

DISARMING

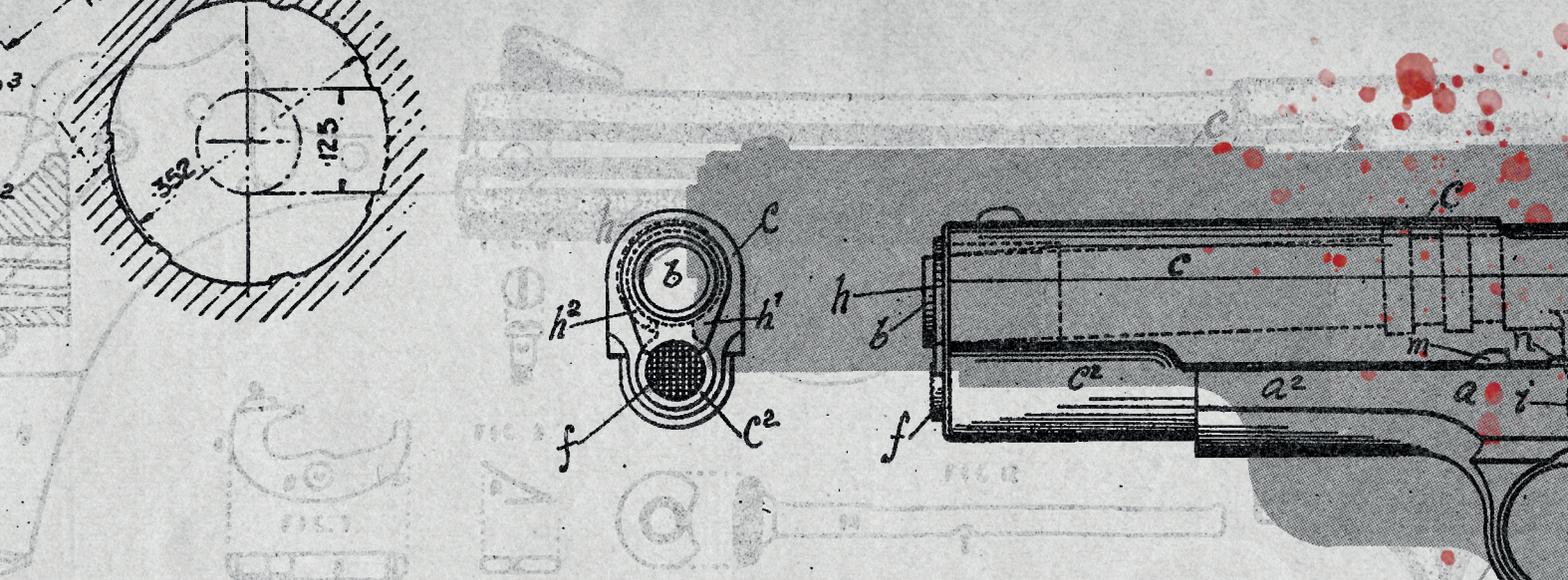
VIOLENCE

Curbing Brazil's homicide epidemic hinges on restricting access to firearms, new research suggests

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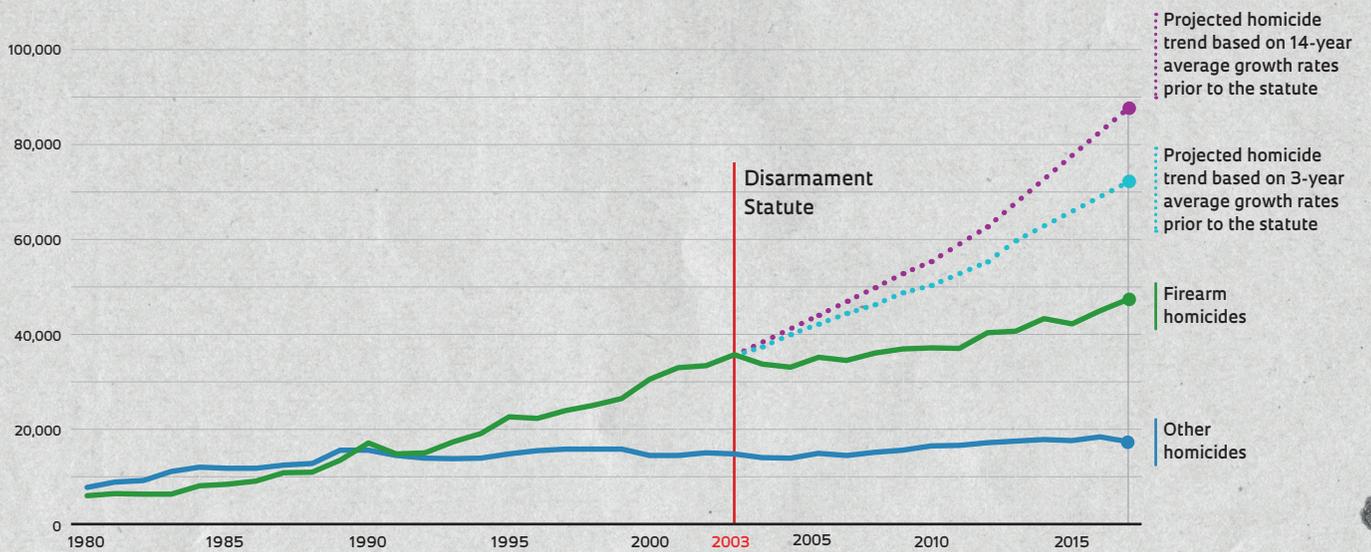
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Between 1990 and 2015, approximately 2.5 million people died from gunshot wounds in Brazil, Colombia, the US, and Mexico, according to a Canadian study published in *Lancet Public Health* in May. The study also found that globally, firearm mortality is highest in countries where firearms are easily accessible. During the study period, firearm deaths declined in the US—where they nevertheless remained among the highest levels globally—and in Colombia, while they increased in Mexico and in Brazil, where the number of guns in circulation remains high despite gun-restricting legislation being in place since 2003. In 2017, the financial burden of violent crime in Brazil amounted to R\$373 billion, or 6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to the *Atlas da Violência* (Atlas of violence) report

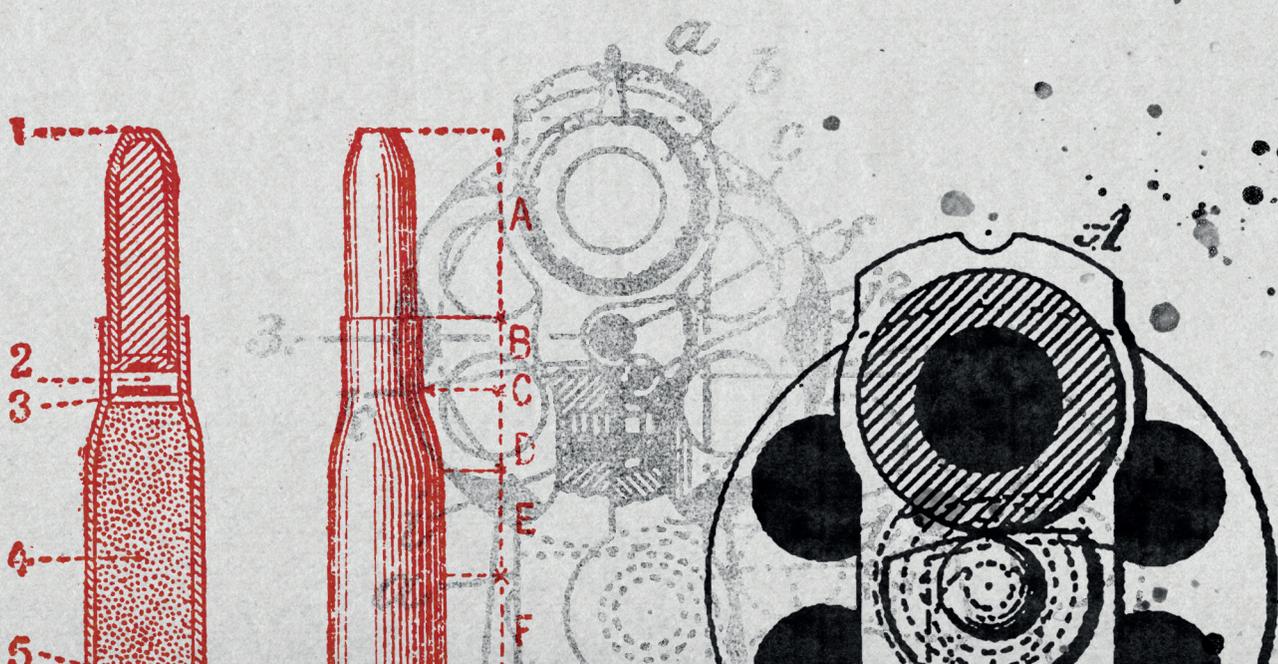


Violent deaths in Brazil

Without the Disarmament Statute, the homicide rate in Brazil between 2003 and 2017 would have been 12% higher



SOURCE MORTALITY INFORMATION SYSTEM (SIM) / DIEST / IPEA / FBSP



recently published by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) and the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSP).

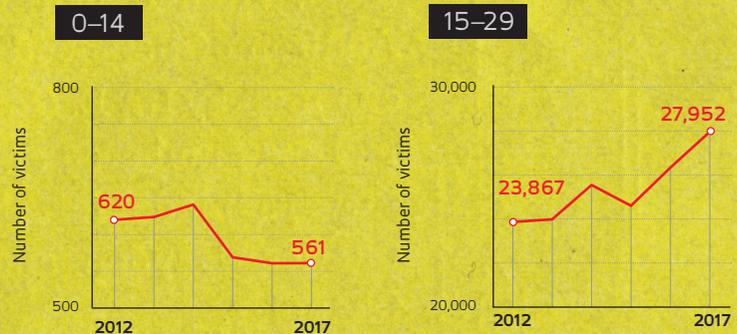
“Brazil is the world’s most homicidal country in absolute terms. In 2017 alone, more than 65,600 people were murdered in the country; 74.4% of these deaths were caused by firearms,” says Bruno Paes Manso, a political scientist and researcher at the University of São Paulo’s Center for Violence Studies (NEV-USP), noting that the average percentage in Europe is just 18% in comparison. With 43,200 firearm murders in 2016, Brazil led the global ranking for gun deaths that year, according to a recent study titled “Global mortality from firearms,” published by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation based on data on 195 countries over a period of 16 years. Next came the US at 37,200 deaths.

There are multiple factors contributing to the high rates of gun deaths in Brazil. One is the acceleration of urbanization between the 1970s and the 1980s. The explosive growth of city populations was accompanied by economic crises, widening inequality, and crime. “The 1980s saw the beginning of a domestic arms race of sorts,” says IPEA economist Daniel Cerqueira. “At that time, you could buy guns at your local department store,” he recalls. Firearm homicides soon began to climb consistently. From 6,100 gun murders in 1980, this figure jumped to 30,800 deaths in 2000 according to data compiled by IPEA from the Brazilian Ministry of Health’s Mortality Information System (SIM).

The escalating violence led several states in Brazil, including São Paulo, to discuss policy measures to restrict access to firearms. In 2003, Federal Act 10826 (known in Brazil as the “Disarmament Statute”) introduced restrictions on carrying guns and regulations on ownership of

Young victims of firearm fatalities

The age group with the highest number of firearm deaths in 2017 was between 20 and 29 years old, at 19,076 deaths



SOURCE SIM

firearms (see timeline on page 89). Data from Instituto Sou da Paz show that a total of 926,000 firearms were sold in Brazil between 1997 and 2003, an average of 132,000 per year. Beginning in 2004, the annual average dropped to 53,000 units.

Since then, the average annual growth in firearm murder rates has been declining. “The advent of the statute broke a growth trend in firearm deaths. From 8.1% in the preceding 23 years, annual growth in gun deaths declined to 2.2% in 2004 and continued at that level until 2014,” says Cerqueira, who estimates 133,000 lives were saved. There is no doubt in the economist’s mind that the new legislation had a hand in the reduction. “If the break in the trend had been caused by factors other than the new law, such as macroeconomic or demographic reasons, similar effects would have been observed in the rates of lethal violence perpetrated by other means, whereas only deaths caused by firearms declined sharply—and precisely—after 2003,” he says. “Without the new legislation, the homicide rate in Brazil between 2003 and 2017 would have been at least 12% higher,” he estimates (see graph on page 87).

In its most recent survey, conducted in Brazil’s midwestern state of Goiás, Instituto Sou da Paz traced the ownership history of 8,900 guns confiscated by the police between June 2016 and December 2017. “We found that 73% of those guns had been manufactured before the gun statute was passed, indicating that guns purchased in the 1980s and 1990s continue to affect rates of violence in Brazil today,” says Bruno Langeani,

74%
OF HOMICIDES IN BRAZIL IN 2017 WERE
CAUSED BY FIREARMS

a lawyer from the institute. At least one-third of guns confiscated in the state of Goiás had been legally purchased and registered before being diverted for use in criminal activity. A study in São Paulo by the same nongovernmental organization, in collaboration with the Public Prosecution Service, examined the history of 4,200 guns seized following robberies and homicides in 2011 and 2012. “At least 38% of them had originally been purchased legally,” says Langeani.

Similar findings were reported by a Parliamentary Investigation Committee (CPI) instituted in 2011 by the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro. The CPI report showed that approximately 18,000 firearms were stolen from private security firms in the state over the space of one decade. The report also examined the origin of guns used in crimes and murders, finding that 86% had been purchased legally and later abstracted for criminal use. “According to the Ministry of Justice’s National Weapons Database [SINARM], 22,900 firearms were lost between 2009 and 2011 and another 29,300 were stolen by theft or robbery,” says Cerqueira, of IPEA. The data, he says, is crystal clear: “The more guns there are in circulation, the more end up in the black market.” Langeani concurs: “The fact that guns seized by the police are largely locally manufactured weapons produced and sold legally suggests that most guns in the black market were legally purchased and registered in Brazil, and not smuggled in.”

FINANCIAL TOLL

The most recent edition of IPEA’s Atlas of Violence places the financial burden of violence in Brazil at R\$373 billion in 2017, including the costs of prisons, public and private security, and public healthcare. Within the Brazilian National Healthcare System (SUS), hospitalizations related to firearm injuries cost a total of R\$190 million between 2015 and 2018 (see graph on page 91). “Violence takes a toll on public healthcare, consuming precious resources that could be better used for acquiring new technologies and medicines,” says sociologist José Ferdinando Ramos Ferreira, who heads the Working Group for Violence and Healthcare at the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO). He notes that gunshot survivors require complex care that typically involves hospitalization followed by multiple rehabilitation sessions to regain physical and mental health. “The costs of gunshot wounds are high because they often involve surgeries and extended hospitalization in intensive care. They can affect multiple organs and frequently require patients to receive prosthetic implants,” says Danilo Blank, a professor in the School of Medicine at the Federal University

Firearm laws

State regulation of firearms began in the 1930s and poses a major challenge today

1934

Getúlio Vargas (1882–1954) passes Presidential Decree 24602, introducing regulations on the manufacture and sale of military weapons by the State and prohibiting private companies from manufacturing weapons other than those used for hunting. The decree contains no provisions on civilian use of weapons and munitions

1965

Decree 55649 repeals the Vargas decree and introduces new regulations on the production, sale, and circulation of weapons and munitions, and it includes weapons among Brazil’s export products. The Civil Police are tasked with managing registration for gun ownership and carriage

1980

Directive 1261 of the Ministry of the Army introduces regulations on the sale and registration of firearms. People above the age of 21 with no criminal record and who are employed are entitled to purchase up to three weapons per year, up to six in total

1997

With the creation of the National Weapons System, oversight of weapons and munitions sales is placed under the exclusive authority of the Federal Police, and proof of “a bona fide need” is required for gun ownership. Illegally carrying a firearm is changed from a misdemeanor to a felony. Oversight of the weapons privately owned by policemen, judges, and collectors remains the responsibility of the Armed Forces

2003

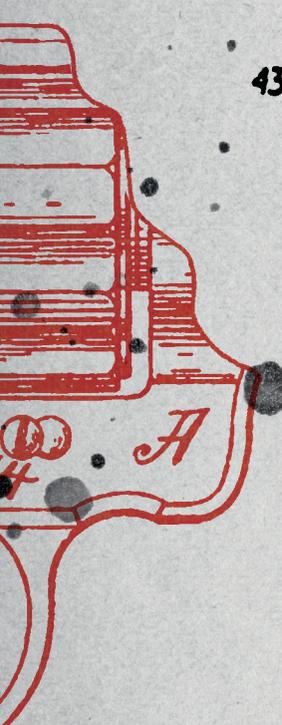
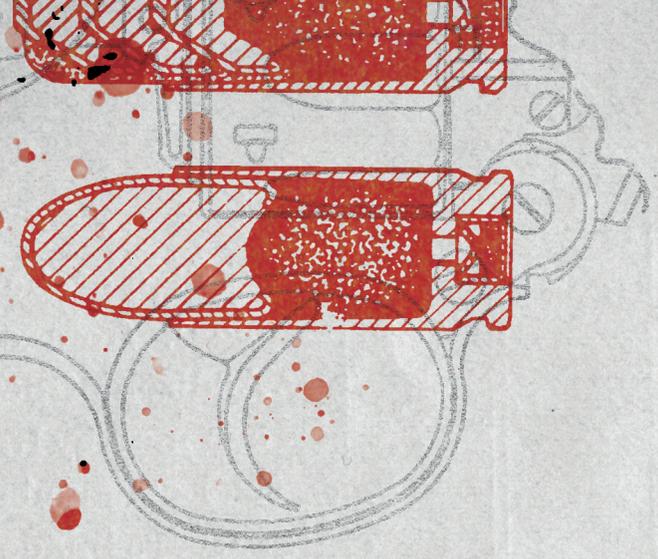
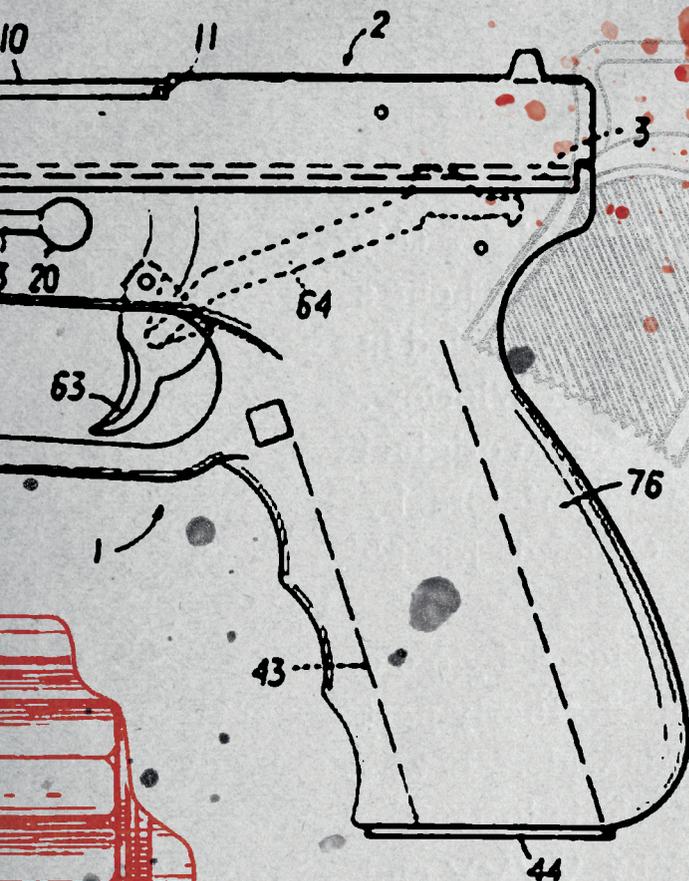
Federal Act 10826, known as the Disarmament Statute, is introduced. The Army acquires overall responsibility for oversight of the manufacture, importation, and registration of weapons. The Federal Police retain responsibility for authorizing the buying, registration, and ownership of weapons by civilians, who are forbidden to carry firearms outside their homes

2019

The rules on buying, registering, carrying, and selling firearms and munitions under the Disarmament Statute are relaxed by successive presidential decrees

SOURCE INSTITUTO SOU DA PAZ

FIG. 1



RS\$ 210

MILLION SPENT WITHIN THE SUS ON GUNSHOT-RELATED HOSPITALIZATIONS INVOLVING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE LAST 20 YEARS

study by the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO), titled “Mapa da Violência” (A snapshot of violence). According to the study, the annual number of gun homicides in this population group has soared from 3,100 to 25,000 in the last 30 years, an increase of 700% compared to 600% among the general public. “People aged 15 to 29 were the victims of 60% of gun killings in the study period,” says Blank. Given Brazil’s aging population—67 million people will be older than 60 by 2050—Blank wonders what effect the homicide rates among young populations might have on the economy. “The demographic transition and the elevated death rates in younger age groups will combine to shrink Brazil’s economically active population,” he says.

An SBP survey based on SIM data found that 145,000 youth up to the age of 19 have died from firearm injuries, either intentional or accidental (including suicides), in the last two decades. “In 2016, alone, more than 9,000 gun deaths were reported in this age group,” says Blank. In the last 20 years, he continues, gunshot-related hospitalizations involving children and adolescents cost approximately R\$210 million in government spending. “Up to the age of 14, traffic accidents are the leading cause of death,” he says. “But at 15 to 30, people are primarily killed by guns.”

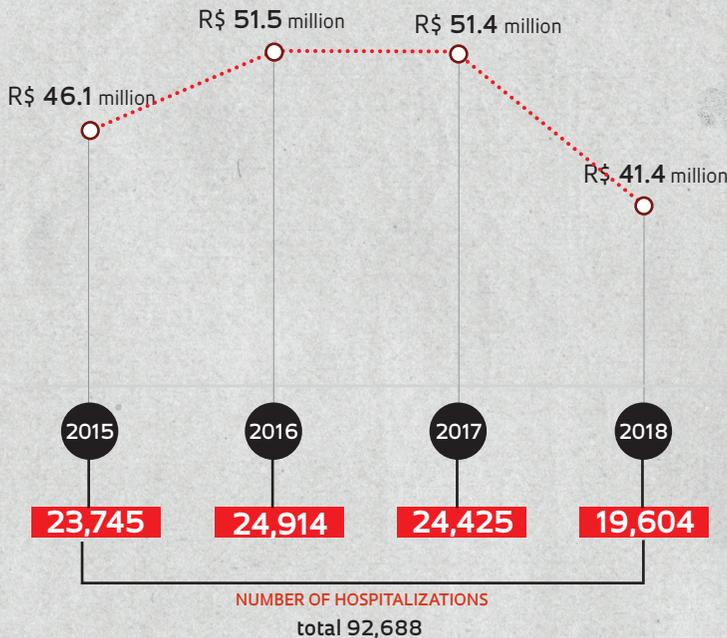
Firearms have remained a persistent cause of death for the past 25 years in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and the US, according to a study reported in *Lancet Public Health*. The study, led by researchers Anna J. Dare and Hyacinth Irving of the Centre for Global Health Research in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto, recommends restrictions on access to guns and the number of guns in circulation as a core strategy for reducing homicide rates in these four countries. They based this recommendation on, among other studies,

of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and a member of the Security Department at the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (SBP).

One of the issues the SBP is currently tackling is the increasing lethality of gun violence among younger populations. “Youth are the number one victims of homicidal violence in Brazil. Growth in firearm lethality has been greater in the 15 to 25 age bracket than in the rest of the population,” says Blank, referring to the findings of a 2016

SUS expenditure

Hospitalizations related to firearm injuries cost a total of R\$190 million in government spending between 2015 and 2018



SOURCE SUS HOSPITAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (SIHSUS)

a literature review published in 2016 in *Epidemiologic Reviews*, of the Oxford University Press, by researchers from Columbia University, New York, the National University of Colombia, and Boston University. The authors revisited evidence from 130 studies in 10 countries between 1950 and 2014, exploring the associations between firearm-related laws and firearm homicides, suicides, and unintentional injuries and death. Based on the findings from the review, Dare and Irving identify a direct association between the implementation of laws restricting access to guns and reductions in firearm deaths. In addition to the association between gun access and gun homicides, the study draws attention to the primary victims of this type of violence: young, black men with low educational attainment.

In the 1990s, economist John Lott Junior, president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, developed a study at the University of Chicago examining the relationship between right-to-carry concealed gun laws and crime statistics for approximately 3,000 US counties from 1977 to 1992. He concluded that states that adopted concealed handgun laws succeeded in reducing murders by 8.5%. “In interpreting the study data, the author developed a hypothesis to the effect

that people are deterred from committing violent crime when they know other people are armed,” explains Bruno Paes Manso of NEV-USP, a Research, Innovation, and Dissemination Center (RIDC) funded by FAPESP.

In 2017, researchers at Stanford University came to different conclusions using a methodology that accounted for the effects of multiple factors—and not only concealed carry laws—on crime rates in US states. The factors they examined included incarceration, police employment, poverty and unemployment rates, population density, income per capita, and alcohol consumption rates. “This recent study found that states without concealed carry laws, such as California and New York, achieved greater reductions in crime rates,” says Manso. The Stanford study also showed that right-to-carry laws led to increases in violent crime of 13% to 15%.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

In June, during the launch of the latest edition of the Atlas of Violence, IPEA President Carlos von Doellinger argued in favor of gun ownership as an individual right of citizens with no criminal record. “There are those who defend the Disarmament Statute, but in my personal view as a citizen, and not as president of IPEA, it bothers me as a matter of principle that a person should be prevented from owning a weapon to defend their physical integrity, their property, and their family.”

While recognizing the legitimacy of this line of reasoning, Cerqueira, a colleague of Doellinger’s at IPEA, cites a pioneering survey of police reports conducted in 1999 by the São Paulo State Department of Public Security and the Brazilian Institute for Criminal Science (IBCCRIM). “Historical data derived from these documents show that when robbery victims are armed, they are 56% more likely to be killed,” he says. Sociologist Jacqueline Sinhoretto, of the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), one of the authors of the study cited by Cerqueira, adds that in situations where victims were armed, the overall death toll—including deaths involving bystanders—was also higher.

In the Canadian study published in *Lancet Public Health*, gun ownership is shown to be a primary risk factor for firearm death. The authors conclude that legal mechanisms to reduce exposures to guns are crucial in reducing firearm-related homicides. These measures, they add, should be accompanied by strategies to deconstruct the association between security and gun ownership. ■

The studies consulted for this article are referenced in the online version.