T&C
TEORIA E CULTURA

Teoria e Cultura | Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais - UFJF | ISSN: 2318-101x | v. 20, n. 2, 2025| p.5-19
DOI: 10.34019/2318-101X.2025.v20.50026

Criminal Governance and New Criminal Enterprises: An Analysis of the "City Control" in Brazil

Governança Criminal e Novas Empresas Criminosas: Uma Análise do "Domínio de Cidades" no Brasil

Gobernanza criminal y nuevas empresas criminales: un análisis del "dominio urbano" en Brasil

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Abstract

Different criminal organizations set different dynamics of social control, with (in)formal rules and establishing what the literature calls criminal governance. In some cases, these criminal groups make informal arrangements with different criminal actors to maintain their power and make economic profits. In this sense, we investigate the relationship between established criminal organizations, especially the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), and criminal gangs that are involved in property crimes, more specifically bank robberies in Brazil. Managing the crime behind bars, PCC established a new logic of criminal governance in the State of São Paulo, exploring the markets of illegal drugs. In the past years, we have witnessed PCC expanding their criminal activities through other parts of Latin America and applying their logic to gain and maintain control of international drug trafficking routes and, in some cases, even the production of illegal drugs. However, even though drug trafficking remains the most profitable enterprise, other criminal actors, such as bank thieves, seem to be connected with PCC and are building new criminal enterprises. Conducting fieldwork in the city of Curitiba, the capital of the State of Paraná, we observed how these gangs operate, their techniques, and their connections with established criminal actors.

Keywords: Criminal Governance. City Control. Organized Crime. Private Security. Violent Property Crimes

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Resumo

Diferentes organizações criminosas estabelecem dinâmicas distintas de controle social, com regras (in)formais, consolidando o que a literatura denomina governança criminal. Em alguns casos, esses grupos fazem acordos informais com outros atores do crime para manter seu poder e obter lucros econômicos. Nesse sentido, investigamos a relação entre organizações criminosas estabelecidas, especialmente o Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), e quadrilhas envolvidas em crimes contra o patrimônio, mais especificamente roubos a bancos no Brasil. Gerenciando o crime de dentro das prisões, o PCC estabeleceu uma nova lógica de governança criminal, explorando os mercados de drogas ilícitas. Nos últimos anos, observamos a expansão das atividades do PCC para outras partes da América Latina, aplicando sua lógica para controlar rotas internacionais de tráfico de drogas e, em alguns casos, até mesmo a produção de drogas ilícitas. No entanto, embora o tráfico de drogas permaneça o empreendimento mais lucrativo, outros atores, como ladrões de bancos, parecem estar conectados ao PCC e desenvolvendo novas conexões. Realizando trabalho de campo na cidade de Curitiba, capital do estado do Paraná, observamos como essas quadrilhas operam, suas técnicas e suas conexões com atores criminosos estabelecidos.

Palavras-chave: *Governança Criminal. Domínio de Cidades. Crime Organizado. Segurança Privada. Crimes Violentos contra o Patrimônio*

Resumen

Distintas organizaciones criminales establecen dinámicas de control social diferenciadas, con reglas (in)formales, consolidando lo que la literatura denomina gobernanza criminal. En algunos casos, estos grupos establecen acuerdos informales con otros actores criminales para mantener su poder y obtener beneficios económicos. En este sentido, investigamos la relación entre las organizaciones criminales consolidadas, especialmente el Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), y las bandas involucradas en delitos contra la propiedad, en particular robos a bancos en Brasil. Gestionando la delincuencia desde las cárceles, el PCC ha establecido una nueva lógica de gobernanza criminal, explotando los mercados de drogas ilícitas. En los últimos años, hemos observado la expansión de las actividades del PCC a otras partes de Latinoamérica, aplicando su lógica para controlar las rutas internacionales del narcotráfico y, en algunos casos, incluso la producción de drogas ilícitas. Sin embargo, si bien el narcotráfico sigue siendo el negocio más lucrativo, otros actores, como los ladrones de bancos, parecen estar vinculados al PCC y desarrollar nuevas conexiones. Durante el trabajo de campo en la ciudad de Curitiba, capital del estado de Paraná, observamos cómo operan estas bandas, sus técnicas y sus conexiones con actores criminales consolidados.

Palabras clave: *Gobernanza Criminal. Control Urbano. Crimen Organizado. Seguridad Privada. Delitos Violentos Contra la Propiedad.*

Introduction

Criminal governance refers to the regulation of social order, which encompasses the management of informal or illegal economic activities through the establishment of both formal and informal rules and norms (Mantilla and Feldmann, 2021). Some scholars analyze the Latin American context, where criminal organizations create both informal and formal institutions that, in certain cases, replace, complement, or compete with state structures. These organizations also distribute public goods, providing services such as justice and security (Feldmann and Luna, 2022; Lessing, 2015, 2021). In contrast, other scholars contend that the high levels of violence in specific Brazilian regions do not stem from institutional failure, but rather from networks that connect criminal actors with civic leaders, politicians, and police forces (Arias, 2006, 2009, 2018; Misse, 2022). These arrangements serve to shield traffickers from state repression, while simultaneously enabling them to garner political support from local communities where they operate.

However, alternative models of criminal governance exist in Brazil, where some organizations manage and regulate illegal markets with less reliance on violence to gain territorial control. These organizations, instead of relying on alliances, emphasize cohesion among different criminal factions (Dias, Salla, and Alvarez, 2022; Lessing and Willis, 2019). A notable example is the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), which represents a distinct form of criminal organization that originated within the Brazilian prison system (Lessing and Willis, 2019; Manso, 2020). In certain instances, established criminal organizations form alliances with various criminal actors to maintain their dominance over illegal markets, employing varying degrees of violence in the process (Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza, 2014; Andreas, 2014; Leeds, 1996; Lessing, 2017).

In recent years, Brazil has witnessed the emergence of new forms of bank robbery, characterized by the use of highly sophisticated tools and well-organized tactics. Police reports suggest that these new criminal groups may have some connection to the PCC, prompting the question of whether established criminal organizations are forming alliances with these emerging groups to expand their criminal activities. While drug trafficking remains the most lucrative illegal market (Arias, 2017; Harding, 2013), these new criminal enterprises appear to be transforming how established criminal groups govern their local territories, with some instances of violence potentially facilitating these robberies.

This article draws on research aimed at addressing the question: What is the relationship between established criminal organizations, particularly the PCC, and criminal gangs involved in property crimes, specifically bank and cargo thefts? To explore this, the research began with fieldwork initiated at a symposium on violent crimes held in Curitiba, the capital of the State of Paraná, Brazil. During this event, police from various regions and agencies presented on a new form of violent property crime known as "city control," as referred to by investigators and police officers. Consequently, the investigation focused on analyzing public security efforts to prevent such "city control" activities and combat organized crime. A central hypothesis emerged: state security actions against "city control" involve local populations as active participants in the fight against crime, aligning with Graham's (2011) concept of asymmetric warfare. Additionally, a second hypothesis was proposed, suggesting that the primary response to this phenomenon comes from private security technologies, thereby reinforcing the erosion of the state's legitimate monopoly on force and highlighting the increasingly blurred lines between public and private security sectors.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, integrating ethnographic inspiration and documentary analysis to examine the phenomenon of "city control" and its connection with organized crime in Brazil. The methodology involves three key components: fieldwork, interviews, and analysis of primary documents. The research aims to elucidate the interplay between established criminal organizations, notably the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), and emerging criminal enterprises involved in violent property crimes. The fieldwork was conducted in Curitiba, the capital of the State of Paraná, over 18 months. The city serves as a critical site for observing the dynamics of violent property crimes, including “city control.” During this period, participant observation was carried out in multiple settings, including symposiums and community meetings. The primary focus was on understanding the operational techniques of criminal gangs and the responses of security forces. A symposium on violent crimes held in Curitiba provided a pivotal starting point for data collection. At this event, law enforcement personnel shared insights into the evolution of property crimes, with particular attention to the concept of “city control.” These interactions allowed for preliminary hypotheses about the structure, tactics, and impacts of this crime.

A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants, including:

- **Law Enforcement Officials**: 9 military police officers and 1 prison officer shared operational insights and investigative findings related to "city control."
- **Judicial System Representatives**: 1 prosecutor, 1 judge, and 2 public defenders provided perspectives on legal responses and the challenges of prosecuting complex criminal networks.
- **Private Security and Corrections Personnel**: 1 psychologist and 1 prison unit director discussed the role of private security in addressing this phenomenon.
- **Former Inmates**: 4 individuals who had served sentences for property crimes recounted their involvement in these activities, offering firsthand accounts of criminal networks and operations.

The interviews followed a thematic guide focusing on the evolution of violent property crimes, the involvement of organized crime, and the responses from state and private security forces. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation for all respondents.

The study included an analysis of primary documents, notably the handwritten "salves" issued by PCC members. These documents serve as internal communications within the organization, outlining rules, strategies, and operational guidelines. By analyzing these "salves," the research gained insights into the internal governance mechanisms and the hierarchical structure of the PCC. Additional materials included police reports, legislative texts (e.g., Bill 882/2021), and media coverage of key events. These documents provided a contextual understanding of the historical evolution and contemporary manifestations of “city control.” Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and relationships in the data. Coding focused on three main themes: a) **Evolution of Property Crimes**: Tracing the transition from traditional bank robberies to the sophisticated tactics of “city control”; b) **State Responses and Security Gaps**: Examining the interplay between public law enforcement and private security initiatives; and c) **Impacts on Public Perception and Governance**: Analyzing how "city control" challenges the state's monopoly on legitimate violence and impacts citizens' sense of security.

While this research provides significant insights, it is not without limitations. The focus on Curitiba and the State of Paraná may limit generalizability to other regions of Brazil. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews may introduce biases. Future

research could expand the scope to include comparative analyses across different regions or explore quantitative measures to complement these findings.

A new phenomenon: the "city control"

a. Evolution of bank robberies in Brazil

Most interviewees begin their historical accounts with the phenomenon known as "blowtorch robberies," a method that involves the theft of cash from ATMs by accessing their safes using drills, blowtorches, and other tools that require a certain level of expertise. These operations were time-consuming, typically carried out by small teams of two or three individuals and were not always executed with the use of weapons. When firearms were involved, they were usually of low caliber, such as revolvers or pistols. These were considered highly skilled thefts with a relatively low level of violence. The prolonged time required to open the safes using blowtorches, however, led criminals to adapt and evolve their techniques.

The next step in this progression, as described by Interviewee 8, a captain of BOPE (Special Police Operations Battalion) and explosives expert, involved the use of explosives to breach ATM safes. This method represented a significant evolution in robbery tactics, characterized by a more sophisticated organization, careful planning, and the employment of higher-caliber firearms. Unlike previous methods, explosive thefts were executed quickly, typically by groups of at least six individuals, including an explosives specialist. These operations did not involve taking hostages; rather, the perpetrators closely monitored law enforcement activities and had pre-arranged escape plans, often targeting areas with difficult access.

A further escalation in criminal tactics is observed in the robbery of cash-in-transit vehicles, which typically occurs on highways, often in broad daylight. These robberies involve the use of roadblocks and high-caliber weapons, such as .50 caliber machine guns capable of penetrating armored vehicles. Due to the destructive power of these weapons, drivers are often forced to stop their vehicles, creating an opportunity for the perpetrators to steal the cargo. These actions frequently lead to violent confrontations between criminal gangs and both public and private security forces.

The next stage in this criminal progression is exemplified by the resurgence of the "new *cangaço*" in Brazil's northeastern region, a phenomenon already studied by scholars (Aquino, 2020; Lopes Jr., 2013). The new *cangaço*[3] represents large-scale violent attacks on financial institutions, utilizing high-caliber weapons such as rifles and involving larger groups of criminals. A variation of this crime is the nocturnal *cangaço*, which typically takes place during the early hours of the morning, when the presence of security agents is minimal. In this form, confrontations with public security forces are avoided, and attacks tend to occur in smaller, less-protected towns.

The concept of "city control" represents the next evolutionary phase in this criminal trajectory. According to the text of bill number 882/2021, this crime is defined as the theft of movable property, carried out with violence or the threat of serious harm. The crime is marked by the use of tactics that prevent or delay the response of public security forces, achieved through the simultaneous execution of at least three of the following actions: (a) the complete or partial obstruction of land or water routes; (b) the blockage of entry or exit points to physical structures, buildings, or other locations that house public security forces,

[3] Cangaço was a form of social banditry located historically in Northeast of Brazil in the end of XIX century and lasts util the 1950's. It was characterized by the activities of independent armed groups that made small plunders and the small cities.

hindering police movement; (c) the employment of firearms; (d) the disabling of transmission infrastructure for energy and/or communication; (e) the use of aircraft or other equipment to gain control or gather intelligence about the airspace related to the ground operations; and (f) the participation of two or more individuals in a stable or non-stable criminal association.

b. Understanding the “city control”

Bill 882/2021 outlines essential elements to characterize "city control." Groups engaged in this criminal modality operate in networks without permanent bonds between members, although temporary hierarchies are formed for each specific action. These groups are not stable but are rather created and dissolved based on operational contingencies, where "joint action seems to constitute an operational contingency, resulting in the formation and disbanding of gangs. These are temporary groupings whose investments and gains are divided" (Aquino, 2023, p. 28). Each action typically involves about forty individuals, a notable number for a robbery. There is a clear specialization and division of labor within these operations. A significant difference between "city control" and previous forms of robbery, such as the "new *cangaço*" or nocturnal "*cangaço*," is that the cities targeted are medium to large-sized, with robust infrastructure and stronger police presence.

A distinguishing feature of "city control" is the gangs' lack of fear of confrontation with security forces. In fact, such confrontations are integral to their planning. The number of participants in these crimes ranges from 20 to 60, with gangs utilizing armored vehicles and high-caliber weaponry. Explosives are used both to breach safes and to block roads, delaying reinforcements from neighboring cities. As one interviewee, a military police officer, explained: “They started using explosives as a ruse to delay the police... if you’re going to remove explosives, the bomb squad has to be called in. The squad can’t pass through the explosives until the specialist arrives. So, the criminals started leaving cars in the way.”

The primary targets in these cities are facilities that house cash transportation companies and banks. A common target is the "Serets" (backroom and treasury sectors), fortified compartments in the underground areas of bank branches, which are strategically used by Banco do Brasil to store and distribute large sums of money. In 2020, these sectors were targeted in attacks in Araraquara and Criciúma, and again in Araçatuba in 2021 (Aquino, 2023, p. 6). "City control" represents a new dynamic in criminal activity, demanding a different operational approach. It involves highly specialized criminals who use .50 caliber machine guns and other military-grade weapons capable of penetrating armored vehicles. These techniques were inspired by gangs that previously targeted armored cars, where they shot at vehicle engines to demonstrate the inefficacy of the armor and force the guards to surrender.

According to an officer from the BOPE of Paraná[4], "city control" gangs ensure that police are confined to specific areas of the city. Part of the gang's task is to block strategic points, leaving security forces unable to prevent robberies elsewhere in the city. One former inmate described the organization of such operations as similar to a construction project, stating, "It's like a construction site, you hire an electrician, a plumber, bricklayers, etc. These city controls are like that too. It's a criminal network of specialties." The "city control" phenomenon also highlights the importance of the Campinas region, particularly in the emergence of cargo theft and its influence on current property crimes. According to a former prosecutor, "The Campinas region was a major exporter of this type of crime." In fact, the roots of "city control" can be traced to two major robberies in Campinas—one at Samsung and another at Magazine Luiza (a major Brazilian retailer).

[4] We chose to hide the names of those interviewed for this research as we consider the positions these agents occupy in investigations to be sensitive.

A 2001 Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) investigated cargo theft nationwide, focusing on the involvement of key figures from Campinas. Businessmen William Sozza and Ari Natalino da Silva were implicated in leading one of the country's largest robbery gangs, with operations across 14 states. This regional nexus provides further insight into the development of "city control" as a distinct criminal phenomenon. A critical aspect of "city control" is the differentiation of the "thief" from the drug trafficker. As described by one interviewee, a military police officer, "The thief, the 157 (armed robber under Brazilian penal code), is always audacious; their profile differs from that of drug traffickers. The mastermind behind 'city control' typically has significant wealth from other robberies, rarely from drug trafficking." The thief's identity is defined by audacity, courage, and a willingness to engage directly with law enforcement, contrasting with the drug trafficker's preference for minimal confrontation and reliance on bribery networks.

The audacity of the "thief" becomes evident in "city control" actions, where confrontation is expected and even welcomed. The use of violence in property crimes serves as a means of asserting dominance and instilling fear in the population. This aggressive approach aligns with Aquino's (2023) assertion that these crimes are not impulsive but are instead "sophisticated occurrences based on rational calculation." The choice of actions is strategic, based on factors such as the value of the target and the availability of reliable information. As one prosecutor noted, “It’s the crime economy; the guy has very good information, a very highlighted value, as was the case with Prosegur."

Thus, the "city control" phenomenon involves a calculated, rational approach to robbery, where knowledge of the target's value and timing, as well as the strategic positioning of gang members, plays a crucial role in minimizing risk. The dynamic of "city control" extends beyond simple criminality into a highly organized, entrepreneurial mindset, where taking risks is seen as worthwhile due to the high rewards. As one military police officer put it, “They accept this confrontation with the State because the value is worth it... they avoid other types of crimes as much as possible.”

Finally, the emergence of "city control" as a researched phenomenon raises important questions about the sociology of crime. These crimes challenge conventional views of thieves and drug traffickers, highlighting a category of criminals who operate based on calculated risk and specialization. This criminal category requires a deeper understanding, as it reflects a changing relationship between crime, labor, and societal structures. As Adorno and Alvarado (2022) argue, “The boundaries between the world of work and crime are not rigid; they communicate, establishing flows and shared activities between different actors.” The figure of the explosive’s expert, for example, demonstrates the intersection between criminality and specialized labor markets, further illustrating the complex dynamics at play in “city control.”

Domination of cities and the weakening of the state

The influential definition of the state, often attributed to Max Weber (1974), conceptualizes it as the entity possessing a legitimate monopoly on physical violence, excluding such a prerogative from all others. According to Weber, the state is the political community that monopolizes the right to use violence in resolving conflicts. He contends that violence is justifiable in two specific contexts: to prevent the internal fragmentation of a political community threatened by civil war and internal conflicts, and to resist external aggression that endangers the sovereignty of the state. As Sérgio Adorno (2023a) interprets Weber, the state’s monopoly on violence not only pertains to its exclusive right to wield violence but also to its exclusive authority to prescribe and prohibit it. From this perspective,

"city control" represents an internal challenge to the state, as it involves the use of illegitimate violence that is visible and disruptive to public order.

Territory and domination are central concepts in modern state theory. While the state holds a monopoly on violence, it cannot maintain control through coercion alone. To ensure its authority, it must dominate its population using legitimate forms of power, as outlined by Weber (1974): charisma, tradition, and legality. The legal system plays a crucial role in maintaining the legitimacy of the state, as it relies on citizens' belief in its justice to preserve social order. Similarly, the administrative apparatus of the state, composed of rationalized officials, is essential in organizing and executing its functions. Foucault (2008) further expands on the idea of governmentality, emphasizing that governing a population also entails managing its life. For Foucault, the regulation of life is a central concern in modern governance, a theme he explores in "Security, Territory, and Population" (2008), a foundational text for understanding contemporary government practices.

In contemporary discourse, Wieviorka (1997) critically engages with Weber’s concept of the state's monopoly on force, arguing that globalization has eroded state power. The rise of transnational corporations and the expansion of informal economies, driven by neoliberal policies, have diminished the state's capacity to regulate security within its borders. This shift has led to the growth of illegal markets and organized crime, which in turn undermines state sovereignty. Wieviorka contends that the increasing blurring of boundaries between public and private sectors represents a fundamental challenge to the state's authority.

Author (2023) investigates the government's response to cargo theft in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro between 2015 and 2017, identifying "gray areas" between the public and private spheres. These areas, which emerge in the context of security policies, reflect a growing collaboration between police forces and private security companies. As one police officer from Paraná (interviewee 1) notes, these partnerships involve sharing resources, such as technology and equipment, which reinforce the blurred lines between state and private security operations. This collaboration, particularly in intelligence gathering, marks a shift away from traditional authoritarian practices based on force. As interviewee 1 further states, private security companies emphasize intelligence over brute force in combating city control.

The growing role of private security is integral to understanding the dynamics of city control. Wieviorka (1997) highlights how the privatization of security shifts responsibility from the state to the private sector, transforming security into a commodity rather than a public service. This trend is evident in São Paulo, where gated communities equipped with advanced surveillance technologies serve as symbols of privatized security. Caldeira (2000) documents the proliferation of such communities, noting how private security becomes central to shaping lifestyle and social order in elite neighborhoods. In contrast, poorer neighborhoods, where police brutality is commonplace, are excluded from such protections, deepening social divisions.

This pattern is also evident in Garland’s (2001) analysis of the United States, where the rise of private security reflects a broader shift in responsibility for public safety. Garland argues that security is increasingly framed as a personal, rather than public, issue. He observes that this privatization of security contributes to the weakening of the state's monopoly on violence, a thesis shared by scholars such as Cléber Lopes (2013, 2015) and Susana Durão (2022, 2016), who examine civil rights violations by security personnel and their relationships with law enforcement in various contexts. The phenomenon of city control is tied to the sense of powerlessness among police forces to ensure public safety. As one BOPE (Special Operations Battalion) sergeant (interviewee 5) describes criminals in cities like Campinas and Recife show no fear of police authority, challenging the state's monopoly on violence. Their actions—such as isolating the police or using hostages as human shields—further undermine

public confidence in the state’s ability to provide security. This subversion of police authority distorts the expectation that the sight of a patrol car should instill a sense of safety.

The implementation of blackouts in areas controlled by criminal groups is another tactic used to disrupt public security. This restriction of movement directly challenges one of the central tenets of capitalist society: the free circulation of people and goods. Foucault (1977; 2006; 2008) emphasizes that controlling flows and circulations is a fundamental prerogative of the security apparatus. City control, therefore, directly targets this principle by limiting mobility and using fear as a tool of control.

Elias (2004) offers further insights into the state's monopoly on violence, arguing that it cannot be maintained solely through force. Constant reliance on violence risks provoking the instability it aims to prevent. Elias’s contribution lies in his understanding of social control not just as external regulation but also as internalized self-discipline. Unlike Weber (1974), who focuses on rationalization, Elias underscores the role of emotions and subjectivity in the maintenance of order. The state's authority is rooted in the development of self-control among individuals, a process that shapes their behavior in accordance with legal norms. For Elias, the rise in violence and the subsequent "sense of insecurity" contribute to the justification of repressive measures, including both state-led punitive actions and the growing reliance on private security. This shift, according to Elias, is reflective of broader changes in social dynamics, where security becomes increasingly privatized, and the state's monopoly on violence is further weakened. Though the Weberian framework for understanding state violence remains a key reference point, contemporary analyses have expanded and refined this model in light of social, political, and economic transformations that we are discussing.

Responses to the domain of cities

Given all the above discussion, we need to analyze the responses to city control attacks in light of the concept of the State in contemporary times. According to Interviewee 1, the fight against city control has two points: the preparation of the military police and the investment of private companies. The highlight of the joint action of the police with private companies once again demonstrates the relevance of the gray areas of security between public and private. According to Brinks’ director, Eduardo Gagg:

> “In 2015, in the first action of this kind in Brazil, the gang stole around R$ 28 million in Campinas. In the most recent action in Confresa, against Brink’s, even with the use of a heavy arsenal and many explosives, the criminals couldn't take a single cent. In November 2021, a police operation in Minas Gerais dismantled a gang preparing for a new action. What changed between the first attack in Campinas and the other two failed actions by the criminals? Intelligence and preparation of security forces and logistics companies guarding values” (Gagg, 2023)

The main response of state military police in combating this criminal modality consists of simulations of attacks on cities considered possible targets of the gangs, even training the civilian population. This action resembles the concept of asymmetric warfare (Graham, 2016), that is, conflicts characteristic of current capitalism that are spread in urban space. Therefore, there is no distinction between enemy and citizens; anyone can be considered a risk or threat. In these "simulations," both police forces and the population are trained on how to act in case of an attack on this criminal modality. According to interviewee 4, a BOPE official from Paraná State Police who participated in the simulation planning in

the city of Londrina: "If you analyze what the police officer is offering? Now, we have a contingency plan, at least there is a response... to plant a seed of doubt of those who will commit the crime... the media helps by spreading the news that there is a plan".

According to another interviewed military police officer, an official from PM/PR, the simulation has an effect in the sense that the policeman knows how to act appropriately. However, more important is the symbolic effect it produces, meaning the propaganda acts as a warning to the gangs that they will face police forces already prepared for city control, greatly increasing the risk of action.

The major strength of the simulated drills strategy, according to both interviewees, is the designated shooter. This can be defined in their words as the police officer who, through training, special shooting techniques, and doctrines, proves capable of making efficient shots at longer distances. According to interviewee 3 (police officer of Paraná State): "Nobody had it before, now we have this shooter, he hits the target from about 300 meters away". At this point, the police's strategy is precisely to use the fear as a weapon against the gangs, working with the realm of emotions as a weapon. This highlights Elias's (2004) emphasis on subjectivity in understanding the issue. Only through the paradigm of objectivity would it not be possible to discuss the issue holistically.

However, it is unanimous among the interviewees in the study that the new technologies of private security and value-holding companies are the main response to city dominance, reinforcing the importance of discussing the privatization of security in this study. According to Interviewee 1:

> "Companies are investing heavily where the money is stored, if they do something, the money is destroyed. The police did a lot, they probably did, but those who invested the most to end this were the companies that store money. For example, from Guarapuava, they couldn't get into the safe. They broke through the first barrier of the safe, it took them hours, and they would have taken even more time to break through the second, they couldn't take anything. Why? It's the company's investment. Even if the PM was fully prepared there and they weren't, they wouldn't be able to take money because the investment of private companies is very large, the same goes for armored vehicles"

At this point, it can be said that the action of the military police in combating city dominance primarily becomes to restore the population's sense of security, which was directly affected by the fear generated by the attacks. It is not possible to protect all cities in a state or country, but it is possible to convey the idea that they will know how to react in a way that frustrates the actions of gangs in possible city dominance operations. According to interviewee 6, a major in the Military Police of Paraná: "The PM promisses security to the citizen, but only delivers a sense of security. It couldn't protect everyone, so it provides the sense of security". The same objective as the Federal Intervention in Public Security in Rio de Janeiro, as identified by Author (2023).

Conclusions

The phenomenon of "city control" represents an evolution in violent property crimes in Brazil, characterized by an unprecedented willingness to confront state security forces. These highly organized crimes demonstrate a shift in tactics, with criminals employing heavy weaponry and fear as deliberate tools to assert control over targeted areas. By temporarily neutralizing the operational capacity of law enforcement, these gangs not only achieve their immediate objectives but also erode public trust in the state's ability to provide security.

The study highlights the intricate relationships between established criminal organizations, such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), and emerging groups specializing in property crimes. While the PCC remains primarily associated with drug trafficking, its tacit or active involvement in these new criminal enterprises underscores the adaptability of organized crime networks. These alliances facilitate the professionalization and diversification of illegal activities, demonstrating the interconnectedness of illicit economies.

One of the most significant findings of this research is the critical role of private security technologies in countering "city control." As state resources prove insufficient to address these complex threats, private companies have stepped in, investing in advanced technologies to protect assets and deter criminal activities. This reliance on private security underscores the weakening of the state's legitimate monopoly on violence and raises critical questions about the privatization of security in contemporary societies.

From a theoretical perspective, the phenomenon of "city control" challenges Max Weber's classical notion of the state as the sole entity with a legitimate claim to violence. The gray areas between public and private security, as well as between lawful and unlawful actors, reflect a broader crisis in governance, where the boundaries of state authority are increasingly blurred. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in regions where organized crime has a strong foothold, further complicating the state's capacity to maintain order.

The findings also reveal the impact of these crimes on societal perceptions. The use of fear as a strategic tool not only disrupts immediate targets but also instills a sense of insecurity among the general population. This aligns with theories that emphasize the performative and psychological dimensions of violence, highlighting its broader sociopolitical ramifications. The study underscores the urgent need for a more integrated approach to addressing "city control." While private security investments have been effective in specific contexts, they are not a substitute for systemic reforms in public security policy. Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies, fostering greater collaboration between public and private sectors, and addressing the socioeconomic conditions that fuel organized crime are essential steps toward mitigating this phenomenon.

Future research should expand the scope of analysis to include comparative studies across different regions and countries facing similar challenges. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of affected communities could provide valuable insights into the broader social impacts of these crimes and inform more inclusive policy responses.

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