

Heuristic Repression: Why Modern Latin American Dictatorships Target Underrepresented Racial Groups

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Abstract

Why do security forces in Latin America disproportionately target racial minorities? This article argues that the regime leadership's racial makeup determines whether they racially target civilians. Using previously formulated databases regarding ethnic inequality and power as well as cases of violence perpetrated by security forces, this study supports the hypothesis that Latin American regimes are more likely to ethnically target civilians of certain races if the leadership is racially homogenous. On the other hand, other indicators outside of race, such as socioeconomic standing are used to target civilians if the security leadership is heterogeneous.

Introduction

There is limited literature in the topic of racial targeting and Latin American security forces, and the literature that is available does not focus on the racial attributes of the leadership itself as a way of identifying whom they will target. Latin American governments have a history of both racial discrimination (*Horwedel, 2005*) and violent repression (*Duff, McCamant, & Morales, 1976*). This article attempts to provide evidence that repression disproportionately affects racial minorities in two Latin American countries and that this can be foreshadowed by the racial makeup of the state's security leadership. In this context, security leadership is used to define the higher ranking officials of the state's armed forces. These are the individuals who have the power to make choices regarding who the military represses. By comparing whom and how the security forces target in two autocratic regimes that have distinct ethnic compositions of their security force leadership, we can examine whether race contributes to state-sponsored violence. This paper also attempts to theorize about why heterogeneous and/or homogeneous militaries target civilians who are underrepresented by looking into each of the two countries' racial history and the composition of the opposition group and the threat they may pose. This study argues that countries with more homogenous security forces are more likely to take a civilian's race as a cue that he/she is a member of the opposition, and thus target him for repression.

Background

Race in Latin America

By “underrepresented,” this literature does not mean “minorities” in a quantitative sense, as a state’s racial minority can be well-represented and wield the majority of power in a nation. Instead, the term encompasses those who are prevented from gaining access to rights or who lack representation in the state’s government compared to their percentage of the population, even if they are the majority of the population percentage wise, which is what most states consider “minorities” (Nagengast, 1994).

Since colonization, the perceived inferiority of non-European groups was apparent, though the groups were not all at the same level of inferiority. According to Wade (1997), the indigenous people of Latin America were perceived as a group to be enslaved, but also protected. This was due to the fact that Europeans had not come into contact with indigenous peoples before. This group was not only unheard of, but openly practiced non-Christian religions that the Europeans deemed backwards and uncivilized. Because Europeans had held contact with Africans and introduced Christianity earlier on, this “protection” was not extended to African slaves. In order to create a difference in these two slave categories, along with the mixed peoples, such as mestizos (Indigenous and European) and zambos (Afro-descendant and Indigenous) that resulted, a hierarchical system, or *sociedad de castas*, was put in place. Europeans were at the top of this structure, while indigenous and afro-descendants were at the bottom, with the middle being reserved for the various mixtures, family lines, and career occupations.

Repression in Latin America

This study defines “repression” as the state-sponsored use or threat of direct or indirect violence. This violence is perpetrated or allowed to happen by the regime in order to reach a social, political, or economic goal (Nagengast, 1994).

Times of conflict and instability tend to produce governments that partake in repressive acts against civilians they deem as a threat. Latin America governments have practiced repression in numerous occasions, including authoritarian regimes in Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Cuba, and Chile. These instances began with “collective acts” carried out by those who oppose the government or actions it has taken. One of the state’s responses to this is repression (Franklin, 2009).

Theories

Although it is necessary to be aware of the possibility that certain types of leaderships are more likely to repress underrepresented groups, it is important to attempt to determine the reason for which the regime represses in the first place. Reasons for repression of certain groups throughout Latin America may be because those in power are faced with the security dilemma or a threat to their economic stakeholding, or because they possess an idea of racial superiority. Both have an origin in the history of Latin America, which hosted the oppression and the discrimination of non-European minority groups since colonization.

The loss of power can be a problem to security leaders for two reasons. One, they risk losing economic power, and, two, they face the possibility of the loss of their lives. As most dictators attempt to hold power in the state’s major industries, the loss of power can also mean

the loss of the stake they hold in the industries. This monopoly on the state's economy by members of a country's leadership has occurred via reforms giving ownership of industries to the government (*Tulloch, 1986*). Proof of this can be found in vehicle-allocations provided by officials in exchange for support in the U.S.S.R. (*Lazarev & Gregory, 2003*). In a state in which this theory is the reason for the repression of underrepresented groups, the leaders of security forces should be found to hold large shares in industries and would stand to lose them if they lose power.

The security dilemma

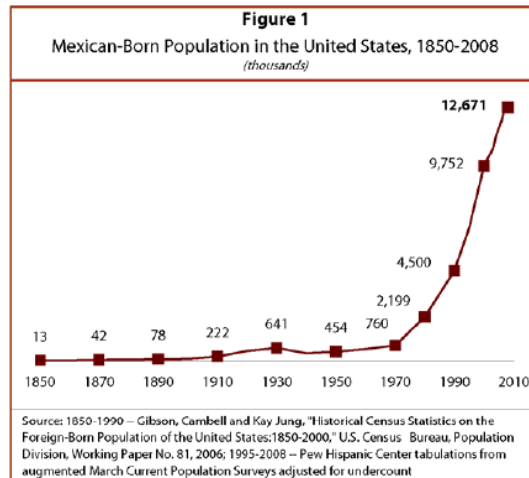
A graver outcome of the loss of power is the endangerment of the leaders' lives. One explanation for why an autocratic regime would target civilians of a particular group would be the overall safety of the leaders in power at the time. In trying to secure their state, the government can face negative outcomes (*Posen, 1993*). By using force against civilians, military officials have to be afraid that if those who have been victims of this violence were to come to power, they would seek to reciprocate the abuse. Thus, governments that have used state-sponsored violence targeted to a particular group fear losing power and losing their lives at the hand of their victims and must continue to repress them in order to avoid reciprocation. Race can then instead be seen as an indicator of who is in the opposition group, and used for strategically attacking those who are seen to be most likely to pose a threat (*Mele & Siegel, 2014*). In order for this theory to be applicable to a state's autocratic regime, the opposition has to have enough power and resentment to pose a threat.

Racial superiority

The second reason would be the idea that certain races or ethnicities are more suitable to be in positions of power than others. The racial and occupational caste system structure that has been in place since colonization in Latin America mostly remains in modern times, although now in an informal social sense. Steps have been taken to integrate the underrepresented groups into society through legislation promoting inclusion. According to information from the Minorities at Risk (2009) project, the Chavez government in Venezuela has attempted to work with the indigenous in Venezuela by demarcating indigenous territory, an issue that has caused continuous land disputes. These kinds of legislation, however, have been vulnerable due to a lack of resources and internal power struggles, leading to the support and integration of minority groups within Latin America being a slow process (*Wade, 1997*). A society with an internalized belief about the unsuitability of certain races for power could make it difficult for underrepresented groups to gain adequate representation in the government. In order for this theory to be the reason that a state represses an underrepresented group, the previous two theories must not be in place. The sole reason for repression of these groups must be a history of discrimination that has remained in place.

Relevance

During times of armed conflict, citizens tend to flee their home states. This loss of work force leads to less able bodies to aid in the nation's development and the increasing of its GDP. According to research done by the PEW Research Center, during the 1990s, there was a sharp increase in migration from Mexico into the United States.



Source: www.pewhispanic.org

During this time, the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed. However, the southern region of Mexico was also experiencing armed conflicts. The conclusion that the spike in migration from Mexico occurred due to not only NAFTA, but the armed conflict as well, can be drawn from this occurrence.

Methodology

In order to compare the racial makeup of the leadership and whether that has an effect on racial targeting, this study focuses on two countries' autocratic regimes, one with a racially homogeneous leadership (Mexico during the beginning of the Chiapas conflict) and another with a racially heterogeneous leadership (Venezuela during the Maduro presidency). In this study, the racial composition of the leadership in each of the regimes will be the independent variable. The dependent variable will then be the ethnic groups targeted. If the hypothesis that this study attempts to support is true, the racial composition of the regime will determine whether the regime targets a specific racial group.

Case selection

This study looks at all of the states with autocratic regimes during the post-cold war not experiencing a civil war, as measured by the UCDP/PRIOD database (*Gleditsch et al. 2002, Themnér & Wallensteen 2014*). It does this in order to avoid states whose regimes may have been funded or otherwise supported by the United States or the U.S.S.R. during the cold war era.

Out of the group of countries that were not categorized as going through a civil war during the post-cold war era, the ones chosen for this study have to be categorized as authoritarian regimes, meaning that the incumbent leader or party has not lost an election. (*Escriba-Folch & Wright, 2012*),

During these countries' times as dictatorships, only Venezuela and Mexico from 1990 to 1994, and Cuba were not experiencing higher threshold civil wars.

To determine disparities or consistencies between ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous security leaderships, this study chooses one country whose leadership is heterogeneous, and one whose leadership is homogeneous. Based on these criteria, the Latin

American countries chosen for this study are Venezuela and Mexico, two countries that have experienced state-sponsored violence throughout the regime.

Data Gathering

In order to capture the groups that are underrepresented in each country, this study uses the *Ethnic Power relations 3.0 dataset (EPR3)* which codes for ethnic, linguistic, religious, racial groups; access to power; times of conflict; how much power political leaders held; and political discrimination throughout 157 countries from 1946 to 2010. The data set will be used in order to record the relevance and representation of racial groups in Mexico and Venezuela.

UCLA's *Ethnic Power Relations* dataset's use of the term ethnicity includes "ethnolinguistic, ethnosomatic (or "racial"), and ethnoreligious groups". It categorizes an ethnic group as "politically relevant" if their interests are nationally-served by one or more active political organizations, or if the group's members experience "systematic and intentional" political discrimination, or targeted exclusion. The dataset does not code the variance in an ethnic group's representation by political groups or the various leaders that represent the same group. It is assumed that with political mobilization or intentional ethnic discrimination in the political arena, comes political relevancy (*Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009*). If the group is politically relevant, it is likely to receive acknowledgement from the state either as a threat or as a group that needs government support.

The second dataset that will be used is the *Minorities at Risk* dataset. It will be used to determine which racial groups throughout Mexico and Venezuela pose any kind of threat to the autocratic regime and what kind of discrimination they are facing within the state.

The *Minorities at Risk* dataset's political discrimination scale (POLDIS*) goes from 0 to 4, with zero meaning that there is no political discrimination

The economic discrimination scale (ECDIS*) goes from 0 to 4, with 0 being no discrimination.

I measure the threat the group poses as the strength of their grievance against the state and their ability to act on this grievance against the state. For grievances by the minority group, the MAR dataset reports the highest grievance level the group representatives express., as reported values are from group leader "statements and actions," as well as what third parties have observed.

Protests (PROT*) range from 0 to 5. The scale zero means that there were no reported protests.

Rebellions (REB*) range from 0 to 7. The MAR dataset's coding of repression (REPNVIOL***) encompasses group members engaged in "nonviolent collective action (e.g., politicians, human rights leaders, nonviolent protesters, etc.), ranging from 0 to 5.

This study will be focusing on Venezuela during Maduro's rule (2013 – present) and Mexico during 1990 to 1994, using information from various news sources collected by the *Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)* for Venezuela, and Guillermo Trejo's *Popular Movements in Latin Autocracies: Religion, Repression, and Indigenous Collective Action in Mexico (2012)* for Mexico, excluding drug-trade related violence. Data from the CEPR and Trejo were used to record state-sponsored repression and violence against civilians. The information served as the dependent variable of this study.

Findings

Venezuela

Racial Underrepresentation

Two significant politically-active groups the Minorities at Risk (2009) dataset focuses on in Venezuela have been Indigenous and Afro- Venezuelans.

Afro-Venezuelans

According to the Ethnic Power Relations (2009), Afro-Venezuelans are an ethnically relevant minority group, but are categorized as powerless. According to the MAR project (2009), Afro-Venezuelans suffer political discrimination, mostly social exclusion, thus they are at risk for protest. The discrimination they face is not institutionally ingrained, but social, such as society labeling them as of lower social class and intelligence.

The most prevalent issue that Afro-Venezuelans face is the lack of economic opportunities (ECGR06 = 2). Low levels of governmental representation and participation in decision-making has linked political issues to these economic issues. Afro-Venezuelans have come to occupy offices appointed by the president, civil service jobs and academic posts, however the majority face discrimination at the social level, underrepresentation at the political level, and remain below the level of the mestizos, the “average” in Venezuela (ECDIS06 = 3, POLDIS06 = 3). Although Afro-Venezuelans have protested in recent years, the instances were in support of President Hugo Chavez, and now President Maduro (MAR, 2009).

Indigenous Peoples of Venezuela

According to the Ethnic Power Relations dataset, indigenous peoples of Venezuela are categorized as an ethnically relevant, but powerless, minority group (Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009). According to MAR, many Venezuelan indigenous are malnourished and are not provided with educational and health or public hygiene services, such as sewage and clean water (ECGR06 = 2). According to the MAR project, Venezuela’s indigenous groups, who comprise 2% of the Venezuelan population, possess a low risk for rebellion, mostly practicing nonviolent protests directed towards United States Caribbean military operations and the Venezuelan government, though they supported President Chavez, and now support President Maduro (MAR, 2009).

Cases of Violence and Repression

According to the data gathered from the news-sources provided by the *Center of Economics and Policy Research*, the majority of the people killed during the recent protests against President Maduro were not mostly of a specific racial makeup, but were reported to be mostly of middle-class backgrounds, with the violence occurring in mostly middle-class neighborhoods.

Dates and Locations of Fatal Events Connected to Protest in Favor and Against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro

DATE	LOCATION
12-Feb	Caracas
12-Feb	Candelaria Parish in Caracas
12-Feb	Chacao, Caracas
18-Feb	Carupano, Sucre
18-Feb	Carabobo
19-Feb	Carabobo
20-Feb	Herman Garmendia de Barquisimeto, Lara
20-Feb	Chacao
21-Feb	Romulo Gallegos Avenue, Caracas
21-Feb	Las Americas, Merida
21-Feb	Candelaria Parish in Caracas
22-Feb	Tazaja, Carabobo
23-Feb	Tachira, San Cristobal
24-Feb	Francisco de Miranda neighborhood, Maracaibo
24-Feb	Fundacion de Cagua sector, Sucre, Aragua
24-Feb	Avenida Espana, San Cristobal
25-Feb	Valencia, Carabobo
25-Feb	El Limon
28-Feb	Valencia
3-Mar	Altamira Sur, Chacao
4-Mar	Rubio, Tachira
6-Mar	Los Ruices, Caracas
6-Mar	Los Ruices, Caracas
7-Mar	N/A
9-Mar	Merida
10-Mar	San Cristobal
12-Mar	La Isabelica, Carabobo
12-Mar	Monango, Naguanagua
12-Mar	La Isabelica
16-Mar	Maracay, Aragua
18-Mar	Montalban neighborhood, Caracas
19-Mar	Tachira
21-Mar	San Cristobal
21-Mar	Valencia
22-Mar	Merida
23-Mar	Los Nueves Teques, Guaicaipuro
24-Mar	Merida

Information gathered from the Center of Economics and Policy Research

Mexico

Racial Underrepresentation

Cases of Violence and Repression

In 2006, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) offices in Mexico City were occupied as a way of protesting the violence and poverty encountered in Oaxaca. 11 people died due to the Popular Revolutionary Army's (EPR), attack on Huatulco in August 1996. The military and police have caused the deaths of 20 to 30 COCEI members since 1974. According to MAR, recent acts of opposition has been nonviolent (PROT01 = 5, PROT02 = 4; PROT03 = 2). However, protests that erupted in Oaxaca in 2006 became violent (PROT06 = 4; REPNVIOL06 = 4) (MAR, 2009). While there have been no cases of rebellions reported within recent years (REB04-06 = 0), land disputes between Zapatista and non-Zapatista supporters have increased and protests have continued (PROT04 = 3; PROT05 = 2; PROT06 = 3) (MAR, 2009).

According to data gathered by Trejo (2012), Mexico's indigenous protest began increasing from 1990 to 1992, dipped in 1993, then significantly increased during 1994. Protesting and rebellions in 1994 during the Chiapas Conflict were mostly against the "PRI-controlled local and state governments," which were corrupt and practiced electoral fraud, the lack of aid provision, were driven by claims of corruption and electoral fraud, state failure to provide promised aid, protection of communal indigenous lands, as well as "expressions of solidarity with the Zapatista rebels" (PROT94-00 = 5; REB94-00 = 6)." (MAR, 2009).

Trejo (2012) also gives data regarding which security forces in Mexico are called in during times of indigenous repression. During instances of indigenous repression, the armed forces and the local police increased and decreased at the same times. However, during the 1990s, the police called in by the state to repress the indigenous populations declined, while the army that was called on to repress indigenous Mexicans increased. Being of a similar racial makeup as the civilians in the area means that the local police are more likely to have local racial ties. The higher the ranking, however, the more homogeneous the leadership is. This shows that the state may rely more on a security force that is not racially tied to a minority group,

Repression by Security Groups

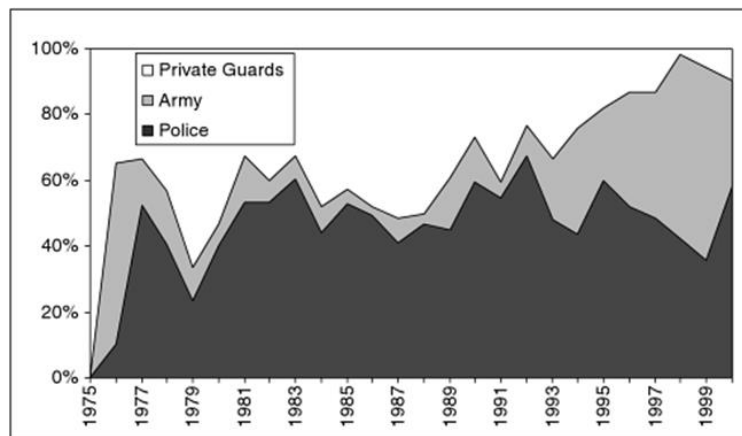


FIGURE 4.2. Repression against indigenous populations by perpetrator (relative contribution).

Source: Guillermo Trejo's *Popular Movements in Autocracies* (2012)

Discussion

This study expected to find that homogeneous leadership is more likely to racially target civilians than a heterogeneous leadership. In order to see which groups provide each state with the most threat, this study looked at racial groups that lack representation. While identifying the racial groups that are most underrepresented, it found that Afro-Venezuelans and Indigenous Venezuelans face social and economic discrimination. Although this is the case, they do not pose as large a threat due to their support of the state's leader according to information from the *Minorities at Risk* project showing Afro-Venezuelans and Indigenous supported Chavez throughout his time of power. However, underrepresented groups do oppose certain governmental issues, such as the lack of Afro-Venezuelan representation in high government ranks, and the endangerment of the indigenous' lifestyles and traditions by the government (MAR, 2009). When compiling data on the victims of violence during the recent protests in Venezuela, the victims were not from the underrepresented groups looked at in this study, but rather from a middle-class background (CEPR, 2014). This is likely due to a targeting of certain socio-economic groups, rather than of specific racial or ethnic groups.

Indigenous Mexicans, on the other hand, have had a history of rebellion against the government, its discrimination against this group, and its leadership. When looking at Mexico's Chiapas Conflict, it is clear that the military branch doing most of the repression against these indigenous groups is the army, rather than the local police (Trejo, 2012). This may be due to security forces at the local level being more heterogeneously comprised of Mexicans of European, mestizo, and indigenous backgrounds. According to Vinson (1995), the higher rankings of the Mexican military, along with higher positions in society, were held for white Mexicans, making it more homogeneous and exclusive of non-whites at the higher levels. Taking that into consideration, the fact that during times of indigenous conflict, homogeneous forces are called on to use repressive means demonstrates that the ethnically homogeneous security force is more likely to repress groups outside of their ethnic group.

It is important to note, however, that this study only focuses on autocratic regimes throughout the post-cold war era. This means that dictatorships before and during the cold war were not studied. Another limitation to this study is the fact that of the two countries compared, not all times of violent repression were examined. Only deaths during protesting in favor of and against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro were recorded, as well as limited information regarding indigenous rebellion and protesting in Mexico's southern Chiapas region.

Conclusion

After gathering data from various datasets, this study's hypothesis is supported by data showing that during times of repression, an ethnically homogeneous security force is more likely to be trusted by the state to repress a population that is outside of their own racial group. This was apparent in Mexico, during the Chiapas conflict during the 1990s, when Mexico repressed indigenous rebellions with the use of the army, which is expected to be more homogeneous, rather than with the police, which is expected to be more heterogeneous. When the leadership is more heterogeneous, however, the security forces may use something else as an indicator for possible threat against the regime. As in Venezuela's case during protests in support or opposition of President Maduro, socioeconomic class was the common theme among those who were killed, rather than race. This may be an indicator that in a state with a heterogeneous

leadership, a non-racial indicator, such as socioeconomic status or region, may be used in place of race or ethnicity as an indicator of probable threat to the regime.

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