Transitioning from dynamic security in italian prisons: assessing the influence of perceived insecurity on prison management

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Abstract

In the earlier part of the decade, italian prisons inplemented the open-cell regime (custodia aperta) and dynamic security, partly as a response to being convicted of overcrowding by the European Court of Human Rights. However, the Penitentiary Administration Circular No. 3693/6143 of 2022 significantly scaled back these interventions, (re)proposing the closed-cell regime and static security to govern prisons. This study aims to clarify the reasons that prompted the shift in the paradigm. It achieved this by first outlining the strategies for prison security management promoted in Italy in the last decades. Second, it investigates the recent departure from dynamic security by looking both at the 'inside' and 'outside' of prisons. Specifically, on the one hand, prison officers' perspectives on dynamic security are considered to understand their views on this mode of surveillance. On the other hand, policies that respond to perceived insecurity in Italian society are examined to assess their impact on both the implementation of dynamic security and the return to static security. While the study acknowledges some officers' resistance to dynamic security, it found that the return to static security can be traced primarily to the policies of the Italian government. They have involved an increase in the inmate population (of which a high percentage is foreign) and the enhancement of the neutralising (not rehabilitating) function of punishment; these factors likely prevented the establishment of positive relationships in prison, which are at the core of dynamic security.

Keywords: prison management, order and security, dynamic security, prison officers, perceived insecurity.

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1. Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, strong collective anguish began to emerge in the public discourse of Western countries as a result of globalisation and the loss of the legitimacy of states, which has left citizens distrustful, disillusioned, and very fearful (Cornelli, 2008; Garland, 2001; Wacquant, 1999). In connection with this growing sense of fear, demands for security started arising; people began demanding politicians to protect their "right to not be afraid" (Ceretti and Cornelli, 2019, p. 1482, my translation) from a perceived rise in crime and disorder.

The authorities did not take long to respond. In the Italian context, the country experienced a tightening of criminal policies since 1990 (Ceretti and Cornelli, 2018; Cornelli, 2008), which, in turn, contributed to a dramatic increase in incarcerations (Pavarini, 2004). The consequent rise in the inmate population led to overcrowding in Italian prisons that reached a level deemed unsustainable, and Italy being convicted of human rights violations by the European Court of Human Rights (*Sulejmanovic v. Italy* No. 22635/03 and *Torreggiani et al. v. Italy* Nos. 43517/09, 46882/09, 55400/09; 57875/09, 61535/09, 35315/10, 37818/10).

Consequently, Italy began taking several steps to comply with international standards. Alongside deflationary measures (for further discussion, Corvi, 2013; Della Bella, 2013; 2014; Porchetti, 2021, pp. 346-347), the open-cell regime and dynamic security[1] were introduced in 2011 for medium-security inmates, who constitute most of the prison population. The value of this renewal lies not only in the attempt to ensure humane treatment in detention, but also in the implementation of cutting-edge models for maintaining order and security in prisons. Indeed, it is widely believed that security provided through physical barriers should be complemented by dynamic security, which is based on building positive relationships between inmates and prison staff (CoE, Rec(2003)23, para. 18. a; Rec(2006)2-rev, Rule 51.2).

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[1] Open-cell regime (*custodia aperta*) is a mode of organising the custody of prisoners. Prisoners assigned to the open-cell regime can spend between eight and 14 hours outside their cells and enjoy special treatment programmes (Circular 3663/6113, 2015). According to the European Prison Rules, dynamic security is "provided by an alert staff who know the prisoners who are under their control" (Rec(2006)2-rev, Rule 51.2). It refers to a working method by which prison staff develop "positive relationships with prisoners based on firmness and fairness, in combination with an understanding of their personal situation and any risk posed by individual prisoners" (CoE, Rec(2003)23, para. 18. a).

These interventions have recently been scaled back following the issuing of the Penitentiary Administration Circular No. 3693/6143 of 2022, which has (re)introduced static security and the closed-cell regime as privileged tools in prison security management. Dynamic security has not been abolished but has been reduced to an exceptional mode for the surveillance of prisoners most engaged in rehabilitation. These changes are currently being implemented; thus, operational aspects have not yet been considered. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the factors that led the Italian administration to favour static surveillance in providing order and security in prisons.

Building on this question, this study first considers the ways in which Italy fostered order and security in its prisons, focusing on the establishment of dynamic security and the recent move towards static security. For this purpose, all circulars issued by the Italian Prison Administration on the subject are examined, and connections are made with the body of socio-criminological research concerning order and security in prisons. Furthermore, the reasons for the shift from dynamic to static security are explored, focusing on both the 'inside' and the 'outside' of prisons; the insider perspective of prison officers on how they experienced dynamic security is considered, as well as the criminal policies promoted in the outside Italian society in the last decades, which may have affected prison management. The analysis relies on academic research and documents and releases from prison officers' unions, opinions, and comments published in Corps magazines or blogs. This lead to the assumption that, while initial attempts to appease social insecurity and the related use of incarceration as a tool of social control indirectly fostered the implementation of dynamic security, they ended up paradoxically undermining its success, probably contributing to the decision to depart from it.

For a proper understanding of the following analysis, it is worth pointing out that this study does not perceive prisons as places where rationality prevails. According to the Weberian bureaucratic model, prisons are highly disciplined to ensure regular and predictable performance. However, the attempt to predict their functioning runs into some internal resistance, which is the result of the perceptions and actions of its members (referring to organisations at large, Bonazzi, 2008, p. 277; Friedberg, 1993/1994, p. 65). Simultaneously, prisons are subject to transformative boosts from the outside; the decisions they make never obey the sole purpose of pursuing official goals but are always influenced by particular situations (Garland, 2001, p. 206; referring to organisations at large, Catino, 2012, p. 173; Esposito, 2021, p. 19). Within this framework, the formal rules set by the prison administration are not irre-

levant, not only because they incorporate the sensitivities of the actors outside and inside the prison but also because they structure thoughts and actions in the sense that they constitute a map guiding the choices of those who must comply with them (Lippi and Morisi, 2005, pp. 85-86).

2. Strategies for maintaining order and security in Italian prisons

In the Italian penitentiary system, order and security are guaranteed by a range of custodial and surveillance arrangements that vary according to the characteristics of the prison population. Importantly, they are conceived not only as a need *per se*, but also as a fundamental condition for inmates' rehabilitation, which is detention's primary aim (Art. 27, para. 3, Constitution). Specifically, Article 2 of Presidential Decree No. 230/2000 stipulates that "Order and discipline in penitentiary institutions ensure security, which is the condition for the realisation of the purposes of treatment of prisoners and internees" (my translation). Although well-established today, such a close interdependence between security and treatment has been achieved over time.

The starting point is represented by Law No. 354 of 1975, which marked a moment of great discontinuity (*ex multis*, Di Somma, 2005, p. 2; Di Gennaro, 2005, p. 15). Through this Law, the prison went from being conceived as a place of exclusion to a place of opportunity, where the inmate was no longer a mere object of control but an actor on an empowering path. Following this trajectory, steps have been taken to realise the redesign of the detention system since the 1980s; new professional profiles were hired, and efforts were made to modernise the organisational structure of Italian prisons (for further discussion, Di Somma, 2005). Within this framework, Circular No. 3337-5787 of 7 February 1992 was the first to recall "the interconnection and interdependence between the goal of legality and the need for security", and to state that security is the tool for achieving inmate rehabilitation.

On 21 April 1993, Circular No. 3359/5809 issued provisions for organising the location of inmates within prisons; security regimes (*circuiti penitenziari*) were established, namely "logistical entities" (Ardita, 2007, p. 43, my translation) to which inmates are assigned taking into account their risk level or specific treatment needs. Specifically, the Circular classified inmates into three categories, resulting in the creation of three different security regimes: (i) a high-security regime (*circuito di alta sicurezza*), which was meant for the most dangerous inmates, mainly those convicted of mafia crimes; (ii) a low-security regime (*circuito a custodia attenuata*), for inmates classified as non-dangerous, namely drug addicts; and (iii) a medium security regime (*circuito di media sicurezza*), designed to house inmates who did not fit into the other two regimes.

This new organisation aimed to allow the implementation of individualised treatment programmes for inmates (Aiello and Rizzo, 2017, p. 54), as required by Article 13, Law No. 354 of 1975. In addition, the idea was to balance surveillance efforts according to the danger of detainees, even to contain the risks of criminal overpowering and proselytising (Falzone, 2015, p. 2). However, while the procedures for the functioning of high- and low-security regimes were defined from the outset, the same did not occur for the medium-security regime. In the following, this study's focus is to investigate the management of the medium security regime over time, which is of special interest because it accommodates most of the prison population.

2.1 Dynamic security as a tool for prison governance

Due to the absence of proper regulations, medium-security inmates have been subjected to prolonged cell confinement for extended periods. This practice, which is inherently illegal, has become untenable over time, exacerbated by the growing issue of overcrowding of Italian prisons, resulting in the aforementioned convictions by the European Court of Human Rights. As a solution, the "revolutionary" (Della Bella, 2011) Circular No. 3594/6044 was issued in 2011, finally bringing order to the matter. Specifically, inmates considered less dangerous were admitted to the open-cell regime (*custodia aperta*), under which the perimeter of detention extends beyond the cell to the common spaces of the section (*sezione*). Only the most dangerous species remained in the closed-cell regime (*custodia chiusa*), which provides limited opportunities for movement[2]. In detailing these provisions, the Circular stated that it seeks to overcome the dichotomy between security and treatment; admission to the open-cell regime depended not only on the dangerousness of inmates but also on their adherence to prison rules, with the consequence that only those most responsible can enjoy it.

Regarding security tasks, the Circular stipulated that the new organisation entails "a *new and more dynamic approach to security*, in line with police tasks carried outside prisons. ... Information-type activities … have to be complemented by *dynamic control of the open facility* and the option to intervene in cases of rule-breaking, with powers to reintroduce the previous more custodial regime" (Circular No. 3594/6044, 2011, my translation, emphasis added). Thus, the idea of dynamic security entered into the Italian scene.

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2   Circular No. 3663/6113 of 2015 clarifies that the assignment of a prisoner to the closed or open cell regime depends on the "different aggression and danger potential" (p. 3, my translation. See also Annex A to the Circular). Moreover, the difference between the two regimes is not limited to the number of hours spent outside the cell, which is eight hours in the case of the closed cell regime and between eight and 14 hours in the case of the open cell regime. Rather, it consists of the different treatment programmes offered (p. 5. See also Annex B to the Circular).

Already recognised internationally (CoE, Rec(2006)2-rev, Rule 51.2), dynamic security "aims at better understanding prisoners and assessing the risks they may pose as well as ensuring safety, security and good order, contributing to rehabilitation and preparation for release" (CoE, 2016, para. 115). Circular No. G-DAP 0206745-2012 of 2012 dwelled more on this concept, invoking the need to prevent the open-cell regime from becoming a burden on prison officers. However, Circulars GDAP-0251644-2013 of 2013 and 3663/6113 of 2015 have definitively established dynamic security as a mode of control for inmates in the open-cell regime. Upon closer examination, dynamic security is defined as a "working method", or "a more effective system for ensuring order within prisons, without hindering treatment activities, based on simplification, rationalisation, qualification of workloads, the distinction of expertise, and sharing of information among staff" (Circular GDAP-0251644-2013, 2013, p. 2, my translation). At the heart of dynamic security is the "knowledge of the inmate", which would be limited if their life remained confined within the cell (Circular GDAP-0251644-2013, 2013, p. 3; see also Giordano, Salvato and Sangiovanni, 2021, p. 48). For this reason, the differentiation of prison spaces has been promoted, distinguishing between cells that should be used only for sleeping and places where rehabilitation programmes are carried out. This should prompt prison officers to serve outside the sections, implementing indirect control according to the model of "patrols presiding over territories" (Circular G-DAP 0206745-2012, 2012, para. 5, my translation; see also Circular GDAP-0251644-2013, 2013, p. 3; Circular 3663/6113, 2015, p. 6). From this perspective, dynamic security embodies a shift from a custody-based model of surveillance to a knowledge-based model of the surveillance of inmates (De Pascalis, 2013), which, according to international prescriptions, must involve building positive relationships (CoE; Rec, (2003)23, para. 18. a; Rec(2006)2-rev, Rule 51.2; UNOHCHR, 2005, p. 86).

Noteworthily, relationships are critical to ensuring order and security within prisons. In the collective imagination, a safe place implies raising physical and emotional barriers to keep danger at a distance. However, barriers seem insufficient to ensure security in a prison; "[an] officer in a watchtower on the perimeter is likely to see an escape attempt only after it has begun. An officer who works closely with prisoners and knows what they are doing will be much more aware of possible threats to security before they occur" (UNOHCHR, 2005, p. 86). Therefore, as much as a prison cannot eliminate its physical barriers, breaking down interpersonal barriers can assist staff in maintaining security by enabling them to anticipate critical incidents (CoE, Revised Commentary on Cm/Rec(2006)2, Rule 51; UNODC, 2015, p. 31).

More broadly, research has shown that the production sites of order in prisons are placed outside hierarchical structures; prison order is not the mere effect of issuing and executing commands but rests on balances established in interpersonal relationships (Buffa, 2001, p. 83; Sarzotti,

1999, pp. 13-16; 2010, p. 184; Vianello, 2018, p. 74). Sykes's studies already found that officers, "far from being omnipotent rulers" who have total control over inmates, "are engaged in a continuous struggle to maintain order", which frequently results in compromise (Sykes, 1958, p. 42). Thus, the order in prison is consolidated in the relational dynamics of negotiations between staff and inmates, where the cooperation of inmates is always necessary (Drake, 2008, p. 153. See also the definition of order given by Sparks, Bottoms and Hay, 1996, p. 119).

However, it is not only the existence of relationships that is important for maintaining order in prison but also the quality of these relationships. In this regard, it must be highlighted that legitimacy problems often affect the interaction between officers and prisoners. This is due to the officers' indirect and ambiguous way of exercising power (Crewe, 2011, pp. 456-463), which is based on the logic of exchange and blackmail or otherwise on strategies that do not involve direct staff intervention, but aim at the self-regulation of prisoners (on different strategies for negotiating order with prisoners, see Fassin, 2015, pp. 337-415; Gariglio, 2018; Goffman, 1961, pp. 12-48; Rostaing, 2014, pp. 316-317). Moreover, the officers' authority is imposed upon inmates, a circumstance that may imply that they are not seen as worthy of respect and obedience (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay, 1996, pp. 86-87).

From this perspective, the challenge of maintaining effective order – and, correlatively, security – in prison ends up becoming a matter of "getting relationships right" (Home Office, 1984, para. 16). Following the procedural justice approach (Cornelli, 2014; Hough, Jackson and Bradford, 2010; Tyler, 1990; 2004; 2006; 2011), officers succeed in governing prisons through communication and the exercise of fair and respectful behaviour in formal and informal interactions with inmates. Indeed, this legitimises officers in the eyes of inmates, with consequences, such as a greater willingness to cooperate with the officers to ensure orderly coexistence (Leggett and Hirons, 2007, p. 234; Liebling, Price and Shefer, 2012, pp. 101-102; Sparks et al., 1996, pp. 88-89, 307-309. See also Sparks and Bottoms, 1995).

Against this background, the value of introducing dynamic security into Italian prisons becomes clear since it is about getting to know the inmates and forging the right relationships with them. It is also worth noting that the implementation of dynamic security created an inextricable link between 'security' and 'treatment' in Italian prisons. This is not only because the open-cell regime and dynamic security require inmates to manage their behaviours with relative autonomy (De Simone, 2018, pp. 3-4, Giordano et al., 2021, p. 47), but also because building genuinely positive relationships between prison officers and inmates encourages inmates to take steps towards positive changes (Liebling et al., 2012, p. 103).

2.2 Circular 3693/6143 of 2022: towards the revival of static security?

The framework outlined above was recently altered by Circular No. 3693/6143 of 2022. It explicitly aims at "overcoming the dualism between the open and the closed cell regime", to achieve true individualisation of the treatment of prisoners (Circular No. 3693/6143, 2022, p. 3, my translation). In other words, the idea was to review custody regimes to promote gradual rehabilitative interventions. Before introducing the new rules in all Italian prisons, the Circular envisaged an experimentation phase in several regions (p. 25), which is ongoing to date. In the analysis that follows, reference will also be made to the Operational Guidelines adopted by the Regional Prison Administration Board (*Provveditorato Regionale dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria (PRAP)*) of Lombardy region for the experimental implementation of the Circular[3] [hereafter PRAP Lombardy, 2022].

Within the medium-security regime, the Circular identifies four types of detention sections (*sezioni detentive*), namely "reception rooms" (*stanze per l'accoglienza*), "ordinary sections (preparing for intensified treatment)" (*sezioni ordinarie (di preparazione al trattamento intensificato)*) [hereafter ordinary sections], "ordinary sections for intensified treatment" (*sezioni ordinarie a trattamento intensificato*) [hereafter intensified treatment sections], "sections under Article 32 Presidential Decree 230/2000" (*sezioni ex art. 32 d.p.r. 230/2000*) [hereafter sections under Article 32], "solitary confinement sections under Article 33, Law No. 354 of 1975" (*sezioni di isolamento ex art. 33 Ord. pen.*) and "other types of institutions and sections" (*altre tipologie di istituti e sezioni*).

Focusing on what changed in the security management, the distinction between ordinary and intensified treatment sections deserves special attention. The former are intended for all first-time inmates, inmates coming out of the sections under Article 32, and, more generally, those who are deemed unready for intensified treatment (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, pp. 7-9; PRAP Lombardy, 2022, p. 11). In these sections, the cells are open for at least eight hours a day, but inmates cannot circulate in the corridor of the section. Prison officers must serve within the section, which means that direct control is preferred over dynamic security – it applies the so-called "in-person service" (*servizio in presenza*) (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, p. 8). However, inmates who demonstrate compliance with prison rules and are committed to rehabilitation have access to intensified treatment sections. They can be out of the cells for no less than 10 hours a day and should

have access to several rehabilitative activities. In these sections, inmates' self-determination is encouraged (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, p. 13; PRAP Lombardy, 2022, p. 13) and security tasks are performed in the dynamic mode (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, pp. 10-11).

Inmates who lack interest in rehabilitation and exhibit behaviour detrimental to prison order and security are assigned to sections under Article 32, following a specific decision, and for a maximum of six months, which may be extended (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, p. 14; PRAP Lombardy, 2022, p. 13). More supervision is provided here than in the ordinary sections; prison officers permanently monitor inmates who are entitled to be out of their cells for at least four hours a day and can participate in treatment programmes only if they are deemed fit (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, pp. 14-16).

In reference to these changes, mixed reactions have emerged among the prison officers' unions. Some have praised the Circular, deeming it necessary to reorganise the medium security regime (Durante, 2021; FPCGIL, 2021). However, others have raised issues regarding the new rules, sometimes suggesting amendments. Along these lines, it has been pointed out that officers will be forced into the role of "butlers" of inmates who are "violent" and "prone to aggression" without any support from the prison administration (Osapp, 2022a, my translation). Accordingly, it has been recommended that inmates responsible for aggression against officers be placed in sections under Article 32 without any prior evaluation (Sappe, 2021).

From a shifting perspective, the associations involved in supporting prisoners have been critical of the establishment of ordinary sections, which not only reintroduce the closed-cell regime for several inmates, but could also degenerate into a predominantly disciplinary model of detention. Similar considerations are made regarding sections under Article 32, as there is fear that they may become ghettos for the most problematic inmates, places of punishment that will eventually fuel conflict and violence (FPCGIL, 2021; Gonnella, 2021).

Prison observers did not consider the security regime promoted by the Circular. As shown, dynamic security is significantly scaled back, remaining in place only in the intensified treatment sections to which a limited portion of the inmate population has access. In this regard, several aspects require further attention. First, the introduction of direct control in ordinary sections has been justified by emphasising that it is instrumental in getting to know inmates to assess their intramural behaviour and prevent critical incidents (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, p. 8; PRAP Lombardy, 2022, p. 11). On closer inspection, however, the same was said in previous Circulars in reference to the indirect control of dynamic security (Circular GDAP-0251644-2013, 2013, p. 3), a circumstance that raises concerns. Second, the documents analysed recommend the use of video surveillance in implementing dynamic security, in part to address staff shortages (Circular 3693/6143, 2022, p. 12; see also PRAP Lombardy, 2022,

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3 Ministero della Giustizia, Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria, Provveditorato Regionale per la Lombardia, Ufficio detenuti e Trattamento, *Circuito Media Sicurezza, Circolare Dap 18.07.2022 nr. 3693/6143, Linee Operative per l'Attuazione della Nuova Direttiva per il Rilancio del Regime e del Trattamento Penitenziario*, 2022.

p. 3). In this regard, if remote surveillance allows for the monitoring of inmates, it does not enable the establishment of those relationships that, according to dynamic security dictates, are crucial in maintaining order and security in prison.

This confused attitude of the Prison Administration testifies to a misunderstanding of dynamic security. However, this is not a novel finding. In 2020, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment noted that, as much as Italian authorities claimed to have implemented dynamic security, "officers were not in continuous interaction with prisoners or involved in any offender management programmes; instead, they performed static security duties by way of observing prisoners and unlocking doors as required" (CoE, 2020, para. 27). The 2022 Circular is perfectly consistent with this scheme and may be more transparent on this point. At the very least, it is now clear that Italy has chosen to avoid dynamic approaches in providing security in prisons. The next section attempts to understand why this is the case.

3. The challenge of building positive relationships in prison

The reasons why the Italian Penitentiary Administration departed from dynamic security remain unclear. Circular 3693/6143 of 2022 does not provide much detail on this matter, indicating that the reform is intended to better differentiate between rehabilitation interventions. However, it is easy to see that the issue is more complex. As mentioned earlier, organisations rarely act simply in the rational pursuit of their purposes. Rather, they rely on complex dynamics in making decisions that respond to conversations with the 'inside' and 'outside' of the organisations themselves. This dialogue in the context of Italian prison management is currently being investigated.

First, the internal perspective of the Penitentiary Police[4] regarding dynamic security is considered. This is particularly important since officers' views have historically influenced prison administrations' decision-making (Torrente, 2019, p. 7). Furthermore, its significance lies in the direct involvement of prison officers in implementing dynamic security, making examining their perspectives crucial in identifying any challenges that have arisen. Second, the analysis moves outside the prison to assess whether criminal policies promoted before and in parallel with dynamic security contributed to the partial departure from this security regime.

3.1 A look at the inside: how prison officers experienced dynamic security

Prison officers have unenthusiastically embraced dynamic security since its inception. First, they believed that the new regime ridiculed their role, which was reduced to servile and auxiliary duties not befitting police officers. In addition, officers worried that indirect control would not guarantee prison security: "One cannot ... even remotely imagine leaving entire sections … in the open-cell regime in the hands of droves of inmates without any form of control, and relegating only the outside areas to the control of patrols that are expected to intervene where the needs of order and security require it" (Osapp, 2015, my translation).

Regarding the first issue, the idea of caring for inmates admittedly conflicts with the traditional custodial duties assigned to the Penitentiary Police. Many years have passed since the 1975 reform, which focused on promoting the prison as a place of opportunity and support. However, it was not until 1990 that provisions for the reorganisation of the Corps[5] were implemented, which, among others, should have fostered cultural transformation (in a critical sense, Margara, 2005, pp. 33-34; more generally on the inadequacy of the organisational interventions that followed the 1975 reform Buffa, 2013, pp. 69-76). Prior to that period, the rules[6] that officers had to follow were fascist in nature, with the result that the rehabilitative ideal of the 1975 reform coexisted for many years with the belief that prison officers had to maintain a custodial, if not purely punitive, attitude towards their inmates (Artale, 1976, pp. 371-372).

It is, therefore, of little wonder that officers have developed a formal-authoritarian cultural code, as opposed to the empathic-treatment code of healthcare, social, and psychological care prison workers (Sarzotti, 1999, pp. 17-21). Accordingly, the bewilderment experienced by officers due to the implementation of dynamic security should not be considered surprising. Dynamic security requires officers to adopt an attitude of understanding and empowerment towards inmates, emphasising their rehabilitation. Consequently, it poses great challenges in terms of redefining their role identity (Signori, 2016, p. 250). In the officers' opinion, "Penitentiary Police do not have a vocation for treatment ... Its spirit and identity allow for

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4   Penitentiary Police (*Corpo di Polizia Penitenziaria*) is the correctional law enforcement agency that operates in the Italian prisons.

5   The reference is to Law No. 395 of 15 December 1990, which demilitarizes and abolishes the Prison Officers' Corps (*Corpo degli Agenti di Custodia*), which is replaced by the civilian-run Penitentiary Police Corps (*Corpo di Polizia Penitenziaria*). Article 5 of the same law provides that, among other things, the Penitentiary Police participate in rehabilitation programmes of prisoners within working groups.

6   Royal Decree No. 2584 of 30 December 1937, Regulations for the Corps of Prison Officers of Prevention and Punishment Institutions (*Regolamento per il Corpo degli agenti di custodia degli istituti di prevenzione e di pena*).

tasks securitarian in nature" (Ripa, 2020, my translation). In line with these considerations, research has highlighted the link between dynamic security implementation and role conflict among prison officers (Santorso, 2021, p. 1568), which also testifies to cultural resistance to organisational change.

Moreover, officers worried about the challenges of maintaining order through dynamic security. While this may also be rooted in their reluctance to change, their concerns seem to have materialised. Officers testified that the new regime moved the balance of control towards the inmates (Antigone, 2018, p. 138; Santorso, 2018, p. 74; 2021, pp. 1566-1567), affecting their negotiating skills and, more generally, their authority (Santorso, 2021, p. 1567). In addition, they reported an increase in the number of aggressive incidents under the new regime (Antigone, 2018, p. 138). Some spoke of a "spiral of violence", in which even the weakest inmates would be caught up (Askanews, 2022, my translation). A survey conducted by a prison officer's union (Sappe, 2018) found that, according to 79% of respondents (n = 397 officers), dynamic security has increased critical incidents; this was mainly because officers have been asked to settle outside sections, whereas proximity to inmates would have allowed for a deterrent effect. Furthermore, a recent study conducted in the prisons of Piemonte, Liguria, and Valle d'Aosta found that although most officers felt that indirect control affects prisons' security, for 90.7% of the sample (n = 380) the new regime did not make prisons safer. In addition, approximately 70% of the respondents perceived a decrease in their authority (n = 290 officers) and felt more at risk (n = 289) (Cornelli, Chisari, Sacino and Squillace, 2023, p. 32). Data from the Prison Administration confirm that aggressive incidents against prison staff by inmates, as well as inter-prisoner violence, disciplinary offences and self-harm, have increased over the past 10 years (Figure 1).
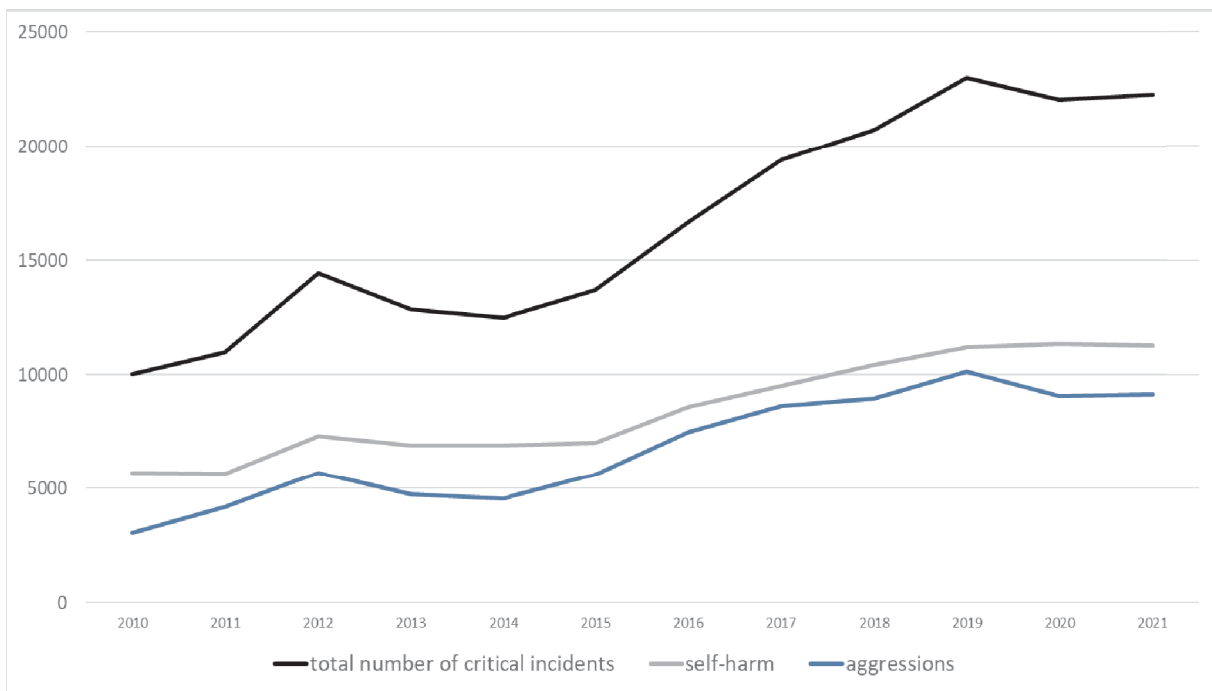
Source: Ministry of Justice, data processed by Roberto Cornelli. Report to the Italian School for the Judiciary "La realtà della pena detentiva attraverso la lettura delle statistiche", 15 February 2023.
Fig. 1: Total number of critical incidents, self-harm, and aggressions to officers and among inmates (2010-2021)

While this figure clearly shows that security and order in Italian prisons have not improved following the implementation of dynamic security, it also reveals the poor quality of the relationship between prison officers and inmates. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that aggressive incidents against prison staff would have occurred to a lesser extent in positive relationships. These assertions are supported by empirical research, which found that dynamic security did not bring about improvements in officer–prisoner relationships (Cornelli et al., 2023, p. 31) but exacerbated the conflict among them, even in light of the role problems suffered by officers (Santorso, 2021, pp. 1567-1568). Thus, despite the intended role of relationships as the driving force behind dynamic security, they have paradoxically emerged as its weakness.

In this regard, it should be acknowledged that building positive relationships in prison is a very ambitious goal. There are several reasons for this observation. First, priso-

ners are perceived as agents of insecurity since they are responsible for criminal acts; no one wants to be near a source of danger and tend to raise relational barriers (Maculan, 2022, p. 72). Second, officers' subculture and the training they receive promote personal detachment from inmates and an aversion to engaging with them proactively; they are called upon not to be too friendly towards their antagonists and rather to be suspicious (Arnold, 2008, pp. 413-414; Crawley, 2004, p. 98; Crawley and Crawley, 2008, p. 143; Giordano et al., 2021, pp. 271-272; Kauffman, 1988, p. 86; Maculan, 2022, pp. 77-81). In parallel, the inmates' code requires prisoners not to engage with officers who are seen as enemies (Ricciardelli and Perry, 2016, p. 406; *contra* Crewe, 2011, p. 456, who found that barriers between prisoners and staff are falling apart, and relationships are improving). Third, officers' availability for relationships with inmates is marked by profound ambiguity, since their openness to others could easily be misinterpreted (Crewe, 2011, p. 458). In this regard, dynamic security requires officers to develop "positive relationships with prisoners based on firmness and fairness, in combination with an understanding of their personal situation and any risk posed by individual prisoners" (CoE Rec(2003)23, para. 18. a). These must be professional and unfriendly relationships (UNODC, 2015, p. 31). However, it is difficult for the officers to be friendly and understanding and not become friends with the prisoners, while also remaining firm or authoritative simultaneously.

Looking at the Italian context, all of the above lead to the hypothesis that officers' cultural attitudes do not foster their involvement in positive relationships with inmates. Moreover, the fact that some officers experienced the implementation of dynamic security as complicating their work to improve the lives of undeserving inmates arguably did not help[7]. More broadly, it seemed that officers were not well disposed to this change in pace. However, blaming the departure from dynamic security on officers is overly simplistic. It has already been mentioned that the Prison Administration has never fully understood dynamic security, having set up indirect control as a remote observation of inmates without any interaction (CoE 2020, para. 27). This suggests that officers have not been properly addressed when assuming new roles. In addition, one wonders whether the right conditions were in place in prisons to build positive relationships with inmates, specifically considering the external political and social dynamics that affected the implementation of the dynamic-security reform.

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7   In this regard, it was noted that, especially in the face of the unionisation of Penitentiary Police, a policy of competition between staff and inmates' needs has developed. An additional right for prisoners is accepted only when it is compatible with staff rights and expectations (Buffa, 2013, pp. 79-81).

3.2 A look at the outside: fear and its effects on prison environment

To understand how the outside environment has affected the implementation of dynamic security in Italian prisons, the fact that fear of crime has prevailed on the Italian political and social scene since the mid-1990s should not be overlooked. These complex dynamics cannot be fully covered here (for further discussion, Ceretti and Cornelli, 2018; Cornelli, 2008; Cornelli, Selmini and Nobili, this volume; De Giorgi, 2000). Just remember that certain events occurring during those years (see Ginsborg, 1998, pp. 471-472) led to the emergence of feelings such as anger, exasperation, and distrust in public debate (Cornelli, 2016) along with demands for security, which had to be provided "immediately" and "in an exemplary way" (Ceretti and Cornelli, 2019, p. 1486, my translation).

In response to the imperative of re-establishing control, the realm of politics has adopted strategies such as reducing public spending on social policies while prioritising the maintenance of public order and security. These strategies involve targeted interventions aimed at protecting citizens from any (real or perceived) threat (Ceretti and Cornelli, 2018, pp. 127-136; Selmini, 2005, p. 313. In general terms, Garland, 2001, p. 234; Wacquant, 1999, pp. 20-27). Criminal law becomes an instrument for public reassurance, directed at quelling collective anguish instead of seriously addressing crime. This also implied a gradual increase in the prison population, especially among those perceived to be a source of danger, namely immigrants, drug addicts, and petty offenders (Anastasia, 2022, pp. 30-32; Buffa, 2011, pp. 50-53; Margara, 2005, pp. 36-38; Wacquant, 1999, pp. 58, 70-73). The growth in imprisonment proceeded almost steadily until the deflective interventions that accompanied, just before and immediately after, the 2013 European Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of *Torreggiani et al. v. Italy* (Torrente, 2019, pp. 2-4; on the judgment, *ex multis* Della Morte, 2013). Within this framework, the percentage of foreign components in the total number of prison admissions increased tangibly (Aebi and Delgrande, 2011, p. 79; Santorso, 2015, p. 161; Vianello, 2019, p. 85; Wacquant, 1999, pp. 78-79).

It has already been mentioned that these events led to the implementation of dynamic security, which was considered beneficial in ensuring more dignified living conditions for the numerous inmates confined in Italian prisons. Dynamic security, however, has not addressed the issues surrounding perceived insecurity, which persisted over time. Thus, beginning in 2015, the prison population increased again, declining in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic but then rising again, reaching an overcrowding rate of 107.4% in 2021 (Antigone, 2022, p. 12). It is worth noting that these numbers of inmates can no longer be explained solely by reference to policies aimed at removing undesirables from society but must also be traced to the lengthening of sentences imposed by courts, coupled with the retaining in prison of vulnerable

inmates, although eligible for alternative sanctions (CoE, 2020, para. 7. On the many factors affecting the trend in prison population rates, see Anastasia, 2022, pp. 33-37; Pavarini, 1997; 2004). However, the political approach to the (in)security issue still seems to be to 'neutralise the enemy'; prisons are used as weapons of compensatory vengeance, according to the idea that imprisonment equals justice and guarantees security.

Against this background, the main assumption is that poor welfare interventions in recent years, the chronic overcrowding of prisons, and the specific characteristics of the prison population have undermined the success of dynamic security and, more specifically, the possibility for officers to establish positive relationships with inmates.

From a first perspective, it should be noted that overcrowding has challenged the functioning of prisons. In the absence of adequate resources to deal with all inmates, the prison administration had to set its priorities; considering not only organisational shortcomings but also social and political pressures from the outside, it was chosen to emphasise the neutralising function of imprisonment at the expense of rehabilitation (Sarzotti, 2010, p. 218; not referring to the Italian context, Garland, 2001, p. 206). For the purposes of this study, this is relevant for several reasons. First, this process may have reinforced the custodial attitude of officers operating in an institutional environment that did not value taking care of prisoners. Second, the use of most resources to strengthen the prison security branch precluded the recruitment of sufficient staff for rehabilitation activities[8], which is a key element in the effective implementation of dynamic security. Finally, limited resources have been spent on providing prison officers with training to properly perform their new tasks, although the importance of increasing officers' skills for dynamic security success is well known (UNODC, 2015, pp. 32-34). Greater investment in the professionalisation of the Corps would have probably helped the staff to better cope with the role conflict they experience and overcome the cultural resistance that motivated the early opposition to the new security regime.

Moreover, it can be assumed that overcrowding does not facilitate *per se* dynamic security. Officers have complained about the inadequacy of uniform staff compared with the number of inmates (Osapp, 2022b). Specifically, they have stressed that the combination of overcrowding and staff shortage "certainly is not the starting point for real 'knowledge' of the inmate and his needs" (SiNAPPe, 2022, my translation), where knowledge of the inmates is at the heart of dynamic security. Beyond numbers, however, one can perceive the difficulty of establishing rela-

tionships in a chaotic environment where interpersonal tensions may inevitably arise. Simultaneously, as noted by the officers, the significant presence of foreign inmates in Italian prisons has posed challenges to fostering interpersonal relationships, primarily due to language barriers (Santorso, 2021, p. 1566).

This framework indicates that if prison officers did not succeed in adequately fulfilling their role in the implementation of dynamic security, it's due to the absence of proper conditions to do so. In other words, the insecurity perceived by Italian society seems to have indirectly implied the shaping of a prison environment in which it is difficult to establish relationships. In parallel, it is interesting to note that just as research already found that the size of the prison population and its ethnic heterogeneity erode the convict code (Seagren and Skarbek, 2021) with detrimental consequences for maintaining control, these same elements appear to have affected Italian prison officers' ability to build positive relationships with inmates and, by extension, viable security regimes. Although the dynamics of the two phenomena are very different, these findings are very meaningful if the goal is to advance 'relational' paradigms of order and security in prisons.

Conclusions

Recently, Circular No. 3693/6143 was issued, which overturned the way prisons' medium-security regimes are managed by limiting the use of the open-cell regime and dynamic security. This is despite dynamic security generally being framed as the most effective solution for prison governance, which is consistent with research findings that order and security in prisons are built in the relationships among all those who live and work there.

To understand this paradigm shift, it must be said that dynamic security has failed to deliver all the expected results; critical incidents have increased in recent years, and the relationships between officers and prisoners have worsened. The reasons for these outcomes are diverse. However, a crucial role has been played by the sense of insecurity that has emerged in Italian society since the 1990s, and the policies implemented to reassure the population, which have impacted the two interconnected fronts. First, they implied an increase in the number of prisoners – a high percentage of whom are foreigners – a circumstance that has made it difficult for officers to build positive relationships with them. Second, they have resulted in the enhancement of the neutralising (not rehabilitating) function of prisons, with the consequence of few investments in staff training and recruitment to implement dynamic security effectively.

Without neglecting some resistance of officers to dynamic security, these elements are believed to have encouraged a shift towards a more custodial security regime in prisons. From this perspective, this study highlighted the role that political and social dynamics may play in the effective management of prisons, something that is not al-

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8 In 2017, more than 70 percent of the Italian Department of Prison Administration spending went to the Prison Police, while only six percent went to the reintegration of prisoners into society (Antigone, 2017). In 2021, the average ratio of the total number of inmates to the total number of educators employed in Italian prisons was 83 inmates to one educator (Antigone, 2022, p. 153).

ways duly considered. However, these findings amount merely to a hypothesis, that needs to be tested empirically for corroboration. In particular, qualitative research in prisons would be desirable, consisting not only of discussions with prison officers, but also with members of the prison administration, with the final aim of clarifying methods to promote a positive relational environment in prison.

Time will indicate whether the static security based on suspicion and coercion yields positive results. What can now be said is that just as dialogue, trust, respect, and solidarity turn out to be crucial in guaranteeing the maintenance of order in the outside society (Ceretti and Cornelli, 2018, pp. 209-210), these same elements should also ground order and security inside prisons, since respect for the rules can only be based on the "expectation of reciprocity" (Cornelli, 2021, p. 214, my translation). Perhaps one idea would be to start moving in this direction 'outside' prisons, believing that something will consequently change 'inside' prisons as well.

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