



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 2, 2019

Decree by Brazil's New President Keeps His Campaign Promise to Expand Gun Rights

Brazil's new president, Jair Bolsonaro (shown), who assumed his office on Tuesday, made many campaign promises. He supported his country's national sovereignty and opposed abortion, affirmative action, and drug liberalization, while supporting closer relations with the United States and Israel. But his signature promise — supported by his famous finger-gun salute — is to [liberalize his country's gun laws](#). Since its enactment in 2003 Brazil's murder rate has soared: Brazil has the highest homicide rate in Latin America and the eighth highest in the world.



Parallels to the U.S. president and the head of the National Rifle Association are obvious, based on his comments on Facebook in October: “Weapons are tools, inert objects, that can be used to kill or to save lives. This depends on who’s holding them: good people or bad guys.... Why have I always defended the ownership of firearms? It’s so that you, upstanding citizens ... can have a weapon inside your house or your farm. If some guy breaks down the door to your house, knocks down the gate to your farm, you have the right to react.”

Last Saturday, three days before assuming office, Bolsonaro issued his decree on Twitter: “By decree, we plan to guarantee the ownership of firearms by citizens without criminal records.”

With the support of the legislative branch consisting of an upper and a lower house of representatives, the new law expanding gun rights could look like this:

- Removal of the present ability of police to arbitrarily deny a permit to own a gun;
- Reduce the minimum age for gun ownership from 25 to 21; and
- Allow Brazilian gun owners the right to carry guns for self-defense.

At present the gun law passed in 2003 that allowed the country's murder rate to soar requires the payment of heavy fees not only for a gun license but for the registration of the firearm, followed by proof of residence and employment as well as technical and psychological capacity to handle the firearm. In practice, local police rarely granted a permit, in effect keeping law-abiding citizens defenseless while allowing criminals to run free.

If by chance a citizen was able to obtain a firearm on the black market, if he were caught with it he would spend the next four years in jail, just for its possession.

The crime rate in Brazil is so high that in São Paulo, a city of 12 million, one in every four residents reports that they have been held up at gunpoint at least once.

In its reporting of the president's decree, Samantha Pearson of the *Wall Street Journal* said that “Brazil



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is set to embark on an *experiment* that will determine what happens when you loosen restrictions in a country battling an overpowering wave of gun crime.” (Emphasis added.)

This is no experiment. Pearson would do well to note Dean Weingarten’s reminder published in *Ammoland*:

In 1980, Brazil had a homicide rate of about 12 per 100,000 people, only a little higher than the United States with a homicide rate of 10.2 in the same year. In 2017, 37 years later, the United States homicide rate dropped in half to 5.2, while Brazil’s rate more than tripled to over 39.

Or she could read John Lott’s book *More Guns, Less Crime*, in which he proves the inverse relationship between gun ownership and the rate of violent crime.

Without a Second Amendment, Bolsonaro’s decree would grant the government the power to extend the privilege of self-defense to its citizenry, rather than protecting their pre-existing right to that self-defense as the U.S. Constitution does for American citizens. And so, in his decree, Brazil’s new president would “allow” ordinary gun owners to own up to six guns along with their “privilege” to purchase up to one hundred rounds of ammunition per year, per gun.

Bolsonaro’s “experiment,” assuming that Brazil’s legislative branch goes along with it, should end well, and quickly. Once criminals are unable to distinguish between those law-abiding citizens who are armed and those who are not, crime — especially holdups and murders — should decline precipitously.

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