Governing through failure: militarization and policialization in Rio de Janeiro

Governando pelo fracasso: militarização e policialização no Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

In this article, we will analyze the surveillance and control strategies and practices developed in the city of Rio de Janeiro, focusing on the period 2001--2021 and analyzing the ongoing militarization and policialization processes. We believe that, with the discontinuation of different security programs, this supposed failure becomes productive for implementing new agendas and partnerships, in which specific actors participate. To this end, we will address the devices and policy networks that form a set of practices considered part of a new sociability, the managerial-police sociability, capable of managing a permanent crisis in the city's security policies.

Keywords: militarization; public security; urban violence; policialization; policy networks.

Resumo

Neste artigo, analisaremos as estratégias e práticas de vigilância e controle experimentadas na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, com atenção especial às décadas de 2001-2021, e em análise aos processos de militarização e de policialização em curso. Consideramos que, ao mesmo tempo que diferentes programas de segurança têm sido descontinuados, esse suposto fracasso se torna produtivo para a implementação de novas agendas e parcerias, com a participação de específicos atores. Para tanto, trataremos dos dispositivos e das redes de política que conformam um conjunto de práticas consideradas parte de uma nova sociabilidade, a sociabilidade gerencial-policial, capaz de gerir a crise permanente das políticas de segurança na cidade.

Palavras-chave: *militarização; segurança pública; violência urbana; policialização; redes de política.*

Introduction

Rio de Janeiro can be seen as both a vast field of possibilities and a laboratory for strategies and practices of political action in contemporary cities. In recent decades, especially concerning urban violence, various devices and techniques have been tested to organize the city's spaces through policies aimed mainly at fighting retail drug trafficking and the people subjected to these activities. In a city divided by inequalities of class, race, and color, this policy, which focuses on drug criminalization, has consistently targeted favela, peripheral, and Black populations as criminalizable. Therefore, this article examines the process of social accumulation of the failures of the public security policies in Rio de Janeiro, considering the ongoing processes of militarization and policialization, and explores how these policy failures might contribute to managing the ongoing security crisis in the city.

Violence, as a category representing various practices and highly complex urban social conflicts, is often used descriptively to refer to the legitimate (or illegitimate) use of force in a given social relationship. However, considering violence in its cumulative causal circularity, as proposed by Misse (2008), allows the inclusion of security policies themselves, and the accumulation of countless supposedly failed programs, within this framework of social accumulation. Machado da Silva (2010) considers this social accumulation of violence capable of structuring a pattern of sociability known as violent sociability. According to the author, physical force, with or without instruments and technologies, ceases to be a means of action and becomes a regime of action. This reflects the social accumulation of the failure of security policies, capable of producing a new pattern of sociability that I refer to as the "managerial-policing mode of sociability" (Polycarpo, 2022). This highlights the persistent crisis in public security policies and intensifies disputes over city territories, operationalizing new forms of developing a city and policies based on neoliberal rationality.

Over the past two decades, particularly amid self-centered attempts at urban policing, the (alleged) failure of traditional policies to control crime and violence has continually created space for reforms and proposals. These reforms and proposals may be seen as innovations or updates that appear new, but ultimately, they tend to reinforce traditional policies. Contrary to the view that public security policies in Brazil operate in a pendular movement (Soares, 2000), this analysis considers the practices and agendas of repressive and overt policing as coexisting, interconnected, and continuously refined through an institution ideologically configured as a legitimate enforcer of social control at any cost: policy networks. Based on ethnographic research I conducted between 2018 and 2022 in the Copacabana and Leme neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone,[1] it was possible to observe the connections surrounding the implementation of public security programs and, along with them, new patterns of sociability that shaped specific forms of politics – and policing – in the city.

Therefore, one could argue that the period from the mid-2010s onward has marked a turning point. Through a series of interventions, operations, and the consolidation of criminal factions, the 2000s saw coordination among the national, state, and municipal levels that shaped a public security agenda. This agenda employed militarization of everyday life as a way to maintain urban control and social order through various warfare devices. In Rio de Janeiro, public security became one of the core principles of the state government

during this period, leading to a policy that became a showcase for the pacification of areas considered hotspots of violence: favelas and peripheral neighborhoods. Since the federal intervention in the Complexo do Alemão area in 2007, the coordination of security forces during the occupation of favela territories, under the idea of "retaking" the state's legitimate monopoly on force, has faced strong criticism from residents and researchers (Machado da Silva, 2008; Leite et al., 2018). As Menezes (2015) notes, the "crossfire" regime that prevailed in favelas and peripheral neighborhoods during the 1990s and 2000s was based on a fluctuation between confrontation and negotiation. This regime, however, has been replaced by the "minefield" model, characterized by constant environmental surveillance and continuous monitoring of the movement of people and objects, representing one of the final stages of a war that is supposedly already won.

Given this scenario, this study examines the interconnections of public security policies over the last two decades (2001–2021), seeking to identify how policy networks, their assemblages, and their interactions or mediations among the actors involved in the implementation and operation of public security policies have been adjusted. These assemblages are contested at the federal, state, municipal, and local levels, through programs and projects that seek to coordinate security forces in line with each agenda and territory.

The research investigates experiences of militarization in the city, highlighting their continuities and breaks, starting with the militarization of favelas through programs such as the *Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (GPAE) (Special Areas Policing Group) and the *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (UPP) (Pacifying Police Units), and later through the adoption of their strategies to militarize urban zones via programs like *Segurança Presente* and *Rio+Seguro*. The analysis focuses on their forms of action (such as policing) and coordination networks (like policy networks), including partnerships with various agencies and sectors of society. The period after the dismantling of the pacification policy is thus seen as marked by conflicts within policy networks, influenced by neoliberalism and its conservative agenda for the people and the city, and capable of fostering new forms of sociability. During this time, new devices of surveillance, control, and legitimization of illegal activities were refined, primarily relying on mechanisms of subjectivation and the production of specific "urban enemies" (Graham, 2010).

The observed occurrences, especially during the 2015–2020 five-year period – defined as the post-pacification period – serve as the backdrop for the replacement, through accumulation, of the grammar of urban violence and, consequently, the dominance of violent sociability as order, with the managerial-policing mode of sociability (Polycarpo, 2022). Therefore, I see the scenario of a persistent crisis as one of social accumulation of the failures of the public security policies, which are becoming more severe and coordinated across federal, state, municipal, and local levels. To address this situation, devices of order and control will be examined, along with how they have been used by actors disputing the city, its territories, and its borders. In this way, the supposed failure of public programs becomes an opportunity for new agendas and private partnerships. The research shows that the practices surrounding the militarization and policialization of the city have been mobilized (and accumulated) by market-driven interests, with increasing openness to the participation of business sectors and civil society not only in evaluating but also in the formulation and implementation of security programs and policies in Rio de Janeiro.

Militarizing the city: the favela as a starting point

In the 2000s, an agenda of community policing (or proximity policing)[2] introduced new experiences designed to overcome persistent challenges. This process stemmed not only from the accumulation of violence as a sign of the city's sense of insecurity but also from the failure of the authoritarian and repressive public security policies that had defined previous decades. It was within this supposed failure that opportunities arose to reformulate agendas, programs, and partnerships. During this period, the Rio de Janeiro state government appointed anthropologist and political scientist Luiz Eduardo Soares as Undersecretary of Public Security. Between 1999 and 2001, he also served as the state's coordinator for security, justice, and citizenship. His career, marked by criticism of repressive policing, included an analysis of the pendulum shifts in security policy to expose the "rotten side" of the police force and, from there, propose reform. This experiment, framed as part of a civilizing shift, aimed to civilize the police under a human rights paradigm and, in doing so, to civilize favela residents themselves. It was dedicated to guiding policing practices toward better alignment with the demands of the working classes. Two initiatives stand out within this public security agenda: the *Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (GPAE) (Special Areas Policing Group) and the *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (UPP) (Pacifying Police Units).

Special Areas Policing Group

One of the first attempts to implement community policing in favela areas that coexist with drug trafficking happened in 1999. Known as the Mutirão da Paz ("Peace Action"), the project lasted ten months and took place in the Vila Pereira da Silva favela, locally called Pereirão, in the neighborhood of Laranjeiras, in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone. It was a police-led initiative aimed at addressing the needs of the local community and involved coordination with multiple public agencies, including the Secretaries of Labor, Education, Health, Justice, Environment, Social Action, and Sports and Recreation; the Public Defender's Office; the Rio de Janeiro State Department of Transportation (Detran/RJ); the Foundation for Support of Technical Schools (Faetec); and the Community Center for the Defense of Citizenship (CCDD). Civil society contributions came from groups such as Viva Rio and the Laranjeiras Residents' Association, among others (Misse and Carvalho, 2007).

Building on this experience, a new security policy project was launched the following year during the administration of Governor Anthony Garotinho (1999–2002). The immediate trigger was the killing of five young men from the Pavão-Pavãozinho-Cantagalo favelas, accused by police of involvement in drug trafficking. Around 100 residents protested in the streets of Copacabana, and buses were vandalized (Cardoso, 2011). The area was then selected as a pilot site for the new initiative, the GPAE, created as a special operational unit of the Rio de Janeiro State Police (PMERJ, a police force with military characteristics) by Resolution SSP No. 0352 issued on July 5, 2000. On September 22 of that year, the GPAE was deployed in the Pavão-Pavãozinho-Cantagalo favelas, located in one of the city's most affluent areas, between Copacabana and Ipanema, turning the territory a laboratory for security policies. Because of the innovative nature of the proposal, soldiers, corporals, and sergeants assigned to the GPAE were mainly chosen through volunteer applications reviewed by the local command.

The goal was to have police officers, portrayed as a "civilizing hero," establish and maintain the state's presence in the favela.

After the first experience was considered successful, three more GPAE units were established in 2002: in the Cavalão favela in the municipality of Niterói; in the Formiga/Borel/Chácara do Céu/Casa Branca favelas in Tijuca (Rio de Janeiro's West Zone); and in Vila Cruzeiro, Penha (North Zone). All these areas urgently needed to reduce violence caused by criminal gangs. The police presence was expected to bring stability and security to support social programs and urban upgrades. Reports indicated that confrontations and shootings declined in the initial months. Nonetheless, each GPAE deployment was preceded by an operation from the State Police Special Operations Battalion (BOPE), which aimed to "pacify" the area. BOPE units were often called back when incidents happened or armed groups threatened to re-establish control of the favelas. This dependence on armed intervention created considerable insecurity among residents (Misse, 2014).

The project's focus was not to directly combat drug trafficking but to reduce violent crimes and ensure residents' safety. In Pavão-Pavãozinho-Cantagalo, the GPAE also became a regulatory agent in community life, responding to requests ranging from medical assistance to job applications and educational activities (Albernaz et al., 2007), taking on a social welfare role. However, infrastructure improvements and public services did not come with the police occupation. The presence of police without corresponding enhancements in public services suggested that social problems and inequalities were viewed as police issues rather than matters of citizenship and rights. In this context, the biggest challenge was building and maintaining community trust. "Community participation" was often reduced to residents' willingness to report crimes, which created tensions for both residents and local leaders. Instead of co-producing public policy, the police sought informants, putting residents in a fragile position amid existing conflicts with traffickers. State agents thus became another source of negotiation, external, armed, and disruptive to daily life, producing a form of sociability characterized by constant surveillance (Menezes, 2015) and varying levels of insecurity.

Even with investments in training volunteer officers, about 70% of the initial force had been transferred for misconduct by the end of the first year. Many favela youth, in particular, did not see the GPAE as different from the "police in general," since suspicion and criminal subjugation (Misse, 1999) through racial profiling remained common among patrol officers. In 2004, the nonprofit Viva Rio and the Rio de Janeiro state government teamed up to create the GPAE Revitalization Project (PRO-GPAE). However, poor coordination among federal, state, and municipal authorities, along with inconsistent funding, weakened both the project and the broader community policing effort in favelas.

Plans for decentralized community policing also failed, with much of the project's decision-making and implementation concentrated in certain commands. For many soldiers, acting as "social workers" for favela residents felt like a diversion from their main policing duties, which involved preventing and fighting crimes that often resulted in armed confrontations (Albernaz et al., 2007). Confrontation was not part of the original policy. Ultimately, the program reached only three favelas in Rio, remained limited in scope, and had little lasting impact on the police force. As a result, confrontational policing returned to the city's public security agenda. During Governor Rosinha Garotinho's administration (2003–2006), Operation "Maximum Oppression" was

launched, its most notorious symbol being the caveirão, an armored vehicle used by the state police in favela raids. This marked a renewed embrace of the militarized approach to public security examined here.

Pacifying Police Unit and its legacy

Due to their potential for media coverage, certain police incidents during the 2000s became public events that generated widespread commotion and shaped political strategies on Rio de Janeiro's public security agenda. In 2007, under the administration of Governor Sérgio Cabral (2007–2014), the city witnessed the tragic death of six-year-old João Hélio Fernandes Vieites, who was dragged over seven kilometers while trapped in a car seatbelt during a robbery in the neighborhood of Bento Ribeiro. Following the crime, the area where João Hélio's family car was stopped came under heavy police presence. Days later, assailants armed with rifles machine-gunned the patrol car stationed there, killing the two officers on duty. In response, the state police launched an operation in Vila Cruzeiro aiming to "hunt down" the alleged drug traffickers responsible for the officers' deaths. This marked the re-emergence of the urban war's central figures, with Vila Cruzeiro, part of the Complexo do Alemão in the city's North Zone, solidifying its role as a stronghold of Rio's criminal factions during the 2000s.

In the aftermath, Governor Sérgio Cabral declared to O Globo newspaper that the state police would confront criminals, stating, "there is a war in the city and we will win this war" (Rocha, 2010). Complexo do Alemão became a battlefield marked by continuous police operations, rifle fire, and troop deployments in what came to be known as "The Rio War." This campaign inaugurated a policing style that emphasized not just sporadic interventions, but the necessity of "holding the occupied terrain" (idem). The favela ceased to be seen solely as a space of criminality; it became a locus from which violent actions radiated citywide, requiring police invasion and state occupation. The state's prior inaction had allowed these areas to become akin to medieval enclaves or fortresses. The official discourse, as articulated by the then-Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame, framed the solution as "returning the favelas to their true owners: the innocent population who only seek tranquility" (Beltrame apud Rocha, 2010), thus reclaiming state territory.[3] However, Beltrame emphasized that this approach could not be purely repressive. The security policy under Governor Cabral was founded on four operational pillars: intelligence, integration, internal affairs, and management, with police officers expected to manage both people and resources effectively (Beltrame, 2009).

In 2008, this militarized agenda was tested in the Santa Marta favela, South Zone, through a BOPE-led "pilot project." Building on this model of "pacification" and supported by quantitative success metrics, 42[4] UPPs were established across Rio by 2017,[5] including in favelas like Chapéu-Mangueira, Babilônia, Pavão-Pavãozinho, and Cantagalo, with priority given to areas at key circulation points or near economically valuable neighborhoods.

The Pavão-Pavãozinho-Cantagalo favelas, located around Copacabana (Rio's South Zone), previously covered by the GPAE, received UPP bases in 2009 as part of the city's security reorganization. To prevent new recruits[6] from adopting the militarized ethos associated with the "shooting, beating, and bombing" triad that had characterized previous Rio state police policies (Muniz et al., 1997), the program prioritized officers from the interior of Rio state, presumed less "contaminated" by traditional

police culture and its associated failures. The program's imperative was to "work," even if proximity policing principles were not fully realized, while maintaining Rio's image as a "wonderful city," especially given the imminent mega-events: the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. A sense of security was necessary to ensure public order and access to the city amid growing concerns about urban violence.

Graham (2010) defines militarization as a moral and ideological justification that transforms all spaces, including city streets and public areas, into "battlefields," creating a scenario of intermittent war (cf. Charleaux, 2010). The concept of "new military urbanism" describes this paradigm of the city as a perpetual war zone. The metaphor of war (Leite, 2012) extends across various urban domains: the war on drugs, terrorism, crime, and insecurity. These conflicts collectively form a system that targets the poorest populations, a form of governance combining surveillance, control, exploitation, and oppression. In Brazil, and particularly in Rio de Janeiro, public security policies are driven by political coordination. Understanding the actors who operationalize these demands and how policies produce new actors and subjectivities is essential.

The UPPs, central to this new policy agenda, helped attract investment and shift market interests toward pacified favelas and their residents by creating a less confrontational image of Rio. The pacification policy included technical management of resources through "agreements and partnerships signed between segments of the public, private, and third sectors" (Rio, 2018). It served as a model of public-private partnership, involving civil society. Partners included the National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac), the Federation of Industries of Rio de Janeiro (Firjan), the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae), Viva Rio, the construction company Odebrecht, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF), the EBX group, Coca-Cola Brazil, and others (Rio, 2018). Territorial control of the favela thus became aligned with the legitimate order and the city's image, profiting from differences under the logic of neoliberal rationality (Dardot and Laval, 2014),[7] which operates within porous boundaries between the legal and illegal, licit and illicit, formal and informal.

Consequently, pacification signaled the arrival of militarily equipped security forces tasked with controlling and organizing favela territories, preparing them for a direct operation of businesses, an operation previously hindered by drug trafficking and armed militia groups.[8] The favela was reimagined not as a space of need and "non-city" but as a space of power and identity within the city's new corporate-like management. Through this militarized public policy, supposedly prepared to mediate conflicts, residents were integrated as consumers and unskilled workers within a morally and formally rationalized framework, rather than simply as citizens.

This relationship between the state (order) and market (capital) in pacified favelas generated intense contradictions. Formalization of microenterprises and services fostered new forms of participation, such as improved services, training courses, tourism potential, and expanded trade. Yet, residents expressed insecurity about the sustainability of policies, many of which were considered discontinued after mega-events, fear of displacement due to commercial interests or rising real estate values, and the effects of formalization, such as increased living costs (Polycarpo, 2018).

More than a decade after its inception, the pacification model in strategic Rio favelas reflects neoliberal rationality that seeks "integration" solely through the market.

However, political instability, rooted in temporary governments, shifting agendas, and uncertain financing,[9] means the model and the city's reformulation are perpetually revisited. Beyond militarized security policies, pacification involved multiple state actors and civil society organizations, encompassing agreements and partnerships across public, private, and third sectors, representing a single process of private-sector participation in public security policy formulation and implementation.

Militarizing security: networks as continuity

In the wake of the pacification program, certain sectors of society emerged as entrepreneurs attempting to resolve conflicts, following a logic that integrated neoliberal interests and mechanisms. Thus, one of the major legacies[10] of pacification was not the so-called community policing, but rather the militarization of territories and populations, and the implementation of public security policies driven by market interests. By militarization, we mean the use of military strategies of confrontation and war, in which the state's legitimate monopoly on physical and police force is deployed against city residents who are defined or classified as "enemies." Through these militarized practices, territories are occupied, racialized and class-marked bodies are repressed, and conflict resolution is naturalized through the use of force and violence, producing the perception that a military presence is the only means of maintaining order and thereby reproducing its "war metaphor" (Leite, 2012).

Despite its supposed failure, marked by the dismantling of the policy and its administrative apparatus, the pacification model had significant and lasting effects on the city's political practices, which persist in more recent approaches and experiences. The occupation of the favelas was presented as a military-corporate intervention to restore order, reinforcing the central role of repressive practices in governing vulnerable populations. This model became embedded in the city's management policies, reinforcing territorial boundaries and divisions. The implementation of the policy (and the policing) expanded through the growth of intervention strategies from the favelas to more central urban areas, applying practices tested on favela populations to other "undesirable" groups in the city, and undergoing new reconfigurations, especially between 2015 and 2020. In this context, we refer to two notable experiences: the Segurança Presente and Rio+Seguro programs, each carried out in specific territories.

The *Segurança Presente* Program and the state government

The *Segurança Presente* program, formerly known as Operação Rio (2015), has been active since 2015 in key areas of Rio de Janeiro, demonstrating how the "integrated action" functions as a model for neoliberal rationality policies in the city. Here, integration does not refer to connecting territories or populations through public policies that expand access to goods and services, but to aligning state powers and sectors toward a common goal as part of a model of integrated technical management. As Hirata and Cardoso (2016) note, such integration can be analyzed in terms of coordination as a technique for governing urban order and public security, emphasizing the importance of coordination among various agencies, actors, and levels of action in implementing policies and programs.

In this "new" *Segurança Presente* program, coordination is the primary mechanism for achieving objectives, mobilizing multiple elements, and uniting a diverse range of actors to support the initiative.

In its post-pacification surveillance model (cf. Polycarpo, 2019), Segurança Presente began through a partnership between the state and Rio de Janeiro's business community, funded by the network of entities related to the commerce sector (Sistema Fecomércio) under a two-year contract (O Globo, 2017a). Originating in the State Secretariat of Government alongside Operação Lei Seca, the program was transferred in 2016 to the State Secretariat of Social Assistance and Human Rights (Rio, 2016) and now operates in partnership with the city government and multiple agencies: the state police, investigative police, Eastern Military Command, municipal guard, municipal departments of Public Order, Social Development, Conservation, Transportation, the city-owned public cleaning and urban waste management services company Comlurb, the city's Operations Center (COR), and the state's Integrated Command and Control Center (CICC). Its goal is to combat petty crime and support public safety in strategic locations, using both active-duty and reserve state police officers as well as civilian agents from the Armed Forces. Operations extend beyond allegedly high-risk areas like favelas and peripheral neighborhoods to high-demand zones such as the city center, Lapa, Aterro do Flamengo, Lagoa, Tijuca, Leblon, and Copacabana.

The program is institutionally disconnected from previous public safety policies, instead emerging from organized civil society and business sectors. This setup received criticism from then–Secretary of Public Safety José Mariano Beltrame, who stated that the agreement with Fecomércio bypassed the department already responsible for public safety. He called the initiative a "private surveillance system" that operates not based on crime rates but according to the priorities of those who pay for security (cf. Extra, 2017). As a "side effect," many state police officers prefer working for the program rather than taking Battalion overtime, since program contracts signed by the Governor's Office (SEGOV) offer higher pay.

In 2019, fulfilling campaign promises focused on strengthening the state police's repressive role, especially in Rio's outskirts and favelas, elected Governor Wilson Witzel (PSC) abolished the State Secretariat of Public Security (SESEG) (cf. Rio, 2019). An example of the repressive tone adopted is the "*mirar na cabecinha*" policy (or "aim for the head"), which is named after a statement made by the then-candidate when discussing his approach toward criminals (cf. Veja, 2018). This restructuring placed the implementation and oversight of security policies directly under the state and investigative police forces and their special secretariats, giving them greater autonomy without oversight from a separate coordinating agency.

Over its seven years, *Segurança Presente* has evolved into a network of overt policing operations, maintained through agreements with commercial and hotel organizations and state–private sector partnerships. Cooperation with other government agencies, such as the Secretariat of Social Assistance's on-call patrols, has been sporadic and localized. As a result, policing remains largely funded by private sources, driven by payer interests and selective state investment, offering officers tangible financial incentives.

In Copacabana and Leme, areas examined in this research, the program launched on January 20, 2020, is supported by the State Fund for the Promotion of Segurança Presente (Fefosp), approved by the Rio de Janeiro State

Legislative Assembly (Alerj) and financed through the Annual Budget Law (LOA), along with donations, loans, and private-sector investments. Even informally, committed officers often respond directly to the demands of paying stakeholders, functioning less as providers of universal public service and more as localized security guards, which reinforces the militarization[11] of urban space and social life. The program operates under the banner of "proximity policing," with officers maintaining direct contact with the public through a "citizen--centered approach" aimed at cultivating community trust (cf. Rio, 2024).

The *Rio+Seguro* Project and the municipal government

The latest example of cooperation networks in the dispute over and configuration of security policies in Rio de Janeiro is the project *Rio Seguro e Vigilante* (or "Rio: Safe and Alert," a motto adopted by the previous municipal administration and announced by then-Mayor Marcelo Crivella in his 2017–2020 Strategic Plan (Rio, 2017a). From the beginning, the city government clearly outlined its interests, reaffirming existing partnerships by emphasizing its "cooperation efforts." It mobilized technicians and representatives from relevant departments and agencies, as well as secretaries working directly with the mayor. A group of managers, organized into think tanks – or, as described in the 2017–2020 Strategic Plan, into a "powerhouse of ideas, a laboratory for research, coordination, and consolidation of government plans and initiatives" (ibid., p. 9) – was tasked with supporting the administration in developing and managing policies, aligning the Multi-Year Plan (PPA) with the city's Master Plan (2020–2030).

With this initiative prioritized by the government, the city positioned itself once again as a police force, aiming to strengthen the municipal guard's role in preventing and fighting crime beyond its original duties of maintaining public order and protecting property. This, in turn, required defining who should be "fought" and who should be "prevented," effectively managing the concept of security through another aspect of the militarization – and policialization – of the city, driven by specific interests and ways of marking territories and profiling identities. Building on previous partnerships and coordination efforts, collaboration with the private sector in policy implementation was deepened further, as seen in the creation of the Special Public Order Fund (Feop) and incentives for installing more than a thousand surveillance cameras across the city in cooperation with the business community and organized civil society.

The strategic use of surveillance cameras as a control device and tool of governance gained significant attention with the city's creation of the COR (Central Office of Public Order) in 2009, under the Department of Public Order (Seop). The COR has sought to meet public order objectives (Cardoso & Hirata, 2016), complementing the state government's CICC, created in 2013 as a socio-technical tool to support the operation and management of mega-events. By reinforcing the notion of a "secure city" (Hirata, 2012), the Rio de Janeiro municipal government has proposed increasingly integrating private surveillance into public safety initiatives under the ongoing justification of combating urban violence. The approval of a portion of society suggests that the exchange of certain civil liberties – through the monitoring and control of cameras by companies and government agencies for the promise of order and security – is a politically viable path, one that can yield significant economic and electoral returns.

This integrated approach to public safety management is also evident in the incentive policy for the Segurança Presente program, a partnership between Fecomércio and the state government, which initially focused on Rio's waterfront as the city's prime leisure and tourism destination. As set out in the Strategic Plan, this policy now includes paying bonuses, funded by the city and its partners, to state and municipal security agents based on the achievement of crime reduction targets in the city's coastal regions, pre-established by the Municipal Department of Public Order. The department is also responsible for investigating, restructuring, and maintaining the existing Segurança Presente program, extending it to coastal areas on a seasonal basis (Rio, 2017a, p. 112).

Following the city government's guidelines announced in October 2017, Councilman Marcelo Arar proposed the Rio+Seguro (Safer Rio) project to the City Council (cf. Rio, 2017b). The project gained support from Mayor Marcelo Crivella and then–Secretary of Public Order, Paulo César Amêndola,[12] a former colonel in the state police and municipal guard, and the founder of BOPE. The project's core concept is similar to Segurança Presente: paying off-duty security officers to reinforce policing in strategic locations. The key difference is that, instead of only state police officers and reservists, off-duty municipal guards and military police officers participate through the State Security Integration Program (Proeis). As a priority area and testing ground for the project, the Copacabana and Leme neighborhoods in Rio's South Zone were the first to adopt the initiative on December 3, 2017 (cf. O Globo, 2017b; 2017c), under Colonel Amêndola's supervision. The justification was twofold: Copacabana's proximity to New Year's Eve celebrations, which attract large numbers of tourists, and a reported rise in crime, particularly street robberies. The project aimed to combat crime, including petty theft, address homelessness, and improve urban planning. This was pursued through direct collaboration between municipal and state public agencies and civil society organizations in daily, overt neighborhood and waterfront policing.

Through open communication channels with public agencies, including the police and municipal and state departments, residents of Copacabana and Leme actively participate in neighborhood security. They do so through monthly meetings with the Community Security Council (CCS-ISP) or daily exchanges in WhatsApp groups monitored by security officers (Polycarpo, 2021; 2022). These channels, with their different ways of managing and monitoring police activities, enable civil society, organized into neighborhood associations, to be more involved in assessing and shaping security policies.

Participation occurs not only through complaints and demands but also via the co-production of data and strategies with security officers. Interaction between police and political networks thus takes place both among human actors (officers and residents) and non-human actors (cell phones and social media), enabling stronger engagement between diverse stakeholders in policy refinement, relationships that are also shaped by trust and resource allocation. These networks, formed around shared interests and built from strategies, tactics, and techniques, generate power relations as an outcome rather than as a starting point.

To expand this model, on June 7, 2019, the Rio municipal government, in partnership with the federal government, launched *Rio+Seguro Fundão*, operating in the University Campus area of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Further, on January 22, 2020,

Rio+Seguro Jacarepaguá was inaugurated in the Freguesia neighborhood of Jacarepaguá, in the city's North Zone. Under the direction of the new Secretary of Public Order, Gutemberg Fonseca, this phase introduced new patrol technology: body-worn cameras to monitor police actions, along with facial and license plate recognition systems. By the end of April 2020, the program had already expanded to six additional regions (Anil, Taquara, Pechincha, Tanque, and Praça Seca in Jacarepaguá, as well as downtown Campo Grande). These experiences demonstrate that the perceived rise in so-called urban violence has reshaped public security policies at the federal, state, municipal, and local levels, reorganizing urban life and sociability under a management logic shaped by the repeated failures and discontinuities of earlier programs. The ongoing production of "policy failures" repeatedly justifies the creation of new security policies, each bringing with it new actors, dispositifs, and ways of operationalizing security and the work of police forces within each territory.

The social accumulation of failures

Even with frequent efforts to bring security forces closer to low-income communities and, to some extent, align them with basic human rights standards, public dissatisfaction with the police persists. Their inefficiency in managing conflicts, the brutality of their tactics, and the legitimization of their violence have sustained a persistent crisis in policing and public safety in Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro.

In recent decades, the so-called "problem of public security" (Machado da Silva, Leite, and Friedman, 2005) has remained grounded in a civilizing shift that, on the one hand, sought to "civilize" the vulnerable classes to prevent the dissolution of social order, and, on the other, to "civilize" police institutions themselves so that urban social controls could appear more transparent and legitimate in the eyes of civil society. Citizenship, as a democratic principle, was thus shaped in ways that excluded the civil rights of large segments of the population. Civilizing ideals portrayed the middle and upper classes as the only citizens deserving of state security and protection, often at the expense of "others." The growing sense of insecurity and fear of violent crime among the urban middle classes of major cities gave the institutional security apparatus a significant degree of autonomy. This autonomy converged diverse and even contradictory demands for the reconstruction of the social fabric toward overt policing. Today, political networks organize practices of policialization bodies and daily life, legitimized through "community policing" programs.

Here, policialization refers to inspection and control practices defined as "police work" that have systematically expanded into civil and community spheres through new surveillance technologies (cameras, drones, smartphones, and digital media). When daily routines are reframed as a matter for police oversight, even actors outside militarized regimes participate in policing as a form of citizenship, seeking to ensure their own sense of security – whether through private surveillance cameras, constant monitoring of neighbors via personal devices, or direct engagement with official (and unofficial) security agents to protect sidewalks and businesses.

In short, relationships between the state, the market, civil society, and their dispositifs of social and urban control are being reorganized into new partnerships capable of

strategically integrating or segregating people and experiences in the city through public security programs. These programs cover territories and populations according to a logic that prioritizes security (and surveillance) over civil liberties. Surveillance becomes essential to controlling "undesirables" and "urban enemies" or keeping the masses productive and obedient. Command-and-control strategies combine the authoritarian, hierarchical, and interventionist traditions of policialization, security, and military institutions with the techniques of business administration, a configuration that Cardoso (2019) calls the managerial-militarized model. This model involves not only frontline agents, such as the state police and municipal guards in programs like *Segurança Presente* and *Rio+Seguro,* but also managers, technical coordinators, and residents, who contribute through both formal and informal mechanisms that sustain the system.

As we have seen, the technologies used to implement public security programs in Rio de Janeiro rely on a coordinated policy network capable of ensuring their implementation, whether through funding or through co--production. By coordinating and controlling the daily routines of passersby and even public officials, the sociotechnical network (Latour, 2012) of actors and devices surrounding security programs extends beyond the control of the policy itself, socially accumulating its failures and managing the ongoing public security crisis (Polycarpo, 2021). In doing so, these devices also produce new forms of sociabilities – and subjectivities.

The enhancement of oversight and control on a sociotechnical level is part of what I previously referred to as the managerial-policing mode of sociability (Polycarpo, 2022). This mode involves arrangements updated through devices that involve all citizens, not just security agents, in the policialization of everyday behavior. Minor disturbances or infractions are reinterpreted as police cases that require public and private control, mobilizing surveillance agents and technologies. The managerial-militarized model shifts the responsibility of resolving all social problems onto police forces and policing activities, resulting in increasingly aggressive, invasive, and restrictive practices. This situation leads some residents to actively participate in law enforcement and oversight using their own resources.

Both "network" and "territory" are essential concepts for understanding the disputes over security policy and the conflicts that arise from "community policing." These practices, tested inconsistently over time, have failed to significantly reduce urban violence or eliminate the feeling of insecurity; fear of crime remains widespread. In the favelas and peripheral neighborhoods, police carry out oppressive and violent actions against residents without actually ensuring citizenship through militarized occupation. In wealthier neighborhoods, efforts at integration coexist with the privatization of security, but there is a lack of thorough evaluation of their broader impacts.

The coordination of police and security forces generates new institutional roles through both internal reorganization and external operationalization with civil society. These networks now form the foundation of public security policy in Rio de Janeiro, producing and intensifying conflicts across the city. In reality, institutions often fail to complement one another; hierarchies clash, and responsibilities are contested in the pursuit of positions and bonuses. Yet, local actors coordinate based on their territorial and network interests, with territory acting as a symbol of legitimacy and a tool for reinforcing boundaries and identities.

Building a good relationship with residents is, in this context, essential for the success of a proximity policy, for example.

When channels of dialogue expand into direct agent-citizen relationships via mobile devices and digital media, coordination as a mode of governing everyday life gains new reach. Ethnographic research in WhatsApp[13] groups between 2018 and 2022 documented dialogues and negotiations around implementing security programs in Copacabana and Leme (Polycarpo, 2021; 2024). In these neighborhoods, Rio+Seguro agents routinely post morning introductions of their on-duty team and share end-of-day operational results in the group chats. Residents, in turn, begin to adopt the language of police work and actively collaborate in mediating conflicts.

The flow of neighborhood policialization is thus shaped by the calls and strategies of each group. Forming the tripod of Rio de Janeiro's public security and urban order, state police, municipal guard, and neighborhood movements, residents become operators in a sociotechnical network managing police forces in specific areas. By prioritizing "integrated" action across security sectors, the policy expands its scope of agents in defending order to include residents armed with smartphones and digital media.

The recurring "failure" of public security policy, expressed through discontinued and repeatedly restructured programs and partnerships, has created new sociabilities and mechanisms that support both the sociotechnical networks and the police, further blurring the boundaries between state functions and other interests. This reconfiguration of actors sustains narratives that emphasize "success" despite "failure" (Ferguson, 2009; Gupta, 2018), perpetuating the crisis. Policialization now fosters a managerial-policing mode of sociability, refining surveillance and control techniques across all urban areas. While tasked with fighting wars on drugs, crime, and disorder simultaneously, aggressive and invasive policing disproportionately targets young, poor, and Black men. What we observe, especially in Brazil, is a political crisis transforming into a persistent public security crisis, driven by the cumulative failures of strategies and programs that focus narrowly on statistical measures of violence while neglecting its structural causes. Throughout all levels, political leaders and middle-class actors have adopted a neoconservative stance that redefines all social problems as police matters.

Final considerations

Conceptions of order, violence, security, and crime shape politics and policing in contemporary cities, based on the physical and symbolic boundaries of borders, territories, and identities. Thus, the policialization of urban conflicts creates a systemic order managed through militarized logic, both in terms of Armed Forces interventions in urban areas and the actions of civilian units acting as security forces.

In Rio de Janeiro, in recent decades, the metaphor of war has framed social issues as police matters, requiring greater consensus and coordination between federal, state, and municipal agendas in shaping security policies that directly involve residents recognized and legitimized by their political networks. It is important to emphasize how the police function is portrayed to understand how police issues – and the policialization of everyday life – have evolved in recent decades. Here, we are not primarily dealing with violent crime or

organized crime, nor with what Machado da Silva (1999) defines as urban violence, given the acknowledged rise in physical and property violence. Instead, we are addressing the policialization of social issues and the political interests that influence them.

Repressive apparatuses and their forms of governing behavior have been examined from various perspectives, starting with Foucault (2008), who defined the forms of state action and the means of controlling populations to maintain certain order. However, as we have observed, when discussing large contemporary cities, strategies for managing population behavior during disorder are now implemented through new technologies and government techniques (Dardot and Laval, 2012). In Brazil, for example, a very specific view of maintaining public order, focused on the fragility of control and repressive agencies, no longer pertains solely to isolated police practices or questions of efficiency. Instead, it involves debates over whether to expand citizenship. Disorder is now seen not as an entity in itself but as simply the absence of order under state control, which justifies intervention, occupation, and the reclaiming of the state's legitimate monopoly on force.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the power dynamics that shape a network of practices related to what is defined as common crime and urban violence, significantly disrupting daily life in large Brazilian cities like Rio de Janeiro. As an instituted form of sociability, the management and preservation of order is also legitimized as a way of structuring the complex network of police forces in dispute, both in addressing common crime and its impact on the sense of insecurity. Therefore, the omnipresent war becomes part of everyday military or civilian practices.

For example, Grillo (2019) suggests that since the 1990s, the "war metaphor" has replaced the representation of urban violence and has promoted the incorporation of violent sociability into the institutional-legal order as a way to legitimize state violence against Black and favela populations, framing what would be considered a "massacre" or "genocide." In this discourse, concepts such as "absence of the state" and "legitimate monopoly of force" guide urban conflict and the (il)legitimacy of the state itself. When social conflicts are depicted as "war," subjugation through force becomes a general approach of governance, and the democratic legal-political order risks losing its legitimacy and relevance.

Therefore, new perspectives are necessary for understanding conflicts framed as "war," requiring politicizing the analysis of urban conflicts through renewed attention to economic inequality and racism. The new alliance between neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and militarization, as Hirata and Grillo (2019) observe, shifts away from commitments to strengthening liberal democratic institutions toward necropolitics (Mbembe, 2010) – which operates not only in favelas and peripheral neighborhoods but across all territories potentially occupied or traversed by criminals, Black people, the poor, and favela residents. This represents a form of governance over life and death in the ongoing creation of precarious lives. The construction of a sense of security in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone neighborhoods reflects a segregated city that constantly pits residents against each other over territoriality, identities, and borders. We therefore propose that the logic of oversight and control on a sociotechnical scale is part of what we call managerial-

-police sociability. Given the widespread use of violent sociability as the practical order of urban relations centered on insecurity and fear, this logic is updated through new sociotechnical mechanisms capable of guiding all citizens – beyond security agents – toward policing routine behavior via coordinated policy networks.

What we observe is that the ongoing crisis in public security, along with the increasing militarization and policialization of daily life, signals an era of low-intensity conflicts or intermittent wars, in which networked weapons target diffuse enemies, such as "drugs." Thus, the management of urban warfare reveals the productive nature of violence in shaping the capitalist order, reclaims civilizing rhetoric as an ideological tool, and exposes the productive aspect of the very failure of public policies. Consequently, space opens for the market to increasingly govern, co-produce, implement, and manage politics, policing, and the city. Through a governmental technique marked by security technologies more accessible to the entire population but monopolized by certain companies, the domination and control of territories, and racialized and class-marked bodies, as part of regulating daily conduct and routines, becomes the practice of a group of citizens who often do not perceive it as such.

The paradigm in question is local order, not just violence or crime, since these are shown through patterns of behavior that are not only criminal or deviant, within the legal boundaries and legitimacy of the state, but also "foreign" to the place defined by identity and territorial borders. The discussion shifts from calling it "criminal" to "undesirable," where control is based on what is seen as disorder, not necessarily the crime itself. This change from criminality to order is rooted in racial and class views that boost control technologies and policing practices. In other words, policing doesn't just aim to fight crime but often targets those who are seen as potentially criminal, mainly the poor and Black communities. Violence is thus not only about force, though police authority is force, but also about the racial and class hierarchy and its symbolic distinctions within the territory. As a result, "policing work" grows and shifts with each low--level conflict affecting the city. To build cities and lives with dignity, we need to consider strategies beyond just continuous policing and the politicization of the police forces.

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Notes

(1) From 2018 to 2020, I attended the monthly meetings of the Copacabana and Leme Community Security Council, where I observed and interviewed some of its members, including residents, leaders, and security officers. In 2020, however, in-person meetings were halted due to the coronavirus pandemic, leading to a shift to digital platforms like WhatsApp groups.

(2) Community policing, also known as proximity policing, is a strategy that focuses on building relationships between residents and law enforcement agencies, aiming to enhance public safety and contribute to crime reduction. This model, inspired by Northern countries such as Canada and the United States, has been implemented in Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, since at least the 1980s (Polycarpo, 2022).

(3) A few years later, in 2010, Complexo do Alemão was taken over by BOPE forces, supported by other police units, Navy armored vehicles, and Army helicopters. Military and civilian police, with the backing of the Brazilian Armed Forces, gained control of the network of favelas that make up Complexo do Alemão. In June 2012, after the planned end of the military presence, the area was placed under the jurisdiction of eight newly established UPPs.

(4) According to the 2010 Census, Rio de Janeiro has more than 750 favelas and urban peripheries. However, residents' memories and recent data collected by local groups and institutions suggest there are over 1,000 favelas and urban communities in the Metropolitan Region (see List, 2024). Although the 42 UPPs deployed across the Metropolitan Region cover only about 4% of the territories classified as favelas and/or peripheries, their militarized occupation was strategically focused on areas under the armed territorial control of the criminal faction Comando Vermelho (CV). In particular, this strategy targeted the "belt" of favelas surrounding the South and North Zones of the city, territories with the highest flow of tourists and businesses.

(5) The pacification policy was discontinued after 2016 due to challenges in maintaining investments and, notably, shifts in the security agenda as new projects targeted different territories and sectors involved in shaping, implementing, and contesting public security policy in Rio de Janeiro. By 2021, at least 20 of these bases had already been closed across the state. In 2024, under the guidance of their respective Battalions, the UPPs started to be integrated.

(6) In addition to different recruitment methods, it is important to highlight the variations in compensation. Police officers assigned to the UPPs received a bonus of BRL500.00 when the program started, as stated in Article 3, §5 of Decree No. 42,787 of January 6, 2011, through contracts signed with both the public and private sectors. However, this payment was discontinued shortly after the Olympic Games, during which a policy crisis also unfolded.

(7) Dardot and Laval (2014) conceptualize neoliberal rationality as a normative system that shapes certain social relations and internally guides the practices of governments, corporations, and millions of individuals, many of whom may be unaware of the system. It subjects them to forms of conduct control aimed at better aligning their behavior with productive interests. This process not only combats idleness but also aims to regulate the otherwise unregulated market.

(8) The motivation behind the "war on drugs" created a network connecting members of the police apparatus, such as state police, civilian police, municipal guards, and firefighters, with merchants, businesspeople, and politicians representing civil society. Conflict management strategies relying on a “known police force” to combat crime, for example, gave rise to one of the most powerful structures of everyday policialization, exchanged for political commodities. The rise of militias stands as one of the most significant expressions of militarization within the context of Brazilian peripheral capitalism.

(9) In 2016, the UPPs faced a drastic budget reduction following the declaration of a “state of financial calamity” in Rio de Janeiro. With the federal intervention in 2018, 12 of the 42 UPPs were disbanded, and another 7 were absorbed by Battalions (Vilarouca, Ribeiro, and Menezes, 2022).

(10) Here, we adopt the lexicon used to discuss the lasting results of public investments, as in the debate on hosting mega-events in the city of Rio de Janeiro and their legacy for the population.

(11) The 2018 federal intervention by the Armed Forces is also considered here as another episode in the ongoing disputes involving militarized public security agencies in the state of Rio de Janeiro, this time driven by federal interests in the territory and the government’s approach to militarism and its technical management.

(12) Paulo César Amêndola has been responsible for leading the repressive actions of the state police since 1974 during the civil-military dictatorship. He was a member of the Special Group for Public Security Operations (GOESP) of the Rio Police during the dictatorship and an agent of repression responsible for capturing many guerrillas. Currently, he is considered a reference in the planning and management of security policies.

(13) In addition to communication coordinated by the Battalions through the CCS-ISP, as part of a policy to address demands via policy networks, WhatsApp groups are also created and managed, involving agents, managers from various agencies, and residents. For example, in 2017, following the dissemination of these contacts at Community Security Council meetings, the groups "Ordem Pública Copa-Leme" and "Moradores Rio+Seguro" were established in Copacabana and Leme, with 155 and 228 members, respectively, by 2024.

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Clara Polycarpo: formal analysis; funding acquisition; conceptualization; data curation; investigação; methodology; resources; rwriting–original draft; writing–review & editing; validation; visualization.

Data Availability Statement
The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.

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