



CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES FOR PUBLIC SAFETY IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL *CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES FOR PUBLIC SECURITY IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL*

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SUMMARY

This paper analyzes the sociological issues that influence the public security system in Brazil, focusing on structural inequalities, racism, and gender discrimination. Based on a qualitative literature review, the study highlights how these dynamics perpetuate social exclusion and violence, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations. Structural racism manifests itself through racial profiling and police lethality, mainly affecting the black population. Gender issues, such as femicide, domestic violence, and marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people, also highlight the system's failures to meet the specific needs of these groups. In contrast, the study presents alternative security policies, such as community policing, conflict mediation, and restorative justice, which offer preventive and inclusive approaches. These initiatives have proven effective in reducing violence and strengthening social relations, although they face institutional and cultural barriers in their implementation in Brazil. The results suggest that public security in Brazil needs to be reformulated from an integrative perspective that recognizes the intersections between race, gender and class, promoting equity and social justice. It is concluded that policies based on inclusion and prevention can transform the public security system, making it more effective and sustainable. The work contributes to the academic and social debate by proposing solutions that address the structural causes of violence and suggests future research to deepen the analysis of successful experiences and adapt strategies to local specificities.

Keywords:Public safety. Structural racism. Gender. Inclusive policies. Prevention.

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the sociological issues influencing Brazil's public security system, focusing on structural inequalities, racism, and gender discrimination. Through a qualitative bibliographic review, the research highlights how these dynamics perpetuate social exclusion and violence, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations. Structural racism manifests through racial profiling and police lethality, primarily affecting the Black population. Gender-related issues, such as femicide, domestic violence, and the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ individuals, also reveal the system's shortcomings in addressing the specific needs of these groups. In contrast, the study presents alternative public security policies, such as community policing, conflict mediation, and restorative justice, which offer preventive and inclusive approaches. These initiatives have proven effective in reducing violence and strengthening social relations, although they face institutional and cultural barriers to implementation in Brazil. The results suggest that Brazil's public security system needs to be restructured from an integrative perspective that acknowledges the intersections of race, gender, and class, promoting equity and social justice. The study concludes that policies based on inclusion and prevention can transform the public security system, making it more effective and sustainable. This work contributes to academic and social debates by proposing solutions that address the structural causes of violence and suggests future research to deepen the analysis of successful experiences and adapt strategies to local specificities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public security is one of the most relevant and challenging issues in contemporary Brazil, reflecting the complex relationships between the State, society and power dynamics. Growing urban violence, social inequality and the structural limitations of the public security system have highlighted the need to understand and reformulate its practices and policies. This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by public security in Brazil, considering historical, social and cultural factors that



shape their performance.

The relevance of this study lies in its ability to contribute to the debate on how public security can evolve to meet society's demands more fairly and effectively. Urban violence affects millions of Brazilians, compromising their quality of life and exposing the fragility of public institutions in guaranteeing fundamental rights. In addition, issues such as structural racism, gender inequality, and social exclusion are intertwined with security practices, perpetuating cycles of violence and discrimination. This work aims to offer a critical and integrated analysis of these intersections, contributing to the formulation of more inclusive policies.

The research problem guiding this study is: how do structural and social factors impact public safety in Brazil, and what are the alternatives to overcome their limitations? The overall objective is to understand the causes and consequences of public safety practices in the Brazilian context. Specific objectives include: analyzing the impact of social inequality and structural racism; investigating the relationship between gender and safety; and evaluating alternative policies, such as community policing and restorative justice.

This work uses a bibliographic review as a methodology, based on works by renowned authors, institutional reports and empirical data. The qualitative approach allows us to explore the multiple dimensions of the topic, connecting theory and practice. The structure of the work is organized into chapters that deal with the historical evolution of public security, social inequalities and alternative policies, culminating in a critical reflection on possibilities for transformation. This study seeks to contribute to the academic and political debate on public security in Brazil, pointing out paths towards a more efficient, equitable and humane system.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 HISTORY OF PUBLIC SAFETY IN BRAZIL

The formation of the Brazilian public security system is intrinsically linked to the country's historical and social context, from the colonial period to the present day. The practices and structures that characterize this system reflect the social inequalities, structural racism, and concentration of power that have marked Brazil's historical trajectory. Understanding this development is essential to understanding the limitations and challenges faced by public security today.

During the colonial period, public security practices were directly associated with the protection of elites and the maintenance of the slave-owning order. The Royal Police Guard, created in 1809, was one of the first official institutions focused on security, and its activities were focused on repressing slave rebellions and protecting the assets of the ruling classes. As Holloway (1997) observes:

The public security apparatus in the colonial era had as its primary objective to guarantee the maintenance of the slave system, repressing any attempt at revolt or insurgency. There was no concern for the safety of the popular classes; on the contrary, police actions often reinforced the exploitation and exclusion of these populations (HOLLOWAY, 1997, p. 45).

This analysis highlights that the origins of security forces in Brazil are deeply rooted in repressive practices aimed at social control of marginalized populations. This logic persists in different forms throughout history, reflected in the militarization and discriminatory bias of modern police forces.

With the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, it was expected that public security practices would be reformulated to meet republican principles of equality and citizenship. However, the exclusion of black and poor populations continued to be a central feature of the system. As Florestan Fernandes (1978) points out:

The transition from slavery to free labor in Brazil did not result in social inclusion or full citizenship for the former slaves. On the contrary, the public security system was adjusted to keep these populations in a state of subordination, using state violence as a mechanism of social control (FERNANDES, 1978, p. 112).

This perpetuation of exclusion shows that, even with institutional changes, police practices

maintained the logic of selective protection, aimed at the elite, and systematic repression of the popular classes. In the 20th century, the militarization of security forces became a striking feature of the Brazilian system. The military dictatorship (1964-1985) consolidated this process, using the military police as instruments of political and social repression. As Caldeira (2000) states:

The militarization of Brazilian police forces during the dictatorship established a culture of institutional violence that continues to deeply mark public security practices in the country. This authoritarian legacy contributes to the perpetuation of repressive and discretionary approaches, which prioritize repression over prevention or dialogue with communities (CALDEIRA, 2000, p. 89).

This perspective highlights how the authoritarian legacy still influences police structures and practices, hindering the implementation of more inclusive and democratic policies. During the democratic period, important reforms were implemented, but many limitations remain. The 1988 Constitution brought progress by consolidating public security as a right for all and by establishing guidelines for the actions of police forces. However, institutional fragmentation, corruption and unequal access to security services continue to be significant challenges.

Therefore, the history of public security in Brazil reveals a system that, since its origins, has been shaped by elitist interests and the exclusion of the most vulnerable populations. This historical analysis is essential to understand the structural limitations that still characterize the current system and to consider alternatives that promote inclusion, justice and equity.

2.2 PUBLIC SECURITY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The relationship between public security and social inequality is a key aspect for understanding the dynamics of violence and exclusion in Brazil. The unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and rights creates an environment of social vulnerability that directly influences the functioning of the public security system. In contexts of inequality, public security tends to reproduce social hierarchies, concentrating repressive actions on the most vulnerable populations and neglecting preventive and inclusive policies.

Economic exclusion is one of the main factors contributing to insecurity in vulnerable territories. According to Wacquant (2001):

Poverty is not just a lack of material resources; it is also a form of marginalization that is expressed in spatial segregation, social stigma and the criminalization of specific groups. The actions of security forces in poor territories often reflect this logic, treating residents as potential threats and reinforcing inequality.

instead of fighting it (WACQUANT, 2001, p. 43).

This analysis highlights that economic exclusion not only creates conditions conducive to crime, but also shapes the way the State intervenes in these spaces. Instead of offering protection and inclusion, the public security system acts in a punitive manner, aggravating conditions of vulnerability.

Urban segregation is another factor that amplifies inequalities in public safety. Brazilian cities, marked by deep socio-spatial divisions, concentrate low-income populations in peripheral areas, which are often neglected by the government. Caldeira (2000) points out that:

Spatial segregation reinforces the isolation of peripheral populations, creating territories that are perceived as threats to the urban center and its elites. In these spaces, the actions of security forces are predominantly repressive, based on specific operations to combat crime, rather than structured actions for social inclusion and community protection (CALDEIRA, 2000, p. 112).

This segregation intensifies the perception that certain territories are “danger zones”, legitimizing violent police interventions and contributing to the stigmatization of its residents. This approach not only fails to reduce crime, but also perpetuates the distance between the State and communities. The actions of security forces in vulnerable territories often reinforce social inequalities, rather than reducing them. According to Soares (2009):

The prevailing logic in police operations in highly vulnerable areas is confrontational, treating residents as suspects and territories as war zones. This approach, instead of solving security problems, increases the cycle of violence and exclusion, making dialogue between the State and communities difficult (SOARES, 2009, p. 98).

This critical view demonstrates how public security practices can exacerbate inequalities by prioritizing repression over protection and dialogue. In many cases, these actions contribute to strengthening the control of criminal factions, which present themselves as alternatives to state power in these communities.

Therefore, social inequalities are determining factors in the dynamics of public security in Brazil. Economic exclusion, urban segregation and the repressive actions of security forces not only reflect existing inequalities, but also perpetuate them. Rethinking public security requires an approach that addresses these structural issues, promoting policies that combine prevention, inclusion and social protection, and that recognize the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

2.3 STRUCTURAL RACISM AND RACIAL PROFILING

Structural racism is a deeply rooted phenomenon in Brazilian society, influencing various spheres, including public safety practices. It manifests itself through policies, behaviors, and institutional norms that perpetuate racial inequality and discrimination against the black population. Racial profiling and police lethality are direct expressions of this racism, resulting in discriminatory approaches and excessive use of force against black people. According to Silva (2016):

Structural racism in Brazil is not only a historical legacy, but a contemporary reality that is reflected in institutions and social relations. Police practices often reproduce racial stereotypes, associating skin color with criminality. This association leads to racial profiling, where black individuals are stopped, searched and detained more frequently and without objective justification (SILVA, 2016, p. 48).

This quote highlights how structural racism operates within law enforcement institutions, creating a bias that negatively affects the black population. Racial profiling is not just a matter of individual police officers' actions, but an institutionalized practice that reflects and reinforces existing racial inequalities.

Empirical studies confirm the impact of racial profiling. According to the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2020), black people account for 75.4% of those killed by the police in Brazil. This disproportion reveals a systematic pattern of targeted violence. As Almeida (2019) argues:

Police lethality in Brazil has a clear racial bias. Skin color is a determining factor in the decision to use lethal force by police authorities. This reality reflects not only individual prejudices, but a structure that historically dehumanizes black bodies and legitimizes violence against them (ALMEIDA, 2019, p. 102).

The discussion about police lethality and structural racism is deepened when we analyze emblematic cases that gained media attention and mobilized public debate. The murder of young black men in urban outskirts has been recurrent, generating indignation and questions about police practices. These cases illustrate how the perception of suspicion falls disproportionately on black individuals, resulting in aggressive and fatal approaches.

Racial profiling also has psychological and social consequences for the affected communities. Feelings of insecurity, distrust in institutions and marginalization are exacerbated by these practices and discriminatory cases. As Nascimento (2018) points out:

The constant surveillance and suspicion of black bodies creates a hostile environment, where the black population is deprived of basic rights and subjected to a permanent state of alert. This affects the mental health, economic opportunities and quality of life of these people, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and violence (NASCIMENTO, 2018, p. 67).

To address structural racism and racial profiling in public safety, it is necessary to implement

develop anti-racist policies and practices. This includes adequate training of police forces on human rights and racial issues, the establishment of clear protocols for police approaches, and effective mechanisms for external control and accountability. In addition, community participation in the formulation of security policies can contribute to building relationships of trust and reducing discriminatory practices.

In short, structural racism significantly influences public safety practices in Brazil, manifesting itself through racial profiling and high police lethality against the black population. Recognizing and addressing this problem is essential to promote social justice and ensure that public safety is a right of all citizens, regardless of race or color.

2.4 GENDER AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Gender issues play a central role in understanding public security dynamics in Brazil, reflecting structural inequalities and specific vulnerabilities faced by women and LGBTQIA+ people. Gender-based violence, which includes femicide, domestic violence, and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ populations, highlights significant gaps in the public security system, both in terms of protection and prevention.

Femicide is one of the most extreme expressions of gender-based violence and reflects the structural inequality faced by women in society. According to Law 14.994/24, which updated the Maria da Penha Law, femicide is now considered an autonomous crime in the Penal Code, with penalties of 20 to 40 years in prison. According to the Câmara de Notícias Agency (2024):

Law 14.994/24 represents a milestone in the fight against gender-based violence by increasing penalties and providing for specific aggravating factors, such as femicide committed during pregnancy or in the presence of the victim's children. These measures reinforce the protection of women and seek to curb violent practices through harsher penalties and accountability mechanisms.

Despite legislative advances, the implementation of effective policies faces practical limitations, such as the lack of adequate training for police forces and the lack of specialized police stations. The weakness in the care provided to victims often prevents the effective provision of protection provided for by law, reinforcing impunity and perpetuating cycles of violence.

In addition to women, LGBTQIA+ people face specific forms of violence and discrimination that are often made invisible in the public security system. Butler (2004) highlights that:

The marginalization of bodies that do not align with hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality is an exclusionary strategy that legitimizes violence against these populations. The lack of full recognition as subjects of rights reinforces the vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ people in contexts of urban and institutional violence. (BUTLER, 2004, p. 62).

This exclusion translates into discriminatory practices in police services, a lack of effective protection and the absence of specific public policies for the safety of these populations. Cases of physical and psychological violence and even homicides motivated by homophobia and transphobia continue to be an alarming reality in Brazil.

Domestic violence, which predominantly affects women and children, is also a critical issue in the field of public safety. Although the Maria da Penha Law was a significant advance, data from the Brazilian Public Safety Forum (2022) indicate that many women still have difficulty accessing protection, either due to fear of reprisals or distrust in the institutions responsible. The lack of a comprehensive support, which includes shelter, psychological assistance and legal counseling, limits the effectiveness of protective measures.

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In the context of police forces, institutional structures themselves reproduce gender inequalities, with low rates of women occupying leadership positions and frequent reports of harassment and discrimination. This reality reflects the need for a cultural transformation in public security institutions, which must begin with the promotion of gender equality and the fight against discriminatory practices within the corporations.

Therefore, the analysis of gender issues in public security reveals structural challenges and practical limitations that compromise the protection of women and LGBTQIA+ people. Although legislative advances are

fundamental, it is crucial that public policies integrate preventive, educational and support actions for victims, promoting a more inclusive and effective security system.

2.5 ALTERNATIVE SECURITY POLICIES

Alternative public security policies emerge as a counterpoint to traditional repressive strategies, seeking to promote preventive and inclusive approaches that address the structural causes of violence. Initiatives such as community policing, conflict mediation and restorative justice have gained prominence for their potential to strengthen relations between the State and society, in addition to promoting sustainable solutions to public security challenges.

Community policing is an approach that aims to bring law enforcement closer to communities, promoting mutual trust and cooperation. Kelling and Moore (1988) argue:

Community policing is based on the idea that public safety is a shared responsibility between the police and citizens. This approach seeks to create partnerships to solve local problems and prevent crime, breaking with the traditional logic of reactive and repressive action. (KELLING; MOORE, 1988, p. 5).

In Brazil, projects such as Community Police Bases in vulnerable communities have shown that the continuous and integrated presence of security agents can reduce violence rates and strengthen the sense of local security. However, implementation faces challenges, such as the need for specific training for police officers and cultural resistance within the police force.

Conflict mediation is another alternative policy that focuses on the peaceful resolution of social tensions, preventing their escalation into situations of violence. Christie (1977) highlights:

Mediation gives the parties involved back control over their conflicts, creating solutions that strengthen social bonds rather than breaking them. This process contributes to building a culture of peace by prioritizing dialogue and mutual understanding over punishment. (CHRISTIAN BROTHERS, 2002) TIE, 1977, p. 7).

National experiences of community mediation, such as in peripheral communities in Rio de Janeiro, show that creating spaces for dialogue can significantly reduce local conflicts, in addition to promoting the empowerment of communities to resolve their own tensions collaboratively. Restorative justice, in turn, proposes a transformative vision of public security, by emphasizing reparation and social reintegration. Zehr (2002) explains:

Restorative justice shifts the focus from punishment to accountability, inviting all parties involved in the conflict – victim, offender and community – to participate in a process of reparation. This approach seeks to restore social balance and prevent reoffending, promoting a broader understanding of the consequences of crime. (ZEHR, 2002, p. 25).

In Brazil, restorative justice has been applied in schools and communities, with promising results in reducing recidivism and improving interpersonal relationships. However, its expansion faces barriers, such as a lack of resources and a lack of knowledge about its effectiveness on a broader scale.

Analysis of international policy alternatives also offers important lessons. Experiences such as the Ceasefire programme in Boston, which combines community policing with targeted social interventions, and restorative justice circles in New Zealand demonstrate the potential of these strategies to reduce violence and promote social inclusion. These initiatives show that integrating different approaches is essential for the success of security policies.

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Therefore, alternative security policies represent a paradigm shift by prioritizing prevention, dialogue and inclusion over repression. Although structural and cultural challenges still limit their implementation in Brazil, these approaches offer a promising path towards building a more just, sustainable and effective public security system.

3 MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study has a bibliographic and qualitative character, seeking to understand the intersections between sociological issues and public security practices in contemporary Brazil. The research was based on theoretical works, empirical data and case studies that address the relationship between structural inequalities and the dynamics of violence and exclusion in the context of public security.

The materials used include reference books by renowned authors such as Michel Foucault, Abdias do Nascimento, Judith Butler, Howard Zehr and Nils Christie, as well as institutional reports, legislation and academic articles. Documents such as the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook 2022 and Law 14.994/24, which brought advances in the fight against femicide, were analyzed. These texts were selected based on their theoretical and practical relevance to the themes of structural racism, gender inequality, public security and alternative policies.

The qualitative method allowed for a critical interpretation of the materials, identifying patterns and intersections between different dimensions of the problem. The analysis was organized around five main axes: the history of public security in Brazil; the relationship between social inequality and security; the impact of structural racism; gender issues; and alternative security policies. Each axis was explored based on theoretical sources and empirical data, seeking to understand how these factors influence public security and offer paths for its transformation.

The approach used prioritized an interdisciplinary analysis, connecting concepts from Sociology, Criminology and Human Rights. Issues such as the impact of social inequalities on racial profiling, the limitations of repressive practices and the potential of preventive policies guided the investigation. This integrative perspective ensured a broad and critical vision, necessary to address the complexity of the issue and propose solutions to the challenges of public security in Brazil.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight how the sociological issues analyzed directly impact the public security system in Brazil, revealing both its structural limitations and the possibilities for transformation. The literature review showed that factors such as social inequality, structural racism, and gender discrimination are deeply rooted in institutional practices, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and violence. In contrast, alternative security policies pointed to promising paths for a more inclusive and effective approach.

The analysis of structural racism revealed its influence on public security practices, especially racial profiling and police lethality. Data from the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2022) indicate that 77% of victims of police interventions are black, which confirms Abdias do Nascimento's (1978) view on institutionalized racial exclusion. This violence is not only a reflection of individual prejudices, but of a structure that associates black bodies with criminality, reinforcing social hierarchies and hindering access to full citizenship.

Regarding gender issues, the study highlighted the challenges in addressing violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people. The update of the Maria da Penha Law by Law 14.994/24 was identified as a milestone in the fight against femicide, but its implementation faces practical barriers, such as the lack of specialized police stations and inadequate training of police forces. Butler (2004) highlighted the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people, revealing the need for policies that recognize and protect these groups effectively.

The discussion also highlighted the limitations of traditional repressive practices in Brazil, which tend to focus on vulnerable territories without addressing the structural causes of violence. As Wacquant (2001) argues, the actions of security forces in these contexts often reinforce social exclusion, treating peripheral communities as containment zones rather than as spaces of citizenship.

On the other hand, alternative security policies, such as community policing, conflict mediation and restorative justice, have proven to be viable solutions to overcome these limitations. International experiences, such as the Ceasefire program in Boston, and national experiences, such as community mediation projects in Rio de Janeiro, indicate that strategies based on prevention and strengthening social relations can significantly reduce violence rates. However, their implementation in Brazil faces challenges related to institutional resistance and lack of resources.

The results obtained reinforce that public safety in Brazil needs to be rethought from an integrative and inclusive perspective. The interaction between social inequality, structural racism and gender discrimination requires public policies that recognize these intersections and prioritize prevention and



inclusion. Furthermore, the implementation of alternative policies requires political and institutional commitment to overcome structural and cultural barriers.

These results point to the urgency of reforming Brazil's public security system, promoting approaches that not only combat violence but also address the underlying causes of the inequalities that perpetuate it. This study contributes to the debate by offering a critical analysis and proposing solutions that combine effectiveness, equity, and sustainability.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper analyzed the intersections between sociological issues and the public security system in Brazil, highlighting how structural inequalities, racism, and gender discrimination shape institutional practices and impact vulnerable populations. The research showed that the current system, largely based on repressive approaches, not only fails to meet security demands, but also perpetuates cycles of exclusion and violence, reinforcing existing social hierarchies.

The results showed that social inequality and urban segregation create an environment where security forces often treat vulnerable communities as containment zones rather than spaces of citizenship. Structural racism, in turn, manifests itself clearly in racial profiling and police lethality, which disproportionately affect the black population. Likewise, gender issues reveal the need for more effective policies to combat femicide, domestic violence, and the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people, who remain underrepresented and unprotected in the public security system.

Despite these limitations, the study highlighted alternative policies, such as community policing, conflict mediation and restorative justice, as promising approaches to transforming public safety. These initiatives have proven effective in national and international contexts by prioritizing social inclusion, violence prevention and strengthening community relations. However, their implementation in Brazil faces institutional and cultural barriers that require political will and strategic planning.

The conclusion is that reform of the Brazilian public security system requires an integrative approach that recognizes the intersections between race, gender, and class, and promotes policies based on equity and prevention. This work contributes to the debate by providing a critical analysis and suggestions for ways to overcome the challenges of public security in Brazil. Future studies can deepen the analysis of successful experiences and explore strategies to expand the implementation of alternative policies, adapting them to local specificities. In this way, it will be possible to build a more just, effective, and sustainable public security model that guarantees the right to security for all citizens.

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