



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

COERCIVE BROKERS

MILITIAS AND URBAN
GOVERNANCE IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Nicholas Pope | Antônio Sampaio

JANUARY 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the people who agreed to be interviewed for their respective research projects on this issue over the years.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nicholas Pope is a research fellow in the Department of War Studies at King's College London. His research focuses on the violence and conflict dynamics of development processes, with special attention to the study of armed groups.

Antônio Sampaio is thematic lead for cities and illicit economies at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). He examines the challenges posed by urban armed violence and non-state armed groups to governance and security. Before joining the GI-TOC, he worked at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, most recently as research fellow, and as a journalist in Brazil.

© 2024 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means without permission in writing from
the Global Initiative.

Cover photograph: Aerial view of Minha Casa Minha Vida in Rio de
Janeiro, Brazil. © *Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images*

Please direct inquiries to:
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland
www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

- Executive summary 2**
 - Militia management of urban expansion 3
 - Crime-politics webs and urban clientelism 4
- Violence and social order: Origins and emergence of militias..... 6**
- Underpinning local power: Control of urban land and real estate..... 11**
 - A view from inside a militia community..... 12
 - Urbanization at the expense of the environment..... 14
- Campo Grande..... 15**
 - Regional identities in Campo Grande: Neglect and the drive for autonomy 16
 - Housing, local populations and militias 16
 - Power, consolidation and influence..... 18
 - Entanglements between the state, militias and residents..... 19
- Conclusion: Militias, urban development and policy implications..... 21**
 - Moving forwards entails a reckoning with the past 22
 - Pilot a multilevel governance taskforce..... 23
- Notes 24



FROM VISION TO ACTION: A DECADE OF ANALYSIS, DISRUPTION AND RESILIENCE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime was founded in 2013. Its vision was to mobilize a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to address the challenge, building the analytical evidence base on organized crime, disrupting criminal economies and developing networks of resilience in affected communities. Ten years on, the threat of organized crime is greater than ever before and it is critical that we continue to take action by building a coordinated global response to meet the challenge.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva launched one of the most ambitious housing projects in Brazil's history: Minha Casa, Minha Vida (My House, My Life). It became one of the signature social development policies of Lula's Workers' Party and is now being relaunched in his return to presidency for a third term.¹ With over four million houses built in the first decade of the programme, it tackled the longstanding housing shortfalls that contributed to the spread of the country's vast informal settlements in and around cities (including the hillside informal *favelas*) and offered politicians convenient media photography opportunities with new homeowners. Even Lula's fierce political rival, former President Jair Bolsonaro, continued the policy, although with severe budget cuts in 2021.²

It quickly became clear that newly built homes – which some low-income Brazilians saw as an opportunity to leave structurally unsafe houses or insecure urban areas – would not offer respite from encroaching criminal actors operating in the profitable housing market. Homeowners from the programme lived in fear of criminal organizations, with many facing the threat of violence, firearms and expulsion from their newly acquired homes.³

An article in one newspaper, *Extra*, cited 674 reports indicating the presence of organized criminal groups in Minha Casa, Minha Vida communities across 19 municipalities in Rio de Janeiro (including the eponymous capital). One police operation in May 2018 saw officers seize eight guns, including a 9 millimetre submachine gun. It was found in a flat in a residential complex built under the government's programme in Itaguaí, a municipality north-west of Rio.⁴ The operation responded to intelligence about the location of a weapons cache belonging to the local militia: an armed group usually comprising large numbers of off-duty or former members of the local security forces (especially the military police) operating in several criminal markets.

Militia involvement in the land and real estate sector is widespread across the city and the broader metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, with the latter including surrounding (smaller) municipalities. Indeed, the militias' gains over the past decades can be partly explained by the political, social and economic opportunities that a rapidly expanding real estate market has enabled. Of the licit and illicit income streams benefiting armed groups, revenue comes predominantly from monetizing services and trading resources. Coercive control and *de facto* governance of peripheral urban communities enable militias to dominate several markets such as transportation, water, electricity, cooking gas, microloans, internet, cable television and security.

These services are often provided in full view (or with the plausible deniability) of state officials and enforcement agencies. This highlights a key difference between militias and Rio de Janeiro's infamous drug gangs: militias are often facilitated by overlapping interests and entanglements with powerful state, political and business actors in formal and legal positions,⁵ while drug gangs tend to operate in relative isolation from formal institutions and with a narrower focus on drugs markets.



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks during a ceremony to deliver new housing under the Minha Casa Minha Vida project he launched in 2009. © Arrison Marinho/AFP via Getty Images

Militia management of urban expansion

Militias have been involved in constructing new buildings and entire residential areas within some of the urban regions furthest from Rio's city centre – many in what is known as the West Zone. Ambitious residential projects, including high rises, experienced a fivefold increase between 2016 and 2020.⁶ Some Brazilian scholars have referred to this as a 'capillarization' of militia projects, representing an 'unprecedented phenomenon' in Brazilian urban centres. This is due to the extensive territorial area, the range of criminal markets involved and militia infiltration of public administration.⁷

This report examines how militias' core function derives from their ability to broker solutions in response to the collective action problems created by rapid and unfettered urbanization. Militias mediate between states, residents and markets to deal with infrastructural and service inadequacies, which have historically proved severe in Brazilian cities.⁸ Through these functions, militias build up social, political and economic capital and expand their influence. Militias' growing dominance – in line with the expansion of the city – has also led to rising levels of violence. Up to 70% of femicides in Rio de Janeiro take place in the militia-dominated West Zone,⁹ with 34.5% of the metropolitan region's shootouts and 23.85% of disappearances occurring in this region.¹⁰

This report demonstrates how the poorly regulated real estate and property market stimulates militia expansion in Rio de Janeiro by enabling them to exploit economic and political opportunities in underserved urban areas. Plotting the history of militias' involvement in land seizures, construction and real estate markets, it analyzes how urban expansion governance has enabled these networks to embed themselves within the city's political and economic social structures and institutions. This has affected other sectors and markets, such as the extraction of sand from rivers, as well as the informal division of land for sale to residents or developers.



FIGURE 1 Areas of armed groups' territorial control in Rio de Janeiro and adjacent municipalities, 2022.

SOURCES: Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Illegalismos (GENI/UFF); Fogo Cruzado; Núcleo de Estudos da Violência - Universidade de São Paulo (NEV-USP); Pista News; Disque-Denúncia

Crime-politics webs and urban clientelism

Militias' staying power in Rio is linked to a long-standing legacy of client-patron networks spanning influential state or political elites, as well as non-state or criminal spaces underpinning local politics. Like many communities across Latin America and developing countries, many of Rio de Janeiro's local power holders support politicians by promising votes in exchange for favours and small local improvements and investments, such as paved roads or funds to pay for residents' funerals.

To strengthen their position, militias embed themselves in local networks of civil society, residents and politicians, at times electing prominent militia members and leaders to legislative bodies through which they can better conceal or protect illicit activities.¹¹ Urban land crimes are particularly prominent. As a local activist demonstrates below, the occupation of protected land and the construction and sale of residential projects, alongside a range of connected services, require strong connections with local governmental and law enforcement structures.

These alliances thrive on reciprocal benefits, with militias' local influence over democratic processes proving to be a longstanding issue. Accounts of 'militia urbanism' present this relationship as deeply predatory, with the corresponding political approach described as 'authoritarian' and as 'dystopian radicalism'.¹² But the militia phenomenon must be contextualized within the established practices of urban clientelism, where local leadership has traditionally mediated between residents of low-income communities and the state to help address access to basic services.¹³

Contemporary forms of militia governance have evolved from urban clientelism by actors with access to means of violence. It sits within the context of patchy state presence¹⁴ and uneven market-based urbanization. The emergence of state-linked armed actors in the urban clientelistic tradition has been described as coercive brokerage: intermediation by state-linked armed actors responding to collective action problems where formal market and state-based solutions are inadequate.¹⁵

This approach to politics is heavily mediated by violence. Displays of violence often characterize the militia dominion, like expelling residents from their homes and practising extortion in exchange for security provision.¹⁶ They operate as both vigilantes and armed wings of local leadership. Militias are often characterized by predatory behaviour, given their 'authoritarian management' of vast urban areas in one of the world's largest megacities, but they are not entirely external or anomalous to the communities they govern.¹⁷

Drug gangs, which typically clash with the military police, have also observed the militias' rise, often disputing territory. Alongside a grossly underfunded public security apparatus with an overreliance on militarized raids, drug-trafficking groups have contributed to the insecurity which has benefited militias. However, the militias' vigilante and community-protection discourses have been significantly weakened, due partly to their publicly violent tactics in the early 2000s, which appeared¹⁸ to rock their relationship with political leaders. Still, their urban territorial control is still facilitated by law enforcement and state actors ignoring, or even advocating for their dominance.¹⁹

In the context of rapid and poorly managed urbanization, as well as the rollback of the state during the 1970s and 1980s, unmet demand for services, security and housing has driven the growing influence of the militias. Residents of militia-dominated communities are often 'clients' in these illicitly built or managed residential buildings. Residents depend on militias for housing supply by selling or renting properties while simultaneously living in fear of their violent governance practices, unable to resort to state agencies or courts.

This report adds to the growing body of research documenting a global challenge linked to organized crime in the urban environment, especially land seizures and unlicensed real estate developments. In sub-Saharan Africa, where urban populations have registered rapid expansion, criminal organizations – often aligned with state officials – can allocate the same parcel of land multiple times, profiting from sales, rent and public services extracted from residents. This is according to a study that describes the exploitation of land and property rights amid rapid urbanization as 'the most dominant type of national and transnational organized crime in Africa'.²⁰ Additionally, Brazilian militias act in ways reminiscent of mafias in Italy, where corruption in planning offices can yield vast sums of money to criminal groups. Here, 'a simple line drawn on a planning chart can determine whether or not a lot is developable, exponentially affecting its value'.²¹

The first two sections of the report track the trajectory of Rio's militias and their local political webs, offering background to the militia phenomenon, followed by an overview of their involvement in urban land crimes. This looks at seizure, construction and occupation of government projects such as Minha Casa, Minha Vida. The report then examines the relations between militias, local power and residents through a case study of the West Zone neighbourhood of Campo Grande, the latter based on ongoing ethnographic work conducted in Rio de Janeiro's West Zone since 2016. The report is further informed by an extensive review of literature and local media.



VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL ORDER: ORIGINS AND EMERGENCE OF MILITIAS

The origin of the militias in Rio can be traced to the urbanization process in Rio de Janeiro that, since the city's golden days as Brazil's capital until 1960, promised Brazilians a prosperous and modernizing future.

Following Brazil's declaration of independence and the creation of the constitutional democracy in 1889, an accord materialized between rural elites in disconnected areas like the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, known as *coronéis*, or landed nobility, with state governors and the central government. In these areas with jurisdictions demarcated by Jesuit church parishes, *coronéis* were the local authorities. Despite operating outside the formal political bureaucracy, *coronéis* wielded auxiliary and subordinate powers, often interlinked with official state machinery.²² This enabled *coronéis* to control populations without central government interference, often employing violence to dominate, influence voting and safeguard their territories.

During the 1930s, the Triangle Group – a coalition of three *coronéis* from the West Zone – became a significant political force in Rio de Janeiro.²³ The coalition created electoral networks, which solidified their influence, often using administrative positions granted to them by the central state – such as control of the slaughterhouse and meat supplies to the city – to leverage political concessions.²⁴ Despite misconduct allegations, the *coronéis* commanded a positive reputation in local communities. However, those in the urban centre aspired to a more cosmopolitan and progressive city, a vision contrasting with that of the more rural *coronéis* and agricultural communities. One of the key reforms of the time, the Pereira Passos reform sought to build squares, expand streets, eradicate squatter settlements and create basic sanitation in the city centre. It also included electoral reforms and boundary reconfigurations, which diminished the power of the rural *coronéis*.

When Brazil experienced high inflation and food supply-chain issues in the 1960s – as many countries did – riots and looting broke out across Rio. Business owners drafted death squads and contract killers with police and military links to protect their businesses and re-establish social order. This was acute in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro (which includes the state capital and surrounding



Partial view of Baixada Fluminense, an area that experienced acute violence in the 1970s and 1980s. © Vanderlei Almeida/AFP via Getty Images

municipalities), particularly in an area known as the Baixada Fluminense. Acts of violence and social control escalated during the 1970s and 1980s after the military dictatorship took over and social 'delinquents' and political adversaries were targeted. In the Baixada Fluminense, the death squads – according to sociologist José Claudio Alves – killed approximately 3 000 people yearly towards the end of the 1980s.²⁵

Tenório Cavalcanti is an infamous character in Baixada's history. Known today as the 'grandfather of the militias', Cavalcanti perpetrated extrajudicial killings during his tenure as a state and federal lawmaker in the 1950s using a machine gun he nicknamed '*lurdinha*' (diminutive for 'Lourdes').²⁶ Death squads thrived in alliances with businesses that hired them to provide security – a service founded on extrajudicial killings and a vibrant business of assassinations for hire – in the absence of state law enforcement.²⁷ When drug-trafficking groups such as the Red Command expanded during the 1990s, this security service increasingly became a base for paramilitary groups to impose their order.

In the second half of the 20th century, social tensions coincided with an influx of urban migrants from the north-east of Brazil in search of manual and construction work. This period of urban expansion occurred as the state reduced the level of service provision during the 1980s, particularly social development and services, in favour of the market provision of public goods. Increasingly, residents in low-income urban areas with precarious infrastructure and service provision were forced to devise informal solutions to confront issues such as poverty, unemployment and rising crime.²⁸

The media reported the emergence of 'self-defence' initiatives typically enacted by military police officers residing in low-income neighbourhoods (see the section on Rio das Pedras). With an echo from the death squads of the 1960s, they were usually justified by a discourse of 'social cleansing', including the expulsion and, frequently, killing of alleged 'bandits'. This was in response to the growing threat of drug trafficking groups together with the persistently insufficient response from the state security authorities.

During the early 2000s, there was a general rise in violence across the militia-dominated communities as militias tightened their control over residents' associations (*associações de moradores*): important local governance bodies managing residents' services and taxes particularly useful to process documentation needed for illegal construction and land occupation in protected areas.²⁹ The militias' involvement in politics quickly evolved from the control of residents' associations to direct elections to local and regional assemblies.

Informal public transport enabled the territorial expansion of the militias. As residents turned to informal transportation solutions in the face of cuts to public bus services during the 1980s, drivers and driver cooperatives hired local vigilantes to guard the pickup stops and ride inside the vehicles.³⁰ Separate militias across the regions competing for business on different transport routes gave rise to frequent fights over control of the lucrative market, which favoured the involvement of the militias. This is according to a public prosecutor cited in the final report of a parliamentary investigative committee (CPI in the Portuguese acronym) organized in 2007 by the state's legislative assembly.³¹

Militias developed stronger ties with politics, both by increasing their connections with residents' associations and using their local territorial control to ally with and support certain candidates. This is known popularly as *carral eleitoral*, or 'electoral farmyard', depicting an area in which candidates unaffiliated to the local power holders are banned or intimidated.³² A CPI report commissioned by the state legislative assembly itself stated that the evolutionary process of the militias during the first decade of the 2000s included a shift from just striking deals with certain politicians to militia leaders becoming politicians themselves.³³

The evolution of the militias into more established criminal institutions came into increased focus in May 2008 when a team of undercover journalists investigating militias for the local *O Dia* newspaper were captured and tortured by a local militia in western Rio's Batan community. The case gained widespread attention in both national and international press and triggered the launch of the CPI.

Today, the militia is not a unified group. Instead, at the local level, it operates through a quasi-franchise model with individual militia units operating through their own sub-structures, organization and connections with communities and politicians. On a city-wide level, these sub-units cluster around broader militia structures, which are defined geographically and by common goals and *modus operandi*. On one end of the spectrum, some militias operate with 'classic' ideas about self-defence groups and social ordering; they vehemently oppose drug use and trafficking and use militarized tactics informed by state training and strategy. They are highly connected to the military police and state institutions and operate more in licit markets. On the opposite end, other militia structures have fused with local and international drug trafficking activities and organized criminal networks, operating in counterfeit goods, haulage seizures and benefiting from illicit markets. Many of the conflicts and high-profile assassinations of militia leaders in areas where militias dominate are due to battles between different arms and factions underneath the militia umbrella.

It is believed this ideological split originated when several leading members of a Campo Grande militia, all former police officers, were arrested in the early 2010s. The leadership passed to the deputy, Carlinhos Três Pontes, who had previously been part of a drug trafficking organization.³⁴ It is believed that this marked the first time someone without a police background assumed the helm of a local militia in Rio – possibly further distancing the group from its original community vigilante ethos.³⁵

Três Pontes is credited with leading an expansion of the Campo Grande militia by making pacts with drug trafficking organizations and distancing this militia faction from the military police.³⁶ Três Pontes was killed in 2017 during a police operation and was succeeded by his brother, Wellington da Silva Braga – known as Ecko – who was killed in 2021 in a shootings with police.³⁷

Rio das Pedras



Aerial view of Rio das Pedras. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

One of the most cited narratives on militias is that of the rise of vigilante groups during the 1970s: the western middle-class neighbourhood of Barra da Tijuca experienced a real estate boom, enabled in part by large numbers of urban migrants from the northeastern regions of Brazil looking for employment.³⁸ Attracted by work opportunities in the construction sector, existing northeastern communities in Rio and newly arrived migrants sought to settle near the building sites. Many chose to live in Rio das Pedras, then a small community. This settlement emerged in similar fashion to cities across the developing world: the northeastern communities built houses informally by occupying areas near lakes in the Jacarepaguá area, often without legal documentation and under frequent threat from eviction.³⁹

The community quickly grew into a densely inhabited settlement in addition to the *favelas* peppered across the urban landscape. Little to no essential urban services were provided by the state because it was self-built and lacked formal planning. The need for security provision came to the fore as drug-trafficking groups were emerging from bands of former inmates of a southern Rio state prison. Shifting the underworld of cocaine sales from an artisanal and disorganized structure to a much more organized and violent one, one drug-trafficking group would become known as the Red Command. It persists today as a particularly violent criminal organization that seeks to operate from informal and semi-formal *favelas* and neighbourhoods. Not long after the real estate boom started, individual residents from Rio das Pedras – many of them linked to the police force and residents association – gained a reputation for using violence to assert control over the community. This was also to protect their friends and neighbours from ‘bandits’ with a *peixeira* – a long knife commonly used in the north-east.⁴⁰

Participants of the vigilante movement in Rio das Pedras linked their need to implement justice to the anticipated threat of the gangs.⁴¹ A longstanding resident of Rio das Pedras described in a newspaper article how the vigilante group – which had broad popular support – became increasingly violent and riddled with internal divisions, resulting in assassinations. One of the first leaders of the self-defence movement – known as Octacílio – was assassinated. Following his death and the ensuing leadership vacuum, other vigilantes became increasingly aggressive towards residents and one another, making arbitrary accusations deeming them as ‘bandits’, leading to threats, evictions and beatings.

The case of Rio das Pedras became culturally and politically infamous. Ex-mayor César Maia accoladed the ‘community self-defence’ groups in 2006 describing them as a ‘lesser evil’ compared to drug-trafficking groups. Eduardo Paes, who became mayor in 2008, praised the militia in a televised interview and suggested they helped to combat drug traffickers and deal with crime. This sentiment was echoed in popular culture when militias were popularized in one of Brazil’s infamous soap operas by *TV Globo* in *Duas Caras*, which told the story of a militia in a fictional *favela* where character Juvenal Antena protected the community from the threat of drug traffickers and criminal violence. ■



UNDERPINNING MILITIA POWER: CONTROL OF URBAN LAND AND REAL ESTATE

The control of urban territory has enabled militias to facilitate urban growth, the housing market and the building of new residential complexes across vast areas of Rio de Janeiro – the second largest city in one of the world's largest democracies.

As with the provision of security, 'alternative' public transportation and other services, militias' involvement with urban land and real estate evolved by providing informal forms of market regulation in collaboration with – but also in lieu of – the state, in areas of rapid urbanization led by low-income populations attracted by manual work during the second half of the 20th century.

Between 1950 and 2000, the population of the Baixada Fluminense – a group of 13 satellite towns north and northwest of Rio de Janeiro – expanded by 688%: from little more than 400 000 to over three million.⁴² The management of urbanization during this population expansion provided some local political leaders with a strong clientelistic base of local residents who owed the local leader for land and the provision of services, rather than the state or its regulated companies. These leaders were sometimes called *padrinho* (godfather), *Deus* (God), or a *dono* (boss).

Much of this urbanization process has been informal or semi-formal, due in part to the high transaction costs of formal development, formal finance and complex bureaucratic processes. The resulting lack of land tenure security and service provision is something that influential local leaders can address through contacts in politics and state bureaucracies. A sociologist documented how a *padrinho* in a militia-held area controlled the process of land tenure formalization by lobbying with political patrons and state agencies, claiming credit for basic urban goods such as pavement, lighting and sewage networks.⁴³ In exchange, this *padrinho* was able to staff the local residents' association and form what Araújo Silva calls a 'political network' that 'helped to elect a lot of politicians'.⁴⁴

Control and regularization of urban land – be it through formal state-recognized processes of land tenure or permits forged by militia operatives – grant the groups power to regulate and profit from the associated public services, and to be selective about who they grant certain rights to. This can mean the punishment or eviction of certain residents. Such control over the physical territory, based on control of land and real estate through state alliances and armed force, is a crucial element of the *modus operandi* of militias and their ability to influence behaviours and voting patterns.

Control over land and housing is one of the most lucrative businesses among the wide range of illicit sectors the militias are involved with, according to local public prosecutors.⁴⁵ Some apartment buildings yield over US\$ 900 000 in gross income for the criminal organization responsible for the construction. This is often on land occupied illegally, which further magnifies the profit potential.⁴⁶ Its profitability is partly owing to militias' 'friends in high places' who grant them impunity and therefore leeway to occupy areas of environmental or historical protection. Here, unlicensed buildings are erected and sold in precarious conditions, such as in swampy and flood-prone areas, where formal housing would not usually be permitted.⁴⁷

A more lethal impact of the militia-led real estate boom was demonstrated in April 2019 when two residential buildings constructed without official permits collapsed in the western neighbourhood of Muzema – a militia-controlled area – killing 24 people.⁴⁸ In June 2021, another irregular building collapsed in Rio das Pedras, killing two people.⁴⁹

A view from inside a militia community



FIGURE 2 Satellite imagery comparison showing Muzema in 2003 (top) and 2023 (bottom).

SOURCE: Google Earth Pro: first photo December 2003; second photo October 2023, 22°59'14.5"S 43°19'51.5"W

There is little doubt about militias' negative impact on formal state governance and citizen access to democratic institutions. To build and maintain their economic and local political interests, militias coerce communities they build or control. This induces fear and intimidation in neighbourhoods where residents are dependent on services managed by militias, militia-allied state officials, or militia-affiliated businesses, including where small businesses are taxed without access to alternatives or to independent conflict resolution.

An activist in one of the cities in the northern areas of the metropolitan Rio area described the chain of illicit economic transactions and political connections needed for militia groups to occupy and sell both land and residential real estate:

A militiaman separated land that had mangroves and he fills this with earth. The guy sells to poor people making promises that he will turn [the land] into this and that. There were reports that buyers were presented with Registro Geral de Imóveis [RGI, General Real Estate Property Registry], therefore an illegal trade in documents arises and we had notary officials being arrested for illegal release of RGI. So, the guy who bought it is poor, but he bought a property for 15, 20 000 [Brazilian Reais] – the price goes up as time goes by and he pays in instalments. But how will [the seller] receive the payments? So, they put up a residents' association, so the militiamen settle in these associations.⁵⁰

This work comprises an ambitious way of governing and managing entire urban communities, sometimes in areas planned and built by the militias and their business associates. The control of this chain of construction and urbanization means not only that profit opportunities multiply – with each step of the chain offering profit – but also that the militia controlling the area wields control and influence over services and residents. The militias have also promised to deliver land tenure, or the legal possession of the land, which is sometimes facilitated by militias' contacts in state agencies and influential political positions. This uses legislation that allows residents in some informally built areas to regularize their housing.

As the activist continues about militia chain of control over the real estate market, it becomes clearer how important the connections to state agencies are:

[The residents] are poor and go on building without planning, without anything. They [separated the area into] lots and opened streets. The militiamen were the architects of these areas, and [the militias] also manage to bring some improvements like light poles. The residents' association receives some monthly fees, it is a militia-controlled territory. (...) The militias instituted a dependency network with poor populations that were not militia members at first.⁵¹

Success bringing public goods such as street lighting and canals to carry rainwater is, according to this activist, a sign of militias' strong links with state agencies and influential politicians. Some of the machinery used for the construction of these communities displayed symbols of the city hall, despite the local authorities' confirmation to the activist that they had not authorized those projects.

This process also allows the militia to name streets, place street signs and to control postal delivery through the residents' association, turning these completely unregulated areas into thriving residential areas. But an important difference of militia-dominated communities is that the building and 'normalization' of daily urban life is underpinned by a strong sense of fear and dependency. The activist describes a clientelistic relationship between militia members and local inhabitants, akin to the 'godfather' relationship that underpinned informal settlements of migrants described in the previous section. Local militia members and politicians help some locals obtain jobs, but according to the activist these jobs need to be 'consolidated through a relationship of loyalty' to the political patron during elections. It is, the activist continues, 'almost a feudal relationship'.

Urbanization at the expense of the environment

The unregulated real estate boom greatly impacts the environment, especially the protected subtropical rainforest areas that have survived the urbanization process in Rio de Janeiro, marked by the expansion of *favelas* over previously pristine nature. Muzema and Rio das Pedras, like so many other low-income areas of the metropolitan area, emerged as unregulated shacks in the 1960s.⁵² But during the past decade their expansion began to encroach upon the nearby Tijuca National Park, with unregulated buildings rising inside the protected areas despite several visits by local authorities to close down building sites.⁵³

During a recent operation to close down the construction site, local public prosecutors conducted a study on the risks to potential residents. These include erosion and destabilization of the hilly areas on which the buildings were rising, the silting up and pollution of rivers by debris, and the permanent loss of forested area to an unplanned process of urbanization.⁵⁴ Despite the risks to residents' lives and the region's rainforests, attempts by prosecutors and municipal authorities to stop such projects typically only have temporary effects; work often resumes shortly afterwards owing to the impunity and protection offered by the militias' networks inside the local public administration and legislative bodies.

To supply this expansive real estate business, Rio's militias have taken over the extremely lucrative but little-known sector of sand mining,⁵⁵ with global demand from the urban construction sector turning sand into one of the world's most mined minerals.⁵⁶ In Rio, militia factions have become deeply involved in this activity, with some processes to extract sand using rudimentary boats to dredge the margins of small lakes common in northern and western areas of Rio.⁵⁷ This extractive activity gradually enlarges the lakes and digs deep into underground water table, polluting, silting up rivers and destroying the vegetation around the lakes, often in protected areas.⁵⁸ Rio de Janeiro state Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainability and the Civil Police have recently conducted an operation against illegal sand mining. Through this, they have identified two rival – and powerful – militia leaders involved in the activity in towns in the northwest of the greater Rio area: mining in Itaguaí is linked to a militia leader known as 'Tandera' while in Seropédica is led by a 25-year-old man known as 'Tubarão' (shark).⁵⁹ The towns are part of the fringes of the Rio metropolitan area, but rapid and often militia-linked construction activity is causing a rapid urbanization process in the broader region, with significant damage to the areas still containing vegetation.

Climate change is increasing the risks involved in this unregulated and aggressive real estate boom. The respected Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Rio predicts that the metropolitan area is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, including intense rainfall.⁶⁰ Rio is a hilly city, with the Sugar Loaf Mountain and Christ Redeemer being famous examples of attractions. But many other hills have been taken up by *favelas*, and this is increasingly the case given that many of the remaining forested areas near militia-held areas in Rio are located on or near hills vulnerable to landslides. Intense rains are common during certain summer months in Rio, usually at the beginning of each calendar year, and have become more common since 2010, according to local authorities responsible for emergency responses.⁶¹ These episodes have caused landslides in built-up areas with 1 232 deaths between 2011 and 2022.⁶² This is despite the fact that the local government has a world-renowned Geotechnical Institute Foundation to help prevent and provide early warning about landslide risks.⁶³ The nexus between climate change and aggressive militia-led urban growth increases the vulnerability of (mostly) low-income populations in Rio.



CAMPO GRANDE

As a case study of militia governance dynamics, this section focuses on Campo Grande, a large neighbourhood whose patterns of development, land management and usage cannot be disentangled from the growth of the militias.

Campo Grande is Rio de Janeiro's largest neighbourhood, a vast geographical area of about 120 000 square kilometres hosting an estimated 478 000 people⁶⁴. The neighbourhood is approximately 45 kilometres from the city's central areas, with public transportation journey times in excess of 90 minutes each way (without traffic congestion).

Campo Grande lags behind other neighbourhoods with a Human Development Index of 0.792 compared to 0.962 in Botafogo, in the city's South Zone neighbourhood.⁶⁵ In addition to inadequate transport, other issues persist such as lacking infrastructure, with only 30% of sewage treated.⁶⁶ There is also an absence of higher education institutions, as well as a disproportionately underfunded police force per capita. The presence of urban land crime reflects its history and its West Zone location: a broad geographical area of more recent population growth in the city of Rio which develops opportunities for networks willing to profit from land seizures and real estate.

Campo Grande is a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood with a rich history and bustling commercial centre. According to the Campo Grande Business Association, approximately 250 000 people pass through its pedestrian centre on a daily basis, whereby commerce evolves from its tradition as a trading centre between urban and rural regions. Before its rapid population growth in the mid-20th century, it received the meats and grains from surrounding farmlands while its own sugar mills and orange groves supplied the urban centre with produce. Since then, its main market expansions have been linked to the population growth in the neighbourhood and the broader city. Campo Grande is an important frontier for Rio, where new markets have expanded, networks developed, and where food supplies and other types of trade circulate through and from.



View of Campo Grande.

© Wikimedia Commons

Regional identities in Campo Grande: Neglect and the drive for autonomy

Local politics and community dynamics in Campo Grande are shaped by precarity and vulnerability, limited access to state resources and an uneven trajectory of urban development. These conditions shape everyday life, irrespective of residents' socioeconomic status. In Campo Grande's periphery, for example, residents make do with the resources available to them. Catarina⁶⁷, a resident of Community A, spoke about challenges faced by many women in her community who had domestic jobs in affluent South Zone homes, enduring exhausting three-hour commutes each way. Catarina explained that she wakes up at 4am and returns after dark, all for a few hours of work.

However, local residents believe that the challenges facing Campo Grande stem predominantly from the actions of municipal and state governments operating at distance from the city centre. Many residents take pride in their locality and share a unified identity driven by a dedication to enhance and improve it.⁶⁸ At the same time, they are committed to safeguarding their way of life against a changing political landscape which they fear may disrupt their routine. Embedded within these communities, the militia represent a sense of consistency and security in line with more conservative politics, often closely connected to the Evangelical church.

An emerging consensus between Campo Grande economic elites bears aspirations for an independent municipal status for the region. Recognizing the importance of a West Zone identity and a desire to determine one's own development is pivotal to understanding the emergence and continued power of the militias. In appearing to guarantee this regional identity on behalf of West Zone residents, militias partly help to facilitate economic independence, but also protect the values that define the lives of many in the region.

Housing, local populations and militias

Land use and housing prove to be one of the key markets through which militias have emerged and evolved. During the second half of the 20th century, rapid urbanization led to vast areas of land being divided and sold through formal and informal markets. As the government's role over housing provision dwindled during the period of privatization and state rollback in the 1980s, the need and demand for governance and management of land distribution emerged. Local *donos*, known later as militias, informally intermediated and brokered these situations.

At least three key land and housing processes demonstrate these dynamics in the peripheries of Campo Grande. The first is the occupation of lands with new communities. Community A, which was founded in 1996 on the outskirts of Campo Grande, was facilitated by a local militia. The group disseminated information about the occupation of an overgrown and disused piece of forest, specifying a date and time to be there to those interested. Equipped with tools and protective gear, families converged on the agreed time and spent days clearing the area. Militias supported the families and provided some construction materials. One female resident said: 'They took the land, and they gave it to the poor people like me. [...] And then they took care of the people who paid the rent or those who didn't have anywhere else to live.'⁶⁹

Another resident explained how the militia assured her that their actions were legally permissible. He said to her: 'we can make our homes here [...] It's an occupation. We're not 'invading'. We're not stealing anything from anyone because it's ours [...] if it's the government's, then it's ours ... So, when they do [eventually] come, we'll pay what we have to, and then that's it, it's over.'⁷⁰

Militias demarcated plots of land and mediated occasional disputes between the new residents about their properties' boundaries, often acting as conflict mediators between the residents. Through their state and political connections and understanding of bureaucratic language, the militias also helped residents navigate the processes needed to regularize the land. However, over thirty years after the lands were occupied, these processes remain ongoing, highlighting a lack of incentive to resolve residents' dilemmas. Doing so would remove some of the militia's leverage over, and power within, the community.

The second process involves the building of modern residential complexes and apartment blocks. Adjacent to Community A, an enclave of housing and apartment is emerging, primarily directed towards middle-class residents looking for green surroundings and more space. In this site, Community B is currently under development. However, it commands views of the protected state park, with its promotional marketing materials showing detached residences, recreational havens, swimming pools and a gated entrance manned by a uniformed security personnel against a picturesque rainforest backdrop.

Nevertheless, the land on which these developments are being built is part of the protected park, raising serious conservation concerns. Mechanical equipment and excavators have already altered the terrain where the sub-tropical Atlantic rainforest once thrived. Militias have an active role in the construction and promotional endeavours, participating in land procurement, materials, labour and financial backing. Despite local residents registering complaints with state authorities,⁷¹ there have been limited efforts to stop the illegal advance of these construction activities.

Third is the local management of the federal government's housing programme Minha Casa, Minha Vida. In the same regions as Communities A and B, militias have asserted control in the Minha Casa, Minha Vida developments. Even before residents moved in, militias demonstrated their claim over the territory by installing lookouts on the building site and forming pacts with the constructors.⁷² In addition to determining the security and economic activities within the complex, cases of fraud have emerged in which militias use violence to compel owners with legal rights to vacate their homes.⁷³ These properties are then sold informally, with advertisements in the local online classified sites or on paper taped to nearby lampposts.

Power, consolidation and influence

Beyond generating profits from housing ventures in the communities where they have the most direct and coercive forms of control, militias also invest in diverse commercial property. This strategic reinvestment involves militias acquiring various enterprises from bakeries, pharmacies and supermarkets, as well as funding local events such as shows and annual carnival festivities. A prosecutor explains how the capital is directed:

Proceeds are allocated to employees, street-level operatives and militia members, with some earmarked for political campaigns, corruption and judicial and legislative manipulation. The surplus is reserved for their personal enrichment, methodically laundered through intermediaries who lend their names to create the illusion of ownership. These proxies, often termed frontmen, strawmen, or money launderers, extend their influence even into realms like art and livestock. After deductions, a large proportion of net earnings goes into their coffers. The ultimate goal remains their own affluence, an objective they undeniably attain.



Apartments of the Minha Casa, Minha Vida housing programme. © Ricardo Moraes via Reuters

Another aspect of this strategy is exemplified by the building of *polos*, centres of retail and hospitality businesses that bring together the community. This strategy serves multiple purposes, including territorial expansion and money laundering. The process of money laundering involves channelling illicit funds into legitimate enterprises. By intertwining their illegally gained capital with these ventures, they obfuscate the origins of their funds and evade detection. Profits accrued are often funnelled into investments strategically targeting areas of political complexity or economic and social opportunity, such as the middle-class neighbourhood of Barra da Tijuca.

This involves a complex web of financial manipulation, where profits are divided among different channels to ensure individual enrichment and evade scrutiny. Simultaneously, funds are directed to acquiring legislation projects, which help to consolidate power. What remains is channelled into the personal accounts of high-ranking militiamen. Intricate money laundering tactics involve the purchase of assets like beachside condos, expensive cars, boats, commercial properties, artworks, livestock and the use of cash payments to fund entertainment events with famous performers. This strategy helps militias to conceal the laundering process.⁷⁴

Whilst usually living day-to-day in their local communities, many militiamen own properties in different locations, safeguarded under pseudonymous owners. This secures territorial control and anonymity, with *laranjas* (intermediaries or strawmen) managing the finances and ensuring the origins of the illicit money cannot be traced. A state prosecutor explained that *laranjas* are typically family members or close friends to limit suspicion from the financial authorities, most of which are at the federal level and less susceptible to militia influence.

This network of money laundering is fundamental to militia expansion, influence and wealth. Analysis of financial data and land titles in the CPI archives corroborates this, with evidence of civil and military police officers buying luxury condos in Barra da Tijuca and even the popular holiday resort of Búzios, with insufficient incomes to do so.⁷⁵ Rodrigo, a military policeman and Campo Grande resident points out that these investments are symbolic and demonstrate how marginalized representatives have been able to claim wealth through upward mobility: 'Barra is for the emergent, it was once poor and became wealthy. It's not where the wealthy have always lived, those who have always been rich live in Ipanema, Leblon, São Conrado [...]. Not in Barra, though... Barra is where those who were once poor, started making money, got rich and moved.'

In the context of urban expansion, development and through their investments into wealthy areas, militias also embody this underdog mentality, not only to launder and secure their personal wealth but to consolidate territorial and political influence.

Entanglements between the state, militias and residents

These processes are made possible with the tacit support or plausible deniability of state officials, bureaucrats and political actors. Within these networks, militias act as intermediaries between the state, civil society and residents' groups. Due in part to their access to means of violence, they fulfil a powerful role that enables them, their associates and their networks to shape politics and policy.

In the subprefecture of Campo Grande, for example, militia-linked bureaucrats and politicians have long exerted influence over the local implementation of politics. Notably, the state Department of Housing – alongside many other government departments – is populated with militia-linked individuals, such as Alex, the son of a prominent hitman and militiaman. Alex can determine the focus of department activities, such as where to monitor and enforce policies against illicit forms of construction.⁷⁶ Like other militia-linked figures, Alex uses his official position to exert pressure on residents, attending resident association meetings to influence housing and land decision outcomes to align with their interests. As one resident explained: 'we all knew they were killers, so [by attending our resident meetings] they knew that this would scare us.'⁷⁷

Council members elected with militia support are entangled in a complex web of reciprocity, compelled to further the interests of the militia in exchange for their support. This exchange of favours extends to matters like building permits, infrastructure and construction projects, often involving irregular properties under militia control. One prosecutor described it as a 'symbiotic relationship where mutual support is contingent on advancing shared objectives.'

But given the militias' dependency on local political economies for their resources, revenues and political support, their long-term survival also hinges the sustained development and well-being of the community residents they govern. One account from a community resident revealed the delicate balance between life and death:

He [the militiaman] started telling me how he knew me... man, I was shocked. He was one of the killers who [had attended our resident meetings]. [...] He said 'remember when João was there, right in the middle of you guys? Well, we didn't let them talk... I see that you don't recognize me. I was one of the people who was there... and we only didn't kill you because we concluded that you weren't interfering with anything. For us to make money, we need the residents to stay, residents have to be living there. If everyone leaves the area, there's no reason for us to stay ... what reason do I have?'

This interview excerpt highlights the delicate balance between life and death, between value and worthlessness, and between community interests and militia survival.



CONCLUSION: MILITIAS, URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Militia dynamics are embedded within urban development in some marginalized regions of Rio de Janeiro. These dynamics help to understand the functions and drivers of militia activities – beyond the conventional explanations and related policy approaches – which tend to focus on the public security, criminality and violence dimensions to be dealt with by law enforcement.

Although militias have developed armed structures and illicit economic enterprises akin to the more ‘classic’ criminal organizations such as drug-trafficking gangs, their power historically derives mostly from exploiting the unmet needs of vast, continually expanding urban areas. One of their core illicit economies, as the report demonstrates, is centred on a growing and poorly regulated real estate and urban land market. By leveraging their state connections – another key difference from drug-trafficking gangs – they have been able to displace families, expand urban areas, create new communities and partially shape the urbanization process in one of the world’s largest cities.

Considering militias as a public security issue is only one piece of the puzzle. This report argues that it is essential to understand militias through the politics of urbanism and not only the issue of public violence. Militias play pivotal roles in urban development – in this case, through the expansion of housing and building of communities – acting as intermediaries between states, markets and populations. They broker between complex political, social and economic processes and the rapid urban expansion in marginal regions where the state has not monopolized the use of violence. In these spaces, the state has often auctioned off ‘violence rights’⁷⁸ to militias who intervene and manage services that are poorly run by the state, such as education, healthcare, social services, land tenure, property rights and housing.

Militias’ wide-reaching entanglement with the state makes the process of reclaiming state authority difficult, especially once militias have accrued political power in an area. This is exacerbated by the mentality of many residents and civil servants, which presents these armed groups as a ‘lesser evil’. Consequently, state officials, politicians and influential voices are not always motivated to denounce and tackle militias.

There is no easy solution for policymakers working on urban development ideas to expand the formal market or state-led interventions where militias or similar armed groups complicate the picture. Still, there are ways to gradually address the structural issues surrounding urban expansion and housing. The former director of Brazil's Federal Ministry of Cities, Júnia Santa Rosa, responsible for the national administration of the Minha Casa, Minha Vida project during Dilma Rousseff's government, described one of the challenges facing the programme's administration: 'When you enter a territory with many forces [meaning political actors], this programme also has to deal with this set of forces.'¹⁷⁹

These 'forces' are not only limited to informal criminal groups vying for power, but to different layers of politics and interests. Santa Rosa goes on to say: 'From the point of view of management [of the programme] over the territory, the conversation is complex, because the actors are diverse. The concessionaires are with the state government. The issue of land approval and social policy is in the hands of municipalities. The issue of mobility: that is in the hands of [the state], with the bus concessionaires, because most of these areas are in the metropolitan borders, metropolitan fringes.'¹⁸⁰

Understanding militias' embedded nature within this complex arrangement of (often conflicting) institutions – formal and informal – can help both urban planning and national policies move towards a more holistic, practical strategy and address uneven urban development and violence. Therefore, policies to advance public security and social development in Brazil must simultaneously target state neglect in key areas as well as state-crime links in others.

At least two areas emerge for further exploration in policy thinking, as discussed below.

Moving forward entails a reckoning with the past

We must confront a historical understanding of militias as not only threats to public security, but as part of local structures providing alternative governance and security. This can be predatory and violent and takes place within urban areas where the state's presence is limited or held back. It must address the more unspoken issue: states' historical reliance on militias to manage and govern peripheral spaces for them.

To ensure desired outcomes of future urban policy in militia-dominated regions, and to reduce the risk of interventions being co-opted, a comprehensive power analysis must inform policymaking. This should include both formal and informal, legal and illegal, and licit and illicit forms of power to accurately reflect the militias' societal, economic and political roles. This does not have to legitimize such forms of governance for the future, but rather looks to investigate and map illicit entanglements as a means to an end: to design better, more effective policies.

Additionally, policymakers in housing and land development – at local and national levels – must address the informal and semi-formal housing practices that militias have historically influenced. This effort must go beyond surface-level recognition such as profiteering and self-enrichment motives; it must understand the underlying factors driving these dynamics, including uneven distribution of social housing and inaccessible finance.

Pilot a multilevel governance taskforce

Given that militias exploit contradictions between formal levels of governance, we propose piloting a multi-level governance taskforce. This taskforce should work to align political agendas, foster cooperation between different levels of government and would focus (at least initially) on a specific urban area. The taskforce composition, with participation of local, regional and national authorities, would reflect the intertwined nature of the policy areas involved, like public security (especially policing), anti-corruption efforts, housing and public infrastructure. It would also help to create sufficient political capital to overcome local opposition by unwilling political actors. The overarching objective should aim to dismantle militia structures, disrupt their revenue sources and replace them with alternatives supported by local communities. An initiative such as this reflects the risks militias pose to Brazilian society, specifically to: security, urban development, trust in the state and democratic processes.

Militias are a political and social phenomenon that will not be resolved through policy and statecraft alone. However, some short- and mid-term steps could minimize their effects. Key components of the taskforce should include:

- **Coordinated governance:** The taskforce should start with developing a strategy involving policy areas across sectors (housing, urban planning, land tenure, policing and infrastructure improvement). The goal should be to design changes in public policies to reduce and gradually dislodge militia structures from urban areas by offering realistic alternatives governed by the state.
- **Capacity building and knowledge sharing:** Addressing institutional and technical capacity gaps at all levels is crucial to ensure management of the social and technical dimensions of the context. A particularly important area is policing, given the longstanding and numerous cases of close relationships between police officers and militias, and the role of violence in enabling militias. A change in approach should involve special policing strategies to allow community-oriented and problem-oriented forms of law enforcement. While notable efforts have been made to this effect in Rio, with the infamous Pacification Police Units (with varying and contested degrees of success), only one of the stations was located in a militia-controlled community.
- **Confronting political misalignment:** Although ultimate success hinges on political alignment and intergovernmental relationships, the taskforce could foster collaboration between different levels of governance and work towards a cross-political technical consensus, particularly in policy areas where federal authority is significant, such as *Minha Casa, Minha Vida*.
- **Civil House leadership:** The federal Casa Civil (Civil House) – a ministry-level department of the federal government functioning as the office of a chief of staff to the president – is well positioned to lead this initiative, especially under the current leadership of the Lula administration. This is owing to its broad remit on policies intersecting different ministries. It should prioritize building trust between stakeholders and only invite participants without militia affiliations.
- **Resource redistribution and investment:** A pilot should include strategic efforts to tackle inequalities across local social development issues. This means public infrastructure of electricity and water provision, roads, streets, lighting, postal delivery and other basic provisions for urban life. The taskforce would also monitor – possibly through vetted providers – the provision of public services to ensure its impartiality and transparency, particularly (but not exclusively) regarding policing. Services such as telecommunications and internet provision have become important areas of militia activity and undermined legal providers. Better monitoring and law enforcement of service provision can help to reaffirm state authority and build its legitimacy with the population.

NOTES

- 1 Leda Antunes, *Minha Casa perto do fim?*, UOL, 24 November 2019, <https://economia.uol.com.br/reportagens-especiais/minha-casa-minha-vida-dez-anos/#cover>.
- 2 *Governo corta 98% dos recursos do Orçamento para novo Minha Casa Minha Vida*, UOL, 23 April 2021, <https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2021/04/23/governo-corta-98-dos-recursos-do-orcamento-para-novo-minha-casa-minha-vida.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>.
- 3 Leandro Prazeres, Rafael Moro Martins and Carolina Farias (n.d), *O pesadelo da casa própria*, UOL, <https://www.uol/noticias/especiais/o-pesadelo-da-casa-propria.htm#um-drama-de-dimensoes-desconhecidas>.
- 4 Rafael Soares, *Caso Marielle: submetralhadora usada para matar vereadora é arma incomum no mundo do crime*, *O Globo*, 20 August 2023, <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/noticia/2023/08/20/caso-marielle-submetralhadora-usada-para-matar-vereadora-e-arma-incomum-no-mundo-do-crime.ghtml>.
- 5 Daniel Veloso Hirata et al, The expansion of *milícias* in Rio de Janeiro: Political and economic advantages, *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 4, 3, 3 December 2022.
- 6 Ana Luíza Albuquerque, *Denúncias de construções irregulares pelas milícias quintuplicam em quatro anos no Rio*, *Folha de São Paulo*, 22 June 2021, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2021/06/denuncias-de-construcoes-irregulares-pelas-milicias-quintuplicam-em-quatro-anos-no-rio.shtml>.
- 7 Daniel Veloso Hirata et al, *A expansão das milícias no rio de janeiro: uso da força estatal, mercado imobiliário e grupos armados*, Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Illegalismos and Observatório das Metrópoles, January 2021, 33, https://br.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/boll_expansao_milicias_RJ_v1.pdf?dimension1=no.
- 8 Nicholas Pope, *Brokering an urban frontier: Milícias, violence, and Rio de Janeiro's West Zone*, doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2020.
- 9 Larissa Ventura, *Em 2021, mais de 70% dos casos de feminicídio no Rio foram na Zona Oeste*, *Diário do Rio*, 7 August 2021, <https://diariodorio.com/em-2021-mais-de-70-dos-casos-de-feminicidio-no-rio-foram-na-zona-oeste/>.
- 10 Camila Zarur, *Rio tem um desaparecido a cada 90 minutos; mais da metade dos registros é em área de milícia*, *Folha de São Paulo*, 31 August 2023, https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2023/08/rio-tem-um-desaparecido-a-cada-1-hora-e-meia-mais-da-metade-dos-registros-e-em-area-de-milicia.shtml?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=lifolha.
- 11 Ignacio Cano, *Seis por meia dúzia? Um estudo exploratório do fenômeno das chamadas milícias no Rio de Janeiro*, in Ignacio Cano and Carolina Iooty (eds), *Segurança, Tráfico e Milícias no Rio de Janeiro*, Justiça Global, June 2008.
- 12 Leandro Benmergui and Rafael Soares Gonçalves, *Urbanismo Miliciano in Rio de Janeiro*, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 51, 4, 2019.
- 13 Luiz César Queiroz Ribeiro and Orlando Alves Santos Junior, *Desafios da questão urbana*, *Observatório das Metrópoles*, 28 April 2011, <https://www.observatoriodasmetrolopes.net.br/desafios-da-questao-urbana-texto-na-integra/>.
- 14 Guillermo O'Donnell, On the state, development, and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with some glances at some post-communist countries, *World Development*, 21, 1993.
- 15 Rio de Janeiro's militias have been described in this way by Nicholas Pope, *Militias going rogue: Social dilemmas and coercive brokerage in Rio de Janeiro's urban frontier*, *Journal of International Development*, 2023. This draws from the work of Francisco Gutierrez Sanín, who used the term to describe paramilitaries in Colombia in his book, *Clientelistic Warfare: Paramilitaries and the State in Colombia (1982–2007)*, Peter Lang Verlag, 2019.
- 16 Rafael Soares, *Invasões do crime organizado no 'Minha casa, minha vida' se alastram por 24 cidades do Rio*, *Extra*, 28 March 2021, <https://extra.globo.com/casos-de-policia/invasoes-do-crime-organizado-no-minha-casa-minha-vida-se-alastram-por-24-cidades-do-rio-24944296.html>.

- 17 Gustavo Prieto, *Milicianos não usam máscara*, Ana Fani Alessandri Carlos, (ed.), *COVID-19 e a crise urbana*, USP, 2020, 58, https://geografia.fflch.usp.br/sites/geografia.fflch.usp.br/files/Covid_19_e_a_Crise_Urbana_v7.pdf#page=57.
- 18 Nicholas Pope, *Brokering an urban frontier: Milícias, violence, and Rio de Janeiro's West Zone* (doctoral dissertation), SOAS University of London, 2020.
- 19 Daniel Veloso Hirata et al, The expansion of *Milícias* in Rio de Janeiro: Political and economic advantages, *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, December 2022.
- 20 Eric Scheye, Heart of Africa's organised crime: Land, property and urbanisation, *ENACT*, May 2019, 2–5.
- 21 Francesco Chiodelli, The illicit side of urban development: Corruption and organised crime in the field of urban planning, *Urban Studies*, 56, 8, (2019), 1622.
- 22 P. Singelmann, Political structure and social banditry in northeast Brazil, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 1975, 59–83.
- 23 A. Freire, C. E. Sarmento and M. S. D. Motta, *O Rio de Janeiro em três perfis: trajetórias individuais e o campo político carioca*, F. G. V. Editora, 2004.
- 24 M. de Moraes Ferreira, M, *Rio de Janeiro: uma cidade na história*, F. G. V. Editora, 2015.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Fabio Leon, *Tenório Cavalcanti, o 'avô' das milícias*, *Ponte*, 1 July 2019, <https://ponte.org/tenorio-cavalcanti-o-avo-das-milicias/>.
- 27 José Claudio Souza Alves, *Milícias: Mudanças na Economia Política do Crime no Rio de Janeiro*, in Ignacio Cano and Carolina looty (eds), *Segurança, tráfico e milícias no Rio de Janeiro*, Heinrich Boll, June 2008, 35, https://br.boell.org/sites/default/files/relatorio_milicias11.pdf.
- 28 Abello-Colak, Alexandra and Valeria Guarneros-Meza, The role of criminal actors in local governance, *Urban Studies*, 51, 15, 2014.
- 29 Leslie Leitão et al, *Major da PM e mais 4 são presos em operação contra milícia que age em grilagem de terras no RJ*, *G1*, 22 January 2019, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2019/01/22/operacao-mira-grilagem-de-terras-pela-milicia-na-zona-oeste-do-rio.ghtml>.
- 30 Nicholas Pope, *Brokering an urban frontier: Milícias, violence, and Rio de Janeiro's West Zone*, doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2020, 169.
- 31 *Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Relatório final da Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito destinada a investigar a ação de milícias no âmbito do estado do Rio de Janeiro*, 2008, 41, <https://www.marcelofreixo.com.br/cpi-das-milicias>.
- 32 Vera Araújo and Chico Otávio, *Rio tem 300 currais eleitorais do tráfico ou milícia*, *O Globo*, 9 September 2018, <https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/rio-tem-300-currais-eleitorais-do-traffic-ou-milicia-23052750>.
- 33 *Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Relatório final da Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito destinada a investigar a ação de milícias no âmbito do estado do Rio de Janeiro*, 2008, 42, <https://www.marcelofreixo.com.br/cpi-das-milicias>.
- 34 Marcela Lemos, *Como Liga da Justiça se transformou no Bonde do Zinho, maior milícia do RJ*, *UOL*, 26 August 2022, <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2022/08/26/como-liga-da-justica-se-transformou-no-bonde-do-zinho-maior-milicia-no-rj.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 *Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Relatório final da Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito destinada a investigar a ação de milícias no âmbito do estado do Rio de Janeiro*, 2008, 42, <https://www.marcelofreixo.com.br/cpi-das-milicias>.
- 39 Elenilce Bottari, *Como Rio das Pedras virou sede do Escritório do Crime*, *O Globo*, 28 January 2019, <https://oglobo.globo.com/epoca/como-rio-das-pedras-vice-sede-do-escritorio-do-crime-23398750>.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Arthur Leal, *O nascimento da milícia em Rio das Pedras, pela visão de um morador*, *O Globo*, 25 July 2019, <https://oglobo.globo.com/epoca/rio/o-nascimento-da-milicia-em-rio-das-pedras-pela-visao-de-um-morador-23831103>.
- 42 Enderson Albuquerque, *O adensamento populacional da baixada fluminense a partir dos loteamentos: a construção de uma periferia*, *GeoPUC – Revista da Pós-Graduação em Geografia da PUC-Rio*, 13, 24, January–July 2020, 152, <http://geopuc.geo.puc-rio.br/media/v13n24a7%20-%20Albuquerque,%20E.pdf>.
- 43 Marcella de Araujo Silva, Houses, tranquility and progressing an *área de milícia*, *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, 14, 3, 10–11.
- 44 Ibid, 10–11.
- 45 Ben-Hur Correia, *Força-tarefa derruba oito construções irregulares da milícia na Muzema*, *G1*, 22 December 2021, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2021/12/22/forca-tarefa-construcoes-irregulares-da-milicia-na-muzema.ghtml>.
- 46 Rafael Soares, *Milícia fatura R\$ 4 milhões por prédios na região de Rio das Pedras*, *O Globo*, 6 June 2021, <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/milicia-fatura-4-milhoes-por-predios-na-regiao-de-rio-das-pedras-2-25048933>.
- 47 Interview with activist, Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, 15 March 2021.
- 48 *Muzema, dominada pela milícia, virou paraíso das construções irregulares*, *Extra*, 19 January 2022, <https://extra.globo.com/casos-de-policia/muzema-dominada-pela-milicia-vice-paraiso-das-construcoes-irregulares-25360314.html>.

- 49 Rafael Soares, *Milícia fatura R\$ 4 milhões por prédios na região de Rio das Pedras*, *O Globo*, 6 June 2021, <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/milicia-fatura-4-milhoes-por-predios-na-regiao-de-rio-das-pedras-2-25048933>.
- 50 Interview with activist, Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, 15 March 2021.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Muzema, *dominada pela milícia, virou paraíso das construções irregulares*, *Extra*, 19 January 2022, <https://extra.globo.com/casos-de-policia/muzema-dominada-pela-milicia-virou-paraíso-das-construções-irregulares-25360314.html>.
- 53 Genilson Araújo, *Prefeitura e MPRJ demolem construções irregulares na região do Parque Nacional da Tijuca*, *G1*, 26 May 2022, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2022/05/26/prefeitura-e-mprj-demolem-construções-irregulares-na-região-do-parque-nacional-da-tijuca.ghtml>.
- 54 Luiza Franco, *Como a milícia ameaça as matas do Rio de Janeiro*, *BBC News Brasil*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-49642625>.
- 55 Frank Müller, The politics of urban sand in Rio de Janeiro, *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 10 February 2021, <https://polarjournal.org/2021/02/10/the-politics-of-urban-sand-in-rio-de-janeiro/>.
- 56 Marco Hernandez, Simon Scarr and Katy Daigle, The messy business of sand mining explained, *Reuters*, 18 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-ENVIRONMENT/SAND/ygdpzkyavw/#:~:text=The%20method%20of%20extraction%20depends,dredging%20boats%20or%20suction%20pumps>.
- 57 Gustavo Silva, *Milícia do RJ busca domínio de cadeia do crime e investe em areais*, *Veja*, 26 April 2023, <https://veja.abril.com.br/brasil/milicia-do-rj-busca-dominio-de-cadeia-do-crime-e-investe-em-areais>.
- 58 Luiza Franco, *Como a milícia ameaça as matas do Rio de Janeiro*, *BBC News Brasil*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-49642625>.
- 59 Jefferson Monteiro and Rafael Nascimento, *Operação mira extração de areia pelas maiores milícias do RJ*, *G1*, 26 April 2023, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2023/04/26/operacao-mira-extracao-de-areia-pelas-maiores-milicias-do-rj.ghtml>.
- 60 Instituto Oswaldo Cruz, *Fiocruz mapeia vulnerabilidade do Rio de Janeiro frente às mudanças climáticas*, *Fiocruz*, 8 August 2013, <https://portal.fiocruz.br/noticia/fiocruz-mapeia-vulnerabilidade-do-rio-de-janeiro-frente-mudancas-climaticas>.
- 61 *Emergência climática: estudo mostra aumento de chuvas muito fortes no Rio*, *Veja Rio*, 9 June 2023, <https://vejario.abril.com.br/cidade/emergencia-climatica-estudo-aumento-chuvas-fortes-rio>.
- 62 Felipe Lucena, *Em 11 anos, Rio de Janeiro teve mais de mil mortes em meio às fortes chuvas*, *Diário do Rio*, 8 April 2022, <https://diariodorio.com/em-11-anos-rio-de-janeiro-teve-mais-de-mil-mortes-por-consequencia-das-chuvas/>.
- 63 Leandro Benmergui and Rafael Soares Gonçalves, Rio de Janeiro: Storms, militia, and urban development, *Metropolitics*, 8 November 2019, <https://metropolitics.org/Rio-de-Janeiro-Storms-Militia-and-Urban-Development.html>.
- 64 The last census data from 2010 notes 328 370. However, the Campo Grande Business Association noted the population growth since then, estimating a population of 478 000 in 2018 when Director, Guilherme Leite, was interviewed.
- 65 Latest available data is from IBGE, *Censo Demográfico*, 2010.
- 66 Interview with Guilherme Leite, director of the Commercial Association of Campo Grande, May 2017.
- 67 All names are aliases.
- 68 Interview with a state prosecutor, April 2017.
- 69 Interview with a resident, March 2017.
- 70 Interview with a resident, March 2017.
- 71 Similar complaints have been reported elsewhere; see Anita Prado and Guilherme Peixoto, *Moradores de Campo Grande denunciam que, apesar de interdição, obra avança dentro de parque*, *G1, Globo*, 19 July 2021, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2021/07/19/moradores-de-campo-grande-denunciam-construções-irregulares-em-area-de-proteção-ambiental-que-havia-sido-interditada.ghtml>.
- 72 Interview with a resident of Minha Casa, Minha Vida development, June 2016.
- 73 Editors, *Bandidos expulsam beneficiados do 'Minha Casa, Minha Vida' de imóveis*, *G1 Fantástico*, 6 April 2014, <https://g1.globo.com/fantastico/noticia/2014/04/bandidos-expulsam-beneficiados-do-minha-casa-minha-vida-de-imoveis.html>.
- 74 Interview with state prosecutor of Santa Cruz, October 2017.
- 75 Archival evidence from ALERJ, *Fundo ALERJ 02, Série 2 000-2, Comissões temporárias (Código P4483) – 2.146 Milícias*.
- 76 Interview with a resident, September 2016.
- 77 Interview with a resident, May 2017.
- 78 C. Cramer, *Peace work: labour markets, work and violence*, New York: Human Development Report Office, UNDP, 2015.
- 79 Interview with Júnia Santa Rosa, Former Director of Ministry of Cities, 4 April 2016.
- 80 Ibid.



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 600 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net