
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

THE ARQUIVOS DAS POLICIAS POLITICAIS OF THE STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO

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In the liberal tradition, democracy is often defined by the holding of open elections and the preservation of a given set of civil rights and liberties. As neoliberal democratic governments emerge around the world, the relationship between democracy and a citizen's democratic rights is rapidly being redefined. In the ensuing debates, access to information has become an important issue. Many of these new governments, in their efforts to project themselves as "democratic," have moved quickly to declassify a host of documents. This strategy has resulted in a tidal wave of revisionist research. One of the countries following this trend is Brazil.

After twenty years of military rule, Brazil began a slow return to democracy during a period of arduous national introspection known as *abertura*, which began in the late 1970s. As a result, Brazilians created the most democratic constitution in their history, the Federal Constitution of 1988, with the participation of political parties, the military, the elite, students and intellectuals, and popular, civil rights, and human rights organizations. Since its ratification, these groups have continued to question their limited access to documents about Brazilian institutions such as the military and police forces, which have been instrumental historically in limiting democratic and civil liberties in Brazil. These discussions led to

federal laws that established the Arquivos das Polícias Políticas, which contain documents for the period from 1930 to 1983.¹

These archives represent a rich source of primary documents for researchers seeking to understand twentieth-century Brazil. While other archival sources in Rio like as the Arquivo Nacional, the Centro da Pesquisa e Documentação (CPDOC), and the Biblioteca Nacional all house miscellaneous materials on the subject, the Arquivos das Polícias Políticas in the Arquivos Públicos do Estado de Rio de Janeiro represent the first attempt to organize systematically information on the political police from the beginning of the century to the 1980s. In order to facilitate access to the archives by international scholars, this research note will provide a brief history of the political police services and the tumultuous changes from 1918 to 1983 as well as a general description of the archives.²

Background

Throughout the twentieth century, the primary function of the Brazilian political police has been to maintain political and social order. Depending on the historical era, each agency of the political police functioned according to its own interpretation of “order and stability.” Activities have ranged from protecting the president, to eradicating fascism or terrorism, to mounting campaigns of political repression and torture. While “public order” was ill defined by national agencies prior to 1930,³ the rise of Getúlio Vargas in 1933 ushered in a new era of political police activities with the creation that same year of the Delegação Especial de Segurança Política e Social (DESPS). The Divisão de Polícia Política e Social of the Ministério da Justiça (referred to officially as the DPS) superseded this body in 1944. Numerous state organizations in Rio de Janeiro worked closely with the federal agencies: principally, the Secção de Ordem Político e Social e Segurança Pública (SOPS/RJ) from 1934 to 1942, the Divisão de Polícia Política e Social (DOPS/RJ) from 1942 to 1971, and the Departamento Autônomo de Ordem Política e Social (DOPS/RJ) from 1971 to 1975. The state of Guanabara maintained its own political police sections from 1960 to 1975. When the new state of Rio de Janeiro was

1. Law no. 8.159/91 established the framework for creating the archive, which opened 3 Mar. 1994.

2. This research note resulted from investigations following a preliminary exhibition of DOPS photographs and materials in Rio de Janeiro in 1993; research and interviews at the Arquivos Públicos do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and the Arquivos Nacionais in Rio; and consultation of two works found in the Arquivos Públicos de Rio de Janeiro: *DOPS: A Lógica da Desconfiança* (Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria de Estado da Justiça, 1993); and *Os Arquivos das Polícias Políticas: Reflexos de nossa história contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 1994).

3. The political police included agencies such as the Corpo de Investigação e Segurança, and the Inspetoria de Investigação e Segurança Pública, both sections of the Polícia Civil of the federal district of Rio de Janeiro.

created in 1975, the Brazilian government abolished all previous organizations in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Guanabara and founded the Departamento Geral de Investigações Especiais (DGIE). This entity eventually inherited all federal archives prior to 1960 and the state archives from 1934 to 1983 (see appendices 1 and 2).⁴

Due to the covert nature of political police activities, each agency maintained its own archive. The current collection of the Arquivos Públicos do Estado de Rio de Janeiro represents a remarkable assembly of federal-level documents on the activities of the political police from 1918 to 1983 throughout the country.

The Archives

The location of the archives far from the Arquivo Nacional intentionally accentuates their special status in a new democratic era. According to Waldecy Catherine Magalhães Pedreira and current director Eliana Rezende Furtado de Mendonça, the government-appointed commission transferred documents to the new location in order to achieve proper preservation and guarantee equal access to the documents.⁵ In 1992 the Ministério da Justiça gave the Arquivos Públicos do Estado de Rio de Janeiro a mandate to safeguard the archives of the political police in Niterói, Rio's sister city. Researchers seeking information on the political police will find the archives a veritable gold mine. Because of this sector's extensive involvement in Brazilian politics, economics, society, and cultural life, these records provide insights into all walks of Brazilian life. Although the collection is still being organized, researchers and technical experts have created a system that will greatly facilitate research. Consulting materials in any archive can be a cumbersome process nonetheless, and it is therefore helpful to be aware of the rules governing access to the collection.

Access to the Archives

Brazilian federal law and Rio de Janeiro state law (number 1.819/94) guarantee access to most of the declassified documents in the Arquivos Públicos. Access is almost always approved, according to Director

4. The federal government was transferred to Brasília in 1955. In 1960, the political police ceased its federal activities in the state of Rio de Janeiro, but its archives remained in the newly created state of Guanabara until 1975. In that year, the state of Guanabara was annexed by the new state of Rio de Janeiro.

5. See Pedreira, "Recolhimento do Arquivo das Polícias Políticas do Rio de Janeiro," *DOPS: A lógica da desconfiança*, 19–21. Interview with Eliana Rezende Furtado de Mendonça, Director of the Arquivos, 10 Jan. 1995. The equal-access clause resulted from the expectation that certain interested parties, especially opposition forces, would seek access to individual collections.

Mendonça, but researchers must follow the necessary protocol to obtain such access. First, they should write a letter to the director of the archives detailing the nature of their research project and the specific sections or parts of the archives to be consulted. Second, although not mandatory, a letter of introduction from a dean or department head from the researcher's institution is helpful. For graduate students, a letter from a thesis advisor will suffice. Letters in English or Portuguese should be sent by air mail or fax to Dr. Eliana Rezende Furtado de Mendonça, Rua Jansen de Melo 3, 4 Andar, Niterói–Rio de Janeiro (fax 021-719-5135).

Description

The diversity and magnitude of the collection are impressive. The archives contain publications, photographs of persons and events, audio-magnetic tape recordings, posters, microfilm, clippings from newspapers, periodicals, and unpublished documents that include letters and notes organized alphabetically within sections. Sections may be classified according to subject, person, event, institution, iconography, investigation, or under a miscellaneous heading. Any topic may contain an unlimited number of files. Prospective researchers should explain in as much detail as possible which sections or areas they want to access (see the description of sections in appendix 3).

On receiving letters requesting access, the director usually responds by mail. If no answer has been received before leaving for Brazil, researchers should take copies of their requests with them. Access is rarely denied, except in cases where researchers are seeking information on individuals. In these cases, the researcher must also obtain permission from the individual or individual's family. Individuals may be difficult to contact directly, but the director's office can facilitate this communication.⁶

After receiving approval, researchers may access the archives once they sign the "Termo de Responsabilidade." This formal document guarantees that no materials to be consulted will be used against the federal government of Brazil. Users must sign this form on site.

Holdings

The archive contains information on the political police of four general political divisions: the federal system (1930–1960), the state of Guanabara (1960–1975), the state of Rio de Janeiro (1934–1975), and the state of Rio de Janeiro (1975–1983). The organizers wisely decided to maintain the thematic classification used by the DGIE, which inherited classification systems employed by previous agencies.

6. Researchers are expected to wear appropriate attire. Shorts are strictly prohibited.

APPENDIX 1

Major Political Police Agencies and Years of Operation at the Federal Level

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Duration</i>
Corpo de Investigação e Segurança (CIS) (part of the Polícia Civil do Distrito Federal)	1907–1920
Inspetoria de Investigação e Segurança Pública (ISP) Secção de Ordem Social e Segurança Pública	1920–1922
Delegação Especial de Segurança Política e Social (DESPS)	1933–1944
Departamento Federal de Segurança Pública (DFSP)	1944–1946
Divisão de Polícia e Social (DPS) ^a	1944–1960

^aThe federal capital moved to Brasília, but the archives remained in Rio.

APPENDIX 2

Major Political Police Agencies and Years of Operation, Rio de Janeiro

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Duration</i>
Divisão de Polícia Política e Social (DOPS/RJ)	1942–1971
Departamento Autônomo de Ordem Política e Social (DOPS/RJ)	1971–1975
Departamento Geral de Investigações Especiais (DGIE)	1975–1983

APPENDIX 3

Organization of Sections by the Departamento Geral de Investigações Especiais

<i>Section</i>	<i>Years of Operation</i>	<i>No. of Files</i>
Arms Possession ^a (Armas, Porte de Armas)	1947–1961	5
Administration ^a (Administração)	1934–1983	182
Africa	1963	1
Austrian ^{a, b} (Austriaco)	1942–1955	3
Communism (Comunismo)	1934–1983	195
Confidential (Confidencial)	1967–1982	30
Custody (Custódia)	1966–1983	12
Cuba	1963–1966	1
Declarations (Declarações)	1960–1982	12
Director's Office (Gabinete do Diretor)	1966–1974	13
Districts ^a (Distritos)	1960–1982	28
Division of Arms and Explosives ^b (Conhecimento, Divisão de Armas e Explosivos)	1971–1982	8
DGIE	1967–1982	110
DOPS ^{a, c}	1957–1975	218
English ^{a, b} (Inglês)	1939–1957	7
Espionage ^{a, b} (Espionagem)	1939–1964	9
French ^{a, b} (Francês)	1939–1957	8
General ^{a, b} (Geral)	1927–1966	125
German ^b (Alemão)	1937–1957	27
Guanabara	1962–1969	5

APPENDIX 3 (continued)

<i>Section</i>	<i>Years of Operation</i>	<i>No. of Files</i>
Information ^a (Informações)	1947–1982	167
Inquiries ^{a, b} (Inquéritos)	1940–1981	31
Integralism ^{a, b} (Integralismo)	1934–1959	36
Investigations (Averiguações)	1947–1983	40
Italian ^{a, b} (Italiano)	1939–1958	6
Japanese ^{a, b} (Japonês)	1938–1955	8
Military ^{a, b} (Militar)	1935–1965	17
Ministry of Justice (Ministério da Justiça)	1965–1973	5
Ministry of Health (Ministério da Saúde)	1965–1973	13
Ministry of Aeronautics (Ministério da Aeronáutica)	1966–1973	5
Ministry of the Navy (Ministério da Marinha)	1966–1974	3
Ministry of Labor (Ministério do Trabalho)	1966–1973	21
Ministry of the Interior (Ministério do Interior)	1968–1973	3
Ministry of Mines and Energy (Ministério das Minas e Energia)	1968–1973	3
Municipalities (Municípios)	1974–1983	72
Miscellanea ^{a, b} (Diversos)	1937–1968	52
Newspaper Clippings (Recortes de Jornais)	1979–1981	4
North American ^{a, b} (Norte-Americano)	1939–1965	15
MEC ^b general		10
Politics ^{a, b} (Político)	1930–1967	22
Political Investigation ^a (Investigação Policial)	1969–1982	18
Preventive ^a (Preventivo)	1951–1983	283
Prisoner Charts ^{a, b} (Mapas de Presos)	1940–1976	12
Probes (Sindicância)	1967–1983	39
Reserved Bulletin (Boletim Reservado)	1961–1971	63
Russia	1962–1981	5
Secret (Secreto)	1962–1978	163
SOPS	1966–1974	9
South America ^{a, b} (Sul-Americano)	1935–1963	17
Spanish ^{a, b} (Espanhol)	1936–1961	5
States ^{a, b} (Estados)	1927–1965	109
Strikes (Greves)	1960–1966	10
Solicitations (Informações Solicitadas)	1965–1983	155
Students (Estudantil)	1965–1982	81
Terrorism (Terrorismo)	1964–1982	22
Testimonials and Affidavits (Certidões)	1964–1978	6
Unions ^{a, b} (Sindicatos)	1938–1976	20
Warrants (Alvarás)	1964–1981	9

^a Documents from the federal Divisão de Polícia Política e Social are integrated into these sections.

^b Documents from the DEPS are integrated into these sections.

^c Despite the existence of a separate DOPS section, all other sections (with the exception of the MEC) contain documents pertaining to or supported by the activities of DOPS. The DOPS section is limited to DOPS activities from 1965 to 1975 under three subheadings: Anti-Democratic Activities, Public Order, and Director's Office.