

The Armed Forces, Police and Crime-fighting in Latin America

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the armed forces have increasingly been asked to take an active role in the fight against the rampant crime in Latin America. Since the militaries are not trained to conduct themselves with restraint, the possibility of excesses and human rights violations is always latent. Despite that prospect, there is a high level of public support for military counter-crime interventions throughout the region. The key argument in this article is that when the Latin American public supports military interventions to combat crime it makes a comparative judgment call about the relative efficacy of military vs. police conduct in domestic security roles. Latin American citizens have very low confidence in the capacity of the police to fight crime effectively and to respect human rights. By contrast, they place more trust in the armed forces as an institution capable of performing effectively, and in accordance with human rights standards and the rule of law. This study first develop these arguments in greater detail, and then turns to recent Americas Barometer surveys that clearly show that Latin American citizens place more trust in the armed forces as an institution capable of performing effectively and humanely in the fight against criminal violence.

Introduction

In the twenty first century, the armed forces have been increasingly asked to assist in the fight against crime in Latin America. Calls for military intervention have escalated in tandem with the rise of increasingly larger, more lethal and sophisticated national and transnational criminal organizations. It is evident that when governments enlist the help of the military to fight these criminal elements, they do so with the firm backing of the public. In fact, constituents are often ahead of the politicians in demanding that tougher measures be taken, and that those specifically include the deployment of soldiers.

Certainly there are reasons to be skeptical about the benefits of turning soldiers loose on city streets to hunt down members of criminal organizations. Militaries are normally trained to use uninhibited, explosive force to subdue an enemy; they are not commonly prepared to conduct themselves with restraint or circumspection. The theoretical possibility that soldiers could, in the process of chasing down suspects, resort to excesses and violate human rights is ever present. Despite that prospect, public support for military counter-crime intervention seems undiminished. Why would this be so?

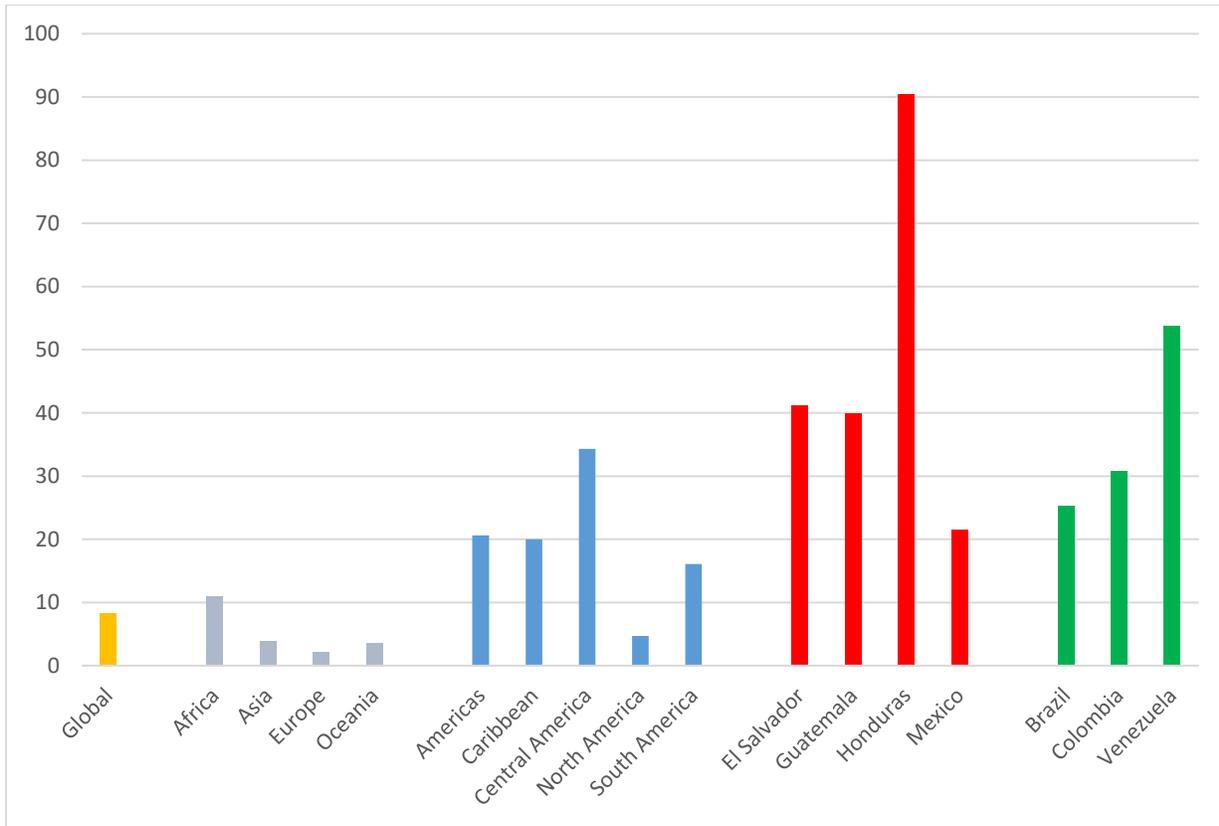
A central contention of this study is that when the Latin American public supports military crime fighting it makes a comparative judgment call about the relative efficacy of military vs. police conduct in domestic security roles. As the evidence will show, citizens of Latin America have a rather dismal view of policemen, convinced they can neither fight crime effectively nor respect the rights of those they are sworn to protect and serve. They lack a fundamental trust in law enforcement to do its job in a successful, transparent and humane manner. By contrast, they place more trust in the armed forces as an institution capable of performing effectively, and in accordance with human rights standards and the rule of law. In other words, the public support for military crime intervention is not an endorsement of repression or authoritarian solutions, so much as it is a belief—accurate or not—that the military can, *compared* to the police, better combat criminal elements without placing innocent civilians in harm's way, to the same degree.

To defend these claims, the article first details the extent of crime and violence in the region and the public's reaction to it. It then uses statistical modeling to examine the reasons for widespread support for military crime-fighting operations, focusing in on the impact of fear, victimization, dissatisfaction with police performance, and police corruption. It turns to surveys indicating that in contrast to negative perceptions about the police, the armed forces are viewed more favorably-- comparatively better trained and more respectful of human rights. These same models will demonstrate that there is an association between the public's trust in the military and its belief they respect human rights on the one hand, and their support for military crime fighting on the other hand.

The Problem and Reactions to it

Crime and violence are two of the most compelling and seemingly intractable problems confronting Latin America today. Latin America is typically described as the most violent region in the world (Parkinson, 2014). The global homicide statistics corroborate this assertion as can be observed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Homicide rates (per 100,000 population), by region



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013).

This figure shows the scale of the crime-related violence in Latin America. The global homicide rate in 2012 was 8.3 per 100,000, and it was lower than 4 per 100,000 in three world regions (Asia, Europe, and Oceania). By contrast, the homicide rate was 20.6 per 100,000 in the Americas, and criminal violence is concentrated in South America, in the Caribbean, and especially in Central America where the homicide rate reaches 34.3 per 100,000. Although criminal violence is on the rise throughout the region, Figure 1 also shows that homicide rates are particularly high in a few Central American (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico) and South American (Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela) countries.

These high crime rates also affect the attitudes and perceptions of Latin America citizens, as several polls and surveys have shown in the past decade. For instance, the 2014 wave of the Americas Barometer asked respondents what is the most important problem facing their countries, and almost a third of people in the region (32.6%) considered criminal violence as the most serious problem.¹ Unsurprisingly, the percentage of people who considered crime as the most serious problem was even higher in the most violent countries (e.g. 47.9% in Honduras and 65.2% in Honduras).

¹ The exact question wording is “In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?” We recoded the responses into a dummy variable. People who responded “crime”, “gangs”, “kidnappings”, “security (lack of)”, and “violence” were coded as 1 (i.e. criminal violence is the most serious problem), all other responses were coded as 0 (i.e. criminal violence is not the most serious problem).

Normally, police are those sent out to fight crime. They are, in theory, the first responders. However, the conundrum facing many Latin American states plagued by pervasive drug-related crime and violence (Bruneau, 2011; Dammert, 2012; Desmond Arias, 2006) is that they are unable to rely on their police forces to provide citizens with the protection they demand. While police are normally at the front lines in the battles to defeat crime, they are also part of the problem: inept, corrupt, outnumbered and outgunned by what are lethal criminal syndicates with sufficient resources to purchase police docility or connivance. Even if they could hold their own against criminal organizations—which they cannot— police often lack the motivation to try. Instead, cops throughout the region regularly skirt the law, and even cross the line into criminality, corruption, and rampant violence (Brinks, 2008). Running drug operations and prostitution rings, committing extrajudicial killings and kidnappings, providing intelligence to drug traffickers, and abusing detainees have become familiar police practices in a number of Latin American countries. Opportunities for these activities abound, as do motives, such as poor pay, poor training, and the knowledge that such transgressions will likely go unpunished. These police practices have also led to an erosion in trust in the police and to low levels of satisfaction with the performance of the police (Lagos & Dammert, 2012).

Reforming the police is the obvious alternative, but is much easier said than done. Numerous scholars have detailed the obstacles to police reform (Fuentes, 2005; Uildriks, 2009; Ungar, 2012; Sabet 2012). Police themselves do not want to be held to close scrutiny, fearing revelations of incompetence, corruption, excessive violence, and criminality within its ranks. The police can pull their weight with a hard line coalition of political office holders, party leaders, and the public (Fuentes, 2005), arguing that reform efforts could actually drive up crime by hampering their resolve, hurting morale, and inviting hesitancy. They boil the problem down to a choice of either harsher measures or human rights observance, but not both (Ungar, 2012). Politicians commonly accept this unfortunate tradeoff when they are confronted with constituents who are panicking about crime, and desiring urgent responses to it. Politically expedient governments then opt for the easier, faster remedy that simply places more heavily armed cops on the streets with a license to kill (Ungar, 2012).

Inevitably however, those superficial responses fail to stem the tide of criminal violence. The excessive use of force backfires, as police, wittingly or unwittingly, threaten the very citizens they depend on to provide intelligence on suspected criminals. Residents shy away from sharing with law enforcement, their localized knowledge of criminal elements, let alone their own harrowing personal experiences of victimization. This is precisely the kind of information police need to uncover wrongdoing and make arrests. Consequently police performance suffers, and the public grows increasingly disenchanted.

It is for these reasons that citizens commonly support and indeed request the introduction of the armed forces to help fight crime, complementing and in some cases supplementing police units. When crime escalates, as it has in recent years throughout Latin America, voters pressure their political leaders to deploy soldiers onto city streets when police have not been up to the task. In El Salvador, it took the form of *mano dura* in 2003, and after that failed, *super mano dura* policies in 2007, which failed as well. What is interesting is that even in the face of failure, citizens will insist on hardline programs that use military force. By 2009, ninety three percent of respondents to a poll conducted by El Salvador's *El Diario de Hoy* still favored the use of soldiers to fight crime (IPS, 2009; see also Pérez, 2010).

In Mexico, a similar pattern is observed. President Felipe Calderón (2006-12) launched a war on drugs which was widely seen as ineffective. In 2009, Calderón resorted to a surge

strategy, sending thousands of soldiers to ‘take back’ northern cities under drug cartel domination. But victory proved elusive. Not only did homicides attributable to the war increase, but allegations of human rights abuses at the hands of army personnel grew as well. When pollsters asked Mexicans in 2012 who had won the war, 54 percent said the criminals and only 18 percent said the government. And yet, by October 2012, with the Calderón *Sexenio* coming to a close, and with no end in sight to the murder and mayhem, 69 percent of those polled still maintained it was correct to use the army to combat organized crime (CESOP, 2013: 39).

In Latin America, the introduction of the military for internal security purposes invokes historically-based fears based in haunting memories of the past. During the years of *de facto* rule, the armed forces granted themselves authority to engage in widespread intervention. Guided by nefarious doctrines and ideological precepts constructed within the context of the Cold War, they repeatedly sacrificed individual rights and freedoms on behalf of the national security state. But even within the context of a democratic state, with constitutional protections in place, the common wisdom has been to avoid reintroducing the military into internal security at all costs; that to do so would be to invite harm to citizens, whether intentional or unintentional (Loveman, 1999; Stepan, 1986). The military’s sin is no longer political or ideological hatred for the target population, though on certain occasions that may be so. Rather, it is most commonly over-reaction, a result of ingrained behavior. Militaries are socialized into the use of maximum force. Conditioned by years of rigorous training and indoctrination, they are hard wired to react in ways that are, as many have observed inappropriate and at odds with police functioning.² Deploying army units in anticrime or antidrug operations in densely populated zones—often alongside police units—is often inviting trouble because militaries resist being compelled to abide by the principles of minimal use of force and due process, which are thought to interfere with combat effectiveness. The result, say the critics, is inescapable: citizens will suffer repeated human rights abuses at the hands of soldiers.

Whether in fact, the armed forces who conduct anti-crime operations are guilty of repeated human rights transgressions is an empirical question, to be addressed below. Separate from that is the question as to whether the public *believes* this to be so. Is the public convinced that military intervention opens the door to the use of unbridled force, resulting in human rights transgressions? If so then, are citizens who demand a military response to crime, explicitly condoning a turn toward repressive measures? If they are not, then what is the basis upon which they support military crime-fighting intervention?

Review of the evidence

Many nations passed laws restricting the use of military force within national borders. And yet, all nations of the region continue to allow for *some* form of military utilization under certain conditions.³ Even Argentina, the country thought to have erected the highest hurdles, does allow for armed forces internal deployment in exceptional circumstances, when normal

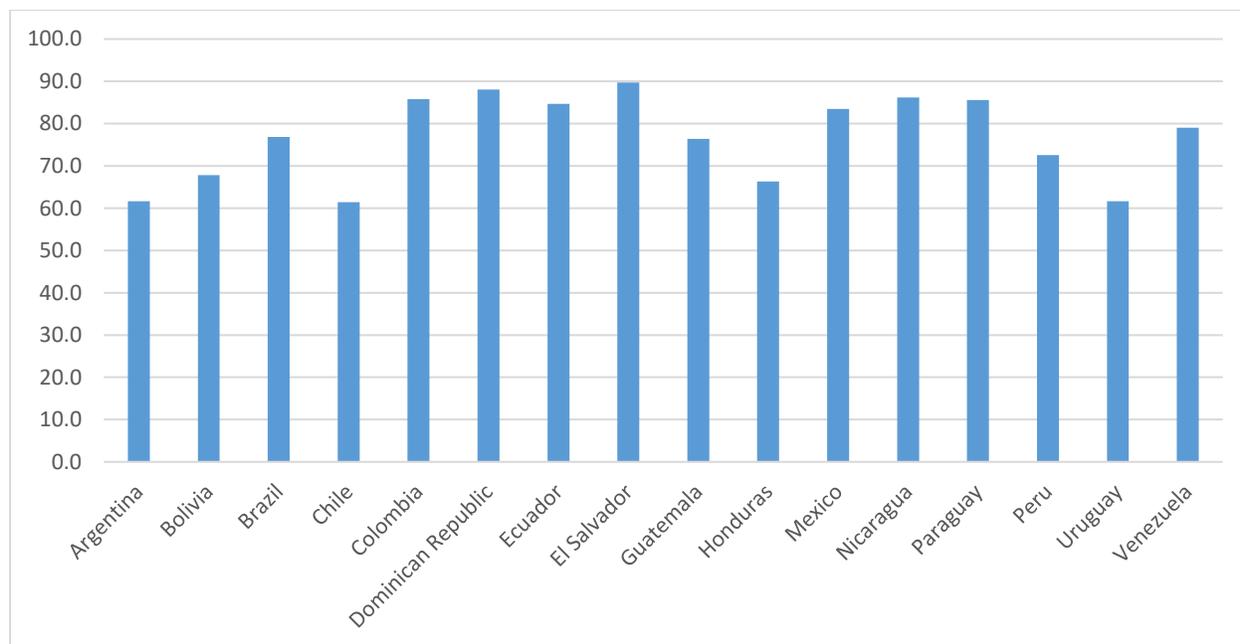
² This training is called Continually Reinforced Functional Discipline (CRFD). See McDavid (2007). David Bayley (2001) argues the military will contaminate community policing because it is trained to take orders from above rather than responding to citizen appeals; because it does not know how to use restrained force; it lacks mediation skills, and does not give soldiers powers of discretion.

³ Of those countries, 54 percent do so only with minimal restrictions, namely that it occur upon presidential authorization. 46 percent impose more formidable conditions, stating either that the military be used only under exceptional circumstances, or that it be confined to supportive roles. See Pion-Berlin (2009).

internal security forces are overwhelmed, and when ordered in by the president under constitutional state of siege provisions.

Does the public favor military intervention to fight crime? In order to explore this question, we used a survey item present in the 2012 wave of the Americas Barometer which asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “The Armed Forces ought to participate in combatting crime and violence in [country].” The responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Figure 2 presents the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with this statement (responses ranging from 5 to 7).

Figure 2. Support for military anti-crime intervention, 2012



Source: LAPOP 2012

The figure shows that there is widespread support for a military intervention in anti-crime operations. In fact, 78 percent of respondents from 19 countries either agree or strongly agree with the statement that the army should help fight crime. This was true throughout the region, regardless of crime levels. While we might have expected support to be strong in high crime countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela (on average 77.8) and it was, support for military intervention to fight crime was also considerable in lower crime countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador (71.6). This was so in Argentina as well where past human rights abuses during the Dirty War had made that military an institutional pariah. In the years immediately following the transition to democracy, citizens there rejected any internal security role for their military which is actually legally prohibited from engaging in law enforcement measures, except in rare circumstances, and as authorized under states of siege. And yet even there, over 61% of those recently polled now favour military intervention to fight crime.

Why are citizens calling for military intervention? In the highest crime countries of Central America, violence has reached unprecedented levels, and political leaders there have referred to organized, gang-related activities as threats to national security. Once the threshold is crossed from a public security peril to one of national dimensions, it does justify the introduction

of the armed forces, since no other agency of state could effectively grapple with such an existential crisis. If the public agrees with that assessment, it would explain its support for introducing troops (Bailey, Parás, & Vargas, 2011).

A second and more likely explanation for region-wide trends is that the police have been unable to effectively respond to escalating crime and violence, leaving citizens frightened, frustrated, and searching for alternatives, including the assistance of the armed forces (Corbacho, Philipp, & Ruiz-Vega, 2012; Lagos & Dammert, 2012). As more police are brought into counter-crime activities, homicide rates actually trend upward—just one indication of police ineffectiveness. This was true in El Salvador, when the *mano dura* policy was introduced in 2003. Thousands of additional police were deployed, but the homicide rate which was at 37 per 100,000 in 2002, soared to 62.2 by 2005. *Mano dura's* successor, *super mano dura*, introduced in 2007, fared no better, as homicide rates escalated to 70.9 by 2009 (UNODC, 2013: 126). In Mexico, in 2007, thousands of additional federal police were deployed to northern border cities, as part of President Felipe Calderón's Drug War. But homicide rates rose steadily from 7.8 per 100,000 that year to 21.5 by the end of his term in 2012.

The public has taken a measure of police performance as indicated by the polling results displayed in the table below. For 2015, across the region, 65% of respondents are dissatisfied, and only 35% satisfied with the police. When broken down by high and low crime countries, the differences are slight.

Table 1. Latin American Public's Police Ratings, 2015

	% Dissatisfied with police performance	Increasingly respect human rights (% yes)	Well-trained (% yes)	Increasingly efficient (% yes)	Increasingly transparent (% yes)
Region ¹	64.7	15.5	16.3	17.1	10.3
High Crime Countries	67.0	15.3	14.1	15.1	9.4
Low Crime Countries	60.6	16.5	19.6	17.7	10.6

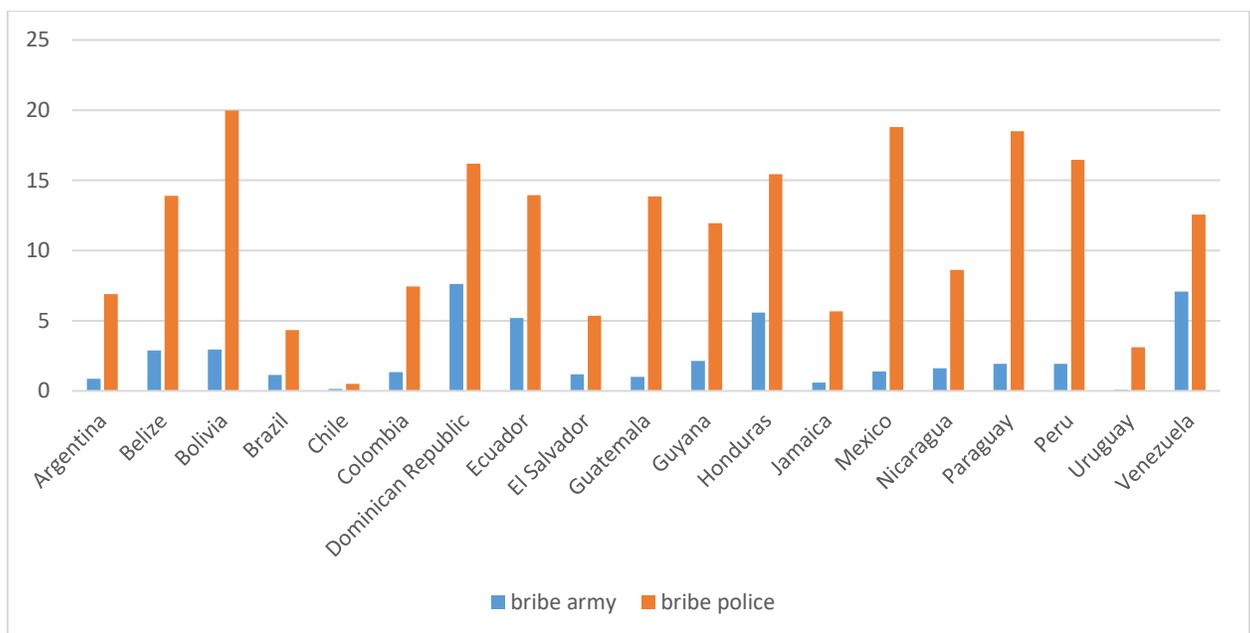
¹Country N=16. High crime states are El Salvador, Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala; Low crime states are Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. Other States fall in between. Source: Latinobarómetro, 2015 online statistics.

Exploring the dimensions to that dissatisfaction, one can see that only small minorities believe the police respect human rights, are well-trained, and are efficient and transparent. Again, the differences between high crime countries and low crime countries are negligible. If the public perceives that the police have little regard for human rights, this is an indication it does not trust the police to protect them. Citizens will not report crimes to policemen who are known to be habitually abusive and violent, convinced that doing so would only personally expose them to greater danger (Brinks, 2008). Police agencies that lack transparency, concealing malfeasance while protecting corrupt officers, will not elicit much faith among the citizenry. These arguments are buttressed by a review of 27 recent studies, which indicates that the strongest predictor of citizen dissatisfaction with the police is having had a negative encounter

with law enforcement (Johnson, 2015). Negative encounters could include violent run-ins with policemen, or requests for bribes.

Police corruption in particular might lead to low satisfaction with the police. Previous studies have shown in different contexts that public experiences of police corruption reduce public confidence in the police (Gerber & Mendelson, 2008; Tankebe, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005), and also negatively affect the legitimacy of the political system (Cruz, 2015). There is widespread evidence of police corruption in Latin America (Cawley, 2013), but do the armed forces fare better? In order to address this question, we used two survey items present in the 2014 wave of the Americas Barometer which asked respondents whether a police/military officer had asked them to pay a bribe in the last 12 months. Figure 3 presents the percentage of respondents who reported having been asked to pay a bribe by the police and by the military in the last 12 months in different Latin American countries.

Figure 3. Percentage of citizens who were asked to pay bribes (police vs. army), 2014



Source: LAPOP 2014

The figure makes it patently clear that the police is much more likely to request bribes from Latin American citizens than the armed forces. While only 2.5% of Latin Americans report having been requested to pay a bribe by a military officer, 11.5% report that a police officer asked them to pay a bribe. In several countries (Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru), almost one in five respondents were asked to pay a bribe by the police. The comparison between corruption in the police and corruption in the armed forces is particularly relevant in countries where the military takes an active role in the fight against criminal violence. In countries such as Brazil, El Salvador, and Mexico, these survey data clearly show that the military operates in a much less corrupt way than the police.

According to the study mentioned earlier (Johnson, 2015), the second most important factor driving dissatisfaction with police is a fear of crime and disorder in one's neighborhood. If a victimized and fearful public has lost faith with law enforcement, it can respond in several

ways. The middle and upper classes will often retreat to gated communities where they pay for the services of private security squads. Poorer communities have sometimes resorted to vigilantism, taking law enforcement into their own hands. But another, more widespread response has been to demand that governments deploy the armed forces to either supplement or supplant the police in the fight against organized crime.

Is there evidence for stronger support for military intervention to fight crime among Latin American people who have negative interactions with the police, are dissatisfied with the performance with the police, or have been victimized? Again, we can take advantage of several survey questions included in the 2012 and 2014 waves of the Americas Barometer to answer this question. Through a series of statistical models, we estimate the impact of crime victimization, fear of crime, satisfaction with the police, and receiving a bribe by the police in the last 12 months on respondents' likelihood of supporting a military intervention to fight crime. We also include two variables to evaluate the effect of trust in the armed forces (models 1-4), and citizens' views about the army's human rights record (models 5-8) on support for military intervention in the fight against crime. We control for the basic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, income, and level of education). The variables used in the analysis are described in Table A1 in the Appendix. All the empirical models in this paper apply multilevel techniques that distinguish between two levels, i.e. the individual level, and the country level.⁴

⁴ Hierarchical models allow for a more precise estimation of individual-level factors because they control for important contextual factors that may bias the estimates of variances and their associated standard errors (Gelman & Hill, 2006; Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).

Table 2. Determinants of support for military intervention in fighting crime (LAPOP 2012 & 2014)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Age	-.001*	-.001*	-.000	-.001*	-.001*	-.001*	-.000	-.001*
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Male	.034*	.039*	.027	.028	.048*	.053*	.043	.043*
	(.015)	(.015)	(.022)	(.015)	(.015)	(.015)	(.022)	(.016)
Income	-.000	-.000	.013*	-.000	-.001	-.000	.010*	-.000
	(.002)	(.002)	(.004)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.004)	(.003)
Education	-.020*	-.017*	-.025*	-.018*	-.021*	-.017*	-.029*	-.019*
	(.006)	(.006)	(.009)	(.006)	(.006)	(.006)	(.009)	(.006)
<i>Trust in the armed forces</i>	.201**	.200**	.212**	.201**				
	(.004)	(.004)	(.006)	(.004)				
<i>Army respects human rights</i>					.189**	.188**	.184**	.188**
					(.004)	(.004)	(.006)	(.004)
<i>Crime victim</i>	.162**				.163**			
	(.020)				(.020)			
<i>Fear crime</i>		.022*				.019*		
		(.008)				(.009)		
<i>Satisfaction with police</i>			-.096**				-.082**	
			(.015)				(.015)	
<i>Bribe by police (last 12 months)</i>				.114**				.108**
				(.024)				(.025)
Constant	4.609**	4.582**	4.601**	4.629**	4.723**	4.702**	4.815**	4.745**
	(.099)	(.101)	(.113)	(.099)	(.108)	(.110)	(.123)	(.107)
N individuals	47,664	47,618	23,891	47,529	46,862	46,823	23,590	46,738
N countries	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19

p<0.05 *p<0.1**

As expected, the results reported in Table 2 show that crime victims and people who fear crime are more likely to support an active role of the military in fighting crime. So too are people who are not satisfied with the performance of the police as are people who were asked for a bribe by law enforcement in the last 12 months. The coefficients for all these variables are in the expected direction and statistically significant in the eight models in Table 2. In sum, Latin American people who have been victimized or who have negative interactions with the police are more supportive of an active military role in the fight against crime.

If people want the military to fight crime, does that also translate into support for repression? Carreras (2013: 101) asks whether public disenchantment with how state institutions have responded to crime could soften opposition to "quasi-authoritarian means to reestablish order?" In other words, citizens may, in desiring military intervention presume that human rights violations will occur and yet not seem troubled by that fact. Indeed, there is evidence that citizens exposed to crime and institutional ineffectiveness in Latin America favor "get tough" policies (Buchanan, DeAngelo, Ma, & Taylor, 2012) and even vigilantism (Nivette, 2016) in response. But the issue is whether they expect the armed forces in particular to resort to excessive force, resulting in human rights violations?

Figure 4. Perceptions of the professionalism of the armed forces (2012)



Source: LAPOP 2012

Survey results indicate that in contrast to perceptions about the police, the armed forces are viewed as well trained and respectful of human rights, as can be observed in Figure 4.⁵ It shows that on average, only 25 percent of respondents believe that the armed forces do not

⁵ This figure reports the percentage of respondents who believe that the army 1) does not respect human rights (answers 1-3 in a 1-7 scale) and 2) is well trained and organized (answers 5-7 in a 1-7 scale).

respect human rights these days. By contrast, 60.5 percent of respondents believe that the army is well trained and organized. With very few exceptions, the public in Latin American countries appears to trust the professionalism of the armed forces and to believe that the army respects human rights.

There may be an association between increased belief in military respecting human rights, and public desire for it to intervene to fight crime. Data from Mexico shows that as belief that the military respects human rights increases, so too does support for military policing activities, both to complement police and to patrol city streets on its own. At the same time, as the perception that police respect human rights decreases, support for the army's counter crime role increases. Moreover, the public associates the effectiveness of the military counter-crime effort with *greater* respect for human rights, not less (Bailey et al., 2011).

The results presented in Table 2 extend the Mexican findings to 19 countries in the Latin American region. In fact, trust in the army and the perception that the army respects human rights are key predictors of support for military intervention in the fight against crime. In other words, Latin American citizens do not appear to be willing to give a blank check to the armed forces to intervene unilaterally in policy implementation or in the fight against criminal violence, which could lead to authoritarian excesses, including human rights abuses. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that they support targeted military operations when they are not satisfied with the performance of the police and when they have confidence that the army will do a better job at respecting citizens' rights and liberties. In other words, the public support for military crime intervention is not an endorsement of repression so much as it is a belief—accurate or not—that the military can, compared to the police, more capably combat criminal elements without harming innocent civilians to the same degree.⁶

Public perceptions seem to square with the actual conduct of the armed forces, when engaged in domestic security operations. Empirical evidence based on our investigation indicates very few civilian casualties result as a consequence of military domestic operations. Research was conducted into civilian injuries and fatalities resulting from military internal security operations of one kind or another, conducted in 8 countries between 2013 and 2015.⁷ Five of these countries were among those with the highest crime rates in Latin America, while three were lower crime states. The armed forces were used to fight crime, suppress protests (including land and oilfield occupations), eradicate illicit coca production, and counter gang and cartel activity. We found data for 60 such operations in all, involving army units, joint task forces, and a few naval forces. We recorded 81 injuries and 52 deaths, 39 of those deaths (75%) occurring in Mexico. In other words there was, on average, less than one fatality per operation. Leaving Mexico out of the equation, there were 33 operations which resulted in just 13 fatalities across 7 countries in three years' time, or in other words one fatality for every 2.5 operations.

Naturally, unreliable reporting and attempts to conceal wrongdoing may have suppressed coverage, resulting in an underestimation of civilian casualties. Moreover, this is just one study that must be balanced with investigations conducted by respected NGOs detailing disturbing

⁶ One study of Mexico shows that awareness of crime nationally leads people to have less tolerance for extra-legal (violent) action to deter crime (Malone, 2013: 37).

⁷ Countries studied were Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, during the period of 2013-2015. Data on those countries was retrieved from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Latin American Weekly Reports, Latin American Security and Strategic Reviews, and newspaper articles from Access World News and Lexis-Nexis.

patterns of abuse at the hands of army units in Mexico, Colombia and Peru, and elsewhere.⁸ The military record is by no means unblemished. That having been said, the key revelation of our study is that the public's yearning for military counter-crime intervention is not a belief that the military is ideally suited for these missions nor an endorsement of repression so much as it is an expression of frustration over police failures and a belief that the military is, *comparatively speaking*, more capable of meeting the challenge of widespread crime. The public's support for the military to conduct crime-fighting more efficaciously and humanely is a relative—not absolute—affirmation.

Conclusion

The public is justifiably unnerved by the unprecedented escalation of violence and criminality throughout much of the Latin American region. In light of the apparent inability or unwillingness of the police to adequately confront the problem, it is also understandable that the public would favor the introduction of troops to chase down drug traffickers and patrol city streets. But such support cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of uninhibited repression on the part of soldiers. Findings from Mexico, and more generalized statistical results suggest strongly that the public evaluates military performance in light of police inadequacies. Disenchanted with corrupt, poorly trained police who trample upon citizens' rights, the public views the military as a comparatively more professional force capable of responding to crime more efficaciously and humanely. Support for military crime fighting rises as satisfaction with the police declines.

These findings are encouraging, in so far as they do not indicate a public preference for unfettered military operations that resort to excessive violence and any and all extra-legal measures to stem crime. While citizens want to live a more secure life, they are not willing to pay just any price for it. They want the military to intervene and to use lethal force if they must, but to do so judiciously, with protections for human rights in mind. The evidence is consistent with the notion that the military ought to be trained to operate within the rule of law and under clear rules of engagement. Soldiers should be given guidelines for operating in densely populated urban settings, where their violent encounters with cartels or gangs often occur just a hair's breath away from civilian dwellings. In those encounters, it is incumbent upon the military to show some restraint, carefully discriminating between criminal targets and law abiding residents living nearby (Pion-Berlin 2017). All of this assumes that the military of a given country is capable of change, of being re-socialized to be much more circumspect and restrained than it is long accustomed to. Some Latin American militaries are fundamentally resistant to change of this sort, fending off all efforts to revamp their modus operandi.

That raises a question that suggests the need for further research. What if citizen views are wrong? What if they have falsely attributed to the military, admirable qualities that are

⁸ Examples of these reports include: Human Rights Watch, "Ni seguridad ni derechos: Ejecuciones, desapariciones y tortura en la 'guerra contra el narcotráfico' de México", Nueva York, Noviembre de 2011; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, "Jurisdicción militar: Impunidad y violaciones a los derechos humanos", enero de 2013, disponible en <cmdpdh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Briefing-Enero-2013-justicia-militar-SK.pdf>; Informe de la alta comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación en Colombia, presentado en el 22º período de sesiones del Consejo de Derechos Humanos, 7 de enero de 2013; Amnistía Internacional, Informe "Colombia", disponible en <amnesty.org/es/library/asset/AMR23/005/2013/es/3aaa9d53-02f5-459b-8864-dbc5e367fda7/amr230052013es.html>.

lacking, and thus put their faith in an institution that cannot really deliver on its promises? As mentioned, there is evidence suggesting that the armed forces of some Latin American countries do commit human rights abuses during internal security operations. Moreover, there is, in the case of Mexico, scholarly research showing that the introduction of its armed forces into counter-crime operations has not reduced homicide rates, and in some instances may have increased them (Calderon, et al, 2015). And yet, public confidence in the armed forces remained unshaken. A recent public opinion survey found that 82 percent of Mexicans want the army and marines to continue patrolling city streets in pursuit of criminals (CESOP, 2016)—results notwithstanding. What then prompts citizens to retain faith in their military, even in the face of facts which do not reflect well upon that institution's performance? Citizens may conclude that there are no better alternatives, or they could be misinformed, convinced that the armed forces are up to the task when they are not. Additional research is needed to determine what drives these perceptions.

Appendix

Table A1. Variables used in models presented in Table 2 (LAPOP 2012)

Variables	Survey Items
Age	Age of the respondents
Gender	1=Male, 0=female
Income	10 deciles based on the currency and distribution of the country (no income=0...maximum income=10)
Education	Years of schooling: recoded into 0=no education, 1=1 to 3 years, 2=4 to 6 years, 3=7 to 9 years, 4=10 to 12 years, 5=13 to 15 years, 6=16 to 18 years
Trust in the armed forces	To what extent do you trust the Armed Forces? 1=Not at all ... 7= A lot
Army respects human rights	To what extent do you believe that the [nationality] Armed Forces respect [nationality's] human rights nowadays? 1=Not at all ... 7= A lot
Crime victim	Have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? 0= No, 1=Yes
Fear crime	Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe? 1=Very safe, 2=Somewhat safe, 3=Somewhat unsafe, 4=Very unsafe
Satisfaction with the police	In general, are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the performance of the police in your neighborhood? 1=Very dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=Satisfied, Very satisfied
Bribe by police (last 12 months)	Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months? 0=No, 1=Yes

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