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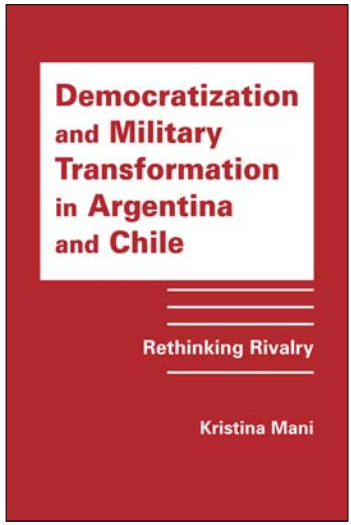
# Democratization and Military Transformation in Argentina and Chile: Rethinking Rivalry

Kristina Mani





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# 1
# The Puzzles of Breaking with the Past

For countries emerging from the brutality of military dictatorship, the task of building democracy can be daunting. All too frequently, beneficiaries of the old regime thwart initial efforts to seek justice for political repression, to reform political institutions, and to establish democratic control over militaries that once were in power. Yet democracies are constructed not only from domestic sources. International conditions and actors also matter. Where domestic opponents obstruct the path to building democracy, democratic government leaders may still be able to advance – through the foreign policies they create and the international norms and allies they cultivate.

In the 1990s, the government leaders of Argentina and Chile did just this – taking significant steps toward the consolidation of democracy by ending the historical rivalry between them. They designed internationalist grand strategies, which are centered on economic openness and security cooperation, and thereby achieved a revolutionary break from the strategic and territorial rivalry that had driven relations between their countries for more than a century.[1] The internationalist turn did more than transform their international relations. It also became a means to reprogram the military to accept the authority of democratic civilian leaders – a remarkable achievement given the mistrust and defiance that had characterized the military's behavior toward civilian leaders following the transitions to democracy in the 1980s. The result was to end rivalries on two fronts – the international one between Argentina and Chile, and the domestic political one between civilian elites and the military.

These transformations mark astonishing breaks with the past. The military regimes that took power in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s had championed a very different environment. Like other military regimes of the Southern Cone, Brazil, and the Andes in this period, their international relations were guided by geopolitical doctrines that emphasized the centrality of territorial expansion and military-based

competition between states. Historical rivalries over disputed territories, arms racing at unprecedented levels, and the competition between Argentina and Brazil to develop nuclear programs defined the militaries' international relations. Between Argentina and Chile, which had a long history of more than two dozen unresolved territorial disputes, the dispute over strategic control of maritime interests in the South Atlantic led to a war crisis in 1978. The military regimes mobilized for war and only an eleventh-hour mediation by the Vatican was able to prevent what would have been a devastating conflict for both sides.[2]

Similarly, in their national politics the military regimes of the Southern Cone and Brazil had inaugurated unprecedented levels of repression of political opponents and the popular sector, seeking to transform politics and engender economic growth through a process liberated from the complicating fetters of democratic participation and protest. In most of the so-called bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes that developed in South America by the 1970s, political parties, labor and popular organizations were shut down, and the major institutions of the state, often down to the municipalities, were under the military's control. For Argentina and Chile in particular, the decade of the 1970s marked severe political polarization and a severance between civil society and the military that had become more extreme than any other time during the twentieth century.[3]

By the 1990s, significant change was apparent in the region. States across South America that had been under military rule were democratizing and adopting liberal market reforms. Latin America's liberalization led some observers to anticipate that the region could soon provide further evidence to confirm the democratic peace theory that democratic states do not go to war with each other.[4] Yet not everywhere in South America did historical rivalries subside and the anticipated democratic peace result, as the resurgence of conflict between Ecuador and Peru in the 1990s demonstrated. In contrast, Argentina and Chile stand out in the region for the dual transformation they achieved in that decade, ending their mutual historical rivalry over territorial and strategic interests and the antagonism in their domestic civil-military relations.

## The Argument in Brief

Why did national leaders in Argentina and Chile end the historical rivalry between their countries and seek to cooperate on security issues in the post-authoritarian period? How did internationalist policies become tools for transforming institutional thinking and behavior of the

militaries in these countries? I answer these questions by tracing the learning process that developed among political and military elites regarding the benefits of internationalist policies. I argue that what fundamentally drove this learning process were the experience of authoritarian rule and the bargaining opportunities political elites faced as they sought to build new democratic polities.

The main argument of the book focuses on explaining the end of rivalry and the development of security cooperation between Argentina and Chile. Over the course of the previous authoritarian regime, high levels of political, social and economic *regime costs* imposed by authoritarian rulers on broad sectors of society convinced political elites governing in the new democratic period to pursue a cooperative internationalist grand strategy. Their logic was that doing so would support domestic reforms needed to advance the liberal democratic political and economic project. In particular, the pursuit of international cooperation, which required the resolution of historical disputes with neighbors, would enable economic integration and support consolidation of the democratic regime. Yet as opportunities developed to resolve historical disputes, internationalists were often constrained by partisan and military *veto players*, who were able to stall progress in the ratification of territorial accords.[5]

Thus internationalist leaders were faced with the dilemma of how to maintain momentum in the cooperative agenda and win over veto players to support it. Their solution was to depoliticize the agenda by embedding it in the domain of foreign and defense ministry technocrats who would establish new venues for building security cooperation between the two countries in a low-key, "off the front pages" setting. The result was a dense array of confidence-and-security-building measures that brought together civilian and military officials from Argentina and Chile to an unprecedented degree. By the end of the 1990s, this approach succeeded in generating a new accord that resolved all remaining territorial issues between the countries in ways that even veto players could support.

The book's second argument explains how internationalist policies became tools for transforming the militaries of Argentina and Chile. Beyond transforming the countries' foreign relations, internationalist policies had another, initially unintended, effect. They engaged key sectors of the armed forces in new professional roles with other militaries and in new relationships with civilians. This process turned them into *stakeholders in internationalism* – military services that developed interests and abilities highly compatible with the agendas advanced by governing internationalist leaders. Military stakeholders in

internationalism emerged as civilians applied three specific mechanisms to engage them: *mobilizing* receptive sectors of the military to participate in confidence building measures like joint exercises and training, and in conflict-resolution missions like international peacekeeping; *technocratizing* both relations with rivals and interactions between civilian and military officials to emphasize minimally political and maximally professional issues; and *embedding* the military in a broader network of actors who share internationalist objectives. My findings show that these dynamics were significant in building military respect for civilian leadership on defense issues and in enabling the military to accept civilian authority.

## Reconsidering Democratization

For quite some time now, scholars of international relations and comparative politics have acknowledged the connections between the international and domestic environments and have operated on each other's theoretical turf. This is perhaps most apparent in the study of democratization. Over the last two decades, international relations scholars became intrigued with how democracies function, initially to gain purchase on international dynamics of cooperation and conflict, and more recently to assess the prospects for democracy promotion by external actors.[6] Similarly, comparativists have acknowledged the importance of international conditions and actors in shaping the opportunities for democracy to develop.[7] While the findings in this book confirm the importance of such connections, they also introduce new dimensions to the study of cooperation-building and the sources of democracy promotion.

On the international relations front, this book takes up questions such as why some democratizing states take the path of international cooperation while others become belligerent, and how states can effectively promote the development of democracy abroad. Those debates, particularly in studies linking democratization and war, have centered on the need for the rule of law and institutions able to channel political participation in ways that defuse the potential for belligerent foreign policy bids. In fact, scholars including Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder have emphasized the problematic nature of such institutions in Argentina and the promising nature of them in Chile.[8] Yet this book shows that not only institutional conditions matter, but also seminally the capacity of political elites to learn through past experiences to privilege security cooperation over conflict.

Thus even when state institutions remain weak, when political party systems are in flux, and when the economy goes haywire, a country can play a constructive role in international politics – not only avoiding militarized international disputes, but actually promoting conflict resolution and going further still to push for security cooperation with its historical rivals. This was the case of post-authoritarian Argentina, which took progressive steps to lock itself out of the most likely conflict scenarios with its rivals. In contrast, strong state institutions, a resiliently stable party system and an economy heralded as a model in the region were in themselves not sufficient drivers to make Chile comparably proactive in pursuing conflict resolution and security cooperation. This was because some of these "stabilizing" institutions – including the national constitution – initially enabled nationalist skeptics to block efforts to resolve outstanding disputes and to promote greater security cooperation with neighbors.

What instead proved determining in both cases was the political commitment of elected governments to cooperation-building, their skillful recourse to international allies to shore up this commitment, and the creation of alternative institutional venues for incorporating potential veto players in the cooperation-building project. These dynamics suggest an important and understudied side of politics, centered on political learning, that may be no less important than the institutions often held to be essential for the development of democracy.

On the comparative politics front, this study offers a reconfirmation of the importance that elite attitudes and strategic behavior have for building democracy, as scholars including Dankwart Rustow, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter have explored.[9] Yet it also reconfigures the potential sources of international pressure for democracy promotion. In the Latin American context, much attention has gone to exploring the dynamics of *defending* democracies in crisis (for instance, when the forced removal of elected leaders is at issue), situations that usually have warranted intense multilateral pressure. Where scholars have studied the dynamics of *promoting* democracy in non-crisis settings, they have focused on democracy promotion "from above" with international institutions, transnational advocacy groups, and the United States as key protagonists.[10] In this book, by contrast, democracy promotion comes consistently "from next door" in a reciprocal process among peers still at work to develop their own democratic norms and institutions. In particular, Argentina played this role with respect to Chile in the early 1990s, as a stabilizing and attractive force in terms of defining a regional security framework that even Chile's well-placed civilian and military hardliners had difficulty

mobilizing against. In tracing how such mutually reinforcing dynamics can emerge among traditional rivals, this study reminds that unconventional actors – and even fledgling democratizers themselves – can play a crucial role in international democracy promotion.[11]

## Studying the Relationship between Argentina and Chile

The Argentina-Chile rivalry is a hard test for ending rivalry and moving toward security cooperation. Skeptics will likely note that in the twentieth century these two countries avoided war (though not a number of militarized disputes short of war), yet just as in the case of the American-Soviet rivalry a hot war is not necessary for deep-seated mistrust and arms racing to persist. Argentina and Chile were for more than a century rivals, involved in a territorial and regional competition that fed national history books and school texts and that demanded the attention of politicians and military officers in rhetoric, diplomacy, doctrine and force structure. While relations between the militaries were often cordial in times of reduced tension, the ground rules remained embedded in expectations of conflict (*hipótesis de conflicto)* and war gaming against each other. For instance, as a retired Chilean army general I interviewed in 2000 recalled of a visit in 1976 to the Argentine Superior War College, shortly before the coup in Argentina:

> There was a good atmosphere. The Argentines were very interested in hearing about our military's experience as governors – they were probably picking up pointers for their own coup. But war games, depicting Chile as the aggressor, were still on the board in one of the rooms we toured. The Argentines were embarrassed – it revealed all their intended strategic movement and operations. But we accepted it, because we also do it, it's part of how the military should prepare as long as there are certain hypotheses of conflict."[12]

Moreover, the existence of unresolved territorial disputes could quite suddenly destabilize "normal" relations, even when cooperation was taking place in other areas, as a senior officer of the Chilean air force recalled of events in 1978:

> In 1978, we were repairing [Chilean air force] planes in Argentina in April or May of 1978…imagine the level of confidence that existed! And in December of 1978 we were on the brink of war.[13]

The 1978 crisis in particular created new enemy images that would be hard to erode. As an Argentine naval officer noted while studying at

Chile's Naval War College on an exchange program created between the countries' navies some 20 years after the crisis:

> In 1978, when we were on the brink of war, there was a cultural preparation in our societies and the military – going to war requires seeing the other side as the enemy. You have to prepare yourself. We learned to create that enemy image. Afterward, this diminished very gradually, transforming into mistrust, which we are now trying to overcome through integration.[14]

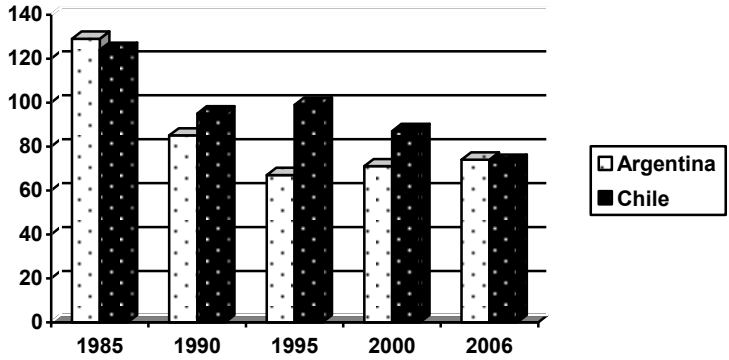
## Studying the 1990s

The 1990s provide a unique window into the evolution of cooperation between Argentina and Chile. This decade not only created the foundation of security cooperation between the two countries, but also belies geopolitical realist expectations that a substantial shift in the strategic balance between the two countries is needed for a transformation in their relations. In particular, developments in the military capabilities of the two rivals in the 1990s show that while on some measures Chile's capabilities were improving and surpassing those of Argentina, in other respects Argentina retained an advantage. Therefore, purely from an analysis of military capabilities it is puzzling that Argentina pushed so hard in this decade to reduce tensions with Chile when there was no strategic imperative for Argentine leaders to "cut their losses" by bringing down international tensions. Similarly, gains Chile was making in its capabilities in this period should likely have encouraged it to pursue a harder line with its rival than it did in reality.

So, for instance, on the one hand the 1990s did mark a decline in Argentina's traditional strategic superiority over Chile in terms of military manpower and defense spending, as Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show.

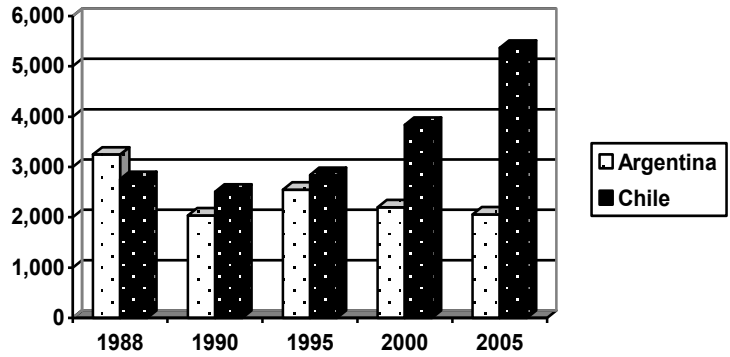
Yet on the other hand, Argentina's military capabilities were still hardly down-and-out in this period. While Chile had expanded its capabilities after the 1978 crisis and was moving the balance in its favor by the early 1990s, even Argentina's defeat at the hands of the British in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands War of 1982 did not significantly diminish its force structure in potential conflicts with Chile. Indeed, much of Argentina's military capabilities remained intact well into the 1990s and it maintained an advantage over Chile in the absolute number of major weapons systems throughout the decade, as Figure 1.3 shows.

**Figure 1.1. Active Duty Military Personnel in Argentina and Chile, 1985-2006 (in thousands)**



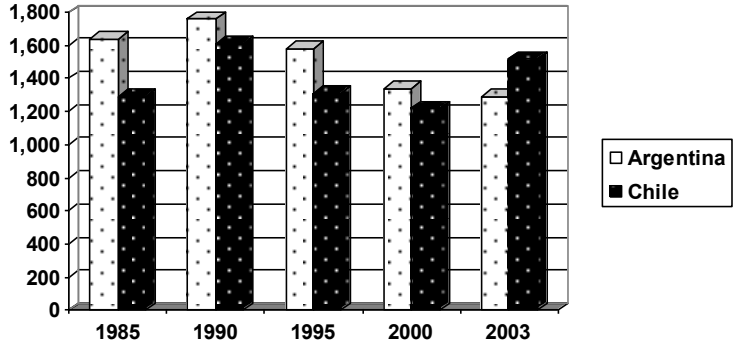

***Source**: For 1985-2000, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, FIRST Database; for 2006, Resdal, Atlas Comparativo de la Defensa 2007.*

**Figure 1.2. Defense Spending in Argentina and Chile, 1988-2005 (in millions of U.S. dollars; constant 2008 prices)**




*Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Military Expenditure Database.*

**Figure 1.3. Major Weapons Systems in Argentina and Chile, 1985-2003**[15]




*Source: Bonn International Center for Conversion, Heavy Weapons Database.*[16]

Moreover, as late as 2000, Argentine officers were encouraged by government policy promises to increase future defense spending and remained confident in their operational preparedness over the next decade.[17] Not least, as realists would highlight, Argentina's geographic depth (and Chile's lack of it) gives it a natural defensive advantage that Chile would disregard only at its existential peril. Nonetheless, by 1999 unprecedented security cooperation was underway, including educational exchanges, joint disaster relief planning exercises, the development of a standardized methodology to measure and make transparent defense spending in the two countries, and perhaps the ultimate evidence of confidence and cooperation, repair of each other's military equipment. In short, the 1990s capture an intriguing and unexpected range of developments in what is probably the hardest area for international cooperation – on security issues.

## Methods and Sources

In complex environments it is often hard to identify causal connections that get at the "what is driving what" that social scientists seek to explain. Teasing out such connections is particularly challenging when they weave through domestic and international environments, connect developments in more than one country, and take place over more than a

decade, as is the case in this book. To manage this complexity I use the method of process tracing. Sometimes described as a within-case analysis, process tracing unpacks the "decision process" that guides actors to action.[18] The analysis emerges in the case study chapters, which provide theoretically-guided narratives tracing the sequence of developments from the political transition moment to the implementation of internationalist strategies, and their feed-back effects into the strategic thinking of military officers.

To analyze the evolution of political learning at work among the political and military elites in this study, I draw from the statements that individuals themselves related to me in structured, in-depth interviews. I conducted 68 such interviews in Argentina and Chile with officers in all branches of the services, foreign policy makers, and members of the legislatures involved in issues of defense and military policy.[19] Sources in this study also include archival material, including government policy declarations, military journals, and media reports. The interviews were conducted between November 1999 and July 2000, the period immediately following the formal resolution of the countries' historical disputes, while archival material covers the period since the transitions in the 1980s.

## The Chapters Ahead

Chapter 2 is the book's theoretical anchor. Drawing on core issues in the study of democratization and war, enduring rivalries and regional orders, it lays out the main argument explaining how regime costs and veto players shape democratizers' policy choices toward historical rivals.

Chapter 3 provides historical context for the focal events of the 1990s. It emphasizes the central role that territorial issues, militaries, and military thinking played in perpetuating rivalries in Latin America. It also lays out the historical background to the Argentina-Chile rivalry, and to the Ecuador-Peru rivalry that serves as the book's counter example of rivalry conflict in the 1990s.

Chapters 4 through 6 tell the story of cooperation building between Argentina and Chile in the post-authoritarian period.

Chapter 4 examines the early years of democratization and the initial efforts Argentine and Chilean leaders undertook in developing internationalist agendas through the early 1990s. It analyzes the regime costs legacy that motivated new democratic leaders to seek international cooperation, and explores how veto players in both contexts placed limits on the extent of cooperation their countries could achieve with each other.

Chapter 5 takes up from events in 1995 through the resolution of rivalries in 1999. It examines how internationalist policies, developed in Argentina by the mid 1990s, made the country increasingly attractive as a potential partner in cooperation and integration with Chile. Exploring the security cooperation that developed between the countries, it describes the creation of an intentionally depoliticized process of confidence-and-security-building measures that was run through the foreign and defense ministries. The chapter concludes by examining how these ties facilitated the formal settlement of all remaining territorial disputes in a comprehensive process that involved civilian and military experts as well as legislators from both countries – effectively bringing around veto players to the internationalist agenda.

Chapter 6 explains how the international confidence building process aided in transforming military perceptions of civilian authority. It focuses on three policy mechanisms – mobilization, techocratization and embedding – that Argentine and Chilean officials used successfully to engage their militaries in the internationalist security cooperation agenda. Through personal interview statements, the analysis documents how military participants in these processes came to assess their foreign counterparts and their own civilian leaders in significantly more positive ways; it pays particular attention to the perspectives of Chilean military officers, who were initially more conservative and reluctant to adapt to the internationalist agenda – or to civilian control – than their Argentine counterparts.

Chapter 7 presents a different path for rivalry resolution: through recourse to militarized conflict in the Ecuador-Peru rivalry. It analyzes how a different constellation of regime cost and veto player dynamics shaped democratization in Ecuador and Peru; how the outbreak of a localized border dispute between them grew into an aggressive nationalist cause that government leaders eagerly took up; how the militaries in both countries remained arbiters of the rivalry; and how the countries' disputes were only resolved through concerted international pressure and diplomacy that encouraged a peace settlement in 1998.

The final chapter scans the evolution of internationalist cooperation between Argentina and Chile in the 2000s, assesses whether the mechanisms of cooperation between them can be adapted to build cooperation elsewhere in the region, and identifies implications from this study for the study of civil-military relations in new democracies.

## Notes

[1] Internationalist grand strategy (along with its counterpoint statist-nationalist grand strategy) is a concept developed by Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn*.

[2] On the Argentine-Brazilian nuclear race, see Guglialmeli, *Argentina, Brasil, y la bomba atómica* and Gorman, "Security, Influence and Nuclear Weapons." On the Beagle Channel dispute, see Mares, *Violent Peace*, ch. 6. On threat perceptions across the region, see Cruz and Varas, *Percepciones de amenaza y políticas de defensa en América Latina*.

[3] The classic statement explaining the rise of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes as the technocratic response to facilitate the deepening of industrial development is by O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*. Powerful accounts of systematic repression by the military regimes in Argentina and Chile include Timerman's memoir, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* and Verdugo, *Chile, Pinochet, and the Caravan of Death*.

[4] Significant in the early post-Cold War period are Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, Owen, "Give Democratic Peace a Chance?" and Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict*.

[5] Veto players are political actors who can block policy change. Tsebelis develops the concept in *Veto Players*.

[6] Prominent IR scholars who have taken up the democracy promotion debate include Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight* and Fukuyama, "'Stateness' First."

[7] See Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, Farer, *Beyond Sovereignty* and Arceneaux and Pion-Berlin, *Transforming Latin America*.

[8] In various works like the one previously cited, Mansfield and Snyder have made the case for state institutional development as a prerequisite for stable democratic development, necessary to avoid aggressive nationalist foreign policy bids; they also note in this respect Argentina as an unpromising case and Chile as a promising one. See for instance their summary account "The Sequencing 'Fallacy.'"

[9] The importance of elite attitudes is seminal in Rustow's "Transitions to Democracy" and O'Donnell and Schmitter's *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions*.

[10] Accounts of those influential actors include Lowenthal, *Exporting Democracy*, Cox, Ikenberry and Inoguchi, *American Democracy Promotion* and Pevehouse, *Democracy From Above*.

[11] For an account that also emphasizes the importance of Argentina's international democracy promotion as a consequence of domestic political conditions, see Margheritis, *Argentina's Foreign Policy.*

[12] Interview with Major General (ret.) Alejandro Medina Lois, Chilean Army, Santiago, May 31, 2000.

[13] Interview with Coronel Patricio Gaete Yantén, Chilean Air Force, Santiago, June 30, 2000.

[14] Interview with Captain Roberto Ulloa, Argentine Navy, Valparaíso, June 13, 2000. In interviews, officers in both countries used "integration" to refer to economic and especially security cooperation.

[15] Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) data counts four categories of heavy weapons including armored vehicles, artillery over 100mm caliber, combat aircraft, and major fighting ships.

[16] Data through 2003 available at SIPRI First, http://first.sipri.org/.

[17] "We're ok till 2010," commented a senior officer in the Argentine Navy, interviewed in Buenos Aires, February 2000. However, continued budget cuts through the 2000s and the mounting problem of maintaining existing equipment in operable condition made this a prediction that did not materialize.

[18] In more specific terms, process tracing "attempts to uncover what stimuli the actors attend to; the decision process that makes use of these stimuli to arrive at decisions; the actual behavior that then occurs; the effect of various institutional arrangements on attention, processing, and behavior." George and McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories," p. 35.

[19] See the Appendix for the name list of interview subjects.