverty," says Sérgio Adorno, head of the Nucleus for the Study of Violence at the University of São Paulo. In a recent league table in which cities were ranked by their murder rates, none of the state capitals made it into the top ten.

The murder rate for Brazil as a whole is still an intolerable 23.8 per 100,000 people and, as the handling of last year's prison-based terrorism showed, its law-enforcement institutions are still inadequate. The terrorism in Rio de Janeiro may have been a message to the "Blue Command", police organised into protection gangs that force their services on terrified neighbourhoods. In December, 82 of the state's civil and military police officers were arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking and illegal gambling.

The PCC's surprising ability to cause mayhem from inside the prison system stems from São Paulo's policy of locking up as many criminals as possible without creating the infrastructure to manage them properly. But what was the point of the attacks? Ms Muniz, the anthropologist, sees them as "marketing tools". The PCC is a collection of loose alliances with a weak chain of

command that needs “symbolic acts” to enforce contracts and hold on to allies. There is a chance that it may strike again.

Fonte: The Economist, v. 383, n. 8524, A special report on Brazil, p. 15-16, 14 April 2007.