Violence on the Right and Threats to Democracy

in Post-Authoritarian Latin America

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The Conservative Strategy Paradox

The transition from authoritarian rule did not end violence from the right. The same sectors that had once formed the coup coalitions that backed repressive authoritarian regimes continue to use violence to assert their political demands during the contemporary democratic era. This paper will focus on three of those groups. In Argentina a group of military officers, called carapintada (painted faces), staged a series of revolts from 1987 to 1990 to protest trials for human rights violations committed during the military regime’s Dirty War. In Brazil landholders organized a lobby in 1985 called the UDR ( União Democrática Ruralista or Rural Democratic Union) to prevent agrarian reform, while simultaneously murdering peasant and environmental leaders involved in the struggle for land and democratic participation. The 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution that brought the FSLN (Frente Sandinista por la Liberación Nacional -- Sandinista National Liberation Front) to power to end the inequality and repression under the Somoza Dynasty also generated the contras, a counter-revolutionary paramilitary that waged a war against the Sandinistas’ revolutionary changes. After the end of the war, a group of contras rearmed as recontras to pressure the democratically-elected Chamorro government.

Since disgruntled military officers, landholders, and paramilitary forces had successfully toppled democratic regimes in the past, these contemporary threats to democracy were taken seriously. The new democratic governments employed a “conservative strategy” of moderation, institutionalization, and gradualism that had been advocated by democratization scholars as the means to check authoritarian reversals. Moderate reforms, these scholars believed, would avoid threatening authoritarian elites, thus obviating their need to overthrow democracies. As O’Donnell and Schmitter contend “if the armed forces are threatened, they may simply sweep their opponents off the board or kick it over and start playing solitaire.”1 DiPalma further claims that “willfully using democracy as a Jacobin tool of progress not only is ingenuous but also may raise intolerable political risks; namely authoritarian backlashes and, in anticipation, escalation into a virtuous ‘guided’ democracy.”2 DiPalma argues, therefore, that it is “ill-advised to conflate democracy with a set of elusive ultimate objectives and normative standards -- coveted as they are.”3

Institutionalization recognizes that “the legacy of despotism cannot be removed surgically.”4 Democratic leaders, therefore, should build capable, minimally ideological, and non-polarized political institutions to accommodate and channel authoritarian elites’ demands within the democratic system.5 O’Donnell and Schmitter claim that, “Chaotic as it may seem to have several players attacking and retreating on various levels at once, it is better to have them in the game, and perhaps committed to its emergent rules, than outside it, threatening to kick over the board.”6

Gradualism assumes that authoritarian elites will eventually tolerate more radical reforms, but only after they have gained experience and confidence playing by democratic rules. Thus, O’Donnell and Schmitter state, “Only once the transition has passed and citizens have learned to tolerate its contingent compromises can one expect political development to induce a more reliable awareness of convergent interests and to create a less suspicious attitude toward each
other’s purposes, ideas, and ideals.” They further caution against popular sectors moving too quickly for radical and redistributive demands. In their words, “an active militant and highly mobilized popular upsurge may be an efficacious instrument for bringing down a dictatorship but may make subsequent democratic consolidation difficult, and under some circumstances may provide an important motive for regression to an even more brutal form of authoritarian rule.” The conservative strategy scholars recognize that gradualism could weaken popular support for democracy. DiPalma, for example, states, “if the regime is interested only in limited reforms, civil society may not put much trust in those reforms and may lack the capacity (and possibly the interest) to obtain more.” O’Donnell and Schmitter state, “the disenchantment it leaves behind is a persistent problem for the ensuing consolidation of political democracy.” These scholars assume, however, that at least in the foreseeable future democracy’s protection against “oppression of arbitrary and undivided rule,” and its emphasis on “civil and political liberties,” will override popular sector disappointment with the particular policies of democratic governments. The memory of authoritarian rule and the legitimacy of democratic rule in the contemporary period protect democratic stability from popular disenchantment.

This paper suggests that the conservative strategy widely applied in the new Latin American democracies creates a paradox. Moderation, institutionalization, and gradualism have successfully eliminated the threat of coups. But in the process they have exaggerated authoritarians’ control over the political system and weakened democratic stability. Authoritarians no longer need to overthrow the political system. The conservative strategy capitulated to their demands, incorporated them into the political system, and indefinitely “postponed” reforms that might threaten elites. Perhaps the uncertainty of the transition warranted caution and conservatism. This paper contends, however, that it is not too late for democratic governments to recover from the conservative strategies. The new democracies can simultaneously erode authoritarians’ power over the democratic system and strengthen democratic governance. But that process will involve both a new understanding of the authoritarian forces and their threats to democracy as well as government resolve to limit the power of those movements.

Crafting Uncivil Movements

New kinds of authoritarian movements have emerged with the transition from authoritarian rule. They resemble old-style authoritarian movements in their social origins. As in the past, they are drawn from the military, the landed elite and paramilitary forces. These new movements also form similar alliances with right-wing sectors of the Catholic Church and abroad. They, like their predecessors, also use violence against popular sectors to control threats to them. And they continue to threaten democracy.

But these new groups are so different in their behavior and impact on democracy, that they defy the term “authoritarian.” Unlike their predecessors, these movements do not intend to topple the democratic system and impose an authoritarian system. Instead, they embrace democratic change. And they even use the democratic politics of lobbies, rallies, and campaigns...
for public office to promote their demands. At least on the surface, then, these movements do not look or act like the exclusionary authoritarian movements of the past.

I refer to these new authoritarians as “uncivil movements.” This term captures their use of uncivil acts -- coups, armed uprisings, murder -- that they fail to relinquish even as they form part of the democratic institutional apparatus. It also captures their opposition to social movements within civil society. But rather than using “authoritarian” language to combat these civil society actors, they appropriate a social movement idiom. They, like social movements, claim to represent the excluded, voiceless, marginalized sectors of the new democratic society. They call for participatory democracy and reject the corrupt and accommodated political machine. They create new identities around culture and values. And they, like new social movements, employ unconventional political tactics to draw attention to, and pressure for, their political demands.\textsuperscript{16}

These uncivil movements emerge in response to the democratic transition. The fading legitimacy of authoritarian rule constrained the political opportunities of authoritarians. Past authoritarian strategies lacked appeal. Moreover, conservative democracies provided new opportunities to mobilize new movements within the political system. Finally, uncivil movements’ skillful crafting enabled them to take advantage of those opportunities and influence political outcomes.

The key to uncivil movements’ craft is “legitimating myths.” Uncivil movements spin contradictory images, messages, and action to draw in a diverse constituency and protect against government reprisals. Uncivil movements obviously appeal to the authoritarian hardcore. Hardcore militants find in these uncivil movements a contemporary version of past successful authoritarian movements. This hardcore, moreover, forms the storm troopers that the movement needs. They threaten democracy and force the government and society to take this otherwise fringe movement seriously. But given the small size of the authoritarian hardcore, and its questionable legitimacy in the new democratic era, uncivil movements also need to appeal to a broader constituency: a modern pragmatic right-wing. The pragmatists share the hardcore’s goals even if they do not openly endorse authoritarian politics. The pragmatists do not only expand the size of uncivil movements. They also provide them with their veneer of legitimacy. They help shed the authoritarian image associated with the hardcore. By playing both democratic and authoritarian games, uncivil movements reach both constituencies. The hardcore accepts the democratic game, viewing it as a “code” to disguise the authoritarian nature of the movements behind a democratic facade. The pragmatists rely on uncivil movements’ official transcripts, filled with democratic platitudes, to justify their participation in such movements.

Legitimating myths serve a variety of needs. They provide the means to bring together different individuals who share some, but not necessarily all, of the movements’ tactics and ideas. They provide the means by which individuals who might not join overtly armed, right-wing, movements can justify their participation. They build on the threat felt by certain sectors of the population, urging them to engage in collective action to end that urgent threat. And they
pose a possible solution to that threat that is recognizable as, but also distinct from, authoritarian solutions. They create a new identity that unites individuals with different views. And they broaden the appeal of the movements by framing their goals as collective, democratic, and national, rather than authoritarian, personal, or class interests. Legitimating myths perform these roles through uncivil movements’ leadership, message, and political action.

Uncivil movements tend to select one powerful male leader who resembles historic figures from the country’s past. His image is evoked to resurrect heroic images and patriotic pride. By using authoritarian imagery, he gains the confidence of the hardcore authoritarians. But if this leader cannot simultaneously shed that authoritarian imagery, the movement will remain limited in its size, appeal, and political power. Repackaging, however, can attract a modern constituency that seeks some, albeit not radical, change from the authoritarian past. The leader of a successful uncivil movement bonds these two constituencies in one group. His personal appeal guarantees him strong support from the constituents. Ad hoc procedures, loose membership requirements, and a minimal division of labor consolidate his personal control over the movement. He becomes the movement’s image and organizational structure. Eventually the movement and the leader are one.

The Argentine carapintada and the Brazilian UDR illustrate how uncivil movements craft legitimating myths around their leaders. Lt. Col. Aldo Rico, who led the carapintada, and Dr. Ronaldo Caiado, who led the UDR, had no movement leadership experience before taking control of their respective movements. They had both helped found the movements because of the sense of threat and urgency they shared with other founding members. Both rose to leadership positions because of their unique characteristics. Both Caiado and Rico were powerful orators. But, more importantly, they embodied the movements’ legitimating myths. They had unquestionable links to the authoritarian past. Rico, for example, resembled the historical military caudillo (not unlike Juan Perón) who used force and political pragmatism to resolve national crises. Rico himself was a decorated hero from the authoritarian regime’s Malvinas [Falklands] War. And he exploited his heroic, patriotic, and military image. Rico dressed in fatigues even after he had been discharged from the army. He incorporated national cultural symbols like the mate bowl and straw and tango music on his campaign trail. Caiado also had impeccable authoritarian credentials. He came from a long line of powerful landholder-politicians on the old Brazilian frontier. He posed mounted on horseback to resurrect images of the powerful rural capitães who used force to control their region.

But these leaders also distanced themselves from these authoritarian images. Both were young and modern. Both had experiences that resonated with a generation that lived through the military regime and the transition from authoritarian rule. Rico used his own personal losses during the repressive era, his heroic achievements in the Malvinas War, and his humble origins to attack the military regime’s failed political, military and economic strategies. Caiado was a medical doctor trained in France. He used his good looks and cosmopolitan air to shed the image of the authoritarian rancher. Thus, these leaders’ meteoric rise in popularity resulted from straddling both authoritarian and democratic worlds. They won strong support from the movements’ dual constituency, providing them with exclusive control over the movements.

The contras never succeeded in constructing legitimating myths around their leaders, and
their movement suffered as a consequence. Enrique Bermúdez was the closest the movement came to developing a charismatic leader. He was, however, a Somoza guardsman. He was not just a symbol of past authoritarianism, he was part of it. Bermúdez, moreover, never had the opportunity to shed his close association with the authoritarian right of the past. He was murdered shortly after the end of the contra war. No new charismatic leaders have filled the leadership vacuum he left. No doubt the polarization within Nicaragua has prevented the contras from crafting a leader who convincingly straddles the authoritarian and democratic worlds.

Legitimating myths are also apparent in uncivil movements’ message. These movements generally organize around a specific catalyst. That catalyst can be regarded as artificial in the sense that it has prevailed over time without provoking action, or is less serious than earlier injustices or threats that never provoked mobilization. The catalyst is almost irrelevant except that it helps the movements anchor grievances and mobilization in current everyday experiences. So, while threat is critical to the mobilization of these movements, skillful movement entrepreneurs can often transform even mild threats into motives for mobilization. The crafting of the catalyst is, therefore, more critical to the mobilization than the threat itself.

Uncivil movements craft the catalyst threat in terms recognizable to hardcore authoritarians. They evoke earlier fears that led to authoritarian solutions. The most common form of catalyst threat is the power of the left and government incompetence. But rather than advocating authoritarian solutions, uncivil movements call for sectoral solutions that distance them from the armed, right-wing authoritarians of the past.

The carapintada uprisings have to be understood as a reaction against the prosecution of officers for their involvement in human rights violations. The carapintada could count on hardcore authoritarians who endorse the military regime and its Dirty War to support them. And yet, the carapintada crafted a legitimating myth to counter this authoritarian image. The carapintada claimed that the mobilization grew out of a frustration with the military incompetence of “desk” generals appointed by President Alfonsín. The carapintada pointed out that leaving the nation’s defense in the hands of desk generals had led to the military regime’s Malvinas debacle. Today it would lead to military disillusion and national defenselessness. The carapintada, in other words, crafted their movement in authoritarian (favoring the Dirty War) and democratic (competence and security) terms.

Similarly, the UDR mobilized to defeat the agrarian reform program in the 1988 Constitution. Few hardcore authoritarians could ignore the similarity with landholder mobilization against President Goulart’s agrarian reform prior to the 1964 coup. The UDR framed the new land invasions and government-sponsored agrarian reform as left-wing control and incompetence. The landholders contrasted the failed and violent agrarian policies of the Soviet Union with their own entrepreneurial model. They argued that only landholders have the training, access to credit, and available agricultural inputs to efficiently develop rural Brazil. The UDR, thus, evoked both an authoritarian-style movement while framing the same movement in modern business terms.

The contras consisted of former Sandinistas, indigenous peoples, and Somoza’s National Guard. To bring these groups together and mobilize them behind one cause, the movements had to find a way of identifying them. They found it in anti-Sandinista sentiment. The contras blamed the Chamorro government’s delay in implementing the peace accords on Sandinista
influence in government. But the contras did not only play this “authoritarian” or “counter-revolutionary” card. Evoking the historic figure of Sandino, the contras framed themselves as the excluded and exploited peasantry, engaged in a democratic struggle for freedom from totalitarian on the right and left.

Uncivil movements also create legitimating myths around identities to counter authoritarian messages. Part of this process involves reframing old images in a more positive light. Uncivil movements glorify their authoritarian predecessors as heroic and patriotic. They, thus, attempt to challenge the conventional wisdom around these movements. In addition, uncivil movements create new images for the movements that distance them from their authoritarian past. They transform authoritarian movements into democratic ones, often by simply changing labels.

The carapintada, for example, rarely use that label anymore. They opt instead to refer to themselves in relationship to the political party (MODIN), the Movement for Dignity and Independence. The UDR put the term “democratic” in their title. UDR members also stopped referring to themselves as ranchers or plantation owners. They adopted a new term, “rural producers,” to evoke the image of modern entrepreneurial hard-working farmers. The contras adopted the name “resistance,” to overcome the negative images associated with counter-revolutionaries.

Legitimating myths also emerge in the uncivil movements’ political action. Uncivil movements rely on hardcore militants to engage in violent illegal behavior. Such action consolidates support from the hardcore. Moreover, it threatens democracy, thereby forcing the government to take the movements seriously. In addition, such action gets media attention, gaining the movement the exposure it needs in remote regions of the country. The media attention compensates for the movements’ limited recruitment possibilities owing to its small size and limited resources. This unconventional political action also demonstrates that the movement acts; it is not simply another mainstream political movement that talks without bringing about change. Finally, this form of political action is consistent with the movements’ claim to represent groups excluded from mainstream politics. That exclusion forces uncivil movements to play unconventional, extra-institutional roles.

This claim of exclusion and the need to resort to extra-institutional methods to assert demands is not without foundation. While the movements are not institutionally prohibited from participating, the leaders and members often feel excluded because of the nature of the democratic political system. They perceive that social movements and the left dominate mainstream politics. Or they believe that the mainstream political system is so corrupt, that only the highest bidders (ironically, the left with their international connections) prevail. Movement entrepreneurs therefore portray the movements as the only alternative to the corrupt and accommodated mainstream political system.

The carapintada, for example, claimed that given the military regime’s debacle, the military had no influence over the democratic government. The military had been ostracized. Moreover, as middle-ranking military officers, they had no direct access to the government, forcing them to depend on ineffective “desk generals” who had little credibility within, or knowledge of, the military. They had to act outside the political system to prevent a greater evil to the country. The landholders in the UDR, although possessing traditional bases of political
power due to their economic prowess and social links, nonetheless claimed exclusion. The UDR’s sense of exclusion stemmed from their feeling of alienation in what they considered to be a leftist government. The peasant base of the contras, the exiled National Guard, and the marginalized indigenous forces had little leverage within the Sandinista government. They also claimed that the Chamorro government marginalized them once the war had ended. Thus, in all three cases these movements could claim exclusion from the democratic process.

Relying on violence political action, however, could cost uncivil movements their support from pragmatists. That is, if they did not formulate legitimating myths. Legitimating myths around political action took various forms. Uncivil movements, for example, simply deny involvement in violence. As long as the democratic governments fail to investigate, this defensive strategy largely succeeds. Movements explain the accusations of violence as left wing social movement, media, and government propaganda.

Consistent with these denials, uncivil movements attempt to counter their image as armed right-wing movements. In both the Brazil and Argentine cases, movements used gender to form their legitimating myths around political action. The carapintada slated women as candidates in their MODIN party in greater proportion than any other political party. Leaders confessed that the movement had an image problem, and by placing women in leadership positions they would overcome their image as a right-wing militaristic party. The UDR created a women’s auxiliary (UDR-Mulher) that UDR leaders admitted served the purpose of countering the image of a right-wing armed militia. The UDR-Mulher carried out social work programs under the UDR label. The contras proved the least interested in promoting the role of women within the organization. While contra women attempted to make in-roads into the party, contra leaders confessed that they had rejected women’s role in combat and continued to protect their families from their political work.

Parallel democratic political action also played a critical role in uncivil movements’ legitimating myths. The carapintada staged coups consistent with authoritarian movements from Argentina’s past. Simultaneously, however, the carapintada formed a political party. UDR members, like their authoritarian forbearers, murdered rural activists. Yet, at the height of the rural murders, the UDR had also created the most powerful democratic lobby in the history of Brazil. Rural violence did not end with the Contra War. The recontras continued paramilitary style uprisings even while the contras formed their Party of National Resistance (PRN). For each uncivil movement, therefore, democratic political action formed legitimating myths that continued authoritarian actions. Uncivil movements, thus, distort the idea of “double-militancy,” a strategy used by new social movements to both take advantage of, and maintain autonomy from, formal institutions. With this strategy movements can apply pressure at different levels on the same or different sets of issues.19

Uncivil movements also defended themselves against negative images by justifying their uncivil acts. Uncivil movements, for example, employ a “relative weight” defense. They claim that their presence actually limits the amount of violence. If they did not exist as a peaceful channel for political expression, violence would increase. They also justify violence as a form of civil disobedience. They need to use violence to protect the country from the more extreme violence used by their authoritarian enemies on the left or in government. “Blaming a few bad eggs,” is another technique used by movements to diffuse criticism from the movements as a
whole. Uncivil movements argue that they cannot be held responsible for the individual acts of a few members. Only occasionally do uncivil movement leaders actually acknowledge the need for violence. This involves a war analogy. War requires acts that would be considered atrocities during periods of peace. While only a psychopath would enjoy committing these atrocities during peacetime, soldiers have a patriotic duty to carry them out and defend their nation from threat. Movements thus frame their violent political action as a heroic struggle for national defense.

The Threat of Uncivil Movements

The examples from the three country cases demonstrates the kinds of threats that uncivil movements pose for democracies. They do not overthrow these democratic systems, like their authoritarian predecessors. Instead, they have the more insidious impact of distorting the democratic process from within, shaping the future democratic system, and eroding support for democracy from key popular sectors. They can have this impact over a relatively short period of time.

Uncivil movements are not just one other organized movement in democratic society that distort democratic practice, but a legacy of authoritarian rule. Successful uncivil movements force executives to capitulate on democratic reforms and moderate policies. Successful electoral strategies allow uncivil movements to penetrate local and national legislatures. This enables them to shape political agenda and outcomes and to transform laws and constitutions. Finally, by avoiding investigation and prosecution, uncivil movements erode the power of the judiciary to implement laws and guarantee personal security. The presence and power of uncivil movements can breed the kind of disenchantment that undermines democratic consolidation. By capitulating to uncivil movements, the democratic institutions not only appear as “ineffective,” a potentially destabilizing characteristic. They also become vulnerable to accusations that the same authoritarian elites still run government.

How effective is a conservative strategy in reducing the power of uncivil movements? Among the cases analyzed in this project, the Argentine carapintada example best resembles the conservative strategy. When the democratic government carried out the radical policy of prosecuting military officers for their involvement in human rights’ abuses, the carapintada staged a revolt. The conservative strategy would have predicted such a reaction from authoritarian forces. Also consistent with a conservative strategy, the rebellions ended when the democratic government reversed its policy, capitulated to the carapintada’s demand to end prosecutions, granted blanket amnesties, and allowed the carapintada to form a political party (MODIN), and participate in the political system.

A more nuanced interpretation of the carapintada case and information from the other two cases, reveal problems associated with the conservative strategy for reducing uncivil movements’ power. Uncivil movements won their victories by forcing the democratic governments to capitulate to their demands. The carapintada claim credit for ending the human rights trials. The UDR proved victorious in ending agrarian reform. And the contras consider themselves instrumental to reducing the power of the Sandinistas. Moderation via capitulation may have ended the threat of overthrow, but it increased the power of uncivil movements in democratic government.
Institutionalization also heightened their power. MODIN transformed the fringe carapintada into the third most important party in Argentina. The UDR became the most powerful political lobby in the country. Only the contras’ political party, PRN, failed to amass significant power.

Gradualism pointed to the power of these movements to keep reform proposals off the agenda and to defeat them when they appear. Because these movements possessed political power that surpassed their numbers, they were increasingly viewed as controlling political outcomes.

These movements could not sustain their power over time. Their fading power, however, did not result from transforming them into democrats, but rather the combined forces of internal weaknesses and government action.

With regard to internal factors, the same factors that strengthened uncivil movements initially weakened them over time. For example, the charismatic personalistic leader that once consolidated these movements’ power eventually led to their weakness. The cases reveal the intrinsic weaknesses in the movements’ leadership strategy. Personalistic leaders consolidate power, and distance themselves from their advisors. They purge dissidents from the movement. Frequent purges, however, cost movements their leadership skills, membership support, and financial resources. The movements look increasingly unstable, reducing their appeal.

In the case of the Argentine carapintada, Rico purged most of the movement’s original leadership. He surrounded himself with only those individuals who agreed with him. When a more viable alternative political party emerged to contest the mainstream political parties, MODIN lost support to it. That party had programmatic coherence, electoral strength, and skilled politicians to lead it.

As already discussed, the charismatic leader of the Nicaraguan contras died. The movement and the party failed to generate a new leader to replace him. Part of the problem was war fatigue. Many contras leaders hoped to return to some semblance of normality after fighting a guerrilla war and living in exile for part of a decade. They were not interested in engaging in continued political battles.

The UDR case echoed the problem of burn-out. Caiado lost interest in the movement, and sought a more alluring career in elected office. The subsequent leaders lacked Caiado’s personal charisma. Moreover, leaders began to leave the movement. Typically, uncivil movements small size and unconventional political action heightens their inherent weaknesses. The small number of militants in these movements and their high energy-high risk political action require lots of labor from a few individuals. Leaders and active members sacrifice their leisure time, careers, family life, income, and personal security for the movements. So while individuals initially experience a “high” or *esprit de corps* by participating in the movements, they cannot sustain this type of action over long periods of time. The costs to their personal lives, careers, and finances are simply too high.

Uncivil movements often try to overcome the burn-out factor by taking a more moderate direction to reduce the stress of uncivil political action. Movements can rarely resist the allure of forming political parties. But while this strategy resolves one source of weakness, it creates another. By becoming moderate conformist political parties, these movements lose their radical base of support. They are perceived by the hardcore as “sell-outs” to the system. The hardcore
accused both Rico and Caiado of becoming self-interested power seekers who had abandoned the movements for their own personal gain.

These three cases show that overtime they could not sustain support for their leaders or political action. But they also faced problems mobilizing behind the catalyst threat. Whether they succeed or fail to achieve their goals, uncivil movements face the same difficulty sustaining support. If they fail, their leaders and members will leave, refusing to waste their time on a losing proposition. In the Nicaraguan case, the contras proved incapable of forcing the Chamorro government to deliver the peace agreements and provide the ex-contras with land, jobs, housing, health and education. Most contras abandoned the PRN in favor of Arnaldo Aleman’s Liberal Party.

Success, however, can have a similar impact on movements. If movements achieve their goals, or at least convince their constituents of their success, they should also disappear. Thus, unless movements can channel their members’ fears into new catalysts threats, their success will lead to their demise. Incapable of meeting this challenge, successful movements, just as the failed ones, tend to die of natural causes before they reach old age.

The UDR, through intense lobbying, intimidation, and violence, ended the threat of agrarian reform in Brazil. Its success led to its withdrawal from politics. Some sectors of the movement proposed the idea of forming an agrarian party or movement that would act as a watchdog against threats to landholders. But the absence of charismatic leadership, the end of the catalyst threat, and burn-out led to the movement to close its doors.

Democratic governments can hasten the demise of these uncivil movements. The Chamorro government, for example, increased the contras obstacles in creating charismatic leaders. It provided attractive incentives to potential leaders, inducing them to join the government’s party and projects, rather than forming a post-war contra movement.

The Chamorro government also defused the power of the recontras through active involvement. The Chamorro government negotiated with the most politically and militarily powerful re-armed rebels, and provided lucrative inducements to disarm. The government considered the rest of the recontras outlaws that the combined forces of the military and police eliminated. The threat from the recontras is virtually nonexistent today.

The Argentine case also points to the important role democratic governments can play in reducing uncivil movements’ power. The rebellions occurred in Argentina even after the MODIN was formed and after the democratic (Alfonsín) government capitulated to carapintada demands. Indeed, the rebellions only ended with the democratic (Menem) government prosecuted the rebels and imposed life sentences. Only then did the government clarify to the rebels that it would not tolerate coup attempts. The Menem government eliminated the carapintada’s political opportunity to engage in civil and uncivil political actions. It simultaneously strengthened the executive and judiciary by imposing controls over the carapintada.

Clearly democratic governments must be sensitive to the martyr syndrome before cracking down on these movements. If existing political institutions, particularly parties, defend the same set of interests as the uncivil movements, it will prove easier for the government to crack down on anti-democratic political expression, especially in the context of waning support for these movements. Governments can treat these movements as criminal groups, not potential
coup plotters. Informational strategies aimed at shifting public perceptions against movements by naming them and their actions, will prove more helpful in eliminating them than confrontational strategies that create martyrs. Similarly, if governments have leverage or bargaining power with certain factions or leaders of these movements, they can negotiate the demise of these movements. Negotiating material, status, or other interests of key leaders or factions could win away the pragmatic leaders from these movements. The hardcore, without the legitimating myths generated by the pragmatists, is likely to accelerate the movements’ demise, especially coupled with the governments’ informational campaign.

These cases demonstrate that democratic governments can play an active role in contributing to the demise of uncivil movements. But they have to possess the will to do so. And in some cases governments derive indirect benefits from uncivil movements. Especially in newly emerging democratic regimes, the state may use the threat of a coup from right-wing movements to keep popular sectors from making “threatening” demands for redistribution. Democratic governments can use the threat of a coup to legitimize their own need or desire to postpone economic redistribution programs. Democratic governments may also use uncivil movements to repress popular sector groups. The governments can use uncivil movements to squelch dissent, avoid repressing these movements themselves, thereby ensuring their own democratic legitimacy while achieving undemocratic objectives. Vigilante-style movements may also provide the force to control order in remote areas or where government policing agencies are absent or inefficient. And private employers can supplement the meager salaries of public security agents who “moonlight” for them. Democratic governments do not publicly acknowledge the “services” these movements provide. Indeed, democratic governments generally condemn the movements. Their utility to the democratic government, however, may explain why these governments have not taken measures to suppress these movements or end their acts of violence.

The power of all three movements have virtually disappeared in the contemporary context. They have left a legacy, however. The carapintada ended the possibilities of bringing justice for human rights violations. The UDR ended the possibility of agrarian reform through land distribution to the landless peasants. The contra war will associate insecurity with the FSLN. In addition, these movements do not seem to ever entirely disappear. Instead, they remain poised to mobilize against future threats and grievances, or to take advantage of opportunities offered by the political context or political system.

Conclusion

This paper has woven its way through five essential points about strategies to reduce right-wing violence in the new Latin American democracies. The first point is that the new democracies face a different type of right-wing threat. Rather than the threat of an authoritarian overthrow, the new democracies are challenged by uncivil movements’ distortion of the democratic system and erosion of democratic values.

The second point is that conservative strategies can heighten the threat from uncivil movements. Moderation, by capitulating to uncivil movements, will enhance their power at least temporarily. Institutionalization will provide uncivil movements with an additional mechanism
for exerting their political demands. Uncivil movements, at least initially, use both democratic institutions and extra-institutional methods to promote their demands. And gradualism, like moderation, enhances uncivil movements’ power over political outcomes as well as stalls reforms that might otherwise deepen popular sector commitment to democracy.

The third point, however, is that uncivil movements possess inherent weaknesses that weaken their power over the democratic system. The charismatic leadership that gives rise to many of these movements can, over time, deteriorate into factionalism, in-fighting, purges, and ungovernability. A coherent message... The challenge of sustaining high-profile political action often leads movements toward moderation, and the formation of political institutions. While the institutions do not necessarily form democrats (as evidenced by the well-entrenched political institutions in Chile and Uruguay of the 1970's), they may reduce the power of these movements. The anti-politics nature of the core constituency will cost the movements their violent militants who see the movement as having sold-out to the political mainstream.

The fourth point is that democratic governments can hasten and deepen the demise of uncivil movements, while simultaneously strengthening the democracy system. By investigating, prosecuting, and sentencing members of the uncivil movements for their illegal acts, the democratic government increases the power of the executive and judiciary branches. Rather than mobilize a reaction from the right against these legal prosecutions, the government will undermine their legitimating myths by demonstrating the violent nature of the movements. The government can simultaneously negotiate with the pragmatic leadership to sustain representation for civil movements.

The fifth point is that uncivil movements today may become the authoritarian movements of tomorrow. These movements do not always disappear. Sometimes their success can lead to their temporary withdrawal from politics. They may remain poised to combat the next threat to their mobilization. In a context less hostile to authoritarian take-overs they may resurrect coup politics. Democratic governments must be prepared for armed opposition. But they must also promote a context of intolerance for anti-democratic acts. This involves strengthening the democratic judiciary and public security.

The lessons of the 1960's and 1970's also pointed to strengthening support from within society. Social unrest, and the incapacity of the democratic governments to deal with that unrest were as critical to the authoritarian coups of the 1960's and 1970's as the radical policies of democratic presidents and legislatures. Diamond and Linz assert in their contemporary work that “enduring democratic value commitments make it more difficult to consolidate and perpetuate authoritarian rule.” Democratic value commitments may not endure if democratic governments prove incapable of satisfying popular sector demands for justice, basic survival needs, and physical protection from violence. Democratic governments’ capitulation to uncivil movements on these points have, thus, limited the strength of democratic value commitments.
Notes


3. Ibid., 16.

4. Ibid., 34.

5. Larry Diamond, Seymour Martin Lipset and Juan J. Linz, *Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 23; DiPalma also states that “the more recalcitrant the players, the more the transition will need to seek democratic rules that stress coexistence above everything else.” DiPalma, 46.


7. Ibid., 72.

8. O’Donnell and Schmitter accept, only with resignation, the inevitability of conservative democracies. Ibid., 27-28.

10. Ibid., 66.


14. Diamond, Lipset and Linz summarize this view as follows: “Democracy -- with its relativism and tolerance (so disturbing to those certain of the truth), and its ‘faith’ in the reasonableness and intelligence of the common people, deciding freely (and with a chance to change their minds every four or five years) and without the use of force -- seems a better option.” Ibid., 3.

15. Diamond, Lipset and Linz even state, “democracy is the only model of government with any broad ideological legitimacy and appeal today,” although they do make an exception for the Islamic World. Ibid., 2.

17. Uncivil movement entrepreneurs rarely consciously or deliberately develop legitimating myths. Legitimating myths, instead, emerge out of power struggles among movement entrepreneurs. Because different leaders hold diverging views, those conflicting or contradictory views form part of the movements’ message. Legitimating myths, therefore, accommodate differences among the entrepreneurs. They also emerge through trial and error or happenstance. Some myths work, and others do not. Sometimes entrepreneurs accidentally hit the right chord that resonates with a potential constituency. But myths also evolve through a learning process developed by analyzing other social movements’ or predecessors’ successes. And, perhaps most importantly, myths change as the movements adapt and respond to new environments.

18. Stagenborg, “The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization....”

19. This was certainly the experience certain feminist groups faced when attempting to work within political parties. The creation of "double militancy" allowed them to pursue political ends through both the formal and the informal process.

20. Robert Dahl argues that organized groups have a disproportionate impact over democracies than an equal or greater number of unorganized citizens. Their ability to shift the public agenda toward issues that concern them, elect representatives to the legislature, and distort the content of the policies of governments indicate the power they can achieve within democracies.

21. Cite disenchantment stuff in O’Donnell and Schmitter and also lawlessness stuff in Diamond et al.

22. Cite Linz stuff on effectiveness
