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Controlling bureaucracies in weak institutional contexts: The politics of police autonomy

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Abstract

This article argues that political competition determines how and when elected politicians can reduce police autonomy. While bureaucratic autonomy is generally lauded in developed democracies, it can result in serious malfeasance in contexts of institutional weakness. Political incumbents may reduce police autonomy through different means and for various purposes. While some politicians seek to professionalize police forces and align them with the rule of law, others aspire to politicize police to appropriate its rents from corruption. This article shows that lack of rotation in office (low political turnover) increases politicians' control of police, while under low turnover, fragmentation in cabinets and the legislature influences whether politicians seek to professionalize or politicize the force. The article illustrates this theory with a subnational comparison of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Santa Fe (Argentina), relying on 80 interviews with police and politicians.

1 | POLICE AUTONOMY IN WEAK INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

Police perform the basic function of the modern state: exercising the monopoly of *legitimate* violence. However, in many developing democracies, police routinely engage in systematic human rights violations and corruption, often against (i.e., with high autonomy from) elected officials' mandates (Hinton & Newburn, 2009; O'Donnell, 1993).[1] Alternatively, politicians may curtail police autonomy to capture police rents from crime or use police to repress political and societal opponents (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Wilkinson, 2006). In either case, the interaction between police and politicians can undermine democratic quality and state legitimacy. Thus, police acquiescence to governing officials in weakly institutionalized democracies should be problematized rather than assumed.

This article explains when and how politicians reduce police autonomy in developing democracies with weak formal institutions. Some incumbents may apply formal statutes to *professionalize* police, providing police with greater skills and capacity to better serve the public rather than individual politicians, criminal groups, or themselves. Contrarily, other governing officials may rely on informal practices to *politicize* police and subdue them to their personal or partisan interests. Of course, elected politicians might fail in either endeavor. The article will focus on a dimension that, while not solely representative, is crucial to differentiating between politicization and professionalization: whether politicians appropriate or restrict police corruption.

Political scientists have mostly neglected the various linkages between police and governing politicians. An exception is the literature on police reform, which explains the implementation (or lack thereof) of "changes in police structure, organization, and functions undertaken [mostly] in post-transition democracies to make the police more accountable to the rule of law and responsive to all citizens" (Bayley, 2006, p. 23).[2] Some scholars propose that police reforms have floundered for political motives, including partisan turnover (Davis, 2006), disputes across government tiers (Eaton, 2008), political and police commitment to reform (Arias & Ungar, 2009), or politicians and bureaucrats seeking to avoid blame for violent crimes (Flom & Post, 2016). Others focus on societal factors, such as private sector activism (Moncada, 2009) and mobilized scandals following police malfeasance (Y. González, 2014) to explain the relatively few successful reform attempts. Unlike this literature, this article also considers how politicians can reduce police autonomy *without* reform (see also Prado, Trebilcock, & Hartford, 2012; Taylor, 2013).

This article argues that the alternation in political power over time (turnover) and the dispersal of power among parties in the cabinet and legislature (fragmentation) jointly determine when and how politicians reduce police autonomy. Low turnover reduces police autonomy because political initiatives to control police are more likely to persist over time. Meanwhile, under low turnover, low fragmentation enables incumbents to appropriate police rents from crime (politicization) while higher fragmentation can sometimes restrain police corruption and promote police professionalization.

This theory is illustrated through a within-case and cross-case comparison of the states of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Santa Fe (Argentina) since democratization in the 1980s. Both subnational governments emerged from authoritarian regimes pressed to control historically violent and corrupt police forces; however, they subsequently underwent opposing trajectories, according to the political turnover and fragmentation their respective administrations endured.

The article relies primarily on 80 interviews with police, politicians, and other state and civil society actors, and uses process tracing to examine within-case variation in both subnational districts. These qualitative data provide crucial evidence to distinguish outcomes and reveal mechanisms in an obscure area such as the informal relations between incumbents and police.

This article seeks to contribute to analyses on the interaction between politicians and bureaucrats in developing democracies. Most studies on bureaucratic politics rely on theoretical models from developed democracies, where bureaucracies tend to exhibit meritocratic selection, tenure security, rule-based evaluation, and relatively high administrative capacity (Polga-Hecimovich & Trelles, 2016). In these contexts, bureaucrats' reputation for expertise and innovativeness enables them to forge autonomy from their political masters (Carpenter, 2001), who, in turn, have stronger incentives to grant discretion to these agents (Huber & Shipan, 2002). Thus, scholars from developed democracies tend to regard bureaucratic autonomy as crucial for economic development and state capacity (Miller & Whitford, 2016).

In contrast, bureaucracies in developing democracies often exhibit the opposite traits. Bureaucrats' recruitment, job security, and promotion often depend on personal ties or political dynamics rather

than formal rules or objective performance indicators (Spiller, Stein, Scartasini, & Tommasi, 2007). Unsurprisingly, these bureaucracies have fostered poor reputations due to systematic inefficiency and corruption (Rauch & Evans, 2000). Elected officials in developing democracies thus have stronger incentives to *restrict* bureaucratic autonomy.

Police rarely appear in this discussion. Nonetheless, police autonomy is particularly relevant for at least two reasons. First, police malfeasance can produce serious human rights violations and undermine democratic legitimacy. Second, unlike their counterparts in developed democracies, police in developing democracies emerged from authoritarian regimes without ever being responsive to elected politicians (Hinton & Newburn, 2009). Police did not need to forge their autonomy but rather to defend it. This article engages with the burgeoning debate on bureaucratic politics in developing democracies, showing when and how politicians can control police, as well as the consequences of such control.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section explains how political turnover and fragmentation affect police autonomy. Section 3 outlines the research design. Section 4 illustrates this argument through the cases of Rio de Janeiro and Santa Fe. Finally, Section 5 discusses broader implications for bureaucratic autonomy in developing democracies.

2 | THE POLITICS OF POLICE AUTONOMY

Police autonomy refers to police forces' capacity to exercise their internal governance and external operations without significant political supervision. Internal governance includes different procedures that allow police to function as an organization, such as recruitment, training, internal discipline, promotions, displacement, and so on (Mawby & Wright, 2008). External operations are what police do with respect to citizens, mainly crime prevention and repression, and order maintenance (Wilson, 1968). With greater autonomy, police, especially commanding officers, determine how these processes take pace.

Politicians may attempt to reduce police autonomy through formal or informal means. Formal instruments include statutory provisions—for example, laws, decrees, resolutions, and so on—that place police internal governance processes under political supervision (Frühling, 2009), establish crime control strategies, tactics and procedures, or select neighborhoods for police interventions. These changes typically aim to increase police skills and qualifications, that is, professionalize police.

However, political incumbents may also control police through *informal* means. Incumbents can resort to individual purges, appointments, promotions, and transfers to remove dissidents and promote loyalists. Elected officials may also protect corrupt officers from disciplinary sanctions or judicial prosecution, quashing these investigations at different stages, which makes police subservient to politicians' demands. Consequently, police autonomy can diminish even though police are not further aligned with the rule of law, that is, police politicization.

2.1 | Politicians and police: Motivations and preferences

Police forces can contribute to incumbents' electoral ambitions in at least two ways. First, when police manage to reduce crime, the incumbent can claim credit for law and order in their jurisdiction. Second, police can supply rents from numerous rackets, ranging from illegal gambling to drug trafficking, to finance politicians' electoral machines or engross their personal fortunes. This practice is common in weak institutional contexts—for example, Latin America, Russia (Gerber & Mendelson, 2008), South Africa (Altbeker, 2009), and India (Raghavan, 2002)—where political parties rely heavily on informal and illicit sources of finance (Freidenberg & Levitsky, 2006). At the same time,

certain acts of police misconduct like corruption and violence can jeopardize politicians' electoral prospects. Politicians, therefore, have strong incentives to control police to preserve their electoral chances.

Meanwhile, while there are certainly different subcultures within police, officers are primarily driven by tenure security and advancement. In weak institutional contexts, indicators of police performance such as clearance rates and citizen satisfaction are less relevant for officers' career prospects than personal endorsements. Police officers thus have an incentive to supply rents to their superiors—whether police commanders or political authorities—to keep their positions or get promotions. Rents also allow street cops and mid-level officers to supplement their meager salaries, obtain desired transfers or paid leave, and avoid disciplinary sanctions.

These incentives structures may place police, especially commanders, at odds with political incumbents. On the one hand, reformist politicians may curtail commanders' capacity to decide on promotions or shut down their rackets. On the other hand, rent-seeking politicians may strive to appropriate a share of illicit revenues that commanders would rather keep for themselves.

Politicians also face a dilemma in *how* to restrain police autonomy (Geddes, 1994). Some incumbents may seek to professionalize police to reduce crime and/or improve citizen confidence in the force. However, while these initiatives entail uncertain, long-term benefits, they carry certain, short-term costs: Police can resist these changes by dragging their feet, threatening politicians, or exploiting their underworld connections to increase crime and spur a public outcry for tougher security policies.

Alternatively, incumbents might politicize police, in part to appropriate its rents from crime, which poses a different quandary. On the one hand, these rents might bolster politicians' electoral machines or personal fortunes. On the other hand, police may renege to control crime or be exposed in corruption scandals, which may provoke protests, impeachment, or criminal investigations against the incumbent (Y. González, 2014). Incumbents might consequently opt to restrict police autonomy to reduce agency losses and preserve their electoral chances.

In short, politicians may seek to reduce police autonomy to professionalize or politicize police, while police will attempt to preserve or increase their autonomy. This article argues that whether politicians or police prevail depends on the political competition incumbents face.

2.2 | Turnover, fragmentation, and police autonomy

This article argues that political competition, both over time (turnover) and between parties (fragmentation), shapes whether and how politicians reduce police autonomy. While low turnover is necessary for politicians to increase their control over police, under this condition high fragmentation can contribute to police professionalization through the disruption of centralized political–police corruption networks. Meanwhile, the combination of low turnover and low fragmentation allows incumbents to politicize police and capture its rents from crime. Finally, high turnover increases police autonomy, regardless of political fragmentation (see Table 1).

Political turnover refers to whether the same party or faction remains in power at the executive level from one electoral term to the next (Grzymala-Busse, 2003; Murillo & Martínez-Gallardo, 2007). *High turnover* increases police autonomy via two mechanisms. First, it undermines policy stability. When a new party takes power, incumbents are likely to change security policies, political authorities, and police commanders to signal their differences with the preceding administration and satisfy their electorate and activists. These changes not only run counter to the bureaucratic inertia in

TABLE 1 The impact of turnover and fragmentation on police autonomy in weak institutional contexts

Turnover	Fragmentation	
	High	**Low**
High	High police autonomy	Temporary reduction of autonomy
Low	Low police autonomy (professionalization)	Low police autonomy (politicization)

Source: Author's elaboration.

police but can also foster dissent within the force, leading officers to resist the incumbent's encroachment on their autonomy.

Second, electoral alternation carries transition costs. When a new administration arrives, relationships between governments and police start afresh, obstructing policy coordination (Post, 2014). Before new incumbents can acquire the necessary expertise to manage police, there might be changes in political leadership or policy orientation. Thus, under high turnover, politicians are unable to reduce police autonomy.

Political fragmentation refers to the dispersal of power during a given term, whether in the form of cabinets made up of several parties or factions, or in the legislative arena as divided government. In a context of high turnover, high fragmentation can further hinder efforts to reduce police autonomy. Higher legislative fragmentation can obstruct policy enactment and implementation because it gives police more potential allies to resist such initiatives. Meanwhile, heterogeneous cabinets often lack policy coherence, which erodes police compliance with gubernatorial decisions. Finally, high fragmentation may entice police to supply rents to the incumbent's rivals, who may have greater future influence on their career trajectories.

In a context of high turnover, *low fragmentation* is insufficient to reduce police autonomy beyond a single administration. While incumbents may enact statutes to professionalize police or make informal attempts to politicize the force, successors from a different party or faction are likely to erode or reverse these measures upon gaining power. High turnover thus increases police autonomy, regardless of fragmentation.

In contrast, *low turnover* decreases police autonomy through two mechanisms. First, it increases policy stability. Statutory changes or informal arrangements are more likely to stick as incumbents will probably maintain policies implemented by themselves or their own party. Second, police commanders are more inclined to perceive entrenched incumbents as "the only game in town" and comply with their decisions. When commanders discount that the incumbent—or their party or faction—will remain in power, they will seek to gain favor with them to ensure their career advancement. In short, turnover determines *whether* politicians can reduce police autonomy, yet political fragmentation influences *how* they do so.

With *low turnover* and *high fragmentation*, governing politicians are more likely to professionalize police. While professionalization includes several components, one of its fundamental dimensions is the restriction of police corruption. Higher fragmentation can contribute to this objective for one of two reasons, depending on the inclination of the opposition. First, stronger rent-seeking political rivals might want to appropriate these illicit revenues for themselves, which threatens incumbents' capacity to maintain order, as dispersed protection pacts undermine peacekeeping agreements with criminal actors and exacerbate conflict (Durán-Martínez, 2018; Snyder & Duran-Martinez, 2009). Second, a stronger reformist opposition can expose corruption schemes and denounce the incumbent in the legislature, the media, or the courts, weakening their chances in the upcoming election.

A stronger opposition might also exercise greater control of police corruption through congressional committees, oversight offices or other institutions, making it more difficult for incumbents to ensure immunity from prosecution to their police allies. Greater fragmentation therefore precludes incumbents from monopolizing patronage, graft (Geddes, 1994; Grzymala-Busse, 2003) or, in this case, police rents from crime.

By contrast, entrenched parties with *low fragmentation* have greater incentives and opportunities to politicize police and appropriate its rents from crime. First, political incumbents are subject to weaker horizontal accountability. Legislative proposals from the opposition to keep police and incumbents in check are less likely to pass. Accountability offices might be occupied by party activists and exist only in name. Second, police commanders have fewer incentives to broker deals with politicians of weak rival parties or factions, as these cannot grant them credible protection or influence their career prospects. Overall, governments with low turnover and low fragmentation can "politicize the state, capture resources, … and privilege themselves unchallenged," including in their control of police (Grzymala-Busse, 2003, pp. 1130–1131).

To summarize, low turnover is necessary to reduce police autonomy in weak institutional contexts, where changes in administration typically lead to serial policy replacement (Levitsky & Murillo, 2013). Meanwhile, under low turnover, high fragmentation can motivate incumbents to restrict police corruption and promote professionalization, while low fragmentation favors politicization and the political appropriation of police rents from crime.

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN

This theory is illustrated by analyzing the cross-case and within-case variation in police autonomy in two subnational states in Argentina and Brazil: Santa Fe and Rio de Janeiro. Using interviews and other qualitative data to conduct process tracing, the ensuing analysis examines the within-case variation in each subnational unit (Brady & Collier, 2010). Performing this analysis in more than one case yields "analytically general insights," as similar mechanisms apply in different contexts (Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

The selected cases, Rio de Janeiro and Santa Fe, illustrate the variation of police autonomy in the weakly institutionalized democracies of Latin America over time. In both countries, subnational police are in charge of preventing crime, responding to distress calls and maintaining order, and most frequently in contact with citizens. Police forces in both subnational districts entered democracy tainted by their involvement in human rights abuses and organized criminal activities (on Santa Fe, see G. González, 2007; on Rio de Janeiro, see McCann, 2014).

Over time, however, these cases underwent opposite trajectories. On the one hand, Rio de Janeiro's governments were initially unable to either professionalize or politicize police due to high turnover and fragmentation. However, with decreasing turnover since 2006, incumbents reduced police autonomy and made advances toward professionalization, including greater checks on police corruption. On the other hand, in Santa Fe, low turnover and fragmentation enabled successive Peronist administrations to politicize police and centralize rents from crime during the initial decades following democratization, while increasing competition since the late 1990s spawned reform cycles and increased police autonomy.

These findings are primarily based on 40 semi-structured interviews in each subnational district.[3] Among the interviewees are former and current appointed government officials in the security department, elected state, and municipal legislators from different parties who served in public security committees, and high-ranking police officers. As police officers are generally banned from speaking

with outsiders without authorization from their superiors, initial access was obtained through previous contacts—politicians, scholars, or members of NGOs and police union representatives—and then a snowball method was used to contact new interviewees. To increase representativeness and control for respondent bias, police commanders from different territorial precincts, unions or political alignments were interviewed and their responses triangulated with contextual evidence from newspaper archives, government reports, NGO briefs, and secondary literature. Using these data, process tracing was conducted to establish how police autonomy varied over time and to showcase the mechanisms that connect its variation to changes in political competition.

4 | POLICE AUTONOMY IN RIO DE JANEIRO AND SANTA FE

4.1 | Rio de Janeiro I: Fleeting administrations, indomitable police (1982–2006)

In Rio de Janeiro, several state governments attempted to professionalize the state military police (PM), particularly to restrict its use of lethal force.[4] However, high turnover and high fragmentation prevented most administrations from implementing or sustaining such changes. Between 1982 and 2006, no party managed to remain in power from one term to the next.[5] Additionally, these governments lacked legislative majorities: Since 1982, no incumbent party obtained more than 35% of seats in the state legislature (see Figure 1).[6] Therefore, they often included coalitions of strange bedfellows, which generated policy incoherence or immobility. Consequently, most attempts at professionalization perished before the end of the administration that promoted them.

Marking the end of authoritarianism, populist candidate Leonel Brizola (PDT, Democratic Workers' Party) won the 1982 gubernatorial election and promised to create a police force respectful of human rights, especially of the poor (McCann, 2014). Brizola, along with reformist Military Police commander, Colonel Magno Nazareth Cerqueira, removed the Military Police from the control of the army and instituted a new training module regulating police use of force (Hollanda, 2005,

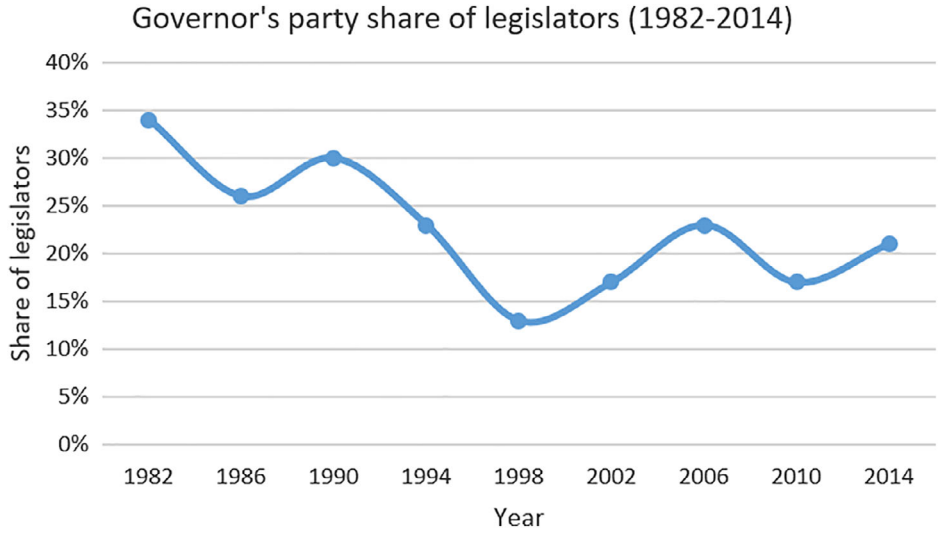

FIGURE 1 Proportion of legislators from the incumbent party, Rio de Janerio, 1982–2014. *Source:* Author's elaboration based on Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE)

pp. 81–82). The governor also eliminated promotions based on *bravura* (bravery), which rewarded police for confirmed kills, and restricted police from entering *favelas* (slums) to hunt down criminals.

However, both Brizola and Cerqueira faced intense opposition from politicians and police. Brizola lacked a legislative majority and needed to form a governing coalition with deputies from conservative parties, who criticized the government's "soft on crime" approach, and supported police protests against the administration (Sé, 1999, p. 289).

Meanwhile, Cerqueira faced dissent within the Military Police. According to a former Captain of the elite squad (BOPE), "Cerqueira had a visionary proposal but … it was a vision outside of what police wanted: there was a lot of resistance" (Interviewee RJ8, personal communication with former BOPE (Batallion of special operations) high-ranking officer, September 1, 2014). Police officers even allowed crimes to occur or intentionally engaged in lethal violence to destabilize the government's proposals (Hollanda, 2005, pp. 132–135).

Ultimately, electoral turnover terminated Brizola's professionalizing initiative. His successor, Wellington Moreira Franco (PMDB, 1986–1990), campaigned promising to "end criminal violence within six months," and once in office, reversed Brizola's policies and "let police loose to reclaim the favelas", increasing police lethal interventions (Interviewee RJ6, personal communication with current military police colonel, September 1, 2014).

A similar dynamic occurred when Brizola took office for a second time in 1990. After a new attempt to reduce police autonomy, turnover in the 1994 election triggered another major shift in security policy. The new governor, Marcello Alencar of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB, Brazilian Social Democratic Party), instituted a policy known as *Faroeste*—Wild West—which provided a bonus for "fearless" police actions, including killing individuals during confrontation (Cavallaro & Manuel, 1997). Police killings increased by 62% during Alencar's first year in office and accounted for nearly one of every 10 homicides in the City of Rio (Cano, 1997).

The election of Anthony Garotinho, a charismatic politician from the PDT, in 1998, sparked the third police reform cycle of this period (Garotinho & Soares, 1998). During his first months in office, Garotinho and his Secretary of Security, anthropologist Luiz Eduardo Soares, transformed Civil Police stations to make them accessible to all citizens and installed a community-policing program in three favelas in the Southern Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro (Riccio, Ruediger, Ross, & Skogan, 2013). However, the reform floundered due to high political fragmentation within the administration. The Security cabinet was split between progressive intellectuals like Soares—backed by the PT (Workers' Party)—and hardliners who defended the status quo of police autonomy. Soares claimed that police allowed and even carried out homicides to destabilize the administration and accused Garotinho of halting the reform so as not to endanger his presidential bid (Soares, 2000). Garotinho fired Soares and broke his alliance with the PT shortly after, before resigning to run for president in April 2001. While Garotinho's vice-governor, PT politician Benedita da Silva, promoted a series of reformist initiatives, these ended abruptly with the election of Rossangela "Rosinha" Barros Matheus de Oliveira, Garotinho's wife, in 2002, and Garotinho's takeover as Secretary of Security a year later.

High turnover and fragmentation not only derailed attempts at police professionalization but also obstructed governing politicians' efforts to capture police rents from crime. Police corruption was massive: In 1994, an Army report and Rio's own Security Secretary stated that between 70 and 90% of the Military and Civil Police were corrupt (Resende, 1995, pp. 75–79). Several politicians, especially the Garotinhos (Arias, 2013, p. 270), attempted to use police corruption rents to finance their political machines, but failed due high political fragmentation: No single party or government centralized these rents (Arias, 2006; Leeds, 1996). Illustrating these fragmented linkages, a former Military Police Commander stressed that governors Garotinho and Rosinha brokered police appointments with

state legislators and local mayors, which partnered police with multiple principals with whom to conduct illicit rackets (Colonel Ubiratan D'Angelo, personal communication with former commander general of the Rio de Janeiro military police, September 4, 2014).

In short, during this period (1982–2006), Rio de Janeiro's police was characterized by high corruption—which politicians coveted but could not centralize; systematic extra-legal violence and marked inefficacy in controlling crime, as evidenced by homicide rates, which peaked at 60 per 100,000 in the early 1990s. Not a single administration succeeded in reducing police autonomy.

4.2 | Rio de Janeiro II: Party entrenchment, high fragmentation, and police professionalization (2007–2015)

Just as high turnover and high fragmentation increased police autonomy during the first period, low turnover decreased it afterward. Starting in 2006, the PMDB won three consecutive gubernatorial elections. This partisan entrenchment enabled the implementation of Police Pacification Units (UPPs), that is, police-led occupations to displace drug trafficking gangs in several favelas in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, in preparation for the 2014 Soccer World Cup and 2016 Olympics to be held in the city. This program constituted an important advance toward professionalization of the Military Police.

The UPP program increased political control over police external operations and internal governance in at least three ways. First, it changed how police intervened in favelas. While police units previously invaded these neighborhoods without political authorization, Governor Sérgio Cabral and Secretary of Public Security José Beltrame planned and directed UPP occupations, announcing them beforehand and allowing drug traffickers to leave the favela to avoid unnecessary bloodshed (Alves & Evanson, 2011, p. 209).

Second, the program modified police training and career structure. All PM recruits were trained in community policing, conflict mediation, and human rights. They were also assigned first to UPPs before being transferred to standard Military Police battalions, "to avoid contamination from corrupt officers in these police stations" (Interviewee RJ35, personal communication with mid-ranking public official in Secretary of Security of Rio de Janeiro, September 19, 2014).

Third, the government disincentivized police use of lethal force. Contra Alencar's Faroeste policy, the administration rewarded police for achieving *fewer* civilian casualties and monitored police officers' actions through body and vehicle cameras. An indication of the UPP's initial success was the dramatic decrease in police lethal interventions, from 1,330 in 2007 to 400 in 2013 (Magaloni, Melo, & Franco, 2015).

Partisan continuity ensured the stability (and expansion) of the UPP policy. While the government had installed 12 UPPs by the end of Cabral's first term (December 2010), this number had grown to 38 by the end of 2014. Whereas Brizola and Garotinho's community policing projects had faded with the end of their administrations—or even before—the UPP program persisted for almost a decade.

The PMDB's entrenchment also preserved Cabral's security staff. Beltrame, the Secretary of Public Security, remained in his post for 10 years (2006–2016), while the average tenure of his 10 predecessors between 1995 and 2006 was less than 15 months. Moreover, Beltrame outlasted five different Military Police Commanders and four Civil Police chiefs and even survived a protest by several PM Colonels who demanded his resignation in December 2007. Following this crisis, there were no more major police rebellions. As the leader of the 2007 protest told me: "After us, no one in the Military Police said no to the government" (Colonel Paúl, personal communication with former

colonel of the military police, August 25, 2014). The contrast with police insubordination during Brizola's term shows that police have stronger incentives to comply with politically robust incumbents.

While decreasing turnover enabled reducing police autonomy during the PMDB administration, the persistence of high fragmentation in Rio de Janeiro impeded a centralized appropriation of police rents from crime. While police corruption undoubtedly remains high, the government took steps to restrain it, dismissing or arresting several officials caught in corruption schemes, including PM Commanders and PC Chiefs, the top officers in their respective forces (Tinar, 2011). Despite the PMDB's participation in major corruption scandals, their top Rio politicians have not been denounced for involvement in police corruption.

This within-case analysis allows controlling for different alternative explanations, among them partisanship, individual leadership, federal assistance, and global events. Governors from both progressive (Brizola, twice; Garotinho, at first) and conservative (Moreira Franco, Alencar, Rosinha) administrations failed to reduce police autonomy when political competition was unfavorable. Individual leadership is not sufficient either. Brizola, Cerqueira, and Soares were as committed to police reform as Beltrame and Cabral, if not more. Nonetheless, they encountered greater political competition and their policies were radically reversed when they left office. While federal government resources, including monetary transfers and army troops, undoubtedly aided the implementation of the Pacification program since 2008, the federal government had also intervened in Rio during the mid-1990s, at the end of Brizola's second term, without any meaningful effect. Finally, the fact that Rio de Janeiro hosted major international events—the World Cup in 2014 and the 2016 Olympics—certainly motivated the government to implement a new security program to reduce criminal violence in the city. Nonetheless, other administrations also had a political and social mandate to curtail violence and invested vast resources in efforts to control police yet failed to do so. It also does not explain why the government implemented changes that affected the entire police organization rather than just those units assigned to favelas with UPPs or the gradual increase in police compliance. Without the political conditions necessary to implement the UPPs, this initiative could hardly have had the impact it did, at least in the short term.

4.3 | Santa Fe I: Peronist hegemony and police politicization, 1983–1997

Santa Fe displays the opposite trajectory to that of Rio de Janeiro. Following democratization, the Partido Justicialista's (PJ, or Peronist Party) domain of the province enabled it to reduce police autonomy through politicization, centralizing police rents from corruption. However, increasing turnover and fragmentation since the late 1990s, first between Peronist factions and then with a new party (the Socialists) in power, hindered the implementation of professionalizing reforms and increased police autonomy.

Between 1983 and 2007, the PJ governed the province and held a practically uninterrupted majority in both legislative chambers (see Figure 2).[7] During the first part of this period, the same Peronist faction remained in power. José María Vernet, the candidate of the orthodox Peronist faction who won the governorship in 1983, preserved party unity by distributing patronage jobs and political posts among different party leaders. Among them, Víctor Reviglio, Vernet's Minister of Health, emerged as the chosen successor for the 1987 election, which he won by 16 points. In 1991, to avoid a party split that could cost the election, party leaders installed a double simultaneous vote system (DSV, Ley de Lemas) and chose a political outsider—former high-speed car racing champion, Carlos Reutemann—as the gubernatorial candidate. Finally, in 1995, Reutemann designated as his successor the former Mayor of the Capital city of Santa Fe, Jorge Obeid.

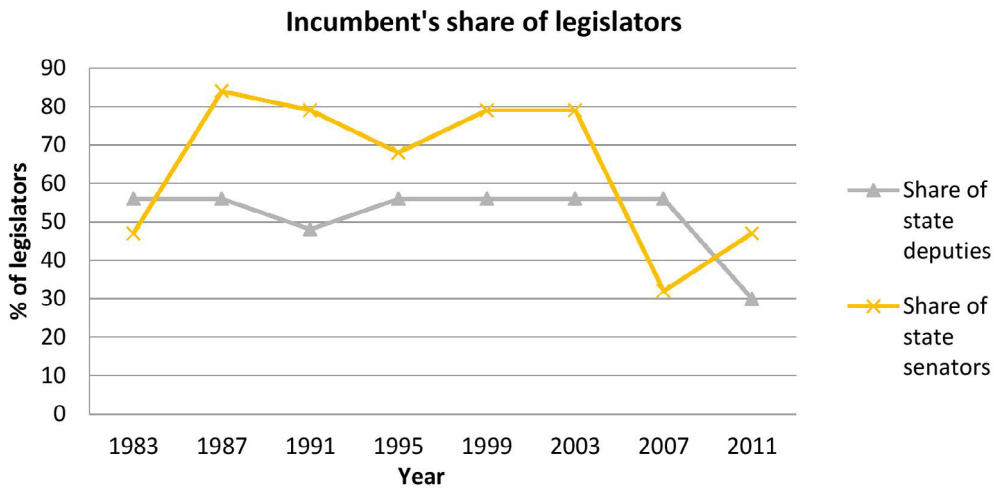

FIGURE 2 Share of provincial deputies and senators belonging to Governor's party, Santa Fe (1983–2011). *Source:* Author's elaboration from Andy Tow's Electoral Blog and Santa Fe Electoral Court

Until 1997, Peronist governments did not attempt to professionalize police but focused on appropriating its rents from criminal activities. Governor Vernet (1983–87) maintained the police structure from the dictatorship, as well as several officers denounced for human rights abuses. He also enacted a Provincial Personnel Law that obstructed the removal of police officers suspected of corruption or other misconduct. Governor Reutemann (1991–95) also sidestepped police professionalization. When asked to evaluate Reutemann's security policy, his former police chief said, "[It was] perfect because he trusted us and gave us the resources we needed" (Savia, personal communication with Mariano Savia, former Police Chief of the province of Santa Fe, November 11, 2013).

Various interviewees and other secondary sources conveyed that Peronist governments during this period appropriated police rents from crime, particularly gambling and prostitution, and used them to buttress their political machines or personal pockets. A former police officer and current union delegate told me: "There was always a direct connivance with politicians in power. There was a chief of police who said: 'how many campaigns have been paid for with money from clandestine gambling?'" (Interviewee SF2, personal communication with police union representative #1, November 7, 2013). In the final months of Reutemann's first administration, a group of officers released a communiqué stating that the incumbent Undersecretary of Public Security had implemented a rent collection scheme, which auctioned police precincts to the highest bidders (Del Frade, 2000, p. 128). In 1998, a former precinct boss also testified that "the Provincial Chief of Police, the Police Chief in Santa Fe [the capital city], and the Minister of Government collected money from illegal gambling" (Del Frade, 2000). These are but a few examples of a system of police provision of rents and political protection: No high-ranking officer, much less any governing politician, was thoroughly investigated, let alone convicted, for these wrongdoings.

4.4 | Santa Fe II: High turnover and fragmentation increase police autonomy

Although the Peronist Party remained in power until 2007, it was split between opposing factions since 1997, resulting in greater fragmentation and turnover. While Reutemann had handpicked Jorge Obeid as his successor (1995–99), they would eventually lead the Center-Right and Center-Left

factions of the Peronist provincial party respectively and their alternation in office triggered profound changes in public security policy.

Contrary to Reutemann's accommodation with police, Obeid (1995–1999) intended to reduce police autonomy through professionalization. He sponsored a law that dismissed officers involved in the dictatorship,[8] modified the force's recruitment and training system, and created the first Office of Internal Affairs to oversee police, placing it under political supervision.[9]

However, the combination of fragmentation in the Peronist Party and electoral turnover impeded the enforcement of these policies. Although the Peronists had a majority in the legislature, several deputies and senators were from Reutemann's faction and did not answer to Obeid (Damianovich, 2001; G. González, 2007, p. 159). A high-ranking member of the administration, illustrated these political hurdles: "We sent a reform project to the legislature in 1997-98, but it got stuck in the chamber; neither the pro-government nor opposition legislators promoted it because it directly eliminated the provincial police and centralized control in political [i.e. the Executive's] hands" (Rosúa, personal communication with Fernando Rosúa, high-ranking official in Obeid administrations, November 7, 2013).

Police commanders exploited this fragmentation to find political allies to resist the reform. For example, the police chief challenged the government's policies in the provincial Senate, controlled by the rival Peronist faction. This chief, who had praised Reutemann effusively, expressed his disgust for Obeid's government: "The other [governors] understood us perfectly well and trusted what we said. That's why we had a good police force. But Obeid was really a person who was on a different path. He was terrible" (Savia, personal communication with Mariano Savia, former Police Chief of the province of Santa Fe, November 11, 2013).

Political fragmentation allowed police to drag their feet and undermine the reform, counting on its termination by a more favorable administration. The same member of Obeid's administration exemplified this tactic:

> During Obeid's first government, we made an agreement with the European Union, in which they would contribute to police technical training. We signed the deal, but at the time of implementing it, Obeid was no longer in government and Reutemann was in office. All that was needed was a law to approve the agreement. Reutemann sent it to the legislature, which voted for it, but Reutemann vetoed it, and it was a major blow to the reform process. (Rosúa, personal communication with Fernando Rosúa, high-ranking official in Obeid administrations, November 7, 2013)

Reutemann's electoral victory in 1999 signified a factional turnover that not only ended but also reversed the budding reform, increasing police autonomy. A few days after Reutemann's inauguration, his new Government and Justice Minister proclaimed, "The previous reform project is buried" (Sozzo, 2005, p. 51). Furthermore, the administration encouraged police violence through its discourse and actions. The Secretary of Public Security publicly stated, "We are not here to protect the rights of criminals" (El Litoral, 2000), and rewarded an officer involved in two fatal shootings. This enabling discourse contributed to a doubling in the number of casualties from police intervention during the first year of Reutemann's administration: from 1999 to 2000, the number of deaths from police intervention rose from 26 to 48 (Sozzo, 2005, p. 29).

Obeid replaced Reutemann again in 2003 and made another attempt to professionalize police. He established the office of the Secretary of Security and created the Institute of Public Security (ISEP), in which civilians would supervise police training.[10] In 2006, the legislature approved a new Police Personnel law,[11] which determined that politicians and civil society representatives would define

police promotions, depriving police commanders of this prerogative. A member of the Socialist administration told me of the corruption by police involved in this process: "Before, selection committees were like this: you were an underofficer that wanted to become an officer; they told you: 'OK, this will be 10,000 pesos; you can pay it in two, three months. If you can't pay it now, when you get promoted and have a new division, it gets deducted'" (Poretti, personal communication with Diego Poretti, former State Undersecretary of Security (Bonfatti administration), November 14, 2013).

However, Obeid's government was again unable to enforce these changes. The ISEP ended up combining civilian and police training staff and loosened educational requirements to recruit more personnel. Furthermore, neither the Peronist government nor the succeeding Socialist administrations implemented the civilian boards to regulate police promotions. Consequently, police autonomy increased, especially following the end of Peronist rule in 2007.

On December 10, 2007, a non-Peronist party took power in the province of Santa Fe for the first time since 1983. Socialist Governor Hermes Binner's administration created a new Ministry of Security and set up a Secretary of Control of Police but encountered heavy transition costs when moving into office. According to Daniel Cuenca, the first Security Minister, in "setting up a ministry from scratch, I inherited a chaotic administrative situation: debts, lack of signed promotions, no staff, not even a desk … I wasted a lot of time on administrative issues such as [approving] promotions, transfers, prisoner custody, etc., and had less time for daily operations" (Cuenca, personal communication with Daniel Cuenca, former State Security Minister (Binner administration), November 20, 2013). Cuenca rapidly encountered police resistance. He found notes in his office saying, "get out, usurper" and eventually decided to bring in his own meals for fear that officers might put something in the cafeteria food. He resigned in December 2009, after a near heart attack.

Meanwhile, high fragmentation in the coalitional government generated policy incoherence, which also increased police autonomy. For example, the appointment of Cuenca's successor as Security Minister, Álvaro Gaviola, spurred conflict with the Socialists' coalition partners, who wanted a different candidate (El mal humor de los radicales, 2009). Furthermore, Gaviola appointed a former police commander as secretary of security but had to reverse his decision as several progressive cabinet members threatened to resign (Superti subió a Giacometti, 2009). Both political rivals and police officers pointed out the administration's "lack of coherent messages" to the force. A police union delegate stated, "There are no precise orders. It's all improvised. Today there is [one security secretary] but tomorrow you come along with other ideas and modify everything" (Interviewee SF21, personal communication with police union representative #2, November 15, 2013).

While they remained in power in 2011, the Socialists' political capital decreased. Their vote share in the gubernatorial election fell from 52% in 2007 to 40% in 2011. Furthermore, they lost their majority in the lower chamber and remained a minority in the Provincial Senate, controlled by the Peronists. Police exploited this high political fragmentation to resist encroachments on their autonomy. Government officials complained that police "operated with legislators to change the course of policies, to prevent the [implementation of the] new selection and promotion mechanisms" and that the opposition summoned the Minister of Security and his cabinet to the legislature to "muddy the field" and undermine the administration (Gutiérrez, personal communication with Alicia Gutiérrez, State Deputy for the Progressive Front, November 12, 2013; Viglione, personal communication with Ana Viglione, former Undersecretary for Complex Crimes (Bonfatti administration), November 15, 2013).

The government's high internal fragmentation continued during Bonfatti's term (2011–2015). The administration's most reform-oriented security ministers—Cuenca and Bonfatti's first Security Minister, Leandro Corti—were not Socialist party cadres, and thus lacked political support to enforce their initiatives. As Corti told me, to control the force, "First, you need not to take money from police,

even if it sounds elementary. Second, *you need to have a lot of political support*, because you will not be making too many friends. Hitting these guys in the head implies having a pretty big dick, so to speak" (Corti, personal communication with Leandro Corti, former State Security Minister (Bonfatti administration), November 14, 2013). Corti resigned after only 6 months, after Governor Bonfatti ignored his decision to suspend a soccer match in Santa Fe for security reasons, which signaled he would not get much political support to pursue deeper police reforms (La Capital, 2012).

Unlike the Peronists, who had informally controlled police by appropriating its rents from crime, the Socialists failed to restrain police corruption, which became anarchic. The clearest example was the arrest by Federal forces of the Provincial Police Chief for complicity with two drug traffickers. This case was not exceptional. Multiple police units protected drug retail sales that occurred through "bunkers"—enclosed fortifications in poor neighborhoods—that operated in broad daylight. According to Federal Judge Carlos Vera Barros, "drug trafficking in Rosario became scandalous because police protection, which always existed but was contained, became decentralized, so every precinct ran three or four bunkers" (Vera Barros, personal communication with Carlos Vera Barros, Federal Judge of Rosario, June 24, 2014). Former Security Minister Corti described this decentralized corruption more graphically: "Today, even corporal Cacho asks you for money" (Corti, personal communication with Leandro Corti, former State Security Minister (Bonfatti administration), November 14, 2013).

Unlike with the Peronists, interviewees from the political opposition did not accuse the Socialists of being involved in police corruption. However, most agreed that the Peronists were effective in informally controlling police rent extraction while the Socialist neither restricted nor appropriated the proceeds from police corruption. Federal Prosecutor Juan Murray emphasized: "The police structure did not change during Peronist administrations, but the PJ always had a particular relationship with police. I think they were always conscious about placing strict limits, establishing very concretely what could and could not be done" (Murray, personal communication with Juan Murray, federal prosecutor in Rosario judicial department, November 12, 2013).

In short, increased political turnover and fragmentation, first between Peronist factions in the mid-1990s and then with the election of Socialist Party in 2007, augmented the autonomy of the provincial police. While earlier Peronist administrations politicized police to appropriate its rents from crime, later Peronist and Socialist administrations (1997 onward) failed to restrain police rent extraction and professionalize the force.

As in Rio de Janeiro, we can rule out certain alternative explanations for changes in police autonomy over time. Partisanship is not a determining factor: while the Socialists suffered the greatest levels of police autonomy, the reformist administrations of Peronist Governor Obeid also faced problems in controlling the force. Similarly, individual political leadership and societal mobilization, such as that following a scandal involving the Robbery and Burglaries Division in 1997, account for the onset rather than the persistence of reform. Finally, one could also argue that the increase in drug trafficking in the province amplified police corruption beyond control. However, police rent extraction was neither curbed nor appropriated by the ruling party, which indicated their autonomy had substantially increased.

5 | CONCLUSION

Despite being a fundamental bureaucracy that fulfills the state's basic function of exercising of monopoly of legitimate violence, police remain an understudied subject in political science and public policy, especially in terms of their interaction with political incumbents. This article argues that

political competition shapes police autonomy in weakly institutionalized democracies, where police acquiescence to political superiors cannot be assumed.

The within-case and cross-case analyses performed shows that both turnover and fragmentation affect police autonomy. Government initiatives to control police, whether in Rio de Janeiro or Santa Fe, collapsed with partisan turnover and generated greater police compliance when governors (or their parties) remained in office. Meanwhile, while the PJ's centralized control in Santa Fe during the first period following democratization enabled governors to politicize the force and appropriate police rents from criminal activities, Rio's fragmented political landscape discouraged incumbents from centralizing police rents from corruption.

The argument presented in this article can be extended to other bureaucracies in developing democracies. In developed democracies, bureaucracies showcase reputations for effectiveness and legitimacy while politicians have stronger motivations to preserve agencies' autonomy and face greater obstacles when trying to encroach on it. In developing democracies, by contrast, many bureaucracies are often correctly perceived as predatory, ineffective, and illegitimate. Politicians therefore have stronger incentives—and, in weak institutional contexts, greater opportunities—to *restrict* agencies' autonomy, whether it is to subordinate them to democratic principles or to politicians' own interests. Using police as an illustrative case, this article shows *when* and *how* politicians can successfully subdue an essential state bureaucracy.

This article has also shown how informal institutions and power dynamics influence bureaucratic autonomy in developing democracies. In addition to formal statutes, politicians have informal ways to control bureaucracies, including tolerating corruption and capturing predatory rents; in other words, rent-seeking does not always signal a lack of bureaucratic control but sometimes the opposite. Additionally, bureaucrats' compliance depends on their assessment of politicians' power rather than solely on formal mandates. In short, especially in weak institutional settings, informal rules, and power dynamics partly explain not just bureaucratic autonomy but, more generally, the nature and speed of change in state bureaucracies' structure and behavior.

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ENDNOTES

[1] These abuses also occur in developed democracies although much less frequently. Even in the United States, which has the most violent police forces among advanced democracies, there are substantially fewer police killings than in most of Latin America or other developing regions.

[2] This definition has an understandable normative and historical bias as reformers have typically attempted to erase entrenched authoritarian police practices during democratic transitions, although reforms have also been attempted in consolidated democracies.

[3] Interviews were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish. All translations are mine.

[4] In Brazil, state-level governments have separate Military Police (PM) and Civil Police (PC) forces. This account refers primarily to the Military Police, which has been the focus of most reform efforts by the state governments of Rio de Janeiro.

[5] The Constitution banned immediate reelection until 1997. The first state executive to run for reelection was PMDB governor Sérgio Cabral in 2010.

[6] The unicameral legislature is renewed entirely every 4 years concurrently with executive elections.

[7] As in Rio de Janeiro, Santa Fe governors and provincial legislators are elected concurrently every 4 years. Unlike in Rio, governors are elected via simple plurality, with no run-off.

[8] Law 11.511 (November 6, 1997).

[9] Decree 1359 (August 22, 1997).

[10] Law 12.333 (September 2, 2004)

[11] Law 12.521 (April 6, 2006)

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