

International Institute Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award
Narrative Report:
Monopolies of Violence: Gang Governance in Rio de Janeiro

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The International Institute Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to spend seven weeks (July 17th – September 7th) carrying out follow-up research in Rio de Janeiro. I spent nearly three years from 2012 to 2015 in the field in Rio de Janeiro investigating the governance strategies of gangs in city's more than a thousand favelas. In most of these communities, few social services, public transportation, schools or even basic utilities are provided to the inhabitants and Rio's military police have a limited albeit brutal and corrupt presence. For their part, gang organizations maintain local monopolies of violence and can be considered the dominant political authority. Yet the relationships these organizations develop with local communities vary considerably across Rio. In some communities, gangs implement responsive systems of law and justice, maintain a relatively high degree of social order and provide some forms of welfare. In other favelas, gangs implement more violent and unresponsive governing institutions while offering the community little in terms of public goods. My dissertation attempts to explain the causes of this variation.

During my original fieldwork, I lived in one set of communities, Complexo da Maré, for nearly 18 months. In April of 2014, military forces invaded and occupied these communities, wresting control from several different gang organizations. In February of 2015, I returned to Wisconsin to write my dissertation. In the intervening six months,

much has changed. First, beginning in April, the military gradually began to scale back their presence and hand Maré over to Pacification Police forces. The transition, however, was never completed and gangs reemerged to dominate local politics, sell illicit substances, and control their turf with huge arsenals of weapons. This transition is an incredible opportunity to study these changes in governance.

I was able to conduct 20 interviews with local politicians and community leaders about this return to gang control. They provided me intimate details about how gangs went about reestablishing their authority and providing resources once again to the communities. These interviews also gave me further insight into how residents responded to such shifting public security environments and the danger that both the arrival of police and the return of gangs presented for particular groups of residents. In addition, I spent a couple of weeks in Maré carrying out participant observation of gang behavior and governance. This data will be incredibly useful in the completion of my dissertation. In addition to the interviews about recent changes in Maré, I conducted several interviews with gang members and long-time residents whom I was unable to interview during my original fieldwork period.

During my summer fieldwork, I was also able to see the completion of a 1000-resident survey about perceptions of public security during military occupation. The local NGO carrying out the survey agreed to provide me the quantitative data and I met several experienced enumerators who agreed to help me when I return to carry out another survey in the future. Originally, I had planned on organizing and conducting my own survey this summer but due to the return of the gangs, this was not possible.

Finally, I presented some of the preliminary results from anonymous hotline data that I acquired from Disque Denúncia. I presented this data to a group of research colleagues as well as to the Director of Disque Denúncia. Both of these presentations were incredibly helpful but for different reasons. My research colleagues were able to suggest some further avenues of investigation and inquiry while the Director of the institute was impressed by the information which his institute was capable of producing and asked me to return at some point in the future to present to a larger forum on public security. He also offered whatever other data his institute has available to help me with my project. Considering Disque Denúncia is one of the only sources of data on drug trafficking and gangs in the city, this will be helpful moving forward.

Overall, my summer fieldwork was extremely productive and the data I gathered will be invaluable as I attempt to complete my dissertation in the next year. International fieldwork is prohibitively costly as a graduate student and without this type of continuing funding, PhD candidates like myself would struggle to complete their dissertations the way they want. I am grateful to the Institute for Regional and International Studies for their support.