

Brazil death toll rises as cops target gangs

The gang attacks that began Friday night have slacked off, but the number of dead is rising as police crack down on gangs.

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SAO PAULO - Police struck back Tuesday at gangs that rampaged through South America's largest city, killing 33 suspected gang members in less than 24 hours and frisking motorists at roadblocks while reporting only one death of their own.

At least 133 people -- including 40 police officers -- had been killed since Friday night, when a prison transfer of gang leaders sparked attacks on police stations, courts, city buses and other symbols of government authority.

But while gang attacks fell off sharply Tuesday, the death toll rose dramatically. Chief among them were the 33 new deaths of suspected criminals announced by authorities, bringing the total number of suspected gang members killed since Friday to 71.

Officers "acted within the law, but that doesn't mean we have to let them humiliate us," Marco Antonio Desgualdo, a top Sao Paulo state law enforcement official, told reporters. He did not give specifics about the killings.

Separately, prison officials said the bodies of 18 inmates were found after police retook control of dozens of lockups where prisoners rioted at the same time that gang members attacked officers across Sao Paulo.

Details about how they died were not immediately disclosed, though inmates periodically use Brazilian prison uprisings to settle scores.

The overall death toll since the violence began last Friday stood at 71 suspected criminals, 40 police officers and jail guards, the 18 prison inmates and four civilians caught in the crossfire.

With guns drawn, plainclothes police in a suburb of South America's largest city stopped and frisked motorists in a hunt for more gang members.

The crime spree showed the strength of organized crime in the financial and industrial heart of Brazil, and it sent fear rippling through the metropolis of 18 million.

Police in Osasco, 10 miles from the center of Sao Paulo, were targeting motorcyclists with passengers for spot checks after one of their own was shot and killed by a gunman on the back of a bike, said Officer Vladimir Storel. The dead officer was the only policeman killed this year in the suburb of one million.

"We're only out here because of the attacks," said Storel, surrounded by fellow policemen wielding pistols, shotguns and Uzi submachine guns.

They patted down riders and checked IDs against a list of suspected gang members.

Across Sao Paulo, police were redeployed in greater numbers to halt the attacks, and authorities said at least 115 people had been arrested since Friday night.

But many citizens said the ferocity of the First Capital Command gang, or PCC, made them doubt law enforcement will ever solve the gang problem.

Some Sao Paulo residents said they now fear being seen near police officers who could be targeted by attackers.

Bus service was fully restored after panicked drivers stayed home Monday over fears they might be attacked, leaving 2.9 million people scrambling to find a way to work.

Associated Press writers Alan Clendenning, Stan Lehman and Alexander V. Ragir contributed to this report.