HOW NOT TO GET CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

Rio de Janeiro's streets are notorious for their gun crime – it's all too easy for citizens to find they're in the wrong place at the wrong time. But an app that can alert users to violent incidents is helping keep people out of harm's way

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n March 14, 2018, Rio de Janeiro councillor and human rights activist Marielle Franco was murdered – shot multiple times in a crime that's unsolved.

Franco's death caused commotion throughout Brazil, and even internationally, as she was a politician with a strong social commitment who had been denouncing the growth of armed militias in the city. But some of the first people to find out about the incident weren't the local police force or the media, but users of an app called Fogo Cruzado, which alerts people to potential shooting incidents across Rio de Janeiro, so that they can avoid entering the area and placing themselves in harm's way.

"I was the person who gave the shooting alert in downtown Rio – only later I found out it was Marielle," says Cecilia Oliveira, a journalist and specialist in public security and drug policy, who founded the app with the support of Amnesty International.

In 2015, she was looking for information on stray bullets and the incidence of gunfire in the city for an article she was writing, but struggled to find any concrete data. The solution to this lack of information? Oliveira decided she would begin to count the shootings herself – tracking them in the press and in police reports, using intelligence from media collectives working in the city and from social media users.

"At first, the users were my contacts in social networks who posted about their daily lives – which sometimes included going through a shootout – but I realised that the reality was much broader than what I could map," she says. She partnered with Amnesty International and a team of volunteers to develop and launch an app within a campaign focusing on violence during the 2016 Olympics in Rio. Fogo Cruzado (the name means "crossfire" in Portuguese) was launched on May 7, 2016 – a month before the games officially began.

By 2018, the project had become completely independent from Amnesty, and today it consists of a mobile app and a website that receives notifications from users. A data management team collects information from recognised partners such as media organisations and active residents from Rio de Janeiro's many favelas. By accessing the app at any given moment, users can check whether there's any active shooting near them or along their route, and they can also subscribe to get alerts whenever there's a shooting near them.

"Everyone who works with Fogo Cruzado has already lost someone close to them, or got stuck in shootings," says Oliveira. On the day she spoke to WIRED in October 2020, the 102nd victim of a stray bullet in the city that year, Caio, was killed at home. "A friend's nephew was killed during a police operation in the favela of Providência," she says.

Cecilia Oliveira founded gunfire-tracking app Fogo Cruzado to make Rio de Janeiro's streets safer

"And the lady who owned the restaurant where I had lunch many times took a rifle shot in the arm during an operation – but at least she survived."

Violence in Rio de Janeiro is an everyday reality, and Fogo Cruzado, downloaded over 250,000 times, is one initiative that aims at not only denouncing such reality and pressuring public authorities, but also at protecting citizens. "The fear of dying or losing someone is a common feeling around here," says Oliveira. "Even if you have the privilege of not living in an area where there are constant police operations, you can get caught in the crossfire going to the airport, for example. This should be everyone's concern." **Raphael Tsavkko Garcia**

Milk or crisps?

Alt-food startups are turning all sorts of stuff into faux-milk or crispy snacks. Can you guess whether these raw ingredients will end up as milk, crisps or both? AK

1. Cauliflower	4. Lentil	7. Quinoa
2. Peanut	5. Pea	8. Banana
3. Oat	6. Hemp	9. Beetroot