

#67 (BEATRIZ MAGALONI)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Beatriz Magaloni is a professor of international relations and political science at Stanford University, and her work focuses on policing and human rights in some of the poorest places in Central and South America. She's also the 2023 winner of the Stockholm Prize in Criminology. We chat about her work examining community policing in Brazil's notorious favelas.

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime.

Millions of people around the world live under the rule of criminal organizations. Beatriz Magaloni has spent years studying poverty, government, policing, and community relations in Central and South America, and in particular Mexico and Brazil. Professor Magaloni is the Graham H. Stuart professor of international relations and a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. Her work focuses on state repression, police, human rights and violence. She's also founded the Poverty, Violence and Governance Lab within Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law. Her first book, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2006 and won the Best Book Award from the Comparative Democratization Section of the American Political Science Association. It also won the 2007 Leon Epstein Award. She has a PhD from the Department of Political Science at Duke University, and prior to joining Stanford over 20 years ago, Beatriz was a visiting professor at UCLA and a professor of political science at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México. And my apologies to Spanish speakers, as I no doubt, just butchered the hell out of that.

This last summer, she was awarded the Stockholm Prize in Criminology. And as I was there, I snagged the opportunity to chat with her. And in particular about her work with the UPP, Rio de Janeiro's Pacifying Police Units, a more community-focused police unit. Most of our conversation revolves around a key paper she published. And don't worry, I'll put a link to it at reducingcrime.com/podcast. It describes favelas as being under five types of control, insurgent rule, bandit rule, symbiotic rule, predatory rule, and split criminal rule, which is mainly referred to in our chat as a contested situation. But don't worry, she explains it all in the conversation, so take a listen.

Beatriz Magaloni:

To me, this is my main contribution. This paper, it took so much field work, what you were describing, so much foot on the ground, so much interacting with officers. We almost went to every single UPP, we were there with them in foot patrol, it was amazing. And we were very vested in a way in the project succeeding. And unfortunately, at the end it lost credibility and the government really stopped investing in it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, some of the things I was talking about in the Jerry Lee Lecture, you were probably thinking, "Yeah, this makes sense."

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes, exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Depressing, right?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes, exactly. Even I took it as a personal failure. We were so vested, so excited that things were working. And then when violence started to escalate again and we saw how everything was unraveling, it was personally depressing. So, this idealist that you talk about is, I've sympathized with that a lot.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When we work in these areas, you end up being so embedded in it-

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... that it feels like there's no progress because it's hard to then think, "Let's think back to where we were 30 years ago."

Beatriz Magaloni:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I am always a disappointed idealist.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes. I now understand that very well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This can be really depressing this next time

Beatriz Magaloni:

It can be really depressing. So, at the end, I actually decided, okay, what's the best thing I can do? I can write the paper. I thought that was the best contribution we could do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This whole experience of doing field work really brings it home to you, doesn't it? Yes, yes. And as I was saying in my Jerry Lee lecture, I really do worry that increasingly students just download data sets.

Beatriz Magaloni:

I love that. The white thing that you put there, and economists tend to do that with no idea.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's like it's a line, it's a dot. It's something to model. And he's like, somebody got shot to death and lay in the street. Too easy to a number. Yeah, it's just a number.

Beatriz Magaloni:

I had invited for the police, a camera paper, an economist from Rio. I ended up not collaborating with him. He had never been in a favela, and he was the expert on crime. He was terrified to go up. Rocinha is very dangerous favela.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right? Well, I've been in the Rocinha favela. You were there. Yeah, I went there. It's a whole different world in the favelas. Yes.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Very different.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's strangely organized. Exactly. There's electricity. People are satellite television. You can find McDonald's.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it's just there is no recourse to government if things go wrong.

Beatriz Magaloni:

You have to go to the geographic or?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. And they rule things as they rule things. They rule things. There's no accountability for them. Exactly. And that's that last piece, isn't it? That's that last piece, which is however good they are. You can never vote the drug dealers out.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely. And I don't know how to pronounce tyrannical methods.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tyrannical. Yeah.

Beatriz Magaloni:

That's their method, right. So, there's no way to control that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you were born and raised in Mexico City. That's right. What's the path that brought you to be doing this kind of research?

Beatriz Magaloni:

I studied law.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I won't hold that against you.

Beatriz Magaloni:

When Mexico was an authoritarian regime. And so, I started to get very close to criminal trials and observe all the brutalities that happened there. And the really injustices are really medieval, terribly backward authoritarian setting. And I thought that the only way I could really do something about was stepping out from law because the lawyers were in fact very supportive of the way the system worked.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what was it like to be studying at the time? I mean, authoritarian regimes don't tolerate a lot of discord and dissent.

Beatriz Magaloni:

So I remember in one of my classes, he was a class on constitutional law and there was this Spanish professor teaching constitutional law, and then he started in the constitutional class defending Franco's regime. I really walk out of the classroom. My sister was next to me, we studied together, and then she said, my sister walks out. I also walk out. It was interesting. I felt law was not for me. I really had to change things. I had this sort of always very rebellious part in myself. So I decided to study political science step away from the law. But I always retained this interest in abuse of power, human rights. And what really changed is that I acquire new methodologies to be able to study behavior better. I think law doesn't give you that, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It doesn't stop lawyers having opinions on everything.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Of course. Exactly. So that was how I started, just the interest on violation of rights and abuse of power.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And what you recognized is it's not just that you have the interest, but you also had to develop a skillset. A skillset to be able to do this work.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. Good.

Beatriz Magaloni:

I had written in my first book was the title is Voting for Autocracy. So I had worked a lot on autocracy and that book gained a lot of recognition within my discipline. But then I got tenure and I said, I really want to put my research to benefit society. That was really my goal. I created this lab, the poverty, violence and governance lab.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was very scholarly of you. Normally it's just producing more journal articles.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. And I said, I really want to impact this reality. Violence started working on Mexico, but then I went with some graduate students to Brazil as a faculty leader. And I spent there 15 days doing interviews in Brasilia and then in Rio de Janeiro. And in one of these interviews, I was able to meet the Secretary of Security who started this reform trying to demilitarize the police in the favelas. And I really got fascinated. I think they had only started with eight, what are called the UPP.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which translates to?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Unifying Pacifying Police units. And I went up to Rocinha, which is a favela that is very close to where we were staying, and it was really eye-opening. It was walking in territory that six months ago, no one outside from the favela without permission could walk there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Even though you've grown up in Mexico City, it was still a shock to walk in a favela in Brazil.

Beatriz Magaloni:

The setting is tracking specific. I also worked, for example, in Mexico, it's a similar setting. So of course, there are settings like that. But the way this took me is because as I was walking there, I wanted to go interview the commander of that unit, the pacifying police unit. The police officer. Leonardo? No, a Black Brazilian officer, and he inspired me so much.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's great.

Beatriz Magaloni:

He really was so committed to the notion of creating a humane police for the poor to stop the violence that has characterized the relationship between police and favelas. I thought, wow, I really want to understand how does this happen? Is it possible to create this type of police for these settings for the poor?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So this wasn't a commander that was just going through the motions. He'd been ordered to do this. He really believed and thought this was the way forward.

Beatriz Magaloni:

He really believed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

He grew up in a favela himself?

Beatriz Magaloni:

I don't think he grew up in Avela. There are many officers we knew that grew up in favelas, and it does create a difference. I think they're better prepared to operate in those environments. But I think he was an idealist and very committed, very serious, hardworking person.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Exposure to policing will crush any idealist dreams, won't it?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. Of course. We also met the other times; I'll tell you about them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But tell me, I'm really interested in this guy. What was your sense of what it was like for him? Because the whole ethos of policing in Brazil at the time was very different. So, he's really being a pioneer and putting himself out there. Yes.

Beatriz Magaloni:

He to me was the ideal pacifying police unit commander. But we met many others who also had very strong commitment to the project, and they really were convinced that it was necessary to stop the violence that the communities deserved at different type of policing. And they were all innovating because there was not like a manual of what they could do in these settings. So, what I, observing all the different units that we visited and we interviewed the commanders, the police, and also residents, we observed very different strategies in each one of-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Them. So, there was no real plan. There was a general idea, but unfortunately there wasn't a plan.

Beatriz Magaloni:

There was not a plan. And the only thing that they did is supposedly they were only going to assign young officers who did not have any experience with the old traditional violent methods. So originally the frontline officers were all young men and women. But what happened gradually, I learned these officers during the free days could work in the regular, what are called battalions, where there is a lot of violence.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And a very different regime and a very different culture.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Very different culture of policing. And so they started to really socialize with the regular police mentality. And interestingly, we collected a large survey of around 5,000 officers in the entire corporation. When you ask those officers who were assigned to the community-oriented policing units where they preferred to work, the overwhelming majority said they didn't want to work there. They wanted to work in the regular battalions or even what is called the BPI. It's a battalion, very small one training counterinsurgency and it's symbol. It's literally a skull with two knives and a revolver.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They wanted to kick in doors and take names. Yeah, they were young, so they wanted to do the exciting stuff. Exactly.

Beatriz Magaloni:

In many areas, they were very well received, where violence was very high. The way they're called is Don Isomoro, which means they're the owners of the hill or the rulers, right? Yeah. So we found that in places where the criminal rulers were very violent, then they didn't restrain their men from harming the community, or they were constantly fighting with rival gangs. People lived terrified in these settings. So police officers were well received there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is what I was really fascinated reading about your work. You published an American political science review, a paper that looked at actually how important it's to understand various different aspects of the gangs and the organized crime groups in the favelas because it's going to affect how successful your policing is. Absolutely. They have different

relationships with government, with the state. Yes. Everybody mostly thinks that organized crime groups and gangs are in conflict with the state, but that's not what you found.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Police know. This territory is different from that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

As an ex-police officer myself, you know where you are, street by street, you have a very good feel for what the vibe is in that neighborhood.

Beatriz Magaloni:

So we could sense that from them. They would say, no complex vote dilemma. That is a really different world from Rocinha, or there is a super different world from Kaju. They really described this, but there was no theory or understanding of what was different. But we started really to observe these differences, and I really got the insight that the relationship of the criminal group with the community and as well with the state, was a really important factor in the way the police were going to be received.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you've got these two different factors, the relationship with the state or the government or the police. Yes. And the relationship the gang have with the community. So, you separated the first one into whether they are confrontational with the state or whether they collude with the state confrontation. I think most people would understand. Yes. Tell me about the collusion.

Beatriz Magaloni:

The collusion and confrontation. I want to characterize both because the confrontation in the case of Rio is really literally putting bombs in police units. It's literally paying residents to kill police officers. This is commando. And at times they have paralyzed the entire city putting bombs in buses. So that is really beyond I think what we understand as confrontation. Right? Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think we have to put in for people some context. It dawned on me because I've been to Athenia. We're talking about areas of the city that have hundreds of thousands of people essentially with no government control. Absolutely. So, while you can have services, you can have electricity, you can have McDonald's, you can have satellite TV, and you have running water, all these kinds of things. There is no government control in there. The police patrol the outsides, but rarely venture inside that it's controlled by armed gangs. These have these different relationships and the confrontational one, as you say, is blowing up police stations. I think you said the other day that they've shot down helicopters.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes, they've shot down helicopters.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is just nuts. This is on a different.

Beatriz Magaloni:

On a different, we were, for example, in what is in English city of God, the week after they had bombed that unit, and we interviewed with the commander there, and he revealed his mental health problems.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Understandably.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Understandably. Everybody was really terrified, and they were very vulnerable in those settings. This supposedly community oriented, more peaceful police. This gang formed in the seventies when they were put in prison next to political prisoners.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This wasn't this a gang that started in Sao Paulo.

Beatriz Magaloni:

No, this is Sao Paulo is this is the Comando Vermelho. When they came out from this prison, they came out with ideology, with the language of insurgencies, and they implemented those strategies once they came out into the street.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In many places people go into prison and become gang members. But it's surprising to hear that become politically radicalized-

Beatriz Magaloni:

In this situation because of what they did put in political prisoners next to criminals.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Isn't prison great?

Beatriz Magaloni:

And I visited the prison because now you can't go. It's in La Grande, the prison where they were literally the water would come up here.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Were up to your neck. Yes. In the cells.

Beatriz Magaloni:

In the cells.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is some medieval shit going on here.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Police brutality, state brutality. Right. Also radicalized so much the criminals. So that's the confrontation commando. Melo emerged us with that ideology and also with the ideology. We need to treat the population well. We are going to solve the problems. Killings are going to be really sanctioned. So they established disorder that was very tyrannical, but they did resolve order. It's called tribunado traffico, which means that drug traffickers' tribunal. And so, conflicts are taken to the traffickers and they resolve it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How do they resolve it?

Beatriz Magaloni:

And they resolve it really violently. One of my friends from a favela describes this anecdote. She lives in Complexo do Alemão, it's a very big, very violent... where three gangs compete. She sees this, how do you say this in English?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A moped. Small motorized-

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes. A dead body on it. And then they were carrying it, and then the friend asks her, why is that person there? And so they just killed him because.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, so he was on the back of a scooter thing.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. How do you say?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

With a carriage on the back of it with a carriage.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. Just committed some crime and they just killed him. And then she told me, I just realized how normalized violence for Aussies living in these settings, right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So she's talking about this and a kind of scooter with a thing on the back of it goes past with the body and she doesn't miss a beat. She just continues saying, oh, he just got killed by the gangs. And anyway, moving on, moving on.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Wow. And then she says, wow. I mean that's how much violence is normalized here.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And of course, there's no way for the government to really get good statistics on how much violence and how much death there is.

Beatriz Magaloni:

That's a very good point. So we got a really amazing source of information. They created this number. It's an NGO that works closely with the police called-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Non-governmental organization. Exactly.

Beatriz Magaloni:

And they receive citizen reports. People in the favela trust them. And so there is this number everywhere and every boss in it. And then there is the narrative of what they are describing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is this a way for people to report crime or to report homicide?

Beatriz Magaloni:

They report violations from the traffickers, violations from the police, from the militia. So this is anonymous. And so you call, you give the report, and they know that their anonymities protected speaking with people on the ground. Sometimes they told you, we live in fear because we are in between the police and the traffickers. So this number helped us. We got their data and the narratives that we were able to read and then process allowed us to understand which gang was in control of the favela and also how they were relating with the state and with the community. So for example, the question that you asked about collusion, there is this other gang that is called friend of friends.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, there's a website called that somewhere, isn't there? Facebook started out, wasn't it? Had drug traffickers meet other drug traffickers. Exactly.

Beatriz Magaloni:

We're very friendly to each other. So the idea was it's not good for the business to confront the state in this manner. The best is to buy off the police. For example, Rocinha was before in control of Comando Vermelho when just before

we were working there at Los Amigos. So friends of friends got control. And you could see in the citizen reports, it's just like now the police comes and the traffickers get in the police cars to go and invade other favelas.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you-

Beatriz Magaloni:

See this police are giving arms to the criminals, a lot of reports of bribes being paid to police. So we could really see where there was more collusion versus more confrontation and also corroborated by interviews with favela residents in qualitative interviews.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you saw the same thing in the relationship between the traffickers and the community. You saw again, that confrontational or abusive relationship and then the sort of more collusive cooperative arrangement.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yes. For example, the cooperative arrangement is very interesting. We were walking Complexo do Alemão. It's a very large favela complex, I think around 300,000.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it is quite incredible to think you've got places with 300,000 people with no government services or protection at all. It's amazing. Ruled by violent drug gangs.

Beatriz Magaloni:

By violent drug gangs. Actually, when the government wanted to put the pacifying police unit there, the army was sent for six months or nine months. Now I don't recall. So you could only enter with the army. The state knew that this is the headquarters of the most powerful gang in Rio. We were there doing field work the day the armed forces left and the pacifying police units were arriving. It was striking. And then collecting interviews with residents, how they were perceiving this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How did they feel about the military being there?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Interestingly, for the interviews that we collected, they felt safer with the military. And then when police began, there was a lot of hope that things were going to change. And then soon things started to really not work well there two police officers got killed, the top commander. He said, that's when we realized that our police officers are too vulnerable in this terrain because this is the terrain of where they actually give money to residents to kill police officers. So that's when the state started to send these other lead squad to this pacifying unit started to respond with more violence.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It had good intentions.

Beatriz Magaloni:

It had good intentions.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I remember you saying those first officers came in with the idea of being peaceful. It was community oriented policing. They didn't bring machine guns. They were teaching classes like karate to the kids and stuff like that. But when you can't protect the officers, it doesn't become sustainable.

Beatriz Magaloni:

And I could see that also. I've analyzed the data and clearly there is killing of an officer. And immediately there is very violent response,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which probably feels right at the time to the people, the officers, but it pushes everybody in the wrong direction.

Beatriz Magaloni:

It tends to backfire. And in that territory, that's what I call the insurgent regime. So it's a regime where you have confrontation with the state and the criminals have more legitimacy than the police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The insurgent regime is an area, it's a, that's controlled by traffickers that are confrontational with the authorities, but they are very much in corporation

Beatriz Magaloni:

With a community.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To some degree, to some degree with the community. So they're often seen as a lesser evil.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what things do they do to generate that level of cooperation with the community?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Residents would narrate things like for example, if you need gas or if you need money, you go to the traffickers and they would provide it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it doesn't come with a cost.

Beatriz Magaloni:

That's a very good question. Obviously there are a lot of residents.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You owe them favors now.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. Who feel very reluctant so that they really try to remain very aloof from them. But they have to follow the rules. But what we heard is they do provide welfare. They do provide order. So this woman was telling us in this settings, she said, now there are people killing each other. So we used to have order. These things didn't happen. And literally she said, we need the drug traffickers to be around. The police don't know how to do anything here. But in this setting, what the So-called pacification cost was really people living in the crossfire. A lot of killings of residents, innocent residents.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're not really giving people much option. No. The drug traffickers and the gangs, they're providing some of the social services at a price that really we would expect in most developed world countries that the government provides.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. If you need those services, if you're not getting from the government, which you're not enough s, you can get it from the drug gangs. Now that's the insurgent group. But the bandit groups sound like they're the worst for everybody because at least in terms of the relationship with the state, it's confrontational. So the gangs, the traffickers are in conflict with the state, but they're also abusive towards the community. I mean, how do people survive in the places where you say there's bandit, criminal rule, what's that like?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Yeah, we heard heartbreaking stories. There a lot of dead bodies all the time fear, people living in fear. And there the police was really well received. The police was seen as the solution to their violence. We collected large surveys like around 5,000 residents in different favelas. And here we observed that the police actually had high levels of legitimacy. And we asked for example in a question, would you rather be ruled by the criminals or the police? And here they would say, we much prefer the police. And then I want to emphasize that in the whole evaluation of the whole process, around 60% of the communities had this positive outcome.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well that's good.

Beatriz Magaloni:

So when police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Officers, I mean incredibly challenging situation, at least it feels like the one little bright light in this otherwise gloomy picture.

Beatriz Magaloni:

And the whole project lost legitimacy in part because the gangs were pushed out of the favelas and they started to operate in other areas of the city. And violence started to be more visible for the middle-class people living outside the favelas. So they started to really.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Drive political change. Absolutely undermine the project.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Unfortunately.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's the same because it sounds like it has some success for the people in the favelas.

Beatriz Magaloni:

That's what I think is important, our findings in this paper. And when Leona, I don't know, the officer that I started talking about read our paper once the whole thing had unraveled, he said, wow, thank you. I'm so happy to read that. What we did really worked in so places because at that time everybody was saying they didn't work. This doesn't have legitimacy. And so I think that that narrative is not a good narrative because then you don't understand that there were really some very positive aspects. And then you could understand, okay, where we went wrong, and instead of reverting to the mediatized approach, you could really improve. Right

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now when a gang is colluding with the state, but abusive to the community. So beforehand they were confrontational with everybody. The state, your bandit gangs are confrontational with the state and confrontational the community. But when they're colluding with the state, but abusive to the community, you called that out, people are under predatory criminal regimes because when the gangs are being abusive, they can't go to the police because they're colluding with the gang.

Beatriz Magaloni:

To me, this is the worst situation and really are called the militias.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you're not necessarily in a war zone when the gang is shooting the community and the police. It's a war zone. Exactly. But this isn't necessarily a war zone, but they can't be much hope.

Beatriz Magaloni:

They are in control of order, but they are also in control of you want TV, then you have to pay money for me. You want the service, you have to pay. Everything is paying to the militias if you want to survive in that setting. The militias are formed by former police officers and prison guards. During the Bolsonaro regime, he had very close relationship with this militia group. So the number of territories that they control significantly increased violations of human rights, a lot of extortion happening. And they also have deep connections with politicians. So if you want to get elected, the militia controls the territory, so you have to make deals with the militia. So the militia is deeply embedded in the state, and they are also not benign. Some of the residents would tell, we grew up with them, these boys play with our children. I asked one woman in Avela, if police came, would you report the drug trafficker? And she said, no, this grew up with us Lord, this play with my children.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Actually, you can find the same thing in communities in the United States and other places. No, they don't really want the gangs. They don't want the shootings, but it's also their nephew or it's their neighbor's kid and they knew them. And yeah, it's very difficult to figure out those relationships. So when police come into these areas with this predatory control where they're colluding with the state, but also abusive to the community. I mean, can you get police to function in this places if there's already collusion with the gangs?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Actually what happens is the formal police remain outside. They actually see territory to the militias. So they're the rulers of all the favelas that, so around 160 favelas were assigned. UPP again, is this pacifying police units, only one of them controlled by the militias. So the state really remains and the police remains absent, and they actually see control completely to the militia.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the penultimate one we haven't talked about is, this is fascinating, the symbiotic organizations that are colluding with the state, but cooperative with the community. I mean, it doesn't sound ideal, but it sounds like the most peaceful as long as you don't step out of line.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. So Nia was just before it receive a UPP was the drug Lord there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Nim, N-I-M?

Beatriz Magaloni:

N-E-M. Okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

N-E-M. Okay.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Then there was a journalist who wrote a book about him because he was taken to prison after the police arrived there. And in the book he describes the best secrets for being a good drug leader.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I just know everybody's going to go and read M's. Guide to being the best drug dealer in South America. Fantastic.

Beatriz Magaloni:

So the first secret is alliance with the state, cooperation with the state. So he knew that. Well, and this is the narrative, I tell you that, okay, police come give us harm. They give us their cars to go invade other favelas. They give us tips. When the other police, which is the investigative police wants to do anything, they get all the information. Very strong operation. The second one he said, is respectability among the community. The community has to really respect you. And so the third secret is to do that, you have to really refrain your arms men, all these young men with muscle not to harm the community. So you have to keep strong control of your organization.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I almost wish that drug dealers in the United States would read this because the second part, they're very, well, I mean the first part I hope they never get engaged in, but the second part they seem really bad at in many places.

Beatriz Magaloni:

I agree. It's very authoritarian, right? The rule. But it does make a difference when you have this goal of buying all support of the community.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, when you're in hell, you end up making a deal with the devil, don't you?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Exactly. When first started in this biotic regime, we were there before the police arrived collecting interviews, but the residents already knew that this was going to happen. And I recall very well this interview with this woman, an old woman who said, poor people have been solving our problems for a long time, and we know how to do this. Now they're going to send the police and they're going to mess everything up. And so actually it didn't work well in Nia. Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We're doing great. We've covered the insurgents, the bandits, the symbiotic relationship, the predatory, the worst seems to be where even before you get to worrying about the relationship with the state or relationship with the community, it's contested territory.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that's one that has the highest levels of violence involved in it. Doesn't that produce a paradox? Because you've got these favelas, which are outside of government control, but if you try to impose government control, you run the risk of creating contested spaces and that pushes the violence up.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you're a political scientist, so I'm going to ask you the policy question. How do you resolve that paradox?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Wow, it's a great question. In the end, our results demonstrate I think quite strongly that in these settings, when you send the police homicides,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Decrease the contested areas. Yes. Yeah.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Homicides decrease significantly. And also police violence because police are not intervening in between gang war. Right. So this situation, I think if you ask me where should you send these police is in split orders,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right? Because there's contested space and the gangs are fighting over the favela who's going to have control? Yes.

Beatriz Magaloni:

In predatory regimes where there is not contestation, but the rulers are very predatory.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So even though they're colluding with the police, they're still abusing the communities in the predatory ones. And so sending police there is good? I

Beatriz Magaloni:

Think so, yes. But it's never going to happen because they are so embedded in the state. And then the other one is the bandits, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because again, the key is whether the community are suffering. Exactly. Even though the gangs are in conflict with the state, they're also being abusive to the community. Like a key metric here is how much the community is suffering is suffering, which has to be the priority decision about whether or not to send police in.

Beatriz Magaloni:

And with our interviews with police officers where we presented these results and they started to understand what was happening. One officer told us, listen, Beatriz, unfortunately, the state never wanted to, and he literally say this, to stop black people from killing each other.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because in Brazil there is definitely, there are variations in how people are treated by the color of the shade of their skin.

Beatriz Magaloni:

And a lot of the residents of favelas are black Brazilians. So the priority for the state was really more to confront Comando Vermelho. So most of the favelas that were intervened were from this confrontational, semi terrorist organization that threatens those outside of favelas a lot.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But police can't do this on their own. The rest of government has to come and fill in the spaces that were in many cases, like the insurgents or the symbiotic gang involved in various, they're providing social services. Yes. So when you take the gang away or you want to take the gang away, you have to bring government services. It can't just be the police.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did that happen?

Beatriz Magaloni:

At the beginning? There was something called the UPP social. So that means, yes, they were going to provide social services. And I remember being in one of these favelas talking with community members, and we were in this community space where kids were playing with computers, and then this woman tells us, this is the police, but the guy we really want is this UPP sociology. He is the one who's going to bring the services. So they were excited about that

approach, and unfortunately, I think it took two years and then they stopped it. I remember in one of the presentations I made of my work before the Ministry of Security, I told him the state left the police alone to deal with such a complex situation. And then if you only send the police, they take all the blame for all what is wrong with the state?

So I really also sympathize a lot with the officers who were there with no support, really no support. So a lot of these UPP units, they are really made of metal. You go in there and there are bullet holes everywhere. The police are really in very difficult settings, and they have to be walking in. The favelas residents are very hostile toward them. They throw urine water. They were put in a very difficult situation, and their relationship ended up being very toxic. But again, I want to emphasize that in many territories it did work. So work like Leonardo Noida should be really recognized. And actually because he was such a good commander, he was sent to I think four or five different UB permissions. He knew his job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We shouldn't be doing that. What rewarding people who've got skills and meritorious promotion, that's disgraceful. We don't do that in policing. Disgraceful.

Beatriz Magaloni:

He got the worst. He ended up actually leaving the UPP. I think there was disappointment by those officers who really believed in this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Maintaining and sustaining good work is incredibly challenging.

Beatriz Magaloni:

That's what I heard.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Even the developed world countries. But when you're an emerging country, it's even harder. I mean, I'm sure you came into thinking about Mexican police as well, but we've mainly been talking about your paper and your work in Brazil. I'm sure you started with a perception of the Brazilian police. Did that change by working with them?

Beatriz Magaloni:

Absolutely. Like every Latin American you see the police and all you do is fear and distrust, right? Because it's an institution that actually works very poorly in our countries. And then after being so embedded with them, also developing friendships, I mean those who really-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I understand. I mean people say, oh, you are just pro policing. Well, I'm pro good policing.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Good policing. Even Vanessa Melo, who did all this work with me underground, my Brazilian student and coauthor, we would joke, yeah, I could become commander because there was so much exposure to how they spoke, what the solutions they were trying to find. But I must also mention that there is the dark side. We collected this focus group in what is called the Killer Battalion in Rio. We spend four hours talking with them. Interestingly, they were drinking beer during wartime, and so they have launched in the battalion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just going to say I've got a shocked face. I've really got a shot.

Beatriz Magaloni:

But very open to us. It was incredibly open and sincere conversation, and they were very violent officers used to just being in battle. Literally. It's battle. And you can see some of the images, PTSD.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

TSC almost.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Oh my God. And then at the end of the interview with these young officers, I asked them, if you have this choice to arrest or to kill, what do you do? He immediately goes like this, and say, I kill. And then he explains why, and he says, it takes too much time for me to go to the De Garcia to just all the paperwork. It's not worth it. And then he describe it. Maybe next week I'll see that criminal out in the street. The justice system, he says doesn't work, but that he just didn't hesitate and say, I kill. It was like an hour of driving back to where we were saying, I just couldn't talk. I stayed the weekend alone in Rena was saying, what am I doing here? It was so heartbreaking, and obviously, so we have to acknowledge that part of policing and the culture is still exists.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And what a juxtaposition between these inspirational, dynamic, thoughtful police officers and their very traditional role. Absolutely. What amazing experience.

Beatriz Magaloni:

It was life changing. Really. It was life changing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think people understand why you absolutely thoroughly deserve the Stockholm prize in criminology this year. Well, for listeners, I'm going to put a link to the paper that we've been talking about, which was published in American Political Science Review with you and your coauthors for I know you've been really busy with lots of media for sitting down with me. Thanks ever so much, Beatriz.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Thank you. It's such a pleasure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And congratulations on your award.

Beatriz Magaloni:

Thank you very much.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 67 of Reducing Crime recorded in Stockholm, Sweden in June, 2023. The link I mentioned to Beatriz's paper is at reducingcrime.com/podcast where you can also find transcripts of this and every episode to learn about new episodes, look out for tweets from at Reducing Crime or at Jerry Ratcliffe, or simply subscribe at Spotify, SoundCloud, apple, or wherever you're listening. If you teach, you can dm me for Excel spreadsheets with multiple choice questions for every episode.

Be safe and best of luck.