

# The Violence of Law-and-Order Politics: The Case of Law Enforcement Candidates in Brazil

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**T**his article analyzes the effects on violence of electing law-and-order candidates at the local level. It argues that law-and-order politicians embedded in the police will divert resources to favor their constituency, which in violence-prone areas could generate more murders. Using ballot names of council candidates in thousands of local elections in Brazil to accurately classify law-and-order candidates, it shows that the election of police law-and-order candidates causes more homicides. Moreover, georeferenced data on police activity and homicides show neglect in areas that did not support a winning police law-and-order candidate, despite these areas being home to the majority of individuals vulnerable to violence. This favoritism, however, is not present in places where preexisting local institutions make policing more transparent. Instead of persecution directed against minorities or the incapacity to battle criminal gangs, this research shows that surges in violence can be the result of typical forms of democratic representation.

## INTRODUCTION

**N**ationwide law-and-order policies have often backfired. Scholars have noted that actions against crime consistently exacerbate violence when the State is ill-equipped to fight transnational drug organizations (Calderón et al. 2015; Lessing 2017; Trejo and Ley 2020; Yashar 2018), or when these actions become justifications for transgressing constitutional rights (Holland 2013). However, we know little about what does succeed at the local level when law-and-order politicians win local elections and can only implement public security policies circumscribed to their districts.

This article asks about the effects on violence of electing law-and-order candidates at the local level. It makes a political argument that law-and-order politicians, if empowered and unchecked, will try to divert public security for political gain. As widely noted and expected, politicians often try to steer public policy for their electoral benefit (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016; Kaufman and Nelson 2004), resulting in politicized delivery (Holland 2015). This article argues that a similar pattern can emerge with law-and-order politics, where political favoritism carried out by politicians embedded in the public security bureaucracy may lead to mismanagement of policing. Unless institutions prevent this misuse of public policy resources, favoritism toward electoral constituencies will lead to a distorted implementation of security policy, which in violence-prone areas could generate more murders.

The empowered law-and-order politician is the politician who is embedded in the police and can

informally influence their operations. This politician wins the votes of citizens that want more security and improving policing for them is one way to fulfill these demands. But using the police for electoral gain is out of reach for most politicians. Police forces in democracies are hermetic to outside control, scrutiny, accountability, and reform (Eckhouse 2022; Flom 2020; González 2020; 2023; Trejo and Ley 2020) and local-level politicians often have few legal prerogatives to direct policing activities. This article argues, however, that a subset of law-and-order politicians can still influence the police since they happen to be police officers. Their embeddedness, acquired after years of working in the police, allows them to informally and covertly influence policing. Other law-and-order incumbents such as former military personnel may also pursue a law-and-order agenda, but they will not use the police for political gain simply because they are not members of the police circle.

The empirical analysis of the argument is based on the case of Brazil. It relies on the accurate classification of law-and-order council candidates and provides the causal effect of their election on local-level violence. In Brazil, military personnel and law enforcement officers often advertise their professional experience in their ballot names to signal their commitment to a law-and-order program. I use this fact to classify candidates with law-and-order platforms—a classification further validated using text analysis of campaign manifestos, and social media analysis. All registered homicides committed between 2000 and 2016 serve as the violence outcome, information that includes victims' characteristics.

Still, a positive relationship between the election of law-and-order candidates and violence could actually reflect the fact that victimization increases support for law-and-order politics (Bateson 2012; García-Ponce, Young, and Zeitzoff 2022; Visconti 2020). To overcome this empirical challenge, this article deploys a research design where having a law-and-order politician in power is credibly exogenous. Using a regression

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discontinuity design, it compares Brazilian municipalities that almost elected a law-and-order council candidate with municipalities that ended up actually electing one. Municipal, budgetary, and social media data, as well as other political outcomes, complement the analysis. Taking advantage of data that identify and distinguish law-and-order candidates according to their past occupation, the design compares how different the effects are between police candidates and other subtypes of law-and-order candidates.

Overall, estimates show that the election of law-and-order candidates generates a sizable increase in murders, especially of non-white men. Homicide rates among women of all races are unaffected. The context in which these candidates are elected matters, as there is considerable variation depending on the type of law-and-order candidate and whether accountability institutions are in place. The election of embedded law-and-order candidates—police candidates—generates more violence, whereas the results for municipalities that elect other subtypes of law-and-order candidates are not significant.

Additionally, this article argues that embedded law-and-order candidates' influence depends on the police's lack of oversight. When institutional measures allow local governments to break open the police black box, it allows additional stakeholders to oversee the delivery of public security services, and more eyes and the dissemination of information prevent individual abuses of influence from going unnoticed. In Brazil and in the area of public security, local executives can create security committees, inviting representatives from all government branches, the police, and local citizen groups to discuss, monitor, and share responsibilities. Additionally, the establishment of committees comes accompanied by other relevant governance innovations that greatly decrease the chances of political capture of policing. To test this, I compare municipalities that had or did not have local security committees, showing suggestive evidence that these local innovations in public security are effective in preventing political mismanagement.

To further explore how electoral incentives and favoritism cause an increase in homicides, I implement a spatial analysis in municipalities that elected law-and-order candidates. Matching census tract data with polling stations' precise locations within municipalities, I show that wealthier areas with older citizens are much more likely to vote for law-and-order candidates, whereas younger, poorer areas, which are home to the individuals most vulnerable to violence (Moncada 2016, 4), do not. Based on geocoded information for all homicides in the state of São Paulo and on a novel measurement of police activity, the results suggest a negative statistical association between the lack of support for law and order and neighborhood policing and a positive correlation between the lack of electoral support and murders. These findings point to favoritism and since supporters live in richer neighborhoods, they uncover the regressive nature of law-and-order politics.

The article theoretically complements the literature on violence and politics by demonstrating that surges in

violence can occur even in places where transnational drug organizations are not present or where state capacity is not deficient.<sup>1</sup> Haphazard state actions can dismantle a balance among criminal gangs, and between gangs and the State, leading to violence (Albarracín 2018; Trejo and Ley 2020), and crackdowns against transnational drug trafficking organizations proved disastrous (Yashar 2018), but these factors might not be the only reason why we see subnational variation in violence or explain why violence is high in areas far from main drug-trafficking arteries.<sup>2</sup> By moving away from areas where criminal governance plays a defining role in the dynamics of homicidal violence (Moncada 2013), the analysis sheds light on the politics of security of other communities.<sup>3</sup> Empirical tests uncover that the effects of the election of law-and-order candidates are indeed different from the cases of State-drug gangs, since there is no increase in the deaths of law enforcement agents, nor in police killings.

The article finds similarity in the study of policing to those of other policy areas, such as health and education, where the interplay between bureaucrats and politicians and bureaucratic accountability determines policy outcomes (Bhavnani and Lee 2018). In doing so, however, it presents a contrasting perspective on embeddedness. While bureaucrats' embeddedness in civil society may generate better service delivery (Evans 2005; Grossman and Slough 2022; Pepinsky, Pierskalla, and Sacks 2017), politicians' embeddedness in bureaucracies encourages resource misallocation, compromising service delivery. However, checks on the bureaucracy and transparency in the decision-making process through the installation of local institutions may prevent embedded politicians from abusing their position.

Finally, the article contributes to filling noted lacunae of our understanding of policing, politics, and everyday violence (Post 2018; Wenzelburger 2015), placing law and order not as matter of State capacity, but of quality of the democracy (Caldeira and Holston

<sup>1</sup> For these other explanations of violence triggered by electoral politics, see, e.g., Calderón et al. (2015), Durán-Martínez (2015), Flores-Macías (2018), Lessing (2017), and Yashar (2018).

<sup>2</sup> The well-documented Mexican case is exemplary in showing how amplifying security efforts can make violence explode. After Felipe Calderón won the presidency and started a war on drug cartels and their kingpins, homicide rates soared (Calderón et al. 2015; Dell 2015; Phillips 2015). Lessing (2017) points out an indirect source of violence. When crackdowns prevent cartels from internally coordinating or bribing security forces, cartels will resort to violence.

<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, scholars have shown that the dramatic reduction in homicides in São Paulo is largely attributable to the rise and territorial dominance of the country's most organized prison gang (Feltran 2018; Lessing and Willis 2019; Willis 2015). However, prison governance has only recently been witnessed in other states, making it implausible that law-and-order politicians derail a low-violence equilibrium among criminals. In the other important case, Rio de Janeiro, organized drug gangs controlling large swaths of territory, paralegal militias, and militarized police forces co-exist in a unique topography (Barnes 2021). As Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo (2020) and Trudeau (2021) show, in Rio, politically motivated police incursions in crime-controlled areas may in fact generate police killings, but the Rio context is not representative of the Brazilian landscape.

1999; Taylor 2011). Crucially, it points toward a cleavage in public security between relatively richer voters who vote for law-and-order candidates and demand protection from crime against property, and poorer citizens, who are vulnerable to homicidal violence. Unlike accounts where politicians use the security apparatus to directly persecute ethnic local groups or the opposition (Hassan 2017; Taylor 2011; Wilkinson 2006), the type of law-and-order politics studied in this article and the consequences of the actions of law-and-order politicians are a product of typical forms of democratic representation. Law-and-order politics responds to reasonable demands of the relatively wealthier for security, but at the same time aggravates the unreasonable risk of homicidal violence run by the poor who do not have countervailing representation in public security.

The article proceeds as follows: the next section conceptualizes the type of law-and-order politician studied in the article and discusses the conditions in which they can practice political favoritism. Then, it provides a detailed description of law-and-order politics in Brazil, focusing on its candidates and on the local institutions that constrain them. It also validates the classification of law-and-order candidates using ballot names. The following section describes the regression discontinuity design. The Effects of Electing a Law-and-order Candidate section provides an extensive analysis of the causal effects of electing a law-and-order candidate, and their heterogeneity according to the types of candidates and the presence of oversight committees. It also examines whether the results can be explained by an alternative mechanism where law-and-order candidates promote aggressive policing tactics. To complement the test of the argument of political favoritism, the Law-and-Order Politics and Public Security Mismanagement section examines the law-and-order constituency and how the election of law-and-order candidates reshapes public security within municipalities, noting that there is a visible difference between neighborhoods that supported or did not support these candidates. The last section briefly discusses the article's findings and its scope conditions, and the generalizability of the argument to other policy areas.

## LAW-AND-ORDER POLITICS AND PUBLIC SECURITY MISMANAGEMENT

The focus of this article is politicians who during the electoral campaign highlight their professional background in law enforcement or in the military. These are law-and-order candidates. They use this signaling to show voters that they are committed to acting on public security and that if elected they will use all the power they have to champion policies in that policy area.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Unlike *mano-dura* law-and-order politicians (Holland 2013), law-and-order politicians in this study do not necessarily try to implement aggressive policing tactics, and they do not have power to enact punitive laws as a show of commitment to law and order (Gunderson 2022).

While for most candidates these powers are circumscribed by the laws and regulations of their political office, a subgroup of law-and-order candidates has an additional political asset that allows them to go beyond the formal capacities of ordinary law-and-order politicians. These are the politicians embedded in the public security bureaucracy: law-and-order candidates who work or have worked in the police.

Differently from the bureaucratic embeddedness stemming from the social relationships between bureaucrats and civil society (Grossman and Slough 2022; Pepinsky, Pierskalla, and Sacks 2017), the relationship between the politician and the bureaucracy is what defines embeddedness here. The professional experience of certain politicians allows them to extract hard-to-obtain knowledge of the bureaucracy's procedures, and establish lasting relationships with its bureaucrats. When they become politicians, their embeddedness becomes an asset, as this privileged information gives them knowledge of the bureaucracy's internal hierarchies, decision-making processes, resource constraints, and how much its norms and rules can be bent or broken with minimal risk of sanction or detection. Either through persuasion, coercion, or affection from former colleagues, politicians can use their embeddedness to influence the bureaucracy toward their political ends. Politicians will activate their embeddedness in the bureaucracy they once belonged to when favoring a specific portion of the electorate increases the chances of winning re-election. Politicians will employ favoritism when voters' support depends on their honoring their commitment to act on the policy area they come from. Embedded politicians who have not forged these programmatic linkages will not have the same incentives to use their connections to capture policymaking because voters do not expect them to do so. For bureaucrats, having an embedded politician from their agency serving office can be advantageous, resulting in more resources, career opportunities, and job security.

Using embeddedness in the police to favor a segment of the electorate of voters is not a winning strategy for some politicians because favoritism distorts public security. While bureaucratic embeddedness may improve efficiency in policymaking (Evans 2005), politicians' embeddedness misallocates resources, generating a worse overall policy outcome. In public security, where policing is the crucial service, rearranging resources from one place to another will displace crime to neglected areas (Blattman et al. 2021). It may also disturb the equilibrium among criminals, generating turf wars (Trejo and Ley 2020; Vargas 2016). These side effects compound given that those who support law-and-order politicians are relatively wealthier citizens or businesses (Gonzalez and Mayka 2023; Lacey and Soskice 2015; Moncada 2016). Young, poor men are those most likely to commit crimes and suffer violent deaths (Reza, Mercy, and Krug 2001), but they are not part of the law-and-order constituency. The favoring of law-and-order voters leads to a greater focus on the protection of property in the wealthier district, but also to less policing where individuals

vulnerable to homicidal violence live. For these reasons, the number of citizens who suffer from favoritism might be larger than the number of voters who benefit from it. When running for office in races that require a majority of voters, playing favorites may backfire. However, in elections where officials are selected through proportional representation, catering to a fraction of all voters can deliver a victory. Politicians under these electoral rules, then, can concentrate their efforts on narrower demands and successfully win re-election (Myerson 1993).<sup>5</sup>

Since favoritism puts particular interests above public governance, it depends on deficient bureaucratic accountability and transparency. Private information is a key factor in models of regulatory capture because if the government knows that the regulator and firms are in collusion against the public, it can prevent capture (Dal Bó 2006). But thanks to attributes that are common to police forces from many countries, changes in policing—for example, the location of police patrols, security cameras, outposts, and checkpoints—can be implemented without detection. The police notoriously receive insufficient oversight (Eckhouse 2022; González 2020; Willis 2014; 2015), are seldom held accountable for transgressions (Brinks 2007; Cabral and Lazzarini 2015), and are corrupt, unprepared, and brutal (Flom and Post 2016; Hinton and Newburn 2008). Still, that does not make it easy for politicians to influence the police. Bureaucracies actively try to block politicians from meddling with their decisions (Flom 2020; González 2020; Pepinsky, Pierskalla, and Sacks 2017). Yet a former police officer is not an ordinary politician. The police force and their strong esprit-de-corps (Hinton 2005, 78) are open to their former colleagues, who may still be part of the police inner circle. In sum, the embedded politician is already inserted in the policing black box, allowing them to misallocate resources without the public and other members of the government noticing.

Police reform has proved difficult, but local measures can overcome the institutional drift from other federal spheres, remedying the lack of transparency in public security. Given the threat of capture by embedded law-and-order politicians, local institutions give other actors incentives to pursue ends that are not aligned with the individual goals of the candidate. Since these institutions produce information (González 2019; Moncada 2009), they reduce the informational asymmetry between local actors and the police (while not necessarily improving public security delivery). Consequently, they increase the likelihood that any effort to capture the police will be detected and stopped.

In the next subsection, I will explain how law-and-order politics in Brazil is conducive to favoritism. First,

I will present a brief overview of public security in Brazilian municipalities, and the scope of action of municipal councilors. Next, I will carefully validate the measure of law-and-order politicians I use.

## Law-and-Order Politics in Brazilian Municipalities

Brazil is an unfortunate but ideal place to study politics and security. Levels of violence in the country are comparable to those of areas under civil conflict (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020) and the issue was ranked high in voters' concerns during the 2018 elections.<sup>6</sup> The Brazilian police force is one of the most lethal police forces in the world (Bueno 2014b) and the criminal justice system investigates police killings less thoroughly than homicides committed by civilians (Willis 2015). Brazilian police have also been noted for concentrating abuses in poorer areas (Caldeira 2000; Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020).

The context of Brazilian law enforcement allows for a test of how the relational capital of some law-and-order candidates affects public security outcomes. In Brazilian federalism, policing is mostly the responsibility of state governments, which control the investigative plainclothes branch (*polícia civil*), and uniformed patrolling police (*polícia militar*—henceforth only *police*).<sup>7</sup> The police are four times more numerous, thus more visible, than their investigative counterpart, and, following state constitutions, are the official guarantors of order. State government authorities dictate statewide strategies and coordinate resources, then police chiefs (“*coronéis*”) oversee regional police divisions (called “battalions”), and then at the municipality level, local police chiefs decide how to police neighborhoods given the number of police officers the state authority has decided to allocate to the municipality. The formal separation between patrolling and investigative branches leads to rivalry and competition (Medeiros 2004). Military law-and-order candidates have no formal connections to law enforcement.

This article will analyze how the election of law-and-order municipal councilors affects homicides. Councilors are the most numerous elected officers in Brazil, but also the least powerful. Council candidates are often facing hundreds of adversaries in open-list proportional representation elections (see Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material). In contrast to mayoral candidates who on average compete among fewer than three candidates in first-past-the-post elections, council candidates can appeal to a select group of the municipality and still win a seat, allowing these candidates to

<sup>5</sup> Law-and-order politicians' favoritism is not contingent on voter support but executed on the expectation that voters recognize an effort to honor a campaign commitment. Yet, since political favoritism is not carried out through publicized rules of distribution, it is a nonprogrammatic tactic similar to partisan bias (Stokes et al. 2013, 7), although, in this case, the bias is toward law-and-order supporters.

<sup>6</sup> <https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2018/eleicao-em-numeros/noticia/2018/09/11/saude-e-violencia-sao-os-principais-problemas-para-os-eleitores-brasileiros-segundo-datafolha.ghtml> (accessed April 8, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Despite its name, the *polícia militar* is under civilian control. For a description of the different attributes of Brazilian police branches, see Willis (2015, 13–5).

“cultivate favored minorities” (Myerson 1993).<sup>8</sup> Councilors are elected when their ranking within a list of candidates (usually from a coalition of many parties) is above or equal to the number of seats allocated to that list. The ranking is defined by the number of votes candidates receive, encouraging council candidates to run individualistic campaigns. Local legislatures in Brazil vary in size according to the municipal population and 90% have a minimum of nine councilors (Mignozzetti, Cepaluni, and Freire *Forthcoming*).<sup>9</sup>

Councilors have limited scope for influencing municipal policy. They can propose municipal laws and legislate local taxes, but cannot individually propose budgetary amendments. Councilors’ staffs lack professional expertise, and their legislative activity often centers on public honoring ceremonies (Silva 2014). Clientelistic exchanges between councilors and voters are common during and after elections (Kerbaui 2005; Lopez and Almeida 2017). As explained later, municipal governments can take more responsibility for public security, and Municipal Guards are part of a decentralizing push and are entirely locally managed (Arvate and Souza 2022). Councilors can support the creation of municipal guards, but ultimately it is the executive that can initiate their establishment. The largest asset a law-and-order candidate may have to affect local public security is relational. Police officers are allowed to run for office and if they win, they must take leave without pay from the police for the duration of their term. Military personnel can only run for office after retirement.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Law-and-Order Candidates and Platforms in Brazil*

To classify law-and-order candidates, I use the ballot names candidates choose to communicate with voters. The Brazilian political system is a low-information environment, but using ballot names to convey signals to voters is common (Boas 2014). Candidates often use the opportunity to tell voters they are, for example, part of the clergy, school teachers, or physicians. Many make reference to the police or military forces by including titles such as captain, colonel, corporal,

detective, lieutenant, private, or sheriff in their ballot names. Candidates who use these titles are the law-and-order candidates in this article.<sup>11</sup> Following this criterion, I was able to identify 7,888 law-and-order council candidates in the 2004–12 period. Of the 5,570 municipalities in Brazil, 2,491 have had a law-and-order candidate at some point and 594 had at least one elected.

But who among these law-and-order candidates are embedded in the police? To separate among subtypes of law-and-order candidates, I use the information they listed as an occupation. Among these, I classify three different subtypes of law-and-order candidates. First, there are 2,286 law-and-order candidates who reported being employed by the police. They correspond to the embedded law-and-order politician because they use a law-and-order ballot name and have worked in the police. Henceforth, police law-and-order candidates correspond to the embedded politician. Second, there are 752 *investigative* police officers (reported as *polícia civil* employees), and third, 2,561 nonpolice candidates with varying backgrounds that include former military (but not listed being *public state employees*, since these could still be police officers). Almost 10,000 law enforcement officers or military did not run as law-and-order candidates; that is, they listed their occupations as law enforcement or military but did not use a law-and-order ballot name as a candidate. By avoiding the use of law-and-order ballot names, they are revealing that they are pursuing an electoral strategy that is different from law-and-order politics. These will serve as a contrasting group to law-and-order candidates since according to the argument this article raises, their election should not affect violence. Additionally, those in this group from the police are embedded politicians, but according to the argument I presented, they do not use this asset for their electoral ends.

President Bolsonaro’s political trajectory helps illustrate how the classification works. In 1988, when he ran for Rio de Janeiro municipal council as “Capitão Bolsonaro,” he was a law-and-order candidate. He was not an embedded politician, since his rank as captain comes from his army service. He dropped the “Captain” for all other elections, and would no longer be classified as a law-and-order candidate. Another helpful example would be the mayor of New York, Eric Adams. He did not run for office in 2021 using his rank as a retired police officer, so would not be a law-and-order candidate here. However, he is an embedded politician, having served in the police for many years before running for office. In races such as New York’s, candidates may have more opportunities to advertise their platforms, finding other ways to show voters their commitment to public security. Even if these candidates would not enter the data here as law-and-order candidates, this type of misclassification is not a

<sup>8</sup> I expect that other politicians elected through proportional representation (as are state and federal deputies in Brazil) and elsewhere would find political favoritism a feasible electoral strategy. Even if theoretically justified, testing for the effects of electing law-and-order mayors, who compete under majoritarian rules, would suffer from a small sample size.

<sup>9</sup> Since there are too few municipalities with more than nine councilors that had close elections of law enforcement councilors, it is not possible to explore whether the number of councilors affects public security.

<sup>10</sup> Political influence over police affairs is hard to identify and quantify, but it exists. One survey finds that political interference is one of the most common complaints among officials in Minas Gerais military police (Batitucci, Ribeiro, and Cruz 2005, 302), and in one interview a high-ranking police officer stated that with political connections fellow police personnel gets promotions more easily. Block (2019) documents that state governors use police resources to improve electoral odds.

<sup>11</sup> For details on the classification, see Appendix B in Novaes (2023). The Electoral Court (TSE) provides data about candidates, the electorate, and election results. Data are available at <https://www.tse.jus.br> (accessed March 7, 2018).

**TABLE 1. Unique Public Security Words Used in Campaign Manifestos**

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
Ballot name	0.4*** (0.10)	0.4*** (0.10)	0.4*** (0.10)	0.3*** (0.12)	0.3** (0.12)	0.2** (0.13)
No ballot name	0.11 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)			
Intercept	0.4*** (0.01)	0.4*** (0.01)	0.4*** (0.09)	0.5*** (0.07)	0.3*** (0.08)	-0.6*** (0.16)
State FE	–	–	Yes	–	–	Yes
Year FE	–	Yes	Yes	–	Yes	Yes
No. of obs.	30,691	30,691	30,691	352	352	352

Note: Robust SEs are reported in parentheses. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

concern for identification due to the research design employed in the article.

Other ways in which candidates in Brazil communicate their law-and-order platform help validate the operationalization of law-and-order candidacy employed here. First, using publicly available campaign platforms of mayoral candidates, I check if law-and-order candidates use more security-related words.<sup>12</sup> For each candidate, I count the number of public security keywords these candidates used.<sup>13</sup> Of around 30,000 mayoral candidates in 2012 and 2016 combined, 132 used law-and-order ballot names and 220 candidates stated past law enforcement or military occupation but did not advertise it through their name.

The text analysis of campaign platforms reveals that law-and-order candidates (of all subtypes) use words related to public security more often than candidates with a past in law enforcement without a law-and-order ballot name. The estimations in Table 1 confirm that ballot-name candidates employ public security words more often.<sup>14</sup> Compared with all other candidates, who are the baseline group in columns 1–3, law-and-order ballot names are associated with twice as many public security words. Importantly, there is a considerable and large difference between ballot and nonballot name candidates, as estimations that only include these candidates (columns 4–6) indicate.

Next, I check how elected candidates use social media to claim credit for achievements in public security. In order to make a credible commitment to law and order, candidates also need to show voters they are pursuing

measures in the area. Nowadays, it is common for politicians in Brazil to advertise their purported accomplishments through social media (Bueno 2021). Law-and-order candidates may use the Internet to report that they have secured funds for CCTV systems, increased the ranks of the local police, protested for better wages and conditions for police officers, or participated in local security councils.<sup>15</sup> To systematically check how law-and-order politicians communicate with their public and contrast these candidates with those who are law enforcement professionals, but not law-and-order, I randomly selected 150 elected council candidates from the 2020 elections, half of whom are law-and-order candidates, and the other half, law enforcement without a law-and-order ballot name. I was able to retrieve 126 Instagram or Facebook personal accounts, and coded postings from the beginning of their term in January 2021 to February 2022. Credit claiming in public security is common among all of these candidates, but even more common among law-and-order candidates. I found that 41.3% of candidates that are not law-and-order have at least one social media posting showcasing achievements in public security. This number, however, climbs to 74.6% among law-and-order candidates.

Importantly, police officers and police chiefs figure frequently in the social media of law-and-order incumbents. Advertising a link with the police is a strategic choice that signals to voters that the candidate has the attention of those individuals who carry out the most important aspect of crime prevention. In the context of political favoritism, it might reveal a continued connection between police officers and their former work colleagues. To make a stronger test of police connections while in office, I randomly selected 160 former police candidates, either law-and-order or not. Law-and-order police candidates have their pictures taken with other police more often. Around 69% of law-and-order police incumbents posted pictures with patrolling police officers, 31.5 percentage points more than from accounts of police incumbents that did not use a ballot name. The two groups of police candidates are also

<sup>12</sup> Since 2012, the electoral authority demands that mayoral candidates submit their political platforms, and previous analyses show that these platforms are not all cheap talk (Pereira 2021). Council candidates are not required to divulge their platforms. Arguably, mayoral platforms must address more issues in their platforms than council candidates, making the test using mayoral candidates more stringent since it is more likely that any candidate will discuss public security, whereas council candidates can focus on a smaller number of social issues.

<sup>13</sup> I use the following words (and when applicable, their plural or gender inflection): *police, crime, security, order, violence, criminality, bandit, banditry, trafficking, robbery, and burglary*.

<sup>14</sup> Count of words as dependent variable yields similar results (Table A.2 in the Supplementary Material).

<sup>15</sup> These are actual examples of credit-claiming I recovered during the research. Stable URLs for these examples and data collection details are in Appendix B of the Supplementary Material.

substantially different when presenting connections to high-ranking police officers. Around 55.2% of law-and-order police candidates publicized meetings with police chiefs, such as battalion commanders (*coroneis de batalhão*), whereas 34.5% of ordinary police candidates had pictures with chiefs.<sup>16</sup>

The empirical analysis only examines municipalities that have had a law-and-order candidate for the municipal council. These municipalities are not a random assortment of the median Brazilian municipality, as Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material attests. They have larger populations and are more violent, especially where a competitive candidate has run. Although this article does not consider the reasons behind why law-and-order candidates emerge, it is plausible that law-and-order platforms appeal more to voters as municipalities grow in population. Population size is related to graver public security concerns, and also have more public security resources (Post and Kuipers 2022), which police candidates can potentially capture. In municipalities with candidates that listed law enforcement as an occupation but refrained from using a law-and-order ballot name, the median population is 25% smaller than those with law-and-order candidates, suggesting that the decision to run under a security platform is more attractive in larger, more violent places.

#### *Local Security Committees*

The lack of comprehensive police reform harms public security at the local level. However, municipalities can remedy their lack of control over opaque state police by taking on some responsibilities in the area of public security. The National Fund for Public Security allows municipalities to request grants for security projects, but approvals are not automatic. They depend on local efforts to implement institutions that manage, oversee, and place local stakeholders in the policymaking process. But these local reforms are not guaranteed to improve public security. For example, Gonzalez and Mayka (2023) show that community security councils in São Paulo can increase demands for repression of marginalized groups. Despite the uncertain effects these institutions may generate on crime and violence, local institutions are a roadblock against police capture. They lock in local priorities in comprehensive plans and budgets, inserting priorities that may go against any attempt from law-and-order politicians to use public security for electoral gain. Importantly, these institutions establish formal channels through which local stakeholders oversee police activity, making other local actors attentive to the misallocation of security resources.

The local security committees (Conselhos Municipais de Segurança Pública) are one of these measures. They do not have formal powers over state police, but

they can reduce the ability of the police to perform exceptional, violent tasks (Taylor 2011) unnoticed, and make any type of politicization of public security harder. According to the IBGE, in 2014, 71% of all established committees reported having met in the preceding year. These security committees are now widespread in Brazil, as the map in Figure A.1b in the Supplementary Material shows, and are increasing rapidly. A qualitative assessment of 25 committees from all regions of Brazil shows that around 90% of the committees include representatives from the local government, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies. On average, four different groups have reserved seats on the committee table.

After municipalities establish a committee, they are likely to have three other institutions, too. First, municipalities can write a multiyear public security goal-setting plan. These plans first diagnose local security problems, establish how local resources can be applied to help, and may recommend specific partnerships with state police where local resources are insufficient. Second, they put together a dedicated public security budget to finance new measures or those recommended in the multiyear plan. Finally, municipalities can help citizens create a nongovernmental security council, whose members often have a seat on the security committee's table.<sup>17</sup> Figure A.2 in the Supplementary Material shows the relationship between committees and these other institutions.

However, municipalities do not create committees at random and other factors could explain differences in outcomes. For example, as Table A.3 in the Supplementary Material shows, municipalities without committees are where political favoritism can do the most harm, as on average they have a larger proportion of non-white residents. Additionally, these committees can be effective in preventing mismanagement caused by the election of law-and-order politicians, but they do not a priori remedy past distortions in the provision of public security, at least not in a manner that communities would take note of and, as a result, start supporting law-and-order platforms (evidence in Appendix A.5 of the Supplementary Material suggests that indeed is not the case).

#### *Homicides in Brazil and Other Data*

This subsection describes the data on homicides and shows that the group most likely to suffer from homicidal violence is the least likely to be the law-and-order constituency. The Ministry of Health collects mortality statistics through the Brazilian System of Death Registration (SIM/Datasus).<sup>18</sup> In contrast to crime data and police reports, every death is documented and the records include the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10)

<sup>16</sup> All differences are statistically significant at the 5% level. See Appendix A.6 of the Supplementary Material for details on estimations.

<sup>17</sup> Even so, these councils have issues in operating and attracting community members to participate in meetings (Gonzalez 2016; Sento-Sé, Rodrigues, and Lázaro 2014).

<sup>18</sup> <ftp.datasus.gov.br/dissem/publicos/SIM/CID10/> (accessed March 7, 2018).

classification. I include all deaths involving third-party aggression.<sup>19</sup> From 2000 to 2016, there have been 1.7-million deaths due to aggression. According to regulations, a coroner or an appointed physician must investigate deaths that involve aggression. Cause of death comes from a medical examination of the body, and through interviews with family members, witnesses, and the police. This decision sometimes contains errors (Cerqueira 2012). Death records also list the victim's race.<sup>20</sup> The National Treasury provides data on municipal spending on public security.<sup>21</sup> All demographic information, which includes Gini coefficients, population, and population according to race, among others, comes from the IBGE.<sup>22</sup> Municipal racial composition comes from census data and the proportions of white and non-white municipal residents used in the estimates (as well as any other covariate) are always pretreatment measurements.

## THE REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY DESIGN

The research design aims to estimate the effect of electing a law-and-order candidate in municipalities that had a law-and-order candidate running for office. Next, it tests whether law-and-order candidates from the police are associated with more violence in comparison to other types of law-and-order candidates. Finally, it compares municipalities that had previously established a security committee with those that did not. The main estimations leverage a regression discontinuity design (RDD). RDDs can alleviate the problem of confounders and produce unbiased estimates under few, testable assumptions (Lee and Lemieux 2010). Many factors drive public security outcomes at the district level, and without accounting for municipal demographics, such as social inequality, employment level, and other variables, the analysis would be confounded. For example, it is possible that municipalities only choose law-and-order candidates after a surge in homicides. RDDs exploit the fact that the treatment assignment, electing a law-and-order candidate, is discontinuous around a vote margin cutoff, but the potential outcomes of violence are continuous, making the observed outcomes in one group comparable to the unobserved potential outcome of units in the other. One caveat in RD designs is the local nature of estimated effects. Effects should be interpreted as causal within the subgroup of municipalities that had a law enforcement candidate elected or not elected by a small margin.

<sup>19</sup> Homicides receive ICD-10 codes ranging between X85–99 and Y00–09; undetermined external causes, which is when the coroner cannot determine intent, receive Y10–34 codes.

<sup>20</sup> The Brazilian bureaucracy separates individuals according to skin color, not race. The classification includes five categories: white, Black, brown (*pardo*), yellow, and Indigenous. Non-white victims are those not classified as “white.” Of these, 97% are either “Black” or “brown.”

<sup>21</sup> <https://siconfi.tesouro.gov.br> (accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> <https://seriesestatisticas.ibge.gov.br/default.aspx> (accessed June 10, 2018).

The estimand is the effect of a municipality electing a law-and-order council candidate. To estimate it, we need to define a score, which will depend on the competitiveness of the candidate in an open-list proportional representation system. In the Brazilian open list proportional representation system (OLPR), candidates are ranked solely according to the personal votes they receive from voters, without interference from party leaders. Following Boas, Hidalgo, and Richardson (2014), I define the score as the distance, in the percentage of valid votes, between the winning law-and-order candidate and most-voted losing candidate on a list.<sup>23</sup> When the law-and-order candidate loses, the score is the distance between this candidate and the least-voted winning candidate on the list. Only municipalities that had a list that received a seat and had a law-and-order candidate will have a score and are thus included in estimations.<sup>24</sup> To compare effects across groups of law-and-order candidates, I calculate a score based on each type of law-and-order candidate—police, investigative police, and others. As discussed in Boas and Hidalgo (2011, 873–4) and shown in Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material, smaller vote share races tend to occur in larger municipalities, which is also the group more likely to have a law-and-order candidate.<sup>25</sup>

This type of design has two complications that are important to recognize and address. First, law-and-order candidates may be different from other candidates not only because they have law-and-order ballot names, but because they also differ in other characteristics. Thus, the causal effect the RDD uncovers is bundled with these different attributes. I show, however, that law-and-order candidates are not different from other candidates with respect to several observable characteristics. Because their differences may not be observable, I compare the effect of electing a law-and-order candidate with the effect of electing a law enforcement officer that does not use a law-and-order ballot name. These two sets of candidates share many characteristics, such as their professional past and social network. If these common traits, not the political platform, drive the results, tests with both groups should yield similar effects.

Second, if law-and-order candidates have specific attributes that make them more likely to appear in close elections, the local average treatment effect (LATE) might be biased (Marshall 2022). However, and contrary to single-member plurality races, the OLPR system makes it plausible that compensating differentials of law-and-order candidates do not strongly affect their vote shares, an assumption that, if

<sup>23</sup> Note that the interest is not in the effect of electing a party, which would require a different score, as described in Folke and Rickne (2016) or Micozzi and Lucardi (2021).

<sup>24</sup> Table A.3 in the Supplementary Material shows that municipalities that had a law-and-order candidate are more violent and more populous than those that did not. There is no substantive difference in terms of income inequality.

<sup>25</sup> Main results are robust to an alternative running variable using raw vote margins (Table A.5 in the Supplementary Material).



met, is enough for identification (Marshall 2022). Voters are largely unaware of the competitiveness of candidates before the election, and thus unlikely to be strategic in their vote. There are no registered pre-election surveys and the multiple lists are populated by a large number of candidates, many of which are newcomers and whose electoral worth is unknown. The large district magnitude and the complexity of the D'Hondt rules that determine who wins a seat make it unlikely that voters know who is competitive or not. In sum, there is little reason to expect that attributes of law-and-order candidates correlate with them being in close contests. Robustness estimations in the Supplementary Material include models with municipalities with law-and-order candidates who are not in the office—a group with unproven electoral viability—and report results similar to the baseline models.

The basic regression discontinuity local-linear model that captures the causal effect of electing a law-and-order candidate is

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta Y_{i,t+1} = & \alpha + \beta_1 LOC_{i,t} + \beta_2 Margin_{i,t} + \beta_3 LOC_{i,t} \\ & \times Margin_{i,t} + \phi_t + \mu_i \\ & \forall i, t \text{ s.t. } |M_{i,t}| < \epsilon, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $LOC_{i,t}$  is a binary indicator equal to one if the law-and-order candidate won the election in  $t$  and  $\beta_1$  measures its causal effect.  $Margin_{i,t}$  is score,  $\phi_t$  are the time fixed effects, and  $\mu_i$  is an error term.  $|M_{i,t}|$  is the score for each municipality  $i$  with a list of candidates that won a seat and had a law-and-order candidate. It is possible for a municipality to have more than one law-and-order candidate. When all candidates lose, the margin of the municipality is the margin of the candidate closest to the cutoff. When more than one wins, the margin is also that of the candidate closest to the cutoff. If there are winning and losing candidates in the same municipality-year, I consider the winning candidates' margin as the forcing variable.  $\epsilon$  is an arbitrarily small vote margin that defines the study group for each estimation.

The dependent variable  $\Delta Y_{i,t+1}$  measures the difference between the outcome in the period after the election and the outcome in the period before the election in municipality  $i$ . For example, for homicides, the dependent variable is the yearly homicide rate in the period after the elections minus the rate in the period before the election.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of

<sup>26</sup> Gerber and Green (2012, 96–102) note that the use of difference scores in place of levels is advisable when the former is less prone to sampling variability. They note that “when a covariate strongly predicts potential outcomes, difference scores can produce substantial gains in precision.” This is the case for Brazilian municipalities, where homicide rates strongly correlate with their past values but differences do not ( $\rho = 0.67$  vs.  $\rho = -0.07$ ), and where some municipalities have very low homicide rates, whereas others approach civil-war levels. For this reason, the standard deviation of levels of homicides is almost twice as large as the one for the difference score (20.42 homicides per 100,000 vs. 11.36). Indeed, estimations using levels

budget spending, the periods of analysis include all years in the study period except the election year.<sup>27</sup>

For the majority of the estimations, I deal with the issue of bandwidth selection using the nonparametric robust method devised in Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014). Particular to this article's design, there is a risk that as bandwidths become larger, municipalities end up having more than one law-and-order candidate elected. This would not make results biased but would change the interpretation of the estimand. To also ensure that the estimations capture a study group close to the cutoff, I restrict bandwidth selection within municipalities whose law-and-order candidate won or lost by a 1.0% margin. Balance tests in the Supplementary Material confirm that there is no noticeable difference in the characteristics of municipalities and candidates between municipalities with winning or losing candidates, with the exception of their age (controlling for this covariate yields the same results). A density test in the Supplementary Material shows no sign of manipulation around the cutoff. It also shows that the density of the forcing variable is not centered on zero. For this reason, the nonparametric estimations select asymmetric bandwidths around the cutoff. Estimations with symmetric bandwidths in robustness tables, also presented in the Supplementary Material, show that these are almost invariably the same. These robustness tables also include estimations with a second-degree polynomial and a study group that only includes municipalities that do not have a sitting law-and-order candidate at the time of the election.

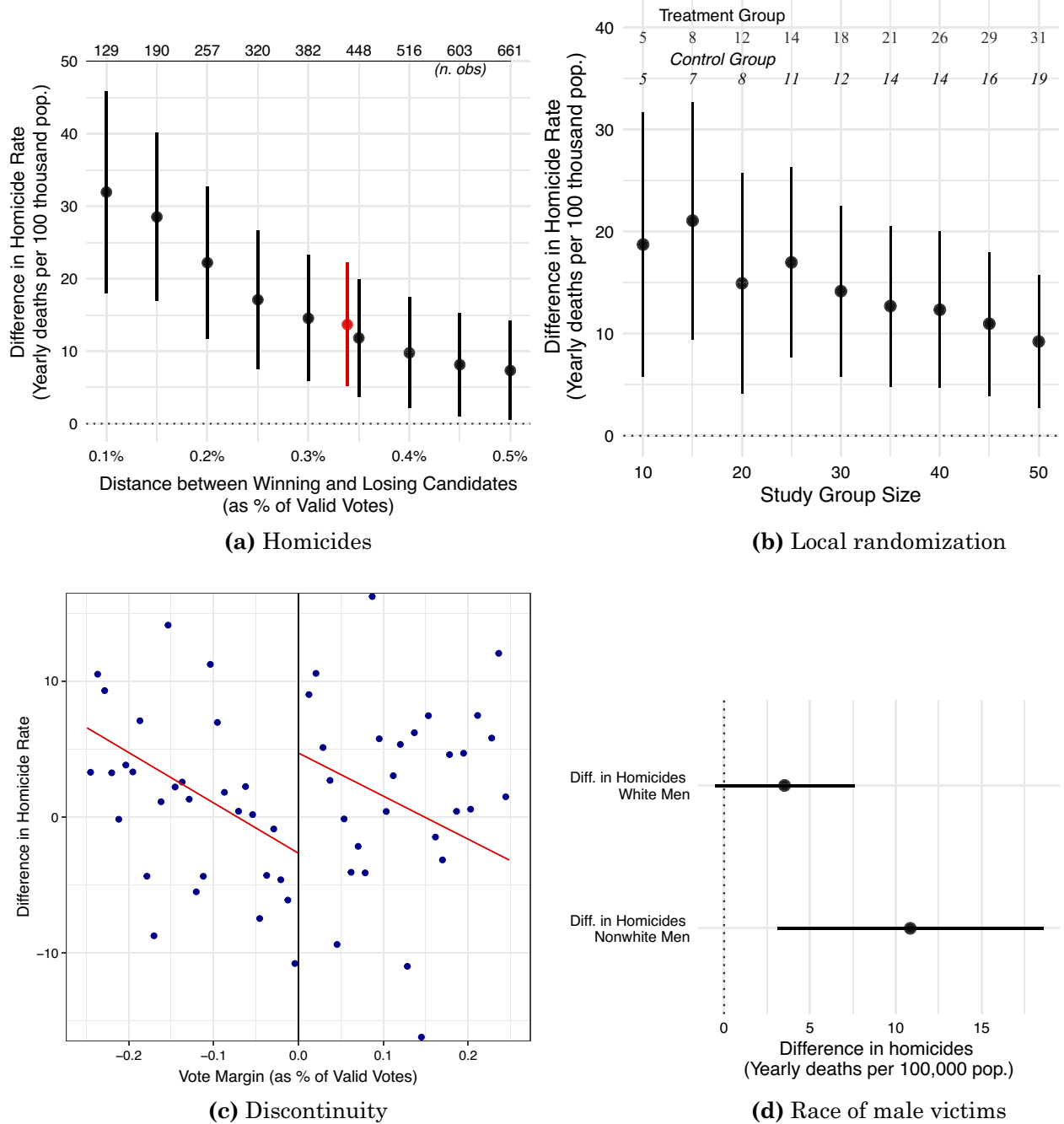
## THE EFFECTS OF ELECTING A LAW-AND-ORDER CANDIDATE

The election of law enforcement candidates results in more homicides. Figure 1 plots several different estimations for homicides, from the smallest bandwidths at the left of each panel to increasingly larger bandwidths moving to the right. The effects are large: in the nonparametrically selected bandwidth (in red), approximately 14 more homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants. The magnitude is in line with estimates from the Mexican drug war in Dell (2015). The median population in municipalities in the study group is

produce noisy and nonsignificant estimates. An estimation in levels that uses past outcomes as controls produces results similar to the main estimations (see Table A.13 in the Supplementary Material).

<sup>27</sup> Since elections are held in October and the appointment only starts in January of the next year, an elected law-and-order candidate could already start influencing policing after her electoral victory but before taking office. By removing the electoral year, I conservatively estimate the effect of the election to only include periods when the law enforcement candidate is in office. The spending outcomes variable is measured differently because the previous year's budget decision carries over to the next. Hence, the first year of a candidate's term also includes budgetary decisions from the previous year. For this reason, I only evaluate spending from the second to the fourth year of a municipal legislature. That said, measuring outcomes using different periods does not qualitatively change the results (not shown).

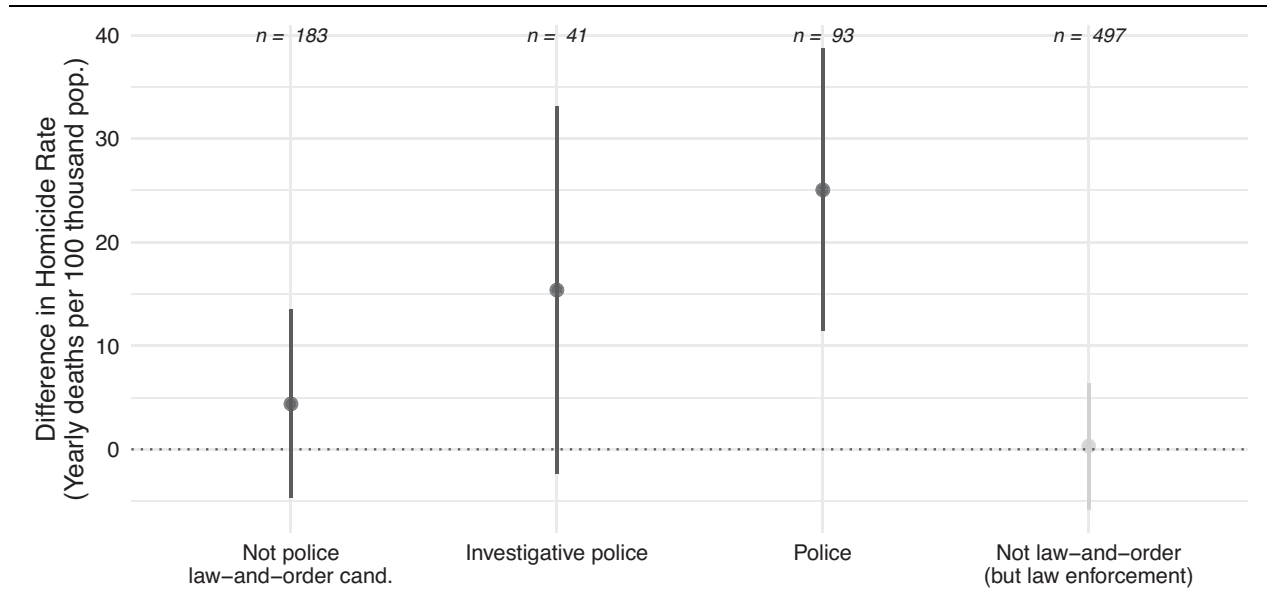
**FIGURE 1. The Effect on Homicide Rates of Electing a Law Enforcement Candidate**



Note: Both plots estimate local linear models. Bars in panel (a) represent 95% robust CIs. Nonparametric bandwidth selection is in red. Table A.13 in the Supplementary Material reports estimates (first column) and different specifications. In panel (b), point estimates are differences of means. Bars are 95% CIs. “Treatment Group” and “Control Group” count the total number of observations in each group. Panel (c) illustrates the discontinuity with binned averages and local linear regression lines and panel (d) illustrates the difference in homicide rates, non-white and white men.

almost 60,000, making this increase equivalent to ten murders per year in the median municipality. Appendix A.7 of the Supplementary Material shows that the results are robust to different polynomial specifications. Panel (b) presents the difference in homicide

rates in a local randomization setup that more closely resembles an as-if random natural experiment (Dunning 2012). The difference of means between treatment and control groups reveals that the effect is significant even at only 10 observations closest to the

**FIGURE 2. Contrasting the Effect of Electing Different Types of Law-and-Order Candidates and Law Enforcement Candidates**

Note: Nonparametric RDDs. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Tables A.14–A.17 in the Supplementary Material report estimates (first columns) and different specifications. Difference between *Police* and *Not law-and-order* is 24.7 ( $t = 3.24$ ).

cutoff. Panel (d) shows that most homicides are committed against non-white men, the group most vulnerable to violence but not the law-and-order constituency. Considering that in Brazil the correlation between skin color and income is high (Bueno and Dunning 2017), when analyzing heterogeneity according to skin color, one is examining heterogeneity by social class, too. These deaths are mostly the result of firearm injuries, and the effects do not extend to any group of women, as Figures A.8 and A.9 in the Supplementary Material show.

Police law-and-order candidates drive the results. Figure 2 shows that compared with municipalities that almost elected a police candidate, those that did face a considerable increase in murders. Those that elected an investigative police officer also see an increase, but it is not a well-powered test (nor robust; see Table A.15 in the Supplementary Material). Elected law-and-order candidates from the military or any other professional background have no effect. Tellingly, not having a law-and-order ballot name returns a well-estimated null effect, which corroborates that it is the campaign platform, not the profession of the candidate, that drives the results.

Municipalities can reserve part of their budgets for security and all law-and-order candidates can demonstrate their programmatic commitment in pressuring for more public security spending (Wenzelburger 2015). Figure 3 shows that municipalities that elect a law-and-order candidate spend around R\$23 more per capita per year,<sup>28</sup> representing a doubling of the R\$19.4 average. In

contrast, municipalities that elect law enforcement agents who do not use a law-and-order ballot name do not experience an increase in spending.<sup>29</sup> This result shows that the choice of using a ballot name is related to the actions these two groups take on an outcome that is at hand for all, independent of their connections to the police.

### Local Security Committees

Figure 4 shows the effects of the electing of law-and-order candidates conditioned on the municipality having or not having local security committees. Consistently, results show that places without committees are subject to a homicide increase following the election of a law-and-order candidate and especially police law-and-order candidate. In places with a committee, the effect is a zero.<sup>30</sup> Although nonobservable attributes may account for the differences across these groups, controlling for observables yields the same results.

### The Embeddedness of Police Candidates

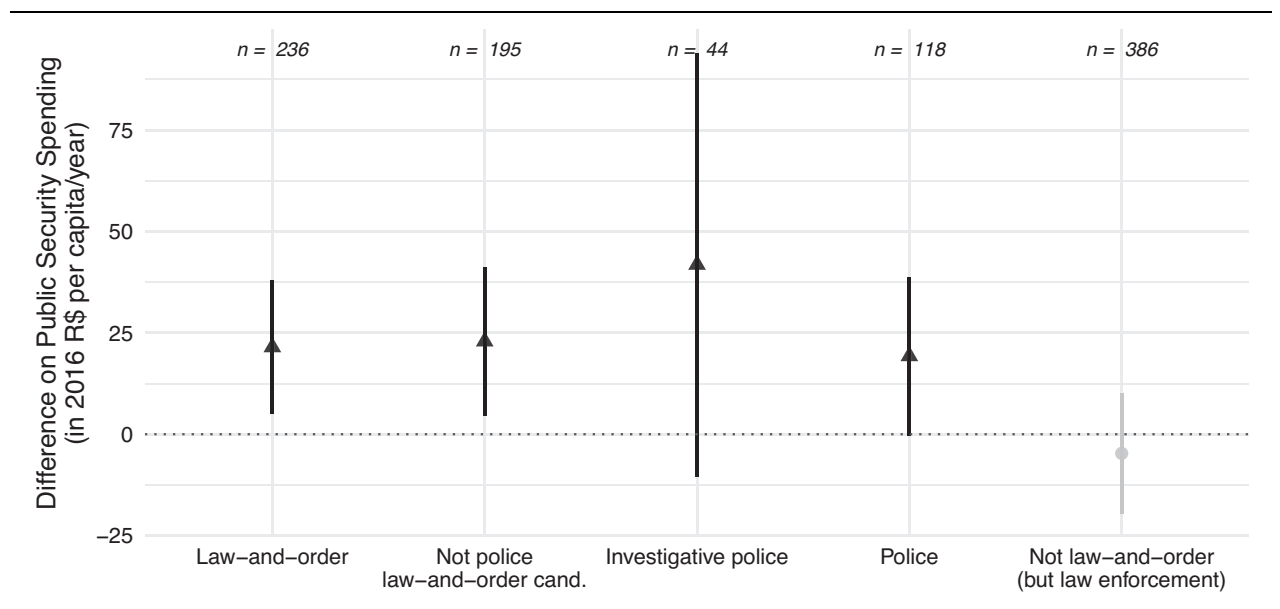
This subsection aims to find evidence of a transactional relationship between the police and police-politicians

<sup>29</sup> This spending is only 10% of the total amount state governments spend on security per capita, thus unlikely to be game-changing. As a placebo check, Figure A.6 in the Supplementary Material shows no effect for expenditures in areas unrelated to the law-and-order agenda.

<sup>30</sup> A low-powered test using only police law-and-order candidates and municipalities with committees estimates a negative, nonsignificant effect (See Table A.6 in the Supplementary Material).

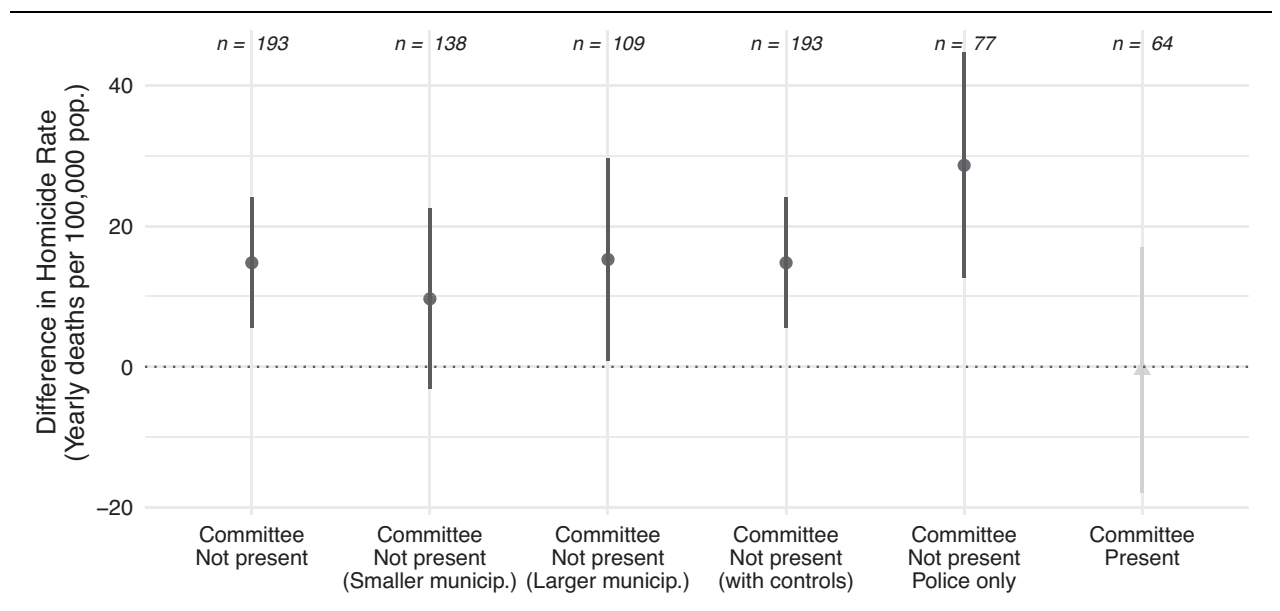
<sup>28</sup> Around \$5 in August 2021.

**FIGURE 3. Heterogeneous Effects in Public Security Spending at the Municipal Level, Candidates from Police or from Armed Forces with or without the Use of Ballot Name to Signal Law-and-Order Platform**

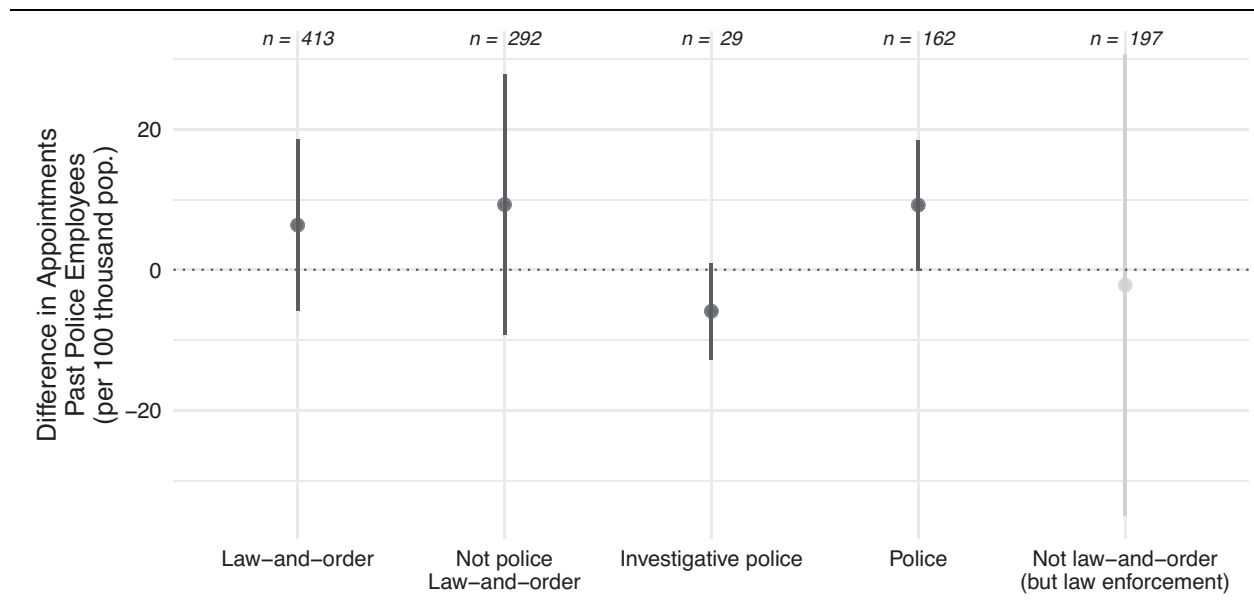


Note: Nonparametric RDDs. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Tables A.18–A.22 in the Supplementary Material report estimates (first columns) and different specifications. Difference between *Law-and-order* and *Not law-and-order (but law enforcement)* is R\$26.21 ( $t = 2.31$ ).

**FIGURE 4. The Effects of Electing a Law-and-Order Candidate and the Presence of Local Security Institutions**



Note: Nonparametric RD models. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Larger and smaller municipalities are above or below 50,000 population, respectively. Controls include GDP per capita, Gini index, proportion of non-white population, and population. Tables A.23–A. 28 in the Supplementary Material report estimates (first columns) and different specifications.

**FIGURE 5. Election of Law-and-Order Police Officers and Appointments of Police Employees to the Municipal Government**

Note: Nonparametric RDDs. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Tables A.29–A.33 in the Supplementary Material report estimates (first columns) and different specifications. Difference between *Police* and *Not law-and-order* is 11.39 ( $t = 0.64$ ).

where the side that receives favors is the police. Recent literature has shown that partisans of winning candidates have a much higher probability of landing a public job when compared with allies of the losing side (Colonnelli, Prem, and Teso 2020). Likewise, police law-and-order candidates might also try to distribute jobs to their former work colleagues.<sup>31</sup> Especially, if these candidates want to use police resources for their benefit, using public jobs might be a way to reciprocate.

To classify political appointees who had been previously employed by the police in a given year, I first collect information about all individuals employed by the police in each state.<sup>32</sup> Next, I check how many of these individuals received wages from the municipal public sector after the election of the law-and-order candidate. The dependent variable represents the variation from before and after the election in the number of new appointments of former or on-temporary leave police employees

through the 4-year span, rescaled to reflect appointments per one hundred thousand residents per year.

The results show that the election of a law-and-order police candidate causes more appointments of former police employees after the election. Over 10 past police employees per one hundred thousand residents start receiving wages from the local government.<sup>33</sup> The election of law-and-order investigative police, however, appears to reduce the number of police employees in the administration (Figure 5). The relocation of police employees is unlikely to generate violence since the effects only represent 5% of the average number of police officers per capita (in 2014, there were 212 officers per one hundred thousand Brazilians; IBGE 2014).

## POLITICAL FAVORITISM AND THE LAW-AND-ORDER CONSTITUENCY

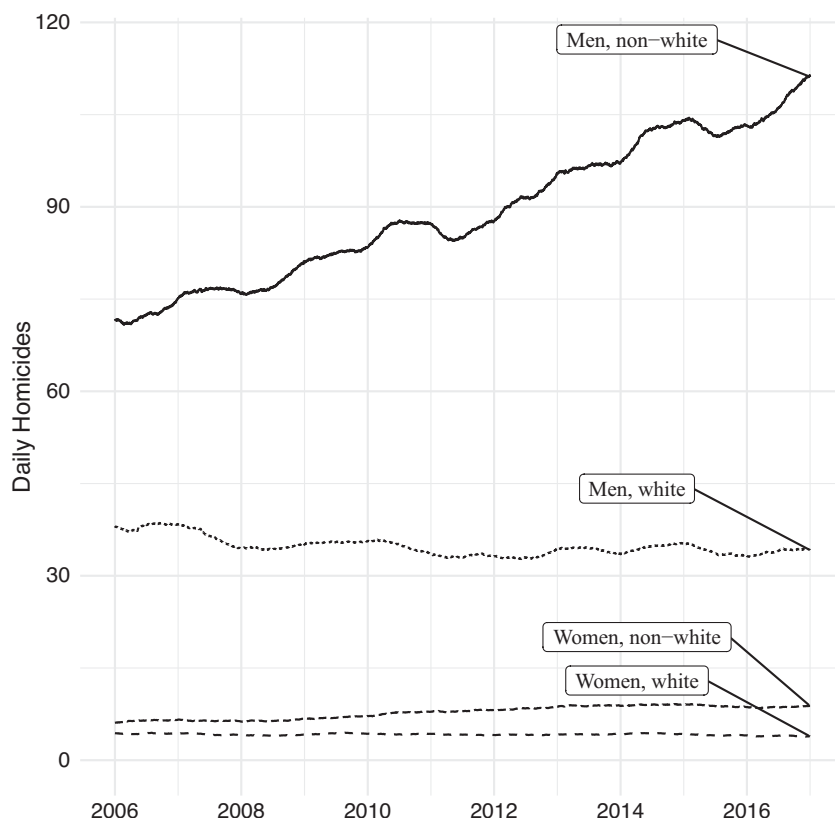
Violence has risen steadily in Brazil during the 2007–17 period. But as Figure 6 shows, the increase concentrates on non-white men—a group that corresponds to roughly one quarter of the population but suffered 71% of all homicides. They are also poorer than white men, as income and race are highly correlated in Brazil. If the primary goal of public security is to prevent murders, focusing resources on this group should be a priority.

Law-and-order candidates' linkages, however, point to other groups. Matching polling station geolocation with fine-grained census tract data, it is possible to

<sup>31</sup> Incumbents giving jobs to past police colleagues is not necessarily patronage, since coworkers may share expertise and affinities that would make them valuable in government alongside the incumbent. Police employees who take a local government job do not have to retire from the police, merely take a leave of absence.

<sup>32</sup> Available in the Annual Social Information Report, *Relação Anual de Informações Sociais—RAIS*, from the Labor secretariat. This database provides detailed individual information on all formal workers in Brazil. Police officers are state employees and there is no information on which municipality an employee was residing in, and whether this employee ended up receiving wages from the public administration or not. Since the database only started providing an exact classification of occupations for police officers in 2011, the collection will eventually include individuals working on administrative affairs within the police. This is why I refer to them as police employees instead of police officers.

<sup>33</sup> This effect is not robust to some specifications (see Tables A.29–A.33 in the Supplementary Material).

**FIGURE 6. Daily Homicides in Brazil by Gender and Race**

Note: Yearly moving average.

characterize neighborhoods precisely according to income and demographic profile.<sup>34</sup> To classify rich and poor households, I define those with less than half of the minimum wage per resident as poor. I classify households with more than five minimum wages per resident as rich. The greater the proportion of households below or above these thresholds in the vicinity of a polling station, the poorer or richer the neighborhood.

Next, I rank polling station neighborhoods according to the support law-and-order candidates received in the municipality. I include in a *Low support* group all polling stations that are either in the lowest quantile or that returned zero votes for law-and-order candidates. Georeferenced polling stations (*locais de votação*) give us a reliable measure of neighborhood support for law enforcement candidates if voters go vote in polling stations that are closest to their homes. That is not an unreasonable assumption. First, voters can choose where they want to vote in their municipality, except when their preferred place to vote is full.<sup>35</sup> Second,

election day is always a Sunday, giving few voters a reason to choose a place that is close to their job, instead of their home. Finally, comparing the scarce demographic information the electoral authority provides for each polling station with detailed census tract data, I show that the two are exceedingly similar (Tables A.8 and A.9 in the Supplementary Material).

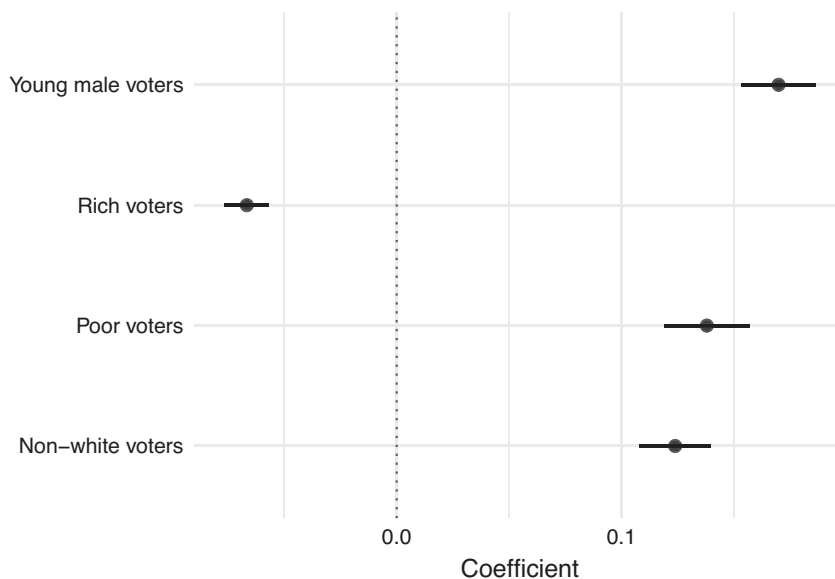
To analyze electoral support within municipalities that elected a law-and-order candidate, I employ a linear model for polling stations with municipality fixed-effects estimations.<sup>36</sup> The dependent variable is the *Low support* group. Due to the high collinearity between variables, I run individual models instead of a saturated model to capture each association in detail, standardizing the variables to facilitate cross-comparisons. It is evident in Figure 7 that *Low support* areas have higher proportions of poor, young, and non-white voters relative to other areas in the municipality. In other words, *Low support* areas concentrate individuals vulnerable to violence.

<sup>34</sup> I refer to *local de votação* as polling station.

<sup>35</sup> If voters end up registered at an inconvenient voting station, we should see that in between elections voters would seek to reregister to a more preferred station. Yet transferring registration within a municipality is rare. Data provided by the electoral authority show

that between the 2018 and 2020 elections, on average, only 0.03% voters chose to reregister within a municipality.

<sup>36</sup> I use data for the state of São Paulo to be consistent with the spatial analysis in the next subsection.

**FIGURE 7. Correlates of (Lack of) Support for Law-and-Order Candidates in São Paulo State**

Note: Point estimates of individual standardized variables in fixed-effect models. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Table B.6 in Appendix B of the Supplementary Material reports estimates.

### Political Favoritism across Neighborhoods

Do neighborhoods that did not support law-and-order candidates (*Low support* neighborhoods) receive less police attention and suffer more from homicides? As a testament to the opacity of policing in Brazil, data on police resources and activities do not exist. I circumvent this issue using data from the state of São Paulo, the only state to consistently provide (since 2011) crime and homicide data with latitude and longitude coordinates, as well as the police reports of these events.<sup>37</sup>

Since there is no information about where and when police officers are present in a given neighborhood, I create a novel measurement of police activity. Using car robberies data,<sup>38</sup> I leverage the fact that police reports include information on whether the robbers were caught in the act by the police (*flagrantes* in Portuguese). The *police activity* variable is the ratio of robberies caught in the act over total robberies in a neighborhood. The greater the proportion of robberies that are caught on the spot, the most likely that the police are present and intervening in that area:

$$\text{Police activity}_{rp} = \frac{(\text{total caught in the act})_{rp}}{(\text{total robberies})_{rp}} \times 100,$$

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ssp.sp.gov.br/> (accessed January 27, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Car robbery is a crime more likely to be reported than ordinary car thefts, since robberies involve direct interaction between the victim and the criminal, and victims need police reports to make an insurance claim and want to avoid any subsequent traffic tickets.

where  $r$  is a radius of either 250, 500, or 1,000 meters, centered around polling station  $p$ . I assume that the higher this ratio, the more police activity around the polling station.

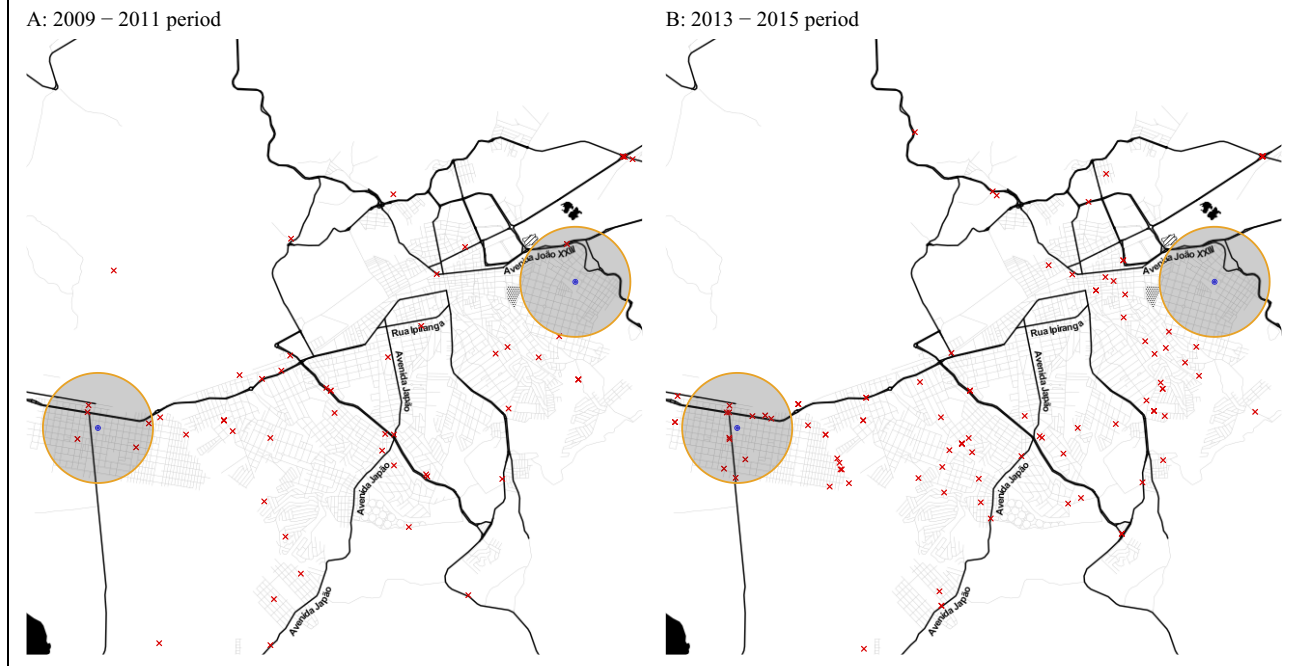
Next, I build a violence score that is the sum of all homicides within a specified radius around the polling station. Figure 8 illustrates this variation in homicide score for two selected polling stations in Mogi das Cruzes, a municipality 60 kilometers from the state capital. The maps show the distribution of homicides in the city and how violence is unevenly distributed. The dots are the two polling stations and the circles are the area within a 1,000-meter radius of the polling station. Jundiapéba, a relatively poor neighborhood on the west side of town, has many more murders—the X's in the maps—than Vila Oliveira, a wealthier district to the east.

For both the police activity and homicide scores, I calculate the difference between after and before the election of a law-and-order candidate. To estimate within-municipality variation, I employ a municipal fixed-effect model that uses polling stations as units of analysis. Fixed effects absorb factors that are common to the whole municipality that could affect public security, such as the type of mayor or overall level of delinquency. The fitted model is

$$\Delta V_{p,m,2016} = V_{p,2016} - V_{p,2012} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Low LEC Support}_{p,2012} + \rho X_{p,2012} + \phi_m + \mu_{pt}, \quad (2)$$

where the variable *Low Support* is a binary indicator that is equal to one if the polling station did not support the elected law-and-order candidate. The

**FIGURE 8. Homicides Near Selected Polling Stations in the City of Mogi das Cruzes**



Note: The eastern dot on each map represents Professor Camilo Faustino de Mello Public School in the Vila Oliveira neighborhood. The western dot is the Professor Paulo Ferrari Massaro Public School in the Jundiapéba neighborhood. Shaded areas are distances within a 1-kilometer radius of polling stations. X's represent homicides.

**TABLE 2. Support for Law-and-Order Candidates, Police Activity, and Homicides**

	Variation, 2012–16					
	Police activity			Homicides		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Low support	-0.36*** (0.08)	-0.39*** (0.11)	-0.26** (0.10)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.44*** (0.10)	3.81*** (0.81)
Radius	0.25 km	0.5 km	1.0 km	0.25 km	0.5 km	1.0 km
P.St. controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Munic. FE	Yes	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of obs.	2,027	2,137	2,247	2,275	2,275	2,275

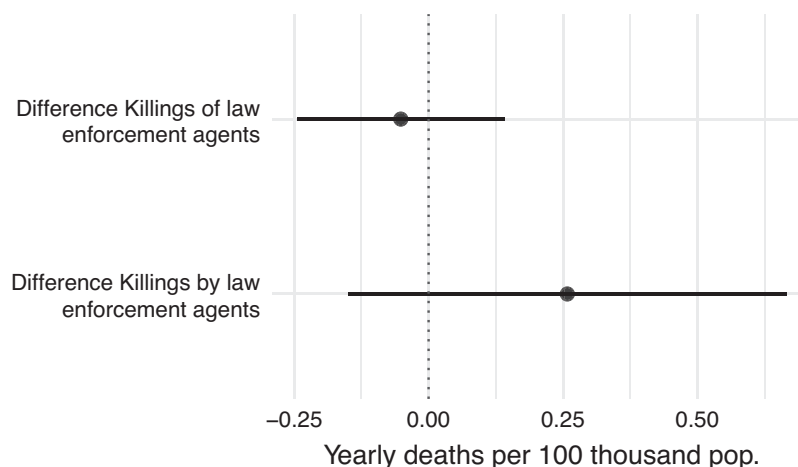
Note: Controls include the proportion of poor voters, proportion of rich voters, proportion of young men, proportion of non-white men, and total votes at the polling station. Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered at the municipality level. Table B.5 in Appendix B of the Supplementary Material reports full results. \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

coefficient  $\beta_1$  is the quantity of interest, measuring the association between public security and support. The matrix  $X$  contains polling station-level controls that we have seen correlate with support and  $\phi_m$  is the fixed effect for municipality  $m$ . Although the model is not a difference-in-difference model (it is not possible to capture support for law-and-order candidates in the pretreatment, as few municipalities have had law enforcement candidates running two consecutive years), the analysis only includes municipalities that did not have a law enforcement incumbent in 2008.

In this way,  $\beta$  captures associations in municipalities that have just elected a law enforcement candidate. Estimates cluster standard errors at the municipality level.

Table 2 confirms that communities that did not vote for law-and-order candidates are neglected. There is a consistent negative relationship between support and police activity, as columns 1–3 show. On average, 3.5%–4% of all car robbers are caught in the act, so the coefficients show that low-support areas are associated with a 10% lower police activity (note



**FIGURE 9. The Effect of Electing Law-and-Order Candidates on Killings of and by Law Enforcement Agents**

Note: Nonparametric RDDs. Bars represent 95% robust CIs. Estimations only include municipalities from states that recorded killings in the past. Table A.34 in the Supplementary Material report estimates.

that these coefficients are consistent with all three radii).<sup>39</sup> Columns 4–6 show the positive correlation between lack of support and homicides. Finally, favoritism only takes place when there is no formal oversight of public security. Results in Appendix A.5 of the Supplementary Material show that in municipalities with a local security committee and low support for law-and-order candidates, there is a considerable penalty for not supporting a winning law-and-order candidate, especially in municipalities lacking police oversight.

## ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The many accounts of police confronting transnational drug organizations or state failure spiraling toward violence provide an alternative to political favoritism. It is plausible that law-and-order incumbents, especially those from the police, encourage their police colleagues to aggressively assault crime-dominated areas. In Brazil, there is a long history of the police using excessive force and carrying out killings of marginalized youth. Together with a popular perception that a “good bandit is a dead bandit,”<sup>40</sup> this approach to crime could be electorally motivated. Furthermore, an action against crime may either take a wrong turn due to a lack of state capacity (Durán-Martínez 2015; Yashar 2018), or force criminals to directly confront the state (Calderón et al. 2015; Lessing 2017), putting

state agents in jeopardy. This, again, would not be surprising for Brazil, where the police suffer from high lethality rates (Bueno 2014b), and have recently been challenged by the rise of well-organized criminal groups (Feltran 2018; Willis 2015).

Using death certificates to capture “legal interventions” (ICD-10 code Y35) and victims’ occupation codes to identify law enforcement agents, I am able to test for these competing explanations. It is worth noting that data on police killings are not completely reliable. For instance, some states have not reported any police killings over the entire period of analysis. To minimize this issue, I only include in the estimations municipalities from states that systematically recorded police killings in the previous period.<sup>41</sup> Figure 9 shows that there is no increase in the number of individuals killed by the police or in the number of law enforcement agents killed.

## CONCLUSION

The results in this article showcase a different manner through which politics disrupts public security. While national-level law-and-order policies have been shown to unbalance the relationship between the State and criminal gangs, at the local level, the electoral interests of the law-and-order politicians lead to the mismanagement of security resources. Law-and-order politicians have incentives to favor their relatively-wealthy constituency, and with that, the upper strata find someone

<sup>39</sup> Sample size varies since the police activity indicator cannot be computed for the few districts that do not report any robbery.

<sup>40</sup> Almost 60% of the Brazilian population agree with the saying “*bandido bom é bandido morto*” (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2016). A bandit in Brazil is often pictured as a young, non-white, poor man (Bueno 2014a).

<sup>41</sup> Figure A.10 in the Supplementary Material shows that there is no evidence of data tampering when law-and-order candidates win, as there is no detectable effect in reporting police killings or in the number of undetermined cases of homicides.

to respond to their demands for material security. The representation of the interests of the relatively-wealthy, however, comes at the expense of the well-being of the poor, non-white voter. While in many instances electoral incentives encourage politicians to use the police to harass and repress this marginalized voter (Bonner et al. 2018; González 2020; Hassan 2017; Wilkinson 2006), in this article, politicians have incentives to neglect them. This outcome provides another example where the less privileged lack proper political representation to counter other organized interests (Poertner 2023, 9). Scholars have already pointed to the regressive character of law-and-order politics (Caldeira and Holston 1999; Gonzalez and Mayka 2023) and one of the critical implications in this article is that slanted representation in public security generates criminal homicidal violence.

The findings also point out that there is still much to be learned regarding the relationship between the police and vulnerable groups. We do not understand much about criminal activity outside transnational trafficking routes. While militarized, aggressive policing in areas under the influence of organized crime aggravates the problem of violence (see, e.g., Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2021; Trudeau 2021), withdrawing the police from violent-prone areas is not the answer either. Attempts to build trust among police and citizens through community policing can be ineffective in reducing crime (Blair et al. 2021), but consistently placing public security resources in the urban space may be the key to stopping homicidal violence (Vargas 2016). In these problematic areas, the effect of policing may not be ambiguous. The presence of local criminals may be conducive to *anarchic criminal orders* in which “only the police can bring a solution to the Hobbesian state of anarchy” (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020).

The phenomena this article uncovers are unlikely to be Brazil-specific. Two factors present in the Brazilian context are typical in much of the democratic world. First, politicians who appeal to law-and-order slogans are common—even if they find ways other than ballot names to inform the public of their commitment to security. For example, Eric Adams extensively used his police background during his successful campaign for mayor of New York (Chaffin 2021). Second, as already noted, the police are resistant to outside scrutiny and reform in much of the world. Together, these factors will permit embedded law-and-order politicians in other places to use public security resources for individual gain. Moreover, for many of these other potential cases, the decision-making power is often at the same level as the law-and-order politician’s office, amplifying their ability to capture the police.

The theoretical underpinnings that lead to public security mismanagement apply to other policy areas, too. Politicians who come from health, education, or public utility providers may also promise to improve the services from the sector of their purported expertise. These visible professional attributes may give them an electoral advantage and convince voters to support them, especially where party brands are not

informative. When elected, these politicians may find it electorally profitable to put their relational capital with their bureaucracy into use to maintain support from their constituency. This strategy may not be an option for politicians from bureaucracies that operate transparently. Unfortunately, however, developed and developing countries alike are rife with bureaucracies—especially police forces—that are protected from public scrutiny.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000540>.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the American Political Science Review Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/U9ZECG>.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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