

Military Intervention in Rio: most vulnerable citizens at risk

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On 16 February 2018, President Michel Temer has called the military to intervene in Rio, indicating general Walter Souza Braga Netto to command the city's entire security system. Some of his duties include overseeing Rio's police forces and managing its prison system. It has been the first time since the end of Brazil's dictatorship (1985) that this type of exceptional armed interference has happened.

The week before, Carnival celebration had been marked by violence. About 6 million people took part in the festivities amidst [several criminal incidents](#). The fact that both the state governor and the city mayor were absent during the famous public event exposed the existing crisis of governance in Rio de Janeiro. Responsible authorities have been extensively criticized for neglect and their leadership had been further questioned.

Since 2008, [more than a dozen](#) military operations have taken place in Rio, most of which during international events such as the World Cup and the Olympics. None of these isolated interpositions have had lasting impacts on enhancing Rio's security. Furthermore, the fact that the "extreme measure", as the President of Brazil described it, has been taken in an electoral year also raises many relevant questions.

Critics are suspicious of Temer's intentions questioning whether the decision can be considered an electoral [political maneuver](#). For Robert Muggah, from the security think-tank Igarapé Institute, the time of the decision is explained by [political calculus](#). Public opinion polls have shown security is [Brazilians' top priority](#). Thus, the intervention would be aimed at raising the president's acceptance rates in a context of unpopular pension reforms.

Although security discourse and measures might play important roles in Brazil's upcoming general elections, the Rio's crime problem has root causes that cannot be overcome overnight. A long term public security planning is indispensable if one considers the underlying aspects of Rio's violence, such as structural violence, poverty and inequality.

Influential human rights activists and organizations have already voiced their concern. Amnesty International (AI) has [denounced a recent federal law](#) that transfers investigations of human rights violations and casualties during police action to Military Court. Such legislation disrespects the right of fair trial and might increase impunity. The militarization of public security is also target of strong criticism in the organization's [last report](#).

In a [joint statement](#), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have urged the Brazilian state to "develop, in a broad and participatory manner, a drug policy based on human rights with a comprehensive focus on social reintegration that prioritizes a public health approach and refrains from focusing on repression and criminalization".

After three months of intervention, data of violence in Rio shows the human rights of Rio's population, particularly of the poorest and most marginalized people, is at risk. This week, a young poor black man [civilian was killed by a soldier](#) for not stopping in a military

roadblock. This tragedy is only an example of how [racial screening and the criminalization of the poor](#) are still prevalent in Rio under military intervention.

For more information, access:

THE WASHINGTON POST. [Brazil's military to take over security in violence-scarred Rio de Janeiro.](#)

LOS ANGELES TIMES. [Military Intervention won't solve the violence in Rio de Janeiro.](#)

CONNECTAS. [UN and OAS warn of risks of violations from intervention in Rio de Janeiro.](#)

According to Jurema Werneck, director of AI in Brazil, the organization's [last report](#) shows "the military presence did not result in an improvement in the indicators of violence".