# A Shift in the Paradigm of Violence: Non–Governmental Terrorism in Latin America since the End of the Cold War[*]

POLÍTICA

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## Resumen

Desde mediados de los años noventa el terrorismo no–gubernamental ha aumentado de forma significativa en muchas regiones del mundo. En América Latina, sin embargo, un área donde históricamente grupos radicales de izquierda y derecha recurrieron a prácticas terroristas para conseguir sus objetivos políticos, el terrorismo como fenómeno ha disminuido notablemente. Basado en el influyente trabajo de Timothy Wickham–Crowley, este artículo sostiene que la disminución del uso del terror en América Latina corresponde a un cambio en los "repertorios culturales" de grupos revolucionarios y otros grupos antisistémicos. El trabajo arguye que este cambio deriva de tres factores: las traumáticas experiencias derivadas de la represión brutal de la que fueron objeto muchos de estos grupos, un creciente pragmatismo y la valoración del juego democrático; y el rechazo por parte de la gran mayoría de la población en la región del uso de la violencia como método político. En este sentido, los grupos que bregan por promover cambios sociales han internalizado que el terror constituye una estrategia contraproducente e ilegítima. El artículo sostiene que Colombia constituye una excepción a esta tendencia. En el caso colombiano, se argumenta, el terror deriva de la lógica perversa del conflicto armado, donde los actores deliberadamente victimizan a los civiles para alcanzar objetivos militares y políticos a través del terror.

## Abstract

While non–state terrorism has grown substantially in many parts of the world since the mid 1990s, in Latin America, the insurgent continent *par excellence*, where radical non–state actors at both ends of the political spectrum have historically resorted to terror to attain political goals, this scourge has dwindled. Drawing on the seminal work of Timothy Wickham–Crowley, this article posits that this baffling trend can be explained as a result of a shift in the *cultural repertoires* of Latin American revolutionary and other antisystemic groups in the 1990s. The traumatic experiences associated with authoritarian backlash and repression; a more pragmatic attitude that values democracy, accommodation, and dialogue as political strategies; and the rejection by vast sectors of the population of wanton violence as a tool to attain political objectives have subtracted terror from the range of activities (stock) of collective action of former and new radical groups. Groups fighting for change have thus internalized that terror ultimately constitutes an ineffectual and de–legitimized strategy. Colombia constitutes the exception to this regional trend. There, it is argued, terror is widely used as and informed by the perverse logic of armed conflict, whereby armed parties deliberately target civilians to advance military and political objectives.

PALABRAS CLAVE • Terrorism • Cultural Repertoires • Armed Conflict • Colombia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since Al–Qaeda operatives struck on September 11, 2001, terrorism, alongside the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, has arguably become the most pressing international issue. While terror has for a long time been an important matter in world affairs, its present status seems unprecedented. Several factors have contributed to terrorism's present prominence.

First, the deadly and daring nature of the September 2001 attacks illustrated the range, sophistication and, most importantly, the dangers posed by terrorist organizations with global reach such as Al–Qaeda. The danger seems particularly chilling as evidence suggests that Al–Qaeda has been seeking control of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in order to maximize the effects of its attacks (IISS, 2003: 17–20). Second, the attacks shattered the aura of invulnerability of the United States, a country which had not withstood a direct, foreign attack on its soil since the attack on Pearl Harbor (1941).

Third, data clearly shows that terror has risen sharply since the mid–1990s. After a drop in the first five years of the 1990s, the total number of terrorist incidents worldwide has soared from 1,955 in the 1990–5 period to 9,903 between 2000 and 2004 (MIPT, 2005a). The growth has been particularly salient since 2001, as clandestine organizations, in particular fundamentalist Islamic organizations associated with the Al–Qaeda phenomenon,[1] and, to a lesser degree, groups espousing radical nationalist, ultra–leftist or ultra–rightist ideologies,[2] either redoubled their activities or came into existence. These organizations have perpetrated deadly attacks in locations as diverse as Spain, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Indonesia, Turkey, Israel, Iraq, the Philippines, and Russia.[3]

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the creation of an anti–terrorism coalition characterized by its global reach, to which America has thrown its significant political, military, diplomatic, and financial weight, has propelled this issue into the forefront of the international agenda. The invasion of Afghanistan led by a coalition under the aegis of the United States in October 2001, justified on the grounds that the Taliban government harbored the masterminds of the September 11 attacks, illustrates this trend. While the American incursion in Afghanistan raised serious questions concerning proportionality in the use of force and the relevance of the principle of non–intervention, the foundation of the international system, the invasion was widely supported by the international community.

Against the backdrop of the mounting importance attained by terrorism worldwide, in Latin America, somehow counter–intuitively, non–governmental terrorism has receded since the end of the Cold War.[4] In the last three decades terror has sharply oscillated: it reached great proportions in the early 1970s, decreased thereafter, rose again in the early 1980s, diminished in the mid 1980s only to rise again in the 1989–1992 period. Since 1993 the trend has been unequivocal, however: terror has declined sharply in all but a few countries in the region. Some countries including Peru, Mexico, Bolivia Chile, Brazil, and Argentina have registered only sporadic incidents in the last 5 years. Nowadays, terror in Latin America seems mostly circumscribed to Colombia where incidents have increased sharply in the last decade. In the period 2000–4, 83% of all terrorist incidents perpetrated in Latin America (1,153) took place in Colombia (MIPT, 2005a). While Venezuela and Ecuador have also registered a slight increase in terrorist activity, in both terror seems related to a spill–over of the Colombian conflict.

This article intends to address the above mentioned puzzle: while terror has grown substantially in many parts of the world since the mid 1990s, in Latin America, the insurgent continent *par excellence*, where radical non–state actors at both ends of the political spectrum have historically resorted to terror to attain political goals, this scourge has dwindled. That is to say, non–governmental groups have overwhelmingly abandoned terror as a political strategy. Drawing on the seminal work of Timothy Wickham–Crowley (1992: 32), as a tentative explanation for this intriguing trend this article posits that it can be explained to be a result of a shift in the *cultural repertoires* of Latin American revolutionary and other anti–systemic groups[5] in the 1990s.

It is argued that at least three factors have caused the abovementioned shift in the *cultural repertoires* of groups that have resorted to terror to promote their political goals. These include: (a) the traumatic experiences associated with authoritarian backlashes in the 1970s and 1980s that decimated scores of organizations that resorted to terror across the region; (b) the development of a more pragmatic attitude on the part of several groups and individuals who resorted to terror, one that conceives democracy, accommodation, and dialogue as a more productive political strategy; and (c) a growing intolerance on the part of the majority of the population towards wanton violence, which de–legitimized the use of terror as a strategy and that marginalized groups that practice terror. These factors, it is argued, encouraged several groups to re–assess their strategies. In other words, as many individuals and groups internalized that terror ultimately constitutes an ineffectual and de–legitimized strategy, they decided to subtract terror from the range of activities (stock) of collective action.

This article, however, acknowledges a salient exception to this trend in the region: Colombia. There the use of terror as a political strategy remains widespread. The article posits that in Colombia terror is informed by the perverse logic of armed conflict, whereby armed parties deliberately target civilians to spread terror and thus advance military and political objectives.[6]

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[1] Al Qaeda is a radical Sunny Muslim umbrella organization founded in 1989 by Muslim veterans who traveled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to combat Soviet troops that invaded the country. Al–Qaeda claims to be avenging the wrongdoings perpetrated by Christians and Jews against Muslims over the ages. Al Qaeda's goals include liberating the holy shrines of Islam from foreign presence and liberating Muslim countries from alleged oppressive, apostate rulers. It is believed that Al Qaeda's network includes organizations operating in as many as 65 countries across the globe. Experts believe that the organization trained as many as ten thousand militants in its camps in Afghanistan. On Al Qaeda's ideology see Hellmich (2005). Groups associated with Al Qaeda include Islamic Group of Egypt, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Goupe Islamique Armee and the Salafist Group for Preaching Combat (MIPT: 2005b; BBC: 2005a).

[2] These include, among others, Jemaah Islamiyah (Indonesia); Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Abu Sayyaf Group (the Philippines); Islamic Resistance Movement, Hizballah, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Population Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Israel/Palestine); Ansar al–Islam, the Al –Zarqawi network (Iraq), Hizb–I Islami Gulbuddin (Afghanistan) (Afghanistan); al–Umar Mujahedin (Kashmir, India); Kongra–Gel, the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (Turkey); Shamil Basayev's Riyad us–Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade, Sword of Islam, Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade, Movsar Baryayev Gang (Chechnya); and Aum Shinrikyo (Japan, Russia).

[3] Walter Laqueur argues that presently radical Islamism is the single most important force of international terrorism and that it will probably remain so for the foreseeable future (2003: 8)

[4] This article will mostly deal with non–state terror. Unless specified otherwise, the expression terror will be used in those terms in the remainder of the piece. The terms terror and terrorism will be used interchangeably following the definition provided in page 9.

[5] Following Fotopoulus (2001: 416–7), anti–systemic groups are defined as those that defy, explicitly or implicitly, the legitimacy of a political and socio–economic system. The rejection includes both the values and institutions of a given ruling system. An anti–systemic group differs from a reformist one for it does not merely seek to reform, existing institutions and values, but to eliminate them and replace them entirely. One of the best reviews on anty–sistemic groups is Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein (1989).

[6] On the logic used by parties in armed conflict see Keen (1998); Kalyvas (2001); Slim (2003), Walzer (1977); Münkler (2003); and Pecault (1999).

This paper will be divided into four sections. In order to provide a sound treatment of the topic, section two discusses several definitions of terrorism and elaborates on the differences between terror and other kinds of political violence. The next section traces the history and evolution of terror in the region since the Cuban Revolution (1959). The paper then elaborates on the conditions informing the decline of terror in the region in the 21st century. Section four examines the reasons behind terror in Colombia and elaborates why this country represents an outlier in the region. In the concluding section, the paper comments on these findings and reflects on the future of terrorism in the region.

## II. DEFINING TERRORISM

Terrorism is a highly complex, contentious, and emotionally charged sociopolitical phenomenon. It is thus pertinent to begin the discussion regarding the evolution of terrorism in Latin America by providing a conceptually sound treatment of the issue. Walter Laqueur provides a good starting point for this fascinating discussion as he reminds us that terrorism is not a uniform, specific phenomenon (2003: 8). A massacre in a rural community differs substantially from the bombing of a soft target in an urban setting or the hijacking of an international airliner. All three incidents, however, share some commonalities: they constitute a violent act whose ultimate motive is not only to harm the victim *per se*, but to spread fear in the wider community.

Reflecting the divisive nature of the concept, scholars, the legal system, the media, and/or security forces have thus far proven unable to reach an agreement regarding the extent and applicability of the term (Laqueur, 1999: 5–7; Gordon and López, 1999: 7; Stern, 1999: 11–15; Brown and Merrill, 1993; Kegley, 1990: 3; United Nations, 2004a: 48–9). Indeed, despite the existence of twelve international counter–terrorism conventions,[7] as a result of the controversial nature of this political phenomenon and the lack of development of norms regarding the use of violence for non–

[7] These include Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, including Diplomatic Agents, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 14 December 1973; International Convention against the Taking of Hostages, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 17 December 1979; International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 15 December 1997; International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1999; Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft, signed at Tokyo on 14 September 1963; Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, signed at the Hague on 16 December 1970; Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation, signed at Montreal on 23 September 1971; Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, signed at Vienna on 3 March 1980; Protocol on the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Civil Aviation, supplementary to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation, signed at Montreal on 24 February 1988; Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, done at Rome on 10 March 1988; Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf, done at Rome on 10 March 1988; Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection, signed at Montreal on 1 March 1991. In addition, several regional conventions deal with this matter including Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, signed at a meeting held at the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 22 April 1998; Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism, adopted at Ouagadougou on 1 July 1999; European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, concluded at Strasbourg on 27 January 1977; OAS Convention to Prevent and Punish Acts of Terrorism Taking the Form of Crimes against Persons and Related Extortion that are of International Significance, concluded at Washington, D.C. on 2 February 1971; OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted at Algiers on 14 July 1999; SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, signed at Katmandu on 4 November 1987; Treaty on Cooperation among States Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Terrorism, done at Minsk on 4 June 1999.

state actors, no particular definition on terrorism has yet attained general acceptance (Laqueur, 2003: 232–238; United Nations, 2004a: 48–9).

Kalliopi K. Koufa, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Terrorism and Human Rights, argues that arriving at a generally accepted definition of this issue has been elusive because terrorism is politically an extremely loaded term. Koufa underscores that there is a

> tendency amongst commentators to mix definitions with value judgments and either qualify as terrorism violent activity or behavior which they are opposed to or, conversely, reject the use of the term when it relates to activities and situations which they approve of (Koufa, 2001: 8).

Several authors underscore that the precursors of modern terrorists have existed since biblical times.[8] The modern term we use today to refer to this kind of violence was first introduced in Europe in reference to the French revolution (Walter, 1969: 4–5). Academics have developed the most meaningful and precise definitions of terrorism. Walzer defines it as "the deliberate killing of innocent people, at random, in order to spread fear through a whole population and force the hand of its political leaders" (2002: 5). He emphasizes that terrorism is an option, a political strategy selected among a wide variety of alternatives. Stern, on the other hand, indicates that terrorism is "an act or threat of violence against noncombatants with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating or otherwise influencing an audience" (1999: 11).

Eugene Victor Walter argues that terror encompasses three basic yet distinct elements: the source of violence, the act and its victims, and the general target of the violent act (Walter, 1969: 9). Gordon and López indicate that one of most striking dimensions of terrorism is precisely that the political goal of a terrorist act "is not encapsulated in the act itself" (1999: 8).

Several authors consider publicity as an essential part of terrorism. Stohl defines terrorism as "the purposeful act or threat of the act of violence to create fear and/or compliant behavior in a victim and/or audience of the act or threat" (1988: 3–5). Segaller argues that terrorists kill one person to threaten a thousand, or to intimidate an industry, expand public insecurity, or blackmail governments into reconsidering the policies they espouse. Their campaigns have two main objectives: tactically, the goal is public recognition of a problem or claim; strategically, the aim is absolute change (Segaller, 1987: 11).

Walter Laqueur (1987) incorporates many of the aforementioned elements in his definition of terrorism. In his view, terrorism represents a strategy or method of combat that resorts to violence or the threat of the use of violence to attain certain political objectives. This strategy does not conform to humanitarian rules or International Humanitarian Law (IHL)[9] and aims at inducing a state of fear in the victim (Laqueur, 1987: 143).

[8] Ancient terrorists included among others the Zealotes–Sicarii, the Assassins and the Thugs. These small groups perpetrated several violent acts including highly visible acts of violence including assassinations, regicides, and tyrannicydes (Stern 1999–5–16).

[9] International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict. Present–day international humanitarian law has grown from two main sources: the Law of Geneva, i.e. a body of rules which protect victims of war, and the Law of The Hague, i.e. those provisions which affect the conduct of hostilities (ICRC 2005).

IHL, the body of law applicable to armed conflict, provides some important insights that contribute to refine our understanding of terrorism.[10] Although IHL does not provide a specific definition of terrorism, it is helpful because it clearly delineates (and prohibits) the parameters of acts or threats aimed at spreading terror among the civilian population in the context of armed conflict.[11] These include collective penalties, indiscriminate attacks, attacks on civilians and civilian objects, attacks on works and installations containing dangerous forces, taking hostages, and the murder of persons not or not longer taking part in hostilities (ICRC, 2004). It is important to underline, however, that IHL cannot provide a comprehensive definition of terrorism because it only specifies acts that amount to terror in the context of armed conflict.

In what is considered a major contribution towards reaching an agreement on the extent and nature of a definition of terrorism, "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility," a special report on collective security and the future of the United Nations commissioned by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, a panel of 16 eminent figures reached a consensus regarding a definition about terrorism. The definition proposed by this panel has attained significant acceptance. For the purposes of this work, I rely on the definition furnished by the abovementioned panel to characterize the nature and extent of terrorism in Latin America. The panel defines terrorism as:

> any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non–combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act (UN, 2004: 49).

Two crucial elements distinguish terrorism from other forms of violence: (i) terrorism is purposely aimed at innocent people including civilians and combatants *hors de combat* (i.e., wounded or ill soldiers not able to participate in hostilities any longer); and (ii) it deliberately resorts to extreme violence against defenseless targets to produce a dramatic situation that may attract publicity and thus fulfill the objective of spreading terror among the targeted population (Stern, 1999: 11–15).

For the sake of conceptual clarity, it is vital to differentiate among governmental and nongovernmental terrorism. While related, these types of terror respond to distinct motives and generally follow a different logic (Stohl and López, 1988: 4).[12] In this study governmental or state terrorism refers to terrorist acts perpetrated by state agents or by private groups acting on the orders of or on behalf of a state to terrorize its population and propagate anxiety among citizens in order to curb political opposition. This method is usually used by authoritarian or totalitarian regimes (Walzer, 2002: 5). Non–governmental terrorism, on the other hand, includes insurgent and right–wing terrorism. "Insurgent terrorism" refers to violent acts perpetrated by identifiable groups that attack governmental or other targets for short–term goals aimed at sparking widespread discontent toward the existing

government. This kind of terrorism is often grounded in a defined ideology, and seeks to unleash a process of revolution. "Right–wing terrorism" refers to acts perpetrated by outlawed groups that do not seek a social revolution but resort to violence as a way to express and advance their political goals, such as ultra–nationalism and anticommunism (López, 1988: 498–99).

Additionally, it is necessary to mention the existence of relatively new type of terror: *narcoterrorism*. This term was coined in Latin America in the 1980s.[13] Narcoterrorism refers to terrorist acts perpetrated by criminal organizations exclusively engaged in the narcotics industry and that seek to influence policies of their governments (Ehrenfeld, 1990).

Concerning the differences between governmental and nongovernmental types of violence, Tilly provides a useful distinction when he differentiates between "state–sponsored" violence (that is, when perpetrators of violence are authorized by and benefit from the protection and material support of the state) and "state–incited" violence (when groups that resort to violence do not control state power, although they explicitly claim it) (Tilly, 1995: 164, 178).

It is also relevant to distinguish between terrorism and guerrilla warfare. This issue is relevant because historically non–state actors such as guerrilla groups have conducted this type of violence to further their goals. The Encyclopedia of Guerrilla Warfare defines guerrilla warfare as "a set of military tactics utilized by a minority group within a state or an indigenous population in order to oppose the government or foreign occupying forces" (Beckett, 1999: ix). Wickham–Crowley explains that guerrilla is a very ancient form of warfare generally used by weaker parties that must confront superior forces. Guerrilla warfare, he argues, is better defined in military than in social or political terms. It involves harassing the enemy by avoiding direct confrontation in pitched battles and concentrating on "slowly sapping the enemy's strength and morale through ambushes, minor skirmishes, lightening raids and withdrawals, cutting of communications and supply lines, and similar techniques" (1992: 3). Guerrillas normally set up small military units and seek to establish liberated zones that may be used to challenge the state militarily. In these enclaves, these groups normally create a parallel state structure. While these areas are usually located in the countryside, on rare occasions guerrillas also "liberate" urban areas. Guerrillas use the areas they control to mount attacks against the state (Laqueur, 1987: 144–48; Clutterbuck, 1990: 6–9).

In other words, the principal difference between terrorism and guerrilla warfare is the nature of the act itself, irrespective of the individual or organization that carries out these actions. States, state–sponsored groups, criminal organizations such as drug lords, guerrillas, and individuals all perpetrate terrorist acts. Laqueur asserts that while guerrilla operations are directed principally against the members of the enemy's security and armed forces, as well as their infrastructure, particularly strategic installations, terrorist organizations are far less discriminate in their choice of targets (1976: 404). In order to challenge their enemy, Laqueur says, terrorist groups generally conduct sporadic, highly visible attacks, normally directed against noncombatants. These attacks aim to create commotion among the population and to weaken the power and legitimacy of government (Laqueur, 1987: 144–48). Commenting on the difference between terrorist organizations and

[10] Other regulations regarding the use of force and terror include articles in the Charter of the United Nations and the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court.

[11] See Fourth Geneva Convention Article 33, Additional Protocol I Article 51(2) and Additional Protocol II Articles 4 and 13 (2).

[12] In Latin America over the last 30 years, the impact of state terrorism has been far greater than that perpetrated by non–state actors, at least when measured by the number of victims. Violence and terror orchestrated by states was prevalent in various dictatorships in the region in the 1970s and 1980s, including Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Nica-ragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, as well as Peru in the 1990s. State terrorism has also occurred in some democracies in the region, most prominently in Colombia (Wickham–Crowley, 1990; Gassmann, 2001; Bushnell, 1993).

[13] The creation of this term/concept is attributed to two sources. On the one hand, former Peruvian President Fernando Belaúnde Terry, who referred to the actions of the Shining Path as narcoterrorism, and on the other, to former US Ambassador to Colombia, Lewis Tambs (1983-5), who used the term to describe the action of the drug cartels in Colombia (Craig, 1993; Wikipedia, 2004).

guerrilla and other groups that resort to terror, Pizarro points that terrorist groups resort to terror systematically, while guerrilla groups use it in a more inconsistent and erratic manner (2004:135).

In Latin America (and elsewhere) guerrilla groups have resorted to terrorism as a deliberate strategy to attain certain goals, principally demoralizing security forces and undermining the ruling government's legitimacy by exposing its incapacity to protect its citizens. In the Latin American context, some guerrilla groups have been more inclined to use terrorism than others, however. While groups such as El Salvador's Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) very seldom engaged in terrorism, others, including Peru's Shining Path and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), consistently resorted to terror.

In short, this section defined terrorism conceptually and differentiated between non–governmental and governmental terrorism. It also distinguished terrorism from other forms of orchestrated violence such as guerrilla warfare. It underscored that two crucial elements distinguish terror from others forms of organized violence: (a) terrorism purposely unleashes extreme violence against innocent people; and (b) this brutal action aims at attracting publicity in order to create commotion and spread terror among a broad audience.

## III. THE EVOLUTION OF LATIN AMERICA TERRORISM SINCE THE 1959 CUBAN REVOLUTION

In Latin America the reliance on terror for political and/or military goals is fairly old. During the internecine wars of the 19th century that followed independence from Spain, terror was widely practiced against civilians by the warring parties disputing political control, especially in rural areas, in several newly created republics. The War of the Thousand Days (1899–1902) and the period known as *La Violencia* (1948–64)[14] in Colombia, where Liberal and Conservative parties fought a vicious war to assert control over the central government and expand their grip over rural areas, are cases in point (Bushnell, 1993; Palacios and Safford, 2002; Oquist, 1980). Cuba provides another example: Dominguez reports the existence of urban terrorism in the island during the early 1930s, as insurgents attempted to end the dictatorship of President Gerardo Machado's dictatorship (1998:114).

In the second part of the 20th century new episodes of terror afflicted the region. Most developed as a concomitant of uprisings and/or violent insurgencies and the harsh counterinsurgency responses carried out by security forces following the 1959 Cuban revolution. In what came to be known as the first Latin American insurrectionary wave, inspired with the victory over Fulgencio Bastista's repressive dictatorship in Cuba, several rebel groups rose in arms against the central government in countries including Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Guatemala (Ratliff, 1988: 15–17; Wright, 1991: 82–87).

While the insurrections were partly inspired by spontaneous revolutionary fervor, they also developed as a result of the deliberate effort on the part of the new Cuban leadership to promote revolution and counterbalance the hegemony of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. In order to attain this goal, the Cuban communist leadership fostered a revolutionary doctrine, *el foco*, which advanced the idea that a small group of military combatants could start an uprising against what

they deemed as *bourgeois* regimes. According to the doctrine, this struggle would prompt popular support for the revolutionary cause and generate a military movement that could defeat ruling regimes and replace them with widely–supported people's governments (Ratliff, 1988: 16; Wickham–Crowley, 1990: 201–2).

In Peru,[15] Guatemala,[16] Venezuela,[17] and Colombia[18] both insurgent groups and security forces perpetrated systematic terror in their zeal to defeat their enemies during the 1960s. Security Forces successfully neutralized these insurgent groups in Venezuela and Peru and restricted guerrilla activities to remote rural locations in Colombia and Guatemala (Wickham–Crowley, 1990: 201–2).

The failure of these early revolutionary adventures was the result of operational mistakes made in the conduct of guerrilla warfare and tactical disputes between insurgent leaders and Cuba's leadership concerning the appropriate way to carry out the revolutionary endeavor (Wright, 1991: 90–94; Waldmann, 1992: 299–300). The unsuccessful revolt led by Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Bolivia, which ended with his capture and execution by Bolivian officers in 1967, epitomizes the failure of rural guerrilla warfare in Latin America (Halperin, 1988: 43–45).

In the late 1960s insurrection rekindled in various parts of Latin America. This *second insurgency wave* resulted from a critical revision by revolutionary leaders such as Abraham Guillén of the failed rural warfare efforts. Guillén studied the conditions and factors that led to the defeat of insurgents in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Peru. He concluded that, against the backdrop of growing urbanization in Latin America, it was simply absurd to restrict insurgent operations to isolated and sparsely populated areas deprived of logistical conditions for modern war. Guillén thus promoted bringing revolutionary warfare to urban areas. Following Guillén's precepts newly created revolutionary groups unleashed violent campaigns in urban settings, which repeatedly included terrorist acts (Wright, 1991: 100–01; Wickham–Crowley, 1992: 209–30).[19]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several urban revolutionary groups composed of highly–educated cadre emerged in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.[20] Leftist militants resorted to violence

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[15] Two leftist groups, the Movement of Revolutionary Left (MIR) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), rebelled in the Andean region in 1965.

[16] Two groups emerged in the 1960s: The 13th of November Revolutionary Movement (MR–13) and the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR).

[17] The first manifestation of urban terrorism in Latin America emerged in Venezuela in 1962. Young urban dwellers–some from poor shantytowns, others from educated backgrounds– organized Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR), a group that unleashed a violent terrorist campaign characterized by robberies, assaults, bombings, and kidnappings. The MIR's strategy was part of a threefold plan that also included rural warfare and infiltration of the Armed Forces that aimed at destabilizing the Venezuelan administration of Rómulo Bentacurt (1959–1964) (Laqueur, 1987: 246–47; Wickham–Crowley, 1992: 17; Valsalice, 1973: 31–43).

[18] Three main guerrilla groups, Army of National Liberation (ELN), People's Liberation Army (EPL) and the FARC emerged in Colombia in the early 1960s.

[19] This second rebellious wave was erroneously dubbed *urban guerrilla*. The notion of an urban guerrilla is problematic in a number of ways. As mentioned in the previous section, guerrilla warfare is a set of tactics defined by clear criteria. These criteria clearly do not match the actions perpetrated by urban militants in the early 1970s (i.e., capturing territory, centering attacks on security forces).

[20] The Tupamaro National Liberation Movement (Tupamaros) started operations in Uruguay, while the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR) was founded in Concepción, Chile. In Argentina, four main groups began to operate: Liberation Armed Forces (FAR), Peronist Armed Forces (FAP), People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), and the *Montoneros*. In Brazil, a myriad of tiny organizations came into existence, among them: National Liberation Action (ALN), Armed Revolutionary Vanguard (VAR) and *Var Palmares* (Wright, 1991: 110; Laqueur, 1987: 248).

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[14] The most moderate accounts indicate that as many as 200 thousand people, mostly peasants, died during la Violencia (Oquist, 1980).

against what they perceived as decadent and in-egalitarian bourgeois societies which produced a steady deterioration of economic conditions for the middle and lower classes. Encouraged by the writings of Carlos Marighela, the leader of the Brazilian ALN, young cadres attempted to topple ruling governments in the Southern Cone and Brazil by draining their economic resources and exposing them to be incapable of protecting the population. While these groups underscored the necessity of creating the conditions for a general armed insurrection, they never attempted to organize armed resistance beyond urban areas.

The illegal and often violent activities perpetrated by these groups unleashed brutal responses by security forces and paramilitary groups associated to right-wing sectors in the Southern Cone in the early 1970s. Groups including *Montoneros and ERP* in Argentina and *Tupamaros* in Uruguay were obliterated prior to the 1976 military coups.[21] Interestingly, the 1976 military coups in Argentina and Uruguay were justified as extreme and necessary "patriotic" measures to stop leftist violence (Parry, 1976: 295; Radu, 1984: 84, 29–30; 251; Gillespie, 1982: 47–82; Rock, 1987: 352–387). Furthermore, in Colombia leftist militants founded the Movement April 19 (M–19). This organization centered its operations in urban areas and attempted, unsuccessfully, to set up rural guerrilla fronts (Bushnell, 1993: 254, 258; Palacios and Safford, 2002: 652). Most of these groups were either crushed by brutal repression unleashed by security forces, especially in Brazil and the Southern Cone or, in the case of Colombia, negotiated a peace treaty and decided to transform themselves into a political parties and participate in elections (Parry, 1976: 295–96; Radu, 1984: 84, 29–30; 251; Asprey, 1994: 1108–13; Bushnell, 1993: 252–3, 257–9).

As several of the organizations of this second wave were disappearing, new ones emerged in Central America. Leftist guerrillas including the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), the Salvadoran FMLN, the Guatemalan FAR and the Honduran National Unity Directorate (DNU),[22] were founded to combat repressive rightwing dictatorships (Castañeda, 1993: 107–23; Booth, 1991: Torres–Rivas, 1997).[23] While predominantly guerrilla organizations, these groups often relied on terror as part of their armed struggle. In Chile, the Communist party created a military front in 1983, Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR). This group openly defied the military regime relying on a strategy that combined attacks on military and civilians (MIPT, 2005c; Lowy, 1997; Chilean National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1993).[24]

Terrorism was also employed against leftwing governments. In Nicaragua, the Contras, an anticommunist guerrilla group supported by the United States, initiated a total war after FSLN

successfully seized power in 1979. The Contras resorted to terror as an integral part of their warfare strategy (Asprey, 1994: 1089–1106). Costa Rica and Honduras also witnessed small levels of terrorist activity during the 1980s, mostly spillover from violence and war in neighboring Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador (Laqueur, 1987: 259–265; Asprey, 1994: 1077–88, 1093–94).

In the early and mid 1980s, several Latin American countries that regained democracy had to confront new, opposition organizations that resorted to terrorism to voice their dissatisfaction with their recently elected leaders and, more generally, with the political system at large. In Argentina, rightwing ultranationalist organizations carried out a violent bombing campaign in an attempt to destabilize the new democratic administration of President Raúl Alfonsín (1984–89). These groups also attacked British targets in retaliation for the Argentine defeat in the Malvinas–Falkland War (Mickolus, Sandler and Murdock, 1989).

In Peru a new armed insurrection surfaced in the Andes in 1980. The Shining Path, a radical organization espousing Maoist ideals, unleashed a violent rebellion against the newly elected administration of Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1980–1983). In 1982, a second revolutionary group, Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) also rebelled against the government. This Marxist–Leninist, pro–Moscow group often resorted to terror to further its military and political goals (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2003). In bordering Ecuador Alfaro Vive Damn It (AVC), a left–wing organization, unleashed a series of terrorist attacks to weaken the new democratic administration of Jaime Roldós (Laqueur, 1987: 255–57; Mickolus, Sandler and Murdock, 1989).

The end of the Cold War led many to believe that non–governmental terrorism would decrease or even entirely cease to exist in Latin America. As the disintegration of the Soviet block prompted the end of the ideological struggle between the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union ceased to endorse the activities of several Latin American organizations that engaged in terrorism.[25] Predictions regarding the positive effect that the end of the Cold War would have in diminishing terrorism in Latin America proved overly simplistic, however.

Table 1 presents the yearly incidence of non–governmental terrorist acts in selected Latin American countries between 1968 and 1989.

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[21] Some scholars argue that the coup in Uruguay took place in 1973.

[22] The DNU was comprised by four groups: the Morazanist Front for the Liberation of *Honduras* (FMLH); the Popular Liberation Movement (MPL), Lorenzo Zelaya Popular Revolutionary Forces (FPR); and the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTCH).

[23] Several guerrilla groups preceded the creation of FMLN and FAR. In El Salvador Salvador Carpio, a militant of the Salvadoran Communist Party, founded the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) in 1969. In El Salvador militants of left wing parties created several groups that later would form the FMLN. These included Groups included the Farabundo Marti Popular Forces for National Liberation (FPL); the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP); the People's United Front for Action (FAPU); the Armed Forces for National Resistance (RN); and the armed group of the Workers' Revolutionary Party of Central America (FRTCA). In Guatemala, *Guerrilla Army of the Poor* (EGP) launched an armed insurrection from neighboring Mexico in 1973. This group led by Rolando Morán was probably the first Latin American guerrilla group to include indigenous demands as part of their revolutionary goals (Castañeda, 1993: 107–111).

[24] The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation states that 90 people were summarily assassinated by opposition forces (1993, xxv).

[25] Throughout the Cold War period, the two superpowers endorsed many Latin American organizations that resorted to terrorism. There is evidence that the Soviet Union –through Cuba– and the United States provided funds, weapons, training, political endorsement and logistical assistance such as passports, intelligence services, and the use of diplomatic facilities to many groups. These included the Argentinean *Montoneros*, the Uruguayan *Tupamaros*, the Colombian FARC and ELN, Peru's MRTA, the MIR and FPMR in Chile, and FAR in Guatemala. By supporting these organizations, the Communist leadership attempted to spread revolution and challenge American dominance in the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, the United States endorsed numerous rightwing groups that perpetrated terrorist acts, especially in Central America such as Death Squadrons in El Salvador and the Contras in Nicaragua. Washington provided weapons and supported these groups politically to contain the advancement of Communism in the Western Hemisphere and, more broadly, in the Third World (Schlagheck, 1990: 171; Luttwak, 1983: 63–64; Laqueur, 1987: 270–74; Asprey, 1994: 1094, 1108–10).

TABLE 1: Nongovernmental Terrorist Acts Perpetrated in Latin America (1968–1989) by Country and by Year

| | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argentina | 6 | 26 | 19 | 17 | 19 | 34 | 51 | 20 | 29 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 263 |
| Bolivia | 1 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 41 |
| Brazil | 4 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 33 |
| Colombia | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 18 | 11 | 10 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 17 | 11 | 22 | 29 | 13 | 29 | 25 | 227 |
| Chile | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 24 | 14 | 13 | 8 | 25 | 120 |
| Costa Rica | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 35 |
| Cuba | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Ecuador | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 24 |
| El Salvador | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 14 | 20 | 16 | 12 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 13 | 108 |
| Guatemala | 2 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 89 |
| Haiti | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Honduras | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 56 |
| Mexico | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 15 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 55 |
| Nicaragua | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 36 |
| Paraguay | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Panama | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Peru | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 17 | 8 | 12 | 12 | 16 | 44 | 38 | 15 | 29 | 215 |
| Uruguay | 2 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Venezuela | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 37 |
| Total | 26 | 42 | 61 | 40 | 42 | 67 | 88 | 32 | 80 | 43 | 36 | 34 | 48 | 69 | 51 | 62 | 63 | 80 | 108 | 85 | 90 | 130 | |

Source: MIPT Terrror Knowledge Base.

As indicated in the introduction, data shows that non–governmental terrorism has shown sharp fluctuation between 1968 and 1992. Since 1993, however, the trend seems unequivocal: as indicated in Table 2 and Figure 1 non–governmental terrorism has sharply decreased in all but a few countries in the region, notably Colombia. In the period 1993–1999 Colombia accounted for more than 50% of the total number of incidents in the region; this percentage increased to 83% for the 2000–4 period.[26]

[26] Data on terror is drawn from the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT, 2005d). The Terrorism Knowledge Base is a comprehensive research data base with information on global terrorist incidents, terrorism–related court cases, as well as terrorist groups and leaders. Data on terrorism incidents integrates data from sources including the RAND Terrorism Chronology 1968–1997; RAND®–MIPT Terrorism Incident database (1998–Present); Terrorism Indictment database (University of Arkansas & University of Oklahoma); and DFI International Government Services global research on terrorist organizations. MIPT defines terrorism as: "as violence, or the threat of violence, calculated to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm. These acts are designed to coerce others into actions they would not otherwise undertake, or refrain from actions they desired to take."

TABLE 2: Nongovernmental Terrorist Acts Perpetrated in Latin America (1990–2004) by Country and by Year

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Argentina** | 9 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | **29** |
| **Bolivia** | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | **24** |
| **Brazil** | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0 | **20** |
| **Colombia** | 9 | 5 | 21 | 33 | 35 | 13 | 30 | 15 | 136 | 94 | 192 | 126 | 432 | 146 | 68 | **1355** |
| **Chile** | 22 | 34 | 23 | 12 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | **112** |
| **Costa Rica** | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **6** |
| **Cuba** | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **16** |
| **Ecuador** | 1 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 11 | 9 | 3 | **50** |
| **El Salvador** | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | **13** |
| **Guatemala** | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | **30** |
| **Haiti** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **17** |
| **Honduras** | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | **21** |
| **Mexico** | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | **19** |
| **Nicaragua** | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **11** |
| **Paraguay** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **3** |
| **Panama** | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **17** |
| **Peru** | 26 | 44 | 14 | 18 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 1 | **144** |
| **Uruguay** | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **4** |
| **Venezuela** | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 15 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 20 | 26 | 8 | **118** |
| **Total** | 93 | 126 | 81 | 77 | 60 | 27 | 57 | 44 | 178 | 113 | 225 | 163 | 477 | 198 | 90 | |

Source: MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base.

FIGURE 1: The Evolution of Terrorism in Latin America (Yearly Number of Nongovernmental Terror Incidents)
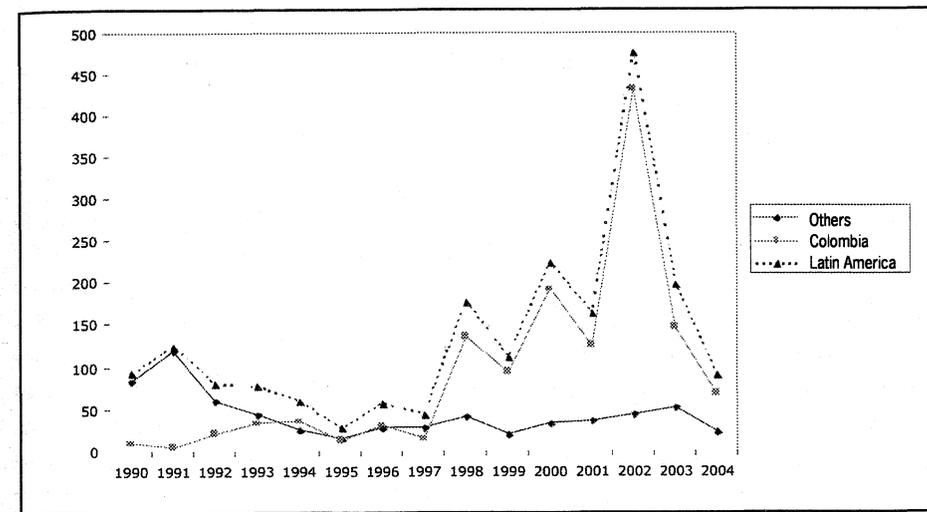


Since the late 1980s and early 1990s countries like Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay have experienced an overall decrease in terrorist activity. Similarly, in the 1990s terrorism has declined steadily in Central America, particularly since the signing of the Esquipulas I and II Regional Peace Treaties. Non-governmental terrorism in Central America has consisted mostly of sporadic attacks against US targets that have been carried out by disgruntled, leftwing militants, particularly in Guatemala and Nicaragua (Vanden, 1990: 55–73; Gorriti, 1991: 89–91; Mickolus and Simmons, 1997). Countries that historically registered negligible incidents of terror such as Paraguay and Costa Rica have maintained this trend.

While non-governmental terrorism generally decreased in Argentina and Mexico during the 1990s, both countries have endured serious terrorist attacks. Argentina suffered the bombings of the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) in 1994 (Mickolus and Simmons, 1997).[27] Mexico, a country with a long tradition of guerrilla movements and insurgency in rural areas dating back to the independence from Spain (1810),[28] witnessed a short-lived spate of violence in urban centers, following the 1994 uprising of Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas. Some of these incidents were attributed to Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), a new guerrilla group that emerged in 1996. The EPR unleashed a string of attacks, including some of a terrorist nature, particularly in the state of Guerrero. These attacks sought to bring attention to social inequalities in southern Mexico (Méndez and Cano, 1994; Díaz, 1997: 5–8; Wrighte, 2002).[29]

[27] These bombings seem to have been the work of foreign agents operating in Argentina. Iran and the Lebanese group Hezbullah remain as the primary suspects in the AMIA bombing (BBC, 2003a). As of recent, an Argentine prosecutor said that Ibrahim Berro, a lebanese militant of Hezbollah, carried out the attack. However, in a statement Hezbollah denied the accusation (BBC, 2005b)

[28] In the 20th century several relevant guerrilla groups sprung up in rural Mexico including National Revolutionary Civic Association led by Jénaro Vasquez in the state of Guerrero, Mexican Insurgent Army in Campeche, Tabasco, Veracruz and Chiapas and the Party of the Poor led by Lucio Cabanas in Guerrero (Hellmann, 1978: 125–127). The state of Guerrero, in particular, has suffered from endemic violence since colonial times (Knight, 1999).

[29] In 1998, a splinter group emerged from EPR, The Insurgent Peoples Revolutionary Army (Wrighte, 2002: 211).

On the other hand, violence, intimidation, and sporadic terrorist episodes derived from struggles related to indigenous grievances and land disputes have afflicted southern Mexico, in particular Oaxaca and Chiapas. In Chiapas paramilitary groups associated to local *caciques* and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) have clashed with the EZLN (Knight, 1999).[30] In 1997 paramilitaries massacred 45 people in Acteal, a rural community in Chiapas, which they accused of supporting the EZLN (MacEoin, 1998; Stahler–Shock, 1998).

Non–governmental terrorism rose sharply in Chile between 1986 and 1992. The FPMR, which at one point had between 500 and 1,000 operatives, and the newly created Lautaro Youth Brigade (BJL), a radical, splinter group founded by militants of the United Popular Action Movement (MAPU), orchestrated several high profile attacks, some of them of terrorist nature, in Santiago and other cities. This included armed robberies, kidnappings, bombings, and attacks principally against US targets. While both groups were purportedly created to topple the Chilean Military regime, they continued their operations after Chile regained democracy in 1990. Terrorist activity in Chile declined steadily after 1993, however. In 1994 the BJL disbanded after most of its members, including its leader, Guillermo Ossandón, were captured. The FPMR, in turn, has been weakened after internal fighting and the arrest of most of its leaders. However, in a spectacular operation, four of its members escaped from a Chilean Maximum Security Prison in 1997. On the other hand, Galvarino Apablaza, one of the founders of the group was arrested in Buenos Aires and may be extradited to Chile to face charges concerning the assassination of rightwing Senator Jaime Guzmán and the kidnapping of the son of a wealthy media tycoon in 1991. While the FPMR remains active and has not renounced armed struggle, it is extremely weak at the moment (Lowy, 1997; MIPT, 2005e; FPMR, 2005; Mickolus and Simmons, 1997).

In bordering Peru, as indicated above, non–governmental terrorism increased steadily between 1980 and 1992 following the violent insurrection launched by the Shining Path and the MRTA. Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission established that the Shining Path was responsible for 54% of the 70,000 victims of political violence between 1980 and 2000. Non–governmental terror in Peru decreased substantially when Peruvian security forces arrested Abimael Guzmán, the leader of the Shining Path in 1992. After the capture of Guzman several other prominent members of the organization were captured by Peruvian Security Forces. The remaining militants of the Shining Path submerged in an attempt to restructure the organization. In 1995, after more than two years of reorganization under the new leadership of Commandant Feliciano, the group resurfaced and resumed violent attacks in urban centers. It also resumed to harassing the civilian population in its new stronghold in the Peruvian eastern jungle departments of Junín, Huanuco, Ucayali, Pasco, and San Martín. However, Peruvian Security Forces arrested Commandant Feliciano and five female comrades in 1999 further debilitating the organization (Scott–Palmer, 1996: 250–306; The Economist, 1997a: 34; Caretas, 1999: 10–16). In March 2002, three days before an official visit by US President George W. Bush to Peru, a powerful bomb exploded in Central Lima, killing nine people and spreading fear of a possible revival of Shining Path. While no organization claimed responsibility for the attack, security services stated that remaining Shining Path cells planted the explosive device (Bolivar, 2002; The New York Times, 2002). In 2004, Comrade Artemio, the professed new leader of the group, threatened to resume violence in a taped interview released from his hiding place in the Peruvian central jungle (BBC, 2004).

[30]    Para–military groups include the Anti–Zapatista Resistance Movement (MIRA).

Similarly, despite the extensive crackdown on subversive activities by Peruvian Security Forces, the MRTA carried out several attacks in the early– and mid–1990s. The most spectacular was the 1996–7 seizure of the Japanese Embassy in Lima by a heavily– armed subversive commando. During this assault MRTA took 72 hostages, including ministers, foreign diplomats, and influential businesspersons. After several months, Peruvian elite forces stormed the Japanese Embassy in Lima liberating all 72 hostages and killing all members of the MRTA commando, including its leader, Néstor Cerpa Cartolini. This incident marked the end of the group, which was already debilitated by internal divisions and the effective actions of security forces (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2003: 379– 430l; The Economist, 1997b: 15).[31]

While most countries in the region have witnessed a steady decline in non–governmental terrorism activity, two Andean countries, Ecuador and Venezuela, have seen a small increase in terror in the last decade. Venezuela has endured a slight rise in non–governmental terrorism as a result of polarization derived from its internal political crisis but, most importantly, as a consequence of the spillover of the Colombian conflict. While the presence of Colombian irregular forces in Venezuelan areas of the long common border dates back to the 1970s, the Colombian guerrillas, particularly FARC, have intensified their operations in Venezuela since the mid 1990s. Incidents have concentrated along the border region in the Zulia provinces, where the guerrillas have bombed infrastructure and kidnapped scores of civilians. Similarly, Colombian paramilitary groups such as the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and other paramilitary organizations have expanded their range of operations into Venezuelan territory. There they have perpetrated violence and intimidated civilians they accuse of helping the Colombian guerrillas (Lemoine, 2000; Mickolus and Simmons, 2002).

As a concomitant of this violence, local paramilitary groups such as the United Self–Defense Forces of Venezuela emerged in 2002. This group has attacked governmental officials and civilians it accuses of collaborating with Colombian guerrillas (MIPT, 2005f). Furthermore, Latin American Patriotic Army (EPLA), another right wing group that resorts to terror and intimidation and seeks to combat guerrilla kidnappings, emerged recently. Two pro government radical, clandestine groups, Tupamaro Revolutionary Movement January 23 and the Carapaica Revolutionary Movement emerged in 1998 and 2002, respectively. These groups have resorted to intimidation and violence against detractors of the Venezuelan regime, sabotaging and attacking the Caracas Metropolitan Police, which they accuse of harming pro–government demonstrators (MIPT, 2005g; MIPT, 2005h).

While Ecuador has been affected by intermittent terror in the last fifteen years, terrorist activities have increased significantly since 2000. Several new, radical organizations have set off bombs and mounted attacks against civilians in urban areas. Radical organizations include Armed Revolutionary Left (IRA), People's Fighters Group (GCP), and Peoples Revolutionary Militias (MRP). These organizations opposed the recently ousted government of President Lucio Gutiérrez, which they accused of neglecting the social needs of the population and espousing a servile attitude towards the United States (MIPT, 2005i; MIPT, 2005j; MIPT, 2005k).

Panama has also witnessed an unusual wave of non–governmental terrorism, particularly after the invasion of the United States in 1989. Nationalistic sectors alienated by the US presence and

[31]    Victor Polay, leader and founder of the MRTA was arrested in 1989. He and other 46 inmates escaped in a spectacular operation from the Canto Grande Prison in Lima in 1990. Polay was re–arrested in 1992.

drug–traffickers were singled out as the main culprits behind terrorist attacks in Panama City.[32] Just as in Venezuela, the Colombian armed parties regularly infiltrate Panamanian territory, especially along the southern Darien border area, and have occasionally attacked civilians (Mickolus and Simmons, 1997; Mickolus and Simmons, 2002).

Cuba has registered an unexpected increase in non–governmental terrorist activity in the 1990s. After having been nearly free of terrorist activity during the Cold War, a wave of bombing attacks on tourist locations has hit the island. Most of the attacks have not been claimed by any organization, however. The Cuban government has blamed the incidents on rightwing Cuban groups operating from Miami (Rother, 1997: 6).

## IV. INTERPRETATION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF TERROR IN LATIN AMERICA

The preceding section underscored that, with the exception of the Colombian case, terror in Latin America has receded in the last decade. Against the backdrop of rising terror on the global scale, this decline constitutes a major puzzle. In trying to formulate a sound explanation of this somewhat intriguing trend, it is pertinent to draw on the established theories concerning the root sources of terrorism. The general literature examining the causes of non–governmental terrorism is vast and somewhat controversial for authors fail to reach a consensus on this matter.[33] In the case of Latin America, scholars have brought forward several hypotheses to explain why groups resort to this extreme and dehumanized strategy to further their political goals.

Non–state terrorism in Latin America has generally been associated with socio–economic conditions such as uneven distribution of wealth and other social and economic grievances.[34] It has been also linked to structural violence.[35] The root sources of terrorism have also been attributed to political conditions including the absence of the rule of law, lack of government legitimacy, restrictions of civil and political liberties, and human rights violations.[36] International geo–strategic concerns have also been discussed as relevant factors prompting terrorism.[37]

A cursory review of the existing theories concerning the root sources of terror in Latin America shows an interesting trend: the use of terror by non state actors has declined in a region where terrorism has been widely used, even though the general conditions thought to inform this practice persist in most if not all Latin American countries. This trend seems even more perplexing when one takes into account that the use of terror as a political strategy has sharply risen in other regions of the world. Drawing on the seminal research by Timothy Wickham–Crawley, as a tentative proposition to explain this puzzle this paper posits that the decline in the use of terror in Latin America derives from a shift in the *cultural repertoires for revolutionary collective action* on the

part of insurgent, anti–systemic and other groups that advocate for social change (Wickham–Crawley, 1992: 32).

Wickham–Crawley explains that social groups have a stock of available responses to confront situations of collective strain or other collective challenges. This *repertoire of collective action,* as he deems it, evolves over time because, to confront strenuous situations, groups add and subtract responses from their available stock. Wickham–Crawley points out that while some additions may enlarge and enrich responses to collective strain, others may reduce it. In this regard he explains that "some additions may so dominate the conscience collective as to squeeze out of consideration all competing responses" (1992: 32). As an example of this dynamic, he cites the case of the successful 1959 Cuban Revolution. According to this author – others including Castañeda (1993) and Radu (1984) coincide with this reading– the triumph of Cuban revolutionaries shrank the range of options within the *cultural repertoires* of other Latin American groups promoting social change in the 1960s and 1970s. The fervor and hope brought by the success story of the Cuban Revolution, where a small group of well motivated revolutionary cadre –el foco– deposed a repressive and corrupt government supported by the region's hegemonic power, effectively discarded alternatives to armed insurrection from Latin American revolutionary groups´ pool of available responses.

Following Wickham–Crawley, this paper argues that in Latin America groups that beforehand relied on terror eschew this strategy today because they have internalized that wanton violence ultimately constitutes not only an illegitimate, but also an ineffectual strategy to promote their goals. In other words, these groups have subtracted terror from the range/stock of collective action measures that they may undertake to further their political goals and, instead, embraced more moderate strategies including popular mobilization and electoral competition.

A complex set of related factors explain the decline of non–governmental terror in Latin America, barring Colombia. First and probably foremost, several groups that resorted to terror suffered brutal repression as hundreds of militants were assassinated, tortured, imprisoned and/or exiled. Many authors (Laqueur, 1987; Wickham–Crowley, 1992; Castañeda, 1993; Radu, 1984; Ratliff, 1988; Basombrío, 1998; Gillespie, 1982; Weiss Fagen, 1992; Perry, 1976) report that groups including the Uruguayan Tupamaros, the Argentinean FAR, FAP, ERP, and Montoneros, the Peruvian MIR, MRTA, and Shining Path, the Chilean MIR, the Guatemalan EGP, the Brazilian ALN, VAR, and Var Palmares, the Venezuelan Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR), and the Bolivian National Liberation Army (ELN) succumbed as a result of the actions of security forces and paramilitary forces in their respective countries. Most of these groups suffered the decapitation of their leadership and the decimation of their cadre. In several instances, furthermore, many of the aforementioned groups could not resist internal divisions derived from the pressure posed by security forces' relentless persecution. Additionally, against the backdrop of harsh repression, recruiting became extremely difficult for the aforementioned groups (Laqueur, 1987: 246–7; Wickham–Crowley, 1992; Castañeda, 1993: 109, 112; Basombrío, 1998; Gillespie, 1982; Weiss Fagen, 1992).

On the other hand and in a somehow related point, the lack of tangible results and the conviction that they could not attain military victory prompted several Latin American organizations that at one point in time relied on terror to question and re–ascertain their strategies. Mounting estrangement, even anger, on the part of civilians afflicted by violence brought about a serious soul searching among several groups that relied on terror, especially those at the left of the

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[32] The most serious incident in Panama occurred in 1994 when a bomb blew up an airliner in Colón. The bomb went off only one day after the bombing of the AMIA and killed 21 people, including 12 Israeli businessmen (Mickolus and Simons 1997: 650–53).

[33] On the general causes prompting non–governmental terrorism, see Kegley (1990); Stohl (1988); Laqueur (1987, 2002); Crenshaw (1990); Reich (1990); Luttwak (1983); Bwy (1968); and Segaller (1987).

[34] See Halperin (1976); Lopez (1998); Waldmann (1992).

[35] Ceboratev and Nef (1989).

[36] Waldmann (1992); Feldmann and Perälä (2004).

[37] Castañeda (1993); Luttwak (1983).

political spectrum. This process buttressed a revisionist mode that began to seriously question the use of violence, especially terror, as a political strategy.

A classical case in point regards the Venezuelan MIR. This group, which emerged in 1962 and that gathered young urban dwellers–some from poor shantytowns, others from educated backgrounds–unleashed a violent terrorist campaign characterized by robberies, assaults, bombings, and kidnappings. The MIR's strategy was part of a threefold plan that also included rural warfare and infiltration of the Armed Forces and that aimed at destabilizing the Venezuelan administration of Rómulo Bentacurt. The movement's violent strategy, however, failed to attract the sympathies of middle and lower class Venezuelans including workers and militants of the communist party. The repudiation of the means used by this group on the part of vast sectors that the group purported to represent, seriously hampered the recruitment efforts of MIR. Isolated by the lack of popular endorsement, incapable to recruit cadre, and weakened by the absence of material and logistical support by the Venezuelan people, the group ended being neutralized by Venezuelan security forces (Laqueur, 1987: 246–47; Wickham–Crowley, 1992: 17; Valsalice, 1973: 31–43). Several militants were imprisoned and killed, while the rest decided to continue their political struggle embracing guerrilla warfare, or joining existing political parties.

Several groups elsewhere and at different points in time were weakened by similar patterns. The brutal tactics of the Shining Path alienated rural population in the Peruvian Andes contributing to weaken the group towards the late 1980s. Degregori (1999) illustrates this pattern when analyzing the emergence of *Rondas Campesinas* in Peru. Gillespie (1992) and Rock (1987) report a similar pattern for Argentinean subversive groups including ERP and the Montoneros, while Bushnell describes how bloody actions by M–19 undermined its chances for recruitment and convinced them to abandon terror. Rightwing groups that relied on terror like the Contras in Nicaragua witnessed a similar pattern (Asprey, 1994). Finally, Wickham–Crawley reports how terror unleashed by guerrilla groups in Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia and Peru dented popular support for these groups in the 1960s (1990).

The abdication of violence as a means to bring about societal change, it is argued, was also informed by the reassessment of the advantages of democracy. Following the tragic experiment with the *vía armada,* several individuals and groups reached the conclusion that seeking power and change through institutional, democratic means was preferable to attempting it though violence. This change of heart formed part of a broader revisionist movement that rejected the dogmatism of radical, leftist groups, in particular their contempt for *bourgeois* democracy, and that, in addition to former guerrilla leaders, included former populists and other progressive movements such as labor unions (Castañeda, 1993). As a concomitant of this trend, many groups including M–19, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), and Quintin Lame in Colombia, FAR in Guatemala, the FMLN in El Salvador, decided to embark on peace negotiations and demobilize. The most popular and strong became political parties and started to compete in elections (Bushnell, 1993; Torres Rivas, 1997: 224–6; Palacios and Safford, 2002: 652; Navarro–Wolff, 2005). Similarly, several militants of groups including the Tupamaros, the Argentinean, ERP and Montoneros, the Peruvian MIR, the Brazilian ALN, VAR, and Var Palmares, the Venezuelan MIR opted for engaging in electoral politics in their respective countries.

Commenting on the change of strategy on the part of M–19, Carlos Pizarro, the slain commander of the group, recognized in an interview in 1988:

> La solución no puede ser masacrar una nación en función de una revolución, tenemos que plantearnos objetivos revolucionarios que garanticen un camino distinto en el ejercicio democrático de la vida de esta nación con objetivos donde nos podamos integrar todos (Alzate Castillo, 1988: 105).

This aforementioned trend was reinforced by the spread and consolidation of democracy in the region and, subsequently, by the election of progressive candidates to the presidency and other important elected posts (e.g., State Governors, Members of Congress, Majors) in countries including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Castañeda, 1993: 153–206). In the same vein, the consolidation of democracy has also placated the intransigent position of some right–wing groups that advocated for violence and terror as a way to prevent the consolidation of leftist dictatorships and that operated in Central America and the Southern Cone (Colombia and Mexico constitute exceptions to this trend).

The rejection of violence and terror and an allegiance to democratic principles has also permeated the activities of new revolutionary groups, even some that have opted for taking arms against states have abstained from resorting to terror. The EZLN, which has abided by international humanitarian law and shown considerable restraint in the use of force, epitomizes this position. Subcomandante Marcos, spokesperson and one of the senior commanders of the EZLN, has reiterated their preference for dialogue and pluralism, their commitment to respecting the laws of war (Monsivais, 2001).[38] Some authors, however, argue that EZLN has dodged a prolonged guerrilla campaign and emphasized dialogue and a political negotiation as a result of its military weakness (Peeler, 2004: 275).

In an interview given to the Spanish Newspaper *El País* in 2001, when asked why the EZLN rejects terror Marcos answered:

> Aunque los indígenas sean los más olvidados, el EZLN se levantó en armas para reclamar democracia, libertad y justicia para todos los mexicanos, y no sólo para los indígenas... El EZLN está organizado como un ejército y respeta todas las disposiciones internacionales para ser reconocido como ejército. Siempre hemos cumplido con las convenciones internacionales y las leyes de la guerra. Declaramos las hostilidades formalmente, tenemos uniformes, grados e insignias reconocibles y respetamos a la población civil y a los organismos neutrales. El EZLN tiene armas, organización y disciplina militares, pero no practica el terrorismo, ni nunca ha cometido atentados. El EZLN lucha para que ya no sea necesario ser clandestino y estar armado para combatir por la justicia, la democracia y la libertad (Ramonet, 2001).

As a reflection of this trend, furthermore, several other organizations fighting for the recognition and redress of old injustices in Latin America (mostly representing indigenous communities and

[38] Pitarch presents a much more critical account on the EZLN. He argues that the group originally espoused Marxist orthodoxy but that, later, it altered its profile and began to defend indigenous rights. He further claims that there is a tremendous distance between the moderate rhetoric and the behavior of the group. In this regard, citing a report of the International Committee of the Red Cross, he describes abuses perpetrated by the EZLN such as internal purges and harassment of alternative indigenous organizations (2004: 291–296).

afro–descendents) have rejected extreme violence and terrorism and opted for more creative strategies including popular mobilization and protests. Indigenous groups, in particular, have mobilized in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru, demanding change and recognition of their rights (Peeler, 2004; Eckstein and Wickham–Crowley, 2004: 22–8).[39]

In short, this section has advanced a tentative proposition regarding the decline of non–state terror in LA. It argued that the traumatic experiences associated with authoritarian backlash and repression; a more pragmatic attitude that values democracy, accommodation, and dialogue as political strategies; and the rejection by vast sectors of the population of wanton violence as a tool to attain political objectives have subtracted terror from the range of activities (stock) of collective action of former and new radical groups. Groups fighting for change have thus internalized that terror ultimately constitutes an ineffectual and de–legitimized strategy.

## V. THE LATEST WAVE OF TERROR: ARMED CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA[40]

If the abovementioned argument regarding the causes for the decline of terror in Latin America is right, how is it possible to account for the Colombian case where non–governmental terror is widespread? The systematic use of terror on the part of Colombian non–state actors, it is argued, is informed by and derives from a different logic –that of internal armed conflicts– whereby armed parties systematically and deliberately attack civilians to further political and military goals. This section reviews how the acute political crisis afflicting Colombia and that is reflected in a bloody internal armed conflict that shows no sign of abating has informed the use of terror among non–governmental actors.

Colombia constitutes a fascinating case study not only because it accounts for the overwhelming majority of current terror perpetrated in the region – 83% of the total number of terror incidents in Latin America for the 2000–4 period took place in Colombia. Colombia also represents an intriguing case because, as indicated in the previous section, several groups that resorted to terror there decided to abandon this strategy. In this sense, Colombia represents an incredibly interesting case study because it encapsulates two simultaneous phenomena: on the one hand, the abdication of terror by some groups like M–19 and, on the other, the exacerbation of this practice by other groups such as FARC, ELN and the more recently created AUC.

Long lasting social and political exclusion, an uneven distribution of wealth, corruption, and a culture of impunity escalated in the mid–1980s into a *Hobbesian* situation brought about by the armed confrontation of the armed forces, scores of paramilitary squads representing the most diverse interests, and two major guerrilla groups. Terror has been practiced on a relatively consistent basis by all the non–state actors involved in the Colombian internal conflict since the 1940s (Pecault,

1999; Pizarro, 2004; Gassmann, 2001; Bushnell, 1993).[41] Terror has also been practiced by the Colombian state.[42] Pecault argues that "violence is translated into localized forms of terror in many different rural and urban areas" (1999:141). Terror was also practiced by narcotics traffickers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In an attempt to influence the decision to extradite narco traffickers to the United States, criminals associated with the Medellín cartel led by Pablo Escobar unleashed a string of deadly bombings and attacks that killed hundreds and injured thousands of innocent people (Ehrenfeld, 1990: 88–91; Bushnell, 1993: 264; Tarzona–Sevillano, 1990; Bibes, 2001).

In what follows, this article reviews the main features and the logic informing the current widespread use of terror as a military and political strategy by Colombian non–governmental armed parties.

### Paramilitary Groups

The emergence of so–called "paramilitary" groups has contributed to the dramatically increased level of violence in Colombia. While *Paramilitary group* is a term of art, it is a rather imprecise, generic one that refers to a wide variety of groups that support the Colombian state's effort to combat guerrillas.[43] These include private armies set up by landowners, cattle ranchers, drug and emerald traffickers, *sicario* gangs (e.g., La Terraza), urban militias, and members of former self–defense groups. Cubides defines paramilitary groups as: "irregular forces of the state, extralegal organizations that have taken the law into their own hands and that, in their struggle against guerrillas, replicate guerrilla methods step for step"(2001: 130–1).[44]

The origins of *paramilitarism* in Colombia can be traced back to the period of *La Violencia* or even before, when members of the Conservative and Liberal parties, particularly landowners, created armed groups to attain party control over rural areas. Most of these paralegal militias that plagued rural Colombia during *La Violencia* disappeared with the creation of the National Front, however.[45] A new breed of paramilitary groups with no organic links to the militias formed in the 1950s

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[41] On the arguments espoused by the Colombian parties to infringe IHL see Gassmann (2001). On criticisms concerning the behavior of ELN towards civilians and its cadre see the classic piece by Arenas (1971).

[42] While it never attained the formidable proportions of other Latin American countries, state terrorism has been widely practiced in Colombia. Governmental repression and abuses during counterinsurgency efforts probably reached their zenith during the administration of President Julio César Turbay Ayala (1979–82), although this practice has continued until this date. As part of the state's counterinsurgent strategy, the military and other state agents have perpetrated serious and systematic human rights abuses such as harassing and attacking union leaders and leftist militants. More severely, however, security forces have participated in torture, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and massacres. These actions represent a deliberate effort on the part on the state to spread terror among the population as a way to quell potential support for leftist organizations, particularly armed groups (Kirk, 2002: 56; Gassmann, 2001: 70; Bushnell, 1993: 249).

[43] Some of the most important paramilitary groups include the Peasant Self Defenses Groups of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU), Víctor Carranza Self–Defense Groups , Self–Defenses of Magdalena Medio, Self–Defense Group of Patevaca, Cundinamarca, Self–Defense Group of el Doradal, Antioquia, Self–Defense of Sincelejo, Sucre, Self–Defense Groups of Planeta Rica, Córdoba, Martyrs of Kidnapping, Anti–Communist American Alliance, National Restoration Movement (MO-RENA), and White Eagles Legion. Many of these groups formed the AUC in the early 1990s (ICG, 2004).

[44] It is relevant to distinguish between paramilitary organizations and death squads. There is a major difference between these groups: whereas paramilitary organizations are structured organizations with a centralized command whose functions are clearly defined, death squads are informal groups characterized by a flexible structure whose composition is largely unknown. These characteristics allow them to carry out their clandestine operations preserving the anonymity of its components (Pizarro, 2004: 116–7).

[45] The National Front was a power–sharing arrangement instituted between Liberals and Conservatives in the 1970s designed to put an end to the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla and to put an end to *La Violencia* (Bushnell, 1993: 201–15; Obregón and Stavropoulou, 1998: 403).

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[39] Some of these indigenous groups include Movement Towards Socialism (MAS); Patriotic Consciousness (CONDEPA) and the Single Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) in Bolivia; Ecuadorian Confederation of Nationalities (CONAIE), National Federation of Indigenous Peasant Organizations in Ecuador; Coalition of Organizations of the Mayan People in Guatemala (COPMAGUA) and National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous People and Peasants (CONIC) in Guatemala. In Peru a myriad of indigenous organizations spread in the Andes and the Amazonian basin.

[40] This section is a slightly modified one of a section of a paper entitled "Terrorism in Colombia: Logic and Sources of a Multidimentional and Ubiquitous Political Phenomenon," which the author presented with Victor Hinojosa at the Latin American Studies Association meeting Las Vegas in 2004.

resurfaced around Puerto Boyacá in the early 1980s (Pizarro, 2004: 119–20; Vargas, 2004: 110). According to Cubides, these groups emerged following the collapse of peace talks between the administration of Belisario Betancourt (1982–6) and the guerrillas.[46]

Tired of putting up with extortion and harassment on the part of guerrillas, and dismayed at the lack of progress of the peace negotiations, landowners organized armed militias to counter the actions of revolutionary groups. In addition to seeking protection from the guerrillas; however, landowners employed vigilante groups to curb forceful occupations of their properties by land-less peasants –colonos– and/or to regain or attain political control of rural areas. The consolidation of drug mafias that commanded vast resources further reinforced the ranks of paramilitary forces. Imitating the organization of landowners, drug kingpins used their resources to set up private armies to protect rural estates they bought to launder their vast illegal earnings. However, these private armies originally formed to protect estates and other properties soon turned into semiautonomous organizations with separate goals and leadership (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Lozano and Osorio, 1998: 395–403; Cubides, 1999; Pizarro, 2004: 119–123; Vargas, 2004: 110–1).

The Colombian state has allegedly played an indirect role in the emergence of paramilitarism. Some members of the Armed Forces, including high ranked officials, have not only turned a blind eye to the illegal activities of these groups, but have also endorsed their activities through the provision of weapons, training, and logistical support. These hawkish members of the Colombian Armed Forces have supported the creation of paramilitary groups to supplement the state's counterinsurgency effort. This strategy has its roots in the doctrine of National Security propagated by the US government during the 1960s and 1970s. Given the existing informal links between paramilitary groups and some members of the army, paramilitaries often operate with impunity in areas of high military presence (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Lozano and Osorio, 1997: 402–3; Cubides, 1999: 155–7).

While initially circumscribed to the Magdalena Medio Region including departments of Antioquia and Cordoba, paramilitarism soon spread across Colombia, especially to the eastern lowland region bordering Venezuela, the Urabá, and the Darien and, more recently, to southern Colombia and the Cauca Valley (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Cubides, 1999; Pizarro, 2004: 119–123; Vargas, 2004: 110–1).

Paramilitary organizations tend to work regionally because, more often than not, they are associated with regional bosses known as caciques. In the early 1990s, however, Carlos Castaño, former leader of the Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU), organized the AUC, a paramilitary umbrella organization comprising several regional groups. At present, the AUC has more than 20.000 armed people divided into more than twenty blocs (International Crisis Group, 2004: 2). According to the UNDP, in 2003 at least 22 different paramilitary groups operated in 28 of Colombia's 32 departments (UNDP, 2003: 60, cited in Pizarro, 2004: 123). Paramilitary groups finance their operations through several illegal activities including taxation on illegal production, drug trafficking, and extortion. Funds are also obtained from voluntary contributions (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Pizarro, 2004; Vargas, 2004).

Paramilitary groups distinguish themselves by having a virulent anti-communist ideology. They perceive and present themselves as restorers of the social order that has been lost as a consequence of guerrilla armed assault on the Colombian state (Cubides, 2001: 133). Another important element characterizing these groups concerns their violent nature. Examining the current patterns of armed conflict in Colombia, Vargas argues that certain types of radical violence discharged by some groups, particularly although not exclusively paramilitaries, partly derive from what he calls a mafia code of conduct. Mafia, explains Vargas, is not an organization but rather a behavioral attitude and a form of power. In order to consolidate their power, paramilitary groups use their vast resources to co-opt people and create clientelistic networks. This strategy is coupled with the use of extreme violence as an instrument to attain social and political control (2004: 107).

Since their creation, paramilitary groups have committed terrible abuses. Indeed, while all groups perpetrate very serious acts of violence against civilians and other targets, there is consensus that these groups are probably the worst human rights offenders in Colombia (Pecault, 1999: 156; Human Rights Watch, 1996 and 2000; International Crisis Group, 2004). Paramilitary violence includes selective killings, massacres,[47] forced disappearances, death threats, and torture (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2004). Paramilitary groups have also been the main sources responsible for the displacement of hundred of thousands of Colombians in the last decade (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2004). Terror has been widely used as a tactic to drive peasants away from areas rich in natural resources or from zones where the property value has surged as the result of the development of infrastructure projects (e.g., highways, channels, irrigation projects). Paramilitary organizations also coerce peasants to sell their properties at an artificially low price or directly evict them from their properties (United Nations Social and Economic Council, 2004; United Stated Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2004; Lozano and Osorio, 1995: 395–99; Uribe, 2004: 81; Pizarro, 2004: 147–8).[48] Commenting on the new type of violence affecting rural areas, Reyes argues that in Colombia, social conflicts have been substituted with conflicts over territorial control among armed parties (cited in Cubides, 1999: 162). Pecault, on the other hand, explains that for paramilitary and other armed groups in Colombia territorial control serves as the foundation for the accrual of power (1999: 152).

Even more disturbingly, though, in addition to perpetrating politically motivated killings, paramilitary groups have reportedly engaged in social cleansing by summarily killing social outcasts and undesirables including drug addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals, homeless people, beggars, and petty criminals, especially in urban centers (Vargas, 2004: 114; Human Rights Watch, 1996; Bushnell, 1993:264).

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[46] Some authors trace the origins of the latest version of paramilitary groups to the creation of MAS in 1981 (López Restrepo and Camacho, 2003: 265) Drug traffickers created this group reacting to the abduction of the daughter of a senior figure of a drug cartel by the M-19. MAS carried out a series of assassinations and retaliated by kidnapping relatives of the guerrillas. Cubides characterize MAS as a pilot experience that would pave the way to the creation of the first paramilitary groups (1999:158).

[47] Massacres are defined as the killing of at least three people at the same incident. According to the Colombian Ministry of Defense, paramilitary groups perpetrated 6 massacres in 1997 (30 people killed); 16 in 1998 (111 people killed), 61 in 1999 (408 people killed) and 83 in 2000 (593 people killed). According to human rights groups, however, this account probably downgrades the number of people killed in massacres perpetrated by paramilitary groups (International Crisis Group 2004).

[48] According to the latest figures, approximately 3 million people remain internally displaced within Colombia as a result of the abuses perpetrated by all armed parties. Additionally, 234 thousand have sought safe haven abroad in countries including Venezuela (182.000), United States (19.000), Ecuador (16.000) Costa Rica (16.000) Canada (5000) and Panama (1000), among others (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2004).

Since their appearance in the 1980s, however, paramilitary groups have gradually mutated from defensive organizations to offensive ones seeking to capture control of vast zones of the country and preying on civilians (Cubides, 2001: 145). Mirroring the strategy employed by guerrilla groups, paramilitary forces have opted for to the *combination of all forms of struggle*, including political campaigns of indoctrination to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population. Knowing the difficulties of fighting a mobile and resilient enemy like FARC and ELN, paramilitary groups have centered their attacks on guerrilla's support networks, which are comprised of civilian auxiliaries and sympathizers. In order to accomplish their goals, paramilitaries have occupied rural towns and asserted their presence in the peripheral urban settlements of important centers such as Medellín, Barrancabermeja, Cali, and Bogotá unleashing ruthless violence to obliterate what they regard as the clandestine backbone of the guerrillas (Cubides, 2001: 131; Peacault, 1999: 145).

I argue that the aforementioned strategy employed by paramilitary groups clearly amounts to terrorism. The deliberate attacks committed by these groups against the civilian population undoubtedly correspond to war terrorism; that is, actions aimed at spreading terror as a way to attain military objectives in the theatre of war. Terror thus serves as a mechanism to enhance social control and attain political hegemony, allowing these groups to implement their political agenda. Paramilitary groups also resort to terror when undertaking operations of social cleansing. Rather than the exercise of terror for political control or economic gain, these barbaric actions seem to be informed by a supremacist ideology that perceives some of the most vulnerable portions of the population as disposable and unworthy of living. Paramilitary groups also use terror to maintain internal discipline and combat defections among its troops (Pecault, 1999: 154).

## Guerrilla Groups

Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union most Latin American guerrilla groups suffered severe setbacks. Colombian insurgent groups flexed their muscles, however. While FACR and ELN are the most important insurgent groups, scores of small guerrilla groups remain active in Colombia.[49] As a result of their growing strength, guerrillas currently control several small pockets of Colombia's territory, especially in remote mountainous areas and jungles. From those areas, they organize hit and run operations targeting military and other strategic targets (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2000: 119–20; Pizarro, 2004).

With approximately 18,000 trained and well–armed militants and presence in at least one–half of the country's municipalities, the FARC is Colombia's most powerful guerrilla group (BBC, 2003b). In the last decade, the FARC has strengthened its position and amassed enormous resources by complementing traditional, illegal activities such as extortion, kidnapping, and armed robberies with arms smuggling and drug trafficking (International Crisis Group, 2004).[50] As part of its strategy to diversify its sources of revenue, especially drug money, the FARC has stepped up its presence in coca growing regions, particularly in several southern departments bordering Ecuador (Putumayo,

Nariño), the strategic Urabá region and some departments bordering Venezuela (Cesar and Norte de Santander) (Project Counselling Service, 1999: 28–9; Lozano and Osorio, 1998: 404–7; Rangel, 1999: 21–52; Keen, 1998).

The ELN, in turn, concentrates its operations in the Magdalena Medio region. Leadership problems following the death in 1998 of Manuel Pérez, one of its main commanders, coupled with military setbacks at the hands of paramilitary forces, have seriously undermined the strength of this group, however. While several authors claim that the ELN has been substantially weakened, security sources indicate that it still retains substantial strength with up to 5,000 armed elements (BBC, 2003b; Pizarro, 2004: 105; International Crisis Group, 2004; Lozano and Osorio, 1998: 405).

The list of IHL infractions perpetrated by Colombia's two main guerrilla groups is long and varied. As far as the ELN is concerned, violent actions range from massive kidnappings and aerial hijackings,[51] to sabotages including attacks on infrastructure (particularly oil pipelines), bombings and targeted killings. ELN also consistently carries out indiscriminate attacks against, and deliberately displaces, civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2000; Pecault, 2001; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2004; Pizarro, 2004; Obregón and Stavropoulou, 1998: 417; Lozano and Osorio, 1998: 404–7).

The infractions perpetrated by FARC have gradually escalated and become much more serious and indiscriminate than in previous decades. These include indiscriminate attacks with crude explosive devices,[52] the use of anti–personal mines, targeted assassinations, threats, coercion, forceful recruitment including that of minors, and kidnappings. Additionally, since the collapse of peace negotiations with the Administration of President Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002), the FARC stepped up attacks against civilians in major urban centers including Bogotá, Medellín, Barrancabermeja, Cúcuta, and Cali, among may others. FARC has also perpetrated several massacres in rural areas. To discourage collaboration with the Armed Forces and paramilitary groups, FARC deliberately forces entire communities to flee in order to obtain control of strategic areas, particularly in coca–growing regions. In the last decade FARC has also stepped up kidnappings and cross border attacks against civilian and military targets in Venezuela, and to a lesser extent in Panama and Ecuador (Mickolus and Sanders, 2002; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2003).

As in the case of paramilitary groups, I argue that ELN and FARC deliberately resort to terror. Many of the violent actions carried out by these groups, especially massacres, assassinations and forced displacement, deliberately seek to instill fear in the civilian population. The guerrillas' gradual and increasing attacks against the civilian population coincided with the appearance of paramilitaries in the late 1980s. This contention does not imply that guerrillas did not harass or target civilians prior to the creation of paramilitary groups, but rather that as of recent these events have become much more systematic and widespread. This seems to indicate that the current wave of terror discharged

[51] In two highly visible incidents ELN commandoes hijacked an Avianca airliner with 46 people on board a flight between Bucaramanga–Bogotá in April 1999. The hijackers aided by other guerrillas took the hostages through the jungle to an undisclosed location in a mountain redoubt. All hostages were released, although two died as result of the exhaustion and shock they experienced. On a second incident, ELN operatives kidnapped 143 churchgoers at la Maria Church in Ciudad Jardín, an exclusive quarter in Cali in May 1999. Victims were forced to walk to an undisclosed location to a nearby mountain range. After months of negotiations all victims were finally freed (Mickolus and Sanders, 2001: 190, 1950).

[52] In May 2002 FARC operatives also killed 110 civilians, including 40 children in Bojayá a rural community in the Urabá region after they fired a cooking–gas cylinder packet with explosives against a church packed with civilians.

[49] Small leftist guerrilla groups operating in Colombia include the EPL, Jaime Bateman Cayon Group (JBC), the Latin American Patriotic Army (EPLA), the Peoples Revolutionary Army (ERP), and the Guevarist Revolutionary Army (ERG).

[50] Guerrillas levy taxes on illegal drugs, manage processing laboratories, maintain clandestine airstrips and at times export drugs directly (UNHCHR, 2003:5). According to the Colombian government, through its illegal activities the FARC collected more than US$ 350 million in 1998 (ICG, 2004).

by these groups is reactive; that is, it represents a response to the challenge mounted by their enemies. As indicated above, paramilitary groups decided to combine all forms of struggle against guerrillas. As a strategy, therefore, they have unleashed a terror campaign against civilians intended to destroy the guerrillas' bases of support. Guerrillas, especially FARC, have responded in kind to the violence unleashed by paramilitaries by indiscriminately targeting civilians they deem or suspect of collaborating with their enemies. Guerrillas resort to extreme violence as a way to prevent civilian collaboration with paramilitaries and thus to limit their advance and neutralize their actions. This strategy has prompted a symmetric escalation of terror against civilians with atrocious humanitarian consequences. At the same time, some actions intended to help the organization to obtain the funds to wage war, such as the widespread practice of kidnapping, while not deliberately intended to spread terror, end up having the same effect. This is particularly apparent in the case of the so called *miraculous fishing*, whereby guerrillas set up roadblocks and kidnap people randomly.

In short, Colombian armed parties have systematically resorted to terror as part of the perverse logic informing the country's internal armed conflict. Parties seek to spread terror to attain economic, political, and military goals. Terror is also informed by ideological dogmatism (virulent anti–communism in the case of paramilitaries and revolutionary dogmatism in the case of FARC) as well as a behavioral *mafia code of conduct* that sees very few limits to the use of violence.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to address a major puzzle related to the practice of terrorism in Latin America. While globally as of late, terror has grown substantially and achieved almost unparalleled prominence, in Latin America, the insurgent continent *par excellence*, this practice has declined significantly. Drawing on the seminal work of Wickham–Crowley, as a tentative explanation for this intriguing trend, this article posits that this trend can be explained as a result of a shift in the *cultural repertoires* of revolutionary and other anti–systemic groups' range of action. The rejection of terror is informed by a complex combination of factors including the devastating effects of repression that obliterated several groups advocating *vía armada*, growing pragmatism and revisionism on the part of these same groups and the consolidation of democracy in the region. Non–state actors, especially on the left, that advocated for violence and resorted to terror internalized that gratuitous violence ultimately constitutes an ineffectual and illegitimate strategy. The case of Colombia represents a partial exception to this trend. There, it has been argued, the systematic use of terror on the part of Colombian non–state actors is informed by and derives from the logic ruling internal armed conflicts. Colombian non–state actors terrorize civilians as a war strategy intended to destroy their enemies' bases of support and achieve control over strategic areas.

At a time when the region is beset by political instability, and pervasive structural problems such as poverty, inequality, and serious human rights abuses, many could arguably regard the aforementioned conclusions as optimistic, even naïve. Could terrorism really cease to be a strategy for radical groups seeking major structural changes and others committed to defend *status quo* even though the structural conditions that most experts claim inform this practice remain unchanged? The tentative answer is yes. Several aggravated groups seeking redress of injustices and the recognition of their rights have shown remarkable restraint and seem to repudiate old, gratuitous forms of violence both

rhetorically and in their actions. This rejection seems informed by the general repudiation of violence by the overwhelming majority of Latin Americans, many of whom have bore the brunt of violence.

Despite past lessons regarding the nefarious consequences of terror, both for victims and perpetrators, history shows that for several groups this strategy can be a very tempting option. Radical, disgruntled groups may embrace terror as an easy outlet for mounting frustration and desperation at the lukewarm and dismissive response to their grievances on the part of governments and the society at large. If Latin American countries are to avoid a relapse of terrorism, they will have to engage in a serious dialogue and use democratic ways to begin to address the demands of several wronged groups. In other words, the future of this practice will depend on the capacity of our democracies to address seriously and in a peaceful and creative manner several pending structural problems. At the same time, governments in the region will need to tackle the serious deterioration of the Colombian internal armed conflict that is threatening the stability of several of the weakly institutionalized Andean democracies.

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# Partidos desafiantes en América Latina: representación política y estrategias de competencia de las nuevas oposiciones[*]

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## Resumen

Durante las pos–transiciones democráticas los sistemas de partidos latinoamericanos enfrentaron la necesidad de auto–transformarse incluyendo nuevos ejes y dimensiones a la competencia interpartidaria para lograr adaptarse a las demandas planteadas por los déficit del sistema de representación tradicional. En consecuencia, emergieron nuevos partidos de oposición (partidos desafiantes) que se presentaron como alternativas a los partidos establecidos. Los partidos desafiantes integrados con éxito al sistema (EP–FA, PAN, PRD y PT) establecieron nítidas pautas de competencia contra el *statu quo* político, adquirieron soportes sociales fuertes, y presentaron características orgánicas e institucionales novedosas; mientras que aquellos que fracasaron (AD–M19, FREPASO, LCR y MAS) no lograron adoptar estrategias de competencia coherentes con el tipo de representación alternativa que las hizo emerger, y se terminaron diluyendo. Por último, este artículo plantea que los niveles de institucionalización del sistema de partidos están asociados a los niveles de éxito y fracaso de los partidos desafiantes.

## Abstract

During the democratic post–transitions the Latin–American party systems faced the need of self–transformation, including new axes and dimensions to the inter–partisan competition in order to adapt to the demands established by the traditional representative system deficits. As a consequence, new opposition parties (challenging parties) emerged which presented themselves as alternatives to the traditional parties. The successfully established challenging parties (EP–FA, PAN, PRD, and PT) established clear patterns of competition against the political status quo, acquired strong social support, and presented organic and newly institutional characteristics, while those that failed (AD–M19, FREPASO, LCR and MAS) did not achieve competition strategies that were consistent with the alternative representation that raised them, and they ended up dissolving away. Lastly I argue that the level of institutionalization of the party system is related to the successes and failures of the challenging parties.

PALABRAS CLAVE • Partidos Desafiantes • Institucionalización • Representación • Sistema de Partidos • Oposición

## I. INTRODUCCIÓN

Las pos–transiciones en América Latina significaron cambios en el rumbo de la investigación en ciencia política, en la medida en que la búsqueda de patrones de estabilidad para la conservación de la democracia dio paso a una variada gama de estudios sobre "calidad democrática" y sus problemas de funcionamiento.

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