

# **PETTY POLITICS OR PURE PROFIT?**

**Understanding the motivations for kidnapping in  
Colombia's internal armed conflict**

Author: Christa Hijkoop MSc (S0207446)

Supervisor: Dr. Willemijn Verkoren

MSc Conflicts, Territories and Identities

Human Geography

Faculty of Management

Radboud University of Nijmegen

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## INTRODUCTION

Several interacting factors together contributed to my fascination and subsequent choice for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context as the focus of my research project. When studying Cultural Anthropology, I followed various elective courses thematically related to conflict, war and violence and geographically focused on Latin America. Besides acquiring theoretical knowledge, I gained practical experience by travelling to and working and living in this region. It struck me that despite the formal ending of several armed conflicts by means of peace accords – leaving Latin America with very few “official” wars today – numerous “low-intensity” conflicts had continued slumbering and dividing its societies. High levels of different manifestations of violence had remained prevalent or had even exacerbated, paralysing its populations by causing destruction and spreading fear. My curiosity for this sad paradox motivated me to scrutinise such phenomena into more depth than I had done so far. I found the Human Geography Master track Conflicts, Territories and Identities (CTI) at the Radboud University of Nijmegen the ideal form to realise this.

Because I preferred not only academically broadening and deepening my insights, but also practically enriching my professional experiences, I wanted to link my final research project to the work of a governmental institution, think tank or non-governmental organisation. The Latin America department of the Dutch peace movement IKV Pax Christi offered me the opportunity to fill in the vacant position of a twofold investigative and advocacy job. I studied the phenomenon of kidnapping, its relation with internal armed conflict and the policies and practices it provokes. I mapped kidnapping incidences and tendencies in four Latin American countries: Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. In addition I collected information on policies and practices responding to kidnapping in order to provide a solid foundation for IKV Pax Christi's lobby for the development of common guidelines on how to deal with perpetrators and for the condemnation of ransom payments and kidnap and ransom insurances.

But the scope of all these different tasks proved too broad for the purpose of designing a research project that would fit into the CTI Master programme. I needed to considerably limit my focus and narrow my questions in order to demarcate my investigation and thesis. Since I consider thorough understanding of a problem's dynamics a prerequisite for legitimising the advocacy for changing policies and practices, it appeared logical to start by delivering a contribution to this first step. I decided to leave the eventual later endeavour of adjusting policies and practices to other scholars, officials and/or politicians. As scrutinising

the phenomenon of kidnapping in four different countries resulted too time-consuming for one research project, I selected one of them. The choice for Colombia evolves from its staggering kidnapping incidences with very divergent characteristics and tendencies that make it an interesting case to study.

### **Soci(et)al relevance**

Throughout human history kidnapping has existed in many forms everywhere around the globe, extremely disrupting the societies where it frequently occurs. It paralyses everyday life and terrorises people by undermining trust, spreading fear (Wright 2009, 1-29) and traumatising victims and their relatives from all societal layers (Turner 1998, 145). Studies from social psychology identify kidnapping as one of the criminal offences most severely affecting society by having such strong and permanent psychological and moral impacts on both the victims and their relatives. Its inherent threats, abuses, subordination and extreme violence pose the risk of undermining a population's stability (Madero Muñoz 2009, 1). This is particularly devastating in already fragile (post)conflict contexts, where ironically most kidnappings happen (Clayton Consultants 2009; García Acosta 2003, 27; IKV Pax Christi 2008, 7, 60-61). Security company Hiscox calculates that annually between 20,000 and 30,000 abductions occur worldwide. However, because it is estimated that for every recorded kidnapping three unreported incidents exist, in fact approximately 100,000 abductions would be committed every year. This figure only includes cases where the perpetrators make a certain demand and thus leaves out other types of kidnappings, such as those happening within the realm of family matters (Vardi 2008, 95).

Latin American countries bear the heaviest burden: although only eight percent of the world's population lives here, between 75 (Cowie 2006, 277; Solís and Rojas Aravena 2008, 11-12) and 85 percent of worldwide kidnappings takes place in this continent (Romero 2004, 78). In the past decades the phenomenon has universally increased dramatically (Boxell 2010; Clayton Consultants 2009; González Placencia 2006, 3) and in Latin America (IKV Pax Christi 2008) exponentially. Moreover, here it has enhanced the committal of other violent crimes too and vice versa. Particularly Colombia proves extremely vulnerable to this practice (Serrano and Toro 2002, 167-168): although the situation is improving now, historically this country has had the highest kidnapping incidence (Bergquist et al. 2001, 230; Briggs 2001; García Acosta 2003, 22, 42; IKV Pax Christi 2008, 25, 59; Pax Christi 2001, 9; Sánchez 2001, 17; Uribe 2001, 165; Verdad Colombia and FAES undated, 2).

In Colombia the protracted civil war between paramilitary and insurgency troops continues. Neglecting the problem of kidnapping in this unstable conflict context implies its slumbering or even growing. As long as no effective anti-kidnapping measures are implemented, it claims more victims, hence affecting larger segments of society. Particularly in countries already torn apart by war and/or other manifestations of violence this has severe consequences. In Latin America this tendency is extraordinarily destructive, because its violent histories have left legacies of widespread distrust and fear among its populations and weak social and societal textures (Davis 2006; Heinemann and Verner 2006, 6-7, 9-10; Koonings and Kruijt 1999; Restrepo 2004, 179-185; Rotker 2000). By exacerbating this, kidnapping causes further devastation in Latin American countries such as Colombia already shattered by war.

The disruptive impact of kidnapping on different social levels, its skyrocketing incidence and close relation with war and other types of violence, and its concentration in Latin America and specifically Colombia, legitimise the desire for developing and/or improving measures that reverse the proliferation of and ideally reduce kidnapping in here. But combatting violence in Latin America starts with an intellectual challenge: comprehensive and systematic analyses of the problem form the crucial and indispensable first step towards any solution (Rojas Aravena 2006, 28). The same counts for kidnapping as occurring in particular conflict situations: designing and implementing mechanisms adequately tackling the problem requires first and foremost in-depth understanding. By thoroughly scrutinising and analysing the motivations for kidnapping in Colombia, my investigation and thesis aim at laying part of this intellectual foundation.

### **Scientific relevance**

Perhaps because of its high psychological and social impacts, kidnapping has become a popular subject to romanticise in fictive material (Keizman 2007), such as novels (García Márquez 1996) and movies (Pardo 2006). It has also inspired the publication of practical manuals on how to reduce the risk of victimisation (Vardi 2008, 98) and the development of policy briefs on how to combat it (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2009). But remarkably, the scientific world has paid little and biased attention to the subject. An extensive collection of academic accounts exists on kidnapping in complex private relational spheres, such as the parental abduction of minors. Also kidnapping cases involving 'high profile' individuals have attracted some interest. However, scholars have largely ignored the

kidnapping of numerous human beings – the vast majority of them ‘insignificant’ – as an instrument systematically rather than sporadically applied by different actors in conflict contexts. Consequently, academic material describing and explaining this phenomenon has remained scarce and anecdotic; very few comprehensive publications on kidnapping have been produced.

Notwithstanding, other manifestations of violence and their connections and blurring distinctions with civil war do have received considerable scientific attention. This has yielded valuable theories possibly contributing to understanding the motivations for kidnapping in Colombia as well. Many authors argue that protracted societal conflict forms a breeding ground for a wide array of actors (to continue) to deploy violence for divergent purposes (Collier 2007, 29-31; Cramer 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Kaldor 2001; Kalyvas 2001; Mair 2003). Fighting parties would gradually lose their original political motivations, economic factors becoming their principal driving force instead. Other actors would opportunistically interfere in societal conflict and/or utilise its inherent turbulence for their private gain. Particularly this criminalisation of conflict and the dichotomy of politics versus economics or grievance versus greed motivating (the continuance of) the application of violence dominate scientific debate (Besançon 2005; Brunnschweiler and Bulte 2009; Collier 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Cramer 2002; Kaldor 2001; Richards 2005, 8-11; Schock 1996). These insights suggest that conflict enhances the occurrence of a myriad of (other) types of violence, committed by many different actors instrumentally using this practice to reach divergent goals.

Several publications on conflict fuelling (the continuance of) the application of violence recognise kidnapping as one of the symptoms of this tendency. As with regard to other manifestations of violence, also this phenomenon is discussed within the framework of the criminalisation of conflict and the tension between economic and political motivations (Briggs 2001; Cowie 2006, 278-280; IKV Pax Christi 2008; Turner 1998). However, few authors have thoroughly scrutinised, described and explained kidnapping. Because compared to other types of violence it has received little attention (Crew and Lammers 2000, 349), in-depth understanding of this subject is scarce. Furthermore, most publications exclusively or principally draw upon (empirical) data collected on the kidnapping boom in Colombia (Cardona et al. 2007; Romero 2004; Rubio 2003; Rubio 2004; Vélez Ramírez 2005), historically the country with the highest kidnapping incidence (Bergquist et al. 2001, 230; Briggs 2001, 15; García Acosta 2003; IKV Pax Christi 2008, 25, 59; Pax Christi 2001, 9; Sánchez 2001, 17; Uribe 2001, 165; Verdad Colombia and FAES undated). This makes the

majority of the sparsely available theoretical accounts on kidnapping narrowly focused and context- and time-specific, difficult to broaden towards the phenomenon in other (war-torn) countries and other historical periods and risky to use when referring to kidnapping in general.

Although theories describing and explaining protracted violence in (post)war contexts suggest a similar nexus between (the proliferation of) kidnapping and conflict, the lack of sufficient studies on the latter impede the drawing of solid conclusions on this relation. By empirically scrutinising a closely related though neglected phenomenon and linking the findings to existing knowledge, my investigation tests theories describing and explaining (the continuance of) the application of violence in (post)war situations. It reveals their strengths and weaknesses when applied to such a specific manifestation of violence as kidnapping, occurring in such a particular conflict context as that of contemporary Colombia. My research project thereby fits into the above-exposed theoretical debates on the criminalisation of conflict and the dichotomy between politics and economics or grievance and greed as motivating violence. By examining to what extent and in what ways these discussions can or cannot explain kidnapping in Colombia today, I contribute to refining these theories, making them more comprehensive and context-sensitive.

### **Central goal and objectives**

Besides this theoretical endeavour representing the central goal of my research project, I aim at multiple additional objectives. The empirical objective is closely related to the above-mentioned theoretical counterpart: capturing the reality of motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context by gathering, scrutinising and analysing empirical data on both phenomena within this particular society. Because most publications on kidnapping in Latin America describe the crime as practiced in Colombia several years ago (Cardona et al. 2007; García Acosta 2003; Pax Christi 2001; Romero 2004; Rubio 2003; Rubio 2004; Vélez Ramírez 2005; Verdad Colombia and FAES undated), my research project historically expands this empirical picture by collecting more recent data. By comparing the results and linking them to broader theories on conflict-related violence, I translate the empirical data into theory, bridging the gap between the empirical representing everyday reality and the theoretical explaining how two phenomena relate to each other.

My research project fits into the programme on Latin America of the Dutch peace movement IKV Pax Christi. For over a decade this organisation has been mapping the problem of kidnapping in (post)conflict contexts and the international responses it provokes.

It aims at combatting kidnapping through the creation of coherence among the policies and practices applied by different countries and multilateral institutions, particularly emphasising the need for prohibition of ransom payments, as these would fuel and/or exacerbate (the continuance of) both kidnapping and conflict (IKV Pax Christi 2008, 49). IKV Pax Christi currently works on the development of a report on kidnapping as today harassing Latin America. Besides it lobbies for priority for and correlation of international policy guidelines regarding this problem. Since my investigation covers an analytical part of this framework, the practical goal of my research project is that IKV Pax Christi can use my thesis in the elaboration of its report and as a part of the foundation for its advocacy work.

In this way I indirectly also contribute to finding a solution for the proliferation of kidnapping in Latin America. By examining part of the problem's background, it helps to determine what action to undertake in order to effectively combat kidnapping. The *diagnosis* formulated in this thesis then serves the *design* and *intervention* phases (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 37) of policy and practice directed at solving the problem. Thereby I make a modest step forward in the combat against kidnapping. However, because of the embeddedness of the phenomenon in historically developed unique societal contexts, solving the whole problem would be an illusionary goal far beyond the scope of this research project. Therefore I have limited my objectives in subject, region and time. Although I aspire multiple mutually reinforcing goals, the theoretical of directly attributing knowledge and insights to academic theory predominates. The empirical objective of mapping the reality of kidnappers' motivations in the conflict currently fought in Colombia enhances the achievement of the theoretical goal. The theoretical and empirical objectives together contribute to reaching the practical goal of delivering a thesis useful for IKV Pax Christi's report and lobby, for better understanding of kidnapping in Latin America facilitates these activities.

### **Research questions**

In order to give direction to the route towards this goal, I have formulated the following overarching central research question: *How do empirical data on kidnapping in Colombia's internal armed conflict contribute to academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as motivating violence?* For a more concrete and step-by-step quest, I have divided this question into four more specific and steering central questions. The answers to these questions collectively answer the aforementioned main question of this research project.

The first two questions are theoretical. Via the question *What motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts do academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring violence reveal?* I explore theories on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed on motivations for (the continuance of) the application of violence in (post)war contexts. As kidnapping is a manifestation of violence, this general framework provides valuable theoretical insights in what possibly inspires the incidences and practices of kidnapping as occurring under contemporary conflict circumstances. Since theories have different explanatory power according to the geographical and historical circumstances applied to, I complement these broad theories with narrower theories more context-specific and sensitive to the peculiarities of today's Latin America and Colombia via the question *What motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts in Latin America and Colombia do academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring violence in Latin America and Colombia reveal?*

After having discussed what motivations for (the continuance of) the application of violence in contemporary conflict contexts academic literature on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed provides both in general and for Latin America and Colombia more specifically, I turn towards the empirical third question *What motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context do recent empirical data reveal?* This question zooms in on the particular reality of motivations for kidnapping today in Colombia

Via the fourth and last question *What are similarities among and differences between the motivations for violence in contemporary conflict contexts (in Latin America and Colombia) as revealed by academic theories on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed and the motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict as revealed by empirical data?* I relate the results found in the empirical data on motivations for kidnapping in today's Colombia to academic theories on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring (the continuance of) the application of violence in contemporary conflict contexts (in Latin America and Colombia). This enables me to view the drawn preliminary conclusions from a more general perspective, to examine the applicability of the broad theories to the peculiarities of the phenomenon of kidnapping as currently harassing Colombia, and to identify on what aspects to eventually refine existing and/or develop new academic theory.

Through the elaboration of the answers to all these questions I step by step work towards achieving the multiple goals of this research project. Whereas the first, second and fourth main questions principally contribute to reaching the theoretical objective, the third question principally contributes to reaching the empirical objective. In addition to these two objectives, the final product of this research project, the thesis, enhances the practical objective. However, it is impossible to completely disentangle the threefold goal of this research project: the theoretical, empirical and practical objectives cannot be isolated from each other nor can the paths towards achieving them be followed separately.

Due to its limited scope this research project leaves many questions (partly) unanswered. These concern, for example, the root causes and proximate triggers of conflict and kidnapping in Colombia, the nexus or mutual influence between conflict and kidnapping, the motivations for kidnapping in other contexts than contemporary Colombia, and the issues to address when developing policy and implementing practice in order to combat kidnapping and the most effective ways to do this. These issues, as well as additional questions that popped up in my investigation and thesis, demand further scrutiny.

### **Outline of the thesis**

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of academic literature providing a theoretical introduction to and foundation for the research questions and theoretically embedding the research topic. I explore theoretical debates on the motivations for the origins and continuance of contemporary conflicts or ‘new wars’, their criminalisation through the involvement of several state and non-state armed actors and the application of ‘new’ instruments for waging war (Kaldor 2001; Kalyvas 2001) and on politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring (the continuance of) the application of violence in such contexts (Collier 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Cramer 2002). Then I pay attention to the scarce theoretical perspectives on the definitions, practices and perpetrators of kidnapping and the perpetrators’ motivations for and aspirations through kidnapping (Crew and Lammers 2000; Turner 1998). I conclude the theoretical framework by positioning these approaches within the aforementioned academic debates.

The second chapter describes the geographical and historical context of the research topic. It briefly summarises the origins and current characteristics of contemporary conflict, (the continuance of) the application of violence and kidnapping in Latin America and more specifically Colombia. The third chapter explains what considerations have led to the choice

for certain methodological approach, strategies, sources and methods of data collection and analysis and the rejection of others. It also reflects on the made decisions and their implications for the scientific criteria of reliability, validity and imitability. The fourth chapter describes several aspects of kidnapping as occurring within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict and explains its motivations. It provides an overview of the modalities, incidences and tendencies of kidnapping and elaborates on the main perpetrators, victims, demands and ways to settle kidnappings. The chapter ends with an analysis of all these aspects, leading to tentative conclusions on the motivations for kidnapping, thereby taking into account the particular context of Colombia's contemporary conflict.

In the final conclusion I recapitulate the results and preliminary conclusions presented earlier in the thesis by briefly summarising them and formulating answers to the first three main research questions. Then I analyse and compare the motivations for violence in contemporary conflict contexts as suggested by the theoretical framework and academic theories on violence in Latin America and Colombia with the motivations for kidnapping as revealed by the case study on this phenomenon in Colombia. This leads to the answer to the fourth main research question. By then identifying similarities and differences I revise existing academic theories, resulting in confirmation of those theoretical aspects verified by the data as described in the fourth chapter and contestation and adjustment of those theoretical aspects falsified by these data. Subsequently I formulate an answer to the overarching central research question of my investigation. I finish by providing recommendations for further academic research and future policy design and implementation in order to strengthen the struggle against kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts.

## **MOTIVATIONS FOR KIDNAPPING THEORETICALLY EXPLAINED**

In this chapter I aim at answering the first research question: *What motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts do academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring violence reveal?* I work towards this objective by exploring theoretical perspectives on the motivations for the start and continuance of contemporary conflicts or so-called ‘new wars’ (Kaldor 2001), their criminalisation through the involvement of several state and non-state armed actors (Devetak 2008; Mair 2003), the application of ‘new’ instruments for waging war and the shifting motivations (Kalyvas 2003). Then I zoom in on the more specific theoretical debates on politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as motivating (the continuance of) the application of violence in contemporary conflict contexts (Collier 2007; Cramer 2006). Subsequently I narrow my approach to the particular topic of motivations for kidnapping by focusing on its perpetrators and their practices and aspirations and settlements of kidnapping as given by the sparsely available scientific accounts on this subject. Finally I position the phenomenon within the broader theoretical framework composed by the academic perspectives and debates on the motivations for contemporary conflicts, their criminalisation, and the role of politics and economics or grievance and greed within.

### **Motivations for starting violent conflict**

Since conflict is inherent to politics, it is a normal rather than exceptional situation in every human society (Collier 2007, 17). Because many states succeed dealing with it peacefully, it not automatically goes accompanied by violence. What, then, does cause, trigger and/or motivate its escalation? Academics from different disciplinary backgrounds have racked their brains over what drives human beings to wage war against each other. They identify a wide array of factors that would motivate people to initiate, exacerbate and/or prolong armed conflict. These vary from incompatible civilisations or cultures (Huntington 1993), distinct religious beliefs (Fox 2005) and the manipulation of ethnic or national differences (Oberschall 2000); to greedy motives and economic opportunities (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and the abundance of natural resources (Le Billon 2001); to relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), economic inequality moderated by political opportunity structures (Schock 1996) and

political and social inequalities (Besançon 2005); to democratisation (Mansfield and Snyder 1995), regime change and semidemocracy (Hegre et al. 2001), deficient inclusiveness of political systems (Reynal-Querol 2005), spoils politics and consequent state collapse (Allen 1999) and a decrease in state legitimacy and political viability (Di John 2008); to integration into international commercial networks through foreign investment (Reno 2004), interference by diaspora communities (Demmers 2002); to underdevelopment (Duffield 2001) and the opposite: processes of development (Cramer 2006).

These different possible causes, triggers and opportunities for war demonstrate that the human species finds many reasons over which to quarrel. But these ideas on what drives people to start fighting each other point to distinct – sometimes opposite – directions. None of them is uncontested and none alone can fully determine the outbreak of violent conflicts nor predict their development. The divergence suggests that multicausality provides the best explanation. Indeed it is argued that since “[m]ost wars have multiple layers of causality” (Collier 2007, 18), “few, if any, conflicts justify single-issue labels”. Several factors mutually influence and modify each other, together leading to the outbreak of war (Gleditsch 2007, 185, 190). Whether conflicts erupt into violence or not and how they subsequently develop depends upon interaction between multiple causes, dimensions, levels, actors and consequences (Frerks and Klein Goldewijk 2007). Historical, social, political and cultural factors and ideology (Hinton 1998), private, collective and individual identities and behaviours (Kalyvas 2003) and relations between state and non-state political, development, humanitarian and private actors (Duffield 2001) altogether determine whether war breaks out or not.

This complexity indicates that when unraveling the multicausality of violent conflict we not only need a multifaceted view (Gleditsch 2007, 185, 190), but also must adhere to country-, case- and sector-specific approaches and interpretations (Storey 1999, 45, 59) rather than one hegemonic explanation. Instead of either/or reasoning, we need to acknowledge both/and linkages (Cramer 2006; Korf 2006) of different though complementary contributions (Allen 1999). The various interacting causes cannot always be clearly distinguished and in different conflicts different motivations dominate (Jenne and Verkoren 2005, 7-8). Whereas under certain circumstances religion, community, poverty and/or inequality can provoke violence (Sen 2006, 142), in other situations principally scarcity, competition and/or the manipulation of ethnicity exacerbate social, ethnic and economic cleavages and regional imbalances. Such factors do not everywhere have equal effects: violence, polarisation and

local dynamics vary across different areas. It is the interaction between structural and triggering causes and opportunities that is decisive. Both horizontal distinctions between different social categories and vertical distinctions among individuals belonging to the same social category are of multiple kinds and overlap (Brachet and Wolpe 2005): “[p]eople can be divided into groups in many ways” (Stewart 2002, 5). Hence, the motivations for waging war are not unambiguous: their characteristics and cogency strongly differ per conflict situation.

Violence evolves from interaction between a myriad of actors with different identities, motivations and interests, operating at different societal levels. Their agency and various preferences and identities all play a role in the commitment of atrocities. In pursuit of their diverse goals, the alliance of local, regional, national and international actors, insiders and outsiders, individuals and organisations, civilians and armies, together lead to divergent activities, including violence (Kalyvas 2003). This indicates that conflicts are not abstractly determined by certain conditions dooming them to escalate, but that they are socially organised (Richards 2005) and that people, regardless of the circumstances they live in, always have a degree of choice whether to perpetrate violence or not (Hinton 1998). Thus the observation that similar phenomena provoke distinct reactions in different societies not only demonstrates the plausibility of multicausality as the best explanation for the onset of civil war, but also reveals how crucial active human involvement and agency are in influencing the evolution of conflicts. These are not necessarily inherently violent, but become so when quarrelling parties consider violence a more effective path towards the achievement of their objectives than peaceful settlement.

### **The ‘criminalisation’ of violent conflict**

Throughout the course of civil war, societal circumstances change and its initial causes, triggers and opportunities exacerbate and/or shift, providing (re)new(ed) grounds for conflict (Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 9; Collier 2007, 37; Gleditsch 2007, 187). These transformations help to explain the protraction of violence, even when the original motivations for dispute for various reasons may no longer matter. Armed conflict expands the array of societal discontents through its negative effects on a country’s governability, judicial system and economics. First, it directly affects the state’s capacities to deliver public goods (Devetak 2008, 10, 12), secure political rights (Collier 2007, 28) and maintain the monopoly over the use of violence and taxation. Failure to physically protect citizens and control violence seriously weakens state authority, representation, and legitimacy of political institutions. The

population loses the confidence that the government is able and willing to meet its concerns (Kaldor 2000, 1, 3), becomes alienated and cynical. Second, war also undermines judicial impartiality and legal accountability, provoking violence committed by people taking justice into their own hands. This feeds a culture of impunity, grievance, fear and suspicion (Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 7). Third, armed conflict distorts the economy, often dividing it into the four interconnected international aid, criminal, informal and formal economic sectors. Because the latter does not provide enough opportunities for people to sustain themselves, many rely upon activities in the former three categories (Kamphuis 2005). As a result, war-related activities and patterns dominate the economy (Anderson 1999, 4). These three broad consequences of violent conflict make war harder to overcome.

Several actors benefit from state collapse and its inherent legacy of political and economic voids. In fragile war-torn contexts transnational criminal networks, terrorist organisations and private military firms easily impose and consolidate parallel power, profit and protection systems. They create 'shadow economies' with access to legitimate and illegitimate international markets. Their formation, maintenance and expansion often depend upon the application, expansion and intensification of violence (Devetak 2008). Their innovative networks offer autonomous forms of development, wealth generation, authority, protection, legitimacy, values and social regulations, providing otherwise deprived people with vital alternative possibilities to sustain themselves. Hence, shadow economies usually constitute a major share of the economies in war-torn countries. Although such organised crime not necessarily relates to violence, this tendency exists when parallel trade clashes with and/or threatens the preconditions for the existence of other networks. Moreover, globalisation brings the application and sophistication of violence beyond the exclusive reach of states and within the reach of numerous autonomous private, non-state and shadow state actors. In this way, state breakdown criminalises the economy and privatises violence and enhances the infiltration of shadow economies in state structures (Duffield 2002). These developments increase the attractiveness of the elaboration and application of modern types of violence (Kaldor 2001) for multiple kinds of perpetrators (Mair 2003). This further deteriorates the government's legitimacy.

The above-described transformations of conflict dynamics and societal, political and economic structures thus have at least two important implications contributing to the protraction of violence. First, they draw in a myriad of 'new' armed actors, each with their own motivations for (the continuance of) the application of violence. Second, they alter the

conflicting parties' original reasons for fighting by taking them away, intensifying them and/or adding new ones. Both developments blur the distinctions between different armed actors operating in contemporary conflict contexts (Mair 2003) and broaden and complicate the array of motivations for (the continuance of) the application of violence. Armed conflict reorders "political, economic and social relationships in a negative spiral of incivility". Violence becomes self-perpetuating, for actors depend on its continuation for political and economic reasons (Kaldor 2000, 3-4). Because hence so many people resort to atrocities as a principal means to strive after their aspirations, violence becomes gratuitous (Richards 2005). Thus paradoxically, whereas armed conflict has an inherently destructive character for most of the societies and the majority of the populations it affects, it not exclusively narrows, but simultaneously opens opportunities for the creation and consolidation of new political and economic structures (Cramer 2006).

Thus the fundamental societal transformations resulting from both civil war and the subsequent difficulties to achieve access to and incorporation in formal economic and political systems, drives people to search for alternatives. Since this frequently provokes new competition and clashes, these transformations make war-torn countries prone to the continuation and proliferation of violence. Societal, political and economic discontent tends to grow during armed conflict, intensifying motivations for (continuing) the application of violence. In addition, many actors – both among those who initially started civil war and those who in a later stage entered the arena of practicing violence – perversely enjoy the circumstances and advantages inherent to the turbulence. In order to be able to continue and preferably also consolidate and expand their for divergent reasons lucrative activities, they try to maintain the divided status quo, often by proliferating the application of violence. Hence, throughout the course of civil war, more and more people resort to violence because they either see no alternative or consider it the best opportunity for settling their legal disputes, for achieving their political aspirations and/or for sustaining themselves. Such 'criminalisation' of conflict through the involvement of a myriad of actors motivated by divergent aspirations would explain the protracted application of violence.

### **Political grievance versus economic greed as motivating violence**

Within these academic debates on the motivations for the onset of civil war and (the continuance of) the application of violence, a tendency to dichotomisation prevails. Either 'legitimate' public politics and grievance (Gurr 1970) or 'criminal' private economics and

greed (Collier 2007) would drive people to fight each other. According to the grievance-oriented perspective, intense and commonly shared discontent about the same issue is a prerequisite for collective violence to occur. When people feel they cannot have what they ought to have in comparison with others, they experience relative deprivation. They may resort to violence in an attempt to address this discrepancy (Gurr 1970). Such inequality can display divergent economic, political and social patterns and provoke various manifestations of conflict and violence (Besançon 2005). But these justifications for armed mobilisation are not uncontested. Many authors question them and argue that this discourse plays only a minor role. Instead, for an individual to decide to participate in the commitment of violence, usually already existing local rivalries and the settlement of personal issues rather than the war's main cleavage form the most convincing motivation (Kalyvas 2003). Although particularly greed would be a strong incentive (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), people do not act exclusively economically, but take into consideration relational, social and historical factors as well (Cramer 2002).

Many scholars explain these divergences in motivations by arguing that the grounds for waging war have significantly changed, not only throughout human history, but also throughout the course of every particular contemporary conflict. They distinguish between 'old' and 'new' wars and between reasons for initiating civil war and for continuing the violence. Two persistent assumptions inspire this differentiation. First, whereas in earlier conflicts mainly 'legitimate' public politics and grievance drove people to wage war, today 'criminal' private economics and greed would predominate among the motivations for the application of violence (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Kaldor 2001; Kalyvas 2001). Second, whereas the former set of reasons would justify the onset of civil war, the latter set of reasons would explain its outbreak and continuance. Due to the changes in conflict dynamics and societal circumstances, throughout civil war the initial motivations to rebel would gradually erode from idealism and/or grievance to opportunism and sadism and/or greed (Collier 2007, 29-31). In addition, opportunities rather than grievance would enhance the continuance of violent crime (Gleditsch 2007, 189). Both the increasing involvement of a myriad of 'new' armed actors in addition to the 'old' ones (Mair 2003) and the (related) increasing dominance of economic rather than political causes to fight for (Collier 2007) would be to blame for these shifts in the spectrum of motivations for and subsequent proliferation of violence during and after internal conflicts.

According to these argumentations, protracted contemporary conflicts start and continue mainly because of ‘criminal’ private economic and greedy considerations. Sadly, people who for personal reasons join armed organisations, would commit more atrocities than people motivated by ideology. This suggests that private motivations rather than collective grievance principally explain why people (continue to) apply violence (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). It also might explain why contemporary conflicts show such extreme and proliferated violence and why they are so protracted. However, as argued before, ‘either/or’ reasoning is too simplistic when explaining what drives people to start and continue fighting each other. The above-described political and economic developments, subsequent involvement of other actors than those who originally initiated civil war, and shifting of motivations of both these ‘old’ and the ‘new’ perpetrators of violence, complicate the unravelling of their grounds for committing cruelties. The distinctions between different parties, levels and reasons increasingly blur in contemporary conflict contexts (Kaldor 2001, 27, 32).

Nevertheless, the dichotomisation of the debate persists, since many authors derive their conclusions from investigations, descriptions, arguments and assumptions strongly imbued with the spirit of the post-Cold War era. Whereas during the Cold War the confrontation between capitalism and communism was held responsible for the outbreak of many violent civil conflicts, “today the incentives to frame conflicts in grand ideological terms have disappeared” (Brubaker and Laitin 1998, 425): the bias has shifted towards seeking the explanations for contemporary conflict in other phenomena than these political frameworks (Brunnschweiler and Bulte 2009; Cramer 2002; Korf 2006). This reasoning suggests a break between “old wars” and post-Cold War “new wars”. However, it is the question whether the observed discrepancy between past and present reflects reality, merely a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of violent conflicts, or a change in approach and hence perception. Taking into consideration the above-exposed theoretical insights in the onset of civil wars and (the continuance of) the application of violence, it appears that the grounds for participation in abusive behaviour not only widely vary per region, period, armed faction and individual, but also continuously blur and overlap. These observations challenge both the simplistically distinguishing between the divergent motivations and the formulation of one general explanation for the use of violence. Rather, it might also be plausible to think of the different motivations for human beings (to continue) to apply violence against each other as forming a complex continuum rather than a clear-cut

dichotomy and that in contemporary conflict contexts different actors commit different types of violence for different reasons.

### **Motivations for kidnapping**

Although many academics studying contemporary conflict obliquely mention kidnapping as one of the manifestations of the violence applied within these realms, few of them have thoroughly scrutinised the phenomenon (Crew and Lammers 2000). Despite the subsequent lack of agreement on a precise and universally acknowledged definition of kidnapping (Wright 2009, 31-32), authors paying more attention to the practice unanimously describe it as a serious crime, involving the illegal abduction and/or detention of a person through force (Crew and Lammers 2000, 349; Soanes and Stevenson 2003). Kidnapping affects people from all societal layers and traumatises its victims and their relatives (Turner 1998, 145-146). A comparative study among 60 states on their legal definitions of the offence reveals four common elements: first, illegal apprehension, elopement or deprivation of freedom of an individual without his/her consent; second, application or threat of violence and/or fraud and deceit in the committal of the offence; third, retention of the victim in an unknown place; fourth, specific objective of obtaining economic or financial benefits and/or (political) influence through the practice of extortion (Gómez 2007, 28-29). Combining these characteristics of kidnapping, I conceptualise kidnapping as *the illegal deprivation of people's liberty by abducting them and/or holding them captive in (an) unknown place(s) against their will, through the use of force and application and/or threat of violence, in order to utilise them in the negotiation for the achievement of the aspiration(s)/goal(s)/objective(s) that form(s) the driving motivation(s) of the perpetrator(s).*

Kidnappings often develop according to the following chronological phases: planning by the perpetrator(s) or director(s); abduction of the victim(s); concealment of the victim(s); negotiation to address the situation; resolution marking the termination of the kidnapping; and further action, taken by the directly involved and/or third parties, resulting from the kidnapping episode. However, some nuances must be taken into account: kidnappings do not necessarily pass through all these stages nor always follow this chronology and the length of the phases strongly varies. Furthermore, whereas resolution might end a particular kidnapping, also subsequent action related to this specific event or a series of kidnappings may follow. The actors (becoming) involved in these stages influence the kidnapping's course, context, outcome and eventual further action. Particularly though not exclusively the negotiation stage

draws others than perpetrator(s) and victim(s) into the process. Because the multiple actors involved and their (inter)actions vary per case, kidnappings follow distinct, uncertain and unpredictable trajectories (Turner 1998, 152-154, 159).

Distinct groups conduct kidnappings (Bergquist, Peñaranda and Sánchez 2001), varying from terrorist movements, criminal organisations, state agencies (Turner 1998, 146), paramilitary troops, police forces, death squads, groups of thugs (Torres-Rivas 1999, 292), political movements, rural and urban guerrilla groups (Feldmann and Perälä 2004, 107-108, 112-113) and (youth) gangs (Savenije and Van der Borgh 2004, 166-167) to drug traffickers (Moser and Shrader 1999, 8). Thus not only illicit groups perpetrate kidnappings. In some contexts, kidnappings have been conducted and/or facilitated by (former) police agents (Auyero 2010, 122; Gay 2010, 215; Koonings 1999, 228; Sain 2004, 134) and military (Bobeia 2010, 197). Also mixed groups consisting of common criminals and employed police officers take and hold hostages (Sain 2004, 135). Because drug gangs, criminal organisations, political movements and common criminals frequently collaborate (Gay 2010, 206) and circularity exists among various violent actors, as individuals opportunistically switch their membership from one group to another (Sánchez 2001, 20), in several cases it is extremely difficult to disentangle and trace the responsible actor.

Moreover, these numerous actors commit kidnapping for divergent reasons. It can help them financing the purchase of weapons, expensive escapes of their fellows from jail (Gay 2010, 206), and/or exchanging their hostages for the release of imprisoned combatants (Koonings 1999, 204). Abductions can serve the purpose of obtaining a (small) ransom or extortion and/or of influencing political decisions (Sain 2004, 134). But although several high-profile political kidnappings have occurred<sup>1</sup>, many lack any explicit political motivation (Turner 1998, 145-146). Kidnapping has principally been a war tactic and extortion method. In the first case it aims at destroying national and familial institutions and abducting and detaining people belonging to the enemy within a declared state of war. In the second case it concerns the violent and brusque deprivation of people's personal freedom, fixing a price for human beings. Although the second modality would predominate, kidnapping has become a more complex phenomenon, typified as 'new' delinquency and terrorism, and conducted by citizens against their fellows. It has achieved an unknown frequency and transcendence and serves political, military, retaliate, commercial and other goals (García Acosta 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> An example is the abduction of Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt in 2002.

Similar to other types of violence committed in contemporary conflict contexts, also regarding kidnapping the tendency exists to simplify the motivations behind in order to make this complex variety easier to understand. Research conducted in the United States of America distinguishes fifteen types of kidnapping. Their methodologies and motivations result in a categorisation with three core motives. According to this generalisation many types of kidnapping involve ransom and/or are instrumental in the committal of other crimes. It furthermore indicates that rather than carefully and intelligently planned and conducted by clever delinquents, most abductions are opportunity crimes generally lacking precise planning and expertise. The quantity and quality of preparation strongly differs per incident. But although this schematisation clarifies the myriad of activities lumped together under the broad label of kidnapping, it simultaneously leaves vagueness by not explaining all identified types and by adding the category of “other and unclassifiable” kidnapping. It remains unclear how to categorise, for instance, the kidnapping of criminals by rivals in order to settle debts or solve disputes and kidnapping as manifestation of political terrorism (Crew and Lammers 2000). It also neglects the kidnapping of high-profile politicians in order to force the government towards making political concessions, though this type of kidnapping may well fit into the broad core motive of kidnapping as an intent to exchange the victim(s) for a certain benefit. The emphasis in this schedule on greedy and criminal aspirations reflects today’s academic bias to interpret the proliferation of violence as a symptom of the criminalisation of contemporary conflict and the prevalence of criminal and economic motivations as inspiring (the continuance of) the application of violence.

Core motive of kidnapping	Types of kidnapping
<i>Kidnapping as an intent to exchange the victim(s) for a certain benefit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Classic ransom kidnapping</i> (targeting, capturing and holding of a victim, demanding a ransom)</li> <li>- <i>Developmental ransom kidnapping</i> (evolving of a ransom demand out of another crime already in progress)</li> <li>- <i>Ransom kidnapping hoax</i></li> <li>- <i>Conspiracy, plot or aborted ransom kidnapping</i></li> <li>- <i>Kidnapping as extortion threat</i></li> <li>- <i>Skyjacking</i></li> <li>- <i>Hostage situation</i> (taking of a victim for protection or facilitation of escape)</li> <li>- <i>White slavery</i> (kidnapping of a woman for commercial prostitution)</li> </ul>
<i>Kidnapping as an intent to harm the victim(s)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Kidnapping for robbery</i> (kidnapping as an instrument to commit robbery)</li> <li>- <i>Kidnapping for murder or other nonsexual assault</i> (kidnapping as an instrument to commit murder or another assault)</li> <li>- <i>Kidnapping for rape or other sexual assault</i> (kidnapping as an instrument to commit sexual assault)</li> </ul>
<i>Kidnapping as an intent to keep the victim(s) indefinitely</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Domestic relations kidnapping</i> (taking a child by one parent in violation of custody decree)</li> <li>- <i>Child stealing</i> (taking a child for reasons not covered in other categories)</li> <li>- <i>Romantic kidnapping</i> (voluntary accompaniment to an offender by a juvenile against his/her parents' will)</li> </ul>
<i>Other and unclassifiable kidnapping</i>	

**Table 1: Core motives and types of kidnapping (Crew and Lammers 2000)**

Wright (2009, 33-35) further subdivides the type *kidnap for ransom* in either *ransom kidnapping* or *express kidnapping*. In case of the former people are taken and held hostage during long-term negotiation for their liberation in exchange for material payment. The latter refers to quick abduction of people for immediate extortion without or through short-term negotiation. Other factors, such as politics, family issues, sexual abuse and slavery, might play a role too in these types of kidnappings. This subscribes that kidnappings are not

necessarily inspired by one single motive. Turner (1998) elaborates this by distinguishing a political and material dimension among the motivations for kidnapping, respectively ranging from non-political to highly political and maximum material gain to no material gain. Rather than as mutually exclusive, he considers these dimensions as continua together forming a matrix of four categories of incentives. In addition, the political and material motivations for kidnappings are liable to change. Kidnappings can (de)politicise as the involvement of actors and their intentions and actions can alter at any moment in the earlier described chronology, influencing the course, context, outcome and eventual further action. Also circumstances may alter, opening opportunities and/or posing constraints. Therefore, the classification of a specific kidnapping as either political or non-political and either material or non-material is fluid rather than rigid and the above-given typology dynamic rather than static (Turner 1998). This reasoning implies that distinct motivations for kidnapping are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can simultaneously exist next to each other. It furthermore suggests that the motivations for kidnapping form continua rather than extreme opposites.

<b>Motivations for kidnapping</b>	<b>← Political incentives →</b>	
<b>← Material incentives →</b>	<p><i>Material and political</i> Kidnapping for both material and political motivation, such as kidnappings for which political and financial and/or material demands are made. Revolutionary or separatist movements frequently kidnap victims with political “value”. Material gains can serve their political struggle and/or their organisation’s survival.</p>	<p><i>Material and non-political</i> Kidnapping for material gain without political motivation, such as classic kidnaps-for-ransom and abductions in which victims are sold for labour and/or sexual exploitation. Perpetrators might nevertheless use a political declaration as smokescreen and attempt to legitimise their act.</p>
	<p><i>Non-material and political</i> Kidnapping for political without material motivation, such as abductions involving demands for political concessions, for example the release of political prisoners or the end of a region’s military occupation. It is not necessarily the kidnappers themselves making such demands.</p>	<p><i>Non-material and non-political</i> Kidnapping for neither material nor political motivation, such as parental abduction of children and abduction of individuals by strangers and non-relatives often in order to harm persons.</p>

**Table 2: Political and material motivations for kidnapping (Turner 1998)**

Many authors believe that most kidnappings are an articulation of economic violence, inspired by the desire for material gain or economic power. Only few kidnappings would represent institutional violence, inspired by the desire for individual or collective institutional power over other (groups of) people. Such desires can be either conscious or unconscious. Within this framework, kidnapping can be a manifestation of organised crime, protection of business interests, delinquency, robbery and protection of land property or other natural resources. But such a static categorisation and typology do not reflect the overlapping and interrelated continuum of important reinforcing interconnections composed by different though not mutually exclusive categories and types of violence together. Rather, different reasons depending on the identity of perpetrator(s) and victim(s) can inspire the same violent practice (Moser and McIlwaine 2006, 93-94, 96; Moser and Rodgers 2005, 5, 35-36; Moser and

Shrader 1999, 4). This correlates with the observation that rebel movements searching for financial assets to cover their expensive activities sometimes turn to kidnapping as one method to raise income. This overshadows their political motives and/or transforms insurgency groups into criminal gangs and/or warlord personnel, hence blurring the distinction between rebellion and organised crime. But also terrorist organisation can use the abduction of individuals or groups to extort political concessions or financial transfers. Thus different types of perpetrators of violence kidnap (Mair 2003, 16-17) for divergent purposes. Therefore, it can be considered a manifestation of both/either organised crime and/or terrorism, used for both/either financial gain and/or political struggle, exploiting the status quo and/or trying to change it (Berdal and Serrano 2002, 6-8). The conflicting assumptions on the definition, chronology and classification of kidnapping demonstrate that the only conclusion beyond question appears that it is one of the numerous manifestations of the broad heterogeneous phenomenon of violence (Heinemann and Verner 2006, 4).

### **Conclusions: motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts**

Since kidnapping is a particular articulation of the phenomenon of violence, it is logical to assume that the broader theoretical discussions on the motivations for the onset and continuance of armed conflict and the application of violence have considerable explanatory power for this more narrow research topic as well. Indeed, the scarce accounts on kidnapping in civil war are heavily imbued with the prevalent academic ideas on the criminalisation of conflict and the conviction that today criminal private economics and greed rather than legitimate public politics and grievance would inspire (the continuance of) the application of violence in contemporary conflict contexts. As with other types of violence, it is often believed that whereas kidnapping in former and the early stages of civil wars was primarily applied as a political instrument addressing popular grievance, today the predominant incentive to kidnap would be personal economic greed. The involvement of new actors in the arena of kidnapping next to those who originally 'invented' the practice in the realm of armed conflict, the increasingly blurring distinctions between these categories of perpetrators, and the shifting motivations within each of these factions would together explain this change. As a result, today kidnappings would be more often settled by financial and/or material payment than in the past when political concessions seemed more common.

But this tendency to reason in opposite terms frequently appears too simplistic to represent the complex reality of violence as occurring in contemporary conflict contexts.

Human aspirations and motivations crucially determine if violence and more specifically kidnapping occurs and how it subsequently develops. Kidnappers, as well as perpetrators of other types of violence, would act out of a conscious or unconscious desire for economic and/or political power. However, they not necessarily pursue financial and/or institutional gain, but may also strive after the mere protection of assets they already possess though fear to lose or fight for causes such as societal equality or justice. The motivations of one (group of) perpetrator(s) may alter according to both the geographic and historical societal environment they operate in and their own economic and political position at a particular moment in time. Because a myriad of actors more or less frequently commit kidnappings, at least an equal myriad of motivations for this type of violence is to expect. However, originally distinct perpetrators may intermingle and although each actor has its own agenda of aspirations, motivations and working methods, these are far from static but quite flexibly adapted to altering necessities. A single or multiple aspiration(s) for kidnapping form(s) the driving force behind the motivation(s) for kidnapping that continuously change(s) according to both the actors involved and the particular situations they encounter. The changing, blurring and overlapping of both the perpetrators of kidnapping and their reasons to kidnap, demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon and make it extremely hard to unravel and distinguish between the perpetrators and their motivations.

## **MOTIVATIONS FOR CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND KIDNAPPING IN LATIN AMERICA AND COLOMBIA**

Violence has marked Latin America's history. From its colonisation until today, numerous different actors have committed numerous different types of atrocities against humanity for numerous of divergent motivations. In this chapter I link the academic discussions explored in the preceding chapter to the particular situation in Latin America and more specifically Colombia in order to understand the continent's and the country's vulnerabilities for protracted conflict, violence and, more specifically, kidnapping. Hereby I aim at answering the second research question: *What motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts in Latin America and Colombia do academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as inspiring violence in Latin America and Colombia reveal?* I therefore briefly describe Latin America's history of colonialism, subsequent civil wars and current violence. Then I position these phenomena within the theoretical framework on the motivations for starting and continuing armed conflicts, their criminalisation and the dichotomy of politics and grievance versus economics and greed as inspiring violence. By applying these insights upon the widespread practice of kidnapping in this continent, I discover what scientific explanations can be given for the particular motivations for committing this crime in Latin America's contemporary conflict contexts. Finally I look closer at the particular situation in Colombia.

### **Latin America's history of protracted (armed) conflict**

From the fifteenth century onwards, European conquistadors invaded the region and implemented repressive economic, political and societal structures (Burkholder and Johnson 2008; Kleinpenning 1997, 39-46; Pérez Herrero 1992). These experiences can have shaped collective memories, inspired hostile discourses and imposed economic and political asymmetries (Sen 2006, 85). In Latin America colonialism left fundamental structures of highly discriminatory and unequal societies that independence did not profoundly transform. The European-descent oligarchy continued ruling over the indigenous and mixed populations, largely conserving the colonial-type authoritarianism, discrimination and oppression securing their economic, political and societal hegemony (Kleinpenning 1997, 60). Such strong multidimensional horizontal inequalities coinciding with rigid cultural distinctions can

seriously affect individual well-being and social stability, provoke (violent) political reactions (Stewart 2002), sow discontent and fuel instrumental mobilisation along ethnic lines (Storey 1999). But Latin America remained relatively tranquil for centuries (Burkholder and Johnson 2008; Pérez Herrero 1992). “[I]ntense and widespread suffering and misery” went “accompanied by unusual peace and silence” (Sen 2006, 143). The colonised indigenous population lacked the position to rebel and hence suffered quietly (Collier 2007, 24). The imperialist authorities managed to establish and secure their dominance through tyranny (Burkholder and Johnson 2008; Pérez Herrero 1992), thus cruelly maintaining their monopoly over violence (Gleditsch 2007, 181). This severe repression can explain why Latin America remained quiet so long.

But during the second half of the twentieth century, many civil wars did erupt. Popular uprisings challenging the dictatorial regimes transformed into guerrilla warfare, in turn oppressed by state terrorism (Koonings and Kruijt 2004, 1). What then caused or triggered the later escalation of the authoritarian situations into civil wars and widespread violence? Social transformations (Duffield 2002, 1053) and/or differential opportunities together with competition can exacerbate societal cleavages and increase the probability of civil war (Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 6, 8). Although independence did not bring quick nor profound societal changes to Latin America, it introduced some modest reforms (Burkholder and Johnson 2008, 396-406; Kleinpenning 1997, 46-60). Such slight transformations open opportunities for quasi- and non-state actors to claim authority and power (Devetak 2008, 25). In Latin America, this provoked waves of violence (Feldmann and Perälä 2004, 121), because it meant that the deprived segments of the population could start rebelling against the oppressors, who responded with repressive tactics. Both the resentment of the disadvantaged and the fear of the advantaged to lose power can fuel mobilisation, political instability and violence (Stewart 2002, 3). Thus although the new societal conditions brought by the modest reforms after independence enabled the popular uprisings against the ruling oligarchies, it was grievance already slumbering for centuries that motivated the oppressed populations in postcolonial Latin America to organise themselves.

Many of these civil wars coincided with ethnic lines, as tensions mainly occurred between powerful elites of European descent and powerless indigenous populations. Nevertheless, cultural identity has seldom been the main discourse to mobilise people here. Rather, rebellion has been justified in terms of discontent about the economic, political and societal situation and repression by the (re)establishment of order and security (Jones 2004,

129-130; Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Silva 2004; Tobler 2001). During the Cold War, ideological dichotomies became the predominant discourse framing the armed conflicts. The grievance of the masses and fears of the elites were interpreted as clashes between communism and liberalism. Hence, the Soviet Union and the United States of America opportunistically supported and strengthened either the rebelling factions or the seated governments. This exacerbated the hostilities and balanced the power divergences between the opposing groups. But although Latin America's insurgencies became more successful in challenging its oligarchies, none of the quarrelling parties proved strong enough to defeat the other (Feldmann and Perälä 2004; Jones, 2004, 129; Van Lindert, Vellinga and Verkoren 1997, 173-181). These developments had two important implications. First, due to the perception of ideological incompatibility and the lack of clear hegemony of one faction over its counterparts, the settlements for the civil wars remained remote and hence the fighting protractedly continued. Second, the dominant discourse to explain the motivations for the use of violence shifted. Whereas initially grievance of the oppressed aspiring change of the status quo and fear of the oppressors aspiring preservation of the status quo provided the principal framework within which civil war was framed, later the two ideologies of communism and liberalism justified the armed conflicts.

### **The continuance of violence in Latin America**

During and after these civil wars parallel political, economic and judicial structures developed that the mere signing of peace agreements could not eliminate and hence still exist. Although their origins and characteristics differ, they have serious implications for the prospects of peace, stability and security (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). In Latin America as elsewhere, numerous actors have become dependent on continuing violence for political and economic reasons (Kaldor 2000, 4). The deterioration of the state's ability to deliver public goods (Devetak 2008, 10), guarantee political rights (Collier 2007, 28) and maintain its monopoly over force affects its legitimacy and the public's confidence (Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 7; Kaldor 2000, 1, 3). In order to secure these necessities and protection in the midst of violent anarchy, people create their own governance systems. The formation and maintenance of these alternative power, profit and protection structures often depends upon the application of violence, extending and intensifying its use and further eroding the state's authority and monopoly (Devetak 2008, 18-19). Because the (re)establishment of legitimacy and confidence takes time and challenged Latin America's

postwar governments, systems of parallel governance have survived (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). This grassroots democratisation of politics often goes accompanied by the grassroots democratisation of violence (Moser and McIlwaine 2006, 90), since the former exists by means of the latter.

In addition, armed conflicts leave a legacy of parallel economic systems. War-related activities distort and later dominate the economy, enriching some individuals (Anderson 1999, 4), criminalising production and trade and privatising violence (Duffield 2002, 1051). Particularly in Latin America during and after armed conflicts many actors have resorted to violence for economic reasons, either in order to keep up the war effort or for personal gain. The end of the Cold War implied that the Soviet Union and the United States of America suspended their support to the insurgencies and the governments. Hence, Latin America's guerrillas and armies sought alternative funding to sustain themselves and continue their operations. Because they partly found the compensation for the loss of income in illicit practices (Jones 2004, 130, 134) that demand the application of force, the conflicting parties further proliferated the use of violence. But also other actors contributed to this development. As Latin America's sharp socioeconomic contrasts survived the wars, access to the formal economy has remained severely limited for the large lower segments of the population. Many people cannot or do not want to find alternatives to earn their money and continue working in the shadow economy (Heinemann and Verner 2006, 7; Jones 2004, 144; Moser and McIlwaine 2006, 97; Moser and Shrader 1999, 1). This development has extended the informal sector, extracting tax revenues for the state further undermining its capacities, and proliferated criminal activities such as drug and weapon trade (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Silva 2004). Latin America thus appears to verify the ideas that during civil wars initial motivations to rebel, justified in terms of grievance, gradually erode, and that economic opportunities gain relevance, particularly when people see no other (viable) options to survive (Collier 2007, 18, 28-31; Gleditsch 2007, 188). The deprivation of (sufficient) income for both the originally conflicting parties and the broader population has drawn many different types of actors into alternative income-generating activities that not seldom depend upon the application of violence.

Next to distorting politics and economics, Latin America's dirty warfare and subsequent violence have severely disrupted societal textures, increasing the population's vulnerability to other forms of violence as well (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Mechkat 2001; Moser and McIlwaine 2006). The since the start of the armed conflicts persistent extremely

high impunity has pushed people to take justice in their own hands, sometimes through violent means. Law enforcement (Devetak 2008, 24) through militarisation has been a common response by Latin American governments (Jones 2004; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). These developments demonstrate that in this region, as elsewhere, paranoia and recriminations over past brutalities motivate further violence (Collier 2007, 27, 33-34) and that political peace does not automatically bring societal peace. Instead of having become safer and harmonious, several countries are more dangerous today than during war. Slumbering societal tensions hinder the consolidation of positive and durable peace (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001, 9-10; Heinemann and Verner 2006, 2-3; Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Moser and Shrader 1999, 1; Silva 2004, 186). This verifies the ideas that war often inspires more violence (Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 9; Gleditsch 2007, 187; Kaldor 2000, 3) and its formal ending does not automatically end conflict (Collier 2007, 34; Junne and Verkoren 2005, 1). In the aftermath of the atrocities that have created an environment of unjustness and impunity, both the populations and the regimes see the necessity to respond to these issues by violent means.

### **Motivations for crime and violence in Latin America today**

From the 1990s onwards, negotiated settlements formally (re)established peace and since then no Latin American country has slid back into war. An exception is Colombia, where until today a protracted armed conflict continues. But the absence of conventional civil war does not mean that the interventions and agreements successfully brought stability, security and prosperity (Davis 2006; Feldmann and Perälä 2004; Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Moser and McIlwaine 2006). Crime and violence have risen dramatically (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Silva 2004, 186), in some areas reaching rates higher than during armed conflict. Several authors rank Latin America among the more dangerous regions in the world or even consider it the most dangerous (Heinemann and Verner 2006; Moser and Shrader 1999). The continent appears extraordinarily vulnerable for the prevalence and exacerbation of crime and violence. Their persistence sometimes exceeds the numbers of casualties and victims caused by the atrocities committed during war.

Domestic and foreign measures intended to address the postwar political, economic and legal problems have often failed. Neither sovereign states nor transnational organisations attempting to reduce Latin America's violence sufficiently succeed in achieving this goal. On the contrary, in many areas they continue its proliferation (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and

Meschkat 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). Political, economic and social arrangements fail to meet the needs of the deprived and secure equal inclusion (Sen 2006, 121-139). Because Latin American states appear incapable to settle the conflicts' root causes, they contribute to the ongoing unrest (Feldmann and Perälä 2004; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). Also global institutions, universal law and justice (Barber 1992, 4) and international aid and assistance ineffectively attempt to address these postwar challenges. Sometimes foreign interference exacerbates rather than solves problems (Anderson 1999; Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 21). Particularly when states try to combat violence through human rights violations, humanitarian interventions and/or counter-terrorism policies, they tend to intensify, extend and prolong violence (Devetak 2008). International involvement can also impose additional shadow networks of governance next to the already during war created alternative grassroots politics. This further hinders the (re)establishment of credible and locally legitimate domestic authorities (Goodhand 2006, 111) and diminishes the governments' incentives to deliver, enhancing their withdrawal, minimisation and corruption. These problems characterise most Latin American states, bringing them into a vicious cycle of more deterioration of authority, legitimacy and power and consolidation of parallel structures (Koonings and Kruijt 2004).

Foreign interference in conflict contexts can have negative economic effects too. Huge discrepancies in the opportunities people receive from globalisation (Sen 2006, 120) and neoliberalism can exacerbate domestic tensions. They facilitate both the further accumulation and subsequent concentration of power and wealth and the internationalisation of violence through enabling access to international networks (Devetak 2008, 7, 16), communication and fund-raising (Collier 2007, 22; Kaldor 2000, 4), and through the exportation of international organised crime and achievement of autonomy and legitimacy by non-state and private actors. Structural adjustment stimulates the creation, consolidation and expansion of shadow networks (Duffield 2002). Moreover, development and growth cause anxiety among the elites for changes in the status quo, their asymmetries anger among the masses (Feldmann and Perälä 2004; Jones, 2004, 129; Van Lindert, Vellinga and Verkoren 1997, 173-181). In some particular contexts extreme poverty and/or resource scarcity or abundance occur (Gilbert 2004, 102-104; Kay 2001, 66). Because the steady progress has been extraordinarily unequal (Heinemann and Verner 2006, 12, 15; Moser and McIlwaine 2006, 90), neoliberalism has further deepened the socioeconomic cleavages and sharpened the contrasts between rich and poor (Silva 2004, 187), liberalists and socialists. Globalisation paves the path to the international shadow economy for those excluded from 'formal' networks. The profitable

international drug and weapon trade flourish and rapidly proliferate across Latin America. Those who earn their money these ways, often violently secure their source of income and buy and/or enforce autonomy and legitimacy in peripheral areas neglected by the state in order to expand their power (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Feldmann and Perälä 2004; Jones 2004; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). Greater worldwide proximity and foreign meddling with internal affairs thus has had problematic effects in Latin America. They considerably contribute to the maintenance of parallel political and economic structures. Theories on globalisation taking into account distributional matters provide valuable insights on what fuels (the continuance of) conflict in Latin America.

The subsequent violence is internally oriented towards its own societies rather than directed against the outside world or (infiltrating) outsiders. Thus the discontent resulting in aggression does not merely evolve from closer proximity with the rest of the world. Rather, in Latin America many conflicts regard access to land and/or drug production and trade (Bodemer, Kurtenbach and Meschkat 2001; Koonings and Kruijt 2004). These disputes seem economic rather than political. Although the exclusion of large segments of the population from the formal economy partly explains why people resort to violent means to earn themselves a living, it must be acknowledged that still then, next to activities such as production and trade of narcotics, alternative and legitimate ways of income-generation exist. However, because the former tends to be much more profitable than the latter, some people prefer controlling the drug business and, if necessary, fight for it (Vellinga 2004). Latin America's jungles and mountains (Beukenkamp 1997) enhance the formation and hiding of not only subversive groups, but also illicit commodity production and trafficking, thereby facilitating conflict. But whereas the continent's armed conflicts indeed were and are principally fought in the rural areas (Kay 2001, 65), its contemporary crime and violence predominantly prevails in urban contexts (Heinemann and Verner 2006, 13; Moser and McIlwaine 2006). Although the availability of (geographical) resources can (partly) explain the successful guerrilla formations, flourishing drug business and protracted violence, it cannot reveal what has *caused* Latin America's conflicts and *enhances* its violence.

The above-given descriptions reveal some interesting insights. Although most conflicts in Latin America roughly coincide with cultural lines, leaders here have seldom exploited ethnic identity as an instrument to create hostilities. Rather, throughout history socioeconomic identity has played a much more significant role, later accompanied by political identity. Typical for Latin America are its extreme contrasts. Hence, most theories

for civil war and violence seem unable to explain the whole continent's prevailing violence, but considerably gain value when zooming in on particular situations. Whereas the region has so far succeeded not to relapse into armed conflict, violence consolidates and proliferates across the continent. Its settlements and societal changes have transformed rather than eliminated violence. A complex multicausality is key to understanding these phenomena and the nexus between former armed conflict and present violence.

Furthermore, motivations for (armed) conflict, violence and crime have been manifold in Latin America. Different societal, political, legal and economic factors drive people here to commit atrocities against each other. Whereas some protest against oppression, others fear losing their advantageous position in the for them favourable status quo. Whereas some revenge themselves on the perpetrators of earlier offences, others instrumentally make use of the opportunities created by the turbulent circumstances to deploy illicit profitable activities. Latin America's history of colonialism and civil wars has left a legacy of both legitimate and illegitimate parallel shadow structures and an atmosphere in which the application of violence has become normal and an accepted way to settle disputes. However, the survival of the hardly changed highly unequal colonial structures, the protraction of conflicts and the proliferation of crime and violence across the continent have mixed and hence today also the motivations for the commitment of violence continuously intertwine and mutually reinforce each other. This makes it hard to distinguish between violence inspired by politics and/or grievance on the one hand and violence inspired by economics and/or greed on the other hand. Doubtlessly, both types of motivations occur in Latin America, though they have become difficult to disentangle.

### **Kidnapping in Latin America**

One of the most popular violent crimes in Latin America is kidnapping (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 39). Hence, this phenomenon contributes to the above-described vicious cycle of violence (Concha-Eastman 2000, 45-47). Throughout history Latin America has appeared the world's most vulnerable continent to this offence (Gómez 2007, 27-28) due to its political instability, weak law enforcement and judicial institutions and impunity rates up to 97 percent. Recently also the global economic crisis has contributed to the proliferation of kidnapping here (Clayton Consultants 2009, 13). Estimates on its extent vary widely. Scholars and non-governmental organisations argue that between 75 (Cowie 2006, 277; Solís and Rojas Aravena 2008, 11-12; Verdad Colombia and FAES undated, 2) and 85 percent of all

kidnappings happening worldwide occurs here (Romero 2004, 78), but private security companies report much lower percentages, such as 48 percent in 2007 (Clayton Consultants 2008) and 37 percent in 2009.<sup>2</sup> Despite the differences, these figures unanimously demonstrate a decrease in the relative share of kidnappings Latin America bears as compared to other geographical contexts: the continent has after many years even lost its leading position as global kidnap-for-ransom hotspot. Nevertheless, the absolute incidence of kidnapping has significantly increased in many countries here (República de Colombia, Organizaciones de los Estados Americanos and Fundación País Libre 2010), extending to more regions and affecting broader segments of societies (Solís and Rojas Aravena 2008, 211, 213). Thus although the situation regarding kidnapping in Latin America has in comparison with other continents relatively improved, the scope of the problem has in absolute sense deteriorated.

But it is extremely difficult to compose reliable statistics on the actual number of abductions occurring across Latin America. Circa 80 percent of the offences remains unreported (Clayton Consultants 2009, 13), as victims are reluctant to involve the authorities for various reasons, such as the mere nature of the crime, fear for reprisals by the aggressors, lack of trust in the judicial system, simple disinformation and/or bureaucratic and procedural obstacles. In kidnapping cases committed by common criminal gangs the perpetrators frequently intimidate the hostages and/or their relatives by threatening them with murder, so that they do not dare report the crime (Gómez Cardona 2007, 1). Adding to this *cifra negra* is that kidnapping often is only one part of a sequence of (other) crimes. Authorities tend to register the latter and neglect the former (Crew and Lammers 2000). Another obstacle posing constraints upon precisely mapping the real numbers of kidnappings across Latin America is that different countries use different (legal) definitions for this type of violence (Wright 2009). Definitional heterogeneity makes it impossible to compare databases on kidnapping across different states, let alone to integrate their statistics into one overview, and poor registration severely impedes knowing the real dimensions of the phenomenon (Gómez 2007, 30). If calculation of the actual numbers of kidnappings across Latin America is this complicated, then differentiating the phenomenon according to type, perpetrator and underlying reason is even more problematic. But for the purpose of gaining insights in the motivations for kidnapping, it is nevertheless necessary to know what kinds of abductions exist, identify who commit them and understand why they do so.

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<sup>2</sup> Presentation by Erik Muller, Utrecht, 9 February 2010.

The disagreement among Latin American states on what exactly constitutes a kidnapping indicates that this type of violence occurs in various forms. It is continuously reproduced and hence its nature continuously transformed. Traditionally, the *secuestro selectivo* or selective kidnapping, in which the perpetrators conduct a thorough study on the vulnerabilities of the victims before abducting and holding them hostage for a protracted period – sometimes extending up to several years – has been prevalent across the continent's rural areas. But particularly Latin America's major conurbations and their surroundings currently experience new modalities of kidnapping, such as the more ad hoc and quick *secuestro express* or express kidnapping, *secuestro al paso* or kidnapping journey and *paseo millonario* or millionaire tour. These abductions demand less careful preparation and last between a few hours and several days (Gómez 2007, 29-30; O'Brien 2001). All these types of kidnapping affect victims from all societal layers (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 39) and the level of violence applied against the hostages strongly varies, not only per category of kidnapping, but also per individual case (Clayton Consultants 2010, 13). Across Latin America the phenomenon thus represents a complexity of wide divergences in modalities, victimisation and application of violence.

This variety evolves from the tendencies that throughout the last decades more and more different types of perpetrators have become actively involved in the practice of kidnapping, and that as a reaction to altering societal contexts, perpetrators have differentiated their methods of kidnapping. During and in the aftermath of Latin America's armed conflicts, a myriad of state, quasi-state and non-state actors that traditionally do not consider kidnapping as their (core) business, have increasingly contributed to its proliferation. The (post)war legacy of generalised illegality and extreme impunity provides them with immunity and protection, as these circumstances form an effective veil of secrecy covering their clandestine activities. The complicity of large sectors of civil society, such as judges, journalists and companies from all levels and layers contributes to this climate in which, next to those organisations traditionally specialised in kidnapping, also paramilitary bodies, police forces, *escuadrones de muerte* or death squads, and groups of thugs broaden their tasks with abduction (Torres-Rivas 1999, 292). Particularly the participation of these non-political criminal groups adds to the complexity of the phenomenon. They have divergent degrees of organisation, specialisation and logistical structures (Gómez 2007, 30). Moreover, the contemporary dynamics of kidnapping drawing in people and organisations from divergent origins inherently implies that the practice crosses national boundaries (República de

Colombia, Organizaciones de los Estados Americanos and Fundación País Libre 2010, 1). Perpetrators operating in distinct contexts easily learn from each other, copy each other's modalities and flexibly adapt their working methods according to what particular situations demand. Actors thereby diversify their ways of kidnapping by no longer exclusively applying the conventional methods of kidnapping, but adding newly achieved methods of abduction to their repertoire.

All these perpetrators kidnap for various reasons. *Secuestro extorsivo* or extortive kidnapping, historically common and still prevalent across Latin America, serves the aim of generating publicity or achieving political goals (Gómez 2007, 30). This activity is particularly interesting for and hence predominantly conducted by organisations such as the leftist guerrilla movements striving against societal disparities. But today, kidnappers seem no longer solely driven by such political motives. Rather, the kidnap-for-ransom market has considerably grown, making the region the most dangerous regarding this specific type of abduction. Today not only gangsters, but also guerrillas consider this carefully planned and conducted activity a lucrative business. However, also random opportunistic kidnapping journey or express kidnapping by less sophisticated criminals have become popular. This modality of kidnapping usually involves the abduction under armed threat of a victim who is taken to an automated teller machine to empty his/her bank account and then within a few hours released. Although this tendency occurs throughout the whole continent, these quick kidnappings particularly prevail in the big cities of Brazil, Colombia and Mexico (O'Brien 2001). The former, the "classic" ransom kidnapping, is usually carried out by sophisticated organisations, not seldom integrating expertised (former) law enforcement officials. They tend to ask high amounts of money. The latter, the short-term express kidnapping, is often the work of simple delinquents who aspire quick payouts (Clayton Consultants 2010, 13). Thus although politics or grievance sometimes forms the driving force behind kidnappings, economics or greed appears (to have become) more common as motivation.

But the reality of the motivations for kidnapping in contemporary Latin America is more complex than these explanations – clearly inspired by academic debates on politics or grievance versus economics or greed – suggest. Occasionally terrorist movements, but today predominantly organised crime groups more and more frequently use kidnapping as a weapon. They often apply it as an instrument for extortive purposes aimed at the accumulation of capital that they subsequently use to commit other crimes (República de Colombia, Organizaciones de los Estados Americanos and Fundación País Libre 2010, 1). Not only

political movements, but also major criminal organisations and small delinquent groups abduct victims from all socioeconomic backgrounds for purposes as divergent as financial profit, intimidation as part of turf warfare between rival criminal groups, and political goals (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009). Guerrilla troops use criminal violence such as kidnapping as a tactic either to approach their (societal) objectives by demanding political concessions or to facilitate the continuation of their strife by exchanging hostages for money and/or commodities. But throughout the protracted course of armed conflict, the criminalisation of their organisations exacerbates, since many guerrillas gradually adopt this irregular warfare as their normal way of life rather than the exceptional means towards the achievement of their societal final goals. Diverse delinquent groups commit abductions for financial gain, not only on their own initiative, but also frequently on request of other (political) actors such as the aforementioned guerrilla movements. Besides, both these categories of perpetrators also use kidnapping as an instrument to enable the committal of other illicit activities and/or to intimidate opposing actors.

### **Conflict and violence in Colombia**

Colombia is the only country in Latin America where a long history of internal armed conflict continues until today. Since colonial times its society has been highly unequal and polarised. In order to address the unjustness affecting large segments of the population, insurgency groups decided to organise themselves and demand political changes. This resulted in violent rather than peaceful confrontations between the guerrillas on the one hand and the government and its army and later also counterinsurgency groups on the other hand. Revolutionary and paramilitary groups have perpetuated this guerrilla war for over four decades now, both heavily financed by illicit drug trafficking. Whereas the conflict between government, illegal armed groups and drug traffickers provoked the internal displacement of almost four million people between 1985 and 2007 and motivated more than 300,000 Colombians to flee the country, the recent decrease in violence has turned this tide. During president Uribe's regime, the government has continuously attempted to improve security, expand international trade, reform the judicial system and reduce poverty, resulting in higher state legitimacy. Nevertheless, it has not significantly succeeded in addressing issues believed to enhance a country's proneness to conflict, such as poor access to public services and high levels of human rights violations (Fund for Peace 2009).

Throughout the 1990s part of the violence has become independent from its strictly political motivations. As multiple actors started to exercise violence in diverse directions and for intermingled purposes, violence has penetrated social life and hence remains an integral part of Colombia's contemporary history (Iglesias 1996, 15). For decades the country has experienced severe levels of varied and diverse types of violence that are hard to distinguish. Forms of 'organised' violence often go accompanied by an increase in 'unorganised' violence. This suggests that not all brutalities occur within the discourse of the protracted armed conflict. Rather, the so-called 'political violence' would account only for circa seven percent of all violence in Colombia. But the boundary between political and other forms of violence is often unclear. Whereas non-political actors sometimes adopt political behaviour – for instance when they intervene in judicial and/or electoral processes, political actors sometimes adopt non-political behaviour – for instance when they apply non-political violence and/or contract criminals in order to commit illicit activities. Furthermore, a usually loose cohesion among different units of the same overarching organisations provides them with the opportunity to relatively autonomously follow their own approaches and strategies. Also the widespread corruption, affecting all societal layers and sectors, complicates the categorisation of violence. As a consequence, all protagonists of violence have acquired (potential) control over the main sectors of Colombia's economy. This complicates clearly distinguishing between these different armed actors and further blurs the boundaries between political and non-political violence (Pécaut 1999, 141-143).

Today the most notorious perpetrators of violence include guerrillas, militaries, paramilitaries, drug cartels, gangs and urban militias (Iglesias 1996, 15). Different parties have developed tactical alliances enabling the consolidation and continuance of their activities. For instance, in exchange for providing a buffer limiting the authorities' access to drug cartels and protection for agricultural, mining and oil companies, guerrillas often receive financial assets from these actors. This requires not only cooperation between these groups, but also the implicit complicity of other local forces, including military, police and politicians. However, since the primary purposes of all these divergent actors usually do not coincide, also new conflicts emerge, not seldom resulting in violent confrontations. These mechanisms of different armed actors providing each other with mutual dependence and reinforcement and their sometimes problematic consequences explain why a significant part of all the violence harassing Colombia is concentrated in rural areas (Pécaut 1999, 144, 149-152). However,

apart from strengthen themselves and each other this way, it also generate new reasons for dispute. This tendency easily leads to the further exacerbation of the violence in Colombia.

The circularity among these various violent actors is significant. For instance, (ex)guerrillas become paramilitaries, insurgency groups offer military training to delinquent juveniles under the auspices of peace agreements, and drug cartels and criminal organisations lend their services to guerrillas. Also urban militias, youth gangs and *sicarios* or hired assassins often intermingle. Thus the borders between all these different parties are complex and blurry. This tendency is sometimes interpreted as a sign of the criminalisation and depoliticisation or “involution-degradation” of the conflict in Colombia (Sánchez G. 2001, 20). This view is further strengthened by the perceived little political interest groups dedicated to organised violence would show (Pécaut 1999, 145) and the divergent public and private motivations of individuals for joining armed groups and/or applying violence. An environment of a combination of scarcity of education and employment opportunities and prevalence of impunity makes it attractive for particularly youth to opt for a career in violence. For example, people join the guerrilla and/or the paramilitary in order to satisfy their needs for generating income, creating a means of living, increasing their status and/or achieving a sense of *belonging*. This explains the aforementioned smooth transitions people make between organisations as divergent as drug cartels, guerrillas and militaries (Pécaut 1999, 148-149), because in their individual considerations ideology and politics appear to play a minor role.

Throughout the armed conflict, particularly the political credibility and prestige of the Colombian guerrillas have diminished for various reasons. First, they have lacked the capability to flexibility towards political ideologies or differences in beliefs. Second, they have lost the means to communicate their aspirations for a better future, believing that their activities sufficiently articulate what they strive after (Pécaut 1999, 145). Third, predominantly guerrillas and drug cartels have established functional and tactical alliances. These have led to “political involution” of the former, as it provides them with economic advantages and brings them towards practices associated more with common crime than political goals (Sánchez G. 2001, 17). For instance, whereas particularly the original goal of the FARC was overthrowing the Colombian government, the movement has become more and more involved in the drug trade and is now held responsible for over half of the cocaine entering the United States of America. Despite the relative successes of the Uribe government

to strengthen the security apparatus and considerably diminish the number of guerrillas, the ELN and the FARC continue to apply different types of violence (Fund for Peace 2009).

These developments demonstrate that the driving motivations behind Colombia's contemporary conflict and the violence perpetrated within this context are multiple, diverse and transforming. The initial reasons of the armed groups that originally started the fighting – the guerrillas against the army and the government and later also the paramilitaries against the guerrillas – appeared predominantly political. However, perhaps their main discourses did not always correspond with the individual motivations of the people joining them. The later involvement of other types of armed actors, utilising the societal turbulence for non-political purposes, partly criminalised the conflict and the violence. The opportunistic alliances these groups subsequently made with the politically motivated organisations, further affected the political framework of the conflict. Transitions of members easily hopping between different armed groups following their personal considerations rather than collective ideologies or politics further undermined the political messages some armed actors attempted to express. Discrepancies between motivations have always existed – among distinct armed groups, between public discourse and private reasons, and among the different members of any violent organisation. Nevertheless, due to the increasing involvement of non-political armed actors, the alliances and mutual dependence between political organisations and non-political protagonists of violence, and individuals changing their memberships, overall the spectrum of the violence committed in Colombia's contemporary conflict context has lost part of its political message and become more and more criminalised, economic motivations gaining importance over political motivations.

### **Conclusions: motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts in Latin America**

In this chapter I have described how Latin American societies throughout history have become permeated with many different types of violence. Colonialism has left a legacy of extreme societal disparities, a form of structural violence. Protracted civil wars have normalised overt violence and criminalised both politics and economics. Since the (post)war period until today has not brought any significant changes, the proliferation of crime and violence continues across the continent. A myriad of actors applies violence against each other for an equal myriad of reasons. Some feel aggrieved, some respond to atrocities committed against themselves and/or their relatives, some consider crime and violence the

only viable and/or most profitable way to live their lives and/or to secure their political and/or economic (power) position. The composition of the (groups of) perpetrators continuously alters, they continuously adapt their working methods according to what seems most convenient in specific situations, and the motivations for applying crime and violence continuously shift according to the societal, political and economic context they at certain moments find themselves. All these dynamics of the widespread crime and violence harassing Latin America form complex continua difficult to disentangle, making it hard to identify who does what for which motivation.

The extraordinary proliferation of kidnapping throughout Latin America clearly reflects the characteristics of this wave of crime and violence. The different opportunities people receive due to the asymmetries in their societies provoke grievance, motivating people to rebel against the regimes. Often they consider irregular warfare the only way to effectively challenge them. Hence, some actors, particularly guerrillas, try to extort societal changes through selective kidnappings. But the exclusion of broad segments of the population from formal political and economic structures also forces people to create their own parallel systems. These often exist by the means of illicit activities that often demand the application of crime and violence to secure their survival in the struggle with both legality and other parallel systems. Making the step towards kidnapping in an environment already used to this type of violence is easy, particularly since many perpetrators have experienced what they can achieve through this offence and/or observed what other perpetrators of similar offences achieve. By exchanging knowledge about the practice more and more actors become involved in kidnapping and differentiate their working methods. Hence, in Latin America kidnapping has become more proliferated and diversified, committed by more and more different perpetrators for goals as divergent as a more just society, intimidation of rivalling actors and material profit. The distinctions between kidnappers, their working methods and their aspirations have thereby become increasingly blurred within multidimensional and flexible continua. But although all these objectives still play a role in contemporary conflict contexts in Latin America, since the criminalisation of politics and economics initiated during and continued after the civil wars, economics rather than politics seem to predominate in the spectrum of motivations for kidnapping.

Although Colombia's protracted internal armed conflict between state and insurgency actors emerged out of discontent about its societal cleavages, today the characteristics of the war have changed. New political and non-political actors, such as paramilitaries and criminal

groups, have entered the arena either to address or to benefit from the societal disturbance. Whereas the main conflicting parties started to fight each other for political reasons, several other armed actors appear predominantly driven by economic incentives. However, today these distinctions have increasingly blurred, as for instance originally political actors resort to criminal activities as a way of fund-raising and criminal actors sometimes aim at political influence. Moreover, different armed groups opportunistically collaborate, mutually supporting each other but sometimes also generating new conflict. Individual members easily switch between organisations as they prioritise personal interests rather than the interests of the groups. These insights suggest that in Colombia crime, politics and economics have considerably mixed, on both organisational and individual level and that conflict and violence thus have become criminalised. Among the grounds for participation in Colombia's internal armed conflict and application of violence, private economic motivations have more and more frequently replaced collective political motivations.

## METHODOLOGY

The motivations why combatants commit brutal activities are difficult to unravel. Studies on this subject face challenges like which research methodology to adopt (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Richards 2005) and how to interpret the gathered data (Kalyvas 2003). Investigating a delicate phenomenon such as kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts inevitably raises several methodological obstacles and excludes some research strategies, sources and methods of data collection and analysis. From a consideration of their advantages and disadvantages and possibilities and impossibilities, my choice for an in-depth qualitative approach has evolved, combining elements from the case study and desk research strategies. My investigation has predominantly depended upon existing material (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 144, 163-184) and interviews (Bernard 2002, 203-239). In this chapter I explain the methodology I followed and elaborate on the underlying arguments that brought me to my decisions and the implications these have for the results of this research project.

### **Integration of the case study and desk research strategies**

Choosing what methodological strategies to follow and what research methods and techniques to apply requires considering *breadth* and *depth*, *quantitative* and *qualitative* study, and *desk* and *empirical* research. Any choice brings advantages and disadvantages. Whereas breadth and quantification, often conducted from behind the desk, facilitate generalisation and clarification in graphic and numeric overviews, they limit in-depth elaboration, complexity and foundation. Though depth and a qualitative and interpretative approach, often conducted in the field, leave more room for these latter aspects and (verbal) contemplation, they constrain generalisation (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 144). However, investigating a phenomenon such as the motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts inevitably raises several methodological obstacles. Lack of agreement on how to define and register kidnapping and high levels of underreporting constrain the reliability of quantitative data and complicate the possibilities for comparison, breadth and quantification. Furthermore, databases do not include detailed information on motivations. Simultaneously, the dangers inherent to studying kidnapping in the field make empirical fieldwork an irresponsible enterprise.

Although five methodological strategies predominate in research projects, the character of the topic of my investigation excludes three of them, namely the experiment, the

survey and the grounded theory. First, conducting an experiment representative of reality (Veschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 156-163) is impossible when scrutinising phenomena such as severe crime, violence and/or armed conflict. Furthermore, designing and implementing kidnapping experiments would be difficult and unethical. Second, the survey strategy requires the willingness of many people to become objects of study (Veschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 149-155). But in case of a delicate subject such as kidnapping in conflict contexts, it is hard to reach large populations of perpetrators and/or victims ready to talk about the motivations for this type of violence. Access to perpetrators is difficult as most of them are either unknown or imprisoned. Victims willing to share information are scarce as most of them fear reprisals and are too terrified to tell their experiences. Although no major hurdles exist to approach experts who want to talk about their knowledge and insights, they are too few for the survey methodological strategy. Third, despite its roots in the qualitative methodological tradition also my project fits in, I consider the grounded theory unsuitable for the purpose of investigating motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context. This strategy principally builds upon first-hand empirical data gathered by the researcher him-/herself during fieldwork (Silverman 2004; Veschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 171-177). But for its hazardous nature, kidnapping does not allow for such a methodology.

From these considerations logically the choice for a mixed quantitative-qualitative in-depth desk research has evolved. In order to construct a comprehensive picture of the motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts in Latin America, I have picked and combined aspects from both the desk research and case study rather than selecting one of these strategies. Although case studies are often described as a *holistic* method with *open observation on site* of processes in their *natural environment* (Veschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 163-171), the characteristics of my research subject does not allow this: striving after holism implies too much breadth not reachable in the short time period of my research project and open observation on site is too dangerous. Nevertheless, close scrutiny for profound insight into the motivations for kidnapping remains possible through interviewing experts and studying all sorts of documents on *certain aspects*, demarcated in space and time. Because in my research project I predominantly use *existing material* by starting with a literature survey and drawing the cases on secondary data, the strategy mainly followed is best typified as desk research (Veschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 178-182).

**Triangulation of sources: (academic) literature, documents and experts**

Because triangulation has the advantage that different (types of) sources together provide a comprehensive picture of reality and compensate each other's shortcomings (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 138), I have consulted as many sources as possible. However, the very nature of the research topic unavoidably implies that some sources are either inaccessible or unfit for the purpose of discovering the motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context. For various reasons I have not used respondents and informants, media and reality. First, although I am convinced that people directly involved in this practice can provide perhaps the most valuable information on what drives people to kidnap, I have not consulted respondents or informants. Keeping in mind the high underreporting and impunity rates in Colombia, I assume that it is very hard to find perpetrators and victims of kidnapping willing to talk openly about such a delicate subject. Second, I have left the media as a source aside. Although they frequently report kidnappings, they predominantly cover high-profile kidnappings involving foreigners, businesspersons and/or influential politicians. Thereby they neglect the vast majority of all abductions occurring and hence provide a biased rather than representative picture of the actual characteristics of kidnapping. Third, for practical safety reasons I have not used the real environment, despite its high value as source of information: studying motivations for kidnapping within their real environment of conflict and violence would simply be too risky.

Instead, I have consulted (academic) literature, documents and experts. First, for its reflective nature and theoretical insights, literature is a crucial knowledge source in any academic research project. It helps to demarcate the research perspective, unravel, define and operationalise key concepts, theoretically embed the project, and in a later stage compare data with theoretical insights and interpretations of reality (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 122-125). Particularly the latter has steered my investigation by delivering the corner stones of the theoretical framework. I gathered (academic) literature via (university) libraries, online (journal) archives and, during my internship, the IKV Pax Christi office.

Second, documents, such as research papers, police reports, consultants' records, annuals and correspondence, help historicising and mapping the research issue and tend to be reliable (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 121-122). However, the last assumption is questionable in case of scrutinising violence committed in the realm of societal conflict. In Latin America's (post)war contexts, the vast majority of abductions remains hidden by extremely high underreporting (CAESE 2007). The subsequent lack of registration of a large share of the total number of incidences implies that the actual extent of the phenomenon can

only be estimated instead of precisely calculated and that the real dimensions of the practice cannot be exactly known. Although documents on kidnapping in Colombia might present all facts available, they cannot provide a complete reflection of reality. Another problem is that in conflict contexts different actors have different purposes when delivering information. They can use it as a powerful instrument to articulate (hostile) messages to bring the enemy in discredit and/or to favour themselves. Documents elaborated in highly tense environments are therefore often political rather than representative. In order to overcome these flaws of incomplete and/or biased information inherent to reports elaborated in the realm of conflict, I have consulted documents publicised by different actors. Together they provide a more realistic picture of kidnapping. I accessed these documents via (university) libraries and online archives of think tanks, multilateral institutions, governments, justice and police apparatuses, non-governmental organisations and private security companies. Besides I have obtained documents at the IKV Pax Christi office, via my supervisor there and on request by e-mail and/or phone from other organisations whilst working for the peace movement.

Third, experts have shared knowledge and revealed insights neglected in (academic) literature and documents and/or more recent than available in publications. At IKV Pax Christi I directly collaborated with experts who gave me the information I needed and introduced me to their expert networks. The internship position also allowed me to participate in several expert meetings arranged and attended by representatives from international, Latin American and Dutch governmental institutions, non-governmental organisations and private security companies all working in environments with high kidnapping risks. By acting as suppliers of knowledge, the experts formed knowledge sources complementing the information as provided by (academic) literature and documents.

### **Triangulation of methods of data collection and analysis**

Also regarding methods of data collection I have applied triangulation (Silverman 2004, 229-255). Finding relevant information from literature and documents started with search methods: using search indexes based on key words and then going through extracts, reviews and bibliographies for getting ideas on new key words and discovering other interesting sources via the snowball principle (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 134-135). Then I sorted, organised and indexed the gathered literature and documents according to cross-sectional and categorical indexing (Mason 1996, 111-128). Using the method of content analysis helped me indicating, understanding, roughly classifying and temporarily labelling the contents of

publications according to a category system of open categories derived from the research questions. My choice for open rather than closed labels has evolved from the qualitative approach I have adopted in this research project (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 133-134). Moreover, using fixed categories would have been problematic, since definitions of kidnapping vary and sources are often unrepresentative due to the underreporting, impunity rates and political bias. Extracting data from literature and documents via such a quantitative method would have meant grabbing distinct realities and moreover only a tiny part of these distinct realities.

Among experts I have strived after a representative selection of academics, officials and civil society representatives. Some have thematically specialised in crime and violence or more specifically the phenomenon of kidnapping, others have regionally specialised in Latin America or more specifically Colombia. With these experts I conducted semistructured and unstructured interviews (Bernard 2002, 203-239), the former in order to steer towards the information crucial for answering my research questions and the latter in order to obtain information I might have not thought about myself. I tried to do most of these interviews face-to-face, but often for practical logistical reasons it turned out impossible to arrange a meeting and I had to speak with experts by phone. I have overcome the risk of receiving strategic answers during the conversations by consciously selecting and interviewing different experts from different backgrounds and with different positions. Besides, I have gathered data by attending meetings on kidnapping or closely related subjects where experts acted as speakers and/or participants. I preferred conducting interviews and having informal conversations above sending questionnaires, as I expected more response this way. Although observation is a method of data collection often applied when using people as a source in a research project, in the particular case of experts this is not very efficient or effective. Hence, I have not obtained information from experts by observing them.

After having collected the needed information, I analysed the found data by comparing the empirical material as provided by the consulted literature, documents and experts with each other and with the knowledge in the form of insights and theories as previously developed by other scholars. Subsequently I have interpreted and interrelated them (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005, 115). Since I have derived much information from texts, either written or spoken, I have predominantly used the method of text analysis, particularly interpretive analysis or hermeneutics (Bernard 2002, 449-451). In addition I have consulted and processed statistical data, facilitating the observation of trends and the interpretation of qualitative data. Through the constant comparative method and analytic induction (Silverman

2004, 237-239) I have revealed central concepts and patterns allowing me to formulate conclusions as answers to my research questions.

### **Overcoming the disadvantageous implications of the methodological choices**

Inevitably the made considerations and subsequently followed research strategy, consulted sources and applied methods of data collection and analysis have their disadvantages. First, conducting desk research implies that I have had no direct contact with the people whose motivations I have studied, thereby missing their points of view and explanations. Second, scrutinising documents elaborated by probably biased actors operating in polarised conflict contexts may mean that these do not correctly represent reality. The (statistical) data they have provided and I have subsequently used in my investigation may misrepresent the facts. Third, having adopted a case study approach risks that the research project has limited external validity as it yield results not or only to a limited extent applicable to other scenarios (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2005). When drawing (partial) conclusions from the analyses of the collected and consulted sources as well as when reading and interpreting this thesis, these remarks must be kept in mind.

Nevertheless, the combination of and critical and continuous comparison among the consulted sources considerably reduce and compensate these disadvantages. First, qualitative and quantitative information on kidnapping incidences, modalities, perpetrators, victims and settlements together with theoretical accounts on motivations for the application of violence provide valuable insights in what drives people to abduct each other. Second, the consultation of a high variety of different publications from distinct sources reveals and filters out biases, discrepancies and errors. Third, the flipside of the limited external validity of the case study approach is the higher internal validity of the conclusions drawn for the particular case under scrutiny. Hence, for the above-explained methodological exclusions and constraints inherent to the research topic and the possibilities and impossibilities and advantages and disadvantages of different approaches, strategies, sources and methods of data collection and analysis, I consider these methodological choices the most suitable for conducting a research project such as the one presented here.

## KIDNAPPING WITHIN THE REALM OF COLOMBIA'S INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

Colombia has throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s acquired the doubtful reputation of being the world's kidnap capital (Briggs 2001; Clayton Consultants 2008, 11, 16; Clayton Consultants 2010, 1, 13; Fundación País Libre 2011, 4; Gómez 2007, 30-3; Vardi 2008, 98): around 50 percent of the global incidence of this type of violence occurred here (Restrepo 2006, 25-27; Sánchez G. 2001, 17; Uribe 2001, 165). Today it is considered a "high kidnapping risk country" (Clayton Consultants 2009, 1), even though recently the numbers of abductions have considerably declined. The frequency of abductions remains significant and regarding planned selective kidnappings Colombia is still one of the most dangerous places in Latin America (CAESE 2006, 20). Abduction has a high impact on the civil population in diverse spheres of society (Fundación País Libre 2011, 4; Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2).

The high incidence of abductions is often ascribed to the protracted internal armed conflict (Restrepo 2006, 25; Silva 2007, 367). The opposing parties and more specifically the insurgency groups among them are held responsible for the major share of kidnappings for a mix of political and economic objectives, though their motivations for committing this type of violence used to be predominantly explained in political terms (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15; Clayton Consultants 2010, 13, 17; Sánchez G. 2001, 17). But today, in addition to the originally quarreling parties, a myriad of other actors apply this practice too, using a variety of modalities (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40) and indiscriminately targeting victims of divergent profiles (García Acosta 2003, 45; Restrepo 2006, 25; Silva 2007, 268, 372). These transformations in the arena of kidnapping are thought to simultaneously have shifted the motivations behind, becoming principally economic both among the traditional and among these new categories of perpetrators (Fondelibertad 2010, 53-55; Fundación País Libre 2011, 5; Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2, 4-7, 10, 23-24, 26). This development has fed the ideas that today the crimes are no longer considered to have such a close relation with the cleavages inspiring the continuing civil war and that the conflict has criminalised (Silva 2007, 268).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Informal conversations with Marianne Moor, Utrecht, September 2009 till June 2010; Speech by Marianne Moor, Bogotá, 12 May 2010.

In this chapter I scrutinise these assumptions and search for an answer to the question *What motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's contemporary conflict context do recent empirical data reveal?* The route towards answering this question starts with an explanation of how Colombian legislation defines kidnapping and what modalities are distinguished in practice. Then an overview of absolute numbers of kidnapping in Colombia follows, revealing incidences and recent historical tendencies. Subsequently, descriptions of respectively the different perpetrators active in the crime today and the targeted victims introduce the analysis of the principle motivations in general and per (category of) actor. This then allows the formulation of a conclusion to the aforementioned question.

### **Modalities**

The Colombian legislation defines kidnapping as any retention against a person's will, with the purpose to demand a specific utility or to get some benefit in exchange for his/her release.<sup>4</sup> It discerns two modalities: *secuestro extorsivo* or extortive kidnapping and *secuestro simple* or simple kidnapping. Extortive kidnapping serves economic, political or publicity objectives: it is the retention of a person in order to demand money or exercise public or political pressure in exchange for his/her release. Simple kidnapping is abduction in which economic and political interests, advantages and utilities play no role: it is the rapture, stealing, retention or hiding of a person against his/her will and without demanding anything in return. This type of kidnapping is often provoked by intrafamiliar conflicts such as disputes about the custody of children.<sup>5</sup> Extortive kidnapping is the type of kidnapping with the major impact on the country, The followed strategies (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 4, 10) and length of kidnapping events strongly varies (Silva 2007, 268).

Throughout decades of experience Colombian kidnapers have achieved good training and organisation (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15) and diversified the character and modus operandi of abduction (Silva 2007, 372; Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). Apart from the still significant planned selective kidnapping (CAESE 2006, 20), other types of simple and extortive kidnappings and abductions of public force members, today also kidnappings with unknown modality occur (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2, 13). Moreover, its transformations from being merely a

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<sup>4</sup> Article 169 of Colombia's *Código Penal*.

<sup>5</sup> Colombia's law 40.

crime towards becoming a social phenomenon, altering habits, behaviours and social logics, have complicated its understanding (Fondelibertad 2010, 88). Both the broad definition and categories as given by Colombia's legislation and these recent developments as observed in practice suggest a wide array of distinct manifestations of hostage-taking, the involvement of many segments of Colombian society and a high variety of modalities and motivations.

It is often assumed that Colombian kidnappers prefer to operate in rural areas, as geographical remoteness and inaccessibility facilitate the holding of hostages over long periods and hence strengthens the negotiation position of the perpetrators (Briggs 2001). From the late 1990s the mass kidnapping and the so-called *pescas milagrosas* or miraculous fishing entered the arena. The former refers to the abduction of multiple persons in one incident. The latter refers to the random abduction of travellers passing illegal patrols along highways (Restrepo 2006, 25). This casual (CAESE 2006, 20) or occasional modality predominates in remote rural areas and lacks previous intelligence, specific planning or knowledge of who will be kidnapped (Silva 2007, 372). The security politics applied from 2003 along highways resulted in a rapid drop of the incidence of this miraculous fishing. From 1998 the strong offensives of the public forces obliged the guerrillas to revisit their tactics. This incited the modality of attacking military and police installations in order to subsequently kidnap employees of these entities (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 11-13; Restrepo 2006, 25).

A highly underreported modus operandi of abduction is the "express kidnapping": the detention of a victim for a short time, demanding minimal amounts of resources or goods in exchange for his/her release (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 12). This category includes the more specific *paseo millonario* or millionaire trip in which someone is abducted, often humiliated and threatened, and obliged to empty his/her bank account. The millionaire trip predominates in urban agglomerations (Silva 2007, 372). Furthermore, in Colombian cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Cartagena many "quickie kidnappings" take place in taxis, holding passengers hostage, demanding small amounts of ransom in turn for their release (O'Brien 2001). Because in urban areas the police tend to be relatively effective, particularly here perpetrators prefer to free their victims as soon as possible: the longer the captivity endures, not only the higher the logistical costs and the smaller the profit, but also the greater the risk of discovery. Hence, the average duration of kidnappings has diminished (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). The short time frame that incidents of these modalities usually last, limits the progress of investigation (Clayton Consultants 2010, 13).

## **Incidences**

In Colombia kidnapping incidents have been registered since the 1960s. In that decade annually an average of 83 abductions occurred, above all in rural areas. In the 1970s this number had decreased to a frequency of averagely 55. But the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated much more elevated numbers: extortive kidnappings alone already made up for an average of 296 incidents per year in the 1980s and 1508 in the 1990s. During the late 1990s and early 2000s the kidnapping problem further exacerbated and reached its climax. As the internal armed conflict considerably transformed, kidnapping became one of the most important manifestations of its violence (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2, 4-5, 8-9). Perpetrators faced few risks, as 95% of all cases remained unpunished (Briggs 2001). Hence, “kidnappings have become so numerous that they are regarded as routine, and no longer come as a surprise” (Pécaut 1999, 147).

But recent official statistics on kidnapping reveal an important overall decrease in the number of kidnappings reported to the authorities (CAESE 2006, 20). Security analysts have gradually marked down Colombia's position in their ranking of the countries with the most elevated risks of falling victim of abduction. This tendency is often interpreted “as a result of the government's successful efforts to improve security” (Clayton Consultants 2009, 1, 4). Its “more serious approach to crime” and “improved law enforcement” would explain the significant drop in numbers of abductions and their duration (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17). From 7 December 1999 onwards the Colombian state implemented more clear and consistent security politics with a military focus. This would have considerably reduced the capacities of some organised armed groups on the fringes of the law and hence caused the drastic decline in kidnapping frequency throughout the first decade of this century and subsequent changes in dynamics, reality and perception of the crime (Fundación País Libre 2011, 4).

In 2002, when peace dialogues failed after a mass kidnapping committed by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the state started strong military actions against this guerrilla group. The subsequent restoration of control and order is reflected in a significant decrease of the kidnapping incidence. Nevertheless, the number of hostages still in captivity remains alarmingly high (Silva 2007, 370). However, when reading and interpreting statistics on the kidnapping incidence in Colombia, at least four important things must be noted. First, their reliability is limited, as for many years information on kidnapping has lacked any actualisation and contained errors (Fondelibertad 2010, 88). Second, they do not include all committed abductions. A comparison of the database of the

Ministry of Defense's entity leading the combat against kidnapping, Fondelibertad<sup>6</sup>, with the database of the non-governmental organisation Fundación País Libre<sup>7</sup>, reveals that approximately 30% of the cases attended by the NGO is not reported to the authorities and thus not represented in Fondelibertad's official figures (CAESE 2006, 20; Silva 2007, 368). Overall, Colombians omit to report between 73% and 80% of all crimes (Barón Calderón 2007, 7) because of bureaucratic and procedural difficulties. Moreover, kidnappers utilise the strategy of intimidation, thereby increasing the victims' reluctance to report the crime (Gómez Cardona 2007, 1). In addition, Fundación País Libre is associated with the Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá and the private sector (Gómez 2006, 2) and might therefore have a biased rather than representative clientele.

Taking into account these aspects, the real percentage of abductions that remain unknown to the authorities is probably higher than the mentioned 30%. Third, in 2000 the registration of distinct types of delinquency changed. Whereas until that year kidnapping statistics included cases of forced disappearance, forced recruitment and human trafficking, these crimes have after 2000 been registered separately and thus excluded from kidnapping statistics (Fondelibertad 2010, 32). Fourth, in June 2004 the methodology of collecting information on delinquency changed and became more dependent upon the particular working methods and interpretations of individual local prosecutors (Silva 2007, 368).

Whereas the first and second factors limit the extent to which the real dimensions of the phenomenon of kidnapping in Colombia can be known, the third and fourth factors severely restrict the possibilities to compare statistics and identify historical tendencies and geographical patterns. As table 3 demonstrates, the numbers of reported and registered kidnappings as appearing in different publications, sometimes even when apparently referring to the same sources, show severe deficiencies in and discrepancies between statistics. Besides, the above-mentioned lack of actualisation and high rates of underreporting must be taken into account. Hence, it is practically impossible to establish the exact amount of kidnappings occurred each year. Also consultation of chart 1 must be cautious, particularly for the above-described changes in registration of and methodology of data collection on delinquency in respectively 2000 and 2004.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Fondelibertad is the abbreviation of fondo nacional para la defensa de la libertad personal.

<sup>7</sup> Fundación País Libre provides assistance to kidnapping victims and their relatives and to vulnerable groups via the Centro de Atención al Empresario en Secuestro y Extorsión (CAESE) (Gómez 2006, 2).

<sup>8</sup> All absolute numbers in this chapter are based on the statistics as provided by Fondelibertad and processed by Fundación País Libre (e-mail from Claudia Llano, 18 June 2009; 2011), because these appear the most complete and reliable. All averages, percentages and graphs are based on my own calculations.

Source	Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Colombia's Ministry of Defense and NGO Fundación País Libre (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 41; Fundación País Libre 2011, 7) <sup>9</sup>		1038 2.8	1624 4.4	2860 7.8	3204 8.8	3572 9.8	2917 8.0	2882 7.9	2121 5.8	1440 3.9	800 2.2	687 1.9	521 1.4	437 1.2	213 0.6	282 0.8
Sistema de Información de la Defensa Nacional de Colombia (SIDEN) (Vélez Ramírez 2005, 137)		1046 2.9	1686 4.6	2900 7.9	3201 8.8	3708 10.1	3041 8.3									
Fondelibertad (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Labuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 14)		1092	1672	3023	3349	3706	3050	2886	2200							
"[U]nified data from various sources resulting in approximate numbers" (Romero 2004, 68-69)		1039 2.8	1675 4.6	3014 8.3	3334 9.1	3706 10.1	3041 8.3	2886 8.2	1800 4.9							

Table 3 Absolute numbers and daily averages of reported and registered kidnappings according to different sources

<sup>9</sup> E-mail from Claudia Llano, 18 June 2009.

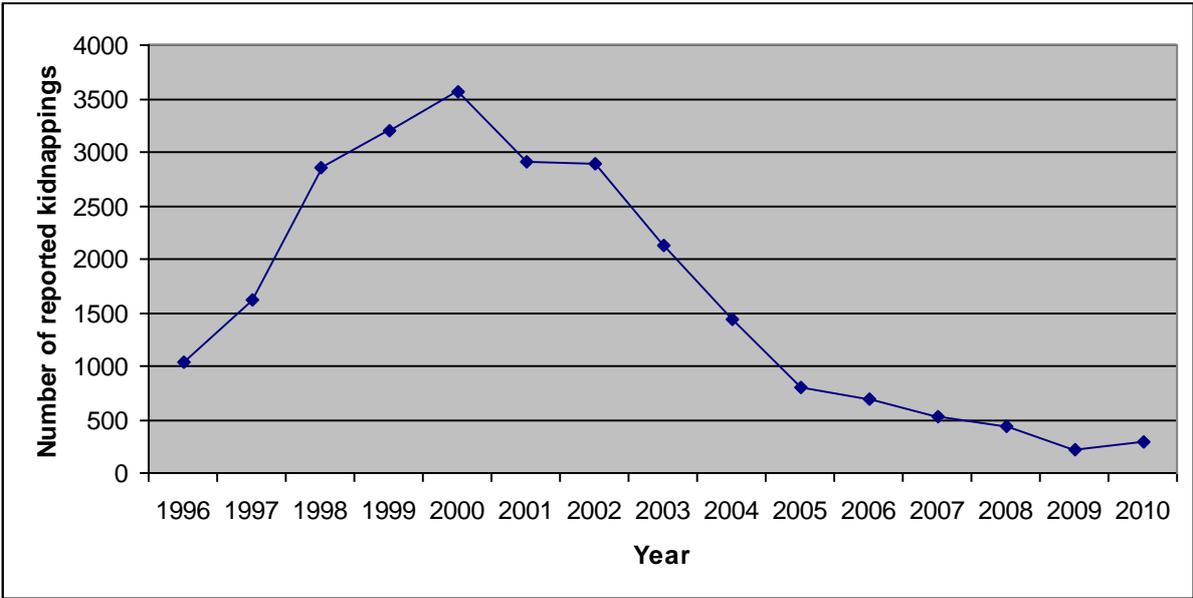


Chart 1 Tendency of total number of reported kidnappings per year from 1996 till 2010

In April 2009 Fondelibertad concluded an analysis of all 3307 kidnapping cases registered in the Centro Nacional de Datos of which it was believed that the victims were still being held hostage. This number was an accumulation of abductions reported to the authorities from 1996. Together with the military forces, national police, Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS), general attorney and Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación (CTI), Fondelibertad verified the captivity of 125 Colombians and found that 507 victims had either recovered their freedom or died. Of 1173 persons the state entity could establish that they were not (anymore) in captivity and the situation of 1502 individuals remained unknown due to lack of information (Fondelibertad 2009). The investigation demonstrated that the registration of abduction and the validity of a subsequent judicial process are not necessarily proofs of ongoing captivity and that the absence of persons caused by third parties cannot always be typified as kidnapping (Fondelibertad 2010, 86).

These conclusions, and particularly the “disappearance” of 2675 kidnapping cases from official figures, provoked a polemical public debate. Journalist Herwin Hoyos, who worked for over a decade with relatives of hostages, insinuated the manipulation of figures with the intention to demonstrate political results by creating a more positive story. Fundación País Libre strongly questioned the applied research methodology and its subsequent outcomes (El Tiempo 2009)<sup>10</sup>. Claudia Llano, coordinator of the investigation and development area of

<sup>10</sup> In 2009 and 2010 numerous articles about this discord were published in different Colombian newspapers, such as *El Tiempo* and *Semana*.

the NGO, mentioned that since 2008 she had experienced inconveniences with the Colombian government regarding the access to its kidnapping statistics over 2008 and 2009.<sup>11</sup> Also Olga Lucía Gómez, director of the NGO, judged the collaboration with the Ministry of Defense as problematic and stressed the importance to demonstrate to the Colombian population the discrepancies in kidnapping statistics.<sup>12</sup> Recently Fundación País Libre expressed its concern that Colombia is becoming a country of disappearances rather than abductions and that from being considered a high impact crime kidnapping has become a crime perceived as under control of the government (Fundación País Libre 2011, 5).

### **Perpetrators**

Constant transformation has characterised the evolution of the crime of kidnapping in Colombia. Apart from having developed from occasional incidents to a powerful industry (Silva 2007, 268), throughout the decades economic, social and political sectors have become involved in the practice of kidnapping (Restrepo 2006, 27). In the 1960s and 1970s common criminals committed the majority of abductions. Whereas the guerrillas of the FARC already in the 1960s started conducting kidnappings, those of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) then still maintained a reluctant attitude towards this practice. In the 1970s Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19) proved itself a pioneer in sophisticated urban kidnappings. Although in 1981 drug traffickers had founded the group Muerte a Secuestradores (MAS) in an attempt to motivate the guerrilla to stop kidnapping – indeed thereby further instigating the conflict instead – ironically from the mid-1980s they themselves began to kidnap. Simultaneously common criminals and guerrillas opportunistically continued the practice. Relatives commit only a very tiny share of all incidents (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 4-7, 26). Today abductions are committed by different structures of different illegal actors (Fundación País Libre 2011, 5), including revolutionary armed groups such as the FARC and the ELN, counterrevolutionary armed groups such as the paramilitaries, common criminals, drug traffickers, relatives and other actors. Distinct perpetrators also collaborate, which for instance explains the selling of hostages between each other (Silva 2007, 268). Strong links between the practice of kidnapping and the activities of organised crime and illegal armed groups reflect not only its association with delinquency, but also how the evolution of kidnapping is part of the history

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<sup>11</sup> E-mail from Claudia Llano, 18 June 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Olga Lucía Gómez Cardona, Utrecht, 2 July 2010.

of the armed conflict and interacts with its modes of operation (Gómez 2006, 1; Gómez 2007, 30-31). These developments have left a broad, diverse and complex spectrum of kidnappers.

Within the wide array of actors committing abductions, it is believed that the principle perpetrators are the guerrillas of the FARC (Restrepo 2006, 27) and ELN (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2). Estimates ascribe to these main guerrilla groups approximately 80% of all kidnappings occurred in Colombia around the turn of the millennium (Briggs 2001). Today illegal armed groups together would be responsible for approximately 60% of all abductions (Silva 2007, 367, 375). According to Fondelibertad, terrorist groups – among whom it ranges the FARC, ELN and Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) – and common crime organisations bear an enormous responsibility in the incidences of both abduction and forced disappearance. Among the registered kidnappings ascribed to the FARC are cases of forced disappearance, assassination, abduction of military and police, forced recruitment and other crimes, among those ascribed to the ELN abductions, forced disappearances and assassinations, and among those ascribed to the AUC above all forced disappearance (Fondelibertad 2010, 53, 55, 67, 78). The FARC tends to hold hostages for long periods in remote mountain areas (Clayton Consultants 2008, 11) and besides copied the practice of mass kidnapping (Restrepo 2004, 179), a modality originally started and mainly committed by the ELN. Such occasional kidnapping by illegal armed actors became widespread in rural areas (Silva 2007, 372), particularly as the creation in 1999 of the *zona de despeje* or clearance zone for the FARC provided the organisation with advantages to commit crimes and hide hostages (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 15).

But state action against armed organisations directly diminished their kidnap capacity (Silva 2007, 375). During the last decade the FARC lost its hegemony over many of its strategic zones. This considerably affected its capacities to realise mass kidnappings and hold hostages for protracted periods (Fondelibertad 2010, 55). In addition, state security forces expelled insurgent activity from the urban centres (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). Although the Colombian government hereby weakened the guerrilla, it is assumed that kidnapping remains a FARC priority (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15) despite the recent decrease in the number of FARC-related abductions. Indeed, amid intensified pressure by the government, leftist groups resort to new tactics (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17). Today intermediary gangs and common criminals tend to execute the abductions to then negotiate with the guerrilla about selling the victims (Fondelibertad 2010, 55). Guerrilla movements such as the FARC often contract criminal gangs for kidnap operations. Criminals mostly

operating in the cities carry out the abduction and sell the hostage to the guerrilla for a previously negotiated price. The guerrillas then take over the negotiation with the victim's relatives and/or employer. This division of labour evolves out of practical considerations (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40): not only the FARC, but also the ELN and self-defense groups utilise common crime gangs to kidnap people in urban zones where they themselves lack personnel and places to hide. Although many of the hostages abducted by common criminals are handed over or sold to the subversive groups, it is undefined which illegal armed actor most utilises this strategy (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 13, 16).

Despite this development it is sometimes assumed that only a small fraction of all abductions involves common criminals (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17). However, others ascribe approximately a quarter of all simple kidnappings to this group of actors (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 26) and state that today more frequently than before the perpetrators of kidnapping are criminal gangs. Since these have weaker logistical infrastructure than insurgent movements based in the jungle, criminal abductions tend to last shorter (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). Finally, as of a very high percentage of kidnappings Fondelibertad fails to establish their perpetrator (Silva 2007, 370), a large group of unidentified perpetrators exists (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 26). As table 4 and charts 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 demonstrate, for several perpetrators information is incomplete and in addition in a large share of kidnapping cases the aggressor remains unknown. Fondelibertad assumes that this last category includes groups operating on the fringes of the law denying their responsibility for abductions, mixed groups of guerrillas and common criminals difficult to identify and unemployed demobilised paramilitaries committing crimes without being identified (CAESE 2006, 23). Others interpret the appearance of the category of unknown perpetrators in official statistics as a manifestation of the confrontation between the government and the guerrilla. Gathering such a voluminous amount of kidnapping cases within this category serves the government's and guerrilla's priorities of respectively maintaining impunity and maintaining criminal business (Romero 2004, 73). In addition to this political interest, perhaps also the described increasing connections and exchanges between different perpetrators considerably add to the difficulties to unravel each one's responsibility in Colombia's high incidence of kidnapping and subsequent mystery of who is to blame for what.

Regardless the deficiencies in the available data, scrutiny still reveals some interesting information, visualised by the charts. Chart 2 clearly indicates that principally the FARC, the ELN and unknown perpetrators together caused the boom in kidnapping incidence during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chart 3 demonstrates what relative share perpetrators have had per year in the total absolute number of registered abductions. It reveals a quite stable tendency for almost every perpetrator, except for common criminals: recently the percentage of abductions committed by these actors has considerably risen. Chart 4 gives this information for the complete period from 1996 till 2008, ascribing most responsibility in kidnappings respectively to the FARC, the ELN, unknown perpetrators and common criminals. In chart 5, 6 and 7 distinct perpetrators are grouped into broader categories: political actors (FARC, ELN, AUC and dissidents), criminal actors (common criminals) and other actors (relatives, various actors and unknown actors). Chart 5 gives similar information as chart 2: a boom in kidnapping incidence during the late 1990s and early 2000s caused by predominantly political actors. Chart 6 reveals a drop in the relative share of kidnappings ascribed to common criminals during the late 1990s and early 2000s, preceded by a higher percentage and followed by a rapid recent increase. Chart 7 is similar to chart 4, attributing 60% of all abductions registered from 1996 till 2008 to political actors.

<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>FARC</b>	228 22.0%	440 27.1%	1016 35.5%	965 30.1%	850 23.8%	939 32.2%	973 33.8%	686 32.3%	319 22.2%	192 24.0%	120 17.5%	120 23.0%	114 26.1%	6962 28.9%
<b>ELN</b>	193 18.6%	423 26.0%	697 24.4%	787 24.6%	917 25.7%	915 31.4%	797 27.7%	353 16.6%	140 9.7%	91 11.4%	66 9.6%	27 5.2%	37 8.5%	5443 22.6%
<b>AUC</b>	5 0.5%	19 1.2%	64 2.2%	148 4.6%	190 5.3%	226 7.7%	164 5.7%	162 7.6%	122 8.5%	52 6.5%	11 1.6%			1163 4.8%
<b>Dissidents</b>	27 2.6%	50 3.1%	143 5.0%	201 6.3%	179 5.0%	56 1.9%	53 1.8%	30 1.4%	15 1.0%	14 1.8%	16 2.3%	1 0.2%		785 3.3%
<b>Common criminals</b>	436 42.0%	257 15.8%	305 10.7%	337 10.5%	316 8.8%	304 10.4%	412 14.3%	391 18.4%	419 29.1%	219 27.4%	269 39.2%	245 46.0%	259 59.3%	4169 17.3%
<b>Relatives</b>		18 1.1%	29 1.0%	15 0.5%	48 1.3%	13 0.4%	41 1.4%	82 3.9%	48 3.3%	9 1.1%	6 0.9%	1 0.2%		310 1.3%
<b>Various</b>			10 0.3%	5 0.2%	4 0.1%		11 0.4%					1 0.2%		31 0.1%
<b>Unknown</b>	149 14.4%	417 25.7%	596 20.8%	746 23.3%	1068 29.9%	464 15.9%	431 15.0%	417 19.7%	377 26.2%	223 27.9%	199 29.0%	126 24.2%	27 6.2%	5240 21.8%
<b>Total</b>	1038	1624	2860	3204	3572	2917	2882	2121	1440	800	687	521	437	24103

Table 4 Absolute numbers and percentages of kidnapping per perpetrator from 1996 till 2008<sup>13</sup><sup>13</sup> E-mail from Claudia Llano, 18 June 2009.

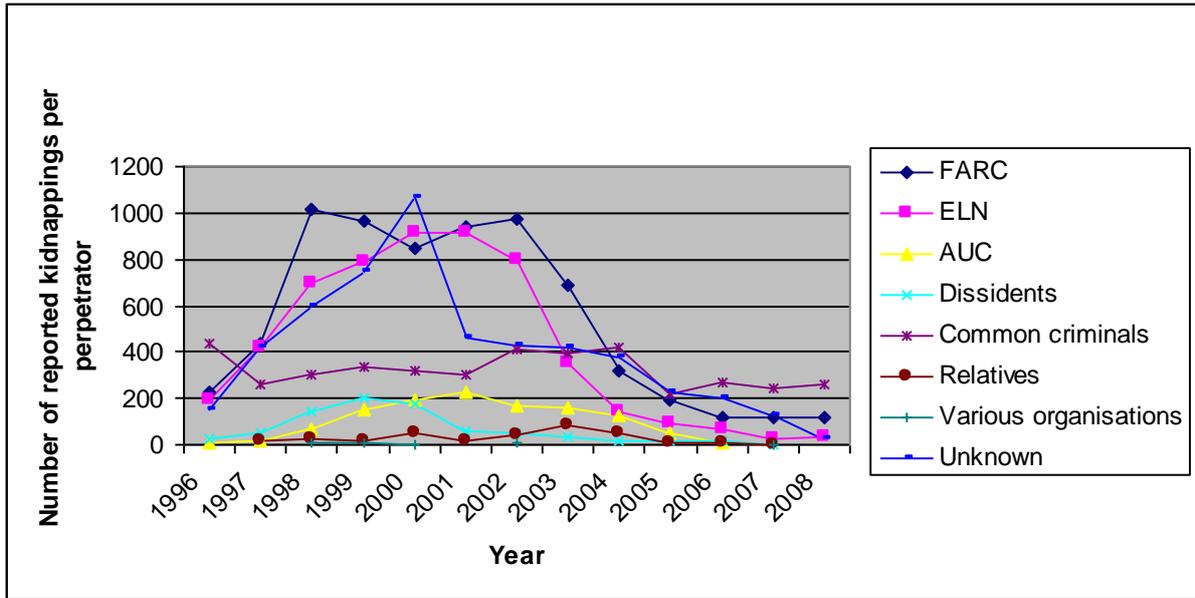


Chart 2 Tendency of absolute kidnapping incidence per perpetrator per year from 1996 till 2008

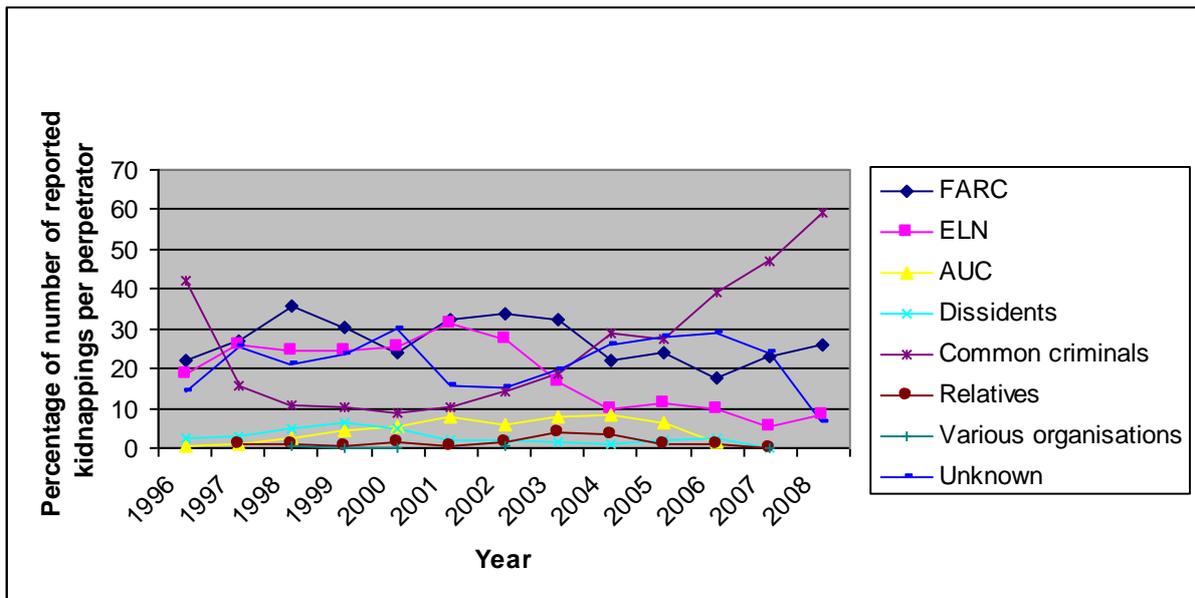


Chart 3 Tendency of relative kidnapping incidence per perpetrator per year from 1996 till 2008

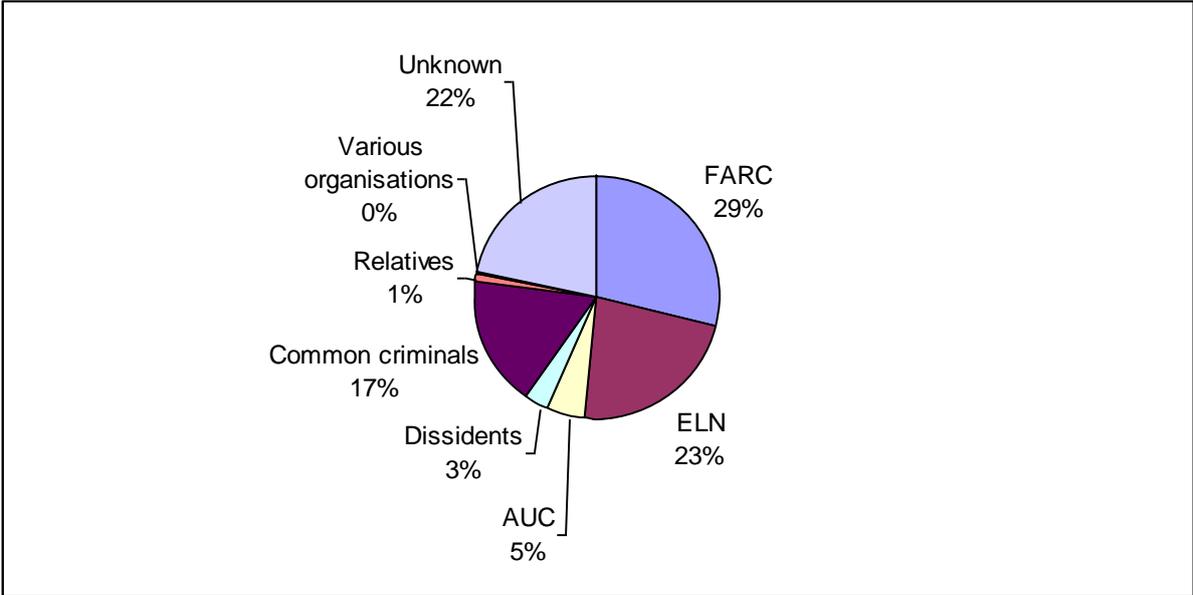


Chart 4 Total relative kidnapping incidence per perpetrator from 1996 till 2008

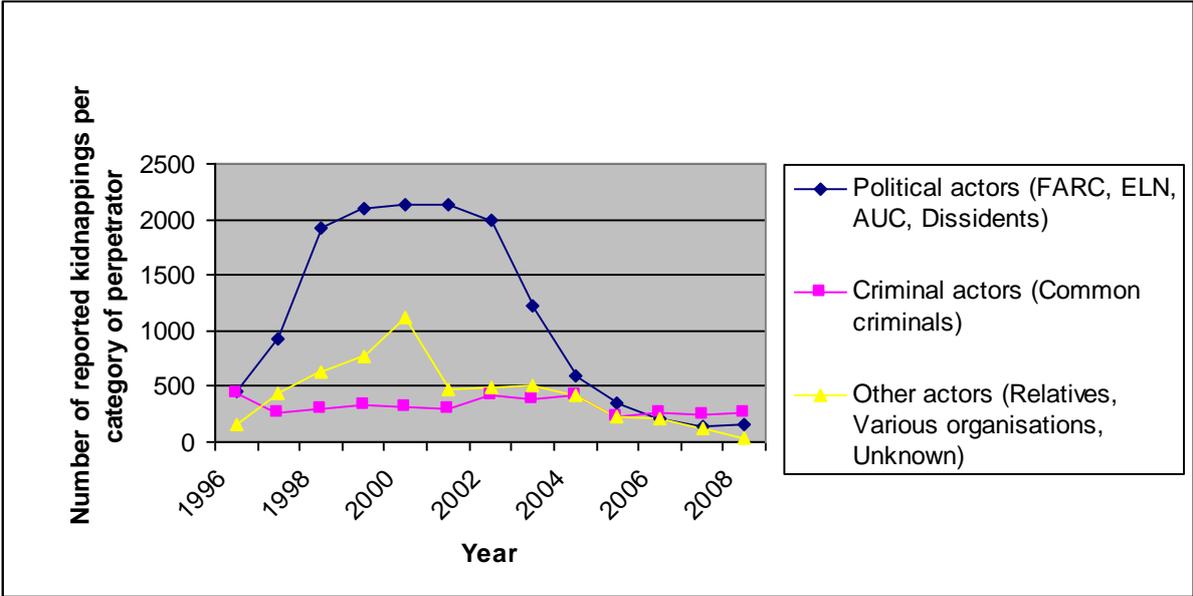


Chart 5 Tendency of absolute kidnapping incidence per category of perpetrator per year from 1996 till 2008

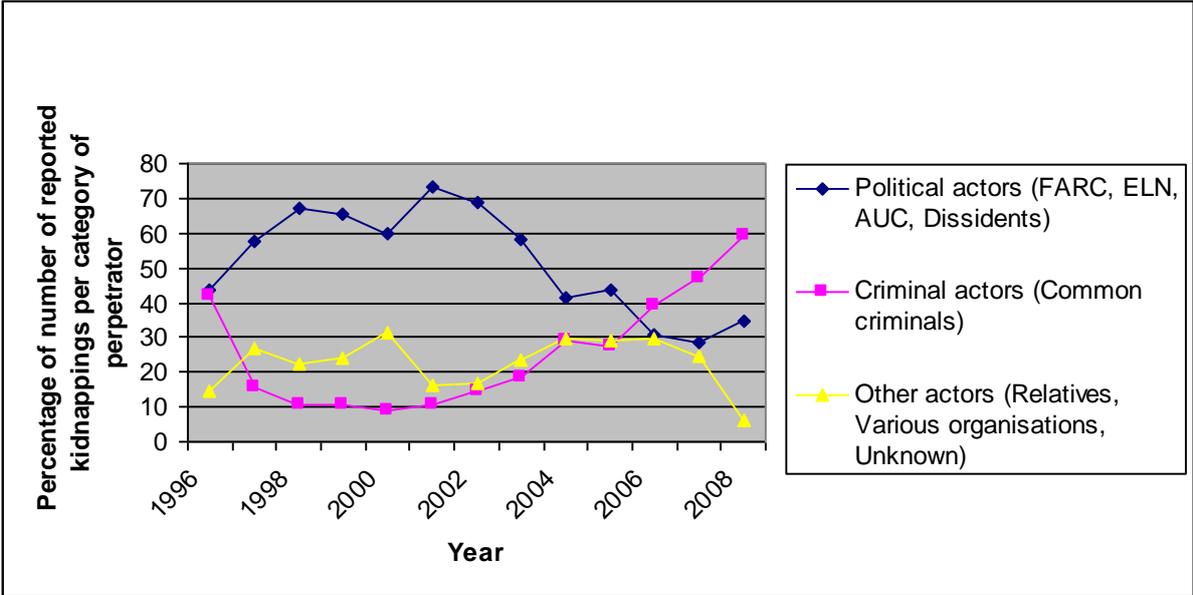


Chart 6 Tendency of relative kidnapping incidence per category of perpetrator per year from 1996 till 2008

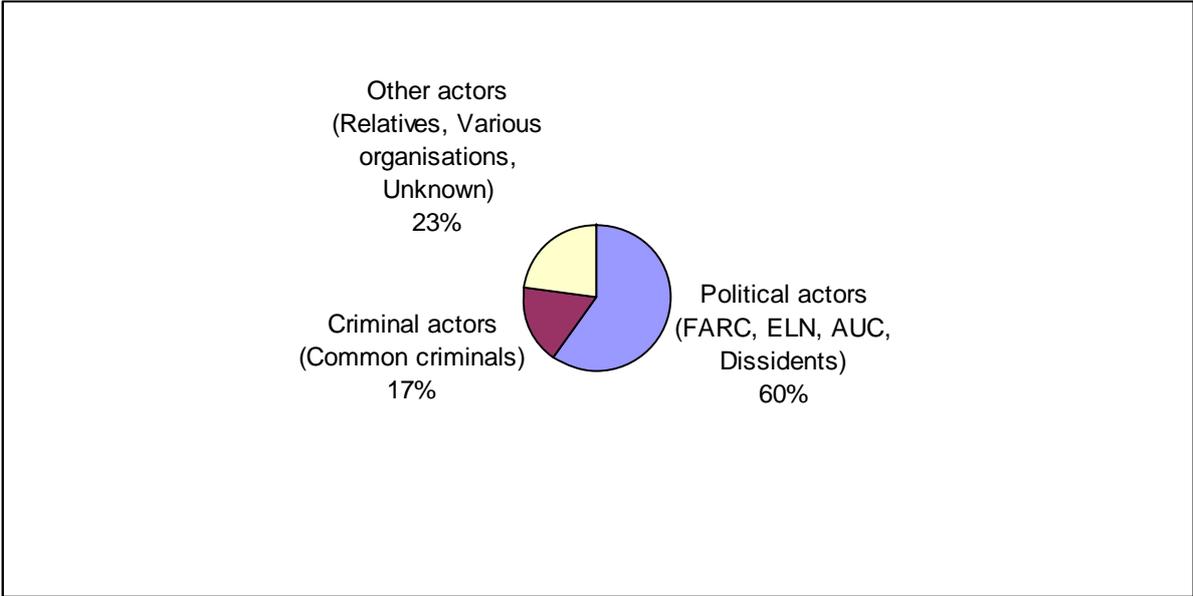


Chart 7 Total relative kidnapping incidence per category of perpetrator from 1996 till 2008

**Victims**

All these different perpetrators target all kinds of people (Silva 2007, 268). From the mid-1960s and during the 1970s foreign businesspersons and diplomats formed the principle targets of kidnappers. From the mid-1980s drug traffickers started to abduct their mafia enemies, wealthy families, prominent journalists and political figures. But in the 1990s the “democratisation of kidnapping” began as the phenomenon of kidnapping started to affect the

whole population (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 5, 7, 10). The delinquent kidnap strategy and industry have grown to such an extent and attracted so many perpetrators, that today every person is a potential victim (García Acosta 2003, 45), regardless of economic or social conditions and threatened by the guerrilla, illegal self-defense groups or common crime (Restrepo 2006, 25). The FARC and the ELN frequently abduct children and minors (Fondelibertad 2009). But although the overall victimisation of kidnapping might have become indiscriminate, the characteristics of the hostages often do differ per modality of kidnapping.

Extortive kidnapping principally victimises businesspersons, farmers, ranchers and minors (Restrepo 2006, 27). For instance, the guerrilla aims at abducting rich people (Romero 2004, 73) and also criminals target wealthy individuals to “sell” to the FARC or the ELN. Today Colombians themselves compose the vast majority of these hostages (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15): quickie kidnapping victimises local residents rather than foreigners (O’Brien 2001) and of occasional kidnapping without previous planning of whom will be victimised, affects infrastructure workers or other persons travelling in remote areas (Silva 2007, 372). Expats would face few kidnapping risks, except when travelling to FARC-controlled areas (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17). Even at its most dangerous moments, only 6% of victims came from abroad (Briggs 2001). It is difficult to say how many foreigners are held hostage today, as figures highly differ.<sup>14</sup> Foreign victims tend to have distinct national backgrounds and to come from different continents (Fundación País Libre 2011, 8).

The confrontation between the insurgency and the government has resulted in the kidnapping of politicians and other persons directly involved in the internal armed conflict (Romero 2004, 73), such as the *canjeables* or exchangeables: those military and police that remain in captivity. However, Fundación País Libre emphasises the biased information provided on the victimisation of kidnapping in Colombia today. Whereas media focus on these exchangeables, they pay little attention to the extortive and simple kidnappings targeting anonymous persons in different zones of the country. This unbalanced representation creates a panorama of invisibility surrounding this type of kidnapping incidents and hence contributes to a mistaken perception with respect to the reality and societal consequences of this crime (Fundación País Libre 2011, 5).

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<sup>14</sup> Presentations by Fabio Hernán López Cruz and Essau Narváez Quinonez, Bogotá, 13 May 2010.

## **Motivations**

In Colombia the evolution of the crime of kidnapping demonstrates a close relation with the political-military conditions of the internal armed conflict. Comparison of the incidence of the crime with the place of operation of the different armed groups and the situation of the war at a certain moment reveal strong correlations between these aspects. Between 1996 and 2007 the highest numbers of abductions occurred during the periods of the highest guerrilla activity. From 1997 till 2002 FARC activity intensified considerably and mass kidnappings occurred (Silva 2007, 368-370). The phenomenon thus has strong ties with the dynamics of the internal armed conflict and the consolidation of its principle actors, as different armed organisations have utilised it as a war instrument. Hostages often serve as an instrument of pressure for a certain purpose in exchange for his/her freedom or life (García Acosta 2003, 45). Whereas in the beginning kidnapping was aimed at provoking social and political impact among the population and within the government, from 1966 in addition economics started to play a role, as the subversive movements required a diversification of their sources of income. In the 1970s high amounts of ransom were demanded in exchange for the release of abducted foreign businesspersons and diplomats. Although multiple causes explain extortive kidnapping in Colombia, those of economic and political nature predominate (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 2, 4-5): today the nature of the phenomenon is often characterised as a mix of monetary and political abductions (Clayton Consultants 2010, 13).

Many of the guerrillas orient kidnapping towards modifying decisions of the executive and legislative branches and the public powers in general, to press for the liberation of political prisoners, and/or to impose a specific course on negotiations (Sánchez G. 2001, 17). By targeting electoral candidates, public servants and members of the military and police forces in political kidnapping, the guerrillas have often searched for domination of public positions and finances and influence on state decisions and subsequent control over territory. In addition the abduction of politicians can serve to put pressure on the government in order to exchange hostages for the release of imprisoned guerrilla members, to influence political decisions, to inflict the resignation of certain politicians or to manipulate the outcomes of elections (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 4, 23-24).

The urban guerrilla M-19, relying on considerable social support, achieved successes by realising activities that destabilised the government. This facilitated its negotiations with state institutions (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and

Mera Sotelo 2004, 5). The FARC and the ELN have applied kidnapping to put communities and the government under pressure to search solutions for peace (Fondelibertad 2010, 53, 55). Particularly the FARC has through the hostage-taking of expats strengthened its political demands (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17) and attempted to gain political leverage (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15). From 1997 till 2002 FARC activity intensified considerably and mass kidnappings occurred. In 2002, when the peace dialogues failed after a mass kidnapping committed by the FARC, the state started strong military actions against this guerrilla group. The subsequent restoration of control and order is reflected in a significant decrease of the kidnapping incidence. However, the number of hostages still in captivity remains alarmingly high (Silva 2007, 368-370).

Indeed, an interpretation of the boom in numbers of abductions in 1998 and 1999 is that the FARC utilised kidnapping as one of its war instruments of its strong campaign of pressure, in order to influence its peace negotiations with the government and the presidential elections and subsequent government change that took place in these years. The kidnapping boom in 2002 can be explained within a similar realm, though simultaneously accompanied by strong governmental military politics against the subversion. Geographical analysis reveals that the departments with most conflict intensity and violent confrontations also show the highest incidences of kidnappings. This distribution of abduction incidents reflects the evolution of the conflict and the strategic interests of the illegal armed groups of consolidating their control over territories and populations. Among other types of violence, they utilise kidnapping as a way to reach this (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 10-11, 17-20, 29-30).

A concrete example of how this political kidnapping works are the disarmament talks in 2006 between president Uribe, rebel groups and paramilitaries that drove the FARC to release two of its hostages. Another example occurred in June 2007 when the government released several imprisoned FARC members in an attempt to motivate the guerrilla to free its hostages in an *acuerdo humanitario* or humanitarian accord (Fund for Peace 2009). However, political extortive kidnapping is no exclusive monopoly of insurgency groups. From the mid-1980s also drug traffickers incorporated this practice in order to put pressure for obtaining legal and political benefits, such as the reduction of legal sentences and the prohibition of the extradition of nationals to the United States of America (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 7-8). This overview of why actors resort to political extortive kidnapping reveals that distinct perpetrators in different occasions utilise this modality in order to come closer to their divergent aspirations. Predominantly to

insurgency groups it provides a powerful instrument to drive the government towards concessions benefiting their revolutionary struggle, such as transformations in political circumstances and legislation and the release of imprisoned colleagues. But also criminals have discovered the practice as a way to force the government to take political and/or legal decisions advantageous for the continuance and/or expansion of their illicit activities.

However, the assumption prevails that rather than by politics, perpetrators of kidnapping are principally driven by economics. They would predominantly strive after economic interests and search for a source of income to finance war activities (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 4, 10). In several occasions Marianne Moor stressed how abduction finances the Colombia's ongoing internal armed conflict.<sup>15</sup> On the first hemispheric conference on the fight against kidnapping, she stated that a systematic study of IKV Pax Christi unmasked the phenomenon as occurring in Colombia as an industry gradually losing its political reasons and instead becoming more and more economic. Moreover, ransom payments produced an explosive growth of the military apparatus of the illegal armed groups.<sup>16</sup> Fundación País Libre endorses this, arguing that kidnapping continues serving as a strategy to obtain funding and finance the conflict (Fundación País Libre 2011, 5). Indeed, geographical maps indicating the concentration of ransom payments and kidnapping incidents both in general and diversified by perpetrator – paramilitaries, common crime, FARC, ELN and unidentified actors – clearly demonstrate correlations (Silva 2007, 373-375).

Fondelibertad explains how the terrorist groups FARC, ELN and AUC together with common crime organisations transformed kidnapping into a highly profitable illicit industry for their own benefit. By neglecting minimal living standards to their hostages, they put relatives under pressure to pay high sums of ransom in exchange for the release of the victims (Fondelibertad 2010, 53). Among other types of violence, illegal armed groups utilise abduction in order to obtaining resources. Followed by common criminals (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 16-20, 29-30), the FARC and the ELN commit most kidnappings for extortion (Uribe 2001, 165). Estimates calculate that Colombia's main guerrilla movements yearly earn between \$150 and \$500 million by abduction. The FARC would guarantee approximately 40% of its budget this way (Briggs 2001), all insurgency groups together would generate approximately 22% of their income via extortive kidnappings. The urban M-19 succeeded accumulating resources

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<sup>15</sup> Informal conversations with Marianne Moor, Utrecht, September 2009 till June 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Speech by Marianne Moor, Bogotá, 12 May 2010.

obtained through abduction (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 5, 15) and for the FARC and ELN the practice a principle source of their revenue (Chernick 1999, 166-167). By holding expats for ransom (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17), the FARC finances itself (Fondelibertad 2010, 55). Thus, next to extortion, kidnapping serves as an “insurgent taxation system” (Sánchez G. 2001, 17). These figures would indicate that guerrillas abduct rich people for economic reasons (Romero 2004, 73).

The guerrillas would allocate the large sums of ransom money they obtain to the financing of their revolutionary campaign (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 8). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Cuba's support to Latin America insurgency movements, inherent to the end of the Cold War, forced them to restructure their funding. The guerrillas resorted to intensifying their involvement in armed robbery, extortion of commercial enterprises and kidnapping throughout most of rural Colombia (Chernick 1999, 166-167). This development, followed by strong attacks by the government, increased the FARC's need to fund missions and to look for new targets to kidnap to make up for its economic losses (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15). On the contrary, common criminals and drug traffickers tend to have distinct reasons for extortive kidnapping. Whereas the former usually seek a means of quick revenue (Clayton Consultants 2010, 17) and just want to obtain ransom (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40), the latter often act out of the need for financial resources and the charge of debts (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 7-8). The differences in the motivations for abduction of different perpetrators, partly explain why negotiations usually are much easier with criminals than with insurgents (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). Securing the release of a hostage held by the guerrillas frequently requires protracted negotiations (Clayton Consultants 2009, 15).

These observations suggest that the guerrillas should not be categorised with other forms of organised delinquency, even their sources and methods of financing have considerably criminalised. They first and foremost remain fundamentally political organisations striving after political and social transformations in the communities where they maintain influence and operating in the pursuit of often local power. For the guerrillas criminal activity is a means rather than an end in their attempts to approach these aspirations. They dedicate resources derived from crime primarily to the expansion of the insurgency (Chernick 1999, 167). Thus the means cannot be separated from the political end proclaimed by the abductors, even though these seem most interested in cashing ransoms. This implies

that the analysis of the phenomenon of kidnapping cannot be limited to its political and economic dimensions. However, “[k]idnapping is thus the symbol par excellence of the guerrilla paradox: proclaiming itself the champion of an emancipating project against alienation, at the same time the guerrilla reduces the bodies of its victims to debased capitalist merchandise” (Sánchez G. 2001, 18-19).

But not all kidnapping cases serve extortive goals. Simple kidnapping is inspired by factors such as internal familiar conflicts, violations of the custody of minors, illegal adoptions and human trafficking for prostitution. Also this type of abduction is related to the evolution of the internal armed conflict: slightly more than half of them occur within this realm (Pinto Borrego, Altamar Consuegra, Lahuerta Percipiano, Cepeda Zuleta and Mera Sotelo 2004, 26). Moreover, besides transforming kidnapping into a criminal industry of fund-raising, Colombian guerrilla troops and illegal self-defense groups recruit minors in order to expand their forces (Fondelibertad 2009). Although today the chance for victims to get killed during captivity is half the probability it was a decade ago, the FARC are more willing to take this drastic measure when they foresee a rescue operation (Becerra and Webb-Vidal 2009, 40). Demobilisation of illegal self-defense groups recently revealed the dimensions of forced disappearance when former chiefs confessed how many abducted persons had ended in clandestine mass graves. Also the FARC and ELN bear a responsibility in the disappearance and assassination of many of their hostages. These figures are sometimes interpreted as a proof that the FARC is a terrorist organisation with economic objectives (Fondelibertad 2010, 53-55). Of course, the same conclusion could be drawn regarding the other aforementioned armed actors, as their modalities appear not to differ that much.

Table 5 gives an overview of the absolute and relative incidences of extortive and simple kidnappings from 1996 till 2010. Mapping these figures in charts 8 and 9 visualises that in the late 1990s extortive kidnappings happened much more frequently than simple kidnappings. From the turn of the millennium until 2008 the ratio between the two modalities was more in balance, but in 2009 and 2010 again extortive kidnappings prevailed above simple kidnappings. These tendencies are in line with the above-given explanations that the withdrawal of communist funding for Latin American guerrillas drove them to economic abductions as an alternative way of finding themselves and that they attempt to influence governmental elections via political abductions, both forms of extortive kidnapping. The former explanation can be observed in the dominance of extortive kidnappings during the 1990s, the period after the end of the Cold War. The latter explanation can be observed in the

dominance of extortive kidnappings in 2009 and 2010, the period of Colombia’s most recent electoral campaign for presidency.

Year Type	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Extortive kidnapping	957 92.2%	1469 90.5%	2300 80.4%	2587 80.7%	2091 58.5%	1208 41.4%	1708 59.3%	1258 59.3%	759 52.7%	377 47.1%	290 42.2%	230 44.1%	198 45.3%	161 75.6%	188 66.7%	15781 64.2%
Simple kidnapping	81 7.8%	155 9.5%	560 19.6%	617 19.3%	1481 41.5%	1709 58.6%	1147 40.7%	863 40.7%	681 47.3%	423 52.9%	397 57.8%	291 55.9%	239 54.7%	52 24.4%	94 33.3%	8817 35.8%
Total	1038	1624	2860	3204	3572	2917	2882	2121	1440	800	687	521	437	213	282	24598

Table 5 Absolute numbers and percentages of kidnapping per type from 1996 till 2010<sup>17</sup>

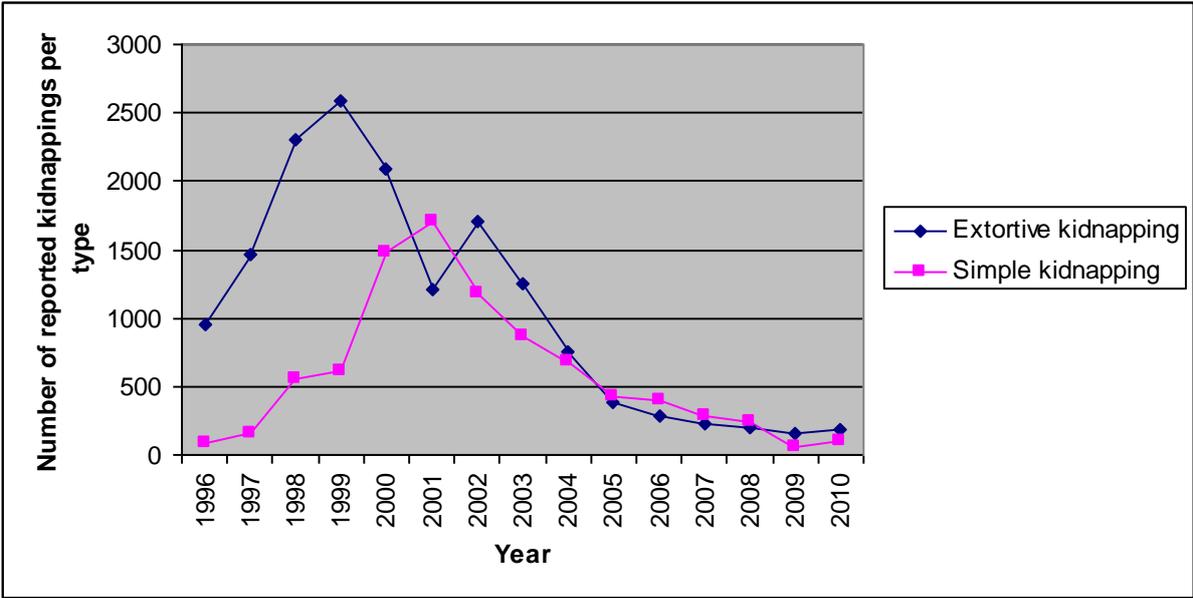


Chart 8 Tendency of absolute kidnapping incidence per type per year from 1996 till 2010

<sup>17</sup> E-mail from Claudia Llano, 18 June 2009; Fundación País Libre 2011.

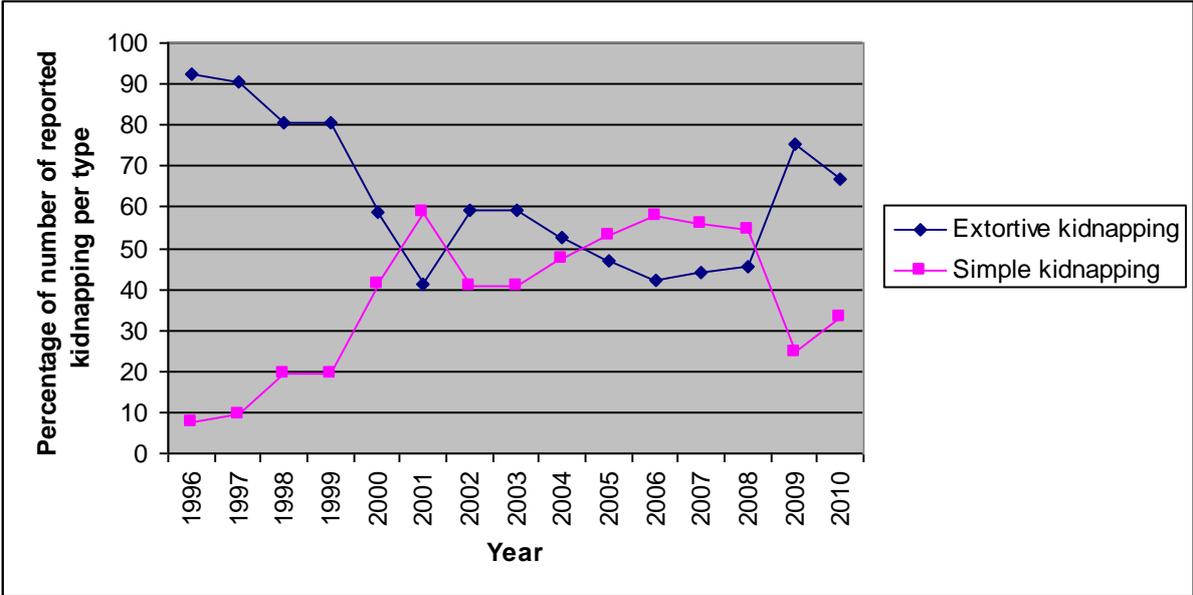


Chart 9 Tendency of relative kidnapping incidence per type from 1996 till 2010

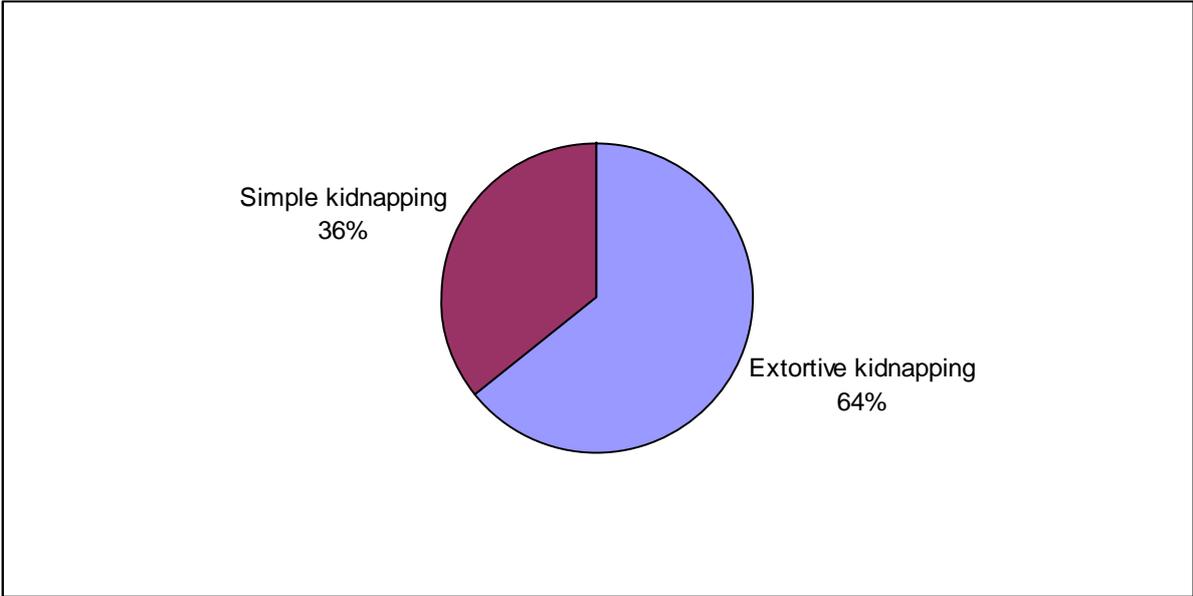


Chart 10 Total relative kidnapping incidence per type from 1996 till 2010

Since this statistical information on extortive and simple kidnapping does not differentiate within nor provide more details about these abductions, it neglects the divergent characteristics that exist within the practice of each of these broad modalities. Neither does it tell under what conditions or circumstances perpetrators whether or not release their hostages. These obstacles severely constrain generating knowledge about the grounds of the settlements. Only Fondelibertad has some very general information about the terminations of kidnapping

incidents between 1996 and 2007. During that period, 13% of abductions ended by assassination, 18% by rescue and 55% by release. The last conclusion is often equated to ransom payment and hence interpreted as indication of the profitability of the activity (Silva 2007, 268). However, as table 6 demonstrates, data on the frequency of ransom payments from 2003 till 2006 do not reflect such a high percentage. Precautious calculations on what percentage of abductions concludes this way reveal that in only 18.6% of kidnapping cases a ransom is paid. However, before verifying any of these percentages, the above-demonstrated tendency of the ratio between the incidences of extortive and simple kidnapping must be taken account. The period of 1996 till 2006 includes much more extortive kidnappings, both in absolute and relative terms, than the period from 2003 till 2006. But even then it seems blunt to simply collate release and ransom payment.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
<b>Number of kidnappings</b>	2121	1440	800	687	5048
<b>Number of ransom payments (Silva 2007, 373)</b>	392	251	149	147	939
<b>Percentage of kidnappings settled by ransom payment</b>	18.5%	17.4%	18.6%	21.4%	18.6%

**Table 6 Percentage of kidnappings settled ransom payment from 2003 till 2006<sup>18</sup>**

## Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of several aspects of the phenomenon of kidnapping as recently occurring within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict. A description of the modalities as recognised by the Colombian legislation and occurring in practice reveals a wide variety of extortive and simple kidnappings committed for divergent purposes, but most crimes have a political or economic character. A description of the incidences from 1996 till 2008 demonstrates a very high frequency of abduction throughout the 1990s, followed by a steady decline after the turn of the millennium. An explanation for not only this drop in amount of kidnappings but also in their duration might be the strong governmental offensive

<sup>18</sup> As the sums mentioned in the original table resulted incorrect, I have used my own calculations for the total percentage of kidnappings settled by ransom payment.

against the guerrillas, implemented from 1999. However, when reading statistics on numbers of abductions in Colombia, several obstacles must be taken into account. For instance, figures contain blanks and errors, even the official statistics. Furthermore, numbers elaborated by the government might be biased and serve as a political instrument within the polarised context of guerrilla warfare.

Many actors have a responsibility in Colombia's high kidnapping incidence. Whereas in the 1960s abduction was almost exclusively an activity conducted by common criminals, later guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries entered the arena. Some of these groups started to opportunistically collaborate and create divisions of labour in the practice of kidnapping. Because this has considerably complicated to get to know who is responsible in each incident, in many cases the perpetrator remains unidentified. The information that is available for the period of 1996 till 2008 ascribes 60% of abductions to political actors, including the FARC, ELN, AUC and dissidents. Criminal actors would have committed 17% of all registered crimes and other actors, including relatives, various actors and unidentified actors, 23%. Of course this last category is quite vague. Statistics record a boom in kidnappings by political actors during the late 1990s and early 2000s, a peak in kidnappings by other actors around 2000 and a quite stable number of kidnappings by criminal actors. Percentages, however, show from the mid-1990s till the mid-2000s a high relative contribution by political actors and a low relative contribution by criminal actors. Common criminals had a considerable relative share in the phenomenon of kidnapping in 1996 and again after the mid-2000s. The first victims of abductions were predominantly wealthy and politically or societally prominent Colombians and foreigners. However, throughout the decades the "democratisation of kidnapping" has altered the spectrum of victims: as modalities and perpetrators have diversified, today everyone forms a potential target to be abducted and eventually sold to another actor. The vast majority of victims are Colombians and a particular group of hostages are the so-called exchangeable military and police.

Divergent motivations for kidnapping exist, often categorised as either political or economic. Political abductions aim at putting legal and governmental institutions under pressure, for example in order to influence decisions or elections, consolidate control or exchange hostages for the release of prisoners. Not only political actors, but sometimes also criminal actors instrumentally utilise kidnapping to achieve such goals. Economic abductions aim at either financing the conflict and social struggle or enriching the organisation or oneself. Whereas political organisations predominantly allocate resources earned by kidnapping to the first cause, criminal organisations tend to accumulate resources for enrichment. This indicates

that when concluding whether abductions have an economic or a political character it is crucial not to confuse between the means and the ends of kidnapping. From 1996 till 2010 two thirds of all kidnappings were extortive and one third was simple. The incidences of extortive kidnappings demonstrate peaks in the years 1998, 2002 and 2010 when presidential elections were held. The incidences of simple kidnappings demonstrate a peak in 2001 and 2002. In the mid-1990s much more extortive than simple abductions occurred, which might be explained by the end of the Cold War and the inherent withdrawal of fundings to the guerrillas. From 2000 till 2008 both types recorded similar numbers and in 2009 and 2010 the share of extortive kidnappings was again the highest. Ransom payments would have become smaller throughout the years, but estimates on how many kidnappings end this way vary highly from 18.6% to 55%. Also the level of violence directed against hostages has diminished.

The multiplicity of modalities, incidences, perpetrators, victims and motivations together contributing to the phenomenon of kidnapping as occurring in Colombia today, reveal that “[t]he relationship between kidnapping, money, and politics is extremely complex” (Sánchez G. 2001, 17). Nevertheless, some precautionous generalisations can be made based on the descriptions and analyses. Abduction incidences demonstrate correlations with conflict dynamics in Colombia: an intensification of insurgency and/or counterinsurgency activity goes with and intensification in kidnapping incidences. Kidnappers operating within this context can be roughly categorised into political and criminal actors, although the divisions are in practice not that strict, as they opportunistically collaborate. Furthermore, all target all kinds of victims, depending on the modality of kidnapping they at a certain moment in a certain place evaluate most convenient. However, political actors abduct more frequently in times of political disturbance, the frequency of criminal abductions has a much more stable trend, more independent from Colombia's political developments. The violence both groups sometimes apply against their hostages can be interpreted as a manner to spread fear and/or increase pressure. Among both groups of actors the demands made vary: both political and criminal actors strive after both political and economic goals. However, whereas political actors tend to allocate the political and economic assets obtained through abductions to their social struggle, criminal actors tend to allocate these assets to the continuance of their criminal businesses.

These generalisations together help drawing two preliminary conclusions. First, as political actors have throughout time realised most abductions, utilising them as an instrument to finance or politically approach the social change they strive after, kidnapping in Colombia

has been predominantly politically motivated. Second, as recently Colombia's internal armed conflict has lost intensity and the security situation has improved, the application of kidnapping has become less convenient for political actors, whilst criminal actors continue the practice. Thus the number of politically motivated abductions has diminished, whereas the number of criminal abductions has remained stable. Hence, the percentage of economically motivated abductions has increased, a tendency that can be interpreted as the criminalisation of the phenomenon of kidnapping within the realm of Colombia's internal conflict, or perhaps better as the criminalisation of the phenomenon of kidnapping *outside* the realm of Colombia's internal conflict.

## CONCLUSIONS

As indicated in the introduction, during my internship at the Dutch peace movement IKV Pax Christi the ideas for this research project evolved. Because the investigation I realised on kidnapping in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela appeared too broad for this academic enterprise, I had to downgrade my ambitions and limit myself to a single case study. In addition, the NGO's lobby directed at the prohibition of ransom payments as the principle way towards banning the crime, raised questions. This focus suggests that predominantly financial reasons instigate kidnapping and that measures curtailing these incentives help reducing its incidence. This assumption woke my curiosity about the perpetrators' underlying motivations. I wondered if these are indeed above all economic or if (also) other grounds play a role. The choice for scrutinising this question regarding the phenomenon as occurring today within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict, adds to the construction of theoretical knowledge of this particular practice in this particular context. It also modestly contributes to gaining academic insights in the motivations for violence in general and more specifically to the debates on greed versus grievance or economics versus politics as the principle motor driving people to commit atrocities. Moreover, understanding the dynamics of abduction in Colombia facilitates the development of policy effectively addressing this problem.

In this final section of my thesis I first summarise the theoretical findings of the scrutiny of existing academic explanations for the motivations for kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts. Subsequently I briefly describe the outcomes evolving from the application of these theories upon the situation of conflict, violence and kidnapping in Latin America and more specifically Colombia. Then I zoom in on the results of the investigation of a myriad of sources on the complex dimensions of the reality of abduction in Colombia. Afterwards I relate these overviews to each other in order to discover similarities and discrepancies that help me drawing conclusions on the motivations for kidnapping within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict. Finally I will utilise these conclusions for the formulation of recommendations for respectively further academic research and policy design.

### **Brief summary of the theoretical and empirical results**

In the first chapter I explored academic accounts on the structural causes provoking societal conflicts and the proximate motivations triggering people to apply violence and more specifically the practice of kidnapping. It appears that usually the interaction between factors

at different societal levels together build various grounds for dispute and determine whether these erupt into war or not. The complexity of circumstances and opportunities creates a divergence of collective and private motivations that drive human beings to transform conflict into a violent enterprise. As civil war transforms societal conditions, initial reasons for discontent may lose significance and other reasons for fighting may emerge and/or gain importance. It not only alters the motivations of those parties and individuals who initially started utilising violence, but also draws in other actors discovering the application of violent activities as beneficial within the realm of the disorder. This broadens and blurs the complexity of armed actors participating in conflict and violence (Mair 2003) that for divergent motivations – either because they see no alternative or because they consider violence the most effective strategy – resort to violence as the principle means to strive after their aspirations (Cramer 2006; Kaldor 2000; Kaldor 2001; Richards 2005). Throughout the course of conflict more people become interested in the continuance of violence and the spectrum of motivations for its application diversifies. This suggests that analysis in terms of multicausality and complementary both/and linkages rather than excluding either/or oppositions provide the best explanation as this allows for context-sensitive approaches and interpretations. However, in academic debates the tendency prevails to dichotomise the motivations for the application of violence in either ‘legitimate’ public politics and grievance or ‘criminal’ private economics and greed. The former would predominate in public discourses framing the main societal cleavages and legitimising the violence and at the start of ‘old’ wars occurring before the end of the Cold War. The latter would predominate in individual decisions to participate in atrocities and in protracted contemporary conflicts and their aftermath (Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Brunnschweiler and Bulte 2009; Cramer 2002; Korf 2006).

Theoretical accounts on the motivations for kidnapping fit into these academic frameworks on the motivations for civil war and the application of violence. As with other types of atrocities, many different actors commit abductions and individuals easily switch between organisations applying this practice. This illustrates the complexity of unravelling the motivations for kidnapping on both organisational and individual level. People abduct for reasons as divergent as financing war efforts, enriching themselves, influencing political decisions, exchanging hostages for other kinds of benefits, harming victims or keeping hostages indefinitely for personal reasons. However, often the simplistic opposition explaining conflict and violence in either political or economical terms is also imposed upon the phenomenon of kidnapping. As with other types of atrocities, regarding abduction the

assumption prevails that throughout time motivations shift from predominantly 'legitimate' public politics or grievance to 'criminal' private economics or greed. Nevertheless, Turner (1998) recognises that these dimensions do not necessarily mutually exclude but can simultaneously exist next to each other. Motivations are furthermore liable to change throughout every kidnapping event and form continua rather than extreme opposites. Abduction can serve as an instrument to obtain material gain than can be utilised to finance political struggles or accumulate wealth, sometimes legitimised by a political smokescreen. It can also serve as an instrument to enforce political concessions or harm persons. Thus the perpetrators of kidnapping as well as their motivations blur and overlap and the complexity does not always allow for simplistic dichotomisation. Moreover, the proximate motivation of abduction does not necessarily reflect the underlying motivation(s) of the respective perpetrator(s) committing the crime.

Also publications on conflict, violence and kidnapping in Latin America and particularly Colombia demonstrate many parallels with the described academic theories. They almost unanimously ascribe the outbreak of civil wars in this continent to political grievance, later framed in and justified by Cold War ideological terms. However, the societal transformations provoked by these internal armed conflicts increased the dependence of organisations and individuals upon the continuance of violence for collective and private and political and economic reasons and opened opportunities facilitating illicit practices. But rather than largely replacing the initial reasons for starting civil war, these developments added motivations for the application of violence in Latin America. This has left a legacy of a complex mix of 'legitimate' public politics or grievance and 'criminal' private economics or greed, inspiring the continuance and exacerbation of atrocities in the region. One of the most striking manifestations of this tendency is Latin America's extraordinary vulnerability to the crime of kidnapping. Armed actors here often intimidate and/or threaten their victims and utilise abduction as an instrument to strive after various goals, such as publicity and societal change, but also the settlement of disputes, the facilitation of other crimes and recently more often economic gain. They implement the practice in many forms, victimise people from all societal categories and apply varying levels of violence. Throughout the last decades the range of perpetrators and inherently modalities and motivations has differentiated.

Motivations for conflict and violence in Colombia follow the tendency identified in the rest of the continent. Whereas predominantly grievance explains why its civil war broke out, throughout the 1990s the vast majority of the violence occurring here lost its political incentives. Armed actors have created alliances among each other, people easily shift between

violent organisations driven by personal rather than group interests, and motivations for the application of violence vary per particular incident. Furthermore, non-political actors sometimes behave politically and political actors sometimes behave criminally. As a result, the boundaries between organisations and their motivations have become blurred and hard to distinguish. However, the overall tendency that can be identified is that Colombia's internal armed conflict has lost part of its political message and become more criminalised, economic motivations gaining importance over political motivations.

Qualitative and quantitative empirical data specifically on kidnapping in Colombia reveal a variety of modalities of abduction committed by different perpetrators for divergent though predominantly political and economic purposes. The above-described development of differentiation and transformation of the phenomenon "democratised" the crime by turning everyone into a potential target. Whereas in the 1960s kidnapping in Colombia was mainly the work of common criminals, later guerrillas, drug traffickers and paramilitaries, sometimes collaborating in the practice, took over this reputation. From 1996 till 2008, the years with the highest kidnapping numbers, 60% of abductions were ascribed to political actors, 17% to criminal actors and the remaining 23% to other and unidentified actors. Statistics record a boom in kidnappings by political actors during the late 1990s and early 2000s, a peak in kidnappings by other actors around 2000 and a quite constant number of kidnappings by criminal actors. The rise after 1996 and decline after the mid-2000s of absolute numbers of abductions committed by political actors and the stability of absolute numbers of abductions committed by criminal actors explain two apparently opposite trends demonstrated by percentages. These show from the mid-1990s till the mid-2000s a high relative contribution by political actors and a low relative contribution by criminal actors. Common criminals had a considerable relative share in the phenomenon of kidnapping in 1996 and again after the mid-2000s.

Thus political actors abduct more frequently in times of political disturbance and the frequency of criminal abductions has a much more stable trend, more independent from Colombia's political developments. The incidences of extortive kidnappings demonstrate peaks around presidential elections and in the mid-1990s. These trends can be explained by respectively the desire to influence political processes and the guerrilla's need for financial revenue as with the end of the Cold War they lost their external funding. Ransom payments would have become smaller throughout the years, but estimates on how many kidnappings end this way vary highly from 18.6% to 55%. Also the level of violence directed against hostages, a manner to spread fear and/or increase pressure, has diminished. These variations

demonstrate correlations between the intensity of insurgency and/or counterinsurgency activities and the incidence and duration of the crime. However, when formulating such a conclusion, the deficiencies and possible politicisation of figures must not be neglected but taken into account.

Not surprisingly, the divergent motivations for kidnapping as occurring within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict are often categorised as either political or economic. However, they appear far from simplistic, as both political and criminal actors commit abductions as an instrument to influence legal or political processes, obtain financial resources or commit other crimes. Economic abductions aim at either financing the conflict and societal struggle or enriching the organisation or oneself. Whereas political organisations predominantly allocate assets earned by kidnapping to the first cause, criminal organisations tend to use revenues for wealth accumulation or investments in the continuance of illicit businesses. When concluding whether abductions have an economic or a political character it is crucial to distinguish between the superficial settlement of kidnapping incidents and the underlying aspirations of the perpetrators, hence not to confuse the means with the ends. This narrowly connects to Turner's (1998) analysis on the political and material dimensions of kidnapping.

The empirical scrutiny of the phenomenon of abduction in Colombia from 1996 till 2010 indicates that predominantly political considerations have motivated the crime within this particular context. It in addition demonstrates that, as recently Colombia's internal armed conflict has lost intensity and the security situation has improved, the application of kidnapping has become less convenient for political actors, whilst criminal actors continue the practice. Thus the number of politically motivated abductions has diminished, whereas the number of criminal abductions has remained stable, and the percentage of economically motivated abductions has hence increased. This tendency of criminal and economic incentives gaining importance in comparison to societal and political incentives can be interpreted as the criminalisation of the phenomenon of kidnapping within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict. However, we must not forget that also during the 1960s criminal rather than political abductions prevailed. The constant trend of criminal kidnappings throughout the decades demonstrates the immunity of this category for the conjunctures of Colombia's civil war. Because this type of abduction has no significant relationship with the conflict and has in addition always had a criminal character regardless of conflict dynamics, utilising the term criminalisation appears inappropriate for this particular manifestation of kidnapping. Nevertheless, due to the drop after the mid-2000s of political kidnapping alongside with the

decrease in the intensity of Colombia's civil war, relatively criminal kidnapping has gained importance and hence the overall spectrum of the phenomenon of kidnapping in Colombia has criminalised indeed. But as this tendency occurs during relatively tranquil periods, rather than speaking of the criminalisation of abduction *within* the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict, perhaps it is better to speak of the criminalisation of abduction *outside* the realm of Colombia's internal conflict.

### **Conclusions**

Comparison of academic accounts on the motivations for violence and kidnapping in contemporary conflict contexts in general and more specifically in Latin America and Colombia with empirical data on the dimensions of kidnapping in Colombia reveals similarities and differences. The findings together provide the cornerstones for the formulation of an adequate answer to the overarching central research question of this thesis: *How do empirical data on kidnapping in Colombia's internal armed conflict contribute to academic debates on the criminalisation of wars and politics versus economics or grievance versus greed as motivating violence?* Theoretical insights recognise the dynamic multicausality underlying internal armed conflict and violence, but stress the dichotomy of 'legitimate' public politics or grievance and 'criminal' private economics or greed. Whereas the former set of incentives would predominantly explain initial motivations of political armed movements starting civil war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the latter set of incentives would predominantly explain individual and later motivations of these organisations and other types of illicit actors for starting contemporary internal conflicts and continuing the application of violence. They often interpret this tendency as the criminalisation of conflict and violence.

Although regarding kidnapping a similar bias in explaining its motivations exists, Turner (1998) provides a more nuanced picture when using these debates to analyse this particular practice. Also his matrix distinguishes between material and political incentives, but in addition leaves more room for shifts between these categories, even during a single kidnapping event, and discrepancies between superficial and underlying motivations. However, as well as the more general theories, he argues that motivations for kidnapping have throughout the decades become material rather than political. Application of the debates upon the situation in Latin America and particularly Colombia adds another nuance. Although also in these more context-specific theories dichotomisation prevails, they recognise that 'criminal' private economics or greed has not merely replaced or come to dominate 'legitimate' public

politics or grievance, but rather broadened and differentiated the continuum of reasons for the protractedness of violence within the realm of (the aftermath of) the civil wars in this continent. They consider both major explanations as equally important and argue that together they form a blurred mix of motivations.

Together these theories on the motivations for conflict, violence and kidnapping in general and more specifically Latin America and Colombia provide valuable insights. But empirical data on the dimensions of abduction within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict only partially subscribe them and rather refine them by adding some details. They agree with existing theories in the sense that motivations for kidnapping as well as for civil war and other manifestations of violence within this realm have become more diverse, blurred and complex and that proximate indicators do not necessarily reflect the underlying motivations of the perpetrators. In terms of percentages they also acknowledge that today criminal incentives play a more important role than a decade ago. However, the dominance of criminal abductions in the 1960s demonstrates that this trend is not exclusively typical for recent years, but has occurred already in earlier days. Furthermore, the correlation of the incidence and duration of kidnapping with major events such as the end of the Cold War, the intensity of insurgency and counterinsurgency activity and presidential elections suggests a political rather than criminal character. The declines in the numbers and sums of ransom payments and the levels of applied violence against hostages – two manifestations of abduction particularly interpreted as exemplary for greed and crime – indicate that 'criminal' private economics or greed might have lost terrain in the spectrum of motivations for kidnapping. Also analysis of the absolute rather than relative incidence of abduction per category of perpetrators questions the assumed criminalisation of contemporary conflict and violence. The stable trend in criminal kidnapping throughout Colombia's recent history demonstrates no relation with its internal armed conflict and no increase in criminal motivations. The relative criminalisation is instead explained by the fluctuations in the incidence of abduction committed by political perpetrators, highly dependent upon conflict conjunctures. Therefore, within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict it is more accurate to speak of the 'depoliticisation' rather than 'criminalisation' of kidnapping.

The outcomes of the empirical scrutiny on abduction in Colombia thus contest the major theoretical conclusions on the motivations for contemporary conflict and violence as described in existing academic accounts. Although as for civil war and other articulations of violence both 'legitimate' public politics or grievance and 'criminal' private economics or greed form important motivations for kidnapping in Colombia's internal armed conflict, in

this particular case the former rather than the latter has more explanatory power. The contradiction between this specific empirical conclusion and general theoretical conclusions indicates that broad studies on contemporary conflict and violence revealing overall patterns are not necessarily able to explain their more narrow particular manifestations. This implies that we must be careful in their application, recognising eventual discrepancies and deficiencies. In addition this demands that we must revisit academic theories on these encompassing phenomena in order to refine them. Only then they become more sensible for peculiarities inherent to the performances of particular types of civil war, violence and crime as occurring in everyday societal realities.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Of course, since I have focused my research project on one particular phenomenon in one particular conflict context, its outcomes cannot be haphazardly applied to other situations. It can however inspire further theoretical and empirical investigation. A more prolonged investigation of the motivations for kidnapping in Colombia can identify tendencies and generate more insight in how these might be related to the internal armed conflict. A field study, involving in-depth interviews with (former) perpetrators of abduction, can deliver more qualitative data that compared with the findings of this desk research project can further refine theory on this phenomenon in this context. Additional case studies can reveal the motivations for kidnapping elsewhere and help discovering parallels and discrepancies and drawing patterns, in order to approach more general and externally valid theory-building on the motivations for kidnapping in conflict contexts, eventually differentiated according to particular circumstances. In-depth scrutiny of the motivations for other types of violence applied within the realm of internal armed conflict is necessary in order to learn why the phenomenon of kidnapping within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict appears to follow distinct patterns that these other phenomena and thus to gain deeper insight in their peculiarities.

However, when conducting future studies on delicate phenomena such as violence in tense and polarised contemporary conflict contexts, some valuable lessons must be taken into account that were taught by the scrutiny of the motivations for kidnapping within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict. First, information might be incomplete, biased and/or politically manipulated. Underreporting and poor registration of crimes prevail and often opposing factions have clear interest in slandering their enemy and promoting themselves

through publishing partial and/or wrong data. Second, simple or superficial symptoms of violence do not necessarily reflect the underlying motivations. For instance, political perpetrators do not always make explicit legal or political demands, but can also aspire financial or material concessions. Criminal perpetrators do not always demand search for money, but can also utilise violence in order to achieve legal or political benefits. Thus the means cannot be separated from the ends. It appears that the dominant assumptions among both academics and policymakers are based upon conclusions ignoring these considerations.

### **Recommendations for policy design**

Besides refining existing academic theories on the motivations for contemporary conflict and violence, the empirical case study also provides useful information for the development of policy aimed at reducing the incidence of kidnapping. Both scholars and policymakers tend to stress the financial aspect of abduction and the importance to take economic incentives away in order to combat the crime. However, it can be questioned if in Colombia this is the most appropriate effort, as it appears that here only a minor share of all kidnapping incidents end through ransom payment and the vast majority of cases end through non-financial settlements. Furthermore, material demands or solutions do not necessarily reflect the underlying motivations of perpetrators and in addition kidnapping events may (de)politicise throughout their course. As perpetrators in most cases do not aspire financial gain and can easily shift the character of their demand when it becomes impossible or inopportune to obtain ransom, within the realm of Colombia's internal armed conflict the majority of abductions would be immune for measures constraining ransom payments. Hence, it can be expected that they would have only a minor effect on the general problem of kidnapping here. And if it does influence, we must be aware that it is probably unable to reduce the overall level of violence in Colombia, as actors remain dependent upon revenues in order to finance their societal struggle and thus will search for alternatives substituting their losses caused by a prohibition on ransom payments.

These remarks have important implications for the development of policy directed at undermining the motivations for kidnapping and reducing its incidence. First, a comprehensive and thorough study on both the proximate and structural motivations must precede any policy design, as a focus on superficial dynamics of abduction risks resulting in a mismatch unable to address the problem. Second, such a policy design must take into account the multiple aspirations of different categories and levels of perpetrators in order to prevent

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the shifting of demands and/or the shifting of types of violence. Third, the taking away of incentives must simultaneously go accompanied by the closing down of opportunities for committing kidnappings and/or other types of violence. Suggestions include the decrease of the extremely high impunity rates by diminishing the (bureaucratical) obstacles preventing people to declare crimes and improving the investigative capacities of the police. Euphemistically stated, it is at least very sad – not only for academics and policymakers, but above all for hostages and their relatives – that until now mistaken assumptions on the motivations for kidnapping have thwarted effectively banning this atrocity.

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