

# Violence and Public Safety as a Democratic Simulacrum in Brazil

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes actions taken by eight special programs for homicide reduction implemented in the states of Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as the Brazilian Federal District. It aims to understand the historical permanence of lethal violence as one of the most striking social characteristics of Brazil and defends the argument that the prevention and tackling of homicides – understood in a broad sense that includes all intentional violent deaths – are operated, both politically and institutionally, from a symbolic simulacrum that causes incremental initiatives to fail to reach the architecture of criminal justice and public security institutions. As structural reforms in the criminal justice and public security system face several obstacles to being approved by the Legislative Branch, this simulacrum makes the police force and other institutions belonging to the system to continue operating from a center of criminal policies that do not depend on the construction of a democratic project of public security, protection of life or civil and human rights. The study reiterates that the debate on transparency and data quality can allow actions to strengthen institutional capacity for monitoring and evaluation and/or strategic litigation, which in turn may weaken of the *path dependence* and worldviews that operate the identified simulacrum. In other words, the debate on transparency and data quality is one of the strongest battlefronts for the reduction of violence and for the democratization of public safety in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Violence, Homicides, Simulacrum, Public safety in Brazil.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to understand the historical permanence of lethal violence as one of the most striking societal characteristics of Brazil and the challenges it creates for the implementation of homicide reduction programs in the Brazilian Federative Units (the states and the Federal District). In this text, I defend the argument that the prevention and tackling of homicides, understood in a broad sense that includes all intentional violent deaths<sup>1</sup>, are operated, both politically and institutionally, from a symbolic simulacrum<sup>2</sup> that causes incremental initiatives, however necessary and important, to fail to reach the

architecture of the institutions charged with providing criminal justice and public safety. For this reason, these institutions continue to operate from a center of criminal policy that does not depend on the construction of a democratic project of public safety, life assurance or civil and human rights.

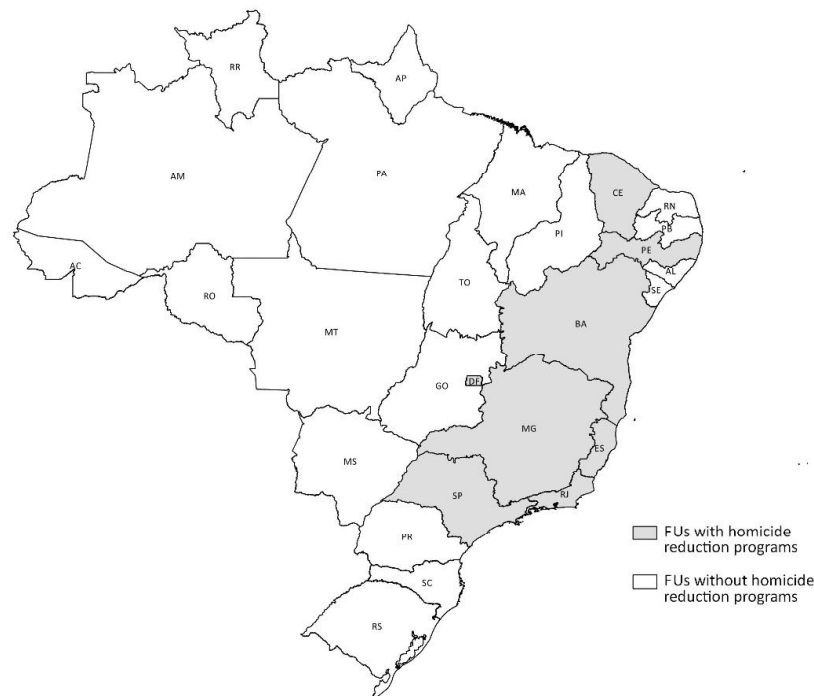
To corroborate this analysis, eight homicide reduction programs were selected, implemented in the states of Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as the Federal District (Map 1). Such programs will be compared with the actions perceived by the specialized literature as the most recommended and efficient for coping with high rates of lethal violence. We shall demonstrate that such programs follow, in broad lines, successful recommendations and practices adopted in the world. Yet, if they have the potential impact in the short and medium term, to be truly successful they would have to cease to be mere programs and become permanent actions that could effectively change the policing standards as well as the country's criminal and penitentiary policies.

However, before beginning the specific discussion on homicide reduction programs, it is worth considering some historical, political and institutional aspects that help to refine the efforts undertaken in the light of the Brazilian reality and that will be key to the effects of the programs analyzed and the reading proposed herein. Among these aspects, the way the State responds to crime and violence in Brazil calls attention, for it has been marked, at least since the beginning of the 20th

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<sup>1</sup>The category of "intentional violent deaths" (MVI) includes records of premeditated murder, theft resulting in death, bodily injury resulting in death, in addition to deaths caused by police use of deadly force and the total number of police officers killed, from the criminal databases produced by the Federative Units. Therefore, the adoption of intentional violent deaths as a category is a methodological option adopted by the Brazilian Forum of Public Safety to give visibility to the phenomenon of lethal violence registered by the country's police organizations in all its spheres. This is because the category "premeditated murder" (in Portuguese, "homicídio doloso") does not include two types of crime that are important for understanding lethal violence in Brazil: robbery resulting in death ("latrocínio") and police use of deadly force, also called "autos de resistência". Prior to the establishment of this category, however, the health system was (and in many cases still is) the only reliable national system that allows for comparative analysis at the international, national and subnational levels. However, in the health system, the categories adopted are "killings by aggression" and "deaths caused by legal intervention", whose aggregate is very close to the overall number of "intentional violent deaths". The advantage of the health system lies in the possibility of disaggregation and use of micro-data, since the official police records do not follow the same classification pattern.

<sup>2</sup>This concept will be further detailed later in this article.



**Map 1:** Selected Federal Units with Special Homicide Reduction Programs.

**Source:** Prepared by the author.

century, by the identification and neutralization of criminals. The criminal policy, i.e., the way laws are interpreted and crimes are punished by the institutions that make up the so-called “criminal justice and public safety system” does not focus on the crime itself, but instead, on those who committed it. There is a modulation of practices that adapt to various socio-political, economic, racial, demographic and cultural profiles (Costa and Lima 2014).

Not surprisingly, Article 144 of the Brazilian Constitution, which deals specifically with public safety, is part of the section entitled “defense of the State” and has kept intact the operative structure of the area, which has been inherited from the military regime that begun in 1964 (several regulations that still govern the operation of military police, for example, were created between 1967 and 1979 and have not been influenced by the logic of the rights agenda as of the current Federal Constitution, dated 1988). The emphasis of the norms governing the field of public security is still strongly linked to the concept of “internal security”, provided by the 1937 Constitution, which feedbacks actions to impose public order and combat enemies. In practice, this causes the concept of “public security” to become an abstract concept, empirically defined in the day-to-day of law enforcement activity. The current Brazilian Constitution and all infra-constitutional

legislation do not define what “public security” is; they simply formalize existing organizations as those responsible for the organizational field (Lima 2011).

Even so, the democratic context has made this same organizational field even more complex. In the 1980s, during the process of transition towards democracy, an alternative narrative to the idea of “internal security” succeeded in introducing tensions in the field of public security. These may have failed in allowing the incorporation of minimum consensus regarding the transformations in the current institutional model, but have fostered the debate on a model of public order based on citizenship, protection of human rights and access to justice (Lima and Sinhoretto 2010). Through this movement, security was inserted in the *Caputs* of Articles 5 and 6 of the same Federal Constitution of 1988, both as a civil right inherent to the exercise of civic consciousness (Article 5) and as a social and universal right (Article 6). However, I argue that such tensions have been kept in the political and strategic discourse sphere and failed to promote the remodeling of practices and organizational cultures; that is, they have not changed the essence of tactical and operational activity.

This is a central variable for the analysis proposed in this article, insofar as it makes public responses and

social perceptions about public safety to be seemingly “out of phase”, borrowing a concept from physics. Such responses recognize as necessary – and at the same time disregard – actions focused on the social dynamics that accept and trivialize domestic, gender and land-related violence, racial issues (not only racism), assaults in bars and in the public transportation system and/or the various other interpersonal conflicts that go beyond the traditional image of “police” vs. “criminals”, who, in turn, happen to be increasingly “organized”, “audacious” and “dangerous” because of drug trafficking. In the end, this image sets the tone of the current demands for order and security and the priority always ends up being to identify and eliminate the “enemy”.

## 2. FRIGHTENED BY CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Therefore, it is important to note that, beyond the dimension of victimization itself, Brazilians are ever frightened by crime and violence. According to data contained in the publication “Fear of Violence and Authoritarianism in Brazil” (Forum ..., 2017), the Brazilian population presented extremely high rates of fear of being victims of a selected set of crimes and acts of violence; furthermore, no stratum of the social pyramid has reported not to be frightened. In all quarters of the study samples, the percentage of respondents who reported being afraid of the situations investigated was, at an index ranging from 0 to 1, greater than 0.50. We emulate a sort of moral and political vendetta that praises violent responses to seemingly endless violence.

In other words, all things considered, there is a serious social fracture on the issue of how to deal with crime and criminals. According to the available surveys, 57% of the Brazilian population agree with the statement that says, “a good criminal is a dead criminal” [bandido bom é bandido morto] (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2016). And this fracture will directly impact the design and implementation of violence reduction programs in Brazil, for it spells out a strong symbolic battle for the legitimacy of killing and, therefore, shapes political and institutional priorities and positions. As a matter of fact, some deaths are even accepted as inherent in the “war” instituted between segments of the Brazilian society, which often reinforce not only violence itself, but the perverse division between “the good citizens” and “the criminals”, while regulated guarantee of the social and political rights for the first group (as it has been well narrated by Wanderley Guilherme dos

Santos, 1979) and sparing the rigor of law and revenge for the latter – we must keep in mind that slavery was legally and morally accepted in colonial Brazil.

That is, if we want to understand the limits and potentialities of violence reduction programs in Brazil, we must note that the socio-cultural categories “good citizen” and “criminal” seem to respectively replace, through a racial and economic profile, the socioeconomic categories of the “hard worker” and the “bum”, which structured the social relations and the relations between the police force and the society in the country until the 1970s (Bueno *et al.* 2016)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, dealing with these new categories will often be more analytically important than merely adopting new technologies and management tools for the operation of existing policing standards. This is because, in fact, these categories will, in moral terms, determine what police actions will be regarded as “right” or “wrong”, indicating that the democratic recovery has not been able to change the paradigm of citizenship in Brazil, whose hallmark has always been grounded on a system of differentiated citizenship, which treats some individuals as citizens who deserve rights while others do not. Actually, such citizenship resorts to social markers such as education, property, race, gender and occupation to provide different treatments for different categories of citizens (Holston 2013).

Along these lines, from a historical perspective of Brazilian politics, the regulated social rights of Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1979), which explains the economic-social policy of the country from the 1930s onwards and binds citizenship to occupational stratification; the concept of “worker” developed by Alba Zaluar (1985), which provides subsidies to think about the formation of the social identity of portions of the population, but which is fundamental to understand the relation that these subjects establish with the State; the concept of

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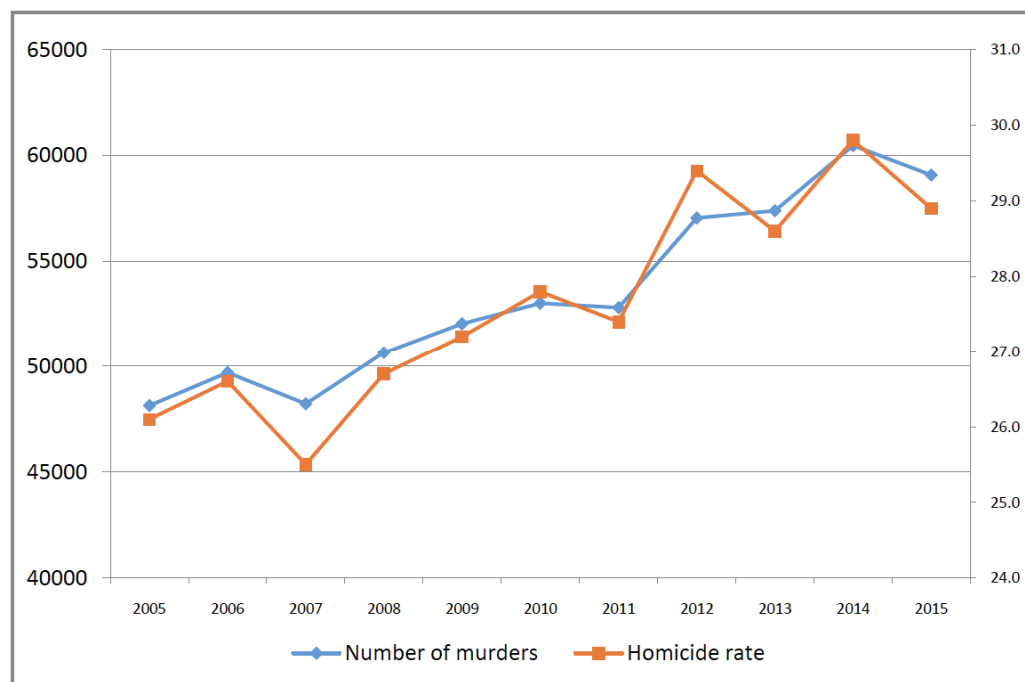
<sup>3</sup>A report published by “O Globo”, one of the largest newspapers in the country, based in the city of Rio de Janeiro, dated 11/15/2017, attributes to a Colonel of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police, the maximum rank of the military police corps in the country, who chairs a Special Analysis Committee of the Militar Police about police officer killed (the state is the leader in the number of police officers killed), a phrase that is the empirical synthesis of what is being affirmed in this text: “To begin with, I would like to separate the civilian, the good citizen, from the criminal, the enemy of the people. *The criminal shoots and kills a policeman, and when the most intense and reactive repression to the death of the guardian of society occurs, he continues to shoot, intensifying the absurd and surreal scenario of facing the police without any fear, exposing innocents to the risk of being hit during shootings*” [emphasis added], available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/para-policia-militar-legislacao-fragil-nao-inibea-ataques-de-criminosos-22071555>.

criminal subjection, by Michel Misse (2014), which aims to analyze the operationalization of the category “criminal” in the Brazilian society; or the notion of democracy disjunctiveness advocated by Teresa Caldeira and James Holston, which is not able to effect civil rights for the whole population, at the same time when it delegitimizes the notion of human rights (Caldeira 2001; Holston 2013); all are extremely current and shape not only the place of speech of significant portions of the Brazilian population, but are decisive for understanding their position in the hierarchical and unequal relationship between society and State in Brazil, as well as explaining the stance of institutions in face of the scenario of crime and violence aggravation witnessed over the last 20 years.

In other words, violence, whether perpetrated by a “criminal”, by the society, or by the State, is still often perceived as a legitimate response to crime, fear, and insecurity. Violence is accepted as a constituent part of our social relations. The problem is that when it reached epidemic levels in the late 1990s, public authorities were politically and managerially pressured to change their discourses and, given the political impossibility of more substantial structural reforms, to

propose programs and actions aimed at integrating efforts to reduce lethal violence. However, a good part of the efforts has been subsumed, at the tactical and operational levels, to the discussion about the criteria for the allocation of police personnel and the adoption of new material and technological resources. A bet was placed on the incremental aspect, and as the limit of that choice was reached, we came across a gap between discourses and practices that impairs permanent improvements in crime reduction.

In addition, this impairment is not directly associated with the fact that the plans put into practice are more or less referenced to the most successful crime prevention practices documented in the specialized literature. Its main reason is that few incremental initiatives have managed to change policing patterns and this move would help explain why violent crime indicators continue to rise and hit record highs. This also helps to understand why the various initiatives to reduce violence end up diluted, even when successful at first, due to the alternation of political leadership and the changes in political and institutional priorities. However, this is only part of the story.



**Chart 1:** Absolute number and rates per group of 100,000 homicides recorded by the Mortality Information System of the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

2005 to 2015

Brazil

**Source:** MS/SVS/CGIAE - Mortality Information System - SIM. The number of homicides in the Federative Unit of residence was obtained by adding the following ICDs 10: X85-Y09 and Y35-Y36, that is, deaths caused by aggression plus those caused by legal intervention. Prepared by Diest/lpea.

### 3. THE TRENDS OF CRIME PERCEIVED THROUGH THE AVAILABLE STATISTICS<sup>4</sup>

Even in the face of all weaknesses in the systems of compilation and production of police statistics, the crossing of several sources of information reveals that in the last 30 years Brazil has failed to reduce violence and protecting civil rights for its population<sup>5</sup>. Brazil alone accounts for an average of 12% of the world's homicides, although it has only about 3% of the total population. Since the 1980s, the national homicide rate has grown by an average of 20% a year. In 2016, we reached 61,000 intentional violent deaths per year or 29.7 more deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. We emphasize that this rate includes the unacceptable and police victimization numbers: 11 people are killed every day by the police forces and the risk of a police officer being killed is three times higher than the general population (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017a).

Given this scenario, all Brazilians know a tale of violence or someone who has been a victim of it: according to another survey carried out by the FBSP in 2017, one out of three adults aged 16 or older knows someone who has been murdered (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017b). Most homicides are concentrated in the Northeast of the country and victimize young individuals aged 15-24, mostly African Brazilian youngsters living in contexts of social and urban vulnerability and interpersonal conflicts ("favela" residents, bar fights, domestic violence, women abuse, among others). In addition, murders occur to a greater extent in certain neighborhoods and territories. In 2015, 71.9% of these deaths were committed with firearms, whereas in Europe, for example, the rate is 21%.

<sup>4</sup>Much of what is said about public security in Brazil depends on the action of entities such as the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety (an NGO that brings together police officers, court operators, academic researchers and representatives of organized civil society) and/or IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research), rather than public agencies officially charged with this task. There is no official national system with high quality crime statistics available in the country. SINESP (National Information System for Public Security, Prison and Drugs), for example, has not been properly fed since its inception in 2012, since the Federative Units are reluctant to provide data there is no legal basis obliging them to do so, much less to organize data according to the same methodological and classification criteria. The option available for studies and analyses is to use data from the aforementioned health system, organized according to the World Health Organization parameters. However, this limitation restricts assessments of police performance and adds an extra challenge to public managers in charge of public safety (Lima 2005).

<sup>5</sup>And Brazil is not alone: in this period, a research on homicide reduction programs in Latin America, carried out by the Laboratory of Violence Analysis of UERJ (Cano and Rojido 2016) shows that one out of four homicides on the planet occurs in only four countries: Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil. Added to that, while in most continents the number of murders has been declining progressively, Latin America has experienced a significant increase in lethal violence in recent years and seems unsure about how to reform its law enforcement and legal structures (Basombrio 2013).

Moreover, in a flagrant evidence of how significant the racial factor is in the country, the relative risk of a black youngster dying is 2.71 times higher than that of a white youngster. In the states of Alagoas and Amapá, this risk is even higher, reaching 12.68 and 11.94 times, respectively (Secretaria Nacional da Juventude 2017). In addition, 62% of those killed by the police [police use of deadly force] were black, just as 56% of the dead police officers, who were also black (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada and Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017a).

Even so, that is not all one can say about these figures. The police forces must deal with the fact that violence is manifested in many other ways and effects and they cannot focus only on cases of lethal violence. There are also the constant threats of organized crime, corruption, the rise of robberies, lynching, killings of natives and land-related conflicts. In addition, in the absence and/or weakening of the democratic modernization project, attempts to control crime will always take place incrementally. In fact, they may even have to interact with the willingness of criminal organizations such as PCC ("Primeiro Comando da Capital"), which emerged in the prisons of the state of São Paulo and is now spread in almost the entire country, to avoid death in their territories as an axis of their business plans and as a tool of their moral legitimacy before the residents living in the areas ruled by them (Biderman *et al.* 2014).

Likewise, Brazilian society still faces high rates of impunity (less than 10% of homicides committed in the country are solved; in some cities such as Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, it takes up to 9.5 years for an identified defendant to be brought to trial) (Ribeiro 2014). At the same time, Brazil has to manage approximately 725,000 prisoners serving sentences in the country's prison system, although 40% of them still wait for trial – a large part of the violence reduction programs has not dealt with the prison dimension and/or encouraged the growth of prisons. The Brazilian prison population is the third largest in the world, only behind China and the USA. The country has already surpassed Russia, which is currently the fourth in the ranking. However, while these other three nations have reduced their number of prisoners in recent years, Brazil has gone against the trend and now arrest more and more individuals (Departamento Penitenciário Nacional 2017).

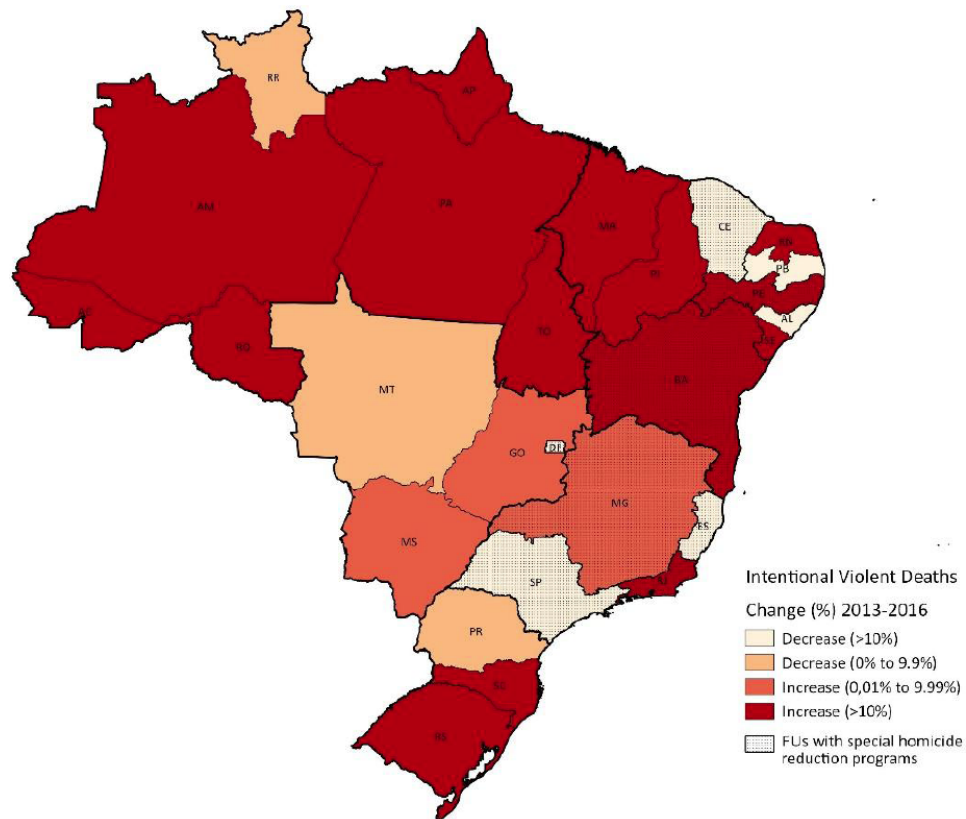
Faced with this serious and contradictory scenario that indicates the permanence of violence in our

political culture, the impression would be that nothing progresses and that the spiral of homicides and other intentional violent deaths is strongly resilient and cannot be detained. However, while it is true that we still live according to a model in which the absence of structural reforms obstructs, in practical and political terms, the assurance of public safety for all, it is also true that several initiatives and management efforts have been made. I'm not aligned with the someone critical criminology currents that address the issue eminently by denouncing the structural causes of violence and inequality. For this reason, it is important to dialectically consider the movements of advances and setbacks imposed on the agenda of crime and public policies in recent years and to identify clearer parameters about the goals and the management of the Brazilian police forces. In our view, the best tool available is the induction of accountability and transparency.

From this perspective, the numbers need to be analyzed in a disaggregated way: in 2016, 61,283 intentional violent deaths were registered, compared to 58,459 occurrences in 2015. However, if looked at in detail, these yearly figures reveal diverse aspects that

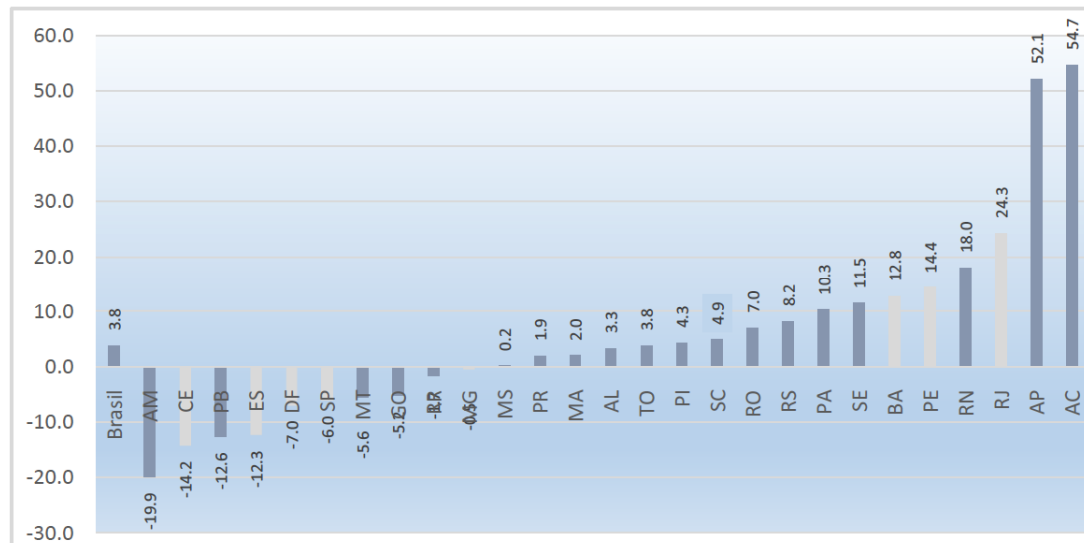
deserve analysis and reflection. The analysis reveals that premeditated murders grew by 3.3% in absolute terms (3.8% in relative terms) in the period, while the number of police use of deadly force increased by 26.8% and police officers killed, 23.1% (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2017). There are differences between the various types of occurrences that, depending on how violence is perceived and recognized by the Homicide Reduction Programs in their goals and objectives, will show completely different results than if we consider the lethality and police victimization rates.

On the other hand, if we look at Map 2, which shows the geographic distribution of intentional violent deaths, we notice a strong tendency of such occurrences in the northeast region of the country. However, in 2015, 15 of the 27 Federative Units reported a reduction in the overall number of deaths compared to 2014. In addition, of the eight units that implemented homicide reduction programs, seven showed a downward trend. In 2016, even with the 3.8% increase observed in the national death rate in 2015-2016, 10 of the 27 Federal Units maintained a trend of reduction in the total of Intentional Violent Deaths.



**Map 2:** Percentage Variation in Intentional Violent Deaths 2013-2016: Brazil and Federative Units.

**Source:** Brazilian Public Safety Yearbook, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2017/Brazilian Forum on Public Safety.



**Chart 2:** Percentage variation in Intentional Violent Deaths 2015-2016: Brazil and Federative Units.

**Source:** Brazilian Public Safety Yearbook, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2017.

**Note:** The Federative Units with light gray columns are those that have adopted special plans to reduce homicides.

Among them, five out of the eight units operating reduction programs maintained their downward trend in total occurrences. Federative Units operating special programs are proportionally more represented among those achieving reductions in total rates. However, the analysis suggests that in the states of Bahia, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro such initiatives seem to have lost strength (Chart 2). In five other Federative Units, the programs have shown strength to contain the growth observed throughout the country.

But the bottom line of this article regarding the meaning of killing acquires empirical contours when we find out that out of the 26 Brazilian states plus the Federal District, only five have shown a decrease in the number of police use of deadly force between 2015 and 2016; and among the Federative Units (FUs) with special homicide reduction programs, only two out of the eight FUs analyzed showed positive results. This trend is repeated in terms of dead police officers. Only five FUs had a decrease in the number of police officers killed on duty and, among those with special homicide reduction programs, only two managed to reduce this data. That is, in order to reduce violence, it is accepted that the police kill and die in proportions regarded as exaggerated by the specialized international literature (Bueno 2014)

#### 4. POLICE FORCES AND PUBLIC POLICIES FOR HOMICIDE REDUCTION

According to Carbonari, Willman and Lima (2017), Brazil is a Federal State, in which state governments

have significant authority in several areas. Particularly in the field of public security, the Constitution provides that the two main law enforcement agencies should be under the responsibility of the states: The Military Police is responsible for patrolling and maintaining public order, whereas the Civil Police is in charge of performing investigations and penal persecution. At the local level, 71% of the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, and 84.6% of those with a population of 500,000 or more, now have municipal guards. At the federal level, the main agency is the Federal Police, which performs tasks like those carried out by the FBI in the United States. However, there is no federal body or institution that has the legal competence to standardize police procedures.

Yet, at the federal level, the National Secretariat of Public Security (SENASP) was created in 1997 to oversee national security policies or plans and is in charge of inducing the overall coordination of national public security policies and law enforcement agencies. It has increased its role significantly ever since, by increasing its mandate and efforts to promote studies and analysis, the qualification of police forces, and the systematization of public security data across the country. In 2001, the Secretariat created a National Fund for Public Security that provided resources for local governments to invest in citizen security. Under such institutional framework, the lack of coordination between all agencies is a historical problem in the country, which adds to the many challenges to improve citizen security (Carbonari, Willman and Lima 2017).

In this context, we highlight a set of actions, programs and public policies specifically aimed at reducing lethal violence, mainly adopted in the eight Federal Units analyzed herein, over the last 20 years and that, according to the public debate, have managed to contribute to homicide reduction<sup>6</sup>. These actions acknowledge that homicides cannot be reduced to a single motivation and do not respond to a single pattern. Also, these specific programs try to prioritize problem-solving strategies. To this end, they have focused on the tripod that has been assumed in Brazil as the most effective in reducing and controlling criminal indicators: modernization of management and structuring systems for criminal analysis and problem-oriented targeting, like the *US CompStat* model, which makes intensive use of information; improvement of intelligence and criminal investigation; and approximation with the population and control of risk factors.

The problem is that when seeking to assess the impact of such policies, we find out that we know little about their real effectiveness. There are few methodologically robust and reliable studies evaluating the directions and meanings of criminal and public security policies in the country (Lima *et al.* 2016)<sup>7</sup>. In addition, specific homicide reduction programs are concurrent with other management modernization programs as a whole, such as those developed in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais since the late 1990s, making it difficult to the isolation and testing of countless variables.

However, in an attempt to fill this methodological gap and produce an analytical view of some of the characteristics identified by the national and international literature as effective in preventing and reducing homicides (Lima 2002; MacDonald, Wilson and Tita 2005; Lima 2008; Peres *et al.* 2011; Lima 2014; Cano and Rojido 2016; Carbonari, Willman and

Lima 2017; Brasil 2017), Table 1 is a synoptic representation of the specific actions for lethal violence reduction implemented by the selected Federative Units in order to verify if and when they were adopted and what aspects were considered in their basic design.

Once the synoptic representation of the actions is done, the reading of Table 1 and the analysis of the available data indicate a worrying scenario, for even if it is not possible to assess the impact of all the selected programs, the latter would be, at least in their conception and formulation, in line with the most successful practices in the world. All programs sought to coordinate and integrate efforts, as well as set common goals among the different police forces. However, more substantive legal reforms remain absent, weakening the 'institutionality' of the initiatives and, in the opposite direction, facilitating their replacement at the first sign of crisis or loss of priority by the center of criminal policy, which is based on the division of the society between "good citizens" and "criminals", as described previously.

Therefore, the incorporation of the innovations proposed by the violence reduction programs is residual and pendular, depending on whoever occupies the position of power and governance of the law enforcement institutions and whatever is considered as the violence target to be reduced<sup>8</sup>. The comparison between the available data and the schematic table of the actions designed by the special programs of violence reduction does not allow to establish causal relationships between the implementation of the programs and the tendency of the criminal statistics. As a consequence, the pressure for effective actions to reduce lethal violence is translated into generalist and unfocused policies for the prevention and tackling of lethal violence, which do not engage the Public Prosecutor's Offices and the Judiciary in the change of paradigm, in terms of the most appropriate way of providing public security and human rights. There is also a lack of federative and republican articulation between the Union, the Federative Units and the

<sup>6</sup>A national diagnostic carried out by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in 2015 shows that, out of the 26 States and the Federal District, 19 declared to currently have a specific policy aimed at reducing violent crimes. Among the 54 reported policies, 25 seemed to have an integrated coordination structure among different government agencies and sectors, and 19 of those included the establishment of articulation mechanisms with municipalities (Engel *et al.* 2015). However, only these eight Federative Units have well documented and structured official plans.

<sup>7</sup>And this is not an exclusively Brazilian feature. According to the aforementioned research by Cano and Rojido (2016), only one out of five violence prevention and reduction initiatives undertaken in Latin America were submitted to impact assessments and had their practices well documented. There is no robust monitoring and evaluation culture in the region, which in a complementary way reinforces a study produced by Eisner and Nivette (2012), showing that 98% of the studies of promising interventions to reduce lethal violence come from the United States, Canada or Europe, and that 95% of the programs evaluated concerned only 12% of the world population.

<sup>8</sup>This fact will explain, for instance, why the state of Pernambuco, after seven years of successive reductions in its rates of lethal violence and having been a world reference in the field, largely due to its "Pact for Life" program, showed a strong growth trend in the state's crime rates, without any specific crisis that could help explain this phenomenon (Hoelscher 2017). What has happened in practice was the replacement of political leaders, and those who have taken the office have chosen not to revise targets and procedures identified as sensitive after a long period of implementation, such as the imprisonment goals that aggravate the prison system overcrowding.



**Table 1: Examples of Incremental Public Safety Actions Focused on Social Participation, Police Management, and Management of Risk Factors in Brazil**

Axis	Action (I)	São Paulo (SP Contra o Crime)	Rio de Janeiro	Pernambuco (Pacto Pela Vida)	Espírito Santo (Estado Presente)	Bahia (Pacto Pela Vida)	Ceará (Ceará Pacífico)	Distrito Federal (Viva Brasília)	Minas Gerais (Fica Vivo!)
Management Modernization	Investment in information systems	Since 1999	Since 1997	Since 2007	Information not available	Since 2011	Since 2014	Information not available	Since 2005
	System of goals and monitoring (management by results)	Since 2014	Since 2008	Since 2007	Since 2011	Information not available	Since 2014	Since 2015	Since 2005
	Variable compensation by performance	Since 2014	Since 2009	Since 2011	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2014	Information not available	Since 2007
	Management mechanism involves inter-sectoral coordination with other secretariats	Since 2014	Information not available	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2015	Since 2015	Since 2003
	Definition of priority territories from murder hot spots	Since 1999	Since 2008	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2015	Since 2015	Since 2003
	Compatibility of Civil and Military Police areas with shared goals	Since 2000	Since 1999	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2014	Since 2015	Since 2005
	Institutionalization of a lethal violence reduction program	Since 2014	Since 2009	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2014	Since 2015	Since 2003
Risk Factors	Creation/Strengthening of specialized departments in the investigation of homicides	Since 2000	Information not available	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2011	Since 2014	Since 2015	Information not available
	Gun control	Since 2000	Information not available	Since 2007	Since 2011	Information not available	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2003
	Drug Enforcement/Seizures	Since 2014	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2011	Information not available	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2003
	Mechanism or goal of controlling the police use of deadly force	SP considers this factor as a bonus reduction factor, but not as a goal	Since 2008	Since 2007	Information not available	Information not available	No	Information not available	MG adds the number of police use of deadly force to homicides, which are part of the overall goal
	Arrest of serial killers	Desde 2000	Information not available	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2014	Since 2015	Since 2003
Social Participation	Youth-focused prevention programs	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2007	Since 2011	Since 2011	Since 2016	Since 2015	Since 2003
	Mobilization of non-state actors to implement the program	Since 2014	Information not available	Since 2007	Since 2011	Information not available	Since 2016	Information not available	Since 2003
	Community Safety Councils	Since 1983	Since 1999	Information not available	Information not available	Since 2011	Since 1998	Since 2015	Since 2002

(1) Considering the actions of the specific programs for homicide reduction, but not the associated security management programs (Infocrim in SP, Igesp in MG, UPP in RJ, among others).

Source: Prepared by the author.

municipalities. The bottom line is that Brazil has a hard time implementing the formulated programs.

## 5. THE DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY SIMULACRUM

In acknowledging that our problem is one of implementation, here, I intend, even preliminarily, to construct an explanatory theory about the gap between the democratic project provided in our Constitution and the violent daily reality of the Brazilian population. A theory that can help us understand the phenomenon and design more focused and capable interventions for reversing the serious scenario of intentional violent deaths. After all, as a fundamental problem, the number of actions described in Table 1 indicates that much effort is undertaken, but little is done to shift the centrality of violence as one of the most striking societal characteristics of Brazil.

First, it is worth noting that the State operates a strong paradox that erodes the confidence in laws and institutions and opens margins for measures of extreme rigor and for disregarding civil protection and rights. Due to this paradox, the police inspire more fear than trust and respect, and the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Judiciary are perceived as distant from reality, accepting without question the operational standards and the filtering procedures carried out by the police forces (Lima, Bueno and Mingardi 2016; CESEC, 2016). Governments and legislators, in turn, refrain from their responsibilities or simply scaremonger or reproduce the sensationalist proposals that have no real impact in reducing fear and violence. Moreover, in this gap, insecurity and violence end up strengthening crime and guiding the relationships between police and community and between State and society. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that we have not guaranteed, in this context, the legitimate monopoly of violence in the hands of the State (Adorno and Dias 2014) and the various initiatives to reduce violence are lost in disputes over the guidelines for security and public order policies.

But why does that happen? Among other reasons, due to the aforementioned fact that our legislation and the jurisprudence of our courts do not define what constitutes security and public order, simply determining which institutions are responsible for them (Lima, Silva and Oliveira 2013). In the absence (or in the multiple presences) of legal boundaries, it is up to the legal doctrine and the daily practice of law enforcement and other institutions of the criminal

justice system to define who will be the object of their attention and vigilance. Also, insofar as the democratic governance instruments of the police mandates have yet to be structured (mechanisms of control, transparency and accountability), the tendency is that – given the path dependency of the criminal justice and public security organizations – the political leaders demand punctual and discontinuous actions, leaving to the police the task of accomplishing the expected goals. There is an excess of autonomy that is detrimental to society and to the law enforcement institution itself.

On the edge, a huge gray area is conceived as a simulacrum of justice and democratic security, whereby the maintenance of order is claimed from the principles of the prevailing Democratic State of Law but operated on a day-to-day basis on the grounds of practices institutional and organizational cultures that are hardly democratic; practices that even accept violence as a language of public policies (in opposition to the grammar of human rights). This simulacrum mirrors and reflects all attempts to effectively modernize public security. At the apparent and/or discursive levels, the organizations seek to adapt to the demands. Yet, in essence, they simulate new patterns of action without, however, implying new practices or organizational cultures (Lima 2005; Lima, Almeida and Sinhoretto 2010).

In addition, to simulate does not mean to deceive, but in the case of Brazilian public security, it means a complex movement of re-signification and repositioning of values and cultures that govern the public responses to violence and crime. Therefore, the political will behind specific homicide reduction plans and programs has not broken the isomorphic barriers built throughout the country's history and faces the risk of being reabsorbed by the "logic in use" by criminal justice and security institutions (Costa and Lima 2014). Therefore, as Jean Baudrillard (1978) explains, the Brazilian simulacrum is not based "on dissimulation, which is pretending not to have something that one has, but in simulation, which is pretending to have what one does not have". As a result, it detaches from reality in an independent and self-reproducing logic.

It is a system permeated by secrecy, opacity and lack of governance. In this case, the strong growth in police use of deadly force and killings of police officers would be evidence that the programs of violence reduction analyzed have reached their limits and now end up feeding back the position that perceives public

safety as a strategy of controlling criminals and defending the interests of the State. According to this view, it would be up to the police to micro-manage the public order, understood as an absence of questioning of the current social order and the boundaries between what is legal and illegal, as well as the selection and classification of the population between the categories “good citizen” and “criminal”. Still from this perspective, society needs to be more guarded and guided about its “real” interests than properly heard about them and even governments must submit to the technical truth that only the operators working in the area have, at the risk of serious malfunctions. Violence is a symbolic reference that, being empirically determined (Porto 2010), constitutes a currency of exchange and tensions between the political sphere and the technical sphere, as well as between governments and institutions.

Thus, more than just acknowledging the *adaptation* by Garland (2008), which makes institutions shape changes that could compromise them, or the *decoupling* (Meyer and Rowan 1977) of criminal justice and public safety organizations, which simulate the adoption of certain practices, we are apparently in the face of a complex system of moral and political equivalences that reinforce the violence and authoritarian features of the Brazilian society and State. The security simulacrum forms a political-institutional kaleidoscope composed not only of police forces but involving the Public Prosecutor’s Office, The Legislative Power and the Judiciary Power in the conformation of colors, shapes and images that gives hues to reality. However, they maintain intact the criminal policies that accept the division of Brazilian society between two broad categories of classification, while they also dissipate transforming energies.

In other words, it is understood that, in addition to the fact that political and ideological processes and the dynamics of power influence the perception that society will have of crime and violence (Arias and Marston 2017), the functioning of public security and criminal justice institutions in Brazil is based not only on the interests and values of the power elite but on the dispute over the meaning of security and public order in Brazilian society – which often opposes segments of this very elite, depending on specific social markers and morals. Insofar as the police institutions, public prosecutors and the judiciary are extremely opaque and autonomous organizations, there is a modulation of the criminal policy center to symbolically ground it on the reality of crime and violence and to operate it without links with this same reality, from references that

bridge the gap between morality and politics. These references are built from often authoritarian institutional practices, maintained by *path dependence* that democracy has failed to transform.

According to the concept by Baudrillard (1994), Brazilian public security would be now founding a scenario of “hyper-reality” that overcomes class interests and is associated, through fear management and the permanence of conceptions that accept violence as a legitimate response to crime, to the excessive autonomy of criminal justice and public security institutions, and to the failure to achieve a legitimate monopoly of the use of force by the State. In practical terms, what will become a violent act that will be the object of attention will be negotiated (Table 1 shows that for some states the police use of deadly force will be considered in the reduction targets, in others as reducers for purposes of bonus cuts, whereas in others such deaths will not even be considered), and there is no consensus on what should or should not be so classified. In other words, at the socio-political level, the Brazilian State and various segments of the population do not accept or acknowledge that the country’s police forces are too lethal, based on the idea that their conduct would be legitimate, in defense of society and against “criminals”. Consequently, the civil and human rights agenda in Brazil has become increasingly associated with the defense of criminals. In this process, public security is not perceived as a consequence of the exercise of citizenship and of the fight for civil rights, yet operated as a regulated social right and subject to the filtering of those who shall deserve it or not. Governance mechanisms are simply perceived as management tools and not as frames for the delimitation of police mandates.

## 6. FINAL REMARKS

As we reach the final section of this article, we realize that the homicide reduction programs carried out in Brazil over the last two decades have been formulated, in their intrinsic characteristics, in line with what the literature of the area identifies as good practices and actions with potential for successful violence reduction. Historically, the developed programs reveal the willingness of certain leaders and segments of the Executive Branch and the police forces to modernize practices and adopt new policing standards. In terms of design and formulation, the programs described herein have been structured in a manner adapted to each subnational context.

However, the analysis of the same programs reveals a major implementation problem, with several of the programs at risk of losing their focus, setting goals that are detached from the current organizational conditions of the police forces, and displacing their political priorities. However, more than just a sign of managerial fatigue and/or need for adjustments, this article defends that these symptoms derive from wider processes of dispute over the meaning of law, order and public safety in the country and, above all, the operation of a symbolic simulacrum that mirrors democratic assumptions but is at the same time based on institutional practices and organizational cultures that are hardly willing to submit to mechanisms of control, transparency and accountability (incremental actions of modernization of the police are necessary and urgent, but Brazil has broken this simulacrum if it can put into practice strong structures of accountability).

Violence continues to be seen as a legitimate response to crime, in a movement that reinforces the maintenance of order as the imposition of a single and hegemonic model of behavior and national project, although it was elaborated prior to the democratic transition cycle. In this movement, it seems that citizenship will continue to be guaranteed only for a portion of the population, that is, those deserving the label of “good citizens”. The contemporary drama is that the universal declarations of rights, among other national and international norms, had at least been able to change such discourses. However, now there seems to be a new wave driven by the right-wing social time, which blocks the political debate and jeopardizes the advances made in 1988 with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution. As predicted by Foa and Mounk (2016) in the American and European context, there is a risk of “deconsolidation” of democracy as the most appropriate regime of government to manage modern social conflicts, and in the case of Brazil, this danger is multiplied by the fact that it has never been able to implement a broad civil rights agenda, succeeded in maximizing social rights, or reduced crime and social inequality indicators.

If we want to revert this more than announced tragedy, it is more than urgent to interdict violence morally and politically; and, to achieve this, a change project needs to mobilize different segments of society around this goal. In our view, this project requires more than practices based on evidence and political will. New institutional frames must be built and to achieve that, we reiterate that the debate on transparency and

data quality can allow actions to strengthen institutional capacity for monitoring and evaluation and/or strategic litigation, which in turn weaken of the *path dependence* and worldviews that operate the simulacrum identified in this study. In other words, the debate on transparency and data quality is one of the strongest battlefronts for the reduction violence and to allow the reform of public safety in Brazil.

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