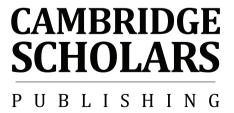# Political Violence in Latin America

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

By

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PREFACE

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

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

The study is primarily based on empirical material collected in field research in Argentina, Colombia and Nicaragua in 2009 and 2010. While

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

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

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

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

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First of all, I want to express my gratitude to Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenshappelijk Onderzoek (NWO) and Utrecht University for having afforded me the opportunity to carry out the investigation. In this line, I want to thank the Onderzoekinstituut voor Geschiedenis en Cultuur (OGC) in particular for having supported me institutionally where possible. I would like to thank especially Prof. Duco Hellema and Prof. Bob de Graaff for their constructive support in the elaboration of the study and their always open doors for solving problems and easing doubts.

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In this line, I am also embedded to Dr. Kees Koonings who supported me in regional questions and pushed me in long discussions to question pre-established concepts and viewpoints. I also want to thank all the participants of the Expert Workshop on Escalation Processes in Irregular War that had taken place in Utrecht on the 17 and 18 September 2010 for the inspiring presentations and discussions, as well as the helpful comments on my own work.

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I would like to express my gratitude to all the interviewees whose fascinating records build the central pillar of this thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank Memoria Abierta, the Centro de Documentación e

Finally, I would like to thank all those I have not mentioned personally but who have helped me–perhaps without being aware of it–completing this study. Thanks!

INTRODUCTION

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

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

Literature on Latin American conflicts highlights the importance of the Cold War and especially of US interference in Latin American internal issues to explain the development and ending of the struggles (Weitz 1986; Dinges 2004; McClintock 1998; Joes 1996; Dominguez 1986; Gill

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

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

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

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

of "how social problems are transformed into social movements."
(Peterson 1989:419) The core questions of social movement research rest
on the reasons and conditions for social movement formation, the
individual's motive for participation and organizational features, action,
tactics and cycles of protest, and the change social movements brought
about (della Porta & Diani 2006; Goodwin & Jaspers 2009). Different
approaches to the study of social movements highlight their internal
organization (Zald & Ash 1966), their political dimension (Tilly 1977;
Tarrow 1994; Meyer & Minkoff 2004), and their framing capacities
(Benford & Snow 2000). Also the question of "personal, collective and
public identity" (Weissmann 2008:8) formation through social movements
has come to the fore since the 1980s (Melucci 1989). All approaches agree
that social movements are a central agent in social change and internal
conflict. Research on internal conflicts, furthermore, focuses on protest
cycles, protest tactics, state approaches to opposition rallies, and the
rational cost-benefit calculation for social mobilization (della Porta 1995a;
Tilly 1977; McAdam et al. 2001; Pierskala 2010; Olson 1994). However,
only scant research has been done into the mechanisms that link social
movements and even the social environment at large to the development of
internal conflicts and the level of political violence. The Theory of
Contention (McAdam et al. 2001) forms a notable exception to this lack of
research. Yet it remains largely unexplored just how social movements
and the broad social environment influenced the development of internal
conflicts and, importantly, the level of violence.

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

as a social movement is an exceptional approach in this respect (2007). A partial explanation for this neglect might be the fact that Latin American social movements and protest were largely labeled as insurgency and guerrilla movements by the governing regimes and by important international actors, such as the United States (Eckstein 2001).

Social movement research, furthermore, is mainly limited to a specific movement or state where it appeared (Trevizo 2006). There are few cross-national and cross-case comparisons of social movements in internal conflicts. Notable exceptions are Donatella della Porta's comparative work on "Social Movements, Political Violence and the State" (1995a) in Germany and Italy, and Jeff Goodwin's investigation "No other Way out." (2001) Detailed analysis and cross-case comparisons of social movements still seem to exclude each other.

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

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

largely determined the level of political violence, the violence's impact on the position of the social audience was central to the development of the conflict.

It is the explicit aim of this study to trace the processes that take place in this triangular conflict constellation and to explain the escalation and de-escalation of political violence in Latin America's internal conflicts. The conditions that determined the changing effects of violent events will be pointed out. Therefore, this study sets out to reconstruct the causal chain that links violent events to specific conflict developments; or to use the terminology of the Theory of the Dynamics of Contention, the study aims to explain the "causal chains" (processes) of "mechanisms" (events) that alter the given situation to explain "episodes of contentious politics" (insurgent campaigns) (McAdam et al. 2001:27-29). Thus, the research focuses especially on the effects that violent actions had on the development of the conflict and on the development of political violence. To understand these processes the research takes into account the broad socio-cultural and historical-political embedding of the conflicts (McAdam et al. 1996). This study will not restrict itself to analyzing the interaction between regimes and insurgents but will try to bring society into the picture.

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

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

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

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

Chapter One then will set the theoretical and historical framework for the study of political violence in Latin America. Central concepts, the triangular nature of conflicts, and the development of violence in this constellation will be discussed. Subsequently, the historical embedding of Latin American conflicts will be examined. This will include a discussion of the influence of the Cold War and foreign interventions, as well as the national conditions for the conflicts. A short historical overview of the main Latin American social revolutionary conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century points to trends in how different state approaches to internal challengers influenced the development of the struggles and political violence. This helps to identify important conditions for the development of political violence and, thus, to focus the analysis of the following case studies.

Chapters Two, Three and Four of this thesis are dedicated to the three case studies on which the main conclusions will be based. Chapter Two examines the Montonero urban insurgent struggle against the Argentinean state. Chapter Three explores the campaign of the largely urban-based Colombian M-19. Chapter Four analyses the insurrection of the Nicaraguan FSLN against the Somoza family dictatorship. The three empirical case studies are structured in a uniform manner. A time-line and a brief historical overview embed the struggles in their historical socio-political environment and point out key events and developments. Then the conflict development is reconstructed from the point of view of the insurgent groups and the regimes, with special consideration for their

relationship to and influence upon the social audience. First, the emergence and development of the insurgent group is scrutinized and its contributions to the conflict development described. Central to this section is a description of the organizational set-up of the insurgent groups and their relationship to the social audience. Then, we will look at the role the ruling regimes played in the development of the conflicts and political violence. Subsequently, we will focus on the extent of legal political opportunity and the specific counter-insurgency responses of each state, and we will analyze the impact of these factors on the subsequent development of the struggle. Each case study will conclude with a summary of the respective processes of political violence observed.

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

Selection of Case Studies

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

differently in rural and urban environments, as discussed in Chapter One. To facilitate a comparison, this study will focus on urban conflicts.

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

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

This selection allows for a comparison of the impact of different regime types on the development of internal conflicts and political violence, as well as an examination of the effect of regime changes on internal struggles. With the exception of the short-lived Campora government in Argentina (in 1973), political exclusion is a common denominator in all the regimes analyzed in this study.

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

All three insurgent groups had a significant urban component. The Montoneros were almost exclusively urban-based, while M-19 and the FSLN also had important rural campaigns. However, M-19 had its main impact with urban actions, not rural guerrilla warfare. The urban aspect of its campaign can be defined as the decisive factor. The FSLN came into

being as a rural guerrilla movement and for many years tried to follow a classic insurgent strategy. In the early 1970s, however, the organization took to the urban centers. Eventually, it was the FSLN's presence among the urban masses that permitted the group to coordinate the popular insurrections of 1978 and 1979 and to lead the Nicaraguan revolution. The FSLN's urban campaign, therefore, was crucial for its victory. The focus on the urban environment is also important because it highlights the triangular constellation of social revolutionary conflict that will be detailed in Chapter One. Here, insurgents cannot conduct a classic insurgency focused on gaining territorial control; they are limited to influencing the social audience by means of armed propaganda. Despite this apparent disadvantage, urban insurgents have often been relatively successful in mobilizing social pressure for change, and a few, such as the FSLN, have even brought about revolution.

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

The Colombian conflict is extremely complex due to the diversity of important violent actors. These include several insurgent groups, paramilitary organizations linked to elite sectors or drug cartels, and security forces operating autonomously. The complexity of the situation requires close attention to the broad conflict environment and particularly to other violent actors when analyzing the processes of political violence. Focusing on the specific insurgent campaign of M-19 allows us to reconstruct the processes of political violence, but we have to take the influences of the dynamic conflict environment into account when evaluating specific decisions and events. The existence of other insurgent

groups, for instance, influenced the position of the government towards the internal struggle and, by extension, towards its dispute with M-19. Therefore the focus of the analysis is on M-19, but where necessary we will discuss how the conflict environment and other violent actors, such as the FARC and paramilitary groups, shaped the course of M-19's campaign. These other actors will only enter the analysis when their activity is relevant to the development of M-19's campaign. The focus on M-19's insurgency and its outcome permits us to analyze the processes of political violence but falls short of explaining the entire internal conflict in all its complexity. This limitation, however, is not a shortcoming but a necessary restriction of the study if we are to focus on processes of political violence.

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

Political Violence and the Triangular Social Revolutionary Conflict Constellation

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

Terrorism and insurgency, the authors argue, are strategies of irregular warfare in their own right that violent opposition groups can follow to change the politics of the state (Duyvesteyn 2006; Duyvesteyn & Fumerton 2009). The strategies differ, however, regarding their ultimate strategic goals. While insurgency aims to take over political control of

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

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

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

sectors that are pursuing structural change and conservative violence by governing regimes that aim to maintain the status quo and sometimes to shape society (Calveiro 2010). We will come back to this later.

Terrorism, however, is not only an analytical tool but also a politically loaded concept (Friedland 1988) that has often been used as a means of propaganda or, to paraphrase Walter Lippmann, of framing reality through a selective presentation of information to shape people's behavior (1950). In Latin America, state authorities used the term terrorism like the term communism, "to denounce, delegitimize and destroy organized political opposition" (Schroeder 2005:69; see also Mejívar & Rodríguez 2005; McCamant 1984)[1] of any kind, while state-sponsored human rights abuses accounted for the main part of the violence (Esparza 2010; Sluka 2000; Menjívar & Rodríguez 2005; Booth & Walker 1989; Mercier Vega 1969; Goodwin 2001). Yet scholars writing about Latin American conflicts tend to describe the armed opponents as insurgents rather than terrorists, without denying the use of terrorist tactics by these groups (Gillespie 1995; Palmer 1995; Palmer 1989; Wickham-Crowley 1990; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Waldmann 2007).[2] State violence more easily resembled a strategy of (state) terrorism, especially when authorities employed "terror-inspiring methods" (Gillespie 1995:214) to "spread panic" (Waldmann 2007:230) and ultimately to maintain control. In the analysis of the three case studies, this study finds that most Latin American armed opposition groups pursued a strategy of insurgency, although the groups sometimes relied heavily on terrorist tactics, especially when acting in urban environments. However, it is not the aim of this study to (re-) label any violent actor but to analyze the development of political violence. To avoid any moral, political or historical bias of the terminology, therefore,

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

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

this study will from now on use the term political violence rather than
terrorism.

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

Latin American conflicts were social conflicts with a social
revolutionary objective. Social conflicts can be best understood as
"purposeful interaction[s] among two or more parties in a competitive
setting" (Oberschall 1993:39) in which "the parties are an aggregate of
individuals, such as groups, organizations, communities, and crowds"
(Oberschall 1978:291) struggling "over values or claims to status, power,
and scarce resources." (Coser 1956:8) More concretely, Latin American
conflicts mainly arose due to political and economic exclusion of "*el
pueblo*" that is

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

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

Latin American conflicts manifested themselves, first and foremost, in
social movements that, according to Sidney Tarrow, constitute "collective
challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained
interaction with elites." (Tarrow 1994:3-4) In the contentious interaction
with elite forces, small protest sectors radicalized (della Porta 1995a) and
armed organizations formed out of the larger protest environments

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[3] Italics in original. Hereinafter, I will use the term popular to refer to this
heterogeneous group of disadvantaged social sectors that compose the "pueblo".