Public Security Institutional Voices and Discursive Frames on Police Killings in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

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Over the years, the military police have been a significant perpetrator of violence in Brazil, targeting mainly Afro-Brazilians in *favelas* and poor suburbs. This thesis investigates the case of the military police of Rio de Janeiro to understand how, over time, public security institutions have framed discourses about the use of lethal force in Black and low-income territories. It applies the framework of discursive institutionalism, the methodology of discourse analysis and a comparative approach to analyze emblematic episodes of lethal police violence that occurred across four political eras. The results suggest that over time discourses have operated more to sustain than to change the way public security institutions deal with police killings. This was expressed by: a) arguing that the contexts of intervention compelled the police to use lethal force; b) asserting that the institution was not directly responsible for the killings; c) explicitly defending the public security model in force or the police approach in the episodes analyzed; d) claiming that there was a political interest behind the repercussions of these episodes. When public security institutions, in addition to perpetuating hyper-violent approaches, fail to offer the public a more critical discursive framing of this problem, they further contribute to the trivialization of Afro-Brazilian deaths in low-income territories. This work demonstrates pathways for understanding how policy institutions create argumentative and ideological mechanisms to justify policy choices. It highlights the significance of discursive institutionalism in comprehending the role of discourse not only in processes of policy change but also in situations of policy maintenance.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Brazilian constitution, the role of public security policies should be to ensure safety for people, guarantee "public order", and protecting "patrimony" (Constitution of The Federative Republic of Brazil 1988, article 144; Freire 2009, 51). However, studies have indicated that public security institutions do not treat everyone equally. Indeed, over the years the military police have been a grand perpetrator of violence and abuse in Brazil, targeting mainly Afro-Brazilians in *favelas* and poor suburbs (Vargas and Alves 2009, 613-614; Schlittler 2016, 59-60; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021, 58, 213; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2022, 76, 403-404; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 60, 284).

Recent data indicate that in 2022 Brazil registered 47.452 intentional violent deaths, which represents the sum of victims of deliberate homicide, robbery accompanied by death, bodily injury followed by death, and deaths resulting from police interventions. This number corresponds to 23.4 per 100,000 inhabitants (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 14, 23-24, 60). This same year, Brazil ranked 132 out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index, which uses 23 different quantitative and qualitative indicators, including statistics on homicides, policing, incarceration, and internal conflicts to measure how peaceful a country is. The higher the score obtained by a country, the less peaceful the country is considered (Institute for Economics and Peace 2023, 2, 9, 18, 87-90). Of the homicides registered in Brazil in 2022, 6,429 resulted from police interventions (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 14, 20). Ninety-nine-point two percent of the victims were men, 83.1% were Afro-Brazilians (which is 5 times higher than the police killing rate among the white population), and 75% were adolescents and young people aged between 12 and 29 mostly living in low-income territories (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 30-32, 66). The unequal incidence of police killings against this demographic group in Brazil has been widely denounced and discussed by studies on systemic racism (Cardia 1997, 264; Namaste 1999, 35; Paes-Machado and Noronha 2002, 204, 219; Barros 2008, 150; Vargas and Alves 2009, 613; Duarte et al. 2014, 116; Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 132; Schlittler 2016, 71-75; Benício et al. 2018, 199-200; Alves 2019, 81-83; Reist 2019, 76; Anunciação et al. 2020, 3, 8).

Aiming to explain how public security institutions, when communicating with the wide population, have argued about the use of lethal police approaches in Black and low-income territories in Brazil, I have formulated the following research question: How has official rhetoric regarding police killings framed the use of lethal police force in Brazilian *favelas* and poor suburbs over time?

This thesis focuses on the work of the military police of the state of Rio de Janeiro, which is one of the most lethal police forces in Brazil (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 14, 20). I collected speeches emitted by spokespersons of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police regarding emblematic episodes of lethal police violence that occurred across four political periods: 2008 - 2012, 2013 - 2016, 2017 - 2018, and 2019 - 2022. I applied the framework of discursive institutionalism and the methodology of discourse analysis to analyze official discourses that were published in media and Internet channels with a wide audience. Additionally, I used a comparative

approach to understand the similarities and differences between the outcomes from different periods (Maldidier 1971; Namaste 1999, 35; Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312).

Analyzing widely disseminated official speeches that focus on the general population as the main interlocutor has allowed me to identify what public security institutions have turned into "communicative discourses" when the subject is the lethal responses of the police in *favelas* and poor suburbs (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312). The study of emblematic cases from four different political periods allowed to find eight modalities of arguments in public security discourses, which were categorized as follows: risk context, criminalization, third-party perpetrators, fatality, misconduct, defense of the approach, critique of the approach, institution targeted. Most of the eight types of argument mapped in the data set were present in each of the four periods. There was no political period that offered a specific modality of argument that could help to outline a distinct discursive trend. However, it was possible to identify some variations in the frequency of each type of argument according to political period.

After comparing data collected from four political periods, I contend that over time "communicative discourses" have operated ideologically more to sustain than to change the way public security institutions deal with police killings. "Rhetorical frames" and "discursive abilities" have primarily conveyed a lack of institutional self-critique regarding the disproportionate use of lethal approaches (Schmidt 2002, 169; Béland 2009,706). This was expressed by: a) arguing that the circumstances/contexts, due to the "risks" they posed, compelled the police to use lethal force in the episodes analyzed; b) asserting that the institution was not directly responsible for the killings; c) explicitly defending the public security model in force, or more specifically the police approach in the episodes analyzed; d) sometimes claiming that there was a political interest behind the repercussions of these episodes.

When public security institutions, in addition to perpetuating hyper-violent approaches over the years, fail to offer the public a more critical discursive framing of this problem, they further contribute to the trivialization of Afro-Brazilian deaths in low-income territories.

This work demonstrates pathways for understanding how policy institutions create argumentative and ideological mechanisms to justify policy choices. It highlights the significance of discursive institutionalism in comprehending the role of discourse not only in processes of policy change but also in situations of policy maintenance (Schmidt 2002, 169-170; Schmidt 2008, 303-305; Béland 2009, 703-704).

Next, I will introduce aspects of the institutional and societal contexts of the problem of lethal police violence in Brazil that were considered when conducting this study.

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIETAL CONTEXTS OF THE PROBLEM OF LETHAL POLICE VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL

In Brazil, the federal, state, and municipal governments have different competencies in managing public security institutions. With regard specifically to the police, the federal government is responsible for managing the federal police, the federal highway police, and the federal railway police. All of them deal with issues that impact more than one state or involve borders with other countries. Each Brazilian state and the federal district manage the civil police, who investigate cases that violate the penal code and the military police, who act preventing and intervening in issues that impact public order. The federal, state and district governments are also responsible for managing their respective penal police forces, which are responsible for the security of prison institutions. The municipalities manage the work of the municipal guards, responsible for preventive and community public security actions (Donato 2016, 37-38; Constitutional Amendment No.104, 2019; Pereira 2021, 64-65).

There are parameters and national laws to guide the work of the polices (Bueno et al. 2020 86), but there are also variations in the ways each Brazilian state organizes itself internally to manage public security policies and coordinate the work of the polices in particular (Costa 2018, 156). Moreover, although the abusive use of lethal police force is a significant and persistent problem in Brazil's history, affecting all states to some extent, the numbers of police killings vary greatly between these states. Currently, Amapá, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Sergipe, Pará and Goiás concentrate a much higher volume of deaths resulting from police intervention compared to Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, and Piauí, for example (Pacheco and Marques 2023, 62-63). Here I highlight two factors that together can influence the continuation of high rates of lethal violence in states such as Rio de Janeiro: the perpetuation of models of management of public security at the state level and, consequently, the decision of those in charge of policing policies to continue reproducing patterns of institutional design and functioning of the polices.

However, in Brazil the support for the presence of hyper-violent police approaches in certain territories and in dealing with certain demographic groups has never been limited to the institutional environment. The proverb "a good thug is a dead thug", for example, has remained quite popular throughout different historical periods and expresses a persistent belief system in force in Brazil that hierarchizes the values of lives. And, as discussed by the literature dedicated to racial studies, this hierarchization of the value of different human lives has colonialist roots, structures both Brazilian society and institutions and is based on racial criteria according to which the lives of white people are more valuable than the lives of people of color (Schlittler 2016, 246; Alves 2019, 83). The origins of the rhetoric "a good thug is a dead thug" date back to the end of the slavery period (1888) and the proclamation of the republic (1889) when people with African origins who had been exploited as slave workforce were replaced by free European workers on the farms, manufacturing activities, and trade. By investing in the free workforce of Europeans, there was a deliberate state effort to promote the whitening of Brazilian population. This was a determining factor in keeping Black and brown-skinned people out of the labor market, in a situation of extreme

poverty, and on the margins of society. With the urbanization of cities and the exclusion of Afro-Brazilians from this process, they were compelled to occupy the areas that constituted the first Brazilian *favela*s. In that process, "vigilant" practices were consolidated towards the territories occupied by this population, who was no longer seen by the state and elites as a commodity but as "marginal" and threat to the security of "good people". The aim was to keep the cities as exempt as possible from the presence of Afro-Brazilians, and the use of extreme repression and state violence was considered pertinent to ensure this (Rolnik 2007, 78-82, 89).

This brief overview helps to understand how police institutions have not been operating as ideological islands throughout history. They, their representatives, and the discourses issued by them have been inserted in a wider context of both trivialization of authoritarian practices and racism.

Studies on racism show that the logic of criminalizing Black and brown-skinned people is still very much present in the speeches and practices of ordinary people in Brazil. One of the racist ideas that have been part of the prevailing belief system in Brazil can be paraphrased as follows: "Black men look more like criminals than the white ones". Although this idea is often not explicitly stated, there are studies that show that people are much more likely to associate the image of an Afro-Brazilian man with that of a person involved in crime (Benício et al. 2018, 199; Anunciação et al. 2020, 7).

Brazilian society, even though it experiences great racial inequalities and reproduces racism in daily-based relationships, has learned to polish discourse trying to hide racist ideas. Discourses based on racist ideas but that seek to mask or attenuate these ideas are among the main resources that underpin the myth of racial democracy, which is a central component of Brazilian national identity. The myth of racial democracy is the ideology according to which miscegenation prevents the existence of racism and even the precise differentiation between who is Black and who is white in Brazil (Ribeiro 2019, 9-11).

Nevertheless, counter-discourses on police violence and authoritarian practices also exist in Brazil. In the public arena these other discourses have been expressed mainly by social movements, community leaders living in poor and Black territories, and through public denounces made by family and friends of lethal victims, as well as by academics and other specialists that dedicate themselves to the study of the theme. Community leaders, anti-racist movements and those led by mothers and relatives of victims are the main political forces in the struggle against lethal police violence in Brazil. For years, they have united their voices to denounce institutional racism within the police, defend the memory of the victims, demand accountability for those responsible for the crimes, call for the abolition of institutional and legal mechanisms that hinder or prevent proper investigations of police killings, and advocate for the demilitarization of the police (Alves 2019, 87).

Also, in the last decade the self-entitled Anti-Fascism Police have begun to mobilize to deconstruct the idea of police officers as "warriors" or "heroes" and strengthen their identity as "workers", to defend human rights, and to call for the reformulation of the prevailing public

security model. They bring together workers from various sectors of public security, including the military, civil, criminal, and federal police forces, municipal guards, fire departments, and the socio-educational system[1]. According to their leaders, in 2022 they had over 700 members. This number still represents a minority within the public security workforce, considering that between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, Brazil recorded 682,279 people working as police officers in the previously mentioned sectors (excluding other positions within the public security organizational chart). As a demographic and ideological minority within public security, members of the Anti-Fascism Police report being targeted for internal discredit and persecution (Policiais Antifascimo 2020, 1-2; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2022, 462; Monteiro 2022, 99-102, 153).

The institutional speeches analyzed for this thesis were publicized within the institutional and societal contexts briefly outlined in this chapter. In the methodology chapter, I will further explore why it is essential to understand these contexts when analyzing speeches issued by institutional spokespersons. Therefore, when reading the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind that my considerations were made taking these contexts into account, as well as the specificities of the different political periods that I will present in the case study chapter.

STATE OF THE FIELD

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses how scholars have approached the persistent problem of police violence in Brazil from an institutional perspective. The second section explains my choice of discursive institutionalism as the theoretical framework for guiding this study.

Studies on Police Violence in Brazil

In this section I discuss how studies on police violence contribute to explain from an institutional perspective the high and ongoing incidence of police killings in *favelas* and poor suburbs in Brazil. I also identify gaps that have not been fully addressed by these studies.

Since the 1990s, following the process of re-democratization, the phenomenon of police violence has been more studied in academic research of public security policies (Cardia 1997, 252; Zaluar 1999, 9; Muniz et al. 2018, 151, 156; Sinhoretto and Moraes 2018, 21-24; Durão and Coelho 2020, 78, 94).

These studies are quite heterogeneous in terms of the areas of knowledge, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, as well as the sub-themes and research questions they explore. There is also a variety of cases studied across Brazil, although the city of Rio de Janeiro and its metropolitan

[1] The socio-educational system is responsible for public policies targeting adolescents accused of committing illegal acts.

region are among the most commonly examined. This focus is generally justified by the high incidence of reported cases in this region and the significant public visibility they have received (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020, 24; 2021, 61-65; 2023, 62, 63).

In reviewing the literature on the subject, I identified three main factors that scholars frequently associate with police violence when explaining why this problem persists over the years in Brazil: police culture (Adorno and Peralva 1997, 2; Porto 2004, 133; Poncioni 2005, 599); institutional structure of social control (Cardia 1997, 249; Zaluar 1999, 9; Caldeira 2002, 236; Paes-Machado and Noronha 2002, 189; Guimarães et al. 2005, 270; Alves and Evanson 2011; Costa and Thompson 2011, 30-31; Ribeiro and Montandon 2015, 68; Guerra 2016, 115; Francisco de Assis 2020, 12-13; Godoi et al. 2020, 62); and systemic racism (Barros 2008, 136; Vargas and Alves 2009, 616; Duarte et al. 2014, 103; Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 123; Schlittler 2016, 319-320; Benicio et al. 2018, 200-201; Sinhoretto and Morais 2018, 17-19; Alves 2019, 81-83; Anunciação et al. 2020, 3-4; Wermuth et al 2020, 135).

To present a review of this literature, I grouped the bibliography based on which of these three factors each study prioritizes when addressing the problem of police violence. However, it is important to point out that most of these studies understand police violence as a complex phenomenon and, thus, affected simultaneously by more than one of these factors, as well as other sociological, political and psychosocial secondary aspects. Although there are divergences in these studies regarding which factors are predominant in explaining the recurrence of police violence, I have also identified considerable complementarity between findings of studies on police culture, institutional structure of social control, and systemic racism.

In the paragraphs that follow, contributions from studies on police violence that focus on police culture, institutional structures of social control and systemic racism will be presented and then I will indicate some gaps or themes that could be more widely discussed.

Research on police culture and violence usually describes police institutional protocols, police internal organization, shared “practices and knowledge” and aspects of police officers' professional identity (Adorno and Peralva 1997, Porto 2004, Poncioni 2005, Muniz et al. 2018). This literature addresses many common features of the Brazilian police culture in different federated states, among them, the shared idea that ostensive repression is the best answer to security problems (Adorno and Peralva 1997, 3; Poncioni 2005, 599). It also helps identify how concepts such as the “war on crime” and “killing bandits” permeate societal understanding of the police's role, influence perceptions of their alleged objectives, and shape police culture." (Porto 2004, 135-136; Poncioni 2005, 59). Some scholars warn about a certain tendency in studies of police culture to treat it as almost inherently “unchangeable” (Muniz et al. 2018, 168-169; Durão and Coelho 2020, 92). This makes it difficult to move beyond merely identifying the problem of excessive use of force and toward explaining how the institutional structures and mechanisms that sustain a violent police culture operate, for example (Muniz et al. 2018, 169).

The literature that correlates police violence to the institutional structures of social control in turn, explores the ways in which different institutions are structured and complementarily act to

maintain the "social order". It discusses how the very institutional structure of the military police favors excessively violent approaches and how this helps maintain a certain "social order" or "structure of domination," serving the interests of political elites (Caldeira 2002, 236; Costa and Thompson 2011, 30-31; Guerra 2016, 115). Some studies discuss how the military dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil, left a legacy of institutional organization that still influences the structure of policing and incarceration policies today. Since then, mechanisms for punishing police deviations, for example, have changed little. They continue to be applied by "military jurisdictions" and military courts, without the interference of the common Brazilian justice or oversight bodies composed by representatives of civil society (Costa and Thompson 2011, 28-29). Furthermore, the logic of treating the preferred targets of police violence as "enemies", reinforced by the authoritarian regime, still influence the functioning of police institutions nowadays (Guerra 2016, 14). Others studies point out that police violence as a way of exercising social control precedes the installation of the military dictatorship in the country, which brings clues to understanding why the establishment of a democratic government did not result in a rupture with excessively violent practices (Costa and Thompson 2011, 30-31). Although not all studies trace the origins of the problem in the same way, there is a consensus that, despite the end of the dictatorship, the police continued to have distinctive power to act arbitrarily and resist changes that could dilute modes of operation considered by officials to be part of their institutional culture. Thus, the lack of both "transparency" and "accountability" in police activity prevailed as a problem after the democratic transition. Also, the existing mechanisms to control the police activity, such as the "internal-affairs units" and the "ombudsman" continue to have few "political and functional autonomy" (Leeds 2007, 23; Willis 2014, 4).

The literature that correlates the institutional structure of social control to police violence does not explore in-depth how the targets of police violence are defined and the coexistence of more than one target group according to the political moment. This literature especially does not explore in-depth why some groups targeted in specific political periods were no longer considered targets in others, while others groups continue to be targeted throughout different political periods, as is the case of Afro-Brazilians living in low-income territories in Brazil. During the military dictatorship, for example, the prevailing security paradigm was that of national security, which focused on the "defense of the state and of political and social order" (Freire 2009, 50). It was common for police violence to be directed at anyone or any group deemed contrary to the "national order" (the "internal enemies" or "communists"), which came to include members of pro-democracy parties, unionists, social movement activists, intellectuals, journalists, middle-class students and teachers, and members of less conservative sectors of the Catholic Church. Some of these sectors of society had previously been more spared from police violence (Cardia 1997, 250; Freire 2009, 50). Since the democratic transition, the idea of violently targeting "internal enemies of the state" has become less relevant, leading to a reduction in violent repressive actions against these groups. However, while police violence against white and middle-class left-wing leaders has significantly reduced after the downfall of the authoritarian regime, Black and poor activists have continued to denounce police abuses (Cardia 1997, 250-251). In fact, Afro-Brazilians living in poor

suburbs and favelas, often labeled as "marginals," have never ceased to be heavily targeted by police violence, as discussed in the previous chapter. (Rolnik 2007, 88-89; Benicio et al. 2018, 201; Alves 2020, 16-17, 25-26). Since the Constitution of 1988 (currently in force) established that the role of public security should be to "preserve public order and the safety of people and property" (Freire 2009, 51), we have seen the consolidation of the idea of antagonism between the police and "bandits", who have been considered a major threat to achieving these goals. During the administration of the president Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), there was an even greater intensification of this reasoning (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020, 84; 162; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021, 24-25, 305, 307; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2022b, 28, 66). Also, during this period, although the political regime maintained certain formal democratic characteristics, Brazilians witnessed an increase in police repression and political violence against sectors that had previously been targets of the military dictatorship (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020, 164).

Research on systemic racism has been crucial in addressing a gap observed in the literature that links police violence to institutional structures of social control, since it has significantly contributed to characterize which groups and territories have been preferentially targeted by police violence and, more specifically, by police killings, over time.

Studies on systemic racism have brought racial profiling to the forefront through critical analyses of data on lethal police violence, integrating this with data that trace the socioeconomic and racial profiles of both direct and indirect victims. This have been fundamental to challenge the academic debate on urban violence and public security to acknowledge that racism is the starting point to explain why the main victims of deaths resulting from police intervention have been Afro-Brazilians living in low-income territories. Those studies rely on data and reports from different periods to demonstrate that since the end of the 19th century – a period that coincides with the abolition of slavery, the proclamation of the republic, and the demographic growth in the cities and constitution of the first *favelas* – until today Afro-Brazilians living in poor suburbs and *favelas*, regardless of whether they have a prior engagement with crime, comprise the group that has remained stable as a target of lethal police violence (Rolnik 2007, 88-89; Benicio et al. 2018, 201; Alves 2020, 16-17, 25-26). People who are part of this group are often identified by police officers as another kind of "enemy", the "bandit", whose existence does not threaten the state but private property and the well-being of "good citizens" (Barros 2008, 147). Studies on systemic racism also point out that socioeconomic inequalities are not sufficient to explain the unequal incidence of police killings in the Brazilian population. First, those studies acknowledge that socioeconomic inequalities are direct consequences of systemic racism in Brazil, which explains why the vast majority of the inhabitants of low-income territories targeted by police violence are Afro-Brazilians, while Brazilian elites remain overwhelmingly white. In addition, this literature points out that since people living in low-income territories are predominantly non-white their lives are usually considered by the state and the elites as less valuable. This would be the main reason why these territories are approached with much more violence than the luxury condos where drug dealing and other illegalities are often found. Furthermore, those studies also demonstrate that due to racism

white people living in poor suburbs and *favelas* have fewer chances of being lethally targeted than Black and brown-skinned inhabitants. So, it is essential to address the racial dimension of police killings as a structural issue in order to obtain more accurate analyses of this problem's occurrence (Rolnik 2007, 79-83; Barros 2008, 140; Vargas and Alves 2009, 613; Duarte et al. 2014, 84; Benicio et al. 2018, 199; Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 134; Sinhoretto and Morais 2018, 23, Alves 2020, 7). This is especially relevant in a context in which a greater part of the society and state officials have learned how to polish discourses and argue that the miscegenation of the population and the impossibility of precisely define who is Black and who is not in Brazil prevents the occurrence of racism (Ribeiro 2019, 9-11). My research is in line with this reasoning according to which the influences of systemic racism in institutional responses is the starting point to explain why lethal police violence unequally affects Black and brown-skinned people living in low-income territories. And considering the extensive knowledge produced by the literature on systemic racism, I decided not to focus on proving whether racism is underlying institutional public discourses in this thesis. The idea that racism is a factor that directly influences the functioning of public security institutions is an assumption of this work. So, regardless of whether the institutional discourse uses words or expressions that are considered explicitly racists, it has already been empirically demonstrated that racism is at the base of the problem of police killings in *favelas* and poor suburbs of Brazil (Rolnik 2007, Barros 2008, Duarte et al. 2014, Alves 2020).

Another frequent characteristic of studies on systemic racism, many of them carried out by Afro-Brazilian researchers, is giving more space to the narratives of victim-survivors, their relatives, and activists, highlighting the importance of their experiences and knowledge to better approach the problem (Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 138-139; Benício et al. 2018; 196; Sinhoretto and Morais 2018, 19-22; Alves 2019, 85-86; Anunciação et. al 2020, 4). This ethical-political orientation has historically been claimed by anti-police violence activists and community leaders, tired of being traditionally sought by researchers only as data sources, privileged informants, but little considered as producers of thoughts that are decisive for a better understanding of the problem of lethal police violence. I consider that the need to listen in depth to those who are directly or indirectly affected by police violence explains why these researchers have produced less studies that took public security officials as the main interlocutors. Also, based on the assumption that racism impacts the functioning of public security institutions, it is worth asking whether police institutions have allowed good access to researchers explicitly studying institutional racism, particularly when it comes to Brazilian scholars of color.

Most studies on systemic racism that address institutional discourses are dedicated to analyzing the content of police reports registered by officers who killed a civilian during their work activity. These studies highlight the recurrent use of the resistance reports (*autos de resistência* in Portuguese) by military police officers to justify to the institution and oversight bodies why lethal force was used during police intervention. The resistance reports are a specific procedure for documenting cases of police intervention that resulted in death, where it is alleged that the victim(s) resisted arrest and posed a risk to police officers or others, making the use of lethal force deemed indispensable (Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 128-129; Schlittler 2016, 34-35, 246). They are, therefore,

more intended to explain what Schmidt (2002, 2008) calls “coordinating discourses”, which I will present better in the chapter on discursive institutionalism, but which in general terms can be said to be directed at interlocutors within the policy arena (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312). Two important conclusions of those studies are that the resistance reports are unequally applied to justify the homicides of Afro-Brazilians in *favelas* and they function as a legal mechanism used to protect perpetrators of police violence from any investigation and/or punishment for abusive practices (Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 128; Schlittler 2016, 34-35, 246). The most common record found is the one in which police officers claim to have killed because the victim represented a threat to their lives (Schlittler 2016, 246). According to the law, this record, usually made in a few words, is typically sufficient to conclude that no further investigation is needed to determine if there was any abuse of power during the intervention (Schlittler 2016, 34-35). It is literally the record of the perpetrator's voice against the silence of the dead person or any witnesses. These studies are very important for several reasons, but here I will highlight three: 1) They indirectly indicate how the authoritarian legacy also influences the continuity of violent practices even today, since the resistance reports are a mechanism created during the Brazilian military dictatorship. 2) They show which are the narratives used to formally justify the use of lethal violence within public security institutions and for institutions responsible for overseeing and judging police conduct. 3) By crossing data on victims' life history and the content of the resistance reports, they show the inconsistencies of numerous officers' narratives, many of them treating as a threat people who were never involved with the crime or previous episodes of confrontation with the police.

As part of the efforts to understand what has sustained hyperviolent police practices in low-income territories throughout the years, I argue that it is also relevant to explain how public security institutions justify those practices to the wide population. Popular support or rejection can either facilitate or make more difficult the continuity of these practices (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312).

That's why I focused my research on explaining how public security institutions, through their representatives` public speeches, have framed over the years public arguments about the use of lethal force in episodes of police killing that gained public visibility.

This thesis demonstrates how the framework of discursive institutionalism can contribute to explaining rhetorical mechanisms that public institutions use to justify their approaches to the general population.

Finally, before moving on to the next section, I will summarize the main gaps that I have identified in the literature on police violence in Brazil: Neither studies that focus on the institutional structure of social control nor those concentrated on police culture explain in detail the relationship between the police and groups preferentially targeted by police violence. They do not explain in depth who in practice is the preferred target of both the social control carried out through police violence and the violent police culture, and why these targets are preferred. The literature focused on systemic racism advances our understanding by identifying racist police responses as an institutional problem rather than an individual deviation, describing target groups and territories, and

providing an in-depth analysis of the experiences of both direct and indirect victims of police violence. Some researchers have also devoted themselves to understanding how perpetrators justify the use of lethal force within institutions. Nevertheless, studies that delve deeply into the "communicative discourses" issued by public security institutions in the public arena and directed at the wider population can still be further explored (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312). The concept of “communicative discourses¨ will be better presented in the chapter on discursive institutionalism.

I contend that the analysis of institutional public discourses regarding police killings can complement the work of the studies reviewed here, as the institutional efforts to change or maintain policy practices also involve communication and persuasion with the population. Analyzing the discursive mechanisms employed by state institutions across different political periods to publicly explain concrete cases of police killings can enhance our understanding of how these institutions have ideologically justified police violence in their communications with the general public over time.

Despite the gaps discussed, I do not consider that this thesis necessarily contradicts the contributions made by other studies on police culture, institutional structure of social control and systemic racism. The results and conclusions that will be presented here can complement many of those reached by these studies. Likewise, information provided by many of these other studies were used as a background for the development of this thesis. In the previous chapter, for example, I relied on contributions from studies on institutional structure of social control and systemic racism to present relevant aspects of the institutional and societal contexts of the problem of lethal police violence in Brazil.

Discursive Institutionalism and the Institutional Rhetoric on Policy Change / Maintenance

Having presented a summary of the institutional and societal background of the problem of police violence and an overview of the main discussions led by the literature on this subject, here I will expose the reasons that led me to choose discursive institutionalism as the theoretical framework for this study. I will discuss how discursive institutionalism, by contributing to the understanding of the role of ideas in policy change and maintenance, helps to explain how public security institutions in Brazil justify the recurrent application of lethal force in *favelas* and poor suburbs in Brazil (Béland 2009; Schmidt 2002, 2008).

As previously discussed, despite the undeniable contributions of studies that correlate police violence with police culture, the institutional structure of social control, and systemic racism, they usually do not explain in-depth some institutional mechanisms that, being shaped by those wide-ranging factors, have been used in the public sphere to sustain the recurrent use of lethal police violence in favelas and poor suburbs in Brazil throughout the years.

I argue that the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism helps to explain at least one of these mechanisms, since it demonstrates the means by which institutional discourses are

used to justify, defend and sustain “policy choices”, influencing the process of policy maintenance or change (Schmidt 2002, 169-170; Schmidt 2008, 303-305; Béland 2009, 703-704).

I have chosen this theoretical approach as part of an attempt to avoid treating police institutions only as a "given" reality, analytically subordinating agency (actions) to structure (consolidated “rules”) to the point that the continuity of institutional practices is treated as something almost inherent that requires no explanation (Schmidt 2008, 313-314). Nonetheless, by working with discursive institutionalism and considering information provided by studies previously mentioned about how police institutions have changed little in Brazil, I also considered those institutions sufficiently stable to constitute the background where policy actors reason, express ideas, and act. This means that, on the one hand, I assume that police institutions, as stable entities, to a certain extent delimit the space for communication and action of these actors. But on the other hand, they only function because of these actors and are influenced by them. This means that even though these institutions are stable, they are “contingent”, that is, derived from people's reasoning, deliberation, decision-making and initiatives, thus being able to experience changes (Schmidt 2008, 313-314). The use of discursive institutionalism as the theoretical framework guiding this work was also an effort to escape the risks of individualizing the problem of lethal police violence, something that is common in analyses that are limited to evaluating police officers' behavior and “self-interests”, which ends up helping to absolve public institutions of their accountability (Schmidt 2008, 317-318; Alves 2019, 81).

Vivien Schmidt (2002, 2008) argues that the concept of discourse is very relevant when one tries to better understand the importance of ideas in the processes of policy change or maintenance. In this thesis I apply the definition of discourse used by this author: “the interactive process of conveying ideas” (Schmidt 2002, 190; Schmidt 2008, 303). When justifying the relevance of addressing discourse while studying policies, Schmidt reminds us that a central part of the work of government representatives is to elaborate and transmit ideas through discourses, which will be objects of public debate and decision-making (Schmidt 2002; Schmidt 2008, 303, 305). According to this author:

> Discourse is not just ideas or “text” (what is said) but also context (where, when, how, and why it was said). The term refers not only to structure (what is said, or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom)” (…). In the representation of ideas, any given discourse may serve to articulate not only different levels of ideas (policy, programmatic, and philosophical […]) and different types of ideas (cognitive and normative) but also different forms of ideas – narratives, myths, frames, collective memories, stories, scripts, scenarios, images, and more. (…) Moreover, discourse may intersperse technical and scientific arguments with more generally accessible narratives that fit together the specialists’ arguments with accounts of events, emblematic cases, and even doomsday scenarios to generate compelling stories about the causes of current problems, what needs to be done to remedy them, and how they fit with the underlying values of the society (Schmidt 2008, 305, 309).

By turning institutional discourses into central objects of analysis, discursive institutionalism enables an accurate and well-contextualized analysis of communication dynamics in the policy process. These communication dynamics involve what Schmidt (2008) names “foreground

discursive abilities" – the policy actors' capacity to reason, talk about and make decisions about institutional changes or continuity. This capacity is influenced by the ideational scenario where those policy actors are inserted, which forms their "background institutional abilities". Discursive "abilities" can help public administrators to support, for example, policies that might initially be unwelcomed by actors who influence the policy process (Schmidt 2002, 169).

Daniel Béland (2009) indicates three fundamental relations between ideas and policy change. The first of them refers to how the definition of policy problems frames the "policy agenda" to some points and not others. For example, a set of argumentative positions through which the debate on a policy issue will take place is defined by excluding alternative reasonings (Béland 2009, 703). Second, ideas function as "economic and social assumptions that either legitimize or challenge existing institutions and policies". Those assumptions influence the definition of issues to be solved through policy, objectives, and policy tools (Béland 2009, 705). And lastly, ideas may work as "ideological" apparatuses applied to justify calls for "reform" (Béland 2009, 705). In this thesis I focus mainly on the second interaction between ideas and policy change/continuity.

Schmidt (2002, 2008) distinguishes between two modalities of institutional discourses that are relevant to understand processes related to policy change and maintenance: "coordinating discourses" and "communicative discourses". Both are oriented toward achieving some "consensus" among relevant actors regarding policy modification or permanence. Coordinating discourses are identifiable in the policy arena, in the practices of "persuasion" among "policy actors" directly involved in the definition or perpetuation of a given policy. This kind of discourse is based on persuasive strategies and "bargaining" for the creation of some "agreement" that allows the implementation or continuity of the policy. Communicative discourses are applied in the political arena for convincing a wider and plural audience composed of the "electorate" and other "political actors" about the need (or no need) for policy change (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312). However, policies can also be transformed or maintained without consensus between multiple actors being previously reached. For example, the possibility of consulting the wider audience about a particular policy can be ignored by certain policy makers either to avoid the ideas being a priori rejected or because they consider that the matter will not receive the proper public attention (Schmidt 2008, 311). My work focuses mainly on communicative discourses, since it analyzes public statements made by public security officials to the general population to report and evaluate the performance of the police in episodes of police killings.

Béland (2009) names the symbolic content used to persuade actors on a policy issue as "rhetorical frame". The use of rhetorical frames is an important institutional tool, applied to justify the need to develop, change, or maintaining a particular policy. This author suggests that rhetorical frames are culturally embedded, i.e., they are influenced by socially available meanings, "symbols", and stories (Béland 2009, 706). This is quite convergent with the concept of "ideological propositions" used by scholars who apply discourse analysis (Namaste, 1999), the methodology that I adopted for interpreting institutional discourses. In line with this, the analyses derived from this study started from the identification and categorization of "rhetorical frames" expressed

through institutional public speeches regarding episodes of police killing in *favelas* and poor suburbs. I consider that using discourse analysis to understand how these rhetorical frames have been structured and expressed helps to explain how official discourse has been applied by security policy officials in the public arena to justify excessively violent police approaches.

While this thesis neither cover analyses of how ideas interact with "institutional constraints" nor measures the impact of different actors on the consolidation or refutation of institutional discourses and policy changes, I acknowledge the importance of these elements for achieving policy change or maintenance (Béland 2009, 703, 706-708). As explained earlier, my analyses focus on how through official statements made in the public arena institutions apply rhetorical frames as a tool to argue about the use of lethal force in Black and low-income territories. I have not addressed the effectiveness of this mechanism in sustaining such policy response, which would be a subject for complementary research.

METHODOLOGY

Defining the Type of Data to be Collected and the Political Periods to be Considered

To develop my argument, I carried out a case study on how public security officials in four different political periods publicly express understandings about emblematic episodes of police killing that occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which has one of the highest rates of deaths resulting from police intervention in Brazil (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023, 14, 20).

Public security is a matter of concern for many people in Brazil. Police interventions resulting in death are often addressed by media and it is common for security policies officials to receive significant public space to comment on them (Palermo 2018, 214; G1 2019a; G1 2019b). Given that Brazilian public opinion often trivializes police violence, policy officials usually find somehow comfortable spaces for expressing institutional understandings about police killing on media and Internet channels (Paes-Machado e Noronha 2002, 218). Consequently, this material becomes a relevant source for accessing official and consolidated discourses on violent policy responses (Palermo 2018, 214).

If one wants to analyze public institutional discourses about police killings, it is helpful to work with a known case of high incidence of this problem. Since the public security problems of Rio de Janeiro often receive prominence in research, news portals and other media channels, compared to other Brazilian cities, episodes of police killing that occur in Rio gain more public visibility and are the target of more public debate. The more episodes of police killing gain public visibility the more institutions are required to speak publicly about them. The more public speeches about the problem the greater the chances of capturing the nuances of the discursive framing process.

In this study episodes of police killing that have gained greater public visibility in the media, have become known by public opinion, and being subjects of public debate in four different political periods were considered as emblematic episodes.

Those episodes exceptionally generated commotion in part of the public opinion, which pressured the security institutions to position themselves publicly. Even though they could have worked as a trigger for the police to change its ways of operating, this did not happen. On the contrary, despite the debate generated around these cases, the use of lethal force against populations in Black and low-income territories continued. This makes these cases relevant for investigating how public security institutions have justified this kind of practice.

As this study focuses on institutional communicative discourses directed to the general population, I decided to work with public statements and interviews provided by public security spokespersons regarding the selected police killing episodes.

Working with public statements made it possible to address discourses whose wide publication (and subsequent debate) was already consented to by the speakers when they decided to speak in the media and on the Internet. Since the guiding question of this work is focused on the institutional/collective level of analysis, the analyses and critiques emerging from it were primarily directed at institutions rather than at each specific individual speaking on their behalf.

The analyses regarding each episode of police killing covered the period from the date of its occurrence until the end of the last analyzed period, aiming to contemplate changes in institutional narratives that may have occurred across different political eras. I considered all public statements made by public security officials found in the selected sources and published within this time frame as a way to obtain a comprehensive view of the institutional narratives created around each episode.

By working with episodes of police killing that occurred in four political periods, it was possible to consider the influences of different political contexts on the production and dissemination of institutional discourses while analyzing those discourses. To define the boundaries between these political periods, I considered historical and political milestones that led to changes on the management and/or provision of military policing policy in Rio de Janeiro. This explains why some periods are shorter in duration than others. The historical and political milestones that I used as references to delimit those four political periods ranged from changes in the political tendencies of the parties in rule to significant variations in the credibility that public opinion was conferring on military policing policies, or even the occurrence of specific events such as the Olympics and the World Cup that were understood by public administrators as reasons to make changes in policing provision in certain territories. I considered as alteration on the provision of military policing policy in Rio de Janeiro any significant approach related to one or more of these factors: a) the implementation of programs or measures that propose some significant rupture with one or more modes of police operation; b) the implementation of programs or measures that propose significant changes in the results of military policing policy; c) changes in the provision of funds for military policing programs; d) changes in the oversight of police activities; e) the perpetuation of new official

discourses redefining the role of the military police and the expected results of policing policies. I used secondary research data published in studies that describe and analyze public security policies in Rio de Janeiro to define the boundaries between periods and better understand the specificities of each one.

In the chapter presenting the case study, I will describe the particularities of each political period and indicate the historical and political milestones that led to changes in policy administration and/or the provision of military policing.

Spokespersons Whose Speeches Were Analyzed

For each political period considered I worked with speeches issued by those who are more directly responsible for the activity of the military police within public security policy at the state and federal levels. I chose spokespersons[2] from the state and federal levels because the state is responsible for the execution and management of the work done by the military police while the federal government must accompany and establish guidelines for this work. I also considered spokespersons from the military jurisdictions responsible for controlling police action at state and federal level.

The spokespersons chosen at the state level included officers from battalions and squads at different hierarchical levels (or lawyers representing them), state secretaries of public security, governors, and prosecutors from the military public ministry of Rio de Janeiro.

At the federal level, the spokespersons included prosecutors from the military public ministry, ministers of the military supreme court, the minister of justice and public security, and the president.

Data Sources

The institutional speeches selected to compose the discourse analysis *corpus*[3] were issued on Internet media channels, mainly news portals with a broad audience reach in Brazil. Official websites and social networks of both public security institutions and the individuals responsible for public security policy at the state and federal levels were also consulted, as well as some independent media portals. I sought to cover communication channels with different ideological tendencies, although most of the content was found in interviews and public statements that public security officials provided to more traditional media channels. The official statements analyzed in this research were obtained from the following sources.:

[2] In this work, I refer to military representatives and public security policy managers who were active during the administrations and periods in which case occurred as spokespersons. I did not include speeches from civil police officers, retired military personnel, or former administrators because I aimed to study the discourses of those considered more directly accountable for the performance of the military police during that political period.

[3] In this work, the *corpus* for the discourse analysis consists of the set of institutional statements that were subjected to this method of interpretation (Jäger and Maier 2016, 70).

Agência Brasil, BBC Brasil, Brasil 247, Carta Capital, Catraca Livre Cidadania, Correio Braziliense, Diário do Centro do Mundo, Defesanet, El País Brasil, Época, Estadão, Extra, Folha de São Paulo, IstoÉ, G1, Jair Bolsonaro's Twitter, Maré de Notícias, Metrópoles, O Dia, O Globo, PMERJ Twitter, Ponte Jornalismo, Portal Alta Definição, R7 Notícias, Senado Notícias, UOL, and Wilson Witzel's Twitter.

Why Apply Discourse Analysis to Public Institutional Speeches?

Researchers recurrently report difficulties of obtaining good access to public security institutions in Brazil for research data collection (Willis 2014, 7). Especially the access of external researchers to institutional data is usually highly regulated. Conditions required for dialogue and negotiate with people in charge of these institutions are not necessarily compatible with conditions available to the researchers in the specific time frame set for conducting field work, especially in the case of master's students. In some institutions, for example, representatives require prior reading of research proposals and approving researchers' access to institutional data can take a long time (Cubas and Branco 2019, 224-225). Certainly, working with discourses issued by officials in their day-to-day work brings important clues to understand how coordinative discourse appear in the ground of the public security policies. However, analyzing official discourses already published by institutions spokespersons can reveal interesting advantages as well, especially if we want to better understand communicative discourse processes (Van Dijk 1993, 256-257). With regard to the "discourse access profile" of different actors involved in security policies, when working with non-public / non-official statements it can be more difficult to separate what is a consolidated institutional discourse from the personal opinions of the people heard, especially if we are analyzing the speeches of those who, within the hierarchical structure of the institution, have less control over the institutional discourse. In this sense, working with public speeches issued by official spokespersons allows faster and more accurate access to discourses that are shaped institutionally, since these officials usually participate more actively in spaces where the official institutional discourse is formulated, being previously prepared / advised to speak on behalf of the institution (Van Dijk 1993, 256). Thus, carrying out a discourse analysis of statements published by official spokespersons made it possible to better understand what public security institutions were willing to communicate to the broad public about the episodes of police killing and to identify some rhetorical arrangements repeatedly applied to formulate institutional discourses.

Paradoxically, research focused on official speeches are also challenging, as the previous effort of polishing these speeches may camouflage aspects of the institutional culture whose transmission could jeopardize public support for the military police's work. This is why discourse analysis is particularly useful for studying official and public speeches. The interpretation of discourses through discourse analysis is not only concerned with what was said from a literal point of view, but also with how it was said (Namaste 1999, 26). It allows us to interpret the meaning of what is communicated in relation to the context, paying attention to contradictions, inconsistencies, euphemisms, and other "discursive abilities" used in constructing the discourse (Schmidt 2008, 314-316).

Carrying out discourse analysis made it possible to capture what was tacit in institutional speech. In addition, working with emblematic cases was a strategy to increase the chances of capturing the contradictions and inconsistencies that tend to appear when speakers must repeat several times and under pressure the institutional point of view on an issue that has generated wider public debate (Pêcheux and Fuchs 1997, 176-179).

To define the *corpus* for the discourse analysis, I first identified what were the most common things that public security spokespersons have said about the problem of police killing in each political period when referring to the episodes studied. Then I applied discourse analysis to discuss what institutions were actually communicating when these things were said.

Since secondary data providers also play a role in framing discourses they share, whenever possible, I prioritized applying discourse analysis to those statements that were published using direct quotes to avoid misinterpretations produced by editors when paraphrasing speeches. When this was not possible, I sought to check whether the same paraphrased content was repeated in other publications and/or sources and whether the paraphrases were publicly refuted by the spokespersons or others on their behalf.

Conducting Discourse Analysis

My work conducting the discourse analysis focused particularly on two aspects of the security policy officials` discourses about the analyzed episodes of police killing:

1) How institutional discourses describe the problem that was sought to be solved using lethal police force in the episodes of police killing; how they refer to direct and indirect victims, as well as the affected territories; and how they describe the police response to this problem.
2) How institutional discourses evaluate the police's lethal response in the analyzed episodes and how they respond to critiques regarding the use of lethal force and claims for policy changes.

The first step of the discourse analysis was to carefully "read and re-read" statements that formed the *corpus* of the study to identify key sentences that condense ideas related to the two topics mentioned above. Those fragments, capable of condensing ideas are named by Pêcheux as "autonomous discursive sequences" and were the main units used for analysis (Pêcheux et al. 1997, 257; Nogueira 2001, 40). The speech quotations that you will see in the chapters on research results are examples of the autonomous discursive sequences that I worked with. While doing that I was paying attention to the fact that one same statement can combine more than one idea. Thus, the number of statements doesn't necessarily correspond to the number of autonomous discursive sequences.

To avoid misinterpretations, when working with autonomous discursive sequences I found in press materials I tried to differentiate between what was an editorial rhetorical effort and what were rhetorical strategies used by institutional speakers, which are the ones that really matter in

this study. In this sense, there were situations in which editors of a media channel repeated the same statement throughout a single article as a strategy to emphasize it or published more than one article repeating the same statement in order to keep the subject under debate. In this case, I only considered once each autonomous discursive sequence that was repeated by the editor. On the other hand, when an institutional spokesperson repeated a statement, either in the same context or in different ones, to reinforce the same argument, I considered all repeated autonomous discursive sequences because, in discourse analysis repetitions being used by the enunciator as a rhetorical resource are important to take into account.

After identifying these key sentences, I characterized how ideas are structured within them, examining the words that were selected to compose the ideas and how those words are allocated and articulated to produce meaning. While trying to examine how those sentences are composed, I interpreted not only what was said but how meanings are produced through them. I identified how words were used to produce effects of emphasizing or attenuating ideas. In some cases, the same phrase or word have different meanings depending on the ways it is placed in the statement or the context in which it is used. I also identified when and how words were organized to produce "metaphors" and what these metaphors inform. In addition, I compared those fragments searching for repetitions, "equivalences", "coherences" and incoherencies (Harris 1952, 5-7, 12; Nogueira 2001, 40-41). During this process, I considered how the sentences relate to other discourses that permeate the context of enunciation (Pêcheux 1997, 257; 77-79). Through these steps I verified whether the analyzed statements effectively function as rhetorical frames and if so, what kind of argument these rhetorical frames bring to the institutional communicative discourse regarding the use of lethal force in Black and low-income territories.

Since discourses are in constant interaction, being influenced, responding to, and sometimes overlapping each other, data collected was analyzed considering other public voices of agreement and disagreement regarding the same episodes, such as the speeches of journalists and editors, victims' relatives, witnesses, ordinary people belonging to different social classes, activists, and NGO officials (Namaste 1999). This helped to better understand to whom, and to which discourses the institutional statements are directed, two aspects that influence what words are used and how they are applied in framing processes (Namaste 1999, 26, 30-31, 35). I considered to which institutions and social actors the security institutions directed their statements, who were named in official discourses as audience and interlocutors (critics, supporters, and opponents). I sought to identify and read/listen what these interlocutors said publicly in media channels, websites, wide-ranging social media platforms, and previous studies about the episodes of police killing. When interpreting the institutional discourses, I considered the content of these other speeches I accessed, since they are important to understand the context of discursive production of the institutional speeches (Namaste 1999, 24). While analyzing institutional communicative discourses, it was also important to continuously ask to what extent the institutional rhetoric was somehow framed according to what public policy representatives believed the audience expected to hear (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312).

Given that it is important to take context into account when seeking to understand the production and enunciation of discourses (Namaste 1999, 24), I also considered socioeconomic characteristics of groups and territories that were targeted by lethal police violence in the episodes studied, as well as what the literature reveals about the social status and common stereotypes historically associated with this population (Vargas and Alves 2009; Alves 2020), a topic covered in the chapter The Institutional and Societal Contexts of the Problem of Lethal Police Violence in Brazil. As discussed in that chapter, racist discourses in Brazil do not necessarily employ explicitly racist language, but can still be based on and perpetuate racist ideas. Therefore, in working with official institutional discourses I did not expect that they would necessarily use words immediately perceived as racist. If that was expected, a content analysis would be enough as a methodology to work with these discourses. However, identifying racism in official rhetorical frames in the Brazilian context requires more sensible tools. In this case, discourse analysis is a good option, since it allows working with what is tacit in the narrative. The analysis of the interaction between prevailing ideas in a certain context and the discourses expressed by actors that belong to that context is what makes it possible to access what is behind the surface of the statements (Namaste 1999, 34-37). Discourse analysis allows us to identify, for example, the images (such as phenotypic traits and class membership) evoked by the term 'thug' in the widely used Brazilian proverb 'a good thug is a dead thug,' even when these images are not explicitly mentioned by the speaker.

I understand that the aim of discourse analysis is not to quantify rigid categories of arguments or compare their frequencies, but rather to explore the nuances and ways in which each idea identified operates. The guiding question of discourse analysis is not ‘what?’ or ‘how much?’ but ‘how?’. However, the research question driving this thesis also implicitly contains a comparative aspect: an interest in understanding how policy discourse framing operates over time, encompassing different epochs, which requires considering that political fluctuations may influence the results.

To better visualize and demonstrate how discourse on police killings varied across different political periods, I coded the types of arguments found in each period and measured their relative frequency, in addition to conducting the discourse analysis. This approach allowed me to understand the recurrence and prominence of certain arguments over different periods. The methodology for this complementary work will be presented in the next section. To maintain the focus of discourse analysis, I also paid attention to identifying period-specific arguments that could be critical to understanding the framing of lethal police violence and the nuances of communicative discourse in each period. Nonetheless, as shown in the results chapter, I did not find rhetorical frames unique to any single period.

Since the purpose of this research was not to explain why institutions use certain types of discourse over others, I did not establish causal links between variables in the data analysis. I consider that this would be a task for another research endeavor. However, by dialoguing with secondary data that inform about the context in which these discourses were produced, I tried to launch some clues on factors that may have influenced the greater incidence of certain discourses in

specific political periods to the detriment of others. These clues could be explored in future research to better understand what causes continuities and ruptures in institutional communicative discourses on police killing over the years.

Comparing Political Periods According to Official Institutional Speeches

To compare different political periods according to the types of arguments about police killing that were found, I took some steps:

First, for each political period I put together all autonomous discursive sequences functioning as rhetorical frames that were either describing or evaluating police interventions that resulted in death (Pêcheux et al. 1997, 257; Nogueira 2001, 40).

I read them all again and coded the types of arguments they used. Then, I utilized QDA Miner Lite software to estimate the frequency of each coded argument per period, rather than merely identifying recurrent arguments across periods.

It is important to note that the number of autonomous discursive sequences considered in each period varied significantly. Methodological choices, the specificities of the historical moment, and the communicative strategies of the governments in power are some of the factors I consider that influenced this variation. For example, more autonomous discursive sequences and, consequently, more arguments were found in period 4, compared to previous periods. This is probably related to the growth in recent years of investment by Brazilian media channels in the circulation of content through Internet, which was the source I prioritized for data collection. In addition, spokespersons from the Social Liberal Party (PSL), the Liberal Party (PL), and the Social Christian Party (PSC) in charge of federal and state governments during this period strategically disseminated their communicative discourses more through Internet channels, whereas in previous periods the transmission of official speeches over the Internet used to be more balanced with the use of written and televised channels. This trend of communication prioritizing Internet channels continued to be followed by subsequent administrations, even those with different political orientations. To prevent this type of bias from corrupting the comparison between periods, and because I didn't study the same number of cases in all periods, I tried to compare political periods by considering the proportional frequency of each type of argument per period (i.e. the percentage of occurrence of each code) rather than the absolute number of arguments in each period.

CASE STUDY

Political Periods Covered

The episodes of police killing covered by this thesis occurred in four different political periods. As detailed in the methodology chapter, the differentiation between these periods was defined based on historical and political milestones that resulted in changes on the management and/or provision of military policing policy in Rio de Janeiro. Next, I will provide a brief characterization of each political period.

1) The first political period covers the years from 2008 to 2012, when the state of Rio de Janeiro (along with its public security policy) was under the administration of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (MDB) – governor Sérgio Cabral Filho – while the federal government was under the administration of the Workers` Party (PT) – presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, respectively. During this period the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs), Brazil's most well-known public security policy, were implemented and consolidated. The UPPs were proposed based on a narrative that they would be an alternative to the existing policing policies, which were not effectively reducing crime rates. Their main goal would be to restore state control of poor territories ruled by drug gangs, the so-called "pacification". To achieve this goal, repressive police interventions would be used to remove drug dealers from the targeted areas and disrupt their activities. Additionally, the installation of permanent public security equipment and the provision of social services for residents were planned. The aim was to reduce crime rates in preparation for the World Cup and the Olympic Games, which were scheduled to take place in the city in 2014 and 2016, respectively (Müller 2018, 221-222, 235-237). According to policy makers, the main difference between UPPs and preexisting policies would be the establishment of a closer and more trusting relationship with the population in the territories occupied by the police (Muggah and Mulli 2012, 65; Hönke and Müller 2016, 87-88).

2) The second political period covers the years from 2013 to 2016, when the MDB was again in charge of the state of Rio de Janeiro – first under governor Sérgio Cabral Filho and then under governor Luiz Fernando Pezão. The Workers` Party (PT), led by president Dilma Rousseff, governed the federal government until 2016, when the MDB took power following an institutional coup d'état, and Michel Temer became president. During this period, Brazil hosted the World Cup and the Olympic Games, and the city of Rio de Janeiro experienced significant gentrification and increased police control in areas surrounding the stadiums, athletes' accommodations, and tourist sites. At that time, authorities aimed to show that pacification would provide the required security for those major events (Hönke and Müller 2016, 87; Freeman and Burgos 2016, 553; Saborio and Costa 2018, 76, 79; Machado et al. 2021, 83).

3) The third political period covers the years from 2017 to 2018, when the state remained under the administration of the MDB led by governor Luiz Fernando Pezão, who was later replaced by vice-governor Francisco Dornelles from the Progressive Party (PP) after Pezão's arrest in 2018 (G1 2018e). At that time, the federal government was led by the MDB under the leadership of Michel Temer. This period marked the downfall of the UPPs, which had been heavily criticized for failing to achieve sustainable results in reducing criminal activity as promised. Additionally, cases of abuse and police killings involving UPP officers gained significant public visibility, further contributing to their loss of credibility (Extra 2017a, Extra 2017b, G1 2017b, G1 2018a, G1 2018b, G1 2018c, Agência Brasil 2019a). In 2018 president Michel Temer, trying to gain more popular support for his government, transferred the control of public security policies from the state domain to the federal government, appointing the army to intervene directly in urban security issues previously addressed by the military police. This process was named federal intervention. The decree establishing the federal intervention stated that this measure aimed to "put an end to the serious deterioration of public order in Rio de Janeiro state" (Decree no. 9.288, of February 16, 2018, Souza and Soares 2019, 19-20; Pereira 2021, 123).

4) The fourth political period covers the years from 2019 to 2022, when the federal government was led by Jair Bolsonaro, who began his mandate affiliated with the Social Liberal Party (PSL) and switched to the Liberal Party (PL) in 2021. Bolsonaro used to present himself as a conservative politician aligned with far-right ideologies. His government was supported by a coalition of parties that have historically engaged in clientelism in the provision of services to the population and advocated for minimal state control over economic activities. The representatives of these allied parties have been mainly linked to the following sectors: the police, the arms industry, agribusiness, and evangelical churches. The government of Rio de Janeiro was led by Wilson Witzel, who was affiliated with the Social Christian Party (PSC) until 2021, when he was impeached and convicted for corruption. He was subsequently replaced by the vice-governor Cláudio Bonfim de Castro e Silva, who was affiliated with the PL. This period was characterized by increased political support for excessively violent police responses to public security concerns, advocacy for higher incarceration rates, greater leniency in firearms acquisition, and explicit rejection of human rights principles by governing politicians (Francisco de Assis 2020, 12; Santos et al. 2020, 35-36; Pereira 2021, 126,128, 151-153).

Episodes of Police Killing

In this section, the 12 episodes of police killings selected for analysis will be introduced. I will outline the key facts about these episodes that have been made public:

Period 1 (2008-2012)

Three young men from Morro da Providência case

Wellington Gonzaga Ferreira, David Wilson da Silva, and Marcos Paulo Campos, three young men living in Morro da Providência, a *favela* located in the Gamboa neighborhood, central region of Rio de Janeiro city, disappeared on June 14, 2008, and were reported dead the following day. Their bodies were found in a garbage dump in the neighboring municipality of Duque de Caxias, in the Baixada Fluminense region. A group of 11 military officers who guarded Morro da Providência during a process of housing renovation promoted by Cimento Social, a federal government project, were indicted by the Federal Public Ministry (MPF) for involvement in this crime. At that time, the indicted police officers claimed that they had detained the three young men for contemptuous behavior and transported them in an army truck to Morro da Mineira, another nearby *favela*. According to the MPF indictment, the officers knew that the three young men could be killed by drug dealers in Morro da Mineira, as this area was controlled by a rival faction to the one operating in Morro da Providência. The officers established a dialogue with one of the drug dealers before handing over the victims. According to the investigation, the young men were tortured and then murdered with 46 gunshots by those drug dealers in Morro da Mineira (G1 2008a, G1 2008b).

João Roberto case

On July 6, 2008, João Roberto Amorim Soares, a three-year-old boy, was in a car driven by his mother, along with his older brother, on General Espírito Santo Cardoso street in the Tijuca neighborhood, North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city, when he was shot by police officers. The family was returning from a birthday party. João Roberto was taken to hospital, as was his mother, who was also injured, but the boy did not survive. One of the officers involved in the police intervention that resulted in Joao Roberto's death claimed they were persecuting suspects heading to the Morro da Cruz *favela*, nearby. Witnesses reported that the vehicle had been shot at least 15 times (G1 2008c, G1 2008d).

Hélio Ribeiro case

On May 19, 2010, Hélio Ribeiro, a 47-year-old resident of the Morro do Andaraí *favela* in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city, was on the terrace of his house with his wife. While using a drill to make repairs, he was shot by a police officer from the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE), the

elite troop of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police. In an interview with the G1 news portal, a neighbor who witnessed the incident reported that when Hélio saw the BOPE officers, who were conducting an intervention in the *favela*, he only had time to briefly tell his wife that the officers might mistake the drill he was carrying for a weapon. He was immediately shot and died. He was immediately shot and died. The BOPE officers continued to aim their weapons at the terrace and shouted at Hélio's wife to get down. According to the neighbor, she screamed, "My husband is dead!" The witness also said, "They are saying he was a drug dealer, but this is absurd. He worked at a supermarket chain" (G1 2010a).

Period 2 (2013-2016)

Amarildo case

Amarildo de Souza, a 48-year-old man and bricklayer's assistant living in the Rocinha *favela*, South Zone of Rio Janeiro city, left home on July 14, 2013, to buy ingredients for cooking, when he was detained by police officers and taken for interrogation at the headquarters of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP), also located in Rocinha. The family publicly reported his disappearance, asking: "Where is Amarildo?" This question resonated among community leaders, social movement activists, human rights advocates, artists, some left-wing politicians, and other public figures, becoming the slogan for a major anti-police violence campaign. The circumstances surrounding Amarildo's disappearance after being approached by UPP officers garnered widespread media attention and sparked international repercussions. He never returned home, and his body was never found (Medina 2013, 1-3; Global Voices 2013; G1 2018d).

Claudia case

Cláudia Ferreira da Silva, a 38-year-old general services assistant, was killed on March 16, 2014, after being shot during a police operation in the Morro da Congonha *favela*, in the Madureira neighborhood, North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. She was on the street en route to buy groceries. The six police officers involved in this episode claimed that there had been an exchange of gunfire with drug dealers in the favela and asserted that they found Claudia already injured at the scene. Residents of the area, however, have questioned this account of an armed conflict, claiming that the police arrived in the *favela* already shooting. After being shot, Claudia was placed in the trunk of a police vehicle by three officers who stated they were transporting her to receive medical attention. However, the trunk door opened, and she was left hanging by a piece of her clothing. Her body was dragged along the street for approximately 350 meters as the car continued to move. The scene was recorded on video by an amateur videographer and widely circulated, which helped draw public attention to the case. In addition to condemning the violence Cláudia suffered, her friends also questioned why it took so long for her to be rescued. In March 2024, the judge presiding over the case declared the police officers innocent, stating that they had made a mistake while acting in self-

defense against unjust aggression from bandits at the scene, resulting in the harm of an innocent person (G1 2014a; G1 2014b; Costa 2018, 75; G1 2024).

Five young boys, 111 shots case

On the night of November 28, 2015, friends Roberto de Souza, 16, Carlos Eduardo da Silva Souza, 16, Cleiton Corrêa de Souza, 18, Wesley Castro, 20, and Wilton Esteves Domingos Junior, 20, were returning from a walk in Madureira Park, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. They were heading to have a snack in the Costa Barros neighborhood, also in the North Zone, when their car was shot multiple times by four military police officers. The officers involved fired 111 times, with at least fifty shots hitting the car the boys were in. The police officers claimed they were in the area investigating a suspected hijacking of a truck carrying alcoholic beverages. According to them, the occupants of a motorcycle and a car were shooting in their direction, which prompted the police to fire. However, this narrative was refuted by the motorcycle rider, who stated that the young men promptly stopped the car when approached by the officers, who then fired at them. Investigations revealed that no shots were fired from inside the car and that the crime scene had been fraudulently altered in an attempt to blame the victims (G1 2015a; G1 2015b; Quirino and Moura 2019, 193-194).

Period 3 (2017-2018)

Maria Eduarda case

Maria Eduarda Alves da Conceição, a 13-year-old girl, was killed on the afternoon of March 30, 2017, on the court of the Jornalista Daniel Piza municipal school, where she was taking physical education classes. The school is located in the Fazenda Botafogo housing complex, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. At the time, the military police reported that the shots that hit Maria Eduarda came from an armed conflict involving police and criminals, in which two suspected of being involved in drug trafficking were also killed. Later, amateur video footage showed that these two men had been executed by police officers after they had already surrendered. The girl's murder triggered protests by residents of the region. An investigation by the Civil Police determined that the shots that killed Maria Eduarda were fired by one of the officers involved in the police intervention (G1 2017a, R7 Notícias 2017, UOL 2018a).

Rodrigo case

Rodrigo Alexandre da Silva Serrano, 26 years old, was murdered on the night of September 17, 2018, during an intervention carried out by the Military Police's Proximity Police Tactical Group (GTPP) in the Chapéu-Mangueira *favela*, located in the Leme neighborhood, South Zone of Rio de Janeiro city, where he resided. Rodrigo was working as a security guard at a bar in Leme at that time. The victim's family told journalists that when the police arrived and began shooting, Rodrigo

was standing on the street next to a car, holding an umbrella and a baby carrier. He was waiting for his wife, who was arriving at the *favela* in a van with their two children. Residents of Chapéu-Mangueira accused police officers of firing after mistaking the umbrella Rodrigo was holding for a rifle. During the police operation, another 21-year-old resident was also shot, suffering superficial injuries. Police officers involved claimed they were attacked as they passed through the area where Rodrigo was, which led them to respond with gunfire. The Homicide Division of the Capital of Rio de Janeiro, an investigative unit of the Civil Police, reported that Rodrigo's death was not investigated because the Military Police classified the incident as a resistance report case. According to the police officer who fired the shot that struck Rodrigo, the victim's reaction prompted him to act in self-defense (Extra 2018a; O Globo 2018).

Period 4 (2019-2022)

Evaldo case

On April 7, 2019, Evaldo dos Santos Rosa, aged 51, was killed during an Army intervention in Guadalupe, in the Military Village region, West Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. When Evaldo was shot, he was driving his car, accompanied by his wife, his seven-year-old son, his father-in-law, and a family friend, going to a baby shower. The victim's father-in-law was also shot and survived the injuries. Luciano Macedo, a recyclable materials collector who happened to be passing by at the time, attempted to help Evaldo's family and was also shot by the officers. Luciano passed away a few days later. Following the occurrence, the Military Police issued an official statement claiming that Evaldo's death occurred during a pursuit of criminals who were driving a vehicle through the area and fired on the officers. The episode sparked protests from local residents. Investigators from the Civil Police Homicide Division reported that military officers fired at least 80 times at Evaldo's car (G1 2019c; G1 2019d; O Dia Rio de Janeiro 2019; Rodrigues Junior 2019, 384-385).

Willian Augusto case

On the morning of August 20, 2019, Willian Augusto da Silva, aged 20, was shot and killed on the Rio-Niterói Bridge[4] by a sniper from the Special Operations Battalion (Bope), after having hijacked a bus (public transportation). The kidnapping was widely publicized by the Brazilian media. According to witnesses, William was carrying a fake gun, a stun gun and a knife, as well as a plastic bottle containing fuel. He held 39 bus passengers as hostages for approximately three and a half hours. William was shot when he exited the bus to negotiate with the police. Before that moment, he had released six people: four women – one of whom had fainted – and two men. Ultimately, all 39 hostages were released unharmed. Shortly after William was killed, governor Wilson Witzel (PSC) arrived at the Rio-Niterói bridge and made celebratory gestures. Witzel, president Jair

[4] The Rio-Niterói bridge connects the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Niterói.

Bolsonaro and justice minister Sergio Moro publicly praised the police for their handling of the operation (G1 2019e; G1 2019f; Mostaro et al 2019, 32-33).

Ágatha case

On September 20, 2019, 8-year-old Ágatha Vitória Sales Félix was killed while she and her mother were traveling home in a public van through the Fazendinha *favela*, part of the Complexo do Alemão in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. The girl was shot in the back inside the vehicle when the van stopped to drop off passengers. According to passengers and the van driver, Ágatha was struck when police officers fired shots at a passing motorcyclist. Witnesses told journalists that they did not see any confrontation at the time the child was shot; they only heard gunfire from the police officers, contradicting the initial police version that there had been a conflict with criminals at the scene. Because the victim was such a young girl, the case caused a commotion in the media and was widely broadcast. Protests were led by family members, friends, and local residents, including during the girl's funeral ceremony (G1 2019g; Francisco de Assis 2020, 9; Wermuth et al 2020, 156).

Kathlen case

On June 8, 2021, Kahtlen Romeu, a 24-year-old interior designer, was struck by a rifle shot while in the company of her grandmother in the Lins de Vasconcelos neighborhood, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Kahtlen was three months pregnant at the time. Officers who were shooting during a Military Police operation claimed they were responding to an attack by criminals. As of the time of writing this thesis, the case had not yet reached a final judicial resolution. Five police officers involved were still facing prosecution for both murder and the fraudulent alteration of the crime scene. Since then, the victim's family and friends have been urging that the case be handled more promptly and that those responsible be held accountable (G1 2022a, G1 2022b, G1 2023a, G1 2023b).

Having presented an overview of the case study, the next chapter will discuss the results of this study with the aim of answering the research question: How has official rhetoric regarding police killings framed the use of lethal police force in Brazilian *favelas* and poor suburbs over time?

HOW HAS OFFICIAL RHETORIC REGARDING POLICE KILLINGS FRAMED THE USE OF LETHAL POLICE FORCE IN BRAZILIAN *FAVELAS* AND POOR SUBURBS OVER TIME?

Types of Arguments Identified in Each Political Period

The arguments that were identified in different political periods were coded in eight categories:

- Risk context - Arguments that emphasize the context of police operations as "risky," presenting a "threat" to officers or the population, or involving "confrontational" situations with third parties, which would justify using violent responses against perceived threats.
- Criminalization - Arguments attempting to justify or minimize police killings by alleging the victims had some level of involvement in criminal activity.
- Third-party perpetrators – Arguments claiming that a third party, typically "criminals," is responsible for the homicide.
- Fatality – Arguments suggesting that the death of an innocent victim(s) was a "fatality", "accident," or "mistake" committed by an officer or group of officers. While these arguments may acknowledge some level of failure, they suggest that there was no deliberate intention to target the victim(s).
- Misconduct – Arguments acknowledging a serious fault committed by an officer or group of officers, addressing this fault as "misconduct", and asserting that this does not align with the values and operational norms of the police institution.
- Defense of the approach – Arguments asserting that the police approach resulting in death was successful, correct, and/or appropriate. Additionally, arguments that explicitly defend the current policy model, institutional protocols and/or praise police officers for their use of force.
- Critique of the approach – Arguments that criticize the institutional approach guiding the police operation in each case or, more broadly, arguments that criticize the security model in force, the Drug War framework, and/or police culture.
- Institution targeted – Arguments suggesting that the episode in question was being exploited for political purposes and/or to unfairly criticize or undermine police institutions or the state, thereby "villainizing", discrediting, or casting suspicion on the involved institutions. Additionally, arguments asserting that the police were facing unjust accusations of employing a racist approach in operations that resulted in deaths.

The first three types of arguments appeared in discursive sequences that described the situation that resulted in police killing while the last five types were mobilized in speeches that evaluated the police approach in this situation.

It is important to emphasize that I did not find a specific type of argument that was exclusively used in any of the periods studied. There was no specific rhetorical frame that marked the particularity of any of these periods. On the contrary, the four periods generally shared the occurrence of the same types of arguments. When a specific type of argument was not present in all periods, it was utilized in at least two of them. However, the frequency of occurrence of certain types of arguments varied across different periods within the sample of sentences collected.

Frequency of Arguments According to Political Period

1st Political Period (2008 - 2012)

In the material studied for period 1, I analyzed a total of 49 arguments:

- Three young men from Morro da Providência case (2008) – 14 arguments.
- João Roberto case (2008) – 19 arguments.
- Hélio case (2010) – 16 arguments.

	Count	% Codes
Description of the problem		
Risk context	7	14.3%
Criminalization	1	2.0%
Third-party perpetrators		
Evaluation of the police response		
Fatality	22	44.9%
Misconduct	12	24.5%
Defense of the approach	5	10.2%
Critique of the approach	2	4.1%
Institution targeted		

In period 1, the most frequent arguments were those categorized as ‘fatality’, comprising 44.9% of the identified arguments.

Following this, arguments classified as ‘misconduct’ accounted for 24.5% of the arguments found in this period.

Arguments categorized as ‘risk context’ made up 14.3% of those identified.

Arguments related to ‘defense of the approach’ accounted for 10.2% of the analyzed arguments.

Arguments categorized as ‘critique of the approach’ represented 4.1% of the arguments found.

‘Criminalization’ arguments accounted for 2.0% of those identified.

No arguments from the categories 'third-party perpetrators' and 'institution targeted' were found in this period.

2nd Political Period (2013 - 2016)

In the material studied for period 2, I analyzed a total of 52 arguments:

- Amarildo case (2013) – 21 arguments.
- Claudia case (2013) – 7 arguments.
- Five young boys, 111 shots case (2015) – 24 arguments.

	Count	% Codes
Description of the problem		
Risk context	11	21.2%
Criminalization	11	21.2%
Third-party perpetrators	9	17.3%
Evaluation of the police response		
Fatality	1	1.9%
Misconduct	10	19.2%
Defense of the approach	5	9.6%
Critique of the approach	2	3.8%
Institution targeted	3	5.8%

In period 2, the largest number of arguments were those coded as both 'risk context' and 'criminalization', each accounting for 21.2% of the analyzed arguments.

Following this, arguments categorized as 'misconduct' represented 19.2% of the arguments studied.

Arguments labeled as 'third-party perpetrators' accounted for 17.3% of those found in this period.

'Defense of the approach' arguments constituted 9.6% of the analyzed arguments.

Arguments categorized as 'institution targeted' made up 5.8% of those studied in this period.

Arguments offering 'critique of the approach' accounted for 3.8% of the arguments identified.

The argument with the lowest incidence in the material studied was the one categorized as 'fatality', corresponding to only 1.9% of the arguments analyzed in the second period.

3rd Political Period (2017 - 2018)

In the material studied for period 3, I analyzed a total of 23 arguments:

- Maria Eduarda case (2017) – 9 arguments.
- Rodrigo case (2018) – 14 arguments.

	Count	% Codes
Description of the problem		
Risk context	6	26.1%
Criminalization	8	34.8%
Third-party perpetrators	1	4.3%
Evaluation of the police response		
Fatality		
Misconduct		
Defense of the approach	6	26.1%
Critique of the approach	2	8.7%
Institution targeted		

In period 3, the largest number of arguments were those categorized as ‘criminalization’, accounting for 34.8% of the arguments found.

Following this, arguments coded as ‘risk context’ and ‘defense of the approach’ each accounted for 26.1% of the arguments analyzed.

Arguments labeled as ‘critique of the approach’ represented 8.7% of those identified.

Arguments categorized as ‘third-party perpetrators’ made up 4.3% of the arguments analyzed in this period.

No arguments belonging to the categories of ‘fatality’, ‘misconduct’, or ‘institution targeted’ were identified in the material studied for the third period.

4th Political Period (2019 - 2022)

In the material studied for period 4, I analyzed a total of 171 arguments:

- Evaldo case (2019) – 77 arguments.
- Willian Augusto case (2019) – 42 arguments.
- Ágatha case (2019) – 27 arguments.
- Kathlen case (2021) – 25 arguments.

	Count	% Codes
Description of the problem		
Risk context	42	24.6%
Criminalization	30	17.5%
Third-party perpetrators	15	8.8%
Evaluation of the police response		
Fatality	14	8.2%
Misconduct	10	5.8%
Defense of the approach	51	29.8%
Critique of the approach	1	0.6%
Institution targeted	8	4.7%

In period 4, the largest number of arguments were those categorized as ‘defense of the approach’, accounting for 29.8% of the arguments identified.

Following this, arguments coded as ‘risk context’ accounted for 24.6% of the arguments studied in this period.

Arguments classified as ‘criminalization’ made up 17.5% of those identified.

Arguments labeled as ‘third-party perpetrators’ accounted for 8.8% of the arguments analyzed.

Arguments categorized as ‘fatality’ were 8.2% of those studied in this period.

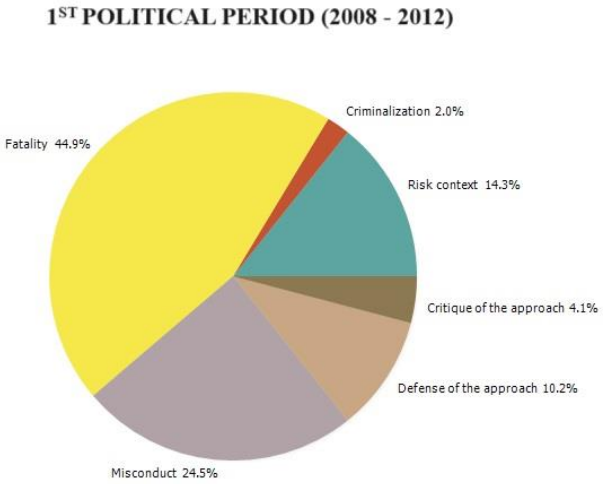
Arguments coded as ‘misconduct’ represented 5.8% of the arguments identified.

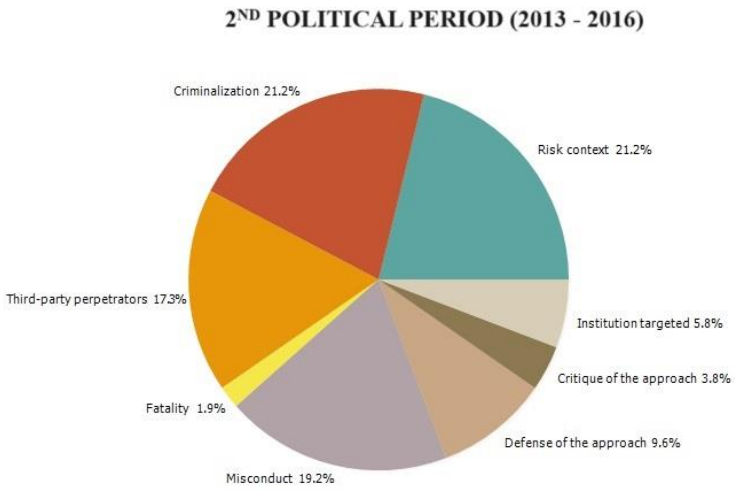
Arguments labeled as ‘institution targeted’ made up 4.7% of the arguments analyzed.

Arguments categorized as ‘critique of the approach’ were the least frequent, accounting for 0.6% of those studied in this period.

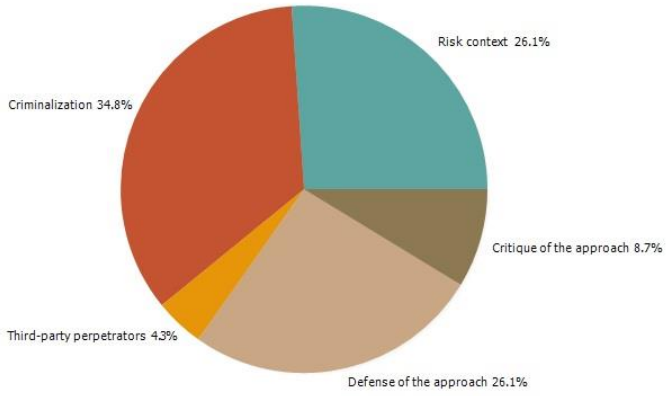
Variations and Similarities Between Periods

The diagrams below illustrate the variation of each type of coded argument across different political periods:

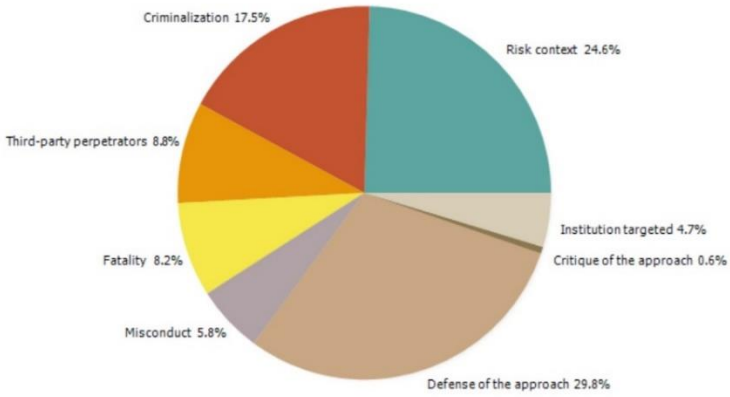




3RD POLITICAL PERIOD (2017 - 2018)



4TH POLITICAL PERIOD (2019 - 2022)



Below, I analyze these variations and identify common aspects across political periods regarding the arguments studied.

Arguments about risk context

In all periods, arguments about 'risk context' were significantly used when describing situations that culminated in police killing. In period 1, 'risk context' was the third most common type of argument, in period 2, along with 'criminalization' it was the first most recurrent. In period 3 (along with 'defense of the approach') and in period 4 'risk context' was the second most mobilized type of argument.

In those different periods, the problem most often highlighted as triggering the police killings was a situation of risk or confrontation that took place in *favelas* or poor suburbs[5]:

> (...) "the agents were alerted by locals that there were criminals in the area of David's bar. When they arrived in the area, there was an exchange of gunfire and a brief confrontation". (Rodrigo case – Period 3/ Statement by Rio de Janeiro Military Police / El País Brasil 2018/ Translated and underlined by the author)

> "This afternoon, military police officers from the #UPPLins were shot at during police patrol in the area known as "Beco da 14". After the shooting stopped, the officers found an injured woman and transported her to Hospital Salgado Filho, in Méier." (Kathlen case – Period 4 / PMERJ tweet / PMERJ Twitter 2021 / Translated and underlined by the author)

The expression "dominated by criminals" and terms such as "threats", "risks" and "confrontation" were often used to characterize territories targeted by the police operations that resulted in death and to argue that they are "risk contexts".

According to this reasoning, situations of "threat", "risk", and "confrontation" would be caused by "criminals" belonging to these target territories and would be directed primarily at the police officers themselves, but also at other "residents". "Threats" and "risks" caused by criminals in the target territories would manifest mainly through:

a) the significant presence of illegal weapons in these territories;

> The commander, however, explained that, given the context of violence in the favela – since earlier there had been an exchange of gunfire at the scene, including the confiscation of a grenade – the police officer may have "acted consciously" because he thought he was in a risky situation for himself and his comrades. In the confrontation, two men died. (Hélio case – Period 1/ Commander of the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE) / G1 2010b / Translated and underlined by the author)

b) shots allegedly fired by the victims against the police officers or third parties;

> The nine officers who participated in the action stated that "they were received with gunfire in a place known as Davi's Bar in the Chapéu Mangueira community" and one of the officers shot back. (Rodrigo

[5] The exception is the death of William Augusto – Period 4, which took place on the Rio-Niterói bridge, which is not a favela or poor suburb, but directly involved "residents" of poor territories using public transportation that crosses that area.

case – Period 3 / Officers who participated in the operation / Extra 2019a / Translated and underlined by the author)

c) or statements indicating the "criminals`" intention to kill police officers or third parties.

> "In previous operations, the officers managed to confiscate a small radio that belonged to them, so we have this communication from these people, so we can hear what they are saying," explained (…). The defendants also detailed that the criminals had made death threats against the military officers. "I was in the police vehicle that was transmitting and I could hear the drug dealers talking about an order, saying that their colonel was in the community and that his order was to kill everyone from the Army that was entering the community", said (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Lieutenant and officer of the 1st Motorized Infantry Battalion / El País Brasil 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author).

The predominance of this frame is contradictory since, with the exception of William's case in period 4, investigations indicated that the victims were not carrying any kind of weapons nor did they issue any threats to police officers or others. Even in William's case, where he was carrying a fake weapon, fuel, and a knife, there were no reports that he physically attempted to harm police officers directly, nor was any hostage injured.

In different political periods, arguments about 'risk context' have often complemented arguments about the 'criminalization of victims', 'third-party perpetrators', and 'fatality'. Examples include episodes in which the police claimed to have mistaken objects like drills and umbrellas for guns or confused cars allegedly driven by "criminals/ bandits" with vehicles being used by "residents" in order to justify "failures" and "fatalities" (João Roberto case – Period 1, Hélio case – Period 1, and Rodrigo case – Period 3):

> "The team was in the context of a conflict-ridden community, where there had been a confrontation shortly before our action. It was a mistake, but because of the similarity of the equipment he was holding, he thought it was a gun." (Hélio case – Period 1/ Commander of the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE) / G1 2010b / Translated and underlined by the author)

In these episodes, the events were usually described in a way that connects terms like "criminal-ruled", "risk/threat", "mistake/fatality" in a cause-and-effect logic. This logic can be summarized as follows:

That *favela* is ruled by "criminals", → therefore it poses "risks" and "threats" to the police. → As a result, according to this reasoning, it is understandable that a "resident" was "mistaken" for a "criminal" because he was carrying an umbrella or a drill, for example.

In the following example, taken from period 3, 'risk context' is used to explain deaths due to confrontation and defend the security approach being used which, according to the Military Police, was committed to reducing lethality:

> In a statement, the Military Police said that the 41st BPM (Irajá) has seen a reduction in the number of deaths resulting from police intervention, especially in recent months, and stressed that the battalion is located in one of the most violent areas of the city.
>
> "Despite this reduction, it is clear that the battalion operates in one of the areas with the highest concentration of communities dominated by drug dealing and also combats vehicle and cargo robberies, especially in the Complexo do Chapadão and Pedreira, where there is a high concentration of armed criminals, so it is clear that in areas with adverse topography and disordered urban land occupation, the risk of confrontations and consequently lethality increases," says the corporation. "Even in this challenging scenario, the command of the 41st BPM, supported by the PMERJ General Command, remains committed to reducing lethality rates." (Maria Eduarda case – Period 3 / Note by the Rio de Janeiro Military Police / UOL 2018b / Translated and underlined by the author)

Here is an example from period 4, in which the argument about 'risk context' is used to relieve the state of responsibility for the victim's death, instead blaming drug gangs for the problem:

> Vice President General Hamilton Mourão followed the same line and excluded any responsibility from the state. "The drug gangs operating in Brazil have become guerrillas. Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that in some parts of the country we are living in a war and that's when tragedies happen," he said. (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Vice president Hamilton Mourão / Ponte Jornalismo 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

In rhetorical frames based on the argument about 'risk context', the police discourse mostly: 1) trivialized lethal violence as the only possible response to "threats" and "risks" caused by "criminals" belonging to those territories (also named as "marginals", "bandits" or "elements", against whom it is acceptable to shoot first and inquire later); 2) banalized the idea that the *favela* "residents" can be mistaken as "criminals". The example below demonstrates how the stereotype of "criminal" is linked to the image of *favela* "residents":

> "Then they say he dies for nothing? Just look at what it seems he has in his hand. In Vila Vintém, leaving the *favela*. What does it seem he has in his hand?", the police officer asks. Then, the patrol approaches the two men and tells them to stop. "Then he dies and the blame is on who? On the police officer", says the officer.
>
> The man carrying the object then explains that it is a microphone stand. "You can film there," he says, showing the accessory used by musicians. "You're crazy, man," says the police officer. "This does not exist. You can't go out with this at night. You were leaving the *favela*, the community, and I approached you. Damn, you almost got shot. You two there!", exclaims the officer (Rodrigo case – Period 3 / Police officer not directly involved in Rodrigo's case / UOL 2019a / Translated and underlined by the author)

In different periods, statements that overgeneralized the experiences of "criminals", "residents", and even those identified as "victims" in 'risk contexts' were recurrent:

> "When the opposition stands up and says that I don't value the life of the *favela* resident, it is a discourse absolutely devoid of common sense and reason. If there is something that I care about and that our government is concerned with, it is the life of *favela* residents," he said. "We do care about *favela*

> residents, about poor and humble people. And we want to preserve lives. But as long as they parade in funk parties, challenging society with weapons of war, we will be grieving victims and receiving them at the Homicide Police Station every month". (William Augusto case – Period 4/ Governador Wilson Witzel / UOL 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

In statements in which the individuals who were killed were identified as victims, the most common term used to refer to them was "resident" ("*morador*" in Portuguese):

> In a statement, the Military Police said that Cláudia da Silva Ferreira was placed in the trunk of the car and on the way to the hospital the door opened. It was at this moment that part of the resident's body was dragged along the street, causing additional injuries. (Claudia case – Period 2 / Statement by the Rio de Janeiro Military Police / G1 2014c / Translated and underlined by the author).

In the case of younger children, the term "innocent" was also employed:

> "The State Government deeply regrets the death of the girl Agatha, as well as that of all innocent victims, during police operations". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Note by the Government of the State of Rio de Janeiro / UOL 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

Also, most of the time, the victims of the episodes studied in the different political periods were not referred to by their names in official statements.

Arguments criminalizing the victims

There was a significant difference in the frequency of arguments coded as 'criminalization' when comparing period 1 with period 2.

While in the first period the 'criminalization of the victim' was the least recurrent argument, in the second period it was precisely the most found argument (along with 'risk context'), reaching a similar percentage to that found in the fourth period. The lower incidence of the 'criminalization' argument in the first political period indicates a rhetorical effort to reframe the traditional police discourse regarding victims through the UPPs at this time. In period 1, the UPPs, despite their contradictions in practice, were presented to society and other sectors of public policy through a communicative discourse that aimed to distinguish itself from recurring discourses, emphasizing the importance of building practices of proximity and trust between police and people living in *favelas* and poor suburbs. This discourse is not coherent with arguments criminalizing victims of police violence. However, in periods 1 and 2, public security policy was coordinated by the same political group and during the second period, the UPP was still a policing policy to which the state gave significant visibility. Thus, the political orientation of those in charge of public security policy does not explain the variation in 'criminalization' arguments between these first two periods. In fact, the Public Security Secretariat of Rio de Janeiro was led in both periods by the same person, José Mariano Beltrame, who was directly involved in the process of implementing the UPPs.

Nevertheless, if the political orientation in this case does not help to explain the difference in the occurrence of the 'criminalization' frame between periods 1 and 2, other factors may provide some clues: 1) Unlike the first period, in the second period I found more arguments enunciated by spokespersons working at the base of the public policy, especially police officers. With the exception of the speech by an assistant chief of police, the other arguments of 'criminalization' that I found in period 2 were enunciated by police officers. Many of them were being judicially investigated for their participation in the police killing episodes they discussed; thus, we cannot ignore the fact that they were also talking in self-defense. Furthermore, it is worth asking: Would have been insufficient incorporation of the allegedly innovative ideas promoted by the creators of the UPPs at the grassroots levels of the policy? Another question that could be answered in future studies is how sustainable the production of new institutional discourses is in contexts where the foundations of the current policies remain essentially the same, as is the case of the UPPs, which although proposing some new strategies were conceived within the same militarized institutional structure that characterized the military dictatorship period without representing a rupture with it. 2) It is also possible to associate the increase in the frequency of arguments criminalizing victims during the second period with changes in the context of discursive production, marked by the growing public debate about the effectiveness of public security policy in Rio de Janeiro due to: a) cases of police killings that gained greater visibility, such as the Amarildo case; and b) the city's preparations for World Cup and the Olympic Games (Agência Brasil 2013; Amnístia Internacional 2013; G1 2013a; Global Voices 2013; Anistia Internacional Brasil 2013; Hönke and Müller 2016, 87; Saborio and Costa 2018, 76).

Period 3 had the highest relative percentage of arguments criminalizing victims, making it the most prevalent type in this period. It's worth noting that this period coincides with the collapse of the UPPs, which, despite the contradictions, were the focus of a political effort aimed at creating a communicative discourse that differentiated them from other policies. The fall of the UPPs may also have implied a decline of their political communicative discourse which, as mentioned before, does not appear to have been so incorporated into the grassroots of the Military Police. In addition, it was during political period 3 that the federal government took control of public security policies away from state institutions, which was justified by political speeches emphasizing the need to reestablish public order in Rio de Janeiro (Decree no. 9.288, of February 16, 2018). Throughout Brazilian history, drastic public security measures such as the federal intervention have been implemented through repressive and generally violent police actions. As discussed earlier in this work, "criminals in the *favelas*" have been cited as the causes of security problems and public disorder in different political periods. It is therefore to be expected that within the political context of the federal intervention in public security, the arguments of 'criminalization' have intensified in official discourse.

On aspects common to the different political periods studied, in at least one of the cases studied in each period, there was an initial persuasive effort to associate directly or indirectly to crime the "residents" that were killed, particularly when the victims were men (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1, Amarildo case – Period 2, Five young boys, 111 shots

case – Period 2, Rodrigo case – Period 3, Evaldo case – Period 4, Willian Augusto case – Period 4).

> "This morning (Saturday), Army troops carrying out the security of personnel, material, and equipment used in the construction of the Social Cement Project, in Providência *favela*, arrested three suspects, who allegedly disrespected the military on duty, near the Américo Brum Square". (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1/ Note by the Eastern Military Command / G1 2008e / Translated and underlined by the author)

> (...) the Military Police officer limited himself to saying that the officers "retaliated against the unjust aggression" of one of the young men who, according to the officers' version, had shot at the officers with a revolver. (Five young boys, 111 shots case – Period 2 / Police officer under investigation in the case / Extra 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The Military Police informs that, besides Rodrigo, another man was shot and taken to Hospital Municipal Miguel Couto, in Gávea. Also in the note, it emphasizes that "one of them [Rodrigo] did not resist his injuries. He had criminal records for robbery and drug dealing". (Rodrigo case – Period 3/ Statement by the Rio de Janeiro Military Police / Ponte Jornalismo 2018 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> In the last of the three testimonies that he gave to Internal Affairs agents on the 21st, when asked if he saw the waiter carrying a gun, he answered only that "Rodrigo was one of the members of the armed group, but [he] cannot give details about it". He then said that he saw Rodrigo and Jonatas da Silva Rodrigues, 21 years old - who was only superficially shot at the time - "with the group that was attacking the garrison". (Rodrigo case – Period 3 / Police officer under investigation in the case / Extra 2018b / Translated and underlined by the author)

> In a note, the Eastern Military Command said that "an Army patrol saw a robbery near the Deodoro swimming pool, close to the site of the tragedy, and that two criminals in a vehicle shot at the team. The Military officers responded to the unjust aggression. As a result, one of the robbers died on the scene and the other was injured and was rescued and taken to the hospital. A pedestrian passing by in the area was injured as a result of the crossfire and was also rescued and transported." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Note by the Eastern Military Command / Catraca Livre Cidadania 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "The said garbage collector has been proven to be a person convicted of the crime 157, with a final and unappealable sentence. And the lady who said to be his wife didn't even declare her address in court. She stated here that she and Mr. Luciano have been previously arrested for the crime of drug trafficking. So, we can't look at this case as if we were in a big fairy tale", said the lawyer after the end of the hearing. (Evaldo case – Period 4/ Lawyer representing the officers under investigation in the case / G1 2019h Translated and underlined by the author)

The presumed criminal affiliation of the victims was employed as a discursive ability used to justify the use of lethal force against them. Even in those cases involving execution-style

shootings, in which the disproportionality of the action that resulted in killing would be more than evident, there was no significant effort to even explain why it was necessary to shoot 80, or 111 times at the presumed “criminals”. Is it really necessary to shoot 111 times to contain a “criminal”? The lack of self-critique on the part of the officials regarding this type of approach indirectly communicates that it is okay to shoot at a resident when one suspects that this person is or was involved in an illicit act.

Unlike terms such as “innocent”, “worker”, “family man” or “good citizen”, the term “resident” – while referring to someone who perhaps should not have been killed – also implies that the person is not exempt from suspicion. The persistent application of the criminal affiliation frame in discourses about “residents”, despite of evidence, allows us to infer that the word “resident” very often holds the implicit meaning of “[potential] bandit until proven otherwise”. Note that in these episodes, the communicative discourse of the police contradicts Article 5 of the Brazilian Constitution, which states that no one shall be considered guilty until a final sentence has been passed (Constitution of The Federative Republic of Brazil 1988, article 5, item LVII, translated by the author). This principle of presumption of innocence should precisely guide the work of public security institutions and their officials.

Also, it is important to remark that in the vast majority of the times that the ‘criminalization’ argument was used it was proven that the victims had no criminal affiliation. In these cases, the police reframed the discourse only after the presumption of criminal involvement of the "residents" was publicly confronted by evidence.

It was also observed that the rhetoric about the “criminals” often depersonalized them.

> "Often some people don't understand police work that sometimes has to be that way. If this criminal had not been slaughtered, many lives would not have been spared. This is happening in the communities; they are with rifles terrorizing the communities. If the police can do their job of slaughtering those with rifles, many other victims will be saved”. (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Correio Braziliense 2019a / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "I thank the Military Police, the Civil Police, the Federal Highway Police, and all members of BOPE. Sometimes the population doesn't understand police work, which has to be this way. If the police can do their job of slaughtering people armed with rifles in the communities, the population will be grateful". (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Correio Braziliense 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

In the example above, the verb “slaughtering” (*"abater"* in Portuguese), often applied in police terminology, originally means in Brazilian Portuguese “to take the life of, to kill (referring to hunting animals or those intended for consumption, in slaughterhouses, in general)” (Michaelis Dicionário Brasileiro da Língua Portuguesa, translated and underlined by the author). The use of the term *"abater"* to refer to killing human beings is so specific to the police context that it doesn't always appear in Brazilian Portuguese dictionaries. The Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese

Language, when referring to this meaning, uses precisely the example of a death caused by a police officer:

> 9. *dtv.* to take the life of; kill (e.g. livestock, birds or hunting) 'he killed the snipe with the first shot', 'the police shot the thug' (Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa / Translated and underlined by the author)

Studies on systemic racism in Brazil have already shown that the individuals most commonly affected by police shootings are Afro-Brazilians. This disparity persists even when comparing the victimization of Black individuals with that of poor white individuals residing in the same targeted territories (Wermuth et al 2020, 135). It is not by coincidence that almost none of the victims in the episodes analyzed can be considered white. Two cases might require further investigation due to the limited information available about the racial and ethnic identity of the victims: Hélio and the boy João Roberto. But in the boy's case, it is known that his mother, a brown-skinned woman, was driving the car targeted by the police. Thus, it can be inferred that the stereotype of "criminals," frequently present in the analyzed discourses, primarily refers to Afro-Brazilian corporealities.

Arguments about third-party perpetrators

When comparing the frequency of the argument about 'third-party perpetrators' in the different political periods, once again, I observed a significant discursive discontinuity between periods 1 and 2, although in both periods public security policy was under the command of the same groups. While in the second period 17.3% of the arguments that I encountered denied police responsibility for the homicide, blaming others, in the first period I did not find any such argument in the data collected.

Period 2 was the one in which I found the highest frequency of arguments denying that the police officers were the perpetrators of the homicides and blaming others, typically drug dealers or "criminals" living and/or operating in the territories where the homicides occurred. These arguments were close in frequency to those invoking the risky nature of the context and those criminalizing the victims. Moreover, the relative percentage of this type of argument was significantly higher in the second period compared to the others, especially the first and third. I argue that this may be a consequence of the fact that in period 2 the state representatives faced much more public pressure to position themselves in relation to crimes perpetrated by police officers (especially in comparison to the previous period). In this context, denying or blaming drug dealers likely served as a discursive ability to defend the state administration against these critiques. I associate the increase in public pressure during period 2 to some events: 1) The video recording and wide replication of the devastating scene of Claudia being dragged by the police car caught the attention of people occupying public positions, such as artists, journalists and some politicians from opposition parties who added their voices to the social movements' demands for explanations (G1 2014d; Jusbrasil 2014; Think Olga 2014). 2) The public resonance of Amarildo case, including his

disappearance after being detained by police officers from an UPP unit, and the accusations that he was tortured while this policy had been presented in the public sphere as an alternative to the hyper-violent police approaches (Agência Brasil 2013; Amnistía Internacional 2013; G1 2013a; Global Voices 2013; Anistia Internacional Brasil 2013). 3) The concern of political sectors with public security in Rio de Janeiro during the World Cup and the Olympic Games (Hönke and Müller 2016, 87; Saborio and Costa 2018, 76).

> – And who killed him?
>
> – I have no doubts and there is enough material in the case records pointing to drug trafficking. (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Major Edson Santos / G1 2015c / Translated and underlined by the author)

In the third period, I noticed a significant drop in the percentage of this type of argument compared to period 2.

In period 4, the percentage of this type of argument doubled compared to period 3.

> "It has been difficult to see the pain of families whose loved ones have been killed by organized crime. I offer my solidarity to the parents of Ágatha. May God bless the angel who has left us." (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Carta Capital 2019a / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "It is good for you, who are not a drug addict but uses marijuana and cocaine recreationally, to reflect. Because you are directly responsible for the death of the girl Ágatha; you took the life of this girl. You, who use marijuana and snort cocaine, give money to feed these genocides who use the communities as human shields. Those involved in organized crime are terrorists, and they are the ones pulling the triggers. Those who use drugs helped pull that trigger." (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / O Globo 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

I consider that the increase in the frequency of arguments about 'third-party perpetrators' in period 4, compared to the previous one, may be related to the growing public pressure on the government to account for crimes committed by police officers, in reaction to the repeated rhetoric of the main government leaders of the time, such as the president and the governor of Rio de Janeiro, explicitly against human rights and in favor of hyper-violent police approaches. I also identify two events that can help to better understand the growth of this public pressure in response to police killing episodes: 1) In this period other social sectors and voices joined social movements to take a stand against state violence, the intensification and radicalization of hate speeches against marginalized groups and communities issued by state representatives, and threats to democracy (Greenpeace Brasil 2019). 2) The public repercussion of the assassination of Rio de Janeiro councilor Marielle Franco, which occurred in 2018, at the end of period 3. Marielle Franco was a Black and LGBTQIAP+ woman who was raised in a *favela* and built her trajectory of human rights activism, leading numerous denunciations regarding the role of the militias in undermining the rights of *favelas* and poor suburbs residents. She was also very committed to the struggles for access to housing and against state violence. She incorporated those agendas into her mandate as a municipal

councilor. It has been legally proven that her assassination was a political crime, perpetrated by a militia member. The alleged masterminds of the crime were recently identified and arrested preventively. They are a federal deputy, a counselor at the Court of Auditors and the man who was in charge of the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro when this political crime occurred. The murder of Marielle Franco highlights how in Rio the connections between institutional politics, militia and the police compromise public security, the proper functioning of justice mechanisms and democratic rule of law (Schwarcz, 2019, 187-188). Although this subject has not been explored in this work, it is fundamental to better understand the context that contributes to the perpetuation and impunity of crimes committed by public security agents in Rio de Janeiro, including police killings, and certainly deserves to be studied in depth.

Especially in periods 2 and 4, arguments about 'third-party perpetrators' often appeared linked to arguments about 'risk context' to absolve the police of responsibility for the murders. In situations where it was immediately acknowledged that the victims were mistakenly or unjustly shot it was common an initial attempt to assign responsibility for the deaths to "bandits" linked to the territories where the killings took place. Some examples are the Claudia case – Period 2, the Ágatha case – Period 4, and the Katlhen case – Period 4.

> On Twitter, the Military Police reported that "The difficult reality experienced by the population of the communities and faced daily by our police officers, makes us deeply solidary to the pain and suffering felt for the death of little Ágatha. She was injured yesterday when criminals cowardly attacked UPP police officers". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / PMERJ Twitter / Maré de Notícias 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "Once again, we are dealing with a gratuitous attack by criminals that operate in this community. It is the same faction that is active in Providência, Jacarezinho, and Prazeres and that has, by nature, by ideology, the merciless attack on the police forces, using the residents as a human shield," said (…). The major stated that police officers have no intention of shooting at residents, especially a pregnant woman. (Katlhen case – Period 4 / Military Police Major / G1 2021a / Translated and underlined by the author)

It was also notable the use of the idea "has been found dead" or "has been found injured" when describing the police encounter with the victims. The narrative that does not indicate who is responsible for the homicide functions as a discursive ability to deny in advance the police authorship.

> The Military Police also informed that the officers found Cláudia already shot at the top of the hill. She was taken to Carlos Chagas State Hospital, but died. (Claudia case – Period 2/ Rio de Janeiro Military Police / G1 2014c / Translated and underlined by the author)

> This afternoon, military police officers from the #UPPLins were attacked by gunshots during a patrol in the area known as "Beco da 14". After the shooting stopped, the officers found an injured woman and took her to Salgado Filho Hospital, in Méier. (Kathlen case – Period 4 / Rio de Janeiro Military Police / PMERJ Twitter 2021 / Translated and underlined by the author)

Arguments about fatality

The first period showed the highest level of public acknowledgment of failures in police performance. More than half of the arguments collected mentioned the occurrence of a failure. Most of them (44.9%) classified the failure as a 'fatality', an unintentional error. The remaining statements classified it as 'misconduct' (24.5%).

> "We deeply regret what happened. It was an extreme misfortune. We are solidary with the immeasurable pain of the family," he stated.
>
> "He's devastated by what he did. He knows he compromised his entire excellent career". (Hélio case – Period 1 / Military Police Major / Folha de São Paulo 2010 / Translated and underlined by the author)

Compared to period 1, in period 2 the occurrence of arguments acknowledging a 'fatality' dropped significantly, representing only 1.9% of the arguments identified.

In period 3, I did not find any arguments acknowledging a 'fatality' in the studied material.

In period 4, the occurrence of arguments acknowledging a failure returned to proportions slightly lower than in period 2. However, there was an inversion: most of these arguments classified the failure as a 'fatality', emphasizing its unintentional nature, whereas in period 2, most arguments acknowledging a failure classified it as 'misconduct'.

> "There was an incident. There has been a death. We regret it was a hard-working, honest citizen". (Evaldo case – Period 4 / President Jair Bolsonaro / Carta Capital 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

With regard to aspects that were common to different periods in terms of the use of the 'fatality' argument, I observed that the speakers often framed arguments about 'fatality' by combining terms like "threat" and "risk", which describe targeted territories, with the terms such as "fatality", "mistake", "accident", "tragedy", and "unfortunate fact", which describe the police acts.

> At the time, the officers said that they had mistaken the car the group was in, a white Fiat Pálio, for another vehicle, which had been used in the theft of a drinks truck nearby. (Five young boys, 111 shots case – Period 2/ Military police officers / UOL 2015 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "There was a fatality. People have been calling it murder, it's not", he said to the journalists covering the Army Day ceremony at the Army Headquarters in São Paulo. "The soldiers who were on mission in the morning had been ambushed. Those who, like me, have been in such a situation of high tension, is very difficult... To judge what happened, we have to wait for the investigations", he added. (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Army General / Brasil 247 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author).

Arguments that highlight the "clean record" and "exemplary behavior" of the perpetrators of lethal violence sometimes appeared connected to arguments about 'fatality', producing the

rhetorical effect of softening the severity of the critiques received, in addition to inducing the unintentionality of the act.

> The commander, who in the morning saw the footage of the police approach captured by the security cameras, said that the corporal and the soldier have clean records and exemplary behavior. The soldier, recently graduated three years ago, had been with the battalion since the beginning. The corporal, who has been in the force for ten years, has also been working in Tijuca for three years. (João Roberto case – Period 1 / Commander of the 6th Military Police Battalion - Tijuca / G1 2008f / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "The police officer is psychologically disturbed. I deeply regret the fact, as the officer has an impeccable career and an unfortunate fact occurred." (Hélio case – Period 1/ Captain of the Special Police Operations Battalion / G1 2010a / Translated and underlined by the author).

> "We deeply regret what happened. It was an extreme misfortune. We are solidary with the immeasurable pain of the family," he stated.
>
> "He's devastated by what he did. He knows he compromised his entire excellent career". (Hélio case – Period 1 / Military Police Major / Folha de São Paulo 2010 / Translated and underlined by the author)

In fact, the argument about 'fatality' explicitly or implicitly encompasses the idea of unintentionality. Terms such as "fatality", "mistake", "accident", "tragedy", and "unfortunate fact" help to frame the police action as unintentional. When "unintentionality" appeared as a characteristic of police action, it suggested that not having the intention to kill would, to some extent, attenuate the perpetrators' responsibility for the act.

> The officer recounted that he intended to use the ink from a red pen to mark the initials of a rival criminal faction on the foreheads of the three young men before taking them to Morro da Mineira. He stated, however, that his intention was not to hand them over to drug dealers to be killed, but "just to scare them" for their disrespect they allegedly committed when they were approached in Morro da Providência. (...)
>
> When questioned by the judge, he retorted: "I know that drug dealers can kill. Nothing good could happen. But I expected that they wouldn't die. I said it was just to scare them" (...). (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1/ Lieutenant of the Military Police / G1 2008g / Translated and underlined by the author)

> He then said that he had told the criminal that they were taking three young men to "scare them" because "they disrespected the troops". Moments before, in the same testimony, Maia had said that he did not know that the lieutenant's intention was to hand over the young men to drug dealers. (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1 / Sergeant of the Military Police / G1 2008g / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "In this situation, what happened there was what should not have happened. Everything went wrong. Everything went wrong," he emphasized. "But it cannot be said that they are agents united in a common

purpose for the commission of crimes," he added. (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Minister of the Military Supreme Court José Côelho Ferreira / G1 2019i / Translated and underlined by the author)

Still on the idea of unintentionality, speeches also emphasized the help provided by police officers to victims after the violent act, as a discursive ability for arguing about their alleged commitment to the victims' lives.

> In an interview with Bom Dia Rio this Wednesday (9), the spokesperson for the Military Police of RJ stated that police officers "fought until the end for Kathlen's life" and denied that the corporation was in an operation. According to him, agents were attacked.
>
> "They took the young woman to the hospital, trying to stop the bleeding. The wound was in the arm and went through the chest. It was not an operation, once again, we are dealing with a gratuitous attack by criminals that operate in this community, the same faction that operates in Providencia, Jacarezinho, and Prazeres, and that has, by nature, by ideology, the gratuitous attack against the police forces. She was in the same direction as the shots that were coming against the police officers," said the major. (Kathlen case – Period 4 / Major of the Military Police / G1 2021a / Translated and underlined by the author)

As suggested earlier, whenever the term "bandit"/ "criminal" was present (either implicitly or explicitly), it appeared as the immediate cause of threats and risks in the contexts targeted by police action. In this sense, by arguing that the failure occurred while trying to shoot at "bandits", the police communicate that making a mistake when one intended to target "bandits" renders this mistake more morally acceptable.

> "The team was in the context of a conflict-ridden community, where there had been a confrontation shortly before our action. It was a mistake, but because of the similarity of the equipment he was holding, he thought it was a gun." (Hélio case – Period 1/ Commander of the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE) / G1 2010b / Translated and underlined by the author)

Arguments about misconduct

In period 1, arguments about 'misconduct' were the second most frequent in the collected data, while in period 2 this type of argument was the third most frequently encountered.

> "We have to act within the law. It's not because someone has a uniform that they should be protected. It's how we act with soldiers and military officials who commit deviations," he added. (Three Young Men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1 / Governor Sergio Cabral/ G1 2008h / Translated and underlined by the author)

However, in period 2, the occurrence of arguments about 'misconduct' remained relatively stable, compared to period 1.

> "We deeply regret the way Mrs. Claudia was rescued, it is a way that we do not tolerate. The corporation does not condone this. For this reason, they are being charged and will be taken to the prison " (…).

> "The ideal would have been for her to be in the back seat, supported by a police officer, which did not happen," [he] added, referring to the way the victim was rescued. (Claudia case – Period 2 / Lieutenant of the Military Police / G1 2014c / Translated and underlined by the author)

In period 3, I did not find any arguments acknowledging 'misconduct' in the analyzed material.

In period 4, these arguments reappeared but at a much lower frequency compared to the first and second periods, at 5.8%.

> "There was [at the time] a very intense exchange [of gunfire] in a nearby residential area. On the way back, there was this incident involving a patrol. It seems that they [the soldiers] did not follow the standard rules of engagement, and that is why the 12 are already in custody for not complying with the rules of engagement. It was regrettable and sad, but it was an isolated incident."
>
> Fernando Azevedo said that all the soldiers involved were questioned, and the conclusion is that they "did not follow the rules in force", which is why they were arrested. (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Minister of Defense, General Fernando Azevedo / R7 Notícias 2019/ Translated and underlined by the author)

On the similarities between political periods in terms of the occurrence of this type of argument, it is also possible to make some considerations:

In different periods arguments about 'misconduct' appeared usually remarked by the idea that the perpetrators actions conflicted with the guidelines of the police corporation.

> Sérgio Cabral emphasized that the conduct of these military officers has nothing to do with the Brazilian Army. The governor stated that the Army is an honorable institution that deserves all the esteem of the people. (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1 / Governor Sérgio Cabral / G1 2008h / Translated and underlined by the author)

> Cabral also classified the entire rescue operation of the general services assistant, from the rescue to the moment she was dragged, as "abominable". The governor also assured that other police officers also repudiate the attitude of the arrested officers and that he does not believe that the fact will undermine the population's trust in the Military Police. (Claudia case – Period 2 / Governor Sérgio Cabral / G1 2014e / Translated and underlined by the author).

> "The least that is expected of the three arrested police officers is that they will be dismissed from the corporation," said the governor, during a ceremony to inaugurate the operation of a new SuperVia train. He stated, however, that the police officers' right of defense should be considered. (Claudia case – Period 2 / Governor Sérgio Cabral / G1 2014f / Translated and underlined by the author)

> In a statement, the Military Police informed that the dismissal occurred "due to the recent unfortunate events involving police officers under his command". The corporation also informed that "the actions are in conflict with the guidelines of the command of the corporation". (Five young boys, 111 shots case

– Period 2 / Statement by Rio de Janeiro Military Police regarding the dismissal of the Irajá Battalion – 41st BPM commander / R7 Notícias 2015 / Translated and underlined by the author)

"It seems that they [the soldiers] did not follow the standard rules of engagement, and that is why the 12 are already in custody for not complying with the rules of engagement. It was regrettable and sad, but it was an isolated incident." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Minister of Defense, General Fernando Azevedo / R7 Notícias 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

"The institutions of the Brazilian Army, the institutions of the Armed Forces do not endorse the failure of their members, but obviously, it needs to be done a more correct and fair investigation possible." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Presidential spokesperson / Carta Capital 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

In arguments about 'misconduct', the perpetrators of police killings were usually named as "irresponsible", "marginals", "criminals" and/or "murderers". When police officers are morally disqualified in these statements, there is a rhetorical effort to differentiate the institution, its values, and principles from the individuals being criticized:

"Two police officers made a fatal mistake and I don't want to see police officers acting like mentally deficient individuals. They really have to be dismissed (from the corporation), they are two murderers." (João Roberto case – Period 1 / Governor Sérgio Cabral / G1 2008i / Translated and underlined by the author)

"The Civil Police acted with firmness in the case of these 11 marginals who did not honor the uniform of the Brazilian Army. They are only masquerading in the uniform, therefore they should be treated as criminals," said Cabral. This is how we act in relation to the soldiers and officers of the Military Police who commit deviations," he added. (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1 / Governor Sérgio Cabral / G1 2008h / Translated and underlined by the author)

"Indefensible, unnecessary and exaggerated action. It is a demonstration of the character they have. These people are already in prison. They will respond criminally and administratively. They can undoubtedly be dismissed from the corporation," said Beltrame. He also classified the agents' attitude as "homicidal", but stated that he does not believe that there was poor training of the police officers, since, according to the secretary, one of the first lessons that the recruits learn is that the weapon should only be used when life is at risk. "The 41st, 7th, 9th, and 14th battalions are battalions where we perceive a higher level of lethality. We have this understanding. Just as we understand that they are deflagrated areas. But this in no way justifies the actions of these police officers. Acting this way is a homicidal way", he added. (Five Young Boys, 111 shots case – Period 2 / Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / G1 2015d / Translated and underlined by the author)

Furthermore, it is worth noting that police officers who killed "criminals" in circumstances morally accepted by the institution were not typically referred to as "murderers".

As the examples above demonstrate, the differentiation between the institution and the perpetrators that comprise arguments about 'misconduct' serves as a discursive ability to shift critiques received by the institution onto specific individuals or groups, framing the problem as an individual issue or as an issue belonging to an isolated group.

In the rare moments when the critique had a more institutional tone and was directed at the corporation in more general terms, there was an effort to point out that the state did not fail to provide guidelines for the police officers perpetrators of the crime. Thus, the main responsibility was once again directed at the individuals who did not follow these principles:

> "Bope's mistake was serious and irreparable," says Rio security secretary. (…)
> However, the secretary emphasized that BOPE is one of the best elite troops in the world. "BOPE is the police force that trains the most, and provides instruction for police forces from other states in Brazil and even from other countries," he noted. (…)
> "It was a mistake that happened, unfortunately, with the troop that is the best trained in the country", concluded Beltrame. (Hélio case – Period 1/ Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / G1 2010c / Translated and underlined by the author)

Arguments in defense of the approach

Arguments in 'defense of the approach' were found with a very approximate frequency in periods 1 and 2. The same happened with periods 3 and 4. However, one difference between the first two periods and the last two is that in period 3 and period 4 I found much more arguments stating that the police operation that resulted in death was appropriate or successful, which is consistent with the intensification of hyperviolent approaches during these last political periods (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017, 13; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2018, 13; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020, 84; 162; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021, 24-25, 305, 307; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2022b, 28, 66).

> In Witzel's words, "the law was made to be interpreted and, therefore, the state will legally defend police officers who kill drug dealers with rifles. But if the courts understand that they should be exonerated, they will be".
>
> When questioned during the interview about cases in which people were killed for carrying drills and even umbrellas, which were mistaken for weapons, Witzel said: "In none of these cases did the shots come from snipers. Not just any police officers will be instructed to do this, and the snipers will go through even more training. I always say the following: I prefer to defend a police officer in court than to go to his funeral. He shot, he killed, that's right," said the governor-elect of the Christian Social Party. (Rodrigo case – Period 3 / Governor Wilson Witzel / UOL 2018c / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "The security policy is successful, the population has felt an increased in the sense of security in the streets. Narco-terrorists operate in the communities and use them as a shield. I chose the best cadres for the police, and they define how to act. It is up to me to listen to the population and demand results. We will continue like this". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / O Globo 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

The fourth period was the one in which I found the most explicit links between arguments defending the approach and arguments criminalizing the victims.

> "There should be no pity [for the kidnapper]", he said. "I defend that the good citizen should not die at the hand of these people". (William Augusto case – Period 4 / President Jair Bolsonaro when asked about the death of William Augusto / UOL 2019d / Translated and underlined by the author)

Note in the example above how "bandit" is explicitly signified as killable. Here are other examples of arguments defending the police approach in which this idea appears:

> "If they had known that the car belonged to people who were not bandits, they wouldn't have done this (….). The guys didn't leave home to kill others." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Deputy Attorney General of Military Justice / Correio Braziliense 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The governor said that, if necessary, he will file a petition with the Supreme Federal Court (STF) to have judicial understanding on the issue of shooting people with rifles in their hands, even if they are not using it. (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Correio Braziliense 2019d /Translated and underlined by the author)

> "I want to extract the understanding that anyone carrying a rifle is an imminent threat, we cannot wait for him to shoot first. Society needs to make this decision; we will provoke the STF to have this judicial understanding. If this one today can be shot, why not those who are with a rifle?", questioned the governor. (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Agência Brasil 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

The fourth period was also the only one in which I observed that an evaluation of the victim's psychological condition was used as a risk indicator, as seen in the case of William Augusto. In this case, it was argued that psychological knowledge was used to justify decisions on how police should approach the victim. As previously mentioned, this was the only episode among all those analyzed in which the victim has committed an offense (hijacking a bus).

> According to the commander of the Military Police Special Operations Battalion (BOPE), who was responsible for the operation, the phone negotiations did not progress and the psychologist present at the scene identified in William a psychotic profile, which, according to him, led the police to start the "tactical negotiation" that culminated in the fatal shootings". In contact, he claimed he wanted to kill himself, he was going to throw himself off the bridge, it was difficult to maintain the negotiation, he got off the bus and pointed the weapon at a victim. We always assumed that the weapon was real. The bus was rigged with PET bottles filled with gasoline, and he had a lighter, so the threat was real. The negotiation turned into a tactical, led by me."
>
> Due to confidentiality of the investigation, [he] did not reveal how many shooters participated in the action nor how many shots were fired. " The necessary shots were fired to make him stop. He also had a knife and a stun gun," the lieutenant colonel informed (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Military Police Lieutenant-colonel / Agência Brasil 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

Among all the collected material, the only presidential statements explicitly defending the police approach in the cases studied were made by Jair Bolsonaro. These statements were issued both at the end of period 3, after his election, and during his term in period 4. Bolsonaro's remarks on the episodes studied predominantly characterized the operations that resulted in deaths as "successful," denied police responsibility for the killings, and asserted that the "criminals" deserved to die. As illustrated by the excerpts above, a similar line of argument also characterized the discourses issued by governor Wilson Witzel.

> "I think a storm is coming, look at how many umbrellas." (Rodrigo case – Period 3 / Tweet originally posted by another social media user and reposted by Jair Bolsonaro, featuring an image of five men carrying rifles with the ironic comment comparing the weapons to umbrellas, in reference to the Rodrigo case / Jair Bolsonaro's Twitter 2018 / Translated and underlined by the author)

The discourse above exemplifies a rhetorical strategy frequently employed by Jair Bolsonaro: using irony in response to critiques regarding the excessive violence in police approaches that resulted in death. Republishing a tweet from an ordinary person and using the tone of irony served as a strategy to connect with his electorate, presenting himself as an ordinary individual who shares their concerns. This kind of speech has mobilized positive reactions from his supporters.

Inspired by Donald Trump's administration, Jair Bolsonaro has extensively used social media to express political positions. Public security is one of the subjects that has most mobilized his communicative discourse in recent years and he has repeatedly used social media to specifically advocate for hyperviolent police approaches (Baptista et al. 2022, 109, 115).

Next, I'll share additional observations on aspects identified in different periods regarding arguments defending the police approach.

In different periods, arguments defending the police approach primarily expressed a persuasive effort to assert that the use of lethal force was necessary to address the security problems in the territories where the episodes of police killing occurred.

> Military Police spokesperson informed that "the action by the 41st BPM (Irajá) was necessary at the site because criminals were attacking drivers on Prefeito Salessa street". According to [him], a young woman was shot during the exchange of gunfire. (Maria Eduarda case – Period 3/ Military Police Major / G1 2017a / Translated and underlined by the author)

> " The necessary shots were fired to make him stop. He also had a knife and a stun gun," the lieutenant colonel informed (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Agência Brasil 2019b / Military Police Lieutenant-colonel / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "The State Secretary of Military Police regrets the death that occurred and understands the feelings of the family members, but the corporation followed the protocols governing hostage situations and, in view of the imminent threat to the 39 victims, the necessary measures were taken by the BOPE team to neutralize the possibility of a greater tragedy." (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Note by the Secretary of State for Military Police / Portal Alta Definição / Translated and underlined by the author)

The interaction between police and ¨bandit¨ was usually described in a binary and antagonistic way, mainly evoking ideas of "confrontation" and/or "war". In this logic, the "bandit" or "criminal" was considered the "enemy", "rival".

> "Unfortunately, the presence of drug dealing in the favelas is not only in Providência. It is a problem throughout Rio de Janeiro. We are following a strategy of confrontation, and it will be maintained. The drug dealing has returned because the army was there occupying." (Three young men from Morro da Providência case – Period 1 / Governor Sergio Cabral / G1 2008j / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "The allegations from these police officers are that two more weapons, pistols, were found with these men. The 41st BPM (Irajá), in particular, deals with the most violent area of Rio. They live a reality of war, in which bandits have war weapons. We live in an asymmetric war. And in this case, only they can answer for what happened." (Maria Eduarda case – Period 3 / Military Police Major / El País Brasil 2017 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "Often some people don't understand police work that sometimes has to be that way. If this criminal had not been slaughtered, many lives would not have been spared. This is happening in the communities; they are with rifles terrorizing the communities. If the police can do their job of slaughtering those with rifles, many other victims will be saved." (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Correio Braziliense 2019a / Translated and underlined by the author)

Police responses to alleged criminal activities were recurrently described using terms that suggest confrontation such as "strike back", "react", "respond to [threat, aggression, etc.]" even when no actual confrontation occurred.

> "We go to the location to fulfill our duty, as planned. When there is a confrontation, if possible, we react." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Lieutenant of the Military Police / El País Brasil 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "On Friday night, criminals carried out simultaneous attacks in several locations in Complexo do Alemão. Police officers from the UPP Fazendinha struck back at the aggression and, after the confrontation, they were informed by residents that the girl had been hit and taken to the Getúlio Vargas Hospital. The Military Police has already opened a procedure to investigate the officers' actions". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Statement by the Government of Rio de Janeiro State / UOL 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

Terms like "surrender", "prevent" and "protect", which could describe less violent approaches, were scarcely seen in the analyzed speeches. The idea of protection appeared most often in the Willian Augusto episode (period 4), where the lethal approach was justified by the need to protect the victims of the bus hijacking.

> "I regret the death that occurred and I am happy with the 37 lives saved. We have much work to do to combat violence and protect the population. We are on the right path" he wrote on Twitter. (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Correio Braziliense 2019d /Translated and underlined by the author)

In other cases, the idea of protection was more frequently used in arguments about the need to protect the police officers themselves, reinforcing the idea that they perceive themselves as being under threat or at risk, and in a state of conflict within the targeted territories.

> "The risk was higher because, on that mission, they left in the Marruá vehicle, without protection, since the Lince vehicles had been damaged in the exchange of gunfire with drug dealers." (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Lieutenant of the Military Police / El País Brasil 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "When we approached the car, about 50 meters away, we saw the robber getting out of the driver's seat, he abandoned the vehicle shooting at us and quickly hid on the car's hood. We shot him to neutralize the threat" (…). The version of the other ten soldiers heard is similar to the lieutenant's account. (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Lieutenant of the Military Police / Extra 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

Another discursive ability that appeared while describing police use of lethal force was the use of euphemisms. Expressions such as "neutralize" or "suicide by police" were particularly notable as substitutes for "police killing", "murder", and "shoot".

"Congratulations to the Rio de Janeiro police officers for the successful operation that ended the bus hijacking on the Rio-Niteroi bridge this morning. Criminal neutralized and no hostages injured. Today the family of an innocent does not cry." (William Augusto case – Period 4 / President Jair Bolsonaro / G1 2019j / Translated and underlined by the author)

"We had to use snipers to neutralize a man who was threatening dozens of lives. I was on site, got on the bus, and noticed that there was a strong smell of gasoline. (...) During the negotiation, he showed a mental disturbance and said he wanted to stop the state. We will listen to the hostages and family members to understand what led him to commit this act." (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Agência Brasil 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

Senator Flávio Bolsonaro (PSL-RJ) proposed a bill to address as suicide the death of criminals who expose themselves to risky situations, as in the case of the hijacking on the Rio-Niteroi Bridge, in which 39 passengers were taken as hostages by Willian Augusto da Silva, 20 years old, inside a Galo Branco bus.

The bill amends the Penal Code to include "suicide by police" among the cases of legitimate defense, in which the police officer "prevents or repels an unjust aggression to his own life or that of others" by killing someone who "refuses to negotiate or surrender, and demonstrates behavior accepting or assuming the risk of the situation being resolved with his own death.

- (The bill) is to protect the police officer from actions in this type of case, such as the bridge kidnapping - Flávio told Globo.

The justification for the bill, presented this Tuesday after the crime, states that the most common cases occur "when the perpetrator, whether premeditating his suicidal intent or not, finds it impossible to escape and refuses to negotiate or to surrender.

The idea is that, in this case, the suspect is choosing to die by not surrendering to the police and therefore "forces the police to act.". (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Senator Flávio Bolsonaro / Extra 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

Unlike "kill" or "murder" a term like "neutralize" does not inherently convey the act of killing someone. By using it to replace terms such as "killing" or "shoot" the institution attenuates the meaning of the lethal approach, minimizing its seriousness and consequences.

Another discursive ability used to defend the way the police operate in *favelas* and poor suburbs was to emphasize the police excellence and prestige in combating crime in those territories and indicate illegal activities discovered during the operations that led to killing.

"The Rocinha UPP was the most well-received and had the lowest rate of disapproval." (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Military Police Major / G1 2015c / Translated and underlined by the author)

"There is a major concern about the deterioration of the image of BOPE, the corporation's most prestigious unit, which has been trying to rebuild its role by actively participating in territory recovery actions for the establishment of UPPs". (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Statement by Rio de Janeiro Military Police / Época 2015 / Translated and underlined by the author)

"The tireless work carried out by the Corporation can be illustrated by the operational results registered this year. The Military Police alone seized, in the first five months of this year, more than three thousand firearms, among which 150 rifles, almost all of them manufactured abroad. During this period, 14,182 people were taken to the Civil Police units - 12,243 adults arrested and 1,939 adolescents apprehended". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Press Office of the State Secretariat of Military Police / G1 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author)

"We will not back down. The state government is on the right path, we are reducing the number of intentional homicides and deeply regret that innocent people like Ágatha and others have lost their lives, as has happened in the state of Rio de Janeiro. We deeply regret this and extend our solidarity to the families." (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Military Police Colonel / G1 2019l / Translated and underlined by the author)

According to the Military Police, after finding the young woman shot, "searches were conducted in the area and the agents seized a rifle magazine, 9mm ammunition, and drugs". (Katlhen case – Period 4 / Statement by Rio de Janeiro Military Police / UOL 2021 / Translated and underlined by the author)

Continuing with the notion of police excellence, another idea used in different periods to justify excessively violent approaches was the emphasis on the technical nature of police actions. In these cases, "technical", "intelligence", "planning" and "training" were terms that stood out.

Questioned about the high number of deaths in 2018, the Rio Military Police says that the corporation's operations are guided by prior planning and carried out within the law, and that, in actions in conflict areas, the mission is primarily the arrest of criminals and the seizure of weapons and drugs. "Often, however, the criminals choose confrontation, initiating the conflict. When the police operation results in deaths or injuries, a Military Police inquiry is opened to investigate the circumstances of the fact". (Rodrigo case – Period 3 / Statement by Rio de Janeiro Military Police / Translated and underlined by the author)

"The state government deeply regrets the death of the girl Ághata, as well as that of all innocent victims during police operations. The work done by the police, whose main objective is to locate criminals and seize weapons and drugs, is based on information provided by the intelligence sector and follows strict execution protocols, always with the concern of preserving lives. All deaths resulting from the intervention of a public agent are investigated by the Internal Affairs and Homicide Police Department. If any excess is proven, the punishments foreseen by law are applied". (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Statement by the Government of Rio de Janeiro State / UOL 2019c / Translated and underlined by the author)

In a statement commenting on Agatha's death, Witzel's office stated that the security policy "is based on intelligence, investigation and re-equipment of the police forces". It also highlighted the 21% decrease in intentional homicides in the first eight months of the year, the lowest rate for the period since 2013. (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel's Office / Metrópoles 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The Press Office of the State Secretary of Military Police informs that the Corporation's actions in combating organized crime are planned based on intelligence information, having as a central concern the preservation of lives. (Ágatha case – Period 4/ Press Office of the State Secretary of Military Police / G1 2020 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The corporation states that the agents receive extensive training. "For this mission, police officers are required to conduct themselves transparently during their actions, guided by integrity and the preservation of lives." (Note by Rio de Janeiro Military Police / G1 2021b / Katlhen case – Period 4/ Translated and underlined by the author)

Arguments criticizing the approach

In all four periods studied, arguments defending the police approach appeared more frequently than those criticizing it.

In periods 1, 2, and 3 arguments criticizing the approach were the second least frequent among the types found.

In period 4 this type of argument was the least frequent among those found.

The second and fourth periods were the only ones in which I found some (although few) structural critiques, pointing to the drug war model, the police culture or to how racism and social inequalities influence police approach. The enunciator of the critiques in period 2 was the Secretary of Public Security.

> The current administration of the Military Police has been advocating for a change from a confrontational model to the expansion of the proximity policing in Rio, aiming to build a relationship of trust with the population. The suspicions of involvement of officers from this squad in a case like the disappearance of Amarildo bring significant damage to this shift in the corporation's stance. (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / Época 2015 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The Secretary of Security of Rio, José Mariano Beltrame, brought the UPPs to the city. In an interview with Gabeira, he states that the UPP is not the solution to all problems and talks about the Amarildo case: "It is very sad that this has happened inside a Pacifying Police Unit. An episode like this, whether from drug trafficking or committed by police officers, is obviously very bad. And I think this episode has a very important lesson that we all should learn: how many Amarildos has this war on drug trafficking already caused in the state of Rio de Janeiro? We need to provide an answer," he declares. (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / G1 2013 / Translated and underlined by the author)

The only critique specifically addressing how racism and social inequalities affect police approach was issued by a Minister of the Military Supreme Court (STM) during the voting process

on a habeas corpus petition presented by the defense of the officers accused in the Evaldo case. Although the STM's is designed to judge military crimes, a process that in theory would necessarily involve critical thinking about military practices, the minister did not receive much support among her peers when expressed her critique.

> "When a poor Black man in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro is mistaken for a thug, I have doubts whether the same would occur with a blond man in Ipanema wearing a Hugo Boss shirt," Maria Elizabeth declared.
>
> The Minister's arguments were rebutted by Minister Odilson Sampaio Benzi, who believes that the Army, on patrol, would not shoot solely based on skin color. (Evaldo case – Period 4 / Minister of the Military Supreme Court Maria Elizabeth Guimaraes Teixeira Rocha / G1 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

This was also the only occasion in which I identified a discourse making explicit divergences among the perceptions of members of higher levels of the military institutions regarding police approaches. The conditions of production of the minister's discourse, the interlocutions and inter discursiveness in that context help to understand why. The minister's discourse was enunciated in a political context in which representatives of the high positions of the policy administration were explicitly defending police killing as a way to deal with public security issues. In a context in which state officials so explicitly defend excessively violent approaches and vehemently criticize the application of human rights principles in public security interventions, interlocutors with divergent positions may feel more impelled to speak out publicly about these divergences, since the public arena is an important space to which one can appeal to dispute meanings about public policies and needs for change (Schmidt 2008, 310-311).

In period 1 arguments criticizing the police approach appeared connected to other frames with a counterbalancing tone. The counterbalancing frames served to assert that the public security policy was already going through an important process of change focused on the reduction of police confrontation, but that the process of change takes time and requires patience.

> According to Beltrame, for four months, the Security Secretariat has been working on a project to create a Police University in the state, which would have a partnership with the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV):
>
> "We are not just standing here. However cultural change does not happen from one Friday to the following Monday. We need to change the culture from the moment the police officer joins. I believe that the university project, along with other major projects, is one that touches the essence and culture of the institutions where we seek to minimize and put an end to, taking a definitive step to ensure that this type of failure does not occur. (Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / João Roberto case – Period 1 / G1 20081 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> "No argument will justify the unjustifiable, it will not bring the child back," he said, and stated that, despite the situation, Rio is not "out of control."

> "We bought 1,550 rifles, in addition to non-lethal weapon kits costing R$ 1 million. We know that things need to be changed, we need to redesign what the police officer is facing on the streets, and these changes are being implemented. Then, a pair of insane individuals shows up and undermines the essence of the change we want to implement. (João Roberto case – Period 1 / Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame / G1 2008m / Translated and underlined by the author)

By using a counterbalancing frame, the speaker differentiates between prevailing police models and cultures that should be criticized and a specific model represented by the UPPs. During a public security administration that used to advocate in favor of the UPPs as a paradigmatic rupture with traditional models of public security, discourses defending the police approach seem to reveal a perception that this shift was in fact being built. This effort towards self-distinction can explain to some extent why even in this period, where one could expect to find more self-critical discourses, the frequency of arguments defending the police approach was more than those criticizing it. In fact, the critical arguments that I found in period 1 were directed at the traces left by the traditional models that UPPs would supposedly help to overcome, which in practice did not happen (Franco 2014, 123-126). Also, the counterbalancing tone in communicative discourses during this period worked to reinforce with the audience the state's commitment to change. It is worth asking, however, to what extent this commitment was widely shared by police officers working regularly in marginalized territories, considering that both administrations of the secretary Beltrame continued to be marked by cases of police killings that gained public attention in the face of evidence that they could have been avoided. The Amarildo case, for example, was even pointed out by politicians and scholars as one of the main events that have contributed to widespread discredit of the UPPs as a successful public security policy and increasing pressure for their revision or dissolution (Menezes and Corrêa 2017, 16).

In the third period, although a slightly higher frequency of critical statements was found, they were generally limited to acknowledging the need to review protocols to improve police performance. Note that the frame "reviewing protocols" articulated with the frame "improving performance" does not indicate any acknowledgment that the current public security model and/or the police institution requires structural change. The argumentative focus here is on refining certain practices and not on their drastic transformation. As mentioned previously, this period had the highest frequency of arguments criminalizing victims, which also highlights the difficulty of making an ideological rupture with the traditional model of public security.

> "It's up to these police officers to have a selective switch in their minds so that they can be, at times, guarantors of society's rights and, at other times, warriors. What human being can do that? It is necessary to review protocols and suppress abuses. What we are experiencing today is a complex and very serious moment," added the Military Police spokesperson. (Military Police Major / Maria Eduarda case – Period 3 / Translated and underlined by the author)

Although institutional self-critiques were scarce in all the political periods considered, the fourth period stood out as the one with the least critiques.

It is relevant to consider that in none of the periods I found critiques of the militarized model itself and its authoritarian legacy, even though Brazil has a history of anti-police violence activism carried out by social movements, family members of victims and community leaders that for years have been calling for the demilitarization of the police. Constantly those activists were publicly speaking about the episodes of police killing studied here, reinforcing the need to debate the issue of demilitarization (Medina 2013, 2-3). However, I did not find any official response to this claim in the material studied.

Arguments about institution targeted

Arguments coded as 'institution targeted' were found in the material referring to periods 2 and 4, but not in data from periods 1 and 3.

In each of these periods, I found one argument identifying "the media" as responsible for casting unfair suspicion on the police institution.

> The assessment of the Military Police command is that the coverage presented on Jornal Nacional casts suspicion and questions on its elite unit based on conjectures and hypotheses with weak foundations. There is a major concern about the deterioration of the image of BOPE, the corporation's most prestigious unit, which has been trying to rebuild its role by actively participating in territory recovery actions for the establishment of UPPs. The current administration of the Military Police has been advocating for a change from a confrontational model to the expansion of the proximity policing in Rio, aiming to build a relationship of trust with the population. The suspicions of involvement of officers from this squad in a case like the disappearance of Amarildo bring significant damage to this shift in the corporation's stance. (Amarildo case – Period 2 / Military Police Command / Época 2015 / Translated and underlined by the author)

> The military's lawyer said at the court hearing that the arrest was "constructed by the media". "We are facing a generic arrest, which was constructed by the media. The media, all the time, portrayed the military as murderers without investigating the facts. The press is using this case to smear the Armed Forces." (Evaldo case – Period 4/ Police officers' defense lawyer / Extra 2019d / Translated and underlined by the author)

Other arguments analyzed in period 2 did not specify who might be interested in targeting the police institution.

In period 4, arguments classified as 'institution targeted' were often found in conjunction with arguments in 'defense of the approach'.

> At a press conference, Witzel attributed Ágatha's death to organized crime, said that the case could not serve as an electoral platform, but took the opportunity to promote the government. "The proof that we are investing in intelligence and in equipment for the police is the reduction in crime rates and the number of homicides. The population is feeling the results on the streets," he said. (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / Ponte Jornalismo 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

In addition to statements that did not explicitly identify who was targeting the institution, there were arguments suggesting that opposition parties and other political sectors opposed to the incumbent government were primarily responsible for unjustly targeting it. Some of those arguments claimed that public debates were being used to attack the police institution and/or the incumbent government, "villainizing", disqualifying or casting suspicions on them to politicize the issue and/or attract the electorate's attention.

> According to [him], speeches that try to "villainize" the presence of police officers in the communities do not take into account that the Military Police help maintain order by addressing cases of various natures, such as domestic violence. "Today the UPPs are responsible for handling over a hundred cases within the communities. Calls from the residents themselves", said the Military Police spokesperson. He also emphasized that disarming criminals is the main goal to bring peace to the residents. "We need a solution that is above this context. A future of peace involves the removal of weapons from the hands of these criminals". (Kathlen case – Period 4 / Military Police Major / G1 2021c / Translated and underlined by the author)

> At various moments during the press conference, Witzel criticized "the opposition", without specifying which parties, but referring more to the National Congress than to Alerj[6], for allegedly making political use of Ágatha's murder. For the governor, this moment cannot be used as a way of obstructing the vote on Minister Sérgio Moro's anti-crime package, in which one of the main points is the definition of the exclusion of unlawfulness, guaranteeing more legal security for police officers who shoot on duty.
>
> "It is indecent to use a coffin as a political platform. We cannot allow opposition parties to use the deaths of innocent individuals as a political platform.
>
> The anti-crime package is essential," said Witzel, who placed deputy Filipe Francischini (PSL-SP), president of the Constitution and Justice Commission in the Chamber of Deputies, at his side at the press conference. "The opposition is making a political platform. I preferred, then, to gather our government and give a state explanation." (Ágatha case – Period 4 / Governor Wilson Witzel / G1 2019 / Translated and underlined by the author)

There were also frames aimed at arguing that the police were facing unfair accusations of using a racist and/or class-based approach in the episodes in question.

> "When the opposition stands up and says that I don't value the life of the *favela* resident, it is a discourse absolutely devoid of common sense and reason". (William Augusto case – Period 4 / Governador Wilson Witzel / UOL 2019b / Translated and underlined by the author)

[6] Alerj is the acronym for the *Assembléia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro).

CONCLUSION

Analyzing widely disseminated official speeches that focus on the general population as the main interlocutor has enabled me to identify what public security institutions have turned into "communicative discourses" when the subject is the lethal responses of the police in *favelas* and poor suburbs (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312).

The study of emblematic cases from four different political periods allowed the identification of eight modalities of arguments present in public security discourses, which were categorized as follows: risk context, criminalization, third-party perpetrators, fatality, misconduct, defense of the approach, critique of the approach, institution targeted. Most of the eight types argument mapped in the data set were present in each of the four periods. Additionally, there was no political period that offered a specific modality of argument that could help to outline a distinct discursive trend.

However, it was possible to identify some variations in the frequency of each type of argument according to political period, as follows:

In all periods, arguments classified as 'risk context' were frequently used when describing situations that resulted in police killings. This type of argument exhibited the smallest variations in frequency across periods. The problem most often pointed out as triggering the police killings was a situation of risk or confrontation that took place in *favelas* or poor suburbs. The expression "dominated by criminals" and terms such as "threats", "risks", and "confrontation" were often used to characterize territories targeted by the police operations. In different periods, arguments about 'risk context' often complemented arguments about the 'criminalization of victims', 'third-party perpetrators', and 'fatality'. Statements that overgeneralize the experiences of "criminals", "residents", and even those identified as "victims" in the alleged "risk contexts" were recurrent.

Concerning the frequency of arguments criminalizing victims, in the studied material, I observed an increase in this type of argument from the second period onward, with period 3 having the highest relative percentage of such arguments. Nonetheless, in at least one of the episodes studied in each period, there was an initial persuasive effort to associate directly or indirectly to crime the "residents" that were killed, particularly when the victims were men. The presumed criminal affiliation of the victims was employed as a discursive ability used to justify the use of lethal force against them. The persistent application of the criminal affiliation frame in discourses about "residents", despite of evidence, allows us to infer that the word "resident" very often holds the implicit meaning of "[potential] bandit until proven otherwise". It was also observed that the rhetoric about the "criminals" often depersonalized them. Furthermore, it is possible to infer that the stereotype of "criminals" primarily refers to Afro-Brazilian corporealities.

When comparing the frequency of the argument about 'third-party perpetrators' across different political periods, once again, I observed a significant discursive discontinuity between periods 1 and 2, although in both periods public security policy was under the command of the same groups. Period 2 stood out from the others due to the greater presence of arguments denying that

the police officers were the perpetrators of the homicides and blaming others, typically drug dealers or “criminals” living and/or operating in the territories where the homicides occurred. This may be a consequence of the fact that in period 2 the state representatives faced much more public pressure to position themselves in relation to crimes perpetrated by police officers (especially in comparison to the previous period). In this context, denying or blaming drug dealers likely served as a discursive ability to defend the state administration against these critiques. In the third period, I noticed a significant drop in the percentage of this type of argument compared to period 2. In period 4, the percentage of this type of argument doubled compared to period 3. I consider that this may be related to the growing public pressure on the government to account for crimes committed by police officers, in reaction to the repeated rhetoric of the main government leaders of the time, such as the president and the governor of Rio de Janeiro, explicitly against human rights and in favor of hyper-violent police approaches. Especially in periods 2 and 4, arguments about ‘third-party perpetrators’ often appeared linked to arguments about ‘risk context’ to absolve the police of responsibility for the murders. It was also notable the use of the idea “has been found death” or “has been found injured” when describing the police encounter with the victims. The narrative that does not indicate who is responsible for the homicide functions as a discursive ability to deny in advance the police authorship.

Regarding arguments about ‘fatality’, the first period showed the highest level of public acknowledgment of failures in police performance. More than half of the arguments collected mentioned the occurrence of a failure. Most of them classified the failure as a ‘fatality’, an unintentional error. The remaining statements classified it as ‘misconduct’. Compared to period 1, in period 2 the occurrence of arguments acknowledging a ‘fatality’ dropped significantly. In period 3, I did not find any arguments acknowledging a ‘fatality’ in the studied material. In period 4, the occurrence of arguments acknowledging a failure returned to proportions slightly lower than in period 2. However, there was an inversion: most of these arguments classified the failure as a ‘fatality’, emphasizing its unintentional nature, whereas in period 2, most arguments acknowledging a failure classified it as ‘misconduct’. In different periods, I observed that the speakers often framed arguments about ‘fatality’ by combining terms like "threat" and "risk", which describe targeted territories, with the terms such as "fatality", "mistake", "accident", "tragedy", and "unfortunate fact", which describe the police acts. These terms describing police actions help to frame them as unintentional and, to some extent, attenuate the perpetrators' responsibility for the acts. Arguments that highlight the "clean record" and "exemplary behavior" of the perpetrators of lethal violence sometimes appeared connected to the argument about ‘fatality’, producing the rhetorical effect of softening the severity of the critiques received, in addition to inducing the unintentionality of the act. Speeches also emphasized the help provided by police officers to victims after the violent act, as a discursive ability for arguing about their allegedly commitment to the victims' lives. Furthermore, by arguing that the failure occurred while trying to shoot at “bandits”, the police communicate that making a mistake when one intended to target “bandits” renders this mistake more morally acceptable.

With respect to the frequency of arguments about ‘misconduct’, in period 1, these arguments were the second most frequent in the collected data, while in period 2 they were the third

most frequently encountered. However, in period 2, the occurrence of arguments about ‘misconduct’ remained relatively stable, compared to period 1. In period 3, I did not find any arguments acknowledging ‘misconduct’ in the analyzed material. In period 4, these arguments reappeared but at a much lower frequency compared to the first and second periods, at 5.8%. In different periods, arguments about ‘misconduct’ appeared usually remarked by the idea that the perpetrators actions conflicted with the guidelines of the police corporation. In arguments about ‘misconduct’, the perpetrators of police killings were usually named as "irresponsible", “marginals”, “criminals” and/or "murderers". When police officers are morally disqualified in these statements, there is a rhetorical effort to differentiate the institution, its values, and principles from the individuals being criticized. This serves as a discursive ability to frame the problem as an individual issue or as an issue belonging to an isolated group. Police officers who killed “criminals” in circumstances morally accepted by the institution were not typically referred to as "murderers". In the rare moments when the critique had a more institutional tone and was directed at the corporation in more general terms, there was an effort to point out that the state did not fail to provide guidelines for the police officers perpetrators of the crime. Thus, the main responsibility was once again directed at the individuals who did not follow these principles.

Arguments in ‘defense of the approach’ were found with a very approximate frequency in periods 1 and 2. The same happened with periods 3 and 4. However, one difference between the first two periods and the last two is that in period 3 and period 4 I found much more arguments stating that the police operation that resulted in death was appropriate or successful, which is consistent with the intensification of hyperviolent approaches during these last political periods. The fourth period was the one in which I found the most explicit links between arguments defending the approach and arguments criminalizing the victims, many of which signified “bandit” as killable. The fourth period was also the only one in which I observed that an evaluation of the victim's psychological condition was used as a risk indicator. Among all the collected material, the only presidential statements explicitly defending the police approach in the cases studied were made by Jair Bolsonaro. A similar line of argument also characterized the discourses issued by governor Wilson Witzel. In different periods, arguments defending the police approach primarily expressed a persuasive effort to assert that the use of lethal force was necessary to address the security problems in the territories where the episodes of police killing occurred. The interaction between police and ¨bandit¨ was usually described in a binary and antagonistic way, mainly evoking ideas of “confrontation” and/or “war”. In this logic, the “bandit” or “criminal” is considered the “enemy”, “rival”. Police responses to alleged criminal activities were recurrently described using terms that suggest confrontation such as "strike back", "react", "respond to [threat, aggression, etc.]” even when no actual confrontation occurred. Terms like "surrender", "prevent" and "protect", which could describe less violent approaches, were scarcely seen in the analyzed speeches. Another discursive ability that appeared while describing police use of lethal force was the use of euphemisms. Expressions such as "neutralize" or "suicide by police" were particularly notable as substitutes for "police killing", "murder", and "shoot". Additionally, a discursive ability used to defend the way the police operate in *favelas* and poor suburbs was to emphasize the police excellence and prestige

in combating crime in those territories and indicate illegal activities discovered during the operations that led to killing. Another idea used in different periods to justify excessively violent approaches was the emphasis on the technical nature of police actions. In these cases, "technical", "intelligence", "planning" and "training" were terms that stood out. In all four periods studied, arguments defending the police approach appeared more frequently than those criticizing it.

In periods 1, 2 and 3 arguments criticizing the approach were the second least frequent and in period 4 this type of argument was the least frequent among those found. The second and fourth periods were the only ones in which I found some (although few) structural critiques, pointing to the drug war model, the police culture or to how racism and social inequalities influence police approach. In period 1 arguments criticizing the police approach appeared connected to other frames with a counterbalancing tone. The counterbalancing frames served to assert that the public security policy was already going through an important process of change focused on the reduction of police confrontation, but that the process of change takes time and requires patience. In the third period, although a slightly higher frequency of critical statements was found, they were generally limited to acknowledging the need to review protocols to improve police performance, focusing on refining certain practices. This does not indicate any acknowledgment that the current public security model and/or the police institution requires structural change. Although institutional self-critiques were scarce in all the political periods considered, the fourth period stood out as the one with the least critiques. In none of the periods I found critiques of the militarized model itself and its authoritarian legacy

Arguments coded as 'institution targeted' were found in the material referring to periods 2 and 4, but not in data from periods 1 and 3. In each of these periods, I found one argument identifying "the media" as responsible for casting unfair suspicion on the police institution. Other arguments analyzed in period 2 did not specify who might be interested in targeting the police institution. In period 4, arguments classified as 'institution targeted' were often found in conjunction with arguments in 'defense of the approach'. In addition to statements that did not explicitly identify who was targeting the institution, there were arguments suggesting that opposition parties and other political sectors opposed to the incumbent government were primarily responsible for unjustly targeting it.

After comparing data collected from four political periods, I contend that over time "communicative discourses" predominantly reflected conservative institutional positions on the use of hyper-violent approaches. They have operated ideologically more to sustain than to change the way public security institutions deal with police killings. "Rhetorical frames" and "discursive abilities" have primarily conveyed a lack of institutional self-critique regarding the disproportionate use of lethal approaches (Schmidt 2002, 169; Béland 2009,706). Rhetorical frames expressed this by:

- Arguing that the circumstances/contexts, due to the "risks" they posed, compelled the police to use lethal force in the episodes analyzed.

- Asserting that the institution was not directly responsible for the killings.

- Explicitly defending the public security model in force, or more specifically the police approach in the episodes analyzed.

- Sometimes claiming that there was a political interest behind the repercussions of these episodes.

With respect to discursive abilities, the lack of institutional self- critique was revealed by:

- Denial of the problem;

- Use of justificatory discursive tones;

- Appealing to unintentionality;

- Describing the killings with euphemisms (such as “neutralizing”);

- Blaming specific individuals or groups, whether they are:

  a) the victims themselves;

  b) other individuals in the targeted territories, labeled as “criminals”;

  c) police officers whose behavior was deemed deviant;

- Moral differentiation between police officer perpetrators and the institution;

- Emphasizing the institution's excellence/prestige and/or the clean record of the perpetrators;

- Highlighting the alleged support provided to the victims;

- Reversing received critiques by interpreting them as attacks.

Arguments criticizing the policy approach guiding police operations or questioning the security model in force — those that could more directly emphasize different viewpoints on the use of lethal police force — appeared with low frequency in all periods. Most of them did not form rhetorical frames evoking paradigmatic shifts. Even in periods when specific public security representatives expressed differing perspectives on this issue, other institutional discourses have not demonstrated support for similar understandings.

As a result, when public security institutions, in addition to perpetuating hyper-violent approaches over the years, fail to offer the public a more critical discursive framing of this problem, they further contribute to the trivialization of Afro-Brazilian deaths in low-income territories.

This work demonstrates pathways for understanding how policy institutions create argumentative and ideological mechanisms to justify policy choices. It highlights the significance of discursive institutionalism in comprehending the role of discourse not only in processes of policy change but also in situations of policy maintenance (Schmidt 2002, 169-170; Schmidt 2008, 303-305; Béland 2009, 703-704).

It also launches clues on institutional and political factors to consider while analyzing the persistence of conservative discourses to the detriment of disruptive discourses in public policies. These clues can be explored in future research to better understand the aspects of the structure of political opportunities that can influence continuities and ruptures in institutional discourses and how this correlates with changes or the maintenance of public policies over time.

The study of institutional communicative discourses on police killings adds to the initiatives of scholars investigating the persistent use of hyperviolent policy approaches in low-income and Black territories, given that institutional efforts aimed at changing or maintaining policy responses involve public communication and persuasion (Schmidt 2002,171-172; Schmidt 2008, 310-312). Studying rhetorical frames applied by public security spokespersons to publicly explain the use of hyperviolent approaches can contribute to a better understanding of how state violence is signified by state institutions and justified to the broader population. This complements studies that address the racial bias of lethal police violence in Brazil by focusing on testimonies and claims of survivors or indirect victims, their families, and activists (Sinhoretto et al. 2014, 138-139; Benício et al. 2018; 196; Sinhoretto and Morais 2018, 19-22; Alves 2019, 85-86; Anunciação et. al 2020, 4).

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