

## **Collective violence in post-conflict Guatemala: Understanding lynch mobs \***

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In this article, rival hypotheses about the causes of collective violence in contemporary Guatemala are tested. According to the mainstream, previous human rights violations during the internal armed conflict and the existing levels of poverty are the main causes of lynchings. An alternative model suggests that the probability that an alleged criminal dies being the victim of a lynch mob depends upon the capacity of the indigenous population to overcome collective action problems and the absence of the state. Data are analyzed using negative binomial regression. The statistical analysis shows that the main factors affecting the probability of occurrence of a death by lynching are some characteristics of the indigenous communities, such as solidarity among ethnic fellows, and the number of courts in each *municipio*: the larger the percentage of the indigenous population, and the smaller the ratio of courts per 100,000 inhabitants, the more likely the occurrence of lynching deaths and mobs.

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As any post-conflict society, Guatemala faces many challenges, such as the consolidation of its democratic institutions, and reduction of poverty.<sup>1</sup> However, one of the most salient concerns for its citizens is still their own security. Victimization surveys have shown that common and organized crime are a nightmare (Prensa Libre 7/18/04). The life, freedom, and property of Guatemalans are always in danger. The courts, the police, the attorney general, and the prisons are not functioning properly. Thus, it is almost impossible to establish the rule of law in the country. Corruption of public officials is an additional factor in favor of criminals and, as a consequence, the population feels helplessness. There is a shared disillusion with democracy because people's expectations were that a regime change would be translated in economic prosperity and security (Azpuru 2000). As a reaction, many people are willing to tolerate tough governments or, even worse, to apply justice by their own hands.

The most striking problem that in recent years has been calling the attention of the world toward Guatemala is the lynching phenomenon. Since 1996 more than 500 lynch mobs have been formed, mainly in the rural areas and regions mostly inhabited by indigenous people. This peculiar form of violence has been characterized by the spontaneous collective reaction of the people in small towns or villages against alleged criminals. However, there is not an agreement about the causes of the problem.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, new forms of collective violence have erupted,

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<sup>1</sup> After 36 years of internal armed conflict, the tragic results of violence for Guatemalans can be summarized as follows: 200,000 civilian casualties, 50,000 forced disappearances, 40,000 refugees in neighbor countries, one million internally displaced people, and around 500 indigenous villages erased from the map. The worst years of counterinsurgency operations were 1980-1983. State terror and even genocide were strategic choices of the political turmoil of that period. Once the guerrillas threat was diminished, military government decided to initiate transition toward democracy in 1984. A new constitution was enacted the next year to hold free and fair elections, and in 1986 after 15 years of continuous military ruling the first civilian president took power. Finally, after many years of negotiation, Guatemala achieved peace in December 1996. On the statistics of the violence see Ball et al. (1999), Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (1999), and Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (1998).

<sup>2</sup> There are more than few academic studies about this problem. Besides the two official reports of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights (MINUGUA 2000, 2002), the work of Adams and Bastos

such as mobs defying the police and damaging its stations as punishment for its inefficacy and corruption.

What are the determinants of lynch mobs? Are the never-ending poverty and the past armed conflict the crucial explanations? How do ethnic or territorial shared identities facilitate collective action? How the absence of the state push people to violent solutions? The aim of this research paper is to achieve a better understanding about the causes of lynchings in Guatemala. A first step toward this goal is to test the explanatory power of different independent variables that have been proposed by some scholars and international agencies (Adams and Bastos 2003; Mendoza and Torres-Rivas 2003; MINUGUA 2000, 2002). The conventional wisdom dictates that the causes of lynchings in Guatemala are related to the consequences of the armed conflict (e.g., the so-called “culture of violence” as a legacy of the war), and to the socioeconomic hardship of the people (i.e., poverty and lack of education) that generates frustration and high levels of criminality. The quantitative analysis that follows reveals that both the armed conflict and poverty should be reconsidered as “the main causes”, due to their lack of statistical significance in explaining the probability of both lynching deaths and mobs in Guatemala during the period 1996-2002. The alternative hypothesis that takes into account the ethnic identity of villagers and the absence of the state, specifically the judiciary, is supported by the data.

### **Theoretical Approaches**

The lynching era in the South of the United States (1882-1937) is the most well known case in the world. A total of 5,112 lynching executions were registered. Sociologists have looked at the relationship between economic conditions (e.g., price of cotton and inflation) and

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(2003), and Gutierrez and Kobrak (2001) are good examples of the anthropological approach to the problem. Some scholarly efforts in the English language are Snodgrass (2002) and Handy (n.d.).

lynchings (Beck and Tolnay 1990), and they have explored the so called “competition and power-threat” hypothesis which suggests that political challenges and economic competition have shaped regional and temporal variation in lynchings against blacks (Corzine, Creech, and Corzine 1983; Olzak 1990). Social control theories have been challenged by means of statistical analysis that shows that there is not clear relationship between the lynching rates, an “informal mechanism” of social control, and two alternative forms of “formal social control” namely legal executions and incarceration (Massey and Myers 1989). There are several models of collective violence. One of them proposes that the activation of latent political identities that separate people into “us” and “them” often triggers violence. This violence does not emerge from preexisting hatred but from sudden uncertainties and shifting social conditions, particularly the declining capacity of authorities to enforce agreements or police existing boundaries (Tilly 2003). Diffusion models explaining racial rioting in the United States during the 1960s can be easily applied to argue that lynchings are not independent events, and that villages not only have differential intrinsic propensities to lynching, but also different levels of responsiveness and resistance to diffusion from other lynchings (Myers 2000). Additionally, trying to understand violent male behavior, the term “culture of honor” suggests that violence is more likely to emerge wherever the man perceives a threat to one of his most valued possessions, namely his reputation for strength and toughness, because gaining resources, or keeping them, depends on the community’s believing that the individual is capable of defending himself against predation (Nisbett and Cohen 1996).

In the case of Guatemala there is no evidence of lynchings as a means of inter-ethnic violence. Then the theoretical framework applied to the quantitative analysis that follows has its roots in the theories of institutions and collective action (Mendoza 2003).

## The Puzzle

The United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA) has claimed that the main characteristics of those regions affected by lynch mobs are the following: *i*) High intensity of the internal armed conflict (e.g., massacres and military intervention in the daily life of the people); and *ii*) Socioeconomic exclusion (e.g., low levels of human development). Concerning the first characteristic, MINUGUA argues that traditional patterns of communitarian life and distribution of power among the indigenous people were destroyed by the armed conflict. The military structures acted to the detriment of the traditional authorities, and against the use of indigenous people's norms, damaging their social fabric, eroding their cultural capital, and violating their notion of rule of law. The cruelty and brutality of the lynching are also related to the counterinsurgency strategy during the 1980s, which implies a process of collective learning on how to deal with conflicts in the villages.<sup>3</sup> About the so-called "structural causes" of lynching (e.g., poverty, illiteracy, and social exclusion), MINUGUA suggests that frustration could be the fuel for angry mobs, and also an explanation of high levels of criminality.

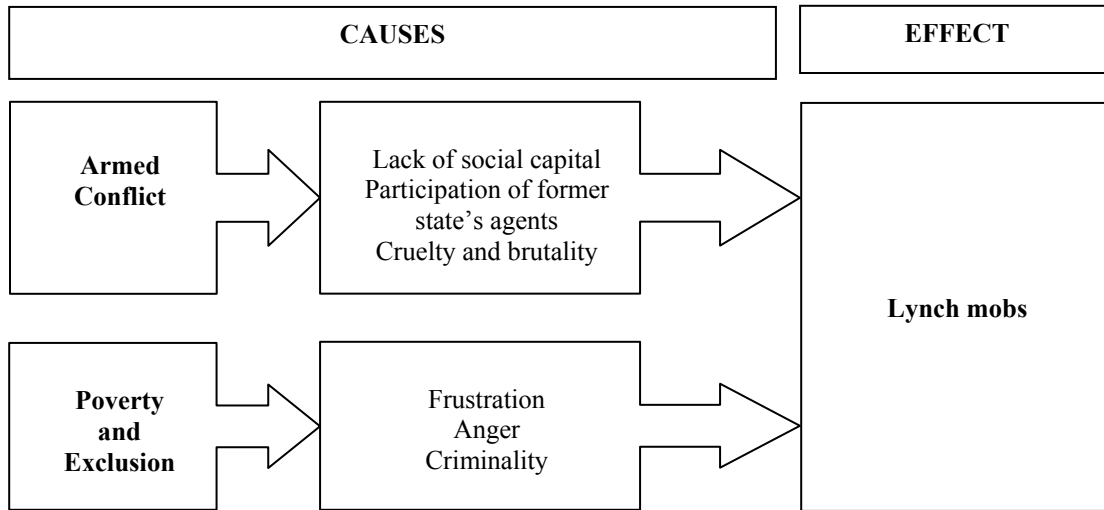
It might be true that lynching deaths have occurred typically in communities where the state repression was more intense during the civil war, and where the socioeconomic conditions are below the national average. However, such a model can not elucidate why in El Salvador, for example, with a very similar brutal civil war and also high levels of poverty the problem of lynching has not been present. Regarding the social and cultural capital, contrary to MINUGUA's assumption about a lack of both, some cultural and social assets of the indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> According to MINUGUA, several mob instigators were related to the Army as *Comisionados Militares* or *Patrulleros de Autodefensa Civil*. However, the data provided by MINUGUA (2004) shows that such claim is only true for less than 5% of the cases. The tabulation of each case verified by MINUGUA's officials confirms that lynch mobs are the result of spontaneous reactions of the communities (in 78% of the cases "the villagers" were the instigators).

population might explain why the indigenous regions have the lowest homicide rates in the country.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1. Causes of lynch mobs according to MINUGUA



The implicit model used by MINUGUA looks like Figure 1, but those elements are not enough to explain *collective* violence. Therefore, alternative hypotheses should be developed. For instance, the propitious environment for such violent collective reaction might be people's frustration in facing the injustice and the high levels of insecurity in their communities.<sup>5</sup> If the most fundamental purpose, and justification, of the state's existence is the provision of order, security, and justice, what happens when the state does not provide those public goods? Some

<sup>4</sup> In seven *departamentos* with high percentage of indigenous population (more than 60%), the annual average of homicide rates (from 1986 to 1997) is 5.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the U.S. during the same period had a rate 9.2 per 100,000 inhabitants (Homicide rates from the Vital Statistics, Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics). Internet source: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/hmrt.txt> Comparisons between lynchings and homicides are made in Adams and Bastos (2003, 173-179), and Mendoza (2003, 105-109).

<sup>5</sup> Of course, such absence of the state might be explained as a consequence of the internal armed conflict. For example, as a result of the tolerance and promotion of violence by the state itself during the conflict, the civilian population understood that the state would not guarantee their lives, freedom and property, and that, even worse, the state's agents could be a menace for those fundamental rights. So, without any legal or institutional protection the people started to provide for themselves the public goods that the state neglected. The people began by coordination and contribution to solve the problem of collective action for the provision of justice, order and security.

people involved in lynch mobs have said that lynching is an answer to the inefficiency of the judiciary, and several surveys have confirmed that the public opinion explains lynching as a result of impunity and lack of confidence in the justice system.

Violence is neither wanton nor senseless; it can be instrumental in order to reduce the probability of defection. In this sense, extreme brutality aims to alter the criminals' expected utility, by increasing the intensity of the sanction and the probability that any crime will be sanctioned (Kalyvas 1999, 251). This violence could be also explained as the result of a "culture of honor" which implies that people need to appear strong and unwilling to tolerate any transgression of their norms. This culture, a set of informal institutions, is more likely to grow in locations where the law and state enforcement mechanisms, the formal institutions, are absent or very weak.<sup>6</sup>

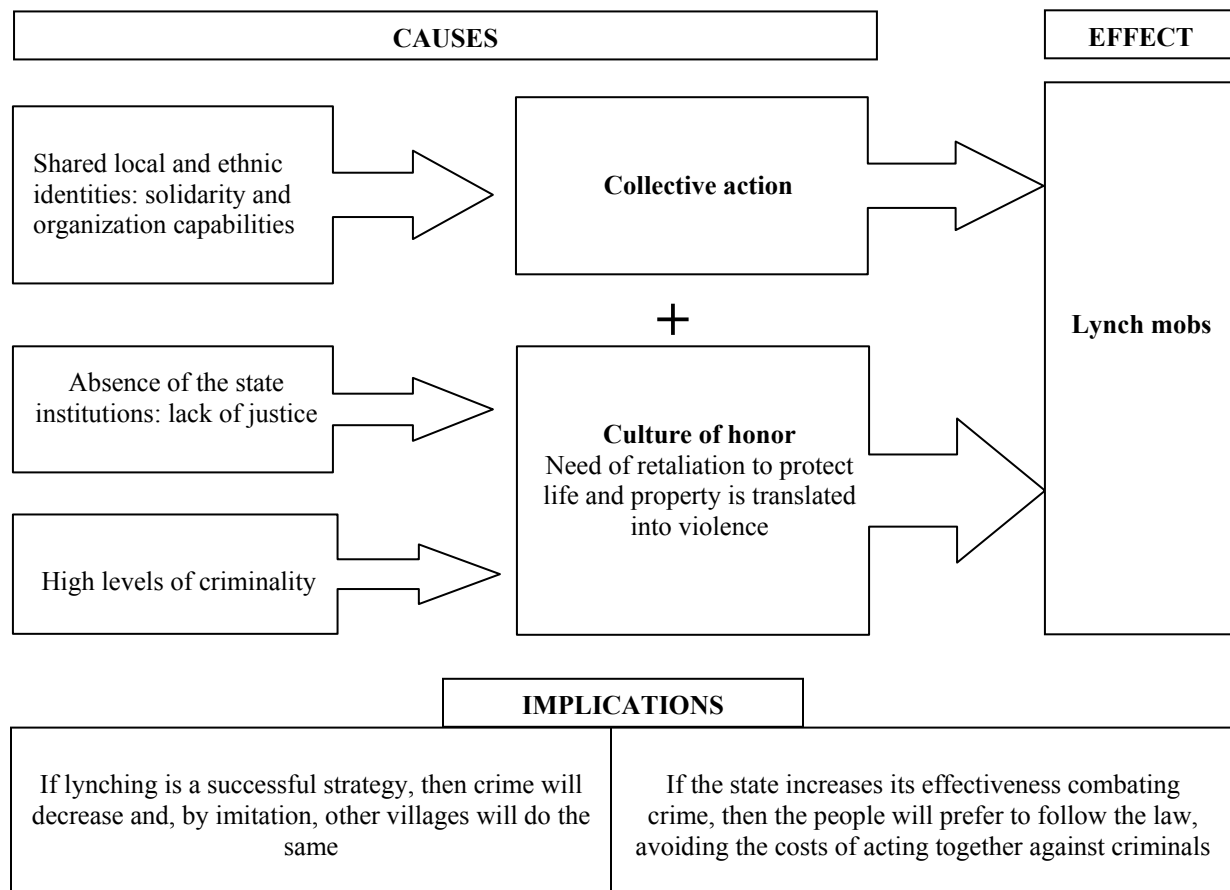
Lynching is not part of indigenous customary law, but instead a form of collective violence that emerges from some particular characteristics of the indigenous culture, such as its enormous capacity of organization, coordination, and contribution to provide public goods. Generally, any problem of collective action is solved thanks to a strong shared local and ethnic identity that in the cases of criminal offenses "makes it more likely that ill-treatment or an injustice to fellow ethnics [neighbors], though not personal experiences will become a grievance and act as a grievance multiplier in the group as a whole" (Oberschall and Kim 1996). Thus, any criminal activity within an indigenous community is not only the victim's problem, but also a concern for the whole village and something that will trigger collective action, especially when there is a perception of high levels of criminality.

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<sup>6</sup> The manhunt tradition in the U.S. was a "practice of Southern white men in arming themselves unofficially and hunting down an accused person. This method of mutual aid in policing area, evolved on the frontier, persisted in localities where police power was least adequate" (Raper 1969, 9).

Consequently, in a society where the formal institutions for preserving order and protecting the life and property of the people do not exist, or are not enforceable, a set of informal institutions that applies instrumental violence are more likely to emerge. When high levels of criminality and impunity exist, and such problems disturb a community with strong ethnic identity, it is more likely that this group will achieve collective action in order to provide a valuable public good: security. If both conditions exist at the same time, in the same area, there is a higher probability of collective violence in the form of lynch mobs. Figure 2 presents an alternative model of the causes of lynching, as a phenomenon of collective violence.

Figure 2. Alternative model about causes of lynch mobs



This model emphasizes an explosive combination: shared ethnic or territorial identities that facilitate coordination and mobilization, and a culture of honor that generates violence. The causes for such culture of honor are the absence of the state and high levels of crime (i.e., threat to people's resources). If such instrumental violence applied through collective action is a successful strategy (e.g., crime decreases), then other communities will behave in the same way following a model of diffusion, by imitation. Another implication is that if the state achieves better levels of performance, not just being physically present, but also by fulfilling its role as enforcement agent of the law, and delivering the public goods, then the people will avoid the risk of dealing directly with criminals, because it also has a cost for individuals.

In a society where crime is one of the most salient problems because it affects directly people's sense of security, order, and peace; and where the state is absent because it is incapable of preventing such crime and punishing criminals; a culture of honor to protect their lives and properties with violence is more likely to emerge. And if the people in such societies have learned to overcome problems of collective action by organizing themselves, thanks to their strong shared identities; then it is more likely that lynchings will occur in such a society. This does not imply that such societies are embedded in a culture of violence, but that its members are willing to take high risks in order to avoid potential losses due to the fact that no formal institution or enforcement agent will protect them. Such self-defense action against criminals is more likely to emerge in communities that have good channels of communication among its members which facilitate a quick mobilization.

## Data and Method

This study is a cross-sectional quantitative analysis during the period recognized as the lynching era in Guatemala. MINUGUA (2004) has verified and documented 480 cases of mob formation, of which 133 were lynchings or “fatal cases” resulting in 235 deaths, from 1996 to 2002.<sup>7</sup> There are two important gains in this statistical analysis vis-à-vis the reports of MINUGUA (2000, 2002) that based their conclusions in very superficial comparisons only taking into account the *departamentos*, the larger political and administrative sub-national unit, or simply some *municipios* where lynching cases occurred. First, while MINUGUA faces limitations for quantitative inquiries because it uses small samples, this study has a larger sample including all the 331 *municipios*. Second, comparisons within the entire municipal set, allowing multiple combinations of variables, prevent the problem of selection bias on the dependent or independent variables. For instance, maybe there are some *municipios* where state institutions are absent and high levels of crime are detected, but where a lynching has never happened. It is also worthwhile to analyze all the *municipios* due to the significant differences among them and because a *municipio* is a sub-national unit that has political autonomy and where the population has a shared territorial identity since colonial times.

The usual definition of lynching and the one I use is as follows: “murder for supposed crime, to seize somebody believed to have committed a crime and put him or her to death immediately and without trial”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the dependent variable should be the number of fatal cases in each *municipio* between 1996 and 2002, which is a count variable (it varies from 0 to 7). The occurrence of mobs without taking into account the final outcome will also be considered as

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<sup>7</sup> Datasets are available through the Internet <http://www.nd.edu/~cmendoza1/datos/>

<sup>8</sup> In Guatemala, a broader definition has been used by MINUGUA: to lynch means to punish (not necessary to death) one or more persons (presumed criminal offenders) by collective violence (mob aggressive reaction) without due process of law. However, it remains debatable whether this is the best conceptual and analytical approach.

a dependent variable in a separate model (it varies from 0 to 34). Due to the use of a count dependent variable and the presence of many observations with zeros (249 municipios with 0 lynching, and 176 with 0 mob cases) it is worthwhile to estimate the models on negative binomial regression. A histogram shows that the data are strongly skewed to the left, thus Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression would be inappropriate.

The first independent variable (conflict) is an average of the annual ratio of human rights violations during the internal armed conflict (people disappeared, injured in army attack, killed, kidnapped or tortured) per 100,000 inhabitants in each municipio from 1960 to 1995 (Ball 1999).<sup>9</sup> The second independent variable (poverty) is the extreme poverty rate for each municipio taking into account the 2000 Living Standards Measurement Survey and the population in 2002 (SEGEPLAN 2004).<sup>10</sup> The third explanatory variable (ethnic) is the percentage of indigenous population in each municipio according to the latest population census of 2002 (INE 2004).<sup>11</sup> The fourth explanatory variable is the current presence of the state (courts) that is measured using a ratio: courts per 100,000 inhabitants by municipio in 2003 (Organismo Judicial 2004).<sup>12</sup> Two control variables are introduced into the models: population density

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<sup>9</sup> Ball, Kobrak and Spierer (1999) have processed and analyzed over 19,000 case reports of human rights violations from various sources. The dataset is available through the Internet <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ciidh/data.html>

<sup>10</sup> This is the most recent estimation of extreme poverty rates for each municipio according to the latest household survey and population census. It has not been published yet by SEGEPLAN.

<sup>11</sup> The ethnic or geographical identity has been captured by the population census. The census data sheds light on the degree of people's self-identification with a specific ethno-linguistic group. Thus, the percentage of speakers of a particular indigenous language will indicate not just the concentration of indigenous population, but also the sense of belonging to that population, at least indirectly. A survey could help us to understand which is the predominant identity shared by the people of a defined area. It could be the case that territorial ties are stronger than ethno-linguistic links. The survey should also explore the propensity of such a strong shared identity to facilitate collective action.

<sup>12</sup> However, the most important question is whether the state agents are or not responsive and effective. Thus, a better measurement needs indicators of responsiveness and effectiveness (e.g., rate of supposed criminal offenders who were captured in a specific year and area). There is a lack of information on this issue.

(density) and percentage of urban population (urban) in each municipio according to the 2002 census (SEGEPLAN 2004).

Table 1 Pearson correlation coefficients and univariate statistics for independent variables

	conflict	poverty	ethnic	courts	density	urban
Annual ratio of human rights violations, 1960-95	1.000					
Extreme poverty rate, 2000	-0.015	1.000				
Percentage of indigenous population, 2002	0.056	-0.138	**	1.000		
Courts per 100,000 inhabitants, 2003	-0.105	*	-0.004	0.072	1.000	
Population density per sq km, 2002	-0.068	-0.103	*	-0.035	-0.081	1.000
Percentage of urban population, 2002	-0.057	-0.010	-0.033	0.283	***	0.424 ***
Mean	6.298	19.776	47.495	7.358	290.126	38.722
Standard deviation	13.759	14.242	40.463	6.549	518.526	25.200
Minimum	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.580	3.000
Maximum	150.360	65.000	100.000	52.190	4398.570	100.000

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01

## Results and Discussion

The violence during the internal armed conflict does not explain the formation of a mob against a suspected criminal but it is statistically significant for fatal cases. It has a positive sign, indicating that in places with more human rights violations, the more likely the occurrence of a lynching. Regarding the argument about socioeconomic hardship and lynchings, the negative binomial regression has shown that the percentage of extreme poverty in each municipio does not have statistically significant impact explaining either the lynching or the formation of mobs. In contrast, the percentage of indigenous population in each municipio is always highly significant in explaining both mob formation and lynchings. It has the expected sign, that is, the more the shared ethnic identity as indigenous people, the more likely the occurrence of a mob and the violent death of the suspects. The presence of the state by means of the courts is also always highly significant and with the sign predicted by theory: the more the presence of the judiciary the less likely the occurrence of deaths by lynching and the formation of violent mobs. Population density is statistically significant in explaining mob formation. It is plausible to say

that in places where the neighbors are isolated from each other it is more difficult to overcome the collective action problem due to the lack of communication among them. The percentage of urban population is significant only in the case of fatal cases, indicating that the higher the urban population the less likely the murder. It might be explained by the fact that in urban areas it is easier for policemen to take care of a situation in which a suspected criminal has been caught by the population.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the negative binomial regressions of four models. In models 1 and 2 the dependent variable is the occurrence of lynching, properly speaking, or the so-called “fatal cases”. The difference between both models is that in the latter the irrelevant variables were dropped. Models 3 and 4 have a different dependent variable: the occurrence of a “mob case”, it does not take into account whether a person was killed. Model 4 only has the significant variables.

Table 2. Determinants of lynchings and mobs

	Lynching Model 1		Lynching Model 2		Mob Model 3		Mob Model 4	
Annual ratio of human rights violations, 1960-95	0.009	**	0.009	**	0.019			
Extreme poverty rate, 2000	-0.005				-0.006			
Percentage of indigenous population, 2002	0.016	***	0.016	***	0.017	***	0.017	***
Courts per 100,000 inhabitants, 2003	-0.153	***	-0.158	***	-0.087	***	-0.096	***
Population density per sq km, 2002	0.000				0.001	***	0.001	***
Percentage of urban population, 2002	-0.011	**	-0.008		-0.005			
Constant	-0.770	*	-0.858	**	-0.240		-0.366	*
Number of observations	331		331		331		331	
Wald chi2 (6)	77.82		68.87		86.07		84.32	
Log likelihood	-234.452		-235.245		-470.020		-474.083	
Alpha	0.791		0.759		1.354		1.422	

All the estimations were made using the option of robust standard errors for the command *nbg* of STATA 8.2.

\* p < 0.10 \*\* p < 0.05 \*\*\* p < 0.01

Table 3 shows the impact on the dependent variable of each coefficient estimated for the six independent variables.<sup>13</sup> The numbers indicate the expected percentage change in the dependent variable with one unit increase in the independent variable, holding the other variables constant.

Table 3. Expected percentage change in the dependent variable

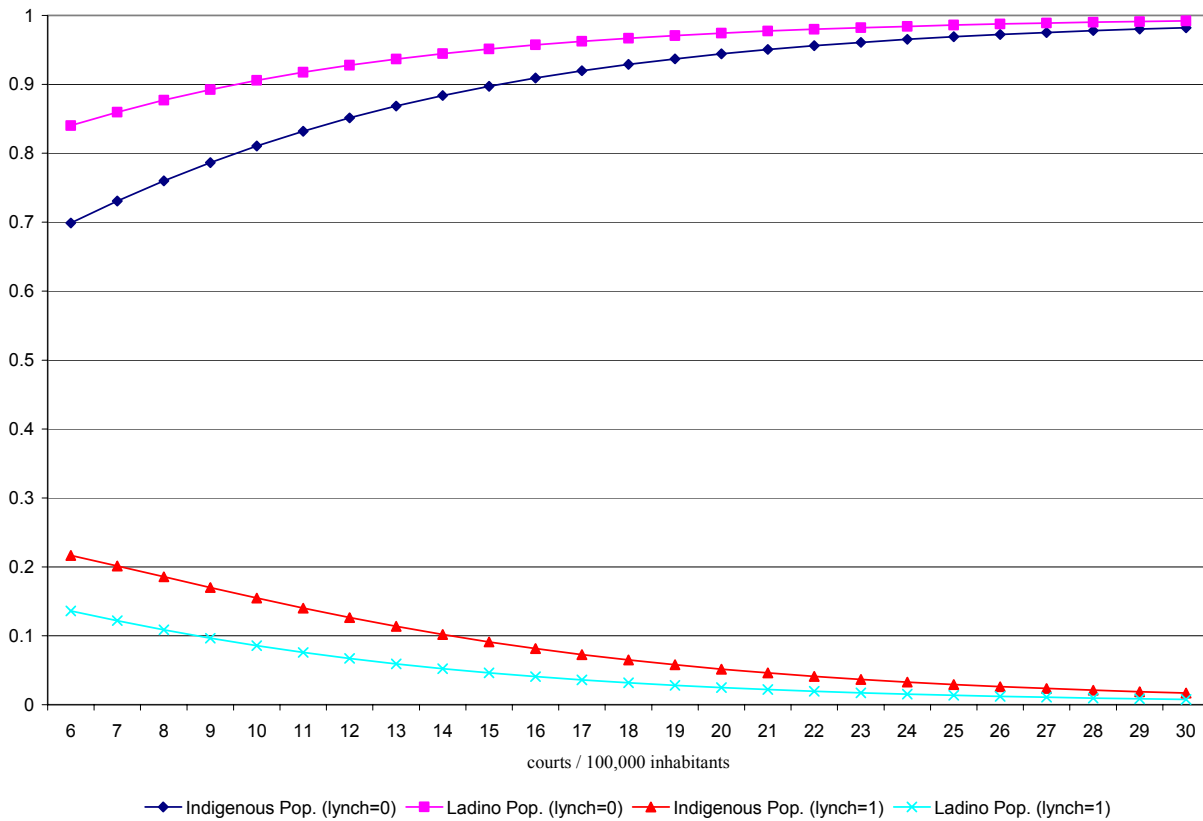
	Lynching Model 1		Mob Model 3	
Annual ratio of human rights violations, 1960-95	0.946	**	1.884	
Extreme poverty rate, 2000	-0.485		-0.591	
Percentage of indigenous population, 2002	1.627	***	1.705	***
Courts per 100,000 inhabitants, 2003	-14.156	***	-8.302	***
Population density per sq km, 2002	0.027		0.066	***
Percentage of urban population, 2002	-1.133	**	-0.513	

An increase of one violation per 100,000 inhabitants leads to an expected 0.95% increase in the number of lynchings. As it was mentioned above, extreme poverty does not have a statistical relevance explaining lynchings or mobs. However, the negative signs might be indicating that collective action of any sort rarely emerges among people who are very poor. The percentage of indigenous population has an important effect: a one percent increase implies a 1.63% increase in the number of fatal cases and 1.71% increase in the number of mob cases. Nevertheless, the most important independent variable is the rate of courts per 100,000 inhabitants because one more court could reduce the number of lynchings and mob cases in 14% and 8% respectively. One person increase per sq km (population density) leads to a 0.07% increase in mob formation. And one percent increase in urban population reduces lynchings in 1.13%.

<sup>13</sup> For models estimated with negative binomial regression,  $[\exp(\beta_j) - 1] * 100$  gives the expected percentage change in the dependent variable with a one unit increase in the independent variable, holding the other variables constant.

Figure 3 illustrates the main conclusions of this statistical analysis through four simulations where the independent variable is the number of courts per 100,000 inhabitants that varies from 6 to 30, and the dependent variables are the probabilities of zero or one lynching. In order to understand the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous (*ladinos*) populations, for one case the variable *ethnic* is set in 75% and for the other case in 25%.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 3. Probability of lynchings by ethnic group



Thus in a municipio with a high percentage of indigenous population it is more likely to achieve collective violent punishment against a suspected criminal than in a municipio with high percentage of non-indigenous population. However, the decisive element to preserve a peaceful social order is the presence of the state delivering the public goods such as justice.

<sup>14</sup> The simulation was produced by CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. Version 2.1. Tomz, et al. (2003).

## Conclusions

Lynch mobs are a specific case of collective violence. On the one hand, the “collective” dimension is related to the ethnic and local identities, that is, the solidarity that increase the capability of the people to get organized in order to provide public goods by themselves, due to the absence of the state. On the other hand, the “violence” is related to a culture of honor that arises due to the need of self-defense against criminals.

One of the important implications of this alternative model is that lynchings might be adopted by other villagers because it is an effective measure for stopping crime. Thus, it is crucial to collect evidence about the consequences of lynching in some villages. This will require a special effort of field work doing interviews with key people in the communities.<sup>15</sup> The levels of criminality could be also measured by victimization surveys that can reveal both the perception and the actual level of burglary and other criminal offenses. However, the main problem is that perceptions and reality are intermixed in the issues of violence and crime, and even a well designed survey could not be able to separate what people believe were the levels of crime before and after a lynching, and the actual prevalence of crime in both moments. People will tend to justify the community behavior by exaggerating the dissatisfaction with the previous situation and the benefits of the radical measure.

A major challenge is to find evidence that will support or contradict the relevance of the two most statistically significant explanatory variables (i.e., ethnic and courts) and that will shed light on the causal mechanisms that finally generate the phenomenon. The implications for public policy will be extremely important, especially because the structural causes that are difficult to address in the short run could be displaced in favor of more specific interventions.

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<sup>15</sup> Guitiérrez and Kobrak (2001, 15) have pointed out that many people in Huehuetenango said that crime was stopped after a lynching.

It is also important to note that although lynch mobs have only been documented since 1996 some evidence about previous events might be found. However, it is still important to answer why lynchings began to be an issue until 1996. One of the missing variables of the alternative model is the level of crime, but there is not data available at this moment to analyze its effect. It could be the case that after the end of the armed conflict crime erupted to levels never reached before and when people started to feel the real threat of such a chaos then decided to take risks.

In terms of theory, it is important to improve our knowledge about human behavior, specifically about collective and violent behavior. It is also crucial to address the relationship between the state responsiveness and citizens provision of public goods by themselves; and the interaction between formal and informal institutions to do so. A more ambitious study should aim to shed light on the human behavior at both the individual and collective levels, explaining the macro-behavior by looking at its micro-foundations: the incentives or motivations of individuals, that is, how humans make decisions.

From a comparative perspective, Guatemala is just another case of post-conflict societies, young democratic regimes, and developing economies. Additionally, the existence of lynch mobs is not an exclusive problem of Guatemalans; lynchings have occurred in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Haiti, Britain, and Spain in recent years. Thus a broader comparative study should be done. In the cases of the Latin American countries, it is clear that there is a relationship between indigenous population and lynch mobs. The most salient cases have been against authorities of the state such as mayors and judges. This could be a sign of a conflict between the formal institutions of the nation-state and the informal institutions of the indigenous peoples.

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