

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT FOR “THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE
BY THE POLICE IN RIO DE JANEIRO AND THE PACIFICATION PROCESS”

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On-screen text:

The Use of Lethal Force by the Police in Rio de Janeiro and the Pacification Process
a discussion with Beatriz Magaloni

On-screen text:

Beatriz Magaloni
Senior Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

Professor Magaloni: The Program on Poverty and Governance... We are a team of researchers—faculty, post-doctoral students, doctoral students, and some undergraduate students—and we work in what we see as action-oriented research that can have an impact in the world on issues that matter to us. We are very much focused on poverty and the problem of violence. Most of our research focuses on Latin America, which is the most violent area of the world. Fifty percent of the world’s deaths by firearms occur in Latin America. The share of the population of Latin America is much lower than that, so it’s by far the most violent region of the world. It also concentrates 41 of the 50 most dangerous cities. And I want to emphasize that the type of violence that we are observing in Latin America is not related to civil war or ethnic violence, but it’s related to criminal violence—drug trafficking. Most of this violence is concentrated in cities, and within cities, in the poorest neighborhoods of the cities.

On-screen text: What is the relationship between poverty and violence?

Professor Magaloni: Poverty causes violence, but violence also perpetrates poverty. So this is like a vicious circle. For example, in the case of the city of Rio de Janeiro, we have been able to geo-reference all the homicides taking place in the city from 2005 until the present, and we know how many homicides take place almost by [the] hour and every day. With these data, we have also been able to correlate with the existing levels of poverty in the neighborhood [and] lack of provision of public goods—lack of, for example, electricity or sanitation. What we find is that there is a very strong correlation between lack of services, poverty, and violence.

On-screen text: How is Rio de Janeiro addressing issues of poverty and violence?

Professor Magaloni: This was, I think, in 2010. I led a group of Stanford students from the Master’s [Program] in Public Policy here at FSI [Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies] to Brazil, and we interviewed with several government officials and NGOs. We were exploring issues of governance, development, international relations. But one of the aspects that we focused on was security. We spoke with the Minister of Security—Mariano Beltrame—back then, and I was very impressed by the initiative that he was leading, which was the introduction of the Pacifying Police Units in the favelas of Rio.

I was able to go to one of these favelas and speak with the police commander of the UPP unit there. I was very impressed by the work they were doing. They were trying to create trust among the community. They were creating courses for the kids on karate and martial arts. They were also working with the kids on vegetable gardens. For teenagers and older they were creating [courses on] different forms of boxing. So the goal of the Pacifying Police Unit was really to try to build trust among the community and build a more humane and proximate

police. Traditionally the police had never really gone into these areas and when it entered the areas it really entered to confront criminals and kill very many people. So the population was really very distrustful and continues to be very distrustful of the police.

I got very interested about this also because I come from Mexico and I've done research in Mexico, and I know how hard it is to get a police [force] that works. The police often [are] involved with the criminal organizations. That's part of the reason criminals operate with impunity. So I said "I want to understand what's going on there."

We spent a couple of years doing interviews in the favelas, interviewing with the police, until we developed trust among Beltrame and the police itself, and they started to trust us with confidential information. We started mapping all the homicides in the city. We started mapping how police behave, whether police were shooting in excess or not. We are developing a very large study that we are going to be presenting this December that focuses on the use of lethal force by the police and ways to limit that force.

One of the interventions we are going to be doing in one of the favelas of the city—Rocinha, which is one of the largest favelas in Brazil—is that we are going to add miniature cameras on the police to observe how the feeling of being observed restrains use of force, and hopefully also increases trust among the community. Doing these types of studies approximating the police is a very hard thing to do as researchers because the information is sensitive. It's often not easy to be trusted. And as I say, I think that in many areas of the developing world, the police [are] part of the criminal organizations. So with this information we are going to be positioned to understand a very important question about policing in the developing world, which is twofold: (1) how to create a more humane police, how to restrain excessive use of force among the police, and (2) how to create technological devices that can help restrain excessive use of force.

I think that excessive use of force by the police creates serious problems because it creates spirals of violence: the police militarizes, then the criminals arm themselves more, and both end up behaving like criminals. The police [force] is like the state arms with weapons. If you don't restrain the use of force through rule of law, principles, and institutions, police behave like criminals. Constructing this type of democratic, humane police is very challenging, especially in the developing world. So this is why we think that the project in Rio is going to have a big impact, not only for Rio itself, but maybe influencing interventions in other areas, like Mexico, or Guatemala, or Honduras, which are really also very violent places.

On-screen text: What have you learned from your research?

Professor Magaloni: One of the aspects that has been important in our work is to humanize the police. One of the findings that I think is important is we did a survey to 6,000 members of the police—around 20% of the entire corporation—about experiences of violence they suffered in childhood and adolescence, both to themselves and their families or close friends. We found that the police [have] been embedded in a very violent society. Around 45% of the officers report having witnessed a homicide. Many of them report having been victims of crime themselves or their families, having heard gunshots constantly in their childhood. We did a statistical analysis with these data, and we were able to demonstrate that those officers who disproportionately suffered violence in childhood tend to engage in more violence. I think this is a very important finding that humanizes the police, but also highlights a problem maybe of selection—so, who selects into the police. Maybe knowing this information we can devise better ways of identifying who should or [should not] join the police. So that was a very important finding.

Another finding is that they are under a lot of stress. They really live in constant confrontation, and that obviously creates a lot of stress. Stress causes more violence; violence causes stress. I think that in highlighting these results, interventions can be devised to help officers deal with this stress and enable them to escape the spiral of violence. So that's another very important result of ours.

And finally, we discovered that police use of force—which is not surprising, considering what has happened recently in Missouri in the U.S.—that it concentrates disproportionately in poor neighborhoods, and that it hits the poorest the [most]. One of the interviews with the police highlighted that officers know when they are dealing with very poor individuals, they know that they don't have a knowledge of their rights, and they know that they can treat them with less respect. I think this is important. We have to be aware of these biases against the poor. I think that's another very important finding of our research.

On-screen text: What are the prospects for reducing violence in Rio?

Professor Magaloni: What we observe is that [in] some places, the impact has been amazing in reducing dramatically both the violence itself and the use of force by the police. That is a very important finding. So we know that the intervention has dramatically reduced the use of lethal force by the police, which is a very important result. But we also have seen that in some favelas where criminal organizations are very strong and they're very armed and powerful, the intervention is less successful. In these places, the UPP still behaves very much like the police used to behave before—very violently—and there is a lot of confrontation. So I think we can understand with this research the conditions under which you can really reduce violence with this approach of proximity, and the conditions where you might need other types of interventions. So there's been success.

Another good indication is that Mariano Beltrame, who is the Minister of Security, is now reelected to his position. There were elections in October, and there was a question whether the UPPs were going to continue. So the government was reelected, and he will continue as the Minister of Security. I think it's very important to give continuity to this process, because every time something goes wrong—every time, for example, the police kills in excess, every time the police is killed—forces on both sides call for stopping the reform. There is always a temptation: “No, let's go back to the military strategy that we followed before.” Many members of the police want to go back to that strategy. And so it's important to give continuity because this process is a very challenging one, and it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy to change the culture of violence among the police itself and the violence in the city.

Here I have to mention that the violence comes from drug trafficking, and the fact that there are a lot of arms and weapons in the streets. And so in that sense, there is a strong connection with what is happening in the U.S., what is happening in Mexico, what is happening all over Latin America. The increase in violence in general in the region is very much related to drug trafficking. I think people have to understand in this country that the main market for drugs is the United States. So there [are] a lot of externalities that that is causing for Latin America, Central America.