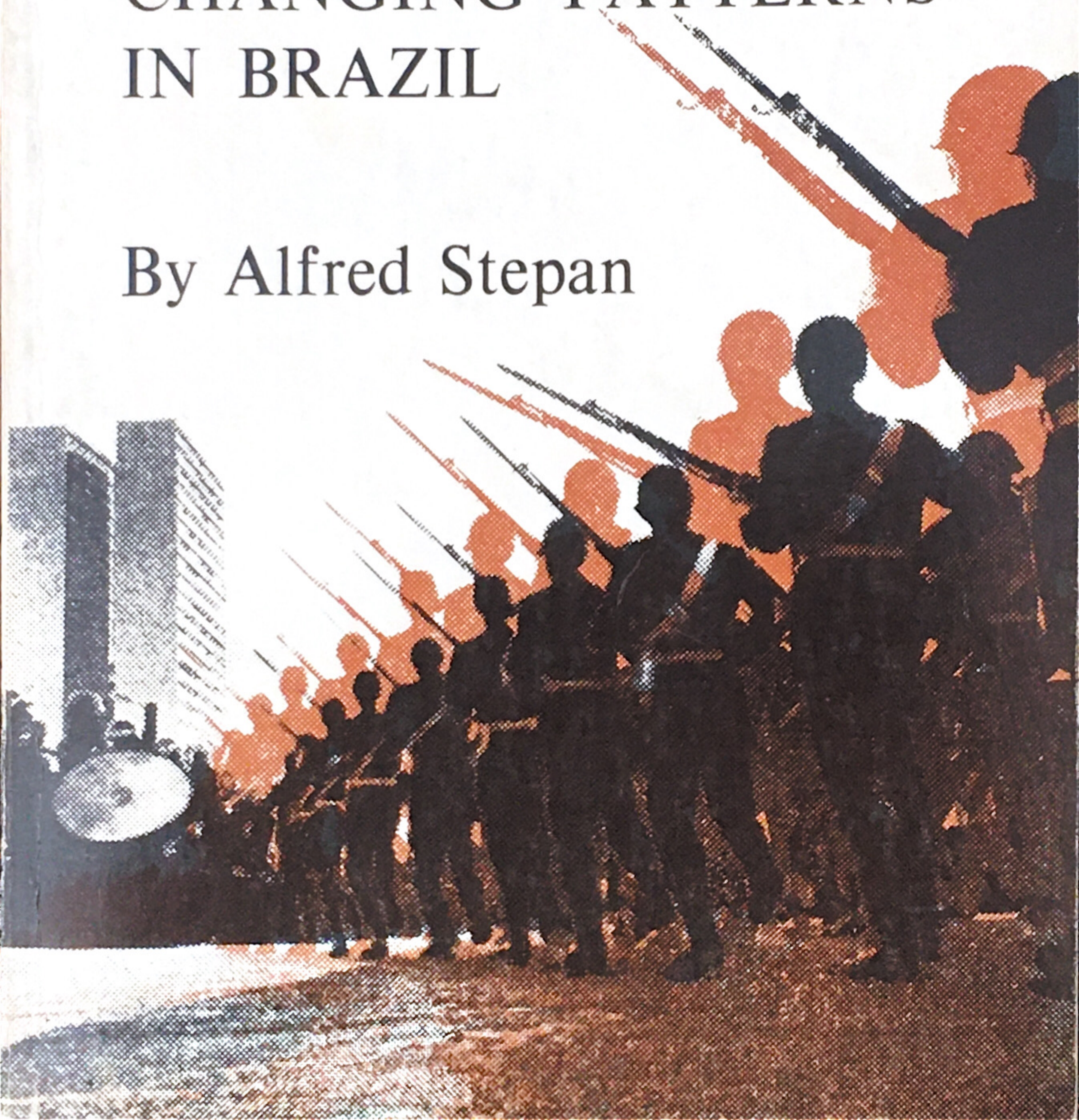


*The Military
in Politics*

CHANGING PATTERNS
IN BRAZIL

By Alfred Stepan



first coups in sub-Saharan Africa was in the Togo Republic, the country with the smallest army (200 men) of any new nation.³ Another commentator, W. F. Gutteridge, the author of the standard account of the African armies, also made size a key variable.

While the armed forces of Africa remain small in proportion to the total populations and to the areas of the countries . . . they are unlikely to be able to consolidate their positions and establish military regimes. . . . This is almost certainly the answer to those who pose the question of the possibility of military coups in Nigeria or more particularly in Ghana. . . .

He was sharply disproved in his expectations when Ghana and Nigeria experienced military coups in 1966.

In Latin America especially, it is heard that size of the armies is a basic cause of instability. However, the African examples suggest that where the overall political system is weak, or lacks legitimacy in the eyes of major participants, the military, no matter how small, will be able to overthrow the government. Indeed, several Latin American instances indicate that even if virtually no army exists, civilian dissension can create governmental instability. Venezuela, for example, is often referred to as the classic case of "militarism." No elected president finished his term until 1964. Yet in fact, in the nineteenth century, the military institution was extremely weak and often numbered less than a thousand. The entire army was dismissed in 1872 and 1876. The weakness of the national polity was so severe, however, that armed civilian bands led by provincial *caudillos* often assumed the central governing power of the state.⁴

³ For a chart giving basic data on the armed forces of the new nations shortly after independence, see Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 20-21.

⁴ *Military Institutions and Power in the New States* (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 143-144. The above two quotes are also cited in the excellent article by David C. Rapoport, "The Political Dimensions of Military Usurpation," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXIII (December 1968), 556.

⁵ An excellent study of civilian armed behavior is Robert L. Gilmore, *Caudillism and Militarism in Venezuela, 1810-1910* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1964), esp. pp. 49-159. One of the most famous Latin American formulations of the argument that, because civilian anarchy is always imminent due to conflicts in the society, "democratic Caesarism" is the most viable form of government was written by a Venezuelan, Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, *Cesarismo democrático. Estudios sobre las bases*

Another interesting case in point is Bolivia. In 1952 Bolivia had one of the few fundamental social revolutions in Latin American history. Many of the officers were dismissed, and the size of the army was greatly reduced.⁶ As revolutionary unity declined, presidents rebuilt the military as a counterweight to the still armed tin miners who had been part of the original revolutionary coalition. In 1964, after a period of growing political strife, this army overthrew the man most responsible for rebuilding it, President Paz Estenssoro.⁷ The point is that governmental instability was more responsible for the size of the military than the size of the military was responsible for governmental instability.

Indeed, the persistence of governmental instability in Latin America has helped create the impression that the military itself is relatively large. This is erroneous. A recent comparison ranking the size of 88 military establishments in relation to total population includes 19 of the 20 Latin American countries. No Latin American country ranked in the top quarter, and only three were in the second quarter.⁸

Turning to an analysis of the Latin American countries themselves, what, if any, relationships exist between the size of the military and military intervention, if we attempt to test the hypothesis quantitatively?

Joseph E. Loftus, in his study of the size and expenditures of the Latin American armies, estimated the size of the military establishment in each country in 1955, 1960, and 1965. If the average for each country is divided by the total population for

sociológicas de la constitución efectiva de Venezuela, 3rd ed. (Caracas: Garrido, 1952).

⁶ Because the military academy was temporarily closed down, numerous references are found which allude to the "disbanding" of the military after the revolution. Actually less than half of the entire officer corps was dismissed. Also, those officers who had been dismissed previously for cooperating with the Villarroel regime were reincorporated. (Informal conversation with Victor Paz Estenssoro, president of Bolivia, 1952-1956, 1960-1964, in Los Angeles, April 18, 1969.)

⁷ See William H. Brill, *Military Intervention in Bolivia: The Overthrow of Paz Estenssoro and the MNR*, Political Studies, no. 3 (Washington: Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems, 1967).

⁸ See Bruce M. Russett, et al., *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 74-76. The same book also reveals that, in regard to expenditure on defense as a percentage of GNP, no Latin American country ranked in the top 30 of the 83 countries listed, pp. 79-80.

these years, it is possible to rank-order the variable of military personnel per capita for each of the 20 countries.⁹

Measurement of military intervention is intrinsically more difficult and any result will at best be impressionistic. With this important caveat in mind, we will use Robert D. Putnam's "military intervention index" for Latin America, which rates each country on a scale from zero to three each year according to the degree of military intervention in the political system. By totalling the sums for each country between 1951 and 1965, we can get a military intervention score.¹⁰ Construction of these variables makes it possible to do a Spearman rank correlation to determine what relationship, if any, exists between the size of the military as a percentage of the population and military intervention. The coefficient of correlation between the two variables is a very low 0.153, indicating no significant detectable relationship.¹¹ The scattergram displaying metric rather than ranked values confirms an essentially random pattern (see Fig. 2.1). The most striking "anomaly" is that of Chile. It has the second largest military establishment in relation to its population yet one of the lowest military intervention scores. In that case, factors stemming from the political system itself are dominant and the correlation between size and activism is the exact reverse of that often hypothesized. Conversely, a country such as El Salvador has the eighth smallest army in pro-

⁹ *Latin American Defense Expenditures, 1938-1965* (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, RM-5310-PR/ISA, January 1968), Appendix D, pp. 86-99. Latin American population estimates for these years are from the *Statistical Abstract of Latin America: 1965* (Los Angeles: University of California, Latin American Center, 1966), pp. 10-11.

¹⁰ See his "Toward Explaining Military Intervention in Latin America," *World Politics*, xx (October 1967), 83-110. This is an interesting and suggestive article but taken as a whole it probably places too much faith on the reliability and significance of exclusively quantitative indicators. For an attempt to construct a constitutionality index from 1935 to 1964 see Martin C. Needler, *Political Development in Latin America: Instability, Violence, and Evolutionary Change* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 81-86.

¹¹ Using a somewhat different time-frame and different population datum Putnam arrived at an even lower figure of 0.07. I prefer my figure because he uses only one year for his estimate of size of military and size of population. Also, he uses the estimate contained in Russett, *et al.*, *Political and Social Indicators*, pp. 74-76, that Mexico has the highest ratio of military personnel to total population in Latin America. All other reliable sources that I have checked place it near the bottom of the 20 Latin American countries. Since Mexico has one of the lowest military intervention scores, this has skewed Putnam's figure downward.

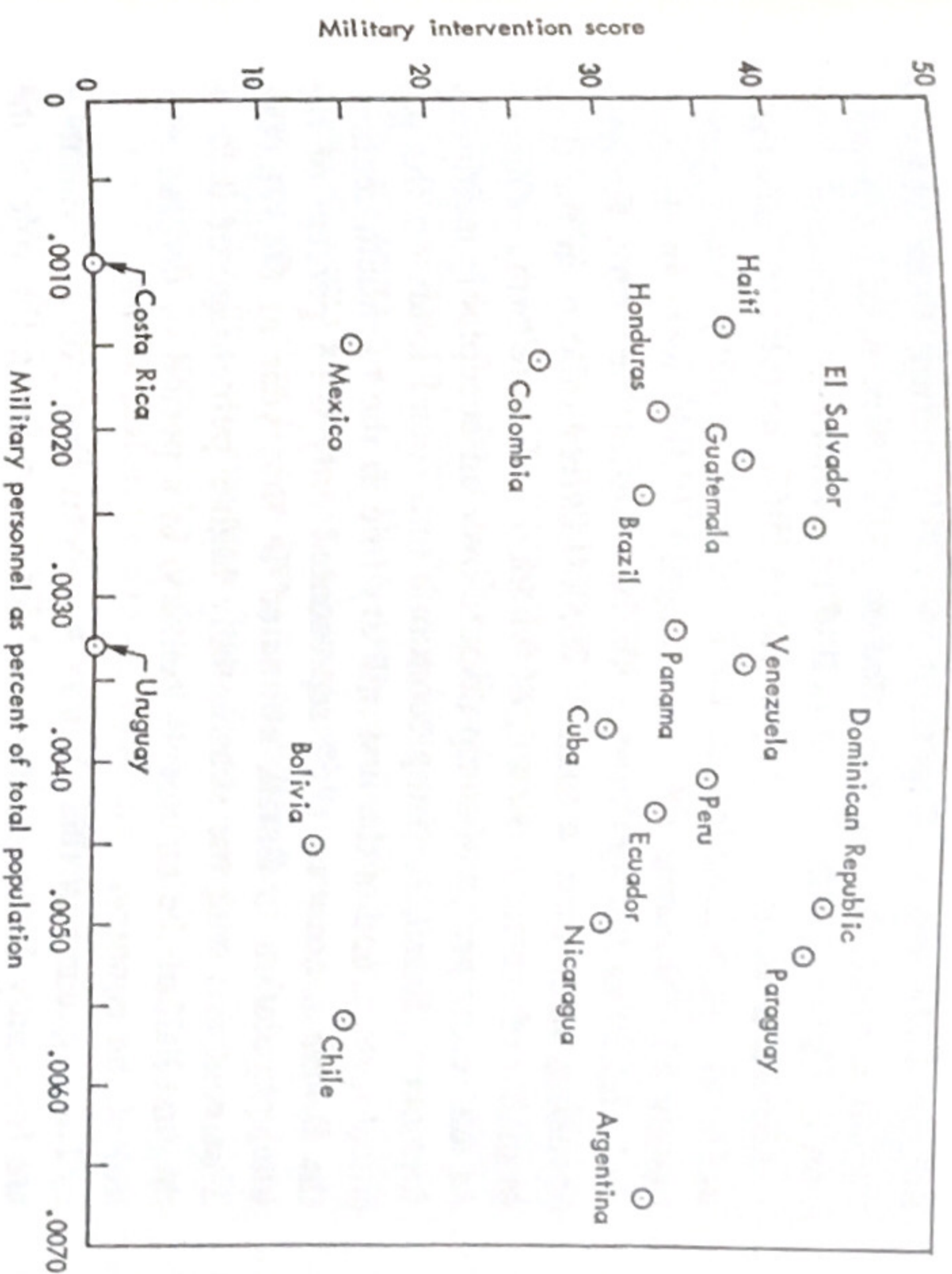


FIG. 2.1 SCATTERGRAM OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MILITARY PERSONNEL AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION AND MILITARY INTERVENTION FOR ALL LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1951-1965

SOURCES: See footnotes 8, 9, and 10 of this chapter.

portion to its population in the whole of Latin America. Yet only the Dominican Republic had a higher score on military intervention.

In Brazil a longitudinal approach to the question of army size and military intervention does not add any further support to the general hypothesis that military intervention is a function of the large size of the military but rather indicates the importance of political factors such as legitimacy. From independence in 1822 until 1889, Brazil was almost unique among Latin American countries in that there were no military governments, largely because the monarchy provided a legitimacy formula that was compatible with and acceptable to dominant social and economic groups within the country.¹² The army represented 0.72 percent of the popula-

¹² For a perceptive, more detailed discussion of the sources of stability during the monarchy see Richard M. Morse, "Some Themes of Brazilian History," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXI (Spring 1962), 159-182. Also see

tion in 1824 and 0.30 percent in 1851, during those years of civilian control; but it represented only 0.17 percent of the population in 1894, as it finished a period of military government.

Moving to the immediate present, in 1968 the total military force in Brazil, which included the air force and the navy, was approximately 234,000 men. Of these roughly 39,000 were in the navy and 28,000 in the air force, with 167,000 in the army. Roughly speaking, there exists a total of 20,000 career officers in the three branches of service in Brazil, of whom 13,373 are army officers.¹³ In this recent period of sharp dispute over an acceptable legitimacy formula in Brazil, of rising economic and social loads on the political system, and of the first military rule in the twentieth century, the Brazilian army in 1968 represented only 0.18 percent of the total population in Brazil, estimated in that year at 89,376,000. This contrasts with the substantially higher percentage of 0.72 in the first half of the nineteenth century, in a period of civilian control of the country.

The argument in this chapter has been that political variables are frequently far more important for determining the role of the military in society than the absolute size of the armed forces. Even if we discuss merely the numbers of military men, it is extremely important to disaggregate this figure and examine such questions as the dispersion of the military, which units are strategically located in terms of internal political power, which units are best equipped and therefore have a comparative advantage over other units, and what is the command and control relationship between different units. I propose to touch briefly on these factors in the case of Brazil, for they are all important for later discussions.

Because of its institutionalized participation in political events

Alfred Stepan, "The Continuing Problem of Brazilian Integration: The Monarchical and Republican Periods," in *Latin American History: Select Problems—Identity, Integration, and Nationhood*, ed. Frederick B. Pike (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), pp. 259-296.

¹³The figures for the air force and navy are necessarily approximate since official figures on the size of these two branches of the armed force in Brazil have not been released. The figures here are the estimates most often cited publicly by knowledgeable Brazilians. The army figures come from the official army publication, Brasil, Ministério do Exército, *Efeitos do Exército: Exposição do Ministro do Exército ao Senado Federal* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa do Exército, 1968). A detailed discussion of the sources for estimating the size of all Latin American armed forces is contained in Loftus, *Latin American Defense Expenditures, 1938-1965*.

and its geographical dispersion throughout the country, as well as because of its comparatively greater size, the Brazilian army has been the most politically powerful of the three services in the twentieth century. Its activity, rather than the navy's or air force's, has been decisive in the civil-military crises of 1930, 1945, 1954, 1955, 1961, and 1964. Different branches of the army also have different political weight in Brazil. The army is divided into four major territorial commands, with the First Army headquartered in Rio de Janeiro, the Second Army in São Paulo, the Third in Pôrto Alegre, and the Fourth in Recife in the northeast. Historically, the First and Third Armies have been the most important. The importance of the First Army is due to its location in the political center of Rio. For internal, political reasons many of the best equipped elite forces have traditionally been stationed in the *Vila Militar* just outside Rio. The Third Army, in Pôrto Alegre, owes its importance to the fact that it is situated near the border of two of Brazil's historic enemies, Paraguay and Argentina. As a result, the Third Army is larger and better equipped than either the Fourth Army in the northeast or the Second Army in São Paulo. The recruitment base of the Third Army is largely from Rio Grande do Sul, and Rio Grande do Sul's central role in national politics since the late 1920s also places the Third Army in a position of prominence.

In 1968, the great bulk of the Brazilian armed forces were located in the Rio area and in Rio Grande do Sul. As the military government's concern over counterinsurgency has grown, the army has initiated a policy called "operation presence," in which military units are to be spread out more evenly across the entire nation, especially into potential insurgent areas, so that a military presence is established everywhere. By this policy, the military hopes to discourage by its mere presence any revolutionary activity that may exist, or suppress it if necessary. This policy has been strongly encouraged by the United States.¹⁴

In fact, although "operation presence" is new, the geographical dispersion of the army has always been important in Brazil and has always reflected political as much as strategic considerations. Unlike in the United States, where tactical units such as the di-

¹⁴Interviews with various senior officers. References to this policy are found in General A. de Lyra Tavares, *A Ação do Exército no Programa do Governo* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa do Exército, 1968), pp. 18-31.

vision are kept together for training purposes, a division in Brazil is often subdivided into regiments and battalions which are scattered over a hundred mile radius or more. One of the historical reasons for this splitting up of units is that it extends the capability of the armed forces to control the population. Given the wide physical separation of units, however, the loyalty of local units is often open to question during times of great national political conflict, since the geographical scatter weakens the command links of the army. Senior commanders of divisions or whole armies often have very few troops under their operational command. This means that middle-level officers commanding the regiments and battalions are often extremely important politically. For example, in the 1964 movement that overthrew President Goulart, the decision of the colonel commanding the Fourth Infantry Regiment in Osasco was considered by some key military and political activists to be just as important as the decision of the general in charge of the entire Second Army in determining the military balance of power in the São Paulo region. This was because the regiment of less than 1,300 men was the largest single body of combat troops in the area that could be mobilized at any one time.¹⁵

The wide distribution of units and consequent dispersion of effective decision-making power in the Brazilian army also explains why there is a need for broad political consensus within the army before the army can initiate decisive political action against an elected president. Because of the virtual operational autonomy of many regiments, divisional and army commanders run the very real risk of having their orders disobeyed unless they have first sounded out opinion among middle-level officers. As we see in later chapters, in the explosive situations during the 1961 and 1964 civil-military crises, this factor was crucial. In the internal military crises of 1965 and 1968, this command structure facilitated the imposition of authoritarian (hard-line) demands by captains, majors, and colonels on the generals in charge of the military government.

This digression into the effect of the geographical and power distribution of the Brazilian armed forces on the political activity of military officers has been made to illustrate once again the importance of multi-factor analyses of the military and its role in politics. This is not to argue, of course, that size is not one factor,

among many, that plays a part in determining political roles. The existence of a large aggregation of 20,000 military officers in Brazil, with a common occupational speciality, mode of organization, and pay scale does, of course, make the officers a political force that at the very minimum acts as a pressure group, although never a totally united one. How this officer group is formed and how it has responded to Brazilian politics is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁵ Interview with Colonel Antonio Lepiane, Commander of the Fourth Infantry Regiment, Second Army, Osasco, São Paulo, September 2, 1968.