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Policing Souls, Redeeming Nations: Evangelical Activism and the Far-Right Counterpolitics of Emotions in the Brazilian Police

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In liberal democracies, policing is conventionally understood as a secular and rational practice grounded in the rule of law. Yet this assumption is unsettled as religion re-emerges as a formative force in security governance. Across the contemporary global far right, religious nationalism increasingly legitimises authoritarian security agendas by fusing moral and emotional appeals with projects of exclusion and repression. This article argues that such dynamics hinge on what we term the counterpolitics of emotions, the political contestation through which actors seek to reshape the emotional norms that sustain liberal institutions. By reconfiguring how state agents feel about themselves, their work, and those they govern, these counterpolitics enable the affective normalization of authoritarian practices. The argument is developed through the case of Brazil, where Evangelical activism has become deeply entwined with policing. Drawing on documentary and interview data, the article shows how Evangelical chaplaincy organizations cultivate emotional repertoires that valorize pride and vulnerability while suppressing guilt and shame. In doing so, they recast police officers as divine subjects and policing as a Christian vocation. This emotional reorientation fuses Evangelical and far-right politics, transforming security institutions from within. The article thus demonstrates how counterpolitics of emotion underpin the rise of authoritarianism and contribute to its transnational diffusion.

En las democracias liberales, la labor policial se entiende, normalmente, como una práctica secular y racional basada en el Estado de derecho. Sin embargo, este supuesto se ve cuestionado a medida que la religión vuelve a surgir como una fuerza formativa en la gobernanza de la seguridad. En toda la extrema derecha global contemporánea, el nacionalismo religioso legitima, cada vez con mayor frecuencia, las agendas autoritarias en materia de seguridad dado que combina apelaciones morales y emocionales con proyectos de exclusión y represión. Este artículo sostiene que tales dinámicas dependen de lo que denominamos la contrapolítica de las emociones, es decir, la contestación política mediante la cual los actores buscan remodelar las normas emocionales que sostienen a las instituciones liberales. Estas contrapolíticas, al reconfigurar cómo los agentes del Estado se sienten respecto a sí mismos, su trabajo y a quienes

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gobiernan, permiten la normalización afectiva de las prácticas autoritarias. Esta hipótesis se desarrolla a través del caso de Brasil, donde el activismo evangélico se ha entrelazado profundamente con la policía. El artículo se basa en datos documentales y en entrevistas con el fin de mostrar cómo las organizaciones de capellanía evangélica cultivan repertorios emocionales que valoran el orgullo y la vulnerabilidad mientras suprimen la culpa y la vergüenza. Con todo esto, estas organizaciones reinterpretan a los policías como sujetos divinos y a la labor policial como una vocación cristiana. Esta reorientación emocional fusiona la política evangélica y de extrema derecha, transformando las instituciones de seguridad desde dentro. De esta forma, el artículo demuestra cómo la contrapolítica de las emociones sostiene el auge del autoritarismo y contribuye a su difusión transnacional.

Dans les démocraties libérales, le maintien de l'ordre s'entend généralement comme une pratique séculaire et rationnelle qui s'ancre dans l'État de droit. Pourtant, la religion vient perturber cette hypothèse, car elle réapparaît comme une force formative dans la gouvernance de sécurité. Dans l'extrême droite mondiale contemporaine, le nationalisme religieux légitime de plus en plus les programmes de sécurité autoritaires en fusionnant les attrait moraux et émotionnels avec des projets d'exclusion et de répression. Cet article affirme que de telles dynamiques reposent sur la « contre-politique des émotions », la contestation politique par laquelle les acteurs cherchent à refaçonner les normes émotionnelles qui entretiennent les institutions libérales. En reconfigurant l'opinion des agents de l'État sur eux-mêmes, leur travail et ceux qu'ils gouvernent, ces contre-politiques permettent la normalisation affective des pratiques autoritaires. L'on développe l'argument en utilisant le cas du Brésil, où le militantisme évangélique s'enchevêtre désormais étroitement dans le maintien de l'ordre. Se fondant sur des données documentaires et d'entretiens, l'article montre comment les organisations de chapellenie évangélique cultivent des répertoires émotionnels qui valorisent la fierté et la vulnérabilité tout en réprimant la culpabilité et la honte. Ce faisant, elles présentent les agents de police comme des sujets divins et le maintien de l'ordre comme une vocation chrétienne. Cette réorientation émotionnelle fusionne les politiques évangélique et d'extrême droite, en transformant les institutions de sécurité de l'intérieur. L'article démontre ainsi comment la contre-politique des émotions sous-tend l'essor de l'autoritarisme et contribue à sa diffusion transnationale.

Introduction

In liberal democracies, the police are conventionally regarded as a secular institution whose mandate and operational practices are presumed to derive from rational procedures and the rule of law. Yet, questions arise when policing and religion intersect in states that are formally secular but experiencing significant religious demographic shifts, and when police culture is shaped by religious activism. Within the contemporary global far-right context, characterized by the expansion of authoritarian security policies aimed at intimidating, repressing, and surveilling marginalized social groups, religious ideologies, including Christian nationalism in the United States, Religious Zionism in Israel, and Hindutva in India, have increasingly served both to legitimize these policies and to mobilize popular support for their enforcement (Seymour 2024). In fact, punitive security practices—through policing, militarism, borderwatch, or ethnic cleansing—and religious nationalism—through grassroots mobilization, legal challenges to constitutional guarantees, and mob violence—appear to be two defining principles in far-right mainstreaming that

contribute to eroding democracies from within (Campos and Finazzi, 2025). Instead of analyzing these agendas separately, however, this article focuses on their fusion and the challenges it presents to democracy.

Drawing on insights from the literature on religious policing (Oosterbaan and Diphooorn 2023), responsabilization in security (Emerson 2020), the far-right (Pinheiro-Machado and Vargas-Maia 2023), and the politics of emotions (Beattie et al. 2019), we introduce the concept of the *counterpolitics of emotions* to denote the political contestation through which actors seek actively to undermine and replace existing and hegemonic “feeling rules.” Such feeling rules are social norms that stipulate to subjects how they ought to feel, what they want to feel, as well as how to express or repress these feelings (Hochschild 1979). In this article, we focus particularly on policing, where such counterpolitics unfolds beyond media scrutiny and public debate because they do not directly change policies, but rather reshape how security and policing actors feel about themselves, their work, others, and the world. In this way, seemingly benign or even well-intentioned political practices produce far-reaching consequences both for those enforcing state authority and for the marginalized communities subjected to it.

While religious affiliations and exact ideological orientations differ across contexts, a transnational trend is evident: far-right actors contest the emotional norms governing security institutions and majority populations alike, subverting liberal democratic norms and cultivating emotional dispositions that enable the co-optation of state institutions and the normalization of authoritarian governance. By engaging in the counterpolitics of emotions, far-right actors facilitate the transnational spread of authoritarian practices and religious nationalist agendas by linking local interventions to broader global religious and ideological networks. As such, this article highlights the significance of the counterpolitics of emotions in explaining the global surge and success of the far right.

To develop this argument we look at the case of Brazil, where in recent years authoritarian policing has become increasingly entwined with Evangelicalism through a successful counterpolitics of emotions operated via volunteer chaplaincy organizations. Brazil faces a persistent problem of violent crime, with 38,722 violent deaths in 2024 alone (Stabile and Moreira 2025). In that same year, however, the police were responsible for a staggering 6,014 deaths (15.53 percent), (Tokarina 2024), with the majority of victims being black and poor favela residents. Scholarship has extensively engaged with these issues, interrogating their causes, such as the impact of colonial legacies and institutionalized racism (Flom 2024; Costa 2011; Willis 2015). We take a slightly different perspective that focuses on the emotional governance that ultimately enables this state violence and ask: how is it possible for police officers to commit and witness violence in their everyday lives without being overwhelmed with anxiety, shame, and guilt?

Official statistics suggest that officers do not in fact always cope well with these issues as there is a mental health epidemic within the Brazilian police forces (de Sousa, Barroso, and Ribeiro 2022). As Martins (2024) reminds us, violence affects individuals in ways that go beyond physical wounds. Yet, due to underfunding and lack of resources, this epidemic is not being properly addressed by the state. Instead, local governments resort increasingly to what in the literature has been referred to as responsabilization of civil society (Emerson 2020), where external actors fill the void of mental health provisions. We are particularly interested in how faith-based actors such as PMs de Cristo (“Officers for Christ”), a São Paulo-based Evangelical volunteer police chaplaincy, exploit this mental health crisis to push their own missionary agenda. Evangelical military and police chaplaincies have grown considerably in the last few years in Brazil, creating strategies to win the hearts and minds of police officers and advance a logic of theocratic policing that is often embroiled in far-right ideology (Campos, 2024). This raises a number of important questions. What are the political consequences of outsourcing mental health care to Evangelical

chaplains? How do Evangelical actors harness the emotional crisis within the police to advance a far-right religious agenda? In what ways do these actors challenge and reconstitute hegemonic emotional norms within policing institutions? And ultimately, what do these dynamics reveal about the broader entanglements between religion, emotion, and authoritarian governance in the contemporary global far-right?

Drawing upon documentary, ethnographic and interview data, we argue that Evangelical actors approach their mandate to provide mental health support by legitimizing and encouraging certain emotions, most notably feelings of vulnerability and pride, while delegitimizing and discouraging others, most notably guilt, shame, and even callous rational “emotionlessness.” This counterpolitics of emotions is a political practice that directly aims to challenge and subvert established hegemonic feeling rules in the Brazilian police apparatus. In the process, it may actually help individual officers to cope with their own mental health issues, such as depression, as well as related problems like drug-addiction and alcoholism, while simultaneously reinforcing entrenched authoritarianism. In the empirical analysis, we show how Evangelical activism in the Brazilian police functions at the micro-level and how actors push for responsabilization at the macro-level to enable and institutionalize this form of activism. We demonstrate how political claims about emotions are central to the Evangelical subversion of the Brazilian state and how transformed feeling rules and emotional dispositions reshape the policing subject and with what political implications.

The article begins with reviewing the literature on citizen responsabilization in global politics and how the role of volunteers in general and faith-based actors in particular have been discussed in the scholarship. We then turn toward the literature on emotion research in International Relations (IR) to develop a framework for the counterpolitics of emotions, allowing us to understand Evangelical chaplains’ political activism and its political implications. We proceed by offering an in-depth discourse analysis of materials published by PMs de Cristo (publications and blog pieces) and expert interviews drawn from author’s fieldwork on Evangelicalism and policing in Brazil. We will then draw a conclusion and reflect on the implications of our findings for future research on the intersections between policing, emotions, and religion to better grasp the global far-right from an International Political Sociology perspective.

Responsibilization in Security Policy and the Role of Faith-Based Actors

While societal engagement in security has deep historical roots (Reeves 2017), the last three decades have seen a marked trend toward integrating citizens into security provision. Framed conceptually as “citizen responsabilization” (Emerson 2020), “civilianization of security” (Sliwinski 2013), or “plural policing” (Hirschmann 2022), this shift positions individuals not merely as objects of state surveillance but as active participants in crime control, policing, and national security (Ayling 2007). This positions the state as a key node within a diffuse network where policing is conducted by, through, and below it (Walsh 2014). While this reshapes state–society relations (van der Land 2014), these partnerships are generally seen as reaffirming rather than overriding the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence (Reeves 2017).

In this responsabilized landscape, faith-based actors have emerged as key articulators. Leveraging long-standing charity and advocacy networks, religious groups act to fill gaps in state security provision exacerbated by neoliberal societies. Within the Brazilian context, Evangelicalism has emerged as the preeminent religious force navigating and capitalizing on this responsabilized landscape. Broadly, Evangelicals share core beliefs in biblical authority, personal salvation through Christ, and active proselytization (McAlister 2018; Spyer 2020). Brazilian Evangelicalism comprises three main strands with often blurry boundaries (Mariano 2014):

middle-class mainline Protestants; Pentecostals, who emerged from the US holiness movement (Cox 2021) to emphasize spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit (Anderson 2010); and neo-Pentecostals, who embrace “this-worldly salvation” through prosperity theology (Kirby 2019, p. 577). Fuelled by the growing inequalities of neoliberal adjustment, Evangelicalism—particularly Pentecostalism—has experienced explosive growth, expanding from 6.6 percent of Brazil’s population in the 1980s to a projected majority by the 2030s (Lanz and Oosterbaan 2016;). In marginalized urban areas, these churches offer crucial micro-solidarity, order, and hope amid violence and precarity (Spyer 2020)—conditions closely mirrored within Brazilian police institutions. This demographic boom has translated into formidable political power, epitomized by the conservative Evangelical Parliamentary Front. Competing fiercely for public space, this bloc frames systemic poverty and crime as individual spiritual failures (Webber 2020) and champions patriarchal welfare alongside punitive, militarized security policies, making them key actors in Brazil’s far-right turn (Lacerda 2019).

Traditionally, research on religion and policing has focused narrowly on the fraught relations between police institutions and religious minorities (Miles-Johnson 2022). While exposing cultural biases, this focus has inadvertently naturalized the assumption that police in liberal democracies operate as strictly secular, rational institutions. Challenging this, Oosterbaan and Diphooorn (2023, p. 226) introduce the framework of “religious policing” to examine the myriad ways in which policing entangles with religious practices. In Brazil, for instance, scholars have witnessed the rise of a religious-military urbanism entailing “the fusion of military interventions on national soil under democracy and religious modes of governing urban territories” through a series of partnerships between Evangelical actors and the military during so-called pacification operations in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Oosterbaan and Machado 2020, p. 105).

Following Oosterbaan and Diphooorn’s framework, we view religion as both a lived reality and a mediated domain of non-empirical ideas and practices (Meyers 2020). However, we also acknowledge that the religion–secular binary is a liberal construct with colonial origins (Stack, Goldenberg, and Fitzgerald 2015). In post-colonial contexts like Brazil, the state’s inception and its historical separation of private religion and public secularism are indistinguishable from a Christian-centred colonial project, for centuries dominated by Roman Catholicism and now giving way to decentralized forms of Christianity.

We argue that police and military chaplaincies—which provide pastoral care and morale-building within institutions of collective violence—are crucial sites for state–religion negotiations. Rather than viewing religion as a “contagion” that strips policing of its secular nature, and rather than angling military chaplaincies solely from the perspective of mental health interventions, we align with Yadgar and Hadad (2023, p. 246) in seeing such fusions as a “theopolitics of the nation-state.” Ultimately, this fusion is dedicated to the sacralization of the state, its military power, and national identity—a logic that underpins most global forms of far-right religious nationalism.

Furthermore, the literature on responsabilization in policing has largely ignored its emotional dimensions. While neoliberalism and austerity have driven responsabilization (Reeves 2017), the emotional labor of non-state actors—particularly religious groups—in shaping “feeling rules” (Hochschild 1979) around trust, empathy, shame, and hate remains underexamined. Emotions are central to policing; as Åhäll (2018) argues, they are the means through which individuals internalize power dynamics and intuitive notions of right and wrong. Thus emotions, and specifically emotions encouraged by forms of religious belonging, constitute a central dimension of how political actors attempt to govern conduct, including in the sphere of policing.

In summary, while existing scholarship addresses the roles of volunteers and chaplains, it lacks a sustained analysis of how these grass-roots actors contest and reshape the emotional culture and “feeling rules” of police forces. This gap underscores the need for a theoretical framework on the politics of emotion to examine religious activism within policing as a site of emotional contestation.

The Counterpolitics of Emotions

To develop our theoretical framework, we define the politics of emotions as the discursive contestation over “who gets to feel what, when, and how, and whose feelings matter” (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, p. 973). While most work on emotions is concerned with what Gustafsson and Hall (2021) refer to as “political emotion” and Sara Ahmed as the “cultural politics of emotions,” namely embodied emotional experiences and the ways in which emotions circulate between bodies and objects and in the process shape social and political relations (Ahmed 2014), the notion of the politics of emotions we deploy differs in emphasis. It is primarily concerned with the *political claims* about emotions and with the differential legitimacy and desirability afforded to particular emotional expressions and experiences thereof (Gellwitzki and Houde 2025; Gustafsson and Hall 2021). This might be about who should feel a certain emotion, for example shame; who is entitled to or even should feel a certain emotion, for instance pride; or interpretations of certain behaviours as (de)legitimately emotional (Beattie et al. 2019; Barberis and Huseynli 2025). All social structures and institutions have their own politics of emotion, established and institutionalized as feeling rules and the social norms related to them (Hochschild 1979; Åhäll 2018). For instance, feeling rules within police forces tend to encourage warrior ethos and masculinized identity, reinforcing the view of police labor as physical and procedural whilst eschewing the emotional (Sørbøe 2020). However, research has shown that police officers are trained to conduct an intense emotional labor of deliberately suppressing personal emotions (i.e., trauma, stress, and fear) to maintain professional demeanor, while actively performing inauthentic or forced emotions (i.e. calmness, empathy, sternness, and anger) when dealing with victims or offenders (Oliveira et al. 2023).

Feeling rules stipulate which emotions are (il)legitimate, what individuals ought to feel, what they attempt to feel, and how they should express and manage their emotions, if at all (Hochschild 1979). Put differently, political claims sediment into social and normative power structures that are internalized and felt by those situated within them (Åhäll 2018). In liberal democracies, for example, there are hegemonic feeling rules that stipulate that hate of a minority is an illegitimate emotion whereas fear of minorities is not; the latter is furthermore often instrumentalized as a justification for repressive measures and security-informed responses (Gellwitzki 2025). These rules, however, are not static or fixed but can be contested and (re)negotiated.

We are interested in a specific form of the politics of emotions, which we term the *counterpolitics* of emotions: the systematic subversion of the dominant politics of emotions and hegemonic feeling rules by actors operating outside formal centres of power within broader projects aimed at capturing or reshaping state institutions and wider social life. Such counterpolitics do not necessarily entail rupture with the status quo; they may involve incremental shifts, intensifications, or selective rearticulations of existing emotional norms and feeling rules, yet still generate significant political effects by consolidating entrenched institutional biases and sustaining forms of structural and direct violence. In particular, they may amplify or slightly alter dominant feeling rules, or legitimize practices previously subject to moral or social censure. This counterpolitics of emotions forms part of a global and transnational trend in which far-right actors seek to capture the state by contesting, (re)negotiating, and ultimately reshaping the ways in which majority populations feel about and relate to themselves, minorities, and the world more broadly

(Gellwitzki 2025; Hamilton 2024). This includes in the literature hitherto neglected transnational religious groups, chaplains, and other non-state actors whose interventions challenge prevailing affective expectations and introduce alternative emotional logics. Thus, the counterpolitics of emotions go beyond merely resisting, contesting, or negotiating hegemonic emotional norms. Rather, they involve the active construction of alternative emotional orders that question the legitimacy and authority of dominant affective regimes. This constitutes a form of political struggle within broader structures of authority, particularly in relation to emotional and, in our case, security governance, with far-reaching political consequences.

In this article, we focus on an understudied yet increasingly important source of contestation of the Brazilian police force's institutionalized feeling rules: Evangelical Christians. Globally, Christianity has a long history of establishing and contesting different feeling rules, ranging from "love thy neighbor" to "hate the enemy" (Broeren and Djupe 2024). In the case at hand, we show how Evangelicals, through police chaplaincy solidarity networks and in alliances with police commanders and the far-right, have been engaged in a coordinated and sustained political intervention that seeks to reconfigure what police officers should feel, how they should manage their emotions, and how they should relate emotionally to their community, to violence, and to the Other. This counterpolitics of emotions promote feeling rules that idealize and sanctify the police officers' self and in-group as divinely sanctioned, while denigrating and vilifying negative emotions and the Other as manifestations of biblical evil. It promotes and encourages police officers to take pride in policing as a "profession of the heart" (Griffith 2021) and to express vulnerability toward in-group members. At the same time, it enables further dehumanization of marginalized groups and spaces as endemically prone to crime and violence due to lack of Christian morals. In other words, this counterpolitics of emotion pushes for feeling rules that, as we will discuss in detail below, are highly attractive to police officers because they alleviate emotional distress and promote self-esteem in the context of a public career perceived as devalued. In fact, Evangelical chaplains are promoting narratives and practices of "humanization" of police labor, effectively filling in the gaps left by decades of neoliberal restructuring that leaves officers (unable) to cope with their own emotional labor. However, they also reshape policing in ways that subvert accountability and democratic processes.

Processes of responsabilization open windows of opportunity for non-state actors to engage in the counterpolitics of emotions. We contest that responsabilization of civil society thrives not only through emotions of fear and anxiety around the perceived incapacity of the state to act on crime and violence, but through a specific form of community building and human networks that evince the power of positive, affectionate emotions such as care, love, solidarity, and redemption—although these should be qualified as *particularistic* and not *universalist* (Pinheiro-Machado 2025). Similarly, it is possible to suggest that the sense of empowerment and responsabilization animating the far-right, and especially the Christian far-right, rests on a type of active base-building from below that hinges on tapping positive emotions and messaging: hope, aspiration, salvation, and "giving back." This reveals the deep-seated complexities animating far-right politics and de-democratization globally whilst also suggesting that political responses need to be equally complex. Crucially, while we focus on the case of Brazil, these counterpolitics of emotions are inevitably connected to the global struggle of Evangelical Christians and the far right to advance authoritarian agendas (author 2023). More importantly, although religious and far-right movements across the world—from the United States to Israel, India, and Brazil—differ in ideological and theological orientation, they share a common investment in the counterpolitics of emotions insofar as they seek to establish new hegemonic feeling rules. Centring on the counterpolitics of emotions thus enables us to make sense of an otherwise bifurcated, fragmented, and decentralized transnational trend by focusing on the one element they all share: the creation,

transformation, and regulation of the emotional needs, demands, expressions, and expectations of majority populations. In the following section, we discuss how the counterpolitics of emotions are enacted by Evangelical police chaplains and consider their implications for police officers and the Brazilian state.

Reaching for the Soul of Officers: Evangelical Activism and the Counterpolitics of Emotions

In this section, we explore how Evangelical activism intersects with the lived realities of police work in Brazil, capitalizing on existing institutional tensions to advance a particular emotional and ideological project. Specifically, we conduct a discourse analysis of the ways in which the volunteer chaplaincy group PMs de Cristo employs emotions and emotionally charged language within its publications and blog posts. Through this analysis, we examine their discursive practices as a form of the counterpolitics of emotions, identifying how existing hegemonic feeling rules are contested and alternative emotional norms are established. This textual data is triangulated and complemented by expert interviews conducted in August 2023 with military police officials, police chaplains, and pastors associated with PMs de Cristo.

The interviews are situated within a broader, multi-year ethnographic project on Evangelicalism and policing in Brazil. This wider fieldwork encompasses four volunteer and institutional chaplaincy organizations across Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Curitiba, Brasília, and Rio Branco, drawing on participant observation, documentary filmmaking, archival research, and semi-structured interviews. Situating our discourse analysis within this extensive ethnographic backdrop allows us to rigorously contextualize the texts within the lived environment and everyday realities of Brazilian policing. It should be noted that despite historical and theological distinctions between Evangelical denominations in Brazil, police chaplaincies actively flatten them. Within the security sector, they operate primarily as interdenominational spaces, deploying a universalist approach to Evangelicalism that prioritizes shared moral governance over strict doctrinal divides.

In terms of our analytical scope, we do not make direct claims about the internal psychological states of individual officers—how they actually experience these emotions—nor do we attempt to map a direct causal link to specific operational outcomes on the ground. Rather, we focus analytically on the explicit and implicit ways Evangelical actors talk about and prescribe emotions. We analyse these discourses as political claims about emotions, which, in the context of coercively mandated institutions like the police, is in and of itself highly significant, for it reveals how the emotional governance underpinning state violence is actively reconfigured from within. Their integration within police structures also indicates the institutionalization and sedimentation of these counterpolitical projects within the very apparatus they seek to reshape.

First, we outline the context of mental health vulnerabilities within the Brazilian police, exacerbated by neoliberal pressures, which has created an opening for religious activism by volunteer-led chaplaincy organizations. Next, we delve into the specific strategies of the group PMs de Cristo and, finally, analyse how they have become embedded in far-right politics.

The Emotional Austerity of Neoliberal Policing: Mental Health and the Opening for Evangelical Activism

Policing in Brazil is complicated by many factors that induce its politicization along the ideological spectrum. Police violence, for instance, creates opposition from progressive sectors that seek more robust forms of regulation (i.e., training and operational mandates) and campaigning for de-militarization and de-funding; while for

conservative, right-wing and far-right sectors it generates support in the form of activism for more police autonomy, which is often applauded by some sectors as a form of productivity (i.e., the more “criminals” arrested or killed, the better). Another important element that affects its politicization, and indeed contributes to violent police culture, are endogenous issues affecting police labor, such as exposure to extreme situations, job precarity, and rigid hierarchies.

The Brazilian police forces operate within a context of significant occupational stress, grappling with issues that profoundly affect officers’ wellbeing. Reports of burnout, depression and PTSD are rising starkly, while suicide rates have reached alarming levels in the last few years. Between 2018 and 2023, 1,047 public security professionals took their own lives, 821 of them being active in service and 226 retired (IPPES 2024, p. 4). Official statistics suggest a mental health epidemic within the police, a crisis exacerbated by underfunding and lack of resources (De Sousa, Barroso, and Ribeiro 2022). This scenario, reflective of broader neoliberal pressures that resulted in the withdrawal of state support for public sector workers’ welfare, creates an environment where officers feel abandoned or left to cope with profound emotional and psychological burdens on their own. Aggravating this is a highly militarized and masculine culture that stigmatizes feelings of vulnerability, reflecting deeply entrenched views of officers as warriors operating in a war between good and evil (Sørbøe 2020). Pauschinger’s (2020) ethnography in Rio de Janeiro, highlights how officers operate as “edgeworkers” navigating extreme risk, disorder, and a strictly hypermasculine working environment. Caught in the futile cycle of policing urban conflict—which officers refer to through the metaphor of “drying ice”—officers experience a profound loss of control, where the prevailing emotional responses frequently manifest as violent emotional outbursts to regain authority.

Evangelical actors perceive this state of affairs as an opportunity. One military police chaplain, for instance, considers that “the intensification of problems such as suicide, violence, and drug addiction [. . .] are opportunities to the advancement of the chaplaincy” (Alves 2017, p. 166). This advancement occurs because Evangelical police chaplaincies, formed from voluntary civil society associations, position themselves as providers of support in a vacuum of official provision. Functioning as micro-solidarity networks (Malesevic 2017), they offer strong social and affective bonds to police officers and are seen as a place of fraternity between “brothers in arms,” actively dedicated to working the “totality” of the officer both in-duty and off-duty (Campos, forthcoming).

During counselling, Bible studies or prayer sessions that take place within police battalions, chaplains address mental health problems associated with the precariousness and risks of police labor through a sentimentalized language (Griffith 2021) that helps break barriers sedimented in organizational culture, effectively allowing officers to express vulnerability and expose emotions otherwise repressed (Campos, forthcoming). By constructing spaces of career valorization (i.e., through charity to officers’ families, allowing church halls to be used by the police in official ceremonies, promoting awareness campaigns within the battalions, and engaging in social media activism exalting the police), Evangelical chaplains have become widely recognized as a strategic asset by military police commanders, on account that they help deliver a more “efficient” officer (Alves 2015). Efficiency here means pitching Christian values as equivalent to secular police mandates, generating highly motivated officers who view their job not as a transactional value but part of a deeply meaningful missionary purpose, and who are able to solve personal moral dilemmas by filtering policing and violence with religious filters. To better understand how Evangelical police chaplains achieve this, below we look at the role of a prominent chaplaincy project, the Evangelical Police Association of the state of São Paulo, known as *PMs de Cristo* or “Officers for Christ,” and how their counterpolitics of emotions is constructed from below in articulation with the Military Police.

The Counterpolitics of Emotions in Action: The Intellectual Workings of the Officers for Christ

PMs de Cristo was formally established on June 25, 1992, by seventy-four Evangelical police officers (Lamin 2021). Its genesis, however, can be traced back to 1984 within the Military Police Academy of Barro Branco, where students initiated the Barro Branco Evangelical Guild, holding “weekly Biblical meditation gatherings and communion” (Terra 2021, p. 9). These early guild activities, encouraged by senior officials as socializing endeavors, were initially “isolated and momentary” (PMs de Cristo 2021a). The formalization in 1992 marked a more structured approach to base-building within the police. PMs de Cristo’s stated mission is to “value the human figure of the police officer, assisting the Military Police family emotionally and spiritually based on the message, principles, and Christian values” (PMs de Cristo, n.d. a). The association, counting with around 20,000 members from the police (in service or retired), has a variety of targeted programmes, such as Suicide Support and Prevention, Support to Young Police and Fire Fighters, Strengthening of the Family, Police Prison chaplaincy, Police Hospital chaplaincy, and their flagship project, Police and Church, described as an “effort to unite the Police and partner Christian Evangelical Churches in order to support the management of personnel and community policing that integrate the Management System of the Military Police of the State of São Paulo” (PMs de Cristo, n.d.).

In their founding statute, the following goals are set as part of their activities:

to offer spiritual, family, and social assistance; to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God in the Military Police milieu; to stimulate and motivate the Military Police to live an authentic Christianity; to rescue the “wounded from war”; to provide social, cultural, recreational, and beneficent activities; to become a representative institution of Evangelicals within the command of the corporation (Neto 2021, p. 106).

PMs de Cristo emerged during a tumultuous period for the Military Police of São Paulo, marked by institutional crisis and reforms aimed at addressing high levels of police brutality and a tarnished public image (Campos, forthcoming). In its nascent phase, the group maintained a relatively low profile, focusing on direct outreach to officers in need and seeking to build legitimacy from within. Their chaplaincy initially targeted administrative sectors like schools, prisons, and hospitals. This early “pacifist” phase saw them working to be perceived as a morally renovating force. Early media reports from the mid-1990s highlighted their efforts to reduce infractions by troops through prayer (Dias 1996), preach the rational use of weapons (Dias 1996), and even convert former police vigilantes (Estadão, 1999). The 2007 documentary *A Force for Change* frames PMs de Cristo’s as a “secret weapon” in the police reforms, particularly in community policing efforts, working to “rescue public trust” (A Force for Change 2007).

This proximity to key figures in the security apparatus and their perceived positive impact gradually led to PMs de Cristo’s institutionalization. By 2003, their “Missionary Patrol” project mobilized hundreds of volunteer chaplains for pre-patrol prayer vigils (PMs de Cristo 2021a). Their growing influence was acknowledged when the São Paulo State Assembly awarded them the Medal of Community Merit in 2003 (Alves 2012, p. 136), but the pivotal moment arrived in 2015 with the implementation of the “Police and Church” project, a partnership with the General-Command of the Military Police of São Paulo (Terra 2021, p. 11; Campos, forthcoming). Officially inaugurated in October 2015, the project was described by one of its founders, Colonel Terra, as an “innovative project, low cost and high impact, not only to the mental health of our officers, but to the strengthening of the three pillars of the Corporation: quality management, human rights, and community policing” (Terra 2021, p. 11). This project effectively positioned PMs de Cristo as the de facto

chaplaincy service, operating with the blessing of the high command and leveraging their volunteer base at no direct cost to the state budget.

As an intellectual incubator for Evangelical activism within the police, PMs de Cristo has developed a coherent doctrine that serves as a field guide for chaplains and which underpins their counterpolitics of emotions. This doctrine is articulated across several key books authored by its members, including *Com o Sacrifício da Própria Vida: uma abordagem empolgante e ousada da nobre missão de ser policial* (“With the sacrifice of one’s own life: an exciting and bold approach to the noble mission of being a police officer”) (Terra and da Silva 2007), *A Polícia e a Igreja: uma parceria para o desenvolvimento da comunidade e o combate à violência* (“Police and Church: a partnership for community development and fighting crime”) (Alves 2012), *Projeto Polícia e Igreja: Manual para Implantação de Capelania Voluntária* (“Police and Church Project: Manual for the implementation of a Volunteer Chaplaincy”) (Lamin 2021), and *A Missão de Deus para o Policial* (“God’s Mission for the Police Officer”) (Neto 2021).

Central to the doctrine underpinning these publications is an interpretation of social violence and criminality not as products of socio-economic conditions, but as direct manifestations of sin, the “deviance from God,” and “collusion with the thought of Satan” (Alves 2012, p. 116; Neto 2021, p. 22). This theological lens effectively reframes the nature of crime, transforming it into a spiritual battleground between good and evil. Consequently, the police are cast as pivotal figures in this spiritual warfare, identified as members of the “axis of good” (Alves 2012, p. 11) who are “target[s] of the enemies of our souls,” precisely because they “fight evil the most.” (Lamin 2021, p. 165; Terra and da Silva, 2007, p. 19). The proposed solution to this pervasive evil is a divinely ordained partnership, a united front between the Church and the police, aimed at enabling the Church to “recover its status quo” (Alves 2012, p. 17) and to “orient political transformations” (Alves 2012, p. 11) within society. This partnership, in their view, is essential because the state is seen as incapable of solving deep-rooted spiritual and moral problems alone, necessitating an approach where organized society, particularly the Church, assumes responsibility for security and moral order. The logic of responsabilization permeates all the group’s activities. Alves, a police official and one of the founding ideologues of the group, reflects on the role that churches should take of improving public security:

It would be politically incorrect to imagine that the government would have the conditions to take care of all urban areas, especially in a city of gigantic dimensions such as São Paulo. Organised society should take this commitment for itself. Everyone wins! (Alves 2012, p. 170)

This intellectual framework constitutes a direct engagement in a counterpolitics of emotions, as it systematically seeks to reshape how officers perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to their role and the challenging aspects of their duties. A cornerstone of this strategy is “career valorization,” which aims to imbue the police mission with sacred meaning. Officers are consistently portrayed as “God’s servant” (Neto 2021, p. 14) or “instruments of God” (Terra and da Silva 2007, p. 19, 66), with their authority directly sanctioned by divine will, a point frequently underscored by referencing Romans 13, a verse about secular authority being established by God and therefore requiring obedience. This re-framing intends to cultivate feelings of pride, divine purpose, and spiritual empowerment, thereby altering the emotional burden of policing from a mere secular obligation to a profound, sacred calling.

Crucially, this involves a redefinition of the feeling rules surrounding the use of force. Within this doctrine, violence enacted by an officer operating under this divine mandate is not only legitimized but sanctified. Alves (2012, pp. 111–112) speaks of “positive violence” as a necessary means to “conquer the Kingdom of God,” while Neto (2021, p. 32) goes further, asserting that if an officer kills an “aggressor of society” under legal circumstances, they are “exercising the judgement of God against him.” Such interpretations are designed to alleviate or transform feelings of

guilt, moral ambiguity, or trauma associated with lethal force, replacing them with a sense of righteous, divinely-approved action. Neto's (2021, p. 32) striking assertion that the police officer, in certain situations, may have to "judge and simultaneously execute the sentence" epitomizes this attempt to establish new, divinely backed feeling rules that place the officer in an almost judicial-executive role, guided by immediate divine justice rather than solely secular legal constraints. This serves to insulate officers from the emotional fallout of their actions by embedding them within a framework of spiritual certainty and divine approval.

The doctrine also offers a specific emotional script for dealing with police deviance. Instead of addressing it as a systemic or institutional cultural, acts of misconduct are framed as individual spiritual failings, where the officer succumbs to "spiritual warfare" or becomes a "servant of darkness" (Neto 2021, p. 27). This individualization of deviance encourages officers to view their colleagues' (and potentially their own) transgressions as personal moral or spiritual battles rather than outcomes of institutional pressures or systemic flaws. The prescribed emotional response and solution involve spiritual intervention, prayer, and a renewed focus on strengthening the "family unit," which is presented as the "core of balance" and the officer's "foundation" (Alves 2012, p. 130). This approach aims to alter the feeling rules around accountability, deflecting critique from the institution toward the individual's spiritual state, and promoting feelings of hope and redemption through faith rather than institutional reform.

Emotional management is further facilitated through a sentimentalized discourse (Griffith 2021) explicitly designed to "penetrate the heart of man" (Souza 2022; Alves 2012, p. 115). This involves chaplains actively building rapport and trust with officers through informal means, such as learning military jargon (Q Code) and sharing casual moments like coffee breaks (Lamin 2021, p. 108; Souza 2022). These interactions are intended to create safe emotional spaces where officers feel comfortable expressing vulnerability, but channelled and interpreted through the group's spiritual and moral framework. According to colonel Neto (2021, pp. 90–91), one can only succeed in evangelizing an institution by sharing its member's "interests, anxieties, emotions, frustrations, objectives, etc." Alves (2012, p. 126), acknowledges that "some officers suffer quietly" as "they are instructed not to expose feelings. The officer thinks he should be superior to these emotional crises, and this feeds ever more the feeling of oppression that consumes him without truce." This fosters a strong in-group emotional culture, reinforcing solidarity and a shared sense of spiritual superiority, while simultaneously distancing officers from feelings of institutional deficiency or the need for external critique.

To redeem the nation against "Cultural Marxism": PMs de Cristo's far-right alignment

In recent years, PMs de Cristo's influence has extended beyond São Paulo, driven by a process of professionalization and an increasingly overt alignment with far-right political agendas. The Police and Church project became a model, with PMs de Cristo actively advising similar initiatives in other states. By 2017, the group was reportedly operating in all twenty-two administrative regions of São Paulo, working with 500 Evangelical churches and having trained nearly 1,500 chaplains (Lamin 2021, p. 85). The General-Command of the São Paulo Military Police even published internal norms in 2017 regulating voluntary chaplaincies, largely formalizing the work PMs de Cristo was already doing (PMESP 2017). This expansion coincided with a more pronounced political radicalization. For instance, in 2017, PMs de Cristo mobilized against Human Rights education reforms in the São Paulo State Assembly, with Colonel Terra urging opposition to "dangerous leftists" and "evil people" allegedly infiltrating human rights councils (Furtado 2017). This intervention framed

human rights advocacy as an antagonistic force, reinforcing an “us versus them” emotional narrative.

Prior to the 2018 presidential election, the group launched the “Pátria Amada” (“Beloved Fatherland”) prayer campaign, explicitly aligning with Jair Bolsonaro’s nationalist slogan and calling for Christians to act as a “united Army” to “reconstruct the nation” (PMs de Cristo 2018a, b). This campaign aimed to evoke feelings of patriotic duty fused with religious mission, positioning political choices within a spiritual battle for the nation’s soul. The group’s hosting of the XIX National Congress of the *União de Militares Cristãos Evangélicos do Brasil* (UMCEB—“Union of the Military Christian Evangelical of Brazil”) in 2019 further solidified this alignment, featuring prominent far-right Evangelical figures like Pastor Silas Malafaia and video-recorded messages of support from Bolsonaro himself, explicitly linking their spiritual mission to the government’s agenda (Campos, forthcoming).

Throughout 2020 and 2021, PMs de Cristo continued to engage in online prayer campaigns and demonstrations that echoed far-right viewpoints, such as questioning the authority of the Supreme Court when it conflicted with their perceived Christian values (PMs de Cristo 2021b; Galhardi and Vieira 2021). This activism culminated in events like Colonel Lamin’s 2022 public lectures just before the second round of the presidential election, warning against “Cultural Marxism” and linking leftist ideologies to the “negation of morality,” urging the church to preserve “Christian morality, the morals of Brazil” (Pib em Birigui 2022). Such discourse aimed to instil fear and moral indignation against perceived ideological enemies, reinforcing the feeling rules that define the “Other” as a corrupting, demonic force.

This explicit far-right discourse, with its emphasis on moral decay, spiritual warfare against ideological adversaries, and the sacralization of national identity, resonates with the core tenets of PMs de Cristo’s doctrine. Mobilizing ideals of militarized warfare against “evil,” moral regeneration of marginalized territories through Christian ethics and discipline, and policing as the quintessential function of democracy (Campos, forthcoming), PMs de Cristo’s model of grassroots, police–church collaboration does not merely provide spiritual and wellbeing support to officers but actively cultivates an emotional and ideological landscape conducive to far-right politics. This creates a durable mechanism for promoting a far-right vision of social order, deeply embedded within the security apparatus, which is capable of persisting and evolving beyond specific electoral cycles by continuously reshaping the “feeling rules” and moral justifications within policing. Their doctrine, therefore, functions as a key component in the far-right’s broader project of Christianizing the state and militarizing social control, proposing an authoritarian mode of policing infused with theocratic elements (Barbosa and Casarões 2022).

As mentioned earlier, we are not analysing how the counterpolitics of emotions is impacting officers on the ground, although anecdotal evidence, coming mainly from PMs de Cristo’s own surveys conducted within police battalions, suggest it is being positively received by troops and commanders alike (Campos, forthcoming). Although we cannot affirm if officers on duty are filtering their decisions concerning the use of force with PMs de Cristo’s emotionally charged theology of policing, we cannot discard this possibility altogether. According to Albernaz (2010, p. 538), the “less institutionalized the parameters of police activity, the more diffuse and obscure the processes of police decision-making becomes.” In Brazil, police discretion is largely deregulated, with officers enjoying virtual immunity from democratic accountability mechanisms. Further, insofar as police discretion is influenced by cultural biases and emotional latitudes, it is expected that notions of religious belonging and justification will impact the conduct of individual officers. Considering PMs de Cristos’s far-right worldview operating within one of the most violent police forces in Brazil and in the world, we echo Seymour’s (2024, p. 99) warnings that it is “when these grassroots forces and the state combine and mesh, supported by a relatively broad civil society base, that they become truly dangerous.”

Finally, it should be noted that PMs de Cristo is not an isolated case: there are dozens of similar, and even larger, Evangelical chaplaincy projects booming in Brazil, a reflection of the growing protagonism and capillary mobilization of Evangelicals in civil society and the state. For example, the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, IURD), a mega-church with branches in Brazilian politics and increasing global presence, created a volunteer chaplaincy project in 2018 called Universal nas Forças Policiais (Universal in the Police Forces, UFP). With approximately 10,000 volunteers operating at a national scale, UFP is often cited in the media for lending its temples to official police ceremonies and prayer events, which many officers have denounced as being mandatory (Nascimento 2023). In the state Amazonian state of Acre, which has proportionally the highest number of Evangelicals in the country, the Military Police has recently implemented the institutional chaplaincy, which is now responsible for all of the mental health and well-being policies within the police force.

This type of activism is not limited to the micro-scale universe of police battalions, but is increasingly sweeping into the macro-level of security politics. The author's ethnographic research has shown how Evangelical chaplains took the core tenets of PMs de Cristo's ideological work to construct a federal public policy of "Spiritual Assistance" to public security professionals in the Minister of Justice and Public Security under Bolsonaro's administration (2019–2022) (Campos, forthcoming). According to classified documents accessed during fieldwork, the policy's objective was the "mobilization of faith in favor of strengthening institutional culture" (Brazil 2021), working through the feelings rules proposed by PMs de Cristo—what the policy calls "biopsychosocial intervention"—to manage stress, trauma, and suicidal ideation within the forces, but also to justify police authority and action.

The integration of conservative Christian ideology into security institutions reflects a broader transnational phenomenon. The Association of Christian Military Fellowships, for instance, serves as a crucial hub connecting various chaplaincies and Evangelical police associations worldwide; PMs de Cristo attended its global conferences in South Korea (2004) and South Africa (2014), and hosted the 2024 edition in São Paulo. Similarly, the aforementioned UFP, linked to the megachurch IURD, operates across multiple countries, including Portugal, Mexico, Argentina, Angola, and the United States (Rodrigues, 2026). Given the IURD's expansive footprint—boasting approximately 360 temples in South Africa alone—its policing chaplaincies are positioned for continued global expansion. Beyond these Brazilian exports, the political entanglement of Evangelical chaplaincies is evident in contexts such as the United States (Griffith 2021) and Kenya (Ross, 2024).

Crucially for an IPS perspective, as Evangelicals increasingly seek to occupy or transform state institutions globally, the security sector emerges as a vital arena. This is compounded by the growing militarization of Evangelicalism through "Spiritual Battle" theologies observed across the Americas and Africa (McAlister 2016; Gukurume and Taru 2021). However, this transnational militarization is not solely about physical force; it is deeply rooted in emotional governance. For instance, O'Neal (2015) shows how Christian piety functions as a "soft policing" technique in Guatemalan prisons. Rather than relying purely on physical coercion, this Evangelical project of self-transformation actively targets the inner emotional and spiritual lives of individuals: "the practice of soft security, when hitched to Christian co-ordinates, targets the heart and the mind; it works on the soul, doing so in ways that distinguish between the lost and the found, the sinner and the saved, the worthy and the unworthy" (O'Neil, 2015, p. 11). By enforcing these rigid moral binaries, this transnational counterpolitics of emotions effectively regulates emotional landscapes, replacing secular, democratic feeling rules with exclusionary, religiously driven hierarchies.

While we have not established any direct connections between the counterpolitics of emotions and police violence in Brazil (although we have shown instances of justifications), we have demonstrated the deeply entrenched process by which Evangelicalism is pushing to reshape the feeling rules within police culture. Our work shows the emergence of a distinctly hybrid emotional regime, which represents a significant historical shift from traditional, hyper-masculine military stoicism. The grounds for claiming a transformation in emotional dispositions lie in this exact synthesis: Evangelical actors are fundamentally altering the institutional emotional landscape by strategically deploying the affective language of vulnerability, positive reinforcement, and a loving, forgiving God. Yet, crucially, this shift in feeling rules operates in continuity with the historical mobilization of police violence. By coupling the psychological soothing of spiritual healing with the militarized ordering of social relations, this counterpolitics of emotion does not dismantle state violence; rather, it provides a new, emotionally resonant framework that legitimizes and sustains it.

Conclusion

This article has explored how Evangelical actors, particularly police chaplaincy groups such as PMs de Cristo, exploit the mental health crisis within the Brazilian police force to advance a Christian far-right agenda. By focusing on the counterpolitics of emotions, we have demonstrated how these actors challenge and reshape hegemonic feeling rules within the police apparatus, legitimizing emotions such as pride and vulnerability, while delegitimizing guilt and shame. This emotional reconfiguration not only addresses individual officers' psychological burdens, such as depression and addiction, but also serves a broader political purpose: transforming police officers into heroic, divinely sanctioned figures and the police institution into an authoritarian, theocratic entity aligned with far-right ideologies.

Our analysis highlights how evangelical chaplains, through initiatives such as the Police and Church project, leverage the neoliberal state's responsabilization of civil society to fill gaps in mental health provision. This activism redefines policing as a sacred mission, sanctifying violence and reframing deviance as spiritual failure. In doing so, it fosters feeling rules conducive to far-right politics and authoritarian policing practices while simultaneously addressing the emotional needs of police officers. The case of PMs de Cristo illustrates how their propagated feeling rules cultivate a culture that aligns policing with a broader project of Christianizing the state.

The counterpolitics of emotions is a nuanced process of contestation: in a country like Brazil, where policing is already historically authoritarian, building on centuries of institutionalized violence against marginalized populations (Müller 2018), the emotional work being performed by Evangelical actors is one of challenging dominant feeling rules *and* laying the groundwork for ever more authoritarian forms of policing and security governance, that is, enacting a form of punitive care. The implications of this is far-reaching, especially when seen in light of debates around emotions in global far-right politics. Research on the global far-right has emphasized the role of negative, reactionary feelings toward scapegoated minorities and establishment politics. The emotionally charged idiom of hatred, resentment, fear, anger, anxiety, and shame have become standard depictions purporting to explain the electoral force behind the "squeezed in-between" or the "left-behinds" of globalization. The "contagion of disaster nationalism flourishes," writes Seymour (2024, p. 31), "not merely because of disinformation and false beliefs, but because the economy of resentment circulating in modern societies makes these beliefs attractive." There is no doubt that such currents are fuelling far-right politics, especially when it comes to white supremacist values, which channel these negative emotions into a form of vindictive pleasure through "neighborly malice, hostile testimony,

inquisition, incitement, and lethal political violence” (Seymour 2024, p. 31). However, as argued by Pinheiro-Machado (2025, p. 6) in the context of the mass of precarious labor force adhering to authoritarianism in the Global South, the far-right exploits not only their rage through disinformation campaigns, but more importantly their dreams and aspirations of “autonomy, achievement, and social mobility.” We have demonstrated that a similar dynamic is at play with Evangelical chaplaincy organizations like PMs de Cristo.

The implications of this research are significant for the future of policing and global politics. The counterpolitics of emotions not only risks entrenching authoritarianism within Brazil’s security apparatus but also signals a global challenge to democratic governance and policing practices. To address these issues, policymakers must implement targeted measures to regulate or prevent the outsourcing of institutional mental health provision to activist groups to safeguard democratic institutions while meeting officers’ psychological needs and ensuring that policing remains aligned with the rule of law rather than theocratic or authoritarian ideologies. While this may not address systemic political violence that may only be addressed through abolition as black movements and movements of relatives of victims of state violence have argued, it would prevent a further intensification and amplification of the already excessive use of force.

More generally, an International Political Sociology perspective on the counterpolitics of emotions sheds light on the global far right beyond macro-level accounts centred on metapolitics, global discourses, and fantasy narratives. It directs analytical attention instead to the meso- and micro-level practices through which non-state actors seek to hollow out liberal state authority from within by translating transnational repertoires, from Christian dogma to nationalist ideologies, into situated local contexts. In doing so, it shows how far-right ideologies, narratives, and repertoires of violence are not simply reproduced but affectively and organizationally localized. These processes coalesce into distinct counterpolitics of emotions that vary across contexts yet remain constitutive of the global far right. While far-right movements differ in their ideological content, they share a broader project of reshaping emotional orders by redefining which emotions are legitimate, desirable, and politically meaningful. Love, compassion, and empathy are reserved for the in-group, while hate, disgust, and contempt are directed toward the out-group (see, for example, Barberis and Huseynli 2025; Gellwitzki 2025). Crucially, although these dynamics are global in scope, they often fall outside the conventional remit of IR scholarship insofar as they appear as domestic or area-specific concerns. An international political sociology perspective challenges this distinction by rendering visible the transnational processes through which established politics of emotions and feeling rules are contested.

This study also underscores the need for academic research to further investigate how emotional contestation shapes state–society relations and institutional practices. Future work should examine how such counterpolitics evolve across different national and cultural contexts, and their long-term implications for democratic institutions. Ultimately, greater scrutiny must be paid to the emotional dimensions of security governance and the role of non-state actors in reshaping the state through affective practices.

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