

# Pro-Government Militias and the Legacy of Military Rule in Latin America

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PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS AND THE LEGACY OF MILITARY RULE IN LATIN  
AMERICA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science  
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## ABSTRACT

Currently Latin America experiences a phenomenon of widely varying levels of violence across the region. Many countries, such as El Salvador and Honduras, have exceptionally high murder rates upwards of 40 homicides per 100,000 people (UNODC 2015). Other countries, such as Uruguay and Argentina, have relatively low rates, below 10 homicides per 100,000 people (UNODC 2015). I believe this variation stems from the use of pro-government militias specifically employed in the past by military governments as tools of suppression. Under the guise of combating subversive elements within their countries, these groups were used to silence and repress those who opposed the military governments. Employing civilians, active military, police officers and high-ranking government officials; these groups often carried clandestine and sometimes public ties to their governments. By examining the origins, afterlives, and level of control exerted over these pro-government militias in Argentina and El Salvador; this study aims to understand the role these groups played in the dispersion of violence throughout society ultimately accounting for the variation we see today.

*Keywords:* Pro-Government Militia, Argentina, El Salvador, Latin America, Military Government, Dirty War

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## INTRODUCTION

Currently Latin America experiences a phenomenon of widely varying levels of violence across the region. Many countries, such as El Salvador and Honduras, have exceptionally high murder rates upwards of 40 homicides per 100,000 people (UNODC 2015). Other countries, such as Uruguay and Argentina, have relatively low rates, below 10 homicides per 100,000 people (UNODC 2015). This wide variation in violence levels across Latin America is the key puzzle behind my research question. My research question is: Does the use of pro-government militias by military regimes affect the level of violence after the regime democratizes/falls? Based on existing research and institutions I believe that these variables positively correlate. That the countries who have greater control over their pro-government militias will experience less violence than that of countries who have less control of their pro-government militias. In recent literature, new theories are being explored about the interaction between governments and pro-government militias. These new theories accompanied by new databases compiling countries histories with these groups is being used to explain the relationships that governments have with these militias, why they use them, cooperate with them, and what benefits and detriments they may have on these states. The literature on pro-government militias is now being examined outside of civil wars and genocide because recent data has shown that between 1982 and 2007, in over 60 countries governments were linked to and cooperated with informal armed groups within their own borders (Carey et al. 2013). Included in the new data are many countries within Latin America. By looking closer at specific countries within Latin America and the actions of the governments and pro-government militias, I hope to find that the level of control that countries had over these groups can provide an

explanation to these militias' actions during the governments time in power and after the government dissolved. I define control as the financial or political power used to influence behavior. I believe that that military regimes levels of control over these pro-government militias will influence the violence we see today because these groups are often comprised of members within the formal security apparatus of the government such as military and police personnel. After these governments transition many of these members disperse throughout society and this dispersal is affected by how many sources of control there were. With more sources of control, members of these militias will obtain similar post-regime employment elsewhere through loyalties to other sources other than the governments; leading to varied post-regime fates and consequently more violence.



## BACKGROUND

Pro-government militias are armed groups that are linked to government but exist outside the regular security apparatus such as the states military or police force and have some level of organization (Carey et al. 2013). It is understood that governments around the world collaborate with irregular security forces such as militias, death squads, and paramilitaries. They have been found to either create these groups, align with them, or support them even when they are not fully under their control to achieve political goals and address security concerns. This term also encompasses other groups as well, such as groups that are considered state-sponsored proxy forces, death squads, vigilantes, paramilitaries, and civil defense forces. It's found that although Pro-government militias are used in a way that increases effectiveness and legitimacy of counterinsurgency campaigns (Carey and Mitchell 2017), they also negatively impact the fragility of the state and welfare of the citizens (Carey and Mitchell 2017). Although it is established that not having a monopoly on the use of violence carries multiple risks, many governments deliberately forego a monopoly. Governments may instead choose to create groups for plausible deniability in human rights abuses, to protect civilians against rebel groups, attack opponents or critics of a regime, to achieve electoral gains, or even to protect the regime from a coup d'état (Carey and Mitchell 2016). These pro-government militias are not limited to being found in developing states but have been found in all regimes and are persistent in continuing their existence and spread. This persistence has raised questions about government's incentives to align with them instead of actively opposing them and making them disappear as the state evolves (Carey and Mitchell 2017).

## WHY PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS?

Considering this persistence, the dynamic of a government's monopoly on violence has shifted to a system closer resembling violence management (Staniland 2012). All governments, even with professional militaries and a formal security apparatus, are found to tolerate at some level or even actively create networks of armed actors, specifically pro-government militias. These groups can be found in countries across the world both developing and long established (Carey and Mitchell 2017). In examining why governments create or support these groups, a few incentives are rationalized as explanations for why governments use these groups. These incentives include the need for cheap additional forces, access to local intelligence, and deniability for violence. Governments may use these groups as additional forces, not because a group can contribute offensively but rather it may be cheaper than fighting the group. In addition, recruited groups may have advantages at navigating difficult terrain if they are local and can aid in projecting the government's force (Carey et al. 2011). Most often, these groups are used to increase a government's legitimacy or decrease a government's accountability for violence. When security tasks are delegated to these groups the political cost of conflict is lowered while simultaneously providing the government with less accountability for losses incurred by the conflict (Carey et al. 2011). These incentives allow governments to justify the potential risks to civilians and the state because of the expected benefits they will receive from these groups while minimizing their own accountability.

## PGMS LINK TO GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

Pro-government militias vary in proximity and affiliation with their government, all have different characteristics and can vary in purpose, organization, and membership. To avoid using labels such as civil defense forces, vigilantes, or paramilitaries which vary regionally and culturally (Campbell and Brenner 2002), a typology has been created for these groups to use for comparison. This new typology focuses on the attributes of the group rather than the context in which they exist. One attribute is the groups link to the government and the other is the groups link to society. It is these attributes that influence the control of these groups which is the main problem behind monopolizing violence (Carey and Mitchell 2017). When countries lose control of these groups it begins to challenge the legitimacy of the state itself.

The link to the government can either be semiofficial or informal (Carey et al. 2013). *Semiofficial pro-government militias* can be characterized by the government establishing the group by law and with members perhaps receiving regular compensation. They are often labeled paramilitary forces, auxiliary forces, and state-legitimate vigilantes and even can come to include militarized police (De Bruin 2015; Dowdle 2007). Examples include Colombia, where Paramilitary Self Defense Forces were sanctioned under a law aimed at fighting left-wing guerillas; and Guatemala where Civil Defense Patrols were formed by decree of the government (Schneider 2000). *Informal militias* are characterized by having no formal link with the government. Even if a link is widely known by the population, it is denied. They are generally clandestine, and the group's leader can report to or be a member of the government, the group may receive weapons from the government or might carry out joint operations with normal forces

(Carey and Mitchell 2017). They are often labeled as death squads, paramilitaries, proxy militias, or surrogates if they are on the governments side (Campbell and Brenner 2002; Alvarez 2006). Examples include.in Argentina where the “Working Group” death squad operated clandestinely under military rule disappearing over 9000 people thought to be against the regime (Schneider 2000).

The link to society is defined by whether the groups are locally recruited and locally active. Local PGMs which can be formed on a neighborhood or community basis may be subject to certain social or economic account mechanisms that non-local PGMs may not be. This link directly affects the groups behavior towards civilians. A key claim is that locally based militias with links to the locality where they are operating, tend to limit indiscriminate violence and should present fewer control problems (Carey and Mitchell 2017). These groups generally exist under the label of civil defense forces and can either be formally recognized by the government, making them semi-official, or develop from grassroots movements and maintain looser links with the state as an informal pro-government militia.

The reason both the link to society and government are important for control purposes is they affect the group’s possible goal variance and the ability of these groups to be monitored. Groups with ties to a local community and a semiofficial link to the government ease the monitoring and punishment process and are less likely to pursue personal goals and exhibit opportunism (Carey and Mitchell 2017). Likewise, informal groups with non-local ties are difficult to monitor and more likely to pursue goals that possibly conflict with the government’s objectives.

Below is the typology outlined by Carey and Mitchell (2017) along with their expectations of the risks these groups pose to the state and civilians.

TABLE 1

PGM Risk to Society based on Governmental and Societal Links

Link to society	Link to government	
	Informal	Semi-Official
Local  Risk to State and Civilians	Medium	Low
Nonlocal  Risk to State and Civilians	Very High	Medium

PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS AND CONTROL

When discussing control of pro-government militias, a key claim is that they are linked to state failure with it being difficult to pinpoint sometimes who is controlling who. Control depends on goal variance, and the balance of information between the government and the militia. Militias with private agendas and with an information advantage that are at odds with the government are difficult to control (Miller 2005). It is suggested that a more formal link with the government lessens goal variance, increases transparency, decreases the information gap, and creates a degree of accountability (Carey and Mitchell 2017). When formalized, the groups are less likely to attract

extremists and opportunists. This may be because of the established punishment mechanisms, formal hierarchal structure and consequently lack of opportunity to pursue personal goals. In addition, recruits that join are provided compensation leading them to place higher value on their position. The groups that are more loosely connected, not created by the government, and that operate at a distance from government are found more likely to have control problems and private goals. Weak control can come from giving discretion to the informal groups or from government weakness in states that are failing. The literature suggests that pro-government militias can be both contributors to and a consequence of state failure (Carey and Mitchell 2017). The government's failure to provide security motivates the creation of militias. When control is lost over these militias it is difficult to demobilize them. These groups can fill a security vacuum as an informal security apparatus and gain backing from political opponents but will usually challenge the authority of the state and put citizens at risk. While informal militias are related to state failure, semiofficial militias are not because of their bureaucratic and financial costs which many failed states cannot incur. Paramilitary and other semi-official organizations only exist when government allocates a significant amount of resources to security (Dowdle 2007). Governments risk of betrayal is lower with semiofficial militias because they are more easily monitored and high goal variance is less likely.

#### ORIGINS OF PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS

Now evaluating the typology of the pro-government militias link to society, the origins of the groups provide implications for the control and predatory nature of the group. Regardless of link to the government, local pro-government militias might be subject to informal social and economic

accountability mechanisms (Clayton and Thompson 2017). This can shape their behavior towards civilians. Locally based militias that have links to the communities they are stationed in tend to limit indiscriminate and predatory violence. Locally based militias have a higher capacity at identifying insurgents which reduces the level of violence against civilians (Clayton and Thompson 2017). There are two types of membership characteristics for pro-government militias: civilians and non-civilian. The civilian memberships may take the form of ethnic/ religious links, political or ideological links, and nationalist links to society. The non-civilian links include off-duty police or military personnel, former members of the regular security apparatus, as well as mercenaries (Carey and Mitchell 2017). Non-civilian militias tend to be small, clandestine, and very violent. Most militias in the non-civilian societal link have an informal link with the government as to provide deniability for their violence (Campbell and Brenner 2002).

#### PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS BEHAVIOR

The link with the government shapes the militias behavior towards civilians. When the government delegates security tasks to nonstate organizations, they yield control and lessen accountability (Carey and Mitchell 2017). Two levels of delegation are identified that increase the danger of opportunistic behavior harmful to civilians. The first is the agency level of delegation that occurs between organizations, this delegation occurs from the state to pro-government militias. The second is the internal or agent level of delegation, this occurs from leader to individual agent and occurs within organizations. At the agency level, government has the most control because of the formal chain of command that flows from government to militia. At the internal level the principal-agent problem occurs where individual agents can take actions on behalf of the leaders within the

militia (Carey and Mitchell 2017). At this point it is difficult to pinpoint control problems because it may be the principal ordering or condoning strategic violence against civilians that is carried out by the agent. When the government delegates to the militias, control decreases as the amount of daylight between the government and agency increases (Fiorina 1985). In other words, the greater the separation between the government and the militia, the less control there is. With informal pro-government militias, the amount of daylight is greater and can expect a higher risk for civilians. At the internal level, individual members may or may not be well controlled by superiors. Informal militias are more likely to commit violations because of lax recruitment procedures, and less predictable training and discipline (Carey and Mitchell 2017). This is not to say that semiofficial militias do not commit violations, they do as well. A key hypothesis is that the more loosely connected a group is to the state, the more likely it is that pro-government militias members use violence for their own benefit such as looting or settling private disputes.

In addition, a key claim in the literature of pro-government militias, is that they provide deniability. This correlates with the varying levels of control because the degree of control influences the ease with which governments can deny responsibility for the violent acts these groups commit. The nature of the multigovernmental link shapes the principal-agent relationship such that government either can't or won't control the groups. It's outlined that informal pro-government militias make government sponsored killings, tortures, and disappearances more likely whereas semiofficial ones do not (Mitchell et al 2014). The plausible deniability that informal militias offer, along with the type of personnel often found in those groups produces "violence without limits" (Alvarez 2006). This raises the question of when governments would employ informal militias. It's found that governments are most likely to have informal links with



armed groups if their country is distant from democracies but dependent on their aid (Carey et.al 2015). Usually in these cases along with external democratization is occurring, leaders will distance themselves from the repressive violence by using informal militias against the opposition.

#### OPEN QUESTIONS IN PGM LITERATURE

There are several questions still posed by the militia-societal link such as how ideology, politics, and religion shape the behavior of these militias? Whether membership characteristics of these groups are important in the relationship and risk to the government, the longevity of the groups, and to the nature of their afterlife? (Carey and Mitchell 2017). Militias based on in-group and out-group dynamics are likely to be more violent towards civilians, this includes groups based on religion, ethnicity, and ideology. Non-civilian militias are predisposed to violence because their members are likely to be skilled in extreme forms of violence (Campbell and Brenner 2002). Membership characteristics influence the probable risk to the state. Pro-government militias with low membership potential such as local or non-civilian groups can't recruit large parts of society such as the civilian groups and pose less risk to the stability of the state. In addition, the bond between members in these groups affects the risk they pose to the state. This is because instead of being loyal to a specific institution, loyalties lie to leaders and their goals (Carey and Mitchell 2017). This puzzling association with society is believed to help in the explanation of the survival of these militias even after governments dissipate. My research would address how membership plays a role on the risk to the state in military regimes, specifically how membership characteristics affect post-regime violence. These membership characteristics also contribute to the literature on the membership potential of these groups as I examine the actual constitutions of these groups and

where the personnel primarily come from. Examining these variables within a military regime allows new insights into these questions and will help further the discussion in the role that membership plays in the control that governments exert on these groups and how that subsequently affects violence after the regime falls.

Regarding the militias link to the government, the most significant questions that arise are; are militias causes or consequences of state failure? Are militias linked to higher levels of predatory violence? The literature posits that examining predatory violence requires that more reliable actor-linked information be generated in order to assess the real risk of militia violence. Research shows militias both fill the security apparatus vacuum and undermine the state's ability to provide security to its citizens (Carey and Mitchell 2017). One is work on the likelihood of betrayal by these militias, and another is how states recover the monopoly of violence from them. The research so far contributes little understanding to why the link between these militias and the state breaks and when that happens what exactly happens to these groups. New data shows semblances of side-switching by these groups, whether it be rebels defecting to the government or why pro-government militias turn on the state (Otto et al. 2015). In either case the switches mostly seem to be economically motivated on all sides including the government (Oppenheim et al. 2015). The entire government-militia link and control issue raise questions about the effectiveness of pro-government militias. Future research may explore institutions holding governments and militia members accountable for war crimes and human rights violations and whether informal or semiofficial status makes a difference (Carey and Mitchell 2017). There are multiple factors influencing their effectiveness as well as wrongdoing. They depend on the members that are attracted to the group, the types of motivations they have and the social and political institutions

in which they develop. My research will be delving into the literature on the constitutions, controls, and punishments these groups received and how the control held over them by the government affected these variables. In examining these behaviors my research will further the discussion on the predatory nature of these groups, their membership characteristics, what happens to these groups after their link to the state breaks and how this affects the variations in violence, we see today.

In addition to the militia's attributes of government and societal link, there is an alternative literature that distinguishes additional attributes that have implications for these groups' survival and behavior. One attribute is whether the group is initiated from the ground up, and the other is the context in which the groups are active. Another notable distinction is that between state-orchestrated and community-driven groups. These alternative attributes somewhat overlap with the typology of semi-official and informal militias (Carey and Mitchell 2017). In examining the pro-government militias used by military regimes, I analyze the origins of these groups including whether they were state orchestrated or driven by community factors; contributing how these factors affect the levels of violence during their use by military governments.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS

The main research questions this paper will be addressing is whether the level of control that a government has over its pro-government militias affects the level of violence by these pro-government militias after the government dissipates. My research would utilize the typology of informal and semi-official militias, and the alternative of community driven groups and state-orchestrated ones. It will examine whether the informal or semi-official status of a group makes a difference in the violence levels today by playing a role in the afterlives of its members and their dispersal through society. This research would add a new element to the literature of control for pro-government militias while simultaneously providing answers to some of the questions posed. By examining whether the groups are funded from a single central source or from multiple sources and linking this funding to how much control the government has over these groups we add another explanation to why the informal groups are so much harder to control than the semi-official groups. This explanation of multiple sources of funding for these militias coincides with the explanation that informal militias generally have secret agendas that may not align with that of the government that they support. This would also provide an explanation for the seemingly inexplicable after life of these groups. Their survival may depend on subsidies from other institutions such as political parties and domestic or foreign governments (Carey and Mitchell 2017). When the government they are in support of no longer holds power nor funding, the informal groups can continue to exist and operate with the funding of other sources along with new objectives that may lead to violence. While this behavior has an increased likelihood for informal militias, it is possible that semi-official militias exhibit it as well. It is also possible that informal militias, although more susceptible to this behavior, may not exhibit it at all. This leads me to form my first hypothesis;

that pro-government militias that are formed and controlled by a single government will survive for a shorter duration than pro-government militias that are created and controlled by multiple sources. My second hypothesis is that countries with more pro-government militias not controlled solely by the government will be more violent today. My research aims to explore these possibilities and make connections to countries current levels of violence. It also aims at exploring other questions and possibilities such as whether the informal or semi-official status of a group matters when they are receiving funding from other sources. By examining the militias sources of funding rather than solely focusing on their relationship with the government, a clearer connection can be made to the actions and survival of these groups after the government dissipates.

The varying levels of violence experienced by countries can be attributed to the varying level of control each country had over these pro-government militias. When militias were solely controlled and held more accountable by a country's government, these countries experienced less violence after the governments and groups officially dissipated. When militias had multiple sources of control besides a country's government and were held loosely accountable, these countries experienced more violence after the governments and groups officially dissipated. These sources of control include foreign governments, political leaders, churches, or even illicit organizations such as gangs or cartels. A pro-government militia is more likely to have multiple sources of control when it has an informal relationship with the government compared to one that has a semi-official one as there are no official links or loyalties. This relationship also has implications for the afterlife, or post-regime fate, of the group. I expect that groups with multiple sources of control will see its members disperse into society with loyalties and employment still intact to these other sources once the military government is no longer in power. I believe this

dispersal and post-regime employment is a key factor in the violence we see today. Meanwhile I expect that groups only being controlled by the military government will see its members quietly disperse into society. As loyalties to the regime are no longer justified once that regime no longer officially exists, less post-regime violence will be exhibited by these members. This assertion dives deeper into the literature of pro-government militias. It encompasses the militias status with the government and society, its likelihood of goal variance, the varying levels of control, what effects the afterlives of these militias, the effect military rule had on these groups, and whether these variables come together to influence violence today. The findings from this research will contribute a new explanation in the literature of control on what exactly affects the afterlives of the pro government militias themselves and how they subsequently affect the civilian population. It will also contribute a method of analysis for predicting whether these militias will exhibit violent behavior in other countries after regime change.

## ANALYSIS

In conducting the analysis for my research, I decided to employ a qualitative comparison between two countries. To evaluate my hypothesis, I will be looking at former military regimes, and the pro-government militias that they used to stay in power. I will be looking at two case studies, both of which were military regimes that used pro-government militias, but which experience very different levels of violence today. The countries that I chose to be case studies are Argentina and El Salvador. I chose these cases because of the contrasting realities that these countries experience today. Argentina experiences relatively low violence today whereas El Salvador experiences relatively high violence, this is despite both countries employing and experiencing similar histories of violence with pro government militias and military regimes. I will be closely evaluating the violence perpetrated by the pro-government militias in these countries, committed on behalf of the government. To measure the violence level, I will analyze country murder rate data for my cases from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. In addition, I will be closely examining and researching whether these pro-government militias had outside sources of funding or were in pursuit of alternative goals that did not coincide with that of their governments. Using the most similar cases method for the countries I chose; I will compare not only the afterlives of the groups in question but also the groups' actions during their employment with the government. Specifically, I will examine whether the groups only acted to achieve goals aligned with that of the governments', or if they acted to pursue their own goals as well. I will examine the link between pro-government militias and government in these cases and gather more information on the acts and afterlives of these groups. After determining these variables, I will examine these militias relations to military regimes and the effects that the military regimes had on these groups. I expect

that countries with pro-government militias whose goals are not only aligned with the governments will experience more post-regime violence compared to those whose goals are only aligned with the governments.

I chose Argentina and El Salvador as case studies because of their similar history yet contrasting reality today. While El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in the world with an average homicide rate of 56.79 homicides per 100,000 people, Argentina's average homicide rate is 7.02 (UNODC 2015). This sharp contrast is puzzling due to their similar internal historical conditions. Both cases had military governments spanning the late 1970s to the early 1980s (Geddes et al. 2014). The governments in each case also employed informal pro-government militias, that is, these militias had no formally established link to the government. Although all these variables are similar, the effects that they had on each country are different, this can be seen via the plot for each country's homicide rates below spanning from 1993-2017.

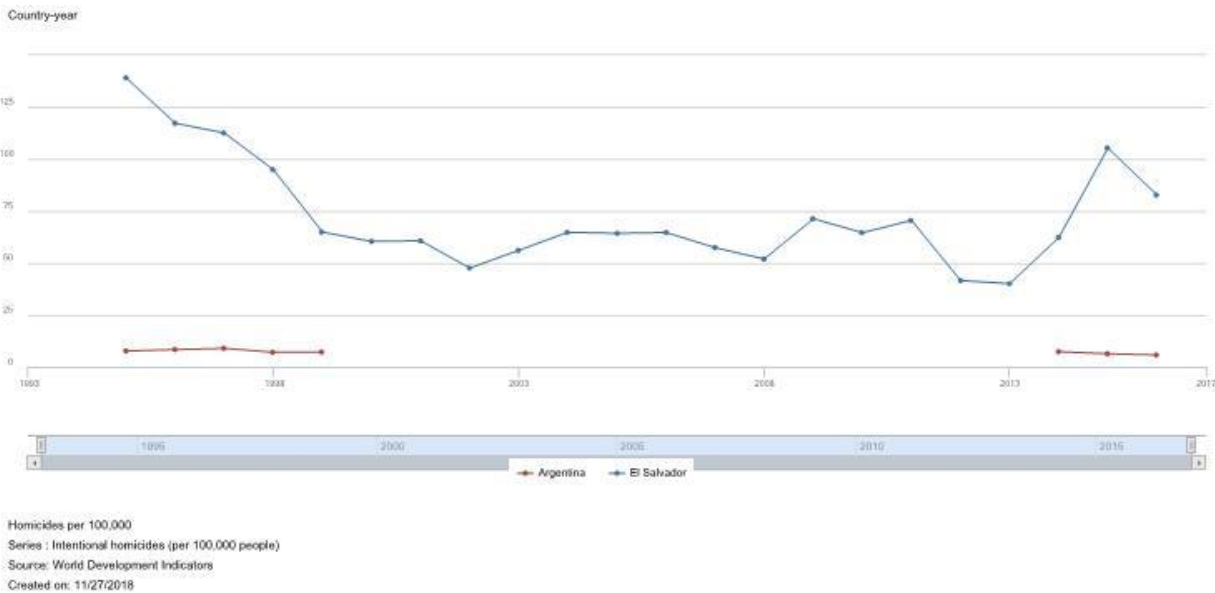


Figure 1: Country Homicide Rates for Argentina and El Salvador 1993-2017



It can be argued that other factors exist that affect this variation in violence we see today. Such factors are El Salvador's role in the drug trade, the trans-national war that was taking place during the same time period, the influence of foreign governments in counterinsurgency training as well as institutional variation in the democratization in both countries. While these factors may have had partial effects on the level of violence we see today; I believe that the military governments use of pro-government militias had a more profound role in the dispersal of violence throughout society once these regimes fell. I argue that this drastic variation can be partially attributed to the level of control that each government had on their respective militias as well as the fate of the militias and their member after the dictatorships fell. In Argentina, when the military junta was established in 1976, multiple death squads known as "working groups" were set up by the government to wipe out opposition (Schneider 2000). This was done under the guise of restoring order and eliminating violence from the Argentine state, which had recently seen leftist guerillas fighting right-wing militias. Once the military junta was established, the military had complete control over the society which had longed for peace, and in doing so allowed the junta the power to take any military actions which it deemed necessary for national security (Schneider 2000). This included the forced disappearances and deaths of opposition. While this pro-government militia was an informal one, because it had no official or formal ties to the government made public, it only had one source of control. The military regime was the single source of control for these working groups, as they consisted of police, military personnel and right-wing death squads (Carey et al. 2013). This case is unique in that while it only has a single source of control and violence levels in the country are relatively low today, it runs counter to the argument that militarized police forces lead to violence after military regimes democratize (Frantz 2018). This

leads me to believe there is another factor influencing the behavior of these groups after the regime that supports them changes. One assumption I make between the cases that explains the difference in violence today is the nature of each military regime. While Argentina had a complete military junta that controlled all aspects of politics and repression; El Salvador had a civilian-military government that received exorbitant amounts of funding from the U.S. This may have created a new dynamic for orders between the government and its institutions and militias where goals varied for the government itself.

The pro-government militias in El Salvador are a direct contrast to those in Argentina. The militias that began in El Salvador were developed as solutions to subversion in the country. These death squads were the results of meetings between Central American ministers of the interior, the U.S. State Department and assistance from the CIA and other U.S. institutions (Sanford 2003). Aiding in the fight against communism, the Reagan Administration drew a theoretical line in El Salvador where Communism would not cross eventually forming policy to strengthen armies across the region which led to cooperation among the military regimes in power in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This line became the backbone for these countries to violently repress leftist movements. During this time, El Salvador's military, death squads and civil defense forces were responsible for 95% of human rights violations found during the U.S. backed war (Sanford 2003). In recruiting for these groups, costs were kept down by recruiting based on political dispositions. This recruitment method would have allowed opportunists and extremists to join with relative ease. As an informal group with funding and support from both a foreign and local government, there is a higher likelihood of goal variance at both the agency level of delegation as well as the internal level of delegation. At the agency level, the U.S. was backing the Salvadoran

government to fight a war against leftist insurgents. Simultaneously, the Salvadoran government was delegating security tasks to death squads and paramilitaries that were created explicitly for counterinsurgency (Sanford 2003). These counterinsurgency forces would then delegate tasks internally among members. At this point it would be difficult to pin-point the principal and the agent for human rights abuses committed as individuals could be acting on behalf of the government or for personal gain. There are also accounts of private and semi-official groups acting independently and joining with other squads (Betancur et al. 1993). This highlights the complexity of one of the many issues with delegating security tasks to informal pro-government militias. In addition, there was covert funding from the U.S. government for upwards of \$200 million (Sanford 2003). The variables of El Salvador's history with pro-government militias correlates with the violence after regime change. It also coincides with the literature on informal pro-government militias likelihood of high goal variance, and low ability to be controlled by the government. Since the groups have been officially disbanded, there are still reports that these death squads still operate within the country with members including civilian and military officials (Betancur et al, 1993). This still leaves questions as to how these groups survive after regime transitions, especially democratization. One assumption is that because of the covert and informal nature of these groups, many officials who were in charge were not known and cannot be convicted of any crimes and thus transition to the next government and continue operating for personal gain.

#### CASE STUDY: ARGENTINA

Argentina's two main pro-government militias were the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (AAA) and military Battalion 601. The Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A) was used as

banner in which death squads organized under. Death squads under this alliance were coordinated by the federal police (Schneider 2000). At the time, Lopez Rega, headed the Triple A, the ministry of social welfare and Argentina's security forces. The Triple A operated with his tacit consent to step up repression tactics in 1975 (Pion-berlin 1983). Many police officers and members of the military were lined to the Triple A yet because of amnesty laws many retained their positions and often sought promotions or continued operating in paramilitaries. This is seen in a wave of anti-Semitic attacks that occurred in the early 1990's which were linked to paramilitary bases and operatives who previously served as army intelligence officers (McSherry 1997). Some of the greatest revelations of the afterlives of this group were during the transition to democracy where political intelligence operations and autonomous "mafias" survived the fall of the military junta. There are numerous intelligence agencies that operate within the military without civilian control or oversight and thousands of retired military, intelligence and security officers that are employed by private security companies (McSherry 1997). Many of these officers engaged in dirty war repression tactics but were pardoned due to laws created during the tenures of Alfonsin and Menem. Many of these laws were created to pardon most of the security forces whose participation in the dirty war was limited; and to punish the more notorious offenders and those in charge. However, this law allowed many to slip through the cracks. According to government sources, active duty officers who were active during the dirty war were linked to private security agencies with links to the government (McSherry 1997). The military was as heavily involved in the dirty war as the Triple A, retired navy officer Adolfo Scilingo publicly admitted participating in the dirty war and implicated many of the admirals in the navy had not only participated but been promoted as well (McSherry 1997). In his account he detailed missions in which the military would

strip prisoners and throw them off planes into the Atlantic Ocean (Hodges 1991). The most common form of participation was kidnapping and torturing which became known as the “sucking up” process. This process targeted subversives which were then kidnapped along with anyone close to them at the time of their abduction, even if they had no relation to subversive groups, the slightest hint of affiliation resulted in being sucked up. This led to the unrelenting torture and death of many civilians whom were suspected and found guilty by association. This “sucking up” process was executed by small task forces of heavily armed men from several sources such as the military, police and criminal entities (Lewis 2002). The military operated with the full support of the federal police throughout Argentina, most notorious of the police chiefs was General Ramon Camps. Camps was chief of police and in charge of units covering Buenos Aires, later earning the moniker “The Butcher of Buenos Aires” he was responsible for the repression in that area from 1976 to 1978 (Hodges 1991). Some of the navy’s first groups were composed of officers, and retired navy and police personnel who were coordinated through a chief officer who reported directly to Admiral Massera. In the Army the Third Army Corps and Battalion 601 were primarily responsible for human rights abuses. The “Comando de Libertadores de America” was a private death squad who had direct ties to the army’s Third Corps and were responsible for many of the abductions and torture prior to 1976 (Brennan & Ferreyra 2018). Battalion 601 primarily dealt with the kidnapping and tortures of suspected subversives. While the actual battalion was composed of soldiers, the task forces were often comprised of men on loan from the police or intelligence agencies and headed by army officers. These tasks forces would use former AAA members and criminals in return for leniency for their sentences (Lewis 2002). The task forces were structured

so that everyone had a specific task; some would kidnap, others would torture, and others would collect and keep records and information (Lewis 2002).

Military Battalion 601 was a specialized military intelligence service set up in the late 1970's and active during the Dirty War and operation Condor who disbanded in 2000. This group was directly under the control of Leopoldo Galtieri, the Leader of the Military Junta. Unclassified documents show the reporting and command structure of Battalion 601 naming Galtieri as the commander in chief which they report to (The National Security Archive 1980). The officer who presided over Battalion 601 was Colonel Mucio. Although he did not rule them, his position was to make decisions yet is said to have found it difficult, resulting in his subordinates operating with more freedom over their own actions leaving Mucio to just accept their actions and decisions (The National Security Archive 1980). This freedom was not limited to Mucio but is a result of how the chain of command was structured. The chain of command for the military Junta was vested between the air force, navy, and army; all of which operated in different regions and coordinated with local police. This structure spanned the entire country the units who oversaw these regions gave subunits responsibility for security zones, and these subunits gave further and more centralized authority to sub-subunits. Each commanding officer of a security zone determined how to root out subversion and had much discretion in doing so (Lewis 2002). This decentralization and autonomy gave power to junior officers and their subordinates who no one could tell whose instructions they were operating under. During the peak years of 1975-1978 the policy of the armed forces was to ensure that most of the officer corps participated in anti-subversive operations. This was to prevent the emergence of an elite body of soldiers with combat experience and to compromise the entire institution in the methods that the leadership recognized may be questioned

(The National Security Archive 1984). There would be no goal variance with this battalion, as their orders would be given by the head of government Galtieri, however because of poor oversight the soldiers were free to complete their orders to any extent with which they deemed necessary which may have led to more casualties. After the fall of Galtieri's regime, Raul Alfonsin took control as the first democratically elected president who now had to reconcile the relationship with the military incorporating them into their standard security role and prevent any more coups from happening. Alfonsin avoided disenfranchising the military through limiting the budget cuts facing the military, reorganizing its structure and punishing only the most corrupt and egregious violators of human rights throughout the past regime (The National Security Archive 1984). This included Battalion 601 which was disbanded in 2000. These compromises allowed for the military to begin the process of slowly falling under civilian control again. By only punishing the most corrupt human rights violators, the government allowed for most officers and personnel to remain in employment if their roles were minimal; avoiding the catastrophe of mass retirements and disenfranchisement of highly trained soldiers. This punishment was a result of a lengthy set of trials of the former Junta generals, admirals, and air force brigadiers responsible. All three branches of the military; Army, Navy and Air Force, had been implicated in the dirty war. Each having colluded with pro-government militias to root out subversion; each having to account for criminal behavior (Hodges 1991).

Both pro-government militias were primarily composed of members from various security or intelligence apparatuses acting on their own discretion from orders from high ranking members of the military juntas. The perpetrators of violence were the three branches of the military, the police, union thugs, and paramilitary organizations with clandestine links to the government.

Namely pro-government militias such as death squads operating under minister Jose Lopez Rega and the AAA (Brennan & Ferreyra 2018). This was confirmed when of 159 alleged members of the Triple A, 66 were proven to be members of the Argentine security apparatus. Of those 66, 5 continued in the armed forces, 43 in the police, and 4 went to work for security forces (Moyano 1995). After the democratic governments of Alfonsin and Menem tried to retain most of the military and only punish those members heavily involved in the dirty war, many officers either stayed in the military or retired and joined private security apparatuses. Those private security apparatuses retained substantial links with the government. Officers and members who stayed in the military and police forces eventually rose through the ranks to higher positions. We see decreased levels in violence today due to these PGM's being officially disbanded and because most of the officers involved in the dirty war were loyal to the military and their superiors rather than the regime itself. Those who stayed in the military and security forces did so to continue their support, those who left to join private security forces continue to do such work as well. With military and civilian government relations improving throughout the years we have seen a decrease in "subversive" elements within society, decreasing the need for mobilization of these forces.

#### CASE STUDY: EL SALVADOR

During the 1980's there were at least 8 paramilitary death squads that operated at once with an estimated 80,000 supporters (Mazzei 2009). The pro-government militias in El Salvador were organized under two categories. The first being the Civil Defense Patrols and the second being Death Squads that operated under military control. After the 1979 coup the paramilitary death squads of the military, including the various security services - The National Guard, Treasury



Police and National Police - remained intact under the control of high-level officials in the Civilian-military Junta's army and continued to target leftist sympathizers and civilians during the civil war (Carey and Mitchell 2014). The Civil Defense Patrols were Village based civil patrols were set up by the Salvadorian army to inform on guerrilla movements in the countryside during the civil war from 1980-1992. Civilians were recruited and sometimes armed by the military. Many had been former members of Orden, a paramilitary network disbanded after the 1979 coup that brought the civil-military junta to power (Carey and Mitchell 2014). ORDEN (National Democratic Organization) was a rural paramilitary force that based its framework for most of the death squads in El Salvador and operated on the doctrine of interpenetration and close control of the system by the regular army (Sanford 2003). It essentially was a nationwide network of informants that acted like a spider web to stop subversives. At the lowest level's peasants acted as grass root informants to the military who would then pass information up to their superiors and act against subversives (Mazzei 2009). ORDEN quickly became a powerful organization and evolved into the backbone of the country's death squads. Even though there were no laws, regulations, or paper trails about the creation of ORDEN, the official chain of command linked the organization to the state, specifically the president (Mazzei 2009). For the death squads and paramilitaries, cooperation was not an issue as there was membership overlap between the military and these groups and was the most common feature. So common that these groups were primarily military personnel working off duty or illegally, and so well known that the president in 1984 called for the registration of several senior officers (Mazzei 2009). It was concluded that death squad personnel overlapped within the military as well as across various other security services such as the national police, treasury police and civilian patrols and that they operated in plain clothes under the orders

of superior officers (Mazzei 2009). They all fell under the military and even though they didn't have one central leader, they were all directed and connected by the military connections they had. These death squads were not the only means for repression by the government, they also used immediate reaction battalions, most notoriously, the Atlacatl Battalion. These battalions were created in 1981 and trained by US advisors, they were specialized in anti-guerilla warfare and were responsible for some of the worst violence against civilians including the El Mozote massacre.

Death squads were and still are prevalent in Salvadorian society. They can be traced back to the wealthy land owners who hired private militias to protect their haciendas. Even prior to the military government in El Salvador the government and military were already being converged. Prior to the consolidation of the armed forces by the state, a national police force had already been formed to protect the domains of large landowners responsible for agricultural exports (Kincaid 2000). In the 1940's the national police force had been transferred to the military controlled defense ministries, putting military officers in senior positions of the police (Kincaid 2000). It was not until later that a national guard was established (Mazzei 2009). However even after they were established, civic patrols were created which were comprised of citizens instead of military officers and were unrestrained when it came to protection. These civic patrols and private militias have historical roots in El Salvador, with the strong relationships to landowners being just one group that had control over them; so much so that many times national guard posts were set up on private haciendas (Mazzei 2009). While currently ORDEN has been disbanded, the structure remained intact and its personnel simply integrated into other security units that became army-run militias that provided local security to villages (Campbell and Brenner 2000). Currently these death squads operate for pay, as a new market has emerged for private security (Kincaid 2000). This private

security is where a majority of disenfranchised military and police have ended up after the military and police purge that occurred after the peace agreements were signed (Call 2003).

The doctrine of repression by the Junta in El Salvador was very similar to that of Argentina, whose goal was to root out subversives by any means and rely on repression as a means of control for the population (Mason and Krane 1989). Like Argentina's Trial of the Junta's, Salvadoran Trials took place, specifically carried out by the UN Human Rights Commission on the Truth. The commission recommended the dismissal of those who were in positions of authority such as military officers, public officials, and judges that were specifically named (Ensalaco 1994). This commission estimated that the military and paramilitary death squads were responsible for 95 percent of the human rights abuses committed between 1980 and 1992 (Call 2003). With these findings, the report also publicly announced the names of those it found to participated in these abuses, effectively ending their careers (Call 2003). Most changes occurred after the peace agreements in 1992. These changes saw a transformation of the doctrine for the military which was now to respect human rights and subordination to civilian authority. In addition, numerous security forces were dissolved such as the National Guard and National Police as well as the disbandment of the Immediate reaction Battalions and civil defense patrols. The largest change was the reduction of the size of the armed forces from 63,000 to 31,000 (Kincaid 2000). While El Salvador has succeeded in eliminating the military from its police forces, another problem has been created. A privatization has occurred in the realm of security, a security market has been created where varying degrees of security can be purchased (Kincaid 2000). Loosely regulated private security firms saw a rise in number from less than ten in 1992, to over 250 in 2001 exhibiting a similar skyrocket in the number of agents working for these companies (Call 2003).

This new market has been attributed to multiple factors including the widespread circulation of black-market military arms, as well as the demobilization of combatants with few good job prospects (Kincaid 2000). This market as well as the demobilization provide a very different scenario to that of Argentina where most who participated in the Dirty War and human rights abuses either were afforded to remain in their positions in the military or find other job prospects.

The violence we see today in El Salvador can be attributed to the existence of these pro-government militias that received foreign training in anti-guerilla tactics yet had multiple political and financial backers. Most of these pro-government militias were financed by right wing civilians as well as those who owned land as private security (Campbell and Brenner 2000). After the peace agreement was reached ending the civil war, reforms were made and about half of the military was purged. The disenfranchisement of these soldiers along with El Salvador's history of private security provided the conditions for a security market to flourish where the same soldiers who were in the military and participated in the civil war are now for hire by entities who are willing to pay them for protection whether it be the land owning elite, the government, or foreign interests such as drug cartels and gangs.

## CONCLUSION

Exploring the wide variation in violence we see today in Latin America, my research sought to uncover a potentially causal link between the level of control that military regimes in these countries had over pro-government militias and current levels of societal violence. I primarily examined the relationship between the government and these groups determining whether there was an informal or semi-official link. I believed that governments that held more control over their pro-government militias saw less post-regime violence than governments who held less control. With the level of control as the main variable in focus, I also examined the constitution of these groups as well as their afterlives.

I chose Argentina and El Salvador as my case studies as they were a representative sample of the variation in violence we currently see in Latin America, while retaining similar characteristics in their military governments use of PGMs as repressive tools in society. There were many similarities in the constitutions of these groups in both countries as well as the relationships they had with their governments. Group in both cases contained active members of the security forces as well as known criminal entities, in both cases most of the commands came from governmental entities and institutions and both cases saw much of their security apparatus implicated in human rights abuses. Where the cases begin to differ is in the level of control the governments had over these groups, specifically, whose orders they took and where the groups goals were aligned. In Argentina, all the orders came from commanding officers in the military or from governmental institutions, aligning the groups goals directly with that of the governments. In El Salvador, orders came from commanding officers in the military, but some groups also received

orders from private interests such as large landowners who held previous relationships with many members of these pro-government militias. This overlap between members taking orders from both private interests and the government diminished the level of control the government had over these groups. While this dynamic may have affected the levels of violence seen during the military regimes control, it is unlikely that it affected post-regime violence as I originally believed. To accurately assess these groups effect on post-regime violence, more detailed information is needed on the members post-regime activities once operations under their pro-government militias were officially terminated.

Ultimately, the results of my case studies did not uncover a causal link. It did, however, generate new insight on other potential variables that had previously been overlooked. Namely the severity of punishment that was dealt to the former military regimes during their respective post-war trials and the post-regime fates of these pro-government militias and their members. I believe future research exploring these areas may benefit the literature of pro-government militias and the literature on state and individual punishment in response to human rights abuses; determining the possible effect these variables may have on post regime dispersal of violence throughout society.

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