SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE ROAD AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Paulo Antônio de Moraes PAULA
Military Police of Minas Gerais
E-mail: paulocegesp2018@gmail.com

João Luiz da Matta FELISBERTO
Military Police of Minas Gerais, Pedro Leopoldo University
E-mail: jlmfelisberto@gmail.com.br
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7917-6919

Abstract. *Under the aegis of social control theory, this work aims to identify the main differences between police pursuits of vehicles on highways and urban roads. The perceptions of military road police officers in Minas Gerais about the characteristics of vehicle chase occurrences are used, identifying the main differences between vehicle pursuits on highways and in urban areas. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using statistical tools and content analysis. Among the differences between the pursuit of vehicles in the urban area and on the highways, 6 (six) of them make up a total of 68% of the total differences that emerged. These 6 (six) main differences are as follows: a) vehicle speed; b) characteristics of the roads; c) onlookers – presence of people on the roads; d) risk of accidents; e) characteristics of the siege and blockade operations; f) difficulties in communications.*

Keywords: *Social control. Police chase. Public security. Public order. Public Management.*

Introduction

Violent crime and public insecurity are two of the main points of distress for Brazilians (Nóbrega Júnior, 2018). In any case, the State reform boosted the development of the modern conception of public security, which is substantiated in managerial ideas supported in conflict resolution through the mediation between coercion and consensus (Veiga and Souza, 2018). Nevertheless, Molina (2002) points out that these deviant behaviors are repressed through the so-called social control, which aims to align behaviors, actions and acts with established norms, forming, in society, majority currents. This same author adds that social control is made up of a complex of institutions, strategies and social sanctions with the aim of submitting individuals to current standards and norms.

Hamelin and Spenlehauer (2006) conclude that the police force is the one who can regularly perform social control for law enforcement. In any case, despite being present in our social daily life, the Police have been the object of scientific research only in the last fifty years, as highlighted by Carvalho (2011). In this perspective, studying this Institution and its activities, characteristics and articulations is always presented as a great challenge in contemporary societies.

Thus, the idea of social control is multifaceted and seen in different ways depending on who approaches the subject. Regardless of the type of society, there will always be a demand for a certain type of social control that allows life in society based on norms and, consequently, punishments, in order to guarantee mutual respect, social interaction, obedience to a minimum ethical standard of sociability, and the coexistence between the different ones (Wacquant, 2002).

Despite this idea, there are some points that are general in almost all the definitions presented by different scholars. The main one is precisely the exercise and monopoly of force by the police, as a peculiar element in relation to any other professional activity or institutional branch of the State (Mello, 2018). In this scenario, the fundamental element of police activity emerges, namely, the maintenance of peace and public order, so that dealing with conflict is at the heart of police work (Goldstein, 2003).

From the above, it is abstracted that the police is one of the instruments of social control available to the State, which is responsible for maintaining public order, the safety of individuals and public and private property. In this light, police pursuits on urban roads and highways emerge, an act in which the agent in charge of law enforcement goes after a citizen who has disobeyed a legal order, fleeing the scene. However, based on the theory of social control, the police will use the techniques and tactics they have to stop the flight, approach the transgressor, identify him and, if necessary, arrest him.

Thus, based on the social control theory, this work aims to identify the main differences between police pursuits of vehicles in road and urban environments. In order to do so, it uses the analysis of the perceptions of military road police officers in Minas Gerais about the characteristics of vehicle chase occurrences, identifying the main differences between vehicle pursuits on highways and in urban areas.

Materials and methods

Applied to the 1.206 (one thousand two hundred and six) individuals (military road police officers of Minas Gerais - Brazil), the data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire, with 19 (nineteen) sequential questions, among which 17 (seventeen) were objective and the other two were subjective (disserative), capable of gathering the perceptions of the individuals surveyed in relation to the objectives of the study. Among the questionnaires answered, 857 (eight hundred and fifty-seven) were considered valid (71.06%). Based on the population fraction of each military police officer surveyed, a proportional stratified random sample was selected.

Immediately afterwards, the aforementioned sample was dimensioned with an α error of 0.05 and a power of 85% (β error of 0.15), assuming as an important factor (which should be preserved in the sample) the approximate percentage of soldiers who responded to the original questionnaire and who felt able to act in vehicle pursuit incidents. The MINITAB-18 program was used and the value for the sample size (n) was equal to 208 questionnaires, among which the stocking fractions had the same percentage values as all the questionnaires validly answered.

Quantitative approach

The answers to the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, medians and standard deviation) and the Wilson's Method statistical tool. The fact that the interviewee had participated, at some point in his career, in a police vehicle chase (technical aptitude variable) was chosen as a preponderant factor for the statistical analyses. This variable presented, in the research population (857 individuals), the dimension of 28%. In this treadmill, applying the Wilson's Method tool (0.25 to 0.31), establishing the confidence level at 95%, the value of 29.81% emerges in the sample. In this scenario, a perfect representativeness of the chosen proportional stratified random sample is confirmed, so that, statistically, the observed value is within the estimated confidence interval.

In a descriptive analysis about the specification of the characteristics considered different between the police pursuit of vehicles in the urban area and on the highways, each answer was replaced by one or more "key words" that meant the written text. These were then collected, coded and the frequency of repetitions of each one of them was observed. Table 1, inserted below, summarizes the set of keywords, code and their respective frequencies.

Table 1. Characteristics judged to be different between police pursuit of vehicles in urban areas and on highways.
Source: Made by the authors from the research carried out.

N	KEYWORD	FREQUENCY
1	Access to side roads	2
2	Motorcycle support	1
3	Support from other sectors	11
4	Attention from users	1
5	Characteristics of the approach	8
6	Characteristics of the roads	32
7	Vehicle characteristics	5
8	Siege and blockade	15
9	Traffic control	1
10	Accreditation for emergency vehicles	1
11	Curious - people on the road	30
12	Support delay	11
13	Communication difficulty	13
14	Firearm shooting	2
15	Distance from the city	1
16	Duration of pursuit	1
17	Effective of the fraction	3
18	Roads and shortcuts	11
19	Driver experience	3
20	Ease of follow-up	1
21	Vehicle flow	8
22	Vehicle braking	1

23	Legislation	1
24	Place to approach	4
25	Ways to neutralize the fugitive	3
26	Radio network	4
27	Accident risk	20
28	Accident risk - security of military police	1
29	Response time	1
30	Specific training	1
31	Vehicle speed	77

Qualitative approach

The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis technique, divided into stages, namely: 1) pre-analysis, 2) material exploration and 3) treatment of results, inference and interpretation. With the support of the NVivo 11 Plus software, the collected data were tabulated (systematized) in order to facilitate the interpretation / understanding of the information, giving more validity and reliability to the analyses, interpretations and inferences of this study (Felisberto and Pardini, 2022). Continuous act, as pointed out by Zermiani *et al*. (2021), the collective subject discourse was elaborated.

In order to obtain the "Collective Subject Discourse", as Lefèvre and Lefèvre (2014) call it, the raw discourses were initially submitted to an analytical work through the selection of the main central ideas and/or anchors present in each of the individual speeches as well as in all of them together. In this scenario, it was possible to obtain everyone's speech as if it were one. The data of the discursive questions were tabulated from the reading of the researched individuals' speeches and the identification of a word, a concept or expression that revealed the essence of the meaning of each answer. Therefore, what was called "unit of analysis" was obtained.

Having found the appropriate expressions or words that denote the statements collected (units of analysis), the categories were established. In the categorization, the grouping of discourses was classificatory, an essential condition for the production of knowledge or understanding through the elimination of individual variability not relevant to the researched phenomenon. Then, what came into being was the name or title of the class, with no empirical discourses from then on. The category came to exist in its place (Lefèvre and Lefèvre, 2014). In this approach, the discourse of the collective subject provided the work with the following category: differences between police pursuit of vehicles in urban areas and on highways. The units of analysis that translated the category in question were: (a) speed of the fleeing vehicle; (b) characteristics of the roads; (c) onlookers – people on the roads; (d) risk of accidents; (e) siege and blockade; and (f) communication.

It is important to highlight that 65% of the respondents had over 5 (five) years in the road policing activity, so it appears that the population surveyed has sufficient knowledge to provide credibility and practical reliability for the conclusions resulting from the research. Additionally,

96% have already participated in vehicle pursuit incidents, so it is inferred that the discussions about the results of this work are of trust and legitimacy, since the knowledge extracted from the present study has its genesis in a population that already experienced, in practice, social control through the activity of police pursuit of vehicles, central object of this study.

Discussion

Police pursuit is the moment when, on their own initiative or by request, police officers undertake to accompany a suspected individual or perpetrator of a crime. In any case, it is certain that the flight of a citizen occurs for various reasons, and can only be verified, in most cases, after the suspect is approached. On the other hand, the duty to pursue is inherent to the police function, as it is a presumably legitimate, self-executable and imperative administrative act (Carlos, 2018).

Quantitative aspects

The Table 2 presents the frequency (individual and relative) of the main characteristics that emerged between police pursuits on highways and urban roads. It appears that the main difference is the speed of the vehicles – 28%. Furthermore, the 6 (six) main differences between the pursuit of vehicles in the urban area and the pursuit of vehicles on the highways, as an instrument of social control, make up 68% of all the differences mentioned.

Table 2. Main characteristics judged to be different between chasing vehicles in urban areas and on highways - keywords and frequency.
Source: Made by the authors from the research carried out.

N	KEYWORD	FREQUENCY	
		Absolute	**Relative**
1	Vehicle speed	77	28%
2	Characteristics of the roads	32	12%
3	Curious - people on the road	30	11%
4	Accident risk	20	7%
5	Siege and blockade	15	5%
6	Communication	13	5%

Qualitative aspects

The interpretation developed was based on the category "differences between police pursuit of vehicles in urban areas and on highways", which emerged from the data analysis technique used. From this category, the units of analysis were: (a) speed of the fleeing vehicle; (b) characteristics of the roads; (c) onlookers – people on the roads; (d) risk of accidents; (e) siege and blockade; and (f) communication. Thus, the main differences between police pursuits

of vehicles that occur on highways and those that occur on urban roads, a tool of social control by the police, were revealed.

a) Runaway vehicle speed

The police pursuit begins in situations in which the driver of a certain vehicle does not respect the stop order issued by the police officer. In any case, it is essential that the police assess the cost-effectiveness of their conduct/decisions, as it is notorious that the lawbreaker on the run does not care about road safety and prints excessive speed in order to avoid legal responsibility. of his deviant act eventually performed. It was evidenced that on highways, when on the run, the speed that the lawbreaker prints is higher than when the escape occurs on urban roads, which is a factor that differentiates police pursuits in the aforementioned scenarios. The extracts below corroborate the assertion presented.

> [...] the average speeds developed on highways are higher compared to the urban perimeter [...] (Interview 113).

> [...] due to the high speed that runaway vehicles print on the highway is much higher than on the streets, most of the time our vehicles are forced to use speeds higher than those provided for in the corporation's manuals [...] (Interview 230).

> [...] vehicle speed on the highway is higher than in urban areas, the distance and duration of a pursuit may be greater because on the highway there are fewer obstacles for the vehicle to move forward [...] (Interview 319).

b) Characteristics of the roads

The characteristics of roadways in relation to urban roads was a converging point in the content of the speeches. Paving and layout emerged as differentiators between urban areas and the road environment, so that social control on highways is difficult compared to when it is exercised on urban roads. The following fragments, taken from the interviewees' speeches, represent the perception of the researched population in such a way that they consolidate the unit of analysis in question.

> [...] the issue of paving the highways, access to side roads, on the streets there is no way to leave the road quickly, making police action difficult, the characteristics of the road on the streets do not favor the marginal as much as on the highways. Knowing the terrain is essential (Interview 460).

> [...] geometry and layout of highways in relation to urban roads, on highways it is easier to escape without being seen, the road network is extensive, there are several escape routes; (Interview 4).

c) Curious – people on the road

When analyzing the discourses about people on the streets as a variable of police pursuits, it became evident that the presence of onlookers / people on the roads is a preponderant factor that differentiates police pursuits on urban roads from those that occur on highways, so that the

risk of accidents increases as the greater the presence of bystanders / people on the roads, the greater the risk of an accident occurring. It appears, therefore, that in vehicle chases that occur in urban areas, the number of bystanders / people on the road is greater when compared to vehicle chases on highways. The extracts below corroborate this assertion.

> [...] on the highways, the number of onlookers and popular people is quite low, on the streets, on the other hand, there are more onlookers, this increases the chance of an accident and makes pursuit more difficult [...] (Interview 413).

> [...] in urban areas, unlike highways, there is a greater number of pedestrians and vehicles circulating, as well as a greater number of streets and alleys, which makes it difficult to pursue safely (Interview 620).

> [...] in urban areas there is the issue of vehicle and people traffic, on the highway there would be a smaller flow of vehicles, usually without pedestrians, then the risk of accidents decreases a little (Interview 634).

d) Risk of accidents

The collective subject discourse indicates, as a differentiating variable for vehicle pursuits on highways and in urban areas, the greater probability of the occurrence of traffic accidents in the urban area. Social control in urban centers, through police pursuit of vehicles, suggests a higher risk of accidents than on highways. The statements below confirm this.

> In the city, the risks of collateral damage and casualties are higher than on the highways, due to terrain geography and other factors (Interview 414).

> In urban areas, there is greater difficulty due to the streets, alleys, alleys and corridors, bringing greater risks of accidents and pedestrians being run over (Interview 444).

> [...] on urban roads, the risk of accidents is more evident, unlike pursuits on highways (Interview 672).

e) Siege and blockade

Siege is the tactical action that consists of positioning a group of police officers and police vehicles in strategic locations in a given sector, aiming to surround escape routes for people and/or evading vehicles and, with that, make their interception or approach feasible. Blockade, on the other hand, is a tactical action, which is based on the positioning of police and vehicles at a specific strategic point, located in a certain sector, aiming to interrupt, obstruct, temporarily reduce or stop the flow of vehicles or people, allowing the interception or approach of the due diligence target (PMMG, 2011). It appears that the siege and blockade activity is evidenced as a differentiating variable in police pursuits of vehicles that occur on highways in relation to those that are triggered on urban roads. The collective subject discourse points out that on highways, siege and blockade are more difficult in relation to urban roads. The following excerpts corroborate this point.

> [...]greater difficulty in setting up a siege and blockade on highways, considering the rapid transit of vehicles (Interview 4).

> On highways, there is often no way to trigger a siege since there are no vehicle(s) ahead [...] (Interview 113).

> Roadblock siege is undoubtedly much more difficult to achieve [...] (Interview 311).

f) Communication

The collective subject discourse denotes that the communication process in vehicle chases is a differentiating variable when they occur on highways from those that occur on urban roads. The following fragments point out that there is greater difficulty in communication on highways, either due to the distance between police buildings or due to the scarcity of coverage of the telephone network or even the fragility of coverage of the police radio network.

> Difficulties in radio and telephone communication on highways are greater than in cities [...] (Interview 514).

> They are different, because each place has its peculiarity. Urban: ease of communication, support, heavy traffic, difficulty approaching in places where there are people who could be reached, etc. On the highway, the communication difficulty increases, because due to places without radio or cell signal [...] (Interview 715).

> On the highway there is no efficient means of communication, on the urban road it is different, there are more means of communication (Interview 720).

From the analyzes carried out, it is possible to infer, in particular, that there are significant differences between vehicle pursuits in urban areas and those that occur on highways. Thus, for the efficient exercise of social control, it is important for police organizations to build rules that regulate police pursuit of vehicles in such a way that they differentiate strategic and operational procedures when on highways and when in urban areas, punctuating the issues that cover the speed of the fleeing vehicle, the characteristics of the roads, the questions about people on the roads, the risks of accidents, the siege and blockade, and the inferences of communication.

Conclusions

The entire process of reform and improvement of the State's capabilities is based on the ideology of managerialism so that, in the exercise of social control, the police officer emerges as a manager and mediator of conflicts, based on legal provisions and guarantee of rights (Veiga and Souza, 2017). In any case, academic studies are essential to see the state of the art of the most diverse themes of the social sciences, specifically when it comes to studies on the subject of public security. From this perspective, the richness of the approach is extremely valuable, as it provides several reflexive subsidies for the manager of public security policy (Nóbrega Jr, 2018).

This study contributes, in particular, as a perspective for police organizations to improve
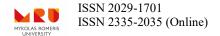
their respective doctrines that cover police pursuits of vehicles so that they are able to promote more efficient social control. Furthermore, it increases the literature on the object under study, contributing to discussions about social control in road and urban environments.

The results achieved in this work are not absolute or definitive, as they address dynamic issues that change in time and space, according to the dynamics and specificities of nature and human resources, so that the generalization of the results is not possible for all populations (Felisberto and Pardini, 2018). As a limitation, it is pointed out the fact that the field research was carried out only with military road police officers in Minas Gerais. In this context, future studies are suggested in which the researched population is composed of urban traffic police officers and/or police officers from other federal states and/or from other police organizations.

In any case, it is important to conclude, finally, that when new ideas and ways of acting start from well-defined rules, opportunism decreases, trust increases, and transaction costs are minimized, converging on an efficient institutional structure (Fuentelsaz *et al*., 2019). In this context, one last reflection is essential: if police organizations want to anticipate new problems and challenges, and respond to them efficiently, in such a way as to chart their own path to prosper in the future, they will need to think and act strategically (Bryson *et al*., 2014; Tomazevic *et al*., 2017; West and Blackman, 2015).

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