

**NONGOVERNMENTAL TERRORISM  
IN LATIN AMERICA:  
RE-EXAMINING OLD ASSUMPTIONS**

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**Working Paper #286 – July 2001**

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual International Studies Association (ISA) meeting in Washington D.C. February 16–20, 1999. We would like to thank the Laboratory for Social Research at the University of Notre Dame for data support. In addition, the authors are indebted to Esteban Montes, Aníbal Pérez Linán, Benjamin Radcliff, Neve Gordon, Michael Francis, Víctor Hinojosa, Carlos Guevara-Mann, and George Lopez for the generous and patient support they gave us during the preparation of this article. The usual caveat applies.

## **ABSTRACT**

For years nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America was considered to be an epiphenomenon of the Cold War, and consequently explained in terms of that war. The persistence of terrorism throughout the region in the 1990s not only has indicated that many of our assumptions concerning the causes of terrorism were misleading, but also has lead scholars to reexamine the phenomenon of nongovernmental political violence. This paper investigates the validity of a number of hypotheses recently explored in the literature by applying a pooled time series cross section regression analysis to data from seventeen Latin American countries between 1980 and 1995. Findings indicate that nongovernmental terrorist acts in Latin America are more likely to occur in countries characterized by widespread state human rights violations. Likewise, evidence is found that nongovernmental terrorism in the region tends to be more prevalent in countries characterized by electoral and associational liberties than by restrictive dictatorships. Association between economic performance or structural economic conditions and the incidence of terrorism is not substantiated by the findings.

## **RESUMEN**

Durante años el terrorismo no gubernamental en América Latina fue considerado como un epifenómeno de la Guerra Fría y, consecuentemente, explicado en términos de esa guerra. La persistencia del terrorismo en la región en los años '90 no sólo ha indicado que muchos de nuestros supuestos sobre las causas del terrorismo estaban mal orientados sino que también ha llevado a los especialistas a reexaminar el fenómeno de la violencia no gubernamental. Este artículo investiga la validez de una serie de hipótesis recientemente exploradas en la literatura a través de la aplicación de un análisis de regresión sobre una serie temporal de datos de diecisiete países latinoamericanos en el período 1980–1995. Los hallazgos de este análisis indican que en América Latina es más probable que los actos de terrorismo no gubernamental ocurran en países caracterizados por violaciones generalizadas de derechos humanos por parte del estado. En el mismo sentido se ha encontrado evidencia de que el terrorismo no gubernamental en la región tiene una más alta incidencia en países con libertades electorales y de asociación antes que en países con dictaduras restrictivas. Los hallazgos no respaldan la hipótesis de asociación entre el rendimiento económico o las condiciones económicas estructurales y la incidencia del terrorismo.

## Introduction

During the Cold War years Latin America witnessed repeated waves of nongovernmental terrorism. At the beginning of the 1970s, terrorist violence struck urban centers as guerrillas, particularly in the Southern Cone, attempted to destabilize ruling governments. Nongovernmental terrorism continued throughout the 1980s as leftist organizations contested military dictatorships in Central America and Chile and democratic governments in Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. The end of the Cold War, a conflict that was singled out by many as the main trigger of terrorist activity in Latin America, brought hope that this kind of violence would soon come to an end. The persistence of terrorist activities in several countries in the region, however, has shattered the hope that this scourge would cease affecting the life and wellbeing of Latin Americans.

The present work endeavors to shed light on a puzzle: if contrary to what many have believed, the Cold War was not the driving force behind nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America, then what are the real factors causing this violence? In order to answer this question, this article reviews the literature on terrorism, drawing particular attention to arguments discussing the possible causes of nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America. It then tests these arguments by conducting a panel data analysis on a dataset for seventeen Latin American countries for the 1980–95 period.

Based on the empirical evidence, the main argument set forth in this article is that nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America is more likely to occur in poorly institutionalized democracies characterized by electoral liberties, but at the same time by widespread state human rights violations. In addition, the results indicate that terrorism tends to surface cyclically and is more prevalent in countries where terrorist organizations have maintained long lasting operations. Lastly, no conclusive evidence is found between economic performance and structural economic inequality and the incidence of terrorism.

Insurgent terrorism, revolutionary terrorism, and rightwing terrorism are included under the nongovernmental terrorism rubric. Insurgent terrorism refers to violent acts perpetrated by identifiable groups that attack governmental or other targets for short-term goals aiming at sparking widespread discontent towards the existing government. This kind of terrorism is often grounded upon a defined ideology, and it seeks to unleash a process of revolution. Revolutionary terrorism, in turn, defines terrorist actions that take place during existing struggles against a determined regime. It develops as a guerrilla tactic, and thus, it is governed by the rules of civil war. Lastly, rightwing terrorism refers to acts perpetrated by outlawed

groups that do not seek a social revolution but that resort to violence as a way to express and advance their goals (i.e., ultra-nationalism, anticommunist ideology) (Lopez 1988, 498–99).<sup>1</sup> State terrorism, terrorist acts perpetrated by state agents or by private groups acting on behalf of a state, are not included in this study. This decision derives from the fact that state terrorism has distinct motives and thus it obeys a different logic than nongovernmental terrorism. Hence, attempting an analysis that would encompass both types of terrorism (governmental and nongovernmental) would yield misleading conclusions (Stohl and Lopez 1988, 4).

This work is divided into five sections. In the following part, we define terrorism, after which we give an overview of the history and the most recent trends of terrorism in Latin America. This summary is followed by a literature review, which examines the causes prompting terrorism, drawing particular attention to the Latin American experience. We then discuss the methodology and data sources used in the empirical analysis, after which we present the results. In the last section, we discuss our conclusions.

### **Defining Terrorism**

Following the work of Mickolus, Sandler, and Murdock terrorism is defined in this article as “the use or threat of use of anxiety-inducing extra normal violence for political purposes by any individual or group, whether acting for or in opposition to established governmental authority, where such action is intended to influence the attitudes and behavior of a target group wider than victims” (1989, xiii). The choice for this definition is logical because the data this empirical study relies on is taken from the exhaustive account on international/transnational terrorist acts developed by Edward Mickolus. Nongovernmental terrorism, the sub-category of terrorism with which this article is concerned, is any action that matches the above definition, yet is not directly perpetrated by state agents or by groups receiving direct orders from it.<sup>2</sup>

One important conceptual clarification that needs to be made before proceeding with this analysis refers to the differences between guerrilla actions and terrorism. This issue is particularly relevant in the Latin American context, for guerrilla movements in this region have often relied on terrorism as a strategy to advance their goals. There is a common perception that the difference between terrorism and guerrilla warfare is determined by the nature of their victims: whereas terrorism is conducted against innocent civilians, guerrilla attacks are only perpetrated against military targets. This reasoning, however, is mistaken for terrorist organizations commonly attack military objectives while, conversely, guerrillas often engage in terrorist activity aimed at nonmilitary targets.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, rather than their targets, the main difference between terrorist and guerrilla organizations is the strategy these groups

employ to challenge existing governments. Terrorists generally attempt to destabilize states through sporadic and highly visible attacks aimed at creating commotion among the population. They operate only in cities and tend to function in small cells. In turn, guerrillas endeavor to establish liberated areas in the countryside and to set up small military units that gradually try to grow in strength in order to reach a point at which they are openly able to challenge the state (Laqueur 1987, 144–48).

### **Terrorism in Latin America: Past and Present**

Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, terrorism became a distinctive phenomenon of Latin American politics. As a way to counterbalance the hegemony of the United States in the Western Hemisphere, Fidel Castro and the Cuban communist leadership fostered a revolutionary doctrine that advanced the idea that a small group of military combatants, *el foco*, could start an uprising against *bourgeois* governments. This struggle, they thought, would prompt popular support for the revolutionary cause and, eventually, would generate a military movement that could defeat ruling regimes and replace them with widely supported people's governments (Ratliff 1990, 16).

With the help of Cuba, several Latin American leftist groups attempted to organize rural guerrilla warfare in Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Guatemala (Ratliff 1990, 15–17; Wright 1991, 82–87). However, in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Peru states' security forces soon neutralized these groups, while in Colombia and Guatemala they considerably restricted guerrillas' activities to remote rural locations. According to many authors, the failure of these early revolutionary enterprises derived from the operational mistakes made in the conduct of guerrilla operations as well as from divisions between insurgent leaders and Cuba's leadership regarding the best way to carry out a revolution (Wright 1991, 90–94; Waldmann 1992, 299–300). The symbol of the failure of the rural guerrilla warfare in Latin America was Ernesto "Che" Guevara's unsuccessful revolt in Bolivia, which ended with his capture and near immediate execution by Bolivian officers in 1967 (Halperin 1988, 43–45).<sup>4</sup>

A partial exception to the failed revolutionary movements of the 1960s are the Colombian guerrillas. During that time, in Colombia three main guerrilla groups were created, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) (Army of National Liberation) in 1964, FARC in 1966, and *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL) (People's Liberation Army) in 1967. These groups operated primarily in rural areas and engaged in armed assaults, kidnappings, and extortion. These organizations have shown a remarkable combative capacity and are still operative today (Wickham-Crowley 1992, 27; Asprey 1994, 1108–9).

In 1969 insurrection rekindled in various parts of Latin America. The nature of violence,

however, changed with the development of urban guerrilla warfare. This new wave of guerrilla activity resulted from a critical revision of the unsuccessful rural warfare by revolutionary leaders such as Abraham Guillén. Guillén studied the conditions and factors that led to the defeat of rural warfare in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Peru. He concluded that, in an epoch of developed urban centers, it was simply absurd to restrict insurgent operations to isolated and hardly populated areas deprived of logistical conditions for modern war (Wright 1991, 100–01).

The first manifestation of terrorism in Latin America emerged in Venezuela between 1962–63. Young urban dwellers from poor shantytowns organized the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* (MIR) (Revolutionary Leftist Movement), an urban guerrilla group, which unleashed a violent terrorist campaign characterized by robberies, assaults, bombings, and kidnappings. The MIR's strategy was part of a threefold plan including rural warfare and infiltration of the Armed Forces that aimed at destabilizing the Venezuelan administration of Belisario Bentacurt. The movement's violent strategy, however, failed to attract the sympathies of middle and lower class Venezuelans. Weakened by the lack of popular support, a few years after its appearance the MIR was effectively neutralized by Venezuelan security forces (Laqueur 1987, 246–47; Wickham-Crowley 1992, 17).

During the second half of the 1960s, urban terror emerged in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the MIR in Venezuela, these groups were composed of highly educated young men and women. These leftist militants resorted to violence because they repudiated what they perceived as decadent and inegalitarian *bourgeois* societies characterized by a steady deterioration of economic conditions for the middle and lower classes. Inspired by the writings of Carlos Marighela,<sup>6</sup> the leader of the Brazilian ALN, these young extremists attempted to undermine their respective states. They aimed at this goal by draining states' economic resources and delegitimizing them for their incapacity to provide general protection for their population. Although these groups underscored the necessity of creating the conditions for a general armed insurrection, they never attempted to organize and foster armed resistance beyond urban areas. The illegal activities perpetrated by these organizations, however, fanned repressive state responses aimed at curbing a trend of violence that was threatening stability and order. In fact, the 1976 military coups in Argentina and Uruguay that ended the existence of Montoneros and Tupamaros were justified by the Argentinean and Uruguayan Armed Forces as extreme, though "patriotic," measures to stop leftist violence (Parry 1976, 295; Radu 1984, 84, 29–30; Laqueur 1987, 168, 251).

Terrorist activity in Venezuela, Brazil, and the Southern Cone produced a contagion effect across Latin America. In Colombia, traditional guerrilla organizations progressively shifted to terrorist activities such as bombings, kidnappings, and sabotage. This trend was

reinforced with the creation in 1974 of *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19) (Movement of April 19th). This organization was the first to combine guerrilla warfare with terrorist practices in Colombia (Parry 1976, 295–96; Radu 1984, 84, 29–30; Laqueur 1987, 168, 251; Asprey 1994, 1108–13).<sup>7</sup>

After many of the first urban guerrillas were deactivated as a result of military coups, several new terrorist organizations surfaced across Latin America. Most of these groups were devised to struggle against repressive military dictatorships. In Chile, Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR) (Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front) began an armed struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship. Similarly, around the mid-1970s, in Central America, leftwing guerrillas such as *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) in El Salvador and the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR) (Rebel Armed Forces) in Guatemala resorted to terrorism to combat repressive rightwing dictatorships. Terrorism was also employed as a strategy against leftwing governments. In Nicaragua, however, after Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) (Sandinista National Liberation Front) seized power in 1979, *the Contras*, an anticommunist guerrilla group supported by the United States, initiated a total war against the Sandinistas, which included terrorist attacks (Asprey 1994, 1089–1106). Albeit to a much lesser degree, Costa Rica and Honduras also suffered from terrorist activity during the 1980s. Political turmoil derived from the rekindling of the Cold War in neighboring Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador spilled over into these two countries fostering an environment of violence in which terrorist activity emerged (Laqueur 1987, 259, 265; Asprey 1994, 1077–88, 1093–94).

By the early 1980s, many Latin American countries returned to democracy. These elected administrations had to face the threat of many extremist groups that showed violently their dissatisfaction with the newly elected leaders. In Argentina, rightwing ultranationalist organizations carried out a violent bombing campaign destined to destabilize the new democratic administration of president Raúl Alfonsín (1984–89).<sup>8</sup> The Peruvian SL began a violent struggle against the new democratic administration of Fernando Belaúnde in 1980. The SL was soon joined by *Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru* (MRTA) (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement), a pro Moscow terrorist organization. Simultaneously, *Alfaro Lives Carajo* (ALC) (Alfaro Lives Damn It) group unleashed terrorist attacks to harm the new democratic administration of Jaime Roldós in Ecuador (Laqueur 1987, 255–57; Mickolus, Murdock, and Sandler 1983, Mickolus 1989).

Throughout the Cold War period, most of the above mentioned terrorist organizations were supported by the superpowers. There is evidence that the Soviet Union and the US provided many of these groups with funds, weapons, training, and political endorsement as well as logistical assistance (e.g., passports, intelligence services, use of diplomatic facilities)



(Schlagheck 1990, 171). Especially Cuba and to a lesser extent the Soviet Union endorsed leftwing terrorist groups across Latin America such as the Argentinean Montoneros; the Uruguayan Tupamaros; the Colombian FARC, EPL, ELN; Peru's Tupac Amaru; the MIR and FPMR in Chile; FAR in Guatemala; and the Salvadoran FSLN. By supporting terrorist activity, the Communist leadership attempted to fan revolution in the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, the US endorsed numerous rightwing groups that perpetrated terrorist acts, especially in Central America (e.g., Death Squadrons in Guatemala and El Salvador, and the Contras in Nicaragua) as part of its communism containment strategy in the Third World (Luttwak 1983, 63–64; Laqueur 1987, 270–74; Asprey 1994, 1094, 1108–10).<sup>9</sup>

The end of the Cold War led many to believe that terrorism would come to an end in Latin America. With the disintegration of the Soviet block, the ideological struggle between the US and the Soviet Union faded away thus depriving Latin American terrorist organizations from superpower support. At least in the case of Latin America,<sup>10</sup> optimistic predictions about the positive effect that the end of the Cold War would have on diminishing terrorism seem to have proven wrong. Table 1 shows the yearly incidence of terrorist acts in Latin America since 1973. It can be clearly observed that terrorism has only slightly decreased since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, it is also possible to see that terrorist activity in the 1990s has presented some oscillation: it increased in the early years of the decade, but has decreased after 1993.<sup>11</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, some countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, and Uruguay, have experienced an overall decrease in terrorist activity. Similarly, in Central America, terrorism has declined steadily in the 1990s, particularly since the signature of the *Esquipulas I* and *II* regional peace treaties. In the post Cold War period, terrorist actions in Central America have been restricted to sporadic attacks against US targets perpetrated by still operative disgruntled leftwing militants, particularly in Guatemala and Nicaragua (Vanden 1990, 55–73; Gorriti 1991, 89–91; Mickolus and Simmons 1997).

Terrorism has also shrunk in Argentina and Mexico in the post Cold War period. Nevertheless, both of these countries have witnessed some serious terrorist incidents. Argentina suffered the bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the *Asociación Mutualista Israelita Argentina* (AMIA) (Argentine Jewish Mutual Association). In Mexico, in turn, several bombs went off in major urban centers in the weeks that followed the 1994 uprising of *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) (Zapatista National Liberation Army) in Chiapas.<sup>12</sup> A few months after that wave of violence, a new guerrilla group, *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (EPR) (Popular Revolutionary Army), initiated violent operations including armed assaults, kidnappings, and bombings in the Mexican states of Guerrero, Michoacán, and Oaxaca (Méndez, Cano and Gimeo 1994; Díaz 1997, 5–8; and Mickolus and Simmons 1997).

Table 1. Nongovernmental terrorist acts perpetrated in Latin America (1973–1995) by country and by year.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total	
Argentina	41	39	19	43	15	6	0	3	1	6	7	5	11	9	4	3	3	4	2	8	2	2	2	2	310
Bolivia	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	1	3	6	4	5	6	2	5	6	3	4	4	5	2	1	2	2	91
Brazil	4	1	1	3	2	0	0	1	3	1	1	4	2	6	0	1	1	2	4	4	3	1	1	1	85
Colombia	3	5	6	18	13	12	4	18	11	8	25	9	36	29	11	23	23	12	13	21	10	15	16	16	381
Chile	8	0	1	2	3	1	3	0	2	0	5	8	12	27	5	6	10	16	17	27	4	5	0	0	178
Costa Rica	0	0	0	5	3	2	2	3	7	4	7	2	6	1	0	7	5	6	8	1	3	2	0	0	78
Ecuador	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	3	4	3	1	2	1	4	1	2	2	2	1	50
El Salvador	1	0	1	8	0	15	18	38	28	9	5	12	8	4	0	9	18	4	4	4	3	1	1	2	191
Guatemala	4	1	1	7	0	6	8	22	21	13	17	5	5	3	0	7	5	6	8	5	2	5	2	5	178
Honduras	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	12	7	10	7	6	4	2	5	6	8	2	6	2	1	0	0	2	89
Mexico	5	14	9	12	11	5	0	3	3	0	6	3	4	4	0	1	2	1	3	0	0	5	0	0	109
Nicaragua	0	1	0	0	0	7	7	0	25	3	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	4	3	69
Panama	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	7	0	2	2	5	8	5	8	6	4	4	2	63
Paraguay	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	1	3	12	
Peru	3	14	2	0	3	2	0	3	10	2	12	8	18	27	28	13	16	20	35	27	9	7	5	5	273
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	3	4	0	1	2	53	
Venezuela	3	3	0	8	4	3	0	6	0	2	0	5	5	2	8	5	2	1	6	5	4	6	5	5	101
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>2311</b>

Note: Above includes only incidents of nongovernmental terrorism. See appendix for sources and further details on the data.

Between 1989 and 1992, terrorism rose sharply in Chile reaching the highest point since the mid-1980s. This was the result of an offensive carried out by the FPMR and the newly created *Brigada Juvenil Lautaro* (BJL) (Lautaro Juvenile Brigade), which conducted robberies, bombings, and attacks principally against US targets. Since 1993, however, terrorist activity has been declining steadily. In bordering Peru, terrorism has maintained a progressive trend since 1980. This tendency was reversed in 1992 when Peruvian security forces arrested Abimael Guzmán, the leader of SL, along with other prominent members of this Maoist organization. After Guzman's capture, the remaining militants of SL submerged in an attempt to restructure the organization. After more than two years of standstill, during which SL reorganized nearly from scratch, in 1995, the group relaunched violent attacks from its new stronghold in the Peruvian eastern jungle departments of Junín, Huanuco, Ucayali, Pasco, and San Martín. Operations were carried out under the new leadership of Commandant Feliciano. Late last year, however, Peruvian security forces hit SL again when they arrested Feliciano along with five female comrades of the organization (Scott-Palmer 1996, 250–306; *The Economist* 1997, 34; CARETAS 1999, 10–16).

In Colombia, terrorist activity has witnessed a sharp rise during the 1990s. ELN and to a lesser extent FARC and EPL have carried out terrorist attacks (particularly bombings and kidnappings) against state and foreign companies' infrastructure and personnel. This trend has been reinforced by the actions of other less influential armed groups that have also engaged in terrorist activities.<sup>13</sup> Currently, Colombia registers the highest level of terrorist activity in the region (Parry 1976, 295–96; Radu 1984, 84, 29–30; Laqueur 1987, 168, 251; Carrigan 1995, 6–10; *Le Monde Diplomatique* 1996, 8–9; Human Rights Watch 1998, 3–22; Lair 1999, 72).

Venezuela has also seen a peak in terrorism mainly as a result of the operations of different branches of the Colombian guerrillas, particularly FARC and ELN. Incidents have been concentrated along the border region in the Zulia department, where the guerrillas have bombed and attacked both civilian and military targets (*Le Monde Diplomatique* 1996, 8–9; Mickolus and Simmons 1997).<sup>14</sup>

Panama has witnessed an unusual terrorist wave in the 1990s, particularly after the 1989 US invasion. Terrorist acts there seem to have been related to nationalistic sectors alienated by the US presence. Furthermore, as in the case of Venezuela, the infiltration of the Colombian guerrilla into Panamanian territory, especially along the southern Darién border zone, has boosted terrorist activity. Additionally, Panama has suffered terrorist attacks against Jewish targets (Mickolus and Simmons 1997).

Cuba has also registered an unexpected increase in terrorist activity in the 1990s. After having been nearly free from terrorist activity during the Cold War, a wave of bombing attacks

on tourist locations has hit the island. Most of the attacks have not been claimed by any terrorist organization, however, the Cuban government has claimed that these incidents are the result of the operations of rightwing Cuban groups based in Miami (Rother 1997, 6).

### **Motivations for Terrorism**

Interpretations about the determinants behind terrorism are multiple. Terrorism has generally been associated with socioeconomic conditions such as uneven distribution of wealth among the population. It has also been linked to political conditions including the absence of the rule of law, lack of government legitimacy, and restrictions in civil and political liberties. Furthermore, international geostrategic concerns have also been accounted for as relevant conditions fostering terrorism. Lastly, it has been suggested that terrorism may derive from people's ideological beliefs or psychological deviations.

Charles Kegley distinguishes between two major interpretations regarding the motivations for terrorism. One explanation indicates that terrorism is a consequence of harsh sociopolitical conditions; that is, circumstances which prevent politically oppressed and economically deprived groups from the ability to meet their basic needs, pushing them to engage in ultraviolent measures to protest and eventually to seek to change conditions they find unbearable (1990, 99–100). According to Kegley's second interpretation, terrorism is a political activity defined by the intentions and tactics of those who perpetrate it. Terrorism, in this view, is disconnected from excessively painful socioeconomic circumstances and results rather from individuals' decision to build a campaign of violence outside the accepted rules of warfare. These violent actions are perpetrated by people without principles who rationalize the destruction of innocent individuals and noncombatants as a means to achieve their political goals, whatever they may be (Kegley 1990, 99–100).

Some authors endorse Kegley's first interpretation. Moorhead Kennedy argues that terrorism is caused principally by poverty and misery, which is bred by exploitation and repression (1986, 5–9). Along similar lines, Martha Crenshaw claims that terrorism follows from the existence of grievances among certain sectors of society, particularly radical intellectuals, who, widely dissatisfied with sociopolitical conditions, initiate an armed struggle against the state. Symbolically, these groups' violent actions are an expression of the general population's dissatisfaction with social and economic conditions (1990, 115–24).<sup>15</sup>

Other scholars believe that the causes of terrorism lie elsewhere. Following Huntington's modernization argument, Douglas Bwy suggests that terrorism results from economic disturbances and instability that characterize modernizing societies (1968, 20–21, 56). Stephen Segaller, in turn, endorses a nationalistic argument; he asserts that terrorism derives

from local or regional patterns depending on separatist movements (e.g., the Basques in Spain or the Tamils in Sri Lanka) or on the nature of ethnic struggles (e.g., the Palestinian or the Kurd independence movements) (1987, 102–03). As mentioned, interpreting terrorism as the consequence of geostrategic rivalry between the superpowers was common during the Cold War years. According to this view, the Soviet Union supported international terrorism to stir up trouble in Western democracies or prowestern nations in order to destabilize and weaken the United States and its allies. This strategy came as a reaction to the failure of traditional Soviet policies aimed at undermining its Western enemies: as the Soviet Union realized it was losing support within labor unions and leftwing parties in the West, it agreed to support leftist guerrilla groups and terrorist organizations because it realized they could become useful allies. As a counter reaction to the Soviet strategy, the US endorsed the activities of rightwing extremist organizations across the Third World in an attempt to contain the expansion of communism (Luttwak 1983, 63–64).

Psychological interpretations about terrorism have been the source of great debate. Numerous references have been made to pathological behavior or mental disorder to explain why individuals engage in terrorism (i.e., that terrorists are neurotically hostile or paranoiac stress seekers). In this regard, several studies have been conducted to investigate the personality of terrorists in order to test if common psychological patterns could be established among them. In the former West Germany numerous psychiatric studies were carried on the captured members of *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF-Baader-Meinhof) (Red Armed Fraction). Pretrial examinations of German terrorists showed that some of them, including the leaders of the RAF, Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader, showed signs of mental disorder. Other members of the organization, however, presented no symptoms of psychosis or neurosis. Likewise, no abnormal tendencies could be found among the Italian *Brigate Rosse* (BR) (Red Brigades) terrorists who operated during the same period. Investigations relying on the psychological aspects of terrorist personalities have not proven useful in shedding light on the motives leading people to engage in terrorism. In spite of the shocking strategies terrorists employ, no evidence has been found to indicate that those having a certain type of personality (or a mental disorder) have a higher propensity to engage in this kind of violence. Likewise, studies have demonstrated that terrorists came from quite different socioeconomic and familiar *milieus* (e.g., affluent and poor; well-constituted and ill-constituted families) (Stohl 1988, 11; Laqueur 1987, 160–62; Crenshaw 1990, 120–21).

Furthermore, terrorism has been interpreted as a phenomenon derived from a cluster of causes. Kegley maintains that terrorism results from a combination of internal factors such as societal characteristics, culture, and governmental decisions with external conditions like the dynamics in the international system (1990, 97–98). Along similar lines, Rubinstein argues

that the real causes of terrorism are situational and that they correspond to “the constellation of economic, political, and psychological factors that have the effect in a particular society, of inciting young people to engage in conspirational violence” (1990, 103).

The literature on terrorism in Latin America coincides with the general arguments espoused with respect to the causes provoking this type of political violence. According to most authors, terrorism in Latin America has been caused by a combination of factors. Ernest Halperin asserts that terrorism in this region has been “a vigorous reaction against economic stagnation and social putrefaction by the most energetic members of the administrative class, a bid for absolute power in order to give another class the challenging task of totally transforming society” (1976, 37). Eleonora Ceboratev and Jorge Nef hold that Latin American terrorism has been a consequence of societal structural violence (1989, 76–88). By this they refer to economic dislocation as well as political and social restrictions that undermine citizens’ rights. In addition, they maintain that repression and state abuse is a particularly powerful factor accounting for the rise of terrorism in the region (Ceboratev and Nef 1989, 76–88).

George Lopez maintains that terrorism in Latin America derives from three main sources: the deteriorating economic situation of some nations as well as the sociopolitical structures of government, powerful ideological forces, and the violent tendencies and uncompromising nature of Latin American politics (1988, 501–05). According to Peter Waldmann, there are four causes prompting terrorism in Latin America: conflicts derived from the economic structure of the region where economic grievances (e.g., struggles for land, endemic agricultural crises, unemployment, and low wages) have not lost their importance and explosive character; racial and social conflicts between classes; the fact that the population does not believe in the Weberian assumption that the monopoly of violence belongs to the state: citizens as well as institutions (e.g., landlords, unions, students, peasants, and especially the Armed Forces) assume they have the right to defend themselves from injustice, even resorting to violence; and restricted political and civil liberties derived from dictatorships or systems in which parties have become so entrenched that change is perceived as highly unlikely or simply impossible (e.g., Mexico and Colombia) (1992, 298–99). Lastly, the Cold War has been also mentioned as a factor prompting political violence and terrorism in Latin America (Castañeda 1993, 5).

In sum, this section of the article has examined terrorism from a theoretical perspective, drawing particular attention to the Latin American experience. It has showed that in Latin America terrorism has not necessarily ceased with the demise of the Cold War. It has also indicated that factors such as economic underdevelopment, state repression and abuse, characteristics of political systems, economic dislocation, and sharp inequalities in the

distribution of resources among the population have provided an appropriate context for the development of terrorism in this area of the world.

### **Data and Methodology**

The previous section shows that various theoretical explanations account for the underlying causes of terrorism. In order to test the empirical validity these arguments have for the Latin American experience, this section conducts a time series cross section regression analysis. This work uses a regional approach to answer the study question because it reduces the risk of over generalization when studying a complex phenomenon. In spite of their various differences, Latin American nations share many similar features which make this investigation meaningful. These characteristics include: a Pre-Columbian past; Spanish and Portuguese domination that brought about a society in which the mestizo (mixed Iberic-Indian) component prevails; all became republics after achieving independence from the Iberian powers in the nineteenth century; most of them have enjoyed brief periods of political stability in an overall environment of instability; and the presence of uneven distribution of wealth and low levels of per capita income, albeit to different degrees.

Information for the empirical research is gathered for seventeen Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.<sup>16</sup> The time frame for the analysis is 1980–95. Data for the dependent variable, nongovernmental terrorist incidents, is presented in table 1. The figures are extracted from Edward Mickolus' *Terrorism: A Chronology of Events*, a comprehensive study accounting for all reported and unclassified terrorist acts perpetrated between 1965–95 and seemingly the most exhaustive description of international terrorism yet published (Mickolus 1980, Mickolus, Murdock, and Sandler 1984; Mickolus 1989; Mickolus 1993; Mickolus and Simmons 1997). In his account of terrorist incidents, Mickolus includes acts such as kidnappings, bombings, armed attacks, assassinations, and aerial hijacking among others.<sup>17</sup> In order to match the requirements of this study on nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America, several acts reported by Mickolus and his colleagues in their work are not included. State terrorism, mob violence, and embassy seizures of pacifist nature are left aside. Furthermore, drug-trafficking related terrorist incidents are also excluded.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, incidents carried out by extra continental organizations are incorporated if police investigations discovered that local groups had contributed either through logistic support or by direct involvement in the perpetration of these acts.<sup>19</sup> Incidents in which the arrest of terrorists led to violence are also included in the sample.<sup>20</sup>

The theoretical literature review highlighted five major causes for terrorism in the Latin American context. These conditions are empirically tested to determine their validity. The first independent variable tested is economic performance. Theoretical research suggests terrorism to be associated with widespread dissatisfaction with socioeconomic conditions (Bwy 1968, 20–21, 56; Kegley 1990, 99; Crenshaw 1990, 115–24). Some studies argue that periods of low growth rates are more likely to produce political violence (Bwy 1968, 22; Mueller and Weede 1990, 648). Research also reports the destabilizing effect that high levels of inflation may have upon social order (Auvinen 1997, 178). A recent investigation, furthermore, has set forth an argument indicating that the frustrating, anger-engendering and distress-inducing potential of unemployment is associated with an increase in community violence (Catalano, Novaco, and McConnell 1997, 1440). To test the validity of these socioeconomic arguments, indicators of economic performance such as unemployment, growth, and inflation are included in the regression analysis.<sup>21</sup>

Structural economic inequality is tested as a second independent variable. The literature argues that terrorism results from a vigorous reaction on behalf of certain members of society who frustrated by unendurable socioeconomic conditions, particularly social injustice, decide to engage in this kind of violent activity (Halperin 1976, 37; Laqueur 1987, 159; Lopez 1988, 501–505; Waldmann 1992, 298). Distribution of income, as measured by GINI coefficient, is selected as a proxy for structural economic inequality.<sup>22</sup>

The third independent variable tested in this study is the nature of political systems. The literature argues that terrorism is more likely to be present in systems restricting citizens' political and civic liberties. Authors indicate that political systems which deprive the population of adequate institutional mechanisms to express and channel their demands may well contribute to increased frustration and thus induce recalcitrant sectors of society to resort to terrorism (Ceboratev and Nef 1989, 76–88; Kegley 1990, 99–100; Crenshaw 1990, 115–24; Waldmann 1992, 289–90). The literature, however, argues also that terrorism does not develop under highly repressive regimes (e.g., totalitarian systems). According to Mueller and Weede, political violence such as terrorism is more likely to be adopted as an opposition strategy in semirepressive political settings, in which resource mobilization is possible while pacifist objection does not provide results (1990, 627). In other words, terrorism needs a relatively permeable system in which information flows and state surveillance is not absolute (Laqueur 1987, 171; Martin 1990, 158–162). In order to test the validity of this line of argument the Freedom House annual scale of civil and political rights is used to proxy the nature of political systems.

Level of state repression and abuse is the fourth independent variable examined in this research. Ceboratev and Nef argue that repression and abuse against civilians is a main factor



fueling terrorism. Along similar lines, Duff and McCamant indicate that, in the case of Latin America, the perpetration of political violence, including terrorism, has been justified as a legitimate form of resistance against abusive regimes (1976, 129). In Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, Chile, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, groups that have engaged in terrorism have claimed that they resort to extreme means as a way to struggle against oppressive states which repeatedly abuse citizens' rights, especially those of the underprivileged. The human rights record of a given country is proxied by the Purdue Political Terror Scale and is employed to test the validity of the arguments relating state abuse to the incidence of nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America.<sup>23</sup>

The fifth and last independent variable tested in this work is the previous incidence of terrorism. Terrorists operate in an underground world in which they need to overcome many logistical problems (e.g., recruitment, funding, and security) in order to mount their clandestine operations. Even more than common criminals, to operate, terrorists need strict security measures that prevent the infiltration by security forces (Crenshaw 1995, 4–7). They require thus a relatively long period of time to develop and secure their operations. Following Crenshaw's point, it is assumed here that terrorism tends to be more prevalent in scenarios where terrorist groups have been active for a longer period of time. In places where terrorist groups have been partially contained by the actions of security forces, terrorist activities need several months, even years to reorganize and resurface.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Enders and Sandler have pointed out that terrorism tends to be characterized by cycles of violence (1999, 165–66). These authors indicate that terrorist cycles are provoked by two factors: on the one hand, successful terrorist operations may stimulate copycat attacks by other groups thus reinforcing a spiral of violence (i.e., contagion effect); on the other, terrorist organizations need to submerge into anonymity after a period of high activity (Enders and Sandler 1999, 165–66). Enders and Sandler argue that after a period of high profile terrorist acts, public opinion pressures governments to do something to curb terror. As a result of this pressure after major terrorist incidents, states tend to temporarily step up their efforts to thwart terrorist activities. Terrorists are aware of this phenomenon and thus ease off their activities in order to avoid being neutralized by security forces (Enders and Sandler 1999, 155–56). In order to measure whether past terrorist activity may influence the incidence of terrorism in the present period, a one year lagged variable is used as an indicator.

To summarize, the influences on nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America can be represented in the following equation form:

Where  $t$  denotes nongovernmental terrorism;  $e$  stands for economic performance,  $p$ ,  $h$ , and  $si$  indicate political system, state's human rights violations and structural

economic inequality, respectively, and lastly  $t_{-1}$  denotes past terrorism. The above formulation is tested through pooled time series cross section analysis (tscs), using a fixed effects approach, which is also known as the dummy variable model. The model adjusts for country specific influences by relying upon the assumption that distinct constant terms estimated for each cross section unit captures these differences (Greene 2000, 560). However, given the limited time series information on the GINI coefficient, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis is conducted in order to assess the validity of arguments linking terrorism to structural economic inequality. In this portion of the analysis, periodic averages are used for the dependent variable as well as for each independent variable.

In the time series cross section analysis, one year lagged permutations are used for all independent variables. This reflects the assumption that the effect of these variables on terrorism is not immediate, but that it rather takes time to unfold. As mentioned in the literature, terrorist organizations require a certain period of time to organize their clandestine operations (Crenshaw 1995, 4–7). Bivariate correlation analysis is conducted in order to control for potential sources of multicollinearity.<sup>25</sup> Various permutations of the independent variables are tested in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis as well as to test for the robustness of the results. However, in cases where multicollinearity is present, only one proxy for a given independent variable category is included in the specification of the regression equation. The Durbin-Watson test is used to detect possible autocorrelation, while the White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors are calculated to control for possible heteroskedasticity. To further check for the validity of the results, any possible outliers are removed from the sample; that is, to assure the robustness of the results, a few countries that prove to be either significantly above or below the mean in their values for the dependent variable are removed one at a time from the sample.<sup>26</sup>

## **Findings and Analysis**

The most significant empirical results are reported in table 2. The theoretical model shows a fairly robust explanatory power. The adjusted R-square for various permutations of the time series cross section model remains 0.50 or above, indicating that it is capable of explaining more than half of the variance of the dependent variable (terrorist incidents). In addition, regression analysis confirms there is a statistically significant association between three independent variable categories and the amount of terrorism.

First, the human rights record shows a consistently negative and significant association

Table 2. Regression results for factors unleashing nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America

<i>Dependent variable:</i> <i>Model:</i>	nongovernmental terrorism										
	tscs	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	ols
<i>Regression:</i>											
<i>Independent variables:</i>											
Economic performance											
Unemployment	0.169 (0.367)	0.140 (0.388)	0.153 (0.369)	0.153 (0.369)	0.153 (0.369)	0.039 (0.440)	0.039 (0.440)	0.039 (0.440)	0.039 (0.440)	-0.052 (0.403)	1.200 (0.65)
Inflation	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.0002 (0.003)	0.0002 (0.003)
Growth (annual)	-0.116 (0.166)	-0.116 (0.166)	-0.085 (0.158)	-0.085 (0.158)	-0.085 (0.158)	-0.113 (-0.181)	-0.113 (-0.181)	-0.106 (0.202)	-0.106 (0.202)	-0.106 (0.202)	-0.106 (0.202)
Political system											
Political rights	0.098* (0.051)	0.098* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)	0.093* (0.051)
Civil liberties			0.121* (0.065)	0.121* (0.065)	0.140** (0.059)	0.126* (0.059)	0.126* (0.059)	0.126* (0.059)	0.126* (0.059)	0.136* (0.075)	0.136* (0.075)
Freedom index										0.145** (0.071)	0.145** (0.071)
Human rights record	-0.095* (0.056)	-0.103* (0.057)	-0.103* (0.057)	-0.098** (0.051)	-0.120** (0.051)	-0.103* (0.056)	-0.117* (0.065)	-0.121** (0.055)	-0.118** (0.061)	-0.128** (0.063)	-0.614 (0.212)
Structural inequality											-0.246 (0.551)
Past terrorism	0.325** (0.114)	0.343** (3.58)	0.325** (0.114)	0.325** (0.114)	0.334** (0.093)	0.325** (0.114)	0.341** (0.060)	0.341** (0.060)	0.341** (0.060)	0.341** (0.060)	0.341** (0.060)
Adj-R2	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.50	0.52	0.52	0.46
No. obs.	187	203	191	207	207	187	203	207	187	189	17

Note: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. See appendix for the sources and definitions of variables.

\* Statistically significant at 10% level.

\*\* Statistically significant at 5% level.

with the incidence of terrorism.<sup>27</sup> This implies that a deterioration of a state's human rights record is accompanied by an increase in terrorist incidents one year later. This result indicates that, in the past two decades, terrorism in Latin America has been more likely to occur in settings characterized by state human rights violations. This finding provides empirical confirmation for theoretical arguments linking terrorism to the level of state repression and abuse (e.g., Cebratev and Nef, 1989; Duff and McCamant, 1976).

Second, the empirical analysis shows that there is a consistent and significant positive association between the occurrence of nongovernmental terrorism and an increase in both the political rights and civil liberties dimensions of the Freedom House scale as well as the Freedom Index constructed by the authors.<sup>28</sup> This result indicates that, as predicted by the literature (e.g., Mueller and Weede 1990), nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America has been more prevalent in regimes characterized by more political and civil liberties as measured by the Freedom House scale.<sup>29</sup>

This finding reflects appropriately the pattern of terrorism in Latin America. Nongovernmental terrorism has been less prevalent under rightwing dictatorships (e.g., Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in the early 1970s; Paraguay under Stroessner, and Nicaragua under Somoza), institutional dictatorships (e.g., Mexico), or leftwing popular dictatorships (e.g. Cuba and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas). These regimes set up repressive surveillance systems in which security services tightly controlled the political activities of the population and severely restricted information and association liberties. This strategy has proven to be a very effective way to eradicate terrorist organizations. Instead, terrorism has been more prevalent in Latin American countries characterized by electoral liberties such as Colombia, Peru and Venezuela between 1980–92, and Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, and Panama, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Salvadorian and Guatemalan cases, where nongovernmental terrorism achieved its zenith during the worst moments of military rule, are partial exceptions to this trend. In these cases, however, the eruption of civil war during the tenure of these highly repressive regimes could be a possible explanation accounting for high levels of terrorism during dictatorships.

Third, the analysis shows that the number of terrorist acts perpetrated the year before holds a consistently positive and significant association with the dependent variable. This indicates that the number of terrorist acts at a moment in time in these seventeen Latin American countries is associated with the previous incidence of terrorism. In other words, this result implies that nongovernmental terrorism tends to be higher in scenarios where terrorist groups have held long lasting operations. Consequently, terrorism does not present sharp oscillations from one year to the other and, as Enders and Sandler argue, empirical analysis indicates that terrorism in Latin America tends to surface in cyclical waves. It is possible to

see this development in table 1 for the cases of Argentina (1973–77), Chile (1985–92); Costa Rica (1981–83), El Salvador (1978–81); Guatemala (1980–83), Honduras (1981–84), Mexico (1973–78), Peru (1985–92), and Venezuela (1991–95).

Fourth, based on this time series cross section analysis, the economic performance variables consistently display lack of statistical significance in relation to terrorism in Latin America during the 1980–1995 period. The OLS regression results, however, point towards the possible significance of economic performance in prompting terrorist activity as a statistically significant association between unemployment and the incidence of terrorism. Nevertheless, given the limited number of observations and the fact that the indicator does not prove significant in the time series cross section portion of the analysis, no conclusive evidence regarding the relation between economic performance and terrorism can be provided. Furthermore, OLS regression analysis shows that there is no statistically significant association between income distribution and the incidence of terrorist acts.<sup>30</sup> However, as a result of methodological restrictions imposed by the limited data availability, further research is required to rule out or to confirm the importance of economic inequality as well as other economic variables that may exercise upon terrorism.

### **Conclusions**

Throughout the years in which the Cold War dominated the international scenario, Latin America endured repeated waves of terrorist activity. Beginning in the 1970s, urban guerrillas became operative and attempted to overthrow governments in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela and the Southern Cone. Terrorist activity continued during the late 1970s and 1980s when new terrorist organizations contested military dictatorships and also attempted to destabilize the governments of redemocratized countries. The end of the Cold War, a conflict which was singled out by many as the principal motive behind terrorism in Latin America, brought hope that terrorist activity would come to an end. This expectation has proved wrong, however, as in the 1990s terrorism has continued affecting the life and well-being of Latin Americans across the region.

This article has empirically reexamined the theoretical arguments presented in the literature on the conditions that have fostered terrorism in Latin America. Empirical findings presented in this work imply that, in the last two decades, nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America has been more prevalent in poorly institutionalized democracies featuring widespread human rights violations.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, results indicated that terrorism has surfaced in cyclical waves. Empirical testing also indicates that neither factors associated with economic performance nor structural economic inequality display a robust relation to

nongovernmental terrorist activity in Latin America during the period of analysis.

In spite of the interesting results, certain limitations of this research must be addressed. First, problems arise from the lack of adequate data to conduct empirical research. With regard to the dependent variable, nongovernmental terrorism, although Edward Mickolus' *Chronology on Terrorism* is the best data source so far created, it is only a descriptive account of terrorist acts and thus lacks a rigorous organizational criteria. This forces researchers who use this source as a base for empirical testing to extract the information and adapt it to their own investigative requirements. Such relatively flexible usage of the data, however, has the potential to decrease the comparability of the research results. Another problem concerns the data on human rights violations. Consistent information on human rights violations goes only as far as 1980, thus impeding the extension of the analysis into the 1970s, a decade of active terrorism in Latin America. Furthermore, the criteria this work uses to measure the characteristics of political systems, the Freedom House political and civic liberties scales, is a relatively weak measure of democracy for it only considers the electoral components of it, leaving aside important elements such as the rule of law, people's effective participation, and accountability, among others. Undeniably, the lack of a comprehensive indicator to measure the extent of democracy that goes beyond a minimalist procedural definition conspires against the researcher's capacity to obtain a more accurate picture on the relationship between democracy and terrorism.

Although important, these obstacles should not dishearten researchers to investigate terrorism by employing quantitative techniques. In spite of all its shortcomings, this analysis is encouraging because it provides empirical evidence on the factors prompting terrorism in Latin America that is consistent with theoretical arguments espoused in the literature. Moreover, it also matches the political and societal characteristics of many Latin American countries that have been severely affected by terrorism such as Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, and, most recently, Panama and Venezuela. All these countries are relatively unconsolidated democracies that, as O'Donnell aptly points out, have institutionalized regular elections, yet are characterized by a weak rule of law, widespread state human rights violations, and lack of accountability.

In sum, given the interesting results obtained by this research we think that this work should be taken as a fruitful first step towards empirical reassessment of the conditions fueling nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America. Hence, it constitutes a valuable contribution to furthering our knowledge on this acute and distressing political phenomenon.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Rightwing terrorist organizations in Latin America have historically been less prominent than insurgent or revolutionary ones. During the 1970s and 1980s, many right wing organizations developed close links to rightwing dictatorships, as they helped the latter to carry out repressive activities against their detractors. In spite of these connections, more often than not these clandestine rightwing groups maintained their own internal organization and operated to a certain degree independently from the state. Furthermore, their activities, except for the case of Nicaragua, were exclusively urban. Among rightwing organizations that perpetrated terrorist attacks it is possible to mention the *Contras* in Nicaragua; Argentina's *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (AAA) (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) and *Mano Blanca* (MB) (White Hand); the Ecuadorian *Orden de la Muerte* (Order of Death); death squadrons in Guatemala and El Salvador; and Colombian paramilitary groups such as the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) (United Self-Defenses of Colombia) led by Carlos Castaño (Radu 1984, 26).
- <sup>2</sup> Hereafter, unless otherwise specified, the term *terrorism* refers to acts of nongovernmental terrorist nature.
- <sup>3</sup> It is the case of guerrilla organizations such as the Peruvian *Sendero Luminoso* (SL) (Shining Path) or *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), which have regularly attacked nonmilitary targets.
- <sup>4</sup> In his private diary, Guevara mentioned many problems that conspired against the revolutionary enterprise, among them lack of food, water, and supplies; sickness; exhaustion; breaches in discipline; low moral; quarrels between Cubans and Bolivians; and the lack of support from Bolivian peasants and urban cadres (Wright 1991, 92).
- <sup>5</sup> The *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Tupamaros* (Tupamaros) (National Liberation Movement Tupamaros) started operations in Uruguay and *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* (MIR) (Revolutionary Leftist Movement) in Chile. In Argentina, four main groups began to operate: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) (Liberation Armed Forces), *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP) (Peronist Armed Forces), *Ejército Revolucionario Popular* (ERP) (People's Revolutionary Army), and the *Montoneros*. In Brazil, a myriad of tiny terrorist organizations came into existence, among them: *Acao Libertadora Nacional* (ALN) (National Liberation Action), *Vanguardia Armada Revolucionaria* (VAR) (Armed Revolutionary Vanguard), and *Var Palmares* (Wright 1991, 110; Laqueur 1987, 248).
- <sup>6</sup> A very influential work by Marighela, the *Manual of the Urban Guerrillas*, a training guide for urban insurrection similar to Che Guevara's handbook for rural guerrilla, inspired leftist terrorist organizations in Latin America and beyond.
- <sup>7</sup> In one of its most spectacular operations, the M-19 seized Colombia's Palace of Justice in November 1985 taking more than 100 people as hostages. The M-19 was also the first Colombian guerrilla organization that became involved in drug-trafficking (Asprey 1999, 1109-10).
- <sup>8</sup> These ultranationalist groups also attacked British targets in retaliation for the Argentine defeat in the Malvinas-Falkland War.
- <sup>9</sup> In a recent CNN documentary on the Cold War, it was acknowledged that the US government largely exaggerated the actual involvement the Soviet Union had with the guerrillas and terrorist organizations in the region. Cuba and the Soviet Union held conflicting agendas on the issue. While Havana proactively endorsed these groups, Moscow showed more reluctance and restraint, as it feared an escalation in the Cold War.
- <sup>10</sup> In other regions of the world, the end of the Cold War has had a more positive impact in diminishing terrorist activity. In this regard, Enders and Sandler argue that the end of the Cold War has "provided a dividend in terms of reduced transnational terrorism" (1999, 145).
- <sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Latin America has the highest occurrence of terrorist attack against US targets in the world. Of a total of 111 terrorist attacks conducted against US targets in the world in 1998, 87% were perpetrated in Latin America (US Department of State 1992, 62; US Department of State 1999, 92).

- <sup>12</sup> The EZLN denied it had participation in those events and repeatedly maintained that terrorism was not part of its strategy (See Méndez and Cano 1994, Díaz 1997)
- <sup>13</sup> Among these groups it is possible to mention: *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (PRT) (Revolutionary Workers Party), *Frente Militar de Liberación de Colombia* (FMLC) (Military Liberation Front of Colombia), and *Coordinadora Guerrillera Nacional Simón Bolívar* (CGSB) (Simon Bolivar National Guerrilla Coordinating Board).
- <sup>14</sup> The most serious incident in Panama occurred in 1994 when a bomb blew up an airliner in Colón. The bomb went off only one day after the bombing of the AMIA building in Buenos Aires and killed 21 people, including twelve Israeli businessmen (Mickolus 1997, 650–53).
- <sup>15</sup> The idea that terrorism derives from negative socioeconomic structural conditions derives from the conflict studies theory. This tradition began before World War II when John Dollard developed his frustration-aggression theory. This theory claimed that aggression was the result of peoples' frustrations. Although strongly attacked by ethologists, who thought that aggression was a natural human condition, Dollard's work was used in the 1960s by students of conflict. One of them, Ted Robert Gurr, applied later the frustration-aggression theory to sociology. Following the work of Thorstein Veblen, Gurr assumed that discontent derives from the perception of *relative deprivation* which pushes people to rebel and thus to engage in violence. Relative deprivation is defined by Gurr as "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities" (1970, 13). Value expectations, he explained, are material goods and living conditions to which people aspire and believe they are rightfully entitled, while value capabilities refer to conditions and goods people think they are capable of attaining (or maintaining) given their social means (1970, 13).
- <sup>16</sup> The Guyanas, Surinam, Haiti, Jamaica, Belize, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic were excluded for a lack of reliable information.
- <sup>17</sup> To check the methodology used by Mickolus see appendix.
- <sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that in Colombia drug cartels have been involved in terrorist acts (i.e., the Medellín Cartel in the late 1980s resorted to terrorist actions to coerce the Colombian government to cease the extradition of drug lords to the US), this article does not investigate the connection between drug-trafficking and terrorism in the region. The rationale for excluding drug-trafficking as an independent variable is related to difficulties with the operationalization of the narcotics variable. Moreover, the literature on narco-terrorism is incipient at its best and thus does neither provide accurate information nor sufficient theoretical insight on the reasons and the nature of terrorist activities perpetrated by these groups (see Rensselaer 1989; Mayer 1990; Ehrenfeld 1990; Tarazona Sevillano 1990; Craig 1993; and Rey 1994; Asprey 1994).
- <sup>19</sup> The bombing of the AMIA in Buenos Aires illustrates this point. The Argentinean police discovered that local ultrarightist groups provided assistance to the terrorist command that executed the operation. The Iranian-backed Lebanese *Hizbullah* remains as the primary suspect of the bombing (US Department 1998, 21).
- <sup>20</sup> One possible problem in the definition of the dependent variable in this work is related to the different nature of terrorist incidents included by Mickolus in his chronology. Since Mickolus' work takes into account incidents as varied as assassinations, bombings, and plane hijacking on the one hand, and telephone threats and attacks with Molotov bombs on the other, it may be a problem when it comes to assessing the real dimension of terrorist activity in a given country. To be sure, a telephone threat or a hoax is not comparable to a major terrorist attack that results in physical harm of innocent civilians and that creates public commotion. However, the decision of counting all the incidents that Mickolus considers as acts of terrorist nature, regardless of their intensity, is purposely taken in order to follow in the most faithful way the criteria used by him in his work. Moreover, it seems clear that, in light of the figures obtained, table 1 reflects accurately the relative incidence of terrorism in the seventeen countries included in the sample.
- <sup>21</sup> Statistical information for unemployment, inflation, and growth rates is obtained from the publications of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- <sup>22</sup> Data on GINI coefficient is obtained from the 1999 UNU/WIDER-UNDPWorld Income Inequality Dataset



(WIID).

- 23 For details on how the Purdue Political Terror Scale is built see the appendix.
- 24 We thank George Lopez and Aníbal Pérez Linán for their insights regarding this point.
- 25 Given that economic growth showed a statistically significant correlation with both inflation and unemployment, the combination of economic performance indicators chosen are growth, on the one hand, and unemployment and inflation on the other. Furthermore, the political system indicators, political rights and civil liberties also showed signs of multicollinearity. Therefore, we included them into the regressions one at a time. However, given that political rights and civil liberties capture different dimensions of political development, we created an index combining both indicators and dubbed it Freedom Index. See appendix for further details.
- 26 These countries are Colombia, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Paraguay, and Uruguay.
- 27 In order to make the results of the regression more intelligible, the somehow counter intuitive PPTS scale, in which the worst human rights record is assigned the highest number is reversed. Hence, the association showed by the regression is negative. For more detail on how the index is constructed see appendix.
- 28 Just as in the case of the human rights scale, the Freedom House scales and the accompanying Freedom Index constructed by authors for political and civic liberties are reversed. See appendix for more details.
- 29 It is important to underscore that the definition used by the Freedom House Scale to measure democracy is procedural at its minimal extent. Political and civic rights are understood along the lines of Robert Dahl's concept of Polyarchy. Polyarchy is a concept created to distinguish among regimes that are democratic and those that are not, however, it is a weak tool to differentiate among democracies. As defined by Dahl, Polyarchy has seven attributes: elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, right to run for elected posts, freedom of expression, alternative information sources, and association liberties (see Robert Dahl 1971; Collier and Levitsky 1996).
- 30 A few tests were attempted to rule out the argument relating the Cold War as a factor affecting the incidence of terrorism in Latin America. Dummy variables for the Cold War period were introduced into the general regression. In addition, time series cross section regression analysis using certain indicators of the Cold War impact for a reduced time frame coinciding with the Cold War period (1973–90) was also attempted. The US and Soviet military and economic aid to Latin America were used as indicators. Results, however, showed there was no statistically significant association between these indicators and the dependent variable (see CIA 1976–1991; and Wilkie 1988, 240–43).
- 31 Guillermo O'Donnell describes these democracies as poorly institutionalized. Following Huntington's work (1991), a fascinating debate on the extension, quality, and attributes of democracy has ensued. This debate provides the appropriate backdrop to understand the contradictory nature of many Latin American democracies that, on the one hand, allow free elections yet, on the other, consistently perpetrate human rights abuses (see O'Donnell 1992, 1996a, 1996b, and 1998; Huntington 1991; and Loveman 1993).

## APPENDIX

List of Dependent and Independent Variables and their respective indicators and sources.

### **Dependent variable:**

*Terrorism Chronology of Events:* Types of incidents include kidnappings; barricade and hostage seizure; occupation of facilities without hostage seizure; letter or parcel bombs; incendiary bombings, arson; explosive bombs (dynamite or plastic); armed attacks employing missiles, mortars or bazookas; aerial hijacking; takeover of non-aerial means of transportation; assassinations; sabotage not involving explosives or arson; exotic pollution including chemical and biological agents; nuclear-related weapons attack; threats with no subsequent terrorist action; theft, break-in of facilities; conspiracy to commit terrorist acts; hoaxes; sniping at buildings or other facilities; shooting out with the police; arms smuggling; car bombing; and suicide car bombings. This chronology does not include belligerent actions during internationally recognized wars and acts of purely criminal nature which do not have a political motivation. Information is based upon publicly available materials that have appeared in the international press. Key sources include press agencies such as Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, newspapers like the Washington Times, TV networks' evening news such as ABC, NBC, and CBS, and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) daily reports, which draws information from hundreds of world print and electronic media sources. Furthermore, material from the Nuclear Regulatory Agency as well as from the FBI and US embassy information services was also used to build Mickolus' chronology (Mickolus 1983, xii-xiii; Mickolus, Sandler, and Murdock 1989, xvii).

### **Independent variables:**

*Economic Performance:* Economic growth, inflation and unemployment. Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, and 1996, editions.

*Structural Economic Conditions:* The UNU/WIDER—UNDP World Income Inequality Database (WIID) collects yearly information on income inequality for developed, developing, and transition countries between 1980-1999.

Available on internet at <http://www.wider.unu.edu/wiid/wiid.htm>.

*Political Systems:* The Freedom Scale is an annual survey that defines the degree of development of any given democracy by ranking both civil and political freedoms. One is the

best score and seven the worst. The score given for political rights is determined by the degree to which a given nation satisfies the following requirements: (a) leaders are chosen in decisions made on the basis of an opening voting process, (b) significant opposition is allowed to compete in this process, (c) there are multiple political parties and candidates not selected by the government, (d) polling and counting is conducted without coercion or fraud, (e) a significant share of political power is exercised by elected representatives, (f) all regions, even the most remote, are included in the political process, and (g) the country is free of foreign or military control or influence. Countries assigned a rank of one most closely satisfy these requirements and those assigned a rank of seven most seriously violate them. The score for civic rights is determined by the degree of liberty a given country grants its news media and individual citizens, primarily as it applies to political expressions. The survey looks at censorship applied to the press or radio. It also assesses the rights granted any individual to openly express ideas, to belong to an organization free of government supervision, and the individual's right to a free trial, i.e. the degree to which the judiciary is independent of administrative control. The number of political prisoners held in a country, the use of torture and brutality, and the degree to which the state security forces respect individual rights is also taken into account. Countries assigned the rank of 1 grant the greatest degree of civil liberties and those assigned the rank of 7 most seriously violate them (Wilkie 1995).

*State Repression: Purdue Terror Scale.* This scale created by Michael Stohl measures human rights violations between 1980–1993. The sources used by this scale are the annual reports by the State Department and Amnesty International about countries' human rights practices. The scale ranks state human rights practices from one to five. Countries ranked one are those under a secure rule of law where imprisonment for political reasons and political murders are rare or exceptional. Political murders are extraordinarily rare. Countries ranked two are those where there is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few are affected, torture and beatings are rare and murder is uncommon. For countries ranked with a three there is extensive political imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality are common. Unlimited detentions, with or without trial, for political reasons are accepted. Countries where murders, disappearances and torture are common features of life and where violence affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas are ranked four in this scale. Finally, five characterizes a scenario where conditions of the violence that characterized level four are extended to the whole population. The leaders of these nations place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

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