



**OF VICTIMS AND EXECUTIONERS:
ARGENTINE STATE TERROR, 1976-1983**

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Working Paper #117 - April 1989

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have found that governments will often terrorize subdued, even compliant populations. Outside of the literature on genocide, little theorizing or empirical testing has been done as to the motivations behind unprovoked governmental violence. This study argues that governments may attack groups whose characteristics seem incongruent with their own ideological agendas. We delineate two major ideologies that guided the Argentine military to perpetrate state terror and gross violations of human rights as standard policy. In national security ideology, the junta found its rationale for the use of unbridled terror against a broad spectrum of the Argentine population. Guided by the hand of a free market ideology, the regime focused its terror on members of collectivities perceived to be irritably obstructive to the achievement of governmental objectives. Together these ideologies provided a motivation for the use of excessive levels of state violence by the regime and the identification of the victims of such violence. A regression analysis of previously undisclosed data on the social characteristics of the Argentine "desaparecidos," coupled with an examination of sectoral legislation, finds that individuals who were affiliated with large collectivities and certain politically powerful and strategically placed unions suffered a greater probability of victimization.

RESUMEN

Estudiosos del campo han encontrado que los gobiernos terrorizarán con frecuencia a las poblaciones sometidas si no sumisas. Aparte de la literatura sobre el genocidio, poca teorización o comprobaciones empíricas se han realizado acerca de los motivos de la violencia gubernamental no provocada. Este estudio arguye que los gobiernos pueden atacar a grupos cuyas características parecen incongruentes con sus propias agendas ideológicas. Nosotros delineamos dos ideologías principales que han guiado al ejército argentino para perpetrar como política normal el terror de estado así como graves violaciones a los derechos humanos. La junta encontró su razonamiento para el uso de terror desenfrenado contra un espectro amplio de la población argentina en la ideología de la seguridad nacional. Guiado por una ideología de mercado libre, el régimen enfocó su terror sobre miembros de colectividades percibidas como irritablemente obstructivas para la realización de los objetivos del gobierno. Juntas, estas ideologías proveyeron la motivación para el uso de niveles excesivos de violencia estatal por el régimen y para la identificación de las víctimas de tal violencia. Un análisis regresivo de información previamente no descubierto sobre las características sociales de los "desaparecidos" de Argentina, emparejado con un exámen de la legislación sectoral, encuentra que los individuos que estaban afiliados con grandes colectividades y en ciertos sindicatos políticamente poderosos y estratégicamente ubicados, sufrieron una mayor probabilidad de victimación.

INTRODUCTION

State terror is a premeditated, patterned, and instrumental form of government violence. It is planned, occurs regularly, and is intended to induce fear through "coercive and life threatening action" (Gurr, 1986: 46). Though most scholars can agree on these features, each new wave of state terror in the twentieth century has spawned a set of nagging questions for the research community. First, why have so many individuals become victims of the most severe form of intimidation and punishment, when other forms of political coercion would have sufficed to control them? Second, why are the "worst" forms of state terror often reserved for those who engage in no form of protest or hostile action against the regime? And finally, how and why are those non-dissenting populations singled out for victimization? (Arendt, 1951; Kelman, 1973; Fein, 1979; Kuper, 1981).

In certain cases, the espousal of invidious doctrines coupled with the clear, public identification and stigmatization of specific religious (Nazi Germany), ethnic (Burundi), or racial (South Africa) populations, make the selection of victims, if not the choice of terror as a policy instrument, somewhat comprehensible. But in other instances both the choice of terror and the selection of victims seem unfathomable. Such is the case of Argentine state terror under the military regime of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (PRN or "Proceso"), which ruled from 1976-1983. During this period of military rule, known as the "Dirty War," an estimated 15,000 citizens were killed or left unaccounted for. This infamous time was marked by numerous acts of state terror, the most frequent of which were disappearances.¹

International human rights offices were flooded weekly with reports of the abductions, murders, and disappearances of a diverse mixture of citizens: teachers, scientists, workers, clergy, professionals, even housewives and children. There were apparently no clear ethnic or religious patterns to these atrocities, and certainly no racial ones in this overwhelmingly white population. Moreover, most of the victims had never engaged in any political activity, let alone activity of a clandestine or radical nature. The guerrilla forces, which had posed a security problem, were firmly rebuked by the end of 1975 and could only commit sporadic and futile acts of urban terror by early 1976. Rather noteworthy is the fact that nearly 70 percent of the disappeared were abducted in the privacy of their homes or while peacefully assembled at work. Only 25 percent were arrested on the street where they were at least in a position to have publicly

¹ A full account of the events leading up to the "Proceso" and of the "Proceso" itself will not be offered here, since the subject has already been treated adequately elsewhere. See Buchanan (1986), Waldmann and Garzon (1983), Simpson and Bennett (1985), and Schvarzer (1983).

dissented (CONADEP, 1986: 11). The state-inflicted human rights abuses were scattered and, with a kind of haunting Orwellian logic, the agents of the military government seemed to strike arbitrarily, unpredictably, and nearly everywhere against the alleged “enemies of the state.”

The striking similarity of the depictions by survivors, friends, and perpetrators with respect to the methods of abduction and the severity of treatment give weight to the idea that the repression was not only deliberate but centrally planned. Moreover, the identification by the presidentially-appointed Argentine National Commission for the Disappeared (CONADEP) of some 340 concentration camps hidden behind the walls of military and police installations, where abuses were committed with the knowledge (and in most instances under the direct supervision) of superior officers, lends weight to the thesis that the “Dirty War” was an intended policy of state.

If state terror was intentionally inflicted, then what motivated the Argentine generals to take such a course of action? Because the Argentine case is sufficiently complex and a number of questions about it remain unresolved, an investigation into the motives behind the “Dirty War” seems fully warranted. In this study, we argue that the state terror was indirectly though persuasively induced by the beliefs of the junta leaders themselves. Their shared views helped to “map” their understanding and perceptions of the Argentine polity and economy. More specifically, the commitment to high and ever expanding levels of violence as a cornerstone of policy is best explained by the regime’s adherence to a national security ideology. Secondly, its pervasive qualities notwithstanding, state violence did have its focal points. Through a statistical examination of monthly data on the social characteristics of the Argentine “desaparecidos” or disappeared, we demonstrate that variations in repressive activity over time can, in part, be attributed to the collective affiliations of its victims. Guided by the hand of a free market ideology, the state systematically targeted members of unions perceived to be irritably obstructive to the achievement of governmental objectives. Together then, these security and economic ideologies provided a motivation for the use of excessive levels of state violence by the regime and the identification of the victims of such violence.

THEORIES OF STATE TERROR

Although it still lags behind the prevalence of the phenomenon itself, our knowledge of why governments terrorize their own political subjects has grown considerably in the past decade (Duff and McCamant, 1976; Goldstein, 1978, 1983; Stohl and Lopez, 1984, 1986; Howard, 1986; Pion-Berlin 1983, 1988). This literature has steadily narrowed the frame of reference from the variables in the wider political environment to more detailed analyses of government strategy and elite decisions, to postulate the conditions under which national leaders and their designated agents employ techniques of terror (Lopez 1986: 73-75). Despite insights into the context and cost-benefit calculus of state violence, less has been done to posit the specific belief systems that motivate state terror.

For example, Falk's (1980) analysis of a general global tendency toward authoritarianism falls considerably short of generating specific propositions or precise indicators of the decisional criteria that will trigger a government's movement from increased centralization of economic, political, and military functions to torture, disappearances, and assassination as standard political practice. But he does detail the structural contours in which these actions come to be accepted as viable policy in the minds of elites.

Within the parameters that demarcate the repressive potential of the centralized state, other analysts have identified the decisional settings, pressures, and rules that explain reliance on terror. Lopez and Stohl (1984) suggest that the resort to terror occurs as a policy choice made under particular national circumstances: either (1) when the resident ruling group engages in a drive to greater control beyond what most observers would claim necessary for them to sustain their existing power or (2) when the resident ruling group is faced with institutional (usually non-violent) or extra-institutional (usually violent) challenges to their power, which cannot be eradicated through minimally acceptable government force.

In their attempt to develop a more precise calculus of decision making, Duvall and Stohl (1988) argue that ruling elites opt for terror (1) when they perceive it to be a useful, efficient, and uncostly tool to achieve desired ends and (2) when the wider political environment permits or encourages the use of state terror to achieve political goals. Operating from the premise of rational choice, the authors presume that decision makers calculate their relative capabilities and vulnerabilities as well as the probability of achieving desired ends with minimal costs prior to resorting to state violence. That presumption may be reasonable and persuasive, but it is also insufficient. Calculations of utility are helpful in predicting *when* terror will be used but less so in understanding *why* it is employed. Elites are unlikely to bother with utility calculations in the first place unless they have already been sufficiently motivated to consider so drastic a policy as

unmitigated terror. Moreover, a zealous determination to accomplish a mission and a faith in terror as a policy instrument may obscure from the policymaker's view the potential costs or risks involved. Thus, the issue of underlying motive has eluded prior studies and demands considerable systematic analysis.

Discovering motive may even be more pronounced a problem in the Argentine case because the veil of secrecy still shrouds much of the armed forces' operations. As far as we know, the military kept no records of their work, never brought formal charges against their victims, nor ever accused them of violating laws. For the most part, the authorities seemed unconcerned about the need to prove specific wrongdoing. Since the disappeared are all presumed to be dead, there can be no first-hand corroboration of theories as to why each individual was detained, tortured and/or executed. Ideally, we would want to have the military's accounts of their prisoners' alleged wrongdoing and the prisoners' statements of defense. In this manner, we could create a "macro" view of terror through the compilation of "micro-specific" details. This kind of information is just not available. We do know, however, a great deal about the ideology of those leaders who directed the Proceso government, including their worldview of the threat facing Argentina and their thinking about the organization and operation of the economy they managed. In these two ideologies, one concerning the general polity and the other the economy, we have what Gurr has termed the "identifiable cultural, ideological and experiential origins of state terror" (1986: 65).

The Case for Ideology as a Source of State Terror

Nearly forty years ago, Hannah Arendt first proposed that unprovoked terror could find its origins in the ideological dispositions of state leaders (Arendt, 1951: 6). The purpose of totalitarian ideology was to construct a "fiction" about the nation's ills, which elites and masses alike would readily consume (341-353). As she explains, the doctrine was fully internalized by the Nazis. Devoid of factual content, their anti-Semitic doctrine was nonetheless touted as scientific, prophetic and infallible, turning the extermination of Jews into a matter of historical necessity (339):

The assumption of a Jewish world conspiracy was transformed by totalitarian propaganda from an objective, arguable matter into the chief element of the Nazi reality; the point was that the Nazis *acted* as though the world were dominated by Jews and needed a counterconspiracy to defend itself (1950: 352).

Arendt added that this brand of terror "...continues to be used by totalitarian regimes even when its psychological aims are achieved; its real horror is that it reigns over a completely subdued population" (1951: 335).

Arendt's insight has received little attention and virtually no testing over the years. The generation of scholars of which she was a part, who were critical of totalitarian rule, themselves earned well-deserved criticisms for their simplistic, deterministic and polemical accounts of communist tyranny. Arendt's own study of Nazi and Stalinist terror fell into a genre obsessed with the inherent evils of totalitarian rule. It failed to recognize the significant variations in political coercion found within communist states. While Arendt's views about totalitarianism may have been skewed, her more generic point about ideologically-induced terror seems to be relevant for contemporary scholars.

More recently, other scholars have noted the importance of ideology as an impetus for genocide against non-hostile populations (Fein, 1979, 1980; Kuper, 1981;) but have not concentrated on non-genocidal forms of state violence. Secondly, ideological genocide, as defined by these authors, refers mainly to the dehumanization of minorities, scapegoats or other communal groups perceived to be different from the dominant civilization, and does not include persecution of minorities or non-minorities defined by economic, political, or social position or opposition. Most recently, Harff and Gurr (1988) have made an important analytical distinction between genocide, where victims are defined by communal characteristics, and politicide, where victims are defined "primarily in terms of their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime and dominant groups" (1988: 360). Their ideological variant of politicide however is restricted to Marxist-Leninist regimes, who stigmatize their opposition for associations with the old order or for lack of revolutionary zeal, and does not allow us to uncover the ideological motivations and cognitive mechanisms behind right-wing authoritarian terror.

At first glance ideologically-driven terror against relatively defenseless populations seems irrational, more so when policy decisions are based on fictionalized accounts of political reality, as was the case in Nazi Germany. Generally however, mass murder is a calculated choice of policymakers (Fein, 1979; Harff, 1986) predicated upon the pursuit of specific objectives. As Fein (1979: 8) argues for genocidal acts (though her point bears relevance for state terror as well), calculations such as those are rational not in so far as they are reasonable but to the extent that they are "goal oriented acts *from the point of view of their perpetrators*" (emphasis ours).

Policymakers with strong ideological predispositions may logically take terror to be the most sensible instrument of policy for the achievement of desired ends. Once ideologies are assimilated, then they serve as a “map” of social and political reality for policymakers who would rather rely on these few guiding principles than be forced to make new and diverse judgments in an uncertain environment (Knorr, 1976). Those “maps” sharpen some images of the political landscape while blurring others, facilitating the selection of information and then decisions by greatly simplifying a rather complex and problematic political situation. Some degree of simplification is of course a nearly universal feature of ideologies and a normal cognitive process in which all policymakers must engage (Jervis, 1976). A major danger lies in a rigid adherence to ideologies which are fundamentally discordant with objective events (Knorr, 1976: 85). Ideologies that are conceptually flawed, anachronistic, or simply incompatible with contemporary realities are sure to inaccurately “map” the political terrain of regime elites. Exaggerated or implausible accounts of national conditions are then fully accepted which, in turn, makes the excessive use of violence by the state against complacent populations appear imperative.

Consequently, we maintain that the Argentine regime’s relentless witch hunt against a relatively compliant citizenry, well after the defeat of armed rebels, was motivated out of a structured and yet misinformed set of explanations of Argentine reality. Such violence did not emerge from a careful, empirical estimate of opposition strength. Although ideologies (to be examined below) did not “cause” state terror directly, they did shape the military’s cognitive framework: security-related problems and their origins were identified, victims were targeted, and strategies chosen. Prompted by ideology, the military turned a limited battle against rebel units into an unnecessary and large scale repression of the general population.

Our analysis of this policy of overkill as unnecessary notwithstanding, it is evident that the military’s ideological “maps” of reality were substantively meaningful *for them*. For that reason, there should be links between the substance of military ideology and their subsequent actions, and there are. Two ideologies guided Argentine state terror. The first, the National Security Doctrine, provided the authorization for unmitigated state violence against citizens. The second, a free-market ideology, provided a focus for the selection of certain victims. The security and economic ideologies of the Argentine rulers were shared by their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America to be sure, and are largely a matter of public record. To identify the specific Argentine variant and interpretation of the National Security Doctrine, a systematic content analysis was done of government documents, speeches and press conferences.² A less formal though

² Most of the speeches and press interviews (and a few secret directives) were those of President Videla who led the military coup of March of 1976 and ruled Argentina until March of 1981. A second source was General Ramón Camps who acted as a frequent spokesman for the

comprehensive assessment of major themes as they appeared in the published speeches of the Argentine President and his Minister of Economics helped us to identify the contours of economic thought.

The content of security documents was analyzed in a two-fold manner. First, an overall qualitative assessment about the central security themes of the military government was made. Secondly, a more precise inventory of public statements was ascertained by taking a subject's repeated usage of certain words and their synonyms as evidence of the extent of commitment to one view or another (Holsti, 1969). The usage of a term as a percentage of all terms in its class, across a sample of documents chosen for the study, indicated the relative salience of that concept for the regime.³ Before coding these terms, sentences were checked to ensure that the context conveyed the appropriate meaning. A sample of these texts was also coded again at a later point in time to ensure some degree of coder reliability. This procedure was necessary since only one coder was available, and it produced a 90% convergence between the first and second codings.

The NSD and State Terror

The qualitative analysis reveals that the Argentine regime subscribed to what is known as the National Security Doctrine (Comblin, 1979; Arriagada, 1981; Tapia Valdez 1980). Though all states are security conscious, within the NSD, security themes become the yardstick by which all policies are measured (Lopez, 1986). In fact all of "national politics" according to one Argentine general and former presidential adviser, "is to be understood and determined from the point of view of the national interest and national security" (Villegas, 1979: 34). Recent scholarship (Lopez, 1986; Pion-Berlin, 1988) describing the contours of national security ideology has demonstrated that the

military and as a former chief of police for Buenos Aires Province was the man most responsible for the detention and disappearance of individuals in the nation's capital. This was an institutionalized military regime and so all remarks by individual officers of state had the official endorsement of the junta. Thus there could be confidence that views expressed in these documents reflected the opinion of the regime itself.

³ Sampling and coding procedures followed here borrow from and are fully explained in a previous study. See Pion-Berlin (1988).

doctrine was an amalgam of recycled concepts of geopolitics, counterinsurgency and norms which glorified the state.

Two principles repeatedly appear in the statements of those Argentine military officers who articulated and implemented national security ideology as state policy. The first, the principle that a state of permanent or total war exists within the society, operationalizes the domestic dimension of the ideology (Ludendorff, 1941; Comblin, 1979; Arriagada, 1981). Subscribing to a fundamentally conspiracy view of the world, the NSD-minded generals were convinced they were besieged (and the nation's security jeopardized) by communist agents engaged in an international war against "Western Civilization and its ideals." Argentina was a major theatre of operations in an ongoing global confrontation.

This was an unconventional war whose practitioners were thought to operate in disguised form. Once having retreated from the battlefield, they would penetrate and then assimilate into the social and political arenas to prepare for the next phase of their struggle. Normal demarcations between war time and peace time would be blurred. Convinced that the enemy's chameleon-like transformations would prolong their life span indefinitely, the Argentine military thrust themselves into permanent combat readiness (Comblin, 1979; Arriagada, 1981). Given the enduring nature of this threat, the state would have to remain forever vigilant, and could do so only through an authoritarian political structure.

The second principle, the implementation of the logic of war within this permanent struggle, is crucial to the notion of security. The logic of war dictated that political life be subordinated to the demands of combat. This produced a simplistic and dichotomous view of the Argentine polity. Those who refused to demonstrate loyalty to the military and its government were declared in opposition to the regime and the state itself. Those placed in opposition were treated as implacable enemies of the state who must consequently be eliminated rather than won over.

Typical of the response of state leaders during war, characterizations of political foes were hostile and demeaning in nature (Keen, 1986). Sixty percent of the time, adversaries were referred to as "subversives or terrorists," terms normally reserved for those thought to be unscrupulous in their tactics and irredeemably immoral in character. Willing to resort to any means to pursue ignominious ends, these foes could neither be trusted to abide by negotiated settlements, nor be permitted to remain even as vanquished members of society. Only their complete extermination would ensure the military's perceived need for total security. Unwilling to admit that relations with political foes could improve, that adversaries on one issue could be allies on another, or that dissidents could redeem themselves, the distinctive character of this view was that it was politically blind and tended "to accelerate compulsively to the point of greatest violence" (Arriagada, 1980: 58). The junta's dependence on extermination is revealed in its own

public discourse. Content analysis reveals that strategies of coercion were mentioned three times more frequently than non-coercive strategies (see Table 1).⁴ The Argentine military also considered itself to be at war nearly two-thirds of the time, while referring to conflict only 30% and to problems or tensions a mere 3%, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Strategies of the Argentine Military Government

Coercion	101 ^a (42.3)
Indeterminate	103 (43.1)
Non-Coercive	35 (14.6)
TOTAL	239 (100)

^a Figures represent the number of references to the indicated term found in the sample of texts. Percentages are in parentheses. Source: Pion-Berlin 1988: 397.

In these two recurrent themes, the condition of permanent war and the logic of combat, we have what Herbert Kelman (1973) has referred to as the loss of restraints against violence. In positing that a condition of permanent internal war existed, the Argentine national security ideology offered the military a warrant for expansive and continuous terror in the name of the protection of the nation. In discussing the operative form of engagement, it justified the routinization of terror. As mutually reinforcing tendencies, the two principles made state terror the cornerstone of governmental policy. Moreover, in the combined power of a permanent war/rules of war mentality, the junta authorized an attack on the enemies of the state on many fronts and in diverse ways.

⁴ Coercion referred to the use of military-repressive force to contain or eliminate domestic and foreign opponents. Non-coercive instruments utilized against internal foes included any political, economic and/or psychological program of government.

Table 2

**Adversarial Relations According to the
Argentine Military Government**

War	54 ^a (94.7)
Conflict	3 (5.3)
Problems	0 (0)
TOTAL	57 (100)

^a Figures represent the total number of references to that term in the sampled texts. Percentages are in parentheses. Source: Pion-Berlin 1988: 400.

In sum, the regime employs a process of ideological deduction. It begins with the premise that defense of national security is the state's paramount objective. It then defines the security dilemma within a framework of permanent war. From there, particular views about the polity in general and the opposition in particular are formulated, as are the problems and threats associated with the state of permanent war. Given these premises, and the perception of threat that they generate, the decision to use coercion becomes a logical conclusion. The cognitive process is diagrammed below.

What the NSD failed to do was to specify with precision who the targets of state terror would be. Certainly, those who taught and were taught subversive social and political doctrines (teachers and students), and those who questioned the legitimacy of military rule (journalists) were suspect. But it is equally apparent from their own pronouncements that the military were particularly vague in their depiction of the opposition. According to President Videla himself, a subversive is "anyone who opposes the Argentine way of life" (Simpson and Bennett, 1985: 76). This discourse masks the fact that while the junta's campaign of terror was extensive, it was not indiscriminate. There were focal points to terror, and to understand how some victims were singled out we turn to the regime's economic ideas.

The Economic Ideology of State Terror

The Argentine regime subscribed to a doctrinaire version of monetarist or free-market economics found throughout the Southern Cone region of Latin America at the time but by no means universally adhered to elsewhere (Sheehan, 1987; Vergara, 1984). Though the military could not claim economic expertise for itself, many officers were quickly enticed by the monetarist's assertive claims that they had the most scientific, rational and effective response to the economic dislocations allegedly caused by populist governments in collusion with the trade union movement.

In particular, the military was irked by the economic practices of the previous labor-dominated Peronist government, which the Junta's opening proclamation at the time of the March 1976 coup accused of a "manifest irresponsibility in the management of the economy, which had destroyed the productive apparatus..." (*Review of the River Plate*, 1976: 405). In announcing their own plans for economic recovery—which included specific adjustments such as limitations on government credit, current expenditures, and deficits, and in general, a dismantling of the state-led economy—the Argentine military were also making a serious indictment of previous economic practices (Martínez de Hoz, 1981: 1-15)

The Argentine military's monetarist economic team, like most in the region, were obsessed with what they perceived to be the excessive expansion of the state's economic functions (*Review of River Plate*, 1977: 441). The state, in their view, had wrongly assumed the burdens of subsidizing poorly run firms, retaining unprofitable state owned enterprises, and preserving and expanding public sector employment sanctuaries. All of these unproductive activities placed enormous strains on the federal budget whose deficits were the motor force behind Argentine inflation according to the monetarists (Martínez de Hoz, 1981: 1-15). The military's inherited excess of public spending over income was particularly bothersome since it was attributed to "irrational" social and political pressures and not to "rational" economic thinking .

The functions of the Argentine state had, according to the military's economic team, increased in proportion to the demands placed upon it by Peronist trade unionists. Collective pressures had 1) forced state protection of highly unionized firms, 2) established the public sector as a refuge for workers displaced by the market, and 3) politicized price, wage, and managerial decisions. Each new state program not only strengthened the trade union movement but stood as a reminder for future governments that fiscal contraction could not be achieved without severe political consequences. Because of labor's clout, the "irrational" allocation of public resources under democratic and "weak" authoritarian governments continued unabated. Consequently, according to the economic liberals, trade unionism and economic decline were two sides of the same coin.

It would take a regime thoroughly committed to free-market philosophy—and prepared to use high levels of force—to weaken labor's grip on the state. Attempts had been made before but none as ambitious as those undertaken by the "Proceso" government. The government's objective was to radically transform the Argentine economy and then force the labor movement into the procrustean bed of a free market. First, it curtailed the state's role in the economy through privatization, turning entrepreneurial functions over to the business sector.⁵ Secondly, it stripped away protective trade and investment barriers and "opened" Argentina to the international economy (Ferrer, 1980; Canitrot, 1980; Schvarzer, 1983). The social objective of these economic moves was to narrow the base and weaken the clout of Argentina's labor movement by reducing opportunities for state-subsidized employment (Canitrot, 1980; Delich, 1983) and by exposing heavily unionized industries to the pressures of international competition (Buchanan, 1987).

The military were only too anxious to cripple a movement which they believed had intentionally undermined the foundations of the economy. Whether workers *actually* engaged in protest against the monetarist plan or only intended to was not the point. The regime's economic ideology told it that as collectivized agents with an inherent motive to protect their own interests via the interventionist state, and wreak havoc on the free operations of the market, they (organized labor) were culpable and must be punished.

If the economic ideology establishes some general contours for the state's political strategies, more specification is needed for the formulation of hypotheses. The trade union movement must be disaggregated. Its affiliated syndicates vary according to their positions and importance in the economy, their size, and their internal political clout. Each of these could exert independent and yet related influences upon the military. For example, harsher treatment might be meted out for individuals associated with unions which were 1) larger in size, 2) politically stronger, or 3) more strategically positioned within the economy. If unionism can obstruct the ebb and flow of the market through its monopolistic practices, then larger unions will have greater monopoly power, making them even more threatening to the regime. Regardless of size, certain unions exerted a stronger political influence over the movement, and thus might fall prey to state terror more easily. Still others, which were neither large nor politically powerful, could be key targets of state terror since they controlled jobs in sensitive areas of the private or public economy, which were to be transformed by the regime's economic plan.

Beginning with normative premises about freely operating markets and the dangers of

⁵ From 1976-1980, approximately 120 firms were privatized under this formula. Martínez de Hoz 1981: 51. However, far fewer firms were privatized than had been planned, and some argue that the subsidiary state actually expanded under military rule. See Schvarzer 1983.

state intervention, the regime is then able to identify specific problems which prevent economic growth: collective pressures imposed on government are antecedent; public sector expansion, inefficiencies, deficits, inflation, and poor growth are derivative. With these problems in mind, the “agents of economic destruction” are identified and perceived to be threatening to the economic order. Given the perceived dangers, the decision to resort to state terror is then made. The process is shown in schematic form below.

Ideological Linkages

Though separate and distinct, the national security and economic ideologies of the Argentine military regime were also related and, at times, mutually reinforcing. According to the military regime, economic progress could not be achieved without the defense of national security, but neither could security be made permanent without economic progress. As early as 1979, Osiris Villegas, the chief ideological architect for the 1966 Revolutionary Military Government of General Juan Onganía, defined national security as a situation in which “the vital interests of the nation are protected from substantial interferences and disturbances” (1979: 40). Vital interests, in turn were linked to industrial growth, technological improvements and productivity enhancement. The Argentine Proceso Government’s version of the security/development nexus placed special emphasis on growth, “efficiency” and “rationality” criteria, to the exclusion of equity and distributive concerns.

Trade unionists who obstructed the achievement of the economic plan were placing the nation’s security at risk, and were therefore treated as enemies of state. A reading of the junta’s own secret documents on the conduct of the “Dirty War” reveals that the struggle against subversion included a special plan to penetrate industrial trade unions (Videla, 1985) for the purpose of “eliminating” undesirable elements. The junta utilized the same discourse of combat, whether referring to guerrillas or to workers.

President Videla called on the regime to carry out its “mission” through the “detection and destruction of subversive organizations” particularly in the industrial and educational sectors of the country (Videla, 1985: 530). With the guidance of economic ideology, the junta could identify particular agents of economic destruction. With the support of national security ideology and through the discourse of war, the junta could unleash a particularly ferocious campaign of terror against them.

EXPLAINING PATTERNS OF VICTIMIZATION

The data on state terror in Argentina was derived from an official list of desaparecidos made available to us by the *Asamblea Permanente Argentina de Derechos Humanos* (The Argentine Permanent Assembly for Human Rights). Founded in 1975, the Assembly’s work in defense of human rights under perilous conditions won it international praise. The Assembly contributed valuable information on the disappeared to the Presidentially-appointed Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), which produced the report *Nunca Más*, and it is that data that we draw on for this study. The Assembly’s information included the name, age, sex, the place and date of apprehension and, in many instances, occupational and associational affiliations of some 5,500 individuals. Since many families were reluctant to divulge all relevant facts about their disappeared relatives, missing data were commonly found. Moreover, we did not have any information on the victims’ ideologies nor on their religious and political party affiliations, which limited analysis to social indicators, not political ones.⁶

Nonetheless, an account of the social sphere is fully warranted since Argentine terror was disproportionately directed against organized labor. The organized work force of Argentina comprises only 13 percent of the total population, and yet 30.2 percent of the disappeared were blue collar workers. If we add to that figure the number of disappeared white collar employees (the majority of whom were members of the organized work force) then this combined group would account for 48.1 percent of all those disappeared.

Our procedure was to record only and all those individuals for whom occupational and/or union identifications could be made. That process yielded a population of 2,078 desaparecidos. Since all those listed by the Asamblea were presumed disappeared, we have no variation with respect to the type of terror technique employed in the repression. Despite this there are two

⁶ However incomplete, this data represents to date the most comprehensive single source of information on the victims of state terror in Argentina, before and during the military rule period.

advantages of using the Asamblea's data. First, we had a more reliable instrument, since the organization and individuals who compiled the data were one and the same. Secondly, the Assembly's compilation afforded us an opportunity to analyze the worst form of abuse committed against Argentines. Certainly, if some sense can be made of the policy of disappearance, then we will have made a significant step towards understanding the syndrome of political repression as a whole.

Important organizational information was also available. We are able to identify those unions which were placed under military jurisdiction. Rather than destroy unions (which, the government feared, would invite radical anarchical elements to infiltrate at factory levels) the armed forces appointed high ranking military officers to serve as heads of a number of unions, replacing elected officials. This policy of intervention suspended most normal trade union deliberations but retained union structures intact. It is likely that, in some instances, intervention substituted for the execution of rank and file members while, in other instances, intervention and disappearances worked in tandem.

To determine the impact of collective affiliations on victimization, a multiple regression analysis was undertaken. Since time dependent data was used, results were observed for possible autocorrelative disturbances. These were found to exist for the dependent term (repression). A lag of the dependent term was inserted as an independent variable to account for this disturbance and to remove it from the error term in the equation (see Table 4). With this adjustment, ordinary least squares estimates could then be made since the autocorrelative error was negligible, as noted by the Durbin Watson score. Additionally, an examination of the variance in the error terms of the regression model revealed no problems of heteroscedasticity, obviating the need for weighted least squares estimates.

The lagged regression term also served as control variable, enabling us to assess what effect, size, sector, and political weight would have on patterns of repression when holding constant for past terrorist actions. Secondly, it is hypothesized that the *effective* use of high levels of prior repression could entice the authorities to sustain even higher levels in the future. Were the lagged repression term to be significantly positive, we could surmise that the use of terror had become habitual, which in turn would establish a new acceptance of violence (Gurr, 1970) as an institutionalized feature of government.

The dependent variable represented the total number of disappeared subjects aggregated on a monthly basis. The independent terms were union size, sectoral location (industrial, state, educational, transportation and communication and miscellaneous) and political importance, and military occupation of unions. Union size could be computed as a continuous variable, since data on membership as a percentage of the total organized work force was available. For the sectoral dimensions of trade unionism dummy coding was used. Each union

was identified (1,0) as being either in industrial, state, transportation/communication or educational sectors. The fifth sector was miscellaneous and represented the dummy variable which was left out of the equation. Dummy coding was also used to identify unions which were or were not politically powerful (1,0) or occupied by military force (1,0).

The results, as reported in table 3 provide partial confirmation of the thesis that variations in general repression are guided by an individual's collective associations. First, the size of collectivities with which individuals are associated has a decisive influence on the regime's choice

B. Statistical Results

of victims. As the size of a union increased, the chances of its members being victimized increased. These results held in multiple regression when controlling for sectoral locations and political power. Table 4 indicates that a few large unions (all with memberships of 100,000 or more) had a greater impact than others. Of the 10 unions officially registered with the Ministry of Labor as having 100,000 or more members and thus comprising the largest syndicates in Argentina (*Clarín*, 1986: 4) affiliation with three of those (Metalworkers, Construction Workers, and the Teachers) helped to explain significant portions of the overall repressive pattern. Though workers from the other unions were victimized, their numbers were not sufficient to make a significant difference.

These findings support the theory that the military was, as Canitrot (1980), O'Donnell (1984), and Buchanan (1987) have suggested, interested in breaking the collective spirits and identities of individuals to create a compliant and atomized society. Association with large collectivities was dangerous, even where those organizations were not presently engaged in strike activity or did not have a history of militant opposition to the state (as was the case with the state employees association). Collectivities obstructed the regime's achievement of economic liberalism by their monopolistic practices, which created private sector employment havens, kept wages 'artificially high' and pressured the state to expend resources on social services and the maintenance of a giant bureaucracy (Canitrot, 1980: 916-917). Larger unions tended to have greater monopoly power, making them even more threatening to this free-market minded dictatorship.

The sectoral location of unions mattered less than did size. In fact, only the educational sector and the residual category of miscellaneous unions had any significant

Table 3

**Influence of Union Dimensions and Prior Repression on
Political Disappearances in Argentina
N = 783**

Dimension	Beta	T-Stat ^a
Intercept	.12	.90
Size	.001	2.99**
Sector		
1. Industrial	.20	1.32
2. State	-.10	-.92
3. Educational	1.11	4.87**
4. Trans/Comm.	-.02	-.17
5. Misc.	.59	6.21**
Political Importance	-.04	-.26
Repression (t-1)	.60	21.14**
Union Intervention	-.02	-.12

$R^2 = .49$; Durbin Watson = 2.27

a** Significant at .01, all others, not significant.

impact on repression levels. At first glance, this result is surprising since it was expected that the military would try to weaken union linkages in precisely those sectors that were to be radically transformed by its free-market project, chief among those the heavily unionized and protected industrial enclaves and the overly subsidized and inefficient state enterprises and bureaucracies.

The apparent discrepancy can be explained as follows. First, though the military did not appear to have a specific industrial repressive strategy, it did single out key unions within that sector. As shown in table 4, the Metalworkers Union (Unión de Obreros Metalúrgicos), which was the second largest union in the nation (comprising nearly 7 percent of the entire organized work force) and the largest single group of laborers in the vital manufacturing sectors of Argentina, bore the brunt of the repression, along with the very powerful automechanics unions. Together, these syndicates controlled over 320,000 jobs in those industrial enclaves built up during periods of state-subsidized industrialization, which were now to be dismembered by the regime's plan of economic openness. To cripple the metalworkers and autoworkers would be to deal a decisive blow not only to Peronist labor but to those overprotected firms muscle-bound and leveraged by trade unionists.

Table 4

Influence of Individual Union Affiliations on State Terror in Argentina^a
N = 884

Union	Beta	T-Stat ^b	Size ^c	Sector	Politically Important
Metalworkers	1.84	6.24**	6.78	industrial	yes
Teachers	3.40	11.51**	4.79	education	no
Construction	1.17	3.97**	4.74	misc.	yes
State Employees Assoc.	.98	3.32**	2.18	state	no
Automechanics	1.21	4.10**	1.37	industrial	yes

$R^2 = .25$ Durbin Watson = 1.85

^a All other union affiliations had no significant impact on state terror and were not included in this table.

^b ** Significant at .01

^c Figures represent membership of trade union as a percentage of the organized work force.

Secondly, it is likely that organizational coercion successfully substituted for the execution of members, since 64 percent of those industrial unions studied were taken over by military officers, compared to 38.2 percent for all unions (see table 5). In the state sector, the one union whose estimating line was significant, the Association of State Employees (ATE), was a largely quiescent and ineffectual collectivity. Interventions in this sector were less frequent. It leaves unexplained why affiliations with the more militant and more powerful Railroad Workers Union (Unión Ferroviaria) or Light and Power Union (Luz y Fuerza) could not account for changes in state terror. The statistical results need to be assessed in light of the government's legal-coercive measures aimed specifically

against state employees and their unions—measures whose effectiveness may have obviated the need for the physical elimination of workers.

Table 5

Military Intervention into Argentine Trade Unions^a

Union Characteristics	Interv.	No Interv.	Interv/Total (percent)
Large Unions	3	7	30
Sectors:			
Industrial	7	4	63.6
State	4	4	50
Trans/Comm.	2	2	50
Educational	0	1	0
Pol. Powerful Unions	10	6	62.5
All Unions ^b	13	21	38.2

^a This table contains some unions which were not included in the regression or correlation analyses.

^b Since some unions overlapped categories and were counted twice, the all union figures do not represent totals for each column.

The Economics Ministry had designed a series of overlapping decrees in 1976, which institutionalized arbitrary dismissals in the public sector. One such decree, the “Ley de Prescindibilidad” (Law 21274), declared employees dispensable and dismissible without warning, for reasons of “service,” “national security,” or “redundancy.” This revoked elements of the Peronist labor stability law, which had prohibited dismissals except for job related blunders (Dimase, 1981). Four years later, the economics minister boasted that the same law had made possible the firing of some 200,000 public servants. A related decree made permissible the firing of public servants engaged in activities of a ‘subversive’ or ‘disruptive’ nature. The purposefully vague wording of these statutes made it virtually impossible for workers to tell whether they had been terminated for economic or political reasons (Spitta, 1982: 82).

Their uncertainty was heightened by the fact that there were financial remunerations for those who denounced fellow workers. The distrust that developed among the workers was a

predictable consequence of a law whose intent was to sow discord within the rank and file and weaken collective affiliations. Erring on the side of caution, many employees chose not to participate visibly in union affairs. Those who did were hurt by an industrial security law with stiff prison sentences against all forms of direct action (e.g. strikes) aimed at interrupting or slowing down the rhythm of the work place (Gonzalez, 1984: 63; Fernandez, 1985: 59). By casting doubts on the utility of collective action or even affiliation through intimidating legal decrees, and by sharply reducing employment for arbitrary reasons, the government could achieve its desired effects without resorting to a policy of disappearance. Since the state sector was singled out for arbitrary dismissal legislation of this kind (Dimase, 1981), legal decrees may well have substituted effectively for a policy of disappearance here and not elsewhere.

The educational sector in our sample is simply the measure of monthly repression scores directed against members of the teachers' confederation, CTERA. Multivariate analysis confirms that when holding constant for the effect of union size and political weight, the impact of educational affiliations on victimization was still quite significant. This finding says nothing about the economic plan, but does link up with the military's national security ideology. President Videla explained: "...a terrorist is not just someone with a gun or a bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization" (Amnesty International, 1978). Videla's comments embody the National Security Doctrine's own expansive redefinition of the counter subversive war to include a struggle against "anti-Western, anti-Christian values" and ensured that teachers would become principal targets and victims of state terror. The Argentine educators were those most responsible for producing and reproducing ideas that threatened the security of the state, according to the military's doctrine.

It was thought that the transportation/communication sectors of the economy would also be hardest hit. The railroad, automotive transport, and telephone employees occupied sensitive positions within the economy, able to interfere suddenly and decisively with the flow of labor, goods and information. However this sector was not a significant determinant of repression, nor were any of the individual unions associated with it.⁷

The political importance of unions had no significant bearing on the disappearance of affiliates. Here again, union intervention appeared to substitute successfully for the execution of members. As shown in table 5, 63 percent of the politically powerful unions were taken over compared to 38.2 percent of all unions studied. In general union intervention appeared more frequently to substitute for rather than complement a policy of disappearance, as noted by the

⁷ The railroad and telephone workers unions were part of both the state sector and the transportation/communication sector. Separate regressions were run, one counting their dual memberships and the other not, but the results were more or less the same.

negative beta coefficient in table 3. However both strategies were probably used, since the inverse correlation between intervention and disappearances was not significant. Finally and as predicted, repression tends to remain at high levels once escalated, indicating that its practice had become habitually accepted and institutionalized.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has found sufficient consistencies between the patterns of victimization on the one hand and the assumptions of doctrine on the other to conclude that ideology was, indirectly, a motivating force behind the Argentine "Dirty War." In national security ideology, Argentine rulers found a warrant for the use of excessive force against perceived enemies of state. Believing themselves to be at war, the military visualized a bifurcated political system comprised only of regime loyalists and opponents. The regime dehumanized its intended victims, expressed considerable hostility towards them, and transformed these hostilities into a clear preference for coercive measures over all others.

If security ideology explained the unprecedented levels of state violence, then economic ideology helped to guide the regime in its selection of victims. Led by the hand of free market principles, the regime systematically victimized individuals who were affiliated with large collectivities and/or those unions which held special economic or political importance. The findings sustain the view that the Proceso government feared and desired to eliminate interest groups that represented potential interference in the plan to liberalize the economy.

Though we have sketched a logical path from ideas to political consequences, this was not an inevitable path nor the only one available to the junta. The military could have chosen to strengthen its hold on the opposition by rewarding compliance with material incentives or governmental appointments. The military could also have captured some public support (or at least hedged against further losses) through the creation of a movement or political party in its own name without abandoning its ideological orientation. However, the military repeatedly discarded plans proposed by individual officers and their civilian advisers to politicize and popularize the Proceso.⁸ The junta had choices that it failed to consider. We have demonstrated the logic of state terror, but not its inevitability.

The discovery of a focal point for terror submerged within a more diffuse pattern of state violence is significant because it cautions against the simplification and overaggregation of

⁸ The junta's rejection of political options was detailed to us in an interview with a key civilian advisor to the Proceso government, Ricardo Yofre, in Buenos Aires on October 6, 1986.

ideologies and their outcomes. It cannot be presumed that regimes (of left or right persuasion) which practice terror are guided by singular ideologies that yield singular effects. Though there were clear linkages between national security and economic ideology, these were separable. If the Argentine military had subscribed only to national security ideology, its vision of and crusade against the opposition should have been largely unfocused. Since practically all those “disloyal” to the military regime were by definition perceived as intransigent enemies of state (given the NSD’s dichotomized view of the political system) then all those so labelled should have been at equal risk of victimization. That was clearly not the case.

Ideological complexity can be found elsewhere. Nazi ideology had as its centerpiece, an anti-Semitic doctrine. But it was also punctuated with rudimentary versions of nationalist, anti-communist and anti-democratic doctrine, which combined gave rise to complex and contradictory dimensions of terror that reached well beyond the confines of the Jewish community (Broszat, 1981). Likewise, right-wing, authoritarian ideology should be thought of as an amalgam of pro-capitalist, anti-socialist, anti-democratic and geopolitical themes, whose political affects are both convergent and divergent.

Secondly, the study warrants similar searches for “dossiers” on the victims of political repression. Empirical evidence about victims will enable social scientists to investigate cases akin to the “Dirty War” where intended targets are not unambiguously revealed beforehand. Obviously, this study would have profited from a more inclusive depiction of each victim. With multivariate information on hand, researchers could then discover a multitude of individual and group attributes which could help them piece together the motives for terror. Subsequent investigations should make every effort to include maximal amounts of information on victims’ social, economic, political, racial, and religious characteristics. Within the confines of its data, this study has shown that the use of inferential and deductive arguments in tandem has its advantage. In effect, by having worked “backwards” from the data as well as “forwards” from the theory, our empirical disclosures helped to sharpen our theoretical insights into terror which, in turn, should improve subsequent empirical research.

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Table 1

Strategies of the Argentine Military Government	
Coercion	101 ^a (42.3)
Indeterminate	103 (43.1)
Non-Coercive	35 (14.6)
TOTAL	239 (100)

^a figures represent the number of references to the indicated term found in the sample of texts. Percent ages are in parentheses. Source: Pion-Berlin (1988: 397).

Table 2

According to the Adversarial Relations Argentine Military Government	
War	54 ^a (94.7)
Conflict	3 (5.3)
Problems	0 (0)
TOTAL	57

^a figures represent the total number of references to that term in the sampled texts. Percentages are in parentheses. Source: Pion-Berlin (1988: 400).

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^b Since some unions overlapped categories and were counted twice, the all union figures do not represent totals for each column.

FIGURE 1

National Security Ideology and the Deduction of State Terror

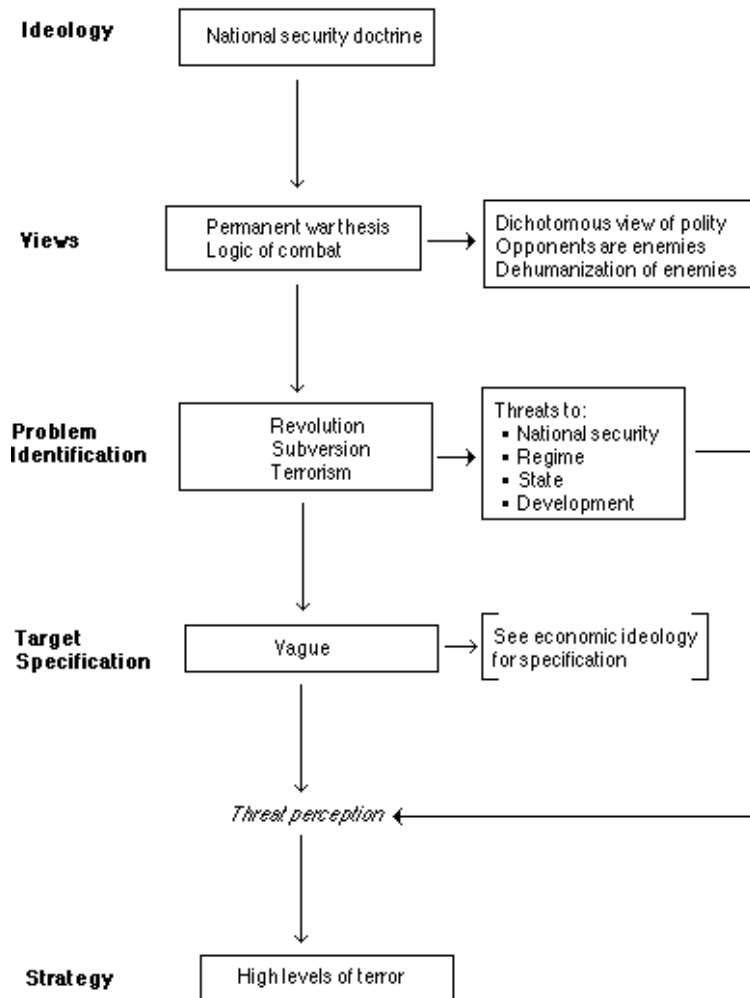


FIGURE 2

Economic Ideology and the Deduction of State Terror

