
Black youth and teenagers most affected by police violence and abuse in Rio's favelas

The news failed to make the headlines. Nor has there been a global mobilisation, as there has been on several occasions in the United States, as after the murder of George Floyd. No urban guerrilla warfare, as in France in recent weeks after the murder of 17-year-old Nahel, except the daily struggle to make a living in the favelas, the suburbs of the big city. And yet, Rio de Janeiro's police are the most violent in the world, especially against young black men and teenagers. Not a single newspaper or news channel outside Brazil reported the news of 23-year-old Anne Caroline Nascimento Silva, who was killed during a police raid on a street in Rio's Baixada Fluminense. According to the reconstruction of the incident, she was in the car with her husband when traffic police opened fire, even though her husband, who was in the driver's seat, had pulled over after the officers had stopped him. "Everyone talks about France, but it's always been like this here, for many years, **Itamar Silva**, an Afro-Brazilian sociologist and social activist, told SIR from his home in the Brazilian metropolis. He has been defending the rights of the black population living in Rio's favelas for decades. He himself lives in one of these districts, Santa Marta. He is a member of the Security Observers Network and several other social research and action networks. **Eloquent data on Rio's sad record.** According to the latest survey by the Security Observers Network (an indispensable source in the absence of data from public institutions), the figures for 2022 are shocking (as were those of previous years), not only for Rio, but also for other states in the east and northeast of Brazil: Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Piauí, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. A total of 21,563 acts of violence were recorded in all seven states. More than half of these incidents continued to involve police violence. [The report](#) was given an emblematic title: 'Máquina de moer gente preta: a responsabilidade da branquitude' ('Machine to crush black people: the responsibility of 'whiteness)'). During the period covered by the report, there were 59 violent incidents per day. This means that at least one person was killed every half hour and that the black population is undoubtedly dying the most in Brazil today. As mentioned above, police brutality takes the lion's share, accounting for 55% of the incidents studied, and as much as 67% in Rio de Janeiro. In absolute terms, the state of São Paulo recorded the highest number of police operations (3,622) and the highest number of complaints of police misconduct. Rio de Janeiro is the state with the highest number of deaths in these operations, which all too often turn into massacres, as happened last year in the Jacarezinho favela, where an anti-drug operation left 23 people dead. Adding up all the deaths recorded in the five Northeastern States that make up the Network, plus the State of São Paulo, gives a total of 281 people killed in 12 months. In Rio alone, 306 deaths were reported. The figure relates only to reported incidents against black people. But the Public Security Institute estimated also an overall figure: in 2022 alone, Rio police officers reportedly killed 1,327 people. In Brazil as a whole, the number of people killed by police officers is estimated at six thousand a year, compared with around ten in Germany and around forty in France. **An ignored judgement.** "I have lived in a favela, the Santa Marta favela, for decades," says Itamar Silva. "The current situation is the result of an established dynamic. We have seen army interventions after 2007 and 2018, police actions, often sensational and dramatic, with a violent and racist attitude. After 2021, these police operations intensified, often involving favela leaders. Last year, the Federal Supreme Court issued a clear ruling, called '[Adpf das favelas](#)', calling on the police to reduce the use of violence in their operations. It also demanded that the police be accompanied by an ambulance when entering favelas and that medical assistance be guaranteed so that any injured could be treated immediately. But none of this has happened; the authorities do not respect the ruling." "In a context of generalised urban violence, why is the situation in Rio de Janeiro not even comparable to that of other large urban centres? This is indeed a very peculiar situation," says Silva. "There are historical reasons. Historically, the police have always been the most violent in the country. At the same time, however, the governor, Claudio Castro, who is close to former president Jair Bolsonaro

and follows his political line, has a clear political agenda. There is no attempt to control the abuses and misconduct.” In other words, there is no political will to curb the Rio police's clearly longstanding attitude. Suffice it to recall that "right now the State of Rio doesn't even have a Public Security Department". Nor is there any official data on such matters. **Young black men are the first victims.** Needless to say, officers operate in violent, problematic contexts, characterised by the presence of criminal gangs, drug traffickers, and paramilitary militias. "The victims are almost always persons of colour and young people, but the number of minors killed in clashes between police, private militias and drug traffickers is also on the rise. The official police and private militias frequently compete for territorial control." The data show, among other things, that confrontation as a public safety policy is unsuccessful. The war on drugs is the main argument used by the police and the governor. In reality, drug seizures tend not to occur. Crime is on the rise, and black and poor people are paying the price. Civil society, concludes Itamar Silva, can do relatively little: "All we can do is voice the constant complaints coming from the favelas. The problem is that there has to be a policy in place that has control over what the police do. The most important success of the citizens' protests was the ruling by the Federal Supreme Court. Let us hope that after the return of President Lula and the defeat of Bolsonaro, some answers will come from the federal level of our republic." But it has not happened so far. (*) *journalist at "La vita del popolo"*

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