



## The Politics of Crime and Militarised Policing in Brazil

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### Abstract

This article queries the effects of international police assistance in the Global South, focusing specifically on Brazil. Utilising recently declassified documents accessed in Washington, DC, this article shows how United States officials sought to intervene in Latin American politics through international police assistance to Brazil during the 1960s–1980s. The article considers the geopolitical motivations behind these programs and highlights the connections between international police assistance, weak democratic institutions in Latin America and legacies of authoritarian policing in the region. The academic objectives are twofold: to foreground debates that emphasise the need for Southern Criminological research perspectives and to explore the broader effects of international police assistance programs in the Global South. By drawing attention to these issues, the article contributes to studies of policing, politics and public security in contexts like Brazil, where extreme levels of everyday violence are a threat to democracy and human rights.

### Keywords

Policing; police assistance; crime; USA; Brazil; Southern Criminology.

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## Introduction

Since *The Economist* denounced him as ‘Latin America’s latest menace’ in September 2018, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has consistently remained in the international spotlight. Whether for his racist, homophobic or misogynist comments (The Economist 2018), or his promises to deliver a Pinochet-style ‘Shock Doctrine’ (Klein 2007) of neoliberal economic reforms, Bolsonaro is archetypal of far-right, authoritarian ‘anti-politicians’ who espouse their populist messages through social media. In the case of Brazil, what has called particular attention is Bolsonaro’s rhetoric of punitive crime fighting, arguing, for example, that police officers who kill while on duty should not face investigation. One of Bolsonaro’s key campaign promises was to reduce restrictions on gun ownership in Brazil and, similar to the United States (US), legalise capital punishment and allow for the torture and killings of terrorists and crime suspects (Escobar 2018). The US has remained a consistent reference point for Bolsonaro, earning him the nickname ‘Tropical Trump’ for his open admiration of the US president, as well as his hard-line stance on public security.

With his adulation of the US and US-style public security measures, Bolsonaro joins many other Latin American leaders who have sought to align more closely with the US. Such developments are hardly new and match historical trends where right-leaning politicians in Latin America (and elsewhere in the Global South) have attempted to strengthen their connections with the US. Similarly, the US has a long history of building links with such leaders, whether for geopolitical reasons or, just as often, in pursuing US economic interests (Huggins 1998; McCann 1974). This legacy extends back to at least the 1820s in Latin America with the presidency of James Monroe and has remained a key focus of academic research for decades (Cupples 2013).

Conversely, what has received little attention are the ways US intervention in Latin America has, in many instances, been facilitated through international police assistance programs. Although appeals for increased security and strict law enforcement are key issues for leaders like Bolsonaro seeking to build closer ties with the US—as well as US discourses of security and democracy that tend to justify US international engagement—historically, researchers have paid little attention to the ways international police assistance programs typically undergird US intervention in such contexts. In particular, while researchers have provided key insight into the ways that international police assistance facilitates the transfer of resources, knowledge and tools of best practice (Lemieux 2010), less focus has been on how these initiatives frequently connect to broader geopolitical agendas connecting the US to the Global South.

The purpose of this article is to clarify this topic, highlighting how US intervention in countries like Brazil is frequently accompanied by international policing assistance measures. It builds on emergent research in the field of ‘Southern Criminology’ (Blaustein et al. 2018; Carrington et al. 2016; Carrington et al. 2019b), examining the enduring legacy of power and knowledge asymmetries that shape policing and crime-control practices in the Global South. It begins with a focused overview of recent studies on international police assistance, highlighting the need for new research that considers points of intersection between public security initiatives, international technology and knowledge transfer, and geopolitical relationships linking Global North and South. It then considers the case of US–Brazil relations, foregrounding the ways that international police assistance has played a key role in mediating this relationship, including US intervention efforts in Latin America more generally. By utilising recently declassified documents made available through the Freedom of Information Act in the US, this article details how US involvement with Brazilian police forces helped to establish the Brazilian military dictatorship that held power from 1964–1985. The article then considers more contemporary shifts in rationalising international police assistance, from fighting communism to the war on drugs, including the transfer of more recent police assistance programs to combat narco trafficking. It concludes by arguing that despite the Cold War ending and the redemocratisation in Brazil, US

influence continues to shape ideas and practices of policing and the politics of crime control, offering new insight into the emergence of political leaders like Bolsonaro.

### **A Southern Criminology of Violence in Brazil: Considering International Police Assistance**

Acts of everyday violence are central to Brazil's bleak social picture. Homicide rates have soared in recent decades, and today are nearly three times higher than they were during the country's military dictatorship (1964–1985). In 2016, homicide rates reached 30.33/100,000 inhabitants (Instituto de Pesquisa Economica Aplicada 2016)—well above the UN's threshold for chronic violence of 10/100,000 (Waiselfisz 2014). With more than 60,000 Brazilians murdered each year (Cerqueira et al. 2016), fear of crime and the practices of crime control agencies are increasingly important political issues. Central to these debates are questions of police use of force—whether police should combat public insecurity with even more violence, or whether police violence is a major part of the problem. During Brazil's 2018 presidential campaign, candidates frequently returned to these questions, with crime data frequently used (and misused) to manipulate voters (Bolsonaro 2018; Londono and Darlington 2018).

A growing body of academic literature has considered the relationships between violence and police abuse of force in Brazil (Alston 2008; Arias 2006; Chevigny 1995; Denyer Willis 2015; Garmany 2014; Huggins 2000; Pinheiro 1982). Political scientists and sociologists, in particular, have provided diverse understandings of Brazilian public security and criminal justice institutions, frequently representing them as chaotic and crisis-ridden (Caldeira 2000; Kant de Lima et al. 2000; Macaulay 2013; Misse 2011; Tavares dos Santos 2009; Wacquant 2003). Curiously, despite increasing attention from social scientists to questions of violence and policing in the Global South, critical criminologists have had little to say regarding the particularities of law and order in Brazil and other similar contexts. With few exceptions (Carrington et al. 2016; Darke 2013; Darke 2014; Macaulay 2007), criminologists have focused their analyses on countries in the Global North, with less attention paid to serious issues of violence and policing that tend to characterise countries like Brazil.

This uneven production of knowledge is of growing concern to critical criminologists (Carrington et al. 2019b; Moosavi 2018). For example, in line with Connell's (2007) critique of sociology and the need for more critical engagement with theories and empirical contexts in the Global South, Carrington et al. (2016) highlighted the need for criminologists to also reflect critically on recent postcolonial critiques in the social sciences. In particular, they call for research that better addresses patterns of crime specific to Southern countries (e.g. violence, policing and violent policing), and legacies of colonialism, imperialism and empire building that should not be ignored when considering Southern contexts. Policing and police violence are central to this research agenda, with scholars frequently noting key differences that must be accounted for when examining crime and public security in countries such as Brazil (Garmany 2011; Hautzinger 2007).

If the field of criminology can be critiqued for overlooking Southern countries and the uncritical application of Northern theories to the Global South, then so too has research into international police assistance focused disproportionately on Euro-American contexts or on exporting 'Northern' models to 'Southern' contexts (c.f., Aitchison 2007; Bayley 2001). In Brazil and Latin America, this relates in large part to the impacts of international police assistance during the Cold War period, as well as the implementation of US models of crime control through the war on drugs and development of police reform initiatives. Recipes for justice reform, policing and crime control emerged predominantly in the US (Bayley 2001; Bratton 2005; Carrington et al. 2016), and were then emulated in countries like Brazil (Denyer Willis 2015; Jones and Newburn 2007; Macaulay 2007). This transfer of knowledge and policy failed to provide adequate crime-control strategies or account for local criminal justice realities, presuming that a 'one-size-fits-all' policing

strategy could be implemented in the Global South (Huggins 1997; Macaulay 2007). To date, there remains a critical lack of research investigating the effects of international police assistance in Southern countries, including broader inquiries into the motives and justifications of these initiatives in the first instance.

For example, why would one country provide assistance to police forces in another? Among the few studies that examine such a question (Aitchison 2007; Aitchison and Blaustein 2013; Isacson and Ball 2006; Marenin 1998), work by Huggins (1998) provides key insight into the Latin American context. By focusing on struggles over power, political influence and control of economic markets, Huggins (1998) examined the US–Brazil relationship during the Cold War, revealing the perverse outcomes of US international police assistance that included, among several factors, the development of police death squads in Brazil. In line with Bayley (1983), whose research was conducted in India, Huggins (1998) argued that international police assistance—particularly when it comes from the Global North—can often undermine democratic development in the Global South by supporting undemocratic governments. As both Huggins (1998) and Bayley (2006) note, international police assistance has often focused on police efficiency in regard to crime fighting rather than compliance with human rights. As such, despite claims that it aims to promote democracy or ‘democratic policing’ (Bayley 2006), it has consistently contributed to excess militarisation of police forces (Huggins 1998) and led to adverse consequences for the most vulnerable sectors of society.

In summary, Huggins’ (1998) historical analysis revealed how international police assistance has promoted counter-democratic measures in Brazil and neglected the protection of human rights. Among other sources, Huggins (1998) examined archival materials from the US that had been declassified after 30 years under the Freedom of Information Act. More materials have been declassified since, providing further insight into the effects and geopolitical motivations of US police assistance in Brazil. This article utilises these recently declassified documents and includes the following sources: data from the US National Security Archives; minutes from US National Security Council (NSC) meetings and documents; a collection of interviews with US ambassadors to Brazil; data from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); and data from the US Department of State Foreign Relations collection. Within these data are international government telegrams and transcripts of telephone conversations, among other sources. These collections (including declassified documents from 1964–1989) were accessed in 2015 at the Library of Congress and the National Security Archives in Washington, DC. The purpose of this archival investigation was to examine newly declassified material documenting instances of military and police assistance between the US and Brazil, building on investigative work conducted by Huggins (1998) more than 20 years prior. These newly collected data illustrate how the US has maintained influence in public security matters in Brazil and supported the continuation of militarised policing, often exacerbating existing challenges such as high levels of violence and resistance to police reform.

By considering new evidence that documents the history of US police assistance to Brazil, this article pursues two key objectives: first, to address a geographical region (Latin America) largely overlooked by criminological studies and to contribute to growing calls for Southern Criminological research; and second, to consider the far-reaching effects of international police assistance programs and some of the geopolitical motivations that undergird these initiatives. In addressing these issues, the article contributes to policing and criminological theory by demonstrating that international police assistance often results in problematic crime-control strategies, where perceived threats and professed internal enemies take precedence over the protection of human rights and the rule of law. More precisely, international police assistance in Latin America has tended to reflect US political culture, benefitting the interests and profits of the US defence industry instead of the citizens in the country where assistance is provided.

This article then provides evidence to support these claims by considering important historical moments of international police assistance in Brazil. The data suggest that US influence strengthened the military dictatorship in the years 1964–1985, enabling the Brazilian military to intervene in public safety matters; a legacy that continues to the present day. This article demonstrates that once the Cold War ended—and limitations were placed on the provision of international police assistance in the US—US intervention then expanded to address narco-trafficking and the war on drugs. This article demonstrates how these models inhibit policing that is respectful of human rights and instead reinforce Brazil's military style of law enforcement.

### **The Origins of US Police Assistance to Brazil and the Military Dictatorship**

It has been widely acknowledged that on 31 March 1964, the Brazilian army overthrew leftist president João Goulart with the support of Brazilian economic and political elites and US military assistance (Huggins 1998; Pereira 2005; Pinheiro 1991). Examples of the reasons for US and corporate support included concerns with Goulart's left-leaning initiatives, including passing a law limiting the number of profits that multinationals could transfer out of Brazil and failing to support sanctions against the Castro Government in Cuba (Blum 1986; Parker 1979). A declassified telephone conversation between US Secretary of State Dean Rusk and President Lyndon Johnson, dated 30 March 1964, confirms US support for the military coup:

Rusk: Mann and group here, including CIA, on this Brazilian situation. This crisis is coming to a head in the next day or two, perhaps even overnight. There is a snowballing of resistance to Goulart and therefore the thing may break at any moment. ... I would like to send a message to Linc Gordon. I would like to read it to you, if I may, and then also indicate that I've asked Bob McNamara to get some tankers ready for some POL [petrol, oil and lubricants] supplies and things of that sort. (Geyer and Herschler 2004b)

The US was prepared to support any government or military coup, as long as they were anti-communist allies (Rabe 2012). The provision of military aid and cooperation between the US and Brazil was a key concern, one that dates back to the 1920s and 1930s (McCann 1974). During an interview conducted in 1989, former US ambassador to Brazil William Rountree (1970–1973) confirmed the nature of the US–Brazil relationship:

We have maintained in Brazil, since 1922, a military mission that has been very important to us, and military facilities established during World War II have been continued in one form or another. Our military have cooperated in many respects over the years ... I think our relations were at an absolute peak in 1972, the time of the visit of President Medici. (Rountree and Lowrie 1989: 50)

In addition to military and political support, US assistance with training and directing international police forces in Brazil began during the first half of the twentieth century, with the objective of gaining political and ideological influence (Pinheiro 1991: 168). The US's intention was to secure most-favoured-nation trading status with South American countries (Huggins 1998: 35; McCann 1974). The US relied on Brazil as a source of important raw materials and as a consumer market for US products. According to ex-ambassador Lincoln Gordon, motivations for international police assistance to Brazil were predicated upon two key factors: 'to keep the supply of military equipment in American hands rather than letting it be taken over by the Europeans' and 'our recognition, I think correctly, that the military are politically influential in Latin America' (Gordon and Kennedy 1987: 25).

By the beginning of World War II, the US had already instituted firm relations with Latin American police forces through either direct military intervention or indirect political networks. During the war, the US penetrated Latin American police forces, providing training and assisting them to develop police structures (Huggins 1998: 62–64). By the end of the war, this strengthened apparatus would serve to monitor and repress communists and government opponents.

Langguth documented this history in his book 'Hidden Terrors' (1978), providing a detailed account of US police interventions in Uruguay and Brazil during the Cold War. He recounted how Dan Mitrione, a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent and advisor to the CIA in South America, was involved with the training of South American police. Mitrione was notorious for introducing new methods of torture (including the technique of applying electric shocks without killing the victim), which became routinely used by South American police forces. He is also known for introducing the system of nationwide identification cards that are still used in Brazil and Uruguay, which facilitated the surveillance and capture of subversives, communists, anti-Americans and political opponents to the military.

During this same period, the US NSC Operations Coordinating Board had the task of developing a program to eradicate the spread of communism. One way to achieve this was by urging Latin American governments to create national security laws<sup>1</sup>, which would enable countries to rule under state-of-siege, limiting civil and political rights (Huggins 1998). Political opponents and communists were considered subversives and were fiercely persecuted under these new national security laws. The new laws, in many cases, were also applied retroactively by the military. Some defendants were prosecuted more than once for the same offence, while crimes by the military regime and its security forces were ignored (Pereira 2005).

Meanwhile, the US donated investigative equipment to the Institute of Criminalistics in Brazil through the Alliance for Progress, with the objective of facilitating the localisation of political adversaries (Zaverucha 2004). With US consent and assistance, many political prisoners were held in custody without trial and tortured. Recently declassified documents show that US officials were aware of human rights abuses in Brazil at that time, and even of the location of some political prisoners who had 'disappeared', yet the US Government did nothing to inform their families (Neri and Valente 2015). These US documents reveal information about political prisoners who died during or after torture and thus, were deemed 'disappeared', including Rubens Paiva (1929–1971), Virgílio Gomes da Silva (1933–1969) and Stuart Edgard Angel Jones (1945–1971). Despite knowledge of these atrocities, the US continued to support and assist the Brazilian military regime and its police forces. This continued even in 1968, when the Brazilian military dictatorship established Institutional Act 5 (AI-5): a decree allowing the military leadership to overrule the constitution, censure the media, overrule the mandates of sitting politicians and suspend voting rights, leading to the institutionalisation of state torture. A recently declassified telegram from the US embassy in Brasília to the Department of State in Washington, DC, dated 14 December 1968 (one day after AI-5 was issued), reveals why the US was idle despite this undemocratic legislation:

These people [i.e., the military dictatorship], while nationalistic and narrow, are fundamentally favourable to the US and can be counted on to side with us either sentimentally or overtly in any East–West confrontation. It is highly likely they will continue in control of Brazil for a number of years to come. (Geyer and Herschler 2004a)

US secret services and international police assistance sought to eradicate communism in Brazil, but the institutions they facilitated, and supported, eradicated democracy and enabled a repressive dictatorship to remain in power for 21 years. Although a militarised branch of the police has existed in Brazil since 1808 (Holloway 1993), it was only during the last military

dictatorship that all branches of the police came under the direct control of the army. The civil police have since been responsible for investigations, while the military police have been responsible for patrolling the streets and repressing crime (Zaverucha 2000). This has enabled the police to become more effective in suppressing public protest, strikes, rallies, political parades, political organisations, rebellions and emerging revolts (Pinheiro 1982).

According to Pereira (2005: 16), Brazil's military dictatorship was a 'prototype for a new kind of authoritarianism in Latin America', a model for other dictatorships that would develop across the region during the Cold War (e.g. Argentina in 1966, Chile in 1973 and Uruguay in 1973). These regimes claimed to defend 'national security' and prosecuted their opponents for offences against national security, yet all of them engaged in state terror—monitoring, torturing, killing and disappearing their own citizens—with the complicity of the US Government. The Brazilian military played a key role as well, providing aid, military training in counter-insurgent techniques, equipment, money and general backing to covertly interfere with electoral campaigns in Bolivia and Chile (Pereira 2005; Harmer 2012) and to support the US invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 (Blum 1986). Through its alliance with Brazil, the US could provide assistance to anti-leftist and military dictatorships throughout Latin America. This alliance was further strengthened under the US President Nixon (1969–74):

In the case of Chile where Nixon told Médici [Brazil's then military president and ex-military attaché to Washington] how important it was to 'work closely', 'if money were required or other discrete aid', Nixon continued, 'we might be able to make it available ... we must try and prevent new Allendes and Castros and try where possible to reverse these trends'. (Harmer 2012: 670)

A recently declassified memorandum from the CIA, entitled 'Brazil–Suriname: The Success of the Brazilian Initiative' (CIA 1983), reveals the extent of Brazil's role in providing military aid throughout Latin America. This was justified through the ideology of fighting communism and curbing Cuba's potential influence. Despite being sanitised, the document reveals how the CIA positively interpreted its collaboration with Brazil to run successful interference in Suriname:

According to our Embassy, Brazilian Ambassador Lampreia was working directly and virtually on a daily basis with Alibux and Graanoogst to implement Brazilian assistance packages. [Sanitised section] For their part, the Surinamers have made numerous requests for Brazilian assistance in diverse areas ranging from academic scholarships to helicopter flight training. The embassy in Brasilia reports the Brazilians generally are pleased with the positive response from Paramaribo and are optimistic about their prospects for supplanting the Cubans. (CIA 1983: 2–3)

What stands out when considering these newly declassified documents are the geopolitical motivations behind US support for Brazil's military dictatorship, as well as the methods by which this support was achieved. For example, researchers have known for years that the US lent support to authoritarian dictatorships in South America (Huggins 1998; Pereira 2005), but what these new data reveal are the key roles of international police assistance in this process. Cornerstone here were links between the US and Brazil—a relationship motivated largely by two interconnected factors: the US defence industry's desire to maintain its monopoly on Latin American markets, and to prevent the growth of communism in the region. Such tactics were justified by US officials, mostly on account of the Cold War. But as dictatorships in South America grew more brutal during the 1970s, such close ties became harder to justify for US policymakers. When direct political interference became less tenable, a new collaborative frontier emerged to sustain links between public security in South America and the US: the war on drugs and

combating narco trafficking in Latin America. Again, much like during the Cold War, international police assistance played a key role in this process.

### **From Fighting Communism to the War on Drugs**

In the late 1960s, international concern with the brutality of the military regimes in Latin America was increasing. An extensive number of NSC meetings from 1969, declassified over 30 years later, reveal continued discussions about whether the US should continue to aid Latin American militaries, and if not, how assistance should be terminated or made less visible. This is reflected in the following comments by Henry Kissinger, US secretary of state under President Nixon, in a NSC meeting regarding Latin America dated 9th July 1969:

Internal security forces have improved, but some countries still need budgetary and technical help. On the other hand, Congress is becoming increasingly opposed to military programs in Latin America. ... at present, there is no wholly satisfactory internal substitute for AID lending ... But by being so 'visible' it also maximizes the amount of direct friction and resentment against the US. (NSC 1969: 6–8)

Two US Senate hearings by Frank Church in 1972, and by James Abourezk in 1973, disclosed increasing proof of torture, killings and disappearances made by police who were trained and resourced with US assistance (Huggins 1998). In 1974, Amnesty International published a damning report titled 'Report on Allegations of Torture in Brazil', and during that same year, Congress banned further US assistance to foreign police. However, by then, Brazilian security forces—and their death squads—were well established and excessively militarised. Further, there existed a number of exceptions to the police assistance ban. Although Congress banned further US assistance to foreign police, narcotics control was exempt from this sanction. In this way, Latin America continued to receive resources via new mechanisms connected to narcotics control rather than direct police aid.

By the mid-1980s, as democracy began returning to South America, foreign police training to combat terrorism was reinstated by the US. Assistance to foreign police forces was also made available through various exemptions to Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act and is not supervised by Congress (Bayley 2001). This was made possible through different privatised programs, allowing US police assistance programs to re-emerge in the 1980s and 1990s. These programs allow for state invisibility by becoming less accountable to Congress and by being contracted out to non-governmental organisations and private groups (Huggins 1998).

Despite limitations placed on international police assistance—or perhaps because of it—the Brazilian military and military police were granted impunity with a constitutional amendment on 13 April 1977. Known as 'o pacote de abril' (literally, the April package), the police, rather than being subject to civilian penal codes of conduct, were placed under the same code of penal conduct as the Brazilian military. Crimes committed by the military (and by extension the military police) were to be judged in the military's own courts, and those courts would in most cases establish that the officers were not guilty as they were following orders or simply 'did the job they had to do'. As such, the military police, while performing a civil service, continue to be protected by military law as if the country was at war. Extrajudicial tactics were also implemented and intensified at this time and included torture, punitive maltreatment and executions (Pinheiro 1982). News reports from the dictatorship era reveal cases of torture and execution and confirmed cases of death squad activity, often formed by active or ex-police officers (Freire 1980). In the state of Pernambuco, for example, the Commission of Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife highlighted these issues in 1979:

Public opinion in Pernambuco is perplexed, following news reports of successive discoveries of corpses with no identification [documentation], usually in deserted places, crimes that the police have not solved. Beyond having marks that indicate barbarity, these corpses have a number of common characteristics: they are usually young, between 18 and 25 years old, they are partially burned, with marks of handcuffs or ropes, they are naked, or semi-naked, very slim and with long facial hair, as if before dying they had been kept in captivity for a long time. (Freire 1980: 20)

Beyond supporting such activities, international police assistance contributed to continuously enforcing militarised models of social control. For instance, a recently declassified report from the US Department of State cites the chief of federal police, Romeu Tuma—formerly head of the Brazilian Secret Service (1972), whose job was to assist the military’s restriction of political freedom by infiltrating leftist student and labour groups (Riding 1985)—revealing US pressure to involve the Brazilian army in counter-narcotics activities:

[Brazil’s] Federal police chief Romeu Tuma asked the mission to confirm press reports that the US is ‘pressuring’ the Brazilian military to enter the anti-drug effort. Our DCM assured him that the reports were not correct, *although the US military does note to its Brazilian counterparts the role it plays in the US effort and that this role makes an important contribution.* (Department of State 1990)

Such discourses about narcotics and the control of organised crime came to replace Cold War ideologies of national security (Hinton 2006; Huggins 1998). Meanwhile, the military was pressured to become involved with police work, and the police continued to be equipped with militarised equipment and training. Several files from the US Agency for International Development (AID) show evidence of continued US support for Brazil’s military regime, which was provided under the pretence of fighting the war on drugs. An illustrative example comes from the Office of the General Counsel, AID/W, dated 5 December 1975, by Charles J. Knowlen:

‘International Narcotics Control’: The enclosed agreement provides US\$120,000 for laboratory equipment to the Federal Police Department, to help develop a basic narcotic identification capability in eight selected regions of Brazil. (AID 1975)

While US influence over international crime control is well documented (Garland 2001; Jones and Newburn 2007; Macaulay 2013; Wacquant 1999), what this new evidence reveals are some of the processes used to export US crime-control practices under controversial circumstances. The dismantling of the US foreign police assistance program, and the closing of the Office for Public Safety in 1974, did not end US support for military forces in South America. A number of recently declassified materials, now available at the ‘Digital National Security Archive’ (under collections such as the ‘CIA Covert Operations 1977–2010’), provide ample evidence of ongoing US intervention in Latin America. For instance, in the minutes of a NSC Meeting on 13 March 1987, President Reagan argued:

Lenin discussed their approach to world communism and said that they would first take Eastern Europe, which they have already done. Then, they would organize the hordes of Asia. Well, they have made great progress there. Then they would move to Latin America. In taking Latin America, the United States, the last bastion of imperialism, would be isolated and fall into their hands like overripe fruit. These are the stakes we are talking about today. (NSC 1987)

The anti-communism agenda had not been dismantled, despite emerging concerns with new threats—namely, drugs. Continued intervention was justified under the cover of fighting old and

new threats: communism, terrorism and narcotics. Following international reports about the increasing involvement of the Brazilian military with torture and human rights abuses, international police aid continued through less visible means. A memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski (US National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977–1981), dated 21 April 1978 and declassified in 2008 by the NSC, reveals the secrecy around state-run, extra-legal intervention in politics through US police assistance to Brazil:

Steve Oxman from Christopher's office called about whether to approve three different licenses for equipment to the Brazilian police. D/HA strongly opposes the sale; I am inclined to recommend going ahead with it, though I recognize it may cause us some problems, particularly the \$15 million fingerprint detecting equipment. (NSC 1978)

Another confidential report from the NSC, entitled 'Issues and Objectives for the President's Visit to Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica', dated 22 November 1982 and declassified in 2009, further illustrates this point:

In Central America, guerrilla warfare persists, but we have stopped the drift toward Marxism/Leninism. ... We should, however, guard against appearing to suggest publicly that we are interested in a special military relationship with Brazil. (NSC 1982)

In 1986, the US Government created another agency for the provision of international police assistance, called the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, funded by AID (Bayley 2001). Both the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration were also involved in training and resourcing international police, with the alleged aim of promoting 'democracy' and ensuring 'a safe environment abroad for market economies' (Bayley 2001: 3). Among 184 recipient countries of this aid in the 1990s, 15 were in Latin America and accounted for nearly half of all investment (Bayley 2001). Given this context, it is hardly surprising that US models of crime control continue to prevail in Latin America.

There is also continuity in this international project, insofar as militarised methods of policing (including militarised equipment and training) have continuously been deployed despite reforms. As Leeds (2014) notes, the continued exportation of militarised methods of crime control to police forces that are not trained in respectful civil relations and human rights protection is deeply problematic:

In March of this year [2014], 22 Brazilians from the Military and Federal Police went to the North Carolina headquarters of Academi, formerly known as the infamous Blackwater, for a three-week training course paid for by the US government, apparently with Defence Department funding. According to a São Paulo Police official, the training was intended 'to learn the practical experiences of the American troops fighting terrorism'. Additionally, with training specifically focused on 'civil disturbances', more than 800 Brazilian police from nine states participated in training by the FBI in the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Ceará, and Brasília. While the Brazilian Police claim they respect the right to protest peacefully, they clearly were not able to distinguish between peaceful and violent protesters. (Leeds 2014, unpagged)

The Brazilian police and criminal justice system are still unable to promote equality before the law, engage in due process or even distinguish between suspects and criminals (Cavalcanti 2017; Leeds 2014). In authoritarian regimes, the police enforce security and conduct investigations by instilling fear. Frequently, this is done through brute and unrestricted force (Uildriks 2009: 16),

often using torture—which is, of course, unwarranted in democratic regimes, but nevertheless continues to persist (Zaverucha 2004: 34). Academic research and recent media reports bear evidence of this: for example, the recent kidnapping and torture of a law student by civil police in Recife; torture tools found in a Pernambucan prison; and cases of torture in young people's detention centres (Cavalcanti 2011; Machado 2011; *Jornal do Comercio* 2013). The penultimate section of this article shows how state crimes like these, along with abuses of human rights (including the use of torture) continue to be routine in Brazil (Macaulay 2013) and show ongoing connections to international police assistance provided by the US.

### **Legacies of Control**

The consequences of the military dictatorship are lasting. The Brazilian military continue to be influential in the country's public security apparatus, with many generals occupying positions of leadership in the secretariats of public security of various states, and the army being increasingly present in public life and called in to control public order (Aranda 2015; Harig 2014; Soares 2000; Zaverucha 2000). This means that despite Brazil's return to democracy in the 1980s—and the notably progressive constitution of 1988—Brazilian public security and policing remain unreformed and reveal the legacy US police assistance and the military's ongoing influence.

Other factors may also be connected to this. The continuation of undemocratic methods of policing and of the ineffectiveness of reforms in Brazil can only be understood in the context of ongoing, deep social inequality and asymmetrical power relations. Brazilians have constitutional rights to justice, but in practice, access to justice is deeply unequal (Holston and Caldeira 1998; Gregori 2010). Additionally, police reform in most parts of Brazil, to date, has not focused on demilitarising the police, or succeeded in making the police more respectful of citizens' rights. Rather, they have espoused the goal of making the police more effective at capturing criminals and apprehending narcotics (Cavalcanti 2017).

There is also the issue of public security organisation and management, which again reflects legacies of the military dictatorship and international police assistance. For example, the Brazilian Military Police, although now under civilian control, are divided into military ranks, institutionally beset by a rigid military hierarchy and ideology, and military culture and training. They continue to be subject to the military, rather than civilian, penal code, which can enforce severe penalties and detention on officers who do not obey orders, regardless of whether these orders are consistent with democratic ideals (Soares 2000; Cubas 2013). Simultaneously, military courts can acquit police for crimes that a civilian court may not (Mingardi 2000). Additionally, despite continuous abuses of force, direct US influence over Brazilian crime control has continued. In March 2015, for example, the FBI provided questioning and interrogation training to the Secretariat of Social Defence in Pernambuco, Brazil (*Diario de Pernambuco* 2015). This enduring US involvement, and the replication of US models of public security, is concerning, given the historical consequences of international police assistance in Brazil.

In addition to a legacy of undemocratic policing, Brazil continues to rely on heavy-handed public security measures, with the military often being called upon to interfere with law and order. For instance, in May 2014, leading up to the presidential election, the Pernambucan police went on strike demanding better pay, a practice that is illegal but recurrent in Brazil since the police are not legally entitled to strike. During the strike, the army was called in to control sprawling crime and looting. Tanks and heavily armed soldiers patrolled streets, pointing their guns at unarmed citizens in scenes that shortly thereafter went viral in Brazil (these images have been widely disseminated on the web; see Julio 2014; Madeiro 2014). The army is also often called on to control protests and strikes without having to account for its actions. This is problematic on several levels; not least for making demilitarisation in Brazil more difficult. It also mars the democratic nature of state institutions, notes Zaverucha (2000: 26): 'treating crime as a military

problem rather than a social problem, which only helps to strengthen the military presence in the political arena, making it more difficult to address the problem through structural changes’.

Where do the roots of such problems lie in Brazil? As this article has demonstrated, one cannot overlook Brazil’s links with the US and the history of international police assistance from the 1960s to the 1980s. Such legacies, of course, are not exclusive to Brazil, highlighting the need for Southern Criminology research that considers similar contexts (Carrington et al. 2019a). Likewise, it needs to be remembered that crime control in Brazil is not overdetermined by US pressures. Also significant (to list but a few factors) is severe social inequality; the ways Brazilian elites have resisted social change for centuries; Brazil’s legacy of colonialism and slavery; a racialised social order masked by myths of racial democracy; and inconsistent public security measures espoused by different political parties (Azevedo and Cifali, 2015). Further, governance processes are shifting in Brazil and much political influence is now achieved by the judiciary instead of the armed forces. A growing body of literature explores this trend; what could be called the politicisation of justice and the judicialisation of politics (Lopes 2011; Santos 2003). This is perhaps best exemplified by recent investigations into members of the Workers’ Party and the imprisonment of former president Lula, who, according to opinion polls, was the favoured candidate to win the 2018 elections (Garmany and Pereira 2019). By accounting for this context—and again, remembering serious concerns over public security that are ubiquitous in contemporary Brazilian society—it is easier to make sense of Jair Bolsonaro’s surprise victory in 2018.

## Conclusion

The rise of right-wing political figures like Brazil’s Bolsonaro, rather than representing new political agendas or a decisive turn in Latin American politics, instead reveal long-rooted histories of authoritarian governance and punitive public security measures. This legacy dates back centuries, yet became especially pronounced during Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964–1985). Not only have the Brazilian Military Police never been significantly reformed, but the methods for engaging public security and everyday policing also continue to reflect militarised tactics and low levels of public accountability. Debates regarding whether Brazil’s police should undergo reform, or in fact engage in even more heavy-handed tactics, continue to divide the Brazilian electorate, just as in many countries throughout the Global South. For many in Brazil today, policing is violent work, meaning that solutions to mounting public security problems necessitate higher levels of violence and fewer concerns for due process and human rights. This, after all, was how public security was maintained during the military dictatorship, which, today, is celebrated by leaders like Bolsonaro for allegedly producing higher levels of public security. Bolsonaro has drawn effectively on this sentiment, and his calls for authoritarian public security measures—though horrific to many—increasingly seem to connect with Brazilian voters.

This article has considered the intersections between international police assistance and public security issues in Brazil and other similar contexts. By engaging with recently declassified documents showing how the US Government sought to influence South American politics through international police assistance programs, this article shows how US interference was implemented over several years, stretching from the Cold War to the war on drugs. The evidence here reveals specific geopolitical motivations, as well as long-lasting consequences of this work, with a specific focus on legacies of militarised policing in countries like Brazil. The purpose of this investigation has been, first, to contribute to emergent research on Southern Criminology by highlighting key issues in a region often overlooked by criminologists in the Global North; and, second, to explore the broader effects of international police assistance programs. By highlighting these issues, this article seeks to make a lasting contribution to studies of policing, politics and public security in contexts like Brazil, where levels of everyday violence reveal crises of human rights and democracy.

Going forward, important questions remain regarding the roles and long-term consequences of international police assistance programs. Related to this are numerous 'blind spots' with respect to criminological research in the Global South and the problems with implementing public security measures promoted by countries like the US. This is not to suggest the US is to blame for all Brazil's public security problems, but rather to draw attention to the effects of ongoing wars on communism, drugs or terror. For example, when international police assistance is uncritically extended to regions that are characterised by weak democratic institutions and low levels of external police oversight, the consequences, in some cases, can produce even higher levels of police brutality (Chevigny 1995). These are the broader ramifications of the issues considered in this article and are worthy of further exploration and critical reflection.

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<sup>1</sup>The first new security law (Ato Institucional, AI-1), disseminated on 9 April 1964, postponed Brazil's presidential elections, reduced congressional powers and established conditions by which one's political rights could be cancelled. On 26 October 1965, AI-2 declared the executive's right to rule without congressional consent, established indirect presidential elections, controlled by the military and established that although state governors could be directly elected, only candidates from the two parties approved by the military could run for office (Aliança de Renovação Nacional (ARENA) and Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB)). In 1968, the Fifth Institutional Act granted extreme freedom to security forces by eradicating habeas corpus. Political killings and repression increased with the establishment of this new security law, which was only eradicated in 1974 with regime liberalisation. Military arbitrariness had, by then, been temporarily legalised in Brazil.

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