

# Michigan Journal of Political Science

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Department of Political Science at the University  
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## Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Hello and welcome to the Fall 2021 Edition of the Michigan Journal of Political Science, our second publication commemorating our Journal's 40th Year Anniversary. We are proud to showcase the following five pieces as exemplary research in Political Science by talented undergraduate students from around the world. These articles reflect a commitment to rigorous investigation and thought provoking historical and contemporary political analysis, while remaining academic and non-partisan. Since its founding, with an evolution in methods of analysis, diverse perspectives, and coverage of contentious topics, our publication has remained steadfast to upholding the Journal's commitment of editing and publishing research that can further the discourse in the Political Science community. We hope that this Edition and our future work continues to uphold the spirit of our journal established in 1981.

In this edition our work has applied modern analysis to key historical events. Our authors have put together captivating lenses to better understand the current geo-political repercussions of power struggles of the past. Pieces like "On Translucent Resolution: The WTO Banana Dispute," explore how newly empowered economic arbiters' attempts to resolve the competing interests of corporations, imperial powers, and former colonies continue to shape our modern international political economy. Meanwhile, pieces like "Understanding the Political Parasocial Encounter" highlight the evolving landscape of social interaction that is now adapted to the widespread use of social media and projects the political ramifications of this transformation. Finally, "López Obrador's Dilemma: Using Game Theory Tools to Understand the Release of Ovidio Guzmán" showcases how game theory can be used to understand the changing incentive structures that motivate governments' decisions in dealing with insurgent cartel groups that have only grown in power. We hope that the creative hypotheses and analytical tools our authors have employed provides insight on the critical political themes we have spotlighted in our Edition. These pieces reflect both on the underlying themes exacerbating and relieving political struggles of the past and present in an attempt to provide rationale that can better equip us for the political conflicts of the future.

As Editors-in-Chief for the past two years, we are greatly appreciative of those who have read, contributed, and supported this Journal. We restarted MJPS in an attempt to better understand the political world around us, and in doing so we have made lifelong friends, mentors, and connections across the globe. We want to not only thank our current Editorial Board for all their hard work, but all our peers and alumni whose work helped create and grow MJPS. The Journal has been a cornerstone of our college experiences and enriched our understanding of the world beyond campus. We thank the Department of Political Science, and particularly Briana Akani, Brian Min, Joseph Johnson, and Dustin Hahn for giving us the platform and support to enact our vision for this journal.

Finally, we would like to extend a few personal thank you's:

The Journal would not have been possible without the support, inspiration, and faith from the Sinha and Vyas family. I have always felt your love and guidance in every endeavor I've taken. Thank you for teaching me the value of knowledge

Por las enseñanzas y reflexiones de la Familia Ramos Salinas, esta publicación ha podido crecer y mejorarse con cada paso. Gracias por siempre aconsejarme y empujarme a ver hacia la cima.

Sincerely,

Ambika Sinha and Andres Ramos Salinas  
Editors in Chief

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Section 1:

# American Politics

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**Featuring:**

“An Overestimated Threat:  
Kissinger’s Cold War Statist Policy in Chile”

Written by Faith Fisher  
Cornell University, Government and Spanish Major, Class of 2022

American Politics

## An Overestimated Threat: Kissinger's Cold War Statist Policy in Chile

Faith Fisher

In a memorandum on November 5, 1970, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger warned President Richard Nixon, "The election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere."<sup>1</sup> This assessment of the communist threat in Chile foreshadows American policy decisions that supported the erosion of democracy and the rise of a brutal dictator in the Latin American nation three years later. What accounts for the United States' contribution to the subversion of Chilean democracy and rise of a dictatorship? Supported by additional archival evidence, the November 5th memo highlights Kissinger's individual role as the chief architect behind the United States' hostile foreign policy with Chile. Despite American economic interests in Chile, ideological factors most saliently influenced—and distorted—Kissinger's policy choices, which successfully sought to overthrow Allende's democratically elected socialist government and support Pinochet's dictatorial regime. Conforming to Krasner's statist explanation, Kissinger's anti-communist ideological fervor caused him to overestimate the communist threat in Chile and pursue a policy that did not best serve the "national interest."

### ***A Coup a Decade in the Making: Background of US Chilean Affairs (1963-1973)***

In order to contextualize Kissinger's assessment of the communist threat in Chile and his individually engineered policy choice, it is first important to expand upon the historical and political background of US-Chilean affairs during the Cold War. In response to the rise of the socialist party in Chile and its nationalization platform, the United States began intervening in Chile in 1963. The prospect of a nationalization policy in Chile threatened the interests of the American owned copper companies Anaconda and Kennecott, in addition to the US manufacturing company International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT). In fact, in the 1960s, Chile was the third largest global copper producer, with Anaconda and Kennecott directly producing over three fourths of this output.<sup>2</sup> Owning 70% of Chitelco, the major telephone company in Chile, ITT had similar economic interests in Chile. Anti-communist concerns also provided an incentive for American intervention in the country.<sup>3</sup> Not only was the 1961 Alliance for Progress designed to inhibit the incubation of communism in Latin America by means of economic aid, but the "loss" of Cuba to Soviet influence loomed large on the American conscience. Thus, with the upcoming 1964 presidential election in Chile, the United States expended \$3 million to ward off the spread of leftist ideology in the hemisphere by thwarting the ascension of the socialist candidate Salvador Allende to power. In addition to funding over half of Christian Democratic candidate Eduardo Frei's campaign, the Americans launched a propagandistic terror campaign to discredit Allende and the left. These actions swayed the election in Frei's favor, who assumed the presidency over Allende in 1964.<sup>4</sup>

American covert action continued both into and beyond the nation's 1970 election to protect the same economic and ideological interests that spurred earlier intervention. In 1970, however, American funds failed to prevent Chilean support for Allende, the leftist Popular Unity candidate. He won a plurality of the vote and was sworn

<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Document 17.

<sup>3</sup> Charles N. Goldman, "Another Side of Chile and I.T.T.," *New York Times*, August 8, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Kornbluh, *Chile 1964: CIA Covert Support in Frei Election Detailed*, September 27, 2004.

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into office by the Chilean Congress.<sup>5</sup> Immediately after the democratic election of a socialist president in the country, the United States implemented a hostile policy, masked under a “cool but correct” posture, against Allende’s regime. The posture entailed measures to “make the Chilean economy scream” and foment distrust towards the government.<sup>6</sup> The Nixon administration implemented an “invisible financial and economic blockade” against the Allende government which exerted pressure on foreign lenders to deny lines of credit to Chile.<sup>7</sup> The United States additionally spent \$8 million between 1970 and 1973 as part of its covert action policy to support various media organizations, opposition political parties, and private actors in the country in order to fray Allende’s power and dispel the socialist appeal.<sup>8</sup> By 1973, the United States had helped create “the conditions as great as possible”—namely, political tension, social unrest, and economic turmoil—to bring to fruition the coup that deposed Allende from power.<sup>9</sup> On September 11, 1973 the head of the armed forces, Augusto Pinochet, led an insurgency against the Allende government, in which neither the presidency nor the toppled president survived.<sup>10</sup> Two days later, Pinochet assumed power, simultaneously marking the start of a brutal dictatorship and the end of 46 years of democratic rule in Chile. Despite Pinochet’s anti-democratic rule and widespread human rights violations, the United States financially and ideologically supported his anti-communist regime.

***Kissinger’s Individual Role: An Exaggerated Response to an Exaggerated Threat***

Kissinger maintained a chief role in influencing the Nixon Administration’s hostile response to the communist threat in Chile actively resisting the State Department’s favored *modus vivendi* strategy. Even before Allende’s election, NSC deputy Viron Vaky attempted to convince Kissinger to espouse a more friendly approach to Chile. Not only did a hostile interventionist approach have the potential to cause “widespread violence and... insurrection,” but it also would present a “violation of our own principles and policy tenets.”<sup>11</sup> Despite this warning, he intensified his position, relaying his belief to the CIA chief Henry Hecksher a month later that “it is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup.”<sup>12</sup> Despite State Department warnings that undermining a democratically elected government could “incur even more serious losses for us in the hemisphere and elsewhere in the world,” Kissinger remained steadfastly committed to the hostile policy position he favored.<sup>13</sup> The November 5th, 1970 memo provides clear evidence of Kissinger’s individual lobbying effort in the Chilean matter and his rejection of the State Department’s approach. It highlights Kissinger’s grave assessment of the communist threat in Chile and his favored strategy in response to the inauguration of Allende. In the memo, Kissinger elucidates his construction of an economic, geopolitical, and ideological national interest, to which Allende “would pose some very serious threats.”<sup>14</sup> More specifically, according to Kissinger’s perceptions, a democratically elected Marxist government in Chile severely threatened US investments and American hegemony in the Western hemisphere, with the capacity to engender “imitative spread of similar phenomena” across the globe.<sup>15</sup> Kissinger feared that all of these considerations would “significantly affect the world balance and our own position in

<sup>5</sup> Due to the close margins of the vote, the Chilean Congress held a run-off election on October 24th. Allende won a large majority of the congressional vote and was sworn in as president on November 3rd.

<sup>6</sup> CIA, Notes on Meeting with the President on Chile, September 15, 1970, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Paul E. Sigmund, “The ‘Invisible Blockade’ and the Overthrow of Allende,” *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1974): 11.

<sup>8</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, “C.I.A. Is Linked to Strikes In Chile That Beset Allende,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> Telcon, Kissinger to Nixon, September 16, 1973, 11:50 a.m., National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 437, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>10</sup> Although the United States actively sought to instigate a military coup in Chile in 1970, the level of US involvement in the 1973 coup remains contested. Nevertheless, the Americans were at least “aware of coup plotting by the military” and even “appeared to condone it” (Report to Congress: CIA Activities in Chile, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1973, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 86.

<sup>12</sup> CIA, Operating Guidance Cable on Coup Plotting, October 16, 1970, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 8, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 172.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

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it.”<sup>16</sup> Before explaining the arsenal of strategies available to the Americans in response, Kissinger heeded the dilemma that he confronted. First, Allende “*has legitimacy*” because he was elected freely and legally. Second, intervention in Chile would violate the American principles of “self-determination and respect for free election,” which could damage American “credibility” and be “very costly” to the nation.<sup>17</sup>

The severity of these risks informed the State Department’s *modus vivendi* strategy, which Kissinger denounced as “dangerous” and unable to “prevent adverse anti-U.S. actions” in Chile. The national security advisor countered this strategy with his construction of a “hostile approach,” more specifically called “Non-overt Pressure, Cold, Correct Approach.”<sup>18</sup> In the Nov. 5 memo, specifically designed to lobby Nixon on the Chilean matter, Kissinger rejected the State Department’s position. He concluded that “the dangers of doing nothing are greater than the risks we run in trying to do something” and in order to dissipate the Chilean threat, the United States must “oppose Allende as strongly as we can.”<sup>19</sup> From his perspective, such opposition could only take the form of hostility. The memo offers clear insights into Kissinger’s rationale for Chilean regime change. More importantly, it signifies the beginning of the American’s “cool but correct” hostile posture—a result of Kissinger’s direct lobbying—which both contributed to the denouement of democracy in Chile and maintained the dictatorial structure implemented in its stead.

Even after Allende was removed from power, Kissinger worked against the resistance of the State Department and Congress to continue his anti-democratic Chilean policy stance. Despite reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Pinochet regime, the newly confirmed Secretary of State dismissed them as “rumors” and maintained his commitment to providing the dictator with military aid.<sup>20</sup> He further shared that the human rights issue is “an issue of balancing the overall interests of the country,” used to justify his belief that “however unpleasant they act, the government is better for us than Allende was.”<sup>21</sup> This policy put Kissinger at crossroads with Congress. Led by Senator Kennedy, a majority of Congress favored curtailing aid to the junta regime to castigate human rights infringements.<sup>22</sup> Even amidst concrete evidence of the regime’s brutality, Kissinger refused to make concessions to Congress with respect to Chilean affairs, rebuking the mere possibility of making “a deal with a Senator we know is against the national interest.”<sup>23,24</sup> While in Chile, the Secretary of State strategized with Foreign Minister Carvajal to temper congressional opposition to his policy stance in Chile. Despite his perception of congressional resistance as an “injustice,” Kissinger expresses that “somewhat visible” efforts to “alleviate that situation” would be “enormously helpful” in shifting congressional attitudes.<sup>25</sup> Kissinger acted against Congress in order to preserve his construction of the national interest and, in doing so, perpetuated a foreign policy of a regime acting in contravention to American values.

### ***Working for the National Interest?***

The Americans started and sustained the Chilean project under “the desire to elect democratic reformers” in the interest of the United States.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the American foreign policy which Kissinger formulated in Chile—a hostile response to Allende’s legitimate presidency and a friendly posture towards the Pinochet

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Department of State, SECRET/NODIS, “Secretary’s Staff Meeting, October 1, 1973”. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 110, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> The Kennedy Amendment, which proposed prohibiting military aid to Chile, formed part of S. 2662 (94th): International Security Assistance and Arms Exports Control Act, was passed by a majority in Congress.

<sup>23</sup> A 1973 memo “Chilean Executions” includes a human rights fact sheet on Chile which counts 320 summary executions—three times the reported number— less than three weeks after the coup.

<sup>24</sup> Department of State, SECRET, “The Secretary’s 8:00 a.m. Regional Staff Meeting,” December 3, 1974. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 110, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C

<sup>25</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 201.

<sup>26</sup> Staff Report of the Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, “Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973,” 94th Congress 1st Session, December 18, 1975.



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dictatorship—was counterproductive to Kissinger’s own conception of the national interest. In support of his policy in Chile, he jeopardized the potency of American influence in the Western hemisphere. Investigating intelligence activities within Chile, a Senate report delivered in 1975 expounded upon the repercussions of intervention in Chile, calling it both “costly and... complex.”<sup>27</sup> On an international level, the policy did not buttress, but rather undermined the American position in Chile and the broader Western hemisphere—a direct contradiction to Kissinger’s objectives. In fact, the report concludes that within Chile, the institutions favored by the US “have been discredited...by the fact of their covert support.” On a continental scale, the clandestine hostile policy enacted by the US revoked the legitimacy of American institutions, as they stood “corrupted in the perception of Latin Americans.”<sup>28</sup> The deterioration of American credibility weakened the United States’ influence as a hegemon within the Western hemisphere.

The Chilean policy blunder also carried domestic consequences that contravened Kissinger’s construction of the national interest. American action in Chile incurred reputational costs. In 1973, American covert operations in Chile became public knowledge; as a result, the public perceived the US to have “contradicted not only its official declarations but its treaty commitments and principles of long standing.”<sup>29,30</sup> The attitudinal effects of this action were evident: 69% of Americans considered it “wrong” that the United States “interfere in the internal politics and elections of another country such as Chile.”<sup>31</sup> American institutions suffered the same erosion of legitimacy in the domestic sphere as it suffered in the international sphere. Within the US, too, the nation’s institutions “(had) been discredited by the pervasiveness of covert action.”<sup>32</sup> Kissinger’s policy evidently fueled the disillusionment of the international and domestic populace with respect to American intervention. The resulting costs of Kissinger’s policy—the decline of American credibility and hegemony domestically and within the broader Western hemisphere—directly contradicted his objectives.

The United States suffered these consequences for a lackluster, arguably non-existent benefit. Even before covert action, it was not clear that Chilean intervention was in the national interest. According to the Senate investigation:

“Officials representing CIA, State, Defense, and the White House, concluded that the United States had no vital interests within Chile, the world military balance of power would not be significantly altered by an Allende regime, and an Allende victory in Chile would not pose any likely threat to the peace of the region.”<sup>33</sup>

As they both concern American interests in Chile and the global balance of power, the national interest outlined in the report and Kissinger coincide. Despite the common themes, however, the senatorial conclusion indicates that Chile did not pose a threat to this shared construction of the national interest. American officials additionally concluded that due to the costs of covert action, it should only be used to ward off severe national security threats, “but it is far from clear that that was the case in Chile.”<sup>34</sup> Working against the acumen of major foreign policy institutions, Kissinger’s interventionist hostile policy sought negligible benefits and responded to a threat that was insignificant.

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<sup>27</sup> Staff Report “Covert Action in Chile”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> On September 16th, 1973, the Washington Post published an article that accused the United States of using covert action and economic measures to undermine the Allende regime. A memo from Memorandum From William J. Jordan of the National Security Council Staff to Kissinger includes responses to the charges and denies that the American actions caused Allende’s downfall (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 149).

<sup>30</sup> Staff Report, “Covert Action in Chile”

<sup>31</sup> Time Magazine. Time Soundings Poll # 1974-8422: Politics/Elections, Question 76. USYANK.748422.Q13. Yankelovich, Skelly & White. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1974. Web. May-03-2012.

<sup>32</sup> Staff Report, “Covert Action in Chile”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

***A Policy Distorted by Ideology***

What can account for the formation and adherence to a policy that responded to a benign threat and proved counterproductive to the national interest? Economic factors were a consideration in the Chilean policy, but these interests alone cannot explain Kissinger's behavior. Even though Kissinger estimated that over a billion dollars were at stake with an Allende presidency, the Nixon administration remained unresponsive to the ITT's lobbying efforts to influence Chilean policy. Even before Allende's inauguration in 1970, the ITT told the Nixon administration that the corporation would "assist financially in sums up to seven figures" in order to block a Communist presidency; despite Kissinger's desire for a hostile action, the proposal received a "cool reception from the White House."<sup>35</sup> After Allende's inauguration, ITT formed an 18-point plan of economic hostility towards Chile, subversion of the Chilean military, and "diplomatic sabotage" designed to ensure that the socialist president "does not get through the crucial next six months."<sup>36</sup> Although the Nixon administration favored hostile policies—a policy choice influenced directly by Kissinger—the White House once again rejected the proposal. The economic interests of the ITT had an insignificant impact on the foreign policy formation.

With respect to economic interests in the copper industry, the economic threat posed by Allende, especially as an individual actor, was minimal. Albeit to the dismay of the United States, even the American-backed president Frei had shifted towards a policy of nationalization during his presidency in the 1960s to serve the "interests of the Chilean people."<sup>37</sup> Over two years before Allende assumed the presidency, the NIE concluded that "steps toward...nationalization of U.S. copper holdings in Chile were inevitable."<sup>38</sup> Although Allende accelerated this inevitable prospect by enacting a policy of outright nationalization, the law provided "suitable compensation" to the corporate owners.<sup>39</sup> Allende maintained this promise and "kept lines open to Washington on...Chilean compensation for expropriated U.S. copper companies."<sup>40</sup> A 1973 telegram from the Chilean Embassy corroborates this observation, informing the State Department that the Chilean government had, after a series of private talks with Anaconda and Kennecott, "come to an essential agreement to compensate these companies."<sup>41</sup> Even though it is impossible to completely dislodge economic incentives from the Americans' hostile foreign policy towards Chile, the predicted inevitability of Chilean nationalization and the promise of compensation for expropriation minimized the salience of these economic factors.

Rather than economic factors, ideology played a principal role in Kissinger's pre- and post-coup policy towards Chile. In accordance with Krasner's statist explanation, this anti-communist ideology distorted Kissinger's policy orientation. He manifests what Krasner describes as "non-logical behavior" borne of the "persistent tendency to overestimate the importance of communist influences in foreign regimes."<sup>42</sup> His anti-communist fervor warped his assessment of the threat posed by Allende as an individual, who he perceived as "a dedicated Marxist...with a profound anti-US bias."<sup>43</sup> A 1973 meeting between Kubisch and Allende negates this perception of Allende. During the meeting, Allende shared that not only "had been no deed or word on his part intended to create problems in relations with the US", but he had even "made gestures of his own towards the US that had been friendly and even deferential."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Allende—although a socialist—was hardly a "dedicated Marxist," failing to espouse the main tenet of universalism inherent in the Marxist ideology. He did not seek a socialist takeover, but instead stressed the need to respect the "transitory" nature of a democratic system, where "in 1976 a different party might come to power" in Chile.<sup>45</sup> Kissinger's anti-communist

<sup>35</sup> "I.T.T said to Seek Chile Coup in '70", New York Times, March 22, 1972

<sup>36</sup> "Papers Show I.T.T Urged U.S. to Help Oust Allende," New York Times, July 3, 1972

<sup>37</sup> Staff Report, "Covert Action in Chile"

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Law No. 17,450, July 16, 1971.

<sup>40</sup> Staff Report, "Covert Action in Chile"

<sup>41</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 323

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest*. (Princeton University Press, 1978), 286

<sup>43</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 172

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Document 327

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

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ideology allowed him to overlook the reality that the Chilean president, as “a man who believed in democratic pluralism and freedom,” espoused quintessentially American values.<sup>46</sup>

Kissinger’s anti-communist vehemence spawned not only an overestimation of the risk posed by an Allende government, but also an underestimation of Pinochet’s threat to American interests of democracy and freedom. Over a year into Pinochet’s rule, Kissinger asked Rodgers if human rights were more severely threatened by Pinochet’s government than that of Allende. Rodgers explained that not only was the human rights problem in Chile worse compared to other Latin American countries, but also, Allende—unlike Pinochet—respected “freedom of association” and “freedom of the press.”<sup>47</sup> Even so, Kissinger remained adamant that the United States continue aid to Pinochet’s Chile, responding that “the consequences could be very serious if we cut them off from military aid.”<sup>48</sup> In the name of expelling communism from the Western Hemisphere, Kissinger’s policy supported a regime that embodied the antithesis of professed American values of self-determination and freedom.

The secretary’s ideological ardor further induced an irrational fear about the potential spread of Soviet-style communism under an Allende government. Kissinger feared that under Allende, Chile would invite Soviet influence and foster the spread of communism within the hemisphere. However, this fear was unfounded. Allende lacked the revolutionary ideological bend Kissinger attributed to his government. In fact, the Senate investigation uncovered that “Allende had gone to great lengths to convince his Latin American neighbors that he did not share Castro’s revolutionary goals.”<sup>49</sup> For domestic purposes too, Allende exercised caution in revolutionary activity “for fear of provoking a military reaction in his own country.”<sup>50</sup> Kissinger’s fear about Soviet presence in the hemisphere was similarly overblown, especially in consideration of Allende’s commitment to a policy of non-alignment. Under Allende, Chile was a member nation of the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to remain independent from the United States and/or the Soviet Union. This independent posture made it unlikely that Chile would forge a strong affiliation with the Soviet Union or build a network with exclusively socialist countries. The Senate investigation corroborated the surmised effect of Allende’s non-alignment, concluding that the Soviet Union would most likely have lacked the ability to decisively influence key issues in the nation and that Chile would not pursue the broad expansion of relationships and alliances with other socialist nations.<sup>51</sup> Chilean nationalism also mitigated the risk of the transformation of Chile into a Soviet satellite state. Even under an Allende presidency, “Chilean nationalism...would as strongly oppose subordinating Chile to the tutelage of Moscow or... Washington.”<sup>52</sup> Despite Kissinger’s belief otherwise, a Chilean nation governed by a socialist president would most likely not succumb to Soviet influence nor seek to expand the reach of socialism beyond its own borders.

### ***Conclusion: An Individually Engineered Statist Policy***

Henry Kissinger played a central role in crafting, implementing, and supporting American foreign policy towards Chile which proved counterproductive to the United States’ national interest. Although there were economic interests at stake in Chile, Kissinger’s anti-communist ideology induced his this seemingly irrational behavior. Supported by other archival documents and government-commissioned reports, the November 5th, 1970 memo demonstrates Kissinger’s over exaggerated policy response to an over exaggerated threat. His anti-communist ideological fervor distorted his perception of the communist threat posed by an Allende presidency, and his vehemence blinded him to the potential costs of hostile action in Chile that eventually came to fruition. The American policy both subverted the democratic tenet of self-determination

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Department of State, SECRET, "The Secretary's 8:00 a.m. Regional Staff Meeting," December 3, 1974, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 110, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Staff Report, "Covert Action in Chile"

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

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and supported the rise of an anti-democratic dictator in the Latin American nation, diminishing American influence and credibility both domestically and internationally. Although American intervention in Chile leaves a stain on the American's Cold War legacy, the Chilean episode is not an anomaly. With widespread American support in regime change in Latin America during the Cold War era, American policy in Chile serves as a singular manifestation of the way in which American interests could, and often *did*, distort foreign policy formulations.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships 1965-1989*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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Section 2:

# International Politics

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**Featuring:**

“On Translucent Resolution: The WTO Banana Dispute”

Written by Thomas Griffith  
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Major, Class of 2023

## On Translucent Resolution: The WTO Banana Dispute

Thomas Griffith

### Introduction

Trade preferences have historically played a key factor in the support of economic well-being throughout developing countries, especially considering smaller, more vulnerable single-export economies dependent on banana agriculture. Until the late 19th century, preferential trade to former colonies was protected under the Lomé Convention. Countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands were able to protect their former colonies by granting them preferential access to trade markets, ensuring fiscal stability for banana dependent nations. In the late 1990s, however, the United States (US) sought to expose and reprimand the European Union (EU) on the basis that its preferential trade agreements with previous colonies throughout the Caribbean and South America monetarily oppressed a larger group of less developed countries (LDCs).<sup>1</sup>

In 1996 after multiple failed attempts to appeal to the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the US and other South and Central American countries (Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and Ecuador) filed their complaints to a supranational adjudicator, the World Trade Organization (WTO). In 1997, the WTO delivered its first ruling against the EU's banana regime in favor of the United States and its supporters.<sup>2</sup> Free trade advocates may find the WTO ruling obvious, given that preferential trade hinders developing countries from trade liberalization. However, the reality of the WTO banana trade dispute is unclear when considering the motivations of both the US and the EU. This article seeks to provide an overarching perspective on the WTO banana trade dispute and how the organization failed to reach an economically beneficial settlement between the corporately manipulated United States and the colonially biased European Union.

#### I. *The Lomé Convention*

A close examination of the Lomé Convention is essential to understanding the WTO's ruling since it helps contextualize the order of events and preceding causal factors. In 1975, the Lomé Convention became the successor of the Yaoundé I Convention; both sought to drive respect and companionship between overseas countries and territories (OCTs) and their former imperial powers.<sup>3</sup> The Lomé Convention intended to showcase strides forward in national cooperation between formerly imperial powers and once colonized OCTs that had achieved independence. While initially drafted between African and European powers, the Lomé Convention underwent a global expansion, later including Caribbean and Pacific nations. Under the Lomé Convention, European states consented to uphold respect towards ACP states (Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific) and their sovereignty, right to partnership, and right to political, cultural, and economic choices.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the freedom of economic choice, the Lomé Convention allowed for European Community (EC) states to favor their former colonies, granting fewer trade barriers in hopes of bolstering the economies of LDCs. "To facilitate ACP product or production's access to European Community markets," the convention ensured that exchanges would be "(...) governed by benefits that have been agreed upon, namely an exemption of custom duties."<sup>5</sup> Under the fifth special protocol of the Lomé Convention, ACP states continued to be held favorably in European markets, entering the market under a 0-rated tariff. While ACP states enjoyed the favorable conditions of the European

<sup>1</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3. (p. 5)

<sup>2</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

<sup>3</sup> "Regional Protection of Human Rights," *Human Rights Law in Africa* 3 (1998): 109-229

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



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market, non-colonial LDCs who invested in the banana market faced much harsher barriers to trade. These barriers, such as the Common Commercial Tariff (CCT), imposed heavy regulations on non-colonial trade partners, thereby rendering non-preferential banana trade partners noncompetitive in the European market. Given how EU Member States were individually responsible for implementing the Lomé Convention's Banana Protocol to their own degrees, most subscribed only to the banana trade with their correlating ACP states. These disposed subscriptions resulted in market exclusion for many non-colonial LDCs under the authority of EU Member States and would later be appealed in the 1997 WTO resolution given the imminent colonial threat of trade preferences to other LDCs invested in the banana market.<sup>6</sup>

To understand the Lomé Convention's consequent dissolution, it is necessary to examine the competing goals the EU sought to accomplish. On one hand, the convention was implemented to ensure that former colonies remained competitive in the global market after gaining their independence from colonial rule.<sup>7</sup> It is significant to note that at the time of the WTO dispute and beforehand, bananas were the third most important internationally traded foodstuff, preceded only by wheat and coffee. In order to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with their former colonies, EU Member States formulated the Lomé Convention in which the Banana Protocol ensured market favorability for ACP states and guaranteed them a competitive edge within independent supply chains. At the time of the WTO agreement, multinational enterprises (MNE), primarily Chiquita, Dole, and Del Monte, controlled 60% of the global banana trade. Utilizing independent supply chains and markets permitted by the EU in the Lomé Convention, ACP countries achieved financial stability within a global market dominated by an MNE oligopoly. This commitment, which would be honored indefinitely by former EU colonizers, was viewed as a sacred pact by various Caribbean states.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, it should be noted that the commitment to ACP nations as prompted by the Banana Protocol was drastically less impactful to its European counterparts. Regarding the preferential trade agreement, "(...) commitments were not strongly felt by those with limited colonial powers (e.g., Italy, Denmark, and Germany) and even less so among the new EU member states of Eastern Europe."<sup>9</sup> Yet, these EU member states' standpoints might be outweighed by the appealing potential the agreement offers for the EU to have competitive market control. EU member states considered the Protocol as a path towards remaining independent from the wide scale market control of MNEs, while avoiding a dependency on the American banana supply. Thus, by exempting ACP states from trade barriers, EU member states, specifically Britain and France, were able to avoid further dependency on American trade. Although favored ACP states benefited greatly from operation in individual markets, their trade independence was not as it may have seemed under EU accordance. The illusion of financial independence permeated the ACP favored states. However, EU trade preferences ensured that banana producing states remained dependent on their previous colonizers as the more expensive and lower-quality bananas of favored states couldn't compete with MNE production on a global scale.<sup>10</sup> So did EU member states genuinely concern themselves with respecting previous colonial relations with ACP states or make a feeble attempt to exploit former colonies in order to circumvent dependency on the American banana trade?

## II. A Unified European Market

To elaborate on the previously proposed question, it is necessary to address the economic stagnation which plagued Europe and the economy of the European Economic Community (EEC) throughout the 1970-1980s. As European Member States faced individual fiscal issues and a common unwillingness to compromise sovereignty on

<sup>6</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

<sup>7</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

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economic problems with other states, integration of a single European market began to stagnate.<sup>11</sup> In order to reinvigorate a competitive market under a unified Europe, the Single European Act (SEA) sought to establish a unified single market by 1992, and on January 1, 1993, the European Single Market, or Common Market, was established. Before the introduction of the Common Market, trade preferences had been protected under article 115 of the Treaty of Rome. For 35 years, the article allowed market controls, ensuring that preferential trade agreements could function freely until the economic unification of Europe in 1993.<sup>12</sup> In an effort to increase global competitiveness within an open market, Common Market legislation revoked these trade preferences as LCD imports were permitted to compete in a single market without restrictions.

As the Common Market redefined the terms of the preferential banana trade, previously favored ACP nations and their former colonizers struggled to maintain legitimacy, even under protection of the Enabling Clause. The Enabling Clause, as allowed for by the GATT, established that LDCs were authorized to participate in preferential trade agreements with previous colonizers. In 1993, however, the terms of the Enabling Clause were challenged by five Latin American banana producing countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.<sup>13</sup> While being thoroughly examined, trade preferences appeared to offend the foundational value of nondiscrimination under the GATT. As Europe faced the oncoming wave of economic unification in the Common Market, challenges to the GATT uncovered a critical conceptual flaw in its implementation. While the Enabling Clause was initially cited as a protectionist method to ensure nondiscrimination towards ACP banana producing states, preferential trade was found to diminish the competitive ability of other LDCs lacking preferential trade agreements.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the 1993 challenge to the GATT by five Latin American states was upheld. A series of negotiations were made to four of the five states and resulted in the implementation of specified quotas regarding the banana trade, excluding Guatemala. This prompted the US to challenge the paradoxical discrimination of the GATT to the WTO, which was later successful.

### III. The US Position

Notably, critics of the EU-US banana trade war note that GATT challenges by the US and the WTOs consequent ruling weren't beneficial to the US when considering the imminent threat to US national security caused by the economic degradation of previously favored ACP states.<sup>15</sup> In fact, at the dilemma's root lies the domestic influence of corporate profit in the United States. Though the US had little to gain on a long term scale, Chiquita's corporate influence resulted in the US dismantling the EU banana trade regime. As noted by author Noel Maurer, "American domestic interests trumped strategic concerns again and again, for small economic gains relative to the US economy and the potential economic losses."<sup>16</sup> In defiance of European Member States and their preferential trade agreements, the US initiated a trade war that would impose a variety of tariffs on European goods. The European Union then fired a volley of retaliatory tariffs right back on the US, which impacted both the American market and the American consumer negatively. As the WTO later affirmed the US' challenge to EU preferential trade, the US faced the impending dissolution of Caribbean banana farmers and the economic stability of banana trading ACP nations. Underlying the trade war and short term economic gains of the US corporate body, however, were disparages within the MNE oligopoly itself.

<sup>11</sup> Olsen, Jonathan, and John McCormick. "The European Union." 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494512>.

<sup>12</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

<sup>13</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Won-Mog Choi & Yong Shik Lee, *Facilitating Preferential Trade Agreements between Developed and Developing Countries: A Case for Enabling the Enabling Clause*, 21 MINN. J. INT'L L. 1 (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Malanson, J. (2014). Noel Maurer. *The Empire Trap: The Rise and Fall of U.S. Intervention to Protect American Property Overseas, 1893–2013*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013

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As it turns out, Dole, a competing member in the global banana oligopoly, did not mirror Chiquita's ambition towards dismantling the EU banana trade regime. In 2000, regarding the US challenge to preferential trade on Chiquita's behalf, a Dole spokesperson stated, "We are puzzled as to why the USTR (United States Trade Representative) did not consult with half of the industry."<sup>17</sup> Rather than consulting the banana oligopoly in its entirety, US legislators reflected the interests of Chiquita alone. Preceding the 1997 WTO ruling, Chiquita successfully appealed to US officials by portraying themselves as a national asset hindered by the unjust legislation of the foreign banana trade in accordance with the Banana Protocol of the Lomé Convention. In this light, Chiquita shifted the market perspective away from its corporate strategic shortcomings and on to the foreign affairs of individual European markets.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Chiquita, Dole hadn't experienced the corporate adversity of poor strategic performance, and thus abstained from joining the Chiquita complaint to the WTO. Thus, US foreign trade policy altered to endorse the short term corporate interests of Chiquita rather than the holistic interests of its banana oligopoly.

In order to better conceptualize why the US would have elected to represent the Chiquita Corporation alone, one must examine the corporation's political ties to US officials. To secure a greater percentage of their market share in the banana industry, Chiquita appealed to the United States as an American corporation in need of reprieve from the EU's unjust international trade preferences. These sentiments were supported by the American public and policy makers as the Reagan administration had recently shielded Harley-Davidson from bankruptcy at a time when the global motorcycle market was dominated by Japanese manufacturers.<sup>19</sup> Thus, American legislators rallied behind Chiquita, viewing the discourse as a means of securing American prowess in the banana market despite the EU's colonial trade preferences. Less than a day after Chiquita chairman Carl Lindner made a \$500,000 donation to varying state officials across 24 states, to which more than 53 members of Congress directly profited, the US prompted the WTO to begin its examination into the legitimacy of the preferential banana trade.<sup>20</sup> It is noted that the \$500,000 donation was directly linked to meetings with the Clinton administration. Lindner had extensive political relations with many US officials including frequently keeping the company of both President Bill Clinton and Senate majority leader Bob Dole. Despite being a historic advocate and donor to the Republican Party, Lindner had been advised to fund Congress members directly rather than donating to the Democratic National Committee (DNC).<sup>21</sup> Thus, backed by the fiscal "generosity" of Lindner, the US began its appeal to the WTO in an effort to abolish the protectionist regime of the European preferential trade system.

In parallel to governmental funding by Chiquita officials, the US decision to side with Chiquita was tied to Democratic Party attempts to recast nationwide perceptions of the Clinton administration. At the time of the WTO ruling in 1997, the Clinton administration had fallen under scrutiny given an ongoing impeachment trial concerning sexual relation allegations towards President Bill Clinton. The impeachment began in 1997 and was spearheaded by Republican Party member and Congressman Bob Barr.<sup>22</sup> In order to redeem the floundering public image of the President amid midterm US elections, the Clinton administration strove to portray an aura of political strength in overseas trade disputes. Thus, having accepted funding from Lindner and Chiquita executives, the Clinton administration launched its attempt to rebrand the presidency's public image in the consequent US-EU banana trade war. To the Clinton administration, and to the delight of Chiquita, a political rebranding and subsequent challenge to the

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Winestock Staff Reporter of THE WALL, STREET JOURNAL. (2000, Oct 09). U.S. starts a fight with dole food co. in the banana war. *Wall Street Journal*

<sup>18</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Dan Koepfel, Banana. *The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World* (London: Hudson Street Press, 2008) page 221.

<sup>21</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> IMPEACHMENT: THE OVERVIEW -- CLINTON IMPEACHED; HE FACES A SENATE TRIAL, 2D IN HISTORY; VOWS TO DO JOB TILL TERM'S 'LAST HOUR': IMPEACHMENT: THE OVERVIEW -- CLINTON IMPEACHED. (1998).

WTO was worth the impending economic collapse of Caribbean single-export economies. Attempting to establish a competitive facade of US strength in foreign trade, and to the dismay of banana producing Caribbean states, Clinton informed Caribbean leaders that, “the target of the US was the discriminatory European system, not the Caribbean.”<sup>23</sup>

#### **IV. The 1997 WTO Ruling**

In May 1997, the WTO resolved its first official ruling on the EU banana regime, favoring the US and its claims of European market discrimination across the banana trade. Finally, after filing two previous GATT complaints, both of which sided against the EU yet faced deflection via procedural policy years prior, the US, alongside Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Ecuador, would walk victorious in their challenge to the WTO. The WTO found that the EU violated WTO rulings on 19 separate occasions and appeared especially adverse to two major principles of the EU preferential trade system: The EU had awarded 30% of its ripening and distribution licenses in Latin America to EU companies, and secondly, the licensing quotas for Latin American producers were much more severe than those for favored ACP states.<sup>24</sup> On these grounds, the WTO concluded that the EU would be held accountable for rectifying its preferential trade system to adhere to WTO standards by the beginning of 1999. However, the WTO never officially condemned preferential trade practices or the Lomé Convention.

Two months after the WTO’s conclusion, the EU attempted to overturn the ruling, hoping that the Appeals Panel would rule in favor of EU preferential trade agreements. Following this development, however, the Appeals Panel upheld the WTO decision, and the EU was charged to redefine its preferential trade policies with banana exporting ACP states.<sup>25</sup> The EU, in an attempt to realign itself with the WTO ruling, proceeded to raise quotas in Latin America while ACP states were granted a tariff free quota of .85 million tons, and EU producers a lesser .75 million tons.<sup>26</sup>

The US viewed these revised EU regulations as less than satisfactory and in March of 1998, rejected these terms of agreement with the EU, believing that the revisions to EU trade policy only addressed a small portion of the preferential trade policy’s malformation. The US felt that the EU should cease and desist from its Lomé practices, or entirely compensate producers/distributors affected by said practices. In an attempt to resolve this dissatisfaction, the EU appealed to hold another WTO panel, yet the US refused this offer. The conclusion of the newly formed WTO, tainted by the two parties’ contrasting motivations in the banana trade dispute, fell into resolution stagnancy which greatly exacerbated the possibility of finding a viable trade resolution.

On January 1, 1995, the WTO would replace the GATT as a global organization responsible for facilitating foreign trade affairs on an intergovernmental level. Given the nascent disposition of the WTO in 1997, the world had yet to see how strictly the intergovernmental body would enforce its rulings; therefore, the EU-US banana trade debacle was shrouded in uncertainty. Regarding the indirect nature of the WTO resolution, author Judith Piggott writes, “The US felt the new scheme did not comply with the WTO’s ruling, the EU felt it did. The problem was the rules were untested and imprecise.”<sup>27</sup> In response to the US claim that the EU hadn’t fulfilled its policy reform responsibilities despite the WTO’s ruling, the EU filed for another Panel decision. As the Panel could not confirm that the EU’s offered resolution was in accordance with the guidelines of the WTO’s 1997 ruling, the debacle would proceed to an Arbitration Panel, where the EU’s revisions to preferential trade agreements were again found to be incompatible with WTO guidelines.<sup>28</sup>

After the Arbitration Panel findings, the US would be granted the right to impose sanctions on the EU, giving the plaintiff entitlement to compensation in the form of trade benefit nullification. In March 1999, the US implemented a 100% tariff on a wide variety

<sup>23</sup> Ray Sanchez, “Summit’s Issue: Bananas/In the Caribbean, trade dispute tops for Clinton”, May 11, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

<sup>27</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Read, R. (2001). The anatomy of the EU/US WTO banana trade dispute [1]; the initial legal challenges to the EU banana trade regime. *The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy*, 2(2), 257-282.

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of European exports. Following the sanctions, however, the EU once again attempted to deflect the US and its punitive sanctions by filing under the guise that the US was acting illegally, a perspective shared by many legal experts today.<sup>29</sup> The WTO once again concluded that the EU challenge to US sanctions' legality was at fault. Surprisingly, however, the WTO reduced the sternness of US sanctions and damage claims, and thus the EU fine was reduced to \$191.4 million, a significantly decreased total compared to the initial US damage report of \$500 million.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, both the US and the EU achieved lackluster consolations, despite the redundancy of their trade dispute on the WTO platform, but at what cost?

### V. *Fallout After Resolution*

Belying the convoluted nature of the 1997 WTO preferential trade ruling and its consequential effects was a lack of clarity on three primary fronts. Immediately, the fallout from severing the EU's post-colonial preferential trade treatment of ACPs created opportunities for growth via diversification, but fell short due to a lack of support from the Union. EU distributors had extensive fiscal profits from the mono-directional banana trade scheme as more than 30% of the EU banana market was imported from preferential trade-dependent ACP states.<sup>31</sup> However, due to preferential trade obligations, ACP states were never capable of trade diversification. Even advocates of free trade will note that the banana-dependent ACP states were blanketed by a false sense of economic security caused by EU preferential trade dependence on ACP bananas. As trade relations between the ACP states and the EU were severed by the 1997 WTO ruling, banana dependent economies were forced to face the reality that trade diversification, "(...) or the idea of alternative choices (was) an illusion."<sup>32</sup> While in theory, non-preferential trade could provide an opportunity for growth and dynamism to reorient their economies, ACPs lacked the resources to do so given their colonial dependency created by EU trade preferences. Had the EU been truly concerned with financial growth and stability of preferential trade dependent LDCs, perhaps it would have been more prepared to face the fallout of the 1997 WTO ruling. The EU might have implemented long term resolutions to diversify the trade commodities of ACP states, or created alternative mediums for ACP states to competitively enter the global, non-preferential banana market. The EU, however, allocated solely \$300 million to aid ACP states recovering from the trade debacle resolution.<sup>33</sup> The financial aid was intended to be spread across 12 states over the course of 10 years and was viewed by affected ACP states as a grotesquely insufficient attempt by the EU to maintain their global credibility.

Secondly, the US faced major threats to national security as the economic well-being and stable markets of the Caribbean islands deteriorated with the collapse of the preferential banana trade system. As banana producing ACP states faced the collapse of the preferential trade market, Caribbean states grew increasingly vulnerable to increased rates of violence and drug trafficking. Caribbean markets turned to the Venezuelan and Colombian marijuana/narcotics trade as a source of immediate income. Marijuana and cocaine seizures drastically increased across all banana producing states from 1994 to 2001.<sup>34</sup> The US had proven its willingness to risk national security for the sake of nationalistic Chiquita support. Ironically, the hubris of US protectionism proved futile as Chiquita went on to sue the EU, yet later fell into corporate disarray. As Chiquita was forced to acknowledge its strategic shortcomings having failed to return to profitability following the 1997 WTO resolution, the corporation fell into bankruptcy, was bought, and ceased to exist in the early 2000s.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, the WTO received mass criticism of its credibility as a result of the extensive failure to clearly facilitate the EU-US foreign trade debacle. Thus the WTO

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3.

<sup>32</sup> "Regional Protection of Human Rights," *Human Rights Law in Africa* 3 (1998): 109-229.

<sup>33</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Bernal, Richard L. *Corporate versus National Interest in US Trade Policy: Chiquita and Caribbean Bananas*. Springer Nature, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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faced the necessity to strengthen its dispute settlement procedures given the tumultuous and redundantly inconclusive results of the 1997 resolution. The WTO had appeared imprecise in its ruling and both the EU and the US threatened the intergovernmental organizations' capability to resolve trade disputes in a timely manner.<sup>36</sup> The legitimacy of the WTO was equally challenged under attempts by the EU and US to undermine the organization's rulings. The blatant neglect of both parties to adhere to WTO standards was an incentive for other states to challenge the intergovernmental authority of the WTO in consequent trade disputes.<sup>37</sup> In attempting to resolve the banana trade wars, the WTO's lackluster resolution delivery and lack of enforcement resulted in the brutally prolonged conclusion of the EU-US banana trade war.

In order to critically evaluate the circumstances of the 1997 WTO banana trade resolution, one must recognize that the WTO's decision was catastrophically plagued by the conflicting motivations of the participating bodies. On one hand, the EU largely capitalized on the banana dependent economies of its former colonies to profit EU distributors greatly. On the other hand, the US haphazardly preserved its corporate interest. While satisfying the pressing need to ensure an increased market presence over the EU, the US neglected the economic peril and national security threats throughout trade preferential ACP states in the Caribbean. As the motivations of both the EU and the US are shrouded by prospects of national gain, it's inherent that researchers recognize the duality of these situations and how national interests derailed the possibility of compromise on both EU and US fronts. Just as motivating factors in the 1997 WTO resolution remain foggy, so does the economic future of banana dependent ACP states and how, or if, they will achieve fiscal stability in the global open market.

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<sup>36</sup> Piggott, J. (1999). Anatomy of a trade dispute. *Teaching Business & Economics*, 3(3), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

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Section 3:

# Political Theory

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**Featuring:**

“Understanding the Political Parasocial Encounter”

Written by Andrew Vinay Pavamani and Shilpa Mariam Joseph  
St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, History Majors, Class of 2022



Political Theory

## Understanding the Political Parasocial Encounter

Andrew Vinay Pavamani  
Shilpa Mariam Joseph

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### Introduction

Anthropologist John L. Caughey uses the term “imaginary relationship” to describe the relationship between media figures and their audiences.<sup>1</sup> In reference to American society, he argued that relationships with and knowledge of media figures remain essential parts of establishing in-group identity. Discussions of television shows, sporting franchises, celebrities, and national political figures create a basis for socialization, even among strangers. Here, media figures comprise a critical part of social life because of both the public’s knowledge of their personalities as well as the public’s both positive and negative feelings toward those personalities.<sup>2</sup> Caughey finds that despite never having interacted with them face-to-face, individuals responded to and spoke of these media personalities as though they were members of their primary social group.<sup>3</sup> For example, sports fans are not only interested in an athlete’s performance, but may often be deeply invested in their personal lives.

To explain such relationships, Donald Horton and Richard Wohl coined the term “parasocial interaction”: the psychological experience of intimacy that develops over mediated encounters with performers over mass media.<sup>4</sup> This concept has been expanded to include interactions with a variety of media figures, including politicians. William Schneider referred to the period from the 1990s onwards as the “populist era,” since political outcomes are determined by direct, personal relationships between political leaders and voters.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as digital media occupies greater and greater space in our social and political interactions, it becomes vital to consider the ways in which social media platforms transform not only personal relationships, but also political ones.

This paper seeks to understand the ways in which parasocial interactions have evolved with the advent of social media, particularly in the case of political actors. First, we trace the development of parasocial theory, with a focus on its application within studying voter behavior. We then examine how political figures use social media to craft distinct personae that facilitate the development of intimate and parasocial connections. Finally, we measure variances in audience response to different kinds of social media content and gauge their impact on the overall impression of a political actor.

### Literature Review

In 1956, Donald Horton and Richard Wohl put forth the concept of “parasocial interaction” to explain relationships that arose out of new mass media, specifically television. These new forms of media create effective illusions of intimacy, prompting the audience to respond to a public figure how they would their peers.<sup>6</sup> Following this, a study of British television audiences found that the responses of the audience to soap opera characters were similar to the phenomena described by Horton and Wohl.<sup>7</sup> Karl E. Rosengren and Sven Windahl, in their study of mass media as an alternative to traditional relationships, argued that parasocial interaction took place because of “deficiencies” in social life, where mass media was used to compensate for loneliness. They also made an

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1984), 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,” *Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215.

<sup>5</sup> William Schneider, “The New Populism,” *Political Psychology* 15, no. 4 (December 1994): 779–780.

<sup>6</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 216.

<sup>7</sup> Denis McQuail, Jay G. Blumler and J. R. Brown, “The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective,” in *Sociology of Mass Communications: Selected Readings*, ed. Denis McQuail (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 157.

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important distinction between the concepts of “parasocial interaction” and “identification,” which refers to the act of imagining oneself in the place of another person.<sup>8</sup> Jan-Erik Nordlund expanded this difference by introducing a third category—“capture”—where the viewer both interacts and identifies with the figure, integrating it into the larger concept of “media interactions.”<sup>9</sup> Research on parasocial interaction was expanded to study the possibility of such interactions with soap opera characters and comedians.<sup>10</sup>

Several researchers have also studied parasocial interaction in terms of its underlying psychological processes. R. B. Rubin and Michael McHugh, through their examination of parasocial relationships with television performers, found that “social attraction”—the idea that a media figure could be a friend—was more important in the development of a parasocial relationship than physical attraction.<sup>11</sup> In 1991, a landmark study by Joseph Conway and Alan M. Rubin found that parasocial interaction was such a significant motive in television viewing that it may be more important than the content of the program itself.<sup>12</sup> John Turner argued that homophily, particularly with regard to similarities in attitude, appearance and background, is an important factor in the formation of a parasocial relationship.<sup>13</sup> From these studies, it can be suggested that there are several similarities between parasocial and social interactions. Parasocial theory is now an interdisciplinary field of study that seeks to explain the one-sided relationships that develop between audiences and distant media figures. Recent scholarship has focused on the effects of social media on parasocial interaction, and their larger implications on social relations, politics and culture.<sup>14</sup> Horton and Wohl described parasocial relationships as one-sided, non-dialectical, controlled by the performer, and unable to reach a stage of mutual development.<sup>15</sup> This definition needs to be re-examined in the context of social media. David Giles argues that the interactivity of social media platforms facilitates a “quasi-parasocial” relationship that is not as one-sided as the earlier conception.<sup>16</sup>

Jonathan Cohen noted that the concept of the parasocial relationship best describes media figures who directly address the audience, such as television hosts, news readers and presenters.<sup>17</sup> However, recent research suggests that parasocial relationships can develop over any medium, most notably including social media platforms.<sup>18</sup> Thus, political scientists must examine how social media platforms shape interactions between political figures and their audiences, as well as offer new channels of political participation.

### ***Refining Theoretical Concepts in the Context of Political Parasocial Interaction***

While early scholarship used the terms “parasocial interaction” and “parasocial relationship” interchangeably, recent work has attempted to distinguish these concepts and define them more clearly.<sup>19</sup> Parasocial interaction has been differentiated from

<sup>8</sup> Karl E. Rosengren and Swen Windahl, “Mass Media Consumption as a Functional Alternative,” in *Sociology of Mass Communications: Selected Readings*, ed. Denis McQuail (Harmondsworth Penguin, 1972), 119–134.

<sup>9</sup> Jan-Erik Nordlund, “Media Interaction,” *Communication Research*, 5 no.2 (April 1978): 152.

<sup>10</sup> Philip J. Auter, “Psychometric: TV that talks back: An experimental validation of a parasocial interaction scale,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 36, no. 2, (1992): (173–181)

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca B. Rubin and Michael P. McHugh, “Development of parasocial interaction relationships,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 31, no. 3, (April 1987): 283.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Conway and Alan M. Rubin, “Psychological Predictors of Television Viewing Motivation,” *Communication Research* 18, no. 4, (August 1991): 449.

<sup>13</sup> John Turner, “Interpersonal and psychological predictors of parasocial interaction with different television performers,” *Communication Quarterly* 41, no. 4, (1993): 445.

<sup>14</sup> Gayle S. Stever, “Parasocial Theory: Concepts and Measures”, *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 215–217.

<sup>16</sup> David Giles, “Parasocial Interaction: A Review of the Literature and a Model for Future Research,” *Media Psychology* 4, no. 3 (2002): 299.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Cohen, “Favorite characters of teenage viewers of Israeli serials,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 43, no. 3 (1999): 331.

<sup>18</sup> Holger Schramm and Wirth Werner, “Testing a universal tool for measuring parasocial interactions across different situations and media: Findings from three studies,” *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications* 22, no. 1 (2010): 27.

<sup>19</sup> Giles, “Parasocial,” 284

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parasocial relationships as the audience's one-sided viewing experience of media, while a parasocial relationship is an on-going process having both affective and cognitive components that extend beyond the moment of media consumption.<sup>20</sup> This difference requires clarification, since not all parasocial interaction will result in the development of a parasocial relationship. A common feature between the two are their affective, cognitive, and behavioral components, although these may vary in intensity.<sup>21</sup> Giles identifies three main characteristics that determine whether an instance of parasocial interaction can evolve beyond the initial encounter: authenticity, representation, and context.<sup>22</sup>

### **I. Authenticity**

Parasocial relationships are based on behaviors and actions that are observable through surface level interaction; it is important for media figures to present a "credible persona."<sup>23</sup> Horton and Wohl argue that the reason that audience members are often interested in the personal lives of performers is that these details (their favorite food, their family, and their homes) help to intensify intimacy and overcome the constraints of the parasocial relationship. Since the relationship is an illusion, constant effort by both audiences and media figures is required to sustain it.<sup>24</sup> The relationship is also maintained through interaction between the audience and media figures as facilitated by social media—when those figures reply to comments, like photos, or send messages the same way a friend would.

Horton and Wohl point out that parasocial relationships differ from traditional relationships in that the performer is static and unchanging and his virtues are standardized according to a certain "formula" of performance. This formulaic performance is intensified through instant feedback and responses decided on the basis of social media analytics. These allow for constant refinement of performance, tailoring them in a manner that will elicit a positive or numerically higher response from the target audience as well as attract new audiences.<sup>25</sup>

On social media, this feeling of authenticity may be deepened as it is perceived as an unmediated and unfiltered platform.<sup>26</sup> Social media could be seen as more democratic in the way that more traditional media are not. While not everyone gets to be on TV, anyone can make an account on social media and use exactly the same features that these personalities do (creating a new post, holding live-streams or commenting on other celebrities' posts), leading to greater feelings of identification and relatability between the performers and the audience that would then translate to an increased perception of authenticity.

### **II. Representations across different media outlets**

The parasocial relationship does not develop in a vacuum but is further reinforced by more "traditional media" (newspapers and televisions), as well as through more overtly mediated interactions such as those through public relations firms and executives.<sup>27</sup>

The familiarity cultivated on social media may also carry over to these traditional platforms, and therefore, the performer may seem more authentic as opposed to figures with whom the audience is unfamiliar. The appearance of political figures on various social media doing tasks out of the realm of politics could make them more relatable to the audience who has already seen them in political debates and discussions. The politician's power may also be further reaffirmed by the real-world impact of their

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<sup>20</sup> Hartmann and Goldhoorn, "Horton," 1105.

<sup>21</sup> Giles, "Parasocial," 292.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Yun Wang, Qi Deng, Michel Rod and Shaobo Ji, "A thematic exploration of social media analytics in marketing research and an agenda for future inquiry," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 26, no. 6. (April 2020): 472.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn and Nisbett, "Parasocial," 28–29.

<sup>27</sup> Giles, "Parasocial," 292.

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performances in the media. One example of this is the impact of Tesla accepting Dogecoin (a cryptocurrency) for the sale of its merchandise. Following a tweet from Elon Musk announcing the news, the prices of Dogecoin soared.<sup>28</sup>

### III. *User Contexts*

The defining characteristic of a parasocial relationship is that the persona offers a “continuing relationship.”<sup>29</sup> On social media, this relationship exists, but is governed by different motives:

- a) algorithms of these websites that reward those who post more.<sup>30</sup>
- b) the increasing competitiveness of the attention economy requires even those who hold power outside of the world of media to constantly reaffirm their existence as relevant within the world of media, reminding users, “I exist and what I have to say is important!”

The association between audience and personality also begins to develop its own history and lexicon, partly through the continued performance of the media figure, but also through the sense of community formed among the members of the audience themselves.<sup>31</sup> On social media, this can manifest as fan pages and fan forums that further intensify the relationship between the figure and the audience by linking people with similar interests so that the figure acts as a mutual friend. Thus, parasocial interaction is transformed from a solitary activity to a community one.

Horton and Wohl argue that the audience does not play a passive role. The performance ends only when the performer’s argument has been analyzed by the audience and either accepted or rejected. This is not an individual process but rather one that occurs through discussions with other spectators. It is thus important for the performer to post content catered to their current demographic to create “intimacy,” while at the same time keeping it broad enough to attract outside viewers.<sup>32</sup> In the case of political figures, this is mainly by avoiding the alienation of their primary political base while attempting to attract new members.

Identification has also been found to be an essential part of the parasocial experience, acting as a necessary catalyst in the development of a parasocial relationship.<sup>33</sup> There are two types of identification that can be seen within the parasocial relationship: personal identification, where the audience member sees themselves as sharing similar qualities with the figure, and wishful identification, where the audience member aspires to be like the figure.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore possible for an audience member to experience parasocial interaction, a parasocial relationship, and identification with the same media figure.<sup>35</sup>

Horton and Wohl make note of the typical relationship shared between the audience and the performer, where the audience is “expected to benefit by his wisdom, reflect on his advice, sympathize with him in his difficulties, forgive his mistakes, buy the products that he recommends, and keep his sponsor informed of the esteem in which he is held.”<sup>36</sup> In the era of social media, this phenomenon has further entrenched itself. A dedicated audience member will only respond to a performer in the way that is expected of them. If they do not, they may either experience a break-up of the parasocial

<sup>28</sup> “Tesla Starts Accepting Once-Joke Cryptocurrency Dogecoin” 2022

<sup>29</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass Communication,” 216.

<sup>30</sup> Paolo Bellavista, Luca Foschini and Nicola Ghiselli, “Analysis of Growth Strategies in Social Media: The Instagram Use Case,” (paper presented at IEEE 24th International Workshop on Computer Aided Modeling and Design of Communication Links and Networks, Cyprus, September 2019), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 216.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Giles, “Parasocial,” 288.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, “Favorite,” 329.

<sup>36</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 219.

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relationship, or find themselves excluded from communities that have coalesced around a particular media figure.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Role of Parasocial Interaction in the Formation of Political Relationships***

Initially, the theory of a parasocial relationship was only confined to those Horton and Wohl considered “media performers,” for whom they coined the term “personae”—talk show hosts, interviewers, quiz masters—figures who held relevance only in the realm of media, in contrast to typical celebrities such as actors or musicians who existed outside the realm of their work. Newer media personalities who existed in the then–novel world of “show business” were only a function of the media in which they appeared.<sup>38</sup> Horton and Wohl note:

“They may move out into positions of leadership in the world at large as they become famous and influential... Conversely, figures from the political world, to choose another example, may become media ‘personalities’ when they appear regularly.”<sup>39</sup>

It is necessary for politicians and other political figures to have at least one, if not multiple, social media accounts spread across a variety of platforms. Each of these accounts cater to a certain demographic of users and posts vary from platform to platform to best appeal to the target audience.<sup>40</sup>

As Giles’s conception of “quasi–parasocial” interaction suggests, social media websites such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook all have various feedback mechanisms—comments, likes, question and answer functions where users can directly converse with their followers, along with the ability to live stream and invite followers ‘on stage.’ These are just a few examples of the many ways social media platforms enable audiences to perceive their relationship with media personalities as one between peers or equals, where their opinions and feedback alter behavior as well as decisions made by these figures.<sup>41</sup>

Candidate–voter interactions prove a potentially decisive factor in a successful political campaign.<sup>42</sup> Because social media’s increased interactivity and feelings of intimacy between users and political figures provides a prime platform for candidate–voter interactions, personal characteristics of political figures become vital factors in deciding voter preferences.<sup>43</sup> Researchers Shira Gabriel, Elaine Paravati, Melanie C. Green, and Jason Flomsbee have argued that parasocial connection constituted a determining factor in Donald Trump’s election.<sup>44</sup> For example, his previous appearances as a television personality on shows such as *The Apprentice* and *Celebrity Apprentice*, where he judged contestants on the basis of various business–related challenges, and assert that since these shows predate his entry into politics, they allowed for the development of a positive parasocial connection that cut across party lines.<sup>45,46</sup> Moreover, as Kevin Drum notes, the content of these shows portrayed Trump in a specific way:

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Cohen, “Parasocial Break-Up from Favorite Television Characters: The Role of Attachment Styles and Relationship Intensity,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 21, no. 2 (April 2004): 196.

<sup>38</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 216.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Haman and Milan Školník, “Politicians on Social Media. The Online Database of Members of National Parliaments on Twitter,” *Profesional De La Información* 30, no. 2 (March 2021): 1–14.

<sup>41</sup> Nicole Gallucci, “Beto O’Rourke and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Have Mastered Instagram Stories,” Mashable (helios.web, June 11, 2021), <https://mashable.com/article/politics-instagram-stories-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-beto-orourke#3Tpf19gdSZqZ>.

<sup>42</sup> Schneider, “Populism,” 780.

<sup>43</sup> Gian Vittorio Caprara and Philip G. Zimbardo, “Personalizing Politics: A Congruency Model of Political Preference,” *American Psychologist* 59, no. 7 (October 2004): 581.

<sup>44</sup> Shira Gabriel, Elaine Paravati, Melanie C. Green and Jason Flomsbee, “From Apprentice to President: The Role of Parasocial Connection in the Election of Donald Trump,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9, no. 3 (March 2018): 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

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"He is running things. He sets the tasks. The competitors all call him "Mr. Trump" and treat him obsequiously. He gives orders and famous people accept them without quibble. At the end of the show, he asks tough questions and demands accountability. He is smooth and unruffled while the team members are tense and tongue-tied. Finally, having given everything the five minutes of due diligence it needs, he takes charge and fires someone. And on the season finale, he picks a big winner and, in the process, raises lots of money for charity. Do you see how precisely this squares with so many people's view of the presidency?"<sup>47</sup>

Similar parallels can be drawn with the political careers of wrestler Jesse Ventura and movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger.<sup>48</sup> Though they were not depicted in the media in such overtly "presidential roles," the traits of the characters they portrayed—invincibility, power, strength, and calmness in the face of danger—continue to be associated with their political identities.

It is important to note that parasocial relationships also vary across different political systems. Hakim and Liu have argued that there is a higher incidence and intensity of parasocial attachments among politicians in a presidential system as compared to those in a parliamentary system. Similar differences can also be noted across mature and emerging democracies, where less established democracies were found to have political parasocial relationships of a higher intensity.<sup>49</sup>

Social media platforms, with the agency they afford to users in crafting their own images, give political figures opportunities to create parasocial connections. There may be significant differences with television—the difficulty in creating a "storyline," and more intense competition for capturing the attention of an audience—that dilute the intensity of the parasocial relationship. But ultimately, social media allows political figures to be in control of their own image, building parasocial relationships anyway they desire. They facilitate interaction with their audience in a way that traditional media does not.

Horton and Wohl outline various strategies used by media personae to create an illusion of intimacy: imitating the conversational style of an informal face to face gathering and while trying to "keep it real" by sharing everything from mundane routines of their day to day lives to personal milestones.<sup>50</sup> Another strategy to blur the lines of the performance is to interact with other public figures on these platforms. Today, media personae tag each other, comment on each other's posts, and tweet to each other in a way that the audience feels privy to the relationship between them. A third strategy employed by public figures is to blend in with the audience itself. Previously, TV show hosts would leave the stage and interact directly with the audience. On social media, political actors engage with their audience through comment replies, social media takeovers and inviting them on live streams. The aim is to reduce the distance between the audience and the media figure. Horton and Wohl highlight how the technical devices of the media themselves are used to create this illusion of intimacy.<sup>51</sup> On social media, this illusion exists by its very nature—there is always a possibility that the media personality may see and like your comment, photo, or reply, even if this is a rare occurrence. Without this illusion of intimacy, the parasocial relationship would not exist. Its one-sided nature precludes any real development and necessitates the continued use of these illusions in order to maintain this relationship.

It is the behavioral component of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships that make them so significant to political relations. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo, seeks to explain differences in the processing of stimuli and their relationship with attitude change. They define elaboration, an essential part of attitude change, as the number of

<sup>47</sup> Kevin Drum, "If You Don't Get Donald Trump's Appeal, You Really Need to Catch up on Your 'Celebrity Apprentice' Viewing," *Mother Jones*, <https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2015/08/if-you-dont-get-donald-trumps-appeal-you-really-need-catch-your-celebrity-apprent/>.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriel et al., "Apprentice," 7.

<sup>49</sup> Hakim and Liu, "Development," 6.

<sup>50</sup> Horton and Wohl, "Mass," 218.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

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thoughts generated by an individual in relation to a particular message.<sup>52</sup> When an individual is presented with any information, they process it in one of two ways—centrally, which involves careful consideration of the merits of an argument, and peripherally, which is the acceptance of an argument without any scrutiny.<sup>53</sup> Petty and Cacioppo referred to these as the “routes to persuasion” and argued that centrally processed information is more likely to result in enduring attitude change.<sup>54</sup> Parasocial relationships, similar to such centrally processed information, are predicated on greater intimacy and involvement, leading to greater elaboration, and therefore, a greater likelihood of successful attitude change.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the importance of parasocial relationships to political behavior has been firmly established. However, the question of how best political actors can cultivate and encourage such relationships remains. This study seeks to examine whether, barring personality factors, particular kinds and styles of content have an effect on the intensity of parasocial connections established with political figures.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Method**

Participants for the online survey were found through random selection. They were first asked to provide details of their social media usage and news consumption. They were then presented with 8 images and captions from the Instagram feed of “Politician A,” whom they were told is a fictitious politician whose political stances aligned with their own. Participants were expected to answer questions as though they were actually viewing A’s Instagram profile. Each image was followed by a set of statements, and participants had to rate each statement on a 5–point Likert scale depending on how much they agreed (5) or disagreed (1) with it.

Since our study aims to define the specific kind of content on social media that elicits a parasocial interaction, we chose to construct a profile of a politician to avoid the bias of participants’ political beliefs. Politician A was represented by a male in his early 20s. The captions and images were based on actual profiles of politicians who vary in their age, gender, popularity level, political party and nationality. The images were divided into two categories—one set consisted of more “traditional” political content with little to no personal information and opinions (hereafter referred to as “traditional content”), the other set was more personal and included information about Politician A’s day–to–day life and personal relations (hereafter referred to as “personal content”).

### **Sample**

We asked participants to provide the following descriptive information:

1. Age
2. Social media usage
3. Platforms of news consumption

We collected a total of 250 responses. Participants ranged from 18 to 78 years of age with the average of the sample being 38. The majority of participants were between the ages of 20 to 30 (44 percent; n=110). 98.4 percent (n=246) of the respondents were found to be using WhatsApp, 39.6 percent (n=99) use Facebook, 51.2 percent (n=128) use Instagram, and 14.4 percent (n=36) use Twitter. Participants were also asked to report their news consumption habits. 60.8 percent (n=152) consumed news through social media platforms, 48.8 percent (n=122) through newspapers and magazines (online and physical editions), 30.4 percent (n=76) through television news channels, and 10.8 percent (n=27) through YouTube videos.

<sup>52</sup> Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986), 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Blair T. Johnson and Alice H. Eagley, “Involvement and Persuasion: Types, Traditions and the Evidence,” *Psychological Bulletin* 107, no. 3 (May 1990): 375.

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**Questionnaire**

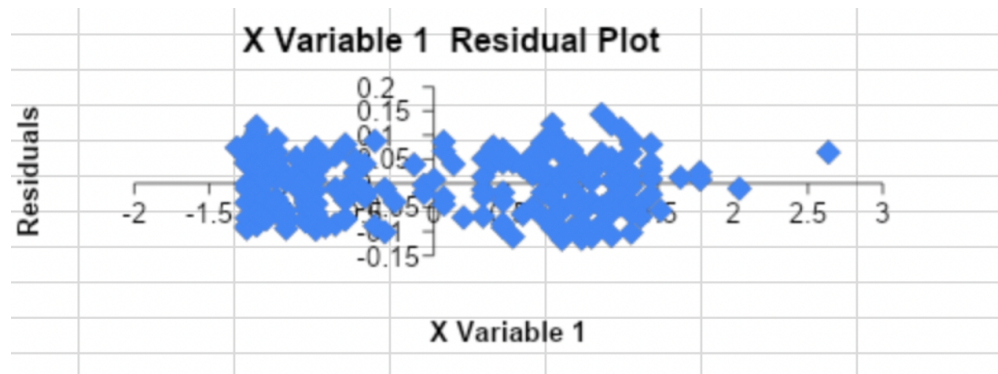
Respondents were required to answer a 47–point questionnaire consisting of 6 questions after each image and a final question that dealt with their overall opinion of A. Questions assessed respondents' opinions of and feelings toward A after each image on the basis of multiple dimensions of parasocial interaction, including—perceptions of intimacy, social attraction, relatability, trustworthiness and desire for sustained interaction.

**Results and Discussion**

The following observations were made using the Python Library Pandas and Scikit learn. The results of the study were analyzed and the following inferences were drawn from them:

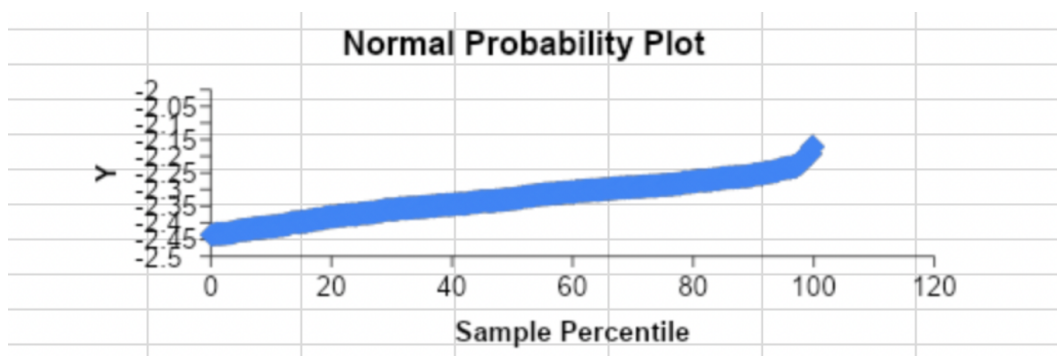
**RQ 1: How does age relate to a respondent's opinion of Politician A?**

- 1.1) Upon using Scikit Learn, the following correlation between the average of all responses of each respondent and their ages was observed: using regression, the  $R^2$  score was found to be 0.388. The variables also have a p–value of 0.0017 indicating that the null hypothesis (that there is no relationship between the variables) is incorrect.



**FIGURE 1. Residuals of the variable are randomly scattered around the residual = 0, indicating that this linear model is accurate**

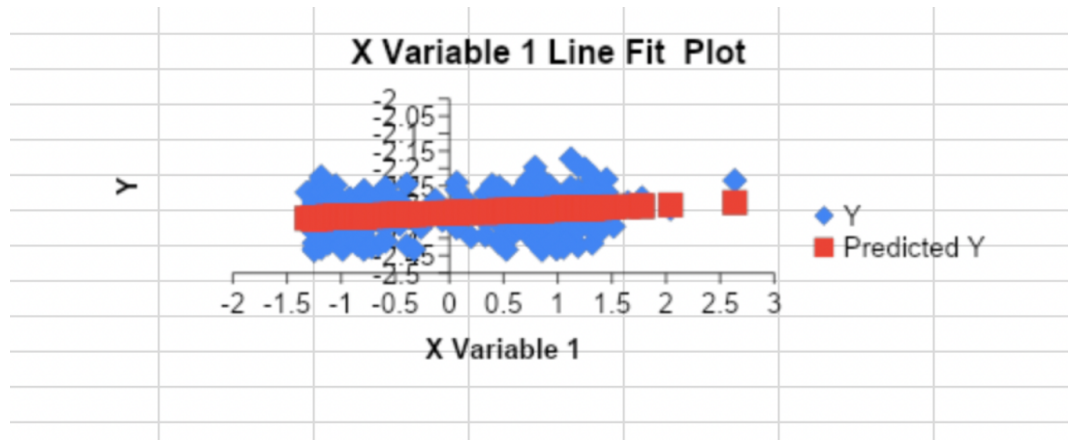
It is interesting to note that as age increases, so does the average score given to Politician A in nearly every criterion, suggesting that individuals over the age of 41 are more likely to have positive parasocial interactions with political figures and form long lasting parasocial relationships.



**FIGURE 2. The line plot above shows a constant increase in the average score paired with an increase in average age**



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**FIGURE 3. A comparison between the predicted and actual fit of the variables**

- 1.2) The following is a table of the average scores for each age group across both traditional and personal content. From table 1, we can observe that personal content scores a higher average in every age range. Every succeeding age group outscores each other, apart from those in the 51–60 range. Yet again, this suggests that individuals over the age of 41 are more likely to experience positive parasocial interaction with political figures than those younger than them.

Age	Average Score of Traditional Content	Average Score of Personal Content	Overall Average Score
20–30	2.2	2.6	2.4
31–40	2.3	2.6	2.5
41–50	2.6	2.9	2.8
51–60	2.5	2.9	2.7
61–70	2.9	3.3	3.1
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>

**TABLE 1. Average scores across all age groups**

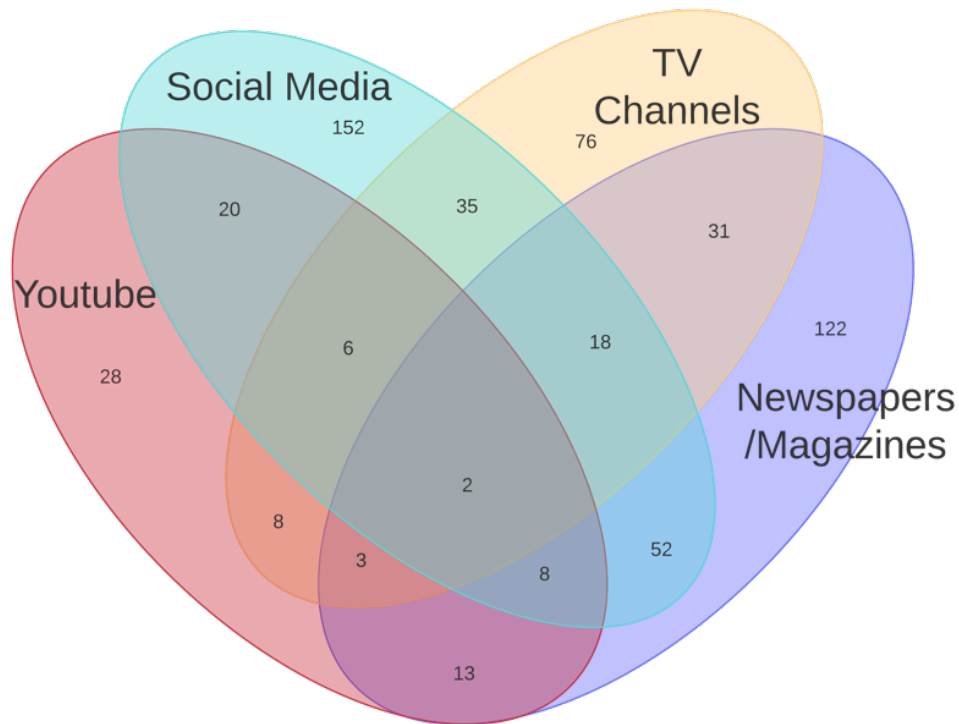
***RQ 2: How do sources of news consumption affect a respondent's opinion of Politician A?***

A majority of the 250 respondents obtained their news from multiple sources, creating 15 different combinations (visible in Graph 4). Out of those combinations, the most used source was social media (152 users), followed by newspapers and magazines (122), television news programs (78) and YouTube (28). These categories are not independent of each other, and most users consume news through more than one source. These variables have a low correlation as they return a p-value of 0.983, thus, news sources did not affect the average scores of respondents. However, respondents who consume news through sources that have the most interaction—YouTube and television news channels—where news presenters address the audience directly, still score the highest.

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Sources of news	Number of Users	Average Age of Users	Percentage of Users	Average Score
Social media	152	33.9	60.8%	2.6
Newspapers, magazines	122	41.2	48.8%	2.6
Television news programs	76	43.9	30.4%	2.8
YouTube	28	33	10.8%	3

**TABLE 2. Respondents' news consumption habits**



**FIGURE 4. Cross-sections between the sources of news used by participants. The figures here represent the number of people in these sections.**

***RQ 3: How does social media usage affect a respondent's view of Politician A?***

A majority of the 250 respondents used 15 unique combinations of different social media apps (visible in Graph 5). Out of those combinations, the most used source was WhatsApp (246 users), followed by Facebook (99), Instagram (128) and Twitter (36). When it comes to social media usage, there is little disparity among average scores, which range from 2.6–2.8. The effect of age also seems to be neutralized. However, Twitter, with the second highest average age of users, also has the highest average score. These variables have a p-value of 0.107, thus, social media use does not affect the average scores of respondents.

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Social Media Platform	Number of Users	Average Age of Users	Percentage of Users	Average Score
WhatsApp	246	38.2	98.4%	2.6
Facebook	99	43.3	39.6%	2.6
Instagram	128	31.1	51.2%	2.6
Twitter	36	39.2	14.4%	2.8
Miscellaneous (Snapchat, Reddit, TikTok, LinkedIn)	9	26.7	3.6%	2.7

TABLE 3. Respondents' social media usage habits

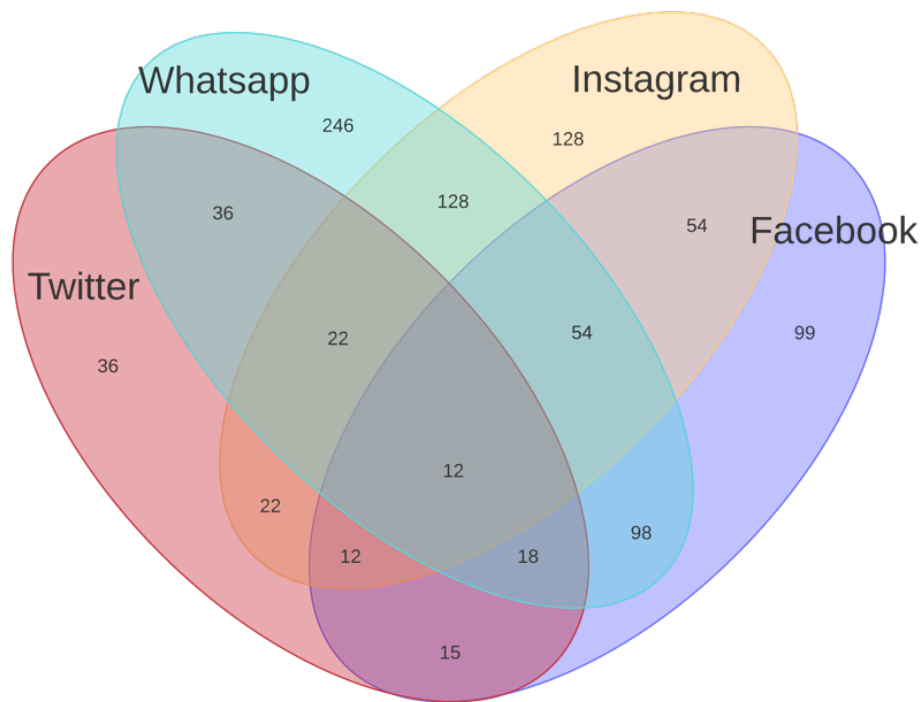


FIGURE 5. The Venn diagram represents the cross-sections between the social media platforms used by participants. The figures here represent the number of people in these sections.

**RQ 4: Do all respondents with a positive view of Politician A want to engage in a parasocial relationship?**

Scores have been divided into the following categories: greater than or equal to 4, indicating a positive response; less than 4 and greater than or equal to 3, indicating a neutral response; and less than 3, indicating a negative response. We calculated the average responses to questions 1–4 (which measure various aspects of parasocial interaction) for each image, and the average of all their responses to questions 5 and 6 (which measure the potential for the development of a parasocial relationship). Upon examining the data, it is apparent that there is a significant difference in the number of respondents who scored above 3 in questions 1–4 and in the overall opinion of Politician

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A, and those who indicated an interest in developing a parasocial relationship. The largest drop off is in the youngest age group, suggesting that they are less likely to form parasocial relationships with political figures, require greater interaction with a figure, or require different kinds of content to form a parasocial connection.

Question 1–4		
Scores	Average Age	Number of people
≥ 4	50.8	13
≥ 3	40.05	84
< 3	35.4	153

TABLE 4. Average scores and ages of respondents for Question 1–4

Question 5, 6		
Scores	Average Age	Number of people
≥ 4	50.5	11
≥ 3	40.3	69
< 3	36.2	170

TABLE 5. Average scores and ages of respondents for Question 5 and 6

Overall Opinion		
Scores	Average Age	Number of people
≥ 4	46.04	25
≥ 3	37.3	203
< 3	35.04	22

TABLE 6. Average scores and ages of respondents for Question 7

***RQ 5: Does the depiction of relationships enhance feelings of intimacy on social media?***

Horton and Wohl note that the performer constantly attempts to blur the line between the studio and the audience; to do so, the presenter and his fellow cast members behave in an intimate manner. This not only allows the audience member to understand what the performer and their “friends” are like, but also reaches a point where the audience member begins considering themselves as a “part of this fellowship, by extension.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Horton and Wohl, “Mass,” 217.

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To test this theory, Politician A was pictured alone in images 1, 2, and 7 (traditional content), and images 3, 4, and 8 (personal content). In images 5 (traditional) and 6 (personal), Politician A was depicted with others—a businessman and his pet dog respectively. The average score of traditional photos where A was alone was 2.4, as compared to image 5 which was 2.5. The average score of personal photos with A alone was found to be 2.7, compared to with image 6 which was 3.1. The image that obtained the highest average score across all metrics (with an average interaction of 3.1 and a long-term interaction of 2.8) was A and their dog, suggesting that relatable companions, such as pets, heavily sway the opinion of the audience. However, the traditional image with a character (image 5) does not have the highest score among other traditional images. Thus, the strategy of depicting personal interactions and relationships is only effective in the case of personal content.

Image	Type	Average Interaction Score	Long-Term Interaction Score
1	Traditional	2.1	1.8
2	Traditional	2.5	2.2
3	Personal	2.5	2.2
4	Personal	2.7	2.5
5	Traditional	2.4	2.2
6	Personal	3.1	2.8
7	Traditional	2.5	2.3
8	Personal	2.8	2.5

**TABLE 7. Classification of the different images and their long-term and average interaction scores**

### Limitations

Our survey faced the following limitations:

- 1) The use of a fictitious political figure does not let us account for variables like a respondent's political preference, which would surely influence the way a respondent interacts with a political figure online.
- 2) The opportunity to cultivate a "continuous relationship" is necessary to develop a parasocial relationship.<sup>57</sup> Given that Politician A is a fictitious figure, respondents could not develop a parasocial relationship through long-term exposure. Credibility is also an important factor in the formation of a parasocial relationship.<sup>58</sup> Irrespective of social media content, the strength of a parasocial relationship is closely linked to the perceived credibility of the political figure. Therefore, a participant's response can be taken not as direct measurements of a parasocial relationship but as the potential to develop one.
- 3) As the questionnaire was 47-items long, participants may have been affected by respondent fatigue, which could potentially impact the accuracy of their responses.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>58</sup> Giles, "Parasocial," 291.

**Conclusion**

Writing this paper amid the COVID–19 pandemic has enhanced our observations of parasocial relationships in action. Public trust in the government is faltering to all–time lows, and politicians find themselves relying on public figures to promote vaccinations.<sup>59</sup> In the absence of institutions they can trust, citizens may turn towards individuals, and it is in this context that the study of parasocial relations acquires an even greater significance. As social media becomes further entrenched in our lives and in our politics, understanding how parasocial relationships are both utilized and exploited is vital to understanding the course of democracy in the 21st century.

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<sup>59</sup> “Public Trust in Government: 1958–2021”, *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/>; and, “Biden Calls on Celebrity Partners, Community Leaders to Boost COVID Vaccinations”, *PBS Newshour*, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/biden-calls-on-celebrity-partners-community-leaders-to-boost-covid-vaccinations>.

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Section 4:

# Comparative Politics

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## **Featuring:**

“War Sometimes Makes the State: Bellicist Dynamics in Chile and Colombia”

Written by

Faith Fisher

Cornell University, Government and Spanish Major, Class of 2022

“López Obrador’s Dilemma:

Using Game Theory Tools to Understand the Release of Ovidio Guzmán”

Written by

José Luis Sabau Fernández

Stanford University, Political Science Major, Class of 2022

## War Sometimes Makes the State: Bellicist Dynamics in Chile and Colombia

Faith Fisher

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Human communities, large and small, have been forced to confront violence and overcome both internal and external threats in order to survive. Leading theorists of state making attempt to explain the emergence of strong states as a consequence of warmaking or violence. Epitomized by the emergence of sovereign states in Western Europe, this bellicist paradigm has become a benchmark for explanatory and comparative studies of state making. Despite the ubiquity of the Western European blueprint, it is not universal across place and time. Using the Western European experience as a benchmark against Latin American state formation, it is clear that violence does not always stimulate state making. The divergent state making outcomes in Chile and Colombia demonstrate how warfare catalyzes state making in Latin America only under specific contextual circumstances, which are broadly captured by three dimensions: domestic extraction, opportune timing, and elite/internal unity. While Chile's 19th century war making experience stimulated state making, Colombia's did not. Chile's experience aligns with the bellicist paradigm because the country managed to extract taxes from its domestic populace, had the preexisting institutional capacity to successfully participate in war, and effectively funneled the unity of elites into state making activities. Colombia's experience, on the other hand, diverges from the bellicist paradigm because the country relied substantially on external revenue sources to fund its warmaking activities, lacked the institutional and ideological foundations to nurture war-generated state growth, and lacked a unified elite to support state making activities.

To make the argument that strong states in Latin America emerge from warfare (or violence more generally understood) according to specific contextual circumstances, I will first provide a definition of the modern state and common measures of state strength. I will then explain the mechanisms involved in the formation of the modern state, specifically developing the Western European state making benchmark. Next, I will draw upon the argument of Miguel Centeno, scholar and professor of sociology at Princeton University, to explain the necessary conditions for the war-centered mechanism to apply to Latin American state making. Finally, I will use 19th century Chile and Colombia in addition to the passage of the Democratic Security Taxes in 2002—what I argue to constitute a 21st century Colombian state making episode—as case studies to illustrate the conditions that must be fulfilled for the Western European benchmark to apply to war-driven institutional development in Latin America.

### ***The Modern State: Definitions and Measurements***

Max Weber's definition of the state has become a standard in the political science community. He defines the state as a "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."<sup>1</sup> Expanding upon this baseline definition, states are collections of institutions that foster a legal rational form of authority to regulate society, solve collective action problems, and allow state makers to claim and maintain the legitimate right to use force. Thus, broadly conceived, the modern state is based on two key requirements: (1) maintenance of a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence across a delimited piece of territory and (2) the enforcement of consistent laws that are perceived to be rational and have been internalized by the population.

State capacity is a measure of a given state's ability "to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm."<sup>2</sup> In recognizing that state capacity is a multidimensional concept scholars have developed variables to operationalize it. *Taxation* and the *provision of basic services* have emerged as two of the most common

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures: Science as a Vocation/Politics as a Vocation*. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2004. pp. xlix

<sup>2</sup> Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its origins, mechanisms, and results." *European Journal of Sociology*, 25, no. 2 (1984): pp. 189.

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measurements. Taxation is a useful measurement in that tax levels “represent and augment the strength of the state...to enforce centralized rule on a territory and its population.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, policy implementation requires tax resources.<sup>4</sup> As for provision of basic services, scholars such as Fredericksen and London, consider public access to a range of state-conferred goods and services to be one of the most important state responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a state with high capacity must be able to fulfill this paramount responsibility with consistency and efficiency. Corroborating the validity and utility of these measurement variables, a factor analysis of 15 measurement variables conducted by Cullen S. Hendrix points to *bureaucratic quality* (measured by efficacy in delivering governmental services) and *total taxes/GDP* as the best indicators of state strength.<sup>6</sup>

***The Western European Benchmark: The Integral Role of Violence***

Explanations for the formation of the Western European states primarily follow a bellicist framework, which argues that state mobilization against internal and external rivals results in state making. Tilly’s aphorism, “war made the state, and the state made war,” most succinctly captures this co-constitutive dynamic between warmaking and statemaking.<sup>7</sup> According to Tilly’s framework, states formed according to the interactions among four mutually reinforcing state objectives: warmaking, statemaking, extraction, and protection. Warmaking eliminated external rivals which threatened a ruler’s monopolization of violence over a territory. Statemaking quelled the competition of internal rivals. The provision of protection to individuals in the territory was crucial for rulers to ensure their political survival. Resource extraction was necessary to fund these state undertakings. These activities thrust states into an “extraction coercion cycle” whereby revenues extracted from the populace helped the state secure internal and external sovereignty. The salience of threats to elite interests and the protection from long-term benefits offered in exchange for extraction helped rulers supersede divisions and financially penetrate elite circles for resources. Mobilization for war deteriorated the parcelized feudal order in Western Europe because the very act of war necessitated an increasingly efficient, organized, and bureaucratized administration.<sup>8</sup> For example, extractive activities drove the development of institutional structures like “tax collection agencies, police forces, courts, account keepers.”<sup>9</sup> Each war had a “ratchet effect”, leaving behind “organizational residues” in the form of bureaucratic structures and “set(ing) higher floors beneath which peacetime revenues and expenditures did not sink.”<sup>10</sup> In exchange for wartime support, “the wielders of coercion (found) themselves obliged to administer the lands, goods, and people they acquire.”<sup>11</sup> As wars became increasingly expensive and reliant on mass mobilization by the end of the 16th century, it is necessary to explore the war-centered mechanisms and their role in the formation of modern nation states in Western Europe.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the centrality of de facto warfare in Tilly’s account, his explanation of state making mechanisms expands itself into the realm of violence more generally understood. Western European governments, according to Tilly, served essentially as

<sup>3</sup> Miguel A. Centeno, “Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 102, no. 6 (1997): pp. 1567.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Kurtz, “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order: Reconsidering War and the Resource Course in Third World state making,” *Politics and Society*, 37, no. 4 (2009): pp. 481.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Fredericksen and Rosanne London, “Disconnect in the Hollow State: The Pivotal Role of Organizational Capacity in Community-Based Development Organizations.” *Public Administration Review*, 60, no. 3 (2000): pp. 230–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/977465>. Pp. 230

<sup>6</sup> Cullen S. Hendrick, “Measuring State Capacity: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for the Study of Civil Conflict.” *Journal of Peace Research*, 47, no. 3 (May 2010): pp. 283.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Tilly, Reflections on the history of European statemaking.” In *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton University Press, 1975. pp. 42

<sup>8</sup> By drawing a correspondent link between advancements in military and state organization, Otto Hintze’s war-centered militarist account of state making complements Tilly’s framework. According to Hintze, “the entire social system was placed in the service of militarism” (202). Advancements in the military realm had a spillover effect into the civil realm, improving the efficacy of both.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.” In *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 183.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 180.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990–1992*. Cambridge, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 1992. pp. 20

<sup>12</sup> Centeno, “Blood and Debt,” pg. 1586

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units of organized crime—“protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy.”<sup>13</sup> He analogizes war makers and state makers to racketeers, as self-seeking entrepreneurs who engaged in legitimate forms of violence against threats (even those they stimulated or fabricated), while providing citizens in the territory with the public good of security. War making was just one of these organized means of violence that governments practiced. Responses to threats required the mobilization of resources; violence sparked the extraction-coercion cycle, which proved pivotal to the growth of Western European nation states.

In broadening the conception of violence beyond narrow conceptions of warfare, it is evident that violence underpins other leading explanations for the growth of modern Western European states. Operating under Mancur Olson’s idea of “bandit rationality”, rulers heed the inefficiencies generated by the inherent tension between an “ownership structure which maximized the rents to the ruler (and his group) and an efficient system that reduced transaction costs and encouraged economic growth.”<sup>14</sup> In response, the ruler transitions from a roving bandit engaged in a predatory state of plunder to a stationary bandit, creating a more efficient economic system. The security offered by property rights encourages investment by subjects, helping rulers strike a new economic equilibrium that increases the ruler’s wealth. Moreover, the conferral of property rights drives the development of the state because rulers must develop institutions to enforce and manage these more efficient property rights. Violence further insinuates itself in North’s explanation as only rulers with a comparative advantage in violence can effectively enforce property rights.<sup>15</sup> Even Hendrik Spruyt, scholar of international systems and state formation, integrates violence into his trade-centered explanation for the emergence of the Western European modern state. Modern states emerged as a response to an exogenous expansion of trade, which empowered a new merchant class with sufficient political clout to overcome the inefficiencies of a warlord system.<sup>16</sup> State making was an inherently combative process, a competition to gain a monopoly over violence in order to lower transaction costs that were inflated by the plunder of parochial feudal lords. Although many scholars emphasize different variables to account for the emergence of the Western European state, violence is the common—and crucial—mechanism that unites these accounts.

### ***Latin America: War Sometimes Makes the State***

According to the Western European consensus, violence, often in the form of war, creates strong nation states. This paradigm, however, is not universal across time and place as evidenced by Miguel Centeno’s study of the relationship between war making and state making experience in Latin America. Using data from 11 Latin American nations and the bellecist framework as a basis of comparison, he concludes that war was only a potential stimulus for state making. After all, war and state making in Latin America “occurred under very different historical circumstances than during the European military revolution.”<sup>17</sup> Nuancing the Western European benchmark, he parses out three conditions that must be met for war to aid in institutional development in the region. First, states must be able to extract resources from domestic actors to fund wars and build institutions: only by turning inwards can states enter the coercion extraction cycle that facilitated Western European state making.<sup>18</sup> Second, war must occur at the “right time”; in other words, states must have adequate structural capacity, favorable systems, and conducive ideological leanings to capitalize upon the state making opportunities generated by war.<sup>19,20</sup> A bureaucracy, for example, must be capable of managing expenditures and revenue. Third, a ruling class must be able to come together to establish sovereignty and organize war making and state making efforts.<sup>21</sup> Without internal unity,

<sup>13</sup> Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”, pp. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Douglass North, “A Framework for Analyzing the State in Economic History,” *Explorations in Economic History*, 16, (1979). pp. 253.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 250.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors*. Princeton UP, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Centeno, “Blood and Debt,” pp. 1565.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1569.

<sup>19</sup> This condition aligns with Francis Fukuyama’s contention that the formation of a state with some institutional capacity is a prerequisite for any following state development: “Before you can have democracy or economic development, you have to have a state” (84).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1589

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1592

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especially among elite classes, the extraction process and administrative management cannot successfully materialize.

Centeno contends that due to a general failure to satisfy these conditions, war did not form the state in most Latin American countries. First, with respect to domestic extraction, most Latin American nations did not rely on domestic taxes for state revenue because of the availability of alternative financing sources. International borrowing, customs, and commodity sales, for example, helped Latin American states evade the quintessentially bellicist extraction-coercion cycle. Additionally, factors like poverty, a resentful collective memory of colonial taxes, and the lack of wage laborers in Latin American states made domestic financial exploitation difficult. Second, many Latin American states were not ideologically or structurally ready to effectively extract taxes. Many Latin American state makers espoused a liberal economic thought, which opposed large, centralized, intrusive states. As for the lack of prior institutional development, according to Centeno, “the states facing war simply did not have the administrative capacity to respond with increased extraction.”<sup>22</sup> Third, Latin American states generally lacked a unified social and political class after independence. States struggled to centralize power after independence because relevant elites did not conceive of wars as major threats to their interests. Thus, they did not have an incentive to establish a strong enough hegemony to ignite the extraction-coercion cycle, a necessary component of the “war makes the state” bellicist framework.

Using the Western European experience as the overarching benchmark for the Chile and Colombia case studies, I will illustrate how war is only a potential state making catalyst. Centeno’s three conditions—domestic extraction, opportune timing, and internal/elite unity—will inform my comparative analysis. These nations are apt for comparison for multiple reasons. First, these states have similar colonial legacies: they both were subject to Spanish rule and declared independence from Spain in 1810. Even amid local differences in colonial rule, Hillel David Soifer finds that “neither the institutional character nor the capacity of the colonial state can explain variation in post-independence state capacity outcomes in Spanish America.”<sup>23</sup> Second, during the 19th century, Chile and Colombia fought a similar number of wars that were comparable in both nature and scale.<sup>24</sup> Third, the historical and war-making similarities in these countries make the divergent state making outcomes all the more curious. While Chile has long been considered a continental outlier with respect to its state capacity, Colombia has primarily stood on the precipice of state failure since its independence until the turn of the 21st century.<sup>25</sup> Whereas war helped stimulate the state making process in Chile in the 19th century, Colombia struggled to capitalize upon war as a state making catalyst during the same period. As a deviation from this 19th century experience, I argue that Colombia’s passage of the Democratic Security Taxes at the turn of the 21st century presents an episode of bellicist state making. I will apply Gustavo Flores-Macias’ study of the passage of the tax to detail how Colombian state makers fulfilled Centeno’s conditions, which thereby enabled the state to align with the Western European benchmark and capitalize upon the threat of warlordism to effectuate state making. The following case studies apply these conditional dynamics.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 1590

<sup>23</sup> David Hillel Soifer, *state making in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2015., pp. 89

<sup>24</sup> In his analysis, Centeno uses Levy’s definition of war as a “substantial armed conflict between the organized military forces of political units” (1573). He also utilizes a threshold of 1,000 deaths, a threshold developed by Singer and Small in 1982. According to these definitional stipulations, Chile was involved in seven major wars in the 19th century: Independence war of 1810, Civil war of 1829, Chile Bolivia War of 1836, Civil War of 1851, Peruvian Spanish War of 1865, War of the Pacific of 1879, and Civil War of 1891. During the same era, Colombia engaged in eight major wars: Independence War of 1810, Civil War of 1839, Civil War of 1854, War of the Cauca of 1859, Civil War of 1876, Civil War of 1884, Secession of Panama of 1898, and Civil War of 1899 (Centeno 1572, Figure 1). In making my case about Colombia’s state strengthening episode at the turn of the 21st century, I will consider the violence of modern warlordism in the nation-- emanating from drug traffickers, guerilla groups, and paramilitary groups-- as the potential state making stimuli.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey, Kline, “Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking, and Carving Up the State,” In *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, ed. Robert Rotberg, Brookings 2003: pp. 161-182.



## Chile

According to the Western European bellicist benchmark, Chile's 19th century war making experience stimulated state making. Unlike most Latin American nations, Chile levied sizable taxes on the domestic populace, had sufficient institutional capacity to successfully engage in warmaking, and could channel the collective power of elites to support state making activities. Due to its ability to fulfill Centeno's three conditions, Chile achieved robust state making success—infrastructural advancements, pervasive administrative control, territorial cohesion, and public goods provisions—with the help of war making activities in the 19th century, especially the War of the Pacific and Revolution of 1891. The success story of post-independence Chile provides evidence that war sometimes makes the Latin American state.

### I. Domestic Extraction

From its inception as an independent state and throughout the 19th century, the Chilean state increasingly relied on domestic taxation to fill its coffers. Despite plateaus in the early Chilean republic, domestic revenue extraction increased considerably in the 19th century while Chile developed from a colony into a sovereign state.<sup>26</sup> Real income tax doubled from the 1850s into the late 1870s. After the global depression of the late 1870s produced an aberrational dip in taxation levels, the general upward trend continued into the 20th century.<sup>27</sup> The increase in tax receipts during the War of the Pacific from 1879 to 1883 is especially notable, as ordinary tax revenues per one thousand residents increased by over 150%.<sup>28</sup> According to Luis L. Schenoni, the war “forced authorities to radically change the fiscal system,” resulting in the introduction of an income tax.<sup>29</sup> Such a precipitous increase signals both the ability and the political will of the state to turn inwards to fund warmaking activities.<sup>30</sup> The victory in the war increased trust in the state, which allowed state making to continue virtually unopposed during the Revolution of 1891.<sup>31</sup> This war, like the War of the Pacific, generated an increase in real income tax extraction. In adherence to the “ratchet effect” of war, domestic extraction continued to follow an upward trajectory during periods of peace after the Revolution, well into the 20th century.

The importance of domestic taxation in Chile is striking considering the state's access to alternative forms of finance, which as Centeno argues, truncated institutional growth in other Latin American nations. Chile gained access to nitrate rich territories in the War of the Pacific, which brought great wealth to the republic. By 1900, nitrate revenues accounted for approximately 14% of GDP and 50% of Chilean revenue.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the easy-money garnered from nitrate revenues confounds resource curse expectations.<sup>33</sup> As Kurtz points out, the expansion in resource wealth did not undermine the state's ability to tax the domestic populace. After the war produced an accumulation of resource wealth, domestic extraction levels which expanded during the war, continued their upward trend. Moreover, the Chilean state taxed elites—a group that is usually considered “politically and economically difficult to levy imposts upon”—at expanding levels in order to extract more handsome revenues from nitrates.<sup>34</sup> Turned over to municipal control, these nitrate revenues reformed the Chilean state's process of institutional modernization. State actors used the wealth to invest in institutional development, enhancing the provision of public goods and services such as education, mail, infrastructural improvements, and a national uniformed police force. In fulfillment of Centeno's first condition, and thus in accordance with the Western European benchmark, war stimulated institutional development because the state relied on

<sup>26</sup> Kurtz, “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order”.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Figure 1.

<sup>29</sup> Luis L. Schenoni, “Bringing War Back in: Victory and State Formation in Latin America.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 65, no. 2 (2021): pp. 418.

<sup>30</sup> As noted by Kurtz, the domestic extraction data actually *underestimate* the extent of domestic taxation because they exclude direct wealth taxes collected after the War of the Pacific.

<sup>31</sup> Kurtz, “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order”

<sup>32</sup> Centeno, “Blood and Debt”

<sup>33</sup> The resource curse describes the paradoxical phenomenon that occurs when countries with an abundance of natural resource wealth have worse development outcomes than countries that lack this same abundance.

<sup>34</sup> Kurtz, “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order” pp. 509.

domestic taxes to fund war making and state making activities. By generating natural resource wealth that statemakers invested in institutional development, war making had an additional positive effect on Chilean state making.

## II. *Opportune Timing*

The Chilean state was able to turn inwards to finance its state making processes due to its favorable economic system and institutional capacity to successfully levy domestic taxes. According to Centeno, the Chilean state preceded war, which allowed it to administer, collect, and manage extraction efforts—further reaping benefits from conflict.<sup>35</sup> Since the economic system was conducive to state growth, the Chilean state was able to grow and develop an institutional capacity to tax *prior* to war making activities. As Kurtz indicates, the “absence of a labor repressive agrarian social structure...opened the door to political development.”<sup>36</sup> Chile possessed a free labor structure, a system of voluntary tenancies allowing peasants to legally leave at will. This structure was “consonant with substantial improvements in the efficacy of the central government” because the centralization of power and military development did not present an existential threat to local elite interests.<sup>37</sup> As I will develop in the next section, this lack of threat allowed elites to create a hegemonic class capable of “intiat(ing) the creation of an effective central state in the post-independence era that began a virtuous cycle of administrative development.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the economic system facilitated elite cooperation, which created the unity and political will necessary to develop administrative institutions that could aid war efforts. Overall, the wars of the 19th century in Chile confirm that the state had the administrative capacity to “(tax) itself to the extent necessary to prosecute successfully...military endeavors, even at great logistical reach.”<sup>39</sup> Supporting the positive relationship between war and state making in Chile, the economic system and prior institutions empowered the state to levy taxes during wartime and peacetime.

## III. *Internal/Elite Unity*

Favorable elite dynamics in Chile, like those in Western Europe, were crucial for the co-constitutive dynamic of war and statemaking to prevail. In alignment with Tilly’s argument about the integral nature of elite participation in war/statemaking, “there must be a compelling collective elite interest in strengthening the central state, [that is] non-threatening to the fundamental material interests of nearly all politically relevant fragments of the upper class.”<sup>40</sup> The Chilean state met both of these conditions. First, wars in Chile were favorable to collective elite interests because they provided opportunities for the dominant classes to “enrich themselves and their country.”<sup>41</sup> Chile primarily led wars of aggression in the 19th century; the elite consensus saw these wars as strategic investments because success in war could provide them with expansion in land and regional dominance. Second, and as introduced in the previous section, state centralization and war did not pose a major threat to elite interests due to the absence of a labor repressive system in the nation. In Chile’s free labor system, multiple factors allayed the threat that warfare and state centralization posed to elite interests. Principle among these factors was that “military service by peasants would not risk the social instability it can bring to servile political economies when peasants, with newly acquired skills in warfare, return.”<sup>42,43</sup> Institutional features separate from the labor system further

<sup>35</sup> Centeno, “Blood and Debt” pp. 1597

<sup>36</sup> Kurtz, “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order” pp. 480.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 502

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 481

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 507

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 504

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 507

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 486

<sup>43</sup> Kurtz provides multiple other reasons why free labor systems are more conducive to warmaking and state making activities than labor repressive (servile) systems. Servile systems depend on local labor control and labor coercion, and state centralization threatens to disrupt the local nature of labor. By threatening to disrupt the foundation of the political economy, state centralization severely jeopardizes the economic well-being of agrarian elites. Due to the different nature of the system, elites within free labor structures do not harbor these



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fostered elite cohesion, which fueled the virtuous cycle of institutional growth in Chile. For example, the political system of the 19th century took the form of an oligarchic republic, which was conducive to elite cooperation in that “all major components of the upper classes (had) effective political representation and in which none (could) seriously contend for perpetual dominance.”<sup>44</sup> The resultant elite cooperation and cohesion gave rise to the development of a hegemonic group in society that could serve as a political and social anchor under which institutions could establish themselves, grow, and capitalize upon the state-making potential of war.

### **Colombia**

Colombia was born a weak state, and despite the prevalence of war in the state during the 19th century, it remained weak.<sup>45</sup> The Western European state making benchmark does not apply to 19th century Colombia. Unlike Chile, the Colombian state was unable to take advantage of war as a stimulant of state growth because it relied heavily on external sources of revenue at the expense of domestic extraction, lacked the prerequisite institutional capacity and ideological posture to support war-spurred state growth, and had a fragmented class of elites. With a divergent war/statemaking outcome from that of Chile, the Colombian case of failure also lends credence to Centeno’s argument that war sometimes (does not) make the Latin American state.

#### *I. (Lack of) Domestic Extraction*

Throughout the 19th century, rather than extracting taxes from the population, the Colombian state primarily relied on alternative sources of revenue to fund its objectives. In the first quarter century of the post-independence period, the state generated over 68% of its revenues from three major sources: customs revenues, and the tobacco and salt monopolies.<sup>46</sup> Revenues from import duties and monopoly production shielded the state from imposing taxes on the population. Reliance on external financing continued into the 19th century, during both wartime and peacetime, and by 1850 the Colombian state collected no direct taxes.<sup>47</sup> Alternative sources of revenue appealed to state actors due to the inherent difficulties involved in levying taxes in Colombia. The state faced an “uphill battle” due to the widespread poverty of citizens and the state’s limited trade in both the domestic and international realm.<sup>48</sup> Wars exacerbated these taxation obstacles, as conflict brought Colombia “misery, hardship, and penury.”<sup>49</sup> By 1871, even after fighting four major wars, the Colombian state’s revenues stood at one-fifth of those of Chile.<sup>50</sup> Whether in peacetime or wartime, “no effort was made to develop taxation in Colombia” during the 19th century.<sup>51</sup> The consistent reliance on alternative revenue sources precluded an extraction-coercion cycle, limiting state growth and perpetuating Colombian state weakness.

#### *II. (In)Opportune Timing*

The ideological postures of state actors and immature institutions were unfavorable to Colombian state making, even in times of war. After independence from Spain, the Colombian state struggled to overcome the weak state system left by colonial rule. According to Kline, the Spanish left behind an imported system of government that functioned poorly, and for over a century after independence, “nothing was done... to change that sense of insufficiency.”<sup>52</sup> Influenced by liberal economic thought, Colombian

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same concerns. Additionally, servile systems have generally low productivity rates compared to free labor systems. Low productivity limits elite fiscal contribution to the state. Elites in this setting, compared to free labor systems, further lack incentives to invest in technology to enhance productivity as a cost-saving measure due to the low cost of labor. This is a detriment to the state in that the cost saving technology would help develop and modernize the state.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 505

<sup>45</sup> Kline, “Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking, and Carving Up the State”

<sup>46</sup> Soifer, *state making in Latin America*, pp. 186.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195

<sup>49</sup> Centeno, “Blood and Debt,” pp. 1583

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1575

<sup>51</sup> Soifer, *state making in Latin America*, pp. 195

<sup>52</sup> Kline, “Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking, and Carving Up the State” pp. 161

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state actors generally espoused an ideological posture averse to fiscal centralization, binding its rule to federalist constitutions. The resultant diffuse nature of the governmental system made it difficult to build the capacity to effectively levy taxes. Within the decentralized system, state actors “restricted the range of taxes that the federal government could institute and allowed subnational authorities to use their influence over the national legislature to undermine efforts to tax.”<sup>53</sup> Even during brief periods of relative centralization, such as during the “Regeneration” of 1886, tax administration remained under the purview of local, rather than national governments, severely limiting the scope and efficiency of extraction collection.

Beyond fiscal policy making, the Colombian legal and military institutions faced deficiencies that compromised war-generated state making opportunities. Following their anti-statist leanings, instead of developing a strong national police force, Colombian state actors decentralized and limited the power of police and armed forces. The lack of police power made it difficult for state actors to monopolize violence over the territory.<sup>54</sup> This general “disinclination toward state making,” revealed in the state’s aversion to domestic taxation and nationalized police power, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to the development of a strong central authority in Colombia.<sup>55</sup> Without a strong central authority, the Colombian state “remained strikingly lacking in its ability to mobilize in response to a threat.”<sup>56</sup> Encumbered by these institutional deficiencies, the Colombian state could not capitalize upon war to drive state making activities. The overall lack of capacity across various sectors of Colombian society limited mobilization for war.

### III. *Internal/Elite (Dis)Unity*

Already ideologically averse to a strong central government, party elites were embroiled in rancorous, often violent, partisan spars. According to Kline, “political competition in Colombia was never limited to peaceful means,” and party members were allowed to engage in armed violence against a member of the other party.<sup>57</sup> This partisan violence often erupted into civil war, pitting liberals against conservatives.<sup>58</sup> Rather than uniting the country under nationalist pride—the expected effect of war according to the Western European benchmark—these wars polarized the state through the politicization of the masses. The population became involved in politics during these conflicts, albeit superficially. They lacked influence on elite policy, and their political leanings mainly “stemmed from their affiliations with a large landowner, who instructed them when and against whom to fight.”<sup>59</sup> Many poor campesinos, peasant farmers, lost their lives during the civil war violence, which inflamed partisan tensions among the Colombian people. As Kline reveals, “many campesino families had...family members who had been killed, disabled, or raped by members of the other political party.”<sup>60</sup> As a result, the masses developed their own derisive partisan identifications, passionately rooted in a memory of violence and loss. The divisions among the elites evidently had a spillover effect upon the masses, undermining the internal unity of the country at all levels of society. The Colombian state failed to fulfill Centeno’s third condition; the national wartime mobilization required by Western European benchmark could not transpire in Colombia because neither elites *nor* the masses could effectively unite and mobilize behind a threat.

### IV. *Did War Make the State in 21st Century Colombia?*

I will now turn to a state-making event in 21st century Colombia in order to illustrate how Centeno’s conditions for an application of the Western European benchmark to Latin America remain robust across time and place. The passage of the

<sup>53</sup> Soifer, *state making in Latin America*, pp. 193

<sup>54</sup> According to Fukuyama, state making must start with the creation of military and police forces so that state actors can enforce their decisions and monopolize the means of violence.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 194.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 212

<sup>57</sup> Kline, “Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking, and Carving Up the State” pp. 164

<sup>58</sup> According to Kline, who uses a more lenient definition of war than Centeno, eight civil wars took place during the 19th century, and six of them “pitted all (or a section) of the Liberal party against the Conservative party” (164).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 167

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 164

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Democratic Security Taxes of 2002 (and the subsequent security taxes of 2003, 2006, and 2009) as a response to a modern threat of violence from warlord groups provides a contrary result to the historical failure of the “war makes the state” dynamic in 19th century Colombia. The success of these taxes, as a response to an internal threat of violence, resulted in state growth according to the measures of state capacity: the state increased its levels of domestic extraction and provided (or was perceived to provide) a public benefit, specifically safety. Although it is a state-making episode of limited scope, the passage of the taxes reveals the robustness and utility of a conditional bellicist framework for Latin America.

The Colombian state’s weakness in the 19th century continued into the 20th century. Three interconnected groups of warlords emerged in Colombia in the 1960’s to fill the vacuum of state power: guerilla groups, paramilitary groups, and drug trafficking organizations or cartels. Starting in 1986, Colombian presidents ushered in a slew of responses to try to mitigate the warlord threat, but according to Kline, after 16 years of efforts, “the Colombian state was failing more than before, and levels of violence continued to increase.”<sup>61</sup> In 2002, Colombians elected Alvaro Uribe as president. Uribe sought to fulfill two major campaign promises: end negotiations with guerrilla groups and strengthen the armed forces. The passage of the security taxes fell within Uribe’s broader anti-warlordism posture. This episode of state making, narrowly construed as the passage of the taxes and provision of safety, aligns with the Western European benchmark because Centeno’s three conditions—domestic extraction, opportune timing, and internal/elite unity—were met.

#### V. *Domestic Extraction*

As a departure from previous trends, in 2002, the Uribe government turned inwards to generate state revenue, which fulfills Centeno’s first condition and aligns with the Western European experience. In response to the omnipresent threat of violence posed by warlordism in the nation, the government imposed a security tax on the wealthiest Colombian taxpayers to finance defense and security expenditures. Considering that the “inability to tax elites has been at the heart of the failure of previous reform attempts in Colombia,” the enactment of these taxes present a clear rupture from the past status quo.<sup>62</sup> The taxes, which affected approximately 420,000 taxpayers, contributed substantial funds to the security sector. In fact, the revenues made up about 20% of the total defense/security budget which allowed the sector to increase expenditures by 120%. The tax also significantly added to overall tax revenues, accounting for 5% of the total and representing 1% of GDP.<sup>63</sup> Unlike responses to past threats, the government espoused a more bellicist response to the threat of warlords by turning to the domestic economy for resource mobilization.

#### VI. *Opportune Timing*

In alignment with Centeno’s second condition, the security tax was only possible because it came at the “right time.” According to Flores-Macias, the combination of a fiscal and security crises made taxing the elite tax feasible. The Uribe government took advantage of a “crisis-based window of opportunity” during which the security dilemma was “perceived as pervasive and beyond the government’s control.”<sup>64</sup> The perception of its severity legitimized Uribe’s decree of a State of Internal Commotion, which facilitated his mandate for the creation of a security tax. Operating within a state of emergency made the tax imposed on the elite more fiscally and politically palatable. The acute sense of threat and crisis at the onset of Uribe’s presidency made domestic taxation, a state-making response to violence, possible.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 170.

<sup>62</sup> Gustavo A. Flores-Macias, “Financing Security through Elite Taxation: Colombia’s Democratic Security Taxes,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 49, no. 4 (2014), pp. 478.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. pp. 484

### VII. *Internal/Elite Unity*

The explanatory power of elite cohesion saliently revealed itself in the passage of the security taxes in 2003, 2006, and 2009. As indicated by Flores-Macias, “the establishment of linkages with key decision makers, consultation forums, and collaboration mechanisms helped the government garner support for the adoption of the subsequent taxes.”<sup>65</sup> For example, Uribe appointed business elites to positions in his cabinet, especially in positions related to security and finance. Additionally, he created an oversight committee with members of the business community to monitor expenditures. These mechanisms between policy makers and the economic elite were crucial to eroding resistance to taxation; they opened up informational channels through which to “exchange information reflecting the different actors’ needs and capabilities, and to lengthen the different actors’ time horizons.”<sup>66</sup> Elite compliance with the security tax even allowed this fragment of society to *advance* their material interests; in fact, “elites saw the security tax as a compromise to avoid a more comprehensive tax reform.”<sup>67</sup> Adhering to the Western European benchmark, elites in Colombia united under a compelling interest to strengthen the state. In doing so they perceived an improvement in public safety (received a good from the state) and were even able to *diffuse* a greater threat to their material interests. The elite unity behind the security taxes fulfilled Centeno’s condition, allowing for an episode of violence-induced state making to transpire in Colombia.

### **Conclusion**

The Western European “war makes the state” benchmark is not universal in its application across time and place. As illustrated by the case studies of Chile and Colombia, state making as a result of war—or violence more generally understood—in 19th century Latin America, and arguably in the 21st century, is conditional. It hinges upon three conditions developed by Centeno: domestic extraction, opportune timing, and elite/internal unity. Importantly, the conclusion that war only *sometimes* makes the state in Latin America does not negate the utility of the Western European benchmark. Perhaps the utility of the framework actually lies in its *lack* of universality. The “war makes the state” argument serves as a theoretical basis of comparison upon which scholars can methodically parse out confounding and more salient explanatory factors for state making episodes across different contexts. This facilitates a better understanding of the reasons behind persistent state weakness and even helps inform modern day state making projects. Moreover, the deviations between the bellicist benchmark and other state making phenomena reflect the need for more nuanced and tailored approaches to backdrops outside of Western Europe—such as that developed by Centeno—especially to account for modern developments in the ever changing dynamic global landscape. As history has revealed, war is a universal human experience, however, one with various state making and institutional outcomes.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp. 489

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp. 482

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp. 488

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# López Obrador's Dilemma: Using Game Theory Tools to Understand the Release of Ovidio Guzmán

José Luis Sabau Fernández

Mexico's 2018 presidential election surprised the nation for a variety of reasons. After almost two decades of campaigning, leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador positioned himself as the clear favorite to win the presidency, promising to end corruption and harbor a new era of social spending.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most surprising element of his campaign was the complete departure from previous militaristic arguments to battle organized crime. Beginning in 2006, during President Felipe Calderón's administration, Mexican forces waged an all-out war against drug cartels, who have since continued to increase their resources and pose a serious threat to the state's legitimacy. Since the conflict started, over 350,000 Mexican citizens have died as a result of confrontations with cartels.<sup>2</sup> In response to such a violent struggle, López Obrador structured his campaign around peaceful strategies, even considering amnesty for some drug lords if necessary.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of whether those promises would ever be fulfilled, they still signaled a clear change for Mexico's *War on Drugs*.

López Obrador won the election by a landslide and his peaceful approach to violent actors was tested during the first months of his administration. On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Mexican army captured Ovidio Guzmán, the son of former Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán Loera, better known by his nickname "*El Chapo*."<sup>4</sup> The Sinaloa Cartel responded by threatening to attack major cities in Mexico's northwest if Ovidio was not immediately released from government custody. Barely a year into his presidency, López Obrador was faced with one of the most difficult choices in the history of Mexico's *War on Drugs*: to battle the Sinaloa Cartel or to yield to its demands. In a surprising series of events, the president chose to release Ovidio, avoiding a violent confrontation and setting a new precedent for dealings with the cartel.

While López Obrador's response is surprising on its own, a larger complication emerges when looking at the entire sequence of events. In particular, it is quite shocking that the Mexican army would go through the trouble of capturing Ovidio Guzmán just for the president to release him a couple of hours later. One might inquire why the military put the president in a position where either choice would result in serious costs. Albeit initially unreasonable, I propose that a closer inspection of these events illuminates the underlying logic that led to Ovidio's release. In this paper, I will use basic tools of game theory to model the decision space surrounding López Obrador's ultimate choice. To do this, I will first provide a detailed account of the operation to capture Ovidio Guzmán. Then, I will build a game tree that replicates all the major decisions that took place during the period. Finally, I will argue that a combination of erroneous beliefs led the army to follow through with a faulty plan, putting the burden of choice in the presidential palace.

## I. *A Day to Remember*

In early January 2016, Mexican forces captured Joaquín "*El Chapo*" Guzmán, father of Ovidio Guzmán and prominent leader of the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>5</sup> Six months before,

<sup>1</sup> Editorial Team. "6 promesas con las que López Obrador quiere cambiar México." *BBC News*, July 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-44681165>.

<sup>2</sup> Pardo Veiras, José Luis. "Una guerra inventada y 350,000 muertos en México." *Washington Post*, October 28, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/06/14/mexico-guerra-narcotrafico-calderon-homicidios-desaparecidos/>

<sup>3</sup> Nájjar, Alberto. "La polémica 'pacificación' que propone AMLO para terminar con la cruel guerra del narco en México." *BBC News*, August 7, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-45093519>.

<sup>4</sup> Navarro, María Fernanda. "Paso a paso: así fue la captura (y liberación) de Ovidio Guzmán." *Forbes México*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/paso-a-paso-asi-fue-la-captura-y-liberacion-de-ovidio-guzman/>

<sup>5</sup> Ángel, Arturo. "Tras 6 meses de fuga, 'el Chapo' es recapturado en Sinaloa." *Animal Político*, January 8, 2016. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2016/01/joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-es-recapturado-en-sinaloa/>

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*El Chapo* had become a topic of national interest after he escaped from Mexico's Altiplano Central Maximum-Security Prison through a 1,500-meter-long tunnel.<sup>6</sup> This was the second time that *El Chapo* managed to escape federal prison, after sneaking out of another facility in 2001 using only a laundry cart.<sup>7</sup> Aware of *El Chapo's* power in Mexico's penitentiary system, the federal government sought a new route to control the drug lord by extraditing him to the United States in early 2017.<sup>8</sup>

Since *El Chapo* was out of the picture, his trial became a starting point for U.S.-Mexico cooperation. After learning more about the Sinaloa Cartel's structure in *El Chapo's* trial, the American government made a series of new petitions to extradite prominent drug lords and prosecute them in the United States. Notoriously, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia issued an arrest warrant for Ovidio Guzmán in April 2018.<sup>9</sup> The warrant itself accused Ovidio of participating in criminal associations to distribute narcotics in the United States. Then, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the U.S. government made an official petition for Mexican authorities to capture Ovidio Guzmán for extradition purposes.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Mexico's government began a federal operation to capture Ovidio just as it had done to capture his father years before.

The goal was to ambush Ovidio in the northern city of Culiacán through a joint operation between Mexico's newly formed National Guard and elements of the federal army on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019.<sup>11</sup> However, the plan quickly ran into several complications. At 2:00 p.m., federal forces confirmed Ovidio had entered his residence in Culiacán and by 2:30 p.m., members of Mexico's military had formed a small perimeter in the designated area.<sup>12</sup> Originally, additional officers were intended to form a second larger perimeter to control potential violence from cartel members. However, as military personnel attempted to secure the area, they were met with immediate resistance from the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>13</sup> Three out of the four military units that were designated to the surrounding perimeter were caught in a battle with cartel members, and never made it to their positions.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the first perimeter managed to capture Ovidio on its own by 3:15 pm and news quickly spread as pictures leaked.<sup>15</sup>

Once Ovidio was in government custody, the situation escalated precipitously. In the hours following his capture, the Sinaloa Cartel attempted to threaten many members of the military and federal government as a means to wreak havoc. In a brief amount of time, cartel members had kidnapped nine soldiers and two police officers, stormed into the homes of four soldiers, and even tried to bribe one of the commanders in charge of the operation.<sup>16</sup> Hoping to avoid additional violence, members of the military convinced Ovidio to call his brother, Iván Archivaldo, who had coordinated the cartel's response. In

<sup>6</sup> Editorial Team. "La Segunda Fuga Del Chapo Guzmán." *El País*, October 23, 2015, sec. Internacional. [https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/07/14/actualidad/1436868229\\_488319.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/07/14/actualidad/1436868229_488319.html).

<sup>7</sup> Editorial Team. "Primer escape de 'El Chapo': la primera versión y la del 'Vicentillo.'" *El Universal*, January 4, 2019. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/mundo/primer-escape-de-el-chapo-la-primera-version-y-la-del-vicentillo>.

<sup>8</sup> Editorial Team. "Extraditan al narcotraficante mexicano Joaquín 'Chapo' Guzmán a Estados Unidos." *BBC News*, January 19, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38672801>.

<sup>9</sup> Navarro, María Fernanda. "Paso a paso: así fue la captura (y liberación) de Ovidio Guzmán." *Forbes México*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/paso-a-paso-asi-fue-la-captura-y-liberacion-de-ovidio-guzman/>.

<sup>10</sup> Editorial Team. "Culiacánazo; nombres clave en la liberación de Ovidio Guzmán en 2019." *El Heraldo de México*, October 16, 2020. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/nacional/2020/10/16/Culiacanazo-nombres-clave-en-la-liberacion-de-ovidio-guzman-en-2019-215800.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Nájjar, Alberto. "Ya paren, ya me entregué: así ocurrió la fallida detención del hijo de El Chapo en Culiacán." *BBC News*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50243661>.

<sup>12</sup> Arreazola, Laura. "Así fue minuto a minuto el operativo para detener a Ovidio Guzmán." *Político Mx*, October 30, 2019. <https://politico.mx/minuta-politica/minuta-politica-gobierno-federal/%C3%AD-fue-minuto-minuto-el-operativo-para-detener-ovidio-guzm%C3%A1n/>.

<sup>13</sup> Navarro, María Fernanda. "Paso a paso: así fue la captura (y liberación) de Ovidio Guzmán." *Forbes México*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/paso-a-paso-asi-fue-la-captura-y-liberacion-de-ovidio-guzman/>.

<sup>14</sup> Nájjar, Alberto. "Ya paren, ya me entregué: así ocurrió la fallida detención del hijo de El Chapo en Culiacán." *BBC News*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50243661>.

<sup>15</sup> Pantoja, Sara. "Hace siete meses se planeó la fallida captura de Ovidio Guzmán." *Proceso*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2019/10/30/hace-siete-meses-se-planeo-la-fallida-captura-de-ovidio-guzman-233557.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Beauregard, Luis Pablo. "Captura de Ovidio Guzmán: El Hijo de El Chapo, Tras Su Detención En Culiacán: 'Ya Paren Todo, Ya Me Entregué, No Quiero Más Desmadre'." *El País*, October 31, 2019. [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116\\_384039.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116_384039.html).



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their short conversation, Ovidio asked his brother to put an end to the conflict, but Iván Archivaldo refused.<sup>17</sup>

In the following hours, the Sinaloa Cartel escalated its threats even further in order to demonstrate its willingness to fight for Ovidio's freedom. Cartel members took to the streets of Culiacán, released inmates from a local prison, and even fired at a military helicopter.<sup>18</sup> Seeing that the government still refused to release Ovidio, the Sinaloa Cartel declared its intentions to expand their attacks to the neighboring states of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango.<sup>19</sup> Now, the federal government was facing immense amounts of pressure and a decision had to be made before the day ended. Mexico could either choose to participate in an all-out war against the Sinaloa Cartel, or release Ovidio avoiding further bloodshed. Ultimately, the latter prevailed and President López Obrador gave the order to release the drug lord. In a morning press briefing after the events, the president justified his decision by arguing that military action would have resulted in the deaths of over 200 innocent civilians.<sup>20</sup>

## II. A Game Theoretic Model

Initially, one might look at the events surrounding Ovidio Guzmán's capture and question the strategy used by military forces. After three out of four squadrons were unable to arrive at their positions due to heavy fire from the Sinaloa Cartel, one would expect that the smaller perimeter surrounding Ovidio's house would wait for further instructions before capturing the drug lord. Without the required back up, the operation could have ended in a catastrophe for the city of Culiacán and Mexico's government as a whole. Furthermore, having witnessed the cartel's violent response, it was only reasonable to expect that military forces would avoid further complications to Mexico's government by returning to a safe position. Instead, the situation escalated to unprecedented levels, forcing President López Obrador to make one of the most contentious decisions in his administration.

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<sup>17</sup> López, Jannet. "Ovidio Guzmán Pidió Detener Balaceras En Culiacán, Pero No Obedecieron." *Milenio*, October 31, 2019. <https://www.milenio.com/policia/ovidio-guzman-pidio-detener-balaceras-culiacan-caso>.

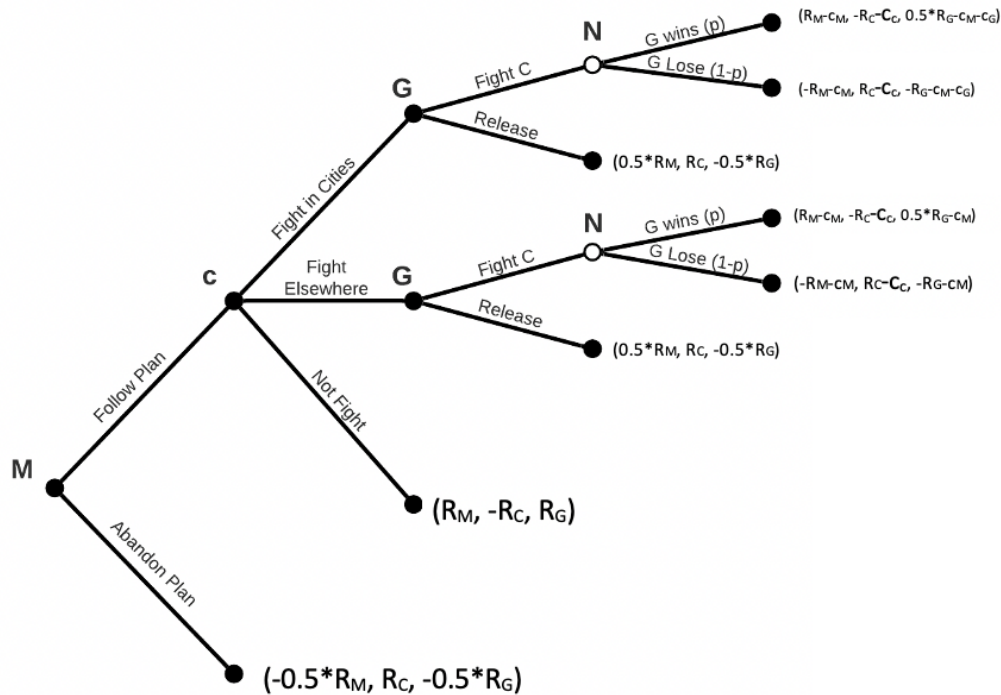
<sup>18</sup> Najar, Alberto. "Ya paren, ya me entregué: así ocurrió la fallida detención del hijo de El Chapo en Culiacán." *BBC News*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50243661>.

<sup>19</sup> Beauregard, Luis Pablo. "Captura de Ovidio Guzmán: El Hijo de El Chapo, Tras Su Detención En Culiacán: "Ya Paren Todo, Ya Me Entregué, No Quiero Más Desmadre"." *El País*, October 31, 2019.

[https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116\\_384039.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116_384039.html).

<sup>20</sup> Villa y Caña, Pedro, and Alberto Morales. "AMLO ordenó liberar a Ovidio Guzmán, hijo de 'El Chapo.'" *El Universal*, June 19, 2020. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/amlo-ordeno-liberar-ovidio-guzman-hijo-de-el-chapo>.

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**FIGURE 1. Game Theory Model for the Capture and Release of Ovidio Guzmán**

Some might argue that the heat of the moment inhibited military officers from acting in a predictable manner. Such a view would hold that there were too many factors playing out at the same time for any cohesive theory to hold. Nevertheless, I will now argue that using game theory, we can successfully unravel the seemingly illogical responses that were made by the Mexican government. To do this, I have replicated the main decisions that took place on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, as shown in Figure 1. Now, I will use the following section to describe each decision node while discussing the payoffs of every actor involved. By analyzing the results, the underlying factors in the seemingly impossible choice faced by President López Obrador will become evident.

Before starting my analysis, I will note that the payoffs are listed in the order in which players appear. At every node where the game ends, the first payoff between parentheses is that of the Military (M), followed by the Sinaloa Cartel (C), and finally the Mexican government (G). The final two decision nodes, listed under the letter N, represent Nature, a non-strategic player, which I will explain later in this section.

It is also important to consider the meaning of a large component to every player's payoff. Whether it is the military, government, or cartel, every potential payoff contains the variable  $R_i$ . This variable represents the perceived revenue to each actor from having Ovidio Guzmán under their control. To the government and the military,  $R_G$  and  $R_M$  respectively represent social perceptions of the operation. In this case, I observe the variables to indicate the media's outlook of how events took place, discerning the press as a means to evaluate public opinion. To the Sinaloa Cartel,  $R_C$  represents the value they receive from keeping Ovidio among their ranks.

It must be noted that  $R_G$ ,  $R_C$ , and  $R_M$  can also be negative, representing media coverage that actively criticized the government, military or the cartel for their response to the capturing of Ovidio Guzmán. As such, these variables are meant to embody an abstract understanding of perceptions to a given decision by the three players. Intuitively, one can imagine there are different degrees of news coverage and public opinion that result from a given action. For instance, the payoff in terms of reputation from capturing the leader of a cartel far exceeds coverage of capturing a street vendor in a considerably sized city such as Los Culiacán, Sinaloa. Conversely, the negative perceptions to the state

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from Ovidio escaping justice during an altercation are less than those of losing a direct fight with a cartel. For the Cartel, negative media coverage would indicate the press reported information that casted doubt on the Cartel's willingness or capacity to respond to the Mexican government or military. This would signal to future adversaries that the Sinaloa Cartel was making an incredible threat in its ability to successfully carry out an armed intervention. Given the possibility for variation, I chose to keep the payoffs in terms of variables to embody the full range of possibilities and enable further studies to build on this model for similar cases.

Now that I have illustrated the concept behind different values of  $R_i$ , I will reconstruct the events of October 17<sup>th</sup>. The game in Figure 1 starts the moment in which troops from the inner perimeter around Ovidio Guzmán's home, waiting for confirmation that backup forces have secured the outer perimeter. As they learn that the Sinaloa Cartel stopped three out of the four battalions meant to support the operation, the inner-perimeter troops must choose whether to follow the initial plan without backup or abandon their mission. If they abandon the operation, they will receive a negative payoff as the press criticizes their failure in securing Ovidio Guzmán and yielding to the initial attacks by the Sinaloa Cartel. Similarly with regard to the government, failure to capture Ovidio will result in criticism from the press while the Sinaloa Cartel gets the full revenue of keeping the drug lord within their ranks.

It is important to acknowledge that the negative payoffs for the military and government are both multiplied by 0.5, meaning that while their costs are still negative, they are not the worst possible scenario. This coefficient considers an outcome later in the game, where the government and military choose to fight the Sinaloa Cartel and are ultimately defeated. We can imagine that there is negative press coverage in both cases. In this first case, choosing to back away from the current plan results in criticisms due to the lack of resolve and organization. However, if the state were to engage with the full-capacity of their military, only to be defeated by drug cartels in Culiacán, it would become a clear sign of a weak government incapable of defending its population—the worst outcome for the Mexican Government. Consequently, press coverage would be intensified to a much harsher degree under the second scenario. Therefore, the initial coefficient of 0.5 is meant to show that critiques from abandoning the initial plan will be milder compared to those of a failed combat.

Starting at the first decision node of the game tree, military forces chose to follow through with their original plan, as a result of new and deadly complications. The troops that formed the inner perimeter successfully captured Ovidio Guzmán and passed the game along to the Sinaloa Cartel. Faced with the situation, cartel leaders had two sets of strategies to follow at the second node along the game tree. Under the first strategy they could allow Mexico's government to keep Ovidio and later extradite him to the U.S., which would end the game for all players. Under this scenario, the government and military would receive the full payoff of positive press and support after a successful operation. This would manifest by positive values of  $R_G$  and  $R_M$ . Conversely, since Ovidio would be imprisoned, the Sinaloa Cartel gets a negative payoff of  $R_C$  as seen by the bottom branch ending after the second node.

Implementing the second strategy, the cartel could respond directly to the military operation and battle the government head on. If it chooses to fight, Mexico's government is forced to respond either by sending more troops to meet the challenge or liberating Ovidio from federal custody. But before analyzing the government's decision, there is a crucial element to the Sinaloa Cartel's choice which influences later stages of the game: the cartel must choose not only whether to fight or not, but also where to fight, creating three choices in the second node. The first approach would be to follow the middle branch of the second node to face Mexico's army as they transport Ovidio to a federal prison, likely in the center of Mexico. Here, the battle would take place in a highway or other unpopulated regions, minimizing costs upon the overall population. The second approach would be for the cartel to follow the top branch of the second node and battle government forces in large cities such as Culiacán. This would result in additional damages to innocent civilians who just happened to be caught in the crossfire. Finally, cartels could choose not to fight, putting an end to the game and resulting in payoffs based on the variables for reputation  $R_M$ ,  $R_C$ , and  $R_G$ .

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Fighting itself will result in costs to every player of the game represented by the various  $c_i$  variables in the payoffs. These variables are meant to show the damages taken by each actor from fighting, most likely in the form of wounds and casualties. The values of  $c_i$  to the military and the Sinaloa Cartel can be seen as just taking into consideration damages incurred to their forces. That is,  $c_M$  tracks the soldiers who are wounded or die in battle and  $c_C$  does the same for cartel members. To the government, however,  $c_G$  represents a metric of the deaths or damages to all civilians who were not directly involved in combat but were nevertheless caught within it. This cost is only endured by the government since it is responsible for the wellbeing of citizens and representatives might suffer in future elections if they neglect their duty to protect the population. I also note that the cost generated by military forces,  $c_M$ , is experienced both by the military, who endures the loss, and the government, who suffers from losses to all law-abiding citizens.

The Sinaloa Cartel then has an important advantage in this game. By choosing the type of fight at the second game node, they also control the state's choices by affecting their payoffs. While the cartel might be unable to impact the value government officials assigned to capturing Ovidio, they do hold power over the costs they will have to pay in order to successfully retrieve him, the second component of the government's payoff function. If the cartel chooses to fight in a sparsely populated region and follow the middle branch of the second node, the government will only endure the costs of lives lost to military officers given by  $c_M$ . If instead they keep the conflict in cities and follow the top branch of the second node, this increases the government's costs by adding the damages to the overall citizenry,  $c_G$ , in addition to those to the military,  $c_M$ . Given that the government in a democratic system seeks to gain the support of the population to remain in office and advance its interests, the costs imposed over the citizenry will exceed the costs upon the military, who are unelected officials ( $c_G < c_M$ ). Furthermore, the costs placed upon the population will always take the form of innocent lives lost during a fight, while the costs borne by the military can be understood as a knowing sacrifice in their line of work, strengthening the implication that one type of cost exceeds the other. This brings an important result for the model: the Sinaloa Cartel can influence the Mexican government's decision calculus by signaling their willingness to fight in large cities since it will impose a larger cost.

If the Sinaloa Cartel decides to fight, regardless of the conditions under which they chose to do so, Mexico's government must respond. Now the state has to choose between releasing Ovidio Guzmán or battling the cartel in the set of third nodes, which were determined by the Sinaloa Cartel in the previous move. Regardless of which decision the Sinaloa Cartel makes, if the government frees Ovidio, the game ends and the Sinaloa Cartel receives the full payoff of retrieving the drug lord without any costs shown by  $R_C$ . To the government, this situation resembles the initial payoff from military forces releasing Ovidio before the cartel has a chance to respond. That is, the payoff is still negative but with a coefficient of 0.5 signaling it is not as damaging as losing a battle to the cartel. This coefficient will impact the reputation variable  $R_G$ , which is meant to reflect the popular opinion of a given strategy followed by the Mexican state. The 0.5 coefficient is meant to provide a more reliable, albeit imperfect, perception of the government. The best scenario would be one in which the government manages to capture Ovidio and the cartels avoid a fight ( $R_G$ ), followed by defeating a cartel in combat and keeping Ovidio in government custody ( $0.5 * R_G$ ). As such, the payoffs from the former will always exceed the latter just in terms of reputation, which is to be expected given the incentives the government faces ( $R_G < 0.5 * R_G$ ).

Furthermore, one must recognize the tangential role played by Ovidio in drug trafficking. Even though Ovidio is the son of one of the most prominent drug barons in the past decades, his father is now in a federal prison in the U.S. where the possibility of communicating with other cartel operators is relatively low.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, as Hernández has shown in her journalistic research, Ovidio's father was never the largest leader of the

<sup>21</sup> Lissardy, Gerardo. "Alcatraz de las Rocosas": así es ADX, la cárcel 'supermax' de EE.UU. donde ingresó Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán." *BBC News*, July 19, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49051852>.

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Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>22</sup> Instead, evidence suggests the lesser-known Ismael Zambada, known as “*El Mayo*,” runs the cartel with little regard to family connections. His own son, Vicente Zambada, was also arrested but did not face any major opposition from the cartel.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Ovidio could have been thought of as a minor player not worth the trouble of violent actions from the Sinaloa Cartel. This seems to suggest that the reputation surrounding the event was also an important factor in the Sinaloa Cartel’s decision calculus. In order to maintain a credible threat of violence, the Cartel must maintain the perception of control, regardless of Ovidio’s tangential role in the organization’s activities.

In this case, however, the military will receive a positive payoff with a coefficient of 0.5 representing potential portrayals in the press. Effectively, military officers have freed themselves from the burden of making a tough decision. At this stage of the game, it is the government’s choice to release Ovidio and the military is only following orders. While overall coverage might be negative, officers cannot be criticized for their commitment to a national cause. This, of course, fails to yield the full payoff of securely keeping Ovidio in custody which is reflected by the 0.5 coefficient.

The last set of decision nodes occurs only when the government responds to the Sinaloa Cartel in a violent struggle. Instead of ending the game, a fight immediately results in the fourth decision node from Nature (N), a nonstrategic player that determines a winner to the battle based purely on probability. This is meant to show the uncertainty of engaging in military action and the potential for the government to lose, reflecting the reality that despite the Mexican government’s superior military capacity compared to that of the cartels, the War on Drugs has continued to rage without end in sight and kill 350,000 in the process.<sup>24</sup> Expectations from the Mexican government and cartels might differ with regards to the probability of success in their respective cases, but the node in itself is meant to represent an objective reality outside their control. That is, the probability of success determined beforehand for the game. These are kept as variables to represent the changing nature of fighting and to consider, at the same time, potential variables omitted in this analysis. The game, of course, remains an abstract effort to explain Lopez Obrador’s ultimate decision, making it more reasonable to keep probabilities as undefined variables.

In this fourth decision node, the probability of the government winning is given by the variable  $p$  which is greater than zero and less than one. Conversely, the probability of the government losing is given by  $1 - p$ . This variable can be interpreted as the various factors that may enable a successful campaign, such as general availability of troops, military training, response time, and overall resolve. For this game, no player knows the true value of  $p$ , but they recognize the element of chance in the model. So Mexico’s government will take into account this final node from Nature before choosing whether to fight the Sinaloa Cartel or release Ovidio Guzmán.

Finally, Nature assigns a probability to either outcome, representing uncertainty in the possibility of victory for the Government or Cartel, and then the game comes to an end. Regardless of which node the Sinaloa Cartel set the game down in the second decision node, a government victory at the end of the fourth node represents a double negative payoff for cartels from losing Ovidio,  $R_C$ , and enduring the costs of fighting,  $c_C$ . Similarly for the military, a triumph will yield the positive payoff of media coverage,  $R_M$ , minus the costs of fighting represented by lost military officers in combat,  $c_M$ . Conversely, losing the battle to drug cartels would give the military the full negative payoff from critical press coverage,  $R_M$ , on top of the costs of fighting,  $c_M$ , as opposed to the negative payoffs multiplied by 0.5 in earlier decision nodes.

Finally, the payoffs to Mexico’s government depend on the particular combat scenario chosen by the Sinaloa Cartel in the second node. If the battle takes place in a thinly populated area, victory will yield the revenue of positive portrayals from capturing Ovidio,  $R_C$ , minus the costs from military casualties,  $c_M$ . A defeat would result in a

<sup>22</sup> Hernández, Anabel. *El Traidor: El Diario Secreto Del Hijo Del Mayo*. Grijalbo, 2020. <https://www.amazon.com/traidor-diario-secreto-Traitor-Spanish/dp/1644731509>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pardo Veiras, José Luis. “Una guerra inventada y 350,000 muertos en México.” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2019. [washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/06/14/mexico-guerra-narcotrafico-calderon-homicidios-desaparecidos/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/06/14/mexico-guerra-narcotrafico-calderon-homicidios-desaparecidos/)

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negative depiction from the public as shown by the payoff  $-R_G$  minus the costs endured by military forces,  $c_M$ . If the battle were to take place in a heavily populated area, the government would experience the same payoffs as in a scarcely populated scenario, but it would also endure the costs to the citizenry,  $c_G$ , regardless of triumph or defeat. With this, all payoffs and decisions in the tree have been explained as a means to replicate the events surrounding Ovidio Guzmán's capture.

### III. Understanding Equilibrium

Using the reconstruction of events from the first part of this paper and following the model developed in the second, we can now explain the resulting equilibrium from this game and the strategies followed by each player. Just by looking at the course of military operations on October 17<sup>th</sup>, we know the ultimate equilibrium to the game. The army first chooses to follow the original plan regardless of the new complications. Then, the Sinaloa Cartel decides to fight in large cities, even signaling their willingness to take the conflict across state borders.<sup>25</sup> Finally, president López Obrador yields to the cartel threats and orders the release of Ovidio Guzmán. Now, we must use the aforementioned model to explain the reasoning behind each player's choice and their overall cohesion as an equilibrium.

The outcome of this game proves an unprecedented decision in Mexican politics. The nation's president not only showed his willingness to negotiate with drug cartels, but effectively recognized the state's inability to deal with a violent threat. With the tools developed throughout this paper, we can now position ourselves in the presidential seat and reason through the different outcomes presented to him, and the final equilibrium.

To understand López Obrador's controversial decision, we must look back to the start of the game and provide a relevant explanation for why the military would choose to follow the original plan to capture Ovidio Guzmán. In light of all the complications, it would have been reasonable to stop the operation and resume on a later date with better organizing and backup support. This would have saved the government the tough choice of negotiating with drug cartels in later states of the game and resulted in the small negative payoff of  $-0.5 * R_G$  for the state and  $-0.5 * R_M$  for the military. Nevertheless, the way events developed saw little to no consideration for these factors. To this I propose two potential explanations which I will develop accordingly.

The first explanation assumes that the military understood what later stages of the game might look like, but their understanding of payoffs to other players and the probabilities of combat were unclear to officers on the ground. This applies equally to the payoffs of the Sinaloa Cartel and the government. In one instance, a case can be made as to why the military might assume the payoff to the cartel from rescuing their fellow drug lord,  $R_C$ , is relatively low. Once again, it is worth noting that Ovidio is a lower-level drug lord mostly famous due to his father's prominence in Mexico's fight against drug trafficking. As such, the revenue of rescuing Ovidio is likely small for cartels.

Despite this, the military could assume that Mexico's government put a high value in capturing Ovidio and had a high probability of winning a military conflict. Mexico's own Secretary of Security has supported this view, defending the nation's military as fully capable of fighting any criminal organization.<sup>26</sup> This assumes there is not only a large payoff to capturing Ovidio from the positive press that could be generated, but that the Mexican government's reputation was dependent on the perception that it was capable of fighting the cartels. Important to our analysis, the payoff to the government should be enough for it to willingly endure the cost of fighting in a large city. So, we can assume the military thought that cartels would not put up a significant fight for Ovidio, and that the overall payoff to the government would justify the intervention required to support troops in the inner perimeter once the battle began.

<sup>25</sup> Beaugard, Luis Pablo. "Captura de Ovidio Guzmán: El Hijo de El Chapo, Tras Su Detención En Culiacán: "Ya Paren Todo, Ya Me Entregué, No Quiero Más Desmadre"." *El País*, October 31, 2019. [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116\\_384039.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/30/actualidad/1572450116_384039.html).

<sup>26</sup> Navarro, María Fernanda. "Habríamos ganado en Culiacán, pero no quisimos exterminio: Durazo." *Forbes México*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/habrimos-ganado-en-Culiacan-pero-no-quisimos-exterminio-durazo/>.

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The second potential explanation portrays the military as holding perfect information about the payoffs to other players. That is, the military is fully aware of all the nodes that will follow from their decision and the corresponding payoffs. In it, they recognize their ability to shield themselves from the decision of releasing Ovidio, putting all blame on the federal government and merely acting as enforcers. Under such an assumption, the army would have to gain from following the original plan to capture Ovidio for the final result to be in equilibrium. Effectively, the military untangled itself from the final decision to release Ovidio and put the entire choice in the government's hands. The potential criticism from the press should judge the president as the one true orchestrator of the events, since the military only followed his orders.

This particular outcome is also reflected in the payoffs from ending the game by aborting the original plan and the choice to release Ovidio. If the military were to break the perimeter and attempt to establish a new operation in the future, they would receive a negative portrayal in society manifested through critical arguments in the press and a  $-0.5 * R_M$  payoff. Whereas, letting the government make the call to release Ovidio frees military officers from the potential blame determined by the press and society. That is, the military receives a partially positive payoff of  $0.5 * R_M$ . Since the payoff of letting the government choose exceeds that of backing out of the operation, the best response to the military is to follow the original plan. The final decision might have been a combination of both these explanations, but their individual existence provides enough explanation for the first choice in the model.

The Sinaloa Cartel's decision is easier to interpret but still requires some beliefs over future stages of the game. Since the cartel's goal is ultimately to maximize payoff by having the government free Ovidio, they must assess the only two outcomes of the game where that would occur; either the government releases Ovidio to avoid a violent confrontation or the cartel defeats the government, taking back Ovidio and enduring the costs of fighting. While one view could be that the cartel thought their probabilities of winning a fight were significant, there is another approach that is far more reasonable. Instead of trying to battle the government, the cartel looks to the next stage of the game and hopes to influence the government's choice. Since the cartel can impose a higher cost to the state by fighting in populated areas, it will try to push the costs of confrontation as high as possible, virtually forcing the government to release Ovidio before Culiacán is transformed into a death zone. Effectively, cartels are aware that the government is more likely to triumph in an all-out military encounter, gaining control over Culiacán and capturing Ovidio. To avoid this scenario, they must raise the stakes of conflict to higher levels by imposing a higher burden on the population. A burden, we might add, the state is unwilling to pay. In other words, since the expected outcome regardless of victory has a lower payoff than releasing Ovidio, the Cartel can deduce that the government would acquiesce.

Therefore, the Sinaloa Cartel chose to fight in highly populated areas not because they thought this would improve their chances of victory, but because it increased the burden and pressure on the state. The ultimate goal of the cartel was to increase the government's cost of fighting to sway the game in their favor. By choosing to attack Culiacán, signaling their willingness to push the conflict to neighboring states, the Sinaloa Cartel forces Mexico's government to endure not only the costs to the military,  $c_M$ , but also those to the citizenry,  $c_G$ . Since the payoff of getting Ovidio exceeds those of a later fight for the Cartel, this decision proves to be reasonable as well.

We finally arrive at López Obrador's decision node. The President must wage three important variables. First, he must consider the probability of success from a military engagement with the Sinaloa Cartel, which, as his Secretary of Security argued in a later press briefing, always favored the state.<sup>27</sup> Second, the president must wage the importance of Ovidio Guzmán to his presidency and the reports that will likely emerge from the press. While Ovidio was only a minor drug lord in comparison to the Sinaloa Cartel leader Zambada, he is still identified as the son of the most famous Mexican drug

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<sup>27</sup> Navarro, María Fernanda. "Habríamos ganado en Culiacán, pero no quisimos exterminio: Durazo." *Forbes México*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/habrimos-ganado-en-Culiacán-pero-no-quisimos-exterminio-durazo/>.

trafficker. Capturing Ovidio might have been a source of unanimous support in the press amidst the first year of López Obrador's administration.

The third factor is perhaps the most important and was used by the state to justify their decision later on. Even if the probability of success was overwhelmingly in the government's favor and the state placed a high value in capturing Ovidio, the president still had to consider the costs generated from fighting. By forcing the battle into large cities, the Sinaloa Cartel effectively pushed the government to an almost impossible wager: either risking the life of hundreds of citizens or being criticized by the national press and public opinion. As explained above, this made the government's expected outcome have a negative payoff, regardless of any positive press coverage from maintaining custody of Ovidio. This criterion was explicitly mentioned by president López Obrador when justifying his decision in a morning press briefing the day after Ovidio's release. As the president mentioned, the risk of having over 200 civilian casualties proved too large for capturing a single drug lord.<sup>28</sup> The potential of winning with a payoff of  $R_G - c_C - c_G$  could not justify the large costs to citizens,  $c_G$ , and pushed the government to the still negative, but smaller payoff of releasing Ovidio of  $-0.5 * R_G$ .

Furthermore, the events of October 17<sup>th</sup> proved to be a moment of reckoning for López Obrador's early campaign promises to use a softer approach when dealing with Mexico's *War on Drugs*. The president stood by his initial promises and surprised observers by yielding to cartel demands, setting precedent for future interactions. Whether such precedent is desirable or useful in enhancing social conditions falls outside of this paper's scope. Regardless of personal opinion, one must reckon that given all the limitations on the president and the decisions of other actors, the individual choices prove to maximize their payoffs and represent an equilibrium to the proposed model.

### **Conclusion**

There are few moments in a president's tenure with the power to set a precedent for future policy making. For the López Obrador administration, the first major of these opportunities came within months of taking power when the president departed from previous approaches and chose to release Ovidio Guzmán from custody. Initially, such a strategy seems to be irrational, signaling to the international community Mexico's willingness to negotiate with drug cartels and lack of capacity to enforce the rule of law. Nevertheless, once all the events surrounding this decision are accounted for, and one considers the potential payoffs of each action, there are various justifications for the president's decision. Whether it is that the costs were too large to endure, or the payoff from keeping Ovidio within government custody was too low, the outcomes were the same. Stuck between hard decisions, the president opted to free Ovidio and avoid violent confrontation. The end results may be praised or criticized, but before such value judgments can take place, one must understand the actions that resulted in these decisions. Without such an analysis, the choices of president López Obrador will remain obscure to political analysts, and so will most conflicts humankind has encountered and will continue to do so in years ahead.

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<sup>28</sup> Villa y Caña, Pedro, and Alberto Morales. "AMLO ordenó liberar a Ovidio Guzmán, hijo de 'El Chapo.'" *El Universal*, June 19, 2020. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/amlo-ordeno-liberar-ovidio-guzman-hijo-de-el-chapo>.



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