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**Criminal Accountability and the Street-level Bureaucrats**

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# **Criminal Accountability and the Street-level Bureaucrats**

## **Abstract**

Street-level Bureaucrats work in a web of multiple relationships, in the context of multiple responsibilities and multilevel governance. This study investigated the interactions between frontline discretion and accountability regime frameworks in prison systems. Building on in-depth qualitative research, this exploratory study focuses on the tensions that arise from criminal organizations, gangs, within the prison context in Brazil. Drawing on ten formal interviews with prison officers from São Paulo, state of São Paulo, Brazil, this study identified the dilemmas experienced by these bureaucrats driven by criminal gang interests and how these dilemmas interact with the multiple accountabilities to which these professionals respond and account. This study contributes to the existing literature by theorizing how criminal governance constrains the discretion of frontline workers while performing their jobs. The result of this study is that street-level bureaucrats account for criminal gangs with the aim of maintaining the physical integrity and ultimately, the order of the penitentiaries.

**Key words:** Street-level workers. Accountability. Criminal Governance.

## 1. Introduction

Street Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) are civil servants who interact with citizens to deliver public policy (Lipsky, 1980). Studies explore two main characteristics of their daily work: a high degree of discretion and relative organizational autonomy (Lotta, 2012; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Møller, 2016). The literature addressing the interaction of SLBs with discretion presents the dilemmas faced by these bureaucrats: simultaneously pressured by conflicts of policy, professional standards, organizational goals, management, and the requirements of the public with whom they interact (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

Their working conditions and professional identities make them difficult to control (Lipsky, 1980). In an attempt to shape and control public organizations and their agents, accountability networks emerge as an indispensable function of democracy (O'Donnell, 1991) and can be set as "a social relationship in which an actor feels an obligation to explain and to justify his conduct to some significant other" (Bovens, 1998, p.172).

Different accountabilities materialize in multiple forms depending on the frontline organizational context. The literature identifies five forms of accountability - organizational, professional, political, legal, and administrative - and points out the need to understand them together with the concept of governance (Meijer & Bovens, 2005). In addition to providing direction, governance implies an institutional design and a managerial dimension; therefore, it refers to the interaction of accountability regimes with the decision-making and management processes (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

Researchers in a systematic review of the literature pointed out the need for studies on SLBs to incorporate a governance perspective with an emphasis on implementation networks to understand the role of accountability in the frontline discretion (Chang & Brewer, 2022). From this perspective, some crucial aspects of performance can be hidden from view in accountability regimes (Brodkin, 2014), especially when accountability practices may be imbricated within others, as in the case of criminal governance, which is presented as "puzzling precisely because of this juxtaposition with state governance" (Lessing, Monteiro & Misse, 2022, p. 11).

Criminal governance, or the "imposition of rules or restriction on behavior by a criminal organization" includes "governance over members, non-member criminal actors, and non-criminal civilians" (Lessing, 2021, p. 3). Its mechanisms arise when the state is difficult to access or lacks strength in law enforcement (Lessing, 2021) and establishes a symbiotic relationship with the state (Lessing & Willis, 2019). In a non-exhaustive literature review, we

find that researchers focus their analysis on how to control, account, and constrain criminal governance. However, these studies do not theorize about it as an accountability mechanism present in the multi-level governance in which bureaucrats are embedded.

As already known, we can no longer comprehend state governance without understanding criminal governance (Lessing, 2021). Therefore, our intent is to analyze how criminal governance is understood within the public-accountability system by street-level bureaucrats, and how criminal governance constrains the discretion of frontline workers in the performance of their duties.

The empirical case of prisons in Brazil, a country with high levels of organized crime control (Adorno & Muniz, 2022) seems to contribute to exploring the still "distant understanding of the interplay of formal rules, informal norms, and enforcement characteristics that together determine the performance of the overall institutional framework" (North, 2009). To this end, ten interviews were conducted with prison guards in São Paulo and the results indicate that gangs exercise power over bureaucrats with clear accountability mechanisms. This control affects and conditions the discretion of these professionals, and as a consequence, the delivery of public service.

This exploratory study starts by looking at the theoretical frameworks of accountability regimes and criminal governance and discusses accounting prisons. This discussion is followed by a section describing the empirical background of the study, including its methodology. Next, the preliminary findings are presented, followed by a discussion of how gang control is linked to the accountability mechanisms to which street-level bureaucrats respond. This is followed by the conclusion.

## **2. Accountability regimes framework: the prison context**

Studies on street-level organizations start from the "inhabited institutions approach" that conceives of institutions as "not inert categories of meaning; rather they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance" (Hallet & Ventresca, 2006, p. 213). SLBs build frontline organizations and have "wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions" (Lipsky, 2010).

The democratic control of street-level workers has become a constant concern for public administration (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2010). In an attempt to shape and control public organizations and their agents, accountability networks emerge as an indispensable function

of democracy (O'Donnell, 1991). The framework of accountability regimes assumes three sources of public accountability for frontline workers at the scales of systemic, organizational, and individual actions: public-administrative, professional, and participatory (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

The first is the accountability related to legal rules. In the context of liberal democracies, the union of political, legal, and new public management mechanisms results in public-administrative accountability. When it comes to daily work, street-level professionals are also accountable to their peers; they practice collective self-management on various scales, and the central point is the expertise inherent in a certain vocation (Hupe & Hill, 2007). The last is the accountability related to participatory citizenship, in which inter-individual contacts are also forms of account, to the extent that it is in the inter-individual interaction that there are joint forms of accountability (Hupe & Hill 2007). Practically, these are the pressures that arise from local associations, local news media, families, and communication media.

Accountability literature points to the need to understand its aspects together with the concept of governance (Meijer & Bovens, 2005). The policy process consists of a series of activity clusters practiced by different actors, which can be understood in terms of governance. Street-level bureaucrats must be conceived of as a layer where governance may be multidimensional in a variety of circumstances, holding these professionals accountable top-down, bottom-up, and sideways (Hupe & Hill, 2007). Therefore, implementation would be a multi-level problem (Hupe & Hill, 2003) to the extent that accountability is addressed in multi-level governance (Hupe & Hill, 2007). In short, conflicts over goals and interests can demonstrably influence frontline staff's work orientation (Considine & Lewis, 1999, 2003) and complicate accountability (Brodkin, 2014).

Literature addressing the interaction of SLBs with simultaneous conflicts assumes that multiple responsibilities increase the dilemmas experienced by these professionals. However, "organizational boundaries may be permeable and changing, the organization's top and management structure may be multiple" (Hupe & Hill, 2007) and the forms of pressure that these professionals are subjected to also transform. In line with the concept of constant changes and distinct organizational nature, studies reveal that SLBs may be subjected to other forms of accountability than those already known. Thomann et al. (2018) suggest that market mechanisms imply a fourth type of accountability by identifying that customers and shareholders also demand SLBs in hybrid organizations.

The example of market-oriented accountability refers to an area of research on hybrid organizations. The present study, therefore, innovates on a similar path by proposing to study one type of organization controlled by gangs: Brazilian prisons. It studies the interaction between discretionary and professional decision-making in a prison environment where the interest of the gangs affects the decision-making of the professionals.

When it comes to closed institutions such as prisons and detention centers, democratic societies are surrounded by accountability challenges (Harding, 2007). In these contexts, relations between the police and citizens face a lack of trust on both sides or reinforce poor accountability structures (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015). In recent years, the prison system has increasingly adopted a detailed business-focused approach to accountability, primarily through the implementation of New Public Management techniques (Ryan & Sim, 2007).

The literature (Bennett, 2007) and police consultants (Chin et al., 2010) argue for the effectiveness of public-administrative accountability systems, such as performance measurement systems, in maintaining orders in the prison context. Others claim that they are inadequate because of their unique moral settings (Wilson, 1995; Godfrey, 1996). When embedded in performance measurement systems, frontline workers may feel more accountable in hierarchical terms (Hupe & Hill, 2007), but in empirical terms, this is not necessarily verified. Although performance measurement systems attempt to regulate the actions of street-level bureaucrats (Behn, 2003), New Public Management mechanisms have raised significant questions regarding the nature of accountability within prisons: who is responsible for it and who is held accountable (Coyle, 2007).

Accountability mechanisms often come into effect only after a crisis has occurred and harm has already been inflicted, yet they are crucial despite their limitations (Jewkes, 2007). For example in 1992, 111 inmates were killed by a military police operation in a prison known as the “Carandiru Massacre”, which represented a symbolic landmark in the history of the Brazilian penal system. As a result, some forces outside the prison walls began to appear (Dias & Salla, 2013), as did internal forces. In the period following the massacre, the inmate gangs underwent a process of expansion and professionalization.

The media, international organizations, and other forms of pressure for better conditions in the system emerged, and the detainees themselves began to be organized. Besides being born and shaped by the state, or the lack of it, prison gangs stand not only against state power, but also complementing it (Lessing, 2021). In addition to maintaining control and order, prison-based organizations play an important role in providing basic goods

and services to prisoners and their families (Dias & Salla, 2013). Prison gangs occur throughout Brazilian territory (Adorno & Muniz, 2022).

Among the various accountabilities coexisting in the system, interacting with and controlling prison officers, gangs act by constraining their work in some way. As we will explore empirically, understanding criminal governance seems essential for discussing governance responses in the prison context. We do not intend to enter into the discussion about prison gang power dynamics in prisons (Adorno & Salla, 2007; Darke, 2013; Adorno & Dias, 2016; Willis, 2009; Feltran, 2010), but assuming that they exist, we try to understand how frontline workers feel they account for them.

Here, alongside the traditional public accountability regime, we explore gangs. In the prison context, as in other organizations, prison officers are embedded in a context of accountability that is essentially multiple. As we will see below, when we expand the framework of accountability regimes to account for other mechanisms in prison policy implementation, we can capture dilemmas experienced by prison officers and identify appropriate governance responses such as criminal governance responses. As pointed out, understanding state governance without understanding criminal governance is no longer possible. Our goal is to examine how criminal governance affects frontline workers' discretion in carrying out their tasks and how street-level bureaucrats conceptualize it within the public accountability system.

### **3. Context and Methods**

#### ***Background***

To better understand how SLBs feel accounted for in their work, this article focuses on the prison system in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. The country has the third largest prison population in the world, behind the United States and China. The vast majority of imprisoned people in Brazil live under unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Prisons are overcrowded, with an average occupation rate that extends between 1.5 to 2 times their capacity. In 2021, more than 800,000 people were in state custody, and in São Paulo, around 200,000 were imprisoned (FBSP, 2022). Regarding the number of professionals, there are 92,000 criminal prison officers in Brazil, of which 18,000 work in the state of São Paulo.

In the latter half of the 1990s, PCC, the hegemonic prison gang in Brazil, gained control over nearly the entire prison system in São Paulo, allowing them to oversee illicit actions taking place both inside and outside of the prisons (Dias & Salla, 2013). Since early

2010, the PCC has expanded its presence and control of regions in Paraguay and other neighboring Latin American countries (Manso & Dias, 2018). With strict hierarchies and codes of conduct, PCC is capillarized to 90% of the São Paulo prison system (Manso & Dias, 2018). PCC plays a part in managing prison units (directly or indirectly) by acting as a regulating court for social interactions within these spaces, taking on the role of a mediator, and making judgments in various types of disputes (Dias & Salla, 2013).

The maintenance of order and discipline inside prison units is a task foreseen by prison police officers, who must enforce the Penal Enforcement Law (Law No. 7.210/1984), a normative instrument providing penitentiary policy accountability. As empirically presented, the maintenance of order is also affected by PCC interests.

### ***Design methods***

The literature has focused on analyzing bureaucrats' discretion in social and labor policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Lotta, 2012). Analyzing prison officers as actors on the front line of prison policy implementation and understanding that observing the work environment and the relationships among prison officials produced, it is critical to understand public service delivery in prisons (Shannon & Page, 2014). In this study, we analyzed the actions of prison officers in the daily lives of inmates through the theoretical framework of street-level bureaucracy (Liebling, 2000; Shannon & Page, 2014).

As points of departure, the research draws on conceptual frameworks centered around who is holding prison officers to account: street-level enablement by performance measurement (Raaphorst, in press); dilemmas involved in their daily practices (Lipsky, 2010); accountability regimes (Hupe & Hill, 2007). While the literature brings more insights into who is holding the prison system accountable, we have attempted to inductively explore whom frontline workers in these organizations feel they are accountable. Combining inductive and deductive approaches, this exploratory study represents a more abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Building on an in-depth qualitative research design among prison officers, this study is interested in the following research question: how do frontline dilemmas interact with accountability regime frameworks and how does criminal governance constrain the discretion of frontline workers while performing their job? To address this question, this exploratory study focuses on the tensions arising from criminal organizations that emerge in the context of multiple responsibilities and multi-level governance embedded in prison officers. To what



extent and in what ways do prison officers respond to these tensions drawn on the edge of legality?

As prison officers work in closed institutions, personal networks were used to reach them, in addition to contacts established on the state union's website. Through semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to extract their attitudes and contextualized experiences (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). The questions were grouped into three themes: daily tasks and professional identity, daily job performance, and the impact of performance measurement systems on daily activities. Prior to each interview, verbal consent was obtained and recorded. Most interviews were conducted online outside of working hours. Ten interviewees were interviewed between February and March, 2022. Both the men and women were interviewed. However, to maintain the confidentiality of the quotes used in this article, considering the limited number of interviewees, we chose to address all the participants with male pronouns.

### ***Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns or themes through a codification process. This process is iterative, meaning that it involves constantly moving between codes, themes, and transcripts to ensure that the themes are both internally consistent and externally diverse, meaning that they exclude each other in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The interviews were recorded and imported as audio files into ATLAS.ti, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Following the steps of the codification process described by Braun and Clarke (2006), we describe the method used in this process. The first step was to transcribe and translate them inductively, getting close to the meaning of what was said. In the second step, patterns were sought by reading all transcriptions, which provided familiarity with the data collected. The excerpts were then grouped into potentially broader and encompassing themes, which is an open coding moment. At this stage, the codes were reviewed, reorganized, and described, and new codes and subcodes emerged, already in contact with potential theoretical references. Finally, the themes were named, systematized, and connected to the theoretical framework. Appendix A provides an overview of the interviewees using pseudonyms, department/unit type, and organizational characteristics.

## **4. Findings**

There is much scholarly literature on the various forms of accountability and their impact on officials of street-level bureaucrats (Thomann et al., 2018; Mutereko, 2013; Hupe & Hill, 2007). The results illustrate the different ways in which street-level bureaucratic decision making about specific cases is shaped by criminal gangs. These excerpts can contribute to a general theory of the role of criminal governance in street-level decision-making.

***Dialoguing with prisoners, a new skill, a dictionary of its own:*** in some situations, prison officers have unforeseen skills to understand the dynamics of prisoners and ensure not only the implementation of the service, but also individual physical integrity. In practice, one of the people interviewed differentiates the performance of prison officers from other police categories by their argumentative capacity necessary for the daily work: "what makes us different from other police, our expertise is precisely verbalizing and dialoguing with someone who has committed a crime" (I9). In general, knowledge of prison dynamics is considered a way of staying alive within the system: "in the public security environment in general, a person who doesn't have any knowledge is not going to last long, soon he or she will be on TV, (there will be cases of) torture, death (I9)".

The gang also assumes that this is a necessary condition for the maintenance of order within the prison, and negotiation skills are expected for all members of the group (Biondi, 2010, p. 112). The following excerpt underlines the importance of communication skills in understanding what is being communicated between inmates:

A good prison officer has to be a person that knows how to verbalize. At first, before verbalizing he has to know how to listen, to discern in order to verbalize because I have already seen many problems in the prison unit due to verbalization and if there is one thing that happens to a prison officer over the years, if he doesn't take care of his person, if he doesn't take care of his integrity (...) the environment that he lives in causes transformation in the way of behaving and in his way of speaking. It's something that sometimes happens in the work environment. So, the prison officer has to be aware of this in the way he speaks, the way he verbalizes especially with the inmates. It is necessary to understand the dialect that they speak among themselves, because they have a dialect, this dialect is a dialect of slang and it is necessary to have knowledge of this slang. If not, you can't understand what they are transmitting to each other, but you can't put it (the slang dialect) into practice in your daily life. So, the prison officer (...) has to exercise the communication link in the best way possible, right? And if there's one thing that causes problems in the work environment, it's communication with both inmates and co-workers. (I7)

Observations of the proper grammar used by prisoners to communicate confirm the need for police officers to develop new skills to understand the specific context in which they are involved. In addition to the work of surveillance, the bureaucrats define their work "a job of dialogue all day long" (I9) and consider this dynamic "the worst part of our service" (I9) because it is necessary "to dialogue with people who have already had problems with the law" (I9). However, communicating becomes imperative, since in the prison context, "our word is worth life, as well as the word of the inmate" (I9).

***Alteration of administrative procedures:*** Regime progression is a guaranteed right for inmates serving their sentences. To grant the benefit, the judge analyzes whether the inmate meets the requirements of the law, once fulfilled, the benefit will be granted. The requirements are set out in Article 112 of the Penal Execution Law, which states that at least one-sixth of the sentence is served under the previous regime and that the inmate demonstrates good behavior.

Although regime progression is provided for by law, the decision that follows on the procedural acts in question results from how prison officers from the administrative area and gang-affiliated inmates interact with each other and how bureaucrats respond to gang pressure mechanisms. Therefore, in the exercise of discretion, "the technicians that do the criminal reports are pressured (...) by gang-affiliated inmates to progress their regime" (I9). Therefore, prison officers border illegality as a way of reacting to coercion imposed by gangs, as illustrated in the story below:

There are inmates who came in yesterday and have already been served. And they are not even in the time lapse, they are still going to enter it. It was not yet possible to evaluate the conduct and the inmate's benefit process (of sentence progression) has already begun. Then you understand what was happening there. And then a very serious problem began (when I realized it), the disciplinary director came to talk to me and he began to persecute me (I10).

The respondent reports a situation in which he was transferred to the sentence progression department and, because he did not submit to operant logic, had his relationship with the boss changed to the point that he had to work with "a lot of suffocation" (I10) until after his vacation period "I came back and I was no longer in that sector" (I10). Thus, alignment among peers as well as between bureaucrats and their superiors is justified by these informal practices in response to gang pressure.

**Shortages and bribery:** Prison officers in the state of São Paulo have salaries lower than the average remuneration of prison officers in other Brazilian States. Working 12-hour shifts for 36-hour of rest (Secretary of Penitentiary Administration, Resolution 91, 04/24/12), many of these bureaucrats "end up supplying their basic needs through (loans) at the bank" (I4) because "the salary you receive is enough for you to take care of your food and energy and water supply expenses, but if you need to go to the dentist, you start to have problems" (I10).

When asked about the characteristics that make a good prison officer, one of the bureaucrats described: "he has to be assiduous, he has to be honest (...) right at the beginning of my career, a inmate offered me money to enter in the penitentiary with a cell phone (...) this puts other colleagues at risk, honesty is the main thing (that characterizes a good prison officer)" (I3). In another case, a prison officer suggests that the dynamic of scarcity that bureaucrats experience increases not only the feeling of professional devaluation but also opens the margin for bribery attempts by gangs within the system.

You can imagine, when an inmate wants a cell phone, he offers you R\$ 10,000 to enter with a mobile (in the penitentiary). And the guy (prison officer) is in need, seeing his family dying of hunger at home, it's complicated. The honest ones moonlighting and work hard (I4).

In this example, the prison officer reports a moral value expected by the other bureaucrats to ensure not only the quality of the implementation work, but the safety of the group, because "facilitating something for the inmate puts the other colleagues at risk" (I3), thus interfering in the bonds between peers within the system, after all "how are you going to work with a person you don't trust? How are you going to share the closet, the car? You can get in trouble" (I3).

**Peer tension:** Whereas prison officers see themselves as professionals who have a certain degree of freedom to adjust their execution styles to the situation and to make decisions, the examples below show that working mostly in pairs is shot through with mechanisms of surveillance of co-workers' discretion. These bureaucrats sometimes worry about inconsistencies in their colleagues' decision making that could put them at risk, fostered by the idea that gangs are aware of how the work is implemented and act according to their interests. The following interview excerpt shows how a prison officer experiences a tension between discretion and the feeling of fear of possible retaliation from the gang.

I've seen a woman almost give birth during the close inspection, imagine a nine-month-old woman and the prison officer asking her to push (to check for illicit items in her private parts). I was there and I had to call the other prison officer aside and I told her: "look, this is wrong, you are going to make the

woman give birth here, stop forcing this situation", then she answered: "but they take advantage that they are pregnant to introduce illicit drugs (in their private parts)". Finally, I said: "if the State didn't want these situations to happen in prisons, they would equip the prisons in a way that was technically possible. If the airports already have the scanners, they could also have them here. Your concern can't be the State's concern, you are forcing it, you are creating problems for yourself, you are going to create a problem" (...) When a conflict happened, I used to do the right procedure. There were some prison officers who were a little more intelligent and asked: "where is this practice written?". Then I would bring it to them and show them and they would feel more secure in front of the legal document with the resolutions of the procedure for close inspection (I10).

The above case explains how knowledge of the specific regulations can influence one's view of the case, and reveals that the decision to go beyond the norms for vocational or other motivations has consequences for the mental health of bureaucrats.

And many prison officers died right there in that prison. One prison officer committed suicide because she was persecuted by the gang. And she was one of the people who forced the situation (to be more restrictive during closing spection). There is no need, there is the protocol, do the protocol and it's good (...) that is why we worked in pairs (I10).

Like other interviewees, this prison officer recognizes that daily decisions are unintentionally influenced by the relationship with the gang. Another police officer explains how peers observe their colleagues' behavior toward crime and interfere to seek protection not only from themselves but for all the group. This bureaucrat recounts a conversation in which the inmate asks the prison officer to solve the problem of leaking water inside the cell:

"Can't you fix the problem? Water is leaking into the cell", the inmate asked. If the prison officer doesn't have a cool head (...) or he will die inside, because one day the inmates will end up getting angry with that employee because not all of them will act this way, and then they will end up killing him or he will end up suffering pressure from the the peers: "come on, you're getting tough with the guys, it's going to be difficult for you" (I4).

These examples clearly show how officers experience not only the relationship with citizens and inmates, but also with their co-workers, that is, feelings of friendship and self-protection can affect the way officers do their work and make decisions. In this last passage, it is notable that inmates identify bureaucrats who are more or less willing to meet their demands, one of the officers explains: "when you are fair, you end up attracting attention, because the inmate knows that in certain situations it is necessary to call the (name of the officer) because he has a word" (I9). Inmates often say: "I don't trust that one, call the (name of the officer) to solve the situation" (I9), in line with how bureaucrats decide to use

their discretion, the excerpt shows how some of the police officers turn to "references who will solve the situation" (I9).

***Enforced respect:*** criminal governance affects how bureaucrats feel the consequences of their decisions on their physical integrity and that of their peers. In particular, the presence of organized crime shapes how discretion is controlled. A prison officer describes how emotional skills are essential to understanding the limits of the relationship between gang-affiliated inmates and bureaucrats.

The guy who belongs to a gang knows that the only way to get things in a penitentiary is to treat the server well. Even to try to corrupt you too. He uses his education and everything else. I usually say that the respect in prison is an imposed respect, because both sides, us and them, know that if you don't respect each other you will have problems and may even die. This is why we are considered, according to the International Labor Organization, the second most dangerous profession in the world. Our work is mental, right? (I9).

The experience of fear described by a bureaucrat affects how the decision is made in different cases. In this example, the prison officer feels obliged to respect gang-affiliated inmates because of fear of retaliation and various past experiences of threats and mental sickness of professionals with gang disagreements.

## **5. Discussion**

This study shows how gang dynamics influence frontline decision-making in specific cases. Our results further highlight the importance of interaction with gangs, mediated by negotiation and informal bargaining (Valensia & King, 2014), and thus, how both sides stand their interests and power in determining the final decision. Our preliminary results provide empirical evidence for the extended accountability regime framework (Thomann et al., 2018) by demonstrating that street-level bureaucrats account for criminal gangs with the aim of maintaining the physical integrity of the police, their colleagues, and ultimately, the order of the penitentiaries.

Beyond the traditional bureaucracy-centric delivery of public policy, some studies accept the growth of multiple stakeholders, interorganizational networks, and collaborative governance, highlighting the role of non-governmental entities, voluntary organizations, and co-production in public service delivery (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2006, 2009). Our preliminary findings also strengthen the literature by underscoring the multiple arrangements involved in the implementation process in complex scenarios.

Research on street-level bureaucracy should therefore broaden its scope to include the influence of gangs on front-line decision-making, the interactive effects between bureaucrats and gang-affiliated inmates, and the various types of interactions between them. This study contributes to the literature by showing that, even where adherence to rules and procedures is expected, gang dynamics within the prison system significantly affect frontline discretion. One possible explanation is that, despite regulations, police officers have to deal with threats to physical integrity, personal value conflicts, and financially scarce situations, as well as inter-organizational relationships and different levels of interaction and subjective pressure among bureaucrats.

These results raise important questions for street-level bureaucracy and accountability scholars. First, to what extent does peer interaction influence colleagues' decision-making regarding the dilemmas brought about by gang interests? By definition, street-level bureaucrats are held accountable in various ways on the scales of interpersonal relationships, organizational interactions, and systemic dynamics (Hupe & Hill, 2007). In addition to reporting to the political and administrative top, bureaucrats are frequently held accountable by their colleagues (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

Thomann et al. (2018) indicates that "action prescriptions" are criteria and requirements for the ideal behavior of street-level bureaucrats. They can be derived from institutionalized frameworks, organizational conditions, and personal traits. The findings on peer protection, counseling, and surveillance require a theoretical reflection on how the work in pairs is crossed by crime expectations from bureaucrats' performance. Finally, understanding how the moral subjectivity and behavioral patterns of individual bureaucrats come together for decision-making and self-protection goes further on the concept of peer accountability.

Second, how can a multiple governance system be composed of criminal interests if they are only known through the individualized contact between police officers and inmates? Hill and Hupe (2007) say that policy processes involve the making of choices between "authority", "transaction" and "persuasion". Our findings indicate that these types of choices are experienced differently among prison officers; that is, the relationship with the gang depends on individual characteristics and motivations as well as inter-individual interactions.

The notion of governance claimed by Hupe and Hill (2017) tends to guide the understanding of the full comprehension of various levels of action and types of variables that can be expected to influence performance. The dynamics and behavior of gang-affiliated inmates are uniquely known and individualized by bureaucrats. As we have seen, inmates

have different preferences and place trust in bureaucrats. However, crime is a strong actor within the web that forms governance within prisons. Criminal gangs may also govern non-member criminal actors; these may be non-member inmates housed in gang-controlled prisons and other people not directly involved in criminal activity (Lessing, 2020). Thus, the governance mechanisms and institutions experienced by these bureaucrats seem to indicate extended and unstated ways in which the state relates and negotiates with these organizations.

Third, who do street-level bureaucrats feel more accountable? Our question here is meant to explore how different types of accountability compete with each other in bureaucrats' decision-making. Our aim is to understand how an alternative form of account, such as gang interest, affects other forms of accountability. Hupe and Hill (2007) stated that alternative forms of accountability exist, and in certain contexts, these can be viewed as being more or less appropriate. Hence, emphasizing dual accountability does not mean that debates over who should be in control should be avoided. This emphasis implies that discussions of the most important aspects of accountability can be strengthened by a better understanding of the relevant issues and the circumstances in which they are debated (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

While the literature brings more insights into who is accounting for the prison system, we have tried to inductively explore for whom the frontline workers in these organizations feel they are accounting. Recognizing the agency of prison officers in the process of interacting with gang-affiliated inmates draws attention to how collaborative governance affects bureaucrats' discretion within prisons.

## **6. Conclusion and further research agenda**

Unlike other street-level bureaucrats, penal police officers' implementation dilemmas are marked by fear, threat, embarrassment, and negotiations with gangs. To analyze crime as a new vector of accountability, it recognizes that part of the implementation of services in the prison system is organized by organized crime. Understanding how interactions within street-level organizations contribute to theoretical inputs and subsidize empirical investigations using analytical parameters about the functioning of public organizations.

By relying on in-depth interviews, this study analyzed how gang interests present in official-citizen interactions may affect decision-making in penitentiary politics. Our study indicates that gang threat and control mechanisms play a determining role in frontline discretion in several ways. Negotiating with inmates, using administrative processes to diffuse perceived pressure, exercising peer surveillance for the protection of physical



integrity, and final decisions depend not only on normative or vocational expectations, but also on communicative skills and knowledge of the acceptable boundaries between the nature of a penal police officer's job and gang interests.

Understanding the relationship between criminal governance and accountability can help identify potential sources of responsibility when making policy decisions at any level, from street-level bureaucracy to higher levels, such as legislatures or top administrators. Sometimes, this is experienced as problematic, when, for example, gang pressure leads to a decision contrary to the bureaucrats' own idea of what is the appropriate decision, or going further, when the decision taken takes out the bureaucrats' moral subjectivity problems that affect their mental health and physical integrity.

In the field of street-level bureaucracy, studies could be conducted to understand in depth the relationship between prison officers and inmates based on the interaction of networks. Works already conducted on their daily work practices, the occupation and circulation of spaces, and personal interactions indicate that officers end up becoming hostages of the prison environment, as most of the people they live with are part of that world (Ribeiro et al., 2019). The study of street-level bureaucracy, connected to network analysis, may be an opportunity for future work. Further studies can be carried out by looking at how accountability and governance processes are established in places with weaker democratic institutions, with organizations that lack effective coercive power (North, 1991). Thus, other forces, besides those acting within legality, see fertile paths to establish themselves, as we verified in the case of criminal governance in the prisons analyzed.

As discussed, the process of organized crime expansion in the prison system emerges as an internal control force to which frontline workers must account. Our preliminary findings revealed that these bureaucrats act by invoking moral, administrative, peer cooperation, and individual protection mechanisms to respond to the pressures they feel.

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## Appendix A: Interviewees' background characteristics

<b>Respondent ID</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Job position</b>
I1	Surveillance	Prison Guard
I2	Cellblock	Prison Guard
I3	Administrative	Prison Guard
I4	Administrative	Prison Guard
I5	Syndicate	Prison Guard
I6	Administrative	Prison Guard
I7	Cellblock	Prison Guard
I8	Nursery	Prison Guard
I9	Syndicate	Prison Guard
I10	Syndicate	Prison Guard