

## HISTORIANS KILLED FOR POLITICAL REASONS IN IBERO-AMERICA (1920-2020)

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### **Abstract:**

This essay examines the Ibero-American history producers who were killed for political reasons during the past century. It presents sixty-one victims from eight countries. Of these, 82% were killed by state forces, 16% by non-state forces. Dictatorships had the worst scores (57% of the victims), while flawed democracies also saw considerable casualties (33%), in contrast to emergent (7%) and stable democracies (3%). Much evidence was found for the thesis that killing these history producers did not necessarily mean the erasure of their names or achievements. Out of the sixty-one victims, nine (15%) were killed for political reasons that were mainly or partly related to their historical works. Six of these, however, occurred under democracies, particularly flawed or emergent democracies, and not under dictatorships. This finding leads to the hypothesis that well-entrenched dictatorships, wielding ruthless power, deter and block incriminating historical research – making the killing of history producers for history-related reasons relatively rare – whereas freer conditions in flawed and emergent democracies prompt or encourage such dangerous

historical research. Those investigating past systemic violence or the crimes of previous dictatorships then risk becoming targets of the military seeking to install or restore authoritarian rule.

**Keywords:**

Democracies (Emergent; Flawed; Stable); Dictatorships; History Producers; Political Murders.

*For Juan Gerardi (1924–1998)*

Between 1960 and 1996, Guatemala was torn by an armed conflict. The peace agreement that followed, created space for two large-scale initiatives to uncover the historical truth about the crimes committed during the conflict. One was supervised by the Church, the other by the United Nations. The bishops, who had started their project already before peace came, called it *Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (REMHI; Recuperation of Historical Memory). After three years of work, on 24 April 1998, the voluminous REMHI report, *Guatemala: nunca más* (Guatemala: Never Again) was presented. It identified the army as responsible for 85% and the guerrilla for 9% of all human rights violations and also provided names of perpetrators. Two days later, REMHI director, Bishop Juan Gerardi, was murdered. It was widely believed that military personnel engineered his death, although the army denied this. Dozens of those involved in the murder's investigation were intimidated. Three witnesses and six potential witnesses were killed. Much evidence was destroyed or disappeared. In 2007, the Constitutional Court eventually confirmed the 2001 conviction of Colonel Byron Lima Estrada, his son Captain Byron Lima Oliva and Sergeant Major José Obdulio Villanueva for the murder, although they saw their imprisonment terms reduced from thirty to twenty years<sup>(1)</sup>.

Gerardi was not a historian. Yet, in 1998 he was a history producer of sorts who symbolized the will of many Guatemalans to come to terms with their repressive and violent past. Behind him was a team of some eighty persons who collaborated in this unique effort at producing history. The

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(1) References for all cases can be found in the Bibliography.

REMHI truth commission wrote a first draft of history, a proto-history, that made headlines far beyond the continent. With Gerardi's death, the determined will to uncover the historical truth that had been hidden for decades received a hard blow, but after more than two decades the REMHI report still stands as a witness of time. The present essay bears witness to history producers like Gerardi, brutally killed for political reasons but not forgotten, and the works that survived them.

## **Method**

In evaluating whether history producers are hampered in their efforts to uncover the past, we possess scores of indicators. We can study how the producers and practitioners of history have been, for example, inappropriately dismissed or attacked by heads of state or censored by the government or unjustly prosecuted on the basis of overbroad laws. All these forms of harassment are important in illustrating attacks against history (De Baets 2019a, 2019b). Here, I will study the most extreme indicator of all: the killing of historians. I will only analyze cases of killings within the Ibero-American area, that is, Spain and Portugal and their former colonies in Latin America<sup>(2)</sup>. My temporal scope was limited to one century, roughly from the end of World War I to the present (1920–2020)<sup>(3)</sup>. In compiling the list of killings, I had to deal with three methodological problems.

The first was already noted in the Gerardi case. To assume that historians were the only ones to deal with the past is too narrow a view. In all Ibero-American countries without exception, many different groups have produced or practiced history. I therefore prefer to speak of history producers rather than historians to designate all those involved, professionally or otherwise, in the collection, creation or transmission of history. History producers include, for example, history students and all those who are engaged in truth-finding during processes of transitional

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(2) Excluding cases from Guyana (Walter Rodney), Haiti (left-wing history teachers under Papa Doc; Céligny Ardouin; Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine) and Suriname (Anton de Kom; Ben Scholtens).

(3) Excluding cases from Colombia (Rafael Uribe Uribe), El Salvador (Luis A. Silveiro), Spain (anonymous historian; Ibn al-Khatib; Antonio Cánovas del Castillo) and perhaps Peru (under Inka Atahualpa).

justice. This broader pool of recruitment has the disadvantage that I had to decide in more borderline cases than otherwise would probably have been the case. But excluding all those who were not officially historians and yet dealt systematically with the past, was not an option.

The second problem was that the term “killing” does not cover all the attempts of dictatorial and other regimes to physically eliminate history producers. Scores of victims were effectively killed, but many others disappeared. Some died in prison or committed suicide under extreme duress. I could not exclude these deaths that amounted to the same result as killings. The major criterion, then, was not killing as such but any physical elimination, provided the reason for it was demonstrably political. I did not include history producers who were abducted but reappeared alive or who were threatened with death or survived attempts on their lives, or who were war casualties either as soldiers or citizens<sup>(4)</sup>.

The third and most important methodological problem consisted in the complexity of what I call “political reasons”. History producers could be eliminated for a variety of political reasons: either because they were history producers in the strict sense; or because they were intellectuals and academics, or because they were journalists, human rights defenders or political activists; or because they were members of specific national, racial, ethnic or religious groups. I am interested above all in the first option, killing for *historical* reasons, but I need the other types of political reasons – elimination for political activities other than history or for reasons related to group membership – to gain an idea of the relative importance of the first option.

Within the framework just given, the collection of cases was still difficult because physical elimination often occurs in obscurity and leaves few traces – although some eliminations happened in broad daylight and had wide resonance. This implies that there are probably many gaps in the list of cases due to ignorance<sup>(5)</sup>. The complete list is

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(4) In Spain, British Communist historians Ralph Fox (1900–1936; also a journalist) and John Cornford (1915–1936; also a poet), both members of the International Brigades who fought the Nationalists, were killed in action. Other historians who died in the civil war, apparently from non-political causes, were Claudio Galindo y Guijarro (Albacete 1937), Andrés Giménez Soler (Zaragoza 1938) and Juan María Rubio Esteban (Valladolid 1939).

(5) Evidently, the fact that in many countries and periods no physical eliminations of history producers took place does not imply that no censorship of history or persecution of historians occurred there.

summarily presented below. Although I often sympathized with the history producers on the list, I should insist that I do not necessarily share their views, historical or otherwise, or approve their actions.

**Ibero-American history producers killed for political reasons (1920–2020) [n=60]**

<i>Argentina</i> (n=17) AAA-related (1973–1976): 2 Military dictatorship (1976–1983): 15	<i>Dominican Republic</i> (n=2) Military dictatorship (1930–1961): 2
<i>Brazil</i> (n=6) Military dictatorship (1964–1985): 4 Transition (1985–): 2	<i>Guatemala</i> (n=8) Civil war and armed conflict (1960–1996): 6 Transition (1996–): 2
<i>Chile</i> (n=7) Military dictatorship (1973–1990): 7	<i>Mexico</i> (n=3) Felipe Calderón presidency (2006–2012): 2 Enrique Peña Nieto presidency (2012–2018): 1
<i>Colombia</i> (n=12) Civil war and armed conflict (1964–2016): 11 Transition (2016–2020): 1	<i>Spain</i> (n=6) Civil war (1936–1939): 3 Exile (1939–1975): 1 ETA-related (1959–2018): 2

*Source:* Author’s database. For underlying sources, see bibliography. For details, see coded variables at <http://www.concernedhistorians.org/va/ibero.pdf>.

*Note:* Total for 8 countries in Ibero-America (1920–2020): 61<sup>(6)</sup>.

The cases are spread over eight countries, Argentina with seventeen cases being located at one end of the spectrum and the Dominican Republic with two at the other. With a timespan running from 1920 to 2020, the earliest identified political death was inflicted in Spain in 1936 (during the civil war) and the latest in Colombia in 2020. The number of cases is so small that most statistics cannot be applied meaningfully. Generalizations will therefore be drawn with utmost caution. In the following section, I present the cases according to whether they occurred under a dictatorship or a democracy. For the latter regime type, I distinguish emergent, flawed, and stable democracies. In painting this general profile of the sixty-one cases, I will pay most attention to those whose deaths were effectively related to history. In the last section, I will ask which regimes killed history producers with the aim to attack history itself<sup>(7)</sup>.

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(6) In comparison, the worldwide total for all countries (68) with cases in the 120 years between 1900 and 2020 was 414. The total for all countries (74) from the beginning of time to 2020 was 465 cases.

(7) I am grateful to the following persons for providing data on one or more cases, Argentina: Joel Horowitz (December 2008); Colombia: Diana Gómez (August 2010), Bas Blaauw (December 2011), César Augusto Duque Sánchez (February 2014, April and

## History producers killed under dictatorships

The six cases in *Spain* display a very irregular pattern as they are dispersed over 64 years, covering a civil war (1936–1939), a dictatorship (1939–1975), and a democratic context marred by terrorist violence (1975–2000). Only one of the political deaths took place under Franco's dictatorship. The victory of Franco's Nationalists in 1939 unleashed a massive wave of exile, mostly to France and Latin America. One of the many exiles was Ramón Iglesia, a historian and director of the Spanish-American Section at the Centro de Estudios Históricos (Center for Historical Studies) of the Universidad de Madrid (University of Madrid). Iglesia had fought in the Republican army for three years and then fled to Mexico. He was deeply influenced by his civil war and exile experiences: both led him to reconsider earlier views of his subject of research, the 1521 conquest of Mexico. He also suffered the humiliation that, while living in exile, his work was published in Spain in 1940 without any mention of his name. In 1942 he went to the United States, where he worked at the Universities of California, Illinois, and Wisconsin. He threw himself from his apartment window in Madison, Wisconsin. From our research perspective, Iglesia's case is rather atypical. On the one hand, his suicide is intimately connected with his war and exile experiences, hence with two eminently political reasons, on the other hand Iglesia had a history of psychiatry and his suicide occurred nine years after his exile – two factors loosening the political character of his death. As far as is known, he was the only one among an estimated 110 Spanish exile historians to have committed suicide.

Another exile from the Spanish civil war, Jesús de Galíndez, had gone to the *Dominican Republic* in 1939. In that country Rafael Trujillo had installed a relentless dictatorship in 1930 that would last until his assassination in 1961. A Basque nationalist, Galíndez became a legal adviser to the Dominican Ministry of Labor and National Economy. He displeased Trujillo by arbitrating several strikes too favorably for the sugar workers. Consequently, he went into exile in the United States in 1946, obtained citizenship there and became active in anti-Trujillo circles,

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September 2020); Guatemala: Tracy Ulltveit-Moe (March 2000), Frank La Rue (March 2020); Peru: Roberto C. Parra (May 2020); Portugal: Sérgio Matos Campos (February 2020), António Borges Coelho (February 2020); Spain: Ignacio Peiró (February 2020).

increasing at the same time his contacts with the American secret services to support a range of anti-Franco activities. In March 1956 he disappeared from the streets of New York less than two weeks after the defense of his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University. It exposed Trujillo as a dictator and would be published as *La era de Trujillo: Un estudio casuístico de una dictadura hispanoamericana* (*The Trujillo Era: Case Study of a Hispanic-American Dictatorship*) within days. The disappearance had been carried out by Trujillo's agents: Galíndez was kidnapped, anaesthetized, and secretly transported by plane to the Dominican Republic, where he was murdered. His body was never found. The case culminated in political and economic sanctions against the Dominican Republic in 1960.

Even closer collaborators of Trujillo were not safe. Minister of Labor Ramón Marrero was a politician, novelist and historian charged with writing the official history of the Dominican Republic. He was put on Trujillo's blacklist after drafting a report about the poverty of the coffee plantation workers hired by the Trujillo family. In July 1959 he was accused of treason for having inspired Tad Szulc's articles in *The New York Times* about the corrupt Dominican government and the property of the Trujillo family. A few days later, he was shot by Trujillo's agents in the national palace itself. The murder was covered up by placing his corpse in a burning car that was pushed into an abyss. He was given a state funeral. Two of the three volumes of his national history were already published, the third was completed after his death by César Herrera.

In *Brazil*, some history producers were killed on account of their political or armed resistance against the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 until 1985. One of them was history teacher Antonio Benetazzo, a leader of the Communist guerrilla group Movimento de Libertação Popular (Molipo; Movement for Popular Liberation) who lived in hiding, was detained, tortured and killed in 1972. Among those who disappeared were Ivan Mota Dias, a history student who was also a militant of a left-wing armed group, Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (VPR; Armed Revolutionary Vanguard), probably executed in prison in 1971, and Vandick Reidner Pereira Coqueiro, a history teacher, militant of the Partido Comunista do Brasil (PcdoB; Communist Party of Brazil) and guerrilla fighter in Araguaia, in 1974. History and geography professor Afonso Henrique Martins Saldanha, a militant of the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB; Communist Party of Brazil) and leader of the teachers' union of Rio de Janeiro, was imprisoned in 1970; he died in 1974 after

he was released from prison following complications resulting from the torture he had suffered.

In *Chile*, General Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship started with a coup in 1973 and took hold of the country until 1990. The first four years were the worst. Among those who committed suicide while in detention was history professor Luis Sanguinetti. He was the head of the customs office investigation department and active in the Partido Socialista de Chile (PS; Socialist Party of Chile). Juan Fernando Ortiz, a professor of history and geography at the University of Chile, was a leader of the Asociación de Profesores y Empleados de la Universidad de Chile (APEUCH; Association of Professors and Staff of the University of Chile) and a member of the Central Committee of the Partido Comunista de Chile (PCCh; Communist Party of Chile). He was dismissed and frequently harassed after the coup, and eventually disappeared. In 2001, his remains were found in an unmarked grave and identified. History students Maria Cristina López, Félix de la Jara, Carlos Guerrero and Herbit Ríos, activists for the left-wing Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR; Revolutionary Left Movement), were abducted by members of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA; National Intelligence Directorate). Their deaths occurred between 1973 and 1976. In 2014, the Supreme Court convicted former DINA members of Guerrero's enforced disappearance. Another case should be noted when the dictatorship was already on its return: Marcelo Barrios, a history and geography student who had become a member of the left-wing guerrilla movement Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR; Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front), was executed by a brigade of marines in 1989.

In *Argentina*, the military staged a coup and installed a dictatorship in order to initiate a so-called Process of National Reorganization in March 1976. It resulted in the disappearance of thousands of left-wing or supposedly left-wing Argentinians in what was termed "a dirty war". Among the disappeared were art history professor Claudio Adur, founder of a Center for Artistic Study and Research, and history teacher Irma Zucchi, who directed an Institute of Fine Arts. Other disappeared included history teachers Eduardo Requena, a founder and board member of the Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina (CTERA, Confederation of Workers in Education in Argentina), and Roberto Sinigaglia, a Peronist activist who was also a lawyer defending political prisoners. The director of historical films



Raymundo Gleyzer was abducted as well. Not only was Gleyzer a militant of the Marxist Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT; Revolutionary Workers' Party), he was also considered dangerous for his films about the poverty of peasants in the Northeast of Brazil (*La tierra quema*; The Land Burns, 1964), the Mexican Revolution (*México, la revolución congelada*; Mexico, the Frozen Revolution, 1971) and the history of a corrupt Peronist trade union leader (*Los traidores*; The Traitors, 1973). His films were often shot and shown in clandestinity. *Los traidores* was confiscated and singled out as one reason for Gleyzer's death. Like Gleyzer, Jorge Cedrón directed historical films, among them *Por los senderos del Libertador* (In the footsteps of the Liberator, 1971); *Operación masacre* (Operation massacre, 1972); *Resistir* (Resist, 1978, pseudonymously). With his name circulating on death lists, he went into exile in France in 1977, where he committed suicide in 1980: while on a toilet in a Paris police station where he was reporting the abduction of his father-in-law, he stabbed himself several times in the heart in despair. Compared to Iglesia's case, the time between exile and death was shorter and the circumstances – a pervasive fear of cross-border persecution – were less ambiguous in Cedrón's case.

At least seven history students disappeared: Jorge Alberto Basso, Alberto Ledo, Marcela Goeytes, Aníbal Gadea, Liliana Galletti, Susana Martínez and Laura Carlotto. Most had been active in left-wing political parties (Gadea and the Brazilian-Argentinian former history student Basso) or human rights organizations (Galletti was a human rights researcher for the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, APDH; Permanent Assembly for Human Rights). Gadea and Carlotto were members of the left-wing Juventud Universitaria Peronista (JUP; Peronist University Youth). Goeytes was two months' pregnant when she disappeared. Carlotto was pregnant as well when she was abducted together with her partner. She gave birth in a military hospital, and then was tortured and killed on orders of General Carlos Guillermo Suárez Masón. The (male) baby was taken away and adopted under another name. At age 36 in 2014, however, he took a DNA test proving his kinship with the Carlotto family. His grandmother was Estela de Carlotto, the president of human rights group Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo). Suárez Masón was tried *in absentia* and sentenced to life imprisonment in Rome in 2000 for this and other crimes. Ledo was a special case: he performed his military service

in a Unidad de Operaciones Antiterroristas (Anti-Terrorist Operations Unit), disappeared and was probably killed on orders of a captain of his own unit, but the official reason for his absence was “desertion”. Carlos Hobert and Domingo García, former history students turned Montonero guerrillas, were killed. Hobert had himself been responsible for planning abductions. Like Carlotto, García’s wife, Beatriz Recchia, had been pregnant when she was captured in 1977. She was killed after delivery and the baby was kidnapped, only to be identified in 2009.

In *Guatemala*, much of the period 1960–1996 was filled with military dictatorships whose security services persecuted critical intellectuals. Some of the historians who did not leave the country became almost inevitably involved in human rights or political work, and, consequently, faced death threats or were abducted and assassinated. All of them were affiliated with the Universidad de San Carlos (USAC; University of San Carlos) in Guatemala City. In 1984, Carlos Ericastilla, USAC history professor and archaeologist, was captured and left for dead on campus. He died later as a result of the beating and torture to which he had been subjected. In 1992, USAC history professor Manuel Peña, a director of the Asociación Magisterial Guatemalteca (AMG; Guatemalan Teachers’ Association) and a member of the Asamblea Nacional del Magisterio (ANM; National Teachers’ Assembly), was shot dead, probably by security forces. Peña had been working in a local community project involving people displaced by the armed conflict. He was known for his left-wing views and had received anonymous threats in the months prior to his death. The murder remained unresolved. USAC history professor Rolando Medina and USAC history student Luis Colindres, a leader of the left-wing Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios (AEU; Association of University Students), disappeared. USAC history students Ligia Martínez and Abilio Berganza were shot dead. While Martínez was also a teacher, Berganza was a member of the council of directors of the USAC School of History. Soon after his death in 1977, the school was raided.

### **History producers killed under emergent democracies**

After a dictatorship had fallen, history producers could still become victims of political murder in roughly two different situations: either they

were involved in contemporary political and human rights activities and killed for this commitment or they did research into the crimes of the past dictatorship and were eliminated by those who could not tolerate that the uncomfortable truths of dictatorial repression were being unearthed. The former can be illustrated with cases from Brazil, the latter with cases from Guatemala. In *Brazil*, poet and historian Hermógenes de Almeida Silva Filho and lawyer Reinaldo Guedes Miranda, advisers to the opposition Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT; Workers' Party), were shot dead in Rio de Janeiro in 1994, possibly by members of the paramilitary Comando de Caça aos Comunistas (CCC; Command for Hunting Communists) or some successor group. The killings occurred only hours after they had participated in a debate on the PT's public security policy, during which Miranda had proposed the complete disarmament of Brazilian society, including the police force. Both were also members of the human rights commission of the local council that monitored the investigation into two massacres of street children. In addition, they had received death threats on account of their activities on behalf of black people and homosexuals. Like these two men, Gilson Nogueira de Carvalho, a human rights lawyer of the Centro de Direitos Humanos e Memória Popular (CDHMP; Center for Human Rights and Popular Memory) in Natal, had received many death threats. He was shot dead in 1996 by three men for investigating the connections between a death squad made up of civil police and other government employees (nicknamed "meninos de ouro"; "golden boys") and local authorities in Rio Grande do Norte. An official investigation into his killing was discontinued a year later "for lack of evidence". In 1997, his parents sued Brazil for lack of due diligence while investigating the relevant facts. In 2006, however, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that it had received only limited factual support for such a claim and that, consequently, Brazil could not be said to have violated the right to a fair trial and the right to judicial protection.

In *Guatemala*, there was the major case of Bishop Juan Gerardi recounted in the beginning. Other human rights defenders in that country received frequent death threats, foremost among them the forensic anthropologists who exhumed mass graves to gather evidence that could prove the dictatorial crimes. One of them was Manuel García de la Cruz, a human rights activist of the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA; National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows) involved in exhumations of clandestine mass

graves in indigenous areas. He was seized, tortured and killed in El Quiché department in 2002.

### **History producers killed under flawed democracies**

Simplifying a more complicated political situation in *Spain*, I characterize the Second Republic during the civil war between Republicans and Nationalists (1936–1939) as a flawed democracy. Three historians fell victims to violence in the first year of war: historian José Palanco Romero, a left-wing Republican politician and member of parliament, was executed by followers of Franco; church historian and Jesuit priest Zacarías García Villada was killed by militias of Frente Popular (Popular Front); and the conservative Catholic historian of law Román Riaza Martínez-Osorio, briefly a sub-secretary at the education ministry, was murdered by left-wing militias.

In the run-up to the 1976 coup, *Argentina* was a flawed democracy marred by much violence. In the years after Juan Perón's return from Spain in 1973, three historians were threatened with assassination by the government-backed extreme right-wing paramilitary organization Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (AAA or Triple A; Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance). Two of them were effectively killed. The AAA's first victim was lawyer, historian and member of parliament Rodolfo Ortega Peña; they shot eight bullets through his head in 1974. A specialist of nineteenth-century Argentinian history, a legal adviser of trade unions, and after the 1966 Onganía coup a member of the emerging new left and staunch defender of political prisoners, Ortega had a reputation as a leading revolutionary Peronist. All the attendees at his funeral were arrested. Silvio Frondizi, a lawyer and Marxist professor of history and political science at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA; Buenos Aires University) and founder of the left-wing revolutionary group Praxis y Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR-Praxis; Praxis and Movement of the Revolutionary Left), was assassinated by the AAA as well, after denouncing the murder and torture practices of the military in Catamarca province. His funeral was also disrupted. He was the brother of Arturo Frondizi, the former President of Argentina.

The political regimes of Colombia and Mexico are not easily characterized. No one calls them dictatorships although they are not

stable democracies either. Both countries have been plagued by large-scale violence for decades. One of the most reliable indicators for democracy, the annually updated Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, has collected data about the democratic characteristics of states since 2006. In that year, 2006, both Colombia and Mexico were labeled “flawed democracies” (Economist Intelligence Unit 2019, 42), which were defined as follows:

Flawed democracies ... have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation (Economist Intelligence Unit 2019: 49).

Both countries amply satisfy these conditions. *Colombia* has had a history of civil wars since independence in 1810. It has experienced protracted but intermittent political violence since the 1948 assassination of liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and especially since 1964, when armed rebel groups appeared on the scene. Usually, the conflict had low intensity levels. In 2016 a peace agreement was concluded between the government and the most powerful guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC; Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces). The International Committee of the Red Cross estimated that 220,000 people had been killed since 1964 and that 70,000 people had gone missing in the conflict. From the 1980s, historians (and other academics) had been among the victims of this political violence. Here is a sobering summary overview.

On 6 November 1985, members of the left-wing guerrilla group Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19; 19th of April Movement) occupied the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and held hostage all those present. Hours later, the army raided the palace, killing 77. Eleven persons disappeared, including historian Cristina Guarín, a temporary employee at the Palace’s cafeteria at that moment. Her remains were found in 2015. In 1992, Canadian archaeologist Steve Gordon was kidnapped and killed by the FARC. In 1995, Gabriel Cruz, a member of the Academy of History of Montería, Córdoba, northern Colombia, and a historian and journalist working on a book about the military’s activities against leftist

insurgents in Córdoba, was stabbed to death by unknown assailants. In 1997, Claudio Pérez, a historian at the University of Córdoba, was abducted by members of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC; United Self-defense Forces of Colombia), killed and buried in a mass grave, possibly in retaliation for some bomb explosion unrelated to him.

On 18 April 1998, a few days after the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of Gaitán on 9 April 1948, human rights lawyer José Eduardo Umaña was killed by three unidentified paramilitaries. Umaña had received plenty of death threats. Among the reasons for the murder were his defense of trade union leaders and guerrillas who had become victims of state violence, his defense of the disappeared of the Palace of Justice, his criticism of death squad activity, and his attempt to reopen the inquiry into the Gaitán murder, including the role played in it by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 2016, the Attorney General declared that the murder of Umaña was an imprescriptible crime against humanity. In 1999, Jesús Antonio Bejarano Ávila, an economist and economic historian, was shot dead by members of the FARC-EP when he was on his way to teach a class at the Faculty of Economics of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (National University of Colombia) in Bogotá. He was an expert in conflict resolution and had been a key government adviser in the peace negotiations with guerrilla groups during the terms of Presidents Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) and César Gaviria (1990–1994). In the same year, the remains of historian Darío Betancourt, a specialist in the history of political violence, regional mafia groups and drug trafficking, and a teachers' union member, were found outside Bogotá. He had been abducted by paramilitary gunmen several months previously, probably because corrupt military intelligence files had falsely linked his name to armed opposition groups. Others pointed to his works on the history of violence in Cali, Valle del Cauca region. In 2001, paramilitary men killed Carlos Delgado in Consacá, Nariño, southern Colombia. He was a historian of the region and a teacher union leader. In 2004, AUC members decapitated Plutarco Granados, a historian and writer, and president of the Academia de Historia Juan Galea, in Tame, Auraca, northern Colombia.

In March 2006, days after the parliamentary elections, Jaime Gómez, a historian at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Pontifical Xavierian University) in Bogotá and a trade union leader, was abducted, tortured and murdered. A leading member of Poder Ciudadano Siglo XXI

(Citizen Power 21st Century) headed by Liberal Party senator Piedad Córdoba, a human rights movement opposing paramilitary groups, Gómez had been secretly investigated by various official agencies and police units. In 2008, human rights defender John Fredy Correa Falla, a member of the Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (MOVICE; National Movement of Victims of State Crimes), which organized demonstrations against the political violence, was shot dead by four gunmen of a paramilitary death squad. He had lived under death threats for three years.

Finally, in late September 2020, Campo Elías Galindo Álvarez, a retired historian and urban planning expert from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, sede Medellín (National University of Colombia, Medellín location), was assassinated in his home with a knife. Galindo had been a left-wing political leader of the Colombia Humana movement in Medellín and a member of the Frente Amplio por la Paz y la Democracia (Broad Front for Peace and Democracy).

Mexico counted more than 60,000 disappeared between 2006, the year in which President Felipe Calderón launched a war against drug cartels, and 2020. In these years, three history producers became victims of violence. In 2008, Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez, a historical anthropologist studying and defending the Amuzgo people along the Costa Chica in southern Guerrero, drove toward Chilpancingo de los Bravo, the capital of Guerrero. He had visited some Amuzgo communities for a documentary film about indigenous cultures and traditions, entitled *La danza del tigre* (The Tiger's Dance). During his visit, he had also documented alleged human rights violations by the authorities against the staff of a local community radio station. On his way back, he was beaten to death and his filming equipment was stolen. One explanation for the murder pointed to the involvement of a local mayor who had opposed indigenous movements, including the radio station; another suggested that Gutiérrez had angered the authorities by filming members of the Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI; Federal Investigations Agency) as they raided the radio station.

A few months later, in October 2008, historian and journalist Enrique Rodríguez was abducted in Durango city, northern Mexico, probably by members of the organized crime. Some pointed to the fact that he had prepared a report on one of the drug cartels operating in Durango, others

suggested that his press article of the 2007 wedding of Emma Amparo Coronel, a beauty queen from Canelas, Durango, with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán had displeased the latter. The third victim, Samuel Malpica Uribe, was a historian and anthropologist working at the Departamento de Investigaciones Históricas del Movimiento Obrero (DIHMO; Department of Historical Research into the Workers’ Movement) of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP; Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla). He had also been the university’s rector in 1987–1989 and made an unsuccessful bid for Puebla’s mayorship in 2007 on behalf of two left-wing political parties. He was shot in 2013 by unidentified gunmen. Investigators looked at a number of possible reasons, including Malpica’s allegations about the existence of a corruption network at the university that involved a politician of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party). A few weeks before his death, he had filed an official request with the state comptroller’s office for an investigation into the alleged irregularities.

### **History producers killed under stable democracies**

Finally, there is the case of post-Franco Spain. Indisputably, Spain was an emergent democracy between Franco’s death in 1975 and the failed 1982 coup and even its accession to the European Union in 1986. It is more contentious, but not impossible, to argue that Spain was an emergent democracy until the first post-Franco generation gave way to the next around 2000, starting a process of active dealing with the dictatorial past that eventually led to the 2007 Historical Memory Law. I take the view that the status of emergent democracy gave way to that of a stable democracy somewhere in the decade following 1986. In this context, two historians were murdered because they had spoken out against Basque terrorism. In 1996, Francisco Tomás y Valiente, a socialist and anti-Franquist professor of history of law and later president of the Constitutional Court (1986–1992), was killed at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Autonomous University of Madrid) by a member of the Basque separatist movement Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basque Homeland and Freedom) who was disguised as a student of his. A leading expert in constitutional history, Tomás y Valiente was a defender of regional autonomy but also an outspoken critic of ETA violence. His murderer was arrested in 2002.



Meanwhile, in November 2000, economic historian Ernest Lluch, a former socialist minister of health, a former Congress member and a former rector, was also shot dead by ETA terrorists after returning home from the Universitat de Barcelona (UB; University of Barcelona). He had been an anti-Franco militant, and as a member of nonviolent associations, he had tabled proposals to solve the Basque problem peacefully. To that aim, he had studied historical proposals to arrange Spain's problem of communities. The day after his murder, one million people demonstrated for dialogue and peace in the streets of Barcelona. Claiming responsibility for the murder, the ETA declared in January 2001 that Lluch's proposals for dialogue in the Basque question had been divisive. The three killers were sentenced each to 33 years in prison in 2002. In his last piece of research, partially published in the daily *El Correo* of 19 September 2000, Lluch had attempted to show that ETA's first victim was not the Francoist police officer Melitón Manzanos in 1968, as ETA asserted, but a baby with the name of María Begoña Urroz as early as 1960. This thesis was controversial as many attributed Begoña's death to the armed group Directorio Revolucionario Ibérico de Liberación (DRIL; Iberian Revolutionary Liberation Board).

## **Patterns**

Now that the cases have been profiled, let us look at patterns. Overall, an estimated sixty-one Ibero-American history producers were killed for political reasons between 1920 and 2020. As argued early on, this number seriously underestimates a phenomenon which by its secretive nature is difficult to investigate. This data collection difficulty can be illustrated. The present research started from a database built since 1980, but during additional research for this essay, the Colombian website *Vidas silenciadas: Base de datos de víctimas silenciadas por el Estado en Colombia* (Silenced Lives: Database of victims silenced by the State in Colombia), established in 2017, was discovered. This website contains a database of people who died during the violence in Colombia, including their professional details, which enables searches with terms such as "history" and "archive". This increased the cases for Colombia from five collected before 2017 to twelve. It cannot be excluded that other such unexplored databases exist. The period covered was 1920–2020, but the earliest deaths were found in Spain in 1936, the latest one was retrieved in Colombia in

2020. This is another indication that the data collection has serious gaps as it is nearly impossible that no political deaths of history producers have occurred between 1920 and 1936. Given these limits, any patterns signaled here should be seen as documented conjecture.

The general characteristics of the sixty-one cases are quickly provided. Of all the victims, 87% were male, 13% female. An estimated 82% of the victims died at the hands of forces allied with or condoned by the state and 16% were killed by non-state forces<sup>(8)</sup>. Of all the victims, 10% had used violence themselves. Eight percent of the victims died abroad. Because 30% of the population consisted of history students, the age of the victims differed wildly. The oldest, Bishop Juan Gerardi, died at age 76, while the youngest three were history students of 21 years old. The single deadliest year was 1976 with nine deaths in Argentina (the year of the Videla coup). Many of the sixty-one Ibero-American history producers were locally known. About one third (30%) were national figures as well<sup>(9)</sup>, among them several who also enjoyed a reputation abroad. Some had a continental or Ibero-American impact. Presumably none was known worldwide, although Jesús de Galíndez and Juan Gerardi came close to this after (and partly because of) their deaths.

This point of posthumous reputation is worth pausing. In general, unnatural deaths are likely to be remembered better than natural ones. In any case, the deaths of these sixty-one history producers did not necessarily mean the erasure of their names or works. In Argentina, Chile and Colombia, among others, large electronic databases of the missing were established; in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, Peru, Brazil and Colombia, truth commissions produced voluminous reports with victim datasets. As for individual cases, Gerardi became the object of no less than five biographies and a film. Aside from Gerardi, at least Laura Carlotto, Francisco Tomás y Valiente and Ernest Lluch were also honored with a biography. Galíndez's doctoral dissertation was published in 1956 in Santiago de Chile: seven printings were issued within six weeks. An almost identical edition was published in Buenos Aires. Galíndez was awarded his doctoral degree *in absentia* in June 1956. He also became the protagonist

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(8) Observe the similarity with the REMHI percentages for Guatemala.

(9) Galíndez, Marrero, Frondizi, Ortega, Gleyzer, Cedrón, Gerardi, Umaña, Betancourt, Bejarano, Gómez, Malpica, Palanco, Martínez-Osorio, Iglesia, Tomás y Valiente, Lluch, and possibly others.

of a realistic novel by Vázquez Montalbán. After the assassination of Jaime Gómez, his daughter Diana, a history student, cofounded *Hijos e hijas por la memoria y contra la impunidad* (Sons and Daughters for Memory and against Impunity) and became involved in human rights work. As a result, she was threatened herself by a paramilitary group and forced into exile. Some history producers became the focus of legal cases at the national level (Guerrero in Chile, Gerardi in Guatemala), abroad (Carlotto in Italy) or at the international level (Nogueira, Guarín and Gómez before the Inter-American system)<sup>(10)</sup>. We see that the memory of many killed history producers lives on in many ways.

It comes as no surprise that the dictatorships of the region had the worst scores, with 57% of the victims. It is, however, revealing that flawed democracies also saw considerable numbers of casualties (33%), especially Colombia which signed for one fifth (20%) of all cases. In emergent democracies, 7% of the cases were counted; in stable democracies, 3%. A majority (54%) was killed, most often executed extrajudicially, but a remarkable 38% disappeared, while the rest (8%) died of other causes (mainly suicide or death in the wake of prolonged ill-treatment). In none of the countries, killing as a form of censorship ever exceeded other, more moderate and classic forms of political persecution, such as unfair dismissal or censorship (De Baets 2002; Network of Concerned Historians, 1995–2020). While superficially there may be nothing more efficient to silence the message than to silence the messenger, the strategy of political murder comes at a high cost as it is logistically laborious and politically dangerous. The chilling effect of political murders and disappearances on the families and professional colleagues of the victims, however, resonated in all layers of society and instilled more fear than more “moderate” forms of censorship such as dismissal.

The multi-faceted profiles of the history producers complicated the search for clear reasons behind their deaths. The first remarkable finding, however, is that no Ibero-American history producers were killed merely because they were members of specific national, racial, ethnic or religious groups. This stands in sharp contrast to the political murders of history producers in other states, such as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, where this was regularly the case. In Ibero-America, most history

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(10) All these legal cases can be consulted at <http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content/le.html>.

producers were killed either because they were political activists, human rights defenders or academics – and were perceived as such rather than as history producers. Many victims were associated with left-wing political parties, reflecting merely that all the dictatorships at issue were right-wing. At least 21% of the victims were involved in human rights work<sup>(11)</sup>. It is telling that most of them died in periods of transition. While human rights work is virtually impossible under dictatorships, in emergent democracies it is everywhere – although often carried out in precarious circumstances (one needs to think only of the exhumation of clandestine mass graves). As many as 15% of the victims were active in teacher or student unions, reflecting the powerful role played by universities in the Ibero-American context<sup>(12)</sup>. Let us now turn to the history producers who were killed mainly or partly for reasons related to their historical work proper:

**Ibero-American history producers killed for historical reasons, among others  
(1920–2020)**

*Argentina*

Di-1 Raymundo Gleyzer: for directing historical films.

*Colombia*

Fd-1 José Umaña: for defending historical legal cases, particularly the 1948 Gaitán murder and 1985 disappearances.

Fd-1 Darío Betancourt: for studying the evolution of political violence and the long-term nexus between politics and drugs dealers.

*Dominican Republic*

Di-1 Jesús de Galíndez: for writing a book of recent history about the Trujillo dictatorship.

*Guatemala*

Ed-2 Juan Gerardi: for leading the initiative of an incriminating truth commission report about 36 years of violence and atrocities.

Ed-1 Manuel García de la Cruz: for supporting exhumations of mass graves.

*Mexico*

Fd-1 Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez: for sustained historical-anthropological interest in and support of an indigenous people.

*Spain*

Di-1 Ramón Iglesia: suicide due to, among others, professional humiliation in 1940 and mental pressure from a changing world view following war (1936–1939) and exile (1939–1948) experiences.

Sd-1 Ernst Lluch: for his research into the first ETA attack.

Source: Author's database. For details, see the coded variables at <http://www.concernedhistorians.org/va/ibero.pdf>.

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(11) Sinigaglia, Galletti, Almeida, Nogueira, Gerardi, García de la Cruz, Ortega, Umaña, Gómez, Correa, Gutiérrez, Tomás y Valiente, Lluch, and possibly others.

(12) Saldanha, Ortiz, Requena, Peña, Colindres, Berganza, Betancourt, Delgado, Gómez, and possibly others.

This overview comprises nine history producers who were killed mainly or partly for historical reasons (15% of the total). Three gradations were distinguished: individuals exclusively killed for historical reasons (none), individuals mainly killed for historical reasons (one, Gerardi) and individuals partly killed for historical reasons (eight). The grading was the result of interpretation. The Iglesia case, it may be recalled, was selected after much hesitation. Or, to cite another example, Lluç's thesis of the early origin of ETA violence is controversial and possibly wrong. This was not a reason, however, to exclude him from this overview as the thesis, valid or not, seriously damaged what was left of ETA's reputation and may well have influenced the decision to kill him.

Despite a context of brutal elimination, the nine cases unintentionally show the rich variety of the historiographical and memory landscape: historical films (Gleyzer), historical court cases (Umaña), a study of historical patterns of violence (Betancourt), a work of contemporary history (Galíndez), a truth commission report about past crimes (Gerardi), the exhumation of graves as evidence of mass atrocities (García de la Cruz), a historical interest in indigenous peoples (Gutiérrez), a life of shifting views due to personal tragedy and deep introspection (Iglesia), and, finally, the demystification of a terrorist group's origins (Lluç). Many approaches to the past are represented here, showing, if anything, that a study only looking into murders of academic or professional historians would miss the better part of the picture.

The overview of nine cases also invites some discussion about countries and persons that are missing. First, one would have expected that cases in countries such as Portugal and Peru would have been on the list. Portugal had its Ditadura Nacional (National Dictatorship) in 1926–1933 and Estado Novo (New State) in 1933–1974, and Peru also saw various authoritarian periods about which a truth commission amply reported (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003). Both countries had their share of persecution of history producers and censorship of history, but apparently without any political deaths. Second, two *prima facie* candidates are not in the overview. In the Dominican Republic, the official historian of the country, Marrero, was killed, but for reasons unrelated to the latter's position as an official historian. In Colombia, history producer Gabriel Cruz Díaz had prepared a book about the military's activities against leftist insurgents in Córdoba at the time of his death. In the case of Betancourt, a similar research interest was historical and probably related to his death

(and therefore he figures on the list), but in the case of Cruz Díaz the data was too scarce to link the book to either history or his killing.

The major surprise of the analysis is the distribution of the nine deaths over the political regimes. Three took place during a dictatorship, three in a flawed democracy, two in an emergent democracy and one in a stable democracy. This means that six out of the nine history producers killed for specifically historical rather than broader political reasons did not occur in outright dictatorships. This is a puzzling finding that leads to speculation: is it possible that history producers risk their lives more in unstable political situations, typical for emergent and flawed democracies, than in stable situations typical for well-established dictatorships? The hypothesis would then be the following: that entrenched dictatorships, because they wield ruthless power, deter and block incriminating historical research – thus making the killing of history producers for history-related reasons relatively rare. In contrast, freer conditions in flawed and emergent democracies prompt or encourage historical research into the crimes of previous dictatorships or into past systemic violence, transforming their authors into targets of the military and their allies seeking to install or restore authoritarian rule. The hypothesis is based on only a few cases and needs further corroboration.

Is the share of 15% Ibero-American history producers killed for historical reasons high? We do not know but we can compare this finding to three recent similar studies:

**Number of history producers killed for historical reasons in four studies**

- \* In a worldwide sample of 132 political deaths of history producers (1945–2017): 30 cases or 23% (De Baets 2019b, 9–27).
- \* In a worldwide sample of 16 political deaths of archivists (1934–2007): 4 cases or 25% (De Baets 2019b, 28–40).
- \* In a worldwide sample of 18 political deaths of exiled history producers (1926–1996): 6 cases or 33% (De Baets [2021]).
- \* This Ibero-American sample of 61 political deaths of history producers (1936–2020): 9 cases or 15%.

A tentative conclusion from this comparison would be that less history producers were killed for reasons related to their historical work in the Ibero-American area than in the entire world. The authoritarian regimes of Ibero-America tended to target history producers relatively more for their activities in the political, journalistic, and human rights fields and relatively less for their historical work as such than regimes in other regions.

As elsewhere, however, history was a prominent feature in the Ibero-American political tapestry. At the presentation of his truth commission report, Juan Gerardi explained the stakes:

We want to contribute to the construction of a different country. Therefore, we recover the memory of our people ... [T]ogether we responsibly accept this task to break the silence that thousands of victims of the war have kept for years. Now they speak and tell their story of pain and suffering so that they feel released from the burden that for years has crushed them ... [W]e cannot cover up reality, we cannot distort history, we should not silence the truth. ... As long as we do not know the truth, the wounds of the past will remain open and unhealed ... To open ourselves up to the truth ... is not an option ..., it is an undisputable imperative ... for each society that claims to be human and free (Gerardi 1998; author's translation).

In these lines we can read the reasons why history and memory are so vital – and therefore so dangerous to those who decide to rule their country with violence.

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