

Endogenous State Weakness in Violent Democracies: Paramilitaries at the Polls

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Abstract

State weakness can be self-reinforcing through electoral channels. Paramilitaries flourish where states are incapable of eliminating oppositional foes like insurgencies; paramilitaries can also, we argue, penetrate the state via elections and further weaken it from within. The state may thus tolerate paramilitaries initially, but find itself unable to eliminate them later. Rio de Janeiro's police-linked *milícias* demonstrate these mechanisms at work. Their domination of hundreds of slums bore political fruit in 2006, when paramilitary leaders and allies were elected state legislators. We exploit the timing of paramilitary expansion, identifying—through difference-in-differences analysis of polling-station returns—a substantial positive effect of territorial domination on paramilitary-aligned candidates' vote share. Qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that winning allied legislators consistently sought to weaken state repression against paramilitaries, possibly contributing to their resilience even after an exogenous increase in state repression since 2008. Electioneering by armed groups thus presents a threat to democratic state consolidation.

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1 Introduction

The 20 years since the cresting of democracy's third wave has brought a perennial problem back to the fore: state weakness as both threat to and *effect* of democracy (Huntington 1997; Diamond 1996). While a long tradition sees democratic institutions and legitimacy as key to state building (e.g. Olson 1993; Levi 1989), a proliferation of low-capacity democracies and strong autocracies has led some scholars—echoing Huntington's "no liberty without order" dictum (1968)—to argue that "precocious electoralism"¹ can lock in or exacerbate state weakness, particularly in contexts of criminal and civil conflict (Collier 2011). This suggests that the question "does democracy strengthen or weaken states?" is too general: recent scholarship has made progress by disaggregating state capacity into more manageable component dimensions, and exploring their many causal linkages with specific aspects of democratic practice in differing contexts (e.g. Mazzuca and Munck 2014; Slater 2008).

This approach is especially apt for violent settings, where democracy might mediate *or* aggravate social conflict. One critical concern is that weak states may not be able to protect voters from coercion by armed groups during elections, thus perverting the primary mechanism of democratic accountability and representation. We take this argument one step further, showing how armed groups can use political power flowing from electoral coercion to further weaken the state *from within*. Rather than a wholesale hollowing-out of the state, this weakening occurs along specific but critical dimensions: the state's capacity to control its own coercive apparatus and thus suppress armed groups with links to state forces. Because such armed groups arise, in part, to fill in gaps in state capacity, we call this mechanism 'self-reinforcing' or 'endogenous state-weakness'.

Endogenous state-weakness need not operate through democratic channels: low state capacity creates incentives for insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003), which can further weaken states through direct military conflict. Yet civil and criminal conflicts frequently produce a more *political*

¹Slater (2008) coins this term to describe an argument he himself contests.

vector of endogenous state weakness: paramilitaries. These pro-government but nonetheless illegal armed groups often arise when states are unable to eliminate oppositional foes, such as insurgencies (Kalyvas and Arjona 2005). Paramilitaries can combine military capacity, local knowledge, and extra-legal violence to make swift advances where states cannot (e.g. Dube and Naidu 2015; Lyall 2010). Ideological and operational alignment can lead states to adopt non-confrontational or even collusive relationships with paramilitaries (Staniland 2015b). Indeed, paramilitaries frequently enjoy direct links to state officials (Carey et al. 2013, 253) and an air of political legitimacy (Staniland 2015a). Yet states' incapacity to eliminate armed groups—both the opposition that give paramilitaries their *raison d'être* and paramilitaries themselves—remains key to paramilitaries' continued existence. These last two facts give paramilitaries, respectively, the means and motives for penetrating the state and potentially weakening it from within.

This claim highlights a potential pitfall of current research on paramilitaries. Focusing on state agency, scholars are challenging the notion that paramilitary presence indicates state failure (Bates 2008) by emphasizing states' strategic decisions to tolerate or even encourage paramilitaries. In this view, states outsource core functions in a kind of Faustian bargain that “dissolves the monopoly on violence in order to preserve it.” (Kalyvas and Arjona 2005, 35). “Violence devolution” is characterized as a deliberate and useful state-formation strategy, “an alternative to central control over the use of force” (Ahram 2015, 8). Scholars typically attribute the presence and persistence of paramilitaries to the benefits they provide the state, including “plausible deniability” (Carey et al. 2011), a critical firewall against insurgency (Dasgupta 2009), and coercive electoral influence (Acemoglu et al. 2013). Patterns of paramilitary presence and behavior are interpreted in terms of how and why governments “use” paramilitaries (e.g. Stanton 2015; Carey et al. 2011).

Enumerating the reasons states have to tolerate or foster paramilitaries is important, but tends to downplay or ignore the agency of paramilitaries.² Taken to its logical extreme, this approach veers into functionalism: paramilitaries exist and persist because they perform needed functions for

²A critical exception is Staniland's (2015a) discussion of armed group autonomy.

states. A corollary, micro-level functionalist account would attribute paramilitary presence wholly to citizens' demand for vigilante protection or counterinsurgency; in democratic contexts, this demand could manifest as votes for paramilitary-allied politicians. While scholars may not explicitly adopt such stark positions, their claims often have an implicitly functionalist flavor. Moreover, real-world defenders of paramilitaries find functionalist accounts quite useful. As a corrective, we show how a purely functionalist account is incompatible with the empirical record. Some extant research already points in this direction: Staniland (2012), for example, finds that deliberate state efforts to foster paramilitaries are less decisive than internal dynamics of recruitment and retention. Paramilitaries' desirability does not conjure them into existence; demand does not necessarily create supply.

This article explores the converse point: just because a state comes to find paramilitaries undesirable does not mean it can control or eliminate them. Their rise and, especially, their persistence reflect not only state "demand" but state (in)capacity to combat them. Moreover, if paramilitaries have agency, then this specific dimension of state capacity is likely to be endogenous, since paramilitaries can improve their chance of survival by eroding it. Consequently, and *contra* the functionalist view, we cannot infer state strategies and social preferences from the presence of paramilitaries. This is especially true in democratic settings: even if some residents of paramilitary-dominated areas *are* sympathetic, paramilitaries wield immense coercive power; it would be both spurious and normatively perverse to assume that residents' votes reveal their true preferences. Similarly, even if a state tolerates or fosters paramilitaries initially, it may do so myopically, underestimating these state-weakening effects and hence the long-run resilience of paramilitaries; this is one reason the bargain seems Faustian.

We document one set of micro-mechanisms linking paramilitary expansion to state weakening: paramilitaries seize territorial control, use it to elect allies and actual members to legislative office, then employ this political power in efforts to weaken state repression of paramilitaries. In theory, this electoral channel of endogenous state weakness could operate for all illegal armed groups,

which generally have strong incentives to degrade the state's capacity to wipe them out. We conjecture, though, that it is particularly important for paramilitaries. For oppositional groups like insurgencies and drug syndicates, territorial control is likely to yield defensive military benefits as well as economic rents from illicit markets and extortion; state weakening occurs through direct confrontation, competitive state-building and public goods provision, and (possibly) criminal activity and corruption of state enforcers. Paramilitaries may also engage in such activities, and certainly derive economic rents and defensive benefits from territorial control. However, paramilitaries often have a comparative advantage in extracting *political* benefits from their coercive power over voters. This electoral edge derives from a perception of relative legitimacy, facilitating paramilitary leaders' navigation of the political world, whether negotiating with politicians or directly contesting elections themselves.

Due to their natural association with security-related issues, paramilitaries may also be especially good at using political power once obtained to weaken the state's capacity to eliminate them. Such weakening need not imply reducing overall state coercive power; what matters is the state's ability to direct that power inward, rooting out corrupt officials and neutralizing armed actors who enjoy tight links to state forces. Moreover, paramilitaries need not seek political power solely for state-weakening purposes: electoral influence can yield many benefits, including salary, personal immunity, and control over distributable goods that can be exchanged for favors or loyalty. However, paramilitaries' illegal nature makes state-weakening an end in itself. We conceptualize *state-weakening rents*—a subset of the benefits of political office—as the benefits to an armed group of using political power to reduce the state's capacity to destroy it, or otherwise disrupt its illegal activities. State-weakening, in this narrow sense, increases paramilitaries' chance of survival, and thus has a multiplier effect on economic and other benefits of territorial control.

Our core claim thus has two pieces. First, paramilitaries can extract electoral, and hence political, power from territorial dominion; second, paramilitaries try to extract state-weakening rents from political power. We demonstrate the plausibility of these propositions through a novel empir-

ical analysis of an under-studied case: Rio de Janeiro's *milícias*. These police-linked paramilitary groups came to prominence in the early 2000s, after two decades of militarized state repression failed to roll back the territorial dominion of Rio de Janeiro's drug syndicates. *Milícias* rapidly expanded from a few isolated *favelas* (slums) to dominate hundreds of communities throughout the city, frequently expelling drug traffickers in the process. The timing and logic of this expansion—driven by factors exogenous to electoral politics but occurring between two legislative elections—offers a unique opportunity to test for the political effects of paramilitary dominion. *Milícia* leaders, we find, (1) leveraged territorial control to win votes and amass political power, which they (2) then employed as part of a larger effort to weaken the state from within.

To test claim (1), we use a difference-in-differences approach to estimate the effect of *milícia* territorial control on voting behavior in state legislative elections. This analysis takes advantage of fine-grained geocoded data on *milícia* presence and polling-station-level electoral results over multiple elections. We then explore claim (2), documenting *milícias*' efforts to employ this political power to weaken the state's anti-*milícia* repressive capacity. Qualitative evidence comes from key episodes in which the so-called “*milícia* block” of legislators successfully scuppered numerous legislative investigations, protected *milícia* allies, and passed legislation that legalized *milícia* activity. Quantitatively, legislative behavior of *milícia* members and allies differed significantly from other legislators, in ways that point to a consistent effort to weaken anti-*milícia* efforts.

The following section lays theoretical and conceptual groundwork for our analysis. The third section provides background on Rio's *milícias*. The fourth section presents our findings on the effects of *milícia* domination on voting behavior, while the fifth analyzes the actions of *milícia*-allied politicians once in office. The sixth section explores whether *milícias* succeeded in weakening the state; the seventh concludes.

2 Theory

This section grounds our study conceptually with respect to scholarship on paramilitaries and armed groups more generally, as well as the literature on state-building and state-weakening; we also develop our concept of state-weakening rents.

Recent scholarship on paramilitaries generally focuses on armed groups allied with relatively weak states or governments, rather than the party-specific militias associated with 20th century fascist and communist parties. Whereas Bates (2008) famously used the presence of paramilitaries as a proxy for state failure, more recent scholarship has focused on states' deliberate tolerance of and even "outsourcing" of core functions to paramilitaries. Kalyvas and Arjona (2005) define paramilitaries as "armed groups directly or indirectly allied with the state and its local agents", developing a typology running from local vigilantes through death squads to full-blown paramilitary armies. Carey et al.'s (2011) dataset of 'pro-government militias' defines them as organized armed groups apart from the regular security forces but sponsored by a national or sub-national government, cataloguing some 300 cases in the last 30 years.

Staniland (2015b) argues that states are more likely to tolerate or collude with armed groups perceived to have a good "ideological fit" and be operationally useful. Both criteria are more easily met, we conjecture, when paramilitaries can position themselves as a "lesser evil" than some more oppositional foe. A key example, in civil-war contexts, is paramilitaries' lack of insurgents' revolutionary or secessionist intentions (Saab and Taylor 2009). In some cases, though, paramilitaries arise to fight armed groups—like drug cartels—that *also* pose no existential threat to the state; such paramilitaries present themselves not as counter-insurgents but as community self-defense groups, defending law, order, and traditional values against morally depraved criminals. Rio's *milicias* are an example of this, as are the Mexican *autodefesas* that recently arose to combat drug cartels there. Though distinct in their origins and methods, both groups vehemently eschew drug trafficking, whereas Colombia's paramilitaries could openly traffic with few political consequences (Saab and

Taylor 2009) precisely because they faced an insurgent “greater evil”.

The question arises: if paramilitaries’ interests align with those of the state, can their presence strengthen—not weaken—it? Might the Faustian bargain be a good one? Obviously, a state that survives a civil war thanks to paramilitary proliferation is in some sense ‘stronger’ than one that is vanquished by rebels. Yet a state dependent on rogue armed groups for survival is clearly weak in important ways. Moreover, not all threats to the state are existential: does replacing drug cartels with rogue police officers count as state consolidation? Under these circumstances, a unidimensional accounting of state weakness is less helpful than a nuanced assessment of armed groups’ impacts along various dimensions of state capacity.

Paramilitaries’ linkages with state security forces mean they can often benefit from both the capacity of those forces—particularly in terms of training, equipment, and intelligence—and the state’s lack of control over that very capacity. When command and control is weak or corrupted, typical state-strengthening measures like improved pay and equipment for soldiers can have the opposite of the intended effect. Our case offers a vivid illustration: *milícias*’ deep connections within the police corps allow them to not only nullify repressive capacity (because police do not like to combat *milícias*) but sometimes harness it to their own ends, directly employing police intelligence (e.g. de Andrade 2011) and equipment (e.g. GI 2007) to expand and defend their territory. At a minimum, then, we must distinguish the resources for repressive capacity from effective and non-corrupt control over those resources.³

This distinction echoes the conceptual disaggregation of state capacity common in macro-historical scholarship on state-building and its relationship to democracy. An important tradition running from Weber, through Gershenkron and Hirschman, to Evans (1989) distinguishes “capacity” from “autonomy”, emphasizing that increases in the physical, bureaucratic, and logistical capacity of the state can be insufficient, and possibly counter-productive, if the state is too vulner-

³Another important dimension involves juridical factors, including the status of incriminating evidence and whether paramilitary activity itself is explicitly defined as a crime.

able to capture by private interests. This concern motivates fears that “too much” or “too early” democracy can weaken states. Yet, as Slater (2008) and Mazzuca and Munck (2014) show, democratization can also strengthen certain dimensions of state capacity; these authors argue that there are multiple causal pathways, some positive and some negative, linking different democratic practices to different aspects of state capacity under different contexts.

We explore one such pathway, linking a specific form of state-weakening, erosion of the capacity to combat paramilitaries, to a particular channel by which that weakening can occur: electoral power derived from territorial control.⁴ Obviously, this pathway is relevant primarily in contexts of “democracy in dangerous places” (Collier 2011). We conceptualize the *state-weakening rents* of electoral power in such contexts as distinct from other, more generally applicable ‘political benefits’, such as prestige and distributable clientelistic goods. In pursuing the latter benefits through the election of allies, illegal groups (including paramilitaries) are no different from many other interest groups such as unions or industry lobbies. Illegal groups, however, can also extract state-weakening rents by, for example, introducing legislation to undermine repression; blocking congressional investigations; and influencing security-related appointments, budgets, and directives to ensure lax enforcement. Legislative power can also complement other channels of state-weakening: paramilitaries can strengthen their ties within the state security apparatus by, say, acting to increase police and army salaries, equipment, impunity, and other benefits. In some cases, paramilitary leaders also pursue direct election, risking public exposure but potentially winning personal immunity.

Of course, paramilitaries’ primary motivation for territorial expansion may not be political at all: there are important economic rents to dominion that include direct appropriation of land and assets, taxation of residents, and control over illicit markets. Nonetheless, state-weakening political rents are complementary to both economic and clientelistic political rents: improving the chances

⁴Another critical channel of state-weakening is direct contacts between paramilitaries and security agents.

that an armed group will continue to be able to operate over time raises the expected return to all other rent-extracting activities, producing a multiplier effect on the overall appeal of illegal armed dominion.

To sketch this in more formal terms, let E_i be the expected economic rents that armed group i can extract from territorial control conditional on surviving state repression, which occurs with probability p_i . Say that by entering politics, i gets a ‘standard’ bundle of expected political benefits—salary, prestige, privileged legal status, and clientelistic benefits C_i . On the other hand, becoming overt political actors exposes armed groups to shifts in public and official opinion, which can turn negative quickly (Bruce 1992). Elected armed-group leaders and their allies can make easy targets. That said, the risk from political overexposure is probably distinct from and narrower than the risk of territorial displacement by the state—at least it has proven so in Colombia and Brazil, where investigation and occasional incarceration of paramilitary-linked politicians has rarely translated directly into territorial loss for paramilitary organizations. Therefore, define R_i as the expected sanction resulting from the risk of political overexposure apart from any effect on the probability of surviving (territorial) state repression.

A naive accounting would separate out economic and political benefits, thus: $E_i + (C_i - R_i)$, and view the decision to enter politics as depending on whether the expression in parentheses is positive. For illegal groups, however, this expression does not exhaust the benefits to political office if they can use political power to weaken state repression of their own illegal activities. To capture these additional benefits, say that political involvement increases the probability of survival by some increment Δ_{SW_i} .⁵

Two related points emerge. First, the net benefits of entering politics can be decomposed into

⁵ Δ_{SW_i} can be thought of as net of any *decrease* in the possibility of survival due to risks of political overexposure.

‘baseline’ political benefits and state-weakening rents:

$$\overbrace{(p_i + \Delta_{SW_i})(E_i + C_i - R_i)}^{\text{Payoff: Enter Politics}} - \underbrace{p_i E_i}_{\text{Payoff: Not Enter Politics}} = \overbrace{p_i(C_i - R_i)}^{\text{‘Baseline’ Political Benefits}} + \underbrace{\Delta_{SW_i}(E_i + C_i - R_i)}_{\text{State-Weakening Rents}}$$

This formulation makes it clear that state-weakening has a multiplier effect on other rents, especially economic ones. Second, this multiplier effect can be decisive for an armed group’s decision to enter politics. To see this, note that, as above, politics is trivially worthwhile if the net ‘baseline’ benefits are positive ($R_i < C_i$). Here, however, even if the risks of exposure are serious enough to outweigh the clientelistic benefits of office (but not economic rents as well), they may be worth bearing if the state-weakening effects of electoral power are large enough. Formally, if $C_i < R_i < (E_i + C_i)$ then entering politics is worth it as long as:

$$\Delta_{SW_i} \geq p_i \frac{R_i - C_i}{E_i + C_i - R_i} \quad (1)$$

Thus group i ’s expectation of state-weakening rents could be decisive in its choice to enter politics.

This framework helps make sense of variation among illegal armed groups’ electoral engagement. All such groups can benefit from state-weakening political rents, but these rents are probably more important for paramilitaries ($i = P$) than oppositional groups ($i = O$), for several related reasons. First, paramilitaries are more likely to obtain political power through elections than insurgencies or criminal organizations, so we would expect $C_P > C_O$.⁶ Second, paramilitaries are more likely to successfully employ political power, once achieved, to weaken the state’s repression of their activities, so we expect $\Delta_{SW_P} > \Delta_{SW_O}$. Concretely, a typical paramilitary leader is more likely to be someone a politician could publicly meet with, or even win office him or herself, than an insurgent or a drug lord. Similarly, promoting policies that reduce state repression of crypto-paramilitary categories like ‘private security’ and ‘self-defense groups’ is far more politically viable than pushing for negotiations with rebels or traffickers. Finally, in places where

⁶The overexposure risks (R_i) could go either way: association with paramilitary groups is usually more likely to be detected, but association with oppositional groups more harshly sanctioned.

paramilitaries eschew the drug trade (in part to distinguish themselves from oppositional groups), economic rents are likely to be significantly lower, so that $E_O > E_P$. All of these factors mean that Equation 1 is more likely to hold, i.e. electoral politics is more likely to be ‘worth it’, for paramilitaries than oppositional groups. Similar considerations might explain variation among paramilitary groups in electoral engagement.

This framework can also address paramilitary leaders’ choice between indirectly electing allied politicians ($i = P_{IND}$), or running for election themselves ($i = P_{DIR}$). Direct election avoids potential principal-agent problems and secures legislative immunity for the leader in question, so that $C_{P_{DIR}} > C_{P_{IND}}$, but at greater risk of exposure: $R_{P_{DIR}} > R_{P_{IND}}$.⁷ If Equation 1 holds for both P_{IND} and P_{DIR} , paramilitaries may well pursue both strategies simultaneously. This calculus could change if $R_{P_{DIR}}$ increases due to shifting public perceptions, or if leaders learn the hard way that they underestimated it, leading them to opt for a purely indirect approach. In general, indirect approaches seem more common, though we observe both in our case.

3 *Milícias* in Rio de Janeiro

The rise of Rio’s *milícias* is intertwined with the larger history of the city’s *favelas* (slums) and the drug syndicates that came to dominate them, a history characterized by self-reinforcing state weakness. Since their inception, favelas have been informal, self-organizing squatter communities with limited state penetration (e.g. McCann 2013). This made them attractive to Rio’s prison-based criminal syndicates, principally the Comando Vermelho (CV), which began to expand beyond the prison walls in the early 1980s. By 1990, the CV held territorial control over the majority of the city’s favelas and the retail drug trade that operated out of them (Amorim 1993). Traffickers

⁷Here, we formalize legal immunity of elected leaders as part of C , not Δ_{SW} . This is because in our case, when *milícia* leaders were removed from office, stripped of immunity, and sometimes imprisoned, it had little impact on their territorial control and the economic rents they extracted from it. Other settings might require a different formulation and analysis.

established a form of ‘parallel power’, providing public goods and security while enforcing codes of silence and cooperation, further eroding state power and legitimacy (Leeds 1996; Arias 2006). The state took measures to increase its capacity, militarizing police repression of the drug trade and occasionally calling in the army to occupy key favelas. Between 2002 and 2008, state forces killed an average of 1,091 criminals in armed confrontation per year; nonetheless, the territorial dominion of the drug syndicates remained virtually unchanged. This is the context in which *milícias*’ rapid expansion occurred.

The roots of the *milícia* phenomenon, however, go back at least to the 1980s, when a group of police officers from the Rio das Pedras favela in the then sparsely populated Western Zone (*Zona Oeste*) of Rio de Janeiro, apparently at the behest of local businessmen, banded together to expel drug dealers from the community. For the next twenty years, their rule was seen as a rare and largely positive exception to the drug syndicates’ dominance of Rio’s favelas (Burgos 2002). Since at least the early 1990s, Campo Grande, another region in the Western Zone, has been under the control of similar, police-linked groups. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, paramilitary leaders from these regions began to seek electoral and political power, running for municipal and state office, and organizing voter registration drives. Yet the phenomenon was restricted to the Western Zone, and drew very little attention from the media or officials.

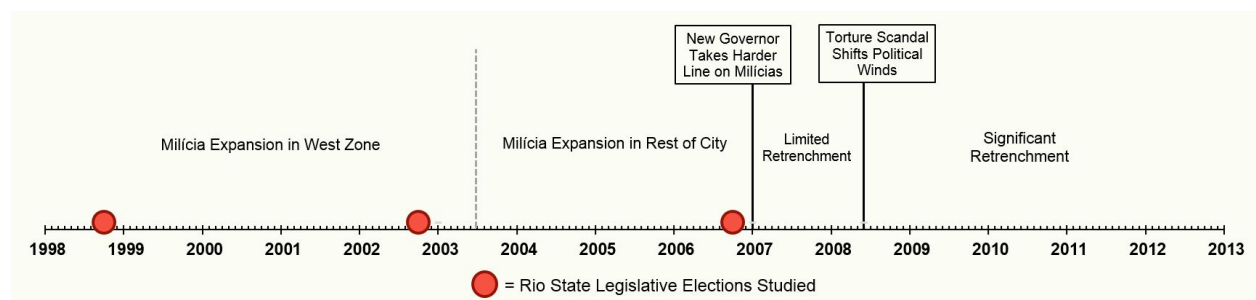


Figure 1: Timeline of *milícia* expansion and elections studied

The period 2003-2006, especially after 2004, saw a rapid expansion of *milícias* not only within the Western Zone but into areas of the city and the greater metropolitan region with no tradition of

such groups. The revelation in 2006 that some 92 favelas in Rio had been taken over by *milícias* laid bare the most significant reconfiguration of power in these communities since the rise of the CV. *Milícia* leaders replicated the legitimizing discourse of the earlier groups, crafting a positive public image of a “Comando Azul” to oppose the Comando Vermelho (Blue and Red Command, respectively). Composed of active duty, reserve, and retired police officers, firemen,⁸ and sometimes military officers, *milícias* supposedly “liberated” and protected communities from tyrannical drug traffickers (Cano and Duarte 2012). In classic paramilitary fashion, *milícias* thus presented themselves as righteous vigilantes, protecting vulnerable (and thankful) citizens; indeed, Rio’s then mayor César Maia publicly termed them “ADCs”, or Community Auto-Defense forces, reminiscent of Colombia’s AUC. For *milícia* supporters, the state’s apparent inability to permanently re-take favela territory from the drug trade made *milícias*—with their strong links to the state and their respect for law and order—a viable second-best solution, or as Mayor Maia put it, “a far lesser problem” (Bottari and Ramalho 2006).

This wave of expansion and largely positive perception began to change in 2007, when Governor Sérgio Cabral took office and adopted a harder line on *milícia* activity. However, attempts to convoke a congressional commission (*Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito*, CPI) to investigate the *milícias* were systematically blocked by *milícia*-allied legislators. A more significant retrenchment began in May 2008, after a team of reporters from the *O Dia* newspaper were captured and tortured by a *milícia* linked to state legislator Coronel Jairo. The horrific details and ensuing media firestorm abruptly shifted public and political opinion from acceptance to skepticism and alarm. One important result was the opening of the CPI investigation, providing the first systematic assessment of *milícia* activity and territorial control.

The CPI report (Freixo 2008), together with qualitative evidence from interviews with residents (Cano and Iooty 2008), show that *milícias* are generally extortionate, violent, and rent-seeking. A

⁸In Brazil, firefighters and civil defense corps (*bombeiros*) have military status, giving them special rights and privileges, including access to military-grade firearms.

<i>Milícia</i> Characteristic	% of <i>Milícia</i> -Dominated Communities (n=119)
Charges Tax on Households	90%
	(Average Tax 14.3 BRL)
Charges Tax on Businesses	85%
Forced Monopoly on Butane Gas	76%
Forced Monopoly on Illegal Cable	76%
Involves Military Police	86%
Involves Civil Police	52%
Involves Military Firemen	25%

Table 1: *Milícia* Characteristics and Behavior. Data from CPI report (Freixo 2008).

majority of *milícia*-controlled territories were not previously controlled by drug syndicates, suggesting that *milícias*' primary motivation is not expelling traffickers per se. Rather, almost all *milícias* actively extract rents from dominated populations, particularly economic rents: taxes on informal transportation, cooking gas, and pirated cable TV seem to be particularly lucrative (Table 1). While traffickers have been known to tax residents under their control, this is thought to be supplemental to drug profits in times of low sales. For *milícias*, excise taxes are the primary source of revenue, and hence key to determining their actions: as one *milícia* leader explained, "It's [while planning an invasion] that it's decided who will exploit what. One group gets to tax transportation, another gets to tax gas, pirated cable, and so on" (Ramalho 2007). In some cases, *milícias* have abandoned favelas after finding the extractable rents insufficient (Ramalho and Bottari 2006).

Economic rents appear to be the primary factor driving *milícia* expansion, as we discuss in the next section; nonetheless, their involvement in electoral politics strongly suggest that territorial dominion also yields political benefits. The 2006 state legislative election in particular suggested that *milícias* had successfully turned their territories into electoral bailiwicks (*currais eleitorais*). For one thing, several suspected *milícia* leaders were themselves elected, with extremely high votes shares in areas under their control, as path-breaking analyses by journalists Bottari and Ramalho (2007b) showed.⁹ *Milícia* leaders also pursued a more indirect political strategy, "contracting"

⁹The state legislature has 70 deputies, elected via open-list proportional representation. The district is the entire state, producing very fragmented polling-station vote shares: in 2006, with 1,321

with traditional politicians to deliver votes in exchange for policy favors and access to confidential information (Bottari and Ramalho 2007a). In later elections, *milícia* leaders only rarely pursued direct election, but actively continued this indirect strategy, trading votes for policy influence.

4 Estimating the Effect of *Milícia* Domination

On its own, the strong correlation between *milícia* control and support for *milícia*-linked candidates in 2006 does not imply that takeover produces electoral support. An alternative explanation—often proffered by *milícia* leaders—is that preferences among residents simultaneously favor the presence of *milícias* in their neighborhoods and the election of *milícia*-allied candidates. This is consistent with a larger “functionalist” account of paramilitarism: *milícias* selectively dominate communities that want to be taken over by *milícias*, and where residents are thus predisposed to vote for *milícia*-linked candidates. Under this hypothesis, *milícia* takeover has no causal effect on electoral outcomes, and electoral institutions are functioning correctly: politicians more responsive to a particular need of the electorate win more votes.

The evidence we present in this section undermines this “functionalist” hypothesis. We show that voters do not disproportionately favor *milícia*-friendly candidates in these communities prior to *milícia* takeover. Rather, our difference-in-differences analysis identifies a causal effect of *milícia* domination on voters in favor of *milícia*-friendly candidates. Because domination produces support, candidates are more accountable to the *milícias* than the voters. This would be true even if the causal effect were entirely due to citizens coming to like the *milícias*’ rule and retrospectively rewarding them with votes, a possibility we cannot systematically rule out. There is strong evidence, however, that less savory channels operate as well: *milícias* restrict unfriendly candidates from campaigning in dominated areas, and practice outright voter intimidation. The existence of armed coercion, in turn, casts further doubt on the idea that *milícias* selected communities for takeover candidates, the average polling-station vote share was just 0.44%. We restrict attention to the municipality of Rio, home to 40% of the state’s electorate.

that were systematically predisposed toward both *milícia* dominion and policy preferences.

4.1 Data

We study the 1998, 2002, and 2006 state legislative assembly elections. Our analytic strategy requires linking polling-station-level electoral data to information on *milícia* zones of control. We obtained voting-table-level (*seção eleitoral*) results from the Brazilian election authorities (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*, TSE) and data linking voting tables to polling-station addresses from Professor Argelina Figueiredo. Polling stations were geo-referenced with data from the Pereira Passos Institute (for polling stations in schools) and the Google Maps Geocoding API (for non-school locations).¹⁰

To link polling stations to favelas, we computed the pairwise distance between them. Under the assumption that most voters are assigned to a polling station near their place of residence¹¹, we classify a polling station as ‘treated’ if it is within 1km of a *milícia*-dominated favela ($n = 220$). Because *milícias* are known to take over both trafficker-dominated favelas and previously ‘virgin’ territory, our main ‘control’ group is comprised of all other polling stations ($n = 1080$). Our results are robust to restricting the control group to stations near trafficker-dominated favelas, as well as alternative distances ranging from .5km to 2km, as we show in the appendix.

To determine which favelas were under *milícia* and trafficker control, we relied on two distinct sources. For our primary source, graciously provided by Alba Zaluar of the Núcleo de Pesquisa das Violências (NUPEVI), field researchers visited each of 965 officially recognized favelas, asking residents and key informants in structured interviews what drug gangs or *milícias* held territorial

¹⁰A map of all polling stations appears in the supplementary appendix.

¹¹Voters are usually, but not always, assigned to the polling station closest to their home by default. However, individuals can request assignment to any polling station within their “electoral zone”, which typically comprises several dozen nearby polling stations (TSE Resolution 21.407/2003), nor are voters automatically reassigned when they move.

dominion in each year between 2005 and 2010. NUPEVI's data shows that in 2005 and 2006, 187 or about 19% of all favelas were controlled by *milícias*. For robustness, we built a secondary dataset of *milícia*-dominated favelas based on the congressional CPI report. This report draws on police intelligence and citizen complaints to produce a list of all known *milícia*-dominated neighborhoods (Freixo 2008), which we manually geocoded. Neither dataset identifies the dates of initial *milícia* takeovers prior to 2005; indeed, dating the original rise of *milícias* in the Western Zone is difficult. However, *milícia* expansion beyond the Western Zone is known to have occurred after 2002. Therefore, our main analysis focuses on non-Western Zone polling stations; in the appendix we discuss the timing of *milícia* expansion and include results for the Western Zone.

As for the dependent variable, a seemingly obvious choice would be the vote share of known *milícia*-aligned candidates; this, however, is problematic for two reasons. First, this approach could bias our results if losing *milícia* candidates receive less media scrutiny and their links are thus less likely to be known. Second, individual candidates' vote shares are not observed over multiple elections, ruling out a difference-in-differences design. Therefore, though we include a cross-sectional analysis of known *milícia* candidates as a robustness check, our main dependent variable is the share of votes received by 'police candidates'—those whose self-declared occupation is 'Civil Police', 'Military Police', 'fireman', or 'general military'; in the appendix, we show our results are robust to the exclusion of the latter category.¹² This is a good proxy for *milícia* influence since *milícias* have deep ties to the security apparatus, and many known *milícia*-linked candidates self-identified as police.¹³ Our police-candidate proxy could be problematic if the variable also proxied for general law-and-order concerns among the electorate; we show, however, that our dependent variable is only very weakly correlated with votes against a 2005 gun-control

¹²'General military' includes both those Military Police and firemen who self-report as such (these professions enjoy military status in Brazil) and some candidates associated with other parts of the military, introducing inevitable measurement error in our outcome variable.

¹³These candidates include Álvaro Lins, Girão Matias, and Jairo Souza Santos.

referendum that largely divided along law-and-order lines, as described below.

For specifications with covariate adjustment, we used census data compiled by the Pereira Passos Institute on the socio-economic status of residents of the closest favela. We also include data from the 2000 census, mapping polling stations to tracts and calculating the average years of education and monthly income for heads of households.

4.2 Research Design

Our quantity of interest is the “average treatment effect on the treated” (ATT): the causal effect of *milícia* domination on those communities that were eventually dominated. To estimate the ATT, we employ a regression of the following form:

$$V_{i,t} = \mu_i + \delta_t + \alpha D_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

where $V_{i,t}$ is police candidate vote shares in precinct i at time t , μ_i is a polling station fixed effect, δ_t is a period fixed effect, α is the ATT, $D_{i,t}$ is a treatment dummy, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the disturbance term. The ATT, in potential outcome notation, is given by $\mathbf{E}[V_{i,1}^1 - V_{i,1}^0 | D_{i,1} = 1]$, that is, the expected difference between the observed vote share for a dominated polling station i and the counterfactual share if i had not been dominated.

To estimate the counterfactual, our difference-in-differences (DID) approach looks at changes over time in vote share across dominated and undominated polling stations.¹⁴ This overcomes any potential bias from paramilitaries occupying communities that were already favorable to police candidates. DID, though, relies on a “parallel paths” identifying assumption: average outcomes for polling stations eventually dominated by *milícias* would have changed at the same rate as undominated stations if domination had never occurred (Abadie 2005).¹⁵ Our estimates are therefore

¹⁴In the appendix, we report results when the control group only includes polling stations near drug trafficker dominated areas. Results are highly similar.

¹⁵Formally, $\mathbf{E}[V_{i,1}^0 - V_{i,0}^0 | X_i, D_{i,1} = 1] = \mathbf{E}[V_{i,1}^0 - V_{i,0}^0 | X_i, D_{i,1} = 0]$. X_i is a set of pre-treatment covariates used in some specifications, with expectations taken over the distribution of X_i amongst

vulnerable to bias if paramilitaries dominated communities that were becoming more pro-police for reasons other than domination. As we show below, however, support for police candidates in areas eventually dominated and areas never dominated by *milícias* evolved almost identically between 1998 and 2002, before domination occurred. If communities eventually dominated were not disproportionately evolving in a pro-police candidate direction between 1998 and 2002, it seems unlikely that they would have systematically done so between 2002 and 2006 on their own.

Furthermore, qualitative evidence suggests that the trajectory of *milícia* expansion was driven principally by economic, geographic, and opportunistic factors, not a careful assessment of residents' preferences. Expansion flowed from *milícias*' original base in the Western Zone eastward toward the city center, targeting communities near police stations with sympathetic officers and those without strong drug traffickers (Soares 2013). Extensive interviews with residents of dominated favelas (Cano and Iooty 2008; Cano and Duarte 2012) make no mention of political factors in explaining *milícia* takeover.

Quantitative evidence further supports the parallel paths assumption. In an October 2005 national referendum, Brazilian citizens voted whether to ban the commercial sale of firearms. The debate quickly polarized, with the successful “no” side arguing that the proposed ban would aid criminals and increase crime by depriving law-abiding citizens of the means for self-defense. Numerous police-linked law-and-order candidates publicly supported the “no” side, and available evidence indicates that *milícia*-linked candidates did as well.¹⁶ This suggests that a “no” vote is a fair proxy for general concern for public security (Vital da Cunha 2006) and a propensity to support politicians and groups identified with law-and-order positions such as the police and *milícias*. If *milícias* were targeting communities sympathetic with their goals, we should observe a positive correlation between the “no” vote and *milícia* influence. As Figure 2 demonstrates, however, vot-

the treated units, and $0 < \Pr(D_{i,1}|X_i) < 1$ for all i .

¹⁶For example, see *milícia*-linked state deputy Coronel Jairo's floor speech in support of the “no” side on October 25, 2005.

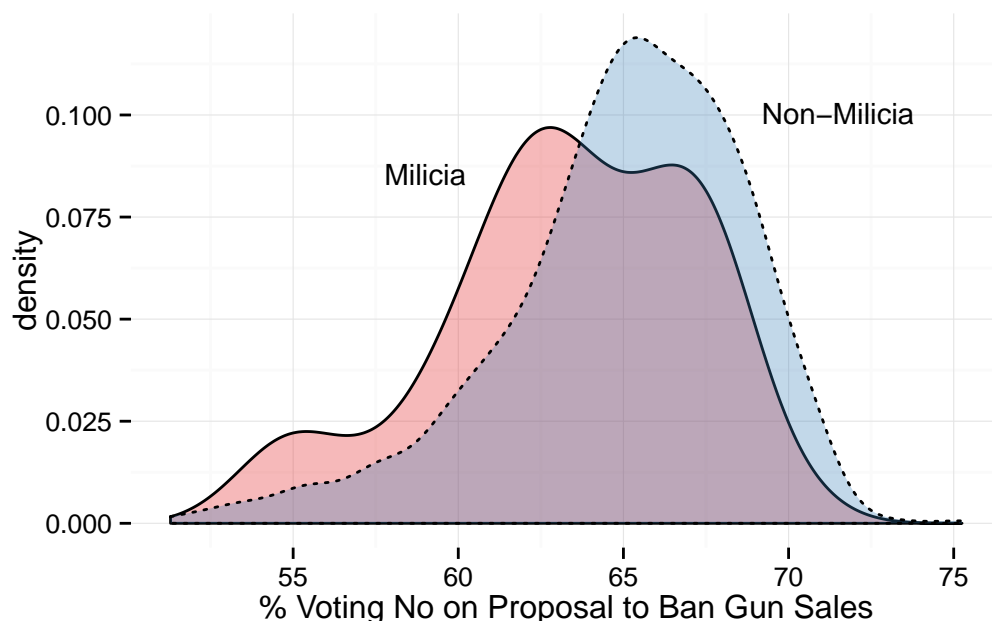


Figure 2: Density plots showing distribution of % voting no in 2005 referendum. Density on the left shows distribution of vote share in precincts dominated by *milicias*, while density on the right shows the density for other precincts. Western zone precincts have been omitted.

ers in *milicia*-dominated communities were *less* likely to vote for the "no" side than voters in other communities. The absence of a positive correlation further supports the hypothesis that *milicias* expanded opportunistically and did not strategically target politically sympathetic communities.

The geographic logic of *milicia* expansion is manifested in covariate imbalance between our treatment and control groups: *milicias* tended to dominate poorer and less central neighborhoods, which systematically differ on socio-economic variables from the average of non-dominated communities (Figure 3a). In contrast, 1998 vote shares for police candidates were very similar across groups, suggesting that prior support for police candidates did not drive *milicia* expansion.

Covariate imbalance raises a concern: weighting all control-group communities equally—including wealthy coastal areas or downtown business districts—might make the parallel trends assumption less plausible. Our preferred specification thus employs inverse propensity score weighting (IPW) to increase comparability between control-group and treated (i.e. dominated) communi-

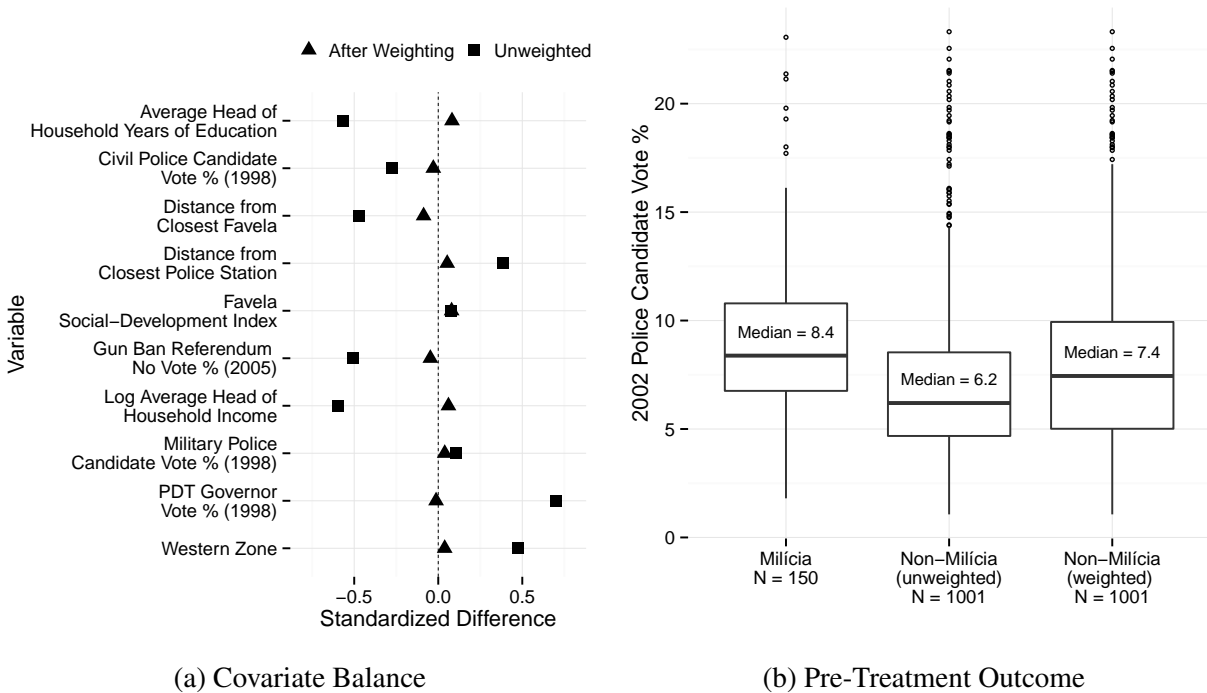


Figure 3: The left panel plots standardized differences on pre-treatment covariates before and after propensity score weighting. Standardized differences are mean differences normalized by the standard deviation. The left most boxplot in the right panel shows the distribution of vote shares received by police-linked candidates in 2002 in *milícia* areas. The center and right boxplots show distribution of vote shares in non-*milícia* areas without and with inverse propensity score weighting.

ties (Abadie 2005). The IPW procedure weights each control polling station based on how similar its covariates are to those of treated polling stations under *milícia* influence. The weighted control-group data, as Figure 3a shows, has vastly improved covariate balance. Moreover, the distributions of pre-treatment values of the outcome variable (2002 vote share, excluded from the IPW process) also prove very similar across treatment and control groups after weighting (Figure 3b).

While we believe that IPW provides the most credible estimates of the ATT, our conclusions do not depend on it. As we report below, non-weighted results without covariate adjustment are significant and broadly similar. So too are the results of a range of alternate covariate adjustment strategies, like genetic matching and inclusion of covariate-by-year interactions, reported in the appendix.

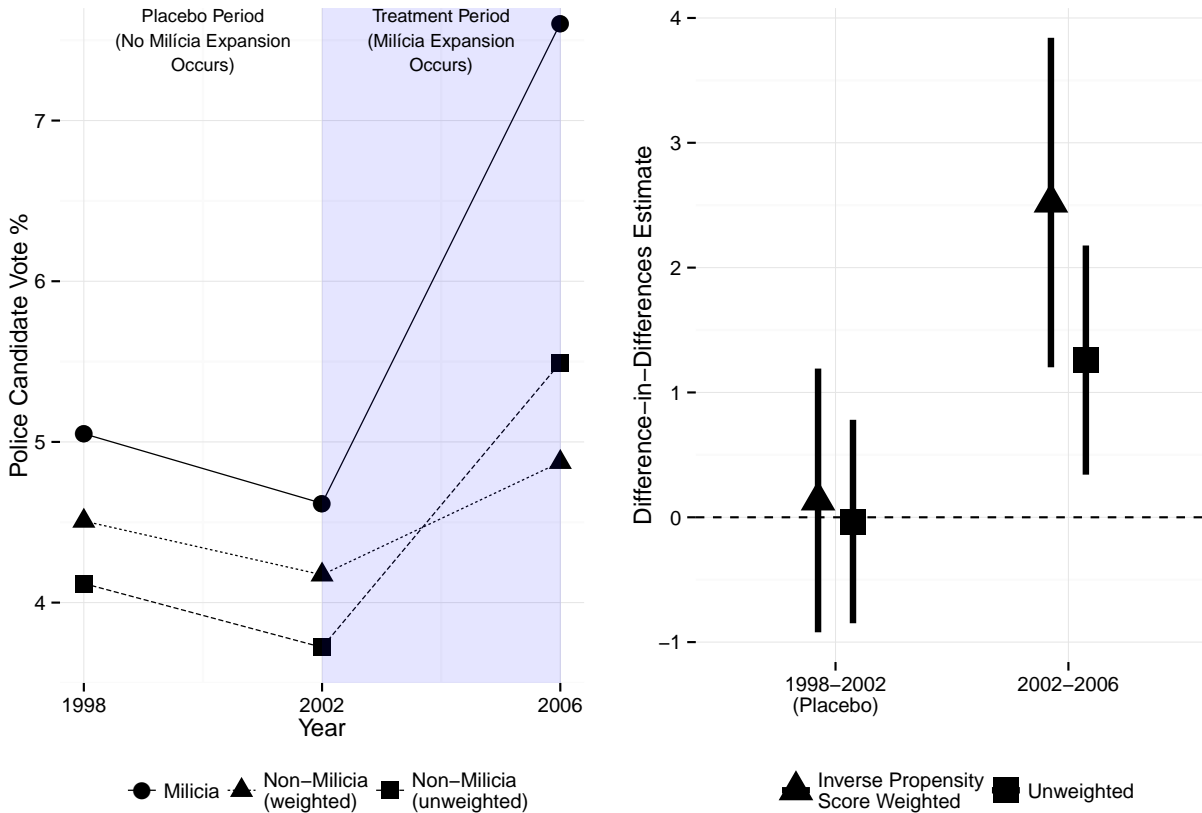
Our preferred IPW procedure employs a non-parametric “random forests” algorithm common in the statistical learning literature (Breiman 2001). A key virtue is that it flexibly models the relationship between the treatment variable and confounders without having to commit to any particular functional form (Lee et al. 2009). Thus, rather than having to pre-specify non-linearities and covariate interactions in a logit or probit model, the random forests model learns from the data whether or not such interactions or higher order terms (or even the main effects) are useful predictors of treatment.

For our main IPW result, we model *milícia* domination as a function of electoral, geographic, and polling-station and *favela* socio-demographic variables that capture important differences across neighborhoods, as well as strategic factors that might influence the *milícias*’ decision-making. In the appendix, we report the full list and show that our results are not highly dependent on the precise choice of covariates: we randomly sample 2 to 20 out of 24 potential covariates for inclusion in our IPW model and show that, in 1000 replications, the estimated ATT is broadly similar.

4.3 Results

Figure 4a presents our main results: unweighted and IPW estimates of the effect of *milícia* domination on police-candidate vote share. In 2002, before treatment, vote share was similar across treatment (*milícia*) and control (non-*milícias*) groups. More importantly, the *change* in vote share from 1998 to 2002, prior to *milícia* expansion, is nearly identical, with or without covariate adjustment. This ‘placebo-test’ point estimate is essentially zero in both specifications (Figure 4b), providing strong support for our parallel-trends assumption that changes from 2002 to 2006 would have been equal across groups in the absence of *milícia* takeover. For this assumption to be violated, the parallel trends observed in the pre-treatment, placebo period (1998-2002) would have had to diverge over the treatment period (2002-2006) for reasons unrelated to *milícia* takeover.

This divergence in trends is substantial: while police candidates did better in both types of neighborhoods, the vote-share growth in *milícia*-occupied communities was much higher than in both weighted and unweighted control groups. As Figure 4b shows, DID estimates of the average



(a) Evolution of Police-Linked Candidate Vote Shares (b) Difference-in-Differences Point Estimates

Figure 4: The effect of *milícia* domination on 2006 vote share of police candidates for the Rio de Janeiro state legislature. The left plot shows the evolution of police candidates in *milícia* and non-*milícia* (inverse propensity score weighted and unweighted) polling stations. The right plot shows difference-in-differences point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for propensity score weighted (triangles) and unweighted data (squares). Bootstrapped standard errors are clustered at the polling station-level.

effect of *milícia* takeover are positive ($3 - 0.7 = 2.3$ percent and $3 - 1.8 = 1.2$ percent) and statistically significant in the weighted and unweighted cases alike.¹⁷

¹⁷Standard errors are derived from a block bootstrap where clusters are the polling stations. The bootstrap algorithm includes the propensity score estimation step, thus these standard errors include the uncertainty generated from estimating the inverse propensity score weights. The number of bootstrap replications is 1000.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Milícia-Linked Candidate %		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Milícia Influence	7.5*** (1.0)	7.1*** (1.4)	6.9*** (1.3)
IPW	No	Yes	Yes
1998 & 2002 Police Candidate Vote %	No	No	Yes
Observations	996	991	991

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses

Table 2: Estimated effects of *milícia* domination on vote share of known *milícia*-linked candidates in 2006. Column 1 shows raw difference-in-means, with no covariate adjustment; column 2 shows a weighted regression using the IPW procedure from our main results; column 3 adds controls for police vote shares in 1998 and 2002. Coefficients on control variables are omitted for clarity.

This estimated effect is substantively large. The median vote share of security-forces candidates in 2002 was about 4.8%. Our weighted estimate corresponds to roughly a 50% increase in the number of votes received by security force candidates in a dominated community. Furthermore, the median vote share of a winning candidate to the state legislature was 0.56%; the treatment effect is about 4 times larger and big enough to be decisive. These estimates indicate that for *milícias*, territorial control can yield electoral power in the form of electoral bailiwicks and a pathway to public office.

In the appendix, we show that our results are robust to multiple specifications of the treatment variable, alternative dependent variables, and a host of covariate adjustment methods. Here we present one key robustness check, replacing our police-candidate proxy approach with the vote shares in 2006 of candidates with known *milícia* ties. This list includes seven candidates identified by the CPI report, plus three legislators who publicly voted in a pro-*milícia* fashion, as discussed in section 5.2. Table 2 presents estimates from a series of cross-sectional regressions.¹⁸ As expected, these candidates did systematically better in polling stations dominated by *milícias*, even when

¹⁸We cannot employ DID here because most of these candidates did not run in 2002.

controlling for the political, geographic, and socio-demographic variables listed in Figure 3a and police-candidate vote share in 1998 and 2002. This further supports our claim that *milícia* leaders used territorial control to help elect themselves and their allies.

4.4 Causal Mechanisms

Our DID strategy establishes that territorial control increases electoral support for police candidates, but it does not tell us how. A relatively benign possible mechanism is persuasion or retrospective voting. Dominated voters may feel that *milícia* governance brings benefits, such as reduced armed conflict or street crime. If voters view *milícia* domination as an improvement over the status quo ante, they might willingly vote for *milícia*-linked candidates at increased rates. In other words, voters may come to like, and vote to entrench, *milícia* domination.

Even in this benign scenario, our larger point stands: *milícias* extract political power from territorial dominion. However, though we cannot rule out retrospective approval, indeed it probably occurs among some voters, there is substantial evidence that more troubling mechanisms like control of candidate access and outright voter intimidation play a role.

News accounts provide ample examples of voter coercion: one police investigation in the *favelas* of Batan, Carobinha, and Barbante found that the local *milícia* group threatened to eject residents from the community if they did not support a favored candidate for city council (Mathias 2008). Another investigation of a different group found that they achieved political success via the “diffusion of terror” (*Jornal do Brasil* 2009) in their dominated neighborhoods. Given *milícias*’ capacity for violence and its successful extraction of poll and excise taxes on all residents, electoral coercion seems quite plausible. As with any coercive or vote-buying strategy, the secret ballot raises problems. These, however, have hardly proven insurmountable for clientelist politicians in general, and are even less likely to bind under physical coercion: even if the probability of *milícias* observing one’s vote is small, the punishment for disobedience if detected is likely to be extreme, making voters more compliant.

Another unsavory mechanism by which territorial control could affect voting behavior is through

control of information voters are exposed to during electoral campaigns. In Brazilian legislative elections, face-to-face campaigning is an important means by which candidates win support. Because television and radio time is allocated to parties via a legal formula and there are typically dozens, if not hundreds, of candidates that must share the same block of time, candidates often rely on rallies, canvassing, and other forms of retail politics to raise awareness of their candidacies. *Milícias* and drug traffickers (Arias 2006, 437) have been known to use their informal zones of control to prevent unaligned candidates from campaigning within their communities via threats of violence against rival candidates and their supporters, thus preventing voters from being exposed to information about politicians that have not curried favor with the locally-dominant armed group. Reports of this phenomenon were so widespread that it spurred the formation of a special task force of state and federal police forces with the specific goal of increasing the ability of candidates to enter these communities.

Finally, another reason to doubt the substantive importance of the retrospective voting mechanism is the surprising finding from the CPI that most favelas conquered by *milícias* were never controlled by the drug traffickers. Instead, *milícias* tended to expand in peripheral favelas largely ignored by drug gangs because of their poor profit potential. In such communities, it is not clear how the advent of *milícia* armed dominion and the associated taxation would be seen as an improvement, making the retrospective voting story far less plausible.

5 *Milícia* Political Power and State-Weakening

The quantitative analysis above establishes that *milícias* are able to convert territorial dominion into political power. But what do they do with that power? In this section we review the *milícias'* political activity and larger trajectory in Rio. A qualitative case study shows that *milícia* legislators and allies: 1) directed their political power toward weakening the state's capacity to repress their activities; 2) were for a time very effective in blocking legislative investigation of their activities, passing pro-*milícia* legislation, and protecting *milícia* allies from prosecution; and 3)

won key informal powers that could plausibly have further weakened the state’s ability to combat them. Although much of *milícias*’ political activity is not easily quantifiable, a systematic analysis of legislative behavior supports claim 1): *milícia*-linked legislators proposed significantly more security-related legislation, with a greater focus on protecting police from investigation, than their colleagues.

5.1 The *Milícias* in Politics: 2006–2008

Taking advantage of the permissive policies of governor Rosinha Matheus, *milícias* expanded from the periphery of the city in the period between 2002 and 2006. During this period of expansion, elected *milícia* members and allies—many with background in the security forces¹⁹—sought out political alliances with these emerging groups (Freixo 2008). These alliances could be quite overt: written “contracts” formalized political alliances between emerging *milícia* groups in Campo Grande and Nadinho, a *milícia* leader elected to the city council in the 2006 election. Similarly, police wiretaps uncovered conversations between members of the armed groups discussing an arrangement with Álvaro Lins, a military policeman turned politician, to deliver votes to favored candidates in the city council elections (Bottari and Ramalho 2007a).

Meanwhile, in the state legislature and city council, *milícia*-backed legislators took up positions that were central to the *milícias*’ interests, including committees charged with overseeing the security apparatus. For example, three known *milícia* leaders were members of the state legislature’s Committee on Public Security and Police Matters. In the city council, Nadinho served on the committee overseeing public servants (including the police) and continued to formally serve on the committee even after imprisonment. In addition, former Security Secretary Marcelo Itagiba, elected to federal office with support of *milícias* in the Western Zone, took a key post on the Justice Committee in the national legislature, and *milícia* leader Cristiano Girão, eventually sentenced to

¹⁹*Milícia*-linked politicians with such backgrounds include Josinaldo Francisco da Cruz (“Nadinho”), Jorge Babu, and Coronel Jairo Souza Santos.

14 years for extortion and money laundering, was appointed Special Advisor to Governor Matheus (Freixo 2008, 62).

Elected office also conferred critical informal power. According to police officials, politicians were given the prerogative of suggesting police commanders for posts in their electoral bailiwick, allowing these officials to select personnel supportive of *milícia* expansion. *Milícia* leaders²⁰ themselves stated that controlling the appointment of police commanders near their zones of control was a “priority” for when they achieved power via elections (Bottari and Ramalho 2007a). These appointments were not only critical to weakening police repression of *milícias*, but in some cases aiding their expansion: frequently, police operations against incumbent drug traffickers would “soften them up” or even expel them, facilitating *milícia* takeover once police withdrew.²¹

The state government’s policy of benign neglect towards the *milícias* was partially reversed in 2007 when Sérgio Cabral became governor of Rio de Janeiro. Cabral appointed José Mariano Beltrame to be state secretary of security, a career Federal Police officer with no *milícia* ties. Beltrame promised to combat *milícia* expansion and acted quickly to reassign *milícia*-linked police commanders.

In response, *milícia* allies in the legislature acted to weaken the state’s repressive response against *milícias*, in varied ways. Most critically, a group of *milícia* members and other sympathetic legislators—referred to by the media as the “*milícia* block”—repeatedly defeated attempts to open a parliamentary inquiry (CPI) with subpoena powers. To the anti-*milícia* proponents of the CPI, these defeats signalled the impossibility of meaningful legislative action against *milícias* as long as their political power remained strong.²² The substantive importance of *milícias*’ blocking capacity was made clear by the wealth of information and indictments the CPI produced once it was finally conducted. In addition, a separate legislative committee, created to investigate police-related issues

²⁰Fábio de Menezes Leão and Mário Franklin Leite Mustrange de Carvalho

²¹Interview, Civil Police *Delegado* Vinicius George, Rio de Janeiro, July 9, 2007.

²²Interviews, State Deputy Marcelo Freixo and members of his cabinet, July 9, 2007.

including the *milícias*, ended up being headed by a known *milícia* ally. In the national legislature, Marcelo Itagiba introduced a December 2007 bill eliminating federal prosecutors' legal authority to prosecute police.

Most glaringly, state legislator and *milícia* leader Natalino Guimarães introduced a bill (*indicação legislativa* 214/2007) that effectively legalized *milícias*, extending legal protections enjoyed by police to informal “community police” groups of retired and off-duty police officers. The bill then went to the Committee on Legislative Projects for evaluation. Jorge Babu, a *milícia*-linked politician, was delegated to write the committee report; his favorable recommendation led to a floor vote on the bill, where it passed overwhelmingly. Other key bills such as a proposal (*projeto de lei* 365/2007) prohibiting the arrests of police officers based on evidence collected via anonymous hotlines—and another (*indicação legislativa* 120/2007) that would prevent the firing of police or firemen with criminal convictions until all appeals are exhausted—were authored by *milícia*-aligned legislators, then issued favorable recommendations in committee by other *milícia*-linked politicians.

Milícia political power blunted state repressive actions again in 2008, after Security Secretary Beltrame increased the pressure on the *milícias* by arresting and jailing state deputy and known *milícia* ally Álvaro Lins on charges of money laundering and criminal conspiracy. Within days, the state legislature voted to release Lins from prison and allow him to continue to operate as a state legislator. Out of 70 deputies, a group of 40—including all known *milícia*-linked legislators—voted in favor of Lins's release. Even after the May 2008 torture scandal shifted public opinion against the *milícias*, triggering the CPI investigation and the eventual arrest of many elected *milícia* members, they retained substantial political power. For example, when intense media pressure to oust *milícia* leaders led to a motion to remove Natalino Guimarães from office, only 43 out of 70 legislators voted in the affirmative.

5.2 The Legislative Behavior of *Milícia*-Aligned Politicians

While not all political activity is quantifiable, our theory of state-weakening rents predicts that *milícia*-aligned legislators will focus their efforts disproportionately on security-related issues in general, and specifically on bills that directly weaken the state's anti-*milícia* capacity, diminish the accountability of security forces, or otherwise cultivate allies within the police rank and file. To test this descriptive claim, we quantitatively characterize their contribution to the legislative output of the 2007-2011 state assembly.

We compiled the complete set of proposed laws (*projetos de lei*) and “legislative suggestions” (“*indicação legislativa*”—requests to the executive to enact a policy change), excluding bill types such as motions (*moções*) that are typically ceremonial in nature. Using the summaries in the bill text, we classified each proposal as ‘public security-related’ (PSR) or not using a set of keywords.²³ For each legislator, we compute the percentage of PSR bills among all bills proposed.²⁴ The median and mean percentage of PSR bills introduced by each legislator are 3% and 5%, respectively.

We then identify legislators as “*milícia*-aligned” using two different approaches. The first creates a dichotomous classification based on the 2008 CPI report and the universe of public roll-call votes on clearly *milícia*-related issues. In the second approach, a continuous variable measures the degree to which each legislator's electors were concentrated in *milícia*-dominated areas. The dichotomous, “roll-call” dummy variable has the advantage of identifying known *milícia* allies, as well as any legislators who consistently supported *milícias*' interests in high-profile public votes. The continuous “electoral” variable is more closely linked to the territorial logic of *milícia* influ-

²³The keywords are “police”, “fireman”, “public security”, “police station”, and “prison”. To check validity, 100 randomly sampled bills were classified by an independent rater; 94 of these were correctly coded by the keyword approach.

²⁴We drop legislators with fewer than 10 proposed bills, leaving a sample of 74 legislators; this includes substitutes who replaced legislators that left before finishing their mandate.

ence discussed earlier.

For the dichotomous “roll-call” measure, we coded legislators as “*milícia*-aligned” who met three or more of these conditions:

1. Were identified as *milícia*-linked by the CPI legislative investigation (Freixo 2008).
2. Voted against the formation of the CPI investigation of the *milícias* (Resolution 626/2008).
3. Voted to release *milícia*-ally Álvaro Lins from prison after his arrest on charges of money laundering and criminal conspiracy (Resolution 663/2008)²⁵.
4. Voted against resolution that prevented known *milícia* leader Natalino Guimarães from being released from prison (Resolution 650/2008).

Items 3 and 4 occurred after the 2008 torture scandal; thus to be coded as *milícia*-aligned, legislators had to publicly take pro-*milícia* positions even after public opinion (and many legislators) had turned against them. This procedure coded six legislators, from five parties, as *milícia*-allied.²⁶ Four were identified as *milícia* leaders in investigations and press accounts, and all six received a substantially higher proportion of their 2006 votes in *milícia*-dominated polling stations (average of 23%) than the average for other legislators (7%). For our continuous “electoral” measure, we simply calculate the percentage of all votes received by each legislator in polling stations dominated by *milícias*.

Regressions indicate that *milícia*-alignment is correlated with a strong propensity to propose security-related bills (Table 3). Simple bivariate regression on our dichotomous “Roll Call” measure reveals that *milícia*-alignment is associated with an additional 9.7 percent share of PSR bills among those proposed by each legislator. To check robustness to the inclusion of basic controls, column 2 includes party fixed effects and a legislative-leadership (*mesa diretora*) participation variable; the coefficient increases to 11.4 percent. Both coefficients are significant and large: known

²⁵The politicians who voted in favor of Lins were labeled the “*milícia* block” by the press.

²⁶Namely: Natalino Guimarães (PFL), Álvaro Lins (PMDB), Anabal Barbosa de Souza (PHS), Jairo de Souza Santos (PSC), Domingos Brazão (PMDB), and Jorge Babu (PT).

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Public Security Bills (% of total bills proposed)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Milícia</i> -Aligned (Roll Call)	9.7*** (2.6)	11.4*** (2.3)		
<i>Milícia</i> -Aligned (Electoral)			0.2** (0.1)	0.3** (0.1)
Intercept	5.8*** (0.9)	3.9** (1.9)	4.7*** (1.0)	0.8* (0.4)
Party and Leadership Controls		X		X
Observations	74	74	72	72

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are heteroskedasticity consistent.

Table 3: Correlation between legislators’ *milícia*-alignment and proportion of bills proposed related to public security. “*Milícia*-Aligned (Roll Call)” is a dichotomous variable based on roll call votes and legislative investigations (see text for details). “*Milícia*-Aligned (Electoral)” is a continuous measure of the share of each legislator’s votes coming from *milícia*-dominated communities. Columns 1 and 3 report results from bivariate OLS regressions; Columns 2 and 4 include party fixed effects and a legislative-leadership variable.

milícia-allies introduced two to three times as many public security-related bills as non-allies. In columns 3 and 4, we regress share of PSR bills on our continuous “Electoral” measure—percentage of votes obtained in *milícia*-dominated communities—and again find statistically significant correlations with and without controls.

While consistent with our hypothesis, these results say little about the content of the proposed legislation. Given our theoretical prediction that *milícia*-aligned legislators favor policies that benefit security forces and protect them from state oversight, we read descriptions of the 28 public security-related bills proposed by aligned legislators (using the dichotomous measure), as well as 76 bills proposed by 30 other randomly sampled legislators, classifying the bills into four types, ordered by *milícia*-friendliness. (Table 4). Type 1 bills directly shield security forces from civilian oversight, while Type 2 provide them with monetary and other benefits; *milícia*-linked politicians were substantially more likely to propose legislation of these types. Type 3—proposing the cre-

Proposal Type	<i>Milícia</i> -aligned Legislators	Other Legislators
1. Increase protections of security forces accused of criminal activity	14%	0%
2. Increase remuneration or perks of security forces	18%	6%
3. Create police or fire station in a particular community	21%	42%
4. Alter other aspects of policing policy and regulations	47%	52%

Table 4: Public Security-related Bills Proposed in the 2007-2010 Rio State Assembly.

ation of police stations in particular neighborhoods, usually the proposer’s—is basically clientelistic in nature and was common across all legislators, as was Type 4, a heterogeneous residual.²⁷

6 Discussion: Did *Milícias* Weaken the State?

It is clear that *milícias* sought to use the political power accumulated in 2006 to weaken state repression. But did they actually succeed? On the one hand, the 2008 scandal and backlash undid much of their formal political power; on the other, *milícias* have retained territorial control in the face of increased repression and continue to engage in electoral politics. The complexities of politics and the ongoing militarized war between the state and Rio’s drug traffickers makes systematic casual inference impossible. Rather, we describe developments since 2008 and discuss possible implications in a more conjectural mode.

6.1 *Milícia* Retrenchment and Resilience: 2008–2014

After the May 2008 torture scandal, anti-*milícia* repressive efforts greatly slowed *milícias*’ expansion and cut into their political power. Many previously elected *milícia* leaders were removed from office and even jailed, along with hundreds of other *milicianos*, many of them active-duty police. State repression also targeted *milícia* electioneering: in the 2008 city council elections, officials restricted candidates’ ability to campaign and coordinate with *milícia* leaders and deployed army troops to dominated favelas during voting. *Milícia* electoral power, however, proved re-

²⁷Bill topics range from the provision of sunscreen to police (*projeto de lei* 836/2007) and bathrooms for officers posted at toll booths (*projeto de lei* 1259/ 2008) to, more significantly, the number of positions per rank (*indicação legislativa* 700/2009).

silent, with several *milícia*-backed candidates winning office. Most prominently, Carmen ‘Bat-girl’ Guimarães, daughter of arrested *milícia* leader and city councilor Jerônimo ‘Jerominho’ Guimarães, won handily despite being imprisoned during the campaign for suspected *milícia* participation.

More broadly, imprisonment of *milícia* members and leaders, while heartening, had little impact on *milícias* as organizations. Numerous *milícia* leaders escaped prison, and those that did not have been able to effectively run their protection and taxation rackets from behind bars (Ramalho 2011). This reflects not only weak carceral institutions, but continued legislative inaction to regulate the economic activities that *milícias* exploit.

Above all, *milícias*’ territorial dominion remains intact. In fact, NUPEVI data demonstrates an increase in the population of residents living under *milícia* dominion from 2008 to 2010 (Zaluar and Barcellos 2013, 24), while CPI chairman Marcelo Freixo found that *milícias* spread from 170 to 300 favelas between 2008 and 2011 (Ramalho 2011). A 2014 study found further expansion of *milícias*, especially into the interior of Rio de Janeiro state (Bottari and Ramalho 2014).

Milícia resilience is particularly striking given that this period saw one of the largest expansions of state capacity and territorial control in Rio’s history. Since 2008, under Cabral and Beltrame’s signature ‘Pacification’ policy, state forces retook some of the largest and most violent favelas of Rio from armed groups, establishing permanent ‘proximity policing’ units known as UPPs²⁸ in them. Armed violence fell dramatically and Pacification was heralded as successful and even transformative. However, out of 257 favelas ‘pacified’, only one was *milícia*-dominated prior to pacification. This exception proves the rule: Jardim Batam was the favela where the *O Dia* journalists were tortured, provoking an impromptu police occupation, later transformed into a UPP without ever having been planned as such. In April 2014, when state forces occupied the Maré complex of favelas, commanders deliberately avoided deploying forces to the two areas dominated by *milícias* (Gomes 2014).

²⁸Unidades de Policiamento Pacificadora, or Pacifying Police Units.

6.2 State-weakening or state preferences?

Throughout this paper, we have contrasted our core claim—that paramilitaries use political power gleaned from territorial control to actively weaken the state’s capacity to eradicate them—with a “functionalist” alternative explanation in which paramilitaries persist because governments, citizens, or both have “demand” for them. With respect to elections, such a view would hold that *milícias* take over communities that want to be taken over by *milícias*, and so residents of such communities naturally vote disproportionately for *milícia*-allied candidates. Our analysis of voting results falsified this hypothesis: *milícia*-dominated communities were politically indistinguishable from comparable trafficker-influenced communities prior to *milícia* takeover, but diverged thereafter.

More broadly, the functionalist explanation of *milícias*’ resilience after 2008 is that the state simply did not want to eliminate them; if true, then their resilience tells us nothing about state capacity. The alleged smoking gun for this position is that under the Pacification initiative, state forces deliberately and consistently occupied trafficker-dominated favelas to the virtual exclusion of *milícia* areas. If these operational decisions reveal state preferences, then *milícias* persist because the state prefers to tolerate them while it focuses on the graver threat. In this view, there is no reason to conclude that *milícias* weaken the state; they may even help it consolidate.

We cannot definitively falsify this claim, in part because the potential channels of *milícias*’ political influence go well beyond the systematically observable ones examined thus far. Still, there are reasons to question it. The 2008 scandal empowered state actors with strong anti-*milícia* preferences; the ensuing increase in repression—removing from office and arresting *milícia* leaders—is, at a minimum, evidence of a drastic collapse in state “demand” for *milícias*. Indeed, Beltrame’s team initially advanced the argument that *milícias* could be effectively neutralized through investigation and arrest, without territorial occupation (Nogueira 2010). Only after it became clear that leaders were able to run extortion rackets from prison did Beltrame declare that territorial occupation was necessary, and that “it’s not enough to just arrest *milícia* leaders” (Carneiro 2012). This

strongly suggests a sincere effort to eliminate the *milícias* that was thwarted by a lack of a specific form of state capacity. As Beltrame himself admitted in 2012, despite the massive increase in physical capacity associated with Pacification, “None of [Rio’s] police forces has acquired the expertise needed to combat [the *milícias*]” (*O Dia* 2012).

Still, Pacification continued to focus on trafficker-controlled favelas: after the unanticipated occupation of Batan in 2008, no *milícia* area was occupied until 2014. Beltrame claimed that when selecting favelas to be pacified, “we do not look whether there are traffickers or *milícias*” (*de Aquino* 2011), and the government maintained that it would eventually pacify *all* dominated favelas. Officials explain the focus on trafficker-held territories in terms of other selection criteria: “The goal of pacification is to reduce armed confrontations. *Milícias* don’t confront the police.”²⁹ For proponents of the functionalist account, this would seem a clear statement of state preferences.

However, the non-confrontational stance of the *milícias* is itself endogenous to the state’s choice to prioritize other groups: one reason *milícias* don’t confront police is because police do not actively try to territorially oust *milícias*. And one plausible reason police do not is because so many *milícia* leaders are themselves current and former police officers, and use their political power to, among other things, improve the lot of police. For police chiefs, rank-and-file reluctance to confront *milícias* makes the prospect of ordering their elimination more costly. Even in theories focused entirely on the benefits that paramilitaries provide, the state weighs the cost of eliminating paramilitaries (*Acemoglu et al.* 2013); we simply argue that this cost is not fixed. It is simply implausible that an erosion of the police’s *milícia*-fighting capacity from within did not influence leaders’ decisions to focus territorial repression on trafficking groups.

If state-weakening did occur, to what extent did it occur through the electoral-political channel we document? Surely, *milícias*’ direct links with police play a critical role outside the electoral realm. Moreover, *milícias*’ direct-election gambit clearly proved a failure. Nonetheless, six years

²⁹Authors’ interview, former Sub-Secretary of Public Security, Rio de Janeiro, March 16, 2014.

See also *Gomes* (2014).

into retrenchment, *milícias* continue to use their territorial dominion to obtain political power. A confidential Security Secretariat report during the 2014 electoral cycle found that *milícias* were maintaining lists of and coercing voters, and selling exclusive campaigning rights within areas under their control (Ferreira and Araújo 2014). According to candidates, whereas drug traffickers sold access to territory piecemeal and to the highest bidders, *milícias* offered exclusive access to a few reliably sympathetic candidates, as part of a strategy to recoup political power lost after 2008 (Magalhães and Remigio 2014). Selling votes below market rates to allied candidates is consistent with the idea that paramilitary groups seek to extract state-weakening rents (above and beyond clientelistic benefits) from territorial control. The election authorities, for their part, take the risk of such extraction seriously: based on the confidential report, they again requested federal occupation of dominated favelas to guarantee voters' safety.

7 Conclusion

We identify a potential pathway linking state weakness, armed conflict, and democracy to further state weakening. The state's inability to vanquish an oppositional foe can foster paramilitary formation and expansion; under democracy, paramilitaries can use territorial dominion to elect friendly candidates and weaken (from within) the state's ability to eliminate them. We demonstrate the plausibility of self-reinforcing state weakness via armed electioneering by presenting evidence that it occurred in the case of Rio de Janeiro's *milícias*.

Our analysis showed that Rio's *milícias* used their territorial control to help elect their own members and allied candidates; *milícias* also clearly sought to use the resulting political power to weaken the state's repressive response against them. These efforts proved effective for a time; unforeseen setbacks then drastically reduced *milícias*' formal political power, complicating further inferences about long-term effects on anti-*milícia* capacity. Nonetheless, 'state-weakening rents' were and appear to still be a key benefit that *milícias* hope to extract from political activity, over and above typical clientelistic benefits of office, and with a multiplier effect on the purely economic

rents from territorial control.

We conclude by considering some implications of the *milícia* phenomenon for future research on conflict, democracy, and state capacity and weakness in general.

In a classic analysis, O'Donnell (1993) conceives of state weakness and incomplete rule of law geographically, in terms of “brown areas” where the state cannot or does not reach, and where other actors enjoy territorial control, sometimes as rough allies of the state (e.g. colonial Brazil's *coroneis*), sometimes as clear adversaries (e.g. insurgent groups). State consolidation requires, at a minimum, turning brown areas blue, i.e. replacing the dominion of local actors with a Weberian monopoly on the use of force, while state weakening consists in the expansion of brown areas.

The initial public debate over *milícias* fit well into this framework. Defenders of *milícias* mostly admitted that they were not retaking stateless areas for the state, but saw them as a ‘lesser evil’, a safer and less adversarial custodian of such areas. The 2008 torture scandal challenged this perception, but even more important was the CPI investigation's finding that many *milícia*-held areas were not previously dominated by the drug trade, but simply un-dominated, far-flung neighborhoods. Given that most *milícia* leaders are police officers or have direct ties to the state's coercive apparatus, the implications of the CPI finding are dire: agents of the state independently took up arms to transform swathes of the city into stateless areas dominated by non-state armed actors, turning “blue” areas “brown”. In doing so, they relied crucially on resources often seen as constitutive of state capacity: military training and weaponry, intelligence-gathering networks, and the capacity to deploy force across distance. Indeed, police access to these resources is what gives them a comparative advantage as *milícia* leaders.

This points to the need to distinguish among dimensions of state capacity. It is not enough to have adequate coercive resources to take and hold territory; the state must also be able to constrain its own agents from using those resources in ways that leave the state weaker. Indeed, it must be able to direct those resources inward, to root out corrupt agents and politicians. In Rio, the state is not ‘weak’ in terms of coercive capacity; rather it lacks *control* over that capacity. Indeed, the

‘control’ dimension of state weakness becomes increasingly important as the ‘resource’ dimension expands: if Rio’s police had not been transformed by decades of fighting the drug syndicates into a highly militarized, seasoned fighting force, widespread corruption would not have led to such extreme outcomes. Likewise, if *milícia*-linked politicians pass legislation increasing police salaries as a quid pro quo with corrupt commanders, they both increase state coercive resources and further weaken state control over them.

This ‘control’ dimension of state weakness is far more difficult to measure than the resource dimension. This is problematic for empirical studies, especially quantitative work, given the potential for corruption to nullify or even invert the capacity-building impact of increased resources. Researchers should continue to look for better measures of paramilitary influence within security forces. More broadly, future work on paramilitaries should address not only the benefits they provide to the state, but the often subtle ways in which they weaken it from within.

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