

Evolution of Control Mechanisms and their Impact on Contemporary Self-Defense

Evolution of Control Mechanisms and their Impact on Contemporary Self-Defense

Sandro Christovam Bearare¹

Lucas Martins da Silveira²

Summary

Self-defense is a right historically recognized as part of the preservation of life and human dignity. With the advancement of social control mechanisms, this prerogative has been gradually limited by legal, technological, and psychological means. This article analyzes the evolution of these mechanisms, from direct forms of coercion to complex systems of digital surveillance, and investigates how they affect the individual's ability to react to threatening situations. The approach includes elements related to the weakening of individual freedom, the moral conditioning imposed by institutionalized discourses, and the increasing difficulty of exercising self-defense in a legitimate manner. The objective is to contribute to the understanding of the impacts of this process and to encourage new studies on the preservation of personal autonomy in contexts of increasing control.

Keywords: self-defense; surveillance; social control; right to react; individual freedom; digital monitoring; public safety.

Abstract

Self-defense is historically recognized as a fundamental right tied to the preservation of life and human dignity. However, with the rise of modern control mechanisms, this right has been increasingly restricted through legal, technological, and psychological means. This article analyzes the evolution of these mechanisms, from direct coercion to complex digital surveillance systems, and investigates how they affect an individual's ability to respond to threats. The discussion includes elements such as the weakening of individual freedom, moral conditioning imposed by institutional narratives, and the growing difficulty of exercising self-defense legitimately. The goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of this process and encourage further studies on maintaining personal autonomy in highly controlled environments.

Keywords: self-defense; surveillance; social control; right to react; individual freedom; digital monitoring; public security.

1. Introduction (reinforced version)

Self-defense is a right that has existed in human societies since ancient times. Throughout history, it has always been considered a legitimate reaction to unjust threats to physical integrity and life. This prerogative has been directly linked to individual freedom, dignity and a sense of self.

¹ Electrical Engineer, MBA in Production Engineering, Postgraduate in Logistics, Psychopedagogy and Extension in neuroscience. Specialist in security, training and education of professionals in the area of weapons and shooting, with extensive experience in project development, logistics processes and team coordination, security consultant and speaker. E-mail: scbearare@bol.com.br

² Bachelor of Physical Education from the State University of Londrina. Shooting Instructor. E-mail: lucas@abaintl.us

personal responsibility. In contexts where institutional power was limited, self-defense often represented the last resort available to ensure survival.

Over time, especially since the 21st century, new control mechanisms have begun to influence the individual's relationship with his or her own ability to react. Advances in technology, the use of real-time monitoring tools, the strict standardization of behaviors, and the imposition of discourses that discourage any form of direct reaction have transformed the way self-defense is perceived and practiced. These factors have created an environment in which citizens, even when faced with a real threat, can feel legally limited, technologically monitored, and morally conditioned not to act.

In light of this scenario, this article proposes an analysis of the evolution of these control mechanisms and their concrete impacts on contemporary self-defense. The central problem lies in the gradual weakening of the individual's capacity for reaction, both from a legal and psychological point of view. In other words, the right to defend oneself remains provided for by law, but in practice it becomes increasingly inaccessible or risky to exercise.

The justification for this study is based on the need to understand how different control systems have been directly affecting the exercise of self-defense. In a context where surveillance is intensifying and reaction becomes subject to public and criminal judgment, it is essential to investigate the current limits of individual defense and identify alternatives for its preservation in highly monitored societies.

2. Fundamentals of Self-Defense

Self-defense is a natural and historically accepted response to threats to physical integrity and life. Its origins lie in the survival instinct, but over time it has come to be recognized as a legitimate right, protected by legal norms and valued in different social contexts. From ancient societies to contemporary legal systems, the ability to react to an unjust aggression has been understood as an essential part of human dignity.

In the current scenario, it is possible to identify three main dimensions of self-defense. The first is the **legal dimension**, which defines the formal conditions under which the reaction is permitted by law. This definition involves criteria such as the proportionality of the means used, the current nature of the threat, and the absence of another way to avoid harm. The second is the **technical dimension**, related to the practical preparation of the individual to act effectively, including mastery of techniques, equipment, and protocols. Finally, there is the **social and psychological dimension**, which directly influences the willingness to react. Factors such as fear of punishment, public judgment, legal uncertainty, or cultural conditioning can weaken the capacity for action, even when the situation requires an immediate response.

Understanding these three layers is essential to assessing the impacts of modern control mechanisms. Self-defense is not limited to the physical act of facing a threat. It involves awareness, preparation, and freedom of decision. When any of these layers is compromised, the individual loses part of their autonomy. Therefore, preserving self-defense is directly linked to maintaining dignity and personal sovereignty in a society.

3. The Timeline of Control Mechanisms

The ability to defend oneself has never been directly nullified. Over time, it has been gradually restricted through mechanisms that have become increasingly subtle and efficient. Observing this evolution allows us to understand how the freedom to react has gone from being an encouraged behavior to becoming an act that is increasingly questioned, monitored and, in many cases, punished.

Physical control

In ancient societies and until the mid-modern era, control was mainly achieved through brute force. The monopoly of violence was exercised directly by power structures, such as armies and militias. Repression was visible, based on direct coercion and fear of physical punishment. In these contexts, self-defense emerged as a necessity, often tolerated or even encouraged in certain cultures, especially in regions without a strong state presence.

Regulatory control

With the strengthening of modern states, control began to be exercised through legislation. More specific laws began to limit the use of defensive means, regulating the carrying of weapons, defining more strictly the criteria for self-defense and increasing criminal liability in cases of reaction. This model reinforced the idea that protecting life was the exclusive duty of the State, reducing confidence in individual preparedness.

Narrative control

From the 20th century onwards, with the expansion of the media and mass communication, a new type of control emerged: narrative control. Institutional discourse began to reinforce that reacting is dangerous, ineffective or socially reprehensible. Self-defense began to be associated with violent, extreme or illegitimate behavior. This process directly influenced public opinion, causing a change in the collective imagination: the prudent citizen became the one who does not react, who waits for official assistance, even when faced with an imminent threat.

Technological control

With advances in technology, especially since the 21st century, control has taken on a more silent and constant form. Surveillance cameras, digital tracking, facial recognition, artificial intelligence and real-time data monitoring have begun to monitor individuals' behavior permanently. In many cases, legitimate reactions can be recorded, misinterpreted and automatically associated with criminal conduct, regardless of the circumstances.

Psychological and social control

Finally, the most profound control occurs at the mental and social level. Constant exposure to surveillance, combined with fear of legal and social judgment, has a direct effect on behavior: inhibition of reaction. The individual fails to react, not for lack of means, but because he or she does not believe that he or she can or should do so. This type of control does not require physical presence or immediate punishment. It works in anticipation, shaping behavior even before the risk becomes apparent.

This timeline shows that the weakening of self-defense did not occur in isolation, but through a structured process that evolved alongside society itself. The result is a population that is increasingly dependent, monitored and insecure about its own responsibility to protect itself.

4. Direct Impacts on Contemporary Self-Defense

The evolution of control mechanisms has not only redesigned the way citizens relate to security, but has also directly affected the way they react when faced with danger. The right to self-defense, although provided for in various laws, currently faces real obstacles that go beyond the letter of the law. These impacts affect both practical action and mental and emotional preparation to react.

Legal reduction of the reaction margin

The legislation regulating the use of force by civilians has become increasingly detailed, expanding interpretations of excessive force and criminal liability. In many cases, citizens are faced with a clear threat but hesitate to act for fear of overstepping legal limits and being criminalized. Fear of punishment outweighs the instinct for self-protection. This legal uncertainty, often accompanied by public judgments on social media, acts as a brake on reaction.

Constant monitoring and risk of exposure

With the growth of digital surveillance and monitoring by cameras, cell phones and social media, any physical reaction runs the risk of being recorded out of context. An act of self-defense can be edited, reinterpreted and distorted in a viral way. This generates a real fear of becoming the target of criticism, lawsuits or cancellation, even when the reaction is technically valid. The fear of always being watched ends up compromising the decision to act.

Replacing self-defense with dependence

Reliance on state assistance, although necessary, has been reinforced as the only acceptable response in risky situations. Constant guidance to “wait for the authorities,” “don’t react,” or “call for help” reinforces the idea that ordinary individuals should not be involved in protecting themselves. This culture of dependency weakens personal preparedness, reduces autonomy, and limits the ability to respond in situations where help is not available in time.

Reaction as risky behavior

In many urban contexts, reacting is seen as an irrational or dangerous decision. This perception is fueled by discourses that ignore the difference between preventive, legitimate action and gratuitous aggression. The reaction began to be treated as a risk factor, and not as a legitimate defense tool. This contributes to the formation of a passive mentality, in which even technical preparation is discouraged or misinterpreted.

Weakening of psychological readiness

The sum of all these factors has a direct impact on the internal willingness to act. Even those who have technical training or legal authorization may hesitate when faced with a critical moment. The fear of making a mistake, being punished or publicly judged outweighs the urgency of the situation. This loss of readiness compromises response time and can cost lives.

These impacts show that contemporary self-defense faces not only external obstacles, but also internal ones. The erosion of the will to react is one of the most serious consequences of modern control, as it affects the basis of individual autonomy: the ability to decide for oneself in the face of danger.

5. The Post-Self-Defense Society: Predictable Consequences

The progressive limitation of individual self-defense does not only affect the isolated behavior of each citizen. Over time, it changes the social fabric, weakens values of responsibility and creates a culture based on passivity. The tendency to demobilize reaction has consequences that go beyond the field of personal security and extend to the way society deals with risks, threats and even freedom.

Demobilized citizens, weakened society

When most people fail to prepare or believe in their own ability to respond, society as a whole becomes more vulnerable. This is true for both external and internal threats.

Demobilized populations have greater difficulty dealing with crises, confronting aggression or reorganizing themselves in the face of institutional failures. The loss of the culture of self-defense results in excessive dependence, which makes any failure in the system a much greater risk.

Submission treated as a virtue

Over time, passivity begins to be treated not just as a choice but as a sign of maturity or civility. The willingness to react is portrayed as negative, immature, or dangerous. This reversal of values transforms the legitimate impulse to protect oneself into an undesirable stance, which further reinforces the cycle of social inhibition. The courage to react is replaced by the valorization of surrender.

The normalization of exposure

In highly monitored environments, being visible at all times is treated as part of everyday life. Surveillance becomes an accepted, and often encouraged, component of social and institutional relationships. In this scenario, the idea of maintaining any kind of tactical preparation or defensive reserve is viewed with suspicion. Surveillance, once a factor of intimidation, becomes romanticized as a symbol of security. The result is a generation that grows up with no practical idea of how to protect itself or that it is, in fact, necessary.

The Displaced Reaction: Violence Where There Is No Real Threat

Paradoxically, the weakening of legitimate self-defense does not prevent the emergence of gratuitous violence. In a society that does not educate people to react in a technical and conscious manner, outbursts of misdirected, disproportionate or unfounded violence arise. The absence of a culture of defense can generate extreme behavior precisely due to a lack of preparation and guidance.

Loss of identity and individual sovereignty

Finally, the erasure of self-defense affects something deeper: the very notion of autonomy. Human beings cease to perceive themselves as responsible for their own safety. Excessive trust in the system, combined with the continuous inhibition of reaction, generates a model of conditioned citizen, who obeys, waits and conforms. When this becomes the norm, society stops forming free people and starts forming moldable individuals, easier to control, but also easier to destroy — physically, morally or psychologically.

The consequences of this process are not immediate, but they are predictable. If the trend of demobilization continues, the future may hold not only a less safe society, but also a less free one.

6. Proposals for Redefining Self-Defense in the Age of Control



Given the progressive limitation of individual reaction, it is necessary to rethink the concept of self-defense. The traditional approach, focused solely on physical or legal means, is no longer sufficient in a society marked by constant surveillance and social pressure against any form of direct response. It is necessary to create new defense strategies that take into account the current scenario, without giving up personal responsibility and the freedom to react.

Defense education as part of citizenship training

The first proposal involves including self-defense as a training topic, and not just as an emergency resource. Instead of treating it as an exception, it should be seen as part of education for life. This means teaching basic notions of safety, risk perception, decision-making under pressure, and legal understanding of the right to react. This training should not be focused on confrontation, but rather on the awareness that the individual is an active part of his or her own protection.

Preparation compatible with the modern environment

Self-defense can no longer rely solely on physical actions. In a context of constant monitoring, it is necessary to develop discreet, strategic and adapted forms of defense to current reality. This includes route planning, conscious use of technology, non-violent response protocols and preventive actions. The reaction today must be intelligent, adapted and, above all, compatible with the legal and technological limits of the environment.

Strengthening the reactive mindset

One of the greatest impacts of control mechanisms is on the mind. Therefore, any proposal for preserving self-defense needs to include psychological strengthening. This involves working on the individual's confidence, readiness and emotional autonomy in the face of critical situations. Reacting, in these cases, is not just about taking physical action, but also about not passively giving in to fear or doubt. Readiness begins long before the moment of threat.

Social revaluation of individual defense

We need to restore respect for those who prepare themselves, for those who train, for those who take responsibility for protecting themselves and others. Instead of marginalizing this type of behavior, society should recognize its value. Citizens who are willing to act with technique and balance are not a threat, but rather a valuable resource in crisis situations. Promoting this appreciation helps break the cycle of guilt and distrust that currently surrounds the issue of self-defense.

Self-defense as an attitude, not just a reaction

More than a physical response, self-defense needs to be seen as an ongoing attitude. Being alert, maintaining preventive measures, avoiding situations of unnecessary exposure and knowing when to act or retreat are all part of this new stance. It is a state of conscious vigilance, not paranoia, that allows citizens to maintain their dignity even in a controlled environment.

Redefining self-defense means, above all, ensuring that the freedom to protect oneself is not stifled by systems that present themselves as protectors but, in practice, weaken the individual. It is possible to resist without breaking, react without colliding, and defend oneself without being criminalized — as long as one understands the scenario and act preparedly.

7. Final Considerations

Self-defense, although still provided for in various laws, today faces challenges that go far beyond the legal text. The combination of normative control, technological surveillance, inhibiting discourses and social pressures has produced a scenario where the act of fighting back becomes increasingly restricted, risky and psychologically discouraged.

This article has shown that the weakening of self-defense did not happen suddenly, but through a historical and progressive process. With each new layer of control—physical, legal, narrative, technological, and psychological—the individual’s margin of decision was reduced. The result is a society that increasingly relies on external systems for its protection, while at the same time moving away from the idea that protecting oneself is also a personal responsibility.

More than pointing out problems, this work sought to propose viable paths for rebuilding the concept of self-defense in times of surveillance and conditioning. Through education, preparation compatible with the current environment and the appreciation of individual autonomy, it is possible to keep alive the right to react — even if in a way adapted to the new conditions.

The challenges remain, but ignoring them only accelerates the loss of something fundamental: the freedom to defend oneself. In contexts of increasing control, studying, debating and strengthening self-defense ceases to be a personal choice and becomes a collective necessity. The path to real security begins with recovering the awareness that reacting, when necessary, is a right that cannot be abandoned.

References

ARENDR, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

BRAZIL. *Brazilian Penal Code*. Decree-Law No. 2,848, of December 7, 1940. Available at: <https://www.planalto.gov.br>. Accessed on: May 14, 2025.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014.

GEORGE, Orwell. *1984*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

KARAM, Maria Lúcia. *Punishing others: an introduction to the foundations of criminal law*. Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2006.

OLAVO DE CARVALHO. *The minimum you need to know to not be an idiot*. São Paulo: Record, 2013.