

***Political Violence in Latin America. A Cross-Case Comparison of the Urban Insurgency Campaigns of Montoneros, M-19, and FSLN in a Historical Perspective***

*Politiek Geweld in Latijns-Amerika. Een Cross-Case Vergelijking van de Stedelijke Opstandsbewegingen van Montoneros, M-19 en FSLN in Historisch Perspectief*

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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## *Preface*

This study, *Political Violence in Latin America—A Cross-Case Comparison of the Urban Insurgency Campaigns of the Montoneros, M-19 and the FSLN in a Historical Perspective*, is part of the larger research project “A History of Counterterrorism” under the direction of Dr. Isabelle Duyvesteyn at Utrecht University. A History of Counterterrorism compares processes of political violence based on empirical case studies of Asian and Latin American domestic conflicts, and on secondary literature about a variety of case studies from Africa, Europe and North America. The project’s global scope provides a thorough analysis of the complex dynamics of political violence in internal conflicts and offers new insights into the processes of escalation and de-escalation of political violence in irregular warfare. My study contributes to this global project by focusing on empirically-based Latin American case studies.

The investigation was initially aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of counter-insurgent measures that states have at their disposal. Evaluating the effectiveness of counter-insurgent measures, though, imposed a state-centered vision on internal conflicts. Furthermore, evidence from the case studies indicated that the states were central to the problem rather than providing the solution. Given these circumstances, and particularly the evidence presented by the Latin American case studies, it was clear the state needed to be included as a central actor in the internal political violence. Consequently, the outline of the project had to be readjusted. Its focus shifted from evaluating the effectiveness of state measures to reconstructing the development of internal conflicts from beginning to end, paying special attention to the often disregarded middle phase of the conflicts. This shift of focus was necessary to examine the processes of political violence, i.e. the causal chain that explains the escalation and de-escalation of political violence in internal conflicts at different moments in time. Examining the specific conflict developments and their causes also required the investigation to explore the interaction between the parties in conflict. This introduced great dynamism into the work and helped the project to overcome its initial, state-centered and static view of internal conflicts.

## PREFACE

The study is primarily based on empirical material collected in field research in Argentina, Colombia and Nicaragua in 2009 and 2010. While gathering the empirical material, particularly when conducting interviews with former insurgents, I found it necessary to reconsider the terminology used in this study. The analytical concept of “terrorism” that is part of the framework in which this research project was undertaken (see Chapter One), provoked objections and discussions. Generally speaking, the term terrorism has negative connotations and is often used to discredit acts and actors. Therefore, I opted to use the politically neutral term “political violence” which circumvents such objections. Similarly, I have avoided labeling the actors insofar as possible. This allowed me to look exclusively at the processes of escalation and de-escalation of politically motivated violence.

At the same time, my field research unveiled the complex reality of the internal conflicts. Surprising details and unexpected viewpoints challenged preconceived categories and expectations. In this way, the empirical research required me to rethink causal chains and to provide new explanations for how the conflict developed.

Unless otherwise indicated, citations from the original empirical material are my own translations from the Spanish. Maintaining the central idea and staying close to the original text was often a challenge. I apologize for any linguistic tensions or awkward translations that may have resulted.

Intermediate results of the study have been presented on several occasions: at the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society in 2009, and, in 2010, at Andes University in Bogotá, at the Expert Workshop on Irregular War in Utrecht, and at the European University Institute, to name a few. The work strongly benefited from expert comments and suggestions, and from being embedded in a broader research project, particularly because this sparked off frequent discussions and constructive criticism from the other project members, my dear colleagues, Dr. Isabelle Duyvesteyn, Alistair Reed and Bart Schuurman.

## *Acknowledgement*

The elaboration of the present study *Political Violence in Latin America: A Cross Case Comparison of the Urban Insurgency Campaigns of Montoneros, M-19, and FSLN in a Historical Perspective* would have been impossible without the significant support that I have received from diverse institutions, colleagues, friends and my family. I want to thank all those who have accompanied me in these past years and helped me to complete this study.

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to Utrecht University and the OGC in particular for having afforded me the opportunity to carry out the investigation and for having supported me institutionally where possible. I would like to thank especially Prof. Duco Hellema and Prof. Bob de Graaff for their constructive support in the elaboration of the study and their always open doors for solving problems and easing doubts.

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I also want to thank my friends in Europe, Latin America and the rest of the world. Your friendship was the best support I had in these years. You made me feel at home wherever I went. It is simply great counting on you—even at distance. Thank you for this great time!

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## *Nederlandse samenvatting*

### **Schets van de studie**

Het huidige onderzoek heeft als doel om processen van escalatie en de-escalatie van politiek geweld in interne conflicten in Latijns-Amerika te reconstrueren en onderzoeken. Data van de studie zijn afkomstig van drie interne conflicten en richten zich op de voornaamste verzetsbewegingen, namelijk de Argentijnse *Montoneros*, de Colombiaanse Beweging 19 April (M-19) en het *National Liberation Front* uit Nicaragua (FSLN). Empirische data zijn verzameld door middel van veldwerk in de betreffende staten en bevatten interviews met vroegere verzetsstrijders en archiefmateriaal zoals publicaties uitgegeven door verzetsbewegingen of individuele opstandelingen, nationale kranten en toegankelijke overheidsdocumenten.

De drie verzetscampagnes vonden plaats op verschillende manieren. Dit maakte het mogelijk om de complete historische processen te onderzoeken die de specifieke conflictontwikkeling en-beëindiging verklaren. Bovendien maakte de case selectie het mogelijk om het belang te evalueren van verschillende regime-types voor conflictontwikkeling. Het maakte het in het bijzonder mogelijk om de logica van verzetsstrijd in een stedelijke omgeving inzichtelijk te maken.

In vergelijking met de gangbare focus van conflictonderzoek richt de huidige studie zich vooral op de middenfase van interne conflicten. Zij kijkt vooral naar de interacties tussen de centrale conflict-actoren, en naar de processen die de specifieke ontwikkeling van interne conflicten en de daarmee gepaard gaande geweldsniveaus verklaren.

De studie is verdeeld in vijf hoofdstukken. Het introductie hoofdstuk begint met een verheldering van centrale concepten en met een theoretische discussie over processen van politiek geweld. Verder verkent het de nationale en internationale historische context van de vele interne Latijns-Amerikaanse conflicten. Dit hoofdstuk eindigt met een overzicht van Latijns-Amerikaanse conflicten en wijst op trends in het gebruik, en het effect van, politiek

geweld. De volgende drie hoofdstukken bevatten de drie empirische case studies. De Argentijnse case study wordt als eerste besproken gevolgd door de Colombiaanse case study en de case study van Nicaragua. Het vijfde en laatste hoofdstuk van de studie bestaat uit een grondige vergelijking van de drie case studies. Centrale bevindingen worden bediscussieerd en redenen voor gelijke en verschillende ontwikkelingen worden uitgelicht. Een conclusie sluit het hoofdstuk en de studie af.

### Theoretisch raamwerk

Theoretisch is de studie gebaseerd op het analytisch concept van terrorisme en op een triangulair model van intern conflict dat sterk gerelateerd is aan *social movement theory*. Het onderzoek beperkt het gebruik van *social movement theory* echter om de analyse vorm te geven en maakt het geen onderwerp van onderzoek op zichzelf.

Isabelle Duyvesteyn en Mario Fumerton (2009) definiëren terrorisme als een strategie van irreguliere oorlogsvoering met eigen kenmerken die afwijken van gewapende opstand. De twee strategieën verschillen in hun strategisch einddoel en daardoor in hun organisationele aspecten en in hun relatie met de maatschappij. Terwijl insurgency als doel heeft politieke controle te krijgen over bevolking en daarna over een territorium, heeft de strategie van terrorisme als doel politieke verandering te forceren zonder noodzakelijkerwijs territorium en bevolking te beheersen en controleren.

Echter, terrorisme geeft ook een tactiek weer binnen de strategie van gewapende opstand (Duyvesteyn 2006). Een terroristische activiteit wordt begrepen als een politiek gemotiveerde gewelddadige activiteit, of dreiging daarvan, welke als doel heeft een groter sociaal publiek te bereiken dan het directe subject van de gewelddadige activiteit. Een terroristische activiteit kan daarom worden uitgevoerd door elke gewelddadige actor met politieke doeleinden inclusief de staat. In deze studie is het gebruik van terrorisme het voornaamste selectiecriteria voor de bestudering van politiek geweld.

In toevoeging op het analytisch concept van terrorisme stelt het onderzoek een triangulair model van interactie voor om de dynamiek inzichtelijk te maken waarbinnen politiek geweld zich ontwikkelt tot interne conflicten met een sociaal revolutionair karakter. Politiek geweld in sociaal-revolutionaire conflicten is grotendeels het product van triangulaire interactie tussen staat, verzetsbewegingen en *civil society*, of “social audience” (Oberschall 2004:29). Binnen deze triangulaire interactie speelt de *social audience* een bepalende rol voor de ontwikkeling en uitkomst van conflicten (Mack 1974; Ross & Gurr 1989; Goodwin 1994; Mesquita 2005). Maar deze rol maakt van de *social audience* een centraal doelwit van

staat en *insurgent activities*, aangezien beide gewelddadige actoren het gedrag van de sociale omgeving proberen te bepalen op grond van hun einddoelen.

Samenvattend geeft de studie aan dat politiek geweld grotendeels het product is van dwingende invloeden van de staat en verzetsbewegingen op de *social audience*, terwijl de ontwikkeling van het conflict afhangt van de positie die de *social audience* inneemt ten opzichte van de interne strijd.

### **De empirische case studies**

De gedetailleerde historische beschrijving en analyse van de drie case studies vormt het hoofdonderdeel van deze dissertatie. Beschrijvingen van de case studies zijn gestructureerd op eenzelfde manier. Een tijdslijn en een historisch overzicht van de hele conflictperiode introduceert de cases en geven de achtergrond weer waartegen de interne conflicten zich ontwikkelden. Daarna richten de case studies zich op de ontwikkeling van politiek geweld door apart aandacht te geven aan de activiteiten van de opstandelingen en die van de staat en hun bijdragen aan de strijd. Deze benadering maakte het mogelijk om de logica en behoeften van de campagnes van de strijdende partijen te verkennen en de belangrijkste redenen voor de specifieke manieren waarop ze acteerden te analyseren. Een vergelijkende samenvatting van de verantwoordelijkheden van zowel de opstandelingen als de staat voor de ontwikkeling van het conflict die het mogelijk maakt om zowel centrale condities voor de conflictontwikkeling te isoleren, als de dynamiek van het conflict in kaart te brengen, sluit elke case af.

Elke case study geeft een gedetailleerde visie op de processen van politiek geweld. Verschillen en overeenkomsten maakten het mogelijk de processen te specificeren in onderling vergelijk. Maar elke case study heeft ook een unieke geschiedenis en complexe context toegevoegd aan de algemene bevindingen. Daardoor geeft het Argentijnse conflict een voorbeeld van zowel de capaciteiten van verzetsbewegingen om verandering te brengen in een situatie van grote sociale polarisatie als de staatscapaciteiten om de oppositie te breken door systematisch staatsterrorisme. Bovendien maakt de case study het mogelijk om redenen weer te geven voor verschillende effecten van veranderende staatsrepressie en geweld gebruikt door opstandelingen.

De Colombiaanse case study toont zowel de moeilijkheden om oppositie te organiseren en samen te brengen, zelfs in tijden van onvrede over de heersende elites, als de mogelijkheid om interne conflicten op te lossen door onderhandelingen. Maar obstakels voor onderhandelingen zijn ook zichtbaar. Het geeft ook een goed voorbeeld van de complementaire rol die geweld en politiek spelen in het genereren van politieke verandering

in situaties waar legale politieke middelen ontbreken. De case van Nicaragua tenslotte is een voorbeeld van succesvolle formatie van een verzetsbeweging en van het organiseren van oppositie voor een revolutie. Bovendien toont deze case de negatieve effecten van langdurige politieke uitsluiting en de beperkingen van heerschappij gebaseerd op militaire macht.

### **Belangrijkste bevindingen**

Door de uitkomsten van de verschillende case studies te vergelijken was het uiteindelijk mogelijk geworden om de dynamiek van de verschillende conflicten te beschrijven en te generaliseren over processen van politiek geweld bij dergelijke intra-statelijke conflicten van sociaal-revolutionaire aard. Verschillende factoren konden worden aangewezen als bijzonder belangrijk voor de ontwikkeling van interne conflicten en bepalend voor de intensiteit van politiek geweld. Dit waren onder andere internationale invloeden op nationale conflicten en het gegeven dat de strijdende partijen publieke steun moesten behouden, alsook de organisatorische vorm van de verzetsbeweging en diens relatie met het maatschappelijk middenveld, het soort geweld dat de combattanten gebruikten en de mate waarin vreedzame methodes van conflictbemiddeling van toepassing waren.

Binnen het internationale kader van de Koude Oorlog werden binnenlandse spanningen in Latijns Amerika steeds verder geradicaliseerd en nam de wens om politiek geweld te gaan gebruiken alsmaar toe. Dit was niet alleen het geval binnen de drie bestuurde case studies, maar kon in de gehele regio worden waargenomen (Menjívar & Rodríguez 2005). De Cubaanse Revolutie vergrootte in omliggende staten zowel de angst voor het communisme als de hoop op maatschappelijke en politieke veranderingen. Amerikaanse bezorgdheid over revoluties in Latijns Amerika overtuigde de grootmacht van het belang om zijn regionale bondgenoten te steunen in diplomatieke, financiële en militaire zin, ongeacht de vaak zeer twijfelachtige reputaties van deze staten op het gebied van democratie en mensenrechten (Wickham-Crowley 1991; Booth & Walker 1989).

De conflicten die in dit proefschrift zijn beschreven ontwikkelden zich echter met name binnen een nationale context en waren sociaal-revolutionair van aard. In essentie ging het daarbij om onenigheden tussen elites die het voor hun zo gunstige politieke en economische status-quo wilden behouden en populaire bewegingen die grotere politieke inspraak eisten. Repressieve en ineffectieve regeringsvormen, van wat Daniel Pecaat "restricted democracies" (1989) noemt tot militaire bewinden en familie-dictaturen, bevorderden buitenparlementaire oppositie en protest in de drie bestudeerde case studies. Binnen een

dergelijke context leek gewapend verzet vaak de laatste mogelijkheid te bieden om politieke veranderingen teweeg te brengen.

Bovendien bepaalden de aard en doelen van de regimes grotendeels hun verhouding met de samenleving en de manieren waarop met oppositie kon worden omgegaan. Zo bleek het aanbieden van legale inspraak in politieke aangelegenheden onacceptabel voor dictatoriale en semi-democratische regimes. De manier waarop regimes met binnenlandse oppositie omgingen had een sterke invloed op de manier waarop het conflict zich ontwikkelde alsook het geweldsniveau. Uit het onderzoek is gebleken dat Latijns Amerikaanse regimes vaak bewust interne conflicten lieten escaleren om te voorkomen dat hun gezag en de status quo zouden worden bedreigd.

Opvallend was tevens het nauwe verband tussen uitingen van populair protest en gewelddadige verzetsactiviteiten. Verzetsstrijders hadden publieke steun nodig om veranderingen teweeg te brengen. Pogingen van de verzetsbewegingen om grote delen van de maatschappij tot protest en gewapend verzet te inspireren waren onderhevig aan mogelijkheden en risico's die in hoge mate in iedere case study terug te vinden waren. Vooral in stedelijke omgevingen werden de verzetsstrijders in hun bewegingsvrijheid beperkt. Als gevolg daarvan werden zogeheten "proxy" organisaties gebruikt als dekmantel, zoals studentenorganisaties of Christelijke bewegingen. Daarnaast ontdekten de verzetsbewegingen dat de mate waarin ze populaire steun voor hun doelen konden mobiliseren sterk verbeterd werd wanneer ze zich verbonden aan grass-roots organisaties. Waar verzetsbewegingen voor hun succes rekenden op het mobiliseren van grote delen van de bevolking werd het coördineren van dergelijke organisaties des te belangrijker. De casus van de FSLN in Nicaragua was het beste voorbeeld van hoe verschillende grass-roots organisaties tot één populair front konden worden samengevoegd tegen het dictatoriale Somoza regime.

Politiek geweld was het centrale thema van dit proefschrift. De manier waarop het werd toegepast bleek echter een grote invloed te hebben op de effecten die het sorteerde. Veelal bleek de overgang tot gewelddadig verzet niet de effecten teweeg te brengen waar de strijdende partijen op hadden gehoopt. Verzetsbewegingen die populaire steun moesten aanwakkeren om maatschappelijke of politieke veranderingen te bewerkstelligen gebruikten geweld als een middel om die steun te generen. Om geweld deze functie te laten uitoefenen moest het met enige terughoudendheid worden toegepast en moest het een duidelijke politieke boodschap uitdragen. De mate waarin er via de politieke weg mogelijkheden voor verandering bestonden had een grote invloed op de maatschappelijke acceptatie van gewapend verzet. Wanneer de opstandelingen unilateraal overgingen tot een escalatie van geweld had dit vaak tot gevolg dat hun politieke boodschap verloren ging waardoor de verzetsbeweging in maatschappelijk isolement terechtkwam en zo zichzelf een strategische

tegenslag bezorgde. Met andere woorden, het was met name de politieke boodschap die de opstandelingen uitdroegen en niet het geweld dat ze gebruikten dat de effectiviteit van gewapend verzet bepaalde.

Voor de regimes, daarentegen, was een eenzijdige escalatie van geweld vaak de geprefereerde manier om orde te bewaren omdat geweldloze alternatieven werden gezien als tekenen van zwakte. Repressief optreden van de staat wakkerde echter vaak meer protest aan dan dat het wist te beëindigen, een gegeven dat in alle drie de case studies naar voren komt. Brede en willekeurige repressie door de staat had vaak tot gevolg dat het protest ook radicaler en gewelddadiger werd. Daarbij richtten de regimes zich meestal op de zichtbare uitingen van protest zoals demonstraties, maar lieten ze de organisatorische capaciteit tot verder verzet intact. Protest en de repressie ervan leidden in dergelijke situaties tot een scherpe en algemene escalatie van geweld.

De clandestiene repressie van protest in de vorm van staatsterrorisme of paramilitair geweld bleek effectief als korte-termijn middel om protestbewegingen te breken, zoals de dictatuur in Argentinië en het voorbeeld van Colombia bewezen. Deze vorm van geweld genereerde het idee dat iedereen een potentieel slachtoffer was en de angst die dit veroorzaakte verstoortte de organisatorische capaciteiten van verzetsbewegingen en ontwrichtte zelfs het bredere politieke en sociale leven in deze staten. Echter, de effectiviteit van deze extreme vorm van geweld is op de langere termijn beperkt gebleken; in Colombia heeft het bijgedragen aan aanhoudende onveiligheid en conflict en in Argentinië heeft het, ondanks dat de overheid de opstandelingen wist te vernietigen, het regime van zijn legitimiteit ontdaan.

Geweldloze vormen van conflictbemiddeling, zoals verbeterde toegang tot het politieke systeem en onderhandelingen tussen de strijdende partijen, werden met name in de Colombiaanse casus geobserveerd. De effectiviteit van deze maatregelen werd voornamelijk bepaald door de mate waarin de onderhandelaars bereid waren om vreedzame alternatieven na te streven. Verzetsstrijders formuleerden vaak onrealistische eisen en op hun beurt committeerden de regimes zich vaak op slechts halfslachtige wijze aan de onderhandelingen. Hierdoor werd de effectiviteit van dergelijke geweldloze middelen ernstig beperkt.

### **Conclusie**

Een gebrek aan legale mogelijkheden om aan het politieke proces deel te nemen vormde de voornaamste motivatie voor protest en het tot stand komen van gewapende verzetsbewegingen in de bestudeerde cases. Repressief optreden van de staat, zowel openlijk als clandestien, vormde bovendien het leeuwendeel van politiek geweld in Latijns

Amerika en fungeerde als aanzet tot de radicalisering van protest. Hoewel de opstandelingen en de regimes waartegen ze stredden andere doelen nastreefden, waren de activiteiten van beide partijen erop gericht om het gedrag van een bepaalde maatschappelijke doelgroep te beïnvloeden. Het was de houding van dit publiek ten opzichte van de conflicten tussen oppositionele groeperingen en de staat die het verloop ervan bepaalde. In die zin overschaduwde de politieke boodschap van een gewelddadige handeling het directe effect ervan.

Uit dit onderzoek is tevens gebleken dat het voornamelijk regeringen zijn die de belangrijkste middelen voor het de-escaleren van sociaal-revolutionaire conflicten in handen hebben. Enige vorm van toegang tot het politieke systeem of ruimte voor discussie moeten geboden worden om de aantrekkingskracht van gewapende strijd als middel voor politieke veranderingen te ondermijnen. Wanneer slechts beperkte politieke of economische concessies worden gedaan aan de verzetsbewegingen om hen tot ontwapenen zonder dat er daarbij zicht op werkelijke maatschappelijke of politieke veranderingen wordt geboden, bestaat het risico dat het geloof in een vreedzame oplossing van het conflict verloren gaat. Staten doen er bovendien goed aan om niet te fel te reageren op maatschappelijk protest en zelfs geïsoleerde geweldsincidenten, maar om in plaats daarvan te zoeken naar mogelijkheden om de grieven van de protestbewegingen structureel aan te pakken. Het beëindigen van sociaal-revolutionaire conflicten is dus een eerste instantie een kwestie van het verbeteren van de mogelijkheden voor legitieme deelname aan het politieke systeem en als zodoende primair een taak van de staat.



## Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century a wave of violent political conflicts swept across nearly all Latin American states. Social revolutionary movements spread in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution. Insurgent attacks as well as military interventions and harsh state repression of internal challengers (Solimano 2004) dominated Latin America's politics between the 1960s and the early 1990s, when criminal violence became the region's main security concern (Kruijt 2002; Koonings & Kruijt 1999). High levels of violence that ranged from systematic state terrorism to open civil war caused hundreds of thousands of deaths.

However, important differences between Latin American conflicts can be observed. Internal conflicts developed differently, the levels of violence varied significantly between states and over time, and the outcomes of the struggles included insurgent defeat, negotiated political reform and even revolution. A first wave of weak and short-lived rural insurgencies in the 1960s was followed by relatively strong urban guerrilla challenges in the southern cone. Then a second wave of rural insurgencies developed in the 1970s and violent conflicts took hold of Central America, Colombia and Peru in the 1980s (Wickham-Crowley 1992). Harsh state repression crushed many of Latin America's insurgent groups, but often such an approach only strengthened opposition forces and radicalized protest, and, thus, essentially contributed to the escalation of internal conflicts (Ross & Gurr 1989; della Porta 1995a; Goodwin 1994; Worchel et al. 1974). Hence, while state terrorism ended the southern cone's urban guerrilla movements and silenced voices of opposition, similarly repressive approaches caused civil wars in the second wave's conflicts and even triggered a revolution in Nicaragua. Eventually it proved to be negotiation and the opening of political opportunities to the opposition, and not mere force, that succeeded in de-escalating these conflicts. This study is an attempt to contribute to the clarification of the conditions and processes that account for the different conflict developments and endings, as well as for the changing levels of political violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature on Latin American conflicts highlights the importance of the Cold War and especially of US interference in Latin American internal issues to explain the development and ending of the struggles (Weitz 1986; Dinges 2004; McClintock 1998; Joes 1996; Dominguez 1986; Gill 2004; McSherry 2005; Menjivar & Rodriguez 2005). The Cold War, however, was not the source of internal conflicts. Nonetheless, it did have an important influence on how social tensions were perceived and it contributed to their radicalization. The Cuban revolution alerted Latin American elites and the US to the possibility of unwanted regime changes even in its sphere of exclusive influence (DeFronzo 2007; Roniger 2010) and put the growing social claims for change at the center of national and hemispheric security concerns (Roca 1984). Elite fears of reform and exaggerated US fears of communism favored especially repressive state responses to internal challengers, regardless of the nature and aims of the challenges (Esparza 2010; Roniger 2010; Calveiro 2005b). The international bias of the bipolar frame denied recognition of the particularity of the national social tensions and subsumed them under the international dispute (Horowitz 1968; Mercier Vega 1969).

However, Latin America's internal conflicts were of a socio-revolutionary nature (Art & Richardson 2007; Abbin 1989)<sup>1</sup> and developed mainly on a national level. Massive social protest called for socio-economic and political changes from below; armed opponents pursued structural changes by force; and state authorities resorted to coercion and even to state terrorism to counter internal challengers and to defend the status quo. Political violence in Latin America, in other words, might have been framed by important international conditions, but it largely manifested itself in the interaction between national actors. To understand the development of political violence in Latin America, we have to bring the national conflict situation back into the analysis. This, however, does not downgrade the importance of the international frame, but shifts the research focus away from external influences and towards the interaction between the active parties to the conflict and, thus, to the processes that account for changing levels of political violence and explain the development of conflicts on the national level.

Social movement theory, which developed over the mass social protests and challenges to the established order of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Europe, offers an interesting framework for approaching internal conflicts (Peterson 1989; della Porta & Diani 2006; Goodwin & Jaspers 2009; Weissmann 2008; Tilly 1977). The early research efforts can be clearly divided into American and European approaches, focusing respectively on the "mechanisms by which movements recruit participation", or resource mobilization, and the structural question of "how social problems are transformed into social movements." (Peterson 1989:419) The core questions of social movement research rest on the reasons

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<sup>1</sup> According to Robert J. Art & Louise Richardson (2007) we can differentiate between social revolutionary, ethno-nationalist and religious orientations of armed opposition organizations.

and conditions for social movement formation, the individual's motive for participation and organizational features, action, tactics and cycles of protest, and the change social movements brought about (della Porta & Diani 2006; Goodwin & Jaspers 2009). Different approaches to the study of social movements highlight their internal organization (Zald & Ash 1966), their political dimension (Tilly 1977; Tarrow 1994; Meyer & Minkoff 2004), and their framing capacities (Benford & Snow 2000). Also the question of "personal, collective and public identity" (Weissmann 2008:8) formation through social movements has come to the fore since the 1980s (Melucci 1989). All approaches agree that social movements are a central agent in social change and internal conflict. Research on internal conflicts, furthermore, focuses on protest cycles, protest tactics, state approaches to opposition rallies, and the rational cost-benefit calculation for social mobilization (della Porta 1995a; Tilly 1977; McAdam et al. 2001; Pierskala 2010; Olson 1994). However, only scant research has been done into the mechanisms that link social movements and even the social environment at large to the development of internal conflicts and the level of political violence. The Theory of Contention (McAdam et al. 2001) forms a notable exception to this lack of research. Yet it remains largely unexplored just how social movements and the broad social environment influenced the development of internal conflicts and, importantly, the level of violence.

Despite the diversity of internal conflicts in Latin America, the conflicts did not attract significant attention from social movement investigation until the 1980s when this research tradition tentatively started to produce analysis of the region's conflicts (Calderon & Jelin 1987; Seoane 2003). Although the social movement perspective became central to analysis of Latin America's social conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s, some examples of which would be the Movement of Those Without Land or the significant revulsion in Argentinean society in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, or the "new left" (Seoane 2003; Seoane 2006; Coletti 2003; Gándara 2003; Carrera & Cotarelo 2003; Rodriguez 2003; Giarracca et al. 2003; Rodriguez Garavito & Barrett 2004), few attempts were made to analyze the important and highly violent internal conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s by means of social movement theory. This is surprising if we consider the fact that the conflicts in Latin America were mainly internal struggles between those who held power and (radical) opposition movements, and that interstate conflicts in the region were rare. Ernesto Salas's analysis of the Montonero organization as a social movement is an exceptional approach in this respect (2007). A partial explanation for this neglect might be the fact that Latin American social movements and protest were largely labeled as insurgency and guerrilla movements by the governing regimes and by important international actors, such as the United States (Eckstein 2001).

Social movement research, furthermore, is mainly limited to a specific movement or state where it appeared (Trevizo 2006). There are few cross-national and cross-case comparisons of social movements in internal conflicts. Notable exceptions are Donatella della

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Porta's comparative work on "Social Movements, Political Violence and the State" (1995a) in Germany and Italy, and Jeff Goodwin's investigation "No other Way out." (2001) Detailed analysis and cross-case comparisons of social movements still seem to exclude each other.

This study aims to shift the traditional focus of social movement research from the emergence, mobilization and achievements of social movements (Peterson 1989) towards exploration of the influences of social movements and the public at large on the development of internal conflicts and the level of political violence in Latin America. The analysis, therefore, principally focuses on the internal conflict constellation and refers to external influences only when they determine the conflict development. While the study leans on social movement theory, it is more concerned with exploring the influence of the larger social "audience" (Oberschall 2004:29) on the development of conflict than with contributing to the social movement debate. However, the study does try to create a bridge between important traditions in conflict research and social movement theory and to apply this theoretical framework to the study of conflict dynamics in Latin America.

By focusing on processes at the national level, this study finds that political violence in Latin America was largely a product of the triangular interaction between the regimes in power, the insurgents and the social audience to the conflicts. The importance of the social revolutionary conflict constellation by far exceeds that of the interaction between regime forces and insurgents; this constellation drew large social sectors into the conflicts. The social audience, as will be shown in the course of the study, played a decisive role in the development and outcomes of the conflicts. It was this important role that made the social audience a target of violence from both regimes and insurgents, violence which was aimed at shaping the social audience's position. Political violence, in this constellation, was mainly a product of influences on the social audience. The position of the social audience, however, was central if not decisive to the development of the conflicts. While the means used to shape the social audience largely determined the level of political violence, the violence's impact on the position of the social audience was central to the development of the conflict.

It is the explicit aim of this study to trace the processes that take place in this triangular conflict constellation and to explain the escalation and de-escalation of political violence in Latin America's internal conflicts. The conditions that determined the changing effects of violent events will be pointed out. Therefore, this study sets out to reconstruct the causal chain that links violent events to specific conflict developments; or to use the terminology of the Theory of the Dynamics of Contention, the study aims to explain the "causal chains" (processes) of "mechanisms" (events) that alter the given situation to explain "episodes of contentious politics" (insurgent campaigns) (McAdam et al. 2001:27-29). Thus, the research focuses especially on the effects that violent actions had on the development of the conflict and on the development of political violence. To understand these processes the research

takes into account the broad socio-cultural and historical-political embedding of the conflicts (McAdam et al. 1996). This study will not restrict itself to analyzing the interaction between regimes and insurgents but will try to bring society into the picture.

To achieve this original heuristic goal of uncovering the processes, or causal chains, of political violence, this investigation systematically compares three case studies of largely urban guerrilla struggles, namely the Argentinean Montoneros, the Colombian M-19, and the Nicaraguan FSLN. This case selection, which will be detailed below, is an attempt to systematically trace the conditions and processes that led to extremely divergent conflict developments and outcomes ranging from the defeat of insurgencies to successful revolution. Therefore, the study employs the method of a “structured, focused comparison” and uses a “set of standardized, general questions to ask of each case” (Alexander & Bennett 2005:71) to allow a better comparison and to theorize on the escalation and de-escalation of political violence.

The comparison of the case studies will be structured around the specific actions of insurgent groups and regimes, especially with respect to their influence on the social audience. The selective focus (Alexander & Bennett 2005) of the study centers on the effects that the insurgents’ and regime’s actions have on the social audience and the development of political violence. The causal chains that link specific events to their outcomes will be tracked in a historical reconstruction of the conflicts. This procedure will point out the conditions that accounted for the different conflict developments and outcomes.

Apart from the claim of making an original contribution based on the focus of the internal interactions, this study bases its analysis on a wide range of secondary literature and original empirical material collected during fieldwork in Argentina, Colombia, and Nicaragua. The backbone of this study is built upon statements made by insurgent groups, in the shape of leaflets, internal analyses and general publications, as well as thirty-four in-depth interviews with former insurgent members of different ranks. Governmental decrees, laws and interventions, as well as national newspapers from the time period of the insurgent activity, were used to reconstruct the governmental approaches to internal conflicts. The fieldwork, furthermore, is not only the source of empirical material; it also helped the researcher to better understand the still lively national debates about the conflicts of the past.

The investigation will proceed as follows. The following pages will outline the selection of the case studies, namely the campaigns of the Montonero group in Argentina, of M-19 in Colombia and of FSLN in Nicaragua.

Chapter One then will set the theoretical and historical framework for the study of political violence in Latin America. Central concepts, the triangular nature of conflicts, and the development of violence in this constellation will be discussed. Subsequently, the historical embedding of Latin American conflicts will be examined. This will include a discussion of the

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influence of the Cold War and foreign interventions, as well as the national conditions for the conflicts. A short historical overview of the main Latin American social revolutionary conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century points to trends in how different state approaches to internal challengers influenced the development of the struggles and political violence. This helps to identify important conditions for the development of political violence and, thus, to focus the analysis of the following case studies.

Chapters Two, Three and Four of this thesis are dedicated to the three case studies on which the main conclusions will be based. Chapter Two examines the Montonero urban insurgent struggle against the Argentinean state. Chapter Three explores the campaign of the largely urban-based Colombian M-19. Chapter Four analyses the insurrection of the Nicaraguan FSLN against the Somoza family dictatorship. The three empirical case studies are structured in a uniform manner. A time-line and a brief historical overview embed the struggles in their historical socio-political environment and point out key events and developments. Then the conflict development is reconstructed from the point of view of the insurgent groups and the regimes, with special consideration for their relationship to and influence upon the social audience. First, the emergence and development of the insurgent group is scrutinized and its contributions to the conflict development described. Central to this section is a description of the organizational set-up of the insurgent groups and their relationship to the social audience. Then, we will look at the role the ruling regimes played in the development of the conflicts and political violence. Subsequently, we will focus on the extent of legal political opportunity and the specific counter-insurgency responses of each state, and we will analyze the impact of these factors on the subsequent development of the struggle. Each case study will conclude with a summary of the respective processes of political violence observed.

Chapter Five compares the results of the case studies and draws conclusions about processes of political violence. It is here that we discuss the main conditions that explain the development of the conflicts and account for the escalation and de-escalation of political violence. The interaction of insurgents and regime forces, and especially these parties' ability to influence the social audience and their methods for doing so, are central to the comparison. The processes of political violence will be described in detail. A short conclusion that highlights the main findings and reflects on ways to counter social revolutionary conflicts closes the study.

### **Selection of Case Studies**

The diversity of internal conflicts, their different paths of development and various outcomes make Latin America a key region for the study of processes of political violence. Several criteria guided the selection of case studies through which to track the processes of political violence by means of empirical research and comparison. Firstly, only historical insurgent campaigns should be studied, and not current conflicts. This allows an analysis of the whole period of conflict between a specific insurgent group and the respective state. The second criterion of selection is the type of regime under which armed opposition campaigns took place. Different regime types offer a chance to compare how varying degrees of political opportunity affect the development of political violence. A third criterion is the outcome of the struggle. Studying a variety of conflict endings makes it possible to examine why different state responses to internal challenge have divergent effects. Different outcomes help us to identify different processes of political violence. The fourth and final criterion is the geographical location of the struggle. Conflicts tended to develop differently in rural and urban environments, as discussed in Chapter One. To facilitate a comparison, this study will focus on urban conflicts.

On the basis of these criteria, the conflicts selected for this study are those that developed between the Argentinean Montoneros, the Colombian M-19 (Movement 19 April) and the Nicaraguan FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) and the respective regimes that were in power for the duration of their campaigns. All three of these insurgent campaigns have come to an end. This allows us to examine the causal chains that have linked specific events with particular conflict endings.

The regime types in this selection range from dictatorial to semi-democratic and short-lived democratic, which allows us to compare a situation without any political opportunities to one semi-open and one truly open situation. What we want to know is how these situations influenced armed struggle. Argentina presents an extremely interesting case in which insurgent struggle appeared under a dictatorship, continued after short interruption under a democracy, and then found itself under an even harsher dictatorship. The Colombian case demonstrates that formal democracy, with restricted but real political opportunities for opposition sectors, has only a limited containing effect on armed struggle. However, the Colombian case also demonstrates that there exists an opportunity to resolve internal conflicts politically. The Nicaraguan case, finally, is an example of a four decade-long dictatorship that only temporarily put up a superficial democratic façade.

This selection allows for a comparison of the impact of different regime types on the development of internal conflicts and political violence, as well as an examination of the effect

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of regime changes on internal struggles. With the exception of the short-lived Campora government in Argentina (in 1973), political exclusion is a common denominator in all the regimes analyzed in this study.

The conflict endings in this selection vary widely: from insurgent defeat in the case of the Montoneros, to a negotiated settlement in the case of M-19, to a revolution and toppling of the regime in the case of the Nicaraguan FSLN. The different outcomes allow us to examine the central events and processes that account for the specific conflict developments. The comparison will examine the conditions and actions that shaped the course of the different conflict outcomes.

All three insurgent groups had a significant urban component. The Montoneros were almost exclusively urban-based, while M-19 and the FSLN also had important rural campaigns. However, M-19 had its main impact with urban actions, not rural guerrilla warfare. The urban aspect of its campaign can be defined as the decisive factor. The FSLN came into being as a rural guerrilla movement and for many years tried to follow a classic insurgent strategy. In the early 1970s, however, the organization took to the urban centers. Eventually, it was the FSLN's presence among the urban masses that permitted the group to coordinate the popular insurrections of 1978 and 1979 and to lead the Nicaraguan revolution. The FSLN's urban campaign, therefore, was crucial for its victory. The focus on the urban environment is also important because it highlights the triangular constellation of social revolutionary conflict that will be detailed in Chapter One. Here, insurgents cannot conduct a classic insurgency focused on gaining territorial control; they are limited to influencing the social audience by means of armed propaganda. Despite this apparent disadvantage, urban insurgents have often been relatively successful in mobilizing social pressure for change, and a few, such as the FSLN, have even brought about revolution.

The Argentinean Montoneros and the Nicaraguan FSLN were the main armed opposition groups in their respective states. The Colombian M-19, however, never achieved the numerical strength of the dominant FARC rebel group. The selection of M-19 instead of the FARC was based on a few important factors. To begin with, the FARC campaign still continues today, which makes it impossible to draw final conclusions about the processes that might lead to a definite de-escalation of its violent campaign. Furthermore, the FARC has so far conducted only a low-profile urban campaign, making a comparison with the other case studies more complicated. M-19, by contrast, was the leading urban insurgent group in Colombia and probably the rebel organization with most impact on public opinion. In addition, the negotiated ending of M-19's campaign adds a third type of conflict ending to the comparison, enabling us a look at the whole range of conflict outcomes: from insurgent defeat, to a negotiated settlement and insurgent victory. This widens the comparison and deepens the value of the conclusions about processes of political violence and outcomes.

The Colombian conflict is extremely complex due to the diversity of important violent actors. These include several insurgent groups, paramilitary organizations linked to elite sectors or drug cartels, and security forces operating autonomously. The complexity of the situation requires close attention to the broad conflict environment and particularly to other violent actors when analyzing the processes of political violence. Focusing on the specific insurgent campaign of M-19 allows us to reconstruct the processes of political violence, but we have to take the influences of the dynamic conflict environment into account when evaluating specific decisions and events. The existence of other insurgent groups, for instance, influenced the position of the government towards the internal struggle and, by extension, towards its dispute with M-19. Therefore the focus of the analysis is on M-19, but where necessary we will discuss how the conflict environment and other violent actors, such as the FARC and paramilitary groups, shaped the course of M-19's campaign. These other actors will only enter the analysis when their activity is relevant to the development of M-19's campaign. The focus on M-19's insurgency and its outcome permits us to analyze the processes of political violence but falls short of explaining the entire internal conflict in all its complexity. This limitation, however, is not a shortcoming but a necessary restriction of the study if we are to focus on processes of political violence.



## Chapter One

### Setting the Framework: The Social Revolutionary Conflict Constellation and the Background of Latin America's Domestic Conflicts

The following pages will define the concept of political violence which forms the basis of this study. This section will explore the triangular constellation of social revolutionary conflicts, examine the variables that stimulate political violence and theoretically discuss the escalation and de-escalation of political violence. After the theoretical underpinnings of this study have been established, the study will examine the historical background of the Latin American conflicts. This will provide an opportunity to compare and contrast the development of different domestic conflicts and to look at various trends in the way violence has affected the course of conflicts and political violence.

#### **Political Violence and the Triangular Social Revolutionary Conflict Constellation**

In the study of political violence in Latin America, diverse concepts such as guerrilla, subversion, insurgency, or terrorism are used without a clear distinction and often with some political motive (Friedland 1988; Walther 2008; Moyano 1995). To guarantee conceptual clarity, this study chooses the act-centered analytical concept of terrorism as defined by Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Mario Fumerton (2009; Duyvesteyn 2006), which permits us to include the diverse forms of political violence and its many actors in Latin America while focusing on the act rather than the actor.

Terrorism and insurgency, the authors argue, are strategies of irregular warfare in their own right that violent opposition groups can follow to change the politics of the state

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(Duyvesteyn 2006; Duyvesteyn & Fumerton 2009). The strategies differ, however, regarding their ultimate strategic goals. While insurgency aims to take over political control of populations and subsequently territory, terrorism's goal is to provoke a political change without necessarily controlling territory and population. These different strategic objectives entail relational and organizational differences. Insurgency, to be successful, requires the mobilization of significant parts of a population into a military force or at least the securing of a population's passive support for a campaign (Kalyvas 2000). Terrorism, by contrast, attempts to achieve its goal without organizing a population into a military force (Duyvesteyn & Fumerton 2009). Provocation aims at achieving its objective by means of the response to the act and not through the act itself. Terrorism and insurgency differ significantly in terms of their relation to broader social groups, but this relation is nonetheless central to both. Armed opposition actors, furthermore, are not statically bound to the strategy they select at the beginning of their campaign; they can shift from insurgency to terrorism, and embrace one or the other at different points in time during their campaigns.

What is more important for this study, is that terrorism can also be seen as a tactic within a broader strategy of insurgency (Duyvesteyn 2006). A terrorist act will be understood as a politically motivated violent act, or credible threat of such an act, that aims to affect a broader social audience than the direct subject of the violent act. Consequently, insurgents can perpetrate terrorist acts without renouncing their general strategy. Terrorist acts, furthermore, can be perpetrated by any violent actor with political aims. In short, the strategic end goal permits us to differentiate the actors, but it is the act that defines terrorism. The violent political act that aims at a broader audience is the selective threshold for the phenomenon of political violence analyzed in this study.

States can also commit terrorist acts and pursue a strategy of terrorism. State terrorism's strategic end aim, however, is diametrically opposed to the end aim of opposition terrorism. The state uses terrorism as a tactic to inspire fear in order to control society on a strategic level (Sluka 2000). State terrorism is aimed at maintaining the status quo or regaining control over the population by force, or threat of force. Although state terrorism may pursue social change, it does not generally pursue a political revolution. State terrorism, in the words of Michael Stohl and George Lopez, constitutes a "system of government that uses terror to rule." (1984:7) However, state terrorism, similarly to opposition terrorism, often aims at influencing social groups which are broader than the direct victims of the violence. States are able not only to perpetrate terrorist acts but also to pursue a strategy of terrorism. This leaves us, principally, with two types of political violence, namely revolutionary violence by opposition sectors that are pursuing structural change and conservative violence by governing regimes that aim to maintain the status quo and sometimes to shape society (Calveiro 2010). We will come back to this later.

## SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

Terrorism, however, is not only an analytical tool but also a politically loaded concept (Friedland 1988) that has often been used as a means of propaganda or, to paraphrase Walter Lippmann, of framing reality through a selective presentation of information to shape people's behavior (1950). In Latin America, state authorities used the term terrorism like the term communism, "to denounce, delegitimize and destroy organized political opposition" (Schroeder 2005:69; see also Mejívar & Rodríguez 2005; McCamant 1984)<sup>2</sup> of any kind, while state-sponsored human rights abuses accounted for the main part of the violence (Esparza 2010; Sluka 2000; Menjívar & Rodríguez 2005; Booth & Walker 1989; Mercier Vega 1969; Goodwin 2001). Yet scholars writing about Latin American conflicts tend to describe the armed opponents as insurgents rather than terrorists, without denying the use of terrorist tactics by these groups (Gillespie 1995; Palmer 1995; Palmer 1989; Wickham-Crowley 1990; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Waldmann 2007).<sup>3</sup> State violence more easily resembled a strategy of (state) terrorism, especially when authorities employed "terror-inspiring methods" (Gillespie 1995:214) to "spread panic" (Waldmann 2007:230) and ultimately to maintain control. In the analysis of the three case studies, this study finds that most Latin American armed opposition groups pursued a strategy of insurgency, although the groups sometimes relied heavily on terrorist tactics, especially when acting in urban environments. However, it is not the aim of this study to (re-) label any violent actor but to analyze the development of political violence. To avoid any moral, political or historical bias of the terminology, therefore, this study will from now on use the term political violence rather than terrorism.

Political violence seems at first glance to develop, or to escalate and de-escalate, which is understood as the increase or decrease of the level of violence directly related to the conflict under consideration, in an interaction between revolutionary and state forces. In this view, armed opponents challenge the regime and state forces respond. However, such an approach to the study of processes of political violence risks overlooking the importance of the socio-cultural, historical and political embedding of the conflicts (McAdam et al. 1996; Zald & Ash 1966), which is crucial to understanding their shape and development.

Latin American conflicts were social conflicts with a social revolutionary objective. Social conflicts can be best understood as "purposeful interaction[s] among two or more parties in a competitive setting" (Oberschall 1993:39) in which "the parties are an aggregate of individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and crowds" (Oberschall

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<sup>2</sup> John F. McCamant observes a generally negative description of "those who do not conform" or who oppose the regime. All perceived opponents face linguistic defamation. Furthermore, he denounces the simultaneous euphemistic description of state counter-insurgent campaigns which often resemble political repression (McCamant 1984). See also Timothy Wickham-Crowley (1990).

<sup>3</sup> For a further discussion of the use of terminology in Latin American conflicts, see Friedland 1988 and Solimano 2004 for the vague scholarly differentiation of the terms. For state labeling practices to justify repression and the application of concepts originally associated with communism to terrorism, see Kawell 2001; Norget 2005; Kruijt 2002; McCamant 1984; Menjívar & Rodríguez 2005; and McSherry 2005. Examples of scholarly interpretations of any kind of opposition, including social movements, as terrorism or terrorist threats can be found in Abbott 2004; Radu 1990; and Joes 1996. A definition of the state as inherently repressive and a consequential justification of armed struggle can be found in Muñoz 1977.

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1978:291) struggling “over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources.” (Coser 1956:8) More concretely, Latin American conflicts mainly arose due to political and economic exclusion of “*el pueblo*” that is

composed of popular organizations from the poor and exploited lower classes like peasant leagues, migrant workers, shantytown organizations, miners’ and workers’ unions, village teachers, and economically disadvantaged populations of urban cities. (Esparza 2010:3)<sup>4</sup>

These disadvantaged social groups that often comprised substantial parts of the population engaged in disputes with national elites (Esparza 2010), lending a social revolutionary objective to the struggles. Although social conflicts are often described as inherently violent (Coser 1956; Oberschall 1978), violence describes merely a “quality of the means normal to [a conflict]” (Weber 1978:38) and is but one possible expression of it.

Latin American conflicts manifested themselves, first and foremost, in social movements that, according to Sidney Tarrow, constitute “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites.” (Tarrow 1994:3-4) In the contentious interaction with elite forces, small protest sectors radicalized (della Porta 1995a) and armed organizations formed out of the larger protest environments (Calveiro 2010). Thus, the use of violent means by protest sectors and the governing regimes is framed by a larger social conflict. Political violence in social revolutionary conflicts develops in a dynamic interaction between not just two but three actors: the regime forces, the insurgents and the social audience. Or to use the words of Sidney Tarrow,

[c]ontentious forms of collective action are different from market relations, lobbying, or representative politics because they bring ordinary people into confrontation with opponents, elites, or authorities. This means that the particular historical, cultural, and power conditions of their society in part determine and in part are determined by contentious politics. Ordinary people have power because they challenge power holders, produce solidarities, and have meaning to particular population groups, situations, and national cultures. (Tarrow 1994:8)

This embedding in the general socio-political environment and the participation of large social sectors in the struggles tended to expand the confrontation. Civil war, in the words of Stathis Kalyvas, “involves not just two (or more) competing actors, but also civilians.” (2000:5) Mao Tse-Tung also remarked that war is not only “a contest of military and

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<sup>4</sup> Italics in original. Hereinafter, I will use the term popular to refer to this heterogeneous group of disadvantaged social sectors that compose the “pueblo”.

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economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale.” (1967a:143) Authors on (counter) insurgency, furthermore, emphasize that the behavior of the social audience is decisive for the success or failure of these campaigns (Mack 1974; Ross & Gurr 1989; Goodwin 1994; Mesquita 2005). Social revolutionary conflicts, in short, are triangular<sup>5</sup> in nature; significant social sectors tend to get involved in these struggles.

Due to its decisive role in conflict development, the social audience becomes a principal target of regimes. Social revolutionary violence is also aimed at shaping the behavior of the social audience, although generally it tends to target symbols and representatives of the governing regimes rather than attack large social sectors. In this process, violent actors try to influence the conflict’s development instead of waiting for (un)favorable developments. The triangular interrelation where most political violence develops and the development of the conflict is decided, can be illustrated in the following figure<sup>6</sup>:

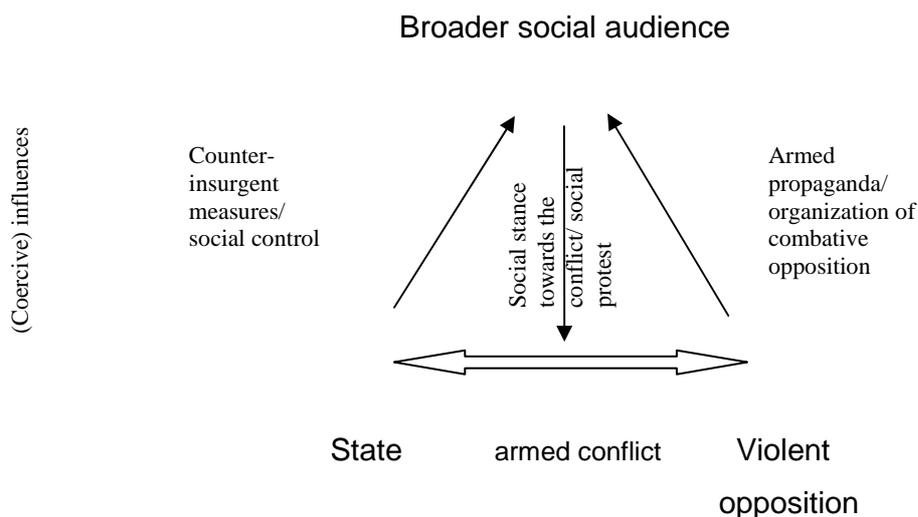


Figure 1: Triangle of political violence in social revolutionary conflicts

Political violence, in other words, develops, or escalates and de-escalates, in the dynamic triangular interaction of regime forces, insurgents, and the social audience. Coercive influences on the social audience account for most political violence, as this study will show. The position the social audience takes towards an armed dispute, however, is significant, if

<sup>5</sup> The triangular character of domestic conflicts refers to social revolutionary struggles. The extent to which this triangular conflict constellation also applies to ethnic separatist or religious conflicts is not explored in this study. The weight of societal influence on the outcome of such struggles might vary from type to type. Social revolutionary conflicts tend to involve society at large, as the struggle over a new socio-political structure takes shape. Ethnic or religious conflicts, by comparison, develop between sharply differentiated social sectors, yielding a clearly differentiated in-group – out-group relationship. An escalation of violence against the antagonistic out-group seems to be more likely in such a clearly differentiated conflict constellation.

<sup>6</sup> The figure aims to schematize those (inter)action lines that are of direct relevance to the development of both political violence and the conflict, and does not claim to depict the relations between the actors exhaustively. Indirect relations and influences are not considered in this figure.

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not decisive for the development and outcome of the conflict. The social audience is not just a victim at the mercy of violent actors; it is a central actor in domestic conflicts (Tarrow 1994:8) that determines the development and outcome of social revolutionary conflicts. The influence of the social audience on an armed dispute is not necessarily violent in nature, as will be discussed below. The social audience influences the conflict mainly through its specific protest behavior; large-scale insurrections only break out in extreme cases. However, it creates a propitious environment for specific forms of state and insurgent violence, such as broad or focused repression, selective armed propaganda and large-scale military confrontations.

There are several variables that strongly shape the specific development of conflicts and the level of violence. The central variables are the political opportunity structure and organizational aspects of insurgent forces (McAdam et al. 1996; Benford & Snow 2000; Tarrow 1994; Tarrow 1996; Meyer & Minkoff 2004; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996) as well as the specific forms of violence employed by insurgents and regimes to influence the behavior of the social audience.

The political opportunity structure, according to Sidney Tarrow, can be understood as

a set of clues for when contentious politics will emerge and will set in motion a chain of causation that may ultimately lead to sustained interaction with authorities and thence to social movements. (1994:32-33)

In this structure, the level of political opportunities, understood as “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—sets of clues that encourage people to engage into collective actions” (Tarrow 1994:32) strongly influences the extent and radicalism of social movements and, therefore, of collective challenges to regimes in power (Tarrow 1994; McAdam et al. 1996). The absence of legal institutional opportunities is an important incentive for opposition sectors to embrace extra-institutional forms of political expression (Posso 1987; Cardenal 2004). Politically exclusive regimes that cannot meet protest claims without the risk of losing control face a dilemma; political exclusion promotes the formation of extra-institutional protest. State facilitation, tolerance, or repression of collective actions shape political opportunities and play a central role in the mobilization of social movements (Tilly 1977). Political exclusion is central to laying the foundation for domestic conflicts and encourages political violence (Skocpol 1994; Goodwin 2001; Kruijt 2008)—from both the state and the opposition.

Apart from the opportunity structure, a second variable for the development of social movements and political violence is the form of opposition organization. Social movements require “sufficient organization—whether formal or informal” to seize political opportunities

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(McAdam et al. 1996:8). Social Movement Organizations (MO) (Zald & Ash 1966) are the most visible part of social movements and are central to the development of sustainable protest campaigns and more radical forms of opposition. MOs can vary from formal unions and associations to grassroots self-help groups and even insurgent groups.

Social movements need to mobilize the broadest support possible if they are to bring about change (Rucht 2004). Collective action, however, has to offer an advantage (McAdam et al. 1996) or, in other words, the goal of social mobilization “ha[s] to be perceived as instrumental to the elimination of (...) feelings” of relative deprivation or frustration (Klandermans 1984:597) to attract significant participation. Especially grassroots self-help organizations that are formed to satisfy

a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem and bringing about desired social and/ or personal change[s] (...) that are not or cannot be met by or through existing institutional channels (Katz 1981:135)

are instrumental to meeting tangible objectives. Paradoxically, mobilization must be broad but mobilizing factors seem more effective at attracting support when specific. Like other MOs, insurgent organizations can embrace any kind of “popular protest movements” to attract support, such as “strikes, demonstrations, student movements, women’s protests over the cost of living, mass actions in general.” (Guillén 2005:130) However, they can also engage in “meaning work” (Benford & Snow 2000:613) that focuses on negotiating

a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, mak[ing] attributions in regard to who or what is to blame, articul[at]ing an alternative set of arrangements, and urg[ing] others to act in concert to affect change.” (Benford & Snow 2000:615)

However, widening active participation in protests increases the framing conflict and promotes the escalation of violence, especially in the form of state repression (Esparza 2010; Cardenas et al. 2001; Goodwin 2001; Sluka 2000; Menjívar & Rodríguez 2005; Booth & Walker 1989; Mercier Vega 1969). The form and extent of opposition organization and insurgents’ influence on this organization, in short, are essential to the development of conflicts and political violence.

Apart from the opportunity structure and organizations, the third factor for the processes of escalation and de-escalation of political violence, as this study will show, is the specific means of employing violence by the two violent adversaries. Regimes and insurgents both want to shape the behavior of the social audience in the triangular conflict and design

their actions according to this aim. Therefore, the relevance of political violence in social revolutionary conflicts cannot be measured in purely military terms but largely depends on the violence's influence on the behavior of the social audience.<sup>7</sup> Regimes and insurgents, however, pursue opposing end aims namely ending or generating protest.

The appearance of insurgent groups marks an escalation of national conflicts as they introduce the means of armed struggle and, tend to try to instigate a broad insurrection to overthrow the government. Generally, insurgents pursue a strategy of escalation. However, it is not the armed struggle alone but the "mediation" (Guillén 2005:122) of the social audience which determines the effectiveness of an insurgency. Organizing social support for an insurgent struggle, nonetheless, is not a linear process, as some authors might believe (Guillén 1969; Jenkins 1972); support can increase exponentially in some moments and decrease as quickly in others. To mobilize mass participation, insurgent violence has to highlight political objectives over purely military aims. Violence as such and especially high intensity violence is generally not a mass mobilizing factor (Hipsher 1998). In urban environments, armed actions have to transmit a self-evident political message because the state-controlled environment impedes insurgents to pursue a classic insurgent strategy (Mack 1974; Moss 1971; Mao 1967a). Insurgents cannot control territory and population or build a popular army in the urban environment. This limits insurgents' action repertoire largely to terrorist acts. Urban insurgents have to substitute for their restricted open organizational capacities by mobilizing masses through armed propaganda.

States generally have four means at their disposal to counter insurgent or terrorist threats, namely military measures, judiciary and financial instruments, the deployment of police and security forces, and social and political measures (Duyvesteyn 2006). Regimes, and politically exclusive regimes in particular, often resort to these measures to counter not only armed challengers but opposition sectors in general, and often use violence to break up protests (della Porta 1995a). Such an approach not only entails the unilateral escalation of violence; it carries the risk of escalating and radicalizing protest even more. While excessive repression may impede civil society's collective action at some point (Tilly 1977; Hipsher 1998), repression often ends up increasing and radicalizing protest (Ross & Gurr 1989; della Porta 1995; Goodwin 1994; Bueno de Mesquita 2005; Worchel et al. 1974). Repression, in short, can have many unforeseen and undesirable consequences for ruling regimes when used to counter protest.

Political violence may escalate unilaterally when one of the violent actors decides to increase the use of coercive means. Escalation may also occur in an interaction, when a violent act generates a violent response. A unilateral escalation of political violence, however,

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<sup>7</sup> The purely military effects of violence play only a limited role in conflict development as long as a violent act does not lead to the complete military defeat of the adversary.

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does not necessarily escalate and/or radicalize the broader socio-political conflict that is manifest mainly in the protest behavior of the social audience. Therefore, unilateral insurgent violence does not automatically bring with it an increase and radicalization of social protest; unilateral state repression may even put an end to protest, decreasing the (visible) level of the framing conflict. Similarly, an expansion of the broader socio-political conflict and a widening of protest do not necessarily escalate the level of political violence, although it can fuel such a development. In short, the broad framing socio-political conflict and political violence are closely related but they are not identical and can develop differently.

As for violence's capacity to shape the behavior of the social audience, it is not only the magnitude of violence that is relevant but also the kind of violence employed. Selective but symbolic violence, for instance, can strongly influence the behavior of the social audience, as acts of armed propaganda demonstrate. A qualitative escalation of violence, for instance an increase in brutality or the introduction of "terror-inspiring methods" (Gillespie 1995:214), can shape the behavior of the social audience even without increasing the number of victims. Paramilitary and death squad violence that engenders a campaign of

systematic terror through particularly brutal means of a constant and omnipresent [nature]: intimidation, searches, raids, arbitrary roadblocks, interrogations, torture, burning and stealing property, ambushes, kidnappings, rapes, and assassinations (Norget 2005:132; see also Edelstein 1987)

constitutes a qualitative escalation of violence. The quality of violence might even have a greater impact on audience behavior than the quantity.

Both governing regimes and insurgents often seek the escalation of violence, however, with opposing end aims. Insurgents, in general, employ violence to provoke the social audience to fight the government, while governing regimes often escalate repressive violence to quell challenges from below. A central aspect of insurgent campaigns is the creation of organizing structures for the mobilization of social participation in armed struggle; this can even be considered a non-violent form of escalation because it increases insurgents' revolutionary capacity (Chenoy 2010; Kalyvas 2010). Regimes, by contrast, employ massive violence aimed at discouraging large social sectors from active participation and thereby decreasing the framing conflict. Regimes, in general, escalate violence to de-escalate internal conflicts, while insurgents seek to escalate conflicts but not necessarily violence.

The political end aims of violent actors, furthermore, make de-escalation by peaceful means a difficult task (Walter 2002). Sustainable agreements are hard to reach, as conflict actors consider achievement of their political objectives more important than the avoidance of violence (Roquié 1994; Esparza 2010; Sluka 2000; Stohl & Lopez 1984; Chernick 1996;

Chernick 1988/89). Moreover, both conflict actors explicitly use political violence to shape the behavior of the social audience in favor of their political objectives. Agreements seem to be sustainable only when conflict actors discover that ceasing violent action holds some advantage (Zartman & Alfredson 2005; Chernick 1999). Conflicts, in other words, have to be institutionalized to find a peaceful solution (Oberschall 1973). This requires a recognition of the adversaries as valid negotiation partners (Oberschall 1973), as well as the existence of alternative means of exercising meaningful opposition (Goodwin 2001) and a credible and effectual cessation of extra-institutional and/or illegal forms of coercive pressure on the part of the adversaries (Zartman & Alfredson 2005). The use of violence is subordinated to the violent actors' political goals; peaceful alternatives can only take hold if the actors stand to benefit more from non-violent means than from maintaining violent pressure.

To summarize, political violence is a means that violent actors have at their disposal to influence the development of the triangular internal conflict. While for opposition groups political violence sometimes seems to be the only way to counter a politically exclusive regime, for governing regimes it is often a means of choice that can be used to prevent a political or economic challenge from opposition forces. In terms of conflict development, however, it is not the total amount of political violence which is important but the impact of violent acts on the behavior of the social audience. Depending on the regime in power, an increase in social protest may be sufficient to bring about change. The quest for change, however, may also develop into large-scale violence and even civil war. This occurs when intransigent regimes block alternative paths to change and escalate repression to retain their power (Goodwin 1994; della Porta 1995a; McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly 1977; Ross & Gurr 1989; Roquié 1994; Worchel et al. 1974).

After having outlined the general triangular framework of Latin America's social revolutionary conflicts, the following section will explore the common backgrounds and influences that underlie many Latin American conflicts.

### **The Historical Background of Latin America's Social Revolutionary Conflicts**

Latin America's social revolutionary struggles developed against a background of social protest over political exclusion and frustrated economic expectations. However, international tensions during the Cold War helped to polarize national conflicts. US fears of communist regimes in Latin America and elite resistance to reforms was conducive to the rise of politically exclusive regimes that came to power in most Latin American states in the 1970s. Social protest grew also due to socio-cultural developments such as the spread of Liberation

Theology and the growth of the student movement. Although Latin America's social revolutionary struggles were influenced by international and regional politics and socio-cultural factors, they manifested themselves mainly on a national level.

### **International Influences on Latin American Conflicts**

Latin American conflicts were framed by the bipolar world of the Cold War. Ideological polarization dominated the national political agenda of Latin American states (Horowitz 1968) and radicalized social tensions into overarching socio-cultural conflicts (Calveiro 2005b; Bufano 2007). This was especially the case after the Cuban revolution demonstrated the possibility of social revolution in the region (DeFronzo 2007). The ideological Cold War dispute denied shades of grey and the particularities of national situations and equated any opposition with fundamental political antagonism. Latin American establishment politicians simply "identif[ie]d every opposition movement that threaten[ed] the established order", including reformist and progressive parties and governments, "with international communism." (Mercier Vega 1969:87) Or to paraphrase Guillermo O'Donnell, all social conflicts were equated with structural crisis that questioned the "reproduction of social relations" and, thus, "affect[ed] the very foundation of capitalist society." (O'Donnell 1988:25)<sup>8</sup> This biased perception not only radicalized tensions but also dramatically simplified state repression and significantly widened the range of social sectors affected by it.

This polarized perception of national tensions had serious consequences. Ideological dualism provided elite sectors with the necessary arguments to restrict or deny political opportunities to opposition sectors and to repress any opposition in the name of fighting communism (Mejivar & Rodríguez 2005; Roca 1984). To withstand pressure to reform, elite sectors embraced forceful means (Esparza 2010; Cardenas et al. 2001) and found a key ally in the armed forces. Politically exclusive regimes mushroomed in the region and by the middle of the 1970s almost all Latin American states were under dictatorial rule. The ideological polarization of the Cold War contributed to the limitation of institutional political opportunities on the national level and, thereby, promoted strong social tensions and even violent forms of dispute.

Foreign interventions and support for regimes or opposition groups added to the ideological influence of the Cold War. The influence of the United States on Latin American

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<sup>8</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell develops the notion of the Bureaucratic Authoritarian state in his analysis of the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship (1966-1973). However, his observations can be applied to other southern cone dictatorships as well. O'Donnell differentiates between five types of crisis—(1) Crisis of Government, (2) Crisis of Regime, (3) Expansion of the Political Arena, (4) Crisis of Accumulation and (5) Crisis of Social (or Cellular) Domination—and argues that the type of perceived crisis influences the type and shape of state response.

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politics and its internal conflicts was dominant. The US had been intervening in Latin American affairs since the signing of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823; its influence grew once it developed into a hegemonic hemispheric power (Roniger 2010). The Cold War context reinforced Washington's offensive policies towards Latin America (Roca 1984). In 1954 Secretary of State Foster Dulles swept aside the principle of self-determination and non-intervention which had been established by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948. Dulles asserted that US interventions in the internal affairs of Latin American states were justified to prevent Communist parties from taking power. A Communist state in the Americas, Dulles argued, would signify a threat to other states and, therefore, was an issue of hemispheric relevance. A Communist threat—present or future; real or false—now justified any kind of intervention (Roca 1984).<sup>9</sup> And, the US-backed coup against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz that same year showed that the US was serious about preventing unwanted governments from coming to power in its backyard.

Aside from political pressure, the US also used training and indoctrination of military personnel to counter the “threat of communist subversion”. At least 60,000 soldiers were trained in the US Army School of the Americas (SOA) in Panama (Gill 2004). Military training improved the counter-insurgent capacity of Latin American armies (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Joes 1996) and reinforced the fierce anti-communism of army officers (Case 1970; Roca 1984). While some scholars stress the positive effects of US training, such as the improved treatment of the population by armed forces (Joes 1996)<sup>10</sup> in their fight against “left-wing terrorists” (Radu 1990; Abbot 2004), scholars that analyze the effects of US training critically highlight the impact it had on the human rights records of Latin American armies and on the vitality of democratic rule.

Scholarly literature (Menjivar & Rodriguez 2005; Case 1970; Ryan 2005; Esparza 2010; Lopez 1984; Kruijt 1999; Sluka 2000; Cavalla Rojas 1980; Armony 2005; Dinges 2004; Roca 1984; Norget 2005; Gillespie 1995; Nolte 1991) has thoroughly documented the abusive practices taught by the US in its military training schools, such as

the use of electric shocks, the use of drugs and hypnosis to induce psychological regression, the sequential use of sensory deprivation, pain, and other means in interrogations, as well as assassination methods and the use of threats against, and abduction of, family members to break down prisoner resistance. (McSherry 2005:32-33)

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<sup>9</sup> Gustavo Roca refers to military, economic and political interventions in overt or covert form.

<sup>10</sup> Joes refers to the Salvadoran and Venezuelan cases. However, he himself points out that the treatment of the population did not improve in Guatemala and Nicaragua.

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John Booth and Thomas Walker, furthermore, highlight the similarities of Central American counter-insurgent tactics with those employed by the US in Vietnam. This resulted in warfare against civilian populations in Central America, which had become the main stage of Latin American insurgency in the 1980s. Nonetheless, the authors specify that

[i]t is an open question whether the extremes of brutality engaged in by the Latin American military were just a product of US advice and assistance gone awry in the hands of local zealots, or were willfully promoted by US personnel. (Booth & Walker 1989:116)

In its exaggerated fear of communism, however, the US simply opted for supporting elite sectors in the Latin American states despite their lack of commitment to democratic rule (Roniger 2010: 29); the United States even tolerated mass human rights abuses to impede the rise to power of the left wing. Latin American conflicts were thus significantly influenced by international factors, but all the same these conflicts developed at a national level among national conflict actors.

US training at the SOA came to be seen in a negative light as so many of its graduates went on to become dictators and notorious human rights violators, such as

Argentinean General Roberto Viola, who was convicted of murder, kidnapping, and torture during Argentina's dirty war (1976-1983); former Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega; Salvadoran Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, who commanded the brutal Atlacatl Battalion that massacred nearly a thousand civilians in El Mozote; Guatemalan Julio Alpirez, who tortured and murdered guerrillas and a US citizen while on the CIA's payroll; and Honduran General Luis Alonso Discua, who commanded the army death squad known as Battalion 3-16. (Gill 2004:6)

The active participation of US-trained military personnel in military coups even cast doubt upon the US commitment to democracy in Latin America (Case 1970). One of the aims of military training was to mold US-friendly future leaders. The ideal candidates had been identified among the armed forces. To the US, the value of "having people in positions of power who have a first-hand knowledge of how we think and act here in the United States", as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara put it (in Feitlowitz 1998:9), was apparently greater than the presence of democratic regimes in the region. US training promoted the politicization of Latin America's armed forces and it was these forces that challenged the stability of constitutional governments in the region more seriously than any insurgency could have done (Ceresole 1970; Gill 2004).

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Massive US support for regimes or opposition groups strongly influenced the outcome of internal struggles (Weitz 1986; Dinges 2004; McClintock 1998), as US aid prolonged their survival and sometimes even played a crucial role in their triumph. This was true of the Salvadoran dictatorship and of the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s. Richard Weitz even goes so far as to claim that “[w]henver the American government firmly opposed insurgency, the rebellion failed. When the administration declined to support the government, the guerrilla triumphed.” (Weitz 1986:406) Similarly Cynthia McClintock points out that the strength of insurgent movements and their chances of success depended on whether the US supported the ruling regimes. Hence, a weak insurgency was triumphant in Cuba but strong insurgencies failed in Colombia and El Salvador (McClintock 1998:27). During the 1980s, the Nicaraguan state was unable to defeat the US-financed Contras even though the government enjoyed strong support from the population and conducted a relatively successful counter-insurgent campaign. The brutal Contra offensive exacted an increasing economic and human price in Nicaraguan society (Dunkerley 1988) which led to the call for elections and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 (Joes 1996). However, long-term foreign support can generate dependencies on foreign resources and decisions, and these dependencies can outweigh short-term advantages (Weitz 1986). This gave credence to the claim of many Latin American insurgent organizations that were fighting a war of national liberation against US domination.

The actions described above are not the whole picture, however. The US also pressured governments to respect human rights and called for democratic elections. During the Carter Administration, human rights records even became an important criterion when Washington’s weighed the possibility of supporting a regime (Joes 1996; Joes 2000). In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, human rights groups became active and revealed the constant and systematic human rights abuses of Latin American regimes to an interested international public. These groups even managed to evoke international pressure on several governments to improve their human rights situation (Madsen 2000; Armony 2005). In the US, public opinion in some cases successfully pressured the government to break relations with governments that violated human rights or to stop supporting ruthless terrorist campaigns such as that of the Contras in Nicaragua (Joes 1996; Joes 2000; Vela Castañeda 2005; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Weitz 1986; Dominguez 1986). Criticism of poor human rights records, however, did not necessarily end US military support for abusive regimes (Menjivar & Rodriguez 2005). For instance, the US government pressed the Salvadoran dictatorship to introduce democratic reforms and to respect human rights, but maintained its financial and military support for the regime (Corr 1996; McClintock 1998; Roquié 1994; Goodwin 2001). US concerns over human rights and democracy were apparently subordinate to its interest of regional control and its fear of communism (Booth & Walker 1989). Mario Lungo even

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describes the US commitment to human rights and democracy in Latin America as superficial and as a propagandistic tactic within an international counter-insurgent strategy (1986). However, in general terms it can be said that “[t]he excessive concern of the United States about communism has led to misguided and counter-productive policies—especially in the form of assisting repressive regimes in their campaigns of demobilization.” (Booth & Walker 1989:120) Whether or not it was deliberate, US support for Latin American armed forces radicalized counter-insurgency techniques and contributed to the escalation of political violence. US aid for repressive regimes overshadowed its work for human rights and democracy.

US influence on Latin American politics far outweighed Soviet and Cuban support for insurgent organizations (Dominguez 1986). Moscow largely accepted US hegemony in Latin America and most Soviet-oriented communist parties rejected armed struggle (Peters 2010). There was hardly any material Soviet support for armed struggle, but Moscow did offer scholarships to Communist youth members. Such educational trips offered them a framework within which they could establish contact with other left-wing militants and build global networks. Later insurgent leaders such as Jaime Bateman attended this Moscow school (Villamizar 2007). And following the Cuban revolution, most Latin American insurgent organizations found shelter and support on the island when needed. For instance, many Montonero, M-19 and FSLN members received training in Cuba (Gasparini 1999; Villamizar 2007; DeFronzo 2007).

The political importance of the Cuban revolution and the island’s support for Latin American insurgent struggles provided arguments for strong counter-insurgent campaigns (DeFronzo 2007). International influences radicalized social tensions and polarized societies. Despite important differences between US and Cuban influences, both supported their allies despite the risk that this would cause an escalation of internal conflicts. While the US supported authoritarian regimes to suppress communist subversion, Cuba hoped to see a fellow revolution. In this way, international influences promoted the development of political violence in Latin America by ideological as well as practical means.

### **Political Exclusion, Economic Inequalities, and Social Protest**

Significant though the international dimension was, Latin American conflicts and political violence developed mainly at a national level. A lack of political opportunity, military interventions against (popular) civil governments, and socio-economic tensions were the main reasons why social protest movements appeared and challenged exclusive regimes.

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Regimes' interest in maintaining the status quo and extra-institutional pressure created strong social tensions which often escalated into political violence. Elite sectors embraced forceful means and frequently violated constitutions to obstruct reform, while discontent and protest grew, often with the support of Catholic, student and insurgent groups that functioned as MOs.

To protect the status quo by any means against broad social challenges (Esparza 2010; Cardenas et al. 2001), elite sectors aligned with the armed forces that had taken a more conservative stance in the second half of the century and had begun to strive for national order, the defeat of internal enemies, and capitalistic economic development (Koonings & Kruijt 2002b).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they began to perceive themselves as guardians of the state and developed their own political and economic agendas, becoming "political armies." (Koonings & Kruijt 2002a; Koonings & Kruijt 2002b) The anti-communist National Security Doctrine (NSD), which was widely disseminated through military academies such as the SOA or the Brazilian Higher War College (Escola Superior da Guerra) (Eakin 1998; McClintock 2002; Rios 1970; Cavalla Rojas 1980), strongly promoted military intervention in politics (McSherry 2005; Koonings & Kruijt 2002b; Pion-Berlin 1989; Lungo 1986; Both & Walker 1989; Roca 1984; Gill 2004). The NSD positioned the state in the international struggle between capitalism and communism and emphasized the need to coordinate all available state resources so as to maintain internal peace and stability in the face of expected communist subversion. The NSD put an emphasis on counter-insurgency; shifting the attention of armed forces away from securing borders and towards fighting internal enemies by all available means (Case 1970; Kruijt 2002; Armony 2005). Military interventions in politics became a frequently employed method of maintaining the status quo and/or shaping society. Norberto Ceresole even defined the Latin American state as a sum of armed forces' interventions in political and socio-economic issues and governmental affairs (1970). Military interventions made political exclusion of the general population visible and clearly restricted reforms and changes.

For opposition sectors in Latin America, there were almost no legitimate political channels through which to pursue their objectives (Tarrow 1996). The lack of political and economic opportunity robbed the exclusive regimes of legitimacy. However, the same lack of opportunity pushed opposition sectors to express their political aspirations in alternative ways, by pursuing change. Participating in social movements and challenging regimes on the streets was often the only meaningful way of opposing politically exclusive regimes. Such

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<sup>11</sup> Between the 1920s and the 1950s many Latin American armed forces had supported populist sectors and had sympathized with national development through state intervention. However, most Latin American armed forces shifted this dogma in the post-war era (Koonings & Kruijt 2002b).

regimes were one of the main reasons why extra-institutional political activities came about. As such, they were at the heart of Latin American conflicts.

Despite significant differences between Latin American states, most faced widespread socio-economic inequality that was reproduced and strengthened over time (Szekely & Montes 2006; Klasen & Nowak-Lehman 2009). The accelerated state-led industrialization, under the strategy of import substitution that most Latin American states pursued after World War II, transformed Latin America's societies (Cardenas et al. 2001; Larrain 2005) but failed to eradicate inequalities in income and extreme poverty (Klasen & Nowak-Lehman 2009; Szekely & Montes 2006). A process of urbanization converted Latin American capitals into modern metropolises; consumption increased; access to education and cultural products improved; the growing labor force became organized in strong unions; and tentative welfare states emerged in the three decades following World War II (Cardenas et al. 2001; Larrain 2005). However, income distribution remained unequal and extreme poverty widespread (Klasen & Nowak-Lehman 2009; Szekely & Montes 2006) while urban unemployment grew and shantytowns sprawled. Furthermore, state institutions defended the status quo and generally "favored elites and limited the access of much of the population to economic opportunities" (Szekely & Montes 2006:586), permitting the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Economic modernization failed to overcome the income gap and popular aspirations were frustrated (Esparza 2010; Larrain 2005), promoting discontent and protest.

Aside from discontent over economic inequality, other factors that contributed to the spread of protest were socio-cultural developments, such as the growth of the student population and the emergence of Liberation Theology. The modernization of Catholic social thought in the 1960s had a major impact in the predominantly Catholic Latin American states (Mangione 2001). Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem en Terries* called on all Catholics to actively participate in public affairs (John XXIII 1963). And only four years later, Pope Paul VI sharply criticized the social effects of capitalism, which he described as structural violence. He even justified grassroots violence as a consequence of, and the only remedy for, politically and economically exclusive states (Pablo VI 1967). The connection between Catholicism and social revolutionary ideas was made explicit by the Manifest of Bishops of the Third World, which was signed by eighteen bishops and which criticized the domination of the Third World by developed states, describing revolution as sometimes necessary and desirable (MOTM 1967). Catholic modernization shaped "attitudes and norms" (Zald & Ash 1966:330) and influenced the general societal stance towards calls for socio-economic and political change. Such developments, however, attracted the attention of the security forces, who perceived the Priests for the Third World as the "most dangerous agitators" of the time, as Argentinean Brigadier Eliseo Ruiz put it (in Mangione 2001:1). Several factors strongly promoted the development of social movements: political neglect of popular claims, the lack

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of institutional channels for change, and the belief that it was both possible and a morally imperative to improve the situation.

Widespread discontent found an organizational frame and a channel for expression in the student movement, Catholic base communities, grassroots self-help associations, and insurgent groups that did social work in neglected neighborhoods working mainly through proxy organizations. Student movements had multiplied during the 1960s (Halperin 1976) and the worldwide phenomenon of student protest (McAdam et al. 1996) did not bypass Latin America. A multitude of political student organizations sprung up; the student movement often actively opposed the ruling regimes and supported insurgent groups (Eckstein 2001; Liebman et al. 1972). The call of Liberation Theology to engage in social work was heard and Catholic base communities became a driving force in the development of social movements and protest against socio-economic inequality and political exclusion (Hipsler 1998). At the same time, Liberation Theology promoted the radicalization of protest tactics, as it espoused an eschatological view of revolutionary struggle and glorified personal sacrifice (Morello 2007). Furthermore, urban self-help organizations appeared in neglected neighborhoods to assume unattended state responsibilities and aspired to provoke structural change, sometimes even by radical means (Larrain 2005). Frequently these organizations were helped by student or Catholic groups. Often insurgent groups used them as proxy organizations to engage in mass social work in neighborhoods. Cultural and sports events, support for self-help activities, and Robin Hood-style distribution of basic goods created sympathy for insurgent activities. Sometimes these groups became central MOs. In many states, peasant land claims and/or indigenous demands for autonomy added a rural dimension to the protest. In other words, popular organizations created organizational frames for *el pueblo* that challenged the national elite from the bottom up (Esparza 2010).

In short, social movements mushroomed and made social tensions visible. Especially the lack of institutional political opportunities for opposition movements created grievances and gave impetus to the development of powerful extra-institutional forms of expression, protest, and change. Frustrated socio-economic expectations attracted people to alternative models of development that emphasized social equality. Such ideas, however, were interpreted as socialist threats in the bipolar frame of the Cold War, at a time when regimes were beginning to counter any perceived communist subversion. Absurdly, the witch-hunt of the internal enemy became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The internal threat to the institutions did not, however, come from the insurgents, as a widely believed truism holds. It came instead from the politicized security forces who acted in transgression of their self-appointed mission to defend the constitutional order (Ceresole 1970; Gill 2004; McSherry 2005; Lopez 1984; Menjívar & Rodriguez 2005). Popular claims for change and elite interests in protecting privileges were at the centre of Latin America's triangular social revolutionary conflicts.

Especially the (preventively) forceful denial of social claims for change dragged large social sectors into the conflicts and became the main source of political violence in the region.

### **Latin America's Social Revolutionary Conflicts in a Historical Perspective**

The following pages will give an overview of social revolutionary conflicts in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. Such an overview is not only interesting to clarify the regional conflict situation reflected by the case studies of the following chapters; it also enables us to observe general trends in Latin America's internal conflicts. Based on the literature about conflicts in Latin America, the overview focuses on state approaches to internal challengers. However, it helps us to appreciate how important the political opportunity structure and social support for insurgents are in the development of internal conflicts.

Generally two types of state approaches to internal challengers can be distinguished. A first group of states kept political opportunities closed and relied almost exclusively on repression, while a second group of states employed a broad range of counter-insurgent measures including civic action and political reform. The different state approaches had divergent effects on conflict development and on the level of political violence, in accordance with the specific application of state force and the geographical setting of the conflict.

#### **Repression of Internal Challengers and the Tendency to Escalate Conflict**

All Latin American regimes countered internal challengers by coercive means. However, the level and range of state repression as well as its combination with other means, such as civic action or political reform, varied significantly between regimes. Among those regimes that relied most exclusively on repressive means to maintain control and to end internal conflicts we can count Batista's Cuba and Somoza's Nicaragua, the only two Latin American states where insurgent movements triumphed, as well as the southern cone states of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay which faced mainly urban-based insurgent struggles.

The Cuban and Nicaraguan dictatorships largely limited their counter-insurgent campaigns to coercive force by their military apparatus and relied on indiscriminate repression of large social sectors to remain in power. In both cases ongoing political exclusion and harsh repression formed the main catalyst for popular insurrections and, thus, for the downfall of the dictatorships. The Batista regime tried to break any resistance by

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spreading fear, using torture or killing without taking prisoners, as well as by shelling peasant villages or removing the inhabitants by force (Wickham-Crowley 1990). Massive state abuses and corruption isolated the discredited dictator and united the opposition in the quest for democracy and economic improvement. Many perceived the regime as “the mechanism through which foreign interests dominated and exploited the Cuban people.” (DeFronzo 2007:189) The bloody repression of urban guerrilla and protest activities provoked popular outrage and promoted rural guerrilla war. The brutality of repression ended US support for Batista (McClintock 1998) and advances of Castro’s guerrilla undermined the morale of the armed forces, permitting the revolution to triumph in early 1959 (Joes 1986).

Likewise, the Nicaraguan Somoza family dictatorship limited its counter-insurgent approaches mainly to the superior firepower of the National Guard (GN). Repression escalated when Anastasio Somoza Debayle took power in 1967. The equilibrium on which *Somocism* had long been based was lost, as will be discussed later in this study in detail.<sup>12</sup> The lack of credible political opportunities and the increasing concentration of wealth in family hands triggered the formation of a broad multi-class opposition movement (Dunkerley 1988; Black 1981). Furthermore, the dictator responded to the FSLN’s urban development with massive and arbitrary violence that culminated in the bombing of neighborhoods to out-terrorize the popular rebellion (Grossman 2005). Open warfare against the population pushed society at large into the conflict, making the armed struggle far more widespread. Somoza’s political intransigency and extreme repression of dissent was the main catalyst of popular insurrection and, thus, for the revolutionary overthrow of the dictatorship. In 1979, under the leadership of the FSLN, the popular forces put an end to Somoza’s regime after a bloody civil war that cost up to 50,000 lives (Booth 1985).

In both Cuba and Nicaragua, indiscriminate actions by governmental forces combined with a lack of political opportunities for the opposition spurred the creation of multi-sector opposition movements that employed all forms of struggle against the regimes. International support for the insurgents and isolation of both regimes, which had lost US backing, were even more powerful factors working in favor of regime change (McClintock 1998; Goodwin 2001). While the internal decay of the Cuban regime, especially the sinking morale and loyalty of the armed forces, had been driving forces behind the revolutionary outcome (Joes 1986), in Nicaragua the FSLN demonstrated the possibility of defeating even loyal armed forces in a popular warfare (Goodwin 2001). Urban insurrections were central to both revolutions as they involved the popular masses in the struggle and hit at the heart of the regimes.

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<sup>12</sup> See the Nicaraguan case study in Chapter Four of this study.

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In the southern cone states the high urbanization rate had shifted social conflicts towards the modern mega-cities (Cardenas 2001; Larrain 2005) that constitute the cultural, economic and political centers of modern societies (Russel & Hildner 1971). The repeated failure of rural guerrilla *foci* provided additional reasons to move insurgency struggles from rural areas to the urban setting (Lamberg 1972). A multitude of urban guerrilla organizations appeared, such as the Uruguayan Tupamaros, the Brazilian Popular Vanguard, the Argentinean Montoneros and the Chilean MIR, to name only a few.<sup>13</sup>

In state-controlled urban environments, however, systematic state terrorism did not engender popular insurrections. Instead it struck fear in societies and crushed all opposition. The dictatorships that governed Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile reinforced their grip on power and persecuted not only insurgents but specifically targeted their alleged support environments and the whole spectrum of opposition organizations as such, using overt and covert repression. The regimes changed the penal codes, established death squads, caused the disappearance and torture of suspects, engaged in psychological warfare and counter-propaganda, and executed opponents (Mariano 1998; Roca 1984; Menjivar & Rodriguez 2005; Nolte 1991; Gillespie 1995; German 1991). Uruguay, for instance, became the Latin American state with the highest torture rate per capita, while the Argentinean Process of National Reorganization (PNR) dictatorship caused the disappearance of up to 30,000 people (Mariano 1998). The southern cone's dictatorships directed their "war" not only "against the guerrillas but against society at large." (Moyano 1991:68)

Furthermore, these regimes began carrying out state terrorism on an international level when they started cooperating in Operation Condor—the 'Mercosur of terror' (Mariano 1998; McSherry 2005).<sup>14</sup> Operation Condor

reflected the region's common counter-subversive doctrine as well as the covert warfare strategy of counter-terror, which were diffused throughout the region via inter-American structures and military-to-military exchanges. (McSherry 2005:50)

It offered the participant dictatorships a framework for security cooperation. Under Operation Condor, they exchanged intelligence information, conducted joint police and military actions in the member states, exchanged prisoners, and assassinated political opponents even in non-participant states including the United States and countries in Europe (Mariano 1998; Dinges 2004; Armony 2005; Geze & Labrousse 1975). Operation Condor "(...) was a modern bureaucratic system that applied scientific concepts and advanced

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, there were at least 16 leftwing urban guerrilla organizations operating in Argentina alone in the early 1970s (Kohl & Litt 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Operation Condor was officially formed by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay in late 1975 (Plummer 08.06.2005). Patrice McSherry, however, points out that the cooperation had already begun in 1973 and that Ecuador and Peru joined at a later stage (2005).

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technology to make repressive operations more lethal and social control more effective” even beyond national borders (McSherry 2005:50).

This all-out repression that transgressed national borders spread fear and apathy in Latin American societies (Roca 1984; Armony 2005; Koonings 1999; Cox 1983). “The fallout of fear from methods being used to counter terrorism proved to be almost one hundred percent effective” (Cox 1983:127) as “[f]amilies and individuals turned in on themselves, allowing fear to constrain their behavior, their conversation, and even their thoughts.” (Gillespie 1995:212) In order to survive, people stopped voicing dissent. Organized opposition was disrupted and the press censored itself. Social apathy also reinforced state terrorism, however (Cox 1983). The decrease of social protest in the face of harsh repression left the field open for increasing acts of state terrorism. In such a way, successful acts of state terrorism paved the way for more severe actions.

The unilateral escalation of violence was a deliberate policy choice and not a last resort. The southern cone’s dictatorships ruled through a strategy of collective threats and the spreading of fear. Preventive repression was used to introduce a new economic reality and change the socio-cultural reality (Pion-Berlin 1989; O’Donnell 1988).

In the short run, the state terrorism strategy of the southern cone’s dictatorships proved effective for the purposes of ending social conflict by eliminating left-wing challengers and all visible opposition. In the long run, however, the unilateral escalation of political violence caused a “complete distortion of the values that constitute the military ethos” (Moyano 1991:69). Through repression and corruption, the armed forces lost their system of values and de-legitimized themselves as the “self-appointed ‘moral reserves of the nation’.” (Moyano 1991:69)

Long term governance was not possible solely on the basis of force, but required a clear political project and a degree of social support. Particularly the fact that some dictatorships neglected to restore political means of control, such as centrally steered mass parties or syndicates (Rios 1970; Roca 1984), hampered their maintenance of power. The Argentinean PNR dictatorship, for instance, excluded the traditional parties from politics but neglected to set up its own party. The lack of clear political leadership fuelled civil political opposition and made the failure of the military project visible (Quiroga 1994). The Brazilian dictatorship, by contrast, formed the pro-regime ARENA (National Renovation Party) and the moderate opposition MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement). This permitted the Brazilian dictatorship to diversify and strengthen the basis of its authority and to introduce a controlled transition to democracy in the mid-1980s (Koonings 1999). Unilateral escalation of repression could force society into compliance with military rule in the short run, but politics determined the long-term development of these social conflicts. Political means of governance required at

least minimal political freedom. This signified a dilemma for exclusive regimes that could not meet social demands without putting their power at stake.

Coercive state approaches to internal dissent strongly encouraged unilateral escalation of violence. Sometimes it also radicalized opposition sectors and resulted in armed struggle. Two factors, namely the specific kind of state repression applied and the level of state control over the territory where repression was stepped up, seem to account for the different outcomes. Blunt indiscriminate repression drove large social sectors to oppose the state and even made taking up arms a matter of survival (Cardenal 2004), promoting armed struggle. Campaigns of systematic state terrorism in controlled areas, by contrast, proved at least temporarily effective in achieving the regime's objective of maintaining social control through fear. These approaches, however, came at an enormous human, social, and political price.

### **Multi-Faceted Approaches to Internal Challengers**

State counter-insurgent approaches in Latin America were not limited to repression; many regimes supplemented coercive forms of social control with economic or political measures. However, the degree and coherence with which these means were applied varied significantly between states, as did the effect these measures had on the conflicts. In the 1960s, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela became the first states to successfully employ a combined counter-insurgent approach that quickly quelled conflicts without escalating political violence. A larger group of states which followed, however, employed non-violent means only half-heartedly; they also used massive violence, often committing horrendous human rights abuses. These actions strongly undermined the moderating effect of economic and political measures in their counter-insurgent campaigns.

The Peruvian, Venezuelan and Bolivian armed forces employed civic action, bringing immediate benefits to neglected communities during their firm counter-insurgency in the 1960s. They distributed primary goods among rural populations and provided basic health care during counter-insurgent operations. Long-term (land) reforms, rural development programs and infrastructural improvements were also part of the counter-insurgent strategies aimed at weakening social support for the insurgents (Mercier Vega 1969; Wickham-Crowley 1991; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Joes 1996; Weitz 1986). While the Peruvian armed forces focused on the immediate provision of peasant communities with basic goods (Mercier Vega 1969; MGP 1966), the Venezuelan and Bolivian counter-insurgency policies favored long-term development projects. These ranged from the construction of schools and medical

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centers to social programs and important socio-economic reforms in Venezuela. The Venezuelan government used its newly-acquired oil wealth to “buy off opposition and consolidate support” while at the same time violently cracking down on insurgents and military rebellions (Calvert 2007:184). Democratic elections undermined support for armed struggle, as the governments were perceived as legitimate and there were alternative channels for political opposition (Wickham-Crowley 1992).

The Peruvian and Bolivian campaigns were textbook examples of counter-insurgency; their strategy was designed to “win popular support and thus isolate the insurgents” and they avoided

tactics that result[ed] in large civilian casualties and instead perform[ed] ‘good deeds’ for the people, such as building bridges and supplying food and basic health care. (Weitz 1986:408; see also Wickham-Crowley 1991; Joes 1996)

Although in the Peruvian counter-insurgent campaign peasant casualties outnumbered guerrilla losses, as they did in nearly all military (counter-insurgent) campaigns (Wickham-Crowley 1991; Wickham-Crowley 1990), visible, immediate aid and good army performance prevented the insurgents from winning any peasant support (Mercier Vega 1969; Wickham-Crowley 1991; Weitz 1986). Without the peasants’ help, the insurgents could not survive, much less grow.

The Venezuelan situation was more complicated. Tensions within the armed forces posed a threat to the democratic regime which had restricted political opportunities for the left-wing sectors. Due to this lack of elbow room, the left had formed the more radical Revolutionary Movement of the Left (MIR) (Calvert 2007). Furthermore, harsh military and police violence, including raids on peasant communities, public rapes and executions, left hundreds of peasants dead and provided the insurgents with new recruits (Wickham-Crowley 1991; Wickham-Crowley 1990). The insurgent Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), however, could only count on limited geographical support in the countryside and attacks on policemen undermined urban support for the group (Lamberg 1972; Joes 1996; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Weitz 1986). Democratic shortcomings and excessive repression prolonged the conflict and increased the level of political violence.

The following examples from the literature on rural insurgent struggles confirm the de-escalating effect of civic action and political and economic reform, as well as the escalating effect of harsh repression and political exclusion. Persistence in time was an alternative form of conflict escalation.

In the 1960s, the Guatemalan and Colombian governments combined brutal repression of opposition forces with civic action campaigns and development projects for rural

communities. However, the non-violent measures were employed incoherently and failed to end the internal conflicts. Both states set up long-term rural development programs but these were only temporarily implemented in a limited geographical area and were abandoned prematurely. Heavy repression, furthermore, overshadowed non-violent counter-insurgency measures.

In Guatemala, the counter-revolutionary purges, which victimized thousands of suspected opponents in the aftermath of the 1954 coup against President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, quickly morphed into a broad counter-insurgent campaign which by 1967 had degenerated into state terrorism (Vela Castañeda 2005; Rosada-Granados 1999; Booth & Walker 1989). From then onwards, paramilitary violence and brutal repression marked the Guatemalan counter-insurgency approach.

In Colombia, arbitrary repression, torture, and even air raids on peasant communities suspected of supporting insurgents, overshadowed tentative development projects (Wickham-Crowley 1991). However, strong urban protest posed a new challenge to the politically exclusive National Front<sup>15</sup> (FN) regime from the late 1960s onwards, and the focus of the counter-insurgency shifted towards the quelling of social protest. Harsh governmental repression fueled peasant resistance, as “peasants subject to terror might (...) stand and fight” instead of flee, as Timothy Wickham-Crowley points out (1992:92). Harsh repression without territorial control hampered the regimes’ attempts to end internal challenges by force and fuelled conflict, strengthening and radicalizing the opposition as a reaction to broad-scale violence. Or to paraphrase Jeff Goodwin, indiscriminate violence seems to be more likely to backfire in infrastructurally weak regions (2001). The continuous use of indiscriminate repression not only claimed many civilian victims, it also drove previously uninvolved people to take sides and made conflicts persistent (Goodwin 2001).<sup>16</sup>

A second wave of rural insurgent groups that included these persistent conflicts developed from the mid 1970s onwards and persisted throughout the 1980s (Wickham-Crowley 1992). Unlike the earlier insurgent struggles, the second wave’s insurgent groups gained significant peasant support and developed in Central American states, in Peru, and in Colombia where the internal conflict grew more complex. The 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, furthermore, revived US concerns over communism in its ‘backyard.’ The northern superpower decided to end the revolutionary experiment and to pre-empt any other unwanted regime change in the isthmus, financing the bloody terrorist campaign of the Contras against the left-wing Nicaraguan government (Dunkerley 1988; Booth & Walker 1989; Goodwin 2001)

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<sup>15</sup> The National Front (1958-1974) was a power-sharing pact between the Colombian Conservative and Liberal parties. The FN and its role in the development of the internal conflict will be discussed in detail in the Colombian case study.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Goodwin introduced a third category of conflicts, differentiating between (1) defeat, (2) success and (3) persistence. According to Goodwin, a conflict is persistent if a decisive defeat of the adversary is not possible, the insurgent power maintains at least 1,000 militants, and the conflict lasts at least 10 years (Goodwin 2001).

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and giving military and financial backing to Central American dictatorial regimes. Concerns over the poor human rights records and the regimes' lack of commitment to democracy were subordinated to the short-term aim of averting another revolution (Booth & Walker 1989).

The Guatemalan and Salvadoran counter-insurgencies of the 1980s were characterized by harsh repression, including death squads, massive human rights abuses and even genocidal campaigns. What was new, however, was that both states added a socio-economic or political dimension to their campaign. For instance, the Guatemalan "beans and guns" and "roof, tortilla and work" campaigns of General Rios Montt combined generous policies towards cooperative villages with genocidal repression against guerrilla strongholds (Joes 1996; Booth & Walker 1989; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Roquie 1994).

[A]pproximately 100,000 civilians were killed; 450 villages and hamlets were completely destroyed; 60,000 indigenous peasants were 'relocated' in 'strategic hamlets'; one million people had chosen 'internal displacement'; 500,000 migrated abroad; and several thousand were 'disappeared'

in the intense counter-insurgent campaigns of the first half of the 1980s (Kruijt 1999:49). In the second half of the 1980s, civic action programs and the creation of model villages with a developmental focus became more important in Guatemalan's counter-insurgency approach (Madsen 2000). However, intense death squad activity was responsible for horrendous human rights abuses throughout the 1980s (Gutiérrez 2004). Massive violence against the population exhausted society and put the insurgents on the defensive as they could no longer protect their supporting communities from reprisals (Kruijt 1999; Goodwin 2001). Ultimately it was not repression but peace negotiations and a political opening that ended the conflict in 1996.

Like its Guatemalan counterpart, the Salvadoran counter-insurgent campaign against the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was mainly repressive in nature. The conflict escalated into an all-out civil war characterized by military abuses and death squad activity, killing 75,000 people (Scaruffi 2009) and displacing half a million out of a total population of four and half million (Booth & Walker 1989). Under US pressure, the dictatorship created limited political alternatives to armed struggle when it held semi-competitive elections in 1982, 1984, 1988, and 1989 (Lungo 1986; Corr 1996; McClintock 1998). The regime achieved some legitimacy (Roquié 1994; Corr 1996), but restrictions on political opportunity and a lack of security for non-violent opponents undermined credible political alternatives to armed struggle and, thus, failed to institutionalize the conflicts (Obershall 1973; Obershall 1993). "A popular insurgency cannot be defeated", as Jeff Goodwin points out, "until rebels can lay down their guns—and they and their supporters can

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engage in peaceful political activities—without fear of being violently attacked.” (2001:234) The Central American regimes consciously escalated repressive violence to prevent the emergence of strong, legal opposition and an electoral victory by their social revolutionary opponents (Roquié 1994). Due to repression and unattended claims support for the insurgents remained strong throughout the 1980s. Despite massive US support for the regime, the armed forces could not defeat the insurgent forces and a stalemate ensued in the late 1980s (Roquié 1994). Thus, the “guerrillas might not have won, but neither did they lose.” (Goodwin 2001:207)

In Peru, the return to democracy in 1980 paradoxically marked the start of Shining Path’s (SL) strong insurgent campaign. The reason why democratic rule had little moderating influence on the conflict may be that “most Peruvians did not perceive their country as truly democratic” and that economic grievances rather than the political situation were central to the conflict (McClintock 1998:301). After two years of low-level response, the Peruvian state assigned responsibility for the counter-insurgency to the armed forces, who acted with great autonomy. The military’s forceful counter-insurgent campaign increased human rights violations (Mauceri 1989; Palmer 2007). As a result, “the highland population feared the PCP-SL [Shining Path] guerrillas, but [they] hated the soldiers.” (Taylor 1998:44) In the Peruvian case indiscriminate repression also escalated the conflict. Furthermore, macro-economic problems compromised socio-economic counter-insurgent measures that had been employed since the mid-1980s with promising results (Mauceri 1989). In the early 1990s, a hearts and minds approach aimed at the indigenous communities and an improvement in the country’s human rights record led to warmer ties between the Peruvian state and peasant communities. Furthermore, government forces began to back peasant self-defense groups—*rondas campesinas*—and this became the backbone of Peru’s counter-insurgency policy. The new approach successfully pushed back the influence of the SL (Fumerton 2002). The capture of SL leader Abimael Guzman in 1992 “delivered a mortal psychological and tactical blow” (Palmer 2007:207) to the organization; SL was on the verge of disintegration by 1993 (Taylor 1998). However, the organization seems to have regrouped in recent years (Palmer 2007).

In the 1980s, the Colombian counter-insurgency policy included political measures. Pressured by an escalating conflict, President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) agreed to negotiate with the various insurgent groups on political reforms; by 1984 there was a so-called National Dialogue which seemed to open up a political alternative to armed struggle. The opportunity to voice protest tempered the conflict and eliminated any direct revolutionary threat. However, the ruling regime’s breaches of the armistice (Villaraga 2008) and growing paramilitary violence that began taking the place of open state repression (Chernick 1999; Villamizar 1995) quickly undermined the negotiations. The conflict resumed in full force in the second half of the 1980s. Frequent attacks on social and political activists and the massacre

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of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) near Patriotic Union party (UP) undermined the credibility of the negotiations and largely shut off political opportunities for opposition. In the second half of the 1980s, violence related to drug-trafficking also increased sharply (Verdadabierta 2010) adding complexity to the internal conflict. The recognition of the military impasse in the conflict by both the government and several insurgent groups, as well as increasing violence and social pressure for peace, prepared the political ground for new negotiations (Berghof 2008; Florez & Valenzuela 1996). These culminated in constitutional reform and the successful demobilization of several insurgent groups, such as M-19, EPL and Quintin Lame. However, not all violent groups demobilized and the conflict still persists.

Multifaceted counter-insurgent approaches were not necessarily less violent than simple repression. However, they employed additional measures aimed mainly at draining insurgents' social support. This entailed either luring support away from insurgents or opening political opportunities for opposition. The impact of such combined policies varied widely, depending on the specific type and magnitude of violence applied and the credibility of the alternative political means. Immediately visible improvements, such as civic action campaigns, could undermine support for insurgents when no major opposition front with deep-rooted grievances existed. Structural economic and political grievances required real changes, however. Incoherent reforms, especially if there was ongoing political exclusion had only a limited appeasing effect on the conflict. In these cases, stepping up state repression not only escalated state violence, but strengthened and radicalized the opposition as well. Repression, however, was not just a central cause of the escalation of political violence, but also an essential obstacle to generating confidence in political channels of conflict resolution.

### **Summary**

Political violence in Latin America, and especially state repression, tended to affect large parts of society. Expanding the scale of violence was, in many cases, even a clear policy choice by regimes. The aim was to out-terrorize opposition sectors and maintain power. The outcome of state approaches towards internal challenges depended not only on the mixture of counter-insurgency means and their specific form of deployment, but also to a great extent on the position that the social audience took towards the conflicts. While the increase of repression always entailed a unilateral escalation of political violence, its results varied widely. Sometimes it put a stop to opposition by force, but other times it fuelled opposition and thereby escalated both the political violence and conflict. A mutual escalation of violence

generally signified a serious challenge to the governing regime that often brought the state to the brink of revolution.

The preceding overview points out two different effects of repressive violence. Systematic state terrorism proved functionally effective for regimes to end social conflicts; they could force populations into compliance through terrorist means in state-controlled urban areas, as illustrated by the examples of the southern cone dictatorships. By contrast, lack of territorial control and the blunt use of coercion tended to spur radical opposition, as numerous examples of rural guerrilla campaigns have shown. In addition, harsh repression showed a clear tendency to escalate political violence, either unilaterally or by promoting a radicalization of opposition forces. The quick and decisive military interventions of the Peruvian and Bolivian regimes against isolated insurgent groups during the 1960s, however, demonstrated that it was possible to end insurgent campaigns by force.

Combined counter-insurgent approaches often included massive coercion and escalated the level of violence. Immediate support for neglected social sectors in the shape of civic action campaigns played an important role at the operational level, as it drained insurgents of social support. This operational approach, however, seemed to fall short in the face of deep-rooted desires for structural change that required the opening of political opportunities. The moderating effect of non-violent counter-insurgent measures, and especially of political opportunities, largely depended on their coherent and credible application. Regimes often preferred to revoke political opportunities in order to avoid legitimate challenges to their rule. The superficial use of political means to distract opposition sectors was, however, not a long-term option, as the conflicts persisted and violence often increased. Combined approaches, furthermore, did not necessarily reduce the level of political violence but offered alternatives for opposition forces.

The counter-insurgent approaches of the Latin American states often—accidentally or on purpose—escalated violence and prolonged conflicts. Ending insurgent challenges by sheer force was not only an uncertain enterprise; it almost unavoidably entailed massive human rights abuses. Latin American counter-insurgent approaches often constituted the main threat to society and constitutional rule and sometimes resembled a strategy of terrorism.

The examples mentioned above were focused on the effects of state approaches towards internal challenges, but they indicate that the political opportunity structure played a central role in the development of internal conflicts. The political opportunity structure largely determined whether any political alternatives to armed struggle could be found and strongly influenced the support for insurgencies. However, it is important to analyze in greater detail those aspects that were only briefly touched upon in the literature overview above. Therefore, the following analysis of the empirical case studies will give equal space to the insurgent

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groups and will include the position and influence of the social audience on the development of internal conflicts. In such a way, the analysis can go beyond the state-centered approach and can focus on the causal links between political opportunity structure and the development of conflict, as well as on the interaction of the central conflict actors. It is necessary to shift the focus so we can examine in detail the processes of escalation and de-escalation of political violence that develop in the complex interaction between the actors in the conflict.

## Chapter Two

### Argentina

#### Social Protest and Political Violence



### Timeline

- 1946 Juan Domingo Peron assumes the presidency.
- 1955 The bombing of the Plaza de Mayo kills hundreds of people (June 16). Generals Lonardi and Aramburu lead the *Revolución Libertadora*, a coup that deposes Peron and sends him into exile (Sep. 16). Peronism is banned, social reforms reversed, and in the following years Peronists are executed.
- 1958 Arturo Frondizi assumes the presidency (May 01).
- 1959 First rural guerrilla foco begins in Tucuman.
- 1960 Enactment of CONINTES (Plan of Internal Commotion of the State), implementing the first Argentinian anti-terrorist legislation (under President Arturo Frondizi).
- 1962 A military coup ousts Frondizi from power (March 29).
- 1963 First urban guerrilla attack by a left-wing splinter group of “Tacuara”. The People’s Guerrilla Army (EGP) establishes a rural foco in Salta. Dr. Arturo Illia is elected president with Peronism still banned and a minority of votes (Oct. 12).
- 1966 A military coup ousts President Illia and installs the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship (June 28).
- 1969 The outbreak of *Cordobazo*—a popular rebellion in Cordoba (May 29).
- 1970 The Montoneros appear on the public stage with the abduction, trial and execution of General Aramburu (May 29).
- 1972 The Trelew Massacre—the execution of 16 guerrilla detainees in a feigned escape (Aug. 22).  
The regime is rocked by several popular rebellions similar to the *Cordobazo*.  
The Argentinean Revolution dictatorship calls for elections. An electoral campaign begins in October.
- 1973 Peronist candidate Héctor Cámpora wins 49.5% of the vote in the first free elections since 1950 (March 11).  
Cámpora assumes the presidency. An amnesty is declared for political prisoners (May 25).  
The Ezeiza Massacre: about a dozen are killed and hundreds wounded in a shootout between right-wing and left-wing Peronist groups at the planned arrival celebration for Peron (June 20).

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In new presidential elections, Peron sweeps to power winning 62% of the votes. His 3<sup>rd</sup> wife, Isabel Martinez de Peron, becomes vice president (Sep. 23).

The Montoneros assassinate Jose Rucci, the head of the General Labor Confederation (CGT) (Sep. 25).

1974 Peron publicly breaks with the Peronist left during labor day celebrations on the Plaza de Mayo (May 01).

Perón dies at the age of 78, leaving a divided and polarized movement behind. Vice President Isabel Martinez assumes the presidency (July 01).

The Montoneros and their mass front organizations self-proscribe and return to the underground (Sep. 06).

1975 Secret decree 261 orders the military to intervene in Tucuman against an ERP (Popular Revolutionary Army) foco (Feb).

The first ever general strike is held against a Peronist government.

Minister of Economy Rodrigo and Minister of Social Welfare Lopez Rega resign (Aug.).

The Montoneros attack the Frigate Santísima Trinidad and bomb a Hercules C-10 troop transporter (Aug.).

The Montoneros attack the garrison of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Mounted Infantry (Oct.).

Decree 1/75 of the Defense Council gives a free hand to the armed forces in the struggle against the Montoneros and its support network.

1976 A military coup ousts President Isabel Martinez and installs the Process of National Reorganization dictatorship (March 24).

The Montonero leadership goes into exile. The group suffers heavy losses of cadres and infrastructure in the last quarter of 1976.

1977 The Montoneros carry out several high profile attacks but suffer heavy losses.

1978 Soccer's World Cup is hosted by Argentina and is accompanied by international denouncements of human rights abuses in the country.

1979 The Montoneros launch a strategic counter-offensive. The insurgency suffers heavy losses on the political front and splits.

The Organization of American States (OAS) investigates human rights abuses in Argentina (Sep.).

1980 Second Montonero counter-offensive.

1982 President Gen. Galtieri orders the occupation of the Falkland Islands,

starting the Falklands War that ends in the military defeat of the dictatorship.

The Montoneros hold a public event with 15.000 in attendance. Losses of high-ranking members.

1983 Raúl Alfonsín wins presidential elections (Oct. 30). The Process of National Reorganization dictatorship hands over power to the elected president (Dec. 10).

The Montonero Peronist Movement is dissolved (Dec. 20).

### A Brief History

On 20 December 1983 the Montonero Peronist Movement (MPM) was officially dissolved. A 13 year-long urban guerrilla struggle had ended and the use of violence for political objectives had become de-legitimized. Only 10 days earlier, the Process of National Reorganization (PNR), as the last Argentinean military dictatorship called itself, had handed over power to a democratic government. Argentina had not only suffered a military defeat in the short Falklands War, but Argentinean society was also reeling from a period of severe state terrorism that had shattered the socio-political landscape. In its attempts to avoid the realization of a divergent socio-political project, the dictatorship that reigned the country from 1976 to 1983 had abducted, tortured and disappeared of up to 30,000 persons.<sup>17</sup> The development of the conflict over non-negotiable cultural identities (Robben 2005) had tended towards a genocide-like<sup>18</sup> form of repression.

Political violence in Argentina developed in close connection with successive military interventions. Six military coups disrupted Argentinean political life between 1930 and 1976<sup>19</sup>. The armed forces, in fact, supervised the political process in this period. In the second half of the 1970s, violence escalated when the PNR dictatorship opted for a strategy of state terrorism to end the social conflict that held Argentina in its grip. The conflict was the legacy of social polarization following the ouster of popular president Juan Domingo Peron in 1955. Peron had been toppled in a military coup that put the state at the brink of civil war. Over the

<sup>17</sup> Estimates of how many people disappeared due to state terrorism vary widely. The official investigation that took place shortly after the restoration of democracy confirmed 8,900 disappearances but stated that the real number was probably higher (CONADEP 1984). Human rights organizations generally speak of 30,000 disappeared.

<sup>18</sup> Human rights organizations often describe the broad, mass repression as genocide. Genocide, in legal terms, however, refers to the systematic attempt to destroy a religious or ethnic group and does not apply to the repression of a diverse political movement (Lozada 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Military interventions took place on Sep. 06, 1930 (ended Feb. 20, 1932), June 04, 1943 (ended Feb. 24, 1946), Sep. 16, 1955 (ended May 01, 1958), March 29, 1962 (ended Oct. 12, 1963), June 29, 1966 (ended May 25, 1973), and March 24, 1976 (ended Dec. 10, 1983).

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course of several years, strong multi-sector protest developed in response to ongoing military interventions in Argentina's political, economic and social life. These interventions took place under the banner of Peronism—the popular movement that rallied around Peron's popular socio-economic measures and provided the excluded masses with an identity (Gillespie 1982; Cuchetti 2007). Subsequent military interventions progressively recurred to more extreme repression (Pion-Berlin 1984; Pion-Berlin 1989) to force opposing social sectors into compliance and to disrupt protest.

On September 16, 1955, General Eduardo Lonardi and General Eugenio Aramburu had deposed President Juan Domingo Peron and installed the so-called *Revolución Libertadora*, or Liberating Revolution. The dictatorship used an unprecedented level of violence, including the execution of Peronists, earning itself the nickname of the “executionist”. In an attempt to de-peronise the unions and to “normalize the economy” (Pion-Berlin 1989; Kohl & Litt 1974), the dictatorship outlawed the Peronist party, reversed Peron's economic policies and tried to break the strength of the unions. For many the intervention “put an end to happiness,” as interviewees recalled their impressions of the event (Interview 5; Interview 3). However, political exclusion of the masses and the cancellation of benevolent labor policies stemming from the Peronist period gave rise to strong grassroots opposition and laid the cornerstone for a major social conflict that dominated Argentinean society for decades to come.

The military intervention was in a position to banish Peronism from institutional power but it failed to disrupt the “structure of feeling” of the Peronist identity (Cuchetti 2007). Peronism constituted a broad movement that had engaged the masses in the political system at the expense of the political institutions of the time (Laclau 2005a; Laclau 2005b).<sup>20</sup> Mass demonstrations had created a close relationship between the leader and the masses that had often bypassed intermediate political authorities (CSMP 17.10.1950; Peron 2006). Wage increases, the enactment of labor legislation, political freedom for unions, women's suffrage and a whole series of welfare policies had triggered a political identification with Peron and the Peronist movement, especially among labor sectors that formed the movement's backbone (Gordillo 2007). The Peronist movement, like any group, provided its members with a social identity that set them apart from other groups (Tajfel & Turner 2004). Peronism was principally of a movement character that transcended a simple political position since its very birth. The weak institutionalization of Peronism and its failure to engage fully in formal democracy strengthened extra-institutional channels of political expression and hampered formal democratic procedures in Argentina (McGuire 1997).

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<sup>20</sup> According to Ernesto Laclau, populism contains an interesting contradiction. Populism is formally anti-liberal but it is nonetheless profoundly democratic in practice since it responds positively to a whole series of popular demands (2005a; 2005b).

Military interventions in the institutions failed to de-peronise labor unions and neighborhoods. The “stark contrast between that past and what ensued” (Gillespie 1982:20) helped to maintain the Peronist identity. What ensued, for instance, was a decrease of the labor sector’s share in the national income from 47.7% in 1955 to 33% in 1973 (Descamisado 18.12.1973, p. 4-6), the abolishment of labor rights, a ban on strikes, and attempts to break up the labor unions. In short, drastic economic reversals and political exclusion of the masses reaffirmed mass identification with Peron and the Argentina of Peron’s government (Gordillo 2007). The extremes the armed forces went to in order to topple Peron, such as the bombing of the Plaza de Mayo on June 16, 1955 and the later execution of Peronists, shocked society and seemed to justify and even call for opposition violence (Interview 5; 9). First Peronist resistance formed that was based on the informal network of the deeply-rooted Peronist movement in popular neighborhoods (Quiroga 2008). And, by 1959, the so-called *Uturuncos*, which was “Quechua for Tigermen” (Kohl & Litt 1974: 323), had established the first short-lived guerrilla *foco* in the northern province of Tucuman, where there were mountains and jungle in which to hide. Social polarization increased and further violent challenges soon followed.

At the same time, the state authorities toughened their stance against organized protest and radical challenges. In 1960, President Arturo Frondizi, acting under pressure from the armed forces, imposed the first anti-terrorist legislation in Argentinean history: Plan CONINTES (Plan of Internal Commotion of the State).<sup>21</sup> CONINTES was designed to crack down on labor protests and unions. Its loose definition of terrorism permitted the state to act against “all those who ‘incited public fear or posed threats to the political and economic order’” (Pion-Berlin 1989:76) In 1962 the armed forces decided to depose President Frondizi when he allowed Peronist candidates to run in provincial elections. To justify their move, the armed forces claimed to be protecting democracy and the constitution from “infiltrated extremists.” (Derrocamiento de Frondizi 29.03.1962) Labor protest continued anyway and peaked in 1964 when about 4 million workers participated in the occupation of 10,000 enterprises (Lobato & Suriano 2003). In 1966, under the leadership of General Juan Carlos Onganía, the armed forces once more seized control of the state and launched the so-called Argentinean Revolution. This time, however, the armed forces pursued their own political and socio-cultural project and established a bureaucratic, authoritarian state (O’Donnell 1988). The dictatorship linked the return to democracy to the achievement of certain objectives without committing to any deadlines and definitively closed off any institutional or political path to change (Junta Revolucionaria 2006b). The military junta interfered in all areas of life and brought about a profound social change.

<sup>21</sup> Plan CONINTES retook an old Peronist defense plan that divided the state’s territory into military zones of operation in case of a foreign invasion (Pion-Berlin 1989 footnote 45).

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In the economic sphere, the dictatorship imposed an orthodox stabilization program. The junta felt modernization depended on breaking the power of the labor unions (Brennan & Gordillo 1994) and it resorted to a “level of coercion seldom seen before” (Buchanan 1985) to prevent labor protest against its economic program (Pion-Berlin 1989).

The generals also started making drastic interventions in cultural life. A real “onslaught on culture” (Moyano 1995:18) took place in the name of suppressing communism. Any critical thought, dissidence or difference faced censorship and repression (Romero 2002; Avellaneda 2006). The fervor to wipe out communism even led the regime to burn books (Funes 2008). The junta also took measures against the universities, the hotbeds of subversion, putting conservative, authoritarian clerics in charge (Luna 1972). Student and faculty protest was violently put down. The interventions turned the students into one of the regime’s most vehement opposition sectors.

In the social sphere, the dictatorship’s intervention resembled a morality crusade. The regime tried to impose military discipline upon social life (Junta Revolucionaria 2006b), aiming to control behavior in the streets and contact between the sexes. A conservative dress code was imposed and kissing in public prohibited; even in dance halls a visible separation of the sexes was decreed (Romero 2002; Calveiro 2005b). Such measures were especially unpopular among the youth.

A stream of military interventions and painful economic policies, however, increased opposition. Opposition largely rallied around the Peronist movement, making it grow significantly and transforming it into the nucleus of social protest in the 1960s. Peronism was an attractive alternative for a diversity of social sectors thanks to its inclusive ideology, based on the three pillars of national sovereignty, economic independence and social justice, and its respect for Christian and humanist values (CSMP 17.10.1950). However, the opposition mainly grew and unified in reaction to the sweeping measures of the Argentinean Revolution. Defiance of the dictatorship became the focal point. The “popular [character of the] struggle that included not only the workers but also other parts of society” formed the “magic of this epoch”, as a member of Montoneros’ National Leadership (*Conducción Nacional*, or CN) explained (Interview 12). The lack of any institutional representation reinforced the movement character of Peronism as well as the individual and collective identification with it, drawing inspiration especially from the idealized past. The discrepancy between the official democratic propaganda and the lack of real political opportunity undermined the population’s belief in democratic channels as adequate ways to seek change. Instead, armed struggle came to be seen as an acceptable if not an indispensable means to achieve political renewal (Interviews 2; 3; 5). Political exclusion had given way to an undemocratic generation (Interview 2; 3; 4). Protest increased and radicalized; armed organizations mushroomed.

On 29 May 1969, a joint labor and student protest escalated into a popular insurrection in Cordoba after the death of one demonstrator at the hands of the police. The so-called *Cordobazo* revealed how much opposition there was towards the regime and how radical popular protest had become (Kohl & Litt 1974; Balve et al. 1973). The protesters, spontaneously supported by the middle classes, overwhelmed the police and took control of the city for two days. Armed groups joined the popular rebellion and complicated the army's intervention (Brennan & Gordillo 1994). The popular rebellion, furthermore, gave a strong boost to armed organizations and sparked off a series of rebellions that shook the regime (Balve et al. 2001; Gillespie 1995). After a repeat uprising in Cordoba, similar rebellions broke out in Rosario, Mendoza, San Miguel de Tucuman, and General Roca between 1970 and 1972. In the early 1970s, social protest was at its height and became a quasi-revolutionary force.

The Argentinean Revolution stepped up its repressive measures and the military presence in the streets (Baschetti 2004) but failed to contain the protest. To the contrary, the demonstrations diversified and radicalized in the face of harsher repression. Crackdowns and abuses by the armed forces, such as the extrajudicial killing of 16 guerrilla detainees in the penitentiary of Trelew on August 29, 1972, increased society's acceptance of the guerrilla organizations and armed struggle. Even moderate sectors that rejected guerrilla violence condemned the dictatorship's reprisals (Moyano 1995). Repression of the opposition reinforced protest and the regime began to fear a convergence of popular protest and guerrilla organizations (Gillespie 1982).

General Alejandro Lanusse, the head of the Argentinean Revolution since April 1971, recognized that concrete changes on the ground were needed to prevent a generalized insurrection. He endorsed a controlled transition to democracy. Massive protest, however, persisted, and in combination with deepening rifts within the armed forces obliged Lanusse to make good on his promise of elections. Polls were scheduled for March 11, 1973 (O'Donnell 1988; Romero 2002). This merely formalized a *fait accompli*—the military dictatorship would have to relinquish power to avert a complete loss of control. The Peronist Youth (JP), however, maintained pressure on the regime with the “fight and (Peron) will return” campaign. The idea was to ensure that the promise of free elections would be kept (Interview 10). The JP was the driving force of the electoral campaign (Weisz 2007). Under the slogan “Campora for President, Peron to power” the Peronist candidate Hector Campora won 49.5% of the votes in the first free elections since 1955.

An outburst of celebration took hold of society when Campora assumed office on May 25, 1973. However, the joy vanished when tensions within the Peronist movement broke out and rapidly descended into violence. Collective opposition to the Argentinean Revolution had united diverse social sectors but it had also concealed deep-rooted differences, opposing

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interests and antagonisms within the Peronist movement and the labor unions (McGuire 1997). On the one hand, there was a revolutionary Peronist left-wing that had developed during the 1960s and that saw Peronism as the stepping stone towards a vaguely defined socialist revolution (Lanusse 2007; Descamisado 12.06.1973; Interview 13).<sup>22</sup> Autonomous local labor unions acting in cohorts with the Peronist Youth (JP)<sup>23</sup> were the driving force behind this “revolutionary tendency.” (Farcic 2009) On the other hand, there was a reformist, negotiation-oriented sector—a “syndicate bureaucracy” as the Peronist left labeled it (FAP 1971)—that pursued the institutionalization of Peronism. This faction even negotiated with the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship and pursued labor policies independently of Peron. Augusto Timoteo Vandor, leader of the powerful Metal Labor Union (UOM) who later headed the General Labor Confederation (CGT), was the main representative of this faction that even advanced this form of “Peronism without Peron” (Pigna 2010a; Caraffini 2010). Peron saw in Vandor, who had positioned himself as the alternative leader of the labor movement, the “principal enemy.” (Pigna 2010a; McGuire 1997) Factions absolutely loyal to Peron criticized “Vandorism” as a sectarian electoral tendency and betrayal of the “authenticity of the Movement.” (McGuire 1997:139) Tensions over the political direction of the Peronist movement that included “men of the extreme right-wing and of the extreme left-wing”, as Peron himself observed (La Prensa 04.09.1973), were almost unavoidable.

The enormous potential for conflict within the Peronist movement surfaced when Vandor was assassinated by the left-wing National Revolutionary Army (ENR) on June 30, 1969. However, the differences were still concealed by collective opposition to the junta and by Peron’s vague project of “National Socialism”. The revolutionary tendency interpreted Peron’s concept as socialism on a national level, while the institutional sector of the movement saw a European-style National Socialism on the horizon (Gillespie 1982; Pigna 2010b). The Peronist left overlooked the structural nature of the differences and misinterpreted the widespread opposition to the dictatorship as a unified struggle for a socialist state (Documento Verde 1972).

The return to democracy after the March elections forced the various Peronist sectors to specify their objectives. Now their differences could no longer be concealed and the latent conflict came out into the open. The dispute over the political direction of Peronism quickly escalated from verbal exchanges to violent confrontations. With slogans such as “Peron, Evita, the socialist fatherland” and “Neither Yankees nor Marxists: Peronists”, it was plain to see where the opposing sides stood. The sectors started battling a turf war by painting

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<sup>22</sup> Aside from revolutionary Peronist groups, Marxist groups had also appeared. The PRT-ERP (Revolutionary Workers Party – Revolutionary Army of the People) that formed in the late 1960s would become the most important non-Peronist guerrilla group.

<sup>23</sup> The JP consisted of several organizations, such as the Peronist University Youth (JUP), the Peronist Workers Youth (JTP) and the Union of Secondary-School Pupils (UES), to name just a few.

slogans and seizing public buildings. Some disputes were already being settled by force (La Prensa 19.06.1973).

On June 20, 1973, a crowd at Ezeiza international airport awaited Peron's return from exile when tensions between the left and right-wing Peronist factions escalated into a shootout. Dozens were killed and hundreds injured in what came to be known as the "Ezeiza Massacre".<sup>24</sup> The restoration of democracy did not put a stop to political violence but shifted the main conflict. The struggle pitting the opposition against the dictatorship was giving way to a confrontation within Peronism itself.

Differences over the identity and representation of Peronism could no longer be concealed and a non-negotiable conflict emerged. The revolutionary tendency identified with a concept of Peronism as a movement (FAP 1971). Following the "20 Truths of Peronism" (CSMP 17.10.1950), it wanted to restore direct contact between the masses and the "revolutionary leader." (Descamisado 26.06.1973a) Furthermore, it saw the intermediary institutions of the syndicate bureaucracy as a betrayal of Peronism (FAP 1971; Montoneros Comunicado 01.08.1970; Descamisado 17.07.1973; Descamisado 06.11.1973). The traditional syndicate sector, for its part, emphasized nationalism and Peronism but explicitly rejected a communist objective (La Prensa 31.07.1973). Furthermore, this faction upheld hierarchy and obedience to authority as central values and rejected independent mass demonstrations. The two sectors with their opposing views on the identity and representation of Peronism refused to recognize each other as members of the same social group (Taijfel & Turner 2004). The internal cohesion of the Peronist movement faded away.

Upon his return to Argentina, Peron set out to reassert his authority over the Peronist movement. He sided with institutionalization rather than the extra-institutional Peronist left that he did not control (La Prensa 21.06.1973; La Prensa 22.06.1973; La Prensa 26.06.1973). The Montoneros, who had assumed a leading role in the Peronist left pressed ahead with mass mobilization. Their objective to "seize control of economic and military power" and to "control the fulfillment of the popular will" (Montoneros Comunicado 24.05.1973) was in direct defiance of government authority.

After Peron was reelected president in September 1973, tensions with the Peronist left quickly mounted. On May 1, 1974, the JP demonstrated during a presidential address, pressed him to change political direction. The Peronist left felt the future of the nation was at stake and claimed that Argentina had to choose between liberation and foreign domination (Montoneros Flyer 1). The youth, largely organized by the Montoneros, goaded Peron with critical songs. The aging president responded by publicly denouncing them as "stupid,"

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<sup>24</sup> Astonishingly, security at the welcome ceremony was not assigned to the national police but to extreme right-wing sectors of the Peronist movement led by Col. Osinde. The shootout is said to have been planned to prevent the revolutionary tendency from taking a position next to the grandstand, but it is unclear how reliable this account is (Moyano 1995; Interview 9). The revolutionary tendency, however, had been ill-prepared for a violent confrontation (Interview 4; 5).

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“greenhorns,” and “dangerous infiltrators” and banishing them from the Peronist movement (Sabsay 2010; La Prensa 02.05.1974; Gasparini 1999). The formerly “glorious youth” retreated in disappointment, leaving Plaza de Mayo half empty—and the Peronist movement badly wounded.

When President Peron died only two months later, on July 1, the only galvanizing figure and arbiter the Peronist movement had disappeared. The struggle for control of the movement escalated once again. Earlier on, when violent confrontations had first reared their head, an infamous death squad known as the Argentinean Anti-Communist Association (AAA) had been formed. The AAA was created under the auspices of Peron’s right hand man, Social Welfare Minister Jose Lopez Rega, in November 1973.<sup>25</sup> Now, in an atmosphere of virtual impunity, the death squad abandoned all restraint and sharply stepped up its attacks on the Peronist left (Calveiro 2005a; Moyano 1995; Terragno 2005). The newspapers were filled with accounts of assassinations and massacres mainly targeting youth activists. Attacks on legal socio-political militants hampered the political activities of the Peronist left (Gillespie 1982; Moyano 1995). Faced with the increasing death squad menace, the Montoneros returned to armed struggle on September 6, 1974—only two months after Peron’s death. A mafia-style series of tit-for-tat attacks by the Montoneros and the AAA commenced. Violence was on the rise throughout 1975, and by early 1976 there was a political assassination once every five hours on average; bombs were detonated in a three hour rhythm (Baschetti 1999).

The Peronist left also launched a political offensive against the unpopular government of Isabel Martinez, Peron’s widow and vice president who was now in charge of state affairs. Isabel lacked the political skills and popularity of her late husband and quickly lost any remaining political credit (Terragno 2005). Disenchanted sectors of the Peronist left accused Martinez’s government of betraying the ideals of the March 1973 elections. Claiming to represent the “authentic” will of the people, they formed the Authentic Peronist Party (PPA) in late 1974 (Apuntes para el Peronismo Autentico 20.11.1975a). The PPA tried to rally followers around a Peronist feeling and identity based on an idealized vision of the historical Peron. The party subscribed to “what [Peron] had represented and what he had defended” in the past (Apuntes del Peronismo Autentico 20.11.1975b). Recognized Peronist figures such as Obregon Cano together with youth sectors formed the backbone of Authentic Peronism, a party that many observers welcomed as an electoral alternative to the official Justicialist Party (PJ) after its successful debut in the Misiones provincial elections in April 1975 (La Prensa 14.04.1975).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Officially, the AAA’s first act was an assassination attempt on Senator Hypólito Solari Yrigoyen on November 21, 1973 (La Prensa 22.11.1973). Most analysts, however, name the Ezeiza Massacre as the moment when the death squad was created (i.e. Moyano 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Misiones was one of the least favorable provinces for the Peronist left. Nonetheless, the new party achieved relatively good results there even though it lacked coherent party structures and resources for the campaign.

The deepening disenchantment with the government and the first-ever general strike against a Peronist government in mid-1975, seemed to indicate to the Peronist left that traditional Peronism was in an identity crisis (Evita Montonera Oct. 1975a). The Peronist left, and especially the Montoneros, saw in this “process of fragmentation of the Peronist movement” their chance to “expel the traitors” and to absorb the traditional Peronist masses into an Authentic Peronist Movement (MPA) under Montonero leadership (Evita Montonera Aug.1975a). The intimate ties between Authentic Peronism and the Montoneros, however, provided the government with a pretext to impose a ban on the MPA in December 1975. The Authentic Peronist experiment was aborted (Partido Autentico 27.12.1975). The Peronist left lost its only remaining channel for legal political representation.

On March 24, 1976, amid escalating violence and a profound political crisis, the armed forces detained Isabel Martinez de Peron and installed the Process of National Reorganization (PNR). This autocratic regime pursued economic change and set about eliminating internal subversion, which in the PNR’s view included any form of social or political opposition (Pion-Berlin 1989). In the years that followed, thousands were abducted, tortured and killed in a campaign of systematic state terrorism. Protest vanished; opponents of the regime fell silent to avoid becoming a target of clandestine repression (Gillespie 1982). Political life in general came to a halt.

In December 1983, the morally and politically defeated armed forces handed over power to a democratic government. Large parts of society had repudiated the regime. The three branches of the armed forces were internally divided and the regime was reeling from military defeat in the Falklands<sup>27</sup> War. Harsh government repression had led to the formation of a strong non-violent opposition movement. There was also protest from the labor movement which had been reawakening since 1979 (Interview 9). In 1982, the dictatorship had embarked on its disastrous military adventure, confronting Great Britain over possession of the Falkland Islands. During the PNR reign, the Montoneros had seen their organizational structure practically annihilated and their support network terrorized. The group disintegrated altogether just a few days after the restoration of democracy. The internal conflict that had steadily worsened since the mid-1950s and culminated in the state-led assassination of tens of thousands of citizens came to an end. Violence on all sides had lost its legitimacy as a means of pursuing political objectives.

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<sup>27</sup> Also known as the Malvinas.

## **Processes of Political Violence in Argentina**

Most political violence in Argentina resulted from the military's preventive crackdown on protest sectors and from state repression aimed at shaping the behavior of the social audience. Furthermore, the deposal of elected regimes sparked and radicalized protest and inspired the formation of armed opposition groups. From the mid-1970s onwards, the Montoneros, too, used violence more indiscriminately and even openly attacked the armed forces, provoking a military escalation of the conflict. Both violent actors tried to influence the social audience in the hope of eliciting the desired societal response towards their political projects. However, attempts to influence society by force were the main source of violence. This chapter explores how the Montonero rebels and the ruling regimes influenced the development of the conflict, while paying special attention to the position of the social audience towards the dispute.

### **Montoneros**

The development of the Montoneros' violent campaign was closely related to the amount of social support the group was able to garner. Society's disapproval of the regime and its broad agreement with the insurgents' claims generated sympathy and support for the Montoneros. Organizational features influenced recruitment opportunities and determined the group's openness towards and relations with society. Both the relative success of the Montoneros' early campaign and the group's later defeat can be analyzed in light of its social support and the group's internal organization.

Three factors influenced the social audience's support for the Montoneros: (1) the general political context; (2) the group's political work, which was closely related to its internal organization; and (3) the Montoneros' use of violence. All three factors changed over time. The influence of these three factors is discussed in the paragraphs below.

When the dictatorship known as the Argentinean Revolution ended, a legitimate democratic government took power. Real political opportunity offered an alternative to armed struggle and split the opposition that had united against the former regime. Differences between sectors of the Peronist movement deepened and the conflict evolved into an internal struggle within Peronism. The political conflict became militarized and the political opposition became the target of clandestine state repression. A new dictatorship interrupted democracy after only three years, but support for the Montoneros' socialist objective and armed struggle had decreased.

In 1972, the Montoneros aligned themselves with the JP and focused on mass political activism. However, the confrontation with Peron, the exclusion of the Peronist left from politics, and the Montoneros' self-proscription in September 1974 ended this fruitful work which had won the group substantial grassroots support. The Montoneros' socialist message and their attempts to transform the traditional Peronist identity into a Montonero identity undermined their support. Vanguardism and foquism subordinated the political impulse in favor of armed struggle, while the group's organizational strength weakened its internal democracy. The Montoneros grew isolated from the masses. Isolation, in turn, made them an easier target for state repression.

The third factor influencing the Montoneros' social support was the use of violence. In the early stages of their campaign, the group's armed activities had been extremely selective and sent clear political messages. Lethal attacks were limited to representatives of the regime. As the Montonero campaign advanced, the violence became increasingly indiscriminate and took on the traits of an all-out war with the security forces. The Montoneros' emphasis on armed struggle subordinated politics and lost them the support of many politically-oriented activists. Political defeat weakened the internal commitment to armed struggle, accelerating the organization's decay. In short, a self-inflicted political defeat preceded the organization's quick military defeat.

The following pages will briefly outline the background and ideological premises of the Montoneros. Subsequently, the urban insurgency's rise, stagnation and fall will be examined. The analysis will focus on the Montoneros' ties with the social audience, the group's internal structure, and the relationship between the political and military defeat.

### **The Formation of the Montoneros and Their Objectives**

The Montoneros formed in the atmosphere of political and cultural upheaval that gripped Argentina in the 1960s. US interference in regional issues was perceived as imperialist domination. The Cold War made its presence felt in the shape of anti-communist legislation and the infamous National Security Doctrine, or NSD (Calveiro 2005a; Interview 15). The abolishment of political channels for change was felt to justify armed struggle. The Montoneros shared this perception and called for a "second war of independence" as a means of liberating the state from imperialism and exploitation by an oligarchy (Cristianismo & Revolución Apr. 1971; Cristianismo & Revolución Sep. 1971). The Montoneros name was already used in reference to the Argentinean War of Independence (Mundo 2006) and to 19<sup>th</sup> Century peasant–*gaucho*–struggles against powerful landlords, emphasizing nationalism and

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claims for social justice alike (Gillespie 1982). The name also alludes to a large number of people (*montón* = a lot) and to fighting in a loosely organized fashion.<sup>28</sup> The Montoneros' immediate aims were to reinstate Peron and to put the people in power (Montoneros Communique 1970/5). The group's often-repeated slogan, "free or dead—never slaves," summarized this widely held aspiration. As far as the Montoneros themselves were concerned, liberation consisted of a "class struggle" between the popular Peronist sector and the anti-national oligarchy (Documento Verde 1972).

The Montonero organization was a conglomeration of 5 groups from different provinces. They shared a Catholic background, Peronist identity, a socialist objective, and an acceptance of armed struggle (Lanusse 2007; Montoneros Communique 1970/1).<sup>29</sup> It would take these loosely connected groups until 1972 to coalesce into a coherent organization (Lanusse 2007). Most early Montonero militants were from a middle class background (Diaz-Bessone 1988) and had become radicalized as students or as members of Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Student Youth (JEC), the Catholic University Youth and the Catholic Worker Youth (JOC). Catholic organizations offered an environment for networking and organizing in the otherwise strictly controlled social setting of the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship. Furthermore, the influential Movement of Priests for the Third World called for social militancy and revolution and glorified sacrifice (Morello 2007). In such a way, in May 1969 the pertinent review *Cristianismo y Revolución* wrote: "The obligation of every Christian is to be revolutionary—the obligation of every revolutionary is to make revolution." Doing social work in shantytowns sensitized the young to poverty and radicalized them politically (Morello 2007; Interview 4; 7; 14).

The Montoneros also adopted the Peronist doctrine and especially its combative tendency as best represented by Eva "Evita" Duarte de Peron and John William Cooke. Evita's attempts to create popular militias in 1952 and statements by Peron such as "only the people will save the people" (FAP 1968), inspired the Montoneros and seemed to justify their rebellion. No one influenced militant Peronism more than John William Cooke, a supporter of the Cuban revolution who represented Peron after his deposal. In his writings, Cooke appealed for foquist guerrilla warfare against the Liberation Revolution dictatorship. He argued that Peronism, an "invertebrate and short-sighted giant," needed strong revolutionary leadership (Rojo 2009). The Montoneros embraced the idea of establishing a vanguard leadership that would transform the popular movement into a revolutionary force (Salas 2007; Documento Verde 1972).

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<sup>28</sup> This definition is taken from the Real Academia Española encyclopedia, [www.rae.es](http://www.rae.es). See also Gillespie 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Some founding members, such as Fernando Abal Medina and Carlos Ramus, had initially become militants in the extreme right-wing Tacuara movement (Morello 2007; Murray 2005a; Murray 2005b).

The Montoneros also found inspiration outside Argentina. Examples of armed struggle abounded on the South American continent and in the rest of the developing world. Cuba served as an example of successful revolution in Latin America and several founding members of the Montoneros, such as Fernando Abal Medina, Norma Arrostito and Emilio Maza, received guerrilla training on the island before launching their armed campaign (Gasparini 1999). Furthermore, the writings of the Brazilian guerrilla theoretician Carlos Marighela (Marighela 1974a; Marighela 1974b) and the impressive activity of the Uruguayan Tupamaros demonstrated the feasibility of guerrilla struggles in urban environments.

On an individual level, most of those who joined armed struggle decided to do so in lengthy debates with friends and in political groups (Interviews 4; 7; 8), many of which were enrooted in popular neighborhoods (Interview 3). For many militants the main objection to taking up arms was not the great personal risk but the obligation to use violence against people (Interview 2; 4). Alternatives were examined and the decision to join the insurgency was often a collective one. Most of the younger militants lacked personal experience of the Peronist government of the 1950s and were quick to embrace the idealized version that was so successfully propagated by the Peronist left. Commitment to the revolutionary tendency often clashed with Peronist identity; that is to say that the revolutionary project competed with the restoration of hierarchical Peronism (Interview 2; 3; 7).

### **The Rise of the Montoneros**

On May 29, 1970, the “men and women” of the Montonero group “assumed an armed struggle against the enemies of the people and the fatherland.” (Montoneros Communique 1970/4) The abduction, “revolutionary trial” and execution of ex-dictator General Aramburu was the first in a series of high-profile attacks that would become a hallmark of the Montonero campaign. Successful armed propaganda, political mass work and the fact that their campaign coincided with a strong protest movement elevated the Montoneros into the strongest urban guerrilla group in Latin America by the mid-1970s (Gillespie 1982).

Early Montonero attacks were characterized by highly discriminate use of violence, especially when directed against people. The group chose targets of political and symbolic value at this stage. They won widespread sympathy and the support of Peronists with their attacks on emblematic figures and symbols of the dictatorship, imperialism and the national oligarchy. With their first coup, the unknown Montoneros became a point reference for large parts of the Peronist movement. The spectacular abduction and “trial” of Aramburu—the emblem of anti-Peronism—provoked a far more favorable social response than expected

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(Interview 12). Support for this act of armed propaganda was overwhelming, but the Montoneros lacked the organizational capacity to absorb the countless volunteers (Interview 9; 13). It seemed as if the Montoneros “had no idea of the magnitude of their act.” (Interview 15) But even their seizures of small towns, the most militarist actions they engaged in during this period (Moyano 1995), were not aimed at confronting the security forces directly. The hit-and-run style attacks on small towns mainly had a psychological impact (Gillespie 1982). The group discovered that selective violence against targets of great political value could win them significant sympathy and support.

Until 1972, the Montoneros limited their activities to armed propaganda. The political objective of attacks prevailed over their military aspects during this first phase of Montoneros' campaign. Assaults on symbols of the regime containing a self-evident political message fostered sympathy and even inspired copycat attacks (Interview 5). Examples of such selective, high-profile operations are rife in the early Montonero campaign: the June 1970 execution of Aramburu and the July 1970 occupation of the city of La Calera, the late 1970 bombing of the home of General Osiris Villega (the ambassador to Brazil), the June 1971 occupation of the city of Jerónimo Norte in Salta Province, and the assassination of Colonel Hector Iribarren in April 1973. Revenge was sometimes a motive. This was certainly the case in the liquidation of Iribarren (commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Corps Intelligence Service), who was held responsible for the Trelew Massacre. However, the Montoneros explicitly rejected attacks on soldiers or policemen and instead called on the security forces to join their struggle (Montonero Documents 09.09.1970). Although shootouts with the police occurred, only “a dozen deaths could be attributed to Montoneros” in their early years (Gillespie 1982:113). Abductions of foreign workers and entrepreneurs and seizures of small towns were aimed at gaining publicity and funds. They were also intended to demonstrate the regime's inability to guarantee security. Other actions, such as bank robberies and disarmament of police officers, had organizational aims.

Social support was central to the Montonero campaign and the organization experienced the limits and strengths of support. Within three months of their appearance on the public stage, several leading members including Emilio Maza, Fernando Abal Medina, Carlos Ramus, and Luis Rodeiro had been killed or arrested. Valuable information had fallen into the hands of the security forces. Often these setbacks were self-inflicted. For instance, on September 7, 1973, later called the “Day of the Montoneros” leading militants met publicly in William Morris's pizzeria in Buenos Aires, disregarding security measures because they expected social sympathy and collaboration. However, they were betrayed and the meeting ended in a fatal shootout with the police. The Montoneros sent a warning to “traitors and collaborators of the regime” but also revised their security measures (Montonero Documents 09.09.1970). While they were rudely awakened in this way to the limits of their support, they

also enjoyed active collaboration. Support from social and political networks enabled the organization to recover from serious losses, self-inflicted setbacks and advances of the security apparatus (Lanusse 2007). Peronist organizations offered help. The Montoneros' prestige allowed them to recruit new cadres and radical Catholic organizations praised the militants' sacrifices (MSTM 07.07.1970). Peron himself demonstrated his sympathy (Peron 1971). Social support, in short, was central to the survival of the Montoneros.

From 1971 onwards, the group added political mass work to their repertoire of activities. Their influence on the social audience rapidly grew along with the support they received. Basic Revolutionary Units (UBR) (Interviews 5; 9; 13) were organized in popular neighborhoods; these units propagated the organization's ideology (Lanusse 2007). When in 1972 the group linked up with the JP, it gained a political platform with a mass constituency. This allowed the Montoneros to engage in mass political work while continuing to act in absolute secrecy. JP was an inclusive social movement organization (Zald & Ash 1966) that could easily absorb the politicized youth masses. The "Peron Return" drive and the electoral campaign brought exponential growth of the JP and thus, indirectly, to the Montoneros' mobilization capacity. The number of supporters they could potentially call upon swelled to well over 100,000 by end of the 1972.<sup>30</sup> Tens of thousands of young people began identifying with the Montoneros, whose links to the JP were well known (Lanusse 2007).

However, the Montoneros did not lead or inspire mass rebellion. They simply coincided with, and benefited from, popular protest against the regime. The group's activities won them sympathy. There was little popular collaboration with the police, which meant the militants could easily operate within the broad opposition movement against the regime. Peron praised the "marvelous youth" and their fight for the fatherland (Cristianismo & Revolución June 1971, p. 8-10). In other words, the Montonero movement at this time supported mass rebellions and looked for a mass base, but lacked the organizational capacity to set up and control a revolutionary force.

Despite their shortcomings, the Montoneros grew into the undisputed point of reference for the Peronist left. The group had won the "emotive battle" (Interview 5) and could count on widespread social sympathy and support. Furthermore, UBRs guaranteed contact with the masses at the grassroots level and the organization entered the democratic epoch with enormous political and social capital (Interview 10; 13). The Montoneros represented the most dynamic sector of the Peronist movement and were able, upon the restoration of democracy, to operate legally. The Montoneros expanded their political grassroots work and created the Peronist Worker Youth (JTP) in a bid to claim representation of the labor unions

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<sup>30</sup> This is according to an estimate by Richard Gillespie (1982). By their own account, the Montoneros represented up to 250,000 people by the end of 1973 (La Prensa 31.01.1974). A number of 150,000 supporters, however, seems to be a more realistic estimate, as a former member of Montoneros' leadership pointed out in an interview (Interview 9).

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(Descamisado 26.09.1973a; Descamisado 26.09.1973b). Although the Montoneros lacked their own institutional representation (Interview 9), the March elections had given the JP control of 8 provincial governments including the important provinces of Buenos Aires and Cordoba. Despite Peron's return to the presidency and the quickly deteriorating political climate, the Montoneros maintained massive growth until mid-1974 (Interview 4; 6; 9). Along with their front organizations, they took control of the increasingly youth-based social mobilization. The Montoneros propagated their political ideas and expanded their support base through legal political activity and mobilized tens of thousands. Social support turned Montoneros into an important political player.

Now the Montoneros grew in organizational terms as well. In 1972, the group had managed to establish a national leadership. Mergers with the Peronist guerrilla groups Descamisados, Peronist Armed Forces (FAP) and Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) in 1973 strengthened the organization further. The number of cadres, which had remained stable under the military dictatorship due to organizational limits and losses in battle, now jumped from 200 to at least 3,000 and went on growing (Moyano 1995). The Montoneros now had the capacity to absorb many volunteers, mainly of whom had a student background (Interview 14). According to the Montoneros' own estimates, the group had almost 10,000 cadres at its peak in early 1974 (Interview 9).<sup>31</sup>

Organizational growth and massive social support allowed the Montoneros' latent insurgency strategy to crystallize. Until now, the Montoneros had limited themselves to calls for mass participation and armed propaganda to involve the masses. Now they tried to establish political control over the population and territory and set about organizing a popular army. The organization claimed to "support" and "defend" the government, but also to "control" it (Montoneros Comunicados 24.05.1973; Montoneros Flyer 2). In short, the Montoneros tried to establish a counter-state and clearly pursued an insurgency strategy. However, the group was faced with a dilemma: its urban base made controlling territory and population a difficult task.

To summarize, the Montoneros' growth was closely linked to growing popular protest against the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship and to the group's own use of violence. The Montoneros easily gained sympathy and support in the context of broad opposition towards the regime. Grassroots political work, in the shape of both the UBRs and alliances with the mass-mobilizing JP, were fruitful and widened the Montonero support base. Selective use of violence, with an emphasis on political rather than military objectives, was welcomed. The Montoneros became a Movement Organization, as well as a central force in politics. Not armed actions as such, but their political message and the political grassroots work of the

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<sup>31</sup> The discrepancy in estimates of the group's strength results from the varying definitions of militants and the wide fluctuation in numbers of less committed militants and collaborators.

Montoneros, gave the group a pivotal position in the movement that opposed the Argentinean Revolution.

### **Organizational Aspects and Stagnation**

The Montoneros developed in close relationship with their support network, especially the youth sectors of the Peronist movement. Despite important organizational growth, the urban environment impeded the group's development into a popular army. The change in politics, namely the return to democracy, reduced society's support for the ongoing Montonero campaign. The organization stagnated and began to decay.

Strengthened by revolutionary volunteers, the vanguard organization established guerrilla foci in the cities and relied on armed propaganda to instigate mass rebellion against the dictatorship (Documento Verde 1972). Acting in the state-controlled urban environments impeded the attempt to pursue a classic insurgent strategy of controlling territory and organizing a popular army. Lacking "liberated territory and without a solid and stable rearguard," the Montoneros decided to reinforce their "own apparatus" to ensure the organization got hold of the necessary "resources, cadres, and organizational techniques" it needed to survive (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976b:10). The Montoneros had already begun to focus on organizational growth the moment democracy was restored in Argentina. After it reverted to a clandestine existence on September 6, 1974, the group put even greater emphasis on the development of its own infrastructure so it could operate independently of social support and escape detection. However, the organization needed active popular participation to achieve its strategic end goal of a socio-political revolution. The Montoneros were tactically independent from social support at this point, but as an urban insurgency they depended on spontaneous massive support on a strategic level (Le Blanc forthcoming). Furthermore, popular insurrections of the past had shown the limitations of unorganized rebellions and the organizational weaknesses of urban guerrilla groups that could not absorb or sustain popular protest. Urban guerrilla organizations only posed an important threat to the state when their campaigns coincided with popular insurrections (Gillespie 1982; Lanusse 2007). Their organizational incapacity to transform spontaneous rebellions into a prolonged insurgency under their leadership limited their revolutionary potential. The contradictory need for active mass support and covert organization left only an insurrectional approach open. The urban insurgents, thus, faced an all-or-nothing scenario—either they achieved mass participation or they would achieve only their own de-legitimation over time.

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The Montoneros missed a chance to clearly differentiate themselves from Peron's project at the time and to formulate their own objectives. Supporting the electoral campaign increased the Montoneros' popularity but implied their subordination to Peron's strategy. The Montoneros had turned into a special formation—an armed wing of Peronism. Supporting the electoral campaign undermined their ability to develop an independent political project and cancelled the chance to end the dictatorship by revolution (Documento Verde 1972). The Column Sabino Navarro<sup>32</sup> split off from the Montoneros over this decision (Documento Verde 1972; Interview 12).

The return to democracy signified a fundamental change of the political environment and functioning of the state. Armed struggle had lost its justification. Opposition now had to be expressed on the political stage. The Montoneros did not adapt organizationally to the new situation, however. They rejected disarmament. While the group had a massive political wing, it maintained a semi-clandestine cell-structure. And, Montoneros failed to achieve an institutional representation. Instead of integrating completely into democratic political life and laying down their arms, the Montoneros started building a popular army. Rodolfo Galimberti, the leader of the JP who was aligned with the Montoneros, called for the formation of popular militias from the JP to deter any future military intervention (La Prensa 22.04.1973). Tensions with the security forces over the monopoly on violence became unavoidable, and Peron, who opposed this project, removed Galimberti from the JP leadership in March 1973 (Descamisado 09.03.1973; La Prensa 27.04.1973). Furthermore, the Montoneros represented a large and active social movement (Salas 2007), but unlike traditional branches of the Peronist movement the group lacked institutional representation. This lack of "a major capacity of decision within the government was one of the reasons which created contradictions" within the Montoneros because the group "lacked institutional instruments to respond to the demands of the social sectors [it] represented," a former member of the Montoneros national leadership explained (Interview 12). In lieu of institutional channels, the organization tried to bypass the institutions and pressed for political change from the streets.

Parallel to intensifying mass political work, the organization expanded its semi-clandestine cell structure. Thousands of professionals and workers began to covertly collaborate with the Montoneros; thanks to their legal status they were not forced to go underground (Bonasso 2010; Interview 9). The Montoneros also enlarged their military apparatus. Volunteers who had earlier failed to establish contact with the organization could now be incorporated, creating a strong military apparatus that posed a serious security threat to the state authorities.

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<sup>32</sup> The name referred to José Sabino Navarro, former Montonero leader who died in a shootout while fleeing police.

Furthermore, the vanguard organization questioned Peron's hegemonic position and openly questioned his leadership of the movement (Salas 2007; Interview 16). The Montoneros called mass demonstrations to put pressure on Peron. However, their defiance of the old leader, who unambiguously blamed the Peronist left for the Ezeiza Massacre and the increase in tensions (La Prensa 21.06.1973; La Prensa 22.06.1973; Descamisado 26.06.1973b), put them in direct confrontation with a large part of the Peronist movement and the entire state apparatus. The Montoneros and their front organizations faced an uncomfortable situation. They had built their support base in Peron's name and had campaigned for the old president, but they were growing increasingly alienated from his political project. Pressuring Peron was bound to end in a split with the leader. But having neglected to develop a clearly differentiated political project and independent support, the Montoneros were left in a weak position. The organization later acknowledged this (Montoneros Curso 2008). In short, the Montoneros' institutional weakness but strong rallying capacity exacerbated the conflict, as extra-institutional pressure clashed with attempts to preserve institutional power. Furthermore, the Peronist identity was at the center of this dispute.

The Montoneros' organizational structure was not conducive to the development of a coherent political force. The political-military vanguard organization (OPM)<sup>33</sup> lacked a clear organizational division between its political and military forces (Evita Montonera Jan.-Feb. 1975) which hampered political work and exposed the whole organization to repression. The JP, for instance, had to deal politically with Montoneros' assassination of CGT leader Jose Rucci just two days after Peron's re-election in September 1973. Additionally, the front organization was increasingly targeted by paramilitary repression.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the fuzzy structural divide between armed and political structures meant both sides were equally exposed to state intervention and repression. Political sectors were publicly exposed and were therefore an easy target for both overt and covert repression (Interview 4).

The Montoneros' resumption of armed struggle was precipitated by several factors: the lack of institutional representation, the political exclusion of the Peronist left, the break with Peron and an increase in paramilitary attacks on political militants after Peron's death. On September 6, 1974, the Montoneros and their front organizations renounced the political path and ceased their political mass work (La Prensa 07.09.1974). The front organizations closed their public meeting venues, withdrew their publicly-known militants and sent them underground to protect them from paramilitary attacks (Interview 4, 6). However, this was not enough to prevent the assassination of militants, for the return to armed struggle gave the

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<sup>33</sup> Political Military Organization.

<sup>34</sup> Although Montonero leader Mario Firmenich later denied responsibility for the assassination, the organization claimed the murder at the time (Asís 2009).

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authorities an additional rationale for repression and lowered the political price for the targeted killing of militants (Interview 9).

The Montonero organization now felt the full impact of the urban guerrilla dilemma. The Montoneros had become a strong cadre organization but they still depended on massive social support to bring about revolution. Ending political mass work robbed the Peronist left of its political space and limited its contact with the popular masses (Interview 4; 6). Clandestine political work was no substitute for the legal political space they had lost. Political activists were easily tracked down and attacked. Recruitment opportunities dried up and the return to “resistance” (Evita Montonera Jan.-Feb. 1975) gave the state all the justification it needed for an offensive against “subversion.” (La Prensa 11.09.1974; La Prensa 27.09.1974a; La Prensa 27.09.1974b; La Prensa 28.09.1974) The collective move underground subordinated all organizational structures to the logic of armed struggle. Furthermore, the concentration of command under the Montonero leadership ended opposition independence and created the impression that all opposition movements were directly linked to the Montoneros, inviting broad repression. The Peronist left abandoned its political space, support for the Montoneros decreased and the organization slowly entered into decay. The Montoneros’ renouncement of legal political activity proved to be the most important political victory of the state authorities and institutional Peronism over the Peronist left (Interview 4; 6; 16). Decreasing support for ongoing armed struggle after the restoration of democracy aggravated the situation for the Montoneros.

The group’s strategic return to resistance inaugurated a phase of restructuring to adapt to a clandestine existence, to correct previous errors and limitations, and to guarantee the advance of socialism. The Montoneros abandoned their presence in the “superstructure”, leaving the university, for instance. Instead they concentrated efforts on expanding their “representation of the Peronist movement.” (Evita Montonera Jan.-Feb. 1975) The organization recognized that its political and military advance depended on how much popular support it had (Evita Montonera Aug. 1975a; Evita Montonera Nov. 1975a). However, a “political revolution, (...) the power-taking of the workers and the people” could not be achieved “without the construction of [the people’s] military power and the destruction of the military power of the enemy.” (Evita Montonera Jan.-Feb. 1975) A popular army was needed (Evita Montonera Oct. 1975b). The group restructured and centralized its political leadership. After Authentic Peronism was banned in late 1975, the Montoneros launched the Montonero Peronist Party (PPM)—a Leninist cadre party (Salas 2007). The Montoneros wanted to transform themselves into a “revolutionary party” (Evita Montonera April-May 1976) and a strong cadre organization was formed. The restructuring had a strengthening effect but it also fostered centralism and emphasized the organization’s military orientation. Their popular support faded (Moyano 1995; Calveiro 2005a; Interview 2; 4; 6). In short, the Montoneros’

structural reinforcement undermined their strategic revolutionary capacity, as it will be discussed in greater detail below.

From early 1975 onwards, The Montoneros subordinated their political objectives to military activities. They felt that “military action [was] always” “the superior form of struggle in the conquest of power.” (Evita Montonera Jan-Feb. 1975) The Montoneros’ believed that “political power is obtained” only in relation “to military power.” (Evita Montonera Oct. 1975b) Military attacks as such were interpreted as blows against the enemy and often lost their self-evident political message that had characterized the early Montonero campaign. High profile attacks like the abduction of entrepreneurs Jorge and Juan Born and the assassination of police chief Alberto Villar were now supplemented by numerous indiscriminate attacks on police officers (La Prensa 10.11.1974). The Montoneros waged a war with the security apparatus that overshadowed the revolutionary message of their campaign. In 1975, they even declared all police officers military targets without distinction (Moyano 1995:61). And, the group attacked targets in all three branches of the armed forces to demonstrate its military capacity and to deter the military from attempting a coup (Interview 9). In August, the Montoneros bombed the frigate Santísima Trinidad before she was even commissioned and a C-130 troop transport plane on the runway. In October, the organization assaulted the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Mounted Infantry in Formosa province. The selective violence of the early Montonero campaign had given way to more random attacks with no apparent political message. However, in revolutionary warfare, even successful attacks are pointless if they do not contain a self-evident political message capable of mobilizing mass rebellion against militarily superior state forces (Guillen 2005).

The Montoneros’ increasing military orientation caused widespread disenchantment and undermined their support base (Interview 4; 6). Moderates distanced themselves from the movement, allowing more radical sectors to take control. A vicious cycle of violent confrontation, radicalization, and erosion of the support base commenced. Amid increasing confrontation, mass movements tend to shrink while smaller protest groups become radicalized (della Porta 1995a). The Montoneros were no exception to the rule.

At the same time, the Montoneros began to centralize political control within and over opposition groups. This process had already begun with the restoration of democracy. The return to armed struggle accelerated matters. Now a strong political-military organization was formed under a National Leadership (CN). A National Council that included members of both the CN and the Regional Leaderships (CR) was responsible for a general evaluation of the campaign and for the preparation of new campaigns. The CN, however, was the central executive body. It controlled, evaluated and planned campaigns and it passed its resolutions to the CR. Furthermore, the CN developed National Services and controlled finances (DIPBA Documents 1). Hierarchies were reinforced and tasks specialized.

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The process of centralization culminated in the formation of the Montonero Peronist Party (PPM) in early 1976. The PPM united politics and the popular army under one roof and emphasized the Montoneros' claim to leadership of the Peronist movement (Evita Montonera April-May 1976; Weisz 2007; Salas 2007). This simplified the vast organizational structure but reinforced hierarchies as well. The first party congress, scheduled for 1976, had to be cancelled and the members were never given an opportunity to vote on the leadership (Gillespie 1982; Interview 4; 6). State repression had stifled internal democracy and debate in favor of more urgent matters. The Montoneros' vanguard concept also favored centralism. A common trait of vanguard leaderships is a tendency to seek legitimacy by claiming to possess a particular insight that promotes elitism, and not through a democratic decision-making process (Salas 2007). Democratic centralism lost its momentum as all remaining space for debate, reflection, critique and change slammed shut (Interview 2; 4; 16). A nascent bureaucracy completed the centralizing process. As ex-Montonero militants recalled, internal debate was limited to orders and written replies (Interview 4); manuals for conduct and training were issued and an internal penal code was established (CPR 2007). As Robert Michels points out, increasing organization promotes the formation of oligarchies and compromises democratic relations (in Sartori 2003). The Montoneros achieved organizational strength at the cost of internal democracy.

Centralism also appeared in the strong infrastructure the Montoneros had financed using the record-setting ransom of USD 60 million they obtained for the release of Juan Born in 1975. The funds were controlled centrally and columns depended on central approval of resources. The organization created a strong underground network of safe houses and offices that served as cover offices, arms and ammunition workshops, supply and printing locations, and even clandestine medical centers (Gillespie 1982). This infrastructure permitted the organization to expand its activities and reduce its dependence on social support for elementary organizational and operational issues. Operational independence reduced risky contact with outsiders but it also isolated the organization from the population (Interview 7). The vanguard organization claimed to represent the popular masses but reduced them to passive spectators of the struggle. The Montoneros' financial strength fuelled the evolution into a centralist and sectarian organization as it separated the functioning of the group from social support. The Montoneros' organizational reinforcement neglected strategic relations with the population and therefore compromised its revolutionary potency. Organizational reinforcement also obscured the group's lack of strategic support (Montoneros Curso 2008) and convinced it to prematurely step up its attacks against the security forces (Salas 2007).

After Authentic Peronism was banned, the Peronist left had closed ranks around the Montoneros. In response to this development, the Montoneros had created the PPM. In early

1977, the Montoneros even created their own support movement—the Montonero Peronist Movement (MPM)—in a top-down move. They hoped not only to absorb traditional Peronism but also to replace its political identity with the “Montonero identity” with the aim of guaranteeing the advance towards liberation and socialism (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976a). This backfired, however, rankling potential support sectors rather than attracting them. Even among cadres the Peronist identity often prevailed (Interview 8). The Montoneros had mistaken opposition to Isabel and Lopez Rega for a crisis of Peronist identity and for support for their socialist objective. However, public discontent was not focused on the Peronist identity but on failing social and economic policies which had sparked a government crisis. In fact, the masses protested against the government *because* of their Peronist identity, not because they had lost it (Terragno 2005). Protest for social improvements was part of the Peronist heritage. Authentic Peronism might have attracted large social sectors with its idealized vision of the historical Peron, but the Montonero Movement required a change of identity toward a less popular, socialist objective. Peronist identity did not transform mechanically, however, and the MPM failed to absorb the popular masses who clearly did not feel represented by the new party. The Montoneros found out the hard way that identity could not be changed by decree. Harsh repression of any political or social activity under the PNR dictatorship hampered development of the new movement. Membership in the MPM was largely limited to Montonero militants; the party remained a shadow of what it wanted to be (Gillespie 1982). The Montoneros had morphed from a popular social movement organization into an exclusive vanguard group.

Through centralization, the group gained in organizational strength what it lost in flexibility and creativity. Central decisions replaced independent and locally rooted activities that had been crucial to the survival and growth of the early Montoneros. As Lucas Lanusse (2007) stresses, the strength of the early organization was, paradoxically, based on its organizational weakness. Large-scale autonomy had helped the group escape repression, and local grassroots work had created strong support. Now a strong cadre organization with clear hierarchies had emerged and had cancelled out the early advantages.

To summarize, the Montoneros’ attempts to win mass support competed with security concerns and increasing organizational control. In response to this dilemma, the rebels reinforced their organizational structure and emphasized military action over political mass work. This, however, accelerated the loss of social support. The strong cadre organization that emerged in the process alienated itself from society. As the Montoneros’ tactical military and organizational strength grew, their strategic ties with society suffered. To insurgent groups, tactical battlefield successes are Pyrrhic victories if they do not attract social support. Support cannot be decreed and requires political work rather than sectarian armed struggle. The Montoneros failed to maintain political mass work after self-proscribing. This precipitated

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their stagnation and decay. Their increasing control over front organizations compromised these bodies politically and exposed them to repression. Montoneros' front organizations lost their close ties to society when they went underground together with the insurgent organization. They became even less attractive to society due to the insurgents' focus on armed struggle and their attempts to impose a new identity. Quickly the front organizations missed their aim of bridging between the insurgent organization and society. Paradoxically, organizational control seems to run counter to the needs of (urban) insurgent groups of generating diverse and widespread opposition towards a regime. Organizational control reduced the space for an independent grassroots opposition to form. In short, centralization and a military orientation accelerated the Montoneros' decay as they exposed the political structure of the insurgent organization to collective repression. The Montoneros compromised their overall revolutionary potency in return for organizational strength.

### **The Fall of the Montoneros**

When the armed forces assumed control on March 24, 1976, they opted for a strategy of systematic state terrorism to combat armed opposition groups and their support environment and to prevent protest against their socio-economic project. Using extreme repression, the dictatorship dismantled large parts of the Montonero organization within one year. The Montoneros had already been significantly weakened by their self-proscription and their resulting political defeat. Furthermore, collectively returning to the underground had compromised the group's compartmentalization and increased the effectiveness of the state offensive.

When the Montoneros self-proscribed and made a priority of armed struggle, they alienated themselves from society. To protect militants, clubs were closed and militants were transferred to new locations. This weakened links to society and consequently reduced the organization's mobilization potential. The organization suffered a political defeat when discontent and massive anti-government protest, such as the mid-1975 general strike, did not result in support for the Montoneros' armed struggle (Terragno 2005) and the organization failed to take advantage of the political crisis. The militarization of the political conflict and the closure of political space for the Peronist left accelerated the group's alienation. Attempts to militarize and to develop militias within the short-lived Authentic Peronist Movement (Evita Montonera Feb.-March 1976) did not fall on fertile soil (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976b). Military operations without self-evident a political message failed to attract support or to weaken the regime. Instead of deterring the armed forces, attacks increased their resolve and security

measures were upgraded (Interview 11). Militarily oriented armed struggle brought on its own demise, as this method failed to generate the necessary social support. It was not armed attacks as such, but their visible political objective, that determined the effectiveness of armed propaganda.

The Montoneros' military focus had its origin in vanguardism (Salas 2007). The vanguard organization claimed to express the highest political conscience of the masses and expected unconditional social support (Evita Montonera Aug. 1975a) for the reconstruction of the "real Peronism (...) under the lead of Montoneros." (Evita Montonera Dec. 1975) The Montoneros mistakenly took their identity and aims for those of the popular masses, as journalist and Montonero intelligence official Rodolfo Walsh criticized shortly before his death (Walsh 23.11.1976). Vanguardism drastically changed relations with the population and the organization soon discovered that support could not be decreed but had to be created.

The Montoneros erroneously saw their network of social support, their "urban rearguard" (Evita Montonera Aug. 1975a), as impenetrable terrain. Borrowing strategy from rural guerrilla warfare, especially in Cuba and Vietnam (Walsh 23.11.1976), the Montoneros wanted to trap and annihilate government forces in "popular territory." (Evita Montonera Feb.-March 1976) Controlling territory in the urban environment was illusory, however, as was the idea of a decisive military victory over the regime. To make up for the social rearguard's lack of support for armed struggle, the Montoneros increasingly relied on their own infrastructure (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976b). Waning support and organizational shutdown reinforced each other; the Montoneros distanced themselves even more from society, handing a decisive victory to the regime.

Centralism also increased the effectiveness of state intelligence and forcefully extracted information. The concentration of information within a limited group made the capture of high-ranking militants tantamount to disaster. In late 1975, the detention of Roberto Quieto, member of the Montonero National Leadership since the merger with the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) in 1973, demonstrated the disruptive effect of losing central members. The Montoneros could not rely on Quieto's reticence and preventively reorganized all infrastructure known to the captured leader (Pastoriza 2006). Suspected of betrayal, Quieto was sentenced to death in absentia by a Montonero tribunal. Centralism required the organization to "[preserve] [its] center of gravity" (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976b), so the leaders opted to go into exile in late 1976 to avoid capture. However, this impeded to effectively lead the masses in the revolutionary struggle.

Forcefully extracted information from rank-and-file militants led to further abductions and losses of infrastructure. Despite the new method of repression that consisted of abduction, disappearances and torture (CONADEP 1984), the organization maintained central control over the militants (Interview 4; 6; 16). Internal control, and not operational

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tasks, was the reason for frequent high-risk meetings that exposed militants to detection. The Montoneros made the achievement of their objective a priority over the preservation of forces (Evita Montonera Oct. 1976b), yet they risked losing forces for the sake of internal control. By mid-1975, the Montoneros had already made it clear that “you cannot justify a companion who *sings*<sup>35</sup> [under torture].” (Evita Montonera Aug. 1975b) However, the organization felt it necessary to introduce a cyanide pill to counter the disruptive effects of abductions (Interview 6). Militants began to see death as a probability. Massive losses that rose to an average of 16 abductions per day in late 1976 (Gillespie 1982) began to seriously hamper the functioning of the organization from 1977 onwards. The Montoneros had lost the initiative and limited themselves to administer their losses (Interview 4; 16).

Central control of resources and information increased the militants’ dependence on the organization. Clandestine militants received a wage from the organization and became fulltime professionals (Interview 8). However, they sometimes felt like its employees (Interview 4). Developing and maintaining a secure infrastructure depended on central approval of funds. For instance, additional money to secure militants of the “Northern Column” was denied. This led to the near complete dismantling of the column. The militants felt betrayed and abandoned by their leadership (Interview 4; 6). Disenchantment over such incidents spread.

The Montoneros’ military orientation and centralism as well as the exponential development of the confrontation paved the way for an authoritarian tendency (Calveiro 2005a; Interview 16). This tendency, however, contrasted with the revolutionary ideal of a new free society. Militants began to doubt the method of armed struggle and the organization’s ability to achieve revolution (Interview 2; 6). In 1979, centralism, bureaucracy and military-based actions caused even high-ranking militants to split off (Montoneros Documents 22.02.1979; Bonasso 2010). Morale among the rank-and-file sank.

The Montoneros’ strong infrastructure accelerated its decay, despite its operational advantages. As Abraham Guillen points out, a strong infrastructure is inconvenient for urban guerrilla groups as it reduces mobility and proper compartmentalization of guerrilla forces and supply networks (Guillen 2005). Strong infrastructure bound the Montoneros to fixed locations—safe houses and workshops—where they concentrated militants, material and tasks. To defend this fixed infrastructure against a militarily superior enemy was a hopeless enterprise for the urban insurgents, as illustrated by numerous dramatic events of resistance and the suicide of militants.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the large number of militants in the underground hampered proper compartmentalization. A vicious cycle of detentions and the uncovering of

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<sup>35</sup> Gives away information.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, the dramatic account of the shootout and suicide of Vicky Walsh, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Official of Montoneros, in September 1976 (Walsh Oct. 1976).

secret infrastructure, which led to new detentions, caused the Montoneros significant losses within a short period after the PNR coup. Centralism and bureaucracy had rationalized the organization but had made it vulnerable to state repression. Facing a serious offensive, the Montoneros concentrated their forces, which only accelerated their dismantling. Calls for decentralization and for a resumption of political mass work were not heard at the time (Walsh 23.11.1976; Walsh 13.12.1976; Walsh 02.01.1977). The Montoneros' "consistency in the struggle and the sacrifice of thousands of lives, the youngest and the most valuable of [the Argentinean] people" (Evita Montonera Sep.-Oct. 1978) did not produce the political prestige the group had expected. When the Montoneros re-emphasized political work in 1977, severe state repression impeded the effort (Evita Montonera Feb. 1977) and the organization failed to achieve its organizational goals.

On the individual level, militancy ended in detention and/or death, or disconnection from the organization. Detention often initiated a period of critical reflection on the Montoneros' ongoing activities; many survivors distanced themselves from the organization when they were released (Interview 16). The main causes for this were the loss of belief in armed struggle, the dismantling of the organizational infrastructure, and the disintegration of the support environment. Some militants were simply disconnected from the organization as it broke apart, facing "internal exile", as one interviewee described the situation (Interview 4). The Montoneros' armed struggle had developed hand in hand with its social support. The drawback of popular support closed the way to revolution and raised doubts about personal roles and actions. Many militants were torn between their commitment to the project and a loss of confidence in armed struggle as a method to make it succeed (Interview 2; 6). Along with their social support, their reason for fighting had disappeared, leading some militants to abandon the struggle and the organization. As a former militant pointed out,

I had lost, in some way, the sense of what I was doing, and if you lose the meaning of what you are doing, well you can lose any sense and (...) I did not want to (...) trespass and convert myself into a traitor and denounce others. (Interview 2)

Despite their decline, the Montoneros tried to sustain the military campaign and hoped to reach an international audience during the 1978 football World Cup. They spread propaganda and carried out military attacks on emblematic institutions such as the ESMA<sup>37</sup>, the Superior War College and government buildings. However, strict press censorship limited the visibility and propaganda effect of the attacks (Astiz 2005). Nonetheless, the Montoneros perceived the popular celebration of the championship as a weakening of the dictatorship's

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<sup>37</sup> Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada–The Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics–is situated in the city of Buenos Aires and housed one of the main secret detention centers. Torture took place in the attic and cellar of the officers' casino while life went on as usual in the military installation and nearby streets.

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position (Interview 9), and prepared a counteroffensive. Rifts within the armed forces and the reemergence of labor strikes in April 1979 dispelled all doubts and convinced the Montoneros that Argentina was in a quasi-insurreccional situation (Evita Montonera May 1979).

The counteroffensive was the Montoneros' last attempt to revive their military practices. They successfully carried out military attacks but their political reorganization was a failure (Interview 8). The Montoneros hoped to carry out a devastating armed propaganda action similar to the *Aramburazo* (Interview 9), but on the ground the militants were surprised by the total absence of support for armed struggle (Interview 2). Armed attacks failed to produce sympathy and support, while political activities put militants at risk of detection and abduction. Furthermore, the Montoneros' remaining infrastructure within Argentina was largely infiltrated and was often used to trap arriving militants (Astiz 2005; Interview 8). This seriously hampered the planning and execution of operations. Militants who could rely on private networks were less exposed and could still enter the country and operate (Astiz 2005; Interview 2; 5; 8). The decay of the dictatorship did not create automatic support for the Montoneros. The Montoneros' correct macro-political analysis of the dictatorship's decline contrasted with the erroneous expectation of massive social support for its offensive. Instead of finding support for armed actions, a non-violent opposition had emerged that denounced state abuses. Isolation, rather than an insurreccional movement, awaited the militants on the ground.

After the failed counteroffensive Montoneros ceased nearly all forms of armed struggle. They resumed political work under the banner of "Intransigency and Peronist Mobilization" (Interview 4). Most of the exiled Montonero leaders returned to the country in the early 1980s. A public event, however, caused the disappearance and death of several high-ranking militants in 1982 and early 1983. With the deaths of Raúl Yäger and Eduardo Pereyra Rossi, both members of the National Leadership, the Montoneros were bereft of the driving force of their political reconstruction (Perdía 1997). On December 20, 1983, ten days after the return to democracy, the Montonero Peronist Movement officially disbanded. Although they could claim to have survived and resisted the dictatorship, the step merely formalized what was already a fact: the destruction of the organization.

To summarize, centralism and Montoneros' subordination of political objectives to military struggle distanced the organization from society. The Montoneros' renouncement of formal politics signified political defeat. The group lost its means of political mass work and its close contact with society. The simultaneous increase of military-style armed struggle isolated the organization socially and caused it to take on sectarian traits. Strictly military confrontation worked to the advantage of the militarily superior state forces. Social isolation increased the impact of repression and massive losses weakened the organization's ability to function. In addition, the decline of social support provoked doubts about the Montoneros' actions and

the very justification for the group's existence. In other words, isolation affected the organization externally and internally; the Montoneros lost both their revolutionary capacity and social support.

### **The State**

The Liberation Revolution that had ousted President Peron in 1955 set a trend of increasingly violent interventions in politics and repression of opposition sectors. The military junta employed all means at hand to break resistance to the coup. The state's approach to protest became harsher with every new military intervention (Pion-Berlin 1989). For the regimes after the 1955 military coup, the main concern was the spread and radicalization of protest against political exclusion. These regimes employed all four counter-insurgent instruments—military action, judicial and financial pressure, repression by the police and security services, and social and political measures (Duyvesteyn 2006). These were used not only to counter armed opposition but also to de-mobilize peaceful protest. Even the harshest forms of repression, such as death squads, were used to deter potential protest and support for the opposition.

The various governments differed in their protest policing. The frequent military dictatorships preferred harsh measures to counter social protest in general and armed struggle in particular. The armed forces frequently intervened in politics to obstruct the introduction of progressive political and economic change. Any popular economic or political measures they permitted were marginal at best. Like the juntas, democratic governments tried to counter protest with harsh measures.

Furthermore, the governments did not differentiate between insurgent groups in the planning of counter-insurgent campaigns. The state strategy was designed to counter all (armed) opposition organizations. Actions of one organization might provoke a state response that equally affected other armed groups. For instance, the ERP's attack on the Azul garrison in early 1974 sparked a harsh state crackdown that was also felt by the Montoneros.

The following pages will closely examine the different counter-insurgent approaches of the governments under which the Montoneros were active, namely the Argentinean Revolution, the democratic governments of Hector Campora, Juan Domingo Peron and Isabel Peron, and the dictatorship known as the Process of National Reorganization.

### The Argentinean Revolution

The Argentinean Revolution pursued a broad socio-economic and political project and relied upon widespread, indiscriminate protest policing and preventive repression to impose its will (Pion-Berlin 1989). The regime employed all kinds of harsh counter-insurgent measures to undermine and pre-empt social protest. Despite these repressive efforts, and in fact thanks to it, a popular opposition movement took shape. Only a return to democracy could channel protest towards political forms of opposition and avert a nationwide insurrection.

On June 28, 1966 the armed forces ousted the weak and unrepresentative President Arturo Illia; General Carlos Onganía assumed the presidency. The intervention was met with broad approval in society (Brennan & Gordillo 1994). This time, however, the armed forces did not limit themselves to substituting the president in power. They pursued their own political project (Koonings & Kruijt 2002a; Koonings & Kruijt 2002b) and aimed to “[occupy] the vacuum of authority” (Junta Revolucionaria 2006a) with this institutional coup (Verbitsky 2006a).

Inspired by the NSD, the armed forces installed a “bureaucratic authoritarian state.” (O’Donnell 1988) Initially, widespread hopes of socio-economic improvement generated support for the coup. The junta had declared it would work to unify Argentineans, to improve the general well-being of the people and to modernize the country in all areas including culture (Junta Revolucionaria 2006b). To bring about this broad societal renewal, the regime created a National Security Council (CONASE) that included a Council of Economic Development and a Council of Science and Technology (Romero 2002:174). However, the economic modernization program that the CONASE developed was never applied (Interview 1) and the Argentinean Revolution limited its struggle against communism to an authoritarian style of government. The initial support for the regime gave way to disillusionment and protest increased.

Soon, social tensions culminated in numerous local popular insurrections such as the so-called *Cordobazo*, the *Rosarioazo* or the *Viborazo*, to name just a few. Popular insurrections demonstrated the regime’s failure to bring national unity. The regime, shaken to its core by rebellions, appeared helpless. It had shut down all channels of political expression and clamped down on all organizations that might have limited protest to peaceful means. These interventions backfired, however, forcing protest to move into spheres outside the junta’s control and uniting the various opposition sectors against the regime. The crackdown on the central labor unions, for instance, had paved the way for local, autonomous and combative unions to take the lead (Gordillo 2007). The regime had simply bereft itself of instruments to prevent and counter social protest.

In response to the popular protests, the regime stiffened and widened its measures. The military increased its presence in the streets and all protest was suppressed. This unsophisticated use of violence to control the protest proved counter-productive for the regime (Calveiro 2005b). It resulted in increased protest and greater unity in the opposition than ever before. Lacking alternative means to counter the resistance, the regime maintained the broad and harsh approach. In 1971, during the presidency of General Alejandro Lanusse, who initiated the transition to democracy, the armed forces were employed to combat terrorism. At the start of 1972, the armed forces were virtually occupying the country (Baschetti 2004). The Argentinean Revolution became isolated and ruled by force alone.

Armed organizations formed and supported popular protest. Constant minor attacks and several high-profile assaults like the Aramburazo shook the regime and spread a feeling of insecurity as the government seemed incapable of maintaining order. However, the Argentinean Revolution did not fear the armed organizations as such. Police and intelligence work dealt them heavy blows and numerous militants were arrested or killed in shootouts. What the regime really feared was a potential alliance between mass protest and armed organizations which could lead to popular insurrections (Romero 2002).

The dictatorship had a dilemma. Cracking down on a heterogeneous multi-sector protest had proven to be inefficient and even counterproductive. It used enough force to provoke protest but not enough to crush it. Faced with such repression, even moderate sectors became more radical. Continuing to stiffen the crackdown on the radical protest movement was risky, however, because it might exacerbate the conflict. For instance, a second Cordobazo—the so-called Viborazo—took place in early 1971 when the local government toughened its stance against all opposition (Verbitsky 2006a). A more selective form of repression of radical sectors provoked solidarity with its victims. The Trelew Massacre, for instance, was aimed at frightening off guerrillas and protesters but it ended up creating martyrs and causing protest to grow (Moyano 1991). A nationwide insurrection became a realistic scenario and formed a serious threat to the dictatorship. Tolerating protest would have allowed the opposition to gather more support. Stepping up repression was dangerous in the context of mass, increasingly radical opposition, but not toughening up effectively meant surrendering the public sphere to the opposition. Later on, the armed forces draw their lessons from this dilemma and the PNR dictatorship that seized power in 1976 employed systematic state terrorism to break all resistance.

General Lanusse, who took over as president in March 1971, recognized how counterproductive a harsh, broad crackdown was and saw the need to return to democracy. The third and final military president of the Argentinean Revolution hoped to control the situation through a carrot-and-stick strategy. Lanusse realized that real change was necessary to keep protest from escalating; immediately after coming to power he announced

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a controlled transition to democracy. A Great National Accord (GAN) was meant to pacify the country and stabilize the situation ahead of elections (O'Donnell 1988). Lanusse hoped to split the popular protest and isolate the most radical sectors. Political parties were allowed to resume their work; political and social life was revived. Only the Peronist party remained banned until early 1972 due to Peron's refusal to condemn insurgent violence (Romero 2002). However, differences within the armed forces undermined Lanusse's strategy. In October 1971, there was a military rebellion aimed at ending the transitional project and restoring the Argentinean Revolution (Verbitsky 2006a). The coup failed, but Lanusse was forced to make his commitment to the democratic project more explicit. Elections were set for March 11, 1973. The scenario of prolonging the dictatorship lost credibility and so did Lanusse's leverage. The general had lost his "stick".

Lanusse refined the counter-insurgent approach. Counter-insurgency became more selective but did not fully supplant broad and harsh protest policing. Special courts and high security prisons were established for offences linked to insurgency (Moyano 1995). The improved counter-insurgency strategy dealt blows to armed groups but the spread of protest frustrated the regime's strategy. The enormous opposition did not decrease; detentions and/or killings created martyrs who were quickly replaced. The changes did not give the regime any strategic advantage.

Amid generalized protest, the GAN had been the dictatorship's last hope of curtailing popular protest and averting a nationwide insurrection (O'Donnell 1988; Iturubu 2008). However, not even the promise of elections could slow down the protest movement as many people distrusted the armed forces' commitment to democracy and their promise of free and fair elections (Romero 2002). Popular insurrections continued throughout 1971 and 1972 and the dictatorship was facing a quasi-revolutionary situation. Concrete changes on the ground were needed to end the protest; vague promises would not be good enough. Elections had to be held as soon as possible. Furthermore, the GAN failed to force the parties and Peron to sign a pact with the dictatorship and to accept Lanusse as transitional president (Romero 2002). Lanusse lost his grip on political events and barely averted a nationwide insurrection and an overthrow by force.

To summarize, the Argentinean Revolution failed to change society by force. Its broad aims required political leadership and not just a prohibition of unwanted expression. Initial support vanished as soon as it became clear that the promised changes would not come about. The regime's intransigent closure of all political space left it no options but to counter protest through coercive means. Through unsophisticated, broad repression the regime grew isolated and turned itself into the focal point of widespread protest. The dictatorship could not generate support without opening up the political sphere. This, however, would compromise

its political survival. Force was the only means left for the regime to keep itself in power, however it failed to lay the foundations of sustainable rule.

### **Democratic Interlude**

On May 25, 1973, Peron's delegate Hector Campora assumed the presidency. The Argentinean Revolution dictatorship had ended and the armed forces had been forced to retreat unceremoniously. A political spring commenced. The new president categorically rejected to suppress social campaigning or to use force to end occupations carried out in the nascent struggle between the Peronist left and right wings. The Campora spring lasted only 49 days, however. Peron's return to office marked the end of the liberal response to protest. Political opportunities decreased and protest policing was stiffened again. Several insurgent attacks reinforced these developments. When Vice President Isabel Peron assumed power in mid-1974, the situation quickly worsened and reached rock bottom by end of 1975. The government lost its legitimacy, the confrontation with the Peronist left escalated, and so did political violence.

President Campora was not one for counter-insurgency and protest policing. The new president recognized the role the Peronist left and especially the youth had played in the electoral campaign, and dismissed the use of violence against the people (Interview 10). Campora wanted to maintain the legal, democratic freedom of expression. Consequently, he limited his interventions in the tumultuous social atmosphere to rational appeals to end the occupation of buildings (La Prensa 04.07.1973). The voice of the legitimate president was heard and widely obeyed.

His hands-off approach to the ongoing social mobilizations also shifted legitimacy to the movement-based Peronist left. On the evening of his inauguration, demonstrators successfully pressed for the release of political detainees. The prisoners were freed in anticipation of Campora's amnesty project (Interview 10). Unwittingly, Campora seemed to confirm the left's self-proclaimed role as controller of the government and representative of the popular masses. Mobilized masses seemed to lend them the legitimacy to play a central political role, and the Montoneros prepared to do so.

The political spring ended as soon as Peron returned to Argentina. Immediately following the Ezeiza Massacre, Peron laid the blame squarely on the Peronist left (La Prensa 21.06.1973; La Prensa 22.06.1973), marking a watershed in the state's reaction to the ongoing social mobilization. Peron wanted to restore his hegemonic control over the Peronist movement (Theiner 2009). He envisioned the establishment of an organized Peronist

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community which would be neither capitalist nor communist (La Prensa 31.07.1973). He by no means championed a socialist revolution. As Peron himself declared, he had “always” aspired to construct an

institutional movement, but the facts had obliged [him] [to opt] for a combative leadership instead of realizing a political leadership of the movement. (La Prensa 04.09.1973)

The dissidence of the Peronist left was simply anathema to his authority. He warned those who tried to “infiltrate” the movement of severe consequences (Theiner 2009) and urged the youth to moderate their claims and to obey the law (La Prensa 04.09.1973).

Peron wanted to avoid a confrontation within Peronism but he could not tolerate the youth’s attempt to take control over the movement (Evita Montonera Nov. 1975b). Ongoing demonstrations, several insurgent attacks<sup>38</sup>, and the youth’s disobedience led Peron to toughen his stance towards the revolutionary sector. Peronism now showed its authoritarian face. Peron issued a classified document that encouraged the establishment of an intelligence system within the movement and authorized the use of all methods necessary to end subversion (CSP 1974); he strengthened the labor union bureaucracy and intervened in autonomous labor unions that had spread in the second half of the 1960s (Gordillo 2007; Campione 2007). Punishments for subversion were stiffened (Descamisado 05.02.1974). The ERP attack on a military installation in early 1974 outraged Peron, who declared war on “criminal terrorism” by “infiltrators” and “enemies of the fatherland.” (La Prensa 21.01.1974) The democratic government could only interpret the attack on a legitimate “national institution” as an attack on democratic state authority as such (La Prensa 21.01.1974). Peron purged the institutional apparatus and the Peronist movement of left-leaning members to appease the armed forces and silence dissidence. Oscar Bidegain, governor of the province of Buenos Aires, was pressured to step down; Obregon Cano, governor of the province of Córdoba, was forced out of office; and the eight JP deputies stepped down over a regressive penal code reform (Descamisado 05.02.1974; El Ortiba 2010). Furthermore, Peron’s comparison of the Peronist left with “microbes that generate antibodies” (La Prensa 25.05.1974) was interpreted as legitimizing the increasing activities of death squads. The government made clear it would not cede to extra-institutional pressure and that it would no longer tolerate dissidence. Dissident sectors had to either obey or disappear.

Tensions increased rapidly and culminated in open conflict between Peron and the youth sectors on May 1, 1974. Nonetheless, Peron hoped to find a political solution for the

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<sup>38</sup> Most of the guerrilla attacks in the period from 25.05.1973 to 06.09.1974 were executed by the ERP. The Montoneros rarely used unprovoked violence in this period.

conflict. He extended a hand to those who turned away from “revolutionary infantilism” and wanted to join the movement without disputing its leadership (La Prensa 14.05.1974; La Prensa 25.05.1974). The attempt to institutionalize the JP under its right-wing sector, the Peronist Youth of the Argentinean Republic (JPRA), was not an option for the majority of the JP (La Prensa 31.01.1974; La Prensa 26.04.1974). Peron denied the formation of an autonomous youth branch to avoid “incorporating the apple of discord into the movement.” (La Prensa 25.05.1974) This, however, crushed the last hopes of the JP and the Peronist left to find an institutional channel of expression. Peron did not negotiate with the JP but pressured it into subordination under institutional Peronism, his own power base.

Peron also secured the support of the armed forces and the police for his offensive against the revolutionary tendency. He replaced the progressive General Jorge Raúl Carcagno, head of the armed forces, and backed conservative sectors who took control of the police. Progressive reforms of the armed forces were reversed. Carcagno had turned away from the NSD, tried to revive relations with society (La Prensa 06.07.1973), and categorically rejected any future military intervention in politics (La Prensa 06.09.1973). Carcagno even negotiated with the Montoneros about a possible future incorporation into the armed forces. It seemed he wanted to reach an agreement with the organization in preparation for the time after Peron’s foreseeable death (Perdía 1997). To prevent this nascent alliance between the Montoneros and the head of the armed forces, Peron replaced Carcagno with General Leandro Anaya in November 1973.<sup>39</sup> Anaya immediately revalidated the NSD, making the struggle against internal subversion once more a central goal of the armed forces (Interview 9). This shift laid a cornerstone for a future military intervention in politics.

Meanwhile anti-subversive officers rose to leading positions on the police force. Peron’s right hand man, Lopez Rega, became General Commissar of the Federal Police. Known anti-insurgent officers such as Alberto Villar and Luis Margaride jumped the hierarchy and came to control the police (La Prensa 11.05.1974). Paramilitary repression that focused on political activists rather than on guerrilla militants completed the offensive against the revolutionary tendency. The infamous triple A acted with impunity, carrying out visible, extremely brutal attacks to frighten off political militants who rallied the masses and did political work (Moyano 1995; Terragno 2005). Peron’s conservative security policy was not only motivated by guerrilla activities but was also aimed at establishing a hierarchical institutional movement under his control.

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<sup>39</sup> It remains debatable whether the removal of General Carcagno was motivated by the changed geopolitical situation after the US-backed military coup in Chile and the Uruguayan dictatorship’s rise to power. It is possible that Peron opted for more conservative politics in the face of these international developments, as Roberto Perdía suggests (1997).

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When Peron died, the unifying figure of Peronism and the government was gone. Isabel Peron quickly lost the political credit she had inherited. Peron's carefully constructed alliances, which had bound the most important actors to the government and had isolated the Peronist left, were sacrificed to please friends (Romero 2002; Terragno 2005). Peron had also left behind a strong opposition to his centralist, authoritarian style. Local labor unions reasserted themselves and looked for political alternatives (Gordillo 2007; Campione 2007). Public faith in the Peronist government had also been weakened by economic woes.

Isabel did not use her initial political credit wisely. There were frequent changes in the cabinet lineup; the government grew unstable and lost support. The rising influence of Lopez Rega upset many people, not only on the left. Despite increasing opposition to Lopez Rega, Isabel unconditionally supported her minister and in the process sacrificed important government alliances. The regime became isolated and dependent on military support (Terragno 2005).

The government faced a growing list of economic and political problems. The much criticized social pact that had capped wage and price rises broke down. To salvage support, Isabel resorted to populist measures such as the nationalization of Shell and Esso gas stations and the cancellation of imports. However, this could not avert the first-ever general strike against a Peronist government in mid-1975. The protest had been triggered by the unpopular economic plan of Celestino Rodrigo, Minister of Economic Affairs. The plan included a 100% devaluation of the Peso, a 40-80% increase in the cost of public services and a tripling of the gasoline price. This was only partially offset by a 45% wage increase (Romero 2002). Despite government attempts to limit the protest, the strike was massive and Rodrigo had to step down. Lopez Rega also left office shortly afterwards and even had to leave the country under pressure from the armed forces (Terragno 2005). Isabel had lost her cabinet strongman and political advisor. Further cabinet shakeups weakened and isolated the government. Hopes that the president would take an early retirement were brusquely ended, however, when she returned to work after a month's leave for health reasons in October 1975. Isabel had adamantly resolved to complete her presidential term (La Prensa 06.11.1975). Meanwhile, economic prospects worsened and inflation soared to 900% (Pion-Berlin 1989).

From the very beginning of her presidential term, Isabel Peron had stepped up the state response to subversion. She declared a state of emergency, intervened in the affairs of the university—a bastion of the left, censored the press and banned labor protest (La Prensa 11.09.1974). The death of her husband had eliminated the last restraint on death squads; now political activists were liquidated on a daily basis. Violence engendered more violence, and the Montoneros picked up their arms. Pushing the Montoneros back into the armed struggle was in fact the main victory of the government over the Peronist left. Political

exclusion and death squads eliminated political competition from the Peronist left and the Montoneros' resumption of armed struggle even seemed to legitimize repression. Death squad activity escalated in synchrony with the rise of Lopez Rega. Political violence peaked in March 1975, when a murder occurred every 2 hours and 24 minutes (La Opinión 23.03.1975). The escalating conflict also weakened the government. Political violence became a central security threat; the government came under pressure for its involvement in clandestine repression and for its inability to get the situation under control. The escalating death squad violence also irked the armed forces that wanted to assume legal control of the counter-insurgency (Terragno 2005).

The government became isolated and progressively handed over responsibility for the counter-insurgency to the armed forces, expanding the military's powers. In early 1975, the armed forces were ordered to fight the ERP's rural guerrilla foco in Tucuman. Later that year, they were deployed in urban areas as well. Two edicts, Secret Decree 261 and Directive 1/75 of the Security Council of the Interior, gave a free hand to the armed forces in the counter-insurgent struggle. The military were ordered to "neutralize and/or annihilate" subversive elements (Diaz Bessone 1988:233) and were assigned the "broadest liberty of action to intervene in all those situations in which one suspects subversive connotations to exist." (Consejo de Defensa 1/75) The central aim was to isolate insurgents from social support. However, the armed forces also started exercising more political influence upon the isolated government and fears of a military coup spread (La Prensa 04.11.1975). The ban on the Authentic Peronist Party was partly meant to appease conservative military leaders who were concerned about the early elections scheduled for October 17, 1976. These sectors feared the "atheist and materialist" Peronist left might legitimate through the ballot box (Terragno 2005:72). The armed forces emphasized their apolitical stance (La Prensa 15.11.1975) but the shift of military opinion became clear with the December 18, 1975 rebellion of Air Force Brigadier Jesus Cappelini, who urged armed forces commander Jorge Rafael Videla to install a military dictatorship similar to neighboring states (Verbitsky 2006a). The coup failed but the government's reliance on military backing, as well as the decline of the armed forces' support, became visible. A coup was now just a matter of time.

The short period of democracy suffered from a lack of democratic conviction in Argentinean society and among the political elite. The brief Campora Spring was an exception. Aside from that period, the main actors did not negotiate but inflexibly tried to impose their positions. Conflicts were not solved by democratic debate but by political and military pressure. Peron progressively stiffened protest policing when his attempts to rebuild his traditional power base and to subjugate the dissident Peronist left encountered problems. The Peronist left quickly lost real political opportunities. Furthermore, Peron's successors progressively militarized the struggle against the Peronist left. Political dominance took

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precedence over the ideal of creating a truly democratic system. The Peronist left resisted political domination. However, the sector failed to achieve an institutional voice as well. Its mainly extra-institutional activity situated the Peronist left outside the institutional political sphere of control. Closing off political opportunities for the Peronist left and toughening responses to protest engendered harsher protest tactics. Political violence escalated and had a negative impact on the government and the entire state apparatus. Insecurity and social turmoil were rife, while confidence in the government and public institutions dropped. Escalating violence paved the way for the armed forces to seize power once more.

### **The Process of National Reorganization**

On March 24, 1976, General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and Air Force Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti toppled the exhausted government of Isabel Perón. General Videla, who had stated in October 1975 that “in Argentina as many people will have to die as necessary to restore peace in the country” (La Opinión 24.10.1975), was appointed president. The so-called Process of National Reorganization (PNR) commenced.

The main objectives of the junta were to restore traditional social values, eradicate “delinquent subversion” (PNR 1976), and bring about economic change. After the transformation of Argentina’s social, economic and political life, a representative democracy “adapted to the [new] reality of the country” would be restored (PNR 1976).

The armed forces saw counter-insurgency as more than a matter of combatting armed militants. They considered it a cultural war and a struggle over values (Robben 2005) that required a profound restructuring of society and the role of the state. According to the junta, “nihilist thoughts of the antinational subversion” (Videla 24.05.1976) had defied society’s traditional values and had caused a crisis of cultural identity. Going against social values was seen as the worst form of subversion (Videla 12.05.1976). Therefore, the military regime reasoned, the almost unrestricted counter-insurgency powers the armed forces had enjoyed under Isabel Peron’s government were not enough to fight subversion. What was needed was a reshaping of society’s values, since the main struggle was for the mind, or conscience, of the population (Videla 30.03.1976). This required total control of the state and intervention in nearly all spheres of society.

The junta interpreted the conflict as a “clash of civilizations.” (Robben 2005) This greatly expanded the category of the enemy and exposed a far greater part of society to repression. Particular targets in this cultural struggle were the “ideologues” and the insurgency’s broad and vaguely defined social environment. Propagating ideas contrary to

western and Christian civilization was equated with terrorism and put on a par with shooting or bombing (Videla 1975). The PNR deliberately targeted the insurgents' social surroundings in order to isolate them from society at large. However, supporters themselves were also seen as subversives. Sympathizers and even their acquaintances ran as much risk of repression as armed militants (CONADEP 1984). The PNR unleashed a genocide-like campaign to eradicate not only subversives but also the wider social and political opposition. This sweeping approach was a direct consequence of the PNR's interpretation of the conflict in terms of non-negotiable cultural values.

The PNR wanted to rebuild social structures and saw the economic sphere as the right starting point. In the eyes of the dictatorship, the state's corporative role as mediator between different social sectors and interests, especially between labor and entrepreneurs, had been the main source of political and social struggle (Romero 2002). Playing the role of mediator had exposed the government to pressures from different interest groups and weakened it politically. The PNR believed this should no longer be the government's role. It saw the need to restructure the economy to prevent future protest. The dictatorship saw the introduction of free-market principles as a way to discipline all social actors. Economic policy was seen as a key instrument for societal change and control, and ultimately for countering the insurgency.

Establishing free-market principles would require rigorous state intervention, however (Polanyi 1989). Minister of Economic Affairs Jose A. Martinez de Hoz abolished labor rights and barriers that protected the national economy from global competition, and cut state spending. A process of de-industrialization set in, while agricultural exports benefited from the changes. And, the financial sector became the new heart of the economy (Pion-Berlin 1989). Argentina's economy changed radically but attacking "subversion" in this broad manner provoked protest from various sectors. Labor protest, however, was seen as "economic subversion" and was countered with the same means used against violent opposition (Calveiro 2005b). The regime broke the power of the main unions, put a stop to collective bargaining, banned strikes, and even sent in the military to occupy some factories (Baschetti 2001; Albornoz Rossier 2011). Ending labor and social protest became the main counter-subversive activity of the dictatorship. A first wave of detentions was simply based on syndicate membership lists (Fernandez 1983). Almost half of those who were disappeared by the PNR were workers or employees (CONADEP 1984), which demonstrates the magnitude of the crackdown on labor protest.

The socio-cultural sphere, and especially education, was also a key area of PNR counter-insurgent activity. The armed forces believed the "sources that form and indoctrinate the delinquent subversives" were "situated in the universities and the secondary schools." (Vilas 1976) Consequently, the PNR had to act "clearly and with energy" to pull up the roots of subversion from the education system (AIDA 2009). The "critical" social sciences became

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the object of suspicion and the cultural sphere was put under tight control. The dictatorship saw “[t]he theatre, the cinema and music” as “fearsome arms of the subversive aggressor.” It was argued, for instance, that “protest songs” that “denounced situations of social injustice” played a “relevant role in the formation of an atmosphere of subversion.” (Viola 26.12.1979) It is not surprising that students constituted the second largest group of disappeared persons (CONADEP 1984).

The PNR clearly interpreted the conflict as triangular and tried to cut off all links between the insurgents and society. This sent a warning to society as a whole to abstain from protest and support for the insurgents. In particular, the PNR aimed to disrupt the insurgents’ network of sympathizers and supporters and to eradicate any form of social behavior seen as essentially subversive in cultural terms. The governor of Buenos Aires, General Iberico Saint-Jean, left no doubt about the aim of purging society:

[f]irst we will kill all the subversives, then we will kill their collaborators, then...their sympathizers, then...those who remain indifferent; and, finally, we will kill the timid.  
(Feitlowitz 1998)

The PNR intended to rid society of all difference and thus all possible conflict. This had an impact not only on armed militants and their sympathizers but also randomly targeted people within the insurgents’ alleged support environment.

With a wide-ranging attack on society, the regime sought to demobilize social protest. The defeat of the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship had demonstrated the threat social protest posed to authoritarian governments. The PNR opted for a broad intervention in society, similar to that of the Argentinean Revolution, but it employed mass clandestine repression to counter protest. The covert repression, however, was selective at the moment of its application; victims were targeted separately and open large-scale clashes were avoided. This particular form of repression was designed to intimidate large social sectors into obedience. Since “terror is more effective when selective” (Kalyvas 2004:105-106), “[t]he fallout of fear” from clandestine repression was “almost one hundred percent effective.” (Cox 1983:127) Social protest and open dissidence declined sharply. Furthermore, this procedure kept the magnitude of the repression out of the public eye for some time. Covert repression and censorship of the media enabled the PNR to crack down on any social protest without falling into the “provocation trap”, or to paraphrase George Lopez, we can say that the terrorist act of the state was not designed to be interactive (Lopez 1984).

A further reason the regime acted covertly was that it would have been very difficult to openly carry out such broad and indiscriminate repression of opposition sectors. Protest and legal moves probably would have impeded the dictatorship’s execution of such a broad,

public attack and crimes against society. General Videla recognized this fact when he stated that

[i]t was impossible to fusillade. (...) Argentinean society would not have endured the executions. (...) There was no other way. We all agreed upon this. (Seoane & Muleiro 2004)

On the ground, the armed forces divided the country into 4 (and later 5) zones of military jurisdiction and coordinated all security forces, even penitentiary personnel, for the fight against subversion. The intelligence services of the different branches of the armed forces set up a parallel clandestine counter-insurgency apparatus (Armony 1997). Task groups persecuted and abducted suspicious individuals, in most cases capturing them at night in their own homes, and incarcerated them without legal registration in one of over 340 secret detention centers throughout Argentina. Many of these centers were situated on police or army bases (CONADEP 1984). The task groups often coordinated their activities with the police to prevent their intervention in what looked like criminal or terrorist attacks.

Far-reaching changes to the legal code supported clandestine repression, despite the fact that it was beyond judicial control. The very day they committed the coup, the junta changed the composition of the Supreme Court. They soon did the same with the provincial courts. Judges were required to swear loyalty to the PNR. Under the state of siege, the junta eliminated prisoners' right to leave the country so they could trap hundreds of political detainees, guerrilla fighters, politicians and syndicate leaders in the country (Crespo 2007).<sup>40</sup> Law 21.312 even eliminated the *habeas corpus*. Suspects now could be held in custody until sentencing. Finally, the death penalty was reintroduced (CONADEP 1984).

These modifications eliminated the legal protection of detainees and impeded judicial steps against the covert counter-insurgent war of a regime that perceived itself as a moral bastion against communist subversion and savior of the state. The regime had its broad interpretation of subversion written into the legal code, even though such changes were redundant because the Dirty War was extrajudicial in nature. Though many people died at the hands of the state, the newly-introduced death penalty was never applied in conformity with the law (CONADEP 1984). Clandestine detentions denied the protection of prisoners' rights. The abductions, torture and forced disappearances, the tactics of the Dirty War, remained illegal. Legal modifications did, however, constitute a significant change for members of the armed forces because they guaranteed virtual impunity for participants in covert repression.

Systematic state terrorism accelerated the destruction of the Montoneros. The organization lost thousands of cadres within two years but hoped to win prestige through

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<sup>40</sup> Law 21.275/76 eliminated the "Right of Option".

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sacrifice (Evita Montonera Sep.-Oct. 1978).<sup>41</sup> The cycle of abductions and torture, followed by more abductions, was effective. The regime obtained names and addresses quickly, leading to more detentions. Information obtained through torture, tended to be of low quality, however. Subjected to lengthy (and by definition excessive) torture, many detainees revealed information about companions, infrastructure and plans, but also about unrelated individuals and events (Constanzo et al. 2007; CONADEP 1984). Anyone a victim knew was at risk of becoming the next victim. Nonetheless, large parts of the Montonero organization had been dismantled within a year's time, and "by 1979 the revolutionary war was over." (Moyano 1995:42) The price for this "success," however, was an enormous overkill. Of the estimated 30,000 who disappeared, only about 5,000 are believed to have been insurgents (Gillespie 1982).

The Dirty War against the Montoneros had clear flaws. The lack of exit options left militants no alternative to continuing the fight. Negotiating with the regime was impossible and did not exempt militants from torture and probable death. Systematic state terrorism was effective, but it unnecessarily inflated the number of deaths by prolonging the struggle. The Montoneros were already in decline when the PNR came to power and launched the Dirty War. However, the PNR wanted to end subversion once and for all. Its interpretation of the conflict in cultural terms blinded it to other potential solutions. It saw no alternative to assassinating "subversives" and their sympathizers. With regard to the 1973 amnesty, the PNR ruled out legal detention of subversives. The junta would not accept the risk of allowing militants to return to society at a later moment. Furthermore, reintegrating militants into society seemed impossible in a non-negotiable value conflict. In the PNR's view, the culturally defined enemy had to disappear if future conflicts were to be averted. Unilateral state violence increased to break the resistance.

The Dirty War had counterproductive long-term effects for the dictatorial regime. The cultural dimension of the Dirty War made it impossible to distinguish between armed militants and peaceful protesters. In time, protest arose over the disappearances and the regime systematically blocked all attempts to investigate these events. Hopes of finding the disappeared alive faded, but relatives needed clarity over the whereabouts of their loved ones to cope with their losses (Robben 2000). National and international human rights organizations pressured the PNR to provide information on the disappeared. Widespread denouncement of human rights abuses sparked an investigation by the Organization of American States (OAS) in September 1979. The PNR hampered the investigation, relocating detainees and painting and redecorating the clandestine detention centers. Nonetheless, the evidence gathered was sufficient to prove serious human rights violations (CIDH 1980).

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Gillespie (1982) estimates that the Montoneros lost 4,500 cadres.

Knowledge about abductions was widespread since these had intentionally been made visible enough to spread fear throughout the population (CONADEP 1984).

The country's 1978 victory in the finals of the soccer World Cup reanimated Argentinean social life. The celebrations created opportunities for the people to meet without the intimidation they had grown accustomed to (Interview 9).<sup>42</sup> Traditional, non-violent labor protest re-appeared. This was accompanied by a worsening of economic prospects from 1979 onwards. During the World Cup, human rights organizations had enjoyed international attention. The dictatorship had passed its peak and was on the decline (Interview 11). The junta lacked a coherent political plan and had missed its opportunity to build political support for the government (Quiroga 1994). A lack of political leadership stimulated the reappearance of civil political opposition. Peaceful protest grew and emphasized the need for politics instead of military repression.

Aside from the reemergence of social protest, the dictatorship also faced internal problems. The PNR had tripled every executive position at all levels so it could divide positions equally among the branches of the armed forces. This strict division gave way to a "double chain of command" that weakened executive power and the cohesiveness of the regime (Romero 2002:233). Furthermore, internal disputes arose over the political leadership of the PNR, weakening the regime (Quiroga 1994; Interview 11). For instance, General Eduardo Massera, head of the Navy and the infamous ESMA, pursued his own political ambitions. With the help of his "little staff" composed of abducted persons, he tried to present himself as a popular leader (CONADEP 1984; Interview 11; 16). General Luciano Benjamin Menendez, head of the 3rd Army Corps and a hardliner, openly rebelled. When General Videla turned over power to Viola in 1981, the internal cohesion of the armed forces had disappeared, as had the insurgent threat. The commanders in power began to rotate quickly. While Videla had governed for a full presidential term, political stability suffered as three different juntas ruled until the PNR was dismantled in late 1983. Furthermore, the armed forces had not achieved any of their major political goals (Quiroga 1994). Economic problems and social protest reappeared and displayed the failure of the PNR's broad socio-political project. The regime had won a military victory over the insurgency but failed to remodel society into its cultural ideal.

The Dirty War undermined the morale of the armed forces. The "self-appointed 'moral reserves of the nation' became ridden with corruption" (Moyano 1991:69) and profiteering was rife within the autonomous parallel structure created to conduct the covert repression. Task forces often considered the possessions of their victims as plunder that was theirs for the taking. In the ESMA, even a real estate agency was created to sell the illegally

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<sup>42</sup> Most analysts, however, consider the championship helpful for the dictatorship (i.e. Gillespie 1982, Moyano 1995).

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expropriated homes of the disappeared (CONADEP 1984). Many officers were disgusted by the covert repression and the parallel world it had created (Fernandez 1983). The dictatorship had opted for a form of repression contrary to its own moral values. Even officers involved in covert operations often recognized the criminal and illegitimate nature of the activity as well as society's rejection of it (Dri 20.09.1978). Despite dissent, the practice was tolerated and a pact of silence prevented denouncement. The PNR could not celebrate its clandestine military victory over the insurgency and it denied all knowledge of the Dirty War, trying to explain away systematic state terrorism as an unconnected collection of individual abuses. Discontent with superior officers and their official policy of denial spread throughout the armed forces (Verbitsky 2006b).

In April 1982 the ruling dictator Leopoldo Galtieri ordered an invasion of the Falkland Islands, which were under British administration. The move was meant to win support and to conceal the dictatorship's political failure. For a short while, the invasion diverted public attention from internal problems. The war roused patriotic feelings; thousands applauded the dictator on Plaza de Mayo. Even some Montoneros supported the move and many captured militants volunteered to fight for the reincorporation of the Islands (Interview 7).<sup>43</sup> However, the short war ended in a military and political fiasco for the dictatorship. Military defeat exacerbated the political failure of the PNR and mass support for the war soon transformed into strong opposition. In December 1983, the morally, politically, and militarily defeated PNR handed over power to elected President Raúl Alfonsín.

To summarize, political violence in the form of unilateral state repression escalated under the PNR. The interpretation of the conflict as a clash of cultural values strongly fuelled genocide-like repression. Ending armed opposition was not sufficient in a struggle over values and ideas. Indiscriminate actions against the entire social surrounding of subversion, which itself was vaguely defined, allowed the government to defeat the insurgents militarily. However, it also led to the ultimate demise of the dictatorship. State terrorism was functionally effective but the bloody offensive against society at large was also counterproductive for the PNR in the long run. Without an armed enemy, the PNR lost its unity. Unable to openly prosecute the Dirty War, the PNR carried out a covert operation that exposed the armed forces to internal moral decay. Finally, it was not military but peaceful political opposition that forced the PNR back into politics.

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<sup>43</sup> Montonero militants who volunteered did so on condition of political reforms. Their offer was not considered by the dictatorship.

**Processes of Escalation and De-escalation Summarized**

In Argentina, political violence developed and escalated mainly because political opportunities were lacking and antagonisms within the Peronist movement grew more radical. Restrictions on the freedom of political expression and organization fostered extra-institutional forms of protest. Frequent military interventions had undermined public confidence in democracy and created an undemocratic generation. Political channels seemed exhausted and violence became an accepted method for achieving political aims. The logic of force prevailed over political means of conflict resolution. The crystallization of the conflict into a struggle over values caused antagonisms to radicalize and escalated the use of violence.

Social protest and mobilization influenced insurgent activities as well as the regimes' approaches to opposition. The societal stance towards the dispute was central to its development. Insurgent activities were closely linked to the perceived social support for their campaign. Strong social mobilization seemed to legitimize insurgent activities and were even seen as an appeal for them. Montoneros' growing focus on armed activities isolated the organization from their social support. Politics and politically symbolic attacks were needed to maintain and develop social support. Military logic, by contrast, could not rally sympathy or support.

Also the type of protest policing employed by the state was linked to the strength of the protest movement. Protest policing was toughened to keep in step with growing opposition. However, broad, indiscriminate repression of mass protest united and strengthened the opposition movement instead of containing it. Still, systematic state terrorism proved effective as a means of demobilizing social protest without falling for the provocation trap, as it decreased participation in protest. The decline of broad popular protest was both a cause and an effect of state terrorism. On the one hand, it ended open opposition. On the other hand, the decrease and concentration of protest in a few social sectors enabled the government to pursue harsh repression.

Ever since the violent ousting of Peron in 1955, exclusive and authoritarian regimes had dominated politics and a spiral of political violence had begun. The political exclusion and economic woes of the masses led to first armed opposition foci. The Argentinean Revolution's radicalization of state interventions—the elimination of institutional political expression and change, and interventions in the economy and all other spheres of life—had the effect of uniting and radicalizing opposition protest. Widening protest created a favorable environment for armed organizations to proliferate. The lack of political opportunities reduced the opposition's options to applying extra-institutional pressure and promoted armed struggle.

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To the state, mass opposition rendered broad repression counterproductive. Strong and wide-ranging protest had developed under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship as dissenters lost their fear of authoritarian control. Far from breaking the resistance, harsher state repression in this situation provoked the people to toughen their own stance. Amid escalating protest only prompt, free and fair elections could possibly have prevented a nationwide insurrection. It had taken popular protest over a decade to develop but once it had reached a critical mass, demonstrations spread and radicalized in face of repression. Popular protest undermined the stability of the dictatorship and fostered revolutionary hopes. The relaxing of political restrictions ahead of the 1973 elections was not enough to calm the mood and demobilize the masses in anticipation of a new, democratic government. Once mobilized, the people would only back down if there were real changes. A common aim and enemy, combined with a lack of political alternatives, had created a quasi-revolutionary popular movement.

The extreme level of violence in the second half of the 1970s was rooted in the increasing polarization of the Peronist movement. The political antagonism between the revolutionary tendency and institutional Peronism was turned into a non-negotiable conflict over alternative value systems. This process of “community polarization” (della Porta 1995a:152) radicalized the conflict in quantitative and qualitative terms. The category of “the enemy” was widened; anyone suspected of sympathizing with the alternative socio-political project of the Peronist left was deliberately targeted.

Several factors caused this conflict to simmer in the background and to re-escalate under the democratic government. After the country’s short period of democratic rule, the political opportunity structure for the Peronist left worsened again. Furthermore, death squad attacks on the entire Peronist left excluded this group progressively from participation in politics, encouraged radical sectors to take control and made a case for the left to pick up their arms. Lacking institutional links and representation, the Montoneros emphasized its movement-base and underlined their claims for greater influence on the political process through mainly youth-based mass campaigning. The authorities could not, and would not, accept the Montoneros’ self-proclaimed role as defender and controller of the government. Extra-institutional shows of force during mass demonstrations inevitably led to direct confrontation with the authorities. Even less acceptable was the Montoneros’ preservation of their military strength—and their occasional use of that strength. In short, the Montoneros’ open attempt to establish a counter-state unavoidably provoked strong opposition of the government.

Last hopes of channeling the dispute through established paths of conflict resolution vanished when Peron opposed the proper institutionalization of the JP. His aim in doing so was to prevent dissidence from entering the political party system. However, institutionalizing

the youth sector would have helped to bind the Montoneros to established politics and given them alternatives to rallying the masses. Instead, Peron chose to expel the insubordinate youth masses from mainstream politics and pushed them towards extra-institutional methods of political activism. Instead of isolating radical sectors, the closure of political opportunities reinforced their position in the short run. It also strengthened calls for armed struggle, prolonging and worsening the conflict. Over time, however, radical sectors isolated themselves through neglect of political activity and their erroneous expectation of society's unconditional backing for armed struggle. Political exclusion provoked radical reactions, but Montoneros emphasized the military over the political aspects of their actions. Consequently, the organization failed to attract sympathy and support. Limiting opposition to military struggle was doomed to fail—both politically and militarily.

Death squads played a central role in the militarization of politics. Attacks on the Peronist left, and especially on politically active militants, in fact sealed off political opportunities. The increase in death squad activity after Peron's death, the (para-) militarization of politics, sparked violent reactions from the opposition. Pressured from below and intent on protecting their cadres, the Montoneros resumed the armed struggle. The room for political activity had largely been eliminated.

Insurgent attacks equally undermined democracy and decreased the chances of a political resolution. The Montoneros' belief in the need for military power to achieve political objectives compromised political opportunities. The group looked back on a successful urban guerrilla struggle against the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship and thought it could count on unconditional popular support for a new armed campaign. Expectations of armed struggle were high and self-proscribing seemed like a good option in face of a major political offensive and death squad attacks. Insurgent attacks, however, made a case for the political exclusion and repression of the Montoneros and legitimized attacks on the organization. Furthermore, support for their armed campaign eroded when military aims took predominance over political objectives. Instead of increasing their popularity among the popular masses, the Montoneros' fixation on armed struggle led to isolation. The group took on sectarian traits. The insurgents and the security forces engaged in a war of military apparatus, trying to capture the control over the state. In this way, an essentially political conflict was reduced to military clashes.

The Montoneros held a central position in the opposition and had close links to important opposition sectors. Some were even controlled by the group. This cast a negative light on other opposition groups, which resulted in their loss of political space and exposure to repression. The Montoneros tried to encourage the entire opposition to join the armed struggle, but politically-oriented sectors distanced themselves from the group. Armed struggle simply closed the space for politics. The Montoneros' control also weakened the opposition landscape as it required identification with the organization and its aims. This reduced the

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diversity and autonomy of opposition groups. In other words, front organizations lost their specific, local objectives and, by extension, grassroots support. A pluralist and locally based opposition probably would have been more resistant to state repression, as shown by the experiences of the growing opposition under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship. Organizational control weakened the opposition landscape internally and provided a pretext for broad state repression.

Systematic state terrorism under the PNR was a unilateral escalation of political violence. It was a direct consequence of the PNR's interpretation of the conflict in terms of cultural values and grand ideologies. The dictatorship aimed not only to dismantle the urban guerrillas but also to enforce compliance through fear. This had a profound effect on the organization and the socio-political environment; the spread of fear eroded support for the Montoneros and any form of social or political activism as well. The decline of the social protest movement impeded the materialization of an effective resistance to state repression and prevented the conflict from escalating to an all-out civil war. In the short run, the forceful demobilization of social protest proved to be effective for the state in its campaign against insurgency and opposition in general.

The escalation of repressive violence in Argentina affirms Stathis N. Kalyvas's (2006) finding that violence concentrates in zones where one conflict actor has secure, but not complete, control. The government forces securely controlled the urban environment, but insurgents were able to operate and survive in these zones as well. Close state control over territory and its population enabled the armed forces to apply selective violence on a mass scale. The state strategy was marked by selective paramilitary attacks on broad social sectors rather than mass confrontations. While state violence was random in its selection of victims within the social group under attack, it was selective at the operational level.

De-escalation—the decrease in the level of political violence related to the conflict—did not proceed evenly on both sides. The unilateral escalation of repressive state violence dismantled large parts of the Montonero infrastructure and quickly hampered its organizational functioning. Excessive state violence forcefully de-escalated the Montoneros' campaign. The state terrorism campaign against the group and its support environment was in this sense effective. The organization was almost inoperative from 1977 on and definitively had to cease military operations in 1980. Furthermore, social support for armed struggle ceased. The PNR, by comparison, only reduced its violent repression when it had restored the state's monopoly on violence and it had complete control of the population. The dictatorship's rapid military victory over the Montoneros was only possible because of the rebel group's earlier, self-inflicted political defeat.

State terrorism was one of the factors that accelerated the fall of the Montoneros. However, such harsh repression was ultimately superfluous since the insurgents had already

gone into decay by the time the PNR came to power. Decreasing social support for armed struggle had weakened the Montoneros from within. Decreasing support led militants to doubt the rationale for armed struggle and even for the campaign of their own organization. Members remained militant because of emotional bonds with companions and a lack of alternatives, but not anymore out of a belief in victory or in armed struggle. Surrender offered no escape from torture or death in the struggle over cultural identities. The absence of exit options, thus, prolonged the organization's survival at a moment when internal doubts and disagreements over armed struggle were on the rise. State terrorism, in other words, had contradictory operational effects. While state terrorism ended the culturally defined subversion, it also prolonged the struggle and maximized the death toll.

State terrorism did not decrease until its main rationale disappeared, i.e. the Montonero group. Once this had taken place, the PNR struggled for legitimacy and survival. The failure of the dictatorship's political, economic and social project had significantly undermined its position. The parallel structure of the apparatus created to carry out repression opened the floodgates to self-enrichment and corruption. Clandestine repression was criminal even by the dictatorship's own standards. This seriously contaminated the armed forces' moral values. Furthermore, the PNR lost its internal cohesion. Serious criticism developed within the armed forces and society, isolating the regime. Unilateral state repression had sown the seeds of the dictatorship's demise. Political violence slowly decreased as insurgent activities ended and the armed forces tried to regain political legitimacy.

The decisive role of social support in bringing about political projects became visible. Without social support, even the strong dictatorship could not survive. Increasing non-violent protest over the mass disappearances and the political and economic failures of the government seriously weakened the dictatorship. The junta's victory in the counter-insurgent struggle was the cause of its own downfall, as it promoted peaceful public pressure. Internally divided, publicly de-legitimized, and bereft of the moral high ground, the armed forces retreated from government. Politically motivated violence, however, did not end until democracy was restored in late 1983.



## Chapter Three

### Colombia

#### M-19's Struggle for a Public Audience

CHAPTER THREE



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Map 2: Colombia; Source: maps of net

### Timeline

- 1948 Popular Liberal Party leader, Jorge Elecier Gaitán Ayala, is murdered in Bogotá (Apr. 9).  
A popular insurrection breaks out and marks the beginning of the civil war known as “La Violencia”.
- 1953 General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla leads a successful coup against President Laureano Gomez (June 13).  
An armistice with most guerrilla groups is reached.
- 1957 A military junta ousts Rojas Pinilla from the presidency (May 10).  
The Liberal and Conservative parties agree on a power-sharing pact, the National Front (FN).
- 1958 Alberto Lleras Camargo, candidate of the Liberal Party, is elected president (May 4).  
End of bipartisan violence.
- 1962 Anapo (National Popular Alliance) is founded.
- 1964 Peasant self-defense organizations form mobile guerrilla groups–FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) is born.
- 1965 ELN (National Liberation Army) forms.
- 1970 Electoral fraud against Rojas Pinilla, leader of the Anapo. Misael Pistrana Borrero, the official candidate of the Conservative Party, wins the presidential elections (Apr. 19).
- 1974 The April 19 Movement (M-19) starts its insurgent campaign with the theft of Liberator Simon Bolivar’s sword and profiles itself as an Anapist organization (Jan. 17).  
Anapo suffers electoral defeat. Liberal Party candidate Alfonso Lopez Michelsen wins the presidential elections.  
The FN power-sharing pact formally ends, yet some of its central tenets remain in place.
- 1976 Anapo-Socialist splits from Anapo (Feb.).  
M-19 executes labor union leader José Raquel Mercado after a “plebiscite” (Feb-Apr).
- 1977 M-19 abducts Ferreira Neira, manager of Indupalma, in support of ongoing labor protests by company employees (Aug).  
General strike. Major confrontations between demonstrators and government forces (Sept.14-16).

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- 1978 Liberal Party candidate Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala is elected president.
- 1979 M-19 steals thousands of arms from a military depot (Jan. 1). Heavy military repression leads to the detention of numerous M-19 militants and the recovery of most of the arms.
- 1980 M-19 seizes the embassy of the Dominican Republic and takes 17 diplomats hostage (Feb. 27).  
Radio-Television M-19 (RTV M-19) begins to interfere with national Radio and TV channels (Sept.).  
M-19 launches the presidential candidature of M-19's founder and leader Jaime Bateman Cayon (Nov.).
- 1981 M-19's rural southern front steps up its activities. Several towns are seized and clashes with the army are frequent.  
In response to M-19's abduction of Marta Nieves Ochoa, drug barons finance the MAS (Death To Abductors) death squad to liquidate guerrilla members.  
A peace commission is formed to advise the government.
- 1982 The government refuses to negotiate with guerrillas. Members of the Peace Commission resign (May).  
Belisario Betancur (Conservative Party) assumes the presidency (Aug.).  
General amnesty for political prisoners (Nov.).
- 1983 M-19 leader Jaime Bateman Cayón dies in an air crash (Apr. 28).
- 1984 Guerrillas and the government sign an amnesty accord (Mar.).  
The National Dialogue gets underway (Aug.).  
M-19 repels an army offensive in Yarumales, effectively ending the peace agreement (Dec.).
- 1985 M-19 forms urban "Peace and Democracy camps" (Mar.).  
The National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNG) is formed (May).  
M-19 gives the general combat order (Sept.).  
M-19 seizes the Palace of Justice. An ensuing army assault on the building leaves over 100 people dead, including several high court judges (Nov. 6-7).
- 1986 M-19's "American Battalion", integrating militants of the Ecuadorian Alvaro Vive guerrilla, the Peruvian Tupac Amaru and the Colombian Quintin Lame organization, marches on Cali.  
Virgilio Barco Vargas (Liberal Party) is elected President.
- 1987 The peace process definitively breaks down and both insurgent and criminal violence increase sharply.

## COLOMBIA–M-19'S STRUGGLE FOR A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

- FARC joins the CNG, which is renamed Guerrilla Coordinator Simon Bolivar (CGSM).
- 1988 M-19 declares peace to the armed forces but war against the oligarchy (Jan.).  
The CGSM emphasizes the need for a Constituting Assembly (Apr.).  
M-19 abducts Conservative Party hardliner Álvaro Gomez Hurtado and presses for negotiations (May).  
Governmental initiative for peace is made public (Sept.).
- 1989 Workshops for peace are introduced (Apr.).  
Carlos Luis Galán, leader of New Liberalism and main candidate for the 1990 presidential elections, is assassinated by the drug mafia (Aug.).  
Based on the workshops for peace, a pact for peace and democracy is presented (Nov.).  
Congress modifies key aspects of the political pact with M-19 and undercuts the peace agreements. M-19 refuses to disarm contrary to the previous agreements (Dec.).
- 1990 M-19 leaders and pre-candidates for the upcoming presidential elections reach personal agreements on reforms (Jan./Feb).  
M-19 lays down arms in a public act and forms a political party (Mar. 8-9).  
Carlos Pizarro Leon-Gomez, leader of M-19 and presidential candidate, is assassinated (Apr.).  
César Gavira Trujillo (Liberal Party) wins the presidential elections.  
National Constitutional Assembly with great M-19 influence starts its work (Dec.).
- 1991 A new Constitution, the so-called Constitution of the Rights, takes effect (July 4).

### **A Brief History**

On March 9, 1990 Colombia's M-19 ceased to exist as a guerilla movement. On that date, the April 19 Movement (M-19) with its high impact on the public, disarmed and established a legal political movement. In its 16-year-long armed struggle, M-19 had become the icon of the struggle to democratically reform Colombia's "restricted democracy." (Pécaut 1989:29) M-19's campaign developed in the context of a broader social conflict over the lack of political opportunities in the 1970s and ended with peace negotiations and a new, politically inclusive

constitution in the late 1980s. M-19's success was due largely to its ability to connect with broader protest sectors. The organization excelled in voicing popular claims and putting these on the national political agenda through high-profile armed propaganda. M-19's political audacity permitted the group to position itself as a key political player and as a central force in the growing protest that put pressure on the government to make political room for negotiation in the early 1980s. M-19's ability to exercise pressure largely depended on its links with various protest movements. The political effects of M-19's actions needed to outweigh their military aspects to connect to the larger protest environment. M-19 owed its political force to the social support that the group could attract rather than to its limited organized force. In the end, political negotiations became an attractive option not only for M-19, but also for the Colombian political elite, as both recognized the limits of military action in the ever more complex and escalating conflict of the late 1980s.

Continuous political exclusion and repressive state practices were the main reasons for strong social protest and political violence in Colombia in the second half of twentieth century. The assassination of popular Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan Ayala on April 9, 1948 triggered *La Violencia* (The Violence), a civil war that lasted for two decades.<sup>44</sup> The murder also marked the beginning of a period of forceful political exclusion of the masses (Delpar 1989) that only ended with the 1991 constitutional reform. The civil war between the Liberal and Conservative parties was the original catastrophe that sowed the seeds for ongoing violence in Colombia in the second half of the twentieth century. As early as 1946, disputes about land tenure had ignited violence in rural Colombia (von der Walde & Burbano 2001), but the murder of Gaitan spread the violence throughout the nation (Delpar 1989:269). The bipartisan civil war left at least 200,000<sup>45</sup> people dead and led many to accept violence as a means to achieve political aims, even after the civil war had ended (Pécaut 1989:23). In the 1960s and '70s, peasant self-defense organizations that had formed during the civil war turned into insurgent groups and ongoing political exclusion provoked mass civil protest and turmoil. During the 1980s, the conflict was further complicated by paramilitary violence, which was linked to elite interests and drug trafficking and often tolerated by the armed forces (Gonzalez 2004; Rivas & Rey 2008). Finding a solution to this internal conflict became increasingly difficult.

In an attempt to end bipartisan violence, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla established the only Colombian military dictatorship in the latter half of the twentieth century on June 13, 1953, when he ousted Conservative president Laureano Gomez Castro. Although Rojas was

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<sup>44</sup> The length of the civil war is a moot point. *La Violencia* began in 1946 and officially ended in 1965 (Minaudier 1992; Delpar 1989). However, its most virulent period "only" spans the decade from 1948 to 1958 (von der Walde & Burbano 2001; Chernick 1999). Nonetheless, most observers put the war's end between 1960 and 1964 (e.g. Pécaut 1989; Wickham-Crowley 1991).

<sup>45</sup> The total number of deaths caused by the civil war is a subject of ongoing debate. Estimates vary from 200,000 to 500,000 people.

able to convince the liberal guerrillas to sign an armistice in September of that year, the violence erupted again, particularly in the shape of attacks on liberal peasants. Additionally, Rojas pursued a populist project and set about building his own support movement independent of the traditional parties. This approach led to the formation of a joint Liberal-Conservative opposition (Guarin 2011). Like many other populist regimes, Rojas' administration offered the masses an institutional voice and fulfilled numerous popular demands despite its inherently anti-liberal nature (Laclau 2005a; Laclau 2005b). Although the Conservative and Liberal parties had initially welcomed the intervention, they were strongly opposed to the development of a political power beyond their traditional sphere of control. In 1957, the parties joined forces to oust Rojas and formed the so-called National Front (FN) power-sharing pact. The FN established the rotation of the presidency and arranged for an equal distribution of lower governmental and administrative posts between the Liberal and the Conservative parties for the next sixteen years.<sup>46</sup> The FN power-sharing pact ended the bipartisan civil war, but denied other political forces legal access to institutional power (Romero 2000). Thus, the FN supplanted

the vertical cleavages of a society divided by opposing party affiliations (...) by new horizontal cleavages that divided an elite who had direct access to the political arena from those who continued to be excluded politically and socially. (Chernick 1999:162)

In other words, the new order still denied the masses an institutional representation in politics that was different from the traditional parties. This laid the groundwork for new tensions and violence.

The FN was not just a peace agreement between the two traditional parties, it also coalesced the parties' interests. The parties had

understood that if the reason to fight was to control the state to pursue their own interests, what [could be better] than sharing the government and getting benefits without the need to fight for it. (Benavides 2008:9)

Restricting democracy was aimed at perpetuating the status quo (Pécaut 1989). A state of emergency that limited political rights and permitted governing by decree (Díaz-Callejas 1991) became the pillar of political exclusion.<sup>47</sup> Lacking political legitimacy, the FN increasingly had to resort to harsh measures of social control to maintain power. In this spirit,

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<sup>46</sup> In 1968, the parties agreed on a transitional phase. As planned, the presidency stopped alternating in 1974, but the division of lower administrative posts was retained until 1978. Furthermore, the parties agreed that the triumphant party would cede a degree of power to the losing party until 1986.

<sup>47</sup> The state of emergency remained in place almost without interruption from 1940 to 1990 (Díaz-Callejas 1991).

the state of emergency was intended to counter protest rather than armed groups (Díaz-Callejas 1991). It was only when Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) became president that Colombia witnessed the definitive end of the FN power-sharing structures.

Apart from its democratic shortcomings, Colombia was also facing economic problems in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The government had to cope with rapid demographic growth, stagnating employment, and falling coffee prices—coffee being Colombia's number one export product at the time (Pécaut 1989). The people lacked democratic space to express their discontent. The immediate consequence was “the deinstitutionalization of social and union-based political struggles.” (Pizarro 1992:174) Political struggle shifted towards extra-institutional expressions. Social movements mushroomed at the local and regional levels (Escóbar & Roux 2005).<sup>48</sup> In the countryside, a proposed land reform failed to satisfy the peasants' land hunger, and unequal land tenure persisted.<sup>49</sup> Peasant protest emerged with force and mass land occupations challenged the FN in the early 1970s. Also, indigenous organizations claimed autonomy and land, organizing regionally and nationally.<sup>50</sup> The unresolved peasant demand for land was a central reason for the growth of rural guerrilla groups in the 1970s (Velez 2001; Molano 2000). At the same time, urban protest grew. In the 1950s, a process of urbanization had started, but the influx of workers by far exceeded employment opportunities (Gilbert 1990). As a result, shanty towns had spread and urban living conditions worsened. Urban protest swelled and became the main form of protest, with at least 138 strikes during the 1970s (Alternativa n° 76; El Tiempo 16.02.1976). In addition, the student movement had grown dramatically during the 1960s (Gilbert 1990; Vasquez 2006) and was now a major protest force that provided significant support for guerrilla organizations. Christian organizations with links to revolutionary Catholicism also joined the protest on issues of socio-economic inequality. Many Catholics stood up against economic exploitation and political repression, supporting protest and even guerrilla organizations. One famous example was Camilo Torres Restrepo—“the guerrilla priest”.

Protest groups mushroomed in the heady social setting of the 1960s (Interview 17) and persisted throughout the 1970s. By the end of that decade, growing concerns over repressive policies led the diverse social sectors to unite under the banner of human rights and democracy against President Turbay's (1978-1982) infamous National Security Statute.

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<sup>48</sup> In general terms, we can differentiate between indigenous, peasant, Christian and civic movements – including urban labor and student organizations (Posso 1987). Some movement organizations, however, such as the National Peasant Association (ANUC) and the two central labor unions, the Colombian Worker Confederation (CTC), close to the Liberal Party, and the Colombian Workers Union (UTC), close to the Conservative Party, were set up at the state's initiative to subdue the increasing opposition and to prevent insurrections (Escóbar & Roux 2005; Rudqvist 1983).

<sup>49</sup> In 1965, 0.2% of the landowners controlled 30.4% of the agrarian land. On the other extreme, 86% of small landowners only controlled 14.6% of the total agricultural land. (Rudqvist 1983, pp.ii)

<sup>50</sup> Indigenous claims found a first expression in the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca (CRIC) that formed in 1971. Shortly afterwards, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) offered a nationwide representation.

The state simply lacked institutional means to respond to the various protest movements and protest became generalized (Restrepo 1992).

The lack of political opportunity under the FN and the poor economy had made the power-sharing government the focal point of protest from the various opposition sectors. Yet most of the time protest remained divided along geographical lines and sectorial interests and no stable, collective action against the FN appeared. Support for social movements was spontaneous and inconsistent and so was the social pressure on the regime. Protest tended to be unorganized and unpredictable. In addition, the desperately divided political left failed to attract popular support or to provide a unifying leadership for the political opposition (Alternativa n° 56). Ideological differences between Soviet-line communists, Maoists, Trotskyites and Castrists flourished, especially among student organizations in the politicized universities (Villamizar 2007; Interview 17; 22; 24). Differences were sometimes even settled by force (El Tiempo 19.04.1974; Interview 24). There were calls from the left-wing journal *Alternativa* for protest and guerrilla unity, while the National Opposition Union (UNO) and Firmes<sup>51</sup> platform made proposals to present a common opposition candidate. However, these appeals were not enough to convince the two major left-wing parties—the Communist Party and the Independent and Revolutionary Labor Movement (MOIR)—to close ranks (Alternativa n° 149). The social audience of the political left was small to begin with and internal division fractured it even more. Protest over local grievances remained divided and failed to connect to claims for structural change at the national level. Therefore, opposition remained divided and protest fitful, and failed to develop its potential pressure force.

These divisions were also visible in the nascent guerrilla organizations (Interview 18; 24). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) came into being in 1964 as the result of a merger between civil war peasant self-defense organizations and (Soviet-line) Communist guerrillas (von der Walde & Burbano 2001; Minaudier 1992; Wickham-Crowley 1991; UNHCR 2003; Rojas 2008). The National Liberation Army (ELN) that formed one year later was rooted in Castrism and Revolutionary Catholicism, while the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) that appeared on the scene in 1967 was based on Maoist communism (Villaraga 2008; Interview 17; 18; 24). The ongoing land conflict, in the shape of peasant expulsions and land occupations, made rural guerrilla organizations and particularly FARC increasingly popular (Molano 2000).

In several instances, the opposition managed to join forces. In 1970, hopes of ending the FN united most opposition movements behind the presidential candidacy of ex-dictator Rojas, head of the the National Popular Alliance (Anapo), who bypassed the power-sharing pact and ran as additional candidate for the Conservative Party (El Tiempo 05.04.1970).

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<sup>51</sup> Firmes was a short-lived electoral platform that formed in 1978 and tried to unite opposition forces by presenting a common presidential candidate.

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Anapo had initially formed around the tentative social welfare policies during Rojas' tenure and after 1964 had become an important popular opposition group that challenged the traditional bipartisan system (Guarin 2011). In response to Rojas' candidacy, the establishment threatened a military coup to prevent an Anapo "dictatorship" (El Tiempo 13.04.1970), a threat that was pre-empted by the massive electoral fraud that assured the official Conservative candidate, Misael Pastrana Borrero of victory on April 19, 1970 (Vergara 2004). The traditional political parties had made clear that they would defend their power by any means. In response to the fraud, Anapo basis confronted the police in the streets of Bogota and ELN offered to provide armed support (Villamizar 1995). However, Rojas rejected to fight the fraud by force, leaving many people so disappointed with Anapo that they turned their backs on the alliance; this inflicted a blow from which Anapo would not recover (El Tiempo 27.04.1970; Benavides 2008). Despite Rojas' objections, protest tactics began to radicalize in the face of this forceful political exclusion. Four years later, in 1974, the urban guerrilla organization April 19 Movement (M-19) was formed, its name a direct allusion to the date of the electoral fraud. M-19 aimed to defend the "popular will" against oligarch interests (M-19 01.01.1978). The tiny group used intelligent armed propaganda to align itself with large protest sectors and quickly obtained widespread sympathy for voicing popular demands at the national level and for provoking debate over the political situation (Chernick 1988/89). For the next sixteen years, M-19 would best embody the political nature of the domestic conflict in its attempts to gain social support. Its campaign developed in accordance with the changing sympathy and support it could obtain.

Another set of instances in which the opposition acted jointly were strikes. In the 1970s, civic strikes often found spontaneous support in neighborhoods and multiplied. This process culminated in a 1977 general strike. Although the strike was declared illegal and the media were censored (El Tiempo 03.09.1977), the joint action of the largest labor and social organizations managed to paralyze the state almost completely. The strike spontaneously continued for an extra day and President Lopez Michelsen compared it with the 1948 *Bogotazo*—the popular insurrection that had hit Bogotá after the assassination of Gaitan (El Tiempo 16.09.1977a). Among guerilla organizations, the strike nurtured hopes of finding support for armed struggle (Delgado 1978; Morales 1978).

A further instance of united protest was the growing call for a lifting of the state of emergency and dismantling of the "constitutional dictatorship", as the government by decree was described (Alternativa n° 55). The Colombian government had started relying increasingly on repressive approaches to opposition activities. In 1978 President Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) enacted a National Security Statute that significantly beefed up the state's counter-insurgency approach, stiffening penalties linked to rebellion and particularly to

protest (Alternativa n° 179). Diverse social sectors united in protest against mass detentions<sup>52</sup> and systematic human rights abuses under the Statute, and clamored for democracy (Alternativa n° 187). Luis Carlos Galan Sarmiento, founder of the dissident Liberal Party sector “New Liberalism”, best voiced the social discontent with the political system and the desire for change when he observed that

the nation is tired of the old political style. It feels oppressed by clientelism and has lost confidence in its leaders. The Colombian people want to express themselves freely. They detest being enclosed by the machinery that prefabricates elections. They no longer submit to being mobilized by hatred or fear. The nation repudiates the old-style machine politics, and understands how much a disorderly, improvised and corrupt public administration costs. (El Tiempo 09.11.1981)

Under Turbay's mandate, social unrest and protest against political exclusion and state repression spread. Faced with a de-legitimized state, many began to perceive guerrilla struggle as legitimate; armed conflict increased sharply (Restrepo 1992; Pizarro 1992; Interview 18). Armed struggle seemed to be a “response of a social sector (...) that does not resign itself to endure the exploitation and domination that the system has imposed” as the Group of Priests for Latin America pointed out (El Tiempo 11.04.1980). Support organizations for detained guerrillas and political activist sprung up everywhere and demonstrated the general rejection of state abuses. Insurgents saw these organizations as an expression of the social acceptance of their struggle (M-19 21.09.1980; Interview 17; 21; 22).

Repression and rejection of negotiations confirmed to many that the government was the main obstacle to reform and change (El Tiempo 18.05.1982). Every insurgent organization experienced a significant influx of volunteers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, FARC, which had started its struggle as an organization of “armed colonization” in 1964 with only 48 men, counted 1,000 cadres in 1978, and opened its 24<sup>th</sup> front in 1982 (Ferro & Uribe 2002; Velez 2001). FARC's tactic of taxing drug-trafficking and, later, taking over drug production and trafficking, permitted the organization to expand its territorial presence, counting 48 fronts in 1990 and 63 by 1999 (Ferro & Uribe 2002; Velez 2001). M-19's call for “peace and democratization” also attracted widespread sympathy and became a reference point for large social sectors (Chernick 1988/89; Posso 1987; El Tiempo 28.02.1980; El Tiempo 01.11.1981; Interview 17; 18; 21; 22; 25). M-19's spectacular armed propaganda actions had great political impact. For example, its hostage taking in the Dominican Embassy forced the government to negotiate and provided the group with an

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<sup>52</sup> According to estimates by human rights groups, up to 5,000 people were detained for political reasons annually under the Security Statute (Romero 2003).

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international audience. This event in particular convinced some sympathizers to join the organization, as one interviewee recalled (Interview 18). All in all, the government's repressive approach to broad protest only fueled and radicalized the opposition. In the early 1980s, the Colombian state faced a severe crisis (Chernick 1988/89; Restrepo 1992; Posso 1987).

Presidential elections in 1982 took some momentum away from the burgeoning protest against the government. Conservative Party candidate Belisario Betancur put popular promises of peace and democracy on his political agenda (Betancur 07.08.1982; *El Tiempo* 01.06.1982; *El Tiempo* 06.06.1982). When he took office he enjoyed enormous political credit (Betancur 29.03.1985). The new president addressed some of the most pressing demands and managed to restore state legitimacy (Camacho Leyva 1987). He abolished the National Security Statute and reduced open repression of social movements; he also granted amnesty to political prisoners (*El Tiempo* 24.11.1982; *El Tiempo* 04.11.1982; *El Tiempo* 17.11.1982). Under his leadership, negotiations with guerrilla organizations culminated in a ceasefire with the majority of the insurgent organizations in 1984. The government signed an agreement with FARC granting the rebel group room for legal political organization and promoting political, economic and social reforms; FARC promised to transform into a political organization after a year's trial period (Acuerdo Uribe 1984). M-19, EPL and ADO<sup>53</sup> also agreed to a ceasefire with the government in return for the establishment of a Great National Dialogue (Acuerdo Aug. 1984; *El Tiempo* 25.08.1984). However, not all insurgent organizations embraced the government's peace initiative and ELN and the indigenous self-defense organization Quintin Lame continued their armed struggle (Villaraga 2008).

The Great National Dialogue secured in the ceasefire negotiations opened an inclusive political space for discussion and was not limited in time or content. The objective was to give voice to excluded social sectors, to every Colombian, to "all lively social forces" including social and political organizations, guerrilla groups and state representatives, and to provide a platform to discuss the wide range of profound national problems (M-19 Sept. 1984; M-19 20.10.1984a). The opening of a political space for solving the national crisis was applauded by all social sectors. The government regained the political initiative (Comunicado Jan. 1985; Posso 1987; Betancur 27.08.1984; Rojas 2008). Hopes of profound political and social change were raised and protest abated. Betancur's political approach de-escalated the conflict and temporarily reduced political violence.

It was not long, however, before the National Dialogue ran into trouble and violence flared up when social and political activists were attacked by paramilitaries (Villaraga 2008; Rojas 2008). Government attempts to institutionalize and limit the dialogue to the

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<sup>53</sup> Workers Self-Defense.

reintegration of the insurgents into society (El Tiempo 02.12.1984; Castro 22.02.1985) clashed with insurgent calls for a broad dialogue open to all social forces. Mass protest developed over unfulfilled government promises (Congreso Jul. 1986; CINEP-1; CINEP-2; Interview 17; 19), such as a referendum and constitutional reform (El Tiempo 02.12.1984; El Tiempo 13.03.1985a; El Tiempo 13.03.1985b). Tension between institutional and extra-institutional forces mounted (Posso 1987). Frequent army violations of the ceasefire endangered its continuation (Comunicado 18.09.1984). The truce effectively ended in December 1984 with a three week-long army siege of M-19's camp in Yarumales.

The mid 1980s saw a sharp rise in paramilitary violence. The paramilitaries had started out as legal civil defense organizations under the Decree 3398 (1965) and Law 48 (1968), but over time had developed into "gangs that defended the private interests of landowners [and drug traffickers] affected by the guerrillas." (Rivas & Rey 2008:45) With drug traffickers financially supporting paramilitary activities, violence rapidly spread. Ironically, these elite self-defense units that had sprung up in the face of "state incapacity to resolve the problems of public order" (Rivas & Rey 2008:44) themselves started to play a key role in undermining public order, to the point of becoming a major threat to the state by the late 1980s (Gonzalez 2004; Molano 2000). Paramilitary violence focused on insurgent political forces and by mid-1985 cut off the avenue of political participation for demobilized insurgents. As a consequence, M-19 resumed its armed activities, launching a vigorous military offensive in mid-1985. EPL quickly followed suit and the insurgent struggle regained momentum. FARC, however, honored the truce and bet on its freshly formed Patriotic Union Party (UP) to introduce political changes. Unlike M-19's basic, democratic ideal of National Dialogue, FARC's electoral-institutional project facilitated negotiations with the government and allowed the group to stick to the truce despite increasing attacks on the UP (Rojas 2008; Villaraga 2008). A side effect of FARC respecting the ceasefire was that the government could focus on combating the other, smaller insurgent groups and could depict these as warmongers in the battle for public opinion. Internal division between the insurgent groups clearly played into the government's hands.

Most people were critical of the revival of armed struggle and were terrified of the escalating violence. The country was shocked when M-19's attempt to seize the Palace of Justice ended in a massacre, and by the escalating insurgent and state violence (Camacho 1992). Paramilitary attacks on activists and UP members, furthermore, frightened off popular participation in protest (Benitez 2008). In an attempt to bolster state authority, the armed forces in 1987 repeatedly attacked FARC columns (Chernick 1996; Molano 2000), eventually driving the guerrilla group to take up arms again. The peace process had come to a complete halt (Hernandez 2007). To make matters worse, criminal violence—primarily linked to drug-trafficking—escalated as well. Casualties of the complex domestic conflict numbered in the

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thousands (Gonzalez 2004; *El Tiempo* 19.01.1988; *El Siglo* 05.03.1988; *El Tiempo* 07.07.1987; *El Tiempo* 07.09.1987; *El Tiempo* 13.11.1987).

Renewed protests erupted against clandestine repression and insufficient reforms, but the limited political space provided by the National Dialogue ensured the protest did not spill over into armed struggle (Posso 1987; Congreso Jul. 1986). The protesters embraced the limited legal political opportunities they had been granted, rejected violence as a path to change, and called for an end to the internal struggle. Armed struggle thereby lost the relative legitimacy it had achieved in the early 1980s and failed to attract support from the masses. Protest and armed struggle bifurcated (Posso 1987). Political violence re-escalated and reached levels previously unknown, but the bifurcation limited the insurgents' chances of overthrowing the government and stopped the conflict from developing into an all-out civil war.

The complex constellation of the struggle brought the state to the brink of institutional breakdown (Berghof 2008; Interview 17). Calls for negotiations with the insurgents and a peaceful solution to the internal conflict grew steadily louder (*El Colombiano* 04.01.1988; *El Colombiano* 13.02.1988; *El Tiempo* 03.06.1988; *El Espectador* 24.06.1988). Civic protest movements, such as the Movement for Life, mobilized ever larger numbers of people against the violent struggle. From 1987 onwards, this movement staged numerous collective actions for peace and pressured the Barco government to take steps towards a peaceful solution of the armed conflict (Fernandez 2004). The escalating violence had also convinced the political elite of the need to introduce profound political reforms; Barco made plans to reform the constitution (*El Tiempo* 31.01.1988). M-19 recognized that the political mood was favorable for change. Seizing the opportunity to exercise political pressure through armed propaganda, M-19 abducted Conservative Party hardliner Alvaro Gomez Hurtado and demanded new peace talks. M-19 realized that the option of "war was exhausted" (Interview 21) and that only negotiations could bring about real change. After initial tensions between Barco and M-19 over who would control the peace talks, M-19 accepted a government offer that satisfied several of its claims and established a feasible framework for negotiations (Chernick 1999; *El Tiempo* 02.09.1988). M-19 accepted its chance to abandon the armed struggle that had lost its effectiveness and embrace negotiation as an instrument of political change.

The government restricted its negotiations with M-19 to demobilization and reintegration into society. After an initial period of closed-door talks, the government invited the public to join the discussions about necessary reforms, fulfilling one of the key insurgent claims: societal participation in the peace process (Berghof 2008; Florez & Valenzuela 1996). Public support for the peace process and the determination of the government and insurgents ensured that the talks continued despite major setbacks such as the assassination of high ranking M-19 members by police officers (*El Tiempo* 08.04.1989a; *El Tiempo* 08.04.1989b).

The climate of mutual trust that had developed over time even helped to overcome the last-minute rejection of the peace agreement by Congress (Berghof 2008; Interview 17; 21; 24; 26). The public was outraged at such set-backs to the peace process and held the government responsible for a possible failure of the negotiations. When a formal peace agreement seemed out of reach, the negotiating partners instead worked out personal agreements between M-19 leaders and Liberal Party pre-candidates for the upcoming presidential elections. These agreements were enough for M-19 to lay down its arms on March 9, 1990 and to form the Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD-M-19) Party.

EPL, Quintin Lame and an ELN splinter group followed M-19's example by demobilizing and reintegrating into society (Villaraga 2008). However, the peace agreement remained incomplete. FARC and ELN continued their struggle. Paramilitary attacks on the UP and military pressure on FARC forces had led the group to renounce the 1984 ceasefire and had undermined the group's belief in negotiations and political ways of change. FARC's political advances had been met with paramilitary attacks by extreme conservative sectors, closing the political opening to the guerrillas and related sectors. At the same time, FARC declined to legalize itself, in violation of the 1984 La Uribe Agreement, and thereby seriously jeopardized sustainable peace between the insurgent group and the government (Ortiz 2001; Ortiz 2007). Barco's 1988 peace initiative set the framework for negotiations, but its insistence on asserting state authority and restricting the agenda for talks rendered a comprehensive peace deal with all insurgents impossible (Chernick 1996). After all, FARC's priority was not to end violence at any price, but rather to discuss Colombia's numerous national problems (Molano 2000; Chernick 1996). Furthermore, the active guerrillas' limited influence on the constitutional reform process also restricted their interest in compromise (Molano 2000). While Betancur's peace process of the mid 1980s had been too vague to achieve real changes, Barco's peace initiative was too narrow to end the entire armed conflict, as we will see in the next section. The partial peace agreement led to a paradoxical situation in which the Colombian state democratized while violence escalated (Chernick 1996).

There were other reasons why FARC could not be brought back into the fold. FARC had experienced a substantial growth during the 1980s and its growing income from drug trafficking had made the organization independent of local social support (Rivas & Rey 2008). FARC had also learned the lessons from the ongoing paramilitary attacks on its social and political basis, from Congress's last minute refusal to pass social and economic reforms and from the assassination of demobilized insurgents. Unlike M-19, which emphasized political reform and had even gone along with the legislature's blockade of proposed socio-economic changes in the hope of achieving these later through political channels, FARC stressed the need to discuss socio-economic changes in particular (Chernick 1996; Molano 2000). FARC

had become skeptical of negotiations with the government and deliberately avoided maneuvering itself into a militarily unfavorable position where it concentrated its forces in one geographical location, as M-19 had done shortly before demobilizing (Molano 2000). Geographical concentration would enable government forces to deal FARC a decisive blow if it came to a confrontation. However, FARC's ongoing mobility and territorial presence hampered peaceful negotiations, as encounters between insurgents and state forces often ended in violent confrontation. In the 1990s, distrust began to dominate negotiations and the negotiators' ever expanding demands stood in the way of successful talks (Molano 2000). At present, it looks like only frank negotiations might be able to put an end to the fifty-year-old conflict and achieve a sustainable peace (Semana 23.05.2011).

### **Processes of Political Violence in Colombia**

The development of the Colombian conflict was closely related to the interactions within the strong but divided opposition movement, which rose up against persistent political exclusion and state repression of extra-institutional expressions of discontent. Wide-ranging protest gave rise to a variety of armed opposition organizations. Of these, M-19 best understood the importance of social support to an insurgent campaign and the group therefore aligned itself with popular protest. In the mid 1980s, protest and armed struggle bifurcated and lessened the chances of a revolutionary overthrow of the government. Armed struggle needed active social support from the masses if it was to bring about revolution. At the same time, the political elite started moving towards social reform as a way to end the ongoing internal conflict. M-19 and the government found themselves competing for public sympathy. Public opinion played a pivotal role in bringing about peace negotiations between the adversaries, as both were well aware of the value of social support. The following detailed analysis of the struggle between M-19 and the Colombian state pays special attention to the relations between the violent actors and the social audience. It also considers the audience's influence on the development of the conflict.

#### **M-19—A Strategy of Armed Pressure for Political Negotiations**

M-19's sixteen years of insurgent struggle were characterized by spectacular armed propaganda. The organization's development was closely linked to the social support it

received in different periods of its existence. M-19 opposed the ideological split of the political left and modernized the Colombian insurgent struggle. In general terms, M-19 used armed struggle as a means to press for negotiations with the government on political change. This strategy was most clearly visible in the first period of M-19's existence (from its inception in 1974 to the 1984 truce). M-19 voiced general protest claims and positioned itself as self-appointed representative of the popular opposition movement. Its pragmatic ideology and highly political armed propaganda attracted widespread sympathy and popular support.

From 1984—the start of the National Dialogue—to 1988, M-19 struggled to maintain social support. By backing its negotiations with military force, M-19 missed an opportunity to establish itself as a purely political force. When violence re-escalated, the group failed to sufficiently communicate its political proposal and its focus on its military campaign alienated the wider protest environment, which opted for political change and rejected armed struggle. This development resembles the problems the Argentinean Montoneros faced, as we will see in Chapter Five.

In 1988, M-19 returned to its initial strategy of pressing for negotiations. The organization recognized the unlikelihood of bringing about change through isolated guerrilla warfare and looked for ways to restore its popularity. By embracing broad social demands it regained popular support and hence a basis for exerting political pressure. The propitious political situation of the late 1980s offered M-19 a chance to influence the government's constitutional reform project. The organization seized this opportunity to contribute to real political change and to abandon armed struggle. Its decision to renounce armed struggle was strongly influenced by the increase in popular demands for peace. M-19's quest for social support made the group sensitive to protest claims. In short, M-19's campaign depended to a great extent on the attitude of broad social sectors towards the struggle.

### **Formation of M-19 and Its Ideological Development**

The formation of the April 19 Movement (M-19) was the result of continuous political exclusion and the rift on the left that characterized Colombia's political scene in the latter half of the twentieth century. M-19 renewed and modernized the Colombian guerrilla struggle. It was the first movement to try to overcome the left's sectarianism, coalesce the protest and unite the guerrilla groups. Additionally, the group moved the conflict from the countryside into the city.

M-19 was formed mainly by young militants from upper and middle class backgrounds (UNHCR 2003), with a relatively good education and a sensibility to social injustice often

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induced by their Catholic upbringing (Vasquez 2006; Villamizar 2007). Most of the founding members had previous experience both in political militancy and in guerrilla struggle, mainly in the Communist Youth (JUCO) and in FARC, respectively (Pizarro 1992; Jaramillo 2006). Some had seen guerrilla action with ELN and EPL (Interview 17; 24). In organizational terms, M-19 was modeled on the Montoneros and Tupamaros. Borrowing from the Uruguayan Tupamaros, the group introduced the principle of compartmentalization, and from the Argentinean Montoneros it learned how to unite political objectives and military operations (Bateman 1984a; Interview 17). A closed structure guaranteed organizational secrecy. Embracing popular demands allowed M-19 to align itself with popular movements. In this way, M-19 positioned itself at the forefront of popular opposition struggles without jeopardizing its secrecy (M-19 1973). M-19's effective armed propaganda and its role as mouthpiece for popular demands quickly turned M-19 into Colombia's most vocal urban guerrilla group.

M-19 emerged in late 1973 out of the *Comuneros*,<sup>54</sup> a group which had envisioned creating a militia within Anapo to counter future electoral frauds, if necessary by armed force. The name M-19 referred to the 1970 electoral fraud and put the organization in the Anapo "camp". However, this alignment was based on tactical rather than ideological motives, as the group admitted internally (M-19 1973; M-19 1974a). M-19 was explicitly looking for a popular support base for the new armed movement and Anapo seemed to offer just that (Bateman 1982). M-19 hoped to rally opposition forces around Anapo and convert the movement into a popular army (M-19 1974a). M-19, therefore, came into existence as an "organ of the Anapist movement." (M-19 01.01.1974) However, support from Anapo was mostly limited to sympathy. Only a few Anapo members, such as Carlos Toledo Plata, later commander of M-19, were aware that an armed organization was being formed within the Anapo movement.

Revolutionary pragmatism, in terms of garnering social support, prevailed over ideological discussions and organizational concerns. For M-19, the tactical and strategic divisions within the political opposition and between various guerrilla organizations were key obstacles to revolution that the group needed to overcome. M-19 clearly recognized the importance of a popular base for any revolutionary project and aimed at building a broad, united opposition front by combining nationalism and socialism (M-19 1973; M-19 Feb. 1977). To attract mass support, the group tied its struggle into Simon Bolivar's national liberation struggle and made sure it took the specific Colombian context into account when adopting foreign strategies and ideologies (M-19 1973; M-19 Feb. 1977; Villamizar 1995:45).

The quest for a popular support base was central to M-19's campaign throughout its existence. The group's historical leader, Jaime Bateman, believed unity of the popular

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<sup>54</sup> The name *Comuneros* refers to the first rebellion against the Spanish colonial power in Santander on March 16, 1781 (Alternativa n° 74).

masses was essential in revolutionary warfare; for raising a popular army and defeating government forces (Bateman 1983:21; Bateman 1982). Mass support and active popular participation were considered key to the struggle, or the very “reason for [the group’s] existence” (M-19 1978), as no vanguard could replace the popular masses (M-19 1974b). Getting the masses actively involved in revolutionary struggle was first and foremost a political problem (M-19 June 1980). Nonetheless, the group was convinced that armed struggle had to be part of its action repertoire (Louis Project 2008; Interview 17) and opted for audacious armed propaganda instead of classic political work to mobilize the masses. In short, M-19’s activities were characterized by the primacy of practice; the group hoped to overcome factionalization by creating political realities such as united mass protest (Fayad 1984). Although M-19 embraced all forms of struggle to bring about change, it believed that armed backing was indispensable to defend popular achievements against elite interests (M-19 01.01.1974).

By 1979, after a long period of internal debate (Interview 23), M-19 abandoned its pursuit of a socialist revolution and began to fight for “national sovereignty, liberty and democracy.” (M-19 01.01.1979) M-19’s early commitment to Marxism-Leninism (M-19 1973) had been a residue of Communist Party and FARC influences, while the group’s ideology was “closer to populism and nationalism” and contained “elements of a liberal revolution.” (Interview 17) A “democracy without attributes,” i.e. a basic democracy without intermediary representatives and limitations, therefore, was much better suited to M-19’s unitary objective and pragmatism (Interview 23; 24). Furthermore, the group understood democracy to mean the sovereignty of the people and saw it as a central aspect of socialism (Bateman 1983:4). This ideological shift allowed the organization to significantly expand its support base. Although the total number of organized M-19 militants was never higher than 1,500-2,000 people (ACED 2000) the group’s broad objectives enabled it to start spearheading popular protest in the early 1980s.

M-19 also saw itself as a movement rather than a political party. It believed it was the armed vanguard of a major socio-political movement consisting of all sectors striving for popular sovereignty (Interview 21). “Being a member of M-19 [meant] participating in the project [even] without organized militancy” and even if one was unaware of it (M-19 June 1980). Consequently, M-19 declined to formulate its own political claims and adopted existing popular claims instead. Popular support was the M-19’s “reason to be” (Interview 24) and, therefore, the group tried to be “in tune with the opinion of the people.” (Interview 17) Realizing popular demands was seen as a revolutionary act in itself and M-19 saw itself as simply defending the “popular will” as expressed in social movements and protest. Therefore, political inclusion of the masses, i.e. democracy, was a revolutionary objective (Interview 17; 26). M-19 adjusted its objectives to popular claims and subordinated its organizational

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survival to the achievement of these objectives. For M-19 “the organization [was] not an aim in itself but a necessary means for (...) pushing forward revolutionary tasks.” (M-19 Feb. 1977) M-19 was prepared to sacrifice the organization for the sake of achieving the desired political change, which was no less than the political inclusion of the popular masses (Interview 18; 21; 23; 25). The group engaged in high risk and high profile actions to achieve these objectives. In M-19’s view, any opposition to the regime was interpreted as support for its own position, guaranteeing the group significant social backing, at least ideologically. The inclusive movement concept prevented M-19 from becoming “schematic, dogmatic and sectarian [like] all the left-wing groups [that] organized themselves in a party”, as a founding member of the group explained (Interview 24). However, this also meant support depended on a vague confluence of objectives while organized support remained limited.

M-19 saw the need to move the struggle to the city in order to directly involve the urban masses and confront the national elite. This urban focus was both an appropriate response to the urbanization of the previous decades and a move that modernized the Colombian guerrilla struggle. Urban armed propaganda opened a new front and the group exercised considerable political pressure on the national elite. Urban actions brought the far-off rural struggle onto the doorstep of the whole nation and put the conflict on the political agenda by force. M-19’s success, especially its strong impact on public opinion, was closely linked to its urban campaign and its capacity to spark public political debate on the reasons for the national conflict. Yet, the political left criticized M-19’s urban focus because it feared an avalanche of repression (Villamizar 1995; Villamizar 2007; Interview 24).

At the individual level, great personal autonomy and an undogmatic ideology that respected the individual inspired strong personal commitment to the organization. Responsibilities were delegated quickly to new militants. This highlighted the importance of personal involvement, actively engaged the recruits, and strengthened their sense of duty and identification with the organization (Interview 17; 18; 23; 25). More importantly, M-19’s undogmatic ideology put the life of the individual over ideology-inspired sacrifice, making the organization attractive to the youth (Interview 17; 21; 22; 23; 25). As one interviewee expressed it: “We understood that the militant before being a militant was a human being of flesh and blood. That made us different.” (Interview 24) This was indeed what made M-19 stand out from the other Colombian insurgent groups, which expected ideological subordination and valued heroism and personal sacrifice (Interview 17; 18). Armed struggle implied high risks, of course, but for M-19 revolution had to be a party and not a tragedy; it should liberate the individual and society—not sacrifice them to ideological ideals (Fayad 1986; Interview 17; 21; 24). As M-19’s charismatic leader Jaime Bateman implored: “[S]ing to life, because if you live in the service of death you are already dead.” (Bateman 1984b) M-19 envisioned quick political changes rather than a distant utopia for which it needed to sacrifice

its cadres. The group felt that ideology had to demonstrate its superiority in the practice of the militants and the organization (Vazquez 2006; Interview 22; 24). Accordingly, M-19 did not punish cadres for distancing themselves from the organization (Interview 17; 21; 22; 24; 25; 26). Militants felt that “there was liberty” in the organization and in personal militancy (Interview 22). Additionally, M-19 introduced an element of democracy in its practice; it held ten national conferences during its existence that assembled large numbers of militants (Interview 24). All the same, moral pressure from the group that for many had become a surrogate family (Vasquez 2006) made it hard to turn one’s back on it (Interview 18).

In summary, M-19 was a pragmatic group that had been formed by experienced political and guerrilla militants from a middle class background. Rejecting ideological sectarianism and pursuing the unity of opposition forces to achieve political changes was its forte. M-19 worked to bring about rapid practical change and modernized Colombian guerrilla warfare by opting for urban guerrilla struggle and geared its activities toward pressuring the national elite. Its inclusive and popular political proposals attracted mass support. A flexible and life-affirming ideology distinguished M-19 from other groups and appealed to young militants in particular.

### **The Rise of M-19—Armed Pressure for Political Change**

M-19’s early campaign was aimed at winning social support and largely relied on military means including urban armed propaganda, and, at a later stage, a constant rural military presence. M-19’s overt pressure on the state was intended to force the government into a dialogue about the political claims the group made. The group generated support by aligning itself with existing social movements, embracing popular demands and building grassroots organizations. In this way, the group could position itself as a (self-appointed) representative of large protest sectors. Both its self-declared alliances to popular movements and the political impact of its activities allowed M-19 to influence the national political debate (Chernick 1988/89).

Concern about its propagandistic impact led M-19 to launch a newspaper propaganda campaign to assure nationwide publicity for its initial attack. Advertisements, ostensibly for a new pesticide and a memory improvement product (El Tiempo 15.01.1974; El Tiempo 16.01.1974; El Tiempo 18.01.1974), announced the group’s first public appearance on January 17, 1974 when it stole the sword of “Colombia’s Liberator [Simon] Bolivar” and “returned [it] to the battle” of independence against national and foreign masters (La Quinta

de Bolívar 2008; Jaramillo 2006:46; *El Tiempo* 18.01.1974).<sup>55</sup> From 1980 M-19 even had its own television station (RTVM-19)<sup>56</sup> to broadcast its message to the public (Lara 1982), maximize publicity and enhance the propaganda effect of its actions in the “war of images.” (Pécaut 1992:232)

M-19’s most direct approach to garnering social support was to link itself to existing social movements such as Anapo and, later, the left-wing political platform Firmes (Jaramillo 2006). The organization first made overtures to Anapo when it signed its first actions “[w]ith the people, with the arms, with Maria Eugenia<sup>57</sup> to power.” (M-19 1974b) The surprised Anapo leadership dismissed any connection to M-19. However, the Anapo followers who were still disappointed by Rojas’s refusal to dispute the 1970 electoral fraud (Benavides 2008) welcomed the appearance of an armed organization among its ranks. However, M-19 introduced a socialist ideology and identity into the Anapo movement (M-19 1974a), leading to the formation of a socialist section led by Carlos Toledo Plata. Tensions between the Anapo leadership and the socialist section split and weakened the movement (Bateman 1982; *Alternativa* n°68) instead of laying the basis for a united opposition front and a popular army. In 1976, when the popular movement descended into decay, M-19 ended its tactical alignment with the movement (*Alternativa* n°84).

This debacle convinced M-19 to change its tactic of generating support and began to actively involve the people in its actions. Consequently, when M-19 abducted CTC labor union leader Jose Raquel Mercado (*El Tiempo* 22.02.1976), the group directly consulted the public about the union leader’s guilt or innocence. They asked the public to participate in the “trial” by painting “yes” or “no” in public spaces (*Alternativa* n° 71). The public seemed to be the driving force behind the guilty verdict, becoming a partner in crime. M-19 tried to exchange Mercado for state concessions, threatening to kill him if the government did not start a dialogue. When the government rejected negotiations, M-19 found itself in the unfortunate position of having to prove it meant business (Bateman 1982). However, executing Mercado was unpopular even among the political left (*Alternativa* n°79). By pulling the trigger, M-19 lost its “innocence.” (Bateman 1982) The execution marked a qualitative escalation of M-19’s campaign, demonstrating that the group was dead serious.

After this incident, M-19 refined its tactic to garner support even more, supporting popular struggles without formulating its own claims. Mercado’s trial had made clear that the government would try to capitalize on insurgent violence and sacrifice hostages instead of ceding to demands (*El Tiempo* 20.04.1976; *El Tiempo* 22.04.1976). M-19 realized it could

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<sup>55</sup> This action also met with significant criticism from sectors of the Colombian left. Ulises Casas, for instance, points out that M-19 lacked any revolutionary content and represented the right wing of the ANAPO. See Casas 1980.

<sup>56</sup> Radio Television M-19.

<sup>57</sup> María Eugenia de Rojas Pinilla was the daughter of ex-dictator Rojas Pinilla. She became leader of the ANAPO movement in 1974.

avoid this trap by joining existing popular struggles and demands. In this way, M-19 became the “armed wing of the exploited people.” (Alternativa n° 129) Defending popular claims assured M-19 social support and made it impossible for the government to reject their demands because these were formulated by the insurgents. For example, in 1977 the group abducted the manager of Indupalma (a palm oil producer) to intervene in a long labor conflict that had attracted nationwide attention. M-19 did not formulate its own claims but merely backed the workers' claims, giving them a voice and encouraging further labor organization (Alternativa n° 129). In this way, M-19 proved its point that “the power of the masses forms in the confluence and integration of gremial, political and military means of struggle.” (M-19 Nov. 1977:9) For this reason, the organization strove to assure “that it [would] be the people themselves that assume[d] their political-military tasks.” (Alternativa n° 111) The group sought to instigate a revolutionary process together with the people, not on behalf of the people, and tried to actively involve the masses in the struggle.

M-19 maintained this successful way of acting when the group stole 5,000 weapons from a military garrison, declaring it was fighting for “national sovereignty, liberty and democracy.” (M-19 01.01.1979) What was meant as tactical declaration to attract sympathy quickly introduced a strategic change when the group assumed the struggle for democracy (Interview 26). Democratizing Colombia, M-19 had recognized, was a popular claim that united the country while signifying a real revolutionary change because democracy had been restricted so far (Interview 23). The organization felt its position was strong and offered to negotiate with the government on an equal footing. However, in disregard of the constitution, the armed forces took quick and decisive action. They recovered the arms within two weeks and caught and imprisoned numerous M-19 cadres, dealing the group its first serious setback. M-19's hopes of gaining military strength through this arms heist were dashed and the organization even ended up weaker. However, in February 1980, M-19 seized the Dominican Embassy in “Operation Democracy and Liberty” and took seventeen ambassadors hostage. The organization firmly inscribed its struggle in the popular movement for human rights and democratization when it voiced these popular claims to a national and international audience. Putting the popular claims onto the national political agenda through armed actions brought the organization great sympathy and allowed M-19 to position as self-appointed representative of the diverse opposition sectors. This probably came closest to M-19's movement concept. The group embraced popular claims and, in so doing, gave voice to the diverse and widespread opposition to Turbay's government. However, the group lacked organizational control over this vague movement. “[F]rom the administrative point of view,” M-19 “never managed to position its apparatus within the masses” and failed to find “an organic symbiosis” with them (Interview 24). Although the group was able to attract mass sympathy

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and support, its lack of organizational control made it less effective; the pressure it could exert depended to a large extent on how the general socio-political environment developed.

The spectacular occupation of the Dominican Embassy was a milestone for M-19 and all Colombian guerrillas as the attack succeeded in forcing the government to negotiate. This partly self-referential attack (della Porta 1995a; Waldmann 1998) was aimed not only at denouncing the lack of democracy but also at freeing detained comrades. Once the operation was underway, it turned into a major political victory for M-19 that by far outweighed the fact that they had failed to liberate the political detainees. Students spontaneously supported the coup and public opinion changed quickly in favor of M-19 when the hostage situation became prolonged and the government refused to negotiate (El Tiempo 28.02.1980; El Tiempo 02.04.1980). Close national and international media coverage of the events and several interviews with leading M-19 figures permitted the organization to propagate its political project and to denounce human rights abuses and democratic shortcomings in Colombia (El Tiempo 29.02.1980b). Although the armed propaganda had missed its material target of freeing detained comrades, it was an enormous political success and made M-19 the self-appointed “standard bearer” (M-19 1982) of the struggle for a democratic opening.

M-19's alignment with social movements provided the organization with widespread sympathy and even some active help in the shape of supportive actions, such as offering shelter and running errands (Patiño & Peralta 2004; Interview 25). But its political alignment to peaceful civic organizations put them in the crossfire of ever harsher state means of protest policing. As M-19 observed, the “enemy” was obliged to “hit the entire popular movement” in order to eliminate the armed organization (M-19 1979). However, broadening repression strengthened M-19 politically. The group had an opportunity to spread its political agenda and give voice to the claims of extensive social sectors by proposing a broad dialogue to democratize and pacify the country (M-19 01.07.1980). Even former president Alfonso Lopez Michelsen (1974-1978) characterized the group as a “social reason.” (El Tiempo 20.04.1980) However, M-19 lacked organizational control over the heterogeneous movement for peace and democracy. Despite the fact that sympathy for M-19's political message was widespread, support for the group remained unorganized and vague.

In response to the growth of its loosely connected support base, M-19 introduced organizational changes. From a small executive circle—a political military apparatus—it transformed itself into a political-military organization (OPM) (M-19 Feb. 1977; M-19 Nov. 1977; Interview 17). This change was aimed at converting the closed, armed vanguard group into an organization capable of mobilizing and coordinating mass support in armed struggle. To organize grassroots support, especially among labor unions, neighborhood associations and student groups, the OPM needed “integral militants”, i.e. activists that formed part of the target organizations and social sectors (M-19 Feb. 1977; M-19 Nov. 1977). M-19 deployed

so-called Base Units, consisting of three to five militants. These were directed by three persons responsible for political, military and propaganda issues respectively. The Base Units would relate to and act from within popular and mass organizations (M-19 Feb. 1977). To recruit integral militants M-19 backed popular claims and approached legal syndicate and neighborhood leaders and grassroots activists from popular sectors that spontaneously took the lead in opposition activities (Interview 23). Establishing a connection with well-known figures and energetic activists granted M-19 greater political influence with larger social sectors (Interview 23; 25). The OPM also understood that specific claims rather than ideology were needed to rally mass support (M-19 Feb. 1977). Therefore, it tried to organize neighborhoods around self-help activities, such as improving basic services, transport or housing (Interview 23). Involving the people in the struggle was M-19's central objective (Interview 21). Although grassroots support for M-19's aim increased, organized support remained limited. Grassroots activists were committed to their specific groups and aims; not to M-19 as an organization. Still, M-19 regarded the growing support for its political objectives as an expansion of its vaguely defined support movement. The group considered this more important than the limited organizational growth (Interview 17; 26). While opposition to Turbay's government increased and support for M-19 grew, the group remained organizationally weak.

The OPM's also did not clearly differentiate between armed and political tasks. Contrary to its initial hopes, this hampered mass participation in armed struggle. This spurred M-19 to look for a better framework for differentiated mass participation in revolutionary struggle. To this end, it formed a party and an army (M-19 June 1980). As a first step, M-19 began in 1980 to specialize the tasks of the OPM and formed a Military Force. In 1982, the group decided to form an army (Interview 17; 20), hoping to transform the widespread support for its political claims into a strong insurgent force. When it came to forming a party, however, M-19 was not so quick to take action and it even renounced the idea when it emphasized basic democratic ideals in the mid-1980s, as we will see in the next chapter. In short, M-19 tried to adapt organizationally to the growth in support but favored the development of military over political organizational structures. This imbalance seems to be a consequence of M-19's hopes of seeing independent political organizations emerge from grassroots organizations. While the organization tried to absorb military participation, political support remained largely movement-based and, therefore, vague.

M-19's fight for peace and democracy was furthered by Colombia's repressive state practices and the lack of political opportunities that justified armed struggle. M-19 stepped up its military campaign and in 1979 created military-oriented stable rural fronts. In 1981, it even launched "wars for peace" when two guerrilla columns simultaneously entered the western department of Chocó and the southern department of Nariño and sought to unite with the military force that advanced from Caquetá department into Putumayo. The idea was to form

one large army (Vasquez 2006).<sup>58</sup> M-19 took care to propagate the political objective of its military offensive. The lack of political opportunities allowed it to blame the escalation of the confrontation on the government, which refused to negotiate. Escalating military violence in a situation of growing opposition to the government, in addition to clever use of political propaganda, generated widespread support for M-19's campaign. According to a 1982 public opinion poll, up to 85% of the population sympathized with or supported M-19's political proposal (Villamizar 2007:531). Furthermore, the low level of visible violence displayed by the insurgents in the short campaign, which ended after a decisive army counter-offensive resulting in the detention of most of the insurgents helped to maintain sympathy for the organization.

Despite the fact that popular support for M-19 remained movement-based, the group absorbed severe military setbacks such as the detention of virtually all of its leaders<sup>59</sup> and the rapid dismantling of the guerrilla columns (Villamizar 2007; Vasquez 2006; Interview 22). In fact, detention ended the clandestine life of the militants and enabled them to engage in political work. Support for the organization grew. "La Picota" prison, where most insurgents were held, turned into M-19's public relations office (Interview 17; 21; 22; 25). From there the organization established contacts with sympathizers and social movement leaders. Guerrilla struggle had achieved legitimacy within society and support organizations for political prisoners increased the impact of the detainees' political work (Interview 17; 21; 22). In short, smart political organization and social support for M-19's political project turned the mass imprisonment of M-19 militants into a political victory.

Because the government's repressive approach to protest only seemed to generate more protest and growing social turmoil, some sections of the political elite became convinced that change was inevitable (Navarro Wolf 1986). So, Belisario Betancur won the elections on a popular ticket of democracy and peace. M-19 felt victorious and validated in its strategy of pressure. Like an arbiter, M-19 supported the government in favor of peace and democracy on condition that real changes would take place. The organization unilaterally refrained from offensive action for eight months (M-19 1982). However, by April 1983, the group resumed military operations to pressure Betancur into fulfilling his promises (El Tiempo 20.04.1983) and to strengthen its bargaining position (Chernick 1988/89).

In stepping up its military activity to press for the opening of a broad societal discussion (the National Dialogue), M-19 speculated on its still widespread popularity and on the fact that the president could not easily go back on his promises of peace and democracy (M-19 07.08.1982; El Tiempo 14.07.1982; El Tiempo 12.08.1984). When M-19 and the

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<sup>58</sup> See map of Colombia on page 114.

<sup>59</sup> The strong counter-insurgent repression in the aftermath of the arms theft from Canton Norte garrison in 1979 led to the detention of numerous M-19 members, such as Iván Marino Ospina and Elmer Marin (second and third in command, resp.). By the end of 1980, Bateman was the only member of the Superior Command in Colombia who had not been detained (Villamizar 2007:503).

government signed the Corinto agreements in August 1984, the guerrilla organization felt victorious for having achieved its key political objective, the National dialogue, but, as we will see in the following chapter, this turned out to be a double edged sword.

To summarize, M-19 recognized that it needed mass support to bring about political change and focused on garnering support from diverse protest movements. However, M-19 did not principally seek to grow as an organization. Rather it tried to position itself as the representative of the heterogeneous opposition movements and managed to self-appoint to this position by expressing general, widely supported opposition claims and grievances. It was the political focus of its armed actions that won M-19 sympathy. Another circumstance that played into the organization’s hands was the state’s exclusion policy, the cause of many widely felt grievances. However, M-19’s neglect of its organizational growth made its effectiveness largely dependent on the socio-political situation and its capacity to position itself as the spokesperson of other sectors.

### **Dialogue and Armed Struggle**

The 1984 La Uribe and Corinto agreements heralded a time of politics. Most insurgent organizations signed a ceasefire with the government. For M-19 the armistice was a necessary step towards a dialogue, but the group made it clear that only profound changes would lead to a sustainable peace. M-19 and EPL agreed with the government on a National Dialogue to discuss far-reaching political reforms, including a constitutional reform (El Tiempo 18.08.1984). M-19 was not fully convinced that the political opening would last and, for the time being, the group remained armed and ready to “defend the popular achievements against possible state violations.” (M-19 20.10.1984b) M-19 also used the armistice to strengthen its military force and to set up urban militias. When no progress was made in the dialogue and government forces violated the armistice, M-19 felt betrayed. In mid-1985, M-19 ended the truce and set out to take power by assault. The offensive, however, failed to overthrow the government and fierce military confrontations ensued. Increasing military confrontations impeded M-19 to communicate its political objective and the organization lost social support.

One of the main problems M-19 faced in this period was the leadership vacuum that had appeared when its driving political figure and charismatic leader Jaime Bateman died in a plane crash on his way to Panama, on March 28, 1983.<sup>60</sup> His death was experienced as a

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<sup>60</sup> Bateman’s plane disappeared in a thunderstorm. The remains of the plane and of its passengers were discovered only nine months later.

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profound loss by M-19 militants (Vasquez 2006; Interview 22; 25). The death of this unifying figure and the “precarious organizational” situation made it difficult to maintain central control of the organization (Interview 17). Bateman’s capacity to build alliances and control different tendencies within the organization was hard to substitute (Villamizar 2007). Ivan Marino Ospina inherited the leadership, but lacked Bateman’s charisma and political sensitiveness (Interview 17). Therefore, Alvaro Fayad replaced Marino Ospina as leader of M-19 in March 1985, shortly before Marino Ospina died in a shootout in August that year. When also Fayad was killed in a shootout on March 13, 1986, the leadership passed to Carlos Pizarro Leongomez, “M-19’s last general commander.” (Interview 17) The loss of other high-ranking militants such as Carlos Toledo Plata, who was assassinated in August 1985, and Luis Ortero and Andres Almarales, who died in M-19’s attack on the Palace of Justice, aggravated the leadership crisis (Interview 24). The group was in danger to disintegrate (Interview 17). Without Bateman the organization quickly lost its “political instinct” (Interview 24) and more militarist tendencies could flourish (Interview 17; 21; 23). As we will see in more detail below, these changes alienated M-19 from its social support base in the years following Bateman’s death. It would take M-19 until late 1987 to return to its political pressure strategy that had first made the organization strong (Interview 17).

The basic democratic spirit of the National Dialogue soon started to present practical problems. The lack of a timeframe for the debate on almost every societal issue and its openness to “every Colombian” (M-19 Sept. 1984) hampered the development of the debate and the formulation of specific agreements and solutions. The discussion simply lacked focus and a tangible objective and failed to achieve any far-reaching agreement (Chernick 1996). Unlike FARC, which had established the UP to engage in legal politics, M-19 rejected the idea of forming a political party and insisted on the basic democratic nature of the discussion (M-19 Sept. 1984). This impeded the group to take the political lead in the negotiations and made it miss the chance to legally gain political capital from the popularity that was still apparent at mass rallies in support of its political claims (El Tiempo 15.03.1985; Interview 18; 23; 25). A 1985 public opinion survey showed that their support would translate into 36.7% of the vote if an M-19 Party were to compete at the polls (Pearce 2011). Because they did not form a party when there was a tentative political opening, however, the insurgents had little to offer the masses who were looking for an electoral alternative and institutional representation (Posso 1987). UP, by contrast, attracted significant left-wing support (Villaraga 2008). Yet, the traditional political parties easily prevailed at the polls and continued their dominance of the political system (Posso 1987). The broad support for the National Dialogue simply failed to offer an electoral option, as M-19 emphasized a system change from below but squandered an opportunity to advance changes from within the established institutional system.

Furthermore, only a month after having signed the ceasefire, M-19 highlighted the importance of forming an army (Fayad 1984). For M-19, “military action [was] an essential [part of] the political life” of Colombia (M-19 1982) and any political project, thus, required armed backing (Fayad 1984). Mistrust in Betancur’s peace discourse was a central motive for maintaining coercive capacities (Interview 24). M-19 used the armistice to organize “camps for democracy and peace” and, thus, to extend its presence among urban popular masses (CINEP-3). The camps had their origin and main presence in Cali and Medellin but were also set up in almost every major city. After just two and a half months, there were about forty such camps (Navarro Wolf 1986). They offered a framework for social work and grassroots organization at the community level. Activities included child care, soup kitchens, medical services, political discussions, self-help activities and the formation of militias. In the eyes of M-19, militias were essential to the organization of the masses. Militias aimed to ensure the sovereignty of popular organizations that faced state aggression and mass detentions since their commencement (M-19 1985d; M-19 1985e). The camps followed the example of the successful Nicaraguan revolution of 1979<sup>61</sup> and aimed to organize and prepare the masses for a future insurrection (M-19 1986-II; Interview 18; 22; 23). In other words, M-19 now set out to enlarge its own organization establishing directly affiliated grassroots organizations. These were a consequence of the fact that it was impossible to create an army in the cities (Interview 22). The camps, in short, were intended as a substitute for state authority at a community level and as a framework for popular organization and participation in opposition activities that could include insurrection (M-19 1985e; M-19 1986a). M-19’s attempts to set up a shadow state at the grassroots level was largely a response to the decrease in government support for the National Dialogue. The organization prepared for alternative paths to change. The opening of political opportunities under the National Dialogue, however, had allowed M-19 to engage in this semi-legal work.

M-19, for its part, saw good reasons to distrust the peace. Voices from the political establishment had soon begun to question the dialogue (El Tiempo 13.03.1985a); the government’s commitment to the political process was unclear. Former president Alberto Lleras Restrepo, for instance, warned against a constitutional reform that contained “dangerous” consequences for the “mechanism of representative democracy.” (El Tiempo 02.12.1984) Sectors of the political elite expressed doubts about essential aspects of the National Dialogue. Paramilitary attacks on guerrilla militants, such as the assassination of prominent M-19 leader Carlos Toledo Plata in the run-up to the Corinto agreements, sent an additional warning to the insurgents and tempered their enthusiasm for legal political activity (CINEP-4; Interview 24). M-19 distrusted “Betancur [who] talked a language of peace but,

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<sup>61</sup> For the organization of grassroots movements in Nicaragua, please see the following case study, especially pp. 193-198.

nonetheless, allowed the state forces to go on killing” opponents, as one interviewee pointed out (Interview 17). For M-19 the problem was that “the principal violators of their own legality are the [legislators] themselves” not the insurgency whose “obligation (...) is to violate the legality.” (Interview 24) Furthermore, the government and the armed forces began to press M-19 to disarm, although this subject had been excluded from the Corinto agreements. The deliberate omission of the issue of demobilization made the Corinto pact essentially different from the La Uribe agreement signed by FARC and the government.<sup>62</sup> The La Uribe accord required the complete reintegration of the insurgents into legal politics (Ortiz 2007). Shootouts quickly threatened the armistice (El Tiempo 17.12.1984; El Tiempo 18.12.1984; El Tiempo 11.03.1985) and by the end of the year, a 22-day battle between the army and M-19 in Yarumales had ended the truce in fact (M-19 1985c). Astonishingly, M-19 repelled the massive army siege and celebrated one of its biggest military victories. However, governmental pressure quickly focused on the peace camps to counter the incipient organizational foothold M-19 enjoyed in popular neighborhoods through grassroots self-help organizations (El Tiempo 26.05.1985; El Espectador 29.05.1985). The political opening, despite its limitations, had eliminated all justification for the camps and especially their self-defense activities. Similar to all urban guerrillas, M-19 faced the dilemma of needing to act openly and the impossibility to do so (Le Blanc forthcoming). In addition, paramilitary attacks on socio-political activists and insurgent members restricted the legal political opportunities and impeded any legal change of the status quo. Paramilitary attacks, thus, promoted the revival of violence, pushing insurgents back into the armed struggle (Interview 23; Comunicado 18.09.1984; FARC-EP 19.07.1984; PCC-ML Dec. 1984).

Finally, after an attack on high-ranking M-19 militants in May 1985, in which the group’s Superior Command member Antonio Navarro Wolff was seriously injured, the organization turned its back on the negotiations (CINEP-3). M-19 decided to bring about changes in practice and tried to set up parallel power structures. For instance, the group called for the formation of popular governmental juntas in neighborhoods, workplaces and universities to deal with unattended state responsibilities through self-help (M-19 1985a). The organization hoped to translate the upcoming national strike into a popular rebellion and the birth of a popular government (M-19 1985b). On September 17, M-19 gave the general order of combat (M-19 17.09.1985) that formalized the return to armed struggle.

Despite constant state violations of the truce, M-19 found it hard to explain its return to armed struggle to the public. The organization had presented itself as the defender of peace and political solutions, but now it turned its back on the dialogue that had opened a space for political discussion and expression. M-19 misjudged the situation and its own strength.

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<sup>62</sup> See the introduction to this case study, pp. 117–128.

Colombia had voted for peace and not war in the 1982 elections. The limited political opening had significantly decreased support for armed struggle. Protest and armed struggle had bifurcated (Posso 1987). M-19, however, believed it “spoke for” protest sectors just as it had before the failed peace process; the group expected protest sectors to follow them into armed insurrection. M-19 brought the truce to a formal end and left the political initiative to Betancur (El Tiempo 02.06.1985). However, it was politics and not armed struggle that was needed to defend and expand the recently improved political opportunities.

M-19's return to armed struggle was a political miscalculation. The organization responded to provocation and entered a military confrontation, relegating the political nature of the struggle to the background. Tens of thousands nationwide had expressed their support for the political activity of the insurgency when they filled city squares and demanded delivery of the promised changes in early 1985 (El Tiempo 16.03.1985; Interview 17; 19; 21; 22). However, the political situation was changed by the timid opening of the National Dialogue and now offered political alternatives. This drastically reduced support for armed struggle. Real democratic reforms, such as the direct election of mayors (Recondo 2005), made it clear that alternative paths to change existed. Sympathy for M-19's political demands did not translate into support for a renewed armed struggle. The group, however, had overestimated society's support for armed struggle.

M-19 launched a formidable military offensive and hoped to pave the way to a new government when it seized the Palace of Justice, planning to put President Betancur on “trial” for his “betrayal” of the peace process on November 6, 1985 (M-19 1986a).<sup>63</sup> The attack was aimed at “breaking the silence into which [M-19] had fallen not only because of [its] own fault but because the enemy took the initiative in terms of communication” with the population (Interview 24). M-19 hoped to restore its formerly effective strategy of mobilizing political pressure on the government through high profile armed propaganda. The operation failed, however, and an immediate military counter-attack claimed over one hundred lives, including those of the guerrilla command and eleven High Court judges. M-19 lost much more in the flames of the Palace of Justice than its commando. It lost society's fiat to voice popular demands and the widespread approval it had once enjoyed for armed propaganda. The disastrous attack, thus, demonstrated the opportunities and risks of high profile armed propaganda. An operational failure turned what was planned as a spectacular end-point of the struggle into a public opinion catastrophe and marked the beginning of a tough military campaign for the group.

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<sup>63</sup> A claim that the attack was financed by drug cartels has never been proven. Members of paramilitary forces stated that M-19 had received USD 2 million for the attack from drug cartels (El Tiempo 03.12.2008) but the group itself categorically denies having received any money (Villamizar 2007; Interviews 1; 5; 8). The official report on the attack also dismisses the claim (Serrano Rueda & Upegui Zapata 1986:204). M-19, however, opposed the extradition of Colombians to the United States and concurred on this point with the views of the drug cartels (M-19 06.11.1985).

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Even left-wing forces criticized the “lunatic” attack (FARC-EP Nov. 1985) and warned of the reinforcement of “militarist tendencies” through such acts of “hopeless adventurism (...) in isolation from the national majorities.” (UP Nov. 1985) The message was clear: peace required dialogue, not military confrontation (UP Nov. 1985). Despite these warnings, M-19 redoubled its military efforts in the hope of demonstrating unbroken strength. In early 1986 it marched on Cali with the “American Battalion” and even entered the city’s suburbs despite fierce resistance from government forces, again demonstrating its military capability to the nation (El Tiempo 13.03.1986; El Tiempo 15.03.1986). However, media coverage focused solely on the military confrontation and M-19 did not get media space to explain its aims, as it had during the seizure of the Dominican embassy. There was no self-evident political objective to the offensive itself and the limited insurgent propaganda was lost on the masses. M-19 failed to communicate its political objective (Interview 17; 24) and missed the opportunity to revive its popularity. Overall, the military offensive did not meet the objective, which was to “create the political and military conditions for the realization of a Grand National Congress” where “all political, military and social forces” could discuss ways to “peace, democracy and well-being.” (M-19-BA 1986)

Furthermore, M-19’s return to armed struggle provoked harsh repression on the urban militias that had organized around the peace and democracy camps. Government forces launched a bloody offensive against “subversive elements” (Camacho 1992:255), affecting social and political activists and guerrilla militants alike (El Tiempo 04.03.1986; El Tiempo 07.03.1986; Interview 23). The offensive largely dismantled M-19’s urban infrastructure. Sympathizers distanced themselves from the group due to its military orientation and to escape repression, the organizers of M-19’s urban structure complained (Interview 23). While the call for a nationwide strike could still count on significant support from diverse sectors (CINEP-1; M-19 1985b), violence alienated the masses that were looking for political alternatives. “The dynamic of the war”, as one M-19 member put it, “silences (...) the political discussion (...) [and] paralyzes (...) the quest for political proposals” (Interview 22), which is a fatal development for an organization that owed its strength to the support it won for its political proposals (Interview 21). M-19’s return to armed struggle, in short, dealt a major political blow to the organization as it severed close links to the protest movements.

Additionally, M-19 began to focus on military organizational improvements, neglecting its political objectives even more (Interview 23). M-19 supported the unity of Colombian guerrilla organizations and in 1985 the National Guerrilla Coordinator (CNG) was formed. This was renamed the Guerrilla Coordinator Simon Bolivar (CGSB) in late 1987 when FARC joined the other insurgent groups (Hernandez 2007; Interview 26). Joint actions remained limited in number, however, and a united military force never materialized (CGSB 1988). All the same, the military focus overshadowed organizational grassroots work (Interview 23) as

well as political initiatives such as appeals for a new dialogue or denouncing injustice (M-19 1986b). The war intensified (Interview 21) and politics militarized (Interview 22; 23). M-19 demonstrated its strength but its offensive only revealed the military impasse. M-19's military orientation and the existence of limited political alternatives cornered the insurgent groups politically. The great risks associated with being linked to M-19 decreased open support for the group (Betancur 20.07.1985). The demonstration of military force failed to achieve any meaningful political objective or motivate a mass insurrection. The political opening had split the protest environment. The revival of armed confrontation failed to restore unity and thereby revive a significant source of pressure.

To summarize, the political opening was at first a victory for M-19 as it fulfilled the group's central objective. However, M-19 wanted to change the system—not reform it. The quest for profound change quickly encountered staunch opposition from parts of the government, elite sectors and the highly autonomous armed forces, resulting in a re-emergence of violence. Furthermore, M-19's political link to the masses remained movement based and therefore unstable. The group's insistence on armed struggle alienated its social support network at a time when political channels were available. M-19's return to armed struggle, in other words, signified a self-inflicted political defeat for the organization, as the revival of the struggle closed political opportunities instead of opening new ones. M-19's emphasis on military confrontations increased the violence, but with the alienation of protest movements the group had lost its strategic ally for pressing the regime for change. In short, it had lost its revolutionary capacity.

### **Military Limitations and the Quest for Peace Negotiations**

Isolated by armed struggle, M-19 began to recognize the need for social support and the organization looked for ways to restore its former popularity. The breach between protest and armed struggle meant there was no chance of defeating the armed forces militarily. M-19 realized that ongoing armed struggle without social support was unlikely to bring change. Aware of this shortcoming, M-19 returned to its campaign of political armed propaganda to press the government for negotiations. The group knew that the only alternative to political talks was pointless, sectarian armed struggle.

By 1987, M-19 had become aware of the limitations of its military offensive (Interview 21; Florez & Valenzuela 1996). The group had demonstrated its strength but had lost numerous cadres in confrontations and had alienated itself from larger protest sectors. M-19 wanted to restore its former ability to put pressure on the authorities. The group changed its

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strategy, declaring “peace to the armed forces, life to the nation and war to the oligarchy” in January 1988 (M-19 22.01.1988; see also Rojas 19.10.1988). Consequently, the organization abstained from offensive violence and declared a six-month unilateral ceasefire (El Tiempo 23.01.1988) to underline its change of strategy. Abstaining from offensive violence broke with the general trend of escalating violence of the time.

The new direction became visible when M-19 abducted Alvaro Gomez Hurtado, an outspoken hardliner and representative of the national elite on May 29, 1988 (El Tiempo 30.05.1988) and demanded the re-opening of peace talks in exchange for his life (El Tiempo 23.06.1988). The selective and highly political armed propaganda assured M-19 media attention. The organization publicly embraced the popular movement for peace, calling for negotiations and democratic reforms. M-19 had timed the coup well. The popular movement for peace was on the rise and President Barco was seeking a constitutional reform (El Tiempo 31.01.1988) to counter escalating violence. The violence, which was the result of intense guerrilla, military, paramilitary and criminal activity, created a fertile soil for negotiations. Even voices to include the guerrillas in such a project were heard (El Colombiano 26.02.1988). Support for the proposal of peace negotiations quickly outweighed the initial condemnation of the abduction (El Tiempo 03.06.1988).

M-19 had once again seized the political initiative and was re-born (La República 25.06.1988). It organized a peace conference in Panama to which it invited representatives of “all social forces” as well as the government (La República 25.06.1988). M-19 proposed a similar negotiation scheme as in 1984. It called for an armistice and a broad dialogue, a constitutional reform, and peace talks between the armed forces and the CGSB (El Tiempo 30.06.1988). M-19 even demonstrated its willingness to compromise when it ceded to government pressure and public opinion by freeing Alvaro Gomez as a precondition for peace talks (Vanguardia Liberal 30.06.1988; El Siglo 28.06.1988; El Espectador 01.07.1988). M-19’s political offensive forced the government to speak out on the peace proposal (El Espectador 14.07.1988; Garcia 1993). M-19’s politically advantageous position changed, however, when Barco presented his own peace initiative offering limited and focused negotiations with the guerrillas, constitutional reform, and the establishment of social discussion tables, all within a clear structure and timeframe for the talks (El Tiempo 02.09.1988). This offer largely met M-19’s basic demand for broad negotiations and far-reaching political reforms, but limited the group’s role in the formulation of possible agreements and changes. Under the president’s counterproposal, negotiations with the insurgents were restricted to their demobilization and reintegration into society (Chernick 1999:177-178; Chernick 1996). M-19 knew it could not pass up the favorable political juncture and so it sacrificed collective negotiations with the CGSB as these were unlikely to be achieved within a reasonable period (Interview 17; 21). Moreover, separate talks would

enable M-19 to spearhead the negotiations—something that would have been improbable in collective negotiations with FARC, Colombia's largest guerrilla group. Politically cornered by Barco's peace initiative, M-19 accepted the offer. The political mood offered M-19 a unique chance to abandon the armed struggle, actively participate in political reforms, and thereby escape the unattractive alternative of sectarian armed struggle.

M-19 found the governmental preconditions for negotiations less favorable than in 1984 but still acceptable. The organization realized that the Colombian insurgent struggle was at a military impasse and that a political opening was needed to give the masses an alternative to the logic of violence (Grave 1988). M-19 hoped to restore its political credibility and popularity by embracing the popular demands for negotiations. The "tables of analysis and agreement", furthermore, opened a space for broad social discussion that added to M-19's negotiations with the government (Berghof 2008) and fulfilled the organization's basic demand for a societal discussion on the conditions for a sustainable peace. This permanent negotiation space "permitted multiple and varied contacts with political, economic and social sectors" and "generated great pressure on the organizations (...) to commit to new forms of political activity", and, thus, helped to overcome the difficulties of the peace negotiations (Florez & Valenzuela 1996:5). Political change was at hand and the organization began to sympathize with legal, institutional means of action (Grave 1988). It was even disposed to renounce armed struggle to achieve change (Interview 21). Although M-19 was far from being defeated militarily, its previous isolation had affected the group at its core. Without opposition unity and support for M-19's struggle, the group lacked the necessary political weight to achieve its political objectives. Armed struggle for political change simply became pointless without mass support. The peace negotiations were politically and strategically of the essence to M-19.

Popular support for the peace process and the opportunity to achieve profound political changes through negotiations persuaded M-19 to persevere with the talks despite important setbacks. When Afranio Parra, number 6 in M-19's hierarchy, was killed by policemen in April 1989 (El País 09.04.1989), fears of a repetition of the failed 1984 peace process surfaced. This time, however, the organization was committed to finding a political way out of the conflict and avoided a violent response (Grave 2010; Berghof 2008; La República 29.12.1989). However, M-19 did capitalize politically on such aggressions, as public opinion held the government responsible for any possible failure of the peace process and kept up the pressure for a successful conclusion of the talks (El Siglo 06.12.1989; El Siglo 16.12.1989; El Tiempo 18.12.1989; La República 29.12.1989). During its 10<sup>th</sup> Conference in October 1989, M-19 definitively committed to peace when 227 out of 230 participants voted in favor of the peace accord (Villamizar 1995:569). Its commitment to

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negotiations restored the organization's popularity and gave the group influence upon the details of political reform.

Nonetheless, the peace process almost suffered a deadly blow when the Colombian Congress rejected the peace deals the government and M-19 had signed in early November (El Siglo 06.12.1989). Apparently, Congress felt left out of the peace negotiations and jealously stood by and watched as agreements were signed (Garcia 1993) that had bypassed the legislative process. The vote in Congress annulled the basis of the peace process and M-19 subsequently refused to lay down its arms as foreseen on December 19, 1989 (El Siglo 16.12.1989). The last minute rejection of the agreements left M-19 with its back against the wall. Returning to armed struggle was not a desirable option. Furthermore, M-19 had concentrated its forces in Santo Domingo camp in Cauca to facilitate the talks (Berghof 2008). This made M-19's forces vulnerable and put the group in an unfavorable military position from which to launch an armed offensive. Although Congress had blocked any far-reaching reform, it approved of the amnesty project (El Tiempo 16.12.1989). M-19 looked for alternative ways of introducing the reforms; Commander Carlos Pizarro and his second in command, Antonio Navarro Wolff, reached personal agreements with the Liberal presidential pre-candidates to introduce the blocked reforms (Grave 2010; El Tiempo 26.01.1990; El Tiempo 03.02.1990). Confidence and gentlemen's agreements substituted for a binding political pact, which persuaded M-19 to demobilize on March 9, 1990. The peace agreement was limited to a declaration of intent (Grave 2010) and M-19 took a "leap of faith", as Carlos Pizarro phrased it, when he handed over M-19's last weapon to the International Socialist Commission that melted the arsenal into a monument to peace (Pizarro 09.03.1990; El Espectador 09.03.1990; El Tiempo 07.03.1990; El Tiempo 08.03.1990; El Heraldo 10.03.1990). M-19's demobilization was a voluntary act but it was also a unique exit option that permitted the group to escape sectarian armed struggle and gave it a voice in the upcoming political reform project.

For M-19 armed struggle had ended and political struggle commenced under the banner of its newly formed Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD-M-19) party. Despite the short preparation and the assassination of M-19's presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro, AD-M-19 won 12.5% of the votes in the presidential elections of May 1990. In December of that year, the party even took 27.3% of the vote in polls for the Constitutional Assembly, which amounted to 19 out of 70 seats. The new Constitution, also called the Constitution of Human Rights, signed in 1991, reinforced democracy and individual rights, ended the state of emergency and transferred some presidential powers to other institutions, adopted international human rights standards and established an independent and strong judiciary apparatus (Fox & Stetson 1992). The political reforms were accompanied by an economic liberalization that M-19 had agreed to as a concession during the peace talks (Murillo-

Castano & Gomez-Segura 2005). Socio-economic reforms that had been proposed by the negotiation tables remained neglected or were even revoked by “post constitutional assembly reforms” and interest groups (Edwards & Steiner 2000). M-19 attained its central political goal by democratizing Colombia’s political system, but concessions on economic policies left the root causes of the conflict intact. AD-M-19 quickly faced political problems and virtually disintegrated in the 1990s (Boudon 2001:85). However, many of its prominent figures still play an important political role, such as Gustavo Petro, newly elected Mayor of Bogotá, or Antonio Navarro Wolf, Governor of Nariño province.<sup>64</sup>

The development of M-19’s campaign, in short, was closely related to the social support the organization could gather for its activities. After a few years of clandestine existence the organization developed quickly into a central political-military force in the early 1980s. However, it was the political effect of its selective armed propaganda activities and not its limited military capacity that generated sympathy for the group and permitted it to position itself as the representative of large opposition sectors. There were two main factors that affected M-19 popularity and isolated the group. These were the changing political environment and in particular the split between social protest and armed struggle, and the military focus of the group when it returned to armed struggle. The organization needed to seek a political solution to the conflict. Only a return to its strategy of political pressure through high profile armed propaganda permitted M-19 to restore its popularity. It could only benefit politically from the popular desire for change when it aligned itself with the popular movement for peace and democracy. However, societal calls for peace and the governmental peace initiative limited M-19’s room for maneuver, obliging the group to continue to support peace negotiations. Armed struggle had opened a political space, but it was through negotiations and not pure force that the group could help bring about political change. M-19’s cooperativeness was one factor which facilitated the peace process. Others were the propitious political atmosphere created by widespread demands for a peace process and the government’s willingness to introduce profound political changes. These factors eased the peace process and permitted to bring it to a successful conclusion. M-19’s good political timing and its quest for support permitted the group to shift its form of action from armed struggle to legal political activity and to participate in political reforms. Renouncing armed struggle had become the only option for real political change.

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<sup>64</sup> Many AD-M-19 figures that stayed in politics assembled around the Polo Democrático Alternativo Party.

### **The State**

In the time period under scrutiny, Colombian democracy was at best deficient. Since the end of the bipartisan civil war, formal democracy belied the absence of political opportunity for any entity other than the traditional Liberal and Conservative Parties under the National Front regime. The authorities protected the status quo by means of broad and coercive protest policing. Political exclusion and the limitation of civil rights under the guise of a state of emergency finally provoked massive social protest and a guerrilla struggle against the “constitutional dictatorship.” (Fox & Stetson 1992)

Over time the state’s approach to protest and insurgency changed. Until 1982 protest policing was aimed at broad social sectors and was mainly harsh in character. However, coercive protest policing proved inefficient and even counter-productive as it failed to stop the growth of opposition protest throughout the 1970s. Repression of protest even helped diverse opposition sectors to unite as well as to make large protest sectors sympathize with armed struggle. The repressive approach fostered opposition activity and led to a severe state crisis that even raised the specter of revolutionary change.

In the 1980s, the state tried through political means to moderate protest; negotiations became a central counter-insurgency tool. President Betancur cleverly co-opted popular demands for peace and democracy and opened space for political expression. Profound political changes, nonetheless, remained absent. Negotiations required political will, but the president tolerated systematic violations of the ceasefire as well as paramilitary attacks on his negotiation partners. Violence quickly flared up again, but Betancur’s political approach had restored the state’s legitimacy and severed the close link between social protest and armed struggle. In short, the political approach brought a strategic victory to the government. However, the internal conflict grew in complexity and escalated in the latter half of the 1980s, convincing President Barco of the need for political changes and peace negotiations to pacify some violent actors.

Despite the president’s new insight, political differences and tensions among state authorities hampered profound political changes. Congress often blocked reform projects and the armed forces—acting on their own authority—militarized the state’s approach to insurgency and protest, undermining peace negotiations. The emergence of paramilitary and mafia violence complicated the conflict scenario even more. Independent paramilitary attacks eroded state authority and often hindered negotiations. Meanwhile the drug mafia established itself as an additional violent actor with its own aims in the conflict. The Colombian state, in short, faced a variety of challenges that ranged from protest and armed struggle to criminal violence and lacking a coherent central authority. The disposition of the political elite to

reform politics in the face of escalating violence created an opportunity to negotiate with and pacify several insurgent groups and to moderate social protest. Holding talks with some insurgent groups gave the government leverage over the remaining insurgents, as an alternative to armed struggle was at hand. In short, only political changes, and not mere military measures, enabled the government to come to terms with several insurgencies.

### **Coercively Backed Political Exclusion**

When in 1958 the National Front (FN) power-sharing pact put a stop to the bipartisan civil war, a restricted democracy and political exclusion began to dominate. In the decades that followed, popular demands for institutional representation were frustrated. The FN faced strong opposition protest over political exclusion and worsening economic prospects. Without far-reaching political reforms, the regime in its bid to maintain the status quo lacked alternatives to ever harsher protest policing and counter-insurgency. Harsh repression had the disadvantage of fuelling opposition and radicalizing protest. The complex domestic conflict escalated and challenged the very core of the state in the early 1980s.

Colombia's semi-democracy invited protest. The restricted democracy maintained some civil rights for organizations and allowed some expression of dissident voices (Pécaut 1992; Wickham-Crowley 1991), while at the same time denying the popular masses an electoral alternative to the pre-established political options. This semi-democracy worked in favor of protest instead of limiting it.<sup>65</sup> Political restrictions denied the regime the moral and legal authority to demand support, and abolished political means to counter protest and insurgency. Increasing repression of the growing opposition merely heightened and radicalized protest over time. The Colombian state became trapped in a vicious cycle of intensifying protest and ever harsher state responses. The social conflict escalated during the 1970s. Especially the unstable and movement-based nature of the protest made it hard for the state to predict and plan its response to this challenge (Escobar & Roux 2005). At the same time, the maintenance of formal democracy avoided a complete escalation of state repression and prevented the spread of radical opposition (Wickham-Crowley 1991).

Differences between successive presidents and Congress hampered change (Archer & Shugart 1997) and exacerbated political exclusion. In practice, Congress kept presidential powers to introduce structural changes in check. In practice, however, members of Congress

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<sup>65</sup> Carlos Gomez (2001) highlights the fundamental role semi-democratic systems play in the appearance of insurgent organizations. He argues that limited political liberties are essential for the formation of dissident groups, since complete control would impede the building of any organized opposition. Semi-democracy, however, facilitates the appearance of social protest and, indirectly, the formation of armed opposition groups.

served “client” demands of their limited constituencies and tended to oppose far-reaching but necessary reforms (Archer & Shugart 1997; Granda 1994). For instance, Congress blocked the constitutional reform projects of presidents Lopez Michelsens, Turbay Ayala, Betancur and Barco (Hurtado 2006). The gridlock this created compromised the entire political system and demonstrated the need for a thorough overhaul of the system. Only the popularly elected Constituent Assembly of 1991 could bypass Congress’s obstruction of reforms, as discussed below.

Soon after its formation, the FN already met with social discontent and protest. While the peace agreement had enjoyed significant support, the ensuing political exclusion of the masses led to powerful extra-institutional opposition (Chernick 1999) and political apathy that de-legitimized the FN (Pécaut 1989). A variety of social movements sprung up and voiced their demands from outside the closed institutional framework. Armed struggle challenged the state from the mid-1960s onwards. The exclusive bipartisan regime, however, was unwilling to open political channels and thereby deprived itself of the institutional capacity to peacefully counter political opposition and protest. Abuse of the state of emergency that permitted rule by decree became common practice (Gomez 2001). The National Defense law of 1974 almost institutionalized the state of exception (Alternativa n° 2a). Armed opposition activities provided a rationale for military counter-insurgent campaigns, but the security forces interpreted their remit liberally and, informed by their anti-communist ideas, widened their field of activity from countering insurgent challenges to attacking social movements as such (Alternativa n° 1; Borrero 1990; Díaz-Callejas 1991). Counter-insurgent campaigns often resembled terrorist campaigns and hit peasant movements particularly hard (Alternativa n° 1).

Protest policing became progressively more military in nature and the armed forces took on the traits of a state within the state (Alternativa n° 2b; Alternativa n° 6; Alternativa n° 54a; Pécaut 1989; Borrero 1990). Rebellion and disobedience, and thus protest itself, were criminalized<sup>66</sup> (Alternativa n° 65-66). Offenses were judged by military courts. As Major Genaro Ñungo described the spirit of military justice, it was “preferable to condemn innocents than to absolve a guilty one.” (Alternativa n° 67) Furthermore, the armed forces pressed for censorship of the media (El Tiempo 03.09.1977; Alternativa n° 54a; Alternativa n° 54b) and a military coup was openly discussed amid fears the national security situation might get out of hand (Alternativa n° 113). The absence of legal political representation of popular sectors promoted extra-institutional protest and even repression tended to accelerate the process (Guarin 2011; Alternativa n° 23-24; Alternativa n° 55). A general strike in September 1977 bore the hallmarks of a popular insurrection; united protest seriously challenged state forces

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<sup>66</sup> Decree 2407 criminalized the formerly political act of “rebellion”. Decree 1533 imposed heavy fines on protest leaders and summary trials with defense counsel limited to ten minutes to argue a case (Alternativa n° 65-66).

(El Tiempo 16.09.1977a; El Tiempo 16.09.1977b; Alternativa n° 132). In short, the stiffening of state procedures to assure political exclusion only radicalized protest and worked in favor of armed struggle.

Julio César Turbay Ayala, who assumed presidency in 1978, stiffened the repressive approach to protest even more. The new president imposed a National Security Statute (Decree 1923) that normalized the state of emergency and elevated penalties for all forms of opposition activity, especially for disturbing public order. Social protest could be punished more harshly than armed rebellion.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, offenses listed by the Statute fell under military jurisdiction (Alternativa n° 179). The decree, described by many as a “covered dictatorship,” immediately met with heightened protest which steadily increased during Turbay’s presidency (Alternativa n° 187). Repression was a double-edged sword when faced by strong opposition.

The contradictory effects of increased repression became visible in the aftermath of M-19’s massive arms theft in 1979. The government gave a free hand to the humiliated armed forces (El Tiempo 06.01.1979; El Tiempo 10.01.1979a; El Tiempo 10.01.1979b) and within just two weeks the arms were recovered (El Tiempo 17.01.1979). Furthermore, the army was able to detain a significant number of M-19 militants (El Tiempo 23.01.1979; Alternativa n° 197) and by 1982 at least 834 of them were imprisoned (Villaraga 2008). However, the price for this triumph had been thousands of arbitrary detentions and the systematic torture of hundreds of individuals (Alternativa n° 196a; Alternativa n° 196b; Villamizar 2007). The armed forces gained international infamy as torturers (El Tiempo 17.04.1980; Alternativa n° 196c; Interview 17; 24). This generated strong social protest, overshadowing the recovery of the weapons and the heavy blow to M-19’s urban guerrilla structure. The government was not willing to seriously discuss the human rights situation in Colombia and did not provide credible information to refute the allegations. The government issued cynical denials of human rights abuses, one notable example being Turbay’s accusation that political prisoners had committed “self-torture” in an attempt to defame the Colombian state (Ladino Orjuela 2004:166). These statements could do little to contain protest against exclusion and repression by the state. Colombia’s poor human rights record became the focus of protest.

Exclusion and harsh protest policing justified guerrilla activity, especially when this activity pressed demands for democracy and denounced human rights abuses. Consequently, the government suffered a public opinion disaster when M-19 seized the Embassy of the Dominican Republic. The government’s hardline negotiating stance denied all the insurgents’ demands (El Tiempo 02.04.1980; El Tiempo 28.04.1980a; El Tiempo 28.04.1980b) but it could not prevent M-19 from sparking a national and international public

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<sup>67</sup> Armed rebellion was punishable by imprisonment of 8 to 14 years. The much broader concept of Disturbance of Public Order, however, could be punished with sentences of 1 to 24 years (Alternativa n° 179).

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debate (El Tiempo 29.02.1980a; El Tiempo 08.04.1980; El Tiempo 11.04.1980;) on the state of Colombian democracy and the country's human rights situation (El Tiempo 20.04.1980). The government boasted that it had denied the insurgents' demands (Camacho Leyva 1987) but its ability to withstand blackmail (Zartmann 2004) was, however, a secondary achievement in face of a public outcry over state abuses and a mushrooming debate on the need for political changes (Pizarro 1992). Moreover, Turbay's inflexible negotiating position had endangered the lives of the hostages and angered several diplomats (Villamizar 1995), increasing pressure on the president. The attack was measured in political terms and not in material concessions and the government lost the battle for public opinion.

Escalating repression gave a short-term tactical advantage to the state authorities, allowing a disruption of large parts of M-19's infrastructure, but it also produced a radicalization of protest tactics—similar to other examples (della Porta 1995b)—and legitimized guerrilla struggle (Restrepo 1992:285). Attacks on the diverse opposition movement united protest and focused it on the government that visibly committed human rights abuses, continually violated constitutional rights, and seemed responsible for the domestic crisis in general (Alternativa n° 196c; El Tiempo 11.04.1980). Arbitrary detentions and torture provoked solidarity with victims and increased protest against the repressive style of government. In this process, the broad protest movement supported even radical tactics and this allowed insurgent organizations to rapidly compensate for their losses (M-19 June 1980).<sup>68</sup> The radicalizing effect of harsh, broad repression was extremely counter-productive to the government's aims, as it had employed coercion in order to break the wave of protest. What it achieved instead was a strengthening and radicalization of the opposition. Increasing repression under the Security Statute underlined the need for human rights and democracy. This escalating effect of the repression limited the state's capacity to impose its will by force. Intensifying the repression any further carried the risk of provoking a general rebellion.

To summarize, the semi-democratic nature of the Colombian political system laid the cornerstone for radicalizing protest and political violence. Political exclusion largely robbed the state of political means to counter protest; discontent could not be expressed through legal political channels. Increasing repression over time backfired on successive governments, as it encouraged protest to grow, unite and radicalize. Real political reforms were needed to counter social protest and prevent its radicalization. The state, however, was trapped between incapacity and unwillingness to bring about these changes; the internal conflict escalated as civil disobedience increased and protest sectors sympathized with insurgent activities.

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<sup>68</sup> According to M-19's own estimate, the regional section of Bogotá grew by 80% between 1978 and 1980 despite significant losses.

**Political Approaches to the Internal Crisis (and Their Limitations)**

The 1982 elections created the chance for a political solution to the crisis. Conservative Party candidate Belisario Betancur won the elections on a popular campaign for peace and democracy. By attending to the most pressing grievances, Betancur restored the state's legitimacy, and a National Dialogue opened up political opportunities that fulfilled a central point of the insurgents' political agenda. Protest decreased but change remained limited. Betancur's political approach was undermined by certain sections of the political elite who opposed change, by insurgents rejecting disarmament and legalization of their organization, by overt military pressure on the insurgents, and by paramilitary attacks on social and political activists. Reforms fell short of expectations. By 1985, Betancur's political offensive had reached its limits and the conflict between the government and insurgent forces resumed when the frequently violated truce formally ended. The renewed conflict became more complex and the president ended his mandate politically discredited amidst escalating violence. Betancur's approach, however, had also strategically undermined social support for the revolutionary struggle.

Negotiations with the insurgent groups culminated in the La Uribe Agreement, signed in March 1984 with FARC, and in the Corinto agreements, signed in August with M-19, EPL and ADO. As a result, about 90% of the insurgents were pacified (El Tiempo 25.08.1984; Interview 17). The agreements differed substantially in terms of the insurgents' commitment to disarm and reintegrate into regular political, economic and social life. FARC had agreed to this, but this had not been part of the agreement with the other insurgent groups (Acuerdo Uribe 1984; Acuerdo 1984). The political opening of the National Dialogue was especially favorable to the government, allowing it to improve its image and take the credit for an initiative originally taken by insurgent groups. By recognizing extra-institutional protest sectors as valid interlocutors and by attending to the protesters' key claims, the administration succeeded in tempering the protest and restoring the state's legitimacy. Betancur had captured the flag of peace and democratization from the insurgents (Betancur 23.09.1982), enabling the government to regain the political initiative (Betancur 20.07.1983). Peace seemed within reach. The government peace project enjoyed widespread popularity and the launching of a political debate satisfied insurgent claims and disarmed the rebel groups politically.

Despite the promising start, Betancur's peace proposals ran into serious problems. The National Rehabilitation Plan, a political and socio-economic program promised to the people, failed to get off the ground (El Tiempo 21.04.1983). Links were discovered between the armed forces and the Death-to-Abductors (MAS) death squad financed by the drug mafia (Informe 04.02.1983), and the armed forces rejected the truce with the insurgent

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organizations (M-19 14.10.1983; El Tiempo 18.12.1984). The assassination of Carlos Toledo Plata on August 10, 1984 even jeopardized the signing of the peace agreements with M-19 (El Tiempo 11.08.1984). Still, Betancur's political offensive and his overtures to negotiations with insurgent organizations compromised these organizations politically.

Betancur was in a precarious political position. He lacked a majority in both chambers and had only been elected president because of a split within the Liberal Party (El Tiempo 01.06.1982). The politically weak president faced diverse opposition to his peace project and failed to bring about necessary reforms (Rojas 2008). As early as December 1984 important sectors of Congress openly rejected the Dialogue and blocked Betancur's attempts to push through major reforms (El Tiempo 02.12.1984; Villaraga 2008). Members of Congress questioned the president's ability to reach agreements with the insurgents and key ingredients of the negotiations, such as a Constitutional Assembly, were voted down (El Tiempo 13.03.1985a). In addition, the armed forces and institutional sectors reinterpreted the Corinto agreements and pressed for the disarmament of the insurgents (El Tiempo 18.12.1984; El Tiempo 11.03.1985; Uribe Vega 13.03.1985; El Tiempo 13.03.1985b). Minister of Government Jaime Castro argued that the lack of an explicit order to "hand over the arms did not imply (...) [permission] to carry guns", adding that

peace requires that the guerrilla organizations dismantle their military apparatus, that they demobilize as an armed corps, and that they reintegrate themselves into the institutional political life of the country. (...) [A]s long as the guerrilla exists, the peace policy may be compromised seriously even against the will of the [negotiation] partners because [the guerrillas'] mere presence creates serious risks of armed confrontations. [Therefore,] (...) the process of pacification demands the transformation of the guerrillas into a legal political movement. (Castro 23.02.1985)

At the same time, the armed forces systematically violated the truce and in so doing threatened its viability (FARC-EP 19.07.1984; Comunicado 18.09.1984). Violent clashes over the disarmament of the insurgents and over territorial control effectively ended the truce in December 1984. The president did not intervene when the armed forces tried to seize M-19's camp in Yarumales, demonstrating the limits of the political peace agreement.

One of the main obstacles to the peace process was the fact that not all institutional actors felt bound to negotiations in which they did not participate directly (Garcia 1993). The armed forces undermined the truce and Congress threatened to reject any reforms proposed by the extra-institutional dialogue committees. The government reduced its participation in the Dialogue and awaited the committees' final, non-binding recommendations (Villaraga 2008; Castro 23.02.1985). However, the government's apparently half-hearted commitment to the

negotiation process angered the insurgent organizations, and in particular M-19 and EPL, which had been politically compromised because of the opening of a political space for which the government had taken credit. Betancur understood how strategically important the National Dialogue was for the justification of insurgent struggle and cornered them politically. Step by step the government chipped away at the broad aims of the peace negotiations, which included profound socio-economic and political changes, replacing them with talk of “disarm[ing] [the insurgents] in every sense of the word: disarming them politically, morally and materially.” (Betancur 20.07.1985) Economic hardship prevented the government from carrying out the promised Rehabilitation Plan (Villaraga 2008) and every decision on major political reform was left in the hands of the political establishment (Castro 23.02.1985). The National Dialogue degenerated into an affirmation of institutional power and the peace process turned into a political tactic to force the insurgents to surrender—not to negotiate. In other words, Betancur in effect tried to impose a new political reality on the insurgents and hoped the carrot of limited political space that dangled in front of them would suffice to make them accept the erosion of the initially broad peace agreements. The president was astute enough to see that a resumption of armed struggle would do political damage to the insurgents and continued his attempts to impose a new political reality on them.

Tensions increased and opposition sectors demonstrated their mobilization force in the streets, protesting against the government’s moves to undermine the dialogue (El Tiempo 16.03.1985; El Tiempo 21.06.1985). Overt repression of protest had lessened during Betancur’s administration, but paramilitary attacks on social and political activists increased and more than made up for the broad repression under Turbay (Chernick 1999; Villamizar 1995). The driving forces behind paramilitary groups were mostly landowners and drug traffickers protecting themselves from guerrilla extortion and abductions (Gonzalez 2004).<sup>69</sup> Yet the phenomenon quickly spread once the Medellin Cartel had demonstrated in late 1981 how effective private paramilitary groups were as a counter-insurgent weapon. In response to M-19’s abduction of Marta Ochoa, sister to important members of the cartel, the drug barons formed the MAS death squad. The MAS killed insurgents, their sympathizers, and left-wing militants (Verdadabierta 2010; Rivas & Rey 2008). The armed forces, which were by and large opposed to Betancur’s peace initiative, tolerated the paramilitary activities. The 1982 amnesty had freed hundreds of insurgents and Betancur’s peace initiative had limited the armed forces’ room for maneuver in fighting the groups. Therefore, many officers sympathized with the paramilitary groups’ counter-insurgent activities (Informe 04.02.1983; Rivas & Rey 2008, Gonzalez 2004). The government took no serious measures against paramilitary attacks on the socio-political opposition and virtual impunity reigned, undermining

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<sup>69</sup> Abducting members of the national elite was a means to finance guerrilla warfare. Social-revolutionary groups saw the national elite, or “oligarchy”, as an enemy, and consequently, as a legitimate target of their actions.

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the truce (Informe 04.02.1983; FARC-EP 19.07.1984; M-19 24.05.1985; El Tiempo 04.03.1986; Restrepo 1992).

Betancur's political offensive shifted legitimacy from the insurgent organization towards the state (Castro 1986:47; Zuluaga 2001). The president celebrated his delegitimization of the armed struggle and welcomed M-19's foreseeable loss of legitimacy when the organization returned to armed struggle (Betancur 24.10.1985). In addition, the persistence of the peace agreement with FARC permitted the government to isolate M-19 even further (Chernick 1988/89). The government highlighted its peace efforts and deployed its forces to combat M-19. The insistence by M-19 on backing its campaign with arms and its ultimate return to armed struggle provided the government with sufficient arguments for portraying the group as warmongers who rejected all political paths to peace. The state won the media battle for social support (Pécaut 1992:232). The government was better aware than M-19 that protest had separated from the guerrilla struggle and that M-19 did not pose a specific revolutionary threat. In this way, Betancur had deactivated the "time-bomb" of radicalizing protest (El Tiempo 09.06.1985).

Still, the government's triumphalism after M-19 returned to armed struggle in mid-1985 was short-lived. Its prediction that the group would isolate itself more if it took up arms proved accurate (Castro 1986), but the insurgents' disastrous attack on the Palace of Justice also had great impact on the government. There was a public outcry over the massacre. People strongly criticized the government's refusal to negotiate and the armed forces for their indiscriminate counter-attack (Jimeno 1989; Informe 2010). Some even suspected the security forces had allowed the initial attack to take place so they could trap M-19 (Informe 2010).<sup>70</sup> To trap insurgents and to push them to unpopular actions was not a new idea. In 1976, President Lopez Michelsen had rejected negotiations with M-19, sacrificing the life of the group's hostage, the liberal CTC labor union leader Jose Raquel Mercado (El Tiempo 20.04.1976), expecting the insurgent group would isolate itself by committing an unpopular assassination. Initial public support for the government after the attack (El Tiempo 08.11.1985a) soon made way for harsh criticism of the government's role in the events (El Tiempo 09.11.1985). Even the official report on the events indicated that Betancur had refused to negotiate with M-19's commando to deny the insurgent group a platform to voice its demands and slam his administration for the failed National Dialogue (Informe 2010). It seemed the president had purposefully neglected to halt the massacre and sacrificed the lives of High Court judges to assure his political survival. The shocking events and the

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<sup>70</sup> Police officers in charge of security at the Palace of Justice gave contradictory statements about why additional security forces were sent home, despite the fact that it was of public knowledge that M-19 planned to seize the Palace. This led the authors of the official report on the attack to conclude that the trap hypothesis was the most likely explanation for the reduced security.

numerous lives lost did not reflect well on his decision though. Widespread criticism of the government was only outweighed by criticism of M-19.

After the attack the government hardened its counter-insurgent campaign against M-19 and declined to negotiate with the group any longer (El Tiempo 08.11.1985b). The state dismantled M-19's urban peace camps and anyone linked to the insurgent group faced severe repressive measures (Interview 23). But instead of ending the conflict, the anti-guerrilla campaign only "heightened the climate of terror and insecurity for the citizens." (Camacho 1992:255) In the countryside, a real war broke out between the armed forces and M-19 when the group marched on Cali in early 1986. Widespread paramilitary and criminal violence only compounded the renewed guerrilla struggle (El Tiempo 05.01.1988) and became a key concern for Virgilio Barco, who took office in 1986. The peace process broke down completely in 1987, when FARC also took up arms again. FARC had respected the ceasefire for a long time, but a steady stream of paramilitary assassinations of UP members, the murder of UP president Jaime Pardo Leal (El Tiempo 16.10.1987), and Barco's reinforcement of state authority at the cost of the agreements with FARC (Chernick 1996) ultimately were reason to resume armed struggle. The state, however, had recovered legitimacy and reopened the fight with renewed force (Agudelo Ríos 21.07.1986).

To summarize, Betancur had recognized that real change was necessary to deal with Colombia's internal crisis. His strategy of immediately alleviating the most pressing needs and starting a political debate on the country's future proved effective in restoring the state's legitimacy and in easing protest. This political opening offered an alternative to armed struggle and set political negotiations in motion with most of the insurgent groups. The government had fulfilled one of the public's key demands, so public opinion supported the peace process. However, the National Dialogue was jeopardized by the president's lack of real political clout, the systematic violation of the truce by the armed forces, and the imposition of new conditions on the insurgents. Attacks on social and political activists limited the opposition's political opportunities and kept the level of confrontation high. It also encouraged the insurgents to maintain their clandestine and armed structure and pushed some guerrilla groups back into armed struggle. In actual fact, violence never ceased and armed confrontations developed parallel to the National Dialogue. Paramilitary attacks continued the offensive on opposition sectors but denied direct state responsibility for the attacks. The price for the paralysis of needed reforms and the limitation of political opportunities for change was the continuation of the conflict.

**Escalating Violence and a New Chance for Peace**

When Virgilio Barco assumed the presidency in 1986, political and criminal violence was on the rise in Colombia. Apart from insurgent violence, there was a surge of social protest, leaving the Barco administration to deal with 62 local strikes in its first year alone (El Tiempo 05.08.1987). Criminal violence increased, got entwined with political violence, and became the government's biggest problem (El Tiempo 04.02.1987; El Tiempo 07.07.1987). The drug mafia deployed private paramilitary forces that committed mass murder in their battle with the guerrillas for control of coca production areas (El Tiempo 17.06.1987; El Tiempo 13.11.1987; El Tiempo 01.02.1988; Verdadabierta 2010). They even launched a war against the state over extradition plans (Gonzalez 2004). At the same time, the state's armed forces were accused of participating in clandestine repression (El Tiempo 16.10.1987). Colombia sank into an ever more complex violent conflict that pushed the country to the verge of an institutional breakdown (Berghof 2008; Interview 17). President Barco faced increasing criticism over his lack of peace efforts and he understood the need for political reforms to pacify at least some of the violent actors in order to concentrate forces in the struggle against criminal violence. The president's talk of political reform and peace negotiations finally materialized when M-19 abducted Alvaro Gomez. Barco presented his peace initiative to the nation, beating M-19 to the prize. While Barco's reformist position laid the groundwork for any possible peace negotiation and political reform, M-19's armed propaganda opened the door to concrete negotiations that culminated in the demobilization of the group in 1990.

Faced with the serious internal crisis that Colombia faced in the latter half of the 1980s, Barco embraced the idea of profound political reforms to contain the escalating insurgent struggle and to alleviate criticism of his administration. Barco offered to negotiate with insurgents and announced a plebiscite on constitutional reform as early as 1988 (El Tiempo 01.02.1988; EL Tiempo 31.01.1988). Political reforms aimed at containing the internal conflict could count on widespread support from all political forces (El Tiempo 12.01.1988). In an attempt to avoid repeating the errors of his predecessors, Barco restricted possible negotiations with insurgent organizations to their demobilization and reintegration into society (Chernick 1996; El Tiempo 05.08.1987; El Tiempo 16.10.1987; El Tiempo 02.01.1989). Any peace talks with the insurgents had to be led by the government. The president demanded the cessation of armed activities as a precondition for talks. However, he also subscribed to the idea of a broad societal dialogue and emphasized the need to include all social forces in order to realize economic, political and social reforms (El Tiempo 05.08.1987). These two topics—state-controlled negotiations and the quest for social consensus—formed the foundation of Barco's peace initiative in the latter half of 1988. The possibility of profound political reforms and of substituting illegal, violent means for legal,

political means was a unique opportunity for the insurgent groups that had started to see the limitations of armed struggle (Florez & Valenzuela 1996).

The first calls for negotiations, however, were unsuccessful and the president seemed helpless in the face of the severe violence.<sup>71</sup> M-19's abduction of Alvaro Gomez Hurtado and the group's demand for new peace negotiations offered the president both opportunities and risks. Clearly, it offered the chance to restart negotiations, but it also posed a risk in that the insurgents could attempt to take the credit for the reform policy (El Tiempo 05.08.1987). Barco faced a dilemma. He could not decline peace talks, but neither could he accept the insurgents taking the lead in the talks. In other words, he had to find a way to establish peace negotiations under state control. He had to bind the insurgents to the peace process while limiting their influence on the definition of the process. Negotiations should focus on demobilizing the insurgents and required concessions on their part. Strong public pressure in favor of peace talks meant Barco could not simply pass up this chance to return to the negotiating table.

In order to restore state control over the bargaining process, Barco indicated he was willing to talk, but rejected negotiations under pressure and made Gomez's liberation a precondition for talks (El Espectador 01.07.1988; El Espectador 14.07.1988). At first, Barco's refusal to participate in M-19's peace conference in Panama threatened to isolate the government (El Tiempo 14.07.1988), but it did make clear that Barco would not submit to insurgent control of the process. His insistence on remaining in control, reinforced governmental authority when he outlined his own peace initiative and was able to bring M-19 to the negotiating table. Barco launched a focused three-phased peace plan and regained the political initiative. A first phase was aimed at decreasing tension and creating an environment of mutual trust. The second phase foresaw the transition to institutional normality and the return of the armed group to the democratic process. The third phase was to conclude with the full reintegration of the insurgents into civilian life and with their entry into legal politics. The peace initiative also had a clear timeframe. The process was expected to be rounded off before the 1990 presidential elections (El Tiempo 02.09.1988; Berghof 2008). Barco's willingness to negotiate and the viable framework for negotiations cornered M-19 politically. The government was prepared to negotiate but on its own terms—not on the insurgents' (Chernick 1999).

The peace plan also included a broad socio-political discussion on national problems. In early 1989, President Barco fulfilled his promise and formally invited the political parties to the Working Tables for Peace and Reconciliation (El Tiempo 01.02.1989) to negotiate political reforms together with M-19 (El Tiempo 03.04.1989). Additional Tables—Analysis and

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<sup>71</sup> The number of homicides (mainly non-combat related) in Colombia increased from 9,087 in 1983 to 28,284 in 1993 (Gonzalez 2004).

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Agreement Tables—were added to the Working Tables to offer an open forum for regional and local organizations, and sector representatives (Berghof 2008; Grave 2009). Broad social sectors were able to voice their ideas and the peace process thrived (Florez & Valenzuela 1996). Although the government had refused to discuss far-reaching socio-political reforms with the insurgent group, it had fulfilled a key insurgent claim by starting a broad societal discussion on reform, thus binding M-19 to the peace process. Barco's peace initiative proved successful because the government also planned a constitutional reform and created a political opening (El Tiempo 02.09.1988; Chernick 1999). This offered a real political alternative to armed struggle. Limiting and focusing the negotiations with M-19 on its demobilization and its reintegration into civil society improved the chances of success. Negotiations committed the insurgents politically and they abstained from violence in order to demonstrate their willingness to integrate into the political process (El Tiempo 01.12.1988). Barco had achieved his objectives of involving and binding M-19 to the peace process, holding the reins in the peace negotiations, and reinforcing the state's legitimacy.

The peace process did not go entirely smoothly however. It was put to the test by severe problems, such as assassinations of M-19 members (El Tiempo 08.04.1989a) and a detention order against members of the group (El Tiempo 08.04.1989b). However, the government's stance of denouncing violent attacks that undermined the peace process aided the growing atmosphere of trust. There were also voices that criticized the peace process. The UP and the Communist Party declined to participate in the talks, making the Working Tables less representative. UP justified its decision by pointing out that the negotiations were conducted only with M-19 and that other guerrilla groups and social sectors had been excluded (El Tiempo 03.04.1989). However, this was due to the fact that M-19 was the only insurgent group that had accepted the government's precondition for negotiations by effectively abstaining from violence, and had indicated it was willing to discuss its demobilization and reintegration into society. Furthermore, the establishment of the Analysis and Agreement Tables opened a space for social participation in the peace negotiations, ending the initial phase of exclusive negotiations between M-19 and the government.

The main obstacle to the peace process was formed by the Colombian Congress. Most of the extra-institutional agreements that were reached at the different negotiation tables required Congressional approval. For example, the proposed amnesty for demobilized insurgents, the Special National Circumscription for Peace that gave a one-time electoral advantage to M-19 and minority sectors, and the planned referendum to open a constitutional reform all had to pass Congress (Garcia 1993; ICG 2002). But Congress voted down many of these deals, as many senators felt marginalized because the legislature had not been included as an independent body in the dialogue (Garcia 1993). Major problems surfaced in the debate about the proposed constitutional reform. The parties almost failed to approve the

political pact between M-19 and the government that served as a basis for the peace agreements (El Tiempo 02.11.1989; El Tiempo 03.11.1989). In another move that threatened to thwart the peace process, Congress extended the presidential pardon to criminal actors (El Tiempo 11.11.1989) and included the decision over a possible extradition of drug gangsters to the US into the plans for a referendum (El Tiempo 02.12.1989a; El Tiempo 02.12.1989b). This structurally modified the conditions for an amnesty and a referendum and made it unacceptable, especially to the president. Barco made clear that he preferred to cancel the referendum rather than expose the Colombian people to the pressure of the drug mafia that was waging a war against the state (El Tiempo 02.12.1989a; Gonzalez 2004). Having failed to ratify the constitutional reform, Congress abolished the fundament of the peace agreement with M-19 (El Tiempo 02.12.1989b).

Other unforeseen obstacles also seriously endangered the finalization of the peace process, for example when M-19 refused to disarm as agreed upon on December 19, 1989 (El Siglo 16.12.1989). This signified a serious political defeat for the government because public opinion held the government responsible for a possible failure of the peace process (El Tiempo 06.12.1989). Last-minute Congressional approval of the amnesty project gave M-19 some political room for maneuver, however (El Tiempo 16.12.1989). The government explored solutions to the dilemma and investigated in particular ways to bypass Congress by organizing a referendum on constitutional reform (El Tiempo 18.12.1989). Direct contact between M-19 commanders and political leaders gave new impetus to the peace process. The leaders on both sides of the negotiating table reached gentlemen's agreements about pursuing the initiatives of the peace deal that had been blocked by Congress. These personal pacts served to replace the binding governmental commitments to change and rescued the peace process (El Tiempo 26.01.1990; El Tiempo 03.02.1990). On March 9, 1990, M-19 demobilized. The peace process culminated in a new constitution, which became effective in April 1991.

To summarize, the re-escalation of political violence in the increasingly complex internal conflict of the latter half of the 1980s laid the basis for new peace negotiations. The Barco administration promoted profound political changes in the hope of ending the violent campaigns of at least some insurgent groups. Frequent calls for negotiations demonstrated the government's general willingness to talk to insurgents. The catastrophic internal situation increased the political openness to profound change, which formed the basis of a new peace process. M-19's change of strategy, shifting the focus of its armed activities towards the national elite, ensured that elite sectors saw the need for a new peace process. This helped to position peace talks high on the national agenda, provoking Barco's initiative and the political reform project. Steadfastness in the face of insurgent pressure, combined with a focused peace initiative, enabled Barco to renew and control the peace process. By leading

focused negotiations with the insurgent group, combined with a societal discussion, the government met central insurgent demands and committed the group to the peace process. Finally, political will and the government's credible rejection of violent attacks on its bargaining partner fostered confidence and enabled the negotiators to overcome serious obstacles on the road to peace. Congress's last-minute rejection of the peace agreements reflected the weakness of the government and the divisions within the state as an institutional actor. It was ultimately not the state as a coherent actor but personal chemistry, good faith, and the strong commitment of individuals such as the president and M-19 commanders, that enabled the successful conclusion of the peace process.

### **Processes of Escalation and De-escalation Summarized**

Political violence in Colombia developed mainly over violently backed political and economic exclusion of large social sectors. Institutional channels for solving tensions and conflicts were deficient or lacking completely. Broad repression of extra-institutional opposition came to justify armed struggle. Escalation and de-escalation of political violence was closely linked to the stance taken by society at large, and social protest movements in particular, towards the violent political dispute. Moments of radicalizing protest and sympathy with the guerrillas' political objectives worked strongly in favor of the insurrectional struggle. Protest, however, largely remained divided and did not always support armed struggle, preventing the insurgency from decisively challenging the state. Persistent protest did, however, maintain political violence by providing constant but limited support for the insurgent struggle.

Colombia's deficient democracy presented the state with a basic dilemma and laid the cornerstone for the domestic conflict and its specific development. The combination of political exclusion and minimal political liberties promoted the development of social conflict. Political exclusion, however, was a necessary means for the governing elite to maintain the status quo. The elite withheld the political opening that would have allowed extra-institutional protest to be channeled into legal politics. Repression reinforced protest and legitimized armed struggle. In such a situation, extra-institutional protest and defiance of state authorities became the only meaningful means of opposition, and even small protest victories engendered more protest. The lack of political opportunities for change, thus, pushed opposition and discontent into an extra-institutional sphere of protest and even towards more radical means, promoting the escalation of the internal conflict. The government lacked political instruments to address protest and, consequently, relied increasingly on harsh measures of social control and counter-insurgency. Only profound political reforms could stop

the spiral of escalation. Increasing opposition protest, furthermore, impeded the state authorities from closing down the already limited political space. If they did so, they would run the risk of encouraging a popular insurrection. Protest had developed despite and because of political exclusion and intensifying state repression did not undermine the extra-institutional protest infrastructure. What meager reforms that were introduced, were hampered by institutional shortcomings and differences within various branches of state authorities. The lack of reforms increased the social conflict in Colombia over time.

Public opinion and protest influenced the escalation and de-escalation of political violence in general and therefore had an impact on M-19's guerrilla campaign as well. The organization intensified its campaign when it had social support. The group attempted to form a popular army and organize popular militias in times of increasing opposition to the government. The organization recognized the importance of massive participation in revolutionary warfare. Only with such support could they bring about changes and avoid becoming a sectarian group. For M-19, sectarian armed struggle was senseless and no alternative to a popular revolution. Constructing its armed campaign around popular political demands and, thus, emphasizing the political objectives of its campaign over pure military aspects, M-19 was able to align itself with popular sectors and to attract social sympathy and support. An undogmatic and inclusive political objective permitted M-19 to side with protest and assured the group widespread support at an ideological level. Highly political armed propaganda and an inclusive political project mobilized and involved people in the struggle. However, when the group limited its activities on armed struggle as such, without self-evident political objectives, this was received critically and it even proved counter-productive to M-19's mobilization efforts and revolutionary aim.

State counter-insurgency developed in relation to social protest and government preferences. Although repressive measures prevailed under the different administrations, political measures formed part of the state's counter-insurgency approach and achieved major importance from Betancur's presidency onwards. Counter-insurgency campaigns, however, focused on demobilizing extra-institutional opposition and social protest as such and not only on confronting armed struggle. This highlights the triangular nature of the domestic conflict. Broad and indiscriminate repression of extra-institutional opposition promoted social disobedience and increased violence. Betancur's intelligent use of political and economic measures in combination with repressive counter-insurgent measures proved more effective in moderating, splitting and demobilizing social protest. The opening of political space for discussion and expression as well as the substitution of open state repression with paramilitary repression permitted Betancur to restore state legitimacy and to seize the political initiative. Betancur met popular demands in order to maintain the political status quo. The clandestine repression of socio-political opposition figures negatively affected the

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organization of political opposition but permitted the government to deny any responsibility for the attacks. The government, thus, could maintain its broad approach against extra-official opposition without assuming full political accountability for it.

Broad but clandestine repression hampered the organization of opposition forces and limited the political opportunities. Paramilitary repression also impeded moves to resolve the conflict through politics. Furthermore, political violence was prolonged partly due to the intransigence of the political elite on issues of democratization and inclusion of the popular masses in the political system. Attacks on socio-political figures and the lack of political opportunities stimulated and justified opposition violence. Clandestine repression, thus, was a form of preserving the political status quo, but it came at the price of continued domestic conflict. No open political alternative could develop. Ongoing violent political exclusion fuelled the guerrilla struggle and social protest. Paramilitary attacks blurred responsibility for attacks and opposition eventually turned against all kinds of violence. Paradoxically it was the escalating violence that created a propitious environment for peace negotiations when the political elite and insurgent sectors recognized they were militarily deadlocked. Widespread societal claims for peace negotiations created a unique critical mass for a political solution to the conflict. However, the key factor that allowed a negotiated settlement between M-19 and the government was the sincere commitment to end violence and introduce real political reforms that offered adversaries non-violent alternatives of action.

Political violence escalated on two occasions. The first was closely linked to the support of social protest for guerrilla struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Social protest built a favorable environment for guerrilla activities in response to which state repression became broader and harsher. The second time political violence and especially the confrontation between M-19 and the Colombian state escalated was in the aftermath of the failed 1984/85 peace process. Unlike the first time, this escalation was accompanied by decreasing social support for armed struggle. The second phase of M-19's violence, therefore, remained sectarian and lacked the revolutionary potential of the former.

From its inception, M-19 aimed to rapidly escalate the conflict. After a phase of growth and progressive escalation, the organization seemed to have reached its goal in the early 1980s when protest generalized and radicalized in support of the guerrilla struggle for democracy. Especially the broad and severe repression of protest under Turbay's National Security Statute had provoked social protest and sympathy for armed struggle. Popular discontent focused on the repressive government and its dictatorial traits. The state's dilemma was that through broad repression of social movements it could neither end protest as such nor improve political opportunity for opponents. Mass detentions and systematic human rights abuses radicalized opposition instead of ending extra-institutional protest. Wide-ranging, blunt repression backfired in a moment of strong social mobilization because it

unified the popular masses against the state. Furthermore, broad and basic political demands rallied the diverse opposition forces around a common project. In particular, M-19 voiced popular demands and was able to attract vast support vaguely expressed in the broad social movement for change. M-19's establishment of grassroots self-help groups in the form of urban peace camps provided the organization with more specific support. However, overall support that was committed to M-19 remained limited and so did the group's organizational growth.

After the collapse of the 1984/85 peace talks, M-19 launched a strong military offensive aimed at inspiring a popular uprising so the group could seize power by assault. The disastrous siege on the Palace of Justice, envisioned as a spectacular end-point of the armed campaign, instead ended in catastrophe. This marked the start of a military phase characterized by confrontations with government forces. All in all, the palace siege signified a serious political defeat for the organization. M-19's ongoing military campaign and the government's repression of all social organizations close to the guerrillas escalated political violence. Overt counter-insurgent activities focused on fighting M-19, while clandestine repression targeted socio-political activists. The fact that social protest and guerrilla warfare had bifurcated did not lessen attacks on social protest sectors. However, guerrilla struggle lost its revolutionary capacity without massive social support. In the particular case of M-19, difficulties communicating its political project and the backlash from its disastrous Palace of Justice attack added to the general rejection of armed struggle. Now the group's precarious organizational situation limited its mobilizing capacity even more.

The (re-) escalation of (political) violence in the latter half of the 1980s, however, was not limited to the struggle between the various guerrilla groups and the state. Colombian society also suffered greatly from the actions of paramilitary groups and the drug cartels that had launched a war against the state. The confrontation between the various violent actors escalated and began to affect all social and political life, sparking a powerful social movement that voiced its resistance to the increasing violence as such. The insurgent organizations did not lose all their support but mobilizing large social sectors for armed struggle became a far more difficult enterprise.

Similar to the two moments of escalation, two moments of de-escalation can be observed that were closely linked to changing political conditions and societal claims for peace. Both processes involved peace negotiations between the government and guerrilla organizations as well as far-reaching political reform projects. There were, however, significant differences in the political conjuncture as well as in the main actor's disposition to negotiate. Both of these factors weakened the first peace process and the chance to de-escalate violence and achieve a sustainable peace. By contrast, the second peace process, in the late 1980s culminated in the demobilization of M-19 and other insurgent groups.

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However, not all insurgent organizations were attracted to the limited negotiation space of Barco's peace process and political violence persisted within the wider Colombian conflict.

A first process of de-escalation commenced with the handover of the presidency from Turbay to Betancur in 1982. Political violence eased as soon as the government agreed to negotiate with guerrilla organizations, signed an armistice and approved the opening of political space for expression and negotiation: the National Dialogue. Aside from emphasizing the importance of politics to reach peace, the new president reduced the broad, visible repression of social movements. A popular discourse of peace and democracy substituted for the repressive and exclusive politics of Turbay. Betancur met basic protest demands by granting a general amnesty for political prisoners and accepting negotiations with guerrilla organizations. However, clandestine repression partially substituted for the broad and open repression of social movements of the former years. Political violence persisted.

Especially the government benefited from the peace process as it regained the political initiative. The agreement to negotiate with guerrilla organizations and begin a broad National Dialogue restored the state's legitimacy and defused the threat of broad and radicalizing social protest. The National Dialogue opened a political space for expression and negotiation and brought basic democratic changes within reach. This fulfilled M-19 and other insurgencies' central political objectives and disarmed the organization politically.

Betancur's clever political offensive reshuffled social support for the different political forces. He managed to maintain the offensive against protest sectors without bearing the political costs for it. He took the sting out of social protest advancing only limited political reforms and he was able to blame the insurgent groups for ending the armistice. However, Betancur undermined the importance of the National Dialogue and indeed called into question the entire enterprise. The negotiations were too broad and vague, hampering the formulation of specific solutions. Nonetheless, the popular masses held on to the recently achieved political space of expression. Open and clandestine violations of the armed truce added tension to the situation, and the state as well as the insurgent group prepared for war in the belief that the adversary would be quickly defeated. The main weakness of the 1984/85 peace process was that armed struggle was still an option, limiting the commitment to political negotiations. The National Dialogue was a political space but neither the government nor M-19 really negotiated. Both tried to impose their vision—a basic democratic project vs. an institutional project—through armed pressure as well as public opinion. The government agreement with FARC, by comparison, was less problematic, at least in the beginning. Both sides agreed on the principle of allowing FARC to form a legal party to participate in the established political system. This sought to open up the political system instead of structurally changing it.

A second process of de-escalation, which commenced in the late 1980s, culminated in M-19's demobilization and reintegration into institutional political life as AD-M-19. Public demands for peace negotiations created a conducive atmosphere for peace talks. The adversaries were still vying for public approval and took care to not to cut off the negotiations unilaterally, lest they risked sparking a public outcry. The public support for the peace process, furthermore, helped the adversaries to maintain negotiations despite obstacles. More than this, however, it was the political will of M-19 and President Barco that enabled them to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. Personal confidence and gentlemen's agreements, in addition to the credible opportunity for political change, were central to the survival of the process despite serious obstacles.

M-19 recognized its isolation and the popular desire for peace, and in its quest to improve its chilled relations with society the organization looked for ways to align once more with the popular movements. M-19's strategic decision to unilaterally declare peace with the armed forces and war on the oligarchy brought political pressure back into the center of its struggle. Political violence between M-19 and the state began to de-escalate. However, it was the abduction of Alvaro Gomez Hurtado that made peace negotiations an urgent political issue and permitted M-19 to position itself once more as a necessary negotiating partner. Highly selective politically attacks, and not military campaigns against the armed forces, proved a more effective way to pressure the political elite for change. M-19 realigned with large social sectors and restored its popularity by voicing general demands for peace and democracy. Political and ideological factors convinced M-19 that negotiations were necessary. Politically, M-19 needed to recover its popularity to remain a central political-military force, and ideologically the organization claimed to defend the popular will. Without popular support it was senseless for M-19 to engage in armed struggle. Popular calls for peace therefore helped persuade M-19 of the need to seek alternatives to its armed struggle. The group won enormous sympathy by pressing for a new peace process and for adhering to it despite the assassination of key militants and the infringement of agreements by the state. Public sympathy for M-19 in turn put pressure on the state to conclude the negotiations.

Also the government felt the pressure of public opinion to accept new negotiations. President Barco faced criticism over a floundering peace initiative and recognized the need for political reforms to curb the escalating internal conflict. Barco had already advanced constitutional reform and called for negotiations with the insurgents, albeit under government control. Criminal violence had attracted the government's main attention. Concrete revolutionary threats had vanished as a result of the bifurcation of protest and armed struggle, but the complex political and criminal conflict escalated and threatened the institutional functioning of the state. The high level of violence obliged the government to pacify some violent actors. The absence of a specific revolutionary threat at that time

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permitted the government to open alternative channels to insurgents and to define the conditions for peace talks. Aside from alleviating armed pressure, negotiations enabled the government to appease public opinion. Strong public support for the peace process pressured the government to condemn attacks on M-19 figures and infringements of the peace accords. Public opinion also forced the government to demonstrate that it was not the main obstacle to peace and to see negotiations through to the end.

The main relevance of the peace negotiations was that it broke the vicious cycle of escalating violence. Crucial aspects of the breach with the logic of violence were the sincere will to achieve peace, which required the demobilization of insurgents, and the creation of a real political alternative to armed struggle. However, the government exploited negotiations with great sophistication, using talks and agreements with one insurgent group as political leverage on other rebel organizations. It was in this way that Betancur had isolated M-19. Similarly, Barco used talks to put pressure on FARC and ELN, both of which had dismissed negotiations despite the improved political opportunities. Combining negotiations and coercion, the governments separated social protest and armed struggle and kept the insurgent organizations divided. This did not end political violence. On the contrary, it partly even promoted violence, yet it undermined the overall revolutionary capacity of the insurgent organizations.

When M-19 began publicly pressing for new peace negotiations and political reforms, President Barco had already put forward a constitutional reform project. The political climate was favorable for negotiations and change. M-19 decided to break with the CGSB and negotiate independently. The organization knew collective negotiations were hard to establish and that the window of political opportunity would eventually slam shut. Decisions had to be taken quickly to open new talks. M-19 saw its chance to play a leading role in talks, which it probably would not have if it joined negotiations along with the much stronger FARC.

By limiting the peace negotiations with M-19 to its demobilization and re-integration into society, the government introduced a necessary focus that helped make the talks a success. However, limiting the scope of negotiations with M-19 required the government to open up a space for societal participation in the broader debate on political and economic reforms. The negotiation framework that was drawn up addressed the central demands and preoccupations of the negotiating partners. This created an atmosphere of confidence. Finally, it was personal agreements that persuaded M-19 to lay down arms without having achieved a binding agreement on political changes. In this climate of confidence, guarantees of political rights and the promise of a Constituent Assembly were enough to substitute for the formal accord that Congress had blocked.

Armed struggle in Colombia could successfully open the door to political opportunity when it coincided with popular protest. These conditions were rarely present, and then only

for a short time. However, M-19’s use of armed propaganda to voice popular grievances permitted the group to influence the national political debate and, thus, to position itself as a self-adjudicated representative of large opposition sectors at different points in time. Importantly, the effectiveness of armed struggle depended on its mobilization capacity more than its purely military strength. Without support and civic political pressure on the government, armed struggle was never enough to bring about any political improvement. Purely military struggle exposed socio-political militants to open and clandestine repression and eroded the mobilization capacity of opposition forces. Armed struggle with a primarily military focus failed to convince the social audience that escalating violence could improve the political situation. Strong but diverse social protest helped to prolong Colombia’s violent domestic conflict, however. No violent actor could garner enough active support to decisively defeat the adversary on the battlefield. Socially sensitive violent actors, however, responded to the growing public cry for peace and embraced negotiations. Armed struggle could apply enough pressure to secure the opening of political space, but only negotiations could bring about political change in a situation where military dominance had become unlikely.



## Chapter Four

### Nicaragua

#### The FSLN's Coordination of a Popular Revolution



### Timeline

- 1927 General Cesar Augusto Sandino rejects Liberal rebel General Jose Maria Moncada's orders to surrender to US forces and, followed by 30 men, starts a guerrilla war of National Liberation.
- 1933 Anastasio "Tacho" Somoza García becomes head of the National Guard (GN)—Nicaragua's only armed body that was responsible for both policing and military tasks.
- 1934 Sandino is assassinated on Somoza's orders (Feb. 21).
- 1936/7 Tacho Somoza ousts President Juan Bautista Sacasa and becomes president in fraudulent elections (Jan. 1, 1937).
- 1944 Somoza's reelection plans spark popular protest.
- 1947 Leonardo Arguello becomes president in fraudulent elections. After 27 days in office he is replaced with a new puppet president: Victor Roman y Reyes—Somoza's uncle.
- 1951 Somoza is reelected president in fraudulent polls.
- 1956 Poet Rigoberto Lopez Perez shoots Tacho Somoza. The president's oldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, succeeds him in office.
- 1957 Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza Debayle, Somoza's second son, becomes head of the National Guard.
- 1959 Student protest against the regime flares up and is violently put down.
- 1961-3 The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is founded.
- 1963 FSLN's first guerrilla foco in Bocay and River Coco near the Honduran border is discovered and dismantled.  
René Schick becomes president in fraudulent elections.
- 1967 Massive protest over Anastasio Somoza Debayle's presidential aspirations is violently suppressed, causing up to 300 deaths. Tachito Somoza comes to power in fraudulent elections.  
An FSLN column in Pancasan is dismantled, giving the struggle nationwide publicity.
- 1969 For the first time an FSLN column survives a GN attack in Zinica.
- 1971 Somoza and the Conservative Party sign the "Kupia-Kumi" power-sharing pact. Grassroots organizations begin to mushroom in reaction to the closure of the last remaining political opportunities.
- 1972/3 An earthquake destroys large parts of Managua including 75% of housing and 90% of the city's commercial capacity. The quake claims up to 20,000

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- lives (Dec. 23, 1972).
- Somoza starts to rule by decree (1973).
- 1974 Somoza begins a second presidential term after fraudulent elections boycotted by all major opposition parties.
- The Sandinistas take numerous diplomats and members of government hostage. Somoza is forced to pay ransom and release political prisoners.
- 1975 The GN begins a major offensive against the FSLN. The GN crackdown and internal rifts divide the FSLN into three fractions—the urban Proletarian Tendency; the rural Prolonged Popular War Tendency; and the Insurreccional “Third” Tendency.
- Grassroots groups grow despite harsh repression.
- 1976 The FSLN suffers heavy losses, including General Secretary and founding member Carlos Fonseca Amador (Nov. 7).
- 1977 The FSLN’s Insurreccional Tendency launches an offensive, attacking GN garrisons. Twelve prominent Nicaraguans form “The Group of Twelve” (Los Doce) in support of the FSLN. From exile in Costa Rica, they call for united struggle against the regime.
- 1978 January - Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of the opposition newspaper La Prensa, is assassinated. A general strike supported by entrepreneurial sectors takes place.
- February—The first popular uprising takes place in Masaya.
- May—The Broad Opposition Front (FAO) is formed.
- July—The Group of Twelve openly return to Nicaragua.
- August—An FSLN command seizes the National Palace and takes 1,000 hostages—Somoza is forced to pay ransom and free political prisoners. A popular rebellion breaks out in Matagalpa.
- September—A national insurrection under FSLN control breaks out in Chinandega, Masaya, Esteli, Leon, and Diriamba. The GN reassumes control of rebellious cities after indiscriminate aerial bombardments.
- October—The Organization of American States (OAS) sends an intermediary to Nicaragua.
- November—The International Monetary Fund (IMF) denies Nicaragua a loan due to US objections over the human rights situation.
- 1979 January—Frente Patriótico Nacional (FPN), a broad dissident bloc, is created.
- March—The three tendencies of the FSLN officially reunite.

May—The IMF grants a USD 66 million loan to Somoza. The FSLN launches its final offensive from the north and the south.

June—A general strike paralyzes Nicaragua. Heavy fighting takes place throughout the country. The FSLN seizes Chinandega, Matagalpa, Leon, and Esteli. Anti-regime sectors form a provisional “Government of Reconstruction”. Several states sever ties with the Somoza regime and others recognize the provisional government. An uprising in Managua is suppressed by indiscriminate aerial bombing. The US steps up diplomatic activity to establish “Somocism without Somoza”.

July—A GN counter-offensive fails. The FSLN encircles Managua. The provisional government forms a cabinet.

July 17—Somoza flees to Miami and appoints Speaker of Congress Francisco Urcuyo Interim President. The GN falls into disarray.

July 19—The FSLN seizes control of Managua.

July 20—Provisional government members arrive in Managua.

### **A Brief History**

On July 19, 1979, half a century of social conflict in Nicaragua culminated in the revolutionary overthrow of the Somoza family dictatorship that had reigned over the country for forty-two years. Decades of harsh socio-economic and political exclusion of the masses had nurtured the domestic conflict and closed off alternative paths towards change. The memory of long-standing US interventions in Nicaragua and ongoing US support for the regime fed anti-imperialist feelings and turned the struggle for many into a war of national liberation. Adding to this potent mix was the concentration of the economy in the hands of a small elite. Protest against the family dictatorship began early on. Control of the National Guard, or GN, Nicaragua’s only armed force, was a cornerstone of the Somoza clan’s dynastic dictatorship. The GN was the main violent actor. A combination of political manipulation and persecution of forces opposed to the regime sustained the dictatorship’s power until it was forcefully overthrown in a bloody civil war. Clever political manipulation by the dictatorship hampered the formation of a united, coherent opposition front until the early 1970s, when independent grassroots protest sprung up. Grassroots opposition built a framework for mass participation in revolutionary struggle that permitted the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to coordinate the 1978 and 1979 popular insurrections, and thus to overthrow the dictator after almost two decades of guerrilla struggle.

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In the early twentieth century, Nicaragua had faced frequent wars between followers of the Conservative and Liberal parties. These struggles for political control led several times to US interventions in the country's domestic politics. When the United States intervened in Nicaragua's Constitutional War (1925-1927), in support of the Conservative Party, and forced the signing of an agreement, General Cesar Augustino Sandino, a Liberal, rejected the settlement and gained fame by fighting the US presence in Nicaragua. Sandino's "small crazy army," as Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral baptized the guerrilla group (Gonzalez 2005), gained control over large parts of the territory. By 1933, increasing support for the insurgents convinced the US to withdraw its troops. National Security was handed over to the newly-formed National Guard (GN) with US ally Anastasio Somoza Garcia at its head. When peace talks brought Sandino to Managua, Somoza—at the instigation of US ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane—seized the opportunity. On Somoza's orders, his only serious political and military rival was assassinated, on February 21, 1934. The memory of the "General of Free Men" (Vianica 2011), however, lived on and inspired social revolutionary armed struggle in Nicaragua.

Two years after the assassination of Sandino, Somoza decided to use his control of the GN towards for his own political ambitions. He ousted President Juan Batista Sacasa and, following fraudulent elections, assumed the presidency as head of the Liberal Nationalist Party (PLN) on January 1, 1937. The GN was the backbone of the nascent Somoza family dictatorship that would gain infamy through self-enrichment and political exclusion of the masses. Somoza instigated corruption and purged the GN to subject the force to his will. Protest and popular struggle were at a low point when Somoza took power. Sandino's successful struggle against the US intervention had fulfilled a central claim and his death had beheaded the popular struggle. The appearance of the new strongman inspired hopes of an end to the ongoing political turmoil and violence. In the early stages of the regime, Somoza showed populist inclinations to strengthen his internal position. At the same time, he began to establish good relations with the US, fervently supporting the northern power's foreign policy to secure international support for his regime (Esgueva Gómez 1999; Guevara López 2008; Walter 1993). Franklin D. Roosevelt best summarized US ties with Somoza when he stated that "Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch." (Roosevelt 2010)

In the 1940s, however, popular protest flared up over the regime's disproportionate self-enrichment and over political exclusion in particular. Economic discontent about a range of issues, including unfulfilled peasant land claims and workers' demands for better labor conditions and wages, added to the anger. Protest over corruption and political exclusion peaked in 1944, frustrating Somoza's re-election attempt and forcing him to withdraw his candidacy. Independent popular protest had demonstrated its strength but the regime set about preventing its growth by bolstering its legal electoral façade and repressing independent opposition. New protests over the fraudulent 1947 election of puppet president

Leonardo Argüello, which continued when he was suddenly replaced after refusing to show loyalty to Somoza, were countered with harsh repression (Guevara López 2007). Demonstrators were subjected to military justice (Decreto 18.09.1947). Mass detentions, torture, forced exile and even assassination of opponents became commonplace and hampered the development of opposition forces (Guevara López 2007; La Prensa 07.07.1944; La Prensa 14.07.1944; La Prensa 17.04.1947). Fervent anti-communism provided the rationale for a crackdown that was aimed especially at the weak but independent labor syndicates (Guevara López 2007). At the same time, Somoza tried to control the legal opposition that was concentrated around the Conservative Party through political pacts (Walter 1993; Fonseca 1960). These offered the Conservative Party a “just participation” in the control of state entities (Pacto CP-S 26.02.1948) and minority participation in the government (PG 03.04.1950). Such appeasement neutralized this part of the opposition. In short, the dictator combined political manipulation and repression to achieve the semblance of legitimacy (Walter 1993) and to divide and contain all independent opposition.

Opposition, through this period, was mainly organized around the Conservative Party whose strategy was to negotiate with the regime rather than change it structurally. The Conservative Party leadership formed part of the economic and land-owning elite that feared a structural change under popular control more than Somocism (Selva 1969) and vacillated between opposing and supporting the regime. However, political exclusion was the only alternative to pacts with the dictator, who held a monopoly on the instruments of coercion and did not hesitate to employ them to stay in power. The Conservative Party, in short, when faced with the choice between the carrot and the stick—either negotiation and minority participation in government, or political exclusion and GN persecution—generally tended to align with Somoza. The Conservative Party participated in fraudulent elections, for instance, helping the regime to establish a legal façade. At the same time, however, the Conservatives—who had significant support in rural areas (Walter 1993)—sometimes voiced more radical opposition and called for opposition unity (La Prensa 18.07.1944). This helped the Conservative Party to attract even radical opposition sectors that sympathized with armed struggle (Interview 30). Thus the Conservatives became the focus around which opposition concentrated itself, hindering the development of an independent opposition. Pacts, in short, created a “loyal opposition” that in fact helped to sustain the regime (Walter 1993). In the long run, Conservative Party alliances and coincidences of interest with the regime frustrated people’s hopes of finding a legal political alternative to Somoza.

Independent and more radical dissident sectors, by contrast, lacked force as well as organizational capacity to channel growing social discontent. This changed in the early 1970s when belief in the Conservative Party opposition evaporated and grassroots dissident groups

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mushroomed, as discussed below (Interview 30). Most of the opposition parties and movements that formed in the 1940s and 1950s, such as the Independent Liberal Party (PLI), the Socialist Party of Nicaragua (PSN) and the National Union of Popular Action (UNAP), failed to attract significant support as long as the Conservative Party offered the illusion of legal and effective opposition. Legal but timid opposition, in short, undermined independent organizations and prevented the development of a united political platform or movement capable of channeling widespread discontent into collective action against the regime (Fonseca 1960). Furthermore, the formation of an effective multi-sector opposition was hampered until a late state of the conflict by the divergence of dissident objectives. These objectives ranged from elite claims for more political rights and a major share in the national economy to demands for radical change and political and economic inclusion of the popular masses. Elite sectors, for instance, sharply criticized the Somoza regime but also warned of the “Castro-communist guerrilla of the FSLN” that had formed in the early 1960s (JDDL-PLI 1967). Opposition unity remained well beyond reach.

While political manipulation and pseudo-democracy contained social protest, they also spurred opponents of the regime to radicalize at the same time. With democracy clearly compromised, socialism seemed to be the only real alternative. Youth protest in particular radicalized, embracing socialism and striving for revolutionary change in response to constant violations of human and constitutional rights and democratic principles (Selva 1969). Radical opposition of a minority sector, however, was the price the Somoza regime had to pay for appeasing and including the Conservative Party as this strategy required leaving open a minimal amount of room for legal political activity by opposition forces (Walter 1993) such as the Socialist Party of Nicaragua, student groups and even independent labor unions. However, the advantages of obtaining a legal façade by allowing Conservative Party collaboration far outweighed the problems a small independent opposition could cause.

Discontent over political exclusion and anger at the dictator’s attempts to perpetuate his power increased. With no coherent organization, however, protest remained small. When armed resistance appeared in the mid-1950s, radical actions went no further than short-lived armed operations and coup attempts (Fonseca 1960). For instance, a Conservative Party conspiracy to overthrow Somoza failed in 1954 (Novedades 12.04.1954a; 12.04.1954b) and was followed by an equally unsuccessful Air Force rebellion in 1957. In this period, discontent was expressed through frequent coup attempts rather than popular rebellions. The small but radical opposition culminated in an act of political violence when young poet Rigoberto López Pérez fulfilled the “duty of every Nicaraguan” (López Pérez 04.09.1956) and shot Anastasio Somoza Garcia dead on September 21, 1956.

The tyrannicide, however, lacked a coherent political back-up plan and failed both to end the dictatorship and to inspire the formation of a broad and united opposition front. It only

accelerated the generational transfer of power to Somoza Garcia's sons. Luis Somoza Debayle immediately replaced his father as president and received the active support of his younger brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the head of the GN. Until then, opposition had focused on Somoza as a dictator and not on Somocism as a system of governance. Paradoxically, Somoza's death weakened those forces of opposition that had focused on the dictator in person, and inspired armed struggle for systemic change at the same time. Independent opposition still lacked organization and the numerous armed rebellions that appeared in the aftermath of the tyrannicide did not surpass conspiracies that lacked popular participation. Despite the agitated atmosphere of the late 1950s, attempts to form multi-party dissident platforms such as the National Opposition Union (UNO)<sup>72</sup> failed to attract mass support (Fonseca 1960). In other words, protest became more combative after the 1956 tyrannicide (Ortega Saavedra 2004) but widespread opposition failed to develop an independent position and continued to group around the Conservative Party throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s (Interview 30).

Luis Somoza's presidency inaugurated a phase of limited reformism. He downgraded the profile of the dictatorship when he handed over power to puppet president Rene Schick; he also toned down the visible repression of the regime (Walker 1981). Schick's popular social works and good economic performance in the first half of the 1960s (Núñez Soto 1980) effectively contained protest (Black 1981; Walker 1981); the dictatorship could once again repeat the positive experience of delegating responsibilities to broaden its air of legitimacy. Control of the National Guard, however, always remained firmly in the family's hands, as did all real political power. Signs of reform, in short, inspired hopes for political change that effectively curbed opposition development.

However, Schick's tentative reformism failed to end popular discontent towards the dictatorship. Political organizations and particularly the student movement that assembled around the Revolutionary Student Federation (FER) benefited from the increased political opportunities (Black 1981). The crackdown on growing student protest, furthermore, provoked radical student opposition as early as 1959 (La Prensa 25.07.1959a; Guevara López 2007). Some peasant sectors and syndicates also began to establish independent opposition in this period. Important stepping stones that led to the formation of independent opposition groups were rural land tenure disputes that made many turn their back on controlled organizations, and the formation of the Independent General Labor Confederacy (CGT-I) in the early 1960s. Political detainees also profited from the situation. For instance, Carlos Fonseca Amador, founding member and later General Secretary of the FSLN, was detained in 1964 but used

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<sup>72</sup> The following parties participated in the UNO: the Independent Liberal Party, Traditional Conservative Party, Republic Mobilization Party, National Renovation Party, and Social Christian Party.

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the public hearings of his trial to spread political propaganda (Fonseca 1964). Survival simply was more likely at this time.

Radical opposition benefited from the reformist period too. In the early 1960s, the numerous small armed movements that had appeared in the aftermath of the tyrannicide joined forces in a coherent revolutionary organization: the FSLN (Tirado López 1980; Manfut 2010). During these years, protest was contained and the development of independent and radical opposition hampered by a combination of strict control and repression, especially in rural areas, and reforms. The slight improvements in civil and political rights during the reformist period, in short, effectively bottled up support for radical groups (Walker 1981) but enabled them to act politically and to establish contacts with larger social sectors.

The transfer of power in 1967 to Luis' younger brother and West Point graduate Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Merrill 1993) marked a watershed in the exercise of power. Contrary to the low-profile approach of his brother, Anastasio restored open control over the state and he employed the GN to achieve this. Popular protest against Anastasio's presidential candidacy and the predictable electoral fraud of 1967 was led by Conservative Party leader Fernando Agüero. The protest was simply massacred, dashing Agüero's hopes of bringing down the dictatorship.<sup>73</sup> The Conservative Party's quick acceptance of the election results and the 1971 Kupia-Kumi power-sharing pact between Agüero and Somoza permitted the unpopular dictator to run once more for the presidency following constitutional reform in 1974 (Pacto KK 1971). This disillusioned large parts of the institutional political opposition. Many perceived the pact, which closed off political opportunities, as amoral and were offended by the unethical political maneuvering of the Conservative Party leadership (Semana 28.02.1971). Legal and peaceful means, it became clear, would not be enough to stop Anastasio Somoza or to bring about structural change. Many turned their backs on the Conservative Party and on legal political opposition as such (Interview 30). The far-reaching Kupia-Kumi pact with the Conservative Party deepened Somoza's institutional political control but ended the population's faith in political paths of reform. The opposition was forced to become anti-systemic in order to bring about change.

The loss of the Conservative Party as a political alternative signified a qualitative change of opposition. Popular opposition sectors of the regime emancipated themselves from institutional party opposition and independent grassroots organizations spread, rallying the masses around issues of daily life throughout the 1970s.<sup>74</sup> The population now began to organize themselves in women's associations, peasant groups, labor syndicates, student unions, neighborhood committees, human rights organizations and Christian movements.

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<sup>73</sup> The reports of the number of dead range from the 21 officially recognized to the 300 claimed by the opposition (La Prensa 23.01.1967).

<sup>74</sup> The first popular organizations had appeared in the aftermath of the tyrannicide, when the Internal Resistance Front (FIR) was formed (Fonseca 1960). The FIR experience, however, had been short-lived.

Once organized, they voiced demands and applied pressure for change. For instance, women's associations campaigned for protection of youths against GN abuses. Later, they called for active resistance to the dictatorship (APMN 04.11.1969; AMPRONAC 13.12.1978; AMPRONAC 21.02.1979). Newly-formed neighborhood committees created informal networks to fight for improvements in living conditions (Borge 1983; Interview 31). Students helped to set up neighborhood committees and played an important role in their politicization (Nicaragua 1978; Interview 32). Persistent land conflicts led to the growth of the peasant movement; syndicates orchestrated strikes. The creation of the Council for Syndicate Unification (CUS) strengthened labor union struggles from 1970 onwards (La Prensa 17.12.1969; La Prensa 27.12.1969). Labor protest increased in the aftermath of the December 1972 earthquake when the number of weekly working hours was increased by decree, in violation of the Somocist labor code (CDT 1945). Additionally, concerns over human rights abuses began to galvanize popular opposition. Human rights groups and the Christian Movement criticized increasing government-instigated persecution and peasant massacres, and later called for structural change. "[I]n light of the objective conditions," the Christian Movement concluded, "revolution is the only way to bring about love for all." (MC nr. 1) The government's relationship with the church worsened due to denouncements such as these and priests became victims of persecution (La Prensa 20.01.1970; La Prensa 25.01.1970). Human rights concerns culminated in the formation of the strong United Popular Movement (MPU) in late 1978 (GS 7/8-1978b).

In addition to political exclusion and increasing persecution, Anastasio Somoza tightened the monopoly on economic opportunities in the hands of his family and a small elite. To Somoza, the 1972 earthquake that destroyed large parts of the capital Managua and killed thousands represented a new opportunity to increase his share of the national economy. Instead of improving the regime's image by rebuilding the destroyed capital, Somoza diverted international aid funds into family hands through "disloyal competition," using "state power and connections to control business and professional opportunities" (Goodwin 2001:187), especially in the construction sector (Black 1981; Walker 1981; Mariño 1982). Many industrial and commercial economic associations began to oppose Somoza as they saw their economic opportunities compromised (Esgueva Gómez 1999).<sup>75</sup> The concentration of wealth accelerated; by 1979 the Somoza family was present in almost every legal and illegal economic sector and had amassed a fortune estimated at USD 1 billion (Karmali 1979:20; Black 1981:36). The corruption-ridden handling of the catastrophe

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<sup>75</sup> For instance, the Superior Council of Private Initiative, the Industrial Chamber of Nicaragua, the National Chamber of Commerce, the Construction Chamber of Nicaragua, the Association of Cotton Farmers of Nicaragua, the Cooperative of Coffee Farmers of Nicaragua, the National Ranchers' Association, the Nicaraguan Organization of Publicity, the Bankers' Association of Nicaragua, the Farmer's Union of Nicaragua, the Popular Action Movement, the Revolutionary Movement of Christians, and the Revolutionary Marxist League formed and organized diverse social sectors and interests.

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offended all social sectors. Popular sectors were outraged because of the diversion of international aid funds; the entrepreneurial sector was angered by their exclusion from the profitable reconstruction business. Still, it seems it was Somoza's political intransigence rather than the unequal distribution of wealth that stimulated the emergence of armed resistance (Kruijt 2008).

Multi-sector opposition increased in the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake. The regime's overt disregard and disrespect for the people and the state, its amoral self-enrichment, and the ever hardening repression of anti-regime forces pushed even allied social sectors into the opposition camp. Moreover, Somoza used the disaster as a pretext to annul the agreement with Agüero that had left executive power in hands of a National Governmental Junta (JNG) composed of two Liberal Party members and the Conservative Agüero (Pacto KK 1971). The JNG intended to reform the constitution to allow Somoza to run for reelection in 1974. Meanwhile Somoza still had control of the GN and, thus, all real power. Somoza seized the opportunity presented by the disaster to bypass the executive power of the Junta. He reassumed direct political control as head of the National Emergency Committee (CNE) with extraordinary powers (La Estrella de Nicaragua 2007; Sandinismo info 2011a; Esgueva Gómez 1999). In response to the lack of institutional political channels to bring about change, a pluralist opposition body was established in late 1974: the Democratic Liberation Union (UDEL).<sup>76</sup> UDEL considered Somoza's presidential candidature for the 1974 elections unconstitutional, denounced the dictatorship as the central obstacle to Nicaragua's progress (Sacasa Guerrero 1975) and called for a boycott of the elections (Esgueva Gómez 1999; La Prensa 03.06.1974). UDEL was close to entrepreneurial sectors (Nicaragua 1978) and failed to attract grassroots support. Nonetheless, it put an end to Somoza's legal façade and reduced his political room for maneuver.

Protest increased and targeted an array of issues: state corruption and arbitrary policing of protest; the economic crisis and poor education; threats against journalists and the government's inability to improve the situation in general (La Prensa 04.11.1969). Many began to sympathize with armed struggle. The Somoza family's reclaiming of direct political control and the return to harsh repression following the relative reformism of the 1960s outraged the masses. Various sectors united in protest. Meanwhile the FSLN had achieved nationwide fame and profited from the burgeoning independent opposition to the regime (Interview 27). Favorable social circumstances had enabled the group to connect with the masses and to "accumulate forces in silence" in the early 1970s (Ortega Saavedra 2004). The FSLN had forged ties with grassroots organizations and increased its mobilization

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<sup>76</sup> UDEL was composed of the Conservative Party; the Liberal Constitutionalist Movement (MLC) that had split from the governing PLN which was under Somoza's control; the Independent Liberal Party; the Nicaraguan Social Christian Party; the Independent General Confederation of Labor; the Labor Union Federation of Nicaragua; and the Nicaraguan Socialist Party.

potential. It did not, however, assert direct control over grassroots groups to avoid provoking an intervention by the GN (Interview 27; 31; 32). Independent grassroots organizations offered a large network without overextending the insurgent group's organizational capacity or exposing it to persecution. High-profile armed propaganda, such as the FSLN hostage-taking of government officials and ambassadors during a party at the home of former Agriculture Minister Jose Maria Castillo in late 1974, demonstrated the vulnerability of the regime and earned sympathy for the insurgent group. Armed defiance of the regime was well-received in an atmosphere of increasing resistance to Somoza.

By severing its ties with the Conservative Party opposition that had collaborated with Somocism, the popular opposition avoided the political manipulation that had previously proved successful in dividing and appeasing political opponents. With no legal political platforms at their disposal, the popular masses found a base in semi-legal neighborhood organizations that campaigned for the improvement of basic services and living conditions (FSLN 04.05.1977; Borge 1983). These groups were outside the sphere of institutional politics and were therefore immune to the manipulation which took place there. Participation in protest increased. Occupations of churches, schools and universities were a frequent and popular means of struggle. The absence of a visible formal opposition hampered GN control. For instance, "Catacomb-Journalism" that consisted of reading out censored news at reunions, eluded the watchful eye of the press censor (Cardenal 2004). Grassroots networks, in short, provided an organizational framework for popular protest and collective action that was not immediately subjected to state repression. Tangible aims radicalized protest tactics.

Bereft of political means to contain the opposition, Somoza relied increasingly on the repressive power of the GN. Strict GN control of opposition activities and a harsh crackdown on extra-institutional opposition still hampered the building of a united opposition front but the increasing persecution also encouraged opponents of the regime to close ranks. Particularly the youth, who were suspected of supporting the FSLN and subjected to abuses ranging from arbitrary detention to torture and even assassination, began to sympathize with FSLN's armed struggle (Interview 27). Meanwhile, repression in the countryside was focused not only on opponents but also on expelling peasants from fertile soil. Massacres claimed thousands of peasant lives. Denouncements of these human rights abuses received international attention and criticism. Solidarity committees proclaiming sympathy with the popular struggle added internal political pressure (GS 3/4-1978b). However, harsh repression also hampered FSLN activities. Several high-ranking members were killed and repressive measures divided the FSLN geographically; it became more difficult for the insurgents to move freely and maintain contact amongst themselves. This fuelled internal differences and caused the organization to split into three factions: The rural Prolonged Popular War Tendency (GPP);

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the urban Proletarian Tendency (TP); and the urban and foreign-based Insurreccional or Third Tendency (TI).

By October 1977 the practice-oriented TI had launched a military offensive that would spark a deep political crisis and mark the onset of popular insurrection against the dictatorship. Twelve renowned Nicaraguans—known simply as the Group of Twelve—pledged their support for the offensive, called for unity and “active resistance” in the struggle against the dictatorship, and vowed to back FSLN participation in any future government (Los Doce 04.02.1978). The Twelve formed in exile, produced their first declaration at a meeting in Costa Rica, and became a leading voice of the revolution at the national and international level. The assassination in early 1978 of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, prominent critic of the regime and owner of *La Prensa* newspaper, was the catalyst for open and popular insurrection against the regime. A general strike paralyzed the country and a spontaneous popular uprising broke out in Monimbó, a popular and largely indigenous neighborhood of Masaya, just thirty kilometers from the capital, in February 1978. Only by massive military force, including indiscriminate aerial bombing of the population, could the GN quell the uprising (*La Prensa* 22.02.1978; *La Prensa* 28.02.1978; Cardenal 2004). Such open warfare against the whole population, however, strengthened the solidarity of the people and prepared the ground for future uprisings, such as the one in Matagalpa in August 1978 (*La Prensa* 30.08.1978). These popular rebellions demonstrated the power but also the limitations of collective action. Their local focus, as well as the rebels’ lack of arms and combat experience, prevented them from mounting stronger resistance against the concentrated superior military force of the regime.

Despite the increasing repression and the public defiance of the Group of Twelve, who openly returned to Nicaragua in August 1978 (*La Prensa* 06.07.1978), the opposition remained divided over the ultimate objective of the rebellions: revolution or reform. The radical opposition accused entrepreneurial and landowning sectors of pseudo opposition (Fonseca 1975). The radicals wanted to dismantle the GN and abolish Somocism (FSLN programa 1984, Los Doce 04.02.1978). Basic democracy and social justice were their central aims. Entrepreneurial and reformist sectors, by contrast, proclaimed support for a “Somocism without Somoza”, a reform of the system while retaining the central pillars of exclusion of the popular masses from politics. The entrepreneurs and reformists warned of the dangers of the FSLN’s socialist objectives. UDEL, for instance, categorically denied any opposition to the GN and emphasized the force’s professionalism, despite the GN’s frequent and blatant abuses of human rights (Sacasa Guerrero 1975). The reformist Broad Opposition Front (FAO), which had evolved from a unifying opposition group into a representative compromise-minded body, kept the door open to negotiation with the GN (*La Prensa* 02.06.1979).

Differences over the desired degree of change, however, prevented the unification of all social sectors in an organized front.

The FSLN began to coordinate the popular struggle through its grassroots network and launched a national insurrection in September 1978. The insurrection united all rebellious and popular forces and permitted the FSLN to position itself at the head of the struggle. Through indiscriminate violence, including the bombing of cities with conventional and incendiary bombs and genocidal mopping-up campaigns that left 10,000 dead, the GN managed to recapture rebellious cities (GS 7/8-1978a; Ortega Saavedra 2004; La Prensa 18.05.1979a). Despite such setbacks, grassroots organizations proved themselves capable of generating and coordinating mass participation in uprisings and showed the way to revolution.

In the face of Somoza's increasingly genocidal campaign, the most persistent differences faded away by early 1979. The three factions of the FSLN reunited and even negotiation-oriented sectors supported the revolutionary struggle (FSLN 07.03.1979). The basic aim of ousting Somoza united large social strata including former supporters of the regime. The popular mobilization dominated events and prevented negotiation-oriented sectors from reaching compromise. Additionally, the regime became politically isolated and lost international allies. The dictator, however, tried to maintain power at any cost and escalated violence to a maximum, causing thousands of mainly civilian deaths in the last few months of his regime. The advance of the rebels and the desertion of GN officers eroded Somoza's power base and he fled the country on July 17, 1979. Two days later rebellious forces at last took control of Managua and ended four decades of family dictatorship. Eighteen months of urban insurrection and popular struggle under FSLN coordination finished what rural guerrilla warfare had begun 17 years earlier.

### **The Processes of Political Violence in Nicaragua**

The escalation of political violence in Nicaragua was closely related to the intransigency of the regime which impeded any civil or political opposition, especially after Anastasio Somoza Debayle had taken power in 1967. Over time, opposition activities radicalized and armed struggle became more attractive as no other meaningful way of opposing the government existed. The regime responded with indiscriminate repression to maintain control and Somoza's GN became the main source of violence. Open civil war pushed violence to extremes. Violence only de-escalated after the military defeat of the Somoza regime.

### **The Sandinista National Liberation Front**

Nearly two decades of armed struggle awaited the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) when it was forged from several small radical opposition groups and commenced its struggle for a social revolution. Founded in the early 1960s, the FSLN saw slow development during the years of government reformism. The FSLN remained almost unknown until the late 1960s. Throughout its existence it remained a small vanguard organization with only a few hundred organized cadres. Nonetheless, the organization managed to stage several high-profile coups against the regime and, despite heavy losses, to inspire, coordinate, and lead the popular insurrections of 1978 and 1979.

The FSLN's development was closely linked to the growing polarization of society. However, it took the mainly student-based FSLN almost a decade to align with the popular masses in the early 1970s through grassroots organizations. Its presence at the grassroots level enabled the FSLN to propagate its aims and to create an informal network for massive mobilization without overextending its organizational capacity. The coordination of grassroots organizations was the FSLN's key to revolution.

Organizational growth and the development of insurrectional capacities attracted repression and caused internal tension that culminated in the splitting up of the guerrilla organization. Astonishingly, this situation worked to the advantage of the insurgent group. The FSLN demonstrated its revolutionary capacity by organizing and coordinating popular insurrections and eventually reunited.

Popular support and cross-sector alliances were central to the creation of a broad national and international opposition front. The group's inclusive ideological objective—democracy—allowed the FSLN to gather even entrepreneurial support. The combination of popular armed struggle, civic political pressure and international diplomacy was decisive in the overthrow of the dictatorship.

#### **Foundation and Ideology of the FSLN**

In the aftermath of the 1956 tyrannicide, societal tensions increased and an avalanche of short-lived armed incursions shook Nicaragua. The FSLN came into being with the aim of uniting radical opposition forces into a coherent revolutionary organization. Radical youth and student groups, such as the Democratic Nicaraguan Youth (JDN), the Revolutionary Nicaraguan Youth (JRN), the Patriotic Nicaraguan Youth (JPN) and the Revolutionary Student Federation (FER), actively opposed the dictatorship from the late 1950s onwards.

The JRN and JPN, however, were formed outside Nicaragua and lacked domestic support. The student movement and in particular the Revolutionary Student Federation (FER) became the driving force of social protest after student mobilizations had been violently suppressed in 1959 (La Prensa 25.07.1959a). Many early FSLN members, such as Carlos Fonseca Amador, who had been chief editor of the University Center of the National University's (CUUN) publication board (Manfut 2010) before he became a founding member of FSLN and later its General Secretary (1968), had become militant when they were in student or youth organizations. By 1961, Fonseca and many of the later FSLN founders formed the Movement New Nicaragua (MNN) (OSN 07.05.1962), which became the National Liberation Front (FLN) in early 1962. Fonseca's proposal to include Sandinista in the name was discussed and finally accepted. Opponents of the proposal criticized Sandino's lack of commitment to Marxism and the fact that his fight against foreign occupation had not developed into a struggle against imperialism as such (Sandinismoinfo 2011b). In the course of 1962 to 1963, the FLN became known as the FSLN.

The first sign of the FSLN's existence appeared in late 1962 when the National Security Office (OSN) captured a red and black flag with FSLN initials in Leon (Manfut 2010). The FSLN's baptism of fire, however, occurred when it organized a guerrilla incursion in the northern region of Bocay and Coco River between July and October 1963. According to a popular account, the group was founded at a meeting between Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga and Tomas Borge in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa on July 19, 1961, exactly 18 years to the day before the triumph of the revolution. However, this is likely to be an apocryphal account. No written evidence of it exists and several members close to the founding group denied such an event ever took place (Manfut 2010; Sanchez 2010).

The early guerrilla movement was mainly student-based and was inspired by the Cuban revolution, which had demonstrated the feasibility of revolutions in the US's backyard. The student movement would remain the main support base of the FSLN until the 1970s (Interview 27; 32; 33). Only a handful of labor and peasant activists, such as Jose Benito Escobar and German Pomares, participated. The Cuban revolution had proven that revolutionary change was possible in Latin America and this had had a significant impact on the Nicaraguan youth that was looking for alternative paths to change (Guevara López 2007). Militancy in earlier youth organizations had taught young activists secrecy and a basic knowledge of conspiracy. Some founding members even had experience in armed struggle. Fonseca, for instance, had been part of the "Rigoberto López Pérez" guerrilla column, which was formed in 1959 in El Chaparral, Honduras and was attacked even before reaching the border. Several guerrillas were killed in the incident and Fonseca was seriously wounded (Sandinovive 2011).

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The FSLN had a broad ideology that included Sandinism, Marxism and popular democracy and aimed at uniting diverse social sectors. The group presented its program first and foremost as a legacy of Sandino's national liberation struggle which, in the FSLN's eyes, represented anti-imperialism, patriotism and nationalism (FSLN Programa 1984). Sandinism focused the FSLN's revolutionary project on Nicaragua and brought nationalism to the fore (Tirado López 1980), making the project attractive to large social sectors (Interview 30). Sandinism also included internationalism and Marxism in its ideology. Marxism, however, was not introduced in a dogmatic manner but was adapted to the national reality (Interview 30; 32); its ideological influence seems to have been limited to the often repeated long-term objective of building a "socialist system without exploitation and misery." (FSLN Programa 1984) The "Sandinist Front (...) considered that the Nicaraguans have to fight first of all for democratization." (CP 1978:3) To the FSLN, a "popular democracy (not a bourgeois)" was an "integral part of the struggle for socialism." (FSLN 04.05.1977:32) The organization's aim of systemic change transcended mere opposition to the dictator. This established the FSLN as a coherent revolutionary organization that could go further than the frequent coup attempts of the 1950s.

The FSLN saw armed struggle as the central and necessary means to bring about change. However, Carlos Fonseca believed not only in the duty of armed action but also in the need to organize social support (Fonseca 1964). Nonetheless, strategy discussions in 1969 gave way to the formulation of the FSLN's "historical program" (FSLN 04.05.1977) that introduced the concept of Prolonged Popular Warfare (GPP) (Zimmermann 2004; FLSN Programa 1984). This strategy was meant to garner the support of urban and rural masses in the struggle against the regime and to create a popular government (FSLN Programa 1984). The FSLN perceived itself as a "political-military vanguard organization" that pursued political power through a "frontal struggle" against the regime (FSLN Programa 1984) and never as a party (Tirado López 1980; Interview 30). As an armed vanguard organization, the FSLN aspired to mobilize social participation in its struggle and it showed ideological pragmatism when it emphasized its "revolutionary-popular" (Fonseca 1964:7) aim over any sectarian dogmatic ideology. The FSLN quickly rallied radical sectors around its project of armed struggle (Fonseca 1969) and by the early 1970s it could even count on widespread social sympathy. However, it was not its moderate organizational growth but its capacity to coordinate the popular struggle in 1978 and 1979 that enabled the organization to lead the popular revolution.

On a personal level, a sense for social justice and anger over political exclusion and ever increasing state repression were the motives for armed struggle. Last hopes in political opposition had perished with the Kupia-Kumi pact in 1971 and many who had hoped to find a political alternative in the Conservative Party joined the FSLN (Interview 30). The spread of

grassroots organizations in the early 1970s facilitated FSLN recruitment in the neighborhoods through direct personal relations. New militants were often recruited by family members and friends (Interview 27; 28; 31). “We Sandinistas,” in the words of a militant “[were] not radical for its own sake but because we [were] tired of [state] abuses.” (FSLN 10.04.1978:2)

The radicalized student movement was the main support and recruitment base of the FSLN until the mid-1970s. Revolutionary voluntarism could be found especially in this sector. Student activists were often approached and recruited by FSLN members (Interview 29; 34). Increasing sympathy of the Christian Movement (MC) with revolutionary armed struggle, eventually linked large social sectors to the armed struggle and, thus, to the FSLN. The predominant Christianity almost turned the FSLN into a Christian organization (Interview 30). Liberation theology and a profound sense of social justice inspired many Christians to join the armed struggle. It was not ideology but a pressing desire to change the socio-political situation that motivated most militants. Most received their political indoctrination in the ranks of the FSLN. Particularly those who became militants from 1978 onwards had responded to the escalation of the social conflict and the widespread desire to oust Somoza. The massive inflow of new militants from youth sectors lowered the average age of fighters to 13-25 years old (Interview 27).

Extreme secrecy and strong compartmentalization guaranteed the FSLN’s survival. The organization grew in independent cells and militants often kept their membership secret, even from their own family, to avoid the vengeance of the GN. The 1978 insurrections ended the secrecy and brought the militancy to light (Interview 29; 31).

In short, the FSLN formed out of the agitated radical opposition of the late 1950s and early 1960s and went on to unite armed opposition. It transcended mere opposition to the dictator by pursuing a systemic change and, thereby, became a coherent revolutionary organization. Its inclusion of Sandinism created an original national revolutionary project that attracted broad support. However, it was not ideology but political exclusion and social injustice that attracted popular support.

### **Early Obstacles and Emergence at the National Level**

Harsh repression, organizational weakness and low support for armed struggle were only a few problems the FSLN faced when it commenced its armed struggle. To organize support and to gain a foothold within Nicaragua was the main challenge for the vanguard organization. Only from 1967 onwards did the vanguard organization emerge at a national level and progressively overcome its organizational weakness. An increasing societal

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readiness for armed struggle was essential for the FSLN to establish a foothold among the masses and to develop its revolutionary capacity.

During its first years of existence, the small FSLN struggled to propagate its existence and to position itself as an opposition alternative at the national level. Their tiny numbers, however, impeded the development of efficient political work. Their first guerrilla operation in Bocay and River Coco was quickly put down. Media attention for the guerrilla foco was limited, so the political objective did not become well known (La Noticia 31.08.1963). The FLSN had hoped the assault would inspire a major insurrection but their quick defeat demonstrated the need to develop national support networks (Borge 1983). Armed activism simply did not mobilize the masses mechanically and the FSLN had to recognize that the Cuban experience of a successful guerrilla foco could not be copied.

Furthermore, no strong social protest movement was in sight with which to align and from which to draw support. The guerrillas faced the arduous task of organizing social protest itself (Ortega Saavedra 2010). Rallying support required major efforts that the small vanguard organization hardly was able to carry out. The FSLN was aware of this need for active social support and returned to preoperational levels to form a support base and make revolution feasible.

Their failed initial guerrilla attempt had coincided with a decrease of anti-Somoza protest under the puppet presidency of René Schick (Fonseca 1969). The tentative reforms and positive economic prospects of the first half of the 1960s eased social protest and hampered the development of the FSLN (Núñez Soto 1980; Walker 1981). However, the reformist period slightly improved tolerance for legal opposition, allowing the FSLN to engage in semi-legal political work. Fonseca, for instance, used his 1964 trial as a political platform to criticize the government (Fonseca 1964). Unlike Fidel Castro, however, Fonseca was not a charismatic leader (Interview 28) and failed to attract mass support. Legal political work, furthermore, compromised the FSLN's armed activities. The small organization lacked the human resources to develop armed actions and legal work simultaneously; armed propaganda was temporarily suspended.

Political work in name of the FSLN, however, was met with merciless repression and the FSLN's weakness also put clear limits on its semi-legal political work. This hampered the organization's growth. Its student background, however, permitted the FSLN to strengthen relations with the student sector and to develop semi-legal activities through student proxy organizations such as the FER (Interview 27). Relations with the peasant sector were also improved (Interview 27; 30), but for the small number of FSLN militants it was almost impossible to develop a major support network.

The situation changed significantly in the late 1960s when the FSLN managed to manifest itself at the national level in a situation of revived social protest. For the first time, the

FSLN was able to develop a guerrilla foco in Pancasan acting entirely from inside the country and this made guerrilla “invasions” from neighboring states superfluous. Previous grassroots campaigning had won the support of peasant leaders for the guerrilla foco. The FSLN, however, discovered that this support was of little help to mobile guerrilla columns as most peasants were reluctant to fight far away from home (Zimmerman 2004). The GN put down the foco in the latter half of 1967 but the experience had demonstrated that support had to be organized locally around tangible questions of local importance. Furthermore, the FSLN’s rural guerrilla struggle had achieved national publicity (La Prensa 23.08.1967; La Prensa 12.11.1967; Borge 1963; Interview 27). The news of armed struggle was well received among the popular masses. Memory was fresh of the harsh crackdown on popular protest against Anastasio Somoza Debayle’s presidential candidacy and the fraudulent elections at the beginning of that year. The FSLN had become known and received growing support especially from students and combative peasant sectors (Interview 28). In short, Pancasan had outlined the path to follow for organizing grassroots support for the revolutionary struggle.

However, it was the March 1971 Kupia-Kumi pact that ended hopes of political opposition and increased support for the FSLN. Many Conservative Party supporters turned their backs on the party and on all political opposition; many joined the FSLN (Interview 30). The FSLN found itself able to recruit new cadres in the cities as well as the countryside. The FSLN was the main winner of the disillusionment with political opposition to the dictatorship and became a valid alternative to unfruitful legal party opposition. Armed struggle became widely accepted as a necessary means for political change.

To summarize, numerical and organizational weaknesses impeded the early FSLN’s efforts to make its existence known and to emerge at a national level. Especially the absence of a strong and united social protest movement hampered the growth of the guerrilla group as they could neither align with nor draw support from an existing movement. Armed propaganda proved inadequate to mobilize masses without any previous organization. The FSLN began to organize support among popular sectors and benefited from the previous organization of local support in Pancasan. The insurgent group had found the basic recipe for insurrectional struggle.

### **The Silent Accumulation of Forces and Problems of Growth**

In the late 1960s social sympathy for armed struggle increased but the FSLN suffered under close National Guard control. To avoid immediate GN intervention, the guerrillas introduced a

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phase of “accumulation of forces in silence”. Offensive guerrilla struggle was halted and the group focused on developing national social support networks. The successful creation of grassroots networks provided the FSLN with the structural capacity to lead and coordinate popular insurrections. This positioned the guerrillas at the doorstep of revolution in late 1974. The secret accumulation of forces was a phase of “non-violent escalation.” (Kalyvas 2010; Chenoy 2010) The FSLN decreased offensive violence in this preparatory phase but only to achieve the capacity to escalate its insurgency campaign later on. However, the group’s improved position also caused internal differences over the way to advance the revolution and attracted GN repression, causing the FSLN to split. This seemingly fatal blow, however, deepened the organization’s insurrectional capacity when the different tendencies realigned in practice in 1978. At the same time, excessive repression and general discontent with the dictatorship created an amenable social environment for FSLN activities.

Based on the lessons of Pancasan, especially the positive effects of previous grassroots organization, the FSLN decided to “accumulate forces in silence” before stepping up its campaign (Zimmermann 2004). The guerrillas aimed at expanding its territorial and social presence by linking to larger social sectors and developing grassroots networks. The FSLN aimed especially at gaining a foothold in the urban environment, organizing neighborhoods and forming urban militant units (Wheelock 1975; Borge 1983). In this period, the FSLN emphasized organizing neighborhoods through semi-legal grassroots organizations and halted its offensive campaign. However, the organization also sent new cadres to the rural guerrilla columns. Especially the student sector and the Christian Movement provided a semi-legal façade for social work in neighborhoods (Interview 28; Arce 2010). Activists attended to neglected state responsibilities, organized sports and cultural events, provided medical attention and helped neighborhoods to self-organize (Interview 32). Increasing protest over the bad handling of the 1972 earthquake offered even more room for FSLN influence. The militants gained confidence and could move about freely in popular neighborhoods (Arce 2010). In addition, the FSLN tried to recruit outstanding neighborhood activists (Interview 28; 30). Visible community work and the presence of FSLN militants earned the guerrillas popular support.

The FSLN did not, however, directly control intermediate neighborhood organizations. The guerrillas formed and supported neighborhood associations through independent proxy organizations and they also established informal links to existing popular associations and labor unions (FSLN 1971). “These [were] the forms the organization acquired, and of course the Sandinist Front [developed] its own internal structure of a cellular nature.” (Bye 1979) Influencing independent popular organizations was more advantageous to the FSLN than directly controlling them. It offered an organizational frame for mass mobilization without requiring the group to overextend its organizational infrastructure. This was essential to avoid

immediate GN repression. Grassroots association compartmentalized organization but, nonetheless, increased organized opposition. Organizing the masses provided the FSLN “with its own popular mass [that was] determined to act within the lines of (...) the organization,” responding to orders and pursuing similar objectives (FSLN 1971:12). Mass recruitment became superfluous. Linking to grassroots organizations thus allowed the FSLN to overcome the urban guerrilla paradox (Le Blanc forthcoming) as the conflicting requirements of large-scale organization and secrecy could be bridged. Furthermore, independent organization permitted local populations to formulate specific local claims that mobilized active mass participation in armed struggle. The Colombian M-19 tried to follow the FSLN’s example of setting up such a network to unite independent grassroots organizations and to establish a framework for mass participation in armed struggle. However, the Colombian group was less successful at doing so than the Sandinistas.

The FSLN became a central social movement organization (Zald & Ash 1966; Interview 32) and even a key political player (FSLN 08.10.1976). The group had recognized that it was impossible to

make the masses insurrect without creating adequate clandestine organizational structures that propagate, discuss, appreciate and prepare (...) the different means (...) of struggle. (Ortega Saavedra 1978:23)

The accumulation of political, ideological, organizational, logistical and military forces permitted the FSLN to take a qualitative step towards revolution (FSLN 04.05.1977). At the end of the phases of accumulation of forces in silence, the group had achieved the structural capacity for coordinating an insurrection.

When the FSLN resumed offensive action in late 1974, the organization received widespread sympathy from grassroots organizations. For instance, the masses applauded the humiliation of Somoza when an FSLN commando seized the house of former agriculture minister Jose Maria Castillo in December 1974, took several ministers and relatives of Somoza hostage, and forced Somoza to free political prisoners and read out a proclamation on the radio (La Prensa 31.12.1974). While the FSLN now had a strengthened organization, it also faced internal problems. While accumulating forces, the organization had simultaneously differentiated internally. The development of a large urban network had relocated the guerrilla movement’s center of gravity from countryside to city environments and threw the GPP rural guerrilla strategy into doubt. Upon the killing in September 1973 of Oscar Turcios and Ricardo Morales, who had overseen development of the urban networks, the generationally renewed urban sectors pressed for more autonomy from the traditional leadership that largely resided abroad (Ortega Saavedra 2004). The FSLN’s urban sector

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wanted to liberate itself from its role as rearguard and supply base for the rural guerrilla struggle and to organize the urban working class independently (Wheelock 1975). Tensions led to the expulsion of the principal leaders of the so-called Proletarian Tendency (TP)—Jaime Wheelock, Roberto Huembes and Luis Carrion—from the FSLN in late 1975, on the initiative of Tomas Borge, member of the National Directorate and representative of the GPP (Zimmermann 2004). Differences became more extreme and hampered the FSLN's organizational abilities as well as its military capacity (Zimmermann 2004). As a general rule, rural and urban environments required different organizational and military capacities and led to tactical differences (Borge 1983; Ortega Saavedra 2004). At the same time, tougher GN repression hampered contact.

Consequently, by 1975 a Proletarian Tendency (TP) split off from the traditional GPP and by end of 1976 an Insurreccional Tendency (TI) or Third Tendency formed. The main disputes developed over the focus on rural guerrilla struggle demanded by the GPP, the TP's insistence on legal political work and labor organization, and the TI's emphasis on the need for armed practice to inspire popular insurrections.

Unlike the TP, the Maoist GPP (Garcia Marquéz 1979) considered building up a political party of secondary importance (FSLN 08.10.1976). The GPP also rejected the primacy of practice and the urban focus upheld by the TI.

The highly ideological TP, however, criticized the GPP's failure to organize the proletariat (FSLN Oct. 1975). It also rejected the TI's "adventurism" over fears of provoking increased repression (TP comunicado Oct. 1977). The TP and GPP agreed on the need for more organizational preparation. The seizure of Castillo's house, for instance, demonstrated to many that the FSLN still lacked the capacity to transform social sympathy into active participation in armed struggle. The time seemed premature for an insurreccional approach.

The Insurreccional Tendency (TI) saw things differently. It advocated armed propaganda and offensive actions as a means of triggering a political crisis and a popular insurrection. This, they reasoned, would shorten the struggle (Ortega Saavedra 2004; Interview 28; FSLN 1977/1978; FSLN 04.05.1977). The TI wanted to escalate the confrontation and retake the initiative after harsh GN repression had inflicted important losses on the FSLN and almost destroyed the organization (Interview 28). High-ranking militants and members of the National Directorate such as Tomas Borge had been captured. Others had been killed, such as Fonseca and Eduardo Contreras, the hero of the assault on Castillo's house (Manfut 2010). The TI saw GPP's rural focus as obsolete and criticized the TP's interpretation of the conflict as a class struggle (FSLN 1977/1978). To the TI, the conflict had developed between Somoza and the Nicaraguan people and not between social classes. Consequently a multi-class alliance against the dictator had to be built and the faction looked for alliances with large social sectors.

In the short run, the split weakened the FSLN and the limited contact between the tendencies hampered the coordination of actions. Energy was wasted when cells of different tendencies planned attacks on the same targets (Interview 27). Furthermore, every tendency developed its own militant and support network. The TP formed Revolutionary Commandos of the People (CRP) and Popular Brigades; the GPP developed Combat Units and Popular Action Committees (CAP); and the TI created Tactical Combat Units and Militias (Interview 27; 32). Yet in the long run, the independent multiplication of insurgent cells and the diversified grassroots structure favored FSLN. The tendencies developed independently, often duplicating but also complementing the organizational structure. The GPP, for instance, deepened its relationship with peasant sectors; the TP emphasized the organization of the urban working class; and the TI fostered international and multi-class relations and built up properly trained and equipped assault commandos (Interview 27; 28). From the moment the FSLN factions joined forces in practice again in September 1978, the insurgency had a significantly strengthened organization at its disposal.

Earlier calls for restoring unity had failed (FSLN 08.10.1976; Fonseca 1975). Moreover, the rifts that were largely limited to disputes within the leadership (Interview 27; 30) threatened to escalate when the TI launched its offensive in October 1977. The TP in particular condemned this as “adventurism” (TP comunicado Oct. 1977) and some of its verbal attacks were even reproduced by the Somocist press (Cardenal 2004; La Prensa 04.10.1977). The TI’s claim to represent the whole organization provoked particular criticism (TP comunicado Oct. 1977). However, spontaneous rank-and-file and grassroots support for the offensive showed that the dispute was limited to the leadership. Apparently, the TP leadership feared being marginalized in the insurrectional process that attracted grassroots support. The shared strategic end aim, the unity among the rank and file, and the spontaneous and growing support for armed attacks finally persuaded the GPP and TP to support the insurrection. Grassroots pressure effectively reunited the tendencies from September 1978 onwards when the successful national insurrection ended disputes over methods (FSLN Oct. 1978). A decision to reunite was already taken by the year’s end (GS 1/2-1979a), but a formal reunion of the factions under a collective leadership<sup>77</sup> did not take effect until March 9, 1979.

To summarize, the absence of a coherent social protest movement meant the FSLN had to organize social protest itself. Growing opposition to Somoza worked in the insurgent group’s favor and helped the organization to link up with the masses from 1967 onwards. Connecting to grassroots organizations during the accumulation of forces in silence provided the FSLN with an organizational framework for mass mobilization without overextending and

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<sup>77</sup> The collective leadership was composed of three commanders of each tendency.

exposing its organizational infrastructure. Accumulating forces turned the FSLN into a central social movement organization and provided it with the structural capacity for leading popular insurrections. However, the group's improved position also generated problems. Especially its asymmetrical growth, which shifted the guerrilla movement's center of gravity to the urban environment, caused problems. Grassroots unity and the succession of events eventually led to a de facto reunification of the factions and the emergence of a stronger guerrilla organization.

### **Primacy of Practice, Popular Insurrections and Revolution**

Inspired by the successful armed propaganda of 1974, and hoping to prove its insurrectional thesis in practice, the TI launched a military and political offensive against the dictatorship in October 1977. The crimes committed by the regime were the main trigger for mass participation in armed struggle. The assassination of opposition leader Pedro Joaquin Chamorro sparked mass protests; spontaneous popular insurrections shook the state to its foundations. The FSLN demonstrated its insurrectional capacity when it began to coordinate grassroots rebellions. Simultaneously, multi-class civic-political opposition and international diplomacy isolated Somoza and put him on the defensive. Political maneuvers prevented last-minute political agreements and a military intervention. Following a bloody civil war, the popular forces under FSLN coordination finally triumphed over the Somoza regime on July 19, 1979.

When the TI began to attack GN garrisons in October 1977, the conflict reached a new level, although a victory over the Somoza regime was still far away. The offensive was discovered prematurely and the EEBI<sup>78</sup> elite troops quickly came to the defense of garrisons under attack, limiting the offensive's direct military achievements (Interview 32). The GN, however, overestimated the FSLN's capacities and concentrated its forces, leaving remote areas to guerrilla control, especially in the northern region. At a military level, the FSLN demonstrated its offensive capacity and the GN's vulnerability, promoting a radicalization of protest.

At the political level, the attacks unleashed a major crisis, and were thus a great political success for the FSLN. The masses applauded the armed actions against the dictatorship and broad social sectors called for a national dialogue and pressed for profound changes (La Prensa 24.10.1977a). The Group of Twelve refused to negotiate with Somoza

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<sup>78</sup> Basic Infantry Training School. The formation of the EEBI was an attempt to modernize the GN. The freshly trained elite troops of the EEBI constituted the backbone of the regime during the insurrection and prolonged the survival of the regime (Pérez 2007).

because the representative of the dynasty simply [had] nothing to offer in a civic conversation that [aimed] at restoring democracy in [the] republic. (La Prensa 24.10.1977b)

The Group advocated support for the struggle against the dictator (La Prensa 21.10.1977; Los Doce 04.02.1978). Somoza's political intransigency prevented moderate change, favoring the FSLN's position. The decided action of a tiny group of was enough to challenge the dictatorship in a situation of social polarization.

At the national level, the success of the offensive was inherently linked to the social support it could gather. However, the October offensive had not triggered popular insurrections immediately and spontaneous popular participation remained limited in its extent (TP comunicado Oct. 1977). It was not until the assassination of Chamorro that popular protest spread. The assassination also promoted opposition unity, as elite sectors were concerned over the extension of repression to the oligarchy (Interview 32). In an immediate response to the murder, a spontaneous joint protest erupted and a two-week general strike supported by entrepreneurial sectors broke out. Differences within the opposition, however, permitted Somoza once more to divide and rule. He ended the strike by coming to an agreement with the entrepreneurial sectors (GS 2-1978a; GS 3/4-1978a). Nonetheless, the popular masses experienced the power of collective action and shed their fear of confronting the GN (Interview 27). Armed voluntarism allayed fears of confronting the GN but state abuses played a bigger role in mobilizing mass support for armed struggle than armed propaganda. The fuse for further popular uprisings had been lit.

Armed propaganda, popular demonstrations and strikes, and the return of the Group of Twelve to Nicaragua (La Prensa 06.07.1978) all signified open defiance of the regime. Every action against the dictatorship strengthened the people's confidence in their own power and paved the way for new protest and rebellion. Ongoing attacks on garrisons and high-profile armed propaganda such as the FSLN's seizure of the National Palace in August 1978 (La Prensa 24.08.1978) demonstrated the guerrilla group's capacity to maintain a prolonged offensive. They also showed how vulnerable the regime was, as Somoza had to cede to the commando's demands and free political prisoners. Thousands lined the streets of Managua and expressed their sympathy for the commando on its way to the airport (La Prensa 24.08.1978). Mass expressions of support and the spontaneous uprisings of Monimbó and Matagalpa demonstrated to the FSLN the popular disposition to engage in armed struggle. The organization launched a first national insurrection in September 1978.

The FSLN had learned lessons from local rebellions. To avoid repeating the same mistakes, they launched a coordinated insurrection in Leon, Chinandega, Esteli, Masaya and

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parts of Managua on September 9, 1978. The insurrection stretched the GN's capacities beyond their limit and put the FSLN in control of territory and cities (FSLN PG 10.09.1978a; FSLN PG 10.09.1978b; DR-FSLN Oct. 1978). The insurgent group found it could test and demonstrate the functioning of its organizational framework to coordinate popular insurrections. Earlier organization of the masses around grassroots associations, FSLN cells and popular militias now enabled the insurgents to mobilize popular masses and to incorporate them into the struggle in an orderly manner. As one protestor put it, "[the] Sandinistas [were] already here, and they [were] our children and the other boys of the neighborhood." (Cardenal 2004:123) Political militants organized the rebels, making the uprisings more sustainable (La Prensa 30.08.1978). The popular masses participated actively in confrontations, built barricades and supplied the fighters. The grassroots network, in short, actively engaged popular sectors in the struggle. Or to use the words of a former participant in the insurrection,

[some] of us thought that the Sandinista Front would appear in columns (...) Only after [the insurrection] did we realize that we were the Sandinista Front; that they would guide us, but it was us at their side who had to fight. (Cardenal 2004:82)

The participation of youngsters in particular persuaded entire families to actively support their children and the "boys" of the neighborhood in the struggle. Furthermore, the rural guerrilla columns that had been relieved by urban insurgent attacks entered the northern cities and supported the uprisings. The people identified with the FSLN after fighting side by side with the guerrillas (GS 1/2-1979c) turning the Sandinistas into the main social movement organization of the moment. The framework of the grassroots organizations, in short, integrated masses into the struggle in a controlled manner and permitted the FSLN to take the lead. Although the insurrection did not end the regime, the FSLN had begun to master the "art" of "armed insurrection [that] is a special type of political struggle" (Ortega Saavedra 1978:10) and "maintained a constant and uninterrupted offensive." (Ortega Saavedra 1978:7)

The lack of sufficient (heavy) arms was a central problem at this stage of the struggle. The rudimentary, light weaponry of the popular masses and even of FSLN militants hampered seizures of local garrisons and made it difficult to defend cities against the reprisals of the GN with its superior arsenal and its use of indiscriminate force. The infamous EEBI elite troops led by the dictator's son, Anastasio Somoza Portocarrera, posed an especially formidable threat. Indiscriminate aerial bombardments of neighborhoods—even with white phosphor (Garcia Marquéz 1979)—were used to recapture the cities, killing as many as 10,000 people (Ortega Saavedra 2004; DR-FSLN Oct. 1978). The FSLN was forced to retreat into the mountains, but the rebellions had demonstrated the power of popular uprisings.

The national insurrection had brought the guerrilla struggle to the urban centers and had gained popular support (FSLN 1977/1978; Interview 28). The FSLN experienced a massive influx of young fighters who preferred to retreat to the mountains with the guerrillas rather than await GN mopping up operations that bore all the hallmarks of retribution campaigns against the population (GS 1/2-1979b; GS 1/2-1979c). Mass abuses by the state made fighting a matter of self-defense and survival; the vast majority of the people were thus dragged into the conflict (Interview 27; 28; 30; 31). Mass armed struggle had brought military victory within reach but the FSLN remained a small group and went on coordinating the popular masses. By the end of the revolutionary struggle, the FSLN had grown from 250-400 organized militants (Interview 31) to 2,500 (Interview 32). However, it was the group's ability to coordinate and organize grass-root forces in the struggle and not its numerical strength that gave a leading role to FSLN. By coordinating grassroots forces in the struggle, by providing political and military leadership, by organizing attacks, defense and logistics, the FSLN multiplied its force without overextending its organizational capacity. Thousands of highly-motivated fighters joined the struggle and increased the FSLN's force.

At a civic-political level, popular participation and multi-class alliances with all opposition sectors were decisive in isolating Somoza and, thus, in limiting the dictator's political space. The practice-oriented TI recognized the need to build a broad multi-class opposition front and aligned with the Group of Twelve (Interview 28; 31). The support of the select group legitimized the FSLN and popularized the guerrilla movement. The alliance with the "Twelve" marked the guerrillas' arrival on the national and international political scene, as it made the FSLN socially acceptable even for entrepreneurial and elite sectors. Furthermore, this alliance provided the basis for good international relations with the guerrillas. The FSLN advanced to the center of national politics (FSLN 1977/1978).

However, the FSLN also sought political emancipation in order to build their own alternative support movements. The group's grassroots network offered it informal popular support. The United Popular Movement (MPU), which emerged out of human rights movements, became a central political representation of the FSLN's objectives (GS 7/8-1978b; GS 3/4-1979a). In this way, the guerrilla obtained a semi-legal political arm and an autonomous support movement in contrast to the FAO, which increasingly positioned itself on the negotiation-oriented side of the opposition spectrum. Good relations with the Twelve persisted, but the FSLN now had become an independent and crucial political player.

The establishment of the National Patriotic Front (FPN) in February 1979 underlined the FSLN's quest for political independence even more emphatically. The FPN competed with the FAO to represent the opposition and aimed at "elevating the mobilization capacity of the popular masses (...) [that] will demolish the Somocist dictatorship." (La Prensa 02.02.1979) The FSLN's strong informal grassroots support made the guerrillas an unavoidable political

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partner for any post-revolutionary government. Strong grassroots support for structural changes forced negotiation-oriented sectors to move toward more radical stances. Negotiation-oriented sectors had been pursuing a dialogue with Somoza since the October 1977 offensive (La Prensa 19.10.1977; La Prensa 21.10.1977; La Prensa 24.10.1977a) and had hoped that an international mediation committee would find a solution to the conflict after the September 1978 insurrection (La Prensa 09.10.1978). The national council of the FAO even made far-reaching concessions to the dictator to foster a political solution that would prevent a revolution (La Prensa 13.01.1979, La Prensa 19.08.1979). Since the September 1978 insurrection, however, the mobilized masses were the key power in the state and were assembled around the revolutionary position of the Twelve and the FSLN. The Patriotic National Front (FPN) was a new umbrella organization that united popular opposition groups, demonstrating the grassroots pressure for revolution (La Prensa 02.02.1979). Reformist sectors lost backing and radicalized their position to avoid being completely marginalized. The National Direction of the FAO was not in favor of active opposition but was dragged into the fray as all popular organizations called for a national strike at the beginning of the final offensive (La Prensa 04.06.1979). The convergence of popular forces around the FSLN, in short, robbed compromise-minded sectors of their effectiveness and prevented the introduction of Somocism without Somoza.

International diplomacy, mainly conducted via the Twelve, was equally important in strengthening the FSLN's forces and isolating the Somoza regime. Propaganda initiatives and denunciations of human rights abuses enabled the FSLN to isolate the dictator and to obtain international diplomatic and financial support, both from neighboring states and from civil solidarity and human rights organizations worldwide. Party donations and worldwide solidarity committees provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for the revolution (GS 3/4-1978b). Some solidarity committees even became stable Nicaraguan representations after the revolution. The French solidarity committee became the Nicaraguan embassy, for instance (Cardenal 2004). Solidarity committees, furthermore, denounced the regime's mass human rights abuses and helped to isolate the dictatorship internationally (La Prensa 05.06.1979a). The Twelve also successfully denounced US interventionist attempts and the OAS rejected all external interference in the Nicaraguan conflict (La Prensa 05.06.1979b; La Prensa 05.06.1979c). This strongly favored FSLN forces over the GN. Visible mass human rights abuses and, finally, television footage of the GN assassination of US reporter Bill Stewart, obliged even Washington to cease supporting its ally.

Good relations with Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba and Venezuela not only provided diplomatic backing for the FSLN but also offered a safe haven for training and organizing new attacks. Somoza's violations of embassies and borderlines (La Prensa 20.10.1977) outraged these states and isolated the dictator. Increasing tensions between Costa Rica and the

Somoza regime, caused by acts such as GN border incursions, led the Costa Rican government to tolerate FSLN activity on its territory. After a GN attack that almost killed Costa Rica's Security Minister (La Prensa 14.10.1977), the guerrillas were given a safe haven for their high-ranking militants and operational camps (La Prensa 05.09.1978; Interview 28). Moreover, the Twelve quickly managed to fill the diplomatic vacuum left by Somoza's self-inflicted isolation. National and international political pressure provided the FSLN with the freedom to act and conduct its military offensive. After the bloody repression of the insurrection in September 1978, only a few states maintained support for Somoza, such as the United States and the Argentinean dictatorship (WACL 12.10.1978).

When the FSLN launched its final offensive, at the end of May 1979 (La Prensa 29.05.1979), all the conditions were in place for victory. The guerrillas had reached an advantageous military position of force and the regime was largely isolated (La Prensa 28.05.1979). The FSLN combined all forms of struggle and the national and international political environment was favorable to the departure of Somoza. A general strike paralyzed the country from June 4 onwards (La Prensa 04.06.1979); a wave of diplomatic ruptures with the Somoza regime ensued after Mexico cut off relations and called on all Latin American states to do the same (El País 22.05.1979; El País 23.05.1979), and some states even recognized the opposition government before its triumph, such as Panama, Libya and Vietnam (La Prensa 02.06.1979; Barreto Perez 2011). Somoza had lost all political instruments for handling the conflict and depended exclusively on the dwindling GN to stay in power.

At the military level, urban insurrections and conventional confrontations once more overstretched GN capacity (Pérez 2008). The GN fought hard to keep control of the cities, but only on the southern front could the National Guard stop the FSLN advance (thanks to the geography). The insurrection in the "strategic hamlet of Managua" (Interview 30) forced Somoza to concentrate forces in the capital and to leave large parts of the territory to FSLN control. The dictator no longer had the option of launching an offensive to recapture rebellious cities as he had in the September insurrection. The strategically important FSLN seizure of Masaya cut off the supply line to the southern GN forces (La Prensa 19.08.1979; La Prensa 22.08.1979). The mass participation by the population that began after the September 1978 insurrection had changed the balance of power. It was only now, however, that a military victory over the GN was within reach. The worst atrocities were committed and thousands fell victim to indiscriminate repression. Wounded people were burned, innocents were shot and bombings killed an estimated 9,000 people in Managua alone (La Prensa 16.08.1979). However, GN forces were growing demoralized by the FSLN advance and the increasingly genocidal repression. Desertions increased and this, too, worked to the advantage of the FSLN (La Prensa 28.05.1979; GS 3/4-1979b).

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Only a few hours separated the FSLN from total victory when Somoza fled Nicaragua and handed over power to Francisco Urcuyo Maliaño, the speaker of Congress, on July 17, 1979. The GN fell into complete disarray. The FSLN rejected negotiations after Urcuyo declared his intention to complete Somoza's presidential term in denial of the desired political change. On July 19, 1979, FSLN troops entered Managua and took over the last disputed city, encountering no significant resistance from the fleeing GN. After seventeen years of armed struggle, a popular revolution under decisive coordination of the FSLN toppled the forty-two-year-long Somoza family regime. The popular triumph over the dictatorship, however, had cost 50,000 lives and left 80,000 wounded (Mariño 1982; Booth 1985).

To summarize, the TI's insurrectional thesis gained the upper hand in the course of the events when the masses began participating in political protest and armed struggle. Years of grassroots organization had created a framework for the mobilization and coordination of popular armed struggle. The coordination of previously established grassroots organizations worked as a force multiplier and enabled the FSLN to amass a numerically impressive fighting force without overextending its organizational capacity. FSLN unity, broad political alliances and popular participation formed the key to revolution. However, Somoza's genocidal repression and political intransigency had created the conditions for radical opposition and had pushed the popular masses into armed struggle. The combination of all forms of struggle robbed Somoza of any room for maneuver. The combination of national and international political pressure with armed struggle backed the dictator into a corner and dispersed his forces. Thus, popular participation in all forms of struggle paved the way for successful insurrections. Multi-sector alliances and the decisive pressure of the popular masses impeded the establishment of Somocism without Somoza. Additionally, international isolation of the regime obstructed foreign military support and prevented Somoza from internationalizing the conflict. In short, the coordination of popular armed struggle under FSLN control enabled military victory over the genocidal regime.

### **The State**

The Somoza family dictatorship stayed in the saddle for forty-two years by controlling the state's coercive power and through a complex strategy of manipulating the political opposition. Political and economic opportunities largely determined the degree of social protest. Political alliances with upper and middle class sectors permitted the regime to contain and to counter protest. However, the reformism of the 1960s had fostered hopes of an improvement of political opportunities. The cancellation of these rights from 1967 onwards

caused discontent. The 1972 earthquake set in motion the decay of Somocism as it disrupted the basic equilibrium the regime was based on.

The regime deliberately used the state for private aims and applied the four counter-insurgent measures (Duyvesteyn 2006), especially to end protest and to keep the family dictatorship in power. The regime's central interest in monopolizing political and economic opportunities limited the degree to which soft measures could be used, but Somocism nonetheless formed a legal political façade that proved effective at stifling protest for a long period. Harsh measures were the rule when it came to countering protest. The GN, which had combined police and military tasks, was the central instrument for dealing with open dissent. Anti-protest legislation got tougher and opponents faced exile or imprisonment. When, in the early 1970s, the regime completely abandoned its legal façade and thereby its political means of manipulation, it left the state but one way of responding to protest: harsh measures and an escalation of repression. The willful escalation of state repression was the catalyst for popular insurrections and, hence, for the regime's downfall.

Political and economic exclusion of the masses contrasted with the assurance of economic and political representation of elite and middle class interests. Early populist tendencies never developed and quickly were denied by means of exclusion. Somoza Garcia and his son Luis Somoza Debayle managed to consolidate the Somocist system of domination, especially through clever use of politics. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, however, undermined the basis of the dictatorship's power. He deepened the institutional power-sharing but rolled back economic opportunities for middle and elite sectors. In this way he undermined the foundations of Somocism. This spurred cross-sector opposition and weakened the regime significantly.

Somoza could no longer contain the opposition once the political center of gravity had shifted from institutional politics to extra-institutional socio-political organizations. The use of sheer coercive power fostered opposition and isolated the regime. The escalating confrontation demoralized large parts of the GN, weakening its military capacity and willingness to fight. The last years of Anastasio Somoza Debayle's tyranny illustrated best that it was impossible to govern exclusively by force.

### **The Cement of Somocism—from Seizing Power to the Kupia-Kumi Pact**

The forty-two year-long reign of the Somoza family was primarily based on its monopoly over the means of violence, the GN. Manipulation of the legal political opposition was another central means by which the Somozas firmly established their power and diluted opposition

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until the late 1960s. Establishing a capitalist system and enriching the family were the central objectives of Somocism. On a political level, the wish for legitimacy made the regime tolerant even of radical opposition as long as it remained legal-institutional and, thus, controllable. However, the regime held power by controlling the GN, which subjected independent popular opposition and the armed opposition to severe repression. The regime also guaranteed its support sectors economic opportunities. In addition, the regime positioned itself as a loyal ally of the US; despite their differences, the US accepted the dictatorship and lent the regime its support.

The first pillar of Somocism was family control of the GN. The successive Somoza dictators did not hesitate to employ this force ruthlessly to remain in power. From the moment he became head of the GN in 1933 and ended Sandino's insurgency in 1934, Anastasio Somoza Garcia held power in Nicaragua. However, it was only from 1936 onwards that he deliberately used his position to back his political ambitions. After he assumed the presidency in 1937, he started deploying the GN to produce the desired electoral outcomes (La Prensa 29.04.1947; La Prensa 26.11.1966; La Prensa 04.11.1969) and to end political protest by massive force if necessary. This occurred in 1944, 1959 and 1967, for instance (La Prensa 07.07.1944; La Prensa 25.07.1959b; La Prensa 23.01.1967). Coercive power was without a doubt the main pillar of Somocism. It made political manipulation possible and thereby closed off legal-institutional channels for change. Any undesirable opposition was simply silenced. It also permitted Somoza to delegate political power to puppet presidents without loss of control. Puppet presidents such as Victor Manuel Roman y Reyes (1947-1950) and Rene Schick (1963-1966) could tend to state affairs without threatening family rule. The deposal of puppet president Fernando Argüello, who in 1947 refused to succumb to Somoza, showed that real power rested with the GN and not with political institutions.

Somoza Garcia stimulated GN corruption and participation in illicit business to assure its loyalty. Lucrative extra-official incomes from gambling, prostitution and smuggling corrupted GN officers and compromised them to Somoza's regime (Walker 1981). Subsequent purges of the GN, such as in the aftermath of the 1954 and 1957 coup attempts (Esgueva Gómez 1999), reinforced the armed forces' loyalty. Illicit business, corruption and privileges separated the GN from the people and converted it into the guardian of the family's power. Privileges and benefits, however, were concentrated in the hands of high-ranking officers while soldiers lived on meager salaries.

The second pillar of the regime consisted of effective political manipulation of legal-institutional opposition and alliances with elite sectors. Somoza became head of the Liberal Nationalist Party (PLN) while opposition rallied around the Conservative Party of Nicaragua,

which still suffered from its unpopular support for US interventions (Fonseca 1960).<sup>79</sup> Political agreements and power-sharing pacts with the legal political opposition as well as respect for elite privileges and economic opportunities immobilized the central conservative opposition and converted it into “loyal opposition” (Walter 1993). Fraudulent elections, with opposition participation, permitted the regime to maintain a legal façade and guaranteed legal opposition parties a political voice. Establishing a legal façade strengthened the regime as it lowered its dependence on coercive social control. Offering limited political opportunities, in short, was essential to the regime’s dominance.

Two important power sharing agreements, the “Cuadra-Pasos–Somoza” pact of February 1948 (Pacto CP-S 26.02.1948) and the General’s Pact of April 1950 (PG 03.04.1950), bought off Conservative opposition. The offer of a minority role in power-sharing convinced the Conservative Party to collaborate with Somoza, especially in light of the unattractive alternative, i.e. political marginalization through a fraudulent electoral process. The power-sharing pact was intended to favor the “historical forces that divide the public opinion of Nicaragua and to establish a policy of equilibrium” (Pacto CP-S 26.02.1948), to cut off political opportunities for real opposition forces, and to provide the regime with a legal façade through Conservative Party collaboration (Selva 1969). The loyal opposition of the Conservative Party, in other words, was central to the Somocist system and strengthened the institutional power of the dictator. As we will see in the next chapter, however, ever increasing control over institutional politics turns counterproductive in the long run. Over time, constant violations of human rights, constitutional rights and democratic principles radicalized the opposition and pushed it to take an anti-systemic stance (Selva 1969).

As Knut Walter remarks in his outstanding work on Somocism, the involvement and appeasement of the loyal opposition required a relative tolerance towards even radical political opposition (Walter 1993). Somocism needed a legal opposition to build its legal façade, permitting at least limited political opportunities to enable opposition to form. This also offered political opportunities to more radical opposition parties. For instance, the Nicaragua Socialist Party (PSN) formed in 1944 and was tolerated, partly because it could never achieve a significant institutional-political voice due to the fraudulent electoral system. Independent grassroots opposition and armed activities, however, faced severe repression. Youth organizations, the Internal Resistance Front (FIR) and popular committees of the late 1950s (Tefel 1961; Fonseca 1960) faced crackdowns by the GN from the moment they were formed. Political tolerance and repression were complementary aspects of a policy that restricted political expression to the legal and controlled opposition. This mechanism played

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<sup>79</sup> However, both parties split over their support for Somoza. The Independent Liberal Party (PLI) broke off from the PLN and opposed Somoza (1944), while the Conservative Nationalist Party broke with the opposing Conservative Party of Nicaragua and openly supported Somoza (1954) (Esgueva Gómez 1999).

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up the apparent political opportunities and enabled the Conservative Party to act as a magnet for opposition forces until 1971.

Another facet of Somocism was the steady flow of constitutional reforms. By continually amending the constitution, the subsequent dictators could extend their “legal” terms in office or make a clean sweep so they could “serve” as president once more.<sup>80</sup> Anastasio Somoza Garcia, for instance, governed from 1937 to his death in 1956 almost without interruption thanks to an exceptional appointment and constitutional reforms (Esgueva Gómez 1999). Subsequent constitutional reforms became a necessary tool to cancel previous political concessions, such as limitations to one presidential term, in order to maintain a legal façade for ongoing family domination.

Good relations with the US provided the regime with the necessary international support to remain in power. Unconditional support for US foreign policy and the protection of US enterprises’ dominance in the mining sector (Mariño 1982) assured the subsequent dictators US backing for their continued political control. US military training and equipping of the GN was a very practical means of support for the dictatorship (GS 3/4-1979b). Despite increasing differences with Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the US government continued to support the regime until a few weeks before the revolutionary overthrow. Somoza’s intransigence had already begun to divide policymakers in Washington in 1977 (La Prensa 02.10.1977), but fears over the revolutionary process and the lack of political alternatives to the dictator (Reporte Secreto 26.10.1978) outweighed human rights concerns; for the time being, ongoing US support was guaranteed.

In an economic sense, Somocism aimed to establish a capitalist economy and to enrich the family (Walter 1993). The capitalist agro-export economy also favored other elite sectors and created a supportive environment for the regime. Social control was a necessary aspect of exclusive economic development. The family’s self-enrichment commenced when the Somozas rose to power and took control of illicit business; it increased during World War II when Somoza seized on the opportunity to expropriate German immigrants (Mariño 1982). The repeated usurpation of state commodities quickly positioned the Somoza family at the top of the national elite. The enormous concentration of wealth in family hands, however, fuelled latent tensions with elite sectors over economic opportunities.

Positive economic outlooks for elite and middle class sectors as well as populist measures in the early years of the dictatorship concealed the lack of real political opportunity and even created support for the regime. Elite sectors profited from the strong macro-economic growth of the agro-export economy (Núñez Soto 1980) until the second half of the 1960s. The state bureaucracy also expanded, offering employment to middle-class sectors.

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<sup>80</sup> Constitutional reforms took place in 1939, 1950, 1955, 1962 and 1974.

In fact, populist promises made during the early years of the dictatorship even provided the regime with short-lived popular support. For instance, Somoza Garcia decreed a Labor Code (CDT 1945) and a Social Security Code (LOSS 1956) to calm social demands. Economic expansion during the 1950s created thousands of industrial jobs and helped contain protest. Unlike populist systems that included the popular masses in the political and economic system (Laclau 2005a; Laclau 2005b), Somoza's populism was aimed only at winning immediate support. The Labor Code, for instance, had been decreed during a period of strong social protest and the Social Security Code was a ploy to attract votes for the forthcoming 1957 elections. Worsening political and economic exclusion of the masses (Karmali 1979:5) and widespread poverty and unemployment, (Black 1981:70) restricted the regime's populist image. Support for the government was limited to elite and middle class sectors and lasted only as long as the government protected their economic interests.

To summarize, a clever combination of coercive social control, political pacts and economic opportunities for allies allowed the regime to tighten its grip on power. Power-sharing pacts compromised legal opposition to the regime and coercion hampered illegal and independent opposition. The regime's forcefully backed institutional control convinced the Conservative Party to accept minority participation in government instead of taking radical opposition to the regime. This choice was helped along by the fact that the Conservatives and the regime had similar economic aims. The participation of the legal opposition provided the regime with a legal façade and permitted it to exclude any other political force. Economic advantages for allies enabled the regime to create a limited supportive environment while economic growth helped to contain protest. However, the regime failed to attract significant popular support since it relied on political and economic exclusion of the masses. The regime that emerged was institutionally and militarily strong; it resisted protest and benefited its friends while effectively controlling its enemies.

### **Internal Antagonisms and the Erosion of the Regime's Base**

When Anastasio Somoza Debayle compromised the middle class and elite sectors' economic opportunities, latent political differences came out into the open and added to popular demands for political change. Institutional control, however, pushed the opposition towards extra-institutional forms of protest and downgraded the role of institutional politics. The equilibrium of Somocism was disturbed and pushed the regime into a position diametrically opposed to the overwhelming majority of the population. Forceful social control remained the dictatorship's last resort and its deliberate use was the main cause of violence. Protest

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increased and radicalized, culminating in an open civil war that put an end to Somoza's regime.

The involvement of the loyal opposition in the institutional political system had been central to Somocism. The Conservative Party was dissatisfied with the imposed minority role in politics. Both the twelve-year-long rift in the Conservative Party over agreements made with Somoza in 1954 (La Prensa 18.11.1966)<sup>81</sup> and subsequent coup attempts illustrated the Conservative Party's discontent (Novedades 12.04.1954a; Novedades 12.04.1954b; La Prensa 07.05.1954; La Prensa 19.03.1959). A major rebellion, however, did not break out since the Conservative Party did not seek a systemic change which would include the masses. It only tried to increase its share of political control (Selva 1969). The Conservative Party sympathized with Somoza more than with the weak syndicates (Walter 1993), especially when these questioned land tenure and the need for a strong GN as the basis of the state. Similar interests, in short, moderated Conservative Party opposition to the dictator and facilitated agreements.

Complete political control as well as exponential accumulation of wealth by the Somoza family destroyed the equilibrium of Somocism and eroded its small support base as latent tensions became visible. Anastasio Somoza Debayle's fraudulent and violent assumption of the presidency (La Prensa Libre 26.01.1967; El Diario de las Americas 31.01.1967) and the far-reaching Kupia-Kumi power-sharing pact seemed to be great victories for the regime. The Kupia-Kumi pact established a bi-party system that annihilated any chance of real legal opposition. The dictator could impose his objectives and achieve his aims even against joint opposition. His control of institutional politics made the lack of political opportunities plain for all to see. Large opposition sectors and Conservative Party supporters became disillusioned by legal institutional politics and looked for alternative ways of organizing; many even joined the FSLN (Interview 30; Semana 28.02.1971). Somoza's desire for direct control also offended the Conservative Party leadership when he terminated the Kupia-Kumi pact and retook control as head of the National Emergency Committee (CNE) shortly after the disastrous 1972 earthquake (La Prensa 16.06.1973). Self-help neighborhood organizations began to spread and extra-institutional political umbrella organizations such as UDEL (La Prensa 15.12.1974; Sacasa Guerrero 1975) were formed. The political center of gravity shifted towards alternative semi-legal platforms of expression and organization. Control over institutional politics proved counterproductive for the regime as it pushed the opposition towards alternative political spaces; institutional politics eventually became obsolete in the face of alternative political organizations.

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<sup>81</sup> The Conservative Party split over supporting Somoza in his reelection attempts, leading to the formation of the Conservative Nationalist Party. Collaborators with the regime became known as *zancudos* (Mosquitos) (Envio 1984; Icaza Gallard 2007; LeoGrande 1992).

Aside from political discontent, latent tensions between the dictatorship and middle and elite sectors also surfaced after the December 1972 earthquake. Somoza's nepotism in the reconstruction business robbed the middle class and even elite sectors of economic opportunities (Black 1981; Walker 1981; Mariño 1982; Esgueva Gómez 1999). The Somoza family and a tiny elite monopolized the national economy and hoarded economic opportunities and wealth (Walker 1981; Black 1981). For instance, corruption and disloyal competence had put the Somoza family in control of "about half of the registered land in Nicaragua, and a quarter of its best arable soil" (Karmali 1979:20), as well as of industries in

almost every economic sector: rice and meat processing plants, tobacco factories, dairies and sugar mills; seven fisheries companies; cooking oil, plastics, matches, packaging, footwear; chemical, ice-making and computing factories, recording companies, jewellerys, coffee retailers and motor distributors; asbestos, cement, concrete, metalwork, furniture and building materials; extensive services industries including the state airline and merchant shipping line, port facilities and cargo handlers, hotel chains, newspapers, radio and television stations; insurance companies, banks and finance houses. (Black 1981:36)

Embezzlement of international aid money (La Prensa 29.03.1973; La Prensa 06.06.1973; Esgueva Gómez 1999) and public funds increased the family's wealth and the public debt (La Prensa 22.09.1977; La Prensa 29.09.1977). The regime's decision to charge the affected population for the clearing of areas devastated by the earthquake was widely criticized (La Prensa 19.03.1973; La Prensa 26.03.1973). The sharing-the-loot mentality that had bought off middle class and elite sectors' opposition had ended and differences between Somoza and these social sectors came to the fore (El Popular 6-1974). The corruption-ridden and unethical management of the catastrophe raised the ire of the middle and upper classes; popular opposition now gave way to multi-sector opposition. Nicaragua developed into a patrimonial regime (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Booth 1998).

An economic downturn that lowered prices for agrarian exports (CSP nr. 1; La Prensa 24.01.1975; La Prensa 25.01.1975) worsened economic inequalities, turning Nicaragua into Somoza's quasi estate (La Prensa 06.11.1978). Common grievances outweighed sector differences and calls for a replacement of the Somoza regime gained force (La Prensa 15.12.1974; Sacasa Guerrero 1975; FAO 1978). Without allies, coercion became Somoza's means of choice to maintain power. Repression worsened, especially in the aftermath of the humiliating 1974 FSLN hostage-taking in Castillo's house. A state of siege was declared (La Prensa 11.01.1975; La Prensa 06.11.1976) and thousands of peasants were disappeared and killed (La Prensa 20.11.1977; La Prensa 15.12.1977; Wagner & Kabot 13.06.1976).

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Although repression dealt severe military blows to FSLN structures, it represented a political setback for Somoza (El Sandinista 2-1975) as it enhanced social polarization and lost the regime prestige and important allies. Clerical criticism of the repression grew, for instance. Detention and torture of priests alienated the clergy from Somoza (La Prensa 10.12.1977; La Prensa 21.12.1977; La Prensa 26.12.1977; La Prensa 09.01.1978). Increasing opposition from priests constituted a major political defeat for Somoza in an overwhelmingly Catholic country.

At an international level, the presidency of Jimmy Carter was a setback for Somoza's repressive approach. The new US president linked his support for the regime to Nicaragua's respect for human rights. In September 1977, Somoza ended the state of siege to please the US administration, in the belief it had defeated the FSLN (DeFronzo 2007). However, international pressure over human rights abuses increased and isolated the dictator on the world stage. A lack of credible political space and increasing repression distanced the dictatorship from possible national and international support sectors.

To summarize, Somoza's political and economic greed upset the equilibrium on which the dictatorship was based. The political-institutional and economic strengthening of Somocism weakened the regime structurally. Politics shifted towards extra-institutional space and movement-based politics made institutional control pointless. The monopolization of the national economy, furthermore, awoke slumbering economic antagonisms. Allied sectors distanced themselves from Somoza as his politics compromised their economic opportunities. The loss of allies and of the political instrument for protest policing made the regime extremely dependent on GN backing. Increasing human rights abuses promoted the opposition of large parts of the clergy and middle class sectors. Political intransigency and greed impeded Somoza from reviving the political instrument. An exponential increase of political and economic control, an almost sultanistic style of rule (Goodwin 2001), paved the way to revolution. The dictator's greed and desire for complete control brought about his downfall.

### **The Decline of Somocism**

Somocism began to decay as soon as the equilibrium that had maintained the regime was disturbed. However, it was the FSLN's October 1977 offensive that provoked a political and military crisis and signaled the regime's ultimate fall. Somoza ignored his last opportunities to negotiate a political settlement. The regime's assassination of critic Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in early 1978 was the trigger for cross-sector protest and popular insurrection. The regime's

political intransigency and indiscriminate repression united and radicalized various opposition sectors. Somoza reduced opposition opportunities for armed struggle, promoting an escalation of violence and precipitating his own downfall.

The FSLN's October offensive demonstrated the surprising vitality of the guerrillas and provoked a political crisis that Somoza failed to manage. Several social sectors, including the church and entrepreneurs, more forcefully called for a national dialogue to prevent civil war (La Prensa 19.10.1977; La Prensa 24.10.1977). Somoza faced a basic dilemma. On the one hand, ceding to demands and reforming the political system would demonstrate his weakness and might reinforce the guerrillas' armed campaign for change. On the other hand, continued political intransigency and tougher repression would radicalize protest tactics and help various opposition sectors to unite against him. Nonetheless, the crisis also offered Somoza an opportunity to negotiate with moderate sectors and to isolate more radical forces that called for a dialogue without Somoza, such as the FSLN and the Twelve. Somoza, however, misjudged the situation; confident in the GN's military capability, he declined a return to politics (La Prensa 09.12.1977). The employment of indiscriminate repression in a situation of strong social mobilization, however, quickly turned out to be counterproductive.

The political killing of Chamorro in early 1978 demonstrated the futility of negotiating with Somoza and triggered united, popular rebellions. Chamorro's death caused a nationwide outcry as the dictator was (wrongly) presumed responsible for his critic's assassination. In fact, the killing appears to have been ordered by his son Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero (Cardenal 2004). Elite sectors felt targeted by repression, began to support mass, spontaneous popular protest and called for a general strike (La Prensa 10.01.1978; La Prensa 11.01.1978a; La Prensa 11.01.1978b; La Prensa 11.01.1978c; La Prensa 11.01.1978d; La Prensa 23.01.1978; La Prensa 24.01.1978). The mass protest over the assassination of Chamorro ended many people's fears of confronting the GN. Protest tactics radicalized. The publicly visible, harsh repression of the first popular insurrection in Monimbó (La Prensa 21.02.1978; La Prensa 23.02.1978) failed to contain radical opposition; instead it radicalized and broadened the protest and the solidarity people felt with the victims. Mass protests, strikes and insurrection, such as in Matagalpa (La Prensa 29.08.1978; La Prensa 30.08.1978; La Prensa 31.08.1978), increased the pressure on the regime. Open and widespread repression popularized the armed struggle.

Channels of negotiation with moderate sectors were cut off (La Prensa 25.01.1978; Los Doce 04.02.1978). Real changes were required to moderate protest, but Somoza announced that he would complete his mandate that ended in 1981 (La Prensa 15.01.1978). Somoza insisted on the obsolete electoral farce and called for municipal elections in February, losing any semblance of legitimacy as other political forces boycotted the elections (La Prensa 19.01.1978; La Prensa 06.02.1978). The dictator maintained this intractable

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position even after the September 1978 insurrection when the FAO and entrepreneurial sectors tried to find a negotiated solution to the escalating conflict (La Prensa 09.10.1978). Somoza, in short, missed the last chance to realign with sectors that feared a triumph of the revolution more than the continuation of his regime (La Prensa 01.11.1978a; La Prensa 13.01.1979; La Prensa 19.01.1979). Negotiations might not have ended the conflict, particularly after the September national insurrection, but they would have permitted a restoration of a political space and split the opposition. However, real changes would have been required and Somoza was not disposed to reform (La Prensa 25.11.1978). The dictator added obstacles for talks and all major political forces turned their backs on him when he dictated unacceptable conditions for negotiations, such as GN control over a possible plebiscite that had been proposed by a mediation group from the US, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic (La Prensa 19.11.1978; La Prensa 13.01.1979; James 1980). Only a minority sector of the FAO was willing to accept a plebiscite under Somoza's control. The dictator, however, knew it was unlikely that he could contain the conflict through political maneuvers and he rejected even a controlled plebiscite (La Prensa 19.01.1979). In so doing, Somoza missed his chance to restore a limited political space to divide and subdue the opposition. The desire for a legal façade became incompatible with his private use of the state.

National political opposition movements, such as the FAO, MPU and later FPN, quickly dominated the political scene. Furthermore, grassroots networks began to replace state responsibilities and formed local seeds of a counter-state (Cardenal 2004). Especially the return of the Twelve was a setback for the dictator who had no choice but to watch the festive, crowded reception of the celebrity opposition group on their return from Costa Rica on a flight sponsored "by Panamanian president General Omar Torrijos." (Everingham 1996:145; La Prensa 06.07.1978) The Twelve dismissed negotiations with Somoza and formed a bridge between the FSLN and large social sectors.

The October 1977 offensive and the subsequent outbreak of popular insurrections put the regime on the defensive. The heightening conflict forced the regime to concentrate its forces. The way the GN's territorial presence was organized had become obsolete. Most towns and villages had only one GN garrison in a central location. This made them easy targets for attack, preventing troops from leaving the garrisons and in some cases annihilating them. In other words, when attacked the GN immediately lost all control over entire cities to insurrectional forces (Interview 28; 32). As former EEBI officer Justiano Pérez pointed out "seizing the garrison meant seizing the entire city." (2008:51) The GN had based its effective social control largely on its intimidating image. As soon as popular fears of the guard evaporated, its power collapsed. Attacks on garrisons exposed GN weaknesses and motivated further attacks as victory seemed possible.

Popular insurrections overextended the National Guard's capacity. Troops were concentrated in important cities and mobile units were rare. "Virtual" conscripts whose salaries ended up in the hands of superiors had inflated the numerical strength of the GN (Pérez 2008). In September 1978 the shortage of forces prevented Somoza from recapturing the five rebellious cities simultaneously; they had to be retaken one by one. However, also mass participation in the insurrections required to concentrate forces in the attacks.

General GN training, equipment and provisions were poor. The Guard's police functions and fears of a GN mutiny partly explained the often poor quality of their equipment. The EEBI elites commanded by Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero were the only unit that received proper training, equipment and pay in the entire GN (Pérez 2008). Eventually, it was this small but militarily strong force that bore the brunt of counter-insurrecional activities in 1978 and 1979. However, it also employed indiscriminate military force against large parts of the population and was responsible for massive human rights abuses (La Prensa 12.09.1978; GS 1/2-1979d). The EEBI were the central pillar of the dictatorship in its last years.

Popular insurrections rendered the National Guard spy network, which had been effective in earlier decades, obsolete. Once rebellions became mass events, the preventive spy network was practically defunct. In addition, state collaborators—the so-called ears of the regime—were often known in their neighborhoods and became targets at the start of the insurrection (Interview 27; 28; 30; 31; 32). The GN failed to modernize and to adapt to the changed situation, giving the advantage to the FSLN.

Indiscriminate repression and uninterrupted combat exhausted and demoralized GN troops. Many disagreed with the genocidal orders and preferred to seek refuge in neighboring states; some even defected to the FSLN (La Prensa 01.11.1978b; GS 2-1978b; GS 3/4-1979b; Interview 28; 31). Even isolated GN criticism of Somoza could be heard (La Prensa 15.01.1979; La Prensa 28.05.1979). Demoralization and desertions forced Somoza to reinforce the number of troops, and especially the Air Force, with mercenaries often of South Vietnamese or US origin (La Prensa 08.02.1978; FSLN-BI 1978; La Prensa 21.05.1979a). The dictator even tried to replenish GN ranks with public employees (La Prensa 05.06.1979d). FSLN advances and increasing numbers of casualties worsened the deplorable condition of the GN. Its combat capacity and morale decayed and Somoza's power base eroded.

The popular insurrection marked the beginning of the military defeat of the dictatorship. GN atrocities did not undermine the insurrection. They united the people against the regime and escalated the confrontation quantitatively and qualitatively. Indiscriminate repression made reconciliation impossible and forced the lion's share of the population to actively fight the state. The National Guard's military strength was outweighed by the numerical superiority and higher morale of the insurrecional forces.

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The escalating domestic conflict and threats of internationalizing the conflict isolated Somoza on an international level as well, complicating the regime's position. Mounting international criticism of the crackdowns in 1978 culminated in a series of diplomatic ruptures in May 1979 (La Prensa 21.05.1979b; La Prensa 22.05.1979). Earlier international rifts had already deprived the regime of key supplies such as petroleum from Venezuela (La Prensa 31.01.1978a), cheap US credit (La Prensa 05.10.1977), and military support (La Prensa 31.01.1978b). Only a few states, such as Guatemala, Argentina and Israel still openly supported the regime and partially compensated for the suspension of US arms deliveries (DeFronzo 2007; La Prensa 05.06.1979a; GS 3/4-1979b). Argentina even sent military advisors to teach the GN the counter-insurgency strategy that had proved effective in Argentina (Armony 1997). The GN, however, controlled neither territory nor the population in the way the Argentinean armed forces did. By 1979, the sight of tortured and executed bodies failed to terrorize and paralyze the opposition in a situation of open civil war. The lack of close territorial control prevented the implementation of systematic state terrorism according to the Argentinean model. Amid the regime's open warfare against the population, Argentinean-style clandestine repression did not have a similar terrorizing effect on society.

Despite increasing US pressure on the dictator and visible differences between the allies (La Prensa 10.12.1978; La Prensa 30.09.1978; La Prensa 06.09.1978; La Prensa 02.09.1978), the Carter administration still supported the dictatorship at crucial moments. For instance, Carter cancelled the weapons embargo he had decreed (La Prensa 31.01.1978b), approved a USD 40 million credit from the IMF (La Prensa 14.03.1979; La Prensa 18.05.1979b), and even wrote a letter praising Somoza for the improvement of the human rights situation (Walker 1981). However, attempts to internationalize the conflict so the US could intervene and prevent an FSLN victory failed (Reporte Secreto 26.10.1978; La Prensa 09.03.1979; GS 3/4-1979c), and the OAS rejected plans to rescue Somoza (La Prensa 05.06.1979b; La Prensa 05.06.1979c). The videotaped and broadcast GN assassination of US journalist Bill Stewart ended all remaining US support for Somoza. International diplomatic isolation, thus, affected Somoza's ability to fight the FSLN and created a climate ripe for revolution.

The combination of nationwide urban insurrections, the FSLN invasion from Costa Rica, and the establishment of a southern front during the final offensive stretched GN forces to the breaking point. The Managua insurrection forced Somoza to concentrate forces in this "strategic hamlet." (Interview 30) Indiscriminate aerial bombardments and the FSLN's tactical retreat from Managua to Masaya restored Somoza's control over the capital but the FSLN controlled the main part of the country including supply roads. Isolated and relying on a dwindling military force, Somoza prepared to leave. On July 17, 1979, Somoza and his family left Nicaragua for Miami, but he was denied asylum. He was given refuge in Paraguay, where

in 1980 he was killed in revenge for the atrocities he committed during the civil war.<sup>82</sup> When the newly-appointed president Urcuyo proclaimed he intended to stay in office until 1981, the FSLN decided to launch an offensive on Managua. Without Somoza in power, the GN fell into complete disarray and put up no further resistance to the FSLN advance. On July 19, 1979 the insurgents declared victory over the Somoza regime to a celebrating crowd.

To summarize, the regime had faced social protest since the 1940s, but it was only in the last years of the Somoza family dictatorship that latent internal antagonisms became visible and opposition to the regime grew and radicalized. It was particularly Somoza's political intransigency that isolated him and weakened his position as he lost the political space to contain the opposition. Somoza's political inflexibility united divergent opposition sectors and provoked armed struggle. Somoza knew that real changes were needed to contain protest. Real changes, however, would have limited his almost total political and economic power. Somoza had started an all-or-nothing game when he based his domination exclusively on the coercive power of the loyal GN. Unfortunately for him, repression proved counterproductive in a situation of strong social mobilization. It escalated violence towards an all-out civil war. Coercive power simply did not suffice as means to govern. Mass military violence against the population prolonged Somoza's rule but did not undermine the people's determination to end the decades-old dictatorship. Somoza's unyielding and disastrous handling of the escalating domestic crisis brought together factors conducive to revolution. The GN grew demoralized. Desertions in the National Guard, combined with the strong popular offensive against the regime, put the insurgents at an advantage in military terms as well. Even when Somoza's situation became unsustainable, he continued to fight and deliberately raised the stakes of revolution through open warfare against the people, causing thousands of deaths before he finally fled the country.

### **Processes of Escalation and De-Escalation Summarized**

The domestic Nicaraguan conflict that culminated in the 1979 revolutionary overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship was characterized by a long period of low-level violence and a quick escalation of political violence from late 1977 onwards. Ongoing political and economic exclusion of the masses fuelled and radicalized protest for decades. Weak social protest slowly developed radical characteristics. Then, from the early 1970s onwards, protestors found new means of organization and expression. Consequently, protest grew and radicalized towards popular insurrection. Coercive containment of protest was the regime's

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<sup>82</sup> The attack was carried out by a commando headed by a former member of the Argentinean ERP (Gorriarán Merlo 2002).

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first line of defense. The dictatorship aimed to stay in power and refused to make any political concessions. For several decades, political manipulation and repression effectively contained protest and restricted armed opposition to a small number of radicals. Somoza even consciously escalated state repression to defend his position, making the GN, by far, the main violent actor. The dictator's central objective was not avoiding escalation but holding on to power. The extreme escalation of violence was only a policy option because the dictator was pursuing a personal rather than a national project.

The conflict escalated in proportion to the growing strength and radicalism of social protest as the regime refused to compromise and was prepared to defend its position by any means necessary. Increasing social protest strengthened the FSLN, led to harsher methods of protest policing and intensified the regime's counter-insurgency policy. The absence of strong social protest movements and divisions between opposition sectors meant no one could mount significant pressure on the regime for concessions at an earlier stage. The lack of a coherent and strong social movement was a great obstacle to opposition activities in general and insurgent activities in particular. After decades of low-level armed struggle and creeping polarization, the dispute rapidly escalated in the last years of the Somoza regime. Grassroots organizations offered a framework for mass mobilization and revolutionary change. Insurgent links to grassroots organizations permitted the FSLN to position itself as a central movement organization and to coordinate the popular struggle. FSLN coordination made the rebellion sustainable but popular participation in protest and the armed struggle was the decisive factor in the development and outcome of the conflict.

Violence escalated as soon as popular participation in the struggle dramatically increased and the regime started to employ any and all forms of repression to end rebellions and maintain control. Somoza's political intransigency and the escalating violence obstructed attempts to reach a political solution to the conflict and to de-escalate violence. Popular uprisings and genocide-like repression culminated in an all-out civil war. Only the complete political and military defeat of the dictator was enough to de-escalate the violence. Both adversaries, but especially the regime, opted to escalate the conflict in the hope of bringing their opponents to their knees. Violence consequently reached extreme levels and casualties numbered in the tens of thousands. The popular victory over the Somoza regime ended violence as abruptly as it had escalated. Peace, however, was short-lived, as a violent opposition to FSLN rule emerged in the early 1980s with US support.

Widespread discontent and the power of protest first became apparent in 1944 when independent opposition protest frustrated Somoza Garcia's reelection attempts. Popular anger and the emergence of numerous armed groupings in the late 1950s convinced small radical sectors of the feasibility of armed struggle and inspired the formation of a unifying insurgent organization with a coherent revolutionary strategic end aim. This was the birth of

the FSLN. The armed organization hoped to channel social discontent towards popular insurgent struggle. However, the group discovered that discontent was not enough to inspire active popular participation in armed struggle. The absence of social and political platforms for expressing discontent and for mobilizing the masses limited the effectiveness of the early FSLN campaign. The group recognized the need for social support for its campaign and dedicated ever-increasing efforts to generating social organization and mobilization. The emancipation of popular dissent from institutional opposition offered the organization an opportunity to align with the popular masses and to develop support networks. Aligning with community leaders and grassroots organizations allowed the FSLN to strengthen its mobilization capacity without overstressing the group and exposing it to GN intervention. Moreover, growing social support enabled the insurgents to survive and grow despite harsh repression. The alignment to grassroots organizations, in short, worked as a force multiplier for the small vanguard group. The outbreak of popular insurrection and the growing identification of the masses with the FSLN even provided the group with an informal popular army by 1978. Social protest not only shaped the development of the insurgent campaign; it even inspired the very formation of the group.

Active popular participation in protest was needed in order to marginalize moderate and compromise-minded sectors. Negotiations with the regime did not find any significant support and had no effect on the mobilized popular sectors with their own movement organizations. Popular grassroots organization had shifted the political center of gravity from institutional, legal organizations towards informal and movement-based groups that attended to neglected state responsibilities and had slowly built a framework for independent popular opposition and even popular self-administration. Umbrella organizations, such as the FAO were forced to radicalize their positions to avoid being completely marginalized. Although different objectives and rifts among the opposition persisted, active mass participation in all kinds of opposition activities dictated the course of events from late 1978 onwards.

The decades-long dictatorship was the main responsible for the escalation of politically-motivated violence in Nicaragua and finally for its own downfall. The Somocist regime and its almost private armed forces were the main violent actor as well as the main factor in protest radicalization. The exclusive nature of the regime and the dictator's private objectives shaped the approach to opposition and made the escalation of violence a thinkable policy option. In other words, Somoza was not a statesman who worked on national progress; he acted as if he were lord of Nicaragua. Somoza pursued personal power and wealth, disregarding whatever detrimental effects this might have for the nation or its people. The regime never intended to halt political violence, but deliberately used it to maintain the extremely exclusive economic and political structure. This pattern was visible from the beginning of the regime, but in the absence of a major protest movement, large-scale

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repression was not yet necessary in the early days of the dictatorship. Superficial populist measures and political manipulation sufficed to divide and rule at the time. However, the regime's focus on family power meant it neglected to earn significant support and instead relied on rule by force. The regime's dilemma was that it based its power on political exclusion, but political reforms seemed the only way to contain the radicalizing opposition. The development of independent popular opposition organizations and demands for structural change from the early 1970s onwards pitted the two sides in a zero-sum game and promoted violence. Hence, a trend to escalation was inherent in the Somocist regime. The violence broke out in full force during the reign of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. In a desperate attempt to maintain power at all costs without making any changes, he escalated repression into open warfare against the population.

Regime repression, in other words, had contradictory effects. On the one hand, harsh social control together with political manipulation proved an effective way to contain radical opposition. On the other hand, broad, harsh repression triggered opposition radicalization and popular insurrections. When the regime lost its legal political façade and its political instruments for containing opposition, lowered also the effectiveness of coercive social control. Increasing repression without any political alternative triggered radical opposition and protest instead of containing opposition activities. The broadening repression also encouraged large social sectors to sympathize with, and actively participate in, popular insurrections. Repression became indiscriminate and failed to discern between insurgents, protesters and bystanders. The patrimonial regime threatened all popular sectors alike. This led the opposition to focus on the dictator, who clearly was mainly responsible for the escalation of violence and the internal crisis. The effects of coercive means of social control depended on the combination with alternative political measures, whether political opportunities existed for opposition sectors, and how widespread repression was. Limiting social control to mere coercion, however, was not a feasible option for long-term governance.

The formation of the FSLN in the early 1960s marked a qualitative escalation of the social conflict. The FSLN was not the first Nicaraguan armed opposition group, but it was the first coherent revolutionary organization with an anti-systemic objective. It was more substantial than previous armed enterprises that had focused on coup attempts. The main obstacle for the group in this decade, however, was the weakness of social protest and organization. The group quickly discovered that guerrilla foci alone did not automatically lead to popular insurrections or the disintegration of government forces. The lack of a social movement or political platform with which to align and from which to draw support hampered the development of the insurgent group and convinced it of the need to engage in basic social organization. Support had to be built before the FSLN could step up its campaign. The spread of opposition in the early 1970s, finally, created a receptive social environment for

FSLN activities. Approaching grassroots networks through proxy organizations and community leaders provided the insurgents with a framework for mass participation. The FSLN could accumulate forces in secrecy without overextending its organizational capacities or attracting immediate GN repression. These links enabled the FSLN to become a central social movement organization and to multiply its forces by coordinating popular protest and insurrection. In short, organization and coordination of grassroots protest were the keys to FSLN success. They gave the group the necessary strength to overthrow Somoza and to spearhead the revolutionary process.

The actions of the regime were central to the radicalization of protest and the success of the revolution, as Carlos Marighela argued (1974a). The insurgent group profited from the benevolent social environment, demonstrated the feasibility of armed struggle, and encouraged insurrection through armed propaganda and attacks on GN garrisons. This would not have been possible if the regime had not created a receptive environment for the FSLN through political exclusion and indiscriminate repression. Joint combat experience in popular insurrections created a strong link between grassroots rebels and the FSLN. The popular masses identified with the insurgent organization and committed themselves to revolutionary struggle. Organizational preparation enabled the FSLN to take the lead as soon as the popular masses were engaged in armed struggle. In the final analysis, however, the radicalization of the masses was largely attributable to the regime itself. Not ideological indoctrination but constant regime abuse had caused the overwhelming majority of society to oppose the state authorities. FSLN activities, by contrast, focused on the organization of potential rebels.

Violence escalated into open civil war. The dictator deliberately escalated violence to out-terrorize the opposition and hold on to power. Random repression reinforced the insurrection. The overextension of the GN's capacity for social control made it react ever more indiscriminately. While extreme levels of repression proved counterproductive at a time of widespread social protest, lower-level repression would have worked in the rebels' favor as well. Somoza's dilemma was that he lacked alternative means to counter protest and was not disposed to seriously discuss political reform. Escalating the violence not only caused thousands of civilian deaths; it also demoralized the GN and brought about the dictator's international isolation. Increasing repression eroded Somoza's power base and even alienated GN officers. Conciliation had become impossible in the face of the regime's brutality and so the insurrectional forces fought to terminate the hated regime. The military defeat of the GN finally ended the bloody civil war that the exclusive regime had deliberately waged in an attempt to maintain control. Somoza discovered too late that he could not govern by sheer force. His regime fell because he neglected politics.



## Chapter Five

### Escalation and De-escalation of Political Violence:

#### A Cross-Case Comparison

In the three case studies examined in the previous chapters, political violence and the wider social conflicts escalated and de-escalated against the background of general conditions such as the Cold War and the rule of repressive regimes. The escalation and de-escalation mainly resulted from the interaction of the central conflict actors. While background conditions encouraged the radicalization of social tensions and framed conflicts, the actual cause of political violence was the triangular interaction between ruling regimes, insurgent organizations and the larger social audiences in each national conflict constellation. The wider social conflicts and political violence, however, did influence each other. The specific way in which political violence was applied in a certain socio-political atmosphere influenced the development of the wider conflict, i.e. either fuelling or easing protest and shaping the quality of the demands that were made. The broader conflict, in turn, shaped the further use of violence as well as its effects, i.e. promoting the (de-) escalation of state as well as of insurgent violence and determining the impact of coercion. Although closely related to political violence, the broader social conflicts were larger because they included a diversity of social protest movements and important non-violent forms of expressions. Therefore, we can say that political violence and the framing social conflict developed in the same, but also opposite, directions.

In the three case studies, politically exclusive regimes were the main driver of opposition and protest. Over time, institutional means of expressing opposition were exhausted without bringing about desired political changes and small protest sectors began to radicalize. Protests and demands from social sectors were at the center of internal conflicts. These conflicts took on a new quality when armed organizations entered the picture

and began to pursue structural changes through coercive means. The violent actors to the conflict—the regime and the insurgents—recognized that civil society held a key position in the development of the conflict. Both actors focused on influencing large social sectors, especially protest sectors, in order to evoke the desired response to their position. Regimes and insurgents, in their quest to shape the development of conflicts, deliberately used coercion and sometimes even willingly escalated it to affect the behavior of the social audience. In this way, they hoped to steer the development and outcome of the conflict.

The conflict actors pursued opposing aims and disposed of different means, so they influenced the development of conflicts in different ways. While the insurgents sought to win sympathy and support through armed propaganda and began to organize opposition sectors to advance their claims, ruling regimes fought armed and peaceful opposition sectors alike using all four types of counter-terrorist measure: political and economic measures, judicial instruments, police and secret service forces, and military means (Duyvesteyn 2006). The regimes under scrutiny often willfully ignored any distinction between insurgents and peaceful protesters, and they even targeted critics and bystanders, when they stepped up repression to stay in power. The heart of the conflict in each case was about social protest for structural change versus exclusive regimes and elites that defended the status quo. Violence, however, was mainly the product of coercive influences on the social audience, and stemmed in particular from the forceful demobilization of protest to protect elite and regime interests amid popular demands for political and economic inclusion (Esparza 2010). However, insurgents also employed violence. They did so explicitly to shape social behavior, thereby contributing quantitatively and qualitatively to the development of political violence, often by providing the necessary pretext for the stiffening of state repression. To a great extent, however, the development of the conflicts depended on the position taken by large social sectors. The three domestic conflicts analyzed in this study were of a triangular nature. In this triangle, coercive influence on the social audience accounted for most of the violence, while the stance of the social audience towards the conflict became decisive for its development and outcome.

Coercive influences on the social audience could vary significantly in their outcomes. The societal position towards repression of protest or towards armed propaganda depended especially on the available political alternatives of expression and change, on how polarized society was, and on the degree of unity there was in the opposition. In this sense, the brief return to democracy in Argentina in 1973, the timid democratic reforms of Betancur in the mid 1980s in Colombia, and even the democratic façade of Nicaragua's Somoza family dictatorship proved effective at reducing or containing protest and insurgent struggle. On the other hand, open socio-political exclusion as it occurred under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship, the government of Turbay in Colombia, and under Anastasio Somoza Debayle,

promoted protest, opposition unity and armed struggle. The specific way in which violence was used also shaped the impact on the social audience and ultimately influenced the development of the internal conflict. Not the mere quantity of violence but especially its quality was decisive for its impact on the social audience. Highly political and selective armed propaganda proved more effective at mobilizing support for insurgent campaigns than purely military offensives. Similarly, regimes discovered that blunt repression did not end opposition as they had hoped, but in fact hampered their attempts to maintain control.

The following pages aim to examine in detail the causal chains that link conditions and actions to the specific development of political violence. This comparison is intended to point out how and why political violence developed in a dissimilar manner in the three case studies and why similar actions often had different outcomes. Therefore, we will examine the various background conditions and different kinds of actions and interactions of the conflict actors. Furthermore, this comparison differentiates between two developments: political violence on the one hand and the conflict as a whole on the other, and it will explore the links between the two. The following findings, however, are based solely on the three case studies of socio-revolutionary conflict and are therefore limited. They cannot be presumed to cover the entire spectrum of violent political conflict constellations. This study does not draw conclusions on the extent to which different group orientations, such as ethno-nationalist or religious aims, might alter insurgents' activities and relations with society. This matter can only be clarified through further comparative study of armed opposition organizations in regard to their ideological orientations, organizational features and use of violence.

### **International and National Framing of Conflicts**

The three national conflicts examined in the previous chapters had been influenced by international conditions such as the Cold War, by regional social developments such as the appearance and dissemination of Liberation Theology, and of course by internal political events such as military coups and the dominance of exclusive regimes. The international frame of the Cold War tended to heighten social tensions and often encouraged the usurpation of power by politically exclusive regimes. The type of regime, in turn, determined the level of political opportunity available to opposition sectors. This shaped the strength and structure of opposition sectors. In short, international influences as well as the political opportunity structure modified the development of domestic conflicts.

### **The Cold War and International Influences**

The bipolar world of the Cold War, cooperation between neighboring states, and foreign support for regimes and insurgent organizations contributed to the development of domestic conflicts. The Cold War radicalized the terms of national disputes and cancelled the finer shades of political positions, reducing these to absolute support for, or opposition to, the regimes in power (Calveiro 2005b; Bufano 2007; Mercier Vega 1969). National political tensions over the political and economic inclusion of the popular masses were simply subsumed into the global dispute between capitalism and communism (Horowitz 1968; Roniger 2010), even where protest sectors were in fact pursuing reforms rather than structural changes to the socio-political and economic system. National political tensions developed along the highly polarized lines of foreign interpretation. This radicalized the terms of the dispute and impeded the opposing sides from finding an original, national solution to socio-political tensions. Especially the United States' exaggerated fear of communism (Booth & Walker 1989) radicalized the terms of the dispute and disguised the national nature of Latin American conflicts, equating all demands for social improvement with international communism. Latin American regimes, however, embraced the fight against communism to justify political exclusion and denial of opposition demands for democratic rights as well as the repression of opposition sectors.

This had far-reaching consequences for the development of the conflicts, as moderate demands for political participation radicalized over time into anti-systemic positions. Lacking legal-institutional means to change the political reality in Nicaragua, for instance, opposition sectors embraced extra-institutional forms of organization. Many embraced socialism because democratic opposition to the regime had proven ineffective (Selva 1969). Opposition developed in a similar manner in Colombia, where persistent shortcomings in the democratic process not only led to mass voter abstention and a legitimacy gap (Pécaut 1989), but also to radicalization. Frequent military interventions in Argentina visibly closed all doors to peaceful political change and reduced democracy to an empty phrase. An anti-democratic generation formed and opposition sectors began to radicalize.

Regimes and insurgents benefited from foreign support. US military training elevated the counter-insurgency capacity of government forces and spread the American anti-communist ideology among armed forces in much of Latin America (Wickham-Crowley 1992). Furthermore, the dissemination of the National Security Doctrine encouraged military coups (McSherry 2005; Menjivar & Rodriguez 2005). Resolute US support for Latin American regimes helped to keep these regimes in power even when they faced united popular opposition (Weitz 2004), as evidenced by the US support which the Nicaraguan Somoza

regime enjoyed until just a few weeks before its fall. Other Central American regimes, such as the Guatemalan and Salvadoran dictatorships, provide additional examples (Booth & Walker 1989). In other words, international influences promoted the radicalization of Latin America's domestic conflicts and stimulated the development of political violence.

Cooperation between neighboring states, as for instance among the southern cone's military dictatorships in Operation Condor, increased the effectiveness of internal repression. Such cooperation elevated state terrorism campaigns to a regional level and denied targeted sectors refuge (Dinges 2004; Roca 1984). On the other hand, tolerance of an insurgent presence in neighboring states hampered national crackdowns on armed opposition forces and provided the latter with an area of retreat. The Colombian M-19, for instance, often retreated to Panama, which was ruled by populist General Omar Torrijos (Villamizar 2007; LCCS 1987). Torrijos also supported the FSLN struggle financially and diplomatically (Cardenal 2004). The Nicaraguan FSLN found a safe haven and an operational base in Costa Rica as tensions between Somoza and the neighboring state threatened to escalate into war. Finding refuge helped insurgent groups not only to organize and recuperate but also to propagate their ideas in the international media.

The Cuban Revolution had had a continent-wide impact, demonstrating the possibility of revolutionary change and inspiring armed struggle throughout Latin America. Furthermore, the island supported Latin American insurgent groups through training (Peters 2010). Members of Montoneros, M-19 and FSLN received training in Cuba. Cuban material support for insurgents, however, was limited (Dominguez 1986). Cuban-style rural foquism was not always applicable in other Latin American insurgent campaigns. Mainly student-based organizations blindly embraced Cuban methods (Lamberg 1972) failing to take into account specific national situations. Copying foreign recipes failed in particular to mobilize the necessary social support for revolutionary struggles; the insurgent groups that took this path remained weak and were often easily dismantled by government forces. Their premature decision to take up armed struggle escalated national tensions. Elites were warned of the radical potential of social tensions; as a result they often supported military coups and repression of all opposition to protect the status quo (Esparza 2010; Cardenas et al. 2001). Armed voluntarism, in short, did not suffice to engender revolutions and often proved counterproductive. A genuine national organization was necessary and not the ideologically-motivated application of foreign recipes for revolutionary struggle. A more successful path was to pursue organized opposition over tangible national or local grievances. This made it possible to focus opposition on the regime in power and to advance structural changes, as will be discussed below.

Developments in the regional and national socio-cultural sphere also influenced the conflicts. One of these was the development of Liberation Theology in Latin America during

the 1960s. A particularly key moment was the Episcopal conference in Medellin, in June 1968, in which eight hundred Latin American priests participated. The clerics denounced the violence and economic exclusion that favored only small elites in Latin America, they criticized the complicity of the clerical hierarchy with oppressive regimes, and they called for justice (Mangione 2001). Their declaration had an important cultural impact on the predominantly Catholic region. Revolutionary Catholicism popularized the demand for structural change among the masses and made revolutionary claims and sometimes even Marxism socially acceptable (Morello 2007; Mangione 2001). To paraphrase Tedd Gurr, the appearance of Liberation Theology added a “normative justification” to the “utilitarian justification” for violence and prepared large social sectors to take a tougher opposition stance towards arbitrary exclusion by regimes (1970; see also Worchel et al. 1974). Radical Catholic organizations played a central role in the development of the national conflicts in the three case studies. They were especially influential in the organization of grassroots opposition.

During the 1960s, the student population experienced significant growth (Halperin 1976) and the majority of the student movement was receptive to left-wing ideologies. The student movements in the three case studies became central opposition sectors and backed radical resistance ideologically as well as practically (Romero 2002; Pécaut 1989; Guevara Lopez 2007). Thus, the polarization of the Cold War also manifested itself in the student movement.

### **Regime Type, Political Opportunities and Legitimacy**

Latin American states played a very complex and even contradictory role regarding the escalation and de-escalation of politically motivated violence. On the one hand, the states were guardians of the constitution. On the other hand, they often violated their own constitution and were the first to deliberately manipulate the political process, provoking social protest. The type and specific objective of the regime in power largely determined its legitimacy and the probability of opposition protest and radicalization. Regimes framed the internal conflicts; they greatly influenced the intensity and radicalism of protest and they largely determined the level of domestic violence that was used.

All three countries considered in the case studies were characterized by undemocratic regimes: either restricted democracies or blatant dictatorships. To briefly sum up their situations in the time period analyzed, Argentina was governed mainly by military dictatorships with only a short democratic interlude in the early 1970s; Colombia experienced

only one blatant dictatorship, but was subjected to a restricted democracy that excluded large social sectors from political participation; and Nicaragua was dominated for 42 years by a family dictatorship that tried to gain and maintain legitimacy through repeated fraudulent elections.

The regimes' undemocratic, politically exclusive nature and unpopular economic policies eroded their legitimacy. They cut off political channels for change and perpetuated the experience of "inequality (...) by members of a particular segment of the community." (Worchel et al. 1974:40) Allowing real political opportunity was simply seen as a threat to the ruling regime and was therefore carefully avoided. Furthermore, the regimes—despite great differences between them—all aimed to maintain inequality in terms of social participation in economic life (Pion-Berlin 1989; O'Donnell 1988; Pécaut 1989; Booth & Walker 1989; Walter 1993; Esgueva Gómez 1999). In short, the politically and economically exclusive nature of the regimes pushed parts of society towards the opposition. Over time, opposition radicalized its protest tactics as no peaceful alternatives for political change were at hand. Political manipulation, as in Nicaragua or in Colombia, was no substitute for real political opportunity in the long run. Instead of having the intended effect of moderating political demands, it in fact underscored the need to change the system. Thus, political manipulation promoted anti-systemic demands once the public's belief in limited political opportunities faded. Anti-systemic claims were potentially more radical; a system overhaul only seemed possible through external pressure and not via legal institutional channels. Thus, exclusive regimes visibly became the main obstacle to peace and change as well as the central cause of protest and the trigger of its radicalization.

The undemocratic nature of the regimes, however, robbed the authorities of the political means to resolve internal tensions. Real political changes, either immediate or future, had never been an option for the Nicaraguan family dictatorship. The Somozas chose to cling to real political and economic power and ruled Nicaragua as if it were their own private property. The Argentinean PNR dictatorship was only willing to restore democracy after having eradicated all opposition and social difference. And, despite tentative political reforms in Colombia, a profound democratization of the system did not take place until the political elite recognized the need for political changes to counter the complex internal conflict and escalating violence. In other words, the exclusive aims of the regimes largely denied them credible political means to counter their internal conflicts; for lack of alternatives, they turned to repressive means for social control and counter-insurgency. However, the focus on coercive measures escalated the violence unilaterally and often provoked a violent opposition response (Ross & Gurr 1989; Regan & Norton 2005). In the three case studies, most regimes became the main threat to their own society as they deliberately employed their entire coercive apparatus to prevent and/or disrupt social protest. Repression was used both to

shape society and to prevent challenges to the status quo from below. Exclusive regimes became the main violent actor both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

The specific political objectives of each regime determined how it responded to opposition demands. The regimes had few political options. The specific political objective, however, did have an influence on repression. The pursuit of a broad socio-political project made the Argentinean dictatorships more likely to resort to unilateral state repression to shape society. However, the project also ensured that society remained the regime's main focus, which meant that the country's exclusive, repressive regimes were "sensitive" to mass, overt social pressure. Despite the violent cultural transformation that took place, society's position towards the national socio-political projects remained the measure of a regime's success. So, the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship ceded to mass social pressure to avoid civil war. Its broad socio-political project was meant to dominate and shape society, not just to exploit it. Society remained the central entity of the state in the eyes of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime and an escalation of the conflict into overt civil war would have manifested the failure of the dictatorship's socio-political plans. Similarly, the much more radical PNR dictatorship employed broad repression and systematic state terrorism to remodel society into a new cultural form, but in its political vision society remained a central entity of the state. In other words, the social-cultural objective led the Argentinean dictatorships to unilaterally escalate violence, but at the same time it restrained them from risking all-out civil war. The regime's response to open confrontation was clandestine state terrorism, the Dirty War. Public, visible opposition was therefore more effective than covert armed struggle as a means of bringing down the PNR dictatorship.

The Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua had no such grand social vision. It sought to gain and hold on to personal power. Because the dictatorship lacked a collective socio-political project, it was less likely to respond to open social pressure or to introduce the slightest reform that it saw as a loss of power. Somoza was willing to indulge in the deliberate escalation of repression, even at the price of a civil war that killed tens of thousands, because he completely disregarded the interests of the Nicaraguan state and society. His focus was on personal benefit.

The observed relationship between political exclusion and the development of opposition confirms Theda Skocpol's finding that

politically exclusionary authoritarian regimes in the Third World have been the ones most likely to generate broad, cross-class political support for revolutionary movements. (1994:19)

In the three case studies, ongoing, coercively backed political and economic exclusion of the masses, coupled with repression of protest, were the main reasons why armed opposition appeared. Economic grievances reinforced political demands, but the main reason for protest and armed rebellions was the lack of political opportunity to change the situation (Kruijt 2008). The lack of political opportunity sparked collective resistance to the regimes both politically and militarily, and it also necessitated state repression in defense of the status quo, leading to periods of highly contentious politics (Tarrow 1994; McAdam et al. 1996; Tilly 1977). The exclusivity of the regimes and their resulting tendency to impose wide-ranging repression simply eroded their legitimacy and promoted opposition and its radicalization. The amount of political opportunity largely determined the degree of support for extra-institutional forms of opposition such as protest and even armed struggle. The political opportunity structure was therefore a central factor in the development of political violence on the national level (Skocpol 1994; Goodwin 2001; Kruijt 2008; Posso 1987; Cardenal 2004).

### **The Necessity of Social Support**

The position of larger social sectors towards domestic struggles was key to the development and outcome of the struggles. For this reason we can say the conflicts were triangular in nature.<sup>83</sup> In general terms, governing without social acceptance and by sheer force was not a long-term option; similarly, revolution required more than sectarian voluntarism (Wickham-Crowley 1991; Skocpol 1994). In the words of Max Weber, “every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (...) in obedience.” (1978:212) In short, even exclusive regimes needed a certain measure of support from civil society, expressed politically through “democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere.” (Cohen & Arato 1994:IX-X) The position of civil society in the conflict was not static and could influence the development of the conflict differently over time.

When protest broke out and the regimes realized “that only [social support] provides a firm foundation for autocratic rule,” they faced a problematic “tradeoff between using repression and building support.” (Wintrobe 2004:88) While isolated regimes were more likely to experience revolutionary overthrow (Skocpol 1994), there is in “any successful dictatorship” not only “a class of people who are repressed” but also an “overpaid” class (Wintrobe 2004:77), or “complicitous civilians,” (Goodwin 2006:2037) who benefit from the regime. The “people in the middle,” however, “can side with either group.” (Wintrobe 2004:77)

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<sup>83</sup> Please see the triangular model of domestic warfare on page 33 of this study.

In all three case studies, violence was used to influence the supporting sector, the opposing sector and especially the sector in the middle.

By positioning itself in the struggle and supporting one of the violent actors, the social audience turned into a central and even decisive player in the development of the conflicts. The violent adversaries recognized this and explicitly tried to influence the social audience's behavior to attract active support and to create a propitious environment for their actions. The coercive strategies of the antagonists, particularly state repression, dragged large social sectors into the conflict. Regimes could not ignore strong protest for very long, and since they lacked political means through which to moderate the opposition, they mainly relied on repression to demobilize protest. The (de-) escalation of political violence, and that of the broader conflict as a whole, was a function of the triangular interaction between regimes, insurgents and social audience.

Political violence, specifically, was mainly a product of coercive influences on the social audience. Although the social audience's position towards the struggle was crucial to the development of social revolutionary conflicts (Mack 1974; Ross & Gurr 1989; Goodwin 1994; Mesquita 2005), its role in political violence was often indirect. An increase in opposition activity, for instance, quickly attracted state repression or inspired an escalation of insurgent activities. Despite coercion against the social audience, the audience itself only became a violent actor in exceptional cases. On these rare occasions, large social sectors did take up arms and join the active struggle. Thus, increasing social participation in conflict contributed to escalating violence: firstly, by creating a conducive environment for violence and, secondly, by actively participating in armed struggle. Society's position towards conflicts was strongly influenced by the type of regime that was in power and its manner of dealing with the opposition; another important influence on society's position was insurgent activity and its link to society.

To summarize, the conflicts were partly seen through an external frame shaped by the international climate, regional affairs, and broad social trends such as the dissemination of Liberation Theology. At the national level, the regime type framed the specific national disputes. The regime's objective largely determined the harshness of its action. The most important factor in the development of political violence was the interaction of the three central conflict actors. The position of the social audience was determinant in for the development of the national conflicts. In the following pages, we will discuss the specific interactions that clarify the development of political violence and how particular types of regime and insurgent activity affected the development of conflicts.

### **Insurgent Organization of Opposition Forces and Conflict Development**

The appearance of social-revolutionary groups signified an escalation of domestic political tensions as they added armed struggle to the protest repertoire and pursued structural changes in the political system. Social-revolutionary organizations were the most radical form of opposition to exclusive regimes. The insurgent's need for mass support brought organizational factors and relations to society to the fore. Close state control over the urban environment hampered the development of a classic insurgent strategy. Urban insurgents acted mainly through (semi-legal) proxy organizations, approached and supported grassroots organizations, and tried to coordinate large social sectors in their struggle against the regime.

The Montoneros, M-19 and the FSLN all recognized the fact that social revolutionary change required active mass participation. Accordingly, the Montoneros called for "the participation of all the people" in their integral warfare against the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship (Descamisado 12.06.1973:2-3; Montoneros Comunicado 01.01.1971); the Colombian M-19 sought to involve "the whole population" in the guerrilla movement since "wars are fought with (...) a lot of people" (Bateman 1982:98-99; Bateman 1983); and for the Nicaraguan FSLN the revolutionary cause, and not the political flag, was what counted (Fonseca 1964). Revolution, the insurgents had understood, required the united and active participation of an overwhelming majority of society and all sectors in the struggle. A slight numerical advantage was not enough.

Insurgency, however, was first and foremost political in nature (Guevara 1961; Jenkins 1972).

Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must, if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and the sympathy, co-operation, and assistance cannot be gained,

wrote Mao Tse-Tung in his work on Guerrilla Warfare (1967b). The political nature of insurgencies and the necessity of support meant a combination of all forms of pressure was required, ranging from legal political opposition to armed struggle. Without organization, furthermore, opposition threatened to remain inconsistent and vague (Fonseca 1960). The insurgent groups had to find ways to expand and radicalize opposition to the regime while keeping these developments under control. Organizing opposition forces was no easy task, however. FSLN leader Carlos Fonseca for one had already recognized in the early 1960s that change was impossible without the organization of broad opposition to the regime (Fonseca 1960). However, it would take the FSLN another decade before it could effectively make

contact with large social sectors, build up a framework for popular protest, and ultimately mobilize the masses in armed struggle.

The insurgents' chances of organizing and mobilizing large sectors of civil society to support their project and actively participate in the struggle depended not only on their own organizational approach but also on the general socio-political situation. Widespread discontent with the government, mass protest, and strong social movements that wanted regime change facilitated the insurgents' organizational task. On the other hand, regimes had a powerful instrument at their disposal: the opening of political opportunity. This could be used to appease the opposition, calm protest movements and isolate armed struggle. Ernesto "Che" Guevara observed that armed struggle could not flourish when the "possibilities for peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted." (Guevara 1961:24)

The challenge for the initially small insurgent organizations was to organize mass participation in opposition activity in general and armed struggle in particular. The urban focus of the insurgent groups complicated their organizational task as close control by the regime hampered open organizational activity (Mack 1974; Urbano 1991; Moss 1971). The insurgent groups won sympathy and even spontaneous but unorganized support by aligning themselves with social movements. M-19, for instance, sided with the Anapo. Another successful support-building measure was the practice of armed propaganda, such as the Montoneros' *Aramburazo*. Sympathy was not enough to promote armed struggle on a large scale, however. Opposition forces needed to be organized. It was the FSLN that demonstrated how to successfully organize the popular masses for revolutionary struggle when the insurgent group

organize[d] the neighborhoods to make them fight for better living conditions on the basis of immediate demands; that means, struggling for water, for light, for medical services etc. (Borge 1983:27)

The insurgents' link with society and their method of organizing support were essential factors in the development of their campaign. Another key factor was the general climate for socio-political opposition. In the following pages we will explore how insurgents organized social support and what direct influence they had on the development of the conflicts.

### **Acting Through Proxy Organizations**

The nascent insurgent organizations largely operated under the cover of (semi-) legal social organizations, in particular Catholic and student groups. They did so to avoid immediate state intervention while organizing social support and establishing nationwide networks. Many early Montonero militants engaged in social work in neglected neighborhoods and embraced Catholic organizations that offered a unique nationwide platform for attracting young militants despite the cultural restrictions imposed by the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship (Lanusse 2007). In its quest for support, the Colombian M-19 embraced large social movements such as the Anapo. But it also set up and aligned itself with local support organizations, for instance, in the relatively urbanized Cauca Valley (Interview 25) and in popular or lower class (Esparza 2010) urban neighborhoods (Camacho 1992). Additionally, the Nicaraguan FSLN carried out fruitful social work through student and Catholic organizations in neglected neighborhoods (Dunkerley 1988; Borge 1983).

Acting through proxy organizations enabled the insurgents to overcome their social isolation to a degree, as this method provided them with a platform for social activities. While carrying out social work under the cover of proxy organizations, undetected militants simultaneously built support networks for insurgent organizations. However, aligning with or recruiting recognized community leaders such as priests or syndicate leaders was an even more important method through which insurgents could increase their influence on large social sectors. This channel had the additional advantage that it did not overextend the insurgents' organizational capacity or needlessly expose them to state control. Winning over these "natural community leaders," as an FSLN militant worded it (Interview 31), guaranteed the insurgent organization significant influence on whole communities without requiring them to build up their own large organizations within the communities. What is more, new attempts to organize quickly attracted state attention, while previously existing community relationships were less suspect and thus hampered the detection of insurgent structures.

Proxy organizations had to remain independent of insurgent groups if they were to avoid being politically compromised or targeted by (coercive) state intervention. Close, open ties to insurgent groups exposed socio-political organizations and activists to overt and covert repression, as significant death squad activity and official state repression demonstrated in the three case studies. Links between opposition sectors and insurgents provided regimes with a justification for equating any kind of opposition with insurgency and repressing opposition sectors as a whole (Calveiro 2010). Organizations known to be front organizations for insurgent groups were attacked. Argentina's Peronist Youth (JP) faced death squad attacks, and in Colombia, the Peace and Democracy camps that had been set up by M-19

were violently dismantled after the insurgents set an official end to the mid-1980s peace process (Restrepo 1992; Camacho 1992). Independence did not always guarantee grassroots organizations freedom from repression, as illustrated by the PNR's and Somoza's genocidal methods in Argentina and Nicaragua. However, it did make open repression politically harder to justify and made it likely to provoke growing opposition.

Insurgent control compromised proxy organizations politically. The strength of grassroots proxy organizations depended on their capacity to rally local protest over specific grievances and demands. Insurgents, however, projected their own political objective onto grassroots organizations, substituting specific local demands with more abstract, macro-political goals. Imposing the insurgency's political objective in this way could undermine popular support for proxy organizations. Especially when opposition groups' demands for broad democratic reforms were narrowed down to socialist objectives, they suffered a loss of mobilization potential. The Montoneros discovered this the hard way when the group began to openly pursue socialism. The organization seemed to have lost the political link with its social environment.

Even more, insurgent control over opposition organization required identification with the insurgents and limited the potential support for the proxy organization. Opposition movements needed to broaden their support base if they were to bring about change (Rucht 2004). However, having a general desire for change did not necessarily mean one identified with the most radical opposition groups and armed struggle. The Montoneros' attempt to transform the Peronist identity into a Montonero identity is a good example of the political damage insurgent control can inflict on grassroots support organizations. The attempt did not only fail to attract support but even alienated it.

Insurgent control could subordinate an organization's collective aim of political change to the insurgency's wider interests of controlling the opposition movement as a whole. This weakened the mobilization capacity of these organizations. In other words, the insurgent group's interest of expanding its organizational control jeopardized the unity a collective opposition needs to bring about political change. In short, tight insurgent control over opposition movements paradoxically ran against one of the (urban) insurgency's own needs: diverse and widespread opposition towards the ruling regime. Having less organizational control seemed to improve the chances of revolution by allowing the spread of autonomous and active participation in the struggle. Thus, it was necessary to achieve a balance between promoting change and controlling the course of events.

### **Grassroots Organization for Tangible Aims**

Proxy organizations played a central role in insurgent relations with society. However, insurgent groups quickly discovered that it was not ideology, but local and specific socio-political activism that created strong ties with civil society and helped them to mobilize opposition against regimes.

Neighborhoods organized around questions of daily life, such as deficient services (water, electricity, housing, etc.), and concerns over state abuses. Community members mobilized to take action on specific local issues that had a visible impact on the daily life of their communities. Organization for tangible aims involved large sectors of communities in opposition activities and promoted grassroots participation in societal struggles. This satisfied the insurgents' quest for social mobilization that was central to their campaign. Unattended state responsibilities and abusive state practices offered great opportunities for insurgents to set up or align themselves with grassroots self-help organizations. Another channel was cultural and sporting events. These were used to attract popular sectors to neighborhood organizations, where political discussions then formed part of the program. To paraphrase Bert Klandermans, state neglect or local grievances facilitated "consensus mobilization" and thus laid the necessary basis for "action mobilization," or the activation of community involvement in self-help activities (1984:586). State absence left the organizational initiative to a range of extra-institutional actors, from grassroots associations to insurgent groups. By participating, the popular masses were not opposing the state authorities out of ideological conviction, but organizing themselves because they lacked means of expression and change.

Neighborhood self-help activities that substituted for unfulfilled state responsibilities were a particularly effective channel through which insurgents could organize and influence larger social sectors. According to Alfred Katz, self-help groups typically start from a position of powerlessness, require spontaneous and personal participation, and fill "needs for a reference group, a point of connection and identification with others, a base for activity and a source of ego-reinforcement." (1981:136) In other words, self-help groups provide an extra-institutional, independent space for social organization and activity that substitutes for otherwise unattended needs and provides members with a (group) identity (Katz 1981; Thome 1991). The achievement of visible improvements promoted grassroots participation. Participants realized they could change their situation without help from state authorities. Self-help activities made state neglect of its responsibilities visible and offered independent solutions at the same time. In this way, grassroots work on specific objectives sowed the seeds of local counter-states. Tensions between grassroots organizations and state authorities increased, as governments feared to lose control.

“[V]olunteer labor” was central to grassroots activities; it was the first step towards local movements and posed a solution to the free-rider problem at the local level (McCarthy & Wolfson 1996:1083). As the achievements of grassroots activity became visible, public interest in collaborating with self-help groups spread, reinforcing their ties to the community. Grassroots organizations therefore played a central role in resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald 1977). Their tangible aims provided activists and the whole community with reasons to defend their independent organizations against outside intervention.

The three insurgent groups analyzed in this study attempted to build autonomous organizations and even shadow-states at the grassroots level. The Nicaraguan FSLN was the most successful of these at organizing and coordinating active grassroots participation. The political emancipation of civil society from ineffective institutional opposition and the spread of grassroots self-help groups in neglected communities allowed the FSLN to accumulate forces in secrecy.<sup>84</sup> By aligning themselves with grassroots organizations, the Nicaraguan insurgents had by the mid-1970s obtained a framework for coordinating popular participation in opposition and insurrectional struggle. Social relations and kinship engendered solidarity with grassroots militants and provided activists with community support against coercive state intervention. Collective opposition against Somoza, shared activism, personal ties and family relationships guaranteed strong support for the 1978 insurrections in Nicaragua and drew entire communities into the struggle (Cardenal 2004). Grassroots groups provided an organizational framework for these insurrections, ensuring popular participation.

Similar to proxy organizations, grassroots organizations were most successful in attracting community members when they set specific objectives and remained independent of insurgents. Being under insurgent control compromised the specificity and, consequently, the attraction of grassroots organizations. Although insurgent groups aimed to create

classical social movement organizations with indigenous leadership, volunteer staff, extensive membership, resources from direct beneficiaries and actions based on mass participation,

they ran the risk of constituting

professional social movement organizations with outside leadership, full-time paid staff, small or non-existent membership, resources from conscience constituencies, and actors that ‘speak for’ rather than involve an aggrieved group. (Jenkins 1983:533)

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<sup>84</sup> See the chapter on the silent accumulation of forces and problems of growth of this study (pp. 193-198).

The increasing professionalism of the insurgent groups tended to isolate them from social support and thereby undermine their revolutionary capacity. The Montoneros, for instance, became more professional and set up their own insurgent infrastructure in the years 1974-'75, but they compromised their political relationship with popular sectors when they self-proscribed. The result was that the Montoneros undermined their own mobilization capacity and revolutionary potential. Because their infrastructure had to remain clandestine, the insurgents were hardly able to involve the masses in opposition activity and therefore could not fulfill their own mobilization needs. Organizational strength had the surprising effect of moving the insurgent group in a sectarian direction, rather than attracting broad popular participation. Especially in urban environments, governments held the territorial control and even the stronger insurgent organizations were relatively weak from a military point of view. This questions whether organizationally strong insurgent groups are needed and even useful for achieving the strategic end-aim of an insurrection (Guillén 2005). Organizational independence might have elevated insurgents' operational capacity, but it could not substitute for the strategically decisive mass participation and social support (Le Blanc forthcoming). Only rallying mass support for the struggle could provide the insurgents with the necessary political and military potency to bring about change.

Independent grassroots organizing was a central means for activating mass opposition and was therefore crucial to insurgent campaigns. Being controlled by an insurgent group, however, often hampered close contacts to society. Insurgents had to find a balance between supporting and controlling independent opposition groups. The need for independent opposition meant insurgents were extremely dependent on the general socio-political environment, and, hence, on regime actions.

### **Coordination of Larger Opposition Sectors**

By organizing social support, insurgent organizations transformed into visible expressions of social movements, or "Movement Organizations." (Zald & Ash 1966) However, insurgents only represented the most radical group within a larger "Movement Family" of opposition movements, that is, the

set of coexisting movements that, regardless of their specific goals, have similar basic values and organizational overlaps, and sometimes even join for common campaigns. (della Porta & Rucht 1995:232)

## CHAPTER FIVE

For instance, the Montoneros formed part of the left-wing of the Peronist movement; M-19 emerged from the various sectors that opposed the National Front; and the FSLN was an organized response within a largely unorganized opposition environment. Insurgent groups constituted but one of the many types of movement organization within a wider whole, but their revolutionary aims required a united struggle by the largest opposition sectors possible. Working for opposition unity while assuring its revolutionary aim was a challenge for insurgents.

Opposition unity required a unifying political objective that was able to connect local grievances to demands for structural change at the national level and, in so doing, to combine the forces of local organizations into a strong national protest movement. Organizational control, by contrast, tended to be counterproductive to the insurgents' mobilizing objective, as explained above. A common political objective was needed that could unite diverse and sometimes even opposed interests. It had to be broad and general enough to be attractive to different sectors and to allow different interpretations of the end-aim. The unifying political objective had to function as a least common denominator of the opposition movement family. The three insurgent organizations analyzed in this study discovered that demands for democracy were the most important objective and mobilization factor in times of political exclusion. They embraced this demand in order to gain an influential position within the opposition movement family. Unity in the struggle was central to insurgent campaigns. Insurgents had to postpone any discussion of the specific political goals being sought until after taking power. Insurgents, to be successful, had to rally opposition sectors around a least common political denominator that implied a structural regime change.

A strong collective identity made it easier to mobilize active participation in the conflict. It promoted escalation of the struggle, as the example of the Argentinean Peronist movement demonstrated. That movement contained both extreme left and extreme right-wing sectors. Infighting over the movement's identity broke out as soon as the short-term collective political goal had been reached. A long-term political objective had to be specified and differences over this ultimate goal ended the tactical coalition between the opposition forces. In another example, the Colombian opposition movement that pressed for an opening of political opportunity in the early 1980s quickly fell apart once President Betancur took office in 1982 and created room for political expression.

United opposition activity served as a force multiplier for the insurgents. Diverse opposition sectors put pressure on the regime with their particular means, spreading state attention and forces thin. United opposition allowed the groups to effectively combine different forms of pressure, including (legal) political moves, traditional labor struggles and armed struggle. The Nicaraguan opposition, for instance, included grassroots organizations and a variety of political platforms. They ranged from the prestigious Group of Twelve to local

organizations, entrepreneurial associations, the moderate FAO and the FSLN insurgents. Their collaboration narrowed Somoza's room for political maneuver and limited his ability to wield coercive power. The tactical collaboration of opposition forces was a decisive factor in the ouster of Somoza at the end of the Nicaraguan civil war.

Having the capacity to coordinate the larger opposition movement family was decisive for insurgent campaigns. This capacity was first and foremost a matter of the insurgency's political agenda and organizational network. The FSLN was able to take a leading role in the revolution because it coordinated the military struggle and rallied political forces around its position. It did not have strict control of fellow opposition movements. The Montoneros, on the other hand, forfeited their central position within the opposition movement family when they increased their control of fellow opposition movements, militarized their campaign, and introduced socialism as the new political objective. Support for their political agenda and front organizations decreased and a rise in violence threatened off many politically oriented activists. The Montoneros declined from a central movement organization into a sectarian group.

M-19, in comparison, largely lacked organizational control and direct influence over fellow opposition organizations. Embracing popular demands and supporting these with armed propaganda generated widespread support for the organization and enabled it to position itself as (self-appointed) representative of various opposition movements. However, M-19 failed to control and dominate the struggle. The group's vague concept of the movement, in which any opponent of the regime was declared an M-19 sympathizer, guaranteed the insurgents an enormous support on an ideological level. At the practical level, however, the degree of committed support they enjoyed was limited by M-19's precarious organizational situation. Widespread sympathy was not enough to secure the commitment of fellow opposition movements to armed struggle. M-19's lack of own grassroots support organizations made the group extremely dependent on developments within the opposition sectors. Coordinating the opposition struggle was therefore a prerequisite to organizing grassroots participation in the struggle.

### **Organizational Patterns' Effects on the Development of Political Violence**

To sum up, the insurgent's relationship to society was the central framework within which social participation in the struggle was organized; this was what determined the insurgent's revolutionary capability. Insurgents, however, faced a paradoxical relationship with civil society. On the one hand insurgent groups desperately needed mass, active social support,

and on the other hand, they had only limited means to organize it. The insurgent's opportunity to organize social support largely depended on the general socio-political environment and, hence, on the actions of the regime.

Insurgent organization and coordination of social support was a form of non-violent escalation (Kalyvas 2010; Chenoy 2010). It had a force-multiplying effect, strengthening the group politically and militarily without overextending its organizational capacities and exposing it to repression. However, successful insurgent organization of social support tended to escalate the conflict at one time or another, as it increased opposition pressure on the regime and tentatively organized counter-states. Furthermore, growing social participation in the struggle exposed larger social sectors to state intervention, readily escalating the conflict in quantitative terms. As discussed in greater detail below, grassroots organization also attracted repression at the grassroots level. This tended to escalate the violence qualitatively and quantitatively, as the repression was intended to disrupt the basic capacity for local organization by instilling fear.

State control over territory obliged urban insurgents to organize social support indirectly through proxy organizations and independent grassroots groups. However, insurgents were better able to win support and coordinate the opposition struggle if they limited their organizational control over fellow opposition movements and maintained loose connections with them. Tight organizational control proved less effective. Building networks was the key to successful insurgent organization and coordination of opposition forces. Voluntary participation in opposition activities enabled insurgents to overcome sectarianism and to unite opposition sectors against the regime. Neither control nor military strength determined insurgents' revolutionary capacity—but their ability to organize social support was key.

### **The Use of Violence**

In domestic violent conflicts, ruling regimes and insurgent forces both employed violence to defeat the adversary and to shape the behavior of the larger social sectors. Both violent actors hoped to inspire compliant social behavior. However, they employed violence in different ways. Insurgents aimed to win sympathy and support for their campaign. They even hoped to promote popular insurrections and to motivate people to actively participate in armed struggle. Regimes, in contrast, generally employed violence to demobilize protest and to discourage societal participation in opposition activity. In the three case studies, insurgents tended to employ selective and highly political violence, although sometimes they militarized

their campaigns and opted to confront state forces directly. Most ruling regimes of the time period analyzed in this study frequently employed broad and indiscriminate violence against alleged opposition sectors and sometimes against civil society at large. Regimes even used state terrorism. However, force only played a decisive role in the development of conflicts when it shaped the behavior of civil society. Attempts to influence societal behavior by force constituted the main source of violence. The effect of force depended on how, and in what socio-political context, it was employed.

The following pages will explore the different ways violence was employed and address the effects these had on the development of conflicts.

### **Insurgent Violence—From Selective Armed Propaganda to Military Confrontation with State Forces**

Armed struggle was as much an essential part of insurgent activities as was the organization of social support. The three insurgent organizations analyzed in this study focused their activity on the urban environment and developed a significant urban campaign. While the Montoneros emerged from the urban protest environment and remained exclusively urban based, the FSLN did not develop an important urban infrastructure until the early 1970s. Its successful insurrectional campaign was closely linked to its urban development. Colombia's M-19 also came from an urban protest environment. Despite the organization's influential urban armed propaganda actions, it believed in the necessity of a rural armed force. However, M-19's urban actions proved a more effective aspect of its campaign against the government than the more military-oriented rural efforts, as will be discussed in detail below.

The urban environment conditioned insurgents' campaigns and use of force. Close government control of the urban environment, for instance, made it impossible to overtly organize and train a classic insurgent force (Moss 1971; Mack 1974). The regime's urban presence prevented rebels from gaining territorial control or defending fixed points (Guillén 2005). Urban insurgents constantly operate "behind enemy lines" (Kroes 1974:91) and attack where the state is strongest (Mack 1974). Although urban insurgents acted among the population, it was a "physically isolated form of struggle" (Gillespie 1980:49) as the risk of infiltration and treason compounded the "security problem of the urban fighter (...) tremendously." (Urbano 1991:10) Urban insurgent organizations have a paradoxical relationship with civil society. As they become increasingly independent of social support at the tactical level, they depend ever more on spontaneous and widespread social support on the strategic level (Le Blanc forthcoming).

Insurgents largely employed propaganda by deed; their use of violence was meant to substitute for the limited organizational means at their disposal to mobilize active participation in armed struggle. Therefore, attacks had to send a self-evident political message (Guillén 2005). A primacy of practice characterized the urban insurgent struggle (Münkler 2008; Teitler 1974; Rammstedt 1974; Lamberg 1974; Marighela 1974). The specific way in which violence was used, which varied from selective and highly political armed propaganda to military-style armed struggle, strongly influenced insurgents' ability to mobilize active support and, by extension, to achieve their revolutionary objective.

### **Urban Insurgent Struggle and Armed Propaganda**

Armed propaganda is the classic type of urban insurgent action. It is the urban insurgent's method of "intervening in public questions" and of thereby insuring "support for [their] cause," as Carlos Marighela observed in his *Mini-Manual on Urban Guerrilla* (1974:131). Armed propaganda is the manifestation of the urban insurgent's belief in the primacy of practice. According to this vision, there is latent social support for armed action, but this must be mobilized through armed action (RAF 1997; Marighela 1974; Rammstedt 1974). Urban insurgents hoped to supplement their limited organizational capacity with armed propaganda. This became their central means of mobilizing mass support and advancing their revolutionary objective.

However, not every armed attack was met with sympathy and support for the insurgents. Generating support was, first and foremost, a question of politics. It depended on the political opportunity structure and the insurgents' political agenda. Armed propaganda had to transmit a clear and attractive political message (Guillén 2005). Selective violence and politically self-evident armed propaganda generated widespread sympathy and mobilized support for the insurgent organizations in a time of strong social conflict. Good examples of this are the Montoneros' *Aramburazo*, the abduction and execution of former dictator General Aramburu; M-19's seizure of the Dominican Embassy, which unleashed a public debate on both the human rights situation and Colombia's restricted democracy; and the FSLN hostage taking of diplomats and high-ranking government figures from the home of former Agriculture Minister Castillo. Successful blows to the security apparatus and the (partial) achievement of insurgent demands were well received at a time of strong social discontent and protest over political exclusion. The acts fulfilled important objectives of armed propaganda: they supplied evidence that it was possible in practice to defy state forces and they demonstrated the regime's incapacity to guarantee security. In the *Aramburazo*, vengeance also played a role.

The execution of the figurehead Aramburo felt to many Peronists like a justified reprisal for the suppression of Peronism and the politically motivated executions of Peronists at the hands of the Liberation Revolution dictatorship (Moyano 1995). While selective and relatively low-level violence against politically significant targets was met with a positive social response, high levels of violence tended to deter protesters from active participation in political rallies (Hipsher 1998). In short, when violence was aimed at winning support, its political effect outweighed its specific military achievements. If revolutionary warfare is at least 50% political (Guillén 1965:175), this percentage is even greater in the case of urban insurgent struggle. To paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, war is essentially of a political nature (1993).

Unsurprisingly, armed propaganda rallied support for insurgent organizations more effectively at times of wide opposition and discontent with the regime. In these situations, armed propaganda added armed struggle to the repertoire of protest tactics. Protesters seemed more disposed to sympathize with armed actions when other forms of resistance had already proven useless. Thus, armed propaganda helped to radicalize existing opposition protest. A good example is the armed activity of Colombian insurgents in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their acts popularized armed struggle among the large opposition movement family. Many sympathized with coercive protest tactics and opposition movements began to radicalize. However, it was not primarily the insurgents' actions but the regime's approach to opposition that determined the strength and the radicalization of opposition sectors.

It is often claimed that the main mobilization factor of armed actions consists of provoking state repression (Marighela 1974; Sánchez-Cuenca & de la Calle 2009; Parker 2007; della Porta 1995a). The armed activities of the three insurgent organizations analyzed in this study contributed to an escalation of the conflict. However, these three groups do not appear to have been deliberately trying to provoke a state overreaction. The regimes were already engaged in tangible political exclusion and an overt crackdown on opposition movements when the insurgents launched their struggle. In Argentina protest and repression had already escalated by the late 1960s and the Montoneros did not need to unmask the true nature of the military dictatorship. In Colombia, restriction of political opportunity and the repressive nature of the National Front regime was publicly recognized by the 1970s and early 1980s and had already led to widespread protest. Similarly in Nicaragua, the Somoza family's political exclusion and repression of independent opposition was publicly visible and had pushed the popular masses into extra-institutional opposition activities. In the case of the Montoneros, M-19 and the FSLN, armed struggle was not meant to unmask the regimes or intensify the crackdown. It was a reaction to the repressiveness and exclusivity of the states. Increasing repression, however, was a side effect of the insurgent campaigns.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Not even the Montoneros' direct military attacks against the armed forces in the course of 1975 were intended to provoke more state repression. On the contrary, they were aimed at pre-empting the expected military coup, however, with counter-productive effects (Perdía 1997; Gillespie 1982). State repression escalated well before the coup, especially by the death squads of the AAA. The Montoneros did not aim to provoke harsher state repression, but they did expect a military coup to replace the death squads with overt forms of repressive social control. The Montoneros hoped to reconstruct a united opposition front of the kind that had existed under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship. In short, the specific circumstances of the three insurgent groups analyzed here, namely the fact that they were operating under undemocratic regimes and even open dictatorships, made unmasking the regimes superfluous.

Armed propaganda held opportunities and risks for the organizations that pursued this method. On the one hand, insurgents could attract widespread sympathy and sometimes even active support by carrying out clearly political, high-profile armed propaganda. On the other, they could just as easily alienate supporters through military-type attacks without clear political messages and simple operational failures. M-19's failed assault on the Colombian Palace of Justice in late 1985 clearly demonstrated the disastrous effects that operational failures could have for insurgent organizations. The assault commando failed to seize the Palace completely and an immediate counter-attack escalated the situation (Jimeno 1989; Informe 2010). Failing to gain control of the situation prevented M-19 from carrying out the political component of the operation, namely the planned "trial" of President Betancur. This reduced the publicly visible part of the attack to the deaths of over one hundred people in the crossfire and the damage done to the Palace of Justice. The fiasco denied M-19 room for political propaganda; the attack was a military and public opinion disaster for the organization.

Armed propaganda was essentially about mobilizing support. To achieve this, it had to send a self-evident and attractive political message. The political message must not be overshadowed by the purely military objectives of the attacks; such objectives had to remain secondary to the insurgency's mobilization capacity. Military capabilities did, however, play an important role at the operational level of armed propaganda, as only successful actions could transmit the political message. Only a fine line divided between opportunities and risks of high profile armed propaganda. The political messages, and not the military actions in and of themselves, were of decisive strategic importance to the insurgent campaign.

**Military-Style Armed Struggle**

Insurgencies by definition used armed struggle as a means to attain political goals. Confronting and defeating the government's armed forces were central to the thinking of the three insurgent groups studied here, each of whom believed that only the "destruction of the military power of the enemy", as the Montoneros explained (Evita Montonera Jan.-Feb. 1975)<sup>85</sup>, would make profound political changes possible. In their determination to defeat government troops and seize power by force, the insurgents not only escalated the confrontation at a military level, they also forgot now and then about their need for social support (Calveiro 2010). Urban insurgencies that focused on the military aspects of attacks and that lacked, or failed to send, self-evident political messages, did not attract social support. This reduced their strategic revolutionary capacity. Violence was not a popular means of action and it could only mobilize support if combined with a political objective that was widely shared by a politically excluded part of the population. However, military capabilities began to play an important role when broad opposition sectors embraced armed struggle and more conventional violent confrontations started to take place.

The insurgent focus on taking power by force, the vanguard concept, and a number of socio-political misjudgments convinced the insurgent groups to step up their campaigns militarily. To defeat the armed forces and take control of the state by military means, the insurgents needed their own army capable of outperforming government forces. The Montoneros and M-19 were convinced of the need to set up a popular army and saw their own forces as that army's core. In militarizing its struggle, the Montoneros went so far as to imitate the government army structure and strengthen their own internal hierarchy and discipline, introducing ranks and even uniforms (Moyano 1995). As a result, the group had significant fighting power by 1975 and it proudly demonstrated this to Argentinean society with attacks on military garrisons. However, these operations failed to send a clear political message and won them no sympathy or support. By emphasizing the military aspects of their campaign over the political, the organization lost its close ties to the population. Through self-imposed isolation, the Montoneros increasingly took on the traits of a sectarian organization.

Similarly, M-19 emphasized the need of a popular army to defend spaces of popular self-organization and protest achievements against elite interests as well as to defeat the Colombian armed forces. M-19 saw no way to set up an army in an urban setting and therefore decided to create rural fronts to maintain constant military pressure on the Colombian government while continuing its urban armed propaganda. Despite considerable military successes by these rural columns, such as the repelling of an army attack at

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<sup>85</sup> M-19 and the FSLN expressed similar ideas.

Yarumales in late 1984 and their march on Cali in early 1986, the force was far too small to deal a decisive blow to the Colombian armed forces. Because of M-19's relative weakness, some also questioned the military success of its march on Cali; the operation cost the lives of many cadres and left M-19 militarily weaker. Most importantly, the heavy battles they fought failed to communicate a convincing political objective to larger social sectors, leaving the organization isolated. Like the Montoneros, M-19 lost both support and revolutionary capacity when it stepped up its military campaign and neglected political communication. In other words, seeking to mobilize popular support through direct confrontations with state forces was politically and military counterproductive for insurgents in situations where the popular environment was not on the verge of insurrection.

The vanguard concept encouraged insurgent groups to militarize their campaigns. Self-declared vanguard organizations interpreted the will of popular opposition sectors and pretended to represent their "real" interests, even if these might have been unthinkable to the masses themselves (Salas 2007). Insurgents often misjudged the extent of grassroots support. For instance, neither the Montoneros nor M-19 noticed their loss of support in time to turn the tide. Grassroots support could not be decreed—it had to be built, instead.

M-19 had largely limited itself to "speaking for" opposition sectors. Nonetheless, the organization attracted massive support in the early 1980s. At that time, the group gave voice to the central demands of the Colombian opposition and positioned itself as the self-declared representative of the opposition movement as a whole. M-19 owed both its success and its weakness to the organization's vague concept of the movement. Ideologically, the non-specificity allowed it to garner enormous support. But at the same time, the vagueness prevented M-19 from building specific grassroots support organizations which it could control. The organization's belief in representing society at large left it blind to its own weakness. This became clear when the broad opposition movement that had formed during the presidency of Turbay collapsed as soon as president Betancur introduced political reforms. Now, M-19 was no longer expressing popular demands, but it remained convinced that it represented the opposition and could count on widespread and active support. These assumptions led the group to overestimate its own force and to resume the armed struggle for a final assault on the regime in mid-1985.

The Montoneros and M-19 looked back on relatively successful early insurgent campaigns but faced problems as soon as political space was opened. The Montoneros gained widespread sympathy and support for its struggle against the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship, but faced severe political problems under the democratic regime due to tensions with Peron over the direction of the Peronist movement. What political space there was for the Montoneros disappeared because the group failed to represent its support sectors in a legal-institutional manner and because left-wing activists were increasingly targeted by death

squads. The glorified memory of their relatively successful insurgent campaign of the early 1970s, when combined with their current political difficulties, made a resumption of armed struggle seem like an attractive option.

Similarly, M-19 quickly faced political problems once Betancur assumed office and responded to the most pressing opposition demands. The commencement of the National Dialogue that was M-19's main achievement failed to produce the expected outcome. Instead it left the organization politically cornered, as the newly created space for expression moderated protest. Ongoing attacks on M-19 members, the group's political difficulties, and the relative success of the armed pressure campaign of the early 1980s made the resumption of armed struggle an attractive option for M-19.

The insurgents misjudged the political situation, overestimating their support and the potential outcome of returning to armed struggle. Expanded political opportunity had eased opposition and eroded support for armed struggle. Socially isolated attacks failed to restore the broad opposition fronts that had formed the foundations of successful campaigns for political change in both examples. The Montoneros and M-19 simply miscalculated the role of armed struggle in the formation of broad opposition protest. What brought opposition forces together was not the use of violence as such, but the shared political grievances of diverse opposition sectors.

An escalation of insurgent violence only had the desired effect when it coincided with increasing and radicalizing opposition activities in general. In other words, armed struggle was only successful when protest radicalization had preceded the escalation of insurgent violence. The FSLN did not escalate its armed campaign until opposition protest had generalized and radicalized. This enabled the organization to find immediate sympathy and active support for its insurrection from the moment it started launching attacks in October 1977. The popular insurrections of Monimbó and Matagalpa in February and August 1978 demonstrated the level of radicalization of popular sectors and their disposition to fight Somoza by all means. In addition to the many volunteers who increased the FSLN's strength, large parts of the population embraced armed struggle. This ensured the FSLN, the only organization experienced in combat, a leading position in the revolution. In other words, insurgent violence proved effective to mobilize and integrate active mass participation in armed struggle at times of extreme social polarization, mobilization and radicalization. Alternative means of opposing the regime had already failed and the popular masses that organized at a grassroots level radicalized their protest tactics; violence seemed to be the only way to bring about the desired changes. In this situation, even military-style attacks on National Guard garrisons helped to inspire independent popular insurrections, demonstrating that it was possible to effectively challenge the regime.

In short, the political objective and self-evident message of insurgent attacks far outweighed their military component in terms of their function in the development of insurgent campaigns. Insurgents had to be capable of carrying out attacks but it was the successful political propaganda act that served as a force-multiplier for the insurgents. Militarily, insurgent groups remained relatively weak until active mass support was achieved. To reach this point, it was crucial to carry out self-evident political armed propaganda. Insurgent campaigns that adopted an exclusively military focus discovered they had sacrificed their own mobilization potential and revolutionary capacity. Armed confrontations developed their own dynamics that could easily subsume the political message to a military logic. Such a development hampered the political and social organization of opposition sectors, especially in state-controlled, urban environments. In addition, the insurgents' military capacity also suffered from such armed confrontations against superior forces. In short, insurgents did well when using violence not for its own sake but as a means through which to express political messages.

### **The Regime's Use of Violence—Between Social Control and State Terrorism**

A central characteristic of the state, according to Max Weber, is that its

administrative staff successfully upholds (...) the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order. (1978:54)

The three states in this study frequently employed this force, not only to counter armed challenges that questioned their monopoly of violence, but also to quell civil opposition and protest.

Regimes were often even more worried by civil protest than by armed uprisings. Widespread protest compromised them politically, while isolated armed attacks did not pose a serious political or military challenge. On the contrary, small-scale armed uprisings gave the regime a justification to impose order, even by coercive means (Wickham-Crowley 1992). Civil protest, however, cast doubt on the legitimacy of governments and often demonstrated the illegitimate nature of the regimes in power.

The regimes analyzed in this study employed different means to counter civil opposition and armed challenges. All regimes, but especially those that lacked political means for countering protest, used force against the opposition and willfully targeted the entire social movement family (della Porta 1995a), not only its radical elements. By 1975, the

Argentinean authorities had already ordered the armed forces to act against the insurgent groups *and* their social surroundings (Consejo de Defensa 1/75). The PNR dictatorship left no room for bystanders in its cultural war when it claimed that “the population [had to] join the ranks of the legal forces.” (Santiago 2005) From then on, public opinion in general and the sectors that were sympathetic to subversion became the main targets of psychological operations in this unconventional war. In short, the PNR dictatorship treated all opposition as a threat to social peace, equating it to insurgency and putting it at the heart of its state terrorism campaign. In Colombia and Nicaragua, too, repressive policies were not limited to counter-insurgent activities but were focused on social control. In Colombia, the authorities used (and abused) the state of emergency to get protest under control (Díaz-Callejas 1991). They also imposed tougher punishments for protest using the Security Statute passed in the late 1970s (Alternativa n° 179). In Nicaragua, protest was outlawed under anti-communist and anti-terrorism measures (Decreto 18.09.1947). Repression became the main cause of violent death in the late 1970s (GS 1-2-1979b) when Somoza tried to out-terrorize popular rebellions in an attempt to stay in power.

Despite the many similarities, there were also enormous differences in the use of violence by the regimes. It ranged from broad and coercive forms of social control to state terrorism and open warfare against the population. Repression often posed a dilemma to the regime. Not only did the more repressive governments lose legitimacy, but the coercion they used, either to defend the status quo or to change society, often had unexpected and undesirable effects for the regimes themselves. Repression not only implied a unilateral escalation of state violence, but it often engendered increased opposition activity. In this way, it increased pressure on the state. State repression was a key factor for motivating the people to join the opposition and to radicalize, leading to the escalation of conflict and political violence (Ross & Gurr 1989; della Porta 1995a; Goodwin 1994; Goodwin 2001; Skocpol 1994; Worchel et al. 1974; Parker 2007). Sometimes, however, repression proved functional effective at easing or putting a stop to opposition activity. Regimes did not aim to end political violence, but to maintain control. To achieve this they sometimes deliberately escalated political violence (Stohl & Lopez 1984; Lopez 1984). Regimes employed violence by choice and not as a last resort.

In the next section we will explore the effects of different regimes’ approaches to insurgency and civil opposition. We will also examine reasons why different conflicts developed the way they did and the regimes’ impact on the level of violence.

**Open Coercive Social Control**

Harsh social control was able to contain weak protest. Nicaragua's Somoza dictatorship demonstrated this over long periods of time. Political manipulation increased the functionality of harsh social control, as discussed in more detail below. Yet, as grievances persisted and protest increased, exclusive regimes broadened the scope of their repressive approach, generating additional grievances for protest. Widespread protest and broad, coercive social control embodied the central dilemma for exclusive regimes. Their politically exclusive nature was the central cause of the appearance of broad demands for structural change. Short of renouncing power, there was no way the regimes could fulfill these demands. Lacking the political means to counter protest, the authorities increasingly resorted to coercive means to maintain control. In doing so, they sacrificed all their remaining legitimacy and provided arguments for more protest. This failed to stop the protest and in the long run it promoted violence.

In the three case studies, open and broad crackdowns on strong protest sectors proved counterproductive to the regime's objective of containing opposition. This confirmed the theoretical assumption that harsh state repression was a key catalyst in the quantitative and qualitative escalation of protest (della Porta 1995a; Ross & Gurr 1989; Mesquita 2005). The overt, harsh repression of protest under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship, the Colombian Security Status of Turbay, and Somoza in the late 1970s caused opposition to spread and either culminated, or threatened to culminate, in popular insurrections.

The lack of political alternatives for expression and the unsophisticated, indiscriminate nature of the repression—which affected all open dissent such as demonstrations but left the protestors' organizational capacity intact—largely explain the escalating effect of this form of repression. Such repressive social control could impede opposition for a while, but over time opposition sectors adapted and organized themselves in uncontrolled or neglected spaces. By the time such protest reappeared, it had an organizational structure that was adapted to the regime's chosen form of repression and could put up effective resistance. This undermined the effectiveness of repression. The broad intervention of the Argentinean Revolution into almost all spheres of political, economic and socio-cultural life temporarily halted all visible activism by the opposition. However, the intervention also decentralized opposition sectors and their activities, giving life to strong, locally-rooted protest movements. When in 1969 the popular insurrection of the *Cordobazo* shattered the illusion of calm, the dictatorial regime lacked effective responses to this new opposition. Similarly, the strong grassroots movements that developed under the Nicaraguan dictatorship were already used to the traditional repressive measures of the dictatorship, which rendered the measures almost useless.

The methods by which exclusive regimes countered strong opposition were superficial as they did not damage the organizational capacity of protest sectors but only affected the most visible forms of protest, namely demonstrations. Such repression was necessarily broad and indiscriminate, affected moderate and radical protest sectors alike, and escalated violence in quantitative terms. Indiscriminate repression of popular protest tended to reaffirm opposition towards the regime, as its aggression underlined the need for change. This meant regimes could not step up open repression without running the risk of provoking an all-out civil war. While increasing repression was risky in times of strong protest, maintaining or lowering it also advantaged the opposition. In short, a strong degree of social mobilization put the state's back against the wall. Civil war became the only alternative to profound political changes. The Nicaraguan social conflict offered the best example of such an escalation. The intransigent Somoza dictatorship relied on broad and indiscriminate means to terrorize the popular opposition, and in so doing, he escalated the conflict to a civil war. A strong and mobilized opposition undermined the effectiveness of repressive social control and unilateral state violence, escalating the confrontation and threatening the regime.

Government attempts to reinforce their control by coercive means after periods of moderation or reform also tended to increase opposition. In Argentina, popular rebellions spread when the new president, General Levingston, attempted to halt the dictatorship's decline by emphasizing the original objectives of the Argentinean Revolution. Similarly, when Anastasio Somoza Debayle expanded his own powers following a period of relative reformism, large social sectors turned their back on institutional politics and embraced extra-institutional forms of organization that laid the basis for the escalation of the Nicaraguan conflict. Reinforcing the exclusive nature of a regime proved difficult once protest had begun. In other words, hard-earned rights were not easy to take away.

Basing power on broad, coercive means proved counterproductive to exclusive regimes in the long run. The best way to counter widespread protest was to prevent it. In the long run, demands for political opportunity could not be resolved by repression, and political dialogue became necessary to avoid escalation. Reducing wide-ranging socio-political disputes to military conflicts in times of strong opposition tended to escalate both the framing conflicts and violence. State repression signified a unilateral escalation of violence and often triggered opposition activity.

**Clandestine Repression of Opposition Sectors**

In addition to open coercion, some regimes attacked opposition forces in a clandestine manner. While indiscriminate repression of widespread protest tended to escalate violence, selective targeting of radical sectors proved a more effective way for regimes to avoid provoking added opposition and violence. Intelligence and spy networks enabled them to focus their repression and dismantle organized opposition sectors without affecting larger social sectors. The vast neighborhood spy network established by the Somoza dictatorship enabled the regime to capture militants without any visible impact on the neighborhoods where they were based. In Colombia, intelligence work aided the detection of the hideouts where high-ranking members of M-19 were staying in the mid-1980s. This damaged the political capacity of M-19 and pushed the group towards a more military approach, and ultimately to isolate itself. Intelligence and focused repression could not entirely dismantle the insurgent groups in these cases, but it hampered the organization of broad opposition.

Despite this legal use of selective repression, clandestine crackdowns were mainly used on opposition sectors that regimes could not attack openly. Generally, state-sponsored or tolerated paramilitary forces carried out clandestine attacks, but sometimes state forces themselves were directly involved in clandestine repression. State-sponsored death squads appeared under Argentina's democratic regime in 1973, but when the PNR dictatorship seized power in 1976 the armed forces institutionalized the clandestine repression which ultimately came to be known as the "Dirty War" (Moyano 1995; Gillespie 1982). Political and social activists and legally acting militants were the main victims of clandestine attacks. While broad repression still could be part the legal repertoire of the state, clandestine repression was illegal and therefore hidden. Covert crackdowns of this type were aimed at instilling fear in the opposition to break them up. This was part of a wider strategy of state terrorism (Stohl & Lopez 1984).

Hidden repression was used to sidestep the negative effects of open and broad repression. Paramilitary attacks resembled a "total war at the grassroots level." (Edelstein 1987:120) In practice they eliminated all political opportunity for opposition groups and allowed the state to disavow direct responsibility. Attacks on leading opposition figures had a major political impact on opposition sectors. Covert repression was a unilateral escalation of state repression that spared the regime any direct political consequences. Substituting open, broad repression of opposition sectors with paramilitary attacks enabled the Betancur government to maintain a strong offensive against active social movements without having to assume political responsibility for the violence. Ongoing violence against the opposition pushed M-19 back into armed struggle and, eventually, into isolation. Clandestine repression

had proven itself an effective way to avoid legal, open political discussion with radical opposition sectors.

The Argentinean PNR dictatorship went so far as to introduce a systematic state terrorism campaign. This allowed a wide-ranging repression of all opposition and socially undesirable sectors, while avoiding the downsides of open, broad repression which had brought down the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship. The PNR focused its repression on the grassroots level and disrupted the organizational capacity of opposition movements. The PNR's operationally selective repression, which made use of forced disappearances, inspired fear and threw grassroots organizations into disarray. Anyone was a potential victim. It was the PNR's tactics and its attack on grassroots organizational capacity that made the dictatorship's offensive so terrifying and effective in disrupting opposition. In the short run, the PNR achieved social compliance through fear, similarly to totalitarian regimes (Arendt 1958).

In the short run, clandestine repression was an effective way for a regime to impose social control and put a stop to opposition. However, it came at an unacceptable price for society and, in the long run, for the state itself. The Argentinean victims of state terrorism numbered in the tens of thousands and the strategy ultimately led to the dictatorship's demise by undermining its legitimacy and own moral foundations (Moyano 1995; Romero 2002). The judicial processes taking place today against those responsible for the crimes in Argentina demonstrate the long-term effects of state terrorism. In Colombia, the spread of paramilitary violence not only undermined the state's monopoly of force by introducing a parallel coercive structure, it also perpetuated the conflict and helped to (re-) escalate the violence. At one time, clandestine repression might have seemed an attractive way for exclusive regimes to counter opposition challenges, but it almost unavoidably escalated violence and undermined the legal state apparatus, ultimately causing serious problems for the authorities.

In times of open conflict, clandestine repression lost its terrifying effect and, hence, its usefulness for exclusive regimes, because overt violence had already reached extreme levels. The introduction of the Argentinean counter-insurgency method in Nicaragua (Armony 1997) had no significant effect on the insurrectional masses, as Somoza was already waging an open war against the people. Furthermore, Somoza lacked absolute control over Nicaragua's territory and population. Such control had been a necessary precondition for the use of Argentinean-style state terrorism that installed fear in society by converting everyone into a potential victim.

### **The Use of Violence Compared**

Socio-revolutionary domestic conflicts were essentially political. Civil society played a central role in these disputes. Insurgents and regimes explicitly employed violence to influence the behavior of large social sectors. The goal was to gain an advantage over the adversary. Avoiding or ending political violence was not a priority for the violent actors. They were chiefly concerned with the achievement of their political objectives. Often the adversaries willfully escalated violence to provoke reactions in society. Because of their basic triangular conflict constellation, socio-revolutionary struggles had a tendency to escalate. However, violence could in turn either escalate or de-escalate the broader conflict; it often enhanced opposition activities but sometimes stunted them. The development of violence and the broader conflict was shaped by the interaction of the three central conflict actors.

Insurgents and regime forces pursued different objectives and employed violence differently to influence social behavior. The insurgents' aim of mobilizing opposition required to emphasize the political aspects of violent actions. Political, selective and limited violence served insurgents' needs better than purely military confrontations with superior government forces. By contrast, regimes aimed to disrupt opposition, which made the use of extreme violence a feasible option. Although regimes willfully escalated coercion to control society, the specific outcome of such repression depended on the socio-political circumstances at the time and the type and focus of the coercive measures taken. The social audience's stance towards the conflict was determined by social perceptions of the government's legitimacy and by the ways in which the state employed coercion. Harsh repression in times of intense and growing opposition tended to have an escalating effect on both the violence and the conflict as a whole, while clandestine repression escalated violence "only" unilaterally and sometimes succeeded in demobilizing opposition protest by instilling fear. Large-scale clandestine repression could even disrupt the collective action of society (Hipsher 1998:155; Gillespie 1982). Coercion could limit the social outrage expressed over state abuses, but clandestine violence tended to perpetuate conflicts as well.

Regimes were often interested in militarizing disputes. Regimes understood that insurgents derived their strength from their political message and not from their military force. The regimes hoped that by escalating the level of violence, they would frighten off those who might otherwise participate in protest. The ultimate goal was to isolate and effectively repress the remaining hardcore protesters. Clandestine attacks on socio-political activities and insurgents effectively provoked military insurgent responses. As a result, insurgents isolated themselves by neglecting the political message of their campaigns. Increasing violence and a de-emphasizing of the political aspects of the struggle was advantageous to exclusive

regimes. Good examples of this are the Montoneros and M-19, who responded to state provocation and alienated their social support when they resumed armed struggle. Both groups emphasized the military aspects of their renewed operations over transmitting their political goals. On the face of it, the insurgents seemed to be escalating the violence unilaterally, losing support as a result. With the military confrontation and escalating violence in the foreground, the disputes lost their political core. This facilitated state repression.

Militarization of the dispute only served the regime's purposes if it interfered with the political agenda of the insurgents or when it disrupted the organizational capacity of opposition sectors. Otherwise, military escalation could even culminate in a revolutionary overthrow of the regime as it left no alternative to radical opposition. The employment of mass coercion against large social sectors definitively converted the regime in the main violent actor in domestic conflicts. This threatened to undermine the legitimacy of regimes and reinforce calls for structural change. The militarization of the disputes was a risky strategy for regimes.

The effectiveness of political violence could best be evaluated in terms of its influence on the behavior of the social audience. The social audience had contrasting expectations of regimes and insurgents and evaluated their violent actions differently. Government was expected to improve social conditions and was held responsible for whatever socio-political situation generated the internal crisis. Furthermore, regimes controlled the central coercive apparatus and were expected to meet any coercive challenge. However, opposition sectors often perceived the use of repression as illegitimate, as the state was supposed to protect its people, and as excessive given the usually asymmetric balance of power between states and challengers. Therefore, opposition sectors often perceived the tactical defeat of regime forces by insurgents as a major strategic victory, even though the balance of power might have remained unchanged. Although outperforming state forces in direct encounters revealed the weaknesses of the regime, the importance of tactical insurgent victories did not lie in their military achievements but in their symbolism. To the insurgent, such a victory symbolized successful defiance of a superior adversary in a specific event for which it had chosen the place and time.

In contrast, insurgent defeats in battle were expected and had less impact. Insurgent groups sometimes gained significant legitimacy when they defied exclusive regimes, formulated popular grievances and assumed neglected state responsibilities. Insurgent legitimacy depended more on what the state did than on the rebels' own actions. In the eyes of the social audience, the regimes and the insurgents were not equally responsible for the conflict. They had different options for intervening into the conflict. These dissimilar possibilities made the social audience evaluate the adversaries' use of violence differently.

Consequently, insurgent victories, which were often no more than tactical triumphs, were frequently overrated in terms of their military importance.

The use of violence was essential to the development of conflicts. However, it was the specific type of violence used and the socio-political environment in which it was employed that determined its effect. Neither insurgents nor regimes were determined to avoid violence. Both hoped to achieve their objectives by using and sometimes even escalating violence. Violence, under such circumstances, easily entered an escalating dynamic: armed challenges to the state's monopoly of force provoked increasing repression. However, it was not violence itself but the position civil society took towards the dispute that was pivotal to the development of domestic conflicts.

### **Non-Violent Interaction and Its Influences on the Development of Conflicts**

In addition to armed confrontation, the adversaries—and particularly ruling regimes—used non-violent means to shape the conflict. Improvements to the political opportunity structure and negotiations between insurgents and regimes often happened concurrently with violent confrontations, and sometimes put a stop to the fighting either temporarily or permanently. The findings of this study reaffirm the importance of the political opportunity structure to the development of internal struggles and their ability to avoid and/or counter political violence (Ross & Gurr 1989; Weitz 1986). However, an improvement of political opportunity sometimes had only a limited—or even an escalating—effect on political violence (Booth & Walker 1989; Roquie 1994; Lungo 1986; Corr 1996; Mesquita 2005). Insurgents did not always welcome the opportunity to conduct peaceful opposition when this was possible. Likewise, state authorities often maintained an armed offensive against opponents to limit their political capacity when engaging in peaceful negotiation. The following pages will explore the impact of political means and negotiations on the development of violence and domestic conflicts.

#### **Improvements of the Political Opportunity Structure**

The three domestic conflicts analyzed in this study were largely rooted in the prolonged political exclusion of the majority of the population. The conflicts' development was closely related to changes in the political opportunity structure. The tentative opening of political

rights was enough to ease popular opposition considerably. This indirectly had a dampening effect on insurgent campaigns, especially at a strategic level. An improved political opportunity structure undermined support for radical opposition sectors and adversely affected their strategic revolutionary capability. However, opposition sectors wanted more than a tentative political opening. The government had to offer real political alternatives. When a political opening was limited to a democratic façade or political exclusion continued by other means such as clandestine repression, the moderating effect was limited and violence tended to re-escalate. In these cases, violence often reached levels of cruelty unknown in earlier stages of the conflict. Strong insurgent groups more readily resumed armed struggle when limitations to political opportunity persisted or when they could find no legal way to play a major political role. Regime attempts to limit political openings, like insurgents' efforts to impose their will through extra-institutional pressure, hurt the chances of shifting a violent dispute towards political channels. These forces often contributed to an escalation (or a re-escalation) of violence.

In Argentina, the Montoneros' strength combined with a lack of legal institutional representation (Perdía 1997) motivated the group to increase pressure on the Peronist government through extra-institutional mobilization. The Montoneros' institutional weakness perpetuated political tensions despite the fall of the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship and the reinstatement of democracy. Meanwhile the government was attempting to limit political space even by illegal means. Death squad attacks on Montonero militants and activists from related organizations eliminated real political opportunity for the insurgent organization and the broader Peronist left. The violence quickly escalated and surpassed the levels of violence Argentina had experienced during the popular struggle against the Argentinean Revolution. The death squads in particular made the conflict more lethal. Regime change had ended the conflict between the popular opposition front and the dictatorship, but it exacerbated internal tensions over the Peronist movement's identity and direction. This quickly escalated into a violent confrontation as the opposing sectors of the movement tried to impose their objective without negotiation or compromise. Government attempts to dominate the Peronist left coincided with a strong insurgent group that campaigned for far-reaching political change through extra-institutional channels. This combination decreased the chances that tensions could be resolved through peaceful political channels. Violence re-escalated. In Argentina the lack of commitment to democracy maintained and escalated political tensions. The PNR dictatorship eventually put a stop to the democratic interlude which, despite its limitations, seemed to have alienated the insurgents from their social support network.

In Colombia, too, a tentative political opening under president Betancur had a moderating effect on the popular opposition that had mobilized against his predecessor. Betancur's move led to the bifurcation of the protest movement and armed struggle (Posso

1987). The broad peace agreement between the government, M-19 and EPL foresaw the establishment of a National Dialogue which satisfied the insurgent groups. However, tensions later resurfaced when the government tried to restrict the broad agreement by adding new conditions such as the disarmament of insurgents. M-19's self-perception as an actor on an equal footing with the state, working as an arbiter between the government and the popular masses, created additional tensions between the extra-institutional group and institutional forces. There was little hope of resolving the conflict through a political compromise as each of the conflict actors aimed to impose its political will on the others. Political tensions were heightened by ambiguous agreements that left room for interpretation as to the extent and content of political change. The gap grew between governmental and insurgent expectations of the peace process. This made a military solution, which both sides still believed possible, an ever more enticing option. The conflict continued thanks to many factors: autonomous army violations of the peace treaty, government criticism of the National Dialogue, paramilitary attacks on socio-political activists and demobilized insurgents, and ongoing insurgent activity including their military reinforcement and support for extra-institutional protest. Violence re-escalated as soon as M-19 resumed armed struggle. M-19 was soon followed by EPL. The violence reached levels hitherto unknown, but the tentative political opening had given a strategic victory to the government by undermining support for armed struggle. Nonetheless, political reform had the power to moderate the conflict and even end the campaigns of several insurgent groups when pursued and applied in a credible manner, as peace negotiations between President Barco and M-19 demonstrated in the late 1980s. The main relevance of the Colombian peace process was that it broke with the logic of violent confrontation and opened real political opportunity to opposition sectors. Despite the persistence of the FARC and ELN campaigns, the peace process had dealt a strategic blow to the insurgent struggle, robbing it of its political argument. Violence persisted after the peace process, but the negotiations had decreased the revolutionary capacity of the insurgent organizations.

A democratic façade like the established by the Nicaraguan dictatorship had a moderating impact on opposition protest at first, but ongoing political exclusion ended all belief in the possibility of change. The dictatorship did not consider a real political opening an option, but maintaining political exclusion by force confronted the regime with increasing opposition. Once the regime had lost its political means of control, revolution was on the way.

Opening up political space eased opposition protest and affected the long-term revolutionary capacity of the insurgents. The creation of political opportunity in times of insurgent development had limited effect, however. It even increased the immediate level of political violence, at least when political exclusion persisted or reappeared. Escalation or re-escalation of violence could be attributed to the regime's decision to maintain or reintroduce

political exclusion through paramilitary violence, as well as to the insurgency's strength and refusal to make a permanent, unequivocal commitment to politics. Insurgent self-interest in retaining an important role as an organization also seemed to limit the group's commitment to purely political channels of conflict resolution, particularly if these channels required compromise but failed to produce structural changes. Political measures, thus, seem to perform poorly if applied only halfheartedly or for immediate counter-insurgent purposes in times of deep-rooted opposition. Real political opportunity, on the other hand, had a strategically moderating effect on domestic conflicts and political violence. Elections were a strong counter-insurgent means in the hands of ruling regimes (Torres Rivas 2002; Torres Rivas 2006).

### **Negotiations**

Only rarely are domestic violent conflicts ended by a negotiated settlement (Walter 1997). The quarrelling forces in this study frequently sought negotiations but a breakdown of talks was equally common. Governments faced the dilemma that negotiating with insurgents implied recognition of them as legitimate negotiating partners. And, the readiness of armed rebels to negotiate depended on their tactical expectations (Zartman & Alfredson 2005). In the case studies here, two types of negotiations could be observed: operational talks that focused on resolving specific crises such as hostage takings, and strategic negotiations that focused on finding solutions for the much broader conflicts. Negotiations were not equally frequent in the three case studies. In Argentina they were virtually absent, while operational negotiations took place in Nicaragua and Colombia, and strategic talks took place only in Colombia. The latter successfully ended M-19's campaign.

Operational negotiations were the consequence of successful armed propaganda attacks or the calculated result of insurgent pressure. Operational negotiations were aimed at attracting media attention to publicly put pressure on the government. It was an operational success for insurgents when they forced the government to the table and positioned themselves as unavoidable negotiating partners. Since urban armed propaganda was principally a political struggle, securing media coverage for accusations against the government and the public propagation of objectives was more valuable to insurgents than additional, specific state concessions. M-19's hostage taking at the Dominican Embassy in 1980, therefore, was a major insurgent success even though the operation failed to achieve its initial aim of freeing detained comrades. Similarly, the FSLN hostage takings at the home of former Agriculture Minister Castillo in 1974 and the National Congress in 1978 were even

more successful; the insurgents not only enjoyed media coverage but Somoza met their demands as well.

Operational negotiations were part of armed propaganda actions and the government only could try to limit insurgent gains by opting for a hardline negotiating position (Zartman 2004). Successful operational negotiations seemed to inspire more insurgent activities. Hostage taking in particular is seen by armed challengers as a “political bargaining tool” (Bandura 1990:13) as it provides media attention for insurgents. Governments have to try to save the lives of the hostages without promoting further hostage takings (Brandt & Sandler 2009). Although social revolutionary insurgents might want to avoid the death of hostages in order to keep the public’s sympathy (Donohue & Taylor 2003:533), governments are also held at least partly responsible for hostages’ lives (Bandura 1990). This makes the death of hostages in shootouts the worst case scenario for both sides, as the disastrous events at the Colombian Palace of Justice demonstrated. Operational negotiations, by contrast, can even give regimes a chance to improve their image by demonstrating that they are concerned about the lives of their citizens.

Unlike operational talks, strategic negotiations required not only pressure from one side but the willingness of both parties to find a negotiated solution. In this sense, the government’s willingness to engage in a process of profound political reform was crucial to enable strategic negotiations. The insurgents also had to be committed to a negotiated solution that required political compromise, not the imposing of one’s will. As Barbara Walter points out, negotiations in internal violent conflicts often broke down during the “risky implementation period” (2002:21) of agreements, when the parties to the conflict become more vulnerable, after retreating from favorable positions or disarming. At such moments, the lack of “credible guarantees” (Walter 2002:3) threatened continued commitment to negotiations.

Strategic negotiations first developed in Colombia when President Betancur recognized the legitimacy of opposition demands and opened a broad dialogue with various insurgent groups and social movements. A negotiated solution was hampered by opposition from forces in the political elite and the lack of deadlines or preconditions (Chernick 1996). Furthermore, the armed nature of the truce quickly generated confrontations as the insurgents refused to disarm while the government forces autonomously maintained their offensive against armed groups. The unfocused talks, the limited commitment to profound political change, and the persistence of the armed option all weakened the ultimate effect of the negotiations.

Although the negotiations were broken off prematurely, the government had achieved several victories. It had neutralized the threat of a general radicalization of protest by responding to key opposition demands. It had impeded tactical unity among various insurgent

groups when it chose a different basis for negotiations with FARC on the one hand and with M-19, EPL and ADO on the other. The peace agreement with the strongest insurgent group, FARC, increased political pressure on the other insurgent groups. This enabled the government to focus military pressure on M-19 in its attempts to push the group to accept its conditions. In the late 1980s, the government used negotiations once more, this time with M-19, to put political pressure on the remaining insurgent groups. Separate negotiations decreased the insurgents' pressure capacity and lowered their expectations of what could be achieved. Although such a situation was favorable to the government negotiating position, it did not lead to a conclusion of the internal conflict. Ongoing insurgent and paramilitary violence simply limited the effect of the peace processes.

The second attempt at strategic negotiations, which developed during the presidency of Virgilio Barco in the late 1980s, differed from the previous negotiations in terms of the changed socio-political situation. Additionally, the government and insurgents recognized that there was a military impasse which prevented resolution of the domestic conflict. This process also differed in the sense that there was a clear framework for the negotiations (Chernick 1999). The government was troubled by the escalation of Colombia's internal conflict in the second half of the 1980s and the emergence of mass criminal violence (Berghof 2008). The government recognized the need for profound political reforms to pacify some violent actors. Furthermore, M-19 recognized the limitations of its military campaign and realized it needed to return to politics if it was to bring about any change. That the government and M-19 recognized the existence of the military impasse and acknowledged the difficulty of ending the internal conflict of seizing power by force, strongly favored their acceptance of negotiations and compromise. M-19 simply had to choose: would it maintain its isolated armed struggle or seize its last chance to abandon the fight and have some influence on political reforms. The government's willingness to act on profound political reforms and insurgent preparedness to completely reintegrate into legal political life were essential to successful negotiations. Credible steps on both sides towards a negotiated solution of the conflict and personal contacts created confidence among the negotiating partners, enabling them to overcome obstacles such as attacks on insurgent militants. Confidence in personal agreements between M-19 commanders and political leaders could even overcome Congress's last minute rejection of the political peace agreements and the sociopolitical recommendations that had developed in the societal debate. M-19's hopes of achieving its objectives by playing a major political role also revived the deadlocked peace negotiations. M-19's concentration of forces had put the organization in a militarily weak position, reducing the risk of a revival of its armed struggle. However, the Congressional rejection of the far-reaching peace agreement sent disturbing signs to the larger FARC organization. The group refused to concentrate its forces as a prerequisite for negotiations to avoid maneuvering itself

into a military weak position similar to M-19. Violent confrontations between FARC and state forces became almost unavoidable, however, and undermined confidence before negotiations were aborted without results in 1993 (Molano 2000). The conditions that ended the struggle between M-19 and the Colombian government were a combination of a favorable political situation of widespread desire for peace with government readiness to reform the political system and an insurgent quest to take a political role.

Clear negotiation objectives, abstention from armed provocation and a credible commitment to negotiations were necessary requirements to enable the conflict parties to enter strategic negotiations (Walter 2002). A societal desire for peace, furthermore, not only pressured the government to pursue talks (Zartman & Alfredson 2005) but also pressured the (politically-oriented) insurgent groups to embrace negotiations.

### **The Effects of Non-Violent Means Summarized**

Opening political alternatives for expression and opposition seemed to be the best way to prevent political violence from emerging and developing into a significant force. Countering violent political conflicts by improving political opportunity, however, presented dilemmas for exclusive regimes and for insurgents alike. Only opening real political opportunity had a moderating effect on radical opposition sectors. Exclusive regimes had to democratize and to accept legal challenges to their power if they were to counter internal conflicts.

For insurgents, a political opening was a mixed success, as it undermined support for armed struggle and, thus, contained a serious threat to the organization's long-term revolutionary capacity. Insurgents had to promote changes through legal political channels without counting on the necessary weight in the institutional political system to bring about significant structural change. The gap between rising social expectations and the lack of power to fulfill promises undermined support for insurgents, as they performed poorly as legal political players and because legal alternatives to armed struggle existed. A political opening, thus, weakened the insurgents, as it shifted the dispute from armed struggle towards legal politics for which insurgent groups were insufficiently prepared. Faced with limited political capacities, insurgents tended to maintain extra-institutional forms of pressure on the governments, maintaining tensions with the authorities. Limited government enthusiasm for permitting a legal opposition often questioned the quality of political opportunities. Insurgent fears of being marginalized in the process of political institutionalization additionally undermined the moderating effect of political openings. A political opening's effectiveness largely depended on the commitment of conflict actors to such a solution. Similarly, strategic

negotiations required a credible commitment by the negotiating parties to establish real alternatives to armed struggle.

Negotiations and political openings were nonetheless highly attractive objectives for insurgents, as they hoped to play a central political role and to bring about profound change via legal channels. However, the social protest that had fought for the opening of political opportunity quickly disintegrated as soon as this unifying aim was achieved. Insurgents often miscalculated the social support for their position as well as the effectiveness of armed struggle in unifying popular sectors. In times of political difficulty and clandestine repression, the return to armed struggle therefore became an attractive option for insurgents. However, improved political opportunity undermined support for armed struggle and insurgents isolated themselves. To paraphrase Tedd Ross and Ian Gurr, the loss of political capabilities seemed to have contributed more to the decline of insurgent campaigns than any counter-insurgent actions taken by the authorities (Ross & Gurr 1989).

### **Conclusion**

Throughout Latin America, violent internal conflicts arose because of regimes that defended elite interests by forcefully excluding popular sectors from politics. This very same type of conflict was at the heart of the three examples analyzed in this study. Sectarian and short-sighted elite interests, as well as the radicalization of social tensions in the polarized ideological atmosphere of the Cold War, hampered political compromises and facilitated the escalation of tension into violent conflict. The exclusive nature of the regimes had not only been the main reason for the formation of strong opposition and the radicalization of protest; political exclusion had also been the central obstacle to finding a peaceful political solution to the national conflicts.

Internal violent conflicts in Latin America had been essentially political disputes that were partly waged by coercive means (Clausewitz 1993). The political nature of the conflicts highlighted the role of civil society in the emergence and development of the conflicts. Insurgent groups were simply the most radical expression of much broader and more diverse opposition and protest sectors. Insurgency was essentially a political problem. The position that civil society took towards the political situation was the pivotal point of domestic conflict, as it determined the strength and radicalism of opposition pressure on the regime. Challenging exclusive regimes from below almost unavoidably provoked repression, as the regimes lacked credible political means to counter opposition. Nonetheless, the specific objective of the regimes and their resoluteness to repel any challenge from below, even by

excessive military means if necessary, determined how strong and radical opposition pressure had to become to bring about changes. Both personal interests and broad socio-political projects led regimes to escalate violence, although the reasons for doing so differed from case to case. Protest challenges and repressive regime responses often tended to reinforce each other, resulting in a spiral of escalating violence as opposition tactics radicalized and repression widened and/or hardened.

Aside from the influences of the regime, the social audience's response to the conflict was also shaped by the ways in which insurgents chose to employ violence and the kind of relations they had to civil society, especially with regard to organizing opposition. Aligning with or setting up independent grassroots opposition organizations helped to mobilize opposition protest and support, as did the practice of political and selective armed propaganda. Generating autonomous and active popular participation in the struggle was a key factor in the escalation of the conflict. It also determined the strength and even the success of the insurgents. However, insurgents faced a dilemma. The effect of their organizational and practical efforts largely depended on the general socio-political environment and, hence, on the regime's performance. Political exclusion, strong opposition, and protest created a conducive atmosphere for insurgent activities, while improvements in the political opportunity structure often dealt a strategic blow to revolutionary struggle.

Organizing opposition was a matter of adaptation to the socio-political environment. Military coups or a qualitative change in regime repression provided a short-term advantage to the regime, allowing it to dismantle the opposition and silence protest. This was neatly demonstrated by the Argentinean Revolution military coup of 1966. However, the opposition adapted to the new situation and eventually cancelled out the repressive advantage of the regime. Increasing but unmodified forms of repression under the Argentinean Revolution dictatorship largely proved unsuccessful and even counter-productive in the early 1970s. Insurgents' close ties to society put these groups at an advantage over the regimes as long as the regimes did not qualitatively change their approach to the opposition, by offering a political opening, for instance. An improvement of political opportunity required a major adaptation by insurgents; they had to abandon a violent campaign and go into legal politics. They often failed to make this transformation, which worked to the state's advantage. Both the Montoneros and M-19 missed the opportunity to adapt to a changed situation—the return to democratic rule in Argentina and the establishment of a National Dialogue in Colombia—and their continued insistence on armed struggle led to the isolation of the two organizations. Thus, it was not only the specific type of action by the violent adversaries, but also the insurgents' capacity to adapt to a changing socio-political environment, that strongly influenced their chances of winning the dispute.

The opposing objectives of insurgents and regimes, as well as their contrasting self-images, were what caused them to use violence so differently. Violence was the tool with which they shaped the societal position, in an effort to influence the conflict's development. Insurgents not only depended far more on social support, they also conceived of themselves as part of the popular opposition movement. Insurgent violence was therefore selective. It was intended to stimulate opposition by highlighting the political message, and not to terrorize civil society. Urban insurgent violence was largely limited to acts of terrorism at the tactical level. Strategically, however, the analyzed groups pursued an insurgent strategy. Furthermore, the insurgents lacked the coercive means and the territorial control to force large social sectors into compliance, especially in urban environments. Here support had to be granted and could not be imposed. Stepping up their military campaign only proved effective when it was accompanied by large combative opposition sectors.

Regimes not only disposed of the necessary means to coerce larger social sectors, they also had an objective—putting a stop to opposition activities—that made the use of indiscriminate violence a valid option. The goal was to frighten opposition sectors into obedience. Unilateral escalation of violence could therefore be an effective way for regimes to hold on to power in the short run. However, regimes that tried to out-terrorize opposition sectors became the main violent conflict actor and a major threat to society, providing arguments for opposition activity. Regimes did not simply overreact in the face of opposition. They often deliberately escalated violence in order to defend the established status quo. Regimes that understood the insurgents' dependency on social support also tried to push them into self-isolation by provoking them to escalate their campaigns militarily. Regimes found a successful recipe in the combination of military pressure with political measures that avoided a general escalation of the conflict. However, this meant the continuation of the conflict. Regimes therefore stood a better chance of effectively countering insurgent challenges with a more comprehensive approach, offering political opportunity to opposition sectors to avoid their radicalization. Such an approach dealt a strategic blow to insurgents as it undermined the acceptance of armed struggle. However, this approach was usually not intended to de-escalate the violence. In the short run violence often escalated as insurgents felt betrayed and were still strong enough to confront governments directly.

The three case studies suggest that governments have the most important means at their disposal for the de-escalation of socio-revolutionary conflicts and political violence. Governments' capabilities in this respect depend first and foremost on their sincere interest in finding a structural and sustainable solution to conflicts. A sustainable solution goes beyond functional approaches that focus on maintaining power. Regimes that opt for a functional approach to opposition and merely focus on maintaining power tended to escalate the violence unilaterally. They also tended to perpetuate the social revolutionary conflicts that

had emerged due to systemic dysfunctions. Regimes can hold on to power by force but they cannot resolve structural social tensions without offering adequate space for political discussion and change. De-escalating social revolutionary conflicts and political violence does not require the elimination of opposition. Instead it depends upon the willingness to re-route a violent dispute into alternative, non-violent channels.

Such an approach can only be effective if those in power offer meaningful alternatives to opposition sectors. Political opportunity or channels of discussion, popular participation in decision-making, and change are required to strategically undermine the option of armed struggle for political change. Using political and economic means only in a tactical manner, to disarm insurgents politically while neglecting to advance real opportunity for change, run the risk of creating political disillusionment as such and drastically reduces the chance of finding a non-violent solution to conflict. Governments, in short, have to advance real changes if they are to de-escalate socio-revolutionary conflicts.

It would seem that governments can make the use of violence more difficult and less attractive. They can even structurally undermine socio-revolutionary struggle. However, they cannot permanently prevent all opposition violence. Picking up arms may always be one of the options radical groups consider, but as long as credible political alternatives exist for expressing demands and influencing political decisions, violence will hardly find the necessary social approval to constitute a significant threat. Sectarian opposition violence cannot be prevented altogether, but it will remain a minor problem as long as the political system offers real channels for change. States that wish to counter social-revolutionary conflicts and political violence would do best not to overreact in the face of opposition protest and even isolated violence. A preferable course of action would be to explore ways of addressing structural grievances. Ending socio-revolutionary conflicts therefore begins at the state level with the improvement of political opportunity. The key to resolving these conflicts lies in the hands of governments and depends on these governments' willingness to attend to societal demands.





## Appendix A

### List of Abbreviation<sup>86</sup>

AAA	Argentinean Anti-Communist Association
AD-M-19	Democratic Alliance M-19
ADO	Worker's Self-Defense
Anapo	National Popular Alliance
ANUC	National Association of Peasant Users
ARENA	National Renovation Party
CAP	Popular Action Commandos
CGT	General Labor Confederation
CGT-I	Independent General Labor Confederation
CN	National Lead
CNE	National Emergency Committee
CNG	National Guerrilla Coordinator
CNSB	National Guerrilla Coordinator Simon Bolivar
CONASE	National Security Council
CONINTES	Internal Commotion of the State
CR	Regional Lead
CRIC	Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca
CRP	Revolutionary Commandos of the People
CTC	Colombian Worker Confederation
CUS	Council for Syndicate Unification
CUUN	University Centre of the National University
EEBI	Basic Infantry Training School

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<sup>86</sup> The abbreviations are Spanish abbreviations, except those that are marked with a \* that are English abbreviations.

## ABBREVIATIONS

EGP	People's Guerrilla Army
ELN	National Liberation Army
ENR	National Revolutionary Army
EPL	Popular Liberation Army
ESMA	Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics
FALN	Armed Forces of National Liberation
FAP	Peronist Armed Forces
FAR	Revolutionary Armed Forces
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FER	Revolutionary Student Federation
FIR	Internal Resistance Front
FLN	National Liberation Front
FMLN	Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front
FN	National Front
FPN	National Patriotic Front
FSLN	Sandinist National Liberation Front
GAN	Great National Accord
GN	National Guard
GPP	Prolonged Popular Warfare
IMF*	International Monetary Fund
JDN	Democratic Nicaraguan Youth
JEC	Catholic Student Youth
JOC	Catholic Worker Youth
JP	Peronist Youth
JPN	Patriotic Nicaraguan Youth
JRN	Revolutionary Nicaraguan Youth
JTP	Peronist Workers Youth
JUCO	Communist Youth
JUP	Peronist University Youth
M-19	April 19 Movement
MAS	Death to Abductors
MC	Christian Movement
MDB	Brazilian Democratic Movement
MIR	Revolutionary Movement of the Left
MNN	Movement New Nicaragua
MOIR	Independent and Revolutionary Labor Movement

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

MPA	Authentic Peronist Movement
MPM	Montonero Peronist Movement
MPU	United Popular Movement
NSD*	National Security Doctrine
OAS*	Organization of American States
ONIC	National Indigenous Organization of Colombia
OPM	Political-Military Organization
OSN	National Security Office
PJ	Justicialist Party
PLI	Independent Liberal Party
PLN	Nationalist Liberal Party
PNR	Process of National Reorganization
PPA	Authentic Peronist Party
PPM	Montonero Peronist Party
PRT-ERP	Revolutionary Workers Party–Revolutionary Army of the People
PSN	Socialist Party of Nicaragua
SL	Shining Path
SOA*	US Army School of the Americas
TI	Insurreccional (also “Third”) Tendency
TP	Proletarian Tendency
UBR	Basic Revolutionary Units
UDEL	Democratic Liberation Union
UES	Union of Secondary-School Pupils
UNAP	National Union of Popular Action
UNO	National Opposition Union
UOM	Metal Labor Union
UP	Patriotic Union
UTC	Colombian Worker Union



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Interview 18: Mauricio Silva (17.12.2009), in La Sociedad restaurant, cll. 11#6-42; and (15.01.2010) at his home, Bogotá, Colombia, M-19 Major.

Interview 19: Jose Miguel Sanchez (17.12.2009), in La Sociedad restaurant, Cll. 11#6-42, Bogotá, Colombia, liberation theologian and M-19 militant.

Interview 20: Luz Amparo Jiménez (17.12.2009), in La Sociedad restaurant, Cll. 11#6-42, Bogotá, Colombia, Commander of urban military force.

Interview 21: Vera Grave (14.01.2010 and 27.01.2010), in her office, Observatorio para la Paz, Bogotá, Colombia, founding member and Commander of M-19.

Interview 22: Maria Eugenia Vasquez (19.01.2010), in OMA café, Cll. 62#3a, Bogotá, Colombia, Commander of M-19.

Interview 23: Alix Maria Salazar (27.01.2010), Cafe Juan Valdez, Cr.7#53, Bogotá, Colombia, Commander of M-19.

Interview 24: Arjaid Artunduaga (25.01.2010 and 08.02.2010), in his office, Bogotá, Colombia, founding member of M-19.

Interview 25: René Ramos (05.02.2010), in his office, Observatorio para la Paz; and (09.02.2010), at his home, Bogotá, Colombia, M-19 delegate in the peace negotiations.

Interview 26: Darío Villamizar (12.01.2010), Bogotá, Colombia, member, spokesperson (in Ecuador) and historian of M-19.

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Interview 27: Iván Escobar (12.04.2010), in the office of the Asociación de Veteranos y Excombatientes de Guerra „Comandante Carlos Fonseca Amador“ (AVEG–CFA), Managua; Member of the Santa Rosa Headquarters of the Managua Insurrection; later Major of Nicaraguan Army.

Interview 28: José Dolores Valdivia Hidalgo (22.04.2010), in Bongo Tropical bar, El Carmen del Canal 2 de TV, 2 cuadras al lago y 2 abajo, Managua, Member of Chief of Staff of the Southern Front, later Guerrilla Commander, Brigade Commander, Colonel of the Nicaraguan Army.

Interview 29: Rafael de Jesús Díaz-Picado (23.04.2010), in Bongo Tropical bar, El Carmen del Canal 2 de TV, 2 cuadras al lago y 2 abajo, Managua, Combatant of the Occidental Front–Chinandega, later Captain of the Nicaraguan Army.

Interview 30: Serafín Antonio García Torrez (29.04.2010), at his house in Altamira neighborhood, Managua, Member of General Staff of the Insurrection, Column Pablo Ubeda/ Atlantic Coast, later Sub-Commander.

Interview 31: Elias Noguera (05.05.2010), in Bongo Tropical bar, El Carmen del Canal 2 de TV, 2 cuadras al lago y 2 abajo, Managua, 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of the Northern Front Carlos Fonseca Amador, in member of General of Staff, later Guerrilla Commander, Colonel of the Nicaraguan Army.

Interview 32: Mónica Baltodano (20.05.2010), in her office PopolNa, Managua, Field Commander of Managua/ Internal Front.

Interview 33: Margarita Vannini (27.04.2010), in her office on the Central American University (UCA) Campus, Managua, Head of the Institute of History of Nicaragua and Central América (Ihnca).

Interview 34: Oscar Moreno (20.05.2010), in McDonalds, Rotonda Güegüense, Managua, member of GPP-UTC cell in Managua.

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## Curriculum Vitae

Jörg H.C. Le Blanc, born on September 28, 1979, holds a diploma (master) degree in Sociology from Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University of Frankfurt, including a substantial study period at the Complutense University Madrid. He wrote his degree dissertation on the phenomenon of the “Recovered Enterprises” in Argentina. In 2007, he joined the research project “A History of Counter-Terrorism, 1945-2005” at the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC) of Utrecht University. As PhD researcher, Jörg Le Blanc conducted empirical research on internal conflicts in Latin America, including interviews with former insurgents and specialists, as well as archival research. He also published on his research and presented key findings at international conferences. His main publications are *Wiedererlangte Unternehmen in Argentinien. Eine Falluntersuchung am Beispiel des Unternehmens Diógenes Taborda* (Verlag Dr. Müller. 2008) and *The Urban Environment and its Influences on Insurgent Campaigns* (forthcoming in *Terrorism and Political Violence*). He presented his research at the Interuniversity Seminar on Armed Forces and Society (2009), the Expert Workshop on Escalation Processes in Irregular War (2010), and at seminars at the Andes University in Bogotá and at the European University Institute in Florence during study stays in 2010.