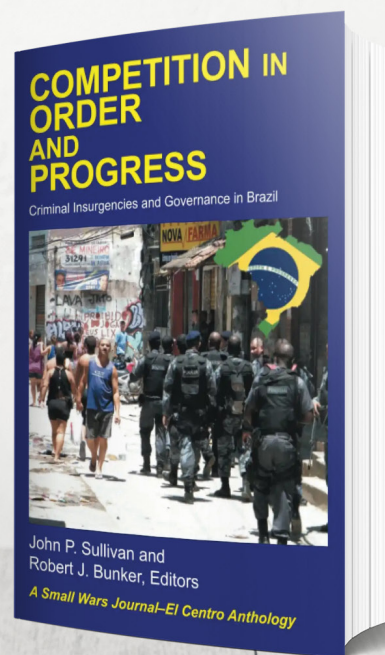


Competition in Order and Progress

Criminal Insurgencies and Governance in Brazil



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C*ompetition in Order and Progress: Criminal Insurgencies and Governance in Brazil* is a Small Wars Journal–El Centro Anthology edited by John Sullivan and Robert Bunker. Bunker and Sullivan have studied and published papers and anthologies on Latin American conflict with a focus on national and transnational criminal organizations for more than three decades. This is an absolute must-read for scholars and practitioners focused on criminal insurgencies, counterinsurgency, and urban warfare. Though the book focuses on Brazil, the complex relationships between the population, local militias, gangs, and the government make this research relevant for any complex urban environment where government services cannot reach the entire population. Before reading this anthology, the reader would benefit from studying Sullivan’s work on third generation gangs, David Kilcullen’s theory of competitive control, and the strategic notes and articles published in the *El Centro Journal*.¹

With twenty authors and over five hundred pages of content, *Competition in Order and Progress* covers a range of topics spanning the specific criminal organizations in Brazil (i.e., Primeiro Comando da Capital [PCC] and Comando Vermelho [CV]) to the challenges of corruption within the Brazilian government. The book is a mix of tactical research notes of individual events in Brazil (everything from bank robberies and complex assaults from criminal organizations to attempts at urban policing from the state) and long-form essays. There are two key themes that stand out from this anthology: the origin and transnational spread of criminal organizations created from a vacuum of state power and the challenge of mounting an effective counterinsurgency with a corrupt government.

Christian Vianna de Azevedo identifies the major challenge in Brazil, which is that “the state is almost completely absent” in the favelas which results in “drug gangs impos[ing] their own systems of justice, law

and order, and taxation enforced through the force of arms.² Azevedo further identifies that the vacuum of power created by a failure of government results in drug cartels that “become criminal insurgents” that “take over geographical areas in which the state has no functional authority.”³ COVID-19 conditions were an example in which “gang leaders acted in the absence of formal governance—they implemented lockdowns, curfews, and created an ad hoc public health system, although not nicely.”⁴ The rapid urbanization of Brazil coupled with the inability of the government to provide services resulted in the rise of criminal organizations. Even the attempt at religion to “purge gangs and drugs from their community” backfired as evangelical groups (also known as evangelical gangsters) resorted to the same tactics as gangs to consolidate power in support of their mission.⁵ The gangs such as PCC and CV that rose in the absence of governance are not just confined to Brazil, which makes them an international problem.

Bunker, Sullivan, and José de Arimatéia da Cruz identify that “the migration and subsequent formation of new gangs or criminal nodes (intentional or unintentional) within émigré or diaspora communities can result in an intentional or unintentional criminal diaspora.”⁶ Brazil’s gangs have

“criminal networks not only in Brazil, especially in States of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, but they are also active in the Tri-Border region and several other countries in South America.”⁷ Brazil’s criminal organizations are not just confined to South America. In one of the more fascinating examples of the spread of criminal gangs, Bunker and Sullivan identified an offshoot of Primeiro Comando da Capital identified in the Northeast United States in 2018.⁸ Gangs in Brazil are “transitioning from solely a law enforcement

issue to a full-blown national security concern as they directly challenge sovereign prerogative and authority.”⁹ The government continues to make attempts to pacify criminal organizations within Brazil and to restore order to the favelas, but it has its own challenges with corruption it must first overcome.

Stephen M. Noguera argues that “Brazil has been transformed from an up-and-coming major actor in the international community in the mid-20th century to a hotbed of underworld activities that are increasingly become an integral part of the country’s governing apparatus at present.”¹⁰ In a clear sign of an ineffective government, each “of the last six governors of Rio de Janeiro have gone to jail” with the latest impeached on corruption charges.¹¹ In August 2021, the ex-secretary of prisons “was arrested for corruption” after meeting with CV leadership with an agreement to “transfer gang members to less restrictive state prisons in Rio de Janeiro and overlook the gang’s activities and prison expansion in exchange for reducing violence in Rio.”¹² The penetration of the Brazilian government from criminal factions undermines the confidence in the government from the populace and increases the reliance on the existing criminal organizations. Noguera argues that “when criminal organizations and illegal acts become fully institutionalized and entrench in a society’s consciousness and status quo, making substantive progress is not only challenging, but essentially impossible.”¹³ There is a consensus from authors in the anthology that Brazil is not a failed state, but that there are territories within Brazil that “are like ‘failed states’ within a functional country.”¹⁴

There are no easy solutions to the problems identified in this volume. Government corruption combined with criminal factions that have both money and political sway make Brazil a functioning state that has pockets of territory and population that are beyond government control. When the government cannot exhibit influence in criminal-controlled territories, the people who live in those territories will depend on criminals for basic services and will lose trust in the government. The challenges posed in this book are the challenges with which scholars and military leaders must grapple. The United States wants to pivot from counterinsurgency operations to large-scale combat operations. The next conflict(s) will inevitably involve urban warfare in which there are local and transnational criminal factions vying for power

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and influence. We cannot abandon our understanding of contemporary insurgencies and transnational organizations because large-scale-combat operations will involve urban conflict, likely in a megacity, in which our forces must prepare for operating in an environment that has existing and newly formed national and transnational criminal organizations.

Sullivan and Bunker's anthology is an incredible amount of information both on the current challenges of criminal insurgencies and government corruption in Brazil and information on the origin and spread of criminal organizations in the absence of state

power. This anthology adds to the literature on Latin American criminal organizations and should serve as a thought primer for leaders thinking about operating in countries with criminal organizations that exert influence on the people and the government. *Competition in Order and Progress* further solidifies El Centro as the most relevant and current hub for scholarship on Latin American guerilla wars and criminal insurgencies. For military professionals looking to learn more about national and transnational criminal organizations, this is an outstanding introduction to a topic that will be part of the next major conflict. ■

Notes

1. John P. Sullivan, "Third Generation Street Gangs: Turf, Cartels, and NetWarriors," *Transnational Organized Crime* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 96; David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–27; *El Centro* (website), accessed 8 July 2022, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/elcentro>.

2. Christian Vianna de Azevedo, "Criminal Insurgency in Brazil: The Case of Rio de Janeiro: Context, Confrontation Issues and Implications for Brazilian Public Security," in *Competition in Order and Progress: Criminal Insurgencies and Governance in Brazil*, ed. John Sullivan and Robert Bunker (self-pub., Xlibris, 2022), 320.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Natalie D. Baker and Gabriel Leão, "Parties of Crime? Brazil's Faccões Criminosas—Good Governance and Bad Government," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 382.

5. Robert J. Bunker, John P. Sullivan, and José de Arimatéia da Cruz "Third Generation Gangs Strategic Note No. 6: Holy War in Rio's Favelas: Bandidos Evangélicos (Evangelical Bandits)," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 45.

6. John P. Sullivan, José de Arimatéia da Cruz, and Robert J. Bunker, "Third Generation Gangs Strategic Note No. 15: Primeiro Comando da Massachusetts (PCM) Emerges in Massachusetts," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 99.

7. Becky Kohler da Cruz and José de Arimatéia da Cruz, "Brazil's Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) and Its National

Security Implications," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 303.

8. Sullivan, Cruz, and Bunker, "Third Generation Gangs Strategic Note No. 15," 97.

9. John P. Sullivan, José de Arimatéia da Cruz, and Robert J. Bunker, "Third Generation Gangs Strategic Note No. 9: Concerns About Potential Gang (PCC-Primeiro Comando da Capital & CV-Comando Vermelho) Influence on Upcoming Brazilian Elections," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 59.

10. Stephen M. Noguera, "The Evolution of Brazilian Militias," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 432.

11. Robert Muggah, "Rio's Bloody Police Campaign," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 394.

12. John P. Sullivan, José de Arimatéia da Cruz, and Robert J. Bunker, "Third Generation Gangs Strategic Note No. 43: Former Rio de Janeiro Prison Secretary Arrested for Collusion with the Comando Vermelho," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 253.

13. Stephen M. Noguera, "The Evolution of Brazilian Militias," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 433.

14. Christian Vianna de Azevedo, "Criminal Insurgency in Brazil: The Case of Rio de Janeiro: Context, Confrontation Issues and Implications for Brazilian Public Security," in Sullivan and Bunker, *Competition in Order and Progress*, 320.