



Policing following political and social transitions: Russia, Brazil, and China compared

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Abstract

This is a comparative analysis of policing in three countries that have experienced a major political or social transition, Russia, Brazil, and China. We consider two related questions: (1) how has transition in each country affected the deployment of the police against regime opponents (which we term “repression”)? And (2) how has the transition affected other police misconduct that also victimizes citizens but is not directly ordered by the regime (“abuse”)? As expected, authoritarian regimes are more likely to perpetrate severe repression. However, the most repressive authoritarian regimes such as China may also contain oversight institutions that limit police abuse. We also assess the relative importance of both transitional *outcomes* and *processes* in post-transition policing evolution, arguing that the “abusiveness” of contemporary Brazilian police reflects the failure to create oversight mechanisms during the transition, and that the increasing “repressiveness” of Chinese police reflects a conscious effort by the Chinese Communist Party to reinforce the police in an era of economic liberalization. In contrast, Russian police are both significantly abusive and repressive, although less systematically “repressive” than Chinese police, and less “abusive” (or at least violent)

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than Brazilian police. Also, abuse and repression are less distinct in Russia than in the other cases. These results reflect the initial processes of decay and fragmentation, and subsequent partial recovery and recentralization, which Russian police have experienced since the Soviet collapse.

Keywords

Brazil, China, police, police reform, Russia, transition

Part I. Introduction: Theorizing policing in political and social transitions

A recent survey asked respondents in 21 countries whether they fear torture if taken into custody by the “authorities”, in most cases meaning the police (Amnesty International, 2014). Here are the percentages of people in three countries who believe they would be at risk of police torture:

- Brazil—80 percent
- Russia—48 percent
- China—25 percent

In other words, most Brazilians fear police violence in custody, most Chinese do not, and Russians are roughly evenly divided. Why are police in a vibrant democracy (Brazil) more frightening than those in a one-party state (China) or a post-communist authoritarian regime (Russia)? In unraveling this puzzle, we add to two scholarly literatures. First, we contribute to research on post-Soviet policing by situating it in comparative perspective. Second, we help theorize policing following major social and political transitions, asking how policing is shaped by both transition “outcomes” (that is, the new political or social order) and “processes” (that is, institutional choices made during the transition, as well as attendant social and political conditions). For each case we review—Russia, Brazil, and China—we ask how the transition affects police malfeasance. We thus analyze the post-transition police on two parameters: politically motivated “repression” and self-interested “abuse”. As we argue, the Brazilian police are highly abusive, but not repressive. The Chinese police are highly repressive, but far less abusive. In contrast, Russian police are both significantly abusive and repressive, although less extreme on each parameter than Brazil and China, respectively. Russian police continue to suffer the institutional effects of the 1990s post-Soviet crisis, despite improved funding in the last decade. One result is that the two parameters of interest—police abuse and repression—are more difficult to distinguish in Russia than in the other two cases.

Our findings are likely applicable elsewhere in the world. First, Russia itself is a critical case for post-Soviet policing. Although it would also be interesting to compare policing among post-Soviet states, Russia is the largest post-Soviet republic, its police have been extensively researched, and numerous published studies furnish material for review. Brazil and China have also experienced major transformations in the last 30 years. That

is, in all three countries, major social or political institutions have been transformed, an experience we term “systemic transition”. In Russia, this meant the break-up of the USSR. Russia also has experienced both a political transition from the Soviet “closed authoritarian regime” of the Communist Party to the current “competitive authoritarian” regime of President Vladimir Putin (Levitsky and Way, 2010), and an economic transition from a centrally planned economy. In Brazil, the transition entailed the replacement of a military dictatorship with democratic institutions, albeit without major changes to the economic system. In post-Mao China, conversely, it meant economic liberalization, albeit under continuing Communist Party rule.

Russia is the focal point of our study, and the other cases complement it. Thus, Russia and Brazil are both large, middle-income countries, but whereas Russia is a post-communist state, Brazil experienced a transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule within a capitalist economic system, and so may represent other such transitions. In contrast, post-Mao China arguably did not experience a “political transition” at all because of the Communist Party’s continuing domination of the state. Yet, the emergence of a large private business sector constitutes a transformation of Chinese society, which (as we show) has significantly influenced Chinese policing. Guided by Loader and Mulcahy’s (2003) argument that policing rests on social and economic bases as well as political ones, China’s experience qualifies as a “systemic transition” whose effects on policing should be investigated. Indeed, before 1991, the Soviet Union and China were rival co-leaders of the worldwide socialist camp. With the Soviet breakup, only China has preserved a Soviet-like policing system roughly intact. Thus, policing in China represents an alternative development trajectory that police in post-Soviet states could have followed.

This article could address many important questions—in particular, how transitions affect police techniques, investigative capacity, and responses to street crime (see, for example, Tanner, 2000). In fact, several articles in this issue address these operational aspects of post-transition policing; see Kapatadze, Lysova and Shchitov, and Arnold. However, we address an equally important question: the relationship between political and policing institutions. We are guided by the influential concept of “democratic policing”, or law enforcement with goals and modalities suitable for democratic states, including civilian oversight, respect for civil rights, equal treatment of citizens, accountability of police to the law, and restraint and civility toward civilians (Bayley, 2006; Loader, 2006; Manning, 2005; Pino and Wiatrowski, 2006; Sheptycki, 2002). These criteria provide a baseline standard of policing outcomes with which we evaluate our three cases.

Other studies investigate how social and political change actually affects policing, finding that policing in contemporary industrialized democracies is highly embedded in the post-Second World War democratic welfare state (Bayley and Shearing, 1996; Loader and Mulcahy, 2003; Savage, 2007) as well as in related cultural practices (Garland, 2001). Still other studies examine changes in policing following political transitions. Although police are often willing to serve new political masters (Bayley, 1971), democratic political institutions do not inevitably create democratic policing, which instead requires the democratic transformation of the police themselves (Pino and Wiatrowski, 2006). Thus, there have been numerous individual country studies of policing in transitions, notably in post-Apartheid South Africa. There, although the police no longer

practice overt political repression (Brogden and Shearing, 1993), they still face problems of legitimacy and capacity (Shearing, 1997) that in turn have led to the partial privatization of policing (Kempa and Singh, 2008; Singh, 2008). In the same vein, the creation of police forces in newly independent states such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Aitchison, 2010) and East Timor (Goldsmith and Harris, 2009) has been fraught with problems, often involving the role of western sponsors.

We promote theorization of policing in transitions by incorporating individual case studies into international comparisons, across world regions. In addition, correcting the overemphasis of policing studies on industrialized democracies (Manning, 2005), we consider transitions of various trajectories—not only to democracy (Brazil), but also to new forms of authoritarian rule (Russia and China), permitting us to observe the effects of such variation in transition trajectory on policing outcomes. The systemic transitions we analyze also feature much more drastic changes in the political role of the police than occur over a comparable time span in industrialized democracies, with some partial exceptions, as in Northern Ireland (Ellison, 2007).

Mindful of the variety of police “deviance” (Punch, 2003, 2009; Shearing, 1981), we nonetheless assign police misconduct to two basic categories: “repression”, meaning politically motivated deployment of the police against regime opponents; and “abuse”, meaning police mistreatment of citizens that is not directly ordered by the political leadership and that primarily serves the private ends of police officers, their supervisors, or organizations. In what follows, we ask how systemic transitions affect such “repression” and “abuse”. Both these questions are motivated by theories of “democratic policing”. Thus, although all regimes deploy police against some opponents (e.g. violent revolutionaries, foreign spies), in democratic policing, both the goals and methods of such repression are constrained (Bayley, 2006). Violent dispersal of opposition protests and politically motivated arrests or investigations, infringe this principle. Democratic policing also includes accountability mechanisms to prevent even non-political abuse of citizens. By postulate, these features of democratic policing should be relatively likely to accompany democratic political institutions, and relatively unlikely to accompany non-democratic ones.

Through our empirical investigation, we partially refute this assumption. Indeed, our findings are somewhat counterintuitive. Although Chinese police perpetrate the most systematic political repression, they are substantially less corrupt and more disciplined than their Russian counterparts and less homicidal and routinely violent than their Brazilian ones. We suggest that some authoritarian regimes contain oversight institutions that limit police abuse. Yet, only democratic regimes can enable the systemic renewal of police services through civil society activism and democratic legislation.

We also argue that policing researchers should focus closely on transitional processes, including both political decisions and their interplay with accompanying economic and social conditions. In most transitions, as in post-Soviet Russia, these conditions inhibit concerted management of police restructuring. While Soviet institutional legacies have allowed the Russian police to maintain basic order, the post-transition crisis also enmeshed them in opportunistic relations with the authorities and “predatory” relations with citizens, creating a nexus of abuse and repression that is difficult to disentangle.

A project such as this faces questions of definition and evidence. First, as we discuss below, different forms of “abuse” are more characteristic of particular police services—with systematic police violence a more serious problem in Brazil, and systematic extortion a more serious one in Russia. How should one define and quantify police “abuse” when it assumes such contrasting forms in different societies? Although this is ultimately a normative question, we postulate that severe police violence and killing constitute more intrinsically serious rights abuses than bribery and extortion. We return to this point in Part 3. Second, data are not always comparable across countries. As we note below, less has been written on police abuse in China than Russia and Brazil. Moreover, the relatively scanty Chinese data raise interpretive questions. Thus, in the report cited above, the proportion of Brazilians who report they fear police torture is the highest among countries surveyed. In contrast, fewer Chinese than US citizens say they fear police torture (Amnesty International, 2014). But what can we really infer about people’s views in a closed authoritarian regime such as China? In Part 4, we consider problems of data in Chinese policing.

Part 2. Policing in Russia from communist hegemony to tenuous “capture”

From hegemony to disarray

In the 1990s, the Russian police suffered greatly from their country’s post-Soviet economic and political crisis. Since 2000, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev have re-funded and partially recentralized the Russian police, without rectifying either police repression or abuse.

Policing in the Soviet Union was intrusive, proactive, and ideological. The Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) carried out most law enforcement, although prosecutors investigated some major crimes (e.g. homicide), and the Committee of State Security (KGB) investigated political offences and major economic crimes (e.g. counterfeiting) (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 47). The MIA included both the *militisiia* (patrol and investigative police), as well as specialized units, including one for economic crimes. Other policing institutions included citizen auxiliaries, or *druzhinniki*, who patrolled public spaces; and Communist Party and workplace committees, who investigated professional or personal misconduct (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 52). Police also relied extensively on coerced informants, and unlike western police, recruited them from law-abiding people as well as criminals (Shelley, 1996: 122–123; Weiner and Rahi-Tamm, 2012).

The MIA also enforced repressive Soviet policies, including residence controls, in which urban citizens required permission to reside in specified locations, usually based on employment, and rural citizens required permission to move to cities at all. Soviet policing of residence entailed more profound surveillance of citizens than in comparable systems, such as the South African “pass laws” (Kessler, 2001; Light, 2010, 2012). Police also suppressed unlawful economic activity, including illegal resale of consumer goods (“speculation”) and holding a second, unofficial job. Officers’ discretionary power to investigate such ubiquitous infractions gave them additional leverage over citizens

(Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 43). Police also dispersed political demonstrations and unauthorized religious observances (Beissinger, 2002: 333).

Like military and KGB officers, police were subject to intensive political indoctrination. Yet, the MIA did not represent the Soviet elite. Most new *milititsia* recruits were young men from less privileged backgrounds, who could be easily molded. Although discipline was severe, training and oversight were rather crude. Thus, performance evaluation relied heavily on clearance rates (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 70), creating incentives to shirk difficult assignments and falsify reports. Also, officers were not trained to communicate effectively with the public, securing compliance more through coercion than persuasion (Beck and Chistyakova, 2002). However, police could not launch criminal investigations against Communist Party members without party approval, demonstrating their low rank in the political hierarchy (Shelley, 1996: 122–123). In summary, although police were not the regime's most sophisticated servants, their management of society was promoted by "high levels of social control, high rates of incarceration, and controls over personal residences" (Shelley, 2003: 118).

Both the reformist Soviet leader, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–1991), and the first president of independent Russia, Boris Yeltsin (1991–1999), encouraged open public criticism of the police. Yet, no Russian president has subjected the MIA to civilian oversight, leaving it a closed paramilitary institution formally responsible to its minister and ultimately the president (Beck and Robertson, 2005: 256). And officers still experience harsh discipline and evaluation by clearance rates (McCarthy, 2014). Moreover, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the disarray of the MIA led to changes in their political role, and new forms of police malfeasance.

The post-Soviet transition was accompanied by a severe economic crisis, a privatization process widely regarded as illegitimate, a corresponding proliferation of new forms of economic crime, and the partial fracturing of state institutions. Today's Russian police still bear the scars of these traumas. Soviet police received a living wage and subsidized housing, health care, and travel. In the 1990s, however, Russia's economy contracted severely. Rapid inflation consumed police salaries, and officers supplemented their wages with unlawful secondary employment (including private security work), or extortion from citizens (Kolennikova et al., 2004). Police also experienced deterioration of their equipment and physical plant (Beck and Robertson, 2005: 258), extreme demoralization, a mass exodus of experienced officers (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 184), and decline in new recruits' professional standards, education, and motivations (Beck and Lee, 2001; Solomon, 2005: 233). Moreover, actors such as former athletes and private security guards (including many former police) began competing with the state in providing security to businesses, a service known in Russian as *krysha* ("roof") (Varese, 2001). By the early 2000s, police and other security agencies, notably the FSB (formerly the KGB), took over the market in security, often providing immunity from both physical violence and legal prosecution (or harassment) in exchange for formal or de facto ownership of the companies they were protecting (Volkov, 2002: 124).

Police also became pawns in political conflicts within Russia's constituent regions, and between regions and the federal government. The federal government's fiscal crisis left regional governments responsible for funding many public services (Stoner-Weiss, 2001). Police became captured by regional governors, who supplemented their meager

budgets, and secured the power of appointment over regional police chiefs. And as regional politicians assumed de facto control of major businesses, they formed “politicized financial-industrial groups” that dominated Russian regional politics (Hale, 2006: 162–173). High-ranking police became supporting actors in these regional power conglomerates (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 201). Thus, regional leaders often directed police to investigate their opponents (Favarel-Garrigues, 2011: 252). In effect, centralized politicization of the police in the USSR (subordination to the national Communist Party leadership) was replaced by decentralized politicization (subordination to localized political interests).

Abuse and repression in a “competitive authoritarian” regime

Despite these problems, Russia has never experienced a breakdown in police services. Police investigate serious crime, such as human trafficking, albeit with mixed success (McCarthy, 2010). Although many citizens distrust the police, view them as brutal and corrupt, and shun them, at least some public hostility toward police derives from indirect knowledge, rather than experience (Semukhina and Reynolds, 2014: 180). Indeed, some Russians actually want *more* police service, especially from local inspectors (*uchastkovye*) (McCarthy, 2014). Thus, not all Russians are equally victimized by police abuse, and such abuse itself is highly differentiated. Granted, police corruption is clearly widespread and often public. An influential study terms the Russian police “predatory”, meaning that they abuse citizens in pursuit of private gain, not at the behest of political leaders (Gerber and Mendelson, 2008). But while “predation” represents a useful category of police abuse, in Russia, such abuse—typically bribery and extortion—results from toleration by powerful officials, in turn motivated by tacit arrangements between them and police. Thus, in Moscow, extortion (often violent) directed at migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus stems from tacit policies of regional governments, police impunity in victimizing particular marginalized groups, and the complicity of the federal government (Light, 2010).

Nor is Russian policing as systematically violent as in Brazil. Granted, citizens routinely suffer when police fail to investigate violent crimes (see Lysova and Shchitov, this issue), or prevent mass violence, as in racist pogroms (see Arnold, this issue). And overt police and military violence against citizens is widespread in Chechnya and neighboring North Caucasus regions, where a brutal counter-insurgency campaign has been raging for decades (Taylor, 2011: 277). Indeed, state violence against civilians in the North Caucasus conflict has cost tens of thousands of lives, in part through aerial bombardment of the Chechen capital, Grozny (Zuercher, 2007: 100). Thousands of additional fatalities occurred in the early 2000s in massacres by the Russian military and MIA special forces (Gilligan, 2010: 50–76), and later in politically motivated “disappearances” carried out by police and pro-government militia on behalf of the pro-Russian Chechen strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov (Gilligan, 2010: 77–97). As compared with our other two cases, post-communist Russia has thus experienced more extreme *political* violence against civilians by state agencies, including some units of the MIA.

Like Arnold (this issue), we thus face the problem of categorizing violence in a society experiencing a low-intensity conflict. Although Russian state violence in the North

Caucasus clearly represents a major human rights violation, it does not reflect routine policing practices, since elsewhere in Russia, police violence does not take on a mass character. Also, the role of the police in everyday political repression has diminished since the fall of the USSR. Although police and other agencies harass troublesome non-governmental organizations (Blitt, 2008), and investigate major regime opponents for political reasons (Hendley, 2009), President Putin does not regiment society as totally as the Soviet regime did, or silence all public dissent (Sakwa, 2011: 50–51). In short, Russia is not a “police state”, in which police control all aspects of citizens’ lives or conduct systematic surveillance of the whole population.

Recentralization and refunding

In the 2000s, President Putin and his lieutenant, Dmitri Medvedev (president from 2008 to 2012, between Putin’s second and third terms) implemented extensive refunding and partial recentralization of the MIA. In particular, Putin has effectively curbed regional politicians (Stoner-Weiss, 2006), and has wrested control over MIA appointments and funding from regional governors, as well as substantially increasing the number of MIA staff (Taylor, 2011: 47). Police salaries have also risen substantially, doubling between 2004 and 2008 alone (Taylor, 2011: 195). Reforms under Medvedev included a “re-attestation”, in which senior police officers were to be reviewed and dismissed if incompetent or corrupt. Yet, “re-attestation” has not removed many bad apples, and indeed may have been largely for show (Taylor, 2014). Also, Putin has neither rectified severe abuses of citizens, nor addressed nepotism in senior appointments, unmotivated and cynical recruits, and high turnover (Taylor, 2011: 193, 198). Perhaps Putin cannot seriously attack police corruption, as police since the 1990s have viewed illicit income sources as a major component of their compensation.¹

Moreover, Putin may not be able to rely on the loyalty of the police. In 2011 and 2012, following rigged parliamentary and presidential elections, Moscow experienced the largest protests in more than a decade. For the first time, Putin ordered a massive police deployment in the capital. Although the police remained loyal then, they may not always do so. First, Putin now faces more widespread opposition, as many Russians identify him with election-rigging and opposition to reform (Sakwa, 2011: 324–325, 364). And as the abandonment by the Ukrainian police of President Victor Yanukovych in early 2014 suggests, authoritarian leaders cannot always rely on a mercenary police force for backing in the face of mass protests or elite defections (for other examples, see also Levitsky and Way, 2010: 222–226).

In conclusion, Putin has strengthened a post-Soviet police force, not recreated the Soviet police. Although contemporary Russian police are available for political capture by President Putin and regional executives, they do not serve a centralized, hegemonic political organization, such as the Soviet Communist Party. Also, the Russian police do not fully envelop society as Soviet police did. However, police abuse and disengagement remain chronic. With the notable exception of the Baltic republics and Georgia (Light, 2013, 2014), most of these statements about Russian police apply elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. However, they also distinguish Russia from the two other cases we examine.

Part 3. Democratization and systematic police violence in Brazil

The failure of civilianization

Brazil's 1964 military coup ushered in a 20-year dictatorship. In 1985, a peaceful democratic transition began, culminating in a new constitution in 1988. Yet, police violence has actually risen since democratization (Pereira and Ungar, 2004; Pinheiro, 2002). Why? As we argue, Brazil's democratic transition actually enhanced police autonomy from political leaders. This autonomy, combined with severe inequities in Brazilian society, potentiates police abuse.

Brazil has multiple police forces controlled by the federal and state governments. The federal police investigate federal crimes, such as drug trafficking and smuggling. Each state has a military police and a civil police, which have respectively preventive (patrolling) and investigative functions. While federal police report to the Ministry of Justice, state military police report both to a civilian body, the Office of Public Security; and to the military. Military authority over police dates to a 1969 decree of the military junta, assigning the army to marshal all state military police forces in the fight against communism. The dictatorship also used police for political investigations, as well as violence, torture, and executions of opponents (Fico, 2001). Military control reinforced police agencies' rigid internal hierarchies and militarized training (Pedroso, 2005).

The 1988 constitution preserved subordination of military police to the army, merely adding the civilian oversight structures described above. Moreover, no other major police reform has been implemented since 1985 (Choukr, 2004), and a 1979 amnesty law even barred disclosure of police files and prosecutions for crimes of the military regime (Silva Filho, 2011). Thus, today, neither civilian nor military institutions exercise effective control over military police (Prado et al., 2012). Moreover, Brazil has not instituted strong police accountability. Police ombudsmen lack enforcement power, and internal affairs departments lack independence. Appointments to regulatory bodies and ombudsman offices are frequently made by patronage (Lemgruber et al., 2003). Internal investigations rarely result in serious punishment (Cabral et al., 2008). Thus, Brazil's police are more unchecked by any external actor than Russia's or China's.

Police abuse in Brazil's war on crime

Brazilian police engage in mass torture and extrajudicial killings. Human Rights Watch (2009) estimates that between 2003 and 2009, police in two states (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) killed 11,000 people. Rio de Janeiro alone recorded a record 1300 police killings in 2008 (Institute of Public Security, 2008). These are very high numbers even compared to other countries with relatively high crime rates, such as South Africa (468 contact killings, i.e. police killings of civilians in 2008) and the United States (371 killings). Brazil's rate of police killings per capita is also high in the international context, although there is variation between states. In Rio de Janeiro, the police killed 6.86 people per 100,000 inhabitants in 2008, whereas in São Paulo, the rate was 0.97, comparable to South Africa (0.96). In the United States, in contrast, the rate was 0.12 (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Most of the victims are young black or mixed-race males from poor neighborhoods, which is also the profile of the vast majority of people convicted of crimes in Brazil. According to forensic studies, police often falsify the circumstances of contact killings (Cano, 1997), up to 70 percent of which may result from unlawful police violence (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Many cases are not investigated, let alone prosecuted, and those that reach the courts rarely result in convictions (Brinks, 2008).

In effect, Brazilian police have become an uncontrollable institution (Prado et al., 2012). But while police in some Latin American countries, such as Mexico, engage in rights violations for corrupt goals, Brazilian police typically do so in pursuit of their all-out war on criminals, popularly known as *mano dura*, or “firm hand”. This agenda stems from Latin America’s heritage of authoritarian rule, in which regime opponents and criminals were both identified as enemies (Chevigny, 1999: 49). There is also popular support for such “noble cause” misconduct. Insecurity consistently ranks as the leading concern of Latin Americans (Ungar, 2008: 2). Many citizens and police themselves prefer to maintain order through brutality rather than through due process (Caldeira, 2002).

Are Brazilian police more “abusive” than Russian police? On balance, we would say, yes. To be sure, as we noted above, police violence in Russia is a serious problem. However, in contrast to Brazil, Russian police violence is: (1) typically incidental to other activities, rather than motivated by the desire to exterminate criminals; and (2) except in the North Caucasus, not on a massive scale. Although Russian police, or criminals linked to them, occasionally perpetrate massacres, these typically involve corruption, as in a notorious 2010 slaughter in a southern Russian village that ultimately led the Kremlin to dismiss the regional police chief.² Moreover, massacres are not daily features of Russian policing. Thus, Russian police exhibit both a basic subordination to executive authority, and a lack of the bloodlust that leads to mass police violence in Brazil. In consequence, if one designates pervasive violence rather than pervasive corruption as the most extreme manifestation of police abuse, then Brazilian police are indeed somewhat more abusive than Russian police. Of course, even this statement requires caution, both because it reflects subjective normative priorities, and because both countries feature *both* police violence and corruption.

Prospects for police reform: Democratization’s late harvest?

As Brazilian democracy enters its third decade, police reform has become a subject of intense debate, yet it still faces political obstacles. As in Russia, corrupt regional oligarchies prefer their police to lack credibility and resources for effective investigations that could target them (Leeds, 2007). In addition, public security agencies are staffed by political appointees, leading to a focus on short-term results and discontinuity of policies (Leeds, 2007; Pereira, 2008). Wealthier Brazilians, faced with high crime and ineffective public police, increasingly rely on private security services (Organization of American States, 2012). They thus are reluctant to underwrite public police services through taxes. Because of these obstacles, Brazil has witnessed mostly piecemeal reforms in response to crises (Leeds, 2007).

Nevertheless, more comprehensive reforms may be emerging. In 1998, a National Secretariat for Public Security (SENASP) was established to coordinate public security

policies among Brazil's 26 states and the Federal District, and finance training and crime prevention programs by state and municipal governments, although some of these projects have been stymied by conflicts between federal, state, and local governments (Pereira, 2008). A further innovation is the so-called *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*, or Pacification Police Units (UPP), initiated in Rio de Janeiro in 2008. The UPP project aims to reclaim shantytowns (known as *favelas*) from criminal organizations (Cano et al., 2012; Denyer Willis and Prado, 2014). In addition, the Rio Office of Public Security was given extensive autonomy, reducing political interference in reforms and overcoming the problem of discontinuity (Ferreira, 2011: 302; Pereira, 2008). The UPPs have achieved a 70 percent drop in homicides and zero killings by police in UPP communities (Cano et al., 2012); the elimination of armed bands; and greater police popularity (Suska, 2011). However, in summer 2013, police violence against protesters in street demonstrations elicited renewed calls to remove state military police from the control of the army, and merge them with the civil police. Congress is considering constitutional amendments to effect these changes.

In contrast to Russia, the current push for reform in Brazil reflects an increasingly active civil society. Since the 1990s, Brazilian academics and non-governmental organizations have begun collaborating with the police in reform proposals (Leeds, 2007). Both these factors were involved in the UPP project (Ferreira, 2011: 301–302). These trends suggest that as a democracy matures, it develops social resources for police reform that an authoritarian regime or even transitional democracy does not possess.

Part 4. The political salience of police in post-Mao China

Upgrading a communist police force

Unlike the Soviet Union, China survived the socialist Armageddon of 1989–1991. And the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has strengthened and modernized the police and deployed them to manage an increasingly restive society. Yet, the same political institutions that facilitate police repression also limit police abuse.

On the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Mao Zedong established a new public security system on a largely Soviet model. Most personnel were directly transferred from the military (Zhu, 2007). Mao's policing system is highly decentralized and characterized by "dual leadership" of the CCP and police hierarchies (Tanner and Green, 2007: 652). In fact, party control is stronger than police control. Whereas higher-level police bodies can only issue recommendations to police bureaus at a lower level, party committees at each territorial level can issue binding orders to police at the same level. Moreover, party committees' organizational, personnel, and financial authority over local police units encourages local police to obey their local Party and government, rather than their public security superiors, or even the national leadership (Tanner and Green, 2007: 648). In addition, separate from the "public security" police, Mao also established the "People's Armed Police" (PAP), a semi-military institution, tasked with eliminating threats to state security, safeguarding important officials, and aiding the military during foreign invasion. Although the PAP and public security hierarchies are formally separate, in most regions their leaderships overlap.

Since Mao's death (1976), police have played an increasingly important role in keeping the CCP in power. First, the number of Chinese police is rising. In 1986, there were 600,000 officers. This figure climbed to 1,600,000 in 2006—a growth rate of 166.7 percent, eight times the rate of population growth (“China to unify police identity card from Jan. 1”, 2007). Second, in the last 20 years, the CCP has incorporated provincial police chiefs into core decision-making institutions. In each level of government, the CCP has established a “leadership team” that includes major CCP and government leaders. In each province, the leadership team includes all CCP standing committee members and government CCP group members. Public security chiefs of provinces do not formally hold this status. However, over the last two decades, most provincial public security chiefs have become de facto provincial-level leaders and serve in their provincial leadership team (Wang, 2014).

Membership in the leadership team gives provincial public security chiefs a higher bureaucratic rank, entitling them to extensive benefits, such as VIP rooms in hospitals, first-class air travel, bodyguards, better pension and health-care benefits, and higher salaries. Leadership team members also have access to classified information and a stronger voice in the decision-making process. Most important meetings on budgeting, security, economic planning, law making, personnel decisions, and urban planning include only leadership team members. Including public security chiefs in the leadership team was an informal rule until 2003, when the CCP central committee made it explicit (“CCP's Central Committee's decision to further strengthen and improve security work”, 2003). And the CCP's order also makes very clear Beijing's motivation:

Western powers never give up westernizing and sabotaging our country ... At present, we are at a critical stage of reforms, some deep contradictions constantly emerge, criminal offenses and economic crimes are detrimental, mass incidents and emergent events are affecting social stability, the problem of the Internet influencing stability looms large. To maintain social stability in this strategic stage is a daunting task that is extremely important. (“CCP's Central Committee's decision to further strengthen and improve security work”, 2003)

Wang (2014) constructed a Chinese Legal Leaders Database (CLLD), which includes biographies of provincial police chiefs from 1992 to 2012. The CLLD reveals that most provincial police chiefs belong to the leadership team, and the proportion has risen rapidly in recent years. Even in 2005, over half of the provincial police chiefs were already members in the leadership team; by 2012, this figure had risen to over 90 percent. In addition, provincial public security bureaus supervised by leadership team members receive more funding than bureaus led by non-members. This further ensures that the coercive organization will obey the CCP leadership in the face of rebellions (Wang, 2015).

In short, the CCP has increased police staffing and upgraded the political status of regional police chiefs. As we argue below, these policies promote political repression.

Systematic police repression, but (probably) less abuse

As in the Soviet Union, the Chinese police are responsible for “everyday forms of social management”: monitoring local residents and Internet users, governing internal migration

and “family registration”, reporting early signs of unrest, spying on political dissidents, controlling small protests, and suppressing large protests.

The Chinese police manage the so-called “family registration system” (*hukou*). As Cheng and Selden (1994) describe, the *hukou* system (like Soviet migration controls) regulates where citizens may live and work. Through *hukou* registration, police manage internal migration, regulate citizens’ legal and social rights, and conduct surveillance. Police even monitor short-term travel through registration of visitors at local sub-stations (Cheng and Selden, 1994). As in the USSR, these police powers are tools against political opposition, and thus qualify as “repression”.

Police also prevent small-scale protests from escalating into large-scale revolts. In recent years, the PAP have restored order following large-scale disorders, as in the 2008 Tibet unrest and 2009 riots in Xinjiang province. The public security police, in contrast, manage small-scale protests and prevent them from escalating. Wang (2014: 628) cites remarks by a local public security chief, explaining his strategy for quashing protests: “In most cases, mass incidents develop from legitimate troublemaking to illegitimate troublemaking and then to street demonstrations. For legitimate troublemaking, we primarily rely on persuasion, education, and problem-solving. For illegitimate troublemaking, we crack down decisively.” Because police effectively suppress small protests before they escalate, few massive demonstrations in the last 20 years have targeted the national government, or spilled over from one locality into another.

However, the number of “mass incidents” skyrocketed around the turn of the century, from about 8700 in 1993, to 32,000 in 1999, to about 50,000 in 2002, and over 58,000 in 2003 (Tanner, 2005). Recent literature on resistance in China has focused on social protests’ “stabilizing” effects, suggesting that “rightful resistance” or “regularized protests” serve as a “safety valve” to strengthen CCP rule (Lorentzen, 2013; O’Brien and Li, 2006). Yet, while local police tolerate moderate protests that release discontent, they face strong incentives to prevent large protests. First, a leader who presides over a large-scale protest risks the end of his or her career (Guo, 2009; Landry, 2008; Shih et al., 2012; Wang and Minzner, 2015; Whiting, 2004). Second, as we noted, regional CCP committees strongly influence public security bureaus through their appointment and budgeting powers (Tanner and Green, 2007: 657). Moreover, local governments (not the central government) also control the budgets of local public security bureaus, giving local police further reason to heed their local masters (Tanner and Green, 2007: 657).

Chinese police have also developed new techniques for containing dissent. Granted, police are not always effective against protests. Some poorly funded police departments cannot crack down on protestors before they take to the streets (Kang, 2003). In addition, heavy-handed police crackdowns sometimes stimulate further protest (O’Brien and Deng, forthcoming). In contrast, successful coercion requires skills and experience, as Wang’s (2014: 629) interview with a local public security chief illustrates:

We divided the police into three teams. The first team is secret police. They were disguised as normal villagers and dispatched to the villages to communicate with protest leaders. The second is the propaganda team. They were sent to the villages to publicize the Party’s policies. The third team is the “liars.” They were sent to the villages to spread rumors that if they stopped protesting, the government would soon solve their problems. This plan worked very well. The villagers who were planning on protesting were all settled.

In addition, when popular action occurs, police identify protesters' relatives, friends, and fellow townspeople, and pressure them (often with threats) to persuade protesters to stand down. Such "relational repression" can help demobilize protesters and halt popular action (Deng and O'Brien, 2013).

Thus, in China, everyday police repression does not primarily involve massive force, but rather pervasive surveillance, infiltration, and undercover operations. We thus consider Chinese police more routinely repressive than their Russian peers. Granted, both Russian and Chinese police have perpetrated political violence in recent decades, and Russian police (broadly defined) may have actually killed more civilians for political reasons than their Chinese peers: again, the civilian death toll of the North Caucasus insurgency is relevant on this point, although police are only one of the actors involved in political killings there. However, our goal is not to quantify the total rights abuses committed by the Chinese and Russian governments, but to understand law enforcement in these two post-transitional societies. Following Levisky and Way (2010: 57–58), we thus distinguish between "high-intensity repression", that is, politically motivated mass violence perpetrated by state agencies including but not limited to police (as in a civil war); and "low-intensity repression", that is, routine management of citizens' political activities, a distinct phenomenon that is more closely associated with police forces as institutions and policing as an activity. While Russia may be "ahead" on the former criterion, China is clearly "ahead" on the latter.

Moreover, although there are numerous studies of routine police repression in China, "[t]here is very little public information on police abuse of power in the PRC and still less information bearing upon the nature, prevalence, and cause of police abuses" (Wong, 1998: 88). A statute, the People's Procuracy Organic Law, empowers the procuracy to investigate legal violations by the police. According to Wong (1998), for a short period in which data are available (1987–1991), most such investigation of police abuse concerned detention violations. Wong (1998: 91) also noted an increase in illegal arrests and detention from 1979 to 1985. There are a few attested cases of official responses to police abuse, as in the 2013 abolition of "re-education through labor", a punishment for minor offences that the police administered and were accused of abusing (Barnett and Duvall, 2005). However, data are too scarce to make confident statements about the prevalence of routine police abuse, such as unauthorized violence and graft. The lack of studies may reflect the difficulty of such research in China, a more closed and regimented society than Brazil or Russia. Still, anecdotal evidence also suggests that Chinese police are indeed more disciplined than their counterparts in those countries.

Granted, there is clearly police abuse in China. Yet, the limited available evidence suggests it primarily involves elite corruption and official ties with organized crime, rather than day-to-day policing abuses by line officers against most citizens. Thus, according to Varese (2011), since the 1980s, Mafia from Hong Kong and Taiwan have moved to the PRC. However, they cannot offer generalized protection, because corrupt police and other officials already offer protection for both legal and illegal businesses. Nonetheless, such high-level corruption is distinct both from the pervasive bribery and extortion observed in Russia, and from the mass police violence observed in Brazil. Thus, although further research is clearly required, so far it appears that

rank-and-file Chinese police are kept on a tighter leash than their Russian and Brazilian counterparts, at least in their routine dealings with citizens. We also think it likely that increasing CCP supervision of police has caused some decline in police abuse in recent decades, although documenting such a trend likewise requires further research.

To conclude, in the face of rising protests from society, the CCP has facilitated repression by empowering its coercive agencies. For high-ranking police, the result is higher status and more political influence than they ever enjoyed under Mao. In a paradoxical result, citizens are now more systematically “policed”, even as Chinese society becomes more affluent and pluralistic. Thus, of our three cases, China is closest to being a genuine “police state”. Yet, such enhanced police repression has not resulted in large-scale police violence as in Brazil, or “predatory policing” as in Russia.

Part 5. Ambiguities of transition

Interpreting our results

In Table 1, we summarize our findings, identifying two key components of the transition (trajectory and process), as well as observed police outcomes.

Table 1. Summary of results for each case.

	Components of transition		Consequences for police after transition			
	Transition trajectory (origin and outcome)	Major features of transition process	Institutional checks on police	Police relationship to regime	Professional ethos of police	Police repression and abuse
Russia	From communist state to “competitive authoritarian” regime	Decay of police during 1990s economic and fiscal collapse	Moderate and fragmented (regional and federal politicians)	Partially autonomous but subject to political capture	Self-serving, cynical	Targeted repression for regime maintenance, systemic “predatory” corruption and related violence
Brazil	From capitalist military dictatorship to capitalist democracy	Police institutions largely unaffected	Weak	Highly autonomous	Crime control ideology, war mentality	Little repression, but mass violence linked to war on crime
China	Economic liberalization within communist state	Police institutions reinforced	Strong and coordinated (Communist Party)	Subordinate, politically integrated	Loyal servants of the regime	Systematic repression, but less abuse

We analyze each transition as a sequence of interrelated components. Table 1 can be read from left to right, indicating an unfolding process of transition in society and the police. We interpret the two parameters of primary interest to us—repression

and abuse—as ultimate consequences of this complex chain reaction. In particular, the contrasting policing outcomes in our three cases reflect political oversight mechanisms created by the transition. We suggest that at least as much attention needs to be paid to the “transition process” (“how”) as to the “transition outcome” (“what”). We also consider whether policing evolution in transitions can actually be planned and directed, and comment on the international distinctiveness of policing in the post-Soviet transition.

Post-transition political outcomes and policing evolution

Our review of policing in Brazil suggests two main consequences for policing that result from transition to democracy *qua* democracy. Brazil’s successful democratic transition has virtually ended police repression of political opponents. This outcome is the direct result of the transition itself, in which the military permitted opposition parties to compete for and win power. Thus, Brazil perfectly illustrates the distinctive role of police in a liberal state. They are not (systematically) used to prevent alternation of power between parties, or engage in violence against opposition leaders. Yet, Brazil also shows that democratic institutions do not prevent extreme violence against subalterns, as of course is true even in industrialized democracies.

Nonetheless, civil society groups have now placed police abuse on the political agenda and some reforms have been enacted. We hypothesize that democratic transition permits the strengthening—albeit, slowly and incrementally—of a mobilized civil society that can organize against police abuses. Indeed, it would be surprising to see this bottom-up reform trajectory in any authoritarian state. Only a democratic polity permits open discussion of sensitive issues, and a concerted campaign for legislative change. In Medvedev’s Russia, although citizens’ anger at police abuse may have helped motivate the Kremlin’s reforms, the top-down management and meager results of Medvedev’s reforms suggest that genuinely addressing police abuse was not possible, or not intended. The official silence over police abuse in China suggests that in its more closed authoritarian regime, debate about police misconduct is even more constrained.

Comparison of China with Brazil and Russia also suggests (unsurprisingly) that closed authoritarian regimes feature the most systematic use of police for political repression. Yet, China’s institutions also limit certain kinds of police abuse. In particular, the increasing sophistication of Chinese police responses to protests results from decisions of higher-level officials, in turn reflecting ongoing supervision of police by regional party officials, whose main interest is regime stability. Such supervision constrains police violence during the suppression of protests, and evidently limits at least some other forms of everyday police abuse. Thus, neither democracies nor authoritarian regimes generate inherently more abusive police forces across the board. Indeed, we hypothesize that systematic police repression is *inversely* correlated with corruption and brutality, whether because a regime that aspires to repress dissent as thoroughly as China’s cannot afford to *provoke* dissent through grossly undisciplined police; or perhaps simply because the establishment of efficient police to repress dissent creates a broadly disciplined police force as a kind of unintended side-effect; or for both these reasons. In contrast, although this may also have been true of the Soviet Union, it clearly is not true of contemporary Russia.³

Process, agency, and the distinctiveness of post-Soviet police

As we have argued, democratic Brazil's anarchic, highly violent police resulted not from the institutional transition from a military junta to democratically elected national leaders, but from the persistence of repressive practices from the military dictatorship. This persistence was partly influenced by the continuing institutional affiliation of the police with the military, but was also driven by the absence of effective accountability mechanisms and civilian oversight. These institutional features of Brazil set it apart even from other similar post-authoritarian capitalist states with extreme poverty and crime, such as South Africa, which does not feature equally extreme police violence. We hypothesize that the greater institutional autonomy of Brazil's police force is the proximate cause of their extreme violence.

Likewise, post-Soviet Russia's often demoralized and cynical police emerged not from the fall of the Communist Party per se, but from the accompanying economic and fiscal crisis, and its institutional consequences. Our findings thus imply a form of path dependency. That is, effects of transitional processes on policing may be enduring, and in turn influence the development of the political system as a whole. In Russia, the agony of post-Soviet police made them ripe for cooptation by regional and national political leaders. President Putin is unlikely to alter this important building block of his regime—not because it is “authoritarian”, but because it is part of Russia's “informal” system of rule; see Kosals and Maksimova, this issue.

In contrast, China represents our only case of a planned transformation of police. Yet, it also demonstrates paradoxically that changes in policing may actually counteract a major social transformation rather than track it. Indeed, despite the Soviet collapse, China's experience shows that it is possible to preserve a communist police state. We also suspect that only an intact authoritarian regime could restructure its police as smoothly as China did. In contrast, Brazil and Russia indicate that police restructuring in most transitional regimes, and perhaps even in mature democracies, is unlikely to be so concerted, whether because of compromises between old and new regimes that constrain reform (Brazil), or because of an ambient crisis that limits state capacity altogether (Russia).

Indeed, if police in China experienced planned policing evolution, and police in Brazil experienced institutional drift following a political transition that left police work and institutions largely unchanged, police in transitional Russia undoubtedly experienced the most destructive transformation. Whereas Chinese police were “managed” in their transition, and Brazilian police were “left alone” in theirs, Russian and other post-Soviet police were essentially “abandoned”. This initial abandonment has had serious long-term consequences. Granted, the Russian police retained important features of their Soviet past, including their paramilitary structure, and subservience to political authority. And of course, extortion, violence, and improper collusion with powerful officials are not unique to the Russian police. Nonetheless, their post-Soviet role as the enforcement arm of regional and federal chief executives has created a specific form of police abuse, in which police exploit their political power to prey on citizens, substantially blurring the lines between our parameters of “abuse” and “repression”. Figure 1 depicts these contrasts in pictorial form.⁴

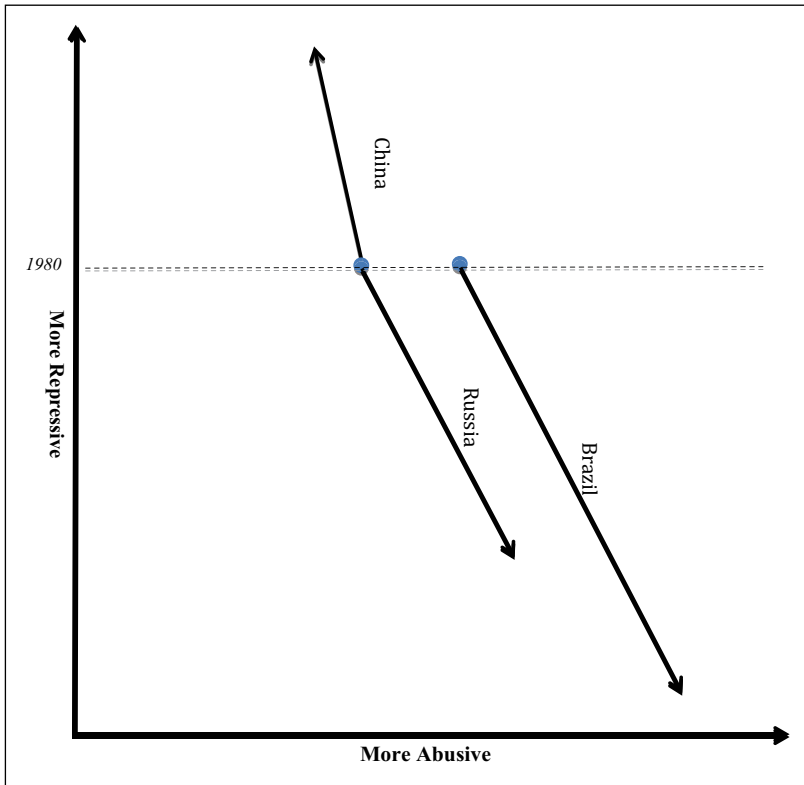


Figure 1. Dynamics of repression and abuse in Russian, Brazilian, and Chinese police since 1980.

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of police in our three cases on two parameters, abuse and repression, since the onset of transition (which for simplicity we set at 1980). China and Brazil now represent opposite poles, with China near the top of the “repression” axis, and Brazil on the far right of the “abuse” axis. The defects of Brazilian and Chinese policing thus could not be more distinct. In contrast, despite sharing a starting point with China, Russia has meandered downward and to the right, and is now lodged somewhere in the middle. This image captures the negative stasis in which Russian law enforcement has settled. Russian police benefit neither from mechanisms that limit repression in democracies, nor from those that limit abuse in more systematically repressive authoritarian regimes.

Notes

1. Leonid Kosals, personal communication to first author.
2. See <http://www.themoscownews.com/russia/20101206/188259583.html>.
3. As a corollary, a highly abusive police force may be too undisciplined to constitute an effective instrument of repression, as in early post-Soviet Georgia (Way and Levitsky, 2006).

4. We thank Leonid Kosals for helpful discussions and Julius Haag for designing the graphic that appears in this article as Figure 1.

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