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Abstract

The book "Peace and Violence in Brazil: Reflections on the Roles of State, Organized Crime, and Civil Society", edited by Marcos Alan Ferreira, provides a comprehensive analysis of the persistence and causes of violence in Brazil. It argues that social inequality, fragile state institutions, and actions by both state actors and criminal groups contribute significantly to high violence levels. The book employs a Peace Studies framework, emphasizing structural and cultural dimensions, such as the normalization of violence and social exclusion, as key to understanding this issue. Moreover, it highlights the roles of civil society, education, and institutional reforms in fostering peace. In addition, the book explores alternative strategies for reducing violence, including peace education and advocacy by non-governmental organizations. However, the analysis would benefit from incorporating an economic perspective, particularly regarding how illicit markets perpetuate violence. This addition could enhance the book's scope, offering a fuller understanding of violence in Brazil.

Keywords: Violence; Peacebuilding; Organized Crime.

Resumo

O livro "Peace and Violence in Brazil: Reflections on the Roles of State, Organized Crime, and Civil Society", editado por Marcos Alan Ferreira, fornece uma análise abrangente da persistência e das causas da violência no Brasil. Ele argumenta que desigualdade social, instituições estatais frágeis e ações de atores estatais e grupos criminosos contribuem significativamente para os altos níveis de violência. O emprega uma abordagem de Estudos da Paz, enfatizando dimensões estruturais e culturais, como a normalização da violência e a exclusão social para entender essa questão. Além disso, ele destaca os papéis da sociedade civil, da educação e das reformas institucionais na promoção da paz. Além disso, o livro explora estratégias alternativas para reduzir a violência, incluindo a educação para a paz. Entretanto, a análise seria beneficiada com a incorporação de uma perspectiva econômica, especialmente com relação a como os mercados ilícitos perpetuam a violência. Esse acréscimo poderia oferecer uma compreensão mais completa da violência no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Crime Organizado; Violência; Paz.

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Introduction

The book "Peace and Violence in Brazil: Reflections on the Roles of State, Organized Crime and Civil Society", edited by Marcos Alan Ferreira, makes the case that the violence in the region is a consequence of social inequality and weak state institutions, particularly in the justice system. The book is the result of a joint project between the Department of International Relations of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and the Department of Politics and the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) of the University of Manchester. From a Peace Studies perspective, it emphasizes that criminal activities and state violence reflect deeper human insecurities tied to underdevelopment, lack of economic opportunity and cultural norms that normalize violence. However, the analysis could be strengthened by incorporating an economic perspective, highlighting how competition for local monopolies in illicit markets fuels social violence.

The Introduction emphasizes the need to understand violence holistically, considering its direct, cultural, and structural manifestations. Thus, direct violence, such as crime-related homicides or state-perpetrated violence, stems from structural forms of violence, such as inequality, and is reinforced by cultural elements that normalize violence, such as entrenched prejudices against Afro-descendants. In addition to these structural and cultural factors, economic incentives play a crucial role in causing violence. In the absence of state regulation and legal protection, criminal organizations use violence against the police or the military to safeguard their business interests from state intervention, and against each other to maintain control over territories, trafficking routes, and consumer markets (WILLIAMS, 2018). Understanding these economic drivers allows for a more complete picture of the factors that perpetuate social violence in Brazil.

The first part of the book explores the social-political context of violence in Brazil. Chapter 1, written by Marcos Alan Ferreira, argues that despite being seen as peaceful due to its lack of interstate conflicts, South America remains one of the most violent regions when social violence is considered. In Chapter 2, Camila de Macedo Braga and Rafael Antônio Duarte Villa analyse hybrid security governance in the Southern Cone, showing how transnational criminal networks, particularly in drug and arms trafficking, drive violence along Brazil's borders. Chapter 3, by Veronica F. Azzi and Kai Michael Kenkel, analyses Brazil's militarized public security policies, which frame organized crime as a national threat, justifying the deployment of the Armed Forces, and the export of this approach through UN peacekeeping. Chapter 4, by Augusto W. M. Teixeira Júnior and Maria Eduarda L. S. Freire, examines Brazil's evolving use of the military in public security, emphasizing the increasing role of joint operations between the military and police to combat transnational organized crime along the borders.

Indeed, despite the relative absence of interstate conflicts in Latin America since the twentieth century, the region faces some of the highest rates of internal violence in the world. Since the late 1970s, homicide rates have increased sharply in much of the region. The onset of democratic transitions in the 1980s and 1990s set the hope that this trend would be reversed (PEREIRA; DAVIS, 2000). However, internal violence remains a pervasive issue in many Latin American countries. With just 8 percent of the global population, Latin America and Caribbean countries account for a third of the world's intentional homicides (ESPINOZA *et al.*, 2024). Since 2017, the Americas have become the most affected region by non-state violence, driven primarily by conflicts between organized crime groups over territorial and drug trafficking control. Unlike rebel groups with political objectives, organized crime groups are driven by economic gain, and engage in violence to secure smuggling routes and assert territorial dominance (DAVIES *et al.*, 2024).

To address the challenges posed by organized crime groups, Latin American governments have been increasingly deploying their armed forces on domestic missions to dismantle these groups. This convergence of military and police activities aims to strengthen the state's response capacities. Nonetheless, replacing police with the military can have negative consequences, such as de-professionalization of the military, loss of civilian control over the military, weakened police legitimacy, and reduced investment in the police (HARIG, 2020; SUNG; CAPELLAN; BARTHULY, 2022).

The second part of the book presents alternative, peaceful strategies to address social violence in the region. Chapter 5, by Henrique Zeferino Menezes, highlights Brazil's efforts to reduce violence, strengthen governance, and address social inequalities to meet Sustainable Development Goal n. 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), but he recognizes the challenges of building inclusive institutions and achieving lasting peace in a country with deep-rooted socio-economic disparities. Chapter 6, by Paulo Roberto Loyolla Kuhlmann, Edith Larissa Rodrigues do Rêgo Souza, and Luan do Nascimento Silva, explores how arts, mediation, and strategies like critical literacy and dialogue circles promote peace education in public schools, empowering students to confront violence and engage in peacebuilding. Chapter 7, by Ingri Bøe Buer, shows how NGOs in Rio de Janeiro's favelas navigate both direct and structural violence to build alternative forms of peace through conflict mediation, youth programs, drug rehabilitation, education, and advocacy. Finally, Chapter 8, by André Duffles Teixeira Aranega and Kai Michael Kenkel, explores the historical role of Brazilian civil society in advocating for gun policy reform, examining how such advocacy can influence violence dynamics, and contribute to a more peaceful society.

While these strategies offer valuable insights into peacebuilding and social violence reduction, they could be further strengthened by public policies focusing on dismantling the economic structures that sustain illicit markets. By targeting the economic structures and supply chains that sustain these activities, peacebuilding efforts could reduce the power and reach of organized crime groups. Specifically, initiatives like enhancing international cooperation and establishing intelligence-sharing networks could disrupt the financial infrastructure supporting illicit markets, such as money laundering.

In conclusion, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of violence in Brazil. While it effectively explores the socio-political factors underlying violence, it would be further strengthened by incorporating an economic perspective on crime. Such an addition would enhance the understanding of how competition for local monopolies in illicit markets drives social violence, offering a more complete picture of the drivers of violence in Brazil.

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