

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title and author information.

Killing Myths and Saving Lives

Latin American Perspectives on Small Arms and Disarmament Campaigns

ANTONIO RANGEL BANDEIRA

September 2012

- The lack of reliable information encourages the continued existence of anachronistic ideas on the possession of firearms. This dichotomy between scientific knowledge and popular perceptions of the use and control of firearms results in inappropriate public policies being developed to tackle the phenomenon, given that these policies are based on inaccurate myths. These include the following:
- It is believed that carrying a gun is a means of protection that reduces risks for holders of guns. However, research shows that carrying a gun increases the likelihood of the holder being killed, as guns have an essentially violent nature, which can lead to an untimely end in the case of dispute resolution and to exposure to risk situations.
- It is argued that banning firearms leaves those who use them legally without protection, while it also favors criminals, given that it promotes a black market. However, as most firearms are made by lawful manufacturers, control experiments have proven to be successful in reducing trade. These control policies make it difficult for criminals to obtain firearms.
- Major firearms manufacturer spread the idea that regulation and disarmament policies are promoted by states that want to subjugate their citizens. However, in the context of the legitimate monopoly on violence, it can be proven that democratic states seek to disarm their populations in order to improve the efficiency of their institutions and guarantee the freedom and security of their citizens.

In 2010 the Americas were in second place with regard to the number of homicides around the world, both in absolute numbers (144,000) and in terms of the rate according to the population (15.6 per 100,000 inhabitants).¹ Experts agree that this tragic scenario is basically due to the combination of three factors: drug trafficking, inefficiency and corruption among police forces and lack of control of firearms by the State. Another point of consensus is that urban violence is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes, that does not have a single solution – a life-saving »silver bullet« – but must be combated in a number of different ways. With this in mind, we will now look at the firearms issue.

Nations learn from other nations, despite some continuing to ignore international experience. In the area of public security, which is a sector that has modernized only recently but at a fast rate, disinformation has a high cost in terms of human lives. As a result, when we decided to tackle the scandalous gun-related death rates in Brazil (in 2003 there were 39,284 gun-related homicides per year), we studied international experience, by visiting countries that were examples due to their negative or positive situations, in order to avoid being influenced by false information. This was a necessary precaution because the billion-dollar gun industry encourages some big myths. For example, »Switzerland is the most armed country in the world, but its crime rate is almost zero«². I know Switzerland very well, as it is the location for the most important center for academic research into small arms and light weapons – the Small Arms Survey in Geneva – which publishes a very prestigious yearbook on arms, with the same name, and with which my organization has a partnership. Switzerland is not the most armed country in the world, as only 27.2 per cent of households have firearms, whereas in the USA the figure is 48 per cent.³ Switzerland is in third place for gun-related suicides (3.15 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2008), only behind the USA (5.75) and Finland (3.47), and its gun-related death rates are among the highest for the developed countries of Europe [0.55 per 100,000 inhabitants compared with France (0.29) or

Germany (0.20), for example].⁴ So, where is the truth in the claim that »Switzerland has an armed population«? Due to its historic tradition as a fighting country (Vatican security is in the hands of the Swiss Guard, which is now made up of Italian police officers), which has since been replaced by its position as a »neutral« country involved in laundering dirty money, Swiss men are required to carry out military service between the ages of 19 and 50 and receive an assault rifle to keep at home, as part of the age-old concept of a »militia« defending the country. The rifle has to be kept in a safe, separate from the ammunition, and is only used for training in the military unit. This is a very different situation from keeping loaded revolvers and pistols as a form of self-defense for the family, as we are unfairly led to believe.⁵

We initially learnt about voluntary disarmament from the extraordinary Nelson Mandela, when he was President of South Africa, by observing the positive impact of campaigns to reduce violence in that country. At the time, Colombia was one of the most significant negative examples. It was common to hear the expression: »If we do not turn things around, we will end up like Colombia.« The fact that in recent years Colombia has become a model of violence reduction is a huge step forward. Brazil has also made progress, so we feel it is useful to compare the policies of our countries with regard to the issue of disarmament.

Scientific knowledge versus perceptions

The first difficulty we encounter when trying to explore the firearms issue in detail is that firearms belong to a dark and secret world. They are traded in a billion-dollar market and those who make profit from their production and sale show no signs of commitment to public security and no interest in releasing their data to analysts not employed by them, and also frequently co-opt the public authorities responsible for controlling these activities. In addition, prior to the end of the Cold War, concern about firearms was focused on the issue of war and not crime as such. As a result, firearms were kept under the control of the Armed Forces, whose activities are shrouded in secrecy. To start with, as early analysts of the firearms issue from a perspective of public security, we were not welcome in this closed world, which

1. In both cases, first place is held by the African continent. See the report »Citizen Security in Latin America«, Inter-American Dialogue, February 2012; <http://www.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/GinoCosta-EnglishFINAL.PDF>.

2. Bandeira, Antonio Rangel and Bourgois, Josephine: *¿Armas de Fuego: Protección o Riesgo?* [Guns: Protection or Risk], Foro Parlamentario Internacional, Stockholm 2006, p. 28; http://www.comunidadsegura.org/files/active/0/armas%20de%20fuego%20protecao%20ou%20risco_esp.pdf.

3. Ibid., p. 28.

4. Ibid., p. 29.

5. Ibid., p. 28.

did not react well to democratization, and in which there were strong interests in continuing to sell firearms to anyone, including criminals and terrorists.

The result was a lack of correct information, or worse, the prevalence of ideas more suited to the reality of agrarian societies and not highly urbanized societies like ours (86 per cent of Brazil's population lives in cities). The function of firearms in the countryside has little connection with their role in urban centers: whilst in the first case, their use is frequently justified by the precarious nature of public security, life in cities requires efficient police protection, with firearms in civilian hands creating more problems than solutions.

In addition to this transplant of rural habits to urban contexts, we have the deep-rooted tradition of an archaic model of masculinity: the »fighting man«. In terms of the new concept of the controlled use of violence, this prototype - already debatable in professions that use force, such as the military and police - contrasts with the model of the »democratic man« who must prevail due to his abilities and sensitivity. However, in Latin America, this concept, which associates the use of guns with masculinity, is still very much widespread.

Faced with these difficulties, it was essential to produce information on »the life« of firearms, i.e. their circulation and use, in order to determine the reality to be changed. In 1999 a progressive government in Rio de Janeiro released information to us on 720,000 firearms seized in that province, so that we could analyze this information. The result led to an about-turn in the perception that people had about illegal firearms: whereas it was thought that most were manufactured abroad, we proved that, in Rio, this was only the case with 14 per cent (in later research, we established that the figure for Brazil is less than 10 per cent);⁶ it was thought that large-caliber firearms, rifles and machine guns were predominant, but we found that 86 per cent were revolvers and pistols.⁷

6. Purcena, Julio Cesar and Nascimento, Marcelo: *Seguindo a Rota das Armas: Desvio, Comércio e Tráfico Ilícitos de Armamento Pequeno e Leve no Brasil* [Following the Arms Trail: Illicit Diversion, Sale and Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Brazil], p. 20; http://www.vivario.org.br/publicue/media/Seguindo_a_Rota_das_Armas.pdf.

7. Report of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on the Illegal Gun Trade, National Congress of Brazil, 2006, p. 453; Specific report by MP Jungmann (contains the basics), <http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/active/0/Relatorio%20sub-relatoria%20de%20industria%20comercio%20e%20cac.pdf>; General report, http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/active/0/relatorio_final_CPL_armas.pdf.

In other words, due to a lack of research, the Brazilian police were fighting the illegal gun trade based on incorrect information and myths fed by ignorance and by the all-powerful national gun industry, which is the fourth largest exporter in the world.

One of the most deep-rooted myths was that the Brazilian problem was primarily due to »the lack of control at its borders« with 10 countries, which is indeed a problem, but one of lesser importance. We proved that over 80 per cent of the illegal firearms were manufactured within Brazil, and were diverted as a result of a lack of control by the State. We therefore encouraged Parliament to set up a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry in 2005 to investigate the illegal gun trade. The Committee forced Brazilian manufacturers to declare the first purchaser of 15,000 firearms seized in Rio. This was the most extensive tracing operation conducted to date and revealed the main sources of diversion to the black market: legal gunsmiths, private security firms, military and police arsenals, private firearms of police officers and military personnel sold to third parties, firearms of fake collectors and sportspeople, fake exports which remained in the country or which returned across the borders, and a lack of control at airports and ports and on the roads. With our technical help, the CPI produced detailed mapping of the flow of guns to criminals in Brazil, which is a fundamental element in any policy to combat illegal armament.

When we began analyzing this huge sample of firearms, we had no model to follow. We were instigating a new field of scientific research and we had to develop a methodology. The Argentinean Pablo Dreyfus, was of essential help in these efforts. He was an expert at the Swiss think tank »Small Arms Survey« and a brilliant pioneer in this area until his death in 2009. As a result, this led to the unusual situation of developing countries being invited to train developed countries in gun control matters. The latter, which in general do not suffer from explicit armed violence, are only now starting to tackle the problem and have little experience in this respect.

In methodological terms, it is vital to work with reliable sources. That is why I find it surprising that a Colombian academic still cites John Lott in order to justify his arguments in favor of the defensive use of firearms. Lott published his book *More Guns, Less Crimes* in 1998,⁸ fol-

8. Bandeira and Bourgois, op. cit, p. 26.

lowing research funded by the National Rifle Association (NRA). The methodology that he used was unanimously rejected by many respectable research centers in the USA, which found that he had manipulated the data.⁹ His fanaticism, or opportunism, was completely laid bare when, while commenting on massacres in the USA, such as the Columbine massacre in 1999, in which two students murdered 12 other students and one teacher, and wounded another 24 students, he asserted in *The Wall Street Journal* that: »Allowing teachers and other law-abiding adults to carry concealed handguns in schools would not only make it easier to stop shootings in progress, it could also help deter shootings from ever occurring.«¹⁰

A myth understood is a myth shattered

Ignorance encourages the survival of anachronistic ideas and customs and the creation of myths. This is the case with certain opinions on firearms that are maintained even though they lack any scientific basis. In Brazil the expression »*mito conhecido, mito caído*« (which roughly translates as »A myth understood is a myth shattered«) refers to the moment when scientific data is sufficiently convincing to destroy a myth. Combating the ideology (which is conceived as an attitude that is emotion-based or governed by interests that distort the analysis) of the glorification of firearms with a pacifist ideology provokes heated discussions, but does not change mentalities.

Having said that, it does seem to be easy to shatter myths, but the knowledge process is complicated when someone has personal experience or knows of a particular case and unduly generalizes that experience or knowledge, believing that this is the rule and not the exception. For example, it is clear that there are situations in which the use of a firearm may save a life that is threatened. However, public policies are not developed on the basis of exceptions, but rather they are based on what is the rule, which is what happens with the majority. In order to determine the rule and what normally happens when a gun is used in self-defense requires measurements, surveys, research and analysis of statistics. On that basis, rules and laws can be constructed to regulate an attitude or activity whose importance and risk require regulation.

9. Ibid., p. 46.

10. Ibid., p. 22.

At this point it is useful to look at some very much generalized ideas about the possession and use of firearms, which do not stand up to expert analysis, albeit with the greatest respect for those who think differently. The first idea is that, for the reasons given with regard to the lack of scientific information available to the public, many rely on traditional views, and the man who arms himself in order to protect his family, even if he is mistaken, believes that he is doing his duty. The second idea is one that I used to have myself, given that I belong to the »1968 generation« which fought against the military dictatorship, because, when I was young, I saw firearms as an instrument of liberation, in addition to having been a shooting instructor in the Brazilian Army, when their use was official. Let us now look at some of the more common ideas about the possession and use of firearms, which do not stand up to analysis.

A gun is for attack, not for defense

Firearms are very effective in attack, when you have the initiative in the armed action. If you want to kill, a gun is an excellent instrument. However, its efficient use in self-defense requires the presence of other factors that rarely exist. The most important is the surprise factor, which decides the conflict in favor of the aggressor, given that he is the one who chooses the moment and circumstance of the attack (an assailant does not sound a bell announcing the assault). The current Mayor of Rio, Eduardo Paes, told me that, when he was a Member of Parliament, he woke up one day in his bed to find a pistol pointed at his head. His wife had gone out to buy bread and a robber had entered the house with her. The criminal had taken the guns that Eduardo possessed for the purpose of defending his home. It is the aggressor who decides when and how to attack, while the victim is surprised and can do little against a gun that is being pointed at him. If he reacts, as a rule he dies. That is the nature of an attack. In interviews with 40 prisoners convicted of murder in Sao Paulo, on being asked why they had killed, all in their way replied »I felt compelled to shoot because the person reacted. I only wanted to rob them.«¹¹

What happened to me was not exceptional and police records show that this is in fact commonplace. After leaving my office, I stopped my car at the traffic lights

11. »*Por que os Bandidos Matam*« [Why Criminals Kill], Veja, São Paulo, 17.11.2010.

and suddenly found a pistol pointing at my head. The assailant had not approached from the front or rear, where I could have detected him, but from a blind spot, which is why I was surprised. What could I have done, even if I had had a gun and known how to handle it properly? This is a common type of attack and that is the reality of an attack. However, many people think that they will have the opportunity to see the criminal approach, and the time to defend themselves, as they see on television. That is an illusion.

The result is that, if a victim has a gun, whether at home or in the car, because they do not have the time to react, that gun will be stolen from them, thus involuntarily increasing the criminal's arsenal. That is what happened with two popular Brazilian television journalists, William Bonner and Fátima Bernardes, who were attacked in their home in 2005 by criminals whose 7.65 pistol had been stolen from the home of a retired naval officer.

Having a gun at home increases the risk that a member of the family will be murdered, simply due to having a weapon that could threaten or be used against the attacker, according to the latter's perception, who is frequently nervous or on drugs and who also normally works with accomplices, which makes the possibility of defense even more remote and only possible in the fantasy of film.

Firearms: risk or protection?

Due to their lack of confidence in police efficiency, it is understandable that some parents arm themselves in order to protect themselves and their family. If a gun is kept ready for immediate use (loaded and within reach), so that it can be used in defense, that gun can be easily found: mainly by children, who will want to play with it and imitate what they see on television; by depressed teenagers, who will commit suicide without thinking; by jealous or drunken men, who kill their partners much more frequently than is thought. It was for that reason that the disarmament campaign in Uruguay said »Do you have a gun? Then you have a problem«. However, if, in order to avoid this risk, the owner of the gun keeps it secure (in a safe, as the law requires in certain countries), then that gun will be of no use for immediate defense in the event of a robbery and will end up being stolen.

The well-known research conducted by the US doctor Arthur Kellermann in the 1990s revealed that, in the USA, »the family that keeps a firearm at home is 4 times more likely to experience a situation where this is accidentally fired, 7 times more likely to see the gun being used in an intra-family murder, and 11 times more likely to have the gun used as an instrument of suicide, than for this gun to be used to defend the family itself«¹².

Misunderstandings and quarrels, which are classed as interpersonal conflicts, occur in all societies. What makes Latin America different is the distribution of firearms. Their presence in a scenario of interpersonal conflict or lack of emotional control can transform a discussion or a quarrel into a murder, to the misfortune of at least two families. The presence of the gun turns ordinary conflicts into irreversible tragedies. Firearms change the nature of personal conflicts, by making them fatal.

This prompts a question: if people cannot trust in police efficiency and do not have a firearm, who can they turn to for their protection? The first answer is to think rationally, not instinctively: it is better to be robbed than to be killed. Cemeteries are full of »valiant« and irresponsible men. Secondly, it is worthwhile looking at international experience. What can we learn from advanced democracies, such as Japan, which has reduced gun-related homicides to 0.05 per cent per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest rate in the world? What can we learn from Great Britain, where fewer people are killed by guns every year than are killed in Brazil every day? Huge investment in improving policing, community control over public security, and a ban on civilians possessing firearms. On the other hand we have the example of the USA, with 300 million inhabitants and 200 million firearms in civilian hands, where, over 12 years, 446 children and teenagers were killed at school, and which has one of the highest rates for gun-related homicides in the developed countries.¹³

Table 1: Homicides rates per 100,000 inhabitants

Japan	1.8 (2008)
Great Britain	1.1 (2009)
Germany	0.8 (2010)
Canada	1.8 (2009)
USA	5.0 (2009)

Source: UNODC (2011) »Global Study on Homicides«.

12. Bandeira and Bourgois, pp. cit., p. 59.

13. Ibid., p. 32.

In 2007 the Federal Supreme Court in Brazil, ruling on an action claiming the unconstitutionality of the *Estatuto de Desarme* (Disarmament Statute), found that this was constitutional because 1) the Constitution guarantees the right to life, and scientific research shows that firearms at home normally pose a high risk to the family; 2) the Constitution guarantees the right to security, to be implemented by the State, and not through self-defense on the part of citizens, who must collaborate with the State; 3) there is no »right to a gun« and their possession is a concession from the State to the citizen. It is worth adding that only the USA and Mexico consider that being armed is a right of citizens and not a concession from the State. In countries such as New Zealand, you need prior authorization from your family in order to purchase a gun. In Latin America, despite improvements in terms of equality between men and women, and the fact that children are no longer the property of their father and their rights are protected by the State, men (who are the main purchasers of firearms) are still permitted to purchase a gun, putting their family at risk and imposing on them their mistaken view of protection.

Guns attract guns

Appearances are deceptive. Someone buys a gun and publicizes the fact so that people know that their home is protected. They believe that potential attackers will refrain from attacking them, instead preferring »unprotected« homes. However, this has not been confirmed by various research work conducted in the USA.¹⁴ One of the objects criminals desire is a gun, an instrument of work and an asset that is easy to sell. Homes with guns normally attract the greed of criminals who, worse still, enter firing in order to prevent an armed reaction. It is also for that reason that, comparatively speaking, the armed robbery rates in Boston are low in relation to other US cities: Massachusetts has very strict gun legislation, guns are not normally found in homes. Knowing that an armed crime is subject to much higher penalties, attackers try not to use firearms in their work, thus significantly reducing the gun-related death rates in Boston.¹⁵

14. Ibid., p. 18.

15. Ibid., p. 18.

Guns don't kill people, people kill people

That is the oft-repeated slogan of the NRA in the USA. It is convincing at first sight. However, the first trap lies in stating the obvious, such as when someone says that, if a car is speeding, the blame does not lie with the car but with the driver. The second trap lies in focusing solely on one aspect on which we are all agreed: the need for good education. For the NRA, it is enough that people are well educated, as in that way they will always use their guns properly and therefore are not only capable of using them but must in fact have them.

We cannot be naïve to the point of imagining that education can solve everything, although it is essential. It has its limits due to human nature, which is not only rational, but also emotional. Psychology talks about »behavioral disturbances« to classify deviations in behavior. These are moments when a person »loses their head«, when emotion takes over rationality, due to fear, hate or another very strong feeling. We can give the example of jealousy, which can be so disruptive that even courts take this into account as an attenuating factor in crimes committed under its influence. Regardless of someone's culture or education, there are moments in life when people lose control. These are situations in which a gun within reach makes all the difference: if we do not have one, we can fight, but not easily kill; when armed, we will fire without thinking and then, too late, we will have regrets. The irreversibility of a shot dictates a tragic end, without any alternative other than the drama that will result for the families of the victim and aggressor.

Viewing a gun as an inert and innocent item about which there is no need to be concerned is irresponsible. Firearms must be regarded as dangerous goods, like certain chemicals, explosives, toxins or radioactive materials that must be controlled and kept under strict security, and whose use must be properly regulated. They are not domestic items, like a cell phone, which can be left on a table or in an accessible drawer. They are small machines made exclusively to kill and that can be easily fired.

The manipulation in the initial argument means that it is a sophism that gives the impression of being a truth, but is in fact a fallacy. To the slogan »Guns don't kill people, people kill people« we should respond with the reality: »Guns don't kill people, armed people kill people«.

Firearms and bladed weapons: a comparison

To discredit disarmament, it is said that anyone who wants to kill, or kill themselves, if they do not have a gun, will use another weapon, such as knives or other objects. Knives, glass, sticks, stones and other items have multiple uses that are peaceful and useful, and only exceptionally do they lend themselves as instruments of aggression. Firearms are exclusively made to kill, and their lethality and effectiveness are much greater, with a much lower chance of survival. In addition, firearms frequently affect third parties. By contrast, the use of bladed weapons »requires the attacker to become involved with the victim, by physically approaching them, and to have greater courage and determination. This is different from the firearm, which can be fired from afar, without any risk to the attacker«, as stated by Luciana Phebo, the famous epidemiologist.¹⁶

In Brazil, 63.9 per cent of homicides are committed using firearms and only 19.8 per cent using bladed weapons. The chance of dying in an attack involving a firearm is 75 per cent, whereas it is 36 per cent for a bladed weapon. Out of every four people attacked with firearms, three will die.¹⁷ Firearms, which are increasingly powerful and precise, kill more than they wound, whereas bladed weapons wound more than they kill. In suicide attempts involving a firearm, 95 per cent are successful, given the effectiveness of this weapon. The cost of treating gunshot wounds is nearly 12 times higher than for injuries caused in other ways.¹⁸ In public hospitals, this treatment is paid for by citizens through their taxes.

The NRA's excuses to discredit disarmament seem to have no limits: »Cars and swimming pools also kill. Are we going to ban them too?« This manipulation is infantile, as if we cannot distinguish between what is useful and peaceful, and only exceptionally causes harm, and what is exclusively intended to kill. Control of cars and obligations imposed on drivers are accepted, but gun control is not.

16. Phebo, Luciana: »O Impacto da Arma de Fogo na Saúde da População do Brasil« [The Impact of Guns on the Health of the Brazilian Population]; Dreyfus, Pablo et al: *BRASIL: AS ARMAS E AS VÍTIMAS* [BRAZIL: GUNS AND VICTIMS], Rio de Janeiro, Ed. 7 Letras, 2005.

17. DATASUS/ISER, Ministry of Health, Brasília, 2002.

18. SMALL ARMS SURVEY, Geneva, 2004.

Will a ban increase the black market?

The opposite has happened with the disarmament campaign in Brazil. According to the police in the State of Santa Catarina, »the law of supply and demand applies. The black market has shrunk as a result of the disarmament campaign. According to the Santa Catarina Federal Police, the 38 revolver, which was previously traded between criminals for 80 reais, now costs no less than 350.«¹⁹

People frequently talk as if there were a large number of legal firearms and a small number of illegal firearms. However, research shows that exactly the opposite is true. Legal firearms in civilian hands account for less than one-quarter of the firearms in circulation. It is therefore observed that the efficient way of controlling firearms is not to increase the legal market, which is small but supplies firearms to the black market, but to reduce the legal market so that it negatively affects the illegal gun trade.

Disarming law-abiding gun owners, but not criminals?

There is a common perception which, due to being biased and incomplete, results in erroneous suggestions as it reduces the firearms issue to a polarization between criminals, with illegal firearms, and law-abiding citizens, with legal firearms. The problem allegedly lies with the former and not with the latter. As criminals will not voluntarily surrender their guns, voluntary disarmament campaigns allegedly do not make sense. This prompts the criticism that we want to disarm law-abiding citizens and leave the criminals armed. This reductionist view is fed by most media, who normally highlight the news concerning the activities of criminals and their confrontations with the police, and relate little about what is happening in homes or about homicides that are not committed using large-caliber firearms, for example. This view is reinforced by US films and television serials, which depict the streets and strangers as dangerous or bad, and the home and families as sanctuaries of safety and love. Unfortunately that is not always the case.

However, we must also point out what should be obvious: disarmament campaigns do not aim to convince

19. »Coluna do Ancelmo Góis« [Ancelmo Góis's column], *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 30.08.2004.

criminals to surrender their guns, although this can sometimes happen. In Brazil there were several cases of young criminals who, mainly after being persuaded by their mothers or grandmothers, handed in guns to priests and ministers in churches. To calm those who fear that some are taking advantage of these campaigns to handover and therefore rid themselves of weapons involved in crimes, a survey conducted during a disarmament campaign in Oakland, California, found that 0.02 per cent of weapons, i.e. virtually no such weapons, were surrendered during this campaign. The reasons are obvious: if you want to get rid of a gun, it is easier to throw it into the sea or a river, after erasing its serial number, than to surrender it in a campaign, when it will be handed over to the police. In addition, it is more lucrative to sell the gun on the black market, where you will be paid much more than the usual compensation paid out in such campaigns.

Another factor in this respect is that people are often unaware of the relationship of interdependence between the legal and illegal markets. According to the »Bush doctrine«, a distinction must be made between good guns and bad guns. According to the view of the former US President, whose political campaign was largely funded by the gun and ammunition industry, it is only necessary to control the bad guns, which are seemingly those that are being illegally traded. This doctrine was defended by the US delegate during the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2001, in opposition to most of the international community, which was arguing for control of the legal and illegal markets. Why? Because almost 100 per cent of illegal firearms are legally produced (only in a few countries, such as New Guinea, are more than 40 per cent of firearms homemade). Unlike the drugs market, which is a black market from production to consumption, firearms are produced legally and, to a certain extent, are removed from the legal market and diverted to the illegal market, normally through the complicity or incompetence of public authorities responsible for control. This means that, in order to combat the illegal trade, we need to start tracing firearms on the legal market, which is not possible if their lifecycle is not monitored by the State. In Brazil, it was by tracing firearms sold by manufacturers that the main points and sources of diversion of firearms to the illegal trade were identified.²⁰

20. Report of the Parliament Committee of Inquiry on the Illegal Gun Trade, p. 349 et seq.

Good guns become bad guns. Bad guns are not made by criminals; they have a legal and »respectable« origin. Separating the two worlds prevents the efficient suppression of the illegal trade. Controlling the legal market is an essential condition for combating the illegal market.

In addition, one of the main sources of firearms for criminals is thefts or robberies from the homes or cars of law-abiding citizens. We have already seen how the first item that robbers steal is the victim's gun, with the victim being unable to react on account of the element of surprise that characterizes a criminal attack. According to the Federal Police, in 2003 in Brazil, prior to the new law on the issue, over 27,000 firearms were stolen from homes. In São Paulo, an average of 11,000 firearms is stolen every year from people without any criminal history or from private security guards, according to the State's Civil Police.²¹ Last year, at a meeting with public security authorities from El Salvador, I heard that, in one year, nearly 8,000 firearms had been stolen from residences. News such as the following is common, rather than the exception: »Thieves entered the home of a friend's father and pointed a gun at him and his wife for nearly an hour. Among the items stolen from the couple were two firearms. So I ask: what is the point in having a gun at home? Now there are two more guns in the hands of criminals, who will enter other homes and steal more guns ...«²²

In another five countries, the situation is exactly the same:

Table 2: Theft of legal firearms

Countries	Year	Firearms stolen	Total number of legal firearms
Australia	2001	4,195	2,165,170
Canada	2001	3,638	1,938,338
England and Wales	1996	3,002	1,793,712
South Africa	2001	23,000	3,500,000
USA	1997	500,000	260,000,000

Source: Small Arms Survey, 2004

21. Cordani, Dora Cavalcanti: »A Sociedade Desarmada. Projeções e Perspectivas« [The Disarmed Society: Projections and Prospects], Estatuto do Desarmamento [Disarmament Statute], São Paulo, 2005.

22. Voligt, Gerson Carlos: »Gazeta do Povo«, Curitiba, cited by Bandeira and Bourgois, op. cit.

A report by a well-known US foundation stated: »A stolen gun is worth its weight in gold to a criminal because it can be quickly sold on without any risk of its source being traced, and more than 80 per cent of stolen guns have come from robberies on homes and cars.«²³ In Brazil, where half a million firearms have been collected from law-abiding citizens and destroyed, this has significantly hindered criminals getting their hands on firearms, while the price of guns on the black market has tripled, as we have already seen.

In Brazil and most Latin American and Caribbean countries, the guns owned by law-abiding citizens are frequently illegal: they have been received as an inheritance, and take time and money to be legalized. Alternatively, these guns belong to people who do not accept the State's control over a particular item, even where they accept that said item is dangerous. According to research by Viva Rio,²⁴ in Brazil there are around 7.6 million illegal firearms in the possession of both criminals and law-abiding citizens. Those in the possession of law-abiding citizens form what we refer to as the informal gun market, to distinguish it from the illegal market used by criminals. This informal market is the main target of our voluntary disarmament campaigns, and in fact 91 per cent of firearms surrendered come from this market. These are firearms that, when stolen and used in criminal activity, cannot be traced, which makes it difficult to solve the crime. That was the reason for the gun legalization campaign conducted in 2008 and 2009 by the Federal Police, with support from Viva Rio, which managed to legalize 1,408,285 firearms.²⁵ However, disarmament also applies to legal firearms, as they pose a risk to families and may also be stolen.

It is obvious that the classification of »law-abiding citizens« is highly debatable when these citizens refuse to legalize their firearms, even though they know that, in the event of a robbery, they will hinder the work of the police. In the eyes of the law, which regards possession of an illegal firearm as a crime, they are criminals, even if they are not aware that they are infringing the Rule of Law, which they believe or claim that they are defending.

23. Bandeira and Bourgois, op. cit., p. 20.

24. Nascimento, Marcelo and Purcena, Julio César: *Estoques e Distribuição de Armas de Fogo no Brasil* [Gun Stocks and Distribution in Brazil], Ministry of Justice/Viva Rio, Rio de Janeiro, 2010, p. 23: http://www.vivario.org.br/publico/media/Estoques_e_Distribuição.pdf.

25. Ibid., p. 39.

In Brazil, 47.6 per cent of firearms in the hands of society are illegal²⁶; in other words, the State is unaware what these firearms are and who has them, and cannot therefore trace them.

With regard to Colombia, it is said that 96 per cent of crimes are committed using illegal firearms. I would suggest that an analysis be carried out of the methodology that led to this figure, as it is very different from the usual figures in the region. As a general rule, these figures do not differ significantly when comparing situations that are very similar. Accordingly, in Colombia 63.9 per cent of homicides are committed using firearms; in Brazil the rate is 62.3 per cent. It is clear that, by emphasizing crimes, and therefore concealing gun-related accidents for example, which mainly involve children or occur during the maintenance of a gun, and also suicides, the aim is to discuss only homicides committed by »bad people«, as if to say the deaths of »good people« are acceptable, inevitable or invisible.

Banning the carrying of firearms in the street has the effect of hindering the work of criminals and facilitates the work of the police, as it would mean that anyone who has a gun is outside the law. It also means that law-abiding citizens will not go around armed, which prevents the use of guns in interpersonal conflicts or accidents involving stray bullets.

Disarmament in dictatorships and democracies

The NRA identifies the possession of guns with freedom, so that the free man can defend himself against the oppressor State. Conservatism attempts to identify the State as the enemy, even where it is a democratic State. It is also very naïve to think that citizens armed with revolvers and pistols will have any success against coups carried out using heavy weapons and aircraft. We saw this ourselves when, as students armed with a few pistols and revolvers in the university, we tried to prevent the military coup in Brazil in 1964.

Over 40 countries have implemented voluntary disarmament campaigns in recent years. There is not one dictatorship among them. Most of the advanced demo-

26. Ibid., p. 40.

cracies, i.e. those that combine freedom with extensive social equality, control or ban the possession or carrying of firearms by civilians, and have efficient public security forces.

One of the pillars of the modern democratic system is the State's monopoly on violence, with the State being responsible for the legitimate and rational use of repression, to the exclusion of civilian self-defense and medieval justice in the hands of the people.

Disarmament campaigns in Brazil

One of the measures provided for by the Brazilian law on firearms – the *Estatuto de Desarme*²⁷ – was the promotion of voluntary disarmament campaigns. Those conducted in 2004 and 2005 collected and destroyed 459,855 firearms. Combined with the ban on carrying firearms in the street, this led to an 8 per cent reduction in homicides in Brazil in subsequent years, saving over 5,000 lives. Taken in the context of the previous situation of a sharp rise in the number of homicides, the reduction was actually 18 per cent.

The Australian campaign in 1996, which collected 700,000 firearms, combined with the ban on automatic and semiautomatic weapons, was the one that achieved the most impressive results. In the six years that followed, gun-related homicides fell by 43 per cent. Why was the reduction smaller in Brazil? Because the Australian police are modern and efficient, and the problem lay in the proliferation of firearms, which proves that, in countries such as Brazil, disarmament has to be accompanied by the modernization and democratization of the police. The NRA states that crime in Australia has risen significantly in recent years, in an attempt to confuse crime with gun-related homicides. Yet this difference is fundamental, due to its lethal consequences, as we have already seen in the case of attacks involving a bladed weapon or a firearm.

The Brazilian campaign was characterized by the compensation (of 60 to 180 dollars, depending on the type of firearm) and the participation of civil society: 400 churches and NGOs were authorized to collect firearms.

This participation expanded the network of drop-off points, as it is difficult for a widow to deliver the firearms of her dead husband to the city center, or to another city, but it is easy for her to do so within her own district. This also offered a »neutral« alternative for citizens without confidence in the police, who are still widely perceived as corrupt.

Given the campaign's success, the Federal Police carried out another gun exchange in 2008 and 2009, but, as this did not involve the participation of civil society, only 30,721 firearms were collected. At the moment we are in the middle of a new campaign, which began last year, with 44,062 firearms having been handed in so far, because the government will only authorize civil society to collect the firearms halfway through this year (civilian drop-off points need to have a police officer present). Another feature of the current campaign is a procedure that was used only at civilian drop-off points in 2005, but which has now also been adopted by the police: use of a small mallet to decommission the firearm when it is handed in. This simple measure ensures greater security at civilian points (everyone knows that the firearms collected there are unusable), and also bolsters confidence that there is no risk of the firearms being diverted. In addition, whereas in 2004 compensation was only paid three months later, in the current campaign it is received within 24 hours, as the process of consulting the Federal Police's firearms database is now automated and payment is made through the Banco de Brasil. Civilian drop-off points, immediate decommissioning of the firearm and rapid compensation are measures that are encouraging people to take part in the campaign.

Marking of ammunition

Due to ill will in the state bureaucracy, it is still not possible in Brazil to pay compensation for ammunition surrendered in the campaign. Consequently, in proportion to the population, the Argentinean campaign, which did pay compensation for ammunition, functioned better in this respect.

Ammunition is as important as the firearm, given that one cannot function without the other. When you realize that the trade in ammunition is much more profitable than the sale of firearms, you can understand the strong resistance of the major producers when the

27. Estatuto do Desarmamento [Disarmament Statute], Brasília, 2003 (updated); http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Leis/2003/L10.826.htm.

marking of ammunition was proposed during the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2001. In terms of police work, the marking on the base of cartridges that are left on the floor after a confrontation with or between criminals is fundamental to tracing them. For example, the murder of the young judge Patricia Acioli in Rio in 2011 by corrupt police officers was only solved following analysis of the ammunition used.

Despite this obvious advantage, those whose interests are at stake invent technical reasons to oppose marking, as was the case with the response of the *Companhia Brasileira de Cartuchos* (CBC) to my proposal to introduce, in the new firearms law, the obligation for the marking of ammunition for our Armed Forces and police. I was accused of being ignorant, as marking would apparently be »anti-economic and impossible in the case of small cartridges«. In reply I presented Brazilian cartridges exported to Colombia, which had been duly marked by the CBC, and bases of cartridges manufactured by the CBC itself in the 1950s, also with a marking, which had been sent to me by a former employee who was angry at the lies of his former bosses. As a result, furious at having been deceived with false technical information from the CBC, the members of Parliament who usually defend the interests of the Brazilian arms industry also voted in favor of the *Estatuto de Desarme*, including marking.²⁸

The results of ammunition marking are so positive that the government is thinking of extending this to all types of ammunition, including that intended for civilians.

Regional and international cooperation

The international exchange of information, which is important in every field of knowledge, is vital in the area of public security, principally in terms of police reform and gun control, fields which have changed enormously with the end of the Cold War, the explosion of urban violence and the corruption caused by drug trafficking. There has been a radical change in ideas, with the emphasis on prevention to the detriment of repression, and with the focus now on management and demilitarization, supported by technological advances. The internationalization of organized crime can be added to the list

of adverse factors, which requires international collaboration between public security forces, going beyond the limits of narrow and outdated nationalism that prevent the necessary joint efforts, as has unfortunately been the case in Central America and, albeit to a lesser extent, in the Mercosur area. The new Public Security Observatory of the OAS, which brings together data from Latin America and the Caribbean, forms a good incentive for joint action.


With regard to firearms, which do not respect borders, the exchange of information and technologies is crucial, and this process is only just beginning. There are constant innovations, such as, for example, the shot identification mechanism, which allows any gun fired in a district to be immediately located, thereby facilitating rapid police action. Used in certain Brazilian cities, this mechanism has led to a significant reduction in homicides and other uses of firearms, and acts as a deterrent because criminals are avoiding firing a gun due to the risk of being located.

One process of major importance – even more so after the failure of the conference in July 2012 – will be the negotiations, in the United Nations, on a possible international Arms Trade Treaty. Firearms and ammunition are some of the least controlled goods in international trade, as if they were inoffensive products. More resources are being used at our borders to control livestock smuggling, in order to prevent diseases, than are being used for gun control.

In order to ensure that one country does not repeat the errors of another, it must be up-to-date with current trends. I explained to the authorities in El Salvador, whose military forces wanted to distribute assault rifles so that the police were better armed than organized crime, that past experience in Rio showed that large-caliber firearms in the hands of a police force extensively contaminated by drug trafficking would result in an increase in the illegal gun trade, and that the modern model was to form very well armed, trained and controlled units, with the specific function of tackling gangs, using firearms whenever necessary.

It is also necessary to resist undue pressure to purchase ever more firearms, and to understand that the trend is increasingly for the use of low-lethality weapons (incorrectly referred to by the North Americans as »non-lethal

28. Bandeira and Bourgois, op. cit., p. 85.



weapons»), which serve to immobilize the criminal, without leading to death. The police in São Paulo, who in 10 years have reduced the number of gun-related homicides by 70 per cent, have stated that it is more important to train police officers in the efficient and safe use of weapons (the efficient Giraldi method), to have good databases, to implement a policy that is more preventative than repressive through the use of low-lethality weapons, to promote geo-management of crime zones, and to monitor police actions on the streets. All this is better than adding to the profits of the gun and ammunition industry, in order to break the increasing spiral of violence caused by the proliferation of firearms.

The Brazilian government has suggested to the International Football Federation that voluntary disarmament should be the social issue of the next World Cup, which will be held in 2014 in Brazil. Entrance tickets for games will be exchanged for surrendered guns. Considering the high rates of gun-related homicide on our continent and the good results of the campaigns conducted in our countries, we propose that our governments join together, with the support of other governments, to carry out voluntary disarmament campaigns during the World Cup, in order to consolidate the sporting ideals of fraternity and peace between peoples.

Conclusion

The use of firearms by civilians is a controversial issue. We must not avoid the controversy; in fact this is essential, but it must be founded on scientific and not ideological bases. Serious studies will help us to examine the issue, by comparing new information with the cultural heritage that has been passed down from previous generations and with the permanent intoxication promoted by Hollywood films, in which violence and guns are glorified. The truth is that we have inherited countries in which firearms proliferate, uncontrolled and in the hands of people who should not have them, and we are killing ourselves as few other nations do. Do we want to break with this past which condemns us? Do we want to confront the powerful economic interests that are profiting from the massacre? What type of countries do we want? Nations with guns or nations protected from guns, as is the case in safer and more peaceful countries? A society in which guns are in the hands of the competent police and military, or where they spread without control among the population, facilitating the activities of organized crime, turning everyday interpersonal conflicts into fatalities and making violence explode? Guns create an illusion of security. In reality they pose more of a risk to families than a genuine security factor.



About the author

Antonio Rangel Bandeira is a sociologist with a postgraduate degree from York University (Toronto). He is Coordinator of the Arms Control Program of the NGO Viva Rio. He was Deputy Minister for Welfare in Brazil, director of the Department of Sociology and Politics at the Instituto Superior de Economía (Lisbon) and at the Universidad Católica de Rio de Janeiro, Deputy Director of the Instituto de Estudios Sociales y Económicos in Chile, and professor at the Universidad Bennett and Universidad Candido Mendes in Rio de Janeiro.

This international policy analysis was originally published

in Spanish: Antonio Rangel Bandeira: »Armas pequeñas y campañas de desarme. Matar los mitos y salvar las vidas«, Fundación Friedrich Ebert Programa de Cooperación en Seguridad Regional en América Latina y el Caribe policy paper 41 (Mayo de 2012); <http://www.seguridadregional-fes.org/>.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Latin America and the Caribbean
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dörte Wollrad, Head, Latin America and the Caribbean

Phone: ++49-30-269-35-7484 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9253
<http://www.fes.de/lateinamerika>

To order publications:
info-lak@fes.de

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or the organizations for which the author works.



ISBN 978-3-86498-210-1