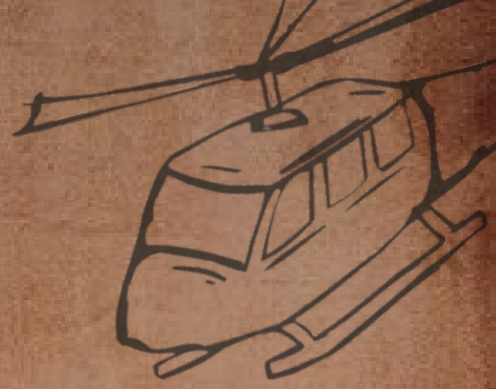
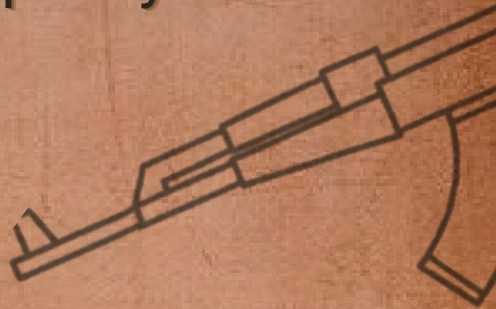


Map the System 2026



GOVERNED BY FEAR

How Armed Territorial Control
Reproduces Educational Inequality



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INTRODUCTION

More than 1,800 public schools in Rio de Janeiro operate under the influence of armed territorial control, exposing over 1 million students to the compounding effects of violence, institutional abandonment, and criminal governance.¹ This report examines how armed territorial control in Rio de Janeiro's favelas reproduces educational inequality as an outcome of the political, institutional, and security arrangements that govern these territories. By mapping the reinforcing mechanisms that sustain this dynamic, we examine the interdependence of security policy, educational governance, and political capture, identify the structural gaps that existing interventions have failed to address, and propose leverage points for meaningful change.

Methodology

This analysis employs systems thinking tools: causal loop diagrams, an Iceberg Model, a Stakeholder Map, and a Comprehensive Systems Map. The purpose is to examine how armed territorial control and educational failure in Rio de Janeiro are structurally interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Guided by Tomasevski's 4 A's framework (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Adaptability)², we evaluate how armed territorial control systematically violates the right to education and identify the structural conditions that must change for those violations to be addressed.

Positionality

This report was produced by a Brazilian and an Italian student. With one student bringing lived familiarity with Brazil's political and social realities, and the other bringing an external perspective that required deliberate attention to the limits of distance, we continuously challenged our own assumptions and biases throughout the research process. We have sought to ground our analysis in literature produced by Brazilian researchers and institutions, prioritising evidence from within the communities this report concerns, while remaining transparent about the positionality we each bring to this work.

¹ GENI-UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, & CERES (2025) Education under siege: Schools in Greater Rio impacted by armed violence. GENI/UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, CERES-IESP, UNICEF.

² Tomaševski, K. (2001) Human rights obligations: making education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Gothenburg: Novum Grafiska AB. (Right to Education Primers No. 3.)

CHALLENGE LANDSCAPE

To synthesise how armed territorial control reproduces educational inequality in Rio de Janeiro, we identified the root causes that created the conditions for this dynamic and the perpetuating factors that sustain it. Root causes are fundamental factors structuralised into Rio's social and political history: the deliberate geographic exclusion of Black and poor populations from formal urban life, and the state's historic governance vacuum in favela territories. Perpetuating factors are patterns of behaviour that reinforce both armed territorial control and educational inequality, and include: the state education authority's failure to adapt to conditions of armed control, repressive security policy, and the structural political incentives that make effective intervention irrational for the actors who would need to implement it. We introduce causal loops to visualise how these dynamics intersect and reproduce one another.

Figure X provides an overview of these root causes and perpetuating factors.

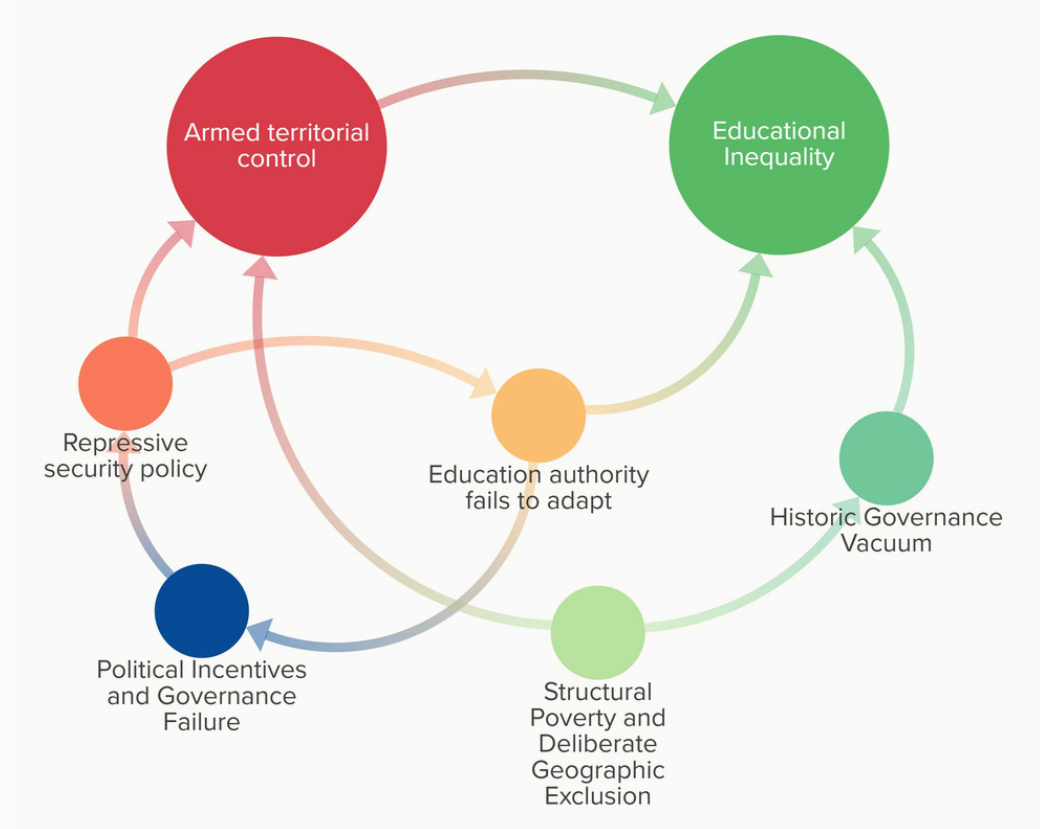


Figure 1 : Challenge Landscape

ROOT CAUSE #1

Structural Poverty and Deliberate Geographic Exclusion

Geographic Exclusion as Policy

Rio's favelas were not products of natural urban growth but rather produced by deliberate policy. Across different historical moments, the city has used geography to manage populations it deemed undesirable: ex-slaves, rural migrants, the poor, and disproportionately, Black Brazilians.

After abolition in 1888, freed slaves were granted no land, no labour rights, and no path into formal housing. Settling in central 'cortiços', they were quickly framed as an urban problem. When real estate interests resulted in the demolition of these settlements in the early twentieth century, displaced residents were pushed to the city's ungoverned peripheries or steep hillsides at the city's margins.⁴

Under Lacerda's remocionismo in the 1960s, an estimated 42,000 people were forcibly relocated to peripheral projects like Cidade de Deus, cheaply built public housing, far from employment, on reclaimed marshland without any infrastructure.⁵ Between 2009 and 2016, ahead of the World Cup and Olympics, over 6,000 families were evicted or threatened with eviction to free up land for development.⁶

³ dos Santos, P. G. (2021, October 22). The essence of the favela is resistance [Podcast]. RioOnWatch. <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=66215>

⁴ Caffagni, L. G. L., & Martins, G. (2025). Community communication and spatial justice: Insurgent practices in Rio de Janeiro favelas. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 23(2), 223–238. *

⁵ A., Diego. (2026, February 2). Cidade de Deus: The favela that became a symbol of Rio's urban struggle. The Dark Atlas. <https://thedarkatlas.com/posts/cidade-de-deus-rio-brazil>

⁶ Kommenda, N. (2016, August 2). How evictions have laid bare Rio's real Olympic legacy. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/ng-interactive/2016/aug/02/how-evictions-have-laid-bare-rios-real-olympic-legacy>

Three Reinforcing Dimensions of Exclusion

What this history produced is not merely poverty but a geography of exclusion operating across three mutually reinforcing dimensions. Spatially, favela territories remain disconnected from formal urban infrastructure; unrecognised housing, inadequate transport, and absent sanitation. Economically, this translates directly into labour market inaccessibility. These populations were not simply poor, they were structurally prevented from escaping poverty. Surveys show unemployment around 39% among favela residents, not from lack of aspiration but because formal pathways are structurally out of reach.⁷ Racially, the population concentrated in these territories is overwhelmingly Black and brown, a direct demographic inheritance of post-abolition policy.⁸

What This Means for Education

Geographic exclusion shapes educational outcomes directly. Physical distance from quality schools, combined with dangerous or costly transport, limits access for favela residents disproportionately. Inability to access the labour market renders education unable to fulfil its purpose as the driving force for social mobility. Hence increasing dropout rates, and making students prioritise working to support their families. This in turn increases the pool of willing recruits for local armed groups and reinforces geographic exclusion as armed territorial control deters formal investment, deepens territorial stigma, and cements the peripheral geography that the state's original displacement created.

⁷Felix, M., Marcoje, B., Matavelli, I., & Rodrigues, M. C. (2026, January). Employment preferences of favela residents [Working paper]. Yale University; Universidade Federal Fluminense; CERGE-EI and University of New South Wales.

⁸ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2024). 2022 Census: 16.4 million persons in Brazil lived in favelas and urban communities. IBGE News Agency.

Figure 2 visualises this reinforcing dynamic.

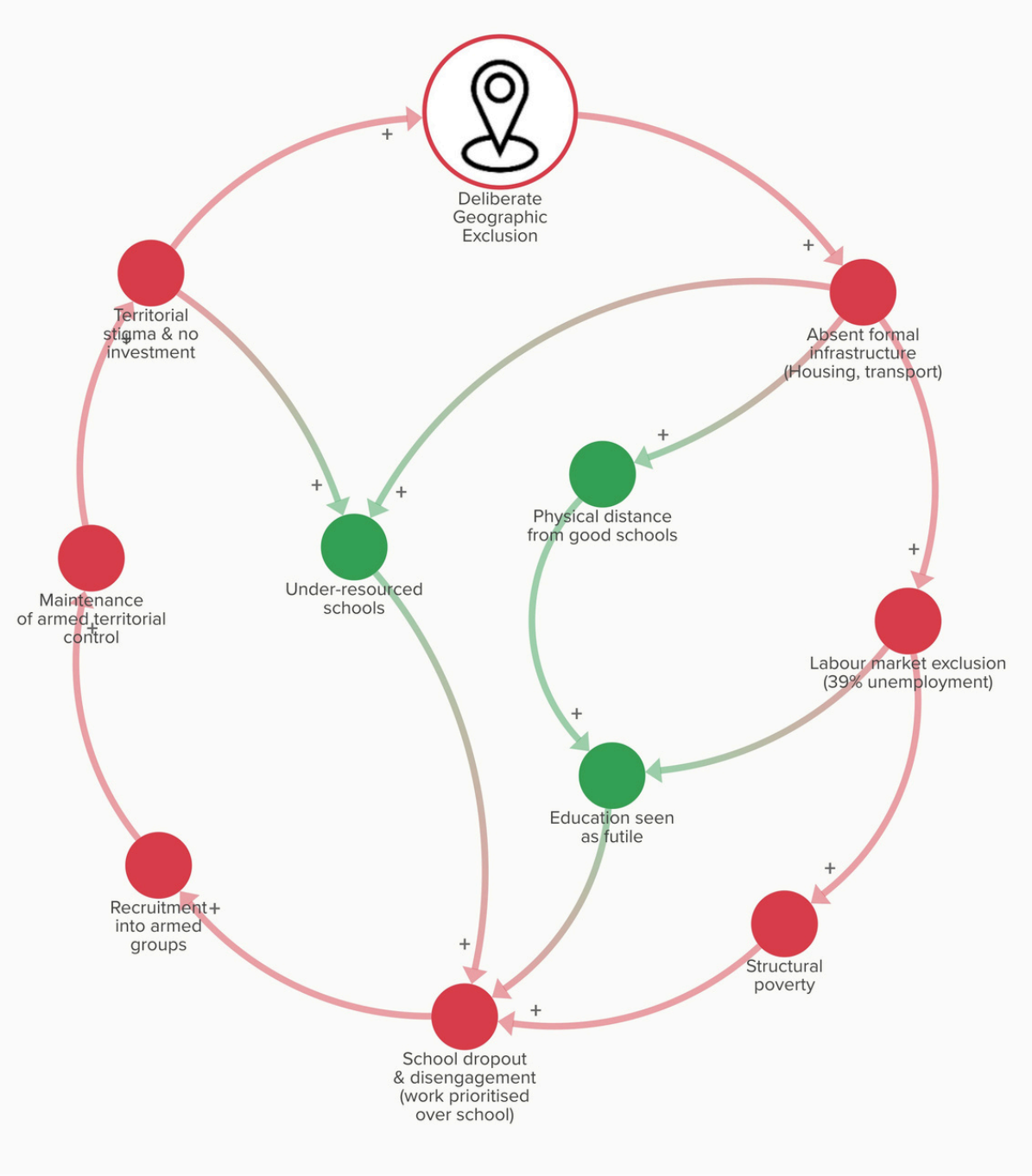


Figure 2 : Causal Loop : Deliberate Geographic Exclusion

ROOT CAUSE #2

The State's Historic Governance Vacuum in Favela Territories

A Vacuum by Design

State absence from Rio's favelas is a form of structural inheritance. Following abolition in 1888, public policy systematically displaced Black and mixed-race populations to Rio's hillsides and peripheries, territories where no formal governance was ever extended. State funded roads, sanitation, healthcare, and reliable schooling were entirely absent from these areas^{3,4}. The informal and designated 'illegal' nature of favelas, combined with the fact that descendants of slaves represented a significant portion of their population, meant residents were never treated as full citizens. This justified ongoing state exclusion as favelas were deemed unentitled to urban improvements or formal services.⁹ This exclusion was upheld by the structural removal of favela residents from political life. Until 1988, literacy was a requirement for voting, disproportionately excluding favelados from voting.¹⁰ This dynamic is ongoing; voting in Brazil today requires proof of formal address and the informal nature of favela residence continues to limit participation for many residents.¹¹ The result is a structural maintenance of political voicelessness, those most in need of state presence have the smallest voice to acquire it. In turn allowing government exclusion to be reproduced. Even in the case of those who can participate politically their socio economic status is instrumentalised against them, targeted with small material promises designed to secure votes without altering the underlying system.

⁹ Williamson, T. (2018, July 31). Not everyone has a price, part 1: (Re)introducing favelas. RioOnWatch. <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=45633>

¹⁰ Gethin, A., & Morgan, M. (2021). Democracy and the politicization of inequality in Brazil, 1989–2018 (World Inequality Lab Working Paper No. 2021/07). Paris School of Economics – World Inequality Lab.

¹¹ Marinho, M., & Robben, L.-L. (2026). From address-less to electorally included: Reducing administrative burdens in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Cities*, 169, 106562.

Community Organisation and Criminal Displacement

Where the state was absent, communities organised. From the 1940s onward, favela residents formed 'Associações de moradores' performing basic governance functions in the absence of the state.¹² When Brazil entered prominent cocaine trading routes in the 1980s, favelas' governance vacuum made them the perfect breeding ground for drug-related criminal activity, forming different criminal groups like the Comando Vermelho.^{13,14} Under state absence, these criminal organisations pursued community cooperation deliberately; offering local governance, security, public works, and social services. The community, in return, provided cover, protection, and recruits.

Presence Without Legitimacy: The Failure of State Intervention

When the state has intervened, it has been almost exclusively through force. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the Pacifying Police Units (UPP), introduced in 2008 as an alternative to spontaneous police raids, deploying permanent 24-hour units to reduce visible drug trafficking activity and disarm these communities. Crucially, however, the programme was designed and implemented without consultation with the communities it targeted. Despite a minor initial success, the UPP quickly deteriorated into a vehicle for police brutality and human rights violations, a notorious example being the disappearance of Amarildo Souza, a bricklayer taken by UPP officers from Rocinha in 2013 who never returned home.^{12,14,15} This only deepened existing distrust of the state, reinforcing the reliance on the authority of the criminal organisations already embedded in these communities, strengthening not only their acceptance, but their recruitment, and ultimately worsening the very armed control the programme sought to dismantle.

¹² Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2021). Favelas in Rio de Janeiro, past and present. In Brazil: Five Centuries of Change (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-9/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-past-and-present/>

¹³ InSight Crime. (2022, November 27). Red Command (Comando Vermelho). <https://insightcrime.org/brazil-organized-crime-news/red-command-profile/>

¹⁴ Catalytic Communities. (n.d.). Pacifying Police Units (UPP). <https://catcomm.org/upp/>

¹⁵ Brooks, B. (2013, October 8). Missing in Rio on the rise; Brazil police accused. AP News. <https://apnews.com/general-news-4904e37e8b02498b8ea4486a95364ada>

The Educational Consequence

State absence has produced chronically under-resourced schools in favela territories. Where funding does reach them, it is undermined by violence: police raids shut schools for thousands of children at a time, while teacher absenteeism rises sharply during conflict with the most qualified staff, who have outside options, leaving first. Children who remain face fear, disrupted routes, and psychological harm that impairs learning.¹⁶ With no credible institutional alternative, and armed groups offering belonging, income, and protection, recruitment of adolescents is fostered.

Figure 3 visualises this reinforcing dynamic.

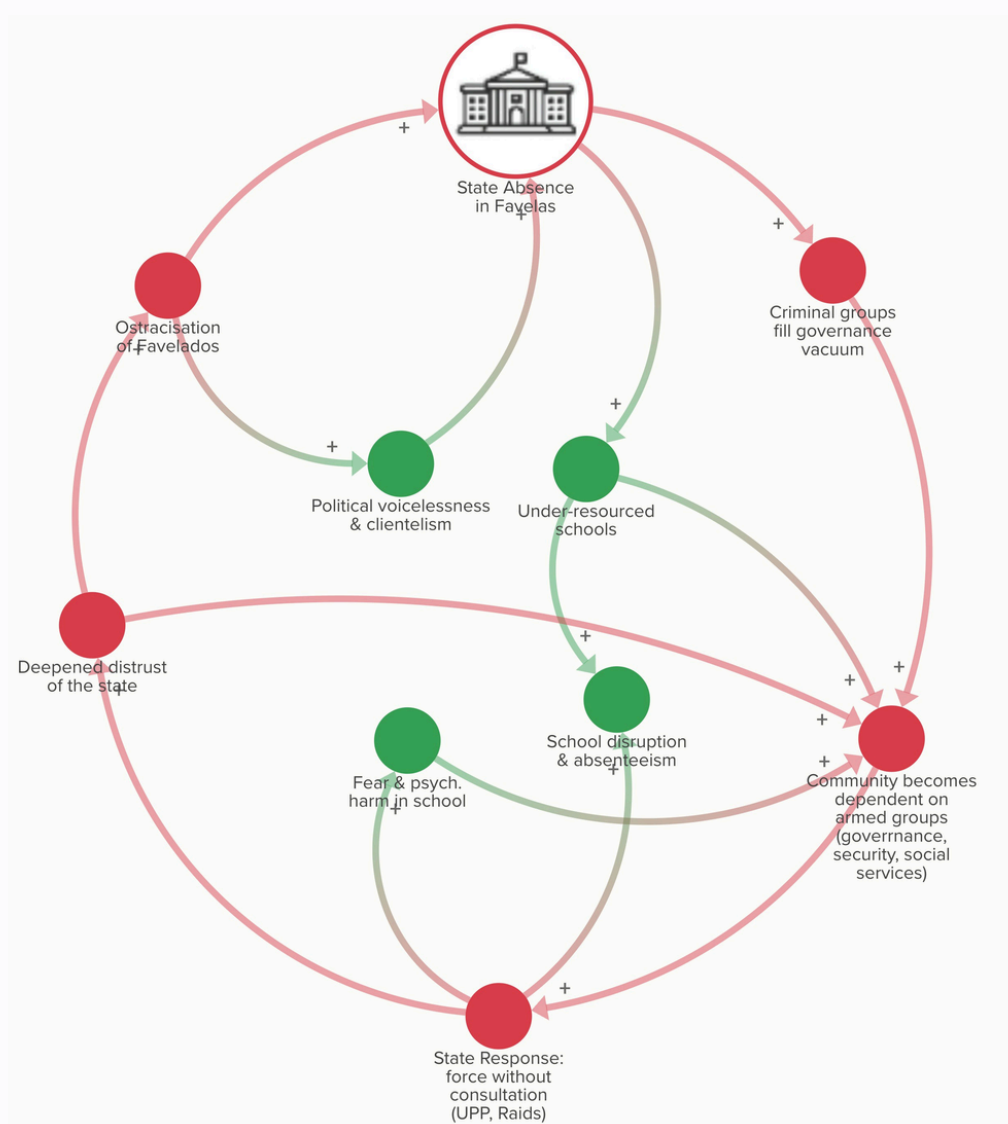


Figure 3 : Causal Loop : Historic Governance Vacuum

¹⁶ Monteiro, J., & Rocha, R. (2012). Drug battles and school achievement: Evidence from Rio de Janeiro's favelas (CID Working Paper No. 227). Center for International Development, Harvard University.

PERPETUATING FACTOR #1

Failure to Adapt as a Driver of School Collapse

The first perpetuating factor is the state education authority's failure to adapt its arrangements to armed territorial control, which makes school collapse predictable. Armed groups absorb the result, converting educational disengagement into recruitment.

In Militia-Controlled Territories

Militias actively constrain what schools can do. Through coercive brokerage, staff are compelled to respect codes of conduct imposed by criminal actors, and the institutional autonomy necessary for schools to function as independent civic spaces is systematically undermined.¹⁷ Because the education authority has never built meaningful school-community relationships in these territories, schools lack the local legitimacy that would allow them to resist this pressure, progressively subordinating themselves to the priorities of armed governance rather than educational ones.¹⁸ This process severs the school-community relationship, leaving schools unable to draw on the local trust and legitimacy that might otherwise protect them against armed group pressure.^{18,20}

The consequence is measurable and distinctive: militia territorial control produces greater learning losses than trafficking control.¹⁷ Students who disengage are absorbed into the informal economic ecosystem that militia governance taxes and regulates, deepening dependency on the very structure that degraded schools.¹⁹

¹⁷ Barbosa, R. J., de Oliveira, A. C., Misse Filho, M., Calzavara, L. M. M., Guimarães, A. J. A. O., Queiroz, C. M., Couto, M. I. M., Hirata, D. V., & Fioravanti, A. (2025). Educação sob cerco: impactos do controle territorial do tráfico e da milícia sobre o desempenho escolar [Education under siege: impacts of territorial control by drug trafficking and militias on school performance]. *Estudos Avançados*, 39(115), e39115351. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0103-4014.202539115.020>

¹⁸ Diniz, E. (2013). O papel da escola pública nas favelas [The role of the public school in favelas]. *Revista Educação On-line PUC-Rio*, 12, 79–99. http://www.maxwell.lambda.ele.puc-rio.br/rev_edu_online.php

¹⁹ Pope, N., & Sampaio, A. (2024). Coercive brokers: Militias and urban governance in Rio de Janeiro. *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*.

²⁰ Ribeiro, E. (2013). Impactos educacionais nas Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora: Explorando os efeitos sobre os fluxos docentes [Educational impacts of Pacifying Police Units: Exploring effects on teacher flows]. *Revista Intratextos*, 4(1), 27–52. <https://doi.org/10.12957/intratextos.2013.8561>.

In Trafficking-Controlled Territories

In trafficking-controlled territories, the mechanism operates through acute institutional collapse. The education authority assigns teachers to conflict zones without meaningful protection or incentives to remain, and teachers respond rationally by leaving, making rational exit the predictable institutional response.¹ Teacher absenteeism rises in conflict years as well as principal turnover, and the most educated teachers, who have outside options, leave first.¹⁶ Drug gang conflict produces a negative and statistically significant impact on student achievement.¹⁶ As school legitimacy as a pathway for socioeconomic ascension declines, student disengagement and dropout follow,^{22,23} and vulnerability peaks at the verge of adolescence, when accumulated school failure coincides with the growing visibility of criminal alternatives.²⁴ This replenishes the recruitment pool of the armed groups whose presence drove teachers away in the first place, deepening the territorial control that further degrades the schools that produced the disengagement.

Among those who have entered crime, 84% would not want their children to follow them.²³ Recruitment succeeds not because criminal life looks desirable, but because school, chronically disrupted and institutionally weakened, no longer appears viable by comparison.

¹ GENI-UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, & CERES. (2025). Education under siege: Schools in Greater Rio impacted by armed violence. GENI/UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, CERES-IESP, UNICEF.

¹⁶ Monteiro, J., & Rocha, R. (2012). Drug battles and school achievement: Evidence from Rio de Janeiro's favelas (CID Working Paper No. 227). Center for International Development, Harvard University.

²² Dowdney, L. (2003). Children of the drug trade: A case study of children in organised armed violence in Rio de Janeiro. 7Letras.

²³ Data Favela. (2025). Raio-X da vida real: Pesquisa de impacto social (v10) [X-ray of real life: Social impact research (v10)]. Data Favela.

²⁴ Zaluar, A. (2010). Youth, drug traffic and hypermasculinity in Rio de Janeiro. *Vibrant*, 7(2), 7–27.

Figure 4 visualises this reinforcing dynamic across both tracks.

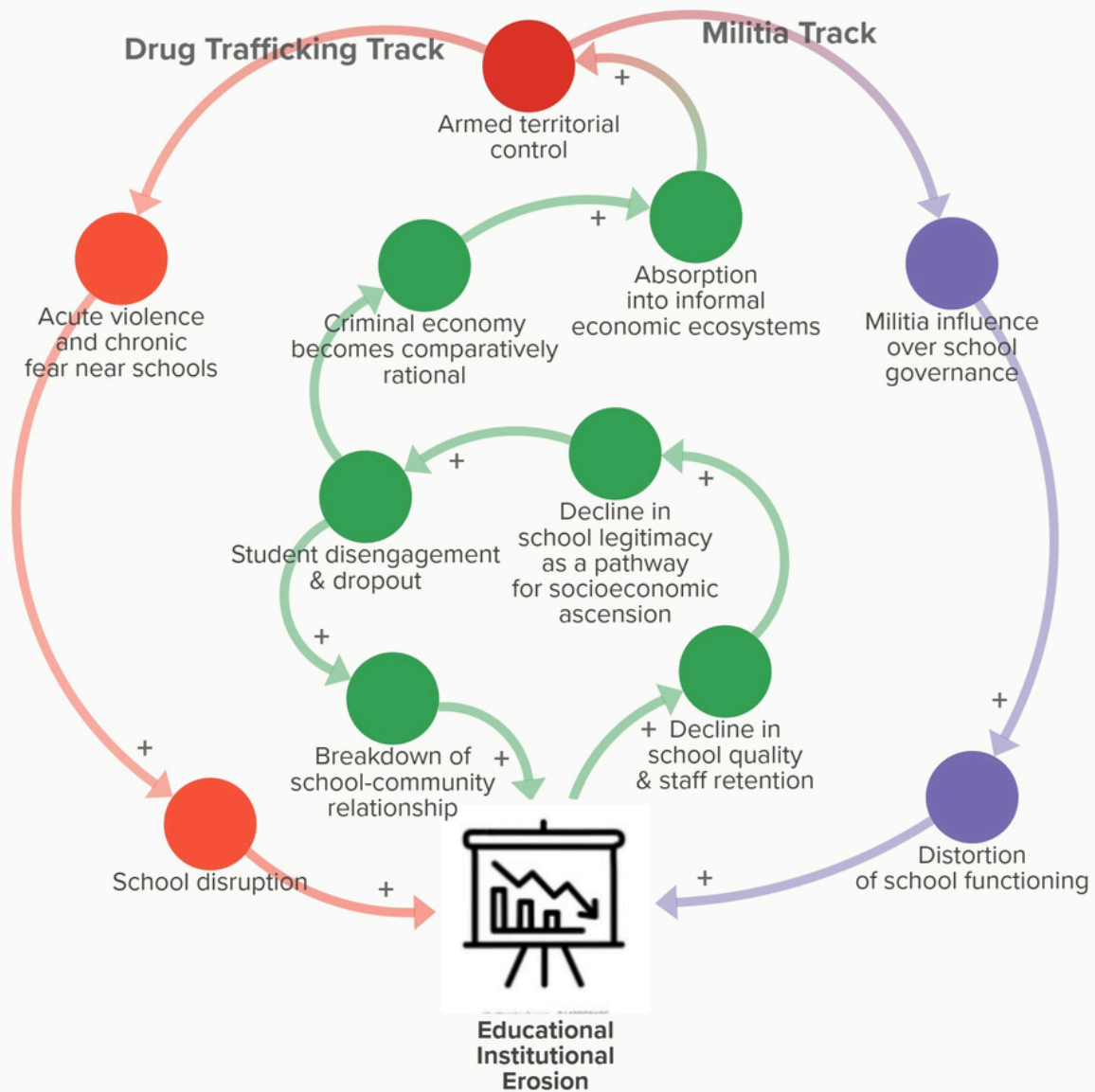


Figure 4: Causal Loop: Failure to Adapt as a Driver of School Collapse

PERPETUATING FACTOR #2

Repressive Security Policy

The second perpetuating factor is repressive security policy. For more than three decades, repressive police operations have been the main instrument of public action used by the government of Rio de Janeiro to address armed territorial control.²⁵ We examine how this choice is self-defeating since force-intensive operations generate violence near schools, disrupt educational continuity, and strengthen the organisational resilience of the armed groups they purport to dismantle, reproducing the very conditions that justify their continued use.

State Operations and School Violence

Repressive operations generate confrontations, and schools absorb a disproportionate share of the resulting violence. In 2022, police-related shootings near schools in controlled territories reached 2,266, compared to 817 in non-controlled areas,¹ a pattern consistent with the strong positive correlation found between police raids and homicides across the period 2007 to 2019.²⁶ The harm extends to school journeys, where police operations account for 22.7% of mobility disruptions during school hours, contributing to approximately 1.02 million disrupted journeys over two and a half years which is largely invisible in school-level data.²⁷ Students whose routes intersect with high-crime areas face an average 48.60% increase in travel time.²⁸ In many territories, school closures suspend not only learning but meals, child development, and social protection.²⁷ Students who accumulate significant time outside the school system become disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation by organised crime, with many of those later recruited into armed groups having already struggled academically.²⁹

¹ GENI-UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, & CERES. (2025). Education under siege: Schools in Greater Rio impacted by armed violence. GENI/UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, CERES-IESP, UNICEF.

²⁵ Hirata, D. V., & Grillo, C. C. (2020). Police special operations and armed criminal groups in Rio de Janeiro. Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. https://www.hfg.org/grant_summaries/police-special-operations-and-armed-criminal-groups-in-rio-de-janeiro/

²⁶ Hirata, D. V., Cardoso, A., Grillo, C. C., dos Santos Junior, O. A., Lyra, D. A., & Dirk, R. C. (2022). The expansion of milícias in Rio de Janeiro: Political and economic advantages. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 4(3), 257–271. <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.140>

²⁷ UNICEF, Fogo Cruzado, & GENI/UFF. (2025). Percursos interrompidos: Efeitos da violência armada na mobilidade de crianças e adolescentes no Rio de Janeiro [Interrupted pathways: Effects of armed violence on the mobility of children and adolescents in Rio de Janeiro]. UNICEF Brasil.

²⁸ Knoblauch, S., Muthusamy, R. K., Moritz, M., Kang, Y., Li, H., Lautenbach, S., Pereira, R. H. M., Biljecki, F., Gonzalez, M. C., Barbosa, R., Hirata, D. V., Ludwig, C., Adamiak, M., Rocha, A. A. de A., & Zipf, A. (2025). Crime-associated inequality in geographical access to education: Insights from the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. *Cities*, 160, 105818. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2025.105818>

²⁹ BBC. (2022). Frustrated aspiration leading young people into drug trafficking. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-60670709>

Organizational Resilience

Repressive operations rest on the assumption that removing individuals weakens armed groups. However, a systematic review identified a significant association between increased drug law enforcement and increased market violence, as enforcement displaces markets and triggers competition among successor groups,³⁰ suggesting that removal strategies not only fail to weaken these organisations but actively generate the conditions for their regeneration. These organisations are sustained by territorial presence, economic infrastructure, and community integration rather than by the individuals who occupy roles within them at any given moment.^{19,31}

From the mid-1990s onward, mass arrests and killings of adult traffickers created growing demand for labour within factions, driving the recruitment of younger members, with the average entry age falling to just over thirteen years.¹⁷ The same dynamic operates in militia structures, which regenerate through internal succession even after leadership losses.¹⁹ This produces a self-reinforcing cycle. Operations generate violence near schools but leave territorial control intact. Community fear generates political pressure for visible state action, which politicians exploit through law and order rhetoric regardless of structural effectiveness,^{1,33} a dynamic in which communities bear the cost of violence and politicians extract the electoral benefit from it. Police operations become the default response, and the cycle continues. A systematic review found a significant association between increased drug law enforcement and increased market violence, as enforcement displaces markets and triggers competition among successor groups.³⁰

Decades of repressive policy have intensified both territorial control and lethal violence rather than reducing either.¹ Educational inequality deepens with each cycle as the state funds schools while systematically deploying the practices most directly associated with their disruption, ensuring that the communities most harmed by armed territorial control are also the most harmed by the policies designed to address it.

¹ GENI-UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, & CERES. (2025). Education under siege: Schools in Greater Rio impacted by armed violence. GENI/UFF, Fogo Cruzado Institute, CERES-IESP, UNICEF.

¹⁷ Dowdney, L. (2003). Children of the drug trade: A case study of children in organised armed violence in Rio de Janeiro. 7Letras.

¹⁹ Pope, N., & Sampaio, A. (2024). Coercive brokers: Militias and urban governance in Rio de Janeiro. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

³⁰ Werb, D., Rowell, G., Guyatt, G., Kerr, T., Montaner, J., & Wood, E. (2011). Effect of drug law enforcement on drug market violence: A systematic review. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 22(2), 87–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2011.02.002>

³¹ Arias, E. D. (2013). The impacts of differential armed dominance of politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 48(3), 263–284.

³³ Bouchard, J. (2025). State integration and violence at the margins: The logic of police raids in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hjoc.12623>

Figure 5 visualises this reinforcing dynamic

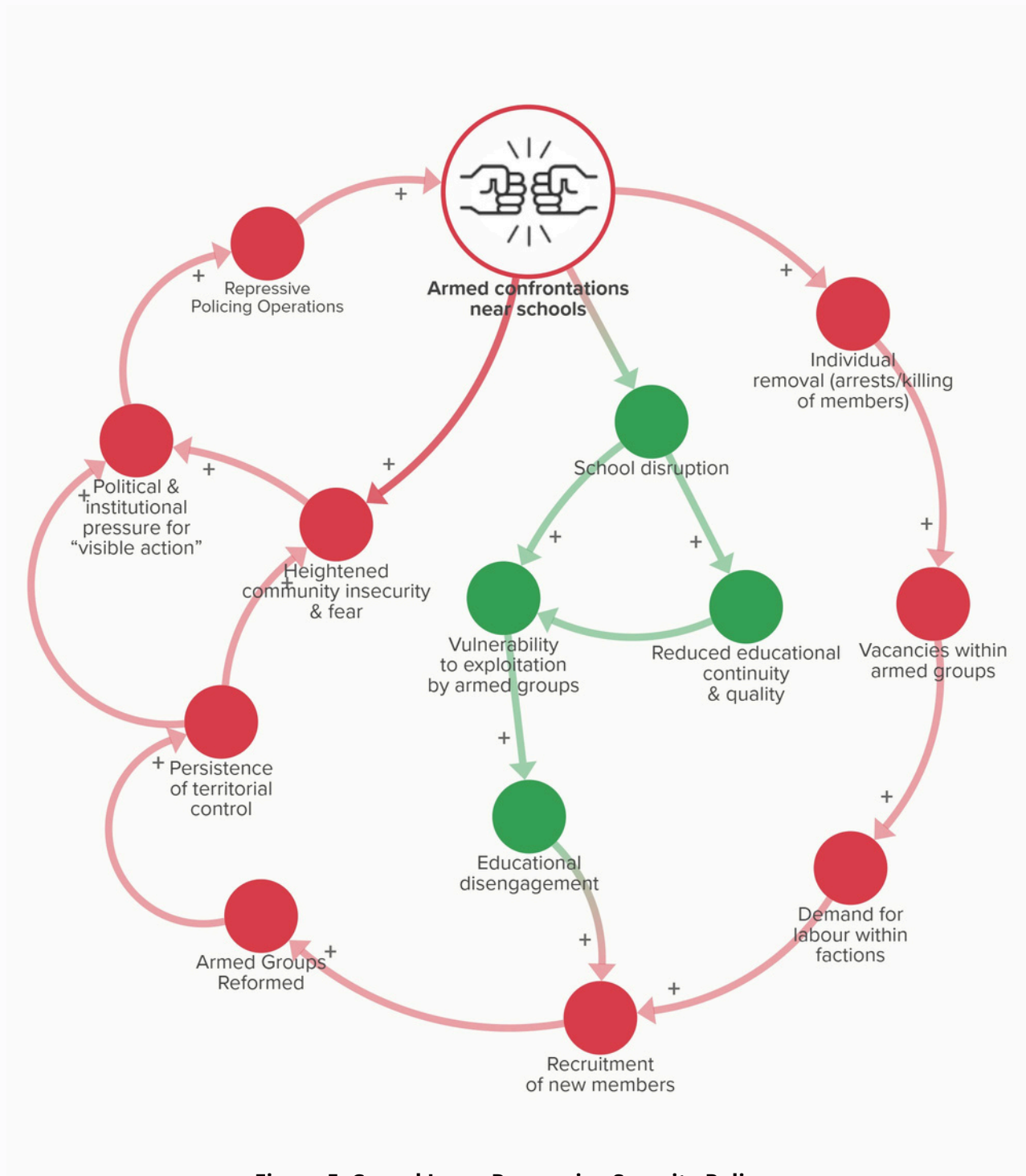


Figure 5: Causal Loop: Repressive Security Policy

PERPETUATING FACTOR #3

Political Incentives and Governance Failure

The third perpetuating factor is the political incentives that make effective educational intervention irrational for the actors who would need to implement it. Where militia-aligned actors convert territorial control into electoral power, and where political fragmentation prevents reform from consolidating, the political architecture systematically produces neglect of the communities most harmed by armed territorial control.

Militia Political Capture and Electoral Entrenchment

Militias convert territorial control into political capital through a self-reinforcing cycle of votes, impunity, and expansion. Militia entry into a new area increases electoral concentration and disproportionately benefits militia-aligned candidates, who in return shield militia operations through bureaucratic appointments and selective law enforcement.³⁴ This capture extends beyond elections, with militia-linked officials redirecting institutional resources to protect criminal interests, including state housing programmes such as Minha Casa, Minha Vida, whose registration, allocation, and management militias have systematically appropriated in territories under their control.¹⁹ Communities are not passive in this exchange. They are coerced into it, their electoral choices constrained by the same armed authority that controls their access to housing, transport, and security.^{19,34} The educational consequence is direct. Armed violence is neglected in education policy planning at all three levels of government, not because evidence is unavailable, but because the political architecture makes acknowledgement institutionally costly.²⁷

¹⁹ Pope, N., & Sampaio, A. (2024). Coercive brokers: Militias and urban governance in Rio de Janeiro. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

²⁷ UNICEF, Fogo Cruzado, & GENI/UFF. (2025). Percursos interrompidos: Efeitos da violência armada na mobilidade de crianças e adolescentes no Rio de Janeiro [Interrupted pathways: Effects of armed violence on the mobility of children and adolescents in Rio de Janeiro]. UNICEF Brasil.

³⁴ Pantaleão, B., & Montini, I. C. (2025). When elections empower crime: Political protection and milícia expansion in Rio de Janeiro. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 67, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2025.10026>

Political Fragmentation and Jurisdictional Abandonment

Even beyond militia capture, Rio's fragmented political landscape prevents sustained reform. A comparison of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro since re-democratisation finds that four party changes in power between 1994 and 2006, combined with divided cabinets, consistently dismantled reformist initiatives before they could consolidate.³⁵ Each electoral cycle risks reversing what the previous one began, and it is militia-aligned actors who benefit most from this instability, as fragmentation prevents the sustained political commitment that dismantling their structures would require.³⁵ The recurring failure of security and education policy is not incidental but productive. It justifies new agendas, redefines social problems as police matters, and forecloses structural educational responses at every governmental level.³⁶

In territories under faction control, this jurisdictional abandonment becomes total. Schools cannot be safely monitored, inspected, or supported.¹⁷ Operations generate visible short-term outputs that satisfy political demand regardless of structural effectiveness, making repressive responses simultaneously politically rational and educationally damaging.³⁶

Together, these mechanisms form a closed loop in which militia capture produces policy neglect of education, policy neglect deepens community dependency on militia governance, and dependency generates the electoral support that sustains capture. The schools most in need of structural support are the least likely to receive it, not because of resource scarcity, but because the political architecture that would need to deliver it has been captured by the groups who benefit from their failure.

¹⁷ Dowdney, L. (2003). Children of the drug trade: A case study of children in organised armed violence in Rio de Janeiro. 7Letras.

³⁵ Flom, H. (2024). The politics of police violence: Political competition and police killings in Brazil. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 46(8), 1644–1666. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2021.2018935>

³⁶ Polycarpo, C. (2026). Governing through failure: Militarization and policialization in Rio de Janeiro. *Cadernos Metr pole*, 28(65), e6564742. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-9996.2026-6564742-en>

The diagram illustrates a causal loop titled "Political Incentive and Governance Failure". It features a central icon of a building with a dollar sign and a flag, labeled "Political Incentives & Governance Failure". Surrounding this central node are several other nodes connected by arrows, forming a circular loop. The nodes are color-coded: red for the "Drug Trafficking Track", green for the "Militia Track", and purple for the "Community dependency" track. The nodes are: "Jurisdictional abandonment", "Schools unmonitored & unsupported", "Repressive operations deployed for political visibility", "Political Incentives & Governance Failure", "Bureaucratic appointments & selective enforcement", "Militia-aligned politicians elected", "Electoral capital consolidates", "Constrained electoral choice", "Community dependency on militia services", "Armed territorial control", "State authority weakened", and "Education neglected in policy planning". The arrows indicate positive feedback loops, with "+" signs at the connection points. The "Drug Trafficking Track" (red) shows a loop from "Jurisdictional abandonment" to "Schools unmonitored & unsupported" to "Repressive operations deployed for political visibility" to "Political Incentives & Governance Failure". The "Militia Track" (green) shows a loop from "Political Incentives & Governance Failure" to "Education neglected in policy planning" to "State authority weakened" to "Armed territorial control" to "Political Incentives & Governance Failure". The "Community dependency" track (purple) shows a loop from "Political Incentives & Governance Failure" to "Bureaucratic appointments & selective enforcement" to "Militia-aligned politicians elected" to "Electoral capital consolidates" to "Constrained electoral choice" to "Community dependency on militia services" to "Armed territorial control" to "Political Incentives & Governance Failure".

Figure 6: Causal Loop: Political Incentive and Governance Failure

SYSTEMS MAPPING

In this section, we introduce further systems maps to visualize the challenge.

Stakeholders Map

Figure 7 portrays the stakeholders that influence or are affected by the dynamics of armed territorial control in Rio de Janeiro.

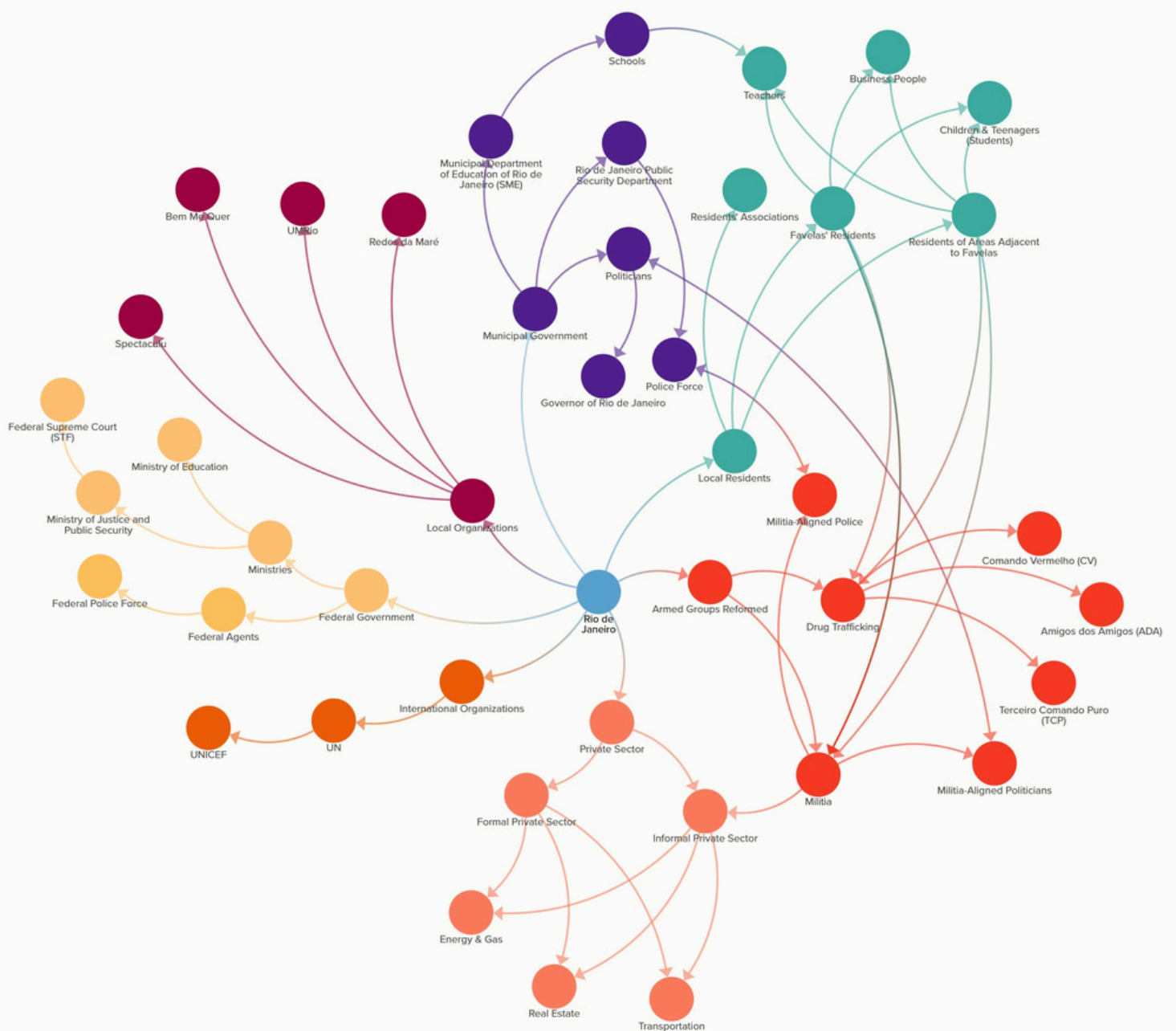


Figure 7 : Stakeholders Map

Iceberg Model

Figure 8 illustrates the events, patterns, structures, and mental models that children, families, and communities in Rio de Janeiro experience as a result of armed territorial control and educational failure.

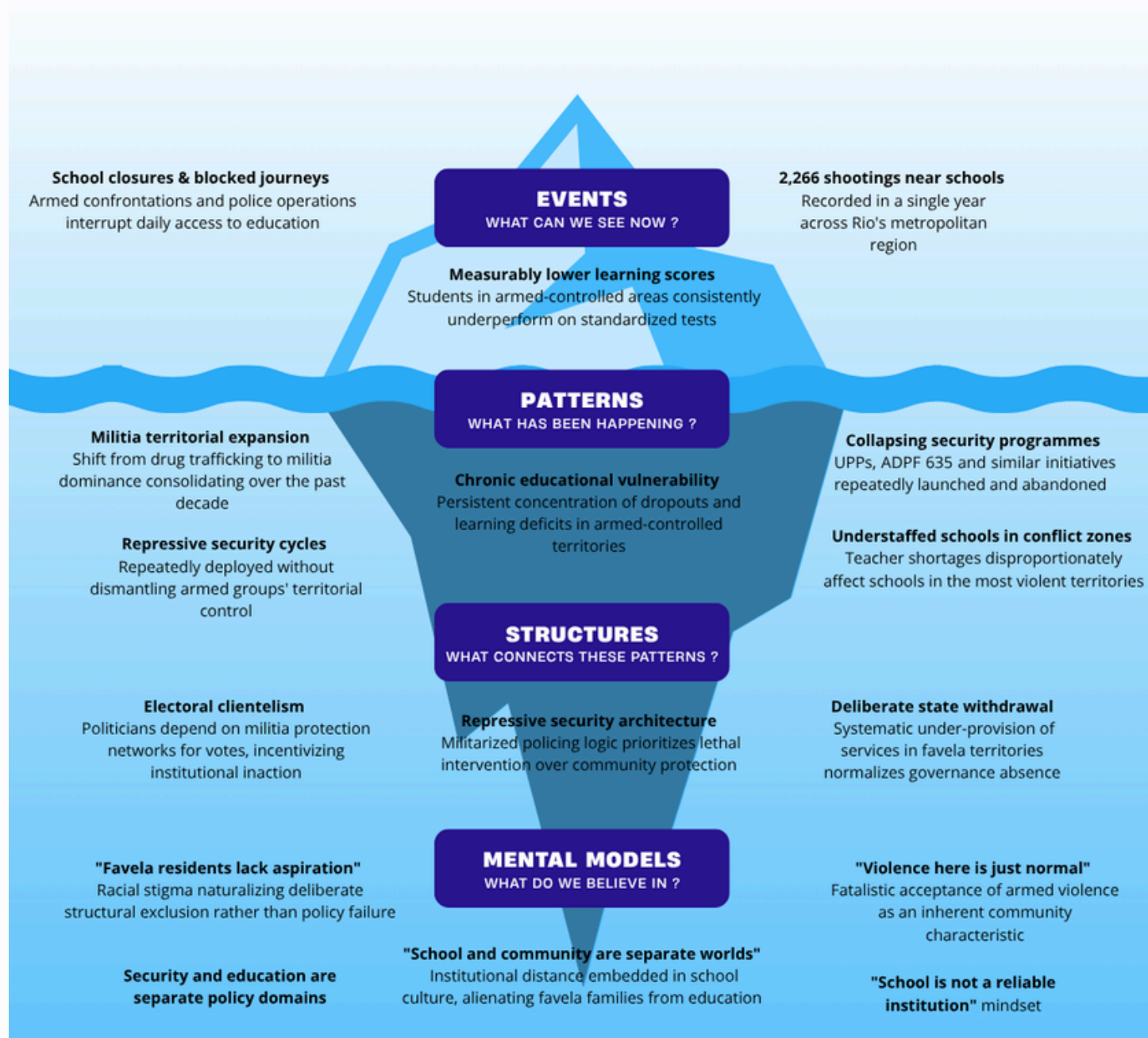


Figure 8 : Iceberg Model

Comprehensive Systems Map

Figure 9 showcases a comprehensive systems map linking the root causes and perpetuating factors through which armed territorial control reproduces and entrenches educational inequality across Rio de Janeiro's favela territories.

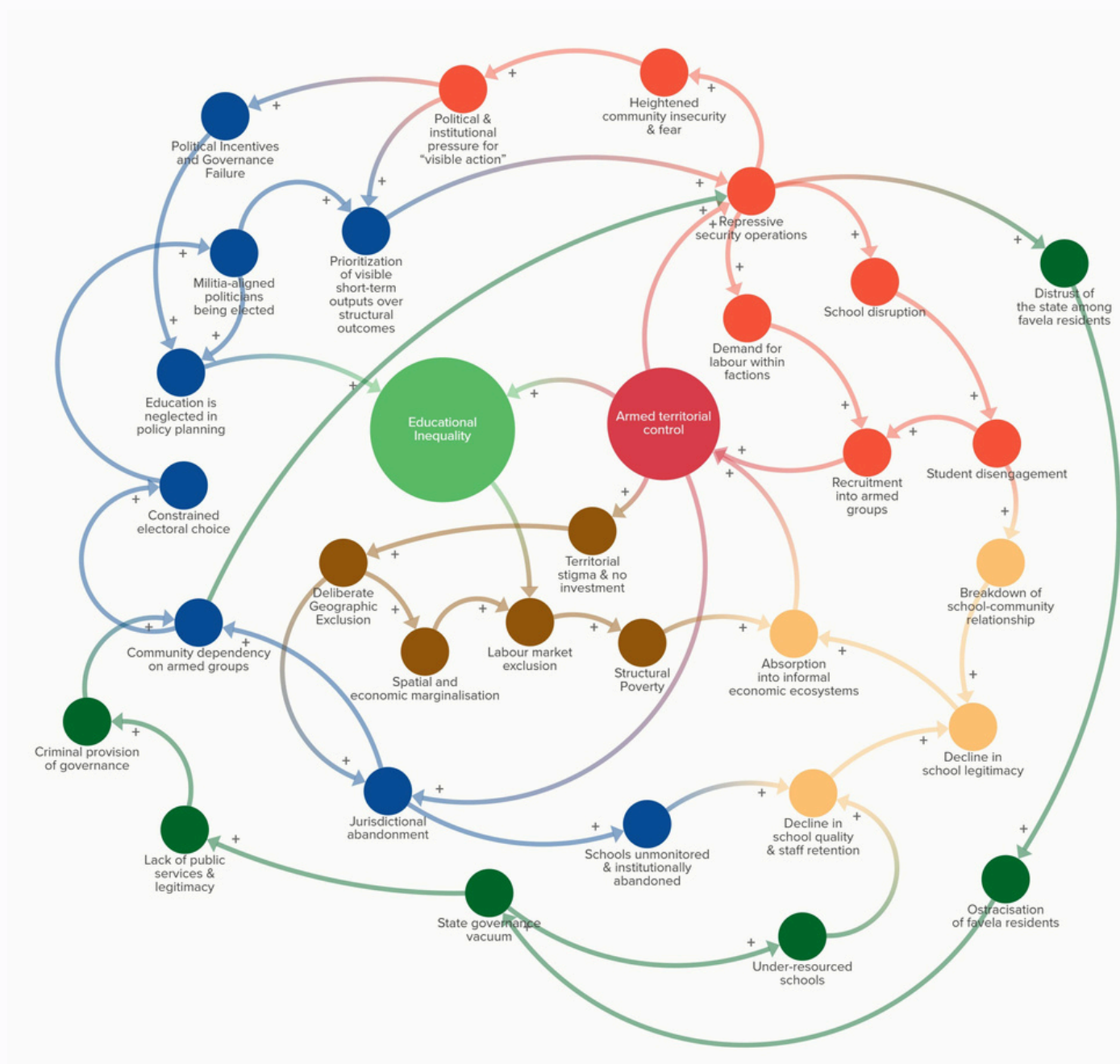


Figure 9 : Comprehensive Systems Map

EXISTING SOLUTIONS

Different agents, from an international to local scale have attempted to tackle Rio's armed territorial control and educational inequality. Figure 10 demonstrates attempted solutions and their strengths and weaknesses.

International Level	Government	NGOs & Community
ORGANISATIONS UNICEF / EMpower Digital education programmes, community funding partnerships, and infrastructure investment (e.g. UPP Social). ^{1,2} + Funds culturally rooted, locally delivered programmes + Expanded connectivity & school access in some areas – Aid mostly financial; limited technical/HR capacity building – Gains contingent on policing presence; collapsed with UPP	POLICING PROGRAMMES UPP (2008), Integrated City (2022) Military police occupation of favelas aiming to displace armed groups. Integrated City added social components (housing, women's programmes, facial recognition). + Short-term drop in visible violence & school disruptions ³ – Recurring human rights abuses; police brutality, disappearances – Targets tourist corridors: displaces gangs to un-policed periphery favelas and militias fill the vacuum ⁴ – No resident consultation; widely seen as rebranded versions of one another – Collapsed with electoral cycles & fiscal crises ⁵ – Facial Recognition: Black individuals more likely to be falsely arrested, 90% of arrests in Bahia were black individuals ⁶	LOCAL NGOS EduMais, Redes de Maré, Spectaculo, UmRio Education, vocational training, digital literacy & life-skills programmes operating directly inside favela communities. ² + Deep community roots; trauma-informed & culturally responsive + Direct counter recruitment pipeline by keeping youth in school & employment pathways – Activities likely suspended during armed conflict
	SOCIAL PROGRAMMES Bolsa Família / PAC Conditional cash transfers tied to school attendance & health checks; federal infrastructure fund investing R\$600m+ in favela upgrades. ⁷ + Measurable rise in school attendance & drop in child labour ⁸ + Physical infrastructure improved in some favelas – Stigmatised as vote-buying and poor seen as incapable of sound decisions – Does not address structural violence or labour market barriers	COMMUNITY RESISTANCE e.g. Frente Maré & resident collectives Self-organised networks that distribute aid, produce independent data, and pursue legal action (e.g. ADPF 635: court ruling restricting police operations in Favelas). ⁹ + Resident-led; produced evidence that state violence near schools can be reduced + Built coalitions capable of forcing institutional change from below – Difficult to enforce /violated many times ⁹ – Operate under constant threat from both armed groups and police

Figure 10 : Existing Solutions

¹ UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein. (2021). Back to school in Brazil. <https://www.unicef.ch/en/what-we-do/completed-programs/back-school-brazil>

²The Borgen Project. (2023, November 26). Empowering the youth of Rio's favelas. BORDEN Magazine. [EMpower](https://www.borgenproject.org/empowering-the-youth-of-rios-favelas)

³Ashcroft, P., & Hilderbrand, R. (2015, January 7). Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) installations part 1: 2008–2010. RioOnWatch. <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=16065>

⁴Rodrigues, T., Brancoli, F., & Kalil, M. (2018). Brazil, pacification and major events: Forging an "ambience of security" in Rio. *Revista de Estudos em Segurança Internacional*, 4(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.18847/1.7.6>

⁵AFP. (2022, January 23). Yet another project seeks to free Rio's favelas from crime groups. France 24.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220123-yet-another-project-seeks-to-free-rio-s-favelas-from-crime-groups>

⁶Santos Filho, J. (2022, May 13). 'Integrated City?!' New year, same old politics. RioOnWatch. <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=70045>

⁷Catalytic Communities. Growth Acceleration Program (PAC). <https://catcomm.org/pac/>

⁸Bourguignon, F., Ferreira, F. H. G., & Leite, P. G. (2002). Ex-ante evaluation of conditional cash transfer programs: The case of Bolsa Escola (Policy Research Working Paper No. 2916). The World Bank. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/wbk/wbrwps/2916.html>

⁹Caffagni, L. G. L., & Martins, G. (2025). Community communication and spatial justice: Insurgent practices in Rio de Janeiro favelas. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 23(2), 223–238

GAPS & LEVERS OF CHANGE

Finally, drawing on the gaps identified in our analysis, Figure 11 outlines key levers for strengthening existing interventions and proposing new ones.

Challenge & Gap	Lever of Change	Impact
GOVERNMENT		
Cyclical rebranding of security policy UPPs, Integrated City: same militarised logic, timed to elections, no long-term commitment.	Mandate multi-term, cross-administration security frameworks co-designed with residents, independently evaluated and insulated from electoral incentives.	Breaks the cycle of 'policy fatigue' eroding community trust. It creates continuity beyond any single governor's tenure.
Displacement, not resolution Operations targeting drug gangs push violence to peripheral favelas; militias fill the vacuum left behind.	Shift from territorial occupation toward de-escalation policing paired with genuine state service delivery: sanitation, schools, health.	Addresses the governance vacuum armed groups exploit; reduces the comparative appeal of criminal governance for residents who depend on it for basic services.
Residents excluded from policy design No consultation before Integrated City, the Alemão cable car, or mass riverbank removals.	Institutionalise mandatory participatory consultation with 'favelados' before any security or infrastructure programme, drawing on existing 'associações de moradores'.	Policies co-designed with residents better reflect actual needs, build trust, and endure beyond their initial rollout.
NGOS & COMMUNITY		
Community self-governance is ignored Residents govern collectively through mutirões, residents' associations, community kitchens. However, policy treats them as passive.	Formally recognise and resource community self-governance structures as legitimate policymaking partners, following Frente Maré's precedent in securing ADPF 635.	Rebuilds communicative justice alongside spatial justice; demonstrates community coalitions can force institutional change.
Stigma and criminalisation of poverty Public discourse delegitimises favela residents, weakening political will for structural investment	Support community-led media collectives to counter misinformation and represent favela life on its own terms. More representation of favelados.	Shifts the public narrative; creates external accountability for government inaction and broadens the political coalition for change.
INTERNATIONAL		
Performative investment over structural change International events (World Cup, Olympics) trigger spending designed to perform prosperity. Defunding once global attention moves on, leaving root causes untouched.	Multilateral accountability mechanisms to ensure international investment in Rio is evaluated against resident welfare outcomes, not reputational optics or tourism-facing infrastructure.	Shifts incentive away from performing prosperity for global audiences; creates oversight that outlasts any single event or electoral cycle.
Favela narratives controlled externally International visibility obscures human rights conditions and reinforces the state's sanitised narrative.	Fund independent favela journalism and data initiatives e.g. Fogo Cruzado (community dashboards) to bring resident-centred evidence to the international stage.	Enables evidence-based international advocacy; makes it harder for governments to conceal the human costs of militarised security policy.

Figure 11 : Gaps & Levers of Change

CONCLUSION

Lessons Learned

Our key learning is that armed territorial control and educational inequality cannot be addressed in isolation. Repressive security responses that ignore structural conditions will continue to disrupt schooling without dismantling the organisations responsible for it, and educational interventions that ignore the security environment will continue to produce predictable institutional collapse. Meaningful change requires an integrated approach addressing security policy, educational governance, and political capture simultaneously, designed alongside affected communities, educators, and local institutions rather than imposed upon them.

Rio de Janeiro's case also reveals that the absence of political will is structural. Where political incentives reward neglect, technical solutions are insufficient. Sustained reform requires confronting the political architecture that makes intervention irrational before designing the interventions themselves.

Research Limitations

We acknowledge two key limitations. First, this research was conducted without direct fieldwork, and future studies would benefit from collaboration with residents, teachers, and policymakers to ground findings in lived experience. Second, the evidence base draws on studies employing different definitions of territorial control, meaning the comparative finding that militia control produces greater learning losses than trafficking control rests on a distinction that is empirically contested at the boundary level. Standardised territorial control metrics would strengthen future comparative estimates.