Understanding Criminal Networks, Political Order, and Politics in Latin America and the Caribbean

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In June 2007 I visited a shantytown in the Comunas Nororientales of Medellín, an area that until recently had been a major site of conflict in Colombia's generations old civil war. Over the past two years, paramilitary groups, through negotiations with the state and defeating FARC militias in the area have established dominance over the local shantytowns. In this process they have not only pushed the guerillas out of much of the neighborhood but they have also taken over many of the neighborhood civic groups, in the process forcing many residents who do not agree with their political program to leave. The paramilitaries who operate in this area are part of a larger military-political structure that is connected into the *Corporacion Democracia* a political interest group that coordinates the wider demobilization process in Medellín, negotiates the national truth and reconciliation process for some paramilitary groups, and makes demands of the government to effectively distribute resources to the areas of the city dominated by their affiliates. The paramilitaries have been very successful in establishing local dominance and, through such programs as the city's participatory budgeting initiative, gaining control of the state resources flowing into the neighborhood and using them to enhance their status.

The role of violent actors in maintaining local order and providing social services is nothing new in Medellín where guerillas and drug traffickers have long engaged in these types of activities. Moreover, the political work of the paramilitaries at the local level reflects a wider trend in Latin America in which armed groups operate in collaboration

with state officials to maintain systems of local governance in exchange for state resources and the support of politicians. This process is equally clear in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Kingston, Jamaica where drug dealers and vigilante groups regularly act as clientelist interlocutors in poor neighborhoods and share the space of governance with public authorities. These three cities, which lie at the empirical heart of this paper, are but a small fraction of the areas of Latin America affected by persistent criminal and political violence.

The analysis of conflict in Latin America, however, lags substantially behind our understanding of political institutions in the region. In general scholarship focuses on democratic processes and treats the growing wave of violence that affects most of the major countries in the region as a failure of policy or a failure of political institutions. This paper will argue that conflict in Latin America stems not from state failure or the failure of policy but, rather from historically based political practices, institutional design, and economic processes that enable armed actors to effectively work with the government and share in local governance. We see in Latin America a new system of governance, that I elsewhere call violent pluralism,[1] in which armed groups are incorporated into wider political process and become part of the political system. The nature of how this system of governance operates is determined by the relationship between sites of institutional strength and weakness, flows of goods, and historical social factors that give rise to different types of organizations and relationships. This paper will explore how these varied factors come to bear on the structure of governance in three cities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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[1] Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel Goldstein, "Violent Pluralism: Understanding the "New Democracies" of Latin America," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico, March 2006.

Violence and Conflict in Latin America Today

For the past generation scholarship on the Western Hemisphere has focused principally on the process of democratization and the consolidation of democratic regimes and institutions. During the initial wave of research on democratization studies focused principally on the complexities of getting the military out of government and popular demands for establishing a responsive political system.[2] As the literature grew over the course of the 1990s more work has focused on the particulars of the institutions that have been established, the ways they operate, and specific things about Latin American governments that can be tweaked to promote effective governance. As a result, writing in major political science journals has focused on such issues a federalism, parliamentarism, economic development, and legislative voting.

The return to democracy, however, coincided with a substantial upsurge in violence throughout the hemisphere. By the time the Argentine dictatorship fell in 1983 Miami was awash in cocaine. The development of this industry in Colombia in the late 1970s spurred a restructuring of the local conflict around illegal goods that enabled the growth of numerous armed groups there.[3] The internationalization of the cocaine trade and its transshipment through other countries led to a growth in violence around the hemisphere. These conditions were aggravated by the difficult financial situation that many governments in the region found themselves in during the debt crisis when they

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[2] See especially here Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
[3] William Ramírez Tobón, "Las Autodefesas y el Poder Local," in *El Poder Paramilitar*, Alfredo Rangel ed., (Bogotá: Editora Planeta, 2005), pp. 183.

experienced substantial inflation and, with pressure from international financial institutions, had to cut back on basic state services to the population.[4]

The shifting resources associated with the growth of the cocaine trade and limitations on spending led to the organization of effective criminal gangs in many cities around the hemisphere that were able to buy high powered weapons and the protection of police and higher state officials. This led to growing murder rates and disorder in many cities throughout the region which was aggravated after 1995 by punitive immigration laws in the United States that led to the deportation of many Central American and Caribbean gang members and the emergence, in some countries, of the maras phenomenon.[5]

Scholarship on the region has struggled to keep up with these issues though, over the course of the 1990s a number of articles and books on the subject began to be published on these issues. Most of this work, however, suggested that Latin America was suffering from a lawlessness that had emerged in the context of state failure.[6] The most sophisticated analyst of these issues, Guillermo O'Donnell, has argued that the region has

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[4] Guillermo O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," *World Development* 21 (August, 1993), pp. 1361, 1364; also see Felipe Agüero, "Conflicting Assessments of Democratization: Exploring the Fault Lines," in *Fault Lines of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America*, Felipe Agüero and Jeffrey Stark eds., (Coral Gables: North-South Center Press, 1993), pp. 6.
[5] Presentation by Honduran Police at conference on community policing in Latin America, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, November, 2006.
[6] A comprehensive example of this approach can be found in United Nations Development Program, "Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens Democracy," (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2004); Guillermo O'Donnell, "Why the Rule of Law Matters," *Journal of Democracy*, 15 no. 4 (2004), 42; on informal rules and police violence see Daniel Brinks, "Informal Institutions and the Rule of Law: The Judicial Response to State Killings in Buenos Aires and São Paulo in the 1990s," *Comparative Politics* 36 no.1 (2003), 6-7; O'Donnell, 1355-69; on policing and violence in Argentina and Brazil see Mercedes Hinton , "A Distant Reality: Democratic Policing in Argentina and Brazil," *Criminal Justice* 5 no. 1 (2005) passim esp. 90; Ronald E. Ahnen, "The Politics of Violence in Brazil," *Latin American Politics and Society* 49 no. 1 (2007), pp. 142 (141-164); in interesting variant on this approach focuses on how state reforms can bring military perpetrators of violence to justice, on this see Jorge Zaverucha, "Military Justice in the State of Pernambuco after the Brazilian Military Regime: An Authoritarian Legacy." *Latin American Research Review* 34, 2 (1999): 43–74; Jorge Correa Sutil, "Judicial Reforms in Latin America: Good News for the Underprivileged," Juan Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, *The (Un)Rule of Law and the underprivileged in Latin America*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1998), 255-277.

broken down into blue, green, and brown areas reflecting different levels of state effectiveness with green areas being places where the government works, brown areas being places of gang or sub-national authoritarian domination outside the normal rule of law, and blue areas falling somewhere in between.[7] O'Donnell has called for increasing attention to the question of state power and other scholars have studied violence by looking, principally at problems in policing.[8] The notable exception to this pattern of scholarship is Colombia where the ongoing civil war has forced scholars to look explicitly at questions of conflict dynamics rather than state institutions.[9] The literature in political science has given us a vision of Latin America in which states are expected to be working democracies and where crime and violence reflect the failure of the state to effectively guarantee democratic order. Violence, as a result, is seen as an absence of effective institutions rather than the presence of some other alternative system of order.

This limits our analysis of the region. Seeing conflict as a failure of the political order can only tell us that murders are a result of something the state has not done such as effectively police neighborhoods or control police who engage in acts of impunity. The issues facing Latin America, however, are much broader and deeper. Poor policing and state violence are a component of conflict in the region but the heart of violence often lies in non-state armed groups that are engaged in a variety of illegal activities. Understanding this process means we have to go beyond looking at brown areas as simply places where the state does not function and look at them as subtly varied areas

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[7] O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems," pp. 1361, 1364

[8] O'Donnel, , "Why the Rule of Law Matters," *Journal of Democracy*, 15 no. 4 (2004), 42.

[9] Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, *Una Democracia Asediada: Balance y Persepctivas del Conflicto Armado en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2004); Jenifer S. Holmes, Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Kevin M. Curtin, "Drugs, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department Level Analysis," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 no. 3 (2006).

where different forms of order exist that intersect with and often support the formal political system in a number of ways.[10] A deeper understanding of the region will only come when we develop a stronger framework for looking at the systems of order that operate in "ungoverned" spaces.

Reinterpreting Politics in Latin America

Violence is not a failure of Latin America's political systems but a product of those systems and often an important factor in supporting their operation. To understand conflict and violence in Latin American and the Caribbean today we need to shift our theoretical orientation from one focused on democratic institutions and their failure to one that focuses on the nature of conflict, broader structural issues, and the relationship between conflict and institutions. In this model the question is not if democracy and the state are succeeding or failing but how space in the region is governed, the factors that support that governance, and the relationship between those involved in governance and the state. A deeper analysis of these historical, social, and structural issues can help us understand these broader trends in the region.

Historical Factors

Susan Strange has argued that we are seeing a world wide retreat of the state.[11] This withdraw, however, has not created a lack of governance but, rather, the proliferation of new forms of governance through such groups as reinsurance firms, accounting firms, and mafias which serve to regulate spaces that states for a number of reasons have neither the resources nor the interests to directly govern. Governments are happy to let certain

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[10] For a discussion of this approach see Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 8.

[11] Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

parts of national territory and the economy be led by other groups in order to economize resources and avoid conflict.

In the context of Latin America the retreat of the state was driven by the twin pressures of the democratization process and the debt crisis. The dictatorships that led Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s usually supported aggressive state policies that actively repressed the left and that inserted the government into economic decisions. Stagnant economies, the debt crisis, and exhaustion with state repression created an alliance between elements of the business elite, the middle class, and the left to shift toward democratic systems of government. These new pacted governments dramatically decreased political repression especially of the elite and middle class, supported the reduction of state intervention in the economy, and left in place a market based economic system in the region.[12]

This shift was, in a sense, nothing new in the region. The Latin American state had emerged under very different historical circumstances than existed in Europe. Lacking international wars to justify large-scale state building projects the region has long been characterized by a relatively high level of decentralization, militaries focused more on suppressing dissidents than fighting foreign rivals, and a mediocre ability to collect revenues.[13] The result is not so much the classic "weak" state found in Africa but rather medium strength states that have long had the capacity to maintain order in major cities, which can engage in substantial national cultural projects, and sustain relatively effective large-scale bureaucracies but which delegate a substantial amounts of state power to

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[12] For a discussion of pacted transitions see O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.
[13] Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

private actors in more isolated areas and that only occasionally have had the capacity to support major industrial programs.

Nevertheless, this retreat did represent a historic break with state policy in the region dating back to the early twentieth century that was characterized by a trend to active government leadership in integrating the working class, state led development, and the repression of political opposition.[14] With this shift most major state building efforts in the region came to an abrupt halt and governments found themselves without the resources or the political support for active state efforts. In its place the state allowed industries, foreign actors, NGOs, civil society, and religious groups to take its place in leading the economy and providing services to the poor and other marginalized actors.[15] The particular way in which old forms of state incorporation and building projects failed in the late twentieth century contributed to the structure of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean today. In some sense, Latin America has fused old and new political formations, on the one hand devolving power to local and private actors while at the same time granting universal suffrage and other rights. This shift in state power created space in poor areas for armed groups to emerge and maintain order.

In the context of the emerging regional and national level political competition that was occurring in many of these countries, politicians would go into poor areas in search of votes. In many cases politicians would develop relationships with local strong men in

[14] Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 6.
[15] On the breakdown of state society ties see Rubem César Fernandes, *Private but Public*, (Washington: Civicus Press, 1995), pp. 104-107; on this process in Ecuador see Monique Segarra, "Redefining the Public / Private Mix: NGOs and the Emergency Social Investment Fund in Ecuador," in *The New Politics of Inequality in Latin America: Rethinking Participation and Representation*, Douglas Chalmers et. al. eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 515; also see Douglas A. Chalmers, Scott B. Martin, and Kerianne Piester, "Associative Networks: New Structures of Representation for the Popular Sectors,' in *The New Politics of Inequality in Latin America: Rethinking Participation and Representation*, Douglas Chalmers et. al. eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 543-582.

which they would exchange personal or state resources for votes.[16] This would further strengthen local armed actors and create a specific relationship between those actors and the state. Alternatively, in some cases armed local actors became so powerful that they had little use for political patronage from state officials and would provide a separate conduit for services in the area they operated in or they would put up their own candidates for office.

This operates in the historic context of clientelism that exists in each country. The particular relationships between political parties and local populations that have evolved in each place will affect the types of violent relationships that emerge at the local level. Thus, in places with long standing tight clientelist relations conditioned by specific historical circumstances different patterns of violent practices and organizations may emerge than in places where looser clientelist relationships exist in which there is a more distant relationship between political leaders and the population. Some of this, of course, is conditioned by the particular impacts of non-democratic or dictatorial predecessor regimes on the current political system. A decolonization experience, for instance, will affect the relationships between political parties and the population differently from a democratization experience or a civil war.

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[16] One of the most nuanced analyses of contemporary clientelism in Latin American can be found in Javier Auyero, *Poor Peoples Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); for analyses specifically of violent clentelism see Robert Gay, "The Broker and the Thief: A Parable (Reflections on Popular Politics in Brazil), *Luso-Brazilian Review* 36 no. 1 (1999), pp. 49-70; Colin Clarke, "Politics, Violence and Drugs in Kingston, Jamaica," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25 no. 3 (2006), 420-440; Amanda Sives, "Changing Patrons, from Politicians to Drug Don: Clientelism in Downtown Kingston, Jamaica," *Latin American Perspectives* 29 no. 5 (September 2002), pp. 66-89; Andres Villareal, "Patronage Competition and Violence in Mexico: Hierarchical Social Control in Local Patrongae Structures," American Sociological Review 67 (2002), pp. 477-498; Kent Eaton, "The Downside of Decentralization: Armed Clientelism in Colombia," *Security Studies* 15 no. 4 (2006), pp. 533-562; Enrique Desmond Arias, "Touble en Route: Drug Trafficking and Clientelism in Rio de Janeiro Shantytowns." *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 4 (2006), pp. 427-445.

This process also operates in relationship to the structure of civil society that has emerged in a particular country or region. In places with a deep and robust civil society armed groups will have to find ways of dealing with various civic actors whereas in places with a more limited civil society armed groups will be able to interpose themselves as the primary local civic actors.

Finally, the role of organized armed groups also appears to be deeply linked to local landholding and economic patterns. There is substantial evidence that support to armed groups is affected by varieties of land ownership and local norms. Long term conflict can often be generated by conflicts over land in rural areas. On the other hand, land tenure in urban areas also affects local dependence on armed actors. In places where individuals do not have a legal right to reside on the land that they live on they may become dependent on armed actors to resolve local disputes and to protect their property rights.[17] Alternatively, armed groups may come to control certain types of housing. For example a gang may control access to a housing project. Residents who would like to live there may need a gang's permission to gang access to the area.[18]

The specific type of relationship that emerges in these places is constrained by historical, geographic, and social factors that support different types of relationships. In some cases local leaders have more importance than outsiders. In these cases individual areas would put up their own candidates. In other cases outsiders played a large role and had more power meaning that the political system would result in strong outsiders establishing clientelist relations with the individuals living in these areas. We will see in

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[17] Hernando De Soto, "The Constituency of Terror," *New York Times*, October 15, 2001, <www.nytimes.com>.

[18] This is the case in Jamaica. See Laurie Gunst, *Born fi' Dead: A Journey Through the Jamaica Posse Underworld*, (New York: Owl Books, 1998), pp. 79-80.

this chapter that the pattern of these relationships emerges out of this history with the decolonization process in Jamaica producing a form of subordination of armed actors to political parties and the state, creating competition and collusion between the state and armed actors in Colombia, and indirectly incorporating armed actors through semi-clandestine links with civil society in Brazil.

Institutional Factors

Another factor affecting the political systems in the hemisphere is the institutional constraints on local level order. These include how elections take place, the distribution of power through levels of government, and the types and quantities of resources state actors have to distribute to different places. The changing structure of the institutional political system affects how violence operates at the local level.

The specific electoral structure can greatly contribute to the types of localized order that emerge in different places. One of the driving factors affecting relations between politicians and armed actors is whether office holders are elected from narrow single seat districts or if they are elected from wider multi-member districts. In places where a single representative emerges from a particular constituency, control of ballot boxes will be essential in putting a member in office since achieving one more vote may be enough to push a candidate past an opponent. In a wider multi-winner system the control of particular geographic space is less important. In these cases armed actors and politicians have more flexibility in choosing where they will concentrate their efforts to obtain votes. In these cases armed actors and other political aspirants have more flexibility in choosing where they will seek votes and how they will achieve the territorial concentration that

tends to favor election in these systems.[19] Elected officials will have considerable flexibility in choosing how they will expand their base for reelection. Since actors have this flexibility, intense and violent confrontations specifically seeking votes will be less likely. This does not mean that in the context of a civil war such as that which exists in Colombia that there will be no military contests focused on controlling towns and votes or that violence will never be used to win elections in particular places but, rather, than that type of violence will be employed intermittently rather than constantly.

In places where concentrated votes are needed to win election you will tend to find tight relationships between politicians and specific armed actors that last for a relatively long period of time. Where votes can be gathered more diffusely politicians should maintain more distant relationships with criminals since they will gain advantages by negotiating with different groups and can gain support in the places where local leaders make the smallest demands.

The distribution of power through the state is also important in how non-state governance occurs. Where power is principally concentrated through a national state there will tend to be more competition to either control the state itself by electing parties aligned with specific illegal actors or, among illegal actors, to formally reject that state system even though they will often maintain relations with actors in it. Where power is more diffuse there is more space for compromise with illegal actors developing different types of relationships with different levels of political actors. This allows for a more subtle integration of illegal actors into the larger state system.

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[19] Barry Ames, "Electoral Strategy Under Open-List Proportional Representation," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (2), 1995.

An important factor in this is how resources are distributed and spending decisions are made. In places where municipal governments control a substantial amount of spending or control security there will be a tighter relationship between illegal groups and this level of the political system. Alternatively if these decisions are made at the national or state level it is with those governments that armed actors will establish relationships. In these later two contexts however we will tend to find more powerful armed actors consolidating political power as opposed to the former case where, with contact at the municipal level, lower level criminals may attain a higher degree of political power.

Another important institutional factor is the question of where and how resources are distributed. In many cases large amounts of state resources are distributed through the decisions of individual politicians. In these cases relationships with armed groups will be particular and individualized. Alternatively, in some cases, resources are distributed through institutionalized mechanisms such as popular budgeting. In these cases armed groups may work to control these different mechanisms and their structure may be affected by this effort. In general, places with smaller and more disorganized criminal groups will tend to work principally through individual politicians and places with larger and more organized criminal groups will have the ability to work through specific institutions.

As discussed above, much of the political analysis of conflict and crime in Latin America focus on institutional factors relating to criminal justice. Having ineffective or corrupt police forces will contribute to growing levels of violence and a greater role of criminal groups in governance. The failure of effective policing or police abuse can result in large portions of the population looking to armed actors for protection.

Disagreements between investigative and uniformed police forces can contribute to these problems. Alternatively, evidence from Brazil shows that poorly managed prison systems can lead to high levels of crime and acts of mass violence against the population.[20]

Economic Structure

The last major factor affecting the impact of crime and violence on governance in the region are the market flows of resources. Places that have easy access to illegal resources will tend to be places where violence will remain high whereas places with lower amounts of illegal resources will suffer less violence.[21]

A large part of the violence in Latin American stems from the cocaine trade. Countries with high levels of cocaine production will tend to have higher levels of violence and governance problems since a substantial amount of effort will be put in to maintaining illegal control of coca growing regions. The major coca producing countries are all sites of substantial rural disorder that have experienced serious political instability in recent years. Other countries may operate as transshipment points. In these cases criminals will need access to hiding places near transportation hubs. The resources flowing in through transshipment should create high levels of urban violence that will have less affect on rural areas. Finally, locations of consumption will experience lower levels of violence. Chart I, which shows data from 1995-1998, demonstrates this. Colombia's city's which combine the commercialization of the drug trade with nearby production have the highest levels of violence. Other Latin American cities on trade

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[20] Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro*; Daniel Brinks, "Informal Institutions and the Rule of Law."

[21] Mathew Brzezinsky, "Re-engineering the Drug Business," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 23, 2002, 24-29, 46, 54-55; Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, *Una Democracia Asediada*, 170-181; William Ramírez Tobón, "Autodefensas y Poder Local," 181-191.

routes to North America and Europe also have high levels of violence (Belford Roxo and

Diadema are poor suburbs of Rio and São Paulo respectively). Lima, which is not a

center of drug commercialization but which is located in a country where drug production

contributed to national violence experiences mid-range violence. Finally, Buenos Aires

and Santiago, centers of drug consumption have the lowest levels of homicides.[22]

Chart I: Urban Homicides Per 100,000 in Latin
America for Selected Years in the Mid-1990s

City	Homicide Rate
Medellín, Colombia	248
Diadema, Brazil	146.1
Calí, Colombia	112
Belford Roxo, Brazil	76.5
Caracas, Venezuela	76
São Paulo, Brazil	55.8
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	52.8
Lima, Peru	25
Santiago, Chile	8
Buenos Aires, Argentina	6.4

Cocaine is not the only source of illegal funding. Other narcotics such as heroin and

marijuana can play a role in organizing local illegal actors. The role they have will

depend on their contribution to the role of the narcotics in the local economy and the

place of the country in the international division of illegal labor. Some mineral resources

can also contribute to local conflicts. This is especially noticeable in Africa where

diamonds have played a role in supporting civil wars and in Colombia where emeralds

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[22] The chart is a shorter version of a chart taken from Leandro Piquet Carneiro, "Violent Crime in Latin America: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo," Research Report for World Bank, 2002. Carneiro drew this data from a variety of national sources as well as Buvinic and Morrisson, 1999.

have long supported conflict in parts of the country.[23] The existence of petroleum can also contribute to conflict but this operates in a very different way since a strong government usually plays an important role in supporting extraction. In Colombia, for example, the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) extorts money from oil companies to not attack their pipelines.[24] Finally, armed groups can make money through other types of illegal activities such as the trade in human beings.

The impact of different types of illegal economic activities varies from country to country depending on the particular role of that country in international illegal activities and the particular historical context that exists in that country. Thus, for example Mexico, Brazil, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic are all transshipment sites but experience the problem of violence slightly differently. At the same time Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are the three largest producers of cocaine and cocaine has contributed to violence and political instability in each country but the particular historical context in each country and the place of the country in the commercialization of drugs has an impact on violence in the country.

A second major component of the way economic flows affect governance is through access to illegal arms. Violent groups with easy access to arms will generally play a larger role in local governance than groups that have more trouble getting access to weapons. The small arms flows from the US, from a large domestic market, or as a result of a nearby conflict will contribute to the ability of armed actors to engage in local governance.

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[23] On this issue see William R Reno, *Warlord Politics and African State*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
[24] Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, *Una Democracia Assediada*, pp. 181-182.

Weapons play an important role in developing illegal activities as they allow armed organizations to shift from primary illegal markets such as dealing drugs into illegal security markets. Selling protection, however, is the central social contribution of the state.[25] As armed organizations shift into the protection market their role in governance will grow as they more distinctly supplant the state.

Criminal Organization and Synthesizing Governance

The foregoing discussion has suggested a large array of factors that can help us to understand the role of armed actors in governance in Latin America. At an abstract level these factors suggest that there are a variety of roles that armed actors can play in governance and that those roles often emerge as a result of relationships between armed actors and wider institutional, social, and economic factors. Illegal groups operate in specific ways on the paths of economic flows, within markets, and in relation to other elements of state and society.

Illegal armed actors can take on a variety of organizational structures though the persistence of armed activity depends on the ways in which these groups are networked together and into social, economic, and political organizations. Depending on the factors discussed above there may be larger or smaller hierarchical components to illegal organizational structures but across the region illegal activities also reflect the role of networking in supporting ongoing illegal activities. Thus, even guerilla armies rely on semi-clandestine networks of supports, contacts in the government, and other illegal actors to support their activities. In most cases these networks will survive the

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[25] Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back* Peter Evans, Dietrich Reuschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol eds., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 169-191.

deactivation of a specific criminal or group since the networks structure will enable other illegal actors to step into their place.[26] These networks are embedded in the social, political, and economic processes discussed above. Thus, governments may work to arrest criminals but the networks through which they operate mean that it is extremely hard to affect overall levels of crime.

Criminals play roles in governing space, negotiating political alliances, delivering political support, and enabling illegal markets on which many in the informal sector depend for a living.[27] As a result they work with state, social, and economic actors in building synthetic forms of governance. As such armed actors resolve disputes and administer certain types of issues at certain times and places. This administration is based within a political calculus that is both related to the wider national law and norms but which also changes the practice of that law.[28] This leads to a constantly shifting structure of order that appears from the outside to be disorder or a lack of governance but, when looked at closely, reflects a changing system of network based governance embedded in a social, political, and economic system. The following sections will suggest how these systems of governance operate in Colombia, Brazil, and Jamaica.

Analyzing Violent Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean

Jamaica is a small Caribbean nation that suffers from political and drug violence principally in its main metropolitan area. Colombia is a mid to large-sized South

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[26] See Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro*.

[27] Anthony Harriott, *Police and Crime Control in Jamaica: Problems of Reforming Ex-Colonial Constabularies*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

[28] Enrique Desmond Arias and Corrine Davis Rodrigues, "The Myth of Personal Security: Criminal Gangs, Dispute Resolution, and Identity in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 no. 4 (2006), pp. 53-81; also see Boaventura de Souza Santos, *Towards a New Common Sense: Law, Science, and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition*, (London: Routledge Press, 1995); Orin Starn, *Nightwatch: The Politics of Protest in the Andes*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Daniel M. Goldstein, *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

American country that has experienced ongoing conflict for more than sixty years and where large armed groups wage a war against the state and each other in both cities and in the countryside that is funded by narcotics revenues. Finally, Brazil is one of the world's largest countries in terms of both population and area. Rio de Janeiro, its former capital and second largest metropolitan area, and other major cities suffer from gang violence principally associated with the local drug trade. Despite these substantial differences they are also remarkable similarities between each of the countries along historical social, economic, and political lines.

International drugs markets fund the conflict in each of these countries. The large international demand for narcotics and the particular value of cocaine infuses a tremendous amount of resources into illegal market places in Latin America and the Caribbean. The conditions of violence in Colombia, however, differ from those in either of the other two countries discussed in this paper. Colombia is one of a handful of Andean countries that can produce large amounts of cocaine. The value of rural areas for coca production creates a situation in which armed groups maintain control of large rural sections of the country and in which the dominant armed groups in each city are connected with rural conflict processes. The armed groups use their operations in the cities to support wider political and military strategies. In other words, urban violence in Colombia is driven by rural processes. Kingston and Rio de Janeiro are very different in that they are transshipment centers where cocaine is moved out of Latin America and to North America and Europe. As a result urban and rural violence are unconnected. Rural violence in Brazil has only a tenuous link to urban violence and each major metropolitan area has its own independent violent organizations. In Jamaica rural areas are generally

experience low violence. Major urban port cities are the center of violence in each

country and gangs located in poor areas provide important support in moving the drugs

abroad. This autonomous urban violence then connects into the political system through

traditional clientelist networks. This is graphically represented in Chart II.

Chart II: The International Division of Criminal Labor and Violence in Latin America		
Country	Criminal Activity	Effects on Conflict
Colombia	Production and Commercialization	High levels of linked urban and rural violence; national scale violent actors.
Brazil	Transshipment	High levels of urban violence unconnected to rural land conflicts; violence is concentrated in port cities.
Jamaica	Transshipment	High levels of urban violence unconnected to generally non-violent political processes in the countryside; violence is concentrated in Kingston Metropolitan area.

All three countries also experience the problems of economic dependence and surplus labor. The unemployed in each city often seek economic support in informal markets. At times this causes them to depend on illegal actors for access to resources in violent markets. At other times it means that working outside the formal sector or living in a home to which they do not have title forces them to go to illegal actors to resolve local conflicts. The result is the same in each country: substantial portions of the population live outside the normal legal system because of poverty and as a result depend on illegal actors for protection. This provides illegal actors with a limited amount of political legitimacy and an important social role

The final element of wider economic processes that are important in each country is access to arms. Weapons are widely available in all three though those weapons come from different places. In Colombia the long term conflict and drug trade provide access to large quantities of weapons from both the international illegal market in arms and from

the Colombian military that supplies some illegal groups. In Brazil arms generally come from their own internal arms industry and are sold often by police officers to gangs. The high levels of internal arms production allow Brazilians to have access to relatively powerful light combat weapons. Jamaica is dependent on the United State's retail arms market.

Elements of the political system in each country also affect the particular practices of violence that evolve in these places and the relationship between violence and governance. Of the three Jamaica has the most unique political system in that it is based on Britain's with indirect elections of the executive through a parliament elected by single-member district plurality. This result is a high stakes two party system with the residents of poor neighborhoods dependent for patronage on their party controlling the parliament. There are two strong clientelist networks in the country and individual neighborhoods and gangs are tied into this system. Colombia has a presidential system with large multi-member districts and, today, relatively powerful municipalities. The power of armed groups and the relative wealth of municipalities results in heavy armed contestation for control of those institutions. The large multi-member districts enable candidates to build relationships with particular neighborhoods and towns across the region which they are aligned with. Candidates must maintain strong contacts with the armed groups that dominate municipalities in their region and these groups have succeeded in electing representatives to the national legislature. The Brazilian political system is very similar to Colombia's. The absence of a rural guerilla, however, limits armed contestation over municipal governments. Armed actors are critical to local political access in Rio de Janeiro. Here, however, violent groups are relatively weaker

and, historically, have less direct links to politicians once they have been elected

especially at the national level. With the advent of *milícias*, local vigilante groups often

tied to state officials, this has begun to change which have succeeded in electing

representatives to municipal councils and state legislatures. The result in both of these

cases has been that state resources are diverted to areas where armed groups with political

representation have power. Chart III shows this.

Chart III: Political Institutions and Violence in Latin America		
Country	Voting System / Sub-National System	Outcomes
Colombia	Large Multi-Member Districts, Proportional Representation	Development of multiple parties with relatively low party discipline. Some parties have direct ties to armed groups but armed groups also have ties to members of other parties
	Direct Budgetary Transfer to Municipalities	Armed groups engage in intense conflict to control municipalities and openly work to control local budgetary mechanisms such as the Participatory Budgeting Program in Medellín
Brazil	Large Multi-Member Districts, Open-List Proportional Representation	Low party discipline in which many political leaders establish transient ties to armed actors to gain access to votes and some successful cases of representatives of armed groups winning election as members of important political parties; residents of neighborhoods tend to identify with local leaders rather than politicians
	Direct Budgetary Transfer to Municipalities	Armed groups attempt to develop relations with municipal leaders to gain access to resources.
Jamaica	Single Member District Plurality	Tight ties between local gangs and national level political leaders
	Funding Concentrated at National Level	Conflict focuses on national level elections.

While the electoral system in each country differs, the bureaucracies in all three suffer from similar problems. Each country has corrupt and inefficient security forces that are often aligned with armed actors. Bribe taking by these groups or actual participation in illegal violent activities reinforces the power of armed groups in each of these places. Corruption on the part of state security forces decreases the legitimacy of the security services among the population.

The result of these factors is that implementation of order in these areas depends on collaboration between armed groups and the state. The type of collaboration that emerges is structured by the particularities of the local electoral system and the division of power between levels of government. In Colombia this plays out in the way that armed groups try to dominate municipal political processes. In Rio it involves the efforts armed groups to control access to their communities and, more recently, to directly seek public office. In Jamaica it is structured around the nature of the specific party and institutional ties that armed groups have built with parties and the state.

Violence does not emerge so much out of state weakness as it does out of the relationship between sites of state strength and weakness. Armed actors engage in governance activities under the types of middle-capacity states that exist in this region and structure many of their activities around getting access to certain types of state resources and maintaining relations with public officials. The types of relationships that emerge and efforts to exploit these resources depend on the institutional constraints of the political system and, as we will see in the next several paragraphs, the historical legacies that have given rise to that political system.

Social and historical factors are the last constraint on the relationship between states and armed groups. The most important component in this is the particular way that the large scale state building and national incorporation processes that occurred in the twentieth century failed and the ways in which that failure played out politically. In Colombia, that national incorporation process began in the 1930s and led to some degree of workers rights in urban areas. As demands spread beyond the major cities and into the countryside land conflicts contributed to the inter-party strife that drove *La Violencia*. This war resulted in a stalemate between armed groups associated with the Liberal and Conservative parties that ended in 1958 with the National Front in which the two major parties agreed to cease hostilities in exchange for sixteen years of power sharing. This was an elite agreement that excluded the armed popular militias that had supported each party. These actors evolved into the nuclei of the left-wing guerillas that participate in the current civil war. Their long standing independence of major parties and their strong position in the countryside enabled them to become political players in Colombia and to sit at the negotiating table with the government. The paramilitary groups that have evolved in response have achieved that same status.

In Jamaica the national incorporation process occurred during decolonization. Here the violent labor unions and gangs that connected particular workers and neighborhoods to the political system were subordinated to the political parties and were directly dependent on them for support. There was a historic tie between gangs and the state which was expressed through direct patronage from politicians to gangs and, more recently, in the creation of new modes of connecting armed actors to government such as the council in one recent peace initiative.

In Brazil the incorporation process centered around a top down form of corporatism initiated during the *Estado Novo* in the 1930 and held together at the federal level through the end of the dictatorship which simultaneously excluded and abused elements of the urban poor even as it worked to maintain the basic corporatist social structures connecting the state to labor. With the debt crisis of the 1980s and the consensus to reduce state size during this same period, the Brazilian government substantially scaled back its safety net to the working classes in the industrial centers of Rio and São Paulo. This pushed many workers into the informal economy. More importantly it undermined the very institutions that used to connect the state to different elements of the poor.[29] Thus, clientelism and an often abusive police presence emerged as the principal ties between the excluded population and the state. In Brazil armed popular actors had never had a substantial political role and, indeed, the state had brutally crushed what popular uprisings emerged in the nineteenth century. The criminals that stepped into fill some of the resource gap left by a retreating state in the 1980s and 1990s did so in an environment where there was little history of links between popular armed groups and the state. As a result they had no accepted place in the political framework. The result was the criminals interposed themselves on the clientelist relations that existed between shantytown dwellers and the state and they started their own local patronage networks. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s drug dealers established semi-clandestine networks that connected them into the political system as a new type of violent actor that provided patronage and controlled access to some parts of the urban area. During this time they often depended on civic actors to maintain their links with the state since there was no accepted way that armed actors could connect directly to the government. As new armed

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[29] Rubem César Fernandes, *Private but Public*.

groups have evolved and relations with the state have changed these groups have been able to establish more regular ties to the state.

Chart IV: Historic Process and Armed Actors' Role in Governance		
Country	Circumstances	Outcome
Colombia	Strong ties between armed actors and state in 1950s that break down in 1960s and 1970s as drug economy provides independent resources to guerilla groups.	Powerful autonomous armed actors with substantial national political standing and dominance over wide areas of national territory
Brazil	Armed popular actors traditionally destroyed by state, clientelism main link between poor and state	Armed groups have no legitimate political role; instead they work through clandestine connections and civil society to establish transient patronage relations with politicians and to work through the state bureaucracy to gain space to engage in violent activities. As a result violence is not tied to elections but rather to contestation over how government bureaucracies will operate
Jamaica	Civil society and armed groups tightly tied to two major political parties though parties begin to distances themselves from armed actors in 1990s	Armed groups subordinated to political parties through 1980s; cocaine economy provides some measure of independence but local links to parties still strong and armed groups remain important in local politics

Interspersed through this is the wider question of civil society. In Colombia popular groups have little access to civil society as a result of the high levels of violence in that country that have resulted in the deaths of many civic actors. In Jamaica civil society among popular groups is quite limited and also tied directly to armed groups and the political system. Here civic actors depend on the same limited two party patronage to act

and have little independence. Brazil on the other hand has a very active and robust civil society that emerged in large part because there was relatively little systematic violence among popular groups. Here criminals have established ties to civic groups and use the connections these groups have to the outside to achieve political objectives.

Violent groups are linked into the state through networks that tie them together with civic actors, bureaucrats, and politicians. The shape of these networks is determined by the historical legacy of how incorporation projects failed and the role of armed groups in those incorporation projects. In that case of Colombia years of fighting and the resources available through drug production enabled these groups to establish themselves as independent political actors who could sit down and negotiate with the state and make formal political demands. In Jamaica, the incorporation process linked the population to the state through labor unions and armed gangs. The result was the criminal groups had a clear subordinate place in the political system and depended on the political parties for access to state resources. Finally, in Brazil armed popular actors had no accepted political space since they had no role in the incorporation process. Here armed groups had to feel their way through the political system initially building contact with the government through civic actors and later developing new types of political activity including vigilantism which enabled them to gain some political legitimacy.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a multi-leveled analysis of the problems of governance in Latin America. Going well beyond the existing writing on this problem in political science, which tends to place the question of violence in Latin America squarely within the bounds of different forms of state failure, this paper has argued that violence in Latin

America reflects not so much the failure of the state but rather the way in which the state operates in conjunction with armed actors. Starting from a historical perspective I have shown that violence in different countries in the region is constrained by the particular ways that state building and incorporation projects have changed or failed over the last thirty years, the ways that political institutions promote different types of conflict and engage violent actors in the governance process, and the ways that economic flows contribute to violence in particular places. This account provides a systematic way to look at violence in Latin America not simply as a problem emanating from weakness in contemporary democratic regimes but, rather, as part of a wider historic, structural, social and economic process that can be contextualized within the long process of state and social violence in the region.